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"This wilderness world": The evolution of a New England farm town, 1820--1840

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“THIS WILDERNESS WORLD”: THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW ENGLAND FARM
TOWN, 1820-1840

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

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in

History

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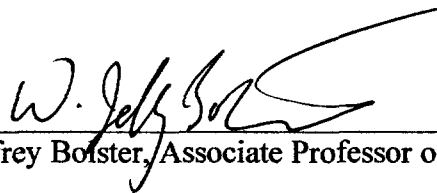
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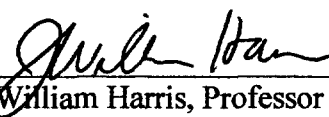


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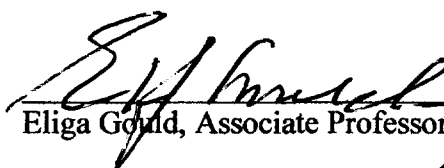
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FORWARD

“Lord, protect him through this wilderness world.” So Mary White would pray each time one of her sons left home. To Mary White’s ancestors, the wilderness had been that howling, unknown place outside the safe circle of cultivated fields and known community.¹ Wilderness was where the wild things had their lairs, where spirits and demons dwelled, and where unwary wanderers might become “be-wildered,” seduced by animal appetites and lost to civilized reason. Mary was far from a medieval peasant in attitude, but she retained that traditional distrust of all that lurked beyond the known and familiar community of home. In mentality she was very much like the present day Amish, who still warn their kin, when leaving community, to “be careful out there among the English.”

This dissertation is the story of how “this wilderness world” came to Mary White’s world of rural Boylston, Massachusetts. During the decades when her children were coming of age, relationships in Mary’s Boylston were in transition. The closed and close-knit community that had been sustained by mutual needs and enforced consensual norms was challenged by an emerging pluralism. Diverse sects, parties, associations, and economic options eroded Boylston’s traditional modes of belonging and relating, as individuals entered into relationships of choice and interest rather than communal obligation. It was a transition that was simultaneously resisted and promoted, creating

¹ John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 7-11.

conflict among neighbors, between family members, and often within individual souls.

It is the goal of this dissertation to better understand how the people of Boylston experienced and made sense of this transformation of their world from organic community to plural communities. The study draws upon the extensive diary and letter resources of the family of Aaron and Mary White, leading citizens of Boylston during its era of transition and conflict. These intimate records reveal those choices that Boylstonians made to forward – or retard – change in their rural, central Massachusetts farming town. They also offer insight into how Boylstonians *experienced* that change. Frightening or exhilarating, frustrating or advantageous, threatening or liberating, the changes that reshaped relationship in Boylston during these decades were variously perceived by those who resisted or welcomed the arrival of “this wilderness world.”

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ABBREVIATIONS

Repositories

AAS	American Antiquarian Society
BPL	Boston Public Library
BHS	Boylston Historical Society
FCCB	First Congregational Church of Boylston
FL	Fruitlands Museums
HU	Harvard College Library, Harvard University
MA	Massachusetts Archives
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society
MSHL	Massachusetts State House Library
NA	National Archives
NEHGS	New England Historic Genealogic Society
NHS	Northborough Historical Society
OSV	Old Sturbridge Village Research Library
UD	University of Delaware Special Collections
WC	Williams College Archives
WORC	Worcester County Registry of Deeds

Journals

AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AQ	<i>American Quarterly</i>
BHSS	<i>Boylston Historical Society Series</i>
FM	<i>Feminist Studies</i>
JAH	<i>Journal of American History</i>
JER	<i>Journal of the Early Republic</i>
JMF	<i>Journal of Marriage and the Family</i>
JSH	<i>Journal of Social History</i>
HEQ	<i>History of Education Quarterly</i>
NEQ	<i>The New England Quarterly</i>
PAAS	<i>Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society</i>
WMQ	<i>The William and Mary Quarterly</i> . 3 rd series

ABSTRACT

THIS WILDERNESS WORLD: THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW ENGLAND FARM
TOWN, 1820-2840

by

Mary Babson Fuhrer

University of New Hampshire, May, 2010

This dissertation uses the extraordinary conflict that roiled one rural town in central Massachusetts during the second quarter of the nineteenth century as a lens through which to observe communal relationships in transition. Using the Amish as a model, the dissertation identifies traditional communal social organization as agrarian, patriarchal, communal, homogeneous, localistic, and consensual – as well as closed, conformist, and suspicious of difference and innovation. The dissertation argues that conflict arose in Boylston during the 1820s and ‘30s as these traditional relationships gradually gave way to more modern ways of belonging, associating, and envisioning one’s place in the wider world. Boylston by 1850, though still a farming town, was significantly more pluralistic, partisan, and cosmopolitan. Belonging had become a function of one’s chosen identity.

The process of transition – a temporal borderland -- was uneven – contested and negotiated -- engendering struggles between townsmen, among neighbors, within families, and in the hearts of individuals. Ultimately, it is a story of the ways in which one family, and the community in which it lived, experienced the “coming of modernity.”

INTRODUCTION

The Bell

It was 1842, in Capt. Howe's barnyard, when the big bell rang for the first time in Boylston. An ox team had arrived the night before from the foundry, pulling the 1,000-pound behemoth in a farm wagon. As townsmen gingerly raised the bell upon timbers to transport it to the new town hall upon the common, the clapper swung clear and the deep tone of the bell rang out, heralding its own arrival in this central Massachusetts farm town.¹ For some, such as the determined Capt. Howe, it was a joyous peal of victory; for others, such as pious matron Mary White, it tolled the death of an old way of life.

Bells were central to regulating life in rural New England. Before the mass production of clocks and watches, the meetinghouse bell on the town common sounded the noon and nine p.m. hours, providing temporal order and regularity.² All who lived within the sound of the great bell heard the call to worship and town meeting. It was the bell that alerted townsfolk to their neighbor's distress in the event of fire or spread civil alarm if danger approached. And it was the town bell that tolled the death of one's neighbors, in numbered strokes that called out the gender and age of the deceased and so

¹ Wm. C. Noonan, *Educational History of Boylston*, BHSS Vol. VI (Boylston, Mass.: Boylston Historical Society, 1980), p. 43; Wm. Dupuis, *History of Boylston, 1786-1886*, BHSS Vol. XII (Boylston, Mass.: Boylston Historical Society, 1978), p. 52.

² For examples of this temporal ordering, particularly after 1780, see John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (Amherst, Mass.: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 239.

announced who was no longer in the land of the living.³ The town bell was a sonorous artifact of custom-bound community.

Yet Howe and his faction had fought long and hard to have their bell heard in rural Boylston. Why? Quite simply, Boylston already had a bell. It hung in the steeple of the meetinghouse on the common, and it had rung out its calls to community for years while the meetinghouse doubled as church and public hall for the congregated community. By the mid-1820s, however, a group of theologically liberal townsmen had withdrawn from the orthodox congregation and established their own worship, first in the schoolhouse, and then in the newly-built Town Hall.⁴ When the state disestablished the ancient Puritan church in 1833, Boylston's orthodox Congregationalists, by a slim majority, claimed possession of the existing meetinghouse – and its bell.

Capt. Howe and his liberal followers battled for a dozen years for the right to ring that bell. Year after year, in town meeting debates that exhibited “great warmth,” Howe's faction put forward motions to allow their ringer to sound the bell at noon and nine p.m. But their elected bell-ringer found that the Congregationalists “refuse him liberty to enter the Meeting House and ring said bell.”⁵ Throughout the 1830s, the two factions fought bitterly – and ultimately legally – for control, and then for ownership, of the old bell. When lawyers determined that the existing bell was indeed the property of the

³ Henry F. Harrington, “The Village Death Bell,” *Ladies Companion and Literary Expositor*, Vols. 11-12. William W. Snowden, Lydia Howard Sigourney, Emma Catherine Embury, Editors. (New York: W. W. Snowden, 1839), p. 142.

⁴ The town house was a secular building for public meetings and town business.

⁵ Boylston Town Meeting Notes, May 1830, November 1835, May 1841, November 1841, Feb. 1843. Transcription, Boylston Historical Society, Boylston, Mass.

Congregationalists, their opponents petitioned to purchase a new bell to hang in the Town Hall adjacent to the Congregationalist meetinghouse. This was the bell that rang out in Howe's barnyard – a welcome sound to only one half of embattled Boylston.

Dueling bells were not a welcome sound to Mary White. Often over the past two decades of turmoil and dissension she had fervently prayed, “May these divisions soon terminate & these people be *of one heart & one mind* . . .”⁶ But all of her efforts and all of her prayers could not knit her fractious community together again. By 1843, Boylston had too many faiths, parties, societies, classes, and identities to be served by a single bell. The people of this small farming town were no longer united by custom and necessity in the bonds of traditional community. They were of many minds, embracing individualism and innovation, pluralism and partisan association. Some rued the loss of their old community of custom, while others reveled in creating new communities of choice. All experienced the unsettling discordance wrought by change.

Conflict in Boylston

Mary White and her farmer and shopkeeper husband, Aaron, settled in the central Massachusetts town of Boylston when they married in 1798. For the next half-century, the couple –and eventually their ten children – lived, quite literally, in the midst of social transformation. From their farmhouse overlooking the town common, Squire and Mrs. White witnessed, promoted, fomented, resisted and lamented change. Like so many of New England's “village folk” at this time, they sought *improvement*, but they discovered that the people of Boylston increasingly disagreed on what made for a better world.

⁶ Diary of Mary White, January 20, 1828, OSV.

This dissertation tells the story of a prosperous farm family and its community in rural New England in the tumultuous decades of the 1820s and 30s. It is a story of transformation – not just of the world around them, but of the relationships between them and of the hearts and minds within them. The conflict that roiled Boylston during these decades had many causes, but at root of all were shifts in the way people thought of themselves and their relation to community and congregation, neighborhood and family. As they gradually evolved into a more modern, pluralist community, they struggled to redefine belonging and to place self in a new, broader context of society.

It is important to qualify at the outset: this will not be a nostalgic study of how close-knit, cooperative, and supportive communities were besieged and destroyed by ruthless competition and self-interest. Traditional community bonds suited an agrarian world where neighborly and family cooperation was essential to survival. They could, however, also be exclusive, conformist, repressive, antagonistic towards innovation, suspicious of outsiders, and enslaved to hierarchal and patriarchal patterns of deference. This study does not romanticize traditional community. It does acknowledge, however, that traditional community fostered ways of understanding one's place in the world and one's relation to others that had been useful in ordering and giving meaning to experience for generations.

During the decades of the 1820s through 1840s, those understandings underwent transformation in Boylston. Relationships, once dictated by proximity or necessity, came to be based on choice and shared interests. Individual beliefs and values challenged traditional norms and mores; pluralist associations formed to support contrasting visions of the good; long-distance networks and communications freed villages from tyranny of

local elites. The emerging community offered choices, multiple creeds, plural interests, different notions of improvement and respectability. It also bred controversy. Some in Boylston embraced new ways of seeing themselves in the world; others resisted, clinging to traditional ways. During this transitional period, Boylston was convulsed in conflicts.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the people of Boylston shared a communal identity rooted in family farming, town membership and spiritual fellowship. Many, like the Whites, shared a sense of destiny, an optimism that with faith and determined striving they could improve their land, character, and community, redeem their soul, and perfect their Republic. Over the next half century, however – and particularly in the third and fourth decades -- the town was convulsed by bitter conflicts over personality and politics, religion and reform. Most troublesome was a generational divide, as offspring declined to adopt their parents' "independent yeomen" identity. There was conflict even within the hearts of individuals: youth struggled to discern their own path to self-mastery and salvation, while elders wrestled with lost security and authority. The 1830s was an anxious decade for the White family and their townsfolk: the exodus of the young, the dissolution of their church, an economic crisis that disrupted patterns of neighborly trade and credit, a divisive antislavery campaign, and partisan political turmoil left many, including Mary White, fearing the imminent end of the world. Optimistic faith in improvement had turned to anxious fear of economic, political, and moral bankruptcy.

Behind this rising tide of conflict and dissension lay a shift in traditional notions of communal identity, belonging, and interdependent relationship. At the turn of the century Boylston was an isolated, localistic community of farm families united by a monolithic faith and an organic sense of civic membership. But economic and social

development after the War of 1812 transformed that world. Market wagons brought new goods and novel ideas into town and carried local youth off to pursue new paths to self-sufficiency and self-determination. As some Boylstonians altered traditional semi-subsistence family farming, they also broke with ancient patterns of behavior and relation -- shared labor, family dependence, neighborly interdependence -- that had ordered and given collective meaning to life. A common mentality rooted in an agrarian way of life gave way to divergent ways of understanding the world. Boylstonians and their offspring contested ways of fashioning identity, establishing social order, redeeming souls, and achieving national destiny. By the 1840s, the town was religiously and politically pluralistic; increasingly marked by distinctions of occupation, affluence, and education; and linked by rail, print, and consumer goods to cosmopolitan – even global - networks. The people of Boylston understood this new world in different, sometimes irreconcilable ways; neighbors, families, and individuals struggled with choice and change. They devised new ways to congregate, to associate, and to campaign on behalf of their beliefs and interests. In doing so, they learned that “the common good” was an elusive – and contested – entity.

Defining an Era

The 1820s’ and ’30s, two tumultuous and transformative decades in American history, have no adequate moniker. The historian’s default has been “Jacksonian,” but that designation is misleading. Jackson’s presidency spanned the years from 1828 to 1836, but the age was not his. A controversial and divisive figure, Jackson’s support for Indian Removal, slavery, and the destruction of the national bank aroused as much

hostility among his opponents as it did enthusiasm among his supporters.⁷ The term “Early Republic” speaks to the sense of national adolescence, of a country experiencing both the exhilaration and anxieties of its own coming-of-age. But in historiographical tradition, “Early Republic” has described the infancy of the nation (the years between the Revolution and the War of 1812), rather than its adolescence. “Antebellum” is equally unsatisfactory. Not only is it weighted with deterministic foreshadowing, it also suggests a sectional flavor, conjuring images of plantations, hoop skirts, and mammies.

None of these terms adequately captures the period that stretches from the early 1820s to the quickening of sectional hostilities in the early 1840s. Yet it was truly *an era*, united in its diverse aspects by its one constant: extraordinary change. The 1820s and '30s were an age of innovations, such that Mary White would call it “a wilderness world.” Historians have often described this dynamic & transformational era as a time of revolutions, although “Age of Revolutions” is not a satisfying designation for these decades of change, in part because that term has been co-opted by historians of the American and French Revolutions, as well as the revolutions of 1848 Europe. And not all of the changes transforming New England in the 1820s and '30s *were* revolutions; some were gradual and natural adaptations to changing resources. Yet, over a generation, the cumulative effect of these changes was an alteration in the way most people understood their world. The era’s muse, Emerson, proclaimed that nothing was eternal any longer,

⁷ “Jacksonian,” as historian Daniel Walker Howe points out, may describe the values of the man’s followers, but there was no Jacksonian nation. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-48*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 330-1.

but each man must daily seek his own fresh truth, “the newness.”⁸

Among the many transformations that reshaped everyday life in this age, economic changes have attracted the most attention – and debate – among historians. Charles Sellers’s influential interpretation of this era depicts an epic struggle between an expanding tide of commercial capitalism and democratic resistance from urban and agrarian poor, a war over the future character of American society.⁹ The Massachusetts farmer has been a favorite subject of studies of “emergence of the market.” Most scholars agree that, sometime between 1750 and 1850, Massachusetts farmers altered their primary objective from producing primarily for family subsistence to a more profit-oriented cash-cropping for trade in the market. But the timing of, motivations for, and consequences of that shift have been sharply contested, in a debate shaped by different methods and grounded in conflicting ideologies.¹⁰ “Market” scholars see farmers striving to maximize profits.¹¹ “Moral economy” scholars see farmers struggling to maintain

⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Robert Spiller et al. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971) Vol. 3 p. 40.

⁹ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Alan Kulikoff summarized the conflict between two dominant schools of economic interpretation in “The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America,” *WMQ* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan. 1989), pp. 120-44.

¹¹ “Market” historians define capitalism in the functional terms of neo-classical economics: the emergence of market processes based on rational attempts to maximize profit. In general, they assume that the spirit of acquisitive striving and profit-seeking was always present in New England and needed only the maturation of colonial society – advances in technology, transportation, and communication - to transform farmers’ behavior. That transformation, they assert, occurred in Massachusetts beginning in the late colonial period. They generally celebrate the transition to market-oriented farm practices as a progressive advance that improved standards of living, fostered

family and communal norms.¹² Some historians have attempted a synthesis of these two interpretations that would meld economic and social motivation in attempting to understand how and why New England farmers changed their practices in this tumultuous era.¹³ We will not attempt to resolve this dispute in our study of Boylston, but we will be aware that the nature of farming was changing during the decades of Boylston's conflict.

Market growth, however we qualify its scope and origins, was not the only harbinger of change. The Industrial Revolution was born on Boylston's doorstep in these same years. Boylston was exclusively a farming community, but it was surrounded by Worcester County villages whose hilly terrain and tumbling streams powered numerous

entrepreneurial growth and made production more efficient; they assume that farmers embraced these changes as rational choices reflecting their best interests. See Winifred B. Rothenberg, *From Markets to Marketplaces: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹² "Moral economy" historians follow a Marxian model that interprets New England farmers before the mid-nineteenth century as *pre-capitalist* in mentality, holding to ancient, customary behaviors that elevated household security, neighborly interdependence, and communal well-being over acquisitive individualism. These farmers did not change their ways until social and ideological forces touched off by the Revolution released an aggressive individualism that displaced old family and communal values. These historians generally show an anti-capitalist bent, idealizing pre-capitalist farm communities as familial, cooperative and communitarian, and decrying the growth of exploitive labor practices, antagonistic class relations, and conflict that accompanied the transition to capitalism. The classic studies in this school include Michael D. Merrill, "Cash is good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review* 3 (1977), pp. 42-71 and James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalities in Pre-Industrial America," *WMQ* 35 no. 1 (1978), pp. 3-32. For other treatments of adaptation and resistance to the coming of capitalism, see Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*, essays by Thomas Dublin, David Jaffee, Gary Kulik, and Jonathan Prude, 1985.

¹³ Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1750-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Brian Donahue: *The Great Meadow: Farms and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

early manufactories for making wire, nails, clocks, combs, carpet, textiles, chairs, pianos and other small-scale mass-produced commodities. This early industry lured Boylston's sons and daughters from home by offering an alternative to the "hot, heavy labor" of tilling the soil, access to cash wages, and a chance for independence from the family economy.¹⁴ It also introduced them to a world their parents could not know – a world of machines requiring skills and knowledge beyond that of their elders, of clocks and time discipline, of standardization and efficiency – a non-agrarian world.¹⁵

The mass-produced goods from Worcester County manufactories fueled an upsurge in consumerism and new concerns for gentility and material refinement.¹⁶ Boylston's "best families" upgraded their parlors with wallpapers, sets of painted chairs, wall clocks and looking glasses, carpets and curtains. They remodeled their houses, tidied their village centers, added fences and ornamental trees, and embraced the romantic ideal of a tamed pastoral landscape.¹⁷ Those who could not afford to participate in the consumer revolution and the new standards of genteel refinement may well have resented their

¹⁴ For a positive view of the motivation to, and rewards of, choosing factory work, see Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). For a negative view, see Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Harvard University Press, 1976).

¹⁵ See E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (London: Merlin Press, 1991). Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

¹⁶ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Joseph S. Wood, *The New England Village* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

increasingly obvious inferior status.¹⁸

The market, industrial, and consumer revolutions in antebellum Worcester would not have been possible without extraordinary advances in the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Between 1790 and 1820, the people of Massachusetts exhibited, as one editor noted in 1839, a “passion for building roads.”¹⁹ At the turn of the nineteenth century, a trip from Boylston to Boston was a two-day ordeal over poor roads; by 1825, a regular stage delivered Boylstonians to the city in about six hours. Less than a decade later, Boylstonians could “take the cars” from neighboring Shrewsbury for a two-hour rail trip to Boston. During the same decade, the Blackstone Canal provided a water route to Providence and the export market. These new routes were arteries not just for commerce; they also brought new ideas, political propaganda, and tales of opportunity available in a wider world. Daniel Walker Howe has proposed that dramatic improvements in transportation and information exchange produced a “communication revolution,” as the flow of ideas “liberated people from the weight of local tyrannies.”²⁰

As the “local tyranny” of Boylston’s Federalist gentry waned in the early years of the 1820s, the town also experienced the transformative effects of yet another innovation,

¹⁸ Alternatively, class distinctions may have been blurred by the sudden elevation of middling sections of society to material equality with the former gentry. This is the interpretation of Richard Bushman, *Refinement of America*.

¹⁹ Jack Larkin. *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 211.

²⁰ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 237. Howe relies on George Rogers Taylor’s classic study, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860*, Economic History of the United States, Vol. 4 (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

the rise of party politics.²¹ During the 1820s and '30s, the town evolved from a solid Federalist consensus to a two-, three-, and eventually *four*-party town. Boylstonians debated whether this rise of parties and factions was positive progress towards popular democratic expression or chaotic descent into dissension and self-interest.

Historians have also cast the Jacksonian era as a time of revolutionary but contentious social idealism, as reformers debated how to perfect their society. The nation was young, forms of social organization and behavior still inchoate. The possibilities looking forward were both exhilarating and terrifying. Rural Boylston, too, had its prophets of social design. Societies and associations promoted the improving benefits of libraries, lyceum lectures, charitable work, and social reform. Historians' assessments of reformers' motivations and goals have ranged from measured admiration for well-intentioned humanitarians to biting denunciation of manipulative social engineers.²²

²¹ Alfred Schlesinger Jr.'s *Age of Jackson* identifies the spread of democracy through partisan and class conflict as the distinguishing feature of this turbulent time. Sean Wilentz essentially agrees, casting the era from Jefferson through Jackson as one of democratic revolution, when social elites struggled fiercely and ultimately unsuccessfully for political dominance over the masses. Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Jackson*. (New York: Norton, 2005). Both historians trace a rise in popular political participation, party enthusiasms, and pervasive democratic ethos that defined both the age and the future of American democracy.

²² Examples of the "social control" school include Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (1960) and Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. More forgiving analyses include Lois W. Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," in *JAH* Vol. 60, No. 1. (Jun., 1973), pp. 423-444; Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815-1860*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.; Lawrence Frederick Kohl, "The Concept of Social Control and the History of Jacksonian America," in *JER*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1985) pp. 21-34; and Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

Whatever Boylston reformers' intentions, their work often produced contention among those who resisted change and a heightened awareness of social difference among those whose names were *not* on the membership rolls.

Perhaps the most powerful transformative force in Boylston in the 1820s and '30s was not something new at all, but the revival of something ancient. The decades of 1815 to 1845 were the heyday of the Second Great Awakening, and the religious sentiments of Boylstonians were most powerfully awakened. Revivalism and social tumult have a long-entwined story. Historians have credited both the First and Second Great Awakening with remaking the social order by undermining the authority of the established clergy, elevating individual conscience, and energizing new forms of association.²³ When disestablishment came to Boylston in 1833, voluntarism renewed the energies of Boylston's ancient orthodox church, but it also forced the church to compete in an increasingly pluralist religious world. Boylston worshippers would never again, as Mary futilely prayed, "be of one heart and one mind."

Of great concern and heartache to some Boylston parents was that their children

²³ For some interpreters, especially those attached to the Puritan paradigm of Perry Miller, these transformations were ultimately detrimental to orthodox observance and religious authority. See Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and Social Order in Connecticut* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Christine Leigh Heyrman. *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). But others see the reverse. In this view, established, state-supported churches played a coercive role in the colonial period, dampening faith both in feeling and practice. Early national churches, freed of both the support and constraints of government authority, were forced to rely on their own efforts. They were energized, and their energies fueled the Second Great Awakening. See Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

were leaving. It was not just that they were leaving home – New England youth had *always* been on the move towards more open land. But in earlier generations, the vast majority of those who left home did *not* leave the land. In the 1820s and '30s, the young men who left Boylston were increasingly headed for a clerk's desk, workshop, factory, or business establishment. Their forefathers had pursued the yeoman's ideal, the belief that a freehold farm guaranteed their security and independence and bespoke their status as free men and worthy citizens. Boylston's sons, however, increasingly rejected that identity. They turned to the alluring opportunities of mercantile trade, emerging manufactures, and the professions, where they could exchange their rough country clothes for white collars and clean boots, their flails and dung forks for desks and counters, their country manners for urban gentility.²⁴ Their parents' hearts, as we will see, ached.

These changes fostered both greater choice and greater controversy. Boylston's conflicts grew from deeper cultural transformation shaping the new nation: a growing awareness of plural interests, an increasing challenge to the notion of a single common good, and a more determined individual pursuit of happiness. They are evidence of an underlying change in the way people understood their place in the world and their relationship to others, an uneven, conflicted, and contested shift from a "traditional" to a more "modern" community.

²⁴ See J.M. Opal, J.M., *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Brian P. Luskey, "Jumping Counters in White Collars: Manliness, Respectability and Work in the Antebellum City," *JER*, 26 (Summer, 2006), pp. 173-219; and Michael Zakim, "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes," *JER* 26. (Summer 2006), pp. 563-602.

Regarding Mentality: Traditional, Modern or Otherwise

The choice of the word “regarding” in the above subtitle is intended to convey two senses: here we will be discussing both the nature of the slippery term “mentality,” and the challenge of actually *observing* mind-sets in historical subjects. Historians and anthropologists have long maintained that people of different cultures and ages possess a general mind-set that is distinctive to their time and place. Needing to find order and meaning in their world, people adopt assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that frame the way they understand their experiences and condition their responses to those experiences. Thus, historians of Europe’s pre-industrial, agrarian societies have identified the qualities of a “traditional” mentality that valued the cooperative, communal behaviors that supported their common goal of surviving off the land and also provided some reassurance of limited control over, or security in face of, seemingly overwhelming forces of fate.²⁵ Historians of Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries posit the emergence of a “modern” mentality that valued rationality, progress, and individual

²⁵ Classic treatments of pre-industrial mentality include George Rude, *The Crowd in History* (London: Serif, 2005, originally published in 1964), which identified the motives, beliefs, and patterns of behavior of eighteenth century French peasants; E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New York Press, 1993), which identified customary behaviors derived from common law and habit of pre-industrial English country folk who were more concerned with provisioning the local population than in accumulating capital; Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, (London: Methuen, 1965), which identified the integration of work and family life as a central quality of the pre-modern world, and Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971) which depicted a pre-modern, pre-enlightened society that adopted a mentality of faith, fate, and magic to deal with the otherwise inexplicable and unpredictable misfortunes of famine, plague, drought, flood, and sudden disaster.

rights while struggling to adjust to the demands of a newly complex, competitive, technological, and globally integrated environment.²⁶

“Traditional” and “modern” are, of course, as slippery and freighted terms as “mentality.” Not all behavior in the pre-modern world was based on custom, and traditions persisted long into the “modern” era – persist, in fact, to the present. The terms have also become value-laden with the ideological biases of Progressive and Marxist schools, as well as the post-modern critique of Foucault and his followers. Where some interpreted the transformations of the modern era as beneficial progress toward a liberal rationality, others romantically idealized the traditional as peaceful, communal Eden.

The study of the ways in which people understood and gave meaning to their experiences poses a second problem: how do we recover it? We cannot enter the minds of Boylston’s farmers. We can record their actions and decisions, we can interpret their creations, but we cannot see the world through their eyes to understand how they

²⁶ For classic studies of “modern mentality,” see Richard D. Brown, “Modernization and the Modern Personality in Early America, 1600-1865: A Sketch of a Synthesis,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Winter, 1972), pp. 201-228, which traces the development of modern mentality as rational, functional, mobile, and centralized; Brown’s *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976) provides a definition of the qualities that define traditional and modern societies and traces the transition to modern life in America; and Richard H. Weibe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) which describes a modern mentality emerging from the dissolution of America’s island communities and their replacement by a national network of association; Marxist historians have focused on the oppositional mentality that resulted from antagonistic class relations in the modern capitalist workplace. Other historians have traced the emergence of “modern” attitudes toward family, privacy, and domesticity as a haven from the modern workplace. See Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (Yale University Press, 1983).

understood what they did, said, and created. How can we regard their assumptions and recover their attitudes when we cannot be among them?

One contemporary window into the pre-modern mind may survive in the agrarian communities of the Amish and related sects. The tourist industry markets the Amish as a culture “frozen in time” because of their efforts to preserve many aspects of their eighteenth century heritage in their twenty-first century life. A psychologist who works with Amish youth in rural Indiana discovered that this cultural distinction extends not just to buggies, straw hats, and horse-drawn plows, but to patterns of thought and ways of understanding the world. In treating the Amish, it was impossible for him to use modern psychological methods or pursue standard therapeutic goals. He had to adapt his therapy to a completely different set of cultural norms, based not on modern assumptions of well-being -- self-exploration, individuation, accepting personal responsibility for one’s actions – but to an older, more communal-centered ethos. For the Amish, talking about self or exploring personal feelings is considered prideful. Individuation – developing a sense of self-identity based on a distinctive “I” – is antithetical to their cultural sensibilities, where the goal is not to become self, but to become a useful member of community. One strives not to define one’s being and develop boundaries, but to submit and conform to the will and discipline of the community, to become one with the group. The community, in turn, accepts lifelong responsibility for the well-being of its members, without the assistance, or interference, of any “outside” institutions. The Amish mentality may offer a modern-day experience of the way people in Mary White’s Boylston envisioned their world.²⁷

Scholars of Amish society have identified those distinctive cultural and religious values that characterize their “traditional” world and help them resist the encroachment of modern society.²⁸ The first is *submission of individual will to communal norms*. In this providential outlook, one renounces pretensions to control and transform his environment and seeks instead to patiently accept what God has designed; one values resignation over self-assertion. But, key to their culture, the Amish submit not just to the will of God, but also to the will of the community. Each year, the community revisits its “Ordnung,” or accepted rules for moral order; the meeting is not adjourned until *consensus* is reached that the rule – as currently held or communally amended -- is unanimously accepted. Then all renew their vow of submission to this order, and to the authority of the community to enforce it upon all members. Those who disobey the Ordnung undergo disciplined counsel from elders until they repent and are reconciled to the community – or are expelled and shunned.

The “yielded self” eschews personal striving, material distinctions, or specialized knowledge that might foster pride or set one apart from the unity of the community.

Communal membership fundamentally shapes identity. One’s being comes from

²⁷ Dr. Jim Cates, “One Man Tackles Psychotherapy for the Amish,” transcript of *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, March 18, 2009. See also, James A. Cates, “Facing Away: Mental Health Treatment with the Old Order Amish,” *American Journal of Psychotherapy* Vol. 59 No. 4, 2005, pp. 371-383.

²⁸ The leading scholars of Amish society are sociologists Donald B. Kraybill and John A. Hostetler. Their works include Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Kraybill and Marc A. Olshan, *The Amish Struggle with Modernity* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1994); and John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963). I also found helpful contrasts between Amish and “English” views in Joe Mackall, *Plain Secrets: An Outsider among the Amish* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

belonging, and one's welfare – both spiritual and material – is dependent upon the acceptance and embrace of the community. Distinctive dialect, dress, and customs set community members apart from the greater world and reinforce group identity and belonging. The goal of community is to serve the *common good*, provide for *collective welfare*, and root individuals in secure belonging and eternal meaning.

Amish societies are *familial* and *agrarian* in organization. Large and patriarchal, the family forms the primary unit of production and reproduction. Family farms shape the rhythms, patterns, and meanings of daily work. The demands of farming both order and sacralize daily life, and through the work of farming children are socialized into the ways of their ancestors. Gendered skills and duties are passed from generation to generation. Elders are esteemed for the wisdom of their accumulated experience; youth are taught to emulate elders and respect tradition. Formal education is limited to those times when children's labor on the farm can be spared, and in no case proceeds beyond the eighth grade of the local one-room Amish schoolhouse, lest the student become proud. The farm family does not work in isolation, as each farmer knows he is dependent upon his neighbor for periodic help. Amish "insurance" is the assurance that neighbors will come to one's assistance in times of need. *Neighborly interdependence* further cements the communal bond; their common, shared work integrates and unites the community.

Amish societies are also marked by their *homogeneity*. Living apart in isolated communities, they have maintained strong ties to their ethnic heritage, strong extended kin relationships, and a uniformity of expression that is accentuated by their distinctive, dress, dialect, and customs. They are suspicious of outsiders and resist incursions into their private world. They maintain a focus that is determinedly *localistic*, and, beyond

sharing communications with other Amish communities and kin, they have little interaction in the world beyond their community. They resist entanglement with state or nation. By choice, they live *isolated*, in island communities apart from the world – or, as they say, from “the English.”

If the Amish offer us insights into the pre-modern identity and community, then, we should expect the people of Boylston at the beginning of the nineteenth century to be relatively communal and committed to the ideal of the common good and collective welfare. Consensual in nature, they would likely expect and enforce conformity to local norms. We should find lives defined by customary farming and extended, patriarchal families. Limited learning and a respect for received knowledge would constrain innovation. An ethic of neighborly interdependence would shape the sharing of resources and labor and binds the community in a web of mutual obligations. With longtime residence and intermarriage, people would be accustomed to a familiar world of the known, the kindred and the like. Living in rural isolation, they would likely be parochial, uncomfortable with difference, and suspect of the stranger. In the face of adversity, they would be providential, embracing fate with faith. Their world was not romantic – it was effective in maintaining a closed, localistic, world of enforced consensus and uniform behavior and belief. Their communal mentality empowered them by providing a meaning-giving bulwark against unpredictable fate and providence, but it also severely limited and circumscribed creativity, difference, and individualism. This we will define as a traditional community.²⁹

²⁹ In Darrett Rutman’s assessment of the New England town studies, most New England communities did indeed share many of these characteristics. He summarized their

By contrast, then, we might expect a fully “modern” community – if it had emerged by mid-century in Boylston-- to be all that the village mind was not. These Boylstonians would value individuality and innovation over conformity and experience, individual striving over communal well-being, and pluralistic compromise over enforced consensus. They would favor state or institutional welfare over collective communal care, diverse occupations and entrepreneurial activity over subsistence farming, the separation of family from work and a redefinition of its purpose. With their more cosmopolitan outlook they would be more aware of difference (ethnic, religious, racial, and class), and would seek incorporation into the broader national and global world. Most of all, they would seek – and expect – to control and improve their environment.

There are serious qualifications to this model. In some very important ways, Boylstonian and Amish experience are arguably *not* comparable. The Amish sought to preserve a culture rooted in German *peasant* tradition; Boylstonians had never been peasants. At the turn of the century almost all Boylstonians were Anglo-Americans who could trace their roots to the Puritan Great Migration of the 1630s. Their ancestors were a literate, mobile population that had carried to the New World transformative ideas about improvement and striving, expansion and opportunity, specialization, and integration, and the role of the individual in society.³⁰ New England’s colonists maintained their

common features as familial; neighborly and cooperative by necessity; localistic and internalized; face-to-face and familiar in scale; ordered by the predictable seasonal cycles of agrarian life. Darrett Rutman, “Assessing the Little Communities of Early America,” *WMQ*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Apr., 1986), pp. 164-178.

³⁰ Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (New Brunswick: N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1982). Gordon Wood, however, argues in *The Radicalism of the American*

cosmopolitan connections through essential imports, the bond of English Protestantism, and a shared, evolving debate over the nature and limits of constituted authority.³¹ The rhetoric of Revolution had reached deep into the heart of rural Boylston, fostering the ideal of individual liberty; the challenge of nation-making had drawn isolated New England villages into networks of provincial communication. In addition, New England's farm towns had never been successfully *consensual*: most town histories are riddled with squabbles over the placement of the meeting house, school houses or local roads, spats over assigned church seating, and struggles over the sharing of the pulpit. At no point in its history could Boylston, or any other New England village, be termed wholly communal, consensual, or sequestered from the wider world.

However, eighteenth-century Boylstonians *had* embraced community and consensus as *ideals*. When the residents of the northern section of Shrewsbury successfully petitioned for their own parish in 1742 (the precursor of Boylston's corporate existence), they immediately adopted a covenant, like all good Puritan congregations, to bind their members to God and to each other. The voluntarily

Revolution (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) that the mature flowering of individualism came in the New World as a result of the Revolution.

³¹ John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); T.H. Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); David Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

covenanted community, in which salvation came through the compact God made with his elect in community, was a guiding and ordering principle of the New England mind.³² In the individual's lifelong struggle against backsliding and sin, the company of a disciplined society, a holy community of saints, was essential. Covenant and commonwealth combined in early New England to create a "civic ecology" that tried to balance individual striving with communal well-being.³³ The early Boylston congregation periodically renewed its covenant and acted on their "covenant obligations" in addressing any potential dissension and resolving discord.

The *ideal* of consensus – though frequently unfulfilled -- governed civic as well as religious matters. Despite the classic paradigm of Puritan "declension" from collectivism in the face of wilderness abundance, eighteenth century communities expected their town government to be based on a shared "sense of the meeting" to which all could subscribe. Unanimity, not majority, was the ideal. Where differences arose, the selectmen used moral suasion, committee negotiation, and external arbitration to resolve differences and reach consensus.³⁴ Though rarely peaceable kingdoms in fact, New

³² For covenant theology, see Perry Miller's *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939), and "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity" in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956): pp. 48-98; for covenanted community see Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955). For a more recent exposition, see David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapid, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

³³ For the notion of civic ecology, see Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995).

England's towns strove to be so. What peace was achieved, of course, came at the cost of toleration for difference.

And if, by the eve of the Revolution, the decline of Puritanism and the rise of a competitive market culture promoted self-interest, the emerging rhetoric of classical republicanism discouraged such behavior. The revolutionary generation embraced civic virtue – the disinterested pursuit of the common good. And they believed that there was, indeed, a *single* common good – liberty – that would be preserved through the balanced institutions of government rather than contest of oppositional parties. When Monroe was elected in 1820, despite the past feuding of Federalists and Jeffersonian Democrats, it was still conventional wisdom that parties were evil; thus Monroe's inaugural address could celebrate "the American people . . . one great family with a common interest."³⁵

Our assumptions about the nature of the "modern" community also need qualification. Many of the "before" and "after" pictures of the advent of modernity are based on and ideas of dramatic and sudden transformations. Work is separated from home; masters withdraw from their charges; artisans are deskilled and enslaved by machinery and clock; people move from farms to factories or from country to city; women retreat to tend domestic havens. Dislocation, disorientation, and alienation are

³⁴ The leading proponent of this school of thought is Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970). See also Christopher M. Jedrej, *The World of John Cleaveland: Family and Community in Eighteenth Century New England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979). Zuckerman and Jedrej were both students of Bailyn; their town studies represent a response to the conflict-oriented research of earlier social historians, who issued heated rebuttals of this more consensus-oriented approach.

³⁵ James Monroe, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1817.

standard themes of this transformation. Yet Boylston remained a solidly agricultural town with a stable population level and a familiar landscape throughout the period of intense conflict.³⁶ In the face of such stability, how can we attribute conflict to revolutionary transformation and the transition to “modern” pressures?

Though Boylston’s environment remained rural and agrarian, Boylston’s society changed. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the bonds that held community together, and the authority that directed behavior, were primarily local. Household, neighbors, town officers, and church members disciplined each other and enforced local norms. They provided the shared labor, social welfare, and exchange of goods to meet most of their needs. Localism shaped their identity and constrained their world. Early national leaders, though, struggled to overcome this parochialism in forging a new nation.³⁷ By mid-century, the nation had indeed entered into New England’s rural consciousness (mostly in the form of sectional tensions and rivalries). But so had other allegiances, connections, and commitments that extended far beyond Boylston’s borders. Control and discipline had turned both inward (toward self-restraint) and outward, to distant sources of authority. Where the people of Boylston had once understood their identity in terms of a communal corporation, they were now increasingly individuals *incorporated* into

³⁶ In fact, the lack of growth in Boylston’s population was the result of the exodus of both Boylston’s poorest folk and its most ambitious youth; with the exit of these potentially volatile groups, “those who stayed behind” might well have represented a stable, like-minded people. Hal Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth Century New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

³⁷ “With the creation of the ‘extended republic’ came a widespread effort to uproot households and communities from their provincial identities and align them with national judgment of self and success, value and virtue, public need and personal worth.” Opal, *Beyond the Farm*, p. ix.

networks and organizations of national and even global scope. From these distant connections they drew various notions of good, of virtue, of well-being, and of improvement. The transformations of the past half-century had brought the world to Boylston, and there was no hope of reconciling the pluralistic views and goals now represented in one small farming town.³⁸ Until the people of Boylston adapted to difference, a conflicted town would wrestle with how, or even if, many could be one.

This dissertation will argue that the extraordinary conflict that roiled rural Boylston in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was evidence of contested ways of understanding the nature of the individual and his relationship to community. Traditional and modern ways of understanding the world were contested in family, neighborhood, church, market and town. It will argue that such a conflict is rooted in, and visible through, changes in personal relationships. The coming of modernity happened not with an event, or at a place, but in the way people understood their relationship to each other and to the wider world. Whatever “came,” whatever transformation occurred, took place between farmers in their fields, neighbors at the gate, the generations at home -- and within each human heart. The decades of conflict in Boylston represent a temporal

³⁸ Themes of disintegration and cohesion, corporation and incorporation, community and society are standard in historiography. Colonial historians debate whether provincial social organization disintegrated in the face of wilderness conditions (Turner, Miller, Bushman) or became increasingly ordered and integrated with the development of economic and political infrastructure. (Greene, Menard, Butler, Breen, Heyrman). Many social historians have mourned the loss of communal values in the face of capitalist development; others have mourned the loss of individualism and agency in the face of capitalist incorporation. The classic study of community and society is Ferdinand Tonnies, whose *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* distinguished between the social character of localistic, communal-oriented groups and the impersonal organizations of those who come together for instrumental, usually self-interested purposes. See Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

borderland. In this threshold era – a period that varies from place to place based on difference in geography and culture -- ideas of individual identity, communal responsibility, the legitimacy of plural interests, and creation of sub-communities of choice are constructed, debated, and negotiated. Only when they are eventually resolved – usually in favor of individualism, voluntary association, and the acceptance of plural mentalities – can a measure of unity and stability return.

Method

To study changing mentality within a community requires insights into both individual thought and collective conditions. To achieve this, I combine the methods of social history and micro history. I reconstitute the population of Boylston using vital, tax, clerk, census, land, probate and civil court records and then situate the White family and a selection of other Boylston families within that economic and social context. Using the extensive diary and letter collections of the White family and supplemental account books, newspapers, and association records, I explore the major conflicts that roiled family and community between 1820 and 1843. Through a close reading of those texts I consider economic, ecological, religious, political, social, and psychological explanations for conflict between neighbors and generations and within individuals.

The social historian’s “collective biography” of a town reveals a community’s social architecture and the contours of change over time.³⁹ The microhistorian’s narrative can reveal, in the choices and actions of individuals, the causes of change. It can locate

³⁹ “Social architecture” here refers to those descriptive features such as the structure of family, demographic and economic mobility, the distribution of wealth and elected power, the range of occupations, etc. On the construction of the prosopography for this study, see Appendix A.

what has often been called “forces” – market, evangelicalism, reform, partisan politics, incorporation – in those individual behaviors and choices underlying beliefs & relationships. Microhistory returns agency and responsibility to the process of change, while reminding us that not all outcomes are the result of choice and intention.

The disadvantage of this and other intensely focused studies is that they are necessarily descriptive of a single place and a limited period of time. Critical historians have questioned whether their results can legitimately be generalized to describe the culture-at-large. I make no claim that the situation in this one small, agrarian Worcester County town in central New England during the decades of the 1820s and 1830s is representative of the national experience at that time. The revolutions and evolutions in commerce, movement, industry, religion and class happened unevenly over time and place, shaped by migration and transportation routes, local natural resources and soil qualities, sectional issues and politics, and the cultural, ethnic, and religious attitudes of residents. In its experience with modernizing mentality, Boylston is not even representative of Massachusetts as a whole, where ancient coastal townships, early-industrializing towns, verdant Connecticut River Valley villages, and the hardscrabble hill towns of the Berkshires each followed different routes from founding to maturity. The way in which Boylston’s experience *is* representative – at least of the New England experience -- is the presence of conflict at the time of transition from localistic, communal, consensual ideals to pluralistic associations of varied interests, integrated into the greater cosmopolitan “community.” What follows is an exploration of the *experience* of that shift, and of that conflict, through the stories of relationships in Boylston.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WORLD OF BOYLSTON, 1800

The Body

By the spring of 1880, the old Whitney farmstead on the crest of a hill near the center of Boylston had weathered nearly 150 winters. The wooden dwelling, a center-chimney saltbox dating to the town's early settlement -- had been hard used. Three generations of Whitneys and Babcocks had been raised under its rafters before the ancient farmstead was purchased by the town as a Poor Farm, and so began a second life sheltering the town's elderly, infirm, insane, incompetent, and transient paupers. But continued years of use took its toll, and in time the original section of the house fell into such a state of disrepair that it was no longer fit for habitation. The town approved extensive repairs, including some foundation excavation. They had no idea what they were about to unearth.

Outside the front door lay a massive stone step, a slab weighing nearly a ton; to excavate the cellar and foundation, workers had to move the huge stone. When the slab was displaced, the workers made a grisly discovery. Entombed under a shallow layer of dirt lay the jumbled bones of what proved to be a young female, around twenty to twenty-five years old, who had died sometime close to the turn of the century.¹ Reaction to the

¹ The bones were sent to experts at Harvard University for analysis in the 1880s; it was the Harvard team that identified the gender and age of the deceased and suggested that she had died approximately 80 years earlier. The time of death could range from 1795 to

find soon turned from shock to fascination: who was the unfortunate girl, how had she died, and why was her death and body hidden from the townsfolk? The macabre story entered town lore, but for years no one was able to shed any light on who the girl was and how her bones came to be secreted under the Whitney's massive stone door slab.

Finally, a century after the bones were recovered, a determined Boylston historian unearthed some of her story.² It was a painstaking process, digging through the debris of time for scant evidence. He sifted vital records and courts records, genealogies and family histories, tax rolls and ancient town documents for piecemeal and fragmentary clues. The girl, he decided, was likely Sophia Martyn Whitney, a young bride in an old family. But the story of how she might have disappeared beneath the family's front door slab, unnoticed and forgotten, is hard to conceive from our vantage point in the twenty-first century. For that we need to recover not just bones and records, but the mind and experience of the people in Boylston in 1800.

That is the task of this chapter – to unearth a world long buried in the past. We will uncover the pre-modern habits of thought and behavior that existed in Boylston *before* the dramatic transformations that reshaped rural life in the 1820s and '30s. It was a time – unlike the modern era – when self was defined in terms of relation to others, in terms of membership and belonging. It was a *small* world, intensely local, intensely familiar, and intensely communal (though not always harmonious, as Yankees always reserved the right to bicker.) Boylston before its time of turmoil possessed a unity of

1810. See William O. Dupuis, *The Boylston Sketch Book*, BHSS Vol. XI (1978), p. 41.

² The historian who deduced the girl's identity was William Dupuis, long-time curator of the Boylston Historical Society. He recorded his meticulous findings and deductions in *The Boylston Sketch Book*, op. cit.

identity: those who *belonged* to Boylston were bound together by their shared life on the land, by their interwoven family stories, by their need for each other's assistance and support. In their smalltown farming world, the community was corporate, and membership in that body provided identity and security. In the context of this traditional community, *not* belonging, as Sophia Whitney discovered, could be a forsaken existence.

A World of Belonging

Boylston's people at the turn of the century were embedded in multiple layers of corporate belonging: farm-family household, neighborhood, church, and town.³ In all four, an individual was a member of a body, and the cooperation of each part of the body was essential for the efficient and successful functioning of the whole. Families who had lived here for generations clustered in farming households and drew their sustenance from land they owned, and to which they belonged. They gathered in neighborhoods whose cooperation and exchanges made their survival on the land possible. Their one meetinghouse was the embodiment of their civic and religious membership in a town where covenant – a promise of mutual support and obligation – bound community. These webs of belonging – of common identity, membership, mutual obligation, and familiarity

³ Christopher Clark suggests that such interdependent social relationships may provide better explanatory insights into rural life than dichotomies of market or self-sufficient economic behavior. Christopher Clark, "The View from the Farmhouse: Rural Lives in the Early Republic," *JER*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer, 2004) p. 202. Jack Larkin proposes household, neighborhood and congregation as the "Little communities" that structured New England life; Richard Brown asserts overlapping rural membership in family, congregation and town. See Jack Larkin, "Rural Life in the North," in *Encyclopedia of American Society History*, 3 vols., ed. Mary Kupiec Cayton, Elliott J. Gorn, Peter W. Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993) vol. 2, p. 1211 and Richard D. Brown, "The Emergence of Urban Society in Rural Massachusetts, 1760-1820," *JAH*, Vol. LXI, No. 1 (June, 1974), p. 33.

– shaped daily life in rural Worcester County at the turn of the century. Those from beyond the borders of local community might excite curiosity and interest, especially if they brought news of city fashion, national happenings, or extraordinary acts of divine providence. But to a great degree at the turn of the century, New England’s rural towns continued to be relatively “closed.”

This social organization was ancient, imported to New England along with the late medieval agrarian farm society of Old England.⁴ It persisted in agrarian Boylston because it fulfilled the physical and psychological needs of a relatively isolated rural people who had to produce most of what they needed to survive and who had to accomplish this while living at the mercy of uncontrollable and unpredictable weather, famine, plague, and frequent, unexpected death. Such conditions made cooperation and mutual support essential. *Family farms* efficiently organized labor for production based on gender and age, and distributed essential resources across the dependent and independent stages of the life cycle. No person could survive on his own: a man needed the assistance of his sons and neighbors to meet periodic labor demands and the assistance of his wife and daughters to turn the raw materials he produced into goods for

⁴ For descriptions of social organization in early modern England, see Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982); Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), and Joan Thirsk, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: 1640-1750 Regional Farming Systems*, Vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). For traditional popular culture in pre-modern Britain, see E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993). For closed corporate community in New England, see Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970).

household consumption and trade. Infants needed their parents' care, parents needed their children's labor, grown men and women needed the older generation's resources to start new households, the elderly needed their grown children's support to survive when they were no longer productive. Household economy provided the essential assurance of nurture, nursing, and support as family members moved through the lifecycle.

Neighborhood and the neighborhood economy redistributed goods, labor and support in times of excess and shortfall, sickness and health, and provided the succor of sociability. The *town* provided for defense, schooling, roads and bridges, and welfare for the town's destitute. The *church* provided moral order and a covenant relationship to bind members in mutual obligation, as well as the emotional, psychological, and spiritual support to deal with the inexplicable and uncontrollable aspects of a pre-modern agrarian life.⁵ Owning a place in a farm-family household, a neighborhood community, the town, and the covenanted church provided essential safety, security, and identity.

None of these memberships was an association of choice.⁶ The corporate status of most Boylstonians was ascribed by the circumstances of their birth family and the location of their farmstead, by divine providence, or in some cases by the decision of the community; participation in these relationships was not voluntary. Family structure was

⁵ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). "Prologue," discusses belief and "preoccupation with the explanation and relief of human misfortune . . . [resulting from] an intensely insecure environment."

⁶ Richard Brown claims that "the family was least voluntary of these connections . . . By 1700 it was public policy that everyone in Massachusetts was gathered in congregations . . . Membership and participation in the town was even less voluntary than church memberships . . . One did not necessarily have to remain in the town of birth, but access to land together with family ties limited the scope of voluntary action." Brown, "The Emergence of Rural Society," *JAH*, pp. 33-35.

patriarchal and children were obliged to labor for and obey their fathers until they were ready to marry and leave home.⁷ “Neighborliness” -- especially assisting in times of need or lending in times of scarcity – was an expected norm, and scoffers risked “rough music” – crude customs of public ridicule intended to humiliate those who flouted social norms.⁸ There was but one church in Boylston – the orthodox Congregational – for which ministerial support was obligatory. Those who wished to marry, to baptize their children, or to share in communion had to submit themselves to church discipline. All men who met the requirements for town membership were warned to attend town meeting and were required to train with the militia, serve on the highway crews, turn out to “clear paths” and “break roads” after winter snows, support the schools, and share responsibility for the town’s destitute. This ascribed and obligatory status of belonging defined Boylston’s social order.

This social order was supported by shared ideals of consent and consensus.⁹ Most would have agreed with Mary White’s prayer that the town be “of one heart and one

⁷ It was generally understood that sons owed their father their labor until at least their maturity; in some cases, a generous father might “give a son his time”; in other cases, sons might arrange to “buy their time” from their fathers. In the Bigelow family in early nineteenth century Boylston, both situations occurred. Andrew Bigelow had eight sons; he gave one his time, allowed another to buy his time, and apparently enjoyed the labor of his remaining six sons on his farm and in his mechanical pursuits. *Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Boylston, Massachusetts*, Henry T. Bray, Editor, (Worcester, Mass.: Press of Sanford & Davis, 1887), p. 118-21.

⁸ For “rough music” and the norms of rural sociability, see Thompson, *Customs in Common and Riot and Revelry in Early America*, ed. William Pencak, Matthew Dennis, and Simon P. Newman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

⁹ Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: 1970). Richard Brown notes that Zuckerman’s assertion of individual relationships “subordinated to ‘coercive’ consensus owing to the overriding

mind.” Though consensus was an ideal, it was *not* always the reality. When disputes disrupted the peace, neighbors, church, and town sought reconciliation through negotiation, committees of arbitration, and solicited confessions. The goal was to reintegrate the disaffected member into the body corporate so that the whole could function in harmony.

Nor was the ideal of belonging applied universally. Though most Boylstonians were descendants of the Great Migration, a few did not share this racial and ethnic background, and their inclusion in community was problematic. Those who defied social norms might be excluded on moral grounds. And the poor who were not *from here* might be summarily expelled. Belonging was essential, but it was not universal.

The corporate nature of Boylston society did not preclude individual striving. Mary and Aaron White urged their children to “improve the opportunity,” by which they meant to pursue their vocation with faithful diligence. The good that came from individual effort and accomplishment would promote the general welfare of the community.¹⁰ Accumulating personal capital was also essential for family well-being. Concerted, strenuous, striving on the part of all family members was essential to accumulate land for the next generation’s security.¹¹ Such striving was both encouraged

attachment to unity and harmony” requires some modification. Brown concedes that the presence of conflict in rural communities ideally committed to unity, but he notes that in rural New England of the Early Republic “division and diversity were barely tolerated; before the Revolution they were never morally accepted.” Brown, “The Emergence of Urban Society,” *JAH*, p. 35.

¹⁰ Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: the Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 16.

and bounded by a “civic ecology” that fostered private property and contracts while repudiating practices that threatened the common good. There were limits to the acceptable pursuit of personal profit: the ancient “moral economy” – in which the community enforced fair distribution of essential resources – was still evident in early Republic Boylston.¹² In the 1790s, some Boylston farmers trekked their surplus oats and rye to market; in 1797 however, Boylston tanner Simon Davis noted that Independence day was marked with a “great cry for bread,” suggesting that the day of public celebration was marred with a disturbance along the lines of a traditional pre-modern bread riot.¹³

The following sections will consider evidence of the membership in the “little communities” of Boylston’s farm-family households, neighborhoods, congregation and town at the turn-of-the century, drawing particularly on the diary records of two families: the prosperous White family of center village and the middling family of tanner and entrepreneur Simon Davis, from the western section of town.¹⁴ We will then consider evidence of those in Boylston who did not belong, and how Boylstonians understood and

¹¹ Richard L. Bushman, “Markets and Composite Farms in Early America,” *WMQ*, Vol. 55 No. 3 (Jul., 1998), pp. 365-6.

¹² E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd,” *Past and Present*, Vol. 50 (1971), pp. 76-136; also in E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New Press, 1993).

¹³ July 4, 1797. Diary of Simon Davis of Boylston, Mass., 1796-1805. Transcript by Frederick Brown. BHS. Ruth Bogin asserts that the “traditional ‘moral’ price” was enforced by the crowd and remained vital in New England throughout the eighteenth century, in small towns as well as urban areas, surging in importance during the economic dislocations of the last decades. Ruth Bogin, “Petitioning and the New Moral Economy of Post-Revolutionary America,” *WMQ*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (July 1988), p. 398.

¹⁴ In 1800, Aaron White was in the top decile for wealth in Boylston; in 1796, Simon Davis was in the fourth decile. Boylston Tax Assessments, BHS.

interacted with those beyond their “little communities.” It is important to get to know this world, because its collapse and disintegration is revealed in the conflicted and tumultuous decades of the 1820s and '30.

Farm-Family Household

Family had always been the fundamental unit of Boylston society, and kinship the strongest social bond, as it had been with Boylston's ancestors in early modern England.¹⁵ The nuclear family was the primary unit, and ideally Worcester county couples of this era hoped to “go to housekeeping” in their own home – however humble– at the time of marriage.¹⁶ The farmer and his wife were the essential units of production and reproduction; to produce efficiently on their acres they needed the “free” labor of their children. Boylston's completed families, like most rural families, were large. Mary White's eventual family of ten children was not unusual.¹⁷ In Boylston, children were

¹⁵ See Keith Wrighton, “Part One: Enduring Structures,” in *English Society 1580 -1780* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982).

¹⁶ John Demos has established that “small and essentially nuclear families were standard from the very beginning of American history”; Peter Laslett claims that this was probably the case from a still earlier time in Western Europe. Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 62. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Scribner's and Sons, 1965), p. 91-94. For a partially dissenting view, see Steven Ruggles, “The Transformation of American Family Structure,” *AHR*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (Feb., 1994), pp. 103-128, who points out that most elderly lived in non-nuclear families, residing with their children. For a discussion of one-room houses as “starter homes” for newlyweds, see J. Edward Hood and Holly V. IZARD, “Two Examples of Marginal Architecture in Rural Worcester County: Identifying and Documenting the Homes of New England's Marginalized Peoples,” an unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Chicago, March 25, 1999.

everywhere: with population growing by twenty-five percent every decade, nearly half of the people of Boylston in 1800 were under the age of sixteen.¹⁸

Yet to the people of Boylston, “family” meant more than parents and their children. When a woman spoke of her family, she included all those who lived under her roof, over whom she was mistress and for whom she had responsibility.¹⁹ Over the course of her lifetime, Mary White’s family included her ten children, her widowed mother, and two orphaned nieces. In addition, for months at a time, her family expanded to include visiting in-laws, siblings, nieces and nephews, grandchildren, live-in hired help, a poor boy “put out” by the town, and a clerk in her husband’s store. Neighborhood women came to live-in while tailoring a suit or dress and neighbor men stayed while completing carpentry, masonry, or laying a new stone wall. Neighborhood women lived with and assisted Mary after childbirth and during illness, school masters boarded for the term, and children from the outer districts lodged while attending a writing, singing, or dame school in the center of town. It was not unusual for Mary to have twelve or more people “in her family” at any one time. It was the same for the Davis family; when Simon Davis’ wife gave birth to her third child, she was assisted by her sister Patty and a live-in helper

¹⁷ Children born in Boylston around 1800 represent the third generation of settlers’ offspring. Philip Greven’s third generation in Andover produced on average 7.2 children, 5.1 of whom survived to adulthood. Philip J. Greven, Jr. *Four Generations: Population, Land and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 201.

¹⁸ On the 1800 U.S. Census, children under the age of 16 accounted for 47.1% of Boylston’s residents. See Appendix C 7 for demographic data.

¹⁹ Jane Nylander describes this inclusive sense of the term “family” in “Our Great Family,” in *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home 1760-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Esther May; waiting in the next room in anticipation were Simon, his two children, and two young apprentices. On the 1800 census, the average household in Boylston sheltered eight people.

Boylston families, then, were elastic and inclusive, expanding to incorporate those whose help was needed – or who needed help – and shrinking as children were sent to relatives or neighbors for work or socializing. This sending out and taking in started early. When Persis Davis was unable to suckle her newborn, the infant was quickly shuttled off to his Uncle Jabez's household, where he lived for the next six weeks. Mary White noted that her four-year old son, "my little Avery," was very glad to see her when she visited her parents in Holden where he had been staying for several weeks in March, 1805. Three months later, "our little Joseph Avery" was carried off to Roxbury by his aunt and uncle for an extended visit to his paternal grandparents. Son Thomas later remembered that "as a *very* young boy, I spent some weeks in the winter season going to school, boarding at my grandfather's."²⁰ Mary's young sons were often absent for three or more months with grandparents, aunts and uncles; meanwhile, their place was taken by Aaron and Mary's grown siblings, whose assistance in the house, shop, tavern and farm was essential to a couple whose children were not old enough to work. "Hardly a week passed," Mary's son later remembered, "that some one did not go to Holden, from our house, or some one come from Holden to visit us."²¹

²⁰ "Recollections from Uncle Thomas White and Aunt Mary White Davis, My Great Uncle and Great Aunt," transcribed for Elinor K. Gregory the original manuscript owned by Grace and Alice White," in the private collection of Vernon Woodward.

²¹ Ibid.

When extended family and neighbors came to live in the White or Davis households, they were fully incorporated into the family. Master and mistress provided for their physical, social and spiritual needs; in return, those who lived in were expected to submit themselves to family discipline. When twenty-year old Lucretia Collier came to work for Mary from January to August of 1807, she was treated like a daughter; Mary sewed her gowns, sent her to singing school, noted her visits to neighbors and her attendance at church. To Mary, her live-in female help were more than employees: through the course of her diary she referred to these women as people who “assist me,” “work with me,” or “live with me.” When they later wed, moved away, or died, she remembered them as those dear to her, who had “lived in my family.” All of the Whites’ live-in help were incorporated into this family relation, receiving not just room and board, but also clothing, schooling, and nursing; they accompanied the Whites to social events, on visits to neighbors, and to church; they, in turn, were expected to fulfill family obligations for social visiting and “sitting up with” the sick.²² Most especially, Mary fretted over the state of their souls. The grease of these inclusive family mechanisms was familiarity – most everyone taken into the family fold was local, well-known and similar.

²² Traditional master-servant contracts in colonial Massachusetts included expectations that the master would provide “meate, drink, apparrell and lodging,” and, if the servant were young, the opportunity to learn to read and write, be catechized, and be brought up under Christian government. “Family life made little distinction between a natural child and a servant of about the same age. For most purposes, especially at the level of everyday care and supervision, the master would perform as a surrogate parent.” Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, p. 107-8.

Few people in turn-of-the-century Boylston lived outside of family government. It was an enduring norm of Puritan society that people should not live alone.²³ To do so was economically inefficient in a farming society where cooperative, gendered labor was essential; it was also dangerous to live beyond the reach of social discipline. Where blood families did not exist, male/female groupings could be created to provide the range of gendered labor needed to survive off the land; for example, when then-bachelor Simon Davis rented his first house and tan yard, he brought in a widow and her two daughters to do his cooking, housework and home production.²⁴ Families disrupted by the unexpected death of a parent quickly regrouped, either by remarriage or, as Simon Davis did at the premature death of his wife, by bringing in an unmarried sibling to serve as a surrogate for departed spouse. Orphaned children, such as Aaron White's nieces, were incorporated into extended families or, if no one stepped forward, assigned to a household, like little Samuel Stone, the son of a destitute farmer, who was "put out" by the town to Aaron White at the age of seven. Boylston's single women lived at home, with parents, or worked in the households of their townsmen. One former Boylstonian who emigrated to the frontier in 1815 wrote home with wonder that in Ohio her sister could live "by herself

²³The Massachusetts Bay Colony from early on legally compelled unmarried persons to live under "family government." In 1670, Plymouth Colony ruled, "Whereas great inconvenience hath arisen by single psons in this Collonie being for themselves and not betakeing themselves to live in well governed families It is enacted by the Court that henceforth noe single pson be suffered to live of himselfe or in any Family but such as the Celectmen of the Towne shall approve of." Cited in Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, p. 78n.

²⁴ Diary of Simon Davis, biographical reflection dated May 13, 1805, Falmouth, Maine.

in a house adjoining mine as independent as you can imagine.”²⁵ Boylston’s young men either worked for their fathers until marriage, or were allowed to put themselves out as “hired hands” to neighbors.²⁶ In the 1790 U.S. Census, only two of Boylston’s 136 households were listed as having a single resident. To belong to Boylston was to belong to a Boylston family.

It was on the male head of household – the patriarch -- that the duty and power of family government lay. Establishing his own farm household secured a man’s independence in many ways, not least of which was self-mastery and mastery over all those who lived under him.²⁷ Mary White’s mother was a formidable woman, but when Aaron approached her to ask about paying his addresses to her daughter she sharply retorted, “Mr. Avery is the head of this family,” and sent him off to the fields where Mary’s father was at work.²⁸ In her diary, Mary never referred to her husband as anything

²⁵ Tamar Farlin to Mrs. Partridge of Boylston, August 16, 1820, BHS.

²⁶ In a farming society where fathers controlled access to inherited land, sons could be made to serve as “forced family labor” until their mid-twenties. As land holdings decreased with population growth, fathers lost this coercive ability, and sons assumed more independence over the decision to set up on their own. Greven, *Four Generations* Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, and Robert A. Gross *The Minutemen and their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976) see this as having taken place in eastern Massachusetts by the end of the eighteenth century.

²⁷ Patriarchal family government died slowly in the frontier communities of New England and upstate New York. Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 32. Though some historians have claimed that patriarchy waned with revolutionary rhetoric, Carole Shammas has shown that patriarchy persisted – especially in farming communities – until work was separated from the home and from the land. Carole Shammas, “Anglo-American Household Government in Comparative Perspective,” *WMQ*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Jan., 1995), pp. 104-144.

other than “Mr. White.” In the journal that Aaron Jr. kept while at Harvard in 1817, he referred to his father as “honored,” “revered,” and “virtuous”; his greatest anxiety came at the thought of disappointing his father’s expectations. For his part, Aaron Sr. devoted himself to acquiring lands and goods to settle his children comfortably in life. Simon Davis, on the other hand, complained in his journal that his young apprentices challenged his authority in the household by their levity. A serious and deeply pious man, Davis usually kept strict government over his young sons and his two tanner’s apprentices, but occasionally – and particularly during town festivities - their “entertainment” was “not agreeable to [him].” Then he exercised his paternal responsibility by letting them know that they were “too much inclined to levity and disrelish a serious life,” that he was “disagreeably affected with their indecent levity,” or that he found their frolicking “extremely foolish and wicked.”²⁹

As patriarchs, Simon Davis and Aaron White headed an economic entity. Their farms were manufactories, and husband and wife directed a varied workforce through the multiple stages of turning raw materials into household consumables. From childhood to seniority, each family member was incorporated into some stage of farm production; their age-and-gender determined work was not only essential for running a farm, but also gave each member a sense of belonging and of contributing to the family’s well-being.³⁰ No

²⁸ “Recollections of Thomas White and Mary Davis White,” p. 9.

²⁹ Diary of Simon Davis, Feb. 6, 1797; March 23, 1798; Feb. 27, 1799, BHS.

man could run a farm alone, for, as one historian has said, “individual family members could not survive apart from the cooperative activity of the corporate whole.”³¹

Family was also the first line of security against the uncontrollable events of fate or providence. Untimely death, farm accidents, incapacitating illness, the vicissitudes of weather or blight were met first through the resources of the extended family. Simon Davis’ family responded to his wife’s illness and eventual death by providing nursing, childcare, and a temporary surrogate. When Aaron White’s sister died, he took in two of her orphaned daughters, raising them, providing their marriage portions, and eventually leaving them bequests in his will. Over the course of his life, Aaron also assisted his siblings and extended family with gifts and loans of staples, tools, and capital.³²

The “built environment” of the average Boylston household at the turn of the century – the farmhouse -- was small, crowded with people, sparse in furnishings, and

³⁰ “The corporate family economy wove together all ages and sexes in the incessant and inescapable interdependency of making a living on the . . . land. . . This sense of interdependency within family units and over generational time . . . is a hallmark of a corporate family economy.” Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class*, p. 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.43.

³² Though such support was common, Boylston families could not always depend on familial good will. Particularly in the matter of providing for dependent kin – widows, minor, or incompetents – Boylstonians were likely to legalize familial responsibilities through deeds and wills. Some Boylston fathers deeded or bequeathed property to a son, dependent upon the son’s providing for his parents’ keep in their old age. Boylstonian fathers also specified what food, clothing, room, fuel and incidentals they expected the inheriting son to provide for his widowed mother. In several cases, they willed their estates to an incompetent son, held in trust by a brother, with the stipulation that the competent son receive the whole of the estate only if he provided for his sibling during his lifetime. For widow’s portions see the probate of Jonathan Bond (1794) or David Hastings (1823), Worcester County Probate Records, 06188 (Vol. 25, p. 371) and 28057 (Vol. 57, p. 211), MA. For example of an incompetent, see the probate of Isaac Temple (1791); Worcester County Probate Records, Docket 58483 (Vol. 23, p. 328), MA.

designed for functionality. Boylston's early farmhouses were built for shelter and production, with little regard for personal privacy or individual taste. The typical farmhouse at the turn of the century was a rustic, unpainted, low-lying, single-story, post-and-beam structure, with one or two rooms below and a sleeping loft above.³³ The tavern-house that prosperous Aaron White purchased for his bride in 1798 – considered capacious at the time -- was a 1760s hall-and-parlor structure, probably with two large 20' by 20' rooms on the first floor to serve as the tavern and the family's "best room" or parlor, respectively; a kitchen addition to the rear; and two or three chambers above for sleeping, storage, and lodging travelers.³⁴

³³ The Federal Direct Tax List of 1798 reveals that two-thirds of houses in Worcester County were single story. "Evidence also strongly suggests that in 1800 the majority of dwellings were unpainted and 'dusky with weatherstain.'" Jack Larkin, "From 'Country Mediocrity' to 'Rural Improvement': Transforming the Slovenly Countryside in Central Massachusetts, 1775-1840," unpublished research paper, Old Sturbridge Village Research Library. The "meanest" houses, where the humblest sixth of Boylstonians lived, were one-room dwellings of less than 500 square feet. Hood and. IZard, "Two Examples of Marginal Architecture." Houses in the middling range had a footprint on average of 20 feet by 40 feet, with approximately 830 square feet of living space. The majority of these middling houses had a two-room English hall-and-parlor design, sometimes with a kitchen in the rear or partitions for smaller work-rooms such as a buttery, well or pump room, or a "small bedroom." Myron Stachiw and Nora Pat Small, "Tradition and Transformation: Rural Society and Architectural Change in Nineteenth-century Central Massachusetts," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, III (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 1988). Those few homesteads that qualified as "mansion houses" generally had a second story, detailed trim work, moldings, and papered walls.

³⁴ William O. Dupuis, *Boylston Taverns* Vol. VII BHSS, pp. 20-21. The exterior of this building exists but unfortunately its interior was gutted and remodeled before it was architecturally surveyed. Assumptions about interior space are based on colonial New England dwellings of similar size and fenestration in Abbott Lowell Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625-1675* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) and Thomas C. Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England* (Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1984).

The material possessions that filled these compact dwellings were few. Inventories taken for probate at the time of death reveal that distinctions of wealth could be found mostly *outside* – in the farmer’s ownership of land. Inside, except for the poorest families, there was not a great deal to distinguish the wealthiest from the middling, or the middling from the modest.³⁵ The tools of production – cookware and wash tubs, textile tools and dairy utensils – mingled with essential bedding, a work table or storage chest, and household linens, preserved foods and farm tools.

This simplicity and relative equity of material possessions at the turn of the century was an important strand in the social fabric. As Boylstonians entered each others’ houses, they were not confronted with reminders of economic or status difference. Wealthy or middling, even to some degree poor, had the same essential tools for sleeping, eating, and processing the products of their farms, and not a great deal more.³⁶

³⁵ Compare selected inventories for Boylstonians of comparable age who died between 1800 and 1815:

Decedent	Age	Wealth Decile	Total Wealth	Real Estate	Pers.Estate
John Whipple	58	1 (High)	2024	1638	386
Oliver Dakin	58	5 (Middling)	1454	964	491
Timo. Temple	62	10 (Low)	194	150	44

³⁶ The most visible difference was in the quantity and quality of clothing, as the middling and poor farmers rarely had more than two coats and jackets, great coat, breeches, several shirts, linen, and stockings, while the gentry might have an assortment of coats, vests, jackets, breaches, and pantaloons in varied colors and fabrics.

Family Farm

In 1831, a Boylston esquire reflected on the town's history and character: "This," he wrote, "is almost exclusively an agricultural town . . . The capital of the citizens is invested in the solid ground, and they draw on a friend, who from time immemorial has never failed to answer all just demands."³⁷ Farming was not a profession; it was a shared way of life and common identity. The same cyclical patterns of farm work regulated their lives. All shared the customary wisdom of their ancestors' husbandry; all feared the same uncontrollable foes of drought or deluge, killing frost, blight or famine; and all drew from tilling their land a shared sense of purpose and self-worth.

With their lives thus shaped by husbandry, all Boylstonians would have understood the significance of the anticipated event Mary White recorded in her diary each spring, between late March and early April: "Frogs peeped." As the warming temperatures turned snow melt to chilly spring pools and Boylston's frozen farm lanes to mud, the peeper frogs predictably broke into their joyous chorus and signaled the start of another farm year. The diary noted the season's advance: fruit trees bloomed, "hay got into barn," geese flew, men sledged wood. In agrarian Boylston, as in New and Old England's farm villages for time beyond memory, the seasons of work turned with the constellations in a steady, familiar, and predictable progression. In December, as Sagittarius the centaur drew his bow overhead, farmers banked their houses with an insulating layer of leaves and families settled in to await Pisces and the peepers of spring.

³⁷ Matthew Davenport, *A Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston, in the County of Worcester: from its First Settlement to the Present Time*. (Worcester: Printed by Carter, Andrews, and Co., 1831), p. 16.

The seasons of cultivation shaped intimate life as well. “Couples married either in anticipation or in fulfillment of the cycles of planting and harvest. . . . Births rose and fell with the seasons [as] rural couples were most likely to conceive in the late planting season . . . and least likely in the months of haying and harvest.”³⁸ Mary White’s diary documents the seasonality of illness, with the “dying times” in March, when respiratory illnesses felled those confined to winter living quarters, and then again in July and August, at the peak of heavy harvest labor, when dysentery-related disorders did their worst. Sociability, too, followed the farm seasons, as Simon Davis noted winter evenings “crowded with company.”³⁹ Even life and death found their echo and explanation in the seasonal cycle: birth, growth, and mortality, like planting, cultivation and harvest, could be followed by resurrection as surely as life returned when the frogs peeped.⁴⁰

The common experience of farm life – shared work, wisdom, goals and meaning – was buttressed by an ancient agrarian ethos and more recent political and social ideology. Farming was *good* work: the plowman’s toil was productive, nurturing, honest,

³⁸ Larkin, “Rural Life in the North,” p. 1210. See also Gloria L. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³⁹ “During the press of summer and fall work, people had much less time for visiting. In wintertime, especially when there was good sleighing, everyone enjoyed a lively sociability. In mud-time it was ‘slow going’ or ‘impossible to stir.’” Jane C. Nylander. *Our Own Snug Fireside*, p. 222.

⁴⁰ Consider, for example, the poem that young Boylstonian Oliver Sawyer copied into his school book in the first decade of the nineteenth century: “The fields are all white, the harvest is near, The reapers with their sharp sickles appear, For to reap down the wheat and gather in barns, While the wild plants of the earth are left for to burn. Come then O my soul meditate on the day, When all things in nature shall cease and decay. When the trumpet shall sound, the angels shall appear, For to reap then the earth, the wealth and the tares . . .” Manuscript school copy book of Oliver Sawyer, Boylston, 1807-1811, OSV.

lacking in artifice and ennobling to the character of the tiller.⁴¹ Just as critical, the freehold farmer was truly independent. The men and women of Boylston did not seek just to farm; they sought to *own* a farm. This was the yeoman's ideal: the man who owned his land had the means to supply his family's needs, and thus to live independently, un beholden to lords, patrons, or creditors. Ownership of a farm was a publicly visible sign of full manhood, an indication of self-determination in economic, personal, political, and religious terms.⁴² This ideal of land-owning independence inherited from late-medieval England was strengthened by eighteenth-century political debate over republicanism, which maintained that only landowners possessed the disinterested independence to be virtuous civic servants, and that an independent landholding citizenry was essential to keep aggrandizing interests in balance.⁴³ Advocates of Jefferson's vision

⁴¹ Jefferson famously offered this observation in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query 19, "Manufactures," 1784. Many writers reiterated the sentiment in the nineteenth century when they protested the eastern exodus from the land. Consider an unattributed column in the *New York Observer*, July 10, 1856, which declares that the plowman's is a "natural" rather than "artificial pursuit," morally and physically uplifting, creating greater stamina and a "freer, franker, happier, and [more] noble man. Would that young men might judge of the dignity of labor by its usefulness and manliness." For a discussion of farming versus the "artifice" of manufactures, mines and forges, see John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America 1580-1845* (Yale University Press: 1982), p. 267.

⁴² For a summary of the yeoman's traditional ideal of independence through land-ownership and a review of the literature, see Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Prologue. See also Richard Bushman's earlier essay in *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The Coming of the American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts and New York*. (1976). Michael Kazim discusses the agrarian ethos and the "indivisible bond that tied freedom to property and undergirded independence" in "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes," *JER*, Vol. 26 (Winter 2006), pp. 563-603.

of protecting the Republic from the tyranny of centralized authority by investing power in a democracy of small farmers kept the agrarian ideal very much alive in the Federalist decade of the 1790s and early 1800s.⁴⁴

In 1800 Boylston, all men either were farmers or hoped to become one. Only a sixth of the male taxpayers owned no land, and of those, the majority were either young men likely waiting to inherit their father's land, or older men who had already distributed their property to sons.⁴⁵ Of the twelve men without hope of inheritance, most were likely striving to set aside enough to secure their "competence." Simon Davis, for example, began married life in Boylston with little capital. He worked at an unrelenting pace for the next fifteen years. He drove his neighbors' cattle to the Boston market and put his profits into a small Boylston tannery on a single acre of land. Gradually he took on apprentices and expanded his works to include a cooper's shop; eventually he created an integrated enterprise, purchasing local cattle, packing the slaughtered beef and shipping it to Boston for export, tanning the hides, and making shoes from the leather. Yet, in 1806, despite the profitability of his growing business and his now-significant assets, Davis

⁴³ For a well-known review of Republicanism in America, see Robert E. Shallhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *WMQ* 29 (January, 1972), pp. 49-80.

⁴⁴ Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ Of the 163 taxpayers in 1800, 28 had no real estate. Of those, 16 were either under 30 or over 60 years old; 9 were men in their prime, and three were men for whom no age could be established. The numbers are similar for 1784, when a complete valuation was taken for Boylston. At that point, one-sixth of the taxpayers owned no real estate; an additional 9 polls owned less than 20 acres. At the turn of the century, then, more than three-quarters of Boylston's taxpayers owned estates of 20 acres or more. Appendix E.

sold the tannery and cooperage. He purchased a farm and with it, his independent yeoman status. In this period, Davis was Boylston's norm, not an exception. His townsman Ezekial Peirce (b. 1787) "was a blacksmith by occupation and worked at this until he had secured a competence, after which he owned one of the best farms in West Boylston."⁴⁶

Every man who owned the minimum amount of land to support a family had a stake in the community. Until 1820, participation in town meeting was restricted by this property requirement.⁴⁷ Land owners were considered permanent and vested members of the community; as tax was based on assessed property, those without property, who paid no tax, had no right to make decisions on revenue, expenditures and supervision of town affairs. Belonging, in Boylston, meant being a farmer.

For a Boylston farm to provide most of what the family needed, it had to include a rather precise calculus of land types. Ideally, it would have a: *houseslot* (shelter for humans and animals, dung yard fowl, swine, vegetable garden, and workspace); *orchard* (fruit, cider, vinegar); *tillage* (grains and flax); *pasture* (three season grazing for neat and dairy cattle, sheep, goats, swine, oxen, and horses); *meadow* (hay for winter feeding of domestic animals) and *woodlot* for fuel.⁴⁸ Once a man secured these plots, he had to deal with the second challenge: farming it sustainably, so that the land maintained its fertility

⁴⁶ Frederick Clifton Pierce, *Peirce Genealogy: Being the Record of the Posterity of John Pers, an Early Inhabitant of Watertown, in New England, with Notes on the History of Other Families of Peirce, Pierce, Pearce, etc.* (Press of C. Hamilton, 1880) pp. 101-2.

⁴⁷ Men had to own a freehold estate with annual income (rent) of \$10 or value of \$200.

⁴⁸ In legal records such as wills and divisions of estates, Boylstonians of this period referred to such a varied mixture of land types as a "farm," whereas unimproved land or single use land was referred to simply as lots or parcels.

for the next generation. Farmers knew they had to balance nutrient inputs and outtakes. Tillage needed manure from cows; cows needed pasture and meadow hay; although pasture, properly managed, would be partially fertilized by animal droppings, meadows needed a yearly renewal of nutrients. This happened naturally when meadows along rivers, streams, and low-lying wetlands were fertilized with rich sediment during spring flooding. The long-term fertility of the whole system was dependent on this annual renewal: the floods fed the meadows, the meadow fed the cattle, the cattle fed the tillage, the tillage fed the humans.⁴⁹ Boylston farmers ideally strove to acquire approximately 60 acres per household – of the right type and in the proper proportions – to provide most of the family’s needs and to maintain fertility over the generations.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For a detailed explanation of this sustainable ecological system, see Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ To support an average family of six to eight people on land that would keep its fertility, a Boylston farmer needed approximately six acres of tillage; to manure the tillage sufficiently, he needed approximately five to six cows; to feed the cows adequately, he needed approximately 12 to 15 acres pasture and the same of meadow. In addition, he would need roughly 20 cords of firewood, or about an acre of woodlot, which would take approximately 20 years to regrow. A sustainable woodlot for an average farm, thus, required about 20 acres. In total, then, a *sustainable* farm that would support the needs of an average Boylston family would need approximately 60 acres of land – of the right types and in the right ratios. These general estimates used in the above calculation are based on minimum subsistence requirements for tillage, pasture, meadow, and woodland from Merchant’s *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*, Chapter 5, “Farm Ecology: Subsistence versus Market.” (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). Sixty acres is an approximation and varied depending on soil fertility and type. Some estimations of average colonial farms requirements range as high as 100 acres, others as low as 30 to 40 acres. See James Kimenker, “The Concord Farmer,” p. 140-141. Robert Gross concurs with the estimate of 60 acres as the average farm set by family needs. Robert A. Gross, “Culture and Cultivation: Agriculture and Society in Thoreau’s Concord,” *JAH*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Jun., 1982), pp. 44-8. Contemporary observer John Lowell “allowed thirty to forty acres as sufficient” if farmed properly. [John Lowell], “Remarks on the Agriculture of Massachusetts, Massachusetts

Evidence from late eighteenth-century Boylston reveals that *on average* farmers did own enough of each type of land to provide their families with a “competence” while maintaining soil fertility.⁵¹ However, few farmers held just the right proportion of each type of resource. By trading their surpluses with each other to cover their deficits, farm families successfully redistributed and balanced resources across the community. The system also bound the community together in a tight web of neighborly reciprocity and mutual obligation.⁵² They had to trade to survive.

With this communal swapping, most Boylston farmers in 1800 produced more than sufficient produce to provision their families.⁵³ From tilled acres they harvested corn, oats, rye and barley; from grazing land they got milk, beef, hides and wool; from

Society for Promoting Agriculture *Journal* 5 (July 1819), pp. 220-26. For a more detailed explanation of the calculus of sustainable New England diversified farming, see Appendix E.

⁵¹ The 1784 Massachusetts Valuation is Districts 2, 3, and 4 of the town of Shrewsbury; these districts comprised the “North Precinct” that became Boylston in 1786. MSHL.

⁵² This neighborly interdependence and the account book system has been well documented by historians. See Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasant to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000) pp. 216-226.

⁵³ Historians have estimated that at an absolute minimum, the average family needed one dairy cow, one beef cattle, one to two oxen for draft work, one to two swine, several sheep for wool, two tons of hay as winter feed for grazing livestock, and thirty bushels of grain. Mean farm holdings in Boylston easily met those requirements. Minimum requirements for average family maintenance are drawn from Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, p. 178. We could, alternatively, use the quantities specified in widow’s portions (wills), but some historians, including Carolyn Merchant and Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, believe that calculations made from these amounts are inflated. Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, “Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,” *WMQ*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (Jul., 1984), pp. 334-364.

their barnyard pork, fowl, eggs and feathers; from their orchards, fruit and cider; from their dooryard gardens, green and root vegetables; from their woodlots, timber and fuel.

The work of wresting these essentials from the land ordered time and organized daily life in Boylston households. Mary White's diary recorded the cyclical tasks, but the same tasks were being performed in every household, uniting the farm community in their common labors. The new year began with mud and muck, as Aaron and his hired hand – a local youth or younger man who hired out his labor for six to eight months at a time -- fertilized the tillage with winter's farmyard refuse. In April they plowed, in May they planted, in June they weeded the garden and hoed their tillage. In July began the hot, heavy work of haying and in August, as Sirius the Dog Star rose on the horizon, extra hands joined in the work of the "Dog Days": reaping, threshing, winnowing and milling grains. September brought apple picking and cider season, while corn harvest and husking continued through October. By November, with the root plants, squash and potatoes in the cellar, Aaron called in the local butcher to slaughter his hogs and surplus beef. In the deep winter months Aaron and his men went to the wood lot to fell and chop the next year's fuel. Then Aaron balanced accounts, visited, and waited for the frogs to peep.⁵⁴ Most Boylston farmers learned these tasks following behind their fathers from early childhood; the traditional wisdom and lore of farming valued the knowledge that came from age and experience.

⁵⁴ This common cycle of chores is recorded in Mary White's diary.

Mary and her townswomen followed the same calendar, but with tasks related to their gender.⁵⁵ When frogs peeped, calving would soon follow, and as cows came into milk the churning and cheese making commenced.⁵⁶ Mary devoted late spring to a thorough house cleaning, white-washing walls to remove winter soot, laundering winter woolens. The hay and grain harvest, for which extra hired hands came to lodge, brought heavy laundry. In early autumn, Mary began turning apples into “sauce” and vinegar, fruits and berries into preserves, and putting up cucumbers, peppers, and other garden vegetable. She usually recorded, “finished making my [apple]sauce” just in time to mince meat for winter pies and turn the freshly slaughtered pig into sausages, soap, and candles. This annual cycle was overlaid on a weekly pattern of laundry, baking, and cleaning, a daily cycle of meal preparation, and the constant, unremitting task of turning flax and wool into thread and yarn, yarn into stockings, and cloth into clothing.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Laurel Ulrich, among others, has established that the economic lives of women and men were clearly differentiated, and she has described their traditional chores and specialized crafts. See “A Friendly Neighbor: Social Dimensions of Daily Work in Northern New England,” *FS* Vol. 6 No. 2 (1980), pp. 392-405, along with *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982) and *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

⁵⁶ In Boylston, males as well as females “went to milk,” but only women produced butter and cheese. Mary’s diary suggests tending chicks, dung hill fowl, and pigs was delegated to children, and garden weeding was generally handled by Mr. White or a hired hand.

⁵⁷ It appears that by the turn of the century, Boylstonians were purchasing, rather than growing, their flax for linen. They continued to process that flax at home, however, throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century. See *Diary of Mary White*, Feb. 1, 1806: “Mr. White bought 65 lbs of flax for me.” UD; *Diary of Simon Davis*, March 1, 1798: “450 wt flax arrived from Newfane, Vt.” BHS. Probates with “widow’s portions” – specifying what allowances should be provided annually for the decedent’s widow, included a ten pound flax allowance through the first quarter of the nineteenth century. See for example, the will of David Hastings, Sr., (wealth decile 3), Worcester County

Mary's most critical responsibility, however, was not production, but reproduction. She bore a child approximately every two years for nearly a quarter century, producing the labor to run her husband's farm. Both Aaron White and Simon Davis understood that their wives' work was essential to the family's economic well-being. Simon remembered that his first wife, though often an invalid, "was posses'd of superior ideas of economy in the management of her domestic affairs. Altho' her feeble body could not at all endure hard labor yet her prudence, her integrity, and her attentions to those things within her sphere contributed much to my prosperity."⁵⁸

If a Boylston farmer did not have enough acres for his sons, he was faced with the challenge, common to farm families across eastern Massachusetts, of accumulating capital to purchase land or settle sons in crafts or professions. Aaron White, for example, owned a generous 100 acres, but he also produced seven sons. His strategy for providing for them was not uncommon for those with resources: he planned to send the eldest to university, set one or two up in professions, and accumulate land in Boylston for the remainder. Over the course of the next twenty years, Aaron worked as a farmer, kept a tavern, ran a country store, marketed rural produce in Boston, lent money at interest, and took advantage of every opportunity that came his way to accumulate the capital he needed to buy land.⁵⁹ In time, his calculated striving doubled his Boylston farm holdings.

Probate Records, Docket 28057, Vol. 57, pg. 211, or the will of Jonathan Bond, Sr., (wealth decile 1), Docket 06188, Vol. 25, pg. 371, MA.

⁵⁸ Journal of Simon Davis, May 13, 1805, BHS.

⁵⁹ The records of the General Court record Aaron White's license as innholder from 1797 to 1809 and as retailer from 1810 to 1833. The diary of Simon Davis, local histories, and

Other Boylston farmers worked to produce a small marketable surplus above their consumption needs, sent their teenaged boys out to labor as hired hands and their daughters to work as “helps,” and took up craft work to supplement their farm products.

This need to accumulate capital to buy more land was no doubt one of the motivations behind early nineteenth century “striving” in Boylston. Most of the town’s farmers had the resources to produce at least a small surplus of beef and grain, and – despite their distance from Boylston and the difficulty of travel – there were markets for these goods. The most common trader was one’s neighbor.⁶⁰ Aaron White’s country store provided another outlet for local trade. White kept accounts with most of his Boylston neighbors, who came to him with farm produce and took away essential imported goods that Aaron trucked in from Boston every other month. White then either re-traded this surplus produce to other locals, used it in his household, or took it to market in Boston. His store account book from 1802-4 shows that he most frequently gave credits to local farm families for butter, beef, lamb, boards, and farm work; in exchange, he provided rum, sugar, salt, spices, coffee, tea, salted fish, fabrics and sewing notions.⁶¹ Mary

family memories, however, indicate that White opened his store in Boylston in May of 1797 and operated it continually, in two different locations, until the early 1840s.

⁶⁰ Neighborly trade has been extensively documented. See Ulrich, *Midwife’s Tale*, and Pruitt, “Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy.”

⁶¹ The country storekeeper in Worcester County had been playing this role for at least 50 years by the turn of the century. See Nathaniel and Thomas Allen, *Pre-Revolutionary Account Books*, American Antiquarian Society, as quoted in Howard S. Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1982), p. 143. Also, John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1715-1861* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press), p. 274.

produced candles, butter, and perhaps linen thread specifically to sell in her husband's store. At the turn of the century, Boylston's largest surplus product was beef cattle, supported by the town's many acres of fertile pasture and rich intervale hay. Simon Davis was one of those who marketed this beef, salting, barreling, and shipping some for the West Indies trade, and likely allowed the rest to walk itself to the Brighton slaughter house – the easiest way to transport such a bulky product long distances over poor roads.⁶² Davis also kept a store for in the western section of Boylston, and he complained that he frequently had to advance goods in *expectation* of a harvest surplus.

Despite the difficulty of travel, by the turn of the century some locals were trekking their load of surplus rye meal over frozen roads to Boston, enticed by the promised price of \$1.25 per bushel, cash; others walked their surplus beef cattle to market.⁶³ Barrels of Boylston cider slaked city thirst.⁶⁴ Others counted on occasional trips of shopkeeper White to Boston. Aaron's son Thomas remembered accompanying his father on these exciting two-day wagon excursions, made once every two months when

⁶² The 1784 Valuation for Shrewsbury North Precinct (which would become Boylston two years later) lists an average of four milch cows and five neat cattle per household. If these cattle had been evenly distributed (which they were not), then every household would have been able to send three to four cattle a year to market, along a little dairy.

⁶³ In 1793, Worcester native Rev. Peter Whitney observed of Boylston: "Here are some large and good farmers as perhaps anywhere in the country, who keep large stocks of cattle. The people raise all kinds of country produce, especially beef, pork and grain, butter and cheese; vastly more than they consume, and carry more into the market, perhaps, than any town of its size and numbers." Whitney is quoted in George L. Wright, *History of Worcester County, Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1889), p. 893.

⁶⁴ Henry T Bray, *Centennial celebration of the incorporation of the town of Boylston, Mass. August 18, 1886* (Worcester, Mass: Press of Sanford & Davis, 1887), p. 20., also p. 34-5; Matthew Davenport, *Brief History*, p. 16.

he was a small boy in the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Mary prepared fowl and butter to go on these trips, while Aaron slaughtered an occasional pig or calf specifically “for the market.” So, while Boylston farmers produced primarily for family consumption, they relied on surplus marketing – in the neighborhood, at the town store, or to occasional “marketers” heading east - to gain the credits and cash needed to make up their farms’ deficiencies and to accumulate capital for building their sons’ estates.

The Neighborhood

The limit of Aaron White’s farm was marked by stone walls, but the little community of household had no such clear boundaries. Those who lived “nigh” to the Whites –minister Rev. Cotton, Major Bush and Deacon White, shoemaker Abishai Crossman and blacksmith Jason Abbott, their wives and their children were constantly in Aaron’s fields and barnyards, in Mary’s kitchen and dooryard, at their front gate, their table, and their bedside. Aaron and Mary, their kin, help, and children, likewise were often on the farms and in the homes of their neighbors, lending, assisting, and gadding. Household extended outwards and blended into the little community of neighborhood.

Aaron White and Jason Abbot illustrate these neighborly connections. Jason and Mary Abbot were the same age as Aaron and Mary White; both Marys were daughters of local ministers; both had married and settled into their homes just at the turn of the century. The Abbots lived at the top of the common in a two-story, center-chimney wooden house, and in 1806 Jason, like Aaron, turned one room of his house into a tavern. Mary’s diary records their many interactions. Their children were about the same ages

⁶⁵ See “Recollections from Uncle Thomas White and Aunt Mary White Davis.”

and attended the one-room center school together. In late December of 1805, Mary Abbot brought her 6-month old son for an evening visit; though home was just up the hill, the infant and mother “tarried all night.” A few weeks later, Mary White went to nurse the little boy, who was dangerously sick of a fever (he survived). Both Capt. Abbot and Aaron White served as town officers and hosted committee meetings. They “changed work” as well: in March of 1806, Capt. Abbot carried Aaron’s pork “to be baconed” at Esq. Beaman’s; shortly afterward, Aaron sent his hired help to do Capt. Abbot’s stint on the road crew. The two Marys went together to hear their children “examined” at the end of the winter school session. And they played: in the winter of 1807, Mary noted a dance at Capt. Abbot’s, a frolic for “young company,” a “sley ride visit to Capt. Abbot’s [with] supper in company of the neighbors,” and frequent visits to the Abbots’ “to hear music.” In February 1807, Mary again went to nurse Jason Abbot’s little boy, as the two-year old endured a week of spasms and fits. On the 24th, the child died, and Mary White laid him out for burial and comforted her grieving friend. Six months later, she was likely present as she noted, “Capt. Abbot’s [second] son born today.”⁶⁶

In a pedestrian world such as Boylston, one’s neighbors enjoyed a special relationship based on proximity: they were the first available to lend aid in times of want, support in times of trial, and entertainment any time. To willingly engage in these

⁶⁶ Diary of Mary White, Dec. 25, 1805; Jan. 18, 1806; Jan. 30, 1806; Mar. 5, 1806, Jun. 4, 1806; Dec. 23, 1806; Jan. 12, 1807; Jan. 21, 1807; Feb. 10, 1807; Feb. 24, 1807; Feb. 27, 1807; Mar. 7, 1807; Mar. 21, 1807; Sept. 21, 1807. UD.

reciprocal obligations and social connections – to be neighborly -- was a long-observed social norm in Boylston.⁶⁷

As early settler families planted children on nearby farms, and as these families intermarried, kin became neighbors and neighbors became kin.⁶⁸ The resulting “cousinhood” of dense family relationships sometimes layered kinship obligations on top of neighborly ones. But even when kinship was not present, clustered homes developed an identity and sense of shared interests based on their physical location – near a bridge, a mill, a road crossing – or their “belonging” to a particular school district. Highway districts also created smaller communities of neighbors responsible for working together to repair and plow their area roads. Most neighborly ties, however, were based on the constant need to share resources and the obligations created by such give-and-take.

In a cash-poor society, farmers did not purchase what they needed from their neighbors, but borrowed on an informal, long-term credit system. Eventually, when the neighbor needed something in return, an off-setting exchange would take place. Mary’s diary doubled as an accounting for such exchanges, with regular entries such as “Mr.

⁶⁷ On neighborliness in early modern English society see Keith Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 51-57. Laurel Ulrich lays out the qualities of a “friendly neighbor” in “A Friendly Neighbor,” *FS*, pp. 392-405.

⁶⁸ Matthew Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston* (Lancaster, Mass.: Printed by Carter, Andrews, and Company, 1831), p. 11. Davenport lists fifteen seed families who could trace their ancestry to the Great Migration. The clustering of interrelated families was particularly dense in the northeast district of Boylston, where one historian has determined that almost all residents in 1800 were either cousins or, “in some other degree related to each other.” Wm. C. Noonan, *Educational History of Boylston* BHS Vol. VI (1980), p. 65. See also Daniel Scott Smith, “All in Some Degree Related to Each Other: A Demographic and Comparative Resolution of the Anomaly of New England Kinship,” *AHR* Vol. 94 No. 1 (Feb., 1989), pp. 44-79.

Andrews in here in the morning and got potatoes to plant”; two months later, Mary went to Mrs. Andrews’ to borrow a pair of wool cards (for combing wool fibers). Most rural folk recorded the cash value of these multiple exchanges in account books, and periodically “reckoned” to see what was due to whom. In most cases any debit was merely carried forward. The webs of obligations were further complicated when farmers used credits with one neighbor to offset a debt to another. Neighbors lived alternately as each others’ debtors and creditors, always aware that their well-being depended on their maintaining the goodwill of those on whom they depended for exchange.⁶⁹ Neighborly accounts maintained relationships, reinforced obligations, and underscored interdependence. “Settling” was a type of social ritual, a negotiation that fostered reconciliation on several levels and re-established social equilibrium suitable for their rural agrarian needs *and* for traditional agrarian sensibilities.⁷⁰ The account book system “was at the center of a distinct culture. It generated its own values of cooperation, of work-swapping, of household integrity and family advancement that were to be influential throughout the early period of capitalistic development.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Kulikoff calls this neighborly exchange “the borrowing system,” and points out that through decisions about whom to include within the rounds of reciprocity, neighbors cemented friendships – and incited conflict. Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers*, p. 219-223.

⁷⁰ Jack Larkin discusses the social dynamics of daybook exchange. Jack Larkin, “Accounting for Change: Exchange in the Rural Economy of Central New England,” unpublished paper, esp. pp. 11-13. OSV.

⁷¹ Christopher Clark, “Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism,” *JSH*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Winter, 1979), p. 175. The account book system is described by Tom Kelleher, “The Debit Economy of 1830s New England,” unpublished study, OSV.

Farmers and their wives were also dependent on their neighbors for many of the everyday tools of husbandry and housewifery. More prosperous than most, Mary's household was well outfitted with the tools of production, though even she needed to borrow Mrs. Andrews' wool cards. Neighborhood women called upon Mary to borrow her churn, cheese tubs, cots and textile utensils. In probate inventories up to 1800, approximately a third of Boylston households lacked churns and spinning wheels at a time when almost all households produced their own butter and linen thread, requiring many to borrow on a regular basis.⁷² In January of 1807, a stream of men came through Aaron's barnyard, asking to borrow his scales to weigh their freshly slaughtered pork before sending it to market. Such daily borrowings, along with endless loans of a "horse to Shrewsbury –bad traveling" -- or a cart or wagon to haul goods, an ox team to plow, or even the plow itself, were precisely recorded in cash value. They bound neighbors together in communal interdependence.

Neighbors were most dependent on each other, however, for their – and their animals' – labor. Farm labor needs fluctuated across the seasons and the lifecycle. Farmers met their intermittent shortage of hands by bringing in a neighbor for a half day or a day's work. Early in the century, when Aaron White's sons were too young to work,

⁷² Based on my study of all Boylston probate inventories from 1786 to 1800. Laurel Ulrich maintains that fewer than a quarter of households on the Maine frontier had dairy processing equipment, making borrowing and lending an essential aspect of daily life. Ulrich, "A Friendly Neighbor," *FS*, p. 395. Regarding flax production Howard Russell maintains that Worcester County towns, including Boylston, were strong linen production centers; Mary White's children recalled that she was an expert at the little wheel, the great wheel & the loom. Mary's diary for 1805-7 includes entries for processing flax and for both putting prepared flax out to be spun and spinning at home. Howard S. Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1982), p. 164; "The Recollections of Thomas White and Mary Avery White"; the Diary of Mary White, 1805-1807, UD.

he frequently called in his neighbors to assist in peak seasons. Mary's diary is filled with the details of such obligations: neighbors with six teams of oxen to sled wood home from the woodlot, "Mr. Temple butchering," "Old Mr. Partridge husking corn," and a whole family of Andrews at harvest, the men reaping, the boys carting grains to the mill, and Polly Andrews helping with the extra wash. In return, the Whites gave pork or beef, a pair of shoes, or simply credited their neighborly account against future claims. Mary, who for years had no daughters old enough to assist, turned to her neighbors to help her complete her textile work. In addition to her hired girl, Susa Cutting, who hatchelled and spun her flax, Mary had several local women assist in spinning flax, wool, and cotton, while Mrs. Maynard and Mrs. Ball both brought completed "webs of cloth." Some of the work that Aaron requested of his neighbors required skills he did not have, such as plastering walls, laying stone, and "burning out" his chimney. Mary had to call in a neighbor skilled in tailoring to assist her with cutting jackets and gowns. Such borrowing and lending of skills and labor was a deeply ingrained social habit that wove neighbors into an organic whole.⁷³ Simon Davis acknowledged gratefully that "Wm. Harthon been a good neighbor to me in many respects (but there sometimes appears to be vagaries in his brain.)"⁷⁴ Mary grieved at the death of Mr. Goodenow: "We have lost in him a great neighbor and a useful member of society."⁷⁵

⁷³ "Borrowing tools and commodities, working in other women's kitchens and yards, exchanging products and children, early American housewives were bound to each other through the most intimate needs of everyday." Ulrich, *Good Wives*, pp. 51-2.

⁷⁴ Diary of Simon Davis, May 19, 1796, BHS.

⁷⁵ Mary White Diary, March 23, 1805, UD.

Not all neighborly debts were recorded in account books. In a world with “scenes of calamitous providences,” as Simon Davis termed them – accidents, illness, and sudden death – neighborliness meant meeting need whenever it occurred. These acts were considered deposits into the bank of good will, for one never knew when he might need to make a withdrawal.⁷⁶

These acts drew neighbors deeply into each others’ intimate lives. Giving birth was a social rite that included a host of female neighbors as attendants.⁷⁷ Simon Davis’ wife gave birth unexpectedly, while he was still out calling in the neighbors, so she was attended only by his sister and young Esther May, the hired help. Davis returned to find the two girls “in a fit of laughter, having been shocked with fear.” He then gratefully recorded that the experienced Mrs. May soon arrived, and was being “*very neighborly*. Think I am under special obligation to gratitude for the favor constantly bestowed upon me. All from the great source of Being -- tho many from my fellow creatures as instruments by which he works.”⁷⁸ Mary recorded numerous instances of going to visit and nurse the sick, or spending the night sitting up and “watching” with sick neighbors, despite her full days as a mother of four young boys. Sometimes she sent her hired girls to fulfill this neighborly duty. In May of 1806, her own little boy Avery was dangerously ill, and neighbor Mary Bush came repeatedly to spend the night at the boy’s bedside.

⁷⁶ On neighborly exchanges, see Laurel T. Ulrich *Midwife’s Tale*, pp. 79-90.

⁷⁷ Laurel T. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, Chapter 7; also *A Midwife’s Tale*, esp. pp. 94-5.

⁷⁸ Diary of Simon Davis, Sept. 24 and 25, 1796, BHS.

Neighbors were present for birthing and nursing, for wedding and for burying. Mary recorded the doleful incident of the death of her neighbor's young son; she spent the whole of the next day at their house, "making mourning," which would have included washing and preparing the boy's body for laying out and burial. When Simon Davis' beloved little boy Ezra died in his arms after an excruciating illness, the grief-stricken father reported, "Neighbors kindly come in to our assistance yesterday and today – large funeral."⁷⁹ When 20-year Aaron Flagg died, his neighbors provided his final essentials: shroud by Eunice Andrews, coffin by Daniel Hartshorn, and grave by Moody Wright.⁸⁰

Some neighborly assistance mixed good will and fun. A young Simon Davis seemed much given to attending his neighbors' house-raising. These events drew large crowds, a goodly supply of rum, and a festive atmosphere. In June and July of 1796, Davis attended three such community socials, some lasting several days; that fall, frame raisings give way to husking bees. Mary recorded quiltings for women and berrying or fishing for youth. These shared tasks blurred the boundaries of work and leisure, obligation and socializing, knitting neighbors into a productive social body.

Some neighborly activities were purely social occasions – sleigh rides and dances, frolics and "walking out." The most frequent neighborly interaction, for both Mary White and Simon Davis, was visiting. The somewhat retiring Davis recorded with seeming regret that his home on the evenings was frequently "crowded with company." On a typical evening in January of 1807, Mary and Aaron suppered "with some of the

⁷⁹ Diary of Simon Davis, Dec. 9, 1796, BHS.

⁸⁰ Probate Account of Aaron Flagg, Worcester County Probate Records, Docket 21102, Vol. 73, pg. 129, MA.

neighbors.” After dinner, they returned to their own home, where Col. Bush, Mrs. Bush, and the minister, Mr. Cotton, joined them for conversation. Often, evening visits included music, and Mary enjoyed listening to singing at the Abbots, sometimes with the accompaniment of Mr. Crossman’s violin, or perhaps the voices of the musical Houghton family.⁸¹ Mary kept a running tally of every visit she received, and every one she paid. Such neighborly socializing was expected, in fact, was obligatory. Mary and Aaron’s first-born son recalled later that there was friction between his father and himself because the youth would *not* visit the neighbors.⁸² These visits, of course, were not always convivial – Simon Davis noted disapprovingly when his visits to others were marred with arguments, where men were “chased with words” that were “more noise [noise] than wise.” The reserved Mary rarely reported on disturbances, but noted approvingly when she had “an agreeable interview.” The expectation that neighbors would socialize – constantly – was deeply ingrained.⁸³

Boylston resident Tamar Farlin, who migrated to Ohio in 1815, wrote a letter to former neighbor that serves as an elegant testimony to the emotional power of neighborly connections. Her sister, Lucy, begged to be remembered to Mrs. Partridge. “She says she longs to have you for a neighbor again. When she wishes to speak highly in praise of any

⁸¹ The Crossman family was musical; Mr. Crossman was later appointed to lead the singing school; his son eventually became a professor of music. For reference to Mr. Crossman’s violin, see the diary of Mary White, Aug. 25, 1835, OSV. Benjamin Houghton raised a family of musicians who later performed at local functions.

⁸² Journal of Aaron White Jr, MHS. July, 1819: “I remained at my father’s house some time . . . but constantly refused, as I always have done in times past, to visit the neighbors, which conduct has always given my Father no small trouble.”

⁸³ Laurel Ulrich discusses the habit of rural visiting in *Midwife’s Tale*, pp. 90-93

friend, she says, ‘She is almost as good a woman as Mrs. Partridge.’” Tamar asked to be “remembered to her old friends and neighbors and pray[ed] that she may one day see them again.”⁸⁴ When Mary White wished to praise the exemplary life of a valued friend, she declared her simply “a good neighbor and a useful woman.”

Congregation

The farm folk of Boylston, like all pre-modern agrarian people, lived in a world of fate and providences. They attributed whatever was beyond their power to control, to predict, or to comprehend to the world of the supernatural. Many mingled Christianity with ancient folk belief. They attended to the alignment of the stars and to the appearance of earthly wonders such as rainbows and lightning, comets and deluge, as signs of God’s power to influence or transcend the laws of nature. Mastering the lore of wonders could bring unnatural gifts, protection, and even good fortune. Mary’s minister father divined for water. Locals superstitiously avoided a stretch of woodland they feared was haunted. Shortly after the Revolution, Goodwife Goodenow dreamed of buried treasure in a nearby grove. A party of townsmen assembled by moonlight, invoked a spell with the aid of an open Bible, a rusty sword, the blood of a pure white dove, and a pledge of silence, and dug. Lore reports that when they hit on metal, one man cried out, “We’ve got it now!” breaking the spell and causing the pot of treasure to sink from sight.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Tamar Farlin to Mrs. Partridge of Boylston, August 16, 1820, BHS.

⁸⁵ For Rev. Avery’s divining, see, “The Recollections of Thomas White and Mary White Davis.” The treasure tale is told in several sources. See Matthew Davenport, *The History of Boylston*, 1831, p. 21; George Wright, *Names of Places* BHS Vol. I (1971), p. 18–19. It was not unusual for rural New Englanders in the Early Republic to dig for supposed buried treasure. Alan Taylor maintains this persistent hope of finding treasure with the

The deeply devout, such as Mary White or Simon Davis, saw the hand of God in both “favors” and “dispensations.” Thus, for Mary, the sudden death of a neighbor was an “admonishment” to “improve the time.” When the horse broke into a run and upset the chaise, Mary’s life was “in immediate danger, but the Lord interposed,” thus “animating” her to “be prepared to meet death.” When the family was visited with two kind providences in one day – little Thomas recovered from dysentery and the men got the hay in before the rain – Mary poured out her gratitude to a kind and interposing God. The total eclipse of the sun in June of 1806, during which “the stars twinkled at noon day,” caused Mary to marvel that “Wonderful are the changes of nature, but more astonishing are the wonders of redeeming love.” Simon Davis, deeply grieving the death of his little son, found consolation in the “comfortable reflection that he has passed all the storms and temptations of an evil world . . . how inconceivably delightful that idea of beholding him safely arriv’d on the opposite shores of immortal Felicity.” Both Simon and Mary repeatedly reflected on the removal or death of friends and family, that they could yet look forward to an eternal reunion. As Simon declared, in the face of “iniquity,” “awful events,” and “trials,” “there is a just GOD who rules the world and directs our destiny.”⁸⁶

aid of the occult was an effort by seekers to bridge the gap between their own limited opportunity and the newly prevalent cant of prosperity. Alan Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast,” *AQ* Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 6-34. For colonial and New England folk belief, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), Chapter 2, and Jon Butler *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 3.

⁸⁶ Letter of Simon Davis to Persis Seaver, May 27, 1809, BHS.

Mary and Simon were Calvinists. They believed in the inherent depravity of humankind, lost in original sin, profoundly and irreconcilably alienated from God and powerless to change that fate. Yet God, in his mercy, reached across that void and entered into relationship with mankind, on the condition that they promise to him their love and obedience. This covenant relationship was the *only* safe and secure ground; those in covenant with God had assurance of salvation and everlasting life.⁸⁷

The first Puritan settlers in New England extended the covenant relationship between God and mankind to include a covenant *between* the saints on earth who sought to live lives of grace. In this partnership, individuals voluntarily relinquished some of their freedoms and agreed to submit to the godly laws and discipline of the community for their own well-being and for the good of the whole community.⁸⁸ The terms of congregational covenants varied by community, but all required unanimous consent to a communal moral code. Those who entered into covenant accepted communal discipline and gained the assurance of supportive relationship with other saints.⁸⁹

The congregation at Boylston descended from a gathering of 45 men and women from Shrewsbury's North Parish, who "covenanted together" – wrote out and signed – the terms of their relationship in 1742.⁹⁰ Each man or woman who desired to join in full

⁸⁷ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, interpreted by Francis T. Butts "The Myth of Perry Miller," *AHR* Vol. 87, No. 3 (June, 1982), pp. 670-2.

⁸⁸ Daniel J. Elazar, "The Political Theory of Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments," *Publius* Vol. 10, No. 4. (Autumn, 1980), p. 23.

⁸⁹ Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, p. 150.

⁹⁰ That document has been lost, but the covenant their parent congregation in Shrewsbury written twenty years earlier cast the signers as a Body that desired "to be joined forever

relationship with the congregation, and thus receive baptism and commune with the congregants, had to “own the covenant.” Those who were either not at peace with some member of the congregation, or known to be in a state of sin, were required to make public confession and reconciliation before entering the covenant relationship.⁹¹ For the first fifty years, the most common entry in the church records was that a recently married couple had made confession of the sin of fornication (in this case, intercourse before their marriage), owned the covenant, and brought their child forward for baptism.

Church members enforced a communal discipline that required all members to submit to covenant rules and to maintain peaceable relationships with the covenanted community. If any member “broke covenant,” the church used persuasion, negotiation, and arbitration to effect repentance and reconciliation.⁹² Within months of their

unto the Lord Jesus, as members of him, our blessed Head . . . and might walk more close with the Lord, and not give way to the sinful liberty of our own hearts.” William O. Dupuis, *A Sword in My Hand: The Life of Rev. Dr. Ebenezer Morse of Boylston, Mass.* (Privately printed, 1992), p. 36. The Shrewsbury Covenant of 1723 is printed in full in Andrew Ward, *History of The Town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts: from its Settlement in 1717 to 1829* (Boston: S. G. Drake, 1847), p. 118.

⁹¹ The North Parish was, according to John Brooke, an “Old Light” church that accepted the Half-Way Covenant. Members could join the church, enter into full communion, and have their children baptized without making a public confession of their conversion experience. Brooke, *Heart of the Commonwealth*, pp. 71 and 85. Rev. Morse’s biographer confirms that the town’s minister was an “Old Light,” who in 1745 “voted with the Marlborough Ministers Association condemning George Whitefield and the New Lights.” Dupuis, *A Sword in My Hand*, p. 66.

⁹² In the Shrewsbury Covenant of 1723, members pledged “to obey such who rule over us in the Lord, and to walk in love one to another, and unto mutual edification; visiting, comforting, exhorting and warning any brother or sister that offendeth, with much love and tenderness; not divulging private offences irregularly, but first going to the party ourselves alone, and if he will not hear, to take one or two more, and then to bring it to the church, if need be, according to the rules of Christ, willingly forgiving all such who give satisfaction.” Ward, *History of Shrewsbury*, p. 118.

formation, the congregation called Elisha Maynard forward to answer to complaints that “our said brother was guilty at the house of Mr. John Bouker on Saturday evening 13 of October last of sinful wrathful conversation, very abusive treatment of several of his neighbours there present & strong [---] of drunkenness.” When Maynard refused to appear and “make satisfaction,” the congregation barred him from communion. Eventually a penitent Maynard submitted a written confession of having acted “contrary to the Gospel and the Holy Religion.” He humbly asked “the forgiveness of this Chh for my having thus offended it and desire that you would restore me to ... fellowship.”⁹³

Maynard’s reconciliation was essential, as disobedience to or disagreement with covenant commandments barred him from relationship with the church. As with the Amish *Ordnanng*, unanimous consent and submission to the covenant were central to congregational polity. It was, of course, only an ideal; the records of the North Parish show members called forward from time to time to answer to “breaches of covenant . . . worthy of censure.”⁹⁴ Simon Davis, who attended Boylston’s west parish, recorded that three members of the parish who objected to the choice of the new minister “busy themselves sowing the seed of discord among the People.”⁹⁵ A month later the parish was once again agitated, on account of “Isaac Smith 2nd to be much offended on acct of R.

⁹³ Boylston (North Parish Shrewsbury) Church Records 1742-1775, NEHGS.

⁹⁴ Even the minister did not escape; disputes over his salary and agitation over his headstrong, outspoken manner led to repeated squabbles. The church called at least three ecclesiastical councils during his thirty year tenure. These quarrels appear to be mostly conflicts over Morse’s salary, but clashes of personality and temperament also played a role. This ill-will led to charges of gossiping, false speaking, breaking covenant, assault, and one groundless charge of adultery. William Dupuis, *Sword in My Hand*, pp. 65-77.

⁹⁵ Diary of Simon Davis, Feb. 9, 1797, BHS.

Dunsmoor's bass viol which was yesterday introduced in public worship."⁹⁶ "Not so much love & good between all the members of this Society as I wish for." Yet in each case, the church worked through committees and emissaries to "execute church discipline" and bring the wayward back into covenant relationship. They believed that the parish should have a "single mind," reflecting a consensus as to the common good.⁹⁷

The Boylston congregation had great power over who could enter into relationship with them.⁹⁸ Before a proposed member could own the covenant, his or her membership was put to congregational vote. Though Molly Whittemore "made Christian satisfaction for the sin of fornication," the church deferred her membership for further consideration. Leaving the covenant relationship in good grace also required the assent of the covenanted, which the church occasionally refused if departing members were not at peace with all the covenanted.⁹⁹ Some townfolk, such as Simon Davis, disagreed with an article of the covenant and thus chose to attend, but not belong to, the church.¹⁰⁰ And

⁹⁶ Diary of Simon Davis, March 6, 1797, BHS.

⁹⁷ Simon Davis refers to this sense of church sentiment in discussing a paper circulated "to ascertain *the mind* of the Parish." Diary of Simon Davis, January 3, 1797, BHS.

⁹⁸ Robert Gross tells a similar tale for Concord. "Election to membership was thus a seal of one's moral acceptability to the community." Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), p. 23.

⁹⁹ Members who wished to transfer their membership to another congregation had to apply for a letter of dismissal and transfer; the Boylston congregation occasionally refused a letter, or gave a "qualified" one, if the applicant's attention to church discipline had been lax. North Parish Shrewsbury Church Records 1742-1775, NEGHS.

¹⁰⁰ Davis believed that baptism should be available to all infants, not just those whose parents had owned the covenant.

others in town chose not to participate at all.¹⁰¹ Despite these different levels of belonging – the covenanted, the “horse shed Christians,” and the unchurched – there were no dissenting religious communities in Boylston in 1800. No freethinkers challenged the standing order of Boylston’s established church.

The power of the church to impose order on the community was visible in the physical structure of the meetinghouse. The large (65’ by 53’) wooden building dominated the northwest end of the common. Periodically, the congregation reevaluated the “seating” of the meetinghouse, in which the square box pews were assigned by “dignity,” with deference to age and social distinction.¹⁰² By 1800, Boylston’s wives sat with their husbands in family pews. From the gallery above, one could see the social order of the town manifested in the distance a family was placed from the pulpit.

This high pulpit, with a set of stairs leading to an elevated lectern, was the focus of worship. From here, the minister gave two lengthy sermons each Sabbath, morning and afternoon. Mary’s children remembered that it was the custom for ministers to intone their delivery, which must have made poor entertainment for the young; not surprisingly, Mary’s diary, in addition to noting the biblical text and substance of the sermon also included occasional references to the “troublesome” behavior of her children. Despite juvenile inattention, the biblical text and its interpretation epitomized authority in this

¹⁰¹ Hall explains that a variety of reasons held people from joining fully in the covenant community. Though some were unenthusiastic – preferring to spend part of their Sabbath chatting in the church horsesheds rather than planted in the pews – many had genuine scruples about their own worthiness to partake of communion and feared profaning the sacrament and damning their souls. Hall, *Worlds of Wonders, Days of Judgment*, p. 161.

¹⁰² See 1792 floor and gallery seating plan for the Boylston meetinghouse, BHS.

well-ordered world of communal worship.¹⁰³ Children of pious parents found the Sabbath order extended to their homes, with no secular reading or conversation allowed. Mary's son remembered that, as his grandmother served tea one Sunday, a young friend of his asked how tea kettles were made. "She replied that they were not made on Sundays, which was all the light he received on the subject."¹⁰⁴

The Boylston congregation's commitment to corporate order and a unified vision of the common good – was put to a severe test on the eve of the Revolution. The congregation had strong patriot sympathies. The minister, and a handful of his supporters, did not. Rev. Morse repeatedly used his pulpit to preach obedience to royal authority. Increasingly incensed, parishioners finally met to address the inharmonious relations. First a parish committee, and then an ecclesiastical council were called to arbitrate. Rev. Morse refused to budge and finally the parish, convinced that the parish and their minister could never be "of one mind," voted to dissolve the pastoral relation. Morse refused to recognize the authority of this decision and swore he would keep his pulpit. The congregation "voted that he should no longer enter the pulpit as their minister and stationed guards at the pulpit stairs to see that he did not."¹⁰⁵ In the end, townsmen disarmed the inveterate Royalist and confined him for the duration of the war.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Despite the minister's authority in biblical interpretation, members of the congregation could, and sometimes did, hold differing views on doctrine. Simon Davis was particularly critical of the content and delivery of some of the sermons he heard from neighboring pulpits. Those who spoke openly and disparagingly about the minister, however, he considered afflicted with "evil spirits," "bent on interrupting the peace of the society." Simon Davis Diary, June 16, 1797; January 14, 1798; January 21, 1798, BHS.

¹⁰⁴ "Recollections from Uncle Thomas White and Aunt Mary White Davis," p. 9.

The parish believed it had no recourse with their obstinate minister but to sever relations. Their covenant mentality conceived of their communal relationship as a corporate entity. They could not tolerate the continued festering of some member of their body; if that member – even the minister -- could not be brought back into harmonious function with the body, it has to be cut off, lest it “despoil the whole.”

Town

Farms in Boylston were strung out across the countryside, planted where farmers believed the soils would suit.¹⁰⁷ Neighborhoods clustered haphazardly where families and resources drew people together, but no larger corporate identity was visible in the countryside. It was visible, however, around the town common. Here the townsfolk had built the structures needed for the common good: the meetinghouse with its noon house and horse sheds, a powder house for the town’s “warlike stores,” a stone-walled pound

¹⁰⁵ Tradition has it that Morse attempted to defy this ban, and had to be physically repulsed by the “pulpit guard.” Dupuis, *Sword in My Hand*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Davenport reported that the parish voted, “to inform Mr. Morse that he is dismissed, and that it is expected he do not attempt to enter the desk any more as a minister in this place, and that the committee is to see that he *do not*,” which latter part of their duty, it is said, they literally performed.” Davenport, *History of Boylston*, p. 24

¹⁰⁷ This “un-centered” development was typical of most colonial New England towns after the wilderness period passed. In Boylston, as in all non-proprietary towns, this characteristic dispersal was exacerbated by the tendency to grow from the outside in, that is, filling in from the development of older, surrounding communities. See Wood, *New England Village*, and David Jaffee, *People of the Wachusett: Greater New England in History and Memory, 1630–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

for wandering livestock, the town stocks, a school house, and the cemetery. The New England common “objectified traditional corporate effort and control.”¹⁰⁸

Town, like congregation, was modeled on covenant. Early Massachusetts settlers had established communities based on a social compact by which, as one scholar has written, “the whole people covenants with each citizen and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good.”¹⁰⁹ The critical elements of town government by covenant were, first, that the people promised to engage in mutual relationships with reciprocal obligations for each others’ well-being; second, that all agreed to obey the “ordering” – laws and decisions – of the community and submit to communal enforcement of these laws; and third, that the goal of these relationships, obligations, and promised obedience was to promote the common good.¹¹⁰ Signed in the presence of God, covenants sacralized the promised relationship.

If one was not born in Boylston, it was no simple matter to “join” the town. Because the people were responsible for the welfare of their fellow townsfolk, Boylstonians allowed newcomers to settle only if they could show sufficient assets to make it unlikely that they would become a public charge. Itinerant poor could be

¹⁰⁸ Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*, p. 49. The early buildings around Boylston’s common are described by George Wright, “Boylston,” *History of Worcester County*, p. 892.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel J. Elazar, “The Principles and Traditions Underlying State Constitutions,” *Publius*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter, 1982), p. 15. Elazar points out that the Massachusetts state constitution of 1780 formalized covenant relationship as the basis of the body politic; many towns had written town covenants (in addition to congregational covenants) as the basis of their local government throughout the colonial period.

¹¹⁰ This is my summary of Elazar, “The Political Theory of Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments,” *Publius*, Vol. 10, No. 4. (Autumn, 1980), p. 4-6. Elazar cites as a classic example of a covenanted polity the Mayflower Compact.

inhospitably “warned out,” sent back to the town of their birth where they “belonged.”¹¹¹ Those who were allowed to settle were expected to take up the obligations of town membership; in return, they gained the benefits of *belonging*: social order, collective effort, and the assurance of communal welfare in times of need.

Those who “belonged” to Boylston at the turn of the century had much in common. About half of all those eligible to vote had been born in town, and the rest hailed from surrounding towns.¹¹² Most of the native-born were descendents of the original settler families, and almost all could trace their ancestors to the Great Migration of 1620-1640. It was a young town, with more than half the population under the age of majority.¹¹³ Land was the most valuable asset, and though the distribution of this wealth in Boylston at the turn of the century was not so equal as on the western frontier, it was far more equal than in more established areas.¹¹⁴ Moreover, most men owned their land

¹¹¹ New England town meeting records documented the concern for determining an indigent’s town of birth and used the term “belongs to” to indicate nativity. Mary White used the same term to indicate the nativity of some traveling strangers who pass through Boylston. See for example, August 6, 1834, “A Mr. Freeman & his wife called here. . . He belonged at New York, Lawrence County.” Diary of Mary White, OSV. The custom persisted. Late nineteenth-century town historian George L. Wright recalled one local Indian who inhabited the early in the early parts of the century “belonged to” Vermont. See unpublished paper of George L. Wright on Native Americans, BHS.

¹¹² Of the 151 polls, the birth location of 131 can be identified. Of those, 61 had been born in Boylston, 36 in a local Worcester County town, and 34 from another town in Massachusetts. It is possible that some of the 20 polls whose nativity could not be determined were from more distant locations.

¹¹³ United States Population Census. For Boylston, 56% of the population was under 21 years of age; only 15% was 45 or older.

¹¹⁴ 1800 Gini Co-efficient for total property in Boylston was .61; total physical wealth for New England on the eve of the Revolution was .64; for Boston in 1860 it was .94. (A higher number indicates greater inequality.) See Appendix F for Distribution of Wealth.

unencumbered by major debt. Those who had debts owed them mostly to their neighbors, and it was rare for any man to lose his farm to insolvency.¹¹⁵ These were a people who could understand belonging to each other, because they were so much alike.

Several times a year, primarily at the annual March meeting in the spring and again in the fall, the town met to determine how it would attend to its communal obligations. About two-thirds of adult males were eligible to participate, and almost all of those obeyed the summons to do their civic duty.¹¹⁶ Leadership of these meetings was usually voted to an older, established town squire who could command the respect and deference of the community. Likewise, votes for the important offices of selectmen and

Only in frontier areas did the co-efficient drop below .5. Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 36-7. Contemporary travelers commented on what they perceived as "roughly equal distribution of property as the defining signature" of rural northern communities. Landholding was *not* equal, but in rural New England, where freehold farms were common, the distribution of wealth was more egalitarian than in rural England, the plantation south, or the American seaport cities. Jack Larkin, "Rural Life in the North," p. 1212.

¹¹⁵ See the probate analysis in Appendix J. Between 1790 and 1800, the mean debt ratio (ratio of total debts to total assets) in probated estates of Boylston males was .24, slightly less than the .27 that Alice Hanson Jones found for all Americans on the eve of the Revolutionary War. The analysis of probate accounts reveals that nearly all creditors were fellow Boylstonians. Before 1810, no estate was completely liquidated for debt.

¹¹⁶ Not everyone who belonged to Boylston had a right to participate in determining the "consensual" ordinances by which they would be governed. Only males, over the age of 21, with at least \$200 property and one year's residence, were called to appear. About two-thirds of the grown men in town met these requirements, and almost all obeyed the summons to do their civic duty. The population of Boylston in 1800 was 1050, 44% of whom were age 21 or over, so that there were approximately 231 males of age; the Boylston Tax Assessment for 1800 lists 151 male polls, or 66% of the of-age male population. Mary White tallied town meeting votes and recorded those tallies in 1805 and 1807. In 1805, 140 men cast votes; in 1807 161 voted.

assessor were usually cast for gentry.¹¹⁷ Townsmen deferred to their wealthier neighbors, regardless of age or town of birth, in part because of traditional patterns of deference and in part because of the belief that men of property were also men of learning, wisdom, and disinterested virtue. They expected that these men, bearing a larger share of the tax burden, would be vested in the town's general wellbeing – and in fiscal restraint.

Town meeting rules were based on the expectation that townsfolk would achieve consensus on most issues. If disagreements arose, as in congregational meetings, Boylstonians followed a set procedure for reaching accord. First, the matter was laid open for discussion; if no clear “sense of the meeting” emerged or if the item proved to be contentious, it was usually passed over, potentially to be returned to when calm prevailed. Alternatively, the town could vote to appoint a committee to investigate the matter and to report back to the next meeting with a proposed resolution, which the meeting would then discuss, and accept or reject. Such efforts usually produced an acceptable resolution. If, however, “after much debate and many trials at different times,” an issue was still contentious, the town usually voted to pass over the article, or, if conversation had become heated, to dissolve the meeting.

The main items of business were providing schooling, roads, and welfare for the town's poor. These communal responsibilities were paid for by a direct tax upon the land and livestock of the townsfolk. Holdings were self-reported, but in general people knew how many cows were in their neighbors' barns and the property lines of their neighbors'

¹¹⁷ From 1800 to 1809, the moderators, selectmen, assessors, and representatives to general court, (the most important elected positions) had an average tax decile of 1.72 (with one being high and ten low); their average age was 43.

lots.¹¹⁸ Tax revenues were handled and disbursed by the town's treasurer, whose job was complicated by the fact that there were no banks anywhere within the region. Thus, the townsfolk themselves acted as bankers for their town. In this way, the town's finances became part of the network of obligations that bound Boylstonians.¹¹⁹

Boylston's farmers were parsimonious providers of public services. Their five one-room school houses were in session for only two brief terms a year, while a master tried to keep order and dispense knowledge to 80 or more youngsters of all ages without benefit of town-issued school books or even a stove for heat.¹²⁰ Expectations were low: as long as a child learned to read the Bible, write well enough to sign a deed or will, and figure sums sufficient to keep his accounts, most parents were satisfied.

Nor did the town spend significant time or resources maintaining public roads. Though every man was responsible for repairing and re-grading the road in his neighborhood district, most Worcester county roads at the turn of the nineteenth century were dismally ill-kept, little more than broad paths cleared of trees and stumps, studded with rocks and roots, rutted with passing of hooves and feet, carts and wagons.¹²¹ Travel

¹¹⁸ In probate estate divisions, neighbors were called upon to define the boundaries of the decedent's parcels, by marks and bounds; they had likely been on the decedent's property in his lifetime, exchanging works at plow, harvest, and wood cutting time.

¹¹⁹ Those with capital, such as Lucy Sawyer, took an interest-bearing note from the town in exchange for lending them cash. Information on the town's handling of its finances can be found in the town meeting records.

¹²⁰ An excellent resource on rural New England schools in this period is Warren Burton, *The District School as It Was and Other Writings* (Boston: Press of T.R. Marvin, 1852). The conditions of Boylston's early schools are surveyed in William C. Noonan, *Educational History of Boylston* BHSS Vol. 6 (1980), pp. 1-7.

along Boylston's three "highways" and numerous cart paths was easy only when the snow, hard packed by ox teams "breaking paths" in mid winter, enameled the uneven surface with a smooth track for sleighs and sleds. But most traffic went on foot or by horseback, so improved roads were not a priority to those who knew they would have to pay in hard-to-find cash.

One inescapable fiscal responsibility was providing for those who had become dependent on the town. Widows, orphans, and elderly infirm whose families could not care for them became charges of the town. Each year at town meeting, Boylstonians put these souls up for auction, settling them with whomever agreed to charge the town the least for their care. Such support was not intended as a measure of kindness or mercy; it simply fulfilled the civic and moral obligation of membership in a covenanted community.

Once a year the town elected county and state officials. Election day was a festive time for socializing and imbibing; in Boylston, as in most of northern Worcester County at the turn of the century, the festive air was not marred with partisan politics. The three decades following the Revolution were "an epoch of Federalist consensus," when the yeomen willingly deferred to the standing order (a fraternal circle of orthodox, Federalist

¹²¹At the turn of the century, travel on Worcester County roads was so poor that most vehicular traffic was limited to sturdy farm carts and wagons. Henry Smith, *Boylston Centennial*, p. 35. Mary White recorded instances of broken axels and over-turned wagons. Even on the "highways," travelers in vehicles risked being shaken and bumped to pieces by ruts and rocks, mired in sand, or sunk in impassable mud. See Roger N. Parks, *Roads and Travel in New England, 1790-1840* (Sturbridge, Mass.: Old Sturbridge Village, 1967) and Francis W. Underwood "Working the Roads," in *Quabbin: The Story of a Small Town* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1893; reprint Northeastern University Press, 1986), pp. 118-19.

gentry and clergy).¹²² Though parts of the county responded to Jeffersonian rhetoric, Boylston remained staunchly Federalist. After town meeting in 1799, Simon Davis noted with approval that his “town was happily united in political sentiments.”¹²³ Mary White’s tally of votes at town meeting suggests a very strong commitment to Federalism.¹²⁴

Historian John Brooke explains why Federalism enjoyed such popularity in northern Worcester town such as Boylston. Federalist politics were rooted in an ideology and language of orthodoxy and national covenant, which resonated well in this orthodox town. Federalism “demanded individual responsibility for the collective welfare, [and] equated personal independence with public obligation, an equation that had a powerful resonance for those who remained committed to orthodox corporation.”¹²⁵ In addition, Boylston had already experienced a small exodus of its most needy – and most ambitious – offspring in the late 1780s. This may have removed those most likely to agitate for change.¹²⁶ Finally, Boylston was close enough to Worcester and the Post Road that by the late 1790s, a small trickle of marketing brought hopes of coming prosperity. The standing order was strengthened as “gentry and yeoman . . . found common cause in the export of

¹²² John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, p. 233.

¹²³ Diary of Simon Davis, April 1, 1799, BHS.

¹²⁴ Diary of Mary White, UD. After town meeting in 1805 and 1807, Mary reported that the Federalist candidates received 77 and 79% of the vote.

¹²⁵ Brooke, *Heart of the Commonwealth*, p. 263.

¹²⁶ “To a great measure, a conservative consensus was reinforced by this exodus of both farm households anxiously fending off a tumble into tenancy and dependency and some of the most energetic and ambitious ‘young men of the Revolution.’” Brooke, *Heart of the Commonwealth*, p. 239

local products of farm and shop.”¹²⁷ When called upon to present a toast while on a market trip to Vermont, Simon Davis declared, “The state of Vermont and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts – their Federalism.”¹²⁸

Town meeting and Election Day provided the town with regular excuses for socializing as a community. The common on the day of March meeting was like a fair ground, with tents and exhibits of vendors; the country store, always a social gathering place, did a hearty business, as did the tavern.¹²⁹ The evening was marked by “frolics.” Simon Davis’ diary records an August town meetin in 1796, followed by a “Frolic at R. Keyes”; on March 6 the following year, Davis reported “All hands [help] at March meeting,” though adding with disapproval, “Boys [his apprentices] had an entertainment in my new shop in evening – Not agreeable to me.”¹³⁰ Mary’s children remembered tales of “Election to Perfection,” a celebration with a parade, speeches and festivities so exciting that they marked notches on a stick to count down to its arrival.¹³¹

The world of Boylston’s people was local. Travel was difficult and slow; news came to town only by the concerted effort of the townsmen. Simon Davis collaborated with neighbors to take turns making the six-mile trip once each week to Worcester for a

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 273.

¹²⁸ Diary of Simon Davis, May 17, 1798, BHS.

¹²⁹ Jack Larkin notes that the country store served as a community forum and arena of debate on town topics, as well as an town information center. Jack Larkin, “Gathering Places, *Old Sturbridge Village Visitor*, 1981.

¹³⁰ Diary of Simon Davis, August 17, 1796 and March 6, 1797, BHS.

¹³¹ “Recollections of Thomas White and Mary White Davis.”

shared newspaper. Family members visiting from surrounding towns – Davis’ sister from Paxton, Mary’s siblings from Holden -- and farmers or craftsmen like Simon Davis “gone to market” in other towns brought some local news, as did pastors on pulpit exchanges. The townsfolk did not live in isolation, however. Some families had already migrated north and west, widening their horizon of known community. Revolution and nation-building had also drawn them into a wider world, and the “empire of goods” that they desired from the continent and the West Indies continued to draw their interest long after they had withdrawn from empire.¹³² Simon Davis and Aaron White, as rural shopkeepers who traveled to Boston to procure these foreign goods for their country shelves, were Boylston’s connection to this distant world. Davis recorded his concerns about “Atlantic World” tensions. “War with ye French talk’d of. American commerce suffers much by that nation,” he noted in March of 1798.

But this was rare news that came from beyond their highly localized community, bounded in everyday life by the pedestrian limits of one’s travel to neighbors, tavern, mill or church. The lived experience of turn-of-the century Boylstonians was of familiarity, custom, and the particularities of local lore, ancient families, parochial speech and

¹³² Some family members of the gentry were involved in this trade, providing a more immediate connection. Mary White’s brother Samuel was engaged in the West Indies trade. Davis noted that the son of a Holden shopkeeper, Joshua Goulding, had borrowed from his neighbors for a West Indies venture, a failure that cost them “some hundreds of dollars.” Diary of Simon Davis, April 22, 1797, BHS. For colonial involvement in the Atlantic world through trade, see T.H. Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1985).

manners.¹³³ It was a world of *belonging*, where life was defined, understood, ordered and made safe through membership. Being included in the little communities of farm family, neighborhood, church and town provided for the essential needs of body and soul: sustenance, security, and identity. However, these were also essentially *closed* communities. Membership could be purchased only through submission to family, church or community government; the dues were assent to communal norms, acceptance of mutual obligations, and limits on personal freedom and individuality. Such a communitarian society functioned best in the isolated, homogeneous farming communities, such as Boylston, where the occasional misfit was not a threat, but merely an oddity.

Severed Bodies

There were those in Boylston who lived outside of the town's corporate identity. They would not, or could not, be joined to the body of the people. These were people whose physical, behavioral, or moral difference made union seem repulsive and incorporation impossible. The clearest manifestation of this repudiation was the townsfolk's tendency to isolate, burlesque, or desecrate the physical bodies of those who did not belong. Debasing the body – treating as one might treat livestock or a wild creature – confirmed and manifested Boylstonian's belief that incorporation of these

¹³³ Parochial speech patterns are evident in diary misspellings of local names. Mr. Hathon, for example, was in actuality Mr. Hawthorne, Mr. Mower was Mr. Moore. Mary's cousin, Jonathan Fisher, who lived with Mary's family when she was growing up in Holden, later created a phonetic dictionary of vernacular speech that records the particular pronunciation patterns of the countryside. See, Raoul N. Smith, "The Speech of Jonathan Fisher (1768-1847) of Blue Hill, Maine, *American Speech: 1600 to Present*, The Dublin Seminar for New England Folk Life Annual Proceedings, 1983 (Boston: Boston University, 1985), pp. 70-76.

outsiders would be unnatural. This either-or outcome – bodily union or bodily rejection – was the result of a society that perceived of membership in corporate terms.

Cato Bondsman lived and served as a slave in the Andrews family from his boyhood in the 1760s. He was freed after the Revolution and first appeared in the public records in the 1790 census, listed as heading one of two black families in town. Cato's family included two daughters, Cate and Joanna, and two sons, Prince and Moses, born in the 1770s and 80s. Cato and Prince appear on the tax rolls of 1796 and 1797 and the children were apparently included in the first school district in the 1790s. But the family was never wholly incorporated in Boylston society.¹³⁴ They were refused a pew at church until Cato petitioned the town for "favor" in 1798: "Whereas Providence hath placed us among you and living under a Constitution that proclaims freedom and diffuses light and knowledge . . . [we pray that you will] appoint the family and others a seat in the meeting house or build us a pew . . . that we may enjoy free and unmolested the indulgence of attending publick worship with you."¹³⁵ His townsman dealt with the issue by building a small second gallery near the belfry, out of view of most worshippers.

Cato's son Moses worked as a farm hand for the Andrews family. In the winter of 1810, when he was thirty, he was fatally injured while hauling wood. As the ground was frozen, his body was kept in a local barn for spring burial. In February, however, Capt.

¹³⁴ Mary White, when she put out flax to some townswomen to spin, recorded their first and last names and affixed the title of "Mr." to their husbands, but a member of the Bondsman family was simply "Moses' wife," without the familiar first name or the honorific. *Diary of Mary White*, May 14, 1805, UD.

¹³⁵ Petition inserted into Boylston's Annual Town Meeting Warrant, April 21, 1798, as quoted in Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886*, p. 15.

Flagg was surprised to see a “wooly scalp” hanging from the wooden underpinnings of a bridge over a local brook. It was Moses Bondsman’s, whose body had been anatomically dissected and then “disposed of piecemeal” in the brook, and finally exposed by the rising waters of the spring thaw.¹³⁶ The ghoulish event may have caused talk, but no prosecution. In fact, no perpetrator was identified for over a century and a half, when a town historian determined the suspect was likely a young doctor, recently settled in town, who had left town within months of the discovery.¹³⁷ The dissection and disposal of the black man’s body seems to have caused little stir. He was not one of them, nor even one of their kind.

Sarah Boston was one of the Hassanamisco Indians of Grafton—descendants of an early “Praying Indian” village. She lived an itinerant life, as did many local Indians, moving with the seasons to follow natural resources, to sell her baskets and tell fortunes, and to seek rum and hard cider offered by farmers in payment for seasonal labor. Sarah had a temporary abode in Boylston, a shanty built against a rock ledge on Timothy

¹³⁶ George L. Wright, *Names of Places*, BHSS Vol. I, (1980), p. 3.

¹³⁷ This story was thoroughly investigated by William Dupuis and recorded in *The Boylston Sketchbook*, BHSS Vol. XI (1978), pp. 14 to 23. In some versions of the story the body was buried and exhumed.

Whitney's farm.¹³⁸ Mary recorded buying a basket from a black woman, likely a mixed-race Native, who came through the area, possibly Sarah Boston or one of her kinsmen.¹³⁹

Sarah Boston lived on the fringes of Yankee life. Neighbors saw Boston and two of her female friends as freakish creatures, "wandering about the countryside... Usually all had baskets of their own make on their arms or brushes for the hearth or other household uses," a neighbor recalled. Sarah dressed as a man and did men's work in the fields. She had three children, with no known husband. Having learned Native medicinal lore from her mother, she practiced occult cures. She enjoyed her liquor and her freedom. Sarah Boston was everything a goodwife should not be.¹⁴⁰

Boylston's people ridiculed her through caricature of her physical appearance and parody of her behavior. She was described as gigantic, well over six feet tall and at least 300 pounds, with astonishing strength. Her attire was reduced to the comedic: short skirt and a jacket, men's boots and men's hat, all wrapped in a blanket "squaw fashion." The effect of her physical appearance could be terrifying, or comedic:

a party of young men returning from a dance . . . at which they had partaken very freely of New England rum were passing the old cemetery . . . where they suggested stopping and waking the dead. Rapping upon the

¹³⁸ According to Wright, Sarah Boston's "wigwam" was on Deacon Moses Brigham's farm; at the time she resided there, that was the homestead of Timothy Whitney. See Dupuis, *Sketch Book*, p. 38.

¹³⁹ Sarah was reputedly the daughter of a Native mother and an enslaved black father. See George L. Wright, *Names of Places* BHSS Vol. 1 (1980), p. 27.

¹⁴⁰ George L. Wright gives the fullest description of Sarah Boston in an unpublished paper, "Tramps & other Peculiar Characters," in the collection of the Boylston Historical Society. Other information is available in "Documenting Hassanamesit Woods: Its History and Cultural Resources," a report prepared by Electa Kane Tritsch of Oakfield Research for the Hassanamesit Woods Management Committee, November 2006.

gate they shouted, 'Arise ye dead and come forth to judgment.' When from a grave arose the gigantic form of Sarah, exclaiming, 'I'm coming Lord, I'm coming.' The young men were so frightened & sobered that they drove away & never stopped until they had reached home.¹⁴¹

Sarah Boston and the two female Native friends that usually traveled with her would never be part of the Boylston community. In all respects she was alien, despite being genuinely Native. Sarah Boston sent her only daughter to live with friends in Worcester, so that she might have "a better life."¹⁴² Meanwhile, Boylstonians shared tales of ancestors' fears of hostile "savages," and played at "sham Indian fighting."¹⁴³

And, there was Sophia Martyn Whitney, the unfortunate girl whose bones were unearthed under her father-in-law's doorstep.¹⁴⁴ In the intimate world of kith-and-kin neighborhoods, where friends and neighbors were woven into the pattern of daily work, worship, and socializing, how could a young woman have disappeared unnoticed? Sophia Martyn, apparently, was not a member of Boylston's corporate community. She did not *belong* to Boylston. She, like Moses and Sarah, was "other."

¹⁴¹ George L. Wright, *Names of Places*, p. 28.

¹⁴² Electra Tritsch, "Documenting Hassanamesit Woods."

¹⁴³ For an early nineteenth century description of the "savages" of earlier days, see Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston*, p. 13. In 1820, Aaron Jr. witnessed the militia training and joined in "sham fighting with Indians." Diary of Aaron White Jr., Oct. 2, 1820, manuscript, collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁴⁴ William Dupuis, historian of the Boylston Historical Society, deduced that the doorstep bones were most likely those of Sophia Martyn Whitney after a painstaking search of town and genealogical records. The case is complicated by the fact that there is no death record for Sophia Martin, and by the fact that Shadrach apparently married a second women named Sophia later in his life. For details of Dupuis' deductions see *The Boylston Sketch Book*, pp. 35-51.

Sophia Martyn was the illegitimate daughter of Mary Ball and Edward Martyn, born in 1784.¹⁴⁵ Martyn never married Mary Ball, and when Mary did marry Dr. Stephen Brigham five years later, she was seven months pregnant with her second child. Whether Mary brought five-year-old Sophia with her, or whether the child had previously been put out to care by the town, is unknown. In 1801, a seventeen-year-old Sophia Martyn married her neighbor, Shadrack Whitney, a 31-year-old farmer of middling wealth. The illegitimate Sophia Martyn must not have been an accepted and integrated part of the community, for sometime in the next decade she disappeared from the homestead, and no one, apparently, took any notice. It was said that she had left her husband and gone to live with family in New Hampshire.¹⁴⁶ Later, with no recorded death or divorce, Shadrach married a second time. In Boylston lore, the guilty secret that someone or ones in the Whitney family had to bear lay behind the “curse” of misery and misfortune that seemed to plague the household in the ensuing years.¹⁴⁷ Whitney’s father, once a prosperous farmer and active in town affairs, began to withdraw from society, drink heavily, and eventually lost his home, his health and his life.

The macabre tale of the doorstep grave reveals the other side of this world of communal belonging. In a corporate social world, membership extended to the family and the familiar, the compliant and the orthodox. It did not include those who were

¹⁴⁵ Dupuis, *The Sketch Book*, p. 45.

¹⁴⁶ The story of the disappearance of a young Whitney wife was related by relatives of both the Whitney and Brigham families and survived in oral tradition down through the end of the nineteenth century. The tale was eventually related to town historian George Wright by his uncle, Augustus Wright, who was related by marriage to the Brigham family. See Dupuis, *The Sketch Book*, p. 42.

¹⁴⁷ This is the conclusion of Dupuis, *The Boylston Sketch Book*, pp. 35-51.

different, unorthodox, unconventional. Those who lived outside the dense network of interpersonal relationship, shared works, mutual obligation, socializing and covenant were not enfolded in fellowship. Sophia Martyn, Sarah Boston, and the Bondsman clan could or would not conform to the social norm or submit to an agreed-upon common good. Since they could not be incorporated into the whole, they must be separated, so that the whole may remain uncorrupted.

But things were on the verge of change. At the turn of the century, consensual, communal, familial, neighborly, localistic and homogeneous qualities marked Boylston – like Amish communities that share those qualities two centuries later – as traditional. But there were factors at work that would transform and reform the very nature of relationship and belonging in Boylston. Families and farms, neighbors, congregation, and town were all about to be subjected to stresses both internal and external that would effectively erode the bonds that had held community together as an interdependent and closely-knit – as well as exclusive and coercive – world of belonging. The transformation would not be easy – change would be resisted and contested fiercely, making the decades to come the most conflicted in the town’s history. The people of Boylston would question – and reject -- the very ideal of a common good and a united corporate community. Their struggles provide a window into the experience of *living through* the coming of a new world and the remaking of relationships.

CHAPTER TWO

A CHURCH DISSASSEMBLED

Let us now look forward a generation. We may peer out the window of the White family's front parlor, as son William did on an April evening in 1841. The world he saw from his vantage point was rather different from the rustic village center of his youth. For one thing, the family no longer lived in the ancient tavern at the foot of the common; in 1820, a prosperous Aaron White had purchased the Abbot place at the crest of the hill and completely remodeled the dwelling, creating a fine Federal façade with pleasant symmetry and elegant fan windows. Mary and Aaron had redesigned the interior to create a fashionable front-to-back center hall with a genteel curving stairway, flanked by east and west parlors. From his writing desk at the window, William could view a much-tided common, graced with an elegant granite town house, a graceful new Greek Revival church, and an assortment of tidy stores offering fashionable wares. Stone walls and fences, flower gardens and hedges imposed a pleasing discipline on the village landscape. But it was an external order only; as William was about to relate, under its façade of neat regularity, Boylston was teeming with factious disorder and mayhem.

As he penned his letter by the parlor window, William gazed across the common at the old meeting house of his youth. The big brooding building had stood empty and abandoned for nearly five years, gradually descending into a dilapidated state, an eyesore on the imposed order of the common. As if musing on the deserted meeting house, William wrote to his brother, "Alas the state of religion in this town is far from what it

should be. Some young professors have sadly departed from the paths of exemplary piety and are in a very [---] and backslidden state...” But then his letter broke off suddenly, as the scene out his window drew him hurriedly from the parlor to his doorstep outside. When he returned, he explained, “Since I have commenced this letter I have been disturbed by some wicked boys (as I suppose) throwing stones at our old meeting house and its already broken windows. I went to the door and gave one screech at them and they soon scampered away into the darkness.”¹

In the generation that spanned the 1820s and ‘30s, what had happened to “the state of religion in this town,” as William dolefully put it, that would cause the people of the town to abandon their meetinghouse – the symbol of their corporate unity – and that would embolden youth to desecrate its decaying shell? This chapter will tell the story of a generation of religious turmoil, played out in Boylston’s town meetings, tavern porches, parlors, and within the hearts of its citizens. It was intensely felt issues of faith and conscience that first redefined relationships in Boylston and transformed the nature of communal belonging.

Partisan Piety

In keeping her diary, Mary White was a reserved woman. Her entries suggest an even temperament, a patient and forbearing nature, a composed mind. Yet, the events of March Meeting in 1829 moved her to impassioned exclamation (and to the rare use of an exclamation point). “The parish nominations triumphant!” Referring to the annual election of town officers, Mary reveled in the success of her favored candidates. She was

¹ William White to Charles White, April 27, 1841. OSV.

not the only one so moved. Leaders of two parties had schemed for days to secure victory. A desperate attempt at unity – a proposal for a “Union Slate” of officers – had failed when the committee assigned to come up with a balanced roster could find no middle ground; debate had been extensive, heated, and angry. There had been scenes and name-calling on town meeting floor, and some had stormed out in fury. The vote, when it finally came, was split, but in the end more of the positions for selectmen, clerk, constable and assessors were won by Mary’s party than their foes. Supporters of the victorious side, including the usually complaisant matron Mary White, were exultant.²

The controversial issues that divided Boylston and roused such partisan passions were not about politics, economics, or social class; they were about religion. Over the past fifteen years, Boylston’s single meetinghouse had struggled to contain two increasingly divergent camps, one theologically liberal, the other conservative. Debate over what should be included in the articles of Covenant, who should be allowed to approach the communion table, and what should be preached from the pulpit provoked such violent passions that even the otherwise sedate Mary White could not contain herself. Years later, one who witnessed the fracas remembered “the bitter animosity of the two parties” and the ugly actions and speeches that poisoned the town.

The most malignant passions of our depraved natures raged. Hard speeches were made, reproach, accusations and criminations were uttered and reiterated. Friends became enemies, jealousies kindled in neighborhoods, and contention and strife existed in every section of town. No heart was indifferent; every man, woman and child was strongly in sympathy with one or the other of the conflicting parties, and all were

² Diary of Mary White, March 2, 1829. OSV. Town clerk’s record book for this meeting reveals the outcome of the voting: Congregationalists won moderator, clerk, first selectman and one assessor; Unitarians won three selectmen and constable.

prepared to employ influences which tended to secure the peculiar ends which they desired.³

Religion became battering ram against Boylston's corporate ideal. It was issues of faith and conscience – issues in which people were deeply invested and on which they felt they could not compromise -- that first challenged and eventually destroyed Boylstonians' allegiance to consensus and one common good.

Many historians have noted a correlation between religious enthusiasm and rapid social change in American history. Most have argued that disorienting social change prompted religious enthusiasm.⁴ Less frequently, historians have argued that the causal relationship ran the other way: that religion *wrought* social change.⁵ In Boylston, this was the case. It was religious division that fractured the town and religious faith that legitimated oppositional behavior. For some, the depth of religious conviction made

³ Wm. H. Sanford, *Two Sermons Preached in Boylston, Massachusetts. Oct. 17 & 24, 1852, Giving A History of the Congregational Church* (Worcester: Buckingham Webb, Printer, 1853), p. 51.

⁴ This historiographical view goes back at least to Perry Miller, who argued in 1965 that the Second Great Awakening was a reaction to rapid social change and fears that such change jeopardized the new nation. Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965). See also, Paul E. Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York. 1979*. Some scholars have suggested that the emergence of new social environments (frontier, urban, industrial) caused stresses that spurred recourse to religion. Consider Anthony Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.) Others have more cynically proposed that conversion and adoption of a "sanctified" Christian lifestyle was urged by elite seeking to control their employees and other urban workers as a way of re-imposing order on the democratic masses. Clifford S. Griffin was perhaps the leading early exponent of religious elites as "social controllers." Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (1960).

⁵ Consider John Murrin, "No Awakening, No Revolution? More Counter Factual Speculation," *RAH*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Jun., 1983), pp. 161-171 and scholars cited therein.

public, visible, dissent not only unavoidable, but essential, even as it undermined a unitary shared common good.⁶ Sectarian strife generated deep divisions in community as opposed sides contended for control of the church, the schools, town offices, and ultimately, the hearts and souls of unaligned townsfolk. In support of their cause, orthodox women in particular created new forms of exclusive association based on promoting not common good but special interest. They joined forces with those beyond the borders of their town who shared their views, breaching the old localism that had once defined community. Most powerfully, as they proselytized their neighbors, Boylston's evangelicals elevated the individual in his struggle to work out his own salvation. This regenerate soul was a powerful force: imbued with an inner authority, feeling justified in asserting righteousness, Boylston's converts – and their equally impassioned liberal opponents – fought a holy war. Change began in the hearts of individuals, rippling out through families and neighborhoods, church and town, to redefine belonging and communal relationship.

Mary's triumph, as it turned out, was short-lived. After the next year's town meeting she reported with dismay, "Quite a revolution in the officers."⁷ Much worse was to follow. Within a few years, battles over belief and religious turf would destroy the ancient congregation.

⁶ Tim Harris made this claim for the role of faith in the rise of sectarian politics in Commonwealth London. Robert Shoemaker corroborated Harris' claims. Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert B. Shoemaker, "The London "Mob in the Early Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul. 1987), pp. 294.

⁷ Diary of Mary White, March 2, 1830.

Roots of a Controversy: Patterns of Belief and Belonging

Trouble simmered in Boylston for several generations before it finally boiled over in 1829. Like many troubles in Boylston, at heart was the sensitive issue of belonging. The parish comprised all who lived within the town's borders, yet only those who passed examination and "owned the covenant" were accepted into full communion. The issue was vexed in Boylston by an unfortunate pattern of alternating inclusively-minded ministers with those who favored exclusivity. Gaining, then losing, the benefits of membership made some parishioners increasingly resentful.

Rev. Ebenezer Morse (pastorate from 1742 to 1774) was an Old Light Calvinist.⁸ For Morse, correct theological belief, as discerned by those trained in rationalist, philosophical methods, was the strongest sign of election. In contrast, New Lights, followers of the Great Awakening's prophet George Whitefield, believed that a profoundly emotional and deeply transformative conversion experience was the only reliable sign of salvation, and that the elect could be distinguished by the regenerate, pious lives that followed this critical moment.⁹ Old Light ministers such as Morse examined members for orthodox belief before admitting them to the covenant, but they did not demand evidence of an intense conversion experience. Under Morse, the church

⁸ William O Dupuis, *A Sword in My Hand: The Life of Rev. Ebenezer Morse of Boylston, Massachusetts* (Printed by the Author, 1992), p. 83. Morse voted to condemn evangelical George Whitefield and his supporters at a minister's association in 1745.

⁹ Old Light ministers resisted the emotionalism of the Great Awakening; their preference for philosophic rationalism would lead many of their successors to sympathize with – or adopt – liberal and Unitarian belief. Richard D. Shiels, "The Scope of the Second Great Awakening: Andover, Massachusetts, as a Case Study," *JER*, Vol. 5, No.2, (Summer, 1985), p. 228.

accepted the Half-Way Covenant and baptized children liberally.¹⁰ Impious members were disciplined, but readily reconciled upon confession. For more than thirty years, then, the people of Boylston enjoyed a relatively open and inclusive church.¹¹

The situation changed dramatically in the tumultuous years of the Revolution. Boylstonians ousted their Royalist minister and in his place called a staunch patriot. Rev. Eleazar Fairbanks, ordained in 1777, was however, a New Light minister, and he lost no time in reforming the lax standards of his congregation.¹² Fairbanks was not alone in his efforts; all around Worcester County a new generation of clergy, supported by gentry concerned with restoring order and regularity in the wake of revolutionary chaos, began reasserting discipline.¹³ Fairbanks immediately set about rewriting the Covenant to reflect New Light intensity, updating church music, and – most critically -- revoking the Half-

¹⁰ Morse's biographer could find only one instance in which Morse refused baptism, a case in which he hoped to avoid offending a neighboring minister who had already refused baptism to this candidate. See Dupuis, *A Sword in My Hand*, p. 70-1.

¹¹ "Such lax, inclusive standards, institutionalized in the Half-Way Covenant, were typical in the orthodox churches throughout central New England," during the mid-eighteenth century. John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.), p. 279.

¹² Fairbanks was a 1775 graduate of the Calvinist Baptist Brown University. George L. Wright, "Boylston's Church History," an historical address delivered November 18, 1929." BHS.

¹³ "A young generation of New Divinity clergy presided over the adoption of strict creeds and covenants. Corporate status would no longer be interwoven with the religious duties and privileges of the federal covenant." John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 239.

Way Covenant.¹⁴ Boylston's gentry approved of their New Light Minister, with his claims that none should rise to places of honor but those who had proven their merit, and saw his efforts as validating their social and political ideals with religious authority.¹⁵ Order, however, came at a cost: the redisciplined church was now exclusive, and those unable to meet the new standards, found themselves outside the circle of belonging.

When Fairbanks retired at the end of the eighteenth century, the parish chose as their new minister the Rev. Ward Cotton. They chose trouble. The standing order no doubt felt Cotton had excellent credentials: scion of Calvinists John Cotton and Increase and Cotton Mather, raised in Plymouth, New England's oldest Calvinist settlement, and educated at Harvard. Cotton came from a family of such substantial means that his bride's rich silks astonished the women of this rural town.¹⁶ But Cotton was *not* a Calvinist. During his years at Harvard, Cotton found that his professors, like many of the

¹⁴ Sanford, *Two Sermons Preached in Boylston*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵ Brooke documents the relationship between New Light enthusiasm and Federalist strongholds. In Worcester County, the New Lights were strongest in rural northern towns, which were nearly unanimously Federalist; they saw Republican claims of the "power of human volition in improving self and society" as a direct challenge to religious doctrine and social order. A shared interest in stability and deference made revived New Light teachings "an important buttress of the Federalist consensus." Brooke, *Heart of the Commonwealth*, pp 239, 252, 257, and 261. New Light ministers and Federalist gentry shared goals: both wanted to address the spiritual lethargy and the rise of deism and skepticism that had marked the end of the colonial era; both believed a revived Christianity was essential to a Republic dependent on the virtue of its citizenry. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 274.

¹⁶ George L. Wright, "History of Boylston" in *History of Worcester County, Massachusetts*, edited by D. Hamilton Hurd (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1889); Augustus Flagg, "Boylston," from *History of Worcester County* (Boston: C.F. Jewett & Co., 1879) p. 314; *Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Boylston, Massachusetts, August 18, 1886* (Worcester: Press of Sanford & Davis, 1887), p. 63.

coastal cosmopolitan elite, had become increasingly liberal in their theology. They embraced doctrines of free will, the power of reason, the innate goodness of humanity, and the unlimited potential of moral and intellectual growth to improve humankind. Quietly, they set aside Calvinist doctrines of original sin, human depravity, predestination, and the Trinity. These liberal ideas spread first among ministers, then to their congregations. One of the earliest churches to split along liberal/orthodox lines was Cotton's hometown congregation of Plymouth.¹⁷

Cotton instituted no revolution when he came to Boylston. He was, by the account of one who knew him well, an amiable man; "obliging in his disposition, he took pleasure in conferring favors and never sought to give unnecessary pain and trouble to those around him."¹⁸ But pain and trouble were inevitable. Under a reinstated Half-Way Covenant, Cotton opened the doors of the church and preached a broad-minded, universal Christian community. The ideal congregation, he insisted, "must seek unity and acceptance of all brethren." Rather than insisting on points of doctrine, they must "study to be quiet, doing their own business." Cotton particularly warned against excess of religious enthusiasm, emotional conversions, and other signs of "fanaticism."

The human feelings or passions . . . are properly the gales of life. They never ought, indeed, to assume the helm or place of the pilot; . . . the passions may be too warm; they may be raised so high, as to obscure the light of understanding and entirely prevent inquiry. . . But religion, *founded on principle, and strengthened by habit*, will usually continue through life. A small stream of affections towards God, which runs

¹⁷ The Plymouth church fractured in 1801, four years after Cotton's ordination in Boylston. Rev. Dr. Douglas K. Showalter, "The Early Days," Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ, 2003, website: <http://www.macucc.org/about-us/vig1.htm>.

¹⁸ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 45.

steadily without abating, is better than a flood, which come violently for a time, and soon diminishes.¹⁹

Cotton, then, was preaching liberal – soon to be Unitarian – tenets from the Boylston pulpit. He rejected Calvinist dogma – rejected all doctrine – and preached a benevolent God who could be known through the light of reason, who was concerned foremost with ethical behavior, who embraced all without qualification, who presumed all should believe “as the light of reason informed them.”²⁰ To those members of Boylston’s congregation who had, for the last quarter century, simmered with discontent over their second-class status, Cotton’s inclusiveness was welcome. For the orthodox, it was not.

To Mary White, one of the orthodox, the amiable Rev. Cotton’s message of peace and acceptance was heresy. Liberalism threatened to be a dagger to the heart of covenanted community. *True religion*, the orthodox insisted, required conversion, not merely rational acceptance; the *true church* was a community of the purified, who had no fellowship with the corrupt; *true teaching* relied only on scripture understood literally, not on reason, science, or philosophy. Cotton’s heterodoxy seemed to threaten not only the right belief but also good social order. Conservatives were anxious for a return to doctrinal integrity, along with “a strict discipline within the church, an adherence to well-

¹⁹ Ward Cotton, *Causes and Effects of Female Regard to Christ: A Sermon Delivered Before the Female Society in Boylston For the Aid of Foreign Missions, October 1, 1816*. (Worcester, William Manning, Printer, 1817.) Emphasis added.

²⁰ Mary Kupiec Cayton, “Who Were the Evangelicals? Conservative and Liberal Identity in the Unitarian Controversy in Boston 1804-1844,” *JSH*, Vo. 31, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), p. 86.

defined standards and a restoration insofar as possible of a consensual, well-integrated, and ideologically homogenous community.”²¹

There was no immediate revolution, however. For fifteen years, most Boylstonians went to hear the amiable Rev. Cotton preach his two Sunday sermons on the ethical and social obligations of believers and the love of a benevolent God. Gradually, the strict Calvinists began to grumble; by 1812, a small contingent withdrew and, together with disgruntled conservatives from neighboring Shrewsbury, formed a Baptist church.²² An ecclesiastical council was called in from neighboring congregations to arbitrate, but no action was taken. One townsman later recalled, “There appears to have been no hasty and rash move by either party, tho both parties exhibited a determination that was absolutely unmovable.”²³ What emerged, instead, was a decade-long contest of wits and wile for control of the soul of Boylston.

The situation was the same in many surrounding communities. The liberal faith that first surfaced around cosmopolitan Boston at the turn of the century made “silent progress” without causing a major backlash for some years. Most progressive-minded ministers called themselves simply “liberal Christians” and tried to avoid controversial

²¹ Ibid., p. 86-90.

²² For history of the Baptist church in Boylston, see George Wright, *History of Worcester County*, p. 897; Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886*, pp. 31- 32; for the ecclesiastical council called in 1814, see Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 44.

²³ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 43-4

issues of doctrine. Many of their parishioners adopted their viewpoint without even fully comprehending the theological rift that separated liberal and orthodox views.²⁴

It was orthodox ministers who cast the first stone. For years, ministers within the Congregational association had been accustomed to regularly “exchanging pulpits,” preaching to each other’s congregations. Around 1810, conservative minister Jedidiah Morse of Boston began to refuse pulpit exchanges with his liberal brethren, claiming that he would not expose his congregation to corrupt and heretical teachings.

The issue might not have had legs, except for Morse’s canny willingness to make use of powerful new resources, a huge expansion in the printing and circulation of pamphlets and newspapers, many produced by the now-rival religious sects. In 1815, Morse published a widely circulated tract that accused the liberals of heresy in rejecting the divinity of Jesus and hypocrisy in attempting to hide their heretical beliefs behind vague sermons and doctrinal dissimulation.²⁵ In response, the liberals admitted that some among them found the Trinity to be unscriptural. But they countered that conservative Congregationalists were an intolerant, exclusive, and reactionary lot whose insistence on doctrinal rigidity “subvert[ed] rights of conscience” and hampered progressive response to the social and ethical problems of humanity.²⁶ William Ellery Channing published a reply that set out the Unitarian ideal: the goal of Christianity should be to inspire people

²⁴ Emerson Davis, *The Half Century: Or, a History of the Changes That Have Taken Place, and Events That Have Transpired, Chiefly in the United States, between 1800 and 1850* (Boston: Tappan & Whittemore, 1851), Chapter IX – Religious Controversies.

²⁵ Cayton, *Who Were the Evangelicals*, p. 141. Morse’s tract was *A Review of American Unitarianism*, (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1815).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-5.

to live lives of Christian love; doctrinal issues such as the Trinity were of no use in reaching that goal and should not be allowed to destroy Christian community.²⁷

Matrons Awaken

It was such printed pieces that lit the fire of sectarian confrontation and its counterpart – religious evangelism. The orthodox churches were particularly adept at using the printed word.²⁸ American religious sects followed the lead of evangelical associations abroad, such as London’s Religious Tract Society, saturating the countryside with cheap printed pieces that pitched their particular enthusiasm. Using books, tracts, and newspapers, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1812), American Bible Society (1816), American Sunday School Union (1817), American Tract Society (1823), and other organs of the “benevolent empire” spread evangelical energy beyond cosmopolitan centers and helped fuel the fires of evangelical revivalism.²⁹

²⁷ William Ellery Channing, *A Letter to the Rev. Samuel C. Thatcher on the Aspersion Contained in a Late Number of the Panoplist, on the Ministers of Boston and the Vicinity* (Boston: Printed and published by Wells and Lilly, 1815). “If there be an act which, above all others, is a transgression of the Christian law, it is this. What is the language of our Master? ‘A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another. By this all men should know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love for one another [his emphasis]. . . . I feel for the cause of our common Christianity.”

²⁸ The Second Great Awakening (approximately 1796 to 1840, with peak periods of intensity between 1826 and 1836) was a nation-wide phenomenon; the Unitarian-Trinitarian controversy was mostly limited to New England. Although sectarian rivalry may have fueled evangelism in New England, in general the causes of the Second Great Awakening cannot be restricted simply to strategic denomination building.

²⁹ The interaction between confrontational sectarianism, religious revivals, and extended communication is treated in Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 236; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, p 274-80; and Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford

Three conservative and deeply pious matrons – all close neighbors in the center of Boylston, and all named Mary – led the orthodox effort. In the autumn of 1815, Mary Bush, Mary White, and Mary Abbot gathered 38 other Boylston women into the parlor of Mary Bush’s mansion house and formed a society. To justify and legitimize their action, they composed the secularized form of a covenant, a constitution. Their preamble explained their purpose: “feeling our Obligations to improve what the great bestower of all good has placed in our power . . . to subserve the best interests of our fellow mortals,” they pledged to contribute fifty cents per year for the privilege of meeting together, the receipts of which would be used to aid foreign missions.³⁰ In five concise articles they set out their rules for membership, electing officers, conducting meetings, raising and disbursing funds, and amending their constitution. The document was signed with the given and surnames -- not the married titles -- of 41 Boylston women.

The goals of the society were simple, but the implications of its formation were not. The women planned to meet five times a year for social and religious purposes. The women who embraced this plan hardly seemed like revolutionaries. On average they were middle-aged, well-to-do matrons, or the daughters or siblings of the same.³¹ Their

University Press, 2007), pp. 211-22.

³⁰ See Constitution of the Boylston Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions, FCCB. “Abroad” at this point meant overseas; the women would later expand their mission to include Native Americans and the provision of bibles and ministers to those on the western frontier.

³¹ For the 41 women who signed the constitution, age could be determined for 32, mean wealth decile of head of household for 35, and marital status for 32. The mean age was 38, mean wealth decile was 3.1 (with one being high), and two-thirds were married. In addition, 61% of the women shared a surname, and presumably a family relationship, with someone else in the society.

respectable position, along with their traditional female activities of shared work and socializing, hardly seemed controversial. Yet for some in Boylston's community, the formation of this new female society was deeply discomfiting.

In forming their voluntary association, these pious women exercised a new type of power: effecting change by joining with like-minded individuals to advance a particular cause. They made no attempt to justify their work as reflecting the values of the whole community. The women of Boylston might attempt to educate and persuade their neighbors to join them, but they were not waiting to create a communal consensus; they were acting to advance goals that they knew would not be universally applauded. Only two of the forty-one initial members of the group were associated with those families who supported the liberal ideas of Rev. Cotton.³² This was, in essence, a clearly partisan society, and some in Boylston found their work doubly troublesome: party spirit had no place in a consensual community, and women had no place in politics.

One of those most disturbed was Rev. Cotton. He was well aware that these women supported only conservative, orthodox missionaries, and he had no desire to aid in spreading Calvinism abroad. More worrisome, he knew well that such a society would likely consolidate and strengthen Calvinism in his own parish. National evangelical associations were most effective when they were able to establish local associations to support their work and to spread their message parochially. Cotton saw the founding of this society as an opening tactic in a local battle for religious allegiance.

³² It is not always possible to match the women, who signed the constitution with their first names, to later heads of household that can be identified with a church. Of those 13 who could be matched, 11 were associated with conservative Congregational or Baptist households, 2 with Unitarian households, and the rest were not official members of a church or could not be linked with a head of household.

He was right. The women were canny; as soon as they had written their constitution, they addressed a polite request to their minister to give his blessing – in the form of an opening sermon – for their first annual meeting. Cotton found himself in an unenviable position. If he accepted, he would have to bless the work he opposed; if he declined, he would appear to publicly oppose pious women in their attempt to spread the gospel. He demurred, claiming that he was not available for the date they requested; they persisted, sending secretary Mary White to his study with a written request to name a date that would be convenient, and instructions to wait for his reply. Perplexed, Cotton sent Mary back with an apologetic note, claiming he did not know when he might be free. Undeterred, the women then appealed to Rev. Puffer of Berlin, who obligingly agreed.

On the January 8, 1816, the women “met at the house of Capt. Abbot at nine o’clock in the forenoon from whence they went in procession to the meetinghouse.”³³ It must have been an imposing scene: forty matrons on a mission. Rev. Puffer provided the public blessing the women had hoped for. Not only did he praise them for adding their “influence and example, prayer and substance” to this “righteous cause” of preaching the gospel “*to every creature,*” he also defended their new voluntary association. “I am not insensible that many things are said against making these efforts.” But, he acknowledged, the women were doing God’s work, and the men would do well to join them. “Feeble individually, but united, they are a mighty engine for promoting truth and righteousness, peace and salvation among men.”³⁴ It was a powerful justification of voluntary

³³ Boylston Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions, Jan. 8, 1816, FCCB.

association for partisan interest, an emerging model of democratic striving. The approving women published his text.

Cotton was appalled. He saw in the women's work not peace and salvation, but contention and strife. Compelled to respond and rebut, the busy minister found time in his schedule to sermonize the women himself. On October 1, 1816, the women again processed to the meetinghouse to hear Rev. Cotton preach on the "Causes and Effects of Female Regard to Christ." Women who love Christ, Cotton declared, are drawn to live like him, lives of love and charity. But women, he noted, can do this best in the way God has appointed, *in their homes*, setting examples of piety and promoting true religion among their families. He acknowledged that they may be moved by Christian love to perform acts of charity and extend the gospel to those who are destitute of it. Why, though, must this be in foreign lands? Why not treat those poor, sick, and needy at home? They must beware, he warned, of striving to be great rather than good. Jesus himself checked the spirit of ascendancy among his disciples, teaching humility and modesty.

He did not caution them on this matter, he assured them, because he doubted their true charitable intentions. Rather, he knew they were innocent of the ways of the world and may be "unsuspicious of those who may misguide you and lead you from the paths of peace and of duty." Women from of old had been misled by connivers, and in their naivety led to act "directly in opposition to Christ and his cause. You will be aware of such deception, and take heed that you fall not *undesignedly into the like error*." Thus Cotton broached his real concern: the society might be of vehicle of sectarian contention.

³⁴ Reuben Puffer, *The Widow's Mite: A Sermon Delivered at Boylston, Before the Boylston Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions, Jan. 8, 1816* (Worcester: William Manning, 1816).

[P]erhaps never, since the settlement of this country, have there been more exertions to promote the spirit of a particular party, than at the present day; and they will endeavour, no doubt, to [secure] the aid of females to prosecute their designs. To this end. . . societies have been instituted, whose professed objects externally are plausible, but whose ends and designs are to strengthen a party. To this end, pamphlets of various kinds are circulated, some of which more openly explain their designs; and others, although they often contain many things which in themselves are good, yet, to a discerning mind, their intention evidently is to prepare their readers, as fast as they can, to approve of and follow their measures. Now it is my desire – and I trust this Female Society, and this Religious Society at large, have the same feelings and wishes – I say, it is my desire that the inhabitants in this place should not be engaged in any proceeding which relates to any party measure or party business whatever.”³⁵

The women were not pleased. Apparently they did not appreciate being warned of spiritual pride, of overstepping their God-given “appointment,” or of being duped, in their gullibility, by the nefarious designs of unchristian partisan fanatics. The sermon caused such a stir that Cotton felt obliged to publish it in his own defense, as “some observations in it were misunderstood, and consequently misrepresented.”³⁶ But feelings were not soothed; in attempting to suppress discord, Cotton had amplified it.

The matrons of Boylston were undeterred. The women of the Female Society increased the frequency of their meetings and began sewing items to sell to augment their revenues. With some of their funds, they purchased conservative religious tracts for a lending library; some they donated to the national Home Missionary Society (for western missionaries) and the American Education Society (for the preparation of ministers). By 1818 the evangelical women of Boylston had founded a Sunday School, which served

³⁵ Ward Cotton, *Causes and Effects of Female Regard to Christ: A Sermon Delivered Before the Female Society in Boylston For the Aid of Foreign Missions, October 1, 1816* (Worcester: William Manning, Printer, 1817.) pp. 16-17. Emphasis in the original

³⁶ *Ibid.*, preface.

both to educate youth on how to read and understand the Bible (in the orthodox manner), and to create a nurturing, supportive community for the young women and matrons who devoted themselves to this work.³⁷ When they heard that an evangelical pastor in Litchfield, Conn. had begun a monthly “concert of prayer” -- joining their brethren in England and around the world on the first Monday of each month to pray for the spread of the gospel in heathen lands – they followed suit.³⁸ The women also held evening prayer meetings in each other’s homes throughout the week.

Irreconcilable Differences

Whatever the women’s prayers may have done for the heathen, they did nothing to reduce tensions in Boylston. Rev. Cotton found it increasingly difficult to hold his divided congregation together. By 1817, a visitor who passed through Boylston noted that religious controversy had caused “much division among the people,” so that often there were no Sunday services at all.³⁹ Boylston was far from the only parish with theological quarrels. Across Massachusetts, and particularly in the eastern half of the state, townsmen battled for control of the church. The intensity of the struggle forced the state to confront

³⁷ Anne Boylan has shown how the relationships formed among evangelical women who taught Sunday School provided them fellowship and support locally as well as national and international connections through letters, visits, and evangelical magazines and newspapers. These relations, Boylan argues, helped them fashion an alternative to “true” and “radical” womanhood, which was “evangelical womanhood.” Anne M. Boylan, “Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools,” *FS*, Vol. 4 #3, October 1978 pp. 62-80.

³⁸ On the Concert of Prayer, see Davis, *The Half Century*, Chapter VIII.

³⁹ *Journal of the Life and Religious Labors of John Comly, Late of Byberry Penn.* Philadelphia: Published by his children, T. Ellwood Chapman. 1853. P. 278.

their laws upholding an established state church, for, as liberals gained in number, the question became, “Which church should the state support?”

Massachusetts had always required its citizens to pay a tax to support the orthodox Congregational church.⁴⁰ While all who lived within the parish were taxed, only members in full communion participated in church governance. Liberals who rejected orthodox teaching were faced with a difficult choice. Either they could remain part of the state church and submit to the Trinitarian minority – essentially being “taxed without representation” for the support of a public minister with whom they had no sympathy – or they could withdraw and form their own society. In doing so, however, they would forfeit their sizeable investment in the property of the public church: pews and furnishings, communion silver, building, bell, lands, and funds. In 1820, a liberal majority in Dedham decided to contest Congregational establishment and sued for control of the town’s meetinghouse; the Supreme Judicial Court found in their favor, ruling that the property of the church belonged to the majority of those who paid for its support. Quite suddenly, the theology of the “public” church became a matter of popular opinion, with both sides campaigning for majority control.

In Boylston, the situation deteriorated to a critical state. Despite the fervent activity of the evangelical women, it appeared that Rev. Cotton had at least half the congregation behind him and could effectively maintain control. At the town’s annual meeting in March of 1825, a motion was made “to see if the town will agree to divide the

⁴⁰ In the late colonial period, members of small dissenting societies, such as the Baptists, were excused from paying taxes to the public church if they could prove that they had withdrawn their membership and supported another society. (Atheists and those belonging to no church were still required to support the public church.)

use of the Meetinghouse among the different religious societies.” The conflicted town voted to pass over this controversial article. Soon after, the Congregationalists began to consider withdrawing and founding their own society, ceding control of the meetinghouse to escape Cotton’s “corrupt” and heretical ministrations.⁴¹ Neither side talked any more of unity and consensus; both were determined that they could not in good conscience remain in fellowship with their opponents.

Had the Congregationalists withdrawn, tensions might have subsided. But the county association of Unitarian ministers knew that losing them would result in significant lost revenue and influence for the Unitarians who remained in the public church. Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Thayer of Lancaster devised a ploy to keep control of the whole of the congregation in liberal hands. In the spring of 1825, Dr. Thayer invited Boylstonians to a meeting. He explained that area ministers were so concerned for “the afflicted state of this parish” that they had authorized Thayer to meet with Cotton. Thayer had “advised [Cotton] to take a dismissal, and had said to him, if he would not take a dismissal . . . they would discard him and have no fellowship with him as a minister – that Mr. Cotton had consented. . .”⁴² Thayer’s goal was to orchestrate the appointment of a new minister, still liberal, but less freighted with ill-will. And so, after 28 years of ministry, Rev. Cotton was dismissed by his own ministerial association.⁴³

⁴¹ Rev. Samuel Russell, *Review of a pamphlet entitled “Trial of the action in favor of the Rev. Samuel Russell of Boylston against John Howe of Boylston, for defamation at the Supreme Judicial Court, holden at Worcester, April, A.D. 1831* (Boston: Printed by Peirce and Parker, 1831).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

But Thayer's ploy backfired. The parish, almost equally divided between liberals and conservatives, called a young minister who appeared to represent middle ground. Rev. Samuel Russell seemed a gentle soul, "simple, unaffected, and kind," a Trinitarian but amenable to exchanging pulpits with liberals.⁴⁴ An examining committee of both liberal and conservative ministers approved his installation. It soon became clear that Russell, though gentle, was a gentle *Calvinist*. "In the early part of his ministry," one witness later reported, "a change was made in the Church Covenant; Articles of Faith were adopted to which all who united with the church in the future should assent, and to a great extent the policy of the church was changed [to be more conservative]."⁴⁵ The Unitarians were appalled, and, by 1827, it was they who decided to withdraw from the "public" church, asking Rev. Ward Cotton to lead their weekly services. "Accordingly, in this small town of 830 inhabitants, which would be only an ordinary parish for one

⁴³ Such ministerial machinations were common during this contested period. Usually, "new congregations resulted from delicate (and often indelicate) nurturing on the part of competing denominations, whose agent sought to shape the variegated spiritual inclinations of interested and half-interested laypeople." Representatives from neighboring ministerial associations, synods, and conferences frequently intervened in disputes in an attempt to build the strength of their particular religious interest. Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, p. 274.

⁴⁴ Mr. Russell's character was described by Dr. Todd of Pittsfield, who added, "I have seen him in situations peculiarly trying, and yet I never have heard him make a severe or unkind remark about any man." Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 47. In 1831, Matthew Davenport reported that ". . . the first 'Unitarian Society' was formed in 1827 to which Mr. Cotton preaches. There are two other religious societies in town, viz, the Baptist Society . . . and the 'First Universalist Society,' which was organized in 1828. These last do not support public worship at present but a small part of the time. Their numbers, together with the Congregational and Unitarian Societies are often varying." Matthew Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston* (Lancaster, Mass.: Carter, Andrews, and Company, 1831), p. 28.

minister, Mr. Cotton, now aided by this same Doctor [Thayer] and other individuals of the association, sustained worship in a School House for a Unitarian Society.”⁴⁶ A year later, an even more liberal subset set up a “Restorationist Society” in town, and invited various Universalist ministers to preach to them of God’s plan for including *all* in his plan of universal salvation. With Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians and Universalists (the last two uniting after 1830) all competing for members, the ideal of a united, covenanted community died.⁴⁷

Who’s Who

Historians have typically identified Massachusetts’ liberal Unitarians with the seacoast’s commercial, cosmopolitan, elite. It has been described as the faith of a privileged social class, deeply influenced both by Enlightenment rationalism and by their own success in a new market-oriented culture. As one historian has written, “As God seemed kindlier, the environment more manageable and their fate more dependent on their own ability, they could no longer see themselves helplessly dependent on the

⁴⁶ Samuel Russell, *Review of a pamphlet entitled “Trial of the action in favor of the Rev. Samuel Russell of Boylston against John Howe of Boylston, for defamation at the Supreme Judicial Court, holden at Worcester, April, A.D. 1831* (Boston: Printed by Peirce and Parker, 1831), p. 4.

⁴⁷ In 1831, Matthew Davenport reported that “at present, 100 out of 193 polls in the town pay [taxes] to the Congregational Society, or ‘first parish.’ The other 93 are divided betwixt the other three societies [Unitarian, Universalist, and Baptist], except eight or ten, who have united themselves with religious societies in other towns.” However, very shortly the Unitarians and Universalists united, and the Baptists dissolved their meeting, presumably to rejoin the now re-purified conservative Congregational society. Matthew Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston* (Lancaster, Mass.: Printed by Carter, Andrews, and Company, 1831),

arbitrary salvation of an all-powerful god.”⁴⁸ Their salvation lay in their own hands. From their vantage point as wealthy, urban, civic and social leaders, they focused on ethics and philanthropy to further their work of improving humankind.⁴⁹ Congregational evangelicals, on the other hand, have been depicted as “stressed rural Yankees . . . trying to negotiate the disruptions that growth of market brought.”⁵⁰ They have been associated with middling rural folk, or those recently relocated to the city from the farm, who resisted modern, cosmopolitan culture and “asserted the subsistence world’s commitment to communal love against the market’s competitive ethic.”⁵¹

These characterizations – an elite minority of privileged, wealthy, rationalist, cosmopolitan Unitarians, resisted by middling, provincial, tradition-bound Congregational rustics – may be descriptive of the urban populations on which these studies are based; they do not describe the liberal/conservative camps in rural Boylston.

Various membership records survive for the Baptist, Unitarian, and Congregational church communities in Boylston, and these records allow us to compare the social and economic characteristics of the congregations.⁵² If we consider all

⁴⁸ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 30.

⁴⁹ Cayton, “Who were the Evangelicals?” p. 86. Cayton cites numerous studies that have associated early (urban) Unitarians with the highest quartile for wealth, professional occupations, social elitism, and more concerned with ethical behavior than religious doctrine or practice. pp. 92-3.

⁵⁰ Cayton, “Who Were the Evangelicals,” p. 85.

⁵¹ Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, p. 30.

⁵² The Boylston members of the Baptist Church are listed in the Boylston-Shrewsbury Baptist Church Records, 1812-1837, Manuscript, OSV. The Boylston Unitarians can be

taxpayers over the period from 1812 to 1843 who were identified as church members, 35% were Congregational, 22% were Baptist, and 43% were Unitarians and Universalists.⁵³ When we compare taxpaying heads-of-household from these member lists, it is clear that orthodox evangelicals, not the Unitarians, were the privileged group. If we divide taxpayers into deciles of wealth where the highest tax decile is one, the Unitarians and Baptists tended to be distributed evenly across deciles; nearly half the Congregationalists were in the wealthiest two deciles. Congregationalists had a mean tax decile of 3.3, compared to the Unitarians' 5.1 and the Baptists' 5.2.

Wealth in Boylston at this period was still held overwhelmingly in land. That Boylston's Congregationalists were wealthier than their dissenting neighbors because they held more land than their neighbors. These larger land-owners were not resisting the market; many had been involved in marketing surpluses for several decades, and most were increasing that activity during the 1820s and '30s.⁵⁴ Members of this same class of

determined from a surviving tax list of the members of the Society dated Dec. 17, 1836. A transcript of this list is preserved in the George Wright papers of the Boylston Historical Society. A Congregational heads-of-household list from 1843 is preserved in records of the First Congregational Church of Boylston, BHS; this list is supplemented by those members mentioned in the 1841-49 church records, those expressly identified as Congregationalists in the BHSS, and those mentioned as church members in the diary of Mary White, years 1827-1843. Note that some members of the Baptist Church withdrew their membership in the 1830s and returned to the Congregational Church. For this membership study, most people are placed in the church to which they belonged in the year closest to 1830, but there may be some inaccuracy in these attributions. In a few cases, it is impossible to distinguish between fathers and sons with the same name; these are all considered to be the fathers. As this study is based on those for taxpaying household heads, it is biased towards adult males; as women and youth are a key part of the evangelical base, this compromises the data to some extent.

⁵³ See Appendix B 1 for chart of Boylston's church membership in 1830.

⁵⁴ We will discuss this in the next chapter.

larger landowners were more likely to be purchasing and displaying fashionable imported goods and urbane amenities for their “mansion houses.” Nearly two-thirds of the Congregationalists lived in the vicinity of the now-thriving center village, near substantial new homes, shops, church, and town house. They were creating a more cosmopolitan village center, while Unitarians were spread across the rural landscape.⁵⁵

In agrarian Boylston, these evangelicals were less likely to be resisting a market ethos than attempting to shore up their leading role as privileged gentry. It was in their interest to maintain the existing social order, which evolved from traditions of landholding as the key to virtue and merit. Exclusive church membership based on proven merit, a focus on church purity and refusal of fellowship with the corrupt, a sure knowledge of doctrinal integrity based on literal scriptural interpretation, a conservative resistance to heterodoxy, and fidelity to a corporate ideal all increased their sense of confidence that they were among the elect. The Unitarian/Universalists, by contrast, were not an educated, professional, cosmopolitan elite, but a wide cross-section of residents who had likely long lived on the fringes of covenanted community. They were less invested in the land and less likely to venerate agrarian tradition. With less at stake locally, they were more open to change and more willing to move to bring about that change.⁵⁶ Being among those who had not enjoyed full privileges of corporate belonging,

⁵⁵ If the town is divided into a 2 by 4 grid of eight equal rectangles, the “center” of town constituted two of those octants. In that center section lived 66% of the Congregationalists and 49% of the Unitarians.

⁵⁶ Boylston’s Unitarians were more likely to leave than the Congregationalists. The subset of the population that were church members is a sample biased towards those who have made a commitment to a community and thus are less likely to move; even so, 64%

they were receptive to the Unitarian message of inclusive membership and universal salvation, of the ability to improve one's spiritual and material position by self-striving.⁵⁷

Religious Rifts

By the late 1820s, the war between Congregationalists and Unitarians had spread throughout the Massachusetts countryside. Their theological rift had hardened into bitter factions, and almost no town escaped a rancorous battle for the meeting house. In Boylston, the party spirit spread far beyond the meetinghouse doors, infecting families, neighbors, and town government. Mary and Aaron sent their first-born son, Aaron Jr, to Harvard University in 1813, likely envisioning that the fourteen-year old would follow in the footsteps of his Harvard-educated grandfather, New Light minister Joseph Avery. But at Harvard, Aaron Jr. imbibed the liberal teaching of a now-Unitarian faculty and was deeply influenced by his free-thinking classmate George Bancroft. By the time he

of Boylston Unitarians during the town's crisis were still present, or had an heir that was present in Boylston in 1850, where 78% of the Congregationalists remained.

⁵⁷ When they first withdrew from the Congregational meeting, many of the Boylstonian dissenters were apparently sympathetic specifically to Universalist teachings, rather than the slightly more conservative variety of their Unitarian brethren. At first, it was itinerant Universalists who Mary most frequently reported preaching in town. In 1831, Matthew Davenport reported that the town's two non-orthodox congregations were Baptist and *Universalist*. The two ministers who followed Cotton in leading the Unitarians also had Universalist connections. This distinction is key as the Universalists tended to be poorer, more radical, and more rural – and more common in rural northern Worcester County. Boylston's Unitarian congregation, which included a cross-section from the wealthiest to the poorest, probably also included a range of Universalist and Unitarian viewpoints. See the unpublished paper of George Wright, "The Unitarians of Boylston," in the collection of the Boylston Historical Society; Dupuis, *The History of Boylston 1786-1886*, pp. 52-3. On Universalism in northern Worcester County, see Jack Larkin, "Episodes from Daily Life: 'The Life and Writings of Minerva Mayo by herself,' an Exercise in Microhistory, unpublished paper presented as the Kidger Academic Award talk to the New England History Teachers' Association, March, 1999, Research Library of Old Sturbridge Village.

graduated, to his mother's devastation, Aaron had rejected Calvinism. He did not return to Boylston after graduation; in 1819, after two years "fortune hunting" in Canada and Middlebury, Vermont, he paid a brief visit to his parents, but found "my Mother . . . does not altogether approve of my religious sentiments so that my visit was not a very pleasant one. After mature deliberation I concluded to return to Middlebury."⁵⁸

Rancor soured neighborly relations as well. "Strong feelings were aroused in almost every breast, bitter animosities produced, severe invectives poured forth, and complaints of abuse and injustice uttered by both of the contending parties. Criminations and recriminations were made with great frequency and severity."⁵⁹ Social visiting had once bound the community together. After the theological rift, however, Mary's pattern of paying and receiving visits changed. Two-thirds of the visits the family received were now from fellow Congregationalists; most of the rest were from townsmen unaffiliated with a church. The family was even more selective in the visits they paid. Eighty percent of all the visits they paid were to fellow church folk; of the few visits exchanged with Unitarians, most were to their next-door neighbors, the Cottons.⁶⁰

Enmity between religious factions was most manifest in town government. Since the incorporation of the town, the Federalist consensus had been so strong in Boylston, as

⁵⁸ Journal of Aaron White Jr., July, 1819, MHS.

⁵⁹ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 47-8.

⁶⁰ A study of social visits received and paid by the White in 1836 reveals the following: of 210 visits received, 66.3% were from Congregationalists; 8.1% were from Unitarians, and 25.6% were from those who were unaffiliated or whose affiliation is unknown. Of 100 visits paid by the Whites, 80% were to Congregationalists, 13% to Unitarians, and 7% to those who were unaffiliated or whose affiliation is unknown. Diary of Mary White, 1836.

in most northern Worcester County towns, that party spirit rarely played a role in town elections.⁶¹ Top town offices' had routinely been granted with deference to wealth and age. Religious strife transformed that felicitous arrangement, as townsmen now competed ferociously to seat their fellow churchmen in positions of power.⁶² Leading men from each faction met in advance of elections to plan strategies for placing their people in power.⁶³ (It was this intense partisanism that evoked Mary's uncharacteristic display of jubilation when Congregational men took the top offices in 1829.)

That victory, however, came at a high price. Tempers flared and angry recriminations were traded in the March meeting of 1829.⁶⁴ The election of the chief officers did not settle the dispute; emotions remained high. Next came the election of the school committee, a group traditionally composed of the town's most educated and chaired by the town's minister. When the vote approved Rev. Samuel Russell as the head

⁶¹ The town had consistently backed Federalists – then their heirs, the National Republicans – for state and national office, being “happily united in political sentiments.” Diary of Simon Davis, April 1, 1799, BHS.

⁶² This shift is reflected in the mean wealth decile of men elected to these offices. In the decades before the religious controversy reached its peaked, Boylstonians routinely elected the wealthiest men to office. Although they still chose men of substance during the controversy, wealth declined in importance as a factor and church affiliation rose. Wealth returned as the prime factor in elections as the controversy waned.

	1800-09	1810-19	1820-29	1830-39	1840-49
N	71	66	60	67	57
Mean Tax Decile	1.72	1.53	1.70	2.34	2.84
Median	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00

⁶³ See, for example, Mary White's entry for Feb. 22, 1830 when she reported that her husband had hosted a meeting that evening to plan a slate of officials for the upcoming March meeting, OSV.

⁶⁴ Conditions at town meeting were reported by witnesses in the court case that followed.

of that committee, Capt. John Howe leapt to his feet, interrupting the assembly. Howe was influential in Boylston, a well-to-do citizen, descendent of early settlers, long active in town affairs. By temperament, he could be difficult; one detractor declared he was “a profane, brawling, quarrelsome man.”⁶⁵ He was inclined to introduce controversial petitions to town meeting discussion, and could be a fierce advocate. He had also assumed unofficial leadership of the Unitarian cause in Boylston.⁶⁶ Now he proclaimed, “If the people have a mind to be such damned fools as to vote in for their first school committee man a liar, then let them go on!” Shock ran through the meeting at such incivility directed at a member of the clergy. Afterwards, as men gathered on the meetinghouse porch, several rebuked Howe, saying that he did not speak as a gentleman. Howe retorted that he did not care, that he could prove Russell a liar.⁶⁷

Howe’s outburst was only the latest in a string of accusations he had made against the Congregational minister. In early 1827 at Capt. Gates store in Northborough, Stephen Flagg overheard someone ask Howe if Mr. Russell was his minister. “Not by a damned sight,” he replied, declaring that he “would not have a damned fool for his minister.”⁶⁸ Others heard Howe publicly declare that Russell was a liar; one of Howe’s hired help

⁶⁵ Russell, *Review of a pamphlet*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Howe’s position in Boylston is reviewed in Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886*, pp. 62-3. Howe’s activity at town meeting is records in the Town Clerk’s Record Book, 1815-1835, typescript, BHS.

⁶⁷ Court clerk’s records of the libel suit that followed, as published in *Trial of the Action in Favor of the Rev. Samuel Russell of Boylston against John Howe of Boylston for Defamation At the Supreme Judicial Court, Holden at Worcester, April A.D. 1831* (Worcester: Spooner and Church, Printers, 1831).

⁶⁸ *Trial in the Action in Favor of the Rev. Samuel Russell*. Flagg continued in his testimony: “He went on and said much more, which I do not recollect.”

reported that Howe, “talking foolishly,” had said the same at meal times. Throughout 1828, Howe repeated the charge that Russell was dishonest: at the home of the Rev. George Allen of Shrewsbury, to the marketman, Baxter Woods, to William Moore as he worked in his field. Russell attempted to meet with Howe to resolve their differences, but to no avail. Finally, the long-suffering minister filed a suit for slander.

The suit further agitated already roiled waters. Lawyers for both parties took depositions for and against from twenty men and five women. Mary White was among those deposed, as Rev. Russell had “lived within her family” for the first year of his tenure in Boylston, and Howe’s team called on her to testify about their conversations during that time. In April in 1830, Mary traveled to the Worcester Court House to attend the trial and to take the witness stand, along with many others from troubled Boylston.

Behind the whole affair, however, was not the ill-tempered Howe, but his Unitarian advocate Rev. Nathaniel Thayer. According to Thayer, Russell had promised during his ministerial examination to exchange pulpits with liberal clergymen. Later, Thayer approached Russell, saying that the way was clear for the two to exchange. But Russell never called to arrange the exchange, and when Howe asked him about it, Russell claimed the exchange had been proposed, but Thayer had not yet found it convenient. This Howe reported to Thayer, who then adamantly declared that Russell was lying. Howe was enraged, and Thayer saw a chance to bring down a conservative clergyman.

At the trial, Russell presented many character witnesses as well and witnesses to Howe’s public slanders. Howe, on the other hand, chose a simple defense. Since Russell was, in truth, a liar, it was not, technically, a slander to call him one. The judge, accepting this assertion, made it the purpose of the trial to determine whether Russell had lied.

The besieged Rev. Russell maintained that he understood his discussion with Thayer as merely a proposal to exchange, and that it was the place of the older man to set a date; as Thayer had never set a date he had assumed it was not yet convenient. He pointed out that he had exchanged pulpits willingly with several other Unitarians in the interim. But Thayer was persistent, testifying that the younger man had intentionally misled people by claiming that he had proposed an exchange when he had never done so. Thayer's testimony felled Russell, as a predominantly Unitarian jury ruled that Russell *had* lied, and therefore that Howe had not slandered him by saying so.⁶⁹ The triumphant Howe/Thayer contingent then magnified their victory by publishing and distributing an edited transcript of the trial. A humiliated Russell responded by publishing his own version, dismissing Howe as a man of little consequence, "lost to a personal sense of decency & moral worth," and likening his charges to "bar-room or grog-shop assertions." It was Thayer, Russell charged, who hoped to use the affair to destroy the fragile harmony of the conservative Boylston congregation.

The trial, in any case, brought no resolution to Boylston's strife. As one witness remembered, sectarian enmity continued to feed "those petty jealousies, those painful contentions, and those bitter animosities, which so marred the moral beauty of this place, and which caused so much pain without accomplishing any good."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Howe, *Trial of the Action in Favor of the Rev. Samuel Russell of Boylston*.

⁷⁰ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 55.

Revival

In the midst of this unholy fracas, Mary White's fervent prayers were answered: the Lord "poured out his Spirit" upon Boylston. A powerful religious revival visited the orthodox church. "Since the days of Edwards and Whitefield [sermonizers of the eighteenth century] the churches of this country have not seen and enjoyed such seasons of refreshing from the Lord as they were blessed with between the years 1826-32 . . . Many were pricked to the heart, and made to enquire, 'Men and Brethren, what shall we do?' Many were those who rejoiced in believing and during [Russell's] short ministry, 104 were added to this church."⁷¹

This Second Great Awakening rolled through Boylston at the height of the sectarian controversy, just a few years after Russell's arrival. Since the turn of the century, New England had been experiencing spasms of intense religious fervor, in which individuals awakened to their sinfulness, struggled with despair, and then experienced a profoundly emotional and life-transforming conversion. Enthusiasm waxed and waned, spread in waves and then receded, for a quarter of a century. Boylston, though, under the anti-evangelical Cotton, had been relatively untouched. Russell's ministry coincided with the peak of a nation-wide surge in revivals that climaxed in 1831. Thus, though beleaguered by his foes, Russell presided over an explosion of evangelical efficacy. Those who lived through it gave witness to its momentous nature. In late December, 1829, Barnabas Davis noted in his diary, "There seems to be an uncommon revival of religion . . . in Boylston, as I understand. May it continue to be lasting and effectual." In

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 48. In six years of evangelical work, Russell added more to the church rolls by profession than his predecessor had done in his twenty-eight year pastorate.

the midst of Russell's trial, Davis commented, "In many places, revivals of religion. In one place in particular there were but 12 in the church 10 years ago, and now upwards of 300 (if I mistake not)."⁷²

The spirit did not come to Boylston unassisted. The national revival of the late 1820s and early 1830s was, to a degree, orchestrated by those already converted, using "scientific methods" designed to "arrest the attention of the sinner and persuad[e] him to be reconciled to God."⁷³ Evangelist Charles Finney introduced new measures to awaken sinners, holding intense, "protracted," four-day meetings. Different ministers took turns continuously exhorting sinners with bold and denunciatory language, calling on the unrepentant by name, urging them to come forward to the front-row "anxious seat," entreating them to public confession, submission, and commitment. Families and friends were urged to make personal entreaties to their loved ones, to bring "seekers" to "inquiry meetings," to share private testimony of struggle, despair, and joy, to gather in small supportive groups for prayer and fellowship. Finney suggested – to the initial consternation of some conservative Calvinist ministers – that the faithful did not have to wait on the Lord, but could through their own efforts invite divine visitation of grace.⁷⁴ Mary White was one of those who decided she must be "up and doing."

Throughout 1828 and 1829, Mary and her fellow evangelicals worked feverishly to awaken their friends and neighbors to the need for immediate repentance. Mary

⁷² Diary of Barnabas Davis, Dec. 27, 1829 and July 3, 1831. OSV.

⁷³ Davis, *The Half Century (1800-1850)* Chapter IX –Revivals.

⁷⁴ Richard D. Shiels, "The Scope of the Second Great Awakening: Andover, Massachusetts, as a Case Study" *JER*, Vol. 5, No.2, (Summer, 1985), pp. 233-35.

believed that the work of conversion and reform was urgent because she believed, like many of her evangelical contemporaries, that the millennium was near. Christ held out the offer of forgiveness, but for a short time only, for soon He would return in judgment and the Book of Life would be sealed. Repeatedly she appealed to her family, “Give your heart to the Savior now while it is an accepted time. . . the longer we neglect to comply with the offer of eternal life the more we are exposed to eternal death.”⁷⁵ To help others in approaching the Lord, Mary organized and attended prayer meetings for women and youth, for those in the various stages of conversion: “inquiring the way,” “grieving,” “indulging a hope,” or “rejoicing.” She attended “concerts of prayer,” hosted Bible studies, taught Sunday school, and distributed religious tracts.

With the ground thus prepared, in the autumn of 1829 the evangelicals hosted a series of protracted meetings. Visiting ministers held meetings in several locations around town – school houses as well as local homes – with different rooms and different meetings appointed for youth, for children, for women, for those at different stages of conversion. Mary’s diary reveals that during the autumn of 1829, a religious meeting was held almost every day, sometimes several in a day. Mary prayed that “the seed sown there spring up and bear fruit to the glory of God.”

Her prayers were answered; the revival yielded a rich harvest. Mary recorded joyfully the conversion of each sinner, the addition of each member to the church. In late 1829, fourteen came forward; the next year there were fifteen. As the revival continued throughout 1831, Mary exulted. “Mr. Benjamin Houghton [whose advanced age of 62

⁷⁵ Mary White to Charles White, November 18, 1838. White Family Collection, OSV.

made his conversion unusual] and wife – he a remarkable instance of victorious grace.

Well may we exclaim *what hath God wrought?*⁷⁶

The decision to convert was not an easy one. Those who were “inquiring the way” were warned of false conversions, of the easy and misleading sense that one had done enough soul-searching or lived a righteous life when in reality the sinner still stubbornly clung to his own self-will. Spiritual pride was doubly damning as it forestalled the humble submission required for true saving grace. Those who stood “propounded” had to go before the church’s examination committee, confess their sinfulness, testify to their experience of the redeeming love of Christ, pledge complete submission to God, and dedicate their lives to his service. They were then expected to live utterly transformed lives, giving evidence of their justification. They were to abandon their previously gay and frivolous lives and their unregenerate friends, find support and companionship among the pious, and dedicate their lives to working for the conversion of the world.⁷⁷

This was a tall order. Undergoing religious conversion was traumatic; becoming a Christian truly required rebirth and reordering mentality; living as a justified person demanded all of one’s energies. What was this experience like? Who would chose to undergo such trauma, and what motivations supported such a decision? Seven of Mary’s ten children underwent conversion experiences; one of them, sixth son Charles, left a journal of the experience that allows us a window to his soul.

⁷⁶ Diary of Mary White, January 24, 1830. OSV.

⁷⁷ See, for example, the work of Rev. Asahel Nettleton, *Sermons from the Second Great Awakening* (International Outreach, Inc., Reprint, May 1995).

Charles was sixteen when he left home to serve as a druggist's apprenticeship in Boston in 1836. During his first two years, he adjusted to city life and pleasures, spent his free time with cousins and friends from work, rambling about, learning to swim, going to band concerts on the common, chasing fire engines, and reading novels of adventure and travel. His mother, sisters, and a converted brother wrote regularly urging him to join a bible class, attend prayer meetings, and closet himself with his bible. Mary wrote weekly to tell him of his friends who have converted – or worse, died unexpectedly before working out their salvation. “Do not forget the one thing needful. We are traveling to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Your Sisters are inquiring the way of Salvation.” “The earnest desire and prayer of your Mother is that you may be a devoted follower of Christ. Do not put off his service, this year may be our last.” “My son, the whole period of our short lives is not too much to be dedicated to the service of God. Remember that the Saviour's now calling upon you to turn and live; before another year, yea before another week, your account may be sealed up, til the judgment of the great day.”⁷⁸

In early 1840, the seeds that Mary had so carefully sown began to germinate. Charles became concerned for the state of his soul. In October and November of 1839, the 18-year-old attended a series of lectures on “The External Evidences of Christianity.” On November 17, 1839, after hearing a sermon on the Sixteenth Psalm, he noted that the words “had considerable effect upon my mind . . . May the truths which I heard this day be treasured up in my mind and at the Judgment Day I may look back upon this as the happiest day of my Life.” He began to read religious and moral foundational books, such

⁷⁸ Mary White to Charles White, Mar. 13, 1837; Jan. 18, 1838; July 25, 1838; Mar. 6, 1839. OSV.

as Joel Hawes's *Lectures to Young Men* and Jacob Abbott's *The Young Christian*.

Although Charles was convinced of the truth of Christianity, his conversion had just begun. He had to endure several months of soul-searching angst before he would feel truly ready to *surrender his will* totally. He struggled to discipline himself, to learn submission, self-denial and spiritual humility. To aid in his quest, he attended a Young Men's Meeting for those wishing to learn the way to salvation and he read nightly from devotional pamphlets and texts. In January of 1840, he joined a class preparing for admission to the church, but he was deeply troubled about his worthiness and the state of his soul, a state of anxiety that was a classic and necessary feature of the conversion process. Charles took the appropriate steps to ease this anxiety by attending Bible classes, prayer meetings, "meetings for young men seeking religion," and "inquiry meetings." His brother Avery visited and gave Charles some passages he had written regarding religion. Brother William wrote letters urging a full surrender. On January 23, Charles recorded: "This night weighed the question with myself whether I would serve Christ or not. Resolved to serve Christ and let it be recorded in Heaven."

Still, his path was not easy nor his conversion complete. On good days he recorded that he "enjoyed some peace of mind, though my stubborn will not broken." On other days, however, he worried that he "did not enjoy any particular blessing from the Holy Spirit," or fretted that he was "very uncomfortable in my mind in regard to moral and religious feelings boath [*sic*]." Finally, on Sunday, March 8, he seemed to reach a turning point: "I felt this AM very distressed in my mind... [then] felt much better. I believe all that is wanting is to feel that Christ is my Guide and submit all unto him."

When he learned that his brother Davis had just made a profession of his faith, Charles declared himself more “resolved in my mind, more this day than for sometime before.”

At this point, Charles informed his parents that he, like Davis, was “rejoicing in hope.” Both Mary and Aaron recorded their joy at their sons’ conversions. They rejoiced “to hear that you have given your heart to the Lord. You will never regret that you have done it this early. . . . If you have made an entire surrender of your heart to God you will find a never failing source of happiness which the world can never give you.”⁷⁹ On May 7, 1840, when Charles and 43 Sunday school classmates were admitted to the Congregational Church at Essex Street in Boston. He confided to his journal: “I view this transaction as one which millions of ages hence I shall look back upon with infinite joy or regret. God grant that it shall be the former.”

Charles’s conversion was only the first step in his new life of righteousness. He immediately began teaching Sunday School, visiting his students at their homes, distributing religious tracts to seamen on the Boston docks, and evangelizing his co-workers and his boardinghouse mates. Among evangelicals, Charles had completed a rite of passage to the adult world of Christian work.

Who among the people of Boylston were drawn to such an experience and to such a commitment? Mary White’s diary and letters record many (though not all) of those who converted during the peak of Boylston’s revival.⁸⁰ A review of converts reveals that the

⁷⁹ Mary White to Charles White, March 9, 1840. OSV.

⁸⁰ See Appendix B on Religion and Religious Conversions.

movement was mainly of young folk from well-to-do families, with a close relative who was either already a member of the church or who converted with them. More females than males converted (58 to 42 percent), but not so overwhelmingly that this could be called principally a women's movement. The mean wealth decile of families of converts was 3.5, approximately the same as the mean wealth decile of Congregationalists in general; moreover, more than half of the converts came from families in the top quintile.⁸¹ More than half had an immediate family member who already belonged to the church, and even more converted with a sibling, spouse, or parent.⁸² Most converts were local; ninety percent had been born either in Boylston or an adjacent town. Most tellingly, most were young. The mean age at conversion was 31, but more than half were under 25, and nearly two-thirds were under 30.

This brief analysis suggests that Boylston's revivals reaped mostly young people from well-to-do local farm families just as they were coming of age. Scholars of the Second Great Awakening have identified a shift in the average age of converts from their mid-twenties to their late 'teens, suggesting that new struggles associated with coming of age may have made youth more susceptible to the urgent proddings of evangelicals.⁸³ Although many of the studies linking social change and religious conversion are based on

⁸¹ 54% of the converts whose wealth decile could be determined were in the first or second decile; 75% belonged to families in the upper half of assessed wealth;

⁸² 51% can be tied to an parent, grandparent, or sibling who were already members of the church; 63% experienced conversion in the company of other family members.

⁸³ Graff, *Conflicting Paths*, p. 117 surveys the literature on teenage conversions and social change. He cites authors from G. Stanley Hall to Mary Ryan and Ann Boylan.

urban models, rural youth were also facing new stresses.⁸⁴ Young rural women encountered changes in the nature of home production, domestic ideals, and marriage prospects that made their futures unknown and insecure; conversion offered security, purpose, and membership in a supportive community. Young men from rural New England also faced a world in transition, as ecological limits closed some doors and new opportunities in trade, manufacturing, and western migration opened others. For evangelical youth, religion offered a refuge of order and security, “at least temporary therapy for doubt and uncertainty.”⁸⁵

But, as Mary White’s anxious letters to Charles reveal, if this was a youth’s revival, it was a maternal evangelism.⁸⁶ The majority of those converted, especially in the 1830s, were the children of orthodox Congregationalists, the offspring of those who had already owned the covenant. This was not by chance. Thirteen years before they had helped organize the Female Foreign Missionary Society. Now, in June of 1828, Mary White went to the home Mary Abbot. Together with a “few females,” they wrote the constitution for a “Maternal Association.” Two months later, the ladies held the first

⁸⁴ Nancy Cott, “Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England,” *FS*, Vol. 3, No. 1-2 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 15-29; Richard D. Shiels, “The Scope of the Second Great Awakening: Andover, Massachusetts, as a Case Study” *JER*, Vol. 5, No.2, (Summer, 1985), pp. 223-246.

⁸⁵ Joseph Kett, “Adolescence and Youth,” p. 290. Kett has extensively researched religious conversion among youth in the nineteenth century, both in this paper and in the chapter “Religious Conversion” in *Rites of Passage*, cited earlier.

⁸⁶ Mary Ryan discusses “maternal evangelism,” of mothers orchestrating domestic revivals, during the Second Great Awakening in Utica, New York. Mary P. Ryan, “A Women’s Awakening” *Evangelical Religion and the Families of Utica, New York, 1800-1840*, *AQ*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (Winter 1978), esp. pp. 616-623.

meeting of the association at the center schoolhouse.⁸⁷ Thereafter, the evangelical mothers met monthly for prayer and support on how best to raise Christian children. They read together such books as the Rev. John S.C. Abbott's new best-seller, *The Mother at Home: Or The Principles of Maternal Duty, Familiarly Described*, which explained in its preface, "The religious sentiments inculcated in this book are those usually denominated *evangelical*. We have proceeded upon the principle that here is the commencement of eternal existence, and that the great object of education is to prepare the child for its heavenly home."⁸⁸ To that end, the mothers regularly prayed together, exchanged advice and support, and discussed sermons directed to prodigal youth. The member list for this association does not survive, but if it reflected the membership of the orthodox church or the converted, we can assume that they were well-to-do, comfortable matrons, with the time and resources to devote to this cause. They also were those most likely to have children facing new opportunities and challenging choices that might take them far beyond the bounds of their parents' traditional, communal, agrarian society. Prayer was the parents' best hope for protecting this new generation, and eternal reunion their consolation for likely earthly separation. As Mary fervently prayed, "May all my dear children be made heirs of a heavenly inheritance." "We may separate a little while, but we shall soon meet again where adieus and farewells are a sound unknown."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Diary of Mary White, June 17 and Sept. 16, 1828. OSV.

⁸⁸ The orthodox minister Abbott's book was published by the American Tract Society in 1833; Mary records that "some instructive pieces" were read from the text at a meeting of the Maternal Association at the minister's home on March 19, 1834. Mary also read *The Mother's Magazine*, see her diary for Jan. 22, 1841. OSV.

⁸⁹ Mary White to Charles White, March 9, 1840. OSV.

What did conversion do to and for the convert? Conversion was an intense, soul-wracking process. Most notably, undergoing conversion focused the mind's eye inward. Self-searching and introspection were essential to arriving at conviction of sin, and self-loathing and despair were an inevitable stage in the process of conversion. Mary's diary records the anguish of some of those in Boylston who struggled with a feeling of unworthiness, who "did not enjoy their minds," who "grieved" their sinfulness, who despaired of reaching salvation. It is notable that mention of suicide in and around Boylston rises significantly in the peak years of the revival; between 1828 and 1839, seven people took their own lives, and five of those deaths occurred during the critical 1830 to 1832 period.⁹⁰ In Concord, Massachusetts, there were twelve recorded suicides in the first half of the century, five of them during the peak years of Awakening fervor. For one 31-year-old female, the cause of suicide was "supposed to be in religious melancholy and despair, by reason of false and distracted notions of God and his decrees."⁹¹ Converts were encouraged to examine themselves on a daily basis, to judge of their usefulness and

⁹⁰ Most death records, even when suicide is the known cause of death, avoid making that designation of "suicide" public. Mention of these seven suicides comes from the diaries of Mary White and of Barnabas Davis. Jack Larkin, who has studied the diary of another potential suicide, Minerva Mayo, notes that there is an interesting though difficult to document link between revivals and suicides. He notes particularly the tale related in Christopher Baldwin's diary of the minister's wife who took her life during a revival led by her husband. The intense emotions produced by revival fever are likely related to suicidal behavior. Jack Larkin, "The Life and Writings of Minerva Mayo by herself," unpublished paper, OSV. Also, Larkin in conversation with author, November 7, 2008.

⁹¹ Marc Harris, "The People of Concord: A Demographic History, 1750-1850," in *Concord: A Social History*, ed. by David Hackett Fisher (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1983), pp. 122-24.

faithfulness in the cause of Christ. They were, most of all, to spend time in prayer, building a personal relationship with their Savior.⁹²

Such personal introspection reshaped the emotional landscape. The intense focus on one's personal agency in both "accepting of offered mercy" and in promoting the millenium redirected habitual thought from community to individual. Evangelical Congregationalists focused on the *personal* – personal experience of emotional conversion, personal salvation, personal devotions, personal belief. Lost in this transformation was an earlier concern with communal salvation and communal covenant. As Donald Kraybill, scholar of Amish culture has written, evangelical revivals "accent the individual rather than the community as the center of redemptive activity."⁹³ By contrast, the Amish he studied reject evangelical Christianity and its focus on "individual belief, subjective experience and emotionalism," which, he argues, might undermine their traditional communalism. The evangelical revival that reshaped Boylston in the 1820s and '30s legitimated individual effort at the cost of cooperative interdependence.

Evangelicalism transformed Boylston in other ways. It gave pious and respectable matrons such as Mary White, Mary Abbot, and Mary Bush a public role as reformers and

⁹² "Grappling with a sense of sin and filled with a desire to extricate themselves from its straining presence, men and women usually became deeply introspective when they first felt the stirrings of religious conversion." Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 187. She cites the young missionary wife, Harriet Newell, whose *Memoir* recorded her anguish: "My soul is enveloped in a dark cloud of troubles. Oh that God would direct me; that he would plainly mark out the path of duty, and let me not depart from it." Newell reported headaches and insomnia brought on by her "obsessed spiritual condition."

⁹³ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 36-7.

transformers. This role provided an alternative to prevailing models of female behavior and ideals of womanhood such as republican motherhood and true womanhood, both of which focused women's work in the home and the family, or Victorian ladyhood, a life of gay and leisured consumption. Evangelical womanhood called for a self-sacrificing life of useful, active, purposeful and socially engaged labor.⁹⁴ Mary was not seeking power in the public sphere; she and her colleagues were careful to secure ministerial support, to ally their reform efforts with the church, and to limit their activities to traditional women's behavior such as meeting together for prayer, reading, social support, sewing, and education. Yet, in the name of orthodox religion, they performed socially unorthodox work. In the name of God they devised an empowering mission, allowing them to take initiative and do what the men in their community could or would not do.⁹⁵

The evangelical doctrine of "sanctification" called on reborn Christians to improve their conduct, purify their lives, and work to perfect the world.⁹⁶ Chief among their obligations was to spread the gospel through unremitting moral suasion. "May we be faithful to those with whom we exert and influence," Mary declared, "in bringing them to accept of offered mercy. . . May we be up and doing with our might whatever of duty

⁹⁴ See Anne M. Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools," *FS*, Vol. 4, #3, Oct. 1978, esp. pp. 62-71.

⁹⁵ There is no record of any male voluntary association being formed in Boylston between 1812 and 1830, when they founded a temperance society.

⁹⁶ Charles Finney's method of "Christian perfection" is described in Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 175.

our hands find to do knowing that in due time we shall reap if we faint not.”⁹⁷ The evangelical women of Boylston were up and doing. In addition to their earlier associations, they now added a female reading society, a women’s auxillary to the American Tract Society, an Education Society, a group to support Sabbatarianism, and a Moral Reform Society.⁹⁸ In doing so they learned and practiced organizational skills and worldly behaviors that they might, had they not been working for God, not dared to attempt. Mary noted four cases – including her own beloved daughter -- of young women from her town who made the commitment to serve as missionaries in Africa, among the American Indians, or on the western frontier. Others, including Mary, would eventually challenge male mores directly -- doing the unthinkable -- in serving the sacred cause of the slave. Their ideological commitments empowered them to lead a new way of life.⁹⁹

Evangelical life provided Boylston’s rural women with something else: female companions with whom they could form a supportive subset of community. Through their trials – the angst of conversion, worries for their children’s salvation, responsibilities in new voluntary religious associations -- evangelical women formed close support networks. They met frequently in small, intimate groups for prayer and sharing. Mary reported female meetings that were “solemn,” “interesting,” and deeply

⁹⁷ Letter of Mary White to Charles White, March 22, 1840. OSV.

⁹⁸ All of these female organizations are mentioned in Mary’s diary. Most were formed during the peak of the 1826-1832 revival.

⁹⁹ “Conversion set up a direct relation to God’s authority that allowed female converts . . . – to defy men [or patriarchal norms] – for God.” Cott, “Young Women at the Second Great Awakening,” pp. 21-2.

moving times of close fellowship, when “each member made a statement of their own feelings,” and “each one stating we trust the true state of feeling which each felt at this time.”¹⁰⁰ Choosing to associate intimately and intensely with a small subset of community created unusually strong bonds; it also created social barriers against those of different creed. Shared faith trumped ties of family and neighborhood, and new religious associations created new ways of belonging – and *not* belonging. “Our society” no longer referred to those within the borders of town, but only to those within the voluntary gatherings of church and association.

If the interactions of the evangelical sisterhood were intense, it was also extensive – evangelical women found a new family of spiritual kin spread across the nation and around the globe. Sister associations in other towns and parent associations in cosmopolitan centers of Boston, New York, London and beyond, exchanged visits, news, and letters of support. Improved roads, regular stage schedules, new canals, and the coming of the railroad made it easier to maintain these global connections. Mary noted hearing testimony from recent missionaries to Bombay, South Africa, Korea, the Bushmen, and the Hoppe Indians; hearing talks by agents from the national organizations of the Home Missionary Bible Society (Cincinnati), American Peace Society (New York), American Education Society (Boston), American Sabbath School Union (nation-wide), and many other voluntary associations; she exchanged correspondence with a missionary to the Choctaw mission; she prepared daughters of her town to go among the

¹⁰⁰ Diary of Mary White, Feb. 2 and Mar. 2, 1843. OSV. Boylan discusses the intimate relationships formed between evangelical women. Boylan, “Evangelical Womanhood,” pp. 69-71.

Seneca and Tuscarora Indians of Western New York and Cherokee in Indiana. An explosion in print media brought religious newspapers and tracts published in Boston and New York with news from further afield. Such global connections redefined “community.” Wide-ranging associations with those who shared a special interest and hoped to influence events in their favor provided a new model of civic organization. It was a model at odds with – and irreconcilable to – the traditional notion of a single common good and a local common wealth.

Dissolution and Deconstruction

The revival that swelled the numbers of Mary’s Congregational Church happened just as the Unitarian-Trinitarian controversy peaked. That the mild-mannered Rev. Russell was successfully filling pews and swelling Congregationalist membership numbers was not lost on disgruntled Unitarian-Universalists. The cantankerous John Howe focused the anger of religiously liberal Boylstonians on the clergyman, but even as they won the battle in Worcester Court House they were steadily losing ground in the Boylston meetinghouse. The humiliation of his trial’s outcome defeated Russell, who requested dismissal and was gone within a year; in fact, some claim that the personal toll of the trial seriously compromised his health and led to his early death two years later.¹⁰¹ But the Unitarians discovered that the new converts he had recruited did not fade away with him, and events were about to make those new members critical.

¹⁰¹ Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886*, p. 70. Dupuis cites George L. Wright, an earlier town historian.

In 1833, Massachusetts officially separated church and state, ending mandatory financial support of religion. At the time of separation in Boylston, the Congregationalists held physical possession of the meetinghouse and church assets; they also had, as a result of the revival, a small plurality in numbers.¹⁰² The division of church assets among those who had been former members continued – even escalated – the tension and hostility between the opposing religious camps.

In 1834, both congregations attempted to start anew. In February of that year, the First Unitarian Society in Boylston was incorporated by the General Court.¹⁰³ Meandwhile, the Congregationalists, ordained a new – and strictly orthodox -- minister and made a “solemn renewal of our covenant” in the spring of 1834.¹⁰⁴ Rev. William Sanford, “an independent and fearless preacher, never hesitating to utter what he believed to be the truth,” immediately set about reforming, disciplining, and strengthening his church.¹⁰⁵

Sanford later confessed that upon his arrival he found “a town torn in fragments by dissension . . . [with] warring elements, which were raging through the town and

¹⁰² In 1832, Matthew Davenport reported that there were 100 Congregationalist polls and 93 others, mostly Unitarian-Universalists, with a few Baptists and a smattering of unaffiliated. Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston*, p. 28. Rev. Sanford reported that at his coming in 1834 there were 148 church *members* (not polls). Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p.56.

¹⁰³ An Act to incorporate the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Boylston. Approved by the Governor, February 21, 1834. *Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Dutton and Wentworth, 1836).

¹⁰⁴ Diary of Mary White, April 13, 1834. OSV.

¹⁰⁵ Wright, “History of the Boylston Church.” 1929. BHS.

which seemed to threaten the peace of any man who should occupy so prominent a place as the pastor of the church.”¹⁰⁶ Though he professed to wish only to secure peace, his first actions escalated tensions between dissenting believers. In September of 1834, at a meeting in his study, Sanford led the church in voting to discipline “delinquent members,” who included prominent Unitarians who had once belonged to the Congregational Church. Among them were Rev. Cotton and his wife, and several of the town’s most wealthy and respected farmers, including Robert Andrews and his wife, Col. Hezekiah Gibbs and his wife, and Levi Howe and his wife. The delinquent members, who had “absented themselves from the communion table and even from the house of God,” were to be conferred with by church members. In response, Cotton and Gibbs sent letters claiming their relation with the church “dissolved,” but Sanford rejected this act of agency on the part of the dissenters, insisting the relationship could be ended only by the church members. The church then passed a resolution that “any delinquent . . . who had absented themselves from our assembly of worship, and from our communion service, and had attended upon the preaching of another gospel . . . [or] communed with another body called a church,” was to be dismissed. Accordingly, the church voted public excommunication of their former pastor. Though Sanford had won a victory for discipline and protocol, his maneuver further enraged his foes.

The Unitarians began to agitate in town meeting for their share of the assets of the original church. Soon they hired legal counsel to sue for their rights to the pews, the bell,

¹⁰⁶ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 53.

the stove, the communion service, and the church furniture.¹⁰⁷ The prickly Capt. Howe authored petitions to dispossess the Congregationalists of joint church property.¹⁰⁸

Sanford realized that he would have no peace in Boylston as long as his church kept possession of the existing meetinghouse. He later confessed,

The church and the society felt deeply sensible of the evils connected with their house of worship. It was owned in part by persons who did not sympathize nor worship with them, who declined occupying their pews, and were thus deprived of the use of the property which they had vested in the house. The house itself was therefore a cause of division in the town, and tended to perpetuate the contentions which existed in this place. . .¹⁰⁹

The Congregationalists abandoned the property, though not their claim to a right in it, moving across the common where they built a new meeting house, furnished with new pews, new communion service, new bible – with nothing, that is, to remind them of their previous affiliation.¹¹⁰

Even so, the situation was not resolved. For six years the two parties engaged in suits and countersuits over the ownership and the division of the old meetinghouse. Strained feelings once again divided town meeting. In 1839, a motion was made that “a Committee of seven persons *from each of the different religious societies* be chosen” to select a Union Ticket of town officers, but the motion failed. Partisans then quarreled over whether the warrant for town meeting should be posted on the old meetinghouse, the

¹⁰⁷ Boylston Town Clerk’s Book, Town Meeting Notes, November 9, 1835. BHS.

¹⁰⁸ The long story of struggle over church property is recorded in the minutes of Town Meeting from 1835 to 1843.

¹⁰⁹ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 58.

¹¹⁰ Augustus Flagg, “Boylston,” *History of Worcester County*, p. 315.

new one, or on the door of Unitarian Eli Lamson's store.¹¹¹ As late as 1843, Capt. Howe was suing to wrest the ownership of the town common from the Congregationalists.¹¹² Finally, in the early 1840s, the now dilapidated old meetinghouse was disassembled, and its parts – pews, timbers, glass, even fieldstones in the foundation, removed and sold to people in the community. The great wooden beams were re-used in the frame of a new barn that Joseph Flagg was building.¹¹³ The proceeds from these sales were divided among those who had originally owned pews in the earlier meetinghouse. “And thus,” Sanford reported, “one fruitful source of controversy in the town was taken away.”¹¹⁴ By thus literally deconstructing this symbol of their earlier covenanted community, the townsfolk acknowledged the end of religious unanimity in Boylston. In the end, the people of Boylston could worship in harmony only when they abandoned worshipping in concert.

¹¹¹ Boylston Town Clerk's Book, Town Meeting Records for March and November, 1839. BHS. The issue of posting the warrant was resolved the next year, when the town approved the “neutral” location of the Town Hall door.

¹¹² Boylston Town Clerk's Record Book, Town Meeting Records for February, 1843. BHS.

¹¹³ The terms of the agreement are recorded in the Town Meeting Records, February 1843: “voted that the Meeting House belong[ing] . . . to the Parish, together with all the underpinning stone, be surrendered & given up to the several persons owning pews therein, provided that the same is accepted by them in full satisfaction of all claims & demands against the Parish for the said Pews . . .” Boylston Historian George L. Wright, in handwritten notes in the Flagg Family File, BHS, noted that the massive oak beams in the barn on the Farm of Joseph Flagg were “timbers taken from the second meeting house when that structure was taken down.”

¹¹⁴ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 58.

Conclusion

And thus it was, on that April evening in 1841, that William White's letter writing was interrupted by the commotion of rowdy youth pelting the old meeting house with stones. It is an arresting image: the looming old clapboard structure, abandoned and soon to be dismantled, being vandalized by youth who had no memory of the time when it stood for the monolithic power of a state church, a standing order, and consensual community. In the course of the Unitarian/Trinitarian feud, enough stones had been hurled to fell the monolith of corporate community. In the name of conscience and free will, religion had been democratized. Shock waves from the contest between evangelical reform and liberal claims for freedom of conscience -- essentially a contest of two views of social order -- would ripple outwards, affecting every aspect of life in Boylston.

Many of the consequences of this struggle were unintended and ironic. The Unitarians, under Cotton, had urged unity and argued strenuously against party, yet ultimately had found that peace could be found only in separation. The orthodox found that maintaining purity of doctrine and exclusive standards of membership in a newly competitive religious scene would require them to go out on the highways and byways to actively recruit sinners. In their work to promote conservative Christian values, Boylston's evangelical women moved towards radically new models of womanhood. Youth found empowerment even as they submitted to Christian discipline, for in attending to the authority of God, they felt *authorized* to defy the authority of parents.

Most powerfully, the very process of conversion -- of surrendering utterly to God -- transformed the individual psyche. It nurtured in the regenerate a powerful new inner focus and promoted self-motivated individualism. As they turned to the work of

evangelism, converts found themselves repeatedly called upon to exercise self-reliance and act as independent moral agents. Religion proved a destabilizing force, rupturing traditional social order in the name of faith and conscience, but by fostering responsible personal control and individual accountability it also provided a psychic basis for a newly democratized social order. The romantic, individualistic ethic fostered by revivalism transformed society, both feeding on and nurturing idealism, a belief in the possibility of transformation, and individual self-determination.¹¹⁵

The religious wars in rural Boylston transformed community, first by breaking it apart, then by rebuilding it along new lines. Prayer groups, charitable associations, restrictive patterns of socializing splintered Boylston's community. Especially among evangelical women, conversion and working for "Christian perfection" created new, intensely personal and utterly exclusive subsets of community. Links to the "evangelical empire" beyond Boylston realigned ties of friendship and mutual interest along vertical lines, from neighbors to state, national, and global networks of communication and support. As much as anything else in Boylston, it was religious doctrine and striving that overcame the localism of this once-isolated rural town.

In 1852, a quarter century after the intense religious strife, Rev. Sanford commented on the extraordinary changes in Boylston in the 30 years since his coming. The forests, he commented, had disappeared; there were new buildings, new roads. But most extraordinary was the change in the state of religion in the little town. When he came, there had been "bitter animosities" and "warring elements"; now, he asked, "where

¹¹⁵ Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, pp. 183-4, and 236; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, pp. 188-93; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, p. 257.

will you find a town in which there is, at this time, more good feeling among the inhabitants? There are now, as there were formerly, diverse views, both on religious and political subjects, yet there is no contention—I think no unkind and hostile party feelings. Each claims for himself, and is willing to grant to others, perfect toleration.”¹¹⁶ It had taken a half century of strife to reach such “good feeling.” Toleration came only with the acceptance of pluralism, the democratization of religion, and the anguished passing of communal consensus and corporate belonging.

¹¹⁶ Sanford, *Two Sermons*, p. 56. He overstated the case for perfect toleration; there was still intense anti-Romanism, as well as distrust of Mormons, Millerites, Shakers, and other sects, as evidenced in Mary’s diary.

CHAPTER THREE

CHOICE AND CONSEQUENCES: THE ECONOMIC EVOLUTION OF BOYLSTON

The Cultivator

On a fair, promising April morning in 1839, with “the mercury nearly at summer heat,” Aaron White and his fifteen-year-old son Francis went on a shopping excursion. The ground was warming – just three days earlier the frogs had peeped – and Aaron had been busy ploughing his garden and preparing his fields. Now he and young Francis were on a mission to purchase one of the new-fangled farm tools that his neighbor Mr. Ward of Shrewsbury had been trying for the past several years, a tool that should transform their springtime planting rituals. Mary noted their success, the family’s acquisition of “a new plough called Cultivator.” “The cultivator” had been introduced in Worcester County, by plough manufacturer Joel Nourse only two years earlier. A specialized plough with sets of cast-iron teeth in the shape of horses’ hooves, it stirred, pulverized and aerated as it was drawn through the soil.¹ With a cultivator, a farmer could switch from hill planting to more efficient row planting, prepare his fields with less labor, and achieve a better crop. Cast iron tools and new technology were changing the nature of farming in Boylston. As enterprising Worcester county smithies turned out new farming implements, labor needs fell: farmers no longer needed to constantly call upon their neighbors to get their ground turned or their crops in. Improved ploughs and cultivators, scythes and reapers produced

¹ Tom Kelleher (Curator, OSV), in discussion with the author, February 17, 2010.

better yields; they also produced disruptions in local patterns of exchange as more farmers expanded their trade.²

Francis was likely excited by the new tool – the very next morning he and Abel, the hired hand, were out putting it to the test. Abel Brigham was a local youth, the twenty-four year old son of neighboring farmer, whom Aaron had hired as an extra hand for the season. Francis was delighted that his father had hired Abel, and likely equally delighted by the new labor saving cultivator, for both brought him a little closer to his own goal. He wanted to leave the land, to go away to the city. But Francis was disappointed; to Charles he confessed, “I have thought of coming to Boston with Mr. Rice a great many [*sic*] but I have not yet had a chance . . . I have been expecting to go to Worcester this good while but in the summer and fall Father wanted me to work with Abel and I could not go.”³ It would be another year before he would escape to the city.

Francis wanted to cultivate something other than his father’s acres. He wanted to follow his brothers to school, to clerkships, to commerce, and to urban culture. He wanted to cultivate himself. Technology, markets, mobility, and dreams together reshaped both the physical and emotional landscape of Boylston during these decades, as the people of Boylston transformed their relationship to the land.

The exodus of sons who came of age in Boylston after 1815 was common. Boylstonians had begun to rethink their assumptions about livelihood, and some found that their dreams were no longer rooted in local land. In part this shift was natural and

² See Andrew Baker and Frank G. White, “The Impact of Changing Plow Technology in Rural New England in the Early Nineteenth Century,” unpublished paper, OSV, 1990.

³ Francis White to Charles White, January 16, 1840. OSV.

inevitable, as the maturing town ran out of room for new farms for offspring. But Boylston farmers were also responding to changes in the broader world that created new opportunities and unleashed new desires and ambitions. They now wanted more than their daily bread, whether that be a “stuffed sophy” or a starched white collar. Dual impulses – the need to finance the settlement of their offspring and the desire to improve their own standard of living – drove farmers to consider new ways to “improve their prospects.” Those who could took advantage of developing markets, improved transportation, and advances in farm technology to trade for what could not be had in the tradition of neighborly exchange – cash. Only cash would purchase needed acres or desired “store bought” goods.

The new economic choices altered both the natural and social landscape of the town. To generate cash, some increased their acreage and modified their farming practices to boost their marketable surplus. Those who had less tried blending subsistence farming with part-time outwork or seasonal day labor for their wealthier neighbors. The youthful exodus left a labor void, filled by newcomers who had few assets *but* their labor, which they now sold for wages rather than exchanging for farm goods. What had in 1800 been a stable community of interdependent freehold yeoman, with a shared concern for securing a competence, gradually evolved into something else: a highly mobile society differentiated by economic status and social caste. Established, prospering, market farmers, their less well-off neighbors struggling to subsist, and a subset of unfamiliar and propertyless young transients had separate interests, goals, and increasingly, identities. Competition was replacing competency as the norm.⁴

Though the story of the transformation of rural Massachusetts has been told before, our goal here will be to understand more clearly how decisions about livelihood reshaped community and mentality.⁵ The economic evolution of Boylston is at heart a story of changed relationships. Facets of traditional agrarian mentality such as family labor, neighborly independence, stewardship of the land, a familiar, homogeneous local culture, and a commitment to a consensual common good were transformed -- often unintentionally -- as plural and separate interests reshaped the notion of a common good.

Changes in Boylston: Crises, Opportunities, and Desires

To be sure, Boylston remained almost exclusively a farming town. While other Worcester county towns developed densely populated mill villages or bustling commercial centers, with agriculture on the outskirts, Boylstonians continued to follow the plow. This was not by choice: Boylston's farming fate was the consequence of geography and history. The town had always been hilly and remote. The terrain might have supported the development of mills had not the annexation of West Boylston in the first decade of the century robbed Boylston of its river, the main source of its waterpower. As a result, as Matthew Davenport recorded in 1831, "[t]his is almost

⁴ Competition and competency are the themes of a seminal article on changing economic ideals in New England, Daniel Vickers, "Competency and Competition in Early America," *WMQ* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Jan. 1990) pp. 3-29.

⁵ See James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America *The WMQ* 35 (1978), pp. 3-32; Winifred B. Rothenberg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1855," *Journal of Economic History* Vol. 41, pp. 283-314, and Winifred B. Rothenberg, *Markets and Marketplaces*; Christopher Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860," *JSH* 13 (1979) pp169-89 or Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism* (1990);; Richard L. Bushman, "Markets and Composite Farms in Early America," *WMQ* Vol. 55 No. 3 (Jul., 1998) pp. 351-374.

exclusively an agricultural town . . . the local situation being such as to afford little encouragement for the mercantile or mechanical business. . . .”⁶ There were no manufactures except for a brick making site and a comb shop, and “there are at present but one saw-mill and two grist mills.”⁷ Of “mechanics,” he noted, there were but a few wheelwrights, blacksmiths and six or seven shoemakers.⁸ They worked small workshops that required little capital. As late as the 1880s, Davenport’s comments were echoed by townsmen who called it “essentially an agricultural town . . . offer[ing] but little opportunity for manufacturing or other industries.”⁹

Even without waterpower, Boylston might have developed, as did other central Worcester County towns, as a commercial and artisan center.¹⁰ Neighboring Shrewsbury

⁶ Matthew Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston* (Lancaster, Mass.: Carter, Andrews, and Company, 1831), pp. 15 and 16.

⁷ Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch*, p. 16. The sawmill and gristmill were part of an ancient mill complex built on that small slice of the Nashua River in the northwest corner of the town that remained to Boylston after the 1808 annexation of West Boylston.

⁸ Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch*, p. 16. A federal survey of manufactures in the 1830s confirmed Davenport’s assessment: Boylston offered *no* non-farm employment opportunities other than its few shoe shops, comb-making workshop, and some palm leaf hat braiding. In total these “manufactures” – none of them factory-based, employed fewer than two dozen men and women. Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the United States, collected and transmitted to the House of Representatives, in compliance with a resolution of Jan. 19, 1832, by the Secretary of the Treasury. United States. Dept. of the Treasury. [Commonly known as the McLane Report.] See Appendix H, Manufactures.

⁹ George Wright, “Boylston,” in D. Hamilton Hurd, ed., *History of Worcester County, Massachusetts*, [Complete Citation], p. 887. Boylston’s strictly agricultural nature likely saved it from some degree of contentiousness. The farming towns of Worcester County had significantly fewer cases brought before the Worcester County Court of Common Pleas than did Worcester County manufacturing towns. See Appendix H, Manufactures.

and Worcester became regional centers of trade and craft, as farmers from outlying areas brought their goods to be marketed and artisans produced wares to be shipped along the main post roads to Boston, Providence, or Worcester mill villages. But in losing the river, Boylston had also lost the convenient valley route for commercial traffic, and post roads, turnpikes and the railroad all bypassed the little hill town. To the end of his life, Aaron White lobbied unsuccessfully for a stage route to run through the center of town.¹¹

And so Boylstonians farmed. Moreover, Boylston's farmers continued to produce first and foremost for family consumption. Mary White's diary reveals just how diverse their family farm remained throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Their cattle provided all of the family's milk, butter, and cheese, along with a yearly allotment of beef and veal. An annual litter of piglets yielded their pork, ham, sausages, and lard. In 1837, Caroline reported to her brother "We have supported eleven old hens this winter and to their shame be it recorded, they have not laid an egg apiece since last Sept. though lately they have been cackling and scraiking great pretensions and fair promises but nothing more."¹² (We can assume the hens eventually provided either eggs or flesh and feathers.)

¹⁰ Historian John Brooke identifies a "central corridor" of Worcester towns that benefited from their ready access to the main east-west post roads and turnpikes. John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), pp. 291-303. Brooke includes Boylston as on the fringe of this corridor; it was not. Boylston had very few of the artisan shops typical of central corridor towns. It also behaved, politically and religiously, like northern agricultural Worcester County towns.

¹¹ Diary of Mary White, July 31, 1837: "Mr. White went with Mr. Sanford to Berlin to see [if] the stage contractor would drive his stage thro' the middle of town & likewise carry the mail so that we may have the post office near us." OSV.

¹² Caroline White to Charles White, March 18, 1837. OSV.

Mary always noted with relief when the grains were “in the barn” and when the men had gotten the root vegetables into the cellar. Aaron turned and tended Mary’s garden, but it was her task, noted with resignation each September, to preserve the produce from the kitchen garden.¹³ Her daughters often helped with the orchard harvest, turning fruit and berries into sauce, preserves, and pies. The winter slaughter busied the women with salting meat and stuffing sausages, trying lard, making soap and candles sufficient for the coming year. Mary always noted when the shed had been filled with split logs for winter fires. Throughout nearly a half-century of profitable farming, Aaron continued to produce nearly all the family’s food and fuel.¹⁴ Other diaries and account books reveal the same broad production of household needs.¹⁵

In some ways, then, continuity marked these decades. There were few without connection to the land, and so ancient rhythms of agricultural life endured. A degree of neighborly interdependence was also perpetuated. Established Boylstonians through mid-century continued to keep old-style daybooks of neighborly trades instead of double-

¹³ Mary White (daughter) to Charles White, June 19, 1838. James Kimenker, in a study of late eighteenth Concord, listed the common kitchen garden produce in east-central Massachusetts as cabbages, turnips, lettuce, spinach, onions, radishes, peas, potatoes, carrots, asparagus, beets, and cucumbers. James Kimenker, “The Concord Farmer: An Economic History,” in *Concord: A Social History*, ed. by David Hackett Fischer, (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1983), p. 166.

¹⁴ The exception was in wheat, which he grew in very small quantities; Mary noted his bringing barrels of wheat from his store, so he likely was purchasing imported grain from Pennsylvania or, after 1835, from the New York. In addition, in the later years of their life, Mary and Aaron appear to purchase, rather than produce, their cheese.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, the Boylston Account Book of Joseph Flagg, 1827-1846, which has yearly entries for a broad range of his farm’s grains, vegetables, meats, dairy, and wood products. Account Book of Joseph Flagg, 1827-1846, OSV. See Appendix K.

entry accounts of business transactions, and they continued to trade primarily with long-time neighbors.¹⁶ The traditional system endured in part because it was functional – it efficiently redistributed resources among those in the local community without resort to scarce cash. But it was also cultural, reflecting deeply held values of trust and reciprocity that persisted among old-time Boylstonians.

To say that Boylston remained exclusively agricultural, that its farmers continued to produce primarily to meet family consumption needs, that cultural attachment to neighborly reciprocity and mutual interdependence persisted, is not to say that the town did not change. It did; all of these cultural ideals were under increasing strain during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Boylston's economic transition was gradual, evolutionary, and the result of voluntary decisions on the part of farm families to alter their customary ways of making a living to meet both old and new goals. Competency gave way only slowly – generationally – to commercial competition and a cash-based economy, as farmers gradually entered the market, seeking within the continuity of family farming better ways to provide for their needs and pursue their desires.¹⁷ Some of their choices led to prosperity, some to calamity; many led to change.

¹⁶ Analysis of the account book of Joseph Flagg, 1827-1846, shows that three quarters of all his transactions were with other Boylstonians; a third of all his trades were with his closest neighboring family, the Brewers. See also the Account Book of Willard Andrews of Boylston, 1839-1846, Manuscript, BHS.

¹⁷Vickers, "Competency and Competition," p.7; Bushman, "Markets and Composite Farms in Early America," p. 367; Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism," p. 171-173.

Crisis

By 1820, Boylston was full. The town's population had reached a density of 45 people per square mile, about the maximum possible to continue their traditional practice of diversified family farming.¹⁸ When that level was reached, population growth tended to level off as most children out-migrated to less densely settled land.¹⁹ For Boylston, that mark was reached as the fourth generation of settlers came of age in the 1820s.²⁰

There was nothing unique about Boylston's plight. Young frontier communities had traditionally had high birth rates and, at first, abundant acres awaiting "improvement" absorbed these offspring. But generally by the fourth generation, or 100 years after settlement, the town could support no more. Settlers had first trickled into Boylston in 1717; now, the town was full. This age-old problem – as old as Old England, whose exodus to New England had been in large part to reduce their over-crowded shores – had

¹⁸ See the chart of Boylston's population density over time in the Appendix C 1. Since each person required approximately ten acres, density per square mile could theoretically approach 80 people (given an average family size of six to eight people). However, some percentage of land was always "unimproveable" (covered with water, roads, rocky outcroppings, or other barriers to agriculture), so Massachusetts' mixed-use farming towns typically supported population densities up to 40 or 50 people per square mile.

¹⁹ Fred Anderson notes that the mean population density for the most populous parts of Massachusetts during the 1750s and 60s was 60 persons per square mile. This high density, however, includes the urban areas of Boston, Gloucester, and Salem, areas that were not trying to live by farming. In comparison, Worcester and Hampshire counties during the same period had fewer than fifteen persons per square mile, thus drawing settlers from the more densely settled eastern counties. Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 36-7.

²⁰ This is the *four generations* that Philip J. Greven refers to in his study of population and farm settlement, *Four Generations of a New England Town: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

been gradually creeping from the coast to the hills of Worcester County and beyond, a geographically and temporally rolling demographic crisis.²¹

From about 1820, then, Boylston farmers faced the stressful challenge of finding the assets to set most of their children up elsewhere. Local land was mostly improved and was relatively expensive. They might send their sons west, but that required assets as well.²² Now they needed for the own farms to produce not just their daily bread, but cash.

The pressure to find farms for maturing sons was likely behind a shift in inheritance patterns and the advent of yet another crisis. When land was abundant, farmers preferred to divide their acres equally among their sons. As towns matured and acres dwindled, they generally switched to “impartible” inheritance, preserving a sustainable homestead for one son but encumbering him with obligations to reimburse his brothers for their shares.²³ In Boylston, this transition was reached by the turn of the century. However, as space and opportunities in Boylston continued to decline, and as children increasingly chose lives and careers beyond “the old home place” during the

²¹ Richard Bushman describes the rise of “composite farming” in response to this crisis as a rolling market entrance based on geography. Bushman, “Markets and Composite Farms,” pp. 351-374.

²² As late as 1860, Minnesota officials advised families to have \$795 to establish a farm in that state. Jeremy Atack, Fred Bateman and William N. Parker, “Northern Agriculture and the Westward Movement,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 313.

²³ The language of wills and of probate administrations, which speak of being unable to divide an estate “without injury to the whole,” attest to this goal. There was a consistent trend towards impartible inheritance in Lexington, Mass. throughout the eighteenth century. Mary Fuhrer, “The Battle for Freehold Farms,” unpublished paper, University of New Hampshire, Dec., 2007. See also Donahue, *The Great Meadow*, p. 198.

critical years of the 1820s and '30s, Boylston farmers reversed their strategy. Both fathers and probate judges increasingly chose to divide the farm, or the proceeds from the sale of the farm, equitably among *all* heirs, male or female, whether or not the resulting parcels were sufficient to support a farm family.²⁴ Offspring could sell their portion of the estate to finance a new start in a different field, but if a son hoped to remain and farm in Boylston, he would have to negotiate with his siblings to buy back their shares. Those sons from large families could not afford to recover their father's estate. Others borrowed or took mortgages, so that some of Boylston's land-rich farmers were, in actuality, burdened with debt. Debt to asset ratios rose across the population, and the sale of an estate for debt during probate – once unheard of in Boylston -- became more common.²⁵ To repurchase farms from siblings, or to repay notes and mortgages, more farmers sought new ways to accumulate assets beyond their consumption needs.²⁶

Opportunities

Boylston farmers faced an old problem in a new time, their demographic crisis coinciding with an explosion in turnpike, canal, and railroad-building that shattered Worcester County's isolation. The first era of road building began around the turn of the

²⁴ See Appendix J, Inheritance Strategies, for Partible/Impartible Inheritance.

²⁵ The ratio of debts to assets as reported in probate accounts from Boylston, 1810-1850, reveals a slow but consistent creep up. See Appendix J, Ratio of Debts to Assets. Most debt in Boylston was settled at the time of death, with final renderings of account and payment of outstanding notes during probate. Before 1800, it was extremely rare for an estate to be "vendued" or auctioned for debt – in part or in whole. By 1800, that tendency was on the rise. See Appendix J, Auction of Real Estate for Debt.

²⁶ Donahue also notes an increase in loss of property to debt suits, vendue at death, and foreclosures between 1825-1850 in Concord. *The Great Meadow*, p. 222.

century, as opportunities resulting from European wars (1793-1815) encouraged turnpike investors to improve the linkages between the hinterland and the coast. Private turnpikes battled with public post roads for the best routes, and both made dramatic inroads into the countryside. The number of stage lines running in New England more than doubled between 1825 and 1832.²⁷ None of these new roads came to Boylston Center, but one stopped at the town's northern border. Mary recorded her family's increased use of the stages, leaving from local towns such as Berlin, Shrewsbury, and Grafton and carrying her family to Boston, Providence, and north to Middlebury and Middlebury, Vermont.

The new roads made it easier for Boylstonians to go elsewhere; they also made it easier for their farm goods to go elsewhere. Farmers' annual treks over winter's frozen roads to carry their surplus grain to Boston were replaced by the local "marketer" -- Mr. Woods or Mr. Rice -- who acted as a teamster middleman, making weekly trips to the city.²⁸ Now Boylston farmers could ship even perishable goods such as butter, fruit, fresh

²⁷ Frederic J. Wood, *The Turnpikes of New England* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1919), p. 160. For the development of post roads and turnpikes in Worcester County during the 1820s and '30s, see also Roger N. Parks, *Roads and Travel in New England, 1790-1840* (Sturbridge, Mass.: Old Sturbridge Village, 1967).

²⁸ Though drovers and victuallers (men who combed the countryside buying provisions for urban inns and establishments) had always been around, the appearance of the marketman, a local resident who made weekly trips carrying produce to Boston, dates in Worcester County to around 1820. "By 1820 the practice among Worcester County farmer of engaging hired carriers was well entrenched; so much so that they were held as a model for farmers in other areas of the state to emulate. . . . By 1826 *all* Worcester County towns relied on hired carriers to sell most if not all of their goods destined for Boston and other urban markets." Andrew H. Baker and Holly V. IZard, "New England Farmers and the Marketplace 1780-1865: A Case Study," *Agricultural History* Vol. 65 No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 36-7.

vegetables, and just-slaughtered poultry to urban market and mill village.²⁹ A new weekly rhythm appeared in Mary's diary, as Mondays and Tuesdays including entries for churning, plucking, or otherwise preparing produce for the Wednesday market wagon.

Such shipping, however, was still costly for large tonnage; in 1830, it was more expensive to ship a ton of goods 40 miles overland from Worcester to Boston than it was to ship the same amount overseas from Liverpool to Boston.³⁰ But, in 1828, the opening of the Blackstone River Canal dramatically cut transportation costs, and landlocked Worcester was proclaimed a seaport.³¹ Rural folk from Worcester County marveled at the man-made river and applauded the ease with which it brought imports to Worcester stores, while carrying their surplus through Providence to the Atlantic. Two days after the canal opened, Mary's family went to Worcester, like tourists, to "take a sail" on the canal boat.³²

Boston merchants, however, were not pleased. The Erie Canal (opened 1825) had already diverted part of their interior trade through New York; now their central Massachusetts trade was flowing south to Providence. In response, they built a railroad. Opened in its entirety on Independence Day, 1835, the Boston & Worcester Railroad zipped people and goods along at a staggering twenty miles per hour, and freight rates

²⁹ Parks notes that by 1840, teaming was a regular form of employment. The term "teamster" began to appear on Massachusetts census forms, directories and legal documents. Parks, *Roads and Travel in New England*.

³⁰ Parks, *Roads and Travel*. The charge was \$10 per ton from Worcester to Boylston.

³¹ Tom Kelleher, *The Blackstone Canal: Artery to the Heart of the Commonwealth* (Sturbridge: Old Sturbridge Village Research Library).

³² Diary of Mary White, Oct. 8, 1828. OSV.

dropped by two-thirds.³³ An excited Mary White reported that “Francis drove Mr. White and myself to Westborough to take the railroad cars for Boston.” When she returned, a week later, she noted “We took our seats in the cars at a quarter past seven o’clock and arrived in Westborough at a quarter past nine o’clock in safety.”³⁴ Her family was soon making regular trips to Boston, and later to Providence, via “the cars.”

The development of stage routes, the Blackstone Canal, and the Boston and Worcester Railroad was spurred by – and spurred – the growth of new commercial and manufacturing centers in Worcester County. Worcester’s Main Street flourished, as people from the hinterland came to town to purchase goods newly arrived from the cosmopolitan coast and beyond. Little mill centers along the Nashua River to the north and especially along the Blackstone River in southern Worcester County grew rapidly, now that they could so easily export their goods. Enterprising men opened all manner of manufactories, from small workshops employing six or eight hands producing wire or combs to large cotton and woolen factories. Though Boylston was bypassed by these developments, they offered opportunities to Worcester County sons and daughters.

For women, the major change was the arrival of affordable, factory-produced textiles, which freed them from the time-consuming task of producing the family’s cloth.

³³ Kelleher, *The Blackstone Canal*, and Parks, *Roads and Travel in New England*.

³⁴ It was Mary’s first trip ever on the railroad. When she returned home, she noted, “May we be grateful for preserving care of our Heavenly Father.” *Diary of Mary White*, November 18 and 19, 1834. OSV. Mary did not seem to completely trust the new technology. She was apt to record any accident associated with “the cars,” as when Mr. Harvard “had his leg crushed under a railroad car. Died of the lockjaw,” or when she “heard of the death of a Mr. Curtis, superintendent of the railroad cars. Killed by putting his head out of the cars and striking against some posts.” *Diary*, October 4, 1835 and April 13, 1839.

Where once she had put out flax to neighbors to spin and weave, she now purchased linen cloth. She still spun the woolen thread that she used for knitting stockings, mittens, and caps, but she purchased her yardgoods – some likely from local mills, and other finer pieces as imports – from Worcester stores.³⁵ Purchasing their cloth gave Mary and her daughters free hours, which, as we will see, they devoted to other strategies for meeting family and personal needs.

For men, technology brought improved farm tools and increased mechanization of farm chores. *The New England Farmer* began advertising “patent hoes and hay cutters, cast and wrought iron ploughs” by the late 1820s, and farm machinery improved dramatically in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.³⁶ By the 1830s, Worcester County farmers of means and mind could avail themselves of early harvesting machines, steel hay forks, horse-drawn hay rakes, and much-improved cast-iron plows, along with the cultivator that so pleased young Francis. For those who could afford them, these tools could significantly improved productivity of Worcester County towns.³⁷

³⁵ The change in production versus consumption is obvious in comparing Mary’s diary entries on her household work in 1807 and 1827. When Mary traveled to Worcester to shop, she referred to going “into the street” to purchase her linen sheetings, tablecloths, and dress goods. Mary did continue to make textiles: sewing was her constant occupation, as was quilting of petticoats, blouses, and bedding. But the time freed by purchasing yard goods she devoted to making household items such as carpets, mats, cushions and curtains. She dyed rags and wove striped carpets in a frame at home; other rug warps she put out to local loom weavers.

³⁶ Kimenker, “The Concord Farmer,” in Fischer, *Concord: A Social History*, pp. 178-9

³⁷ Brian Donahue, “The Forests and Fields of Concord: An Ecological History, 1750-1850” in *Concord: A Social History*, edited by David Hackett Fisher (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1983, p. 35; Kimenker, “The Concord Farmer,” pp. 178-9; See Atack, Bateman and Parker, “The Farm, the Farmer, and the Market,” p. 268-9. For

The ease of access to metropolitan centers of Boston and Providence, as well as the growth of commercial centers in Worcester County, provided Boylston's sons new opportunities. In the cities, financial institutions and mercantile concerns offered young clerks entry to a new world. Along the "central corridor" of Worcester County, good roads and access to water power offered a varied economy of smaller shops "combining textiles, machinery production, paper manufacture, and boot and shoe making." To the south, in the towns of the Blackstone River Valley, the Industrial Revolution got on capitially, luring men to work as machinists, textile operatives, and factory employees. Such southern Worcester County towns as Mendon, Uxbridge, Oxbridge, and Sutton had factories with tens of thousands of spindles as early as 1831; the McLane Report, an 1832 U.S. census of manufacturing enterprises, also documents the many positions these towns offered to machinists and operatives.³⁸ In addition, each of these densely-populated villages demanded goods and services, creating additional opportunities in retail, artisan work, and marketing farm products.

Opportunities were not limited to Worcester County. Before settling down, all of Aaron and Mary's sons traveled widely. They took stages as far as Montreal; sailed up the Hudson River Valley; explored western New York State on the Erie Canal, stopping in bustling Rochester and Syracuse. They took "the cars" to New Haven and steam

technology and changes in farming, see also Peter D McClelland, *Sowing Modernity: America's First Agricultural Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³⁸ These four towns averaged over 10,000 spindles each, with population densities two to three times that of Boylston. See the Massachusetts State Tax Records, Valuation Returns of 1831. See also Worcester County Returns in *Documents Relative to the Manufacturers in the United States* (also known as the McLane Report), U. S. Treasury, 1832.

packets to New York and Philadelphia, explored as far as Louisville, Kentucky, and even ventured up the Mississippi on paddlewheelers.

Unlike previous generations, then, the demographic crisis in Boylston did not doom sons and daughters to a westward trudge to find new land. The expanded range of occupational choice was so daunting for sons coming of age in the 1830s that Edward Hazen was able to profit from his guidebook, *The Panorama of Professions and Trades; or Every Man's Book*, which was marketed to those who wanted to make “an informed choice” as to career. Hazen sought to expose his young readers to 87 common occupations and help them determine which would best suit their talents and abilities.³⁹

New Sensibilities and Desires

Hazen's *Panorama* also suggested a shift in attitude toward the venerable old livelihood of husbandry. Laboring on the land, dirtying one's hands in the earth, was no longer the most respectable means of securing a competence. As he explained, “in the present age [1836], a great proportion of mankind pursue some kind of business or distinction, and . . . such pursuit is deemed honourable, and in fact, indispensable to a reputable position in the community.” In comparison with such cosmopolitan careers, farming was losing its luster. Agricultural reformers and ministers might protest, lecturing about the virtue of working one's own land. They decried young “loafers” who pursued genteel clerkships and counter positions, affected polite airs and the latest fashions, did no *real work*, and yet looked down upon the manual labor on the land. Such a lifestyle, they warned, would ultimately enervate the clerk and tie him to a life of

³⁹ Edward Hazen, *The Panorama of Professions and Trades; or Every Man's Book* (Philadelphia: Uriah Hunt and Sons, 1836), Preface.

subservient dependence upon his employers and his mostly female customers. The only way to safeguard one's dignity and masculinity, as well as the virtue of an independent citizenry, was to return to the plough, to hard work and simple frugality. "'Stick to the farm, young men,' warned the *Cultivator* in 1854. 'You are tempted to exchange the hard work of the farm, to become a clerk in a city shop, to put off your heavy boots and frock, and be a gentleman, behind the counter!' Such vocational retraining would be paramount to selling one's manhood for a wage, to 'learning to fetch and carry like a spaniel.'" ⁴⁰

Despite these protests, many Massachusetts farm boys were becoming "impatient of hard work out of doors," as Horace Bushnell later recalled.⁴¹ Farming *was* hard work, and those who had taken time off to do genteel desk labor were reminded of this when they returned to a stint in the fields. One young shopkeeper in the Worcester County town of Grafton wrote to his betrothed after a week spent in the field. "Last Tuesday I worked at haying all day. It was almost too much, but I made out to get through and should have [quit] in the middle of the day but did not like the [thought] of giving up, but I am done haying for this Season . . . I have done more work for a week past at farming than I have for seven years [as a clerk's apprentice in a shop]."⁴² The White sons also found it

⁴⁰ The *Cultivator*, June 1854, p. 175, as cited in Michael Zakim, "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Non-Producing Classes," *JER*, Vol. 26 (Winter 2006), esp. 563-576. Zakim also cites Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Mann, agricultural reformers, and popular journals such as *The American Whig* and *Atlantic Monthly*.

⁴¹ Bushnell romanticized the "age of homespun," an agrarian age when "no affectation of polite living, no languishing airs of delicacy and softness in-doors, had begun to make the fathers and sons impatient of hard work out of doors." Horace Bushnell, *Work and Play* (London: Alexander Strahan and Company, 1864) pp. 55-56.

⁴² Jonathan Wheeler to Elisabeth Davenport, Grafton, July 22, 1830. FL.

difficult to return to the fields after years of office work. Francis was still working for his father in the summer of 1840 when older brother Thomas took a break from his lawyer's practice to assist with the hay harvest. "This is a busy season with us," Francis wrote to Charles. "Hay time is a hot hard labor, my busy time, for Father has not hired so much as one man extra through this year. But Thomas helped us when he was at home and he said he would not work so hard as we had to for a fortnight for as much Salary as Van Buren has. It is 'most over.'"⁴³

Women agreed. The heavy demands of women's farm labor, especially in the laundry and the dairy, could and often did break a woman's health.⁴⁴ By mid-century, reformers were acknowledging that "these burdens . . . bear so heavily upon the wives of our farmers as to constitute a great objection to the choice of agriculture as a business."⁴⁵ The *New England Farmer* lamented that most farmers' daughters would prefer "almost any settlement in town or city, to the domestic cares of the farm-house and dairy."⁴⁶ As farm wives of means gradually absorbed new notions of women's role as gentle nurturer

⁴³ Francis White to Charles White, July 25, 1840. OSV. William, home from school, confessed "I have worked on the farm for Mr. Ball some among the hay. I find that studying has not yet deprived me of the ability nor the knowledge of laboring, nor am I free from those pains which I used to feel when engaged in hard manual exercise." William White to Charles White, Aug. 11, 1836. OSV.

⁴⁴ Linda Borish, "Weighing Women's Work: Artifact and Ideology in Farm Women's Well-Being, 1820-1870," unpublished paper, OSV.

⁴⁵ Mr. French's Address, *The New England Farmer; a Monthly Journal* Dec. 1852, as cited in Sarah Campbell Sutton, "From Farmhouse to Factory: Dairy Centralization in Worcester County, Massachusetts," unpublished paper, Brandeis University, 2008.

⁴⁶ W.H. Seward, "Prejudice Against Farming," *New England Farmer; A Monthly Journal*, Jan. 1853, p. 46. As quoted in Sutton, "From Farmhouse to Factory," p. 19.

and genteel agent of moral and refinement within the family, they were increasingly unwilling to embrace the hard physical toil of farm life.⁴⁷

Boylston farmers' sons and daughters might have been more willing to stay had they felt that farming offered great opportunities for *advancement*, but most did not believe that it did. Contemporary Boylstonians noted that the young people left, not just because land was in short supply, but also because they could not "advance their interest," given the lack of "mercantile or mechanical business" in Boylston.⁴⁸ The Reverend Henry Colman, a Unitarian minister and agricultural writer, lectured farmers at the 1821 Brighton Cattle Show to forsake dreams of riches:

That farmer is prosperous, who is able . . . to provide for the ordinary wants of himself and his family; to give his children a suitable education and establishment . . .; to keep himself free from the curse of debt and mortgage; to maintain the character and assert the rights of the independent freeholder . . . to contribute something every year to the improvement of his estate, and . . . to provide against a season when . . . old age may render it necessary to repose from his labours and cares. This is all the prosperity which a reasonable farmer ought to expect or wish.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Sutton documents Worcester County this shift in mentality for Worcester County women with significant dairy responsibilities during the mid-nineteenth century. Sutton, "From Farmhouse to Factory," pp. 18-19.

⁴⁸ Davenport, *Brief History of the Town of Boylston*, p. 15. Henry Brigham also reflected, "As soon as they [Boylston's youth] arrive at mature age they are obliged to seek employment elsewhere; but we have the satisfaction of knowing that healthful influences have gone forth that are widespread and far reaching. "Remarks of Henry Brigham," *Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Boylston, Massachusetts, August 18, 1886* (Worcester, Mass.: Press of Sanford & Davis, 1887), p. 53.

⁴⁹ Henry Colman, "An Address Delivered before the Massachusetts Agricultural Society at the Bright Cattle Show, 17th Oct., 1821," *Massachusetts Agricultural Repository and Journal* 7 (January 1822), p. 2.

But the young people of Boylston *did* wish for more. Their expectations had been rising with the tide of goods and fashions flowing into Worcester County on the new roads, canals, and rails. Country stores now connected them to the Atlantic world.⁵⁰ By the early 1830s, Aaron White's village store had been joined by two others, all offering ". . . the usual supplies of domestic, English, and West Indies goods," from cottons to crockery, as well as an assortment of enticing luxuries and amusements.⁵¹

What could not be had in the center village could be purchased on shopping trips to the closest metropolis. Squire White, as a leading citizen with contacts in Boston, Providence, and Worcester, embraced – and set – new standards of living. Mary was assisted in her household chores by a new cook stove, set kettle, and washing machine.⁵² Several rooms in the house were improved with stoves for heating. Mary recorded papering walls, putting up curtains and blinds and putting down carpets and rugs. The family furnished their home with "stuffed sophs" and other upholstered furniture, mirrors, painted portraits, tall case clocks, writing desks, and other emblems of refinement.⁵³ In their letters to Charles, the family asked him to send home scented toilet waters, fine writing paper, visiting cards, silk for handkerchiefs, candied citron, hair oils, shaving soap, and other luxury items that could not be had in the hinterlands. To prepare

⁵⁰ Jack Larkin, "Accounting for Change," p. 17.

⁵¹ Davenport, *Brief History of Boylston*, p. 16.

⁵² Whether this new appliances eased or complicated women's work is a matter of debate. See Ruth Schwartz Cohen, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁵³ Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Things* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

for her wedding, daughter Eliza made shopping trips to Boston to secure fine furniture, and to Worcester for fine fabrics, that she wanted to outfit her new household.

The Whites, and other aspiring folk of Boylston, were typical in their desire to improve their lives with purchased goods. In some cases, their purchases seemed to make economic sense, as inexpensive goods now available from distant farms made it more efficient to purchase certain staples – wheat, rye, factory cloth – than to produce them at home. In other cases, it was not sense but desire for improved standards of living that drove their acquisitions. After 1820, household production in rural Massachusetts began to slowly decline, as farmers learned to be consumers, turning to distant sources “to obtain what they ate, drank, wore, heated with, cooked on, slept in, inhabited, and generally used.”⁵⁴ But to buy these things, they needed cash.

For Boylston farmers in the 1820s and ‘30s, then, it was becoming clear that “family competence” – providing for the needs of the household and establishing the next generation – would require more than providing their daily bread. As old needs met new opportunities and desires, farm families experimented with different paths to satisfaction. Their decisions would reshape social and physical landscape of the town.

Choosing to Leave

How did the farm families of Boylston respond to growing challenges of meeting crises, supplying needs, and pursuing desires? Large families had been common in

⁵⁴ Donahue, *The Great Meadow*, p 210. The process of transition is documented in Clark, “Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism,” pp. 171-178. See also, Clark, *The Roots of Capitalism*; and Andrew H. Baker and Holly V. Izard, “New England Farmers & the Marketplace,” p. 43.

Boylston since its founding, but, as the town reached maturity and unused acres dwindled, the birth rate began to fall, reaching its lowest point during the conflicted decade of the 1820s.⁵⁵ Historians attribute this decline in population growth among land-strapped farm families to conscious decisions to limit fertility.⁵⁶ It may be that Boylstonians controlled their fertility. But a close look at Boylston births reveals a drop so sudden and sharp that it is clear something else was also at work: a drop in the number of women of childbearing age.⁵⁷ Boylston's young families were leaving home, the most common response to the pressures of need and want. Fully three-quarters of Boylston sons who were born between 1786 and 1825 – and so came of age during the period of

⁵⁵ See Appendix C 5 for Crude Birth Rate, 1786-1849, and additional data on births. Between 1820 and 1850, after years of healthy growth, population growth stagnated.

⁵⁶ See Atack, Bateman and Parker, "The Farm, the Farmer, and the Market," p. 263-4. Marc Harris carefully documents a drop in fertility for the same period in Concord by tracing completed families who remained in town. Most of the decline can be explained by delaying the age in marriage, but Harris also documents fertility peaking in the early years of marriage and then dropping sharply when the family's target size is reached. He notes that the evidence for contraception is most apparent for couples who marry after 1831. Marc Harris, "The People of Concord: A Demographic History, 1750-1850," in *Concord: A Social History* edited by David Hackett Fisher (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1983) pp. 84-103. For timing of this change in Worcester County, see Sutton, "From Farmhouse to Factory," p. 15, who attributes a decline in average household size from seven to between four and five people between 1820 and 1850 to a decision on the part of families to decrease fertility and reorganize work. See also Jack Larkin, "Accounting for Change," p. 9.

⁵⁷ From 1800 to 1815, Boylston generally produced ten to eleven male births per year. In 1816, that number dropped by nearly half, and remained at the new level for years afterwards. See chart in Appendix C. We know anecdotally that around the end of the War of 1812, young families from Boylston began to migrate west to the newly secure territories of Ohio. See the Letter of Tamar Farlin to [Mrs. Partridge] of Boylston, which noted that at the time of her writing in 1820, "it is five years this day since I arrived here." BHS.

intense strife -- and who survived to maturity left town.⁵⁸ The exodus deeply impressed Boylston's contemporary observers and early historians, who spoke regretfully of the young "abandoning the homes of their fathers," and of "the desertion of her sons and daughters . . . for more attractive pursuits elsewhere."⁵⁹

Most did not head off to hew an independent homestead from a rugged western frontier. The majority, in fact, apparently believed they could find their heart's desire not far from their own backyards. Well over half of those Boylston sons who left home went no further than another Worcester County town. Among those who ventured farther afield, some sought the city lights of Boston, Providence or Worcester, while another small contingent headed to rural land in western Massachusetts or northern New England.⁶⁰ Only a handful ventured as far as the mid-Atlantic, South, or West. This was a geographically limited diaspora.

⁵⁸ See Appendix D for statistics on ex-migration of the Boylston cohort.

⁵⁹ Augustus Flagg, "Boylston," in *History of Worcester County*, p. 311; Davenport, *Brief History of Boylston*: "The causes of this decrease in numbers may be found in the fact that the enterprising character of our citizens is constantly prompting to emigration, often by families, but oftener still by draining the town of many young men; inducing them to abandon the homes of their fathers, for the prospect of advancing their interest in other places." P. 15 Out-migration can be confirmed by a diachronic study of Boylston's tax lists. These reveal that, when adjusted for mortality, about a third of Boylston's taxpayers left town by the end of each five-year period. This trend rose over the period from 1820 to 1835, and peaked in the 1830 to 1835 period. The average age of these taxpaying out-migrant males is in the mid thirties, as one would expect for a male head of household with a young family and enough capital accrued to make a new start elsewhere.

⁶⁰ Of the 219 males who out-migrated, the geographic destination of 193 can be determined. Of those, 58% settled in Worcester County; 16% in metro Boston, Providence or New York; 17% in western Massachusetts or northern New England; and 9% in the Mid-Atlantic, South, or West. See Appendix D.

Those who hoped for a professional career as lawyers, doctors, ministers, engineers, and merchants -- a small fraction of the total -- were predominantly the sons of well-to-do Boylstonians, though some carved out new professions on the basis of aptitude rather than assets.⁶¹ Usually, their training and the demands of their profession took them to metropolitan centers. Those who left home to pursue farming -- about a third of the total -- were also, on average, the sons of *wealthy* Boylstonians, and the great majority of them purchased their farms in other *Worcester County* towns.⁶² These, then, were sons of the gentry with significant cash assets who were able to secure an improved estate -- and no doubt positions of respect -- in a mature community close to home.

But the majority of sons who left Boylston did not or could not pursue such options. Instead, they mostly found jobs in Worcester County manufacturing, shop work, or the trades.⁶³ The poorest overwhelmingly left Boylston for other Worcester County towns, likely selling their labor in local mills or workshops and hoping for improvement. The middling and poorer sons chose Worcester County manufacturing and shop work *in lieu of* western migration to undeveloped frontier land.⁶⁴

The mass exodus of Boylston's youth, whether as families or young singles, must have been wrenching to those longstanding relationships of kin and neighbor that had

⁶¹ The occupational choices of those sons who *left* Boylston can be traced for 161 of the 219 out-migrating sons. See Appendix D.

⁶² Mean tax decile of 2.71; 71% of those who left home to pursue farming located in another Worcester County town.

⁶³ See chart in Appendix D.

⁶⁴ See Appendix D on Geographic Destination of Boylston Cohort by Wealth.

provided support and fellowship in their small agrarian world. It also brought family heartache, a sense of abandonment and rejection. Aaron White's letters to his sons poignantly reveal his inner struggle.

Charles White loved fresh fruit, and his father knew it. When the sixteen-year-old moved to Boston in 1836 to serve an apprenticeship in an apothecary shop, he left behind the family orchard of apples, peaches, pears and cherries, vines of grapes, patches of strawberries and wild berries galore. In the city he craved the sweet goodness that had been so abundant on "the old home place," and his account book included nearly daily outlays for an apple from the market carts. In his letters home he confessed "wanting fruit so much that it seemed as though [he] could eat apples core and all."⁶⁵

Each week, when Mr. Woods, the Boylston marketman, made a trip to Boston with a wagon full of country goods, Charles sought out his stall in the market and the two exchanged wooden buckets. Charles gave Wood one filled with clothes needing washing or mending, an item or two requested by the family from the apothecary shop, and a letter. In exchange, he received one from his family, packed with washed or mended clothes, a few baked goods, letters from home, and, almost always, apples. Aaron was glad to be able to satisfy his son's sweet tooth, but he had another motive as well. "I wanted to send you something to remind you of home."⁶⁶ He confessed in sentimental letters that the fruit brought to mind his absent son, and he hoped that it would also make

⁶⁵ Aaron White Sr. to Charles White, Oct. 10, 1837. OSV. Aaron also sent boxes of cherries and grapes in season, but apples from his cold cellar he could send from September through March.

⁶⁶ Aaron White to Charles White, Oct. 10, 1837. OSV.

his son think of the folks on the farm. He commented frequently on luxurious yields of cherries or grapes, and promised that if “Charley” would come home he might have as much as he wished.

I have almost expected you this week, although we had not much reason to. The fact is, Charley, we have had a great supply this year of cherries and other fruit and we have thought and spoke much of you. . . [W]e will try to keep the boys and the birds from the trees until Saturday next in the hope that you will get this in season to take the Boylston stage that day and come home . . . So many things come to mind that I wish to say that I can say nothing as I wish and will add no more.⁶⁷

Two years later, Aaron was still using images of fruit to entice his son: “We have had a fine supply of cherries. I should have liked to have had your company to eat them with us.”⁶⁸ Apples would remind his son of the sweetness of home and the blessings of the farm. And perhaps lure him back: “I shall try to send you this week a few apples which . . . will please you as the box contains some of your favorites.” “Shall send you some of your favorite Peck’s Pleasants next week.” “We shall always try to send you some [apples], such as we have. I rather think that any kind of fruit will taste better in Boston than it did here.”⁶⁹ But Charles did not return. The farm was not his Eden. His father had given him the freedom to choose his life’s work, and Charles had traded the farm for a clerk’s collar and counter in the city.

Charles was far from the first of White’s sons to leave the farm for the city; he was the sixth. Aaron had spent years turning the capital raised from his country store and

⁶⁷ Aaron White to Charles White, July 26, 1838. OSV.

⁶⁸ Aaron White to Charles White, July 14, 1840. OSV.

⁶⁹ Aaron White to Charles White, March 19, 1839; Feb. 1, 1837; July 13, 1836. OSV.

farm surplus from his farm into acres to settle his boys around him in Boylston. In 1820, as his firstborn turned twenty-one, Aaron purchased Jason Abbot's farm and house on the crest of the hill in the center village, into which he moved his family, leaving the "Old Farm" available for Aaron Jr. But Aaron chose to pursue a law career and eventually settled in Providence. Aaron Sr. continued to gather up Boylston parcels throughout the 1820s, adding "the Eager place" and "the Fuller place" to his holdings, but each son, on reaching his teens, chose instead a city profession or business. Avery apprenticed to a Boston-based West Indies merchant; Thomas followed his older brother into law with a practice in New York City; Davis opened a Dorchester tannery to provide leather for the burgeoning shoe industry; William went West as a missionary to the Indians. When Charles left home, a now-aging Aaron began to sell land that he no longer had the labor to farm. His hopes now rested on young Francis. When the boy returned from visiting Charles in the city, aglow with excitement and yearning to join his brother, Aaron confessed, "I dread the thought of parting from him."⁷⁰ Aaron detained "his Frank" at home several more years, but in 1841, he let the 17-year-old join Davis in the Dorchester tanning business. Mother Mary wrote, "Your Father feels rather sober at the thought of parting with Francis but hopes it will be for the best . . . But if his children must leave him, he wants to have them visit him as often as they can. He says why don't Avery come & see me, he has been a pretty good boy about coming home."⁷¹ When Charles set up his Worcester druggist shop, his father sent him a gift: a barrel of apples. Aaron's heartache

⁷⁰ Aaron White Sr. to Charles White, June 28, 1841. OSV

⁷¹ Mary White to Charles White, July 26, 1841. OSV.

was keen. His beloved sons had rejected his land, his farming identity, and the companionship of his mature years.

Choosing to Stay: For Better or Worse

Who, then, was *staying* in Boylston? During the turbulent period from 1826 to 1835, almost *all* of Boylston's sons who remained did so to farm.⁷² Some were men of merely moderate means, struggling to hold onto the family plot and meet their family's bare subsistence needs. But most Boylston men who remained in town were farmers of above-average means who owned or expected to own their own farms.⁷³ Wealth was the strongest predictor of who would stay. Age was another strong predictor: if a man reached age 40 and was still in Boylston, he was extremely likely to stay put. Finally, those born in town were more likely to stay in town.⁷⁴ Wealth, local birth, and advance to a settled age all provide the sort of roots and personal investment in a community that made men more likely to stay, and then to form a stable base against the growing parade of out-migrating youth.

⁷² Three quarter of all the sons who remained in town had fathers in the upper half of assessed wealth. See Appendix D.

⁷³ For 66 of the 71 sons who persisted in Boylston, the father's tax decile at age 50 can be determined. This allows us to determine the mean total wealth of fathers at approximately the age a son would be deciding to stay or to leave town. The mean tax decile for fathers of persisters is 3.79, considerably above the town-wide mean of 5.0. For statistics on persistence, see Appendix D.

⁷⁴ Four-fifths of all taxpayers in the top quintile (top 20%) remained in Boylston. Eighty-nine percent of the men who reached their 40th birthday in Boylston stayed in town for the rest of their life. Two-thirds of all persisters in the 1820 to 1840 period were men born in town (an increase from 50% in the previous twenty-year period).

During the first quarter of the century these fortunate Boylston-born persisters were joined by a small number of those who chose to move into Boylston – mostly from nearby towns –with enough resources to purchase a substantial estate. These affluent in-migrants, such as Aaron White, James Longley, and Hezekiah Gibbs, were quickly integrated into the community. They invested themselves in their land, raised their families in town, and eventually were buried in the town cemetery.⁷⁵

Reaping More: Aaron White's Strategy

These prosperous farmers turned their attention towards making their land produce more, so that they could meet their increased needs and desires for cash. For Aaron White's family, improvement was a favorite word: Mary urged young Charles to “improve his hours” with Bible study; Caroline wished him to “improve the opportunity” of hearing lectures in the city. “Improvement” would increase one's worth, be that spiritual, intellectual, or material. For Aaron, it meant seeking out new methods of farming and marketing surplus to increase his profits and better his family's life.

It would be wrong to say that in the 1820s Aaron White and his like-minded Boylston farmers “entered” the market in response to their crises of wants and needs. The people of Boylston had always marketed their surplus, whether by swapping with neighbors, exchanging farm goods for credit at the village store, or carrying an annual load of grain to Boston. This essential exchange was always, no matter how neighborly,

⁷⁵ These men few in-migrants who managed to carve out a permanent place in the community were all in the first or second decile of wealth. It was their wealth that allowed them to purchase their landed estate, and in Boylston, it was their landed estate that won them their positions of respect.

in some respects commercial.⁷⁶ Historians have debated whether this trading was oriented towards family maintenance or profit-seeking.⁷⁷ Aaron White would likely not have understood the distinction. He farmed primarily to meet his family's needs, but he also sought profits to better their standard of living and to provide for his children's security.⁷⁸ Getting the most that he could from his acres was part of his obligation to *improve* his farm; it increasingly became part of his strategy to meet, not just a rising need, but also a chorus of wants.

White's most obvious strategy, as a man of means, was to purchase more land. Between 1820 and 1830, he more than doubled his holdings, buying up his neighbor's parcels as they became available. By 1835 he owned two complete farms, one of which he let out, along with the "Eager place" and the "Fuller place," upland parcels from which he harvested English (planted) hay, grains, and fruit to add to the products of his

⁷⁶ Whether this swapping was "commercial" or needs-based is, as Daniel Vickers has said, immaterial. "The distinction between production for use and production for sale was sometimes recognizable and sometimes not, but it was never a matter of significance." Vickers, "Competency and Competition in Early America," *WMQ* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Jan. 1990), p. 7.

⁷⁷ Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America,"; Rothenberg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1855,"; Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860"; Vickers, "Competency and Competition in Early America."

⁷⁸ As Richard Bushman eloquently put it, "Market production implied not the abandonment of family values, but the reverse. Far from going reluctantly to market for fear of undermining their families, farmers went precisely to sustain and advance them. Market production not only raised the level of family comfort, but was essential for family perpetuation. In no other way could farmers accumulate land for their children except by selling farm goods." "Markets and Composite Farms in Early America," p. 364

home farm.⁷⁹ Most farmers could not afford to augment their acres so aggressively, and the growth of some farms, of course, came at the diminution of others. White was able to accumulate land because some of his neighbors – the Eagers, the Fullers, the Houghtons - - chose or were forced to sell. This growing disparity in the distribution of landed wealth marked the course of the first half of the nineteenth century in Boylston.⁸⁰

Taking advantage of the great improvements in roads, White enthusiastically threw his lot in with those new “book farmers,” whose ambition for improvement made them willing to experiment with new ways to increase productivity. He was typical of this new class of farmer: wealthier, more widely read, with more contacts in cosmopolitan communities, they put their faith in science and education and eagerly adopted innovations proposed by newly formed agricultural societies and the farm press.⁸¹ Not all Boylston farmers shared White’s enthusiasm for agricultural reform. One contemporary treated innovators dismissively, noting that Boylston farmers for the most part “are not so much attached to agricultural societies and *book* farming as some others.”⁸² Practical” farmers’ prejudice against new methods perhaps reflected their angst

⁷⁹ This information comes from collected references in the diary and letters of the White family. The Eager place yielded upland hay, grains, apples, and pastured some livestock the Fuller place yielded upland hay and oats.

⁸⁰ See Gini coefficients of Total and Real Property in Boylston by Decade, 1800-1850, in Appendix F, Distribution of Wealth. Kimenker documents the same increasing disparity in the distribution of landed wealth in Concord, from the mid-eighteenth century through the mid-nineteenth. Average farm size grew in Concord from 68 acres in 1840 to 93 acres in 1850. Kimenker, “The Concord Farmer,” pp. 143-4.

⁸¹ Atack, Bateman, and Parker, “The Farm, the Farmer, and the Market,” pp. 270-2.

⁸² Davenport, *History of Boylston*, p. 16.

at having been stripped of their status as bearers of essential folk knowledge, and also may have reflected a growing distrust of wealthy, calculating farmers whose interests had little to do with their practical concerns of supplying the family larder.⁸³

If Aaron White heard the sneers of some of his neighbors, he was not dissuaded. He and his family attended the Brighton or Worcester Cattle Shows each year for the latest news of advancements. He experimented with cattle breeding, and was likely tickled when *The American Farmer* gave special mention to the “fine ox, grass fed, half Denton, exhibited by Mr. White of Boylston” which “showed the disposition to early maturity of native stock when it is crossed with a short-horned breed of Great Britain” at the Brighton Cattle Show of 1826.⁸⁴ He rotated his tilled crops with clover hay, and used lime to improve the alkalinity of his soil.⁸⁵ He experimented with hot beds to give his vegetables and strawberries an early start.⁸⁶ Like other Boylston farmers by the 1820s,

⁸³ Kimenker cites the frustration of the agricultural press with the attitude of “practical farmers” and their resistance to farm improvements. He acknowledges that their distrust was sometimes merited, as some innovations were introduced by those “with an interest in the ventures they championed.” “The Concord Farmer,” p. 189.

⁸⁴ John Lowell, “Brighton Cattle Show Reports,” *The American Farmer*, No. 35, Vol. 8.1 (Baltimore, 1826), November 17, 1826, p. 275.

⁸⁵ Diary of Mary White, February 19, 1829; June 2, 1835. OSV. Rotating clover with tillage “fixes nitrogen from air, brings potassium and phosphorous from subsoil by deep, foraging roots.” Liming clover helped clover restore soil fertility. Brian Donahue, “Skinning the Land: Economic”: Economic Growth and the Ecology of Farming in 19th Century Massachusetts,” (Unpublished paper, Brandeis University, October, 1980), p. 18. Mary did not indicate *where* on his farm Aaron used the casks of lime.

⁸⁶ Diary of Mary White, March 15, 1830. OSV.

White planted potatoes, whose tolerance for acidic soils made them better yielders than most grains.⁸⁷ And he manured and mucked, mucked and manured, season after season.

From the mid 1820s on, White consistently traded surpluses of poultry and butter, corn, oats, and potatoes, fruit and cider vinegar, along with several pigs, a cow and a calf each.⁸⁸ Much of this was an extension of his earlier neighborly exchanges; in fact, many of the trades mentioned in the White family diaries and letters continued to be made within the community, or, in the case of fatted cows and oxen, with men in neighboring towns. By 1828, however, it is clear that White was also making regular use of the marketer, sending small quantities of surplus butter, fruit and freshly killed pork or fowl to the Boston market on a weekly basis.⁸⁹ Larger quantities of oats, corn, and hay were

⁸⁷ Donahue, *The Great Meadow*, p. 207.

⁸⁸ No farm account book survives for White. However diary and letter references from the period 1827 to 1843 refer to the following. It appears that White sent about 150 bu of corn to market, in addition to what he grew for his family. He grew around 60 bu of oats, 50 of which he sent to market. He harvested approximately 25 to 30 bu of rye and 18 bu of wheat per year, all, apparently for home use. He raised up to 114 bu of potatoes a year, but mentioned selling only in small quantities of less than 20 bu. He sent from 11 to 26 barrels of apples a year to market, along with several hogsheds of vinegar. He usually sent a calf and two pigs to market, while trading a fatted cow or two and his fattened oxen to men in neighboring Shrewsbury and Northborough. Mary records churning, or having her girls or help churn, packing and sending to market butter in quantities as small as a few lbs to up to large batches of 45 or more pounds. Fowls were killed, plucked, and shipped in quantities ranging from six to eighteen at a time.

⁸⁹ The White family's relationship with the town's marketman is illustrated in a letter from father Aaron to Charles, who lived in Boston: "Mr. Rice whom I have directed to call on you with this [letter] has taken Baxter Woods' old stand close by us and will be our Marketer in future which we consider will be a great accommodation to us. His day to be in the market will be on Wednesday and you will call on him on that day and let the late marketer Mr. Wood alone. Not that we have anything against him but his living so far from us [Baxter Wood had recently removed from Boylston to Lancaster] has been a great inconvenience to us and we wish to do all we can to support and encourage Mr.

dispatched at harvest to Worcester County buyers who supplied new commercial and manufacturing villages; by the 1830s, White was sending barrels of apples and cider vinegar directly to Worcester retailers.⁹⁰

White's farming – and marketing – methods represent not a radical break with custom but a gradual extension and intensification of it. He traded surplus, but more of it. He traded locally, but also via marketer and directly to retailers, all while continuing to practice diversified family farming. And he was not alone. Between 1800 and 1850, Boylston farmers increased the number of acres devoted to tillage (saleable grains and potatoes) by a sixth and improved their tillage output by more than a quarter. More telling, their crop choices reflected changing market demands, as their production of humble rye fell by two-thirds, while their output of high demand oats nearly tripled.⁹¹ Even men of sturdy yeoman ideals, like Aaron White, were coming to understand ways that they could harvest much-needed cash from their land.

Yet, trading at a distance was a profoundly different relationship from trading with neighbors. Aaron had been accustomed to knowing the people who consumed his farm goods, imbuing his produce with a value beyond its marketable price. Farming was “good” work because it was life-sustaining for family and community. As Aaron and his

Rice. You must find out where he stands [in the Boylston market] and call on him as you did on Mr. Woods and send your bundles to us by him.” March 19, 1839.

⁹⁰ Of 33 diary entries referring to trades outside of Boylston, two-thirds were for marketer trips to Boston, six were trips to Worcester, and the rest were scattered trades in the neighboring towns of Shrewsbury and Northborough. Only one trade was recorded outside Worcester County, and that was fatted oxen to Westfield, in western Mass.

⁹¹ See Aggregate chart in Appendix E.

fellow farmers sent more and more of their goods to distant, impersonal markets, they received in exchange the cash they wanted, but they forfeited relations of neighborly interdependence and community sustenance. With the intimate tie between growing and consuming broken, Aaron's relationship to his land subtly transformed.

Clearing Profits - Joseph Flagg's Strategy

Joseph Flagg was fifteen years younger than Aaron White; his approach to farming, however, was in many ways a generation ahead. Flagg was from an old Boylston family, a clan of "thrifty, enterprising" men. When still a young man, he inherited the lion's share of his father's large farm, along with heavy debts to his siblings for their share of the estate.⁹² Fortunately, he also inherited his father's enterprising nature, and he succeeded both in settling his obligations and enlarging his estate.

Flagg's account book survives for two decades (1827-1846), revealing the strategies he followed to reap the most from his land. In many ways, the book shows a continuation of customary practices of family farming and neighborly trading. Entries cover the entire range of farm products – from grains, dairy, meat and vegetables to hay, wood, and cider. His family likely took their share for consumption before the rest entered his account book, and the great majority of trades were local.⁹³ His exchanges

⁹² Will and Partition of Real Estate for Benjamin Flagg, Worcester County Probate Docket 21133, Vol. 42, pp.624-625 and Vol. 43, pp. 241-248, MA. Also, manuscript notes of George Wright on Flagg Family, BHS.

⁹³ A quarter of all Flagg's trades were with his closest neighbors, the Brewers. We can determine the residence of 95 of the 106 people with whom Flagg traded. Of those, 70% lived in Boylston. The 95 traders whose residence is known made a total of 1302 trades with Flagg, valued at \$3482. Boylston trades amounted to 78% of the total, and 64% of the value. This pattern of heavy trading with close neighbors was characteristic of social and economic networks of farmers' accounts.

peaked in the months of plowing, when he could trade the labor of his draft animals and his nearly-grown sons.⁹⁴ He continued the ancient custom of keeping running accounts, with each debtor having his own page.⁹⁵

But in other ways, Flagg was enterprising indeed. He seems to have purposely planned a surplus in at least one crop each year, usually alternating oats, corn, and hay.⁹⁶ In addition, he sold timber from his woodlot and pastured other men's cattle, "fattening them" for market, as he did for Aaron White in the summer of 1837.⁹⁷ He exploited his tillage, meadow, pasture and woodlot in ways that would maximize his likelihood of achieving a cash return.⁹⁸ Flagg's book also reveals expanded ways of reaching a market: He sold directly to Worcester and Shrewsbury shopkeepers and taverners.⁹⁹ He recorded market trips to area mill towns.¹⁰⁰ He sometimes sold whole fields of hay ("piece of grass") or lots of timber "in the woods" directly to buyers who were

⁹⁴ Of the 963 entries for which a month is indicated, 330 fall in April, May or June.

⁹⁵ On average, his debtors took over a year to make payment; in some cases, debts were left on his book for a decade or longer. For first third of traders listed alphabetically (37 out of 108), average length to repay (unweighted by frequency of trade) was 14.8 months.

⁹⁶ See Appendix K for Flagg's major surplus trades.

⁹⁷ Diary of Mary White, Aug. 17, 1837. OSV.

⁹⁸ See Appendix K entry for Flagg Account Book activity.

⁹⁹ Flagg sold large quantities of corn and wood to Worcester taverner Gilbert Haven (5 trades in 1826-8 valued at \$121); Samuel Woodman, possibly of Worcester, purchased large quantities of oats and wood (43 trades in 1833-5 valued at \$349); "Mr. Hewit" bought cider to sell in his Worcester store in 1844.

¹⁰⁰ These trips were made by Flagg for other farmers. He charged them for hauling their goods to market in Shrewsbury, Worcester, and eight other Worcester County mill towns. See Appendix K.

responsible for harvesting; he charged an additional amount for delivering these goods to the purchaser. And he worked with the marketing firms that emerged in Worcester County during the 1830s and '40s as its commercial and mill centers began to replace Boston as the primary market for farm goods. The firms, like "Bartlett and Warren," with whom Flagg worked, simplified the process of selling farm products by combining several steps that farmers had previously arranged for separately. Bartlett and Warren, for example, bought cattle directly from the farmer, then butchered, dressed, and delivered the product to market. Though they took a percentage of profit, they paid the farmer in cash, directly upon delivery of his cattle, rather than after its sale in the market.¹⁰¹ They also decreased local farmers' dependence on the services of their neighborhood cooper and butchers, unraveling ancient webs of local interdependency.

Like most Worcester County farmers, Flagg knew the cost of labor, and varied his charge for a day's work depending upon the season, the task, and the age or skill of the man – or boy – whose labor he was lending. Like other "improving" farmers, he knew the "going price" in city markets for his commodities and adjusted his charges accordingly.¹⁰² Flagg's price fluctuations for oats, corn, and hay also reveal his new

¹⁰¹ Baker and Izard, "New England Farmers and the Marketplace," pp. 41-2. The authors cite William Harlow, who stated that by the 1840s, Worcester County farmers took their produce to the shire town rather than to Boston. Harlow, "Historical Sketch of the Town of Shrewsbury," in D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Worcester County Massachusetts*, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia J.W. Lewis & Co., 1889), pp. 802-3.

¹⁰² "Worcester County farmers were attuned sufficiently to comparatively distant markets for these commodities that their account books registered their price shifts with considerable precision and speed." Jack Larkin, "Accounting for Change." See also Rothenberg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers," and Rothenberg, *Markets and Marketplaces*.

dependence on market vicissitudes.¹⁰³ A farmer producing mostly for family needs, who sold only a small surplus on the market for incidental cash, would be little affected by speculative fevers or crashes. Flagg, however, who was increasingly reliant on larger sales of a few commodities, felt his fortunes rise with the speculative fever of the early 1830s – and crash with the national economic contraction following the panic of 1837.¹⁰⁴

Joseph Flagg was surely savvy. One entry records his personal innovation in turning resources to cash: a rent-to-own agreement for a cow!¹⁰⁵ But the decisions he made to maximize short-term profits had long-term consequences for both the ecology and community of Boylston. Flagg was no longer practicing sustainable farming.

For example, Flagg could increase his immediate profits if he clear-cut his woodlots, selling the wood as timber and fuel. He could plant the cleared land to upland hay or grain, which would also yield saleable surpluses of corn, oats and hay for a short while. However, without sufficient fertilizing, these fields would soon run down. For Flagg himself, this was not an issue, for ultimately he would turn the land to pasture, realizing yet more profits by fattening other men's cattle and raising some of his own to sell for beef. His arrangement with Barlett and Warren, the beef marketing firm, is particularly telling, for Flagg was not their debtor, but their creditor; *he* was pasturing *their* many cattle (and some sheep), stock that they had purchased from area farmers and

¹⁰³ See Appendix K for Comparison of Joseph Flagg's Corn and Potato prices with Rothenberg Price Index, 1833-43.

¹⁰⁴ This rise and fall is graphed in Appendix K.

¹⁰⁵ "April 3 1843, Agreement maid between Flagg and Brighman & Ball. He repeated the arrangement with "Mr. Newton" the following week.

were holding and fattening for sale during the late autumn slaughter. It did not concern Flagg that he would not have hay to feed these many creatures over the winter, for they would not be wintered with him. They would be returned, fatted, to their owners and likely slaughtered at that point for consumption or sale. It was what one western Massachusetts contemporary called “skinning the land”: “cutting off wood and timber, selling hay, and sometimes what little grain they raise, to the [Connecticut River Valley] farmers, ‘running’ their mowing lands and then turning them into pasturage. In short, taking all they can from the land and returning nothing.”¹⁰⁶

Gross exportation of nutrients, in the form of timber, grain, hay, and beef, brought Flagg cash, but at the cost of destroying the delicate ecological balance that had kept family farms producing a “comfortable subsistence” throughout the colonial era. And Flagg was far from the only offender. The transformation was visible to the eye in the rapid deforestation of the countryside. In one Worcester County town, a resident estimated that land was three-quarters cleared in 1830, and nearly completely deforested by 1850.¹⁰⁷ Equally alarming was the degradation of pasture land. Overgrazed and underfertilized, pastures produced less and less edible fodder, eventually deteriorating to prickly fields, stubby with inedible juniper and cedar. In 1800, three acres of Boylston pasture would support a cow; by 1850, it took five acres.¹⁰⁸ At the turn of the century,

¹⁰⁶ J.M. Smith, Franklin County, Mass., 1865, quoted by Donahue, “Skinning the Land,” p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ Hugh M. Raup, “The View from John Sanderson’s Farm: A Perspective for the Use of the Land,” *Forest History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Apr., 1966), p. 4. Raup indicates the land was 77% cleared in 1830 and 90% in 1850.

Boylston farmers held a quarter of their land as pasture; by 1850, grazing their livestock took 40 percent of their acres.¹⁰⁹ Farmers like Flagg had shifted their priorities from family sustenance and preservation of the homestead to earning cash as a way to purchase their families' needs and desires, in the process dramatically transforming their relationship with the land. And in fact, in 1846, Joseph Flagg sold his ancestral farm and moved his family to a new estate in neighboring Berlin.¹¹⁰

The Transition to Commercial Farming

The coming of the railroad in 1835 assisted in the final stage of Boylston's slow transition to commercial agriculture. With cheap and rapid transport, farmers could send perishable products to cities and mill villages. Equally important, farmers of means could purchase cheap wheat arriving by rail from the west for their own consumption and feed their cows their oats and corn. This removed the limitation on stock-keeping that had traditionally come from dependence on hay as a winter feed; in addition, feeding their cows corn instead of hay also made them more productive milkers.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ See Aggregate Valuation in Appendix E. Yields for tillage and hay remained relatively stable during the same period. After deducting for flax production, tillage fields in 1800 Boylston produced about 22.4 bushels per acres; in 1850, they produced 22.9. Hay fields in 1800 produced .82 tons per acres in 1850, when they were mostly upland English hay, they produced .84 tons per acre.

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix E, "1784 and 1850 Comparison of Boylston Farms by land ratios."

¹¹⁰ George Wright, manuscript notes in "Flagg Family Records" File, BHS.

¹¹¹ Feed grain increased the protein fed to cows and raised milk flow. In time, Worcester County farmers replaced not just winter feed, but pasture grazing, with imported grains. They essentially redistributed nutrients, importing grains from the west and exporting milk, butter, and cheese to eastern cities and manufacturing villages. Donahue, "Skinning the Land," p. 23-30.

Boylston's larger farmers, then, could begin to specialize in dairying. The shift was gradual, but by mid-century it is clear that a subset of farmers was focusing more of their energies on producing surplus butter to export. The shift likely depended not just on how many cows a farmer could keep, but also on how much butter or cheese his wife, daughters, and hired help could produce. It is clear, from Mary's diary, that this was not the White family's principal or sole economic activity. Mary churned butter or "had butter churned" when her daughters were home from school or visiting, a niece came to live with the family, or when an "excellent help" (as Caroline called it) lived in. Mary might send 40 pounds of butter to market one week, then none for the next few, as other needs interfered. Cumulatively, though, by 1850 Boylston's larger farmers were producing more butter for sale. Fully one-third produced 500 pounds or more per year, far in excess of domestic consumption.¹¹²

Meanwhile, the town's more affluent farmers were also producing significant marketable surpluses of corn and oats, potatoes and pork.¹¹³ Like the Whites' surplus, these goods took various paths to market, some still swapped with a neighbor, some riding to town on Baxter Wood's market cart, some carted by Joseph Flagg's sons to nearby mill villages, some sold directly to a shop keeper in Worcester. However they got to market, surplus farm goods were increasingly seen as the path to improvement.

¹¹² U.S. Agricultural Census of 1850. The family consumption of butter is based on a nineteenth century estimate of per person butter use peaking at 19 lbs per person. Lee A. Craig, Barry Goodwin, and Thomas Grennes, "The Effect of Mechanical Refrigeration on Nutrition in the United States, *Social Science History*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004), p. 327. Family butter production in excess of 150 lbs is assumed to be marketable surplus. About 90% of Boylstonions *who owned farms* produced more than 150 pounds of butter a year.

¹¹³ Appendix I, Marketable Surplus.

Farming to market, and depending increasingly on cash as a medium of exchange, would transform traditional relationships of interdependence and neighborly cooperation.

The important qualifier was that market participation was mainly limited to *those who owned large farms*. By 1850, fewer than half of Boylston's taxpayers owned a farm, and some of those who did manage to hold onto some land were marginal men. They farmed to survive, producing some of what they needed and trading their labor to wealthier neighbors for the rest. It is to those who sold their labor that we turn now.

Working For a Living: Hired Help

Family was the primary source of farm labor in New England; one historian has called farmers' sons the North's "unfree labor."¹¹⁴ By the mid-eighteenth century, however, it became more common for young men to spend several years "working out" for a neighbor who was short on hands.¹¹⁵ During such a stint they not only learned the farm trade, but also accumulated wages. Hired hands usually agreed to six-month contracts, covering the period from planting through harvest, April-September, or for one calendar year. There was no stigma attached to laboring for another man like this. The ambitious sons of wealthy farmer Joseph Flagg worked out, just as Flagg had hired the sons of other prosperous farm neighbors on contract when his own boys were too young

¹¹⁴ Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 83.

¹¹⁵ This transition is likely related to the maturation of New England farming communities. Not only had much of the labor-intensive work of "making land" been completed, but fathers without land to bequeath lost some leverage over sons' labor choices. Fred Anderson documents these conditions in *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War*, Chap. 2. Kimenker claims that hiring labor beyond family was rare before 1800 in Concord, Mass. "The Concord Farmer," p. 184.

to work. At the same time, the able-bodied son of a poor farmer was equally acceptable as contract labor. Aaron White hired sons of both poor and wealthy neighbors, usually paying them wages but sometimes crediting goods to their fathers' store accounts.

These local "helps" lived in and became one of the family, working alongside their employer and his sons in the field, sharing his dinner table. Mary White's diary is filled with references to clothing, nursing, evangelizing and socializing with her husband's hired hands, some of whom returned for family visits for years after their contract ended. The "cousinhood" of traditional farm communities made it easy for these familiar sons of neighbors and peers to be temporarily absorbed into another's family. Meanwhile, the hired help's own parents lived within the community, providing a check on youthful exuberance and a safe haven if the youth should become homesick. (Mary recorded each time one of the hired hands went home for a day's visit to kin.) Traditional working out, then, was a transitional state that provided predictability and control for employers and supervised training for youth.¹¹⁶

After 1830, however, the labor situation in Boylston noticeably changed. The heavy out-migration of Boylston sons left a void, and farmers struggled to find the native help they needed. Squire White had hired a succession of sons of local men as contract

¹¹⁶ Jack Larkin's study of male hired help during the first half of the nineteenth century in neighboring Shrewsbury indicates that before 1800 these men were predominantly from nearby, nearly always from Massachusetts. They were generally young, unmarried, and mobile, learning their trade but still connected to their local home. They were "integrated into family and into communal time off for militia training, town meetings, elections days, Fourth of July, etc." Helps, he notes were from both wealthy and marginal status, as this marked a widespread "transitional stage" in young farm boys lives. Jack Larkin, "Labor is the Great Thing in Farming": The Farm Laborers of the Ward Family of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, 1787-1860," *PAAS* Vol. 99, No. 1 (1989), pp. 201-15.

workers through the mid '30s, but by 1837 he was forced to scour the greater countryside for help. In mid-March, as the start of the farming season approached, Caroline confessed to her brother Charles, "He [Aaron] knows not what to do . . . he can hire no one for any sum."¹¹⁷ Finally, just as the farm season began, White's son-in-law found Lucius Barnes, a 24-year-old stranger from a far-western Worcester County town. Barnes signed on for nine months, and when he left at the end of his term Aaron White was once again scrambling for help. He was delighted to keep Joseph Flagg's son Lincoln for two years, and dismayed when Flagg's eventual departure left him once again resorting to unfamiliar men from far away. Joseph Flagg had a similar experience. Before 1834, he hired only local youth, most of them young men awaiting inheritances. By the mid-1830s, however, such prospects disappeared; from then on Flagg was forced to resort to poor men already married, with families to support. These men rented part of Flagg's house and also charged essential household needs such as grains, meat, and wood against their accounts; by the end of their terms, they had little gain to show for their labor.

The changes in White's and Flagg's hired labor represent a dramatic demographic transformation occurring in Boylston during the conflicted era of the 1820s and 1830s. Three-quarters of Boylston's sons were leaving town, yet, during the time of this exodus, the number of male taxpayers in town was consistently rising.¹¹⁸ Boylston's home-grown

¹¹⁷ Caroline White to Charles White, March 18, 1837. OSV.

¹¹⁸ See chart of population and taxpayers in Appendix C. A decline in total population with a rise in taxpayers likely indicates that out-migrating families with children (counted as population but not as taxpayers) were being replaced by young single men of taxpaying age. Note also that the high male sex ratio in Boylston during the 1830s and 40s is likely indication of predominantly male in-migration. The male to female sex ratio

youth were being replaced by an in-migration of young workers, most of them poor and from beyond the borders of Worcester County.¹¹⁹ They came looking for cash wages, hoping to accumulate enough to move on to a better position elsewhere. Meanwhile, these workers had to be absorbed into the families and extended households of Boylston's farmers.

Most in-migrants did not – could not -- set down roots in Boylston. Most stayed in town fewer than five years before moving on, and that high transience rate does not reflect youth from age sixteen to twenty, a most likely age for hiring out. Moreover, as the period progressed, more of these youth were coming to Boylston from a distant place of birth. In 1820, most in-migrants to Boylston were from a Worcester County town, and the rest from some other Massachusetts town. By 1850, only one-sixth came from a local town, while the greatest share came from outside Massachusetts, even outside of the United States. French Canadian and English immigrants, as well as Irish workers migrating into central Worcester County after completing work on the Blackstone Canal, added their accents to Boylston's Yankee tones. These transients, increasingly alien, become a significant fraction of Boylston's 1830s population.¹²⁰

in Boylston rose from .97 in 1820 to 1.025 in 1830 and 1.015 in 1840 before falling back to a more normal .996 in 1850.

¹¹⁹ A study of the in-migrants on Boylston's tax list (those non-local men who appeared on a tax list for the first time), we see that the number of in-migrants as a percent of the total population ran between twenty to thirty-five percent of the population between 1820 and 1850. More tellingly, these in-migrants were increasingly younger men, with an average age dropping to 26 in the critical 1830 to 1835 period. At the same time, their mean wealth decile dropped dramatically, from 6.78 in 1820 to 8.66 by 1840. By 1830 the *median* wealth of in-migrants was an utterly destitute 10.0. See charts in Appendix D.

It is hard to imagine how the close, homogenous, kin-based people of Boylston adapted to incorporating these strangers into their homes. They were culturally unfamiliar to be sure. Mary worried intensely about the rise of Catholicism as Irish Catholics began to appear in town as hired helps and domestics in 1835.¹²¹ Within a year, Mary was praying for protection from “Romanism,” fearing “the Roman Catholics, that their influence may not destroy our liberties and bring down upon us the judgments of heaven.”¹²² Worried about what she viewed as a frightening increase in the incidence of crime, she reported each robbery and assault in neighboring towns. In 1837, an unknown man attempted to break into the White family house at night by using a ladder to gain access to a second-story window. His attempt was foiled by Caroline, who, writing a letter to Charles by candlelight, saw the intruder and sounded an alarm. Mary reported the incident in detail and prayed, “May the Lord protect us in our state.”¹²³ Mary also reported when Aaron’s horse was stolen; when her brother-in-law’s barn was destroyed by arson; and when by a robbery took place at midday in neighboring Hubbardston and “the robber escaped, the man robbed injured but not mortally.” The perils of engaging with strangers was brought home to Boylston when a visiting preacher, who took the

¹²⁰ Larkin’s study of hired help in neighboring Shrewsbury reflects Boylston’s experience. After 1830, none of the Ward family helps came from Shrewsbury, only a few were local, and those born anywhere in Massachusetts dropped below fifty percent. Most were now from northern New England, Nova Scotia, French Canada, and Ireland. “Labor is the Great Thing in Farming,” p. 218.

¹²¹ Boylston historian Bill Dupuis claims that the first Irish immigrants began to arrive in Boylston in 1835 (likely migrating north after finishing work on the Blackstone Canal.

¹²² Diary of Mary White, March 28, 1836; also December 9, 1839. OSV.

¹²³ Diary of Mary White, July 20, 1837. OSV.

pulpit on an April Sunday in 1830, was exposed two weeks later as a prison escapee posing as an itinerant minister.¹²⁴

Even when unfamiliar hired help were law-abiding, they were less reliable and harder to retain.¹²⁵ They had no parents or extended kin nearby to enforce parental authority, no local roots to bind them. It was not uncommon for dissatisfied foreign help simply to leave, abandoning their contracts for better situations elsewhere. Caroline wrote apologetically to her brother Charles that their cousin Avery would not be able to make a promised visit to Boston in the late 1830s “because his father’s hired men have taken French leave in the night.”¹²⁶ Most notable, however, was a change in the nature of the working conditions. The familiarity and kinship ties of employers and their help declined and tensions rose when differing work traditions and expectations collided. Mr. Ward of neighboring Shrewsbury regretted the loss of his good native hired hand to the West, and complained of the poor work habits of immigrant workers after 1840. “As he is Irish, I must take Irish pay [that is, nothing] for the balance.”¹²⁷

And yet, if the farmers of Boylston were to have help at all, they had to hire – and board – these unfamiliar, culturally alien newcomers; by 1850, both Mary White and Joseph Flagg’s heir had Irish domestics in their kitchen and Irish hands in their barns.

¹²⁴ *Salem Gazette*, April 20, 1830. Vol. VIII, Issue 32, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Larkin, “Labor is the Great Thing in Farming,” p. 219.

¹²⁶ Caroline White to Charles White, no date (between 1837 and 1840), OSV. “French leave” is leaving without permission or announcement, a phrase with military roots in either the French and Indian or the Napoleonic conflict.

¹²⁷ Larkin, “Labor is the Great Thing in Farming,” p. 225.

Moreover, their high turnover rate meant that they were moving in and out of their homes on a regular basis. The nature of live-in hired help forced Boylstonians to confront new issues of difference and otherness – at home.

Eventually, the shortage of long-term contract help forced Worcester County farmers to rely more on day help. Day laborers had always been a part of the Boylston work force, as peak work periods required extra hands. White hired extra men for the work of haying and raking, reaping and threshing, and getting his wood in from the woodlot. He also hired by-the-job for specialized work, such as butchering, laying stone, or doing carpentry work. Most of these day helps were near neighbors, and many of them were poorer men who sold their labor to fill out what their undersized farms could not provide.¹²⁸ Francis was thrilled when his father hired three extra men for the harvest; Caroline was not, as their presence greatly increased her duties in the laundry and the kitchen. (And, to her annoyance, they brought bed-bugs, a secret she told Charles not to share for the shame it would bring on her housekeeping!)

In time, though, as contract labor became more scarce, mention of poor local men doing day work for Aaron increasingly appeared in Mary's diary. Abishai Crossman came to hay and plant, Joseph Eager to butcher hogs, Abel Farwell to chop wood, Benjamin Sawtell to husk and thresh. All were local, and all were poor. Some, with modest holdings and artisan skills, worked to supplement their meager subsistence. Others, like Benjamin Sawtell, were propertyless; they rented houses and sold their labor

¹²⁸ There were exceptions to this for haying season. Mr. Bush and Mr. Abbot, among Boylston's most prosperous, lent a hand at this time of year. When the need was pressing, most farmers were willing to lend a hand, knowing that they might need the same.

to wealthier farmers to survive. As a study of neighboring Shrewsbury has shown, the increased use of day labor subtly changed the nature of exchange relationships that had long marked traditional agrarian communities. These were no longer exchanges of equality or reciprocity. Wealthy farmers needed only labor and the poor day laborers had nothing to give *but* labor. This was no “changing of works”; Boylston’s poorer farmers had slipped from independent yeomen to dependent laborers.¹²⁹ Nor, like the struggling Benjamin Sawtell, whose wages from Joseph Flagg barely covered his rent and charges for family necessities, were they likely to advance. Evidence “suggests strongly that opportunity on the land through farm labor was virtually blocked” by mid-century in Worcester County towns such as Boylston and Shrewsbury.¹³⁰

Female Help

Mary White found it even more difficult to find female domestic help. In 1834, after the marriages and departure of her daughter and adopted niece, Mary went in search of a girl to assist her in her housework. She tried to engage Maria Curtis of Shrewsbury, but Maria declined. She took in an orphan girl named Nancy Fielding, but found her unsuitable. For two years she and her daughters searched fruitlessly in the neighborhood, finally securing a girl, Mary Giles, from Essex County who was known to a neighbor. Mary Giles stayed for less than a year before leaving for a better housekeeping offer elsewhere. In 1839, Mary sent her son Thomas out to scour the countryside “in pursuit of

¹²⁹ Larkin, “Labor is the Great Thing in Farming,” pp. 195-201.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 217. Sawtell’s story is nearly identical to that of another laborer, John A. Woods, who rented and worked for Flagg for several years in the late 1830s. Wood labored for a quarter century in Boylston and never accumulated property.

a girl to do house work.” He located “a Miss Whitaker” from another Worcester County town, and engaged her “on trial.” After only a month, however, Lucinda Whitaker decided she would prefer to work in a factory. In 1841, Mary was delighted to retain her townswoman Clarissa Osgood, but after a year, Clarissa left, as she had “decided not to go out to work.” Those local women who stayed in Boylston increasingly chose options other than working in another women’s house.

Mary’s problem was shared by farmwives throughout the area.¹³¹ Part of the problem was an emerging urban and middle class ideology of domesticity, which elevated domestic nurturing and moral cultivation while demoting domestic *work*, an ideal that simply was unfeasible on the farm. Part lay in the accurate perception of domestic farm work as strenuous and wearing. But mostly, young farm women who once “went out” to work for their neighbors now had more attractive options, especially in Worcester County. Boylston girls could – and did – choose to work in urban households, to go to nearby factories, to teach, or to work at several different forms of outwork.¹³²

For example, while Mary White pursued female household help, her daughters pursued their own options. Before her marriage, Elizabeth went to New Haven for a year to live with and work for a family that was friends of her parents. Mary and Caroline both took turns teaching in district schools. Boylston female teachers earned \$10 a month for teaching the summer term, less than half what male teachers earned, but to Caroline, who

¹³¹ Holly Izard found similar results in her study of the Ward family female helps. “The Ward Family and their ‘Helps’: Domestic Work, Workers, and Relationships on a New England Farm, 1787-1866,” *PAAS*, Vol. 103, No. 1, (1992), pp. 61-90.

¹³² Izard makes a similar observation about rural Worcester County women’s options in the 1830s and afterward. “The Ward Family and their Helps,” pp. 85-86.

confessed to her brother that she was “poverty struck” and “desperately needing some honest cash,” it was welcome. Caroline and Mary also did various forms of home-based “outwork,” such as braiding straw for bonnet makers, binding shoe uppers for local shoemakers, and feeding mulberry leaves to a neighbor’s hungry silkworms. Their goal was to earn some “honest cash” -- the stuff of their independence – in any way *but* going out to do domestic work.

Like male farm hands, live-in hired women increasingly tended to come from elsewhere – first from distant towns and eventually from Ireland – and be less culturally familiar.¹³³ And, as Mary White had greater difficulty finding anyone willing to live-in, she increasingly hired poor women to do tasks by the day. So Mrs. Simpson came on laundry day, Mrs. McLure came to scour and scrub, Mrs. Eager to assist with housework. Like a domestic piecework system, “chores were splintered into discrete categories of work and handled by women who resided in separate households within the community.”¹³⁴ Mary paid these women in cash.¹³⁵

Both male and female hired help in Boylston gradually became more culturally heterogeneous, alien, poor and transient. Even in this utterly agrarian farm town, classes of haves and have nots, with divergent interests and a range of identities, was emerging.

¹³³ Holly Izard’s study of the Ward’s female helps also found that they tended to become younger and poorer over time. I was not able to document such a change for the White family. Izard, “The Ward Family Helps,” pp. 85-6.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 79.

¹³⁵ In the back leaf of her diary, Mary recorded Mrs. Simpson’s wage for a days laundering: of 33 cents, about a third of a man’s daily wage for farm work.

Consequences for Traditional Agrarian Community

The responses Boylstonians made to the limits and opportunities they encountered in the second quarter of the nineteenth century transformed the community. They reshaped relations between neighbors, between locals and strangers, between farmers and their help, between farmers and their land, and between the generations. They freed some from earlier dependencies and bound others in new relations of dependence. They created, and emphasized, difference and distinction. They helped remake Boylston as a pluralist, more modern community.

Mobility brought about the demise of the “cousinhood” – the broad and dense network of extended kin and interdependent neighbors. In 1800, nearly two-thirds of the town’s residents represented early settler families; by 1850, those settlers’ descendents had dwindled to less than a third.¹³⁶ Boylston’s offspring were leaving, while the inflow of young migrants were on the whole too transient, too culturally different, and too poor to marry into established families and weave themselves into the web of extended family relationships. The familiar kith-and-kin community that had grown from generations of inter-marriage and living within each other’s households must have been strained by high rates of out-migration and transience. Neighborly lending, swapping, and long-term credit were predicated on a stable, familiar network of people whose history of reliable reciprocity built trust. Increased mobility disrupted traditional agrarian interdependence and put a new premium on the value of being able to provide for oneself.

The in-migration of those who were increasingly unfamiliar meant that the native

¹³⁶ In 1800, 102 of 163 taxpayers were from the 20 founding families listed earlier; in 1850, 79 of the 259 taxpayers were from those same families.

people of Boylston were constantly confronted with difference. Non-local speech, patterns of behavior and dress might be easily absorbed in a community that was overwhelmingly native-born, but as the percentage of out-migrants increased, Boylstonians were forced to acknowledge that their ways were not the only ways. In-migrants brought new ideas, alien religious beliefs, and unfamiliar cultural ways. How could there be a close-knit community among those who had so little in common?

Selective mobility also led to a community striated by age and wealth. Those native sons who stayed tended to be those who were invested in the land: they were established men with families and significant landed estates. Their wealth, age, and deep roots brought them respect and elected office. This privileged “class,” able to purchase or hire rather than borrow to fulfill their needs and wants, gradually weaned themselves of neighborly interdependence. Their increasing use of piecework labor and cash wages freed them from traditional bonds of reciprocity. The growing concentration of wealth in Boylston significantly strained old norms of interdependence, which were based on a general sense of equality rooted in the understanding that every farmer depended upon his neighbors to survive.¹³⁷

The privileged, independent status of wealthy landowners stood in stark contrast to that of poorer persisters, small farmers and artisans who survived by trading their labor to their wealthier neighbors. Their dependence deepened. Even if their ownership of a few acres of land allowed them to call themselves farmers, they could not produce

¹³⁷ Baker and Izard note the same erosion of interdependence among the wealthier farmers of neighboring Shrewsbury who were able to maintain a higher lever of self-sufficiency than their neighbors. “New England Farmers and the Marketplace,” p. 51.

enough to free themselves from their need for “neighborly assistance.” By 1850, fewer than half of those who owned farms in Boylston could afford to keep their own oxen; a third of the men who died in Boylston in the second half of the nineteenth century owned no plow.¹³⁸ As the interests of the poor and wealthy farmers increasingly diverged, the former group had little to gain from plans for new and improved roads; tensions rose dramatically in town meeting in the second quarter of the nineteenth century over road and bridge improvements. Vital to the interests of marketing farmers, these roads were to their poorer neighbors merely a factor in the town’s ever-burgeoning tax bill.¹³⁹ In Worcester County towns where wealthy farmers proposed private toll roads over post road improvements, middling and struggling farmers protested that such a move was “against the general interest.”¹⁴⁰ Public debates over roads, schools, and support of the poor were often marked with “much warmth” and “considerable debate” as different elements of Boylston’s society contested these now-conflicting interests.¹⁴¹

Opposed to both native groups were the young transients, the town’s alien invaders with no roots or ties to community. Their presence changed the nature of work in the field and kitchen. The potential for conflict between employers and laborers had already escalated, as new pressures to increase surplus drove farmers to intensify work

¹³⁸ See Appendix F for figures. Gross confirms similar holdings in Concord. “Culture and Cultivation,” p. 52.

¹³⁹ See minutes of Boylston town meetings.

¹⁴⁰ Having private turnpikes supercede public post roads was protested as “very injurious” to the general welfare, enriching the investors at the expense of the common farmer. See Baker and Izard, “New England Farmers and the Marketplace,” p. 35.

¹⁴¹ Records of Boylston Town Meeting, Clerk’s Record Book, BHS.

and dispense with traditional leisurely rhythms and patterns of farm work.¹⁴² But the camaraderie and shared identity that had marked earlier group labor were further blunted by cultural and ethnic difference. When workers had been the sons of neighbors or extended kin, their co-residence and shared labor had seemed natural and had strengthened communal bonds. Now that they were so much easier to see as “other,” their close proximity served more to heighten perceptions of difference.¹⁴³ “Service” in another man’s field or another woman’s kitchen, once a reciprocal or familial relation, became less personal, devolving to a wage relation, allowing both employer and worker to identify the other as other, in nature and in interest.¹⁴⁴ In the words of historian Robert Gross, “a calculating, even suspicious spirit dominated the relations between farmers and their help. Where once farm boys had labored for their fathers out of duty, love, and an expectation that they would inherit land of their own someday, now it was money – and money alone – that kept help working on the farm.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Gross, “Culture and Cultivation,” p. 54.

¹⁴³ Larkin characterizes the change in labor in neighboring Shrewsbury: “Once, local connections, comradeship in the fields, and the diversity of contract laborers’ economic status had blurred or softened some of the boundaries between workers and employers, without negating the realities of power, economic inequality, and limited opportunity on the land. But in the years after 1830 . . . [t]he new farm laborers were . . . much easier to see as a group set apart – rarely originating in the community, unambiguously poor, and often culturally alien.” Larkin, “Labor is the Great Thing in Farming,” pp. 225-6.

¹⁴⁴ Carol Lasser, “The Domestic Balance of Power: Relations Between Mistress and Maid in Nineteenth-Century New England,” *Labor History* 28, No. 1 (Winter, 1987) pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁵ Gross, “Culture and Cultivation,” pp. 51-2.

By 1850, nearly half of Boylston's taxpayers owned no land.¹⁴⁶ For the transients, this lack of property may still have been a function of age, but for Boylston's poorer persisters, poverty was no longer a stage in life, it *was* life. With their varied interests and goals, such a community had little hope of developing a strongly shared identity or an ideal of common good.

The push to increase surplus yields for market also transformed communal relations. "Improving" farmers such as Aaron White were urged by the agricultural press to abandon cooperative practices like husking, bees, and "changing works" in pursuit of more efficient, rationalized methods.¹⁴⁷ Some of their innovations, as we have seen, aroused distrust and derision among their more traditional neighbors. The use of marketing firms, which cut out the neighborly "middlemen" in preparing and delivering a crop to market, may have been more efficient, but it also decreased the network and resulting social bonds of local trade.¹⁴⁸

Few innovations were as transformative, however, as the advent of cash, which essentially eliminated the need for an extensive network of reciprocal obligations. Although it was slow to replace the traditional account book world in Boylston, cash played an increasingly important role. Mary White paid her washerwoman and scullery help in cash, relieving her of further obligations to these poorest of women. Joseph Flagg treated cash as one of his commodities, lending it to family, hired help, and neighbors

¹⁴⁶ This trend was general throughout eastern Massachusetts during the first half of the nineteenth century. Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, p. 301.

¹⁴⁷ Gross, "Culture and Cultivation," p. 51.

¹⁴⁸ Baker and Izard, "New England Farmers and the Marketplace," p. 43.

who increasingly needed it for shop purchases. Caroline sought not just any work, but work that would bring her “some honest cash,” so she could order things from her brother’s Boston shop. Her father was equally concerned about cash, as she reported to her brother, “I am as empty [headed] as father’s purse always is. Just at present time he says he has not enough to make a jingle with and bank bills are not to be seen.”¹⁴⁹

Transient hired help wanted pay in cash, as they had no intention of remaining in town long enough to collect on long-term credits. Cash was “the universal solvent” – eroding the account book world, neighborly obligations, and the personal nature of worker-employee ties. “Those who gave up their accounts were freer to buy and sell where they wished; they were not bound up in a web of local history. In this sense their economic life had been significantly disentangled from the life of neighborhood and town.”¹⁵⁰

Boylston farmers’ market entanglements also influenced the character of life in Boylston. Profits rose and fell with the market price of their crops, binding them more closely to the cosmopolitan world beyond their fields, and making them feel dependent on forces they could not see or know. When he sold his crops at a distance, the farmer lost his personal connection with those who would use his farm’s goods.¹⁵¹ In the second

¹⁴⁹ Caroline White to Charles White, Jan. 6, 1839. OSV.

¹⁵⁰ Larkin, “Accounting for Change,” p.22 and p. 25. Myron Stachiew’s study of a Worcester County blacksmithing account book documents this shift from long-term credit accounts to cash during the 1840s. Myron O. Stachiw, “Tradition and Transformation: Emerson Bixby and the Social, Material and Economic World of Barre Four Corners, unpublished paper presented at the 1988 annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, July 22, 1988,” OSV.

¹⁵¹ The work of his hands became, instead, “. . . part of an impersonal, homogenous supply to be traded to unknown, anonymous, distant consumers who cared nothing for its

quarter of the nineteenth century, Boylston's farmers – who had always understood land as wealth – kept significantly more of their assets in paper - notes, bonds, stocks and cash.¹⁵² Not only did this change erode the farmer's connection to his land as the source of his competence and independence, it also exposed him to increased risk. Aaron White worried intensely about the safety of these investments and nagged his sons in Boston and Providence for the latest news on stocks and banking stability. He confessed to Charles, "You know that I am considerable interested in the safety of our banking institutions which seem to be in a very precarious situation just now, and what will become of my interest in them I know not but I know there is no dependence on the stability of anything on earth and that riches make themselves wings and fly away."¹⁵³ Caroline added, "He does not sleep nights very well, or he hears the clock strike almost every hour. I have threatened to take off the striking weight some night, to see what effect that will produce."¹⁵⁴ Aaron White had reason to worry. Changing inheritance practices along with market engagement had led to rising debt in Boylston over the first half of the nineteenth century, and an increase in the number of farms being sold to settle claims. Two of his brothers-in-law lost their estates to debt, and he feared for his sons' security in this newly volatile economic world.

Farmers' concerns for their security were no doubt heightened by their awareness

source." Atack, Bateman, and Parkers, "The Farm, the Farmer, and the Market," p. 254 and 257.

¹⁵² See Appendix J.

¹⁵³ Aaron White to Charles White, January 16, 1838. OSV.

¹⁵⁴ Caroline White to Charles White, March 18, 1837. OSV.

that their land was losing its fertility. Degrading pastures and declining yields encouraged them to specialize, purchasing grains from the west to feed both humans and livestock, while selling beef and dairy to the commercial and manufacturing centers. The decision helped restore some ecological balance, but it bound them ever more tightly to an impersonal market over which they had, it seemed, no control.

Given the risks of market farming, the decline in the land's fertility, and the difficulty securing labor, it is not surprising that three quarters of Boylston's sons chose to leave town. That they also chose to leave the *land* however, was evidence of a growing generational rift. Family tensions could run high during the 1820s to 1840s, as the majority of Boylston sons rejected their father's agrarian identity. We can imagine the emotional toll on fathers such as Aaron White, who deeply valued the yeoman ideal of an agrarian "competence" or "comfortable subsistence" – that is, a farm of sufficient acres to ensure his independence. White watched as each of his sons passed up farming for urban educations and professional lives. This rejection of their father's ideal -- of their father's very identity as a rural squire -- for a new way of life must have been keenly felt. Numerous letters attest to Aaron's sensitivity to perceived slights or neglect from his sons. Caroline confessed to Charles, "scarcely a day passes when we are not called (I mean mother, Mary, Francis [and myself]) to render a reason [to Father] for some real or imaginary misdemeanor. We always do our best to make things smooth, but sometimes we have rather a hard task."¹⁵⁵ We know that Aaron mourned the absence of his boys, and felt at times abandoned by those he most loved. Those other Boylston fathers who

¹⁵⁵ Caroline White to Charles White, March 18, 1837. OSV

watched their sons leave for Worcester county workshops, factories, and commercial trades no doubt shared his feelings.

The Boylston parents who hoped to support their sons in their choice of a new profession faced a painful reality. For generations respect was paid to elders in part because they possessed the assets, knowledge and experience necessary for youth to succeed. With the emergence of new trades, youth needed different assets and different tutelage. Increasingly during this period, Boylston's well-to-do sent their sons and daughters away to private academies for advanced education in methods and manners of polite living, providing yet another level of distinction in an increasingly striated society. After completing their education, they were likely to leave their less trained and polished parents behind, possibly heightening the sense of rejection and desertion.

Parents had other reasons to worry about the new professional identities of their offspring. The mobility of the young heightened their self-reliance. The young could not, so they did not, depend on ancient bonds of neighborliness because their neighbors were constantly changing. Rather, they developed an ideal of the self-made man. As historians such as Karen Hultunnen have demonstrated, mobile urban youth entered a world where people learned about each other by reading behavior and appearance, making success dependent on self-fashioning and self-creation and eroding ancient notions of a collective identity rooted in community interdependence.¹⁵⁶ Although New Englanders had always harbored dreams of individual improvement and "pursuits of happiness," leaving the farm for the counting house or the factory made those goals primary.

¹⁵⁶ Karen Hultunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

This “abandonment” of Boylston by the next generation had quite real consequences for Boylston’s older generation. For centuries aging parents had depended upon grown children to support them as they became unable to support themselves. As so many of Boylston’s native sons left home, the rolls of destitute elderly increased, as did the problem of town care for the orphaned, sick, and insane. This, too, must have deeply troubled those who had grown up believing that the family, extended family, and community would care for its own.

The second quarter of the nineteenth century in Boylston is marked by a strong sense of impending loss, an insecurity about resources, an expectation of sudden death, and a fear or anticipation of the end times. These fears and expectations heightened a sense of urgency to secure oneself. Parents worried ceaselessly about sons’ prospects in their new, non-agrarian careers; some parents worked to promote their children’s religious conversion. Much of the language of persuasion included the assurance that once saved, a family could look forward to eventual – and eternal – reunion in the afterlife. Mary White repeated these assurances to herself frequently in her diary, even as her husband mourned, “Of all our ten children, not one is at home at present.”¹⁵⁷

Aaron White summarized these concerns in a letter to his beloved “Charley.”

We hope that you are well and are doing well, although we don’t hear from you so frequently of late as we have been used to. You must not omit to send a few lines with the clothing that you send home from week to week. It gives us much pleasure to receive your letters and will be no injury to you. We don’t want that you should forget your old home and its associations yet . . . The anxiety we feel for your welfare and good conduct will be my excuse for repeating some advice & directions you have received before. . . . I don’t know how you get along with your employers of late and what satisfaction you are able to give. We do hope,

¹⁵⁷ Aaron White to Charles White, August 10, 1840. OSV.

Charly, that you will try to do your best to keep your place and please your masters. They may yet think that you will not answer their purposes if you are not careful and dismiss you after this year. . . And, remember your Creator now in the days of your youth: fear him, love him, and seek his favour while you are young, and he will guide you and not forsake you when you are old, should you live to be old . . . Did you realise the anxious solicitude I feel for your prosperity and happiness and how short and uncertain the time is for me to do anything to promote it, you would not wonder at my writing to you in the manner I now do. . . .

Your affectionate parent, Aaron White

Aaron's plaintive note speaks directly to the unsettling fears that plagued his later years. He had devoted his life to being a good country squire, a man of independent competence who improved his opportunities for himself and his children. Yet their choices -- made possible by his own successful striving -- filled him with regret and anxiety. His sons did not want his land, the wisdom of his experience, or, he feared, even the pleasure of his company. Their choices, he worried, threatened not only his own happiness, but also the security of their futures. Would they succeed in their risky new enterprises? Would they live moral, Christian lives when immersed in urban artifice? Would they lose their affection for their "old home and its associations" once seduced by the lure of cosmopolitan culture? In Boylston, Aaron White had successfully secured a place among the prosperous, civically prominent, "improving" farmers. But in his sons' eyes, he feared, he was merely a forgotten and inconsequential old man. A more worldly, mobile youth rejected their fathers' land and his identity as a yeoman farmer. They would be cultivators of the mind, embracing new ideals of independent, self-made manhood beyond the farm.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ See J.M. Opal, J.M., *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)

CHAPTER FOUR

FIELDS AND DREAMS

The economic evolution that transformed daily life and personal relationships in Boylston during the second quarter of the nineteenth century was the consequence of individual choices. Behind each choice is the story of an individual attempting to pursue a dream – or escape a nightmare. Let us pause to consider some of those personal stories. We will recover the choices and life consequences of six contemporary Boylston youth: Charles, Squire White’s sixth son; the aspiring Benjamin Houghton Jr.; the musically-gifted son of a modest shoemaking family, Caleb Crossman; the purpose-filled Cassandra Hooper; Joseph Flagg’s enterprising son Lincoln; and Caroline White, the witty and warm-hearted mainstay of her parent’s old age. These six young folk grew up together as friends and neighbors near Boylston’s center village, attended the same school, socialized with and worked for each other’s families. Yet they had very different destinies – both from their parents and from each other. Their varied stories remind us that change occurs first on a personal level, in the choices that individuals make. It also reminds us that the consequences of those choices – especially the transformation of personal relationships – are often unforeseen and unintended.

Charles White: The Druggist’s Apprentice

Sixteen-year-old Charles White faced a double challenge: coming to the city and coming of age.¹ Like most sons of prosperous village gentry who flocked to the region’s

cities seeking the white collars of an aspiring new class, Charles had to make his way in a crowded new world -- alone.²

Growing up had once been a much simpler matter.³ In agrarian New England, boys followed their fathers in the field or their masters at the workbench, gradually maturing under the watchful eyes of family and community.⁴ A youth became a man when he acquired a farm and a wife, the necessities for production and reproduction.⁵ In

¹ Some of the material in this section was previously published in Mary Fuhrer, "The Druggist's Apprentice: A Diary of Coming of Age in Antebellum Boston," *In Our Own Words: New England Diaries, 1600 to the Present* (Vol. 1), The Dublin Seminar for New England Folk life Annual Proceedings, 2006/2007 Vol. 39 (Boston: Boston University Press, 2009), pp.160-73.

² *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America 1830-1870*. Karen Halttunen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 1. Although many studies repeat this assertion, there is scant data on the actual number of rural youth who migrated to cities during this period.

³ Joseph Kett provides a full discussion of youth in agrarian society. He notes, "the range of occupational and religious choices open to young people was so narrow as to preclude a period of doubt and indecision." Joseph Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in 19th Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 285.

⁴ For a discussion of agrarian coming-of-age, see Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), Chapter 1.

⁵ This statement assumes that we are discussing the social nature of growing up, rather than the biological or psychological. Historians and psychologists debate whether adolescence is a universal, timeless process of maturation or a socially constructed process of identity formation. The issue is a matter of disciplinary focus. Biologists and psychologists, including pioneering psychologists of adolescence Stanley Hall and Erik Erikson, see universally-shared characteristics of physical growth and psychological resolution of internal issues around self and significant others; sociologists and historians see a culturally and socially-conditioned adaptation of behavioral norms, life goals, values, and ideals. For the purpose of this paper, I assume the historical and cultural nature of coming of age. See John Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 94-5. See also Susan M. Juster and Maris A. Vinoviskis, "Changing Perspectives on the American Family in the Past." *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 13, (1987), p. 204.

the antebellum city, land was not the measure of the man; different assets were needed. Urban coming-of-age would require separation from family, initiation into a new world of work and time discipline, immersion in peer- and age-segregated groups, introduction to new urban social standards, and exposure to the vices and temptations of city life. Most especially, they would need to learn how to safely navigate the impersonal –and potentially hazardous -- relationships of modern cosmopolitan life.

Unlike earlier urban apprentices, they would not have the guidance of a paternal master: the personal relationship that once bound master and apprentice had eroded, leaving boys like Charles quite literally on their own. As he arrived in the city, Charles faced a confounding array of new choices, and the consequences of choosing poorly could be dire.⁶ Naive youth, led astray by “confidence men” and “painted ladies,” might succumb to gambling, addiction, and prostitution. Falling in with a bad set of peers led to profanity, blasphemy and impiety; misuse of leisure hours squandered opportunities for improvement; social gaffes endangered one’s place in the white-collar class. And a volatile business climate doomed many young men in the 1830s. Mary prayed fervently that her sons be kept on the straight path in “this pilgrimage world.”

⁶ Demos considers this challenge daunting. “Circumstances had reduced the capacity of the older generation to provide youth with leadership, guidance, with assistance of the traditional kinds. The young, while in theory still expected to follow their elders, were in practice faced with new and difficult choices – to be made largely on their own . . . This factor of *choice* was now emerging as key to a broad range of youth experience: choice of occupation, choice of residence, choice of values, of friends, of sweetheart (and ultimately of spouse). These were now matters of individual resolution.” Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, p. 102. In another article, John and Virginia Demos assert that rapid social change and a “plurality of alternatives in regard to careers, moral codes, and lifestyles” at this time, makes it likely that an adolescent will not find in his parents a suitable model for forming his identity. “Adolescence in Historical Perspective,” *JMF* Vol. 31, No. 4 (Nov., 1969), p. 637.

Charles's father chose his son's placement well. Aaron White reached an agreement with William Ward, a well-established wholesale druggist on Washington St., who had grown up in neighboring Shrewsbury. In early Republic Boston, druggists were high-status professionals, following only merchants, lawyers and doctors in mean wealth by occupation.⁷ And large wholesale firms were more likely to lead to a lucrative partnership at the end of training.⁸ The terms of the agreement were not recorded, but Aaron's understanding was that Ward would be Charles's "master," instructing and advancing him through the stages of the business.⁹ Aaron envisioned a traditional apprenticeship where master took responsibility for his charge's present welfare and future prospects.¹⁰

William Ward, however, did not see himself as the boy's master. Ward did not

⁷ Allan Kulikoff, "The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *WMQ*, Vol. 28, No.3. (Jul., 1971), p. 385. Druggists outranked 40 other professions in Kulikoff's study.

⁸ Aaron's well-laid plans for Charles' apprenticeship to progress to partnership were partially derailed within a year, when Ward took first a younger brother, then an in-law, as his junior partners to form the firm of Henshaw, Ward & Co., one of the largest wholesale druggists in the United States. Charles Henshaw brought more business to the shop, but he also brought numerous teenaged sons, potential competition for Charles in the quest for a share in the proprietorship of the firm. For genealogical information on the Henshaw and Ward druggist dynasties, see *Brief Memoir of Andrew Henshaw Ward* by William Blake Trask (Albany: J. Munsell, 1863).

⁹ Charles' initial wage was \$175 a year; the average wage of an unskilled laborer in the northeastern U.S. during this period was \$318. See the wage indices of Robert A. Margo and Georgia C. Villaflor, "The Growth of Wages in Antebellum America: New Evidence," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 47, No. 4 (Dec. 1987), p. 881.

¹⁰ Comments throughout Aaron's letters indicate that he had selected Ward for Charles' apprenticeship, that he considered Ward to be Charles' master – to whom Charles owed complete obedience and subservience – and that he expected Ward to abide by their understood agreement. See especially Aaron to Charles, March 3, 1841. OSV.

accept the ancient paternal notions of a master's responsibilities: he would provide no housing, no supervision, no practical, moral, or spiritual direction. What he would provide was a wage. Though Charles's family thought of him as an apprentice, his employer thought of him as cheap wage labor. For a generation the old system of apprenticeship had been breaking down as masters withdrew both personally and residentially from shop production. Apprentices increasingly worked out the daily routine of living and learning on their own.¹¹

For Charles, the transition from home to shop was difficult. He suffered the usual fate of the youngest apprentice: the hardest physical labor and the worst torments of the older boys. His elder brother William wrote words of consolation after others stole the berries that the family sent for Charles. William urged him to endure the "insolence of apprentices toward the youngest," to hold his tongue and try not to mind.¹²

But things did not go well. The boy was accustomed to the pace and rhythm of country life, where work varied by the season and tasks were frequently interrupted for socializing; his employers complained that he was slow, inexact and careless in his work. Ward was so dissatisfied with the boy that Charles was almost let go after only three

¹¹Masters withdrew from their personal relationship of guardians, while apprentices were degraded to wage earners who learned their skills as much from mechanics' libraries as from masterly tutelage. Masters, who once lived with their apprentices above their shops, withdrew with their families to upscale residential neighborhoods. See W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Craft Apprentice: From Franklin to the Machine Age in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

¹² William White to Charles White, August 10, 1836. OSV

months.¹³ Father advised son that he was on probation: “Be sure to have the store opened and put in order in good season. Be always at your post ready to do anything that needs to be done and be careful to have it done well. They have complained that you were deaf; convince them that you can hear and obey their orders with readiness.”¹⁴

Charles learned to adjust his manner and appearance to urban standards. He learned to think, talk, and especially to write rapidly, since, in the words of one apprentice, “the commercial world would not brook sluggishness of any kind.”¹⁵ He practiced his penmanship in his journal and wrote to his schoolteacher sister for correction. Daily practice built speed and facility, essential for a clerk. His clear and rapid penmanship became a measure of his productivity.¹⁶

Charles also learned to adjust his hygiene and attire to urban norms. He learned that bathing once a week was essential for urban gentlemen and purchased tickets for visits to Bramin’s Bath House in the warm months, supplemented by evening dips in the harbor. His parents were somewhat surprised but understanding about this new need for regular bathing, though concerned that he not do so on the Sabbath. Charles also quickly learned that heavy boots and rough country “frock” were not appropriate behind the urban counter; there, he needed the clerk’s emblematic dark broadcloth coat, shirt with

¹³ Mary White to Charles White, July 28, 1836. OSV.

¹⁴ Aaron White to Charles White, August 10, 1836. OSV.

¹⁵ Luskey, “Jumping Counters in White Collars,” p. 184.

¹⁶ Michael Zakim, “The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes,” *JER* 26 (Winter, 2006), p. 580.

detachable collar to change when soiled, fine boots, and silk handkerchief.¹⁷ His mother responded by sewing more fine shirts for him, suggesting though, that Charles use his rustic checked shirts for heavy labor to save wear on his more formal attire. In his second year, after receiving a raise, he spent over a month's wages on a fine new broadcloth coat, followed by new hat and shoes "both to wear at the store," a black silk neckerchief, calfskin boots and silk gloves. Charles's manners, hygiene, and attire distinguished him as an urban clerk – and distinguished him *from* his rural family and friends.¹⁸ Charles could measure his progress by the changing contents of his wardrobe.

He could also measure his progress by his daily work assignments. Like all apprentices, he had to start at the bottom, with dirty, heavy, strenuous, and often outdoors work.¹⁹ Charles opened the store, cleaned cellars and stockrooms, made deliveries, unloaded crates at the wharves. By 1838, two years into his apprenticeship, Charles had advanced to "putting up things for orders."²⁰ Though a few patent medicines came ready-

¹⁷ Luskey, "Jumping Counters," p. 173.

¹⁸ Though critics sometimes ridiculed retail clerks as dandies, acquiring the wardrobe and manners for a proper presentation was essential to establishing credibility in the urban world. In the country, one knew and was known by all; in the city, one had to quickly gather information about character, resources and social standing from appearance. As historian Karen Hulttunen put it, "surface impressions were essential to success in a world of strangers . . . In every detail of his conduct and appearance, the youth gave off clues to his interior identity, clues which would shape his destiny." Hulttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, p. 40.

¹⁹ One first year apprentice complained, "Everything there is to perform that is heavy --- I have to do it. But I shall not too soon be discouraged. I am sure that clerks in the first year . . . have to work harder than any other time." Zakim, "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary," p. 578.

made, most concoctions had to be made from scratch. The apothecary cut and rolled pills by hand, made plasters with a spreading iron, powdered drugs in a stone mortar and made tinctures in glass jars.²¹ Charles' tasks during this period ranged from packaging essence of rose in vials or extract of Butternut (a cathartic) in galley pots to conjuring compounds, as when preparing nitrate of strontium for Election Day fireworks, or preparing bottled quinine extract from cinchona bark.²²

In the third year of Charles' apprenticeship, Aaron wrote, "Your time for entering the Counting room by agreement is just at hand. Let us know what your prospect is in this respect."²³ Aaron was anxious for his son to progress from chemicals to cashbooks. The

²⁰ The apothecary sold powders, dyestuffs, essences, oils, paints, and commodities of any sort that required mixing, measuring, or portioning out. Many of the elements for mixing and making medicines were imported from London or the West Indies, along with other exotics such as lemons, figs, spices, cooking essences, and liqueurs. Druggists might also carry items for personal toiletry, household cleaning, laundry, dyestuffs, and paints.

²¹ Apprentices mixed their potions with the aid of "such books as the *Edinburgh Dispensatory* (1794), Chaptal's *Elements of Chemistry*, Cullen's *Materia Medica and Practice of Physic*, and Cheselden's *Anatomy*." Robert W. Lovett, "Squire Rantoul and His Drug Store, 1796-1824," *The Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, Vol. 25, No. 2. (June 1951), p. 101.

²² Ward did most of his business as a wholesaler, but he allowed his employees to develop their own retail clientele. Charles took advantage of this first by procuring items for his family, who appreciated the convenience and expected Charles to "take something for his effort." His diary doubled as an account book as he practiced recording orders and shipments, calculating profit and interest, making payments to Ward, "writing out bills" and collecting debts. In this way apprentice clerks learned to "count the daily interest on one dollar compounded at six percent per annum, or plot the number of days until notes and bills issued on time came due." Zakim, "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary," p. 579.

²³ Aaron White to Charles White, March 19, 1839. Charles had begun his preparation for these duties by reading the professional's tome, *The Counting House Assistant*.

accounting clerk stood higher than the counter clerk. With ink-stained fingers these clerks stood over desks and recorded the stuff of commerce: profits.

But Charles was not promoted. Instead, one of his co-workers – his employer’s son – “went as clerk into the counting Room. I took his place as Foreman.” It may have been nepotism that cost Charles his hoped-for promotion – but it may have been his own ineptitude. He was plagued during this period by missteps and errors. Mr. Ward reproved him harshly. Charles confessed to his journal, “things went all wrong with me at the store. [Elder brother Avery] had some conversation with Mr. Ward about me. Did not speak very favorably of me.” Charles felt keenly the insecurity of the commercial world.

One year later, in February of 1841, Charles received devastating news: Mr. Ward intended to let him go. In Ward’s view, he could hire and fire wageworkers at will, but Aaron was incensed that Ward had violated the trust of a master-apprentice agreement:

From what we can learn it seems that your present employers, after getting all they could out of you, intend to turn you adrift as we say. They have by no means fulfilled their agreement that they made when you first went to them. . . . But I fear from what I hear of their general character that they are governed in their conduct by the narrowest motives of selfishness.²⁴

In the next few weeks, Charles fretted. As the date of his dismissal neared, he took a step that revealed a level of self-determination. He made arrangements for employment with a competitor. Ward counter-offered: “came to the conclusion with my employers to stay with them six months longer at the rate of \$400 a year.”²⁵

²⁴ Aaron White to Charles White, March 3, 1841. OSV.

²⁵ Journal of Charles White, March 26, 1841. OSV.

Charles had finally become a clerk. He would now receive not a wage but a salary, nearly doubling his previous pay. At the end of traditional apprenticeships, masters often outfitted their charges with a new suit of clothes suitable to commence business. Mr. Ward did no such thing, but Charles himself acknowledged the moment by purchasing his first full broadcloth suit, coat, pants, and vest. He would have new responsibilities and authority, and at the end of his six months, he might look forward to negotiating part proprietorship. At 21 years of age, Charles had sufficiently mastered his trade to have the goal of secure economic competency within view.

Economic competency was only one facet of self-determination for antebellum youth. Equally important was disciplined self-governance. In the city, where boys worked by the clock rather than the task, the evening's leisure hours offered dangerous enticements to unsupervised youth. Charles' family worried about how he might spend his evenings and Sabbaths.²⁶

Parental warnings reflected a general anxiety about the welfare of unsupervised urban youth, a "home-less" and "master-less" class. It was not that they lacked a place to live or work, but that they no longer lived and worked *under family government*. Living in boardinghouses and working for employers who wanted no part of paternal responsibilities, these youth socialized with other unsupervised peers. Stories of youthful

²⁶ "You are surrounded by snares and temptations to lead you in a wrong way and unless you are circumspect and watchful and seek for guidance and direction on high, you will in all probability fall before them. Let me in the first place caution you to mind how you spend or misspend your leisure time of which you will have or will have a considerable portion. This will either be a benefit or a bane to you as it is improved well or otherwise." Aaron White to Charles White, June 1, 1836. OSV.

dissipation and violence were common.²⁷ Caroline confided to him the shameful fate of a former schoolmate, who, having “violated the 7th commandment,” was afflicted with a shameful sickness that cost him his fiancé, his store, his goods, his reputation, and possibly his soul. She added, “I often think, dear brother, of the many temptations to evil by which you are or may be surrounded; perhaps they exist in my imagination only, would that it might be so, but I fear otherwise.”²⁸ In the summer of 1837, just a few blocks from Charles’ store, a riot erupted between Irish immigrants and Yankees; the militia had to restore order. Mary wrote, “We hear that you have riotous proceedings and fires in your city. We hope that you will be kept from all bad company.”²⁹

Mary and Aaron had cause for concern: Charles was a “homeless” and “masterless” youth. He rented a room and took his meals in the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Jones by the wharves of Fort Hill. They were one of the many working-class Boston families who boarded single youth for extra income.³⁰ Aaron considered this a good arrangement, for the Jones took in only a few boarders.³¹ Aaron and Mary looked upon the Jones as surrogate parents, and they sometimes sent gifts of fruit and fresh produce to

²⁷ The year Charles started his apprenticeship the popular press was abuzz with a sensational sex-and-death story involving a New York clerk and a prostitute. See Patricia Cline Cohen’s *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998).

²⁸ Caroline White to Charles White, July 26, 1839. OSV.

²⁹ Mary White to Charles White, June 13, 1837. OSV.

³⁰ The house was located in tiny Spear Alley, one block from the wharves in the Fort Hill section of town. When the Jones family moved to a more elegant brick residence in nearby Washington Square, Charles moved with them.

³¹ Aaron White to Charles White, January 24, 1837. OSV.

Mrs. Jones as tokens of appreciation. Mary wrote, "Tell Mrs. Jones that her attentions to you I consider an equivalent to any small thing that I send to her."³²

But boardinghouses presented a paradox in the new middle class idealization of home and domesticity. Home was the heart of morality and a refuge from the degrading influences of commercial life, yet boardinghouses were homes that had been commercialized.³³ Charles' relationship with the Joneses reflected the transitional – and confused - nature of a society moving away from domestic economy. Charles paid rent, but for some services, such as occasional laundering or mending, he paid in favors and gifts: sharing whortleberries and watermelon from Boylston, procuring items for the Joneses from his store, carrying a pot of beans for Mrs. Jones to the bake house. These exchanges conflated the distinction between love and profit. In his rural village, such exchanges would have been the stuff of domestic economy and neighborly obligations; in the city boardinghouse, "homeless youth" like Charles had to negotiate these services and determine whether to pay in kind or kindness.

In time, Charles adapted to boardinghouse life and his rooming place became his home. Fellow boarders appeared in diary entries as companions on such youthful outings as a visit to "a fire in the South part of the city." This is the sort of acquaintance Charles's family had feared -- young men socializing on their own in the city – but the family would have been pleased with Charles's style of socializing. Though he sometimes went with roommates to Fanueil Hall to watch the infantry companies drill or to the Commons

³² Mary White to Charles White, June 28, 1837. OSV.

³³ Wendy Gambler, "Tarnished Labor: The Home, the Market and the Boarding House in Antebellum America," in *JER* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2002), pp. 177-204.

to hear a Brigade Band, more frequently he spent the evening in earnest conversation. As the years passed, Charles increasingly played the role of mentor to the younger boarders.

His family was also concerned about the bad influences of fellow apprentices. His mother prayed the he not be led into temptation; his father advised him to “never listen to any suggestion of your fellow apprentices or others to do anything that you think will be injurious or displeasing to [your employers].” Brother William warned of “obscene and filthy talking. . . among Journeymen and fellow Apprentices. Turn away your ears from hearing filthy stories. Avoid all licentious practices to which young men in cities are much addicted.”³⁴ Charles learned to navigate these waters as well. In time, he cultivated friendships with coworkers on a respectable and non-threatening basis. A friendly rapport emerged; the other boys challenged him to learn to swim; when he failed, he reported the lost wager in his journal: an expense for treating co-workers to “boles of oysters at Holbrooks Oyster Room.”³⁵ Soon after, they taught him to swim.

Learning how to safely navigate these new relationships – to interact with his boss, landlady’s family, boardinghouse mates, and coworkers on his own terms, to be sociable without being sullied -- was a feat of self-determination. Charles achieved this by a conscious effort to a *mold his character*. Advice writers envisioned the character of youth as malleable, shaped by youthful experiences and fixed for a lifetime.³⁶ Ministers

³⁴ William White to Charles White, April 12, 1837. OSV.

³⁵ Diary of Charles White, July 27, 1839. OSV. Oysters, along with ice cream and popcorn, were favorite “treats and excesses” for young men of this period.

³⁶ Demos and Demos show that the advice literature of this time reveals “a sense of ‘youth’ as a critical transition period in the life of nearly everyone. It is a time . . . when people are extremely impressionable, extremely open to a wide range of outside

urged city boys to take control of this formative stage by choosing habits that would mold their characters according to the norms of respectable middle class behavior. This was ultimately an act of agency: rather than allowing himself to be shaped by surrounding influences, the boy was counseled to *self-fashion* his moral fiber.³⁷ In the city, the most important asset in securing independence was that self-mastery that enabled one to interact safely—and profitably-- with strangers in an impersonal cosmopolitan world.

In 1843 Charles bid farewell to his Boston friends and colleagues. With capital loaned by his father, the 23-year-old opened his own apothecary shop and hardware store in Worcester. An ad in the city directory declared, “Medicines, Paints, Oil, Dye Stuffs, Window Glass, Nails, Potash, Pear ash, Paint Brushes, etc. at No. 3 Washington Square, Worcester.”³⁸ Charles would go on to successful career as a Worcester druggist, followed by a partnership with his brother in a lucrative sulfur refining business in New Jersey. He would eventually build a fine estate on then-upscale Bergin Point where he lived the life

influences. It is – to quote from Joel Hawes *Lectures to Young Men* (1832) ‘pre-eminently . . . the forming, fixing period . . . It is during this season, more than any other, that the character assumes its permanent shape and color.’ Words such as ‘pliant,’ ‘plastic’ and ‘formative’ appear again and again in the discussion of youth.” “Adolescence in Historical Perspective,” p. 634.

³⁷ Young apprentices were well aware of the rhetoric of character formation, and many internalized that rhetoric. Just as Charles took to heart his father’s warning that he was “now forming habits and character for life both in a moral and business point of view,” so printer’s apprentice’s David Clapp of Dorchester repeated these concerns to his diary. He wrote of his printing office as the scene where “I shall form new connections, new habits and desires, and where perhaps the die will be cast for my future character in life; so that in a great measure my prospects depend upon my good or bad behavior in this office, as youth is the time we are most susceptible of impressions, and impressions formed in youth generally have an influence over our conduct through life.” Journal of David Clapp, May 13, 1822. AAS.

³⁸ *Worcester City Directory*, 1844. AAS.

of a Victorian gentleman, one of many who started their journey to manhood on the back of a farmwagon headed for the city.

Caleb Crossman

When Caleb Crossman's father, Abishai, brought his bride to Boylston from neighboring Worcester in 1794, he already had skills as a shoemaker and hopes of acquiring a small farm.³⁹ It was a reasonable expectation. Shoemaking was a long-established and respected form of competence with craft traditions of apprenticeship, journeymen, and master status that ensured the quality of the product and the relative security of the trained cordwainer.⁴⁰ In rural Massachusetts, most shoemakers combined their craft with farming, working on custom orders for the local community. With a young and rapidly growing family to assist him at the workbench and on the land, Abishai Crossman likely had high hopes that he would be able to achieve independence.

It was not so easy as he had hoped. Crossman lived and worked in Boylston for more than a dozen years, fathering ten children, before he was able to purchase a humble six-acre farm just west of Boylston center.⁴¹ Such a small holding likely yielded the

³⁹ Abishai Crossman was born in neighboring Shirley. He was 23 when he married at Worcester in 1794. His first child was born in Boylston five months later. Boylston Vital Records, Mormon Family Records.

⁴⁰ For a description of the craft of shoemaking in the pre-industrial age, see Ross Thomson, *The Path to Mechanized Shoe Production in the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) and Alan Dawley *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

⁴¹ Worcester County Land Records, 206-643, Jotham Bush, Gentleman, of Boylston to Abishai Crossman, Cordwainer of Boylston for \$104.84, six acres 130 rods. WORC.

family's vegetables, fruit, and grain, and perhaps enough pasture to graze a cow. For their wood, hay, and other needs, Abishai likely traded shoe credits with neighboring farmers.

But it was not a bad life for young Caleb, the ninth child and last of five sons. Born in 1814, Caleb grew up in a family of low to middling means.⁴² Despite their humbler status, the lives of Caleb, his siblings, and parents often intersected with that of their well-to-do neighbors. Caleb and his brothers went to the center district school with the White boys. The Crossmans were often in the White family home, barn, or fields, working, borrowing, or visiting. Mary White and her daughters sat up with Crossman family members when they were ill, or served tea to Mrs. Crossman and her daughters if they came for a social visit. Aaron White liked having the Crossmans visit, as the family was musical, and he enjoyed hearing them sing, or listening to Abishai or one of his sons play the viol or the cello. During the 1820s, Aaron secured neighbor Crossman to conduct the singers in the church choir.⁴³

Yet all was not well with the shoemaker. In the years of the Embargo and the War of 1812, as the demand for U.S.-produced shoes grew, new techniques of organizing production in shoemaking spread to Worcester County, following a trend that began earlier in Essex County to the northeast.⁴⁴ Shoemakers began to expand their business beyond local custom, to make shoes in standard sizes, and to send them to city markets

⁴² Boylston Vital Records; Boylston Tax Assessments 1800, 1820, 1825, and 1830. The Crossman family was in the seventh decile in 1800, dropped to the ninth decile in 1820, and rebounded to the sixth decile in 1830 and 1835 as Caleb came of age. BHS.

⁴³ All of these references are found in the Diary of Mary White. OSV.

⁴⁴ John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, p. 299.

and country stores. Gradually, the steps of shoemaking were subdivided and distributed among less-skilled neighbors – usually women; production shifted from the home to “ten-footer shops” as shoemakers coordinated “putting out” and production in quantity. Though he continued some local custom work, Crossman likely made this transition to wholesale production in 1819 as his first-born son came of age; together they purchased a ten-footer shop in the center of Boylston for their craft.⁴⁵

Intensifying their work, producing for wholesale, and dividing labor among the family did not threaten Crossman’s competence; it likely increased the family’s income. By the 1820s and ‘30s in Worcester County, however, shoe “bosses” – men with the assets to purchase leather in quantity and the wherewithal to distribute finished shoes broadly -- began to assume more control. These men set up central shops, each employing about 40 shoemakers as outworkers. Instead of producing the whole shoe within the family, many shoe workers now found themselves part of a complex system of outwork: the shoemaker became a middleman, taking in pre-cut lots of leather from the central shop, distributing uppers around the countryside to be sewn by farm women, bottoming the lots as they were returned, and delivering finished cases of shoes to the central shop, where bosses arranged for them to be sold as far afield as the slave south.⁴⁶

The change was effectively a demotion for men like Abishai Crossman. Shoemakers were no longer independent craftsmen, masters of a family-based business; they were piece workers, mere dependent laborers, lacking power to set prices or

⁴⁵ Worcester County Land Records, Vol. 214, Pg. 562. WORC.

⁴⁶ See Thomson, *The Path to Mechanized Shoe Production*, pp. 2-27; Blewett, *We Will Rise in Our Might*, pp. 2-25. Dawley, *Class and Community*, pp. 2-72.

determine markets. And as the work was divided and deskilled, needy young men flooded the field, creating ruthless competition for old-time shoemakers. Abishai Crossman faced this plight by the 1830s.

Soon, and perhaps as an outgrowth of these troubles, other problems had begun to beset the shoemaker. In 1828, the Congregational Church filed charges against Crossman and summoned him to face discipline.⁴⁷ Although the charges were not specified, Abishai was known to be a hearty drinker, “no friend to temperance” as Aaron White would later say, and the church had been moving towards temperance. Although reconciled to the church and retained as its choir leader, Crossman was again in trouble with the congregation in 1830. Soon after, he left to join the Unitarians.⁴⁸ In 1834, his wife was reprimanded for her delinquency and ultimately excommunicated.⁴⁹ Crossman became increasingly obstreperous throughout the 1830s, engaging in clever forms of civil disobedience. By 1840, the shoemaker was being sued for debt.⁵⁰

Perhaps not surprisingly, none of his sons chose to follow in the shoemaker’s footsteps. Abishai Jr., moved to neighboring Shirley after his marriage in 1823; each son left in turn before or as soon as he came of age. By 1835, only youngest Caleb, was still

⁴⁷ Diary of Mary White, June 20, 1828. OSV.

⁴⁸ Abishai Crossman’s name appears on Boylston’s Unitarian church documents and petitions. See Petition of April 3, 1837, submitted to the Wm. Moore, Chairman of the Board of Selectman, transcribed in the William Harlow Collection, Book XLVI, p. 44. BHS. See also Dupuis, *History of Boylston*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ Boylston Congregational Church Records, September 1834; February 14, 1837. BHS.

⁵⁰ See *Smith v Crossman*, March, 1840, suit for debt, Vol. 92, p. 210, Worcester Court of Common Pleas, MA.

at home. And Caleb, it seems, had aspirations for a better life as well. He apparently apprenticed as a Worcester jeweler and watch repairer, and in 1836, Caroline reported to her brother that Caleb was in Worcester, “working at his trade with Mr. Fenno,” a silversmith, jeweler, watchmaker and general merchant of fine goods, who advertised in the *Worcester Spy* “an assortment of fancy goods, silver spoons, earrings, thimbles, gold watch chains, etc.”⁵¹ But Caleb did not stay in Worcester. Within a few years – perhaps as a result of the hard times of the Panic of 1837 – he had returned to his father’s home. He purchased his father’s workshop and a small farm of 13 acres, and turned his energies to shoework, distributing shoes on an outwork basis. He took up his father’s old position leading the Congregational church choir.⁵² But this life did not suit his ambitions either. Sometime after 1840 Caleb Crossman left Boylston, moved to the emerging commercial center of Keene, New Hampshire, and set himself up as a “professor of music.”⁵³

It is possible that Crossman had training in music. In 1833 the Boston Academy of Music offered the nation’s first school of music instruction, allowing students to train without having to travel to Europe. But it is more likely that in an age before professional training and graduate schools, Crossman relied on his native talent, his gifts on the viol, and his experience as a choral director. Rural centers such as Keene had a strong demand

⁵¹ Caroline White to Charles White, June 14, 1836. OSV; *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester MA), 1822-1824.

⁵² Worcester County Land Records, 306-480 and 308-124: WORC. The 1835 land transactions list Caleb’s occupation as cordwainer. Caroline White to Charles White, Dec. 20, 1836, OSV; George L. Wright, “Boylston’s Church History,” BHS.

⁵³ Ibid. See also the “Remarks of Henry Brigham,” in *The Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Boylston, Massachusetts, August 18, 1886* (Worcester, Mass.: Press of Sanford and Davis, 1887), pp. 53-4: “If we go to the State of Ohio we find a noted Professor of Music there from this town.”

for teachers of refined arts. And Crossman apparently did well, for by 1855 he had gone west, first to Wisconsin, then to Ohio, married, and established himself as a credentialed professor of music.⁵⁴ He had also become one of the wealthiest men with one of the finest houses in his adopted hometown.⁵⁵

Crossman had “escaped” from Boylston to a life that was bigger, more refined, and more upwardly mobile than anything his struggling father or the little farm town of Boylston could promise. He never returned home. In 1855, when his elderly parents were destitute and dependent on town support, the town moved to seize the shoemaker’s workshop as their only asset. Caleb wrote from his home in Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin to protest – not the plight of his parents, but the ownership of the workshop. The building and plot were his, he rightly asserted, and could not be sold to support the aging couple. Though he permitted the produce of the plot to be used for the comfort of his *mother* alone, beyond that he refused to support the couple, who then joined early residents of the town’s poor farm.⁵⁶ In 1886, when the town invited all past citizens home to celebrate their Centennial, Caleb sent regrets that he would miss “the glorious Centennial Birthday

⁵⁴ Caleb Crossman to the Selectmen of Boylston, dated Fond du Lac Wisconsin, November 1855. BHS. An 1856 Worcester County deed lists Crossman as a teacher and a resident of Toledo, Ohio. Worcester County Land Records, 568-10 and 579-593. WORC. Crossman lived in Van Wert, Ohio from 1867 to his death in 1889. Sophia (Smith) Martin, *A Complete Genealogy of the Descendants of Matthew Smith of East Haddam, Conn. with Mention of his Ancestors, 1637-1890* (Rutland: Vermont: The Tuttle Company, 1890), p. 46.

⁵⁵ U.S. Population Census of 1880.

⁵⁶ Caleb Crossman to the Selectmen of Boylston, Nov., 1855. Records of the Overseers of the Poor, BHS.

of my own, my native town – Boylston – name always remembered and revered.”⁵⁷ One senses that Caleb Crossman most definitely did *not* regret that he would not be returning to his own, his native land. And yet, there may have been ambivalence in his self-imposed exile. He quoted, after all, the romantic Sir Walter Scott: “Breathes there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, ‘This is my own, my native land!’” The poem went on to say that the wandering soul who achieved “titles, power, and pelf,” but cherished not his homely roots would die “unwept, unhonour’d and unsung.” At his death, Crossman’s body was sent home to be buried.⁵⁸

Cassandra Hooper: Path of Purpose

Cassandra Hooper and her siblings – three younger sisters & a brother – were not born in Boylston, and the circumstances of their coming there are somewhat curious.⁵⁹ As would often be the case in her family, it seems it was first-born Cassandra who led the way and opened the path for her siblings and parents to follow.

⁵⁷ Caleb Crossman to Centennial Committee, *Centennial Celebration of the Town of Boylston, August 16, 1886* by Henry T. Bray (Worcester: Press of Sanford and Davis, 1887), p. 90.

⁵⁸ Martin, *A Complete Genealogy of the Descendants of Matthew Smith*, p. 46. “Caleb Strong Crossman . . . [died] Aug. 31, 1889, at his home, Van Wert, Ohio, where he had resided twenty-two years. All his life he was a student and teacher of music. In his career as a musician it was his lot to be one of the anvil chorus in the “Peace Jubilee,” held in Boston shortly after the close of the civil war. Prof. Crossman was buried at Shirley Village, Mass. [He had] no children.”

⁵⁹ Isaac and Sarah Hooper, both of Bridgewater, had three boys and four girls, but one son died in infancy and another departed at a young age for New Orleans, where he died unmarried at the age of 29. Cassandra was the first-born. Charles Henry Pope and Thomas Hooper, *Hooper Genealogy* (Boston: Published by Charles Pope, 1908), p. 47.

Cassandra's parents were born and married in Bridgewater, in southeastern Massachusetts, but shortly after Cassandra's birth in 1802, the young family moved west to the Worcester County farming town of Oakham. There, Isaac prospered at farming, steadily adding to his family – and his acres – until he could count himself among the prosperous yeomen of the town. Cassandra was apparently bright and curious as a child, soon mastering what could be offered at her local district school and yearning for more. Her father indulged her desire to learn, sending her to private academies at New Ipswich and later at Andover, where she reportedly studied partly under the direction of Mary Lyon, the pioneering female educator who would go on to found the nation's first women's college. In her twenties, Cassandra's credentials caught the attention of Samuel Slater, founder of Rhode Island's cotton mill complex, who engaged her to teach the school connected with his establishment.⁶⁰

But while Cassandra was busy teaching – and, apparently, saving – her father was encountering difficulties. In 1820, he tried to expand his holdings by purchasing 44 acres in neighboring Rutland, but within a year the property was mortgaged, and after two years, he was forced to sell the heavily indebted land back to its original owner.⁶¹ Shortly afterward, Isaac Hooper sold the whole of his Oakham estate of 100 improved acres for \$1000.⁶² He did not purchase any other property. Hooper was only in his fifties at the

⁶⁰ J.S. Schenk and W.S. Rann, "History of Corydon Township," in *History of Warren County* (Syracuse: D. Mason, 1887), Chapter 49.

⁶¹ Worcester County Registry of Deeds, Vol. 220, Pg. 267; Vol. 220, Pg. 271; Vol. 292, Pg. 273. WORC.

⁶² Worcester County Registry of Deeds, Vol. 229, Pg. 273. WORC.

time he sold his property, and his young son only twelve, so it is unlikely that he was “retiring” or passing the land on to the next generation. It is possible that injury or poor health rendered him incapable of farm work. In any event, several years later the entire family arrived in Boylston, taking up residence in a simple dwelling house on a one-acre parcel next to the old burying ground in center Boylston. What is rather astonishing, however, is that the \$415 cost of the house and lot was paid not by father Isaac, but by daughter Cassandra. The thirty-year old teacher, identified on the deed simply as “singlewoman,” was the rightful owner of her family’s shelter.⁶³

The children, now mostly grown, set to work supporting their parents. Sister Avis, four years younger than Cassandra, went to New Ipswich academy for a semester with Caroline White, then taught school in Boylston.⁶⁴ Younger sisters Lydia and Eunice, now in their late ‘teens and twenties, braided straw and made straw bonnets.⁶⁵ Young Charles became a shoemaker. The family, with Cassandra essentially as its head, struggled along, among the poorer but respectable members of the community.

One of the families that welcomed the Hooper daughters warmly was the Whites. Cassandra, possibly through the influence of Mary Lyon, was a committed evangelical Christian, and from her arrival in 1830 she, along with her sisters Avis, Lydia, and Eunice were frequent visitors to the White family parlor, while Mary and her daughters

⁶³ Worcester County Registry of Deeds, Vol. 288, Pg. 64.

⁶⁴ See the Diary of Mary White, July 31 1832 and September 12, 1837. OSV.

⁶⁵ Note diary entries for April 8, 1831 where Mary notes going to Mr. Hooper’s to get straw braid for Caroline’s bonnet, and again in June of 1834 when she went to Mr. Hooper’s to pick up Nancy Fielding’s finished bonnet.

returned those visits to the Hooper's humble home. The nature of the visits is clear, as they were frequently made in company with the minister's wife and other active evangelical women.⁶⁶ Cassandra had apparently embraced evangelical Christianity before her arrival in Boylston, but her younger sister Avis was "received to our Communion" along with eight other converts in March of 1834; her sister Lydia made her public confession in October of the same year.

Then, with no warning or advance preparations, Mary White made a surprise announcement in her diary. At the close of the afternoon service on the Sabbath of September 2, 1832, 30-year-old Cassandra Hooper was married to a Mr. Bliss, and the couple left almost immediately to serve as missionaries to the Seneca Indians. They would continue in that work in western New York for the rest of their lives.

The suddenness of Cassandra Bliss's "change in station" has an explanation. Most "foreign" missionaries from New England (including those sent to the Native American West as well as those who ventured overseas) went under the auspices and with the support of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Since their first emissaries set sail for Hawaii in 1812, the ABCFM had insisted almost without exception that their male missionaries be married men.⁶⁷ It was unrealistic to place an

⁶⁶ See a typical round of evangelical visiting in Mary's Diary, June 5, 1837: "I called at Mrs. Abbott's Mrs. Stratton's and Mrs. Hastings." Mrs. Hasting went with me to Mr. Tilton's. Mrs. Sanford and Mrs. Abbot and Miss Hooper and Mrs. Whipple and Mrs. Sal Bigelow and her mother, a Mrs. Parker [there]. Had an interesting meeting." OSV.

⁶⁷ Ann White, "Counting the Cost of Faith: America's Early Female Missionaries," *Church History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Mar., 1988), p. 19: "The ABCFM, the first American sending agency, sent married men from the beginning, believing that men should not be

unmarried man among the unrestrained sexuality of native cultures, they reasoned, lest “the powerful law of nature” overcome his better self.⁶⁸ In addition to satisfying his sexual needs, a wife would provide domestic services, maintain the missionary’s household in the midst of wilderness, and serve as a model of domestic life for heathen women encountering “civilization” for the first time. In addition, she could teach native women and children, if her domestic duties allowed time.⁶⁹ Thus, men who aspired to missionary work, after completing a rigorous course of training that generally kept them cloistered within all-male institutions, faced an additional daunting proviso: between the time they were approved and the time their ship sailed or stage departed, they needed to secure the hand of a woman willing to leave her world behind and embark on a religious mission with a relative stranger, bound for life.

The ABCFM, aware of the difficulties this created, acted as matchmaker throughout the northeast, pairing evangelical women with missionary aspirants. As historian Patricia Grimshaw explains, the ABCFM sustained a network of contacts, “usually ministers and college teachers, who supplied a confidential listing of women who might consent to marry missionaries under the necessary circumstance, women who were ‘missionary-minded’ as well as being young, pious, educated, fit, and reasonably

asked to go abroad without wives and that Christian family life was part of an effective missionary witness.”

⁶⁸ Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), p. 6. Grimshaw is quoting an 1836 missionary memoir.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7

good looking.”⁷⁰ There was one further qualification: most had to be ready and willing to leave immediately, and often forever. Barely two weeks after Cassandra’s wedding, Mary noted that she had “called at Mr. Hooper’s this evening & took leave of their daughter Bliss who was about to go to Cattaraugus Station [missionary village of the Seneca] with her husband to instruct the Indians. May they be instrumental of much good.”⁷¹ Six days later, requisite bride in hand, Rev. Asher Bliss was ordained a missionary by the ABCFM in his home town of Post Mills Village, Vermont.⁷²

While the risks of such a matrimonial contract seem extraordinary, in truth there was much to recommend the pairing. Cassandra Hooper was an intelligent, well-educated, and purposeful woman of 30; she had attended to her family’s well-being; she felt compelled to “up and doing” as Mary White so often put it, to spread the gospel. She joined herself to another New Englander of like age and education. (Asher Bliss had graduated from Amherst in the Class of 1829 before entering Andover Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in the autumn of 1832.)⁷³ Like his wife, he shared a deep commitment to evangelical Christianity and to spreading the gospel. Both secured the independent and purpose-driven life they sought – but could achieve only together.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 9.

⁷¹ Diary of Mary White, September 19, 1932. OSV.

⁷² Robert S. Fletcher and Malcom O. Young, eds. “Class of 1839,” *Amherst College Biographical Record of the Graduates and Non-Graduates, Biographic Record, Centennial Edition (1821-1921)*. (Amherst: Published by the College, 1927), Entry # 148.

⁷³ Ibid.

Cassandra and her new husband had settled among the Seneca by November of that year. When they arrived, there were but two or three framed buildings on the reservation, the rest being the log and bark huts of the Seneca.⁷⁴ Here they went to housekeeping, sharing this lifework in the wilderness of western New York for the next thirty years. Together they bore six children. Rev. Bliss was remembered for elevating the material as well as the spiritual condition of his charges, helping them to “build comfortable houses and barns, fences and cultivate their land, set out fruit trees, etc. . . . he effected a wonderful improvement among them in these respects.”⁷⁵ Cassandra also played a purposeful role, “a lady of fine personal traits of character, deeply beloved by her associates, and by the Indians to whom she was so long a benefactress.”⁷⁶

Despite her new responsibilities, Cassandra did not neglect her family in Boylston. In 1838, when her youngest brother turned 21, she sold to him the property on which her aging and ailing parents now lived.⁷⁷ Charles married a Boylston girl and lived and worked as a shoemaker in the humble house next to the center village burying ground. Younger sisters Lydia and Eunice both waited until their mid-thirties before marrying, perhaps working to earn their independence before choosing a life path. Avis Hooper, however, a frequent visitor to the White family home, followed her eldest sister’s path. In 1837, after a semester spent at New Ipswich Academy with Caroline

⁷⁴ Schenck and Rann, *History of Warren County*, Chapter 49.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Worcester County Registry of Deeds, Vol. 337, Pg. 389. WORC.

White, Avis returned to Boylston to wed the Rev. Gilbert Rockwood, who was then appointed missionary to the Tuscarora Indians in Niagara County, New York. On November 2 of that year, Mary noted in her diary, "I called at Mr. Hooper's. Took my leave of Miss Avis who was soon expecting to be married to a Mr. Rockwood and go as missionaries to the Tuscarora Mission."⁷⁸ Mary's wording yields two insights: Mr. Rockwood was unknown to the people of Boylston – and likely to Avis as well, another example of missionary matchmaking (Rockwood was five years her junior; Avis was 31 at the time of her marriage.) But more importantly, Mary noted that *both* Avis and her husband to be were to "go as missionaries," that she, and likely Avis as well, considered the required wife to be every bit as much a missionary as the ordained husband. The Rockwoods worked among the Tuscarora for over a quarter century and all their children were born on the reservation. They were credited with bringing temperance to the Native people they served.⁷⁹ Despite their limited means and their circumscribed female sphere, Cassandra and Avis Hooper succeeded in blazing paths of purpose and, as Mary would say, "enlarging their sphere of usefulness."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Diary of Mary White, November 2, 1837. OSV.

⁷⁹ In 1845, Gilbert Rockwood reported to the ABCFM: "It is within the memory of many now living among them, when drunkenness was almost universal, now, comparatively few are intemperate. A majority of the chiefs are decidedly temperance men and exert a salutary influence. They have a temperance society and hold frequent meetings. They utterly forbid the traffic in intoxicating drinks on their own soil." Letter of Gilbert Rockwood to Henry R. Schoolcraft, August 1, 1845, in Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Notes on the Iroquois: or, Contributions to American History, Antiquities, and General Ethnology* (H. Pease & Co., 1847) p. 250. But see the contrasting interpretation in Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

Benjamin Houghton Jr.: Limits and Liabilities

The Houghtons were an ancient Boylston family, having migrated south from the seventeenth century settlement of Lancaster when Boylston was in its infancy. The “Houghton Place,” a sprawling farm just northeast of the town center, had supported the family for three generations when Benjamin Jr. came of age in 1825. These fertile acres made the family among the wealthiest in Boylston, and Benjamin’s father enjoyed the respect due a leading citizen.⁸¹

Though established and affluent, the Houghtons were also prolific, and therein lay Benjamin Jr.’s problem. He was one of fifteen children, twelve of whom survived to maturity. (Musically gifted, the Houghton children by themselves constituted a whole choir for town events.)⁸² The family farm had already been divided through three

⁸⁰ Mary and Aaron’s daughter Mary would also accompany her husband west as a missionary bride. Their term of service was relatively brief, and they eventually returned to Worcester County.

⁸¹ Benjamin Houghton Sr. was in the second decile of assessed wealth in Boylston for most of his adult life; he was repeatedly elected selectman during the 1820s. Town officers can be found in William Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886*, BHSS Vol. XII (1978), Appendix I. Houghton family history is given in Wm. C. Noonan, *Educational History of Boylston* BHSS Vol. VI (1980), pp. 60-1.

⁸² The family was especially well remembered to providing the music on the occasion of the cornerstone laying for the Town Hall in 1830. See a 1901 newspaper clipping, “Houghton Family Reunion,” *Worcester Spy*, Boylston Historical Society’s newspaper clippings archive: “The family was always noted for its musical ability and in the olden times the choir of the Boylston church was largely made up of members of the family. At the time of the dedication of the present Town Hall in Boylston in 1830, the singing was furnished by the Houghton family.”

generations; Benjamin Sr.'s remaining 128 acres, while generous for one farm, would barely support two – and certainly not twelve -- new estates.⁸³

Still, Benjamin Jr. had aspirations. In the early 1830s, he courted and successfully won the hand of Lucy Ann Brigham, Aaron White's orphaned niece and long a member of White's prosperous and genteel family.⁸⁴ Her indulgent uncle outfitted the couple with fine furniture, household goods and textiles, and silk gowns for the bride.⁸⁵ Three fine chaises escorted the bridal couple home to the ancient Houghton homestead, where Benjamin ran the estate for his aging father. Four years later, Benjamin moved his wife and two children to their own home, a newly purchased parcel of nine acres in Boylston, with a mortgage taken from his wife's dotting uncle. There Houghton built a new house worth an impressive \$800 and set to work as an independent husbandman.⁸⁶

Two years later, in the wake of his father's death, Benjamin came into his inheritance. However, as was increasingly the case in now land-strapped Boylston, none

⁸³ Information of Benjamin Houghton's estate comes from Worcester County Land Records, Vol. 332 Pg. 468, WORC.

⁸⁴ Diary of Mary White, September 20, 1832, OSV.

⁸⁵ Mary recorded the family preparation of Lucy Ann's bridal portion. Aaron purchased for the couple a bedstead, feather bed, bureaus and a looking glass, tables and chairs, all necessary crockery, iron, tin, and kitchen items – and a cow; Mary supervised the production of all household linens, bed ticks, blankets, coverlids, comforters, quilts, carpets, bonnets, shoes, and seven new gowns, including one of crepe and one of silk. It was very much the same marriage portion they would provide for their own daughter, Eliza, the following year. Diary of Mary White, January to September, 1832. OSV.

⁸⁶ Worcester County Land Records, Vol. 314 Pg. 367 and Vol. 337 Pg.449. WORC. Houghton's new house is referred to in a letter of Mary White Jr. to Charles White, June 21, 1836. OSV. The value of the house is based on the sale of the land and house two years after its completion for \$1200, \$800 more than the value of the land itself.

of Houghton's sons inherited the family farm. Rather, the entire estate was sold and each of the heirs received a one-twelfth share of the proceeds. Benjamin's portion was a mere \$245, far less than what he would have needed to purchase a farm in Boylston.⁸⁷

The same year, Benjamin sold his own house and farm. He should have had assets at this point of over \$1000, but he apparently had either amassed debts to offset his gains, or he had suffered severe losses in the Panic of 1837, for he was not able to acquire another farm in Boylston.⁸⁸ Instead, now landless, he began to rent, first from Aaron White and then from another major landholder.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, his assessed worth slipped lower and lower. We can only speculate whether his reverses were due to unfortunate investments, or to speculative ventures, or perhaps to the strain of trying to maintain a growing family and wife in the manner in which she – and he – had been raised. A prolonged illness in 1839 further reduced his resources, and the family took to binding shoes in their kitchen to earn extra cash.⁹⁰ Such shoe “outwork” was a fairly recent development, an “adaptive traditionalism” in which rural families tried to preserve traditional household production, but it paid little and imposed a degree of dependence

⁸⁷ Worcester County Land Records, Vol. 332 Pg. 468, WORC.

⁸⁸ Worcester County Land Records, Vol. 337 Pg. 449, WORC. It is possible that Houghton was forced to sell his land to satisfy debts; the purchaser was a James Harrington of Lowell, who did not become a resident of Boylston.

⁸⁹ References to Houghton's renting come from the letters and diary of Mary White, who noted her nieces many “removes.” See entries for August, 1839, March 1841. OSV.

⁹⁰ Mary White to Charles White, March 6, 1839; Diary of Mary White, May 22, 1839. OSV.

and “never commanded the dignity of independent farming.”⁹¹ Eventually Houghton began producing shoes full-time, distributing uppers to be bound in the neighborhood.

In 1843, he again tried to gain some independence, purchasing a single acre and modest house near the center village for \$400, though with the help of a \$300 mortgage from a local carpenter.⁹² Houghton tried to piece together a living doing carpentry and shoework, but by 1846, he had been defeated. He sold his meager holding, auctioned his household goods, packed his family into a wagon, and headed west to the Hudson River mill town of Sandy Hill. Here, he likely sought work in one of the textile mills of Mr. Edward Harris, a business associate of his wife’s cousin, Aaron White Jr.⁹³ From here he wrote home wistfully,

How do you get along in Boylston? Does our religious society prosper?
How do you get along with our singing at church? I feel much interested

⁹¹ Vickers, “Competency and Competition,” p. 10; Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth*, p. 296. See also, Mary H. Blewett, *We Will Rise in Our Might: Workingwomen’s Voices from Nineteenth Century New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 2-25.

⁹² Worcester County land Records, Vol. 381 Pg. 85, Vol. 381 Pg195, WORC. The occupation of the man who held the mortgage, George Maynard, is taken from the U.S. Population Census of 1850.

⁹³ Diary of Mary White, March 1846. OSV. Sandy Hill was a village on the Hudson River near Troy that was incorporated in 1810. A 1200-foot dam there furnished waterpower for several mills and a woolen factory. Information on Sandy Hill from an 1860 *Gazetteer*, provided by the Research Library of the New York Historical Society, New York, N.Y. An obituary of Aaron White Jr. noted that he had journeyed to Sandy Hill on business for Edward Harris, “one of the most successful and wealthy woolen manufacturers of Rhode Island,” to assist Harris with legal work in purchasing a valuable water privilege on the Hudson River at the Sandy Hill Falls. White spent six or seven weeks in Sandy Hill on business for his client and quite possibly secured a position for his cousin’s struggling husband at that time. “Instructive and Interesting History of ‘Squire’ Aaron White, *Transcript*, March 19, 1889. Clipping Sheet for Aaron White, Jr. Class of 1817, HU.

about these things and I think about them every sabbath day. I have not sat with the singers [church choir] but once since I left Boylston. This is new times for me. The singing at Sandy Hill is pretty good, though not so good as we used to have at B. It is altogether vocal . . . Do you have Lyceums this winter? I should like to attend them. Have you got good schools this winter? I hope you have . . .⁹⁴

This experiment, however, also failed; two years later he returned penniless to Boylston and again tried to find carpentry and shoework.⁹⁵ Finally, in the early 1850s, Benjamin Houghton moved his wife and children to a boarding house in the Middlesex County factory town of Ashland, where the family found work as laborers in the shoe and boot industry.⁹⁶ In Ashland, the Houghtons were respected for their upright character and piety, but Benjamin never rose out of poverty and Lucy Ann never recovered anything like the genteel lifestyle she had enjoyed in her uncle White's household.⁹⁷ Benjamin Houghton's strategies for securing a livelihood, first at farming, then at artisan work, and

⁹⁴ Letter from Benjamin Houghton to Deacon Henry Brigham of Boylston, Sandy Hill, New York, 1846. From the Hiram Harlow manuscript collection, BHS.

⁹⁵ The Houghtons' return is recorded in the diary of Mary White. Benjamin Houghton was listed as a carpenter with no estate in the 1850 U.S. Population Census for Boylston. In early 1851 the family moved to Ashland.

⁹⁶ Ashland transformed for a town of small ten-footer shoe shops to an industrial shoe center just at the time of Houghton's arrival. The railroad had come through the town in 1850; the adoption of pegging machines, sewing machines, and steam power centralized shoe work in factories where investors were able to provide capital for the expensive equipment. George T. Higley, "Ashland," Chapter XL, *History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts* edited by D. Hamilton Hurd, Vol. 5. (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1890), pp. 550-54.

⁹⁷ In her obituary, Lucy Ann Houghton was remember as ". . . everywhere loved and respected. She had been a member of the Congregational Church for 45 years." Untitled and undated newspaper clipping in the files of the Ashland Historical Society.

finally as a factory laborer, had not brought the improvement to which he had aspired, nor the prosperity to which his parents, and his wife, had been accustomed.

Benjamin Houghton's story – his “progress” from prosperity to penury, from independent farmer's son to dependent factory laborer – illustrates the risky nature of making a living in Boylston during the volatile decades of the 1820s through 1840s. Houghton's experiments, from farming to artisan and outwork, migration, and factory labor, were attempted by other Boylston sons throughout the era, with varying degrees of success, and eventually with transformative consequences for the community.

Venturing: Levi Lincoln Flagg

Levi Lincoln Flagg, first-born son of Joseph, inherited his father's enterprising nature and driving ambition. He did not inherit his father's farm, however. That he would have to earn. Born in 1818, he grew up working his father's land. By the time he was fourteen, his father was lending him out to their neighbor Mr. Brewer for plowing at one-quarter wages – payable to his father.⁹⁸ Lincoln went to the district school with the White boys, but unlike the Squire's sons, he did not continue on to a local academy or a business clerkship. At the age of twenty, when Joseph Flagg gave his first-born his freedom, Lincoln hired himself out as a farm hand to neighboring farmers for the sum of eight dollars a month, plus board.

Lincoln's industry and determination soon earned him the reputation of being “a real eleven fellow.”⁹⁹ In 1840, Aaron White hired him on salary, a princely sum of \$160,

⁹⁸ Account Book of Joseph Flagg, p. 36. OSV.

⁹⁹ Francis White to Charles White, Aug. 30, 1842. OSV.

and Lincoln moved into the White's mansion house and became one of their family.¹⁰⁰

The women made his meals and clothing, did his laundry, and nursed him when sick; the men shared with him in the farm work and socialized with him in their hours of leisure.

He was a family favorite. Francis confessed to his older brother, "I never have found any one else with whom I have lived so long as I have with him that I got along so well as I did with him."¹⁰¹ Aaron was able to persuade Lincoln to remain with them for two years, but in 1842, despite the family's entreaties that he stay on, Lincoln Flagg was ready to move on with his plan.

That plan, as he later confessed, was simple. "I started out in life with the intention of becoming worth \$100,000 and living to be 100 years old," he told an interviewer in 1907. ("I have," he said with a smile, 'got my \$100,000, but have not lived 100 years yet."¹⁰²) By frugal management, he had saved all of his earnings, and he then hired part of his father's farm on shares, "he to have one-half the profits and I the other half." By the end of the first summer he had \$100 to pay his father, but Joseph told his son he could keep the money until spring. With shrewd calculation, Flagg rose early the next morning and walked twelve miles to the train in Westborough, which he took to the Brighton cattle yards. There, he remembered later, "I bought cattle and sold them for profit, and this I followed for seventeen years, walking to Westborough every week, and

¹⁰⁰ In Concord in 1818, a good farm laborer could expect to earn \$120/year with board. Kimenker, "The Concord Farmer," in *Concord: A Social History*, p. 184.

¹⁰¹ Francis White to Charles White, Aug. 30 1842. OSV

¹⁰² *Worcester Telegram*, February 11, 1907. Newspaper clipping, BHS.

the least I ever made was twelve dollars in one week, and often I ran as high as \$60.” Within four years, he was able to purchase his father’s Boylston farm for \$2000.¹⁰³

But Lincoln Flagg was not content to accumulate merely a comfortable subsistence. He set up his own cattle marketing firm, purchasing, butchering, and retailing at three markets in Worcester, one each in the neighboring towns of Clinton and Berlin. Dividing his time between his home farm and his livestock business, Flagg earned a reputation as a “shrewd, far-seeing businessman, although always having the reputation of being strictly honest and honorable in his dealing.”¹⁰⁴ In later life, Flagg bought and sold real estate, investing in and eventually owning over 60 Worcester tenements and 1,000 acres of county land.¹⁰⁵ He was the wealthiest man in Boylston.

His town honored his achievements by consistently choosing him to hold their highest offices, as his biographer noted, “a remarkable tribute on the part of his fellow townsmen to his ability and good judgment, such as few men in any town of the Commonwealth have ever received.”¹⁰⁶ But what people remembered the most was his constant industry, his resourcefulness, his determined striving. When he died, his obituary announced, “Levi Lincoln Flagg Ends 87 Years Work.” It seemed only death released him from the obligation to improve his opportunities.

¹⁰³ See documents relating to this property transaction in the Flagg Family File, BHS.

¹⁰⁴ *Worcester Telegram*, February 11, 1907. Newspaper clipping, BHS.

¹⁰⁵ Untitled, undated newspaper clipping in the “Obituary News Clippings” files, BHS.

¹⁰⁶ Ellery Bicknell Crane, ed. *Historic Homes and Institution and Genealogical and Personal Memories of Worcester County*, Vol. 1 (New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1907), p. 533.

Lincoln Flagg was no different from the White sons or Caleb Crossman in wanting more than traditional farming offered, but he achieved his goals without leaving the land. His journey was not geographical so much as mental: like the Charles White or Caleb Crossman, he preferred competitive striving to communal competence.

Caroline White

Caroline White, the eighth of Aaron and Mary's offspring, was torn between two worlds. Bright and inquisitive, she actively pursued the knowledge that she believed would enlarge her mind and fit her for greater usefulness in the world. And there were things from that greater world that she wanted – both experiences and material goods – that she could achieve only if she could earn her way to independence. Yet her heart was most stubbornly rooted in her home soil; she felt deeply her obligations to serve her parents and to nurture the bonds of family ties. As her siblings one by one left to seek their fortunes, Caroline's steadfast devotion to family anchored their hearts, at least, to "the old home place."

Caroline stayed at home partly because her parents so needed her household labor. Once elder sister Elizabeth wed in 1832, Caroline's were the only able set of hands available to assist her mother with the "household affairs," as she termed them. (Sister Mary helped when she could, but she was infirm – suffering from an unspecified nervous disorder – that limited her usefulness). Despite the family's relative gentility, the Whites were a *farm* family, and farmwomen had heavy responsibilities. Caroline's letters and Mary's diary record the yearly round of cleanings, scourings, and putting up food, along with the weekly tasks of laundry, baking, and dairying and the ceaseless, year-round work of sewing and mending the extended family's clothing. Haying season was

particularly stressful, as she confessed to Charles, “Father having to take care of the old farm makes rather more work in the house. We have had three hired men a week or two past, and shall continue to have, I suppose, for some time whenever the weather is fair.”¹⁰⁷ The live-in help particularly added to Caroline’s laundry duties, making Monday wash days exhausting. Caroline excused her rambling thoughts in a letter to Charles one August evening with the simple explanation, “the reason is it is Monday evening and I feel rather tired.”¹⁰⁸ To household duties were added neighborly obligations, as Caroline was frequently sent to take her mother’s place sitting up with the sick or assisting in times of trouble. When Mr. Cotton died in November of 1843, Mary noted that Caroline went to assist them, lodging two days with the family to lend support and assist with the burial.

As a single adult female, Caroline was constantly called upon to aid her married sister Elizabeth with her young family in Worcester. When young nephew Myron fell into the fire and was badly burned, Aaron wrote to Charles that they had sent Caroline to Worcester to aid the family.¹⁰⁹ In 1840, when her nephew “Franky” turned two, Caroline was sent to fetch the boy from his mother in Worcester and tend to him in Boylston for a month while he “unlearned some earlier habits,” (that is, was weaned).¹¹⁰ Whenever

¹⁰⁷ Caroline White to Charles White, summer’s eve, 1837. OSV.

¹⁰⁸ Caroline White to Charles White, August 19, 1839. OSV.

¹⁰⁹ Aaron White to Charles White, August 15, 1837. OSV.

¹¹⁰ In a letter of Feb. 17, 1840, Caroline informed Charles that “Young Mr. Franky came home with me from W[orcester] a fortnight ago to be weaned”; her father reported on March 1 that Caroline had that day carried “your little nephew Frank (who has been here for a few weeks to unlearn some early habits) to Worcester.”

Elizabeth had a baby, a sick child, a move from one house to another, or any other stressful event, Caroline was sent for – and she always complied.¹¹¹

But Caroline also had dreams of her own. She had a good mind, and she wanted to improve it. From the time she was in her early teens she secured her father's approval and support to go away for occasional semesters at private academies. This schooling was in addition to her attendance at the center schoolhouse (when household duties permitted – she occasionally admitted to her brother that “as I have to stay at home so much, I think I shall go [to school] but little longer”) as well as taking private lessons from itinerant reading and writing masters.¹¹² And she read, voraciously.

All this learning helped Caroline form a mind of her own, and she was not afraid to express her opinions within the security of family, though she frequently qualified her forceful statements with meek comments about her general ignorance. In May of 1837, during the onset of the Panic of 1837, Caroline explained to Charles her astute (and rather accurate) opinion on the cause of the current economic woes:

It appears to me that for a number of years past, the whole nation has been madly bent on speculating and living on credit; but credit without cash, will not stand many years, and now credit has expired, those who have lived on it, must fall. Southern planters, a year or two since, bought a vast number of slaves on credit, expecting their cotton crops would pay principal & interest for slaves, and leave a handsome fortune besides; but instead, they raised so much, that cotton fell in price, and they were left greatly in debt; so that they could not pay the northern merchants and manufacturers their dues, then they failed. Thus there was one source of the troublous times, and it has caused a most disastrous train of evils. I suppose that all might be accounted for, in a somewhat similar fashion,

¹¹¹ See, for example, the letter of Aaron White to Charles White, January 4, 1841. OSV. For more on Caroline's education, see the following chapter.

¹¹² Caroline White to Charles White, June 14, 1836. OSV.

though Gen. Jackson and his constituents, have a great share attributed to them. For my part, I have picked up the idea, (extremely heretical at home however) that the banks are a little more than half to blame, though some ought to be attached to both sides; indeed, if I happen to say a word against the “banking citadel” it produces so much excitement, that I think they know it is rather feeble or they would not be alarmed at my weak weapons. But I will close my long speech about that, [of] which I am very ignorant.¹¹³

Caroline read the papers and followed politics closely, particularly in regard to evangelical reform and the Garrisonian movement. She was not easily impressed. On Election Day in 1839, she wrote to Charles,

I do not feel near the interest in politics I did a few years since, owing partly I believe to the little faith I have in the nonresistance mode of acting & partly with my increase of years the increase of my acquaintance with the two opposing parties has led me to think that whatever the principles of either may be, the majority on both sides exhibit rascally conduct & when we attempt to lean on either for support, they are like broken reeds piercing us through. I will now dismiss national politics, thinking that you & I just this minute feel more interest in the affairs of church & state at home.¹¹⁴

Though always concerned with “the affairs of church and state at home,” Caroline romanticized life in what she called the “bustling metropolis,” and tended to gently mock the “small town” world of Boylston. As she told Charles, “the letter which I received from you . . . gratified me much, and I must say as an apology for my dull scrawls, that situated as you are, in the very focus of news, you ought to have more to amuse and interest than I, who live in such a place, that scarcely a single ray reached here straight. I am sure I have nothing to say now.”¹¹⁵ She loved to travel, and her parents allowed her to

¹¹³ Caroline White to Charles White, Wednesday, May, 1837. OSV.

¹¹⁴ Caroline White to Charles White, November 11, 1839. OSV.

¹¹⁵ Caroline White to Charles White, “Wed. morn.,” May, 1837. OSV.

make rounds visiting her siblings and relatives in Boston and Roxbury, Providence, and Middlebury, Vt.

But what did Caroline want from life? She had a soul both deeply religious and deeply romantic, and her letters occasionally reveal the yearnings of her heart.

Last night as if in preparation for the day of rest, a gentle breeze dispersed the clouds and dried from the face of the earth the excess of moisture. When the sun went down the scene was truly glorious; the clearness of its departure was beautifully displayed on all the works of nature. The different shades of the green leaves showed the character of the plants or their advancement this season, the raindrops glistened on all, the singing of the birds was rich harmony for the mind as well as ear, every thing about us was radiant with the smile of God. Oh, if the polluting waves of sin had not rolled over it, this earth would be a Paradise. To make a right improvement of these blessings which are flung around us with an unsparing hand, we must “look through nature up to nature’s God.” We ought to feel His presence every where and whilst we feel, let us love, & adore him . . . Let us live soberly & gladly in this present world.¹¹⁶

How was Caroline to “make a right improvement” of her blessings? There is some suggestion that at one point she was considering marriage. She was certainly engaged in following the marital prospects of others. Many of her letters lead off with announcements of who had “changed her name and station,” or rumors about her siblings’ potential romantic attachments, to which she always bound Charles to the *strictest secrecy* lest she be accused of gossip. In fact, Caroline did indulge in matrimonial gossip, sometimes with an edge:

Miss Sophia S. Bond came to Boylston week before last to astonish the natives (as Cousin Catharine Bent used to say). She was in company with Lambert Lamson, thus publicly announcing a matrimonial engagement with the aforesaid gentleman. As soon as the house is fitted for her reception, I expect she will consent to have the noose (or rather her heart) securely fastened around his heart or purse as it is uncertain which

¹¹⁶ Caroline White to Charles White, “Last Sabbath in May,” 1839. OSV.

possessed the strongest attraction. Nancy Crossman is published to a Mr. Parker of Shirley. Your quondam friend Joshua, alias Sanford K[endall] has dissolved all intentions of partnership with Miss H.L[?] Billings, no good reason assigned. I believe he said he did not think she would wish to wait seven years, the time he expects to devote to study, but *she* did not say so . . .

As for Caroline's own heart, there is some suggestion that at one point it was devoted to the White's live-in hired help, Levi Lincoln Flagg. The situation would have been natural, as Lincoln was a much-loved member of the family for two years when both he and Caroline were in their mid-twenties. Lincoln escorted Caroline to a neighbor's wedding and accompanied her to Dr. Andrews "where a company of singers met to sing."¹¹⁷ Most tellingly, Francis complained to his brother that "Caroline I suppose has found some one for whom she feels a greater interest," and thus was no longer sending him her regular long missives.¹¹⁸ Sadly for Caroline's hopes, another Caroline entered the picture and stole Lincoln's heart. Caroline Barnes, a young lady from neighboring Berlin, came to board with the White's while going to school with their neighbor, Sally Cotton.¹¹⁹ The eligible young Lincoln now co-resided with two likely Carolines; he chose the latter. Caroline White remained single for the rest of her life.

As her siblings and friends married or moved away from Boylston, Caroline was left with two pressing concerns: how was she to "improve her sphere of usefulness" and how was she to gain some economic independence? There were things she desired – books, pens, paper, special fabrics and threads, hairbrushes and apothecary lotions – and

¹¹⁷ Diary of Mary White, May 11, 1843 and October 27, 1843. OSV.

¹¹⁸ Francis White to Charles White, August 30, 1842. OSV.

¹¹⁹ Diary of Mary White, March 7, 1843. OSV.

she was keenly aware that there were limits to how often she could apply to her father for assistance. She complained to Charles of being “poverty struck.” Caroline wanted a job.

In the summer of 1838, she accepted a position as mistress of a one-room school in Worcester. It is clear from her letters to Charles that she disliked the job. She regaled Charles with humorous sketches of her “voluntary prison”:

The seats & desks are placed in undivided rows, which makes me a great deal of trouble, for nothing is easier for those who wish to play than to slide along a little way, as it were by the attraction of cohesion . . . ; no birch fences I have made has altogether prevented this business. Then such a mob, (for I can think of no other title just now) as I have to manage. I have had thirty-three different scholars since I commenced, but average only thirty a day. No motive I can present will make some of them study, but they are full of tricks (as we say). If they can contrive to [lure] a sheep, or a dog, into the house, they consider it a far greater exploit, than if they mastered some difficult sum in Arithmetic. Occasionally I find frogs hopping about on the floor, then again, I hear some old cat mewing in a corner. As we are situated so near the woods, we are abundantly supplied with moschetoës. One day I observed one of my largest boys very busily engaged, and having the curiosity to ascertain what it was so occupied his attention, I discovered that he had cut a hole in the top of his desk, and out of a chip, he had made a sliding lid for it; this he was filling with mutilated moschetoës. Now from the specimens I have presented you, should you think I had any one who would make any improvement? But I have some, who seem trying to gain some useful knowledge.¹²⁰

“Moschetoës” or no, Caroline’s greatest difficulty with the job was that it required her to board away from home. She confessed that had she not been able to spend Sundays with her sister Elizabeth’s family in Worcester, she did not know how she would have coped.

The attraction of the job, of course, was that Caroline was paid in cash. Caroline also made some “honest cash” tending a neighbor's silk worms, braiding straw to trade for cash or credits at a West Boylston store, and binding shoes for Caleb Crossman and

¹²⁰ Caroline White to Charles White, July 5, 1838. OSV.

Benjamin Houghton. Shoe binding was a rigorous task that required the strength to work a barrel stave clamp with one's knees and strong, dexterous hands to work the leather with awl and needle. Historians have assumed that only poorer women, desperate to augment family income without leaving the home, did it.¹²¹ "Poor" may have been in the mind of the binder, though, for Caroline, daughter of one of the wealthiest men in town, bound cases of shoes from 1837 through 1842. As Caroline explained to her brother, "I have been trying to find employment whereby I might earn something at home," adding that the current haying season made other work impossible.¹²² Shoe binding, though physically demanding wage work, could be done in the home when other household duties did not take precedence.¹²³ For her labors, Caroline was likely paid the going rate of two to six cents a pair, about half what a hired man could earn in the fields. But it was *cash*, cash that she could use for her own desires.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Mary H. Blewett, "Women Shoeworkers and Domestic Ideology: Rural Outwork in Early Nineteenth-Century Essex County," *NEQ* Vol. 60 No. 3 (Sept., 1987), pp. 405-7. See also Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

¹²² Caroline White to Charles White, July 19, 1841. OSV.

¹²³ Jack Larkin points out more than two-thirds of all women who worked for wages were under thirty and unmarried, as married and widowed rural women had heavy domestic responsibilities. Jack Larkin, "Women in the Workplace: Rural New England in the Early Nineteenth Century," unpublished paper, OSV, pp. 6-7. Blewett emphasizes that shoe binding women consistently regarded domestic duties as primary and bound only when they had fulfilled their other responsibilities. Blewett, "Women Shoeworkers," p. 423. Christopher Clark points out the importance of outwork in preserving family labor, though it led to radical social change. "Household Economy, Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism," pp. 180-1.

¹²⁴ Blewett, "Women Shoeworkers," pp. 405-7.

Caroline wanted to be *useful*, to earn some honest cash, to gain some economic independence, but she wanted to do so within the sphere of her family. In 1841, she wrote tellingly to her brother, Charles, “Is it not too bad that the customs of society forbid you and I setting up business together like [cousins] George and Avery? . . . I think too you and I should hitch horses very well. I am afraid Frank & I would have some arguments about who should hold the reins and it would not be quite so pleasant riding.”¹ We cannot know if Caroline ever truly considered setting up a business, but clearly her desire to “hitch horses” with family members was genuine.

In fact, Caroline eventually assumed the role of the family teamster, hitching all her siblings together through her constant letters, visits, and family nurture. In 1846 she inherited some money of her own, granting her the degree of independence she desired. Now in her thirties, Caroline devoted herself to the care of her aging parents, and eventually her widowed mother, for the next fifteen years. She found her “usefulness” in her role as daughter, sister, aunt, and neighbor. Her choice blended an ancient female role with a new one: spinning and weaving the threads of family affection into a new fabric of social relationship, one suitable for a highly mobile, otherwise independent generation.

None of these young Boylstonians followed in his or her parents’ footsteps. Each made choices that led them away from the traditional agrarian life into which they had been born. Charles went to the city, Benjamin to the factory, Caleb to a western university, Cassandra to the Indian frontier. Though Lincoln and Caroline remained in

¹ Caroline White to Charles White, April 5, 1841. OSV.

Boylston, they did not live as traditional farm folk; Lincoln became an enterprising investor and Caroline an educated, devout and devoted maiden aunt who perhaps chose liberty as the “better husband.”¹²⁶ All of their lives reached far beyond the borders of Boylston and linked them through business, mission, or voluntary association to a wider world mostly unknown to their parents. Navigating this new world required these young people to master new forms of relationship and establish new sources of independence. The familiar and communal dispositions of an intensely local, kin-based, and tradition-bound life on the land did not suit in their new lives. This generation had to create for themselves new identities as citizens of a less predictable, more impersonal and cosmopolitan world. They would have to learn to survive outside the protective order of family government or master-apprentice relations; to secure independence based not on inherited land, but on self-mastery and creative adaptation; to fashion identities based on their dreams, rather than on local traditions; to embrace their mission to boldly go where no woman had gone before. Most critically, each would learn to center their dependence not on family, neighbor, and community, but on self and – in some cases – on God.

¹²⁶ See Lee Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America : The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) for discussion of the growing number of women who chose to remain single during this period in order to lead active, purposeful lives in multiple spheres.

CHAPTER FIVE

“USEFUL KNOWLEDGE”

“I go to school and study a little and sit with Lincoln Flagg. He is a very good steady fellow to sit with. We have a pretty large school and have a good time of it and we should have more play out of doors if the snow was not so deep. We have a first rate of a master. I never went to one that I liked so well. ... I wrote this in school midst of the noise and bustle of about eighty scholars and I would not write so well as I could in some other place but if you can read it I do not care.”¹

So sixteen-year-old Francis White wrote to his brother Charles in 1840, reporting on the winter session of Boylston’s center district school. He studied “a little,” but, amidst the “noise and bustle” of 80 scholars – ranging in age from three to twenty-one – Francis was more concerned with playing and having a good time. His narration calls to mind nostalgic illustrations of a rustic one-room schoolhouse, carefree barefoot farm boys, and “reading and writing and ‘rithmetic.” That homey, age-of-homespun image obscures the reality: the process of getting an education was in the midst of a prolonged but profound transformation during the years that Aaron and Mary White’s children were coming of age. In 1831, one local squire noted approvingly that

[a]t the present time some of the inhabitants of this town have caught the generous spirit that is now beginning to pervade this Commonwealth on the all important subject of a more general diffusion of knowledge amongst the rising generation, and it is confidently hoped that the few who are alive to this subject will infuse their own zeal into the breasts of others,

¹ Francis White to Charles White, Worcester, January 16, 1840. OSV.

till there shall be a general attention to the improvement of our district schools . . .²

That transformation was driven by shifting notions of what was required to secure personal independence and competence, and how best to raise the next generation to be virtuous and useful citizens. But, as is often the case when a community debates the best ways to socialize its children, this period of transition was marked with intense conflict. The people of Boylston argued over authority, control, content and access to schooling. Some explored new avenues to learning – tutoring, private classes, reading societies, public lectures -- that challenged the “commonness” of common school education. And a select group, including the White children, increasingly chose to continue their education at elite private academies, gathering knowledge, cosmopolitan views, and class assumptions that set them apart from their less-tutored townsfolk. Although too prolonged and diffuse to be styled a revolution, the growth of new institutions and associations for acquiring knowledge during this period profoundly changed the ways in which Boylstonians saw themselves in relation to their community. For some, such as the White family children, the purpose of schooling itself shifted. The old goals of communal socialization into the authority, norms, and practices of a traditional society with a static social order gave way to individual development of judgment, self-discipline, and internalized virtue to meet the challenges of a pluralistic and mobile world.³

² Matthew Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston in the County of Worcester, from Its First Settlement to the Present Time* (Lancaster: Carter, Andrews and Co., 1831), p. 18.

³ The educational changes that I refer to here are institutional and associational, rather than pedagogical. There is an established literature on the “pedagogical revolution” that flourished in the greater Boston area during the early and mid-nineteenth centuries.

Educational innovation and reform in early to mid-nineteenth century New England was driven by a complex combination of moral, civic, religious, cultural, and career-training concerns. Commentators and reformers claimed that it was essential for the newly enfranchised to be literate, informed, and morally grounded in order to maintain a virtuous Republic. Religious denominations promoted curricula and textbooks to advance their sectarian interests. The region's artisans and their advocates hoped that generous access to "useful knowledge" would secure their status among the respectable and independent middle-class and allow New England to avoid the European class system. Social reformers hoped that immigrants could be brought into the mainstream of New England culture. New England's free school proponents believed that public education would transform a disunited people into a moral society with shared values and norms. Anxious parents hoped that book learning might prepare their offspring for a changing economic world. And the children of farmers who aspired to middle-class status saw in advanced education their entrance to a world of refined sensibilities.⁴ In each

However, the "New England pedagogy," incorporating the teachings of Locke and Swiss reformer Johann Pestalozzi, while written about and experimented with in the Boston and Concord circle, did not make its way into most rural school houses in the 1820s, and '30s. The state-imposed school reforms of Massachusetts' first School Board commissioner, Horace Mann, affected rural towns beginning in the late 1830s; these will be discussed later. For discussion of the "New England pedagogy," see Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); David Hogan, "Modes of Discipline: Affective Individualism and Pedagogical Reform in New England, 182-1850," *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (Nov., 1990) pp. 1-56. For a comparison of New England educational opportunities with those elsewhere in the Early Republic, see Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790-1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 34.

⁴ For a general summary of the school reform movement, see Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers: 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) pp. 206-209.

case, reformers and innovators argued that that improved education would promote moral self-discipline, intellectual and cultural self-improvement, and ultimately self-determination, critical assets in a time of social and economic flux. In a world of shifting economic opportunities, fluid social structure, and plural interests and ideas of good, youth could no longer depend on the guidance of communal norms; educational opportunities aided in the new skill of self-construction.

The demand for “useful knowledge,” a term so often employed by contemporaries, was met by a surge of printed materials and the cultural organizations that promoted and consumed them in rural New England. David Jaffee has termed this extraordinary output of “cultural commodities in printed form” the *village enlightenment*: “It signifies the erosion of a hierarchical structure of authority, in which cultural controls were held by a clerical or college-trained elite; it points to the emergence of a social organization of knowledge suitable to the requirements of rural folk in a rising republic.”⁵ The explosion in print culture helped democratize knowledge, which was now not only available to, but also tailored to the tastes and needs of middling rural folk.⁶ Aspiring

⁵ David Jaffee, “The Village Enlightenment in New England, 1760-1820,” *WMQ* Vol. 47, No. 3 (Jul., 1990), p 328.

⁶ Print culture exploded onto the rural scene in the early 1800’s. One Worcester County citizen recalled that in 1798 only a few copies of a single weekly newspaper made their way into village homes; by 1848, 342 residents subscribed to fifty-five different newspapers and fifty-five periodicals. Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life*, p. 53. By mid-century, rural New Englanders were not only patronizing urban publications, but supporting rural presses that filled an insatiable demand for books. Most popular were schoolbooks, making up three-fifths of rural book sales, followed by the “steady sellers,” devotional texts of the eighteenth-century and contemporary religious works by English evangelicals. But there was an important new component in rural reading as well, books devoted to edification and instruction in natural science and natural and moral

middle-class parents, including successful rural farmers and merchants such as Aaron White, wanted their children to be literate, to be well-read. It was the mark of a gentleman to have “improved oneself,” and the way to do that was to read, read, read.

But the pursuit of educational improvement bred conflict in Boylston. As learning became a valuable commodity, access to it engendered jealousy. As moral consensus in the community splintered, control over the content of schooling became contested. And as some of Boylston’s offspring sought new paths to cultivating their minds, the common schools lost much of their unifying function. Those who could afford tutors, supplemental classes, and local private schools were able to build up greater “stores” of useful knowledge. Those who were able to board away at private academies cultivated not just their minds, but also their social sensibilities, building peer networks that heightened their sense of cosmopolitan distinction and strengthened ties beyond the local sphere. The institutions and associations of education became a lightning rod for contention.

District Schools

Massachusetts had required towns to provide a schoolmaster to teach its children to read and write from the mid-seventeenth century.⁷ Boylston, like most towns, met its obligation by building “district schools,” one-room schoolhouses serving each of the

philosophy. See Jack Larkin’s article, “The Merriams of Brookfield: Printing in the Economy and Culture of Rural Massachusetts in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *PASS* Vol. 96, Part 1, April 1986, pp. 39 – 69.

⁷ The 1647 law shifted responsibility for primary education from families to community. It required towns with 50 or more children to provide instruction in reading and writing; towns with 100 or more children had to provide instruction in Latin and Greek grammar as well. This law was generally interpreted to apply to free, white male students.

major neighborhoods in town. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Boylston had five such district schools, each of which offered two terms of instruction. Winter term began after Thanksgiving, when the harvest was over and the children's labor no longer essential at home, and ran for twelve weeks. The summer term began in May and generally ran till haying time. Responsibility for hiring masters for each district, stocking the schoolhouse with wood, and overseeing end-of-the term examinations was vested in an annually elected school committee.

Boylston's one-room district schoolhouses in the 1820s and '30s usually held sixty to eighty scholars of varying ages. Late in his life, Deacon Henry Brigham teaching in the Center District School in the 1830s, where his average class consisted of eighty pupils, "from the little tot of four years old to the stalwart young men and ladies of twenty-one years of age."⁸ The atmosphere within the Boylston schoolhouses, with so much reciting and instruction going on simultaneously, was truly one of "noise and bustle," as Francis described. One former Boylston schoolmaster wrote of the difficulties that faced even the male teachers:

The winter terms were always taught by men, and as they were attended by pupils, especially young men who had reached, and in some instances passed, the age of majority, it often required not only a great amount of tact and resolution, but of physical strength and ability on the part of the master to discipline and control the troublesome element that would sometimes manifest itself. A successful Schoolmaster of those old-time district schools was considered something of an athlete in strength and movement.⁹

⁸ Wm. C. Noonan, *Educational History of Boylston* BHSS Vol. VI (1972), pp. 10-11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

Caroline White, writing to her brother Charles in 1840, agreed. She reported on the trials of the district schoolmaster, a contemporary and friend of Charles':

Mr. Sanford M. Kendall has finished school keeping for this season; he closed with very little ceremony; the majority of the inhabitants of that district were much prejudiced against him; three or four of the larger scholars were determined to be rebellious and make disturbances. After trying various methods to oust him from the schoolhouse, they hit upon one at last which proved successful; they entirely closed up the chimney and fairly smoked him out.¹⁰

Despite these conditions, the Boylston School Committee expected their hired masters to instruct students in a broad array of subjects. Most students applied themselves to basic writing, reading, grammar, parsing, and ciphering, but the committee reported that during the winter term advanced pupils at the Center School also studied Latin and French, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, and even Mental and Natural Philosophy. Though some in town had argued for the provision of standard school books, by the 1830s, many students still brought whatever texts they had from home, or copied mathematical rules and problems, grammar rules, and sample letters or lines for orthography lessons into blank copy books.¹¹ The goal was to give each student the opportunity to learn to read, write legibly, and keep accounts; advanced students tackled subjects necessary for college entrance examinations. Phineas Ball's printed copybook promised exercises to produce "plain rapid writing," and "practical arithmetic as it occurs in ordinary business."¹² In his copybook, the fourteen-year old Phineas repeated letters

¹⁰ Caroline White to Charles White, January 6, 1840. OSV.

¹¹ For examples of these copy books, see Oliver Sawyer's Book, 1811, OSV, and Phineas Ball's School Book, 1837-8, BHS.

and numbers, and practiced writing such useful terms as “demand,” “paid,” his signature, and the names of his friends. He sketched surveying images for rivers, roads, ponds, or lakes, and he refined his handwriting by copying set lines such as “Vanity and presumption ruins many a promising youth,” and “Have your attention always directed to something useful.”

Hidden amongst the commonplaces of Phineas Ball’s seemingly innocuous schoolbook, however, is evidence of a simmering controversy. His teacher had set him to copy a simple poem called “The Housebuilder,” about a man who procrastinated in building his house until death provided him a permanent “home of clay.” The poem was an eighteenth-century Russian piece, known to Phineas’ schoolmaster because Boston minister John Pierpont had selected it for inclusion in his 1826 school text, *The American First Class Book*.¹³ Pierpont had not made his selections idly, as he explained in his preface, but had chosen works that would be approved “by those, in every part of our country, who are attentive to the national, moral and religious sentiments contained in the books that are used by their children while learning to read, and while their literary taste is beginning to assume something of the character which it ever afterward retains.”

John Pierpont was concerned that schoolbooks reflect correct “national, moral, and religious sentiment,” but as a Boston minister in the 1820s, his notion of moral and religious correctness was inevitably shaped by sectarian concerns. A leading Unitarian, he designed his schoolbook to counter the biblically based, Calvinistic school texts that

¹² See Phineas Ball’s *School Book*. OSV.

¹³ John Pierpont, *The American First Class Book* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little and Wilkins, 1826).

had dominated common school instruction. He wished to shape Christian characters in a way that was “more suited to the American Republic . . . and less obnoxious to complaint,” that is, less imbued with specifically biblical or Calvinist sentiments. It is not surprising that the schoolmaster in Phineas Ball’s school who chose this text was himself selected by Lambert Lamson, a school committeeman with strong Unitarian leanings.

Pierpont had powerful coworkers in his struggle to impose standardized non-Calvinist texts and statewide “non-sectarian” teacher training. In 1837, Unitarian Horace Mann was appointed the first head of a newly established Massachusetts State Board of Education. The stated goal was to upgrade and standardize public education, but included in that agenda was the demand that all public education be non-sectarian, a veiled attempt to counter the influence of Calvinism in the schools. Orthodox clergy fought this imposition of “non-sectarian moral education.” In 1840, they struggled unsuccessfully to abolish the Board of Education, fearing that the Board’s supposedly non-divisive, non-denominational moral instruction would “breed Unitarians, or worse, nonbelievers.”¹⁴

Struggle for control over the common schools and their curricula is evident in Boylston town records. For years, the town had annually nominated and elected without incident five school committeemen – one for each district – as well as three examiners. In the sectarian conflict of the 1820s, however, little passed town meeting without conflict. The minister, as the town’s most educated citizen, had traditionally served on the committee to examine schools, but when Unitarian Ward Cotton was dismissed in 1825,

¹⁴ Charles E. Bidwell, “The Moral Significance of the Common School,” *HEQ*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Autumn, 1966) p. 53.

the town began a protracted battle over control of the examining and school committees. It was essentially a battle for control of moral instruction in Boylston.

Each year, these issues and appointments became more controversial. In 1827, elections were postponed, and then an examining committee of one Unitarian, one Congregationalist, and an unaffiliated church member was elected. In 1828, Unitarian Rev. Cotton was chosen to examine, but the following year, Congregationalist Rev. Russell was elected (prompting Capt. Howe's profane outburst: "If the people have a mind to be such damned fools as to vote in for their first school committee man a liar, then let them go on!"). In 1830, the town voted to let each district choose its own school agents, but that vote was then reconsidered and overturned, a process repeated the next two years. The town tried electing school committeemen by show of hands, by ballot, by "a union ticket from the different religious societies," but no proposal succeeded in restoring peace. For the next decade, the choice of school committee and examiners raised tensions and tried tempers at every annual town meeting.

An analysis of those who were elected to school committee positions between 1825 and 1840 reveals the underlying sectarian divisions.¹⁵ More than three-quarters of those elected were members of a town church, far higher than the 50 percent average for the town as a whole. Of those, half were professed Unitarians, and half were orthodox, revealing the closely contested struggle for sectarian domination.¹⁶ The keenest contest

¹⁵ Information on these elections comes from the Boylston Town Clerk's Record Book, Vols. III and IV, typescript. BHS.

¹⁶ Religious sect is known for 93 of 119 – or 78% -- agents and examiners who made up the school committee between 1825 and 1840. Of those 93, 48% were Congregationalists and 52% were Unitarians.

appears to have been over ministerial representation on the examining committee, as Sanford and Cotton battled for, alternately winning and losing, this important position. Their struggle represented the greater contest over the use of the Bible, or of non-sectarian teachings, as the authority for moral instruction in the school. Would Phineas Ball be asked to parse “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all,” or “Hypocrisy is injurious to society generally?”¹⁷

These were not idle questions. Behind them lay a struggle for control and a debate over authority in the schools. Schools had always played a significant role in shaping moral values. Factions in Boylston contested every aspect of education: lines of parsing, text books, who should choose schoolmasters, and how students should be examined to assert control over that process of moral instructions. Evangelical orthodox Protestants saw biblically based elementary education as essential to the salvation of the nation; literacy was a tool for advancing Bible study, Sabbath Schools, tract societies, and conversion. Unitarians resisted orthodox focus on biblically centered education and pushed revised textbooks and curricula to support their “non-sectarian” concerns of moral improvement. The battle over school committeemen was a battle over moral authority; it was evidence that in Boylston a moral consensus was no longer widely shared.¹⁸

¹⁷ The first line is from the *New England Primer*, the classic seventeenth century schoolbook that combined learning the alphabet with a Puritan catechism of mankind’s inherent sinfulness, divine punishment, and the inevitability of death. The second line, from Phineas Ball’s school book, reflects Unitarianism’s general embrace of moral principles for the progressive improvement of individual and society.

¹⁸ Charles Bidwell compared schooling in communities that were “morally-integrated,” morally pluralist, and morally conflicted or polarized. In the “moral community” control of community organizations such as schools is “vested in persons who exemplify or safeguard the preferred moral standard.” Highly pluralist towns, accepting that such a

Not all the tension surrounding Boylston common schools originated in sacred concerns; Boylstonians also battled over how educational resources should be divided. In the economic turmoil of these decades, parents were concerned that their children be properly equipped for “the chancy competition of market revolution and agrarian crisis,” as historian Charles Sellers termed it.¹⁹ Reading, a fine written hand, and ciphering were increasingly seen as essential skills for non-agrarian careers.

Boylston had traditionally allotted each district an equal share of the town’s tax revenues that had been appropriated for schooling expenses. Each agent then hired a schoolmaster, paid his room and board, and provided wood for the schoolhouse. In 1829, however, a year of intense Boylston controversy, a motion was made and passed to alter the proportion of school money among the several districts. School agents were directed to prepare a census of scholars in their districts between the ages of four and twenty-one years of age, so that in the future school monies could be divided according to the number of scholars. The census was duly taken, but the next year, the motion to divide school funds proportionately was intensely debated. Opponents insisted that money should be divided between the districts according to what the people in that district paid in tax. The controversy continued throughout the decade, with various proposals of increasing complexity put forward. (In 1836 a motion was made that one half of the funds

moral consensus will not be reached, are less likely to battle for control. But towns that are morally polarized and in the process of losing their moral integration will struggle to produce conforming sentiments and to assert control over socialization of the next generation. Charles E. Bidwell, “The Moral Significance of the Common School,” *HEQ* (Fall, 1966), pp. 50-91.

¹⁹ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 366-7.

should be equally divided, and one half divided according to the number of scholars in each district. The motion was defeated.)

This debate reflects more than general discord or sectarian controversy. For years Boylston had considered schooling a communal responsibility. All youth who belonged to the town, regardless of their parents' ability to pay taxes, were to be allowed at least one term's schooling per year, and all households, whether they had school-age youth or not, were required to pay for support of the districts schools in general.²⁰ This shared obligation was for the public good, intended to produce useful Christian servants. As long as family-taught skills and family-bequeathed land were the most important determinants of economic competence and social status, no one quarreled over how school funds were allotted. However, as classroom skills became more important for success in the non-farming world, Boylston's farm parents became jealous of these limited resources.

Competition between school districts for funding indicates a shift from a general communal mentality of common good to a more individualist, competitive concern for self-advancement. It also indicates, in Boylston's case, the rising tensions over an increasingly inequitable distribution of wealth. The problem was felt most intensely in the Center District, where the White children attended school. As more stores opened around the green, and more of Boylston's gentry such as Aaron White chose to build their mansion houses in the bustling center village, these families came to have, on average,

²⁰ Well into the nineteenth century, Boylston town meeting voted that poor children put out to their neighbors had the right "to be taught to read, write, and cipher, so far as is attainable by causing him to attend the town school in his school district at least eight weeks in every year during the term with suitable books and stationary together with such other instruction as is suitable to his dignity." Indenture of Samuel Stone, recorded in the Boylston Town Clerks Record Book, Vol. III, town meeting minutes for 1826. BHS.

more resources – and perhaps more ambitions – to lavish on their children. Soon upwardly aspiring parents from the outer districts such as Benjamin Houghton Sr. were petitioning town meeting to be allowed to have their children attend the Center School, perhaps believing that study there would be more effective than among their more rustic neighbors.²¹ Resentment against the Center District was most likely heightened in the turbulent years of 1829 and 1830, when the town acted on a bequest from the Boylston family of Boston and built a fine new granite town house in the center village, with the lower level designated as a new Center District School. The rest of the town grumbled about this advantage, heaped on an already advantaged district; when town meeting met that year, nasty debate erupted over a motion to provide two stoves for the building, one for the town hall and one for the school. Two stoves were too expensive! After much debate, it was voted to procure a stove for the school only, but this vote was so fiercely resisted that it was quickly overturned. It was then voted to procure a stove for the town hall only; the center district scholars in their new granite schoolroom would have no stove, or at least not one provided by their fellow townsmen.²² (After a bitterly cold winter session, the town consented the following January to procuring a school stove.)

Education in Boylston had always been an intensely local concern; local men procured mostly local teachers to prepare Boylston's offspring to be useful Boylston citizens. Rising mobility and the influx of young people who did not have community roots may well have strained the sense of civic responsibility for local education, but the

²¹ See the petition of Benjamin Houghton to Town Meeting, March 21, 1836, Boylston Town Clerk's Record Book, Vol. IV, typescript. BHS.

²² Minutes of Boylston Town Meeting, March 1830 and January 1831, Boylston Town Clerk's Book, Vol. IV, typescript. BHS.

state, too, played a role, by beginning to take over some of the authority that had once belonged to Boylston alone. From 1838 on, Horace Mann's State Board of Education increasingly directed – or meddled in – the choice of textbooks, the training of teachers, and the collection of school data. Local schools were no longer wholly independent, and Boylstonians were aware that they now ran their schools in conjunction with the state. Consistently, after 1838, town meeting notes referring to the districts schools appended the note, “agreeable to a provision contained in section of an Act passed by the Legislature . . .” Whether, in fact, the town was agreeable to these acts we do not know, but they were certainly aware that they now shared responsibility for district schooling with an increasingly activist state.

The federal government also made its presence felt in Boylston schools after the Surplus Distribution of 1837. Andrew Jackson's fiscal policies, and especially receipts from western land sales and tariffs, had produced an unprecedented and politically embarrassing surplus in government revenue. In April of 1836, the federal government authorized a temporary distribution of the surplus revenue to the states, and in 1837 Massachusetts distributed these funds to the towns. Many Massachusetts towns devoted the whole of their distribution to improving local district schools; Boylston dedicated a significant portion to repairing schoolhouses, using the rest to retire town debt.²³ It was the first time Boylston had received direct government aid for education, and it must have

²³ Edward Gaylord Bourne, *The History of the Surplus Revenue of 1837; Being an Account of Its Origin, Its Distribution Among the States, and the Uses to Which it was Applied* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1885), Appendix III. See also, “Orders drawn on the Treasurer by the Selectmen,” 1837, Boylston Town Clerk's Record Book, Vol. IV, 1838. BHS.

deepened their sense that their local common schools were now part of a larger institutional structure.

By the late 1830s, then, the Boylston district schools were debating newly contested questions: What would be taught and by whom? Would all children receive the same “common” education, or would districts be distinguished by the resources of area farmers? Who would have the authority to make decisions regarding curriculum, texts, methods, teacher qualifications and credentials? Did the responsibility – and the power – to oversee these decisions rest with the townsfolk or the state? As Boylston contested these questions, competitive concerns to advance personal interest and sectarian views colored old notions of a shared responsibility to promote the common good.

Other Paths to Education in Boylston

Like many of the aspiring gentry in Boylston, the White family did not limit their education to the offerings of their Center District School. They were active participants in the Village Enlightenment. They “improved” every opportunity to gain useful knowledge, to form their characters through reading and discussion, to enlarge their understanding of the world as an on-going act of self-education.

The breadth of their educational activities – reading, attending lectures and public speeches, exhibitions and concerts, touring institutions and museums, and attending an extraordinary range of private and public classes – reflected the inchoate state of formal education. Other than the ministry, there was no established educational path to the professions, nor any recognized form of preparation for most emerging trades. Accumulating general “useful knowledge” was the best preparation for, as Donald M. Scott has said, “achieving a broad though difficult-to-measure goal of ‘rise,’

'betterment,' 'fame,' or success.'"²⁴ To do that, the Whites supported their children in their efforts to piece together an education from a broad range of local resources.

Not all the districts schools had their sessions at the same time, and some students -- especially those whose fathers could afford extra hired help on the farm -- supplemented their own district schooling by attending some weeks in the common schools of other districts. Thus, Mary White records in the early 1830s that youngsters Charles and Francis attended the South district school for a month before the winter session opened in the Center district. When no district school was in session, the Whites sometimes sent their teen-aged children -- both boys and girls -- to be tutored individually by the minister. Caroline and Mary studied intermittently with "Miss Nelson." Caroline performed "recitations" for Rev. Sanford, and Francis spent several seasons working one-on-one in the minister's study; both were likely refining their Latin and Greek in preparation for higher studies.

In the early 1830s, when, as Squire Davenport reported in his contemporary history of the town, enthusiasm was rising for "a more general diffusion of knowledge amongst the rising generation," local townsfolk began to offer private classes for those

²⁴ "The coherence and organization that had marked most trades and professions in the eighteenth-century had eroded, and the rationalized and bureaucratic professional structures of the last decades of the nineteenth century had not yet emerged." Donald M. Scott, "The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth Century America," *JAH* Vol. 66, No. 4 (Mar. 1980), p. 795. James D. Watkinson notes that storing one's brain with general, useful knowledge "still seemed the key to social mobility in the young democracy, and popular images of success through self-education supported this belief." The popularity of general self-education lost its promise later in the nineteenth century as specialized and professionalized knowledge became the prerequisite for advancement in many fields. James D. Watkinson, "Useful Knowledge? Concepts, Values, and Access in American Education, 1776-1840" *HEQ* Vol. 20, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 351-2.

who could afford the tuition. Rev. Cotton's daughter, Sally, kept "Miss Cotton's School" in her father's home, which seems to have catered to the youngest students. Charles and Francis went "to school to Miss Cotton" in 1828 when they were six and eight years old respectively. A decade later, Mary's four-year old grandson Myron Conant came to live with the family while attending Miss Cotton's school.

By the late 1830s, the town supported four private schools, "to supplement the terms and times of the schools supported by the town."²⁵ The town allowed the free use of the district schoolhouses, and those parents who could afford the tuition of about \$1.75 per term sent their children by the week or the term. One local observer noted the marked tendency of these tuition schools to intensify distinctions between families based on economic means: "One disadvantage of this system . . . of supplementing the work of the town school with a private school, was that it gave the children of wealthier and more affluent people, who were able to pay the cost of tuition for their children, an unequal and undue opportunity and advantage over the poor ones who were unable to meet the additional cost of tuition and instructions."²⁶ Contemporaries noted with concern that "the children of one family are often all distinguished for good scholarship, while those of another family are exceedingly deficient in this respect."²⁷ The commonness of common schools was diluted by the advent of these private supplemental classes.

²⁵ Wright, *The Educational History of Boylston*, pp. 8-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 8

²⁷ This observation was made by the Boylston school committee in 1842. The committee attributed the difference primarily to parental influence and commitment to education. School committee report cited in Wright, *The Educational History of Boylston*, p. 11.

The White children also attended – and provided – evening “specialty” schools in spelling and writing. In an age when American spellings were only beginning to become standardized (Webster’s mammoth two-volume *American Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1828), mastering the genteel and correct spelling, rather than the phonetic or colloquial, was a mark of cosmopolitan refinement. Mary White regularly noted her children’s attendance at evening spelling schools, particularly in the cold winter months. William White took the winter quarter off from his studies at Williams College in 1837 and 1838 and opened a school for training in penmanship and writing in the family home. His sister reported that the two-month school, whose students included his own younger brother Francis, was a “good success.”²⁸

In this dawning age of clerks and commerce, a fine hand was considered an essential skill for any properly trained professional man. In one letter, unfortunately damaged by water blots, Aaron urges Charles to perfect his penmanship:

[Fine writing is essential] for a man of business, yet it may at least be said that it is highly ornamental. I have always thought that it was natural for my boys to acquire the art of handsome writing and I have no doubt that with a little attention and practice you will be able to show as fair specimens as any one of them which will be no small praise.²⁹

But it was not professional aspirations alone that filled the desks at William’s school.

Writing masters such as William were also patronized by youth of both sexes who saw a fine hand as a mark of gentility. In previous generations, only aristocratic ladies and gentlemen had had the time and resources to perfect the graceful Chancery script of the

²⁸ See Diary of Mary White, Dec. 7, 1837, OSV; Mary White (junior) to Charles White, Feb. 6, 1838; Francis White to Charles White, Jan. 17, 1838. OSV.

²⁹ Aaron White to Charles White, May 1, 1838. OSV.

Italian Renaissance. Now, the aspiring middle class in America pursued this art as proof of their own claim to gentility.

When perfected, penmanship was to be put to use for another emerging middle-class passion, letter writing. Once a pastime of nobility and scribes, letters were now self-consciously exchanged by middle class writers as marks of their qualifications for polite society. "Because the letter writers thought of their epistles as presentations of themselves, they strove to produce beauty not only of penmanship but also of expression."³⁰ Writing masters helped their students to perfect their epistolary composition, penmanship, and spelling. The letters sent to Charles by his siblings reflect their concern with mastering this art. "I am glad to find that you express yourself so easily and there is nothing I can see in the way to your becoming a finished letter writer and that is not a contemptible attainment," wrote elder sister Elizabeth.³¹ Charles' sister Mary expressed her embarrassment at her own poor letter-writing skills:

I am much obliged to you for the letter received from you though I must say the compliments it contained did more credit your partiality than your judgment. I am altogether unused to the business (as your letter intimates and as indeed I am for I write to you as often as to any one) letter writing seems a formidable task. Though the improvement which you have made in the art since leaving home at times almost induces me to adopt your plan of practicing to see if I can attain any degree of ease in the occupation; . . . I hope you will continue to favor me with letters from you which I highly prize.³²

³⁰ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 215. Bushman points out that during the nineteenth century, the letter "once meant to demonstrate propriety and polish... now carried messages of regard and love, creating an affectionate society of family and friends." p. 216.

³¹ Elizabeth White Conant to Charles White, November 19, 1839. OSV.

³² Mary White (sister) to Charles White, June 19, 1838. OSV.

Sister Caroline, who wrote frequent and amusing letters to Charles, belittled her own abilities by signing herself “Madame Mistake Blot” and “Caroline Scratcher.” “Francis thinks it will be a blot on my name to send such a scribble as this but you know I have passed the reach of slander in that respect. If ever you pick this out it must be at odd intervals of leisure the ensuing season.” “My letter, I think, resembles that portion of a newspaper which comes under the head of miscellaneous, where you will find wonderful discoveries. Steam boat accident, Mammoth pumpkin, and horrid murder all in a string, as if you tried to see what a jumble you could make.” “I have written in great haste & nearly covered a sheet of paper with poor nonsense, which I am afraid you will never be able to read, but if you cannot, get no one to assist you nor let any one see this, if you have any compassion for the credit of your sister, Caroline.” “My pen & ink have been good emblems of my brain all the way through. One is cracked halfway up the quill, the other is as thick as mud.”³³

As family and friends became more mobile, letter writing proved an essential link in the chain of childhood love and memory. A badly written letter, as much as being a disgraceful presentation of the self, could also be interpreted as a lack of affection.³⁴ Caroline and Mary were quick to reassure their brother that the shortfall lay in their abilities, and not in their love.

Don't you sometimes feel ashamed, vexed, provoked with me, for sending you such ragged, dirty, stingy little bits of paper after you have supplied

³³ Caroline White to Charles White, No date, Accession No. 1.17; Dec. 20, 1836; No date, 1.24; Mar. 1, 1839. OSV.

³⁴ Bushman, *Refinement of America*, p. 215

me with good paper, at a very cheap rate? Now you must not ascribe it all to my closeness that I do so, but put the best construction on it, as I do, viz, it is in good taste: it corresponds throughout, the ideas, the penmanship, & the paper... these little weekly scraps I trust you always destroy as soon as you have deciphered them.³⁵

William was able to support himself for two terms as a writing master, and he was not the only gentleman in town to keep a writing school.³⁶ The demand for tutoring in orthography, composition, and letter-writing in rural Boylston speaks to growing desire for cultural refinement among a certain element in town. The ability to acquire a “fine hand,” use standardized spellings and compose a proper letter would also serve as marks of distinction, separating those in Boylston who could afford private tuition from those who must be – or simply were – satisfied with common-school training.

Mary and Aaron White also paid tuition to send their children to evening “reading schools.”³⁷ These classes improved facility with reading, but also taught students to *engage* with their texts by writing commentaries, preparing essays to read aloud in class, and enlarging on a text by addressing questions that it raised.³⁸ The White family believed wholeheartedly in the power of reading to form character and shape powers of independent judgment. Charles’s parents and siblings wrote to him during his

³⁵ Caroline White to Charles White, July 19, 1839. OSV.

³⁶ Mary’s diary records that Francis attended a summer writing school in 1836, while Mary and Caroline attended a winter writing school in 1841. William was not at home at this time; the diary does not record who taught the school.

³⁷ See the Diary of Mary White in December of 1832 and 1834. OSV.

³⁸ Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America,” *JAH* Vol. 83, No. 2 (Sept., 1996), pp. 419-423.

apprenticeship, urging him to take advantage of every opportunity to educate himself, and most especially to devote his leisure hours to reading.

Read good books. You now probably enjoy the best opportunity to improve your mind which you will ever have . . . Study when you read; by this I mean only that it be your aim to understand and comprehend the meaning of what you read. Do not compare your amount of knowledge by the number of pages which you turn over but by the variety and correctness of ideas with which you store your mind. Think upon what you read or hear that is important and so make it a part of yourself. This is the only way by which substantial advantage can be derived by reading. Your main business now is to learn, learn, learn.³⁹

William often repeated the advice, urging Charles to “improve every opportunity for gaining useful knowledge.”⁴⁰ William usually focused on the practical benefits of reading for developing good habits for successful business. By attentive reading, Charles would build his store of useful ideas, William exhorted, strengthen his memory, discipline his mind, learn attention to detail, perseverance, patience, and discernment. “I mention these things now for your improvement,” William explained, “for you have just commenced your apprenticeship and the formation of habits which you will have through life.”

Sister Caroline also encouraged Charles to educate himself. But she was concerned less with the practical benefits of reading than with Charles’s sacred duty to improve his mind that he might improve the world.

You wish to know my opinion respecting spending so much time in the cultivation of the mind. Your hours of leisure being limited, how can I best spend them? I suppose is your question. Is it right from [sic] me to devote that time to myself? & first I would ask, do you know of any way you could more good with it. If so, then your present course is wrong, but remember, the soul or mind is yours to prepare for a higher, a nobler state

³⁹ William White to Charles White, January 2, 1838. OSV.

⁴⁰ William White to Charles White, Aug. 11, 1836. OSV.

of existence, & as the education is to commence here, it is the duty of each to use all the means in their power to enlarge its capacity for knowledge and if the heart is sanctified the effort will at the same time increase the usefulness and happiness of the individual.⁴¹

The White family women were equally determined to benefit from books. Until they were married, daughter Elizabeth and niece Lucy Ann faithfully attended the “Reading Society.” This appears to have been a female society that met once a month to read aloud from a library of books that they had jointly acquired; while they listened and then discussed, they sewed items to donate to charity.⁴² Similar female reading societies were springing up in other rural communities. Elizabeth’s and Lucy Ann’s reading society likely had its roots in the earlier Congregational women’s society, which listened to biblical and devotional works while sewing for charity, but the latter-day Reading Society was different in several respects. First, if it was like its sister societies in other towns, it addressed secular as well as sacred texts, work of history, biography, travel literature, tales, and sketches. Second, their reading was an act not of passive consumption, but of active engagement. Women were encouraged in these societies, as scholar Mary Kelley has shown, to explore the ideas and “try on the personae they encountered in their texts, sample perspectives of authors and fellow readers and measure the relevance for their lives. In the process, they engaged in self-fashioning: having been exposed to a range of possibilities, they were able to choose their own “distinctive

⁴¹ Caroline White to Charles White, Aug. 16, 18[40?]. OSV.

⁴² There are diary entries for White family daughters attending the Reading Society on a regular basis in 1827, 1828, 1829, and 1830, then again in 1832. The society appears to have disbanded in 1832, following the departure of Rev. Russell, suggesting that there was a sectarian element to its membership.

personality, a particular address to the world, a way of acting and thinking.”⁴³ The young ladies’ society, then, used reading not only to gain useful knowledge and to discipline the character, but also to develop personal identity and self-determination.

Despite their focus on the individual, these reading societies had a collective and expansive effect as well. These women forged a common intellectual world. This subset of Boylston’s young women now shared cultural references, experiences, and values that separated them from the rest of Boylston’s women. Moreover, their reading habit gave them the freedom to choose where and from whom they would acquire their knowledge. Local male esquires were no longer “the information gatekeepers for their neighbors.”⁴⁴ They were connected directly to the greater cosmopolitan world.

One educational institution in Boylston during the 1830s was intended to embrace the entire community. The lyceum, a series of public lectures and debates, drew crowds throughout the 1830s to hear local and Worcester County men of repute speak on topics of useful knowledge. Lyceum lectures, an idea imported from Britain to provide the uplift of education to working men, had their advent in Worcester County in 1826, when Yale geologist Josiah Holbrook introduced a series of public lectures to his home town of Millbury as a form of “mutual education.”⁴⁵ Holbrook’s goal was to bring scientific

⁴³ Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” p. 401-424. On self-fashioning through engagement with texts, Kelley cites Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt, p. 403.

⁴⁴ Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 294.

⁴⁵ The lyceum was defined as a “mutual education association” by Josiah Holbrook in the 1820s. Boylstonian Matthew Davenport referred to the town’s “mutual system of instruction” in 1831. Vern Wagner, “The Lecture Lyceum and the Problem of Controversy,” *The Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan. 1954), p. 122;

knowledge and other “useful” topics to mechanics and farmers, both to make them better in their occupations and to help them achieve independence and uplift in a socially mobile democracy.⁴⁶ The idea of self-education through public lectures quickly gained popularity in Boston, and by 1829 the Boston Mechanics’ Lyceum was providing a series of self-help lectures, a library, and periodicals designed “to diffuse general elementary knowledge.”⁴⁷ Lectures were open to all who could pay the minimal fee, and organizers adopted an ecumenical approach to encourage attendance by the whole community. As one historian has shown, lyceum lectures in the 1830s were “free from the taint of violent proposal, free from the worrisome suggestions of agitators The lyceum was to be preserved untarnished from contact with sectarian and political and minority struggles.”⁴⁸

In Boylston, as in most towns in the 1830s, a local squire, lawyer, professor or clergyman usually delivered the lyceum lecture. Most of the presenters listed in Mary’s diary were men from Boylston or surrounding communities who were known to her. These gentlemen delivered lectures on chemistry, electricity, Galvinism, phrenology, the wonders of microscopes, and – by far the most popular topic – astronomy. They also entertained their audiences with travel tales, such as a presentation on “Hindoo manners

Matthew Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston* (Lancaster, Mass.: Carter, Andrews and Co. Printers), p. 18.

⁴⁶ James D. Watkinson, “Useful Knowledge?” pp. 351-70. For a general history of the origins of the lyceum movement, see Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 361.

⁴⁸ Vern Wagner, “The Lecture Lyceum and the Problem of Controversy,” p. 121.

and customs, displaying paintings representing scenes and things in India.”⁴⁹ Winter was the “season” for the Boylston lyceum, and the evening lectures were delivered on neutral ground: in school houses or in the town hall, but never in the meeting house.

Despite the non-sectarian mandate of the lyceum movement, Boylston’s lectures on “general knowledge” and uplift through learning were likely attractive to the Unitarian minds in town, especially as a foil to the myriad evangelical societies. They hoped to combat “received wisdom” and biblical authority with the spread of enlightened thought and the power of the human will. Congregationalists, however, had their concerns. They embraced “ennobling knowledge” that confirmed the divine natural order and the power of the creator; Mary frequently followed her discussion of a lyceum topic with a diary comment such as that following a presentation on astronomy on May of 1830: “How great must the creator be. May this view of his works lead us to put our trust in him.” Congregationalists approved of lectures that explored the mysteries of God’s nature, truths about human nature around the world, or discussions of American customs and character.⁵⁰ But they worried about too much emphasis on Unitarian celebration of rationalism and the power of human agency. In 1833, a Boylston lyceum was followed by a debate on the question “whether the lyceum was favourable to religion.” The question, ultimately, was decided in the affirmative.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Diary of Mary White, May 24, 1843. OSV.

⁵⁰ Donald M. Scott, “The Popular Lecture,” p. 803.

⁵¹ Diary of Mary White, February 14, 1833. Diary mention of lyceum lectures begins in 1830. Speakers were generally local lawyers and ministers. As the decade progressed, the speakers were more frequently traveling professional lecturers unknown to Mary White.

What effect did Boylston's program of "mutual instruction," as contemporary Matthew Davenport termed the lyceum lectures, have on the community? It had been the goal of the movement's founders to both unify and democratize the community by transcending social and sectarian divisions and, as Donald Scott has said, making useful knowledge "readily accessible to the common man."⁵² But were such noble goals achieved in Boylston? Through the 1830s, it does appear that lecture topics in Boylston avoided controversial sectarian, political, and reform issues, providing one of the few social rituals in which diverse Boylston audiences could come together to absorb common teaching and share a common experience. However, in avoiding the controversies that roiled the town, the lyceum served not so much to build consensus as to promote the idea that it was acceptable to "agree to disagree." For the purpose of civil discourse, people agreed to check their partisan, sectarian, and political views at the door, essentially abandoning the town's ancient goal of bringing all into agreement with the communal covenant. The goal of democratizing knowledge was also problematic. Boylston's lectures made general useful knowledge available to those who would attend. But who attended? In Boylston, our only record is from Mary's diary, who indicated that the *young* people in her family, and their socio-economic peers, regularly attended the lyceum.⁵³ Did the requirement of a fee, or the investment of time, prevent the town's

For "Village Enlightenment", see Jaffee, "The Village Enlightenment in New England, 1760-1820".

⁵² Scott, "The Popular Lecture," p. 806.

⁵³ Mary noted lyceum attendance by her children, their friends, and the family's live-in hired help.

struggling farmers and poorer in-migrants from benefiting from this mutual instruction in common knowledge? Donald Scott, who studied northern lyceum audiences, noted that the people who attended public lectures were generally young (mostly in their twenties or thirties), native born, from the middling classes, with strong personal, social, and cultural aspirations to rise. Farmers were underrepresented.⁵⁴ If Scott's study holds true for Boylston lyceum attendees, then the lectures did not serve to democratize Boylston's increasingly diverse population, but to foster a collective cultural consciousness of one aspiring subset of the population: native-born white, middling, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. The self-selected audience that attended Boylston lectures learned, like the members of Elizabeth's reading society, to distinguish themselves from the common population of farmers by cultivating both knowledge both useful and social.

Private Academies

Boylston's most prosperous and aspiring families were not satisfied with local educational resources. Beginning in the early nineteenth-century, a subset of families began to patronize private rural academies.⁵⁵ One Boylstonian later recalled,

In the earlier New England times, no higher schooling was supported by many of the towns other than the district schools. ... if a pupil desired to obtain a higher education than the district school offered, or prepare for college entrance, it was necessary to supplement his district school education by attendance at an incorporated academy, of which there were

⁵⁴ Scott, "The Popular Lecture," pp. 800-809.

⁵⁵ Matthew Davenport reported in 1831 that "... a considerable number within thirty or forty years have spent different terms of time at Leicester & other academics." Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of the Town of Boylston*, p. 18.

many scattered throughout the towns. A pupil who had attended academy was thought to possess a superior education . . .⁵⁶

For families like the Whites, some attendance at a private academy provided a critical element in piecing together an education that would fit them for life in a changing world.

Between 1790 and 1830 the number of rural academies mushroomed in New England; they would remain the primary source of higher education for rural youth throughout the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Many of New England's earliest rural academies had their origins in denominational efforts to meet the needs of those preparing for the ministry. They provided a classical liberal curriculum in ancient languages, literature, theology, and natural sciences to prepare a student for entrance to college, and defined their general purposes as "promoting piety, religion, and morality."⁵⁸ In the early nineteenth century, however, the number of rural academies swelled as civic patrons and mercantile associations founded schools that, while promoting piety, were also intended to improve students' prospects as clerks, teachers, and venturers in emerging

⁵⁶ Wright, *Educational History of Boylston*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Kim Tolley and Nancy Beadie, "Symposium: Reappraisals of the Academy Movement," *HEQ* Vol. 41 No. 2 (Summer, 2001) pp. 216-224; see also Theodore R. Sizer, "The Academies: An Interpretation," in *The Age of Academies* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964), pp. 1-48.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the purposes set forth in the acts of incorporation of two of many academies attended by the White family children: New Salem Academy, founded in 1795, "for the purpose of promoting piety, religion and morality and for the instruction of youth in such languages and in such of the liberal arts and sciences as the trustees shall direct"; New Ipswich Academy, founded in 1789, ". . . to promote piety and virtue." See Louis H. Everts, *History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts*, Vol. II, 1879, and Augustus Gould, *History of New Ipswich* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1852), p. 200.

professions.⁵⁹ The broad curricula of these schools – for both males and females – included ancient and modern languages, the arts of writing and speaking, logic, philosophy, theology, history and politics, mathematics (arithmetic, algebra, geometry), and the natural sciences (especially geography, astronomy, chemistry, botany, anatomy, and natural history). To this was added such practical instruction as penmanship, spelling, composition, elocution, bookkeeping, and teaching methods, and such ornamental arts as music, drawing, needlework, and calisthenics.⁶⁰

Aaron White was determined that all of his children – male and female – should have the opportunity, should they so choose, to augment their piety, virtue, and useful knowledge at a private academy. All but one of his ten children chose to do so; six sons and three daughters attended nine different rural academies in eastern and central Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.⁶¹ (The one son who chose not to attend

⁵⁹ Tolley and Beadies, “Symposium,” pp. 219-20.

⁶⁰ This list is drawn from the curricula of schools attended by the White family children during the 1820s and ‘30s, including the catalogues and histories of Leicester Academy (Emory Washburn, *Historical Sketches of the Town of Leicester, Massachusetts* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1860, pp. 22-24); Middlebury Seminary (Samuel Swift, *History of the Town of Middlebury in the County of Addison, Vermont* (Middlebury: A.H. Copeland, 1859), pp 391 -8; New Ipswich (N.H.) Academy, from Article II of the Constitution as cited in Gould, *History of New Ipswich*, pp. 200 and the *Catalogue of New Ipswich Academy, 1830*; and Norton (Mass.) Academy, *Catalogue of the Officers and Members of Wheaton Female Seminary at Norton, MS [sic] for the Year Ending Oct. 20, 1840* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, Printers, 1840), pp. 8-9.

⁶¹ Only third-born son Davis, who decided early on a career in tanning and leather sales, did not chose to attend a private academy. The other children attended: Leicester Academy in Worcester County, an early non-sectarian school popular with Boylston’s gentry; New Salem Academy in Franklin County; Brookfield Seminary in Worcester County; Middlebury Seminary and Academy in Vermont; Phillips Academy in Andover,

academy later regretted the decision, and felt self-conscious that he “had no learning.”⁶²) Not one graduated. In this, they were typical of most academy students. Attendance was intermittent. Most rural youth who attended academies did so for only a term or two, as family resources and labor needs would admit.⁶³ The rural academy, like most aspects of rural life, was shaped by the seasonal demands of farm life; Francis wrote Charles that he hoped one summer to go to Andover, but their father did not think he could spare him. The White children seem to have taken turns attending terms, with no more than two in private schools in any semester. Nor, if they returned to school, did they necessarily return to the same academy. Almost all attended one or two semesters at two or three different academies, interspersed with periods at home attending the district schools or studying with a private tutor. Their placement in class levels was determined by entrance examinations; thus Caroline, after spending one semester at Middlebury Seminary in 1831, another at New Ipswich Academy in 1837, and intervening years at the district school, reciting with Rev. Sanford, and taking private classes in writing and spelling, was able to enter Norton Academy in 1840 as a member of the “Junior Class.”

Mass.; Dr. Wardell’s [Female] School, also in Andover; New Ipswich Academy in New Ipswich, N.H.; Norton Academy (also known as the Wheaton Female Seminary) in Norton, Mass.; the Baptist Seminary in Worcester; and the Baptist Manual Training School in Worcester.

⁶² William White to Charles White, March 19, 1838, W.J. White Collection, WC.

⁶³ Joseph Kett has documented that fewer than one-third of the students attending one semester returned the next. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1977, p. 19); Nancy Beadie confirmed the intermittent and episodic nature of attendance in her more recent study of academy students: “Academy Students in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Social Geography, Demography, and the Culture of Academy Attendance,” *HEQ* Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), p. 253.

Failing to graduate was not, in fact, a failure at all. The goal was not to be credentialed, as there were no standard credentials for most professions at this time. Rather, it was to augment one's store of general knowledge, shape one's character, and form one's habits for a successful life. In fact, despite their extensive preparation, only two of Aaron's children chose to attend college. First-born Aaron was sent to Harvard, where his grandfather had gone before him, and graduated with the class of 1817. But his mother was dismayed to discover that his exposure to Harvard's Unitarian faculty had converted him to liberal theological views; his father was equally dismayed to discover that his friendship with classmate George Bancroft had converted Aaron to decidedly Democratic political views.⁶⁴ When William desired to study to become a minister two decades later, his parents sent him to conservative Williams College. For the other children, though, as for most students, the goal was to gather neither a degree nor professional training, but to "improve the season well," as mother Mary prayed when Francis left for school, that "it may be well with him in time and eternity."⁶⁵

The classmates that the White children met when they went away to board were, for the most part, much like themselves. During the years that Mary and Caroline attended New Ipswich Academy, for example, seven other Boylston females accompanied them; all were from respected, long-time landed families.⁶⁶ In this they fit

⁶⁴ See "Instructive and Interesting History of 'Squire Aaron White,'" *Webster Times*, December 8, 1886.

⁶⁵ Mary White to Charles White, March 1, 1841. OSV.

⁶⁶ The nine young women from Boylston were all, with one exception, from families in the third tax decile or higher.

the profile of rural academy students during this period: mostly from rural towns, and overwhelmingly from the “middling classes” of property-owning farmers or proprietors who relied on their own household labor.⁶⁷ These “middling” rural youth from land-owning backgrounds, by garnering education and the means of employment, were in the act of crossing the bridge that divided the rural yeomanry from the urban middle class. Though it was their family’s property that allowed them the luxury of attending academy, in the future it would be their own education, acquired skills, and industry that secured their place in a more cosmopolitan world. By bringing these similar youth together, indeed, rural academies were helping to foster the values of a rural middle class.

Many rural academies were co-educational, and the early nineteenth century saw additional founding of female seminaries and academies. As a result, before 1850, more females than males received the benefits of attending a rural academy.⁶⁸ The published literature of the time is brimming with complaints about fashionable female boarding schools. *Godey’s Ladies Book* (Vol. 40, May 1850) tells the tale of poor Mr. McArthur, who placed his motherless daughters in a fancy boarding school. “They entered good-natured, unaffectedly sprightly girls; they emerged, after three years of seclusion, fashionable young ladies.” Although they could sing high notes and crochet fancy purses, they had no practical skills whatsoever, and had even developed a strong aversion to work.⁶⁹ Such depictions may have said more about social fears regarding the education of

⁶⁷ Beadie, “Academy Students,” p. 254-55.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁶⁹ As quoted in Bushman, *Refinement of America*, p. 300 – 3-2. Bushman cites numerous literary protestations of uselessly educated females: Royal Tyler, in “The Bad Boy,”

women than actual academy standards. In fact, contrary to such contemporary critics and to earlier scholarship, most of these girls were not simply being “finished,” with an ornamental schooling in embroidery, art, and manners. Recent work has shown that most female academies in the early Republic had curricula virtually identical, in core academic subjects, to that of their male counterparts.⁷⁰

Caroline certainly found academic challenge in her “Junior Class” curriculum at Norton Female Seminary. Norton had been established in 1834 under the direction of Mary Lyon, who later founded what would become Mt. Holyoke College. Lyon created a curriculum that she deemed to be equal to that offered in men’s *colleges*. When Caroline attended with the nineteen members of the Junior Class in 1839, she and her classmates chose their courses from offerings in English Grammar, Algebra, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy, Euclid’s Geometry, Human Physiology, Botany, Chemistry, Intellectual Philosophy, Philosophy of Natural History, Outline of Geology, Ecclesiastical History, Rhetoric, Logic, Natural Theology, Moral Philosophy, Evidences of Christianity, Analogy of Revealed Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature. For an

describes a young lady who was taught at her boarding school every genteel accomplishment, including cutting paper, sewing fancy stitches, making silk flowers, playing the piano, sitting, walking, and dressing fashionably, but was utterly unacquainted with any useful skill or practical knowledge.

⁶⁹ Lydia Maria Child decried female academies that taught music, drawing, and history to no effect, and “needlework that is utterly impracticable and useless all through life, but forsakes industry, frugality, and the practical skills of domestic life.”

⁷⁰ Margaret A. Nash, “Cultivating the Powers of Human Beings”: Gendered Perspectives on Curricula and Pedagogy in Academies of the New Republic,” *HEQ* Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 239-250.

additional fee, she could also study piano.⁷¹ Far from ornamental, these studies were *useful* to the degree that they might certify a female for employment as a teacher, and Caroline, as well as Mary and Elizabeth, did serve terms as district school mistresses between and during their studies. But their greater purpose (and likely the reason behind Aaron White's willingness to pay more than fifty dollars for a term's tuition and board) was to store Caroline's mind with useful knowledge and refine her powers of judgment, discernment, and moral reasoning. Her family believed, as Caroline herself testified to her brother, that it was a duty to improve oneself by enlarging one's "capacity for knowledge," as this would increase one's worldly usefulness and personal happiness.

How did these intermittent periods of study at private academies affect daily life in Boylston? Study at a private academy undoubtedly distinguished these scholars from their peers at the common school; Matthew Davenport boasted in 1831 of the "considerable number" of students who had enjoyed a term at a private academy since the turn of the century. But distinction and difference was not always viewed approvingly in rural New England. Private academies were publicly chartered corporations, and their charters were granted originally in the expectation that they would provide a public good by increasing learning, virtue and piety. As they shifted in purpose, however, from preparing those called to serve as ministers to providing the privileged with entrée to middle-class and cosmopolitan culture, opponents began to argue that they were, in fact, harmful to the public interest.⁷² There is no evidence of open hostility to private academy

⁷¹ *Catalogue of the Officers and Members of Wheaton Female Seminary at Norton, MS (sic) for the Year Ending Oct. 20, 1840* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, Printers, 1840).

⁷² Tolley and Beadie, "Symposium," p. 216.

education in Boylston. There *is*, however, evidence that some youth whose families could well afford the tuition rejected the time and expense involved in advanced formal education and chose instead to bank on entrepreneurial drive and personal industry.⁷³

Private school study also focused students' attention on the self. Turning attention inward, to nurture individual talents and develop critical judgment and independent thought likely challenged traditional submission to the authority and norms of the "moral community." Although there is little direct evidence of this threat in Boylston documents, the experience of the Amish communities supports the supposition. The Amish have long recognized that advanced education poses a threat to communal allegiance. Their prohibition of education beyond the "three R's" reflects their fear of "pride," the elevation of any individual above the group. It also reveals their concern that too much investment in self-determination erodes commitment to communal consensus. Social control in their traditional "moral community" rests on passing received wisdom from elders to the next generation; developing conforming sentiments, not independent thought, is the goal. It is for this reason that the Amish insist on maintaining their own schools, controlling their curricula, and limiting education to the eighth grade level.⁷⁴ Their twenty-first century choices reflect the conditions in early nineteenth century

⁷³ Charles and Francis' contemporaries and close friends Levi Lincoln Flagg and Homer Ball— both of whom lived in the White household as hired help — contented themselves with the local district schools and then launched immediately into business. Homer Ball worked for Aaron White until he was twenty-one, when he left to apprentice with an engraver in Boston.

⁷⁴ See Donald Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, Revised) pp. 173-82; John Hostetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, Fourth edition), pp 247-48 and 375-76.

Boylston, before the rise of supplemental classes, lectures, and private academies shattered the commonness of local district schooling.

Whether or not intermittent terms of private schooling introduced distinction or discord, they definitely increased angst over separations and the fragility of human ties. The practice of sending children away for a term or two greatly increased the frequency of leave-takings. Students experienced the loss of ties not only to those at home, but also to those with whom they had bonded for an intense semester and then were called upon to leave, perhaps forever. Mindy Lamson, a Boylston contemporary of Caroline, kept a “friendship book,” in the mid-1830s while she was a student at Bolton Academy. These hand-sewn paper books, intended to record the sentiments of friends, were growing in popularity in rural New England during this period. Mindy’s book includes poems, prayers, and notes from both her Boylston friends and from her fellow scholars at the academy. These friends wrote of partings, of fragile ties, of bonds they hoped would endure, of fear that they would be forgotten. Page after page reflects their angst in the face of transience and loss: “My friend farewell I will you tell, That you and I must part, You go away and here I stay, But still we’re joined in heart.” Another pleaded, “Go lovely youth over distant hills, Some friend more blest than I to find, And when the evening dew distills, Gently call past scenes to mind. Thy joys, thy sorrows here to share, Such[?] can never be my lot, But grant dear one my fervent prayer, Forget me not, forget me not!” In the very center of her book, Mindy recorded her own reflections in the form of a poem she copied from the *Rural Repository*, “Broken Ties.”

The broken ties of happier days
How often do they seem
To come before our mental gaze
Like a remembered dream:

Around us each dissevered chain
In sparkling ruin lies
And earthly hand can never again
Unite those broken ties

The parents of our infant home
The kindred that we loved
Far from our arms perchance may roam
To distant scenes removed.
Or we have watched their parting breath
And closed their weary eyes
And sighed to think how sadly death
Can sever human ties

The friends, the loved ones of our youth
Those too are gone or changed
Or worse than all their love and truth
Are darkened and estranged . . . ⁷⁵

Mindy's poem ends with the admonition to set aside these transient and untrustworthy earthly bonds, "And trust to holier ties."

Increased leave-takings profoundly affected the White family. In earlier times, filial duty and land-based dependence bound children to their parents, and generational inter-dependence provided a degree of permanence. As children increasingly left home at younger ages, families – or at least the White family – worried intensely about maintaining family ties. To replace earlier bonds of obligation and dependence, they strove to cultivate bonds of affection through regular exchange of visits, ritual reunions – especially at Thanksgiving – and faithful intercourse through letters.

⁷⁵ Text copied by Mindy Lamson from *The Rural Repository*, Sept. 19, 1835. The editors of the *Repository* indicated that the verses were from the pen of James Montgomery. Mindy Lamson's Book, circa 1836, manuscript in the collection of the Boylston Historical Society.

Aaron especially was sensitive about his children's faithful performance of regular filial visits. He liked his house full of family; when his children went away to school or apprenticeships he mourned their absence. He confessed to Charles, "Your brothers and sisters are now all absent excepting Mary, so that our family is very small." When Mary left to take her turn at the academy, Caroline noted, "Father is sitting alone this evening and rather low-spirited and wishes to know what I am about. I must go."⁷⁶ To assuage his loneliness, Aaron placed great importance on his children's regular visits. "We hope that Davis will find it convenient to visit us soon as your Father feels rather lonely." "William has been a pleasant companion to us in our winter evenings." "We have had a pleasant visit from Thomas. . . We had a very pleasant visit from Avery Independence Day. We love to have our Children come and see us when they can." "Davis made us a very pleasant visit last week. Elizabeth is now will us. . . . We hope you will be able to visit us soon. Thomas we expect to see next week."⁷⁷ Each son had his regularly appointed "season" for visiting, and Aaron was keenly disappointed when anything delayed or prevented their return home. "Charley," he wrote, "we should be very glad to see you. I believe that your brothers have all been at home since you were here and some of them repeatedly. Hoping to see you here before a great while, I will trouble you with nothing further."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Aaron White to Charles White, Oct. 10, 1837; letter of Caroline White to Charles White, late 1839. OSV.

⁷⁷ Mary White (mother) to Charles White, Feb 5, 1838; Feb. 6 1839; July 16, 1839; April 6, 1840. OSV.

⁷⁸ Aaron White to Charles White, August 10, 1840. OSV.

Thanksgiving in New England by the 1820s and '30s had taken on special importance as a ritualized family reunion, long before it was officially declared a national holiday during the Civil War. Mary noted each year whether her whole family was present, and remembered the absent in prayer. For Aaron, the return of his offspring at Thanksgiving was an assurance that "the tender cord of affection which binds us together" was not "relaxing its hold, as we have seen in many instances."⁷⁹ Caroline worked to orchestrate full family attendance at the ritual reunion. "I have been pondering in my mind lately, what you said about visiting home at [Thanksgiving]. I have come to the conclusion that you had better come. For one great object of our annually meeting together at that time is to preserve ever warm, those kindly feelings of love towards one another, that absence is apt to cool . . ."⁸⁰ "I was in hopes there would have been made an extra exertion on the part of each member of our family to meet together once more at the approaching festival. I am now afraid that there will be one or more delinquent members but I hope not."⁸¹ "Is Avery calculating to come home at Thanksgiving? I hope every one will come, for I think we shall never meet again this side of eternity."⁸²

When family did not visit, a faithful exchange of letters or mementos served as reassurance of their continued affections. William praised his brother Charles:

Your conduct and deportment have been such since you left the paternal roof as has tended to keep alive an affectionate remembrance of you. On

⁷⁹ Caroline White to Charles White, December 20, 1836. OSV.

⁸⁰ Caroline White to Charles White, October 25, 1838. OSV.

⁸¹ Caroline White to Charles White, November 11, 1839. OSV.

⁸² Caroline White to Charles White, 1.15 (no date, possibly 1840). OSV.

about every shelf we can see some memento of your filial regard: these are valued not so much for their intrinsic worth as expressions of your attachment to those with whom you are allied by the ties of paternal and brotherly affections.⁸³

Sister Elizabeth, on the other hand, scolded Charles for his neglect, and suggested his family affections were cooling.

I have heard from you indirectly several times... But all this is not equal to receiving a direct personal communication from you. I certainly have no reason to suspect your lack of affection yet it is pleasant to be occasionally assured of it... Is it not time for you to come home again? Recollect I had no visit from you when you were at home last, and please make up the deficiency if our lives are spared when you come.⁸⁴

William also reprimanded Charles for lax correspondence and suggested his brother perhaps had lost interest in his family ties:

I am not a little surprised that you do not write to me, after I have written to you so many letters . . . Suppose that you should enter into some mechanical shop and find one of your brothers apparently busily engaged in some interesting employment and you should attempt to converse with him . . . but instead of answering your questions, he should say nothing to you and treat you with entire indifference. Would you not think him to be rather impolite and wanting in respect for you?⁸⁵

When Francis went away to school at Philips Academy in Andover, he interpreted a decline in letters from home – caused by family sickness – to the home folks' having “lost part of their attachment for me . . . One good effect the folks noticing me no more has upon me is that it weans me from home.”⁸⁶

⁸³ William White to Charles White, May 9, 1837. OSV.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth White Conant to Charles White, March 25, 1839. OSV.

⁸⁵ William White to Charles White, March 19, 1839, W. J. White Collection, WC.

No one was more sensitive to the perception of neglect and weakening family bonds than father Aaron. His letters repeatedly expressed his continued warmth of feeling for absent family members. If he did not receive the same in reply, he felt the slight was evidence of lost regard. He profusely thanked Charles for his letters, “as they evince that there is at least one who retains an affection remembrance of the home of his childhood and the associations therewith connected.” Then he went on to indict Charles’ brothers:

We have not heard from Thomas since he wrote to us a day or two after his arrival in safety at New York. That letter has been replied to. We understood that Avery was in these parts last week and hoped that he would have called to see us but in this we were disappointed . . . Aaron who you will recollect is a little more than half the distance from us that you are has not thought it worth his while to visit his aged parents since you saw him here last Thanksgiving. He has however written to us *once*.⁸⁷

Aaron’s need for assurance of his children’s love and their remembrance of home reflected his anxiety over the new economy of relationships. Children, neighbors, friends, were no longer anchored in the local community, or bound together by ties of mutual interdependence, ancient authority or communal norms. In this newly mobile world, such attachments had to be cultivated with expressions of affection and assurances of faithful remembrance and continued regard. Aaron’s commitment to his children’s education and professional preparation increased their frequent leave-taking; the price he paid, beyond tuition and foregone labor, was the anxious fear that they would never return.

Anxiety, conflict, and an escalation in difference were the common outcome of changes in the way young people acquired an education during this period in Boylston. Partisans struggled for control over texts, teachers, and curricula in the common schools.

⁸⁶ Francis White to Charles White, Aug. 30, 1840. OSV.

⁸⁷ Aaron White to Charles White, June 28, 1841. OSV.

Districts competed for funds. Locals resisted state intervention. Supplemental classes and resources for the children of affluent parents distinguished them from the common lot, stressing difference in social status through privileged access to knowledge. The advanced learning of academy students set them apart from their former peers; it also elevated them above and beyond the experience-based practical wisdom of the parents. Their social experience with private school companions helped to solidify their sense of middle-class status, distinguished from their more rustic neighbors at home. Meanwhile, their habits of reading broadly to develop independent judgment strained old communal reliance on shared social norms. Self-cultivation, as the Amish understand, is inherently a self-centered process that stresses individuality and difference. But the self-formed Boylston youth was also vulnerable: no longer at one with community or family, he or she risked the angst of real or imagined leave-takings among those most dear.

Changes in education worked like acid upon the old ligaments of community. As the White children followed admonitions to “read, read, read,” took in lyceum lectures, and ventured off to distant academies, they absorbed ideas that linked them to the cosmopolitan world beyond the boundaries of Boylston. All those literate Yankees were particularly susceptible to cultural transformation. Ultimately, their schooling would not only make them ready for the new world, but also bring the new world home.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ “Print culture became a powerful solvent of traditional culture by providing alternative perspectives and nourishing through private reading the egotistic individualism of bourgeois middle class culture.” Sellers, *Market Revolution*, p. 366. See also Jaffee, “The Village Enlightenment in New England,” pp. 327-46.

CHAPTER SIX

RE-FORMING BOYLSTON'S COMMUNITY

If a Boylston farmer happened to travel through the neighboring town of Harvard in the spring of 1843, he might have thought the farm folk had gone mad. Passing the tillage fields of Fruitlands, a utopian community, he would have seen men pulling their plows by hand so as not to exploit the labor of their oxen. Down the road, the Shakers were also in their fields, ecstatically sowing spiritual “seeds of love” from invisible “baskets of mercy.” In another field, the farmer might have spotted local Millerites, gathered in their “tabernacle” tents, prayerfully awaiting the imminent Second Coming.

Harvard was a locus for quixotic zeal, but nearby Boylston was not immune to reformist enthusiasms. Some Boylstonians embraced radical causes that challenged local customs and constrained habitual behaviors. Others formed local associations to promote moral uplift – or sectarian practice. Some promoted the founding of professionally-run institutions to replace traditional household-based social welfare. The innovators’ zeal was sometimes grounded in religious conviction, other times in faith in scientific progress, and yet other times in mere pragmatic self-interest. Their proposed changes both energized and polarized the community. Men refused to shop where the storekeeper did not share their social views, children formed musical bands to march through town and trumpet their causes, women assailed their neighbors with petitions. And everywhere – in parlor and tavern, town meeting and country store, anywhere the folk of Boylston came upon one another, they argued over what was proper, healthful, and righteous.

As historian Daniel Walker Howe points out, improvement was an *imperative* of the age, an obligation both secular and religious, shared by urban and rural, rich and poor.¹ The urge to “improve the opportunity,” as the White parents so often encouraged their children, embraced national betterment, entrepreneurial striving, social reform, personal character building, and, always, Christian redemption. To achieve these goals, New Englanders in particular invested their social capital in the 1820s and 30s in founding institutions and forming voluntary associations.² However, as the situation in Boylston reveals, they rarely agreed on what constituted a “new and improved” society.

Association and institution building was buoyed by an ebullient belief in the possibility of *re-forming* society: tempering or refining behavior and restructuring social organization. These dreams were powered by religious zeal, by the optimism of a new nation, and by the energy of a new age of technological and commercial innovation. But reformers were also driven by an awareness that the old social order was rapidly crumbling, and if they did not act to bring about a new order, the new nation might succumb to unchecked interests, self-indulgence, and vulgarity. Historians have long

¹ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 244.

² The rise of voluntary associations in the Early Republic and antebellum has recently been studied by Albrecht Koschnik, “*Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together*”: *Associations, Partisanship and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2007), and Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). The history of institution founding in this era is covered by David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971).

debated whether antebellum reform was an expression of optimism or fear: it was both.³

The combined hope and fear of the age produced the organizational energy that drove reforms. In Boylston, it also produced conflict.⁴

Historians have assigned diverse causes and motivations to the rise of voluntary societies and institutions for uplift during this period. Their views, ranging from measured admiration of well-intentioned humanitarians to biting denunciation of manipulative social engineers, were refracted through the lenses of their time. One early study, published during World War II, not surprisingly cast antebellum reformers in a

³ Ronald Walters, after reviewing the scholarly research on antebellum reform, insists that optimism and pessimism were complementary products of an age of rapid social transformation. Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978). Steven Mintz agrees that the reformers acted out of both hope and anxiety as a product of their age. Mintz introduces a typology based on the reformers' immediate goals: moral or religious reformers, humanitarians or institutional reformers, and radical social justice reformers. Though all ultimately sought improvement, individuals within each group were motivated by both hope and anxiety. Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

⁴ The historiography of antebellum reform movements is extensive. Major studies include Walters, *American Reformers* and Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*. Jacksonian era histories include major treatments of antebellum reform movements. See especially Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, and Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000). For women's role in antebellum reform, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Individual reforms have produced their own literature. For temperance, see W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), and Robert L. Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition in Massachusetts 1813-1852* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); for health, see Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1980); for institutional uplift see David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971). The literature of antislavery reform will be covered in a later chapter.

positive, Whiggish light, part of the nation's story of progress towards humanitarianism and freedom.⁵ Post-war writers in the '50s, sensitive to the recent tragedies of fascist social engineering, denounced the reformers as fanatics and elitist "social controllers."⁶ The turbulent '60s and '70s produced divergent views of antebellum reform. Some saw the expansion of institutions for the deaf, blind, insane and criminal as efforts by an anxious establishment to control deviant or unconventional behavior. In this ideologically driven view, the reformers' goal was to restore stability and social cohesion to a troubled social order.⁷ Others attributed reform to the market and changes in labor relations, suggesting that employers embraced reforms to assuage their guilt and control their workers' behavior.⁸ Charles Sellers saw reform as an outgrowth of the market revolution, the self-inflicted collective repression of a bourgeois middle class, trying to "discipline

⁵ See Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment Phases in American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944).

⁶ These historians included Avery Craven, David Donald, and especially Clifford S. Griffin, who introduced the term "social control" to describe the tactics of New England's church-based reformers, who "averred that they were the earthly vicereagents of the Almighty." Writing two years after *Age of Reform* was published, Griffin adapted Hofstadter's concept of status anxiety to describe New England's antebellum clergy, frustrated by their decline in social and political power. To Griffin, organizing reform was a tactic for reasserting power and control. See Clifford S. Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Dec., 1957), pp. 423-444.

⁷ See David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1971). Gerald N. Grob criticized Rothman on a presentist critique of contemporary public welfare (repressing and controlling social undesirables to maintain the status quo). "Review: *The Discovery of the Asylum Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, by David J. Rothman, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (Jun., 1972), pp. 325-326.

⁸ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeepers' Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

recalcitrant inclinations to capitalist effort.”⁹ Others were more generous to the reformers, seeing them as noble idealists, responding to new social inequities and working to expand civil rights.¹⁰ Since the flowering of social history studies of individual reforms and reformers, historians have tended to eschew the historiographic debate over motive. Reformers, it is now generally acknowledged, were a highly diverse and complex group, embracing both conservative “moralists” concerned with order and piety, and progressive “modernizers,” concerned with humanitarian uplift and utopian ideals.¹¹ Within the movement – often within the same associations and institutions - were the hopeful and the anxious, conservative and progressive, those seeking the stability of the past and the utopian possibilities of the future. Their mingling created an *urgent* energy, deep convictions, heated contests, and ironic outcomes.¹²

How did reform come to Boylston? At the turn of the century, Boylston relied on local customs for meeting community needs and enforcing community behavioral norms; needs were met and norms were enforced within a household or neighborhood setting. By mid-century, those responsibilities had shifted outward, to town or state government

⁹ Charles Sellers, *Market Revolution*, p. 259.

¹⁰ Lois Banner claimed reformers were more concerned with promoting “Christian Republicanism” than controlling society or resurrection an older social order. Their goal was a stable but democratic order. Lois W. Banner, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation,” *JAH* Vol. 60, No. 1 (June 1973), pp. 23-41. Daniel Walker Howe also supports this more generous view.

¹¹ This is the conclusion of Mintz’s *Moralists and Modernizers*.

¹² Steven Mintz outlines these paradoxical outcomes: religious energies led to secular changes; deeply conservative evangelicals pursued their convictions to radical positions and actions; those seeking to restore order worked hand in hand with those working to bring about the millennium; doctrines of self-control and self-determination led to new definitions of individual freedom and civic liberty.

institutions, or inward, to individual conscience, bolstered by membership in a voluntary association of like-minded souls.

Institutions for Social Welfare: Poverty ¹³

At the turn of the century, Simon Davis complained that Boylston was “burthened with poor.”¹⁴ His understanding that the poor were a local responsibility – and burden -- was rooted in ancient English tradition: each community had to support its own. The “Old Poor Law” of Elizabethan England made the parish responsible for the care of its destitute residents, and that legal tradition carried over to the Bay Colony.¹⁵ Some of the earliest laws on Massachusetts Bay Colony’s books reflect concern with limiting this local obligation by jealously guarding who was permitted to be “legally settled” in any community, and thus eligible for local aid.¹⁶ Boylston squabbled with neighboring towns over the “ownership” of various poor folks right through the 1840s. But once legally

¹³ This chapter explores the ways in which Boylstonians gradually replaced local and customary social welfare with “modern” or “progressive” institutions; the next chapter will consider the rise of voluntary associations for social reform.

¹⁴ Diary of Simon Davis, Nov. 7, 1796. Typescript, BHS.

¹⁵ The earliest law on legal settlement and eligibility for receipt of aid dates to 1639; the law was revised in 1655 to make it more difficult for strangers to join any settlement without consent of the inhabitants. John Cummings, “Poor-Laws of Massachusetts and New York: With Appendices Containing the United States Immigration and Contract Laws,” *Publications of the American Economic Association*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Jul. 1895), pp. 22-24.

¹⁶ The requirements for legal settlement in Massachusetts were altered throughout the colonial period. In the early Republic, the requirement for legal settlement in a town was raised to ten years of residence and the payment of all state, county and town taxes during at least five of those ten years. Cummings, “Poor Laws of Massachusetts,” pp. 35-6.

settled – by birth or by ten years of tax-paying residence – those who could not support themselves became the responsibility of their townfolk.

Biblical strictures and aristocratic paternalism might augment town-based aid with charitable acts. Thus, in June of 1836, Mary White noted in her diary that neighbors pledged money “to purchase a cow for Old Mr. Eams as his had lately died.” As the weather turned bitter cold later that same year, the minister’s wife made the rounds of the neighborhood farmhouses, “collecting money for Old Mrs. Smith’s cloak.”¹⁷ Both of these elderly people were experiencing temporary difficulties, for which their neighbors provided temporary assistance. Those who were utterly destitute, however, became wards of the town. These unfortunates came before town meeting to face the unhappy fate of being auctioned off to whomever would charge the least to keep them.

This auction, or vendue, as it was commonly called, occurred each March at the annual town meeting. Among the regular items of town business was an article calling on Boylstonians to “make disposal of and provision of their poor, as they shall think proper.” Thus, in 1836, 83-year old David Bush, a one-time Tory whose estate had been confiscated during the Revolutionary War, leaving him destitute, was bid off to Henry Brewer for \$1.04 a week. The 81-year old widow Lucy Cutting, apparently considered an easier charge, went for only 99 cents a week, while Calvin Brigham would take nothing less than \$1.95 a week to care for the ancient, 90-year old spinster Catherine Eager. Promiscuous 22-year-old Relief Stone, who had compounded her father’s poverty by producing a bastard son, was also on the public dole. Proud old Zachariah Sawtell came

¹⁷ Diary of Mary White, June 4 1836 and October 28, 1836. OSV.

forward at the meeting and proposed that he would support himself and his seventy-something wife if the town would give him \$45.00 per year as “outdoor relief” – funds given to him directly – rather than board them out. The town squabbled; direct relief had often been controversial, as some feared it encouraged idleness and weakened or corrupted character.¹⁸ The town denied the request, then voted to reconsider, finally deciding that, at roughly 87 cents a week for the couple, the arrangement was a bargain. They voted to pay the sum in quarterly payments, “and also pay his Doctors’ bills.” Between 1830 and 1840, the town averaged about six destitute cases per year.¹⁹ The numbers of poor did not increase dramatically during this period.

It was not a fate to which any able-bodied soul would submit. The low bidder took his poor charge into his household, where he was required to provide shelter, food, heat, nursing, and care for the amount bid; in addition, he was to secure clothing and doctoring, and, if needed, a burial shroud, coffin, and someone to dig the grave, for which

¹⁸ This is the conclusion of the 1821 “Quincy Report,” issued by a special committee of the Massachusetts General Court headed by Josiah Quincy. The report condemned indirect or outdoor relief as “. . . the poor begin to consider it as a right; next they calculate upon it as an income. The stimulus to industry and economy is annihilated, or weakened; temptations to extravagance and dissipation are increased, in proportion as public supply is likely, or certain, or desirable. The just pride of independence, so honorable to man, in every condition, is thus corrupted by the certainty of public provision; and is either weakened, or destroyed according to the facility of its attainment, or its amount.” Josiah Quincy, *Massachusetts, General Court, Committee on Pauper Laws* (Boston, Printed by Russell and Gardner, 1821). See also, David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America’s Forgotten Institution* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2005), pp. 7-8.

¹⁹ This is less than the Worcester County average of two percent per year, cited by the research staff at Old Sturbridge Village in their report on poverty during this era, “Poverty’: A Resource Packet of Teaching Documents.” Developed and Produced by the Museum Education Department at Old Sturbridge Village with the support of the Fuller Foundation. (Sturbridge, Mass.: Old Sturbridge Village, 1979).

the town agreed to reimburse his additional expense.²⁰ Though the caretakers of the poor pledged “to provide and take care of them in sickness and in health,” there were no established standards for that care, and the bound-out were expected to labor for the family if physically able. The town met the cost of providing for their poor each year through a tax on the real and personal estate of its residents, so there was incentive to accept the lowest bid and, presumably, the least care.

Who was likely to be put up for vendue in Boylston? Between 1820 and 1845, these included several mentally incompetent people, an orphan, one unwed mother and her infant, a woman whose husband appears to have deserted her, a farmer maimed and incapacitated in a farm accident, the children of a destitute young widow, and assorted elderly widows, widowers, spinsters, and couples who had long passed the age when they could contribute to their own upkeep.²¹ Other than the unwed mother and perhaps the aging Tory, all of these were what New Englanders would have considered deserving poor: their hardship was an “act of God,” the result of illness, accident, infirmity, abandonment, or the premature death of spouse or parent. Boylston was not troubled during this period, as some urban areas claimed to be, with rising numbers of idle, unemployed, or intemperate poor – those whose poverty was the result of a flawed character or sinful, irresponsible life.²²

²⁰ The terms were repeated at each annual meeting. Boylston Clerk’s Record Book. BHS.

²¹ See Appendix M for listing of Boylston Poor, 1830-1840.

²² David Rothman notes that social planners perceived the issue of poverty as caused by a breakdown in family government and communal order. Some blamed the vices of society

And yet, though the numbers remained relatively constant, the costs for supporting Boylston's poor rose steadily over this period. Between 1825 and 1840, on average, budgeted poor expenses doubled, ranging from a low of \$300 in 1825 to a high of \$1,000 in the difficult years after the Panic of 1837, and averaging \$650 over the period. Of all regularly budgeted items (poor relief, schools, and roads), the cost of supporting the poor was by far the most volatile, and usually the most burdensome. Selectmen were proactive in trying to restrain these expenses. They tried to foist the costs of supporting the aging Tory David Bush onto the state, claiming that he had been stripped of his citizenship for his treason, and thus was technically an alien, not legally settled in Boylston. They sued (and were sued by) neighboring towns, trying to prove that various of their poor had legal settlements elsewhere. They tried to anticipate potential poor cases and seize assets that could be used to support that person. Thus, they "took over the affairs" of the blind and deranged widow Abigail Butler, gaining guardianship of her meager assets and using them to offset her support while she was boarded out at town expense.²³ Similarly, James Davenport became guardian for his West Boylston neighbor,

in general; others were more likely to blame the behavior and character of the poor for their situation. Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, pp. 155-79.

²³ Boylston Town Clerk's Records Book, February 1842: "Voted that Selectmen be authorized to take over the affairs of Abigail Butler, insane." Boylston Vital Records: Entry for the death of Abigail Butler, who died May 5, 1843, age 77. Appended to the entry: "She fell into the fire in a fit when she was alone, which caused the loss of both eyes and brought on insanity, in which condition she has been for about 2 years." See also Probate of Abigail Butler, Petition for Guardianship, Worcester County Probate Docket #09465, Vol. 239, Pg. 515. MA.

to prevent him from “wasting his estate by excessive drinking” and thus becoming a charge on the town.²⁴ But despite their best efforts, costs continued to rise.

Though other towns frequently blamed rising poor costs during this period on intemperance and poor character, in Boylston, the problem appears to be related mainly to mobility and economic instability. The great majority of those on Boylston’s dole were elderly, in their seventies or older. Unlike orphaned youth or young widows, they could add little to the family economy, and so those who boarded them out charged more for their support than they would have charged for a person who could add his or her labor to the family pool. In the past, Boylston’s farmers had ensured their care in old age by bequeathing their home farm to one child, on condition that the elderly be cared for by the inheritor’s family. But with fewer and fewer Boylston children remaining in town, more of the town’s elderly were facing their final years alone. Some found their problems compounded by the volatile new farm economy. The craft and land that had sustained the independence of a marginal man like Abishai Crossman in his youth failed in later years, as the market slowly eclipsed his artisan skills, or excluded his small plot. And so the rolls of the elderly poor mushroomed. In 1831-32 the town supported four elderly paupers; twenty years later, that number had doubled.

New Views on the Causes and Treatment of Poverty

During the first decades of the nineteenth century attitudes towards providing for the poor began to shift, reflecting new assumptions about human nature. A liberalized Calvinism blended with Enlightenment ideas gave people a greater sense of being in

²⁴ Suit of Ezra Goodale (by Pierce & Davenport) v Knight, March 1840, Vol. 92 p. 64 Worcester Court of Common Pleas. MA.

control of their own destiny. Such empowerment made it possible to envision a perfected world in which poverty did not exist. Utopians and reformers began to dream of new approaches to eliminating poverty by transforming the environment that, they believed, led to poverty. These visions shifted the boundaries of responsibility for the poor from the local community to the larger public or the state.

At the same time, a new belief in the power of the individual to shape his own destiny focused attention on the responsibility of the poor for their own condition. When misfortune was the result of divine providence, the poor man bore no blame for his lot. All farmers knew they were vulnerable to unpredictable fate, and each was morally bound to assist his stricken neighbor. But as people came to feel responsible for creating their own successes, they were also more likely to hold paupers culpable for their failures. Conflating poverty with morality, they often assumed moral deviance – idleness, dissolution, promiscuity or poor judgment -- lay behind poverty. These shifts in attitude were idealistic and punitive at the same time: reformers believed that a perfected environment could eliminate poverty, and that those who could or would not provide for themselves should be compelled to enter a structured and controlled environment to correct their behavior.²⁵

Attitudes towards the poor were also affected by the changing social and economic conditions.²⁶ Rural Boylston was increasingly mobile, integrated with the larger world, and shaped by market goals. Mobility fractured the cousinhood, replacing family and familiar neighbors with alien immigrants. Communication and transportation

²⁵ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, pp. 20-21; Old Sturbridge Village, *Poverty: A Resource*.

²⁶ See the discussion in Chapter Three.

dissolved local isolation and shifted attention to the larger state. Market concerns reshaped labor relations, replacing mutual independence with wages and contracts. Commerce and manufacturing drew people to large central places, where unfamiliarity and transience made communal obligations obsolete. Economic volatility and entrepreneurial risk increased the sense of vulnerability, particularly in the difficult years of the late 1830s. Together, these social and economic shifts stressed long-time assumptions about local, mutually-shared responsibility for the community's needy.

The Poor Farm

By the early nineteenth century, urban reformers had begun to propose workhouses or almshouses to provide for a growing number of transient and immigrant unemployed poor. The tradition of almshouses harkened back to ancient English traditions of providing, as David Wagner says, "hospitality for the needy and punishment for the morally nonconforming."²⁷ New England's early urban almshouses practiced "repressive benevolence," providing the essentials for existence in exchange for a strict, institutionalized regimen of work.²⁸

In 1820, the Massachusetts General Court appointed a committee to study the ways in which poor relief was granted around the state and to propose improvements to the poor law. The committee polled towns on the nature and effectiveness of their poor relief. Their report, issued in 1821, distinguished between the "impotent" or worthy poor who were wholly incapable of work through no fault of their own, and the "able poor." It

²⁷ Wagner, *The Poorhouse* p. 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

was this last that drew most of the attention of the committee, for current systems of “outdoor relief” and vendue “diminished industry” and “destroyed economical habits” by assisting them in their idleness. The Quincy Report strongly recommended that each town establish a House of Industry “in which work is provided for every degree of the ability in the pauper; and thus the able poor made to provide . . . for their own support.” This system, they claimed, was not only most economical, but also more likely to promote a moral society.²⁹

The Quincy Report transformed poor relief in many Massachusetts towns. In the next twenty years, 60 towns built new almshouses or poor farms while others refurbished old ones.³⁰ There was a distinction, however, between urban workhouses, such as those established in Boston and industrial Manchester, N.H., and rural poor farms. The inmates (as they were called) of rural poor farms were likely to be familiar to each other and the community, and so lived under regulations that were less regimented and repressive than those in impersonal urban institutions. Because they worked a *farm* in a *farming community*, they shared the same round of seasonal duties and ethic of working the land for survival as their neighbors. Young and old, men and women, continued on the poor farm the sorts of work they had done at home, producing their own food and supporting their expenses of lodging, fuel, and clothing with the sale of farm products, much as their neighbors were doing.³¹

²⁹ Josiah Quincy, *Quincy Report*, pp. 1-9.

³⁰ Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, p. 180.

³¹ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, p. 5.

Still, there was no doubt that they lived in an institution. Being sent to “the farm” meant living under the supervision of the overseer, being assigned and observed in one’s work, submitting to the morality of the house rule (particularly in regard to temperance and sexual behavior), and losing control of the products of their labor.³² If the ethic was not so repressive as urban workhouses, it was also not so idealistic. Rural poor farms rarely strove so much to reform their inmates as to exact from them the useful labor that would pay for their upkeep. The goals were not so much improvement as expedience.³³

As with most issues in the turbulent 1820s and ’30s, the people of Boylston argued for years over whether to establish a poor farm. At March meeting in 1836, a petition was presented to this end, and a committee was appointed to “look into the utility” of such an institution. Nothing came of their report. However, two years later, after the financial Panic of 1837 that constricted credit and brought on a rash of farm foreclosures, the petition was presented again, asking for a poor farm “for the accommodation and support of the Town’s Poor.” The article caused so much debate that the meeting finally chose to table the matter by passing over the motion without a vote. But the issue of treatment of the poor remain hotly contested; in 1840, the town decided to strip the selectmen of their authority over the poor and create a new committee, the

³² The rules of Boylston’s early poorhouse do not survive. However, the historian of neighboring Harvard noted that in 1825 the town’s Poor Farm had fourteen rules regulating behavior, a breach of which would result in solitary confinement upon bread and water for twelve to forty-eight hours. Henry S. Nourse, *History of the Town of Harvard, Mass. 1732-1893* (Harvard: W.J. Coulter for Warren Hapgood, 1894). Rothman compares the strict rules and regulations of many workhouses to the regimentation of early factories, and the rationalization of industrial life. Wagner reproduces the rules and regulations governing the “City Almshouse and Farm” of neighboring Worcester. Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, p. 47.

³³ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, p. 40.

“Overseers of the Poor,” to attend to these duties. With their new officers in place, supporters of the poor farm tried again, and they succeeded in securing a vote to establish a committee “to inquire of other Towns as to the utility of a Poor Farm and report at a future meeting.” The committee returned a month later, but was so divided in their opinions that they chose to report not as a body but individually. Town Clerk reported: “having inquired of several Towns where they had farms for the use of the Poor, the result was found to be that there was a savings in the expenses for their support, especially where there was a large number of Paupers.” Apparently moved by the prospect of achieving an economy in town expenses, the town voted that the same men “see upon what terms they can purchase a farm and report next fall.” When time came to report, however, the still-divided committee met an even more divided town, which rejected their proposal for purchase. Opponents tried to kill the proposal, but when the moderator “tried the minds of the meeting” he determined there was a majority in favor. It would be another seven years before the town succeeded in establishing a Poor Farm.³⁴

What did Boylstonians find so controversial in this proposal? We do not have record of the debate, but some reasons for opposing the poor farm can be surmised. Andrew Ward, leading citizen of neighboring Shrewsbury, attributed opposition to a reluctance to change traditional ways: “It has been so long and so generally practiced in this part of the country, that for an individual to attempt to remedy it, is for him to set

³⁴ The town of Boylston finally purchased a poor farm on January 18, 1847. See William O. Dupuis, *History of Boylston: 1786-1886* BHSS Vol. XII (1978), p. 74. Wagner notes that “many towns repeatedly rejected warrant articles at town meetings to build a poorhouse, then suddenly, changed their minds and adopted” the measure. *The Poorhouse*, p. 46.

himself against thousands.”³⁵ Poor farms also separated the poor from the rest of the community, isolating them in their house of shame. More worrisome to moral reformers, the poor farm forced the worthy and innocent poor to cohabitate with such moral deviants as drunkards, the unchaste, and the idle.³⁶ Some feared the expense of purchasing the farm. Others -- those poor and middling farmers who bid on the poor -- may have resisted losing this source of income.³⁷

Those who argued *for* poor farms in rural Worcester County cited humane, moral, and practical reasons. Captain Jason Abbot, the man who repeatedly presented the poor farm petitions to town meeting, had experienced vendue in his own family. When his incapacitated daughter was “sold” to the *lowest* bidder, he apparently found the process intolerable. The following year, he bid on his daughter himself; he introduced the first Boylston poorhouse proposal in 1836. The system was unquestionably humiliating. Shrewsbury’s Ward criticized the practice as worse than slavery, for the humiliation of being sold was repeated annually, placing the poor ever under a “new master.” Daily the vendued person, “an educated and feeling person as the slave is not,” was reminded of his utter dependence, reducing him to a state of “utter mortification.”³⁸ Others might have argued, feelingly, that vendue separated families, especially in dividing widows from

³⁵ Andrew Henshaw Ward, *History of Shrewsbury, Mass.* (Boston: s.n., 1847).

³⁶ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, p. 5 and 8. Wagner speaks of concern among reformers that poorhouses indiscriminately mixed “the ‘indolent and vicious’ with the widowed, aged, infirm, children and other ‘deserving poor’ all housed together in one place.”

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁸ Ward, *History of Shrewsbury, Mass.*

their young children. In 1820, for example, Mrs. Sawyer and her youngest child were put out to one family, while her four older children were put out to separate households.³⁹ Some apparently believed that under the Poor Farm system, the overseer could prevent intemperance and cure drunkards.⁴⁰ But the main argument in Boylston – the only reason directly revealed in town documents – was economic interest: a “savings in expenses.” The Quincy Report echoed this observation, arguing that the average cost of \$1.31 per head per week to board out was far more costly than an institutional approach would be.

Boylston’s Poor Farm did, ultimately, save the town money. The town purchased the 95 acres and buildings of the old Whitney farm in 1846 for \$2200 and invested another \$900 in livestock, farm tools, and household furnishings. After this initial investment, the annual sale of butter, eggs, lard, pork, milk, calves, hay, timber, and knitted woolen socks – all produced by the inmates and resident farmer – paid for the salary of the caretaker and his wife and the living expenses of the residents. Within five years, then, the town had recovered its initial investment in annual savings on the poor budget.⁴¹ Among Boylston’s more enterprising and calculating farmers, such evidence of efficient economy was a compelling motivation to change old ways.

³⁹ Boylston Town Clerk’s Record Book, 1820. BHS.

⁴⁰ “Poverty’: A Resource Packet,” Old Sturbridge Village. The editors note that “despite the fact that most rural poor were the aged, widows, orphans, or the infirm,” many in rural Worcester County believed that poverty was caused by intemperance, and thus they adopted poor farms “as a way of providing close supervision, hard work, and ultimately sobriety to these drunkards.” Josiah Quincy had made that precise charge in his report: “That of all causes of pauperism, intemperance, in the use of spirituous liquors, is the most powerful and universal . . .” Quincy, *Quincy Report*, 1821. There is no evidence that any of those on poor relief in the 1820s or ‘30s was a drunkard.

Communal Consequences

But what were the non-financial consequences of this shift from household-based to institutional welfare in Boylston? For some, it may have accelerated a decline in family authority. The average age of inmates at the farm rose from seventy-one to over eighty in the first quarter century of its existence.⁴² The farm had been established in part to meet the needs of a growing number of elderly without family to care for them; its existence may have increased the number of offspring who, like Caleb Crossman, went off to make their fortune and left their aged parents – no longer the arbiters of their children’s fate -- to the town’s care.

Town order had always been based on a family model: town, church, and farm all replicated patriarchal households in which order was maintained and morality upheld by “family government.” Though economic motives may have been behind the decision to remove the poor from household to institution, the change likely had unintended social consequences. When co-mingled with the family, the poor were individuals, known and experienced intimately in the daily acts of shared family life; shifted to the public sphere of the Poor Farm, these personal relationships were lost. With the poor removed from their midst, it was easier for the rest of the community to treat them as abstract object –

⁴¹ Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886*, pp. 75-76. The town continued to have some poor expenses associated with those who needed assistance but were not residents of the Poor Farm.

⁴² In the first published report of the Poor Farm in 1851-2, the average age of the eight inmates was 71; by 1879, town historian Augustus Flagg could report that the average age of those who died at the Poor Farm between 1847 and 1879 was over 80 years. “Reports of the Overseers of the Poor,” BHS; Augustus Flagg, “Boylston,” from *History of Worcester County, Mass.* Vol. 1 (Boston: C.F. Jewett & Co., 1879), p. 311.

an item in the town budget – or a debased class, rather than as household members for whom they were personally and morally responsible.

Isolating the poor also made it easier to think of them as a class of unfortunate failures. As Boylstonians embraced the ethic of the self-made man, with each having the potential to rise according to his industry, poverty became a mark of shame. When it had been Providence or fate that determined a man's lot, poverty was a regrettable trial. When poverty became a sign of failed character, however, it was easier for Boylstonians to dismiss the poorhouse inmates as being, in some fashion, culpable for their own misfortune. The ascent of personal responsibility was mirrored by the decline of communal responsibility.

The tendency to blame the poor for their plight may have reflected Boylstonians' angst in the face of a volatile social order. The Panic of 1837 had made most Boylston farmers aware of their vulnerability. There were no banks or corporations in rural Boylston, yet the sharp contraction of credit and failure of financial institutions during the panic was felt acutely in the rural village. Those who had mortgaged their land faced foreclosure and the loss of their means of independence. Wealthier farmers, like Aaron White, who had invested in shares of bank and insurance stock, feared their savings would evaporate. Aaron confessed to his son,

You know that I am considerably interested in the safety of our banking institutions which seem to be in a very precarious situation just now and what will become of my interest in them I know not but I know that there is no dependence on the stability of anything on earth and that riches make to themselves wings and fly away...⁴³

⁴³ Aaron White to Charles White, January 16, 1838. OSV.

The Panic reminded farmers that they, too, could become “inmates” if their riches “flew away.” If poverty could be identified with weak character and deviant behavior, then struggling farmers could reassure themselves that their own efforts at self-improvement and industry would maintain their place in society.

Blaming the poor, of course, also tended to highlight their difference, and to lead to their vilification. With their community in flux, some may have feared that traditional social enforcement of behavioral norms through shaming and threats of exclusion were no longer strong enough to regulate community behavior. Reformers called for controlled pauper environments to rehabilitate those whose degenerate behavior posed a risk to the rest of society. For the safety of the town, it was considered better to isolate and control those who lacked the character to control and provide for themselves. This attitude of exclusion and isolation magnified the shift from communal care to public commission.

Establishing a pauper institution ultimately made Boylston more efficient, bureaucratic, and segregated. It also strengthened the idea that responsibility lay inward with the self, or outward with the government, rather than between neighbors.

Insanity

In late August of 1832, Mary noted somberly in her diary, “Mr. Jerm’h Pratt died Friday and buried from the town house where there was a prayer made. A very aged man, *non compos*.” Jeremiah Pratt had been deranged, or *non compos mentis*, for at least the last fifteen years of his life when he died at age 91. For all of that period, he had lived quietly within the Boylston community, bound out to the care of his neighbors. As he was

not “furiously mad” and posed no threat, Jeremiah Pratt was accepted as merely another dependent member of the community who required charitable care.

Pratt’s treatment reflected earlier ideas about deranged souls.⁴⁴ And derangement was, for most of the colonial era, considered a matter of the soul. “Distraction,” as historian Mary Ann Jimenez has shown, was believed in colonial Massachusetts to be “a manifestation of a supernatural drama, with God, the devil, and the distracted person as the principal characters.”⁴⁵ Such trials might be either the result of divine punishment or merely the “mysterious workings of God’s providence.” Since the cause was supernatural, there was little hope that the distracted might be cured by human means, but also little fear that the person’s deviant behavior needed to be controlled or restricted:

The elaborate external constraints that characterized many colonial settlements in the form of close proximity of family and well-known neighbors, various formal and informal measures of surveillance and social control, and a widely shared religious world view that offered a powerful explanation of any untoward event, had made the anomalous behavior of the insane less troublesome before the turn-of-the century decades.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Insanity in America has been covered by Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill* (Chapel Hill, 1966) about the founding of the Worcester Insane Asylum; David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (Boston, 1971), who treats institutions, while motivated by progressive ideals and repressive fears, as being fundamentally instruments of social control; Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions in America* (New York: 1973), a view more generous to the motivations of founders; and Mary Ann Jimenez, “Madness in Early American History: Insanity in Massachusetts from 1700 to 1830,” *JSH* Vol. 20 No. 1 (Autumn, 1986), pp. 25-44, who seeks to correct the notion that insane were treated cruelly and inhumanely during the colonial years. See also Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America’s Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan), 1994.

⁴⁵ Jimenez, “Madness in Early American History,” pp. 28-9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

In their predominantly rural communities, the insane had few restrictions on their movements or behavior. Most were cared for within their families, with their degree of care dependent on the wealth of their families. If no family support was available, the insane person became a pauper and, like Jeremiah Pratt, was boarded out in the same manner as other town dependants. The concern to the community in these cases was not their insanity but their poverty. Only in rare cases in which a distracted person was believed to pose a threat to community safety, did the law allow confinement.⁴⁷

Most cases insanity in Boylston in first decades of the nineteenth century fell within this framework of family and communal-based care. One of those families that boarded Jeremiah Pratt during his long dementia was the poor but respectable couple, Ebenezer and Abigail Butler. Later, the Widow Butler fell into the fire, causing burns that left her blind and precipitated her own insanity. With no family to care for her, Abigail Butler became a ward of the selectmen, who boarded her out to Otis Flagg after confiscating her small estate to pay her charges. Relief Stone was mentally incompetent when she became pregnant out of wedlock; the town took responsibility for Relief and, eventually her two children, boarding out Relief and her “feeble minded” daughter, indenturing her son.

Jeremiah Pratt, Abigail Butler, and the Stone females were deranged and dependent, but viewed as harmless; the town absorbed them into their traditional network of communal care. Mary Ann Abbot posed a somewhat different challenge. In July of 1830, Mary White was called to assist her longtime neighbors, the Abbots. Mary reported

⁴⁷ Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill: A History of Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830-1926* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), p. 4. Grob discusses early law regarding the insane in Massachusetts.

that their daughter, 32-year-old Mary Ann, was “very much deranged.” She was suffering, apparently, from raving insanity (possibly schizophrenia), such that the family required two grown men to watch with her that night. Though Mary prayed for the woman’s “restoration of reason,” Mrs. Abbot called in the next morning “very much alarmed at Mary Ann’s situation.” By the evening, Mary Ann seemed calmer, but despite the attentions of a local doctor, she was soon again wildly deranged. Her behavior was so erratic that Caroline White came to describe any irrational act as being “as crazy as Mary Ann Abbot.” Her parents struggled for six months to cope with their daughter’s delirium, but by the spring of 1831, they had decided to turn her over to the care of the community. Surrendering Mary Ann’s only personal assets, valued at \$35, her parents made her a ward of the selectmen.⁴⁸

Had the town considered Mary Ann truly a danger, they could have had her confined, chained in cell, a legal option since colonial times. But the town did not view her that way. At town meeting in 1831, Mary Ann, though “still very much deranged,” was bid out to Mr. Robert Hudson Jr., one of the town’s most established and respected citizens, who agreed to take responsibility for her care. The next year, Jason Abbot himself bid for his daughter. Soon after, her reason was restored.

We know these cases of insanity because they became paupers and so entered the public records as charges to the town. Most cases of dementia, mental incompetence, and

⁴⁸ This process was legally known as “destermperature,” in which the selectmen took control of assets and used them to support the insane and dependents. See Jimenez, “Madness in Early American History,” p. 28.

madness were cared for within the family, and so lost to history.⁴⁹ Mary White's diary, however, provides insight into the family care of her own increasingly senile mother.

Mary Avery, the mother of Mary White, was not a dependent, but a widow with resources. Strong minded and outspoken, the minister's widow, before the onset of her dementia, made her own decisions. She customarily boarded with each of her local daughters in turn, spending "a quarter" – or 13 weeks – in residence before moving on. At times, she chose instead to board herself out in the family Capt. John Bond, the wealthiest man in Boylston, whose elegant mansion house crowned the hill in the center of town. By 1838, however, as the widow advanced into her eighties, her daughter began to confess to her children that their grandmother appeared "rather broken in mind," her memory failing and "her mental faculties much impaired."⁵⁰ Caroline was much more forthcoming in her letters to her brother:

I am seated in Grandmother's room. . . & she is busily preparing herself to go to rest, a business not a little formidable to a person of her fast-decaying faculties; though I must say her tongue moves with the same facility it was always remarkable for, & if her ideas seem to come at lagging distances (as they generally do,) she makes up in constant repetition, so as to produce her former continuous sounds. . . . O dear what ugly blots! & Grandmother must have the credit, for she caused me to turn round suddenly by pulling my skirts.⁵¹

Over the next two years, Grandmother Avery's feebleness in mind increased.

⁴⁹ Jimenez notes that for the colonial era, "the majority of Massachusetts residents who needed attention . . . were probably cared for by their own families. The distracted were rarely confined in their own homes, but seem to have been treated as dependent persons who needed family care." "Madness in Early American History," p. 27.

⁵⁰ Mary White to Charles White, Jan. 28, 1838; June 27, 1838; March 6, 1839; August 19, 1839; March 2, 1840. OSV.

⁵¹ Caroline White to Charles White, Oct. 25, 1838. OSV.

Grandmother is a great deal of care. Last night such a time!! About midnight she began to thump and talk or rather rave, calling for fire. She had not gone to bed for good not she. I tried to explain but to no purpose and then Mother came and finally returned to bed without doing anything to calm her. She continued to cry and scream and scold by turns calling upon somebody or everybody to come to her assistance, upon friends long since dead as if alive, and as a last resort got out of bed came to mine and then round the room crying murder murder help. Father then came and ordered her to get into bed immediately and finally succeeded with my assistance though she continued to scream for some time. Such was the scene for two hours.⁵²

Grandmother Avery's dementia was a trial, but the Whites kept her care within the family. As she was neither indigent nor dangerous, Mary Avery's insanity did not concern the community, except to the extent that they extended neighborly assistance and support in her care. Mary Avery died in the White family home in 1842, surrounded by attending family and assisting neighbors. They were able to ask those last crucial questions: "Does the Savior appear precious?" Five neighborhood women came to watch with her on her deathbed, and three more came to assist in preparing for burial. The community followed her funeral procession, attending in death as they had in life.

Thus, for much of the early nineteenth century, Boylston cared for its insane within the framework of traditional communal welfare. Such treatment suggests that Boylstonians continued to view madness and dementia as blameless and untreatable afflictions, to be borne with Job-like patience and general acceptance. As Gerald Grob notes, this informal, local approach to the care of the insane worked in predominantly rural communities, where society was intensely local and familiar, and "deviant behavior, unless extreme in nature, was tolerated" because it was not felt to be threatening.

Changing Views of Insanity

⁵² Caroline White to Charles White, no date, likely autumn of 1840. OSV.

Beyond Boylston, however, these views were changing, and new ideas and practices would eventually infiltrate its rural borders. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, perception and treatment of the insane began to shift, for much the same reasons as treatment of the poor had changed. Some progressive intellectuals began to seek natural causes for what they increasingly saw as a bodily disease, rather than a supernatural condition. Focusing on the behavior of the insane, some doctors identified a “breach of the natural order,” where disordered or excessive behavior or emotions led to a disordered mind. This made the insane person culpable for his condition; it also suggested that a cure might be found in strictly controlling behavior and environment.⁵³

Both suggestions – personal responsibility for one’s condition and control of deviant behavior – found a receptive audience in early nineteenth-century Massachusetts. Social and economic changes had created a more complicated world, especially in cosmopolitan centers experiencing urbanization, industrialization, and an expanding market economy. Especially disorienting were immigration and movement: growing, mobile, non-native populations displaced familiar neighbors.⁵⁴ This increasingly complex society aroused anxiety and fears of social disorder. Critics warned that deviant behavior,

⁵³ Jimenez, “Madness in Early American History,” pp. 31-34. Jimenez notes that physicians began to suggest that overly passionate behavior led to the onset of symptoms. Excesses such as obsessive thoughts, intense study, indulging too much in the passions of terror, joy, ambition, love, jealousy or sexual desire could disrupt the natural order of the mind. If this were the case, physicians might have a role to play in treating insanity, by imposing regulation over “irregular habits and excess passions.” The goal was self-regulation that kept behavior in conformity with the natural, balanced, order.

⁵⁴ See Robert Doherty, *Society and Power: Five New England Towns 1800-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977); for the translation of cosmopolitan attitudes to urban areas, see Richard D. Brown, “The Emergence of Urban Society in Rural Massachusetts, 1760-1820,” *JAH* Vol. 61, (1974), pp. 29-51.

unchecked, threatened the social fabric of the new nation. Old systems of family government and communal-enforced norms seemed insufficient to control newly threatening behavior. In response, some reformers suggested dual controls. Individuals must take personal responsibility for their condition and develop internalized controls to regulate their behavior; communities must police and control deviant behavior.

Re-imagining the “distracted” as culpable and dangerous deviants led to a period of brutal repression of the insane in the early nineteenth century. Towns increasingly banished from their borders any person without a legal settlement who exhibited unusual behavior, including such non-violent but obstreperous behavior as shouting and swearing.⁵⁵ The growing numbers of wandering insane were, as one contemporary remembered, “left, forlorn and friendless, to roam through the county, exposed to the insults of the thoughtless and wicked; to hunger, cold, and various calamitous and fatal accidents, a terror to female delicacy.”⁵⁶ In November of 1830, Mary White noted in her diary that such a “poor, crazy man” called at their house and she had given him “supper and lodging in the barn.” Those who did have legal settlement were increasingly confined, kept in chains in a private home, or locked in cells in almshouses or jails. A 1796 law had authorized local authorities to confine the “furiously mad” in jails, but increasingly, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, rising fears of deviant social

⁵⁵ Jimenez, “Madness in Early American History,” p. 35.

⁵⁶ Rev. Jedidiah Morse, 1801, as quoted by Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill*, p. 18. A similar passage is quoted in Emerson Davis, *The Half Century; Or, A History of the Changes that Have Taken Place, and Events that Have Transpired, Chiefly in the United States, Between 1800 and 1850* (Boston: Tappan and Whittemore, 1851). Chapter III: Charitable Educational Institutions, Section 4, “Lunatic Asylums, or Hospitals for the Insane,” p. 115.

behavior had led to the incarceration of even the docile insane.⁵⁷ An 1829 report indicated that of 289 deranged souls, two-thirds were confined, thirty-eight of them in chains.⁵⁸ Others reported on the horrific conditions in which the confined insane were kept, often “chained in a back room without furniture, without comforts, and sometimes without a fire even in the midst of winter; some of them were confined in jails surrounded with great wretchedness.”⁵⁹ It was not just urban centers that came to fear uncontrolled madness. A woman from rural New Hampshire recalled the treatment of the town’s insane during her youth in the 1830s: one cold winter day, “a poor Crazy Man” who had broken his chain and escaped, appeared at their door, half clothed, broken chain still hanging around his waist. He rushed in to the warmth of the fire, talked nonsense and danced, frightening the family. “There was another Crazy Man in Town who was kept Chained in a barn. His insanity was caused by over studying in the summer. When the big barn doors were opened any one could see him as they passed by. If they stopped to look at him, he would say, “”much learning makes me mad.””⁶⁰

Eventually, such brutalization sparked calls for reform. Boston’s liberal elite, in an act of paternal benevolence, sponsored a private hospital for the insane in 1812. But as the problem of the poor, wretched, wandering – and frightening – deranged magnified in

⁵⁷ Jimenez, “Madness in Early American History,” p. 36.

⁵⁸ *Reports and Other Documents Relating to the State Lunatic Hospital at Worcester, Mass.*, Printed by order of the Senate (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, Printers to the State, 1837), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁹ Davis, *The Half Century*, p. 115.

⁶⁰ Susan Baker Blunt, *Childish Things: The Reminiscence of Susan Baker Blunt*, ed. Francis Mason, Ph.D. (Grantham, N.H.: Thompson & Rutter, Inc.1988), pp. 36-7.

public perception, calls for a public response grew.⁶¹ In 1829, Horace Mann issued a call for a study by the Massachusetts legislature; their report on the numbers and conditions of the states' insane prompted the founding of the state's first public institution for incarcerating and treating the mentally deranged.

Asylum

The Worcester Lunatic Asylum opened in 1833, with a large, impressive-looking institutional building visible from the hilltop of Boylston center village. The man chosen to lead that institution exemplified the reforming attitudes that would shape the treatment of insanity for the next several decades. Samuel B. Woodward, though an orthodox Congregationalist, was a theological liberal who rejected the depravity of mankind and embraced the idea of individual free will. The key to reform, he believed, was to help individuals learn to direct and control their will through developing conscience. In addition, Woodward was a devotee of the optimistic Enlightenment attitudes of European reformers who believed insanity was merely the mind responding to a disordered environment and that the application of a scientific program of "moral treatment" could ameliorate suffering. The key to a cure was to create the proper environmental conditions, then to allow the addled person to regain order and develop self-control. To withdraw the afflicted from his disordered environment and place him where he could

⁶¹ Americans in the 1830s believed that the incidence of insanity in their society was increasing. This may, however, speak more to public awareness of and concern for their presence of disorderly people than to an actual increase in mental illness. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, p. 110.

experience the therapeutic calm and order necessary for recovery, Woodward advocated institutionalization.⁶²

Woodward's reports to the legislature in the first five years of the Asylum's operation reveal the social concerns and idealistic hopes that fostered institutionalization. The deranged mind had, in effect, been sickened by over-exposure to modern society. Rapid change, overstimulation, the pursuit of material goals, "political strife, religious vagaries, overtrading, debt" had disturbed the natural functioning of the mind.⁶³ Thus, patients were insane because they lived in a turbulent, unstable society. Though environment was critical, Woodward usually located the immediate cause of insanity in his patients' *response* to that society: excessive behaviors (intemperance, smoking, masturbation, religious fanaticism) or disappointment or fears regarding family or economic relations (disappointed love, domestic affliction, economic woes, loss or fear of loss of property). Two thirds of his diagnoses were attributed to an individual's action or volition, rather than physical causes or any force beyond his control.⁶⁴ Accordingly, Woodward called for control of the environment to eliminate sources of over-stimulation, excitement or stress, and for teaching the patient self-regulation.

⁶² Background on social and intellectual conditions leading to the advent of institutionalization, the character and motives of Samuel B. Woodward, and the founding of the Worcester Lunatic Asylum, can be found in Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill*.

⁶³ Grob, citing Woodward, in *The State and the Mentally Ill*. Grob also points out that Woodward's reasoning had a romantic element: he tended to see the advance of civilization as a regression from a golden, agrarian past.

⁶⁴ See Appendix N for an analysis of Woodward's attribution of causes of insanity from 1833 through 1836. Note that men had significantly more personally culpable causes; women had significantly more bodily causes.

On September 2, 1837, Mary White wrote in her diary, "Mary Ann Abbot's insanity appears to be returning. May the Lord in mercy avert this calamity." But the Lord did not avert the calamity, and this time, Capt. Abbot and his wife, now in their mid-sixties, did not attempt to care for their daughter at home. Instead, they carried her six miles south, to the Lunatic Asylum in Worcester.

The massive, multistoried brick building overshadowed most of still-parochial Worcester. Two long wings, each filled with eight-by ten-foot chambers, flanked a four-story center hall. By the autumn of 1837, though the building had already been expanded, it was nearly filled to capacity. When Mary Ann arrived, she was classified and separated by type; those who were manic or furiously mad were generally separated from the merely melancholic and the quietly recovering. Once admitted, Mary Ann followed a strict daily regimen to help her re-establish a balanced body and an ordered mind. A schedule determined the time for waking, meals, working, religious worship and recreation. Diet and hygiene were strictly prescribed, to balance stimulation and aid in general health. In addition to outdoor recreation, inmates had daily time dedicated to worthy reading and religious reflection to build moral strength. As occupational therapy was considered key to recovery, Mary Ann likely worked at some useful task for part of each day. A critical component of therapy was regular conversation with Woodward to build relationships of respect and trust and thereby strengthen self-respect and self-control. Woodward also attempted to restore bodily balances through stimulants and narcotics.⁶⁵ He believed -- and advertised -- that insanity, like any medical ailment, was

⁶⁵ Grob discusses Woodward's treatments, *The State and the Mentally Ill*, pp. 61-66.

treatable: "It is now most abundantly demonstrated that with appropriate medical and moral treatment, insanity yields with more readiness than ordinary diseases."⁶⁶

Unfortunately for Mary Ann, Woodward's treatment never had time to take effect. Within days she was suffering from one of the curses of crowded institutional life – dysentery. On September 23, Mary White wrote, "Capt. Abbot came here this morning and informed us of the sudden death of his daughter Maryann who was insane at the hospital at Worcester. May this providence be improved by us all. The corpse brought home at night. I went to Capt. Abbot's. The family much affected. May this dispensation be sanctified to them." The next day she attended Mary Ann's funeral, noting, "She was carried to the meetinghouse. Mr. Sanford delivered an address. A hymn was performed by the choir." Mary tried to "sanctify this dispensation" by using the opportunity to urge immediate conversion for her son, Charles.

We are continually reminded in providence of the uncertainty of life. Mary Ann Abbot who had become insane was carried to the Hospital at Worcester died on Saturday morning of a dysentery. Her parents are deeply afflicted. She expressed a hope in Christ before her insanity came on which is a great consolation to her friends.⁶⁷

Why did the Abbots send Mary Ann to the Lunatic Asylum instead of caring for her at home or within the community as they had previously? Although Boylston was

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 36. Woodward's efforts at curing insanity were hindered by overpopulation of the hospital. As Grob points out, some towns also continued to keep their insane chained in local prisons, finding it a cheaper than the Asylum's fees. As a result, a decade after the Asylum's establishment, Dorothea Dix could still report horrific cases of the state's insane chained in "cages, closes, cellars, stall, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, lashed into obedience . . ." Dorothea Dix, *Memorial to the Massachusetts Legislature*, 1843. Thomas J. Brown, *Dorothea Dix: New England Reformer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ Mary White (mother) to Charles White, September 27, 1837. OSV.

undergoing some of the social flux that has been blamed for urban anxiety over deviant behavior, it is not apparent that Mary Ann's condition had created any particular anxieties during her earlier bout with insanity. She had been lodged within the community, with no mention of restraints. She clearly had periods of great agitation, followed by calm, but had she been declared "furiously mad" and in need of confinement, Boylston would have been required by law to commit her to the Worcester asylum. This was not the case; if it had been so, the town would have been responsible for the cost of her care, and the Boylston treasurer recorded no expense for Mary Ann's asylum treatment. The decision to commit Mary Ann to the asylum was most likely made privately, by her parents, and paid for by them as well.

If Jason and Mary Abbot chose to send Mary Ann to Worcester, they did not do so for reasons of economy. The costs for covering private admissions to the hospital were high, far greater than boarding a person out within the community.⁶⁸ What seems more likely is that the proximity of the asylum had made the Abbots aware of a new approach to insanity, and held out to them the hope of improvement. Since Mary Ann's first derangement, the institution at Worcester had opened, with some fanfare, and Woodward had quickly won a national reputation.⁶⁹ Woodward spoke glowingly of his successes, claiming a recovery rate between 82 and 91 percent, and asserting, "In recent [onset] cases of insanity, under judicious treatment, as large a proportion of recoveries will take

⁶⁸ Grob documents the cost of maintaining an inmate at the Worcester Asylum in the 1830s at \$2.50 per week, significantly more than the most expensive bid for a pauper at Boylston vendue during that time. Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill*, p. 87.

⁶⁹ As Grob notes, "His claims concerning the curability of insanity received widespread attention and played an important role in setting into motion . . . the cult of curability."

place, as from any other acute disease of equal severity.”⁷⁰ Woodward’s claim likely gave the Abbots hope that, by entrusting their daughter to an emerging profession with specialized knowledge, they could improve significantly on her chances for a cure.

Institutions and Traditional Community

We do not know what it was like for the Abbots to deliver their daughter into the hands of strangers. It must have been an act of faith, no doubt somewhat controversial among less progressive minds in Boylston. But their decision is evidence of a shift in the locus of authority, away from friends and neighbors, the time-honored knowledge of the local doctor, and the comfort of the minister, toward the specialized knowledge of experts and the controlled atmosphere of an institution. Their action reveals that emerging faith in scientific knowledge, specialized expertise, and institutional order had penetrated even rural Boylston.⁷¹ It also indicates a loss of personal control over one’s world, as situations and developments reached beyond the townspeople’s ability to resolve, or even to comprehend. The complexity of the market, the mysteries of industrial machines, the schedules of railways – all incorporated rural Boylstonians into a larger, more enigmatic world.

⁷⁰ Worcester State Hospital, *Third Annual Report* (1835), p. 35.

⁷¹ Mary Ann Abbot was not the only Boylston to be institutionalized during this period. The town entrusted Lucy Stone, Relief’s illegitimate and mentally retarded daughter, to the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded in nearby Marlborough shortly after the institution opened in 1851. Again, the motivation was likely hope. Her mother, also reportedly mentally challenged, was raised by the town, boarded out from year to year, and finally committed to the Poor Farm. Lucy began her life at the Poor Farm, and the town could have saved money by keeping her there. That the town paid her tuition to attend another institution likely reflects their increasing faith in the expertise and resources of professional institutions to provide a better life than her mother had endured.

Removing the poor and insane from community households to institutions also aided in the emergence of the private domestic household. As long as the town's dependents were absorbed within households, the boundaries between private and public were uncertain. Isolating dependents in the poor house, however, allowed people to think of them as "other" and to shift responsibility of their care from the personal to the public sphere. The growth of the public institutions complemented – and enabled - the growth of middle-class domestic privacy. By supplanting traditional communal interdependence and its personal obligation for communal welfare, these institutions allowed Boylstonians to re-imagine themselves as independent beings, bound only by the affective ties of family.

The rise of centers of expertise, where those with professional training applied specialized knowledge to solve problems, also reshaped rural community. To benefit from these advances required *going elsewhere*, usually to an urban or cosmopolitan center, and entrusting oneself to a distant and unknown authority. Local traditional authorities paled in comparison. In this increasingly complex world, innovation and experiment supplanted tradition and custom as people followed the path to improvement beyond "the old home place."

CHAPTER SEVEN

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS FOR SOCIAL REFORM

Institutions reshaped Boylston by shifting responsibility for communal welfare away from individuals. In voluntary associations, individuals usurped the power of communal norms and appropriated them for partisan or personal interests.

The phenomenon of individuals' joining together to form voluntary societies was new. In Massachusetts, in particular, it required a complex conjunction of conditions: the waning of old social, political, and religious orders, the rise of powerful new dreams of social and material advancement, and a compelling concern that without direction, so much rapid change would lead to a collapse of order and morality.

Before voluntary societies could arise in Massachusetts, the intensely communitarian political order of the Federalists had to give way. As long as Federalism held sway in Massachusetts – and it persisted in northern Worcester farm towns longer than in more cosmopolitan or industrializing communities – the dominant political culture remained deeply suspicious of competing organizations. Private voluntary societies, with their pursuit of “party” interests, were deemed a threat to the public good. As one historian has pointed out, freedom of association was not protected by the state's 1780 constitution. “According to Federalists, only the state could determine which associations and corporations to sanction because the state alone represented the

community. When individuals formed an association independent of the state, Federalists labeled them partial voices – those of a minority – that ought to be discouraged.”¹

Despite the intense partisan political conflict of the late 1790s, Federalist communitarian ideals kept a stronghold on many rural Worcester County towns into the nineteenth century. However, once the War of 1812 dealt its deathblow to Federalist interests, Massachusetts’s citizens increasingly rejected the notion of a state-determined and sanctioned common good. The more pluralistic concept of a commonwealth as the sum of the private interests of its voters gained credence. Only as this notion came to maturity could associations representing partisan goals gain general acceptance.

The disestablishment of the state church also created an opening for reforming energies. Orthodox clergy, like Federalist squires, had initially resisted interference from lay associations, fearing they would serve as subversive societies spreading dissenting views. As Unitarians wrestled control of more pulpits, however, Congregationalists warmed to lay societies. Reverend Cotton had been right to fear the partisan goals of Boylston’s Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions. The decline of a monolithic church released the proselytizing energies of both Evangelicals and Unitarians, as both sects competed to secure the commitment of members through dedicated investment in sectarian service. Cut loose from dependence on state support, as Lyman Beecher notes, churches grew by persuading their members to form multiple voluntary societies.²

¹ Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) p. 33.

² Lyman Beecher, as cited in Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners*, pp. 67-8.

The decline of Federalism and an established church relaxed political and clerical elite's control of the communitarian social order. Social changes further weakened old communal values of shared interests, interdependence, and local responsibility for community welfare. Geographic mobility, market goals, and new relations of labor were dissolving ligaments of traditional community. Neighborliness, long-term credit, shared work, familiarity, localism, the cousinhood – all declined in importance. As these traditional structures weakened, so did communal norms that had provided order and controlled social behavior. Many were troubled with uncertainties. Would democracy promote freedom and virtue or anarchy and lawlessness? Would the new growth of trade and commercialism bring prosperity and a rising standard of living or selfish acquisitiveness? Would the de-establishment of churches promote freedom of conscience or a descent into atheism? Were restructured family roles, growing cities, and the rise of industry signs of progress or harbingers of social disorder and degeneracy? Freed of the old patriarchal and hierarchical social order, how could society still safeguard morality and preserve the Republic? Reform offered paths to self-control and communal stability.

There was opportunity, then, and there was a felt need, for social reforms. There was also a powerful optimism. Enlightenment rationalism blended with liberalized Christianity to release the New England mind from the confines of fate, predestination and tradition. Faith in free agency, reason, popular judgment and social progress became “middle class orthodoxy by the 1830s,” powerful ideas that transformed society.³ With

³ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revival in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*, (1978), p. 5. These words are Johnson's but the powerful motivating force of evangelical religion is acknowledged throughout the literature.

discipline and concerted effort, the goal of human improvement -- personal, social, and national -- was endlessly attainable. Mary White, like many of her age, believed in the power of human agency to bring about the Millennium, if only mankind would commit to eradicating sin and embracing virtue. If they did not, the Republic must fail, and God would visit his horrible vengeance on the nation. And so, Boylstonians founded societies to promote religious and moral reform.

The small town of Boylston -- no more than 750 souls all told -- supported an extraordinary range of reform efforts in the decade of the 1830s. Boylston's evangelical women, in particular, organized feverishly to meet each perceived opportunity to convert or redeem. Mary White attended local meetings of the Ladies' Benevolent Society (for local charitable aid), Foreign Missionary Society, Tract Society (for the distribution of Bibles and religious tracts), Sabbath School Union (for literacy and Bible study), Maternal Association (for supporting Christian parenting), and Moral Reform Society (to curb prostitution and redeem prostitutes); she also attended lectures in neighboring towns for the Home Missionary Society (for frontier and Native American evangelization), Education Society (for ministerial training), and Peace Society.

But efforts to improve the people and society of Boylston were not limited to evangelicals. The town's Temperance Society drew support from respectable citizens of various denominations. The Female Antislavery Society also drew from a diverse group of townswomen who shared a concern for social justice. These rural associations strove to promote liberal thought, humane action, and refined behavior as part of the "Village Enlightenment."⁴

Though some voluntary associations crossed sectarian or partisan lines in pursuit of reform goals, they were not a force for town unity. Voluntary societies were, in essence, lobbying organizations. Their members had identified a social condition that was not to their liking and had banded together to change that condition to coincide with their particular principles, religious beliefs, or behavioral norms. Since such standards were contested in an increasingly pluralist Boylston, the work of local reform societies was often controversial. Though supporters came from both orthodox and liberal religious traditions, from Whig and Democrat political parties, they did not represent a communal consensus. Others in town resisted their attempts to impose new standards of behavior that replaced traditional communal sociability with respectable restraint and sober self-control. As an examination of temperance reform shows, the rise of reform societies presented challenges to deeply communal norms.

Temperance Reform in Boylston - Religious Suasion

In the middle of harvest season in 1838, Mary White confided doleful news to her diary: “We heard of a murder committed in [neighboring] Holden by John L. Davis on the person of Mr. Edwards. Davis supposed to be in a fit of intoxication When shall our land be freed of the sin of drunkenness and its appalling effects?”⁵ Her prayer that the nation be liberated from the tyranny of alcohol was a commonplace of the temperance

⁴ For “Village Enlightenment”, see Chapter Five, and David Jaffee, “The Village Enlightenment in New England, 1760-1820,” *WMQ* Vol. 47, No. 3 (Jul., 1990), pp. 327-346; also, Craig James Hazen, *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁵ Diary of Mary White, August 16, 1838. OSV.

movement. Reformers cast their battle with the bottle as another war for independence from an oppressive despot. Temperance reformers appropriated the Fourth of July, hosting alcohol-free picnics to celebrate their “dry oaths,” sign pledges, and preach about how strong drink enslaved its users and threatened the security of the nation.⁶ They spoke of imprisoned souls, chained to Demon Rum, and read a modified Declaration of Independence, in which Prince Alcohol replaced King George.⁷ Using symbols of and analogies to the Revolution evoked their underlying message: true liberty required wresting control not only from external political tyrants, but also from internal appetites and sinful passions. Freedom lay in self-denial and self-control.⁸ Alcohol threatened man’s autonomy, and therefore was an enemy of personal – and national – independence.

It had not always been so. At the turn of the nineteenth century, rum had been the most common, and most profitable, item of trade in Aaron White’s store.⁹ Business in Simon Davis’ store leapt dramatically when he was licensed to sell liquor, for, as he noted, there was plentiful custom for rum.¹⁰ People were accustomed to punctuating their day with breaks for rum and rest. It was expected that the gears of work – whether in the

⁶ W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 195-200.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 200.

⁸ “To be free, it was necessary to curb appetites, to subordinate passions to reason, to control animalistic impulses through the development of moral ideas. Man could attain liberty only through self-control, self-examination, vigilance, the development of high moral values, and integration of himself into a moral society. Freedom then, was autonomy exercised within a moral code.” Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, pp. 194-200.

⁹ Store Ledger of Aaron White, 1802-1804, bound manuscript. BHS.

¹⁰ Diary of Simon Davis, July 13 and 14, 1798. BHS.

fields or the minister's study – would be lubricated with rum. Alcohol was considered an essential ingredient of all communal labor, particularly work with a social aspect such as bees or house-raising. Serving drink was an essential social obligation in entertaining guests. The town's major civic observances – Town Meeting, Election Day, Fourth of July, and the Taking of Cornwallis – were all celebrated with drink. The average American in 1810 drank three times the alcohol consumed by post-1940 Americans. Socially important, drink was rarely condemned.¹¹

By 1830, however, attitudes towards ardent spirits in rural Boylston, as elsewhere, had begun to change.¹² Historians have debated the reasons for that change. Some propose that religious clergy were anxious about their status in a new age of religious pluralism and “Jeffersonian mobocracy,” and so they embarked on temperance as a way to regain moral authority and control.¹³ Others see a culture struggle between an

¹¹ Robert L. Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition in Massachusetts, 1813-1852* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Research Press, 1982), p. 1; Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 167-8.

¹² Early calls to temper liquor consumption in New England came from Boston's social elite, who worried about what they perceived to be the declining morality of unruly urban poor. In 1813 orthodox clergy in Boston founded the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, a top-down effort to improve lower class behavior by enforcing laws, regulating liquor licenses, and setting examples of temperate drinking. There is no evidence that this early temperance effort had any effect on habits and attitudes in rural Boylston. See Joyce Appleby, “The Personal Roots of the First American Temperance Movement,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 141, No. 2 (June., 1997), pp. 142-3. Hampel notes that this effort was motivated not so much by elitist fears of Jeffersonian mobocracy, but rather with concerns that the effects of alcohol – shoddy work, ruined health, broken families, crime, and destitution, threatened Republican virtue and the Christian nation. Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 12-13.

emerging middle class and the growing ranks of propertyless manual laborers.¹⁴ Recent social history studies have focused on anxiety about social disorder in a rapidly changing society; fears that a loss of Republican virtue threatened the new nation; middle-class concerns for self-control and respectability; and the rise of the female as the guardian of family morality.¹⁵ In Boylston, Temperance as a call for liberation through control was first rooted in evangelical turf, but quickly spread as a cross-denominational effort of those respectable souls who feared a perceived rise in vice and disorder. The movement was far from unanimous, however, as opponents accused temperance advocates of tyrannically oppressing *their* liberties.

In opposing drink, Boylston's Temperance advocates challenged ancient communal norms. They argued not for a return to an old order, but the imposition of new social mores. But there was no consensus for such a change. Nor was there any one united social group – by sect, class, or age – that supported this work. Temperance reformers were an eclectic group united by a belief that discipline and control were the way to personal and national improvement. They were opposed by an equally diverse contingent who resisted their discipline and control as an assault on liberty. Temperance advocates in Boylston had to build a coalition, to rely on the power of voluntary

¹³ Hampel reviews the historiography of temperance, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 2-3. A 1925 study by John Krout identified fearful ministers at the root of temperance. Hofstadter promoted this idea with his theory of status anxiety.

¹⁴ Hampel notes a 1963 study by Joseph Garfield identifying rival subcultures in the temperance struggle. See also Paul E. Johnson, *Shopkeepers' Millennium*.

¹⁵ See especially Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder: Temperance Reform in Cincinnati from the Washingtonian Revival to the WCTU* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

association among diverse groups, to succeed. Though they began with the goal of building a consensus around a new social norm, they learned to work, instead, to build a majority. The struggles of the Temperance Society taught Boylstonians that where unanimity in social norms was no longer possible, building a plurality through persuasion, influence and association was the next best thing.

As with many of the controversies that roiled Boylston during this period, temperance first came to Boylston as a sectarian, evangelical issue. In the mid-1820s, orthodox preachers began to assert that the use of hard spirits was a sin. Lyman Beecher (at that point a minister in Boston's Hanover St. church) identified alcohol as a moral pollutant that led to other sins (profanity, promiscuity, violence) and was at the root of frightening social problems (poverty, deserted families, crime, broken health and insanity). In 1826, Beecher, along with other Orthodox ministers and laymen, founded the American Temperance Society (A.T.S) in Boston.¹⁶ Having identified alcohol as a sinful pollutant -- the Holy Spirit would not enter the soul of the inebriate -- they called for the converted to immediately renounce the sin of drink and work for its abolition as a means of regenerating society. Adopting the strategies and methods of contemporary evangelical revivalists, the A.T.S. sponsored agents to travel New England spreading the word and recruiting converts to pledge abstinence from strong drink.

Wherever they lectured, evangelical temperance agents attempted to establish the "moral machines" (as historian W.J. Rorabaugh call them) of their movement: local temperance societies. With organizational techniques borrowed from the revival movement, A.T.S. agents enlisted the support of local orthodox ministers, delivered

¹⁶ Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 25-6.

lectures on the sinfulness of alcohol consumption, and called on the faithful to pledge immediate renunciation of hard spirits. They then urged prominent men in town to organize a local society. These respected members of the community were expected to use the combined power of moral argument and social influence to persuade fellow churchmen to add their names to the society list. New signers were initiated at monthly meetings, and the movement grew.¹⁷

So it happened in Boylston. Gathering in the center schoolhouse on a September evening in 1830, the Temperance Society received members and elected officers.¹⁸ Among the earliest members, Mary White's diary notes, were prominent young Congregationalist men from the respected (and prosperous) Moore, Temple, Bush, and Houghton families. The society held regular meetings, subscribed to temperance publications, and canvassed the town seeking pledges to abstain from ardent spirits. Much emphasis was put on publicly signing the pledge, both for its effect in visibly sealing one's promise, and, equally important, for the influence that these actions exerted on one's peers. Mary urged her son to sign: "I did not think to request if you have a convenient opportunity to sign the temperance pledge. I have seen Mr. George Allen since I saw you and he thinks that every temperate person ought to, on account of the influence he may have upon others and I wish you to be a decided follower of Christ."¹⁹

¹⁷ W.J. Roarbaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, p. 193.

¹⁸ Diary of Mary White, September 8, 1832. OSV.

¹⁹ Mary White to Charles White, May 19, 1838. OSV.

From its inception, Boylston's Temperance Society subtly reshaped the structure and bounds of the community. Membership itself redefined the nature of civic belonging. Those in voluntary societies formed subsets of community bound not by ascription based on family or location, but by choice. They were a people set apart from community. Voluntary associations such as Boylston's Temperance Society had two contrasting foci: first, empowering *individuals* to resist the norms of their immediate community, and second, bonding them through association with like-minded souls in a greater *confraternity*. Members turned their attention both inwards, to personal will, and outwards, to the support of association. Both trumped traditional community norms.

There were other ways in which voluntary association reshaped understandings of community. Despite high sectarian strife at the time, evangelical temperance advocates in town did not limit their outreach to church members. Though Boylston's orthodox minister frequently gave addresses on the topic of drink, he did so on neutral ground -- the town hall or area schoolhouses, rather than the Congregational meetinghouse -- in an effort to reach beyond his denomination. The respectable churchgoer potentially had a shared interest in limiting vice, and evangelicals were not opposed to recruiting Unitarians to their cause. Mary, returning from one such talk, labeled it "a Noble and animated discourse."²⁰ In Boylston, this opened a new approach to association: universal accord was not essential to cooperation; it was possible to associate by interest on some matters while disagreeing on others. Unanimity -- the traditional goal of a consensual society -- was no longer possible in a pluralist society, but alliance was.

²⁰ Diary of Mary White, February 26, 1833. OSV.

Temperance also linked Boylstonians to the larger world through the network of state and national temperance organizations. Boylston's temperance advocates did not struggle alone. The umbrella organizations provided guidance on composing society constitutions, circulating pledges, and organizing locally. Their publications provided the verbiage for debate. Traveling agents, especially, linked distant communities to the greater movement and opened Boylston to happenings beyond its borders. Mary White recorded visits from traveling temperance agents, seeking support or delivering lectures. Boylston's orthodox minister frequently traveled to speak on temperance elsewhere, and received other speakers in return. The society consistently sent delegates to local and state conventions. These connections made Boylston's temperance advocates members of a community extending far beyond Boylston.

Though the Temperance effort in Boylston may have been ecumenical and expansive, it was also divisive. Resistance and contention were particularly apparent within the membership of the Congregational church when in the autumn of 1832, the newly ordained Rev. Sanford persuaded his flock to embrace total abstinence for all new members and church discipline for those who violated this principle.²¹ The vote was supposedly unanimous, but the sentiment, apparently, was not. Abishai Crossman, who (as we shall see) enjoyed his drink, soon transferred his membership to the Unitarians. His wife was repeatedly disciplined for lax observance of church principles until the church expelled her five years later. Abel Dakin, serving at the time as Joseph Flagg's hired help, was called before the church in October of 1833 to answer to "the charge of

²¹ Records of the Congregational Church of Boylston, Oct. 14, 1832, BHS.

drunkenness and profanity.” As he failed to appear, and the charges were “substantiated to the satisfaction of all present,” young Dakin was excommunicated.²² This dramatic action did not sit well with his father, the elderly, respected, and well-to-do farmer David Dakin. Shortly thereafter, the elder Dakin moved his entire family from the land they had farmed for generations and relocated in neighboring Worcester. Although we can not be certain that his removal was the result of hard feelings over his son’s excommunication, it is notable that when he asked the church for a letter of dismissal (to present for membership in his new church in Worcester), his former congregants demurred; they ultimately granted a *qualified* recommendation only, suggesting that ill-will still plagued their relationship.²³ Even within the supposedly receptive audience of the evangelical church, then, Temperance caused dispute and division in Boylston from its earliest years. Controversy would escalate as the movement grew.

A Wider Net: Respectability and Moral Suasion

By the mid-1830s, the temperance movement had matured. A new organization, the Massachusetts Temperance Union (M.T.U.), now insisted on a “long pledge” binding one to total abstinence rather than mere moderation in the use of spirits.²⁴ Moreover, the

²² Boylston Congregational Church Records, October 12, 1833. BHS.

²³ Boylston Congregational Church Records, December 29, 1835. BHS.

²⁴ The long pledge included abstinence from wine, cider and beer, which had been excluded from the earlier pledge. The change came partly from the protests of the poor, who charged that the pledge operated unequally, as the rich could drink strong wines that the poor could not afford. The new long pledge prohibited the use of fermented as well as distilled liquor. Religious reformers also supported the long pledge, as it followed the logic of immediate abolition of *all* sin. See Emerson Davis, *The Half Century; or, A History of the Changes that Have Taken Place and Events that Have Transpired, Chiefly*

movement had spread well beyond evangelical Christians to become a social movement for self and national improvement. As historian Robert Hampel has shown, temperance reformers discovered that they could cast a larger net by supporting personal respectability and national interest than by exhorting against sinfulness.

Tying temperance to respectability was a powerful tactic. In a mobile and rapidly evolving social world, influence and prestige were no longer inherited with the paternal estate; they had to be earned through proper behavior. To be respectable (that is, to be self-supporting, to exhibit self-control, to behave with propriety, to present oneself with decorum) was now considered essential for success. Strong drink derailed this quest by leading the individual down the road to ruin, consuming a man's finances, family affections, and sanity. Ultimately, it threatened the survival of the nation. Mary noted temperance lectures that focused particularly on the deleterious effect of drink on "our national prosperity."²⁵ When she "overtook a young man in a wagon appearing like a dead man under the influence of rum," she prayed, "May this pestilence be cleansed from our land!"²⁶ For their own good and for the good of society, reformers argued, *all* men should strive for respectability through temperance.²⁷

Who responded to this rhetoric? Unfortunately, the Temperance Society records for Boylston do not survive. However, Hampel's study of those who embraced the cause

in the United States, Between 1800 and 1850. (Boston: Tappan and Whittemore, 1851). See also Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 46-7.

²⁵ Diary of Mary White, December 15, 1835. OSV.

²⁶ Diary of Mary White, May 19, 1835. OSV.

²⁷ Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 7-8.

in Massachusetts between 1826 and 1840 show they were not the elite. They were on average slightly wealthier and more likely to own property than those who eschewed temperance. They were also more likely to be churched (of any denomination) and more likely to be involved in other reform causes (though not necessarily more likely to hold political office). They appear to have been those who sought material and spiritual betterment, attracted by rhetoric of self and social improvement, of respectability and influence.²⁸

Joyce Appleby's study of autobiographies from this period suggests that temperance played a life-transforming role in the lives of many young men. She attributes their powerful recollections of the experience of signing the pledge to their psychological need to assert control and demonstrate self-mastery in rapidly transforming world. "The ebullience of the American economy, the mobility of its people, and the intense personal passions of religious revivals confronted the young with the drama of decision making. Maturing to adult status in this world was to take on the task of defining oneself . . . and to enter into the competition of defining the nation as well." The decision to drink or not was a liminal test: the young were challenged to control the temptation to self-indulgence; by doing so they could both demonstrate a mature and respectable manliness and save the nation.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 30-33..

²⁹ Joyce Appleby, "Personal Roots," pp. 142-8. Appleby also reviews the historiography of previous discussion of temperance motivations. W.J Rorabaugh argues that the success of temperance was based on its resonance with two central impulses of the age the desire for material success and the desire for religious salvation. Temperance improved the chances for both. W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, p. 202.

In Boylston, as in many Worcester County locales, temperance came to dominate town life. By the early 1830s, there were such innovations as the “temperance wedding,” where the customary flow of wine was replaced with coffee.³⁰ People subscribed to temperance periodicals, went to temperance lectures in town, and traveled to temperance conventions in Worcester. Men and women, including Mary’s single daughters and their friends, made circuits around town collecting temperance pledges. Children were recruited to sign the pledge, after hearing addresses specifically directed to them. As in many other towns, Boylston’s children were formed into a musical band -- “the little Cold Water Army” as Mary called it -- that played for temperance processions.³¹ One anthem written for such young recruits included the declaration: “This youthful band Do with our hand The pledge now sign To drink no Wine, Nor Brandy red to Turn the head, Nor whiskey hot That makes the sot, Nor fiery Rum To turn our home Into a hell Where none can dwell . . . So here we sign perpetual hate To all that can Intoxicate.”³² If they followed fashion, they were adorned with satin bows as “Temperance badges,” emblems of their pledge. On Fourth of July, temperance advocates in Boylston hosted an alternative picnic, as Mary noted with approval:

³⁰ Reported in Boylston Vital Records: “Samuel G. Reed of No. Brookfield to Fanny L. Tilton, April 9, 1832. BHS. The first temperance wedding in Boylston at which coffee was served instead of wine.”

³¹ Hampel notes that enlistment of children as junior teetotalers with Cold Water banners and badges was common enough in the late 1830s and ‘40s to support unauthorized peddlers of temperance paraphernalia specifically for youth. *Temperance and Prohibition*, p. 92.

³² Gerald Carson, *Rum and Reform in Old New England* (Sturbridge, Mass.: Old Sturbridge Village, Inc. 1966), p. 17.

PicNic [sic] temperance celebration. Met at the Town Hall & formed a procession & cold water army & met in the grove near Mr. Fawcett's where addresses were made. Mr. Sanford opened the meeting with prayer, Rev. Mr. Blair, Baptist minister at Worcester & Dr. Bates, son of Northboro made an interesting address. May the Lord grant success to the cause of Temperance in this place.³³

The next year, Mary noted that their celebration had included many from other towns, including two bands of music from neighboring Sterling and Grafton. A "fine table of refreshments [was] prepared, handsomely decorated with evergreens & flowers."³⁴ In rural Boylston, such a celebration was respectable competition for the usual rambunctious and "wet" Fourth of July festivities.

Most temperance activities in Boylston, however, did *not* raise festive good will. Drink had deep roots in New England's villages. To some -- perhaps those who were not so assiduously seeking rise and betterment through riches, religion, and respectability -- sharing a rum flip at the pub or passing the jug during harvest labors were rites of communal sociability. To others -- especially shopkeepers who depended on liquor sales for a good portion of their profits -- the attempt to change social norms represented a threat to livelihood. Pro and anti sentiment ran hot, and sometimes turned violent.³⁵ Mary White noted several instances in which anti-temperance advocates attempted to interrupt temperance activities, with disturbances made by "lads and young men" from the

³³ Diary of Mary White, July 4, 1842. OSV.

³⁴ Diary of Mary White, June 27, 1843. OSV.

³⁵ Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, pp. 183-4.

neighboring manufacturing village of West Boylston.³⁶ A contemporary observer in the neighboring town of Sturbridge remembered:

Nothing ever caused the excitement that the temperance cause did from 1836 to 1844. It struck the town hard; it made its mark, and drew a line, for it went through both political parties, through the church and many family circles. He who was not for was against, and it carried out to the letter. The storekeeper who sold rum could not sell molasses or codfish to a temperance man.³⁷

Conflict over temperance grew as reformers enlarged their efforts. It was one thing to encourage people not to drink; it was another thing to demonize those who did. In the mid-1830s, the M.T.U. began to focus attention on two classes of miscreants: drunkards and those who sold liquor to them. Drunkards were an easy target; they had long been classed among the fallen. Revival preachers often portrayed the classic sinner as the alcoholic, a wicked and depraved creature. But the tavern keepers, shopkeepers, and merchants who sold spirits were usually among the town's most respected citizens.³⁸ What began as mere hectoring of sellers escalated to what one historian has called "judgmental belligerence."³⁹ Evangelical temperance advocates accused them of carrying on -- and profiting from -- an evil traffic that led their neighbors to damnation.⁴⁰ That

³⁶ Diary of Mary White, May 4, 1842. OSV.

³⁷ From "A Recollection of Sturbridge, Mass.," excerpted in "Reform: Temperance," a Resource Packet edited by the Museum Education Department at Old Sturbridge Village, 1978, p. 1.

³⁸ Hampel's study of liquor sellers in Salem indicates that they were on average wealthy & likely to hold town offices, though unlikely to hold church office or be involved in political parties. Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, p. 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53

⁴⁰ Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, pp. 206-7.

they were men of standing and likely to wield influence made their sin even more grievous. The Unitarian Horace Mann attempted a more rational approach, arguing that it was in the retailers' self-interest to ban liquor sales, as drink made farmers unproductive and so reduced what they could afford to spend at the store.⁴¹ Many shopkeepers, however, aware that spirits remained their most profitable commodity, were not impressed. Though no Carrie Nation wielded her ax in Boylston, the issue of liquor sales was fraught with controversy and tension.

For the Whites, the issue was personal. Aaron White owned the most established store in Boylston, and the first to go dry. In 1831, a local noted that the town had "three stores, in two of which are found the usual supplies of domestic, English, and West Indies goods; the other is upon the plan of *total abstinence* in the sale of ardent spirits."⁴² This was Aaron White's center village store. As Mary did not comment in her diary on her husband's decision to stop selling ardent spirits, he likely made this change before the 1827 volume opened. If so, his action was no doubt in response to the early preaching by the evangelical ministers of the A.T. U., and likely transmitted to Aaron through his devout wife. We do not know if the savvy retailer abandoned liquor sales willingly or only after a marital struggle. Contemporary temperance provided plentiful arguments for persuading liquor sellers to give up their traffic. The A.T.U. literature warned sellers to desist, for "in no other way can they escape the guilt of being accessory to the making of

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 205.

⁴² Davenport, *Brief Historical Sketch of Boylston*, p. 16.

drunkards, and the danger, in the day of retribution of being partakers in their plagues.”⁴³

We do not know if Mary used these arguments on Aaron. We do know that the decision was costly, for Aaron lost not just sales, but custom, as those who did not share his moralizing stance could take their business to Bond’s store or Hastings’s tavern.

The family issue was not resolved when Aaron gave up the sale of liquor. Their son Avery was a West India merchant, and he did a substantial business in rum. The matter was deeply troubling to his mother. Mary’s letters to Avery do not survive, so we do not know what powers of persuasion she exerted. The parents’ relationship with their second son was somewhat strained; Aaron quarreled with him frequently over imagined slights and miscommunications, and Mary was no doubt concerned that as a man in his thirties Avery had not yet made a confession of faith. The thorny issue of his continuing liquor sales was finally resolved in February of 1838, when Mary wrote to Charles, “I rejoice to hear that Avery is likely to be liberated from the sad traffic of rum selling!”⁴⁴

But the family was not done with the contentious issue of liquor sales. In 1841, an aging Aaron sold his store to the family’s good friend and neighbor, Dr. John Andrews. To Mary’s dismay, the doctor decided to stock his shelves with spirits. William wrote to his brother, “Intemperance, that woeful bane of all human happiness and peace, is I fear on the increase here at present. Mr. Andrews keeps liquors in his bar and one and another are seen to go in there and take the intoxicating cup. I saw the effect almost as soon as I

⁴³ *Sixth Annual Report of the American Temperance Society* (Boston: 1833), p. 50.

⁴⁴ She added, “I received a letter from Aaron last Saturday in which he mentions the deleterious effects of ardent spirits on two of his neighbors who had died in consequence of drinking, one frozen to death and the other drowning. Thus too leaving 17 orphan children in a destitute situation!” Mary White to Charles White, February 20, 1838.

arrived in town.”⁴⁵ The issue of liquor sales vexed relations between husband and wife, parents and son, and neighbors during the 1830s in Boylston.

Legal Coercion

It was difficult for temperance advocates to vilify and reduce to disrespectability such established gentlemen as the rum-sellers Avery White and Dr. John Andrews. By the mid-1830s, the M.T. U. had decided to shift tactics from moral persuasion to political and legal restraint. In Massachusetts, licenses to sell liquor were granted by appointed county commissioners. In 1835, after sustained pressure from Temperance advocates, the legislature made these elected positions. The 1835 elections for commissioners came only two weeks after the change in law, too early for Temperance advocates to organize themselves. However, by the next election in 1838, they were prepared.

The struggle to control county commissioners was hotly contested, and election results in Boylston reveal that feelings ran high. In 1835, turnout was low and highly lopsided. Three years later, the story was different. Those for and against campaigned ferociously, with supporters urging the need to cleanse sin, and opposition decrying rule by fanatics and ultraists.⁴⁶ In Worcester, one observer reported, “Wherever two men are seen together, the subject of conversation is temperance. In many instances they become so furious as to almost come to blows. I perceived that whoever speaks upon the subject manifests his passions at once. In this respect, the friends of temperance are as

⁴⁵ William White to Charles White, April 27, 1841. OSV.

⁴⁶ Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 65-9.

intemperate as their opponents. Everybody is getting mad."⁴⁷ For the first time, Mary White noted the meeting for election of County Commissioners in her diary, revealing that high interest surrounded the event. In Boylston, turnout was double what it had been previously, and the vote was nearly evenly divided between two sets of candidates, likely pro- and anti- temperance tickets.⁴⁸

Temperance reformers continued their legal campaign, bombarding the legislature with petitions to limit or prohibit alcohol sales. In 1838, the Massachusetts legislature bent to their will, approving a law that they believed was moderate, for it merely limited rather than prohibited sales. The Fifteen Gallon Law authorized the sale of spirits only in quantities of fifteen gallons or more. The law effectively shut down all casual drinking at taverns, pubs, and country stores. It also put drink beyond the reach of all but those wealthy enough to purchase and store a large quantity.

Temperance advocates were pleased. Then they were shocked when a huge and sometimes violent backlash ensued. Active temperance supporters found their horses' tails shaved, their trees girdled, or their houses defaced. Bitter confrontation, harassment, vandalism, and physical abuse -- including tarring and feathering -- fell upon those who tried to enforce the law. Even mob violence was threatened.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁸ See Boylston Town Clerk's Record Book, Election Results for April 25, 1835 and April 2, 1838. BHS. In the first election one set of three candidates received 84% of the vote. In the second election, one slate received 43% of the vote, while the other received 47%. These were not party affiliations, Hampel claims, but represented pro and anti temperance views. Hampel., *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 65-9.

⁴⁹ Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, p. 88.

Anti-temperance protesters claimed the law was an attack on liberty and equality. One observer later recalled the arguments of the protesters: “They said their liberties were in danger; their fathers had fought for liberty; and they would shoulder their muskets, and fight over the battles of freedom, before they would relinquish their right to drink when they pleased.”⁵⁰ The law, they claimed, was a dangerous infringement on their personal liberties by Puritan fanatics, who soon, if not stopped, would be regulating dress and diet. One neighboring Worcester County town vehemently denounced the law as “an act of Tyranny and fitted for arbitrary abuse,” a violation of “the rights of poor and middling interests.”⁵¹ Others argued that law exceeded the state’s power to regulate interstate commerce, discriminated against those who could not afford to buy fifteen gallons at a time, and – in a jab at evangelical proponents – was unscriptural.⁵² Calling the law “restrictive and coercive,” they positioned themselves as those with “liberal and enlarged views.”⁵³

Evading or flouting the law was common, especially as there was not enough manpower to enforce it. One common ploy was to buy fifteen gallons and one gill of rum

⁵⁰ Davis, *The Half Century*, pp. 138-9.

⁵¹ John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), pp. 357-8.

⁵² See *The Temperance Society Record*, No XVIII, (Nov. 1831), Vol. II, from a speech by Mr. Collins, First Public Meeting of the British and Foreign Temperance Society. “We are frequently told by opponents of Temperance Societies that they do not find any warrant for such institutions in the word of God, and that, therefore, they are unscriptural.” p. 1.

⁵³ Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 61-2 and 79-81.

on credit; after drinking the gill, the fifteen gallons were returned and the account paid.⁵⁴

Less common, but much discussed, was the exhibition of the striped pig. This rather ingenious ploy was developed to ensure that militia musters and town-meeting days – long a time of rummy sociability – would not go dry. One enterprising youth from Dedham decided that the town's militia muster in the autumn of 1838 should include an educational exhibit of a "striped pig." He received a license to set up a tent, where, for a fee, visitors could enter, view an ordinary pig painted with black stripes – and receive a *free* brandy. "A flag was raised, bearing an image of the rare creature on view inside; trade was brisk as word got round that for every patron of the pig there was a free drink. Thus the problem was solved: liquor was dispensed but not sold."⁵⁵

Abishai Crossman decided that the people of Boylston also deserved this educational opportunity during March meeting. Aaron wrote to Charles of the incident that followed:

Yesterday was our annual March Meeting. You have not forgotten the incidents of a country March Meeting. One incident however took place of rather an unusual character for to take place in the staid and sober town of Boylston. We had a regular row. The circumstances were as follows. Our old neighbor Crossman who by the way is no friend to the law of 1838 [Fifteen Gallon Law] or to any other law for the suppression of intemperance, insisted upon exhibiting the striped pig for the good of his fellow townsmen. Not being able to find any tenement for his purpose in the neighborhood, his zeal for the publick good induced him to pitch his tent under one of the old sheds back of the old meeting house. It was not long before some boys proceeded to erect a suitable sign of invitation nigh the premises. This of course attracted attention and soon there was a gathering of youngsters to the number of many scores. When after the

⁵⁴ "Reform: Temperance," a Resource Packet edited by the Museum Education Department at Old Sturbridge Village, 1978.

⁵⁵ Carson, *Rum and Reform*, p. 15.

usual negotiations, shoutings and other concomitants of such times, means were found to upset the table and let loose the striped pig who was seen running and rooting among the stones to the no small gratification of all excepting those who had produced him for exhibition.⁵⁶

Aaron clearly found the incident amusing; Mary did not. She recorded, “Our temperance cause injured by one man attempting to sell without a license.”⁵⁷

The striped pig became an extremely popular animal, inspiring cartoons, songs, and pamphlets. Temperance folk tried to make light of the matter by issuing their own tale of the pig’s genealogy and demise. One reported that the pig had been slaughtered, and provided a memorial in the form of an “obituary”: “Died yesterday, at the ballot-boxes, of *delirium tremens*, that wonderful beast . . . the *striped pig!* Post mortem – innerds all alcohol and rot, heart shrunken, emitted foul alcoholic order – stomach filled with excrement of paper – handbills, circulars, letters of the “pig party.”⁵⁸

Anti-temperance was, however, no laughing matter to reformers. In shifting their campaign from moral appeal to legal coercion, temperance supporters had unwittingly tapped a strong vein of popular protest. The outcry was so strong that legislators considered repeal. Temperance advocates rallied to their cause. In Boylston, Mary’s commitment led her from religiously-motivated reform to public political action. Throughout 1839, she recorded going -- or sending her daughters to go -- “round to the neighbors to get signatures for the female petition” against the repeal of the law.

⁵⁶ Aaron White to Charles White, March 3, 1840. OSV.

⁵⁷ Diary of Mary White, March 2, 1840. OSV.

⁵⁸ *A History of the Striped Pig* (Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1938), p. 8.

Petitioning was the only political power a female had. It was, in essence, a prayer to be heard. But during the 1830s, various causes appropriated the petition as a political tool – a demand asserting political or constitutional claims. In this transformation, the petition carried women into the political sphere and brought down upon those who dared to participate the charge of behaving in a manner unbecoming to their sex. Mary White and her daughters took that risk. In January of 1839, as the issue of repealing the Fifteen Gallon Law occupied the Legislature, Caroline wrote to her brother:

At this particular time, you hear much said on the subject of Temperance. Petitions on both sides [of the Fifteen Gallon Law] are busily circulating in this town. I went round in the center district with one among the females; of all I asked, I met with but one refusal and she was the wife of a drunken husband, who stood in fear of his displeasure. Therefore did not dare to sign. In one place where the rum bottle stood on the table, the toddy stick in the mug on the mantle shelf, the wife readily put her name to the petition. The voice of the people I hope will decide right . . .⁵⁹

Caroline noted that petitions on both sides of the issue were circulating in Boylston. The town, with dueling petitions, a split vote on county commissioners, and support for the striped pig, was clearly divided on this issue. By 1838, Boylston's temperance reformers had abandoned the attempt to create a moral consensus on drink through persuasion and influence. Instead, they turned to building a majority coalition that could win its battles in the legislature.

Politically, the Fifteen Gallon Law backfired for temperance reformers. The coercive action caused such an outcry that both Whigs and Democrats attempted to distance themselves from what had never been a party movement. Democrats, however, were more successful, as their candidate for governor, Marcus Morton, promised to sign

⁵⁹ Caroline White to Charles White, January 26, 1839. OSV.

any repeal bill presented by the legislature; his opponent, Edward Everett had unfortunately signed the unpopular bill into law. Morton was elected. Although Boylston embraced Everett, it was the tightest contest the once predominantly Federalist/Whig town had ever witnessed for a gubernatorial election.⁶⁰

The issue of temperance eventually cooled as the energy in the movement shifted to reform led by and for lower class laborers. By then, however, respectable middling sorts in Boylston, as in most of Massachusetts, had gradually embraced a social norm of sobriety.⁶¹ In 1844, the last tavern in Boylston went out of business; shortly afterward, John Gough, the nation's leading Temperance speaker, made Boylston his home. At the town's centennial in 1886, one town father bragged,

We are a temperance people and are all prohibitionists. When called upon to vote whether intoxicating liquors shall be sold in town or not, the vote is an unanimous No. . . [T]he sale [of liquor] was voluntarily given up, and for forty years no rum has been sold in town, consequently very little of the effects of intoxicating drinks have been seen.⁶²

Associations and Community

⁶⁰ In the 1839 election for governor, Boylston cast 59% of its votes for Everett, 41% for Morton. Whigs lost electoral strength and Massachusetts saw many splinter tickets in the 1838 and 1839 elections. Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition*, pp. 81-2.

⁶¹ Joyce Appleby asserts that the temperance struggles of the 1830s gradually resulted in a "sea change in public mores . . . [C]onsumption was cut in half in the ten years between 1835 and 1845. More importantly, the public realm was reclaimed for sobriety." Appleby, "Personal Roots," p. 154.

⁶² Henry Brigham, *Centennial of Boylston*, p. 54.

How did voluntary associations such as the Temperance Society change Boylston? They strengthened the individual in his quest to stand against the norm, to separate himself from the collective mentality of traditional New England farm villages. Voluntary societies focused attention on self, on personal choice and self-direction, rather than on communal authority and established custom. Mary White, with her formidable faith, may have had no trouble taking an unpopular stand against sin, but others likely benefited from the support of shared pledges and sociability of the society. The politics of association empowered individualism.

If temperance nurtured individualism, it also taught Boylstonians the power of alliance. Hierarchical authority and tradition-bound customs no longer exercised dominant control in a rapidly changing social world. But individuals who formed themselves into associations could exercise control through the politics of persuasion. Temperance succeeded in the long run by appealing to a persuasive ideal of respectability, one that allowed proponents to build a majority willing to embrace sobriety. Such a majority made strange bedfellows in Boylston, bringing feuding orthodox and Unitarian neighbors to share tea and celebratory picnics. But such cooperation brought home the idea that in this new pluralist world, unanimous consensus was unlikely, and, in fact, unnecessary.

Overcoming the limits of geography, associations also enlarged the “sphere of useful action,” as Mary so often termed it. Their linkages to state and national branches shattered the isolation that had helped foster homogeneity and social solidarity. As traveling agents, delegates to conventions, and associations brought a continuous flow of ideas, Boylstonians were liberated from the tyranny of localism. It was no longer

necessary to defer to the minister, the local squire, or even the mob at the local tavern. As part of a larger association, Boylstonians had the freedom to make their own decisions and to imagine themselves as members of a wider world. It was, perhaps, as the temperance supporters claimed, a declaration of independence.

In 1842, Mary White noted a wedding in her diary. Miss Sophia Cotton, neighbor, friend and contemporary of Mary's daughters, and a committed member of Mary's reform associations, had married Mr. Nathaniel Whitney. Mary and her family did not attend the wedding, for it was held at "the community lodge" in Hopedale, Massachusetts. "Mr. Ballou," Mary noted, "married them." Sophia Cotton had left Boylston to join the fledgling utopian community of Adin Ballou, on a 600-acre farm in the Worcester County town of Milford, where Ballou and his followers hoped to separate from corrupted society and create a perfected community. Following "Practical Christianity," members would share all possessions in common while promoting pacifism, temperance, abolition, women's rights, spiritualism, and education. Ballou and his followers hoped their utopia at Hopedale would serve as an example for others seeking to recreate community.

Sophia Cotton's search for a perfected community took her away from Boylston, even as reformers remade life at home. Driven by hope and fear, by religious zeal or pragmatic desire for gain, Boylstonians re-formed community in the 1830s. Their outcomes were sometimes ironic: those seeking submission to God's will found liberty from the communal will, those preaching self-control promoted legal coercion. Ultimately they discovered that there was no longer a consensus on the common good; in their plural society, each had to advocate for his own ideal of the perfect community.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ANTISLAVERY

On a mild December afternoon in 1840, Mary White set out on foot from her center village home. The 62-year old matron walked the hilly country roads and cart paths, from time to time stopping at a farmstead along her way. These were not social calls, nor were they visits to the sick, or a neighborly exchange of goods. There was nothing traditional about Mary's errand: she was seeking signatures for a female antislavery petition. It was hard work, made more difficult by the hostile reception of neighbors who thought women had no business meddling in political causes. But Mary White believed that slavery was a sinful "stain on our National Character," and her evangelical conscience told her she "had a duty to perform to do away with this stain."¹

The mission was made more urgent by Mary's belief that she lived in the end times, that the millennial return of Christ was imminent, and thus the time was short for the young nation to either cleanse itself of sin or bear the wrath of God's righteous judgment.² Cleansing moral stains, she might reason, was rightfully women's work, for

¹ Mary White to Charles White, June 2, 1840. OSV. Portions of this chapter were previously published in Mary Fuhrer, "'We All have Something to Do in the Cause of Freeing the Slave,': The Abolition Work of Mary White," in *Women's Work in New England, 1620-1920*, The Dublin Seminar for New England Folk life Annual Proceedings 2001 (Vol. 26) (Boston: Boston University Press, 2001), pp. 109-125.

² Mary noted with joy whenever there was an "outpouring of the spirit of the Lord." This was her biblical shorthand for signs of the end time. See Joel 2: 28-29, in which God promises in the end time to "pour out my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see

women were the nation's moral housekeepers.³ Mary would find her duty as a Christian woman leading her beyond what most of her Christian peers would have seen as womanly. This pious, genteel, and otherwise conservative country matron made her afternoon circuit, an unintentional journey down the path of radical activism.

Abolition Arrives in Boylston

When Rev. Sanford arrived as the new pastor of Boylston's Congregational Church in 1832, he brought with him his young wife, Harriet, and xthrough her, a whole network of early antislavery activists. Sanford had recently married into the family of the Rev. Ethan Smith of New Hampshire, an ardently evangelical and socially activist clan. Harriet's sister Sarah edited the *Moral Advocate*, a New York periodical for moral reform, worked for Temperance, and was vice president of the second Antislavery Convention for American Women in 1838.⁴ Sister Grace Smith Martyn was First

visions." Mary may have believed that social reform would hasten the coming of the Kingdom: in 1835 revivalist preacher Charles Finney hopefully predicted, "if the church will do her duty the millennium may come in this country in three years." Quoted in Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1993), p. 159. The urgency was particularly acute for the new nation, with whom they believed God had made a special covenant: "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people, the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world." Herman Melville, as quoted in Johnson, *Redeeming America*, p. 116.

³ Consider work on the "cult of domesticity," and Republican Motherhood. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" *AQ* Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer 1966), pp. 151-174; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴ Bertha-Monica Sterns, "Reform Periodicals and Female Reformers, 1830-1860," *AHR*

Directress of the Ladies' New York City Antislavery Society.⁵ Brother-in-law Job Martyn, a Congregational minister, lectured for the antislavery cause. Through the Smith-Martyn families, Harriet had ties to male and female abolitionist leaders and agents in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. The 25-year-old Harriet shared her family's strong antislavery convictions.

Rev. Sanford, like his wife, was friendly to the abolition cause, sponsored regular "concerts of prayer" for the slave, delivered antislavery sermons, and opened his pulpit to the army of antislavery agents. Mary and her family attended these events, and listened.

In 1836, daughter Caroline wrote to her brother:

Last Friday, I enjoyed the high privilege of hearing Mr. [Henry] Stanton deliver an address... Amos Dresser, the Lane Seminary student who was shamefully whipped in Nashville, Tenn., sometime since because he was a member of an abolition society in Cincinnati Ohio, was there and gave an account of his mock trial. Poor fellow, I pitied him, but I believe he feels that blessed are ye, when men shall persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake, Yea for great is your reward in heaven. I expect to hear Mr. Stanton again this afternoon and am longing for the feast...

Three days later Mary noted in her diary that Dresser and Stanton were still in town, and that she had just attended another lecture by the pair. She added the prayer, "May the

Vol. 37, No. 4 (Jul., 1932), p. 683; Lori D. Ginzberg, "'Moral Suasion Is Moral Balderdash': Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s," *JAH* Vol. 73, No. 3 (Dec., 1986), pp. 607. For more on Grace and Job Martyn, see Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 113-114.

⁵ Anne M. Boylan, "Timid Girls, Venerable Widows, and Dignified Matrons: Life Cycle Patterns Among Organized Women in New York and Boston, 1797-1840," *AQ* Vol. 38, No. 5 (Winter, 1986), p. 790.

⁶ Caroline White to Charles White, December 20, 1836. OSV.

Lord grant his blessing to the efforts they are making to abolish Slavery.”⁷ When Harriet’s brother-in-law Rev. Job Martyn visited Boylston, Mary reported to her son, “[Mr. Martyn] appears as interesting as ever. He has delivered one Antislavery lecture here. He thinks that the Monster Slavery has received his death wound...”⁸ As the new minister and his wife settled into the parsonage next to the White family home in center village, Mary White was about to embrace a new mission.

In itself, antislavery was neither new nor radical.⁹ But when William Lloyd Garrison took up the crusade with the strident publication *The Liberator* in early 1830, antislavery went from genteel and moderate to fervent, intransigent and political.¹⁰ Garrison argued that slavery was sinful and all believers had a duty to work for its eradication. Repentance -- emancipation -- must be immediate. By identifying slavery as

⁷ Diary of Mary White, December 12, 1836. OSV.

⁸ Mary White to Charles White, February 2, 1838. OSV.

⁹ Antislavery had no doubt begun with the resistance of the first enslaved. Antislavery sentiments in the colonies rose with the rhetoric of liberty and rights during the Revolution, and antislavery advocacy in the early U.S. benefited from Britain’s earlier example. But most U.S. proposals were gradualist, or called for colonization of freed slaves to Africa before 1830. There is a huge body of literature on antislavery. For an excellent sum of historiography, see James L. Huston, “The Experiential Basis of Northern Antislavery Impulse,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. LVI, No. 4. November 1990, esp. pp. 610-18. A fairly recent synthesis of scholarship that includes the often overlooked early period of American abolitionism, see Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); for a classic on the Garrisonian years, see Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978). For the post-1840 rise of political abolitionism, see Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal*, p. vii.

sin, Garrison was able to enlist the activist energies and unbending conscience of evangelicalism.¹¹ Antislavery organizers then appropriated the language, logic, and methods of evangelicalism. Even non-evangelical Quaker and Unitarian abolitionists recognized how effective revival-like methods of “abolitionizing” could be. Traveling antislavery agents, like traveling revivalists, went from village to village lecturing and exhorting on the sinfulness of slavery. Convinced hearers were to embrace emancipation as they did repentance, enroll in antislavery societies as they did in churches, and commit themselves to a new life of work for the cause. And there was urgency to this work: God would take righteous vengeance on the United States if the stain of slavery were not immediately expunged. Mary declared to her son, “we have all something to do in the cause of freeing the slaves or we shall all be brought into bondage.”¹²

The sermons, lectures, and prayers of her abolitionist minister won an early convert in Mary White. By 1836 Mary was convinced of her duty to “have something to do in the cause of freeing the slaves.” In May of that year, Harriet and Mary organized the first meeting of the Boylston Female Antislavery Society (BFASS).

The Work of Female Abolitionists

The two women drew on their experience with organized benevolence. They knew the first order of business was to draft a constitution, enroll members, and elect

¹¹ Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 128.

¹² Mary White to Charles White, May 1839. OSV.

officers. Although some antislavery societies used a pre-printed constitution provided by the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, Harriet and Mary chose their own words:

Believing that the usurped dominion of one man over another is sin inasmuch as it takes from him the ownership of his own person, robs him of the right to the product of his own labour, reduces him from a person to a thing, shuts him out from the enjoyment of the means of grace, darkens the mind, and debases the intellects and sacrifices all domestic rights that it there lays in ruins the comfort and happiness of more than three millions of our fellow-citizens in this land of boasted freedom -- that it tramples in the dust all that is dear to women and is inconsistent with the principles of a free government as it is with the law of God -- and believing it to be the duty of every one to exert their influence to effect their emancipation -- therefore we the undersigned women of the town of Boylston agree to unite ourselves into a society for the purpose of more effectively exerting our influence in the behalf of the oppressed.¹³

Harriet and Mary's preface gives us some insight into *why* they abhorred slavery and helps us understand what cultural messages they had absorbed in forming an understanding of ways in which slavery departed from normative behavior. Though Harriet and Mary conflated current political, economic, moral, and religious indictments of slavery, their primary objection was to its sinfulness. How was slavery sinful? In laying out the ways in which slavery violated the divine will, Harriet and Mary reveal how their moral imperatives had been shaped by the emerging norms of a Protestant middle class that valued self-supporting independence, respectability, domesticity, and redemption. The two women asserted that denying the political right of self-determination and the economic right to the fruits of one's labor were moral transgressions as well as legal issues; in their deeply evangelical world, rights and religion were of a piece. Slavery was sinful inasmuch as it kept that slave from knowing the path to salvation, but it was also sinful in keeping the slave's intellect in darkness, in

¹³ Boylston Female Antislavery Society, Constitution, manuscript, BHS.

denying the slave now-hallowed self-improvement through education. The sacrifice of “domestic rights” – breaking up of households, separating husbands from wives and parents from children – was especially sinful in the context of a culture that increasingly believed that the domestic sphere was sacred, a haven for the nurture of faith, morality, and familial love. They made a special appeal to “all that is dear to women,” embracing the gendered role of women as responsible for purging sin and alleviating suffering. Interestingly, they made no direct reference to brutality and violence of slavery, though empathy for suffering seems present. What specifically might they have meant in “all that is dear to women?” Perhaps they were referring to the sexual abuse of female slaves by lascivious masters as trampling the modesty and chastity of women. Perhaps they had in mind the tenuous nature of slave family domestic life.

In seeking to understand Mary and Harriet’s characterization of slavery, perhaps it is worthwhile to ask what experience either of them had ever had of the institution, beyond the tales of fugitives and the reports of visitors to the South. Neither woman had ever traveled to the South, but Mary, born in 1778, could remember slaves and ex-slaves personally. (Harriet, born in 1807, would not have had such personal memories.) Mary may not have witnessed brutality, but she certainly experienced “owned” persons. And she knew the cruelty of the auction block. Mary’s grandmother had requested the gift of a slave girl for a house servant as a wedding present. “Dinah” lived her whole life with the family, “marrying” a coachman and having many children, all of whom Mary’s grandmother gave away when quite young. Mary’s mother, when asked if Dinah felt badly about this, explained, “Oh no, she did not care any more for them than the cat when

her kittens were taken from her.”¹⁴ The story of Dinah’s children being given away like kittens must have left a keen impression on Mary, for it was remembered and retold a century later by her own children. Having one’s children stripped away may indeed have been in the minds of two women empathetically decrying the loss “of all that women hold dear.”

It is hard to know precisely what meaning Mary and Harriet gave to the words “reduces him from a person to a thing.” What assumptions did the women carry about the nature of black people? In their minds, were they fully human, the same in mind and soul, if not in body, as white people? How did they understand racial difference? There is no doubt that they had met and interacted with northern free blacks. Census studies indicate that during the first half of the nineteenth century, Worcester County towns averaged about one percent “colored” population, a category that likely included Native American and mixed race peoples as well as those of African descent.¹⁵ But though these people may have been familiar, they were not accepted as equal.¹⁶

¹⁴ “Recollections from Uncle Thomas White and Aunt Mary White Davis,” original manuscript owned by Grace and Alice White in 1946, lent to the author by descendants.

¹⁵ A study based on the U.S. Population Census for Worcester County indicates that the average black population ranged from .91 to 1.44 between 1790 and 1850. Old Sturbridge Village, “Interpretive Sourcebook on African Americans in Rural New England,” Unpublished study, Old Sturbridge Village Research Department, 1990.

¹⁶ Holly Izard reconstructs the life of a Sturbridge black family and their relationship with whites as they worked and lived in a Worcester County town during this era. See “Guy Scott of Sturbridge: Exploring Cultural Diversity,” *Old Sturbridge Visitor* (Winter, 1994), pp. 10-11. For more recent work on race and slavery in New England, see Elise Lemire, *Black Walden: Slavery and Its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) and Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

To some degree, black bodies were a thing of cultural curiosity in antebellum New England. Particularly with the rise of “racial science,” in which the black cranium was theoretically determined to house a brain deficient in reasoning capacity but superior in musical skills, Northern whites attended to the physical differences of blacks.¹⁷ Perhaps this was nowhere more striking than in P.T. Barnum’s first venture in exhibiting physical curiosities: the exhibition of Joice Heth, supposedly the 161-year-old nurse of Gen. George Washington. In 1835, Barnum traveled around New England offering the chance to view this extraordinary spectacle of race: a wizened and withered old black woman who was “The Greatest Natural and National Curiosity in the World.” People – including Mary White – turned out in droves to view, touch, and comment upon what many saw as a grotesque freak of nature, a forerunner to the carnival sideshow. Barnum played upon Heth’s age and patriotic ties to the Founding Father, but he was particularly successful in his appeal to popular interest in putting the black body on display to prove its denigration and “otherness.” His advertisements described her body in animalist terms. Many visitors shared his bent, describing her as physically repulsive, possessing “paws” or “talons,” an object of mockery.¹⁸ Upon her death in 1836, there was clamor for Heth’s public autopsy, happily capitalized upon by Barnum as another spectacle of race. Blacks -- like poor Moses Bondsman, the unfortunate Boylstonian whose scalp was

¹⁷ Benjamin Reiss discusses scientific attempts to essentialize race in antebellum society. See “P.T. Barnum, Joice Heth, and Antebellum Spectacles of Race,” *AQ* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Mar., 1999), esp. pp. 84-85. See also the book, Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum’s America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave*, p. 89.

found floating in a brook after his corpse had been dissected -- were the most likely subjects of autopsies in this era, in part because their kin had less power to resist, but also to satisfy a white population determined to prove the scientific basis of racism. Historian Benjamin Reiss points out, "as the economy dilated and as social roles for whites grew more varied and unstable, essentialized notions of race served as ballast for anxieties about the shifting grounds of identity, status, and authenticity."¹⁹

How did Mary White view Joice Heth? Did she seek in Joice Heth a reassuring affirmation of her own superior place in a shifting society? The opportunity came in September of 1835, as Mary and Aaron traveled to Providence to attend the Brown University commencement and visit with their sons Aaron and Thomas. Mary recorded that on the afternoon of the commencement, she – not in the company of her husband or sons – went to view Heth, then on exhibition in the city.

I went to see an old colored woman who was nurse to General Washington, her age 161 years. She has been totally blind for more than half a century, but retains her hearing. Repeats & sings hymns, her voice very clear. She appears very willing to leave this world as she believes she shall go to her Savior, whom she has professed to love 116 years. She is said to have led an upright & exemplary life.

Mary's only comments on Heth's physical characteristics relate to the extraordinary ability to hear, speak, and sing at such an advanced age. Of far more concern to Mary was the state of Heth's soul. She believed in the Savior, whom she had loved and served for over a century, and she awaited death in calm anticipation of a heavenly reunion – these were the "evidences" that impressed Mary. We cannot know what Mary thought of the minds or bodies of blacks, but she clearly believed that their souls (slave or free) were

¹⁹ Reiss, "P. T. Barnum, Joice Heth, and Antebellum Spectacles of Race," p. 95.

receptive to grace.²⁰ In loving and being loved by the Savior, slaves were acceptable to God, and so acceptable to Mary White.

Mary and Harriet justified their work for the emancipation of slaves by asserting the duty of women to “exert influence.” The trouble, as they were about to discover, was in finding ways to exert their influence that were not offensive to their conservative fellow churchwomen. Antislavery was not popular; historians estimate that between 1830 and 1865 only one percent of American men and women were active abolitionists.²¹ Those who worked publicly for the cause in the urban North risked being stoned, mobbed, or becoming the focus of violent riots.²² Women had special reason to excuse themselves: immediate emancipation required radical social change, and demanding that change exceeded the bounds of womanly propriety. Elizabeth Chace of Rhode Island later recalled that she was repaid for her antislavery work with social ostracism, persecution, slander and insult. Very few women in Boylston -- or anywhere else -- were willing to take on such work.²³ When Harriet and Mary canvassed the women of their

²⁰ On the appeal to Christian brotherhood as a basis of racial equality, see Paul Goodman *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

²¹ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 3.

²² There were anti-abolition riots in Philadelphia and New York City in 1834, and in Boston in 1835. During the Boston riot, radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was nearly murdered, saved only when authorities seized and jailed him overnight to keep him from the hands of mob. See Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

²³ Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, pp. 3-6.

church, they could find only a handful brave enough to enlist. So Harriet and Mary, it seems, went out to the highways and byways. In a town simmering with sectarian animosity, they appealed to the women of the Unitarian church for their sympathy. With cross-sectarian support, they recruited forty-six women to sign the constitution.²⁴

Boylston's coalition of antislavery women was a diverse group.²⁵ Eventually forty-eight Boylston women supported the BFASS in some fashion, donating either money, materials or work to the cause. For those women whose church affiliation could be determined, Unitarians outnumbered Congregationalists, for reasons we will come to see. Half were married and half single, with a handful of widows. Their ages ranged from the teens to their seventies, but most of the women were in their twenties and thirties. Despite the heavy workload of young married women with children, this group accounted for more than half of the membership. Their residences were scattered around town, with only a small clustering in the center village. They were not generally part of Mary's regular social network. In fact, most of Mary's closest friends and most frequent household visitors were notably absent from the abolitionist ranks.²⁶ Two common characteristics stand out: most of these women were affluent, and most were related. More than three quarters of the members whose taxable household wealth could be determined were in the top three deciles. Unlike the earlier "Benevolent Society," women

²⁴ This number is based on the 1840 history of the BFASS written by Mary White and preserved in the records of the Society. BHS.

²⁵ See Appendix O for analysis of Boylston females known to have worked for abolition in the 1836-1838.

²⁶ Mary's social network was determined by compiling a record of visits paid and received in 1836.

were not required to pay dues, but affluence afforded the free time necessary to devote to charitable causes. And family ties - the presence of siblings, parents and in-laws, suggest both that families tended to be “abolitionized” together and that family support was essential when embracing such an unpopular cause. Even with the support of family, however, few women were willing to enlist in the cause. The forty-eight women who worked for abolition represented less than a fifth of Boylston’s females over the age of 16; when only active supporters (those who contributed money, materials, or sewing) are counted, the number drops well below 10% of Boylston’s adult females.²⁷ Boylston’s Society, then, like most rural women’s antislavery groups, was a small, diverse coalition of women who shared a strong conviction. As we shall see, they were not like-minded about acceptable ways to pursue their goal.²⁸

With their first members enrolled, Harriet and Mary set about the work of the society. Embracing the tactic of moral suasion, they focused their work on informing themselves and their neighbors about the sinfulness of slavery and raising money to pay traveling agents and publishers to do the same. The constitution mandated that “the time of meeting [2 pm to 5 pm] shall be spent in work for the benefit of the cause, while some one shall read books or papers calculated to enlighten and interest us in the Anti-Slavery cause.” The women took a subscription to the *Emancipator*, a periodical of the New York Antislavery Society, rather than Garrison’s Boston paper *The Liberator*, perhaps because

²⁷ According to the 1840 U.S. Population Census, Boylston had 265 females over the age of sixteen. Twenty women were active participants in the society, though, as Mary often lamented, most meetings brought together only a handful of faithful servants. For active workers, see Appendix O.

²⁸ See Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, p. 47.

Harriet's sisters were involved with the journal. With materials in hand, the women gathered monthly to pray, sew and listen to readings. With donated fabric, linen thread, and yarn, they sewed lace caps, cuffs, and aprons, and they knit stockings. This sewn work they sold locally and in 1836, by Mary's account, "the Treasurer received between 2 and 3 dollars for work done."²⁹

But things were not well with the BFASS. The membership fell off, as fewer and fewer women were willing to continue the work. Mary recorded the troubled time in the Society's records, noting how attendance flagged and little work was accomplished. Why did Mary and Harriet struggle so to keep members active? In part their struggles may have been related to the financial crisis of the Panic of 1837. "The Times," as the crisis was dubbed, spread fear and economic hardship and may well have distracted some farmers' wives from the "luxury" of devoting their time and resources to charity. But the falling away of members was more likely the result of the society's close affiliation with the Boston Female Antislavery Society and their adoption of the more radical tone and methods of that organization. Mary's diary and letters during these two years reveal that she and Harriet were stretching the limits of female propriety, and it is likely that their more timid neighbors were unwilling to associate with such controversial company.

Though Mary and Harriet's antislavery society meetings followed the same format as earlier benevolent societies, the tone of the meetings was decidedly different. The structure of female antislavery meetings varied, but most included scripture reading, reviewing minutes, conducting business, reading and conversation on slavery, sewing,

²⁹ Record Book of the Boylston Female Antislavery Society, BHS.

hymn singing, and a closing prayer. Into each of these traditional activities Mary and Harriet brought a voice of protest urging social change. Their prayers became political petitions: "May [our] labors be blessed of the Lord to bring about the emancipation of the poor Negro." Their hymns became protest songs:

I am an Abolitionist! I glory in the name;
Though now by slavery's minions hissed and covered o'er with shame;
It is a spell of light and power, The watchword of the free;
Who spurns it in the trial hour, A craven soul is he³⁰

Their readings from antislavery periodicals became lessons in propaganda and persuasion. Many *Liberator* articles were directed to women's sewing groups, teaching them how to speak convincingly, present and defend arguments, and develop cogent appeals to the mind, heart and emotions of their fellow women.³¹ These, then, were not passive inspirational messages, but lessons in advocacy and activism. The women of Boylston were not accustomed to such tactics.

As the members of the Boylston Antislavery Society sat listening to these readings, they sewed articles to be donated to antislavery fairs. Sewing was a traditional activity, but these women embellished their items with antislavery slogans or images. For example, the BFASS completed a cradle quilt and a bed quilt which "none but an

³⁰ Lyrics by Garrison, this song was set to the tune of "Old Lang Syne." From Jairus Lincoln's *Anti-Slavery Melodies: For the Friends of Freedom*. (Hingham: Elijah B. Gill, 1843), pp. 70-1. Mary hosted abolitionist songwriter Jairus Lincoln; it is probable the BFASS hymns included his work.

³¹ Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, pp. 22-3.

Abolitionist would buy.”³² They were probably decorated with poems such as the one printed on a quilt sold at the 1837 Boston Antislavery Fair:

Mother when around your child you clasp your arms in love,
And when with grateful joy you raise your eyes to God above-
Think of the negro-mother, when her child is torn away-
Sold for a little slave-oh, then, For that poor mother pray!³³

Some were stamped with stenciled images of shackled slaves, pleading for mercy.³⁴ The Boylston women recorded crafting pincushions and needle books; they may well have embellished them with the motto, “May the use of our needles *prick* the consciences of slaveholder,” making them a popular item at the 1837 antislavery fair. Pen wipers were inscribed, “Wipe out the *blot* of slavery,” while wafer boxes proclaimed, “The doom of slavery is *sealed*.” If all sewing was so marked, Garrison reasoned, the subject of slavery would be always kept before the mind of the items’ users.³⁵ Thus sewing was politicized.

Rural antislavery societies supported traveling abolition agents as they came through town. Harriet and Mary extended the work of the BFASS to hearing and hosting these speakers. They were fortunate that their minister lent his pulpit -- and his legitimacy -- to these speakers, and so diffused some level of controversy, but the tone of these agents’ addresses grew increasingly fervent and their nature increasingly radical. Harriet

³² Hannah S. P. Cotton to “Mrs. Chapman,” Oct. 27, 1839. Antislavery Collection, BPL.

³³ Wm. L. Garrison, *The Liberator* Jan. 2, 1837, p. 3, reporting on the recent Boston Antislavery Fair.

³⁴ See, for example, the pincushion, board with stencil illustration on fabric, ca. 1835, in the Friends Historical Library Collection of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Penn.

³⁵ Garrison described these and other similarly marked items at the Boston Ladies’ Antislavery Fair in the Jan. 2, 1837 issue of *The Liberator*, p. 3.

and Mary welcomed them all. First there were the men, notorious souls such as Amos Dresser, the young seminarian who had been publicly whipped in Tennessee for possessing antislavery literature, or Henry Stanton, a well-known abolitionist orator and journalist. Then, more shockingly, came the women. The Quaker Grimke sisters' scandalous practice of speaking in public before "promiscuous" (mixed male and female) audiences earned them the censure of orthodox clergy as immodest agents of "degeneracy and ruin." On October 2 and 3 of 1837, *after* the Grimkes had been publicly censured, Mary wrote in her diary: "attended in the evening lectures by the Miss Grimkes on Slavery. Very interesting lectures. May the Lord direct them in all they do." The next night, she "went to Mr. Sanford's and had the pleasure of seeing the Miss Grimkes."³⁶

Mary also offered hospitality to these agents, even though such courtesy often brought criticism to others who did likewise.³⁷ Though some women had been ostracized for publicly associating with blacks, Mary provided lodging for black male abolitionist agents – and not in the barn. Mary confided to her diary, "Mr. Brown and Mr. Washington, a colored man, lodged here and went from here this morning."³⁸ The two had spoken in Boylston at an antislavery meeting the day before. This degree of intimacy was uncommon even among abolitionists, who often felt strongly that blacks should not

³⁶ Diary of Mary White, Oct. 2 and 3, 1837. OSV.

³⁷ "Mr. Fairbanks, Antislavery agent from Providence, took tea here [8-23-37];" Mr. [Stephen] Foster and Mr. Pettibone, Antislavery agents, called here [10-4-39]."

³⁸ Diary of Mary White, Nov. 19, 1843. OSV. Garrison to Boston Female Antislavery Society, April 1834, MHS, as quoted in Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, p. 126.

be treated with familiarity. In nearby Leominster, for example, Frances Drake was ostracized when she walked in public with the Remonds, a black abolitionist family visiting from Salem. Neighbors informed her that it was improper for her to “treat niggers so familiarly.”³⁹ Sharing hospitality, courtesy, or even the sidewalk with black people could unleash a storm of criticism.⁴⁰ Mary set a radical example in bringing Mr. Washington under her roof and to her dinner table, an example that may have been disconcerting or even threatening to those who were relying on racial superiority as one assurance of worth in a changing world. Caroline advised her brother Charles, “Do treat with respect the colored person who conducts himself respectfully, let not the tincture of the skin be your standard how you shall treat a person, but their conduct.”⁴¹

The Liberator proposed a strategy for women to use in educating their neighbors about the evils of slavery: “Let the friends of the cause in each school district start a subscription, raise what they can, purchase a library, appoint some one to act as librarian, and then draw out the books to read... and put into the hands of their friends and neighbors... In this way, three or four abolitionists may abolitionize almost any town or village.”⁴² Harriet and Mary’s society at various times subscribed to *The Emancipator*

³⁹ Francis Drake, as quoted in Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, p. 126.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, p. 126. Even Garrison, Jeffrey notes, had reassured members of the Boston Female Antislavery Society that they were “not called upon to decide that you will make bosom friends of colored females, or invite them into your parlor or eat or drink with them, or walk with them in the streets.” Garrison to the Boston Female Antislavery Society [April?] 1834, as cited by Jeffrey, p. 45.

⁴¹ Caroline White to Charles White, December 20, 1836. OSV.

⁴² *The Liberator*, March 12, 1841.

and *The Cradle of Liberty*, and Mary noted that she “had the privilege of reading the *Liberator*”; they also purchased Theodore Weld’s *American Slavery As It Is* and Maria Chapman’s collection of antislavery readings, *The Liberty Bell*.⁴³ As their constitution called for directors to “circulate books,” members may well have circulated abolition materials in their neighborhoods. If they did, Weld’s book in particular may have had an “abolitionizing” effect. Subtitled, “*The Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*,” it used documents such as advertisements for runaway slaves to describe in graphic detail the conditions of plantation slave life and the tortures to which slaves were subjected to an audience who had, for the most part, never witnessed a person in bondage.

Mary and Harriet also expected their society to support antislavery fairs and conventions. Women’s antislavery fairs were intended to raise money and awareness, but they inevitably raised controversy. The products of their sewing circles, sold at these fairs, carried their political messages back home. Of even greater concern, the women who made, priced and marketed these goods were entering the marketplace. When female fair organizers began retailing imported antislavery wares as well, conservatives protested that fair work exposed ladies to the hard-edged world of business, exceeding the bounds of female propriety by thrusting them from the genteel domestic sphere into the commercial world of marketplace values and competitive behaviors.⁴⁴ Mary and Harriet were not deterred. Though they felt inadequate to the task, they “appraised” or set

⁴³ References to the *Emancipator*, *Cradle of Liberty*, *Liberty Bell* and *Slavery As It Is* are from the BFASS records, BHS. Mary refers to reading *The Liberator* in a letter to Charles dated June 9, 1840. OSV.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, p. 109-121.

prices on most fair items, occasionally leaving large items such as quilts unpriced, as they “would not set bounds” to the generosity of anyone who might procure such an item at the fair.⁴⁵ In 1840, Mary noted in her diary two days spent hearing addresses at the Worcester Convention and visiting the Antislavery Fair there.

Female antislavery societies also strengthened a regional network of correspondence between large urban or statewide organizations and their rural affiliates. Mary regularly directed her Boston-based son to deliver or pick up papers from “Mrs. Chapman, No. 46 Washington St., Antislavery office,” referring most likely to Maria Weston Chapman, the publicly active and prominent Secretary of the Boston Female Antislavery Society. Mary, Harriet and neighbor Hannah Sophia Cotton wrote regularly to the Chapman and Weston family women, who played central roles in supporting the work of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society at their Boston headquarters. Their letters were a mixture of business, news, confessions of trials, and prayers of encouragement. Woven into them is rhetoric of persevering determination in the cause of the oppressed. They decried party feeling and declared, “We consider union strength.” Mary wrote of “light breaking in for the oppressed,” while Hannah spoke of “slaves fleeing American tyranny.” They assured their urban colleagues that the women of rural Boylston were working for the deliverance of the downtrodden.⁴⁶ This exchange of sympathy, support and advice -- what the women of Fitchburg called their “epistolary social intercourse” --

⁴⁵ Hannah S. P. Cotton of the Boylston Female Antislavery Society to Mrs. Maria Weston Chapman, October 27, 1839. Antislavery Collection Letters, BPL.

⁴⁶ Resolution of the Female Antislavery Society of Boylston, Oct. 16, 1839 and Letter of Mary White to Maria Weston Chapman, March 16, 1840. Antislavery Collection, BPL.

created a sense of female political community.⁴⁷ Like other rural abolitionists, Harriet and Mary also sent notices of resolutions to antislavery newspapers, and followed the news of other societies.⁴⁸

All of this work of the BFASS was to some degree controversial and intimidating to diffident members, but it was petitioning that caused the most qualms. Signing -- and certainly circulating -- petitions was a political gesture, a redefinition of women's relation to the state. Where once the petitions of women to their governors had merely "prayed" for special favor, antislavery petitions demanded action, asserting the will of an activist people. Female petitioners defended their work, claiming it was a *moral duty* of women to "supplicate for the oppressed and suffering." Harriet's sister, Sarah Smith, speaking at the Antislavery Convention of American Women in Philadelphia in 1838, declared that such work was justified not as political action, "but as a question of justice, of humanity, of morality, of religion."⁴⁹ The petitioners claimed that woman would be less than woman if she did not plead for the slave. If she faced censure, she must endure it for the sake of the suffering: "female delicacy cannot be considered while people are enslaved, degraded and dishonored."⁵⁰ Mary agreed. She and her unmarried daughters signed and

⁴⁷ Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, p. 59.

⁴⁸ See for example the letter of Mary White to Mrs. Chapman, Oct. 16 1839, in which she reports that the Society "Voted that the above resolutions be printed in the antislavery newspapers." Antislavery Collection, BPL.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Jean Fagan Yellin and John C Van Horne, eds., *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 6.

⁵⁰ Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, "Let Your Names Be Enrolled": Method and Ideology in Women's Antislavery Petitioning," in *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, p. 188.

circulated petitions, and Mary prayed in a letter to Mrs. Chapman that they “be made willing to be of no reputation in the cause of the oppressed.”⁵¹

Women who circulated petitions reported being called “unwomanly” or “trollops” and threatened with violence.⁵² An August 4, 1837 edition of *The Liberator* reported that petitioners were told, “My darter says that you want the niggers and whites to marry together,” or “I hope you get a nigger husband.” Some refused to sign, not because they favored slavery, but because they opposed women working for political ends. Some husbands shooed petitioners away, declaring, “‘Women are meddling with that that’s none of their business.’ Occasionally a man met them at the door and bid them ‘be gone and never bring such a thing to the house again,’ concluding ‘it’s none of your business gals, and you’d better go right straight home.’”⁵³ Maria Child called petitioning “the most odious work of all,” while Harriet Hale of Providence admitted that “few are found possessing that self-denying spirit requisite to lead them from house to house to obtain signatures for a petition. This of all others is considered the most thankless and difficult field of labor. Oh for the spirit of the early martyrs which would enable us to desire the posts of greatest danger and toil.”⁵⁴ Mary and Harriet took this post, using blank petitions

⁵¹ Mary White to Mrs. Chapman, March 16, 1840, Antislavery Collection, BPL.

⁵² Jeffrey provides examples in *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, pp. 89-91.

⁵³ *The Liberator*, August 4, 1837, as quoted by Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Antislavery* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991), p. 35.

⁵⁴ As quoted in *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, p. 189-90

supplied by the Boston Female Antislavery Society.⁵⁵ Between 1836 and 1842, Mary's diary repeatedly records carrying petitions to her Boylston neighbors or enlisting her unmarried daughter to do so.

During 1837 and 1838, the peak years of antislavery petitioning, the citizens of Boylston sent eight petitions to their congressman, Levi Lincoln, for presentation to Congress.⁵⁶ Harriet Sanford submitted three with the signatures of females; one was submitted by William Sanford with the signatures of males; and four were submitted by William Sanford with the signatures of males and females. Six of those petitions survive in the National Archives.⁵⁷ An analysis of the petitions reveals that antislavery likely aroused gender tensions in Boylston, and particularly in the White family household.

Both males and females in Boylston petitioned for the same causes: to abolish slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia, in the United States, or in newly admitted territories or states; to reject the annexation of Texas (a proposed slave state) to the union; and to protest the tabling of antislavery petitions by Congress. All used pre-

⁵⁵ Mary's letters to her Boston-based son include her requests for petition forms; see for example letters of July 28, 1839, and Aug. 19, 1839. OSV.

⁵⁶ *The Massachusetts Spy* notes receipt by Congress of at least three women's antislavery petitions from Boylston during the 1830's, each carrying between 100 to 200 women's signatures. This data was compiled by Lynn Manring and Jack Larkin in the unpublished text, "Women, Anti-Slavery, and the Constitution in Rural New England: A Sourcebook for Interpretation, Old Sturbridge Village Research Department. Mary's diary includes references to antislavery petitioning through 1842. The petitions were noted in issues of the *Massachusetts Spy* dated Sept. 20, 1837; Jan. 1, 1838; Feb. 14, 1838; and Dec. 26, 1838. A summary of these petitions is listed in Appendix O.

⁵⁷ I am grateful to independent scholar Diana M. Smith, who traveled to the National Archives in March of 2005 to recover these petitions for family genealogical purposes and shared her copies with me.

printed forms. Interestingly, the men's petitions use brief and to-the-point statements of their grievance: "Respectfully pray your honourable body to immediately abolish slavery and the slave trade in those territories where they exist." The petition submitted by females only, however, sets their appeal in the context of righteous justification:

The undersigned women of Boylston, Mass, deeply convinced of the sinfulness of Slavery, and keenly aggrieved by its existence in a part of our country over which Congress possess exclusive jurisdiction in all cases whatsoever, do most earnestly petition your honorable body immediately to abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia, and also to put an end to the slave trade in the United States. We also respectfully announce our intention to present the same petition yearly before your honorable body, that it may at least be a 'memorial of us' that in the holy cause of Human Freedom, 'we have done what we could.'⁵⁸

The delicacy of wording, and the concern to cast their work as a "holy cause" of eradicating sin, may have been intended to soften the petition's reception by men unsympathetic to women's political activity. Or, it may have been intended to reassure *women* of the propriety of participating in such an act. If the latter were the case, it succeeded in Boylston, as women were far more likely than men to sign antislavery petitions in that town. No more than one-third of the males over twenty-one years of age could be induced to sign an antislavery petition, whereas well over half of the women put their names down on most petitions.⁵⁹ This difference may represent the greater

⁵⁸ Petition of the Women of Boylston, Massachusetts to Congress, Box 34 of the Library of Congress Box 123, Twenty-fifth Congress of the United States. NA. Though the petition was not pre-printed, the women of Boylston copied the verbiage of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, published in their Annual Report for 1836, *Right and Wrong in Boston in 1836*.

⁵⁹ There were 209 males over the age of 21 in Boylston in 1840 according to the U.S. Census Population, and the greatest number that signed any antislavery petition was 72, or 35%. There were 233 females over the age of 21; the average number of females to

persistence and determination of Boylston's female antislavery canvassers, or greater female empathy for the oppressed. It may also represent a *disinclination* among Boylston males to support antislavery. Records reveal little active male support for antislavery in Boylston.⁶⁰

Beyond gender, there were a few other revelations. Significantly more male and female Congregationalists signed petitions than did Unitarians, but this skew may be related to the fact that the petitions were initiated by the Congregationalist minister and his wife, and carried by Congregationalists, who may have been more likely to visit Congregationalist than Unitarian neighbors.⁶¹ Interestingly, other than the male only petition (which appears to have been circulated at a Congregational men's meeting), the majority of signers were unaffiliated with any church. Unlike the membership in the

sign the petitions was 127 or 57%. One female petition had 197 signatures, representing 85% of Boylston adult females. See Appendix O.

⁶⁰ Previous research indicated that Boylston had no male antislavery society. See "Women, Anti-Slavery, and the Constitution in Rural New England," OSV. However, recent digitization of *Liberator* has made a more thorough search possible. On May 14 of 1836, the *Liberator* recorded that Boylston sent 30 men to the New England Anti-Slavery Convention. Most of these men were young (20s and 30s) and virtually all were Congregationalists. On April 20 of 1838, *The Liberator* reported that Boylston had a male antislavery society with *140 members*, William Sanford, President. This seems highly inflated, as Sanford could never gather more than 74 male signatures for Boylston antislavery petitions. Mary White never mentions any meetings held or work performed by the male society. The male society kept no record of work, made no donations, and sent no delegates to convention; in comparison, the West Boylston male antislavery society did all of the above. By 1840, the Boylston male society, like the Female society, had split upon sectarian lines. The nine remaining members of the "old" male organization, as recorded in the *Liberator* April 3, 1840, were predominantly older, poorer, and Unitarian.

⁶¹ Mary's diary specifically mentions antislavery petitions being carried by herself, her daughters Mary and Caroline, and their Congregationalist friend Lucy Goodenow.

BFASS, male and female petition signers represent the full range of wealth deciles; being poor was apparently not a bar to signing one's name.

Many of the women who signed had a spouse sign as well. Many, but not all. Critically, ten women signed the petitions whose husbands most notably did *not* sign. One of those was Mary White. We can be certain that Aaron White had plentiful opportunities – and likely great family encouragement – to add his name to the enrolled, which suggests a strong underlying disagreement over the work of abolition. Aaron was a former Federalist and a devout Whig, who may have felt that antislavery threatened commercial relations between northern textile industries and southern cotton producers. His reasons for not signing were never discussed in the diary or the family letters. But his wife, his three daughters, and at least two of his sons were ardent abolitionists. Tension within the household over this issue, and over Mary's dedicated and controversial work for the cause, must have been intense.

Analysis of the petitions signed by both men and women reveals another significant division in the community over the issue of abolition. This was predominantly a cause of the younger generation. Although there were a handful of older signers, such as the intrepid Mary White and her friend Mary Abbot, or respected elderly yeomen such as Robert Andrews and Nathaniel Goodenow, the majority of signers were young people in their 20s and 30s.⁶² This was the cause of Harriet Sanford's generation, not Mary White's. Thus, those who had never known slavery were more likely to condemn it than

⁶² Half of the women and nearly two-thirds of the men were in their twenties or thirties, far exceeding the proportion of the population in this age bracket on the 1840 U.S. census. See Appendix O.

those for whom it had once been normative.⁶³ It seems likely that the issue of slavery brought tension into family relations, as parents and children claimed opposing positions.

Despite the stigma attached to the work, petitioning was effective. Congress was deluged with petitions, which both houses routinely tabled. In December 1838 Mary received a letter from the Hon. Levi Lincoln that “informed us of the neglect that our petition was treated with in Congress.” That Mary White received correspondence from her congressman (the former Governor of Massachusetts) suggests how petitioning, in effect, expanded notions of women’s citizenship. It is unknown what her husband thought of Mary’s corresponding with Representative Lincoln.

There was, in fact, only one more step that this pious middle-aged matron needed to take to be classed among the most radical activist women of her time. And it is possible that Mary White took that step. On November 2, 1837, Samuel Fisher, a cabinet maker from the neighboring town of Northborough, recorded in his journal, “Herd Mrs. White Lecu[r]e on Slavery in Baptist meeting house in afternoon.”⁶⁴ A Northborough historian who has researched this quote believes that Fisher must have been referring to Boylston’s antislavery activist, Mary White.⁶⁵ However, in her diary, Mary noted being in Boylston on November 2, making social calls and visiting the sick. The next day, however, she noted being in Westborough (adjacent to Northborough), visiting her sister, Nancy Avery

⁶³ Alternatively, it could merely indicate that young people were more likely to embrace reform than their elders.

⁶⁴ Journal of Samuel Fisher, November 2, 1837, manuscript, NHS. I am grateful to Northborough historian Robert Ellis for sharing this information with me.

⁶⁵ Robert P. Ellis, *Northborough in the Civil War: Citizen Soldiering and Sacrifice* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2007) p. 118.

White, also an abolitionist. Perhaps Mary White spoke in public before a promiscuous audience; or it is possible that her sister Nancy – also a Mrs. White and more likely known to Fisher – spoke.⁶⁶ For either of them, it would have been a bold move indeed.

If one of them was the speaker, she may have been inspired by the recent visit by the audacious Grimke sisters, among the very first American women to assert their rights to speak in public before audiences that included men.⁶⁷ It had been only one month since the Grimkes visited Worcester County, speaking before huge crowds at the Methodist meeting house in Worcester, stopping in Boylston and visiting with Harriet and Mary. They were persuasive, and they pleaded an urgent cause that, as Mary said, required they “be of no reputation in the cause of the oppressed.” If Mary was the speaker in Westborough, it is hard to imagine her mind as she faced the disapproval of her husband, the censure of her social peers, and the sneers of the majority of Boylston’s male population. Was she supported by Harriet? Harriet’s own sister would speak in public before a female audience the following year, and her orthodox husband would support her. But most orthodox clergy were not so accepting.

In the summer of 1837, Massachusetts’s clergy severely scolded activist antislavery women for their controversial activism. They branded work such as Mary’s” “immodest,” “indelicate,” and “unnatural,” “bringing shame and dishonor” on her sex.

⁶⁶ Nancy Avery White also kept a diary. On November 2, 1837, however, she noted only that she cut apples and “boiled cider for applesauce.” *Diary of Nancy Avery White*, White-Forbes Collection, Octavo VI, Vol. 6. AAS.

⁶⁷ On the Grimke sisters, see Gerda Lerner, *The Grimke Sisters of South Carolina: Pioneers for Women’s Rights and Abolition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

“We cannot,” they admonished, “but regret the mistaken conduct of those who encourage females to bear an obtrusive and ostentatious part in measures of reform, and countenance any of that sex who so far forget themselves as to itinerate in the character of public lectures and teachers.”⁶⁸

It is not surprising, given such condemnation, that most of the 46 women who had signed the Boylston Female Antislavery Society Constitution fell away. A loyal remnant kept antislavery alive in Boylston in 1837 and 1838. Mary described these lean times:

The Society struggled for an existence. Several pieces of work were begun but none were finished. In 1838 and in the preceding year there were never members enough present to elect their officers & there were none during that year. We were this year unprofitable servants for nothing was done comparatively. 3 or 4 members kept the Society from utterly sinking in oblivion. They came to the place of meeting sometimes there would be two, sometimes three, and sometimes there would be only one present of a society of 46 members. Let it be recorded to our shame!!

In 1839, eleven women sewed throughout the summer; by October, they were ready to send their work to an antislavery fair. Then came disaster.

The Quilt War

Throughout 1839 Massachusetts clergy had grown increasingly critical of antislavery women’s activism. In response, the leadership of Boston’s Female Antislavery Society -- mostly liberal Unitarians -- became vocally anticlerical, accusing churches of laxness on the issue of slavery. When the male Massachusetts Antislavery Society declared that women could serve as full members of their organization and elected Abby Kelley to their national business committee, Congregational clergymen

⁶⁸ “Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Massachusetts to the Churches under their Care,” *The Liberator*, August 11, 1837.

withdrew in protest and formed a “new organization,” the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The division caused unprecedented upheaval in the cause. Minister’s wives and pious orthodox women mostly withdrew their membership from societies affiliated with the “old organization” and re-constituted themselves as new societies with more modest goals of clothing and comforting fugitives on their way to Canada. “Ultraist” women, usually anti-clerical Unitarians or Quakers, held power in the old organization and continued to push for immediate abolition and for civil equality for blacks – and women. Each group continued to craft items for their major fundraisers, the antislavery fair. But now there were *two* competing Boston fairs, and much ill will.⁶⁹

On October 16, 1839, the antislavery women of Boylston met to vote on the disposition of their handwork: five pairs of scarlet socks, a cradle quilt, and a rather extraordinary bed quilt stitched with antislavery messages and images.⁷⁰ Harriet Sanford was absent; Mary ran the meeting. After taking a vote, she drafted the following:

“Resolved that we approve the principle on which the Massachusetts Antislavery Society [the “old organization”] was formed ... we will therefore do all in our power to sustain the October Fair.” The work, including a bed quilt, went to the original, radical, anti-clerical organization. Mary, despite her pious orthodox background, approved the disposal.

⁶⁹ On this schism, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971); for women’s role in that schism, see Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*.

⁷⁰ For images of such bed quilts, see Lynne Z. Bassett, *Massachusetts Quilts: Our Common Wealth* (University Press of New England, 2009), Chapter 10.

Harriet was furious. She was determined that the Boylston women would support the new clerical organization. A chance letter between the Chapman sisters reveals the intensity of conflict:

... in the course of [friend Elizabeth Doubleday's recent] visitations she was in Boylston about the time of our fair ... [-] bed quilt was made up there and quite a dreadful fight they had about it. Mrs. Harriet Sanford, the orthodox minister's wife, clerical of course, was very earnest to have it go to the Boston Female [new organization], but the old organization, among whom were Miss D's relations, declared that if it were so disposed of every stitch which they had set (and they had set a good many) should come out. Resolution like that generally carries the day and so we got the bed quilt...⁷¹

The bed quilt must have been extraordinary indeed. It was reported that William Lloyd Garrison himself purchased the item, for an unknown sum.⁷²

Perhaps because it was such a fine specimen, Harriet was not easily placated. When the antislavery society next met in March of 1840, she entered a protest regarding the quilt. Rebuffed, she and eight other members withdrew and formed a new antislavery organization of conservative Congregational women.⁷³ Rev. Sanford supported his wife's efforts by inviting the Rev. Charles T. Torrey, one of the founders of the "new organization" in Boston, to share his pulpit and recruit females for Harriet's fledgling society. Mary confessed that though "Mr Torrey has been lecturing with us in favor of the new organization . . . I believe he has not made many proselytes."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Deborah Chapman to Anne Chapman, New Bedford, Feb. 29, 1840. Antislavery Collection. BPL.

⁷² Mary White to Mrs. Chapman, Dec. 2, 1839, Antislavery Collection. BPL.

⁷³ See Diary of Mary White, March 16, 1840.

⁷⁴ Mary White to Mrs. Chapman, Dec. 2, 1839. BPL.

Mary was left nearly alone to carry on the old organization along with her daughters and a few young Unitarian women. She wrote to Mrs. Chapman for support: "Our antislavery society at present are meeting with opposition from the new organization as they term themselves (our minister and his partner) . . . may we be enabled like Gideon of old with a small band to overcome a host of enemies ."⁷⁵ She persevered and later reported triumphantly: "In the year 1840 . . . some were not there whom we were accustomed to see at the 1st meeting of the Society -- but were our ranks thinned; No! Was there less Anti-Slavery there than in former years? We think not! For notwithstanding the rain, there were 13 present . . . we proceeded to elect officers."⁷⁶ Rarely did Mary express such emotion in her diary; one senses that she believed their little band prevailed because, as with Gideon against the Midianites, God was with them.

Following her conscience, Mary persevered without the support of her church, against her minister's authority, and against her husband's inclination. Mary was not a radical feminist; she was a radical evangelist. Many of those women who pursued "ultraist" antislavery tactics also embraced women's rights, laying the ground work for the women's suffrage movement, but Mary White did not. She accepted the impropriety and indignity of women's working in the public sphere, but believed that violating those norms was a personal sacrifice made that they might cleanse sin and alleviate suffering. Her wish, as she wrote to Mrs. Chapman, was "that all bitterness and denunciatory

⁷⁵ Mary White to Mrs. Chapman, March 16, 1840. BPL.

⁷⁶ Mary White was chosen President, Vice President was the wife of the new Unitarian minister, and Secretary/Treasurer was the daughter of the old Unitarian minister.

writing were laid aside and we were simulating our blessed Savior who meekly bore all injuries. I think then we should see more light breaking in for the oppressed.”⁷⁷

For several years Mary struggled to keep up the work of the “old organization.” Her group sewed to support the liberal fairs, petitioned, attended lectures, and hosted radical speakers, including the controversial Abby Kelley. But in 1842 Mary’s little band lost several key supporters as young women married and moved away. By July, she noted in her diary, “Went to the hall to attend Antislavery Meeting. No one present but Miss Sally Cotton.”⁷⁸ In December of that year she wrote her last letter to Mrs. Chapman: “Some of our most active friends have moved out of town yet there are some who continue to feel for the down trodden and oppressed. Hope that the era for their deliverance is not far distant. We send what little cash we have on hand, \$3.63.”⁷⁹ Then the records ceased.

Mary’s faith-based commitment to “the cause of the oppressed,” however, did not cease. The records of the new Female Benevolent Society, which Harriet Sanford founded in 1840 during her quilt protest, list the first officers: Harriet Sanford was president, and Mary White was the vice president. A careful reading of Mary’s diary reveals that she attended and supported the work of *both* societies.⁸⁰ She harbored no

⁷⁷ Mary White to Mrs. Chapman, March 16, 1840. Antislavery Collection. BPL.

⁷⁸ Diary of Mary White, July 6, 1842. OSV.

⁷⁹ Mary White to Mrs. Chapman, Dec. 11, 1842. Antislavery Collection. BPL.

⁸⁰ Mary generally referred to the new BFBS as the “antislavery sewing circle”; it met at the vestry of the church. She referred to the work of her “old organization” as the “Antislavery Meeting,” which met at the town hall.

party feeling; she let no personal resentment interfere with the important work of antislavery. Instead she joined the “new organization.” As a traditional sewing circle, this group sewed clothing for slaves who had escaped to Canada.⁸¹ The ladies of the society - - all members of the Congregational Church -- were unhesitant in attending to this non-controversial work; Mary’s diary notes regular Sewing Circle gatherings of 25 to 60 women.⁸² Within several years, however, the Sewing Circle began to vote the avails of their labor to more general works of charity. By 1846, organized women’s abolitionism ceased in Boylston.⁸³

Still, Mary noted, the cause moved slowly forward. In April 1842, her Congregational church voted that a committee be formed “to prepare some resolutions expressing the sentiments of this church in response to the moral character of the system of American Slavery.”⁸⁴ When they were presented, however, Mary noted sadly, “none of them voted for.” However, as Mr. Sanford increasingly addressed antislavery from the pulpit, his congregation warmed to the cause. In February of 1843, the congregation unanimously resolved “that in the opinion of this church the system of American Slavery

⁸¹ Church-based female antislavery societies after 1839 usually focused on the “Canada Mission,” visiting, supporting and educating local blacks, and eliminating or reducing racism. See Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, p. 160.

⁸² Mary also noted attending lectures on and by fugitive slaves, she oversaw appraisal and packing of sewn items to be shipped to Canada, and possibly assisted fugitives on their way to freedom. Diary of Mary White, July 4 and August 4, 1848. OSV.

⁸³ This shift to general benevolence and moral reform follows other “new organization” groups in the Boston area. See Debra Gold Hansen in *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, p. 59.

⁸⁴ Records of the Congregational Church of Boylston, April 24, 1842. BHS.

is Sin against God & man and that no possible circumstances can justify a man in knowingly holding his fellowman as property.”⁸⁵

This was small progress for a woman who hoped for immediate emancipation. Still, with the decline of moral suasion as a reform tactic, Mary began to note the hopeful progress of antislavery politics. In 1845 her sons and daughters went to hear Gerrit Smith and Henry Stanton lecture for the Liberty Party in Worcester. Each year she recorded the slow but steady increase in support for what she called “the Abolition Ticket” in her town.⁸⁶ She noted each sermon that touched on national leadership: “Sermon from Prov. 29c 29v. When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice but when the wicked bear the role the people mourn. May we be humbled under a sense of our sinfulness as a nation.”⁸⁷ “Mr. Sanford preached... a call to repentance and on the import of choosing good rulers and putting away slavery from our mindset...”⁸⁸ Though she could not vote, she could discuss, and pray: “In the evening a conversation mainly of politics. May the Lord direct the electing of this nation that slavery and oppression ... may cease.”⁸⁹

In abandoning moral suasion for politics, Mary made the transition from a traditional goal of building a consensus to a new tactic of building a majority. The

⁸⁵ Records of the Congregational Church of Boylston, Feb. 15, 1843. The full text of the resolution is Appendix O.

⁸⁶ This shift in political party support is chronicled in Appendix O and Appendix P.

⁸⁷ Diary of Mary White, April 6, 1848. OSV.

⁸⁸ Diary of Mary White, July 4, 1847. OSV.

⁸⁹ Diary of Mary White, September 14, 1848. OSV.

Liberty Party was an association of those with shared interests; to accomplish its goals it did not have to achieve unanimity, merely plurality. Partisanship acknowledges the legitimacy of disagreement. As with temperance, antislavery revealed that the public good was no longer “common,” but instead contested by those with different interests; it was changeable, with a shift in attitude. Pursing what one believed to be the public good in an age of pluralism required that one endure dispute and conflict as an unavoidable part of life. In some cases, as Mary White discovered, dissension disturbed peaceable relations even among family and close friends.

As the years wore on and the goal of emancipation seemed no closer, resignation and fear set in. Though Mary still prayed, “May the Lord direct the efforts to wipe the foul Stain of Slavery from our National Escutcheon,” she worried that it was too late. Increasingly her entries turned to foreboding: “Mr. Davis delivered an Antislavery discourse. The text from Isai. 60 12v. [For the people or kingdom shall perish that does not serve you; Those nations shall be utterly destroyed.] May this nation be delivered from the sin of Slavery. May we be indeed humbled under a sum of our manifold transgressions.”⁹⁰ Mary’s fears echoed the apprehension of many in the 1840s that the end of the world was imminent. Increasingly she voiced fear of divine retribution in the form of a devastating war. By 1847, she prayed, “May the Lord make me humble and

⁹⁰ Diary of Mary White, April 6, 1843. OSV.

watchful and avert from us his judgments. May the Lord deliver us from the Horrors of [the impending Mexican] war . . . and we be humble penitent and believing Christians.”⁹¹

The Workings of Antislavery Work: Society, Community, Family, Individual

The Boylston Female Antislavery Society, despite its brief and contested life, had a transformative effect on several social levels. As with other associations, it introduced Mary, Harriet, and the other faithful to a broad national network of agents, lecturers, publishers and advocates. By attending lectures, subscribing to special interest periodicals, and circulating letters from other “friends of the oppressed,” these women formed long-distance ties that stretched from Boylston to Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Oberlin, and Cincinnati, as well as to local antislavery people in surrounding towns and counties of Massachusetts. With that association came the sense of sorority or camaraderie that comes from striving and suffering together for a shared cause. As far as we know, Mary never met the radical Maria Weston Chapman, but after years of corresponding with her, she addressed her as “My dear Mrs. Chapman,” and signed her letters, “Your friend, Mary White.” Moreover, antislavery work affirmed for Mary that she had a role to play in that wider world, through petitioning, supporting state and national agents and publications, and attending conventions, fairs, and concerts of prayer. It would be tempting to assert, as other historians of female abolitionists have, that Mary White was at heart a women’s rights activist. That would be a mistake; Mary did not set out to secure access to power in the public sphere, and there is no indication that she valued such power. She never advocated women’s voting in her diary. But

⁹¹ Diary of Mary White, April 8, 1847. OSV.

having realized her own potential for agency in the cause of the oppressed, she felt keenly obliged to act. As Mary said, “We have all something to do in the cause of freeing the slave.”

Antislavery work also transformed community in Boylston. As a voluntary association of those with shared interests, it transcended previous ruptures by religious sect and possibly by class. It created new social bonds based on choice. However, when Mary and Harriet reached out to the wives and daughters of Unitarians ministers, and the daughters of their old foe, Capt. Howe, they also affirmed that it was possible to cooperate on some matters while agreeing to disagree on others. Choosing to associate, whether in a female sewing society or a male political party, affirmed the legitimacy of dissent, as it weakened the traditional communitarian respect for unanimous consent.

Most notably, antislavery work challenged Boylstonians to form their own opinions and make decisions based on conscience and personal judgment. Each time a petitioner arrived at the door, a family faced potential friction between husband and wife, parents and children. The intensity of the debate required Boylstonians to engage with this issue, relying on personal judgment and conscience to reach a decision. Expressing one’s mind, sometimes took courage, as William White related to his brother:

I took the stage . . . with a few passengers one of whom . . . I had considerable pleasant conversation, finding him a good christian and Abolitionist. One gentleman in the stage . . . was not an Abolitionist and was quite strenuous in opposing our sentiments. But we did not cower under him feeling that we were in N[ew] England where mob law and lynch law has not yet become the law of the people but where each man may think and speak his own sentiments without fear of tar and feathering.⁹²

⁹² William White to Charles White, Sept. 22, 1839. OSV.

For William – or his mother Mary – to “think and speak his own sentiments” regarding slavery required the courage of conviction, whether or not threatened with tar and feathering. For Mary to follow her convictions to their logical consequences – associating with scandalous women, housing black antislavery agents, pricing items for sale, persuading neighbors to sign petitions, corresponding with her senator, and possibly speaking in public – required tremendous strength of character and a formed and fixed mind. There is irony here – in looking to submit and obey the will of God, Mary unwittingly elevated the idea of self-formation and self-determination.

Mary’s conscious motive in working for abolition was to do the will of God. As historian Julie Jeffrey has noted, “few abolitionists perceived or intended the long-term consequences of encouraging women to use their moral influence in the cause.”⁹³ Again, there is irony, for most of the conservative evangelical women who responded to the call of duty accepted that role partly because they accepted the conservative gendered view of women as moral guardians. Abolition, though, called them to extend and eventually cross those traditional boundaries, and fervent faith gave them the courage to do so. Mary White transgressed the limits of womanly propriety not to assert her rights, but as a sacrifice for those suffering in slavery. Her work for antislavery is evidence of the radically transformative power of religious conviction in overcoming the forces of tradition and custom. In the spirit of obedience to the will of God, Mary White was able to transcend worldly conventions, unwittingly shaping a new world.

⁹³ Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, p. 52.

CONCLUSION

THE END OF THEIR WORLD?

In the early Spring of 1843, as Mary White waited for the frogs to peep, some of her neighbors were awaiting the end of the world. For the past decade, Massachusetts farmer William Miller had been traveling the countryside, urging folk to be prepared for an imminent Second Coming. His meticulous study of the Bible had convinced him that the signs of the times matched the conditions of biblical prophecy and that Christ was due to make his return on or around March 21, 1843. Miller gained a following, particularly in Worcester County, where his disciples held “tabernacle” meetings in tents, spread his teachings, and urged their neighbors to prepare.¹ Throughout the spring, Mary reported her children and hired help attending Millerite talks, Lawyer Davenport relating “some of his visions of the second coming of Christ,” Mr. Flagg lecturing on the Second Advent, and Deacon Moore conversing “on the subject of the temporal Millenium.”² As the date neared, Millerite believers sold or gave away their property and prepared for the end. Some claim they prepared white “ascension robes,” and assembled on hilltops to await

¹ In 1920, local author Clara Endicott Sears advertised in newspapers across the northeast for letters from those who remembered witnessing or hearing about the Millerite Craze. The many responses she received are preserved in the archives of Historic New England, and reviewed in Sears’ book *Days of Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 1924). A review of those letters reveals strong Millerite response in Worcester County.

² Diary of Mary White, Jan. 17 and 24, March 8, 9, 10 and 26 of 1843. OSV.

the sound of the trumpet with outstretched arms.³ Three believers from Boylston were among their number.⁴ But they were disappointed. Mary White noted simply, “May we all be prepared for [Christ’s] appearing whether sooner or later.” Shortly afterward, on April 17, she reported, “Frogs peeped.”

The Millerites were widely derided for what many dismissed as hysteria. And yet, in many ways the world of rural Worcester County *was* coming to an end in 1843. Dramatic changes in religious organization, transportation, communication, farming technology and market practices, education, consumer goods, voluntary associations and social reform had remade the physical and emotional landscape. The “old world” of tradition-bound, isolated, agrarian communities was giving way to more integrated, progressive, improvement-minded farm towns. It was not a sudden revolution, and the transformation could not be pegged, as William Miller had tried, to a specific date or event. It took a generation for people to process and make sense of the changes all around them and thus to adapt the way they thought about themselves and their world. And it was this generation of the turbulent 1820s, ‘30s and ‘40s, when new and old understandings of relationship and belonging contended, that was so marked by conflict in Boylston.

³ Historians debate the degree of fanaticism of Miller’s followers. Some dismiss claims of ascension robes and mountain-top gatherings as belittling rumors spread by critics. Others claim primary source evidence of these behaviors. For a comment on the debate, see Robert F. Craig and Kathleen Housley, “Communications,” *NEQ*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Jun., 1989), pp. 315-18.

⁴ One Boylston historian’s research indicates that Samuel Flagg, Lucy Flagg, and Johanna Flagg were excommunicated from the Congregational Church in 1843-1844 for professing Millerism. See William Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886* BHSS Vol. XII (1978), p. 55.

That contention was evidence of a shift in mentalities – contested and uneven, but shifting nevertheless. The rapid transformation of the outer world of institutions, markets, technology, and information was accompanied by – perhaps assisted by – an equally dramatic transformation of the inner world, the way people thought about themselves and their relationship to those around them. In the introduction, we defined a traditional mentality by examining the mental and emotional architecture of the Amish world: a primarily self-sufficient agrarian world, local, familiar, and homogenous, neighborly and communal, and committed to consensual order, tradition, and subjugation of the personal to the common good. These qualities also marked Boylston in 1800. In the next forty contentious years, though, as Boylston adopted and adapted to myriad “modernizing” changes, attitudes clashed and conflicted. By 1840, the younger generation was increasingly a diverse mix of contending faiths, market farmers and struggling laborers, entrenched old-timers and mobile, ethnically diverse strangers, pluralist in their approach to reform, politics, and self-improvement. Boylston by mid-century had a new “personality,” one that favored mastery over interdependence, networks over neighborliness, cosmopolitan over local interests, mobility over rootedness, innovation over tradition and experience, and voluntary affective ties over obligatory bonds of deference and respect. The life goal of the traditional mentality was to be socialized into the community, which would sustain you; the life goal of the emerging mentality was to develop self-mastery and independence, essential survival skills in a more modern, mobile, cosmopolitan world.

The advent of cash, modernized technology, marketing firms, and day labor freed Boylston’s farmer from the *neighborly interdependence* that had long marked traditional

communities. Farmers and their wives could do more on their own, and what they could not do, they could hire someone to do for cash without incurring reciprocal obligations. Canals, railroads, and markets helped transform a local, mainly subsistence *agrarianism* into farming for profit, whenever possible. Sons' desires for white collars undermined the yeoman ethic that had long supported that agrarian mentality. Leaving the farm – for schooling, city employment, or fortune hunting (as Aaron Jr. called it) elsewhere – transformed *family relations*; as a father's land became less important to son's plans for success, bonds of authority and obligation dissolved into more tenuous ties of affection and sentiment. *Localism* that had marked Boylston in 1800, when Simon Davis took turns with his neighbors making the weekly trip to Worcester for a newspaper, gave way to regional, state, and national networks of association and communication. Through correspondence and print people shared information and bonds with those at great distances from their rural home. The transcendent *communal good*, the common wealth that had traditionally bound them in covenant of mutual support, was eclipsed by the rise of individualism. Revivals focused on individual salvation; academies and reading societies encouraged individual discernment; the village enlightenment fostered individual development and personal refinement; rural youth who headed to cities were urged to develop personal character and individual mastery of their world. Mid-century Boylston was no longer culturally *homogeneous*, having endured several decades of ethnic and class differentiation. And, most clearly, the *consensual* world of a unified covenanted church and community disintegrated in the solvent of pluralism. It was no longer feasible for townsfolk to insist that negotiation, compromise and reconciliation bring all into agreement. There were too many sects, parties, associations – all with

differing, sometimes conflicting interests – to achieve consensus. Nor was consensus considered essential. Difference had to be tolerated – there would be more than one religious society in town, more than one political party, various associations with dissimilar interests. The goal now was not consensus, but coalition and majority.

The consequences of these shifts were not always intended, and sometimes they were ironic. Aaron White did not see that his devoted work to cultivate his sons would lead to their abandoning his rustic world. Mary White did not imagine that her pious and evangelical work for the slave would have radical social consequences for free white women. Joseph Flagg did not anticipate that his use of marketmen and cash would destroy the traditional account book culture in which he had been raised. Each made decisions in response to evolving conditions – or changed perceptions of those conditions – in an attempt to reassert order or gain control.

The modernization of Boylston, then, was not something that was done *to* people, but *through* them and *by* them, as they adjusted their relationships to suit – or create – new conditions. It was a personal process, and it occurred unevenly across neighborhoods and families, and between individuals. Some embraced pluralism, diversity, cosmopolitan connections, individualism, and self-determination; others resisted. Their different responses produced the conflict and contention that so unsettled the town in the 1820s and '30s. Whether one sees the fomenters or the resisters as “good guys” or “bad guys” depends on whether one gives higher value to cooperation and consensus or individualism and diversity.

By the post-Civil War era, the conflicted era of transformation in Boylston had passed.⁵ The war had a unifying effect, and the inescapable swelling of the number of Irish and French Canadian immigrants seeking work in neighboring mills made diversity an inevitable part of life. In 1886, as the town celebrated its centennial, its citizens looked back through rosy glasses at earlier decades. They remembered a peaceful age of spinning wheels, open hearths, and old oaken buckets.⁶ Returning from distant cities to celebrate the anniversary of their native town, they revered the well-tempered virtues of their forefathers:

Good morals, industry frugality, honesty, neighborly kindness, fidelity to marriage vows, public spirit and the fear of God, were the sources of their happiness. They had pleasant gatherings and innocent hilarity, and an outflow of love to family and kin and kind, which enriched their minds . . . [T]hey had a religion that sweetened their affections, bound them together in kindly neighborhood, and showed them the way to heaven.⁷

One too young to remember, delivering the historical address, informed his audience that, “the history of the town of Boylston during the first century of its existence was, like that of most country towns of its size and situation, quiet and uneventful.”⁸

⁵ This was, of course, a “rolling” era of transformation, based on geography and access to commercial centers. Midwestern and western farmers were still struggling with the transition from “island” to “integrated” communities in the Populist era. See Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

⁶ On romanticized memory, see Laurel Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

⁷ Rev. A.P. Marvin, “Response,” *Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Boylston Massachusetts, August 18, 1886* (Worcester: Press of Sanford and Davis, 1887), pp. 72-3.

⁸ George L. Wright, “Boylston,” *History of Worcester County, Massachusetts*, ed. By D. Hamilton Hurd (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1889), p. 894.

Mary White knew better. In the summer of 1840, she confessed to her diary, “Changes are continually taking place around us, showing us that here we have no abiding place. Let us live for one that shall endure.”⁹

Aftermath

“Aftermath” is a wonderful farming term: it refers to that which grows after the mowing. What grew to be for those Boylstonians we have come to know?

Aaron White saw the last of his sons, Francis, depart for the city in the 1842. The next year, daughter Mary, at the age of 29, married widowed Congregational minister Elnathan Davis, and shortly thereafter left with him to go west as a missionary to the Indians. Only Caroline remained at home to nurse Aaron through his final illness and to console her mother when he passed away in 1846.

In 1847, when the Poor House opened, Abishai Crossman and his wife Ruth were among its first residents. As Crossman became poor, Lincoln Flagg became wealthy. Flagg and his wife, the chosen Caroline, had five sons and three daughters, one of whom, Alice, married her father’s hired hand, George Hazard, a black man.

Mary White remained on the “old home place,” running the farm with the assistance of hired Irish hands and her devoted daughter, Caroline. In later life, she gained sainted status among her townsfolk. In 1929, George Wright lectured on the Congregational Church, in which he detailed the terms and personalities of all the ministers. Then he noted,

Time will not allow for any extended or individual notice of the men and women who have composed the laity of the church; but of the women

⁹ Diary of Mary White, June 2, 1840. OSV.

there is at least one of whom a passing notice should be given, one, who after she became connected with the church unceasingly devoted her life to its service, and who in my early boyhood was most affectionately referred to by the then older members of the church as its "Mother of Israel," Mary Avery White, wife of Aaron White, Esq.¹⁰

Mary White died on May 26, 1860, at the age of 82, on the eve of the war that would end slavery. It would also take the life of her beloved grandson, Franky Conant.

Her last hours are recorded in an obituary published in the *Boston Recorder*:

With more than the usual vigor had her mind shone out the past few weeks, and her bodily powers, if slightly more feeble for some days, were still so active as to give no intimation of so near a departure. Calm . . . she passed the hours of night, and to the questions of filial kindness, 'Is the Saviour present with you, mother? Is his sympathy precious?' came the feeble yet assured response, "Yes" . . . With the dawn she was raised from the bed, and assisted to the chair so familiarly her own . . . 'Do you lie comfortably?' tenderly inquired the loving daughter. 'Oh, yes, I lie nicely,' was said calmly. The numbered minutes hastened to their close. This moment the heavy breathing was distinctly heard by the daughter, now penning a note, a few feet distant – the next, it came not – life's clock had suddenly stopped . . . all was still. The aged saint had closed her eyes on earth, and opened them to the full glories of heaven. She touched the shore of time only to feel in the next step the firm ground of eternity.¹¹

She left this world seeking a heavenly home where family and friends would be eternally re-united, all would be "of one heart and one mind," and change would be no more.

¹⁰ George L. Wright, address, November 13, 1829. BHS. Wright went on to say, "Mrs. White's father was the pastor of the church in Holden from 1774 until his death in 1824, and she was herself, on her mother's side a grand-niece of Gov. Samuel Adams, the Revolutionary patriot. It is said that Mrs. White kept a dairy for many years in which she faithfully recorded the daily events in the life of the church and town."

¹¹ "M.S.W." *Boston Recorder*, undated clipping, White Family Collection, OSV.

APPENDIX A: PROSOPOGRAPY

The “collective biography” of the town of Boylston traces all tax-paying citizens of Boylston and their families over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. This database is used to track geographic and economic mobility of taxpayers and their families, and to trace status of subsets of the population by characteristics such as religious denomination, livelihood, etc. The database was constructed as follows:

1. From Boylston tax lists selected at five year intervals from 1800 to 1850 (excluding 1810, for which no tax records survive), I made a composite listing of all taxable residents, with their taxable deciles over time.
2. I then expanded this list, working with Boylston vital records, to include household heads, parents, spouse(s), and children of those taxed with dates of birth and death where available. For this step, I also used family genealogies, town histories, and online genealogical resources.
3. Church affiliation was added where it could be determined.
4. “Occupation” or livelihood was added using the 1850 U.S. Population Census, town and county histories, genealogies, obituaries, probates, and court records.
5. Town of Birth and Geographical Destination were added where they could be determined from town records, census records, town histories, and genealogical records. Note that geographical destination and occupation based on census records may be intermediate, as the subject may have moved or changed profession after the census was taken.
6. Note that this tax-based biography under-represents those highly transient young people who moved through town before coming of age. It also under-represents those sons who leave town before coming of taxable age.

The “town cohort” prosopography is based on Boylston Vital Records, rather than tax records. It includes every male born in Boylston between 1786 (town founding) and 1825 who survived to maturity. This should include all males who came of age during the study period 1820-1840. This database was used to compare the status of *all* Boylston-born males, including those who left town before reaching taxable age. Included in this data base are parents, siblings, spouses and offspring, taxable Boylston decile where known, geographic destination, and occupation where known.

Primary sources used in constructing this data base include:

- Boylston Vital Records
- Boylston Tax Assessments
- Records of the Boylston Congregation, Unitarian, and Baptist Churches
- Boylston Town Meeting Records, Boylston Town Clerk’s Record Book
- Probate Records of Worcester County, Massachusetts Archives
- Worcester County Registry of Deeds, Worcester, Massachusetts

Published sources used in constructing these data bases include:

- Barry, William. *A History of Framingham, Massachusetts: Including the Plantation, from 1640 to the Present Time with an Appendix, Containing a Notice of Sudbury and Its First Proprietors; Also, a Register of the Inhabitants of Framingham Before 1800, with Genealogical Sketches.* Boston: J. Munroe & Co., 1847.
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 Family Search (Mormon Genealogy) <http://www.familysearch.org/eng/default.asp>
 New England Ball Project. <http://www.newenglandballproject.com>
 New England Historic Genealogical Society. <http://www.newenglandancestors.org/>

APPENDIX B: RELIGION

1. Religious Affiliation of Boylston Heads of Household, Circa 1830

Denomination	Number	Percent of Affiliated	Percent of Total	Mean Tax Decile ¹
Congregational	52	35.4	26.0	3.33
Unitarian	63	42.9	31.5	5.14
Baptist ²	32	21.8	16.0	5.19
Unknown/Unaffiliated	53		26.5	4.68
Total	200	100.1	100.0	

Sources:

- The Records of the Boylston Congregational Church 1832-1849
- Conversions recorded in the letters and diary of the White family
- A listing of the members of the Unitarian Congregation, 1830, compiled by Boylston historian George L. Wright and recorded in Dupuis, *The History of Boylston 1786-1886*, p. 53
- The Records of the Boylston and Shrewsbury Baptist Church, manuscript in the collection of the Old Sturbridge Village Research Library.
- Heads of household are identified from an 1830 town map listing all resident household heads.

¹ Where tax decile is known. Tax decile is known for 91 percent.

² Baptist membership was strongest before 1825. The Boylston Baptist church disbanded by 1837, with some members returning to the Congregational Church.

2. Tax Decile of New Members (Converts) to Congregational Church, 1830-1839

Decile	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of Known Decile	Cumulative Percent
1	19	27.1	35.2	35.2
2	10	14.3	18.5	53.7
3	5	7.1	9.3	63.0
4	2	2.9	3.7	66.7
5	3	4.3	5.6	72.2
6	7	10.0	13.0	85.2
8	3	4.3	5.6	90.7
10	5	7.1	9.3	100.0
Total Known	54	77.1	100	
Unknown	16	22.9		
Total	70	100.0		

Sources: A database using Mary White's diary entries from 1830 to 1839 and family letters from 1836 to 1843 yields the names of converts. Mary recorded most conversions,

though in some cases her records are incomplete (using phrases such as “and several others” or “Mr. Flagg’s other son”). These records may be biased towards people that she knew, and so the sample may under-represent itinerants, poor folk with whom she had little interaction, etc. Wealth is based on the tax decile of the family head of household at the five-year period closest to the date of conversion.

3. Age of New Members (Converts) of Boylston Congregational Church, 1830-1839

Age by Decade	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of Known	Cumulative Percent
10-19	11	15.7	18.0	18.0
20-29	26	37.1	42.6	60.7
30-39	9	12.9	14.8	75.4
40-49	4	5.7	6.6	82.0
50-59	4	5.7	6.6	88.5
60 +	7	10.0	11.5	100.0
Total Known	61	87.1	100.0	
Unknown Age	9	12.9		
Total	70	100.0		

Source: Religious database as above. Convert’s age, where known, based on the study prosopography; in some cases where data are not available, the age of a known spouse is used as an approximation.

4. Place of Birth of New Members (Converts) of Boylston Congregational Church, 1830-1839

Place of Birth	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of Known	Cumulative Percent
Boylston	38	54.3	66.7	54.3
Worcester Cty	13	18.6	22.8	89.5
New England	6	8.6	10.5	100.0
Total Known	57	84.1	100.0	
Unknown	13	18.6		
Total	70	100.0		

Source: Religious database as above. Location of birth is based on the prosopography.

5. Gender of New Members (Converts) of Boylston Congregational Church, 1830-1839

Gender	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of Known	Cumulative Percent
Male	27	38.6	38.6	38.6
Female	43	61.4	61.4	100.0
Total	70	100.0	100.0	

Source: Religious database as above. The characteristics of wealth, age, and place of birth do not vary much between males & females.

APPENDIX C: POPULATION

1. Boylston Population Density Over Time, 1786-1860

Year	Population	Sq. Miles ¹	Density	Notes
1786	700	26.7	26.2	
1790	839	26.7	31.4	
1800	1050	26.7	39.3	
1808	1030	26.7	38.6	
1810	800	19.7	40.6	Loss of approx. 250 ²
1820	902	19.7	45.8	Max. Sustainable
1830	820	19.7	41.6	
1840	821	19.7	41.7	
1850	797	19.7	40.5	First factory opens
1860	929	19.7	46.6	

Sources: Population for 1786 from BHS, Vol. XII, p. 1; Population for 1808, just before the annexation of West Boylston from BHS, Vol. XII, p. 23; all other population figures from the U.S. Population Census for given year.

¹ Boylston had approximately 26.7 square miles before the annexation of West Boylston in 1808. After that, it had approximately 19.7 square miles.

² In 1807, agents for the town of Boylston asserted that loss of the “West Parish” had cost the town a quarter of its ratable polls. James Longley, Robert Andrews, and Aaron White, Agents for the town of Boylston, Petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, Boylston May 26 1807. Cited in Henry T. Bray, *Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Boylston, Massachusetts, August 18, 1886* (Worcester: Press of Sanford and Davis, 1887), pp. 102-5.

2. Graph of Boylston Population 1786-1880.



Source: Boylston Vital Records. BHS.

3. All Births in Boylston 1786 to 1850, by Decade

Decade	Total Male & Female Births	Average No. of Births per Year
1786-1790 (half decade)	102	20.2
1791-1800	241	24.1
1801-1810	209	16.6
1811-1820	166	16.6 ¹
1821-1830	135	13.5
1831-1840	164	16.4
1841-1850	170	17.0

Source: Boylston Vital Records. BHS.

¹ The drop in births after 1808 reflects the loss of one quarter of the population in the annexation of West Boylston. The relative stability of the birth rate after that period, however, masks a sharp drop in births between 1816 and 1825.

4. Boylston Male Birth Rate, 1800-1824

Year	# Male Births	Five Year Average
1800	12	
1801	10	
1802	10	
1803	12	
1804	8	10.4
1805	10	
1806	12	
1807	11	
1808	9	
1809	13	10.8
1810	10	
1811	10	
1812	15	
1813	6	
1814	13	10.8
1815	10	
1816	6	Beginning of drop
1817	4	
1818	6	
1819	4	6.0
1820	6	
1821	9	
1822	6	
1823	9	
1824	6	7.2

Source: Boylston Vital Records

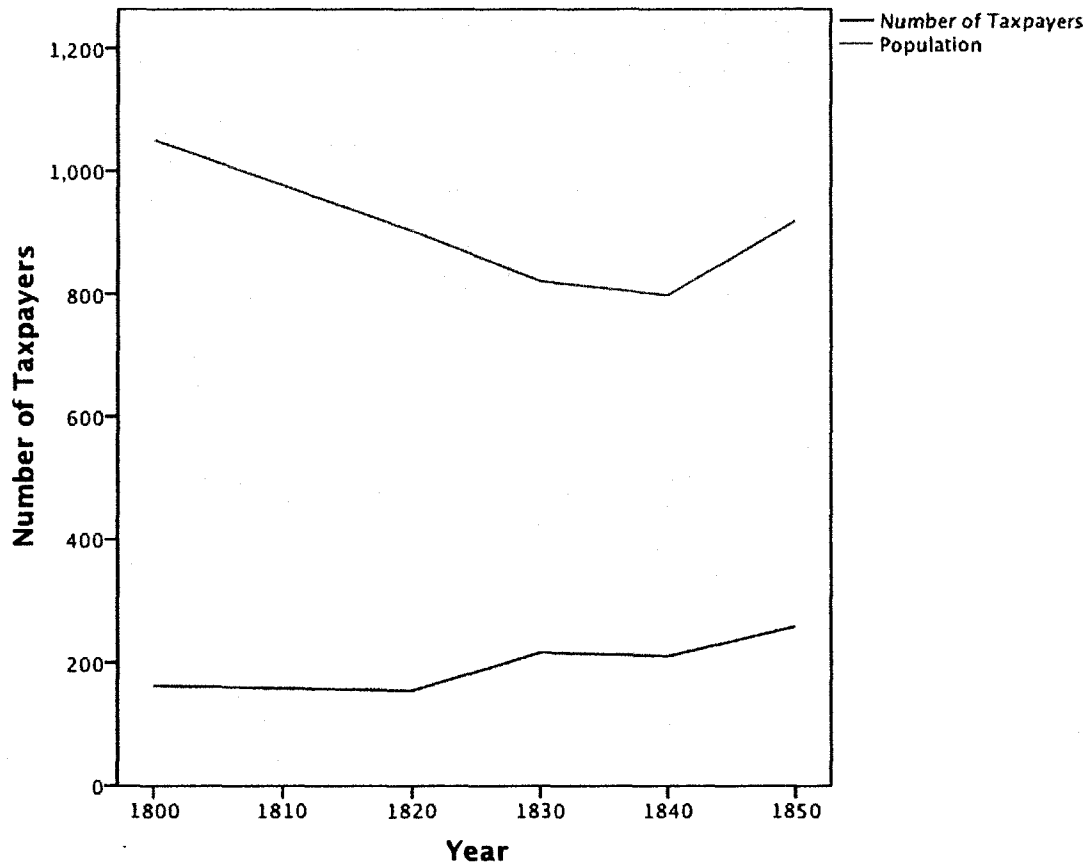
This dramatic drop in birthrate in the decade following the war of 1812 likely indicates out-migration of women of child-bearing age. The fact that population does not fall significantly with this out-migration suggests that they were being replaced by people of non-childbearing age, either young single people or older people (45+) who were either established & purchasing improved farms or moving in with children.

5. Boylston Crude Birth Rate By Decade, 1786-1849

Decade	Average Birth Rate
1786 to 1789	2.70
1790 to 1799	2.48
1800 to 1809	2.29
1810 to 1819	2.05
1820 to 1829	1.53
1830 to 1839	2.02
1840 to 1849	1.97

Source: Boylston Vital Records. Crude birth rate is the average number of births per year divided by the average population per decade.

6. Boylston Population Compared to Number of Male Taxpayers



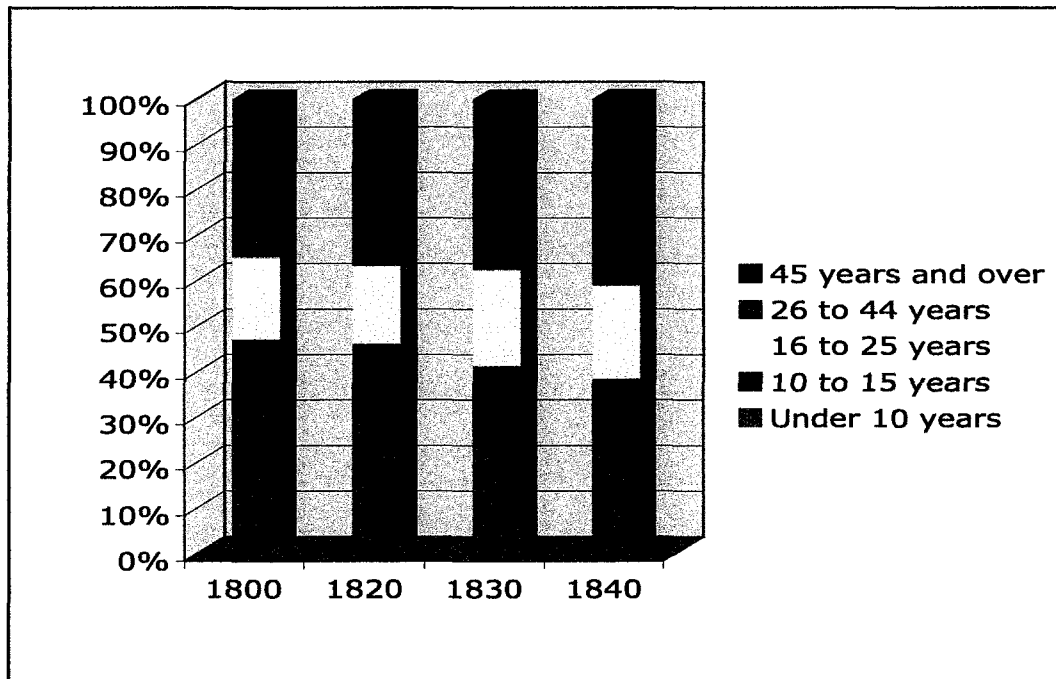
Sources: Boylston Vital Records and Boylston Tax Assessments. BHS.

7. Change in Percent Age Distribution of Boylston Males by Decade, 1800-1840

Age Groups	1800	1820	1830	1840
	N=535	N=435	N=415	N=403
Under 10 yrs	30.5	29.9	25.5	25.8
10 to 15 yrs	16.6	16.1	15.5	12.8
16 to 25 yrs	18.1	17.2	21.0	20.6
26 to 44 yrs	19.8	18.6	15.3	15.2
45 yrs and over	15.0	18.0	22.0	26.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: U.S. Population Censuses, 1800-1840.

8. Boylston Male Population by Age Groups



Source: U.S. Population Census, 1800-1840.

These data confirm that families with young children are leaving Boylston during this period. The rise in the number of young men age 16 to 25 suggests immigration of single adolescents and young men working temporarily as hired labor. The data also show an extraordinary rise in older people. Barron suggests that such an “aging” of the population indicates a stable core of farm owners who remain in town as they age. See Hal Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 81.

9. Population, Taxpayers and Farm Owners in Boylston in 1850

Population	Taxpayers	Households	Farm Owners
910	239	191	103

Source: 1850 U.S. Population and Agricultural Census and Boylston tax assessments.

By 1850, 42% of household heads and 58% of polls did not own a farm. This would be consistent with a young transient labor pool and an older, established core of farm owners.

10. Male to Female Population Ratios in Boylston, 1800-1850

Year	Males	Females	Ratio
1800	534	509	1.049
1810	403	390	1.033
1820	453	466	.972
1830	415	405	1.025
1840	400	394	1.015
1850	458	460	.996

Source: U.S. Federal Census Returns.

Sex ratio can be used to determine if a population is experiencing migration. Sex ratio is usually about 100 men to 105 women; "a low sex ratio would [indicate that] large numbers of men migrate."¹ Boylston's sex ratio was generally high; it dropped only in the tumultuous 1820s, indicating a particularly robust period of out-migration. See Marc Harris, "The People of Concord," in *Concord: A Social History*, edited by David Hackett Fischer (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1983), p. 80.

APPENDIX D: GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY

1. Out-Migration of Males Born in Boylston, 1786-1820¹

Boylston-Born Males	Number	Percent
Remained in Boylston	73	25.0
Outmigrated	219	75.0
Total	292	100.0

Source: Boylston-Born Cohort Database (see Appendix A)

¹ Note that this tracks only those Boylston-born males who survived to maturity. Although 351 males were born in Boylston between 1786 and 1825, only 292 survived to maturity. Three-quarters of those left town.

2. Out-Migration of Boylston-Born Males by Destination¹

Destination	N	Percent of Total	Cumulative Percent
Worcester County	111	58%	58
Metro Boston, Providence, or New York City	30	16%	74
Western Mass, Vt., N.H., or Me.	33	17%	91
West or South	19	10%	101

Source: Boylston-Born Cohort Database (see Appendix A)

¹ Of the 219 males who out-migrated, 193 can be tracked through census and genealogic records to destinations. In cases where the data are based on family and town histories, the *final* or ultimate destination and occupation are used. In cases where data are based on census information, the data reflect information available at the time of the census; it is possible that these men moved or changed professions after the census used.

3. Geographic Destination of Boylston-Born Males By Wealth Deciles

Father's Tax Decile 1-5	N	%	Father's Tax Decile 6-10	N	%
Boylston	47	25.3	Boylston	17	23.9
Worcester Cty	79	42.5	Worcester County	29	40.8
Metro Boston	20	10.8	Metro Boston	2	2.8
Western Mass.	7	3.8	Western Mass.	1	1.4
Greater New England	15	8.1	Greater New England	5	7.0
West or South	7	3.8	West or South	8	11.3
Unknown	11	5.9	Unknown	9	12.7

Source: Boylston-Born Cohort Database (see Appendix A)

4. Outmigration – All Boylston Taxpayers 1820-1850, by Five-Year Periods

	1820-25	1825-30	1830-35	1835-40	1840-45	1845-50
Total Number of Male Taxpayers	138	158	187	182	191	251
No. of male taxpayers who out-migrated during this period	42	32	69	55	52	95
Percentage of out-migration during this period	30.4%	20.3%	36.9%	30.2%	27.2%	37.8%
Percentage of out-migrants whose age is known	76%	69%	86%	80%	77%	51%
Mean known age of out-migrants	40.2	38.7	33.3	34.3	40.1	35.2%
Mean wealth decile of out-migrants (1=hi)	6.74	7.72	7.67	7.71	7.60	8.65
Percentage of out-migrants born in Boylston	35.7%	37.5%	47.8%	41.8%	34.6%	15.8%
Percentage of out migrants who were transients (present for only one tax period, not born in Boyl.)	45% (N=19)	47% (N=15)	52% (N=36)	47% (N=26)	44% (N=23)	73% (N=69)

Source: Boylston Prosopography (See Appendix A).

5. Boylston Male Taxpayers Who Were Transients¹

	1820-25	1825-30	1830-35	1835-40	1840-45	1845-50
Percent Transients	13.7	9.5	19.3	14.3	12%	27.5

Source:

¹Transient is defined here as present on Boylston Tax Assessments for fewer than five years.

6. Birth Location of All Boylston Male Taxpayers Who Out-Migrated, 1820 to 1850, by Five Year Period

Birth Location	1820-29		1830-39		1840-49	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Boylston	27	36.6	56	46.2	33	22.5
Local town ¹	12	16.2	22	18.2	19	12.9
Other Mass.	13	17.7	20	16.5	30	20.4
New Eng.	--	--	1	0.8	4	2.7
Beyond ²	--	--	--	--	7	4.8
Unknown	22	29.7	22	18.2	54	36.7
Total	74	100.2	121	99.9	147	100.0

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

¹Worcester County or nearby Middlesex County

²Other State, Canada, England, or Ireland

7. In-Migration of Boylston Taxpayers as Percent of Total Population, 1830-1850

	1820-25	1825-30	1830-35	1835-40	1840-45	1845-50
No. of Total Taxpayers (in later year)	158	187	182	191	251	241
No. of taxpayers who in-migrated during this period	37	39	35	46	94	85
Percentage of population that was in-migrants by end of period	23.4	20.8	19.2	24.1	37.5	35.3

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

8. Age of Boylston Male Taxpayer Immigrants, 1820-1850

	1820-25	1825-30	1830-35	1835-40	1840-45	1845-50
Percentage of in-migrants whose age is known	76% (N=28)	72% (N=28)	66% (N=23)	70% (N=32)	49% (N=46)	68% (N=58)
Mean age ¹	38.2	39.0	28.3	36.5	36.4	33.6
Median age ¹	32.5	38.0	26.0	32.5	32.0	31.5

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

¹ Where age is known

9. Wealth of Boylston Male Taxpayer In-Migrants

	1820- 25	1825- 30	1830- 35	1835- 40	1840- 45	1845- 50
Mean wealth decile of in-migrants in later tax year (1=high)	6.8	7.8	8.2	8.4	8.7	8.1
Median wealth decile of in-migrants in later tax year	8	8	10	10	10	10
Modal wealth decile of in-migrants in later tax year	10	10	10	10	10	10

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

10. Place of Birth of Boylston Male Taxpayer In-Migrants

Place of Birth	1820- 25	1825- 30	1830- 35	1835- 40	1840- 45	1845- 50
Local town	41	33	34	20	21	15
Other Massachusetts town	27	28	32	33	19	25
Other New England state	--	3	3	7	4	7
Other state, Canada, England, Ireland	--	--	--	--	9	21
Unknown	32	36	32	39	47	30

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

11. Transients as a Proportion of Total In-migrants and Total Population

	1820- 25	1825- 30	1830- 35	1835- 40	1840- 45	1845- 50
Percentage in-migrants that was transient (present for only one tax period, not Boyl.-born)	40% N=15	56% N=22	74% N=26	50% (N=23)	73% (N=69)	NA
Percentage of total population that was transient	10%	12%	14%	12%	28%	NA

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

12. Persistence, Wealth Decile and Average Age of Boylston-Born Males by Decade

	1820-30	1830-40	1840-50
Percentage of Boylston-Born Males who Persisted	63.7 (N=72)	63.8 (N=102)	66.5 (N=109)
Ave. Wealth Decile	4.86	4.83	4.94
Ave. Age	40.7	40.2	42.7

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

13. Persistence of Boylston-Born Males by Two Decade Periods as Compared to Rural Vermont and Iowa

	1800-1820	1820-1840	1860-1880
Boylston	43.2%	44.6%	--
Chelsea, Vt. ¹	--	--	30.9%
Iowa Farm Operators ²	--	--	48.0%

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A)

¹ Note that Hal Barron's *Those Who Stayed Behind*, which is based on census data, calculates persistence over a two-decade period, rather than one-decade as above. (Barron, p. 80). Two-decade persistence rates are included below for comparison's sake.

² From Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt* (Chicago, 1968), p. 127

14. Economic Standing of Boylston-Born Sons Who Persisted, as Compared to their Fathers at the Same Age

Father's tax decile in 1800	Mean decile of son at same age	Number
1	1.33	6
2	2.88	8
3	1.00	3
4	3.67	6
5	7.00	1
6	5.50	4
7	4.00	2
8	5.50	2
10	3.00	1
Average and Total	3.24	33

Source: Boylston Prosopography (see Appendix A) How did remaining in town affect the economic mobility of Boylston's sons? We can compare the economic standing (decile) of fathers between the age of 40 and 55 years old in 1800 with the economic standing (decile) of their sons who remained in town when the sons had reached the same age.

APPENDIX E: AGRICULTURAL DATA

Explanation of New England's Sustainable Diversified Subsistence Farm Acreage Requirements

To sustain a family of six to eight people, a diversified farm in Massachusetts generally included about two to four acres for houselot, barnyard, dooryard garden and orchard; six acres for tillage; twelve to fifteen acres each for meadow and pasture; and twenty to thirty acres for woodlot. These estimates are based on family consumption of grains and the manure needed to keep that tillage land fertile, along with family consumption of wood and the time needed for that wood to regrow. Thus, if a family needed approximately 50 to 60 bushels of grain to thrive, they would need approximately five acres of tillage, with an additional one half to one acre for flax to provide linen. Fertilizing that tillage required the manure of roughly .75 to one cow per acre. These four to six cows would need about two and a half acres each of pasture to graze, or 10 to 15 acres, increasing over time. In addition, for winter feeding each cow would need the hay from about one and a half to two acres of meadow, increasing over time. Each household consumed on average 20 to 30 cords of wood per year, requiring the harvest of about one to one and half acres of woodlot a year. As hardwoods generally took about 20 years to regrow to a harvestable size, a sustainable woodlot needed to be 20 to 30 acres. For minimum and average consumption requirements, see Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*. For yields of tillage, pasture, and meadow in the late colonial and early national period in Concord, see Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow* pp. 203-211. For acreage devoted to flax for linen production, see Darwin P. Kelsey, "Early New England Farm Crops: Flax," Unpublished paper, Research Library at Old Sturbridge Village, 1980.

1. Estimates of General Acreage Requirements for a Sustainable Yeoman's Farm for an Average Family

Land Type	Acres	% of Estate
Houselot	1-2	2%
Orchard	1-2	2%
Tillage	6	10%
Pasture	12-15	25%
Meadow	12-15	25%
Woodlot	20	35%
Total	52-60	99%

Source: Estimates based on minimum subsistence requirements for tillage, pasture, meadow, and woodland from Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), Chapter 5, "Farm Ecology: Subsistence versus Market."

2. Comparison of Land Ratios in Percents for Tillage, Mowing, Pasture and Woodlot in Boylston, 1784-1850

Land Type	Sustainable	1784	1801	1831	1841	1850
Tillage	10%	10.7	7.6	7.5	6.1	6.9
Mowing	27	25.4	24.4	20.9	20.7	22.1
Pasture	27	28.1	32.6	38.5	43.1	41.9
Woodland	36	35.8	35.3	33.0	30.0	29.2
Total	100%	100%	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.1

Sources: 1784 data from the Massachusetts Valuation for Shrewsbury, Districts 2, 3, and 4. State House Library, Boston, Mass. 1801, 1821, 1831, and 1841 from Massachusetts Valuation for Boylston, Aggregates, transcription from manuscript, OSV Library.

3. Comparison of Boylston Farms, 1784 and 1850

Land Type	Sustainable Approx.		1784 ¹ [N farms =76]		1850 ² [N farms=103]	
	Acres	Percentage	Acres	Percentage	Acres	Percentage
Houselot/Orchard	4	7%	4 ³	5.4%	4	4.4%
Tillage	6	10%	7.6	10.2%	6.0	6.6%
Meadow	15	25%	17.9	24%	19.2	21.2%
Pasture	15	25%	19.8	26.5%	36.3	40.0%
Woodland ⁴	20	33%	25.3	33.9%	25.3	27.9
Total Improved	60	100%	74.6	100%	90.8	99.9%
Total Unimprov.			87.8		21.8	
Total Land			162.4		112.6	

Sources: 1784 data from the Massachusetts Valuation for Shrewsbury, Districts 2, 3, and 4. State House Library, Boston, Mass. 1801, 1821, 1831, and 1841 from Massachusetts Valuation for Boylston, Aggregates, transcription from manuscript, OSV Library.

¹ Assumes a farm is any improved land with a house, for a total of 76 farms.

² Assumes same number of farms as listed on the 1850 U.S. Agricultural Census, or 103.

³ Assumed for orchard, garden, barnyards, outyards; not specified in 1784 valuation.

⁴ Many calculations of improved land from the period do not include woodland, even if it had been intensively managed as woodlot.

4. Agricultural Change over Time – Massachusetts Tax Valuations for Boylston, 1784-1850¹

	1784	1801	1831	1841	1850
Polls	188	228	193	225	239
Dwelling houses	87	134	123.5	129	153.5
Shops w/in-adjoin houses	0	2	1	7	0
Other shops	0	0	18	53	79
Tan Houses	5	1	0	0	0
Pot & pearl ash works	2	0			0
Warehouses	0	0	3	3	2
Grist, fulling, saw, carding mills	7	8	8	6	3
Other mills	1	0		0	0
Barns	90	121	115	126	132
Other buildings	3	69		0	0
Cotton manufactory					1
Tillage	574	536	561	541.5	620
Upland mowing	330	434	764	1106	1410
Fresh meadow	1034	1285	808	728	565
Pasturage	1508	2294	2882	3821	3741
Cows that acres will feed	-	749	708	715	751
Woodland	1923	2486	2472	2664	2604
Unimproved land	5600	3628	2011	1598	2011
Unimproveable land	1075	2801	1204	624	235
Wheat bushels		98	56	151	28
Rye bushels		2321	1438	886	808
Oat bushels		2333	4581	5486	5997
Corn bushels		6321	5657	4931	7357
Barley bushels		125	134	70	16
Peas & beans bushels		79			
Hops - lbs		0	5200	1000	2200
English hay - tons		400	656	1004	1261
Fresh hay - tons		1005	600	479	393
Cider - barrels	1154	1175			

Sources: 1784 data from the Massachusetts Valuation for Shrewsbury, Districts 2, 3, and 4. State House Library, Boston, Mass. 1801, 1821, 1831, and 1841 from Massachusetts Valuation for Boylston, Aggregates, transcription from manuscript, OSV

¹No data survives for 1810 and 1820.

Horses	112	142	94	94	121
Oxen	148	214	167	157	149
Steers (Neat Cattle)	450	490*	250	204	110
Cows	378		431	413	581
Sheep and Goats	444		309	184	110
Swine	228	265	179	184	37
Money at Interest	0	0		0	18920
Money on hand or deposit		9740		0	0
Stock in trade	0	1800		0	2000
Oz of silver plate	0			0	66
\$ value of shares of stock		650		0	5900

*Neat cattle and cows are listed together in 1801.

5. Boylston Livestock Holdings - Average Holding per Farm 1784 and 1850

	Minimum	1784	1850
Horses	0	1.8	1.1
Oxen	2	2.8	1.4
Cows	1	4.6	4.8
Beef Cattle	1	6.8*	1.4
Swine	1-2	2.8	3.6
Sheep/Goats	6-10	7.9	0.3

Sources: 1784 Massachusetts Agricultural Valuation and 1850 U.S. Agricultural Census

* Note the concern that this might be an outlier.

6. Boylston Pasture and Meadow Fertility, 1801 and 1850

	1801	1850
Pasture	2294	3741
Number of cattle pasture will keep	749	751
Acres of pasture needed per cow	3.1	5.0
Acres of Fresh Meadow	1285	565
Acres of English Upland Meadow	434	1410
Total Meadow	1719	1975

Sources: 1784 Massachusetts Agricultural Valuation and 1850 U.S. Agricultural Census

7. 1850 Federal Agricultural Census for Boylston, Mean Production per Farmer

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Improved Acres	103	5	227	65	48.596
Unimproved Acres	103	0	131	31	26.552
Cash Value of Farm	103	400	8000	2630	1560.603
Value of Farming Utensils	103	5	300	76	58.058
Horses	103	0	6	1.1	.744
Cows	103	1	14	4.8	2.854
Oxen	103	0	6	1.4	1.439
Other Cattle	103	0	14	1.4	2.189
Sheep	103	0	6	.3	.972
Swine	103	0	14	3.6	2.841
Value of Livestock	103	35	896	267	178.188
Wheat bu	103	0	15	.2	1.625
Rye bu	103	0	60	7.8	9.375
Indian Corn bu	103	0	200	35.0	47.863
Oats bu	103	0	210	57.8	55.819
Wool lbs	103	0	30	1.0	4.018
Peas & Beans, bu	103	0	12	.8	2.162
Irish Potatoes, bu	103	20	500	104.7	76.611
Value of Orchard Products (\$)	103	0	75	12.18	17.548
Value of Produce Market Products	103	0	30	.68	4.025
Butter lbs	103	0	1400	452	291.889
Cheese lbs	103	0	500	74	128.173
Hay tons	103	2	70	16.7	13.054
Value of Animals Slaughtered	103	0	1275	61.54	148.423

Source: 1850 Federal Agricultural Census

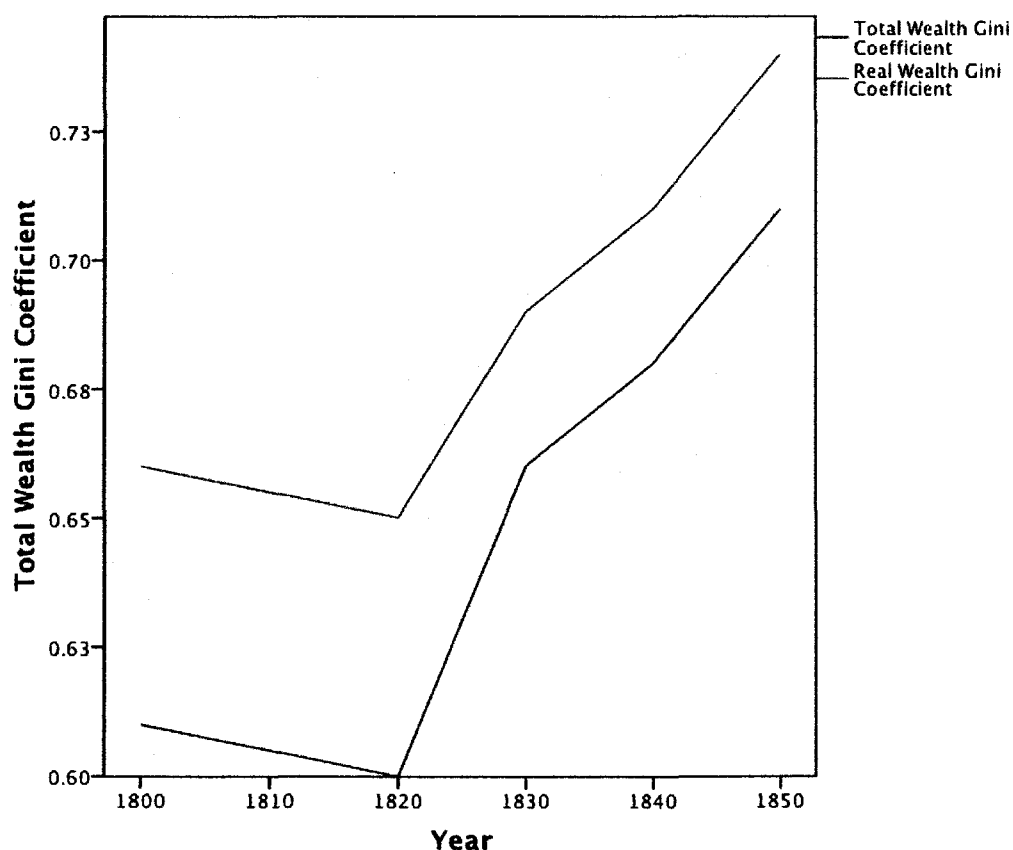
APPENDIX F: DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

1. Distribution of Wealth in Boylston, 1800-150

Tax Year	Total Property Gini Coefficient	Real Property Gini Coefficient
1800	.61	.66
1820	.60	.65
1830	.66	.69
1840	.68	.71
1850	.71	.74

Source: Tax Assessments of Male Residents of Boylston, 1800, 1820, 1830, 1840, and 1850. Tax Assessor's Record Book, BHS. No assessment survives for 1810.

2. Trend of Increasing Inequity in Distribution of Total and Real Property, 1800-1850 Boylston



Source: Tax Assessments of Male Residents of Boylston, 1800, 1820, 1830, 1840, and 1850. Tax Assessor's Record Book, Boylston Historical Society, Boylston, Mass. No assessment survives for 1810.

3. Location of Birth for Boylston Male Taxpayers with No Property 1800 and 1850

Location of Birth	1800 %	1800 [N]	1850 %	1850 [N]
Boylston	32.0	8	22.1	19
Local Town	21.2	5	14.0	12
Other Massachusetts town	24.2	7	12.8	11
Other New England State	-	0	4.7	4
Non-New England State, Canada, England, Ireland	-	0	20.9	18
Unknown	24.2	5	25.6	22
	99.9	25	100.1	86

Source: Boylston Tax Assessments, 1800 to 1850, BHS. Location of Birth from Prosopography

4. Percent of Boylston Taxpayers with No Real Property and No Total Property 1800-1850, from Boylston Tax Assessor's Record Book



Source: See Chart 3.

5. Improved Land and Livestock Ownership in Boylston 1784 and 1850, Distribution and Average Size of Holdings

Year	1784	1850
Number of Polls (taxpayers)	188	239
Percent of taxpayers with improved land	54%	45.0%
Ave. # of improved acres held by those who own land	51.4	64.5
Percent of taxpayers with oxen	27.1%	24.3%
Ave. # of oxen held by those who own oxen	2.8	2.5
Percent of taxpayers with cows	52.7%	43.1%
Aver # of cows held by those who own cows	3.8	4.9
Percent of taxpayers with steers	37.2%	22.2%
Ave. # of steers held by those who own steers	unknown	2.7
Percent of taxpayers with swine	47.3%	42.6%
Ave. # of swine held by those who own swine	2.5	3.6

Sources: From Boylston Tax Assessments, 1800 and 1850, Manuscript Ledger, Boylston Historical Society, Boylston, Mass. Location of Birth from Boylston Prosopography constructed from Boylston Vital Records, town histories, and genealogical records.

6. Number of Ploughs in Probate Inventories of Boylston Men 1820-1840

# Plows in Inventory	0	1	2	2+	Total
# of Decedents	9	2	8	1	20
% of Decedents	45%	10%	40%	5%	100%
Mean Decile	7.8	3.5	2.8	2.0	

Source: Boylston Probate Inventories, MA. Note that this chart uses only probates that detailed farming tools.

Nearly half the men who died between 1820-1840 & left detailed probate inventories owned no plough. Almost all of the plow owners possessed *more than* a single plow. The chart reveals a division by wealth: poor farmers generally needed to depend on their wealthier neighbors to borrow a plow each spring. Meanwhile, wealthier farmers were able to buy extra plows, likely with specialized uses, that reduced labor needs and dependence on neighborly assistance. Plough ownership, and the need to borrow/depend on neighbors, became wealth based. Poorer farmers continued to need to rely on old ways of swapped labor & tools; richer farmers become more truly independent & could use their tools both to prepare their soil and to lend out for profit— as Flagg did with oxen.

APPENDIX G: CHOICE OF LIVELIHOOD

1. Livelihood listed of Boylston Males 21 & over in 1850

Livelihood	N	%
Farmer or farm laborer ¹	157	66
Small craft shop/artisan ²	42	18
Factory employee	11	5
“Professional” ³	9	4
“Marketer” or “Teamster”	4	2
Other ⁴	2	1
“None”/no occupation listed	13	5
Total	238	101%

Source: U.S. Population Census for Boylston.

¹ Farmers (128), Laborers (29)

² Shoemaker (20), carpenter (8), blacksmith (3), miller (3), brickmaker (2), wheelwright (1), harnessmaker (1), butcher (2), painter (1), basketmaker (1)

³ Clergy, Lawyer, Physician, Merchant, Clerk, Lecturer, Poor Farm Overseer

⁴ Sailor (1), “Ship’s Timber” (1)

2. Livelihood choices for Entire Boylston-Born Cohort, Born 1786-1825

Livelihood ¹	Number	Percent of Known
Farming	101	46
Rural Craft	19	9
Manufacturing	41	19
Trades	32	14
Professions	29	13
Total	222	101

Source: Boylston-Born Cohort Database (See Appendix A). Livelihood can be established for 222 out of 292 of the Boylston-born cohort, or 76%.

¹ These are grouped as follows:

1. 1 Farm (Farmer, farm laborer)
2. Traditional/Agrarian Craft (smiths, wrights, peddlers, etc)
3. Manufacturing (shoe or boot maker, comb maker, furniture/piano maker, other small shop worker, factory/mill employee, machinist, mechanic)
4. Trades (transport services, communication services, building, retail provisions, wholesale provisions)
5. Professions (merchant, lawyer, engineer, manufactory owner, minister, business clerk, banker, professor).

3. Livelihood Choices for Boylston-Born Cohort Out-Migrants

Livelihood	Number	% of Known
Farming	55	34%
Rural Craft	10	6
Manufacturing	35	22
Trade	30	19
Profession	28	17
Other	3	2

Source: Boylston-Born Cohort Database (See Appendix A). livelihood choices of those sons who *left* Boylston can be traced for 161 of the 219 out-migrating sons, or 74%.

APPENDIX H: MANUFACTURES

1. Boylston Manufactures in 1833
 - A. Boots & Shoes
 - a. Value of RE -\$1400; Value of tools & machinery -\$350
 - b. Kinds & Quantity of Manufacture – Boots & shoes, \$4700 annually
 - c. # employed – 8 men (no women) @ 75cts /day for 310 day);
 - d. Sold in – Massachusetts
 - B. Combs – J. Scudtell (Joel Sawtell, b. 1809, Decile 8 in 1830; age in 1833 = 24)
 - a. Value of RE -\$1000; Value of tools & machinery -\$450
 - b. Kinds & Quantity Manufacture – combs \$6000 annually
 - c. # employed – 6 men (@ 75cts /day for 310 day/yr ea; 2 women @ \$125/yr
 - d. Sold in - principal cities in Union
 - C. Palm leaf hats; Eli Lamson (b. 1803, Decile 2 in 1835; age in 1833 = 30)
 - a. Value of RE - \$0; Value of tools & machinery - \$0
 - b. Kinds & Quantity of Manufacture - 3000 hats & straw braid valued at \$750 & \$200
 - c. # employed 8 women earning 30ct/day for 310 days – \$744 [outwork]
 - d. Sold in – [not listed]

Source: Louis MacLane, *Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the United States*. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Executive Document No. 308, collected and transmitted by the Secretary of the Treasury (Washington, 1833; Reprinted New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), p.482-3. NOTE: \$ 0.75 a day was what Flagg pd for day's labor.

2. Civil Suits Per Poll in Textile and Non-Textile Worcester County Towns, 1831

Suits Per Poll in Agricultural Towns¹

Town	# Polls	# Spindles	Spindles per poll	# Cases in Worcester CCP in 1831	Cases per poll
Boylston	193	0	0	16	.08
Berlin	162	0	0	19	.12
Shrewsbury	340	0	0	57	.17
Sterling	412	0	0	25	.06
Average	276			29	.11

Suits per Poll in Textile Towns²

Town	# Polls	# Spindles	Spindles per poll	# Cases in Worcester CCP in 1831	Cases per poll
Mendon	687	17,156	25.0	145	.21
Uxbridge	483	11,566	24.0	86	.18
Oxford	452	7374	16.3	84	.19
Sutton	410	6004	14.6	124	.30
Average	508			110	.22

Source: Civil suits filed in the Worcester County Court of Common Pleas Records, MA. Determination of agricultural and non-agricultural towns made from number of spindles reported per town in the Massachusetts State Tax Records, Valuation Returns 1791-1860. Worcester County. Transcribed from microfilmed manuscript records by Darwin P. Kelsey, c. 1970. OSV

Men living in textile-producing Worcester County towns had double the likelihood of being involved in a civil suit; they also lived, on average, in a more densely populated environment.

¹ Selection Criteria for Agricultural Towns: Boylston and three contiguous towns with no textile factories, as measured by number of cotton, wool and linen spindles reported in the Massachusetts State Tax Records, Valuation Returns of 1831.

² Selection Criteria for Textile Towns: Boylston and three contiguous towns with no textile factories, as measured by number of cotton, wool and linen spindles reported in the Massachusetts State Tax Records, Valuation Returns of 1831.

APPENDIX I: BOYLSTON FARMERS WITH MARKETABLE
SURPLUS IN 1850

Assumptions:

The following assumptions about family consumption needs shape the estimation of Boylston's marketable farm surplus in 1850. The farm family is assumed to be composed of six to eight people. For grains, we assume that each farm family will consume a minimum of 30 bushels of corn, oats, and rye and an average of 50 bushels per family. In addition, each family will consume a minimum of 20 bushels and an average of 25 bushels of potatoes. It is assumed that each family has at minimum one milch cow, who would consume 30 hundred (3,000 lbs.) or 1.5 tons of hay. (These assumptions are based on Carolyn Merchant's *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 178-8).

For dairy, we will assume that each family will consume at minimum 120 lbs of butter. This is based on widow's portions estimating per person consumption of butter at 20 lbs, and on a study that estimated nineteenth-century per person butter consumption peaking at 19 lbs per person. (See Lee A. Craig, Barry Goodwin, and Thomas Grennes, "The Effect of Mechanical Refrigeration on Nutrition in the United States," *Social Science History* Vol. 28 No. 2. (2004), p. 327.) For cheese, we assume each person in a family will consume 40 lbs. of butter, which would require 240-320 lbs. of butter per family, based on widow's portions from late eighteenth-century probates. However, as Bettye Pruitt points out, widows' portions often inflated butter requirements to allow excess for trade, so we will assume a more conservative lbs per family for minimum consumption. (See Betty Hobbs Pruitt, "Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts," *WMQ* Vol. 41, No. 3 (Jul., 1984), pp. 334-364.)

For meat, we will assume each family slaughters for its own use one beef cow and one to two pigs per year.

Any produce in excess of these family minimums is assumed to be available as marketable surplus.

1. 1850 Boylston Farm Surplus for Market

Product	N farmers with surplus	% Farmers with Surplus ¹
Grain (Corn, Oats, Rye)	67	65
Potatoes	100	95
Butter	93	88
Cheese	33	32
Hay	67	65
Beef Cattle	40	39
Swine	53	51

Source: U.S. Agricultural Census for Boylston, 1850.

¹ Note that this is the percent of *farmers* (103 in 1850); only one-third of Boylston taxpayers owned farms in the 1850 census.

APPENDIX J: INHERITANCE STRATEGIES, DEBTS, AND ASSETS

1. Percent of Boylston Probates with Impartible and Partible Estates by Decade 1786-1850

Decade	1786-1789	1790-1799	1800-1809	1810-1819	1820-1829	1830-1839	1840-1850
% Impartible	67	60	50	42	44	33	20
% Partible	33	40	50	58	57	68	80
Number	3	5	8	12	9	12	5

Source: Author's study of all Boylston probates, based on Worcester County Probate Records, MA.

2. Ratio of Debt to Assets in Boylston Male Probates with Complete Accounts by Decade 1810-1840¹

Year of Death by Decade	N	Ratio	Std. Dev.
1810 Ratio of Debts to Assets	12	.23	.20915
1820 Ratio of Debts to Assets	13	.37	.43217
1830 Ratio of Debts to Assets	12	.38	.44567
1840 Ratio of Debts to Assets	19	.41	.35837
Total	56		

Source: See Chart 1 above.

¹ Most debt in Boylston was settled at the time of death, with final renderings of account and payment of outstanding notes during probate.

3. Percent of Boylston Male Probates in Which Some or All Real Estate is Ordered Auctioned to Settle Debt, by Decade 1810-1850¹

Decade	1810-19	1820-29	1830-39	1840-49
Percent of Estates Auctioned for Debt	17%	21%	46%	32%

Source: See Chart 1 above.

¹ Before 1800, it was extremely rare for an estate to be "vendued" or auctioned for debt – in part or in whole. By the turn of the century that tendency was on the rise.

4. Notes as a Proportion of Total Paper Assets in Boylston Male Probates with Complete Inventories by Decade

	1790-99	1800-09	1810-19	1820-29	1830-39	1840-50
Ratio	.97	.90	.97	.74	.76	.98

Source: See Chart 1 above.

5. Paper Assets (Notes, Book Accounts, Cash) as a Proportion of Total Personal Estate in Boylston Male Probates with Complete Inventories by Decade

	1800-09	1810-19	1820-29	1830-39	1840-50
Ratio	.37	.28	.11	.46	.78

Source: See Chart 1 above.

6. Mean Net Worth of Boylston's Top Tax Quintile by Decade

Year of Death by Decade	Number of Decedents	Mean Net Worth of Top Tax Quintile
1800	4	\$2610
1810	5	\$2990
1820	8	\$1688
1830	3	\$2276
1840	9	\$3994

Source: Boylston Tax Assessments. BHS.

APPENDIX K: JOSEPH FLAGG ACCOUNT BOOK DEBIT ENTRIES, 1827-1845¹

1. Number of Trades and Percentage of Gross Value by Category

Item	Subtotals	Gross	% of Gross	N	%N
Work		306.76	8.6	290	22.1
Use of Animals or Tools		186.81	5.2	199	15.2
Wood		690.40	19.4	147	11.2
Tillage Grains		666.14	18.7	148	11.3
Corn (86)	220.55				
Barley (7)	11.01				
Oats (34)	397.43				
Rye (13)	14.48				
Flour/M Meal (8)	22.72				
Garden		99.36	2.8	107	8.2
Beans (8)	3.12				
Cabbage (1)	3.00				
Pumpkins (12)	18.75				
Potatoes (83)	73.22				
Turnips (3)	1.27				
Orchard		112.22	3.2	83	6.3
Apples (8)	5.13				
Cider (63)	93.86				
Cider Making (12)	13.23				
Livestock Products		199.07	5.6	52	4.0
Beef/Veal (17)	81.60				
Cow/Steer/Heifer (2)	28.00				
Pork/Salt Pork/Bacon (6)	13.57				
Pig (7)	33.93				
Mutton/Lamb (10)	17.50				
Sheep/Lambs/Sheepskin (6)	15.95				
Dairy (4)	8.41				
Livestock Tending Keeping Stock (41) “Tucking” Stock (34)	NA	42.86 ²	1.2% ³	75	5.7
Hay		176.86	5.0%	29	2.2
Money/Notes/Interest		286.62	8.0%	73	5.6
Money (71)	264.90				
Notes/Interest (2)	21.72				
Rent of House/Farm		334.00	9.4%	9	0.7
“Stuff to Meetinghouse”		83.75	2.4%	2	0.2
Miscellaneous		378.40	10.6%	126	9.6
TOTALS		\$3563	100.1%	1312	102.3

Source: Account Book of Joseph Flagg of Boylston. OSV.

¹ Excluded: Entries with no price, “bills”, accounts paid, reckonings, etc. “Keeping Livestock” entries included for number but not percentage of gross

² Total of those few entries that included prices for livestock care

³ Percentage of those few entries with recorded prices

2. Location of Trade – Debit Trades in Joseph Flagg’s Account Book, 1827-1846¹

Location	Traders		Debit Trades		Value of Trades	
	[N]	Percent	[N]	Percent	Amount	Percent
Family/Live-In Help	16		381			
Neighbors ²	14		399			
Boylston	37		232			
Total Local	67	70.5%	1012	77.8%	\$2219	63.7%
Shrewsbury	21		222		\$1142	
Worcester & Other	7		68		\$121	
Total Beyond Boylston	28	29.5%	290	22.2%	\$1263	36.3%
TOTAL	95	100%	1302	100%	\$3482	100%

Source: See Chart 1 above.

¹ Residences known for 95 of the 108 traders (value of trade not known for all trades)

² The Brewers, Flagg’s closest neighbor, accounted for 337 or a third of all trades in the book.

3. Destination for Debits for Trips with Flagg's Wagon or Cart plus a Horse or Oxen

Destination	# of Trips	County	Mill/Commercial Village
Shrewsbury	24	Worcester	Commercial
Worcester	9	Worcester	Commercial/Mill
Grafton	6	Worcester	Commercial/Mill
West Boylston	2	Worcester	Mill
Oxford	2	Worcester	Mill
Westborough	2	Worcester	Commercial/Rail Depot
Northborough	2	Worcester	Mill
Millbury	1	Worcester	Mill
Princeton	1	Worcester	Agricultural
Bolton	1	Worcester	Agricultural
Greenwich	1	Hampshire	Agricultural
Boston	1	Suffolk	Commercial
TOTAL	53		

Source: See Chart 1 above.

4. Destination of Aaron White's Market Trips: 1828-1837

- Boston 21 (most with marketer)
- Worcester 6
- Shrewsbury 2
- Northborough 2
- Providence, R.I. 1
- Westfield, Mass. 1

Source: Diary of Mary White. OSV.

5. Crops Marketed in Large Quantities by Flagg, 1828- 1844

Year	Crops
1828	Corn
1833	Oats
1834	Potatoes
1835	Oats
1836	Corn and Oats
1837	Oats and Hay
1838	Hay
1839	Oats
1843	Oats and Hay
1844	Oats

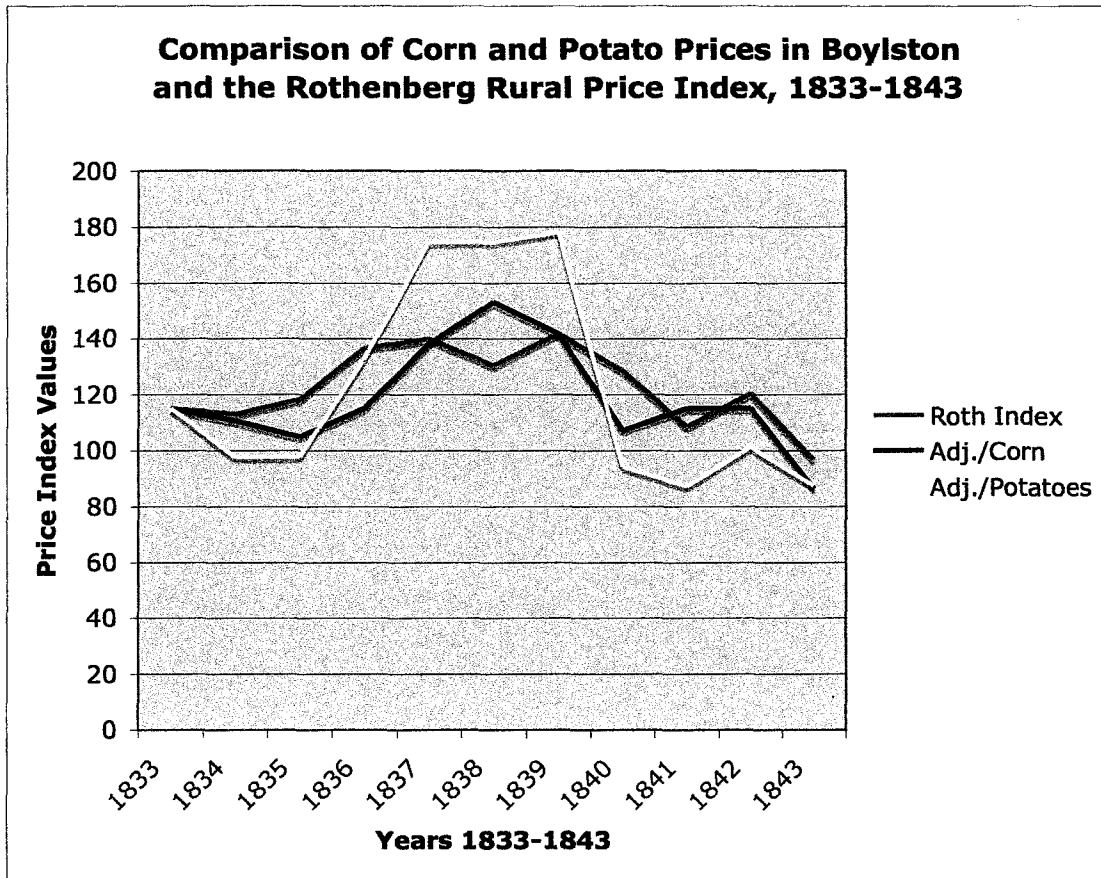
Source: Joseph Flagg Account Book. OSV.

6. Comparison of Flagg's Corn and Potato Prices with Rothenberg Price Index

Year	Corn Ave/bu	Potatoes Ave/bu	Rothenberg Index	Adj./Corn	Adj./Potatoes
1833	\$1.00	\$0.33	115	115	115
1834	\$0.96	\$0.28	113	111	98
1835	\$0.91	\$0.28	118	105	98
1836	\$1.00	\$0.38	137	115	133
1837	\$1.20	\$0.50	140	138	175
1838	\$1.33	\$0.50	130	153	175
1839	\$1.23	\$0.51	142	142	178
1840	\$0.93	\$0.27	129	107	94
1841	\$1.00	\$0.25	109	115	87
1842	\$1.00	\$0.29	120	115	101
1843	\$0.75	\$0.25	97	86	87

Sources: Joseph Flagg Account Book. OSV; Winifred B. Rothenberg, "A Price Index for Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1855," *Journal of Economic History* Vol. XXXIX, No. 4 (Dec. 1979), pp. 975-1001.

7. Graph of Flagg's Corn and Potato Prices with Rothenberg Price Index



Source: See Chart 5 above.

Corn is 13.9%, and potatoes 1.2% of the commodities used in Rothenberg's thirteen-commodity "market basket" for her price index. Flagg's price for oats remained steady throughout the 1830s, but succumbed in early 1840 to the national recession. His price for hay peaked at .76/hundred (about \$23/ton) in April of 1837, just before the Panic; the next year it dropped dramatically to .29/hundred (about \$9/ton). By 1841 it had returned to a more-normal 50 cents a hundred, the same price charged in Concord, Mass for hay in 1840. Kimenker, "Concord: A Social History," p. 163

8. Joseph Flagg's Male Hired Help by Year, 1820-1841

Year	Hired Help	Term	Wage	Age	Boylston Born?	Married	Decile of Hand ¹
1828	Thos. Willington	7 mos.	\$70	19	Yes	No	1 st - Father
1829	John A. Wood	6 mos.	\$78	29	No	Yes	10 th - Self
1830	Jonas Hunt			20	Yes	No	6 th - Self
1832	Abel Dakin	6 mos		26	Yes	Yes	1 st - Father
1833	Thomas Brewer	Weeks		19	Yes	No	10 th - Self
1834	Benj. Sawtell	6 wks		25	Yes	Yes	10 th - Self
1835	Benj. Sawtell	2 mos		26	Yes	Yes	10 th - Self
1836	Benj. Sawtell	10 wks		27	Yes	Yes	10 th - Self
1839	John A. Woods	Year		39	Yes	Yes	10 th - Self
1840	John A. Woods	Year		40	Yes	Yes	10 th - Self
1841	John A. Woods	Year		41	Yes	Yes	10 th - Self

Source: Joseph Flagg Account Book. OSV.

¹ Where hand is a dependent juvenile, his father's decile is used.

9. Value of Day's Work from Flagg Accounts

Work of: little boys= one-quarter man's wage;
 young boys = one half man's wage;
 to age 14= two-thirds man's wage;
 age 16 & older =full man's wage.

Full Day's generic work in 1825 - \$0.67 to \$0.74

additional for ox, cart, etc; stays about same for next decade

Full Day's work at haying or laying wall in 1825 - \$0.85

Full Day's work plowing 1834 – up to \$1.00/day

Full Day's work 1835 for Benj. Sawtell only \$0.55/day

Full Day's work 1837 – getting ice in cellar - \$0.83

Full Day's work 1838 – threshing – \$1.12

Full Day's work 1839 drawing timber – \$1.50

Full Day's work 1843 of Mr. Wood - \$0.75

Source: Joseph Flagg Account Book. OSV.

APPENDIX L: TOWN MEETING APPROPRIATIONS

1. Boylston Appropriations for Poor, School, and Roads, 1815-1843

Year	Budgeted Poor	Budgeted Schools	Budgeted Roads	Total Budget	"Total commitments"	Notes
1815	710	300	UN	UN	1028.7	
1816	275	300	600		670.91	
1817	500	300	600		891.41	
1818	400	400	600		977.58	
1819			600		950.74	
1820	600	300	500		932.61	
1821	550	300	0		1435.12	
1822	600	300	400	1300	1031.49	
1823	500	300	450	1250	1092.6	
1824	700	300	500	1500	1006.45	
1825	300	350	500	1150		
1826	300	400	450	1150		
1827	350	450	500	1300		
1828	400	450	600	1450		
1829	525	400	600	1525		
1830	500	400	600	1500	1412.46	
1831	600	400	600	1600	1937.35	
1832	1000	400	600	2000		
1833	800	400	700	1900		
1834	800	400	600	1800	1358.75	
1835	800	400	600	1800		
1836	800	400	600	1800		¹
1837	400	500	600	1500		²
1838	800	400	500	1700	1296.74	
1839	1000	400	600	2000		
1840	1000	400	600	2000		
1841	800	400	600	1800		
1842	800	400	800	2000		
1843	800	400	600	1800	2026.16	

Source: Boylston Town Clerk's Books III and IV, 1815-1843. BHS.

¹ \$500 debt paid off; poor house proposed.

² Had to raise supplemental amount later in the year to cover shortfall in poor funds.

APPENDIX M: POOR RECORDS

1. Boylston's Poor Disposed of in Town Meeting, 1830-1840

<u>Poor</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Reason for Poverty, if known</u>
Mary Ann Abbot	30s	insane
Widow of Amaziah Ball	50s	widowed
David Bush	80s	stripped of property as Tory
Widow Josiah Cutting	80s	widow
Widow of Silas Cutting	70s	widow
Catherine Eager	80s	singlewoman
Widow Martha Hastings		widow
Submit Howe	70s	married, but husband untraceable –
Jeremiah Pratt	90s	elderly
Jason Rice & wife	70s	unknown
Zachariah Sawtell and his wife	70s	unknown
Relief Stone	20s	single mother, feeble-minded
Relief Stone's child	infant	bastard
Widow of Timothy Whitney	60s	widow

Source: Boylston Town Clerk's Books III and IV. BHS.

2. Boylston's Overseers of Poor Report of Poor House Inmates, 1852

<u>Poor</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Reason for Poverty, if known</u>
Benjamin Sawtel	67	Unknown
Wife of Benjamin Sawtell	66	Unknown
Widow of Jason Rice	83	Widow
Widow of Asa Bennet	87	Widow
Widow of Amariah Ball	61	Widow
Widow of Oliver Barnes	85	Widow
Betsey Stone	84	Elderly
Relief Stone	36	single mother, feeble-minded
Lucy Stone	child	feeble-minded, bastard

Also supported by/or given assistance in Boylston, 1851-2, but not on Poor farm:

Silas Stone (illegitimate son of Relief), age 14, – bound out to Leonard Brewer

Martha Harrington – age 7, born in Boylston – bound out to Jacob Stone

Eli Ferry & Wife – age and location of birth unknown

Mas Larram his wife & 7 children – age and location of birth unknown

John Willington, wife & 5 children - born in Boylston, situation unknown

Sources: Overseers of the Poor Records, BHS; Wm. Dupuis, *History of Boylston 1786-1886*, BHSS, pp. 75-6.

APPENDIX N: WORCESTER INSANE HOSPITAL

1. Massachusetts Town Returns on Lunatics and Furiously Mad, 1830

114 Towns Returned 1830 Massachusetts Census on Lunatics. Of those, 89 towns reported supporting a total of 289 lunatics or furiously mad, 161 of whom were confined. Of those confined, 78 were in poor houses, 37 in private homes, 19 in jails, 10 in private insane hospitals, and 17 had no stated place of confinement. In addition, 60 were known to be confined in the insane hospital at Charlestown.

Source: Report (requested Feb. 23, 1829 by Horace Mann) submitted to the Mass. House of Reps, Feb. 13, 1830.

2. Most common Causes of Insanity 1833 Worcester Insane Asylum

Cause	Males	Females	Total	%
Bodily Infirmary ¹	10	16	26	16%
Intemperance	31	8	39	24%
Sexual Excess ²	7	1	8	
Disappointed Hopes/Affections ³	4	6	10	
Family Troubles ⁴	3	8	11	
Fanaticism/Religious Fanaticism/Enthusiasm	10	6	16	
Failure in Business/Loss of Property ⁵	10	2	12	
Excessive Study	3	0	3	
Nervous Excitement	0	2	2	
Excessive Use of Tobacco	1	0	1	
A Prosecution	1	0	1	
Dread of Future Punishment	1	0	1	
Unknown ⁶	16	17	33	20%
Total	97	66	163	
	60%	40%		
Personally Culpable Causes (Behaviors) ⁷	52	15	67	41%
Biological (Bodily) Causes	10	18	28	17%
163 total cases				

Source: *Reports and Other Documents Relating to the State Lunatic Hospital at Worcester, Mass.*, Printed by order of the Senate (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, Printers to the State, 1837), pp. 4-5.

¹ Includes Ill health, Physical Wound, Result of Measles or Fever, Amenorrhoea, Puerperal, "repelled eruption (measles)"

² Includes Masturbation or Excessive Venereal Indulgence

³ Includes Disappointment in Marriage, Love, Affection

⁴ Includes Jealous of Husband, Abuse of Parent, Abuse of Husband, Loss of Husband, Solicitude for Sick Child

⁵ Includes Pecuniary Embarrassment, Fear of Poverty, Disappointed Ambitions

⁶ Includes one unknown entry for "Periodical"

⁷ Includes Intemperance, Sexual Excesses, Use of Tobacco, Excessive Study, Fanaticism

Notes:

1. 58% of all insane were males; 42% females.

2. Ill health was considered most curable (73%); masturbation least curable (7%).

3. 58% of all females were considered cured or curable (mostly those with physical ailments); 43% of all males cured or curable.

4. 60% of all insanity was deemed to be the result of excessive or uncontrolled behavior (drinking, sexual excesses, smoking, religious fanaticism, excessive study). Thus, Woodward believed that the majority of all insanity cases could be cured by teaching self-control. An underlying bodily infirmity accounted for only 16% of admissions in 1833.

5. Economic insecurity was not a significant cause of insanity before 1837. In 1833, economic insecurity accounted for fewer than 10% of all cases. At the end of 1836 a total of 10 cases in the hospital were related to pecuniary or business embarrassments or fears of poverty.

APPENDIX O: ANTISLAVERY

1. Combined Membership of the Boylston Female Antislavery Society 1836-42
(Original and Ultraist)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Household Head</u>	<u>Rel. to HHH</u>	<u>Soc¹</u>	<u>Marital</u>	<u>Tax²</u>	<u>Age³</u>	<u>Ch⁴</u>
Abbot, Mary	Abbot, Jason	wife	2	M	3	73	
Andrews, Lucy	Andrews, Robert	wife	2	M	1	63	U
Andrews, Martha	Andrews, Robt. Jr	wife	2	M	2	22	U
Andrews, Persis	Andrews, James	wife	2	M	3	24	
Babcock, Martha	Unknown		2				
Ball, Lydia F	Ball, Aaron	wife	2	M	4	35 ⁵	U
Barnes, Submit	Barnes, David	wife	2	W	1		U
Brewer, Mrs. Louisa	Brewer, Leander	wife	2	M	5	34	
Brewer, Olive	Unknown	wife	2	M		46	
Brown, Elvira	Brown, Joel	daugh.	2	S	3	16	
Brown, Lucy	Brown, Joel	wife	2	M	3		
Brown, Mrs. Lois	Brown, George	wife	2	M		63	
Brown, Sarah	Brown, Joel	daugh.	2	S	3	14	
Cobb, Clarissa	Cobb, Salem	wife	2	M	4	42	U
Cotton, Hannah S.	Cotton, Ward	daugh.	1,2	S	3	30	U
Cotton, Rebeckah	Cotton, Ward	wife	1,2	M	3	68	U
Cotton, Sally M.	Cotton, Ward	daugh.	1,2	S	3	32	U
Davenport, Amelia	Davenport, James	daugh.	2	S		28	
Davenport, Caroline	Davenport, James	daugh.	2	S	1	16	
Davenport, Nancy	Unknown		2	S		21	
Davenport, Sally A.	Davenport, Matt.	wife	2	M	3	54	
Dunton, Mrs.	Dunton, Reuben J	wife	2	M	3	61	U
Eager, Mrs.	Unknown		2				
Fawcett, Mrs.	Unknown		2				
Flagg, Caroline	Flagg, Jonathan	daugh.	2	S	1	20	U
Flagg, Mary M.	Flagg, Abijah	wife	2	M	1	54	C
Goddard, Miss Sarah	Unknown		2	S			
Goodnow, Lucy	Goodnow,	daugh.	1	S	3	35	C

	Capt						
Hastings, Mrs. Polly	Hastings, Silas	wife	2	W	5	58	C
Houghton, Lucy Ann	White, Aaron	niece	1	M	7	29	C
Howe, Dolly	Howe, Capt. John	daugh.	2	S	1	33	U
Howe, Mary M.	Howe, Capt. John	daugh.	2	S	1	35	U
Howe, Olive M.	Howe, Capt. John	daugh.	1,2	S	1	21	U
Hudson, E/Almira	Hudson, Robert	daugh.	2	S	2	23	
Marsh, Persis	Marsh, Samuel	wife	2	M	10	41	C
Osgood, Clarissa	Osgood, Abel Jr.	daugh.	2	S	6	35	
Rice, Mrs. Hannah	Unknown		2	M/W			
Sanford, Harriet	Sanford, Wm.	wife	1	M	8	33	C
Sawyer, Harriet	Sawyer, Oliver	wife	2	W	1	44	
Smith, Sarah		sis-in-law	1	S	8	35	C
Stacy, Mrs. Sarah	Sanford, Wm.	law	1	S	8	35	C
Toombs, Betsey	Stacy, Geo. W	wife	2	M	10	36	U
Toombs, Elizabeth	Toombs, William	wife	2	W	2	45	U
White, Caroline	Toombs, William	daugh.	2	S	2	14	U
White, Mary	White, Aaron	daugh.	1,2	S	1	24	C
White, Mary A.	White, Aaron	wife	1,2	M	1	64	C
White, Mrs. Eunice	White, Aaron	daugh.	1,2	S	1	27	C
Whitney, Sarah	White, Seth	wife	2	W	5	47	C
	Whitney, Levi						
	T.	wife	2	M			

Sources: Compiled from people mentioned as working for society in BFAS records (BHS) or in Mary White's diary and White family letters (OSV).

¹ Member of first Society 1836-1839=1, Member of second Society 1840-1842=2

² Tax in 1840

³ Age in 1840

⁴ Church Affiliation

⁵ Age estimated.

Total number : 48

- Marital status known for 45 of 48; 21 Married, 19 Single, 5 widowed
- Household wealth decile known for 38 of 48 or 79%; mean decile: 3.3

- Church affiliation known for 27 of 48 or 56%; 60% Unitarians, 40% Congregationalists
- Age known for 40 of 48 or 83%; mean age: 37.4; most in 20s and 30s
- Age distribution:
 - o Teens – 4
 - o 20s – 10
 - o 30s – 11
 - o 40s – 6
 - o 50s – 3
 - o 60s – 5
 - o 70s – 1

2. Antislavery Petitions Sent to Congress from Boylston, 1837-1838

Name under which Petition sent	# signatures		Type	Cause	Date Rec'd in Congress
	Men	Women			
Harriet Sanford		197	Women	1	1/4/1838
Wm. H. Sanford	71	93	Citizens	1	2/5/1838
Wm. H. Sanford	70	94	Citizens	2	2/5/1838
Wm. H. Sanford	74	94	Citizens	3	2/5/1838
Wm. H. Sanford	70	97	Citizens	4	2/5/1838
Wm. H. Sanford		72	Men	5	2/5/1838
Harriet Sanford		94	Women	5	2/5/1838
Harriet Sanford		124	Women	1,3	12/18/1838

Key to Causes:

1. Abolish slavery & slave trade in Washington, D.C.
2. Abolish slavery & slave trade in U.S.
3. Against admission of pro-slave territories to the Union
4. Against admission of pro-slave states to the Union
5. Against annexation of Texas to the Union
6. Uphold right of petition

Sources: Compiled by Lynn Manring and Jack Larkin in the unpublished text, "Women, Anti-Slavery, and the Constitution in Rural New England: A Sourcebook for Interpretation," Old Sturbridge Village Research Department. Additions made by Mary

Fuhrer using copies of original petitions from the National Archives. Mary White's diary includes references to antislavery petitioning through 1842. The petitions were noted in issues of the *Massachusetts Spy* dated Sept. 20, 1837; Jan. 1, 1838; Feb. 14, 1838; and Dec. 26, 1838.

3. Analysis of Boylston Antislavery Petitions Signed by "Citizens" (Both Male and Female Signers) by Gender

	Males [N=66]	Females [N=95]
Percent for whom Decile is known	70	64
Of Known, Mean Decile	4.5	4.1
Percent for whom Church Affiliation Known	50	48
Of Known, Percent Congregational	74	74
Of Known, Percent Unitarian	26	26
Percent for whom Age is known	82	57
Of Known, Mean Age	40.2	38
Of Known, Percent in '20s or '30s	50	61

Source: Study by author based on Antislavery Petitions from the Citizens of Boylston to the United States Congress, NA.

4. Resolutions of the Boylston Congregational Church Regarding Slavery

"Whereas the system of American Slavery has its defenders, supporters, & victims within the pale of the Christian church and consequently must be intimately connected with the temporal, spiritual, and eternal welfare of both master and slave, therefore

1. Resolved that it is the [---] duty of every Church of Christ in our land to give a full & lucid expression of its sentiments in reference to the moral character of the slave system.
2. Resolved that the church which [---] intentionally or negligently maintains silence on this subject does not remember those who are in bonds as bound with them and exposes himself to the just charge of being proslavery
3. Resolved that in the opinion of this church the system of American Slavery is Sin against God & man and that no possible circumstances can justify a man in knowingly holding his fellowman as property.
4. Resolved that all attempts to defend the System from the word of God as attempted to so far [---] the scriptures as from their true meaning & spirit as to make them justify theft, concubinage, & murder.
5. Resolved that all apologies for slavery are apologies for Sin and are therefore, [---] inconsistent with Christian profession.

Voted that the above resolutions be offered for publication in the *Emancipator & Free American* and *New England Puritan*.

Source: Records of the Boylston Congregational Church, Feb. 15, 1843. BHS.

5. Boylston Elections for Governor by Party – Growth of Liberty Party

<u>Year</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Party</u>
<u>1835</u>	Edward Everett	89	Whig
	Marcus Morton	25	DemRep/Dem
<u>1836</u>	Edward Everett	83	Whig
	Marcus Morton	45	DemRep/Dem
<u>1837</u>	Edward Everett	97	Whig
	Marcus Morton	29	DemRep/Dem
<u>1838</u>	Edward Everett	76	Whig
	Marcus Morton	52	DemRep/Dem
	Francis Jackson	16	Antislavery activist
<u>1839</u>	Edward Everett	80	Whig
	Marcus Morton	56	DemRep/Dem
	William Jackson	2	Anti-Masonic, then Liberty
	Ellis G. Loring	1	Antislavery Activist
<u>1840</u>	John Davis	108	Whig (began career as Anti-Jacksonian)
	Marcus Morton	56	DemRep/Democrat
	George W. Johnson	1	Unknown, likely Liberty Party
<u>1841</u>	John Davis	93	Whig (began career as Anti-Jacksonian)
	Marcus Morton	50	DemRep/Democrat
	Lucius Boltwood	6	Liberty Party
<u>1842</u>	John Davis	93	Whig (began career as Anti-Jacksonian)
	Marcus Morton	54 -	DemRep/Dem
	Samuel E. Sewell	18	Liberty Party – later Free Soil Party
<u>1843</u>	George N. Briggs	104	Anti-Jacksonian then Whig
	Marcus Morton	51	Democrat
	Samuel E. Sewall	24	Liberty Party

Source: Boylston Town Clerk's Record Book, Vol. III and IV, 1820-143. BHS.

6. Growth of Liberty Party Support in Boylston Elections for Governor 1835-1843
By Percent

	Whig	Democrat ¹	Liberty	Unknown ²
1835	78	22		
1836	65	35		
1837	77	23		
1838	53	36		11
1839	58	40		2
1840	66	34	1	
1841	62	40	4	
1842	56	33	11	
1843	58	29	13	

Source: Boylston Town Clerk's Record Book. BHS.

¹ Democratic-Republican and Democrat parties

² Unable to identify candidate's party affiliation; in some cases, likely Anti-Masonic vote.

7. Growth of Liberty Party Support in Worcester County Elections for Governor
1840-1845 By Percent

	Whig	Democrat	Liberty
1840	60	39	1
1841	56	40	4
1842	50	44	7
1843	48	43	9
1844	51	40	9
1845	50	38	12

Source: "Returns for Governor, U.S. and state censuses." Compiled by John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), pp. 402-3.

APPENDIX P: POLITICS

1. Boylston Election for Governor By Party By Percent

	Federalist	Nat. Rep.	Whig	Democrat ¹	Liberty	Unknown ²
1820	83			17		
1821	81			19		
1822	84			16		
1823	80			20		
1824	73					
1825	1	97		27		1
1826	87	9				3
1827		43/54 ³				3
1828	3	71		26		
1829		37		63		
1830		63		37		
1831 ⁴		55		45		
1832		55		24		21
1833			66	15		19
1834			87	12		1
1835			78	22		
1836			65	35		
1837			77	23		
1838			53	36		11
1839			58	40		2
1840			66	34	1	
1841			62	40	4	
1842			56	33	11	
1843			58	29	13	

Source: Boylston Town Clerk's Record Bood, Vol. III and IV, 1820-1843. BHS.

¹ Democratic-Republican and Democrat parties

² Unable to identify party affiliated with candidate; in some cases, likely Anti-Masonic vote.

³ Two National Republican candidates, one an ex-Federalist, one an anti-Jacksonian.

⁴ There were two elections in 1831, because the date for holding elections was changed from April to November. These are the results from the first of those elections.

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