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REBECCA ROBBINS

*Colonel John Black of Ellsworth*  
(1781–1856)

Colonel John Black, agent for the estate of William Bingham, was one of early Maine's most ambitious and hard-working businessmen. A meticulous record keeper, his papers provide a detailed picture of his widely-ranging activities. Though largely consisting of business records, the Black Papers, from the family mansion, "Woodlawn", at Ellsworth, contain some personal material as well. These letters, bills, receipts and memos allow one to get a more intimate glimpse at this extraordinary man. As Colonel Black's business dealings have been dealt with at length elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> it is the private aspect of Mr. Black's life which will be focused on here.

First, however, it will be helpful to provide some background information on the so-called "Bingham Lands" in Maine.<sup>2</sup> In 1793, William Bingham, a prominent Philadelphia businessman, purchased two large tracts in Maine, of approximately one million acres each. These became known as the Kennebec Purchase, encompassing a large part of what is now Somerset County, often referred to as the "Million Acres"; and the Penobscot Purchase, located in Washington and Hancock counties. In 1796, Bingham, faced with financial difficulties, succeeded in selling a half-interest in his lands to Alexander Baring, who represented the banking houses of Baring Brothers and Hope and Company of London. Baring is better known as Lord Ashburton, who, with Daniel Webster, negotiated the treaty settling Maine's northeastern boundary. For an excellent history of the Bingham Lands see the two volume work, *William*

*Bingham's Maine Lands, 1790-1820*, edited by Frederick S. Allis, Jr., and published by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup>

In 1795, General David Cobb of Taunton, Massachusetts, a former aide to General Washington, had been sent to Gouldsboro to act as Bingham's agent for promoting the sale and settlement of the Maine lands. The choice of Gouldsboro as Cobb's headquarters was based on its geographical location. Not only did Gouldsboro possess an excellent harbor to accommodate commercial enterprises, it also provided an entrance into the Penobscot Million.<sup>4</sup> Here Cobb hoped to build a city, and in pursuit of his goal, constructed wharves, storehouses, saw mills, and shops.<sup>5</sup> In July 1797, John Richards was sent to Gouldsboro from England to act as agent for the Baring interest. It was to serve as a clerk to Cobb and Richards that young John Black came to Maine.

Surprisingly, there is very little biographical material to be found on John Black. Joseph Porter, writing in the *Bangor Historical Magazine*, described him as follows: "He was short and thick in stature, and of fine personal presence, and was possessed of all those qualities and finer graces of character which go to make up the good citizen, neighbor, and friend."<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the Black Papers do not shed much light on Black's family background. According to his petition for naturalization, dated November 1804, he was born in Whitehaven, England on July 31, 1780.<sup>7</sup> While still a teenager, he entered the influential London banking house of Hope and Company as a clerk. There his talents as an accountant were recognized, probably by Alexander Baring, and he was hired to serve as clerk at Gouldsboro.<sup>8</sup> The earliest reference to Black's residence in this country is in a letter from Baring to John Williams Hope, written from Philadelphia on December 31, 1797. Baring writes:

I have placed young Black in Willing and Francis counting house to keep him employed for the present and they speak very highly of him. He appears a very steady young man and will I dare say be usefull to Richards, with whom he will go. He writes a good hand and may superintend the counting house work with a little instruction . . . . If Black behaves well we may be able to place him very comfortably sometime hence.<sup>9</sup>

In the spring of 1798, Richards and Black arrived in Gouldsboro. Cobb mentions in a letter written to Bingham from Boston on April 16, 1798, that he and Richards would be departing for Maine the last of the month.<sup>10</sup> Presumably, Black accompanied them on this trip. Indeed, the first Gouldsboro ledgers and journals in his hand begin on May 8, 1798.

Once at Gouldsboro, John Black moved in with the family of General Cobb. Four years later, he wed Mary, the sixth of Cobb's eleven children. She had been born in Taunton, Massachusetts, on July 26, 1776.<sup>11</sup> Cobb wrote to Bingham, April 20, 1803, "Mr. Black, the last fall, was married to the only daughter I have left, and they are at house keeper [*sic*] in our little neighborhood at Gouldsboro."<sup>12</sup> Strangely, the Black Papers reveal virtually nothing about this woman, despite her marriage of nearly fifty years to Colonel Black.

The correspondence during Black's first years in Gouldsboro is scanty, thus making it difficult to reconstruct the events of that period. Cobb had opened a store in 1798<sup>13</sup> and it is likely that Black worked there. On April 28, 1803, the Blacks' first child, Mary Ann, was born. During the winter of 1803-1804, General Cobb was away on business and it appears, from the letters exchanged, that Black was left in charge at Gouldsboro. In a letter of February 24, 1804, Black informed the general that Mrs. Cobb was seriously ill and had been, "violently seized with one of those nervous times". Though he wished to hurry back to Maine, Cobb, tied down by business and legisla-

tive affairs in Massachusetts, could not return home immediately. As his wife had suffered such attacks before, he recommended that the usual treatments be administered.<sup>14</sup>

In a letter dated February 10, 1804, Black reported that "Mr. Ross, several days since was not expected to live twenty four hours — and presume now he is no more." Donald Ross, a Scotchman, was Cobb's subagent at Ellsworth. There seems to be confusion among historians as to when Ross died, a question that is significant because Black was appointed to succeed Ross as agent at Ellsworth. A. H. Davis, an Ellsworth historian, states that Ross died in 1814, but the above letter, and another cited by Allis concerning Ross's estate, indicates that he died in 1804 or early 1805.<sup>16</sup> An article in the *Maine Historical Magazine*, "Donald Ross of Union River,"<sup>17</sup> states that he died November 23, 1804 at the age of forty-five. Since Black did not move to Ellsworth until 1809-1810, there is question as to who handled the agency during the intervening period.

While in Gouldsboro, John Black took an active part in local affairs. Beginning in the fall of 1803 he was the scribe of the town records. From April 1805 until October 1809, he served as town clerk and as surveyor of highways and sealer of weights and measures.<sup>18</sup> As clerk he entered into the vital records the birth of his first son, John Black, Jr., on April 12, 1805.

In addition to his many other undertakings, Mr. Black pursued a rather active military career. On July 2, 1805, he was commissioned a captain in the Second Regiment of Infantry, Second Brigade and Tenth Division of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia. Black served for many years as commander of the Ellsworth militia company known locally as the Cobb Light Infantry.<sup>19</sup> A letter from the adjutant general of Massachusetts, certifying Black's



*John Black.*

military service, lists his advancements as follows: promoted major January 15, 1811; promoted lieutenant colonel June 15, 1812; promoted colonel June 20, 1816. He was discharged on February 11, 1817.<sup>20</sup>

Upon William Bingham's death in 1804, the trustees of his estate began to pursue new policies in relation to the Maine lands. In the spring of 1807, a settlement was finally reached with the Massachusetts legislature on the terms for placing settlers on the tracts.<sup>21</sup> The trustees also abandoned Bingham's unsuccessful program of selling land at retail and began selling it in six-mile-square townships.<sup>22</sup> Harrison Gray Otis<sup>23</sup> and John Richards were placed in charge of the Kennebec tract while General Cobb was forced into the background. Cobb's secondary status was made clear in Charles Willing Hare's report to the trustees in February 1807:

General Cobb has been instructed to proceed with the retail system in Gouldsbrough of which however I do not perceive the advantage, but which I have not thought myself authorized to stop, . . .<sup>24</sup>

Allis concludes that the primary reasons for retaining Cobb's services at all were his political influence in Massachusetts and his years of service to the Bingham interest.<sup>25</sup>

While Cobb's role diminished, John Black began taking on more responsibility. A letter from Cobb at Gouldsboro, to C. W. Hare, dated November 10, 1810, discusses the plan made by Richards and Cobb to begin selling land to settlers for payment

. . . in pine logs deliver'd at tide water, which logs are there saw'd or hew'd for the European market and to be convey'd in our own ship . . . The business of loading and all negotiations here will be translated by Mr. Black who is to have a small premium on the proceeds.<sup>26</sup>

In the latter part of 1809 or early 1810, John Black and his family moved to Ellsworth, where he assumed the duties of local agent for the Bingham estate. The exact date of the

move is uncertain. His third and fourth children, Henry and Elizabeth, were born in Gouldsboro on August 17, 1807 and August 28, 1809, respectively. A deed in the Black Papers, dated August 30, 1809, records the sale by George Herbert of a tract of land in Ellsworth. This land, formerly the homestead of Donald Ross, was opposite what is now Laurel Street,<sup>27</sup> — this is where the Black family settled, and the federal census of 1810 lists John Black and his family as residents of Ellsworth.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to his duties for the Bingham interest, Black began to serve as a civil official as well. According to records in the Massachusetts Archives, John Black of Gouldsboro was appointed a justice of the peace on October 17, 1809, and was reappointed on February 2, 1816, when he was a resident of Ellsworth.<sup>29</sup> From 1824-1845 he served as a justice of the peace and quorum. Thus in some capacity, he came into contact with a large number of the early settlers of Maine. It has been calculated that Black's papers contain material relating to over 3200 persons and companies.

Black's merits as a businessman continued to be recognized by Alexander Baring, who reported to Hope and Company:

Mr. Black, who resides and will continue to reside in Maine, has hitherto received 1,000 dollars per annum. His conduct has been in every respect most exemplary, and it is proposed by way of encouragement to allow him in addition  $\frac{1}{4}$  the part of the timber rents which he may collect from the lumberers who cut timber on the tract, and also to interest him to the extent of one half in the shipment of lumber to Liverpool, in which it will be for your interest to employ a small capital of 2,000. Mr. Black has already had authority for this purpose and I am inclined to think that these two modes of compensation so far from proving a burthen are likely to be productive to the concerned as well as to Mr Black, . . .<sup>30</sup>

There was a high degree of mutual regard between the future Lord Ashburton and John Black, which lasted throughout their lifetimes. Black's fourth son was named



Alexander Baring Black. Among the colonel's papers are several letters of Lord Ashburton written during the period of his visit to this country, engaged in the northeastern boundary negotiations. These letters will be discussed in more detail later in this narrative. No doubt John Black was proud to possess the friendship of this distinguished gentleman.

It was precisely the fact of Black's British background which precipitated, in 1813, what was probably the most dramatic incident of his life. Certainly the War of 1812 was a trying period for Mr. Black who must have had difficulty taking a stand against his native land. Although he was a man of strong personal character, it was not unreasonable that some of his neighbors might doubt his loyalty. After all, not only was he British by birth, he was also, as agent for the Bingham estate, representing the Barings of London. This question reached a climax when Black's military company was called upon to march to Mt. Desert, where a British invasion was feared.

Before setting out on this march, however, Lieutenant Colonel Black addressed his men in an effort to settle any doubts concerning his sympathies. In the heart of a stirring speech, he eloquently defended himself with these words:

My friends (I say friends for I know of no foes among you), I have been informed tha[t] some persons pretending to be friends to you (no doubt) and to the country, have endeavored to create in your breasts suspicions of me, as I understand, because I was born in England — the country with which we are now at war. It is true that I was born in England, and I would thank any of these jealous, suspicious people to inform me how I could prevent that had I been so disposed; and I would ask if a man in this country of boasted liberty is to be suspected and convicted without a trial. I came to this country when but a boy. I have lived in this neighborhood for almost fourteen years, and have been known to most of you for that term of time. Notwithstanding the insinuations alluded to, I have the strongest proofs of the regard and confidence of my neighbors and friends. I have been elected to perform

the duties of several important offices; and presume that I have hitherto performed those duties to the satisfaction of the electors, or I should not now have the honor to command the Second Regiment of the Second Brigade of the Tenth Division of the Militia of Massachusetts.

Brother Soldiers: I should not have noticed the base insinuations of such men as would make those I have alluded to, had it not been to satisfy you and them, that I consider my character and reputation as a citizen-soldier invulnerable against such attacks. I am a citizen of the United States of America — have renounced allegiance to the Government under which I was born, and many now present were born under the same; have a wife and children and property here to protect; and I appeal to you, brother soldiers, whether these are not the strongest ties; and be assured while you will stand by me, and I have strength to wield this sabre, I will defend *your* wives, children, and property, and the Constitution of our country, as far as my abilities permit, against the attacks of all enemies whatsoever.<sup>31</sup>

The company then marched on to Mt. Desert, but the threatened invasion never occurred.

The following years witnessed the steady expansion of Black's business activities. In November 1815, his records for the concern known as Black and Sons begin. These run continuously through the year 1850, when John Black retired. In 1816, Black was granted a license as a retailer on Union River.<sup>32</sup> The Peters and Pond Mill on Union River was sold to John Black in 1818.<sup>33</sup> It is said that he borrowed the money for the purchase of the mill from Melatiah Jordan, and that this was the only money he ever borrowed.<sup>34</sup> Not only did Black's business interests grow during this period, but his family grew as well. Three sons were born to John and Mary Black after their move to Ellsworth: George Nixon, January 15, 1814; Alexander Baring, July 20, 1816; and their eighth child, Charles Richards, October 9, 1818.

Colonel Black became the general agent in Maine for the Bingham lands in 1820. For some time, he had been the de facto agent for the Penobscot Tract while

General Cobb devoted his energies to Massachusetts politics. With Black's succession to the agency, the Bingham lands finally became a profitable venture. Cobb's attempts to promote agriculture in the region never met with success. Consequently, Black abandoned that program and focused, instead, on the lumbering potential of the lands. In Allis's words, "Black was fortunate in assuming responsibility for the Maine property just as a new era was opening; but he showed remarkable judgment in all that he did, and the success of his agency was due in large measure to his own abilities."<sup>35</sup> Among the Black Papers relating to the Kennebec Tract is a copy of the following proposal from John Hare Powel, dated August 9, 1820. Black is offered the agency of this tract upon the following terms:

... that you receive therefor, in full compensation for all the services that you shall perform, the annual sum of four hundred and fifty Dollars, payable half yearly, and a further sum of One Hundred Dollars for each annual ride through the incorporated towns of that Million, and throughout the new road to the States land; with an allowance of Four Dollars p. day when you shall be actually travelling for the purposes thereof; and also, a commission of One p. cent on all Notes when paid, for sales to actual Settlers, who shall go upon the land after this date; the amount of any sale whereon Commission shall be charged being not more than Six hundred Dollars. You will charge the proper sum that you shall have disbursed for Stationary, etc.

As requested by Powel, Black acknowledged his acceptance of the agency by recapitulating the terms which Powel had set forth. His agency was to begin with the date of Powel's letter. In a subsequent letter of instruction (August 14), Powel specified the powers and duties associated with the agency:

As you have accepted the agency of Mr. Bingham's lands called the Kennebec Million in the State of Maine I proceed to enumerate the objects to'ards which I wish your attention to be directed. The most important objects for your exertion are, the regular payment of the taxes, the protection of the timber, the examination of the new road

made by Col. Jewett, the settlement of his accounts, the inspection of his vouchers, the adjustment of the claims of the settlers, the investigation of the modes of assessment established in the incorporated towns, the survey of certain parts of townships through which the new road passes, the establishment of families at distances of eight or ten miles asunder upon fit and convenient positions for the accommodation of travelers, as well as the establishment of a family and ferry at the proper and most convenient part of Dead River, for such purpose.

A similar proposal and set of instructions was not found for the Penobscot Tract, but this could be because Black had already been handling those duties.

Despite the constant demands of his business activities, John Black appears to have been a dutiful parent who was deeply loved and respected by his children. With eight of them, it seems nearly impossible that he could have found the necessary time to devote to their problems and needs, but the letters reveal the strong family ties which existed. Unfortunately, there is no such correspondence prior to 1820. The first letter, although undated, probably was written in 1820, and provides a glimpse into a family crisis in the making. It was written by Mary Ann Black, age 17, and contains a touching and sincere plea for her father's permission to marry Charles Jarvis, a man fifteen years her senior. Herewith, a determined girl states her case:

My dear Father,

I cannot let another day pass without addressing you on a subject which employs all my thoughts, and on which my future happiness or misery depends; though too sensible of your feelings and opinion, still I cannot but cherish the hope dear Father, that your objections to my connection with Mr. Jarvis are not *insurmountable*, and that you will not oppose our union — painful and heart-rending as it would be, to be renounced by a dear and beloved parent, still I cannot give him up; for it has been an attachment of years, not days; . . . Should I be connected with Mr. Jarvis, I shall always love you as I have always done; and forever be grateful for the many and very great kindnesses you have bestowed upon me — do not I beg of you think because I love another, I must forsake my Father; No! I should feel in duty bound to respect and love a parent; but you, I should love whether I was bound by duty or not; and ungrateful indeed I must be not to love you . . . .

As to renouncing Mr. Jarvis I cannot think of it, and Oh! I most sincerely beg of you not to ask it; . . . do dear Father think of him as favourably as possible, and by so doing you will greatly add to the happiness of her who dearly loves you.

The considerable difference in the ages of the couple was probably an important basis for Black's opposition to the union. But the fact that the Jarvis and Black families were prominent social and political rivals lends the romance a certain *Romeo and Juliet* quality. During the 1820's, the two families paired off in a dispute concerning the annexation to Ellsworth of that part of Surry lying west of the Union River. Nevertheless, Black gave the couple his blessing, and they were married on December 15, 1820.

As if Colonel Black did not have enough on his mind, his son Henry was proving to be a cause for concern. Apparently Henry was the son his father had chosen to groom as his successor in business. To receive the proper training, Henry entered Bowdoin College in 1823. As for his career while at Bowdoin, these excerpts from the "Records of the Executive Government" speak for themselves:

May 20, 1823. Black fined .80 for absence from public worship.

July 16, 1823. Voted that freshman Black be sent home on account of this indolence and great negligence and other irregularities, and that his father be requested to take him from college.

March 6, 1824. Black fined .25 cents for irregular conduct in college on Friday evening last.

April 21, 1824. Black fined 1 dollar for wanton injury to college property and Black fined 50 cents for being concerned in a bonfire last Thursday night.

May 14, 1824. Black fined .42 for absence from prayers.

July 26, 1824. Black fined 2.00 for absence from recitation; .36 for absence from prayers.

August 10, 1824. Black fined 50 cents for walking unnecessarily the last Sabbath.

August 25, 1824. Black fined .36 for absence from prayers; .60 for

absence from Sunday evening prayers; .20 for absence from public worship; .80 for absence from recitation.

October 29, 1824. Voted that sophomore Black, on account of his irregularity the last night in remaining in town, although expressly required to leave Brunswick yesterday, and in passing the night in a counting room of a store in this town in company with other students, be dismissed from college.<sup>36</sup>

One wishes there were more documentation to further explain the situation. Just what happened to Henry immediately after his dismissal is uncertain. From the references to him in his father's correspondence, it appears that he was in and out of trouble during the following years. Not until the 1830's are there any letters between father and son, and these will be discussed later in this narrative.

The colonel insured that his daughters, as well as his sons, were well-educated. He wrote to John Richards, in Boston, August 13, 1825:

Mr. Wood, a young lawyer here, is now absent [?] going to Taunton to marry Frances Hodges — They will return here soon after their marriage — and as Elizabeth has been absent for two years, and her quarter near at an end, I have written to her, that she may return home in company with her cousin Frances and husband.

According to the *Biographical Encyclopedia*, George Black also received "his preliminary scholastic education at Taunton".<sup>37</sup> However, what school the Black children attended there is not known. It is also interesting to note that the Frances Hodges mentioned in the above letter was the niece of Mary Cobb Black, and later became Colonel Black's second wife.

Meanwhile, Colonel Black was corresponding with another Bowdoin student, Nahum Jordan. Nahum needed money to pay his college expenses and asked Mr. Black for help. He was the son of Nahum and Rachel Joy Jordan.<sup>38</sup> His father had died in 1807, shortly before Nahum's birth. The Jordans were a prominent Ellsworth

family and had engaged in business with Mr. Black.<sup>39</sup> The colonel generously provided the money to Nahum who graduated in the class of 1827, and went on to receive an M.D. degree in 1830.<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note a passage from a letter from Nahum to John Black, written November 16, 1825:

Tutor Abbot and Prof. Packard likewise inform me that they are very well satisfied with my appearance to them in my private and public recitations this term, and the latter also informed me that Henry would make a very great man if he were so disposed, for he had talents and a great deal of activity.

Certainly, Henry's behavior must have been an extreme disappointment and, no doubt, a deep source of embarrassment but the colonel had no time to dwell upon these troubles. His busy schedule required that he spend a great deal of time in travel attending to his business affairs. Being a meticulous record keeper, Black wrote detailed journals of these trips.<sup>41</sup> An interesting example is the account of a journey to Portland, then the state capital, in 1827. The major purpose of the trip was to present a petition to the legislature signed by himself and other residents of the west bank of the Union River, then part of Surry. These people wished to be annexed to Ellsworth as their center of business was located there. Moreover, mail addressed to Surry was received six days later than if directed to Ellsworth, thus causing great inconvenience.<sup>42</sup>

It is hard for us to imagine now what a major undertaking a journey of this kind was. Colonel Black left Ellsworth on Tuesday, January 16, as a snowstorm began. He stayed in Bucksport that night where, by morning, five or six inches of snow had fallen. Thursday morning found him in Unity where it was "Fair, but very cold—at sunrise the thermometer 13 below 0—." After spending that night in Hallowell, he left the next morning "at 8 a.m. in the mail

stage still very cold — arrived at Brunswick about 1 p.m.— . . . Many places were drifted badly, yet I arrived at Portland without incident at 6 p.m.” A four day journey!

On Saturday, Black “went to the Representatives Chamber, and got Mr. Pond to present my petition for annexation to Ellsworth.” While there, he was surprised to learn of a bill to incorporate township no. 3 in the first range east of the Kennebec River as the town of Wellington. Mr. Black opposed this bill and “immediately took measures to have it stop’d in the third reading”. There were also bills proposed to change the name of Northhill to Brighton and to incorporate the town of Trescott. Neither of these measures were objected to by the colonel. In addition, he found that “great exertions are making to procure an appropriat[ion] for making the Canada road over the states land a carriage road — say \$7,000 — If they succeed, much will be expected of the Proprietors — in making their part of the road good.”

On Sunday, the colonel, a very religious man, attended two services. In the morning, a Dr. Payson, apparently familiar to Mr. Black, gave “one of his hightoned Calvinistic sermons.” Next he went to hear Dr. Nichols “who gave us an admirable sermon from John ‘Love one another’.” Monday was again occupied with legislative affairs, but Black found time that evening to hear Mr. Nichols the ventriloquist — “whose astonishing power over his voice, surprised all present.”

Colonel Black’s attempts to defeat the incorporation of Wellington were successful, at least for the time being, for, on Tuesday, that bill was referred to the next legislature. In the afternoon, he appeared before the Committee on Parishes concerning his petition. Afterwards he wrote, “I learn that this committee has reported against every petition for dividing towns and parishes — have there-



fore but little hopes of success —.” True to form, on Wednesday, “The Com[mittee] made report to the Senate against me — and of course the same will go to the House —”. The colonel left Portland on Thursday afternoon, and proceeded to the Kennebec tract where further business matters awaited his attention.

Also during the period 1824-1828, Colonel Black was in the process of building the lovely mansion called Woodlawn, probably better known as the Black Mansion. According to a manuscript describing the estate, found among the colonel’s papers, the land was given by General Cobb to his daughter, Mary. It also states that the bricks for the house were shipped from Philadelphia and the workmen came from Boston. In a letter to E. D. Peters, a Boston merchant, written August 23, 1828, Mr. Black mentions that the roof was going on his house that day and that he was pleased with the Boston masons. The aforementioned manuscript provides the following details about the mansion:

The house built of brick with two wings, with railings on the roof of the main house and wings, has a covered piazza on the front, with five Roman Ionic pillars — The main house is 49 ft. by 41 ft. — Each wing is 24 ft., 6 inches by 22 feet 9 inches —”

The Black Mansion is discussed by Denys Peter Myers in his essay, “The Historic Architecture of Maine”.<sup>43</sup> He gives the dates of Woodlawn’s construction as 1824-1827, rather than 1802, as was formerly thought. Myers also notes that the house is based on a design by Asher Benjamin.

A particularly interesting item relating to Woodlawn is a list of expenses for furniture and other items, dated September 1827. All the bills are from Boston:

Ballard & Prince	Carpets, etc.	\$ 249.69
Joseph S. Hastings	China-Crockery etc.	136.
Henry Rice & Co.	Dimothy etc.	41.54
Pratt & Goddard	Furniture	32.59

Fairbanks & Loring	Knives & Forks	15.50
B. T. Loring	Table linen, etc.	44.87½
Samuel Beal	Furniture	195.99
Commission Warehouse	Furniture	438.86
John B. Jones	Plate etc.	181.00
		<hr/>
		1336.4½

Unfortunately, no list of total expenses for the construction of the house has been found.

Soon after moving into Woodlawn in 1828, two more of the Black children were married. On Christmas day of that year, John, Jr. wed Priscilla Porter Upton; the following March, Elizabeth became Mrs. David Dyer. Meanwhile, the younger sons were being educated for their eventual entry into the business world. The letters extant, exchanged between the colonel and his sons over the next few years, make for most enjoyable reading. John Black, though a very loving and devoted parent, was a believer in strict discipline and hard work. In his letters, he did not hesitate to lecture at length upon these virtues.

Most of the correspondence is between the colonel and his son George, who, upon Henry's failure, was groomed to be his father's successor. After attending school at Taunton, George went to "the celebrated school taught by Mr. Greene at Jamaica Plain".<sup>44</sup> In addition to the moral lectures, these letters contain some interesting bits of family information as well. In particular, a letter to George of December 22, 1829, contains a clue to John Black's family background. He writes, "Mr. Green thinks favorably of your going to Constantinople; you would probably have a better chance of success than any other young American; and you would probably gain great advantage from a residence with your Uncle." There is no further evidence to indicate whether or not George ever went to Turkey. But this reference to an uncle in Constantinople plus a document entitled "Observations on the Turkey Trade", written by a T. N. Black in 1820, lead

to the assumption that T. N. Black is John's brother. It is further speculated that he held some sort of official position in Turkey. Based upon the above information and some vague references in other letters received from relatives in England, the very tentative guess is made that his brother was in the consular service.

In 1830, Alexander was also attending Mr. Greene's school. When the following letter was written by his father, February 8, 1830, George had just gone to Boston to learn French in the home of a certain French gentleman, recommended by Mr. Greene". The colonel, characteristically, has some advice for his son:

Take care that the amusements of the City, do not attract too much of your attention; and that your friends do not induce you to bestow upon them, too much of your time and attention.—The time you may loose now, is invaluable.

In a letter of March 10, 1830, George is told that his grandfather, General Cobb, is not expected to live much longer. But the general had enjoyed a full life, and Mr. Black commented, "He has lived to a great age — and few men have seen more of the world and mankind than he has." Unfortunately, part of this letter has been torn away. Later in this letter, the colonel remarks:

I am glad you carried Alexander to see his Uncle Wild, and Cousin Ann; he is diffident, and rather averse to going into company; therefore, whenever you have opportunity, I wish you would introduce him to your friends, and endeavour to familiarize him to the company of strangers, — After you leave him, much will depend on his habits, as it respect[s] Charles, when he goes up.

This last sentence relates to a letter of February 8, when Mr. Black told George that Charles would be sent to Mr. Greene's school "next season".

Meanwhile, Henry, the wayward son, was in trouble again. The letters written to him by his father are strong, carefully worded appeals to change his ways before it is too late. They have been painstakingly edited to achieve the



*Woodlawn*

desired effect. The following passages from a letter of January 26, 1831, illustrate well the tone and content of Mr. Black's entreaties to his son. He begins:

If you will allow yourself a few minutes time for reflection, I wish you to peruse this letter attentively. It is not in my power to represent your wretched, abandon'd, and profligate mode of life in stronger color to you than I have before done, still, a monitor within me says it is my duty to make another effort to save you. Unhappily, my former admonitions, if listen[ed] to, have had no favorable effect upon you, but otherwise, for it is very evident of late, that you have more pertinaciously pursued your debaucheries — absented yourself from your home, and your friends — spent your time on Taverns and grog shops with the lowest and most despicable about the village — and avoided all respectable or even decent associates. Where is your pride? Where is your self respect? Where is your conscience? Are they drown'd in the cup of intoxication?

Further on:

Endow'd by nature with more than a common share of the powers and faculties of the human mind; with capacity to engage in any business or pursuit in life — and with ample means at your command to ensure success — what more was wanting? — a proper use of the talents given



*Staircase, Woodlawn*

you and advantages throw[n] within your reach by the almighty giver of every good, — to secure to yourself independence — honor, & respect from all who might know you — to become the pride of your parents and family and all their hearts could wish you. But alas! what are the facts? . . . Instead of avoiding temptations, you seek them, and indulge in the lowest haunts of dissipation. — You have become a town talk —

Surely, the fact that his son was a “town talk” caused Colonel Black extreme distress. As a man of high moral standards, he must have been deeply humiliated. Nonetheless, he hopefully urged Henry to reform:

Abandon your haunts and companions of dissipation forever, return to your house, and in the bosom of your family, you will receive that comfort and consolation to your mortified and wounded spirit, that the world beside cannot give — Attend to your business — and be advised by your best friends, and all may yet be well.

By continuing to disobey, Henry stood to lose his place in his father’s business structure. He would thus be giving up a virtually guaranteed route to success and considerable wealth. But, evidently, business was not the career which Henry wanted to pursue.

Perhaps he was seeking adventure, for in February 1832 he ran away to sea. On February 8, Colonel Black wrote to his son, referring to Henry’s decision to go to sea as the greatest disappointment of his life. But grieved though he was, the colonel was too proud to disown his son. He let Henry know that there would be a place for him in his parents’ home when, and if, he chose to return.

There are few details of Henry’s life at sea. His letters to his family indicate that all seemed to be going fairly well. Nevertheless, almost inevitably it seems, Henry was to find himself in dire straights once more. Just what occurred is not known, but the following letter from Henry to E. D. Peters is a desperate plea for help. It was written from the Charlestown Naval Yard, Boston, on August 11, 1834:

Dear Sir,

Sincerely do I regret that I am under the disagreeable necessity of encroaching once more upon your kindness for assistance, and I assure you I should never have applied for it excepting in extreme distress — On my arrival in Boston it was my intention to have returned home but giving way to dissipation, I lost all my clothes, and was ashamed to see any of my friends and in a fit of despair I entered the service, and am now here without a shirt to my back, I have not clothes enough for a change — Do my dear once more assist me, try Sir to get me released, which I think you can do with the aid of Mr. Tilden by getting a substitute in my place, which will be but a trifling expence and I am certain my father would pay all — For heaven sake do call over and see me Sir for I am really in distress and you shall ever have my blessings — Think my dear Sir what my feelings must be confined with a band of wretches stealing what little I have and working worse than in prison — Oh sir if you have any compassion do dear Sir call and see the Captain tomorrow[.] I think he will release me, for the sake of my poor mother and friends do come and see me[.] I am I assure you Sir nearly distracted without clothes for a change or money to purchase them, and expecting daily to receive the lash for not appearing clean[.] Oh for heavens sake and my poor parents do come over on receipt of this and God will reward you for your kindness to the truly distressed — Should my poor father or any one from Ellsworth be in Boston do show them this and they will call — Do not I beseech you Sir refuse my request for god sake come[.] I shipped by the name Henry Morton you will find me in the Potomac — It is certainly a great request but situated as I am you are my nearest friend and although unworthy of assistance am obliged to apply to you.

Henry's prayers were speedily answered, for three days later Colonel Black received this letter from the Boston Navy Yard:

Sir:

It gives me pleasure to inform you that I yesterday brought the subject of the enlistment of your son to the notice of the Hon'ble Secretary of the Navy and obtained permission to have him discharged.

It appears that he has been a little wild and I trust that the short time

which he has been on board ship will operate as a preventive against any thing of the kind hereafter and be instructive in procuring his future advancement.

I am Respectfully  
Your Obedient Servant,  
J. D. Elliot

Again, following this latest incident, Henry fades into obscurity. There is no more material concerning him until after his father's death. Hopefully, the details of Henry's life will one day be brought to light, for he is an enigmatic figure whose story deserves to be told.

While Henry sailed the seas, his brothers were entering business. Colonel Black set up generous arrangements to get his sons established. In November 1832, he made a proposal to William for setting up a dry goods store, laying down the following guidelines and procedures:<sup>45</sup>

It is my intention to procure for you a stock of goods, suitable for our market; such as you shall select in Boston — That you shall occupy the Deane store (so call'd) there to commence, and manage business in your own name. You will purchase, and open, and keep a fair sett of Books, such as you have kept; but must take special care, to open as few accounts with individuals, as possible. — Your business will be principally with the settlers, and others in my employ; . . . it is my intention to allow you \_\_\_\_\_ Dollars p[er] annum for your private expences; and after deducting that sum, — store rent, and other incidental expences, one half of the net profit arising from your negotiations.

Even with the precise dollar figure not included on this copy of the letter, the terms seem very favorable and it is not surprising that William accepted his father's offer.

John Black, a sagacious business man indeed, cautioned his son of the hazards to be encountered:

There will probably be applications to you to make advances for one, and another; but, you will have a very proper answer, by saying, — That you are just about to commence business, and are wholly dependent on your father, for capital to set out with; — and therefore, have no means of accomodating anyone — Besides, you must adopt business principles; — and let others, depend upon such means as *they*



have; — as you have to depend upon yours. — Depend upon it, if you do not *now* adopt that course, you will soon find yourself so beset by friends, if not involved by them, that you will have reason to repeat the Spanish Proverb — '*Deliver me from my friends*'.

The wisdom of experience was speaking.

The management of the dry goods store was assumed by William and George in 1836.<sup>46</sup> They jointly ran the store until May 1839, when George left. William then managed it alone from June 1839 to May 1840. The store's records for the next year are missing; they resume in June 1841 when Alexander took over.<sup>47</sup> He was manager until November 1853, when George assumed control. Although John Jr., Charles, and Henry assisted their father in his businesses at various times, they never assumed the degree of responsibility that the other sons did.

As business connections multiplied, family connections did likewise. Three weddings took place during the 1830's:

Alexander to Susan Otis	December 1833
William to Abigail Eliza Little of Castine	June 4, 1834
George to Mary Peters of Ellsworth	November 16, 1836

Charles and Henry never married.

Having placed his sons in his businesses, Black by no means sat back while they did the work. In word and deed, he continued to set a rigorous example for his sons. The colonel's quarrel with the Ellsworth assessors is a case in point.

Then, as now, it seemed that nothing was as certain as taxes, taxes, and more taxes. But John Black would not sit idly by if he thought he was paying more than his fair share. Throughout much of 1838, he carried on a running argument with the assessors over what he claimed was an over-valuation of his property. On May first, he wrote to

the assessors, enclosing a list of his real and personal estate, along with its value in 1837. Among the major items were:

Saw Mills with land adjoining	\$ 40,000
Lower Wharf and Store thereon	400
Wharf on the East side of the river	400
Homestead	8,000
Lot East end of Bridge—1½ acres	6,000
House and Land—South side Bridge Mill	900
Schooner Fame	2,800
½ Schooner George	400
3 horses	450
4 Oxen and 4 cows	294
Carriage—Chaise and Sleigh	300
Income	2,000

He also listed bank stock of \$16,000, but noted that, “I received no dividend from my Bank Stock last year, and none can be paid this year, in conformity to law.” Including “Debts on interest” and all other items, Colonel Black’s valuation totaled over \$100,000.

The matter remained unresolved in August, causing Black to petition the assessors once more:

Gentlemen:

I have obtained a copy of your valuation of the property that I gave you a list of last Spring, for taxation — and perceive that you have valued my mills at Doll[ars]: 40,000 . . . \$40,000 and the lot of land call’d “corner lot” meaning I presume the acre and half lot opposite the east end of the bridge . . . \$5,000.

The residue of my Real Estate is valued high — but it may be in proportion with other Real Estate in this neighborhood. — tho’ I apprehend not with the general value of Real Estate in town.

The valuation of the mills surprised me, particularly as it is well known that they have been useless for more than twelve months, in consequence of the depressed state of the lumber market. And the still more extravagant valuation of an acre and a halfe of land astonishes me. I cannot account for it.

I do therefore protest against this unreasonable valuation and claim an abatement thereon as follows viz:

For excessive assessment on my mills . . .	\$106.20
on the <i>corner lot</i> so called	15.93

making one hundred twenty two Dollars 13/100. — And I cannot but think that on comparing the valuation of this property, with the valuation of other property in town, you will not hesitate to grant the abatement I claim.

However, it was not until October 3 that Mr. Black received a response. The assessors decided to abate his taxes, but not to the extent requested. The valuation of the saw mill was reduced by \$8,000 and that of the corner lot by \$2,000. With a tax rate of 5 3/10 mills applied to the \$10,000 devaluation, Black's rebate totaled \$53.00.

Unappeased, he immediately replied:

Your decision on the subject is by no means satisfactory, and therefore I would inform you that as an alternative I shall appeal to the County Commissioners, at the next term of their Court, for redress, as the law in such cases provides.

Consequently, on October 8, Black received another letter from the assessors, who "having further considered your claim of the 7th August, have at length determined to make you the abatement you ask, being One hundred and twenty two dollars, and 13/100." Black had won, and this instance serves as an example of the perseverance and adherence to principle which made him the successful businessman he was.

Throughout Black's career, his talents had been recognized and appreciated by Alexander Baring, now Lord Ashburton. In a letter of April 9, 1842, Black thanked Ashburton for a recent decision allowing him to retain three percent of the remittances from land sales. As sales for the previous year, a land boom period in Maine, had amounted to over \$400,000, this meant that Black would receive more than \$12,000.

The correspondence between Black and Lord Ashburton is particularly significant in terms of

Ashburton's role in Maine history. His Lordship wrote to Black, in January of 1842, informing him that he would soon be coming to the United States to settle the controversial Maine-New Brunswick boundary question. While here, he wanted to meet Black in New York City.

I should very much my Dear Sir like to shake you by the hand during my stay which I hope will be short. There are a few points of business upon which I may wish to talk with you, but my principal wish is to see you personally and thank you for the care of our affairs.

For some reason, the two men ultimately met in Washington. On his return to Ellsworth, the colonel wrote to Ashburton (June 6, 1842) making a proposal which he had not presented at their meeting. It seems that Black had invested his three percent bonus in bank stocks and securities. Unfortunately, however, due to the business depression of this period, these investments proved worthless. In fact, he had lost over \$25,000 intended for his family's future use. Thus, he wrote, "I have taken into consideration, the kind suggestion you made to me at Washington, respecting some land for the future benefit of my family." He then asked if he might select a half township on the Union River for this purpose.

Ashburton replied from Washington on August 15, assuring Colonel Black that he would immediately attend to his request. As for his own diplomatic efforts, Ashburton remarked:

I am happy to say that my work here is done and is now before the Senate, by whom I am assured it will be ratified, in which case I flatter myself that I shall have terminated my life with a good work of consolidation and Peace.

Black promptly acknowledged Ashburton's acceptance of his request, and sent him a sketch of the land he wanted; Township No. 40 on the Union River.<sup>48</sup>

Due to some misunderstanding, two years passed with no action taken on the request. Finally, in November 1844, Ashburton replied to a letter received from Black the

previous month. Enclosing an open letter to Joseph Ingersoll, one of the Bingham trustees, urging him to oblige Black, Ashburton told the colonel:

Although I am, from bad habits, an indifferent correspondent, I trust you will believe my Dear Sir that I have never been insensible of your great merits in the management of our property, which has become a most valuable property, through your care perseverance and integrity. I have never failed to impress on all concerned my sense of our great obligations to you, and it is this sense which makes me the more anxious that your very reasonable application should meet with no disappointment.

Ashburton concluded with a request to be kept informed of developments in Maine, a state to which he had devoted considerable time and money:

It will be a great gratification to me to hear from you occasionally, as not only my private affairs interest me but having succeeded to I believe pretty general satisfaction, in restoring [peace? — the letter is damaged here] and order to the boundaries of your state of Maine I claim a right to interest myself in its welfare.

This letter is apparently the last which colonel received from Lord Ashburton. His Lordship died in 1848, and Black must have felt deeply the loss of a good friend and supporter.

Colonel Black's overseas business connections proved very important in 1849-1850 when the potato famine raged in Ireland. An examination of the Ellsworth census of 1850 reveals many residents of Irish birth. The Black household lists three Irish laborers among its members: Jarvis Cony, Jarvis O'Neil, and Margaret Murphy.<sup>49</sup> Through Colonel Black's ability to draw bills of exchange on London banks, these individuals could send money to their suffering relatives in Ireland. A group of papers, called the Ireland Letters, are found among Mr. Black's correspondence. Many of them are directed to parish priests who were to forward money to the designated recipients. As the most influential man in the area, Colonel

Black was looked to in times of trouble, and he was a man who would help those in need.

Again referring to the 1850 census, one finds a considerable amount of information on John Black and his holdings. The colonel declared that he owned \$24,000 worth of property.<sup>50</sup> Under the Schedule for Products of Industry in Ellsworth, the following data on Black's lumbering business is provided:<sup>51</sup>

Capital invested in real and personal estate in the business .....			\$10,000
	quantity	kind	values
Annual product .....	5,000,000	pine boards	\$50,000
	1,500,000	laths	\$ 1,500

At the end of 1850, John Black retired, although by no means did he become idle. For reasons of health the colonel began the transfer of his personal enterprises and the Bingham agency to his son, George. The *Biographical Encyclopedia*<sup>52</sup> states that "for several years before his death he was afflicted with partial and finally total blindness . . ." No doubt this condition was primarily the result of the enormous amount of paperwork involved in his work.

From the correspondence of this period, it is possible to gather some details on Mr. Black's condition. In November 1849, John Black was in Boston undergoing treatment. David Dyer, writing to his brother-in-law, George, concerning Black and Company business matters, included this note on the colonel's health:

Your father's eye is much inflamed, and is now totally blind — Whether he will be able to see, after his eye gets restored to health, is a question that no human mind can solve. The case now, seems to be nearly a hopeless one.

But even partial blindness did not dampen the colonel's spirit. Although his son, George, was nearly thirty-six years old, he still received lectures from his father like this one:<sup>53</sup>

Dear George,

I received yours dated January 5 today, but I was under the necessity of calling in several members of the family to decypher the contents of your letter.

Writing that requires so much study to understand it, is really no credit to you, and until you can take more time and pains to write intelligibly, I would recommend you do as I am from necessity obliged to do, employ an amanuensis.

Concerning himself, the colonel later says:

The inflammation on my eye continues to subside, but slowly; I do not suffer any pain and my general health is pretty good. I hope soon to be permitted to take air, and food sufficient to give me strength enough to return home as soon as possible.

Besides these personal messages, the colonel's letters from the hospital were full of business advice to his son. His daughter, Elizabeth, who lived in Boston, served as her father's secretary. The letter quoted above contains an amusing postscript from Elizabeth to her brother:

P.S. I wish Mary would write me how she was pleased with her Bonnet, and all the news of the day. I should have written her when I sent it — but I have not had a moments leisure since you were here. —

What a trimming you have got about your writing. *Charles had had the same to comfort you.*

Though perhaps his pace had slowed a bit, John Black still actively engaged in business ventures. With the Gold Rush in its heyday, "Colonel Black took his flyer in the California trade." Richard G. Wood, author of *A History of Lumbering in Maine*, has provided some details of Black's undertaking:<sup>54</sup>

He sent out the *Swiss Boy* under the command of Captain Dexter. The *Swiss Boy* carried long lumber, clapboards, shingles, blinds, doors, windows, and miscellaneous building materials, together with apples and cider, with a total value of \$8787.09. At first the Colonel was well pleased. Once the *Swiss Boy* had arrived, however, her captain did not find marketing prospects rosy. Black became a little discouraged, but the news of a big fire in California cheered him up. Meanwhile his captain made some small sales, but was holding his lumber for higher

prices in San Francisco. Up to October, 1851, only \$10,000 worth had been sold and by January, 1853, \$17,000 worth. Black by that time expected to lose \$5,000 on his venture. What hurt the Colonel most was California's grand manner in the matter of prices: \$1200 commission and \$800 for land upon which to unload the lumber. Finally, he gave up in disgust and roundly declared 'from further intercourse with California by Sea, or by Land, I say good Lord preserve us.'

A truly tragic loss occurred when Mary Cobb Black passed away on October 17, 1851. Though little documentation of her life exists, she must have been a remarkable woman to have raised eight children with her husband away most of the time. Four years older than John, Mary Black was seventy-five years of age at her death.

Just over a year later, Colonel Black, now seventy-two years old, married again. His second wife was Mrs. Frances Hodges Wood, widow of Joseph A. Wood, a former business associate upon whose death Black had been appointed executor of the estate. Furthermore, Frances Wood was the daughter of Mary Cobb's sister, Eleanor,<sup>55</sup> and thus a niece of Black's first wife. Mrs. Wood was twenty-five years younger than the colonel.<sup>56</sup> Their wedding took place on November 21, 1852.<sup>57</sup>

In 1853, George N. Black assumed overall control of the family enterprises. Perhaps in these final years of life, with the burden of business lifted from his shoulders, the colonel at last found time to fully enjoy his family and the beautiful home he had built for them. Between his six married children, there were thirty grandchildren to dote on. In addition to his family on this side of the Atlantic, Mr. Black remained in contact with relatives in England as well. There is a letter to "Uncle John" from 23 Prospect Place, Wadsworth Road, in Surrey, England, dated April 25, 1855. The closing is missing so the writer remains unidentified. However, because of the reference to "Aunt Harriet", one of John's sisters, it could perhaps be from a child of his other sister, Eliza. It seems unfortunate that



Black never recrossed the ocean for even a brief visit to his family. But apparently he was so devoted to his work that he never felt able to take the time. Although he probably had the time and money for such a trip after his retirement, his deteriorating health must have precluded such a long journey.

There can be no question that John Black lived a full and useful life. He could justly be proud of his accomplishments, for due to his efforts on behalf of the Bingham trustees, the Maine wilderness was opened to settlement. Colonel Black was certainly one of the state's leading citizens during its early years, and his qualities of wisdom, foresight and perseverance were well known. He could have held a political office if he had so desired, but he was too involved in his work for anything else. Besides his duties as Bingham's agent, he succeeded in building a successful lumber and mercantile business of his own. Black can indeed be credited with helping to launch Maine's lumbering industry, for he quickly saw that timber was the state's prime resource. Finally, and not the least of his accomplishments, was the beautiful mansion, Woodlawn, which stands today as a testament to the achievements of this remarkable man.

According to a journal kept by Joseph Deane of Ellsworth, John Black died on Saturday, October 25, 1856, at 9:00 a.m. The October 31 issue of the *Ellsworth American* noted that, "Colonel Black, an old and highly esteemed citizen of this town, died on Saturday last." In the November 7 edition it was reported that the colonel left "probably the largest estate ever left by any person in the state east of Portland."<sup>58</sup> Mr. Black's will, dated December 19, 1855, appointed Elijah L. Hamlin of Bangor, Thomas Robinson of Ellsworth, and George N. Black as trustees.

To his wife, Frances H. Black, was left the sum of fifty thousand dollars with interest annually . . . "as well as that part of the homestead situated and being on the west side

of the County Road leading from Union River Bridge to Surry, together with out buildings, furniture, linen and plate with my horse and carriage and one cow, and also my pew No. 37 in the Congregational Meeting house . . .” In the event of her death or remarriage, these were to go to George N. Black and his heirs. His son, John, Jr., received the lot of land on the east side of the county road. To his sisters, Mrs. Eliza Mimpriss and Mrs. Harriet Stewart Kerr, both of London, five hundred pounds sterling each.

An especially interesting provision is that made for his son, Henry. One eighth of the remainder of the estate was to be retained for Henry’s use and benefit. Furthermore, it was the colonel’s wish that Henry “should remain in my house and occupy the same room which has always been appropriated for his use and that he should have all the privileges he now possesses during his natural life or while he continues in the same contented and peaceable state of mind in which he now is.” The seven remaining shares were to be equally divided among the seven other children.<sup>59</sup>

Two codicils were added to the will. The first, dated March 18, 1856, bequeathed the following: \$5,000 to the Perkins Institution for the Blind in South Boston, \$3,000 to the American Bible Society of Boston, and \$2,000 to Miss Eleanor Hodges of Taunton, Mass. On May 28, 1856, the colonel revoked his bequest to the Bible Society and instead directed that said sum go to the Maine Insane Hospital for the formation of a library. Today, at the Augusta Mental Health Institute, the library is known as the Colonel Black Library, and Mr. Black’s picture hangs on the wall there.

Having set aside a portion of his estate for a graveyard, the colonel’s remains were placed in the family tomb. There, amidst a picturesque grove of horse chestnut trees, John Black could rest in peace. Although he earned a prominent place in the annals of Maine’s early history, he

has not received the recognition he deserves.

Obviously, the colonel's death brought many changes. The Bingham agency was assumed by his son, George, who, as noted earlier, had been gradually accepting more and more of his father's responsibilities. Thereupon, George and his family moved into the Woodlawn Mansion from their home on Main Street.<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Frances Black continued to live there as well. George's business records, correspondence, and other pertinent material are included in the collection of Black Papers.

The following January (1857), George received a letter from J. R. Ingersoll of Philadelphia, one of the Bingham trustees. Ingersoll informed Black that:

A letter from Lord Ashburton has reached me in reply to mine which made known to him the death of your father so long the agent of the estate in which Lord A. has held a deep interest. He expresses the deepest regret at receiving the intelligence, and adds that it was never indeed his good fortune to become personally acquainted with your father but that he has heard him so often spoken of by those whom he loved and respected that he had come to look upon him, as he looked upon the late Mr. John Richards the type of what was good and honorable.

Considerably later, George received letters of condolence from his aunts, Eliza Mimpriss and Harriet Stewart Kerr. Both were sent in April 1858 from Prospect Place, Wadsworth Road, Surrey, England.

George Black certainly had quite a name to live up to, but he was indeed his father's son and handled himself creditably in all respects. The *Biographical Encyclopedia* says of him:

In business life he strikingly exhibited the qualities which constitute the ordinary factors of success. Upright, cautious, prudent, self-reliant, and of tireless energy, he exhibited a strong and persistent will. When once he had entered upon any course of procedure, he permitted no surmountable obstacle to turn him aside, but resolutely pressed forward to the successful accomplishment of his purpose. Failing in any undertaking was of very infrequent occurrence.<sup>61</sup>

During the 1860's George and his family moved to Boston, returning to Ellsworth only occasionally. At the end of 1865, George terminated his agency of the Bingham lands. With the liquidation of the family businesses in the 1870's an era dominated by the name of Black came to an end.

As for the other family members, it is of interest to note their whereabouts following the colonel's death, but there is such a dearth of information concerning them, little can be said. Fortunately, Davis's history of Ellsworth provides some details. Of the eight children, three lived out their lives in Ellsworth: John, William and Alexander. Of William, Davis writes:

For many years, Mr. Black was a well known merchant, and took a prominent part in civic affairs. His extreme generosity promoted him to give many public gifts.<sup>62</sup>

Davis comments on Alexander as follows:

He was for many years a member of the firm of Black Brothers, who conducted a general store on State Street. Mr. Black was of a studious nature and after segregating his association in the firm spent a long retirement in study.<sup>63</sup>

John Black, Jr., according to the 1860 census, was a farmer.<sup>64</sup> Charles moved to the Boston area in later life<sup>65</sup> as George had done. Elizabeth Black Dyer, it will be remembered, also resided there. As for Mary Ann and Charles Jarvis, Davis notes that they are buried in Philadelphia.<sup>66</sup>

The fate of Henry Black is the tragic episode in the Black family's story. There seem to be no details of what went wrong, but the provisions made for Henry in his father's will did not prove satisfactory. On November 2, 1857, he was committed to the Maine Insane Hospital, where he spent the rest of his life. Upon his death on February 16, 1884, Henry was laid to rest in the hospital's cemetery in Augusta.

The colonel's widow continued to reside at Woodlawn for the remainder of her life. Unlike the first Mrs. Black, there are many bills and receipts for Frances Black's household and personal expenditures. Undoubtedly the most interesting item among her records is a diary kept intermittently during the 1860's. It contains recipes, favorite poems, and medical advice in addition to notes on day to day events. Mrs. Black died on February 14, 1874, whereupon, as provided for in Colonel Black's will, George then inherited sole possession of the Woodlawn estate.

When George died on October 2, 1880, he left the estate to his son, also named George Nixon. Although his residence was in Boston, the colonel's grandson spent his summers in Ellsworth. A bachelor, he was the last member of the Black family to live in the mansion. When Mr. Black died in 1928, the property was given to the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations.

It is fortunate that the house has been retained exactly as the last Mr. Black left it. In fact, it is not much different now than when John Black himself lived there. The priceless family possessions (including a miniature of George Washington by Peale, given to General Cobb by General Washington) date from as early as 1650, and most predate 1850.<sup>67</sup> The Black Mansion is well worth a visit, for the picture of John Black, the man, is not quite complete without it.

— NOTES —

<sup>1</sup> Richard G. Wood, *A History of Lumbering in Maine, 1820-1861*, University of Maine Studies, 2nd Series, No. 33 (1935; rpt. Orono, Maine: University Press, 1961). pp. 61-62, *et passim*. Wood used the Black Papers as source material, citing them as the *Woodlawn Manuscripts*.

<sup>2</sup> For a very readable account of Bingham's life see: Robert C. Alberts, *The Life and Times of William Bingham, 1752-1804* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Frederick C. Allis, Jr., ed., *William Bingham's Maine Lands, 1790-1820*, 2 vols. (Boston: Publication of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1954).

<sup>4</sup> Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 1, p. 524.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph W. Porter, "General David Cobb of Gouldsboro, Maine," 2 *Coll. Me. Hist. Soc.* 6 (1895): 3.

<sup>6</sup> "Colonel John Black and Family of Ellsworth, Maine," *Bangor Historical Magazine* 4 (July 1888-June 1889): 63. All birth, marriage and death dates for Colonel Black and his family are taken from this article, unless otherwise stated. It is the only bibliographical article on Mr. Black and his family to be found.

<sup>7</sup> Court of Common Pleas: Hancock County, 5 (November Term 1804): pp. 466-467.

<sup>8</sup> "The Black Mansion: An Historical Introduction," author unknown, pp. 30-31. This typewritten article was found among the Black Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 906 and n. 1. Willing and Francis were the Philadelphia correspondents for the House of Baring.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 937.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph W. Porter, "Memoir of General David Cobb and Family of Gouldsborough, Maine and Taunton, Mass.," *Bangor Historical Magazine* 4 (July 1888-June 1889): 6.

<sup>12</sup> Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 1159.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 912.

<sup>14</sup> Cobb was president of the Massachusetts Senate from 1801 to 1805 (Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 1176).

<sup>15</sup> Albert H. Davis, *History of Ellsworth Maine* (Lewiston, Me.: Lewiston Journal Printshop, 1927), pp. 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 1227, n. 4.

<sup>17</sup> "Donald Ross of Union River," *Maine Historical Magazine* (formerly *Bangor Historical Magazine*) 8 (Jan.-Dec. 1893): 223.

<sup>18</sup> This information was obtained from the microfilm of the Gouldsboro Town and Vital Records (D.M. 88-89) filmed by the Genealogical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah in September, 1955. This film is available for research at the Maine State Archives, Augusta.

<sup>19</sup> Among the Black Papers is an orderly book of the Cobb Light Infantry, 1810-1823.

<sup>20</sup> This letter is dated Boston, March 12, 1869. It is signed by James A Cunningham, Adjutant General.

<sup>21</sup> Allis discussed the controversy and its solution in *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, ch. 16, pp. 1175-1222. See also, William Allen, "Bingham Land," 1 *Coll. Me. Hist. Soc.*, 7 (1876): 351-360. In the back of vol. 7, John Black is listed as having been elected, in 1830, an Associate Resident Member of the Maine Historical Society.

<sup>22</sup> See: Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, pp. 1222 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Otis was a leading Federalist in the Massachusetts Senate and had been involved in the Bingham speculation for over ten years. Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 1212.

<sup>24</sup> C. W. Hare, a cousin of Bingham by marriage, was appointed a trustee in Bingham's will. He acted as agent for the trustees. Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, pp. 1215-1218.

<sup>25</sup> Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 1125.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1235-1237. The passage quoted is from p. 1237.

<sup>27</sup> See the passage from Joseph Deane's manuscript describing Ellsworth in 1820 which is quoted in Davis, *History of Ellsworth*, p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> Population Schedules of the Third Census of the United States: 1810, roll 11 (Maine), (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy No. 252, 1960), p. 439. The page number 439 is that printed on the page. There is also a numbering system written on the pages in crayon, this page being number 505 according to that series.

<sup>29</sup> I received this information from Leo Flaherty, Curator of the Massachusetts Archives, in a letter of February 14, 1975.

<sup>30</sup> Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 1239.

<sup>31</sup> *Biographical Encyclopedia of Maine of the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Metropolitan Publishing and Engraving Company, 1885), pp. 214-215.

<sup>32</sup> Herbert T. Silsby, II, "Ellsworth: A Brief History," *Historical Record and Program: Bicentennial Celebration July 20-27, 1963* (Bangor, Me.: Furbush-Roberts Printing Co., Inc.). There are no page numbers, but by count, the information is from page 6 of the article.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, *History of Ellsworth*, p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> John A. Peters, "Memoir of Col. Melatiah Jordan, of Ellsworth, Maine," *Bangor Historical Magazine* 4 (July 1888-June 1889): 70.

<sup>35</sup> Allis, *Bingham's Maine Lands*, vol. 2, p. 1254.

<sup>36</sup> My thanks to Mrs. Mary H. Hughes of the Special Collections Division of the Bowdoin College Library for providing me with this information.

<sup>37</sup> *Biographical Encyclopedia*, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> William MacBeth Pierce, *Old Hancock Country Families*, 1st series (Ellsworth, Me.: Hancock County Publishing Co., 1933), pp. 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> This information was furnished to me by Mr. Herbert T. Silsby II, a trustee of the Black estate. I wish to thank him for all the assistance he gave me in preparing this paper.

<sup>40</sup> *General Catalogue of Bowdoin College and the Medical School of Maine: A Biographical Record of Alumni and Officers* (Portland, Maine: Anthoensen Press, 1950), p. 59.

<sup>41</sup> The Black Papers contain approximately 150 of these journals. Most of them are written by Colonel Black; some are by James Grant, an employee of Mr. Black, and several are of unknown authorship.

<sup>42</sup> A copy of this petition is not among the Black Papers, but there are copies of similar petitions addressed to the legislatures of 1828 and 1829. Part of Surry was finally set off to Ellsworth on February 17, 1829. Stanley B. Attwood, *The Length and Breadth of Maine* (Augusta, Me.: Kennebec Journal Print Shop, 1946; reprint ed., Orono, Me.: University of Maine, Maine Studies no. 96, 1973), p. 251.

<sup>43</sup> This essay is the introduction to the *Maine Catalog* (Lewiston, Me.: Pen-Mor Printers, Inc. for the Maine State Museum, 1974). The Black Mansion is discussed on pp. 33-34.

<sup>44</sup> *Biographical Encyclopedia*, p. 216.

<sup>45</sup> There are two letters to William; one dated November 13, the other November 17. The first quotation is from the letter of the 13th; the second from that of the 17th.



<sup>46</sup> The information in this paragraph is taken from the inventory to the Black Papers, pp. 28-30. The inventory, prepared by Patty K. Lincoln, projects director at the Maine State Archives, provides an excellent outline and summary of the various record groups contained in the Black Papers.

<sup>47</sup> In the Special Collections Division of the Fogler Library, University of Maine at Orono, are some of Alexander Black's business records. There are seven ledgers as well as a sizeable amount of unbound papers. One of the ledgers marked, "Alexander B. Black and Company: June 1840 — December 1840", could be that missing from the store's records, as mentioned above.

<sup>48</sup> There is no copy of the sketch accompanying the copy of the letter, dated August 22, 1842.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Census of 1850: Census of Maine, vol. 10, "Schedule I. Free Inhabitants in Ellsworth . . .," p. 94.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, "Schedule 5. Products of Industry in Ellsworth . . .," p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> *Biographical Encyclopedia*, p. 213.

<sup>53</sup> This letter was written from Boston, January 11, 1850.

<sup>54</sup> Wood, *Lumbering in Maine*, pp. 221-222.

<sup>55</sup> Porter, "Memoir of General Cobb," p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> The article cited above does not give Frances' birthdate. The 1860 census of Hancock County, vol. 55, "Schedule I. Free Inhabitants in Ellsworth . . .," p. 6, gives her age as 55, thus making her birthdate sometime in 1804 or 1805.

<sup>57</sup> Porter, "Col. John Black and Family," p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> The information from Deane's journal and the *Ellsworth American* were furnished to me by Mr. Herbert T. Silsby, II.

<sup>59</sup> Other bequests to individuals included; \$5,000 to Margaret P. Nelson of Orland; \$2,000 to Mary T. Child of Taunton, Mass.; \$1,000 to each of the trustees.

<sup>60</sup> "The Black Mansion: Ellsworth, Maine," (Ellsworth?: c. 1938), p. 20. This is a pamphlet with a preface by Richard W. Hale, Chairman of the Committee in Charge of the Black House. It is written as if Mrs. Axel Eliason, the caretaker for the last Mr. Black, is giving a tour of the mansion. The details about the contents of the house and anecdotes concerning the family make interesting reading.

<sup>61</sup> *Biographical Encyclopedia*, p. 216.

<sup>62</sup> Davis, *History of Ellsworth*, p. 159.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>64</sup> U.S. Census of 1860: Census of Maine, vol. 55, "Schedule I. Free Inhabitants in Ellsworth . . .," p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Davis, *History of Ellsworth*, p. 35.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 27.

<sup>67</sup> "The Black Mansion," pamphlet (see n. 60), p. 3.

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