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**How 'poor country boys' became Boston Brahmins:
The Rise of the Appletons and the Lawrences in Ante-bellum
Massachusetts¹**

By

Anthony Mann

The promise of social mobility was a central cultural tenet of the northern American states during the nineteenth century. The stories of those who raised themselves from obscure and humble origins to positions of wealth and status, whilst retaining a sufficiency of Protestant social responsibility, were widely distributed and well received amongst a people daily experiencing the personal instabilities of the market revolution.² Two families which represented the ideal of social mobility

¹ A version of this essay was first read at the conference of the British Association for American Studies, Birmingham, and April 1997. My thanks to Colin Bonwick, Louis Billington, Martin Crawford and Phillip Taylor who have advised since then. This work was in part made possible by the award of a Mary Catherine Mooney Fellowship of the Boston Athenaeum taken in August, 1996. Support was also given by the David Bruce Centre for American Studies, Keele University, United Kingdom. My thanks to all involved, and particularly to Mr. Stephen Nonack, Research Librarian of the Athenaeum.

² For discussion of the nineteenth century literature of social mobility, see Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), chap. 3; Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New York: Free Press, 1966).

at its most extreme were the Appletons and Lawrences of ante-bellum Boston, Massachusetts.³ By the mid-nineteenth century, both families were solidly entrenched within the exclusive ranks of the Boston Brahmin upper-class. A lifetime earlier the same families, indeed the same men, had existed in provincial obscurity. The aim of this essay is to reinvestigate the social mobility of the Appletons and Lawrences, outline contemporary explanations for their success, often moral in tone, and put forward more persuasive alternative reasons for their climb from provincial obscurity. In so doing, it explores the relationship between social respectability and economic opportunity, examining social and cultural developments within the small New England towns of the late eighteenth century out of which the two families emerged.

The ante-bellum reputations of the Appletons and Lawrences were based on three related factors: they were successful merchants; they were self-made; and they were philanthropists giving time and money to enhance the well-being of their community. The combination of these themes persuaded the Reverend Theodore Parker to entitle his sermon on the death of Amos Lawrence “The Good Merchant.” In praising the deceased, Parker stressed a number of aspects of Amos’s life: his ready donations to charity; his seeking out former customers who had fallen on hard times; his sympathy for escaped slaves; and his ecumenical support for institutionalized education and religion. However, of greatest importance to Parker was that Amos was a self-made man, someone who had come to Boston “with nothing -- nothing but himself,” but remained proud of his origins and benevolent in his success. To Theodore Parker, here was a model: “a man who knew the odds between the Means of

³ For an introduction to the two families see *Dictionary of American Biography* ed. Allen Johnson et al (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928-36). Samuel Appleton (1766-1853) was first established as a shopkeeper in Boston in 1799; there he was joined by his brothers Nathan (1779-1861), Eben (1784-1823) and their first cousin William Appleton (1786-1862). The Lawrence presence in Boston was begun by Amos Lawrence (1786-1852) in 1807. He was joined in that town by his brothers William (1783-1848), Abbott (1786-1852) and Samuel (b.1801).

Living and the Ends of Life. He knew the true use of riches.”⁴ Amos Lawrence’s death provoked strong reaction through Boston society. His own minister, the Reverend Samuel Lothrop at Brattle Street Church, called upon his congregation to examine this life “absolutely without spot or blemish” and to apply its characteristics of rectitude and honor to their own lives.⁵ The respectful dry goods merchants of Milk and Pearl streets closed their offices for Amos’s funeral. The *Boston Evening Transcript* reported the “very remarkable” news that a post-mortem had shown that the brain of the deceased weighed fully two ounces more than that of the late Daniel Webster, a man whose own cranial capacity had been the largest previously known.⁶

The death of Amos Lawrence’s younger brother Abbott in 1855 was treated with similar respect. Newspapers reported his rise from lowly origins, his economic and political successes, and that his name “was the synonym of honor, uprightness, and all the kindred virtues.” A public meeting was called at Faneuil Hall to decide how best to mark the death of someone who, in the words of Robert Charles Winthrop, had arrived in Boston, a poor boy with his bundle under his arm, and had “become the most important man in the community.” Shortly after Abbott’s elaborate funeral, newspapers announced that photographs of the deceased were available from Messrs. Southworth and Hawes of Tremont Street.⁷

Like the Lawrence brothers, the Appleton family enjoyed a reputation which went beyond economic and political success. An obituary of Samuel Appleton noted how he had “combined in a rare

⁴ ‘The Good Merchant,’ an extract from Rev. Theodore Parker’s Sunday sermon on “The Means of Living and the Ends of Life” *Boston Evening Transcript* (hereafter cited as *B.E.T.*), January 8 1853, 1.

⁵ “The Late Amos Lawrence” *B. E. T.*, January 10, 1853, 2.

⁶ “Funeral of Amos Lawrence, Esq.” *B.E.T.*, January 4, 1853, 1; On the size of Daniel Webster’s brain, see Bertha M. Rothe ed., *Daniel Webster Reader* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1956), 48.

⁷ “Died, August 18, 1855 -- Abbott Lawrence, Aged 69 years 8 months” *B.E.T* August 18, 1855, 2; “Meeting at Faneuil Hall on Death of Abbott Lawrence.” *B.E.T.*, August 20, 1855, 2; “Funeral Obsequies of Abbott Lawrence” *B.E.T.* August 22, 1855, 2; *B.E.T.*, August 23, 1855, 2.

degree the best elements of the New England character.” A self-made man, Appleton, like Amos Lawrence, never forgot his “youthful struggles and sacrifices,” yet made yearly charitable donations which “exceeded twenty-five thousand dollars.” As with Abbott Lawrence, Boston came to a halt in marking the funeral of Samuel Appleton. He had lived, said one newspaper, “a most useful and honourable life” -- perhaps the highest esteem the New England yankee could bestow.⁸ The Reverend Ephraim Peabody singled out Samuel as “a model of what a merchant should be.”⁹ Samuel’s younger brother, Nathan, on his death was also recommended as “a man whom the young merchants of Boston might well take as their model, and strive to copy.” Moreover, returning to the theme established by Theodore Parker, the Reverend Ezra Stiles Gannett, in a sermon entitled “Religion conducive to Prosperity in this Life” and preached the Sunday after the funeral of Nathan Appleton, made the following remarks:

A Christian merchant, whose faith is at once his safeguard and his impulse, whose conscience is shown in what he says, and whose heart shines through his deeds, falls behind no example that may claim the praise, or provoke the imitation, of men. When such an one passes on to the eternal world, let those who have beheld his excellence profit by its instruction, and repeat history.¹⁰

Nathan would have approved of these sentiments. In his own obituary of his close friend Abbott Lawrence, he explored the high moral character demanded of the merchant, noting that integrity was the basis of success.

⁸ “Death of Samuel Appleton” *B.E.T.*, July 13, 1853, 2; “The Late Samuel Appleton” *B.E.T.*, July 14, 1853, 2.

⁹ Ephraim Peabody “Samuel Appleton” in *Lives of American Merchants*, ed. Freeman Hunt (1856: rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 2 vols, Vol. 1, 429.

¹⁰ Robert C Winthrop “Memoir of Hon. Nathan Appleton” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 5 (1861), 251; see also similar eulogies to William Appleton noted in Cleveland Amory, *The Proper Bostonians* (New York: E P Dutton, 1947), 78.

“Mercantile honor,” Nathan maintained, “is as delicate and fragile as that of a woman. It will not bear the slightest stain.”¹¹

The Appletons and the Lawrences were held up as archetypes of success in the nineteenth century. Real life versions of Horatio Alger heroes, they began their lives in small rural communities, the Lawrences in Groton, Middlesex County, Massachusetts and the Appletons across the border in New Ipswich, New Hampshire. From such obscure origins, contemporaries described the way they came to Boston, like Amos Lawrence “with nothing but himself”; or as Abbott “a poor, unknown and friendless boy” with three dollars in his pocket, beginning in business like a third brother, William “with no capital but his own energies and talents.”¹² The Appletons were pictured in similar fashion. A biographical directory of Boston’s business elite, published in 1848, noted that it was “to the credit of Samuel Appleton, that he commenced life with a single four-pence half penny, paid to him by a drover who passed his father’s house, for assistance in driving [cattle].”¹³

In any such tale of rags to riches, it is, as a rule, easier to measure the riches than to take stock of the rags. The Appletons and Lawrences are no exception. Edward Pessen includes Nathan, Samuel and William Appleton alongside Abbott, Amos and William Lawrence among his sample of the wealthiest forty-eight Bostonians of 1848, each worth at least \$250,000 and situated comfortably within the town’s wealthiest one per cent. In addition to sheer wealth, they occupied positions of central economic importance in the rapidly developing New England economy. Both families won initial fortunes in international trade during the

¹¹ Nathan Appleton “Memoir of Abbott Lawrence” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 4 (1858), 496.

¹² “The Good Merchant” *B. E. T.* January 8 1853, 1; “Abbott Lawrence” *B. E. T.* August 18 1855, 2; William R. Lawrence ed., *Extracts from the Diary and Correspondence of the late Amos Lawrence with a Brief Account of some incidents in his life* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1855), 38; Samuel K Lothrop “William Lawrence” in Hunt ed., *Lives of American Merchants*, Vol. 2, .372.

¹³ Thomas L V Wilson, *The Aristocracy of Boston; who they are, and what they were; being a history of Business and Business Men of Boston, for the last forty years* (Boston: Thomas Wilson, 1848), 4; see also Winthrop “Nathan Appleton” *Proc. Mass. Hist. Soc.* 5 (1861), 304; Peabody “Samuel Appleton” in Hunts ed., *Lives of American Merchants*, Vol. I, 429, 433.

Napoleonic wars and then diversified holdings and economic roles. Appletons and Lawrences sat on the boards of a clutch of Boston-based financial institutions, including the Suffolk Bank, which from 1818 played a dominant role in providing New England traders with a stable regional currency. Moreover, from its founding in 1823, Amos and Abbott Lawrence, alongside Nathan, Samuel and William Appleton held high office in the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company, the single most important supplier of investment capital in pre-Civil War New England. Both institutions were a part of the economic infrastructure established and run by the Boston Associates, a close knit group of businessmen who established the Waltham-Lowell textile mill system within which the two families were heavily represented, both as investors and as directors. It is no exaggeration to state, as the business historian Frances Gregory has, that from 1811 hardly any successful venture in New England was begun without the support of the Appletons, the Lawrences and Thomas Wren Ward, agent of the British bankers, the Baring brothers.¹⁴

¹⁴ In 1847 Abbott Lawrence estimated his own wealth at two million dollars. Samuel Appleton died in 1853 leaving an estate in the region of one million dollars; his brother Nathan's estate, probated in 1861, was worth \$1.82 million. Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class and Power Before the Civil War* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath & Co., 1973), 333, 39; Hannah Josephson, *The Golden Threads -- New England's Mill Girls and Magnates* (1949, rpt.: New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), 117; Will and Inventory, Box 13, Nathan Appleton Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 328; Gerald T White, *A History of the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1955), 170; D.A.B. "William Lawrence"; Robert F. Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite -- The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 51. Dalzell's appendix lists the economic activity of leading Associates, including Eben Appleton (active in three textile mills), Nathan Appleton (12), Samuel Appleton (3), William Appleton (12), Abbott Lawrence (5), Amos Lawrence (2), Amos A. Lawrence (1), Samuel Lawrence (1), 233-236; Frances Gregory, *Nathan Appleton -- Merchant and Entrepreneur, 1779-1861* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 272. Samuel Appleton had particularly close business dealings with the Barings; see Ralph W. Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance -- English Merchant Bankers at Work, 1763-1861* (1949, rpt.: New York: Russell and Russell, 1970) 189-90, 199-200. Nathan Appleton's estate included stock held in 22 manufacturing companies, 15 railroads, 11 insurance companies and 8 banks.

Not only were the two families represented at the heart of ante-bellum economic culture, they were also frequently selected and elected as political representatives of Federalist and then Whig conservatism. Nathan Appleton, active in the Federalist movement from 1808, first represented Boston in the Massachusetts legislature in 1815, serving five further terms before 1828, when his elder brother Samuel began the first of his three terms. In 1830, Nathan gained election to Congress, winning a pivotal contest as the candidate of protection over free trade; four years later, his seat in Washington was filled by Abbott Lawrence, a man described by John Quincy Adams in 1838, as “perhaps, the most leading man of Whig politics in Boston.” In 1848, Abbott missed his party’s vice-presidential nomination by six votes, and, given the early death in office of Zachary Taylor, effectively missed the presidency too. Abbott’s consolation was his appointment, the following year to the most desirable and important of diplomatic posts: minister to the Court of St. James’s in London.¹⁵

Further signs of communal approbation can be traced in the election of Appletons and Lawrences to distinguished positions within the voluntary institutions which so characterized the Brahmin elite. Members of the two families were chosen by their social peers to serve on the boards of the Massachusetts General Hospital and the Boston Athenaeum, as well as gaining membership to exclusive social institutions such as the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Humane Society. It is surprisingly difficult to find any snobbery in accounts of

¹⁵ William Appleton, cousin of Nathan and Samuel, also served the Whig Party in the U.S. Congress between 1851 and 1855 and in 1861. See *Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress, 1774-1961* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1961); Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 39, 84; Winthrop “Nathan Appleton”, 272; Luther Lawrence, brother of Amos and Abbott, represented the family’s home town of Groton in the General Court, 1812-24 and was elected mayor of Lowell in 1838; Robert M. Lawrence, *The Descendants of Major Samuel Lawrence of Groton, Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1904), 14; Josephson, *Golden Threads*, 161; Abbott’s political life started in the Boston Council in 1831 -- *B.E.T.* August 18, 1855; JQA quote cited in Kinley J. Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience -- Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southwestern Expansion, 1843-1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 78); Appleton “Abbott Lawrence”, 500.

the two families in the diaries, letters and memoirs of longer established members of the elite.¹⁶

Evidence of social acceptability is also seen in second generation marriages, uniting Appletons with Coolidges and Lymans, and Lawrences with Prescotts and Lowells. In 1839, Mary Appleton, daughter of Nathan, cemented one of the earliest transatlantic unions between American money and British status, when she married a son of Whig politician and philosopher Sir James Mackintosh. A generation later, a granddaughter of Eben Appleton married Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte, grandnephew of the French Emperor.¹⁷

¹⁶ In many sources by elite figures, the two families are noticeable only by their absence. Two writers suggest snobbery on the part of Nathan Appleton's Beacon Street neighbors around 1810 and from Henry Lee, the defeated free trader of 1830, but the examples are poorly documented. See, respectively, Louisa Hall Tharp, *The Appletons of Beacon Hill* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 51; and Josephson, *Golden Threads*, 133. Anna Cabot Lowell Quincy attended a party hosted by Mrs. Abbott Lawrence in 1833, and her diary notes that due to "the variety of modea [sic] which the eccentric lady had used in her invitations, some came in ball dresses, flowers and feathers, while some were in simply home attire. But the various persons were nothing to the variety of things which were cram'd into those devoted apartments. I never saw anything to equal it. Pictures of every shape, size and hue, were hung, or rather pitched upon the walls, without the slightest regard to conformity.[...] I never beheld anything like it, it really seemed as Mrs. L. must have gone up into all the garrets of the museums and neighboring houses and showered down upon her hapless mansion all the old, odd things that ever were stored away." M. A. DeWolfe Howe, *The Articulate Sisters -- Passages from the Journals and Letters of the Daughters of President Josiah Quincy of Harvard University* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1946), 195-96.

¹⁷ For genealogical material on the families, see Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 309-314; Tharp, *Appletons of Beacon Hill*, xv; H. G. Somerby "Pedigree of Lawrence" *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* X, 4 (October 1856), chart facing p. 297; John Lawrence, *The Genealogy of the Family of John Lawrence of Wisset, in Suffolk, England and of Watertown and Groton, Massachusetts* (Boston: S. K. Whipple & Co., 1857). Eben Appleton was a brother of Samuel and Nathan Appleton, working with them in trade particularly during the early nineteenth century, but he was not so active in politics or business as his two more famous brothers. For details of the career of Sir James Mackintosh, see *Dictionary of National Biography* ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (London: Oxford University Press, 1937-38).

In their everyday lives, the first generations of Boston Appletons and Lawrences can be seen as typical Boston Brahmins.¹⁸ In addition to Boston Associate economic ties, Whig Party loyalties, and membership of exclusive cultural institutions, the Appletons and Lawrences lived in the right places, worshipped at the correct churches and gave to the most appropriate charities. By 1820, Samuel, Nathan and William Appleton all owned town houses along Beacon Street, the most genteel urban development of the Early Republic. By 1840, Abbott and Amos Lawrence had joined them, living across from Boston Common on Park and Tremont streets respectively. The once country boys now had for close neighbours many of the most eminent of Boston families: the Eliots, Quincys, Otises, Phillipses, Winthrops, Amorys, Searses, Cabots and Lowells. The children who were to marry so well were educated among the offspring of such families, whether at Boston Latin School, the Round Hill School, at Harvard College or, as in the case of Amos's eldest son, at educational establishments in France and Spain. The two families worshipped alongside members of the emerging Boston upper class; Samuel Appleton owning a pew at King's Chapel, Nathan worshipping there or at William Ellery Channing's Federal Street church. Amos and Abbott Lawrence were also Unitarians, joining the genteel Brattle Street congregation shortly after moving to Boston. Gradually, the two families progressed to the equally respectable creed of Episcopalianism. William Appleton helped to found St. Paul's in 1820, and further converts followed in the 1840s. Finally, as philanthropists, the two families gave heavily to the leading causes of their generation, not least to Harvard University, where Appleton Chapel and the Lawrence Scientific School are outstanding legacies of their antebellum beneficence.¹⁹

¹⁸ For an insight into the "standard" behavior of ante-bellum Boston elites, see Paul Goodman "Ethics and Enterprise: The Values of the Boston Elite, 1800-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Fall 1966), 437-451; Robert Rich "'A Wilderness of Whigs': The Wealthy Men of Boston" *Journal of Social History*, 4 (1970-71), 264-276.

¹⁹ In 1820 Abbott Lawrence had lived in Somerset Street, still a respectable address, close to Beacon Street and the Parkman family. See *The Boston Directory: containing Names of inhabitants; their occupations, places of business and dwelling houses; with lists of the streets, lanes and wharves: the town offices, public offices and banks, and other useful information* (Boston: John H. A. Frost and Charles Stimpson, Jr., 1820); Charles Stimpson,

By the middle third of the nineteenth century, the Appletons and the Lawrences had become secure members within Boston's solidifying upper class, connected by a host of intricate ties to families of similar wealth, economic interest and outlook. Among this group, however, the two families were rare in that they maintained reputations as self-made men. The Appletons and Lawrences embodied a Whig Party version of the American dream, poor country boys who, within a generation, became benevolent merchant princes, respected and honored by their grateful community. These stories provoke an obvious question: if they were so poor to begin with, how then did they do it? The remainder of this essay will retrace the steps of the two families from their rural homes to their inclusion within the economic and social elite of ante-bellum New England in an attempt to explain such remarkable mobility.

Contemporary explanations of their success dwelt upon personal characteristics. Amos Lawrence, in particular, explained his own success in terms of self-control. At the start of 1828, he reflected in his diary on his worldly accomplishments, recalling how he had arrived in the city with "no other possessions than a common country education, a sincere love for his family, and habits of industry, economy, and sobriety. Under God," he continued, "it is these same self-denying habits, and a desire always to please, so far as I could without sinful compliance, that I [...] see as the true ground of my success. I have many things to reproach myself; but among them is not idling away my time, or spending money for such things as are improper." Amos contrasted his own success with

Stimpson's Boston Directory; containing the names of the inhabitants: their occupations, places of business, and dwelling houses, and the Cite Register, with lists of streets, lanes and wharves, the city officers, public offices and banks and other useful information (Boston: Charles Stimpson, Jr., 1840). On education see *Materials for a catalogue of the Masters and Scholars who have belonged to the Public Latin School, Boston, Massachusetts, from 1635 to 1846* (Boston: William Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1847); *Names of the Pupils of the Round Hill School, Northampton, Massachusetts, from its Commencement until June, 1831* (Newport, RI: James Atkinson, 1862); Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence; D.A.B.* "Nathan Appleton," "Amos Lawrence," "Amos Adams Lawrence"; Henry Wilde Foote, *Annals of King's Chapel* 2 vol. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1896), Vol. 2, Appendix. Samuel Appleton was also a vestryman of King's Chapel between 1830 and 1840; Susan M. Loring, *Selections from the Diaries of William Appleton, 1786-1862* (Boston: Privately Printed, 1922), 32-33, 63.

the failure of the peers of his youth. To his knowledge, among the Groton country store apprentices he first worked with, he alone had “escaped the bog or slough,” tracing his prosperity to “the simple fact of my having put a restraint on my appetite.” At the boarding house where Amos lodged on his first arrival in Boston, he encouraged a “quiet and improving set of young men” to follow his example in setting aside each day an hour for quiet study after the evening meal. He contrasted their later success with the “few who [...] went abroad after tea, sometimes to the theatre, sometimes to other places...[who] to a man, became bankrupt in after life, not only in fortune, but in reputation.”²⁰

Theodore Parker agreed with Amos’s own interpretation. The merchant’s large estate, he maintained, was the result of “honest industry, forecast, prudence, thrift.”²¹ The Reverend Ephraim Peabody’s reached similar conclusions in recounting the life of Samuel Appleton. “Every advancing step” in Appleton’s career, Peabody wrote, “was the legitimate result of preceding self-denial, foresight, integrity, and cheerful labor.” Indeed, a “full account of his early career would hardly be a less instructive one to young men than that of Franklin.”²²

The Appletons and Lawrences saw their lives as the legitimate result of hard work and correct principles. Nathan Appleton, in an 1802 journal kept on his first visit to Europe, praised “Happy America!” where “the poorest of your sons -- knows that by industry and economy -- he can acquire property & respectability -- and has ambition enough to make the attempt -- which seldom indeed fails of success.” This was a sentiment Nathan returned to in an 1844 publication, which called for greater tariff protection, whilst delivering a broadside against the critics of growing social polarization. Appleton argued that in America, unlike in Europe, industry was the only road to wealth. Mechanics of character in America might “rise to any position in society.” Fortunes might be made, but they were quickly dissipated by equal inheritance. Moreover, elites were legitimized by their labor. “The eloquent advocate, the learned divine, the able writer, the successful merchant, manufacturer, or

²⁰ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 82, 24, 30-31.

²¹ Parker ““The Good Merchant”” *B.E.T.* January 8, 1853.

²² Ephraim Peabody “Notice of Samuel Appleton, Esq.” *New England Historical and Genealogical Review* 8 (January, 1854), 12.

agriculturalist,” Appleton argued, “are allotted the highest places in society. These places are only obtained through an active and successful industry.”²³ Amos Lawrence agreed, writing to his son in 1831: “We are literally all working-men; and the attempt to get up a ‘Workingmen’s Party’ is a libel upon the whole population.”²⁴

Such an explanation of their success does have some basis in fact, but as might be expected also has clear limitations. In business, the two families lay great store by adopting a systematic approach to commerce, maintaining especially accurate records. The Appletons were among the first Boston traders to introduce double-entry book keeping, but such an innovation was uncharacteristic of their, and the Lawrences’, commercial lives. As entrepreneurs, rather than forging new enterprises, they followed the lead of men raised in the second or third generation of high status: Francis Cabot Lowell in textiles, Patrick Tracy Jackson in railroads. In business, the Appletons in particular operated a safety-first policy, regularly auditing books, holding large capital reserves, reducing the common threat of over-extension, using trusted, if inefficient, relatives instead of employing supercargoes or anonymous agents. Between 1800 and 1826, one of the Appleton brothers permanently operated out of either Liverpool or Manchester, overseeing the British end of their transatlantic trade.²⁵ In a similar fashion, on the outbreak of peace in 1815, Amos Lawrence sent his brother Abbott to Britain from where he bought and dispatched dry goods, which arrived in Boston a remarkably quick 84 days after his departure. Trust was a crucial element in a competitive market, reducing the threat of fraud and the export of unsuitable or poor quality goods. The two families, each with four blood relations active in trade, were well placed to enter, and prosper in, the world of transatlantic commerce.²⁶

²³ Nathan Appleton -- Journal of 1802, Box 23, Appleton Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Nathan Appleton, *Labor, its relations in Europe and the United States compared* (Boston: Eastburn Press, 1844), 8.

²⁴ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 104.

²⁵ On the Appletons’ business practices, see Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, esp. 114-117.

²⁶ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 52.

Part of their success can then be attributed to attention to detail. Like Amos Lawrence, William Appleton felt uneasy about his devotion to his commercial career, confiding to his diary in 1822 that even in church he was “quite eaten up with business,” his mind “flying from City to City, from Ship to Ship, from Speculation to Speculation.”²⁷ Yet there is reason to think that such obsessive industry and devotion were not wholly characteristic of the two families. It is true that Amos Lawrence, abstainer from alcohol, tobacco and snuff, adopted as a personal motto “Business before friends.” The maxim of Samuel Appleton, however, was a rather different: “Make hay while the sun shines.”²⁸ Samuel considered retirement in 1811, when he was described by a sister-in-law as in “very good spirits -- enjoying the world as much as any man can,” caring “little for money as he finds himself rich enough.” In 1823, again perhaps a little bored with his own outstanding success, Samuel pledged in his journal “during the following year, to spend the whole of my income, either in frivolity, amusement, public utility or benevolence.” Samuel’s outlook on life was shared by Nathan Appleton. “The first public amusement I attended was Dury [sic] lane theatre,” he wrote in the 1802 journal recording his activities in London. By 1810, aged 30, Nathan re-organized his business partnerships, aiming to transfer to others the strains of detailed book keeping. By 1815, he too considered and then rejected the possibility of an early retirement.²⁹

Amos’s own brother, Abbott Lawrence, was similarly tempted by worldly pleasures. A devotee of fine wines and socializing, he mixed easily in London Society whilst minister to Great Britain.³⁰ During his fleeting 1815 business trip to Europe, Amos’s fear that his brother might succumb to temptation is revealed in letters urging Abbott to resist

²⁷ Susan M. Loring ed., *Selections from the Diaries of William Appleton, 1786-1862* (Boston: Privately Printed, 1922), 33, entry for March 25, 1822.

²⁸ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 31; Tharp, *Appletons of Beacon Hill*, 85.

²⁹ Tharp, *Appletons of Beacon Hill*, 56; Peabody “Samuel Appleton”, 9-10; Nathan Appleton, *Journal of 1802*, MHS -- Entry for April 12, 1802; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 42, 137.

³⁰ Beckles Willson, *America’s Ambassadors to England (1785-1928)* (London: John Murray, 1928), 261-265; Josephson, *The Golden Threads*, 149-50.

temptation, to reject the habits of vice and to spend Sabbaths not in noise and riot, but in church. He encouraged his brother to cultivate correct principles, to make good use of his time and improve himself at any opportunity. Active employment, Amos maintained, was the best safeguard of his virtue.³¹ That Abbott needed such a warning, and that others in the two families were far more relaxed than Amos Lawrence in regard to the merits of continual industry and frugality, suggests the limits of contemporary thought which predominantly explained economic success through personal self-control. More problematic is that it does not account for how the two families came to be resident in Boston with capital to begin in business, nor does it fully explain their acceptance by established social and economic elites. The Boston of the Early Republic was a city given to elegance and distinction as well as the pursuit of profit. Established elites consumed the cultural capital of Charles Bulfinch architecture, genteel learned societies and fashionable socializing, as well as chasing economic success. In their reputations as self-made men, the Appletons and Lawrences were not cast as *parvenus*. They were not early versions of Howells' Silas Lapham, clumsily grasping for social respectability, rather they were admitted to the exclusive circles of economic, political and cultural life with little apparent controversy. Moreover, great wealth did not automatically determine social acceptance by established polite society, as the experience of the eccentric Crowninshields of Salem and the self-styled "Lord" Timothy Dexter of Newburyport attested.³²

Membership of the Athenaeum or Historical Society came from election by existing members or through a direct informal approach; and much of business operated in a similar manner. In maritime trade, where information was at a premium, extended families and partnerships acted as closed corporations where preference in business was granted to blood

³¹ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 48-52.

³² On nature of polite society in Early Republic, see Harold Kirker and James Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); on Timothy Dexter, see Milton Halsey Thomas ed., *Elias Boudinot's Journey to Boston in 1809* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955), 58-59; on the Salem merchant family see David L. Ferguson, *Cleopatra's Barge -- The Crowninshield Story* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), chapter 1.

and marital connections. Francis Cabot Lowell, when establishing the Boston Manufacturing Company in 1813, set a precedent for Boston Associate enterprises in taking great care in selecting to whom he would offer shares in his new venture, limiting numbers so as to maintain the co-operative spirit of mercantile trade.³³ Therefore, in order to understand fully the success of the two families, it is necessary to try and establish what it was about them that led them to Boston in the first place, and once there, to be seen as individuals in whom established elite members might place their trust. In seeking to resolve such questions, it is necessary to return to the agrarian communities from whence the families came.

In examining the origins of the Appletons in New Ipswich and the Lawrences in Groton, it becomes clear that neither family can be labeled unambiguously poor. Two benchmarks serve as indicators of relative wealth at the turn of the century. First, there is Winifred Rothenberg's sample of 512 estates probated between 1720 and 1838 in Middlesex County, home to the Lawrences, just across the state line from the Appletons. Adjusted to 1800 dollars, the mean net worth of the sample amounts to \$3,600. Second, there is the figure of \$80,000, the sum of the estate, probated in 1802, of John Lowell, a lawyer/jurist/financier, which can be seen as representative of a family comfortably established within Boston's post-revolutionary economic elite.³⁴

Samuel Lawrence, the father of Amos and Abbott, was a farmer. In 1807, when Amos began his career as a Boston shopkeeper, he estimated his father's estate to have been worth \$4,000. Isaac Appleton, father of Samuel and Nathan, was also a farmer. He died in 1806, seven years after Samuel had moved to Boston, leaving an estate of \$7,500. Isaac's

³³ On restrictive business practices during the Early Republic, see Kenneth W. Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees: Two Generations of Massachusetts Merchants, 1765-1844* (1937, rpt.: New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), Vol. 1, 94-98; Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite*, 29; White, *Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company*, 14.

³⁴ Winifred B. Rothenberg "The Emergence of a Capital Market in Rural Massachusetts, 1730-1838" in Ronald Hoffman, John J. McCusker, Russell R. Menard, Peter J. Albert eds., *The Economy of Early America -- The Revolutionary Period, 1763-1790* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 129, 142 n.26; Ferris Greenslet, *The Lowells and their Seven Worlds* (London: Ernest Benn, 1947), 74.

brother was the Reverend Joseph Appleton of Brookfield in the neighboring county of Worcester. Joseph was the father of William Appleton who would join his cousins in business in 1810. William's father died in 1795, leaving an estate of \$4,500, of which \$700 was inherited by his merchant son on his coming of age in 1807. These were not insubstantial sums. In 1807, Samuel Lawrence was in a position to mortgage part of his farm to supply Amos with the \$1,000 he desired to commence his business life. Yet, the sons still had much to do in order to reach the levels of affluence enjoyed by the Lowells.³⁵

The fathers of the Appletons and Lawrences were men of above average wealth, but they cannot be cast as country squires; the generation of Isaac Appleton and Samuel Lawrence contained no representatives to the General Court, nor colonels of the militia. They did, however, enjoy a degree of status within their respective towns. William Appleton's father was pastor to his community. Samuel Lawrence's family had been resident in Groton since 1660. Lawrences had represented the town in the General Court in the mid-eighteenth century, and Samuel himself was a major in the Continental Army and later a justice of the peace. He also served in a number of local offices, including some forty years as church deacon, and was elected for shorter terms as a selectman, town clerk, assessor and moderator.³⁶ Living in many ways a parallel life, Isaac Appleton, whose family were among the first settlers of New Ipswich in 1750, between 1751 and 1790 served fifteen terms as town moderator, twelve times as selectman, and five terms as town clerk. Too old to serve in the Revolutionary Army, Appleton was an active organizer of the town's Patriot movement, and like Samuel Lawrence, he held the office of deacon in the New Ipswich church for thirty years.³⁷

³⁵ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 30; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 5-6; Loring, *Diary of William Appleton*, 3-4. It is of interest to note, given the predominance of moral explanations for worldly success, that William Appleton's start in business was funded by a \$700 inheritance and a \$200 win on a lottery.

³⁶ Robert M. Lawrence, *Historical Sketches of Some of members of the Lawrence Family* (Boston: Rand Avery Company, 1888), 108-10.

³⁷ Kidder and Gould, *The History of New Ipswich from its first grant in MDCCXXXVI to the present time* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1852), 266-68; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 4-5. Both men married women from Concord, and both raced to that town in April, 1775. On the social significance of such office

There is reason to believe, however, that such upper-middling levels of wealth and status may be misleading. Between 1762 and 1784, Isaac and Mary Appleton saw the birth of ten children who survived infancy, including seven boys. Samuel and Susanna Lawrence would have sympathized. Eight of their children survived early childhood, including five boys. Both Groton and especially New Ipswich were settled late in New England terms, but by the 1790s traditional agrarian opportunities appeared to have stagnated. The population of New Ipswich rose sharply from 350 in 1760 to 1,241 in 1790, but thereafter stabilized around that figure, reaching 1,278 in 1820. In identical fashion, the population of Groton rose from 1,400 in 1764 to 1,840 in 1790. Thirty years later, the town's populace stood at 1,897.³⁸

Such figures of stagnating population give reason to suggest that Groton and New Ipswich were experiencing the sort of declining opportunity which marked many comparable New England communities during the late eighteenth century as population growth outstripped the supply of farming land. Communities established at a similar time, such as Kent in Connecticut, were transformed in the same fashion from frontier settlements to overcrowded communities within two generations. The problem of land shortage in eighteenth century New England has been widely recognized. Christopher Clark, Robert Gross and James Henretta, most notably, have suggested that land shortages provoked a change in the outlook of agrarian families. Increasingly, as the land resources of a family reached their last point of distribution, families sought to diversify their economic activities, innovating in terms of market production, capital investments and child vocation. At the same time, the mechanisms by which such non-traditional economic activity might take place were becoming more accessible. The strategies of the Appletons and Lawrences in the late eighteenth century need to be viewed through such a prism of declining traditional opportunity; as

holding, see Edward M. Cook, Jr., *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth century New England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

³⁸ Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 314; Lawrence, *Genealogy of...John Lawrence*; Kidder and Gould, *The History of New Ipswich*, 261; Caleb Butler, *History of the Town of Groton, including Pepperell and Shirley* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1848), 464.

families holding insufficient resources to be complacent about structural changes, yet possessing sufficient wealth to be able to become engaged in alternative means of wealth production and enabling their children to pursue new vocations, securing their independence without threatening the family estate.³⁹

Reconstituting the market activity of a particular family at a particular time is a difficult endeavor, although some general impressions can be given. It is known that Major Samuel Lawrence, for example, at times employed apprentice and journeymen shoemakers, so diversifying from purely agricultural production. Samuel's brother, Amos, whose estate was probated in 1798, certainly owned equipment to suggest he was in a position to produce surpluses for the market. He was in the minority of farmers who owned a plough and a harrow, as well as oxen, at least five cows, at least four pigs and probably seven horses, in addition to such consumer goods as looking glasses, a clock, glasses, cups and saucers, tea pots and books.⁴⁰

The Appletons represent a clearer case of a family seeking to diversify their economic interests. In 1781, Isaac Appleton was among a number of local investors who financed a glass manufactory in the neighboring town of Temple. The enterprise was instigated by a wealthy Bostonian of English parentage, Robert Hewes. Hewes brought an innovative economic venture into agrarian New Hampshire, offering the chance for locals to earn returns from capital investments. Isaac Appleton was one of a number of such men suitably interested and able

³⁹ Charles S. Grant, *Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), esp. 98-103; Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism -- Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), esp. 21-27, 60-63, 88; Robert Gross "Culture and Cultivation: Agriculture and Society in Thoreau's Concord" *Journal of American History*, 69 (1982), esp. 44-48; Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 78-83, 181; James Henretta "Families and Farms: *Mentalite* in Pre-industrial America" *William and Mary Quarterly* (1978), 3-32; Kenneth Lockridge "Land, Population, and the Evolution of New England Society, 1630-1790" *Past and Present* 39 (1968), 62-80.

⁴⁰ The probated estate of Amos Lawrence (d.1798) in Lawrence, *Sketches of [...] Lawrence Family*, 191-94; on the significance and rarity of the goods described, see Gross "Culture and Cultivation", 45-46.

to take advantage of the offer. The glass works quickly closed, killed off by insufficient capitalization, a smallpox outbreak among the Hessian deserters recruited as workers, and by the resumption of European imports.⁴¹ Frustrated in that venture, Isaac may well have fallen back on frontier land speculation or production of agricultural goods for the market. After all, his extended family did have some experience in both activities. His son, Samuel, first visited Boston in 1780 accompanying his maternal grandfather Deacon Joseph Chandler of Concord on a marketing expedition to the capital. Samuel's reward was sufficient for him to purchase a large pair of brass sleeve buttons. Samuel's early career suggests a repeat of the way earlier generations of his own family had migrated in an organized fashion to the frontier in search of land. On coming of age, he spent two summers with a party of young men clearing land for settlement in Maine.⁴²

Whereas the above evidence is at best incomplete, less ambiguous is the attention Samuel Lawrence and Isaac Appleton gave to the education of their children. Amos Lawrence recalled of his own childhood that he and his siblings "were carefully looked after, but were taught to use the talents intrusted [sic] to us; and every nerve was strained [by his father] to provide for us the academy which is now doing so much there." It seems likely that Isaac Appleton was equally as determined to provide the best education possible for his children. In 1795, he received a letter from one Samuel Worcester, then a student at Dartmouth College. Worcester had boarded with the Appletons while attending the town's academy which Isaac would do much to establish. Worcester accredited his scholastic progress as much to Appleton as to the school: "It was under your hospitable roof, that I made my first essays in my literary career. It was then that I first came to a determination of prosecuting a classical education. -- I shall never forget the place; it is dear as that of my nativity. I had almost said, it is the birthplace of my mind."⁴³

⁴¹ Rhea Mansfield Knittle, *Early American Class* (New York: Century Co., 1927), chapter 20; Kidder and Gould, *History of New Ipswich*, 223-24.

⁴² Peabody "Samuel Appleton", 10-12; Tharp, *Appletons of Beacon Street*, 12.

⁴³ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 18; Samuel M. Worcester, *The Life and Labors of Rev. Samuel Worcester*, 2 volumes (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1852), Vol. 1, 111 [Italics in original -- my thanks to Louis Billington for tracing this source].

Both Samuel Lawrence and Isaac Appleton were active in seeking to rationalize the education available to their sons, improving upon the itinerant, haphazard and rudimentary schooling previously available.⁴⁴ In 1787, Isaac Appleton was one of thirty-two local men who combined their efforts and resources to establish the New Ipswich Academy. Five years later, Samuel Lawrence was one of forty-three men who subscribed to the establishment of Groton Academy. Both institutions represented a sharp break with the type of local education which had previously been offered. Both were fee paying institutions, Groton charging one shilling a week, New Ipswich twelve shillings a quarter in advance. Both were to be run by educated men; the first preceptor of the New Ipswich Academy was Dartmouth graduate John Hubbard; Groton first hiring Samuel Holyoke, a recent Harvard graduate. Both institutions offered a classical curriculum, aimed at providing an education sufficient to pass college entrance exams. Such schooling allowed children to diversify careers, whilst retaining or increasing status. Two of Isaac's sons, Joseph and Moses Appleton, went on to graduate from Dartmouth College, both in 1791. Joseph died the same year; while Moses went on to enjoy a medical career, studying first with Governor Brooks of Medford, gaining a diploma from the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1796, and settling in Watertown. A third son, Nathan, after an academy education, passed the entrance exams for Dartmouth, but was apprenticed to his brother Samuel in Boston before entering the college. In a similar fashion, the eldest of the Lawrence boys attended Harvard, graduating in the class of 1801 and studying law with a locally eminent lawyer before establishing a successful practice in Groton.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ On the educational context, see Brain Cooke "New England Academy Education in the Early Republic" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 21 (1993), 74-87; Nathan Appleton's Memoir at New Ipswich, Box 13, Appleton Papers, MHS, gives an insight into the limited and often violent educational environment which preceded the establishment of the Academy.

⁴⁵ Butler, *History of Groton*, 228-33; Kidder and Gould, *History of New Ipswich*, 195-213; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 6-8; "Moses Appleton" *New England Historic and Genealogical Register* 5 (1849), 406; Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 148. Between 1769 and 1800, the median age for students entering Harvard was 17. Luther Lawrence would have been some three years older than this, whilst Joseph Appleton was 24 when he entered Dartmouth. His brother, Moses, was closer to the standard age of entry at 15. These ages support the view that neither of the two families were of

More than providing vocational and academic training, the academies provided a web of valuable future contacts. The oldest of the Lawrence boys, the Harvard graduate Luther, gained much from his early training. One of some fifty students in his year, his social acceptability is demonstrated in membership of the exclusive Hasty Pudding Club and selection as club orator of the 1801 semi-annual public exhibition.⁴⁶ When Luther returned to Groton, he entered the highly successful legal practice of the Honorable Timothy Bigelow (1767-1821), a Harvard graduate himself who sat in the General Court for more than thirty years, before and after his move to Boston in 1806. In 1805, having established an independent legal practice, Luther married Lucy Bigelow, sister of his old employer and granddaughter of the Honorable Oliver Prescott M.D. (1731-1804) of Groton, also a Harvard graduate, thirty two years a selectman, major-general, judge of probate and, like Bigelow, local gentry with ties to men of wealth and status in Boston. At a stroke therefore, the Lawrences had become united with two of the most important Groton families.

This was the first time in more than fifty years that a Lawrence had married into either family, although the family had moved in similar circles as the Bigelows and Prescotts for some time. Family legend notes that on the 19th of April, 1775, Colonel William Prescott, brother of Oliver and the hero of Bunker Hill, had arrived at the Lawrence home, crying "Samuel, notify your men: the British are coming," whereupon Samuel Lawrence mounted the colonel's horse to call out the men of his circuit. A family historian records that after the war the two veterans "frequently exchanged visits and always attended the old-fashioned muster together." A letter of January 1799 also suggests strong ties between Samuel Lawrence and Timothy Bigelow. Samuel addresses

gentry status, but were of upper middling stock. See Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936* (1936 rpt.: Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 102.

⁴⁶ *Eleventh Catalogue of the Officers and Members of the Hasty-Pudding Club in Harvard College, containing a Brief Sketch of the Club and an index of Names* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: W. H. Wheeler, 1891), 10. The Club, described as "a rather jolly amalgam of literary, convivial and patriotic elements" was not the most exclusive, nor the most expensive, of Harvard societies, but membership still called for a degree of cultural acceptability; see Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard*, 182-83.

Bigelow as “My good Friend” and outlines brief details of the meetings of tax assessors and the Academy trustees, before congratulating

your Honor for the good news of our eastward lands. We have had a number of very agreeable visits since you left Groton. [I] only mention one at your hd. father’s, among which your Dearly beloved made one of the Company. I want to see you at Groton. Sir, I shall take it as a favor if you will be so kind as to think of some matters you and I have conversed upon heretofore, you will much oblige your friend and Humble servt.⁴⁷

The tone of these relationships is ambivalent, demonstrating close social contact, but perhaps not as equals. After all, whereas Samuel was a major, Prescott was a colonel, Samuel a country farmer and deacon, Bigelow, a Harvard educated, successful lawyer, representing his town in the General Court.⁴⁸

In Groton, as elsewhere in eighteenth century New England, the dominant social relationship within rural communities was a vertical one. Men of status occupied multiple positions of authority. Deference was given to the man in recognition of his inherent abilities, rather than to the political measures which he advocated. During the nineteenth century, horizontal social relations became more dominant. The thousands of voluntary societies of ante-bellum New England were organized overwhelmingly as subscriber democracies. The new institutions consisted of equals uniting in support of a given cause. Groton Academy was established at a time when the vertical social institutions of town, church and militia were giving way to more fluid, cosmopolitan relations of waged labor, mass politics and denominational heterogeneity. It is

⁴⁷ This is possibly a reference to the granting of 11,520 acres of Maine land by the General Court to support the Groton Academy in response to a 1797 petition of the trustees. See Lothrop “William Lawrence” in Hunt, *Lives of American Merchants*, Vol. II, 376.

⁴⁸ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 16; Lawrence, *Sketches of [...] Lawrence Family*, 110-111, 116; Butler, *History of Groton*, 285-297.

fitting then that the early organization of the Academy reflected the ambivalent and conflictual era of its birth.⁴⁹

Of the forty three men who subscribed to the founding of the Groton school, only five bought as many as three shares; none bought more. The subscribers therefore enjoyed a rough equality in terms of initial financial investment in the institution. Eleven of the founders bore a title of some description, whether of military, religious or political rank, or even the simple suffix “esquire.” Paradoxically, all fifteen members of the first board of trustees were titled. The explanation lies in the fact that seven men of rank from surrounding towns were approached to sit on the board of governance. The subscribers were free to choose their officers, and chose to maintain traditional deferential habits. They would wait until 1804 before electing plain Samuel Rockwood as trustee. When in 1794, Samuel Lawrence, Esq. began his thirty-three years of service on the Academy’s board of governance, he was breaking into the ranks of Middlesex County’s Standing Order of men of wealth, power and status now reflecting an institutionalized degree of equality amongst the trustees.⁵⁰

The relationship among trustees was co-operative and proved to be highly beneficial to the Lawrence family. Alongside Oliver Prescott (trustee between 1794 and 1804) and Timothy Bigelow (1793-1813) was a third man of local status: James Brazer (1795-1818). Brazer, in addition to occasional town service, was in the words of a Lawrence biographer, “an enterprising and thrifty country merchant, who transacted a large business...with his own and surrounding towns” from a store situated on the main road between Boston and New Hampshire and Canada. Brazer employed several clerks, one of whom, commencing his apprenticeship in 1799, was Samuel Lawrence’s son, the young Amos Lawrence, the future Boston merchant prince.⁵¹ In commencing a business career in Boston, Amos had already established a number of

⁴⁹ James A. Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700-1815 -- An Interdisciplinary Analysis* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath & Co., 1973), 206-14; Richard D. Brown “The Emergence of Urban Society in Rural Massachusetts, 1760-1820” *Journal of American History* 61 (1974-75), 29-51.

⁵⁰ Butler, *History of Groton*, 229-30.

⁵¹ Butler, *History of Groton*, 229-30, 464; Lawrence, *Diary and Letters of Amos Lawrence*, 22-23.

valuable contacts. Timothy Bigelow was not only a successful lawyer, but also the brother-in-law of one Samuel Williams, American consul in London and a financier extensively engaged in New England trade: Williams' agents in Boston, Timothy Williams, William Pratt and David Greenough, were important figures in supplying investment capital within New England. The significance of such links is revealed by Thomas Wilson's 1848 biographical dictionary of Boston's businessmen:

Before the war of 1812, the bulk of the importations was made but twice a year. Long credits were given here. To buy well in England, and give such credits required large capital, or ample means somewhere. From the above sources [S. and T. Williams, Pratt, Greenough] the Lawrences could always command them. The Brazers and Timothy Bigelow were known to all New England, and familiar with every member of a Legislature of six or seven hundred, whom he [sic] could call by name. Thus few young men were better prepared to start for a prosperous career.⁵²

The ties were further tightened in 1819 when Abbott Lawrence married a daughter of the Honorable Timothy Bigelow.

When Amos Lawrence made his journey to Boston in 1807, his initial aim was to purchase goods to establish himself independently in business in Groton. The favorable trading conditions encouraged him to stay in the capital, sending for Abbott to act as his own cheap, but reliable apprentice. By 1810 a third brother, William, had arrived in Boston, keeping shop at 32 Cornhill under the watchful guidance of Amos at number 31.⁵³ In Boston, the Lawrences made use of the old

⁵² Thomas L. V. Wilson, *The Aristocracy of Boston*, 23-24. Wilson does make one error in attributing part of the Lawrence success to the marriage of Amos to a daughter of Col. Robert Means of Amherst, who dealt with extensive country business. The marriage in 1821 can not have harmed the Lawrence fortune, but their prosperity was secured by then.

⁵³ *The Boston Directory; containing the names of the inhabitants, their occupations, places of business and dwelling-houses. With lists of the streets, lanes and wharves; the town officers, public officers and banks and other useful information* (Boston: Edward Cotton, 1810).

Groton contacts, painstakingly established by their father, to break into the secretive and untrusting world of transatlantic trade. In this progress, they owed much to the Groton Academy. As well as securing relationships, it supplied an education necessary for both professional vocations and social respectability.

Amos Lawrence's recollection of his childhood and youth paints rather a different picture of than that established by nineteenth century commentators. "My academy lessons, little academy balls, and eight-cent expenses for music and gingerbread," he recalled, along with "the agreeable partners in the hall, and pleasant companions in the stroll." To Amos, these were the symbols of respectability and cosmopolitan behavior which "all helped me believe that I had a character even then; and, after leaving school and going into the store, there was not a month passed before I became impressed with the opinion that restraint upon the appetite was necessary to prevent the slavery I saw destroying numbers around me." Drawing such a connection between the etiquette of a newly learned gentility and the lives of the many "farmers, mechanics, and apprentices" who filled "drunkards' graves" highlights the way that the Lawrences managed to fit into Boston society.⁵⁴ Genteel behavior, by the Early Republic, could not simply be lambasted as foreign frippery, ostentation and vanity, as it had been during the 1780s. A generation later, a suitable level of gentility expressed learning and self-control, and the Lawrences had sufficient training to avoid being treated as country bumpkins on their arrival in the metropolis.

What is so striking in this web of contacts is how closely it replicates the Appleton story. It was through the Academy that the Appletons cemented valuable connections to families of greater social importance and economic influence. The New Ipswich equivalent of James Brazer was Charles Barrett. The Barretts were one of the leading families of pre-Revolutionary Concord, Massachusetts, settling progeny on New Ipswich lands in the middle of the eighteenth century. In the New Hampshire town, Charles Barrett served as moderator of the town meeting, represented New Ipswich at the state constitutional convention of 1787 and was the largest supporter of the Academy, donating £100 and 3000 acres compared to the £35 promised by Isaac Appleton. Like Appleton, Barrett was later a trustee of the Academy, as well an investor

⁵⁴ Lawrence, *Diary and Correspondence of Amos Lawrence*, 25-26.

in the failed glass manufactory at Temple. When Samuel Appleton had tried his luck in Maine in 1790-92, he was engaged in improving Barrett lands. Samuel next tried school teaching, armed with a testimony to his moral character and ability to instruct in reading, writing, orthography, English grammar, and arithmetic signed by Stephen Farrar, minister of the town who was the son of a Barrett mother, and brother of Timothy Farrar, chief justice of New Hampshire. Both brothers were among the founders and trustees of the Academy.⁵⁵ Changing his mind, by 1794 Samuel had settled upon a career in trade, working first with a Colonel Jewett of Ashburnham, before setting up in business with Charles Barrett, Jr., an Academy old boy and Dartmouth College graduate. The plan was a simple one: Charles kept the New Ipswich store, whilst Samuel would open and run the Boston end of the enterprise. Soon joined by Nathan, Samuel Appleton focused on buying European dry goods at auction and then selling them on to country traders often in exchange for well-made homespun cloth and increasingly pot and pearl ash which could be exported to fuel the growing British chemical industry. In 1799, the partnership was dissolved, with Charles Barrett trying his hand alone in Boston trade before returning in 1815 to New Ipswich, where he established himself as a country gentleman, involved in manufacturing, banking and keeping the town's first private carriage. Barrett combined political office with a doomed attempt to establish a Unitarian congregation in the agrarian New Hampshire community. From 1800, the Appletons became directly involved in transatlantic trade, with Samuel beginning a twenty year residency in Britain. The family fortunes rose sharply thereafter, but Samuel remembered with

⁵⁵ Gross, *Minutemen and their World*, 74-83, 177-81, 212; Nathan Appleton "Memoir at New Ipswich"; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 18; "The Late Samuel Appleton" *B.E.T.* July 15, 1853; Peabody "Samuel Appleton", 10; Samuel Lee, *A Historic Discourse: Delivered at the Centennial Celebration of the First Congregational Church in New Ipswich, October 22, 1860* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Gage and Farnsworth, 1861), 8, 25-30; Kidder and Gould, *History of New Ipswich*, 115, 198-223; for details of the Farrars, see Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates -- Biographical sketches of those who attended Harvard College*, Volume XVI (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1972).

gratitude the role that the Barretts had played in his early establishment, bequeathing \$10,000 to the descendants of Charles Barrett.⁵⁶

Engaging in business, the Appletons made use of other old contacts. Nathan Appleton, shortly after arriving in Boston was taught the first principles of double entry bookkeeping by Eliphalet Hale, an Academy friend then employed in the counting house of merchant prince, John Cushing. Later, the Appletons would follow the practice of another successful old boy, Timothy Wiggin, in purchasing British goods directly from manufacturers. Wiggin had established himself in Manchester, England, where Nathan Appleton visited him in 1802, and would later play an important role in finding British workmen with the skills needed by the Waltham-Lowell industrialists. Samuel Batchelder was another boyhood acquaintance who became involved in the textile industry, establishing his own mill in New Ipswich in 1810 in which Samuel Appleton invested, and in the 1820s helping the Boston Associates to develop new machinery, whilst serving later as a Lowell administrator and investor.⁵⁷

The Appletons initial contact with the closed shop world of the Boston Associates came in 1813, when Francis Cabot Lowell approached Nathan Appleton with view to his investing \$10,000 in the Boston Manufacturing Company. Erring as always on the side of caution, Appleton took \$5,000 worth of stock. Lowell was a distant relative of the Appletons, a fourth cousin of Nathan, and it certainly appears to have been a contact which was exploited. Many of the Appletons' earliest trading partners, most notably the Lees the Jacksons and the Cabots of Newburyport and Beverley, and the Salem branch of the Prescotts, had

⁵⁶ Kidder and Gould, *History of New Ipswich*, 213, 255; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 14-17; Charles Henry Chandler, *The History of New Ipswich, New Hampshire, 1735-1914, with genealogical records of principal families* (Fitchburg, Massachusetts: Sentinel Printing Company, 1914), 214, 195.

⁵⁷ Nathan Appleton, Journal of 1802 -- Entry for July 18, 1802; Nathan Appleton, *Introduction of the Power Loom and Origin of Lowell* (Lowell, Massachusetts: Proprietors of the Locks and Canals on the Merrimack River, 1858), 25; David J. Jeremy, *Transatlantic Industrial Revolution: The Diffusion of Textile Technologies between Britain and America, 1790-1830s* (Oxford: Basil Blackwater, 1981), 89; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 70, 185, 187, 258-59.

worked with and married into the Lowell family, before migrating, like them, to Boston after the Revolution.⁵⁸

As with the Lawrence family, the Appletons before leaving New Ipswich gained contacts who would play important roles in their later economic success. They were also prepared culturally for later social acceptance, and as in Groton, the Academy played a central part in equipping the young Appletons with the skills required for eventual respectability. Nathan Appleton was a student at the New Ipswich Academy between 1792 and 1794. While there, in addition to being prepared to pass the exams which led to the declined place at Dartmouth College, he also took part in theatrical exhibitions and gave public poetry readings. The Academy was at the center of a wave of new cosmopolitan and literary behavior in the 1790s. This included the establishment of a social library and the formation of the Demosthenian Society, a splendidly named literary group whose members included the young Samuel Worcester.⁵⁹

The stories of the Appletons and Lawrences cast light on the interaction between culture and commerce which shaped rural New England through the late eighteenth century. As David Jaffee has argued, provincial storekeepers operated in the role of tutor introducing customers to the polite world of material goods. Storeowners, as peddlers, shared “in the self-fashioning of new identities through the exchange of goods that facilitated the democratization of gentility and the fluidity of social identity.”⁶⁰ The stores of Charles Barrett and James Brazer gave Samuel Appleton and Amos Lawrence crucial entrances into a network of commercial opportunities and urban culture reaching into

⁵⁸ William Prescott, son of Colonel William Prescott of Groton, was active in commerce in Salem and Beverley in the 1780s and 1790s, before moving permanently to Boston in 1808. See C. Harvey Gardiner, *William Hickling Prescott -- A Biography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 10-13; and Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 17-18.

⁵⁹ Appleton “Memoir at New Ipswich”; Chandler, *History of New Ipswich*, 147; Tharp, *Appletons of Beacon Street*, 28-29; Kidder and Gould, *History of New Ipswich*, 204.

⁶⁰ David Jaffee “Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860” *Journal of American History* 78 (1991), 511-535, esp. 511-516, 523-525.

Boston and across the Atlantic. Samuel and Amos followed these pathways as their lives and those of their brothers mirrored the ante-bellum market revolution. Yet, these initial opportunities depended much upon an older and far more local network of men of economic power and social status. Through institutional cooperation in establishing the academies at Groton and New Ipswich, the two families gained new access to the local gentry, whilst the rising first generation of merchants were educated into a cultural respectability socially acceptable to a flourishing transatlantic commercial, urban bourgeoisie.

In many ways, the ante-bellum generation of Appletons and the Lawrences led parallel lives, rising from agrarian obscurity to aristocratic grandeur within a single generation. Their lives clearly do entail substantial and undeniable social mobility. It is equally clear, however, that neither family deserved their reputations as “poor country boys” who began with nothing. Two factors shed light on this ambiguity. First, if we are to accept Edward Pessen’s claim that 94% of the super wealthy of Jacksonian Boston were born to wealthy and/or eminent parents, then the comparatively humble origins of the Appletons and the Lawrences become exceptionally unusual.⁶¹ Arguably, the very rarity of their modest backgrounds confirmed their distinction. It was not that they were born poor, but that they were not born rich which drew the attention of late ante-bellum commentators. Second, the nineteenth century narratives surrounding the two families served a political purpose. The Appletons and Lawrences were models of the type of social mobility envisaged by the Brahmin Whigs. Economic improvement and social respectability went hand in hand. They embodied a mobility which was unthreatening and acceptable to the existing elite. Their very presence in that upper class enabled Whig politicians to draw a connection between social success and personal endeavor, so devaluing the claims of critics who maintained that New England was rapidly succumbing to the class rigidities and restricted opportunities of Europe.

Still, the two families occupied an ambivalent social position. Operating in the middle third of the nineteenth century at the heart of a codifying upper class, they were aware, and reminded, of their lowly origins at a time when lineage was of growing importance in defining an elite identity and in maintaining a degree of cohesive exclusivity. It was an ambivalence resolved in part through a redefinition of family history.

⁶¹ Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class and Power before the Civil War*, 85.

Deacon Appleton and Major Lawrence were not forgotten, but they were placed in context by the work of amateur and professional genealogists. The *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* accompanied its eulogy to Abbott Lawrence in 1856 with a pedigree tracing the line back to Sir Robert Lawrence who “had arms conferred upon him by Richard Coeur de Lion, for his bravery in scaling the walls of Acre, A.D. 1191.” In a similar fashion, the memoir of Nathan Appleton penned by Robert Charles Winthrop for the journal of Massachusetts Historical Society, noted that few families in either New or Old England could be traced back as far as the Appletons “through a respectable ancestry, and by an unquestioned pedigree.”⁶²

The Appleton line reached back to John Appulton of Great Waldingfield, Suffolk who died in 1416. They knew this in part through the research of Eben Appleton, who in 1818 wrote from Britain a sixteen page letter to his brother Nathan describing his genealogical tour around south-eastern England. Reporting that “none of our ancestors were noted as great warriors, orators, or statesmen,” Eben searched out the few individuals discovered bearing the family name and in so doing positioned his own family line as among the respectable with honor as frail perhaps as that of a merchant prince:

There are but a few of the name in London -- I applied [sic] to one (Ludgate Hill). He only knew his father was a beggar, and he, born on some Common in Berkshire. Of course I did not claim kindred with him.⁶³

⁶² H.G. Somersby, “Pedigree of Lawrence” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 10 (1856), facing p. 297; Winthrop “Memoir of Nathan Appleton,” 252.

⁶³ Eben Appleton -- Nathan Appleton, October 20, 1818, Box 13, Nathan Appleton Papers, MHS.

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Appendix. Economic, Political and Social Success of Appletons and Lawrences, 1800-1860

Congress MHLIC PIS MGH MHiS B.Ath B.Ath Hu.Soe
(BDAC) Officer Officer Officer Member Officer Member Member
1807-50 1807-50 1786-1838

Avaldffl

Nathan 1831-3 1823-61 1818- --- 1834-61 1816-27 1807-50 Yes
1779- 1842 1835

1861

Samuel --- 1825-47 --- 1819-22 -- --- 1822-50 -
1766- 1836

1853

William 1851-55 1845-6 1837- 1838-41 1858-62 - 1820-50 Yes
1786- 1861 1861 1-844-62

1862

Lawrence

Abbott 1835-37 1838-55 --- 1832-35 1853-55 -- 1822-50 Yes
1792- 1839-40 1858-59

1855

Amos --- 1823-37 1820- 1826-31 --- 1822-25 1822-36 -
1786- 1838 1844-50

1852

William -- --- 1835- -_- --- 1849 1822-50 -
1783- 1838

1848

Sources:-, Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress, 1774-1961 (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1961); Gerald T While. A History of the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1955); Walter Muir Whitehill, The Provident Institute for Savings of the Town of Boston, 1816-1966 (Boston: Provident Institute for Savings, 1966); , Massachusetts General Hospital - Memorial and Historical Volume (Boston: Griffith-Stillings Press, 1921); , Handbook of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1791-1948 (Boston:

Massachusetts Historical Society, 1949); Josiah Quincy, *The History of the Boston Athenaeum, with biographical notices of its deceased founders* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Metcalf and Company, 1851); M. A. DeWolfe Howe. *The Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. An Historical Review. 1785-1916* (Boston: Humane Society, 1918).

