ABSTRACT

Title:	POVERTY ENCOUNTERS: UNITARIANS, THE POOR, AND POOR RELIEF IN ANTEBELLUM BOSTON AND PHILADELPHIA
	Trisha Diane Carter Posey, Ph.D., 2007
Directed By:	Associate Professor David Grimsted, Department of History

"Poverty Encounters: Unitarians, the Poor, and Poor Relief in Antebellum Boston and Philadelphia," examines Unitarian poor relief programs in Boston and Philadelphia between 1820 and 1860 and the role of encounters with the poor in shaping such programs. The dissertation argues that Unitarian theopolitical beliefs struck a balance between individual self-culture and the common good, and that Unitarian poor relief programs reflected attempts to achieve this equilibrium. Nevertheless, internal dissent among Unitarians over theology, shifting economic conditions, and the actions of the poor and working classes upset the Unitarian social vision and led to the decline of Unitarianism as it had existed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Using diaries of poor relief workers, organizational reports, correspondence from poor relief recipients, and fictional literature, the dissertation explores the influence of poor relief encounters on the Boston Unitarian ministry-at-large, Philadelphia lay Unitarians' poor relief efforts, the Boston Asylum and Farm

School for Indigent Boys, the Boston Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, and

Transcendentalist experiments in economic reform. "Poverty Encounters" explains

not only how poor relief programs were shaped by interactions between elites and the

poor, but also how such encounters led to changes in social, political, and theological

ideologies. It challenges traditional understandings of the antebellum United States

as bifurcated into a liberal individualist North and a communal, "organic" South,

arguing that elements of organic thought played an important role in Northerners'

ideas about poverty in the antebellum period. Paying particular attention to the

language and discourse of politics and theology, "Poverty Encounters" is what Mark

Noll has called a "social history of ideas." It clarifies the elements that came to hold

together the age's burgeoning democracy and capitalism. and reveals the role of

religion in shifting political ideologies and the relationship of both to changing ideas

about poverty.

POVERTY ENCOUNTERS: UNITARIANS, THE POOR, AND POOR RELIEF IN
ANTEBELLUM BOSTON AND PHILADELPHIA

By

Trisha Diane Carter Posey

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2007

Advisory Committee:
Associate Professor David Grimsted, Chair
Professor Herman Belz
Professor Sonya Michel
Professor Nancy Struna
Associate Professor Alfred Moss

Acknowledgements

I have incurred many debts in writing this dissertation. Even before I began graduation school, several professors at Grand Canyon University modeled for me the joy of the life of the mind and then supported my own feeble efforts to research and write history. Jim Helfers, Barbara Hoffman, Robin Baker, Maxie Burch, Doug Dye, and Rick Ostrander gave me the encouragement I needed to follow my calling. Barbara Hoffman and Rick Ostrander, especially, opened important academic doors for me, and, in hindsight, I realize the incredible amount of faith it took for them to do so. The history faculty at the University of Maryland, a lively and diverse group, stretched my intellect and made me a much better historian. Robyn Muncy modeled good teaching for me and showed me more kindness than any faculty member I have ever worked with. My committee members, Nancy Struna, Herman Belz, Al Moss, and Sonya Michel, asked important questions of my research and my findings that strengthened the dissertation. I did not always agree with them, but the discussions I had with them played a vital role in helping me rethink my work. Any inadequacies in the dissertation are my sole responsibility, and are present despite, not because of, their input. Sonya Michel, especially, took a great deal of time and care in reading and critiquing my dissertation, and her insight into the history and historiography of poverty was invaluable. Her concern for my dissertation was more than matched by her care for me as a person, for which I am very grateful. Ira Berlin and Clare Lyons also read my work, offered timely and helpful advice, and taught me a good deal about how to write history well. My adviser, David Grimsted, is an incomparably wonderful man, whose patience with my intellectual weaknesses should earn him a

special place in heaven. He is the only faculty member I have ever worked with who could thoroughly and devastatingly critique my work but still send me from his office with a smile on my face. The consistency of his care for the voiceless in his academic work and his personal life reinforces my belief in the invaluable worth of a scholar of integrity.

Several of my graduate student colleagues also read my work and offered helpful advice. Kate Keane and Claire Goldstene, in addition to being good friends, also offered criticism on chapters and served as sounding boards for ideas. Jonathan White and Christian Esh read many chapters for me and were wonderful colleagues during my time at Maryland. I learned a good deal from them during our monthly meetings in Washington D.C., our casual lunches, and our conference presentations together. Jonathan gave me faith that "compassionate conservatism" is indeed alive and well. We do not always see eye to eye, but I appreciate his intellectual and personal consistency and his passion and commitment to truth. Christian taught me not only about the organic idea in antebellum America but also about the importance and value of humility. I know few scholars who are able to match the strength of their ideas with such a spirit of modesty.

The many archivists and librarians who helped me along the way also deserve a special note of thanks. Elizabeth Mock and Dale Freeman of Healey Library at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Frances O'Donnell of the Andover-Harvard Divinity School Library, Cornelia King of the Library Company of Philadelphia, and the staff of the Massachusetts Historical Society cheerfully provided for me the material I needed. Many of them went above and beyond the call of duty by

the middle of this whole process, a reality he could not control and I'm afraid may have worked to his disadvantage. I don't know how much a one-and-a-half-year old kid can comprehend, but I have the sense he felt my burden and did everything possible to make life easy for me. I could not imagine a more funny and endearingly sweet child. He is a blessing. Of all the people who came alongside me, my husband Jake showed the most faith in me. He has lost his wife to research trips, conferences, piles of papers, and intellectual distractions many times over the last few years and has had the patience of a saint. He shouldered far too much of the burden in the writing of this dissertation, and I can only say I hope to show him the same sacrificing spirit he has shown me.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The presence of the poor generates questions that touch on ideas of the individual, society, political economy, and theology, revealing how they overlap and influence each other. What obligations do those with means have toward those without? Who are the "poor?" Does every person have a natural right to basic material goods? Who determines this, and what role does politics play in how it is determined? How does God care for God's people? Do God—and God's people— have responsibilities to those beyond the bounds of their chosen church? What role does sin play in individual suffering? Such questions not only raise difficulties about the natural and supernatural worlds, they also reveal the complex knot of relationships between theology, politics, and social thought.[1] This dissertation attempts to untangle this knot, at least at one point in the historical web, by examining the approaches of the American Unitarian church to economic inequality in the North between 1820 and 1850 and the role of encounters between relief workers and the poor in shaping them.

Unitarian poor relief efforts were part of a larger movement between 1820 and 1850 among municipal and voluntary groups to address the poverty that had been caused by the massive social, economic, and political upheaval of the period. During this time, the land area of the United States increased substantially, the nation's population exploded, and increasing immigration brought large numbers of foreigners to the nation's shores. In the North, the proportion of agricultural laborers declined

---

[1] Mark Noll talks about the relationships between theology, social change, and political events in his book *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

while the growth of industry brought workers from their homes into new factories. The nation's cities grew and new urban areas began to dot the American landscape. Changes in America's economy also caused new boom-and-bust business cycles, bringing with them prosperity for some and destitution for others.[2] While the nation was expanding geographically and demographically, democracy also spread. States lowered franchise requirements, allowing almost every adult while male to vote. These newly empowered voters fostered fear of a tyrannous majority among some Americans, and hopefulness among others that their political voices would finally be heard. As democracy exploded, so too did Protestant Christianity. The Second Great Awakening gripped the United States in the early nineteenth century as the fire of religious enthusiasm spread from Kentucky and Tennessee back toward New York and New England. The Awakening provided a spiritual grounding for many Americans, who clung to its promise that both the individual and society could be sanctified despite the unsettling changes of the time.

One of the most troubling of these changes was the perceived inability to adequately deal with poverty in urban areas. Linking the social and economic changes of the antebellum period to urban poverty, the historian Michael Katz argues that changes in social and economic structures both "disrupted social relations" and also "created a class of highly mobile wage laborers subject to irregular, seasonal, dangerous, unhealthy, and often badly paid work."[3] During the Panic of 1819, 1,808 persons were sent to debtors' prison in Philadelphia; the number was 3,500 in Boston.

---

[2] Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, rev., American Century, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 5-7.
[3] Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, Tenth Anniversary ed., rev. (New York: Harper Collins, Basic Books, 1996), 10.

In 1820 the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism in New York City estimated that out of a population of 120,000 New Yorkers, 13,000 were paupers.[4] The difficulty in managing urban poverty alarmed many nineteenth-century Northerners and forced them to confront more methodically a problem they had previously been able to handle informally and through community care for the poor.

Poor relief took a variety of forms. Many city governments moved away from systems of outdoor relief, in which "guardians" or "overseers" of the poor distributed food, fuel, and money to the poor in their homes, believing that such relief fostered idleness by divorcing survival from labor.[5] Instead, municipalities reinvigorated existing almshouses or built new ones in an effort to handle more systematically the poor men, women, and children in their midst. Poorhouses served two, contradictory, functions. As Katz argues, "the almshouse was to be at once a refuge for the helpless and a deterrent to the able-bodied; it was supposed to care for the poor humanely and to discourage them from applying for relief."[6] This schizophrenic approach to poor relief led to the obsolescence of most poorhouses in the United States North by mid-century, but for a time many Americans saw them as the most effective way to handle the problem of poverty.[7]

Volunteer groups also took up the task of poor relief. The number of poor relief associations exploded in the antebellum United States, part of a massive movement among Northerners to ameliorate social ills such as intemperance, slavery, and prostitution. Northern benevolent associations were influenced by Enlightenment

---

[4] Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 82.
[5] Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 17.
[6] Ibid., 25.
[7] Ibid., 26-36.

ideas of respect for all human beings and the power of human reason to improve

society, as well as republican ideas of civic virtue and the public good. The most

important influence on poor relief programs, however, was Protestant Christianity.

Most reformers were Protestants whose poor relief work was a pious expression of

their faith and a response to the biblical call to care for the poor.[8] Voluntary poor

relief took a variety of forms. Organizations provided relief for the poor in their

homes, opened banks to encourage saving among the poor, and served as liaisons

between the poor and the resources to which they did not always have access,

especially medical care. Volunteer poor relief workers, who often saw poverty as a

sign of spiritual need, frequently accompanied material aid with moral advice; many

poor relief groups also functioned as evangelistic societies.[9]

Voluntary and state poor relief programs were not completely separate entities

in the antebellum period. Many voluntary organizations received funding from the

state to accomplish tasks that were considered to be in the public interest. Voluntary

groups and individual philanthropists also donated money or land to municipalities

and state governments to start new institutions, or turned over existing private

institutions to them.[10] The intermingling of voluntary and state organizations

indicates that the leaders of such groups were often wrestling with similar questions

about poverty. Inquiries about the relationship between urbanization and poverty, the

role vice played in poverty, and whether to address poverty as an individual or

systemic issue were pervasive in northerners' explorations of poverty, and they were

---

[8] Mintz, *Moralist and Modernizers*, chapter 2.
[9] Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 53-54.
[10] Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 11.

asked by state and voluntary poor relief workers alike. Unitarians asked these questions as well. While many of the debates that occurred in the church were rooted in Unitarian church doctrine and social relationships, Unitarian debates about poor relief touched on questions about poverty that were widely discussed among northern poor relief workers.

Unitarian poor relief manifested itself in a variety of programs for assistance that were similar in method and scope to other Protestant programs, including personal visitation and care in the homes of the poor, the establishment of free chapels, and the creation of institutions for poor children. These programs took form in a particular setting, however, one that differed from that of other northern Protestant groups such as the evangelical-minded Society for the Prevention of Pauperism in New York City. Unitarians rejected the revivalism that influenced many Protestant groups and found the evangelistic emphasis of such groups to be distasteful. Even while they emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to poverty that included spiritual elements, they did not attempt any sort of conversion of their charges and were unwilling to connect their work to any sort of broad evangelization effort. On the other hand, Unitarians did see religion as essential to the development of a stable society and an important element of their poor relief work. They believed the problem of poverty could not be addressed adequately without considering the role of religion in the lives of individuals and the community.

This work argues that the central tenets of Unitarian theopolitical belief fundamentally shaped Unitarian approaches to poverty and welfare and that these theopolitical beliefs were themselves influenced by Unitarian encounters with the

poor. Unitarian "organic" beliefs struck a balance between individual self-culture and the common good, and Unitarian poor relief programs reflected attempts to achieve this equilibrium. Nevertheless, internal dissent among Unitarians over theology, shifting economic conditions, and most especially the actions of the poor and working classes upset the Unitarian social vision. External forces and internal dissension stripped Unitarian reformers of control over their reform efforts, a reality that had profound implications not only for Unitarian poor relief programs, but also the church as a whole. By 1850, the nineteenth-century Unitarian church was in decline, partly because of Unitarians' inability to realize the cross-class organic vision they had hoped to bring about through their work with the poor, a vision that had been weakened by their poverty encounters.

This dissertation contributes to the historiography of antebellum American history in three ways. First, it critically re-examines the role of the Unitarian church in the politico-economic world of the nineteenth-century North. Historians frequently see nineteenth-century American politico-economic thought as falling into either liberal individualist or republican "public good" camps, and identify Unitarians as proponents of and apologists for the emerging liberal capitalism of the early nineteenth century.[11] Charles Sellers most famously argued for the liberal capitalist

---

[11] On the liberal side of the debate see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Liberal Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955); Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). On the republican side see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967); and J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). For syntheses of and comments on this debate see Robert Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 39, no. 2 (1982): 334-56 and Daniel Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (1992): 11-38.

view of Unitarians in his division of Jacksonian Americans into individualist

"arminians" and communitarian "antinomians."   Arguing from a position of

economic determinism, Sellers contended that "Unitarianism reshaped Christianity

most fully to the market mentality."[12] Similarly, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth

Fox-Genovese identified Unitarians as exemplary of the liberal-minded capitalist

North, which they juxtaposed with the paternalistic slave South. For the Genoveses,

Unitarians symbolized all that Southern culture was opposed to, especially radical

individualism.[13] In reality, very few nineteenth-century Unitarians, or Northerners in

general, viewed society in the way Sellers and the Genoveses posit. Unitarians, as I

will argue, retained elements of both individualism and communalism, and they saw

them not as contradictory, but as overlapping.

This work follows the example of historians like Daniel Walker Howe,

Richard Carwardine, and Harry Stout, who have criticized the simplistic elision of

theological and economic liberal individualism.[14]   As the dissertation argues, there

was profound ambivalence among Unitarians about the economic and sociopolitical

changes of the nineteenth century, and like many northern clergymen, Unitarians

often served as a prophetic voice against what they believed was the development of a

politico-economic system that had the potential to destroy family and community life.

---

[12] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 202-3.

[13] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 659.

[14] Daniel Walker Howe, "The Market Revolution and the Shaping of Identity in Whig-Jacksonian America," and Richard Carwardine, "'Antinomians *and* Arminians': Methodists and the Market Revolution," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Harry Stout, "Puritans, Planters, and American Intellectual History," *Books and Culture* 11, no. 6 (2005): 29-31. Drew Faust points to the similarities between the organic thinking of Southern defenders of slavery and the Unitarians in *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 130.

Like Jonathan Sassi, Mark Hanley, Barry Alan Shain, and Dale Kuehne, this dissertation challenges the idea that Protestant religion was used to bolster the liberal politico-economic ideology among nineteenth-century northerners.[15]

This work also addresses the historiography of reform in the antebellum North.[16] Early historians of reform argued that middle-class and elite reformers, influenced by democratic ideas cultivated in the American west, sought to create broader opportunities for the poor and helpless.[17] Historians who followed them also examined reform from a top-down perspective, reconstructing reformers' motives for reform, though they held reformers in less esteem. Scholars in this historiographical vein most often described reform as an attempt by a ruling elite to maintain power in the face of rapid change, especially increasing democratization, or the efforts of an emerging middle class to solidify their social standing.[18] Other historians interested

---

[15] Jonathan Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Mark Hanley, *Beyond a Christian Commonwealth: The Protestant Quarrel with the American Republic, 1830-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Barry Shain, *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Dale Kuehne, *Massachusetts Congregational Political Thought, 1760-1790: The Design of Heaven* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996). For a useful, if brief, analysis of the literature challenging the ascendancy of liberal individual ideas among early Americans, see Daniel Walker Howe, "The Individual and the Community in Early America," *Responsive Community* 8, no. 2 (1998): 61-70.

[16] For excellent discussions of the historiography of social reform, see the introductions and the bibliographic essays in Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers* and Walters, *American Reformers*.

[17] See, for example, Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, Academic Library ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1957; reprint, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965); Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944); and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1945).

[18] For general studies of elite and middle-class reform movements and the motives behind them, see Robert Azbug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Clifford Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960); David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); David Brion Davis, ed., *Ante-bellum Reform* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1967); Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Virtue, and Authority in*

in the lives of ordinary Americans have looked at the experiences of members of the

lower class by examining their resistance to and shaping of reform efforts, as well as

the political mobilization of members of the working class who presented other

reform visions of American society.[19] More recently, historians such as Peter

Mandler and Linda Gordon, who see reform as a crucial arena for negotiation among

a variety of persons that led to both the formation and the disruption of notions of

gender, race, and class, have talked about the role of poverty encounters in shaping

Philadelphia, 1760-1835 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Clifford Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 3 (1957): 423-44; Lois Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (1973): 23-41; Gerald Grob, "Welfare and Poverty in American History," *Reviews in American History* 1, no. 1 (1973): 43-52; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mission and the Masses: The Moral Imperatives of the City Bourgeoisie," *Reviews in American History* 7, no. 4 (1979): 527-34; Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility," *Journal of American History* 90, nos. 2, 3 (1985): 339-61, 547-66; and Lawrence Kohl, "The Concept of Social Control and the History of Jacksonian America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 1 (1985): 21-34. A few studies focus more specifically on women and gender in relation to general reform. These include Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change, Rochester, N.Y., 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Clare Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006); Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*; and Ann Boylan, "Women in Groups: An Analysis of Women's Benevolent Organizations in New York and Boston," *Journal of American History*, 71, no. 3 (1984): 497-523.

[19] For general discussions of the lives of the lower classes see Billy Smith, ed., *Down and Out in Early America* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004) and Smith, *"The Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). See also Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Peter Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of the North American Canals, 1780-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Peter Knights, *The Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860: A Study in City Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). The literature on antebellum laborers and labor politics is vast. Major works include Mary Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860: The Reaction of American Industrial Society to the Advance of the Industrial Revolution* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); and Seth Rockman, *"Working for Wages in Early Republic Baltimore: Unskilled Labor and the Blurring of Slavery and Freedom"* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1999).

poor relief programs.[20] The present work adds to the literature that considers reform

as an arena for negotiation, revealing the ways that relationships and encounters

between elites and the poor deeply influenced both groups. It goes beyond this,

however, demonstrating how poverty encounters not only influenced the shape of

church poor relief programs, but also directed the path of the church as a whole.

Finally, this dissertation seeks to complicate the narrative of northern poor

relief efforts in the antebellum period. Many historians have presented the story of

poor relief as a declension narrative in which the mandated communal care for the

poor that was practiced in the colonial period was replaced in the early republic and

antebellum periods by a punitive system in public institutions.[21]   Studies in this

tradition argue that poor relief reformers in this period turned away from

understanding the individual and circumstantial problems of poverty to generalizing

about the poor in ways that shifted the blame for poverty from circumstances to

---

[20] Peter Mandler, *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) and Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960* (New York: Viking, 1988). For examinations of negotiatory relationships between reformers and the recipients of their reform efforts see Simon Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Bruce Bellingham, "'Little Wanderers': A Socio-Historical Study of the Nineteenth Century Origins of Child Fostering and Adoption Reform, Based on Early Records of the New York Children's Aid Society" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1984); and Stansell, *City of Women*. For studies of the use of religion or community ideals in negotiating relationships between workers and employers see Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995) and "Religion and Labor Reform in Antebellum America," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1986): 265-86; Teresa Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); David Grimsted, "Antebellum Labor: Violence, Strike, and Communal Arbitration," *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 1 (1985): 5-28; and Herbert Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement," *American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (1966): 74-101.
[21] John Alexander, *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Welfare and the Poor in the Nineteenth-Century City: Philadelphia, 1800-1854* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1985); Robert Cray, Jr., *Paupers and Poor Relief in New York City and Its Rural Environs, 1700-1830* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue*, especially chapter 7; Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*; and Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*.

individual sin.[22] To be sure, the general trend in treatment of the poor was away from

communal care for individuals and toward regimented, often punitive treatment of the

poor in collective settings like almshouses. Yet the experience of Unitarians in poor

relief complicates this narrative. Many Unitarians, like some other voluntary

religious groups, were troubled by the institutionalization of the poor in almshouses

and offered alternatives that were more caring and effective. Second, contrary to

much historiography about voluntary poor relief, some Unitarians actually grew from

relative ignorance about the causes and conditions of poverty to a greater

understanding of the complexities of political economy and its impact on the family

lives, social networks, and health of the poor.

The Unitarian example provides an excellent window through which to view

poor relief and its influence on theology, politics, and social thought in the

antebellum North. Unitarians were leading intellectuals of the antebellum period,

inhabiting a position of national respect and authority, particularly at Harvard

University, and in Boston, the "Athens of America." They officially formed their

own denominational organization, the American Unitarian Association, in 1825.

Heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, Unitarians emphasized the importance of

reason and believed that human beings were fundamentally good by nature. They

were hopeful men and women who believed in the possibility of the improvement and

progress of humankind and led reform movements at the local and national levels.

---

[22] See especially Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, chapter 2. Dorsey argues that women reformers
had a keen understanding of the causes of poverty, especially as poverty became more feminized in the
antebellum period, but that they, too, eventually "capitulated" to "prevailing perceptions of poverty
and benevolence." (89)

Unitarianism, especially in Boston, was not only a religious and philosophical movement, but a social one as well. By 1850, two-thirds of the richest Bostonians were Unitarians, and many Unitarians saw their denominational affiliation as a reflection of their social standing.[23] The Unitarian church was always a small denomination, but its importance to the political and social thought of the antebellum United States should not be underestimated. Unitarians counted among their ranks, and their dissenters, the young nation's preeminent philosophers, writers, and historians, including Joseph Story, Daniel Webster, Edward Everett, Andrews Norton, Francis Parkman, and George Bancroft.[24]

It is precisely Unitarians' intellectual and economic might that make them such a fascinating study in the impact of lived experience on ideological commitments. Unitarians were prolific writers, and historians have a rich treasure of literature from which to gain understanding about the changes in their worldview over time. Like their Puritan forbears, Unitarians were highly self-reflective, and the tomes of diaries and institutional reports they created provide a useful window through which to view the personal philanthropic efforts that had a profound impact on their theopolitical understandings. The meeting of Unitarian ideals with the

---

[23] Ronald Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard and the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1980) and "Class and Culture in Boston," *American Quarterly* 27 (1975): 178-199; Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Who Were the Evangelicals? Conservative and Liberal Identity in the Unitarian Controversy in Boston, 1804-1833," *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 1 (1997): 87-107; Anne C. Rose, "Social Sources of Denominationalism Reconsidered: Post-Revolutionary Boston as a Case Study," *American Quarterly*, 38, no. 2 (1986): 243-64; and Richard Sykes, "The Changing Class Structure of Unitarian Parishes in Massachusetts, 1780-1880," *Review of Religious Research* 12, no. 1 (1970): 26-34.

[24] On the importance of Unitarians to antebellum northern culture, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 9-10.

realities Unitarians saw around them often challenged their suppositions and forced them to reconsider their beliefs.

Indeed, one of the central arguments of this dissertation is that "encounters" between poor relief workers and the members of the lower and working classes played a central role in shaping Unitarian policy about poverty, as well as Unitarian ideas about society, the economy, and theology. The idea of "encounter" conveys a certain unexpectedness, the confrontation of supposition with actuality. Encounters bring with them surprises, and out of the shock of surprise often comes the stuff of ideological change. Some of the changes outlined in this dissertation were subtle, others explosive, but neither Unitarian reformers nor the poor men and women they met came out of these encounters unchanged.

Encounters between Unitarians and the poor and working classes took a variety of forms. First, and most obviously, were direct encounters between Unitarian poor relief workers and those they were seeking to assist. These encounters took place in the homes of the poor, on the streets of the city, and in the almshouse and the church. Direct encounters introduced poor relief workers to the causes and conditions of poverty, moving them beyond their theorizations of impoverishment and economic inequality to deeper understandings of the poor and working classes. In their work with the poor, Unitarians encountered the human realities, circumstances, and hopes of those whom they sought to help. For some, like the Boston Unitarian minister Joseph Tuckerman, direct encounters with the poor illuminated the structural causes of economic inequality, which, in turn, transformed them into advocates for solutions to impoverishment that addressed systemic issues.

Encounters need not to have been direct, however. In many cases, the mere presence of the poor sparked discussion and debate among Unitarians. For instance, poor members of the Boston Unitarian free chapels, through their dress and their proprietorship of the free chapels, caused debates among the city's Unitarian clergy about the role of class divisions in the city's Unitarian churches. Unitarians made direct reference to the appearance of the poor in these disputes, and in this way the poor chapel attendees, if unwittingly, influenced church discussions about the poor relief ministry. The influence of the poor chapel attendees extended even beyond this limited debate, however, for the discussions about the poor relief ministry eventually played an important role in the theological crisis that led to major schism and weakening of the church.

Encounters exacerbated Unitarian theological disputes by revealing underlying contradictions and tensions in Unitarian theology. Unitarianism was a fragile denomination because it had been founded as an oppositional force to the perceived false doctrine of the Congregational church. Since it was fundamentally a negative movement, Unitarianism had little concrete doctrine of its own, other than a rational objection to the more emotional aspects of Protestant religion. The amorphousness of Unitarianism and the vast variety of beliefs among Unitarian Christians often led to tension in the church, exacerbated by the stress on reason which could upset positions earlier accepted. Unitarian efforts to assist the poor and working classes were thus built on an unstable theological foundation. This unsteady foundation was created by the intersections of tenuous Unitarian ideas of agency,

human nature and sin, the work of God in the world, and the role of the church in public life, all of which are embodied in the term "theopolitics."[25]

What were Unitarians' theopolitical views? While they varied across time and space, one theme of Unitarian theopolitics was the concept of an organic social order. That is, Unitarians believed that human beings were fundamentally social in nature and that the social order was divinely ordained.[26] Unitarians emphasized the utility and functional differentiation among the varying parts of society, which work together interdependently to create a collective entity. Like the body of Christ, in which "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be," so did Unitarians believe God arranged persons in society to fulfill specific needs for the good of the whole.[27] Yet even while Unitarians emphasized social interdependence, they never lost sight of the individual. William Ellery Channing argued, for example, that "the progress of society consists in nothing more,

---

[25] My use of the word "theopolitics" is similar in subject and scope to the idea of "political theology" as defined by Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004). In their introduction to the book, Scott and Cavanaugh define political theology as "the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social, and economic aspects) from the perspective of differing interpretations of God's way with the world." (1) The phrase "political theology," as Scott and Cavanaugh point out, can mean different things to different people. "Theopolitics" is most closely related to "political theology" in those cases in which "political theology" refers to both politics and theology as "constituted in the production of metaphysical images around which communities are organized." (2)

[26] Several ideological strains influenced Unitarian organicism. Puritanism, the intellectual predecessor of New England Unitarianism, with its emphasis on the divinely-ordered community, was the foundation of Unitarians' organic vision. Unitarians were also the intellectual heirs of Edmund Burke, whose emphasis on the great unbroken chain of humanity throughout time influenced Unitarian views of society. Organicism was also central to the ancient and medieval philosophies that Boston Unitarians studied at Harvard University. Aristotelian and Thomist organic ideas of the social order played an important role in shaping Unitarian organicism. For an exploration of medieval organic thought see Ewart Lewis, "Organic Tendencies in Medieval Political Thought," *American Political Science Review* 32, no. 5 (1938): 849-76. For the influence of medieval organicism on one Unitarian see Thomas Cooke and Arnaud Leavelle, "Orestes Brownson's 'The American Republic,'" *Review of Politics*, 4, no. 1 (1942): 77-90.

[27] I Corinthians 11:18, NIV.

than in bringing out the individual."[28] Moreover, Unitarian poor relief programs,

especially those of individual visitation, were concerned not only with developing ties

between rich and poor, but also providing the poor with the tools they needed for

individual self-improvement and education.

Unitarians' particular theopolitical worldview influenced their responses to

questions about poverty even though these concerns were not unique to the Unitarian

church. Like many Northerners, Unitarians were concerned that the urban

environment might rend asunder the interdependency and community necessary for

the proper development of society, and also like many Northerners, they idealized a

pristine American past rooted in a bucolic yeoman existence. Unitarians who led in

founding the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, for example,

attempted to turn Boston's urban boys into "little tanned agriculturalists," yeomen

farmers who would cultivate both crops and moral stability in the Massachusetts

countryside. Their efforts to foster apprenticeships a form of labor marked by

hierarchy and deference, even as those types of relationships were rapidly being

replaced by the wage labor system, reveals their worry over the loss of a social

system that they believed had provided economic and social stability for all members

of society. Similarly, the Brook Farm Transcendentalists tapped into notions of a

bucolic American past. In joining manual labor with intellectual pursuits they sought

to stem the tide of what they believed was the unfortunate separation of what should

---

[28] William Ellery Channing, *Spiritual Freedom: Discourse Preached at the Annual Election, May 26, 1830*, in *The Works of William Ellery Channing* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903), 4:78.

16

naturally be joined.[29] Brook Farm was an attempt to reunite the hand with the heart

and mind, to create the conditions necessary for the redevelopment of a well-

informed citizenry, rooted in the soil and practicing the virtues of frugality, hard

work, and self-culture. Yet the poor boys in the BAFS and the laborers whom the

Transcendentalists attempted to assist resisted such a vision. Moreover, in resisting

the particular forms of aid offered to them, they led some Unitarians to accept the

wage labor system as a legitimate form of political economy. Unitarians' poverty

encounters thus altered their bucolic moral vision.

Unitarians also wrestled with the common antebellum question of whether

poor relief workers should approach poverty as an individual or systemic issue, and

their encounters with the poor also heavily shaped their thought in this area. Some

Unitarians, like Joseph Tuckerman in Boston and Joseph Sill in Philadelphia,

approached their work from the latter point of view. Believing that the God-ordained

interdependency of different groups in society called for every Unitarian to help the

poor, Tuckerman and Sill visited the poor in their homes, attempted to gain an

understanding of their needs, and then sought to fill those needs at the individual

level. Yet, Tuckerman's and Sill's encounters with poverty taught them that the

needs of the poor were often created by an unjust economic system that debilitated or

left helpless, both physically and financially, even the most diligent workers. Sill

attempted to help workers, especially English immigrants, to navigate the

uncertainties caused by these injustices, and Tuckerman continued his individual

---

[29] According to George Ripley, the goal of Brook Farm was "to combine the thinker and the worker, as far as possible, in the same individual." Ripley to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 9 November 1940, quoted in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *George Ripley* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882), 307-8, in Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 218.

visitation, but coupled his friendly visiting work with calls for wider reform. Some

Unitarians, however, focused their energies more directly and exclusively on enacting

major reforms. Some Unitarian Transcendentalists, for example, attempted to bring

about wider, even radical, social change and called for the complete transformation of

the American social and economic systems.

Another common question of antebellum poor relief work, the relationship

between vice and poverty, was also an important issue for Unitarians that was

affected by poverty encounters. Like many antebellum Americans, some Unitarians

made direct links between poverty and sins such as laziness, intemperance, or

improvidence.[30] One Unitarian argued that "a due measure of poverty" was

inevitable, but stated that "even if by some marvellous [sic] changes, all mankind

were made as equal in their possessions or means . . . this Utopian equality would

scarcely last a day," for "the lazy and the wicked, and not they alone, but the shiftless,

the extravagant, and improvident, would soon fall back into dependence."[31] Many

Unitarians would have agreed with this statement. Nevertheless, those Unitarians

who developed close relationships with the poor grew to believe that automatic links

between poverty and vice were too simplistic. "The words *pauperism* and *crime* . . .

are so constantly placed by the side of each other by writers on these subjects,"

Joseph Tuckerman wrote, "that the public is in great danger of becoming impressed

with the idea that there is a necessary connexion between them." Tuckerman argued

that "it would be at least as true . . . to say, that there is a stronger and more direct

---

[30] On the connections made between vice and poverty see Seth Rockman, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 14-16; Stansell, *City of Women*, 34; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 19; and Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 159-70.
[31] "Public Charities," *Christian Examiner* 7, no. 1 (1830): 369.

connexion between vice and wealth, than between crime and poverty."[32] Tuckerman

had met too many impoverished Bostonians like the Jeffers family, a widowed

mother and daughter who had lost their needleworking income to illness, to believe

that poverty was always the result of sin.[33] Similarly, Joseph Sill, in his individual

encounters with the poor, grew to appreciate the shallowness of crude links made

between poverty and vice. As he encountered English textile workers who had been

displaced by mechanization and spoke with friends who had been devastated by

financial downturns, he came to a more nuanced understanding of poverty and its

causes. For Sill and Tuckerman, and many other Unitarians, relationships with the

poor created deeper understandings of poverty that more often blamed poverty on the

injustices of economic and social structures and the somehow hard hand of

providence or circumstance than individual moral failure.

Poverty encounters also fostered Unitarian debates about the role of the

church in perpetuating unjust social structures. For instance, after the Unitarian

church established free chapels for the poor in Boston, some Unitarians began to

argue that the separation of rich from poor on Sunday belied the social

interdependency the church claimed to be fostering in their ministry to the poor. True

care for the poor and cultivation of social interdependency would only be reflected in

the complete integration of the church on Sunday mornings, some Unitarians claimed.

The debate over the free chapels and the question of whether they perpetuated the

very social injustices they were meant to ameliorate influenced the Unitarian church

---

[32] "Mr. Tuckerman's Eight Semi-Annual Report of His Service as Minister at Large in Boston,"
Christian Examiner 12, no. 1 (1832): 116-17.
[33] Tuckerman visitation notes, Tuckerman Diary, Tuckerman Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

in important ways, creating divisions in the church over the place of social hierarchy in the religious community.[34]

The questions Unitarians asked about poverty were common among nineteenth-century Northerners concerned about the number of poor men, women, and children in the nation's cities. Was poverty the result of sin, or caused by structural problems in the political economy? Should reformers address poverty as a personal or systemic problem?   What was the role of the church in ameliorating poverty, and how did religious reform intersect with social and political reform? While Unitarians were not alone in struggling with these questions, the answers they found to them were heavily influenced by their theopolitical views and the influence of poverty encounters on them. This dissertation explores these encounters to shed light on their importance to the history of American society and religion.

The first chapter of the dissertation traces the work of Joseph Tuckerman, the first Unitarian minister-at-large in Boston, and the role of Tuckerman's encounters with the poor in its transformation. Tuckerman's work, with its emphasis on friendly visiting, was an expression of the Unitarian organic social vision. Tuckerman and his supporters envisioned a poor relief system that would establish relationships of care in systems of interdependency even as it met the material needs of the poor and fostered individual self-improvement. Yet, in his encounters with Boston's poor, Tuckerman received an education in the circumstantial causes of poverty that caused him to question whether impoverishment was a natural phenomenon. As he became more aware of the systemic causes of poverty such as abysmal wages for women, he

---

[34] George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America: A History of Its Origin and Development* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910), 158-62.

became an advocate for changes to the political economy, encouraging his fellow Unitarians to consider how structural injustices perpetuated poverty among the lower class. Even as he promoted structural changes, he did so in a way that tapped into the sensibilities of social interdependency of his elite audience. Tuckerman was unable to convince his audience of the importance of altering the structural changes of poverty, but in his daily work with the poor he gained a new appreciation for the dignity of the impoverished and, in a small way, was able to ameliorate some of the harsher conditions of poverty in the city.

The story of Unitarian poor relief work should not be confined to Boston, for Philadelphia Unitarians were just as active in addressing poverty in their own city. Philadelphia Unitarians had a different spiritual and social heritage from their Boston counterparts. They came from a dissenting tradition in England, were much more middle-class in social standing, and operated in a city marked by a heterogeneity of religion and culture. Philadelphia Unitarians, most of whom were English immigrant merchants, concentrated their efforts on assisting newly arrived English immigrants, many of whom had been displaced by economic changes in the mother land, and bringing members of the marginal lower class into the middle-class fold. Nevertheless, Philadelphia Unitarians did not differ completely from their Boston counterparts. Joseph Sill and his wife Jane Sill, the most well-known Unitarian poor relief volunteers in the city, took an individualistic approach to poverty, much like Joseph Tuckerman. And like Tuckerman, the Sills' encounters with the poor caused them to believe that one rarely could make connections between a person's morality and economic status. In the men and women whom he helped, Joseph Sill

encountered a certain moral strength that belied the supposed relationship between sin and poverty. The Sills' experience was representative of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia as a whole, where social differentiation between reformers and the recipients of their assistance was less stark than in Boston, and where many more laymen and women became involved in poor relief work. In this way, the Philadelphia Unitarian Church more successfully fulfilled Tuckerman's ministerial vision of lay ministry than the Unitarian church in Boston.

The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys (BAFS) is the subject of the third chapter. The BAFS, while not a ministry of the Unitarian church, was run mostly by Unitarians and influenced by Unitarian ideas. In the BAFS, Unitarians attempted to institute their organic vision, with a romantic view of the relationship between farming and the integrity of the American citizenry, by pulling boys from the pernicious influence of the city and placing them in a bucolic setting. Yet, the Directors of the Farm School adopted means to meet this goal that were ill-suited to a society whose understandings of labor were rapidly changing. The young men who were sent to the BAFS usually rejected the apprenticeship system on which the BAFS was based in favor of the "freedom" offered by wage labor. Encounters between the Directors of the BAFS and the students, then, taught the Directors about changing understandings of labor and class. Nevertheless, the School Directors did not abandon those boys who refused to adopt their organic vision. Instead, through men like Moses Grant, they did what they could to ease the entry of young men into the wage labor economy of the antebellum North. In doing so, however, they undermined the conceptions on which the BAFS had been founded.

Chapter four examines the influence of the dress of the poor and their appropriation of the free chapels on debates in the Boston Unitarian church over the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches (BFC), the institutional arm of the ministry-at-large. Many ministers changed the focus of the ministry by instituting formal chapel ministries to the poor and all but abandoning the friendly visiting that had been central to Tuckerman's work. The result was the creation of churches over which the poor attendees were able to assert proprietorship. In claiming ownership of their churches, the free chapel attendees often acted in ways that challenged common Unitarian notions of poverty and hierarchy and caused the church to erupt into debate about the role of social distinctions in the Christian community. Questions about the separation of rich and poor into distinct churches and the harmful social differentiation that many considered to be defiling the church led to a crisis not only in the ministry-at-large, but also in the denomination as a whole. The life and ministry of John Turner Sargent, who abandoned his ministry to the poor out of theological protest during this crisis, represents the instability in the church caused by the inability of its leaders to come to agreement about what their theopolitical vision should look like.

By the late 1830s and 1840s Unitarian Transcendentalists had challenged that theopolitical vision, and this, as well as the unsteady relationship between Transcendentalists and the working class, is the subject of the final chapter. Unitarian Transcendentalists like Orestes Brownson and William Henry Channing, who developed ties with workingmen's and women's groups, attempted to create a classless society, but in approaching economic inequity as a class-based issue they

ignored the needs of the most destitute poor. Moreover, Unitarian Transcendentalists like the Brook Farm reformers, despite their rhetoric of dignifying the working class, often adopted an elitist attitude toward working-class reformers. Their language of radical reform, for all the agitation it created in the church, did little to address the real needs of working-class men and women, and alienated them from those whom they were supposedly trying to help. The failure of Unitarian Transcendentalists to create real relationships with the lower and working classes was the death knell of the Unitarian organic vision and the Unitarian effort to create a cross-class denomination.

Poverty encounters played an important role in the decline of this Unitarian vision because they opened up doors of dissent and opposition among Unitarian leaders over theopolitical questions, doors that the church was never able to close. Unitarians' hopeful vision of social interdependency between the classes was rent asunder by a rapidly changing economy and an inability to incorporate members of all classes into their denominational fold. By the 1850s, Unitarianism as it had existed in the first half of the nineteenth century was experiencing rapid decline, due in no small part to the church's inability to sustain its theopolitical beliefs, which had been profoundly transformed by the church's encounters with poverty and the poor.

Chapter 1: "Bonds of the Mind and the Heart": Unitarian Organic Thought and Joseph Tuckerman's Work with the Poor

In February of 1827, the Reverend Joseph Tuckerman met with a woman named Mrs. Russell while on his rounds for his ministry-at-large. Mrs. Russell informed him that her husband had been sent to jail for failing to pay a week's board while in Providence, Rhode Island. Moved by the woman's distress, Tuckerman took the matter into his own hands. He visited Russell's creditor, Mr. Morse, and, attempting to stir Morse's sense of mercy, related the anguish of the Russell family. Perhaps believing that petitions for grace might not be sufficient, Tuckerman also appealed to Morse's bottom line. He assured Morse that the only possible way he might recover his debt would be by dropping all charges against Russell so that Russell could earn the money to repay him.[1] Tuckerman did not record whether his entreaties were successful, but his determination to help had given hope for relief to a poor family in need.

As an antebellum ambassador to the poor, including families like the Russells, from the ranks of Boston's elite, Tuckerman occupied a unique position, one that allowed him to explore the meanings of community and social obligation in a rapidly changing urban society. But he did not shape his social welfare system alone, nor did it take form solely in the ephemeral realm of ideology, though Unitarian theopolitics played a crucial role in its method. Instead, it lived, grew, and was transformed in the nooks and crannies of Boston's back alleys, in Tuckerman's daily experiences with

---

[1] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 2 February 1827, Tuckerman Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

the poor, and by the poor themselves, working to improve their precarious circumstances.

Largely because of the efforts of the poor to shape the system for themselves, the seeds of charity sown by Joseph Tuckerman grew into something he never imagined when he began his work. Far from being passive recipients of poor relief, Boston's lower class used Tuckerman's gifts and services for their own purposes, and in the process transformed both the gift and the giver alike.[2] This is the story of that transformation, of the way one man's views, shaped by elite theology and social theory, changed as a result of his encounters with the poor. It is also the story of the limits of that transformation and the way Tuckerman's portrayals of poverty tapped into notions of dependency and hierarchy among Boston's elites even as Tuckerman challenged such notions. Tuckerman's poverty encounters also show how the lower class survived life on the margins of society by creatively using the sources available to them. To be sure, most of the individual stories remain tales of hardship, loss, and marginal subsistence, and sometimes reveal the seedier side of human nature.

---

[2] For a discussion of historical approaches to such encounters in the literature about antebellum poverty see Peter Mandler, "Poverty and Charity in the Nineteenth Century Metropolis: An Introduction," in *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, ed. Peter Mandler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 1-37. Mandler states that "social historians of the poor have relinquished the field [of poverty studies], virtually agreeing that charity was a business of giving, but not receiving, a self-interested obsession of the rich that hardly figures in the lives of the poor." Instead, Mandler argues, "historians should recognize that poverty and charity went hand in hand as integral parts of urban life in nineteenth-century Europe and America," and that "the task of the recipients was to fit themselves into the positions required of the donors . . . and then to apply the gift (so far as they were able) to their own real needs." Mandler, *The Uses of Charity*, 1-2. On the importance of the poor in shaping relief programs, see also Bruce Bellingham, "Waifs and Strays: Child Abandonment, Foster Care, and Families in Mid-Nineteenth Century New York," in *The Uses of Charity*, 123-60; Bellingham, "'Little Wanderers': A Socio-Historical Study of the Nineteenth Century Origins of Child Fostering and Adoption Reform, Based on Early Records of the New York Children's Aid Society" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1984); Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960* (New York: Viking, 1988); Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, *The Logic of Charity: Amsterdam, 1800-1850*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); and Patrick Wilkinson, "The Selfless and the Helpless: Maternalist Origins of the U.S. Welfare State," *Feminist Studies*, 25, no. 3 (1999): 571-97.

Nevertheless, they are also accounts of hope, love, and commitment in the most trying of circumstances.

Foundations of the Unitarian Ministry-at-Large

Joseph Tuckerman's call to Boston's Unitarian ministry to the poor in 1826 was the culmination of a series of events that had begun in 1822. In autumn of that year, four Unitarian men met at the home of Madam Turell, a wealthy Boston woman, in Boston's fashionable Brattle Street. Their aim was modest—to found a Sunday School in North Boston for neglected children. This informal group called themselves "The Young Men's Association for Mutual Improvement and for the Religious Instruction of the Poor." They offered, along with the usual Sunday School classes, a series of lectures for Boston's poor citizens. However, their progress was halting and they often lacked ministers to deliver evening lectures. Between the autumn of 1824 and 1826, the group abandoned the evening lectures and held only weekly meetings amongst themselves.[3]   William Ellery Channing, the minister of the Unitarian Federal Street Church, hoping to re-start the work they had abandoned, initiated the formal ministry to the poor by calling for the hiring of a minister whose sole duty would be offering religious services for the lower class. At one of the Wednesday meetings in May of 1826, Channing "made an address on the expediency and practicability of procuring for the poor of the city a preacher, who should associate with himself as instructors, intelligent laymen."[4] The American Unitarian

---

[3] Daniel McColgan, *Joseph Tuckerman: Pioneer in American Social Work* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1940), 66-67.
[4] Ibid., 68.

Association (AUA), itself an infant organization, answered Channing's call six months later by hiring Joseph Tuckerman as the minister to the poor.

Tuckerman, the son of a Boston merchant, had followed the typical path to Harvard through the Boston Latin School and Phillips Academy in Andover. His Harvard classmates, who went on to become eminent thinkers of the antebellum period, included Channing, who was nationally recognized as the leader of the Unitarian movement, and the Supreme Court Associate Justice Joseph Story.[5] Following his Harvard graduation, Tuckerman took a ministerial position in Chelsea outside of Boston, from where he was called to the ministry to the poor by the AUA. Channing was well acquainted with his Harvard classmate's ministerial gifts; preaching was not one of them. According to one of Tuckerman's biographers, Tuckerman was "dull and uninspiring as a preacher" and he found the work required to prepare and deliver sermons in his Chelsea ministry taxing on his health.[6] Thus he eagerly took up the position as minister to the poor, in which his work would be focused less on preaching to the masses than stirring the individual soul. Tuckerman brought his wife Sarah, his "earthly central light," and his six children with him to Boston when he began his ministry there.[7]

Poor Relief in Early Nineteenth-Century Boston

Tuckerman began his work knowing little about the methods of delivering poor relief in urban settings. The few ideas he had about the causes and conditions of

---

[5] Ibid., 8. McColgan refers to Channing, Story, and Tuckerman as the "triumvirate."
[6] Ibid., 31.
[7] Joseph Tuckerman, 19 November 1838, letter reproduced in Mary Carpenter, *Memoir of Joseph Tuckerman* (London: Christian Tract Society, 1849), 88-142, quoted in McColgan, *Joseph Tuckerman*, 41.

poverty came from his visits as pastor to the poor house in Chelsea and from the debates about state and local poor relief in antebellum Boston. One of his first tasks, then, was to acquaint himself with the major arguments about the causes of and solutions to poverty. Tuckerman spent the early weeks of his ministry reading from the reports of internationally recognized poor relief thinkers such as the Scottish reformer Thomas Chalmers. He also passed many hours with the city officials who spent the most time with the poor, including prison officials, Overseers of the Poor, and temperance advocates. He read a history of Boston, probably to familiarize himself with the city that, though only a few miles away from his Chelsea home, was a very different world to him.

At the beginning of Tuckerman's ministry, Boston's municipal leaders were participating in vitriolic disputes about the nature of poverty and the best way to handle it. By 1826 systems that had been in place since Boston's earliest days were undergoing rapid transformations. In 1800 Boston had built a new almshouse on Leverett Street, but in 1821 a special committee examined its efficacy criticized it for containing a mixed inmate population in which the sick and insane were living side by side with the healthy poor. The committee's report recommended the construction of a House of Industry, which the city opened in 1823. The House of Industry would serve the same purpose as Boston's eighteenth-century workhouse; it would be a place where the healthy poor could work in return for food and shelter. A bitter controversy arose between the Overseers of the Poor and the Committee for the House of Industry over the administration of the House, with the Overseers claiming rights over the admission process. The Overseers were fiercely protective of their

jurisdiction, particularly since their work in distributing food, fuel, and other supplies

was waning as city officials abandoned support for "outdoor relief" in favor of

institutionalization of the poor. The Overseers and the committee decided that the

Overseers would continue to run the outdoor relief program and the Committee for

the House of Industry would oversee the House, including admissions.[8]

Few of the adults living in the House of Industry were the clients for whom

the House had been built—the "able-bodied poor." The House had been built to

temporarily house those poor who were capable of working but could not find work.

Inmates were expected to perform manual labor, usually spinning, weaving, making

shoes, or performing tasks required for the upkeep of the facility. However, the

Directors complained that many of Boston's poor used the House as a stopping point

when they were "worn down by intemperance and disease," and that they left as soon

as they were well enough to return to the city. "Instead of being a House of

Industry," a committee on the Massachusetts pauper system complained, "the

institution has therefore become at once, a general Infirmary—an Asylum for the

insane, and a refuge for the deserted and most destitute children of the city." Most of

the well inhabitants spent their labor caring for "the aged and infirm," and "the sick,

insane, idiots, and helpless children."[9] The Boston House of Industry also served as a

collecting point for many poor people whose homes were outside of Boston, a

---

[8] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed in Order of the House of Representatives, February 29, 1832, on the Subject of the Pauper System of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1835), 44-45, and *The Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston, to their Constituents* (Boston: n.p., 1823).
[9] *Report of the Commissioners*, 44-45.

repository for the "state's poor" whom the city cared for under obligations that the Commonwealth had established decades earlier.[10]

Boston's municipal poor relief system was typical of many northern cities during the antebellum period. Most major cities, including Philadelphia and New York, established almshouses to handle poverty and reduce outdoor relief in the early nineteenth century. Arguments about the efficacy and propriety of outdoor relief dominated debates about the response to poverty in these cities. Many historians attribute these debates to the increasingly unwieldy problem of poverty and changing attitudes toward the poor. Municipal authorities began to see the poor not as a natural part of the community whose divinely ordained circumstances demanded care and attention, but as immoral and the creators of their own poverty. State and city officials viewed outdoor relief as an encouragement to loafing and dependency. Administrators of poor relief thus sought to decrease outdoor relief and replace it with the more punitive and reform-minded almshouse system.[11] Almshouses were meant to assist the poor in curing the vices that had caused their impoverishment. They also,

---

[10] Under early Massachusetts law, townships were responsible to care for their poor inhabitants, with non-residents being "warned out." As transience and immigration in the state increased, fewer poor people were able to meet the inhabitancy requirements for local assistance. The "state's poor" were such citizens whose relief was taken on by the state. See Robert Kelso, *The History of Public Poor Relief in Massachusetts, 1620-1920* (Montclair: Patterson Smith, 1969), 55. On January 17, 1832, the population of the House of Industry was 440, but only 170 of the inhabitants were from Boston. The rest came from other towns in the state (thirty-three), other parts of the country (fifty-four), or from other nations (183). One hundred eighty-three children also lived in the House; sixty-seven were from Boston and the others were mostly foreigners (seventy-nine were from Ireland or were the children of Irish parents). Many of the immigrants in the House were probably newcomers who had arrived in Boston penniless. The city housed more "State's Poor" than "Town's Poor" in the House; out of 1237 families admitted in 1831, three-fifths of them were States Poor. See *Report of the Commissioners*, 45. By way of contrast, during Tuckerman's third year of ministry in 1829, he visited nearly five hundred families. On early Boston poor relief see also Gary Nash, *Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Unitarian Press, 1986), 114-16; David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1971), 39; and George Hale, "The Charities of Boston," in *The Memorial History of Boston, Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts, 1630-1880*, (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1881), 4:648.

[11] Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, especially chapter 7.

paradoxically, were meant to be so unattractive that the poor would enter them only as a final recourse.[12] As the situation in Boston suggests, however, the transition from outdoor to indoor relief was not a smooth one and was never fully complete. Charity dispensed by the Overseers, based on a view of the poor as helpless and dependent, remained central to Boston's poor relief efforts and operated alongside the punitive almshouse system for much of the nineteenth century.

Like municipal authorities, northern reformers in voluntary associations also began to attribute poverty to the vice of the poor in the antebellum period. Evangelical pietism, with its strong belief that individuals could play a role in their own salvation and that of society, caused an explosion of poor relief work in the antebellum period. Just as individuals were active agents in their own salvation, so were they responsible for their own economic success. Reformers, influenced by liberal ideas of economic striving and self-sufficiency, came to see economic independence as the hallmark of virtuous citizenship, at least among free white males. Protestant ideas of salvation and liberalism were thus mutually reinforcing ideas.[13] By the early 1830s, fewer reformers were willing to see the poor as virtuous, if unfortunate, members of the community. While dependency had earlier been viewed as simply a natural condition of life in a hierarchical society, by the antebellum period

---

[12] The most succinct statement of this argument is by Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, Tenth Anniversary ed., rev. (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 25. For examinations of the shift from outdoor relief to almshouses in specific cities see Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) and Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Welfare and the Poor in the Nineteenth Century City, Philadelphia, 1800-1854* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985). Robert Kelso examines the shift from outdoor to indoor relief at the state level in *The History of Public Poor Relief in Massachusetts*, chapter 6.

[13] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 11.

it came to be seen as a negative character trait.[14] Because of this, benevolent groups

began to focus less on the material needs of the poor and more on their spiritual

improvement.[15]

Unitarian Organicism and Poor Relief

Unitarian theopolitical views, especially as embodied in the work of Joseph

Tuckerman, complicate the neat picture painted by historians of changes in

nineteenth-century poor relief. Tuckerman, for example, came to believe that no

form of punitive state poor relief would be as effective as private charity. Before he

began his ministry to the poor he "was decidedly in favor of a modified plan for a

State provision for the poor," but in the process of examining the Massachusetts poor

laws, he "was brought to an entirely different conviction."[16] Tuckerman also

operated under different assumptions about poverty than public relief officials and

other voluntary poor relief workers. He did not shift from viewing the poor as a

natural part of society to seeing them as creators of their own poverty or as

particularly vicious or dangerous in nature. Indeed, instead of viewing poverty as an

unnatural state of existence that should be eliminated, he, like many Unitarians, saw

the relationship of dependency between rich and poor as ordinary and, in some ways,

---

[14] Americans more often defined dependency as a negative trait among free white males. Women, children, and slaves were viewed as naturally dependent. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "'Dependency' Demystified: Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the Welfare State," in Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, eds., *Contemporary Political Philosophy, an Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 618-33.

[15] Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), chapter 2.

[16] Joseph Tuckerman, *Eleventh Semiannual Report*, 5 May 1833, 13, quoted in McColgan, *Joseph Tuckerman*, 196. On Tuckerman's ambivalence about public poor relief see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 251.

good. In the late 1820s and early 1830s Unitarians often expressed an understanding of poverty that was rooted in an organic view of society.

While moving away from the language of covenant of their Puritan forbears, Unitarians maintained the Puritan belief that society functioned best when it operated as an organism in which individuals carried out their God-ordained roles in relationships of mutuality and deference. Men were, by their very nature, communal beings.[17] William Ellery Channing argued that the common belief "that society is the creature of compact and selfish calculation" was false. Instead, he argued, "Society is of earlier and higher origin. It is God's ordinance, and answers to that which is most godlike in our nature." Instead of "self-interest, or compacts, or positive institutions, or force" holding men together, Channing stated, ties of community were "invisible, refined, spiritual ties, bonds of the mind and the heart."[18] Community, then, was an outgrowth of the divinely ordained natural order.[19] For some Unitarians, this meant that some members of society would inevitably be higher on the social scale than others. Like their Puritan forbears, Unitarian clergymen often

---

[17] Jonathan Sassi argues that this belief is fundamentally at odds with the usual portrayal of New England clergy as liberal-minded individualists in the post-Revolutionary period. According to Sassi, while historians often portray the New England Congregationalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as "privatized, confined to the believer's heart, and divorced from its conventional concern with larger society," in reality, "New England's traditional religious leaders remained largely actively engaged in the search to maintain the connection between Christianity and the society at large; they stood against the liberal juggernaut and raised a prophetic voice." See Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10-11.

[18] William Ellery Channing, *The Works of William Ellery Channing* (Boston: J. Munroe and Company, 1841), 4:91-92, quoted in Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 122-23.

[19] Mary Kupiec Cayton, who argues that "In their insistence that powerful laws of the human psyche could produce social unity just as natural laws produced unity in nature, Unitarians buttressed the notion of social organicism with a justification taken from nature. Men were to cooperate in a harmonious social order because their natures demanded that they do so." See Cayton, *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in Emerson's Boston, 1800-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 63. For discussions of Unitarian ideas of organic society, see Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 125-31 and *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 69-75; Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness,* 154-63; and John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 91-96.

associated material wealth with legitimate political authority, though they consistently emphasized that wealth must always be directed by virtue.[20]

Hierarchicalism was present in many Unitarian discussions of poverty in the late 1820s and early 1830s. As one Unitarian argued, "differences in the external condition of men are necessary, that is, of the appointment of God." They are "*essential to the very existence of society*. Without them, it is obvious there could be no subordination, and if no subordination, no government."[21] These positions were not necessarily caused by vice, but were appointments by God to allow different virtues to flourish in the community. "If the distinctions of wealth and poverty were abolished," one Unitarian argued, "a vast proportion of the opportunities of kindness and usefulness would thereby be destroyed." On one hand, the wealthy would be deprived of the opportunity "of doing good to others by acts of encouragement, beneficence, and charity," and on the other hand the poor would lose the ability to express "those sentiments of gratitude, respect, and good will, which beneficent deeds naturally inspire."[22] The poor would always be a part of the properly-ordered community; the elimination of poverty, another Unitarian argued, would mean "an entire change of the constitution of nature."[23]

---

[20] Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 139-40.

[21] J. Brazer, "The Visitor of the Poor," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, November 1832, 142. Emphasis in original.

[22] Ibid., 146.

[23] Samuel A. Eliot, "Mr. Tuckerman's Eighth Semi-Annual Report of his Service as a Minister-at-large in Boston," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, March 1832, 124. See also Francis Parkman, "Public Charities," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, January 1830, especially page 368. Parkman argued, "'The poor ye shall always have with you'—is not only the declaration of him who came to relieve them, but is a part of the established constitution of the world. It is the positive ordinance of God, the will and pleasure of the general moral Governor, that the poor shall never cease from the land."

Unitarian ministers' pronouncements of social hierarchy fit well with the material condition of their congregants, most of whom were members Boston's upper class. The social makeup of liberal Massachusetts congregations changed considerably in the post-revolutionary period, with a substantial decrease in the membership of artisans and farmers and an increase in membership of men and women of wealth and status. Boston Unitarians were members of the city's *nouveau riche* class who had accumulated wealth by investing in internal improvements and building factories and then consolidated it through intermarriage and control of the banking establishment. By 1850, two-thirds of the wealthiest Bostonians were Unitarians, and many Unitarians saw their denominational affiliation as a reflection of their social standing.[24]

Unitarians tempered their belief in a communal social order with an emphasis on the individual right to education and free thought. If rich and poor had duties toward one another, individuals of both groups also had the right and ability to develop their intellectual and moral abilities to their fullest extent. "'I call that mind free, which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers, which calls no man master, which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith, which opens itself to light whencesoever it may come," William Ellery Channing argued.[25]

---

[24] Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Who Were the Evangelicals? Conservative and Liberal Identity in the Unitarian Controversy in Boston, 1804-1833," *Journal of Social History* 31 no. 1 (1997): 87; Ronald Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard and the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1980); Story, "Class and Culture in Boston," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1975): 178-99; Anne C. Rose, "Social Sources of Denominationalism Reconsidered: Post-Revolutionary Boston as a Case Study," *American Quarterly*, 38, no. 2 (1986): 243-64; and Richard Sykes, "The Changing Class Structure of Unitarian Parishes in Massachusetts, 1780-1880," *Review of Religious Research* 12, no. 1 (1970): 26-34.

[25] William Ellery Channing, *Spiritual Freedom: Discourse Preached at the Annual Election, May 26, 1830*, in *The Works of William Ellery Channing*, 8th ed. (Boston and New York: J. Munroe, 1848), 4:72, 85, quoted in Sassi, *Republic of Righteousness*, 156.

Unitarians' democratic attitude toward education was influenced by faculty

psychology, which "taught that every man could develop his potential through mental

discipline."[26] The Unitarian emphasis on the individual dignity of each person was a

sort of "Christian humanism" that moved away from the traditional Calvinist

emphasis on the depravity of man.[27] Truth was available to all, though men and

women needed to be taught to reason properly. Furthermore, knowledge was not

simply understanding of the physical world but the ethical world as well, a

comprehension of the moral law.

Cultivation of the "moral sense" was the most important element of

education.[28] The Unitarian belief in self-culture was democratic in that Unitarians

believed everyone, elites and the lower class, male and female, could shape their

characters through "critical reflection" and "conscious effort." Though they believed

reform required control and guidance by elites, the ultimate goal of *external* control

was the creation of *self*-controlled individuals who did not require outside restraint.

As Daniel Walker Howe argues, this "conscious cultivation of character" was made a

substitute for the evangelical conversion experience popularized by nineteenth-

century evangelical culture. Unitarians balanced their acceptance of social hierarchy

with their liberal belief in the ability of each person to practice self-culture by arguing

that education provided an equal opportunity for all to enter the elite class.[29] In

reality, few of the poor ever did so.

---

[26] Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 260. Faculty psychology, as defined by the Scottish philosopher
Thomas Reid, saw the mind as distinct from the body and comprised of three elements—will,
emotions, and intellect. All there were to be shaped and moderated in harmony. For an explanation of
faculty psychology and its influence on Unitarian philosophy see pp. 57-64.
[27] Ibid., 4-7.
[28] Ibid., 45-46.
[29] Ibid., 260.

Unitarian theopolitical views were evident in Tuckerman's outline of the three

tasks of the minister to the poor. First, he argued, the minister should serve as a

religious instructor to the poor. Second, he should provide "the basic Christian

sympathy and kindness which are called for by the various necessities and sufferings

of the poor." Finally, the minister should serve as a mediator between the poor and

the "more favored classes" of society.[30] Tuckerman's ministry, then, was an

outgrowth of the organic ideal. Tuckerman believed development of proper

relationships of interdependency would allow for moral improvement of both rich and

poor as the rich practiced benevolence and the poor practiced gratitude and learned

the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Tuckerman's ministry was also influenced by

liberal individualism, though. It was premised on the idea that each of the recipients

of Tuckerman's spiritual guidance would eventually be capable of autonomous self-

discipline.

Tuckerman found a blueprint for his approach in Thomas Chalmer's *The*

Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns, a book that proved to be remarkably

compatible with Unitarian ideas of society. Chalmers, a Scottish theologian, had

written his book as a report of an experiment he conducted in the Glasgow parish of

St. John's during the late 1810s and early 1820s. He had grown alarmed at the

increasing pauperism of Glasgow, which he attributed to a poorly run bureaucratic

system that provided few checks on the distribution of poor relief and discouraged

communal care for the poor. In 1819, the Glasgow Magistrates and City Council

granted Chalmers permission to create a new parish that would slowly decrease its

---

[30] Joseph Tuckerman, *On the Elevation of the Poor: A Selection from His Reports as Minister-at-large in Boston*, ed. Edward Everett Hale, in *Poverty, U.S.A.: The Historical Record*, ed. David Rothman (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 90.

dependence on central state poor relief aid and increase parish care for the poor.[31]

Chalmers's report provided guidance for the New England clergy attempting to deal with similar problems caused by urbanization and the disintegration of the communal ideal.

Chalmers emphasized the need for a spiritual renewal in urban Glasgow, where the rapid expansion of the city and the consequent slackening of religious instruction seemed to be leaving many members of the city without a moral compass. "There is a sure experimental alliance between the defect of Christianity among a people, and the defect of certain human arrangements that conduce to its growth and preservation," Chalmers wrote, "and one most palpable defect of the latter sort is, that the population of cities have been permitted so far to outgrow the means of their religious instruction." Poor relief, then, was not meant only to meet the physical needs of the poor, but to restore Christianity among the population.[32]

Tuckerman, influenced by Chalmers, saw his task as fundamentally one of spiritual renewal. His first goal was to seek out the unchurched population of the city to bring them a Christian education that would allow them to develop habits of virtue needed for both their spiritual improvement and their development as members of the community. His primary method of poor relief was "friendly visiting." Each day Tuckerman would make his rounds among families with whom he had become acquainted. Most of the families he visited were immigrants to the city from the countryside or from Western Europe, particularly England. The majority were households with both a husband and wife present, though Tuckerman also served

---

[31] See Steward J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 116-51.
[32] Ibid., 1-2.

39

many families headed by women who had been abandoned or whose husbands had died.[33] Their labor experience was varied; some were too sick to work, others were seasonal laborers, and some, especially Tuckerman's female clients, worked hard but were unable to provide for their families with their meager pay they received. Tuckerman's main criterion in choosing his clients was their status as members of a church; anyone who was not a member of a local church was considered a candidate for assistance. During Tuckerman's visits he would assess the moral character of his clients as well as their physical needs. He usually accompanied his provision of food and needed supplies with a word of advice for moral improvement.   Tuckerman avoided proselytizing, however, maintaining a broad Christian approach rather than trying to persuade his parishioners into Unitarian beliefs.

A typical workday for Tuckerman usually lasted from early in the morning to about ten o'clock at night. Tuckerman would write in his diary and read material about poor relief in the morning, then meet with his parishioners or visit the House of Correction. After about three "friendly visits," each of lasted about an hour or so, Tuckerman would talk to city officials, ministers, doctors, and other leaders of the city about his clients and their needs, often convincing them to help in particular cases. Following these meetings, Tuckerman would visit more of his poor parishioners in the afternoon. By the end of the day Tuckerman had visited, on

---

[33] In 1829 Tuckerman listed 112 client cases, thirty-nine (34%) of which were widows or women whose husbands had abandoned them. Seventy-two (64%) were households with both spouses present, and only three (2%) were households headed by single fathers. See Tuckerman's Visitation Notes, Diary. This is by no means a comprehensive list of Tuckerman's clientele, but provides a good snapshot of his clients at the height of his ministry.

average, seven poor families and at least one official.[34] Tuckerman's empathy for his clients allowed him to place himself in their positions and act as their advocate, pleading their cases with those officials who could best meet their needs.

Tuckerman's Poverty Encounters

As Joseph Tuckerman entered the homes of the poor to help and serve as a moral and religious educator, he became a student himself. Tuckerman's parishioners taught him the importance of self-created networks of care among the poor, the problem of the addictive nature of alcohol, and the inability of some, even of the most industrious, to make a decent living. They also taught Tuckerman, through their resistance to and manipulation of his assistance, that they were determined to maintain ultimate control over their own lives.

Soon after Tuckerman began his ministry, he learned that his help was often only one thread of care in the larger web of support that Boston's poor created for themselves. The case of one woman, a Mrs. Buxton, provides a particularly poignant example of the desire and ability of the poor to care for their own and Tuckerman's recognition of the inadequacy of his care in comparison to such aid. In 1829, Tuckerman placed a child in the House of Industry after the death of its mother and secured a wet nurse to care for it. Tuckerman, his "conscience being laid at rest respecting her," "forgot her." Mrs. Buxton, herself a woman living in poverty, had gone to the House of Industry to see another child and had come across this infant, who was "then without a nurse," and would soon die of malnourishment. Buxton, the

---

[34] This statistic comes from an 1828 report, in which he reported making 3,000 visits over the course of six months. See Tuckerman, *Mr. Tuckerman's First Semi-Annual Report of the Second Year, As Minister at Large* (Boston: Bowles & Dearborn, 1828), 18.

mother of a five-month-old child, took the child to nurse it. When told she would not

receive remuneration for her work, she replied that she only wished "approbation of

what I have done." Tuckerman was struck by Mrs. Buxton's compassion for the child

and humbled by the woman's willingness to care for the infant after he had absolved

himself of responsibility for the child's care. He had given the infant to the House of

Industry believing his duty done, but it took the care of a woman living in poverty to

save the child from death. Mrs. Buxton's compassion taught Tuckerman that

salvation for the poor often came from their own rather than benevolent hands.[35]

Tuckerman continually expressed wonder in his diary at the familial and

neighborly care and love he witnessed among the poor. He recounted cases of older

siblings caring for younger siblings after the loss of their parents and neighbors caring

for the sick or offering temporary shelter during times of economic distress. Women

cared for each other's children on Sundays so that they could rotate attendance at

Sabbath day services. Women also protected each other in cases of physical abuse,

providing free shelter for distressed women with nowhere else to turn.

Tuckerman was so struck by the networks of care among the poor that in 1835

he wrote a book, *Gleams of Truth*, to demonstrate to his fellow Unitarians the

willingness of the poor to sacrifice for the good of their neighbors. The book, a

sentimental novellete, led the reader on a fictional "Morning Walk," "Evening at

Home," and "Review of the Day," during which the narrator led a wealthy man, and

the reader, on a tour of his daily rounds. By the time Tuckerman published the book,

he was consistently expressing frustration at the unwillingness of laymen and women

from the Unitarian church to accompany him on his rounds. In his 1829 report, he

---

[35] Tuckerman's Visitation Notes, Diary.

stated that despite having the "means enough, intellectual, moral, and pecuniary," to meet "all the demands" of the city's poor, the city's Unitarians required "greater prevalence of the true spirit of our religion" and a commitment "to the christian duties" required of them, especially the duty to "*visit* the widow, the fatherless, and the prisoner."[36] *Gleams of Truth* was a way for him to place the lives of the poor—and his surprising discoveries about them—before his elite readers.[37] If he could not bring Boston's Unitarian elites to the poor, he would bring the poor to them.

In the opening scene of *Gleams of Truth*, the narrator describes a fictional encounter with a man who enthusiastically describes the "benefaction" of a wealthy man who "gives like a prince" to charitable causes. As Tuckerman soon shows, however, this wealthy benefactor has much to learn about true giving. While the narrator is listening to this story of generosity, a plainly dressed woman comes to him to ask assistance for her son. When the friend inquires about the woman, the narrator teaches his friend a lesson by leading him on a tour of the homes of the poor, pointing out their benevolent acts throughout the "morning walk." He introduces the man to poor women who have taken in sick children and women who work for their families while their husbands are ill. The story culminates with the narrator's introduction of his friend to a poor woman, simply known as Catharine. Catharine takes in orphans, delivers tea and sugar to the residents of the workhouse, provides clean clothes for her neighbors, endangers herself to care for those with cholera, and gives food to the poor. Catharine's character was almost too good to be true, but for Tuckerman she

---

[36] Joseph Tuckerman, *Mr. Tuckerman's Second Semiannual Report of the Third Year of His Service as a Minister at Large in Boston* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1829), 20-21.
[37] Joseph Tuckerman, *Gleams of Truth, or Scenes From Real Life* (Boston: James Munroe & Company, 1835).

43

embodied the hundreds of cases of self-sacrifice that he had witnessed as a minister to the poor. Tuckerman used Catharine to connect his elite readers to a world about which they were almost wholly unaware, and about which he himself was still learning.[38]

While Tuckerman grew to appreciate the networks of care among the poor, he also experienced the use of these very same networks as forms of resistance against his ministrations. Tuckerman's poor parishioners used their own systems of assistance to avoid those elements of his aid to which they did not want to be subjected. Their neighborly and family care thus served as a supplement to or substitute for Tuckerman's overtures. The case of a Mrs. King taught Tuckerman this lesson in December 1826, during the early days of his poor relief ministry. Tuckerman had visited Mrs. King, but on his second visit to her house discovered that she had died. Curious about the whereabouts of her children, and concerned for their moral wellbeing, Tuckerman began a search for them. Tuckerman's inquiries about the children brought him into contact with several of Mrs. King's friends and family members, all who denied having any knowledge of where the children were. Tuckerman tracked down Mrs. King's brother in Boylson Market and visited Mrs. King's neighbors and acquaintances. Neighbors and family members passed around Tuckerman and his intrusive questions about the children, until finally, in exasperation, Tuckerman asked a Mrs. Fitzgerald to serve as his informant and to tell him any news she heard about the children. Not surprisingly, Mrs. Fitzgerald never

---

[38] Ibid., 72-98.

reported anything about them to Tuckerman, though he visited her several times to inquire about them.[39]

It is possible that the children vanished, no one knew where, when their mother died. But it is more likely that no one wanted to give up the children to the House of Reformation or to an apprenticeship not of their own choosing, which were common fates of poor children during the 1820s. Indeed, Tuckerman would later help found a school that took orphan and indigent boys from the streets of Boston to prepare them for apprenticeships in the Massachusetts countryside. Mrs. King's family and friends probably took care of the children themselves, refusing to submit them to the hands of one whose charitable gifts might mean the separation of the children from their kinship and neighborhood networks.

Tuckerman also learned about social safety nets through his work with Boston's African-American community, which had the most self-sufficient kinship and neighborhood support network in the city. Tuckerman began to consider the needs of impoverished free blacks in 1833 after he returned from a European tour, where acquaintances confronted him about the hypocrisy of racial hierarchy in a supposedly free country. Tuckerman visited the African school on Belknap Street soon after returning from his European tour "to get some statistics regarding the coloured population."[40] The same day, Tuckerman visited one of the city's black business-owners, and that evening he "made a summary of information received concerning the means of improvement among the coloured population."[41] The next week he met with "a coloured man," to ask him to set up an appointment for him with

---

[39] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 12, 14, 16, 18 December 1826.
[40] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 15 December 1834.
[41] Ibid.

the city's black men.[42] After meeting with the men and making the rounds among the

blacks on Boston's West End, Tuckerman's black guides told him the most effective

way he could aid the city's blacks was by helping them to open a sewing school for

the city's African Americans, a project already underway. Boston's West End blacks

themselves did most of the work of gathering the children and adult pupils for the

school, while Tuckerman found a building for the sewing school. He and the sewing

women of Boston's black community opened the facility the next month.[43]

Tuckerman relied heavily on the network of African-American leaders as he

examined the needs of the community. African-Americans not only decided the type

of aid they received from Tuckerman, but also used him to strengthen community

institutions that served as centers of their own care networks.

While Tuckerman increased his visits to Boston's black population, few of his

clients were African American. African Americans were probably the most

independent community in Boston because they were the most ignored. The African

Society, a mutual aid organization that provided social welfare, job placement, and

burial services, among others, had been in existence since 1796. African Americans

also used Prince Hall's African Masonic Lodge, library and theatre groups,

educational societies, and a myriad of other institutions, including the church, as a

social nexus around which they built a strong community. In short, out of all of the

disadvantaged groups living in antebellum Boston, the city's African Americans most

successfully provided for their own members. Tuckerman made an effort to help, but

---

[42] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 21 December 1834.
[43] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 12, 20 January 1835.

he found less need and acceptance among a group who had learned not to rely on even well-disposed whites.[44]

Tuckerman's education at the hands of Boston's African American community was part of a growing understanding that charity was not a simple relationship of charitable giving by the rich and grateful receiving by the poor. All of Tuckerman's clients carefully weighed the cost of receiving charity with the benefits of assistance. For many, the cost was too great to bear. Despite Tuckerman's attempt to persuade the fifty-eight year-old widow Mrs. Robinson to enter the House of Industry, for example, she refused to leave her home. Mrs. Robinson lived "in one of the poorest & oldest rooms in the city, without fuel, or food, or any other accommodations for sitting except a broken chair," Tuckerman wrote, but she valued her freedom more than the food and shelter provided by the House of Industry. "'[E]very bird of the air loves his liberty," she reportedly told Tuckerman, "& let me have mine."[45]

Other families, even after approaching Tuckerman for assistance, later expressed resistance to the aid Tuckerman offered when it did not meet their expectations. A Mrs. Patterson, who attended one of Tuckerman's chapel services, afterward asked him to visit her sick husband. Her husband required hospitalization, and her request for help was probably more shrewdly calculated than it may initially have appeared to Tuckerman. During the 1820s in Boston, admission to

---

[44] James Horton and Lois Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*, rev. ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1999), 28-39; George Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, A Study in Acculturation*, rev. (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 248.
[45] Tuckerman's Visitation Notes, Diary.

Massachusetts General Hospital was an arduous process. The Hospital required prospective patients to make a written application, be examined by a physician, and then appear before a board before their case would be considered. Often the odds of being admitted were based more on who an ill person knew than how sick he or she was. As Charles Rosenberg demonstrates, the hospital admission process tapped into relationships of deference in urban social networks.[46] Mrs. Patterson knew that Tuckerman, who might have connections to Boston's medical authorities, would likely be able to provide her husband with the assistance he needed. She was correct, for after visiting Mr. Patterson, Tuckerman asked his friend Walter Channing (the physician brother of William Ellery Channing) to arrange a bed for Patterson in the Massachusetts General Hospital.

Tuckerman's relationship with the Pattersons did not end there, though, for Mrs. Patterson had second thoughts about admitting her husband to the hospital. Tuckerman eventually, it seems, convinced the Pattersons that the safest measure for Mr. Patterson's care was admission into the Hospital, but Mrs. Patterson's resistance to his charitable offer taught Tuckerman the importance of negotiating with his clients, who reserved the right to change their minds as they weighed the costs and benefits of care.

Tuckerman also saw the deceptive side of human nature as he encountered men and women who took advantage of his charitable offers and lied about their situations. Tuckerman had built intimate relationships of trust with his clients, and he was personally hurt when this trust was violated. His visit to a Mrs. Doane made him

---

[46] Charles Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America's Hospital System* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 24.

particularly angry. Tuckerman was shocked when, upon entering her kitchen during a visit, he saw that "A generous fire blazed on the hearth; & here was a table containing two large dishes of meat; a boiled rack of mutton in one, & some fine looking corned pork in another, —2 pieces—in another." On the table lay "quite a pound of golden butter in a plate, & every preparation for a dinner for eight or ten men." Incensed, Tuckerman angrily confronted Mrs. Doane with her display of food and fuel, which she had received from the Unitarian ministry. "'And this is your poverty?'" Tuckerman asked. "How could you so impose upon us?'" Mrs. Doane explained, "'I never imposed upon you <u>much</u>.'" Tuckerman, after "giving her a rebuke I thought she deserved," angrily left.[47] Mrs. Doane, like many other clients Tuckerman visited, presented herself as her benefactor wished to see her, a poor woman with little material comfort. She was no different from most other poor relief recipients, who, as Peter Mandler has argued, are always required to "fit themselves into the positions required of the donors."[48] Tuckerman's trust had been violated when Mrs. Doane lied to him, which he saw as a direct affront to his paternalistic care.

As in the case of Mrs. Doane, Tuckerman's education in poverty relief often took place in moments of conflict, when the poor refused to act as passive recipients of his aid. Every case of charitable assistance was a process of negotiation. Some of Tuckerman's parishioners refused his assistance, others used Tuckerman's aid in ways that would most benefit them, and still others lied to Tuckerman to get what they wanted. For his part, Tuckerman grew to appreciate the willingness of the poor to care for their own, even while it meant the diminution of his control over their care.

---

[47] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 6 January 1835.
[48] Mandler, *Uses of Charity*, 1-2.

In many cases, Tuckerman rejoiced with his parishioners as they, in partnership, overcame obstacles to their material and spiritual flourishing. This was particularly true in cases of intemperance.

The Battle Against Intemperance

In antebellum Boston, as in other communities, drinking and drunkenness were a common part of the landscape. The best estimates are that by 1830 Americans were drinking over five gallons of distilled spirits a year, and Boston was no exception to this trend.[49] Tuckerman's clientele included numerous women and many more men who had succumbed to alcoholism. Tuckerman's experience with these men and women, as well as new medical ideas about the causes and treatment of alcoholism, influenced his attitude about the relationship between intemperance and poverty.   Despite the common notion among many antebellum temperance reformers that drunkenness was a failure of the individual—that alcoholism was a moral choice made by free will—Tuckerman began to view alcoholism as a medical disorder, a disease to be treated by medical therapy. He began to view intemperance as both a cause and a result of poverty.

During a particularly active time in his ministry when he was wrestling intensely with the alcoholism of several clients, Tuckerman began to record a peculiar phenomenon. Many of his clients were actually approaching *him*, even visiting his home, to request assistance in curing themselves or family members of intemperance. "There is a very remarkable disposition at the time among the intemperate to be cured," Tuckerman recorded in his diary, and his parishioners' enthusiasm for new

---

[49] W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 8.

medicinal cures for intemperance bore this out. As Tuckerman was leaving his house

one evening, one of them met him at the door to ask for his assistance in

administering the "drunkard's cure." Between that encounter and the next morning

Tuckerman was approached by three women who requested that Tuckerman

administer the cure to their husbands and one doctor who asked Tuckerman to visit

his patient for the same purpose.[50]

Giddy with his clients' enthusiasm for "the cure," Tuckerman began a torrent

of "drunkard's cure" administration, buying up the supplies of medicine from the

local pharmacist and giving them directly to his clients. Some clients paid for their

own medicine, but Tuckerman was willing to foot the bill for clients who showed the

desire and determination to complete the course of treatment. Tuckerman's cure-all

for intemperance, which he variously referred to as "Chamber's Powder," Reed's

Powder," or "drunkard's medicine," complemented the course of medicated rum that

he had served to his alcoholic clients.[51]

"Chamber's Powder" was short for Dr. William Chambers' Remedy for

Intemperance, a tartar emetic that induced violent vomiting and infused liquor with

such a disgusting taste that the drunkard often refused to pick up another drink

again.[52] Dr. Chambers, a physician at Rutgers Medical College, had developed the

cure, whose secret recipe was transferred to a physician and a merchant in

Philadelphia upon Chambers's death. The recipe holders advertised the powder

---

[50] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 5, 6 July 1827.
[51] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 12 June 1827.
[52] I am grateful to Matthew Osborn for information about Chamber's Powder.   Osborn explores attitudes about the powder in "The Anatomy of Intemperance: Alcohol and the Diseased Imagination in Philadelphia, 1784-1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 2007), chapter 4. According to Osborn, few doctors used the powder.

widely in northern newspapers. Tuckerman probably saw the advertisement for the cure in the March 1827 *Boston Recorder*, which praised the efficacy of the powder and stated that the cure could be sent through the mail with instructions about how to administer it.[53]

Many physicians dismissed the effectiveness of Chambers Powder even as they argued that alcoholism was a physiological, not a moral, problem.[54] An 1828 article in *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, which supported the use of the powder, argued the alcoholism-as-disease position.[55] Tuckerman was a man of his time, willing to explore new scientific ideas and changing medical practices. Whatever negative side effects Chambers Powder may have had, Tuckerman believed the efficacy of the cure far outweighed them. His eagerness to use the powder was a sign of his belief in the efficacy of science in solving social ills.

The powder seems to have worked, at least temporarily, and sometimes permanently, for many of Tuckerman's clients.   The results for a Mr. Loring sound almost like a penny press advertisement for Tuckerman's cure. "Mr. Loring says his desire for rum is gone that the change he finds in his mind & feelings is worth 1000$," Tuckerman wrote in his diary. "[H]e used to be so heavy in the morning, that he could hardly awake. Now, as soon as his eyes are open, he feels himself to be a man. He <u>was</u> very irritable. <u>Now</u>, nothing offends him. Has a fine appetite, & hopes he shall be a better man."[56]

---

[53] "Cure for Drunkenness," *Boston Recorder and Religious Telegraph*, 2 March 1827, 36.
[54] Osborn, "The Anatomy of Intemperance," chapter 4.
[55] "On Intemperance Considered as a Disease and Susceptible of Cure," *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 2, no. 4 (1828): 291-96.
[56] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 3 July 1827.

Excited by his clients' response to the possibility of ending their addiction, Tuckerman penned his new thoughts on intemperance. "This is a very wonderful disease," he wrote. "The patient seems to be under a completely uncontrollable hankering. He says it is <u>impossible</u> to resist it. But, at the same time, he feels it to be <u>the greatest of evils</u>; & often would do any thing, & suffer anything, to be delivered from the bondage." Impressed by this dedication, Tuckerman could only write, "What a blessing, that this <u>willingness</u>, & desire to be cured, remains amongst this debasement!" The cure, though, could only be successful if Tuckerman could persuade his clients of the moral imperative to avoid strong drink. The usefulness of "the cure" was that, even if it could not serve as a permanent solution to drunkenness, "an opportunity is given for moral suasion, which, it may be hoped, will not be wholly ineffectual."[57]

Tuckerman began to argue more forcefully that intemperance was a medical condition. "Intemperance is a disease," he wrote. "Call it, if you will, a diseased appetite, or diseased state of the stomach, or of the imagination, still it is a disease, & should be treated as a disease."[58] The approach to curing it, then, was not to berate or imprison its victims, but to offer medical aid to them. For if alcoholism was truly a sickness, similar to the cholera or tuberculosis that plagued his poor clients, then it would respond to medical treatment.

Tuckerman's cure had strong effects. In one case, some friends of a client decided to administer the medicine themselves. When their efforts went horribly awry and they became "alarmed at its operation," they immediately sent for

---

[57] Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 6 July 1827.
[58] Ibid.

Tuckerman.   Perhaps worried by this experience, Tuckerman began to seek doctors

in whose care he could place his clients once he administered the medicine.

Curiously, though, the whirlwind of drunkard's cure administration ended just as

abruptly as it had started. After the summer of 1827 Tuckerman recorded little

activity in the administration of cures for intemperance. Tuckerman's frightful

experiences with a few patients, cases in which he had to call for emergency medical

care, might have made him less willing to subject his clients to the dangers of an still

unproven remedy. Probably this "cure," like so many in all poverty programs, proved

to have more ambiguous results than Tuckerman initially hoped, and might have

proved worse than the disease.

Tuckerman's experience with his alcoholic clients influenced his attitude

toward the imprisonment of drunkards in the House of Correction. Having seen the

addictive nature of alcohol, he believed imprisonment for intemperance served no

one's best interests. Arguing that the city gained little by imprisoning chronic

drunkards, Tuckerman wrote in 1830, "we not only gain nothing by an exaggeration

of the evil" of alcoholism, "but we lose very much of the power, which we might

exert over some of the worst of human propensities," by treating common alcoholics

as if they were of the same ilk as criminals. Separating crimes against property and

person from addiction to alcohol, Tuckerman argued that the drunkard was driven by

alcoholism to be what he did not want to be. Instead of imprisoning alcoholics,

Tuckerman argued, the city should separate them from the temptation of alcohol by

placing them in the House of Industry for a period of time to help them sober up.[59]

---

[59] Joseph Tuckerman, *A Letter Addressed to Hon. Harrison Gray Otis, Mayor Of Boston, Respecting the House Of Correction, and the Common Jail in Boston* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830), 17-19.

Despite the failures of Tuckerman's medical approach to intemperance, the partnership that he and his parishioners displayed in this antebellum summer speaks to the ways in which both he and they changed as a result of their encounters. Tuckerman, for one, grew to appreciate the commitment of his clients to ending habits that were at best burdensome and, at worst, destructive of family and social ties. He also saw first-hand the addictiveness of alcohol and began to blame his clients less often for their addiction. His approach to alcoholism became one of medical treatment first and moral suasion second. Even if a course of treatment did not completely cure his clients, Tuckerman's growing understanding of their family, neighborly, and work commitments had altered his views of the poor, making him more sensitive to the networks of care among them. For their part, Tuckerman's parishioners came to recognize him as a source of assistance—someone who might help meet some of their needs, occasionally generously.

The Virtuous Poor

Tuckerman's clients also influenced his thinking about the question of whether the poor were less virtuous than their middle-class and elite counterparts and therefore the makers of their own impoverishment. When Boston's authorities began in the 1820s and early 1830s to question the effectiveness of a poor relief system that they believed rewarded laziness and indigence, many Unitarians agreed with them. Tuckerman, who had read widely about poverty and poor relief, was exposed to these arguments and seemingly influenced by them. His diary is a window into his struggle over the question of the morality of the poor, and reveals a shift in his thinking about the relationships between vice and poverty. Early in his ministry, Tuckerman was

often surprised by the "virtuousness" of his clients, seemingly viewing their virtuous

actions as exceptions to the usually immoral activity of the poor. His surprise

diminished, however, as he came to understand that most of the families he

encountered were not to blame for their poverty, but were unfortunate victims of

illness, death, abandonment, or job loss. Tuckerman's enlightenment in this area

caused him to encourage wealthy Unitarians to treat the poor justly even as he helped

the poor lift themselves out of poverty.[60] This was not an easy task. Tuckerman's

pronouncements of the worthy poor contradicted the notion that poor relief would

exacerbate vice among the poor, an idea that was increasingly gaining traction among

Unitarians. Moreover, Tuckerman's recommendations for ameliorating poverty

required action by Boston's elites that would force them to face uncomfortable

realities. Tuckerman sought to alleviate such discomfort by appealing to Unitarians'

notions of social interdependency. In doing so, he had to delicately balance liberal

ideas of individual moral autonomy with ideas of communal obligation.

Tuckerman's self-education in poverty relief had exposed him to a view of

poverty as a pathological problem caused by the depravity of the individual. Before

beginning his ministry to the poor, he had mostly likely read Massachusetts's 1821

report on the state's pauper laws, which revealed a hardened attitude toward the poor.

A committee headed by the Unitarian Massachusetts house member Josiah Quincy

issued the report as part of its charge to update the Massachusetts poor laws. Instead

---

[60] Similar processes of transformation of attitudes about the poor are recorded in Mari Jo Buhle,
"Needlewomen and the Vicissitudes of Modern Life: A Study of Middle-Class Construction in the
Antebellum Northeast," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, eds. Nancy Hewitt and
Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 152-54 and Barbara Berg, *The
Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1978), 170-71.

of seeing the poor as unfortunate victims of providential circumstance, the authors of the report differentiated the "impotent" from the "able" poor. The "impotent" poor were genuinely needy, those who were unable to work because of "old age, infancy, sickness, or corporeal debility." The "able" poor were those who were capable of working but differed "in the degree of their capacity, and in the kind of work, of which they are capable."[61] It was clear that Quincy considered most "able" poor to be loafers who took advantage of a system that did little to discourage unnecessary dependency. The report indicted the present poor relief system, which Quincy described as "diminishing the industry, destroying the economical habits and eradicating the providence of the laboring class of society." For Quincy, the most grievous casualty of Massachusetts poor relief system was "the just pride of independence, so honorable to man, in every condition."[62] He argued that the most "economical" method of dealing with poverty was to place the poor in workhouses, where they would work for their own provision.[63]

Quincy, like many other nineteenth-century poor relief theorists, believed the British poor relief system, upon which the Massachusetts system was based, exemplified the tendency of state poor relief to exacerbate the vice of the poor. In Britain, redistributive taxation served as the foundation of the public system of poor relief; the poor received alms from public officials whose "poors purse" was funded by tax money. Many Britons and Americans believed this system invited laziness by the poor, who, they believed, would be less willing to work if given a handout.

---

[61] Josiah Quincy, *Report of the Committee to Whom Was Referred the Consideration of the Pauper Laws of this Commonwealth* (Boston: Russell and Gardner,1821)
[62] Ibid., 5.
[63] Ibid., 9.

Quincy quoted British parliamentarians who believed the English poor laws encouraged the "worthless and audacious," and bred deceit.[64]

By 1830s, many Unitarians were beginning to agree with this view. The poor in Britain, "[b]y the facilities for obtaining" relief, "are tempted to idleness and improvidence," the Unitarian minister Francis Parkman argued. Parkman called on Boston's municipal leaders to take note of the failures of the British poor relief system, in which the poor were "in perpetual danger of passing from idleness and beggary into intemperance and irreclaimable profligacy."[65] Parkman was not completely convinced of the direct link between poor relief and moral failure, for he still argued that poverty was "one of the inevitable conditions of humanity," part of the divinely ordained social order.[66] But the idea that the improper administration of poor relief led to moral failure had clearly taken root in his mind. By the early 1830s, most Boston Unitarians, like Parkman, echoed the views of poor relief reformers in the antebellum period who "spiritualized poverty" by linking economic instability with personal immorality.[67]

Steeped in a cultural milieu of reform in which the immorality of the poor was believed to be fostered by an overly "generous" system, Tuckerman was seemingly surprised early in his ministry by the overwhelming evidence he discovered for the virtue of the poor. His surprise gave way to delight as he encountered examples of decency among his clients, which he often recorded in his visitation notes. Contrary to popular notions of the poor as lazy, Tuckerman described in his visitation notes

---

[64] Ibid., 6.
[65] Parkman, "Public Charities," 383-84.
[66] Ibid., 368.
[67] Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 76-85.

many of his clients as "industrious." He especially praised women whose husbands had died or had abandoned them for their diligence in providing for their families in the most trying of circumstances. For example, Tuckerman described Mrs. Badger, a fifty-five-year-old woman whose husband had abandoned her, as "an industrious woman" who "never asks for charity."[68] Tuckerman encountered many women like Mrs. Badger, who not only challenged traditional notions of the laziness of the poor, but also revealed to him the gendered nature of poverty.

Tuckerman's clients showed him that there were far fewer "unworthy" poor than Quincy and others claimed. He found Clarissa Skerry, for example, whose husband Ephraim had abandoned her with six children (one of whom was crippled), to be a "deserving" recipient of assistance. She was deserving not only because her gender made her a natural dependent, but also because she had kept her family out of poverty by working as a seamstress. Only when she had come close to losing her sight, and thus her ability to work, had she approached Tuckerman for aid. Similarly, Tuckerman considered the family of James Cooke, a twenty-eight year old father of two young children who had fallen fatally ill, to be "very worthy people," though he did not indicate what caused him to believe they deserved aid. Certainly, the fact that Cooke's impoverishment was due to illness played a role in Tuckerman's assessment.[69] The vast majority of cases Tuckerman described were situations in which the poor were *not* to blame for their own poverty. The most common reasons Tuckerman listed for the poverty of his clients were illness, job loss, abandonment, and widowhood. While he made connections between intemperance and poverty in

---

[68] Tuckerman Visitation Notes, Diary.
[69] Tuckerman Visitation Notes, Diary.

his visitation notes, his diary indicates that he had come to understand alcoholism as a medical condition requiring medical treatment. Moreover, when talking about the relationship between alcoholism and poverty, he most often discussed the impact of intemperance on the innocent wives and children of intemperate men, again emphasizing the virtuousness of those whom he assisted. His visitation notes show a growing understanding of poverty as a systematic problem usually caused by conditions outside the control of the poor.

One circumstance that especially stood out to Tuckerman as a cause of poverty was the piecework system of production, which often left workers, especially women workers, impoverished.[70] Tuckerman's 1830 essay *On the Wages Paid to the Female Poor* provides one of the best expressions of his new awareness about the problems caused by changing relationships between laborers and employers. Tuckerman wrote the essay for a contest sponsored by Mathew Carey, the Philadelphia reformer who was an antebellum advocate for women's labor reform. In the essay, Tuckerman emphasized the structural problems of the economic system as more significant than the moral ignorance of the poor in causing poverty. Tuckerman specifically focused on the problems of women's wage labor, but in the process he extrapolated themes touching on poverty more widely.

Based on his work with his female clients, Tuckerman argued that women workers, "for whose services there is a demand exactly proportioned to the state of trade and commerce, of manufactures, and of agriculture," found themselves in the

---

[70] Piecework is a productive system in which employees are paid for each "piece" of product they produce, such as shirts sewn or shoes bound. Many Boston women conducted piecework in their homes during the antebellum period in a system known as "outwork."

most vulnerable positions during economic downturns.[71] Tuckerman was keenly

aware of the gendered nature of poverty and the particular needs of women workers.[72]

"There are among us hundreds of these poor females, mothers, and widows, who are

deeply anxious to support their families by their own exertions," he argued, "but who,

even while their families are in health, and when employment can be obtained for

every hour in every day, can at best earn but a dollar, or a dollar and a quarter in a

week."[73] He argued for the just treatment of laboring women as independent

economic actors. His ideas about women's labor had been cultivated in the rich soil

of his experiences with his widowed or single women clients, who washed clothes,

made yarn, sewed, or picked hair, and who, even when they worked almost beyond

human endurance, made too little to live on.

Tuckerman did not solely discuss women's labor; he also used his essay to

warn his readers of general problems intrinsic to the wage system that was taking

hold in the North. Tuckerman used the British economist Thomas Malthus's theories

to argue that "the price of labour" was constantly changing based on supplies of labor

and costs of basic necessities, leaving the poor in an unstable situation. Yet he was

angered by Malthus's unsympathetic reference to the problems caused by the wage

labor system as "accidental circumstances" or "a transient evil."[74] He sought to

transcend Malthus's seemingly cold and emotionless approach to political economy.

He was also alarmed by Malthus's brutal proposal that decent wages would cause

---

[71] Joseph Tuckerman, *An Essay on the Wages Paid to Females for Their Labour; in the Form of a Letter, from a Gentleman in Boston to His Friend in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1830), 9.

[72] This counters the argument of the historian Bruce Dorsey, who proposes that northern poor relief ideologies were unable to "conceive a solution to poverty that endorsed women's behavior as autonomous economic agents." See Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 75.

[73] Tuckerman, *On the Wages Paid to Females for Their Labor*, 14.

[74] Ibid., 12.

over-reproduction among the poor and lead to wide-scale starvation.[75] Tuckerman

lamented the loss of jobs held by independent artisan men to children operating

machines in dangerous conditions. Just as worrisome for Tuckerman was that despite

predictions that the prices of basic necessities would fluctuate with wages, rents for

wage laborers were still outrageously high.[76]

Tuckerman, by the time he wrote his essay, had become keenly aware that

most cases of poverty were the result of exigencies wholly beyond control of the poor

and that the poor were rarely less virtuous than his elite Unitarian supporters. He had

also become aware of the systemic nature of economic inequality intrinsic to the

emerging wage labor system. But in presenting his findings to his financial sponsors,

he was faced with a conundrum. On one hand, many Unitarians still believed that

poverty was a natural condition, part of the divinely ordained social order. On the

other hand, some Unitarians, influenced by the rhetoric of poverty as a pathological

condition, were coming to believe that poverty was the result of individual failure and

that assistance to the poor only exacerbated pauperism. To be sure, Boston

Unitarians like William Ellery Channing supported Tuckerman's work financially

because they believed he was serving the most valuable service to the poor—giving

them a spiritual education and teaching them moral principles. But Tuckerman, who

had learned that such work was futile if structural causes of poverty were not

---

[75] Tuckerman had actually met Thomas Malthus while walking one day during a trip to England. Tuckerman wrote to his wife about the encounter, noting that he passed "a very pleasant moment with him." He also wrote, however, that he could not agree with Malthus that the pressure of population "was the result of any inevitable law of providence," but rather was the failure of a true manifestation of the Christian spirit. Joseph Tuckerman, Diary, 21, 22 July, 26 October, and 8, 11, 17 December 1833.
[76] Tuckerman, *An Essay on the Wages Paid to Females*, 12.

addressed, had to convince his fellow Unitarians of the systematic nature of poverty.

Tuckerman's public reports reveal a shrewd use of rhetoric in his efforts to do so.

The Rhetoric of Poverty

Tuckerman combined notions of individualism and communalism in his

appeals to Boston's Unitarian population for assistance in his work. On one hand, he

took pains to describe his poor clients in terms that recognized the individual moral

agency of the poor. Tuckerman knew that only by establishing his clients as morally

upright would he receive a hearing from his elite audience and support in his work.

While establishing the moral respectability of his clients Tuckerman reminded his

supporters of their obligation to the poor—an obligation rooted in the organic nature

of society and the natural dependency of the lower class. Challenging his elite

audience to transform the economic system into one that rightly reflected a decent

communal social order, Tuckerman cleverly used the familiar rhetoric of social

interdependency to attempt to convince them of their duty to put an end to the

structural causes of impoverishment.

Tuckerman's second semi-annual report in 1828 illuminates his use of the

rhetoric of individualism in appealing for assistance from Boston elites. Tuckerman's

report was one of many that he issued as part of his ministry to the American

Unitarian Association to keep the AUA updated on his work. The AUA published

most of Tuckerman's reports, using them as fundraising tools for the ministry-at-

large. Tuckerman's use of language and rhetorical strategies in his reports was

calculated to appeal to the sensibilities of Boston's elite, whose views of poverty did

not always square with Tuckerman's experience in the homes of the poor and in the economic milieu that surrounded them.

Tuckerman began his report by asking for the appointment of another minister to the poor. In describing the qualifications of a minister, he reminded his readers of the goal of his ministry—the religious and moral instruction of the poor. "There is indeed, among the poor, great ignorance of moral and religious subjects," he wrote, and the role of the minister to the poor was to instruct the poor in "christian principles."[77] Tuckerman reminded his readers that he was aware of their concern for the moral education of the poor and that he still saw the task of the minister-at-large as one of spiritual guidance.

Tuckerman, however, then argued that in few of his clients' cases could poverty be related to spiritual failure or vice. He provided a descriptive list of nine "divisions" of poverty, systematically listing the circumstances of poverty he encountered. In his list Tuckerman used the word "virtuous" to describe almost all of the poor men and women he encountered. Indeed, Tuckerman use the word "virtuous" in all but two of the nine "divisions," and those groups whom Tuckerman did not describe as "virtuous" were still portrayed as blameless for their circumstances. Topping the list of Tuckerman's "divisions" of poverty were "virtuous widows." Most members of the nineteenth-century middle and upper classes saw widows as the most vulnerable and deserving poor; vulnerable because the loss of a male wage-earner was one of the most devastating blows to the economic stability of the family, and deserving because they were natural dependents

---

[77] Joseph Tuckerman, *Mr. Tuckerman's Second Seminannual Report of the Second Year of His Service as a Minister-at-large in Boston* (Boston: Bowles & Dearborn, 1828), 5-6.

whose care was mandated under the Biblical injunction to "care for orphans and widows." Tuckerman's decision to use widows as his first example, even when they were only a minority of his parishioners, was a calculated attempt to use the idea of dependency to his advantage. Tuckerman's other categories of poverty included "virtuous husbands and wives," "virtuous single women," and poor families "who, in their poverty, have retained their virtue."[78] Tuckerman's list catalogued his encounters with a wide variety of circumstances of poverty, but a common thread among all of them was the moral uprightness of the recipients of aid. By portraying the poor as virtuous, Tuckerman sought to remind his readers that his work, and their support for it, was a legitimate effort to assist those with genuine needs.

Having reminded his readers of the virtue of the poor, Tuckerman then instructed his audience that the onus for meeting the needs of the virtuous poor, as it has always been, was on Boston's elite, not the poor themselves. In his reports to the AUA and in other public writings, he highlighted the themes of dependency. "I think it is contemplated by our religion," he wrote, "that the more favored classes should strongly feel that they have a common nature with those in less favored conditions of life; that opportunities are means and responsibilities."[79] Tuckerman's rhetoric appealed to a traditional understanding of social relationships, a hierarchical system in which those with means had obligations to those in need.

Tuckerman shrewdly used the notion of communalism to try to bring about structural changes in his battle against poverty. He argued that the "means and responsibilities" of Boston's elite included providing just wages so that those who

---

[78] Ibid., 17-25.
[79] Tuckerman, *On the Elevation of the Poor*, 94.

worked hard were decently rewarded for their labor. Political economists,

Tuckerman argued, would say that economic laws prevent raising wages because the

"elementary principles" of economics teach that wages are a function of supply and

demand.[80] The answer, then, was to move beyond economic principles to principles

of justice. Convince the employer of the suffering of his workers, Tuckerman said,

and you will see a rise in wages. "Nothing, more, indeed, would be necessary to

secure this good to the poor, in a society of Christians, than an appeal to their sense of

justice." Once employers understood fully the plight of their workers, "there would

always be a *generous consideration of the hireling in his wages*."[81] For Tuckerman,

"The best charity which can be exercised towards those who are capable of labour, is

to give them, as far as possible, the labour by which they may earn the means of their

subsistence." And this could be accomplished within the higher laws of political

economy. "I hold him to be an economist, in the highest sense of the term,"

Tuckerman wrote, "who saves in those things in which he ought to save, that he may

expend liberally in those which he ought, according to his means, to be a liberal."[82]

Tuckerman, then, used two rhetorical strategies in his appeal for assistance

from his fellow Unitarians. On one hand, he appealed to the notion of individualism

and the belief that all humans have both the ability and duty to carry out self-culture.

At a time when poor relief was coming to be viewed as the result of failure of the

individual, Tuckerman had to convince his supporters of the moral uprightness of his

clients and their blamelessness for their own poverty. Tuckerman's "virtuous" poor

were worthy of assistance. On the other hand, Tuckerman tapped into to a notion of

---

[80] Ibid., 37.
[81] Ibid., 38-39.
[82] Ibid., 39-41.

communalism and social interdependency that had been central to Unitarian thought.

His poor were natural dependents, an element of society whose presence necessitated

the practice of benevolence—and fair treatment—by elites. Tuckerman tied together

these two elements by linking poverty not to individual moral failure, but to structural

inadequacies in the changing political economic system that required adjustment by

those capable of fixing them—Boston's elite capitalists. For the most part,

Tuckerman's calls for correction to a political economy that left many abandoned fell

on deaf ears. Perhaps Boston's Unitarians believed their financial support for

Tuckerman's ministry, if meager, was adequate to meet the needs of the poor.

William Ellery Channing's ideas about poverty, untested by the fires of

individual encounter with the poor, offer a useful counterpoint for thinking about

Tuckerman's changing ideas about poverty and the importance of personal encounter

to their development. While Tuckerman's encounters with the poor had caused him

to focus more on structural causes of poverty and the variety of measures needed to

address it, Channing continued to preach a singular approach to poverty based on

educative relationships between rich and poor. As the AUA began its work to

formalize the ministry to the poor in 1833 by founding a group called the Benevolent

Fraternity of Churches, Channing wrote a letter to remind them of the purpose of the

ministry. As he and others and stated when Tuckerman began his program, Channing

argued, "We all feel that the greatest good perhaps is, not his [Tuckerman's] direct

influence on the poor, but the effect of his labor & writings in exciting among the

prosperous a new and enlightened interest in the poor." Emphasizing the communal

nature of society, he wrote, "It seems to me that <u>we</u> understand better than most

Christians that it is the object of our religion to establish a fraternal union among all classes of society," based not on artificial class distinctions, but on recognition of the dignity of each human. Unitarians were to "direct all the energies of the enlightened & virtuous to the work of elevating the depressed classes to an enlightened piety, to intellectual & moral dignity."[83] Tuckerman agreed with Channing on most of these points, though he had learned to attribute to his poor clients more "intellectual and moral dignity" than did his fellow Unitarians. For Tuckerman, however, the ministry to the poor became one in which moral inculcation went hand-in-hand with investigating the causes of poverty and eliminating or ameliorating them. He placed the burden for this at the feet of his fellow Unitarians.

Thus even while Tuckerman was bringing to light injustices in the economic system, advocating higher wages, and serving the practical needs of the poor, Channing stood firm in a single-minded commitment to moral education of the poor over and above directly meeting their needs or advocating structural changes to deal with poverty. Even in 1835, nine years after Tuckerman's ministry started, Channing, in an address on Unitarian poor relief, displayed a marked lack of sympathy to the plight of the poor and failed to recognize Tuckerman's challenges to the wage labor system. Channing's inexperience among the lower class was evident, for he argued, "I cannot think the difference between the rich and the poor, in regard to mere physical suffering, so great as is sometimes imagined." According to Channing, more

---

[83] William Ellery Channing, letter to Committee of the Unitarian Association on the Ministry-at-large, 1 July 1833, William Ellery Channing Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

rich died from overeating than poor of undernourishment.[84] "Spiritual culture" was

the only "effectual service" the church could serve the poor, and if it did so

effectively, economic advancement among the poor would naturally follow.[85]

Tuckerman would hardly have agreed with Channing on this point. For

Tuckerman had come to believe that spiritual culture was completely ineffective if

not accompanied by a real understanding of the causes and conditions of poverty,

which were not purely moral in character. Tuckerman's changing beliefs about

poverty followed along an *opposite* trajectory than many antebellum Unitarians.

While other Unitarians began in the late 1820s and early 1830s to view poverty as a

symptom of vice that was best treated through moral suasion, Tuckerman moved

toward a vision of humanitarian assistance based on a new understanding of the

causes and conditions of poverty. [86] As a result of his encounters with the poor and

the requests and needs of the poor themselves, Tuckerman had begun to understand

poverty in all its complexities.

There were, however, limits to the language Tuckerman could use when

describing the poor. Despite his changing ideas about the causes of poverty,

Tuckerman worked in a denomination in which the dominant theopolitical worldview

emphasized the dependency of the poor. Tuckerman's poor parishioners, while

---

[84] William Ellery Channing, *Ministry for the Poor, Discourse Delivered Before the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches. Boston, April 9, 1835* in *The Works of William Ellery Channing* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903), 3:270.

[85] Ibid.., 280.

[86] Tuckerman's changing ideology, in fact, is the inverse of that described by Bruce Dorsey in *Reforming Men and Women*, chapter 2. Dorsey argues that members of antebellum Philadelphia benevolent societies moved from viewing poverty as a natural condition requiring humanitarian benevolence to seeing poverty as a result of vice that required the education of the poor in virtuous living. Tuckerman, on the other hand, started out viewing his mission as fundamentally religious in character, but moved toward a vision of humanitarian assistance based on understanding of the structural causes of poverty. The key difference between Dorsey's reformers and Tuckerman was Tuckerman's close personal work with the poor.

shaping his views about the causes and solutions to poverty, sometimes remained

objects of relief, and not independent actors, to many Unitarians. Even while the

poor were using Tuckerman's assistance in unique ways he had not anticipated and

shaping his ministry to meet their needs, Tuckerman sometimes predicated his calls

for help on their status as dependents. Tuckerman's rhetoric of dependence was

partly calculated to justify his ministry; the presence of the "helpless" poor

legitimated his work of personal care and home visitation. As Patrick Wilkinson has

shown, the rhetoric of helplessness creates spaces for reformers who are seen as

gifted in caring for dependent members of society. Like Wilkinson's maternalist

reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tuckerman portrayed

the poor as dependent on the charity of the rich because such a description carried

cultural valence.[87] The notion of dependency thus served, in the words of Alice

O'Connor, as an "ideological boundary of poverty knowledge."[88] When Tuckerman

argued that the "characters [of the poor] are principally formed, and their conditions

are determined, by the estimation in which they are held, by the examples which they

witness, and by the treatment they receive" from the rich, he was speaking to an elite

class to which such words would have sounded natural.[89]

     Such words would not have sounded as natural to Unitarians in Philadelphia.

While Philadelphia Unitarian laymen and women took up the task of poor relief in

much the same way as Tuckerman had, emphasizing the importance of friendly

---

[87] Wilkinson, "The Selfless and the Helpless," 591-92.

[88] Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4-9. According to O'Connor, contemporary arguments about whether poverty is caused by individual faults or structural inequities are often shaped by an ideological hegemony that accepts "the political economy and culture of late twentieth-century capitalism."

[89] Joseph Tuckerman, *Mr. Tuckerman's First Semiannual Report of the Fourth Year of His Service as a Minister-at-large in Boston, May, 1830* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830), 22.

visiting and individual relationships with the poor, they approached their poor relief efforts with a different spiritual heritage and in a dissimilar urban setting. Philadelphia Unitarians were less likely to view the poor men and women they assisted as natural dependents; instead, they more often saw them as potential spiritual and social equals. Yet even while their poverty encounters took place in a different physical and social environment, Philadelphia Unitarians like the immigrant merchant Joseph Sill underwent a transformation in their understanding of poverty that was similar to that of Joseph Tuckerman. It is that transformation that is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: "Alive to the Cry of Distress": Joseph Sill and Unitarian Poor

Relief in Philadelphia

In 1819, Joseph Sill left his home in Cumberland County, England, to start a

new life in the United States. Lured by the promise of a prosperous future in the

plentiful American economy, Sill was disappointed upon his arrival in Philadelphia,

where he discovered that "all business was at a stand."[1] Sill had arrived at the most

inopportune time, when the United States was experiencing its first major downturn

in the new boom-and-bust cycle of its changing economic system. A harsh reality

greeted Sill in Philadelphia: three out of four workers were reportedly jobless, and

the city's jail contained 1,808 inmates who had been incarcerated for their inability to

pay their debts. Philadelphia wheat, which had sold for $2.41 a bushel in 1817, was

rapidly descending toward the low of eighty-eight cents it would reach in 1820.[2] Sill

never forgot the uncertainty he felt upon his arrival to the demoralized Philadelphia of

1819. Indeed, even after he had become a successful merchant, the memories of that

time came to his mind as he reflected on the precariousness of his own and others'

personal success.

Sill's appreciation for the fickleness of personal success served as the *leitmotif*

of his work with Philadelphia's lower-class population. From the late 1820s until his

death in 1854, Sill and his wife Jane concerned themselves with meeting the needs of

Philadelphia's poor population. As with Joseph Tuckerman, their encounters with the

---

[1] Joseph Sill, Diary, 8 November 1840, 2: 260-62, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of
Pennsylvania. For additional biographical information on Sill see Elizabeth Geffen, "Joseph Sill and
His Diary," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 94, no. 3 (1970): 275-330.
[2] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1864* (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1991), 136-37.

poor revealed to them that poverty was often not the result of vice or sin, but of difficult circumstances in an economic system that was hardly forgiving to those on the margins. Their individual care of the poor taught them that they were not so different from the men and women they assisted.

Joseph and Jane Sill were also members of the Philadelphia Unitarian church. Their experience as Unitarians illuminates similarities and differences between Boston and Philadelphia Unitarianism, especially as they relate to questions of class and poor relief. Even while Philadelphia and Boston Unitarians shared central theological views, their dissimilar histories and differences in social status played key roles in their diverging attitudes toward poverty and poor relief. Boston Unitarianism had deep roots in Boston's civic and social life and was strongly tied to the elite social world of Boston's upper class. By contrast, Philadelphia Unitarianism was not indigenous to Philadelphia, but a transplant from England, and its social make-up was less elite.[3] While Boston Unitarians tied their poor relief efforts to the maintenance of social hierarchy in an organic social order, Philadelphia Unitarians like the Sills saw their poor relief work as part of the development of a stable middle class. Philadelphia Unitarians like the Sills entered the homes of the poor in numbers that would have pleased Tuckerman. Indeed, the congregation of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia came closer than Boston Unitarians to bringing Tuckerman's vision of intimate care for the poor to fruition.

---

[3] The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia also had a small number of members with ties to the South and southern culture, though their presence was never as influential as that of the English members of the congregation. Pierce Butler, one of the more prominent southern members of the church, owned rice and cotton plantations on the Georgia coast. Southern members of the Church became increasingly alienated from the congregation when the pastor of the church, William Henry Furness, became more vocal in his support for abolitionism in the early 1840s. See Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism, 1796-1861* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 95-96, 186-87, 231-34.

Joseph Sill and Upward Mobility

Joseph Sill was born in 1801 in Carlisle, England. When he was twelve years old his father died and Sill abandoned his schoolwork to support his mother and sister. Like many members of the British underclass, Sill, when he was eighteen years old, sought new opportunities in the United States, which he had been told was a land teeming with opportunities. Sill had been promised a position before his departure from England, probably as a clerk for a mercantile house in Philadelphia, but upon his arrival he learned that the promised situation was no longer available, no doubt a victim of the economic crisis of 1819. As his savings depleted, Sill began a desperate search for work, finally procuring a "humble clerkship" in Market Street about a month after his arrival. He described his three-hundred-dollar annual salary as "the first foundation of my success."[4] Having settled into a steady position as a clerk, Sill soon began courting Jane Todhunter, the daughter of the prominent English immigrant merchant Joseph Todhunter. The Todhunters were also leading members of Philadelphia's Unitarian Church. In 1825 Sill married Jane and joined the Unitarian church.[5]

Jane Sill was a steady partner in her husband's entrepreneurial endeavors, and in April 1827 they opened their own mercantile business at 177 Chestnut Street, near the Old State House. Sill saw his wife as a co-partner in his business and financial affairs, and he credited her with much of the success of the business. In his words, Jane, "by her pleasing manners and untiring industry soon got plenty of trade."[6]

---

[4] Joseph Sill, Diary, 8 November 1840, 2:260-62, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[5] Geffen, "Joseph Sill and His Diary," 277-79.
[6] Joseph Sill, Diary, 8 November 1840, 2:262, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

While indebtedness was a source of strain for Sill during the first few years of his business, the store soon began bringing in a profit, and by 1840 Sill could say "I owe nothing but what I can readily pay, and I have, or ought to have, few cares to trouble me."[7] Sill wrote, "I look back but a few years, and feel that my Youth was pass'd amidst privation and poverty—that my thoughts then never imagined that I should enjoy in after life a moiety of the comforts that now surround me."[8] With hard work, aid from fellow English immigrants, and, in his mind, the help of Providence, he became a successful Philadelphia merchant.

Joseph Sill was a man-on-the-make who cultivated his socioeconomic world to conform to his new social status. Sill's diary, which he kept assiduously from 1831 to his death in 1854, was a confessional for him, and in writing his thoughts he revealed his struggles over his place in Philadelphia society. He displayed a shrewd awareness of social stratification based on occupation. He was annoyed that in the United States, a supposedly "Democratic community," he "whose progenitors had lived before him and upon whose 'gettings' he supports his station" was considered "highest in the Scale of personal dignity." According to Sill, "the 2d in the scale of dignity is the Professional Man, the Parson, the Lawyer & the Doctor—the 3d the Merchant, the 4th the Storekeepers, the 5th the Mechanic &c &c."[9] Sill was angered that such distinctions created an "arbitrary nobility," similar to the unjust aristocracy of Europe. The petty insults others directed at Sill only solidified his awareness of unjust social differentiation by occupation. When Sill was not invited to a party thrown by one of his "oldest Friends," he became "full of trouble and humiliation,"

---

[7] Ibid., 260.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Joseph Sill, Diary, 26 February 1833, 1:308, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

and smarted at the slight. "The only reason I can assign for it is, that I am engaged in Retail business—that I am a shopkeeper!" [10] Sill was also alarmed when, while walking with a friend who was a well-known member of Philadelphia's upper class, he was mistaken for his friend's servant. "I had felt once or twice before that I was look'd upon in that light, by many whom we have met in our frequent peregrinations," he wrote, "but this was the first time I had the fortune to be ordered about, as though there was not doubt about the fact."[11] While Sill wrote about the situation amusingly in his diary, his pain at being mistaken as someone from a distinctly lower social level was evident.

Even after Sill had obtained success as a merchant, he remained unconvinced that he had achieved economic stability. He frequently reflected on his good fortune as a merchant and on the fact that he was only one business dealing away from failure. Each year, as he tallied his business profits on New Years' Day, he simultaneously praised God for his continued success and reminded himself to remember how fleeting it might be. Even years after he had established his business on firm footing, Sill wrote of his fear of impoverishment, as he had each year before, and would continue each year until his death. "I frequently think how hard it would have been to me, if Providence had seen fit to reduce me to Poverty & distress," he wrote. "I cannot but conclude," he continued later, "that I should be almost unequal to bear up against the trial & temptations which Poverty brings along with it."[12]

---

[10] Joseph Sill, Diary, 18 November 1840, 2:270-71, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[11] Joseph Sill, Diary, 3 November 1841, 3:196-97, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[12] Joseph Sill Diary, 1 January 1838, 2:157-58, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Sill used his poor relief work to help those who were themselves facing precarious futures. He conducted his poor relief in a variety of venues, but it was in his participation in the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia where he made his most important contacts for his benevolent work. In fact, the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia was a central point of connection for many antebellum English immigrants to Philadelphia interested in participating in charitable endeavors.

Philadelphia Unitarianism and Poor Relief

While crucial ties connected the Unitarian church of Philadelphia and the Harvard-based Unitarianism of Boston, important differences between the two churches and cities caused Philadelphia Unitarians to approach poor relief differently. Philadelphia Unitarian poor-relief reformers, like the first Unitarian workers in Boston, emphasized the importance of individual work with the poor for the maintenance of inter-class ties. Yet Philadelphia Unitarians, while they highlighted the necessity of establishing social bonds through poor relief, were less likely than their Boston counterparts to accept social hierarchy as natural. As upwardly mobile strivers, they sought to bring more members of the lower class into the middle-class fold and to challenge the tendency toward aristocracy they observed among some members of Philadelphia's elite, and the more general American tendency to place themselves into hierarchies created in their minds.

While Boston Unitarianism had deep roots in Boston and its governance, Philadelphia Unitarianism had no such ties to the City of Brotherly Love. Instead, Philadelphia Unitarianism was a transplant from England. The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia was founded in 1796 under the leadership of Joseph Priestley.

Priestley was a famous English Unitarian, a dissenter from the Anglican Church who fled his home country following the destruction of his house and church by a mob angered by his unorthodox religious views and support for the French Revolution. Priestley fought publicly with the Boston Unitarian hero Edmund Burke over issues of authority, aristocracy, and dissent, which came to be major issues of debate during the French Revolution. Priestley's Unitarianism was distinct from that of Boston in that it challenged church/state authority and questioned traditional social hierarchies in both England and the United States.[13]

The social make-up of the Philadelphia Unitarian church was also much different from that of Boston. The vast majority of Philadelphia Unitarians were men and women like Sill, recent immigrants who had arrived in Philadelphia with few resources but had established themselves as merchants and clerks. According to the historian Elizabeth Geffen, the Philadelphia Unitarian Church maintained a "strong English tone" even after a New England pastor ascended the church's pulpit in 1825, an ethos cultivated by the constant influx of new church members from England.[14] Many of these immigrants became part of the Philadelphia merchant community. Of the fifteen members who signed the first constitution of the church in 1807, the occupations of twelve are known. They included six merchants, a broker, a coachmaker, a plasterer, a shoemaker, a wire fender and cagemaker, and a teacher.[15] Between 1820 and 1850, forty-six percent of the members of the church were

---

[13] Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstances of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II Until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 347-48; F.W. Gibbs, *Joseph Priestley: Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965), 176-88; and Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 36.
[14] Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 133.
[15] Ibid., 72.

merchants like Sill.[16] These Philadelphia Unitarians differed substantially from their

Boston counterparts, who were well-established political and social elites.

The Boston and Philadelphia Unitarian churches also reflected more general

differences between Massachusetts and Philadelphia in terms of religious and ethnic

make-up, business organization, and traditional forms of leadership. As one historian

has argued, while Massachusetts "was an experiment in political democracy set

within a hierarchical social structure," Pennsylvania was "a tolerant, secular

plutocratic society plagued by sectarian politics."[17] Boston Unitarians were leaders of

a relatively homogenous society, English and Protestant in nature. Philadelphia

Unitarians were a distinct minority in a city marked by extreme heterogeneity of

religious and ethnic groups. Irish and German Catholics, English Quakers, Scottish

Presbyterians, German and English Moravians, and Mennonites and Jews all came

into contact with one another in a city teeming with diversity. Moreover, the

capitalist systems in which the two groups operated were distinct, and these

differences played an important role in the differing Unitarian approaches to poverty

in Boston and Philadelphia. While Boston owners of incorporated textile factories,

many of them prominent in the Unitarian church, led lives distant from the factory

operatives whom they employed, most Philadelphia textile manufacturers ran their

factories directly, some of them with mostly family labor or management. For these

---

[16] Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, Appendix B. One hundred and seven out of two hundred and thirty-three church members were merchants during this time. The dates come from when members made their first recorded connection with the society and are thus not completely accurate. Geffen only includes those members whose occupations she could find in the *City Directory* for the first year of contact. In many cases, occupations of the members were subsequently changed. Even adjusting for these statistical inadequacies, it is clear that merchants were an important part of the church membership.

[17] E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class Authority and Leadership* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 370.

manufacturers, many of whom were English immigrants, the economic, social, and geographic distance between them and their workers was less distinct and less hierarchical.[18] The Philadelphia Unitarian church, largely made up of English immigrants, many of whom had ties to the English textile industry, was part of this milieu. For these reasons, Philadelphia Unitarians like Sill were less willing to link their poor relief work to questions of authority and governance on a broad level.

Nevertheless, there were strong ties between Boston and Philadelphia Unitarians, fostered by a shared vision of theological liberalism. Philadelphia Unitarians turned to the center of American Unitarianism, Harvard University, when seeking a full-time pastor. Their first minister, William Henry Furness, was a blue-blood Unitarian, fresh from Harvard Divinity School, who led the congregation from 1825 to 1875. Philadelphia Unitarians also welcomed into their midst such prominent Boston Unitarians as William Ellery Channing, William Henry Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Ezra Stiles Gannett, many of whom preached for Furness when he was away from the city. In addition, Boston and Philadelphia Unitarians were deeply immersed in the culture of print, and they shared ideas in the pages of the Unitarian periodicals *Christian Examiner* and *Christian Disciple*.

Philadelphia Unitarians also shared with their Boston colleagues a commitment to an organic social order in their poor relief work, even if they rejected the social hierarchy to which many Boston Unitarians subscribed. True to their social beliefs, Philadelphia Unitarians argued that poor relief was a duty of those with means, as William Henry Furness preached in January 1837. In Sill's words, Furness

---

[18] Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacturer at Philadelphia, 1800-1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10.

told his Unitarian congregation that "we should never forget, as Christ had never forgotten, that we were all connected together by fraternal ties—all children of the same universal Parent—all heirs of the same glorious hope."[19] Like Joseph Tuckerman, Joseph Sill and his fellow poor-relief workers emphasized the need for close personal contact between them and the recipients of their aid. Only by visiting the homes of the poor and understanding their circumstances would their needs be met.

While Boston Unitarians emphasized authority and a stable relationship between church and civic life in their poor relief work, Philadelphia Unitarians, part of an extremely heterogenous urban population, pursued more limited goals. They most often confined their poor relief work to English immigrants, and whether those whom they aided were English or not, their efforts were always based on bringing those whom they aided into the middle-class fold. In working with the poor, Philadelphia Unitarians like the Sills invited the lower class to participate in a project that defined their own lives. This project was part of a larger system of municipal and voluntary poor relief programs in Philadelphia, which were undergoing important transformations in the antebellum period.

Philadelphia Poor Relief in the Antebellum Period

Major shifts occurred in the conditions of and responses to poverty in Philadelphia during the antebellum period. As in Boston, the forces of immigration, economic instability, disease, and seasonal needs combined to create a large class of dependent poor who increasingly called on the city or local benevolent organizations

---

[19] Joseph Sill, Diary, 15 January 1837, 2:45, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

for assistance. As changing ideas about the causes of poverty intersected with this

reality, city officials and private organizations began to rethink their approach to poor

relief. Municipal leaders sought to systematize poor relief through the creation of

almshouses for the poor. At the same time, leaders of voluntary benevolent

organizations debated among themselves the causes of and proper approach to the

problem of poverty. Joseph and Jane Sill both shaped and were shaped by these

changes, and their work with Philadelphia's poor and lower classes reflected new

ideas about poverty even while the Sills themselves were educated by those whom

they assisted.

In the antebellum period the number of Philadelphians receiving public

assistance increased. The historian Priscilla Ferguson Clement estimates that the

number of public poor relief recipients per thousand Philadelphians rose from forty-

eight to eighty-seven between 1820 and 1848.[20] A number of economic downturns

and depressions during this period caused massive unemployment. In addition to the

economic crisis caused by the Panic of 1819, Philadelphia was hit hard by the

depression that devastated the nation between 1837 and 1843. Five thousand

Philadelphians were unemployed in 1837.[21] Joseph Sill recorded several instances of

---

[20] Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Welfare and the Poor in the Nineteenth-Century City: Philadelphia, 1800-1854* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1985), 49. The most dramatic rise occurred between 1841 and 1848, when the number of poor relief recipients per thousand Philadelphians increased from fifty-four to eighty-seven.

[21] Clement, *Welfare and the Poor*, 28. On Philadelphia's poor and poor relief in the antebellum period see Simon P. Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); and Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Virtue, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 265-72. Works that address the colonial and early national periods include Billy Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); John K. Alexander, *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979); and Clare Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of*

financial failure among friends affected by the economic crisis. These economic

fluctuations exacerbated difficulties caused by other realities that had always been

part of life in Philadelphia. Philadelphians had always faced seasonal changes that

drastically affected the availability of work. During the winter, the Delaware River

iced over, bringing the maritime trade to a virtual standstill. As unemployment

increased, lower-class Philadelphians found themselves without food and fuel to

make it through the harsh winters. Sickness and disease also plagued all of

Philadelphia as yellow fever, cholera, typhus, and smallpox invaded the city.

Diseases did not discriminate between rich and poor, but the less sanitary conditions

among the lower-class population and their inability to leave the city when disease

ravaged the city meant they were more often affected by outbreaks of contagious

diseases. During periods of illness, the loss of a wageworker often caused families on

the edge of poverty to fall into financial chasms from which they could not free

themselves. All of these things combined to push many Philadelphians on the

financial margins into poverty.[22]

Philadelphia's public poor relief system resembled that of Boston, New York,

and most other major cities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Guardians of the Poor collected a poor tax from Philadelphia citizens, which they

then applied to the needs of the city's poor. In the late 1720s, the city's leaders built

an almshouse, which, like the eighteenth-century almshouse in Boston, did little to

attract voluntary poor inmates and housed few poor when the city's economy was

strong. In 1766 the city's Quakers built a larger almshouse. It did not reduce the

---

Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830 (Chapel Hill: University of
North Carolina Press, 2006).
[22] Clement, *Welfare and the Poor*, 26-30.

poor tax, however, and in 1788, the city revamped its welfare system, assigning

Guardians of the Poor to outdoor relief and the administration of the almshouse. The

Guardians constituted a board that met annually to appoint almshouse managers from

among their ranks and to set the poor tax. Guardians continued to visit the poor in

their homes and deliver aid to them.[23]

The financial crisis of 1819, however, caused many Philadelphians to question

a poor tax rate that cut into their shrinking incomes and also created resentment

among many toward the impoverished who benefited from the tax. Even before the

crisis, a report on the state of poverty in the city revealed growing frustration with the

city's poor population and increasing tendency to blame the poor themselves for their

plight.[24] By 1825 the city's poor relief system had reached a crisis point, and a

committee appointed to examine the poor laws and their implementation reflected the

public's anger. "Under this system we have gone on, for more than fifty years," the

committee reported, "and it is found that the burthens upon the community have been

increased," and "that the number of paupers has been augmented."[25] Such a situation

required a serious examination of the poor relief laws, which the committee found

wanting. According to the committee, a "compulsory public provision for the poor"

fostered resentment among those who were taxed, and selfish graspingness among

those who received poor relief funds. Furthermore, just as critics in Boston had

argued, the committee argued that Philadelphia's system of relief stifled a sense of

---

[23] Ibid., 38-42.
[24] Ibid., 50-51.
[25] *Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Operation of the Poor Laws, Read January 28th, 1825* (Harrisburg, Penn.: John S. Wiestling, 1825), 4.

industry, causing the poor to "relax" their "frugal and industrious habits."[26] Finally,

the committee argued that the system of poor relief was simply unfair because "by far

the greater number of paupers are individuals who have been reduced to want by their

own debauched habits, intemperance, or improvidence."[27] In 1827 the Guardians of

the Poor conducted a survey of almshouses in Baltimore, New York, Providence,

Boston, and Salem, and came to very similar conclusions about the inefficacy, indeed

the injuriousness, of Philadelphia's outdoor poor relief and almshouses systems.[28] In

1828 the city undertook a massive reorganization of its poor relief system that

reflected a harsher view of the poor. City leaders eliminated outdoor cash relief,

increased the size of the poorhouse, and began to send many more poor

Philadelphians there.[29]

Men and women in voluntary reform groups also debated the nature of and

proper solution to poverty. According to the historian Bruce Dorsey, the 1820s were

a crucial turning point in attitudes toward the poor among religious reformers

especially, members of groups like Philadelphia's Provident Society, Orphans'

Society, Bible and missionary societies, and the myriad of poor-relief groups

associated with the city's churches.[30] The same criticisms of public charity spilled

over into critiques of voluntary benevolence. In the 1820s, support for religious poor

relief groups fell, forcing their leaders to reexamine the organizations' approaches to

---

[26] Ibid., 5.

[27] Ibid., 22.

[28] *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Guardians of the Poor of the City and Districts of Philadelphia, to Visit the Cities of Baltimore, New-York, Providence, Boston, and Salem* (Philadelphia: Samuel Parker, 1827).

[29] Clement, *Welfare and the Poor*, 55-58.

[30] For a useful breakdown of nineteenth-century Philadelphia charitable organizations in Philadelphia see John Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia; L.H. Everts & Co., 1884), 2:1449-91.

poor relief.[31] Religious groups began to develop programs based on work relief

rather than charitable distributions, echoing arguments that the best solution to

poverty was the creation of a stable class of free workers who, through hard work and

industriousness, would strengthen both themselves and the economy.[32]

Not all Philadelphians were willing to shift the blame of poverty to the poor.

One of the most vocal critics of the reports of the Guardians of the Poor and the

declining support for voluntary charitable organizations was Mathew Carey, the

Philadelphia publisher and advocate for the working class. In pamphlets and reports,

Carey launched an all-out war on what he considered to be false perceptions of

poverty and the effects of poor relief on the poor.[33] To Carey, one of the most

egregiously erroneous assumptions of Philadelphians was that adequately paid work

was available to anyone who sought it. According to Carey, there were fewer labor

positions than workers in the city, and even those who were able to find work were

---

[31] Brucey Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 63.

[32] Ibid., 71.

[33] Carey wrote extensively on poverty and issued several pamphlets answering reports from public poor relief officials and private religious groups in which he attacked the prevalent view of poverty as caused by sin or indigence. The titles of the reports provide a useful snapshot of his understanding of poverty. A sampling of these includes: *Essays on the Public Charities of Philadelphia, Intended to Vindicate Benevolent Societies from the Charge of Encouraging Idleness, and to Place in Strong Relief, Before an Enlightened Public, the Sufferings and Oppressions under which the Greater Part of the Females Labour, who Depend on their Industry for a Support for Themselves and Children* (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1830); *Appeal to the Wealthy of the Land, Ladies as Well as Gentlemen, on the Character, Conduct, Situation, and Prospects of those Whose Sole Dependence for Subsistence is on the Labour of their Hands* (Philadelphia: L. Johnson, 1833); *To the Managers of the Union Benevolent Society* (n.p., 1834); *Letters on the Condition of the Poor: Addressed to Alexander Henry, Esq. Containing a Vindication of the Poor Laws and Benevolent Societies: Proofs of the Injustice of the General Censure of the Poor, for Extravagance, Dissipation, etc. Instances of Human Suffering in Philadelphia, Not Exceeded in London Or Paris: Examples of the Gross Inconsistency of the Edinburgh Review, on the Subject of the Poor Laws: With a View of the System and Operation of the Union Benevolent Association* (Philadelphia: Haswell & Barrington, 1835); *Reflections on the Union Benevolent Association, Stating its Beneficent Effects on the Manners, Habits, Conduct, and Comforts of the Poor; but the Utter Inadequacy of its Means, to Enable it, on a Proper Scale to Minister that Physical Aid to the Distressed and Suffering, which Humanity Demands; and the Necessity of Raising Funds Adequate for the Purpose. With Suggestions for Alterations Imperiously Requisite, in Order to Carry into Full Operation the Benevolent Views of the Founders* (Philadelphia: William F. Geddes, 1837).

often paid wages that were entirely inadequate for their families' needs. In an 1829 memorial to the city, Carey and a committee of five others argued that a false view of poverty had taken hold in Philadelphia. According to Carey, even single women, "unencumbered with families," earned no more than $1.25 per week. If women paid seventy-five cents for room and fuel per week, that left only fifty cents per week to pay for food and clothing. "Can we wonder at the harrowing misery and distress that prevail among this class under such a deplorable state of things?" Carey asked.[34] He refuted each of the false arguments that had been made about poverty, especially the view of the poor as irresponsible and the belief that poor relief only exacerbated poverty. The "thousands of men who eagerly seek for labour on canals, often in pestilential situations, with death staring them in the face" and the "1000 to 1100 women" who "traveled three, four, six, eight, or ten squares" to procure work from the Provident Society were proof enough that the poor were eager to work for their subsistence. Furthermore, the paltry sums distributed by poor relief organizations, and the fact that they were most often distributed to the "aged women, superannuated men and women, and destitute children," proved that poor relief most often benefited those who were unable to work rather than providing a welcome to laze around and drink.[35]

Carey fought the unsympathetic view of poverty that had caused many Philadelphians to stop giving to charitable organizations or support municipal efforts to approach poverty as a humanitarian issue. He sought to infuse poor relief with the

---

[34] *The Subscribers, a Committee Appointed by the Town Meeting of the Citizens of the City and County of Philadelphia, on the 21st Ult. to Ascertain Whether Those Who are Able and Willing to Work, Can in General Procure Employment . . .* (Philadelphia: s.n., 1829), 1.
[35] Ibid., 2.

same caringness that had marked welfare programs in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries, while at the same time tapping into the ideas of capitalistic

individualism that had driven many reformers to criticize the poor relief system in the

first place. Carey sought to ameliorate the economy's harsh conditions by reminding

Philadelphians of their obligations to provide support for those who genuinely wished

to participate and flourish in the market economy but who were unable to do so

because of poor wages or lack of employment opportunity. Tapping into "fears of

downward mobility," Carey also appealed to upwardly mobile men and women for

support of poor relief programs by arguing they could be close to poverty

themselves.[36] "When you consider the vicissitudes of life," Carey proposed, "it is not

impossible that at a future day—heaven avert such a catastrophe!—some of you may

be reduced as low as those ill-fated women" who were brought low by poor wages.[37]

Joseph and Jane Sill's work with the poor exemplifies the uncertainty that

Carey evoked his attempts to encourage charity.[38] Like the middle-class audience for

whom Carey was writing, Joseph and Jane Sill were members of an upwardly mobile

community. They understood Carey when he highlighted the dangers of the market

economy, because they had experienced such perils themselves. The Sills'

involvement with charitable groups and individual acts of charity allowed them to

show their sensitivity to the needs of the poor in an often volatile economic system,

---

[36] Mari Jo Buhle, "Needlewomen and the Vicissitudes of Modern Life: A Study of Middle-Class Construction in the Antebellum Northeast," in Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 155.

[37] Mathew Carey, "Female Wages and Female Oppression," Philadelphia, July 23, 1835 in Carey, *Miscellaneous Essays* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1830), 2, quoted in Buhle, "Needlewomen and the Vicissitudes of Modern Life," 155-56.

[38] Sill was not the only one whose charitable endeavors were motivated by both sympathy and anxiety. As Mari Jo Buhle argues, that middle-class women of Philadelphia responded to Carey's rhetoric by "following Carey's advice to the letter." See Buhle, "Needlewomen and the vicissitudes of Modern Life," 157.

and deepened their understanding of the myriad causes of poverty that had nothing to do with individual moral failure.

The Society of the Sons of St. George, the Vaughan Charitable Association, and Friendly Visiting

The Sills conducted their work with the poor in three arenas. Joseph Sill participated in the Society of the Sons of St. George (SSSG), an ethnic support group for English immigrants, as well as the Unitarian Church's Vaughan Charitable Association. Both Joseph and Jane conducted personal visits in the homes of the poor. Even while they brought certain assumptions to the assistance they provided to their poor neighbors, their work with the poor taught them much about life on the margins in Philadelphia's uncertain economy.

The SSSG, founded in 1772, was one of many ethnic groups in antebellum Philadelphia concerned with easing the entry of foreign immigrants into American society. Like the St. Andrew's Society for Scots, the Hibernian Society for Irish immigrants, and the French and German Societies, the SSSG provided material assistance for newly arrived immigrants.[39] It also served as a source of collective experience and wisdom for new immigrants unfamiliar with American customs and as a site where old immigrants could steer recent ones toward available work opportunities. The charter of the SSSG prioritized aid to "artificers and manufacturers" over unskilled workers without "any trade or calling."[40] In reality almost all applicants for aid—both skilled and unskilled—received assistance.

---

[39] For information on the ethnic groups who provided assistance to new immigrants see Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 1464-69.
[40] *Rules and Constitution of the Society of the Sons of St. George* (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, Jr., 1772), 19.

Leaders of the SSSG included a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and a Committee of Stewards. Sill served as Steward, Secretary, Vice-President, and President in the organization; his first official role was as a steward. The role of steward reflected the members' belief in the need for close relationships between the givers and recipients of aid. The responsibilities of stewards involved visiting applicants for aid, assessing their situations and determining their needs, and then delivering the needed assistance or giving cash to them. The stewards were under strict orders to provide assistance only to English immigrants. When investigation into an immigrant's situation revealed they were not English, all aid was cut off; stewards usually handed over such cases to the appropriate immigrant aid society such as the Hibernian or Scots Society.

The SSSG not only served the needs of English immigrants, but was also a social club for Englishmen of the city. The vast majority of leaders of the SSSG were also leaders in the Unitarian Church; the eminent John Vaughan, Sill's father-in-law Joseph Todhunter and brothers-in-law William and John Todhunter, and even the famous artist Thomas Sully belonged to both the Philadelphia Unitarian Church and the SSSG. Like Sill, Vaughan and the Todhunters were established merchants who were leaders in the Unitarian church.[41] The SSSG provided a space for them to practice social graces and to develop the networks helpful for their businesses and their social status. The highlight of the year for the SSSG was the annual St. George's Day dinner, where the members of the Society met to offer toasts to the Queen even while they praised their adopted homeland, and to practice the wit and

---

[41] Almost half (twelve out twenty-six) of the Unitarian members of the SSSG were merchants. See Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, Appendix B and Appendix C.

gentility that marked them as cultivated men. Sill was sometimes troubled by the social atmosphere of the SSSG. "Amongst the Englishmen who compose the Society," he wrote in his diary, "there are unfortunately not a few who are disposed rather to spend the [organization's] funds in drinking and riot, rather than in charitable purposes."[42] Yet even while Sill criticized his fellow members of the SSSG, he himself often saw the SSSG as a place that provided useful connections for his business and personal life.

Sill also participated in the Vaughan Charitable Association, the benevolent arm of the First Unitarian Church. Established in 1841 in response to the prolonged depression that had begun in the late 1830s, the Association collected alms from church members and then used the funds to buy food, clothes, and fuel for the city's needy residents. The Vaughan Sewing Circle, run by the women of the church, made clothes for the poor.[43] It was named for John Vaughan, a friend of Joseph Priestley and perhaps the best-known Philadelphia Unitarian, who had assisted Joseph Sill upon his arrival in the United States. The religious leaders of the Vaughan Charitable Association, like many of their counterparts in Philadelphia, displayed a certain ambivalence about the causes of poverty. On one hand, they sympathized with those who believed that "almost all cases of poverty and distress" were caused by "ignorance and improvidence" and "the want of ability to economize and manage to get on in the world."[44] But on the other, they also believed that wealthy men who disregarded the "natural laws" of economics and created "disastrous effects" that fell

---

[42] Joseph Sill, Diary, 23 January 1833, 1:283, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[43] Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 201.
[44] Records and Minutes [of Annual Meetings, Financial Reports, and Societies of the Church, 20 January 1823 to 7 February 1907], 125, quoted in Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 201. Since the publication of Geffen's book, these minutes have been lost.

"most heavily on the poor" were more often the cause of poverty.[45] Like other

organizations, the Vaughan Charitable Association argued that while poverty was

sometimes the result of improvidence or vice, it was also caused by an economic

system gone awry, and especially of bad luck or circumstances that had nothing to do

with character.

As Joseph and Jane Sill conducted their work in the SSSG and the Vaughan

Charitable Association, they also began visiting with the poor outside the boundaries

of these organizations. As the Sills' reputation as a family of means and the

willingness to help spread, poor Philadelphians began to approach them directly for

assistance. In the closeness of a mixed urban environment, the Sills developed an

intimacy with those whom they helped. Much of their aid was offered in their home,

the central location of activity for antebellum middle-class families. On one

particular November morning in 1842 as winter came and the depression lingered,

Sill noted that he had been "almost over-run with applicants for charity" and that

"scarcely half an hour passed throughout the whole day without some English man or

Woman" presenting an application "either for Charity or advice."[46] Sill often felt

imposed upon, even as he welcomed applicants for charity in his home and shop. Just

two weeks after the November barrage of poor relief applicants, he recorded again,

"We had a great many calls to day for charity; and gave out Wood, &c." Apparently,

his charitableness had been "noised abroad amongst the Poor," and they came to

Sill's store "as if it was a Depository for bestowing everything."[47]

---

[45] Ibid., 126.
[46] Joseph Sill, Diary, 23 November 1842, 4:161-62, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[47] Joseph Sill, Diary, 6 December 1842, 4:176, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Joseph and Jane Sill's work with the poor, like that of Joseph Tuckerman, was thus very intimate. Like Tuckerman, the Sills entered the homes of the poor to assess their needs and to offer assistance based on those needs. Similarly, the men and women whom the Sills assisted often approached them in their own home, just as they had with Joseph Tuckerman. The close relationships the Sills established with those whom they assisted brought them face-to-face with the daily struggles of the lives of poor Philadelphians, and allowed them to transcend the common assumption among nineteenth-century northerners that poverty was usually caused by vice.

Joseph and Jane Sill's Poverty Encounters

While he had experienced firsthand the harsh results of the Panic of 1819, Joseph Sill's own financial success had led him to believe that material achievement was possible with enough hard work and perhaps assistance from a few important individuals. His work, then, was an attempt to help English immigrants on their path to dignity or even success. Sill quickly discovered, however, that his task would not be as easy as he supposed. In the poor English wool workers who entered Philadelphia's port and in colleagues who were devastated by the destructive depression of 1837-1842, Sill saw clearly that the economic system that had benefited him could destroy others. Like Joseph Tuckerman, Sill was directly exposed to the devastating affects of the new business cycle.

At the beginning of his poor relief work, Sill held a positive view of the relationship between industrial machinery and the working class. In an 1833 diary entry, he contemplated *The Hill and the Valley*, "one of a series of tales intended to illustrate Political Economy." Written by Harriet Martineau, an English Unitarian

93

with ties to the Unitarians of the United States, *The Hill and the Valley* aimed to show the progress brought about by technological innovation.[48] Sill seemed to agree with Martineau that labor, instead of being degraded by the introduction of new technology and methods of efficiency, was improved by it. "The Hill & the Valley, contrast the families of a Recluse, and a Manufacturer, in which is very ably shewn the unproductiveness of the one, & the productiveness of the other," Sill recorded. "The meaning of Capital & Labour is clearly defined, & their relative connexion & dependance made apparent; while it is strikingly urged that Machinery does not interfere with, but rather enhances Labour_&c &c."[49]

The many English textile workers who approached Sill for aid revealed to him the costs that came with the machinery he had praised in the early 1830s. Sill himself had emigrated from Carlisle in Cumberland County, and was thus called upon frequently to meet with immigrants to Philadelphia from that area. Cumberland County was a major wool and cotton-processing area, and the industrialization of the textile industry displaced many workers there. Weavers and wool combers left the region to find work in the United States; as early as 1820 the SSSG recorded a case of assistance to a muslin weaver who was unable to find work. By the time Sill began his work with the poor, wool and cotton workers were flooding into Philadelphia.[50]

---

[48] For more on Martineau's politico-social worldview, see K.J. Fielding and Anne Smith, "Hard Times and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 24(1970): 404-27.

[49] Joseph Sill, Diary, 15 January 1833, 1:277, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[50] Minute Books, 2 January 1820, vol. 2, Records of the Society of the Sons of St. George, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. On the role of English immigrants in shaping the Philadelphia textile industry, see Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism*, 95. The commentator Edward Freedley remarked in 1857 that "the majority of the operatives . . . are English or Anglo-Americans." Quote from Freedley, *Philadelphia and Its Manufactures* (Philadelphia, 1857) in Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism*, 94. Scranton also remarks that "Philadelphia may well have drawn a substantial share of British textile

The case of James Bell taught Sill an important lesson in the downside to the efficiency created by machinery. In 1841, Sill was approached by Bell, whose wife had recently died, leaving him to care for two young children. Bell was a gingham weaver who earned three dollars per week in the United States, hardly enough to sustain his family.[51] As a recent immigrant, familiar with the situation of textile laborers in England, Bell told of many weavers from Carlisle, "who give a sad account of the Manufacturing trade," where workers could "only earn 6/ to 7/ per week with continued labour."[52] This was due to new weaving machinery, the improvements of which were so great "that a handloom Weaver can scarcely procure the necessaries of life, after the most assiduous toil." Sill was distressed to hear that "many are compell'd to seek relief from the Poor Houses in consequence of it."[53] He was beginning to learn the error in Martineau's claims about the wholly happy results of improved machinery.

Sill met other English immigrant textile workers who had difficulty finding well-paid, steady labor, even though they were eager to work. The Sills visited one woman in a dank cellar who had two children, with a third on the way. Her husband was a weaver who kept his loom in the cellar where they lived, but he had only "occasional work" and was "obliged to take Goods for his labour." Like many lower-class antebellum Americans, the weaver's family had adapted to the market

---

migrants, carrying with them both their skills and cultural traditions and installing elements of the British productive relations into the city." (95)

[51] Gingham is a cotton cloth woven into stripes or checks. According to Bruce Laurie, the average income of textile workers in 1850 was two hundred and ten dollars per year, which put them "near the bottom of the occupational pyramid." Bell's one hundred fifty-six dollars per year was thus an extremely low wage for the time. See Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 20.

[52] Equivalent to about four dollars per week.

[53] Joseph Sill, Diary, 24 June 1841, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

economy by resorting to a system of barter and exchange. The Sills gave clothes to the cloth weaver's family, an irony that was apparently lost on them.[54]

In the textile workers he encountered, Sill was reminded that poverty was often caused by circumstances well outside of one's control, and that the poor were often harder workers than those who assisted them. Textile work in the Philadelphia area, especially that still connected to hand weavers, was notoriously underpaid, even when compared with other poorly paid occupations, and positions were usually few and far between.[55] Particularly poignant for Sill was the case of a cloth draper, who "had been all round the Country in search of work, but in vain; altho' he had walked until his feet were all swelld & scar'd."[56]

Sill often stated that the goal of his assistance was to provide a hand-up for those in need, that they might establish themselves on more stable footing. He praised the "industrious" poor he aided and hoped the assistance he offered might "in some instances lay the foundation of a competency or a fortune." Sill bought equipment for women who earned their livings by spooling, provided money for men and women to start their own businesses, and found positions for skilled tradesmen with master artisans and small textile producers.[57] The proprietary nature of the Philadelphia textile industry meant that, as the historian Philip Scranton argues, "a

---

[54] For more on the effects of the transition to an industrialized market economy and the response of laborers to these changes see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
[55] Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 16-20.
[56] Joseph Sill, Diary, 26 November 1841, 3:224, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[57] Joseph Sill, Diary, 2 April 1844, 5:224-25; 12 December 1844, 6:36-37; and 9 March 1850, 9:175, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

manufacturer's family was welded to the relations of production."[58] Sill probably used this to his advantage, serving as a bridge between the many English immigrant small factory owners and the skilled English textile workers they needed to keep their businesses running smoothly.

Even as Sill assisted workers who had been displaced by the vicissitudes of the economic system, he did not believe that the economy required any sort of major adjustment. Sill had few kind words for workers who used strikes to gain higher wages. Such workers hurt their own families by depriving them of food and fuel, he argued. Weaving unions in England were "altogether wrong," Sill argued, because those who were "disposed to work" were prevented from doing so by those who were not.[59] He argued, however, that manufacturers should quell strikes and labor violence by responding to the legitimate demands of their workers.[60]

Even while Sill disagreed with those who called for drastic solutions to economic inequality, he still sympathized with them. Sill listened attentively as William Henry Channing delivered a lecture on the principles of Association, an antebellum communitarian movement centered in Boston and New York that sought to reorganize society along socialist lines.[61] As Sill recorded in his diary, Channing argued "the great inequality in the condition of men" was caused by "the third power which has stept in between the producer and the consumer, the Mercantile Class." While it had been formed "to facilitate the transfer from the producer to the

---

[58] Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism*, 10. This differed markedly from the New England Textile industry, in which factory owners lived in Boston and had little to do with the daily affairs of their factories in the Massachusetts countryside.

[59] Joseph Sill, Diary, 28 February 1846, 7:5, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[60] Joseph Sill, Diary, 3 September 1842, 4:87, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[61] See chapter five for an explanation of Associationism and its relationship to Unitarian Transcendentalism.

consumer," it had overstepped its bounds and "become an overgrown & tyrannical power." Praising the Fourierist scheme of labor, in which all workers were able to pursue their "passions" equally in community groups called "phalanxes," Channing argued the solution to economic injustice was the creation of Associations, where "every man should have the assurance of a fair equivalent for his labour, and be considered equal in the eye of his Brother Man." Despite Sill's membership in the very class Channing referred to as "tyrannical," he praised the oration. He wrote in his diary that evening, "The whole address of Mr Channing was the very simplicity of true Eloquence – earnest, plain, persuasive, and nearly convincing."[62] He could sympathize with Channing's criticism of the disparity between one's labor and the reward for that labor; he had seen too many hard-working, but poor, laborers to believe that the wage system adequately rewarded workers for their efforts. Yet he could not support Channing's radical scheme. Instead, he worked within the system in which he lived, attempting to provide for each worker "a fair equivalent for his labour" without radically altering the system from which he had benefited and he believed could benefit others.

Sill could sympathize with Channing's assessment of the American economy because he had witnessed its devastating effects on many worthy people. The financial collapse of many of his close friends and business associates reminded him that he himself was only one failure away from destitution. The insecurity of life in the volatile antebellum economy was brought all too close to home for Sill in the difficult situations of his colleagues. The economic depression of 1837-1842 was

---

[62] Joseph Sill, Diary, 17 December 1847, 8:68-69, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For more on William Henry Channing and Associations, see chapter 5.

particularly trying for middle-class Philadelphia merchants like Sill. In that city, the

nadir of the depression occurred in late 1841 and early 1842. By 1841 Pennsylvania

had the highest total debt of any state, owing $33,301,013 to its creditors, which did

not bode well for Philadelphia's working and middle classes.[63] Many merchants, who

were intimately bound to the world of credit, were devastated by the economic

collapse.

The case of William Ferguson was a powerful example to Sill of the

precariousness of life in the market economy. In November 1843, a "miserable

looking man" called upon Sill to ask him for assistance. The man introduced himself

as William Ferguson, who, twenty years earlier, had been a colleague of Sill in one of

his first positions as a clerk. Ferguson had begun "a manufacturing concern" in Ohio,

but when it burned down, he was left penniless. He had heard the woolen mills in

Baltimore were hiring, but he had no money to complete his journey there and was

calling on Sill for assistance. Sill felt empathy for Ferguson and did what he could to

help, but Ferguson's fate concerned him. "I could not get rid of the impression that

his case might have been mine, and for aught I know, just as deservedly!" he wrote in

his diary that evening.[64]

In an 1840 diary entry, Sill expressed the new understanding of poverty that

he had come to as a result of his work with the poor and his experiences in the midst

---

[63] According to John Wallis, the bank panic of 1841 and 1842 was brought about by a complicated
series of economic events caused by ill-considered state methods of funding internal improvements
and the consequent failure of banks across the country. For an explanation of the causes of the panic
see John Joseph Wallis, "Constitutions, Corporations, and Corruption: American States and
Constitutional Change, 1842 to 1852," *Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 1 (2005): 211-56. I am
grateful to Dr. Wallis for this reference. For information on the bank panic see Scharf and Westcott,
History of Philadelphia, 1:657-59. Sill reflected on the events of the Bank Panic in his Diary, 8
February 1842, 3:319 and 16 March 1842, 3:378, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of
Pennsylvania.
[64] Joseph Sill, Diary, 9 November 1843, 5:68, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

of the depression. During a snow storm, as he lay "warm and comfortable in his bed," worries began to haunt him. "My mind could not but revert to the dreadful situation of the poor Mariner on the Stormy Sea—to the way-worn Traveller on the open plain, or on the Mountain top, and to the desolate and cheerless abodes of Poverty even nigh at hand," he wrote. The storm of fear continued unabated, and though he "wish'd for its termination," it continued stronger than ever. His thoughts then turned to himself and his own life. "I felt even a chill as a if I had been subject to the perils of the cold without, and for a moment thought that some change of fortune would surely reach me," he recorded, "and that I should certainly be calld upon to endure the dangers which my imagination had pictured so many were enduring at that time." At that moment, when he "felt most secure of worldly abundance," he was also terrified that "some unforeseen event would happen to annihilate these blessings," leaving him with as little as those for whom he had served as benefactor.[65]

Sill doubted his own ability to withstand the pressures of financial ruin, a doubt that only grew in the face of the strength and dignity he had observed among the displaced workers he had assisted. In them he saw a fortitude that he believed he lacked. "I frequently reflect on the different effect that trial & poverty and hard toil would have had on my temper & disposition," he recorded one New Year's Eve, and "I fear that I would not have stood the test as consistently and as temperatively as many of my fellow Creatures." Among those he assisted he believed many were

---

[65] Joseph Sill, Diary, 6 December 1840, 2:294-95, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

"more worthy of comfort and happiness than myself," and that if he were in similar circumstances he "should hardly be as patient and resigned as they."[66]

Sill's troubled attitude about how he might react to penury shows how his encounters with poverty influenced his views of the poor and the causes of impoverishment. Sill admired those whom he assisted for their fortitude, which outweighed any sort of courage he believed he had. He saw the strength of the poor, like that of the wandering cloth draper, as a sign of virtue. At the same time, Sill learned that poverty and financial failure were more often than not the result of circumstances wholly outside of one's control. Success was little proof of virtue, nor was poverty evidence of its lack. Sill came to understand the realities of the market economy—and their effects on workers—in new ways.

Poor Relief as an Exercise in Piety

Sill had respect for the lower class, an admiration fostered by their dignity in the face of harsh circumstances. Yet this respect was often tempered by condescension and Sill's desire to separate himself from those whom he assisted. Even as his poor relief work was a sincere act of charity, it was also an exercise in self-advancement and self-culture. The reputation Sill gained as a benefactor to the poor and the development of his own piety sometimes came at the expense of those whom he assisted. Sill was often troubled by this, and worked hard to keep himself from allowing his self-interest or haughtiness to overrun his charity work.

Sill appreciated the value of showing his good works to the public as he participated in benevolent activity, for doing so enhanced his reputation as a

---

[66] Joseph Sill, Diary, 31 December 1851, 9:495-96, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

charitable man. He reflected on the importance of public giving after the death of a neighbor, Jacob Ridgway, who had consistently refused Sill's requests for monetary support for his charitable work. "I calld upon him & represented the necessities of the poor, and asked him if he had any wood to dispense?" Sill recorded after Ridgway's death. "He replied in the negative, seem'd to acknowledge & sympathize with the unprecedented sufferings of the lower class, yet gave no assistance, at least through me." Sill believed this worked to the detriment of Ridgway's reputation. "The World thinks he has been too fond of accumulation to think of the miseries of others," Sill wrote. In Sill's view, more benefit would have accrued if Ridgway had given to charity in full sight of his neighbors, for not only would the poor be aided, Ridgway also would have had more friends and respect in the community.[67]

Even while Sill saw the advantages to the giver in giving, it simultaneously troubled him. When he participated in the annual collection of funds for the Vaughan Charitable Association at the First Unitarian Church, he chose to take up the collection in the upper gallery, where few parishioners sat and he would be out of view from most of the congregation. "I do not like to be conspicuous on these occasions," he confided to his diary.[68] Debates over the method of collecting the yearly donations troubled Sill and his pastor, who argued that benevolence "should be moved by a spontaneous desire to do good," not a wish to be noticed by one's neighbors.[69] Sill was aware of the hypocrisy of giving for the purpose of self-

[67] Joseph Sill, Diary, 23 April 1843, 4:311-12, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[68] Joseph Sill, Diary, 10 November 1844, 5:441, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[69] Joseph Sill, Diary, 22 November 1846, 7:229-30, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The question of how to collect alms in the church spanned two years. See Joseph Sill, Diary, 16 November 1845, 6:389-90, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

advancement. His struggle over how public to be in his giving was marked not only

by a feeling of obligation to give out of sincerity, but also by knowing that outward

actions could easily be manipulated to present a false front to one's neighbors.[70]

Indeed, one of the important lessons Sill learned in his encounters with those

whom he assisted was that appearance was not always reality, for many men and

women stretched the truth or lied about their situations in order to gain his help. Sill

had difficulty knowing how to handle cases like that of William Shipley of Sunbury,

Pennsylvania, who came to Sill in 1843 while supposedly on a trip to view some

available land to purchase. Shipley presented himself as short of funds for his return

trip, but assured Sill he would repay him if he loaned him two dollars, a sum he said

he could quickly obtain by selling lumber at a nearby port. "It seemd a strange

request for a Stranger to make," Sill wrote in his diary, but Shipley seemed to know

so many details about Sunbury's Unitarian community that Sill was convinced to loan

him the money.[71] When Shipley did not return as promised in the next few days,

Sill's suspicions about him were confirmed. "It looks like an imposition," Sill

disappointedly recorded in his diary.[72]

Sill had enough experience with false representations among those he assisted

to begin to request letters of reference from them in the early 1850s. Such letters

---

[70] This fits well with Karen Halttunen's work on ideas of hypocrisy among the middle class in the antebellum United States. According to Halttunen, "For the advice writers, it was one thing to assert that appearances are important because they reveal inner character; it was quite another to say that appearances might be deceitfully manipulated to convince others of inner character. The young man who concentrated solely on engineering an acceptable front to the world was guilty of cultivating what the advice writers condemned as 'the mere surface of character.'" See Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 43.

[71] Joseph Sill, Diary, 9 January 1843, 4:211-12, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[72] Joseph Sill, Diary, 13 January 1843, 4:214, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

verified the stories he heard, and he was displeased when Englishmen and women who came to him for help did not offer the proper verification of their truthfulness. "It is thoughtless in most of them <u>not</u> to bring recommendations of character with them," he wrote, "as without them it is very difficult to find situations for them; yet it is very few who come here who bring such credentials."[73] Sill focused much of his energy on assisting displaced English workers who had been members of small communities and who, he believed, had access to character references from their neighbors and parish ministers. In a world of declining familiarity and intimacy with one's neighbors, Sill valued evidence of the *bona fides* of those whom he helped.

Sill recognized the value of public giving, even while he questioned its performative nature, and he also believed giving offered more private rewards. Sill saw his poor relief as an exercise in self-development, a spiritual discipline that helped cultivate his faith. This self-interested approach to poor relief sometimes came at the expense of those whom he assisted. The case of the Barnes family, whom the Sills assisted in the winter and spring of 1845, illustrates this. Sill was first introduced to Jonathan Barnes and his wife and two children through Jane Sill. Sill did not indicate the financial status of the Barneses, but it is clear from his diary entries that the Barnes family had few financial resources on which to draw in the face of family crisis.

Jane had visited the Barneses, and seeing that both Mrs. Barnes and Elizabeth were ill, had attempted to arrange a nurse for them. Having no success, she decided to bring Elizabeth home with her. Perhaps attempting to assuage his guilt for the "great trial" to the Barneses caused by Mrs. Sill's taking of their child, Sill wrote in

---

[73] Joseph Sill, Diary, 5 January 1854, 10:416, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

his diary they "deliverd it to her charge with every confidence that it would be better cared for than it could be with them."[74] Elizabeth had little chance of survival, for she was in "a very low sickly condition, with a constant Cough, and difficulty in breathing," an assumption confirmed by the diagnosis of the family doctor.

The Sills cared for Elizabeth for the next few days, sending periodic reports to the Barneses, whose second child became gravely ill while Elizabeth was with them. Elizabeth's father, distraught that he and his wife were losing their final moments with their daughter, visited Elizabeth the day after she entered the Sill household. Apparently insensitive to the emotions of Jonathan Barnes, Sill wrote, pleased, in his diary that Elizabeth was so attached to his wife Jane that she told her father she did not want to go home with him.[75] Elizabeth's mother visited four days later, and that evening Elizabeth died. Sill's diary entry of Elizabeth's last moments was full of sentimental reflection of the "angel" they had lost.[76]

Sill wrote in his diary about the influence Elizabeth's presence had on his and his family's spiritual condition. "We were conscious that this death Scene of the poor Child had not been without its uses," Sill wrote, for "it had made us better Christians!"[77] His daughter Jane also told her mother, "perhaps God has permitted this little child to die in our house, as much for our sakes, as for hers."[78] For the Sill family, the presence of Elizabeth in their house had provided an opportunity for them to reflect that the little girl, for whom they "would have done anything," sparked a

---

[74] Joseph Sill, Diary, 13 February 1845, 6:113, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[75] Joseph Sill, Diary, 14 February 1845, 6:114, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[76] Joseph Sill, Diary, 24 February 1845, 6:131-32, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Joseph Sill, Diary, 25 February 1845, 6:133, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

charity in them that made them better Christians.[79] Yet by focusing so intently on

Elizabeth's effect on their own family, Sill downplayed the importance of allowing

Jonathan Barnes and his wife to grieve for their lost child. Sill waited until the

morning after Elizabeth's death to inform the Barneses that she had passed away, and

told them not to come to the Sill home to see her, but that they would send

Elizabeth's remains to them.

     While Sill seemed somewhat insensitive to the way his treatment of the

Barnes family reflected an attitude of condescension, he was sometimes troubled by

the superiority he felt toward the poor and working classes. He self-consciously

corrected himself when he found himself slipping into such thoughts. After visiting

two destitute families, Sill caught himself as he recorded disdainfully of what he had

observed. He wrote:

> Surely there is an immense variety in the condition of human life; and
> what an awful contrast between the means of the rich man, and the
> wants of the Poor! We can hardly conceive how vast the difference is
> until we leave our own comfortable & luxurious dwellings, and
> ~~descend~~ enter into the huts and garrets and cellars of the destitute &
> forlorn.[80]

His shock and disgust at what he had seen had prompted him to write about the vast

circumstantial differences between him and those whom he aided. Yet, as his editing

reveals, he checked his condescension, attempting to treat the recipients of his aid as

worthy of respect. The self-respect he had seen among them had helped prompt such

a reaction.

---

[79] Mary Louise Kete argues such modes of mourning played an important role in developing middle-class identity in the nineteenth century. Sentimental mourning allowed for "sentimental collaboration," "a symbolic process" meant to alleviate feelings of uncertainty "and to rebind the mourner to the community." See Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 55.

[80] Joseph Sill, Diary, 28 October 1842, 4:133-34, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Sill focused his charitable energies more on those who could potentially participate in the same project he was participating in, most of them men with some chance of upward mobility. Sill's wife, Jane, always an active participant in her husband's charitable work, took on her own benevolent work with the destitute poor, men and women who had little opportunity to move out of poverty, and whose desperate need required help from others. In her work with the poor, Jane Sill provided a different care than that of her husband, rooted in home, domesticity, and maternal nurture.

Jane Sill and Domestic Poor Relief

While Joseph Sill was assisting displaced artisans and skilled workers, his wife Jane focused her energies on the destitute poor. Joseph Sill found the task of friendly visiting to be burdensome, and he handed most of the responsibility of such care to his wife, especially since many of the recipients of aid in such situations were poor women whom Sill believed would be better served by a woman. Jane entered the homes of the poor to nurse the sick, provide material aid, and help find resources for those whom she helped. Much of her work was focused on providing care to lower-class women.

Jane Sill's involvement in her husband's work with the poor increased during the early 1840s. She had always been a strong partner for Joseph, and their relationship was perhaps more egalitarian than most antebellum middle-class marriages. It was thus natural for Jane to take up the visiting duties in the family's work with the poor when it became too burdensome for her husband. By 1844, Joseph, having given to Jane complete control of the family's visiting duties, was

referring to "Jane's poor."[81] Jane did not confine her poor relief efforts to friendly

visiting. In 1842, she also helped found a Dorcas Society for the First Unitarian

Church, a group of women who met weekly to sew clothes for the poor and then

distribute them.[82] Jane probably also relieved Joseph of some of his visiting duties as

a Steward of the SSSG. In 1843, a committee consisting of Joseph Sill and two other

SSSG members recommended that Society members "invite their female relatives,"

whose "instrumentality would, in many instances, be more productive of good to the

indigent and afflicted," to help the Stewards distribute aid.[83] Sill's involvement in the

committee probably indicates that Jane participated in friendly visiting on behalf of

the SSSG. But Jane did not engage in organized benevolent activity outside her

involvement in the Dorcas Society or the SSSG; instead she focused most of her

attention on friendly visiting outside any institutional network.[84]

　　　While Jane approached her work from a middle-class perspective, she brought

to it a feminine sensibility that transcended class lines. She often interceded for poor

women whose course of care was dictated by men who had little knowledge of or

appreciation for women's experiences. In one case, the Sills' male neighbor, a Mr.

Brown, arranged for a Scottish woman named Mrs. Kelly, soon to give birth to a

child, to be admitted to the Pennsylvania Hospital. Kelly, it seems, did not want to

give birth to her first child away from the support of her family and neighbors, and

---

[81] Joseph Sill, Diary, 13 January 1844, 5:135, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[82] Joseph Sill, Diary, 14 November 1842, 4:153 and 18 November 1842, 4:156, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[83] Minute Books, 23 October 1843, Volume 3, Records of the Society of the Sons of St. George, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[84] On women's organized friendly visiting activity, see Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activisim and Social Change: Rochester New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 70; Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (Oxford; New Yorks: Oxford University Press, 1978), chapter 7; and Stansell, *City of Women*, 64-70.

she left the hospital, walking the three miles to her husband on the other side of the city. The walk caused Kelly to begin labor, and she gave birth to a daughter soon after arriving at her home. Brown approached the Sills for assistance, probably to solicit Jane's help in caring for Mrs. Kelly. He "authorized her [Jane] to get every thing necessary for her [Mrs. Kelly's] comfort," and Jane soon visited the Kelly family. Jane learned the importance of Mrs. Kelly's neighbors to her, and she enlisted an "old Woman" to care for Mrs. Kelly, promising to compensate the woman for her labors. Jane then reported to her neighbor the needs of Mrs. Kelly and her child, and he delivered the necessary goods to the family that afternoon.[85]

Mr. Brown had turned to Jane because he believed she was more qualified to care for the needs of a woman who had rejected his overtures of assistance. Jane, the mother of seven children, recognized Mrs. Kelly's need to tend to her child with the help of people who knew and cared for her. Instead of sending Mrs. Kelly back to the hospital, where Brown believed she belonged, Sill helped Mrs. Kelly in her own home, with the neighborly care the new mother wanted. Mrs. Kelly was grateful for Sill's assistance, and named her baby Jane Sill Kelly in Sill's honor. Sill's sympathy for Mrs. Kelly was sparked by a "vision of universal sisterhood"[86] that transcended class barriers. In providing the materials Mrs. Kelly needed to care for her child, Sill acted on a belief that her experience as a mother served as a link between herself and the woman.

---

[85] Joseph Sill, Diary, 1 March 1845, 6:138-39, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[86] On the idea of "universal sisterhood" among middle-class women reformers see Stansell, *City of Women*, 75, 219; Berg, *Remembered Gate*, 174; and Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 167.

Jane also brought into her own home poor children and their parents to provide for them an example of warm domesticity. She did this through her yearly Christmas open house, begun in 1844. Every year, the Sills would invite Philadelphia's poor children and their parents into their home. The Christmas festivities usually began with the children being led to the drawing room or parlor, where they were greeted with Christmas decorations and led around the room to examine a host of material goods, including sweetmeats and other "goodies," toys, books, and dollhouses. The children were then allowed to partake of the sweets in front of them. They ate "of various good things with great avidity," Joseph Sill recorded in his diary, "and seemed too intent upon them to talk, or observe others." When they were full, "they were told to help themselves & carry as much home as they could." According to Sill, the children's parents "seemd much pleased that their children were thus cared for."[87]

Some women, however, resisted Jane Sill's assistance, even as they used their positions as mothers to obtain material goods. One Christmas, the mothers of the children who had been invited came to the Sill home to collect the gifts without their children. When questioned why their children had not come, the mothers answered they "were prevented from coming only by the thinness of their Shoes, which were not good enough to keep out the snow." Having supplied "explanation enough" for Sills' inquiry, the mothers left the house with "lots of good things." Joseph Sill even praised the mothers "who seemd content to expose themselves to the Storm for the pleasure & benefit of their Children."[88]

---

[87] Joseph Sill, Diary, 25 December 1844, 6:54, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[88] Joseph Sill, Diary, 25 December 1847, 8:77, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The Christmas season was a suitable time for Jane Sill to conduct her work with the poor for, as Stephen Nissenbaum argues, it was a crucial time of negotiation between the classes in the nineteenth century. According to Nissenbaum, antebellum middle-class families transformed Christmas from an unruly time of social inversion to a safe, domestic holiday located in the parlor instead of the street. Poor children, as Nissenbaum argues, were the "ideal recipients of face-to-face charity because "they could be counted on to be both well behaved and truly grateful."[89] By bringing poor children and their parents into the Sill home, Jane Sill not only was participating in the nineteenth-century domestication of Christmas but also actively engaging in the replacement of class-based hierarchical relationships with less volatile age-based hierarchical relationships.[90]

Jane Sill's charitable work provided a perfect complement to her husband's. While Joseph Sill was working to find employment for displaced laborers in the textile shops and factories of Philadelphia, Jane Sill focused her energies on caring for the destitute poor in their homes. In this way, her work in the homes of the poor was more similar than her husband's to that of Joseph Tuckerman. And like Tuckerman, the fatigue of Jane Sill's work and her exposure to the harsh Philadelphia winters on her errands of mercy often laid her low, and her health suffered. Nevertheless, in leaving the confines of her own home to help others realize the importance of their own homes to family and social stability, Sill found a place for herself as a benevolent woman.

---

[89] Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 246.
[90] Ibid., 240-42.

"The Immigrant"

In 1842 Joseph Sill published a short story, "The Immigrant," in *Godey's Ladies Book* that revealed somes lessons he and Jane Sill had learned in their encounters with the poor. "The Immigrant" was a somewhat autobiographical story that examined poverty, the American economy, and changing class relations through the story of a young English immigrant to the United States named Edward Foster.[91] Even while Sill's tale was intended to show the rewards of the virtues of hard work and independence, it also revealed ambivalence about the American capitalism. Sill used the story to illuminate his understanding of the ambiguous relationship between virtue and success, one gained in long contact with the poor.

The story begins in Cumberland County, England, Sill's English home, where a farmer, Robert Graham, lives with his wife, two sons, and a daughter. The sentimental love story of this daughter, Mary, and the farm hand Edward Foster provides the foundational narrative for Sill's musings about the difficult journey of life in the modern economy. Edward is considered a beloved member of the Graham family and stays on after his apprenticeship out of a sense of duty and love for his master. He works hard to educate himself, listening in on the school lessons of Graham's sons and learning from Mary the lessons of the Bible. Spurned by Mary's father as an acceptable suitor for Mary, Edward begins a journey to the United States, "where he was told, an honest industrious man might in time raise himself to a

---

[91] Joseph Sill, "The Immigrant," *Godey's Lady's Book, and Ladies' American Magazine*, October 1842, 180-88; and November 1842, 217-23.

respectable rank in life." He hopes to earn a competency and thus be able to convince Mary to join him in the United States.[92]

Upon his arrival in Philadelphia, Edward, who has made sure to bring with him a letter of reference from his parish clergyman, inquires about the best way to find a position as a farmer and is led to a benevolent society much like the Sons of St. George. With the help of the benevolent president, Edward finds a position on a farm. Treating the land as something to "cherish and foster," Edward increases his new employer's yield and gains the respect of his employer.[93] Despite his success, Edward worries about his prospects, afraid that that he might lose his earnings or that Mary might choose to marry someone else.[94]

While Edward is working hard to establish his own farm, farmer Graham, who has encouraged his boys to become fops and dandies instead of industrious workers, is left to toil on his farm alone after his wife dies. The farm declines, out of both "sloth and mismanagement," and also "those dispensations of Providence which no human foresight or industry could prevent."[95] The Grahams' salvation comes through Edward, who writes to Mary that America, "the home of the poor industrious man" is the perfect place for Mary's father to live out his final days and for them to establish their home.[96]

Mary's father begrudgingly accepts Edward's offer, and the Graham family moves to Pennsylvania, where Edward and Mary marry and raise many children and the lazy Graham boys learn proper habits of industry. Sill ends his tale by talking

---

[92] Ibid., 183.
[93] Ibid., 187.
[94] Ibid.,188.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 219-220.

113

about the new life of the family and the nation they are helping to build. As the immigrants become acquainted with the New World, "attached to its climate, its mode of life, its institutions, and its prospects," they become useful members of the "body politic," adding "to its resources and character by their industry, their morality, and continued prosperity."[97]

Sill's narrative could be read as a typical middle-class morality tale, a story of the benefits of hard work, a positive attitude, and integrity and the dangers of duplicity and selfishness. In this way it is not much different from other middle-class morality tales of the antebellum period. Yet Edward's morality is not enough to bring him from the brink of poverty. At every turn he is given assistance from others— from the president of the benevolent society, the farmer who gives him extra pay and eventually helps him purchase his farm, and from Mary. Their moral and financial assistance is the key to Edward's success. In them is the embodiment of the organic mutuality Sill believed was necessary for the success of the American economic system. Honest striving and industriousness for Sill are not enough in themselves; their principal value comes from the bonds they create between the characters in his story. Furthermore, these bonds provide the safety net Edward needs when he falls on difficult financial times. Both Edward and farmer Graham learn that financial stability is the gift of providence, not necessarily the reward for hard work. By contrast, Edwards learns that financial failure can also be the design of providence. The vicissitudes of life sometimes leave even the most industrious in need of assistance, and even turn the bad qualities learned in prosperity to virtue.

---

[97] Ibid., 223.

In "The Immigrant," Sill demonstrated his deepened understanding of poverty, social obligations, and the precariousness of life in the modern economy. He emphasized the need for every worker to labor diligently for their keep, not only for their own benefit but also for the good of the community. At the same time, he hoped to demonstrate to his readers that poverty was not always caused by the lack of diligence. A variety of circumstances might bring a person to the brink of poverty, and often one required the hand of providence or the help of others to escape such calamities. Sill's story thus illuminates the more nuanced ideas about poverty that had been forged in his relationships with the poor and his honest recognition of how much luck and mutual help mattered in a volatile capitalist system.

Philadelphia and Boston Unitarian Poor Relief in Comparative Perspective

Joseph and Jane Sill's work with Philadelphia's lower and working-class communities is representative of that of other Philadelphia Unitarians, many of whom shared the Sills' background and beliefs. Philadelphia Unitarians developed a sensibility that differentiated their poor-relief work from that of Boston Unitarians. As immigrants from England to the New World, they brought with them certain expectations, hopes for a future marked by the establishment of a stable competence in a fruitful land. Such dreams were chastened by the economic instability of the antebellum period and the realization that attaining social status was just as much about self-fashioning as about hard work. Nevertheless, as the case of Joseph Sill demonstrates, Philadelphia Unitarians were able to accomplish their goal of attaining

economic stability and social success, though they came to recognize that such advancements were often based more on luck than virtue.

Boston Unitarians, on the other hand, had little doubt about their position as solid members of Boston's elite community.   For them, poor relief was about developing ties between rich and poor, which they saw as natural categories reflecting God's design of the social order, and fostering the growth of complementary virtues of benevolence and gratitude among rich and poor. They conducted their work from a position of established authority in a relatively homogenous community where authority emanated from a more closely tied church and state. The difference in social status between them and those whom they aided was starker than that of Philadelphia Unitarians and those they assisted. Furthermore, Philadelphia Unitarians lived and worked in a much more heterogenous and less hierarchical community where the question of who held authority was more in flux.

On one hand, this meant Philadelphia Unitarians like the Sills saw their work as a shared effort with the poor to create a larger and more stable society. Many of the men and women the Sills aided were displaced English artisans struggling to establish themselves with a competence, just as Sill had done as a young immigrant in 1819. They often shared the Sills' social and economic vision even as they reminded their benefactors of everyone's economic uncertainties. Both Sills fought against condescension in their work with those in need, and Joseph, in moments of clarity, was reminded that those whom he assisted often showed more fortitude, piety, and industriousness than he had been forced to do. Sill's wife described him after his

death in 1854 as " peculiarly alive to the cry of distress."[98] Sill's willingness to hear this cry in his intimate relationships with the poor taught him much about life on the economic margins.

Despite differences in the poor relief work of Boston and Philadelphian Unitarians, both groups held a shared commitment, at least for a time, to fostering organic relationships of mutuality and care in individual relationships with the poor. Philadelphia Unitarians were able to bring this vision to reality in a more widespread and consistent manner. While Tuckerman lamented the burden he bore as the single friendly visitor to Boston's poor, Sill was joined in his work by a number of Philadelphia Unitarians like himself, including John Vaughan and the Todhunter family, among many others. Joseph Sill was just one of many friendly visitors in the Philadelphia Unitarian Church; at least eight others joined him as Stewards in the Society of the Sons of St. George, and many more probably assisted in the work of the Vaughan Charitable Association.[99]

The work of the Philadelphia Unitarian church to alleviate poverty indicates a persistent commitment to community and mutuality, and an astute understanding of poverty, that historians have often overlooked. Unitarian ideas of community were also evident in the work of Boston Unitarians with the city's poor children. The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, which is the subject of the next chapter, provides further evidence of the role of organic mutuality in Unitarian approaches to poor relief. As with Joseph Tuckerman and Joseph Sill, the Directors of the Boston Asylum and Farm School came to new understandings of poverty and

---

[98] Joseph Sill, Diary, January 1855, vol. 10, (PHi)Am.1525, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
[99] Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, Appendix C.

the political economy in the crucible of their encounters with the poor. The shifting

understandings brought about subtle, but important, changes in Unitarian

understandings of the relationship between the individual and society and the nature

of the politico-economic system in mediating such relationships.

Chapter 3: "Little Tanned Agriculturalists": The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys

In March 1838 Ann Gould, a widow and mother of four boys in Boston, wrote a letter to the Directors of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Distraught by the behavior of her youngest son Charles, age twelve, Ann sought to have him admitted to the School. "It has been his lot," Ann wrote of Charles, "never to have experienced the directing care of a father, who died in the extreme infancy of Charles." Without paternal guidance, Charles was succumbing to the "pernicious influence" of his peers because of the "power which the continual temptations of a city life have had, over a mind ill suited to resist them." Charles was not completely lost to vice, for he had "good talents" and "kindness of heart," but these admirable qualities were quickly being overcome by "an idle disposition," "little reverence," "no strength of moral principles," and "no energy, or decision of character."[1] Two days later, a Mr. Carpenter wrote a letter of support for Mrs. Gould. He had already spoken to some of the Directors in person, but followed his oral communication with a letter to encourage them to offer "the Relief of a deserving widow and the Rescue of her talented child."[2] Persuaded by a widow's pleas and the entreaties of a man who was probably a well-respected Boston citizen, the committee on admissions agreed to take in Charles, who they believed was "in danger of being ruined, unless soon

---

[1] Letter from Ann Gould to Directors of The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, 8 March 1838, Box 3-3, Folder 4, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[2] Letter from [Aaron?] David Carpenter to Directors of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, 10 March 1838, Box 3-3, Folder 1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

rescued." Mrs. Gould agreed to try to pay $2 per week for Charles's board, though the admissions committee seemed to recommend leniency in enforcing her pledge.[3]

After the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys (BAFS) opened in 1835, the Directors received hundreds, perhaps thousands, of letters from parents and patrons like Ann Gould and Mr. Carpenter for the admission of boys into the School. The parents were seeking the moral salvation of their boys and the maintenance of family integrity in the face of harsh economic circumstances. Their stories are a chronicle of often heartbreaking, but sometimes hopeful stories of the lives of poor children and their families' survival in the mid-nineteenth century urban environment. When interwoven with the institutional history of the BAFS, they show how the poor turned a backward-looking ideology into a system better fitting the growing free labor realities of the nineteenth-century North.

The BAFS ideology was rooted in an idealized American past, agrarian and organic. Tapping into prevalent notions of the intimate relationship of farming and artisanal labor with wholesome independence, the directors of the BAFS shaped their program to train young men through apprenticeship in occupations they considered to be essential to American democracy. The young men whom the BAFS Directors sought to mold in the image of the steady American yeoman roundly rejected such guidance, opting instead to pursue economic advancement in other, more popular endeavors such as wage labor or seamanship. Parents, too, used the BAFS in ways its directors had not anticipated, remaining active participants in their boys' upbringing even when they officially gave custody of their children to the School. The actions of the parents and the boys forced the Directors of the BAFS to wrestle with the

---

[3] Ibid. [note on back of letter]

relationship between the ideal and the real as they considered the methods and purposes of the School. Through the late 1830s and 1840s they shifted their criteria for determining the "success" of the school, basing it less on the numbers of boys who completed indentures, always quite small, than on the preparation of the boys for steady lives in a shifting economic system. Moses Grant, a Unitarian temperance reformer who served as an arbitrator between the BAFS and its charges, was especially crucial in mediating these changing understandings.

The Foundation of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys

The BAFS had roots in an early 1832 meeting among leaders of Boston philanthropy. In January of that year several gentlemen, led by Charles Jackson, the venerable former judge of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, met in the hall of the Tremont Bank. Their purpose was to discuss a proposed farm school for the city's indigent boys. The Reverend Joseph Tuckerman, the city's Unitarian minister to the poor, quickly took charge of the meeting and put forth a resolution proposing "that the establishment of a FARM SCHOOL" in the Massachusetts countryside for Boston's boys "would be not only a great benefit to such children, but would greatly conduce to the peace and good order of this community."[4] The BAFS was to serve a triple purpose: saving children from vice, providing help to their families, and developing a new generation of citizens whose virtue would uphold the integrity of American democracy.

Like many other nineteenth-century Unitarian-influenced programs, the BAFS was ambivalent about the role of the State in reforming children. The Directors

---

[4] *Report on the Establishment of a Farm School* (n.p., 1832), 1-2, Massachusetts Historical Society.

managed the School on the theory that the most effective aid was that offered by "a warm hand and a cheerful heart" in a setting that recreated family life outside the cold walls of the Boston House of Reformation, where many indigent boys were often sent.[5] Nevertheless, the BAFS, like most antebellum reform programs, was not completely separated from the world of the state. Pragmatic concerns dictated the necessity of seeking state affirmation in incorporation, and state relief workers involved themselves in the program as they recommended boys to the care of the BAFS.

The predecessor to the BAFS was the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys (BAIB), a charitable organization incorporated in 1814 to care for half or full-orphan boys.[6] The BAIB admitted children aged three to twelve whose parents had signed parental rights over to the Asylum. They were taught to read and write and were employed in "useful" occupations at the Asylum, which, early on, included knitting socks and folding books.[7] When they were "of a proper age," which was not specifically identified, the boys were apprenticed to "respectable" mechanics, usually shoe binders, cordwainers, sail makers, or other artisans. Binding pauper children had been a common practice in Boston and was usually carried out by Overseers of the Poor who, in their contact with poor families, identified certain youths as proper cases for indenture.[8] The BAIB privatized and centralized the process. The leaders

---

[5] Peter C. Holloran, *Boston's Wayward Children: Social Services for Homeless Children, 1830-1930* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989), 34.

[6] Half orphans were children with one living parent; full orphans were children who had lost both of their parents.

[7] *An Account of the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys, the Act of Incorporation, Bye-Laws, and the Rules and Regulations Adopted by the Board of Managers. Also, an Extract from the First Anniversary Sermon by the Rev. Mr. Lowell* (Boston: Nathaniel Willis, 1816), 11.

[8] John E. Murray and Ruth Wallis Herndon, "Markets for Children in Early America: A Political Economy of Pauper Apprenticeship," *Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 2 (2002): 356-82.

of the organization sought to provide "a haven, a shelter, a home" for those boys who

were too young to be indentured before their entrance into the world of

apprenticeship.[9] Important leaders in Boston Unitarianism were subscribers to the

BAIB, including Joseph Tuckerman's father Edward Tuckerman, William Ellery

Channing, and the reformer Moses Grant, who would play a key role in the operation

of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys.

Joseph Tuckerman and the other founders of the BAFS sought to expand the

work of the BAIB by focusing on the development of agricultural skills among

Boston's indigent boys. They refocused the energies of the BAIB by relocating the

school to a more bucolic setting, which they believed would be more conducive than

the destructive urban environment of Boston to the development of virtuous habits.

The Directors raised $23,000 for the BAFS after their 1832 meeting, and in

November of the same year they purchased Thompson's Island, a 140-acre island in

Boston Harbor.   In 1835 the Farm School merged with the Boston Asylum for

Indigent Boys as an incorporated entity, and on June 9, 1835 fifty boys were removed

from the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys to Thompson's Island, where two other

boys joined them. Within the year the School received forty-eight more boys,

bringing the total to one hundred. For the next several decades the BAFS operated

with approximately one hundred boys in residence at any given time. The boys

ranged from age five to sixteen, though there were few at either age extreme. The

average age of the boys upon entry was ten years old, and most of them were native

Americans, mostly of English heritage, though a few had Irish parents. The boys'

---

[9] *An Account of the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys*, 29.

123

average length of stay on the Island before being withdrawn or sent to an indenture was close to two years.[10]

The emphasis of the BAFS committee on younger boys reflected a common nineteenth-century notion of childhood. As childhood came to be understood as a separate life stage, reformers focused their attention on children, whom they considered more innocent and malleable than older youth. Boys like Charles Gould—" the class . . . of the quite young, who in poverty and neglect are just beginning to yield to the temptation of guilt"—needed the most protection.[11] Boys who were believed to be lost to habits of wickedness were sent to the city's House of Reformation for Juvenile Offenders; the BAFS was for boys teetering on the brink— boys who had been exposed to bad influences but were believed to be still young enough to adopt positive values without resistance caused by a hardened will.[12]

The Organic Ideal and Farming

The family was the primary model for the structure of the BAFS. The School would operate *in loco parentis*, with a matron who would "have charge of all the

---

[10] Statistics on the boys are based on calculations from the first five hundred entries in the entry book for the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, Box 1-1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston. The entries date from 1 January 1833 (when boys were admitted to the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys before merging with the Farm School) to 19 January 1848. The average age of the boys stayed relatively consistent during this time period. The average length of stay on the Island was much higher during the first three years of the program (about three years) than toward the end of the statistical sample.

[11] *Report on the Establishment of a Farm School*, 4.

[12] For explanations of why reformers chose children as the objects of their attention see Bruce Bellingham, "'Little Wanderers': A Socio-Historical Study of the Nineteenth Century Origins of Child Fostering and Adoption Reform, Based on Early Records of the Children's Aid Society" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 7; N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, eds., *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Eric Schneider, *In the Web of Class: Delinquents and Reformers in Boston, 1810s-1930s* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 26; Timothy A. Hacsi, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17; and Sonya Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 22.

domestic concerns of the Institution" and would "be in relation to the boys in the place of the mother." Reflecting a common notion of the place of women, and particularly mothers, in American society, the Directors of the BAFS counseled the matron to consider it "her bounden duty to gain their [the boys'] love and respect, and exert the influence of her character and example in forming their minds to a love of truth, virtue, and obedience."[13] The matron was to serve as a substitute mother for boys whose own mothers were incapable of serving as the teachers of virtue for their boys.

The presence of a virtuous mother figure was not the only way the School was consciously tied to the family. The Directors, many of them Unitarians, founded the School on an organic view of society in which the family served as the foundation of the state. As Henry Ware, a Unitarian preacher proposed, "the character of the nation will be affected and modified by that of the families which compose it." The leaders of the BAFS agreed with Ware's argument that "Strict discipline, habits of order, obedience, and sobriety in the family circle, lay the best foundation for good citizenship."[14] Like other benevolent institutions such as the Boston Female Asylum, the BAFS sought to serve as a model of a "well-ordered family" rather than a "well-ordered asylum."[15] The School would serve the function of moral education that was

---

[13] *Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, Statements, Acts, By-Laws, and Rules and Regulations* (Boston: Isaac R. Butts, 1839), 31-32. On ideas of the role of women in developing American citizens see Rosemarie Zagarri, "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1992): 192-215.

[14] Henry Ware, Jr., Sermon on Psalm 122: 6 (1824), Manuscript in Harvard University Archives, quoted in Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 129. On the importance of family to the organic idea see Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 86.

[15] Susan Porter, "The Benevolent Asylum—Image and Reality: The Care and Training of Female Orphans in Boston, 1800-1840" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1984), 188.

sometimes lost in the chaotic or economically desperate family lives of the urban poor, and thus provide a firm, virtuous, civic footing for its charges.[16]

One of the purposes of the BAFS was to help students become part of a class of stable, industrious men who would serve as the backbone of American democracy. The Asylum would prevent Boston's indigent boys from "growing up to be the great burthen of the community" and instead would "prepare them . . . for lives of industry and usefulness."[17] This idea of usefulness was gendered in nature and reflected a common nineteenth-century view of the importance of men occupying positions that served the community more generally.[18] Farming and the "mechanic trades" would be perfect occupations for such a class. Vocational skills were central to the curriculum of the BAFS, but these skills were supplemented by lessons in math and reading.

---

[16] Matthew Crenson discusses the "family" idea in orphanages in *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). According to Crenson, the emphasis on the importance of orphanages serving as an alternate family was ironically self-destructive, for reformers began to wonder, "Instead of burdening the orphan asylum with the struggle to make itself more homelike, might it not be less awkward and expensive simply to place children in real homes?" (313). This was exactly the reasoning behind the New York reformer Charles Loring Brace's push to place children immediately in foster care rather than institutionalize them before sending them to families. See Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), chapter 6.

[17] *Report on the Establishment of a Farm School*, 4-5. On the inculcation of patriotism and civic virtue in the nineteenth-century schoolhouse, see Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), chapter 2.

[18] For examples of the rhetoric of "usefulness" see *Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Statements . . .* (1839), 10, 17, 30 and *Report of the Boston Asylum, and Farm School for Indigent Boys* (Boston: Samuel N. Dickinson, 1845), 11. E. Anthony Rotundo talks about the emphasis on the importance of the idea of "usefulness" of men's labor in *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 167. Rotundo identifies the concept of "usefulness" as unique to eighteenth-century society, part of the communitarian ethos of nineteenth-century masculinity. However "usefulness" remained an important concept well into the nineteenth century, an indication that the shift from "community" to "individual" manhood occurred later and was perhaps more complicated than Rotundo argues.

The elite, mostly Unitarian, leaders involved in the founding of the School saw farming as the most appropriate avenues for the creation of a secure, virtuous middling class. Many northerners had long viewed farming as a stabilizing force in republican societies. The core elements of agricultural success—frugality and hard work—were also considered important virtues of a democratic populace. The economic independence of farming allowed political independence and served as a barrier to the pernicious tendency to place self-interest before the common good.[19] The Directors prepared others boys for "useful" occupations in artisanal trades by indenturing them to shoemakers, sailmakers, and other Massachusetts artisans. Several School reports issued in the 1830s and 1840s encouraged the supporters of the School to help fund the creation of "useful" workers and citizens.[20]

The most common reasons for boys' entrance into the School were idleness and vagrancy, two vices associated particularly with the urban environment, where "idle hands" were too often used as the "devil's tool." As urbanization and a growing factory movement took hold in New England, the Boston elite became increasingly fearful about the decline of farming and artisanal labor and sought to bolster the agricultural and craft elements of the Massachusetts citizenry. In training the boys for lives in the Massachusetts countryside, where village, church, and family, rather than political group or social class, supposedly formed the core of identity, the founders of the BAFS were tapping into prevalent nineteenth-century notions of community.

---

[19] Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 4. Carl Siracusa also argues that the Boston elite "single[d] out the farmer for special praise." See his *A Mechanical People: Perceptions of the Industrial Order in Massachusetts, 1815-1880* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 61-65.

[20] See, for example, *Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Statements. . .* (1839), 10, 17, 30 and *Report of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys* (1845), 11.

Fearful of the individualistic and atomistic tendency of the city, the School Directors

sought to place the boys where, in their view, the organic ties of society created a

stability and political unity that was absent in city life.[21] The irony that the Boston

elite themselves were partly responsible for industry's eclipse of independent farming

and craft labor was apparently lost on elite reformers.

The BAFS apprenticeship system reflected disagreement about notions of free

and unfree labor between the Directors of the School and the boys who attended. At

the time the BAFS was indenturing boys, most northerners had abandoned indentures

as a legitimate form of labor relationship; by 1820 indentured servitude had all but

ended, and apprenticeships were in decline as well.[22] These systems of labor

relationships were replaced by the emerging wage labor system, in which autonomous

individuals sold their labor, not themselves, as a commodity in the market. Like other

northerners, however, the Directors of the BAFS still believed that the discipline

required to prepare children, especially poor children, for self-sufficient lives could

often best be achieved in the system of indenture and apprenticeship that had largely

been abandoned by other members of the laboring population and their employers.[23]

The boys disagreed with the BAFS Directors about this. They usually abandoned

their apprenticeships, which allowed them little freedom and paid them nothing (or

very little) for their labor, and instead pursued wage labor and the freedom to come

---

[21] On notions of the pastoral yeoman ideal among colonial and nineteenth-century leaders see Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978), 61-108; Barbara J. Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 31-36; and John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1965): 667-68. For a discussion of the fear of urbanization see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), vii-viii.
[22] Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: Employment in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 11.
[23] Ibid., 136-37.

and go as they wished.   The boys and the Directors of the BAFS, then, had very different views of labor, and these differences had important consequences.

Running the BAFS

The Directors of the BAFS laid out their plan for the School's organization in the 1835 merger of the BAFS with the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys and the joint organization's incorporation. The BAFS would be funded by subscriptions, though a portion of the School's expenses would be paid by selling the produce farmed by the boys. Boston boys over age five were eligible for entry, and Directors expected parents to give up all parental rights by signing a legal surrender. Boys on the Island attended class daily to receive a basic education in "useful knowledge, reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography," with "special attention" given "to their moral and religious culture," which was not specifically Unitarian, but broadly Protestant. Most of the boys also learned agricultural or mechanical trades at the School before being sent to their apprenticeship positions. At a "suitable age" boys would be apprenticed to Massachusetts farmers or tradesmen who would prepare them for self-sufficient labor and then release them, at the age of twenty-one, with two sets of clothes and, if they were with farmers, one hundred dollars.[24] Ideally, the money the boys received would be put toward the purchase of their own farms.

Despite having signed over their parental rights to the School, any parent wishing to withdraw his or her child from the School could do so if they paid the Corporation for "expenses incurred by them in the relief, support, and instruction of

---

[24] *Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Statements. . .* (1839), 16.

such boy."[25] In exceptional situations the Directors of the Asylum accepted children whose parents could pay their board. According to the Directors, children whose parents could pay for them should not be admitted to the School, since it was "the natural, solemn obligation of every parent to provide, to the utmost of his ability for his own offspring." Furthermore, they believed, parents seeking to admit their children on grounds other than destitution usually were doing so because their sons had become more unmanageable than ideal BAFS applicants. The Directors feared the pernicious influence of such boys, "whose example, on the very grounds urged for their admission, might prove injurious to other children." An unstated, though surely present, concern was also that parents whose children were paying boarders had much more control over their child's experience at the School, since, unlike non-paying parents, they could withdraw their sons without the burden of having to pay a large sum of money. The Directors believed that if too many parents were allowed to admit and remove their sons on at will, the School would be unable to serve its purpose as a long-term site for moral and vocational education. Thus, while thirteen boys were received on pay during the School's first year, it was "with caution and with some reluctance." [26]

Parents, their patrons (often parents' employers), and Boston reformers deluged the Directors of the BAFS with requests for the admission of boys to the School. Joseph Tuckerman, Charles Francis Barnard, and other Unitarian ministers-at-large who were well acquainted with the children of the city sought admission of

---

[25] *Act of Incorporation, and Report of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys* (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1836), Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[26] Ibid., 8-9.

130

boys to the school, and Tuckerman served on the admissions committee for several

years. Parents and patrons who applied for boys' admission reflected a savvy

understanding of what the Directors were looking for. Most letters for admission

followed a formula similar to that of a letter sent by William Beck, who requested

admission of his sixteen-year-old son George in 1838. Beck, like most other parents,

used two rhetorical tactics to convince the Directors to admit his son to the School.

First, he sought to establish his credentials as a caring father whose child was being

led astray not by lack of parental guidance, but by forces outside his control. Beck

wrote to the Directors that he had attempted to fulfill his parental disciplinary duties.

"I have corrected him [George] and tried in vain to have him stay at home," Beck

wrote, but George had "repeatedly disobeyed me by being out late at night."[27] Beck

also suggested that while his son might be heading down the path of moral ruin,

George still was simply a good young man subjected to the destructive influence of

morally corrupt peers. Parents feared that if they did not communicate signs of hope

that their boys were redeemable the School would reject them as candidates for

admission, and they were probably correct. For this reason, most parents used

language similar to that of Beck, who wrote, "He [George] is active and capable, but

wholly ungovernable by the means I can use." Beck attributed George's misbehavior

less to his rebellious disposition than to the "acquaintances of bad boys."[28]

The number of boys seeking admission to the School far outnumbered the

available slots, so parents, in addition to crafting their letters in ways that would

---

[27] Letter from William Beck to Directors of The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, n.d., Box 3-3, Folder 3, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[28] Ibid.

appeal to the sensibilities of the Directors, also enlisted the help of their employers and city aid workers such as Tuckerman. These letter writers usually served as character witnesses for parents, verifying both the parents' virtues and the veracity of their reports about their children. Letters like the one Tuckerman wrote on behalf of Abigail Woodman, mother of Thomas Woodman, were typical. "Mrs. Woodman . . . has lived in Boston the last five years, & will pass the remnant of her life here," Tuckerman wrote. Her twelve-year-old son Thomas, a truant, was "accustomed also to be much with bad boys," a situation that caused Mrs. Woodman to suffer "extremely from her anxiety for the boy." Tuckerman's letter had the desired effect, for Thomas was admitted to the school in August of 1835, and after three and a half years indentured to a bookbinder in Worcester, Massachusetts.[29]

Cases like Thomas Woodman's surely pleased the Directors during the first year of the School's operation. Of the boys who entered the School in 1835, forty percent were indentured, mostly to farmers.[30] A representative story was that of Alvan Brown, who entered the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys on July 22, 1834 and was transferred to Thompson's Island. Alvan, whose birth name was Henry, was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1823, to Henry Hilliard and his wife, who both died when Alvan was a toddler. Several guardians passed young Henry around, and by the time he was nine his name had been changed and he had lived in at least four households, all of which gave him up when they were unable to support him. While

---

[29] Letter from Joseph Tuckerman to Directors of The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, 28 July 1835, Box 7-2; and Notes on Thomas Woodman, Headmaster's Notebook, Box 7-1A, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

[30] Entry Book, Box 1-1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston. The majority of the remainder of the boys (twenty-three percent of the total) were withdrawn by family members. Ten percent of the boys who had been admitted by 1835 absconded.

the Headmaster initially described Alvan as "a very naughty boy" who stubbornly

insisted on being called by his birth name, Alvan eventually became "one of the best

boys in the Institution," and was indentured to Thomas Dupree, a farmer and sail-

maker in Westport, Massachusetts.[31]

The Superintendent and Instructor taught Alvan and his companions the

virtues of hard work and frugality, both believed to be elements of successful farming

as well as virtuous citizenship. A School songbook produced in 1834 for the boys

reflected this. The first song, simply called "The Farmer's Song," described the

dignity of farm work and contrasted farmers to "loungers" and "corsetted dandies."

One stanza suggested farm labor as an honorable occupation:

> In days of our sires, but a short time ago,
> It was deemed a dishonour to plow and to hoe,
> And now it is the pride of the greatest of men,
> To trim the green cornfields, and mow the sweet glen.[32]

Boys also sang about the contrast of uncertainty of grasping speculators and the

safety brought about by steady honest farm work.

> Some growing ambition, their purse getting lank,
> To fill up their coffers, resort to the bank,
> But wealth the most lasting is purchased by toil,
> And the farmer's best bank is a bank of rich soil.[33]

---

[31] Notes on Alvan Brown, Headmaster's Notebook, Box 7-1A; letter from Alvan Brown to Moses Grant, 22 June 1837, Box 3-3, Folder 1; and letter from Alvan Brown to Moses Grant, 8 December 1840, Box 3-3, Folder 10, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston. Alvan's story was atypical in that most of the boys at the School were not true orphans but half-orphans with one living parent. Many boys, though, whether their parents were alive or not, were passed around among kin and friends in much the same way as Alvan.

[32] The "sires" mentioned in the song perhaps refer to the European forbears of Americans, whose understanding of labor was supposedly rooted in the aristocratic distaste for farming of the Old World. The New England authors of this song probably believed that the fruitfulness of the American soil created a proper appreciation for the land that their forefathers lacked.

[33] "The Farmer's Song," *Songs for the Boston Farm School*, 1834, Box 1834, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Another song, called simply "The Farmer," reflected similar views and linked them to

patriotic nationalism:

> For love of wealth, some get ensnared
>   In speculations toils;
> And others, when disasters come,
>   Are scrambling for the spoils;
> Stil [sic] does the prudent farmer pay
>   To industry his vow,
> Nor heeds the struggle, nor the strife,
>   But guides the steady plough.
>
> Good rule and order he maintains;
>   He lives in peace with all;
> And, to defend his country's rights,
>   He's ready for the call.
> Now to be ever thus content?
>   Say, wights, would you know how?
> 'Tis but to mind your own affairs,
>   And Steady guide the plow.[34]

The Directors of the Farm School argued that work was good, but ambition bad.

Work should be its own reward, and the boys were advised to be content in the

knowledge that their labor would lead to great moral, if not economic, advancement.

Excessive attention to moving up in the world would only lead to ruin.[35]

Nathaniel Hawthorne, after a visit to Thompson's Island, captured the image

of the boys as ruddy yeomen, wedded to the soil and to a dignified life of toil. "The

Farm boys remained insulated, looking at the passing show" of sloops in Boston

Harbor, Hawthorne wrote. They were "within sight of the city, yet with nothing to do

with it," close to the dangers of urban life but shielded in their "little world by itself."

Hawthorne referred to the boys as "little tanned agriculturalists," fresh would-be

---

[34] "The Farmer," Ibid.

[35] For a discussion of the Unitarian view of labor and social mobility, and its inherent inconsistency, see Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 145-46.

farmers who would inherit and enhance the nation's young democracy.[36]

Hawthorne's description of the boys tapped into prevalent notions of the

wholesomeness of rural life and tied them to the innocence of childhood. Yet, even

as Hawthorne portrayed the BAFS boys as cut off from their former worlds, the boys

and their parents maintained ties that kept the BAFS Directors from maintaining

complete control over them.

The BAFS and Parental Influence

In December 1835 David Curtis, the Superintendent of the BAFS, reported

that Anthony P. Holbrook and Samuel Barrett "made an unsuccessful attempt to cross

to Boston" by walking over icy Boston Harbor to Squantum Point.[37] Anthony and

Samuel's activity—journeying together to return to the lives from which they had

been removed—reveals both the forging of new bonds among the boys on

Thompson's Island and the desire to maintain old familial and friendly ties in the city.

While Anthony and Samuel's icy excursion was a prank, it was probably motivated

by the pain of their separation from family and friends in Boston. Conversely, the

parents of boys like Anthony and Samuel often journeyed to the BAFS or wrote to

their boys through the School's Directors in an effort to maintain the ties that had

---

[36] *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Claude M. Simpson, vol. 8, *The American Notebooks* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 70-71. Charles Dickens noted in his *American Notes* that the boys at the Boylston School, a home for indigent boys in antebellum Boston, also sang songs about farming as part of their education. See *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), 1:115-16. R. Richard Wohl explores the ties made between the innocence of childhood and rural life in response to urban social problems in "The 'Country Boy' Myth and Its Place in American Urban Culture: The Nineteenth-Century Contribution," *Perspectives in American History* 3, no. 148 (1969): 77-156.

[37] Report of Superintendent Daniel Curtis, 31 December 1835, Box 2-1, Folder 1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston. Several boys used the winter ice as a path to temporary freedom, though they almost always returned after their visits to the city.

been torn by the boys' entrance into the School. Parents worked to maintain a sense of control over their children, sometimes successfully.

Despite the School Directors' desire to distance boys from the perceived bad example of their parents and Boston peers, they allowed scheduled visits between boys and their friends and family. Sometimes the Directors released the boys to Boston for a day to visit friends, but more often they held special days on which parents and friends were allowed to visit the boys under the watchful eye of the School's leaders.[38] The School held special ceremonies in which the boys displayed their knowledge in public examinations, though as Daniel Chambers, the Superintendent in 1838 wrote, "the Mothers complain very much and the boys complain very much: they say that they have not time to be with their friends." Moreover, mothers whose boys were left out of the examination displayed "unpleasant feelings" and the boys, preoccupied with the presence of their friends, their "mouths crammed full of gingerbread," were less than stellar in their school performances.[39] Despite the grumblings from School leaders, the visitation days continued, probably because they served as an outlet for both the boys and their parents and friends, a time when the pressure of separation could be released, if only slightly.

The mothers who actively participated in the visitation days were among many parents who carved out a role in the lives of their children, despite having

---

[38] Report of Superintendent Daniel Curtis, 1 September 1836, Box 2-1, Folder 1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

[39] Report of Superintendent Daniel Curtis, 2 June 1838, Box 2-1, Folder 1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

surrendered custody of them to the School. Indeed, from the beginning, parents

requested—even demanded—the return of their boys, usually when their economic

circumstances improved. In this way, the BAFS was similar to most nineteenth-

century orphan asylums. For many poor families, the School became a temporary

location for the placement of children during times of family economic distress, not

the site of long-term intellectual and moral training that the Asylum officials intended

it to be.[40]

Mary Gould (unrelated to Ann Gould), for example, penned a letter to Moses

Grant, one of the directors of the BAFS, in February of 1842 to request the return of

her son George. George had been in the School for two and a half years, and while

Mary felt "gratefull [sic] for the benefit received from that institution," she said that

she was, with the help of friends, now able to support herself and George. Knowing

the Directors might wonder about George's moral safety in Boston, Mary emphasized

that she would enroll George in the city schools, "till he shall be old enough to be

placed at some business."[41] The Directors almost always granted requests of parents

to withdraw their children even if parents did not pay the required fee, and by 1839

the School returned almost as many boys to their parents as they indentured.[42]

---

[40] Several historians have shown that parents often enrolled their children in orphan asylums in the nineteenth century as temporary solutions to economic misfortune. See, for example, Bellingham, "'Little Wanderers'" and "Waifs and Strays: Child Abandonment, Foster Care, and Families in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York," in Peter Mandler, ed., *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 123-60; Lynn Hollen Lees, "The Survival of the Unfit: Welfare Policies and Family Maintenance in Nineteenth-Century London," in *The Uses of Charity*, 68-91; Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, 40-41, 43-46; and Priscilla Ferguson Clement, "Families and Foster Care: Philadelphia in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Hiner and Hawes, *Growing Up in America*, 135-46.

[41] Letter from Mary Gould to Moses Grant, 21 February 1842, Box 7-0, Folder 13, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

[42] Between 1836 and 1838, twenty-nine percent of the boys were withdrawn or returned to their parents; thirty-three percent were indentured. The fate of most of the rest was unrecorded (21%). See

The beginning of the next year marked an important development in the

School's existence and further revealed the shifting of power from the Directors to

the parents. With "great reluctance," the Directors, who "felt themselves compelled,

by the low state of the finances," began to admit only boys whose parents could pay

for their board. Even though Directors usually granted non-paying parents

permission to withdraw their boys, paying parents held more power than non-paying

parents over their boys' education and indenture experiences.

Moreover, admitting boys from paying families forced the Directors to admit they

were working with what they had earlier argued was a more intransigent group of

farm scholars. Knowing that some elite donors might question the efficacy of the

School in shaping the moral characters of the boys when their parents could withdraw

them on a whim and when the boys were less likely to experience moral

transformation, the Directors reported that they would "continue to exert their utmost

efforts to make the Institution all that its liberal founders and friends can reasonably

expect under its present restricted resources." Most importantly, the boys' "spiritual

and religious culture shall not be neglected, but be regarded and pursued, as it ever

has been, as by far the most important object of the Institution." [43]

The switch to admitting only paying boys also marked a crucial transition

away from helping the most destitute of Boston's poor. While the Directors carefully

considered parents' meager earnings when negotiating the price of the boys' board,

very few parents could afford even the minimum of fifty cents a week toward

boarding costs. Parents who promised to pay often did not, though the School

---

Entry Book, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey
Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[43] *Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Statements. . .* (1839), 16-17.

Directors rarely dismissed boys whose parents were delinquent in their payments. Nevertheless, the small amount the boys' parents paid went a long way toward empowering them to believe they should continue to play an influential role in their sons' lives, even if they had officially handed over authority of their children to the School.[44] The School, and the homes to which the boys were sent for their apprenticeships, became sites of negotiation among parents, their sons, School officials, and masters over the fate of the boys.

In the Massachusetts Countryside

The most important mediator in negotiations among children, their parents, and boys' masters was Moses Grant, member of the BAFS board, Deacon at the Unitarian Brattle Street Church, and an informal colleague of Joseph Tuckerman in his work with Boston's poor. Grant was a paper dealer and a leader in political temperance efforts in antebellum Boston. Described by contemporaries as "the prime mover in many operations . . . for the production of moral and social sunshine in the pathways of the unfortunate," Grant spent hundreds of hours corresponding with the boys of the Farm School as a friend and as an intermediary.[45] Grant's most important function was shepherding the School and its Board through difficult changes, and pushing the School's leaders to an acceptance of and appreciation for the goals and desires of the boys and their parents, often at odds with the School's plans. Grant had

---

[44] Sonya Michel also notes that in the late nineteenth century payments for child-care services made by wage-earning mothers allowed the mothers "to regard themselves as clients, not beneficiaries, of child care services." See Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers Rights*, 32.

[45] Very little is known about Moses Grant, though he was clearly a well-known and politically active Bostonian and played an important role in several Unitarian poor relief programs. See Abner Forbes and J.W. Greene, *The Rich Men of Massachusetts: Containing a Statement of the Reputed Wealth of about Fifteen Hundred Persons, with Brief Sketches of More than One Thousand Characters* (Boston: Fetridge and Company, 1851), 30-31.

a shrewd understanding of the changing nature of the Massachusetts economy and the inability of the School, with its antiquated emphasis on farming and apprenticeship, to meet the needs of the boys in an economy that increasingly lured boys into more immediately gratifying—and financially advantageous—positions as wage laborers. Grant never gave up the project of training the boys to be morally upright workers, but his vision of how to do so was broadened by his experiences, both on and off the Island, with the Thompson Island boys.

Grant made special efforts to follow the moral education of the boys through their indenture experiences. Along with School Directors, he closely scrutinized the farmers and artisans who applied for apprentices to be sure that the boys they placed would live in homes that carried on the good work of moral education begun by the School. They also made periodic visits to the farms and homes where the boys lived and requested regular reports from masters to be sure the boys were receiving a proper education in the local schoolhouses and not being used simply as free sources of labor.[46] Even more importantly, they wrote letters to the boys themselves to learn the state of the boys' moral character.

Grant, especially, carried on an extensive correspondence with many of the boys. While none of Grant's letters to the boys survive, their responses, kept on

---

[46] This practice runs contrary to the argument made by Eric Schneider about the apprenticing of children by Unitarian reformers. According to Schneider, "The superiority of rural life was such an ingrained assumption that no thought was given to investigating rural families to ensure their suitability or to see that children and families were getting along. The idea that Yankee Protestant farm families could abuse or overwork children never crossed anyone's mind—placement in a rural family was de facto an improvement over what reformers thought passed for family life in working-class neighborhoods." Schneider, *In the Web of Class*, 55. Schneider's arguments are left unsubstantiated. Despite their romantic views of the countryside, Unitarian poor relief workers were all too aware of the abuse that could occur in farm families. In 1835, Joseph Tuckerman, for example, investigated two farmers, one of whom had transferred his apprentice to someone else and another who had placed his apprentice in a factory. See the Report of Manager, April 29, 1835, Box 2-1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

record by the School, reveal Grant's interest in their moral education. Many letters contain passages similar to that in a letter sent by Samuel Cutter to Grant in March of 1840.[47] A year after being indentured to a shoemaker in Wenham, Samuel wrote that he was pleased to have received a letter from Grant. "I went to Sabbath School while it kept," he informed Grant. "[Y]ou asked me in your letter if there was any Brandy Gin Wine or any kind of ardent Spirit sold here in this town," Samuel wrote. He was happy to report that that there was not, though he did suppose "as the 15 gallon law is broken you will have plenty of it in the City of Boston."[48] While Samuel did not "know how to make a shoe yet," Grant could rest assured that Samuel knew the value of Sabbath School attendance and sobriety.[49] The responses of individual boys to Grant's letters indicate Grant's interest in three areas in particular: the boys' regular Sunday School attendance, their participation in Temperance activities, and regular attendance at school. For Grant, these things served as good indicators of whether the boys were receiving the moral education he believed they required.

---

[47] Samuel's father had been a chair maker, but after his death Samuel's mother (referred to as both Adeline and Anne in the School records) found that the work she did binding shoes was not enough to support herself, Samuel, and Samuel's five older sisters. She entrusted Samuel with Mr. Benzy, then a Mr. Guiles, both of Boston, and finally gave him up to the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys in 1833. Samuel joined the other Asylum boys in the transfer to Thompson's Island and he left the School to be indentured in 1839 at age fourteen. Headmaster's Notebook and Entry Book, Box 7-1A, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

[48] Letter from Samuel Cutter to Moses Grant, 23 March 1840, Box 3-3, Folder 10, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston. The Fifteen-Gallon Law, which forbade the selling of spirits in quantities less than fifteen gallons, in effect shut down every public drinking house in the state. It was passed by the Massachusetts legislature in 1838 and repealed in 1839.

[49] Samuel explained that he was, in fact, caring for a baby and had not learned shoemaking skills. This indicates that his apprenticeship was less for his own training than for the benefit of his master and his master's wife, who probably needed childcare more than an additional hand in shoemaking. Given that women played an important role in shoemaking before industrialization of the shoe industry, Samuel's master probably saw more value in his wife's labor power than Samuel's. The use of indentured boys for such labor was quite common, though frowned upon by the BAFS leaders. On the relationship between childcare and women's work in the shoe industry see Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, 17-18. See also Mary Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 17-19.

Grant's more useful work, however, was in his role as mediator among boys who had departed the farm for their indentures and desired to maintain ties with the friends they had left. George Bibby, like many of his friends, carried on a lengthy correspondence with Moses Grant in which he hoped to enlist Grant's help in keeping contact with his schoolmates. In one letter to Grant, written two years after he left the school, George spoke longingly of a desire to see Grant and the other boys. "I don't suppose I could find all of the Boys on the Island that was ther [sic] when I went on in the summer I suppose that all of my old acquaintances gon [sic] out to places," he wrote.[50] "[Y]ou have written me 7 or 8 letters," he later wrote to Grant, "I have got them all now I mean to keep them as long as I live to remember you by."[51] Many boys ended their letters with requests for Grant to give their love to their former playmates and to Mrs. Morrison, the School's matron. While it is unclear whether Grant passed along their messages, their requests for him to do so served as a way to remember their time on the Island and the boyhood culture they had left behind.

While the boys used Grant to try to keep in touch with their friends at the School, Grant also served as a mediator among the boys in the Massachusetts countryside, their families, and the farmers and artisans to whom they had been indentured. The letters from boys, their parents, and the families who acted *in loco parentis* reveal the complexities of their relationships. The Dearborn family represents a typical case of the role Grant played in mediating relationships among boys, parents, and masters. Jonathan and Sophia Dearborn lived near Foster Place in

---

[50] Letter from George Bibby to Moses Grant, 14 March 1841, Box 7-2, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[51] Letter from George Bibby to Moses Grant, 15 December 1844, Box 3-3, Folder 12, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

Commercial Street, next to the wharves in Boston's North End. Jonathan, a carpenter who was, according to School officials, "[i]ntemperate," had reportedly neglected his four children—three boys and a girl. Sophia probably sought the admission of their son Alfred into the School, and he was admitted in February of 1836 at age eight. Three months later, she successfully sought the admission of Alfred's older brother George, who was twelve years old.[52] Four years later Alfred was indentured to a farmer in Plainfield who had taken in several boys from the School, and Alfred wrote to Moses Grant from Plainfield in December 1840. "I am in good health," he wrote. He was clearly fascinated by his farming life in Plainfield, describing in minute detail the agriculture and livestock produced and owned by his new master. Between the description of his schooling and the farm report, however, Alfred wrote longingly, "I should like to hear from george very much indeed."[53]

George, for his part, seems to have had a less direct trajectory than Alfred to his indenture. While Sophia withdrew him in 1839, he evidently returned to the School and was indentured to a farmer in Harvard sometime later. George had lost contact with his mother and asked Grant to find her. "Mr. Grant I should like to you go [sic] see My Mother and tell me where she lives," he wrote. "I have not heard from her these 5 months and if you can find her I should like to have you tell her to write to me and tell me where she lives." He also inquired about Alfred: "I should

---

[52] Headmaster's Notebook and Entry Book, Box 7-1A, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[53] Letter from Alfred Dearborn to Moses Grant, 11 December 1840, Box 7-2, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

like to know wether [sic] you have heard from Alfred. [sic] Dearborn since he went away from the Island."[54]

The Dearborns' tumultuous family life, in which two of the sons were flung far from each other and from their parents, typifies that of many families who gave up their boys to the School. In the circumstances in which they were placed they used the only link between them—Moses Grant—to attempt to maintain the family ties that were fraying. The Dearborns seem to have had difficulty keeping in contact with each other. Other families were more easily able to do so through Grant's assistance.

George Crane, for example, carried on a correspondence with his parents by enlisting the aid of Grant and the man to whom he had been apprenticed, Jonathan Emerson. George was nine years old when he was given up by his parents in 1843. In January of 1848 Emerson delivered a letter from George to the School, which kept a copy of the letter for its records. "My Dear Parents," George wrote, "I received your letter a few night [sic] ago with joy. I am well and hope you are the same. Tell Uncle Thomas and George that I thank them for sending their love to me, and wish them the same, give my love to Grandmother and Grandfather, and to all the rest of the family." While George said he was enjoying his time with Mr. Emerson, he said that he would try to visit his true family "as soon as Mr Emerson will let me." "Writ [sic] soon," he closed.[55]

---

[54] Letter from George Dearborn to Moses Grant, 27 March 1842, Box 7-2, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston. Most siblings who were admitted together were withdrawn by their parents at the same time. Those siblings who were indentured were never sent to the same location. Sometimes parents would withdraw one son from the School and allow the other to be indentured. See Entry Book, Box 1-1, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[55] Letter from George Crane to parents, 15 January 1848, Box 7-2, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

Grant's position as mediator between parents and children meant that he was able to assert some control over the lives of the boys, even after they left the watchful eye of the matron and superintendent of Thompson's Island. Yet Grant's oversight was limited. Once boys entered apprenticeships, they and their families were more easily able to exert control over their own fates. Several farmers and artisans wrote to Grant and to other members of the BAFS Board to complain of boys who returned to their families whenever it pleased them and parents who insisted on maintaining authority over their boys, despite the fact they had given up their legal parental rights.

Some parents arranged for their boys to come home for visits and then refused to send them back when masters called for their return. Israel Lyman, for example, wrote to Moses Grant about Edward McDonald, his farming apprentice, in September 1845. Edward's father had requested that Edward be sent home for a visit, and Lyman agreed to release Edward for three weeks. Six weeks later Edward still had not returned. Angry that Edward had possibly absconded at the height of the harvest, Lyman wrote to Grant, "I would be much obliged to you if you would go and see Mr. McDonald and write me the reasons he did not come back."[56] Edward's fate was left unrecorded by the School officials, though he probably returned only if he was willing or persuaded to do so; labor contracts for indentures were rarely legally enforced by this time.

Freeman Foster was particularly perturbed by the actions of his apprentice, Samuel Cushing, and Samuel's family. In November 1848 Foster complained to Moses Grant, "Respecting Saml Cushing leaving me. On the actual cause I am not

---

[56] Letter from Israel Lyman to Moses Grant, 20 September 1845, Box 3-3, Folder 13, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

able to say—but am left to believe that his mother is the cause." In June of 1848 Samuel's father had requested that Samuel be allowed to visit, but Foster "wrote to his Father that it would be inconvenient for him to come until after Haying." Nevertheless in July, Foster wrote, "down came [Samuel's] Father Mother & Sister— just the busiest [sic] time of the year & would have taken him off." Foster convinced Samuel's parents to allow Foster to keep him, as long as he paid Samuel wages. "They consented & left him," Foster wrote, "but before harvest was over . . . Down came his Fathr & want Saml to go amediately [sic] to Boston to see the great display of Torchlight." Frustrated with Samuel, Foster paid him the twelve or fifteen dollars that he would have received upon release from his indenture and washed his hands clean of the family.[57] Samuel and his family had rejected the pastoral farm life of the Massachusetts countryside—and its ostensible competency—for the "Torchlight" of the city. They were no financial dunces, though. Samuel and his family skillfully manipulated Mr. Foster to force his hand, and Samuel received his freedom dues long before his apprenticeship was complete.

Most of the BAFS boys and their parents refused to follow the path laid out for them by the School's Directors. Yet the BAFS leaders seemed resigned to accept the fact that a number of boys would take a different direction than the one intended for them. Through the work of Moses Grant, the School leaders stayed in touch with the boys, their families, and their masters, working to mediate situations over which they often had very little control. Perhaps they did so because they believed they could still assert an influence, if small, over the moral character of the boys and their

---

[57] Letter from Freeman Foster to Moses Grant, 1 November 1848, Box 3-2, Folder 30, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

parents, and possibly ease the boys' transition into the wage labor economy. If they

could not fight the onslaught of wage labor, they could at least try to stem its

atomizing tendencies by reminding the boys of the communalist goals of the School.

Apprenticeship and "Free" Labor

No matter what sorts of relationships parents had with their sons' masters, the

masters had little control over boys who did not wish to stay in their indentures.

Ultimately, the boys had the power to express discontent over their situations with

their feet, and many of them did. Several boys simply left their indentures to return

home, and those who did not used the threat of doing so as a way to gain leverage

over their masters and the School Directors. Franklin Jones, for example, wrote to

Moses Grant from his indenture in April 1845. He had been apprenticed three years

earlier and had not seen his mother since then. Though he had spoken with his master

about visiting his mother "three or four times," his master had denied Franklin's

requests and Franklin was writing Grant to see if he could persuade his master to

allow him a two or three week visit. Given that Franklin's master had legal control

over Franklin, there was little Grant could do to intervene. Ultimately, however,

Franklin stated that if Grant did not give Franklin his request he would "go home and

not come back again." According to Franklin, his master "will not clothe me as well

as other apprentices, and will not let me have the money."[58] Franklin insisted on

collecting the ninety dollars he believed his master owed him, recruiting Grant to help

his case. And, finally, pulling out his trump card, he wrote, "And he [his master]

---

[58] Letter from Franklin J. Jones to Moses Grant, 28 April 1845, Box 3-3, Folder 13, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

don't do me well enough to go to meeting, nor he will not let me go to school, which my mother said I should have three months of in a year."[59] Franklin's years at the School had taught him the value of an education, or at least its importance to the School Directors.

Franklin was expressing a common desire among many of the boys—to abandon the lengthy process of apprenticeship for the more immediately lucrative prospects of wage labor. By the mid-1840s it was becoming clear that the School— whose plan was to bring in boys, reform them, teach them the value of hard work, religious commitment, and sobriety, and then indent them to masters who would carry on the good work begun at the School—had to accept other realities. Only about one-fourth of the boys who entered the School actually entered apprenticeships, and many of these absconded when they found the work too grueling, became homesick, or desired to pursue wage labor.[60] The boys understood well the shifting tides of ideas about labor and usually anchored their hopes to more modern ideas of wage labor rather than farm life.

Several boys left their apprenticeships for more immediately well-paid—and sometimes more romantic—occupations. Phineas Allen asked permission from Grant to leave his apprenticeship to work as a sailor on a whaling ship, which he assured Grant was "a good business well followed."[61] Similarly, as James Brown's indenture was coming to a close, he wrote to Moses Grant to inform him that instead

---

[59] Ibid.
[60] Of boys who entered the School between 1842 and 1844, for example, 27% of them were indentured. Sixty-two percent were withdrawn by their parents. These numbers are slightly irregular because of the unusually high number of boys who died in an 1842 boating accident.
[61] Letter from Phineas Allen to Moses Grant, 18 April 1841, Box 3-3, Folder 10, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

of entering a life of farming, "I should like to go into a store or some profitable employment in the city." Knowing that Grant might question the wisdom of such a move, Brown pointed out that his master supported his decision, was willing to allow him to leave his indenture early, and would even give him the hundred dollars and two suits that would have been due at his release.[62]

Even if James Brown had stayed in his apprenticeship and attempted to enter a farming career, the hundred dollars he received would have gone only a small way toward helping him establish his own farm. By the mid-nineteenth century, the base price of renting farmland was $500, and most new farmers borrowed even more money to cover the costs of equipment and livestock.[63] Furthermore, boys' experiences in the homes of farmers taught them firsthand the difficulties that farmers faced in the changing market economy.[64] The independent farm life the Directors of the BAFS envisioned was succumbing to market pressures, and many boys who understood this reality chose to take their chances with wage labor.

Franklin, Phineas, and James were all expressing a belief that true freedom came not from the stifling system of apprenticeship, but from the ability to choose one's future in the expanding marketplace. For them, wage labor was not slavery, but opportunity—the opportunity to build a better life on their own terms. George Bibby contrasted his restricted life as an apprentice with his hope for a liberated future. "I

---

[62] Letter from James O. Brown to Moses Grant, 20 April 1844, Box 3-3, Folder 12, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

[63] Clarence Danhof, *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 87-88.

[64] For discussions of the these changes see Winifred Barr Rothenberg, *From Market-Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1861* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

hope you will write me a good many more [times] before I am free," he wrote to

Moses Grant five years into his apprenticeship.[65]

Even after boys like George finished their apprenticeships, Grant tried to serve

as a useful anchor and stable source of comfort for their journeys into the often harsh

world of the capitalist marketplace. Grant continued to write letters to the boys long

after their apprenticeships had ended or, as was more often the case, they had

absconded the School or their indentures or their parents had withdrawn them. In

some cases, Grant's overtures seem to have had their desired effect. For example, a

few Island boys who left the School to enlist in the Army together during the

Mexican-American War kept in touch with Grant and the matron of the BAFS. They

returned to the Island as young men, dutifully reporting to the School's matron that

they "had not acquired any bad habits" while away.[66] Perhaps the notions of morality

the boys had been taught at the BAFS had followed them into their new occupations,

even as they rejected the occupational lives that the BAFS Directors had associated

with such principles.

Shifting Priorities

The actions of the boys and their parents in the 1830s and 1840s and the

opening of the State Reform School in 1848 prompted the Directors of the BAFS to

address the state of the School in its 1849 report. Hinting at the influence of the boys'

steady entrance into the market economy on the changing priorities of the School, the

---

[65] Letter from George Bibby to Moses Grant, 15 December 1844, Box 3-3, Folder 12, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[66] *The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Reports, Acts of Incorporation, By-Laws, General Rules and Regulations, and Appendix* (Boston: John Wilson, 1849), 19, 41-42.

Directors stated that as "the relations of an institution to its patrons and the public rapidly change, especially in our own fast moving community, it may not be uninteresting to assert some of our starting principles, and inquire how far they are carried out."[67] The report offers a glimpse at the views of the Directors and how they had changed since the opening of the BAFS in 1835, partly because of changing circumstances in the city, but also in response to the use of the School by poor parents and their boys.

The opening of the State Reform School in Westborough, Massachusetts played an important role in the Directors' re-examination of the purpose of the BAFS. In theory, the State Reform School's purpose was similar to that of the BAFS—to inculcate Protestant religious and moral values in boys who were on the brink of moral ruin. The School, opened in 1848, was founded partly as a response to the increasing number of Irish paupers in Massachusetts. Theodore Lyman, the former mayor of Boston and a merchant in the China trade, donated seventy thousand dollars for the cause, which allowed the state to purchase a farm site for the School in Westborough, about thirty miles outside of Boston.[68] As in the BAFS, some of the boys worked on a farm at the Reform School and were supposed to be indentured to farmers and artisans, though a general education in farming was emphasized less. The Reform School prepared most of the boys for lives as factory operatives in the booming Massachusetts boot and shoe industry.[69]

---

[67] *The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Reports . . .* (1849), 6.
[68] The relationship between Lyman and the state officials, and his funding of the School indicates the blurred boundaries between state and voluntary philanthropy and reform in the nineteenth-century United States. Michael Katz talks about these blurred boundaries in *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, Tenth Anniversary ed., rev. (New York: Harper Collins, Basic Books, 1996), 43-47.
[69] Schneider, *In the Web of Class*, 47-49.

In discussions about the State Reform School, the BAFS was usually presented as a model of education and care of the poor to be emulated. According to the 1849 BAFS report, Richard W. Bayley, "holding up the example of the School as a precedent . . . is believed to have exerted no little influence towards securing the establishment of the State institution."[70] To the BAFS Directors, there was little competition between the voluntary BAFS and the State Reform School. Indeed, the Directors took pains to differentiate the two institutions to answer criticisms from those who might see redundancy between them or view the State Reform School as a "more general system and a more economical method."[71] At a time when many were arguing for the efficiency of state intervention in aid to the poor, the BAFS Directors continued to advocate a more organic system rooted in the ideas of community and social interdependency.

According to the BAFS Directors, even if the Massachusetts-run State Reform School was more efficient, it was less conducive to the cultivation of moral virtue. Because "the law" was "obliged to wait for some positive or overt act of criminality," the State Reform School could only admit boys who had acted clearly unacceptably— boys whose moral character required government intervention.[72] This description of the State Reform School was rooted in the Unitarian belief that the purpose of the State was negative in nature, even while it was rooted in the law. As William Ellery Channing argued, the direct influence of the State should be in "preventing and

---

[70] *The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Reports. . .* (1849), 14-15.
[71] Ibid., 6.
[72] *The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Reports. . .* (1849), 6-7. This idea of the State as essentially a negative institution became an important part of William Ellery Channing's sociopolitical vision, the changes of which John E. Reinhardt traces in his article, "The Evolution of William Ellery Channing's Sociopolitical Ideas," *American Literature* 26, no. 2 (1954): 154-65.

punishing crime."[73] Compared, then, to the House of Reformation and the State

Reform School, the BAFS differed "advantageously." According to the Directors, "if

the House of Reformation and the State Reform School are institutions designed to be

preventative of crime, ours is designed to be preventative even of the necessity for

them."[74] The School leaders tapped into older notions of community, where

neighborly care and watchfulness precluded the necessity for punitive state

intervention. To be sure, the BAFS Directors saw a necessity for the State Reform

School; there would always be children who would need a more disciplinary hand.

Nevertheless, the Directors believed such an approach should always be taken as a

last resort and argued that the BAFS was more useful in preventing boys from

committing crimes in the first place.

Despite their continued emphasis on the Farm School as a site of moral

cultivation and communal care, the Directors also indicated in their report that they

had shifted their thinking about the nature of the program and its purpose.   While ten

years earlier the Directors had viewed the presence of paying boys as an unfortunate

but necessary evil that helped meet the financial obligations of the School, by 1849

they saw it as a positive good, a sign of the proactive involvement of parents in the

development of the boys' character. "The class of *paying* boys is also one which the

Managers believe derives great benefit from the institution," the Directors believed.

Indicating a sympathy for the unsteadiness of the life of the laboring poor, a

sympathy gained in their fourteen years of experience poor parents, the Directors

---

[73] William Ellery Channing, *Spiritual Freedom: Discourse Preached at the Annual Election, May 26, 1830*, in *The Works of William Ellery Channing*, (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903), 4:97.
[74] *The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Reports. . .* (1849), 6-7.

wrote, "sometimes it happens that a parent or guardian is about making that change in his or her domestic arrangements, that an opportunity of committing a boy to good management, for three months or more, while they could not give the proper attention to him themselves, is highly prized." Because these boys were often "in that transition state between the forming of good or bad habits," a shorter period of time at the School, three or six months, "makes an incalculable difference with them for life." While the Directors did believe that such stints were less efficacious than the full course of education and indenture, they argued that "More [boys] in number, at any rate, are benefited, if less in degree."[75] The Farm School leaders had accepted, even if begrudgingly, that the boys who entered their program would rarely enter the bucolic world of country farming. They adjusted their priorities accordingly, now aiming to assist the boys on their journey into the unfamiliar world of the antebellum market.

A look at the long-term relationships of some of the boys with the School sheds light on the enduring effects of the School in light of its programmatic goals. The case of Alvan Brown, the Rhode Island boy who had been passed around from guardian to guardian before finally arriving at the School, reveals the complex long-term relationship between some boys and the School. The Superintendent of the School sent Alvan to Thomas Dupree, a farmer and sail-maker in Westport in 1837, three years after he had entered the School and just before his twelfth birthday. During his time with Mr. Dupree, Alvan kept in touch with Moses Grant, writing about the "clever people" he encountered (whose cleverness he measured by the scarcity of "grog shops" and "bar rooms" in Westport), as well as the farm and mast-

---

[75] Ibid., 12-13.

making work he did. Sometime between 1840 and 1845, however, Alvan apparently became less cheerful about his situation with Mr. Dupree and ran away. Eight years after he left the School he wrote a desperate note for help to Moses Grant.

Alvan had already informed Grant of his reasons for absconding and, according to his letter, had received a sympathetic response. Finding himself without patronage and little education, Alvan pleaded, "I came here today to ask you to assist me as I have not [sic] other one to go to." He asked Grant to get him a place at a school as well as part-time work to pay his education expenses. "If you but knew my circumstances and my mind you would for you told me you would," Alvan implored. Indicating both a desire for assistance and knowledge of the language of benevolence he wrote, "I cannot live honest and uprightly without some one to point and help me in the way."[76] Alvan's willingness to request aid from Grant, even though he had broken his indenture with Dupree, reveals his belief that the Directors of the School, especially Moses Grant, might be ruled less by the letter of the law than its spirit in administering aid to the boys.

The records do not indicate what came of Alvan's request for aid from Moses Grant, but they are clearer in the case of Henry Stevens. He seems to have been one of the few boys to complete his indenture, and in 1845, six years after he left the school, he was writing for assistance. Henry had attempted to start a business, and the School had loaned him money to help. According to Henry he was unable to repay his debt, "not by mismanagement," but because he "was sick the best part of the season from May, until September." Despite his best efforts, "business of all

---

[76] Letter from Alvan Brown to Moses Grant, 1845, Box 3-3, Folder 12, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

kinds was very dull" and he could not collect on old debts. He finally gave up his business. He was coming to the Directors to request money for a new business in bookkeeping and he promised, "if you can help me to a situation I will endeavor by constant application to Business to fill it satisfactory."[77]

The School apparently granted his request, and when Grant wrote to Henry a year and a half later to check the progress of his business endeavor, Henry wrote back with a new proposal for aid. Ever the entrepreneur, Henry had come up with a new business plan and was hoping the Directors would fund him. "I wish to open a shop called the Mechanics Tool Shop," he wrote. He was requesting no small sum. "The capital required for this business would be from $1200 to $1500," he wrote, and he asked the Directors to either loan him the money or go into partnership with him.[78] While the records do not indicate if Grant and the BAFS Directors helped Henry with his second request, he had every reason to expect they would help him in his attempt to succeed in the market economy, for they had done so in the past. They did so for many other boys as well.

When the Directors planted the BAFS seed in 1832, few knew how it would come to fruition. Organic metaphors infused the language of benevolence among the Directors. The School would be a site of growth and a return to the soil and the rich democratic spirit of farm life and work. Nevertheless, the boys of the School and their parents challenged the School Directors' vision. While many parents surely were

---

[77] Letter from Henry Stevens to Moses Grant, 5 December 1845, Box 3-3, Folder 12, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.
[78] Letter from Henry Stevens to Moses Grant, 31 July 1847, Box 3-3, Folder 12, Thompson Island Collection, Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

disturbed by the behavior of their boys and sought to use the School to instill moral

values in their wayward youth, others used the School as a temporary solution to

long-term problems of financial and familial instability. Some used the School for

both purposes. Parents withdrew their children at will, enticed them away from their

indentures, and generally influenced the paths their boys took. For their part, most

boys rejected the yeoman life of farming that the School's Directors envisioned,

instead pursuing a variety of opportunities in the growing capitalist marketplace.

The Directors of the School, in the course of working with parents, masters,

and the boys and through the leadership of Moses Grant, came to new realizations

about the poor families they aided and the proper role of aid in creating virtuous

citizens.[79] They began to see parents less as dangers from which to protect their

children, and more as unfortunate men and women seeking their children's best

interest during harsh economic times. Directors began to consider parents as partners

rather than antagonists in the boys' upbringing. Hierarchical relationships still

remained, but they were tempered by empathy. The Directors also came to see that

their program was not a solution for all boys in all circumstances. While they were

surely disappointed that only a miniscule number of boys made it through the

program, their continued contact with the boys taught them that success could not

always be measured in terms of the number of acres owned or shoes produced. As

Massachusetts entered the increasingly industrialized middle nineteenth-century, the

School Directors became less sanguine about the ability to lay the burden of virtuous

---

[79] Linda Gordon notes a similar process of shifting programmatic priorities among social welfare workers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Boston. According to Gordon, the "cumulative pressure" of agencies' clients "affected the agencies' definitions of problems and proposals for help." See Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), 295.

citizenship on the backs of a decreasing population of farmers. The School

encouraged and financially supported boys who expressed desires to join the Navy, to

sail on merchant ships, or to try their fortunes in opening their own businesses long

after the boys' formal ties with the School had ended. Encounters between the "little

tanned agriculturalists" of Thompson's Island and the Directors of the BAFS played

an important role in shifting the Directors' understandings of the changing political

economy. The Directors seemingly accepted that the world they world they sought to

cultivate—rooted in organic ties of community and rural life—was rapidly slipping

away.

Chapter 4: "Their Own Verdict of Dissolution:" Boston Unitarians and the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches

In 1835 the Unitarian minister Charles Francis Barnard gave the first annual report of his work as minister of the Warren Street Chapel in Boston. Barnard, a recent Harvard Divinity School graduate, had worked with Joseph Tuckerman in Tuckerman's ministry to the poor and simultaneously taught Sunday School lessons to children in the front parlor of Dorothea Dix, who would later become famous for her advocacy for the mentally ill. When the small class at Dix's home grew too large, Barnard raised funds to build the new Chapel, which became one of the most vibrant Sunday School operations in the city. During its first year, the Chapel was supported by the Unitarian Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, an organization initiated by Boston Unitarians in 1834 to systematize the church's ministry to the poor. Barnard and his Sunday School were probably most famous for the yearly Fourth of July "floral processions" the children made from the Sunday School to Boston Common, which raised money for the Sunday School and had thousands of spectators. Barnard's life as a minister-at-large was hardly one of sunshine and roses, however. The foundation of the Warren Chapel had barely settled when it became the site of an important controversy.

A short time after opening his chapel, Barnard faced criticism from a few of Boston's Unitarian leaders for allowing middle-class and elite children into the Chapel. Barnard did not indicate the reasons for the criticisms, but he answered his detractors in this first report. "It is said that the Warren Street Chapel embraces classes for whom it was not intended," Barnard stated. "An objection has been made

that it is not confined to the poor." Barnard readily admitted this was the case, though

he wondered whether his critics would have him go through his student population

and "cull out the poor and gather them into a congregation by themselves." Aside

from pointing out the obvious humiliation such an exercise would induce, Barnard

assailed the fundamental tenet of his critics—that rich and poor should be separated

into different congregations. "We should eventually have the Churches of the Rich

and the Chapels of the Poor to mar the beauty and the Catholicism of our religion," he

argued. Indeed, he stated, "It is to be regretted that the poor are not with the rich in

all our present churches," and "the evil would be double to be deprecated, should the

former ever be gathered into audiences composed exclusively of themselves." In his

view, the division of classes into separate places of worship undermined the ministry

to the poor, which was to be "one of mediation between man and man." To separate

the rich and poor on Sunday would rob the rich of their "fraternal interest" in the poor

and the "return of the same feeling on the part of the poor."[1]

In the late 1830s and early 1840s this controversy over the Unitarian free

chapel ministry exploded into full-fledged warfare. The debate over the nature of the

Unitarian ministry to the poor was vitriolic because it was tied to deep-seated

Unitarian theopolitical and social views. It reveals the ideological departure of some

second-generation Unitarians from the first generation. While second-generation

Unitarians maintained a commitment to the organic social vision of Unitarianism's

pioneers, they disagreed on what an organic community should look like. Second-

---

[1] Charles Francis Barnard, *First Annual Report, to the Proprietors and Friends of the Warren Street Chapel* (n.p., 1835), 18-19.

generation Unitarians welcomed ideological heterogeneity and deemphasized social hierarchy, which often put them at odds with those who had ministered before them.

The Unitarian ministry to the poor served as a central battleground over these crucial theological and political debates because it was where streams of social, political, economic, and theological thought converged. While historians have recognized fundamental theological and political changes in the late 1830s and early 1840s among American Unitarians, few have recognized the importance of debates about the ministry-at-large to changing Unitarian political and theological dynamics.[2] The debate over the organic social vision that took place in discussions about the Unitarian ministry to the poor highlighted the tensions in this vision, revealing the inherent contradiction in the Unitarian attempt to create a seamless society based on social interdependency. If the rich and poor were to serve one another—the rich through the exercise of benevolence, and the poor through the exercise of gratitude— how could the church justify separating the poor into their own chapels? For many Unitarians, social stratification interfered with the organic social interdependency required for the proper functioning of society.

---

[2] On the changing theology of the late 1830s and early 1840s see Gary Collison, "'A True Toleration': Harvard Divinity School Students and Unitarianism, 1830-1859," in *American Unitarianism, 1805-1865*, ed. Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 209-37 and Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 76-82. Three books that use biography to trace individual experiences of wider theological trends in Boston include Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Mary Kupiec Cayton, *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England, 1800-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); and Patrick Carey, *Orestes Brownson: American Religious Weathervane* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's Publishing, 2004).

The Unitarian chapel ministry to the poor also tested the limits of Unitarians' views of intellectual and theological liberalism.[3] Concerns over the possibly subversive implications of theological liberalism intersected with Unitarian ideas about poverty in the free chapel ministry. Much of the discomfort over the free chapels was about what the free chapel attendees were hearing from the pulpit. Ministers to the poor and their supporters, including John Turner Sargent, Theodore Parker, and Orestes Brownson, preached more "reform"-minded sermons, which were concerned with ending slavery or restructuring society to end economic inequality. Such sermons alarmed the more conservative first generation of Unitarians. Paradoxically, however, by criticizing preachers like Parker and Brownson, Unitarian leaders were undermining one of the most fundamental tenets of their beliefs—the notion that each individual was capable of knowing religious truth and should be allowed to express that truth to others. Unitarian support for theological liberalism was challenged by the heterodox views of many of their ranks. Theological heterodoxy, especially among the ministers to the poor, forced many Unitarians to decide if their theopolitical organic vision required homogeneity of belief, and agreement on the answer to this question remained elusive.

Finally, the existence of the free chapels provides evidence that the Unitarians were beginning to identify the poor as a collective entity, a group with assumed common characteristics, backgrounds, and needs. While Unitarians had previously argued that individual differences in social status were inevitable, indeed good, they

---

[3] "Theological liberalism" in this chapter refers to the "the defense of free inquiry and the rights of conscience against dogmatism." This definition comes from Jonathan Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the New England Clergy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 155.

had simultaneously spoken out against the creation of artificial class distinctions, which they believed fostered the development of selfish factions. Yet by treating the poor collectively, Unitarians not only abandoned Tuckerman's vision of individualized approaches to assistance, they also cultivated the very class-based distinctions they had previously seen as pernicious. Moreover, in doing so, they often left the most destitute poor to fend for themselves.

Of course, in all of the Unitarian debates about poverty, the central topic remained the poor themselves, and as with other Unitarian poverty-relief programs, those who accepted aid played an important role in framing the terms of the debate. By dressing in clothing more often associated with the middle class and claiming the free chapels as their own, the free chapel attendees challenged notions of poverty, serving as symbols of the failure of Unitarians to maintain the social differentiation they had seen as central to their organic vision. Indeed, the behavior of the free chapel attendees served as the catalyst for the major crisis in the chapel program that eventually altered irrevocably the church's ministry to the poor, and the church itself.

Tensions Within Unitarianism and Without

The creation of the Unitarian chapel ministry to the poor occurred just as the second generation of Unitarians was taking its place of leadership in the Unitarian church. This second generation, in the name of the theological liberalism that had been central to early American Unitarian ideology, challenged many of the fundamental tenets of first-generation Unitarians, creating rifts between themselves and the founders of the Unitarian church. Debates over issues such as the veracity of the Biblical accounts of miracles played an important role in the tug-of-war between

163

older Unitarians, who subscribed to theological liberalism, and their successors, who

pushed Unitarian doctrine in directions their predecessors never would have

imagined. These tensions were exacerbated by the destruction of the Massachusetts

church establishment, which many first-generation Unitarians had seen as important

to the maintenance of organic social ties. Moreover, the rejection of social hierarchy

and accusations of classism by second-generation Unitarians troubled many founders

of the Unitarian church. These three debates—over the nature of theological

liberalism, the role of the church in public life, and the necessity for social

hierarchy—had important implications for the Unitarian ministry to the poor.

Theological liberalism had been one of the central tenets of Unitarianism

since its beginning. Indeed, its importance is evidenced by the fact that Unitarians, at

least early in the nineteenth century referred to themselves as "liberal Christians," not

as Unitarians.[4] If, as Unitarians believed, all were able to engage in enlightened

reason, then all should be free to follow their conscience in matters of faith. "I call

that mind free, which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers," William

Ellery Channing argued, "which calls no man master, which does not content itself

with a passive or hereditary faith, which opens itself to light whencesoever it may

come."[5] Yet Channing and other Unitarians simultaneously, and paradoxically,

emphasized Christian faith as a social institution reinforced by the community.

Religion, Channing said, "is the gift of society. You received it from parents, and

---

[4] Trinitarian Congregationalists used the term "Unitarian" as a way to differentiate liberal from orthodox Christians by focusing on the most divisive element of liberal Christian views. The first use of the term "Unitarian" by a liberal Christian was in William Ellery Channing's famous sermon, *Unitarian Christianity*. Channing delivered the sermon in 1819 at the ordination of the Reverend Jared Sparks—long after liberal Christians had cohered as a distinguishable group.

[5] William Ellery Channing, *Spiritual Freedom: Discourse Preached at the Annual Election, May 26, 1830*, in *The Works of William Ellery Channing* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903), 4:72.

still more from the community."[6] Furthermore, Channing argued, "it is not wise for a community to leave to private discretion any great interest, in which its safety is involved."[7] Channing, like many first-generation Unitarians, advocated theological liberalism, but only insofar as it corresponded with generally accepted Unitarian doctrine and fostered social stability.

Second-generation Unitarians were more likely to emphasize the individualistic elements of the faith, which they believed most fully represented religious liberalism. John Turner Sargent, born in 1807, was a leader among this group, which included the radical anti-slavery advocates Theodore Parker, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and James Freeman Clarke.[8] Sargent's education in the increasingly liberal atmosphere of Harvard Divinity School, from which he graduated in 1830, played an important role in the development of his open-minded view of dissenting voices and his willingness to accept theological disagreement. Indeed, in dedicating his Suffolk Street Chapel, Sargent announced that his church would define liberal faith as "pleasing to do and say only what we ought," while exercising "individual thought." The church would not be bound by creed or denomination, but would operate in the spirit of ecumenism. "From its very birth in this city, the ministry represented here has cordially extended the hand of its fellowship and the word of invitation to its brethren of other denominations," Sargent stated.[9] Sargent followed through on his word to make the Suffolk Street Chapel a site of

---

[6] William Ellery Channing, *Religion a Social Principle: A Sermon, Delivered in the Church in Federal Street, Boston, December 10, 1820* (Boston: Russell and Gardner, 1820), 6.
[7] Ibid., 14.
[8] Collison, "'A True Toleration.'"
[9] John Turner Sargent, *A Discourse Preached at the Dedication of the Suffolk Street Chapel, February 5, 1840* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1840), 11-13.

interdenominational interaction, bringing in Baptists and Methodists to preach from his pulpit, and exchanging pulpits with Orestes Brownson, one of the more radical members of the Unitarian clergy.

Some first-generation Unitarians found the seemingly extreme liberalism of Sargent and his colleagues disturbing. Even while Unitarians had preached the importance of religious individualism, they believed that a truly reasoned understanding of faith would lead all toward the same truth, and agreement about what that truth was. Unitarians thus saw theological disagreement as anomalous and unnatural, something that should not be encouraged, but eliminated through investigation and dialogue. Unitarians argued, like Henry Ware, that Christians should always keep "a readiness to be silent upon points of difference, or, when there is occasion to speak of them, to do it with gentleness, decorum, and mutual respect."[10] For first-generation Unitarians, acceptance by the younger generation of theological disagreement as something to be embraced undermined the concord necessary for social harmony. Debates over theological liberalism therefore spilled over into disputes about the free chapel ministry because they touched on fundamental beliefs about the nature of a stable society.

The controversy over theological liberalism was tied to and influenced by the destruction of the established church, or Standing Order, in Massachusetts in 1833.[11]

---

[10] Henry Ware, *Inquiry into the Foundation, Evidences, and Truths of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Owen, 1842), 2:310, quoted in Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 215.

[11] By 1833, the established church in Massachusetts existed in name only. The Standing Order had been weakened considerably by legislation such as the Religious Liberties Act of 1824, which "allowed church members to leave their churches and join another just by handing in a certificate." The *Baker v. Fales* ruling in 1821 also weakened support for the established church. It decreed that in cases of church splits, the majority of a parish would maintain ownership of the church property, since they would be considered the established church of a locality. At the time, many congregations were dividing between Trinitarians and Unitarians, with the majority more often than not siding with the

Unitarian ministers remained stalwart advocates for the established church until the formal end of establishment. Boston Unitarians feared the end of the Standing Order would spell the end of the moral foundation of the American political system.[12] For Unitarians, the Standing Order was the most important source of stability for the young republic, for only through the church would the right ordering of society be inculcated in the democratic populace. Only a morally upright people could make prudent political decisions. Furthermore, Unitarians argued, if the established church was ended and ministers were forced to rely on their congregations for support, they would become slaves to public opinion and would lose their authority as moral expositors. If ministers were beholden to the people for their authority, one Unitarian argued, "'preaching will be literally an article in the market, and men will chaffer for it at the cheapest rate."[13] Boston Unitarian ministers, ironically, argued this position while the wealthy members of their congregations paid their salaries.[14]

Just before the bill to strike down the Massachusetts established church was put before the people for a vote in 1833, "ABM" wrote in the Unitarian *Christian Register* of the portentousness of the decision. The question involved "the most sacred interests, both present and eternal, of the inhabitants of this community."[15]

Unitarians. Through the institution of the Standing Order, Unitarians usually maintained control of church property when formal dissolution of a church was carried out. After the *Baker v. Fales* ruling, Unitarians lost support among orthodox Congregationalists, who saw in the ruling the negative effect of the Standing Order on their own stability. See Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 159-63.

[12] Peter Field, *The Crisis of the Standing Order: Clerical Intellectuals and Cultural Authority in Massachusetts, 1780-1833* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness*, 159-61; and Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 216-21. See also Johann Neem, "The Transformation of Civil Society in Massachusetts, 1780s-1840s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2004), chapter 3 and "The Elusive Common Good: Religion and Civil Society in Massachusetts, 1780-1833," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 3 (2004): 381-417.

[13] Quoted in Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 217.

[14] This was different from every other established church in the state, whose ministers received their salaries from the tax collected for support of the local congregation.

[15] "ABM," *Christian Register*, 6 October 1832, 158.

Only by the maintenance of spiritual authority could true liberty flourish. "ABM" asked," is there one who is prepared to deny that this religion is the very father and friend of order, civil, and social good?"[16] The vote one month later revealed that the majority of Massachusetts voting citizens were prepared to do just that.

Disestablishment challenged the basis of Unitarian social philosophy—belief in the development of a homogenous, organic community. Henry Ware, an elder statesman in the Unitarian church, had tied the Standing Order directly to the organic Unitarian vision of society, arguing that religion was a unifying principle. "Not to separate but to combine, not to drive men asunder, but to unite them together, and bind them by new ties of interest and affection is its tendency," he argued. "Breathing kindness and good will all around, it produces, not hatred and hostility, not mutual injuries and deeds of violence, but love, and harmony, and peace."[17] For many first-generation Unitarians, then, the loss of the Standing Order marked a turn away from an older, more stable, theopolitical view in which religion served as one of the ties that knit humans together. Unitarians transferred these uncertainties into discussions about the nature of the ministry to the poor, where they believed religion had been most important for fostering ties between the classes.

The social hierarchy of Unitarian organic thought also came under attack as outsiders to the Unitarian church criticized the elite make-up of Boston Unitarian congregations and second-generation Unitarians began to equate a belief in social hierarchy with unhealthy class differentiation. By 1830 the accusations by leaders of

---

[16] Ibid.
[17] Henry Ware, *A Sermon, Delivered Before His Excellency John Brooks, Esq. Governor, His Honor William Phillips, Esq. Lieutenant Governor, the Honorable Council, and the Two Houses Composing the Legislature of Massachusetts, on the Anniversary Election, May 30, 1821* (Boston: B. Russell, 1821), 5.

other Protestant denominations that Unitarianism was a denomination for only the wealthiest Bostonians had become too persistent to ignore. Alexander Young, minister of Boston's New South Unitarian Church, wrote a reply to the denomination's critics. Young freely admitted Unitarianism had to that point been confined to "the well-informed, occupying important stations in society." After all, "the light of christian truth" usually fell on those most willing to accept it, "the intelligent," whom Young equated with Boston's elite. "This simple circumstance," according to Young, had created the illusion that Unitarianism was "not a religion for common minds."[18] To the contrary, Young argued, Unitarianism was *better* suited for the poor. Its doctrine of the unity of God was simpler; it emphasized the principle of *sola scriptura*, the ability of every man to understand the Bible on its own terms; and it offered practical assistance to those who needed Christ's consolation the most.[19] According to Young, the only impediment to the mass conversion of the poor to Unitarianism had been the slowness with which it had been preached to them. William Ellery Channing added that the ministry to the poor "would refute the oft repeated calumny 'That Unitarian views were not suited to interest & awaken the common mind.'"[20]

Young's and Channing's protestations seem dubious in light of the nature of nineteenth-century Boston Unitarians. Sunday services in Unitarian churches were attended almost exclusively by wealthy Bostonians. As Joseph Tuckerman opined to

---

[18] Alexander Young, *Evangelical Unitarianism Adapted to the Poor and Unlearned*, in *Tracts of the American Unitarian Association*, 1st Ser., Vol. 3 (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830), 270-71.
[19] Ibid., 274-81.
[20] Minutes, Executive Committee of the BFC, April 9, 1837, BFC in the City of Boston. Records, 1827-1928, BMS 460, Box 1, Archives and Manuscripts, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School.

a friend, "There is very little room in many of these churches to which the poor have any more right (and of which they may more freely avail themselves) than they have in our homes."[21] According to Tuckerman, Boston's elites had transformed the city's churches into private clubs and were keeping them from serving as the public institutions they were meant to be. By the mid-1830s, the Boston upper class had removed the free galleries in their churches, installing pews that church authorities rented to Boston's richest citizens.[22] As throughout much of American history, Sunday remained one of the most segregated days in antebellum Boston.

Second-generation Unitarians recognized the hypocrisy of preaching social interdependency while practicing social segregation. Equating Unitarian ideas of social hierarchy with snobbery, they emphasized the common human nature of the wealthy and poor. Ironically, however, even while they accused their predecessors of creating unhealthy class distinctions, they also more often discussed the poor as a collective entity rather than as individuals. According to many second-generation Unitarians, approaches to poverty required collective, rather than individual approaches. The drawback to this was that desperately poor individuals were often overlooked as Unitarian ministers devised approaches that dealt more often with the poor as a group than as individuals.

The Benevolent Fraternity of Churches: Foundations and Concerns

The collective approach to poor relief took shape simultaneously with the founding of the Unitarian Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in Boston. By 1834,

---

[21] Letter from Joseph Tuckerman to George Bond, April 11, 1835 in George Bond Papers, Boston Public Library, quoted in Field, *Crisis of the Standing Order*, 63.
[22] Ibid.

two ministers-at-large, Charles Francis Barnard and Frederick T. Gray, had joined

Joseph Tuckerman in his work. While Tuckerman was in Europe to regain strength

following a string of health problems, Barnard and Gray took over his ministry. At

the same time, the American Unitarian Association (AUA) began a program to

provide a more stable form of financial assistance to the ministries. In July of 1834

the AUA formed the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches (BFC). The ministry would

remain the same—friendly visiting would be the cornerstone of the church's work—

but Boston's churches were to provide more direct financial support and oversight

than in the past. The Central Board of the AUA chose an Executive Committee for

the Fraternity, and nine churches associated themselves with the ministry by formal

or auxiliary membership.[23] Each church provided two delegates for a board that

would serve as a liaison between the congregations and the Executive Committee and

would administer the raising of funds at their churches for the support of the ministry.

The financial burden for the ministry-at-large thus shifted from the AUA, a national

organization, to the local Boston Unitarian congregations.

　　　While most Boston Unitarians welcomed the formation of the BFC as a means

of streamlining the ministry-at-large, Tuckerman and Channing were somewhat

worried by it, and they used the language of organicism to express caution about what

they believed was its potential to cut off rich from poor. Of course, very few of

Boston's wealthy Unitarians had ever established such ties with the poor, so

Channing's and Tuckerman's language was more a rhetorical tactic than a description

---

[23] These churches were New North Church, Second Church, Brattle Street Church, Federal Street Church, King's Chapel, New South Church, Purchase Street Chapel, Hollis Street Church, and Twelfth Congregational Church. See the Minutes of the Executive Committee of the BFC, BFC in the City of Boston. Records, 1827-1928, BMS 460, Box 1.

of reality. Channing argued to his fellow Unitarians that the achievement of

Tuckerman's ministry had been "exciting among the more prosperous a new & more

enlightened interest in the poor." Any change in the ministry should continue the goal

of establishing "a fraternal union among all classes of society."[24] Channing hoped the

men chosen to carry out the work of the BFC would be just as zealous in their pursuit

of relationships between rich and poor. Through the Fraternity, Channning argued,

the ministers "have now access to our congregations, & it will be their fault if the

conditions, wants, & claims of the poor & means of [accounting] them in their highest

interests be not brought more frequently and effecty [sic] than ever before the minds

of the people."[25]

Tuckerman argued that the most important task for the Fraternity was to

continue and refine the practice of friendly visiting with the aim of cultivating "a

more xtian union of the classes of our society."[26] He also continued to argue for the

importance of lay visitation of the poor, urging Unitarians not to see the work of a

select group of ministers as fulfilling the duties for all. In an open letter to the

Executive Committee of the BFC, Tuckerman sought to remind the Committee and

the Unitarian readers of the *Christian Examiner* of the purpose of the ministry. The

ministry to the poor was the responsibility of all Christian believers, not a few

ministers, and certainly should not be left solely in the hands of a single association.

---

[24] William Ellery Channing, Letter to the Committee of the Unitarian Association on the Ministry at Large, July 1, 1833, William Ellery Channing Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[25] William Ellery Channing, Letter to Ezra Stiles Gannett, 17 July 1834, William Ellery Channing Papers. See also William Ellery Channing to [unknown], 12 August 1834, William Ellery Channing Papers.
[26] Joseph Tuckerman to William Ellery Channing, 25 August 1834, Joseph Tuckerman Correspondence, 1830-1840, BMS 105, Box 1, Archives and Manuscripts, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School. See also Joseph Tuckerman to William Ellery Channing, 25 September 1834, Joseph Tuckerman Correspondence, 1830-1840, BMS 105, Box 1.

"Christianity looks to far more important agencies, than those either of associated, or of deputed sympathy and interest. It addresses itself to every individual," he continued, "and it calls every individual to the offices which he can perform in its cause."[27]

Tuckerman feared that the BFC would turn into an easy escape for Unitarians who had no desire to participate in their duty of friendly visiting. By hiring more ministers-at-large and supporting them financially, elite Unitarians might feel little obligation to visit the poor themselves. Indeed, few Unitarians had ever expressed a desire to accompany Joseph Tuckerman on his friendly visiting rounds with the intent of taking up their own ministry to the poor. One of the constant sources of frustration for Tuckerman had been the lack of interest among lay Unitarians in creating the army of poor relief workers he had imagined. For Tuckerman, the creation of the BFC meant the church might take another step away from fostering the organic relationships required to maintain a healthy society.

To a certain extent, Tuckerman was correct. With the creation of the BFC came the hiring of new ministers-at-large who were much less concerned with friendly visiting than with caring for the poor collectively through church ministries. As the BFC began its work, the ministers-at-large adopted new techniques of handling poverty that reflected changing ideas of social stratification and the role of the church in binding rich and poor. These new ideas would lead to conflict that struck at the heart of Unitarians' faith.

---

[27] Joseph Tuckerman, "A Letter to the Executive Committee of the BFC, respecting their Organization for the Support of the Ministry at Large in Boston," *Christian Examiner and General*, November 1834, 232.

Chapel Ministries in the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches

With the creation of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches came a move away from friendly visiting and toward chapel ministries to the poor. With the BFC's financial assistance, the ministers to the poor who succeeded Tuckerman were able to open their own chapels, which they hoped would serve as a home base from which they could conduct their ministries of friendly visiting. Yet the demands of the chapel ministry, including weekly sermon preparation and the distraction of running a church building, pulled the ministers-at-large away from friendly visiting. At the same time, the chapels became the center of the social life of many lower-class Bostonians, who claimed the churches as their own. In the BFC chapels, the Unitarian ministry to the poor took on a new shape as Unitarian ministers encountered the poor in new ways.

By 1836, the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches had built two new chapels for the poor. The first, Warren Street Chapel, was opened in 1835 and served as Charles Francis Barnard's ministerial home. The Pitts Street Chapel was built one year later for Frederick T. Gray. In 1840 the Unitarian minister-at-large John Turner Sargent opened his own church, the Suffolk Street Chapel, in the southern part of the city. The chapels were usually filled to capacity, and hopeful worshippers sometimes had to be turned away. In 1839, the Pitts Street Chapel had 221 families in regular attendance, totally about eight hundred congregants.[28] John Turner Sargent reported the next year that 112 families attended his services regularly.[29]

---

[28] *The Fifth Annual Report of the Central Board of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches* (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1839), 10.
[29] *The Sixth Annual Report of the Central Board of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches* (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1840), 13.

The socio-economic status of the Unitarian free chapel congregants varied.

Robert Cassie Waterston, Gray's successor at the Pitts Street Chapel, reported on the

variety of congregants in his church, and it would be fair to assume that the Pitts

Street Chapel was similar to others in this respect. First, there were some who were

"in comfortable circumstances" who supported the church through their financial

assistance and by serving as Sunday School teachers. Waterston called such

supporters "his co-workers." For Sargent they were "props to the minister."[30] Sargent

reported that twenty-six families who chose to attend his free chapel "could support

the expense of other churches" through pew rentals, and indeed ten or twelve families

did own pews in other churches.[31] Second were those who "live by their daily toil,

and while they are in strength, manage with prudence to keep above want," but "who

by a short sickness, or some slight disappointment in business, would be stripped of

their scanty earnings and plunged into distress."[32] These were the workers of the city

who manned the docks in Boston harbor, made barrels, labored as carpenters, or held

a variety of positions simply as "laborers" in the ebb and flow of Boston's changing

economy.[33] Conspicuously absent from descriptions of the make-up of the free

chapels were the desperately poor, those who were confined to their homes, unable to

---

[30] *The Ninth Annual Report of the Central Board of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches* (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1843), 15; and *The Sixth Annual Report of the BFC*, 16.

[31] *Sixth Annual Report of the BFC*, 13.

[32] *Ninth Annual Report of the BFC*, 15. Gary Nash refers to this condition as "living poor," or poverty as a "condition of living impoverished" without the aid of "public relief and private charity." Nash, "Poverty and Politics in Early American History," in *Down and Out in Early America*, ed. Billy Smith (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 6.

[33] John Turner Sargent reported the occupations of his parishioners in his 1844 report to the BFC. They included "six housewrights, eight carpenters, two candle manufacturers, one book-binder, one schoolmaster, one confectioner, two seamen, four grocers, five blacksmiths, one wheelright, four teamsters, two coopers, six machinists, three curriers, one sign painter, sixteen laborers, four painters and glaziers, two masons, two tavern keepers, six who live in families, ten who work in piano-forte establishments, three shoemakers, two watchmen, six seamstresses, fifteen widows, and one portrait painter." *The Tenth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches* (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1844), 27-28.

find work, care properly for their families, or buy clothes suitable for church attendance. Such members of the community had been the object of Joseph Tuckerman's concern, and in the process of creating the free chapels, their needs often went unmet by the Unitarian ministers-at-large.

Indeed, the creation of the chapel ministries marked a move away from friendly visiting, which was meant to provide spiritual and physical sustenance to the most poor, toward an emphasis on the chapel ministry, with its myriad of programs for the marginal poor. Sargent and his fellow ministers were aware of this shift, but argued that the strain of preparing three sermons a week for chapel services was too draining to allow for consistent friendly visiting. By 1840, Sargent was conducting "three or four" visits a day during the winter, about half the number Tuckerman had conducted as minister-at-large.[34] The BFC recognized this shortfall and attempted to correct it by hiring new ministers whose exclusive ministry would be home visitation.[35] If Sargent had "some one to share the labor with him" then the ministry could "'be made to penetrate to the lowest depths of the community.'"[36] It was not until three years later that such a minister was hired.

---

[34] *Sixth Annual Report of the BFC*, 16.

[35] Attempts to enlist lay men and women as friendly visitors had largely failed, though a few women, like the intrepid Caroline Healey Dall, a Sunday School teacher at Boston's West Church, took up the task of friendly visiting as part of their Sunday School duties. Dall used her experience among the poor to help shape the ideas of the American Social Science Association, of which she was a founding member. Nevertheless, the paucity of volunteers like Dall meant the church lacked the necessary number of friendly visitors, and the AUA was forced to hire friendly visitors to supplement the work of the ministers-at-large. On Dall's work with the poor see *Daughter of Boston: The Extraordinary Diary of a Nineteenth-Century Woman*, ed. Helen R. Deese (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 21 and Nancy Bowman, "Caroline Healey Dall: Her Creation and Reform Career," in *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*, ed. Susan Porter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 121-46.

[36] *Sixth Annual Report of the BFC*, 18-19. The quote comes from John Turner Sargent's report to the BFC.

While the development of the chapel ministry diverted Unitarian resources from the most destitute poor, it created new opportunities for social interaction among members of the lower class, and new venues for encounters between them and Unitarian ministers. The chapels served a variety of functions for lower-class Bostonians that transcended simple religious and moral education. They were vocational training centers, sites of education, and social centers for the members of the free chapels. In some ways, the free chapels operated in much the same way as the settlement houses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In addition to offering Sunday church services to the poor, the free chapels instituted programs for training the lower class in vocational skills. Sewing circles were a staple of each chapel ministry. At the Pitts Street Chapel, for example, 200-400 girls participated in the sewing circle, which met every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon.[37] Middle-class women of the church, Waterston's and Sargent's "co-workers" and "props to the minister," would meet with the girls to offer instruction in sewing, and perhaps moral lessons. Not all of the girls who joined the sewing circle were members of the church; many came simply to learn one of the few skills that allowed women to earn a wage, even if meager. Because the number of women looking for sewing work far outweighed the number of available opportunities for performing "slopwork," the lower-class girls and women of Boston's neighborhoods took advantage of any opportunity to learn advanced sewing skills that might set them apart and give them an advantage when looking for seamstress work.

The chapels also served as locations of education for young men seeking to establish themselves in the community. At the Pitts Street Chapel, the Society of

---

[37] *Fifth Annual Report of the BFC*, 12.

Young Men for Mutual Improvement met every other week to hear a lecture or to

discuss a moral topic. Most of the young men were apprentices and clerks, upwardly

mobile youths who required more formal education to move out of the ranks of the

marginal poor. The mutual improvement societies provided an opportunity for young

men to improve their social as well as intellectual skills. They gave the young men

an alternative to the perceived temptations of the lower-class world, occupying "their

time and thoughts in innocent pursuit," engaging them "on the side of virtue," and

providing "an opportunity for acquiring information and influence."[38] The ministers

believed that through debates and lectures, the young men of the free chapels were

preparing themselves for life in the middle-class world of social graces and

respectability.[39]

Similarly, every Unitarian free chapel maintained a library. The Pitts Street

Chapel had two, one for the Sunday School and the other for the Chapel, "for the

benefit of the worshipers." The Sunday School library held 820 volumes for both

pupils and teachers, probably Sunday School preparation texts for the teachers and

didactic moral texts for the youngsters. The main Chapel library maintained 530

volumes, including the works of Carl Follen, a Harvard professor of literature, and

probably other texts from the growing body of Unitarian literature. The libraries were

meant to promote domestic harmony, to allow the "poor laborer" to "pass in a rational

manner his leisure hours," instead of losing his time, money, and moral character to

the saloon. "Children can read to their fathers and parents to children, and thus will

---

[38] *Fifth Annual Report of the BFC*, 13.
[39] For a discussion of the importance of mutual improvement associations to male culture see E.
Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the
Modern Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 67-71.

the pleasures of the home become more refined and elevated," Robert Cassie

Waterston remarked.[40] Such remarks indicated a desire to foster the values of

domesticity and self-improvement in the free chapel attendees. Yet, the attendees

participated quite willingly in this project. The chapel attendees eagerly took

advantage of the available literature. In 1843 the children and teachers of the Sunday

School borrowed over three thousand volumes, and the regular Chapel attendees, over

one thousand.[41] The parishioners volunteered their time to run the libraries, and the

number of congregants who borrowed materials far exceeded the expectations of the

chapel ministers.

The lower-class members of the free Unitarian chapels claimed the chapels as

their own, investing their time and resources in the church. Several families

approached John Turner Sargent, for example, requesting that they be able to pay to

attend his services and offering a sort of pew rent without claiming rights to a

particular pew. When he adopted a plan to take up a collection, the church members

gave willingly. "There is a very natural, and may we not say, laudable, disinclination

with many to avail of what is offered gratuitously or comes to them too cheap," he

reported. "They prefer to pay something, be it ever so little, —nor can we doubt that

the benediction bestowed upon 'the widow's mite,' goes with all such free will

offerings."[42] Robert Cassie Waterston reported that his parishioners donated both

money and their artisanal skills to the upkeep of the church. When the congregants

heard the BFC was to pay for repairs to the chapel, they took up an offering

---

[40] *The Eighth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches*
(Boston: Isaac R. Butts, 1842), 11-12.
[41] *Ninth Annual Report of the BFC*, 12.
[42] *Eighth Annual Report of the BFC*, 11-12.

themselves, though, as Waterston reported, "many gave, who by so doing put themselves to great inconvenience." Carpenters and painters donated their time to repair the church, "without the slightest expense to any out of the Chapel; and the whole movement was an evidence of practical interest delightful to witness."[43]

The intense involvement of the free chapel attendees in the life of the church created close relationships between them and the ministers. Sargent, especially, had a close bond with his parishioners, whose respect for his leadership ran deep. In April 1843 the congregation gave Sargent a gift of a silver pitcher, and in the accompanying letter praised him for his guidance. "You have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner," they wrote. The letter was signed by a majority of the congregation.[44] The love Sargent's congregation showed to him was partly a response to his empathy for them and his genuine efforts to grant them dignity. Sargent displayed sensitivity to the embarrassment many of his congregants felt about their economic situations. He refused to share details of the lives of his parishioners in his reports to the BFC out of a belief that it was inappropriate to "make a printed story out of their sufferings and experience."[45]

The free chapel attendees, desiring to show a middle-class sense of propriety, paid particular attention to dressing appropriately for Sunday services. Joseph Tuckerman argued in his early reports for his ministry-at-large that many Bostonians

---

[43] *Ninth Annual Report of the BFC*,12-13.

[44] *Records of the Ministry at Large; in Connection with the Suffolk Street Chapel: Including the Early History of that Chapel Under its First Minister John T. Sargent, From May 1ˢᵗ 1837 to Jany 1ˢᵗ 1845*, Unitarian Universalist Association.

[45] *Tenth Annual Report of the BFC*, 25. This is contrary to the common tendency of poor relief reformers to turn charity into spectacle. On charity as spectacle see Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 176-204 and Sonya Michel, "Dorothea Dix; or, the Voice of the Maniac," *Discourse* 17, no. 2 (1994-95): 49-66.

stayed at home on Sundays instead of attending church because they had no attire appropriate for church attendance. Indeed, one of the reasons Tuckerman gave for the importance of the ministry-at-large was to provide a site where such Bostonians could attend church outside the gaze of their better-dressed social betters.[46] Wearing one's Sunday clothes was a sign not only of respect for the holiness of the Sabbath, but also an indication of one's location in the hierarchy of social relationships.[47] In colonial Massachusetts officials had regulated by law the clothing of the poor, prohibiting them from wearing anything outside clothing fitted for their social status. While such laws were long past and probably never enforced, they indicated the importance of clothing to the establishment of social hierarchy. Informal social regulation of dress was still powerful.[48]

Boston's poor had both knowledge of and access to the fashion of elite and middle-class members of Boston society. Ironically, this access came partly from the very elites who tried to separate themselves from the masses by way of fashion. Many of the poor congregants of the Unitarian free chapels received their clothing from the sewing circles associated with the ministry-at-large. The Tuckerman Sewing Circle and the Howard Sewing Circle were the two largest makers and distributors of free clothes for the poor in the Unitarian ministry.[49] Moreover, many

---

[46] Tuckerman, "A Letter to the Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches," 223.
[47] Eric Leigh Schmidt, "'A Church-Going People are a Dress-Loving People,'" *Church History* 58, no. 1 (1989): 36-51; Hilda Kuper, "Costume and Identity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15, no. 3 (1973): 348-67; and Pamela Klassen, "The Robes of Womanhood," *Religion and American Culture* 14, no. 1 (2004): 39-82.
[48] Schmidt, "A Church-Going People are a Dress-Loving People," 38-39. On Puritan sumptuary laws see Gary North, "The Puritan Experiment with Sumptuary Legislation," *Freeman* 24, no. 6 (1974): 341-55.
[49] Women of the Unitarian church founded the Tuckerman Sewing Circle in 1827 to assist Tuckerman in his ministry. They raised money for Tuckerman's poor's purse by selling hand-made craft items, made clothes for children, and distributed second-hand clothes to their parents. The Howard Sewing

women who attended the free chapels earned money by engaging in "slop work,"
producing the fashions their middle-class counterparts used to differentiate
themselves from poor women.[50] The members of the free chapels also learned about
middle-class fashion by watching those who taught the Sunday School classes and
preached sermons in the chapels. The closeness of Boston city life led to intimate
interactions between rich and poor, and sharing social space allowed the poor to gain
knowledge of elite and middle-class fashion by simple observation on the streets of
the city.

The poor members of the Unitarian chapel used this knowledge to their
advantage. They self-consciously fashioned themselves in the clothing of the middle-
class. In a world in which outward appearance could be used as a sign of social
mobility, the poor were just as eager as their benefactors to perform their movement
into the middle class. John Turner Sargent made this point while chastising his
colleagues who would seek to determine the social class of his congregants based on
their appearance. "We judge too much by external and equivocal signs," he wrote.
"A very common remark of the stranger who enters our Chapels, is, —'Why, these
people are not all poor, are they?' 'They look very respectably,' &c." But Sargent
questioned what a Unitarian elite expected to see in the free chapels. "One would

Circle was founded in 1832 by the women teachers of the Howard Sunday School, associated with
Tuckerman's, and then Gray's, ministry. They established a visiting committee to distribute the
clothing, and by 1835 they were distributing over one hundred articles of clothing a year. See "The
Tuckerman Sewing Circle," File for Joseph Tuckerman, Unitarian Universalist Association Inactive
Minister Files, 1825-1999, BMS 1446, Box 231, Archives and Manuscripts, Andover-Harvard
Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, and Record of the Howard Sewing Circle, Bulfinch
Place Church, Boston, MA Records, BMS 140, Box 4, Archives and Manuscripts, Andover-Harvard
Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School.

[50] Nan Enstad discusses this phenomenon in the early twentieth century in *Ladies of Labor, Girls of
Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth
Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 22.

think that he expected to see a congregation all dressed in rags," he remarked.

Sargent reminded his audience, many of whom were the misguided visitors he had

just spoken of, that "pride of appearance is as strong with the poor as the rich." And,

furthermore, he argued, the visitor to the chapel "forgets that the greatest exertions

are made by them, to appear well and respectably clad on the Sabbath, and that often

the dress which he points out, as indicating in the wearer a prosperous condition, was

bestowed in charity."[51]

There were probably several reasons why the poor chose to dress themselves

in middle-class Sunday dress. Sargent was surely correct to assume that his lower-

class congregants were particularly fastidious in their appearance out of pride and a

sense of reverence. Robert Cassie Waterston argued that his congregants, who were

"industrial, frugal and neat," were "with a careful economy" able "to obtain some

humble luxuries, among which are appropriate apparel for the Lord's day."

According to Waterston, "There is among many such a just self-respect, and so true a

regard for the house of God, as to make them somewhat sensitive on this point."[52]

The men and women who attended his church on Sunday were aware that their dress

displayed both a sense of self-worth and religious piety. Their clothing labeled them

as respectable worshippers and supported their activities as righteous Christians, a

designation they also earned by their active involvement in their churches.

While the dress of the poor was an outgrowth of their sense of pride as church

congregants, the lower class free chapel attendees also knew that the "politics of

---

[51] *Sixth Annual Report of the BFC*, 14-15.
[52] *Ninth Annual Report of the BFC*, 15.

respectability" required certain actions and outward appearances.[53] If they were to be taken seriously as worthy recipients of aid, they needed to display their moral uprightness to their benefactors. By dressing in a way that made them indistinguishable from their supporters, however, they also challenged traditional notions of social status and hierarchy of many Unitarians. Their use of dress, then, even while mimicking that of the upper class, was at the same time subversive of it.[54]

The appearance of the attendees of the free Unitarian churches belied the notion of the "ragged poor" that was prevalent among nineteenth-century reformers. Reform pamphlets about poverty usually displayed their poor subjects in unmistakably humble appearance—tattered dresses and trousers, soiled faces, spiked hair, and bare feet—all of which served to identify the poor in a way that was intended to touch the hearts and "connect the actions" of readers with the "suffering" of the pamphlets' characters.[55] When the social chasm was narrowed by the actions of the poor, elites, who had been inundated with these images, did not know how to handle the resultant ambiguity.[56] Whatever the intentions of the poor, their actions

---

[53] The phrase "politics of respectability" comes from Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's work on African-American Baptist women at the turn of the twentieth century. See her *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). Higginbotham discusses the emphasis black women placed on public behavior in subverting stereotypes of African-American womanhood. While lower-class white Bostonians experienced a different type of stigmatization, they adopted similar tactics to accomplish similar goals.
[54] Other discussions of the use of clothing for subversive purposes and asserting independence include Klassen, "The Robes of Womanhood;" Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Clothing and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 3, no. 148 (1995): 149-86; Peter Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?' Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability," *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 3 (1979): 336-53; and Simon P. Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 100-2.
[55] Lacqueur,"Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," 177.
[56] A useful discussion of elite views of the poor and the ways images influenced them is Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially chapter 2. Koven argues that London's poor children used the image of raggedness to their advantage, manipulating their appearance to appear more destitute than they really were. See also Lyn Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space* (New York: Basic

produced chaos among the Unitarian leaders of the BFC. The disruption caused by

the inability to recognize the poor in the free chapels brought to the surface

disagreements that had long been simmering regarding the proper way to educate the

poor. The question of how to balance friendly visiting with chapel attendance, a

question intimately tied to ideas of social relationships and the politics of class

interaction, occupied the minds of the leaders of the BFC. These questions led to a

debate that tapped into underlying differences in theopolitical and social beliefs and

eventually weakened both the BFC and the Unitarian church.

Controversy in the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, the presence and behavior of the poor in the

free Unitarian chapels caused the leaders of Boston's Unitarian church to wrestle over

the purposes and methods of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches. Some Unitarians

believed the BFC had strayed from its original purpose—fostering organic

relationships between rich and poor through friendly visiting. Those who argued this

were usually first-generation Unitarians who continued to believe that social

hierarchy was natural. However, others who also believed in social hierarchy

supported the Unitarian free chapels. They argued that the chapels allowed the rich to

care for the poor more broadly and that the free chapels would serve as valuable sites

of moral uplift, preparing the poor for eventual entrance into the established Unitarian

churches of the city. Still others proposed that such an attitude about the free chapels

was a sign of dangerous social differentiation that belied the Unitarian belief in

---

Books, 1973). Lofland argues that order in the preindustrial city was possible because certain
"appearential" codes allowed strangers to identify one another even though they knew little about each
other. Once the technology of fabric production allowed the poor to emulate their social "betters" in
appearance, new tools such as spatial differentiation were adopted.

185

spiritual equality among all humans. As these viewpoints came together, underlying debates that had been simmering in the church about the limits of theological liberalism came to a boiling point. Controversies in the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches spilled into larger doctrinal debates because such debates were intimately tied to notions of class and society among Unitarians.

In a highly contentious meeting on October 1, 1837, the Executive Committee of the BFC engaged in a spirited discussion about the nature of the ministry and the question of whether the ministry should focus on individual visitation or Sunday church services for the poor. The immediate spark for the debate was the dress of John Turner Sargent's parishioners. The Executive Committee of the BFC had admonished Sargent two days earlier to "discourage the attendance at his chapel of all families & individuals that belong to any of our regularly established churches and" to avoid any attempt to "influence the Catholic Irish to attend the chapels of this ministry."[57] Those who had warned Sargent to keep out those classes that did not belong in his church based their assessment of the social status of his parishioners on their dress. The appearance of the free chapel attendees served as a central point of contention about their social status and their proper place in the church.

The remarks of L.G. Pray, of the 12th Congregational Church, shed light on the issue at hand. Pray argued that the worshippers at the free chapels were "of the right sort," meaning members of the lower class. According to Pray, "it was not just to drawn [sic] an influence as to their station from their <u>dress</u>," because "no American

---

[57] Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, Record Books, 29 September 1837, Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in the City of Boston. Records, 1827-1928, BMS 460, Box 2.

186

however poor will come to church unless he is decently clad."[58] Pray's statement

reveals one of the most important concerns of the Unitarian ministers—the question

of who was rich and who was poor and how to tell the difference. It also illuminates

how poor chapel attendees, however inadvertently, stoked the fires of debate about

their place in Boston's elite Unitarian society.

The skirmish over the appearance of Sargent's parishioners led to a full-scale

battle during which larger questions of social hierarchy in the church surfaced. Some

Unitarians argued that the respectable appearance of Sargent's parishioners belied

their impoverished status. If those being served in the church were not poor, they

contended, the free chapel ministers were doing little to foster organic relationships

between rich and poor. Some argued that the most effective way to encourage such

relationships was through the friendly visiting approach Tuckerman had taken.

Jonathan Phillips, a judge who had served as an Overseer of the Poor, remarked that

the success of the chapels was eclipsing the ongoing necessity of friendly visiting.

"In no other way than by a direct & frequent exhibition of personal sympathy" would

the poor be "raised from the deplorable evils" of their lives, he remarked.[59]

Reverend Francis Parkman, minister of the New North Church, disagreed with

Phillips's analysis of the question over visiting and chapel ministries, displaying an

insightful recognition of the heart of the problem. "[T]he very success which has

attended the religious services," he wrote, "in some degree contributed to defeat the

primary object of this institution." For, by "bringing in the poor, it raised them from

their former sphere & placed them upon a footing with many" in Boston's Unitarian

---

[58] Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, Minutes, 1 October 1837,
Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in the City of Boston. Records, 1827-1928, BMS 460, Box 1.
[59] Ibid.

churches. The question was not one of whether to balance friendly visiting with preaching, but what to do with the population of the poor who, having received an education in the tenets of the faith, began to put it into practice and moved beyond their physical as well as theirs spiritual poverty. Parkman suggested these people should now be "parishioners of our associated societies." [60]

At last, the question that had surely been on the minds of Boston's Unitarians but had gone unspoken for three years, was laid on the table. If the goal of the Unitarian ministry to the poor was to create a seamless society, one in which the rich and poor were indistinguishable in terms of faith, how could the Unitarian denomination justify keeping the classes separate on Sunday morning? How could Unitarian ministers-at-large be criticized for allowing members of different classes to mingle in their church? And how could the wealthiest Bostonians, members of the elite King's Chapel, Federal Street Church, and Brattle Street Church, rationalize keeping their spiritual peers shut out by their prohibitive pew rates?

These questions lay unanswered until 1843, when the debate over the appearance of the free chapel attendees resurfaced and once again raised questions about the nature of the ministry to the poor. William Ware, editor of the *Christian Examiner*, fired the first salvo in this second battle over the ministry in a September 1843 editorial in his journal. While ministries founded on Tuckerman's method of friendly visiting were thriving in Great Britain, Ware reported, Boston's Unitarian ministry had fallen on hard times because it had experienced a crisis of vision. "The institution as at first established has so changed its character, that it can scarcely be said to exist," he argued. Instead, it had been replaced by a church system that, while

---

[60] Ibid.

188

admirable, was ineffective. "These churches, with their large, well looking, and well dressed congregations, and their preaching ministers, are not the Ministry at Large," he argued, for they did not meet the poor at their most vulnerable points, "in garret, cellar, alley, and lane." The problem with prioritizing chapel ministries over visiting ministries was twofold. First, chapels, by their nature, excluded those whose "wickedness and their rags" prohibited them from attending church. Second, and more importantly, the diminution of visiting cut the most effective tie between rich and poor. "We cannot imagine a better plan for putting these two great classes of society on the best possible footing in relation to each other" than the ministry-at-large, Ware wrote. By giving up the visiting ministry to chapels, "a medium of frequent and trustworthy communication" that had been "established between rich and poor" and was "of the utmost value to both classes" was lost.[61] The only way to maintain true organic ties between the classes was by meeting the poor where they were most vulnerable and most needed education—in their homes.

Ware was correct in asserting that the chapel ministry had begun to eclipse friendly visiting and that in the new chapel system, the needs of the most desperate poor were ignored. Following the publication of his article, the Executive Committee of the BFC met to discuss again the practically of hiring assistants to the ministers-at-large whose sole task would be visiting the poor.[62] They also responded to Ware's criticism that the chapel ministry consisted of middle-class congregations who were

---

[61] William Ware, "The Eighth Report of the London Domestic Mission Society," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, September 1843, 126-28.

[62] Minutes, Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, 8 October 1843 and 22 October 1843, Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in the City of Boston. Records, 1827-1928, BMX 460, Box 1. One of the major debates over the hiring of new visitors was whether they should be ministers or lay members of the church. The BFC did hire new visitors, who functioned as part-time salaried ministers.

"nearly or quite able to take care of themselves" and thus barely distinguishable from other Unitarian churches.[63] The Executive Committee began to scrutinize who was attending the free chapels and whether they were the poor population for whom the chapels were intended. As they did so, related questions about the nature of class in the church the desirability of separating the poor from elites continued to boil to the surface.

While the Executive Committee of the BFC took Ware's criticism seriously, some Unitarian ministers took offense at his remarks and defended the emphasis on chapel ministry in the BFC. They did so for different reasons, however. Some, like Robert Cassie Waterston, argued that the chapels provided a place where the poor could come to be trained in the basic tenets of the faith and taught skills that would allow them to establish the self-sufficiency necessary to escape poverty. According to the proponents of this view, who maintained an emphasis on social hierarchy, once the poor had received this basic education they could then join the mainstream Unitarian church. Others, including John Turner Sargent, defended the chapels for reasons that contradicted their colleagues' arguments. They proposed that the free chapels served as sites where the rich and poor met together and where pernicious class distinctions were erased in the light of spiritual equality.

In the middle of the contentious debate over the chapel ministry and its relationship to friendly visiting, Robert Cassie Waterston responded to Ware's criticisms by arguing that his church at the Pitts Street Chapel was one for the poor only. As he explained it, his chapel served as a way station for the poor on their way to the more established churches of the city. "If persons are often brought from a

---

[63] Ware, "Eighth Report of the London Domestic Mission Society," 127.

neglect of religion and its institutions, *to attend* the Chapels connected with this

ministry, so they are often introduced *from* our Chapels *to the various churches*

around," he wrote. "Many during the past year, by my advice and with my most

hearty good wishes, have left our Chapel and connected themselves with other

churches of our faith." While their experience at his church had been edifying, the

success of the chapel in raising them out of their destitution meant "it was better for

them to unite with another church, and thus leave room for others."[64] Waterston,

then, took pride in the fact that his church was for the poor only, that it served the

needs of a particular part of the community and then prepared them for entry into

more established churches. While rejecting Ware's criticisms of the lack of friendly

visiting, Waterston simultaneously agreed with Ware that social hierarchy required

the poor to be separated from the rich for a time so that they might be educated in

preparation for advancement to a higher social and spiritual level.

     John Turner Sargent also defended his chapel ministry, but used different

reasoning than Waterston. He completely dismissed the argument that the chapels

should serve as locations where the poor were separated for the purpose of moral and

spiritual education. Such arguments, he proposed, contradicted Unitarians' belief that

the various classes should work together in a process of mutual service and

edification. Yet, even while Sargent claimed that his chapel served the purpose of

fostering organic relationships, he rejected the belief that hierarchy was natural and

essential to the health of such relationships. Instead, Sargent emphasized the spiritual

equality of rich and poor and argued that the first generation of Unitarians had

succumb to a snobbery that was harming the church.

---

[64] *Tenth Annual Report of the BFC*, 19.

Soon after Ware published his critical article, an anonymous critic, most likely Sargent, responded to Ware's criticisms in the *Christian Examiner*. Contrary to Ware's argument, Sargent stated, free chapels fulfilled the spirit of Tuckerman's ministry more fully than practicing friendly visiting alone. Tuckerman himself had begun a free chapel, and the majority of the congregants in his church were the destitute poor Ware had said were ignored by the chapel ministry. Furthermore, while it was true that some who attended the chapels were not "absolutely" poor, this was "considered by many as one of their [the chapels'] most beautiful features." For, by mixing the middle class and poor in the churches, the poor were prevented from being cut off as a caste. "Those who are not absolutely poor are willing to mingle with those who are less fortunate, and labor for their good," Sargent wrote. "They are generally elevated but a little above poverty themselves, and to the very utmost of their ability these individuals contribute to the support of the chapels and the institutions of religion." Furthermore, "To cut off such persons from attending the chapels, would be like cutting off the right hand of the ministry. These are the connecting links which run up from the lowest towards the higher."[65]

This argument—that the presence of middle-class congregants served as an effective bridge between rich and poor—was a crucial one and a direct challenge to the Executive Committee of the BFC. As they had in 1837, the Executive Committee of the BFC continued to criticize Sargent for allowing members of the middle and upper classes into his church. Sargent's dismissive attitude toward such criticisms reveals his concern over the BFC's vision of the ministry to the poor. While

---

[65] "The Ministry at Large in Boston," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, November 1843, 244-57.

Waterston highlighted the fact that his church consisted only of the poor, Sargent saw such statements as pernicious evidence of artificial social differentiation, which he sought to eradicate by allowing the rich and poor to meet as spiritual equals in the free chapels.

In the face of continued resistance from the BFC and his fellow ministers to class-mingling in his church, Sargent argued that the lower middle-class—those who were "not very poor, nor yet. . . rich"—should not be excluded from his chapel because of the BFC's rule of allowing only the very poor into the chapels. Sargent found "those rules and views erroneous in point of policy." According to Sargent, the loss of the middle-class in the free chapels to the injudicious rules of the BFC was harmful. He wrote, "we not only lose the cooperation of such as might help us in the Sunday School and in other ways, but we ultimately widen the separation between the poor and the more prosperous."[66]

By the early 1840s, then, questions were bubbling to the surface over exactly what the nature of the ministry to the poor should look like. These questions were tied to larger debates about the nature of the organic social vision that had long been central to Unitarianism. Did organic relationships require social hierarchy, or did hierarchy perpetuate unjust social structures? Unitarians were decreasingly able to come to agreement about these fundamental questions. In 1844, the debate over the Unitarian free chapels reached a new height when these became entwined with intense theological debate about the nature of theological liberalism. Once again, John Turner Sargent was placed in the middle of a swirling controversy, one that ultimately did irreparable damage to the ministry-at-large and to the Unitarian church.

---

[66] *Tenth Annual Report of the BFC*, 27.

"Their Own Verdict of Dissolution"

In late 1844 and early 1845 John Turner Sargent found himself at the center of a storm involving the Unitarian ministry to the poor. Sargent's continued refusal to keep the middle and upper classes out of his chapel, as well as a controversial pulpit exchange with the divisive Unitarian Theodore Parker, alienated him from the Executive Committee of the BFC. In the debate between Sargent and the BFC, discordant ideas of social thought and theology came into open conflict. Sargent's changing understanding of the Unitarian church, its doctrine, and its social make-up reflected a common trend among second-generation Unitarians—a movement away from the hierarchy of organicism toward egalitarianism, and a renewed emphasis on the necessity of theological liberalism for the health of church and society. The outcome of the controversy—Sargent's departure from the ministry—was an ominous sign that the fragile Unitarian synthesis of the individual and society in Unitarian organic social thought had been irreparably damaged.

In 1844 Sargent responded to those who had criticized him for allowing rich and poor to mingle in his church. His sermon *Rich and Poor* not only emphasized the need for mixed-class chapel services, but also directly challenged Unitarian ideas of social hierarchy. *Rich and Poor* tied Christianity to the American democratic spirit in a more direct way than most Unitarians would have been comfortable with. "That great truth which nerved our country in her struggle from freedom . . . the truth, namely, that 'all men are created equal,' is but the transcript of that holier sentiment which runs throughout the Gospel record," Sargent argued. Nevertheless, the ideas of liberty and equality had become divorced from their proper biblical foundations, and

tied in the public mind to radical movements, "agrarian schemes, advocated by the insane demagogue." Sargent sought to reclaim the biblical foundations of equality—an equality characterized by the biblical truth that "the rich and the poor meet together."[67]

How did the rich and the poor meet together? They held a common spiritual origin and a shared human nature. They also had common abilities to understand the Bible as the revealed word of God, for "in the light of revelation, as under the light of nature, they are called equally to rejoicing and to privilege." William Ellery Channing had emphasized the need to evoke the unrefined sentiments of the poor, who would otherwise be confused by the "vague language" of the typical Boston Unitarian sermon.[68] Yet Sargent argued that the principles of Christianity, available to all, transcended class distinctions and were readily accessible to all hearers. Directly challenging those who would argue for the separation of rich and poor in the free chapels, Sargent also wondered who was at fault if the rich and poor did not meet together in Sunday services; he clearly blamed his fellow Unitarians for perpetuating unhealthy class distinctions.[69]

Rich and Poor was a call for a renewal of the spirit of interclass interaction that Tuckerman had emphasized. Concerned by the classism he saw among his fellow Unitarians, Sargent argued for a return to a time when organic ties of mutuality bound the rich and poor together. Yet, Sargent's call for a renewal of organic ties between rich and poor revealed a new, more egalitarian ethos. This egalitarianism

---

[67] John Turner Sargent, *The Rich and Poor* (Boston: Leonard C. Bowles, 1844), 3-4.
[68] William Ellery Channing, "Charge," in *A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of Charles Francis Barnard and Frederick T. Gray, as Ministers at Large in Boston, by Joseph Tuckerman; with the Charge by William E. Channing* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1834), 43.
[69] Ibid, 8.

reflected the effects of a strengthening democratic spirit on Sargent and other Unitarians. Sargent, like other second-generation Unitarians, argued that social hierarchy in the church was no longer acceptable because it too often translated into a belief in hierarchy before God. Yet the Executive Committee of the BFC rejected Sargent's justification for allowing class-mingling in his church. They responded to *Rich and Poor* with a demand that Sargent remember the goal of the ministry—the maintenance of a system of tutelage of the poor by the rich. By the end of 1844, Sargent and the Executive Committee of the BFC had come to an impasse.

One of the key underlying issues in Sargent's struggle with the BFC Executive Committee was his migration, along with his fellow second-generation Unitarians, toward Transcendentalist philosophy. By 1844, a major rift had occurred between older and younger Unitarians over basic epistemological questions that had important implications for Unitarian understandings of class and hierarchy. Transcendentalists challenged the notion that all knowledge was received, either from observation or divine revelation. Instead, they argued, humans ordered the world according to understandings from their own minds, which they then used to comprehend the external world.[70] For Unitarian Transcendentalists, the Unitarian approach to poor relief, with its emphasis on elites educating the poor in spiritual matters, failed to recognize that the poor themselves had sufficient means to educate themselves.[71]

It is not coincidental, then, that Sargent's departure from the BFC finally resulted from an argument over theological liberalism. In 1844 Sargent engaged in a

---

[70] Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 78-80.
[71] See chapter 5 on the debate between Transcendentalists and Unitarians and its implications for the Unitarian ministry to the poor.

controversial pulpit exchange with Theodore Parker, whose presence in Boston's Unitarian community had long been a thorn in the side of conservative Unitarian leaders. Parker's heterodox religious beliefs, when combined with a stubborn self-righteousness, continually caused trouble for Unitarian leaders and himself. Parker, unlike Sargent, did not fit the usual mold of a Boston Unitarian minister. He was not a member of the Boston elite but the son of a Lexington farmer, and he was unable to afford the tuition at Harvard. With the assistance of a benevolent friend, Parker was admitted to Harvard Divinity School, from which he graduated a few years after Sargent. The crux of Parker's theological dispute with Boston Unitarians was whether the events depicted in the Bible, especially the miracles, were true events. For many Unitarians, recognizing the factuality of the biblical revelation was essential to understanding religious truth. Parker denied this, arguing that the Bible, and its claims of Jesus's divinity, was a "transient" element of Christian faith, less important than the "Absolute Religion" of fidelity to "permanent" spiritual laws as perfected in the life of Christ and revealed in nature. This view, a manifestation of Transcendentalism, riled many Unitarians who wondered how one who denied the special revelation of the Bible could call himself a Christian.

Parker also angered Boston Unitarians by supporting Unitarian clergy whose reform efforts put them at odds with their wealthy congregants. He defended John Pierpont, the minister of the Unitarian Hollis Street Church, who had come into conflict with wealthy members of his congregation. Pierpont had helped to spearhead passage of the fifteen-gallon law in 1838, which prohibited selling liquor in quantities less than fifteen gallons. When Pierpont's case was brought before an ecclesiastical

council in 1841, Parker defended Pierpont, whose only crime, according to Parker, was "preaching against the actual sins of his own parish," many of whom were involved with the production and selling of rum.[72] Parker's reform agitation and stubbornness in what many considered to be heretical views created further distance between him and leading Unitarians of the city. In 1843 the American Unitarian Association, who could not officially ban Parker from their organization, asked him to resign as a member, which he refused to do.

It was in this charged atmosphere that John Turner Sargent exchanged pulpits with Parker in November 1844. Sargent knew the exchange would cause controversy, but there is little evidence he had second thoughts about exchanging with someone who had been shunned by the Unitarian community. Parker was the perfect test case to prove Sargent's mettle in his commitment to liberality of religious thought. Sargent had already come into open conflict with the BFC over his willingness to defy their demand that he carefully separate the poor from the middle class in his church. His exchange with Parker may have been an attempt to provoke further agitation in an effort to challenge the authority of the BFC. Sargent had exchanged pulpits with Parker in 1841 and had been asked by the BFC to avoid doing so in the future. Parker's actions in the Pierpont case and his continued disruption of the Unitarian communion in Boston following Sargent's first exchange with Parker made the second exchange even more egregious to the BFC.

The pulpit-exchange controversy became fodder for public consumption when the correspondence between Sargent and the Executive Committee of the BFC was published in the Unitarian *Christian Register* in January 1845. The letters sent by the

---

[72] Quoted in Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 351.

Executive Committee and Sargent were fairly civil at the outset, but grew

increasingly strident in tone. In the first letter, written on November 22, 1844, the

Executive Committee of the BFC issued a charge prohibiting the ministers at large

from exchanging pulpits with Parker. Their reasons for doing so were twofold. First,

they argued, by exchanging with Parker, Sargent had jeopardized the financial

stability of the BFC. Donors to the BFC would be less willing to donate money if

Parker was allowed to continue preaching in free Unitarian chapels. If philanthropists

refused Parker entry to their own churches, why should they support other churches

that did so? The "confidence of the Brethren of the Fraternity in the usefulness of this

ministry will receive a shock," the Executive Committee of the BFC wrote, and

"there will be reason to apprehend that the stream of a liberal bounty in many a pious

and benevolent bosom, will be diverted into other channels."[73]

More quietly, however, the executive committee of the BFC also feared the

consequences of Parker's heretical views being preached from the pulpit of the poor

churches. They only hinted at this objection, wondering what the consequences

would be if "Mr. Parker shall, as a teacher, gain access to the poor," but Sargent was

more forceful in pushing the argument that the BFC's objections were not just about

Parker's heresies but also based on discrimination toward the poor. For Sargent, the

pulpit exchange controversy revealed the tendency of conservative Unitarians to shun

those whose message might have implications that would challenge hierarchical

social structures that sustained conservative Unitarians as social and cultural

leaders.[74] "Falling back, *in terrorem*, against the legitimate deductions of their

---

[73] *Christian Register*, 18 January 1845, 24.
[74] Ibid.

199

principles" of theological liberalism, Sargent later wrote, the Unitarian church had

"put on the shackles to their own wrists, and passed their own verdict of

dissolution."[75]

Unbeknownst to the Executive Committee, Sargent had written a letter

tendering his resignation the day before they met to prohibit pulpit exchanges with

Parker. In his letter, Sargent alluded to "feelings of disaffection already existing"

between him and the Committee. For years Sargent had butted heads with the

Committee over the demographics of his congregation. The pulpit exchange

controversy had finally irreparably damaged an already fragile relationship, and

Sargent believed it was time for him to resign. When the Committee suggested that

Sargent reconsider his resignation, he wrote back in a tone so strident that the

Committee could only assume he wished to have no further part of the BFC.

Believing that the Executive Committee held an "inexorable disaffection" for him,

Sargent argued that he could only resign to avoid the "serious and weighty prejudice"

that he was sure would be lobbied against him. Sargent contended that he

sympathized with the Executive Committee in their concern for the ministry, but he

also suggested that the Committee was being disingenuous in its objections to

Parker's presence in the free chapels. Several Boston Unitarian pastors shared

Parker's views, Sargent wrote, and the congregations of the city were "athirst" to hear

them. The real problem was not Parker's theological views, but the same problem the

conservative Unitarians of the city had with John Pierpont: using the pulpit as a

---

[75] John Turner Sargent, *The Crisis of Unitarianism in Boston, as Connected with the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society; With Some Account of the Origin and Decline of that Organization* (Boston: Walker, Wise, and Company, 1859), 16 and Sargent, *Theodore Parker, The Reform Pulpit, and the Influences that Oppose It: A Sermon Preached at the Melodeon, November 7, 1852* (Boston: B.H. Greene, 1852), 16-17.

platform to preach radical ideas. "Surely it is not pretended that Mr. Pierpont is

theologically a heretic," Sargent stated. "There must, therefore, be some other reason

for the exclusion in his case." For Sargent, the "singular" similarity between

Parker's and Pierpont's experiences revealed that the Committee's objections were

not to Parker's so-called heretical views, but to his boldness in using the pulpit as a

tool of reform. Sargent, taking an accusatory tone, had burned his bridges, and the

Committee accepted his resignation.[76]

Shortly after the acrimonious correspondence between Sargent and the

Executive Committee, Sargent preached at the Hollis Street church, site of Pierpont's

own struggle with his congregation. In a sermon entitled *Obstacles to Truth*, Sargent

laid out his philosophy about freedom of the pulpit and the tendency of wealthy

congregants to pay their ministers to preach only that which satisfied their selfish and

materialistic spirits. The rich "really seem to think that, because they have settled a

minister, and pay him a salary, they have bought, thereby, the exclusive right to his

faith, conscience, and liberty," he angrily preached.[77] He later wrote anonymously a

scathing pamphlet excoriating the BFC and the American Unitarian Association for

their narrowness and chastising R.C. Waterston for accepting the prohibition against

exchanging pulpits with Parker.[78] His final thoughts in the records of the Suffolk

Street Chapel, which he wrote as a close to the tumultuous events of December and

January 1845, sum up his opinion about the controversy. "Theodore Parker is not the

---

[76] Ibid.

[77] John Turner Sargent, *Obstacles to the Truth: A Sermon Preached in Hollis Street Church, on Sunday Morning, December 8, 1844, by John Turner Sargent* (Boston: Samuel N. Dickenson, 1845), 5-6.

[78] John Turner Sargent, *The True Position of Theodore Parker, Being a Review of R.C. Waterston's letter, in the Fourth Quarterly Report of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches* (Boston: Andrews, Prentiss, and Studley, 1845).

worst grievance under which the church is groaning," he wrote, "but . . . he is doing

as much as any to alleviate its real wounds."[79]

Sargent was emotionally drained by the controversy and never fully recovered

from the blow that was dealt to him.[80] He had invested his time and money in the

ministry to the poor, at great cost to himself and his family. His departure from his

congregation was sorrowful for both sides. While preparing his farewell sermon, he

wrote depressingly to his friend and fellow Boston reformer Caroline Healey Dall, "it

seems to be ordered that the field of my labors for seven years past shall be the

cemetery of my hopes and the very chapel itself the mausoleum of my struggles in its

behalf."[81] His congregation, for their part, stood steadfast in their support for him,

expressing agreement with Sargent's actions soon after the controversy erupted.[82]

Many of his congregants asked him to begin a new chapel near the Suffolk Street

building, but he refused to do so, believing it would be improper.[83] Sargent left the

city to pursue a ministry elsewhere, and a number of his congregants helped to found

a new church for Theodore Parker at Boston's Melodeon Theater. The middle-class

members of the Suffolk Street Chapel contributed a large part of the financial support

for Parker's new church. Sargent believed that about one hundred of his congregants

left his church after his resignation to support Parker. Sargent's disaffected

---

[79] *Records of the Ministry at Large; in Connection with the Suffolk Street Chapel*, 130.

[80] All of Sargent's eulogists referred in their comments to the controversy as a defining moment in Sargent's life. See "In Memoriam, John Turner Sargent," File for John Turner Sargent, Unitarian Universalist Association. Inactive Minister Files, BMS 1446, Box 190.

[81] John Turner Sargent, Letter to Caroline Healey Dall, 24 December 1844, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. See also his farewell sermon, *The Ministry at Suffolk Street Chapel; its Origin, Progress and Experience* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1845).

[82] *Records of the Ministry at Large; in Connection with the Suffolk Street Chapel*, 98.

[83] John Turner Sargent, Letter to Caroline W. H. Dall, 24 December 1844, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers.

congregants were joined by supporters of Pierpont, who recently had resigned over the temperance controversy that had begun years earlier.[84]

Comments made years after the exchange controversy, and with the benefit of hindsight, continued to emphasize that the controversy was as much about fears of indoctrinating the poor in the "reform spirit" as about giving Parker a pulpit to preach heresy. Eight years after Sargent resigned, he was still arguing that the pulpit exchange controversy was caused by the fear of the Executive Committee of the BFC over the challenges that Parker and Sargent were making to the elitism of the Boston Unitarian church. Speaking in a mocking imitative voice, Sargent wrote that the Committee questioned of Parker, "What have *you* to do with the preaching of the gospel to the poor, —with your infidelity and radicalism? You put in jeopardy the interests of our denomination!"[85] John Weiss, an early biographer of Parker, also wrote that Parker's "attempt to expose the causes of pauperism and crime, to lift up the hearts of sorrowful men and women, to bring the strong moral help of everlasting truths to a languishing society," had caused the Executive Committee to fear "that the poor would be corrupted and misled."[86]

Despite the attempts of the Executive Committee of the BFC to stem the radicalism of some of its ministers, they were never able to completely eradicate the more subversive tone of ministers who took an interest in the ministry. Just five months after the pulpit exchange controversy, James Freeman Clarke, the minister of the Church of the Disciples, who would himself receive criticism for exchanging with

---

[84] Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 456-58.

[85] Sargent, *Theodore Parker, The Reform Pulpit, and the Influences that Oppose It*, 12.

[86] John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker, Minister of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, Boston* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1864; reprint, Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 253.

Parker, picked up where Sargent had left off. In a tone similar to Sargent's, he spoke

at the anniversary meeting of the BFC to say that the "spirit of a condescending

charity" would only harm the BFC and its aid recipients. "If we, while sitting in our

pews here, talk patronizingly of the poor, as though they belong to an other order of

beings to whom another gospel is to be sent," then "the ministry-at large may do

harm," he stated. And echoing statements that Sargent had made throughout his

ministry, Clarke said, "For myself, I hope to see the day when all our churches shall

be churches for the poor; when the rich and poor shall meet together in freedom and

perfect equality."[87]

Changes and Continuities in the Unitarian Ministry to the Poor

According to John Turner Sargent, his pulpit exchange and the ensuing debate

between him and the leaders of the BFC led to a "crisis" in the denomination from

which it never fully recovered.[88] Sargent may have been exaggerating the importance

of this singular event to the decline of Unitarianism, but he was correct in his view

that by the mid-1840s, Unitarianism had reached a crisis point. Shifting theological

beliefs among second-generation Unitarians revealed contradictions in Unitarian

social and theopolitical views, and these contradictions were highlighted in the

Unitarian ministry to the poor. In founding the BFC, the Unitarian church had sought

to put the ministry-at-large on more stable footing. The ministers-at-large fostered

important elements of the organic worldview on which the BFC had been founded.

Yet, influenced by their lower-class parishioners, they also blazed new paths that

departed markedly from the traditional Unitarian approach to poverty and poor relief.

---

[87] *Christian Register*, 26 April 1845, 66.
[88] Sargent, *Crisis of Unitarianism in Boston*, 4.

The ministers-at-large under the BFC, like Channing and Tuckerman, maintained an emphasis on organic social interdependency in their poor relief work. Even during the debate over the eclipsing of the visiting ministry by free chapels, all parties involved in the argument assumed that social interdependency was essential to a well-functioning society. While emphasizing the naturalness of interdependency, however, Unitarian ministers-at-large like Sargent challenged the normative perception of social hierarchy that had been assumed by many first-generation Unitarians. Instead, Sargent argued for a more democratic approach to interclass relationships, one that stressed more the common nature of rich and poor.

Ironically, however, the Unitarian ministers-at-large involved in the BFC actually fostered the class-based divisions they had sought to eliminate. While Joseph Tuckerman had emphasized the individual circumstances of poverty, arguing that every single case of poverty was unique in its causes and circumstances, his successors in the ministry-at-large took a collective approach to poverty. In their educative and vocational programs at their chapels, the ministers-at-large emphasized less the individualized approach to aid and began to view the poor collectively.

The lower-class chapel attendees themselves played an important role—if inadvertently—in debates about the BFC. By dressing in a way that belied common notions of poverty, they confused Unitarians about exactly who was being served by the chapel ministries. The resulting ambiguity led to debates about who should and should not be allowed in the church and whether separate chapels for the poor fostered class-based divisions. Furthermore, as the lower-class members of the chapels gave generously toward the church and each other, their shepherds began to

see them less often as in need of spiritual education and more often as spiritual equals with Boston's elite Unitarians, while many mainline Unitarians were sure that their money bought them higher spiritual rank.

This more egalitarian approach to aid challenged Unitarian social ideas. For the first fifteen years of the Unitarian ministry-at-large, Unitarians had maintained a delicate balance in their theopolitical ideology among ideas of social hierarchy, social interdependency and mutuality, and the dignity of the individual. Yet this balance was difficult to maintain in the face of a rising democratic spirit among Unitarian ministers, a spirit often cultivated in their interactions with the poor. As Sargent's battle with the church reveals, the Unitarian call for freedom of conscience had the potential to undermine the social harmony Unitarians so vigorously attempted to foster. In many ways, Sargent served as a symbol of the transition from early nineteenth-century Unitarianism to Unitarian Transcendentalism. By the mid-1840s, the streams of dissent from traditional Unitarianism and challenges from below to accepted hierarchy merged, and the rapid river of change that resulted swept Unitarianism in its wake. Interactions between reformers and the poor served as conduits for these important changes.

Chapter 5: "To Christianize Democracy and Democratize the Church":

Transcendentalists, the Working Class, and New Solutions to Economic

Inequality

In the late 1830s and 1840s, Unitarian Transcendentalism emerged as an

offshoot of Unitarianism that challenged traditional Unitarian notions of self and

society. Transcendentalists were less concerned than reformers like Joseph

Tuckerman with cultivating relationships of education between rich and poor to end

poverty, for they trusted that all had an innate ability to understand truth and duty

without assistance from elites. Free from the burden of educating the poor on the

individual level, Transcendentalists identified economic inequality as a sociological

issue rooted in unjust class distinctions and a competitive society. Transcendentalists

like Orestes Brownson, William Henry Channing, and the leaders of the

communitarian Brook Farm group sought to "democratize the church" and to bring

about a more just society. Their interests created natural ties between them and

workers in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Brook Farm, the communitarian group

outside of Boston, was one manifestation of this effort. The culmination of

Transcendentalists' social justice work was the establishment in 1844 of the

Associationist movement, tied to the philosophy of the French socialist Charles

Fourier, under the leadership of William Ellery Channing's nephew William Henry

Channing.

While encounters between working men and women and Transcendentalists

allowed exploration of alternatives to a political economic system that both viewed as

unjust, they had minimal practical effect on the lives of working men and women.

Transcendentalists offered little assistance to workers hoping to establish basic decency in the areas of wages, work hours, and education. Instead, they diverted attention away from such basic issues by speaking generally about the need for radical reform and offering solutions that had little relevance to the lives of workers. Their paternalistic attitude toward working men and women created rifts that were never bridged, and by the late 1840s Orestes Brownson, and others, turned to a hierarchical organicism that was similar to that of earlier Unitarians. By failing to listen to the very people they professed to be helping, Unitarian Transcendentalists lost the opportunity to turn their vision of a classless society into reality.

The Unitarian/Transcendentalist Debate

The Transcendentalists were a group of Unitarian clergymen who were uneasy with the overwhelming emphasis of Unitarian doctrine on Enlightenment rationalism as the foundation for spiritual understanding. From the late eighteenth century, Unitarians had insisted that religion must be subject to reason; this was the basis on which they had discarded the Protestant doctrines of Trinitarianism and predestination. Unitarian Transcendentalists reasoned even further, however, rejecting the Biblical accounts of miracles, which many Unitarians had argued provided evidence of the truth of Christianity. Unitarian Transcendentalists also challenged Unitarians' beliefs in the full efficacy of reason in shaping human understanding. They argued for the prioritization of emotion and intuitive perception over reason in shaping religious experience.[1] Some Unitarians, like the individualists

---

[1] Donald N. Koster, *Transcendentalism in America* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 8. Attempts to provide a complete definition of Transcendentalism always fall short, in part because Transcendentalism took many forms and Transcendentalists themselves could not agree on basic tenets

Ralph Waldo Emerson, saw these divergences in belief as grounds for leaving the Unitarian church. Others, like the communitarians Orestes Brownson, George Ripley, and William Henry Channing, attempted to reform the Unitarian church from within to bring it in line with Transcendentalist understandings of the relationship between reason and belief. These reforms inevitably challenged ideas of society that were intimately tied with Unitarian theology.

Unitarians had argued that all knowledge came from experience; that is, the human mind, a blank slate at birth, grew to knowledge and understanding through experience of and reflection on the world outside the self. For Unitarians, Christianity, a set of beliefs verified by reason and common sense, involved an assent to the proof of God's work in the world, proof that was offered in nature as well as through Biblical revelation, the moral example of Christ, and Gospel accounts of his miracles.[2] Transcendentalists, in contrast, argued that placing one's faith in such things made for a weak spiritual foundation. Debates between Unitarians and Unitarian Transcendentalists about questions arising from these differences occurred during the Unitarian/Transcendentalist controversy between 1836 and 1840. Important events in the controversy included the blasphemy trial of Abner Kneeland in the mid-1830s, the "miracles controversy" of 1836, and perhaps most famously, Ralph Waldo Emerson's address to the Harvard Divinity School in 1838, in which he

---

of the movement. Many historians of Transcendentalism have commiserated with Charles Dickens, who "was given to understand that whatever was unintelligible would certainly be transcendental." Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, quoted in Koster, 3. I am confining my description of Transcendentalism to elements of the movement that are directly relevant to the ideas of communitarian Transcendentalists like Orestes Brownson, George Ripley, and William Henry Channing.

[2] Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 62-63.

angrily attacked Unitarianism as a "corpse cold" church that did little to awaken the souls of the people.[3]

Individualist Transcendentalists like Emerson saw little hope for reform of the Unitarian church from within. "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature," Emerson stated; "the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against is."[4] Believing the Unitarian church was fundamentally "against" his "constitution," he left to pursue other avenues of reform. Many Transcendentalists, however, criticized Emerson for his excessive individualism. Communitarian Transcendentalists argued against Emerson, stating that Emerson's individualism and "self-reliance" could prove dangerous if divorced from the context of external truth. How was one to verify that their truth was correct without substantiation from outside the self? They also believed that if all human beings were excessively focused on individual self-culture they would lack the ability to meet the needs of others around them, to develop a socially-minded view of the world. Many of the Transcendentalists who attacked Emerson for his views for these reasons sought to reform Unitarianism from within, to use the church to develop a community marked by an emotive spirituality.

---

[3] The blasphemy trial of Abner Kneeland, a carpenter who preached free inquiry through his paper the *Boston Investigator*, occurred between 1834 and 1838. Unitarians, worried that Kneeland's preaching would foster "infidelism" among the working classes, supported the Commonwealth in the trial. The Transcendentalists supported Kneeland. The miracles controversy was an extended debate between the Unitarian scholar Andrews Norton and George Ripley about the factuality of the miracle accounts in the Bible. Norton argued that an acceptance of the miracles was fundamental to Christian faith; Ripley challenged this notion, arguing that an excessive emphasis on "external" proofs of Christianity actually created a feeble foundation on which to build one's faith. For discussions of the Transcendentalist Controversy see Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), chapter 3 and Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 118-28.
[4] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 148, quoted in Koster, *Transcendentalism in America*, 37.

One of the most trenchant attacks on Emerson's Transcendentalism came from Orestes Brownson. Brownson feared the individualism of Emerson's philosophy, asking, "Shall a man take himself as the center of the universe, and say all things are for his use, and count them of value only as they contribute something to his growth and well-being?" Brownson called this view "transcendental selfishness" and "pure egotism." The soul needed something outside itself to direct its progress, Brownson argued, for "man feels an obligation to obey a law; not the law of his own soul. . . but a law above his soul." This law was "imposed upon him by a supreme lawgiver, who has a right to command his obedience." The law is not of "man's own nature," but "out of him, above him, and independent of him."[5]

Brownson agreed with his fellow Unitarians that a moral law existed and that humans could know the moral law. He, and other communitarian transcendentalists, disagreed, however, with the common Unitarian view that some had a fuller knowledge of the moral law and were thus called upon to teach others this law. This had important implications for Unitarian Transcendentalists' approach to poverty. They focused their attention away from educative relationships of rich and poor in their solutions to poverty. For, if every individual was capable of understanding truth on her own, paternalistic relationships of tutelage were unnecessary. Instead what was needed was the empowerment of the individual, the granting of freedom to all human beings to cultivate their knowledge to the fullest. Some Unitarian ministers recognized a danger in this, believing that it would militate against the common understanding required for social order. As Francis Bowen, a Harvard professor of political economy, remarked, Transcendentalism had "given good cause for regarding

---

[5] Orestes Brownson, "Mr. Emerson's Address," *Boston Quarterly Review*, October 1838, 124, 122.

a system of philosophical radicalism as a mere cover for an attack on all the principles of government and social order."[6] Unitarians believed the organic social order of the past was slipping away, a victim of Unitarian Transcendentalist attacks on traditional authority.

Orestes Brownson and "The Democratization of the Church"

Bowen perhaps misunderstood the motives of the Transcendentalists, who were less conspiratorial than he imagined, but he did understand the radical implications of Transcendentalist thought. The entrance into the church of men like Orestes Brownson, who were less entrenched in the elitism of Boston Unitarianism, infused Unitarian theopolitical debates with new vigor. Less willing to accept the hierarchy of Unitarian social thought, Brownson challenged Unitarian clergymen on their attitude toward the poor, especially unbelievers. Brownson argued that the friendly visiting work of reformers like Tuckerman displayed an unhealthy paternalism that did little to empower the lower class. Brownson argued that Unitarians should replace such poor relief work with broader efforts to transform society in a way that would reflect more just social structures. Brownson's self-fashioned identity as a friend of the worker caused the Unitarian church to turn to him, after his conversion to Unitarianism, in their work to reach Boston's laboring population. Brownson's encounters with leaders of the Workingmen's Parties in New York and Boston and his contact with labor leaders influenced his thinking about

---

[6] Francis Bowen, *Critical Essays on a Few Subjects Connected with the History and Present Condition of Speculative Philosophy* (n.p., 1842), 65, Quoted in Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 80. See also Francis Bowen, "Locke and the Transcendentalists," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, November 1837, 170-95.

economic inequality. Nevertheless, his relationships with workers were always

tenuous, and he rarely offered full support to workers' political platforms.

Brownson's roots lay in the humble life of the New England backcountry. He

spent his early years in Stockbridge, Vermont, but when his father, who was a hired

hand, died, Brownson's mother sent him and his twin sister to live in a neighboring

town.[7] When Brownson was fourteen years old, his mother relocated to upstate New

York, where Brownson became an apprentice and then a journeyman in a printer's

office. The printer for whom Brownson worked, James Comstock, printed

Universalist tracts, which he encouraged Brownson to read. As a result of his

relationship with Comstock and the influence of several family members who

converted to Universalism, Brownson began to move away from the Presbyterianism

of his youth toward Universalism. In March of 1825, he entered an apprenticeship

program in Reading, Vermont, to become a Universalist minister. The same year,

Brownson applied for a position as a Universalist minister in Michigan, where he

would spend the next few years, and in 1826 he was ordained into the Universalist

ministry.[8] Brownson's Universalist career was short-lived and in 1829, experiencing

a crisis of religious faith, he returned to the east, focusing his energy less on spiritual

than political reform.

Brownson became active in the New York Workingmen's Party, though his

relationship with the group did not last long. Workingmen's Parties, which dotted the

landscape of the North in the 1820s and early 1830s, were part of the rising tide of

democracy in the Jacksonian era. They focused on the interests of workingmen and

---

[7] Patrick Carey, *Orestes Brownson: American Religious Weathervane* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's
Publishing Company, 2004), 2.
[8] Ibid., 8-13.

women by setting up formal political parties, working to elect officials sympathetic to the needs of the working class. They pursued reforms such as the establishment of public education, the abolition of the compulsory militia system, an end to imprisonment for debt, the institution of mechanics lien laws, the abolition of chartered monopolies, more stringent bank regulation, an end to convict labor, elimination of property requirements for voting, and a more equitable distribution of profits to laborers.[9] Despite the brevity of Brownson's affiliation with the Workingmen's Party in New York, he was influenced by its members' views of democracy. Brownson, for example, was persuaded by Workingmens' argument that universal education was one way to move toward economic equality. By July of 1830, when Brownson moved his family to Genesee County, New York, he was advocating universal public education in the newspaper he co-edited, the *Genesee Republican and Herald of Reform*.[10]

Brownson, however, became concerned about the internecine fighting among members of the Workingmen's Party, and during the 1830 election he announced he would not support the Workingmen's candidate, but would instead back whichever of the candidates in the two leading parties were most sympathetic to the needs of workingmen. "The support that Brownson gave to the Workingmen's Party was

---

[9] Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. 1, *From Colonial Times to the Founding of the American Federation of Labor* (New York: International Publishers, 1972). See also Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967); Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Ronald Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860: The Reaction of American Industrial Society to the Advance of the Industrial Revolution* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); and David Grimsted, "Ante-Bellum Labor: Violence, Strike, and Communal Arbitration," *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 1 (1985): 5-28.
[10] Carey, *Orestes Brownson*, 32-33.

rather by moral and social, than by political views," his son later wrote," suggesting

the generality of Brownson's ties with both workers and the Workingmen's Party.[11]

In late 1830, Brownson moved to Ithaca where, under the influence of

William Ellery Channing's writings, he rediscovered his faith and began a new

church. His church was non-doctrinal and followed the liberal strain of Unitarian

thought, though Brownson did not identify himself as a Unitarian. By 1832, though,

he had established himself as a Unitarian minister, and when he was called to

Walpole, New Hampshire, to take up a Unitarian pulpit he eagerly accepted.

At the same time, Boston's elite Unitarian ministers began to recognize the

value of having Brownson serve as an advocate of Unitarian principles among the

working class. Brownson brought to Unitarianism two unique experiences which, in

the minds of many elite Unitarians, were closely related: an experience with unbelief,

or "infidelism," and participation in the political life of the working class. Unitarians

sought to use Brownson's unusual background to their advantage. In 1833, Bernard

Whitman, editor of *The Unitarian*, a periodical of liberal religion for the working

class, approached Brownson to write a series of articles for the journal. He requested

that Brownson write about the Workingmen's Party in Massachusetts. Whitman

intended Brownson's articles (which were never written) to educate not only the

working class, but also Boston's Unitarian ministers, who were alarmed by the

success of the Workingmen's Party at the polls in the 1833 Massachusetts election.

In that election, the Party gained control of ten towns, though six of the ten towns

---

[11] Henry Brownson, *Orestes A. Brownson's Early Life, from 1803 to 1844* (Detroit: Henry F. Brownson, 1898), 49. On the internal battles in the New York Workingmen's Party see Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, chapter 5.

were in western agricultural districts.[12] While Boston remained immune to the

influence of the Workingmen's Party, Channing was still concerned by its limited

electoral advancements. "Dr. Channing spoke to me on the subject a few days since,

and wished to know if this party were all infidels!" Whitman confided to Brownson.[13]

Channing's concern was widespread among the Unitarian clergy and indicated the

extent to which they had come to fear the formation of class-based divisions in

society and the church.

George Ripley, a Unitarian Transcendentalist cousin of Emerson, referring to

Brownson's period of unbelief, wrote to Brownson in 1834, "You have rare

advantages from your former relations to scepticism, and it appears to me are

designed in Providence to act upon larger and different classes of men from those to

whom you now have access." Ripley encouraged Brownson to see his work as

similar to that of the Methodists and Universalists, to adopt a more aggressive

evangelical approach to bring unbelievers into the church.[14] Brownson would

introduce workers to religious truth—a truth that had thus far been denied to them

because of the lack of ministers with whom they could identify. Ripley invited

Brownson to begin a new ministry to the working class in Boston, but Brownson had

already agreed to take up a Unitarian pastorate in Canton, Massachusetts. His move

to Boston would have to wait.

While Brownson had gained a reputation among Unitarians as a friend of

workers, members of the Massachusetts Workingmen's Party were not so convinced.

In 1834, Samuel Allen, the Workingmen's candidate for governor, attempted to

---

[12] Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 140.
[13] Brownson, *Orestes A. Brownson's Early Life*, 100.
[14] Ibid., 104-5.

persuade Brownson of the importance of legislative approaches to economic

inequality. Allen wrote to Brownson in July 1834 in response to a Fourth of July

speech Brownson had made.[15] In his speech, Brownson had argued that the spirit of

the American Revolution, that of democracy and equality, had not yet been fulfilled.

Legislation was not the answer to continued inequality, for legislation could do little

if not accompanied by the enlightenment of the public. "The public, if ignorant or

immoral, or but feebly moral, will not be very likely to demand any very good laws,"

he argued.[16] According to Brownson, education—"moral, religious, intellectual, and

physical training,"—was the key to equality. Brownson, like other Unitarians, argued

that social change would only come about by harmonious interclass cooperation and

education.[17]

Allen criticized Brownson for his emphasis on education to the exclusion of

legislative or political approaches to inequality. Allen believed that social reform

would never occur without a fundamental re-ordering of class relations, which

required legislative support for its accomplishment. He inverted the Unitarian view

of social change, arguing that, instead of individual character influencing social

institutions, "individual character is very much *formed by* social institutions."[18]

"What have the laboring classes to expect from their [property holders'] justice or

charity? What from a government in their control?" Allen asked Brownson. "Its

legislation and jurisprudence, the ministrations of religion and justice, when held and

---

[15] Orestes Brownson, *An Address Delivered at Dedham, on the Fifty-Eighth Anniversary of American Independence, July 4, 1834* (Dedham: H. Mann, 1834), in *The Early Works of Orestes A. Brownson,* ed. Patrick Carey, vol. 2, *The Free Thought and Unitarian Years* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 339-52.

[16] Ibid., 347.

[17] Ibid., 348.

[18] Samuel Allen to Orestes Brownson, 18 August 1834, quoted in Brownson, *Orestes Brownson's Early Life*, 114-18.

directed by theory will afford no relief to the laborers *as a class*." Unlike Brownson, Allen believed that no "extensive or permanent reform can be effected without change in the economical relations of society." And, more importantly, Allen argued, "such change cannot be brought about but by means of a just legislation and a plan of policy adapted to the rights and interests of labor."[19] Such a plan included public education, the abolition of imprisonment for debt, and equal taxation of property, among other proposals.[20] It is not clear if or how Brownson responded to Allen's letter, but Brownson took to heart his argument for the prioritization of structural over personal change in the quest for economic equity.

In 1836 Brownson moved to Chelsea, across the Charles River from Boston, to begin a new church. The church was outside the purview of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches, the Unitarian poor relief ministry, but had the same goal of bringing the unchurched poor into the Christian fold. Brownson called his church the "Society for the Promotion of Christian Union and Progress." [21] His ministry was successful. His association with the Workingmen's and Democratic parties and his support for workers gave him credibility with the lower- and lower-middle-class that other elite Unitarian clergymen lacked, and the working-class citizens of Boston eagerly responded to his call. Brownson brought in about 400-500 visitors to his sermons and lectures every week. Most of the members of his congregation were trades unionists from in and around Boston; few of them were desperately poor.[22]

---

[19] Ibid.
[20] Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, chapter 10, esp. 225-26.
[21] Carey, *Orestes Brownson*, 54.
[22] Ibid., 57-58; Brownson, *Orestes Brownson's Early Life*, 146.

By the time he started his church, Brownson was a Transcendentalist. He also belonged to the Transcendentalist Club, a group of Unitarian intellectuals who met on a regular basis to discuss their similar views about Unitarianism, philosophy, and social reform. Brownson used his pulpit to preach his new Transcendentalist views, which heavily influenced his thinking about relationships between Unitarian theopolitics and social thought. Brownson's work in the "Society for the Promotion of Christian Union and Progress" indicates the influence Allen, the Workingmen's movement, and Transcendentalist thought had had on him. It also shows the extent to which he was departing from Channing in his approach to the problem of poverty.

Channing had consistently argued that the most important way to "elevate" the working class was to develop in them "a right religious impulse" through religious education. Brownson, knowing Channing's fears about the "infidelity" of the working class, had personally approached him to talk about the roots of such infidelity. Brownson told Channing that unbelief among the poor was not the result of lack of education, but their treatment by the rich. As Channing recorded, Brownson "tells me that he has found among them more hatred of the rich than he expected, and very probably this may form one of their tendencies to infidelity."[23] Brownson was beginning to argue that class conflict was both imminent and inevitable.

Brownson served as a shrewd messenger to Boston's Unitarians as he informed them about the effects of their approach to poor relief on the lower classes. He sought to convince Unitarians of the ways their theopolitical views had built

---

[23] William Ellery Channing, *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, with Extracts from His Correspondence and Manuscripts*, 3rd ed. (Boston: William Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1848), 3:52-53.

barriers between them and the lower classes, and he simultaneously hoped to guide

Unitarians toward a more democratic view of social reform. Brownson attempted to

persuade his fellow clergymen that the old order of deferential social hierarchy had

passed. He argued that the clergy were too quick to "dogmatize" in their educative

pursuits, to see their task as the inculcation of certain canons instead of the awakening

of the mind. The clergy must "educate by arousing and directing the attention of the

people," Brownson argued. "They are to act on free minds, and that not to control

them, but to quicken and strengthen them. They must convince, not dictate; persuade,

not compel."[24]

Brownson informed Unitarians of the ways their rationalist assumptions

negatively influenced their reform efforts. For him, Unitarian clerical paternalism

was evidence of the tendency of Lockean rationalist philosophy to justify an anti-

democratic position. "The educated, the scientific are prone to look upon the masses

as possessing no ideas," Brownson argued. In viewing the mind of a lower-class

person as "a *tabula rasa* on which others indeed may write what they will," Unitarian

clergymen, Brownson argued, acted condescendingly. Brownson criticized the clergy

for "the pity and commiseration, the great condescension, and vast amount of baby-

talk" which characterized the "kind-hearted . . . portion of the more favored classes."

Instead of learning from the poor "or of verifying their beliefs," Brownson accused

the clergy of "teaching them what they ought to believe." "The masses are not to be

---

[24] Orestes Brownson, "Education of the People," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, May 1836, 153-69, in *The Early Works of Orestes A. Brownson,* ed. Patrick Carey, vol. 3, *The Transcendentalist Years, 1836-38* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 47-48.

pitied," he argued, "but respected, and herein is laid the foundation of true philosophy."[25]

Brownson's arguments directly attacked the educative approach to social reform that Unitarians like Channing preached. "If the mass of the people can come to a knowledge and to the evidence of truth only as truth comes to them from a teacher possessing inherent or miraculous powers for discovering and authenticating it," then "democracy is an illusion, a utopian dream," Brownson contended. He maintained that Unitarians had betrayed their own belief in common sense by condemning the masses as ignorant. "The democrat is not he who only believes in the people's capacity of being taught, and therefore graciously condescends to be their instructor," he argued, "but he who believes that reason, the light which shines out from God's throne, shines into the heart of every man."[26]

The links between Brownson's work with Workingmen's groups and his Transcendentalist thought came through clearly in his arguments about the relationship between individual and social reform. Ministers "give no direct instructions on the destination of society, do little to awaken a zeal and quicken exertions for social progress," he argued. The people suffered when the clergy overlooked "the material elements of religion."[27] Brownson thus sought to balance the scale of religious emphasis, encouraging the church to awaken the conscience of

---

[25] Orestes Brownson, "Philosophy and Common Sense," *Boston Quarterly Review*, January 1838, 83-106, in *The Transcendentalist Years, 1836-38*, 300-17. Brownson wrote this piece as a response to Francis Bowen's 1837 article in the *Christian Examiner*, "Locke and the Transcendentalists," footnoted earlier, in which Bowen identified Transcendentalism as tipping dangerously toward social radicalism.

[26] Orestes Brownson, "Norton on the Evidences of Christianity," *Boston Quarterly Review*, January 1839, 86-113, in *The Early Works of Orestes A. Brownson,* ed. Patrick Carey, vol. 4, *The Transcendentalist Years, 1838-39* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003), 213.

[27] Brownson, "Education of the People," 47-48.

society for the betterment of the human race. While other Unitarians, especially Channing and Tuckerman, had talked about this, Brownson hoped to bring new life to the discussion.

Brownson expounded his ideas about the relationship between Christianity and democracy in his periodical the *Boston Quarterly Review*, begun in 1838. Brownson told George Bancroft that his aim in starting the *Review* was "by means of a higher philosophy of man than Reid's or Locke's to christianize democracy and *democratize* the church."[28] His discontent with Unitarian approaches to economic and political injustice had turned to anger, and he sought to express his anger and influence the church's theopolitical ideology through his new journal. The *Boston Quarterly Review* would serve as Brownson's mouthpiece until 1842. Brownson intended it to be the flagship journal of Transcendentalism, and, indeed, at its height it had more subscribers than the *Dial*, the Transcendentalist periodical associated with Ralph Waldo Emerson.[29]

The Panic of 1837 nurtured the more radical tendencies Brownson had cultivated in his years of involvement with the New York Workingmen's movement—those of which Allen had reminded him after his Dedham Address. On May 28, 1837, just eighteen days after the suspension of specie payment in New York that led to the panic, he preached a sermon entitled "Babylon is Falling" to the Society for Christian Union and Progress. Brownson, unlike his Whiggish fellow clergymen, did not lay the blame for the state of the economic system at the feet of

---

[28] Orestes Brownson, letter to George Bancroft, 10 November 1837, Microfilm #9, Brownson Papers, *The Transcendentalist Years, 1836-38*, 34.

[29] The *Boston Quarterly Review* averaged 1000 subscribers at its height; the *Dial* 300. Carey, *Orestes Brownson*, 35.

Andrew Jackson or others who had opposed the Bank of the United States. "It is not the United States Bank, it is not the deposit system; it is not a mere question of government or finance, which divides the human family today," Brownson stated. Instead, it was the injustice in social relations caused by the misdistribution of property. The "riders" of society, the wealthy consumers, would soon experience the wrath of the "ridden," the producers whose labor created wealth but who received none of it. "Peace between these two parties is henceforth out of the question," Brownson argued apocalyptically.[30]

Indeed, one of the elements of Brownson's definitions of democracy was the protection of the "unprivileged many" against the "privileged few." [31] This probably served as a shock to Boston Unitarians, who viewed their status as the "privileged few" as one of the bases of their claim to authority.[32] Still, Brownson did hold one thing in common with the Unitarians of the city. He never defined democracy as mere popular sovereignty. Democracy, when defined as "sovereignty of the people," was false. For Brownson, sovereignty lay in "justice . . . the sovereign of sovereign, the king of kings, lord of lords, the supreme law of the people, and of the individual."[33] While he did not specify who would define justice, Brownson claimed that justice was even sovereign over the state, which acted in the service of justice. Arguing for the existence of natural rights, though never defining them, Brownson argued that rights were based not in the Constitution or the Declaration of

---

[30] Orestes Brownson, *A Discourse Preached in the Masonic Temple, to the Society for Christian Union and Progress; Sunday, May 28, 1837* (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1837), in Carey, *The Transcendentalist Years, 1836-38*, 240.
[31] Orestes Brownson, "Democracy," *Boston Quarterly Review*, January 1838, 33-74, in Carey, *The Transcendentalist Years, 1836-38*, 270.
[32] Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, 205-6.
[33] Brownson, "Democracy," 272, 277.

Independence, for "the charter, by virtue of which we legitimate our rights" was not a "charter engrossed on parchment, but one which God Almighty has engrossed on the human heart."[34]

Brownson saved some of his most forceful criticism for the clergy, even for the venerable Joseph Tuckerman. He accused clergymen of siding with the propertied interests against the people in the fight against inequality, which, for Brownson was particularly egregious because the church was the only true path to democratic reform. Brownson's main objection to Tuckerman's individualistic "friendly visiting" approach to ministry was that it focused too narrowly on cultivating the religious nature of the poor relief recipient and neglected the "social and political nature" of the poor. Brownson's criticisms were unfair and inaccurate. While Tuckerman had presented his work as primarily spiritual in nature, he had continually sought to provide practical assistance to the poor and highlight the social and political inadequacies that exacerbated their poverty. Brownson had selectively represented Tuckerman's work in order to differentiate his ministry from that of Tuckerman's. Let the clergy "be ever on the side of the people; let them use all their efforts to cause every question, which comes up, to be decided in a sense favorable to the millions," Brownson wrote, for only in doing this would democracy reach fruition.[35]

Brownson used the *Boston Quarterly Review* to spread his views of the relationship between Transcendentalist thought and American democracy. According to Brownson, Transcendentalism's emphasis on intuition allowed its followers more

---

[34] Ibid., 294.
[35] Orestes Brownson, "Democracy of Christianity," *Boston Quarterly Review*, October 1838, 444-73, in Carey, *The Transcendentalist Years, 1838-39*, 76, 97

space to trust the masses, for "it acknowledged their dignity and their instinctive beliefs."[36] The *Boston Quarterly Review*, according to Brownson, explored these beliefs and their relationship both to politics and to religion. The most famous of Brownson's *Boston Quarterly Review* articles was entitled "The Laboring Classes." This essay, published during the election of 1840, was a radical consideration of the state of society, a pre-Marxian screed that prophesied apocalyptic class warfare. It was also a shrewd attack on the clergy, aimed at shaking them into action for radical social reform. As Brownson argued in "The Laboring Classes," the wage-labor system rewarded laborers "in an inverse ratio to the amount of actual service they perform."[37] Everywhere he looked, in the homes of poor women who toiled for a pittance, in the factory towns where women were used up and sent home "to die"—anywhere wage labor existed—Brownson saw poverty and degradation. Clergymen, instead of aiding the poor, perpetuated systems of poverty by focusing on self-culture while ignoring unjust social structures. Attacking William Ellery Channing directly, Brownson wrote that his emphasis on "self-culture," while it quickened "moral and intellectual energy," did little to end poverty, for the evil of poverty "is not merely individual in its character." Instead it was "inherent in all our social arrangements, and cannot be cured without a radical change of those arrangements."[38]

The "radical change" Brownson recommended offered little in the way of a substantial alternative and was perhaps not so radical as Brownson's fellow

---

[36] Carey, *Orestes Brownson*, 36.
[37] Orestes Brownson, "The Laboring Classes," *Boston Quarterly Review*, July 1840, 367.
[38] Ibid., 375.

Unitarians or historians have argued.[39] In essence, Brownson advocated a return to an idealized past in which the toil of a laborer allowed him to accumulate enough "to be an independent laborer on his own capital—on his own farm or in his own shop."[40] In this way, he was not so different from the leaders of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, whose programs were founded on a similar mythical American past. Brownson offered few concrete ideas about how to bring about this ideal society; he issued vague statements about freeing society from the control of the priesthood, and he advocated liberating the State from the power of the Banks and abolishing hereditary property rights. Yet Brownson's suggestions for change were heavily qualified and generalized, to the extent that many readers dismissed his essay as a useless tirade that offered little practical hope to laborers. Brownson had argued that Thomas Carlyle, a review of whose work was the basis of "The Laboring Classes," "is good as a demolisher, but pitiable enough as a builder." Brownson himself might have been accused of the same.[41]

Unitarians strenuously objected to Brownson's essay, most likely because of his harsh treatment of the clergy. For Brownson, the "priesthood" had served throughout history, and especially in the United States, as the most oppressive force in society. Priests, "the civilizers of the race," had reduced "the people to the most wretched subjection" by controlling individuals through fear of God and a claim to

---

[39] For representations of "The Laboring Classes" as a radical document see Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*, 91-92 and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Orestes Brownson: A Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Octagon Books, 1939; reprint, 1963), 95-111.
[40] Ibid., 373.
[41] Ibid., 358.

knowledge of the means to avert God's wrath.[42] But, Christianity, as manifested in

the life and work of Christ, was fundamentally opposed to the priesthood, for Christ

taught the priesthood of all believers. According to Brownson, Christ's message was

one of freedom, of the abolition of unjust social and political structures, and the

reestablishment of a society shaped in the image of God.

"The Laboring Classes" resulted in a substantial uproar, not just among

Brownson's Unitarian colleagues, who claimed his arguments were "opposite to the

philosophy of common sense," and "shocking or absurd," but also among both

northern Whigs and Democrats.[43] Many Democrats believed Brownson's radical

pronouncements, coming at the height of the 1840 presidential election season, were

poorly timed. Conservative Whigs, who promoted nationalism and moral reform,

accused Van Buren Democrats, with their emphasis on equal rights and states' rights,

of radicalism, and Brownson's essay further fueled accusations of Democratic

radicalism. Some angry Democrats blamed Brownson for Martin van Buren's

defeat.[44]

Laborers themselves also objected to Brownson's essay. His characterization

of the women workers in the Lowell factories as "damn[ed] to infamy" evoked a

strong response from the Lowell women in the pages of the *Lowell Offering*. Calling

Brownson a "slanderer," "A Factory Girl" attacked Brownson vociferously for his

statements. Even if it was true that Brownson only referred to the *reputation* of

---

[42] Ibid., 383, 381. Unitarians, who consistently preached the benevolence and love of God, probably balked at Brownson's characterization of the manipulation of the idea of God's wrath by the priesthood.
[43] "Chartism," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, September 1840, 127 and William Ellery Channing, letter to Elizabeth Peabody, September 1840, quoted in Schlesinger, *Orestes A. Brownson*, 102.
[44] Carey, *Orestes Brownson*, 94.

factory women in his essay, that still made the women "a set of worthy and virtuous idiots," because, the "factory girl" argued, "no virtuous girl of common sense would choose for an occupation one that would consign her to infamy." [45] Accusing Brownson of lacking "truth and common sense," she challenged him to visit Lowell personally to see if his claims about the "virtuous girls consigned to infamy" held true.[46] Brownson responded to these objections in his own journal, reiterating that his statement about the "infamy" of the factory girls was not meant to describe reality, but perception. Refusing to apologize, he further argued that the workers' attack on him actually served to advance the interests of their mutual "enemies."[47] "Believe me, they laugh right merrily at your simplicity in condemning me," he condescended. The Lowell ladies offered no further response, and the matter was promptly dropped. Nevertheless, Brownson had caused a rift between himself and the very workers for whom he claimed to be advocating. Following the outcry against "The Laboring Classes," he retreated from the public eye, rethinking his position about class conflict and politics in light of his failure to stir radical change

The Unitarian church brought Orestes Brownson to Boston to serve as a mediator between the working class and Boston's Unitarian elites. He effectively reminded Unitarians of the need to take note of the rise of democratic power. Yet his attempt to "Christianize democracy and democratize the church" effected little change. Indeed, in the end he alienated the very workers for whom he claimed to be speaking. His condescension toward them and failure to understand the real needs of

---

[45] "A Factory Girl," "Factory Girls," *Lowell Offering*, December 1840, 17. See also *Lowell Offering*, October 1840, 16.
[46] "A Factory Girl," "Factory Girls," 17.
[47] Orestes Brownson, "To the Editors of 'The Lowell Offering,'" *Boston Quarterly Review*, April 1841, 261.

workers actually harmed Unitarian efforts to bring the working classes into the Unitarian fold. Moreover, while Brownson's Unitarian Transcendentalist faith had given him a theological foundation to bolster the legitimacy of his political views, his beliefs would later be tested as the democracy he held so much faith in disappointed him.

William Henry Channing and the Associationists

While Orestes Brownson argued vaguely in 1840 that economic injustice could only be tackled by radical restructuring of unjust social and political systems, another Unitarian minister, William Henry Channing, argued the importance of combining social with individual reform. Channing, the nephew of William Ellery Channing, began his career as a minister to the poor in New York. Channing modeled his ministry after the work of Joseph Tuckerman but quickly became frustrated by his inability to provide any real help to the poor after the massive economic devastation of the Panic of 1837. Forced to re-think his approach, Channing took up the cause of Associationism, which he believed allowed for the perfect balance of individual and social reform. He and the leaders of the Transcendentalist communitarian experiment at Brook Farm recognized the deep connections between their theopolitical views and the reformist scheme of Charles Fourier, and in the mid-1840s they took up the Fourierist cause in earnest. The Brook Farm Fourierists, under the spiritual leadership of Channing, attempted to develop ties with the working class, but in the end their alliance faltered as class differences caused clashes over means and ends in curtailing social inequality.

William Henry Channing's father was Francis Dana Channing, the older

brother of William Ellery Channing. William Henry's father died when he was

young, leaving William Ellery in charge of his young nephew's spiritual and

intellectual education. It was at the elder Channing's suggestion that William Henry

settled in New York to join George B. Arnold in his ministry to the poor at the

Unitarian First Congregational Church of New York. The members of the church,

modeling their ministry after Joseph Tuckerman's in Boston, had started the ministry

in 1832 by setting aside 1,500 dollars, 1,200 of which would serve as Arnold's salary

and the rest of which would go toward Arnold's poor's purse. In 1836 Channing took

over the ministry from Arnold.[48] Like Tuckerman, Channing, upon his arrival in New

York, proposed that "every family should take under their charge some one or more

poor families, to be their spiritual and temporal friends." Channing believed that

once this task was accomplished, the momentum of the friendly visiting system

would carry itself forward and he could resign his position. But Channing soon

discovered the field of friendly visiting was "already faithfully harvested" by other

denominations. The Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, and

Catholics had already cooperated to set up their own system of friendly visiting, from

which the Unitarian church was excluded. "Every family I entered, but with few

exceptions, was already visited," Channing reported despondently.[49]

William Ellery Channing urged his nephew to stay the course, but instead

William Henry began a church for the "industrial classes," which he hoped would "be

---

[48] Walter Donald Kring, *Liberals Among the Orthodox: Unitarian Beginnings in New York City, 1819-1839* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 179-81.

[49] Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Memoir of William Henry Channing* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1886), 130-32.

a center of beneficent action, unsectarian in spirit and deed, human, sympathetic, helpful, hopeful."[50] Channing began his new ministerial endeavor in May, 1837, just as the Panic of 1837 began. New York City was the financial center of the Panic, where 6,000 trade workers lost their jobs in the first year alone. Unpersuaded by Channing's calls for individual improvement in the midst of extreme financial stress, the working class failed to attend Channing's weekly services; his first had only ten attendees, and the weekly number rarely rose above this.[51] After a few years, Channing left New York in frustration; his political maturation was to take place in the 1840s, when the Transcendentalists took up the cause of the working men and women in earnest.

Channing moved to Cincinnati, where, along with the Unitarian minister James Freeman Clarke, he attempted to spread Unitarian principles among the immigrants to the western United States. While ministering to his Cincinnati congregation, Channing experienced a crisis of faith. Little is known about this crisis, but Channing clearly had become disillusioned with the Unitarian emphasis on individual reform over social reform. Perhaps Brownson's "Laboring Classes," which dropped like a bomb onto the political scene while Channing was in Cincinnati, stirred him to think about economic inequality in a new way. Channing disagreed with Brownson's vague "plan for the regeneration of society," calling it "visionary, and, at the same time, more destructive of the best interests of humanity." Yet, he defended Brownson's right to speak, even if in error, and he considered the

---

[50] Frothingham, *Memoir of William Henry Channing*, 132-33. Channing continued to support Tuckerman's work with the poor, even while he abandoned Tuckerman's technique himself. See "The Ministry at Large," *Western Messenger*, September 1837, 39.
[51] Frothingham, *Memoir of William Henry Channing*, 137.

subject of his essay "of the first importance."[52]   Whatever the cause, Channing left

Cincinnati newly politicized, and in 1842 he began a new church in New York City

that reflected his views. Channing did not seek to break his ties with the Unitarian

church, but, as he wrote to Theodore Parker, he wanted to bring about "a completion

of that movement."[53]

Channing's new endeavor was the Christian Union church in Brooklyn. In his

founding statement, Channing argued that "individual exertion" was wholly

insufficient to meet the needs of the times. Only by "Union" would "*heaven on*

earth" be established.[54] The format of the church's service reflected Channing's

emphasis on unity. Sunday morning services were guided by a chosen leader,

"appointed for such a time as may seem best for the interests of society." Channing

specifically repudiated the "priesthood," as Brownson had done, for he believed "that

the only true priesthood is the innumerable company of earnest, upright, loving souls,

whom God forever consecrates anew." The Sunday evening services, much like

those of the Quakers, were "wholly spontaneous in character." Individuals were

encouraged to speak as they felt led by the Holy Spirit, which Channing believed

would ameliorate the divisions of class, intelligence, and religious backgrounds of the

congregants.[55]

Channing presented the views that guided his ministry and his theopolitical

ideas in *The Present*, a journal he edited while pastor in New York. *The Present*

---

[52] "Brownson on the Laboring Classes," *The Western Messenger*, November 1840, 316-30.
[53] Letter from William Henry Channing to Theodore Parker, June 1842, quoted in Frothingham, *Memoir of William Henry Channing*, 176.
[54] William Henry Channing, *A Statement of the Principles of the Christian Union* (New York: George W. Wood & Co., 1843), 7.
[55] Channing, *Statement of the Principles*, 11-12.

provides the most comprehensive explication of Channing's views in the early 1840s about the relationship between individual and social reform and the answer to social and economic inequality. In the journal, Channing argued for the symbiotic relationship between individual and social reform. For Channing and the Transcendentalists in general, the great question of the age was, "[H]ow can we have community with individuality, and individuality with community, and so love our neighbors as ourselves?"[56] Liberty had erred to the side of license and "selfish independence," leaving the United States a mass of atomistic individuals who had forgotten the importance of community. While William Ellery Channing had argued that individual moral cultivation was the central way to bring about economic justice and Brownson had argued that individual reform was useless without first fundamentally reordering society, Channing believed individual and social reform went hand in hand.

Channing's passion for joining individual and social reform led him to become one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Brook Farm. While never a formal member, Channing was a major leader in the group. George Ripley, who had invited Orestes Brownson to Boston, founded Brook Farm in 1841 with the support of his friend and fellow Unitarian minister John Dwight. In 1844, Dwight eloquently conveyed the spirit behind the Brook Farm experiment. "Was not the law of my individual being appointed with perfect knowledge of all the laws of the whole universe of things, and with full regard to the laws of all other individual natures like myself," he wondered, "so that I in my true self-development must harmonize with

---

[56] William Henry Channing, "Call of the Present—No. 1—Social Reorganization," *The Present*, 15 October 1843, 37-45.

others and not clash?"[57] Brook Farmers pursued the proper development of the

organic social order in earnest.

Brook Farm, located about one mile from West Roxbury, a suburb of Boston,

was on 170 acres of land, with a farmhouse, or "Hive," as the center of activity. It

was primarily an agricultural endeavor, though the leaders of the Farm supplemented

its income by operating a boarding school on the grounds. Each member bought a

share in the Farm and was required to perform manual labor. The original members

were an eclectic group, consisting of a number of Ripley's supporters, paying

boarders who did not perform manual labor, and youth enrolled in the Farm's

boarding school. The earliest male Farm residents devoted their time exclusively to

caring for livestock and preparing the fields for crops, while the women managed the

"Hive" by preparing meals and cleaning. Evenings were spent in intellectual pursuits,

as men and women joined in reading, playing games, or discussing philosophy and

politics.[58] Early on, most of the Brook Farm residents were members of Boston's

elite Unitarian Transcendentalist group.

While Brook Farm was an experiment in balancing the individual and the

social, the Brook Farmers sometimes emphasized the whole over the parts in their

discussion of the organic social order.   "Humanity is a living organism, of which

every individual is a member," one Transcendentalist wrote, "—each in his sphere,

bound to his fellows and the whole, as the arm or the foot is bound to the body."

Corporeal language infused Transcendentalist writings with imagery of a healthy

---

[57] John Sullivan Dwight, *Association in Connection with Education* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1844), 4, quoted in Richard Francis, *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 71.
[58] Delano, *Brook Farm*, 46-47.

body whose parts operated seamlessly as a whole. Channing described the divinely-ordained social order as a "living body," and as a "Collective Man"[59] while Ripley claimed that the perfect society was one with "such *oneness* as is felt in the physical body—in which the slightest pain in the remotest nerve is sympathized by all the others."[60]

William Ellery Channing had also spoken in corporeal terms when discussing the organic society, though with a different emphasis. "A human being is a member of the community, not as a limb or a member of the body . . . intended only to contribute to some general, joint result," he argued. Individual identity did not derive solely from the function one served as part of society. Moreover, the most important result of social relations was not some vague "common good." For Channing, "the progress of society consists in nothing more, than in bringing out the individual, in giving him a consciousness of his own being, and in quickening him to strengthen and elevate his own mind."   Society existed and had existed since time immemorial, but to assert that the chief purpose of society was to achieve some collective end was false.[61]

Nevertheless, there was overlap in the organic idea of Brook Farm and that of its Unitarian predecessors. Both hearkened to the New England township of the Puritan era. George Ripley expressed longing for the "primitive, beautiful country

---

[59] William Henry Channing, "Signs of the Times," *The Present*, 15 January 1844, 280 and *The Christian Church and Social Reform: A Discourse Delivered Before the Religious Union of Associationists* (Boston: William Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1848), 23.

[60] Ripley in "Celebration of Fourier's Birthday at Brook Farm," *The Phalanx*, 3 May 1845, 336, quoted in Charles Guarneri, "The Associationists: Forging a Christian Socialism in Antebellum America," *Church History* 52, no. 1 (1983): 43.

[61] William Ellery Channing, *Spiritual Freedom: Discourse Preached at the Annual Election, May 26, 1830*, in *The Works of William Ellery Channing* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903), 4:77-78.

life" of his childhood home of Greenfield, Massachusetts.[62] The New Yorker Parke

Godwin, while not a native of Massachusetts, argued for a return to the township

model of government, since the township was the most "legitimate sphere" of

power.[63] Like the founders of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys

and Orestes Brownson, the Brook Farmers premised their solutions to economic

inequality on a romantic vision of an organic agrarian American past. While their

vision, unlike that of the Farm School, remained general and offered little practical

help, the Brook Farm leaders tapped into notions of an idyllic rural life that had been

sacrificed to economic opportunism. As the historian Anne Rose writes, the

Transcendentalists "saw farming as the occupation most favorable to personal growth

because of its distance from the market, proximity to nature, and promise of a

subsistence to protect moral independence."[64]

One working-class member of Brook Farm, Louis Ryckman, though not a

Transcendentalist, played an especially important role in shaping Transcendentalist

organic thought by introducing to the Brook Farmers a social scheme that seemed

capable of establishing the perfect society. Ryckman, a New York shoemaker who

joined Brook Farm in 1843, was the Second Vice President of the New York Fourier

Society. Fourierism had reached the shores of the United States through the work of

Albert Brisbane, a western New Yorker who had been exposed to Fourier's ideas

while studying in Europe. Brisbane convinced Fourier to tutor him, and the fruit of

---

[62] Quoted in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *A Life of George Ripley* (n.p.), 276, in Charles Crowe, "Transcendentalist Support of Brook Farm: A Paradox?," *The Historian* 21, no. 3 (May, 1959): 286.
[63] Parke Godwin, "Constructive and Pacific Democracy," *The Present*,1 March 1844, 344. Guarneri points to the "lingering strain of corporatism" in Godwin's and Horace Greeley's thought in *Utopian Alternative*, 43.
[64] Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*, 138.

their relationship was Brisbane's *Social Destiny of Man or, Association and Reorganization of Industry*, which he published in 1840. Brisbane converted Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York *Tribune*, to the Fourierist cause, and the popularity of the *Tribune* assured Brisbane a wide readership of his ideas. Greeley had been sending the *Tribune* to Brook Farm, where the residents eagerly read about Fourierism and were probably amazed by the close compatibility of Fourier's scheme with the goals of Brook Farm.[65] Ryckman's arrival in 1843 only strengthened the push toward Fourierism.

Fourierism fit the Brook Farm Transcendentalists' philosophy extremely well. Fourierists, like Brownson and communitarian Transcendentalists, saw economic inequality in American society less in terms of individual failures than sociological problems such as the degradation of work in the wage labor system and the atomization caused by a laissez-faire economy, and they were committed to a "universal reform" of the individual and society involving all classes. Fourierism was especially helpful in tying organic and individualist thought together because it harnessed individual interests for the good of the community. As Carl Guarneri argues, New England Fourierists "espoused an old-fashioned communal bond but advocated new individualistic forms to attain it."[66] Fourier's "passional attraction" was the idea that each person, in pursuing the work for they were most suited and "passionate" would, in combination with others following their passions, create an ordered community. Brook Farm officially converted to Fourierism in 1844, adopting new Articles of Association to reflect the leaders' adoption of the Fourierist

---

[65] Delano, *Brook Farm*, 85-89. See also Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, chapter 1.
[66] Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 138.

scheme. The leaders of Brook Farm created their own work scheme based on passion, separating the labor into "Agricultural," "Mechanical," "Domestic," and "Educational" groups.[67] There was no hierarchy of groupings; the Brook Farmers claimed that manual labor was just as useful and meaningful as all other pursuits.

The Brook Farmers and leaders of the Associationist movement refused to call themselves Fourierists because they believed doing so would bring undue attention to Fourier and cause the public to believe that Fourier's scheme was a mere human invention. Thus they asserted that it was "a discovery of the divine order of society."[68] William Henry Channing linked Christ's work directly to the Associationist movement, arguing that "In the devotedness and disinterestedness of the Prophet of Nazareth was the birth of Association—Association is Christianity, carried into every relation and detail of human life."[69] What had been an abstract among Unitarians—the belief in a divinely-ordained social order—was systematized by the Brook Farm Associationists.

The Brook Farmers' embrace of Fourierism created a natural bridge between them and resurgent workers' groups as both sought to bring about an end to the economic inequality that had become glaringly obvious in the wake of the depression of the late 1830s and 1840s. The leaders of Brook Farm eagerly joined Massachusetts workingmen and women in October 1844, when laborers from all over Massachusetts met to discuss the need for a national union and the establishment of a ten-hour work day. George Ripley played an especially prominent role in the

---

[67] Delano, *Brook Farm*, 162-64.
[68] Ibid., 196-97.
[69] "Associationists' Convention," *The Phalanx*, 20 April 1844, 103-6, in *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, eds. John R. Commons, et. al. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), 7:190.

convention. On the first day of the convention he and Ryckman discussed the need

for a ten-hour day, and the *Workingman's Advocate*, a New York Workingmen's

newspaper, praised Ripley for his "eloquent remarks" in a speech he gave supporting

the Workingmen's cause. The convention resulted in the formation of the New

England Workingmen's Association (NEWA), in which Ripley, Ryckman, and

several other Brook Farmers played an essential role. At its March, 1845 meeting,

the NEWA appointed George Ripley to the executive committee and elected Louis

Ryckman president.[70]

From the beginning of the Brook Farmers' involvement with the NEWA, their

motivation was to mold the NEWA in the Associationist image. The Brook Farm

leaders' paternalistic treatment of the working-class leaders of the NEWA shows that

they had not completely given up the hierarchy of their elite Unitarian roots. Two

weeks after the October, 1844 gathering of workingmen and women and their

supporters, Charles Dana, Brook Farm's Director of Finance, wrote to Parke Godwin

in New York. "I think we can hardly fail to have it [the workingmen's movement] in

our hands. We are in fact the only men who can really point out their course for them

& they can hardly help looking to us for their advisors." Godwin replied, "The

working classes are ready for us—and absolutely ask for our instruction and

guidance."[71]

---

[70] Delano, *Brook Farm*, 205.

[71] Charles Dana to Parke Godwin, 30 October 1844, and Godwin to Dana, 8 November 1844, Bryant-Godwin Papers, New York Public Library, quoted in Delano, *Brook Farm*, 189. Historians have debated the extent to which the takeover of the NEWA by the Brook Farm Associationists was a paternalistic overture by elites toward the working class. Norman Ware offers a scathing analysis of the Associationists, arguing that Associationism was a middle-class movement that "attached" itself "to the workers' agitation of the period, often to the detriment of the latter." He goes on to say, "Unfortunately for the working-class movements of the forties, the intellectuals were always attempting to use them to advance their own plans." See Ware, *Industrial Worker*, 164, 178. For a

As the correspondence between Dana and Godwin shows, attempts to create a society in which class distinctions were erased were often not as fruitful as some Brook Farmers may have claimed. The Brook Farmer Marianne Dwight revealed her classism in a letter to her friend Anna Parsons about Mary Ann Cheswell, a member of Brook Farm and the wife of a carpenter. "I have been much affected lately, by the noble devotedness of our good Mrs. Cheswell," Dwight wrote to Parsons. "This coarse woman, as I once thought her, and as she was, is really becoming very charming . . . . In her, we see what Association is going to do for the uneducated and rude."[72] Dwight was not so sanguine a year later, when she again wrote to Parsons about Cheswell and other working-class members who had left the Farm. She wondered:

> How is it that the people who are not calculated to help us, who, tho'
> good in their way, yet lack that refinement which is indispensable to
> give a good tone to the place, do actually withdraw in the pleasantest
> manner, wholly unasked, and without any chance of feeling that their
> withdrawal is desirable to us? I cannot call it chance. God wills it. . .
> Our friends, the Cheswells, for instance; well, all at once, comes a call
> to them from abroad, —a better prospect opens to them outside the
> camp, than from within, and they have gone to enjoy it, —bidding us
> adieu with kind feelings and some regrets which indeed are mutual.
> Mrs. Ryckman and Jeanie, too, are gone, but we hope some time to
> have Mrs. R. back again. . . . We feel, too, our brotherhood with those
> who have gone, —but it always seemed to me a great mistake to admit

---

similar argument, see "New England Workingman's Association, 1840-1848," in Susan Kingsbury, ed., *Labor Laws and Their Enforcement, with Special Reference to Massachusetts* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 32-35. Carl Guarneri is more sympathetic to the Associationists, many of whom, he argues, were actually members of the working class and not the elite intellectuals Ware describes. Guarneri points to Louis Ryckman as an example of a working-class radical who, "far from being diverted from labor agitation by utopian socialism, brought Associationist ideas into the labor movement." See Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 293. The elite Brook Farmers were probably less conspiratorial than Ware suggests, though their tendency to talk paternalistically about the workingmen and women, does reveal an entrenched class bias.

[72] Letter from Marianne Dwight to Anna Parsons, Summer 1845, in Marianne Dwight Orvis, *Letters from Brook Farm, 1844-1847*, ed. Amy L. Reed (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College, 1928), 104.

coarse people upon the place. Now we need not fear subjecting our
pupils to evil influences from such quarters.[73]

Dwight's description of the Cheswells and the Ryckmans belied the classlessness of

the Brook Farm experiment. For Brook Farm to succeed, it needed the very "coarse

people" whom Dwight so easily dismissed. Dwight's condescension hints at one of

the causes of the failure of Brook Farm—the perpetuation of class bias among the

Farm leaders.

NEWA leaders were not so quick to accept the condescending guidance of the

Brook Farmers. An uneasy tension marked the relationship between the NEWA and

Brook Farm. Members of the NEWA expressed resistance to the proposals of the

Brook Farm Associationists. Much of the debate between the Brook Farmers and the

rank-and-file members of the NEWA was over means and ends in labor reform. The

impetus for the formation of the NEWA had been the desire to use collective action to

bring about the ten-hour workday. Members of the NEWA were fundamentally

concerned with bread-and-butter issues, immediate changes that would bring clear

results. The Brook Farmers, however, balked at this approach, arguing that the only

way to bring about real change was by fundamentally reorienting the individual and

society in a way that established just economic and social relationships. The Brook

Farmers' emphasis on larger philosophical questions about injustice in the politico-

economic system, like Brownson's general discussions of class warfare, did little to

address the real needs of Massachusetts workers.

---

[73] Letter from Marianne Dwight to Anna Parsons, 19 April 1846, in Orvis, *Letters from Brook Farm*,
164-5. "Mrs. Ryckman" and "Jeanie" refer to June and Jeanie Ryckman, the wife and daughter of
Louis Ryckman. Louis Ryckman left the farm in November 1845, and June and Jeanie followed him
in Spring 1846.

Battles between the Brook Farm Associationists and other members and leaders of the NEWA erupted in 1845 over the need to strike for a ten-hour day. In a May, 1844 article in the Associationist periodical *The Phalanx*, the Associationists had criticized workers who were organizing to strike. "We wish," the author wrote, "that we could impress upon our countrymen the degrading littleness and insufficiency of this attempt at a compromise of their rights," for the strike "only modifies the condition but does not change the terms of dependence on masters." The Associationists called it "disgraceful" that workers would seek a reform that would only "convert them from twelve and fourteen to ten hour slaves."[74] Like many of Brownson's arguments, the statements of the Associationists suggests they failed to acknowledge or respect workers' desires.

William Field Young, editor of the NEWA's *Voice of Industry*, warned the Brook Farm leaders of the danger of alienating the vast majority of the NEWA's members. "Our friends at 'Brook Farm,' and some others, are in favor of introducing strong measures, while others doubtless equally interested are not prepared for such entirely new and decided steps," he stated diplomatically. Young argued that the Associationist members of the NEWA would cut themselves "loose from many good and honest workingmen" if they continued to pursue the path of radical reform. He sought to bring the factions of the NEWA together, by calling for the ten-hour advocates to pursue their reforms while the Associationists simultaneously worked toward more radical solutions to economic inequality.[75]

---

[74] *The Phalanx*, 18 May 1844, 189, in *Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, 7:232-33.
[75] *Voice of Industry*, 12 June 1845, 3.

The battle between the Associationists and the working-class members of the NEWA reached its height at a September 1845 meeting of the NEWA, when a member of the NEWA proposed a resolution in praise of the formation of a mutual aid group among some Boston mechanics. The collective effort would "protect the workingmen against the cupidity of mercenary speculation and grasping monopolization and unite them into a charitable business organization." Louis Ryckman angrily responded to the resolution, arguing that "the N.E. Association was organized upon a broader and nobler basis" and that "the Resolution tended to retrograde rather than progress." Ryckman argued that measures for immediate amelioration of needs were completely useless without a fundamental reformation of society, which, he argued, could only be accomplished by means of "some united, moral, intelligent action through the ballot box."[76] Ryckman's oratory was an attempt to whip the workingmen into a frenzy, but such rhetoric rang hollow in the ears of workers whose immediate needs required something other than ideological resolutions. Young tried to mediate the dispute, suggesting to Ryckman that perhaps he had misunderstood the resolution, but by the end of the session it was clear that the debate had generated more heat than light.[77]

As the workingmen and women in the NEWA became convinced that their organization was being co-opted by the Associationists, they began to pass measures strengthening their position that "practical" measures were necessary for the accomplishment of their goals. These measures included the establishment of a ten-hour workday, the creation of "Protective Charity" groups, and the use of political

---

[76] *Voice of Industry*, 18 September 1845, 2.
[77] Ibid.

power to achieve economic justice.[78] Refusing to truckle to the paternalism of the Associationists, they resisted the "impractical," if well-meaning suggestions of the Brook Farm leaders for radical change.

Workers' groups, then, did not allow themselves to be disempowered by the overtures of Brook Farm's reformers, and, in their own way, influenced the direction of Associational Reform. As Associationism waned in the late 1840s, workingmen's groups provided a useful outlet for the energies of displaced Associationist reformers. The NEWA dissolved in 1846 but was quickly replaced by the Labor Reform League of New England. The former Brook Farmer John Allen led the Labor Reform League, which included many former NEWA members who had been Associationist sympathizers. Other labor reform groups sprang up in Boston as well, so that by the late 1840s the city and the surrounding countryside were inundated with reform-minded labor groups. When Boston journeymen tailors went on strike in 1849, the Boston Associationists, many of whom had been members of Brook Farm, encouraged the creation of a cooperative shop, a tactic they had earlier opposed. The Associationists also met with representatives from tailors', printers', seamstresses', and cabinetmakers' cooperatives in 1850 to form the New England Industrial League, which became a popular political organization.[79] Having been humbled by their own failures and the resistance of the working class to their solutions to economic injustice, some Associationists adopted many of the measures they had previously seen as futile.

---

[78] *Voice of Industry*, 7 November 1845, 3.
[79] Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 316-19.

Brook Farm collapsed in 1847 under the weight of mounting debt and internal disagreement. Fourierism had come under harsh criticism from some Transcendentalists, most notably James Freeman Clarke, the Unitarian minister who had served as one of the key Unitarian Transcendentalists in debates within the church, and had been sympathetic to Brook Farm. According to Clarke, the Brook Farmers, by adopting Fourierism, had gone too far in their emphasis on a structural solution to poverty. Clarke accused the Fourierists of "looking to outward forms for a cure of the evils which have their root in the soul and heart."[80] For Clarke, the "deepest cause of all social evil" was not the inadequate arrangement of society, but "SIN—individual sin." "If we wish then to reform society," he argued, "we must first of all reform ourselves."[81] Another Unitarian argued that both "imperfect institutions" and "individual character" should be objects for reform, but "that first comes the duty of the individual." The "Gospel method is the true one," the anonymous clergyman wrote, "aiming as it does first at the individual conscience."[82] These critiques of Fourierism, when combined with its unstable financial situation, created a crushing weight on the Farm. The final deathblow was a fire in 1846 that destroyed the Phalanstery, the building under construction that was to serve as the center of Farm life.

But the Transcendentalist experiment in Associationism did not die with Brook Farm. In May 1846 William Henry Channing founded the Religious Union of Associationists, which absorbed many of the Brook Farm residents who were leaving the failing group. The Religious Union of Associationists attempted to tie Fourierism

---

[80] James Freeman Clarke, "Fourierism," *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*, July 1844, 74.
[81] Ibid., 77.
[82] "Christianity and Socialism," *Christian Examiner* 4th Ser. 10 (September 1848): 211.

more closely to Christianity, emphasize the divine nature of social order, and seamlessly join the individual and the collective. As Channing argued, "Surely, if, throughout creation in the grouping of solar systems and the arrangement of insect republics, Divine Wisdom is manifest in Order, there must be a Law of Society." This society is "perfect, permanent, beautiful as God's own reason, which man's intelligence can discern, and man's free-will apply."[83] The Religious Union of Associationists was short-lived, however, dissolving in 1854. Despite Channing's effort to correct the mistakes of other Associationist groups by tying the group more closely to Christian principles and making it more inclusive of the working class, the Religious Union of Associations failed to accomplish its goals.[84]

Channing and the Brook Farm Associationists had attempted to join individual and collective reform to create a classless society in which the labor of head and hand were equally yoked. They carried their heritage of organic thought into their experiment, a thread of communitarianism that tied them to the Unitarians from whom they differentiated themselves. Transcendentalists' social reform ideas led them to develop ties with the working class. Debates over the translation of idea into practice strained these ties, however, and they were ultimately severed by the elitism of Unitarian Transcendentalists.

Coming Full Circle: A Return to Conservatism

---

[83] Channing, *The Christian Church and Social Reform*, 31.
[84] Charles Crowe, "Christian Socialism and the First Church of Humanity," *Church History* 35, no. 1 (1966): 103.

The loss of faith in egalitarian organicism led some Transcendentalists to pursue a hierarchical unity, one that was similar to that of early nineteenth-century Unitarians. William Henry Channing turned toward a more conservative worldview following the collapse of the Religious Union of Associationists, and Orestes Brownson, after his call for social upheaval in "The Laboring Classes," retreated from radicalism and gradually adopted a conservative stance toward economic inequality. [85] Brownson's conversion to Catholicism in 1844, far from being a sign of religious inconsistency or ideological fickleness, was a continuation of his struggle with the way to best balance the individual and community. It also reveals a disappointment in the Transcendentalist experiment to eliminate a class-based society and replace it with a democracy bolstered by economic equity. Transcendentalist solutions to economic inequality had failed, in part because they had succumbed to the very thing they had sought to eliminate—divisions between elites and the poor and working classes.

The most dramatic conversion to conservatism was that of Orestes Brownson. In the early 1840s, Brownson was an enthusiastic early supporter of Brook Farm. In 1842 he sent his son to the Brook Farm School as a show of support for Ripley's experiment, and some of his writings, in contradiction to his earlier statements about the need to place social change above individual reform, seemed to support the individual/social dialectic that William Henry Channing had emphasized. "Individuality has its origin and support in Community," he argued, "and Community

---

[85] "Conservative" here does not imply a lack of interest in reform. Rather, the conservatism of Channing and his fellow Transcendentalists was one that sought ordered progress rooted in continuity and tradition.

its life, its actual existence in individuality."[86] By late 1843 and early 1844, though, Brownson had begun to question the ability of a superficially classless society like Brook Farm to create the order necessary for individual and social flourishing.

The seeds of Brownson's doubt had been sown after the election of 1840 when, despite his clarion call for change in "The Laboring Classes," the vast majority of voters elected the Whig William Henry Harrison over the Democrat Martin Van Buren. Brownson was shocked that the masses, as he believed, had voted against their own interests for a candidate whom he thought would only worsen the economic plight of the most downtrodden. The 1840 campaign "disgusted me with democracy as distinguished from constitutional republicanism, destroyed what little confidence I had in popular elections, and made me distrust both the intelligence and the instincts of the masses," he later wrote.[87] His attempt to "christianize democracy" had come to naught, as the mass of voters had rejected Martin van Buren, the candidate whom he believed most clearly represented Christian democracy. Brownson became less sanguine about the ability of individuals to discern right action. He wished "to see a greater degree of social equality," but he had come to believe it could only be accomplished "through the aid of the more influential classes themselves."[88] He had deeply sympathized with the laboring classes, but had never shown any real knowledge of their lives or concerns. Now he believed they were not worth listening to.

---

[86] Orestes Brownson, "The Community System," *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review*, February 1843, 133.

[87] Orestes Brownson, *The Convert*, in *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson*, arr. Henry Brownson (Detroit: Thorndike House, 1884), 5:120, quoted in R.A. Herrera, *Orestes Brownson: Sign of Contradiction* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999), 52.

[88] Orestes Brownson, "Introduction," *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, January 1844, 25.

Brownson argued that human sin was the largest stumbling block to social reform. "With ignorant, depraved men, can you have a rightly organized society?" he wondered.[89] By 1844 his support for Brook Farm had waned, and he became a vehement critic of Fourierism, which he believed was fundamentally anti-Christian in character. "You assume the perfection of human nature," he wrote to the Fourierists, "the essential holiness of all man's instincts, passions, and tendencies." But "Christianity . . . teaches that evil comes from within, from man's abuse of the freedom essential to his being as man."[90] "You cannot serve both God and mammon;" he argued, "and the Fourier attempt to reconcile the service of the one with that of the other will turn out a miserable failure, and cover with merited disgrace all concerned in making it."[91]

If social reform could not come from Fourierism or political democracy, what would be its source? Brownson's answer was the Church, specifically, the Catholic Church. Brownson's quest for certitude of belief had led him into discussion with Benedict Fenwick, the Catholic Bishop of Boston, in early 1843, and over the next year or so he increasingly came under the influence of the Catholic Church. Brownson's desire for "logical consistency," as one biographer put it, was answered by Catholicism, and in October 1844 Brownson took the sacrament to join the Catholic Church.

Brownson's conversion to Catholicism was, in his view, an assent to the call of God. But it was also the end result of a long quest for a socio-political worldview

---

[89] Orestes Brownson, "No Church, No Reform," *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, April 1844, 194.
[90] Orestes Brownson, "Church Unity and Social Amelioration," *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, July 1844, 313.
[91] Ibid., 327.

in which he could confidently place his trust. For Brownson, one of the appeals of the Catholic Church was that it allowed for the formulation of moral principles based on long-standing tradition. Brownson had seen the unfavorable side of democracy and had become alarmed by Transcendentalists' relativistic approach to faith. The doctrine of the Catholic Church, in its certainty of tradition, gave him comfort. He believed that the standard of Christianity, "the word of God, as preserved and interpreted by the Church," was the only true standard by which to organize and judge social progress.[92] According to Brownson, "contrary to the views of the associationists, the Church [was] the highest, the paramount, association."[93]

Brownson's Catholicism might seem far from the Unitarianism and Transcendentalism he had embraced in the 1830s. In reality, his acceptance of Catholicism, with its Natural Law ideology, fit well with his earlier embrace of organicism. The belief in society as divinely ordained and ordered had been a consistent force in the ideological thread from Unitarianism to Transcendentalism. If Unitarians and Unitarian Transcendentalists could agree on one thing, it was that society was the result not of compact, but divine will. They also agreed that the organic nature of society imposed duties on each member of society, though they disagreed on the duties owed by different members of the social order. Like early Unitarians who had argued that the established church was essential to the proper development of organic society, the Catholic Brownson argued, "this organic principle and these guaranties can be found only in religion, in the life of the

---

[92] Orestes Brownson, "Fourierism Repugnant to Christianity," *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, October 1844, 451-52.
[93] Brownson, "Church Unity," 325.

Gospel."[94] As one of his biographer argues, Brownson's ideas of organicism and tradition "were arising out of American Protestant religious culture," but at the same time "were alternatives to prevailing notions of Protestant evangelical individualism."[95] By 1848 Brownson, who had once boasted that his aim was to "christianize democracy and democratize the church," was arguing that "democracy always sooner or later terminates in despotism or autocracy."[96] The only true source of authority was the Church.

What did this mean for Brownson's understanding of economic inequality? First, Brownson, like Unitarians two decades earlier, argued that the poor were a natural part of the social order. "Now, we, for our part, do not believe poverty can be cured," he argued, "for we do not believe that poverty is an evil." Christ's words, "'The poor ye have always with you,'" and "'blessed are the poor,'" were evidence that poverty was not the result of individual immorality or unjust social structures. Instead, "When submitted to as a penance," poverty was "a great blessing," one that all humans should voluntarily seek.[97] Second, Brownson believed that lasting socio-economic change would never result from democracy, but only through the work of the Church. Justice was the work of God, as carried out by his disciples in the Church. Change should be ordered and rooted in tradition, as interpreted and taught by the Catholic Church, the only universal church.

---

[94] Ibid., 324.
[95] Carey, *Orestes Brownson*, 135.
[96] Orestes Brownson, "Legitimacy and Revolutionism—Conservatism and Reform," *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, October 1848, 456.
[97] Orestes Brownson, "Poverty: Its Legal Causes, and Legal Cure," *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, July 1846, 408.

William Henry Channing, like Brownson, embraced a sort of conservatism, abandoning his Associationist dreams to take up a pulpit in England. Channing left the Religious Union of Associationists in 1854 and moved to Liverpool, where he took over the church of James Martineau, the English Unitarian and younger brother of the famous writer Harriet Martineau. As the historian David Robinson argues, in England Channing adopted a "high church air."[98] According to his biographer, Octavius Brooks Frothingham, "'He put on the gown; wore a high collar and a white cravat; mounted a lofty pulpit.'"[99] He apparently had abandoned the battle against the priesthood, declaring himself a full-fledged member of the ministerial class. Channing's frustration in his effort to transmit "a system of idealism" into "the material conditions of antebellum America" was typical of many Transcendentalists, whose "fervent hope for social justice" was left unfulfilled.[100]

Successes and Failures of Radical Reform

In their embrace of more radical democratic reform, Brownson, Channing, and the Brook Farm Associationists joined their changing theopolitical beliefs with social reform to make sense of the changing circumstances in antebellum America. By the late 1820s, political democracy had reached every state, each of which eliminated property ownership as a qualification for voting. When economic disaster struck in the late 1830s and persisted into the early 1840s, vulnerable members of the economic order used their new democratic power to protest the policies and systems that were keeping them in a weak position. Links between Transcendentalists and

---

[98] Robinson, "Political Odyssey," 183.
[99] Frothingham, *Memoir of William Henry Channing*, 285.
[100] Robinson, "Political Odyssey," 183-84.

members of the laboring class occurred naturally because Transcendentalist thought, with its democratic veneer, fit well with laborers' views about politics and society. Yet there were limits to the Transcendentalist solutions to economic inequality. Ties with the laboring class were strained as Transcendental elitist paternalism alienated many working class leader. Even those most sympathetic to some serious change provided answers rather than listening to the answers pushed by the nation's laborers.

As democracy took hold in the late 1820s and 1830s, the cacophony of voices in the public sphere drowned out voices like that of William Ellery Channing. Reformers interested in economic inequality were no longer able to preach about mutuality and charity in a world in which workingmen and women articulated and demanded their rights as citizens.[101] William Henry Channing and Orestes Brownson, in their changing approaches to poverty and emphasis on social reform as coequal to or more important than individual reform, were responding to demands for a change along more democratic lines, though their answers to socioeconomic problems were often vague, and counter to those of workers themselves.

Ironically, it was the social barrier of class that helped sunder the ties between Transcendentalists and members of the working class. Transcendentalists could never quite distance themselves from the elitism of their Unitarian heritage, a reality made evident in their attempts to co-opt the New England Workingmen's Association and their attitude toward the working-class members of Brook Farm. To be sure, the leaders of the working-class movement, much to the disappointment of many labor historians, were often middle-class in background and occupation, and therefore less

---

[101] On the changing politics of the antebellum period see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005) and Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

likely to protest attempted takeovers of working-class reforms by the Transcendentalists.[102] Nevertheless, the working-class rank and file members of the New England Workingmen's Association objected when they believed their attempts at real change were being compromised by ideological pursuits that did little to help meet real needs. The attempt of the Brook Farmers to recreate an idealized past that had never existed—and one that the working class themselves had rejected—left many working-class leaders doubtful of Transcendentalists' ability to effect practical change. Their objections, coupled with the decline of the Associationist movement, caused the Transcendentalist Associationists to accept modifications to their program, incorporating more practical issues in their pursuit of structural change. In the late 1840s, the tenuous alliance between working-class groups and the Transcendentalists finally crashed on the rocks of ideological difference. By 1850, the Associationist movement was effectively dead, and Transcendentalists were left with the remnants of a shattered attempt to transform their theopolitical ideas into practical social and political change.

Perhaps the ultimate irony in the story of Transcendentalist/working-class encounters is that the joint reform efforts they pursued effected little change in the lives of the most destitute poor. Even as Unitarian Transcendentalists and working-class reformers were seeking to change the structures that created or exacerbated economic injustice, the very people who were most affected by such structures were ignored. On one hand, the Unitarian Transcendentalists fulfilled Joseph Tuckerman's

---

[102] On the make-up of the leadership of antebellum working-class movements see Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, vii; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 6; Formisano, *Transformation of Political Parties*, chapter ten; Ware, *Industrial Worker*, xi; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 10; and Grimsted, "Ante-Bellum Labor," 17.

ministerial desire to see poverty addressed beyond the personal level, at the level of

society. Experiments such as Brook Farm showed the potential of alternative ways of

living to provide an economic justice not available in the wage system of labor as it

was practiced in New England. Nevertheless, these radical alternatives usually failed,

leaving the certainty of their proponents in shambles. The inability of the

Transcendentalist experiment to find enduring answers to basic questions about the

foundation of social harmony led some Unitarian Transcendentalists to retreat to an

explanation of poverty as the result of sin, with little sense or concern for wider issues

of social injustice.

Conclusion

In 1860 the Unitarian James Freeman Clarke offered an assessment of the Unitarian church in Boston. Having emerged from the church's theological and social battles of the 1840s and 1850s, his prognosis for the church was less than positive. "The Unitarian churches in Boston see no reason for diffusing their faith," he wrote. Instead, "they treat it as a luxury to be kept for themselves, as they keep Boston Common."[1] Three years later Clarke saw little improvement, arguing that Boston's Unitarian church would be weakened by its "conservative and timid" tendencies.[2] Clarke's argument about the elitism of the Boston Unitarian church was not new; for years many Bostonians had argued, like Harriet Beecher Stowe, that "all the literary men of Massachusetts were Unitarians. All the trustees of Harvard College were Unitarians. All the elite of wealth and fashion crowded the Unitarian churches."[3]

Many Unitarians, like Clarke, wished that Stowe's statement were not true. Unitarians believed that men and women across the social spectrum should, and could, live in community with each other, and that the church should serve as a conduit for the development of relationships between rich and poor. Unitarians had wished to establish such a society in Boston. Through their work with the poor, they had dreamed and talked about a seamless social system where rich and poor would

---

[1] James Freeman Clarke, *The Monthly Journal of the American Unitarian Association*, vol. 1, 350, quoted in George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America: A History of Its Origins and Development* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910), 160.

[2] James Freeman Clarke, *Christian Register*, 17 October 1863, quoted in Cooke, *Unitarianism in America*, 159-60.

[3] *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher*, ed. Barbara M. Cross (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 2:81-82, quoted in Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 8.

meet together and practice the virtues of benevolence, gratitude, humility, and love.

They believed their work would create a sort of interclass harmony that might serve

as a buffer against the fractiousness of their times. As a result of their encounters

with poverty, however, Unitarians discovered underlying tensions and contradictions

in their theopolitical vision. Tense debates among Unitarians about the legitimacy of

social stratification, the causes of and solutions to impoverishment, and the role of the

church in ameliorating poverty arose in the 1830s and 1840s, and these debates had a

lasting effect on both Unitarian poor relief programs and the Unitarian church as a

whole.

For the Boston Unitarian minister-at-large Joseph Tuckerman, encounters

with the poor created a wedge between him and his fellow clergymen in the Unitarian

church. As Tuckerman, through his work with the poor, gained awareness of the

causes and conditions of poverty and began to view the poor more sympathetically,

he proposed structural solutions to poverty that his Unitarian supporters often

ignored. Many Boston Unitarians, content to provide money for Tuckerman's

individualized approach to poverty, closed their ears to Tuckerman's call for wider

reform and ignored his pleas for their own participation in his ministry.

While Boston laymen and women were resisting Tuckerman's call for their

participation in his ministry, many members of the First Unitarian Church of

Philadelphia participated in both church and parachurch poor relief efforts that

focused on individual care for the poor. The more widespread involvement of

Philadelphia Unitarians in poor relief is partly related to the much different

environment in which they conducted their poor relief efforts. They were a distinct

minority in Philadelphia, with little public authority, and unlike Boston Unitarians, they did not make explicit links between their work and wider questions of public authority and its relationship to the church. Most Philadelphia Unitarians, like Joseph Sill, were merchants who had been members of the dissenting Unitarian church in England. They usually focused their efforts on providing monetary support and finding work for displaced English textile workers. While Boston Unitarians saw their work in terms of relationships of social hierarchy, Philadelphia Unitarians more often envisioned their poor relief work as an effort to broaden the middle class of which they were a part. Philadelphia Unitarians had a more vibrant poor relief ministry than Boston Unitarians, one in which more of the church's congregation played an active role. As Philadelphia Unitarians, men and women like the Jane and Joseph Sill, encountered the poor, they were reminded that the connections commonly made between vice and impoverishment were wholly insufficient for explaining poverty.

Other Unitarians pursued reform in institutional settings like the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys (BAFS), where crucial challenges to the Unitarian theopolitical vision also occurred. The School's founders had started the BAFS believing it would bolster a communal ethos that was falling victim to urbanization and social atomization. Believing such an ethos would be fostered best in a program of agricultural apprenticeships, they established a program in which Boston's poor boys were removed from the perceived dangerous urban environment, taught basic farm skills at the School, and then indentured to Massachusetts farmers. By the mid-1840s, however, most boys had left the Farm School or their

apprenticeships to pursue wage labor positions. For them, wage labor was not slavery, but opportunity—the opportunity to build a better life on their own terms. Instead of a long-term program for the cultivation of a steady class of Massachusetts farmers, the Farm School became a waystation for many families on the tortuous road toward economic stability. Yet, the Directors of the program continued to support the boys in their uncertain journeys into the dangerous world of liberal capitalism, praising boys who succeeded in the marketplace and recognizing the limits of their organic vision. The seeds of doubt planted by the boys and their parents about this vision would come to fruition in Unitarian debates over the church's ministry to the poor in the 1830s and 1840s.

One such debate involved the Unitarians' free chapel system in Boston. The entrance of the poor into the Unitarian free chapels exposed many more Unitarians to the presence of their poor neighbors and challenged Unitarians' notions of poverty. As the poor claimed the chapels for themselves and dressed in ways that defied common ideas of poverty, they threw Unitarian ideas of class and social stratification into disarray. This disarray, in turn, stoked the fires of theological debate, which were intimately tied to understandings of the individual and society, as well as the role of the church in perpetuating unjust social distinctions. As ministers to the poor like John Turner Sargent challenged Unitarian understandings of the role of social hierarchy in the church, the theopolitical cracks in the denomination's foundation widened.

Sargent was part of a vanguard of Unitarians whose members would eventually become known as Unitarian Transcendentalists. They rejected many

elements of the traditional Unitarian theopolitical vision, especially the church's

emphasis on the need to educate the poor through relationships of social hierarchy.

Unitarian Transcendentalists who challenged Unitarian theological doctrine also

challenged prevailing notions of the market economy. Intent on re-establishing the

social interdependency they believed was slipping away, they attempted to stir

reforms that would completely eliminate class distinctions in an overwhelming wave

of democracy. Transcendentalists were, in some ways, quite radical, but in others,

profoundly backward looking. The theopolitical ideas of Transcendentalists like

Orestes Brownson and William Henry Channing point to a continuation of a central

aspect of the Unitarian journey, one rooted in a romanticized view of an organic

communal past. Yet, even while they claimed to be building an organic society with

the workers of the American North, Transcendentalists usually ignored the very

people whom their experiments were meant to benefit. As workers challenged the

elitist views of their Transcendentalist supporters, Transcendentalists became

disillusioned, abandoning both their vision and the workers whom they sought to aid.

By the late 1840s and early 1850s Transcendentalism, and the Unitarian

denomination, was in a rapid decline, due to internal dissent that had been heavily

influenced by Unitarians' encounters with the poor.

What generalizations might historians draw from the story of Unitarian poor

relief in the antebellum period? First, the individualized approach to assistance taken

by Joseph Tuckerman and the Sill family seems to have been the most helpful kind of

aid. Tuckerman's and the Sills' intimate awareness of the conditions of those whom

they aided allowed them to more suitably meet needs and gave them a greater depth

of understanding about the lives and dignity of the poor. While Tuckerman may have failed in his attempts to effect wider reform that might have eliminated some of the systemic causes of the poverty he witnessed, his individualized approach to care, like the Sills', made an important difference in the lives of the small number of men, women, and children he was able to assist.

This differed markedly from the approaches to poverty proposed by ministers-at-large in Unitarian free chapels who focused on the poor in more collective terms and by Unitarian Transcendentalists who sought more systemic social and economic changes in their efforts to end poverty. The example of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches shows that when Unitarians treated the poor as a distinct class they perpetuated stereotypes of the poor as a distinct—and inferior—part of the social fabric. The physical separation of the rich from poor allowed elite Boston Unitarians to maintain class distinctions that belied their organic social rhetoric. Moreover, in their collective response to poverty in the free chapels, the ministers-at-large, with the exception of John Turner Sargent, largely dismissed those poor who were unable or unwilling to attend Sunday services. These men and women were usually the most needy of Boston's poor, men and women shut in the dank cellars of the city's hovels, to whom Tuckerman had been able to provide at least a ray of hope.

Ironically, Unitarian Transcendentalists, who argued they were most effectively serving the interests of the lower class, were least helpful in meeting the needs of the poor. Their systemic approach to economic inequity offered very few solutions to the real problems and needs of the working-class men and women for whom they supposedly spoke. Indeed, the inability of Unitarian Transcendentalists to

bring about any sort of effective assistance to the lower class is striking when compared with the numbers of women whom Joseph Tuckerman—a single minister-at-large—aided effectively. Had Unitarian Transcendentalists really listened to the needs of those whom they claimed to represent, they would have learned that Boston workers were less interested in wide social, political, or economic reform than in immediately meaningful adjustments to the system, like the ten-hour day, that would help abet levels of decency in their home and work lives.

The inability of Unitarian Transcendentalists and other Unitarians to truly understand the needs of the poor had important implications for the Unitarian church as a whole. The vibrancy of a church depends on its strength as a communal center that brings together men and women from all walks of life, a place where, in the words of John Turner Sargent, "rich and poor meet together." Unitarians understood this reality well, and their social vision, but not their social practices, reflected a hope in the strengthening power of cross-class relationships for the church. As James Freeman Clarke pointed out, the Unitarian church could only flourish if it rid itself of its exclusive tendencies and recognized the legitimacy of the presence of the poor in its congregations.

Yet the very people whom Clarke hoped to incorporate into the Unitarian fold in cross-class relationships—men and women on the bottom of the social ladder—often acted in ways that fostered disagreement among Unitarians about the vision that shaped Unitarians' encounters with the poor. In very real ways, then, poverty encounters had immediate implications not only for Unitarian poor relief workers and the poor, but also for the church as a whole. Unitarian poor relief encounters had

played an important role in shaping the antebellum Unitarian theopolitical vision because they reflected Unitarian ideas about God's work in the world, the role of sin in suffering, and the nature of human relationships, notions that Unitarians, and Americans in general, had long tied to understandings of politics, society, and political economy. These understandings were shaped in relationships of power, though one may wonder exactly who held power over these ideas at any particular moment. Indeed, historians are only beginning to understand the ways that the recipients of reform influenced, immediately and broadly, ideas that shaped reform programs and the churches that sponsored them.

Debates among Unitarians about their theopolitical ideas were part of a wider American discussion about how to care for the poor in a way that recognized individual dignity while maintaining community cohesion, a conversation that never ends. As is evident in the case of the nineteenth-century Unitarian church, this discussion is rendered more complex by the historical interplay of religious, social, and political thought in American society and by the almost infinite variety of social interactions that shape such thought. Americans would do well to take heed of such complexities, even as they continue the struggle to develop a society based on the liberty of the individual and the good of the whole.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AHTL   Archives and Manuscripts, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School

BA   Boston Athenaeum

BPL   Boston Public Library

DL   Duke University Library

HSP   Historical Society of Pennsylvania

LC   Library of Congress

LCP   Library Company of Philadelphia

MHS   Massachusetts Historical Society

ML   McKeldin Library, University of Maryland

UMB   Archives and Special Collections Department, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston

UUA   Unitarian Universalist Association

WL   Widener Library, Harvard University

PRIMARY SOURCES

Private Letters and Diaries

Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers (1811-1917). MHS.

Ezra Stiles Gannett Papers (1816-1918). MHS.

Joseph Sill Diaries (1831-1854). HSP.

Joseph Tuckerman Papers (1799-1863). MHS.

Joseph Tuckerman Correspondence (1830-1840). AHTL.

William Ellery Channing Papers (1780-1842). MHS.

Church Records

Bulfinch Place Chapel Records (1827-1957). AHTL.

Second Church (Boston, Mass.) Records (1650-1970). MHS.

Suffolk Street Chapel Records (1837-1845). UUA.

Organizational Records

American Unitarian Association Letterbooks (1822-1902). AHTL.

Benevolent Fraternity of Churches Annual Reports (1839-1850). AHTL.

Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in the City of Boston Records (1827-1928).
AHTL.

Society of the Sons of Saint George Records (1772-1949). HSP.

Thompson's Island Records (1814-1990). UMB.

Unitarian Universalist Association, Inactive Minister Files (1825-1999). AHTL.
        Charles Francis Barnard
        John Turner Sargent
        Joseph Tuckerman
        Robert Cassie Waterston

Periodicals

American Journal of the Medical Sciences
Boston Quarterly Review
Boston Recorder and Religious Telegraph
Brownson's Quarterly Review
Christian Disciple
Christian Examiner and General Review
Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany

Godey's Lady's Book, and Ladies' American Magazine
Lowell Offering
The Present
United States Magazine, and Democratic Review
Voice of Industry
Western Messenger

<u>Books, Tracts, and Pamphlets</u>

An Account of the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys, the Act of Incorporation, Bye-Laws, and the Rules and Regulations Adopted by the Board of Managers. Also, an Extract from the First Anniversary Sermon by the Rev. Mr. Lowell. Boston: Nathaniel Willis, 1816. LC.

Accounts of the Guardians of the Poor and the Managers of the Alms House and House of Employment of the City of Philadelphia, the District of Southwark, and Township of the Northern Liberties, for the Year Commencing 28th May, 1822, and Ending 27th May, 1823.   n.p., 1823. LCP.

Act of Incorporation and Report of the Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Boston: I.R. Butts, 1836. MHS.

Barnard, Charles Francis. *First Annual Report. To the Proprietors and Friends of the Warren Street Chapel.* Boston: n.p., 1837. LC.

The Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Reports, Act of Incorporation, By-Laws, General Rules, and Regulations, and Appendix. Boston: John Wilson, 1849. AHTL.

Boston Asylum and Farm School for Indigent Boys, Statements, Acts, By-Laws, and Rules and Regulations. Boston: I.R. Butts, 1839. MHS.

Carey, Mathew. *Appeal to the Wealthy of the Land, Ladies as Well as Gentlemen, on the Character, Conduct, Situation, and Prospects of those Whose Sole Dependence for Subsistence Is on the Labour of Their Hands.* Philadelphia: L. Johnson, 1833. LCP.

____. *Essays on the Public Charities of Philadelphia, Intended to Vindicate Benevolent Societies from the Charge of Encouraging Idleness, and to Place in Strong Relief, Before an Enlightened Public, the Sufferings and Oppressions under Which the Greater Part of the Females Labour, Who Depend on Their Industry for a Support for Themselves and Children.* Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1830. LCP.

_____. *Letters on the Condition of the Poor: Addressed to Alexander Henry, Esq. Containing a Vindication of the Poor Laws and Benevolent Societies: Proofs of the Injustice of the General Censure of the Poor, for Extravagance, Dissipation, etc. Instances of Human Suffering in Philadelphia, Not Exceeded in London Or Paris: Examples of the Gross Inconsistency of the Edinburgh Review, on the Subject of the Poor Laws: With a View of the System and Operation of the Union Benevolent Association.* Philadelphia: Haswell & Barrington, 1835. LCP.

_____. *Reflections on the Union Benevolent Association, Stating its Beneficent Effects on the Manners, Habits, Conduct, and Comforts of the Poor; but the Utter Inadequacy of Its Means, to Enable it, on a Proper Scale to Minister that Physical Aid to the Distressed and Suffering, Which Humanity Demands; and the Necessity of Raising Funds Adequate for the Purpose. With Suggestions for Alterations Imperiously Requisite, in Order to Carry into Full Operation the Benevolent Views of the Founders.* Philadelphia: William F. Geddes, 1837. LCP.

_____. *To the Managers of the Union Benevolent Society.* n.p., 1834. LCP.

Channing, William Ellery. *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, With Extracts from His Correspondence and Manuscripts*, 3rd ed. Boston: William Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1848.

_____. *Religion a Social Principle: A Sermon, Delivered in the Church in Federal Street, Boston, December 10, 1820.* Boston: Russell and Gardner, 1820.

Channing, William Henry. *The Christian Church and Social Reform: A Discourse Delivered Before the Religious Union of Associationists.* Boston: William Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1848.

_____. *A Statement of the Principles of the Christian Union.* New York: George W. Wood and Company, 1843. ML.

Dickens, Charles. *American Notes for General Circulation.* London: Chapman and Hall, 1842. ML.

The First Annual Report, of the Directors of the Boston Asylum and Farm School. n.p., 1835. MHS.

Forbes, Abner and J.W. Greene. *The Rich Men of Massachusetts: Containing a Statement of the Reputed Wealth of about Fifteen Hundred Persons, with Brief Sketches of More than One Thousand Characters.* Boston: Fetridge and Company, 1851. LC.

Quincy, Josiah. *Remarks on Some of the Provisions of the Laws of Massachusetts, Affecting Poverty, Vice, and Crime; Being the General Topics of a Charge to the Grand Jury of the County of Suffolk, in March Term, 1822*. Cambridge, Mass.: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1822. LC.

_____. *Report of the Committee to Whom Was Referred the Consideration of the Pauper Laws of this Commonwealth*. Boston: Russell and Gardner, 1821. LC.

Report of the Boston Asylum, and Farm School for Indigent Boys. Boston: Samuel N. Dickinson and Company, 1845. MHS.

Report of the Commissioners Appointed in Order of the House of Representatives, Feb. 29, 1832, on the Subject of the Pauper System of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, State Printers, 1835. LC.

Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Guardians of the Poor of the City and Districts of Philadelphia, to Visit the Cities of Baltimore, New-York, Providence, Boston, and Salem. Philadelphia: Samuel Parker, 1827. LCP.

Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Operation of the Poor Laws, Read January 28th, 1825. Harrisburg, Penn.: John S. Wiestling, 1825. LCP.

Report on the Establishment of a Farm School. n.p., 1832. MHS.

Rules and Constitution of the Society of the Sons of St. George. Philadelphia: James Humphreys, Jr., 1772. LCP.

Sargent, John Turner. *The Crisis of Unitarianism in Boston, As Connected with the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society; with Some Account of the Origin and Decline of That Organization*. Boston: Walker, Wise, and Company, 1859. LC.

_____. *A Discourse Preached at the Dedication of the Suffolk Street Chapel, February 5, 1840*. Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1840. AHTL.

_____. *The Ministry at Suffolk Street Chapel; Its Origin, Progress and Experience*. Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1845. LC.

_____. *Obstacles to the Truth: A Sermon Preached in Hollis Street Church, on Sunday Morning, December 8, 1844, by John Turner Sargent*. Boston: Samuel N. Dickenson, 1845. LC.

_____. *The Rich and Poor*. Boston: Leonard C. Bowles, 1844. BPL.

_____. *Theodore Parker, The Reform Pulpit, and the Influences That Oppose It: A Sermon Preached at the Melodeon, November 7, 1852*. Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1852. AHTL.

_____. *The True Position of Theodore Parker, Being a Review of R.C. Waterston's Letter, in the Fourth Quarterly Report of the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches*. Boston: Andrews, Prentiss, and Studley, 1845. AHTL.

A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of Charles Francis Barnard and Frederick T. Gray, as Ministers at Large in Boston, by Joseph Tuckerman; with the Charge by William E. Channing. Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1834.

Songs for the Boston Farm School. MHS.

The Subscribers, a Committee Appointed by the Town Meeting of the Citizens of the City and County of Philadelphia, on the 21st Ult. to Ascertain Whether Those Who Are Able and Willing to Work, Can in General Procure Employment . . . . n.p., 1829. LCP.

Tuckerman, Joseph. *An Essay on the Wages Paid to Females for their Labour; in the form of a Letter, from a Gentleman in Boston to His Friend in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1830. ML.

_____. *Gleams of Truth, or Scenes From Real Life*. Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1835. LC.

_____. *A Letter Addressed to the Honorable Harrison Gray Otis, Mayor of Boston, Respecting the House of Correction, and the Common Jail in Boston*. Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830. LC.

_____. *The Principles and Results of the Ministry at Large, in Boston*. Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1838. LC.

_____. *Mr. Tuckerman's Eighth Semiannual Report of His Service As a Minister at Large in Boston.* Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1831. BA.

_____. *Mr. Tuckerman's First Semiannual Report of the Fourth Year of His Service As a Minister at Large in Boston. May, 1830.* Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830. BA.

_____. *Mr. Tuckerman's First Semi-Annual Report of the Second Year, As Minister at Large.* Boston: Bowles and Dearborn, 1828. WL.

_____. *Mr. Tuckerman's Fourth Quarterly, or First Annual Report. Addressed to the American Unitarian Association*. Boston: Bowles and Dearborn, 1827. DL.

    . *Mr. Tuckerman's Second Semiannual Report of the Second Year of His Service As a Minister at Large in Boston*. Boston: Bowles and Dearborn, 1828. DL.

    . *Mr. Tuckerman's Second Semiannual Report of the Third Year of His Service As a Minister at Large in Boston*. Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1829. BA.

    . *Mr. Tuckerman's Seventh Semiannual Report of His Ministry at Large in Boston*, in *Tracts of the American Unitarian Association*. First Series, Vol. 4. Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1831. MHS.

Ware, Henry. *A Sermon, Delivered Before His Excellency John Brooks, Esq. Governor, His Honor William Phillips, Esq. Lieutenant Governor, the Honorable Council, and the Two Houses Composing the Legislature of Massachusetts, on the Anniversary Election, May 30, 1821*. Boston: B. Russell, 1821. LC.

Young, Alexander. *Evangelical Unitarianism Adapted to the Poor and Unlearned*, in *Tracts of the American Unitarian Association*. 1st Ser., Vol. 3. Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830. MHS.

Published Primary Sources

Brownson, Orestes. *The Early Works of Orestes A. Brownson*. Edited by Patrick Carey. Vol. 2, *The Free Thought and Unitarian Years*, *1830-35*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001.

    . *The Early Works of Orestes A. Brownson*. Edited by Patrick Carey. Vol. 3, *The Transcendentalist Years*, *1836-38*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002.

    . *The Early Works of Orestes A. Brownson*. Edited by Patrick Carey. Vol. 4, *The Transcendentalist Years, 1838-39*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003.

Channing, William Ellery. *The Works of William Ellery Channing*. 6 Vols. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903.

Commons, John R., et. al., eds. *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*. Vols. 5, 7, 8, *The Labor Movement*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1958.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Edited by Claude M. Simpson. Vol. 8, *The American Notebooks*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972.

Orvis, Marianne Dwight. *Letters from Brook Farm, 1844-1847*. Edited by Amy L. Reed. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College, 1928.

Rothman, David, ed. *The Jacksonians on the Poor; Collected Pamphlets*. Poverty, U.S.A., The Historical Record. New York: Arno Press, 1971.

Tuckerman, Joseph. *On the Elevation of the Poor: A Selection from His Reports as Minister-at-large in Boston*, ed. Edward Everett Hale. In *Poverty, U.S.A.: The Historical Record*, ed. David Rothman. New York: Arno Press, 1971.

Weiss John. *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker, Minister of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, Boston*. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1864. Reprint, Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Articles

Bailey, Peter. "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?' Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability." *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 3 (1979): 336-53.

Banner, Lois. "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation." *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (1973): 23-41.

Boylan, Ann. "Women in Groups: An Analysis of Women's Benevolent Organizations in New York and Boston." *Journal of American History*, 71, no. 3 (1984): 497-523.

Cayton, Mary Kupiec. "Who Were the Evangelicals? Conservative and Liberal Identity in the Unitarian Controversy in Boston, 1804-1833." *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 1 (1997): 86-107.

Cooke, Thomas and Arnaud Leavelle. "Orestes Brownson's 'The American Republic.'" *Review of Politics*, 4, no. 1 (1942): 77-90.

Crowe, Charles. "Christian Socialism and the First Church of Humanity." *Church History* 35, no. 1 (1966): 93-106.

____. "Transcendentalist Support of Brook Farm: A Paradox?" *The Historian* 21, no. 3 (1959): 281-295.

Fielding, K.J. and Anne Smith. "Hard Times and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 24 (1970): 404-27.

Geffen, Elizabeth. "Joseph Sill and His Diary." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 94, no. 3 (1970): 275-330.

Griffin, Clifford. "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 3 (1957): 423-44.

Grimsted, David. "Antebellum Labor: Violence, Strike, and Communal Arbitration." *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 1 (1985): 5-28.

Grob, Gerald. "Welfare and Poverty in American History." *Reviews in American History* 1, no. 1 (1973): 43-52.

Guarneri, Carl. "The Associationists: Forging a Christian Socialism in Antebellum America." *Church History* 52, no. 1 (1983): 36-49.

Gutman, Herbert. "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement." *American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (1966): 74-101.

Haskell, Thomas. "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility." *Journal of American History* 90, nos. 2, 3 (1985): 339-61, 547-66.

Howe, Daniel Walker. "The Individual and the Community in Early America." *Responsive Community* 8, no. 2 (1998): 61-70.

Klassen, Pamela. "The Robes of Womanhood." *Religion and American Culture* 14, no. 1 (2004): 39-82.

Kohl, Lawrence. "The Concept of Social Control and the History of Jacksonian America." *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 1 (1985): 21-34.

Kuper, Hilda. "Costume and Identity." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15, no. 3 (1973): 348-67.

Lazerow, Jama. "Religion and Labor Reform in Antebellum America." *American Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1986): 265-86.

Lewis, Ewart. "Organic Tendencies in Medieval Political Thought," *American Political Science Review* 32, no. 5 (1938): 849-76.

Michel, Sonya. "Dorothea Dix; or, the Voice of the Maniac." *Discourse* 17, no. 2 (1994-95): 49-66.

Murray, John and Ruth Wallis Herndon. "Markets for Children in Early America: A
    Political Economy of Pauper Apprenticeship." *The Journal of Economic
    History* 62, no. 2 (2002): 356-82.

Neem, Johann. "The Elusive Common Good: Religion and Civil Society in
    Massachusetts, 1780-1833." *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 3 (2004):
    381-417.

North, Gary. "The Puritan Experiment with Sumptuary Legislation." *Freeman* 24,
    no. 6 (1974): 341-55.

Reinhardt, John. "The Evolution of William Ellery Channing's Sociopolitical Ideas."
    American Literature 26, no. 2 (1954): 154-65.

Robinson, David. "The Political Odyssey of William Henry Channing." *American
    Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1982): 165-84.

Rodgers, Daniel. "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept." *Journal of American
    History* 79, no. 1 (1992): 11-38.

Rose, Anne. "Social Sources of Denominationalism Reconsidered: Post-
    Revolutionary Boston as a Case Study." *American Quarterly*, 38, no. 2
    (1986): 243-64.

Schmidt, Eric. "'A Church-Going People are a Dress-Loving People.'" *Church
    History* 58, no. 1 (1989): 36-51.

Shalhope, Robert. "Republicanism and Early American Historiography." *William
    and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 39, no. 2 (1982): 334-56.

Story, Ronald. "Class and Culture in Boston." *American Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1975):
    178-99.

Stout, Harry. "Puritans, Planters, and American Intellectual History." *Books and
    Culture* 11, no. 6 (2005): 29-31.

Sykes, Richard. "The Changing Class Structure of Unitarian Parishes in
    Massachusetts, 1780-1880." *Review of Religious Research* 12, no. 1 (1970):
    26-34.

Thomas, John. "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865." *American Quarterly* 17,
    no. 4 (1965): 656-81.

Wallis, John. "Constitutions, Corporations, and Corruption: American States and
    Constitutional Change, 1842 to 1852." *Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 1
    (2005): 211-56.

White, Shane and Graham White. "Slave Clothing and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." *Past and Present* 3, no. 148 (1995): 149-86.

Wilkinson, Patrick. "The Selfless and the Helpless: Maternalist Origins of the U.S. Welfare State." *Feminist Studies*, 25, no. 3 (1999): 571-97.

Wohl, R. Richard. "The 'Country Boy' Myth and Its Place in American Urban Culture: The Nineteenth-Century Contribution." *Perspectives in American History* 3, no. 148 (1969): 77-156.

Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. "The Mission and the Masses: The Moral Imperatives of the City Bourgeoisie." *Reviews in American History* 7, no. 4 (1979): 527-34.

Zagarri, Rosemarie. "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother." *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1992): 192-215.

Books, Theses, and Dissertations

Abzug, Robert. *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Alexander, John. *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.

Appleby, Joyce. *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967.

Baker, Jean. *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Baltzell, E. Digby. *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia: Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class Authority and Leadership*. New York: The Free Press, 1979.

Bellingham, Bruce. "'Little Wanderers': A Socio-Historical Study of the Nineteenth Century Origins of Child Fostering and Adoption Reform, Based on Early Records of the New York Children's Aid Society." Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1984.

Bender, Thomas. *Community and Social Change in America*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978.

_____. *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

Berg, Barbara. *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, The Woman and the City, 1800-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Bledstein, Burton and Robert D. Johnston, eds. *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Blewett, Mary. *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910*. Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Boydston, Jeanne. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Boyer, Paul. *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Boylan, Anne. *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Brown, Steward. *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Brownson, Henry. *Orestes A. Brownson's Early Life, from 1803 to 1844*. Detroit: Henry F. Brownson, 1898.

Carey, Patrick. *Orestes Brownson: American Religious Weathervane*. Grand Rapids: Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2004.

Cayton, Mary Kupiec. *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England, 1800-1845*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

Clark, Christopher. *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1861*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Clement, Priscilla Ferguson. *Welfare and the Poor in the Nineteenth-Century City: Philadelphia, 1800-1854*. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1985.

Cooke, George Willis. *Unitarianism in America: A History of Its Origin and Development*. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910.

Cray, Jr., Robert. *Paupers and Poor Relief in New York City and Its Rural Environs, 1700-1830.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

Crenson, Matthew. *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Danhof, Clarence. *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Davis, David Brion, ed. *Ante-bellum Reform.* New York: Harper and Rowe, 1967.

Delano, Sterling. *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2004.

Dorsey, Bruce. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Enstad, Nan. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Faust, Drew. *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Field, Peter. *The Crisis of the Standing Order: Clerical Intellectuals and Cultural Authority in Massachusetts, 1780-1833.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

Foner, Philip. *History of the Labor Movement in the United States.* Vol. 2, *From Colonial Times to the Founding of the American Federation of Labor.* New York: International Publishers, 1972.

Formisano, Ronald. *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth and Eugene Genovese. *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview.* Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Francis, Richard. *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Frothingham, Octavius Brooks. *Memoir of William Henry Channing.* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1886.

_____. *Transcendentalism in New England, A History*. Edited by Sydney Ahlstrom.
        New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1876. Reprint, Philadelphia: University of
        Pennsylvania Press, 1959.

Geffen, Elizabeth. *Philadelphia Unitarianism, 1796-1861*. Philadelphia: University
        of Pennsylvania Press, 1961.

Gibbs, F.W. *Joseph Priestley: Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth*.
        London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965.

Ginzberg, Lori. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class
        in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. New Haven: Yale University Press,
        1990.

Goodin, Robert and Philip Pettit, eds. *Contemporary Political Philosophy, an
        Anthology*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

Gordon, Linda. *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family
        Violence, Boston, 1880-1960*. New York: Viking, 1988.

Griffin, Clifford. *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States,
        1800-1865*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960.

Grodzins, Dean. *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism*.
        Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Guarneri, Carl. *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America*.
        Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Hacsi, Timothy. *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America*.
        Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class
        Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

Handlin, Oscar. *Boston's Immigrants, A Study in Acculturation*, Rev. and Enl. New
        York: Atheneum, 1977.

Handlin, Oscar and Mary Flug Handlin. *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of
        Government and the American Economy: Massachusetts, 1774-1861*, Rev.
        Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1969.

Hanley, Mark. *Beyond a Christian Commonwealth: The Protestant Quarrel with the
        American Republic, 1830-1860*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
        Press, 1994.

Hartz, Louis. *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Liberal Thought Since the Revolution*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.

Herrera, R.A. *Orestes Brownson: Sign of Contradiction*. Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 1999.

Hewitt, Nancy. *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester New York, 1822-1872*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Hewitt, Nancy and Suzanne Lebsock, eds. *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hiner, N. Ray and Joseph Hawes, eds. *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Holloran, Peter. *Boston's Wayward Children: Social Services for Homeless Children, 1830-1930*. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989.

Horton, James and Lois Horton. *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*, rev. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1999.

Howe, Daniel Walker. *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

_____. *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Hugins, Walter. *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960.

Hunt, Lynn, ed. *The New Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Katz, Michael. *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, Tenth Anniversary ed., rev. New York: Harper Collins, Basic Books, 1996.

Kelso, Robert. *The History of Public Poor Relief in Massachusetts, 1620-1920*. Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1969.

Kete, Mary Louise. *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000.

Kingsbury, Susan, ed. *Labor Laws and Their Enforcement, with Special Reference to Massachusetts*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1911.

Knights, Peter. *The Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860: A Study in City Growth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Koster, Donald. *Transcendentalism in America*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975.

Koven, Seth. *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Koven, Seth and Sonya Michel, eds. *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Kring, Walter. *Liberals Among the Orthodox: Unitarian Beginnings in New York City, 1819-1839*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.

Kuehne, Dale. *Massachusetts Congregationalist Political Thought, 1760-1790: The Design of Heaven*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996.

Laurie, Bruce. *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.

Lazerow, Jama. *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.

Levesque, George. *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1994.

Lofland, Lyn. *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Lyons, Clare. *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006.

Mandler, Peter, ed., *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

McColgan, Daniel. *Joseph Tuckerman: Pioneer in American Social Work*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1940.

The Memorial History of Boston, Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts, 1630-1880, Vol. 4. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1881.

Meranze, Michael. *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Virtue, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Mintz, Steven. *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Mohl, Raymond. *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Murphy, Teresa. *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Nash, Gary. *Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Unitarian Press, 1986.

Neem, Johann. "The Transformation of Civil Society in Massachusetts, 1780s-1840s." Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2004.

Newman, Simon. *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Nissenbaum, Stephen. *The Battle for Christmas*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

Noll, Mark. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

O'Connor, Alice. *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Osborn, Matthew. "The Anatomy of Intemperance: Alcohol and the Diseased Imagination in Philadelphia, 1784-1860." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 2007.

Pessen, Edward. *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967.

Pocock, J.G.A. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Porter, Susan, ed. *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*. Edited by Susan Porter. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

Porter, Susan. "The Benevolent Asylum—Image and Reality: The Care and Training of Female Orphans in Boston, 1800-1840." Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1984.

Robbins, Caroline. *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Rockman, Seth. *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.

_____. "Working for Wages in Early Republic Baltimore: Unskilled Labor and the Blurring of Slavery and Freedom." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1999.

Rorabaugh, W. J. *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Rose, Anne. *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Rosenberg, Charles. *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America's Hospital System*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

Rothenberg, Winifred Barr. *From Market-Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Rothman, David. *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1971.

Rotundo, E. Anthony. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1990.

Ryan, Mary. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Sassi, Jonathan. *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Scharf, J. Thomas, and Thompson Westcott. *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884.*
         Vol. 2. Philadelphia: L.H. Everts and Company, 1884.

Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur. *The Age of Jackson.* Boston: Little, Brown, and Company,
1945.

_____. *Orestes A. Brownson: A Pilgrim's Progress.* New York: Octagon Books,
         1939. Reprint, 1963.

Schneider, Eric. *In the Web of Class: Delinquents and Reformers in Boston, 1810s-*
         1930s. New York: New York University Press, 1992.

Scott, Peter and William Cavanaugh, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Political*
         Theology. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Scranton, Philip. *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia,*
         1800-1885. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Sellers, Charles. *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846.* New
         York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Shain, Barry. *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of*
         American Political Thought. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Siracusa, Carl. *A Mechanical People: Perceptions of the Industrial Order in*
         Massachusetts, 1815-1880. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press,
         1979.

Smith, Billy, ed. *Down and Out in Early America.* University Park, Penn.:
         Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.

_____. *"The Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800.* Ithaca:
         Cornell University Press, 1990.

Smith, Timothy. *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve*
         of the Civil War, Academic Library ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.
         Reprint, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965.

Stansell, Christine. *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860.* New
         York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

Steinfeld, Robert. *The Invention of Free Labor: Employment in English and*
         American Law and Culture, 1350-1870. Chapel Hill: University of North
         Carolina Press, 1991.

Stokes, Melvyn and Stephen Conway, eds. *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.

Story, Ronald. *The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard and the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870.* Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1980.

Thornton, Tamara Plakins. *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Tyler, Alice Felt. *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944.

van Leeuwen, Marco H.D. *The Logic of Charity: Amsterdam, 1800-1850.* Translated by Arnold J. Pomerans. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Walters, Ronald. *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, rev. American Century, ed. Eric Foner. New York: Hill and Wang, 1997.

Ware, Norman. *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860: The Reaction of American Industrial Society to the Advance of the Industrial Revolution.* Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959.

Way, Peter. *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of the North American Canals, 1780-1860.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

West, Jr., John. *The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation.* Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1996.

Wilentz, Sean. *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

_____. *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. New York: Norton, 2005.

Wood, Gordon. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967.

Wright, Conrad Edick, ed. *American Unitarianism, 1805-1865.* Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, Northeastern University Press, 1989.