

Free Trade & Family Values:
Kinship Networks and the Culture of Early American Capitalism

Rachel Tamar Van

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the international flow of ideas and goods in eighteenth and nineteenth century New England port towns through the experience of a Boston-based commercial network. It traces the evolution of the commercial network established by the intertwined Perkins, Forbes, and Sturgis families of Boston from its foundations in the Atlantic fur trade in the 1740s to the crises of succession in the early 1840s. The allied Perkins firms and families established one of the most successful American trading networks of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and as such it provides fertile ground for investigating mercantile strategies in early America. An analysis of the Perkins family's commercial network yields three core insights.

First, the Perkinses illuminate the ways in which American mercantile strategies shaped global capitalism. The strategies and practices of American merchants and mariners contributed to a growing international critique of mercantilist principles and chartered trading monopolies. While the Perkinses did not consider themselves "free traders," British observers did. Their penchant for smuggling and seeking out niches of trade created by competing mercantilist trading companies meant that to critics of British mercantilist policies, American merchants had an unfair advantage that only the liberalization of trade policy could rectify. Following the Perkinses allows for a reconsideration of the Anglo-American relationship in the East Indies, especially China. For example, the special relationships the Perkinses established with the Wu family of Canton as well as the London-based Baring Brothers & Co. proved critical to their

success in business. Yet these relationships developed out of the Perkinses' geopolitical position *as* Americans.

Further, the project shows that family life, gendered ideals, and particular visions of the life cycle were central to how Americans came to terms with expanding trade and evolving markets. In the late eighteenth century, Americans began to exalt family as a sentimental unit whose central aims were personal fulfillment and the raising of future citizens. But this new ideology of family masked the institution's continued political and economic utility. Family has never been the promised "haven from the heartless world" of market perils; in fact, well into the nineteenth century it was the opposite: family was a core market institution used for protection from risk and speculation. Even as the Perkinses embraced the speculative potential of commerce and investment, familial and gendered ideals shaped how they understood profit, risk, and even what it meant to be a merchant.

Finally, in recent years, scholars have integrated New England into the Atlantic World; I demonstrate the importance of New Englanders in shaping American involvement in Asia and the Pacific as well. The Pacific continues to be a central space of American empire and influence, from former colonies to trust territories. Its history merits a more robust place in American historical consciousness.

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It may very well be that the desire to scrutinize family life came from my recognition that, in my own life, there was as much pushing and rooting from my family as tugging on my own bootstraps. Whenever I wanted to know who I was and who I wanted to be, I looked to my grandparents, Mary and Stan. My grandmother taught me never to turn down an opportunity to learn something new. She might have reserved that wisdom had she known it would lead me to academia! My mom took seriously everything I ever said I wanted to do and said, let’s figure out how to achieve that. If she didn’t know the answer, she knocked on doors until she found one. I aspire to pass on this tremendous faith to my own daughter. Mom, thank you.

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as my partner. Our daughter Sierra is pretty much the best kid an aspiring academic could wish to have. She slept through the night and kept us entertained. Who needs cable when you have a toddler as silly as ours? It is to these two, my favorite people, Jon and Sierra, that I dedicate this dissertation.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------|---|
| AAS | American Antiquarian Society |
| Baker | Baker Library, Harvard Business School |
| Baring | ING/Baring Archives |
| BAT | Boston Athenaeum |
| BL | British Library |
| Cambridge | Cambridge University Library |
| Houghton | Houghton Library, Harvard University |
| JEC | James Elliot Cabot Ledger Extracts, Schlesinger Library |
| Liverpool | Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library |
| MHS | Massachusetts Historical Society |
| PEM | Peabody Essex Museum, Phillips Library |
| NEGHS | New England Genealogical Historical Society |
| NYPL | New York Public Library |
| Schlesinger | Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University |
| Smith | Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College |
| Sturgis | Sturgis Library |

INTRODUCTION

In July 1789, twenty-five year old Thomas Handasyd Perkins first arrived in Batavia (now Jakarta), capital of the Dutch East Indian Empire and longtime entrepôt of South Asian commerce. Perkins marveled that the harbors and canals overflowed with peoples and vessels from an “astonishing” array of nations: Hollanders, Armenians, Moormen, Chinese, and Malays. Americans had only recently entered the East Indies trade on their own account. In the 1789 voyage, Perkins traveled as the supercargo (sales’ agent) for the *Astrea*, a ship owned by Salem merchant Elias Hasket Derby. Perkins bore letters of introduction to Dutch officials to smooth his path, but they did little. During his first day of petitioning, Perkins reported that a British captain received permission to sell, “but we, poor, despised devils, were absolutely denied the liberty of selling a farthing’s worth.”¹ As Americans, recently independent from the British Empire, Perkins and his compatriots had little influence.

Perkins wrote of the pomp and pageantry of Batavia, of dinner with “twenty ladies at the table; their dress, manner, style of putting up their hair; sitting by themselves; toasts, huzzas, bouquets, rose-water; superfluity of everything which Europe and the Indies can give.”² Something of a nabob himself within the more modest context

¹ Thomas G. Cary, *Memoir of Thomas Handasyd Perkins* (Boston: Little Brown, 1856), 14, 18, 23. Handasyd is pronounced Handy-side.

² Cary, *Memoir of Thomas Handasyd Perkins*, 17. His writings blended notes of self-discovery with tropes common to the travel and discovery literature of the era. Travel writing and the discovery literature have much longer histories, but this type of writings became especially popular in the eighteenth century. For the use of shared tropes in travel narratives see Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008).

of Boston, Perkins recognized that the opulence of Batavia surpassed anything he might find at home.³ Yet Perkins also suggested that it was his ability to navigate this world—his fluency in French, his comportment, and his sociability—that eventually gained him license to sell the *Astrea*'s cargo. Perkins depicted himself as an explorer and a pioneer even though, as he was well aware, these distant waters were already peppered with Americans. In a way, Perkins *was* a pioneer.⁴ At a time when traders played an important role in exploration, expansion, and even simply global interaction, much of the news and narratives of the broader world came from the pens of merchant-mariners.⁵

³ Perkins's experience paralleled that of other Americans traveling abroad at the same time, to the extent that a comparison is useful. In the opening of *Empire of Liberty*, Gordon Wood describes the reflections of Thomas Lee Shippen during his presentation to the French Court at Versailles by Thomas Jefferson in 1788. Shippen, son of a prominent Philadelphia merchant family, recognized his own penchant for "the tinsel of life," but discovered the republican—indeed, the American—within when confronted by the elaborate courtesies, the "Oriental splendor and magnificence," and the transparent ennui of the French Court. Shippen and Perkins both lumped European and Asian opulence together as allied decadent societies. But they also both sought a middle space for themselves, as cosmopolitan republicans who could navigate such dense social worlds while, at the same time, maintaining their virtue. Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-6. On republican ideology as shaping moral as well as political outlooks amongst early Americans, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: Norton, 1972), Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 1st ed. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1992).

⁴ "Pioneer" here is meant with all of the historical baggage implied in the term: going boldly where many had gone before. Yet it also refers to the fact that Americans themselves heralded early merchant adventurers to the East Indies as pioneers. Ships in American harbors shot off twelve gun salutes, crowds flocked to the wharves, and newspapers published poems to honor their arrival. Perkins was not alone in seeing his experience as one of national import. On mariners and merchants as forgotten American literary protagonists, see Jacques Downs, "Fair Game: Exploitive Role-Myths and the American Opium Trade," *Pacific Historical Review* 41, no. 2 (1972): 133-149.

⁵ From the vantage of the eighteenth century Atlantic, trade was not important for its own sake alone, but also for the health and well-being of the state. While in the early national period Americans relied upon overseas trade to obtain necessary manufactures and consumer goods, challenges to the nation's ability to trade had further reaching implications. According to the political economic logic that Adam Smith dubbed the "mercantile system," commercial advantages of one nation deprived those of another. Colonial commerce, a category apart from overseas commerce, was felt to improve the colonial power's wealth by providing raw materials on the one hand and markets on the other. Overseas trade played an important revenue function, as duties on international trade promised a relatively stable source of funds for states' coffers without the political upheaval connected with land taxes. John J. McCusker, "British Mercantilist Policies and the American Colonies," in *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge

Before the American Revolution had even officially ended, American speculators laid plans for voyages into markets newly opened to them by their rebellion against the British Empire. In the fall of 1779, Thomas Perkins's brother James set sail for the French West Indies. Another group of ambitious Americans set about an adventure aboard the *Empress of China*, the first American vessel to arrive in China.⁶ The *Empress* was not the first vessel to depart for China. That honor belonged to the smaller *Harriet*, a fifty-five ton sloop that departed from Boston in December of 1783. By the time the Congress of the Confederation ratified the Treaty of Paris ending hostilities on January 14, 1784, American merchants were already on the move.⁷

Perkins was a part of this burst of commercial energy. Perkins and his uncle-in-law, James Magee, used their experience aboard the 1789 *Astrea* voyage to gain a toehold in one of the most exciting markets of their day: the East Indies trade. In partnership with his older brother, Perkins would use this toehold combined with the aggressive training and recruitment of family members, friends, and contacts to establish a trading

University Press, 1996), 337-362. As John Brewer has shown, a decisive factor in British competition with France in the long eighteenth century was Great Britain's ability to swell its national debt. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power : War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783*, 1st Harvard University pbk. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Further, sailors and merchants' vessels doubled as the "nation's naval reserve," thus enhancing the martial potential of the state. John E. Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence : Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Max M. Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government : Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (Oxford England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 86. John McCusker disputes the idea that this "pursuit of a merchant marine" was ever a mercantilist policy objective. McCusker, "British Mercantilist Policies and the American Colonies," 346.

⁶ Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, *The Empress of China* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Maritime Museum, 1984).

⁷As Cathy Matson has shown, many Americans expressed an optimistic and often unrealistic economic exuberance following the Revolution. But they also banked on it. Cathy D. Matson, "Capitalizing Hope: Economic Thought and the Early National Economy," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (1996): 273-291, Cathy D. Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1990). On speculations based upon this exuberance, see for example chapter 7 of Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

and investment network of global proportions. Perkins's entrepreneurial eye spotted many an opportunity for himself and his business partners, but long-distance trade was as risky and expensive as it was potentially lucrative. As others before him had discovered, building upon existing social ties helped to curb the risks and the costs of such trade. Together, Perkins and his brother James assembled a kinship-based commercial network centered first in the West Indies and then in the East Indies trade. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Perkins family had become the foundation for one of the most significant trading lineages of Boston. Their trade in the East Indies rivaled not only American competitors like John Jacob Astor and Stephen Girard, but also challenged well-known British companies such as the East India Company and later Jardine, Matheson & Co. and Dent & Co. But, as I will show, the challenge to foreign competitors had less to do with the size of their trade than their methods.

This study examines the strategies employed by the intermarried and intermingled Perkins, Sturgis, and Forbes clans as their commercial network stretched from an Atlantic to a global sphere of trade, from the 1780s to the 1840s, in order to ask two central questions. First, how did the Perkinses' embeddedness in a particular nation-state, the United States, influence their commercial operations? In other words, how did independence shape the norms and practices of merchant capitalists in the early national period and, conversely, how did the norms and practices of American merchants abroad shape prospects for the nation?⁸ While the literature on the domestic work of early

⁸ "Merchant" here refers to the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth century implication of "overseas merchants," and not the broader range of traders, shopkeepers, or artisans involved in commerce at any level. On this usage, see for example, David Hancock, *Citizens of the World : London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785*, 1st pbk. ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9. On mercantilism, see Lars Magnusson, *Mercantilism : The Shaping of an Economic Language* (London England ; New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1994).

American nation-building is considerable, we know far less about the international component of early American development.⁹ Second, how did social strategies, especially their use of kinship, shape the Perkinses' mercantile strategies? At a time when the literature on Atlantic exchanges has transformed historical approaches to geographies of interaction, this project further aims to push our attention to the intersection between Asian, Pacific, and Atlantic circuits of trade and influence. While Atlantic goods and markets, especially those of Britain, dominated the American economy, Asian and Pacific goods and markets played a disproportionate role in the American imagination. Given their centrality in trade with the East Indies, especially China, the Perkinses shaped perceptions of the American involvement in the Pacific.¹⁰

⁹ As Thomas Bender and Eric Foner argue, we know more about how Americans shaped the world than how "our history has been shaped from abroad." Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Eric Foner, "American Freedom in a Global Age," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (2001): 1-16.

This project builds on Doron Ben-Atar's argument that interest in the formation of American national identity augers a new opening for diplomatic history as foreign affairs was one of the few arenas where early Americans were thinking about the United States as a nation. I would add to this Kristin Hoganson's critical reflections on the nature of early American foreign relations versus diplomacy—the former extending into the messier field of merchants, consuls (who were often merchants), and foreign intercourse. Until the formation of a professionalized diplomatic corps later in the nineteenth century, it hardly makes sense to limit such discussions to formal state missions. Doron Ben-Atar, "Nationalism, Neo-Mercantilism, and Diplomacy: Rethinking the Franklin Mission," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (1998): 101-114, Kristin Hoganson, "'Hop Off the Bandwagon: It's a Mass Movement, Not a Parade,'" *Journal of American History* 29, no. March (2009): 1087-1091. This is not to argue that American merchants always improved the nation's standing or supported the nation-state. As Gautham Rao's dissertation on customhouses of the early republic argues, American merchants all over the country avidly undercut the ability of the federal government to enforce trade restrictions through the end of the War of 1812. While Rao argues this was due to merchants' "capture" of revenue officers and judges, the popular opposition to the same trade restrictions suggests a broader phenomenon than Rao allows. Gautham Rao, "Visible Hands: Customhouses, the National Market, and Federal Power in Antebellum America" (University of Chicago, 2008). Nevertheless, Rao raises important questions about the relationship of trade, merchants, and duties as a form of revenue to state formation during this period, which I hope this dissertation will also further.

¹⁰ While it has become commonplace to cast a cynical eye to nineteenth century American-Chinese trade, particularly given that the trade never lived up to the hype of a massive market for American goods, there are several reasons for maintaining historical emphasis. As Walter LaFeber has pointed out, the hype itself is significant. China and the East Indies captured people's imaginations. From Columbus to Captain Cook to Hawaii and the Spanish-American War, aspirations of finding convenient paths to the East

Not all American merchants were as well-off or as successful as the Perkinses.

Yet as one of the most well-known commercial networks of New England, they provide a fruitful field for the analysis of early American mercantile strategies. While the Perkinses appear in countless monographs considering nineteenth century New England capitalism¹¹, class structure¹², or the American China trade¹³, the closest monographs to

Indies drove massive undertakings. Ideas about Asia – whether as producers of amazing things, tradition-bound peoples, or as a massive market for American goods – frequently found a place in the American mind. Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire : An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, 35th anniversary ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), xxvii. John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast : The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design : Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Hong Kong ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Ernest R. and Fairbank May, John King, *America's China Trade in Historical Perspective : The Chinese and American Performance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market : America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901*, 1st Quadrangle pbk. ed. (Chicago, [Ill.]: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

¹¹ Robert F. Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite : The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), Norman Scott Brien Gras and Henrietta M. Larson, *Casebook in American Business History* (New York,: F.S. Crofts & co., 1939), John Lauritz Larson, *Bonds of Enterprise : John Murray Forbes and Western Development in America's Railway Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), Glenn Porter and Harold C. Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers; Studies in the Changing Structure of Nineteenth-Century Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), Mira Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹² Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1982), William F. Hartford, *Money, Morals, and Politics : Massachusetts in the Age of the Boston Associates* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Age of Industrialism in America; Essays in Social Structure and Cultural Values* (New York: Free Press, 1968), Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment : Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), Harlow W. Sheidley, "The Politics of Honor: The Massachusetts Conservative Elite and the Trials of Amalgamation, 1824-9," in *Entrepreneurs : The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850*, ed. Conrad Edick Wright and Katheryn P. Viens (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society : Distributed by Northeastern University Press, 1997), 297-323, Ronald Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy : Harvard & the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870*, 1st ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen : The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹³ Tyler Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia; a Critical Study of the Policy of the United States with Reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th Century* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), Jacques M. Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1997), Foster Rhea Dulles, *The Old China Trade*, 1st AMS ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1970), Yen-p ing Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China : The Rise of Sino-Western Mercantile Capitalism*

published studies of their commercial circle are the 1971 biography of Thomas Handasyd Perkins by Carl Seaburg and Stanley Paterson and John Larson's biography of John Murray Forbes.¹⁴ The principal reason for this may well be the gaps between the various firms' ledgers. In spite of this shortcoming, firm and family records provide a considerable source base for a more qualitative study of their worlds.

To some scholars, New England merchants differed significantly in both commercial resources and methods and thus must necessarily tell us less about the nation than about the conditions and character of New Englanders themselves. More than America's other key ports—New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston—Bostonians suffered from poor soils and thus a lack of agricultural staples for export. Philadelphia and New York were America's commercial capitals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. Both had more diverse populations, greater in- and out-migration, and higher turnover of firms than Boston. "The hub," by contrast, underwent a commercial consolidation in the late eighteenth century as the economic activity of the New England littoral increasingly concentrated in and through Boston.¹⁵

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), He Sibing, "Russell and Company, 1818-1891: America's Trade and Diplomacy in Nineteenth Century China" (Dissertation, Miami University, 1997).

¹⁴ Larson, *Bonds of Enterprise: John Murray Forbes and Western Development in America's Railway Age*, Carl Seaburg and Stanley Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971). Note, however, that Jacques Downs pays considerable attention to the Perkinses in *Golden Ghetto*, and Duncan Yaggy's dissertation on John Murray Forbes also includes an insightful consideration of the broader commercial network of the Perkinses. Duncan Yaggy, "John Forbes: Entrepreneur" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1974). Tim Sturgis, himself a descendant of Russell Sturgis, wrote on an episode in the network's history that pays particular attention to the broader network of firms and families as well. Tim Sturgis, *Rivalry in Canton: The Control of Russell & Co 1838-1840 and the Founding of Augustine Heard & Co 1840* (London: Warren Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (New York: Scribner, 1970), Robert Greenhalgh Albion, William A. Baker, and Benjamin Woods Labaree, *New England and the Sea*, 1st ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961).

Relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity and culture, Bostonians seem to have relied upon kinship and intermarriage to cement business and social ties more than their counterparts.¹⁶ To Steven Watts, Boston Federalists' preference for a patriarchal, deferential society on the one hand and involvement in speculation and luxuries trades on the other produced a cultural dissonance within Boston of the early republic.¹⁷ On the one hand, these arguments of New England exceptionalism are valid and, if not taken to extreme, valuable. The premise of this study is not that the Perkinses typified all American merchants, but that they help us to identify patterns of merchant capitalists operating *as* Americans abroad. And in that, they tell us about New England capitalist development – including the funneling of Boston capital through New York – but also about American commercial strategies.

Drawing upon a combination of personal and commercial letters and journals, ledgers, newspapers, and government publications, I demonstrate that the Perkinses relied upon mercantile strategies commonly associated with the Napoleonic Wars—the type of

¹⁶ This is certainly not the first work to consider this issue of internal dynamics of prominent Boston or even New England families and capitalist development, although most such works focus on industrialization. See Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made*, Bernard Farber, *Guardians of Virtue: Salem Families in 1800* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), Betty Farrell, *Elite Families: Class and Power in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), Arthur Menzies Johnson and Barry Supple, *Boston Capitalists and Western Railroads; a Study in the Nineteenth-Century Railroad Investment Process* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), Janet Siskind, *Rum and Axes: The Rise of a Connecticut Merchant Family, 1795-1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002). On New England merchants, see Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), William T. Baxter, *The House of Hancock; Business in Boston, 1724-1775* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1984), Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees; Two Generations of Massachusetts Merchants, 1765-1844* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937), Mark R. Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Steven Watts, "Ministers, Misanthropes, and Mandarins: The Federalists and the Culture of Capitalism, 1790-1820," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doron S. Ben-Atar and Barbara Oberg (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 157-178, Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

niche trading enabled by America's political neutrality, for example—well after the peace after 1815. Many of these techniques fit within what Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick labeled the “shadow trade,” in which merchants operated within the shadow of the law, such as smuggling or other illicit practices.¹⁸ But these techniques included other strategies deployed in the shadows of foreign monopoly and empire. Competing British and Spanish monopolies allowed them to flourish in the trade of Pacific furs between North America and China. Regulations favoring the British East India Company's monopoly on Indian opium provided an opening for Americans in the Near East. And competition between metropole and colony in Spanish America created an opportunity for Americans to trade in prized South and Central American ports. A key implication of this argument is that rather than simply looking at the role of the United States

¹⁸ On the “shadow trade,” see Stanley M. Elkins and Eric L. McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 382, Alice Keith, “Relaxations in the British Restrictions on the American Trade with the British West Indies, 1783-1802,” *The Journal of Modern History* 20, no. 1 (1948): 1-18. While it is tempting to see these niche-based strategies as unique to the Perkiennes due to Boston's notable lack of agricultural resources compared with Philadelphia or New York, traders operating out of the latter ports also used these strategies, including the aforementioned John Jacob Astor and Stephen Girard. Indeed, Thomas Doerflinger suggests that, amongst Philadelphians, New Englanders even had a reputation for being especially prone to “sharp” practices. To Doerflinger, this is not necessarily a bad thing. He argues that adverse New England conditions fueled Yankee entrepreneurialism. Yet the observations of William Pollard and Stephen Girard, whom Doerflinger cites, should be taken with a grain of salt as it is rather a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 340.

As Wim Klooster suggests, the history of American smuggling is as long as the history of the Americas, but how prevalent it was at any point in time remains a question, perhaps an unanswerable one. Wim Klooster, “Inter-Imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600-1800,” in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 141-180. Klooster offers an excellent selection of the literature. See especially Catherine Cangany, “Frontier Seaport: Detroit's Transformation into an Atlantic Entrepot, 1750-1825” (University of Michigan, 2009), Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713-1826* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), Gautham Rao, “Visible Hands: Customhouses, the National Market, and Federal Power in Antebellum America” (University of Chicago, 2008), Joshua M. Smith, *Borderland Smuggling: Patriots, Loyalists, and Illicit Trade in the Northeast, 1783-1820* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), John W. Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986). On the difficulty of writing histories of clandestine trading practices, see Alan L. Karras, *Smuggling: Contraband and Corruption in World History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

government in supporting trade (or not), be it through policies, diplomacy, or naval support, the geographic lens must be widened to consider the ways in which American merchants benefited from the state or martial power of others, including competitors.¹⁹

I show that the strategies and practices of American merchants and mariners contributed to a growing international critique of mercantilist principles and chartered trading monopolies. Nowhere was this more visible than in the use of American trade to critique British trading companies. James Fichter recently argued that American competition in India provided a primary justification for Parliament to revoke the British East India Company's monopoly of trade in India.²⁰ Even British manufacturers pointed to the Americans in their detractions of the Company's charter.²¹ This dissertation reveals that similar debates took place regarding the Company's monopoly in China, regarding American trade in the Pacific Northwest, and more. British public figures successively used Spanish, Dutch, and French competitors as yardsticks for what strategies were or were not fair in trade; by the nineteenth century, this position was taken

¹⁹ Contemporary competitors themselves complained that American merchants were, in essence, free riders, that their cheaper shipping costs could at least partially be attributed to the fact that they piggy-backed on the circuits of trade established by others. See, for example, such complaints made in the Pacific Northwest trade as discussed in Sister Magdalen Coughlin, "Commercial Foundations of Political Interest in the Opening Pacific," *California Historical Society Quarterly* XLX, no. 1 (1971): 15-33, James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992).

²⁰ James R. Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 232.

²¹ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 234. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism : Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London ; New York: Longman, 1993), John and Ronald Robinson Gallagher, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review* VI, no. 1 (1953), Yukihiisa Kumagai, "The Lobbying Activities of Provincial Mercantile and Manufacturing Interests against the Renewal of the East India Company's Charter, 1812-1813 and 1829-1833." (University of Glasgow, 2008), Anthony Webster, *The Debate on the Rise of the British Empire* (Manchester ; New York: Manchester University Press : Distributed in the USA by Palgrave, 2006), Anthony Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790-1860* (Woodbridge ; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009).

up by Americans.²² But if to some foreign observers, early American merchants of the era seemed to be “free traders,” we must ask ourselves what modes of hidden work went into constructing “free.”

This expansive picture of the Perkinses’ commerce is incomplete without an analysis of the local, personal, and even intimate ties that enabled the growth and flexibility of the Perkinses’ investments. For the Perkinses, the success of their commercial network relied upon their ability to mobilize kinship-based and kinship-like strategies to minimize risk and maximize loyalties. While Americans rejected proposals to form European-style chartered trading companies and even resisted corporations for economic rather than public purposes, the type of collaborative trust network established by the Perkinses allowed for a broader organization of market activity than that of an individual or partnership.²³ Overlapping personal and business ties furthered prospects of cross-cultural collaboration, most notably the Perkinses’ relationship with the Wu family

²² While the term “free trade” is often used by historians to study the rise of ideological opposition to protectionist trade barriers in the vein of Richard Cobden, this study relies upon an earlier use for the term, to denote an opposition to state-based monopolies in trade. See Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, Paul A. Gilje, “Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights’: Rhetoric of the War of 1812,” *Journal of Early Republic* 30, no. 3 (2010): 1-23, Lars Magnusson, *The Tradition of Free Trade* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

On the vacillation of favor and opposition to “free trade” and mercantilist practices in the American colonies and early United States, see Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution*, Christian J. Koot, “A ‘Dangerous Principle’: Free Trade Discourses in Barbados and the English Leeward Islands, 1650-1689,” *Early American Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007): 132-163, Cathy D. Matson, *Merchants & Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). As Matson argues, mercantilism and free trade or “economic freedom” were not sequential ideologies, but were repertoires of economic thought that people drew upon in complex and even contradictory ways.

²³ On resistance to chartered trading companies and corporations in early America, see, for example Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, Naomi R. Lamoreaux, “The Partnership Form of Organization: Its Popularity in Early-Nineteenth-Century Boston,” in *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850*, ed. Conrad Edick Wright and Katheryn P. Viens (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society: Distributed by Northeastern University Press, 1997), 208-295.

of Canton (Guangzhou), especially Wu Bingjian (伍秉鑿), the Hong merchant better known as Houqua (浩官). Despite cultural and legal differences, the alliance between the two business groups used kinship to establish a chain of recourse beyond firms, into families. Similar examples of collaboration are increasingly being recognized by scholars, but, in considering Chinese-American relations, it cuts against the grain of historical writing which has tended to emphasize proto-imperial tensions, racism, and commercial knowledge as traveling from west to east.²⁴ Above all, the connection of commercial and social interests molded the aspirations and expectations of many a member of the Perkinses' trade network and thus shaped the prospects for the larger group. Through the socialization of children, self-conscious maintenance of social bonds, and inheritance practices, kinship networks played a pivotal role in the development of American capitalism during its "take-off" period and paved the way for later imperial interest in the Pacific.

The Perkinses' use of kinship is not surprising. Scholars have long remarked upon the importance of social institutions to commercial networks, especially their prominence in facilitating long-distance trade. Religion, ethnicity, regional identity, and, of course, kinship, all served as important foundations for commercial networks.²⁵ Yet

²⁴ As I hope will be clear later in the text, to argue that individual Chinese merchants proved influential or even powerful relative to their American allies is not to argue that their relationship was harmonious or untouched by the political discord and colonial imbalances of the early nineteenth century. But nor should such political contexts obscure other forms of power and politics, especially prior to the Opium War. On Chinese-American relations, see Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854*. For a trenchant criticism, see Tani E. Barlow, *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). On cross-cultural collaboration, see for example Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

²⁵ The literature here is enormous. See, for example, Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis, and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou, *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History* (New

the relationship of kinship and commerce is ripe for reanalysis. In most scholarship on kinship-based business networks, families operate as ciphers for trust and loyalty.²⁶

Family itself is not interrogated. Family ties either worked, or they did not. As Sylvia Yanagisako argues, scholars often treat family “as a stable cultural resource rather than a historically situated, negotiated process that is itself continually produced.”²⁷ But *how* did these ties work? As the experiences of the Perkinses demonstrate, even within families, trust and loyalty required cultivation.

The scholarly discussion on the relationship between family and firm continues to be framed by the work of Alfred Chandler. In 1977, with the publication of the Pulitzer Prize winning *The Visible Hand*, Chandler wrote a new orthodoxy of nineteenth century economic development: the decline of “personal” or family capitalism in favor of a “managerial capitalism” rooted in the rise of a professional class of managers.²⁸

York: Berg, 2005), Frederick Barnes Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House; the Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948).

²⁶ This is true of many thoughtful works in part because family has long been considered epiphenomenal to materialist causation. Family appears more as structure—kinship—than as a social and thus personal, contingent institution. Franco Amatori and Geoffrey Jones, *Business History around the World* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Mark Casson, *Entrepreneurship and Business Culture : Studies in the Economics of Trust* (Aldershot, Hants, England: E. Elgar, 1995), M. W. Kirby and Mary B. Rose, *Business Enterprise in Modern Britain: From the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1994), David S. Landes, *Dynasties : Fortunes and Misfortunes of the World's Great Family Businesses* (New York: Viking, 2006).

²⁷ Sylvia Junko Yanagisako, "Family and Household: The Analysis of Domestic Groups," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8 (1979): 161-205. I also draw upon Yanagisako's work for defining family. Where I use household in its more specifically residential sense, I attempt to allow the Perkinses themselves to define “family.” I pay particular attention to genealogical considerations (hence the genealogical charts at the start and end of the text), but I seek out cultural markers of kinship and connection in order to consider the meanings and boundaries of family: inclusion in inheritance, rituals, familial language, etc. In an article that continues to be canonical, Yanagisako argued that “there is but one way to decide who are the members of the family in any particular case: that is by asking the natives to identify the culturally meaningful ‘kinship’ units in their society.”

²⁸ Alfred Dupont Chandler, *The Visible Hand : The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977). Historians generally see kin-based business networks as declining during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See for example Doerflinger, A

Managers enabled more complex business relations and larger economies of scale. Thus, it was not simply the corporate form that gave rise to big business in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but also the proliferation of specialized middlemen. In 1990, Chandler pushed the argument even farther. In *Scale and Scope*, Chandler compared twentieth century American business practices with those of Germany and Britain, and explicitly argued that the dependence of the latter two on personal and family ties held those countries back.²⁹ In other words, family bonds in business inhibited economic growth.

While Chandler's insights continue to be valuable for understanding business expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his narrative situates family in business within a modernizing narrative of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. In this view, family and personal relations in business were obstacles to be overcome. This depiction of kinship as static and premodern obfuscates a larger history of kinship's continued importance in business, not only in societies depicted as "more tradition-bound" like Korea and Japan, or even—per Chandler—England and Germany, but also within American business.³⁰ It shrouds the vigorous and variable ways in which capitalism and

Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise, Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality*.

²⁹ Alfred Dupont Chandler and Takashi Hikino, *Scale and Scope : The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1990).

³⁰ David Landes's recent book, *Dynasties*, points out that the family firm is alive and well and nowhere more so than in the United States. But Landes is virtually alone in keeping American businesses in the mix. Most critics argue that Chandler exaggerated the inefficiencies of family in capitalism. They reject views of family as a mere dependent variable in economic history and point to the social embeddedness of market culture. But many of these scholars suggest that American business was uniquely anti-family. Conditions ranging from the lack of an aristocracy to the ready availability of land contributed to looser family loyalties in the United States. Mark Casson's argument that American business culture emerged out of a "low trust society" can be read in this light. To Casson, immigration and mobility produced a social instability, so that Americans trusted institutions more than they trusted each other. Mark Casson, *Information and Organization : A New Perspective on the Theory of the Firm* (Oxford: Oxford

family have interacted over time, from the prevalence of family businesses to inheritance patterns and financial instruments such as trusts. Moreover, this view of kinship and capitalism obscures the extent to which market meanings themselves are historically and culturally contingent. Kinship did serve as an important tool for early modern business. Family ties provided a mechanism for pooling capital, mitigating risk, and ascertaining reputation before the advent of banks, insurance companies, or credit rating agencies. But this fact should not lead us to ignore family's longer, dynamic connection to commerce and capitalism.

Rather than seeing the Perkins network as an exemplar of a bygone stage, I argue that a more fruitful analysis can be derived from considering their commercial network within a longer history of investment networks. Different modes of organizing capital suggest different personal and business strategies. Thus, it behooves us to examine the types of internal work being done within the Perkinses' network in conjunction with changing modes of accessing capital and changing valences of family life.³¹ In the late eighteenth century, Americans began to exalt family as a sentimental unit whose central

University Press, 1997), Landes, *Dynasties : Fortunes and Misfortunes of the World's Great Family Businesses*.

³¹ In this, I take inspiration from such works as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes : Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Rev. ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), Micaela Di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship," *Signs* 12, no. 3 (1987): 440-453, Toby Ditz, "Formative Ventures: Mercantile Letters and the Articulation of Experience," in *Epistolary Selves*, ed. Rebecca Earle and Carolyn Steedman (London: Ashgate, 1990), 59-78, Toby Ditz, "Ownership and Obligation: Inheritance and Patriarchal Households in Connecticut, 1750-1820," *William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1990): 235-265, Toby Ditz, "Shipwrecked: Imperiled Masculinity and the Representation of Business Failures among Philadelphia's Eighteenth-Century Merchants," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 51-80, Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class : Explorations in Femimism and History* (N. Y.: Routledge, 1992), Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy : Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), Serena R. Zabin, *Dangerous Economies : Status and Commerce in Imperial New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

aims were personal fulfillment and the raising of future citizens.³² This new ideology of family masked the institution's political and economic value. Family has never been the promised "haven from the heartless world" of market perils. Well into the nineteenth century it was the opposite: family was a core market institution used for protection from risk and speculation. Kinship continued to be a significant consideration in organizing capital, at times as family businesses, but also in terms of investment logics for perpetuating family itself. Thus, the question is not simply how family strategies or business models changed. Investigating family strategies like those employed by the Perkinses illuminate how the two adapted to each other.

The Commercial Network

The commercial network established by Thomas Handasyd Perkins and his older brother James began with the brothers' partnership in Boston in 1792. It grew into one of the most successful American trading networks of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. "Network" is not a term the Perkinses used to describe themselves, but it is nevertheless useful for understanding the Perkinses' overarching commercial strategies and the overlap between personal and mercantile practice. Network, here, signifies more than their roster of clients and corresponding agents, although it was that. It refers to the inner circle of regular co-investors on their shipping ventures and investments.³³ In the

³² In fact, if Sarah Pearsall is correct, the increased prevalence of long-distance trade networks like that operated by the Perkinses may well have fostered what contemporaries referred to as "family feeling." Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families : Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³³ The very malleability of the term "network" lends itself to understanding social, religious, immigrant, militaristic, as well as various types of economic relationships. But the concept's utility also leads to challenges over definition and scope. Joel Polodny and Karen Page, for example, define networks as a collection of actors who "pursue repeated, enduring exchange relations with one another and, at the

words of sociologist Charles Tilly, this inner circle constituted a “trust network.” As Tilly notes, networks permeate social life. But trust networks differentiate themselves from other networks of commerce and communication in that “the configuration of ties within the network sets the collective enterprise at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, and failures of individual members.”³⁴ The Perkinses, as merchants, participated in a network of corresponding agents, suppliers, and clients, but within this broader web of commerce, they cultivated a tighter circle of trusted collaborators.

For the Perkinses, the regularity of collaboration constituted the network. The Perkinses sold freight on their ships and freighted cargo on other merchants’ vessels, but a bulk of their trade proceeded through cooperation with clusters of recurring co-investors. In the Pacific-China trade, for example, the brothers regularly turned to Russell Sturgis, James & Thomas Lamb, and Bryant, Sturgis & Co. In the West Indies-European and even the India trade, they collaborated with Stephen Higginson, his sons,

same time, lack a legitimate organizational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchange relationship.” Joel M. Podolny and Karen Page, “Networks Forms of Organization,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 77-103.

The term has become increasingly popular in connoting trade networks. See, for example, Paul Duguid, “Networks and Knowledge: The Beginning and End of the Port Commodity Chain, 1703-1860,” *The Business Historical Review* 79, no. 3 (2005): 493-526, Paul Duguid, “Networks in the Trade of Alcohol,” *The Business Historical Review* 79, no. 3 (2005): 453-466, David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine : Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), David Hancock, “The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots’ Early Madeira Trade,” *Business History Review* 79, no. 3 (2005): 467-493, Liss, *Atlantic Empires : The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713-1826*, Silvia Marzagalli, “Establishing Transatlantic Trade Networks in Time of War: Bordeaux and the United States, 1793-1815,” *Business History Review* 79, no. Winter (2005): 811-844, McCabe, Harlaftis, and Pepelasis Minoglou, *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History*, Kenneth Morgan, “Business Networks in the British Export Trade to North America, 1750-1800,” in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, ed. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36-62, John F. Padgett and Christopher K. Ansell, “Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1993): 1259-1319, Mary B. Rose, *Firms, Networks, and Business Values : The British and American Cotton Industries since 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House; the Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763*.

³⁴ Charles Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

and their brother Samuel G. Perkins. Periodically these relationships would result in interlocking partnerships, such as the partnership of James and Thomas Perkins in Perkins & Co. of Canton or John Perkins Cushing's stake in James P. Sturgis & Co. of Macau. It was this regularity that created the greater benefits—reduced risk, cost-splitting, enhanced trust and stability, secure channels of information, greater clout within specific markets—but also that regularity which put the group at risk to the iniquity or ineptitude of collaborators.

Yet the collaboration often proceeded on a more casual basis as well. Interested parties owned shares of a shipping adventure which entitled them to portions of the profit and loss. One firm might manage the venture—outfitting and perhaps even owning the ship, hiring the mariners, selecting the cargo, purchasing insurance, instructing the captain and supercargo, keeping up regular correspondence with the captain and agents abroad, and, finally, storing and selling off commodities and remitting profits back to the investors. Splitting ventures allowed the interested parties to reduce risk on multiple counts: the risk for any single adventure declined, investors broadened the number of adventures they were interested in, and they invested with known parties. The merchants had no need to solicit prospective investors to freight with them—a time-consuming chore that lengthened the time any cargo languished in a warehouse, waiting to ship. And, as their interests often aligned with trusted collaborators, these casual partnerships gave them greater political and economic clout in specific markets.

Broader linkages of corresponding agents changed frequently; thus, regular collaboration with an inner circle of fellow merchants offered greater stability. Risk is an inherent factor in most any business speculation, but long-distance trade was a sphere of

particular uncertainty and high stakes. The investment of time, capital, and resources increased exponentially in the shift from a trade between Boston and the West Indies to Boston and the East Indies. Where the former might require only a month round trip and an investment of \$20,000, the latter might well take over a year and an investment of \$120,000.³⁵ While a merchant or firm might well engage business with the West Indies on their own, the larger costs and greater risk of the latter adventure demanded a different set of business and social strategies. Many merchants participated in this trade by buying shares in long-distance mercantile ventures, purchasing cargo space, or, like the Perkinses, participating in a regular circle of trusted investors: their commercial network.

While this project centers on the commercial network formed by an inner circle of kin and colleagues, it nevertheless sheds light on their broader network of clients and correspondents. Networks are especially useful for examining pre-corporate commercial patterns. The tenuous nature of mercantile partnerships of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant that individuals might be involved in rapidly changing enterprises. Partnerships provided flexibility and convenience, but started and failed with such frequency, the business environment could be unstable.³⁶ A partnership might last for only a few years, ending with the departure or death of one partner, only to reappear in a new configuration, with new partners.³⁷ From 1807 to 1831, for example, the Perkinses

³⁵ Clarence L. Ver Steeg, "Financing and Outfitting the First United States Ship to China," *Pacific Historical Review* 22, no. 1 (1953): 1-12. As I discuss in chapter one, where a Boston-West Indies venture took a month round trip, the *Empress of China* returned almost fifteen months after her departure. While Daniel Parker & Company spent approximately \$20,000 to outfit the *Comte de Artois* for France, the *Empress of China* cost five times that.

³⁶ As Naomi Lamoreaux has argued, the impermanence of partnerships was both a strength and a nuisance for early American entrepreneurs. Lamoreaux, "The Partnership Form of Organization: Its Popularity in Early-Nineteenth-Century Boston."

³⁷ A firm might hand off their contact roster to a new or established house—both as a courtesy to the new house and to their clients—just as tensions or avarice within a partnership brought with it the risk

did business with William Lorman of Baltimore. Yet over the years, their connection appeared to shift from Fulford & Lorman, Lorman & Son, to Wm. Lorman & Co. Even beyond the core Perkins network, such an approach accounts for the underlying continuities of their mercantile connections amidst the overarching variability of early American business.

Thus, methodologically, studying the Perkinses' broader commercial network promises insight on several fronts. A network approach moves overlapping business and social connections from periphery to center. Certain charismatic individuals were more significant to the network's operations than others, Thomas Handasyd Perkins being a case in point. But Perkins's success in overseas trade depended in large part upon his participation in a broader commercial network. As Mark Granovetter has argued, social life must be taken out of the "black box" if we are to gain a more nuanced appreciation of economic action.³⁸ The fact of the matter is, while the literature on commercial networks is already overwhelming, we still have much to learn. A focus on commercial networks allows for research on the slippage between economic policies and mercantile pressures from the bottom up.³⁹ Geographically expansive networks offer a venue for recognizing

that a partner might attempt to make off with the business of the clients. In this way, when Bryant & Sturgis of Boston decided to focus on investing in domestic corporations, William Appleton & Co. inherited their trade along with a Sturgis son-in-law as a partner. When Appleton retired, the son-in-law continued the trade as Samuel Hooper & Co. Many core relationships—such as that of Russell & Co. in Canton and Cary & Co. in New York—continued through all three of these firms. Thus, as firms closed or merchants retired, the network persisted.

³⁸ Mark Granovetter, "The Impact of Social Structure on Economic Outcomes," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (2005): 33-50.

³⁹ Charles A. Jones, *International Business in the Nineteenth Century: The Rise and Fall of a Cosmopolitan Bourgeoisie* (Brighton, Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987), Magnusson, *The Tradition of Free Trade*, Viviana A. Rotman Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

the contingencies of state-based power.⁴⁰ And analyzing the social work that goes into such networks facilitates an understanding of changing meanings and sensibilities of capitalism itself.⁴¹

Chapter Organization

This study breaks down into six thematic chapters that follow the inception and expansion of the Perkins network. The network outlived its founders. Perkins & Co. of Boston lasted from 1792 to 1838 in various incarnations. Perkins & Co. of Canton, which the Perkins brothers established in 1803, merged with Russell & Co. in 1830. But the nodes of trade continued with many firms established by alumni of the Perkins firms, especially Forbes, Sturgis, Cabot, and Cary kin.⁴² The larger commercial network established by the Perkins brothers frayed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but

⁴⁰ Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), Tilly, *Trust and Rule*.

⁴¹ Joyce Oldham Appleby, "The Vexed Story of Capitalism Told by American Historians," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (2001): 1-18, Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Toby Ditz, "Secret Selves, Credible Personas: The Problematics of Trust and Public Display in the Writing of Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Merchants," in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 219-242, Ditz, "Shipwrecked: Imperiled Masculinity and the Representation of Business Failures among Philadelphia's Eighteenth-Century Merchants.", Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Sylvia Junko Yanagisako, *Producing Culture and Capital: Family Firms in Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁴² In using the term "the Perkinses," I refer to the progeny of Elizabeth Peck Perkins and James Perkins, as listed in the appendix. Yet I also use the term "extended Perkins" family in order to include relations by marriage. Many of these individuals would not have seen themselves as "Perkinses," but would have recognized the import of the Perkins firms and entrepreneurs in their lives. Finally, there are several firms (see Chart 1) that I include as a part of the Perkins network not because the partners were strictly beholden to the Perkinses, but because they featured within the inner circle of regular collaborators. Often these firms either began out of a Perkins firm or inherited a client list from a Perkins firm. Russell & Co. of China included many individuals who bore no connection to the Perkinses. But much of the firm's strength came from its merger with Perkins & Co. of Canton in 1830. Even as control of the firm became increasingly contentious in the 1840s on, Russell & Co. continued to be largely dominated by Perkins cousins—the Forbeses.

private family trusts and investment networks established with profits from these firms continue to this day. This study focuses on the period from 1792 to 1838, the lifespan of the Boston-based Perkins & Co., but it casts an eye both forward and back in order to gauge larger shifts in family, trade, and politics visible through an examination of the kinship-based commercial network.

The first chapter traces the roots of the trading network established by Thomas H. Perkins and his brother James. When the two brothers opened a counting house in Boston in 1792, they drew upon capital, contacts, and education culled from the transatlantic trading of their mother and maternal grandfather as well as their own prior experience in the West and East Indies. Partnership between Thomas and James was not expected or compelled from within the family, but nor was it surprising. The sizeable circle of Perkins siblings was in and of itself a resource. The circle of “kith, kin, and allies” amassed through early business and social relationships provided the foundation to their broader commercial network.

Chapter two considers the expansion of the Perkins network during the French Revolutionary Wars of 1793 to 1815. The Perkins brothers found themselves well-placed to take advantage of American neutrality during the French Wars. I show that the French Wars provided a space for experimentation as well as expansion for Americans. This experimentation demanded social as well as economic capital. Scholars often refer to the “Perkins network” or the “Boston Concern” to denote the Boston firm’s collaboration with Bryant & Sturgis, with John Perkins Cushing in Perkins & Co. of Canton, and with James P. Sturgis & Co. in their China trading. But co-investing was a broader phenomenon. Americans did not have mercantile companies, but they used other

associational mechanisms to advance their influence in specific markets and in politics. Unlike contract-based partnerships or state-chartered corporations, this type of regular association offered no formal backing. Still, informal networks enhanced stability in trade and influence in specific avenues of trade. As the Perkins brothers expanded their interests from Atlantic to global trade, they relied on more extensive relationships based on overlapping social and economic ties.

Chapter three examines the internal familial strategies of the Perkinses. It considers mechanisms for the cultivation of obligation between the generations, as well as the repercussions of success, failure, and rebellion for family and firm. I show that, for the Perkinses, commercial aspiration and familial subjectivities blended in significant ways. Beyond the paternalism discussed in other chapters, this chapter also emphasizes the importance of maternal networking in terms of a broad array of educational, marital, and occupational opportunities. Obligation itself was patently gendered, not simply in terms of the divergence of expectations as daughters and sons, but in the use of gender to exhort kin into compliance. Inequalities within the family helped to structure succession. In many ways, the story of intergenerational expectation for the Perkinses followed the classic narrative of the family firm: success killed succession. Thus, in the 1840s, Forbes cousins inherited the Perkins network. The Perkins network continued but without the Perkins name. While most scholarship on family firms emphasize the demise of the firm as a failure of succession, it is not clear that the Perkinses saw the closure of Perkins & Co. in this light. In passing on a considerable inheritance and social standing to the next generation, family firms enabled succession of the family rather than the family enabling a succession of the family firms.

Chapter four turns to kinship as a repertoire for a broader, cross-cultural circle of business relationships from the formation of the Perkinses' Canton-based office in 1803. In stretching their trading network across the globe, individuals within the Perkins network mapped several of their most significant business relationships on paternal and fraternal ties. While these ties were highly contingent, I suggest that modeling such connections on kinship offered a certain level of stability and reciprocity of expectation than they otherwise might have expected. The fact that the Perkinses were Americans was itself valuable to Chinese and British allies. Finally, the chapter challenges the still common perception that business strategies, capital, and leadership flowed from west to east by demonstrating the importance of Chinese merchants to American and British trade.

Chapter five looks at sociability, sexuality, and marriage as a factor in the commercial network. Here the project focuses on the relationship between Canton—where women were not allowed—and the mixed-sex community that sprang up in Macau. This chapter shows that profit was personal. While many Chinese regulations governing the foreign community at Canton were overlooked by local officials, the prohibition of foreign women in Canton was enforced. This sex-segregation shaped the social prospects of foreign merchants stationed in southern China. For American merchants abroad, China's connection to personal aspiration and sacrifice meant that traveling evoked deep feelings of hope, desire, despair, and resentment.

Finally, chapter six examines the dialectic between British and American observers of Anglo-American trade in Asia and the Pacific over meanings and methods of trade itself. While to American merchants "free traders" referred to British firms

operating outside the bounds of chartered trade monopolies, to British merchants of the early nineteenth century, Americans were the real free traders. I use the Perkinses' fur and opium trading as examples of American cognizance of the opportunity foreign monopolies provided to non-nationals. British opponents of the East India Company used American trading practice to assail the Company's monopoly in China. Participants in the Perkins network did not write of themselves as "free traders." Rather, they depicted themselves as ordinary merchants seeking to keep trade open to all comers against the threats of imperial powers. This "open trade" argument was central to private rationalizations of smuggling as well as public arguments legitimating American diplomatic and naval practice in Asia from the 1830s to the 1850s and beyond.

CHART 1. Key Perkins Firms

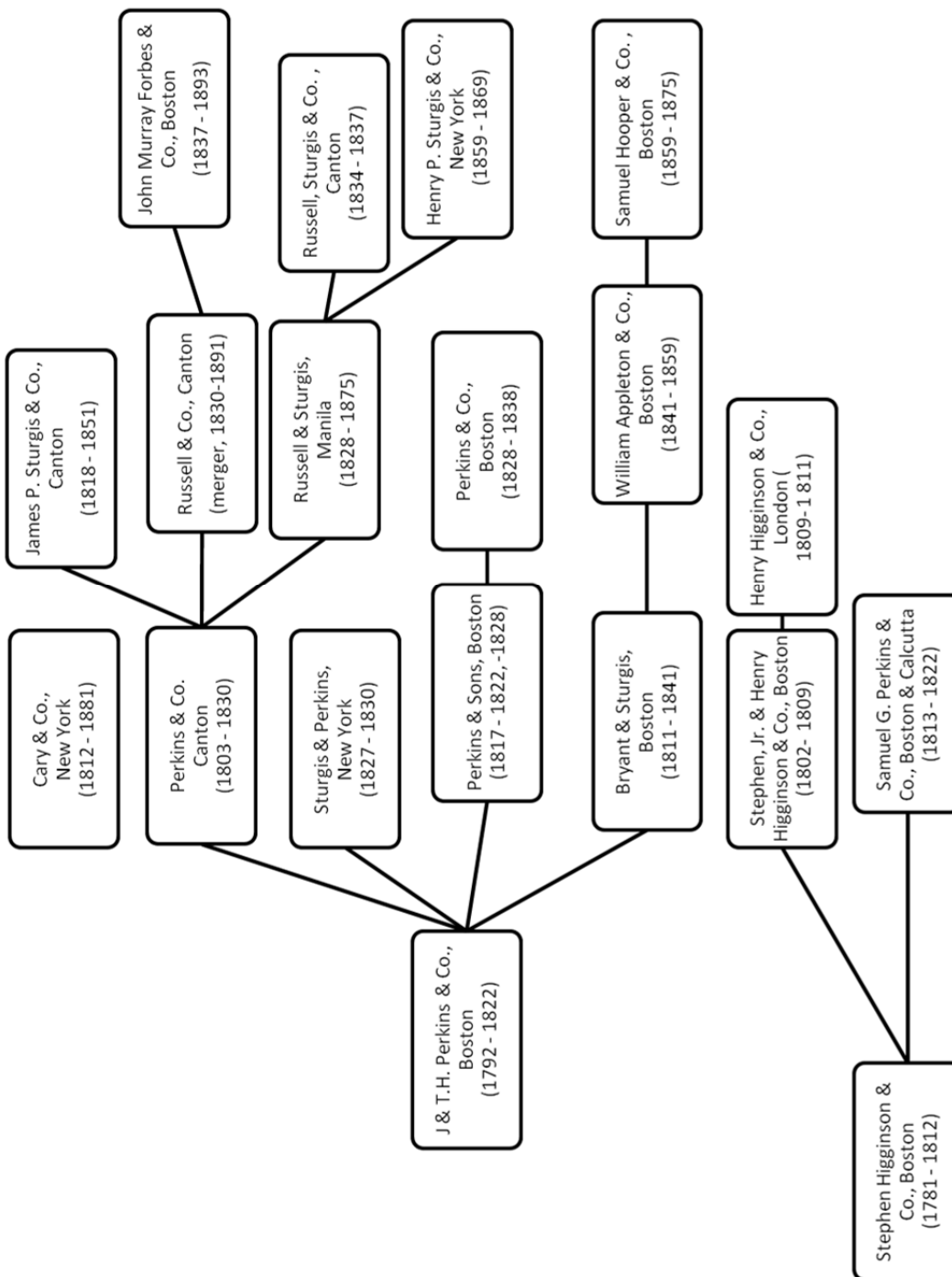
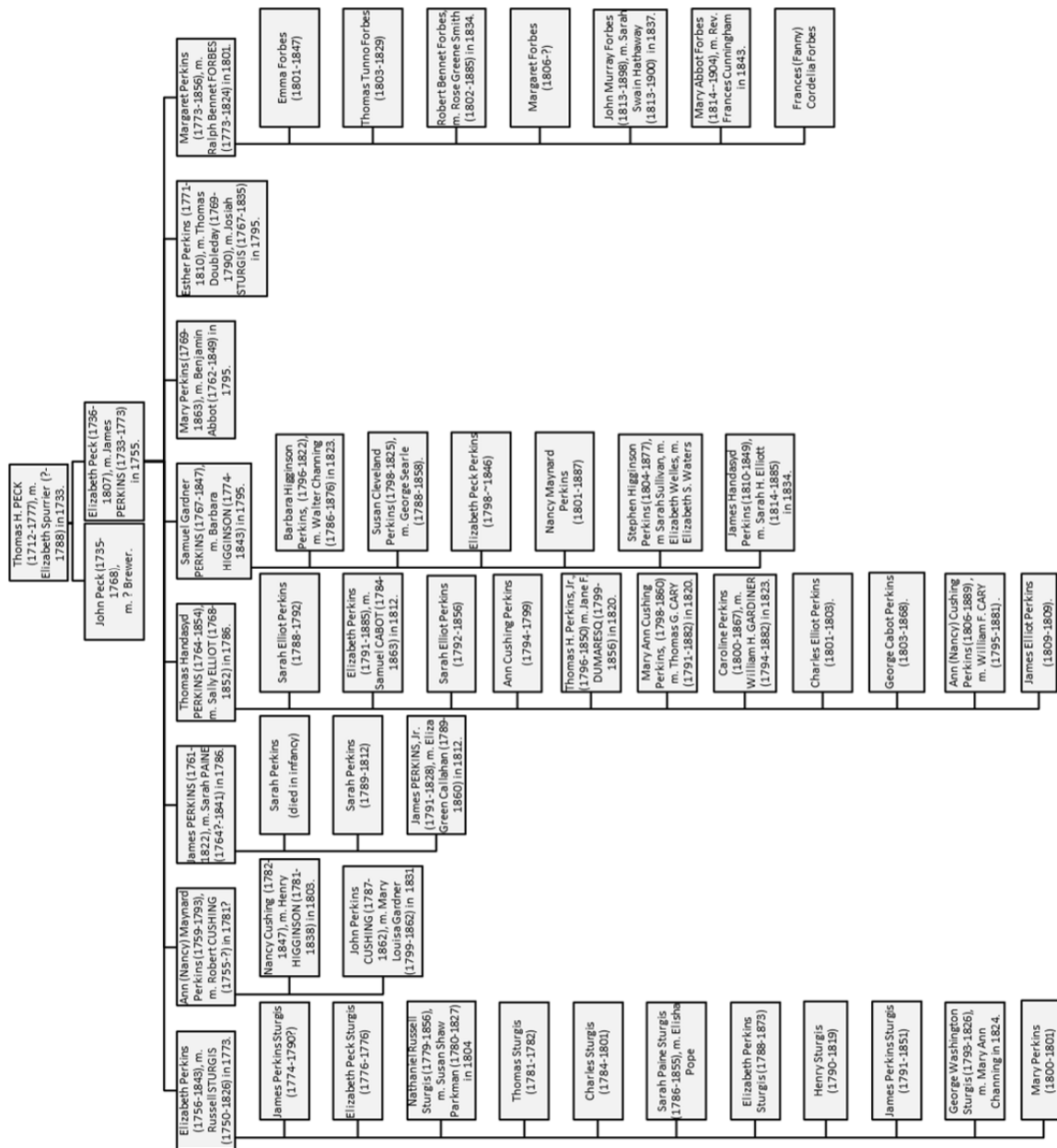


CHART 2. Perkins Genealogy, G₁-G₃



CHAPTER 1.
ATLANTIC FOUNDATIONS, 1740s-1792

The commercial network established by the Perkins brothers of Boston had its roots in the aftermath of the American Revolution. By chance or by circumstance, the Perkins brothers' progress in trade mirrored the nation. The brothers found themselves well-placed to take advantage of mercantile opportunities that emerged to them *as* Americans. Yet this luck should not obscure the fact that when opportunities did not present themselves, the Perkins brothers were not adverse to making their own opportunities as smugglers and “shadow traders.” In the perilous business of commerce, the Perkins brothers specialized in managing risk—and, at times, courting it.

Like other aspiring New England merchants of their generation, brothers **James, Thomas, and Samuel Perkins** all got their start in the Atlantic. Many Americans expected that, after the American Revolution, trade with the British would resume as before. It did not. While Americans remained a principal consumer of British products, they also faced new restrictions.⁴³ British leaders had little incentive to offer trading privileges to the newly independent Americans, to the point of arguing that provisions for their West Indian colonies could and should be brought in from Nova Scotia and Canada rather than from American ports. In fact, British parliamentarians who argued for

⁴³ Beginning in 1651, a series of Navigation Acts directed British colonial trade. The Navigation Acts structured the British mercantilist system: they aimed to limit foreign powers, especially the Dutch, from developing a carrying trade between English colonies (British after 1707) and Europe. The Navigation Acts necessarily pushed the American colonies into specific patterns of commerce. In the seventeenth-century, Barbados was usually the first stop and in the eighteenth century Jamaica. As New England exports outstripped what the British islands could absorb in the eighteenth century, French, Dutch, and Spanish islands increasingly became destinations. Albion, Baker, and Labaree, *New England and the Sea*, 34-35.

Canadian provisions—most famously Lord Sheffield in his *Observations of the Commerce of the United States*—overestimated capacity of the Canadian colonies and new patterns of smuggling and ‘exception’ clauses ensued.⁴⁴ But between 1784 and 1787, British West Indian demand for American ships, freight services, and goods plummeted.⁴⁵ New Englanders continued older patterns of trade, exchanging fish, timber, livestock, rum, and other provisions for West Indian sugar, coffee, and molasses, and European manufactures and luxuries, but some, like the Perkinses, constructed new networks of correspondents outside the British Empire.

All three Perkins brothers cut their commercial teeth on the New England-West Indies trade based out of Saint Domingue (Haiti), trading with the French rather than the British West Indies. Where it seems likely that the Perkins brothers would have otherwise built upon their family’s British contacts, the Revolution and its aftermath pressed them to seek out new connections in the French Caribbean. They received this opportunity through the efforts of their mother, **Elizabeth Peck Perkins**, a considerable merchant in her own right.

⁴⁴ Keith, "Relaxations in the British Restrictions on the American Trade with the British West Indies, 1783-1802," 2.

⁴⁵ Despite negotiating an “open port” policy in the September 1783 Treaty of Paris, British officials under William Pitt issued one proclamation after another limiting American trade in British ports. An Order in Council of July 2, 1783 prohibited American-built ships in British waters as a bulwark for the British shipping and maritime industry (and thus the British navy). In 1784 and 1785, the British prohibited American vessels from fishing or whaling in their Canadian colonies, barred American fish, meat, and whale oil from being sold in British ports, and placed crippling duties on many American staples that could still be sold to British possessions. Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence : Neomercantilism and the American Revolution*, Cathy D. Matson, "The Revolution, the Constitution, and the New Nation," in *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 363-401, John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 351-377. Still, in spite of these hurdles and the damage to America’s maritime and export industries, Britain remained America’s largest trading partner; the American market for French manufactures never replaced the British market. Even the Perkinses largely purchased French luxuries. See François Crouzet, *Britain Ascendant : Comparative Studies in Franco-British Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 319-320.

In September 1792, James and Thomas formally allied as the Boston-based trading house of Perkins & Co. While scholars often write of the firm as if family was destiny, by late 1788, the two brothers were on distinctly different paths. James was still in the French West Indies. Thomas was in Boston, laying plans for a voyage to the East Indies with his uncle-in-law, James Magee. They were in partnerships with other people, interested in different markets, trading in different circles. But by late 1791, the suggestion of a partnership presented itself. Circumstances had brought them back together. In late 1791, when James Perkins first proposed the partnership, the Haitian Revolution ate away at his business prospects in Saint Domingue. His clients in the Caribbean themselves suggested Perkins invest their salvaged property in Boston. And Thomas was uncertain as to his own future as well. He had two adventures on their way to the Pacific Northwest and China, but had been unable to do more. Thus, when the opportunity of partnership arose, both brothers welcomed the prospect. These earlier partnerships—Perkins, Burling & Perkins and Perkins & Magee—extended the contacts, interests, and experience base that the two brothers built upon in their new firm. Here, in addition to their mother's support, were the building blocks of the Perkins network. Thus, to understand the foundation of the Perkins network, it is important to consider these earlier firms.

Thomas Handasyde Peck & Elizabeth Perkins: Fur Trading Foundations

The Perkins brothers began their Atlantic commerce with a foundation of capital inherited from their mother and their maternal grandfather's fur trading. By the eighteenth century, fur trading was virtually nonexistent in New England.⁴⁶ Yet **Thomas Handasyde Peck (1712-1777)** was successful enough as a furrier to leave his wife a house, chaise, and an annuity of £80, in addition to leaving several properties along merchant's row to his grandson.⁴⁷ In exchange for providing rifles and powder, hunters brought back a variety of pelts from New England and Newfoundland to Peck's store. Sables, minks, otter, bear, mongrel, grey, and red fox, wolves, fishers, and raccoons were all either sold locally or, more commonly, shipped across the Atlantic to Mess. Lane & Company of London. Lane & Company purchased Peck's furs and hats and, in trade, offered finished goods, shot, and other necessities as well as tea, wine, and luxury items, obtained insurance on cargoes on Peck's behalf, and negotiated bills. While the tensions leading up to the Revolution strained relations between Peck and the Lanes, they were on sufficiently good terms for Peck to recommend the relationship to his daughter as she entered business in 1773.⁴⁸

Thomas Peck and his wife Elizabeth had two children, a son and a daughter. The couple's son John became an apothecary while their daughter, also named **Elizabeth**,

⁴⁶ McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789*, 94.

⁴⁷ Will of Thomas Handasyd Peck, 31 August 1774. Suffolk County, Massachusetts Probate, Docket #16305. Volume 76, 200-204.

⁴⁸ Thomas Handasyde Peck Letterbook. MHS. T.H. Peck's mother, Margaret Maynard Peck, may well have been involved in business as well. When his father, Captain John Peck, died, his mother married a Thomas Mitchell of Newport, Rhode Island. Yet records indicate that Mitchell may have taken over her business in Cornhill, Boston's central shopping avenue (now Washington Street), as a retailer or innkeeper. Gary Boyd Roberts, *Genealogies of Rhode Island Families* 2vols., vol. 1 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1989), 708-709.

married one of her father's apprentices, James Perkins. And in fact it was Elizabeth rather than John who inherited her father's business. Most of what we know about **Elizabeth Peck Perkins (1736-1807)** comes from retrospective accounts given by her children and grandchildren. These memoirs tell of the woman Elizabeth became when faced with the exigencies of her husband's and father's deaths in the lead up to the American colonial rebellion against the British: a shrewd woman with a strong mind and the capacity to enforce her will. Her great grandson traced the family's entrepreneurial lineage back not to her husband or father, but to her.⁴⁹ As evidence of her financial acumen, her eldest son told of Dutch trading partners who assumed she must be a man, "Mr. Elizabeth Perkins."⁵⁰ We have no evidence that she worked in commerce for her father, yet he clearly viewed her capable of handling her husband's affairs.⁵¹ More, she parlayed her husband's business into trade with the French and Dutch, thus pushing beyond even her father's commercial connections.

Elizabeth's husband **James Perkins (1733-1773)** apprenticed with her father. According to family lore, young James had been intended for Harvard and showed a strong inclination toward scholarship, but at age fourteen received an offer that he could not refuse: an apprenticeship into mercantile affairs with Thomas H. Peck.⁵² More than

⁴⁹ Augustus Thorndike Perkins, *A Private Proof* (Boston: T.R. Marvin & Sons, 1890).

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Perkins Cabot, *Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot* (date). Cabot Family Papers.(Schlesinger.), "Memoir of James Perkins," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (April 1823): 353-368.

⁵¹ Cornelia Dayton's work on eighteenth century women in Connecticut offers a sense of how daughters and wives might well have been fully immersed in commerce even if they were not merchants in their own right. Cornelia Hughes Dayton and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), *Women before the Bar : Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁵² Perkins, *A Private Proof*.

likely, James' father arranged the apprenticeship as a less costly or perhaps even more promising path for his son. In eighteenth century New England, commerce became an increasingly esteemed profession.⁵³ James was the second youngest of nine children and his eldest brother, Henry, was also a merchant. On December 24, 1754, at the age of 22, James married the master's daughter.

By reputation, James Perkins was a handsome man with a courteous, restrained way about him.⁵⁴ Where his father Edmund was a burly, bear of a man with a "roving, eccentric" nature, Perkins rebelled against his father in every way: his dress, his comportment, and even his accounts were impeccable. In one favorite family story, Perkins would go riding with his good friend, Paul Revere; the latter would return covered in mud, but no dirt would stick to James Perkins.⁵⁵ Writing from the late nineteenth century, Perkins's great grandson wrote that in learning and in business, Perkins displayed considerable acumen.⁵⁶ If this was true, his profits were not in his own name. The inventory at his death listed only £351 worth of property for his wife and eight children.⁵⁷ While not inconsiderable, this was no great wealth. By contrast, each of the Perkins children received £66 13 shillings and 4 pence in cash upon their majority from their maternal grandfather's legacy, in addition to tracts of land in Maine for the

⁵³ Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality*.

⁵⁴ Perkins, *A Private Proof*, 30.

⁵⁵ Perkins, *A Private Proof*.

⁵⁶ Perkins, *A Private Proof*.

⁵⁷ Inventory of James Perkins, 1773. Suffolk County, Massachusetts Probate, Docket #15410. Volume 73, 124. This inventory included a female slave, tea ware, furniture, and spices.

sons.⁵⁸ Perkins died in late April 1773, with obituary notices simply inviting friends and acquaintances to a funeral at his home on King Street (later State Street) on the 4th of May.⁵⁹ Perhaps Perkins became sick when he visited England in 1771 to plead the Bostonians' cause.⁶⁰ Or, as some have intimated, perhaps he was in fact supplying guns to the patriots in the run up to the American Revolution and caught ill.⁶¹ Whatever the cause, James Perkins's death left Elizabeth with eight children and a business to care for as Boston descended into war. To make matters worse, Elizabeth's father was also unwell and died of a "lingering indisposition" in 1777. Her mother died not long after.⁶²

Between 1773 and 1775, Elizabeth managed the store on King Street.

Advertisements up to April of 1775 announced:

Elizabeth Perkins, at her Shop two Doors below the British Coffee-House, North-Side of Kingstreet, hath for Sale, An Assortment of China, Glass and Stone Ware, among which are Pickle Pots of various Sizes, and Half-Pint Dram Bottles, A few Crates of black and yellow Ware, Also Groceries of all Sorts, viz. Capers by the Bottle, Keg, or Pound, Anchovies, Choice Durham Mustard ... Flask Oil, Double & Single refined Loaf Sugar, Coffee, Chocolate, Spermaceti Candles, Hard Soap⁶³

From April 1775 through March 1776, New England militias surrounded Boston in an attempt to choke off the British soldiers garrisoned in the city. The city became a dangerous place to live. Elizabeth moved her family from Boston to Barnstable on the

⁵⁸ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 25.

⁵⁹ "Matrimony Notices," *Boston Post-Boy* 3 May 1773, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Roger Faxton Sturgis, *Edward Sturgis of Yarmouth, Massachusetts, 1613-1695, and His Descendants* (Boston: Printed for Private Circulation at the Stanhope Press, 1914), 31-32.

⁶¹ Perkins, *A Private Proof*, 31-32.

⁶² Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 25.

⁶³ Advertisement, *Boston Evening Post* 17 April 1775, p. 3. This advertisement with some variation ran monthly and followed the same template as when her husband ran the store, varying only in goods offered.

southern Massachusetts coast to stay with a family friend, Edward Bacon, and enrolled the children in school locally. When the patriot militias successfully forced the British to depart, the Perkinses returned to the city. While advertisements for Elizabeth's store did not pick up again after the war, we know from her sons that she continued in trade.⁶⁴

In addition to the property and upbringing she provided, Elizabeth Peck Perkins's management of her children's careers and marriages laid the groundwork for the trading network established by her sons. Elizabeth was a firm matriarch with definite ideas about her children's futures. To her granddaughter and namesake Eliza, "Madam Perkins" was an indomitable woman. She had strong ideas about society and had no compunction about acting on her views. In advance of the wide acceptance of Unitarianism in Boston, Elizabeth referred to herself as a "universalist." Like her father, Elizabeth balked at the idea of everlasting damnation. When Bishop "John" Cheverus came to Boston in 1796, Elizabeth gave him her barn to preach in. For most Americans, the French Catholic Jean-Louis Lefebvre de Cheverus slowly brooked anti-Catholic prejudice through his selflessness and missions work. But Elizabeth had heard of Cheverus's "boundless charity" from a poor woman who sometimes worked for her, and thus invited him to her home. When family members grumbled about how Barbara Higginson Perkins treated her children, the family relied upon Elizabeth to chastise her daughter-in-law.⁶⁵

Of Elizabeth's eight children to reach maturity, all but one married into mercantile families. In a society as small and homogenous as late eighteenth century

⁶⁴ Cary, *Memoir of Thomas Handasyd Perkins*, 5-6.

⁶⁵ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot." In Eliza's telling, the family turned to Grandmother Perkins even as the older woman lay ill.

Boston, it was easy for social and commercial connections to overlap.⁶⁶ But as Peter Dobkin Hall writes, the notion of who was a desirable marriage partner changed over the course of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries: New Englanders especially prized religious and political connections in the earlier period; by the latter half of the eighteenth- and start of the nineteenth-centuries, merchant families increasingly pooled resources through intermarriage. In 1773, Elizabeth's eldest daughter, her namesake, married one of her grandfather's younger apprentices, Russell Sturgis. Like T.H. Peck and James Perkins before him, Russell Sturgis began as a furrier before extending his business interests in collaboration with his brothers-in-law. Two of Elizabeth's daughters married shipping captains: Robert Cushing and Thomas Doubleday. Several siblings similarly married into prominent New England mercantile families—the Eliots, the Higginsons, and the Forbeses—while the eldest, James, married into the wealthy Paine family of Worcester. Often business relations preceded marriage, but not always. Just as family provided a resource for labor and capital in the Perkinses' enterprise, so, too, did their business provide a resource for employing kin. Here, in this extended kinship circle, was a core of the foundation of the Perkins commercial network.

Elizabeth further laid the groundwork for her family's commercial network in guiding her son's careers. In the eighteenth century, locating a promising apprenticeship was an important step. Her two eldest sons, James and Thomas H. Perkins, both

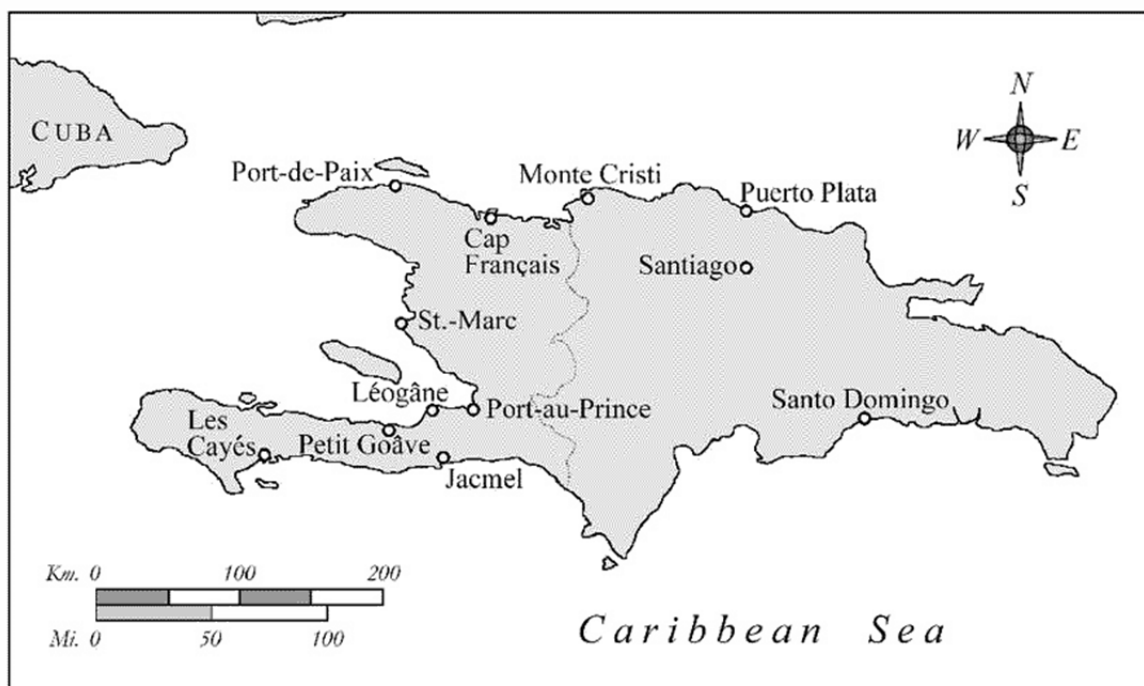
⁶⁶ Nathaniel Cutting, a friend and colleague of the Perkins brothers, called on Mrs. Perkins and her younger daughters regularly during his Boston sojourn in 1792-1793. His flirtation with these "youthful daughters of expectation," these "human blossoms," seamlessly blended commercial and social aspirations with personal desires. His journal records days spent visiting a variety of friends for meals, for social events, and for mercantile news. The facility with which these three blended demonstrate their overlap in individuals' lived experience.

apprenticed with the prominent Boston trading house of William and John Shattuck.⁶⁷ Trading during the American Revolution, the Shattucks and the Perkinses branched from established contacts with British merchants into business with the French, especially via Saint Domingue (Haiti).⁶⁸ In March of 1779, **James Perkins (1761-1822)** achieved his majority and attempted to sail aboard a Shattuck ship to Virginia for a tobacco speculation to England. Instead, the British captured the vessel, put him ashore at New York, and he made his way home to Boston. In the fall of the same year, James tried again. This time, he made passage on the *Beaver*, co-owned by the Shattucks and his mother, to the French West Indies. The French government had chartered the *Beaver* to deliver a cavalry of horses to Cap François (now Cap Haitien), the capital of French commerce in the West Indies.⁶⁹ James's two brothers, Thomas and Samuel, both followed their brother to Saint Domingue. All three partnered at various points in the Cap François firm Perkins, Burling & Perkins (1786-1793). By a quirk of fate and politics, James Perkins and subsequently his brothers all began their careers in the French West Indian trade.

⁶⁷ On William and John Shattuck, see Lemuel Shattuck, *Memorials of the Descendants of William Shattuck* (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, 1855), 155. The Shattucks, unfortunately, got tangled up in the financial disasters that accompanied the French Revolution. Their trading house failed after being called to pay the debts on several notes they had endorsed valued at over \$100,000.

⁶⁸ Shattuck, *Memorials of the Descendants of William Shattuck*, 155. The Shattucks, unfortunately, got tangled up in the financial disasters that accompanied the French Revolution. Their trading house failed after being called to pay the debts on several notes they had endorsed valued at over \$100,000. It is interesting to note that James G. Forbes, James Perkins's future brother-in-law, also attempted to get his start in the British West Indies (Jamaica), but also ended up in Saint Domingue. Forbes had been uncertain as to whether or not his loyalty remained with the British, or if he would become an American. His inability to find passage to Jamaica decided his nationality.

⁶⁹ "Notes from Thomas H. Perkins's Memo, 1847." JEC Extracts. Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 32-33.



MAP 1: Saint Domingue and Santo Domingo circa 1770, with the principal towns.
 Source: David Geggus, "The French Slave Trade: an Overview," *William & Mary Quartly* 58, no. 1, Based on Eltis et al., eds. *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. Map Drawn by Rebecca Wren.

The French West Indies: Perkins, Burling & Co., 1786-1793

In the wake of the American Revolution, America served as a hinterland to the French West Indies. In 1784 and 1785, France opened five West Indian ports to American shipping, especially broadening the provisioning trade. The trip between Boston and Cap François took approximately two weeks in good weather.⁷⁰ A vessel arriving from the Atlantic would first arrive at the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo before jockeying around the coast for the French Saint Domingue. This was the island first known to Europeans as Hispaniola per Columbus's arrival in 1492. The French capture of rights to the western portion of the island in 1697 marked a turning point in the

⁷⁰ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 38-39.

colony's economic development.⁷¹ From 1700 to 1704 alone, sugar plantations jumped from 18 to 120.⁷² On the eve of the Haitian Revolution, the colonists produced enough sugar to compete with Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil combined, and grew roughly half of the world's coffee.⁷³ Sugar flourished in the plains and coffee in the mountains; between the two, Saint Domingue became known as the jewel of the Caribbean.

For Americans, Saint Domingue was especially significant. The French colony provided almost all of the United States' sugar and molasses, and, in 1790 for example, took in 16% of American exports: 23% of American flour, 73% of livestock, 77% of processed beef, 63% of dried fish, and 80% of pickled fish.⁷⁴ Saint Domingue became the United States' second largest trading partner, second only to Great Britain. It accepted more American exports than all the other West Indian islands combined.⁷⁵

James Perkins was the first of the Perkinses to travel to Saint Domingue, where he was fortunate to find a position in the trading house of Samuel Wall and Gabriel Tardy. Wall & Tardy was an American house that specialized in French commerce. The firm opened for business in Cap François in July 1782 where, according to the circular

⁷¹ Sugar was first grown on the island as early as 1530, but in the eighteenth century, coffee became a new boom crop.

⁷² Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 19.

⁷³ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 21.

⁷⁴ John H. Coatsworth, "American Trade with European Colonies in the Caribbean and South America, 1790-1812," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1967): 243-266, Donald R. Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806," *Journal of Early Republic* 2, no. Winter (1982): 361-379.

⁷⁵ Note that it was cheaper for Americans to purchase French goods in the Caribbean than in France, thus Saint Domingue also became a transfer point for trade between the United States and France. James Alexander Dun, "What Avenues of Commerce, Will You, Americans, Not Explore!": Commercial Philadelphia's Vantage onto the Early Haitian Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2005): 473-504, Silvia Marzagalli, "The Failure of a Transatlantic Alliance? Franco-American Trade, 1783-1815," *History of European Ideas* 34 (2008): 456-464.

announcing the move, they had established a partnership “in friendly relations” with Jonathan Williams, “the first American merchant who had settled in France.”⁷⁶ In 1783, James Perkins partnered with a fellow clerk by the name of Walter Burling of Baltimore to form a branch house of Wall & Tardy. The Port-au-Prince house was known as Perkins, Burling & Co., but the circulars made clear its relationship to Wall & Tardy.⁷⁷ When the original house closed its doors “by mutual consent” in 1786, Wall & Tardy handed off their contact base to Perkins and Burling. The two established a new firm as a three-way partnership between James and Thomas H. Perkins with Walter Burling: **Perkins, Burling & Perkins (1786-1793)**. The recently married James would reside in Boston and “hold himself at all times furnished with a state of their markets,” while Thomas and Walter would manage commissions at the Cape.⁷⁸

As a commission agency, the partners of Perkins, Burling & Perkins served as middlemen between vendors of all types. They exchanged West Indian sugar, coffee, and molasses for goods from New England fisheries, lumber yards, and rum distillers, Baltimore flour millers, Charleston rice plantations, as well as “Guinea ships” bringing

⁷⁶ John Carter Brown Library, *Annual Report, 1910-1911*, Providence, 1911, 27. Jonathan Williams had earned this distinction by serving as the commercial agent to Nantes for the Continental Congress from 1776-1778. He received this position through his connection to his grand-uncle, Benjamin Franklin, himself a commissioner to France during this period. As late as June 1782, Gabriel Tardy was introduced as Williams’s head clerk. Williams left France in 1785 with his grand-uncle. Tardy’s partner, Samuel Wall, hailed from Providence. Mumford, Gurdon S. to William Temple Franklin, 1782 June 22. William Temple Franklin Papers, CIV, 65. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA, per online finding aid: <http://www.amphilsoc.org/mole/view?docId=ead/Mss.B.F86-ead.xml;query=;brand=default>. Accessed June 15, 2010.

⁷⁷ Advertisement, *Massachusetts Centinel* 10 June 1786, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

slaves from Africa.⁷⁹ Their principal clients, not surprisingly, operated out of New England—per the Perkinses—and Baltimore—from whence Walter Burling hailed.

Perkins, Burling & Co.'s stock in trade was the cultivation of contacts in order to know where, when, and how to receive worthwhile prices and to pull political strings when clients' vessels were captured or plundered. Trade laws pitted European nationals against each other in the West Indies, but regulations were often made more with the metropole than the colony in mind. While many West Indian colonies were legally off limits for American shippers, in practice local governors, customs officials, and planters collaborated with merchants like Perkins, Burling & Co. to secret provisions onto the islands.⁸⁰ Regulations changed frequently, as did the exigencies of trade. In a fundamentally risky business, the firm worked to manage risk and profit their clients.

As was common in the Caribbean, Perkins, Burling & Perkins engaged in what has been referred to as "the shadow trade": trading through special dispensation of island officials, outright smuggling, and indirect smuggling by re-exporting through legal entrepôts.⁸¹ The firm's business correspondence sheds insight into their management of

⁷⁹ This per their correspondence in the JEC Extracts and L. Vernon Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927* (Boston: C.E. Goodspeed & co., 1927), Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 41.

⁸⁰ In Saint Domingue, policies were actually made with the planters in mind as they had the most political clout in the metropole. Frances Armytage, *The Free Port System in the British West Indies: A Study in Commercial Policy, 1766-1822* (London: Published for the Royal Empire Society by Longmans, Green, 1953), Coatsworth, "American Trade with European Colonies in the Caribbean and South America, 1790-1812," 243-266, François Crouzet, "American and the Crisis of the British Imperial Economy, 1803-1807," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, ed. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 278-315, Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 73, 650, Morgan, "Business Networks in the British Export Trade to North America, 1750-1800," 36-62.

⁸¹ David Geggus actually uses the Perkinses as exemplary in demonstrating the significant role played by Americans in organizing contraband activities in Saint Domingue. "One sees them touring plantations drumming up illicit cargoes, sailing to Dominica for cargoes of slaves, bribing port officials, and paying drogher captains to carry out hundreds of barrels of sugar to their vessels lying off the coast. They also paid intermediaries to do their bribing and unloading for them, such as Monsieur Petiton of Fort Dauphin who had all the local port officers and fishermen 'subservient to him.'" David Patrick Geggus,

contraband trade. They directed a 1787 ship to Baltimore from Cap François without colors, for example, declaring from the free Dutch port of St. Eustatius rather than allow it be known she was from a French port.⁸² And in packing for the return voyage, the firm ordered deliveries of herring and smuggled flour inside the herring barrels. When the return vessel arrived off the coast of Saint Domingue, smaller vessels called droghers would be sent out to unload the flour in order to smuggle it to port separately.⁸³ Another gambit was to trade slaves between the islands, bringing African slaves from Martinique, through the Spanish side of the island, to Cap François or off to Havana.⁸⁴ This was precarious work. In rationalizing a commission increase to 2 ½%, the partners wrote Salem merchant William Gray, Jr. that “there are so many dangerous consequences, we think it at least but a just and reasonable charge. Indeed in a government like ours smuggling is a heart rending business.”⁸⁵ If the hazards made the trade lucrative and narrowed competition, it also required strong nerves.

For **Walter Burling (~1762-1810)** of Perkins, Burling & Co., Saint Domingue may not have been too difficult of an adjustment. Burling was born into a New York

"The Major Port Towns of Saint Domingue in the Later Eighteenth Century," in *Atlantic Port Cities : Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World 1650-1850*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 87-116. On the “shadow trade,” see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 382, Keith, "Relaxations in the British Restrictions on the American Trade with the British West Indies, 1783-1802," 2.

⁸² Sailing under foreign flags was simply par for the course, such as when the solicited Spanish colors from a contact for a venture to New Orleans in 1790. Perkins, Burling & Co. to Clark & Rees, New Orleans August 1790. JEC Extracts.

⁸³ Perkins, Burling & Co. to James Clarke, Baltimore 9 January 1787, to Samuel & John Smith, Baltimore 22 March 1787. JEC Extracts. Similar tactics were employed by other American merchants as well, such as Elias Hasket Derby. See Richard H. McKey, "Elias Hasket Derby, Merchant of Salem, Massachusetts, 1739-1799" (Ph.d. dissertation, Clark University, 1961), 204.

⁸⁴ Perkins, Burling & Co. to John Monnoreau, Martinique 29 May 1788. JEC Extracts.

⁸⁵ Perkins, Burling & Co. to William Gray, Jr., Salem 16 December 1787. JEC Extracts.

Quaker family and likely grew up with firsthand knowledge of his father's distillery and the West Indian shipping that supplied it.⁸⁶ The Burlings lived a peripatetic life, settling for a time in a Quaker settlement in the Caribbean island of St. Croix, later in New York—where Thomas Burling, Walter's father, twice received censure for his slave trading—and then in Baltimore. Perhaps this itinerancy explains something of Walter's roving character. He never settled down for more than a few years at a time. While this served his mercantile pursuits to some extent (he accumulated too many debts along the way to profit in the long run), it must have been difficult for those closest to him.⁸⁷ In late 1786, Walter's parents Thomas and Phebe Burling moved the family from Baltimore to a plantation in Natchez, then part of Spanish Louisiana. Apparently, part of the reason for the move was to escape scandal left behind: on February 23, 1781, Walter's sister Elizabeth gave birth to a son, Samuel. In 1784, she married a kinsman of the baby's father, Richard Whittell, the father to her later daughter. But in April 24, 1786, Walter traveled to New York where he challenged young Samuel's father to a duel. If the family's reputation had withstood poor Elizabeth's condition, the fatal shooting of Samuel Curzon, a "respectable citizen" and "eminent merchant," at Walter's hand was too much. The Burlings bought a plantation in Natchez, while young Samuel Burling, then a tender lad of five years, was sent to Boston under the care of the Perkinses. Walter

⁸⁶ Jane Thompson-Star, *The Burling Books: Ancestors and Descendants of Edward and Grace Burling, Quakers, 1600-2000*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 2001), 314-315.

⁸⁷ In 1793, when Burling announced his intention to retire from trade (he did not, but Perkins, Burling & Perkins did close its accounts), James Perkins told his brother Samuel that he had such a high sense of Burling's "refined honour" that he trusted the two men to settle the firm's accounts as they would. When Burling died in 1810, however, he still owed the Perkins brothers \$3,737.67. He never paid them a cent of the money promised for their role in Samuel Burling's upbringing and apprenticeship, a fact that worried Samuel. James Perkins to Samuel G. Perkins, 16 May 1793. JEC Extracts. Thompson-Star, *The Burling Books: Ancestors and Descendants of Edward and Grace Burling, Quakers, 1600-2000*, 323-324.

returned to the Cape.⁸⁸ But Walter and Samuel Burling both remained connected to the Perkinses for the rest of their lives.

In contrast to Burling, **Thomas H. Perkins (1763-1854)** did not adapt readily to the West Indies. He first traveled to Saint Domingue in 1785, before journeying north to Charleston to visit with a fellow former Shattuck apprentice, William Crafts, for the winter. He carried with him introductions to several Revolutionary war heroes of South Carolina and thus moved amongst the “best circles” of Charleston society. Perkins returned to Santo Domingo in the spring of 1786 to partner with Burling and his brother James. After one season, he returned to Boston claiming ill health. By 1788, **Samuel G. Perkins (1767-1847)** replaced his brother Thomas as the second “Perkins” in the partnership, and James was once more in the West Indies with his new wife.⁸⁹

Samuel Perkins had been to Saint Domingue intermittently since 1785. He knew the principals; he knew the trade; he knew the instability of imperial politics in the West Indies. But nothing could have prepared Samuel for the difficulties ahead. The tensions in France that sparked the French Revolution also roiled Saint Domingue. The partners of Perkins, Burling & Perkins initially saw war as an opportunity. Letters to constituents in late 1787 and early 1788 refer to the “advantageous” and “hoped for” prospect of war.⁹⁰ But the war they hoped for was in Europe, not in Saint Domingue.

The revolution in Saint Domingue—the Haitian Revolution—had deep roots, but the conflict began over discontent with representation in the metropole. When King

⁸⁸ Thompson-Star, *The Burling Books: Ancestors and Descendants of Edward and Grace Burling, Quakers, 1600-2000*, 155-163, 314-477.

⁸⁹ “Notes mostly from Thomas H. Perkins’s Memo in 1847.” JEC Extracts.

⁹⁰ Perkins, Burling & Co. to John Codman, Boston 27 October 1787 and Joseph Marquand 23 January 1788. JEC Extracts.

Louis XVI agreed to call the Estates General in 1787 in France, agitation began in Saint Domingue for representation. Who would have a voice? Tensions in the colony crossed both class and race lines: white planters, creole planters and merchants known as *grands blancs*, the *petits blancs* who managed local stores and industry, the *gens de couleur* or free mulattoes who could themselves be well-to-do planters or artisans, and, finally, the black slaves who made up five-sixths of the colony's population.⁹¹ In December of 1788, the colony elected 37 delegates, but the election only exacerbated the conflict. The matter was complex: many Africans on the island feared that a greater voice for the *grands blancs* would lead to harsher conditions on the island, while some *gens de couleur* argued that the Declaration of the Rights of Man meant they, too, should have a voice in the polity. Just as the tensions crossed many lines, so, too, did the violence. Smaller uprisings and rebellions rocked the island well before the overthrow of the colonial government in 1791.

By October 1789, Perkins, Burling & Co. wrote to their clients that all was in confusion in the Cape. Where on May 27, 1789 they exulted that all kinds of American produce, including flour, could now be legally exported to the Cape, by February 1790, turmoil on the island had brought business to a standstill.⁹² On the ground, it was difficult to gauge if the discontent would stop trade or make it all the more lucrative. The partners vacillated between confidence that the French troops would and could ensure

⁹¹ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 650, Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

⁹² Perkins, Burling & Co. to John Hollins, Baltimore 27 May 1789. JEC Extracts. Saint Domingue was legally bound to import its food from France, but the grain crop was short in the winter of 1788-1789, leading the governor to open their ports in March and to proclaim a free trade (for export to any ports save France) to commence in August in hopes of acquiring much needed provisions. Flour, however, could only be imported until the end of September. The opening created a huge boom and glut. Perkins, Burling & Co. reported receiving \$12 to \$15 per barrel in late July. By August, they could not get \$8; by mid-September, flour would not sell at any price.

eventual peace in their most profitable of colonies and utter frustration. A partner wrote that he “almost wept at disappointment” at the armed rebels in the street.⁹³ James Perkins reported to brother Tom, “We are again embroiled in a War with the Mulattoes, who have taken arms in the neighborhood and menaced the capital. Our Collections suffer inconceivably by it.”⁹⁴ James sounded weary, but hardly frightened. On August 22, 1791, revolution officially came to the capital with a slave uprising in Cap François. Nine miles from town, a group of slaves broke into a refinery and killed the owner and an apprentice. The slaves moved on the town to claim their independence.⁹⁵ The revolution had begun.

At the time of the insurrection, James and his family were visiting with the Comte d’Hauteval.⁹⁶ According to Sarah Perkins, James’s wife, they stopped at the Rouvry plantation for dinner on their way back to the Cape. Madame de Rouvry arrived at the plantation that afternoon with news that the whole country was in turmoil. The guests attempted to quietly secure belongings before the information reached the slaves, but as evening came, a slave from a neighboring plantation passed through with an account. “We soon discovered what had happened by the changed manner of the slaves,” Sarah reflected. “Their insolence and bravado, their noise and general deportment, but we

⁹³ Perkins, Burling & Co. Letterbook entry, August 1790. JEC Extracts.

⁹⁴ James Perkins to Thomas Handasyd Perkins 5 November 1790. JEC Extracts.

⁹⁵ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 77.

⁹⁶ This was the same Comte Lucien d’Hauteval who would later be “Z” of the “XYZ Affair”—i.e., one of three French agents who made secret demands on the American government in order to begin peace negotiations in 1798, including a hefty bribe for the French foreign minister. Hauteval bore no real responsibility for the demands, however, serving as a translator and loyal friend to the minister. Americans close to the affair recognized that Hauteval – who had spent time in Boston after escaping Saint Domingue – actively favored a pro-American French foreign policy. See Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 573, William Stinchcombe, “The Diplomacy of the Wxyz Affair,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1977): 590-617

nevertheless, sat down to dinner from rich service of plate, though we ate little and spent but a short time at the table in gloomy silence.”⁹⁷ Apparently, the company also received both the tip off and assistance from a slave of the Perkinses, Moussa (a corruption of the French title *monsieur*), who helped the party escape.⁹⁸ Madame de Rouvry ordered the carriages to be made ready for departure and gathered her silver. With a bribe to the coachman, the six women, two children, and two armed men forced their way to the village of Fort Dauphin in three coaches and a man on horseback. “On reaching the center of the village, Madame de Rouvry’s postilion drew up and stopped the whole party. We now gave ourselves up for lost.” Sarah was not certain what budged the servant, Madame de Rouvry’s fierce demeanor or, more likely, Monsieur Bauray brandishing a sword on horseback. The man led them to the harbor. From there, the company obtained a drogher which carried them the forty miles to Cap François.⁹⁹

From August 1791 to May 1792, James stayed in Cap François. He, Burling, his brother Samuel, and other resident Americans fought alongside the local and French militias to put down the uprising. He wrote to one correspondent that “the whole Country

⁹⁷ Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927*, 488.

⁹⁸ According to Briggs, passing along the family’s narrative of “Moussa the faithful slave,” Moussa had been purchased by T.H. Perkins in 1785. Upon passing by the slave market, Perkins reported being outraged at the African man’s condition. He upbraided the slave dealer for not seeing the poor man to a doctor. The slave dealer said it was not worth the trouble and sold Moussa to Perkins for half a Joe (Portuguese gold coins valued at about \$8) and left Perkins to see Moussa to the hospital. When he recovered, Moussa went to work in the countinghouse. He shared that his name was Deyaha and that he had been captured by slave dealers in the interior of Africa while tending sheep with his father, but the nickname Moussa, given him by his fellow slaves for his “dignified deportment and superiority of character” was the appellation that stuck. When James Perkins departed the Cape in 1792, Moussa refused to be left behind to the point of swimming out the ship. He worked as a servant for James Perkins and his family until his death on August 15, 1831. Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927*, 489-490. Eliza Cabot, Thomas’s daughter, told a slightly different version. Her father felt sorry for Moussa, asked the price, and paid thirty dollars for him. He took his new slave to James’s wife as a present (they did not marry until 1786) who healed him. Despite the humanitarian ring to the story, the Perkins brothers frequented the local slave markets often enough as both buyers and sellers.

⁹⁹ Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927*, 488-489.

has been thrown into a State of Confusion. All business suspended & martial law proclaimed in the Garrison.”¹⁰⁰ And yet the partners stayed, tried to salvage what property they could, and continued to do what trade as they could. They mostly diverted shipments to Port au Prince, Martinique, and Havana.

Newspapers throughout the American north carried the “letters from James Perkins” in which he described his experiences and the state of affairs in the colony.¹⁰¹ That his letters were so widely printed is hardly surprising: merchants’ letters were the most thorough and current news on the conflict. Even Thomas Jefferson, then the Secretary of State, urged Nathaniel Cutting—himself an intimate and guest of the Perkinses in Cap François—to keep him apprised of events as it was the most up-to-date news to be had.¹⁰²

The partners of Perkins, Burling & Co. supplied residents of Cap François with what provisions they had in stock. They were afraid not to. They dared not raise prices lest locals simply take what they wanted, despite scarcities. Simon Newman has argued that while Republicans lambasted Federalists as aristocrats and monarchists, “those same Federalists were actively aiding the most radical revolution of their age.”¹⁰³ The Perkins brothers certainly fit within this class of merchants, but, as with many Federalists, their

¹⁰⁰ James Perkins, Cape Francis, to Arnold Welles 13 September 1791. Thomas Handasyd Perkins Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.2. MHS.

¹⁰¹ Extracts appeared in the *New Hampshire Gazetteer* and the *New Hampshire Spy*, the *New York Journal*, the *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, the *Western Star*, the *Daily Advertiser*, and the *Independent Chronicle* of Massachusetts, and much more. The most southerly paper to carry the letters appears to have been the *Maryland Gazette* of Annapolis, Maryland.

¹⁰² Simon P. Newman, “American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans,” in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David Patrick Geggus (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 2001), 72-89.

¹⁰³ Newman, “American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans,” 80.

provisioning of the rebels was less about principle than profit. Even in the face of a revolution fought for a liberty so resonant of their own revolution, the Perkinses continued to traffic in slaves.¹⁰⁴ For the Perkinses, their sympathies were with the planters run out of their plantations, several of whom ended up refugees sleeping on the floors of Perkins' family homes in Boston.¹⁰⁵ Both Thomas H. Perkins and his brother-in-law and trading partner, Russell Sturgis, served on a committee to aid the French refugees.¹⁰⁶ But the Perkinses were first and foremost merchants and they kept their firm active in the French West Indies as long as they could. The principle involved, to them, was the right to engage in the commerce.

The destruction of Cap François in 1793 was immediately but not ultimately devastating to Perkins, Burling & Perkins. Despite early luck with war speculations and in escaping with their lives, much property was lost. Fires wiped out their warehouses in the Cape, leaving the French government their only hope of restitution. Years later, Samuel would write of watching the great city burn, one of the many "miserable tenants" of the ships who dotted the outskirts of the Cap François harbor. Sam and Walter Burling sailed for Port-au-Prince in hopes of recovering their funds at the colonial capitol. The two men sailed separately with what property they could carry.

Their luck (bad) held. A British merchantman captured Walter Burling's vessel with the \$15,000 the two men managed to secure from the wreckage and carried it to

¹⁰⁴ To say that the Perkins brothers did not see it in this light is an understatement. In his reminiscences of the revolution, Samuel Perkins blamed the uprising on unthinking instigators in France such as Abbé Gregoire, mistakes made by white plantation owners, and, above all, "the secret arts of the free mulattoes." To him, the slaves were pawns. The entire revolution was a tragedy for the loss it brought to the formerly prosperous colony and her people, including the slaves who, under slavery, "barely needed work at all." Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927*, 483-484.

¹⁰⁵ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

¹⁰⁶ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 102.

Jamaica.¹⁰⁷ The brig carrying Samuel Perkins docked at St. Mark's where, upon learning those on board hailed from Cap François, French officials carted the lot of them to the local jail. With the assistance of some of the town's white inhabitants and coin, Perkins and his fellow castaways managed to secure a late supper and a separate room in the jail where they slept undisturbed by the other inmates, but Samuel's hopes of getting to the capitol had to wait for the arrival of the local governor. When Perkins finally arrived in Port au Prince a few days later, French officials evidently notified him that he required evidence of the debts owed the government to receive compensation, for he soon embarked on a return voyage to the Cape in search of certification from the local commissary. In the Cape, Sam encountered a friendly Boston captain of his acquaintance. The captain, sensibly, was horrified at the news Samuel intended to seek restitution, and urged him to stay aboard the *Betsey* and not endanger his life. But Samuel had to try. He took refuge aboard the *Betsey* at night, but at daybreak, he stole into town with a hat pull low across his brow. It took him several days of petitioning to receive the French commissary's certification of the debts owed the Perkins firm. Once received, Samuel was able to conclude his business. Much had been lost in the violence of revolution, but here, at least, was something.¹⁰⁸

Still, despite all of the upheaval and the damage to agricultural output, the revolution in Saint Domingue did not put an end to American trade on the island. As late as November of 1803, the Perkinses informed correspondents that they still endeavored

¹⁰⁷ Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927*, 497.

¹⁰⁸ Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927*.

to obtain cargoes of coffee from the colony, albeit with difficulty.¹⁰⁹ In November of the following year, they wrote that they expected the Haitian trade to be interdicted entirely. Martinique, Guadeloupe, and India would be their only remaining coffee suppliers.¹¹⁰ They purchased sugar and molasses from Havana. The official end to their trade did not really happen until 1806, when President Thomas Jefferson finally pushed legislation through congress making it illegal to provision the republic of former slaves.¹¹¹



MAP 2: Pacific Northwest Fur Trade in World Context, circa 1790 to 1840.

Source: Created by Pfly, April 10, 2010.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maritime_Fur_Trade-WorldContext.png>

¹⁰⁹ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. to J.M. Forbes, London, 4 November 1803, to T. & A. Cremer, Rotterdam, 7 November 1803. JEC Extracts.

¹¹⁰ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. to T. & A. Cremer, Rotterdam, 24 November 1804. JEC Extracts.

¹¹¹ Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806."

The East Indies: Perkins & Magee, 1788-1801

While his brothers concentrated on the French West Indies trade, Thomas Handasyd Perkins moved in a new direction. In March of 1788, Thomas married Sally Elliot, daughter to the prosperous Boston merchant, Simon Elliot.¹¹² And on October 14, 1788, Thomas partnered with his new uncle-in-law, James Magee. The two men opened a store on Butler's Row not far from Simon Elliot's tobacco shop—one of three properties owned by Elliot on Butler's Row alone. Perkins & Magee's declared ambition was to manage a commission agency focused on exchanging New England rum for European wines and Charleston rice.¹¹³ Already, however, Magee had already been approached by the Salem shipping magnate, Elias Hasket Derby. Magee agreed to captain Derby's *Astrea* to the East Indies and, in turn, brought in Perkins as the supercargo or shipboard sales' agent.¹¹⁴ For Perkins & Magee, the paint on their shingle barely dry, this shipping venture was an entrée into the East Indies trade on their own account.

¹¹² George Sweet Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops; Textile Machinery Building in New England, 1813-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 15-17. Elliot left an estate valued at close to £15,000 at his death in 1794. He owned four stores, three on Butler's Row and one on State Street, and a mansion on Federal Street. Elliot was especially known for the snuff mills he built along the banks of the Charles River by the Newton Upper Falls in the 1780s and 1790s. He completed the first snuff mill in 1782, followed by another three, a grist mill, and a nail factory over the course of the next twelve years. These were some of the early manufacturing factories built in the region and made use of the Newton waterways. Thomas Perkins would later attempt to use these properties in constructing a cotton mill, the Elliot Manufacturing Company.

¹¹³ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 42.

¹¹⁴ Magee agreed to make the voyage in late 1787 and was heavily involved in the organizing of the adventure's investors, cargo, crew, and course. See James Magee to Elias Hasket Derby, 17 December 1787, 15 March 1788, and more. Box 1, Folder 8: Ship's Papers, *Astrea*, 1789-1790. Derby Family Papers. PEM.

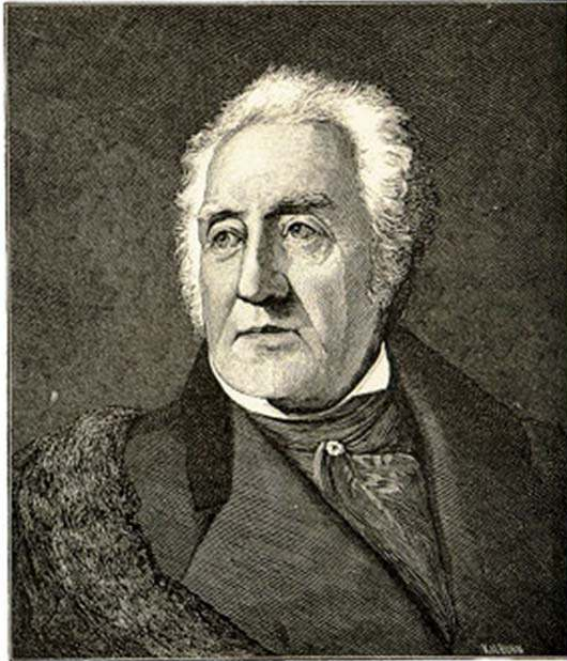


IMAGE 1. Thomas Handasyd Perkins.

Source: Justin Winsor, *Memorial History of Boston, including Suffolk County Massachusetts, 1630-1880* (J.R. Osgood & Co., 1881), vol. 4, p. 118.

When he partnered with Perkins in 1788, **James Magee (1750-1801)** was a gritty, experienced ship captain of thirty-eight years. He and his brother Bernard were Irish sea dogs turned Revolutionary War heroes. During the American Revolution, James Magee captained American privateers such as the *Independence* which captured the British *Countess*. He also commanded the *General Arnold*, a vessel whose maritime fate shocked even hardy New Englanders. A day out of Boston, a violent wind shattered the ship against a shoal off of Plymouth. Almost 80% of the crew died from exposure to the elements and Magee was lucky to survive with his limbs and, according to one version, escaped such a fate by pouring brandy into his boots.¹¹⁵ In spite of that horrific experience and a later capture by British privateers, Magee felt bound to the sea. He had

¹¹⁵ Henry Lee, "The Magee Family and the Origins of the China Trade," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 81 (1969): 104-119.

amassed a nest egg from small adventures here and there. New England shippers often gave freight privileges to a ship's officers and sometimes even the crew. A precursor to corporate stock privileges, this investment in an adventure's success allowed mariners to participate in the mercantile life of the ship. Magee had managed to parlay these smaller speculations into larger commercial investments, enough to go into business for himself or settle down. But he was in no mood to retire. In 1786, at the helm of the *Hope*, Magee was the first Boston captain to visit China and the first American to dock at Batavia (Jakarta). Returning in 1787, Magee was in great demand by American merchants interested in the China trade.¹¹⁶

In early America, trade with the East Indies signified more than luxury goods and spectacular wealth. The commerce was also a physical manifestation of independence and American commercial potential.¹¹⁷ Before the American Revolution, East Indian produce such as tea, pepper, and spices were colonial goods, imported to the Americas largely through British trading companies and Dutch smugglers. Thus, when the American *Empress of China* embarked from New York on February 22, 1784—the birthday of George Washington himself—guns fired their salutes, crowds cheered, and Philip Freneau captured the nationalism of the moment in poetry:

To that old trade no more confined,
By Britain's jealous court assigned

¹¹⁶ Lee, "The Magee Family and the Origins of the China Trade," 105-106. A consortium of New York merchants owned the *Hope*, including Samuel Shaw, Isaac Sears, etc.

¹¹⁷ The aforementioned *Observations on the Commerce of the United States* by Lord Sheffield proclaimed in 1783 that America's commerce would surely continue through Britain as much as it had before. "The superior credit afforded by England will always give the preference; and it is probably many foreign articles will go to America through Great Britain." To many Americans, from Philip Freneau to Benjamin Franklin to merchants such as Joseph Barrell, ventures like that of the *Empress of China* were an opportunity to prove the British wrong. See Edward D. Graham, *American Ideas of a Special Relationship with China, 1784-1900* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 2-7.

She round the Stormy Cape shall sail
And, eastward, catch the odorous gale...

Thus commerce to our world conveys
All that the varying taste can please;
For us, the Indian looms are free
And Java strips her spicy tree....¹¹⁸

At a time when most avenues of trade were closing for Americans—trade with the British, Spanish, and even French West Indies—the East Indies offered hope for new beginnings. Yet not only were such voyages long, capital intensive, and risky, they were also ventures into the unknown. Where a Boston-West Indies venture might take a little over a month round trip, the *Empress of China* returned fourteen months and twenty-four days after her departure. While Daniel Parker & Company, the firm managing the *Empress of China* adventure, spent approximately \$20,000 to outfit the *Comte de Artois* for France, the *Empress* required a whopping \$120,000.¹¹⁹ Few American merchants could amass this kind of capital for a single venture.

By 1788, as Perkins & Magee set up shop, Elias Hasket Derby had already made a name for himself in the East Indies trade. Here was the man dubbed “King Derby” by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Derby reputedly rode through Salem’s narrow lanes in a gilded coach and sported, when spotted, elegant attire topped off with a

¹¹⁸ Ver Steeg, "Financing and Outfitting the First United States Ship to China," 10. A Hingham, Massachusetts vessel, the *Harriet*, was actually the first to embark for China in December of 1783. But the little 55-ton sloop never made it past the Cape of Good Hope. Encountering British East Indiamen off the Cape, the British officials offered more than double her weight in Hyson tea to keep her from continuing the voyage. The *Harriet* lost her place in history but made fantastic profits for her owners. Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860*, 44.

¹¹⁹ Ver Steeg, "Financing and Outfitting the First United States Ship to China," 8-9. Outfitting a vessel included purchasing the ship, hiring the mariners and officers, provisioning the ship, securing the cargo, and, usually, insuring the ship and cargo. Justin Winsor quotes an *Independent Chronicle* article from June 23, 1785 in which hopeful investors hold a meeting in New York to attract subscriptions (at a share of \$100 each) to partake in such a voyage. Justin Winsor and C. F. Jewett, *The Memorial History of Boston : Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts. 1630-1880* (Boston: Osgood, 1882), vol. 4, p. 204.

gold-headed cane. Derby was not the first American merchant to send a vessel for trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope. But he was one of the most heavily involved American merchants in the region. In 1784 and again 1785, he sent out the *Grand Turk* for the Isle of France and China respectively. By the fall of 1786, he outfitted another three vessels for the Indian Ocean.¹²⁰

Where most Derby adventures were joint ventures between closer family and friends, the management of the *Astrea* took place through the careful solicitation of a broader circle of merchants. Both Magee and Perkins were heavily involved in the planning for the voyage. The Articles of Agreement for the voyage were made between Derby and the individual merchants, with stipulations that Magee and Perkins were to manage the sales.¹²¹ David Sears and Samuel Parkman were they key initial investors, with a stake of \$20,000 each, followed by the Shippeys and Seamans (connected families) of New York.¹²² Officers for the voyage, however, were personal choices: Perkins, Philip Howland, and John Russell were all Magee picks; H.J. Bettle and Samuel Derby were both Derby picks.

Magee and Perkins also agreed to take a fair amount of the risk for the *Astrea* adventure upon themselves. As was common to such voyages, the shippers purchased insurance for the vessel and cargo. Russell Sturgis secured the London insurance at a rate

¹²⁰ McKey, "Elias Hasket Derby, Merchant of Salem, Massachusetts, 1739-1799."

¹²¹ See individual letters of articles of agreement in Box 1, Folder 8: Ship's Papers, *Astrea*, 1789-1790. Derby Family Papers. PEM. Sears and Parkman were both wealthy merchants, and Magee had done considerable work for the Sears family, especially Isaac Sears. Special thanks to Jessica Lepler and Lesley Doig for their insight on the Derby family and mercantile practices.

¹²² Apparently the involvement of New York men (i.e., not New England men) was a source of tension between Magee and Derby. In February 1789, Magee wrote "I dare say there will be as much money or freight as we had right to expect, but I never understood that I was confined to the town of Boston to get freight."

of 8% and noted to Derby that he had been able to negotiate a lower premium, “owing to her sailing in what they think will be a good season.”¹²³ In a less customary turn, Derby purchased additional insurance in the form of subscriptions at a rate of 12%. Some of the subscribers were also interested in the voyage themselves, but many were not.

Subscribers included merchants and firms: William Gray, John Fish, John Norris, Benjamin Pickman, John Cabot, Francis Cabot, as well as Brown & Thorndike, Lee & Cabot.¹²⁴ And finally, the contract and invoice for outbound cargo for the voyage included the following provision:

I do hereby acknowledge to have received of Capt. James Magee fifteen hundred dollars of Mr. Thos. Hand. Perkins the sum of five hundred dollars, which is by agreement to be taken out of the sales of the Cargo at Canton. Provided Capt. Magee should loose (sic) my ship & Cargo & save the money on board ship in that case, Mr. Derby will pay one fourth of the sum and the quarter part of his property is not insured.¹²⁵

Beyond the planning of the voyage itself and their personal investments, Perkins and Magee were contractually implicated by the success or failure of the *Astrea*'s voyage.

For merchants with the funds to invest, the *Astrea* speculation was clearly an exciting prospect. Together, Magee and Perkins attracted eighteen subscribers and a cargo of mostly ginseng and silver—38 tons of ginseng, \$30,000 worth of silver—as well as beeswax, butter, Philadelphia beer and New England rum, codfish, spermaceti candles,

¹²³ Russell Sturgis to Elias Hasket Derby, 20 June 1789, Box 1, Folder 8, Derby Shipping Papers. PEM.

¹²⁴ “Know all men,” 14 February 1789, Box 1, Folder 8, Derby Shipping Papers. PEM

¹²⁵ “Invoice of sundry merchandise shipt by Elias Hasket Derby of Salem on board the Ship *Astrea* James Magee Master bound for Batavia and Canton on Account and risqué of the Shipper and consigned to Master and Mr. Thomas Perkins for Sales and Returns, viz. 14 Feb. 1789,” *Astrea: Invoice Book, Outbound Cargoes*, vol. 2. Derby Shipping Papers. PEM.

tobacco, bar iron, and sundries.¹²⁶ William Cabot even packed up the household silver, plates, platters, tankards and all, to be sent to China in trade for teas.¹²⁷ For their trouble, Magee and Perkins were to receive 5% commission on the sales of cargo headed out, 2 ½% on cargo brought home, and another 5% on goods sold between Batavia (Jakarta) and Canton.¹²⁸

The *Astrea* departed in February 1789 and arrived in Batavia in July. As the vessel neared Java Head, Magee ordered the guns mounted in case they met up with pirates, only to discover that the shot would not fit their guns. A tense crew made their way to port, luckily meeting no harm, only to discover from another Derby vessel, the *Three Sisters*, that Dutch officials refused the Americans' trade. Here we arrive at Perkins's petitioning, per the introduction. Day after day he approached the governor-general with petitions and wooed officials and other residents by night at dinners and social events. Finally, on July 21, the *Astrea* received permission to sell her cargo. Yet another rude awakening awaited. The merchants, Perkins felt, joined together to force the outsider-Americans to sell low. On July 28, Perkins consented to sell what he could in order to be off. The vessel had still to make her way to her destination in China.¹²⁹

In September 1789, the *Astrea* arrived in Macau, a peninsula downriver from Canton. For Perkins, a supercargo in a new market, the challenges came hard and fast.

¹²⁶ Elias Hasket Derby, "Invoice Book: Outbound Cargoes, 1785-1896." Derby Family Papers. PEM.

¹²⁷ William Cabot to Elias Hasket Derby, 12 February 1789. Box 1, Folder 8: Ship's Papers, *Astrea*, 1789-1790. Derby Family Papers. The plate included the following: "Tea kettle, tankard, coffee pot, half pint can, 2 porringers, tea pot and cream, old spout cup, 2 old wrought plates (1 L, 1 Sm), 1 old bowl, sundry pieces. Est. value 255.16..12."

¹²⁸ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 44.

¹²⁹ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 50.

Trading in China did not require the intense petitioning of Java, but merchants needed to know how to navigate the complex system of ship pilots, customs officials, compradors, linguists, and Hong merchants. Simply traveling from Macau to Canton required entertaining customs officials en route and offering appropriate “cumshas” (gifts or bribes) to officials and “tidewaiters” (to deter smuggling along the river). A first Chinese pilot navigated the foreign vessel from Macau to the customs house at the Bocca Tigris, or mouth of the Pearl River. From there, after a vessel’s papers passed inspection, a second, more skilled pilot guided the vessel upriver to the Whampoa Anchorage.¹³⁰ From Whampoa, small Chinese sampans or “chop boats” carried merchandise up the shallower portion of the Pearl River to Canton to be sold under the consignment of a licensed Hong merchant. Hong merchants were elite merchants of Canton and, officially at least, the only ones legally allowed to sell to foreign traders. In exchange for privileged access to the foreign trade, Hong merchants were responsible for the foreign vessels consigned to them, and the behavior of its occupants.

At Whampoa, Perkins found more than a dozen American ships already congregated. The cluster raised the prices on teas and lowered the prices for their own all-too-similar cargoes. Making matters worse, Elias Hasket Derby owned four of the vessels: not only the *Astrea*, but also the *Three Sisters*, the *Atlantic*, and the *Light Horse*. The latter two vessels had been intended for Isle de France (now Reunion, off the eastern coast of Africa), but a Derby son who was stationed there sent the vessels along to China in hope of better prices. The four Derby vessels alone glutted the market with ginseng.

¹³⁰ Paul Arthur Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 19-33.

The *Astrea* itself contained nearly 75,000 pounds of the root.¹³¹ Like many Americans, the Derby investors hoped the Chinese would appreciate the native American ginseng. Samuel Shaw expressed this faith in the article following his return from the *Empress of China* adventure in a letter to Secretary of State John Jay: “Though a very small portion of [American vessel’s] funds consisted of specie, they see them all returning with full and valuable cargoes. Such are the advantages which America derives from her ginseng. . . . It is probably that there will always be a sufficient demand for the article to make it equally valuable.”¹³² This optimism was ill-founded. Americans tended to amass ginseng without attention to quality, a fact that also made the cargoes a difficult match for the more refined Chinese market. But the large quantities of ginseng imported to China make far more sense in this light.

Perkins and his fellow Derby agents decided to combine to sell off their cargoes and two vessels—New England ships being one of the few items actually in demand—and loaded the *Astrea* and the *Light Horse* with 2,000 chests of black and green teas, nankeens, and mercury. Returning to New England in 1790, the merchants found the tea market itself was overdone.¹³³ Thus, on his first voyage to the East Indies, Perkins experienced what later became recognizable as a pattern in the American-China trade: the booms and busts of new commodities and new markets, from American ginseng, to

¹³¹ A 1787 despatch to Secretary of State John Jay sheds insight on the boosterism for ginseng. American consul to China Samuel Shaw wrote that “Until the American flag appeared in this quarter, it had been generally supposed that forty or fifty piculs (one hundred and thirty-three and one-third pounds) were equal to the annual consumption Notwithstanding this increased quantity since 1784, the sales have not been materially affected by it, and it is probably that there will always be a sufficient demand for the article to make it equally valuable.” Quoted in Winsor and Jewett, *The Memorial History of Boston : Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts. 1630-1880*, vol. 4, p. 205.

¹³² Samuel Shaw to Secretary of State John Jay, June 1787, quoted in Winsor and Jewett, *The Memorial History of Boston : Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts. 1630-1880*, vol. 4, p. 205.

¹³³ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 53-56.

Pacific furs and sandalwood, to Turkish opium. If anything, the experience seemed to sharpen Perkins's resolve to be more aggressive in future speculations.

For Thomas H. Perkins, this East Indies adventure shaped the rest of his career. While still in Canton, Perkins and Magee witnessed firsthand the potential profits to be had in the Pacific fur trade. On October 5, the British *Iphigenia* arrived in Whampoa with a cargo of pelts, followed by the American *Columbia* on November 17. Sea otters from the Pacific Northwest had extremely fine but dense fur that gave the pelts a soft radiance for which they were prized. The pelts of either the north Pacific *Enhydra lutris lutris* or their more southerly compatriots the *Enhydra lutris neireis* shimmered brown, black, and silver, but the former were said to be darker and far more lush than the latter. William Sturgis, a Perkins nephew, would later write that the luster of the sea otter pelts rivaled the appeal of a beautiful woman or newborn babe. A smuggled pelt valued at only a few dollars off the Pacific coast of North America, Perkins discovered, could bring as much as \$70 in Canton.¹³⁴ Seizing the opportunity, Perkins and his business partner quietly approached the first mate aboard the *Columbia*, Joseph Ingraham, and contracted with him to captain a new venture upon his return to Boston.

The strategies by which Perkins and Magee embarked on their first independent venture are instructive for understanding the foundation of the larger Perkins network. The *Astrea* arrived in Boston in June of 1790, the *Columbia* on August 9. While awaiting Joseph Ingraham's return aboard the *Columbia*, Perkins and Magee pooled resources with Perkins's brother-in-law, Russell Sturgis, to purchase a small two-masted brigantine, the *Hope*. Perkins arranged with his school friend Harrison Gray Otis, then a Boston lawyer,

¹³⁴ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 55.

to secure a letter from the American government as well as from the Spanish Ambassador to smooth the vessel's reception in Spanish America.¹³⁵ Where in the West Indies and Europe James Perkins drew upon a core of contacts inherited from Wall & Tardy and brought his brothers in to an established circle of merchants and retailers, in the Pacific Northwest and China trade, Thomas H. Perkins's initial foray built more immediately upon kin—including in-laws James Magee and Russell Sturgis and a 1/16 share for Perkins, Burling & Co.—and friends.

Perkins and Magee threw themselves into the Pacific Northwest trade with both feet. On the morning of September 16, 1790, the *Hope* set sail for the Pacific, followed a year later by the *Margaret*. The *Hope* had only a 71-ton capacity, barely 1/5 the size of the *Astrea*, with a crew of fourteen men, a boy, and a dog. This included the 28-year old Captain Ingraham, a Hawaiian islander and friend of Ingraham by the name of Opie (he had arrived in Boston with the *Columbia*), and Ebenezer Dorr, Jr., son to a local mercantile family, as supercargo. Dorr, much like Thomas Perkins in his *Astrea* voyage, aspired to use the voyage to gain experience and contacts in specific markets and sea lanes for his own family. The *Hope*'s small vessel and crew meant it could be discharged without delay, getting a hoped-for jump on the competition. The *Margaret*, on the other hand, was a partnership between Perkins, Magee, and brothers James and Thomas Lamb. The *Margaret* was built for the trade, complete with a copper bottom to stave off barnacles and eight swivel guns to protect against pirates or Indians.¹³⁶ Magee once more took to the helm to oversee the latter adventure himself.

¹³⁵ Thomas H. Perkins to John Blagge, 31 August 1790. JEC Extracts.

¹³⁶ Lee, "The Magee Family and the Origins of the China Trade," 110.

While Magee returned to sea, Perkins handled their affairs from Boston and took on commissions from Perkins, Burling & Co. He had never entirely left his brothers behind. For example, he invested James and Samuel in the *Hope* speculation. Yet much was up in the air. In correspondence with a colleague in May of 1792, he felt that his friend would be surprised not to find him back in China. Perkins explained that the prospects had been so “unpromising that I have been laying on my oars.”¹³⁷ He had attempted to organize a new China voyage through Elias Hasket Derby, but to no avail. Several merchants involved in the *Astrea* voyage indicated that if he returned to China, they wished to ship with him, and he led Derby to believe that such a voyage was imminent. But he had not been able to solicit sufficient subscriptions for a voyage. While seeking merchants to freight with him, those who had initially indicated interest employed their funds elsewhere.¹³⁸ Here was a weakness of the consignee model for young merchants. No merchant wished to see their property or capital languish; delays might undermine an adventure altogether.

The year 1792 could have found Thomas Perkins en route to Canton. Instead he was in Boston, where, by July, he accepted a proposal from his brother. The two would form a new agency based in Boston but centered on the West Indian trade. Ironically, the partnership began at the suggestion of the more circumspect James. The offer was purely business, James wrote, and not his idea. “At this moment the Confusion in France and in this Colony, the Planters are looking for new resources,” James explained. “We make

¹³⁷ Thomas Handasyd Perkins to Mr. Henderson, Bombay, 2 May 1792. JEC Extracts.

¹³⁸ Thomas Handasyd Perkins to Elias Hasket Derby, 30 January 1792. Box 1, Folder 3, Papers Collected by the First and Second Church. MHS. His letter indicates that Derby had delayed a vessel for him. “As I am uncertain of raising the sum you mention I must relinquish the object having not been able to raise more than from 25 to 30 thousand dollars. I have written to New York and Philadelphia, but am uncertain what will be the success of my letters.”

you this Proposition as merchants, for in Trade we are told there is no friendship.”¹³⁹ As originally proposed, Thomas would form a branch house of Perkins, Burling & Perkins to handle their Boston consignments. Thomas batted his brother’s diffidence away, “You quote the old adage that there’s not friendship in trade, tho’ I’m confident when you wrote it y’r own feelings gave the lie to it.”¹⁴⁰

Thomas expressed to his brother of his confidence at the prospect. The chance at “clubbing our stocks’ is a thing I have always looked forward to with great pleasure,” he wrote. “The inducement to strangers to connect themselves in business ought to be great. A want of Confidence, and of course a Jealousy in the parties, must be productive of great uneasiness to them, and make them appear unfavourable in the public eye.

There are a thousand causes wh. give rise to the low suspicions wh. we so often see reigning between partners, wh. were the furthest from their minds when they connected themselves. . . . On the other hand a connection between brothers is both natural and beneficial; they have fewer distrusts and are more communicative, wh. strengthens their confidence and makes their business but amusement.¹⁴¹

For many relatives, kinship promised no such openness, trust, or harmony.¹⁴² The Perkins brothers were fortunate—at least in each other.

Boston: James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., 1792-1822

In 1792, Boston newspapers proclaimed that as of 29 September “Thomas Handasyd Perkins respectfully announces to the Public, his connection in business with

¹³⁹ James Perkins to Thomas Handasyd Perkins, 13 December 1791. JEC Extracts.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Handasyd Perkins to James Perkins, 29 March 1792. JEC Extracts.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Handasyd Perkins to James Perkins, 14 July 1792. JEC Extracts.

¹⁴² One example of brothers who collaborated to ill effect, is Stephen Girard and his brother Jean. John Bach McMaster, *The Life and Times of Stephen Girard, Mariner and Merchant* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1918).

his Brother James Perkins, jun. under the firm of James & Tho's H. Perkins." The trading house had a new shipment in with cotton, brown sugars by the hogshead, tierce, barrel, or loaf, as well as Madeira wine and sherry in pipes and quarter casks, all for sale at their new store on No. 11 Long Wharf.¹⁴³ The firm was not a fresh beginning for either of James or Thomas, but a merging of existing interests. The adventures, business, and contacts of both Perkins, Burling & Co. and Perkins & Magee became enmeshed in the new trading house. This range of experience and connections proved a boon to the Perkinses, both for the firm and the larger family. As Thomas wrote to his brother about the prospect of James returning to Boston for the sake of the partnership, "our good Mother renews her age on the idea."¹⁴⁴ While Perkins & Co. faced several stumbling blocks—vessels captured by warring nations and pirates, swindlers, glutted markets, and ill-fated speculations—the brothers engaged in commerce during a period of considerable opportunity for Americans. And the firm proved energetic in seeking out new openings. Time and again, Perkins & Co. located niches of trade where competition between larger powers opened up a space for smaller American merchants.

The Boston of the Perkins brothers' childhood was a commercial center amidst a broader coastline of New England ports; by the time they returned to establish a trading house in 1792, Boston was the undisputed political and economic capital of the larger region. Merchant families of outlying ports increasingly relocated to "the Hub," bringing capital and commercial experience with them.¹⁴⁵ And why not? Boston boasted a natural

¹⁴³ "Advertisement," *American Apollo* 5 October 1792, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Handasyd Perkins to James Perkins, 14 July 1792. JEC Extracts.

¹⁴⁵ Albion, Baker, and Labaree, *New England and the Sea*, Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860*, Winsor and Jewett, *The Memorial History of Boston : Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts. 1630-1880*, Conrad Edick Wright and Katheryn P. Viens, *Entrepreneurs: The Boston*

harbor with a narrow inlet and a large, calm bay. Some eighty wharves cropped into the city's harbor, offering anchorage to a good five hundred vessels. Among these was the 1700-foot, aptly-named Long Wharf, where the Perkins set up shop.¹⁴⁶ This central wharf jutted out from State Street, formerly King Street, and the equivalent to early Boston's Main Street. Boston of 1790 may have only had a population of 18,320 compared with New York's 33,131 and Philadelphia's 28,522, but New England merchants still competed effectively in trade.¹⁴⁷ What the region lacked in agricultural abundance, it made up for in commercial elbow grease.

Yet the Boston the Perkins brothers settled into was still a relatively intimate space where business and social worlds coincided. To Thomas, the streets of London felt akin to Boston after the churches let out on Sunday—or, more likely, when the fire bell rang.¹⁴⁸ Nathaniel Cutting's journal of his return to Boston during 1792 offers a window into the comfortable overlap of social and mercantile worlds. Cutting was a good friend to the Perkinses, and returned home to Boston with them in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution. His journal traces his visiting habits. On September 12, 1792, for example, Cutting went with his brother to visit Mrs. Eliza Gray at Salem, but she was not at home. He left his card and returned for Boston—running into an old friend, Captain Jonathan Ingersoll. Cutting then went to visit with Thomas H. Perkins, who read to him a letter

Business Community, 1700-1850 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society; Distributed by Northeastern University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁶ "Advertisement," *American Apollo* 5 October 1792, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ They were followed by Charleston at 16,359 and Baltimore at 13,503. But other New England ports were not inconsiderable: Salem at 7,921, Newport at 6,716, Providence at 6,380, and Marblehead at 5,661. See "Population of the 24 Urban Places: 1790," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed online on August 6, 2010 at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab02.txt>

¹⁴⁸ Thomas H. Perkins to Sally Perkins, 25 September 1811. Cabot Papers, Box 1, Folder 10. MHS.

just received from his brother and Cutting's companion of Cape François, Samuel Perkins. The two men then considered the prospects of the West Indian trade and Perkins plotted out a plan for a sugar adventure. Cutting promised to return that evening to discuss the prospect further. He returned home to find Mr. Murray and several gentlemen had dropped by to dine, a lovely evening. After this, he called at "chez Perkins" and passed an hour with Thomas and his wife. Cutting journeyed easily from the docks to a relaxing tea, from the Boston Exchange, to dinner with friends, to the theater. While visiting with the Perkinses, he conferred with "Madam Perkins" about business and politics and flirted with the "youthful daughters of expectation"—unmarried sisters—among them.¹⁴⁹ A marriage could have very easily come out of the scenario. While the Perkins brothers did not live in their store, nor did they leave business at the countinghouse.

James and Thomas worked well together in part because they had different temperaments that allowed them to split their responsibilities effectively. James handled the "inside work" of supervising the accounts, the clerks, and the apprentices; Thomas oversaw the "outside work" of managing their fleet, maritime employees, as well as being the more public face of the firm. James had long felt an affinity for accounting.¹⁵⁰ During his apprenticeship with William Shattuck, it was James who introduced the new format of double-entry bookkeeping into the firm.¹⁵¹ Double-entry bookkeeping had been around for centuries, but only gained prominence within the United States at the

¹⁴⁹ Journal Entry, 27 September 1792. Nathaniel Cutting journal and letterbooks, 1786-1798. MHS.

¹⁵⁰ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 146-148.

¹⁵¹ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 148.

turn of the nineteenth century. By balancing the credits as well as the debits inherent in every business transaction, double-entry bookkeeping allowed for a more precise understanding of the impact of each transaction on a firm's accounts. This was an innovation James brought to Perkins & Co. as well. While less publicly acclaimed than his charismatic brother, James nonetheless played an important role in the partnership.¹⁵²

Where James enjoyed the studious scribbling of the clerks, Thomas preferred to gossip with merchants at the Exchange on State Street or, after 1808, at the Boston Exchange Coffee House around the corner on Congress Street.¹⁵³ He was at his best when surrounded by people or making a deal. Fellow Boston merchant William Appleton once confessed that making money was devilishly addictive; Thomas would have likely agreed wholeheartedly.¹⁵⁴ Thus it was Thomas who negotiated contracts, purchased provisions, and oversaw the outfitting of vessels for departure. Thomas recruited the employees necessary to each voyage: ship captains, sailors, dockworkers, shipwrights, and more. Ship captains and officers were critical to the success of any adventure and had to be selected with care. In hiring a crew for the *Thomas Russell* in 1798, for example, wages varied considerably according to position, experience, and time with the Perkinses. John Purdy, one "ordinary seaman" was to receive fifteen dollars a month, where Asia Morse, with the same classification, was to receive only ten.¹⁵⁵ If not

¹⁵² A hint of contemporary appreciation for James Perkins is visible in the number of sons named after him: James Perkins Sturgis, James Perkins Higginson, and more.

¹⁵³ "Business and the Coffee House," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 2, no. 3 (1928): 10-13, Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 149. It was customary for merchants to gather at the Boston Exchange at one in the afternoon for about a half hour to share news and market information.

¹⁵⁴ Chandler Robbins, *Memoir of Hon. William Appleton* (Boston: Printed by J. Wilson and Son, 1863), 20.

¹⁵⁵ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 147.

enough sailors could be found in Boston, Thomas traveled to neighboring ports to secure additional men. According to a testimony Thomas gave before a state commission, between 1793 and 1813, Perkins & Co. of Boston employed an average of 100-150 mariners per year.¹⁵⁶

The firm's initial business built on the trade of Perkins, Burling & Co. James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. kicked off its career in the closing months of 1792 as Boston agents for several vessels owned by Daniel McNeil: the *Katy*, the *Clarissa*, the *Willing Quaker*, and the *Delight*.¹⁵⁷ They received 5% for outfitting the vessels with flour, rum, tobacco, and other provisions, dispatching the vessels to Africa and to Saint Domingue, Havana, and the Windward Isles where a willingness to import slaves would gain them entry to purchase their molasses, sugar, and coffee. In spite of legal prohibitions on Americans engaging in the slave trade, the Perkinses continued in the trade under foreign colors. Captains knew to keep the whole of the trade outside American waters. Had they been caught, the Perkinses would have faced a prohibitive fine of £50 per head.¹⁵⁸ The revolution in Saint Domingue did not dislodge the Perkinses involvement in the island, but their West Indies trade increasingly incorporated Martinique and, especially,

¹⁵⁶ Thomas H. Perkins testified before the House of Representatives for the state of Massachusetts in 1813 as to the nature of his business for a commission investigating impressed seamen. See *Report on the Committee of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts*, (Boston: Russell & Cutler, 1813), 46.

¹⁵⁷ See James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. to Daniel McNeil 19 December 1792, to Perkins, Burling & Co. 6 October 1792 and 7 December 1792, as well as copies of letters from Daniel McNeil to various contacts in Africa dated 17 November 1792. JEC Extracts.

¹⁵⁸ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 145. This was actually by Massachusetts state law. The Slave Trade Act of 1794 was the first congressional legislation to prohibit slave trafficking by American citizens (or other persons residing in the United States) or even the building of vessels in American ports for the purposes of slave trading. Section two of the bill levied a \$2000 fine on such persons for their involvement. *Slave Trade Act of 1794, U.S. Statues at Large*, 3d Congress, Session 1, Chapter 11: 347-349.

Havana.¹⁵⁹ Their brother Samuel initially served as their agent in Cap François and helped to direct their Havana trade, but by 1794 he went to work for his soon-to-be father-in-law: Stephen Higginson. Walter Burling announced an intention to retire in 1793, but remained involved in many adventures with the Perkinses. He served as supercargo for several Perkins-owned voyages.

Conclusion

Despite the Perkinses early intention to focus on the West Indies, the expected war in Europe finally erupted in 1793. The ensuing wars—known collectively as the French Revolutionary Wars—changed everything. Suddenly, opportunities to carry not only American produce but foreign luxuries such as West Indian coffee and sugar, East Indian tea, textiles, and coffee, and European manufactures abounded. James and Thomas H. Perkins threw themselves into the new trade. By the mid-1790s, Perkins & Co. focused on three circuits of trade: short-term speculations in the West Indies; medium-length adventures to Europe; and long-term voyages to China via the Pacific Northwest and the Mediterranean.¹⁶⁰ In the process, the brothers assembled a network of corresponding agents. Within this however, they cultivated an inner circle of regular collaborators. The very practice of fostering, maintaining, and using the network through cooperation and making demands of others, made and remade their commercial network. Well after the firm of James & Thomas H. Perkins or even Perkins & Sons closed its doors, the circuit of agents connecting specific markets continued.

¹⁵⁹ In December of 1792, for example, James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. sent a letter to Perkins, Burling & Co., chastising them for not feeling “the importance of this Havanna (sic) business as forcibly as ourselves.” Perkins & Co. to Perkins, Burling & Co. 7 December 1792. JEC Extracts.

¹⁶⁰ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 145.

**CHAPTER 2.
EXPERIMENTATION AND EXPANSION:
THE PERKINS NETWORK
IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS, 1793-1815**

In the years following its formation in 1792, James and Thomas H. Perkins & Co. expanded rapidly from transatlantic trade to a solidly global enterprise. They were fortunate to partner at an auspicious moment for American traders: the French Revolutionary Wars transformed the economic landscape for neutral powers. After the execution of King Louis XVI of France in January of 1793, European powers united in opposition to the French Republic. The resulting wars lasted intermittently until the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and touched all corners of the globe. As France came under the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799, the French Republic became a vehicle for the upstart general's ambitions. By the 1802-3 Peace of Amiens, France controlled much of Western Europe through either conquest or alliance. The British opposition relied upon their naval advantage on several geographic fronts. Most significantly for the Perkinses, British blockades in Asia and the Americas created opportunities for them to expand their own trade by stepping in for the Dutch, Spanish, and French in distant colonial ports.¹⁶¹

The French Wars proved especially profitable to Americans. According to Douglass North, international trade and shipping was the key source of growth in the early republic, above all the re-export trade arising from the French Wars. "The expansion of the carrying and re-export trades was a result of the disappearance from international trade of the ships of every belligerent save England," North writes. "Holland, France, Spain, and others ultimately drawn into the conflict were all

¹⁶¹ For more on American merchants shoring up European colonies in Asia during the French Wars, see chapter six of James Fichter's new book. Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, see chapter 6.

important carriers leaving the vast colonial trade of Europe in the hands of neutrals, specifically the United States.”¹⁶² Gradually, all other neutral powers on the continent found themselves pushed or pulled into the conflict, from Denmark and the German States to Russia, leaving an open playing field for the Americans as neutrals. While the domestic exports of the coastal trade or the Mississippi River trade doubled between 1790 and 1807, re-exports grew exponentially: from \$300,000 to \$59,643,558.¹⁶³ Prices and wages surged. Shipbuilding boomed. This early trade produced many of the early American fortunes that, in turn, capitalized the antebellum expansion of American infrastructure and industry.¹⁶⁴ The Perkinses were in the thick of this capitalist boom, both as merchants and investors.

But the French Wars should be recognized as more than a period of profit for Americans: it was also a period of immense experimentation. The niches in trade opened by American neutrality in the French Wars produced lasting involvement in new markets. And even markets where involvement was not lasting were significant.

¹⁶² Douglass Cecil North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (New York: Norton, 1966), 36.

¹⁶³ North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860*, 35-36. Trade tended to vary according to region. New York merchants tended to lead in trade with Britain, but New Englanders did more to supply the Mediterranean, including Southern France, Italy, and Smyrna where they traded rum and cottons for wine, fruit, olive oil, raisins, figs, and opium. Albion, Baker, and Labaree, *New England and the Sea*, 121.

¹⁶⁴ While other scholars such as Claudia Goldin and Frank Lewis counter that the national income did not budge and that profit went unevenly to wealthier Americans and investors, James Fichter suggests that this was actually to the benefit of national infrastructural development. To Fichter, many of these early American millionaires who profited from Europe’s wars were more likely than the middle classes to treat the income as capital to be reinvested into enterprise: infrastructure, manufacturing, and further trade. In 1808, there were only 15 cotton mills in the United States; by the end of 1809, an additional 87 mills had been built. James R. Fichter, "Dreams of Avarice: The First Generation of American Millionaires, 1792-1802," in *Program in Early American Economy & Society* (The Library Company of Philadelphia: 2006), Claudia D. Goldin and Frank D. Lewis, "The Role of Exports in American Economic Growth During the Napoleonic Wars, 1793 to 1807," *Explorations in Economic History* 17, no. 1 (1980): 6-25, North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860*, 46-57.

Merchants had no idea what the long-term outcome of the wars would be or how long they would last. Many aspects of the aftermath of the wars would have been difficult to predict. The end of the war should have pushed Americans out of trade in British India, but did not. The flood of British manufactures crushed budding industrial experiments in the United States, only to see an industrial boom in the next decade. This uncertainty encouraged merchants like the Perkinses to take greater risks while opportunities existed. For the Perkins brothers, the exigencies of the wars led them to seek out new opportunities away from French territories toward those occupied by the Dutch, the Spanish, and the British. Experimentation gave American merchants a taste for possible openings. They sought out a variety of new routes of trade and new investment possibilities after the war. Most significantly for the Perkinses, the wars reduced competition in the East Indies so that by the early years of the nineteenth century, they were one of the most significant American firms involved in trade in China and the Pacific.

Taking advantage of these opportunities required social as well as economic capital. Global trade networks depended upon an ability to pull together cohorts of dependable employees. Merchants needed to be able to trust hirelings would not take off with their cargoes (which they sometimes did)¹⁶⁵ and could handle themselves without constant oversight. Part of what made the Perkins network function was the ability to tap and train potential talent into their ideals of commercial practice and civility. Leading partners placed protégés where they might be best made of service to the network itself.

¹⁶⁵ In 1797, for example, the captain of the *Eliza* apparently “showed disposition to run off with her.” The first mate wrested command from the captain and saw the ship back to Providence where T.H. Perkins traveled to take care of the matter. JEC Extracts.

Many of the young men who traveled abroad as part of the Perkins network got their start in J. & T.H. Perkins & Co. and worked their way up the rungs of the Boston house or aboard Perkins-financed ships. Several founded firms that collaborated regularly with Perkins & Co., including Perkins & Co. of Canton, Bryant, Sturgis & Co. of Boston, James P. Sturgis & Co. of Macau, and Russell, Sturgis & Co. of Manila. Friends and family who did not travel also played critical roles in the network by maintaining the relationships with those who did travel, representing them at home, transmitting information, and training the next generation into family and business life.

This overlap of economic capital and social capital generated interdependencies conducive to long-term cooperation and group investing: a commercial network. This chapter examines this intersection of social and economic capital in the network's expansion during the French Wars. The chapter begins with James and Thomas Perkins's strategies for taking advantage of the United States' neutrality during the French Wars: co-investment, locating foreign agents, and tapping young clerks as supercargoes and agents abroad. It then looks more specifically at how that patronage extended into experiments in new markets, including expanding and solidifying their interests in the East Indies, Spanish America, and the Pacific. Finally, the chapter turns to the relationship between wartime opportunities and spoliations and the Perkinses' investments into domestic industry. Here we see another element of the commercial network: regular correspondence with politicians and fellow merchant lobbyists who, with mixed results, collaborated with the Perkinses to advocate pro-commerce policy. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna finally brought a lasting peace to Europe and the United States Senate ratified the Treaty of Ghent to resolve the War of 1812 with Britain. As the

dust settled, it became clear that American merchants including those enmeshed in the Perkins network were primed to take advantage of the new geopolitical landscape.

Neutrality & Networking in the French Wars

While President George Washington did not have confirmation of a declaration of war until early April of 1793, the Perkinses saw war between France and Britain as certain by the 25th of February. They wrote to a correspondent on March 15th that they had “every reason to apprehend that a War has taken effect.”¹⁶⁶ They began to plan accordingly. “What can prevent our success? There will be scarcely any Neutral flag but our own,” revealed Walter Burling.¹⁶⁷ And indeed, they were correct: on February 1, 1793, the Republic of France had declared war on Great Britain and Holland. On March 25th, Perkins & Co. produced a circular for distribution in Cape François, urging French planters to ship their produce and property to France via Boston, where it could be shipped without risk of being taken as war prizes.¹⁶⁸ By May of 1793, the Perkins brothers had made arrangements to send several ships from West Indian ports to France and Holland. The Perkinses threw themselves into the opening created by war with both feet.

Washington officially proclaimed America’s neutrality in the French Wars on April 22, 1793. To Americans, this was a relief; to the French, it was a betrayal. The United States was still bound by the 1778 Treaty of Alliance with France from America’s

¹⁶⁶ Perkins & Company to Claude Thouin, 15 March 1793. JEC Extracts, Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 337. As noted in chapter 1, it was common at this time for merchants to have better information networks than politicians.

¹⁶⁷ Walter Burling, Cap François, to James Perkins, Boston 25 February 1793. JEC Extracts.

¹⁶⁸ Perkins & Company Circular, 25 March 1793. JEC Extracts.

Revolution, which should have given France preferential treatment. Now that the French Republic faced attacks on all sides, the French accused, the United States abandoned her ally. In fact, Americans initially rejoiced over news of the formation of the French Republic. The principles of the new republic echoed their own. The prospect of a second republican nation in the heart of Old Europe was immensely gratifying and citizens of the major American cities from Savannah to New York to Boston held festivities in honor of France. The Boston celebration, held on January 24, 1793, was the grandest of all. Complete with two parades, a great banquet at Faneuil Hall, and a fireworks display, no one could doubt Bostonians support for the French Republic.¹⁶⁹ But just as French society before their revolution differed profoundly from American society, so the nature of the two revolutions diverged. The carnage of the French Revolution shocked Americans. While French ambassador Citizen Genet sought to paint the 1793 war as the French republic defending itself against old Europe—not untruthfully—Americans and Europeans alike knew that, even had there been popular support, the United States was in no position to enter the war. Even devoted French supporters such as Thomas Jefferson did not wish to see America enmeshed in this conflict.¹⁷⁰ The country's best option was neutrality.

¹⁶⁹ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 310-311. The early support for the French republic came not only from Jeffersonian Republicans in the family, like Russell Sturgis, but also avid Federalists (by and large the rest of the family). Even Thomas H. Perkins supported the revolution at first. He met Thomas Paine while staying with then ambassador James Monroe in Paris in 1794. While he disagreed avidly with the man's politics and suspected he drank too much, he found him to be an otherwise interesting conversationalist. Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 114-115.

¹⁷⁰ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 338. Elkins and McKittrick quote a letter from Jefferson to James Madison in which the former recognized that “a fair neutrality will prove a disagreeable pill to our friends, tho' necessary to keep out of the calamities of a war.” While he might have wished to aid the French, he knew any such assistance was impracticable.

When the United States Congress approved the Neutrality Act in 1794, the legal and practical meanings of neutrality were vague. For neutrality to be effective as a national policy much less an international one, a general understanding had to prevail. Neutrality had to be systematized. President Washington and his Cabinet drew up a list of policies to frame just such a system. The policies established that vessels could not be taken as war prizes within a sea league (three miles) of American territory. They barred foreign consuls from using American soil or waters to hold or condemn prizes of war as a violation of sovereignty. They forbade the recruitment of American citizens or the arming and equipping of foreign belligerents. Finally, the American government proclaimed their acceptance of the principle of “free ships, free goods”: as neutrals, no matter who owned the cargo, American-registered vessels should not be subject to seizure by belligerent powers.¹⁷¹

Of course, it was one thing to proclaim the rules of neutrality and quite another for other nations to respect them. American merchants may have been overly optimistic about the respect that belligerents would have for neutrals. On July 22, 1793, Thomas H. Perkins oversaw a meeting of Boston’s leading merchants to urge President Washington to not risk undercutting American neutrality by authorizing privateers—three of which had already received approval in Boston alone. By September 12 of the same year, as the

¹⁷¹ They specifically addressed privileges agreed to under the 1778 French-American treaty, but that would necessarily implicate Americans in the war. For example, the treaty stated that the French should have the use and protection of American ports. But the United States could hardly protect or give refuge to belligerents without being drawn into the war itself. Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 352-354.

violence American shipping faced on all sides became apparent, the merchants met again and reversed their stance: American ships required protection!¹⁷²

Belligerents periodically found it preferable to allow, and even encourage, neutral trading between Europe and West Indian colonies. Between 1793 and 1802, for example, the British suspended the Navigation Acts which forbade Americans from shipping goods within the British Empire. British officials attempted to reinstate the Navigation Acts in 1804, but Jamaicans simply ignored the law. By 1805, officials agreed to suspend the law once more.¹⁷³ French policies vacillated even more erratically than this: a law that allowed French privateers to make prizes of any vessel bound for an enemy port first took hold on May 9, 1793. The French government rescinded the law on May 23, restored it May 28, rescinded July 1, restored July 27, rescinded March 24, 1794, restored November 18, and then rescinded on January 2, 1795, and restored again by the Edict of July 2, 1796. This fluctuation was not as irrational as it seems: the law's cycle of instatement and repeal had less to do with political principle than the exigencies of grain shortages and replenishment—which included frequent gluts from shippers—a depleted treasury, and local pressures.¹⁷⁴ For merchants, it was hard to keep up with the changes. Letters of instruction to ship captains often included a list of prioritized ports to try for

¹⁷² John D. Forbes, "European Wars and Boston Trade, 1783-1815," *The New England Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1938): 709-730.

¹⁷³ Crouzet, "American and the Crisis of the British Imperial Economy, 1803-1807," 293-296.

¹⁷⁴ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 538.

selling off goods and securing return cargoes. As Sylvia Marzagalli has noted, the impact of the French Wars at any given time depended on the status of the port.¹⁷⁵

At the same time as belligerent powers sought to secure the benefits of neutral trade for themselves, they were understandably jealous of neutral interlopers. Not only did neutral shippers accumulate profits for carrying trade that previously belonged to their merchants, but neutrals carried provisions to their enemies. Hence the French law of May 9, 1793 legalizing the capture of neutral vessels carrying provisions to enemy ports. And hence the British answer of June 8: Parliament issued a provision order that made all grain ships bound for France fair game to British privateers. The vicious circle of retributive laws, orders in council, and blockades generated economic warfare that targeted neutrals and belligerents alike.

Despite the dangers, Americans recognized the wars as a chance to extend their interests into Europe. Before the war French ships monopolized the trade between the West Indies and France; now the Perkinses could transship goods between American ports, the West Indies, and Europe. In June of 1793, James Perkins (in collaboration with Stephen Higginson) sailed the *Charlotte* for Martinique where she picked up a cargo of sugar and coffee for Bordeaux, and back to Boston with wine, oils, soap, and other French luxuries.¹⁷⁶ By the fall of 1794, the brothers had their eye not only on trade with France, but also Holland and England. Thomas Perkins sailed for France on May 11, 1794 with the twin purposes of making contacts and lobbying the British government to

¹⁷⁵ Silvia Marzagalli, "Port Cities in the French Wars: The Responses of Merchants in Bordeaux, Hamburg, and Livorno to Napoleon's Continental Blockade, 1806-1813," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord* VI, no. 4 (1996): 65-73.

¹⁷⁶ In June 1793, the firm also reported that all business was at an end with the Cape save with the Crown, which they continued to provision.

recover \$15-20,000 owed them from spoliation claims on vessels already taken as prizes by British privateers, the *Charlotte* and the *Delight*. Together with Joseph Russell, Perkins traveled through France, the Low Countries, and England to assess commercial prospects. By August of 1795, he was in London, awaiting the adjudication of the *Charlotte*'s case by the British "prize masters."¹⁷⁷

As with their previous career in smuggling goods between the United States and the West Indies, the Perkinses felt that unfair laws demanded creativity, not obedience. While in London, for example, Thomas Perkins expressed wonder at the number of American seamen suffering through the trials of the British admiral system. "I don't see the necessity of declaring the vessel bound to France," he observed. "Why not as well pay to Hamburg in her clearance and give the captain verbal orders? It is a Shame." To Perkins, the exigencies of the circumstances "obliged" them "under the present circumstances to use any sort of collusion as is necessary."¹⁷⁸ In 1794 James sent a letter to Thomas in Europe of one such plan to get around the wartime imbroglio. He recommended they ply the trade between France and England via the neutral ports among them: Hamburg, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam.¹⁷⁹ When the French captured Amsterdam in 1795, the Perkinses pushed north to Hamburg, albeit continuing to ship goods in through Rotterdam. When Napoleon annexed Hamburg in 1810, the Perkinses smuggled commodities through Tönning in Denmark.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ His term, as per Thomas H. Perkins, London to James Perkins, Boston, 3 August 1795. Cabot Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. MHS.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 107.

¹⁸⁰ Sam A. Mustafa, *Merchants and Migrations : Germans and Americans in Connection, 1776-1835* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 206. By late 1809, John Murray Forbes, brother to Ralph Murray

Wartime opportunities led Perkins & Co. to extend into new branches of commerce. They located corresponding agents in new ports through a combination of introductions, reputation, and personal trial and error. In 1795, Thomas Perkins confided to James that “There is nothing more embarrassing than to know where to consign your property to have justice done you without having some one to push on it.”¹⁸¹ He found the merchants in Le Havre (Paris) wanting—including their own agents, Homberg & Homberg. “Homberg is a solid house and perhaps as good a one in other respects as there is at Havre, but unless someone is present to urge the sales, your goods which are in store may stay there twelve months.”¹⁸² It did not help to be affiliated with the “best houses” if those merchants did not prioritize your business. The optimum approach, he felt, was to station an agent abroad.¹⁸³ As the Perkins brothers contemplated their prospects, they began to incorporate techniques that merchants often reserved for riskier, long-distance trade into their regular practice: splitting ventures, sending shipboard supercargoes to manage trade from port to port, and stationing agents abroad.

The instability of wartime trade may have made regular collaboration in shipping speculations all the more ideal. Many of the Perkins & Co. adventures to Europe were joint investments with Stephen Higginson & Co. (later Samuel G. Perkins & Co.) and Russell Sturgis. The Perkinses split shipments to the Pacific Northwest with Russell

Forbes (who was himself brother-in-law to James and Thomas Perkins), was the U.S. consul in Hamburg. He personally facilitated the smuggling of American cargoes into Hamburg via Denmark. Forbes had been in the region long enough to have well-placed political contacts in both Hanseatic cities and Denmark, but even he could not reassure the Danish that the French would let them be. By the end of 1810, the Danish loophole had closed.

¹⁸¹ Thomas H. Perkins, London to James Perkins, Boston, 3 August 1795. Cabot Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. MHS.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Sturgis, James and Thomas Lamb & Co., and later Bryant, Sturgis & Co. And firms such as Samuel Williams and Henry Higginson & Co. in London and Perkins & Co. in Canton played an important role in directing their trade abroad during the 1807 Embargo. The extent to which this inner circle worked together can be overstated: these firms did not always have the same agents in foreign ports, for example.¹⁸⁴ But, their regularity of collaboration for a variety of types of speculation (shipping, manufacturing, financial institutions such as insurance companies), gives a sense of the associational mechanisms used in mercantile ventures. These associational mechanisms cut costs and curbed risks, but they also held the potential for a cluster of firms to wield greater authority, such as in influencing politics or in cornering markets.¹⁸⁵

The Perkins brothers regularly tapped their young clerks, themselves already connected to the Perkinses through family or friends, to serve as supercargoes and agents abroad. Agents and supercargoes were not mutually exclusive positions, but often stages on the ladder of mercantile advancement. Into the early nineteenth century, mercantile education was an extension of family life. Or, more to the point, households included a more diverse population than kin alone. The eldest children of James and Thomas Perkins, James, Jr. and Eliza, both born in 1791, remembered their fathers' clerks as a part of their shared childhood. Eliza wrote in her memoirs of her father's clerks

¹⁸⁴ For their inner circle, the Perkinses seem to have been on such familiar terms they could invest on their behalf without first asking. This can be contrasted with other merchants whom the Perkinses frequently tapped to freight with them, but who were not on such familiar terms. This included a changing roster of correspondents such as Adam Babcock, Samuel Parkman, Samuel P. Gardner, various Grays, Lees, Dorrs, Cabots, amongst others.

¹⁸⁵ Jacques Downs makes a similar argument as to the importance of collaboration in the Perkinses involvement in the Mediterranean opium trade, which I will build upon here. Jacques Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40," *The Business History Review* 42, no. 4 (1968): 418-442, Downs, "Fair Game: Exploitive Role-Myths and the American Opium Trade.", Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844.*

performing puppet shows for them under the tall mercantile desks.¹⁸⁶ And until the late 1810s, young clerks and apprentices lived with the partners in their homes.

But family dynamics also shaped firm life. Consider for example, the varying relationships younger men and women had with Elizabeth Peck Perkins. To her granddaughter Eliza, Grandmother Perkins was “silent, reserved,” albeit “a very remarkable woman, very dignified, and of great strength of character.”¹⁸⁷ But Eliza’s cousin John turned to their grandmother for support and to soften his relationship with his uncle. Sam Burling, a young man who apprenticed with the Perkinses and lived for a time with various family members, also saw Elizabeth Perkins as a protective, maternal figure. And Nathaniel Cutting wrote that he saw her as “one of the most worthy and agreeable old Ladies existing.”¹⁸⁸ For Eliza, her memories of her Grandmother Elliot were of tasty treats and political gossip in a warm kitchen. Grandmother Perkins was intimidating.¹⁸⁹ But for the young men, apprenticed to James & Thomas Handasyd Perkins & Co., Grandmother Perkins was an intermediary in the intersecting worlds of family and business.

Young apprentices and their families expected, or at least hoped for, a paternal bond of filial respect and obligation in exchange for mentorship and tutelage. In practice,

¹⁸⁶ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

¹⁸⁷ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

¹⁸⁸ Journal entry, 28 September 1792. Nathaniel Cutting journal and letterbooks, 1786-1798. MHS.

¹⁸⁹ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot." Eliza writes that Grandma Elliot was “indulgent and generous, always bent upon making you happy,” and that she felt they lived in the kitchen, “a nice old place with brass and pewter kitchen things about, very neat and shining.”

training standards varied.¹⁹⁰ Merchants earned reputations for the level of guidance and support they gave young men under their care so that some apprenticeships were more desirable than others. For example, being placed with Elias Hasket Derby was attractive not simply because he was a formidable merchant, but also because he systematically provided for young men's success. A lad would graduate from an academy at the age of 15, spend several years in Derby's countinghouse, followed by instruction in maritime navigation under a retired sea captain, a few voyages as supercargo aboard Derby's trusted old West Indian vessel, the *Rose*, before graduating to serve as supercargo for one of Derby's sizable East Indian voyages. On these latter adventures, a young man could earn a nest egg sufficient to set up his own trading house or buy into an existing firm.¹⁹¹ Once an apprentice came of age, legal obligation ended, but a social sense of obligation did not always end with independence.¹⁹²

Like Derby, the Perkinses gave their clerks opportunities to rise through the ranks and serve as supercargoes in order to gain experience in specific markets and to profit on their own account.¹⁹³ Letters of instruction included routes to take, commodities to seek in specific markets, fair prices, and agents to consult with, but for mentees, they also included recommendations on comportment and skills to seek out—such as learning a

¹⁹⁰ Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees; Two Generations of Massachusetts Merchants, 1765-1844*, 6-11.

¹⁹¹ Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees; Two Generations of Massachusetts Merchants, 1765-1844*, 10-11.

¹⁹² Apprenticeships were not always formalized with contracts, but continued in similar terms as customary practice. Brian Luskey, "What Is My Prospects?": The Contours of Mercantile Apprenticeship, Ambition, and Advancement in the Early American Economy," *Business History Review* 78, no. 4 (2004): 665-702.

¹⁹³ Robert Bennet Forbes describes a very similar mercantile education, including studying trigonometry and navigation with retired shipping captain John Kendrick. Robert B. Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences; to Which Is Added Rambling Recollections Connected with China*, 3d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1892), 32.

foreign language or firms to apply to for a position. While such support might prove a boon for young merchants, it came at a cost. Ephraim Bumstead established one of the most important American trading houses in China in partnership with the Perkinses, but did not live to see its success. John Perkins Cushing became a millionaire as Bumstead's successor, but regretted that he spent nearly thirty years of his life apart from his family and friends. Frederick W. Paine lived in London and Leghorn as agent for the Perkinses, but like Cushing, found it difficult to get the Perkins brothers to allow him to resign his post so he could come home.¹⁹⁴

Paternalism resonated with aristocratic ideals of obligation and deference and thus inequality, but it was also part of an occupational model in which individuals expected to rise in skill and rank in connection with mentors above, and mentees below. While by the 1830s this path to business success seemed increasingly distant, at the turn of the nineteenth century the model held promise.¹⁹⁵ Just as subordinates relied upon senior merchants for education and opportunity, so, too, did superiors rely upon protégés for business continuity. Paternal obligation could provide a safety net for those at any point along the spectrum. When the firms of Gabriel Tardy and William Shattuck failed, for example, former apprentices turned merchants sent them relief. The Perkinses sent funds to both Tardy and Shattuck, albeit not much. The flip side of obligation, however, was expectation. Those same paternal bonds could burden a merchant, especially if he or she

¹⁹⁴ See for example an 1819 letter from Thomas H. Perkins to F.W. Paine attempting to reconcile the younger man to his lonely post in Leghorn and frustrations with agents there. Perkins wrote of the importance of Paine's work during the economic hard times. Thomas H. Perkins to Frederick W. Paine, 22 May 1819. JEC Extracts.

¹⁹⁵ Brian P. Luskey, *On the Make : Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press), Michael Zakim, "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes," *Journal of Early Republic* 26, no. 4 (2006): 563-603.

faced persistent failure. When a friend of the Perkinses from Providence, William Megee, found himself ever deeper in debt, he abandoned his debts and his family to run a boardinghouse in Macau.¹⁹⁶

In many ways, paternalism—realized through the practices of “patronage”—was the glue to the commercial network. In addition to obligation, paternalism fostered a cultivation of “commercial friendships” as conduits for information, influence, and especially, stability. Patronage melted readily into collaboration which could be a powerful tool in business.¹⁹⁷ The Perkins brothers took their paternal obligations seriously, toward their immediate households, their broader circle of kin, friends, and employees, and toward their community. Colonel Thomas H. Perkins in particular felt he knew what was best for society and did not hesitate to act on his convictions. This quality made him both a leader of Boston society and a source of resentment for several in the next generation. This paternal affinity cannot be taken for granted; as Randolph Klein’s research on the Shippen family of Philadelphia shows, not all eighteenth century merchants aspired to a paternal legacy or family successors.¹⁹⁸ And, as the next section shows, relationships patterned on paternalism were nonetheless highly contingent. The “glue” did not always hold.

In examining the expansion of the Perkins commercial network, it is useful to not only follow the money, so to speak, but also to follow the agents: Ephraim Bumstead,

¹⁹⁶ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 180-181.

¹⁹⁷ Luskey, “‘What Is My Prospects?’: The Contours of Mercantile Apprenticeship, Ambition, and Advancement in the Early American Economy,” 670.

¹⁹⁸ Randolph Shipley Klein, *Portrait of an Early American Family: The Shippens of Pennsylvania across Five Generations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975). A fascinating irony of Klein’s research across five generations is that the family’s social and financial legacy persisted in spite of a lack interest by early patriarchs.

John Perkins Cushing and a rush of Sturgis and Forbes kin in Canton and Manila; Samuel Burling's travels in the "Spanish Main," Thomas Doubleday in Cadiz, and Henry Sturgis in Lisbon; Thomas Sturgis to Ile de France, Fred Paine to Leghorn, as well as collaborators in the Pacific fur trade such as William Sturgis. These young men clerked in the Perkins brothers' countinghouse. John Perkins Cushing and William Sturgis were the most significant of these men to the expansion of the overarching network, but examining experiences of several of the less successful connections are also instructive. This next section turns to the Perkinses' expansion in the East Indies trade.

Expansion & Experimentation: the Boston Concern

The French Wars allowed American merchants to step into foreign markets where European traders had already cultivated contacts and successful trade routes. This was as much the case in the East Indies as it was in the West Indies. Even as Americans sought to make their way in Asian and Pacific markets, they frequently followed European merchants into well-established entrepôts with known commodities.¹⁹⁹ For the Perkins brothers, this meant that in addition to extending their interests from the French West Indies into trade with Europe, they also used their toehold in the Pacific and East Indies trade per the *Hope* and *Margaret* adventures to experiment more expansively in trade in

¹⁹⁹ Americans did seek out trade beyond simply replacing European trade, but this seems to have been the exception more than the rule. For the Perkinses, they funded the speculations of Captain Charles G. Cabot for several years as Cabot experimented in trading within the Bay of Bengal and between various South East Asian ports. His letters to the Perkinses between 1804 and 1806 offer interesting assessments of the prospects for trade in Siam (Thailand), the Malay coast (especially Pulau Pinang), and Borneo. Cabot's situation was relatively exceptional, however, including the willingness of the Perkinses to back such undirected trade. His capital was not unlimited. At one point the Perkinses wrote of their faith in him at the same time as reminding him that they did not wish him to spend more than the original capital allowed him, \$50,000. James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Charles G. Cabot, Calcutta, January 1804. JEC Extracts.

the Pacific basin and Asian waters. With the 1803 establishment of a branch firm in Canton and the 1811 partnership of William Sturgis and John Bryant, the Perkins brothers gathered an influential inner circle of regular co-investors for their Asian and Pacific commerce. Together, these firms became known to contemporaries as “the Boston Concern.”

Rivalries between larger powers opened profitable niches for neutral American traders. Thus European politics often set the tone for American interests even into these distant ports. This could mean that the limitations of the American state also limited the ability of American merchants to negotiate trading privileges abroad. But the reverse was also true: American weakness and her distance from the European continent opened up opportunities as well. As war constrained European trade abroad, American merchants seemed less threatening than other colonial powers. The Perkinses and their fellow Americans consciously sought out niches of trade between European rivalries to see what might be made of them, for the short-term or the long. In doing so, Americans shored up European colonial power in Asia and the Americas.²⁰⁰

The Dutch East Indies

American involvement in the Dutch East Indies provides an example of the openings created by the French Wars. The Perkinses were part of a cohort of Americans who attempted to usurp trade routes previously occupied by the Dutch. The French Wars left Dutch shipping vulnerable to attack by British privateers, creating openings for Americans. Between 1796 and 1807, a good 65% of the vessels that visited Batavia

²⁰⁰ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 149.

(Jakarta) were American.²⁰¹ In May 1797, for example, the Perkins assessed their prospects of replacing the tea trade of the Dutch East India Company (the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC). They hoped to carry goods between Batavia and Canton in the East Indies to Holland and sought recommendations from their Dutch connections in order to put their plan before the officers of the VOC.²⁰²

The plan faced roadblocks, not from the Dutch, but from the British navy: the British ensnared their vessel the *John Jay*, bound for Rotterdam, in their European continental blockade. As the Perkinses shared with a correspondent in Havana, the British blockade of Dutch ports had cut them off from the markets they considered the most flattering for their West Indies produce, forcing them to the Baltic, Hamburg, and the Mediterranean.²⁰³ These ports were themselves entry points for smuggling into the Batavian Republic (as Holland was known between 1795 and 1806) and France. In 1804, the Perkinses obtained a permit from the VOC to export tea to Holland.²⁰⁴ In 1806 the Boston firm declared to their Canton agents that they considered the time for selling teas to Holland had passed, but the very next year they bragged that two of their vessels, the *Montezuma* and the *True American*, had been mistaken by the Dutch to be cargoes packed by one of their own. This was a high compliment to the Canton firm as the Dutch

²⁰¹ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 151.

²⁰² James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Mess. Rocquette Elsvien & Bieddamaker, Rotterdam, 2 May 1797. JEC Extracts. Their letter sought recommendations from men of influence connected to VOC officers. “As Dutch trade to China is at an end, we think teas may answer in Holland, if permitted.”

²⁰³ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Mess. St. Maria & Cuesta, Havana, 24 September 1798. JEC Extracts.

²⁰⁴ James & T.H. Perkins, Boston to Munro, Snow & Munro, 21 August 1804. JEC Extracts. In 1805, Perkins & Co. asked their correspondents in Amsterdam, Hope & Co., to write a letter verifying their creditworthiness to the VOC agents in Canton on their behalf. James & T.H. Perkins, Boston to Hope & Co., Amsterdam, 23 June 1805. JEC Extracts.

were known for the quality of their tea selections.²⁰⁵ While the carrying trade between Holland and the East Indies petered out during the American embargo and War of 1812, Dutch ports proved important export markets for the Perkins network following the peace of 1815.

There are other examples of Americans stepping into Dutch trade routes during the French Wars as well. For example, Dutch officers outsourced their annual voyage from Java to Nagasaki to eager American traders between 1797 and 1809. In the seventeenth century, Japan limited its trade with Western merchants to an annual visit, a privilege the Dutch feared losing under the blockade. In 1799, a Perkins vessel made the voyage: the *Franklin* under Captain James Devereux.²⁰⁶ The charter between the Dutch and the Americans stipulated that in exchange for a freight of coffee and spices, the *Franklin* should carry a cargo of cloves and sugar, cotton, chintz, tin, sapan-wood, and elephants' teeth as well as supplies for the VOC agents stationed at Nagasaki. In return, the vessel would load copper, camphor, boxes, and boards.²⁰⁷ While the Nagasaki voyages created no permanent trade relations, it was not for lack of American effort. The first vessel to make the trip, in fact, was the *Eliza* under Captain William Stewart. Captain Stewart was so excited at the prospect, he attempted to negotiate his own bargain to trade with the Japanese. He returned in 1800 and again in 1803. At first he claimed to

²⁰⁵ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Perkins & Co., Canton, 17 November 1806 and 4 March 1807. JEC Extracts.

²⁰⁶ There has been some confusion over the ownership of this vessel as it returned repeatedly to Batavia under Captain James Devereux, but with different owners. On December 7, 1798, the Perkinses wrote a letter of instruction to Captain Devereux for the *Franklin*, to carry 24,000 dollars in specie to purchase coffee.

²⁰⁷ Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia; a Critical Study of the Policy of the United States with Reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th Century*, 243-244, "Orient and Occident," *Journal of the American Asiatic Association* 13, no. 2 (1913): 333-342, Alfred H. Tamarin, *Japan and the United States; Early Encounters 1791-1860* ([New York]: Macmillan, 1970), 16-23.

have lost his first cargo and to be in need of a new shipment. When that failed, he simply sought permission to trade as an American. Neither gambit worked. Instead Stewart faced charges by the Dutch for making off with their 1798 ship. After 1809, however, Americans were again cut off from Japan.

The China Market

But the Dutch East Indies was only one arena where the Perkinses sought to expand their trade during the political morass of the French Wars. At the time James and Thomas H. Perkins formally partnered in 1792, they were already interested in two Pacific Northwest and China-bound voyages per the firm Perkins & Magee: the *Hope* and the *Margaret*. The business of the *Hope* proved a disaster, for which the Perkinses blamed Captain Joseph Ingraham.²⁰⁸ The men of the *Hope* collected fewer furs, sold them at lower prices, and, worst of all, obligated the adventure's backers to Chinese merchant Consequa for adulterated teas purchased at exorbitant prices.²⁰⁹ The *Margaret*, on the other hand, brought a profit of nearly half a million dollars. Having collected 12-15,000 otter skins off the Oregon coast, the captain and supercargo were then able to sell the skins in China for \$30 to \$40 apiece which they exchanged for teas, silks, porcelain, and East Indian cottons called nankeens. The entire adventure yielded a whopping \$2000 per share for the *Margaret's* investors.²¹⁰ As Colonel Perkins's second adventure to the East Indies, the *Margaret* seemed particularly auspicious as to the potential profits to be

²⁰⁸ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 103.

²⁰⁹ One wonders why Ebenezer Dorr, the supercargo, and James Magee—a backer for both voyages who was also the *Margaret's* captain and was thus in China with Ingraham—did not come in for a share for this blame. Why was Ingraham the sole agent, especially if he erred as extensively as Thomas H. Perkins felt he did?

²¹⁰ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 103-104.

found in China and surrounding Asian and Pacific ports. The Perkinses felt their firm could create a niche in selling high quality teas in the United States and Europe.²¹¹ Many of Perkins & Co.'s business, social, and political strategies of the 1790s and 1800s can be traced back to this ambition.

In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, the China market itself was imagined as part of a larger cluster of ports and commodities known collectively as the East Indies. The Perkins brothers sought to strengthen their position in markets with commodities marketable in China: Spanish silver, Pacific furs, and Mediterranean opium. This narrow circle of interests can be misleading, however. Just as the Perkinses kept an eye out for new opportunities in Europe, they similarly opened themselves to new avenues of trade in Asia and the Pacific. Thus, they traded a variety of articles, from purchasing Spanish American hides and tallow for the English glue industry to selling Pacific furs to Mediterranean consumers.

Perkins & Co., Canton, 1803-1830

By 1803, China had become substantial enough to the Perkins's trade that the brothers sent out their head clerk, Ephraim Bumstead, to establish a firm in Canton to handle their trade locally. Bumstead had made the voyage previously, in 1798, as supercargo for the Perkins vessel *Thomas Russell*. Yet it was one thing to have charge of the sale and collection of cargo for a single adventure, quite another to administer trade for the East Indies trade as a whole. At the time that the Perkinses made preparations to send Bumstead abroad, agents for the American China trade usually traveled aboard the

²¹¹Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 163.

vessels—superintendents for specific cargoes, a.k.a., supercargoes—rather than living abroad.

Myra Wilkins lists three common early American strategies for locating commercial agents abroad: sending independent “transplanted Americans” to live abroad; sending family members who would serve as agent to the family and others on a commission basis; and, in ports where business was not sufficient to warrant sending an agent, connecting with independent foreign agents.²¹² In moving to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the French Wars and expand their trade, the Perkinses employed all three of these strategies.

There were advantages and disadvantages to establishing a branch office abroad. Benefits included prioritization and personal attention for your business, better information on markets, more beneficial credit arrangements, better storage facilities, and being able to keep the profits in-house. But no matter the level of business, establishing a branch office meant fixed costs: the salary to the agent abroad, rent and expenses for warehouses and offices abroad, as well as losing any privileged local knowledge or financing opportunities that came from having a foreign agent native to the market. Thus, business had to be sufficient to at least cover these costs. And, of course, merchants expected a profit above this. To establish a branch office then, the home firm needed to be prosperous enough to entertain the risk and have the foreign business sizeable enough to make the risk worth taking.²¹³ The Perkinses were willing to take this risk, but their expectations of their agent abroad were considerable.

²¹² Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise*, 4-12. She lists the Perkinses as an example of those who sent relatives abroad.

²¹³ Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise*, 8-9.

The arrangements for the new firm were as follows: Bumstead would establish a trading house in his own name. The Perkinses provided the largest chunk of capital, \$20,000, followed by their brother-in-law Russell Sturgis with \$10,000. But the other investors were not inconsiderable: Andrew Dorr invested \$9,000, Thomas Amory \$5,000, Adam Babcock \$5,000, Trott & Bumstead \$5,000, Samuel P. Gardner \$4,000, as well as \$6,500 of Ephraim Bumstead's own capital.²¹⁴ Many of these men collaborated with the Perkinses in trade and had their own interests in having a known and trustworthy commission agent in China. Yet the Perkins brothers also had their own plans for Ephraim Bumstead & Co. The Boston firm sent six vessels to China in 1804, two of which alone were laden with approximately \$400,000 in specie. The Perkinses sent their nephew along to clerk for Bumstead and thus be trained into the Canton trade. And the Perkinses began to petition President Jefferson for Bumstead's appointment to the American consulship at Canton.²¹⁵

An 1805 letter gives a sense of the commercial and geographic scope of the new position. The Perkinses charged Bumstead with surveying the Indian ports, noting that the captains involved in the country trade—trade between India and China—were a likely source of information on which ports to load at, the usual price of cotton, the best season for traveling to Bombay, “and generally everything that can be interesting in the promise.” They wrote of their hopes for obtaining specie via the Spanish colonies. And they sent out a snuff sample to see how tobacco sold in the region.²¹⁶ While located in

²¹⁴ Bumstead & Co. Blotter, 1803-1805. Thomas H. Perkins Papers. MHS.

²¹⁵ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 160.

²¹⁶ James and Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Ephraim Bumstead, Canton, 12 December 1803. JEC Extracts.

Canton, Ephraim Bumstead & Co. was to oversee trade and information for Asia and the Pacific: literally, the other half of the globe.

While chapter four offers greater detail on the operations of this firm, the greatest challenge for the Perkinses was finding a capable agent willing to stay abroad long enough to be worthwhile. For young men training into commerce, traveling to the East Indies was at once a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous sacrifice. Most of these agents aimed to only stay abroad long enough to secure a foundation of capital with which to establish themselves in business at home. This could be as short as three to five years, depending on the market itself and family resources. While this fleeting strategy made sense for the individual, it could be costly to the agent's patrons unless another similarly adept candidate was in the pipeline to take on the agent's commercial responsibilities and personal connections. Bumstead, tragically, grew ill not long after arriving. He wrote to the Perkinses on November 12, 1804 that he planned to leave Canton in an effort to preserve his health—a letter the Perkinses did not receive until March 20, 1805.²¹⁷ Days later the Perkinses learned Bumstead had departed from China on the *Guatamozin*, captained by his brother. He died soon after.

The Perkins brothers got lucky in young Cushing. John Perkins Cushing quickly ripened into a savvy, confident man of business. Following Bumstead's death, Cushing found himself in a tight spot. All of the Perkinses' China ventures rested on his young shoulders. In April of 1804, Colonel (Thomas) Perkins wrote to him a florid but frantic letter that he wished *he* could have had such an opportunity to distinguish himself as a

²¹⁷ E. Bumstead to Perkins & Co., 12 November 1804. Cabot Family Papers. JEC Extracts.

youth.²¹⁸ By the following summer, after many months of haggling to secure one of their more experienced protégés voyage to Canton to replace Bumstead, James and Thomas Perkins wrote a calmer, ingratiating letter but with no less expectation. Suddenly, Cushing represented them and their capital in the East Indies:

You will consider yourself as the principal agent of an important Establishment. Your mode of living and dressing you will conform to your wishes: independently of which we shall allow you \$500 pr. ann. for private expenses, and also ship on y'r own acct. any adventures you may think proper.

... Persevere as you have begun and we shall have reason to continue the patronage wh. we have always been inclined to extend to you ... We now close this long letter with our affectionate love and regards, and hope it will find you in as much happiness as can be enjoyed away from y'r friends and connections.²¹⁹

Cushing himself likely grappled with similar doubts as to his ability, but in the end, he performed admirably. His success ended his apprenticeship early. In April of 1806, as Cushing prepared to celebrate his nineteenth birthday, his Perkins uncles wrote that “in lieu of putting off your introduction into the House until y'r age makes you legally free, we shall consider you a partner in the House of Perkins & Co. from the time of Mr. Payne's (sic) arrival ... we do it as a tribute to y'r manly, unremitted attention to your duty.”²²⁰

Much of the success of the overarching network was due to Cushing's prowess. This was not simply because he built Perkins & Co. of Canton, but also through the protégés that he cultivated and recruited. Over the years, even clerks who came to

²¹⁸ Thomas H. Perkins, Boston to John Perkins Cushing, Canton, 2 April 1805. JEC Extracts.

²¹⁹ James and Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to John Perkins Cushing, Canton, 19 June 1805. JEC Extracts.

²²⁰ James and Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to John Perkins Cushing, Canton, 11 April 1806. JEC Extracts.

Canton through the ranks of the Boston firm felt more flattered by his attentions and more attached to Cushing than to James and Thomas Perkins. The Forbes brothers—Thomas, Bennet, and John—all certainly found themselves under Cushing’s wing, at least in part because of his close friendship with their mother, Margaret Perkins Forbes. George Russell, who would partner in the Manila firm, Russell & Sturgis in 1828, similarly wrote that it was Cushing, not Manila, that turned his head. He gave up his intention of working for Samuel Russell & Co., and traveled to the Philippines to establish a trading house in conjunction with Perkins & Co. of Canton.²²¹ But he was not the only one: Russell Sturgis was a Boston lawyer traveling in Europe when he met his cousin, the great China trader John Perkins Cushing. Russell overheard Cushing complain of a certain unnamed someone’s disinclination to go to China. In a rush of blood and air, Russell blurted that he wished the chance was his. It was not simply the lure of the East that drew him, but also the character and career of Cushing himself that flattered Sturgis into accepting the opportunity. Like Thomas Handasyd Perkins before him, Cushing was a capitalist legend, a merchant prince, an East Indian “nabob” in the eyes of the New England and trading circles who monitored such fortunes. Russell Sturgis, according to his son’s memorialization, was chosen by destiny and John Perkins Cushing himself.²²² For nearly three decades, Cushing’s patronage extended the patronage and influence of the Perkinses and the broader network.

Pacific Furs & Incense

Chinese consumption of furs drove the Perkinses expansive involvement in the

²²¹ Benito J. Legarda, *After the Galleons : Foreign Trade, Economic Change & Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth Century Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999).

²²² Julian Sturgis, *From the Books and Papers of Russell Sturgis* (n.p., 1893).

Pacific coast of North America. As Adele Ogden has shown, interest in China transformed the Pacific into a space of European, Russian, and American commercial rivalry. The Pacific – its islands, its littoral, its peoples, its flora, its fauna – was already a source of imperial and scientific rivalry in the mid-eighteenth century. But in 1778, mariners aboard Captain James Cook’s third and final voyage made a discovery that changed everything. They found that sea otter skins purchased for a pittance brought great favor in China. James King, Cook’s Second Lieutenant, reported that pelts from this first foray brought £90 or \$120 per skin, an astronomical return of 1800%. King wrote that, “The rage with which our seamen were possessed to return and buy another cargo of skins to make their fortunes at one time, was not far short of mutiny.”²²³ Scarcely a year later, after England attacked the Spanish in the Philippines, English deserters in Spanish Manila regaled Spaniards with the *Resolution*’s good fortune. By the time the official account of Cook’s *Resolution* confirmed the story in 1784, legends of velvety sea otter pelts and Chinese favor had spread across the globe several times over.²²⁴ The new commodity attracted vessels that otherwise would have traveled east around the African Cape of Good Hope to instead charter a longer, more hazardous, but now potentially more lucrative route round the American Cape Horn and across the Pacific. The rush on sea otter pelts launched a new phase of Pacific exploration and

²²³ Quoted in Edward G. Gray, *The Making of John Ledyard : Empire and Ambition in the Life of an Early American Traveler* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 103. John Ledyard was an American who sailed with Cook. He urged American capitalists of the profits to be had in the fur trade and sought to enter it himself with the backing of the wealthy Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris.

²²⁴ James King, *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, Undertaken by the Command of His Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere, to Determine the Position and Extent of the West Side of North America, Its Distance from Asia, and the Practicability of a Northern Passage to Europe* (London: printed by W. and A. Strahan: for G. Nicol; and T. Cadell, 1784). Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 22-23, Richard Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains : The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793-1843* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 4-5, Adele Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784-1848* (Berkeley, Los Angeles,: University of California Press, 1941), 2-3.

competition. Washington Irving characterized it best in his classic *Astoria*: “It was as if a new gold rush had been discovered.”²²⁵

The Perkinses first became involved in this trade in 1791 when Perkins & Magee dispatched their first ship, the *Hope*, bound for the Pacific Northwest and on to China. By 1798, in addition to Russian competition, primacy in the sea otter pelt trade had shifted from British traders to Americans. By 1800 Bostonians predominated.²²⁶ Yet this dominance requires explanation. Despite being on the North American continent, New England was an ocean away from the Pacific coast. And there was another rival far closer at hand: the question is not merely why New Englanders did so well in this trade, but why they were not edged out by the Russians, the British, and, even more, the Spanish? Why did the Spanish not take advantage of their strategic position in California, Mexico, and the Philippines, with their annual galleon voyages between Acapulco and Manila, to monopolize the sea otter trade? American dominance in this trade is partly explained by the French Wars, but only partly.

The Spanish knew of the existence of the sea otters well before the Americans or British: as early as 1733, Spanish travelers in California remarked the animals could be found in such numbers that sailors could simply chase after them with sticks and return with a good twenty pelts.²²⁷ In the mid-1770s, before Captain Cook’s men discovered the

²²⁵ Washington Irving, *Astoria*, p. 13 quoted in James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods : The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 23.

²²⁶ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 155.

²²⁷ This per Father Sigismundo Taraval per his trip to Cerros Island on the west coast of lower California. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 7, Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784-1848*, 2. The sea otters found along the California coast were smaller and browner than their northern brethren, especially those living in Alaska. Russian traders distinguished four grades of sea otter peltry, based on size and softness of fur. They ranked as follows: Kurilian-Kamchatkan, Aleutian,

prized sea otters further north, Spanish sailors exchanged pelts along the coast for abalone shells from Monterey and Carmel. The trade was appealing to Spaniards on the coast for multiple reasons: as an alternative commodity to American silver in trading with China, to develop Spanish interests in California and up the coast, and to stave off imperial rivals. In the 1780s, Spanish missionaries and soldiers began working with indigenous hunters to collect pelts in earnest and send them west to China with the annual Manila Galleon. Of the several schemes advanced to carry out a Spanish American fur trade, the most significant was the 1784 plan outlined by Vicente Vasadre y Vega. Between 1786 and 1789, Vasadre sent 9,729 pelts to Manila, earning the Spanish Crown \$3,120,00. The stage seemed set for Spanish ships to capture the market.²²⁸ Instead, by the nineteenth century, Americans not only had hold of the Pacific-China fur trade, but also sold manufactures to Spanish and later Mexican California.

The Spanish foray into Pacific fur trading failed for two principle reasons. First, the Spanish traded California sea otter pelts, which were a lower quality, less profitable commodity than those collected by Russian, British, or American traders further north. Native hunters in California lacked the tradition of sea otter trapping and thus skill of their northern counterparts. And the *habilitados* who compensated hunters for the pelts regularly cheated native hunters. Soldiers received 3-4 reales per skin while native hunters received a few beads, some thread, or a piece of flannel in exchange for fine, large skins. These issues and more came to a head in the colonial politics of California. Missionaries, soldiers, and colonial officials bickered over the means of the trade, from

Northwest Coast, and Californian. Chinese buyers further classed the furs in eight to ten quality-based varieties.

²²⁸ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 19-20.

issues of fair compensation to competing influences over native populations.²²⁹ Second, efforts to direct a Spanish fur trade to China faced jealous opposition from the *Compania Real de Filipinas*, or Royal Philippine Company. The Madrid-based directors of the *Compania* had their own plans for trading furs while jealously guarding their monopoly rights to sell East Indian goods in the Americas. Despite several proposals for a Spanish Pacific fur trade, interimperial jealousy made it difficult for Spanish merchants to find a profitable model for the trade.²³⁰

The French Wars put a strain on European trade and expansion in the Pacific, creating yet another opportunity for Americans, but New England merchants were also able to operate more efficiently than their rivals.²³¹ There were several possible reasons for this. James Gibson has argued that the skill and economy of Yankee sailors was itself a tremendous advantage. He quotes Sullivan Dorr who noted that even if mariners from New England cost two to three dollars more per month in wages, the cost was readily made up in peace and order on the ship and economizing in rations and shipboard supplies. And the sailors were skillful, obedient, and honest.²³² In contemplating this very question, why New Englanders outperformed British competitors in the Pacific and even Asia, foreign merchants gave precisely this argument. British observers complained

²²⁹ Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784-1848*, 20-22.

²³⁰ Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784-1848*, 31.

²³¹ Barry M. Gough, "The North West Company's 'Adventure to China'," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (1975): 309-331.

²³² Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 31-35. Of course, shipping firms such as Bryant & Sturgis also made their employees buy any additional clothing and supplies they needed at sea from the "company store" at premium prices.

that American mariners as a whole tended to be better behaved and less prone to disorderly squabbles and drunken riots than their British counterparts.²³³

Shipboard organization aboard Yankee ships also encouraged a more compliant crew. Specifically, American merchants commonly gave ship captains and officers a stake in the venture's success through freight privileges. Cargo space was relatively expensive, but by allowing the officers space in the cargo hold for their own speculations, the ship's officers were just as interested in the adventure's success at every level as the larger investors. Mariners, too, would often buy smaller trinkets in foreign ports to sell along the voyage to supplement their wages.²³⁴ Merchants credited these labor policies with facilitating the success of their voyages and some—John Murray Forbes wrote about this explicitly in his memoirs—transferred the idea of employee stakeholding from their maritime to their industrial corporate ventures.²³⁵ For Americans trading in the Pacific, these methods proved profitable.

By the 1800s, Russians and Americans dominated the China-Pacific fur trade.²³⁶ Of the Bostonians active in the Pacific Northwest, Perkins & Co. together with Russell

²³³ See testimonies in Henry M. Lansdowne Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Report [Relative to the Trade with the East Indies and China,] from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the Means of Extending and Securing the Foreign Trade of the Country, and to Report to the House; Together with the Minutes of Evidence Taken in Sessions 1820 and 1821, before the Said Committee:--11 April 1821," in *Document type: HOUSE OF COMMONS PAPERS; REPORTS OF COMMITTEES* (1821).

²³⁴ See, for example, Robert Pulsifer's Calcutta Accounts, 10 March 1816. Robert Starkey Pulsifer Papers, Folder 2. MHS.

²³⁵ John Murray and Sarah Forbes Hughes Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* 3vols. (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1902), vol. 1, 58.

²³⁶ By and large, the Russians operated out of Alaska and traded into northern China while the Americans bartered for furs near the mouth of the Columbia River and thereabouts and carried those furs to southern China. But the trade overlapped. Mary Wheeler, "Empires in Conflict and Cooperation: The 'Bostonians' and the Russian-American Company," *Pacific Historical Review* 40, no. 4 (1971): 419-441.

Sturgis, the Lamb brothers, and Theodore Lyman, led the pack.²³⁷ These firms traded iron, textiles, and firearms for pelts with indigenous hunters of the Pacific Northwest, a variety of textiles, manufactured goods, and luxuries for sandalwood in the Sandwich Islands (Hawai'i), and later provisions and manufactured goods for hides and tallow in Spanish California. Of these Boston firms, the Perkinses, Sturgis, and the Lambs regularly collaborated on ventures.

Only in considering the Perkinses broader network does their contract with Theodore Lyman make sense. On June 8, 1807, the Perkins brothers signed a contract with Theodore Lyman to withdraw from the Pacific Northwest trade for seven years. For this, the brothers agreed to pay \$8000 due in one year. As part of the bargain, they purchased his vessel, the *Vancouver*, and the remaining goods from the trade.²³⁸ Lyman seemed delighted with the offer: at fifty-four years of age with a country estate in nearby Waltham, he was ready to retire. For their part, the contract gave the Perkinses a virtual monopoly on the Pacific fur trade. With Theodore Lyman out of the trade, the Perkinses, Lambs, and Sturgises expected to have the run of the trade. As the Perkinses triumphed to one of their Northwest shipping captains, they felt they had “at length got the N. W. Trade into our own hands, and shall thereby experience the advantage of having the Business conducted in such a manner as will make it more productive.”²³⁹ While they

²³⁷ As the Pacific Northwest trade died out in the 1820s, Bryant, Sturgis & Co. focused on the hide and tallow trade which they passed on to William Appleton & Co. in 1841. As Bryant, Sturgis & Co. increasingly focused on the investments of friends and kin, they passed their contact roster to William Sturgis's son-in-law, Samuel Hooper, who joined Appleton's firm. When William Appleton & Co. closed in 1861, Appleton passed his contacts on to Samuel Hooper & Co. Hooper also took over Appleton's seat in Congress.

²³⁸ *James and Thomas H. Perkins v. Theodore Lyman*, 9 Mass 522 (1813).

²³⁹ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. to Captain Benjamin Swift, 22 July 1807. JEC Extracts.

knew the market was vulnerable to new entrants, John Jacob Astor being a case and point, the barriers to entry were such that only a larger player like Astor could make any money off the trade. Or, alternatively, Lyman's son George, using advantages culled from his father.

Their planned monopoly did not work as well as they had hoped. The contractual arrangement had always been vulnerable to outsiders, in spite of the barriers to entry. But they expected that Lyman had "relinquished to us his trade and obligated himself not to engage in it again for seven years."²⁴⁰ As early as November 1808, however, they had reason to believe Lyman himself was back in the trade, "undertaking largely . . . tho' he is doing it under the rose."²⁴¹ Lyman, they maintained, used his son as a front for his own trade, and they took him to court for the contractual breach.

The Perkinses alleged that in March of 1809, Theodore Lyman's *Hamilton* embarked for the Pacific coast, outfitted specifically for that trade, in violation of their agreement. Lyman countered that this was not *his* adventure, but that of his son George. True, he owned the vessel and gave his son the capital—on credit—to undertake the adventure. But the vessel was being sold to his son. His only interest in the adventure was as a father and a creditor. Lyman swore that he spoke with the Perkins brothers about these speculations and invited them to participate—which they agreed happened, but later than Lyman implied. They purchased a share of the adventure, but in October of 1809, after the *Hamilton* had sailed, and only to save themselves from being undercut in the market. To the Perkinses, Lyman's explanation was thin. In the contract both had

²⁴⁰ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. to Captain Benjamin Swift, 22 July 1807. JEC Extracts.

²⁴¹ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. to Anonymous, 16 November 1808. JEC Extracts.

signed, Lyman agreed “that he would not, in his own name, or in the name of any other person for him, directly or indirectly, be interested in any voyage to the said coast, or in any adventure to that coast, or any species of traffic with the natives of that country.”²⁴² Entering the trade required considerable knowledge of the geography as well as the ever-changing tastes of native hunters to barter for the furs themselves. Lyman’s son could not enter the trade without guidance from his father. The Supreme Court of Massachusetts agreed with the Perkinses, both for the case of the *Hamilton* and another vessel, the *Lydia*, and ordered Lyman to repay the Perkinses with interest.²⁴³

Interestingly enough, the arguments made by the Perkins lawyers paralleled British pro-monopoly advocates observing the region. John Meares of the Royal Navy argued in 1790 that the competition in the sea otter trade would necessarily “lower the price of them as to make the Trade no longer profitable.”²⁴⁴ One of the arguments for monopoly—and, indeed, a criticism of American traders in general—was that a rogue vessel representing untried merchants could overply the field and thus ruin the trade for everyone. New merchants might never return, but by then the damage was done. Fragile markets demanded monopoly.

This was precisely the argument lawyers made for the Perkinses before the Supreme Court of Massachusetts: “the said trade is limited as to the number of such skins, which amount, on an average, to nine thousand skins annually, and which are sufficient only to load, with reasonable expectation of profit, six vessels at most.”

²⁴² *James and Thomas H. Perkins v. Theodore Lyman*, 9 Mass 522 (1813).

²⁴³ See also *James and Thomas H. Perkins v. Theodore Lyman*, 11 Mass. 76 (1814).

²⁴⁴ “Minutes of the Committee of Trade from January 2, 1790 to December 29 1790” quoted in Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 215.

Between 1791 when Perkins & Magee first sent the *Hope* to the Pacific Northwest and 1807, the Pacific fur trade was becoming more fiercely competitive. Heavy hunting thinned the sea otter population so that it took longer to amass a cargo. Buying out competitors was a reasonable action in order to maintain the trade. After the courts rejected the Lyman claim that father and son had not been in breach of covenant, the Lymans took aim at the monopolistic objective behind the contract itself. They suggested that the contract was void at its origin as it was in restraint of trade and thus an injury to the public. The court took the Perkinses line. Given that “This is a branch of commerce very limited in its nature. ... A restraint of trade contract could benefit the community by preventing a glut in the market.”²⁴⁵

Bryant, Sturgis & Co., 1811-1841

In 1811, another trading house with extensive connections to the Perkins network and their Pacific trading formed in Boston: Bryant, Sturgis & Co. The new firm joined John Bryant (1760-1865) of Springfield, Massachusetts with Captain William Sturgis (1782-1863) of Marblehead. The two men began trading together in 1810, including an adventure aboard the ship *Topaz* in collaboration with Andrew Cabot. An early account book for John Bryant makes clear that the firm combined contacts from John Bryant’s existing business with the merchants and mariners William Sturgis worked with in his Pacific adventures. Familiar names coursed through ledgers and receipt books: Lamb, Sturgis, Cabot, Lyman, Higginson, Bromfield, Hinckley. The connection between Bryant, Sturgis & Co. and the Perkins firms—Boston or Canton—should not be overstated. The firms were not formally connected. Nevertheless, the firms regularly

²⁴⁵ *Perkins v. Lyman* (1813) 9 Mass. 522.

collaborated in ventures to Asia and the Pacific, to the point that observers in the early nineteenth century referred to this cluster of firms as “the Boston Concern” or “PCBS”:
Perkins Cushing Bryant Sturgis.

Bryant, Sturgis & Co. began where John Bryant’s early adventures left off, but it was Sturgis’s business acuity that became renowned throughout the Northeast. If Colonel Thomas H. Perkins tended to overshadow his less gregarious older brother, so, too, did William Sturgis overshadow his mild-mannered partner. At the start of 1796, William Sturgis began an apprenticeship in his uncle Russell Sturgis’s countinghouse. The next year, he moved to the Perkinses countinghouse. Sadly, his father died that year, leaving him the family breadwinner. Young Sturgis needed a wage. Thus, at the age of sixteen, he went to sea as a foremast hand on the *Eliza*, owned by his Perkins uncles. Within five years, Sturgis worked his way up the shipboard ranks to be master of the *Caroline*, owned by James and Thomas Lamb. In 1809, he set sail as captain of Theodore Lyman’s *Atahualpa* with a good \$300,000 of silver dollars in his cargo hold. Here, Sturgis’s reputation was set: while just off Macau, Chinese pirates attacked the *Atahualpa* and another ship. Led by the courageous “Captain Bill,” the two vessels faced off against their aggressors and escaped with their lives, their vessels, and their cargoes. By the time he returned, Sturgis knew well the sea lanes and markets involved in the New England-Pacific-China triangle. He was primed to go into trade on his own account. Through regular collaboration with the Perkins network and Bryant & Sturgis’s own entrepreneurialism, William Sturgis became one of the wealthiest, most influential

capitalists of his generation. To his contemporaries, Sturgis was “living proof that Yankee industry, honesty, and purpose, if properly applied, were the basis of success.”²⁴⁶

While Perkins & Co. of Boston focused on Pacific furs from the Columbia River region or commodities obtained from Pacific Islanders, Bryant and Sturgis shifted their attention south to California. They collaborated with the Perkins firms in Boston and China, although by no means only them, but their firm invested in other directions as well. With Mexican independence from Spain, Bryant and Sturgis found Mexican Californians eager to exchange cattle and horse hides and tallow for provisions and manufactures. The hides and tallow were then auctioned off for the production of shoes, leather goods, and tallow candles and oil. Bryant, Sturgis & Co. participated in the Perkins network, but the firm and its partners operated outside the network as well.

Silver, Hides, & the Spanish Main

The Perkinses’ involvement in trade with China also deepened their interest in Spanish America. The dangers of the West Indian trade during the 1790s made the East Indies all the more attractive to those who could afford such long distance trade. By 1805, the Perkinses wrote to their agent in Havana that they were “anxious to get out of the W. I. trade. It has cost us more trouble and anxiety than all our E.I. business.”²⁴⁷ Yet the 1790s and 1800s were nevertheless a period of overlap: the Perkinses turned to Batavia (Jakarta) as an outlet for Javan coffee as their sources in Saint Domingue dried up, for example, and wealthier Spanish American consumers consumed East Indians

²⁴⁶ William Dane Phelps et al., *Fur Traders from New England : The Boston Men in the North Pacific, 1787-1800 : The Narratives of William Dane Phelps, William Sturgis, and James Gilchrist Swan* (Spokane, Wash.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1997), 22.

²⁴⁷ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to James Gorham, Havana, 7 November 1805. JEC Extracts.

goods such as cotton nankeens and silks.²⁴⁸ Most significantly, Spanish American ports offered the prospect of silver dollars.

Silver was the preferred commodity in trade with China and India at this point. This was especially the case for milled Spanish silver dollars as they were a higher grade of silver than other silver coins. The Perkinses purchased silver in domestic and European markets and preferred to receive payments for European goods in silver where possible, but openings in Spanish American markets offered access at the source.²⁴⁹ As they wrote to their China agent in 1803, “We are in the hopes the Spanish Colonies will again be open, and they will flow upon us.”²⁵⁰ Little wonder then that as the Perkinses expanded their interests in Asia, they sought entry into Spanish American ports such as Montevideo, Lima, Buenos Aires, and Monterey.

As early as 1792, Perkins & Co. attempted to shift their West Indian trade away from Saint Domingue toward Havana.²⁵¹ In December 1792, for example, James and Thomas wrote their brother Sam in Saint Domingue on how to ensure a client’s ship, the *Delight*, gained entry to Havana. They feared their business partners did not appreciate

²⁴⁸ While Seaburg & Paterson note that it took time for the Perkinses to liquidate their West Indian concerns, they continued to traffic in Havana sugar for at least another decade. This may well have been because Samuel Curson, né Burling, decided to settle in Havana with the firm Miralla & Co.

²⁴⁹ Spanish dollars accounted for approximately 80% of the specie in circulation in the United States in 1800. Mexican silver dollars could be exchanged for U.S. silver dollars (not that there were many), but contained a higher percentage of silver. In practice this meant that the Mexican silver dollars were both worth more abroad and they kept the U.S. coins as a domestic tender. While Americans used foreign currencies in the domestic market, U.S. tender did not travel. David A. Martin, "The Changing Role of Foreign Money in the United States, 1782-1857," *The Journal of Economic History* 37, no. 4 (1977): 1009-1027.

²⁵⁰ James and Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Ephraim Bumstead, Canton, 12 December 1803. JEC Extracts.

²⁵¹ As late as 7 November 1803, the Perkinses wrote to their agents in both Canton and Rotterdam that they were “endeavouring (sic) to get some coffee from the Blacks at St. Domingo and had a vessell (sic) sail for this purpose this day,” but this was the exception rather than the rule.

the importance of the Havana business “as forcibly as ourselves,” according to the letter, adding that they did not mean it as a reproach and hoped Sam would not be as “huffy” as he had upon receiving earlier advice.²⁵² The Perkins brothers tried to purchase sugar, molasses, and coffee from other West Indian ports such as Martinique, but time and again they returned to Havana. In 1793, their agent was a British merchant, Charles Frazier. By the turn of the 1800s, New Englander James Gorham was in residence as their agent. The problem for the Perkinses was that Cubans demanded American vessels carry slaves from Africa to gain entry. The Perkinses tried to ship horses rather than human chattel, but fared poorly.

While earlier in their careers the Perkins brothers had engaged in the purchasing, transport, and sale of slaves, they seemed to want to reinvent themselves at the turn of the century. The brothers claimed in a letter that they had never sold slaves.²⁵³ But when they first partnered in 1792, their early commissions revolved around slave trading in Havana. In 1803, they sent the *Hope* to Senegal. On December 29, 1803, the ship was condemned with fifty-six slaves on board. In 1804, they wrote to Gorham in Havana that laws against the slave trade prevented them “from availing of the benefit of promises” and that they were much in want of dollars. Nevertheless, that year they sent the *Paragon* on another adventure to Senegal.²⁵⁴

²⁵² James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Perkins, Burling & Co., Saint Domingue, 7 December 1792. JEC Extracts.

²⁵³ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to James Gorham, Havana, 16 July 1804. JEC Extracts.

²⁵⁴ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to James Gorham, Havana, 21 August 1804. JEC Extracts.

Fortunately, for the Perkins brothers at least, war between Britain and Spain from 1796-1800 and again in 1800-1804 opened the prospect of direct trade with Spanish America. Throughout the French Wars, Spain found itself caught between French alliance and British occupation.²⁵⁵ In 1796, the British blockade of the Spanish trade with her American colonies threatened the colonial project itself. In order to continue to supply the Spanish colonies with European manufactures—and thus to ensure native industry did not develop to compete with imports via the metropole—the Spanish government opened colonial ports to neutral traders in November 1797. Here, again, was an opening for Americans to profit from carrying European manufactures and American produce to foreign colonies. When that policy fell under criticism from traders Cádiz in 1799, the government narrowed the trade to specially licensed merchant traders who would carry goods directly from foreign ports to the colonies.²⁵⁶ Licenses to trade with Spanish colonies, much sought after, were bought and sold among merchants.²⁵⁷ The entire process was ripe for abuse.

The Perkinses made a first foray into direct trade with South America in 1800.²⁵⁸ A Guatemala merchant by the name of Alejandro Ramirez secured them permission to

²⁵⁵ During the French Wars, Spain fought two wars with Great Britain, one from 1796 to 1802, the other from 1804 to 1808.

²⁵⁶ On 10 December 1798, the Perkinses wrote to the Havana firm of Maria & Cuesta to inquire about opportunities for trade on the Pacific coast of South America. Jacques A. Barbier and Allan J. Kuethe, *The North American Role in the Spanish Imperial Economy, 1760-1819* (Manchester [Greater Manchester] ; Dover, N.H., USA: Manchester University Press, 1984), Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Port Cities : Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World 1650-1850* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), Patricia H. Marks, *Deconstructing Legitimacy: Viceroy, Merchants, and the Military in Late Colonial Peru* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

²⁵⁷ Marks writes that these licenses were never intended for Callao or other Pacific ports because these might compete with the interests of the Spanish Filipinas Company. The licensed trade nevertheless existed. Marks, *Deconstructing Legitimacy*, 111.

²⁵⁸ In 1799 they made a less direct venture: they hired James Rowan as captain for the *Eliza* in a voyage to the Pacific Northwest in China. Rowan knew the California coast and, the Perkinses hoped,

trade with the assurance that the authorization qualified them to trade as long as the neutral trade with Spain was open. Adventures would be as easy as their current trade with Havana, Ramirez claimed.²⁵⁹ On June 5th, the Perkinses joined with Stephen Higginson & Co. to dispatch the *Diana*. They gave instructions for the *Diana* to sail for either Callao off of Lima, Peru or Sonsonate in what is now El Salvador. While docked at Lima's port at Callao, Spanish officials seized the *Diana*'s cargo as illegitimate and ordered Captain Obed Barnard to depart. He did, only to be captured again in El Salvador. The captain and the crew were thrown into prison. When finally released, Barnard continued the vessel on her path, sailing to Hawai'i, China, and then to the Isle of France where the vessel was sold.²⁶⁰ Whether or not the permission the owners received was legitimate, they operated on the premise that it was.²⁶¹

The *Diana*'s seizure was disappointing, to say the least. While the venture may have only been an initial foray, when looked at another way, it is clear that the Perkinses had high hopes. The supercargo for the venture was Samuel Burling (later Curson), who had grown up in their countinghouse. Samuel Burling was nephew to Walter Burling, the former partner to both James and Thomas Perkins in their earlier West Indies trading. As

might be able to secure them entrance at Montevideo. The Perkinses were clearly looking for possible midway points in Spanish America where they could purchase silver for the voyage to China. While Rowan failed because the Spanish authorities knew him, other ventures such as the *Montezuma* had more luck.

²⁵⁹ Alejandro Ramirez, Philadelphia to James & T.H. Perkins, Boston, 21 April 1800. JEC Extracts.

²⁶⁰ Alexander Hamilton and Harold Coffin Syrett, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 157-158. Stephen Higginson wrote Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of State James Madison, and others to lobby the claim via official channels.

²⁶¹ See their letter of 28 February 1807. JEC Extracts. "We send the original Permission of the Viceroy or Gov. of Guatemala, under wh. our Ship *Diana* sailed, and also a copy of the order of his Catholick (sic) Majesty, wh. recognizes the permission in question, and orders restoration. The Person to whom we furnished the funds for this Expedition has rec'd them from the royal chest in Lima."

mentioned in chapter one, young Sam apprenticed with the Perkins brothers in the 1790s.²⁶² The Perkins brothers had high hopes for Burling's career. Another young man they recommended to the Spanish American trade was Hibbert Newton. In 1804, Newton sailed as supercargo to the *Tarantula*, but the Perkinses urged him to win the confidence of local merchant Pedro Boyer as well as their Havana agent who might, they hoped, have occasion for Newton's services. They instructed him to demonstrate "steady deportment ... without too much familiarity" to remain in Havana if he could and learn Spanish. At this time in his life, the "polar star of [his] conduct" ought to be "making y'r self a Man of Business."²⁶³ The immersion of these young men the Spanish market gave the Perkinses an entrée as well.

The Perkinses desired a skilled and trustworthy agent to handle their Spanish American interests, but they had only so much control over Burling's mercantile path. In 1804, after Ephraim Bumstead's death had left them without a fully trained agent to handle their considerable business in China, the Perkins brothers attempted to push Burling into accepting the post. But Sam Burling thought his prospects were better in the Spanish trade.²⁶⁴ In March 1804, the Perkinses updated his uncle Walter that Samuel had traveled to New York for them on a Spanish project; they expected him to succeed, but if

²⁶² Samuel Burling lived with Joseph May while he apprenticed with the Perkinses, and the older merchant was a mentor to him. In 1797, the various parties discussed Samuel's future as there was some confusion over whether he should travel to Natchez and take over the family plantation there or go into business under the patronage of the Perkins brothers. Samuel's grandfather wrote that the latter offered the young man better prospects, but it seems there was some rancor over the Natchez property between Walter and the other family members, especially Samuel's mother. Samuel wrote a letter to May, indicating he expected the letter to be shared with the Perkinses, that Walter Burling was not the honorable man they took him to be. Thompson-Star, *The Burling Books: Ancestors and Descendants of Edward and Grace Burling, Quakers, 1600-2000*, 320.

²⁶³ J. & T.H. Perkins & Co. to Hibbert Newton, November 1804. JEC Extracts.

²⁶⁴ J. & T.H. Perkins & Co. to Walter Burling, 20 March 1807. JEC Extracts.

not, never fear, they would procure another voyage for him to try again.²⁶⁵ In 1807, young Burling was still engaged in the Spanish trade.

Given the difficulties they faced with the *Diana*²⁶⁶, one would think that the Perkinses would have had little taste for the South America market. Yet the prospects must have seemed too good to overlook. For the Perkinses, the Spanish colonies promised more than profits from the re-export of European manufactures, they offered the prospect of a linchpin to their East Indies trade. In exchange for American produce and East Indian commodities such as silk, tea, and spices, the Spanish colonies could, they hoped, pay in silver. By 1804, the Perkinses dispatched at least three further vessels for Lima, Chile, and Buenos Aires: the *George Washington*, the *Cordelia*, and the *Carlota*.²⁶⁷ The Perkinses obtained licenses for these ventures through collaboration with Gaspar Rico and Julián Hernández Barruso.²⁶⁸ Hernández Barruso met Thomas H.

²⁶⁵ J. & T.H. Perkins & Co. to Walter Burling, 4 March 1804. JEC Extracts.

²⁶⁶ The Bostonians fought for restitution for the *Diana* losses on two fronts, neither easy. First, their underwriters argued that the Spanish government condemned the *Diana*'s cargo as illegal plunder thus vitiated the claim. Second, the owners levied a claim against the Spanish government itself. In 1806, after considerable lobbying of American officials and Spanish, the *Diana*'s owners received \$20,000 in restitution—but argued that the Spanish owed them an additional \$53,798. Finally, in 1821, following the U.S.-Spanish Treaty of Amity, Settlement and Limits of 1819, a joint commission agreed to pay out the claim for the *Diana* to the amount of \$43,619.11. Hamilton and Syrett, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 157-158.

²⁶⁷ Marks, *Deconstructing Legitimacy*, 2-4, 113-114. Hernández Barruso purchased the license from Bedmar after the directors of the Cinco Gremios rejected a contract he had signed with Gaspar Rico directly. This contract directed Hernández Barruso to charter ships in Europe and Rio de Janeiro for the purposes of trading hides from Buenos Aires and other South American goods to neutral ports for European manufactures. The *Cinco Gremios Mayores de Madrid* was a powerful trading company based in Madrid. Gaspar Rico was an employee of the *Cinco Gremios* as of about 1795, and the director of their Lima *factoría* beginning in 1801 until 1811 when they fired him. As this example shows, however, he was a bit of a rogue.

²⁶⁸ Sergio Villalobos uses Julián Hernández Barruso's sale of the licenses as an example of the flagrant abuses of the licensing system. The Bedmar license allowed for 600 tons to be sent to Callao (Lima) and Montevideo on neutral vessels. Hernández Barruso split the 600 tons into minute chunks. The *Massachusetts* declared only 7 tons at Montevideo and the *Cordelia* a mere 25—including prohibited goods—at Callao. Sergio Villalobos R., "El Comercio Extranjero a Fines De La Dominacion Espanola," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 4, no. 4 (1962): 517-1962.

Perkins while traveling to the United States, looking for precisely this type of opportunity. After purchasing part of a license the Spanish crown had granted to the Marqués de Bedmar, Hernández Barruso partnered with the Perkinses for speculations in South America. The cargoes were consigned to Gaspar Rico and his cousin, Gaspar Antonio de Osma. The Perkinses were very secretive about the ventures in their letters, and they explicitly warned Samuel Burling to be discreet about their involvement with Hernández Barruso.²⁶⁹

The Perkinses gave Burling two sets of instructions for the *George Washington's* adventure, one on 20 July 1804 and the next a mere three days later. The differences between the two is instructive. In the first letter, the Perkinses offer smuggling tips. The *Washington* should sail to Rio de Janeiro where, on the pretence of watering, Burling should attempt to sell his cargo. If this did not work, head to the River La Plata and report distress. Damage the ship, create a leak, anything to allow the ship to dock for a substantial amount of time. Here they expected to sell the cargo to advantage and to thus secure a decent cargo of hides and tallow and other goods for Europe or the United States. If all else failed, head to Manila and attempt to trade between Manila and Acapulco. In the letter of 23 July 1804, the tone changed. Perhaps the Perkinses received official permission from Hernández Barruso. The *Washington* would sail to Montevideo and ask permission to visit Buenos Aires. Unlike the false distress advised previously, “Your conduct should prove to the inhabitants that you intend to pay the utmost regard and respect to their customs and ceremonies. Marked attentions to be paid

²⁶⁹ James and T.H. Perkins & Co. to Samuel Burling, 4 March 1804. JEC Extracts. At the time they sent the letter, they had dispatched Burling to New York to purchase a ship and cargo for a voyage to the Spanish Main. They warned Burling to keep the entire project secret.

to the officers of the Gov't." This they felt Burling particularly suited to, noting familiarly, "You will have occasion for all y'r Patience, forbearance and vigilance in trading." But this was important: "We know it is too often the case that the prejudices of the People our vessels have visited So. America have been sported with, and their religious ceremonies derided—inculcate the necessity of avoiding a similar conduct." Still, they urged Burling to make the visit seem as if the vessel traveled to South America on Burling's own plan—to American officials at least. And to the officers and crew.²⁷⁰

Once again, James and Thomas Perkins faced disappointment. Spanish officials at Callao condemned the *General Washington*, ship and cargo. The problem they faced this time was political. Their Lima agent, Gaspar Rico, was also the factor for the *Cinco Gremios Mayores de Madrid*, a powerful Spanish trading company.²⁷¹ As tensions mounted between the *Cinco Gremios* and a competing trading company, the *Real Compañía de Filipinas* and their local allies in Lima, Rico became a pawn between the two.²⁷² The American neutral ventures promised to profit Rico and the *Cinco Gremios*

²⁷⁰ J. & T.H. Perkins & Co. to Samuel Burling 20 July 1804, 23 July 1804. JEC Extracts. They directed other captains and supercargoes similarly, such as the instructions to Captain J. Harvey regarding the Schooner *William*, which was to pretend distress in order to gain entry. "You must let y'r vessel have the appearance of being in distress, by springing her boom, bowsprit, etc. and by putting some fishes on y'r main-mast just below the hounds." Another technique was to "Spaniardize" vessels (the *Lion*, the *Tarantula*) to attempt further trade with Havana and South America. Such vessels sailed either with permission or, like the *Tarantula*, with papers claiming they were owned by Spaniards (here Pedro Boyer, who did have permission to introduce specified commodities into Havana). See J. & T.H. Perkins & Co. to Captain J. Harvey, 22 November 1804, to Jas. Gorham 11 November 1804, 22 November 1804. JEC Extracts.

²⁷¹ *Cinco Gremios Mayores* translates as the Five Major Guilds. The company began in 1667 as a guild conglomerate, combining guilds for clothiers, silk and linen wholesalers, jewelers and druggists. By the late eighteenth century, the *Cinco Gremios* organized joint-stock companies involved in the supply business and thus commerce between Spain and her American colonies. See Miguel and Antonio Matilla Tascón Capella Martínez, *Los Cinco Gremios Mayores De Madrid* (Madrid: Saez, 1951), 116-130, 271-308, David R. Ringrose, *Madrid and the Spanish Economy, 1560-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), chapter 7.

²⁷² Marks, *Deconstructing Legitimacy*, 122-123.

on two counts, both through consignments to Rico (and his cousin) himself and through investments made on behalf of the *Caja de Consolidación de Vales Reales* of Peru. The *Caja* was a fund for bonds floated by the Spanish Crown. While in the *Caja*, the bond funds could be invested elsewhere—such as in colonial commerce and neutral shipping. According to Patricia Marks, it is likely that the total amount of merchandise imported by Hernández Barruso, Rico, and the *Caja* were a significant portion of Peru's licensed imports. Perhaps because of this, Viceroy Gabriel de Avilés stepped in to condemn the ventures. The cargoes of three Perkins vessels—the *Washington*, the *Cordelia*, and the *Carlota* were all confiscated at Callao. The Peruvians held the *Washington* under the claim that the Bedmar licenses were annulled by Spanish royal decrees of June 20 and July 15, 1805, the *Cordelia*'s cargo for having been purchased with funds embezzled by Rico from the *Cinco Gremios*, and the *Carlota* was simply confiscated by the Count of Villar de Fuente via an audit of the *Cinco Gremios* accounts in Lima.²⁷³

Still, this did not end their efforts to trade with Spanish America. In 1807, for example, the Perkinses had goods selected at Manila specifically for the Lima trade for the *Herald*, again in connection with Hernández Barruso, and they dispatched the *Resource* for the Rio La Plata. Silver was simply too important a commodity for their trade with the East Indies to relinquish their hopes. Not until after the French Wars ended did Americans have access to viable alternatives to silver in their East Indies trading: bills of exchange and opium.

Mediterranean Opium

²⁷³ Marks, *Deconstructing Legitimacy*, 115-117.

Another market the Perkinses experimented in during the French Wars was the Ottoman opium trade. Years before, in 1796, James and Thomas H. Perkins inquired to George Perkins in Smyrna (now Izmir in Turkey) of the British Levant Company as to the prospects of trade between Smyrna and Boston. They wrote of a joint adventure between them, Stephen Higginson, and George's brother and their townsman, Thomas Perkins. At this point, however, the letter was simply a foray into advancing their reexportation of West Indian produce—coffee, sugar—with the potential of bringing East Indian goods to Smyrna. It had nothing to do with opium. As the letter explained, the war had brought new openings for American traders, and they wondered how an American vessel might be received, under what circumstances, and what articles would best answer.²⁷⁴ Why then did they return for opium? During the 1804-5 season, the price for patna opium nearly doubled.²⁷⁵ Loaves of poppy cakes arrived in Smyrna from the poppy-growing district of Afyon-Kara-Hisar (literally, “opium black castle”) in late summer, and from Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey), merchants purchased the opium for shipment to Europe, the Americas, or, more commonly, Asia.

As early as June 1805, James & T.H. Perkins wrote to their Canton branch inquiring as to the prospects for selling Turkish opium in China.²⁷⁶ The Perkinses were not the first to discover the possibilities of opium in the China market. Better quality Indian varieties of the poppy juice had long been sold in the region and the British had

²⁷⁴ J & T.H. Perkins & Company to George Perkins, 27 December 1796 as quoted in Cary, *Memoir of Thomas Handasyd Perkins*, 282-283.

²⁷⁵ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, 112.

²⁷⁶ J & T.H. Perkins & Co. to John Perkins Cushing 19 June 1805 and 23 September 1805. JEC Extracts.

become very protective of their Indian supply routes. Nor were they the first Americans in the Turkish opium trade. James Wilcocks of Philadelphia visited the port of Smyrna (Izmir, Turkey) in 1804 as the supercargo for the *Pennsylvania*. Wilcocks arrived in Canton by October of 1805, selling his cargo of opium and laying plans for a new voyage. Clearly the adventure did well: in 1805, Willings & Francis, Stephen Girard, and the Perkins brothers, all American merchants of considerable repute, either sent ships to Smyrna or laid plans to do so.²⁷⁷

Opium had a longer history in the China trade, but the turn of the nineteenth century witnessed a marked change. While the Portuguese and the Dutch brought opium to China in the seventeenth century, it was not until the British East India Company took control of poppy cultivation and began to orchestrate opium operations in the eighteenth century through a system of licenses, advances, and auctions that the drug's sales surged in China. The Company monopolized the growth of poppies in India, sold the cakes of dried poppy juice at auctions in Calcutta to private British traders who specialized in the trade between India and China (so-called "country traders"), who then smuggled chests of opium off the coast of Nanyang for silver. The country traders would then exchange the silver for East India Company bills, a safe form of remittance for the country traders, and the Company would trade the silver for tea that, legally, only it could export back into Britain. By the turn of the nineteenth century, opium was the most profitable element of the British East India Company's operations.²⁷⁸ As Michael Greenberg notes, the Company prospered through "the technique of growing opium in India and disowning

²⁷⁷ Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40," 421-422.

²⁷⁸ Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire : Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), Carl A. Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy : A Study of the Asian Opium Trade, 1750-1950* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999).

it in China.”²⁷⁹ The Chinese were the largest opium consumers in Asia, but they were by no means the only ones, and the effects of the drug trafficking rippled throughout the region. To historian Carl Trocki, opium was the trap that enmeshed the economies of China and Southeast Asia in European—especially British—colonial capitalism.²⁸⁰

In 1804 and 1805, when the Perkinses and other American merchants began carrying Turkish opium to China, the East India Company’s prohibition on fellow British merchants bringing opium from Turkey protected the Americans from their most likely competitors.²⁸¹ Because the Company received considerable revenue from its opium sales, in 1773 they prohibited British vessels from carrying foreign opium into its jurisdiction. The refusal of Company ships to carry opium to China combined with their prohibition on British merchants carrying the drug from other markets to create a niche for Americans and other non-British players. As Charles Stelle put it, “Private English shipping could not, and the Company’s vessel would not, carry the drug to China.”²⁸²

The devastating effect of the French Wars on much of European shipping left non-

²⁷⁹ Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42* (Cambridge Eng.: University Press, 1951), 110.

²⁸⁰ David Anthony Bello, *Opium and the Limits of Empire : Drug Prohibition in the Chinese Interior, 1729-1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2005), Trocki, *Opium and Empire : Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*, Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates : The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore, 1784-1885* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979), Yangwen Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Trocki argues, as do others, that opium should not be seen as a mere commodity because of its addictive properties and thus the exponential expansion in consumption. The addiction however, seemed to go both ways. Jacques Downs argues that the profits realized by British and American merchants allowed for an unfortunate slippage between the interests of merchants and nations.

²⁸¹ Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40.", Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, Samuel Eliot Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles in 1810," *New England Quarterly* 1 (1928): 208-225, Charles C. Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, Prior to 1820," *Pacific Historical Review* 9, no. 4 (1940): 425-444.

²⁸² Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, Prior to 1820," 430.

Company opium in the hands of a small number of players—most notably Americans. The American embargo and the War of 1812 diverted traffic, but after the war's end in 1815 the trade surged. The Perkinses experimented with bringing Persian opium, but, as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six, they specialized in the lesser quality varieties found in the Mediterranean. In the 1817-8 season, “turkey” accounted for half of what Americans brought to China.²⁸³

American Politics & the Struggle for Neutrality

If the Perkinses had been able to dictate federal policy during the French Wars, there would have been no embargo in 1807 and no War of 1812. Instead, they protested through private as well as public channels. Despite the profits to be had from neutral trade, American tempers were naturally frayed by the predations on their vessels. This frustration drew Americans into the French Wars by fits and starts: in a war of all-but-name with the French in the West Indies and the American littoral in 1798; through economic warfare epitomized by the American embargo of 1807; and finally in war with the British in the War of 1812. Through all of this, American merchants struggled to find avenues of profit. As much as the Perkinses abhorred the prospect of entering the war, they feared peace as well. As they explained to their London agent, Samuel Williams, “peace does not promise us a very extensive field in which to range”²⁸⁴

The so-called “Quasi-War” between the United States and France transpired over the sanctioned pillaging of American shipping. On January 18, 1798, the French

²⁸³ Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship : The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 7.

²⁸⁴ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Samuel Williams, London, 4 February 1808. JEC Extracts.

government rejected the American neutral position of “free ships, free goods.” By the new French law, the nationality of the cargo would now determine the character of the ship. Therefore, a ship that was registered in Boston but carried goods out of Jamaica was considered British. Rather than changing flags for vessels, merchants now provided forged certificates of origins for their goods.²⁸⁵ The French law, however, followed rather than generated practice, sanctioning existing pillaging. Between 1797 and 1798, French privateers captured approximately 330 American ships as prizes. Because neutral vessels were not allowed to be armed, the Americans were vulnerable to anyone who could muster a cannon. By early 1798, French privateers hovered off America’s key waterways—the Long Island Sound (New York), the entrance to the Delaware Bay (Philadelphia)—simply waiting for vessels to depart. As Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick put it, Americans could either give up a trade that was one-third of the nation’s commerce or they could build a navy. They chose the latter. Luckily, America’s incipient navy under Benjamin Stoddert mounted a rather impressive response. Seizures by privateers and insurance rates alike dropped drastically over the following year.²⁸⁶

Despite the obvious evidence of a naval conflict in the Quasi-War, the fact that Congress never declared war meant that for all intents and purposes, the United States kept its neutral status. This in and of itself was a feat. As tensions escalated between Britain and France, neutrals got caught in the middle.²⁸⁷ By 1805, the United States and Denmark were by and large the only neutral powers remaining. That year, Great Britain

²⁸⁵ Mustafa, *Merchants and Migrations : Germans and Americans in Connection, 1776-1835*, 184.

²⁸⁶ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 652.

²⁸⁷ Russia allied with Britain in April of 1805, followed by Sweden in August. Denmark entered the war in 1807 when attacked by the British navy.

reinvoked a 1756 rule that argued neutrals could only continue trade what they already had access to in peacetime. The rule effectively outlawed the re-export trade: neutrals could not encroach on the trade between colonies and their respective metropolises. The French countered with the Berlin Decree on November 21, 1806. Any ship approaching Great Britain, neutral or no, was subject to capture. The British retaliated with a similar prohibition of trade between the United States and Europe. The French answered with the Milan Decree of November 23, 1807 and its beefed up version of December 17: any ship that “touched” England, whether docking an English port or being boarded by English officers, was fair game for French privateers. Between 1803 and 1807, the British seized 528 American ships and the French 389.²⁸⁸

The Perkinses complained about British as well as French injury to the American merchant marine, but there was no ambiguity as to who they favored. To them, the British were “fair and reasonable” and attempted to “appease” Americans, but President Thomas Jefferson could not be appeased.²⁸⁹ Despite continued friendships in France, politically and economically, the Perkinses aligned themselves with the British. In many ways, the Perkinses were apologists for the British.²⁹⁰ But they were not entirely wrong about the Republican president. To Jefferson, Britain was the greater threat to America’s future stability and well-being: Britain was a naval power with a significant presence in

²⁸⁸ North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860*, 37.

²⁸⁹ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Samuel Williams, London, 17 November 1807 and to John Perkins Cushing, 29 March 1808. JEC Extracts.

²⁹⁰ For example, in August of 1807, they decried to LeRoy, Bayard & McEvers of New York that the American government should rebel at the protection of His Majesty’s fugitives “at the moment G.B. is struggling for her existence and fighting the Battles of the Civilized World” [to defeat Napoleon]. LeRoy was a regular correspondent of theirs for political news and one of the most prominent commercial houses in New York. James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to LeRoy, Bayard & McEvers, New York 13 August 1807. JEC Extracts.

North America. While not ideologically aligned with Napoleon, Jefferson reasoned that France's strength was on land—and hence a challenge to the European continent more than the United States—and her loss of Louisiana and Haiti lessened the likelihood of encroachment upon American interests. And Jefferson hoped that Napoleon might provide openings for American expansion in North America, such as removing the Spanish from Florida. As Jefferson's own writings make clear, the President did not seek to simply disentangle Americans from the French Wars, but to weaken the British by withholding the American market.²⁹¹

In 1807, the *Chesapeake* incident provided the necessary public outcry to allow Jefferson to act. On June 22, the *HMS Leopard* bore down on the *USS Chesapeake* and demanded to see the American vessel's papers. The American captain refused. The British commander, Salusbury Pryce Humphrey, suspected four deserters from the British navy hid among the *Chesapeake*'s crew. Of the four, the *Chesapeake*'s captain considered three to be Americans who had been impressed into the British navy and the fourth used an alias in signing on for the *Chesapeake*. The *Leopard* retaliated with cannon shot that killed three and wounded eighteen. Americans were outraged. The incident occurred just ten miles out of the Virginia port of Hampton Roads. When Robert

²⁹¹ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 376-385, Donald R. Hickey, "American Trade Restrictions During the War of 1812," *Journal of American History* 68, no. 3 (1981): 517-538, Lawrence S. Kaplan, "Jefferson, the Napoleonic Wars, and the Balance of Power," *William and Mary Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1957): 196-217, McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*. Jefferson and Madison had long proposed restrictions on American trade with Britain. In January 1794, James Madison introduced a plan akin to his discrimination plan of 1789 – basically raising duties on trade with British possessions based on the principal of reciprocity. The British discriminated against American shipping; the United States would similarly hold British shipping accountable. The Non-Importation Act of 1806 and the 1807 Embargo in many ways continued this older desire to ensure American independence from Britain by constraining economic ties. The Non-Importation Act of 1806 prohibited the importation of select British goods, but it was suspended several times and thus largely merged into the Embargo.

MacDonald, one of the injured mariners, died several days later, the nation mourned.²⁹² President Jefferson called on the British government to answer for the attack on the *Chesapeake*, to no avail. While the British disavowed the actions of the *Leopard*, they rejected American demands for redress and continued to prey upon American shipping. To Jefferson, this was further evidence of the low esteem in which the British held the United States.

Upset by the *Chesapeake* conflict, Jefferson nevertheless saw it as an opportunity. An embargo on American trade would provide the benefit of hurting American enemies without the expense of mustering for battle. Commercial rather than military strategies, he wrote, would be one of many “useful lessons” Americans could teach Europeans, “showing them that there are peaceable means of repressing injustice.”²⁹³ On the 22nd of December 1807, Congress passed the Embargo Act. Scholars differ on whether or not the Embargo could have been successful had it lasted longer, but for many merchants, there was no controversy. The Embargo promised to hurt Americans far more than it would hurt the British.²⁹⁴ The Perkinses summed their opinion in a letter to a constituent: “We cannot believe that those who hold the reins of Gov’t will act in so direct opposition

²⁹² Robert E. Cray, Jr., “Remembering the U.S.S. Chesapeake: The Politics of Maritime Death and Impressment,” *Journal of Early Republic* 25, no. 3 (2005): 445-474.

²⁹³ Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin 15 May 1808, 2 April 1808 as quoted in Doron S. Ben-Atar, *The Origins of Jeffersonian Commercial Policy and Diplomacy* (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 165.

²⁹⁴ Ben-Atar, *The Origins of Jeffersonian Commercial Policy and Diplomacy*, 166, Jeffrey A. Frankel, “The 1807-1809 Embargo against Great Britain,” *Journal of Economic History* 42, no. 2 (1982): 291-308. Jeffrey Frankel argues that the embargo did in fact have a severe effect on the British, and resulted on a real decline in standards of living and labor unrest. To Ben-Atar, this indicates that “The Embargo failed, then, not because it did not inflict significant pain but because American leaders had little comprehension of Britain’s willingness to pay the price for its crusade against French militarism.” And the more immediate pain *was* felt at home. American exports fell from \$108 million in 1807 to \$22 million in 1808.

to the Will of the People and the best interests of the Country as to plunge us into a contest wh. would be ruinous, to defend a principle not worth a Cent to us.”²⁹⁵

On the news that the Embargo would, in fact, go into effect, the Perkinses moved quickly to protect their interests. They worried that hostilities would allow foreign governments to lay claim to funds held by belligerents in commercial houses within their borders. They did not worry that Britain would seize their funds, but France. Just as Jefferson mistrusted the British, so, too, the Perkinses mistrusted the French under Napoleon. “In the present alarming state of things,” they wrote David Parish, “we are anxious for the safety of our property in the hands of Hope & Co.; should France declare Hostilities ag’st the Country, w’d she not endeavor to secure the property of individuals in Holland?”²⁹⁶ They had over \$200,000 in the hands of the Dutch bank. As Hope & Co.’s agent in the United States and a friend of theirs, Parish seemed an obvious choice. They did not leave the matter there, however, and wrote several times to their London agent, Samuel Williams, to see if Hope & Co. might allow him to draw or advance him the funds on their behalf.²⁹⁷ While the funds were not deemed safe in Holland, London was the next best thing to Boston.

²⁹⁵ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to James E. Henderson, Glasgow, 17 November 1807. JEC Extracts.

²⁹⁶ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to David Parish, New York 28 December 1807 and again on 24 March 1808. JEC Extracts. The latter letter refers to a draft on Hope & Co. for 285 million guilders for James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. “in order to guard against any unforeseen event in Europe which might lace it at hazard where it is.” The Perkinses also wrote to LeRoy, Bayard & McEvers of New York that “It is possible that the Emperor of France may, in consequence of the supposed ‘30 millions’ held by the Dutch in the funds of the U.S., forebear to seize a Private Property lying in Holland. It is not however safe to judge this extraordinary and eccentric being by ordinary rules.” They continued that they had already spoken with Representative Josiah Quincy of their state that, should this transpire, Congress should be prepared to introduce a retaliatory measure. James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to LeRoy, Bayard & McEvers, New York, 24 February 1808. JEC Extracts.

²⁹⁷ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Samuel Williams, London 2 January 1808 and 4 February 1808. JEC Extracts.

They dispatched a flurry of letters to correspondents—agents, partners, ship captains, informants—with orders for how to proceed. Under the embargo, Public Dispatch Boat vessels provided the only official means of correspondence with Europe. The Boston office asked their London agent to keep their Canton office apprised of politics and prices, but to an extent that must have been extremely unsettling, they simply had to trust that their agents abroad would see to their interests. While they hoped to be able to sell off their overstock of goods while shopkeepers had no access to fresh imports, they expected the immediate effect of the embargo to be a drop in prices as American ships all returned to the United States rather than plying other markets.²⁹⁸ This was indeed the case. Prices for staples plummeted: tea, coffee, sugar, cotton, rice. Over one hundred New York businesses went under in the aftermath.²⁹⁹

The Perkinses larger network included individuals and firms who were not clients per se, but corresponding agents who shared details of politics, prices, as well advocacy for the future. Most of their direct political intercourse occurred through New England legislators. According to Samuel Eliot Morrison, New England Federalists tended to view congressional representatives as their “political chanteymen,” elected to represent them, to speak for them, and to convey their will.³⁰⁰ Yet this did not prevent the Perkinses from lobbying other politicians as well; that lobbying simply transpired through less direct channels. Their circle of correspondents shared advocacy as well as

²⁹⁸ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to LeRoy, Bayard & McEvers, New York, 21 March 1808. JEC Extracts.

²⁹⁹ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 190.

³⁰⁰ Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860*, 167.

information and advice. Note, for example, the following letter that the Perkins brothers wrote to Prime & Ward of New York:

We think there is a chance of better times, provided you Yorkers can be induced to pepper our good friends at Washington with the artillery of petition, remonstrance, memorial, etc. We should go farther were it not thought inexpedient that the fire should be continued here [in New England], where they say ‘everything rebellious and wicked is want to originate.’ We are surprised at the torpor of your suffering city.³⁰¹

They wrote similarly to the Olivers of Philadelphia:

We hope in God your expectations of a change of administration will be realized. Nothing else can save us from destruction. No paint or other means should be spared to produce this desirable end.³⁰²

Their correspondent roster included some of the most prominent trading houses along the American littoral. Not all of their correspondents agreed with the Perkinses politically, to be sure, but even with their influential correspondents, the Perkinses had little influence on the direction of federal policy under the Republicans.

Merchants worked to get around the Embargo every way they could. As with earlier smuggling, the Perkinses felt unfair laws demanded imagination, not obedience. In this, the Perkinses were not alone. As Donald Hickey has written, it is not “surprising that so many Americans in this freewheeling commercial age were willing to defy their own government in the pursuit of profits.”³⁰³ In June 1808, John Jacob Astor filed petitions with the federal government to be able to retrieve property he claimed to have left in China. The Perkinses similarly petitioned to be able to collect the cargo of the

³⁰¹ These letters were in the lead up to the War of 1812. James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Prime & Ward, New York, 18 May 1812. JEC Extracts.

³⁰² James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Robt. Oliver, New York, 10 September 1812. JEC Extracts.

³⁰³ Hickey, "American Trade Restrictions During the War of 1812," 537.

Mandarin. Both were refused.³⁰⁴ To get around the restrictions, the Perkinses partook in John Jacob Astor's ruse to embark a ship from the port of New York to China. In July 1808, Astor requested special dispensation from President Jefferson to help a visiting mandarin return home aboard the *Beaver*. Newspapers reported of jealous merchants who visited the ship to see this putative mandarin before the vessel departed and scoffed at the trickery. This was no mandarin, they proclaimed, but a "Chinaman picked up in the Park" or a "common Chinese dock loafer" dressed in silks. President Jefferson and his Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin, shrugged off the news, arguing that it was worth the risk.³⁰⁵

As long as ships did not return home, they could remain active. Thus, a common technique for those who could afford it was to keep vessels abroad and direct agents abroad to make decisions as necessary. "The Government seems determined to destroy our Commerce," a Perkins & Company letter grouched, "and we shall be unpardonable not to profit of the Situation of things, as far as in our Power, by Continuing to keep our Ships going as long as we can."³⁰⁶ Luckily, the Perkinses had several vessels abroad. The *Derby*, the *Pearl*, the *Eclipse* and the *Vancouver* were all in the Pacific. The *Levant* was en route from Boston to Canton. And the *Mandarin* and the *Cordelia* were in the Atlantic. Of these, several wrecked – the *Mandarin*, the *Cordelia*, and the *Eclipse*. But

³⁰⁴ David Parish, on the other hand, was able to obtain permission from Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin to send out a vessel to retrieve property. The Perkinses also wrote to their agent in Havana in July of 1808, asking him for a letter stating that they had property in Cuba so that they might send a vessel for sugar. This was not a unique strategy. David Parish, for example, had more luck in receiving special dispensation from Gallatin. See Raymond Walters Philip G. Walters, Jr., "The American Career of David Parish," *Journal of Economic History* 4, no. 2 (1944): 149-166. James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co. to James Gorham, Havana, 9 July 1808. JEC Extracts.

³⁰⁵ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 192-194.

³⁰⁶ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to John Perkins Cushing, March 29, 1808. JEC Extracts.

the Perkinses were nonetheless positioned to continue a certain level of trade.³⁰⁷ In this, they were fortunate. Most of America's port towns during the embargo had the appearance of wastelands with abandoned ships lining the wharves. One observer recalled Boston's harbor as follows: "...Sun burnt masts stripped of their cheering appendages, exhibited the appearance of a forest, whose stately cedars had been deprived of their foliage by a destructive conflagration, or scath'd by the lightening (sic) of Heaven."³⁰⁸

The Perkinses were especially fortunate to have a branch office abroad to direct trade following the embargo. John Perkins Cushing had arrived home in Boston for a visit on April 19, 1807, only to return to China in early June of 1807 aboard the *Levant*. The sea voyage from Canton alone had been longer than his six-week stay. Nor could the visit have been much of a vacation. On May 24 his grandmother, long ill, passed away. Seeing Cushing and knowing of his success must have been a comfort to Elizabeth Peck Perkins, but it must have also been difficult for her grandson. The trip was a whirlwind of visits and business meetings. Yet somewhere in there, the family grieved.

Cushing's post abroad already required considerable independence and entrepreneurialism, but the Embargo deepened this exponentially. The Embargo did more than cut Cushing off from advice on politics and prices—it cut him off from letters from home. It is hard to fathom how lonely he must have felt. Cushing put Perkins capital to use in various ways, from shipping sandalwood and tin between China and the Sandwich Islands, loaning out money in Canton at 18%, and more. The Perkins brothers

³⁰⁷ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 189.

³⁰⁸ Account of Shubael Bell as quoted in Forbes, "European Wars and Boston Trade, 1783-1815," 724.

hoped that at least the Embargo would allow them to run off their stocks of tea. Luckily for them, they had the capital base to allow them to store the tea in warehouses until prices improved.

Another wartime boom market in which the Perkinses invested heavily was the American-Iberian flour trade. During the French Wars, the American grain trade to Britain ebbed and flowed dramatically. Exports surged in 1801, 1807, and 1809 respectively and crashed in 1804, 1808, and especially during the War of 1812 when conflict between the new nations took the exports from nearly 1.4 million bushels in 1809 down to a scant 14 recorded bushels in 1814.³⁰⁹ In Spain and Portugal, American flour exports to the region surged from 105,196 bushels in 1809 to 825,179 in 1811.³¹⁰ As Napoleon's troops took on the Spanish, Portuguese, and British in the Iberian Peninsula, the troops required food. Prices soared. A Virginia merchant wrote in June of 1810 that flour sold at \$12.50 per barrel in Lisbon; by April of 1811, the Perkinses instructed Joseph Cabot to not sell his flour for less than \$15 per barrel.³¹¹ Merchants knew the boom was temporary, but hastened to profit while the embattled conditions continued.

Even after war began between the United States and Britain, the flour trade did not end. Prices were too good. By 1812, the Perkinses purchased licenses directly from the British government to sell flour to the British-occupied Iberian Peninsula. In October 1812, the Perkinses dispatched seven ships to take advantage of this demand, five to

³⁰⁹ W. Freeman Galpin, "The American Grain Trade to the Spanish Peninsula, 1810-1814," *The American Historical Review* 28, no. 1 (1922): 24-44.

³¹⁰ Galpin, "The American Grain Trade to the Spanish Peninsula, 1810-1814," 25.

³¹¹ Josiah Faxon, Virginia to Andrew Clobber, Boston, 18 May 1810, NYPL quoted in Galpin, "The American Grain Trade to the Spanish Peninsula, 1810-1814," 25. James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Joseph Cabot, 13 April 1811. JEC Extracts.

Cadiz and two for Lisbon: the *Miser* (Samuel Storrow, supercargo), the *Factor* (Thomas Doubleday), the *Topaz* (John Bromfield), the *Ariadne* (William Farris), the *Spartan* (S.L. Cunningham), the *Argo* (Henry Sturgis), and the *Bedford* (John Linzee). Of these, American privateers captured two and the British one, with the *Miser* escorted to Gibraltar as a British prize for lacking the proper papers: the papers had been eaten by rats en route.³¹² In January 1813, the Perkinses chided their London agent, Samuel Williams, for not having supplied them with British licenses. They paid \$1500 for licenses to continue their trade to the Iberian Peninsula; had he sent them from London, the price would have been only £10-12 each. If the British government still allowed the provisions trade, they wrote, they were happy to oblige.³¹³

The Perkinses received dispatches from their political contacts about changes in policy that would affect their business. In April of 1812, for example, the Perkinses informed a client that “Thanks to Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Quincy, who sent us early advice of the intention to impose another embargo, we have succeeded in disposing of your tobacco.”³¹⁴ Senator James Lloyd and Representative Josiah Quincy, both Federalists of Boston, were good friends to the Perkinses and clearly good friends to have. With the advice from these political contacts, the Perkinses were able to dispatch their flour vessels for Cadiz: the *Henry*, the *Miser*, the *Washington*, and the *Nancy*, the last out of

³¹² James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Samuel Williams, London, 26 October 1812. JEC Extracts.

³¹³ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Samuel Williams, London, 5 January 1813. JEC Extracts.

³¹⁴ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to R. & J. Oliver, Baltimore, 12 April 1812. JEC Extracts.

New Orleans. They estimated about 12,300 barrels of flour cleared the American ports before they closed.³¹⁵

Jeffersonian Republicans looked the other way on the American trade with British-occupied Iberia. The Perkinses' agent in Cadiz was the American consul there, Richard S. Hackley. In April of 1811, they wrote to Hackley about the prospect of taking one of their own into his firm. A "nephew of ours, Mr. T.P. Doubleday sl'd in the Ship Newburyport the other day for Gibraltar. We have been casting about for a Foreign Establishment for him, and have concluded to recommend y'r forming a mercantile connection for him in Cadiz. We take the liberty of suggesting to you taking him into y'r firm."³¹⁶ The Perkinses likely saw this as a longer-term connection to the Spanish trade rather than the flour trade which was clearly a temporary, war-induced boom.

In 1809, the Perkinses split their London accounts between their established London agent, Samuel Williams, and Henry Higginson & Co. On one level, the business decision can be explained by affective ties. The Perkinses intermarried with the Higginson clan several times over, including Perkins brother Samuel's nuptials with Barbara—the belle of Boston—in 1795 and their niece Nancy's 1803 marriage to Barbara's younger brother Henry. The second marriage may well have been connected to the first. Barbara and Henry were both the offspring of the Honorable Stephen Higginson, one of Boston's most esteemed merchants and a key ally of James & Thomas H. Perkins. But Samuel and Barbara Perkins also fostered Nancy Perkins Cushing after the death of the girl's mother, the same Nancy who married Barbara's younger brother

³¹⁵ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to John Vaughan, 12 April 1812. JEC Extracts.

³¹⁶ James & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to R.S. Hackley, 5 April 1811. JEC Extracts.

Henry. According to family lore, Barbara fought the connection; for Nancy, the marriage was a quick path out of her aunt's household.³¹⁷ Nancy moved to London with her husband where they entertained many of the American travelers, often merchants, who passed through.

Viewed through the lens of the Embargo, however, the decision to split their accounts may well have had to do with the business at hand. Even when Congress repealed the embargo, legislation still prohibited trade with England and France. And this may have been the point: the Higginson family hired a young man by the name of William Tudor, Jr. to help them smuggle British goods into Napoleon-occupied Europe.³¹⁸

Unfortunately, the Higginsons' sojourn was short-lived. On November 3, 1811, Higginson approached Thomas H. Perkins, himself then in London to invest the £80,000 the Perkinses had in war-induced limbo in the British market. Higginson confided to Perkins that nearly half a million pounds of funds that he had advanced to correspondents had not been paid back. He had extended his young firm to the point that he could not meet his obligations and thus had little choice but to dissolve the house. Included in the morass was approximately £31,000 of Perkins money. Samuel Williams and Thomas H. Perkins were left to handle the creditors.³¹⁹ When Stephen Higginson & Co. also failed

³¹⁷ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

³¹⁸ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 225.

³¹⁹ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 225-226. See also letters between Thomas H. Perkins and his wife Sally in the Cabot Family Papers, MHS.

in 1813, Samuel G. Perkins & Co. began, run by all of the same principals and carrying on much the same trade.³²⁰

The American Embargo created other difficulties: substantive capital the Perkinses had amassed from their neutral shipping was stuck abroad. They lacked the means to remit the funds to the United States. There were three mechanisms for remitting profits home: shipping specie, commodities, or bills. Specie was expensive and dangerous to ship in the best of times and thus relatively rare. Sending goods, conversely, was usually very common. A corresponding agent invested funds held for the American firm in a cargo of merchandise that they then shipped on the Americans' behalf, thus reinvesting the funds in a new venture offering further profits. But the Embargo put a stop to this, at least officially. There was always smuggling. Some merchants elected to use bills of exchange to remit funds, but given that the exorbitant rates, bills tended to be a measure of desperation.³²¹ When they were able to remit profits home to Boston, however, the same restrictions on trade led them to seek out investments closer to home.

Wartime Industry: Monkton Iron, Northampton Lead, & the Eliot Manufacturing Co.

The Embargo and the War of 1812 did not stymie Perkins & Co. trading as much as the partners claimed that it did, but the political turmoil did leave them with excess capital on their hands. As many scholars have noted, merchants who otherwise would have sent capital abroad began looking for ways to invest in newly protected markets at home. Without the competition of European (especially British) manufactures, domestic

³²⁰ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 241.

³²¹ Herbert Heaton, "Non-Importation, 1806-1812," *Journal of Economic History* 1, no. 2 (1941): 178-198.

industry had a chance. Between 1807 and 1815, the Perkinses invested in three industrial projects: Monkton Ironworks in Vergennes, Vermont, a lead mine in Northampton, Massachusetts, and finally, they made an initial foray into turning several mills in Newton, Massachusetts to the production of cotton textiles. While peace and cheap British textiles shelved latter project, by the 1820s, participants in the Perkins network counted themselves as both merchants and manufacturers. Not surprisingly, collaboration begun in splitting shares in mercantile speculations continued in industrial speculations. When searching for investors for a project, the Perkinses turned to known principals.

In 1807, the Perkins brothers joined with Francis Bradbury, Stephen and George Higginson, William Parsons, and Colonel Benjamin Welles to form the Monkton Iron Company in Vergennes, Vermont. The concept began with Bradbury. In the spring of 1807, James and Thomas H. Perkins moved their store from to India Wharf, where Frank Bradbury and his brother had operated a store for about five years. Chatting about business and likely speculations, Bradbury mentioned the natural bounty of Monkton to his new neighbors. Monkton had iron deposits just below the surface. The deposits stood near the Vergennes Falls on Great Otter Creek in Vermont's Green Mountains, with the forest an obvious fodder for charcoal to fuel the ironworks. Plus, the local town already had significant industry: a grist mill, two saw mills, a carding mill, a rolling and slitting mill, and a bloomer forge. That spring, the group of prospective Boston investors hired a merchant and lawyer by the name of Perkins Nichols to examine the prospects for an ironworks.³²² The opportunity was hard to resist. The Monkton investment would be

³²² Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*.

a companion industry and workers, for the most part at least, would be trained and ready for the ironworks. New England's shipyards generally shipped iron in from Pennsylvania and New Jersey, but the transport costs created an advantage for a Vermont site. Given the context of the Embargo, the question was not whether or not to invest, but how soon the ironworks could be up and running. Here, again, the Perkinses collaborated with a familiar circle of capitalists: Stephen Higginson and his son George, William Parsons, Colonel B. Welles.

Despite the business proficiency of the investors, an industrial venture—an ironworks more specifically—was a new order of things. George Higginson, Stephen Higginson's twenty-seven year old son, served as the company's secretary and treasurer and thus managed the business side of the enterprise. Frank Bradbury agreed to move to Vermont as the site manager. And Thomas H. Perkins began tapping contacts for a technical expert on the group's glaring blind spot: iron. From Dr. Nathan Howard of Plymouth, Perkins heard that a local wheelwright with some knowledge of iron smelting by the name of Daniel Johnson might be hired to advise on the project. Johnson was amenable and agreed to travel to Monkton in March or April. Meanwhile, the investors pushed forward. They leased the land, buildings, and local water rights. Bradbury contracted for coal shipments and, after purchasing what he could locally, hired a crew to make charcoal on company land. Consulting what books and advice the group had been able to pool, Bradbury began to build.³²³

In many ways Bradbury was in a difficult spot. Expectations were high because the iron was close to the surface. How hard could it be? Yet while none of the partners

³²³ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 201-203.

had anything close to expertise—which made them all the more suspicious of being cheated—they were all businessmen keeping an eye on their investment. They expected to approve all large-scale decisions from Boston. And the preparations required to get the ironworks up and running were daunting: construct a foundry and waterworks, secure housing for workers, supply a company store, arrange for workers to mine and smelt the iron ore, refine the ore, and then wrought the pig iron into sheets, bars, rods, and nails. Some of the supposed local advantages did not pan out. The workers were mostly farmers who hired out during the off-season. Because they were not as strapped by the embargo as the laborers in the port towns, they demanded wages higher than what the directors found reasonable. Bradbury wondered that transporting Boston stone masons and mechanics to Vergennes might not be cheaper. Worse, by August of 1808, the promised Daniel Johnson had still not arrived. Bradbury located a foundryman by the name of Bates to build the furnace, a refiner by the name of Otis Pettee, and a few other experienced workmen, but the project was already much delayed. In March 1809, the directors received more bad news: the Embargo was ending, which promised an influx of cheaper, better quality iron. But this was almost immaterial. The investors had almost \$200,000 sunk in the project with no product.³²⁴

The War of 1812 was actually a boon to Monkton Ironworks. The war created a new market for iron: iron balls for the American artillery and iron to fasten together timbers for new American frigates. Luckily for the Monkton directors, Thomas Macdonough set up his command in Vergennes. Macdonough's reasoning was in part *because* of the presence of the ironworks, in part for the same reasons that had attracted

³²⁴ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 208-210.

the directors to Vergennes themselves: access to shipping on the Hudson, roads to Boston, and the natural bounty of the river, waterfalls, and iron.³²⁵ Thomas H. Perkins entered negotiations with the American government to provide iron balls for shot at a price of \$120 per ton. Given that the iron only cost \$25/ton to make, per Perkins's estimate, this was no small profit.³²⁶ This profit, however, depended upon the exigencies of war.

At the same time as the Perkinses interested themselves in Monkton, they also invested in other local development projects. Their success in trade begot opportunities for investment: speculators wanted the Perkinses involved in their projects, not simply for the capital they themselves brought to the table, but for the legitimacy their reputation brought and their business contacts. At a time when merchants rather than banks provided seed capital, attracting leading capitalists helped to ensure a project's success. Perkins & co. bought a one third interest in a marble quarry.³²⁷ In 1808 and 1809, they helped to organize the Lechmere Point Corporation in collaboration with fellow leading Boston Federalists such as Harrison Gray Otis, Ebenezer Francis, and Christopher Gore. The corporation owned land in East Cambridge with the intention to develop it—including a toll road.³²⁸ And in October of 1809, Perkins Nichols' brought Thomas H.

³²⁵ David Curtis Skaggs, *Thomas Macdonough : Master of Command in the Early U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 88-89.

³²⁶ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 238.

³²⁷ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 220-221.

³²⁸ Andrew Craigie purchased land at Lechmere Point in 1795 and, in 1807, petitioned the Massachusetts state legislature for permission to build a toll bridge. Harrison Gray Otis, then Secretary of the Senate, indicated he would support the project if he and several friends were allowed to invest—these included his childhood friend T.H. Perkins and four other Federalists in the state legislature. Republicans were understandably outraged and the project foundered. On November 4, 1809, James Perkins and the other investors met at the Exchange Coffee House in Boston to discuss the matter. The group formed the Lechmere Point Corporation. In 1810, shareholders in this corporation purchased the shares of financially

Perkins east to Northampton to an old lead mine that had closed in the wake of the Revolution. Perkins and Nichols consulted a professor of chemistry from Yale, Benjamin Silliman, as well. The project proved to be the inverse of Monkton: hiring on twelve men, the Northampton Lead Mine sank a shaft fifty feet down—through granite, mind you—and immediately found a rich vein of 60% lead, together with silver, zinc, barite, and copper. Perkin and Nichols sold shares to Samuel G. Perkins, to Isaac Davis, and to David Hinckley.³²⁹

A final example of their wartime investing is that of the Newton Mills which, in 1814, the Perkinses thought to transform into a textile mill. The time was ripe: the prices of cottons had trebled as war prevented cheap British textiles from reaching the American market. And, best of all, Thomas H. Perkins owned land inherited from his father-in-law just downriver from Francis Cabot Lowell's more famous industrial experiment at Waltham. The Newton lands held several snuff mills, a grist mill, and a nail factory and access to the Upper Falls of the Charles River. Half of the Newton properties belonged to Perkins, the other half to Simon Elliot, Jr. Elliot, however, faced financial difficulties from poor investments. The Perkins brothers offered to take Elliot's share off his hands

troubled stockholders in the Prison Point Corporation. In 1812, when the Prison Point Corporation petitioned the legislature for an amendment to its charter, the petition was made by William Payne—also the treasurer for the Lechmere corporation and James Perkins's brother-in-law. Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 212-215, 316, Nancy S. Seasholes, *Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London, England: MIT Press, 2003), 393. See also "An Act to Incorporate Certain Persons into a Company by the Name of the Lechmere Point Corporation, 3 March 1810," in *Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2009), 136-138. While not as controversial as the later Warren Bridge and Charles River Bridge Companies, the Lechmere and Prison Point corporations nevertheless faced contests over rights to take toll, the safety of the prison, and building bridges versus dams.

³²⁹ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 214-216, 421-212. Thomas H. Perkins initially bought a 1/3 interest in the project for the firm at \$2,666.66 and soon sold half of it—a 1/6 share—to David Hinckley for \$8,750. See James & T.H. Perkins & Co. to Henry Higginson, 24 August 1810. JEC Extracts on the lead mine's opening and the sale of shares to Davis, S.G.P. and David Hinkley.

for \$20,000. Perhaps luckily, before the Perkinses could transform the mills, the war ended. British merchants flooded American ports with dirt cheap textiles—both to unload them and to deliberately do away with the budding American textile industry.³³⁰ The Perkinses returned the Newton mills to tobacco and corn, at least until 1823, when they formed the Elliot Manufacturing Company.

Yet, as Carl Prince and Seth Taylor have written, American capitalists' investment in domestic industry and infrastructure during the upheaval of the French Wars did not end with the wars themselves. By the time American merchants received funds from the spoliation claims arising out of wartime plunder, the better investment tended to be domestic industry. Prince and Taylor suggest that the payout from Spanish spoliation claims beginning in 1820 coincided with the post-Panic of 1819 expansion of industry: the Locks and Canals Company (1821), the Merrimack Manufacturing Company (1822), the Hamilton Manufacturing Company (1825), the Lowell Manufacturing Company (1828). In 1831, a French Claims Commission developed out of a Franco-American treaty of that year that followed along the same lines as the previous Spanish commission. For both Spanish and French claims, Daniel Webster served as lawyer to key Boston capitalists, including Thomas H. Perkins and those who made claims through Perkins. Prince and Taylor qualify that their argument is not that the influx of spoliation funds "paid directly for the Boston Associates' industrial expansion ... or even that it motivated that expansion." Still, they conclude that the timing is certainly suggestive. "United States money arrived at the time that venture capital was being invested and that it must have been reassuring to replace capital

³³⁰ Gibb, *The Saco-Lowell Shops; Textile Machinery Building in New England, 1813-1949*, 15-17, Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 311-313.

ventured with capital found.”³³¹ Many of the Boston capitalists received funds not only from claims as merchants, but also from claims as investors in insurance companies such as the Boston Marine Insurance Company and the Massachusetts Fire and Marine.³³²

The investment examples listed above point to continuity between investment practices and strategies used in trade with those of early industrialization. After the French Wars ended, the Perkins brothers continued to invest in industry, infrastructure, and financial institutions. They were not industrialists, but capitalists. But in this further extension of their investment interests, as in their trade, they frequently invested in groups of known principals.

Conclusion

When Americans first arrived in Asian ports in the 1780s *as* Americans, many prospective trading partners mistook them for British nationals. Few European merchants saw them as rivals.³³³ But the French Revolutionary Wars changed this. By the time a lasting peace finally arrived in 1815, war itself had diminished the mercantile capacity of French and Dutch rivals. The Spanish and Portuguese were fighting to hang on to their empires abroad. America was a growing commercial power.

³³¹ Carl E. Prince and Seth Taylor, "Daniel Webster, the Boston Associates, and the U.S. Government's Role in the Industrializing Process, 1815-1830," *Journal of Early Republic* 2, no. 3 (1982): 283-299.

³³² Taylor, "Daniel Webster, the Boston Associates, and the U.S. Government's Role in the Industrializing Process, 1815-1830," 294.

³³³ To be sure, there were those who predicted the United States would grow quickly as well as those who did find the presence of Americans as threatening. James Fichter writes of British officials at Penang who predicted an "Ascendancy" of "American interests" in Burma and who spread rumors that the U.S. government was constructing a frigate upriver in order to take the post as their own. Fichter suggests this had more to do with the need for imperial officials at the edge of empire to imagine a meaningful role for themselves. Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 150.

By 1815, James and Thomas H. Perkins were 54 and 51 respectively and had spent more than two decades of their commercial lives trading in the shadows of the French Revolutionary Wars. They were fortunate to have entered trade at a particularly auspicious moment for American merchants. But the brothers brought their own entrepreneurial energy to their enterprise as well. This energy was evident in the breadth of markets they sought out during the wars, tapping “niche markets” from the Dutch East Indies to Spanish America, as well as in smuggling. As the Perkins brothers recognized in a letter to Hope & Co. of Amsterdam, “such times require strong nerves and long purses.”³³⁴ As chapter six will discuss in greater detail, the repercussions of the American “free” trade, especially in niche markets and smuggling, proved far more influential than the brothers or their compatriots could have imagined.

But their entrepreneurial energy was evident on another front as well. The ability of the brothers to cultivate collaboration and even a sense of obligation from fellow merchants and clerks was critical to their expansion. Paternalism served as a social glue that held individuals and firms together with a contingent loyalty. One of the questions underlying this chapter was how this associationalism worked in practice. What could it *do*? The most obvious answer is that it reduced risks and diversified interests. But more than this, it allowed for merchants to corner markets, as with Pacific furs and Mediterranean opium. While not realized in lobbying against Jeffersonian commercial policy, the broader network also promised to shape policy.

By the wars’ end, the Perkins brothers were ready to pass their place in the network off to their sons. The next chapter examines the network from inside the Perkins

³³⁴ James & Thomas H. Perkins to Hope & Co., 22 October 1806. JEC Extracts.

family, considering the reliance of the commercial network on internal familial and gendered dynamics. While the chapter starts with the Perkinses own conceptualization of “family feeling,” to use the words of the era, it particularly focuses on how families negotiated commercial obligation, rebellions, and failures—especially the failure of succession.

CHAPTER 3.
THAT FAMILY FEELING:
AT HOME WITH *HOMO ECONOMICUS*

“When he goes to apprentice and the notions of trade are scarce got into his head; for the first three or four years they are rather to be taught submission to family orders, subjection to their masters, and dutiful attendance to their shops or warehouses.”

Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1724).

“I can wish you no better lot ... than to have a wife and children.
If you are prosperous, there they are to share your prosperity;
if otherwise, there they are to comfort you.”

Washington Irving, *The Wife* (1820).

The Perkinses were not just any family. They were a rich, privileged family residing in New England’s political, economic, and cultural capital. Members of the Perkins clan worked hard to cultivate a “family feeling” to use the words of the era, albeit some more than others. Means as well as aims varied: those with resources to do so settled family around them in a cluster of homes. Others corralled relatives into family vacations at Nahant and Naushon. The existence of family firms themselves provided a centralizing force. While family had different meanings to different members, there is evidence that the generations shared a “family mind” akin to the intergenerational continuity that David F. Musto observed in the Adams family.³³⁵ According to one piece of family lore, the congregation of kin around Temple Place in Boston produced such an accordance of view that one son-in-law, Thomas Graves Cary, would jest at some discord with the outer world, “I dare say they are wrong; *they* do not live in Temple Place.”³³⁶

³³⁵ David F. Musto, “The Adams Family,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 93 (1981): 40-58.

³³⁶ Lucy Allen Paton, *Elizabeth Cary Agassiz: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 10.

Cultivating a sense of family feeling did work for the maintenance and perpetuation of family firms. But, more than this, familial subjectivities—the way family was experienced and imagined—were not always distinguishable from commercial goals.³³⁷ This chapter examines this intersection of commerce and kinship through a consideration of intergenerational expectations and experiences. I examine strategies for the cultivation of obligation between the generations before turning to an analysis of succession, rebellion, and failure as parents and siblings attempted to mobilize obligation in their kin in service of both firm and family. As I will show, the network was astoundingly capacious in terms of allowing for ineptitude, apathy, and outright rebellion. The interpersonal ties that structured the network itself protected against precisely these frailties, even to the detriment of the larger group. Yet there were boundaries, namely, deceit. Obligation itself was patently gendered, not simply in terms of the divergence of expectations as daughters and sons, but in the use of gender to exhort kin into compliance. Strategies and values of gender and commerce were thus yoked together as manly duty and motherly care, for example, in ways that shaped how individuals imagined their behavior in the marketplace.³³⁸ Finally, I show that economic inequalities within the extended family played an important role in structuring opportunity and obligation. I include kin who not only took up the mantle of family and firm, but also

³³⁷ As Nicola Beisel reminds us, “reducing moral concerns to economic factors, or treating concern about children as ‘symbolic’ rather than a ‘real’ issue, blinds us not only to a fundamental motivator of human action—love for one’s children—but leads us to misperceive the causes of a number of significant issues in both historical and contemporary political debate.” Nicola Kay Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 14.

³³⁸ It is instructive to think here of the similarities as well as the differences between the Perkinses and the farmers discussed by Daniel Vickers in his discussion of meanings of competency and competition in preindustrial America. Daniel Vickers, “Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1990): 3-29.

those who failed within it, rebelled against it, or were rejected from it. These areas of discord help us to understand the functioning of the network, the priorities of its leaders, as well as limits to those shibboleths of commercial networks: trust, loyalty, and obligation.

The social meanings of obligation are especially of interest for a kin group like the Perkinses given the expectation associated with family firms and collaborative enterprises.³³⁹ In many ways the Perkins brothers, especially Colonel Thomas Handasyd Perkins, resembled the archetypical “economic man.” Colonel Perkins could not seem to pass a town or a stream without pausing to inspect the very rocks on the ground for some element of profit. But as Barbara and Kenneth Tucker have pointed out, we need to consider how early American cultural norms may have constrained emphasis on individualism and self-interest as well as produced it. To what extent was paternalism less a form of social control employed by the elite than a cultural demand *placed* on the elite?³⁴⁰ How were entrepreneurs as individuals constituted by social relationships, whether through family strategies for success, through marriage as a signifier of success,

³³⁹The insights of two groups scholars are especially useful for thinking about obligation: first, the social meanings of economic obligation as delineated by Craig Muldrew in analyzing credit networks in early modern England and, second, the gendered meanings of social obligation as discussed by Toby Ditz and Linda Kerber. Toby Ditz, "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Remedies from Early American Gender History," *Gender & History* 16, no. April (2004): 1-35, Ditz, "Ownership and Obligation: Inheritance and Patriarchal Households in Connecticut, 1750-1820.", Ditz, "Shipwrecked: Imperiled Masculinity and the Representation of Business Failures among Philadelphia's Eighteenth-Century Merchants.", Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies : Women and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation : The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin's press, 1998).

³⁴⁰James L. Huston, "Economic Landscapes yet to Be Discovered: The Early American Republic and Historians' Unsubtle Adoption of Political Economy," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 3 (2004): 219-231, Barbara M. and Kenneth H. Tucker Tucker, Jr., "The Limits of Homo Economicus: An Appraisal of Early American Entrepreneurship," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 3 (2004): 208-218. The Tuckers call for more intergenerational strategies and a reexamination of paternalism. The usual narrative is that, in the 1830s, new social conditions challenged paternalism, as they coexisted uneasily with republican beliefs in individualism, simplicity, frugality, and devotion to duty and the public good.

or other? How did commercial successes and failures buttress and even create family sentiments? The Perkinses were one of the central commercial families of early national New England, one known for their use of kinship in structuring economic strategies. As such, they provide a compelling case study for examining precisely this.

In many ways, the story of intergenerational expectation for the Perkinses followed the classic narrative of the family firm: success killed succession. New entrepreneurs within the family invariably came from the ranks of poorer relations, daughters, and son-in-laws. Yet viewed from the perspective of family, we have to ask whether patriarchs and matriarchs viewed the demise of the family firms as a failure, as having served their purpose, or something else entirely. By 1838, when Perkins & Co. of Boston announced its closure, the firm slipped away without a fight. The Perkins network continued but without the Perkins name. While the family firms unquestionably aimed to profit the partners, producing family seems to have been more than a means for the business, but also an end. Family facilitated business, but the more significant element for many within the Perkins network seems to have been that business profited family.

Family Feeling

The Perkins family's commercial network began at a moment when, to family historians, American family life was becoming less amenable to carrying the burdens of enterprise.³⁴¹ The mid-eighteenth- to the mid-nineteenth-centuries marked the shift from

³⁴¹ Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality*. Others have countered that family continues to be the center for many businesses around the world, including the United States. See for example Landes, *Dynasties : Fortunes and Misfortunes of the World's Great Family Businesses*.

the “functional family” to the “sentimental family.”³⁴² Where Americans depicted the seventeenth century family as a microcosm of society itself, by the nineteenth century Americans imagined home and hearth as a space *apart* from the harsh worlds of markets and politics. The earlier household was a public institution: families provided poor relief, cared for the sick and elderly, raised and educated children—or bound children out as laborers—and functioned as the core unit of economic production. The latter household was a home: a private realm shorn of those beyond the nuclear family and a space of psychic renewal. Much of this new ideology of family relied upon new languages of sentiment and sensibility that flourished in the eighteenth century.³⁴³ By

³⁴² Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions : A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 44-45.

³⁴³ Ruth Bloch argues that the new languages of sentiment came from three interwoven spheres: an increasingly evangelical Protestantism, literary sentimentalism in novels, and moral philosophers grappling with Lockean notions of human nature. To Sarah Knott, sentimentalism and sensibility were part of a reaction to gradual social changes taking place within Britain: the decline of aristocratic privilege, the questioning of monarchical authority following the English Civil War, and the dislocations arising from expanding commercialism. To paraphrase Sarah Maza, once “progressive thought had laid waste to notions of hierarchy and deference, to aristocratic pedigrees and the Great Chain of Being,” the “loving family” seemed the remaining mechanism for constructing and imagining social connectedness. Initially, sentiment seemed necessary to reason rather than apart from it. Properly cultivated sentiments contributed to a sense of morality that shaped reason by allowing individuals to distinguish right from wrong. By the century’s end, criticisms emerged that sentiment reduced individuals (particularly men) to self-indulgence, emotionalism, and effeminacy. Sentiments, sympathy, and even morality itself increasingly came to be seen as feminine attributes, while reason was the provenance of men. Within all three realms—religious thought, novels, and moral philosophy—family was pivotal. In Scottish moral philosophy, for example, family was the key site of social reproduction and, as Adam Smith wrote, the source of human sympathy. Significantly, Mary Kelley suggests that Americans differed from the British in an important respect. Rather than reject sensibility whole hog, they differentiated between “true” and “false” sensibility, the latter being the path to corruption. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility : Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Ruth H. Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” *Signs* 13, no. 1 (1987): 37-58, David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans Green, and Co., 1739), Frances Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (London: Millar, 1755), Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak : Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), Sarah Maza, “Only Connect: Family Values in the Age of Sentiment: Introduction,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Spring (1997): 207-212, Pearsall, *Atlantic Families : Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century*, Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6th ed. (Sao Paolo: Metalibrary, 1790), Rosemarie Zagari, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1992): 192-215.

1820, Washington Irving published a short story entitled “The Wife,” in which a proper wife was no longer the helpmeet of yesteryear, but a companion whose presence was a respite from the harsh vicissitudes of the countinghouse. The responsibilities of Irving’s wife were clear: to dust off her man and get him back into the market.³⁴⁴ In spite of the new ideals and at times in conjunction with them, even patently bourgeois families like the Perkinses continued to use the family as a form of social security and, more, as a vehicle for speculation and risk.

For the Perkinses the household slimmed down over generations. The process involved both reimagining and reshaping personal practices of household formation: idealizing the family as a domestic circle on the one hand, and excluding apprentices, clerks, and even fostered children from the bourgeois household on the other. Individuals re-imagined family first, writing of the “pleasures” and “delights” of “domestic life,” and only gradually reconfigured who was included as part of the household.³⁴⁵ When Robert Bennet Forbes apprenticed with Perkins & Sons from 1816 to 1817, for example, he lived part of the year at the Boston home of his uncle Colonel Thomas H. Perkins with his family and summered with his cousin Barbara Perkins (daughter of Samuel G. Perkins)

³⁴⁴ Ruth H. Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815,” *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2 (1978): 100-126, Washington Irving, *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (READ BOOKS, 2008 [1819, 1820]), Laurel Ulrich, *Good Wives : Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y.: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1982).

³⁴⁵ Thomas Handasyd Perkins to Sally Perkins, his wife, 16 January 1812. Cabot Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 10. MHS. See Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood : "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness : Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Jan Lewis and Peter S. Onuf, *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson : History, Memory, and Civic Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 130-131.

and her husband, Walter Channing.³⁴⁶ By the time Ben's younger brother John came under the Perkins's employ in 1829, a rented room at a boardinghouse sufficed.

Paternalist expectation changed in the interim—or at least in the paternalists in question.

Perkins & Sons formed just as Bennet began his indenture.³⁴⁷ John apprenticed with Perkins & Sons, then managed by son-in-law Samuel Cabot. John still attended Sunday night family dinners at Colonel Perkins's home, but the older merchant was not as central a figure in John's life as he was to Bennet.³⁴⁸

The household's structural change can easily be overstated. Even as apprentices and clerks found new accommodations, the Perkinses continued to care for children of kith and kin either whose families could not afford to care for them or who attended a school nearby.³⁴⁹ For example, Margaret Forbes, older sister to Bennet and John Forbes, went to live with James Perkins, Sr. and his wife Sarah as a young girl. By fostering Peg, Sarah and James Perkins helped the Forbes household to consolidate their resources. While it is difficult to discern the precise nature of Peg's relationship with her aunt and uncle, the language between them evoked the sentimental expectations of nurturing, affective ties. In her will, Aunt Sarah referred to her as her "dear niece and adopted

³⁴⁶ Walter Channing (1786-1876) was an obstetrician and professor of midwifery and medical jurisprudence at Harvard. William Ellery Channing was his older brother. Thomas Wentworth Higginson describes the couple in his *Cheerful Yesterdays*, especially Barbara. Higginson writes of Barbara as attractive and charismatic, and tells of taking her to a ball at Brook Farm, her in a "creole dress" of madras handkerchiefs her brother Stephen had brought her from his travels. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays* (Boston, New York,: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1898), 84.

³⁴⁷ Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 27.

³⁴⁸ Edith Perkins Cunningham, *Owl's Nest: A Tribute to Sarah Elliott Perkins* (n.p.: The Riverside Press, 1907), 30.

³⁴⁹ Another part of this was guardianships for the children of business clients and friends in terms of overseeing the children's education, covering financial needs, and ensuring their well-being.

daughter, Margaret Perkins Forbes.”³⁵⁰ While Margaret was not included in the trust Aunt Sarah set up for her grandchildren, she did leave her niece a considerable legacy of \$1000, a pianoforte, and clothing. It is hard to imagine Peg was not expected to contribute to the household, but it does not seem to have been on par with an apprenticeship.³⁵¹ Visits between the Perkins and Forbes households indicate a considerable degree of lassitude in Peg’s experience. While many young women fostered out in the early nineteenth century worked as virtual or actual servants and had very little freedom of mobility, this was not the case for Peg. There are a number of other ways the Perkinses may have imagined the relationship. A fire at the residence of James and Sarah scarred poor Margaret as a girl, thus rendering her all the more vulnerable; the couple may have felt responsible for the young girl’s care. Or Aunt Sarah and her husband James may have felt raising Margaret eased the pain of losing first one, then another daughter.³⁵² Or the couple may have simply opened their home and hearts to the daughter of one of their less fortunate siblings.

The itinerancy of unwed daughters itself points to the continued permeability of households. Unwed women, generally, were expected to earn their keep in other people’s households. Sally Perkins, for example, shuttled between the households of her sisters Eliza Cabot, Mary Ann Cary, Caroline Gardiner, and Nancy Cary to help them care for their children. Letters between the sisters negotiated who they proposed Sally stay with

³⁵⁰ Will of Sarah Paine Perkins, 13 December 1841, File no. 33034, Suffolk County Probate Records. NEGHS. She left Margaret \$1000, a pianoforte, and clothing. This was a considerable inheritance. But Margaret was not included in the trust Aunt Sarah set up for her grandchildren.

³⁵¹ Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray, *Children Bound to Labor : The Pauper Apprentices System in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

³⁵² One daughter died soon after birth and another who died tragically at the age of 23 in 1812, leaving the couple with only their son James.

based on who they felt needed her most and who had alternate resources—i.e., spinster sister-in-laws.³⁵³ Visiting customs themselves allowed for a variety of household strategies. Jenny Trumbull visited with Sarah Paine Perkins and the Forbes sisters on several occasions, much to her mother's relief. Jenny's grandmother was Sarah Perkins's sister. As Jenny's father flitted from one unsuccessful small venture to another, Jenny's lengthy visits with her great aunt Sarah both offered the girl a learning experience and lessened the financial burden for her family.³⁵⁴ The household *was* changing, but gradually.

More significant were changes to how the Perkinses imagined family and thus managed familial expectations. Jan Lewis suggests the profundity of the shifts taking place. In the nineteenth century, the notion of family as a space of comfort and refuge from the ravages of politics was such a common trope that by the century's end, it had become hard to imagine otherwise. Lewis quips: "We need think only of Shakespeare's families—the warring Montagues and Capulets, the conflict-ridden Lears, the scheming Macbeths—to realize how remarkable, how revolutionary was the notion that a family might be a source of any pleasure at all, let alone the source of *everything* pleasurable."³⁵⁵ Just as Thomas Jefferson wrote to his daughter "I pant for that society where all is peace and harmony," so Thomas H. Perkins wrote to his wife in 1812 that he

³⁵³ See for example Eliza Cabot, Boston to Mary Ann Perkins Cary, New York, 26 October 1822. Cabot Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 2. MHS.

³⁵⁴ See the excerpts of Jenny Trumbull's diaries in James Alan Marten, *Children and Youth in a New Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

³⁵⁵ Lewis and Onuf, *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson : History, Memory, and Civic Culture*, 130-131.

“pant[ed] for the delight of domestic life.”³⁵⁶ As with politics, Americans contrasted the mayhem of the marketplace to the security and comfort of home. Home life was not apart from economic aspiration, but increasingly envisaged as its culmination.

Americans of the early republic imagined society as circles of connection, be it social circles or family circles. “Give my love to all your circle” was a common closing to familiar letters.³⁵⁷ Family entrepreneurs reproduced these circles physically as well as socially. The Perkinses lived together and they vacationed together. They socialized and schooled together, worked together, and—as family plots at Mount Auburn cemetery testify—they were buried together. While the Perkinses like any family had their share of discontents, rumblings, and rebels, they also had considerable resources for fostering family feeling. They lived within a Boston society that prized both the household and family as sources of order. Many of the same efforts that went into fostering family also produced family firms, but this is not to say that the values for both were symbiotic. As parents discovered time and again, reconciling the cultivation of manners and taste rooted in class aspiration with the capacity for independence and sacrifice was no easy matter.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Lewis and Onuf, *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson : History, Memory, and Civic Culture*, 130. Thomas H. Perkins, London to Sally Perkins, Boston, 16 January 1812. Cabot Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 10. MHS.

³⁵⁷ On familiar letters, see Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters : Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power : Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), Rebecca Earle, *Epistolary Selves : Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1999), Pearsall, *Atlantic Families : Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century*.

³⁵⁸ On the increased emphasis on manners during the late eighteenth century, see C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities : A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness : Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Living close to one another was a significant mode of fostering togetherness. According to Lucy Paton, clustering family dwellings together was “the Boston way.”³⁵⁹ Thus, for example, when Colonel Perkins bought his Temple Place estate in 1833, he also purchased the two adjoining lots to settle his daughters and their families. Thus, by 1851, still in residence at “the Court” (as Temple Place was called) were the families of Samuel and Eliza Perkins Cabot at 9 Temple Place, Thomas G. and Mary Ann Perkins Cary at 10 Temple Place, William H. and Caroline Perkins Gardiner at 11 Temple Place, alongside the Colonel and his wife at 12 Temple Place.³⁶⁰ In 1843, Colonel Perkins similarly offered a plot of land in Brookline to his son, Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. and his family. There was one condition: his son had to build on the land and live there. His son elected to accept the offer, and thereby joined the family’s country settlement in Brookline: his parents’ estate on Warren Street, his “uncle and aunt James’s” estate at Jamaica Pond, known fondly as Pine Bank, “uncle and aunt Sam’s” estate between the two, as well as the residences of several cousins (Stephen, Edward, and Charles), all of whom lived within a mile of the property.³⁶¹

While agricultural families lived in joined plots to consolidate land and thereby keep estates viable as family size outstripped acreage, for mercantile families there was no longer an economic basis for the strategy. Motives varied. Parents with the resources to do so used proximity and property ownership to maintain influence over the next generation. Some family leaders desired the psychic benefit of shared emotional bonds, while others aimed to promote the lineage’s identity, which could itself advance an

³⁵⁹ Paton, *Elizabeth Cary Agassiz: A Biography*.

³⁶⁰ *The Boston Directory*, (Boston: George Adams, 1851).

³⁶¹ Perkins, *A Private Proof*, 104.

individual's longevity through history and memory. As Eliza Cabot reminisced, her kin and neighbors were her childhood chums. Together they put on plays and assembled museums and ran wild in Boston Common.³⁶² Some families kept kin close, especially daughters, in order to care for aging parents or to share family work. Living near kin was especially useful for women in managing households, even those able to hire help. And still other family members supported kin who might not be able to support themselves. Clustered dwellings provided a physical manifestation of family togetherness that that could foster "family feeling" and shared values. They also provided the means for a shared public face.

Moving house was often associated with a change in means. The upward mobility of Thomas Handasyde Peck and his wife was evident in their change of addresses. The couple moved from Mackerel Lane just off King Street to Merchants' Row in 1751, and from there to a building on King Street just doors down from the Customs House.³⁶³ King Street—renamed State Street after the Revolution—cut through the heart of Boston down to Long Wharf (see image below). The aptly named Long Wharf was built in 1710. At one-third of a mile, it allowed even the largest eighteenth century vessels to transfer cargoes directly into the shops and warehouses that lined the pier (see image below: Long Wharf is clearly visible). Peck and his family never moved far from this artery of Boston's maritime life. But as his fortunes improved, the Pecks ensured their residence provided a daily reminder of their success.

³⁶² Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

³⁶³ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*.

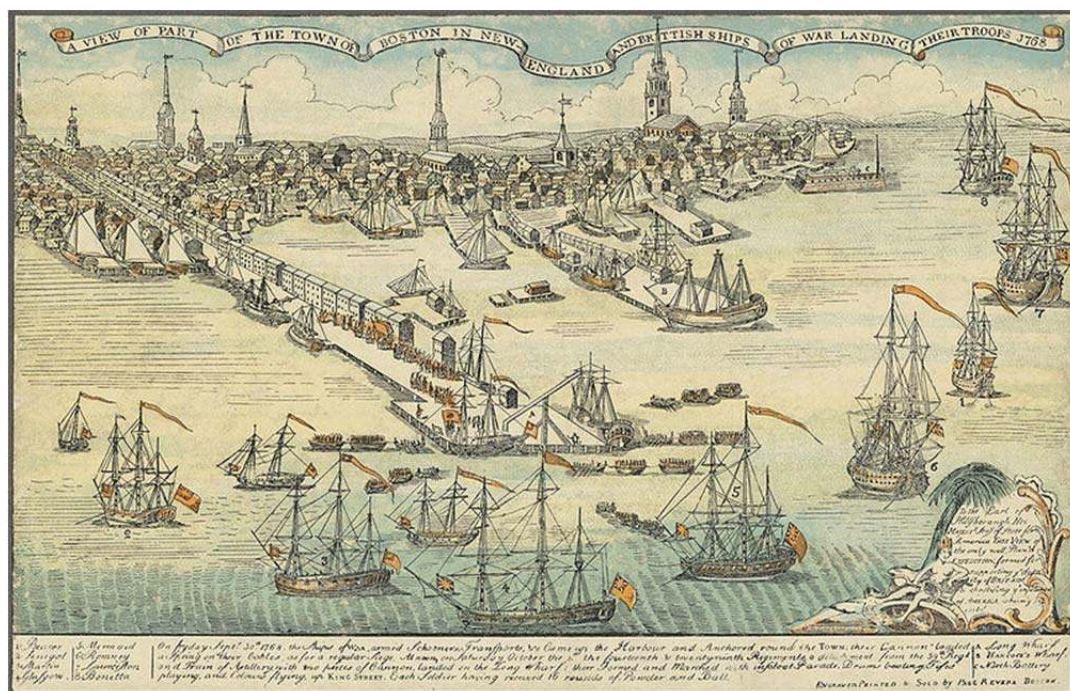


IMAGE 2. *A view of the Town of Boston in New England and British ships of war landing their troops, 1768 (1898, based on 1768 engraving by Paul Revere). Source: Boston Public Library. This image is in the public domain in the United States.*

Until her death in 1807, most of Elizabeth Peck Perkins's offspring lived within close proximity to their mother. Elizabeth herself lived in a West Indian style home on Purchase Street, above Sears Wharf. From the grand piazza that skirted the residence, visitors could gaze down upon a large garden of vegetables and flowers or up at the seascape vista of Boston's harbor. In 1796, Elizabeth still lived with her two unmarried daughters, Mary and Margaret, and her one servant, a Scottish woman.³⁶⁴ Her daughter Esther had just moved to Charleston, South Carolina with her new husband, Josiah Sturgis, but most of the siblings lived within a stone's throw of the harbor in the "Old

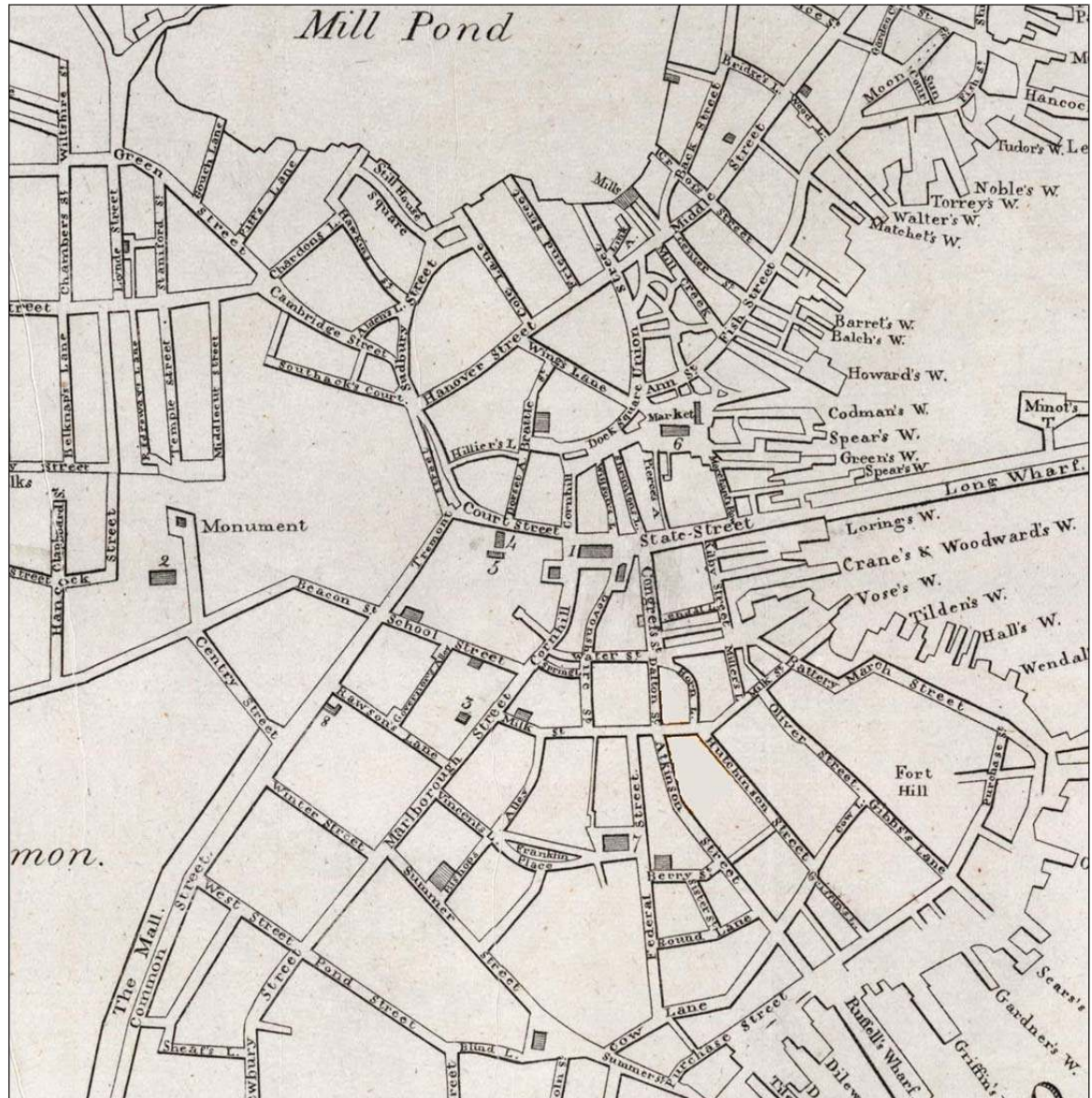
³⁶⁴ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot," 8. According to Eliza, her grandmother's countinghouse at this time was located at State Street. The Boston Directories of 1796 to 1803 did not list her store, only her residence.

South End.” Her eldest daughter Elizabeth Sturgis lived down the street at a house on Atkinson Street with her family, with husband Russell’s storefront on the other side of State Street on Merchant’s Row. Both James and Samuel Perkins had recently moved with their families into houses in Charles Bulfinch’s famed Franklin Place experiment, numbers three and seven respectively.³⁶⁵ Colonel Perkins and his family resided at Federal Street, on just the other side of Atkinson. The proximity may well have had more to do with intimate Boston than strategic intervention by Elizabeth. Even as Boston’s merchants and mariners expanded their interests in global commerce, the population increased gradually in the eighteenth century: between 1743 and 1800, the figure only rose from 16,382 to 24,937.³⁶⁶ While the city’s neighborhoods were far more mixed than they would be by mid-century, many of Boston’s well-to-do mercantile families already congregated in the South End. Still, as her granddaughter intimated, Elizabeth was a powerful figure in the family, a matriarch in deed as well as position. It is easy to believe that her children would have aimed to live within easy visiting distance.³⁶⁷ Elizabeth was fortunate that her children had done well enough that they had all settled back in Boston—many parents were not so lucky.

³⁶⁵ *The Boston Directory*, (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1796), Harold Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston; a Topographical History*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).

³⁶⁶ Whitehill, *Boston; a Topographical History*, 47.

³⁶⁷ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."



MAP 3. Boston, 1796. Carleton Osgood, Boston (John West, Publisher: 1796). Source: Boston Public Library. This image is in the public domain in the United States. This applies to U.S. works where the copyright has expired, often because its first publication occurred prior to January 1, 1923.

For individuals who had no real reasons to move besides growing families and personal aspiration, the Perkinses moved at an astoundingly frequent rate. Thomas Handasyd Perkins, moved six times in the decades following his marriage to Sally Elliot, and the fact that each dwelling was more elaborate than the next offered a similar

testament to his upward mobility. He and Sally began in a rented house on Summer Street on the corner of Chauncy Place in 1788, but soon moved to a home they bought from two elderly ladies on Purchase Street. The latter house may have been larger with an ocean view, but it was just down the street from his mother—which may not have been a benefit in Sally Perkins's mind. By 1796, a mere three years later, the family rented a house on Federal Street. The fact that this move brought them closer to the Elliots hints that the move may have been instigated by Sally. In their eldest daughter's fond recollections, her mother and grandmother were close; it seemed as if they lived in Grandmother Elliot's kitchen.³⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the Federal Street house was a refined three-story structure with elegant furnishings of mahogany, bronze, and red Moroccan leather. In 1799, Colonel Perkins moved his family to a three-story brick mansion on Pearl Street. By 1810, the family of Colonel Perkins resided at 17 Pearl Street while that of James Perkins dwelled at house number 13 (see image below). At the turn of the century, Pearl Street (the erstwhile Atkinson Street) was still relatively open. Most lots, like the one purchased by Perkins, had sizeable gardens and stables. The neighborhood could be what the Perkinses made of it.

Thomas H. Perkins and his family were doing well for themselves and their homes largely reflected these social and sumptuary ambitions—or at least his. By Eliza's account, Colonel Perkins and not his wife Sally oversaw the decoration of much of their homes. He desired to be fashionable, to keep up with the Otises, while his wife preferred the comfort of the nursery.³⁶⁹ During his 1795 European travels, Colonel Perkins secured

³⁶⁸ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot," 10.

³⁶⁹ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

a sizeable selection of furniture and ornamentation that one suspects came to decorate his home and potentially those of family and friends. The purchases included gaming tables, lingerie cabinets, and iron beds with feather mattresses. Perkins decorated the Federal Street house with fine Sevres porcelain and gilded ormolu candlesticks to a Chinese-style folding screen and an elaborate collection of maps, books, toys, telescopes to engravings of the Italian countryside.³⁷⁰ Perkins's ideas for the Pearl Street mansion were even more elaborate. His daughter Eliza recalled its rich oak-paneled walls and a white marble mantelpiece shot through with handsome streaks of purple. Perkins's account books reveal a man with money to spend. Considerable sums went into his home: he had fresh water piped in from Jamaica Pond, running baths, sinks, and bidets, and a water closet imported from England.³⁷¹ He even purchased a refrigerator. The Perkins mansions brought together West Indian, Chinese, and European styles in a medley of cosmopolitan styles.

³⁷⁰ Perkins's descriptions of his 1795 travels through Europe filled four diaries: volumes 3-6 in his papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society. See also Tanya Boyett, "Thomas Handasyd Perkins: An Essay on Material Culture," *Old-time New England* 70, no. 257 (1980): 45-62.

³⁷¹ According to Tanya Boyett, he had water piped in from Jamaica Pond first at the Federal Street house. Boyett, "Thomas Handasyd Perkins: An Essay on Material Culture," 54.



IMAGE 3. James Perkins's Residence at 13 Pearl Street.

Source: Boston Athenaeum, *The Athenaeum Centenary* (Boston, the Boston Athenaeum: 1907).

On a par with the residences themselves, the gardens on the Perkins estates proclaimed the family's aspirations. Tamara Thornton argues that by the first decade of the nineteenth century, the horticultural ambitions of the "gentlemen farmers" of Boston's elite far outstripped the republican ideals. Horticulture had long been a passion for many of these men, and the lands, as much as if not more than the residences themselves, signified a very specific set of ideas about class, stewardship, and civilization.³⁷² Men like Colonel Perkins emulated the landscaped gardens and elaborate greenhouses on display in Europe. The Perkins gardens and orchards were known for their beauty and the incredible diversity of species on display. The brothers experimented with plants and livestock that they found in their travels, often asking

³⁷² Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen : The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860*.

agents abroad to send them samples to try in their gardens. Thus, Samuel G. Perkins introduced the Golden Nectarine, the French Duchesse d'Angouleme pear, and the Franconia raspberry to the United States.³⁷³ John Perkins Cushing's Belmont estate contained Asian plants and livestock varieties that drew visitors from far and wide (that and the elaborate estate itself, the porcelain said to line the walls, and the Chinese servants). It is little wonder that the esteemed horticulturalist and historian, A.J. Downing, featured the estates of these families in his treatises on landscape gardening.³⁷⁴ And these home and gardens served as landmarks: by the 1830s, locals and tourists alike could visit Perkins properties at certain times of the year. Concierges at select Boston hotels could direct their guests to visit the Perkins (and other) homes to view their landscapes and private art collections.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Justin Winsor and C. F. Jewett, *The Memorial History of Boston, Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts. 1630-1880* (Boston,: J. R. Osgood and Co., 1883).

³⁷⁴ Charles Downing Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* (New York: John Wiley, 1860), ix, 41, 547, 649, A. J. Downing, *Rural Essays* (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1858), 114, 331,352, A. J. Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1852), 54-56, 453. See also John Perkins Cushing's diaries in the John Perkins Cushing Papers at the Boston Athenaeum for extensive descriptions and drawings of the Cushing grounds.

³⁷⁵ Perkins, *A Private Proof*.



Fig. 10. Belmont Place, near Boston, the seat of J. P. Cushing, Esq.

IMAGE 4. John Perkins Cushing's Estate at Belmont.

Source: Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1852), p. 54.

Downward mobility also spurred changes in residence. Just as wealthier kin might facilitate the movement to a choice residence, so the same safety net could aim to prevent the loss of a home. But this did not always work. In 1806, Stephen Higginson, Jr. moved with his family to the increasingly fashionable neighborhood of Beacon Hill. Charles Bulfinch himself designed the residence along with much of the area. The building represented Higginson's success in his mercantile partnership with his brother Henry. The mansion stood four stories high with seventeen rooms, two staircases, a carriage house, and a driveway. Stephen had just married the enchanting Louisa Storow, his second wife, and must have felt on top of the world. Yet by 1809, just a few short years after the Higginsons moved into their new home, Jefferson's Embargo reduced Higginson's fortune so that the family could no longer afford the opulent residence. Initially, kin stepped in. In 1811, his father, his brother George, and his brother-in-law

Samuel G. Perkins purchased the mansion for the considerable sum of \$36,000. They rented the house back to Stephen, thus transferring capital to the young family while allowing them to remain in their Beacon Hill home. By 1815, financial strains cut too deep. The Higginsons auctioned off much of their furnishings, from bureaus and bookcases to chinaware, glassware, and large busts of Alexander Hamilton and George Washington. As Louisa Storrow Higginson lamented in her diary, "On Saturday the 8th of April 1815, we left our home, endeared to us by a long and happy residence and by the society of dear and kind friends."³⁷⁶

Sometimes, however, the neighborhood changed around the homes. James and Thomas Perkins both gave their Pearl Street homes away to prominent Boston institutions: James gave his house at 13 Pearl Street to the Boston Athenaeum shortly before he died in 1822, and in 1833, Thomas gave his residence at 17 Pearl Street to the school for the blind. While generous, Colonel Perkins's donation and subsequent move may also have been motivated by the changes to the neighborhood. By the 1830s, warehouses and railroad terminuses encroached into an area known for its grassy slopes and private estates. According to Edward Pessen, Colonel Perkins's decision to move sparked a mass exodus of wealthier residents to Beacon Hill, but his own decision was surely sparked by the same concerns that led others to follow him out of the neighborhood. No one wanted to be the last to leave.³⁷⁷ In April of 1833, the idea of a

³⁷⁶ Louisa Storrow's diary, quoted in Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays*, 10. Elton W. Hall, *The Colonial Society's House: 87 Mount Vernon Street, Boston* ([cited]; available from <http://www.colonialsociety.org/87.pdf>, William P. Mason, "Adrian Cremer V. Stephen Higginson and Samuel G. Perkins," in *Report of cases argued and determined in the Circuit Court of the United States for the First Circuit*, Verdict for the defendants. (Boston: Hillard, Gray, and Company, 1817)

³⁷⁷ Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1973), 199, 204.

donation suggested itself. Elizabeth and Sophia Peabody organized two Blind Fairs in Salem and Boston to raise funds for Samuel Gridley Howe's experimental school for the blind. The fairs auctioned off women's handicrafts, offered wine at a dollar a glass, and a handful of ladies mingled among the crowds with silk purses for spontaneous donations. Colonel Perkins promised the Peabody sisters that if they could raise \$50,000, he would donate his estate to house a new school.³⁷⁸

Another particularly elaborate example of the physical rendition of the family circle was John and Sarah Forbes's efforts to settle a community of family and friends in Milton, just south of Boston.³⁷⁹ When Bennet Forbes first retired in 1834 (he retired several times), he used a sizeable chunk of his earnings to construct a home for his mother and sisters in Milton. John and Sarah solicited kin as well as families they hoped would provide a positive influence for their children to create their own neighborhood settlement in Milton. Their desires were explicit: John Murray Forbes's success in business had left him something of the family patriarch, even though he was the third youngest. Living together allowed the Forbeses to both ensure the well-being of kin as well as to provide a nurturing community for the next generation.³⁸⁰ The hardships of their own childhoods fostered a considerable "family feeling" in both John and Sarah Forbes—for him financial, for her emotional, growing up as an orphan with her twin

³⁷⁸ Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 262-265, 523. An additional incentive for the philanthropy may well have been the fact that Perkins and his brother Samuel both suffered from cataracts. Samuel was blind by the latter years of his life while Colonel Perkins underwent a risky (but ultimately successful) surgery to save his vision.

³⁷⁹ Yaggy, "John Forbes: Entrepreneur."

³⁸⁰ Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes*, John Murray Forbes and Sarah Forbes Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes* (Boston, New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899).

sister. Not everyone the couple approached moved to Milton—New York cousins Paul Sieman Forbes and Josephine Forbes never joined them, despite appeals—but they proved remarkably successful in creating their desired community.

Rituals such as family meals and shared holidays within these homes created a sense of family, even as they highlighted authority structures. To clerks and kin alike, Sunday dinners at Colonel Perkins's house manifested the joined patriarchy of family and firm around the dinner table. And given that, according to one daughter, children usually ate in the nursery, the ability to dine with the adults in the family must have been a marker of maturity.³⁸¹ In 1852 the Perkinses of Temple Place celebrated what Emma Forbes Cary referred to as “the last Thanksgiving.” Grandfather and grandmother—Colonel Thomas Handasyd Perkins and his wife Sallie—presided over the Thanksgiving meal, just as they presided over a network of kinship, influence, trade, and investment. Four generations gathered around a great table that stretched across two large parlors, from the end of one room to the end of the other. “How the tables groaned under the production of Hannah Allen's genius, who was surely a high priestess in the culinary art,” Emma mused. When great grandchild Patty Cabot was lifted to the table and toddled “about among the nuts and raisins, looking not much taller than one of the decanters,” the vigor and fertility of the family line was on display.³⁸² Events like this fostered a sense of kinship even as they purported to simply reflect it.

³⁸¹ Cabot, “Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot.”

³⁸² Emma Forbes Cary, “Memories: Old Temple Place,” 27 November 1916. MHS. In 1852, Grandmother Perkins passed away and Grandfather Perkins soon followed, hence the “last Thanksgiving.” To Emma, their deaths were linked. “I had taken their formal manners to each other for indifference. In reality, their companionship of sixty years in its breaking, broke his heart.”

Vacationing together also served the direct function of enjoying (or not) company while affirming a long-term sense of kinship. Many of the aspects of Boston residences were equally true of “country residences” in Brookline: clustered plots of land, shared experiences, and concern for both appearance and comfort in construction. By the 1790s, as summer heated Boston’s brick façade to intolerable levels, those who could afford to do so escaped to Brookline or Nahant. Back-to-back yellow fever scares in Boston in 1798 and 1799 fueled a rush on land in “the country.” George Cabot, Stephen Higginson, Jonathan Mason, and the Perkins brothers all purchased lots in Brookline as refuges for their families. While the desire for country manors can be tied to class interests, the fear of pestilence in the city was very real.³⁸³ Thomas and Sally Perkins lost their daughter Ann in February 1799 to the fever, and quickly packed the family off to brother James’s Roxbury farm until the disease dissipated from Boston’s city center.³⁸⁴ Few Americans, of course, could simply buy a patch of land in an attempt to outrun yellow fever, much less the 61 acres purchased in Brookline by Colonel Perkins in 1799.

The letters between the Perkins sisters, urging one another out to the seashore at Nahant, give a sense of a community of women gathered about the beach, the piano, and the parlor.³⁸⁵ In rituals of sociability such as holidays, visiting, shared vacations, and correspondence, the extended family affirmed their connection and participation as

³⁸³ Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen : The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860*, 148. Thornton writes, “For these men gardening was a pastime appropriate to their stations in life, inasmuch as a rational and therefore socially sophisticated and morally acceptable, amusement.”

³⁸⁴ Their eldest daughter had died of smallpox in 1793 as well, and their next eldest daughter, Eliza, then only 15 months old, wrote in her memoirs that she was inoculated and broke out the same day that her sister died. Cabot, “Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot.”

³⁸⁵ See for example Eliza Perkins Cabot’s letter to her sister Mary Ann Perkins Cary, 24 September 1820. Cabot Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 1. MHS.

family and friends.³⁸⁶ Visitors came and went, but the core vacationers appear to have been the women and children. Perhaps this should not be surprising given the emphasis scholars have placed on women in creating what Micaela di Leonardo termed “the female world of cards and holidays.”³⁸⁷ But summer vacationing and visiting were an important part of social exchange and affirmation, for family circles and broader social circles. The descendents of John Murray Forbes continue to promote a sense of connection through summer vacations at the shared family island of Naushon. It became (and still is) central to their ability to maintain a sense of family identity over generations.³⁸⁸

Perkins patriarchs and matriarchs cultivated values that scholars have described as archetypal for Boston’s “Brahmins,” “elites,” “conservatives,” the “Federalist (Whig) aristocracy,” and “proper Bostonians.”³⁸⁹ Colonel Perkins above all viewed society as a space of hierarchy, with civic-mindedness, charity, and leadership from the wealthy and deference from the rest of the community. But as Harlow Sheidley argues, there was a

³⁸⁶ Diaries such as those kept by Nathaniel Cutting, Jenny Trumbull, and John Perkins Cushing offer the most wonderful picture of visiting practices in that they capture the quotidian, ritualistic element to visiting and the social threads that structured the process. See their papers at the MHS, AAS, and BAT respectively.

³⁸⁷ Di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship."

³⁸⁸ On the Forbeses in Naushon see George Howe Colt, *The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes*, Forbes and Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*.

³⁸⁹ Cleveland Amory, *The Proper Bostonians* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1947), Frederic Cople Jaher, "Nineteenth-Century Elites in Boston and New York," *Journal of Social History* 6, no. 1 (1972): 32-77, Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles*, Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard & the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870*. This had as much to do with the fact that many of these individuals, especially Colonel Thomas Handasyd Perkins, were central producers of those values as with the fact that they also figure prominently in the historical scholarship. For example, when Alexander Everett failed to receive an invitation to an important political dinner in 1832, he blamed “Perkins, Webster & Co.” as leading political and social arbiters of Boston. See Harlow W. Sheidley, *Sectional Nationalism: Massachusetts Conservative Leaders and the Transformation of America, 1815-1836* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 22.

fundamental tension within the Bostonian elite between the ideal of a stable social order rooted in a natural aristocracy and the anxieties attendant with achieving and maintaining social status. Sheidley writes that this tension led to an “oppressive demand for political and personal conformity.”³⁹⁰ To be sure, to say that the Perkinses may have had a “family mind” akin to the Adams family is not to see the extended family or even individual households as a homogenous unit, but to see an effort to produce togetherness, legacy, and a level of shared norms and values. Even in the realm of norms and values, however, hierarchies within family and business life shaped possibilities. In the overlap between hierarchies of firms and families, different individuals within the core of the network had different access to resources and were better able to set the terms of family life.

Faith and religious understanding could also provide an important foundation for family feeling. Yet with a few significant exceptions, discussions or even mentions of religious principles in family letters were surprisingly scarce. Mary Abbot, one of the younger daughters of Elizabeth Peck Perkins, wrote loving epistles to her nieces and nephews, as did Emma Forbes. These letters meant a lot, especially for those traveling abroad.³⁹¹ At least two wives sent their husbands copies of sermons in the 1830s, albeit to different effect. For Robert Bennet Forbes and his wife Rose, exchanging sermon notes was a form of communion; for John Murray Forbes and his wife Sarah, it was not. John thanked Sarah for sending him Orville Dewey’s sermons, a Unitarian from New Bedford, noting that the sermons appealed to him in that they were “marked by manly

³⁹⁰ Sheidley, *Sectional Nationalism*, 22.

³⁹¹ Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 72-73.

independence and system and vigor” (and thus implied most were not). But he put it to Sarah to “rouse” him to “active religion” and make him “really virtuous.”³⁹²

Sometimes religious feeling appeared when least expected. Frederick Paine, in a letter to his cousin (later wife) Nancy Sturgis, expressed his shock that she was not a Unitarian. He knew he had a reputation amongst their friends as being no better than an infidel because he did not attend church, “but I assure you I would not marry the fabled goddess of love unless she would bow down to the one Eternal.” He could not countenance that she would follow a doctrine that ascribed such human characteristics to the deity as revenge and hatred.

“Nancy I solemnly assure you that neither in health nor in sickness, in danger or in serenity have I since my remembrance ever closed my eyes at night without addressing myself to the care of our Heavenly Father ... I hope we may be a mutual support to each other and that when we sleep at the close of life it will only be to awake to live together thro’ all ages.”³⁹³

As the example of Paine and Sturgis shows, many but not all of the extended Perkins kinship circle followed William Ellery Channing to become Unitarians early in the nineteenth century.³⁹⁴ Yet while religious discussions and attending meeting provided sites of sociability, mentions of these appeared within letters largely in passing.³⁹⁵

³⁹² John Murray Forbes to Sarah Hathaway Forbes, 16 April 1836 as quoted in John Murray Forbes and Sarah Forbes Hughes, *Letters (Supplementary) : Of John Murray Forbes*, 3 vols. (Boston: George H. Ellis Co., 1905), 26-27. Forbes seems to have rebelled against the religious instruction of his eldest sister, Emma. In spite of his deep respect and affection for her, he found religious teachings gloomy and uninspiring. He and Sarah later became close friends with Ralph Waldo Emerson and became involved in a circle of New England philosophers, poets, activists, and businessmen.

³⁹³ Frederick William Paine to Nancy Sturgis, early 1822? (archivist note, they married later that year). Paine Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 3. AAS.

³⁹⁴ Thomas Handasyd Perkins was a member of several churches, from Federal Street Church in Boston to the First Parish Unitarian Church in Brookline.

³⁹⁵ This is notable given the emphasis scholars have placed on the intersection of religious principles and commercial ideology. Mary Abbot and the Cary sisters laced their letters with religious endearments and precepts. Thus, the fact that most Perkins letters did not contain these is in and of itself significant.

A faith that struck closer to home was Federalism. Even as the political party itself dissipated, Federalist feelings burned in the breasts of newly minted Whigs. James Handasyd Perkins, son to Samuel G. Perkins and Barbara Higginson, wrote that “Aunt Esther,” his nurse, raised him with stories of hellfire and the devil himself: Thomas Jefferson. She would reenact battles from the Napoleonic Wars on her sewing table.³⁹⁶ Such tutelage would have received wide approval within the family. The lone (Jeffersonian) Republican of the second generation was Russell Sturgis, Sr. Colonel Perkins served as a public figure for Boston Federalists. References to Perkins as the “merchant prince” connoted more than his wealth, but also civic leadership.³⁹⁷

The fundamental tenets of political creeds became most apparent in domestic conflicts. Two daughters discovered that slavery was a sore subject in Perkins and Sturgis households when they faced rebukes from their respective fathers. For Eliza Perkins in about 1808, there is a sense that her father felt sensitive about his own role in slave trading in the West Indies. He thus brooked no criticism of the slave trade within

³⁹⁶ Cunningham, *Owl's Nest*. Colonel Perkins and William Sturgis both served in the Massachusetts State Legislature as representatives and senators. Perkins, Sturgis, and John Murray Forbes were particularly well-connected politically. Colonel Perkins participated in the fomentation against the federal government during the Embargo of 1807, including suggestions that Massachusetts secede from the union. Sturgis's son-in-law, Samuel Hooper, replaced William Appleton in the United States Senate from 1861 to 1875.

³⁹⁷ Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Fragmentation of 'a Great Family': The Panic of 1819 and the Rise of the Middling Interest in Boston, 1818-1822," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 2 (1982): 143-167, Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture : Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns, *Boston, 1700-1980 : The Evolution of Urban Politics* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), Sheidley, *Sectional Nationalism*. Thomas Handasyd Perkins, William Sturgis, and later John Murray Forbes, Thomas G. Cary, and Samuel Hooper were especially involved in formal politics. Perkins and Sturgis served in the Massachusetts State Legislature; Forbes and Cary did more work lobbying behind the scenes (as did Perkins and Sturgis); Hooper, son-in-law to William Sturgis, took over William Appleton's seat in the United States Senate.

his household.³⁹⁸ For Carrie Sturgis, her father's 1847 censure came less for the issue of slavery itself, but from his daughter's experimentation with abolitionism. William Sturgis suggested abolitionists were a dangerous crowd inappropriate for his daughter.³⁹⁹ In both cases, fathers dealt with children growing up in a time in which morals changed around them—an early nineteenth century generation gap.

The effort the Perkinses put into creating a “family feeling” indicates that kinship was not something that they took for granted. Economic dependence created its own sense of obligation and authority, but the relationships between kinship, firms, and market values were more complex than simply considering economic relationships allows. Duncan Yaggy once wrote about this very network that the challenge of writing about individuals as a network was that, at the end of the day, the network consisted of relationships. Messy, idiosyncratic relationships. But examining these relationships reveals that commercial leaders were just as enmeshed in social aspirations and family foibles as were other families of the era.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Cabot, “Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot.” See chapter two: the Perkins brothers sought to revise their own history of involvement in slave trading, indicating that they may have found the issue to be a sore spot as early as the 1790s.

³⁹⁹ William Sturgis to “Diamond,” 30 August 1846. Caroline Sturgis Tappan Papers, Box 3, Doc. No. 257. Houghton.

⁴⁰⁰ There is a penchant within the early American literature to see agrarian families as the moral individuals within American society, with corruptible and corrupting urban merchants existing outside of the concerns of family economies or the balance between market activity and family life. In Christopher Clark's wonderful work on Connecticut agrarian families, for example, merchants act as agents of capitalism in a way that makes them seem quite apart from such mundane concerns. For a similar critique, see Appleby, “The Vexed Story of Capitalism Told by American Historians,” 4-12. To add a caveat, as I argued earlier, Peter Dobkin Hall is certainly correct in his argument that the rich were different. “Family” meant different things to different people and money changed things, certainly for nineteenth century American families. Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism : Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), George E. Marcus and Peter Dobkin Hall, *Lives in Trust : The Fortunes of Dynastic Families in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

Family Values: Obligation and Its Discontents

Children raised in commercial households received early inculcation into values and skills of a trading life. To a number of scholars writing recently on literacy and epistolary traditions, a transatlantic middle class stood at the center of the expansion of a prolific print culture and communications infrastructure built on letter writing in the eighteenth century. Trade was an important part of this expansion.⁴⁰¹ The aspiring “middling interest” used correspondence as a means of representing self and proclaiming social stature in a world made uncertain by physical and social mobility.⁴⁰² Letter writing manuals proliferated in the eighteenth century, in Great Britain and the United States. But such training also transpired within family correspondence.⁴⁰³ From a young age, parents encouraged daughters and sons to participate in their own correspondence to family and friends.⁴⁰⁴ Many of Eliza Cabot’s letters to her sister, Mary Ann Cary, included the childish scrawl of notes from her offspring. This provided early training into both penmanship and a variety of epistolary traditions that helped mark the Perkins offspring as the children of a cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. Epistolary self-making was one of many forms of cultural capital parents hoped to pass on to their children.

⁴⁰¹ Pearsall, *Atlantic Families : Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century*.

⁴⁰² Bannet, *Empire of Letters : Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820*, Dierks, *In My Power : Letter Writing and Communications in Early America*, Pearsall, *Atlantic Families : Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century*.

⁴⁰³ E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 298-301. Monaghan contends that letter writing manuals were not specifically for children and schoolroom pedagogy until the 1770s. Eve Tavor Bannet suggests otherwise, at least in the case of England. She writes that English letter writing manuals frequently contained a note as being for the education of youth and were closely tied to school room texts. Eve Tavor Bannet, "Empire and Occasional Conformity: David Fordyce's 'Complete British Letter-Writer'," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 1/2 (2003): 55-79.

⁴⁰⁴ Jennifer Monaghan estimates that by the 1750s, parents encouraged literacy training for daughters as well as sons. Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*, 301.

As boys and girls matured, their education and even their play began to diverge. Commerce was more than an arena of formal training, it was a subject of play. Sons received encouragement to maintain play account books to track how they spent their allowance. They even engaged in their own speculations. John Murray Forbes, for example, used his allowance to purchase Chinese toys and trinkets from his older brother Tom. He sold the items to his classmates and then reinvested his profits into more goods—a schoolyard entrepreneur. Early speculations often came under the watchful eye of an older mentor, especially as a youth worked his way up the ranks from apprentice to independent merchant. Accounting primers and advice books detailed how to be a clerk and merchant, but for Perkins sons and cousins, family provided an early training ground for both commerce and class polish.⁴⁰⁵

Eliza Perkins Cabot describes no such experiences within her own childhood. Instead, in her memoir, she and her cousins read as hoydens turned young ladies: they sledged and tussled with the best of their neighbors as girls and morphed into virtuous young ladies with their hair piled high within the matter of a few pages.⁴⁰⁶ In one happy memory, Eliza gathered with cousins Elizabeth Elliot, Ann and Mary Magee, and friend Eliza Otis to stage Hannah More's "The Search after Happiness: a Pastoral Drama for Young Ladies." The Bristol-born Hannah More wrote "The Search for Happiness" as an alternative to the morality of the usual reading material for the impressionable young ladies in her schoolroom. In this first publishing venture, printed in England in 1762, More's future career as a conservative tract writer on domestic ideology was already

⁴⁰⁵ Luskey, "'What Is My Prospects?': The Contours of Mercantile Apprenticeship, Ambition, and Advancement in the Early American Economy.", Luskey, *On the Make : Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America*.

⁴⁰⁶ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

visible. Four young shepherdesses seek the meaning of happiness. Urania, an “ancient shepherdess,” instructs them as follows:

Let the proud sex possess their vaunted powers;
Be other triumphs, other glories, ours!
The gentler charms which wait on female life,
Which grace the daughter and adorn the wife.⁴⁰⁷

More’s ideas in many ways resonated with later American proponents of women’s special moral calling like Catherine Beecher and Sarah Hale. As Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff note, between the late 1780s and 1830s, Hannah More stood as one of Britain’s most popular authors and as a leading advocate of domesticity.⁴⁰⁸ Yet clearly More was already influential to at least some American women by the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Within the extended family, few markers cut as wide a swathe as gender. Male cousins might enter a family firm by the pen or by sea. They might sail as a merchant or a mariner. But chances were, their future was in commerce. Commerce was the family business. Thus, for example, Nancy Sturgis implored her cousin George Washington Sturgis for details on “all the rude dangers in crossing the ocean.” The grass appeared greener to Nancy, who grew up with stories of exotic adventures from her father and uncles, her brothers and cousins. George obligingly wrote of his experiences in Chile where he saw enough “novelty”—music and cockfighting, fireworks and fandangos—to “amaze a raw yankee lad like myself.” He promised his next letter would regale her with “a specimen of Owyhee [Hawai’i] dancing and singing, after the manner of the princess

⁴⁰⁷ Hannah More, ed., *The Works of Hannah More*, vol. 6 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), 407.

⁴⁰⁸ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes : Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, 167.

royal which I think would astonish the fair ladies of Boston not a little.” But the grass was also greener to George. As the letter continued, a note of melancholy crept into the droll narration:

You talk with a provoking degree of coolness of matrimony, the pleasures of domestic life &c. &c. without once reflecting that I am probably to be immured on this foreign prison some four or five years, or if I return home, that I am as poor as Job’s cat and shall be obliged to decamp again immediately . . . I should like to take a peek in upon you, about these times, seated by a large fire with a bevy of fair cousins and perhaps a friend or two....⁴⁰⁹

Nancy and George grew up in the same circle of families, within commercial households, but with expectations that split on gender lines. Yet, more than simply a divergence of expectation, individuals within the family exhorted individuals to comply with familial expectations on gendered lines. These exhortations facilitated the commercial network in significant ways.

Domesticity as Cultural Capital

In *The Complete English Tradesman*, originally published in 1726, Daniel Defoe dedicated an entire chapter to the importance of wives becoming acquainted with their husbands’ trade. He chastised “gay, delicate ladies,” married to tradesmen and merchants, who perceived themselves as gentlewomen. Defoe urged wives and husbands alike to consider the consequences of a wife’s ignorance: wives forced to marry apprentices in order to not become beggars, children’s inheritances squandered away from this lack of preparation. The onus was on the ladies. “Pride,” he wrote, “is, indeed,

⁴⁰⁹ George Washington Sturgis to Nancy Sturgis, 9 January 1810. Paine Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 5. AAS.

the great misfortune of tradesmen's wives."⁴¹⁰ By 1839, however, when *The Complete English Tradesman* was republished, the later editor felt the need to add a historical footnote to the chapter: "Most of the wives of tradesmen above a certain rather humble condition would now smile at the idea of their being expected to attend their husbands' shops." Defoe, the editor condescended, lived in simpler times.

[I]n the days of Defoe, when the capitals of tradesmen were less, when provision for widows by insurance upon lives was not practised, and when the comparative simplicity of the modes of conducting business admitted it, a female in that situation would only be exercising a prudent caution, and doing nothing in the least inconsistent with the delicacy of her sex, in obeying the rules laid down in the text.⁴¹¹

By 1839, the editor implied, new institutions allowed for greater security following a breadwinner's death, but, in addition, business was more complicated so that it was impossible for women to participate so fully in a husband's enterprises. Where to Defoe the lack of involvement in a husband's business was a choice made out of class-based pretension, to the later editor it was a strategy based on woman's capacity. In between these two assumptions, however, lies a world of difference.⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London, Edinburgh: Project Gutenberg, Rev. Ed. 1839, Orig. Pub. 1726), Chapter 21.

⁴¹¹ Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, footnote 35.

⁴¹² The question here is not that of the "golden age thesis," did conditions for women improve or decline in early America, but a more specific question about the gendered strategies and ambitions within the family. The literature critiquing the "separate spheres" thesis has mushroomed in recent years. Some of this work urges a new language entirely, others seek more nuanced, contingent understandings of public and private and to understand how such ideals related to other precepts. Leonore Davidoff, "Gender and the 'Great Divide'," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-27, Lawrence E. Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions About Evidence and Analytical Procedure," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 1 (1995): 97-109, Joan Wallach Scott and Debra Keates, *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993): 383-414. The touchstone critical analysis is Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9-39. As some scholars increasingly look at transatlantic questions between British and American "middling interests," a central question here needs to be about the differences as well as connections between changes in class and gender

By the late eighteenth century, educating daughters of the commercial classes into music, art, literature, history, and needlepoint seemed a more prudent investment than ensuring daughters could read account books for the Perkinses.⁴¹³ Family matriarchs such as Elizabeth Peck Perkins and Dorothy Murray Forbes were both able to take over family finances and businesses after the deaths of their respective husbands. Forbes received formal training in accounting; if Perkins did not receive such training, she was at least familiar enough with the mechanisms of trade and accounting at the time of her husband's death that she was able to continue—and expand—the family business. Indeed, Anne Boylan suggests that it was Perkins's business prowess that led the Boston Female Asylum to place its funds into stocks and to operate off of the income.⁴¹⁴ But by the next generation, not a single woman received similar preparation. For Perkins, two of her daughters faced overwhelming challenges as their husbands either deserted or became too ill to provide for them. One reading of this parenting decision is that Elizabeth, by undervaluing skills she herself had, left her daughters vulnerable to economic hardship. But Elizabeth made provisions for her daughters that she may have considered more practical.

understanding within the United States and Great Britain. How much did the Revolution and subsequent political differences matter?

⁴¹³ Patricia Cleary argues that opportunities increased for women in business at this time and there have been a surge of wonderful studies looking at “she-merchants” and female shopkeepers and tradeswomen. This is not meant as a discounting of the women active in business. Rather, it is to pose the question in terms of generations: how did businesswomen train their daughters? Patricia Cleary and Elizabeth Murray, *Elizabeth Murray : A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2000), Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy : The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy : Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America*. See also the special forum on women's economies in North America before 1820 in the Fall 2006 *Early American Studies* as well as the special section on gender and business in the September 1998 *The Business History Review*.

⁴¹⁴ Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism : New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 19.

In the 1750s, Dorothy Murray (Forbes) received formal training in accounting with her father's encouragement. Dorothy was mother to Ralph Bennet Forbes, and grandmother to the Forbes men who traded through the auspices of the Perkins network. While Dorothy had no daughters, the available records offer rare insight into her upbringing and her parents' objectives for her education. In the mid-eighteenth century, Dorothy's father James was a North Carolina merchant and plantation owner with strong transatlantic ties.⁴¹⁵ Young Dolly, however, was raised in Boston by her aunt, Elizabeth Murray. Like her other siblings, Elizabeth Murray followed her brother James from Scotland to London to North Carolina. But Elizabeth pitched a plan to her brothers that would allow her independence and a life in the port town of Boston: she proposed to open a millinery shop. With letters of introduction and credit from her brothers to London merchants, she did precisely that. According to biographer Patricia Cleary, Elizabeth's brothers were supportive but skeptical of their sister's prospects for success. They repeatedly wrote to her, urging her to move closer and to take a place in their households in North Carolina and England respectively.⁴¹⁶ But Elizabeth had a flair for business and her success was the envy of many of the men of her acquaintance. It was in this environment,

⁴¹⁵ James Murray, Nina Moore Tiffany, and Susan I. Lesley, *Letters of James Murray, Loyalist* (Boston,: printed: not published, 1901).

⁴¹⁶ Patricia Cleary, "'Who Shall Say We Have Not Equal Abilitys with the Men When Girls of 18 Years of Age Discover Such Great Capacitys?' Women of Commerce in Boston, 1775—1776," in *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850*, ed. Conrad Edick Wright and Kathryn P. Viens (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society : Distributed by Northeastern University Press, 1997), Cleary and Murray, *Elizabeth Murray : A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America*, 52.

living with her aunt and apprenticing in her aunt's store, that Dolly received her education.⁴¹⁷

Why did James Murray allow his sister, a single woman attempting to build a business from the ground up, to raise his oldest daughter? The answer, likely, had to do with the greater educational opportunities of Boston over North Carolina. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Latin schools were required for towns with over 100 families as early as the 1730s. In the 1750s when Dolly was a student, Latin schools tended to be reserved for boys. But their existence helped to foster a broader educational industry. Dame schools, taught by women in their homes, also offered girls and boys an introduction to reading and writing. Tutors offering instruction in sewing and music advertised in local newspapers. At first Elizabeth attempted to train Dolly herself while managing her store, but the two were too much. She placed Dolly with a number of teachers to learn sewing and needlepoint, literacy, and accounting: Miss Purcell on Milk Street, Miss Reed, and finally, in 1757, a good friend and protégé of Elizabeth's, Jannette Day. And indeed, Elizabeth's success with her business and with Dolly encouraged James Murray to suggest that Dolly's cousin, Annie Clarke, also train into shop keeping under Elizabeth's patronage.⁴¹⁸

Dolly Murray Forbes had no daughters, thus we cannot say if she would have passed along her aunt's training, but it is interesting to note her father's view on her education. James supported his daughter's education into arithmetic and accounting. He

⁴¹⁷ Thomas Campbell, Elizabeth's suitor turned husband, wrote that he thought Dolly's "genius" was more "for an Accomptant (sic) than a Seemstriss (sic)." Cleary and Murray, *Elizabeth Murray: A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America*, 73-75.

⁴¹⁸ Cleary and Murray, *Elizabeth Murray: A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America*, 72-75.

cajoled, “If you will write well and beg hard your Papa will let you keep his books. The learning of it, as they do at school, is nothing without the practice.” The offer was in earnest. Murray proceeded to echo Defoe’s argument “The learning of it, as they do at school, is nothing without the practice. How many families are ruined by the women not understanding accounts: this you have seen instances of.”⁴¹⁹ The knowledge served her well. After her husband’s death in 1783, Dolly managed several properties and worked to advance her sons’ educations and ambitions. While she relied upon her sons and sister’s family (especially as she suffered from gout as she aged)⁴²⁰, Dolly fared better than many other women might have in her position.

Dolly met Elizabeth Peck Perkins through their sons’ shared mercantile interests in the West Indies trade in the 1780s, but the two may well have felt an early affinity based on their similar life experiences. When Elizabeth’s husband died in 1773, her father, Thomas Handasyd Peck, extended her a line of credit with his contacts in London. While we do not know the specifics of Elizabeth’s education or involvement in her husband’s business, we do know that she was able to pick up the reigns of his trade after his death. Merchants in Boston and London knew her as a tough businesswoman. Local lore placed her in the store and her thumb in the “measures” as she served up her customers.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ James Murray to Dolly Murray, 17 February 1762. Forbes Family Papers, Folder 38b. Baker. Cleary and Murray, *Elizabeth Murray: A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America*.

⁴²⁰ Susan I. Lesley, *Memoir of the Life of Mrs. Anne Jean Lyman* (Cambridge, Mass.: Press of John Wilson & Son, 1875), 16, 29, 49. Several of the references to “Aunt Forbes” were to Dolly in her later years. She came to live with them when she could no longer care for herself. The gout must have been very painful, but the family quite enjoyed her in that she never lost her interest in the family and the outer world. Anne Jean Lyman, née Anne Jean Robbins, was the daughter of Dolly’s sister Elizabeth Murray Robbins.

⁴²¹ Sarah Forbes Hughes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes*, 3 vols. (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1902), 3. This per a story Sarah Forbes Hughes reported James Sturgis told her.

Elizabeth's mercantile success paved (and paid) the way for her sons' advent in trade. Elizabeth's father died three years after her husband and her mother not long after, leaving her with eight children to care for, in the thick of the turmoil leading up to the Revolutionary War.⁴²² Her commercial acumen served her and her children in good stead.

Elizabeth Peck Perkins knew well the dangers of losing a husband's support. But this knowledge did not dispose her to provide her own daughters with a commercial education. When two of her own daughters could not support themselves, they sent children to live with siblings and received charity from wealthier kin. Both Nancy Cushing and Margaret Forbes faced financial hardship when their husbands either deserted them (as with Nancy) or fared poorly in business and health (as with Margaret). Nancy Perkins married the dashing, but "dissipated" Captain Robert Cushing.⁴²³ The family disapproved, or so the family later claimed. In 1791, Nancy and her two children moved to Edenton, North Carolina to be with her husband. After a period of silence, Colonel Perkins received a letter from a third party in March 1793 alerting him that Cushing had abandoned his family and Nancy was ill. At first Colonel Perkins sent funds, but when Nancy passed away, he sent for the children. Young Nancy was not quite eleven and John even younger, a shy five, when the two came into Boston harbor on a coasting vessel. Colonel Perkins escorted the siblings firmly to his mansion on Pearl Street. "John had lost his hat,

⁴²² According to *Notable American Women*, her mother died a few years after her father. "Perkins, Elizabeth Peck," ed. by Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer. In *Notable American Women, 1607-1950, Volume III: P-Z*, ed. by Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁴²³ Eliza wrote of Captain Cushing as a "fascinating sort of man, but dissipated." Given that she was likely a toddler the last time she would have known Cushing, this assessment must have come from someone else.

and they looked like wild Indians,” their cousin Eliza recalled. “Father brought them up from the wharf in a carriage and he pulled the blinds down, to Nancy’s great disappointment, for she wanted to see the town.”⁴²⁴ The two youngsters moved in with Colonel Perkins and his family, but when Uncle Samuel G. Perkins married Barbara Higginson two years later, Nancy went to live with them. John soon entered the family business.

Margaret Perkins Forbes, youngest daughter to Elizabeth Perkins, fared similarly. In 1799, Margaret married Ralph Benet Forbes. By all indications it was a love match. Her elder brothers did business with Forbes and his brothers, but Ralph was the least successful of the three.⁴²⁵ Here, again, the family disapproved the match, but Margaret insisted. “He was a bright man,” Eliza wrote, “but they thought he wanted balance. He made money and lost it.”⁴²⁶ More difficult for Margaret were Ralph’s health problems. Ralph was one of those men who people referred to as “unfortunate.” He was bright and good-humored, but his mercantile interests never seemed to come together. As he aged, he suffered from gout and later a stroke that left him partially paralyzed. Well before Ralph died in 1824, Margaret and the couple’s eldest daughter Emma banded together to care for the family. Yet where for Margaret’s mother this had meant picking up her husband’s business, Margaret’s choices were limited to internal, familial strategies.

Margaret and Emma were smart, resourceful women, who maintained a household with seven kids while caring for the family patriarch in sickness and in health.

⁴²⁴ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

⁴²⁵ See the Forbes Family Papers at Baker Library, especially Box 3, Folder 48 on James Grant Forbes and Ralph Bennet Forbes’s involvement in the West Indies, and connections with Perkins, Burling & Co.

⁴²⁶ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

John Murray Forbes wrote of his mother's "patient patching and darning," cutting down trousers from the castoffs of his brothers and cousins. Mundane decisions had to be balanced against the family economy. When Thomas sent his brother a lovely Chinese paint set, Emma and her mother tried to sell it to see if the gift could be put to better use for the brother as cash. Emma kept "a vigilant eye to their wants, corporeal and spiritual." On Sunday afternoons, Emma read to them from the Bible and taught them hymns. The family lived at a small house in Milton owned by Ralph's brother, John Murray Forbes, Sr. The Perkins brothers, James, Thomas, and Samuel, pooled an annual income of \$1200. John remembered well his mother's frustration. "Being an extremely proud woman, she insisted on receiving the least possible aid from her brothers necessary to a life of the utmost frugality, while at the same time she felt it incumbent on her to have a certain regard for external appearances, so as to allow as little contrast as possible to appear between our mode of life and that of our well-to-do relations on both sides of the house."⁴²⁷ The siblings were very cognizant of what they were missing. They visited regularly with their Perkins, Robbins, Lyman, and Forbes kin. To reach his better-heeled cousins, John recalled that he and his siblings loaded into a threadbare yellow two-wheeled chaise that they rented from a neighbor. The economic difficulties faced by the Forbes family made a lasting impression on the children.

The fact of the matter was, Dolly's education was exceptional. Elizabeth Peck Perkins may not have been formally educated into commerce, but given the changes within her own lineage she was more likely to have spent a fair portion of her youth in her father's store and to have participated in conversations about business than her

⁴²⁷ Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* vol. 1, p. 57.

daughters and certainly her daughters' daughters.⁴²⁸ For upwardly striving commercial families like those within the extended Perkins clan, a more appropriate education proclaimed the status of the pupil's family and prepared her for marriage. Domestic education was not perceived as a lack, but as important preparation for the prospects of a young woman and her family.⁴²⁹ Fathers as well as mothers monitored young women's education and, indeed, sacrificed personal well-being to ensure that a daughter received training in needlework, art and literature, music, dancing, sociability, and taste.⁴³⁰ If possible, daughters attended schools where they socialized with young women of similar stations, attended balls with their brothers, and married into like families. As Mary Kelley documents, the proliferation of schools for women in the early nineteenth century demonstrates the importance placed on daughters' education as a form of cultural capital.⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ See, for example, Cornelia Dayton's findings as to the involvement of wives and daughters in the stores of their husbands and fathers per courtroom testimony. To Dayton, as with Defoe's editor, commerce became increasingly global and complex over the course of the eighteenth century. Dayton and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), *Women before the Bar : Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789*.

⁴²⁹ Ship Captain Robert Pulsifer wrote to Col. Samuel Aspinwall regularly regarding his daughter's education. Pulsifer was anxious that his daughter receive a good education, especially in music. He wrote from Buenos Aires "Don't neglect my Child. Her Education is what keeps me in this Country, but I hope to see you in a few years ... draw on me for as much money as you want for the Education..." Robert Pulsifer to Samuel Aspinwall, 26 March 1825, 6 July 1826. Robert Starkey Pulsifer Papers, Folder 1824-9. MHS. Educational opportunities for girls proliferated in the early nineteenth century, but schooling itself was in the process of becoming systematized. Thus, instruction itself varied from sibling to sibling and even over the course of a single child's education. At the century's start, Eliza Perkins and siblings ("we") attended Mrs. Mary Cranch's school in Mattapan. Eliza herself boarded with Mrs. (Abigail) John Adams. Later, Eliza went to study at the Federal Street Academy with Mrs. Payne, "a Jewess, a handsome woman and a good teacher, a woman of taste. She read English poetry well, and encouraged us to read it." Mrs. Paine allowed them to select pieces and Eliza favored William Cowper. Her younger sister Sally, however, studied in Brighton and lived with Mr. Foster, a clergyman, and his family, while Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. went to Phillips Exeter.

⁴³⁰ Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak : Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*, 36.

⁴³¹ Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak : Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff make this point as well for England, arguing that "any claim to participate in the 'polite world' depended in part in a capacity to read, think, and speak correctly." Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes : Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, 156.

Exponents of domesticity and female refinement extolled women's public value in relationship to their husbands.⁴³² But more than this, the call to family yoked together obligation in economic and social spheres. The entrepreneurialism of female kin became evident in fields such as maternal oversight of social reproduction.⁴³³ Overseeing the education of children into skills, values, and taste became increasingly fraught. As Leonore Davidoff has argued, "Womanly skills have been consistently seen as generalized, almost natural attributes of femininity, despite the reality that adult women taught them to young girls."⁴³⁴ Here I discuss mothers shaping markets as mothers: maternal networking. Thus, for example, Margaret's garrulity and warmth appeared to have opened doors for her sons at subtle yet significant moments. Her sons felt that both John Perkins Cushing and William Sturgis, cousins of Margaret's generation, paid them particular attention out of affection for their mother. And this was not incidental. Robert Bennet Forbes recalled that his mother wrote to Cushing indicating her hopes that he

⁴³² See for example, Richard Bushman's discussion of women's role in demarcating gentility for families. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America : Persons, Houses, Cities*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

⁴³³ Wives entertained and networked as well as maintained the household in the absence of their husbands. They formed part of the sinews of information and care passed through the network—albeit some more than others. Sarah and Sally Perkins, the wives of James and Thomas H. Perkins respectively, were of very different temperaments. Sarah enjoyed visiting and was a guiding figure within the extended family. Sally kept a very intimate circle and her eldest daughter attended social events in her stead.

Yet wives also seem to have been seen as secret keepers about business and financial matters by their husbands. Certainly husbands of the 1830s vented to their wives about personal frustrations and boasts, firm politics, and aspirations. Given the relatively small sample, it is hard to say if this is a shift in circumstances or marriages, but it does point to the importance of the psychic work marriage was expected to do in relieving the stress of market-based risk. For "deputy husbands" among maritime and political wives see Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife : New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720-1870* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). For an example of such a secretive letter, see Robert Bennet Forbes to Rose Greene Forbes, 22 February 1839, as quoted in R. B. Forbes and Phyllis Forbes Kerr, *Letters from China : The Canton-Boston Correspondence of Robert Bennet Forbes, 1838-1840*, 1st ed. (Mystic, Ct.: Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc., 1996).

⁴³⁴ Davidoff, "Gender and the 'Great Divide'," 16.

might take one of her sons under his wing in China.⁴³⁵ Cushing was instrumental in establishing the careers of all three Forbes boys in China.

Another example of such maternal maneuvering is Sarah Cabot's role in her son Samuel's marriage to Eliza Perkins. Sarah Cabot watched as her sons chased mercantile ambitions around the globe. When her son Samuel Cabot, Jr. moved to Philadelphia in 1807, she began laying the groundwork for his return on the very eve of his departure. He traveled to join his brother Joseph in the commission house Perit & Cabot.⁴³⁶ In her very first letter to him at his new abode, Sarah hinted to Samuel that "A Philadelphia Beau would be quite an acquisition to our [Boston] Belles."⁴³⁷ Sarah was not subtle about her desires. She used her contacts in Boston society to keep tabs on her son, and also to create opportunities for him. As Sarah well knew, marital and mercantile opportunities went hand in hand. She learned of Sam's flirtation with a woman in Philadelphia and, in her letters, sought to dissuade him from forming any serious connection. She warned him against women who would want him for his place in society rather than himself, about women who were too beautiful or indecorous.⁴³⁸ Finally, on

⁴³⁵ Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 32-33, 41.

⁴³⁶ The firm's partners were Joseph Cabot and John W. Perit.

⁴³⁷ Sarah Cabot to Samuel Cabot, Jr., 16 March 1807. Cabot Family Papers, Reel 1, Box 1, Folder 7. MHS.

⁴³⁸ Sarah Cabot to Samuel Cabot, Jr., 22 November 1807. Cabot Family Papers, Reel 1, Box 1, Folder 7. MHS. In the letters, the engagement between Isaac P. Davis and Susan Jackson became a touchstone for discussing marriage, courtship, and finances. Davis was a prominent Boston merchant and Jackson, daughter of a Pennsylvania physician, was, with her sister, a renowned belle. Washington Irving wrote of Susan's younger sister in 1811 that it was "enough to cure spleen and melancholy only to look at her." George Champlin Mason, *The Life and Works of Gilbert Stuart* (n.p.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), 197-198. Sarah warned that surely Mr. Davis would be shocked to think anything but his merits won the hand of Miss Jackson, but that Samuel should look past such illusions. She heard through the grapevine that her son was "much caressed by the sons and daughters of fashion" in the "first circles" of Philadelphia, but she urged him to be alive to those who would care for him for wealth or status. "I sincerely wish to see you married to one who would take you for yourself and not on account of the situation you could place her in." And later when Sam courted Eliza Perkins, Sarah fretted that Mr. Hazard—a Cabot business partner

January 10, 1808, Sarah scribbled to her son triumphantly: if his heart was free, please keep it so, for she had found him a “prize” in Boston.⁴³⁹

The prize in question was Elizabeth Perkins, eldest daughter of Colonel Thomas Handasyd Perkins. Sarah collaborated with Eliza Morton Quincy, wife of U.S. Representative Josiah Quincy and neighbor to both the Cabot and Perkins families, and the two women played matchmaker for Samuel and the young Perkins “prize.” Mrs. Quincy considered herself to be an intimate of the Perkins family as well as with Mrs. Cabot, who was a dear friend to her mother-in-law.⁴⁴⁰ Eliza Perkins later recalled that when she was seventeen, Mrs. Quincy had suggested to her mother that mother and daughter call upon the Mrs. Cabot and her daughters. The Cabots had recently moved to Fort Hill from Beverly, and could use visitors to welcome them to Boston. In Eliza’s memoirs, it was the Cabot sisters she was to visit.⁴⁴¹ Unbeknownst to Eliza, Sarah Cabot and Eliza Quincy had something else in mind for her: the call served as an interview for a prospective daughter-in-law.

Eliza became good friends with the Cabot sisters, especially Elizabeth Cabot (later Follen). When Samuel came home for a visit, the young couple accepted their families’ encouragements. All went well until Eliza’s father, Colonel Perkins, put the brakes on the match: he feared his seventeen year old daughter was too young. Colonel Perkins set a later date on his daughter’s majority, thus lengthening the couple’s

whom the family sought to impress—had not thought Miss Jackson very handsome, so chances were he would not think Eliza lovely either. Sarah Cabot to Samuel Cabot, Jr., 16 March 1807, 22 June 1808. Cabot Family Papers, Reel 1, Box 1, Folder 7. MHS.

⁴³⁹ Sarah Cabot to Samuel Cabot, Jr., 10 January 1808. Cabot Family Papers, Reel 1, Box 1, Folder 7. MHS.

⁴⁴⁰ Eliza Susan Quincy, *Memoir of the Life of Eliza S. M. Quincy* (Boston: n.p., 1861), 77.

⁴⁴¹ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

engagement. This course elicited another flurry of networking within Sarah's circle of merchants, politicians, and their wives to ensure there were no hidden motives. Would Eliza back out of the marriage? Would Samuel's entry into the commercial field in Boston create ill will that might hurt his prospects? Her sources assured her no on both counts.⁴⁴²

Sarah Cabot's aim went beyond marrying her son into one of Boston's first families and to solidify Samuel's career prospects. She also desired to bring her son home. "Mr. Joe Lee says that it is as unreasonable for people to think of having their children settle about them as it would be to insist on living with their great grandchildren," she mused in one letter. "How very easily these philosophical old bachelors can settle these matters."⁴⁴³ To Sarah, settling her family in Boston was in the family's best interests. Few of her contemporaries could have begrudged Sarah's machinations, given that many of those who had the resources to do so endeavored to accomplish the very same end. By drawing Eliza Perkins and Samuel Cabot together, marriage settled her husband in the area more effectively than simply reestablishing her son commercially. Marriage, career, and family formation went hand in hand.

Similar networking can be seen by Sally Perkins in the interest of her daughter, Mary Ann Perkins Cary. In 1821, Thomas G. Cary considered whether or not to accept an offer from his brother Henry to partner in his commercial establishment in New York.

⁴⁴² Sarah Cabot to Samuel Cabot, Jr., 10 January 1809, 13 January 1809, 31 January 1809. Cabot Family Papers, Reel 1, Box 1, Folder 7. MHS. Sarah consulted with kin as well as having friends consult others, such as having Mrs. Quincy probe Isaac Davis. She feared the Perkinses felt Sam had been compromised by his "embarrassment" with his Philadelphia belle, but did not wish this to be known lest the fear itself create a need for worry.

⁴⁴³ Sarah Cabot to Samuel Cabot, Jr., 29 March 1807. Cabot Family Papers, Reel 1, Box 1, Folder 7. MHS.

For the Carys (including Henry), everything hinged on Colonel Thomas H. Perkins, Thomas's father-in-law. At the time, Thomas worked as a lawyer and farmer in Battleboro, Vermont. The family lived off land owned by the Colonel and received a monthly stipend. Further, Henry Cary was a business associate of the Perkinses. A partnership with his brother Thomas was actually a smooth business move for Henry as it strengthened his ties with the Perkins family and firms. Letters crossed between members of the Cary and Perkins families, but a simple plea from Caroline Perkins, Mary Ann's sister, is most revealing:

My dear Mr. Cary, I hardly know how to begin with this all important subject. My mind has been in such a turmoil ever since I heard of your brother's proposals, that I have delayed writing till the last moment hoping to gain some composure but even now. I feel as unable to express half I want to as ever. In the first place have you any doubts in your own mind? As I cannot find out from any quarter what you think or feel about it!

Eliza and mother fear you only feel influenced from father's letters to reject it, they told me to impress on your mind that his views were wholly in favor of it, but that he felt delicate about withdrawing the salary that you now receive from him. Mr. Cabot only wonders that you hesitate a moment. We all think this is your only chance of leaving Battleboro. Should father do otherways than will you are there for life. I fear my dear Mr. Cary you may think me very impertinent but you know how important we think it for Mary. Ma has just come again from talking with father, he says, "I cannot concern that Mr. Cary can hesitate a moment and presumes your answer is written to your brother. I shall not rest till I hear from you. My whole heart and soul are with you. Believe me your affectionate sister, Caroline."⁴⁴⁴

For Caroline and her fellow partisans, their goal was to relocate their sister in New York, a place deemed infinitely preferable to Battleboro, Vermont. But the demand was not only

⁴⁴⁴ Caroline Perkins to Thomas G. Cary, 23 October 1821. Cary Family Papers III, Box 4, Folder 1821, October. MHS. The firm was first Henry Cary & Co. and then Thomas Graves & Wm. F. Cary & Co.

for Thomas G. Cary to make a career change, from law to commerce, but also for the implicit economic backing of Colonel Perkins.⁴⁴⁵

Within the network, women frequently served as connections between men and conveyors of property.⁴⁴⁶ As wives and mothers, they brought in new blood. However subordinating, these bonds between men and women also represented several significant vulnerabilities within families and, especially, within family firms. Increasingly in the 1810s and certainly by the 1830s, the practice of husbands designating executrixes of their estates was in decline. Instead, husbands and wives with the resources to do so created trusts. For some, this meant placing brothers and uncles in charge of managing and investing family capital on behalf of beneficiaries. For others, this meant placing their funds in newly forming trust companies. As capital rather than land or movable property came to comprise the bulk of family inheritance, the family began experimenting with mechanisms for protecting kin. Protections developed in both wills and in prenuptial agreements.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ This backing was something Thomas G. Cary recognized. He seems to have been an intelligent man, if not the most gifted merchant. But many of his career decisions owed to the influence of his father-in-law. He recognized as much in his will: "Inasmuch as a very large portion of the Estate and property of which I am possessed has been derived to me through my dearly beloved wife, Mary, daughter of the late Hon. Thomas H. Perkins, I do therefore give, devise and bequeath to my said wife...." Further backing came, for example, in the letter of credit for \$10,000 Perkins issued for Cary with the esteemed New York firm, Prime, Ward, and Sands. Thomas H. Perkins to Prime, Ward & Sands, 1 December, 1823. JEC Extracts.

⁴⁴⁶ Ditz, "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Remedies from Early American Gender History.", Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.

⁴⁴⁷ See for example, Sarah Perkins's marriage settlement (prenuptial agreement) with William Cleveland of 1838 in the Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 67. BL. See also the letters between John Murray Forbes, his sister Mary, and his future brother-in-law, Francis Cunningham, regarding a marriage and property settlement. While Forbes expected Mary to find the language overly technical, and urged her to have William Gardiner (himself a Perkins by marriage) or another Boston lawyer look it over, she was involved in the negotiations herself.

Elizabeth Peck Perkins explicitly qualified the legacies for her daughters and granddaughters with the words “despite coverture.” She stipulated that 5/8 of her property should go to her three sons, James, Thomas, and Samuel, but that 1/3 of the net proceeds from that property should be held “in trust” for her daughters Esther, Mary, and Margaret, as well as Margaret’s children. The final 3/8 went to her eldest daughter Elizabeth and her two grandchildren by her second eldest daughter, John Perkins Cushing and Nancy Cushing Higginson. John was a merchant on the rise at this point, apprenticing for his uncles in China. Elizabeth and Nancy were both married to successful merchants, or so it seemed at the time. By contrast, Esther, Mary, and Margaret were all married to less successful men: Josiah Sturgis, a middling merchant in Charleston; Benjamin Abbot, a schoolmaster; and Ralph Forbes, whose ill health was inextricably tied up in his failings in commerce. Elizabeth’s bequests to her female progeny outside of coverture may have aimed to keep the funds out of the reach of their husbands’ creditors. But it is likely that she also expected her sons to take a primary responsibility for overseeing the investment of the funds and thus ensure that all of the family’s womenfolk had income.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, trusts and prenuptial agreements provided a legal mechanism for families to protect members from the vicissitudes of market capitalism. Trusts themselves were closely tied to gendered perceptions of savings, commerce, and republicanism common to the era: independent men should be able to invest on their own account; funds placed in savings banks or in trust were so placed *because* the trustee was a dependent unable to invest for themselves. Promotions for early trust services advertised them as for the benefit of widows and orphans. As

Charles G. Loring wrote in 1867 regarding the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company (MHLIC), “We do not look upon this company as a money-making machine for the benefit of the stockholders, but as a great Charity for the safe-keeping and prudent care of the property of those who cannot manage it for themselves, or who desire such place of deposit.”⁴⁴⁸ The Massachusetts General Hospital itself was founded in 1811 as the third general hospital in the United States. Founders chartered the life insurance company in 1818 with a third of its profits promised to the hospital. By the time the MHLIC began operations in 1823, the potential of the trust business was already apparent to its founders, and verbiage allowing for it to hold and invest deposits in trust were included in the 1823 amendments to the charter. By the 1840s, MHLIC was more trust company than life insurance provider.⁴⁴⁹ Several scholars have pointed to the importance of the MHLIC as the first trust company and investment firm in the United States and, more, as a protector of wealth for Boston’s upper crust.⁴⁵⁰ For the Perkinses, this was certainly the case.

⁴⁴⁸ Gerald Taylor White, *A History of the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), 21-22.

⁴⁴⁹ J. G. Smith, *The Development of Trust Companies in the United States* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1928), 240. MHLIC began as a charity. The MHLIC was the second life insurance company in the United States, but its principle aim was to provide supplementary monies to fund the operations of the Massachusetts General Hospital. Its real significance lay in its evolution into an investment house and trust company. MHLIC directors were not particularly aggressive in their investment habits, a trait Gerald White attributed to directors viewing the MHLIC as more charity than business enterprise. Because profits continued to be tied to the well-being of the Massachusetts General Hospital, losses would be far more devastating than those faced by independent investors. When their life insurance business peaked in 1842-3, the MHLIC had 209 policies representing \$378,305 of insurance. The demand for this service declined to the point that in 1879 MHLIC had five policies on their books, totaling \$13,000 of insurance.

⁴⁵⁰ Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite : The Boston Associates and the World They Made*, Farrell, *Elite Families : Class and Power in Nineteenth-Century Boston*, Peter Dobkin Hall, "What the Merchants Did with Their Money: Charitable and Testamentary Trusts in Massachusetts, 1780-1880," in *Entrepreneurs : The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850* ed. Conrad Edick Wright and Kathryn P. Viens (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society : Distributed by Northeastern University Press, 1997), 365-421, Story, *The Forging of an Aristocracy : Harvard & the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870*.

The family produced deeply entrepreneurial women. By the fourth generation, several prominent names come to view: Eliza Perkins Cary Agassiz who both fostered her husband's Louis's scientific career through her writing and practical acumen and provided the foundation for Radcliffe College in Cambridge; Ellen Sturgis Hooper and Carrie Sturgis Tappan whose poetry, books, and correspondence with such better known figures as Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson were instrumental to what we now know as the Transcendentalist movement. But for as long as the family could afford it, their entrepreneurialism was channeled in specific and specifically gendered directions.

Economic Inequalities within the Family

In *Riches, Class, and Power*, Edward Pessen uses John Perkins Cushing, Robert Bennet Forbes, and William and Russell Sturgis as examples of Boston men who went from wealth to wealth and thus defied the traditional narrative of the second quarter of the nineteenth century as an "egalitarian era."⁴⁵¹ But while none of these men went from rags to riches and were obviously well-connected, they all worked hard for their wealth. Cushing, Forbes, and William Sturgis received their start in trade in the Perkins countinghouse through the kinship connection. They all received assistance up the ladder to becoming independent merchants. Yet their circumstances differed profoundly from those of their Perkins cousins.

Compare for example, the circumstances in which Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. made his maiden adventure to that of Robert Bennet Forbes. Thomas Perkins, Jr. was born in 1796 in the family's Pearl Street residence in Boston. At the age of ten he joined a class of his peers at the Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, an elite preparatory

⁴⁵¹ Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War*, 111-128.

academy overseen by his uncle, Dr. Benjamin Abbot. According to the family narrative, Tom was being prepared for Harvard, but fell in with two young men from Baltimore who persuaded him to enter St. Mary's College instead. The more likely story is told by Colonel Perkins's biographers who suggest Tom's father recognized the boy's scholarly limits and never attempted to place him at Harvard. For a Bostonian of means, attending Harvard was the path from which all deviations must be explained, and explained away it was. Two of his friends from Exeter—Jared Sparks and Edward Everett (a tutor at Exeter at the time) no less—described Tom as quick-minded, handsome, honest, kind-hearted, and generous. But Tom resembled his great grandfather: he preferred sports, the outdoors, and society to the classroom. He was a footballer, a wrestler, a boxer, a hunter, a runner, a skater, and a horse rider, but not a scholar. Frankly, the same could be said of Colonel Perkins. The difference was the profound pleasure Colonel Perkins came to take in the game of capitalism: locating new speculations and sources of profit.

In January 1814, Colonel Thomas H. Perkins wrote his eldest son a letter, from father to son, in preparation for his son's first major maritime departure. "It is my duty from the situation I bear to you, that I give you my ideas as to that course you are to pursue in the new line of life which you are now commencing," Perkins wrote. Much like his cousins before and after him, Thomas Handasyd Perkins, Jr. prepared to travel to China on a commercial adventure. And much like his cousins, his parents intended the voyage to make a man of him. He would gain independence, maturity, and sophistication. Colonel Perkins had prepared many a man for a life in commerce, but the paternal ethos in writing to his son was altogether different. The stakes were higher. "Upon your conduct in the few years next succeeding depends your future welfare," his

father warned, “and you will suppose this is highly interesting to me as well as to yourself.”⁴⁵²

The letter was of a common type: a coming of age letter offering intergenerational instruction for a youth on the cusp of adulthood. As such, the letter elucidates ideals and expectations of character formation. At the fount of character for men of Colonel Perkins’s generation was a single quality: virtue. “Remember,” his father reminded Tom, “without virtue you have no claim to my esteem.” And later, “bear in mind that you have a mother and sisters who will be made happy by finding that you are walking in the path of virtue.” In 1815, John Adams similarly summed for George Washington Adams: “Virtues and Studies, make Men! All else are brutes.”⁴⁵³

Fortunately, Tom’s father gave him explicit instructions on how to be virtuous: be polite; follow the rules of the ship; be friendly, but do not engage in “vulgar familiarity”; keep regular hours; have a place for everything; keep accounts of all expenses; be economical; maintain a clean appearance; do not drink too much or game—especially for money; read but not only for pleasure; continue his French lessons as if a master peered over his shoulder; and lastly, religion might be “unfashionable” but there was no better guide to life than scripture. His family’s reputation, especially that of his mother and sisters, depended upon his comportment.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² T.H. Perkins to T.H. Perkins, Jr. 15 January 1813. Cary Family Letters III, Box 3, File 1813, July 1-15. MHS. The date of this letter was probably 1814 rather than 1813 as that is when the *Jacob Jones* sailed with Tom Perkins, Jr. aboard.

⁴⁵³ Musto, "The Adams Family," 52.

⁴⁵⁴ Mary Cranch, Abigail Adams’s sister, similarly exhorted her son Billy to remember what his sisters did for him and that they would rely upon his protection and virtuous conduct. Special thanks to Robert Mossey for sharing these letters with me. In August 1783, for example, Mary wrote as follows:

“Your Sister says she is happy – this is saying ‘[My Brother behaves well ‘ She could not be happy if you did not. In a Letter to Miss N.Q. [Nancy Quincy] she speaks in the tenderest terms of your

For all of these calls to order and economy, Tom's father provided for him well—perhaps too well. Colonel Perkins's desires for his son in terms of class and comfort clashed with his objectives for his son in business. In addition to his regular allowance, Perkins would receive a clothing allowance of \$500 per year⁴⁵⁵ and an investment allowance of \$5000 to allocate under the tutelage of his cousins, John Perkins Cushing and James P. Sturgis. In order to ensure his clean appearance, his father arranged for him enough clothing and linen that, if he changed every Sunday and Thursday, there would be enough to last him to China. Colonel Perkins also packed a trunk of books⁴⁵⁶ and an array of foods. No hardtack for his son, but a supply of beef, tongue, ham, tripe, apples, wine, cider, and porter. Young Perkins traveled not as a mariner (as had William Sturgis) or a supercargo or supercargo's clerk (as had John Perkins Cushing), but as a passenger.⁴⁵⁷ While Colonel Perkins privately enjoined Captain Roberts to not show any preference to his son, one imagines it would have been hard for Captain Roberts to refuse

kind attention to her. You know not the pleasure it gave me. ... For they are worth of your best affections. You are under many obligations to them. & in return they will in a few years look to you for protection. They as well as your Parents are desirous of seeing you a great & good Man – You are now arriv'd at an age which we call coming to years of disservice [sic] but which I think should rather be call'd years of folly for they really are so with most young folks. Here again I hope you will be an exception – It would be a sad thing if that steadyness & sobriety which has always gain'd you the name of Deacon should forsake you when you stand in most need of it You have just began to form a character in the world. The eyes of every one Will be upon you & I wish you to be sensible how much you[r] future well-being in both Worlds depends upon the next four or five years of your Life. Let this thought influence every action – let it never forsake you for an hour – be modest – & diffident in your behaviour.”

⁴⁵⁵ Compare Perkins's clothing allowance of \$500 per year—this beyond his regular allowance and funds for speculations—to the annual stipend of \$1200 his aunt Margaret received to maintain her entire family or Captain John King of the *Canton Packet* (Bennet's ship, discussed below) who received \$600 per year as his salary.

⁴⁵⁶ The books included the works of Fisher Ames and the *Life of Washington*; Junius' *Letters* as “a finished style of writing” that “should be read by everyone”; Moore's *Travels* and the works of Shakespeare as literature from the land of their forefathers; and of course, the Bible.

⁴⁵⁷ His father indicates in the letter that he traveled as a passenger with no specific duties, but according to a memoir written by his son from stories shared by family friends—in this instance Captain George W. Lewis—Perkins traveled as a captain with mariners who drilled and served under his command. Perkins, *A Private Proof*, 40-43.

the owner's son favors had he asked.⁴⁵⁸ Fortunately, the seventeen year old Tom proved he was no idler. In character and in capital, Colonel Perkins intended the yield from this adventure to be the foundation of his son's fortune. But if his son failed, there was always his own fortune to ensure his son's comfort.

Both James and Tom Perkins, Jr. experienced their families' deep pockets from a young age and cultivated a refined taste for pleasure. As Tom sailed aboard the *Jacob Jones* in 1814, James Perkins, Jr. worked for his father. He traveled to New York that summer to visit the esteemed firm of Prime & Ward and transport home \$40,000 in gold.⁴⁵⁹ According to that faithful memoirist, cousin Eliza, James seemed promising in his youth, but went astray. To her, the culprit was Harvard, where "he got into a gay set, Kirk Boott and others, and I remember wondering as a girl to see Aunt James putting up bottles of wine to send out to Cambridge to him."⁴⁶⁰ Eliza and James grew up together, fighting pitched battles in which the "Fort Hillers" faced off against the "Round Pointers" in the Common, even assembling a museum together.⁴⁶¹ Yet if his youth was like his cousin Tom's, as his mother packing up cases of wine presumably to share with friends suggests, access to personal wealth offered opportunities to win popularity through "generosity."

Compare Tom's experience with that of his cousin, Robert Bennet Forbes.

Looking back on his youth, Bennet confessed that the sea did not tempt him so much as

⁴⁵⁸ Seaburg and Paterson, *Merchant Prince of Boston, Colonel T. H. Perkins, 1764-1854*, 244.

⁴⁵⁹ J. and T.H. Perkins to Prime & Ward, New York, 9 June 1814. JEC Extracts.

⁴⁶⁰ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot," 14. Like Kirk Boott, it seems James attended but did not graduate from Harvard.

⁴⁶¹ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

his uncle did. Bennet wrote his memoirs quite cognizant of the importance of the extended family to their personal decisions, yet family letters reveal the strings of negotiated family influence structuring individual choices even beyond his ken. Colonel Perkins would drop hints to the boy's future at the dinner table. He would tease him familiarly about shipboard life. On scooping pudding to his plate, the older man would remark that Ben would not get such delicious pudding off the Cape of Good Hope. "I thus became familiar with the idea I was *born to eat bad puddings of the cape*," Ben recalled. And on one fateful day in October of 1817, as Ben rambled amongst the sailors of the Perkins' *Canton Packet*, his uncle called out to him, "Well, Ben, which of these ships do you intend to go in?"⁴⁶² To Ben, fate and his uncle seemed one and the same, and all indicators pointed to a maritime career.

In fact, family letters reveal that Ben's uncle was simply the agent of family decision making. Well before Ben himself decided upon a maritime career, his elders had already decided the matter for him. As early as November 1816, Ben's father Ralph wrote to one of his brothers with the plan James Perkins had laid out for Ben's education: the lad would winter with "Uncle Thomas H." where he would learn French and navigation, and then go to China in the spring.⁴⁶² In planning for their son's future, Ralph and Margaret Forbes were fortunate to have siblings in a position to take on their offspring's education, but this training was not free. While the prospect of Ben taking to the sea at such a tender age worried the couple, they still appreciated the opportunity for

⁴⁶² Ralph B. Forbes explained his understanding of the plan to his brother John, 13 November 1816. Forbes Family Papers, Box C2, Private Letterbook, 1815-1817. Baker. If the extant correspondence is to be believed, the Forbeses turned most frequently to James Perkins with economic hardship (as well as John Murray Forbes, Sr., who owned the Forbes family's Milton home). See for example Ralph B. Forbes to James Perkins, 15 July 1816. Forbes Family Papers, Box C2, Private Letterbook, 1815-1817. Baker. In this letter, Forbes turns to James for assistance after being arrested on an old claim of Richard Denis of Philadelphia, writing that James was "the only person in the country" he could apply to.

their son. As Ralph indicated in a letter to his brother-in-law in January 1817, money was a central underlying preoccupation. Going to sea saved the family the expense of supporting Ben in an apprenticeship in the Perkins's countinghouse. Instead, the young mariner's wages now went straight to his parents and thus contributed to the family economy. In the 1817 letter, Ralph thanked Colonel Perkins for his attentions to Ben and his interests, but begged his indulgence on his inability to support his son. "I most cheerfully resign him to your joint management."⁴⁶³

Private correspondence provides insights into how extended family hierarchies operated in practice. This example shows both the hidden negotiations that could structure individual prospects, but also how economic inequalities within the extended family shaped power dynamics on a very intimate level—shaping relationships between Ralph and Margaret and their son. As Ben went to sea at the age of thirteen, it was with a keen awareness of his family's debt to his uncles. His uncle's influence over his decision was clear to Ben, but in the narrative as he tells it in his memoirs, Ben traveled to Milton to inform his mother of his decision. She was "overcome" by the prospect—until, that is, "she saw that I had made up my mind to conform to the destiny imposed on my by fate and my revered uncle." Then, she gave her consent.⁴⁶⁴

Thus, in the fall of 1817, the thirteen year old Ben Forbes prepared to embark as a mariner aboard a Perkins ship, the *Canton Packet*. As with Tom, Colonel Perkins prepared young Ben for the voyage. Even beyond the difference in their positions aboard their respective vessels, the disparity in the kinsmen's positions was stark. Perkins sent

⁴⁶³ Ralph B. Forbes to Thomas H. Perkins, 19 January 1817. Forbes Family Papers, Box C2, Private Letterbook, 1815-1817. Baker.

⁴⁶⁴ Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 31.

Ben to a shopkeeper by the name of Gedney King to secure a quadrant, a Bowditch's navigator, and a log book. An older clerk who had been to sea visited a slop shop to procure him a chest for his belongings and an outfit of sailor clothes: checked shirts, oversized duck trousers, socks, shoes, and a pea jacket. He also received a tin pot and iron spoon, several knives, a bed stuffed with pig hair, and a blanket. Colonel Perkins saw to Ben's education, focusing on French, navigation, and trigonometry. From home, Ben received his selection of luxuries: a 'ditty bag' complete with needles and thread and buttons to repair clothing while abroad, several well-patched socks and articles of clothing, a bottle of red lavender and another of essence of peppermint, a small box of broken sugar, and from a neighbor, a barrel of apples. His Aunt Abbot gave him a Testament for the voyage. Ben recalled that his mother had tried to give him a pillow, but the comfort clashed with his idea of a mariner's life and he refused. Upon reflection, too late, he remembered this his mother had been to sea herself and was fully cognizant of the life and dangers he was to face.⁴⁶⁵ Perhaps the pillow would have been acceptable after all.

Both Tom and Ben rose to prominent positions in the commercial network, but from very different starting points. As with Tom, Ben's aspirations were bound up in exhortations to consider his mother and younger siblings. Yet where to Tom this was a call to manliness, to virtue, and to honor, Ben's family circumstances were more meager. Manliness, virtue, and honor still mattered, but they were intimately connected with the need to contribute to his family's income. Ben's wages contributed directly to the

⁴⁶⁵ Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 31. During the War of 1812, Margaret journeyed with her husband and older children to southern France on a mercantile voyage. The voyage may have proved more adventurous than the couple would have hoped (they were captured by the British, but well treated), but the trip provided the foundation of French that the older Forbes children assiduously maintained over the years. Margaret gave birth to John Murray Forbes on this trip, while in Bordeaux.

education of his siblings. When Ben met up with his older brother, Thomas Tunno Forbes, in Manila in April of 1825, Ben carried the sad news of their father's death. The moment provided a period of reflection for the two brothers. They realized "how much we owe our parents and how much we must do for the education and maintenance of the younger members of the family" and "were drawn more intimately together than ever before."⁴⁶⁶

For the Forbes brothers, the exigencies of caring for their own siblings rendered their own hard work and success necessary in a way it could not have been for Tom Perkins. The education, career, and marital ambitions of the Forbes siblings developed out of family-based strategies. Birth order constrained choices so that, for example, Thomas T. Forbes had little choice but to go into his uncles' countinghouse and Emma, the eldest, never married but instead took care of her siblings and their families. While John Murray Forbes was able to attend the Round Hill Academy and had broader career options (it was initially thought he would go into the clergy), the opportunity was paved and paid for by the work of his older siblings. Mary and Fanny Forbes, the two youngest, were similarly able to take advantage of greater preparation than their elder siblings. Fanny took riding lessons. Mary attended Sophia Peabody's school. It was here that Mary befriended the Hathaway twins. As Mary Kelley has written, this was one of the express purposes of female academies: the socialization of young women with others of similar prospects.⁴⁶⁷ Through Sarah Hathaway's friendship with Mary, she would meet

⁴⁶⁶ Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 88.

⁴⁶⁷ Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak : Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*.

her future husband, John Murray Forbes. But the resources available to the younger siblings owed much to the energies of their older brothers and sisters.

Uncles James and Thomas Perkins looked out for their poorer nephews, but they also recognized the potential within the inequalities of the extended family. Ben and his older brother both received considerable support from their uncles: introductions and credit to advance their careers, higher wages than they might otherwise expect, and the present of a box of silver dollars for Ben and Thomas to invest independently and thus start their careers.⁴⁶⁸ But the fact of inequality within the family was useful. Whether or not the Perkins uncles looked at their nephews in this light, they were cognizant that need made for hard workers. Consider a letter that Perkins & Co. of Boston sent to their Canton house regarding a young ship captain by the name of Drumeray who, they noted, had “brought this ship into port in first rate order, and seems much inclined to keep down expenses.” They recommended him not only for his skill, but also for the fact that the man’s father had recently died “and his desire to get forward will be increased by the loss, from his wish to contribute to the comfort of his mother and family.”⁴⁶⁹ This comment could just as well have been applied to a number of young kinsmen in their employ. Indeed, it echoes many of their own exhortations to said kin to mind their obligations to their siblings or parents. While the uncles established their heirs in business in Boston, the nephews worked as resident agents abroad.

Furthermore, while participation within the commercial network offered the opportunity of wealth, of making one’s “*lac*” (\$100,000), lucre was never just about

⁴⁶⁸ As a second mate, for example, Ben Forbes received the same wages as the first mate.

⁴⁶⁹ Perkins & Co., Boston to Perkins & Co., Canton, 14 August 1827. JEC Extracts.

lucre. It also conveyed social and personal obligation. When John Perkins Cushing himself set sail at the age of sixteen, his uncles' reminded him that he had a responsibility to contribute to his sister's livelihood. Cushing's need for "lucre" was as much about obligation as it was about personal gain if not more. Even beyond his sister's well-being, he had been brought up within his uncles' countinghouse with an expectation that he would contribute to the family business. His cousin Eliza remarked at his artistic temperament, what a shame it was that he should be pressed abroad for his competency, but as a young man he required a means to independence.⁴⁷⁰ He lived in China for nearly thirty years, a home that was never quite home, and on several occasions planned for his retirement. But he was a gifted merchant, and partners urged him to stay. In an 1822 letter, one uncle sounded a note of relief that Cushing planned to stay until his cousin and successor, Thomas Forbes, could run the Canton house on his own. "I was glad to find you intend remaining some time longer," the uncle penned. "There are those who would gladly see you return and so shall I, when I think you will be contented to set down and remain here the rest of your days, but I am convinced that was you to return now, you will go back again. If in three or four years Forbes can be made to be able to do your business, it will be very desirable."⁴⁷¹ But Cushing feared he had been a "fool to stay away."⁴⁷² This sentiments was echoed by John Murray Forbes in reflection upon his time in China. He feared that he had "acted upon a theory regarding 'happiness' and did not sufficiently consider the stake which I hazarded the risk of life, health and loss of friends

⁴⁷⁰ Cabot, "Reminiscences of Mrs. Eliza Cabot."

⁴⁷¹ Thomas H. Perkins to John P. Cushing, 26 February 1822. Cabot Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 2. MHS.

⁴⁷² Thomas T. Forbes to Emma P. Forbes, 28 January 1828. Thomas Tunno Forbes Letterbook. MHS.

the years of youth and probably of happiness which I threw away in Exchange for a doubtfull (sic) good money.”⁴⁷³

The Forbes cousins—Ben, Tom, and later John—could not compare with their Perkins cousins in terms of immediate access to financial or cultural capital, but this made them all the more upwardly striving and thus useful to the network. Thus, in examining rebels within the family, it is important to consider the parameters of rebellion.

The Privilege of Opting Out

Not everyone accepted familial expectations. Parents rejected responsibilities toward their children and husbands and wives toward their spouses. Captain Robert Cushing’s desertion of his wife and two children in North Carolina and Barbara Higginson’s apparent harsh treatment of her children are both evidence of this. Sons and daughters rejected family expectations of mercantile careers, marriage, or family life.

James Handasyd Perkins, the youngest child of Samuel and Barbara Perkins, provides a prime example. James did not reject his family, but he did reject the expectations of a commercial life placed him on from a young age. James attended public schools before going to a school in Lancaster to Philips Academy in Exeter, and then to Round Hill at Northampton with John Murray Forbes. At eighteen, James left Round Hill for his Perkins uncles’ countinghouse. But over the course of his clerkship, he became increasingly withdrawn and depressed. His father sought to intervene and arranged for James to take a business trip to England followed by the West Indies. Here was an adventure akin to those taken by Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. and others: a coming of

⁴⁷³ John Murray Forbes to Samuel Cabot, 13 March 1836. Forbes Family Papers, John Murray Forbes Letterbook, August 11, 1834 to November 20 1836. Baker.

age voyage. Instead of reconciling the young man to commerce, however, the trip solidified his convictions to seek out some other means of making a living. In January of 1831, en route to London, James wrote to his good friend and cousin Walter Channing that he felt melancholy “of a particular kind.” He paused to explain his feelings: “It is not doubt concerning the future, nor sorrow for the past ... but I do not like fashionable society, because it scarce appears to me to deserve the name ... I have an itching for something beyond and better than eating and drinking and money-making.”⁴⁷⁴ His melancholy continued in England. His only pleasure seems to have been watching Fanny Kemble’s performances on the stage. Before he knew it, he was again aboard a ship, this time bound for Barbados and the Castries.

James’s experience in the West Indies seemed to epitomize everything he found troubling about commerce. To James, trade required exploitation. In May of 1831 his good friend Channing received the following rant: “Fortunately you are not a merchant, and know not mercantile troubles. Voici! A gentleman invites me to his house, treats me as kind as possible, does all in his power for me, --and what then? Why, I must - *must* observe ye - try to bargain him, coax him, drive him, cheat him, out of a dollar or two. I’d rather lose a leg; and yet if I don’t, I’m a fool, a greenhorn, and *he’ll* take *me* in, because *I* wouldn’t serve *him* so. If I ever get home again, I’ll quit trade rover and aye.”⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ James Perkins, New York, to Walter Channing, 15 January 1831 as quoted in Cunningham, *Owl’s Nest*, 32.

⁴⁷⁵ Cunningham, *Owl’s Nest*, 35. He disliked the West Indies from the start and was especially critical of slavery. He wrote that slavery harmed the whites even more than the blacks because it made them (the whites) little more than beasts. “Honesty is rare here; morality is an exotic, and if it is brought in, the climate kills it.”

James wrote home that, upon his return, he intended to head west. He tested the waters first: in 1832, he corresponded with a former teacher who had moved to Cincinnati. He hoped to use the town as a jumping off point for making his way west. He inquired into the prospects of finding a short term occupation while he looked for land ... and tried to pick up the basics of farming. “At present I know nothing,” he confessed, “being one of that amphibious species, half merchant, half scholar, with a strong inclination to become either a cobbler or a blacksmith.”⁴⁷⁶ James did not know what he wanted to do with his life—farmer, cobbler, blacksmith—but he knew what he did not want to do, and that was the family business: commerce.

James never returned to Boston to live, but he visited as did his children. And, ironically, his sons became some of the most successful merchants of the next generation.⁴⁷⁷ This did not come out of any personal encouragement from their parents. When James arrived in Cincinnati, he accepted a law position with his teacher, Timothy Walker with the caveat that he could leave at a moment’s notice if he found his farm. Cincinnati of the 1830s was an up-and-coming western boomtown, teeming with Americans and foreigners coming from all directions (albeit predominantly from the south). Many shared James’s ambition to remake themselves in the American west. Luckily for James, Cincinnati was also home to a small but tight-knit community of New England expatriates: Samuel P. Chase, Samuel and Elizabeth Foote, Lyman Beecher’s

⁴⁷⁶ Cunningham, *Owl's Nest*, 37.

⁴⁷⁷ John Murray Forbes—who followed James from Round Hill to the Perkins countinghouse—periodically sent James H. Perkins funds to help him through financial difficulties. But more significantly, he mentored Perkins’s son Charles Elliott Perkins, in business. Richard Cleghorn Overton, Charles Elliott Perkins, and Ralph Budd, *Perkins/Budd, Railway Statesmen of the Burlington* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), Charles Elliott Perkins, Edith Forbes Perkins, and Edith Perkins Cunningham, *Family Letters, 1861-1869 of Charles Elliott Perkins and Edith Forbes Perkins* (Boston: Priv. Print., 1949).

family including sisters Catherine, Harriet, and Isabella, and the Blackwell sisters, many of whom came together in a mixed-sex reading group “Semi-Colon Club.”⁴⁷⁸ In these social gatherings, James met Elizabeth Foote’s visiting sister, the sensitive and intelligent Sarah Elliott. The two married on December 17, 1834.

If James hoped to find his calling out west, he had a difficult time of it. Yet his path illuminates the type of work he found valuable. James received admission to the local bar, but felt troubled about the moral worth of this work as well. He next tried his hand at journalism, writing first for the *Western Monthly Magazine* and then, in the winter of 1835, purchasing the *Saturday Evening Chronicle* and merging it with the *Cincinnati Mirror*. Between monetary and health troubles, however, journalistic and literary pursuits did not suit Perkins. He joined with friends in a mining and milling adventure in Pomeroy, Ohio. Returning to Cincinnati in 1837, Perkins finally bought his land, a lot just outside of town called Walnut Hill. On this property, he built his family’s cottage: Owl’s Nest. In 1838 and 1839, Perkins worked for a local Unitarian Church as minister-at-large to the poor. His ministry also emerged out of the Cincinnati Relief Union which engaged in a wide range of reforms, including educational work and improving prison conditions. His work for the church did not support his family, however, and he opened a school for young ladies to pay the bills.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁸ The meetings had the following purpose: the discussion of literary items, wholesome not personal gossip, and intellectual not luxurious food and drink, discouraged extravagant dress. Their goals were to act upon the public welfare by increasing private, domestic virtues. William Cook, *Memoirs of Samuel Foote, Esq. With a Collection of His Genuine Bon-Mots, Anecdotes, Opinions, &C. Mostly Original. And Three of His Dramatic Pieces, Not Published in His Works* (New-York: Printed for Peter A. Mesier, no. 107, 1806), 181. According to Joan Hedrick, Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe : A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 90-92, 162.

⁴⁷⁹ See James Handasyd Perkins, *Annals of the West, Western Messenger, Memoirs and Writings* by his childhood friend and cousin, William Henry Channing. See *Cincinnati, the Queen City*, 587-590.

James H. Perkins's brother Stephen similarly rejected his parents' offerings of a commercial life. Stephen had studied in Germany under Edward Everett's guidance before going into trade as a supercargo to both the West and East Indies. He followed the traditional path, going into the family business as a resident agent in Calcutta.⁴⁸⁰ But to his cousin, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "This pursuit he hated and disapproved; all his tastes were for art, in which he was at the time perhaps the best connoisseur in Boston."⁴⁸¹ Higginson described cousin Stephen as a handsome, cultivated figure. Higginson likely knew Stephen during his youth, but in 1842, after six months teaching at a school kept by Stephen Minot Weld in Jamaica Plain, Higginson accepted a position as private tutor for his cousin's three sons. Higginson described Perkins as "the most attractive man I had yet met and the one who was most to influence me. He was indeed a person of unique qualities and great gifts."

Perkins resembled a Jane Austen character living in genteel poverty. It is not clear that he had an income beyond his earlier mercantile capital and family funds. Higginson later wrote of Perkins that he lived "in a state of social revolt, enhanced by a certain shyness and by deafness; full of theories, and ready to encourage all independent thinking."⁴⁸² He valued erudition and art over commercial pursuits. Rather than invest his funds in stocks or bonds, Perkins assembled the funds to purchase a handful of prized paintings: a Reynolds, a Van der Velde, and an oil copy of the Sistine Madonna by Moritz Retzsch. Part of Higginson's attraction to Perkins may well have been his

⁴⁸⁰ Note the letter from Colonel Perkins recommending Stephen H. Perkins in Calcutta. He wrote, "We have seldom seen a finer young fellow; you cannot serve us more than by promoting his interests." Perkins & Co., Boston, to John P. Cushing, 2 January 1826. JEC Extracts.

⁴⁸¹ Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays*, 79.

⁴⁸² Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays*, 80.

iconoclasm. The older man drew about him an eclectic social circle different from anything Higginson had experienced at Harvard. He rejected classical training and yet was widely read in French and German.⁴⁸³ He introduced Higginson to authors the younger man came to treasure, such as Heinrich Heine and Paul Louis Courier. Unlike other Perkins cousins—John Perkins Cushing, the Sturgis cousins, the Forbes brothers—James and Stephen Perkins were in a position where they not only felt the will to reject their family's compulsion to commerce, but also that there was a way. For the other Perkins cousins, obligations to siblings and parents made such a contemplation far more difficult.

Daughters rejected the family business as well, only for daughters, this increasingly meant marriage. Two of Samuel G. Perkins's daughters, sisters to James and Stephen, did not marry. Stephen Perkins's household included his three sons and his unmarried sister who kept his house. Of Samuel and Barbara's four daughters, two married, two did not. And of the two that did not, Nancy Maynard and Elizabeth Peck Perkins, one cared for Stephen's household, the other for their parents. As Virginia Lee Chambers-Schiller observes in *Liberty a Better Husband*, the number of spinsters in colonial America was negligible, but it increased over the nineteenth century so that of women born between 1865 and 1875, approximately 11% of American women chose not to marry.⁴⁸⁴ Of this third generation of Perkinses, born from 1788 to 1815, nearly as many daughters did not marry as did: 7: 9. For some of these women, spinsterhood was

⁴⁸³ Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays*. He later bequeathed these to the Boston Art Museum.

⁴⁸⁴ This number may not seem significant, but it was concentrated within a relatively small portion of the population so that, as Lee-Schiller later notes, in 1860, 17-20% of women in Massachusetts aged 35-54 were not married. Taken to its upper limits, nearly a fifth of women in the state were not marrying. Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 3, 30.

not a choice, or at least not a rejection of marriage. Emma Forbes never married, but this may well have been because her role raising her siblings melted into raising her siblings' children. For many families, unattached women provided a social safety net by caring for aging parents, siblings, and their sibling's families.⁴⁸⁵ For other daughters, family wealth provided a mechanism for opting out of marriage.⁴⁸⁶ By the third and fourth generations, as wealth came to daughters and sons in the form of trusts, access to a livelihood independent of work became a dilemma for family continuity. Marrying against family wishes or choosing not to marry at all, took courage and resources.

The Limits of Obligation

Yet if rebellion from a life of commerce did not receive censure from family, deception and dishonesty proved the limit. Here, a sense of responsibility to kin broke down. A salient example of this is John Perkins Cushing's frank letter to his brother-in-law, Henry Higginson, regarding his son's dismissal from Perkins & Co. in Canton. Henry Higginson, Jr. resided in Canton during Cushing's absence and through the tragic boating death of Perkins & Co.'s heir apparent, Thomas Tunno Forbes. Had Higginson proved adept, or even adequate, he might have been in line to a partnership in the prosperous firm. But as Cushing shared with Higginson's father, the young man had instead proven himself "totally unworthy of the confidence or good opinion of his connexions (sic)." The letter came from within the family as the only way to penetrate the web of protection that the Perkinses' business and family connections had forged.

⁴⁸⁵ Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband : Single Women in America : The Generations of 1780-1840*, 33. She writes that when sons left the family home, it was usually to marry, and increasingly shed the responsibilities of caring for aging parents. This fell to daughters.

⁴⁸⁶ Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband : Single Women in America : The Generations of 1780-1840*, Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft : A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

Cushing was the only one willing to alert the father “as he may and probably will misrepresent his conduct here in such a way as may ... prevent your adopting such measures as will be necessary to ... prevent a recurrence of conduct that will not fail to disgrace himself and his friends.”

What could warrant such a rebuke? Not Higginson’s carelessness or laziness. No, Cushing knew of these when he had advanced the lad’s candidacy. Likely he expected Canton’s isolation could force Higginson to apply himself. But even he was surprised at the dissipation, the mendacity, “indeed ... almost every bad quality without a redeeming good one.” What is interesting here is not only the lengths it took to earn such a reproach, but the defensive mechanisms that came into view to shield the larger network from scandal. The merchants in China charged with handling Perkins & Co. business after Forbes’s death had been reticent to send him home and had willingly paid off exorbitant debts on his behalf rather than “have his connexions (sic) disgraced by an exposure of his conduct.”⁴⁸⁷ Instead, the censure and dismissal had to come from an authority figure connecting family and firm.

Other limits occurred on a more personal level, such as when Joshua Bates wrote to his firm’s agent in Boston, Thomas Wren Ward, to prepare him for potential calumny.⁴⁸⁸ His “reprobate” brother-in-law had sent Bates’s wife a letter accusing her of standing between him and funds that Bates would surely otherwise lend him. Unless Mrs. Bates sent him £300, Charles Sturgis threatened to tattle on her misdeeds to the newspapers. Bates supposed these to be empty threats, but warned Ward of the matter

⁴⁸⁷ John Perkins Cushing to Henry Higginson, 28 August 1830. Bryant & Sturgis Papers, Volume 12: Private Letterbook of John Perkins Cushing, Boston, 1828-1842. Baker.

⁴⁸⁸ Joshua Bates to Thomas Wren Ward, 22 October 1841. Thomas Wren Ward Papers, Box 10, Folder 13. MHS.

nonetheless. Sturgis felt his sister owed him something in her good fortune. But Charles's manner of handling the relationship was ineffective. Another Sturgis brother, John Sturgis, cultivated a regular correspondence and sense of patronage and obligation with his wealthy brother-in-law. He, too, expected to benefit from his sister's favorable marriage, but curried favors within a paternalist framework.

Samuel Cabot similarly put the brakes on funds disbursed in the favor of his nephew Joseph in reaction to the younger man's dishonesty. Joseph was the son of Samuel's unfortunate brother Stephen and his West Indian mistress, Zamie Feche. Beginning in about 1830, Joseph Cabot traveled from either St. Thomas or Port au Prince to live with Samuel Cabot and his family in Boston.⁴⁸⁹ Joseph entered into commerce himself but, in the mid-1850s, he claimed he suffered several reverses and could no longer manage support payments to his mother in St. Thomas. His wealthier uncle took over the payments until a lack of response to his correspondence led Samuel to inquire after Joseph. Instead of bordering poverty, Joseph turned out to be a prosperous, popular merchant in the bustling Mississippi River boomtown of St. Louis. The news of his nephew's duplicity angered Samuel Cabot so that he not only stopped covering Joseph's obligations to his mother, he called in Joseph's debts to him with interest to the tune of \$5-6,000.⁴⁹⁰ Kinship as lines of duty and affection created business opportunities and safeguards. While apathy, ineptitude, and antipathy toward commerce did not break these bonds, deceit did.

⁴⁸⁹ Stephen Cabot, Port au Prince, to Samuel Cabot, Boston, 2 November 1830. Samuel Cabot Papers, Box 2, Folder 3. MHS. In addition to Joseph, Stephen and Zamie had several daughters.

⁴⁹⁰ Joseph Cabot, St. Louis, to Samuel Cabot, Boston, 15 November 1855; B.C. Clark to Samuel Cabot, 31 August 1855; Samuel Cabot, Boston, to Joseph Cabot, St. Louis, 12 April 1858. Samuel Cabot Papers, Reel 2, Folder 11. MHS. Note that the final, angry letter from Samuel to Joseph was a draft, but it seems likely that it was sent. This is where the correspondence ends.

Inheriting the Firm

When the elder James & Thomas H. Perkins established Perkins & Sons in 1817, they followed a pattern with a long history in commercial practice: bringing their sons into the family business. As common a dilemma as succession was, it was also one of the most difficult steps in family businesses. The myriad quotes of “shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves” and the rise and fall of the family firm in three generations may feel cliché, but there is a reason for their prominence. Succession was hard. The Perkins brothers clearly aimed to pass on the capital, skills, knowledge, reputation, and contacts they had amassed over the decades. Their sons and son-in-laws took up the challenge, albeit the son-in-laws more than the sons. This ambivalent transfer of power became a problem that manifested in later crises of succession so that the 1830s became a pivotal period for the network. Perkins & Co. of Canton merged with Samuel Russell & Co. in 1830. Perkins & Co. of Boston closed its doors on January 1, 1838. Successors to the Perkins legacy explicitly preferred to use Russell & Co. and a newly formed John Murray Forbes & Co. to taking up the mantle of the Perkins name. The new firms grafted onto the older network, but as a “Forbes dynasty.” Understanding these breaks in succession require looking not simply at the life of the firms, but intersections of firm and family life.

As a family business, the Perkins commercial network can be read as a failure or a success. Perkins & Co. successfully profited the partners and their families, employed a broad range of kin, and allowed for the perpetuation of this legacy. Yet the Perkins legacy *as* a Perkins legacy did not last long. This was not for lack of trying. In 1817, when James and Thomas H. Perkins formed Perkins & Sons, they aimed to give their

successors the most promising gift a merchant could give his or her child: not simply an inheritance, but the means to perpetuate that inheritance. The new countinghouse brought together the two juniors with Colonel Perkins's son-in-law, Samuel Cabot, Jr. Business between the two firms would overlap, but without any liability for debts or losses for the other firm. Perkins & Sons would handle a fair portion of the short and medium-term ventures of the parent firm as well as any new business the younger men brought in. The original firm maintained the lucrative China trade. Most significantly, the contract for the new firm guaranteed an income for the three young men. If the partnership failed to profit, the older merchants would make up the difference so that the younger men had no fear of losing the lifestyle to which they were accustomed.

The contract establishing the new firm raises the question, was the trading house set up for succession in commerce or family life? While these did not have to be alternatives, Perkins & Sons seems to have been intended more for the latter than the former. Thomas H. Perkin, Jr. and James Perkins, Jr. both chafed under the pressure to accept the commercial mantle of their fathers, but they eventually came to the table and accepted partnerships in James and Thomas H. Perkins & Sons.⁴⁹¹ By all accounts, however, neither of the two juniors were very involved in the firm. Descriptions of the countinghouse given by Robert Bennet Forbes per 1817 and those of John Murray Forbes

⁴⁹¹ Successful, durable firms followed this pattern. In Jardine & Matheson, for example, the firm periodically seemed more an enterprise to establish sons and relatives than to profit. Here, the senior partners in Perkins & Co. retained the choice plum for themselves—the China trade—and brought the sons into the trade gradually. Henry Cary, whose brothers Thomas and William would both marry daughters of Colonel Perkins, brought several of his brothers into his New York commission house, but also retained the moneymaker (for him the fur trade) for himself. See Carol Matheson Connell, "Jardine Matheson & Company: The Role of External Organization in a 19th C. Trading Firm," *Enterprise & Society* 4, no. 1 (2003): 99-138, Geoffrey Jones, *Merchants to Multinationals : British Trading Companies in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Alain Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire : Jardine, Matheson & Co. And the Origins of British Rule in Hong Kong, 1827-1843* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

and James Handasyd Perkins (son to Samuel G. Perkins) per 1829-1830 all indicated that neither of the juniors spent much time there. John Murray Forbes wrote that while the juniors both took a kind interest in the clerks—taking them to the theater or teaching them to sail—Samuel Cabot “bore the brunt of the work at Central Wharf” and seemed an “indefatigable worker.” Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. turned up when a vessel returned from a sea voyage. Like his father, Tom preferred the outdoor work of overseeing cargoes and mariners. James Perkins, Jr. appeared to John to not to worry himself with the business at all.⁴⁹²

The juniors accepted the role expected of them, to go into the family firm. The partnership proved profitable enough that the fathers never needed to bail out the juniors. But neither did any of the younger men display the entrepreneurial dynamism of William Sturgis, John Perkins Cushing, or John Murray Forbes.⁴⁹³ Instead of expanding, the firm largely continued with existing commissions until the firm closed in 1838—not for a lack of business, but for a lack of successors. Colonel Perkins probed John Perkins Cushing, offering “the Head of our Hong,” but Cushing demurred.⁴⁹⁴ In 1828, another son-in-law, Thomas G. Cary, agreed to partner with Samuel Cabot and Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. following the retirement and passing of James Perkins, Jr. Cary was not inexperienced. Beginning in 1821, Cary partnered with his brothers Henry and William Ferdinand Cary

⁴⁹² Quoted in Cunningham, *Owl's Nest*, 29-30. Thomas Perkins, Jr.'s business correspondence indicates he did participate in the indoor work to a certain extent, but the overall characterization of Samuel Cabot, Jr. as the real workhorse of the firm appears fair.

⁴⁹³ Even Samuel Cabot seemed more of a workhorse than a businessman. John M. Forbes, who bore deep affection for Cabot, wrote in 1829 that at times the man seemed to prefer a bad deal to a good one from the greater certainty of getting paid. Forbes and Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, vol. 1, p. 58.

⁴⁹⁴ Perkins & Sons, Boston to John Perkins Cushing, 18 May 1827. JEC Extracts. “After a busy life of 20 years’ uninterrupted labor, we doubt if you will be content to remain quiet. We offer you the Head of our Hong, from which the writer must soon retire *nolens volens*.”

in a New York-based commission house. The Carys came from Chelsea, Massachusetts, but most of the Cary brothers followed the eldest, Henry, in establishing themselves in New York. But as Perkins and Cabot sought to retire, there was no one to take up the mantle of the Perkins's commercial legacy.⁴⁹⁵ Given that the basic sinews of the network continued beyond the flagship firm's demise, the closure of Perkins & Co. of Boston is curious.

Most accounts of Perkins & Co. of Boston suggest that the firm failed. This is a logical conclusion given the firm officially closed its doors on January 1, 1838, not long after the nation's sharp economic downturn in the wake of the Panic of 1837.⁴⁹⁶ Rather than a bankruptcy, the firm's failure was a failure of succession. Of the three partners, Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. had made moves to retire on several occasions and Samuel Cabot had just lost his son and successor, T. Handasyd Cabot, who died of smallpox in Canton in 1836. Thomas G. Cary displayed a willingness to locate a new partner, but found no one with the skill, capital, and most importantly the will necessary to energize the venerable firm of Perkins & Co. Thus, after 1838, Perkins & Co. was no more.

John Perkins Cushing and John Murray Forbes both declined to pick up the mantle of the Boston firm at different points. Both displayed the acumen and returned from China with the capital needed to reinvigorate the Boston trading house. Neither found the prospect appealing. Cushing, certainly, was ready to retire in 1828. But his

⁴⁹⁵ Cary & Co. of New York failed in 1837, as did many countinghouses in the wake of the financial panic of 1837.

⁴⁹⁶ This was not a bankruptcy, but nor was the firm flourishing. By Samuel Cabot's tabulations of the trial balances in 1838, the firm's partners stood to make approximately \$125,000 at its closure. This was not inconsiderable, but it was a small sum compared with the estimates following the closure of the second establishment with the death of James Perkins, Jr. of \$1,127,432.49. Samuel Cabot to T. H. Perkins, 9 January 1838. Thomas H. Perkins Papers, Box 2, Folder 2.9. MHS; Perkins & Sons, Boston to Perkins & Co., Canton, 20 October 1830. JEC Extracts.

letters to Thomas T. Forbes, his chosen successor, show that Cushing contemplated breaking with the Perkinses entirely. In reorganizing the new Canton house on Forbes's behalf, Cushing laid down fairly stiff terms for the partners of Perkins & Sons. He warned Tom Forbes that if the Perkinses did not comply, he would back out and the two would proceed on their own in collaboration with Bryant & Sturgis. He proposed that the two Perkins juniors and Samuel Cabot concern themselves only with supplying cash capital (one-third of a million dollars each).⁴⁹⁷ Cushing aimed to limit the influence the young Perkins inheritors had on the running of the firm.⁴⁹⁸

These negotiations for a new China house fell apart with Forbes's untimely death in a boating accident. When Forbes died, Cushing wrote to the young man's mother that "Canton now appears to have lost that interest to me which it formerly possessed when I was looking forward to the useful and honorable career of him who is thus suddenly and prematurely cut off in the midst of his usefulness."⁴⁹⁹ Cushing already seemed reticent to join other potential successors in business with the Perkinses. Yet Tom Forbes's death must have been difficult for Cushing. The younger man was not just his successor, he was his legacy. After Forbes's death, Cushing retired from business entirely. Cushing merged the Canton house with Samuel Russell & Co. and made arrangements for Tom

⁴⁹⁷ Cushing also desired that Forbes should have access to one-fourth of the capital, interest free, and that the agency should focus on the China trade. John Perkins Cushing to Thomas T. Forbes, 23 November 1828. Bryant & Sturgis Papers, Volume 12. Baker.

⁴⁹⁸ In Cushing's letters to Forbes, it seems it was not simply the younger men Cushing desired to constrain. He urged Forbes to be wary of Colonel Perkins writing him to overextend himself with large shipments. "The Col. you must recollect is rather forgetful and sometimes recommends what at other times he condemns." John Perkins Cushing to Thomas T. Forbes, 14 October 1828. Thomas H. Perkins Papers, Box 2, Folder 2.8. MHS. Perkins was more wont to take large risks than Cushing, as in the zeal the elder merchant displayed in the Turkish opium market, overextending the firm to a degree that clearly displeased Cushing.

⁴⁹⁹ John Perkins Cushing to Margaret Perkins Forbes, 21 October 1830. Bryant & Sturgis Papers, Volume 12. Baker.

Forbes's younger brother, John, to take a place in the house with a fast track to partnership. He had first offered the place to Robert Bennet Forbes, but after consulting with Colonel Perkins and William Sturgis, Bennet opted for a maritime post as captain of the *Lintin*, the network's opium smuggling vessel. Cushing handed over his fortune to Bryant & Sturgis (and thus his good friend William Sturgis) to administer as an investment fund. Cushing took his place in the family's circle and supported kin socially and financially, but he wanted no part in the running of the Perkins network.⁵⁰⁰

By 1837, Perkins & Co. of Boston was at a crossroads. Both Robert Bennet Forbes and John Murray Forbes considered taking over the firm. Bennet wrote to his cousin Paul Sieman Forbes about the prospect, but the Panic of 1837 interceded and nearly bankrupted Bennet.⁵⁰¹ John suggested the prospect of the same cousin partnering with Thomas Graves Cary. At the time, Cary had pitched a partnership with John himself. John declined. His explanation was tactful and perhaps sincere, but it was not entirely honest. He wrote: "I have often thought that if more money became necessary to me, I should want no safer and surer road to a fortune than would be secured by joining forces with you in business. As it is, however, I hope ere long to wind up my Canton Concerns, with ballast enough left, to enable me to lead a lazy quiet cottage life, without doing more work than is agreeable to me, and that I fear is very little."⁵⁰² Forbes

⁵⁰⁰ Thus, for example, Cushing wrote letters of introduction for kin and loaned Bennet Forbes the funds to hide his insolvency from creditors in 1837. He played chess with Colonel Perkins and had celebrated parties. But by and large, he left commerce behind with his retirement. This was not the case with many of his kinsman, like Colonel Perkins and William Sturgis, who never really retired.

⁵⁰¹ See the letters between Paul Sieman Forbes and Robert Bennet Forbes in the Forbes Family Papers, Box 4, Folders 41b and 46. Baker.

⁵⁰² John M. Forbes to Thomas G. Cary, 19 December 1838, 14 December 1838. Forbes Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 14. Baker. On Forbes's future as an industrial investor, see especially Johnson and Supple, *Boston Capitalists and Western Railroads; a Study in the Nineteenth-Century Railroad Investment*

instead went into business for himself as John Murray Forbes & Co. His “quiet cottage” stood across the street from his mother and sisters at “Chateau Forbes,” all of whom he put to work helping with both the care of his twin daughters and serving as copyists for his continued mercantile affairs. John M. Forbes’s decision to opt out of a partnership may have been personal. In those economically troubled years following his return, Forbes focused on family affairs. He took on his brother’s as well as his own obligations soon after returning to Milton. He managed funds for his siblings in order to ensure their economic security.

But it is striking that the firm had no other individuals in the pipeline for succession. No one within the family exerted pressure on younger men to take up the mantle of the family firm. While young yet, even as they came of age, the grandchildren of James and Thomas H. Perkins showed little inclination to commerce. Rather, they seemed evidence of Cleveland Amory’s old adage of Boston’s “first families.” Family histories followed the merchants: the ante-merchant era scarcely mattered and the post-merchant era was largely a matter of not outspending the merchant’s fortune.

Alternately, the family needed to produce new merchants to make up the difference. For the offspring of James and Thomas H. Perkins, their wealth allowed them to travel Europe, collect and write about art, and live leisured lives.⁵⁰³ Contrast this with the work

Process, Larson, *Bonds of Enterprise : John Murray Forbes and Western Development in America's Railway Age*, Yaggy, "John Forbes: Entrepreneur."

⁵⁰³ The grandchildren of James and Thomas H. Perkins, the partners of the initial Boston firm in 1792, used their inheritance to participate in philanthropy and artistic circles unencumbered by work for wages. Charles Callahan Perkins was probably the best known of the Perkinses in this generation. Charles Perkins attended both William Wells’s school and Harvard with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who described him as attractive and refined and, best of all, possessor of a liberal income. Perkins used said liberal income to support art and music education and enjoyment in Boston. He was the first American accepted to the French Academy and a founder and honorary director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the largest subscriber in the building of the Boston Concert Hall. He and his cousins tended to write

that John and Bennet Forbes put into marshalling kin into a “Forbes dynasty.” Russell & Co. was no longer a family firm. Partners came from a variety of allied families and contacts. But John, Bennet, and Sieman Forbes at various points collaborated to ensure a controlling interest in the firm and to keep the family interest alive.⁵⁰⁴ Russell & Co. continued to trade with Russell & Sturgis in Manila, Baring Brothers in London, Cary & Co. in New York, William Appleton and Samuel Hooper in Boston (William Sturgis’s successors), as well as John Murray Forbes & Co. in Boston, amongst others. The younger men who went to China in the mid- to late-nineteenth century tended to be

books and give lectures about art, architecture, music, and history. The legacies of the early merchant fortunes poured into the creation of a cosmopolitan Boston society.

Along with the marriages to Harvard professors observed by Ronald Story, Perkins women married men with other artistic proclivities and followed their own literary pursuits. None would approach the quiet fame of Carrie Sturgis Tappan or her sister Ellen, but Sarah Perkins (Cleveland) seems to have played a similar behind the scenes role of inspiring others. Mary Louisa Cary married Cornelius C. Felton and Elizabeth Perkins Cary married Louis Agassiz, Harvard professors both. Sarah Perkins, Charles’s sister and granddaughter to James Perkins, married Henry Russell Cleveland. Her cousin Louisa Perkins married the painter William Morris Hunt. Sarah and Henry Cleveland traveled in literary and philanthropic circles, but Henry closed his school for boys soon after marrying Sarah. They both participated in the circle of friends known as the “Five of Clubs”: Hal Cleveland, Corny Felton, Henry W. Longfellow, George Hillard, and Charley Sumner. William Hunt, by contrast, continued an active career as a painter and art teacher known for cultivating female artists. See the Cleveland-Perkins Papers, NYPL and the Sarah Perkins Cleveland Papers, Houghton, Henry Russell and George Stillman Hillard Cleveland, *A Selection from the Writings of Henry R. Cleveland: With a Memoir* (Boston: n.p., 1844), Martha J. Hoppin, “Women Artists in Boston, 1870-1900: The Pupils of William Morris Hunt,” *American Art Journal* 13, no. 1 (1981): 17-46, Anne-Marie Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner and the Legacy of the American Enlightenment, 1811-1851* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner and the Legacy of the American Enlightenment, 1811-1851*. Interestingly enough, several of the grandchildren of Samuel Cabot and Barbara Higginson made their way back into commerce and finance, perhaps because the middle generation had opted out of commerce leaving little for them to live off. Charles Elliot Perkins and his brother Edward both followed this pattern.

⁵⁰⁴ The cousins calculated in private letters who within Russell & Co. felt “obligated” to them and could be counted on to favor the “Forbes interest.” As Bennet wrote to Sieman, “The moment you leave the field, the Forbes dynasty and control must end—unless you get into the concern men who have some obligation toward us.” In between themselves, the Forbes cousins referred to Russell & Co. as a “Forbes dynasty,” but when it seemed Russell Sturgis might manage the house, Bennet Forbes broadened it once again to a “Boston concern.” Robert Bennet Forbes to Paul Sieman Forbes, 23 March 1848, 5 March 1849. Forbes Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 47. Baker. Sieman wrote to John: “As you well know my chief reason for renewing the engagement with R & Co at the end of 1852 was to keep up the connection of my friends with the house and with the view of introducing a nephew of mine when I should finally retire.” Paul Sieman Forbes to John Murray Forbes 21 July 1853. Forbes Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 48. Baker. On the Forbes interest, see for example, Robert Bennet Forbes to Paul Sieman Forbes, 8 December 1843. Forbes Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 46. Baker.

Forbeses, not Perkinses. Thus, by the 1840s the basic sinews of the commercial network proceeded, but without the Perkinses.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that kinship did psychic and not just structural work for merchant families and their businesses. Understandings of familial obligation shaped business strategies beyond a nepotistic desire to profit favored children. Rather, in more subtle ways, the overlap of family and firm directed attention, care, and sentiments in ways that helped to construct an elaborate web of filial obligation. Scholars tend to see filial ties as obstructing a more pure and profitable business impulse. Certainly James and Thomas H. Perkinses efforts to provide for their juniors enriched favored sons more than the family firms. But this father-son relationship was not the only way in which family ties shaped business and vice versa.

For sons and brothers, daughters and sisters, the yoking together of gender-based obligations to the virtue or well-being of family members could provide a potent call to action than a duty to self. While domesticity is often understood as an ideology removing women from marketplace labor (no matter their actual contributions), it is in seeing domesticity as a masculine trait in pressing men to work rather than simply keeping women from it that most clearly demonstrates the ideology's productive capacity. For women like Elizabeth Peck Perkins, Sarah Cabot, and Margaret Perkins Forbes, their social entrepreneurialism *as* mothers served the commercial network well. Opting out of the "family business," either by choosing another career path or refusing to marry, was a privilege that not all kin could afford.

James and Thomas H. Perkins were both products of a moment and place in which wealth carried implications of a particular social merit, status, and obligation. In Thomas H. Perkins's letters to his son, Perkins wrote of his obligation to his son and his son's obligation to his mother and sisters. The bonds did not go one way, but demanded a sort of reciprocity. By the time John Murray Forbes and his wife wrote similar letters to their children and prospective guardians, the couple emphasized not obligation to siblings or themselves as parents, but a need for their children to perform useful labor for society.⁵⁰⁵ Obligations and interests were not axiomatic, but socially constructed.

⁵⁰⁵ John Murray Forbes to Emma Forbes, 19 November 1843, quoted in Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* 33.

**CHAPTER 4.
INTANGIBLE ASSETS:
PATRONAGE, PATERNALISM, AND GLOBAL FINANCING
IN THE AMERICAN CHINA TRADE.**

By the turn of the nineteenth century, James and Thomas Perkins saw China as a pivot in their trading interests. Their other regional interests contained commodities of interest to the China market. Pacific sea otter furs, South American silver, Mediterranean and South Asian opium, and Filipino rice made for a global commerce—all of which relied upon Chinese demand on one end and the European and American taste for tea on the other. In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, a single Canton voyage could tie up funds anywhere from a year to three, or even longer if goods were held from the market to await an improvement in price. Long-distance trade demanded not only capable agents who would mind Perkins' interests while on the other side of the globe, but also far more capital than had been required for the West Indies trade. Pooling capital with family and friends allowed merchants to amass larger sums while also mitigating risk; if a single venture shipwrecked or fared poorly, the loss would be split amongst a number of families. Beyond these basic building blocks of international trade however, the Perkinses strengthened their position in commerce through powerful partnerships with foreign firms. While the Perkinses maintained a strong inner circle of trusted kin and neighbors and a weaker circle of regular agents with whom they traded and corresponded about markets in distant ports, they also cultivated a mid-level tier of preferred relationships with the Wus of Canton and the Barings of London.

This chapter examines the ties between these distinct but overlapping commercial circles, assessing the ways in which kinship provided a repertoire of behavioral and cultural strategies. It looks first at the Wus and then the Perkins' various London agents

culminating with their relationship with the Barings. As Philip Curtin surveyed in his *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, traders have built and patterned long-distance networks on a plethora of relationships, from kinship and guild ties to religious and ethnic groups, from marrying into local societies to maintaining distinct social enclaves within a foreign port.⁵⁰⁶ What is interesting about the Perkins-Wu relationship is that it most closely resembled paternalist expectation of father and son, merchant and apprentice—a familial relationship not often discussed in terms of cross-cultural inter-firm behavior. As such, the relationship challenges the traditional historiographical expectations of power and influence running from Western traders into China: the Perkinses' success depended to a considerable extent on their relationship with the Wu family.

The Barings, by contrast, *did* connect families. Baring partner Joshua Bates corresponded regularly with his wife's Sturgis kin. Russell Sturgis of this clan later became a senior partner in Baring Brothers as well. Americans had more familiarity with London's mode of business and finance than with China's: London continued to be America's financial capital well into the nineteenth century, even as New York gained ground mid-century. Even as Americans rushed to launch marine insurance companies, banks, and other domestic financial establishments in the wake of independence from Britain, they patterned these companies on the London institutions with which they were most familiar. Thus, it was advantageous for the Perkinses to have the confidence of one of the world's financial heavyweights—London-based Baring Brothers. This more fraternal tie reflected both individual connections and the relative positions of the firms.

⁵⁰⁶ Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*.

The connections that the Perkins established within Chinese and British commercial circles proved essential to their expanding capacity in terms of access to capital, information, as well as patronage and mentorship. These cultivated ties staved off crises and kept the network active during economic hard times.⁵⁰⁷ The Wus and Barings extended capital and choice goods and, more significantly, elected to not withdraw credit from the Perkins firms at critical moments.⁵⁰⁸ While the ties differed in substance, they similarly blended business and affective connections in order to cultivate preferential relationships and to better secure information, advice, and capital.⁵⁰⁹ During the run up to the Opium War in China, for example, the Wus advised Perkins firm Russell & Co. on how to negotiate local politics in order to best preserve their position. To the Perkinses, these preferred relationships helped them to navigate foreign legal, political, cultural, and economic systems. To competitors, the relationships provided the Perkinses with a critical advantage that explained their success.

A Chinese-American Alliance: The Wu Family of Canton

In 1842, John Murray Forbes wrote a letter to the esteemed Chief Hong merchant, Houqua (Wu Bingjian). He wrote:

⁵⁰⁷ David Hancock argues that scholars need to examine failures and not simply focus on successful networks. But part of what is missing in this emphasis on success or failure is an understanding of how networks function to help to rescue firms from likely failures. Hancock, "The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots' Early Madeira Trade." See also Edward J. Balleisen, *Navigating Failure : Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁵⁰⁸ Russell & Company's demise in 1891 was at least in part due to the fact that they were no longer privy to Wu family funds and the Barings were unable to bail them out.

⁵⁰⁹ Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship : The United States and China to 1914*. Where Michael Hunt writes that the head of the Wu family, "based his relationship with Americans not on sentiment but on a clear and immediate profit basis," in fact there is little evidence that the connection was a matter of either/or and considerable evidence to the contrary.

My dear Friend,

This will be handed by my Cousin P.S. Forbes the son of my Father's Elder Brother and for whom I have the same regard as for a Brother.

He has been a Commission merchant connecting a very large business ever since he was 18 years old having begun his commercial operations at the same time that I had reached, when you took me under your fatherly care. Since that time he has been hard at work chiefly in South America and possesses the confidence of some of the first houses in New York, among others of Howland & Aspinwall who have usually sent two or three ships to China yearly.

Last year which in this Country the imprudence of his partner added to some matter imprudences of his own, involved him in shipments of coffee by which he lost dearly at the same time his Partner Father failed owing them considerable sums, his agents in London and in New Orleans both failed and finally three of his correspondents in this Country refused to pay for the Coffee they had ordered. How could anyone stand up under such a combination of losses? I had helped him to about 10000\$ should have gone farther but the amount was too large and so I advised him to stop at once and divide his property among his creditors and he did so and in about six months he will probably be discharged from anything and whatever he can make from the time will be his own.

I have perfect confidence in his integrity and he has certainly had great experience as a merchant, all he wants is an advisor like you to make him remember his former bad luck and take no more risks in future. My Brother and I hope that Russell & Co. will soon take him into their house, they have cut down my Brother to one sixteenth which I tell him is no object for the risk of keeping his name in the House. I hope you will use your influence with them now that they have almost turned old Forbes out to take our Cousin in. If they do they will get a good working Partner and we shall do just as much as we can to promote their interest. Whether they take him or not I can only say to you that if you can help him in any way you will at the same time help me and that you may trust his integrity just as much as you could in mine or my Brothers.

With my best compliments to your Grandson and my best wishes for yourself, I remain, Your friend and Servant.

The letter invoked friendship, fatherly care, and family obligation both within the Forbes clan and between Houqua and Forbes. In effect, John Murray Forbes entreated Houqua to recall the loyalty and paternal attention the older merchant had given him and to extend it to his cousin.

In expressing his own obligation to his brother and cousin—whom he had gone to great lengths to assist already, in whom he had great confidence, whom he regarded as a brother—John put forth a vision of family and commerce that he knew would appeal to the elderly Chinese merchant: one in which the family structured business goals. This was a value the two men shared. John Murray Forbes went to great lengths to support his kin and kinship itself as a value. But it was also probably a value that his time working for Houqua heightened. In his letter, John referenced a period in the 1830s when Houqua took him “under [his] fatherly care.” Like his brother and his uncle before him, Forbes worked as a liaison between Houqua and Western merchants and officials. He was employed both by Russell & Co. and by Houqua’s *I-he* hong. Through these liaisons and the cultivated ties they established, expressed as bonds of friendship and between families, the Perkins and Wu families maintained a preferential business relationship that endured over multiple generations.

The Wu family of Canton collaborated with the Perkinses in trade and investment for much of the nineteenth century. While their relationship was not exclusive, the alliance between the two families opened pathways of international commerce and investment that might otherwise have been closed to them. For the Perkinses and their later firm, Russell & Co., the Wu family provided prestige, quality teas, and access to capital and information. In return, Perkins connections allowed the Wus to diversify into the American and European markets and gave recourse to a network of foreign agents and their court systems in case of misconduct. When American or European merchants failed to pay notes owed to Houqua and when the British government confiscated Houqua’s property, the Perkinses acted as claims agents on his behalf. And between

1838 and 1878, the Perkinses—or, more specifically, John Murray Forbes—invested millions of dollars in American stocks and bonds on behalf of the Wu family.

While the relationship between the Wu and Perkins families is no mystery to scholars⁵¹⁰, the relationship challenges historiographical expectations of a natural hierarchy of power and influence: without Houqua, the Perkinses may not have become quite so successful. Further, its existence flies in the face of the emphasis on cultural and political antagonism leading up to the Opium Wars and “unequal treaties” of mid-century. Much of the China-Western trade literature is dedicated to the questions of what led to the Opium War of 1840-1842 and the imperialist, unequal treaties that followed, and whether Western trade helped or hindered Chinese economic development in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries.⁵¹¹ The relationships between the firms considered in

⁵¹⁰ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China : The Rise of Sino-Western Mercantile Capitalism*, Yen-p ing Hao, *The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China: Bridge between East and West* (Cambridge,: Harvard University Press, 1970), Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship : The United States and China to 1914*.

⁵¹¹ Much of the China-Western trade literature is dedicated to the questions of what led to the Opium War of 1840-1842 and the imperialist, unequal treaties that followed, and whether Western trade helped or hindered Chinese economic development in the nineteenth-and twentieth-centuries. The relationships between the firms considered in this chapter are pertinent to both: the Perkinses were significant opium traffickers, they were pivotal in the continuation of trade with China during the Opium War—but also shaped the terms of American negotiations of their own “unequal treaty” with Chinese officials—and they invested in Chinese development from banks and manufacturing to China’s first steamship line. A selection of such works includes Dilip Kumar Basu, "Asian Merchants and Western Trade: A Comparative Study of Calcutta and Canton, 1800-1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1975), W. E. Cheong, *Mandarins and Merchants: Jardine, Matheson, & Co., a China Agency of the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Curzon Press, 1979), Connell, "Jardine Matheson & Company: The Role of External Organization in a 19th C. Trading Firm.", Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia; a Critical Study of the Policy of the United States with Reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th Century*, Dulles, *The Old China Trade*, Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast : The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854*, Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, James Louis Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar : Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), James Louis Hevia, *English Lessons : The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The History of Early Relations between the United States and China, 1784-1844* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1917), Alain Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire : Jardine, Matheson & Co. And the Origins of British Rule in Hong Kong, 1827-1843* (Oxford ; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2006), Glenn Melancon, *Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis : Balancing Drugs,*

this chapter are pertinent to both: the Perkinses were significant opium traffickers, they were pivotal in the continuation of trade with China during the Opium War—but also shaped the terms of American negotiations of their own “unequal treaty” with Chinese officials—and they invested in Chinese development from banks and manufacturing to China’s first steamship line. While the Wu-Perkins connection did not obviate conflict, prejudice, or, as we shall see, a willingness to sell opium, it suggests that the Chinese-American relationship was more complex than the political trajectories allow.

Preferential ties like that of the Wu and Perkins firms were not uncommon between Chinese and Western merchants in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. The Yan family collaborated extensively with Danish traders; the British firm of Jardine, Matheson & Co. had close ties with Mouqua, Manhop, and Hingtae; and Pankequa favored Swedish merchants.⁵¹² In fact, there were several reasons why cultivating loyalties, merging business with personal ties, made strategic sense for Chinese merchants in Canton in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Chinese merchants depended on these personal relationships for recourse if and when other foreigners absconded with their funds and merchandise. Foreign merchants provided an outlet for capital in the face of few domestic opportunities for investment.⁵¹³ And finally, sending

Violence and National Honour, 1833-1840 (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), Ann Bolbach White, "The Hong Merchants of Canton" (University of Pennsylvania, 1967).

⁵¹² Basu, "Asian Merchants and Western Trade: A Comparative Study of Calcutta and Canton, 1800-1840," 353, Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, 154, Paul Arthur Van Dyke, "The Yan Family: Merchants of Canton, 1734-1780s," *Review of Culture International Edition* 9 (004): 30-85.

⁵¹³ Basu, "Asian Merchants and Western Trade: A Comparative Study of Calcutta and Canton, 1800-1840," 314.

out ventures in the names of trusted foreign merchants kept the funds out of the hands of grasping officials.⁵¹⁴

The Wu-Perkins relationship joined two kinship-based commercial networks, but it began with two individuals: John Perkins Cushing and Wu Bingjian. Wu Bingjian (伍秉鑑)⁵¹⁵, better known to contemporaries as Houqua (浩官)⁵¹⁶, may well have been the richest man in the world in the early nineteenth century. In 1834, he estimated his wealth at \$26 million.⁵¹⁷ Compare this, for example, with Stephen Girard's estimated wealth of \$7 million at the time of his death in 1831, or Nathan Rothschild's estimated wealth of \$17.85 million in 1837.⁵¹⁸ Houqua's fame was such that paintings of the elderly

⁵¹⁴ Kuo-tung Anthony Chen, "The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760-1843" (Dissertation, Yale University, 1990).

⁵¹⁵ Wu Ping-chien in Wade-Giles. While many of the English-language sources use Wade-Giles, I use pinyin as that is the more common form of Chinese to English Romanization in use today. The exception to this conversion is for the formal names for Chinese merchants (ending in "-qua"), where I use the names as used by the Perkinses. Some sources record his name as Wu Dunyuan (伍敦元). The descriptions indicate that this was the same man and not one of his sons or brothers. See Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926), vol. 4, p. 59, Betty Peh- T. i Wei, *Ruan Yuan, 1764-1849: The Life and Work of a Major Scholar-Official in Nineteenth-Century China before the Opium War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 145.

⁵¹⁶ Chinese Hong merchants used trade names that ended in the titular "qua," with the name commonly handed down to successors. Thus, when Houqua's son became the head of the family hong, he, too, became known as Houqua. Hao Guan in pinyin, Howqua to the British. I use the spelling "Houqua" because it was the spelling used by the Perkins family and most Americans.

⁵¹⁷ This was an estimate Houqua gave of his own wealth, as cited by William C. Hunter of Russell & Company. This estimate may well have been for his family's property rather than his as an individual, but even if that was the case, the bulk of it would have been garnered through his business acumen. William C. Hunter, *The 'Fan Kwae' at Canton before Treaty Days, 1825-1844*, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1911), 48.

⁵¹⁸ Jacques M. Downs, *The Golden Ghetto: The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1997), 415, fn 443, Niall Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild: Volume 1: Money's Prophets, 1798-1848* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 481, John B. MacMaster, *Life and Times of Stephen Girard*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1918), 461. Ferguson estimates Nathan Rothschild's wealth at £3.5 million in 1837. The dollar value was calculated using an exchange rate of \$5.10 for 1837. Lawrence H. Officer, "Dollar-Pound Exchange Rate From 1791," *Measuring Worth*, 2008. URL: <http://www.measuringworth.org/exchangepond/>. While it should be noted that Houqua's reckoning was likely family wealth rather than his alone, he played a more than leading role in accumulating the fortune.

merchant decorated the offices and homes of his correspondents, including the Perkinses and the Barings.⁵¹⁹ Visitors to Great Britain could even see his likeness amongst Madame Tussaud's waxwork collection.⁵²⁰ Over the course of his lifetime, Houqua was one of the most significant trading partners not only to the Perkinses and other American merchants, but also to the British East India Company.

Houqua was born in 1769 to a trading family that originated from Quanzhou, Fujian, a trading capital along China's eastern seaboard but whose line had settled in Nanhai close to Canton.⁵²¹ His father, Wu Guoying, began trading in Canton in 1777. This earlier Houqua worked his way up as a purser to leading Hong merchant Pankequa, where he did well enough to earn solicitations from Chinese officials to become a Hong merchant in his own right.⁵²² The word "hong" in Chinese refers to a firm or company on the one hand, as in the *I-he hong*, and a special cadre of merchants (Hong merchants) licensed to trade with foreigners on the other. The Chinese government established the

⁵¹⁹ The most famous of these paintings was the oil portrait done by George Chinnery for W.H.C. Ploweden which transferred to the ownership of J. Orange, Esq. and then A.G. Stephen, Esq. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 4, p. 1. Paintings can be found at the Forbes House in Milton, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the ING offices in London (as owners of the Baring collection), and much more.

⁵²⁰ White, "The Hong Merchants of Canton," 108.

⁵²¹ Nanhai formed part of a three county-region (Nanhai, Panyu, Shunde), linked to Canton and its trade by the Pearl River. Wu Zhao Feng (1613-1694) was a merchant who had moved from Fujian to Canton, registered as a citizen in Nanhai (currently part of the city of Foshan), and lived closed to Canton's western gate. He seems to have been successful enough as he was able to bring his father Wu Tien-pei to the new home and is seen as the first settler of the new Anhui house. Not much more is known about them until Wu Guo Ying (1731-1810) who was the founder of a prominent overseas trading house (怡和洋行/*yi huo yang hang*/happy harmony import company – my translation). He traveled to and from Fujian to Canton, for his business. Wolfram Eberhard, *Social Mobility in Traditional China* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1962), 83. Yong Chen, "Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community," in *Asian America* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 17-37.

⁵²² These names – Houqua, Pankequa – were trade names often passed down within families. The suffix "-qua" was akin to an honorific title.

Canton-based Co-Hong in 1760 as a means to protect and stabilize trade with foreign traders.

The Co-Hong was an organization of the wealthiest merchants in Canton and, officially at least, the only ones allowed by the government to trade with foreigners.⁵²³ In exchange for the prerogative of access to foreign trade, Hong merchants were both responsible for the foreigners with whom they traded and for the debts of their fellow merchants. Thus, while membership was potentially lucrative, the obligations could also be onerous.⁵²⁴ As W.E. Cheong writes in *Mandarins and Merchants*, "Membership was sought after by pursers or cashiers of the old Hong merchants to strike out on their own, sons of established merchants by contrast sought every means to evade the duty of succeeding their father's title."⁵²⁵ Wu Guoying had seen enough of this dubious privilege to question its worth. Initially, he refused Hong membership. A British East India Company official provided the following tongue-in-cheek report of his fate:

Howqua, Puankhequa's Purser, had also been mentioned, but positively refused to comply; & absconded for some time; as a punishment for which he is compelled to be a Salt Merchant which will probably ruin him very shortly. He now repents very sincerely that he did not accept the Hoppo's Offer of Hong Chop.⁵²⁶

⁵²³ In fact, trade with non-Hong merchants fluctuated considerably over the years. This trade would often surge under the auspices of the Hong merchants (who would provide their chop or license to cargoes in order to allow exports to exit Canton, for a fee of course) to the point that foreign merchants would attempt to legalize the trade, only to have the non-Hong intercourse shut down by regional officials. East India Company records indicate that this happened on several occasions over the years. Further, the Co-Hong was not a stable or consistent institution: it lost members through bankruptcy and death and initiated in new members, going through periods of upheaval as well as relative stability. The Co-Hong failed or was abolished by a group on repeated occasions.

⁵²⁴ Chen, "The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760-1843.", W. E. Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton : Chinese Merchants in Sino-Western Trade* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1997), White, "The Hong Merchants of Canton."

⁵²⁵ Cheong, *Mandarins and Merchants: Jardine, Matheson, & Co., a China Agency of the Early Nineteenth Century*, 25.

⁵²⁶ Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 2, p. 82.

For whatever reason, Guoying eventually changed his mind. Guoying served as a member of the Co-Hong from 1784 until 1789 when officials expelled him for the inability to pay his taxes.⁵²⁷

In the Chinese record, Guoying is remembered as a wealthy merchant who earned a posthumous title and who, above all, was part of a family that had contributed immensely to the southern Chinese city of Nanhai.⁵²⁸ But his reputation was less than stellar amongst the foreign merchants. Rhode Island merchant Samuel Shaw wrote that he “delayed performing his contract, absented himself almost continually from his hong, smoked opium, absconded on the 24th December, was declared bankrupt, and his effects were seized.”⁵²⁹ Perhaps it is not surprising then that when his eldest son, Wu Bingzhun, followed his father into the Canton trade, he opted for a new trade name, Puiqua, rather than adopt his father’s mantle. In 1792, Bingzhun received his Hong Chop, or official license to sell as a Hong merchant.⁵³⁰ Until his sudden death in 1801, he worked hard to restore his family’s reputation.

When Wu Bingjian followed his brother into trade, he also adopted the name Puiqua, but records indicate that Wu was soon using both merchant names, Houqua and

⁵²⁷ Basu, "Asian Merchants and Western Trade: A Comparative Study of Calcutta and Canton, 1800-1840," 356-357, Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 2, p. 89, 118, 153, vol. 113, p. 135.

⁵²⁸ Eberhard, *Social Mobility in Traditional China*, 83.

⁵²⁹ Josiah Quincy, *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton* (Boston: Wm. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1847), 301-302.

⁵³⁰ Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 2, p. 197. The Select Committee of the East India Company reported that they knew little about him and refused to accept him (and the other new “unknowns”) as Securities for their goods, but selected him to contract with for the 1793 season.

Puiqua.⁵³¹ According to Hosea Morse, he seemed to use the name Puiqua for tea contracts and Houqua for diplomatic work, but he used the name Houqua with the American merchants from their first contract for tea in April 1804.⁵³² He continued use of the name Puiqua for the family hong until 1827 when he formally changed it to Houqua so that his brothers would have no difficulty claiming shares in the firm on the event of his death.⁵³³ Through his commercial acumen, he recast the name so that rather than recall his father's failure, the name Houqua and that of the family hong, the *I-he* or *Ewo Hang* (義和行), connoted his own spectacular success.⁵³⁴

When 16 year old John Perkins Cushing arrived in Canton in 1803, Wu Bingjian had just taken over the family hong from his older brother. Cushing first traveled to China as assistant to his uncles' chosen agent, Ephraim Bumstead. At a time when most American traders engaged shipboard supercargoes (sales' agents) to handle their trade from port to port, James and Thomas Perkins charged Bumstead with establishing a new Canton-based firm to handle trading interests for their circle and his own. The Perkinses bet that having an agent in residence to make on the spot decisions would prove an advantage in the competitive East Indies market. When Thomas Perkins initially sailed to Asia in 1789, he found a cosmopolitan community of foreign traders operating out of Canton; fourteen years later, when Cushing and Bumstead arrived, the bulk of the ships

⁵³¹ British East India Company records use both names for him, but the Americans mostly used the name Houqua.

⁵³² Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 3, p. 35. Ann White indicates that Houqua's first contract with American merchants was his sale of tea to Ephraim Bumstead in 1804. White, "The Hong Merchants of Canton," 96. Bumstead & Co. Blotter, 1803-1805. MHS.

⁵³³ Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 4, 149.

⁵³⁴ The *I-he Hang* was very likely a lineage trust.

stopping at the port were British and American. As of yet, there were still few Americans in residence in China, but more and more American ships were arriving every year. In addition to the Canton residents settled by the Dutch, Swedish, Spanish, or British companies (in 1799 this population totaled 28), the EIC tally of 1802 included three English merchants operating under the auspices of the Prussian flag and two Americans. In 1802, the British East India Company (EIC) recorded the arrival of 82 ships, 70 of which flew either British or American flags.⁵³⁵ Napoleon's war on the European continent had disrupted the prospects of their competitors across the Atlantic, and the Perkinses leapt into the breach.

The Perkins brothers were anxious to put as many cargoes into play as possible while their European competitors remained preoccupied with war on the continent. In early 1805, the Boston firm sent out six ships scheduled to arrive in Canton: the *Mandarin*, the *Montezuma*, the *Globe*, and the *General Washington*, as well as the *Hazard* and the *Caroline* circling from the Pacific Northwest. The *Mandarin* alone carried 300,000 silver dollars in her hold to purchase Chinese goods.⁵³⁶ The Perkins placed a lot of faith in their former head clerk.

As early as February 1804, Colonel Thomas H. Perkins wrote to Ephraim Bumstead of the utter dearth of silver to be had by American traders—a shortage they contributed to by shipping what could be found to China (such as the above-mentioned *Mandarin* cargo). The solution, Perkins felt, was to form a close bond with a well-off

⁵³⁵ Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 2, p. 322, 389-390. It was not unusual for merchants to trade under a foreign nation's flag and to serve as their consular official, but it was also a tactic used for getting around various laws (such as the East India Company monopoly) or political prohibitions (such as against carrying particular goods such as tea or opium).

⁵³⁶ As listed in JEC Extracts.

Chinese merchant who might allow them to further their trade on credit.⁵³⁷ While their trade with Houqua began in April of 1804, Bumstead died tragically before he was able to see to Perkins's request.⁵³⁸ As mentioned in chapter two, the Perkinses scrambled to find a replacement for Bumstead. Instead, somewhat ironically, it was the still apprenticed Cushing, the nephew already residing in Canton, who saved the day and in the process won his uncles' esteem.

This outcome was by no means evident as the Perkins brothers imagined the sixteen-year old Cushing standing between them and bankruptcy. In a harried letter, the Perkinses informed Cushing they "calculated upon your throwing off juvenile pursuits." They urged him to "let the warm councils of your Grandmother still vibrate in your ear" for "You will have a great charge on you, and such as few young men ever meet with . . . future well-being depends on y'r conduct in this crisis."⁵³⁹ They still worked behind the scenes to send Burling out, even as they rhapsodized rather frantically of how they wished they had had such opportunities to distinguish themselves in their youth.⁵⁴⁰ On May 4, 1805, the partners wrote with a heavy heart: the first of their vessels, the *Guatamozin*, had arrived and it was in bad order. Boxes of tea were broken, rendering it unsalable. Worse, they had not heard from Cushing and had no idea of his condition or their prospects. Was he simply bashful about his abilities, they wondered? Two days later, however, they received a letter Cushing had written on December 10, 1804,

⁵³⁷ Thomas H. Perkins to Ephraim Bumstead, 24 February 1804. JEC Extracts.

⁵³⁸ Bumstead & Co. Blotter, 1803-1805. Thomas H. Perkins Papers. MHS.

⁵³⁹ Perkins & Co. to John Perkins Cushing, 20 March 1805. JEC Extracts.

⁵⁴⁰ Perkins & Co. to John Perkins Cushing, 2 April 1805, Perkins & Co. to Samuel Williams, 12 April 1805. JEC Extracts.

followed by the arrival of a second ship, the *Hazard*, on May 16, 1805. Both proved that Cushing was attentive and able. The detailed letters that now arrived from Cushing eased and elated his uncles' minds. In 1808, the Perkins brothers forwarded their nephew a letter that proved his worth beyond a doubt: a letter indicating that Hope & Co., the preeminent Amsterdam trading house, was "labouring under the idea that the cargoes were selected by a Dutch factor."⁵⁴¹ Given that teas for the American market were notoriously lower in quality than those selected for the European market—especially the Dutch market—this was a high compliment indeed.

In 1805, Ephraim Bumstead & Co. became Perkins & Co. of Canton. Cushing was still apprenticed to his uncles at the time, but was given a share of the partnership upon his majority in 1807. The trading house handled business on its own account as well as on commission (generally at a rate of 2 ½%). The general structure of the firm was to have one resident manager abroad (Cushing and later Thomas Tunno Forbes), one to two clerks (Forbes and John Hartt), as well as employing Portuguese copyists and Chinese servants.

We do not know how the Wu-Perkins relationship commenced. Trade between the Perkinses and Houqua began as early as 1804, but when did Houqua bring Cushing under his wing? It is possible that Cushing's ability, especially in selecting superior teas, derived from collaboration with Houqua already. In February of 1804, Thomas H. Perkins had called on the Canton branch to seek out a special relationship with a Chinese merchant in order to secure in credit. In commenting on the excellent quality of the *Hazard's* cargo, for example, the Perkins brothers commented that the packing had held

⁵⁴¹ Perkins & Co. to John Perkins Cushing, 22 December 1808. JEC Extracts.

the teas in perfect order. Sealed chests rendered it impossible to ensure the quality of the teas were as purchased but, the brothers conceded, “in dealing with such men as Puankequa and Houqua, we perceive that opening two or three in a chop [official stamp, here a quantity bearing the merchant’s official stamp or seal] would suffice.”⁵⁴²

Initially, Bumstead and Cushing traded with a variety of Chinese merchants, Hong and not. While the Hong merchants ostensibly had a monopoly on trade with foreigners, in practice trade with non-Hong merchants fluctuated with official willingness to look the other way. For a fee, Hong merchants allowed shopkeepers to use their “chop” on shipments, thus providing the official Hong license for outbound cargoes. The two Americans bought teas from Yamqua, Kinqa, and Houqua, nankeens from Poonqua and Youqua, Chinaware from Exching. On November 25, 1804, however, Cushing received a warning. Consequa, from whom the young firm had purchased a fair stock of teas, fabrics, and other goods, passed them counterfeit money. When they demanded that he exchange the counterfeit for good money, Consequa refused.⁵⁴³ As far as can be determined, they never traded with him again.⁵⁴⁴ The experience underscored the importance of cultivating relationships with merchants and shopkeepers they could trust.

There are several reasons why a relationship with an American firm might have been appealing to Houqua. First, when Ephraim Bumstead and John Perkins Cushing arrived in Canton in 1803 to establish a local house, there were precious few other foreign merchants to trade with. War between Britain and France took its toll on most

⁵⁴² Perkins & Co. to John Perkins Cushing, 16 May 1805. JEC Extracts.

⁵⁴³ Consequa passed them 20 counterfeit dollars, yet given that dollars were silver, it is not clear what is meant by counterfeit. It may have been a cheaper silver alloy.

⁵⁴⁴ Bumstead & Co. Blotter, 1803-1805. Thomas H. Perkins Papers. MHS.

European merchants. Where in the late eighteenth century Americans found a diverse community of traders dominated by the British East India Company—Arabs, Armenians, Austrians, British, Danes, Dutch, French, Parsees, Portuguese, Prussians, Spaniards, Swedes, various kinds of Italians, and Jews from the Near East—the French Revolution and subsequent European wars created an opening for the geographically-advantaged Americans.⁵⁴⁵ As Paul Van Dyke has noted, neutral Armenians, Muslims, Parsees, and Americans were especially sought after as trading partners in times of trouble.⁵⁴⁶

Certainly as important as this, however, was the fact that the Americans were not British. Chinese merchants joked that it was hard to tell the difference between British and American nationals, but given the role the East India Company played in “regulating” the foreign community at Canton and representing their interests to Chinese officials, the difference was not a small one. Houqua likely found it a strategic advantage to cultivate ties outside of the British Company officials and their private counterparts.

Last and certainly not least, Americans came with cash (specie or silver). During the first decade of the nineteenth century, American merchants brought over two million Spanish dollars annually.⁵⁴⁷ Americans pushed the silver market to the brink: according to the Perkinses, American efforts to take advantage of the European distraction had drained the silver market on the American continent. Even the banks were short. The combined impact of rebellions against Spanish rule in South America and Jefferson’s Embargo, beginning in 1809, further depleted the China market of American bullion.

⁵⁴⁵ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, 44.

⁵⁴⁶ Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, 158.

⁵⁴⁷ Ship numbers and silver shipments pulled from Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*.

Americans turned to bills on their London bankers as an alternative to silver. According to W.E. Cheong in *Mandarins and Merchants*, bills of exchange took off in the China trade in the early nineteenth century, but vacillations in the ability to bring silver—the end of the “Manila Galleons” or Spanish shipments of American silver to Asia via Manila in 1811, political upheaval in the Americas, the drainage of specie, the dangers of carrying specie through pirate or privateer-infested waters—all contributed to a surge in demand for alternate forms of financing. The market in private bills (credit) developed over the subsequent decades.⁵⁴⁸ Given the importance of Americans as carriers of silver to the China market, their shift to bills and opium marked a significant departure in the market. While the Perkinses shifted to both opium and bills on London, they continued to seek silver for Houqua.⁵⁴⁹

By 1814, letters from Houqua referred to Perkins & Co. as his “general agents.”⁵⁵⁰

Many of these letters were specific to the spillover effect from the wars raging in Europe

⁵⁴⁸ Cheong, *Mandarins and Merchants: Jardine, Matheson, & Co., a China Agency of the Early Nineteenth Century*. The Perkinses did start to use bills of exchange in the first decade of the nineteenth century, at least by 1806, specifically as a strategy for negotiating the scarcity of silver.

⁵⁴⁹ As discussed in chapter 1, the Perkinses were significant opium dealers. While British “country traders” (private British merchants trading between India and China) brought Malwa and Patna opium from India, Americans brought some of this, but especially focused on the cheaper, lower quality Turkey opium from Smyrna (modern-day Izmir). Their relationship with Houqua was so significant that the Perkinses spun off a separate firm with another nephew, James P. Sturgis & Co., to handle their opium trade so as not to implicate Houqua in the illegal drug trade. While he initially dabbled, the Hong merchant decided against involvement in the highly lucrative smuggling business. Opium was smuggled into Canton via Lintin, an anchorage about 70 miles downriver from Canton. A Chinese purchaser would pay for a cargo and receive an order for the opium. They would then send a separate boat down with the order and the opium would be transferred to the boat for the purchaser. One common smugglers’ complaint was that the illegality of the trade seemed to have less to do with the morality of the drug than with the exorbitant bribes that could be wrought from the legal threat. See especially Downs, “American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40.”

⁵⁵⁰ Houqua to H. Tingley, 28 January 1814. Houqua to Richard Gardner, to Thomas Bryant 28 January 1814. Houqua to Thomas Bryant 28 January 1814. Samuel Cabot Papers, Reel 1, Box 1, Folder 11. MHS. In 1813 and 1814, the letters indicative of this relationship were claims letters, allowing the Perkinses to act on Houqua’s behalf in order to rescue property either owed to him or confiscated from him by the British. The latter letters from Perkins & Co. warn that Houqua is of the utmost importance to the

and the Atlantic, including the British-American War of 1812. The Perkinses sought to navigate the war-torn Atlantic to earn Houqua's esteem. They provided recourse against other private merchants who owed Houqua money. They lobbied on Houqua's behalf to secure spoliation claims from the French and British Admiralties from seizures of the Chinese merchant's property.⁵⁵¹ The political conflagrations shaped not only prices, insurance, and the possibility of attacks on ships in the Atlantic, they also carried over into the political and social relations of Westerners in Asia. During the War of 1812, for example, Chinese officials streamlined the entry of ships into the Boca Tigris, the entryway upriver to Canton, in order to prevent fighting between belligerents of a war half a world on their doorstep.⁵⁵²

On April 25, 1815, the Perkinses wrote a long letter on the state of Houqua's goods in their hands, concluding with gratitude for the "kindness and friendship" the older man had given Cushing:

We hope now that Peace is restored, we shall be again enabled to give you new proofs of our zeal to promote your interest. . . . We now beg leave to make you our warm acknowledgments for the confidence you have been pleased to repose in us: & the unvaried kindness and friendship you have bestowed on our friend and relation Mr. Cushing.

The relationship had begun.

East India Company in supplying their teas, yet it is interesting to note that he did not seek out Company officials to assist him on this.

⁵⁵¹ Frederick Grant, "The Failure of the Li-Ch'uan Hong: Litigation as a Hazard of Nineteenth Century Foreign Trade," *American Neptune* 48, no. 4 (1988): 243-260, Frederick Grant, "Hong Merchant Litigation in the American Courts," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 99 (1987): 44-62, Frederick Grant, "Merchants, Lawyers, and the China Trade of Boston," *Boston Bar Journal* 23, no. 8 (1979): 5-16.

⁵⁵² Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, 19.

Over the course of the first decade of the nineteenth century, Houqua had distinguished himself amongst the Chinese trading community. Houqua officially became head of the Co-Hong in 1812, following the death of Mouqua that winter. But well before this, Chinese and foreign merchants alike came to Houqua for advice and authority. In many ways he took over the role Pankequa had played a generation prior: guiding relations between the Chinese and foreign communities to ensure peaceful intercourse between the two. While local officials of the British East India Company complained that Houqua was “too timid” to be effective in negotiating with Chinese officials (a common complaint of theirs to criticize those who did not fall in line with them) and that his wealth was a constant attraction for those officials to squeeze him for funds, part of their disquiet came from their dependence on the prominent merchant as he handled the bulk of their trade.⁵⁵³ Establishing a preferential relationship with Houqua was a coup for the Perkinses, and they knew it.

As mentioned above, the relationship was not exclusive: Houqua traded with other merchants as well, including Samuel Russell, the original founder of Russell & Co. The nature and duration of his and his family’s ties to the Perkinses was unique however. For the Perkinses, the relationship with Houqua was treated as a valued asset that they passed down from one individual to succeeding family representatives. When Perkins & Co. merged with Russell & Co. in 1828, the Perkinses used their special relationship with Houqua to ensure their authority within the new firm. While Houqua did not accept successors uncritically, recommendations from one family member to the next mattered and allowed for ties close enough to be used as a negotiating chip for the younger men

⁵⁵³ Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635-1834*, vol. 4, p. 59.

within their own firms and in their general business. The question is, why did the relationship take the form that it did? What benefits did a more paternal relationship offer? Assuming that Houqua took the initiative, and it is hard to imagine that he did not, why did he select younger merchants for collaboration rather than peers?

Much of what we know about the relationship Houqua had with John Perkins Cushing and his successors, Thomas Tunno Forbes, John Murray Forbes, and later Robert Bennet Forbes comes from later writings.⁵⁵⁴ John Murray Forbes, for example, described his experience in his memoirs:

Houqua, who never did anything by halves, at once took me as Mr. Cushing's successor, and that of my brother Tom, who had been his intimate friend, and gave me his entire confidence. All his foreign letters were handed me to read, and to prepare such answers as he indicated, which, after being read to him, were usually signed and sent without alteration. Some of these were letters of friendship, but more often of a public or business nature, and occasionally of almost national importance.⁵⁵⁵

In 1835, Forbes explained the relationship to his wife as follows:

I have great advantages over any one in Canton in Houqua's head and purse; he seems really to be interested for me and has given solid proofs of friendship. Little of a merchant as you are, you can imagine the intimacy and confidence of the person who has entire control over the foreign trade, and who has a fortune of 15 to 20,000,000--20 millions of dollars--which enables him to lord it over the other ten Hong merchants, most of whom are poor. Through his means, we always have money when all the other Houses are pinched. Had I not joined Russell & Co. I might probably at this moment have been rich, as I should have shared all the old gentleman's foreign trade which he does under my name to amount of 6 or 700,000, all of which this year (under my advice) will turn out famously.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Houqua and Cushing's letters don't begin until Cushing left China in 1828.

⁵⁵⁵ Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* vol. 1, p. 141.

⁵⁵⁶ John Murray Forbes to Sarah Hathaway Forbes, 11 July 1835 as quoted in Forbes and Hughes, *Letters (Supplementary) : Of John Murray Forbes*, 22. Both John and his brother Bennet wrote to their wives from Canton in such a privileged, confidential tone. The boastful tone here – “under my advice” “will turn out famously” “might have been rich” – is the result of the intimacy of the letter. Sarah would

Houqua and the American merchants communicated in a Chinese-Portuguese-English patois “pidgin.” He could not read or write English, and they could not speak or read Chinese.⁵⁵⁷ The Americans read letters aloud to the older gentleman, translating English to pidgin, and penned dictated responses on his behalf, translating them into a more standardized English. They chartered ships and cargoes, managed the loading and unpacking of cargoes, and tracked the progress of these global ventures. In addition to his work for Russell & Co., Forbes was an employee of Houqua’s *I-he hong*. Forbes wrote that before he was even 18 years old he had over half a million dollars afloat in the world.⁵⁵⁸

Yet his youth was important. A rebuke Houqua gave Forbes on a poorly handled commission is revealing. By the late 1820s, Baring Brothers were the London bankers for the Perkinses and thus managed Houqua’s British dealings on their behalf. The Barings placed their own judgment of the Chinese market above Houqua’s orders. As Houqua’s mediating agent, the responsibility for the shipment fell to Forbes. This was not acceptable. But despite his censure, Houqua sought to affirm his faith in Forbes as follows: “I allow you a wide range of authority,” he wrote, “because I consider that you have the advantage of long training under my personal care and must therefore

have known that John was in awe of his opportunity to work with Houqua and thus was both serious (about the money being made under his direction) and jesting (about his own importance).

⁵⁵⁷ Chinese law prohibited foreign merchants from learning Chinese, but there were exceptions. William C. Hunter, a partner in Russell & Co. from 1837 to 1842, learned the language from a Chinese man on the voyage to Canton. By the 1730s, pidgin English had replaced a more Portuguese-based patois. According to Paul Van Dyke, beginning in the 1730s, the three most important languages in the region were Cantonese, Mandarin, and pidgin English. Of course, the extent to which Chinese linguists understood and translated English was a matter of contention. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, 77.

⁵⁵⁸ Forbes and Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, 62-63.

necessarily be better acquainted with my wishes and able to determine what course I would myself pursue under particular circumstances, and willing to adopt it.”⁵⁵⁹ Part of Forbes’s value came from the fact that he so readily adapted to Houqua’s mode of doing business. Houqua sought not equal partners, but promising young men amenable to training.

These men of the Perkins family virtually apprenticed under the esteemed Hong merchant; Houqua could not help but be a potent force in their outlook on the nature of commerce. John Murray Forbes credited Houqua with as much. But what precisely did this influence mean? When John Perkins Cushing returned to Boston in 1830, he commented that the mode of doing business there was so different from Canton, his skills were not transferrable. This remark, of course, should be taken with a heavy dose of salt: Cushing sought to extricate himself from calls to take over Perkins & Co. of Boston and instead retired.⁵⁶⁰ The separation between Canton and Boston was more likely the distance between Cushing and Thomas H. Perkins. John Murray Forbes was perfectly able to transfer his skills from Canton to Boston a mere eight years later, but in his own firm. The difference between Cushing and Forbes on the one hand, and Perkins on the other, seems to have come down to caution. Where Colonel Perkins preferred bold action in commerce (for example, his decision to send out vessel after vessel to mark his commitment to the China trade, as well as his flooding of the China market with Turkey opium in the 1820s), Houqua emphasized security and the sure win, “additional insurance,” and demanded as much from his trading partners.

⁵⁵⁹ Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* vol. 1, 247-248.

⁵⁶⁰ John Perkins Cushing to Thomas H. Perkins, 19 January 1829. Bryant & Sturgis Papers, Volume 12. Baker.

Correspondence between Houqua and his pupils shared details of family life, births, marriages, and personal triumphs. The tenor of these letters differed substantively from that of much of the Perkins correspondence with their agents overseas. While the private news may have been pleasantries, this sharing of intimate details was only found within letters to those within their inner circles. “Do I trust you will always feel an interest in whatever relates to me,” Houqua wrote to Cushing in 1833, “it will afford you pleasure to learn that my No. 4 son, in whose name is the Hong, has within a few days received from the Emperor the highest Evidence of his favor, namely, a Peacock’s Tail ... I esteem this the happiest circumstance of my life.”⁵⁶¹ Later that year he reported a reversal: “This year has brought about a most afflicting visitation in my family. My No. 4 Son, the Hong merchant, was taken sick with a fever and after a short sickness died on the 27th day of the 7 month this bereavement has deprived me of the support which one of my years can illy dispense with, and taken away nearly all the little courage that time had left me and destroyed the main support of my house.”⁵⁶² He continued to take a personal interest in their lives as well. In 1837 Houqua wrote of Cushing to another family member, noting that he felt “quite as much satisfaction as if the possession had been my own; and I am amused myself with the contrast of his present luxurious accommodations with No. 1, or no. 4, Swedish Hong.”⁵⁶³

More, the warm language was joined by action. Houqua helped the Perkinses navigate the commercial and legal environment of East Asia. During the Chinese rice

⁵⁶¹ Houqua to John Perkins Cushing, 25 April 1833. Forbes Family Papers, F5, JMF Letterbook. Baker.

⁵⁶² Houqua to JP Cushing, 6 December 1833. Forbes Family Papers, Volume F-5. Baker.

⁵⁶³ Houqua to John Murray Forbes, 30 December 1837. Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* vol. 1, p. 247.

famine of 1825, for example, Houqua convinced John Perkins Cushing to bargain for a general reduction in tonnage duties for anyone bringing in shipments of rice to cover shortfalls in the Chinese harvest. This deal proved a boon to numerous merchants, and contributed to the Perkins's decision to set up a trading house in Manila soon after.⁵⁶⁴

And Houqua's wealth and status gave the Perkinses leverage within not only Canton, but also in the wider East Indies trade, in the United States, and in Europe. European tea dealers knew Houqua's chop (official stamp) as a symbol for quality. After the East India Company's Canton monopoly ended in 1834, when Houqua was officially retired but still selling tea through Russell & Co., British merchants beat a path to the American firm's door in order to secure goods with such solid branding.⁵⁶⁵

The relationship helped them during troubled periods. Houqua lent the Perkinses money when the opium market became glutted in the 1820s and again when the Panic of 1837 tightened capital supplies for American merchants.⁵⁶⁶ Houqua warned his friends about the seriousness of Chinese officials in the months leading up to the opium conflict: it was through his intercession that the Americans realized the need to voluntarily give up their opium stocks and not disregard Chinese orders.

The assistance was personal as well as professional. In 1839, Houqua and Cushing, both retired at this point, coordinated an adventure specifically for the benefit of fellow kinsman and merchant James P. Sturgis. The older merchant had retired at Macao

⁵⁶⁴ Why did Houqua do this for them? Why didn't his firm do this for themselves? Basu suggests it was illegal for him to send out cargoes on his own account, but I can't find that verified in other sources. But as far as I know, he did not send out his own ships, but rather sent out cargoes through agents—he connected Fujian tea growers with American, British, and Parsee shippers.

⁵⁶⁵ Hughes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes*, 194.

⁵⁶⁶ White, "The Hong Merchants of Canton," 146.

and professed to relatives that he lacked the funds to return home. The profits of the adventure were intended to provide something of a pension. Houqua contributed 70,000 dollars for every 30,000 advanced by Cushing, all invested into China goods bound for the United States.⁵⁶⁷ Thus, the two successful merchants gave of their time and capital to provide succor to a partner whom speculation had not treated so well.

There were few large decisions made in Russell & Co. without conferring with the head of the Wu family's hong, and on countless occasions, Houqua's backing changed the firm's course and decided major disputes. Houqua influenced Perkins' family involvement with opium, contributed to their establishment of a branch in Manila, and more. In 1837 and again in 1843, Houqua's influence played a decisive role in cutting one partner out of Russell & Company, and in the latter case accepting a partner in. This was an extraordinary level of control for an outside merchant to have on a firm.

In 1837, Russell & Co. dropped Joseph Coolidge as a partner. Coolidge had come to Canton in the early 1833 with little training and limited means, but recommendations from Robert G. Shaw, William Appleton, and other esteemed Boston businessmen. At the time, the partners of Russell & Co. desperately needed employees. The end of the East India Company monopoly in Canton had flooded the market with private British traders. They took the unknown Coolidge on as a clerk and, not long after, as a partner. According to one partner, Coolidge "was a gentleman in his manners, but had very crude ideas about commerce, believing in show rather than substantial management."⁵⁶⁸ For example, Coolidge wanted to give up their residence in the modest

⁵⁶⁷ John Perkins Cushing to Houqua, 28 June 1830. Bryant & Sturgis Papers, Volume 12. Baker.

⁵⁶⁸ Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* 194.

Swedish Hong where they paid a mere \$1500 rent, and rent a space in the East India Company hong as wealthy “nabobs.” Two of the existing partners, John Murray Forbes and John Greene, took an instant dislike to Coolidge. Both wanted to live quietly, trade, and go home.

The tension between Coolidge and the Forbeses is often attributed to Robert Bennet Forbes because Coolidge attempted to block Bennet’s admission to the firm when the older man needed it most.⁵⁶⁹ Forbes hoped to make a competency for himself and his family after losing everything in the Panic of 1837, all while keeping his impoverished status a secret. But the anti-Coolidge sentiment began before Forbes had even cast an eye to Canton. John Murray Forbes was no friend to Coolidge. On November 18, 1835 he crowed to his wife that he had finally gotten rid of the man. “Congratulate me, Sarah dear!” he wrote.

[Coolidge] became such a nuisance that I got quite outrageous and determined that he should go or I: so I went to Houqua and asked him for letters of introduction and \$300,000 to buy cotton in Calcutta! He stroked his scanty beard, laid his hand on the table and swore by the bones of his grandfather that I should not budge a foot – and then with a sly look, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb, he said ‘More better you send - ---! Spose you go, who man take care of business?’⁵⁷⁰

This was gratifying to John, for the vote of confidence in his ability, for the evidence of Houqua’s favor, and finally, because with Houqua’s influence, Coolidge was as good as gone.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ Sturgis, *Rivalry in Canton : The Control of Russell & Co 1838-1840 and the Founding of Augustine Heard & Co 1840*

⁵⁷⁰ Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* vol. 1, p. 196.

⁵⁷¹ The relationships with the Barings and Houqua were not distinct. John Murray Forbes to Edward King, 8 June 1839 in Forbes and Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, vol. 1, pp. 32-34. When Coolidge traveled to London, he and Joshua Bates became close friends. Bates refused to believe Coolidge could be as bad at business as the partners of Russell & Co. argued. Forbes felt that

In 1843, John Perkins Cushing, John Murray Forbes, and Robert Bennet Forbes all beseeched Houqua to help their cousin Paul Sieman Forbes find a place in Russell & Co. Another cousin, Russell Sturgis, objected, but Houqua's influence proved more significant. Though Houqua did not yet know the new cousin, he vouched for him based on the strong recommendations from his former pupils. Shortly after the new partner arrived, Houqua passed away, and the shocked man wrote that Houqua "had become identified with all [his] hopes and dreams ... that with him was not only connected [his] own prosperity but that of [his] children."⁵⁷²

This influence is not surprising: Wu family deposits formed a substantive portion of the capital base for Russell & Co. It was illegal under Chinese law for merchants to borrow money from or lend money to foreigners, but this did not stop a lively market in capital from developing in Canton.⁵⁷³ For much of the eighteenth century, "bottomry bonds" or "respondentia" were a common mechanism for financing adventures, and allowed bold adventurers to build a fortune on very little. Bottomry bonds were part loan, part insurance: a merchant financed a shipment in whole or parts and, if the shipment arrived at its destination, the loan came due within a specified period of time at an agreed-upon rate of interest. If the disaster befell the vessel and the shipment could not be sold, the loan was null and void. Rates of interest depended in part on who sought the advance. Chinese junk captains, for example, paid rates as high as 40%. Conversely,

Baring Brothers would likely recommend Coolidge to prospective merchants, but would not transfer their own business away from Russell & Co. as long as the latter firm handled Houqua's business.

⁵⁷² Journal of Paul Sieman Forbes, 9 September 1843. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 65. Baker.

⁵⁷³ Basu, "Asian Merchants and Western Trade: A Comparative Study of Calcutta and Canton, 1800-1840," 314, Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, 150.

merchants seeking to cultivate a relationship might offer a preferential rate below the 10-12% common for foreign traders.⁵⁷⁴ Where it was more common for foreigners to lend to Chinese merchants—while risky, as early as 1807 T.H. Perkins reported that funds lent to Chinese merchants could bring 18% per year—capital traveled both directions.⁵⁷⁵

These loans were beneficial to the Chinese as well. Investing through foreigners was a sort of “tax shelter” for Chinese merchants, like floating Swiss banks. Anthony Chen’s research on the enormously high rates of bankruptcy for Hong merchants indicates that the pressure on Chinese officials to “squeeze” merchants significantly contributed to this insolvency.⁵⁷⁶ Thus the Wu family put money into both the trading house, Russell & Co., and into the American market, investing through Russell & Co. partner John Murray Forbes. Thus, in addition to the contributions from partners, Russell & Company had a floating balance from the Wus at their discretion. In 1861, for example, the commission house’s capital broke down as follows: \$400,000 from the partners collectively, \$200,000 from the Wu family, and an additional \$250,000 from other depositors based in China and abroad.⁵⁷⁷ Russell & Co. partners knew that in a pinch, they could turn to the Wu family for an additional \$200,000 of capital. And following his return to Milton in 1837, Russell & Co. partner John Murray Forbes managed funds for the Wu family in the American market. These funds offered a failsafe

⁵⁷⁴ Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, 151-153.

⁵⁷⁵ Colonel Thomas H. Perkins to Perkins & Co., Canton, 18 May 1807. Cabot Family Papers. JEC Extracts.

⁵⁷⁶ Chen, "The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760-1843.", Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton : Chinese Merchants in Sino-Western Trade*.

⁵⁷⁷ Edward Cunningham to Paul Sieman Forbes, 14 June 1861. Forbes Family Papers. Baker. Many commission houses in the mid-nineteenth century had taken on a banking function, and Russell & Co. was no exception.

mechanism for Wu Ping-chien's family in case everything was lost in China. Wu family capital remained invested in the American market for many years through the Perkins family alliance.

In later years, the account was listed under the name "American Stock Investment" or "ASI." The account paid periodic dividends in silver via the British banking house, Baring Brothers, and between 1858 and 1879 the Wu family received \$1,269,539.91 through this fund.⁵⁷⁸ Investments ranged from the Iowa Land Association, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad of Iowa, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad of Nebraska, the Michigan Central Railroad of Nebraska, the Michigan Central Railroad, the Albany and Boston Mining Co., J.M. Howe & Co., and the New England Land Company, several of which were projects Forbes himself was interested in. Forbes managed trust accounts and funds for a circle of kin and their offspring, which gave him a larger pool of capital to invest in his own name. The money allowed Forbes to throw his weight around, both in shaping the strategies and decision making of the companies he was interested in as well as in raising money on their behalf. As he gained stature as an investor of good repute, his fundraising letters headlined his own level of involvement

⁵⁷⁸ John Murray Forbes & Co. Account Journals JE, J, K, L, JA, JB, JD, JE. Baker. The stocks from 1858 to 1879 totaled \$375,379.27, per John Murray Forbes & Co. Account Journals I, J, K, L, JA, JB, JC (A), JD. During the same period, however, JMF & Co. had accumulated assets of \$2,082,742.04, giving it close to a million dollars of income from the management of the family's funds. Basu, "Asian Merchants and Western Trade: A Comparative Study of Calcutta and Canton, 1800-1840," 367. Stephen Chapman Lockwood, *Augustine Heard and Company, 1858-1862; American Merchants in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Center Harvard University; distributed by Harvard University Press, 1971), 140, fn. 127. "At the time of the settlement of Russell & Co. in 1881, according to John Murray Forbes, Russell & Co. owed the Houqua clan over one million dollars and held property in trust equal to the same amount. Between 1828 and 1881 Russell's paid representatives of the family about \$30,000/year in interest." Investments ranged from the Iowa Land Association, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad of Iowa, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad of Nebraska, the Michigan Central Railroad of Nebraska, the Michigan Central Railroad, the Albany and Boston Mining Co., J.M. Howe & Co., and the New England Land Company, several of which were projects Forbes himself was interested in.

before asking others to contribute.⁵⁷⁹ The Wu family formed part of the circle of insiders to whom Forbes turned as lenders of first resort.

Access to Wu family funds provided a foundation of credit that helped to establish his operations and his reputation at home. Nowhere was this more significant than in Forbes's involvement in railroads.⁵⁸⁰ The managed accounts under Forbes's care allowed him greater access to capital and thus flexibility in his actions. For example, just as the Panic of 1857 dried up supplies of capital, the board of his Michigan Central Railroad faced the task of raising \$2 million to cover their debt for construction. Rather than sell stocks and bonds to cover the outlays, they sought short term commercial loans from friends on the presumption that the going high rates of interest were temporary.⁵⁸¹ Forbes explained the need to his cousin Sieman:

I have subscribed for 250,000 money expecting to get at most 125,000 and it being one of those chances that only come in times of panic I put you down (without any definite authority) for 50,000\$ which you can repudiate by return mail if you choose but whatever you do or not I shall use a friend's privilege and use your notes to raise money or even if pushed into a corner rather than fail shall draw on you for 50,000 which you must borrow of Houqua or otherwise raise for me at some rate or other.⁵⁸²

The Wus of Canton, like the Barings of London, were an important source of capital not only for Russell & Co., but also for the Forbes family.

⁵⁷⁹ Yaggy, "John Forbes: Entrepreneur."

⁵⁸⁰ Johnson and Supple, *Boston Capitalists and Western Railroads; a Study in the Nineteenth-Century Railroad Investment Process*, Larson, *Bonds of Enterprise : John Murray Forbes and Western Development in America's Railway Age*.

⁵⁸¹ JMF to PSF, 30 June 1847. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 46. Baker. See also Yaggy, 330.

⁵⁸² JMF to PSF, 16 October 1857. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 65. Baker.

Between 1859 and 1861, Houqua III (Wu Shao-jung, the second son of Houqua) withdrew 500-600,000 taels from Russell & Company in order to contribute “loans” demanded of the family by the provincial government.⁵⁸³ Further, burdens from inside and outside the family weighed him down. He had a large family depending on him. Recent wars such as the Taiping Rebellion destroyed considerable amounts of his property. But much of their capital had been tied to the entrepreneurialism of Wu Bing Jian and a system of trade that by limiting foreign trade to Canton, served to enrich the Cantonese. The opening of treaty ports along China’s eastern seaboard as a part of the post-Opium War concessions of 1842 and 1844 took its toll on Canton’s economy. Numerous veterans of the Canton trade decamped to other ports either on their own or in the employ of foreign firms. Russell & Co. established branch offices in nearby Hong Kong, Shanghai, etc.

In 1878, the Wu family recalled the funds from Forbes, and in 1879 closed their account with Russell & Co.⁵⁸⁴ The request followed economic hard times in both China and the United States, so it may well have been that the Wu family needed the funds or feared the upheavals of the American market. But it also might have been that the nature of the underlying relationships had just changed too much: there was no longer a personal connection between the concerned parties.

⁵⁸³ Warren Delano to Paul Sieman Forbes, 18 September 1861. Forbes Family Papers. Baker. See Lockwood, *Augustine Heard and Company, 1858-1862; American Merchants in China*, 140.

⁵⁸⁴ William Cameron Forbes, "Houqua: Merchant Prince of China, 1769-1843," *The American Asiatic Association* 4 (1940): 9-18.

Paternalism in business entailed obligation, deference, and reciprocity, values that were familiar to both the Wus and the Perkinses.⁵⁸⁵ While the values did not always match reality, and one wonders that paternalism itself did not have substantively different meanings for the Chinese and American merchants, there was sufficient space for a common ground to maintain a relationship over multiple decades. Houqua did not need for the Perkinses to be a kinship-based network to serve his business ends, but it was useful to him that it was. As one merchant within the network vouched for another, the relationship deepened and Houqua maintained correspondence with his Perkins associates even as they returned to New England. The larger organization of family even more than business maintained a larger sense of obligation: when John Perkins Cushing had retired to a comfortable estate in Belmont, he was still in contact with Houqua regarding the state of the market, mutual friends, and the status of kin. But as the principal individuals passed away, the relationship was difficult to maintain.

Where Houqua played a paternal role for these American merchants, there were aspiring Chinese merchants who may have had similar relationships with them. A comprador (clerk) who worked with John Perkins Cushing in China, Chutang Ahoo, traveled to Boston with Cushing to work as an employee. Ahoo may have been a servant akin to the handful of other Chinese servants brought into the employ of American merchants in the early nineteenth century, but if so, this raises questions about the motivations and opportunities available to Chinese servants in early America. The visit seems to have always been temporary. While in Boston, Ahoo received part of his pay

⁵⁸⁵ One question of interest is how the Perkinses expectations of paternalism differed from that of Wu. Seems like they forged a middle ground of understanding, a working relationship, yet surely these must have developed out of very different epistemologies of paternalism. In thinking about this type of contact zone, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

locally with the bulk paid directly to his family in China by Russell & Company.⁵⁸⁶ And when Ahoo left Boston for home within a few years, Cushing encouraged him in the China-America trade. When Ahoo's speculation in mulberry trees in Boston failed to bear fruit, for example, Cushing wrote that he had "concluded to bear [the loss] himself as [he] was probably the cause of [his] undertaking the speculation."⁵⁸⁷ Ahoo cultivated a relationship not only with Cushing, but also the broader kinship network. He sent presents to Cushing's children and received warm regards from the Forbes ladies who clearly knew him. When Ahoo returned to China in 1835, he sought employment with John Murray Forbes. While this did not pan out, Ahoo continued to correspond with Forbes as part of his own business network.

The relationship that the Perkinses had with Baring Brothers of London, by contrast, was based at least partially on marital ties: Baring partner Joshua Bates married Lucretia Sturgis, whose family intertwined with the Perkinses several times over. Here, bonds of friendship and marriage overlapped, even created opportunities. The following section examines the Perkinses relationships with their various London agents with an eye to their valuation of personal ties. While the Perkins-Baring connection was mutually beneficial, the fact of the Perkins network—the Barings' ability to tap into a larger cluster of merchants with strong relationships, especially in the East Indies—seems to have been most valuable to the Barings in the end.

London Bankers: Joshua Bates & Baring Brothers of London

⁵⁸⁶ Journal A. John Perkins Cushing & Family Papers. BAT.

⁵⁸⁷ John Perkins Cushing to Chutang Ahoo, 27 October 1838. Bryant, Sturgis & Co. Papers, Volume 12. Baker.

Even with national independence, London continued to be a financial capital to merchants of the young United States. Not only was London a central entrepôt for the fruits of British industrialization, but Britain continued to be America's main trading partner.⁵⁸⁸ When Elizabeth Peck Perkins inherited her husband's business in 1773, she picked up her father's longstanding relationship with Lane & Company of London. Lane exchanged her pelts for manufactured goods, insured ships she sent out, and extended credit to run her business: like her father, when Perkins purchased goods in Britain, Lane & Company was her banker on whom she directed firms to draw. Her sons operated in a different commercial milieu. They had a more extensive network of correspondents with whom they exchanged goods, drew upon, and secured remittances. Banking and insurance services could be secured in Boston. Yet London was still central to their enterprises.

The Perkins brothers selected London agents for acumen in advising them on the state of business and politics, access to information and markets, and for the strength of their personal bond. The latter was intimately connected to the prior two, as trust and loyalty helped to ensure that the Perkinses would be prioritized in receiving critical advice and information. In the 1790s, John Vaughan who seemed well-placed to advise them on how to profit from the trade opportunities arising out of the French Revolution and its aftermath.⁵⁸⁹ When Samuel Williams settled in London in 1800 to handle

⁵⁸⁸ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789*, John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵⁸⁹ Perkins & Company to John Vaughan, 11 May 1793. JEC Extracts. The Perkinses wrote to Vaughan, "As you are at the fountain head of information, we shall rely on your furnishing us with the earliest of importance to us either as Merchants or Politicians. What think your wise heads of our being obliged to take a share in the game playing in Europe?"

American spoliation claims arising from these same political tensions, the Perkinses shifted their business to him. A dour man known for his taciturn style and financial acumen, Williams managed the London accounts of many of America's leading merchants. The Perkinses split their business between Williams and kinsman Henry Higginson in 1809 until the latter's bankruptcy in late 1811, and then to Bates & Baring and Baring Brothers when Samuel Williams' firm failed in 1825.

Samuel Williams served as the Perkins's London banker for decades. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that his family felt betrayed when the Perkinses, to them, helped to bring about his firm's demise. A dour man known for his taciturn style and financial acumen, Williams managed the accounts of many of America's leading merchants. As early as 1823—in advance of the London-based Panic of 1825—Colonel Perkins wrote to his nephew Frederick Paine of their urgent need to send an agent abroad. “Perfect secrecy is an object of the first consequence. If you make your mind up to go, you will come here forthwith and let no one know your object,” Perkins penned.⁵⁹⁰ No one could know but his wife. Paine accepted the offer, but what he found made him “sick in body and soul.”⁵⁹¹ The 1825 panic left American merchants scrambling to recover what capital they could from their British bankers. “The state of things here is most dreadful,” Paine told his father of the London market. “Ruin seems to be staring everyone in the face.”⁵⁹² The Perkinses had enormous sums in Williams's hands and charged Paine with the task of extricating their property as best as possible. The Williamses no longer welcomed him into their home, which Paine claimed bothered him not at all, save for the loss of the

⁵⁹⁰ Thomas H. Perkins to Frederick W. Paine, 31 March 1823. Paine Family Papers. AAS.

⁵⁹¹ Frederick W. Paine to Mary L. Pickard, 27 January 1826. Paine Family Papers. AAS.

⁵⁹² Frederick W. Paine to his father, 24 February 1826. Paine Family Papers. AAS.

friendship of Williams himself.⁵⁹³ Paine respected Williams, but he was disappointed in him. He confided to a close friend that his opinion of Williams had changed from a man who always did right, to a man who always meant to do right.⁵⁹⁴

The exact details of Williams's financial troubles are elusive. Did the Perkinses' quick actions save their own credit at the expense of Williams? Did they seal Williams's fate when they might instead have shored him up? Colonel Perkins expressed his sentiments as follows: "This is a sore thing to Williams, I have no doubt, but I see no reason why my personal regard for him should induce me to do that which my judgment does not bear me out in."⁵⁹⁵ Out of the ashes of Williams's business came a host of competitors seeking American business, including Timothy Wiggins & Co. and Bates & Baring. It was hard for merchants to know who would stay solvent, and some merchants, the wealthy Bostonian Israel Thorndike amongst them, went from Williams to another firm that eventually collapsed. Whether or not the Perkinses could have saved Williams or not, Williams's family clearly expected that the Perkinses should have stood by him and Paine regretted that they did not.

What is clear is that Joshua Bates benefited from Williams's downfall in the wake of London's Panic of 1825.⁵⁹⁶ Bates was born in 1788 in Weymouth, Massachusetts as the youngest child and only son of Colonel Joshua Bates. At the age of 15, Bates began

⁵⁹³ Frederick W. Paine to Mary L. Pickard, 11 February 1826. Paine Family Papers. AAS.

⁵⁹⁴ Frederick W. Paine to Mary L. Pickard, 11 February 1826. Paine Family Papers. AAS.

⁵⁹⁵ Thomas H. Perkins to John Perkins Cushing, 10 August 1826. JEC Extracts.

⁵⁹⁶ Ironically, according to his letters with Timothy Pickering, Williams was chosen to handle the spoliation claims for Americans in London in part due to his connections to the Hamburg branch of the Baring family. He had considerable business with the Barings and, as American consul in London, used Baring Brothers for all currency exchange and credit. Mustafa, *Merchants and Migrations : Germans and Americans in Connection, 1776-1835*, 134.

an apprenticeship with the eldest son of William Gray, and clerked for the senior merchant until 1809, when he struck out on his own in partnership with a Captain Beckford. In 1812, Beckford & Bates failed, but Gray continued to be so impressed with Bates that he brought the younger man back into his employ. In 1816, Bates traveled to London as an agent for the Grays. While in London, Bates met Peter Labouchère, a banker and son-in-law to Francis Baring, who introduced him in turn to John Baring, Francis's grandson.⁵⁹⁷ In January 1826, Bates partnered with the younger Baring in a firm intending to specialize in the American trade.⁵⁹⁸ While competitor Timothy Wiggins aggressively courted Samuel Williams's client roster, promising to make good on his debts, Colonel Perkins signaled to Americans abroad that Bates & Baring was the better successor to Williams.⁵⁹⁹ Little wonder then that Bates credited Perkins with helping him to get his start in business.⁶⁰⁰

Baring Brothers & Co. was one of the central sources of international banking and finance in the nineteenth century. In 1818, Duc de Richelieu famously said "There are six great powers in Europe; England, France, Prussia, Austria, Russia, and Baring Brothers."⁶⁰¹ The Barings initially began investing in the American colonies in 1774.

⁵⁹⁷ Bates became very close with Labouchère, whom he considered a "staunch friend and a father." See the Diaries of Joshua Bates in the Baring Archives, London, UK.

⁵⁹⁸ John Orbell, "Bates, Joshua (1788–1864)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1678> (accessed May 1, 2007). While Baring put in £20,000 of capital to Bates's £10,000, the two were to receive equally in the profits.

⁵⁹⁹ Letters between John Sturgis and Joshua Bates in 1825 reveal the behind-the-scenes buildup of the Bates & Baring clientele. House Correspondence 5.1.31.45. Baring.

⁶⁰⁰ Joshua Bates to Samuel Cabot, 3 February 1854. "To me Col. Perkins has been indeed a friend," Bates wrote. "His confidence and friendship on my starting in business here [London] were the foundation of my success." Quoted in Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927*, 590.

⁶⁰¹ Philip Ziegler, *The Sixth Great Power: Barings, 1762-1929*. (London: Collins, 1988).

They poured money into the British cause during the Revolution, only to return to the United States in 1783 upon the request of Philadelphia merchant William Morris. By 1828, Baring Brothers was the largest of the Anglo-American trading houses.⁶⁰² The Perkinses became a client through a side door: the partnership of kinsman Joshua Bates with John Baring, Jr. in 1826. This was a fortuitous confluence of events for the Barings: Bates credited Thomas H. Perkins with establishing Bates & Baring with American traders, and Baring scholars credit the Bates & Baring partnership (and its subsequent absorption into Baring Brothers in 1828) with the revitalization of the Baring enterprise.⁶⁰³ But it was also fortuitous for the Perkinses. The Bates-Baring tie gave the Perkinses a personal connection which could provide preferential backing, and from a business connection whose name—Baring—had widespread recognition. In the context of early nineteenth century international commerce, name recognition and a solid reputation went a long way.

Bates was a brilliant businessman and a critical asset to Baring Brothers & Co. In 1828, Baring Brothers absorbed Bates & Baring. According to John Orbell, Baring Brothers still retained the prestige of earlier years at this time, but it was no longer a profitable business.⁶⁰⁴ Under the new organization, Bates, Thomas Baring, and Baring son-in-law Humphrey St. John Mildmay took charge of the company.⁶⁰⁵ Baring directed

⁶⁰² Ralph Willard Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance: English Merchant Bankers at Work, 1763-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), 75.

⁶⁰³ See especially John Orbell, *Baring Brothers & Co., Limited: A History to 1939* (London: Baring Brothers & Co., 1985).

⁶⁰⁴ Orbell, "Joshua Bates (1788-1864)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁶⁰⁵ Thomas Baring, Joshua Bates, and Humphrey St. John Mildmay received one quarter of the firm's profits for their trouble, while the final quarter was divided evenly between Francis Baring (Alexander Baring's less than able son) and Bates's former "able but indolent" partner, John Baring. Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 79.

finance for the firm, especially on the European continent; Bates handled commerce and agency work for foreign clients; and Mildmay “kept his finger on the pulse of the London money market” through his capacity as a director of the Bank of England.⁶⁰⁶ To Orbell, the Thomas Baring-Joshua Bates match up was the “greatest partnership in Barings’ history.”⁶⁰⁷

Bates changed how the Barings did business. He systematized and expanded the countinghouse. Together with Humphrey Mildmay, he directed regular reports on the states of market, Baring balances, and consolidated their accounting by bringing in-house functions that had been spun off to other London agency houses and brokerages. Bates sought to improve the flow of information within the firm and with their correspondents. ““While I am in business,” he once wrote of himself, “I like and wish to play the game well.””⁶⁰⁸

Bates also expanded the Barings’ America business. The Barings already had a foot in the American market, but Bates convinced them to really turn their heads west.⁶⁰⁹ While many big financiers such as the Rothschilds focused on navigating the war to invest in the European market, Baring Brothers expanded their involvement in both commerce and financing American expansion. There were a number of reasons for this. First, money was worth more in the United States than Britain. In 1833, market rates for capital ranged from 5 ½ to 7% in America, versus 2.73% in London. Next, the country

⁶⁰⁶ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 126-127.

⁶⁰⁷ Orbell, “Joshua Bates (1788-1864),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁶⁰⁸ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 83.

⁶⁰⁹ Even Peter Austin who emphasized the long trajectory of Baring investment in the United States argues that the “new partnership [with the absorption of Bates & Baring] decided to recommit the House to the United States trade.” Peter E. Austin, *Baring Brothers and the Birth of Modern Finance* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), 29.

showed considerable promise. State governments promoted internal improvements, banks, and legal protections for capital. And while President Andrew Jackson did not inspire confidence—he vetoed the Bank of the United States, faced massive controversy regarding the so-called “tariff of abominations” including a nullification crisis, and more—he was not as hostile to business as many had feared. The country had low debt and no real history of large debts or defaults.⁶¹⁰ But it helped that Bates had considerable experience and a strong contact base with American traders.

The Perkins connection with the Barings developed through their existing relationship with Bates. Bates had married Lucretia Sturgis in 1813. Lucretia was sister to John Sturgis of Perkins & Sturgis of New York and cousin to William Sturgis of Bryant & Sturgis of Boston. Letters between the two families indicate that Bates both looked out for his wife’s siblings and that he maintained a close friendship with William Sturgis. His correspondence with the Perkinses on business matters preceded his involvement with the Barings and even his work for them as a London agent and banker.⁶¹¹ By 1831, Bates wrote to the Baring Brothers agent in Boston that while New York already seemed the more promising location for their interests, in Boston “Perkins & Co. is worth all the others put together.”⁶¹²

Collaboration between the Perkinses and the Barings began in the late 1820s and surged during the 1830s and 1840s. While Perkins & Co. of Boston broke up in 1835,

⁶¹⁰ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 91-93.

⁶¹¹ This correspondence began at least as early as 1822, but likely earlier. Bates wrote Frederick Paine that year, but the letter has an easy familiarity and knowledge of the Perkins’s business. Operating out of London, Bates would have wanted to know as much as possible about the business of American houses with London. Joshua Bates to Frederick William Paine, 22 February 1822. Paine Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 3. AAS.

⁶¹² Joshua Bates to Thomas Wren Ward, 6 February 1831. Thomas Wren Ward Papers, Box 10, Folder 1. MHS.

the relationship with the Barings continued through Bryant & Sturgis and John Murray Forbes & Co., both of Boston. The Perkinses were useful both in the American market and for revitalizing Baring interests in the East Indies. Peter Austin argues that “By bringing the ‘colonial’ Bates into the firm, Alexander Baring also captured the valuable American client list which Bates and John Baring had assembled as business partners.”⁶¹³ The list contained almost three dozen firms, most of which centered on East Indies trading. While the Perkinses were not the most substantial of the Barings’ American trading partners—ledgers reveal a shift to a reliance on firms based in New York in the 1830s, such as Prime, Ward & King—they were nonetheless significant.

The Barings tapped into the entire Perkins network, but especially grafted onto the Asian houses: Russell & Co. was easily their favorite of the China-based agencies and related firm Russell & Sturgis handled their Manila trade. As the volume of the Barings’ business increased, the London house sent price currents, market reports, and recommendations to their favored correspondents. Ralph Hidy writes that, “Special advices and reports on prices of both Far Eastern imports and British manufactured goods were sent only” to John Perkins Cushing, Bryant & Sturgis, and Thomas Handasyd Perkins. “Friendship for the Boston specialists in Far Eastern operations was strong enough for the Barings to commit the New Englanders without previous authorization to a large venture in tea for the French market in 1832.”⁶¹⁴ And Bates accepted agents into the Baring fold without any further vetting than the recommendation of Thomas

⁶¹³ Austin, *Baring Brothers and the Birth of Modern Finance*, 40.

⁶¹⁴ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 107.

Handasyd Perkins, as was the case with Joseph Langdon in Smyrna (modern-day Izmir, Turkey).

The friendship between Joshua Bates and William Sturgis, and their shared role in looking after Sturgis kin, strengthened the potential of the business connection between the two men. In fact, the business ties themselves opened up greater facility in maintaining personal contact. Business letters and family advice mixed in seeking to advance the careers and independence of Mrs. Bates two brothers, Josiah Sturgis and John Sturgis.⁶¹⁵ As the family entrepreneurs, Joshua Bates and William Sturgis bore more of the responsibility for kin who needed help, something that drew them together and fostered their friendship. While too much can be made of kinship in this relationship, for Bates and Sturgis commercial sympathy and family connection grafted on each other rather than the relationship being simply about one or the other.

The Barings' connections were abundant and diverse, but they looked to a few select firms for advice. Members of the Perkins network continued to be counted as advisers and among those with impeccable credit for decades.⁶¹⁶ William Sturgis was intimates with both Bates and the Baring Brothers' American agent, Thomas Wren Ward. Sturgis had even advised Bates in selecting Ward in 1828, as Bates deliberated on whether to approach Ward or Henry Lee.⁶¹⁷ Ward was an excellent choice: well respected and well connected, Ward traveled widely and leaned successfully on

⁶¹⁵ See House Correspondence 5.1.5 in the Baring Archives, London.

⁶¹⁶ This advice continued at least into the 1850s. William Sturgis, John Murray Forbes, Robert Bennet Forbes, and William Appleton all advised the Barings on railroad investments. John M. Forbes looked to the Barings for funding in his own railroad projects.

⁶¹⁷ William Sturgis to Joshua Bates, 5 October 1828. House Correspondence, Folder 5.1.5. Jonathan Goodhue also vouched for Ward on 15 December 1828, House Correspondence, Folder 5.2.12. Baring.

merchants around the country for information. And social ties buoyed business connections. Merchants were loath to put choice details on their neighbors and competitors into writing; far more information was available in private conversations. The Barings relied upon codes in their correspondence, and assigned a number to firms and individuals of interest. Even in considering the relationship between Joshua Bates and William Sturgis, social lines of communication structured information: letters indicate that neighborly gossip between Sturgis and Ward were part of the advice network that contributed to Bates's read on the American market.⁶¹⁸

The connection between the Perkinses and the Barings was not always smooth, but it was often mutually beneficial. While the Baring name was useful to the Perkinses, the size and hubris of the British firm was also a source of concern. As early as 1829, John Perkins Cushing wrote of his apprehension to Samuel Cabot in the Boston-based Perkins & Co. Cushing felt it unwise to allow the Barings to have too much influence over their trade or to be "under obligation" to them, or anyone in Europe. Cushing warned Cabot that when the Barings sought to advise them on what to sell in the East Indies to remember that they were bankers not traders.⁶¹⁹ Although Cushing left it unsaid, the Barings also seemed to share British overconfidence in the prospects for pushing British manufactures on Asians. Cushing had a far more sophisticated grasp of Eastern markets: on a trip to select British and French textiles for sale in China and Manila, for example, Cushing secreted patterns and color swatches specific to the tastes of those markets to manufacturers. A few years later, Bryant & Sturgis similarly

⁶¹⁸ Ward to Barings, Jan. 7, 1833, Dec. 15, 1834, May 19, 1835. Cited in Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 157.

⁶¹⁹ John Perkins Cushing to Samuel Cabot, 22 August 1829. Samuel Cabot Papers, Box 2, Folder 3. MHS.

complained that they could purchase English manufactures for the China trade better elsewhere, to which Bates vehemently countered that Baring Brothers was as vigorous as any of the American houses.⁶²⁰

The relationship was beneficial in several ways. Four examples of these benefits are as follows. First, the Baring name helped the Perkinses to shift the financing of their East Indies trade increasingly from silver to Bills on London. Second, the Baring's elected not to call in debts owed by Russell & Co. during the American Panics of 1837 and 1839. Third, the Perkinses lobbied on behalf of the Barings as American states defaulted en masse on bonds owned by the Barings. And, finally, the Barings extended uncovered credits to Russell & Co. in 1843, which helped the firm stabilize following the upheaval of war in China and the death of Houqua.

First, increasingly in the 1820s, the Perkinses relied upon bills of exchange (and opium) rather than silver to finance their trade with China. Bills of exchange functioned as letters of credit or proof of debt. A bill specified that one person, the acceptor who accepted obligation to pay the bill, agreed to pay a fixed amount of money to another at a future specified date. American merchants leapt at the opportunity to use bills as they were generally less expensive and more secure than shipping specie. The Barings and other large British houses were generally better known in Asia than American banks, and thus stepped in as intermediaries for American merchants. The growing consumption of Indian opium in China fostered a demand for bills on London, which in turn furthered the

⁶²⁰ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 160.

use of bills as a way of remitting funds back to London. For the American government, bills were also a boon as they kept specie in American banks.⁶²¹

Second, and perhaps most significantly, the Barings stood behind Russell & Co. during the Panic of 1837. While the American economy expanded in the mid-1830s, waves of economic expansion and contraction hit various ports connected to the Perkins network.⁶²² The British East India Company lost its monopoly on British trade in China in 1833, flooding the market with British merchants leading to a crash in prices. Financial panic rocked Calcutta in 1834-5. And in the summer of 1836, when the Bank of England discovered that a number of British merchant banks had overextended themselves in the American market, the Bank tightened credit. Perkins & Co. of Boston was already winding up its books at this point, but Russell & Co. in China found itself overextended. Had either the Barings or Houqua called in their debts with Russell & Co., the firm would have had to close its doors.⁶²³

The Perkinses returned the favor as political allies to the Barings. They helped the Barings' American agent lobby and pressure states to pay their bond obligations to investors in the wake of the Panics of 1837 and 1839. There was an enormous amount of public criticism of Baring influence on politics and business in American newspapers, and Perkins allies exerted their own influence in this debate. William Sturgis and William Appleton were both among the select confidantes to the Barings.⁶²⁴ Baring

⁶²¹ Austin, *Baring Brothers and the Birth of Modern Finance*, 60.

⁶²² Jessica Lepler's interesting work on the Panic of 1837 suggests that this may have been the first global recession, or, at the very least, the first transatlantic recession. Jessica M. Lepler, "1837: Anatomy of a Panic" (Brandeis University, 2007).

⁶²³ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 191.

⁶²⁴ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 286.

Brothers had been a big seller of American securities abroad, so the panics and subsequent defaults were a blow to them, too.⁶²⁵ For example, by contract, Illinois had taken early steps to avoid repudiation and reestablished the credit of the state on a compromise basis. The Barings combined with other foreign firms including Magniac, Jardine & Co. to appoint a group of prominent Boston merchants who were also Baring insiders to represent them. The so-called “Boston Committee” included the Barings’ agent Thomas Wren Ward, Abbott Lawrence, and William Sturgis to represent the foreign bondholders in ensuring the completion of the Illinois & Michigan Central.⁶²⁶

Finally, in 1843, for the first time, the Barings granted uncovered credits to American houses in China including Russell & Co. and Heard & Co. This came at a pivotal moment for the American firms, but especially for Russell & Co. In the late 1830s, tensions mounted between Western merchants and the Chinese government over the opium trade. Whether the real source of tension was the deleterious effect of opium smoking on the Chinese people, the drain of specie out of China because of the trade in opium, or British zealotry, the Chinese government insisted in 1839 that the opium trade be brought to an end and all opium be delivered to the authorities. The British refused and backed their position with warships. This first Opium War lasted from 1840 to 1842. The British won and, as their spoils, forced the Chinese to sign what became known as the first of the “unequal treaties.” Other Westerners followed suit, including the Americans with the 1844 signing of the Treaty of Wanxia. Of the most immediate significance to China traders, the unequal treaties forced the Chinese government to open

⁶²⁵ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 308.

⁶²⁶ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 337.

other ports to Western trade—the so-called “treaty ports.” The expansion of Westerners into Hong Kong, Shanghai, Amoy, and more transformed the trade. On top of all this, the partners of Russell & Co. had just lost a good friend and mentor: Houqua died in 1843. While Russell & Co. continued to have access to Wu family funds, as discussed above, they lost the influence and keen insight that were unique to Houqua the individual. The new access to credit from the Barings helped Russell & Co. negotiate the necessary expansion into the treaty ports and step into the breach following Houqua’s death.⁶²⁷

Even into the 1850s, the Barings turned to participants in the Perkins network for advice, and they turned to the Barings for capital. Mid-decade, the Barings purchased back door investments in American railroads through state bonds and credit for the purchase of rails. Initially, American political tensions over slavery and economic uncertainty made the Barings reticent. But money was cheap. They consulted a variety of correspondents, including John and Bennet Forbes, William Sturgis, and William Appleton.⁶²⁸ With their advice, the Barings bought \$500,000 worth of 10 year convertible bonds in the Eastern Rail Road of Massachusetts in July 1852. They bought another \$150,000 in August.⁶²⁹ When the Panic of 1857 made money scarce, and John

⁶²⁷ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 353.

⁶²⁸ Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 408-412.

⁶²⁹ Samuel Hooper (of William Appleton & Co., Boston) to Russell Sturgis, 6 January 1852. Carton 1, Folder 14: 1852. Samuel Hooper Papers. MHS. Baring Brothers to Thomas W. Ward, 13 February, 19 March, 22 July, 9 August, 3 September, 15 October 1852. Baker. Thomas W. Ward to Baring Brothers, 23 July (copy of agreement of July 22 enclosed), 20 August 1852. Baring. See Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 413-418. Hooper first addressed Sturgis with a proposition to take jointly with Appleton & Co. a 6% \$500,000 loan for five years to the Eastern, 5 shares to the Eastern, 5,000 shares of the company to serve as collateral. The Barings refused on the ground that the bonds would not sell when Boston 5% would bring but little above par, that Appleton & Co. wanted them to supply all the funds, and that the Boston house seemed to expect them to borrow at a very low rate of interest, whereas they would charge no less than 5% for the loan, with power to call for the portion advanced to Appleton & Co. upon six months’ notice. The bonds were convertible into shares after five years.

M. Forbes was charged with the task of raising \$2 million in fresh capital or the Michigan Central would fail, Forbes turned to Baring Brothers.⁶³⁰

In 1849, Joshua Bates brought Russell Sturgis into Baring Brothers to test the younger man as a potential successor. He had not been casting about for a kinsman to step into the breach of his retirement (his own son died tragically years before), but Russell Sturgis himself used the personal connection to apply to Bates for a position. The two had long been correspondents, with letters a mixture of business and family news between a senior and junior kinsman. In 1848, Sturgis queried Bates as to an opening, that “an occupation on your side of the water . . . would suit me exactly.” He quickly added, “As I said before, I hope you will not feel annoyed at my broaching this subject, for whilst on the one hand your standing and your valuable experience would enable you to judge correctly, your personal knowledge of me would prevent any hesitation about using all frankness in your reply.”⁶³¹ Sturgis was not a bad candidate. He had over a decade’s worth of experience in East Indies trading and managed a grueling trial run in the London headquarters. In January 1851, he made full partner. In 1873, after the death of Thomas Baring, Sturgis became the firm’s senior partner until his own death in 1882. While it is doubtful that Russell Sturgis saw himself as a part of the network begun by the Perkins brothers in 1792, he was certainly a beneficiary of the web of commerce and connection they established in the prior century.

In the end, personal ties provided an opportunity for connection between the Perkinses and the Barings more than it guided business decisions. The relationship

⁶³⁰ Yaggy, "John Forbes: Entrepreneur," 328.

⁶³¹ Russell Sturgis to Joshua Bates, 18 September 1848. House Correspondence, Folder 1.204.25. Baring. See also Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance*, 395.

between the Perkinses and the Barings was not rooted in the sort of paternalistic, mentor-apprentice pattern of the Perkins-Wu relationship. Rather, if anything, it resembled fraternal ties. The marital connection between Joshua Bates and his wife's Sturgis kin did not demand loyalty from either Bates or the Sturgises, but it did provide an opportunity for a fraternal connection that linked personal and business ties. As will be discussed further in chapter six, fraternal ties did not always translate into privileging those ties over prospective opportunities.

Conclusion

Trade was not just about financial capital, but about social and cultural capital as well. Personal relationships could also create problems, tensions, and did not necessarily bring about profitable business ties, as with the losses Perkins & Co. sustained with the bankruptcy of Henry Higginson & Co. But losses also came out of non-kin ties, as with the bankruptcy of Samuel Williams. Affective ties did work. When business ties frayed through miscommunication or poor economic returns, personal bonds could help to sustain relationships. Correspondents were more likely to receive the benefit of the doubt or second chances, giving openings to repair the relationships and soothe tempers. And contacts could be assets that younger merchants could inherit.

The fact that the Perkinses were organized as a kinship-based network—that they not only had a significant contact base of correspondents, but also had a foundation of strong ties forged through personal as well as business relationships—was part of what made them attractive to both the Wu family and the Barings. While the bond that the Perkinses had with the Wus and the Barings differed in substance, both connected with

more than a single firm or entrepreneurial individual (only Perkins & Co. of Canton or Boston, only John Perkins Cushing or William Sturgis). Both tapped into the larger network.

The differences in the Perkins-Wu and the Perkins-Baring relationship were in part due to the fact that the network of Perkins family and firms had different uses for each. For Houqua and the Wu family, preferential ties with the Perkinses allowed for a sort of preventive recourse. The Perkinses as a family, not just as individuals, were invested in the relationship, and worked hard to maintain the relationship. By mentoring younger merchants within this context, Houqua trained agents into his approach to commerce and thus felt more comfortable empowering them with decision making and investing on his behalf and for his family. Paternalism made sense. The Perkinses helped establish Joshua Bates with American merchants in London and thus played a role in the expansion of Baring Brothers after 1828. More, the Perkinses allowed the Barings to graft onto their network of correspondents. This was useful to the Perkinses in that it enhanced the flow of credit and backing in international markets, and useful to the Barings in that it gave them new outlets in Asia. The Perkins-Bates connection was significant, but the Bates' marital connection to the Sturgis family was only part of the relationship.

**CHAPTER 5.
THE WOMAN PIGEON:
SOCIABILITY, SEXUALITY, AND MARRIAGE
IN THE
ANGLO-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN CANTON & MACAU**

Gem of the Orient Earth and open Sea,
Macau! that in thy lap and on thy breast
Hast Gathered beauties all the loveliest,
O'er which the sun smiles in his majesty!

--Sir John Bowring, "Sonnet to Macau" (1849)

When the fifty-eight year old James Perkins Sturgis asked Harriet Low to marry him in 1832, she thought he might joking. As one of the few eligible Western women in Macau, Low was no stranger to odd propositions. It was clear to her that this one, offered with inept gallantry as it was, required delicacy.⁶³² Harriet's refusal nonetheless devastated Sturgis. For over two decades, James Sturgis had lived in southern China as a merchant connected to his brothers and cousins and later as an independent trader in collaboration with kin at Russell & Co., Russell Sturgis & Co., and Russell & Sturgis. The devastation had to do with more than just a difference in attraction. For James, the proposal likely meant something very different than for Harriet. Harriet sought a stimulating companion with a competency sufficient to meet her family's approval.⁶³³

⁶³² Nan P. Hodges and Arthur W. Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life: The Journal of Harriet Low, Travelling Spinster*, 2 vols. (Winthrop, WA: Bear Creek Books, 2002), 354.

⁶³³ While in Macau, Harriet became secretly engaged to William Wood, but her family disapproved. Wood lacked stability. He flitted through several jobs, including clerking for Russell & Sturgis in Manila and managing a coffee plantation in Rizal (the Philippines), but with little success. Harriet later married John Hillard, Jr. of the New York trading family. The Hillard family papers, including correspondence with Harriet, are at the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan.

James sought those domestic symbols of maturity that trade with China had promised, yet instead precluded: home and family.

For American traders like Sturgis, Canton was a liminal space connected to aspirations for individuals and families to remake themselves through quick fortunes.⁶³⁴ Men generally traveled early in their careers with expectations tied to that stage of life. They would make a fortune in trade, return home, and use that fortune as a foundation of capital for both business and marriage. This happened enough for it to seem a plausible expectation, but it was by no means the rule. Even men who were successful might face decades abroad.

Many facets of life in Canton joined to make trade there a means rather than an end, including its distance from New England, its prohibitions on foreign settlement, and its exclusion of foreign women. Yet China's connection to personal aspiration and sacrifice meant that traveling evoked deep feelings of hope, desire, despair, and resentment. Despite the distance and the prohibition on settlement, some merchants and missionaries spent the bulk if not the entirety of their lives in China and Macau. The ban on foreign women was another matter. Between 1760 and the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing, Chinese law prohibited the presence of foreign women in Canton. Females who journeyed to China from the Atlantic lived in the Portuguese peninsular colony of Macau

⁶³⁴ China at this time was perceived as a "boomtown" much akin to other entrepreneurial spaces such as Gold Rush California. The two shared many essential features. Aspiring clerks or merchants who traveled to China generally came from the middle class, not the upper or lower echelons of society. Wealthier men could afford to stay in the metropole while poorer men lacked the resources for such adventures. While China and California are larger boomtowns, smaller 'gold rushes' shared similar features and expectations, including maritime adventures and frontier prospecting in general. A book that also makes this connection is Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy : The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). As I note later in this chapter, however, not all men found this expected life path desirable, and traveling provided a means for escaping those expectations.

downriver from Canton. From 1800 when the British East India Company allowed women to travel in the berths of Company ships to 1842, a mixed-sex community developed in Macau that was particularly tied to the British and American trade at Canton. Many men had local mistresses and families at Macau, but it was taboo to make these families legitimate through marriage.

This chapter examines the ban on foreign women in Canton and its consequences as a way of thinking about the connections between social lives and foreign relations and trade in southern China. While considerable research has been done on trade in Canton during this period, far less is known about the connection between Canton and Macau. Yet examining the two together sheds insight on connections between sociability, sexuality, and marriage and trade and foreign relations prior to the Treaty of Nanjing. It suggests that Chinese officials saw gender as a significant way to manage the foreign population residing in Canton. And it suggests that gender and sexuality were part of the confluence of issues that some Western observers felt distinguished them from Chinese counterparts.

For the Perkinses, the centrality of China to their trade meant that sex segregation in Canton and Macau played a significant role in the social and business strategies of workers and families tied to their network. Using marital ties to cement business relationships was not an option in such a setting. Those connected to the Perkins network who married abroad did so in Manila, California, or South America. Women who traveled to China did so as wives or daughters. Harriet Low, who arrived as her aunt's nurse and companion, was the exceptional single woman. Maintaining a Western wife in China was incredibly expensive, however, a fact that may well have made families

abroad the ultimate status symbol. While costly, the decision to bring a wife could also prove a business investment by opening social doors. Americans in Macau and Canton lived, worked, and socialized within a British-dominated community of foreign traders. Within this enclave, whether one had a wife opened social doors—and with them, business and political opportunities. While Americans imagined themselves as distinct from British outlooks and ambitions in China, sociability between merchants and their families fostered an Anglo-American community that, while by no means unified, still often shared common strategies for ensuring the ability to trade in China.

“The Woman Pigeon”: Excluding Women from Canton

By the time Americans journeyed to China on their own behalf in 1784, intercourse between Chinese and foreigners was highly regulated.⁶³⁵ These regulations often felt arbitrary to foreign merchants, but they developed out of Chinese efforts to mitigate conflict within the empire. The decision of the Chinese government to limit foreign vessels to Canton, a port deliberately distant from the imperial capital of Beijing, was part and parcel to these efforts. Even ships arriving from Southeast Asia (Nanyang or southern sea) who traded in other Chinese ports such as Amoy could only do so with Chinese sailors in Chinese vessels.⁶³⁶ Foreign merchants in Canton lived not in the city

⁶³⁵ Qing officials had considerable experience dealing with mixed populations, being both non-Han rulers themselves as well as grappling with Eurasian frontiers to the north and west. Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, *Empire at the Margins : Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way ; the Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West : The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁶³⁶ Jennifer Cushman, *Fields from the Sea: Chinese Junk Trade with Siam During the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1993), 2-5. However, the Spanish were given special privileges to trade between Manila and Amoy along China’s Fujian coast and Japanese and Russian traders traded further to the north under separate trade

proper, but in a segregated enclave outside of a Cantonese suburb. As discussed in chapter four, Chinese officials expected the leading Cantonese merchants, members of a formal organization known as the “Co-Hong,” to guide foreigners through trade and navigate any potential difficulties with the foreign population so as to mitigate conflict. And in 1760, as part of China’s “Eight Regulations” governing visitors’ conduct in Canton, the Chinese government prohibited foreign merchants from living in the city year-round and prohibited the presence of foreign women at all. The rule against foreign women became one of many examples foreigners used to decry Chinese law as unreasonable, irrational, and inconsistent.⁶³⁷

According to Colin Crissell, the “Eight Regulations” were originally issued in response to the lengthening European trading season in Canton. Where the custom had been for European vessels to arrive on the summer wind and depart six months later on the winter wind, ship sizes increased to accommodate greater cargoes, leading merchants and sailors to lodge in Canton until the next season.⁶³⁸ This explains the limits on men’s yearlong residence in Canton, but why prohibit women altogether? Especially given the paucity of foreign women in the region?⁶³⁹ The most probable explanation is that the

agreements as well. Legarda, *After the Galleons : Foreign Trade, Economic Change & Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth Century Philippines*, 35, Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*.

⁶³⁷ Li Chen, "Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Western Knowledge of Chinese Law and Society, 1750–1900" (Columbia University, 2005).

⁶³⁸ Colin N. Crisswell, *The Taipans, Hong Kong's Merchant Princes* (Hong Kong ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 14. See also Randle Edwards, “Ch’ing Legal Jurisdiction over Foreigners,” in Jerome Cohen, *Essays on China’s Legal Tradition* (1980), 222-23.

⁶³⁹ Susannah Hoe writes that foreign women had been barred from Canton beginning in 1751 when a woman traveling with a Dutch merchant was escorted to Macau in Chinese custody. While a considerable amount of time had passed, the possibility of foreign women in Canton was not unknown. Susanna Hoe, *The Private Life of Old Hong Kong: Western Women in the British Colony, 1841-1941* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

Chinese government used sex-based border policies to constrain a foreign population—a questionable population in the eyes of the state. By hindering opportunities for foreign men to establish families in China, the Qing government expected the merchants would not settle in China. Prohibiting the residence of foreign women in Canton limited the ability of visiting merchants to put down roots.

An additional explanation, suggested by Stacilee Ford Hosford, is that anxieties about foreign women were rife. Hosford uses a Chinese anti-Christian tract quoted by the London Missionary Society in the 1830s to demonstrate that these anxieties did exist: “Allowing men and women to mix in society, and walk arm in arm through the streets, . . . shewed (sic) that they [foreigners] had not the least sense of propriety.”⁶⁴⁰ Frances Wood similarly contends that “it was considered improper for women to associate with men not of their immediate family . . . Walking in the streets, talking directly to men, and dancing were unthinkable activities for demure Chinese ladies and such behavior from foreign women not unnaturally attracted critical attention.”⁶⁴¹ Wood cites a Manchu dignitary who, in 1843, expressed horror at being “saluted” by a Western woman in Hong Kong. And Jonathan Porter argues that Chinese observers were fascinated by foreign women, including both Western women and the Eurasian population native to Macau, but that such fascination led Chinese writers to favor separation. Commenting on Western women’s dress and “exposed bosoms,” their freedom of movement, and their social roles vis-à-vis their husbands, one Chinese writer

⁶⁴⁰ Quoted in Stacilee Ford Hosford, “Gendered Exceptionalisms: American Women in Hong Kong and Macao, 1830-2000” (University of Hong Kong, 2002), 18.

⁶⁴¹ Hosford, “Gendered Exceptionalisms: American Women in Hong Kong and Macao, 1830-2000,” 18-19, Frances Wood, *No Dogs and Not Many Chinese: Treaty Port Life in China, 1843-1943* (London: John Murray, 1998), 133.

concluded “this is why Heaven separates the Chinese and barbarians.”⁶⁴² These scholars suggest a concern that by their very presence, Western women would import Western gender norms into China and create strife. But was such a concern present in the 1750s?

Certainly gender—women’s behavior in particular—was a preoccupation for Manchu officials.⁶⁴³ From the very outset of the Qing dynasty in 1644, Manchu officials instituted state programs designed to elevate the “virtuous woman.” Women, especially as mothers, anchored the Confucian household and thus the social order. Distinguished writers on Chinese statecraft of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries penned advice manuals on female conduct, specifically condemning behavior “that they deemed heterodox or threatening to the Confucian family and political order.”⁶⁴⁴ Women’s participation in Buddhist rituals faced particular censure. Rules against the presence of Western women may have been an extension of this larger concern over unorthodox behavior.

The prohibition on foreign women was one of a number of regulations that chafed the foreign community and was eventually tested. Many of the Chinese rules were more

⁶⁴² Jonathan Porter, *Macau: The Imaginary City, 1557 to Present* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1996), 135.

⁶⁴³ Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender : Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers : Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), Fangqin Du and Susan Mann, "Competing Claims on Womanly Virtue in Late Imperial China," in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 219-247, Susan Mann, *Precious Records : Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), Matthew Harvey Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁴⁴ Mann, *Precious Records : Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, 23, 28-29. Mann argues that Manchu programs and edicts marked a transformation of gender roles through their particular concern over women’s virtue and the Confucian family. For example, Manchu officials sought to elevate the archetype of the “chaste widow” (widows who did not marry again and thus continued to honor her husband’s kin group and ancestors) by continuing older commemorations of notable widows and by building stone arch monuments to honor them.

ideal than reality, easily overlooked for a *cumsha* or gift. Boat racing, for example, was prohibited but popular. While foreigners were not supposed to employ Chinese servants, all of the factories (buildings which doubled as residences and offices for the foreigners) depended on the myriad domestics that cooked, cleaned, and ran errands for them—when these servants were withdrawn from the foreign community during the tensions leading to the Opium War, merchants in residence divvied up the household duties to comic effect. And while the Chinese government mandated that foreign merchants should remove from Canton during the off-season, a handful made year-round homes of their factories.⁶⁴⁵

This was not one of those rules. When Americans first arrived in Canton in the 1780s, they encountered a cosmopolitan society of Europeans (British, French, Swedes, Danes, Austrians, Portuguese, Spaniards, and various kinds of Italians) as well as merchants from Asia and Africa, especially the Near East including Armenians, Parsis, Indians, Arabs, and Near Eastern Jews.⁶⁴⁶ As the British began to dominate China's trade out of Canton during the eighteenth century, they also engulfed Macau. While some

⁶⁴⁵ Portuguese officials in 1803 refused to allow Americans to reside in Macau during the off-season as the United States had no treaty with Portugal. The few Americans desiring to stay at that point appealed to local officials in order to reside in their Canton factories. Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia; a Critical Study of the Policy of the United States with Reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th Century*, 80.

⁶⁴⁶ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 44. Just as the Portuguese and Spanish trade included non-nationals (including Chinese) trading under those countries' flags, so, too, did the British trade include Company and private traders as well as native Indian merchants, especially Parsis who were listed as British in the East India Company records. British involvement in China cannot be understood entirely apart from the British presence in India. I do not know of any Parsi or Armenian women in Macau. Parsis were minority outsiders in India and readily intertwined with British trading networks in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Parsi women tended to be more involved in business than Western women, but, as far as I can tell, these women did not tend travel to Canton. Parsi merchants brought their own servants to China, but not their wives. According to Chiara Betta, one of the advantages that Baghdadi Jews had in trading in China over Parsi merchants post-1842 was that they brought their families with them. Parsis, Betta writes, were usually sojourning men who, given their situation, became involved with prostitutes and liaisons. Chiara Betta, "The Trade Diaspora of Baghdadi Jews: From India to China's Treaty Ports, 1842-1937," in *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History*, ed. Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis, and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou (Boston: Berg, 2005), 269-285.

British wives may have already lived in Macau, in 1800 the British East India Company began to allow berths to be used by women, thus allowing wives to travel to China.⁶⁴⁷ By 1822, a mixed population of 2,693 non-Chinese women lived in Macau and 604 non-Chinese men.⁶⁴⁸ The sizeable population of non-Chinese women was likely connected to the Portuguese charitable institutions: the *Misericórdia*, the Asylum for Female Orphans, and the Asylum of Mary Magdalen. Still, as foreign women traveled to Canton, they made it no further than Macau. As American women arrived in 1829, they socialized almost entirely within the existing community of British women.

Given the British prominence in Canton and Macau by the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries and the history of East India Company challenges to Chinese law, it is hardly surprising that the “test” of the Chinese prohibition on women in Canton should come from amongst Company ranks. In February 1830, Julia Smith Baynes made a first, probing voyage upriver to Canton.⁶⁴⁹ Wife to the president of the East India Company’s Select Committee, the lovely Mrs. Baynes had a reputation for the dramatic. According to British merchant William Jardine, her arrival went “without the slightest molestation from the Chinese Govt.”⁶⁵⁰ The British merchants flouted her presence.

⁶⁴⁷ Crisswell, *The Taipans, Hong Kong's Merchant Princes*, 16, Hoe, *The Private Life of Old Hong Kong*, 5, Hosford, "Gendered Exceptionalisms: American Women in Hong Kong and Macao, 1830-2000," 19. Jonathan Porter speculates as to why the numbers were so skewed female in *Macau: The Imaginary City*, 132. He suggests that male children may have been more easily sold to outside families or as slaves, where girls were more likely to have been abandoned locally to become prostitutes or kept in families as servants.

⁶⁴⁸ As quoted in Crisswell, *The Taipans, Hong Kong's Merchant Princes*, 16.

⁶⁴⁹ Her father, General John Smith, even wrote to Julia that her “adventure to Canton has proved you to be a heroine.” This per Hoe, *The Private Life of Old Hong Kong*, 6. Hoe referenced private letters in the family’s possession. The letter raises interesting questions. How well-known were Julia’s exploits, and who celebrated them?

⁶⁵⁰ William Jardine to Thomas Weeding, 3 March 1830, quoted in Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 391.

Hong merchants called upon her.⁶⁵¹ The visit went so swimmingly, several other ladies followed in her footsteps.

Among them were Harriet Low and her aunt, wife to merchant William H. Low, who paid their own surreptitious visit to the factories at Canton. The two were the first—and at this point only—American women at Macau. The Low ladies had watched with interest the reaction surrounding the efforts of William Baynes to keep his wife in Canton. Harriet wrote to her sister that while great excitement ensued, all expected the calamity to die down, and “though the Chinese will never consent to ladies going to Canton, that they will wink at it, and, as Mouqua told Uncle, ‘they will shutty eye and shutty ear.’”⁶⁵² Mouqua was one of the leading Chinese merchants and seemed in a position to know the political climate. Low preferred confrontation. “I should be very glad to have the English carry the point if it can be done without bloodshed,” she confided to her sister.

The Chinese are making a great fuss about us poor harmless Fanquis (foreign devils), and say, and persist in saying, that ‘that lady’ (meaning Mrs. Baynes) ‘must go down,’ but ‘that lady’ is very obstinate, and will not go. They have threatened to send soldiers to take her away, upon which Mr. B. has had up a hundred armed sailors from the ships, and cannon placed at the gate of factory.

By the time Harriet and her aunt finally made the fateful journey for themselves, tempers were already frayed.

William Low came down from Canton to Macau on November 3 to escort them on a small brig that John Perkins Cushing lent to the escapade, the *Terrier*. Two days later, with the sun barely peeping into the sky, the two climbed aboard. All of the

⁶⁵¹ Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 110.

⁶⁵² Harriet Low to her sister, 27 October 1830, as quoted in Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 190.

Chinese hands at the docks turned their backs on the ladies save “one boat-girl, more courageous than the rest, who lent us a board to step on as we got into the boat, for which she was liberally rewarded with a dollar.”⁶⁵³ A cold wind bore down on the ship and cockroaches entertained the ladies in their berth, but the two maintained their resolve. Under the cover of heavy cloaks and velvet caps, they transferred to a schooner, the *Slyph*, at the mouth of the Pearl River.

To Harriet at least, all seemed worthwhile when they arrived in Canton. Fatigue, cold, aching bones, all slipped out of her mind as Harriet’s curiosity got the best of her. The schooner approached the factories under a luminous moonlit sky, with pagodas rising against the dark and an “endless variety” of boats spreading left and right. Rows of sailing vessels formed water-laden streets: enormous tea ships, boats with houses within them. “It was more Chinese than anything we had seen before,” Harriet exulted.⁶⁵⁴ They walked straight to the Russell & Co. factory without trouble, but did so in disguise while the town slept. Trouble came to them soon enough.

On November 14, Chinese officials issued a chop, a notice: trade would cease if the Low women did not disembark. This seemed cruel and unfair; after all, the English ladies still resided at Canton. Harriet blamed the Chinese not for the rule, but “the knavery.” Mouqua had explained to her that when Mrs. Baynes arrived, the Viceroy called on him for an explanation. He lied and said that Mr. Baynes was desperately sick, and that Mrs. Baynes had come to nurse him back to health. Then Mrs. Thornhill arrived and, again, the Viceroy demanded answers. Mouqua replied that the illness was so

⁶⁵³ Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 191.

⁶⁵⁴ Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 192.

severe, as Mr. Baynes' cousin, Mrs. Thornhill had been allowed to come see him. But for the Lows, he had run out of excuses. Harriet told her sister that she suspected the Hong merchants had forged the chop and the Viceroy knew nothing of the incident. As a large body, the affiliates of the East India Company had influence. The Americans had none. "If the trade is stopped," Harriet wrote, "we shall have to budge."⁶⁵⁵

Chinese officials handled the situation with a deft touch. Instead of halting all commerce, they only banned trade with Russell & Co., Low's firm. Any resolve the merchants may have felt crumbled. As Harriet noted, "Had they stopped the American trade in general, they would have had all the gallant youths fighting for us at the city gates."⁶⁵⁶ Rumor was, the Emperor had given notice that *no* foreign women were to be allowed to visit Canton in the future, but that the Viceroy was waiting for the seasonal departure of Company officials in the spring to make the announcement. When the Company ships left, even officials and wives who remained in Asia disembarked for the more temperate weather and social environment of Macau. By summer 1831, when the new trading season began, the stage was reset. Canton was again a men's society of merchants with wives and children safely ensconced at Macau.

The 1830 clash underscores two things. First, we see gender's potential as a fault line for intercultural conflict (as well as its limitations). The prohibition on women was significant enough to be included in the Eight Regulations, upheld as the regulations were repeatedly renewed, and, most of all, enforced when so many of the other regulations were not. To Chinese officials, the presence of foreign women held the potential for

⁶⁵⁵ Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 193.

⁶⁵⁶ Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 195.

problems best avoided. While complaints abounded that the rule against foreign women in Canton was arbitrary and unfair, Mrs. Baynes' situation and Harriet's desired uprising of the "gallant youths" to the ladies' cause was precisely the sort of conflict Chinese officials sought to avoid. The fact that officials hit upon a peaceful solution may well have contributed to the specific outcome of the confrontation. Second, we see the fractious nature of relations between British and American residents in southern Asia. The Chinese strategy of targeting the American firm successfully drove a wedge between the two groups. When Harriet Low and her aunt first traveled to Canton, she wrote sympathetically of her British counterparts and their efforts. In singling out one American firm, the Chinese hit upon a sore spot. Their actions reminded the Americans that whatever their pretensions to participating in the same social circle as the Company families, they were by no means equals.

Canton: A Bachelor Society

The prohibition on women in Canton shaped possibilities for trade, sociability, and peaceful relations in China. Where other trading entrepôts of the era such as Calcutta and Batavia (Jakarta) became home to clusters of foreign and mixed trading families, in China before the Treaty of Nanjing, women, children, and mistresses lived apart from the trading enclave at Canton, either at home or in Macau.⁶⁵⁷ In southern China, by contrast, foreign social circles developed with one group at Canton composed of men, the other a

⁶⁵⁷ Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal, 1757-1800* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

mixed-sex community at Macau. This section turns to the society of foreign men living together in Canton, suggesting that the developed as a bachelor space both in its demographics and its lifestyle: Chinese compradors and servants managed households; merchants worked hard and played hard; and issues of sexuality and intimacy brought foreign merchants into conflict with the Chinese government.

The Canton of China's foreign traders was a Canton apart. Traders lived on a small, twelve acre enclave by the western suburbs outside the city wall. About three hundred feet back from the banks of the Pearl River stood the factories where the traders both lived and worked. The term "factories" refers to the residences or offices of a factor or sales' agent, but the buildings could also serve as a makeshift hotel for ship captains, play host to church services and club meetings, and more. Made of brick and granite, these rather stately buildings have been memorialized time and again in paintings by both Western and Chinese artists, complete with consuls' flags flying from the rooftops and clusters of boats moored along the river. These long, narrow structures contained a lower level with kitchens, servants' quarters, a treasury, and a godown (warehouse), and an upper level with the counting rooms and bedrooms, a dining room and parlors, and often a veranda facing the river. Some factories even had a roof terrace to escape the swelter of September nights as the tea season began.⁶⁵⁸ It was in this twelve-acre space that foreign merchants ostensibly lived, worked, and played. In practice they visited other locations

⁶⁵⁸ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, 27.

as well—temples, gardens, the countryside—although either with Chinese escorts or at their own peril.⁶⁵⁹

The factories lined one against the other interspersed with a few narrow streets: Old China Street, New China Street, Hog (formerly Hong) Street, and Puantiqua Street. These slender byways may have been cramped, but they nonetheless teemed with shops and peddlers retailing merchandise ranging from silk, porcelain, jade, and lacquer ware, bamboo and even European furniture, to fruits and vegetables, noodles, pickled olives, ground nuts, and pastries. There were butchers, barbers, and book sellers and makeshift bars toting tea, congee, and stiff rice liquors such as “samsha” and “Mandarin gin.”⁶⁶⁰ By the turn of the nineteenth century, beggars and street performers thronged to the foreign enclave, much to the horror and annoyance of many of the residents. In 1807, William Paine noted in his journal that he had discovered that the beggars reported to a head beggar who had “the power of life or death over the others.”⁶⁶¹ When Paul Sieman Forbes arrived in 1843, he romanticized the Tanka boat women⁶⁶² with their babies

⁶⁵⁹ For example, John Murray Forbes wrote that his “most serious adventure” was taking a party to visit a tea plantation upriver. The party had two boats with a couple of China boatmen in each. About a mile inland the group was surrounded by an infuriated mob armed with sticks and bricks. Forbes later discovered that a group of Englishmen had recently had visited the area not long before and had given offence to the local villagers. To Forbes, they sought to make the band of foreigners pay for “brother John’s arrogance”—it didn’t help that Forbes’s cousin, Sam Sturgis, was rather brash himself. The group aborted the trip. Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* 160.

⁶⁶⁰ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, 31, William C. Hunter, *Bits of Old China* (London,: K. Paul, Trench, & Co., 1885), 13. Hunter describes congee as hot rice water, but at least in its current form (zhou or 粥), it’s more of a savory rice porridge.

⁶⁶¹ Diaries of William Fitz Paine. Paine Family Papers, Box 9, Folder 4. AAS.

⁶⁶² Tanka/danjia (疍家) people are of somewhat controversial origin, but during our period, they were considered lower class boat people by the Chinese who lived on the land and were not allowed to settle on land or marry into land-based families. The Tanka boat women were especially of interest to European and American visitors and have been memorialized both in paintings and sketches, but also in writings. They were at times viewed as a simple, innocent people (as in Forbes’s description) or as likely mistresses or prostitutes (see John Heard, later in chapter). Zhiwei Liu and Helen F. Siu, "Lineage, Market,

strapped to their backs and the gentleness of the Cantonese, but even he was taken aback by beggars who writhed in pain in the street and beat themselves until paid to stop. “You may judge of my surprise when I afterwards learned that this was a trick to excite the sympathy of the benevolent intended to deceive some countryman and is a very common practice,” he wrote.⁶⁶³ This piece of China was deliberately apart from the rest of the empire, and yet it was the China known to most Western travelers.

The life of the Canton trader varied by season. Trade ebbed and flowed with the monsoons or trade winds which carried ships in on the southwest winds of May and June, and carried them out on the northeast monsoons by mid-January.⁶⁶⁴ While year-round residence at Macau allowed sales’ agents to stay longer, cargoes needed to depart on these winds or face being stuck at port until the monsoons eased. During the busy season, merchants typically began with a morning bath—the first of many in the sticky heat—and a breakfast of tea, rice, perhaps eggs or fish, curry, toast and jellies, and maybe rice cakes. Partners, clerks, and copyists (who were usually Portuguese) then applied themselves to trade before breaking for lunch around noon. Dinner, around half past six in the evening, gathered guests and residents alike for a social break. While in the off-season dinner would be an extended ritual with many courses, concluding with brandy

Pirate, and Dan: Ethnicity in the Pearl River Delta of South China,” in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, ed. Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 285-310.

⁶⁶³ Diaries of Paul Sieman Forbes. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 65. Baker.

⁶⁶⁴ Cheong, *Mandarins and Merchants: Jardine, Matheson, & Co., a China Agency of the Early Nineteenth Century*, 36. While Suresh Ghosh writes that British Calcutta traders mapped their social calendar onto that of London aristocrats—working from late summer to winter, then retiring to a comfortable water hole for the spring and summer—Calcutta was equally subject to the trade winds. Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal, 1757-1800*, 130.

and the long black cheroots or cigars imported from Manila, during the high season dinner went quickly in the rush to return to work.

For American traders, as with many merchants, most men traveled while young and unmarried, although some returned to Canton as married men, usually because they needed to recover from bankruptcy. China offered a possibility for remaking oneself. Traveling was a gamble, a speculation in and of itself. It could yield a fortune, or it could carry enormous costs. A man might gain wealth and with it stature for himself and his family, and a woman might marry above her prospects in the metropole. Or one might give up relationships with family and friends, miss out on important portions of children's lives, end up writing letters of well wishes to a personal circle half-composed of people never met, and despair of ever having a home life. The speculation carried the possibility of a win or a loss, but the *expectation* inherent in the gamble shaped personal strategies. For many men, the exclusion of women ensured life in Canton was a means and not an end. The lifestyle of foreigners in the trading enclave reflected this: men worked hard and played hard, hoping to turn a quick fortune and return home.

Americans could not compete with the extravagance of their British and Dutch counterparts, but their mode of living and dining in Canton remained far more sumptuous than anything imaginable to them at home.⁶⁶⁵ Each factory was run by a comprador who handled the finances of the factory and its residents. Servants handled the housework: they kept the factories stocked and clean, cooked and served food, brewed tea, brought

⁶⁶⁵ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 36. "Golden ghetto" refers to his argument that work and life in this circumscribed quasi-China, the foreigners' Canton, shaped how foreigners viewed China and the Chinese people, with generous merchants and knavish, downtrodden coolies.

water for baths, and laundered the linen and clothing.⁶⁶⁶ The comprador supplied the factory complete and received a personal cut from each purchase. The separation of buying and consuming may have contributed to a lavish lifestyle in Canton, but extravagance itself bred extravagance. Robert Bennet Forbes, for example, traveled to China to recoup a fortune lost in the Panic of 1837. Shortly after arriving, he found himself writing to his wife in Boston to explain why he needed a yacht. “Here comes the cloven foot say you, there’s the sock he has already split open—but this is not so. Ask [his brother] John and he will tell you that health is capital here & health can only be retained by a relaxation from the desk for an hour or two *every day* after dinner—therefore the boat is my capital.”⁶⁶⁷ And how else would he partake in the regular boat racing on the Pearl River? As his brother promised, a racing boat was guaranteed to make him popular with the British.⁶⁶⁸ Owning a serviceable schooner seemed a necessary expense.

While Macau was the center of the foreign merchants’ social world, Canton did not lack for recreation. Merchants hosted and attended dinner parties, gathered for music, book clubs, and games ranging from whist, backgammon, checkers, and billiards to team sports including cricket and a game the Americans called “ball” (a forerunner of baseball).⁶⁶⁹ By 1816, the British East India Company gave chamber concerts in their

⁶⁶⁶ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 39, A. M. Ferguson and John Ferguson, *All About Tobacco: Including Practical Instructions for Planting, Cultivation, and Curing of the Leaf, with Other Suitable Information, from a Variety of Sources, Referring to the Industry in Ceylon, South India, Sumatra, Virginia, and the West Indies* (Colombo, Ceylon: Ceylon Observer Office, 1889), 43, Hunter, *Bits of Old China*, 11.

⁶⁶⁷ Robert B. Forbes to Rose Forbes, 20 November 1838 quoted in Forbes and Kerr, *Letters from China: The Canton-Boston Correspondence of Robert Bennet Forbes, 1838-1840*, 68-69.

⁶⁶⁸ John Murray Forbes to Robert Bennet Forbes, 5 April 1839. Letterbook F-8, Forbes Family Papers. Baker.

⁶⁶⁹ Forbes and Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, Volume 1, p. 86.

factory on Thursday evenings. By 1841, Russell & Company had a bowling alley in its factory. The most popular activity by far, as shown by Bennet Forbes's experience above, was boat racing. The races began with East India Company efforts to fill the hours for idle sailors at Whampoa, but soon caught on.⁶⁷⁰

Despite these spaces of conviviality, manners in Canton were formal. Men referred to each other as "Mr. Cushing" or "Mr. Forbes" rather than the more intimate use of given names or family names without the honorific. To some Americans, this was due to the formality of Chinese society.⁶⁷¹ To others, the lack of women's society rendered courtesy necessary. Bryant P. Tilden wrote, "We are such a mixture of gentlemen, sailors, and all of us necessarily bachelors (sic), while at Canton, certain etiquet (sic) is quite necessary to keep us from becoming as the Chinese say many of us are—'half wild mans.'⁶⁷² Of course, formal manners did not a gentleman make. British mariners, certainly, had a reputation for raucous shore leaves. Whether or not Canton as a men's society far from the constraining influence of home freed men to behave badly, many contemporaries thought it did.

Settling families, marrying Chinese women, and consorting with prostitutes were all illegal for foreign traders, but some were more illegal than others. Visiting prostitutes could bring a fine of several thousand dollars for foreign men.⁶⁷³ One traveler by the

⁶⁷⁰ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 47-48, Forbes and Hughes, *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, Volume 1, p. 155.

⁶⁷¹ John Latimer as quoted in Downs, p. 49.

⁶⁷² Tilden as quoted in Downs, p. 49.

⁶⁷³ Peter Dobell, *Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia; with a Narrative of a Residence in China*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, & R. Bentley, 1830), 226. Many of the sources in prostitution in nineteenth-century Canton come from foreign travelers describing the "flower boat women" who plied their trade along the Pearl River. Many of these travelers wrote as customers. For examples of such narratives see George Walter Caldwell, *Oriental Rambles* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: G.W. Caldwell, M.D., 1906), p. 86,

name of William Hickey, son to a prominent British lawyer, reported in 1769 that a “whole class of water-borne prostitutes” plied their wares to sailors during their “lay-days” out of Lob-Lob Creek near the Whampoa anchorage, just downriver from Canton.⁶⁷⁴ And Peter Dobell, an American who had visited Canton on several occasions, wrote of “flower boat women” as a normal part of the local scenery in 1830. While prefacing with a comment on the “good disposition and friendly conduct” of most Chinese, Dobell decried that such a sober nation should have so many “*bon vivans*.” He described the fancy dress, the gaming, quail-fighting, and womanizing habits of Chinese dandies. The discussion included not only pity for Chinese women and for the quail, but also for the city in the face of vice emanating from the flower boats on the Pearl River.

And in fact, Dobell writes that flower boats were popular places of business.

Dobell’s narrative included a Hong merchant who shared with him that, by ancient custom, tea contracts were made (a year in advance) in the midst of lavish entertainments

James Ricalton, *China Through the Stereoscope: a Journey through the Dragon Empire at the time of the Boxer Uprising* (New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1901), 31-34. According to Sue Groenwald in *Beautiful Merchandise: Prostitution in China, 1860-1936*, brothels were highly regulated prior to the Qing dynasty, especially lower class establishments which were even government run and staffed. Groenwald distinguishes between three classes of brothels: upper class tea houses or sing-song houses where clients wooed skilled courtesans over long and expensive courtships; less exclusive wine houses, restaurants, and taverns where customers might stay the night after a few visits; and, finally, quick, inexpensive brothels whose workers had little if any training in singing or entertainment. The latter served poorer men and travelers who could not afford to marry or who could not find partners because of the scarcity of women. Flower boats were floating brothels of south and central China, and varied by class. Even missionaries described the luminescence of the lantern-lit flower boats with awe. The more ornate craft might contain delicately carved walls, rosewood and ebony tables and chairs, and even velvet curtains and European chandeliers. Women did not live on the boats, but came to work in the evenings. There were often rooms on the boat for eating and gaming as well as for fooling around with women and smoking opium. Kitchen boats and smaller boats might be tethered to the larger boat for the cooking and overnight guests. Sue Gronewold, *Beautiful Merchandise : Prostitution in China, 1860-1936* (New York: Institute for Research in History and Haworth Press, 1982), 6-8, Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai : A Social History 1849-1949* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Gail Hershtatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Mann, *Precious Records : Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*.

⁶⁷⁴ Quoted in Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 389, fn 112.

on flower boats.⁶⁷⁵ “They have assured me that the women in those boats have more agreeable conversation, and are better educated than others, and are more genteel and engaging in their manner. A well-spread table, of which the Chinese are great lovers, is always found prepared for the guests.”⁶⁷⁶ Merchants made up the immense cost of the entertainment in the contract.

The flower boats were one outlet for foreign traders’ impulses to sexuality, intimacy, and companionship, but there are suggestions of more private arrangements as well.⁶⁷⁷ In 1828, the British East India Company wrote of a complaint made by the Cantonese Hoppo that some Hong Merchants would provide young boys to act as servants to the foreign merchants and would bring Tanka boat prostitutes “to supply their whoredoms.”⁶⁷⁸ The reference to servant boys most certainly alluded to sexual behavior. The British took it as such and took offense. In a formal response, the British argued “Your edict also mentions, ‘that barbarians use boys, public women, &c.’ The English

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid. In 1868, James Murray Forbes received a petition in English from eight flower boats regarding Russell & Co.’s rebuilding of its hong. Russell & Co. had asked customs officials to drive the boats away from berths near the new building. The petition begged them to ask leniency of the Commissioner of Chinese Customs, as 3000 men, women, and children depended on the income of the brothel trades. The letter appealed to Forbes as a “gentleman of high talent and great experience,” who would never “think to injure or trying to starve the poor which this city abounds.” Ho Kow Flower Boat, A Ching Flower Boat, Fung Guo Chow Flower Boat, et al. to James Murray Forbes, 25 March 1868. James Murray Forbes Papers. MHS.

⁶⁷⁶ Peter Dobell, *Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia*, volume 2 (1830), 224-5. The Perkinses encountered Dobell not only in China, but also in Manila and in the Pacific Northwest.

⁶⁷⁷ Austin Coates notes “private arrangements” as well. *Macau and the British*, 146.

⁶⁷⁸ Translation of a “Public Proclamation of September 11, 1828, Concerning the Intercourse of Hong Merchants and Foreigners,” Lee Governor, Yen, Hoppo. East India Company Secret Committee Letters received from China, 28 January 1838 to 12 June 1832. East India Company Factory Records G/12/287, British Library, London, UK.

consider the crime alluded to deserving death.”⁶⁷⁹ Yet the offense went much deeper than questions about sexual mores.

In the 1828 case, the Hoppo directed Chinese merchants and linguists to persuade foreigners to “repress their bad dispositions” and “be transformed (or civilized) that they also may enjoy the benefit of a universal glorious peace, and every one kept within his own province (or sphere) and quietly trade.”⁶⁸⁰ Representatives of the British East India Company were taken aback: the Hoppo called upon *them* to restrain themselves, to be civilized, and to take lessons from the Chinese merchants on proper decorum. The British reply fairly sputtered in response: “It is directed, that the Hong merchants and linguists shall continually teach the foreigners, repress their pride and profligacy, and insist on their turning, with all their heart, to civilization. But the men who are directed to instruct us, are themselves very ignorant.”⁶⁸¹

The exchange over the sexuality and self-control of British merchants got to the very heart of British critiques of Chinese society of the early nineteenth century. Merchants and missionaries alike pointed to China as a formerly great but now corrupt and decrepit society. As James Hevia has argued, Englishmen in China saw themselves as *instructing* the Chinese on proper behavior within an international society—how to be civilized. “Civilization” and self-control were the terms on which ideological differences

⁶⁷⁹ Charles Gützlaff, *A Sketch of Chinese History, Ancient and Modern: Comprising a Retrospect of the Foreign Intercourse and Trade with China*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1834), 384.

⁶⁸⁰ Translation of a “Public Proclamation of September 11, 1828.

⁶⁸¹ Gützlaff, *A Sketch of Chinese History, Ancient and Modern: Comprising a Retrospect of the Foreign Intercourse and Trade with China*, 384.

over international relations were negotiated, and sexuality was a part of this.⁶⁸² While there was no formal political intercourse between Beijing and Western diplomats prior to 1842, despite insistent and often obnoxious efforts on the part of British legations, the informal exchanges between merchants and Western consular officials in Canton had a lasting impact on developing notions of international norms and international law.⁶⁸³

Negotiations over concepts such as self-control, morality, and civilization rationalized arguments as to which nations had rights under the terms of international law and which did not. While gender and sexuality were only pieces of a much larger discourse of laws and norms, it is one that scholars have little examined.⁶⁸⁴ Such linkages were not absent from contemporary discourses on law, civilization, and, for example, chivalry. In an 1839 talk on the topic, the well-known American jurist William Kent argued that these three historical institutions developed hand in hand with commerce. Commerce brought trading peoples together and forced them to recognize “principles of justice and universal law” through a “jealous observance of rights of

⁶⁸² Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of "Civilization" in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar : Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*, Hevia, *English Lessons : The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*, Lydia He Liu, *The Clash of Empires : The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), Lydia He Liu, *Tokens of Exchange : The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁶⁸³ On the significance of universalizing discourses of civilization, law, and reason to the history of international law, see Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*, Gong, *The Standard of "Civilization" in International Society*, Liu, *The Clash of Empires : The Invention of China in Modern World Making*.

⁶⁸⁴ The emphasis instead has been on conflicts over property rights and opium, the symbolic significance of the kowtow, and Western horror at harsh sentences for Chinese lawbreakers. Several key works on these themes include Chen, "Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Western Knowledge of Chinese Law and Society, 1750–1900.", Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar : Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*, Hevia, *English Lessons : The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*, Liu, *The Clash of Empires : The Invention of China in Modern World Making*, Liu, *Tokens of Exchange : The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*.

property.” Chivalry provided another mode of morality to guide such interaction by prizing courtesy, valor, humanity, and devotion to the fair sex. These two elements intertwined in civilization’s “elevation and freedom of the female sex, which forms the peculiar feature of modern manners.” Woman desired to “become ornaments” while man’s inclination to commerce and chivalry allowed him to provide her “the rich furs of the north, the gay silks of Asia, the wrought gold of domestic manufacture.”⁶⁸⁵ Here, to Kent, was the pinnacle of civilization.

For Chinese officials, maintaining the foreign community at Canton as a homosocial bachelor society kept that population from putting down roots. This bachelor society necessarily contained many foreign merchants who had no investment in the local order beyond “making their lac” as quickly as possible in order to return home and start their lives. Yet it is interesting that gender-based tensions such as the presence of women in Canton incited conflict more than issues tied to sexuality such as prostitution, concubinage, and miscegenation. Chinese regulations prohibited not only the presence of foreign women, but also marriage between foreigners and Chinese women. While Western merchants ostensibly broke the law by visiting prostitutes or flower boats as well, this offense reaped a mere fine and seems to have been seen as part of the cost of doing business. Considering the circumstances of life in Canton is necessarily incomplete, however, without a consideration of the linked community of foreigners in Macau. In Macau, there lived the wives, mistresses, and families of foreign traders who operated out of Canton.

⁶⁸⁵ William Kent, “The Commercial Rights of Neutral Nations,” *Hunt’s Merchants’ Magazine* 1, no. 2 (August 1839): 99-100.

Macau: Of Mistresses & Marriage

During the summer “off-season,” foreign traders retired to Macau. While French, Dutch, Danish, English, Swedish, Armenian, and Portuguese supercargoes variously spent their summer months in Macau in the eighteenth century and the Qing government even required it in 1741, it was not until 1765 that the practice of retiring to Macau became standard.⁶⁸⁶ By the late eighteenth century, however, British ships came to dominate not only the trade out of Canton, but also the social life of Macau. In 1773, the British East India Company appointed the “Select Committee of Supercargoes” to oversee the Company’s China trade. Company officials either lived in a stately Company house on the Praia Grande next to the Governor’s Palace or in private residences.⁶⁸⁷ The East India Company became known for giving lavish fancy balls and Company wives played an important role in setting the terms of society.

Macau sits on a small peninsula off the southern coast of China, about 90 miles south of Canton and 40 miles west of Hong Kong. Until 1999, Macau was a Portuguese colony. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to make headway in the South China Sea. Vasco de Gama reached India in 1498, and Portuguese sailors first visited Macau in 1513. By the end of the sixteenth-century, the Portuguese had turned Macau into a major trading entrepôt and a primary way station in trade between Japan and India.⁶⁸⁸ A verbal agreement between Portuguese and Chinese military commanders in 1555 paved the way

⁶⁸⁶ Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, 13-14.

⁶⁸⁷ Austin Coates, *Macao and the British, 1637-1842 : Prelude to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 61.

⁶⁸⁸ Coates, *Macao and the British, 1637-1842 : Prelude to Hong Kong*, Porter, *Macau: The Imaginary City, 1557 to Present*, Steve Shipp, *Macau, China: A Political History of the Portuguese Colony's Transition to Chinese Rule* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997), 13.

to settlement: the Portuguese agreed to pay licensing fees, customs taxes, and a yearly lease in exchange for rights to trade off of southern China.⁶⁸⁹ By the end of the 1560s, Macau's population had grown from 400 in 1557 to nearly 5,000, including Chinese residents (mostly fishing families), Portuguese merchants, and African and Indian slaves, servants, and mistresses who had been brought to the peninsula by the Portuguese.⁶⁹⁰ The colony faded following the abrupt Japanese withdrawal from trade in 1639, but conditions improved with China's decision to open several ports along its southern coast to European trade in 1685, and even more when China limited its European trade to Canton in 1757.⁶⁹¹

For such a small space, power relations in Macau were surprisingly complex. The colony was governed by a colonial governor and senate appointed by the Portuguese crown, while most of the administrative and judicial appointments came by way of the

⁶⁸⁹ Shipp, *Macau, China: A Political History of the Portuguese Colony's Transition to Chinese Rule* 17, 32. Three lines of trade became especially profitable: Macau to Malacca, Goa, and Lisbon; Canton to Macau and Nagasaki; Macau to Manila and Mexico. The Portuguese brought European goods that ranged from mirrors and metalware, cut glass, wine, and decorative items, but they especially profited from a carrying trade of existing lines of commerce. They carried cotton textiles and muslin from India to the Spice Islands for pepper, trading the textiles and pepper to Canton. They traded Japanese and Mexican silver for Chinese silks and porcelain. On this trade, see C. R. Boxer, *Fidalgos in the Far East, 1550-1770: Fact and Fancy in the History of Macao* (The Hague,: M. Nijhoff, 1948), C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London,: Hutchinson, 1969), George Bryan Souza, *The Survival of Empire : Portuguese Trade and Society in China and the South China Sea, 1630-1754* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁶⁹⁰ Shipp, *Macau, China: A Political History of the Portuguese Colony's Transition to Chinese Rule* 18, 34.

⁶⁹¹ Paul Van Dyke argues that the "Canton System" (the trading system based around foreign merchants limited to Canton) began about 1700 in practice, and offers a wonderful sense of the back and forth of custom, regulation, and commercial practice in the eighteenth century. Scholars traditionally point to a beginning some point between 1757 and 1760, when the Qing government issued a flurry of edicts regarding trade restrictions in response to British efforts to trade at Chusan. Interestingly enough, the Chinese government considered limiting Western trade to Macao as late as 1733, but recognized that it was impracticable to move the goods downriver rather than allow traders upriver to Canton. Still, there was considerable back and forth of Chinese and foreign merchants between Canton and Macau. Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, 46, Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, 1-18, 166.

Portuguese Viceroy of the *Estado de India* headquartered in Goa (India). The Viceroy claimed royal authority to manage Portuguese possessions in Africa (Mozambique), India (Goa, Diu, and Daman), as well as Macau. In practice, however, the Macanese government attempted to play Lisbon off Goa in order to chart its own path. And the British “John Company” made its own efforts to shape local politics. More significantly for Macau, the Portuguese colonial government operated at the pleasure of Beijing.⁶⁹² Chinese officials threatened and enacted sanctions against Macau residents in times of unrest. The Chinese servants would depart the town. Provisions, including food, would be cut off from the inhabitants of Macau. Long-term residents bore no illusion as to the precarity of Macau’s existence. Macau was more a product of the sea and the circuits of trade that traversed the South China Sea than either China or Portugal.

TABLE 1.
Demography of Macau, 1583-1834

| | |
|-------|--|
| 1583 | 900 Portuguese men. |
| 1622 | 700-800 Portuguese <i>casados</i> and <i>mestiços</i> 10,000 Chinese |
| 1635 | 850 <i>casados</i> 150 single and married men with wives in Portugal 5,100 slaves (6 slaves average per <i>casado</i>) |
| 1640 | 600 Portuguese <i>casados</i> 600 sons capable of bearing arms 500 native-born <i>casados</i> and soldiers 5,000 slaves 20,000 Chinese |
| 1662 | 200-300 Portuguese and other Christian males ~2,000 widows and orphans |
| 1690s | 19,500 inhabitants |
| 1800 | 8,000 Chinese |
| 1822 | Christian population listed as: 604 adult males (14 or older) 473 boys |

⁶⁹² Shipp, *Macau, China: A Political History of the Portuguese Colony's Transition to Chinese Rule* 52.

| | |
|------|--|
| | 2,701 women |
| | 537 slaves |
| 1830 | 1,202 men and 2,149 women denoted as “white” |
| | 350 male slaves |
| | 779 female slaves |
| | 38 men and 118 of mixed races. |
| 1834 | 90 total Portuguese residents in the city |

Source: Timothy Coates, *Convicts and Orphans: Forced and State-Sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550-1755* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 181, Anders Ljungstedt. *An Historical Sketch of the Portuguese Settlements in China, and of the Roman Catholic Church and Mission in China; a Supplementary Chapter, Description of the City of Canton* (Boston: James Munroe & Co., 1836).

In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century China, neither marriage nor long-term liaisons with foreign men were allowed by the Chinese government; in fact, they were actively discouraged. Reasons for these regulations may have been more fraught than simply seeking to prevent foreign men from settling in China. Two additional explanations for the prohibition are the importance of family to the Chinese social order and a demographic crisis that already made marriageable women scarce. Wives were significant both as mothers to sons and as guardians of a husband’s family lineage. Qing China experienced a “marriage crunch” in which men seeking wives far outpaced women of childbearing age. Susan Mann writes that these trends led Qing officials to clamp down on courtesan culture as the occupation pulled young women out of the marriage market.⁶⁹³ In this light, marriage to foreign men seems especially problematic.

With a few exceptions, Western women who arrived in Macau came because they were already married. For employees of the British East India Company, company law

⁶⁹³ Mann, *Precious Records : Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, 10-12, 23-29, 34, 125.

and social custom forbade marriage to local women in Macau. Those who disregarded the law faced punishment, but the ostracism that followed from disobeying custom could be worse. The men and their families were cut off from their commercial networks and business partners, leaving them little means to support their families. East India Company employees faced loss of employment and property.⁶⁹⁴ Sex was one thing, marriage was quite another. It may well have been, given the social weight of the East India Company until 1833 when the Company lost its monopoly on the British tea trade, that Americans followed this custom as well. While no one within the Perkins network faced marriage restrictions of the kind set by banks, estates, and government services in sending Europeans abroad, cultural restrictions may have played the same function.⁶⁹⁵

In many merchant networks, including those of overseas Chinese, marriage was a common mechanism for cementing alliances between cross-cultural business partners or adapting into a local society.⁶⁹⁶ Alfred Robinson, the California agent for Bryant & Sturgis married the young daughter of a prestigious Mexican family.⁶⁹⁷ Henry P. Sturgis and George Sturgis, both stationed in Manila, married into an English East India

⁶⁹⁴ Coates, *Macao and the British, 1637-1842 : Prelude to Hong Kong*, 105.

⁶⁹⁵ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, 52-53. As late as 1929 in India, for example, British political employees were recruited at the age of 26 and required to sign a contract that they would not marry in their first three years of service. In Malaya, British bank employees agreed to solicit permission to marry, knowing that it would not be granted for at least eight years.

⁶⁹⁶ Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change : Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), Edgar Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898* (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1965).

⁶⁹⁷ Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers : Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).

Company family and a Spanish colonial family respectively.⁶⁹⁸ While these marriages did not necessarily improve their careers, spaces where cross-cultural marriage between trading families was an option could cement commercial ties and provide an avenue for personal ambition. European trading companies actively promoted a variety of unions abroad, especially concubinage—long term liaisons and families—as an alternative or addition to marriage. Employees and native women formed long-term liaisons in colonies ranging from Dutch Indonesia, British India, and more.⁶⁹⁹ These liaisons could smooth a man's adaptation to a foreign language and culture. Family life could settle him within a place and job in the service of his trading company. This was precisely what the Chinese government hoped to avoid.

⁶⁹⁸ George Sturgis married the daughter of a Spanish colonial official in the Philippines, Josefina Borrás (later Santayana and mother to the philosopher George Santayana). Josefina applied to the Archbishop of Manila for dispensation to marry a Protestant—approval was required from Rome—but to no avail. The two were married by a Protestant chaplain on a British warship in the Manila harbor on April 22, 1849. The very act of the marriage, taking place on a British vessel, a warship no less (with its associations to official power), just outside the reach of the Catholic church, was a provocative move on the part of the foreign trading community. Henry Sturgis married Mary Georgianna Howard in Macau on March 5, 1835. Mary was the daughter of an officer in the British East India Company, lawyer Robert Howard, Esq., and his wife Marie. She was born in Calcutta, a child of the Company. Mary and Henry settled in Manila, but visited Boston in 1841 (and passed through Calcutta on their way), before returning to Manila. Santayana later described their children, Fred and Nena (Mary Howard Trinidad Sturgis, later Nena Middlemore, wife to Englishman Samuel George Chetwynd Middlemore), as “creoles like us.” He wrote “Besides being a Sturgis she was, like my brother and sisters, an East Indian; lively, erratic, and as her name, Nena, suggests, with something pseudo-Spanish or Creole about her. Her mother had been born of British parents in India, and I believe had lived there most of her life; at any rate, she was exotic, and Nena too seemed exotic on Boston, like ourselves.” These cousins were all of European and American heritage, born in the East Indies. Filomeno V Aguilar, *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), John McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1987), George Santayana, *Persons and Places* (New York,: Scribner, 1944).

⁶⁹⁹ Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal, 1757-1800*, P. J. Marshall, "The White Town of Calcutta under Rule of the East India Company," *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 307-331, Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia*. Here we see the import of the connection of the East India Company's experience in India—where concerns over miscegenation were taking root in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries—in shaping policy and custom in Macau. While miscegenation was still common, Ghosh writes that it became increasingly difficult to integrate children into the metropole and find employment in the Company for mixed-race sons and daughters.

Even after men began to bring wives to China, for bachelor traders, Macau offered greater opportunities for liaisons than marriage. John Heard, a partner at Heard & Co., wrote that dalliances were “only looked upon here as *amiable* weaknesses, and there are a lot of bastard children kicking about Macau.”⁷⁰⁰ He mailed the print of a lovely Macanese girl to his friend Charley Brown. The girl was mistress to an English gentleman who resided at Macau. “She has a sister,” Heard confided, “also kept, who is nearly as good looking. And there is a little girl named ‘Ayow’ now about 15 years old who lives in a boat near our house, who is prettier than either of them. She is still virtuous & has refused an offer of \$500, but I suspect will relent before long.”⁷⁰¹ The Tanka women who plied the Pearl River and lived in Macau may have found foreign merchants to be lucrative partners, but, as Heard’s lascivious tone illustrates, relations were also fraught and potentially dangerous.

Austin Coates’s 1967 novel, *City of Broken Promises*, suggests the overlaps between sexuality, morality, politics, and commerce in late eighteenth century Macau. Coates offers a fictionalized account of the late eighteenth century love affair between British East India Company officer Thomas van Mierop and his mistress and rumored wife, Martha da Silva Van Merop.⁷⁰² In the novel, Thomas van Mierop arrives in Macau aboard the Company ship *Grenada* on March 12, 1780. Instead of living at the lavish Company house there in Macau, Mierop follows the advice that he should live in a local

⁷⁰⁰ John Heard to Charles Brown, 26 September 1844. Heard Papers. Baker. Cited in Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 50.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid. Rosmarie Lamas notes that \$500 approximated the annual salary for a Canton clerk: “the offer was definitely not made by a poor man.” Rosmarie W. N. Lamas, *Everything in Style: Harriet Low's Macau* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 159.

⁷⁰² Rogério Miguel Puga, “A Vida E O Legado De Marta Da Silva Van Mierop,” *Review of Culture International Edition* 22 (2007): 40-51.

residence. Only Portuguese were allowed to actually own property, but through a British intermediary trading under a local Portuguese family, Mierop manages to procure the house of a former Company officer. With the house, Mierop acquires the house's baggage—a caretaker for the household, the servants, and above all, a “pensioner.” Mierop had seen “pensioner” as a line item on many an account book, but now, after asking to see “him,” he discovers his error. He was a she: “Her eyes, up-tilted and almond-shaped, and her pale, exceptionally smooth skin suggested that she was Chinese; yet the way she wore her fine black hair, and her black dress, short and shapeless, was more European than Chinese.”⁷⁰³ Mierop accepts Martha as his mistress. In the Lolita tradition, she makes the first advance. But never within the story does he completely appreciate Martha's abilities. She seems powerless: an orphan, a pensioner, looked down upon by the servants. And yet her ability to negotiate the myriad worlds of Macau allows her to thrive time and again. She speaks multiple languages and is clever to the point that she eventually becomes one of the wealthiest merchants in Macau.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰³ Austin Coates, *City of Broken Promises* (London,: Muller, 1967), 21. The characters of the novel follow the paths of historical individuals, at least to a certain extent: Abraham Biddle bears an uncanny resemblance to Thomas Beale, Pedro Gonçalves Sequeira to São Joao de Porto Alegre, and Judge Dom Paulo Mascarenhas Pereira to Miguel de Arriaga.

⁷⁰⁴ Christina Miu Bing Cheng reads the relationship between Martha and Thomas as a classic imperial tale: the European protector must rescue his exotic, Oriental and Orientalized child mistress. “She is illiterate, subaltern, submissive, and dependent. By contrast, her Western benefactor is an Englishman of Anglo-Dutch parentage.” This subtext is there, but as Cheng notes to a certain extent, other dialogics are present as well. I suspect Coates was more conscious of social complexities that, to Cheng, were the subconscious meanings brought in by characters within the text. But Coates's novel is more a product of the 1960s than the 1790s. Martha rather than Mierop is the protagonist of *City of Broken Promises*. The British within the story are powerful, yet constrained. Thus, while Thomas Van Mierop's name and property play a central role in legitimating Martha, the benevolent imperialist (unlike those brutish opium traders), Martha nonetheless achieves independence in the end. This is not only symbolized in Martha Merop sending out a vessel on her own account thus liberating her “golden fingers,” but also in the servants' decision to follow her in the absence of their former master. Christina Miu Bing Cheng, *Macau : A Cultural Janus* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1999), 143, Coates, *A Macao Narrative*, 87-91.

In Coates's reading, the illicit and licit sexuality, love, and family-making of the British in Macau paralleled the illicit and licit commerce of opium. A tension on which the story turns is the competition between Mierop and another Company officer, George Cuming. While Cuming traffics in opium and Mierop does not, Cuming has no mistress, so that when British wives create a new social world in Macau at the turn of the nineteenth century, the British women create a social rift. Cuming and other officers with their wives were the moral clique, with British men with local, illicit families pushed to the outside. Cuming's group then represents the moral choices made by the British in China: to traffic in opium and to deny British men the ability to care for their Macanese families. This unfortunate "choice" then presages the descent into the Opium War.

In the end, Mierop dies, killed by disease caught in Canton and the "death sentence" of Company policy to send home all officers unable to manage their posts in Canton. Before Mierop passes away, he attempts to marry Martha and the authorities rush to stop him. He had promised he would, but Macau is the city of broken promises, filled with merchants who make many promises to their local mistresses and children. Thomas and Martha plan to marry in a Catholic church, but in the end they simply make a promise each other, "married before God."⁷⁰⁵ Mierop writes up a will leaving much of what he owns to Martha, "his wife," including something she has long sought: a name. She becomes Martha Mierop. In seeking to convey this newfound legitimacy, she has her name emblazoned on the side of a ship she has built to carry on her trade. As Christina

⁷⁰⁵ The politics of intermarriage between Protestants and Catholics was intense. On the politics of the marriage between Protestant George Sturgis and Catholic Josefina Borrás in Manila, see Aguilar, *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island*.

Cheng writes, the phallic “i” is left off, leaving her a name that is hers alone, a pidginized “Martha Merop.”

Coates penned several short histories of Macau and Hong Kong in which he similarly suggested that the coming of the “ladies”—British women—marked a social change amongst the Anglo-American inhabitants of Macau.⁷⁰⁶ In *City of Broken Promises*, Coates wrote that: “Men with pensioners in the unseen mystery of their homes were not entirely acceptable socially in the new conditions. Though they were invited, it seemed to others as if they stood apart, estranged from the gaiety of the proceedings; and as time passed they were invited less. Privately the ladies referred to such men as ‘Asiatics.’”⁷⁰⁷ While mistresses may have provided other advantages such as insight on local customs and resources, by the nineteenth century at least, they did not provide the social advantage of wives at Macau.⁷⁰⁸ Portuguese elites overlapped with British and American social circles; creole Macanese and Chinese mistresses did not.

Yet Harriet Low implied that even to the ladies, morality was more fluid in Macau than it was at home. In doing so, however, she suggested that Americans in Macau adapted to British sensibilities of sojourner morality. On March 27, 1832, Harriet

⁷⁰⁶ Coates, *Macao and the British, 1637-1842 : Prelude to Hong Kong*, 104-107. This argument, however, merits scrutiny. A number of works have challenged the trajectory of the coming of white women as an onset of Victorian decorum in other colonial entrepôts. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India : The Making of Empire*, Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*.

⁷⁰⁷ Coates, *City of Broken Promises*, 153. To Coates, oddly enough, this had more to do with the context of China than British social and moral leanings. “In strict conformity with the illogicality of things China fashion it was George Cuming, the opium dealer, and not Thomas van Mierop, the humanitarian, who had become the upholder of morals on the China station.” Coates often seems to code the British male and the Chinese female, so that from the Chinese government to servants to “the China fashion,” in his writing, all seem clever yet emotional and irrational.

⁷⁰⁸ On local orphans and the marriage market amongst elite Portuguese in Macau, see Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, “Orfandade Feminina, Mercado Matrimonial E Elites Sociais Em Macau (Século Xviii),” *Review of Culture International Edition* 22 (2007): 7-39.

wrote to her sister of Chay Beale, the illegitimate son of British trader Thomas Beale, “This youth perhaps (with your scrupulous ideas of what is good and proper) might not make one of your circle, as he is an illegitimate, but he has been educated in England and visits the best society here. Alas these misdeeds are too common in the eastern world to be looked upon with the shame they should be.”⁷⁰⁹ Even though such bastard children *should* be looked down upon, she implied, they were not, even by the ladies. And Harriet mocked the innocence of another Yankee, Mr. Warriner, who was new to Asia. The man noted of Mr. Blight’s house “his delight in everything” and that he had ““often heard of eastern magnificence, but he had no idea of it before.”” She added that her sister might be in on the joke: “You must know Mr. Blight’s house is one of the plainest in the place, very comfortable, but no elegance about it.” She continued that he knew little of the wickedness of the world. “We have had several good jokes at his expense, but I shall not note them, for my sister would say I was getting scandalous.”⁷¹⁰ Obviously Harriet did not worry too much that her sister would think ill of her, but she implied that her own standards were not what they would be in Massachusetts. Harriet’s adaptation to what she saw as local morality raises questions about Coates’s argument that the arrival of foreign women marked the change in social standards. Did the terms of sociability change? And if so, what sparked the change?

Miscegenation was so common in Macau the consequences seem to have been more connected to the metropole than local society. John Hartt, a clerk at Perkins & Co., Benjamin Wilcocks, and later William C. Hunter of Russell & Co. all fathered children

⁷⁰⁹ Lamas, *Everything in Style*.

⁷¹⁰ Lamas, *Everything in Style*, 207-208.

by their Chinese or Macanese mistresses.⁷¹¹ While these children show up because the fathers stood by their offspring, the existence of such children could also prove awkward. Wilcocks' partner shipped his young daughter to Philadelphia to be with her father, at a time when the aging merchant was in the market for a wife.⁷¹² And John and Robert Bennet Forbes were both involved in efforts to secure the inheritance of John Hartt's Macanese daughter against challenges from his family in the United States.⁷¹³ There is no evidence that Perkins kinsmen who lived for many years in China had lovers or mixed families abroad, yet it is hard to imagine that they did not: John Perkins Cushing lived abroad for close to thirty years and James Perkins Sturgis for over forty.

And in fact, James Perkins Sturgis's experience with courtship in Macau sheds insight on the import of domesticity as a symbol of masculine achievement and maturity. Here we return to the story of James P. Sturgis and his proposal to Harriet Low. Sturgis traveled to China at the age of 18. He sailed in 1809 aboard the *Atahualpa*, captained by his cousin William Sturgis. Sturgis lived in the Suy Hong in Canton for about 25 years before removing to Macau where he lived for another 18 years.⁷¹⁴ He ensconced himself within the Western expatriate community in Asia, far removed from the larger responsibilities of family although, given the large number of Sturgises who thronged to Canton, Macau, and Manila, not family itself.

⁷¹¹ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 388-389, fn 111.

⁷¹² Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 43.

⁷¹³ John Murray Forbes to Robert Bennet Forbes, 1 May 1839. Forbes Family Papers, John Murray Forbes Letterbook, F-8. Baker.

⁷¹⁴ Sturgis, *Edward Sturgis of Yarmouth, Massachusetts, 1613-1695, and His Descendants*, 37.

While kinsman all spoke warmly of “Uncle Jimmy” and visited with him as they passed through Canton and Macau, he was universally seen as socially awkward, unconventional, and perhaps a little mad. Julian Sturgis told of a family tale passed down to him in which a man came to his office with “Uncle Jimmy” on his heels. The man asked if the proprietor was in only to be told he was not. Uncle Jimmy then stepped into the office, proceeded to his desk and got to work. The man waited for some time before finally inquiring once more after the proprietor—which of course was Uncle Jimmy himself.⁷¹⁵ The humor lay in the oddity that typified Uncle Jimmy Sturgis for those who loved him best. Whether China provided a refuge for a family eccentric or exacerbated awkwardness in a young man is hard to say. But his letters home from late in life reveal a man who felt keenly the loss of family and home.

In China, Sturgis’s business was enmeshed with that of his more successful cousins John Perkins Cushing, William Sturgis, and Russell Sturgis, yet he himself never obtained sufficient wealth to return an expected East India nabob. In 1818, James formed James P. Sturgis & Co. in partnership with John Perkins Cushing. Through this new house, the partners handled the opium trade for the Perkins network.⁷¹⁶ Opium came largely from Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey), to a ship stationed off of Lintin Island just outside of Canton, and from there the drug was smuggled into China. This structure of trade—the use of the second partnership and the outside vessel—provided distance between the Perkins’s drug trafficking and their relationship with Chinese merchants,

⁷¹⁵ Sturgis, *From the Books and Papers of Russell Sturgis*, 256.

⁷¹⁶ Circular announcing formation of James P. Sturgis & Co., 26 October 1818. Carrington Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, as quoted in Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*.

especially the esteemed Houqua.⁷¹⁷ The opium trade was lucrative, but if it made a fortune for Sturgis as it did several of his cousins, he must have lost it. Given the arrival and departure of so many vessels owned by family and friends, Sturgis's inability to return likely had less to do with inaccessibility of homeward bound passage than the lack of sufficient funds to establish himself in New England. This was certainly the view of his status reported by others who visited with him. Of course, Sturgis may well have preferred life in Macau. Yet the adventure co-financed by John Perkins Cushing and Wu Bingjian in Sturgis's name suggest that financial troubles were at least partly at issue. As discussed in chapter four, the explicit goal of the adventure was to shore up Sturgis's finances.

Life in China was hard on Sturgis. He watched two of his brothers follow him out to Canton and die at young ages. First Henry died in Macau in 1819 and George followed in 1826. Merchants shared expectation that financial success enabled social success. In 1812, just a few years after leaving him in Canton, his cousin William Sturgis teased Jimmy about his prospects:

I predict you will hereafter be a richer fellow than you ever expected or ever deserved. Your old dissipated friends are nearly all gone. Some hanged and some luckily died a natural death. Frank Foster was the last and he died a few days since at the Havana. Staying at Canton was a lucky think for you my Bog—ninety nine hundredths of the young men in Town envy your situation and well they may for there is nothing to be done here. You have a good reputation now and pretty well established. Only care to keep it a few years longer and there will be no charge of hurting it, do what you will.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁷ Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40.", Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*. This is covered in more detail in chapter 4.

⁷¹⁸ William Sturgis to James P. Sturgis, 26 March 1812. Bryant & Sturgis Papers, Letterbook 8. Baker.

The letter underscored the shared expectation of the commercial arc: travel abroad for opportunities not available at home and return with the capital and reputation to live comfortably amongst family and friends. But this commercial arc offered little room for failure. Several men within the Perkins network felt that they lacked the capital to return home despite feeling stranded abroad.⁷¹⁹

By the mid-1830s, Sturgis claimed to have given up all desire for hearth and home. In an exchange of letters with his sister Betsy, Sturgis decried the prospect of marriage—turning “Benedict”—but the story behind the letters reveals how dearly he desired precisely what he claimed to deplore. In 1832, he had proposed to Harriet Low. As one of the few American women in visiting range of Canton, Harriet Low had her share of suitors, including both James and his nephew, Samuel Sturgis. Low recorded the stream of visitors to the bungalow she shared with her aunt in volumes of journals that she mailed off to her sister. James was already a crotchety old bachelor by the time Harriet made his acquaintance. When he called on her in November 1829, she noted in her diary that this was “the first time he has called on a lady these 20 years.”⁷²⁰ Uncle Jimmy called again six months later, at which time he stayed a good two hours. “He is an odd fish,” Harriet reported at another intermittent visit.

Macau may have yielded few opportunities for courtship, but Jimmy did fall for Harriet. In 1832, John Murray Forbes wrote an assessment of Harriet and her compatriot

⁷¹⁹ For example, William F. Paine wrote to his father, “unless I can return independent I must do as well as I can in this part of the world for a poor man in America is too sorry a figure. This true Mess. JP says I am very far from being poor, but I am far from feeling myself sufficiently strong to fix myself at home.” These letters should be taken with a grain of salt. As embarrassing as it might be to depict oneself as a failure to family and friends, it was a recognized explanation for staying abroad and thus could excuse those who desired to “go native” or “turn beachcomber.” William F. Paine, St. Denis, Bourbon to his father, Worcester, 24 August 1811. Paine Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 5. AAS.

⁷²⁰ Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*.

Caroline Shillaber to a business partner and shared the gossip that Sturgis was quite smitten.⁷²¹ On June 30, 1832, Sturgis asked for her hand. That night, Harriet recorded her astonishment in her journal:

After dinner walked upon the Campo. Only think how strange—but what makes it more wonderful that James P. Sturgis, Esq. condescended to offer me his arm. Walked home, took tea with us, and made himself extremely agreeable. Perhaps it will be in The Courier!! Sam [Sturgis] took tea with us. He [JPS] has been here 23 years, is to be sure an excuse for any enormity he might commit. Never been in ladies' society. Is of a most reserved and singular temper, but when in the humour can be quite delightful. He let me step into a heap of mud tonight, which I did not much like, because it was so heavy it took my shoe off and broke the string. However, he's near sighted, and then the honour.⁷²²

The flirtation, if it can even be called that, did not last long. She was his guest for his birthday party, but then declined his hand.

For Harriet, there had never really been a connection. But Sturgis was stung, and sought retribution. He wrote a poem revealing a scandal surrounding her aunt's relatives back home. Aunt Low's brothers were implicated in a murder. Given the importance of reputation in Macao and the fact that the Lows had been able to make a social splash, the family hoped to keep the rumor quiet. Not only did Sturgis write the poem⁷²³, but he

⁷²¹ John Murray Forbes to Augustine Heard, quoted in Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 792, fn 712.

⁷²² Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, 354.

⁷²³ The poem, entitled "Air," went as follows:

Now Joe and Frank they both are hung
And Phip is like to swing.
What horrid grief and trouble too
My thieving brothers bring.

For tho' they killed old Uncle White
They got but little plunder,
therefore if I'm a 'drop too low'
I'm sure it's no great wonder.

posted a copy of it on the door of the East India Company's factory in Macau (itself a sign of the English significance to the Americans' social world), with 500 left behind for ease of distribution. There may have been other reasons for such nasty behavior⁷²⁴, but Sturgis's correspondence with his sister Betsy indicate that he felt snubbed by Harriet and the Low family, and took it very personally:

Had there been any unmarried woman in this country 10 years since, I should most probably have become a Benedict, that is, if any one would have taken me; but I should have looked for something better than the Yankee women now here; they appear a little vulgar; and the old one, Low's wife, arrogant as well as weak. I fancy that the acquisition of a little money has effected her mind.

I was told by a lady at Macau that Mrs. Low had stated that 'she could not know our family at home, as the father of it was a hatter'; You know the old saying of set a beggar on horseback. I know not anyone to whom more applicable than the woman in question. If the reputation of the Knapp gang was known to the English females at Macau, and it will not be long a secret, this great character would soon be rather more guarded in her remarks, for the English ladies, with whom she is tolerated only from their good feelings towards one who is in a manner a stranger amongst them, would be a little mortified⁷²⁵

One would hardly suspect from his tone that he had himself proposed to one of these "vulgar" women.

For after sticking the old Wretch
And knocking on the knob him,
How it subdues my weaker part
To think they did not rob him.

Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, fn 18, p. 809-810.

⁷²⁴ Another such reason is that Sturgis, apparently, was in an "open feud" with Harriet's uncle since Sturgis lost the share of the *Lintin*, the ship which served as the Perkins and then Russell & Co. entry point for bringing opium into China, promised to him by Robert B. Forbes, to Low. John Latimer felt that Sturgis must have been the author of the poem as he was the only one to express dislike of Mrs. Low. In an exchange of letters with Latimer, Sturgis denied writing the letters, arguing that he disliked Mrs. Low because "she had cast a stain on his character in Macau by 'asserting that my father's 'reputation' was such that She could not know his family at home." Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*, fn 18, p. 809-810.

⁷²⁵ James P. Sturgis to Betsy Sturgis, 2 May 1833. Paine Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 4. AAS.

It must have taken a lot for Sturgis, something of a recluse, to ask for Harriet's hand. While she wondered at his proposal, he wondered if the opportunities of home life had passed him by. By rejecting his proposal, Harriet denied Sturgis's aspirations to domesticity. The ability to marry carried very different implications for men as for women. Domesticity was not just an ideal or female world of home and hearth, but a stage of life that signaled a man's maturity and vigor. Harriet confirmed what Sturgis had long feared: that the intimacy of marriage and companionship were beyond his grasp. Thus, the spurned Sturgis lashed out by revealing Low family's secrets and thus putting her family in public, political, and social peril.

In his letters home, Sturgis indicated comfort that at least he was not *alone* in terminal bachelorhood. John Perkins Cushing who had been his friend and business partner for decades was also "free." "Be assured that he will remain so," Sturgis scrawled, "I consider a man of 35 years a little too odd for the holy state as some call it, but when past 40, he must be a little mad he who thinks of it."⁷²⁶ Sturgis was wrong. Cushing was incredibly wealthy and viewed by New England society as quite the catch. References to him as a China or India "nabob" abounded, as if he were a walking silk purse and the emblem of all the East Indies had to offer. Cushing married quickly to a young Boston belle with whom he had little in common and spent little time, but the two went on to have four sons, one daughter, and a large home partially modeled on what Cushing had left behind in China. Their mutual cousin and friend, William Sturgis, worried that Cushing had returned home a stranger to his friends and family. Unlike Uncle Jimmy, Cushing was able to reestablish himself. But Sturgis had probably never

⁷²⁶ James P. Sturgis to Betsy Sturgis, 2 May 1833. Paine Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 4. AAS.

been talking about Cushing in the first place. By 1837, Sturgis retired to a little bungalow in Macau's Penha Hill permanently, and became the American consul there. In 1851, at the age of 60, Sturgis finally sailed for the United States, and died en route.

Domesticity symbolized masculine achievement quite different from its equivalent meanings for women. A wife, children, and home signified both a coming of age, manhood, and a certain measure of success, the ability to care for a family. For some men, journeying abroad may have been an opportunity to escape the responsibilities of life at home. But others who journeyed lacked the funds to return or the will to return with little to nothing to show for their efforts. The longer abroad, the harder it was to return. And business failure was compounded by an inability to create a home life. Yet this difficulty may well have been furthered by social rules that made it difficult for merchants to establish mixed families in Macau. In Manila and California, merchants connected to the Perkins network *did* marry. In Calcutta and Batavia (Jakarta), mixed families provided commercial advantages for foreign merchants, at least until the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast, most Western merchants in China lived as bachelors until commercial success allowed them to return to the metropole. Sometimes, however, these merchants returned with their wives.

Macau: Wives & Sociability

Foreign women's social circles in Macau provide another venue for considering the impact of sex segregation on trade in southern China. For months at a time, Macau emptied of foreign merchants whose entire purpose for being abroad was trade. The women left behind formed a society that both connected to these men and respective metropolises, and yet had its own peculiar characteristics. British and American residents

described a ladies' society that was *less* formal than either home or that of their menfolk and yet *more* demanding. For merchants, wives abroad could prove advantageous. Given the expense of maintaining a family abroad, wives and children could be the ultimate status symbol. Wives could also make trading abroad feel less like an exile to a husband, and could broker the challenges of having a spouse so far away for wives. And further, within this cluster of Anglo-American women, the sociability of wives could open doors for husbands or even prove socially disruptive.

Two wives who traveled with their husbands and left correspondence during their time abroad were Mary Greene Hubbard Sturgis, wife to Russell Sturgis, and Valeria Wright Forbes, wife to Paul Sieman Forbes. Both Russell Sturgis and Paul Sieman Forbes were partners in Russell & Co. (successor to Perkins & Co., Canton) in the 1830s and 1840s. Mary and Valeria were not the first wives to travel in connection with the Perkins network: Sarah Perkins followed her husband James to Cap François (Haiti), Nancy Higginson traveled to London in 1809, and Margaret Curzon resided in Havana with her husband in 1816 until she became pregnant. Yet many others did not.

Why did Mary Hubbard Sturgis and Valeria Wright Forbes elect to go? Both had children which must have made the decision more difficult. Residing near kin provided a support network that buttressed social life and childrearing in the nineteenth century. Home provided a known women's society. Both Mary and Valeria gave this up to live in China with (or at least near) their husbands. Where to Mary living abroad was about being near her husband, Valeria seemed more inclined to adventure (and perhaps to escape her own kin). Both discovered that the exigencies of life in China meant that training into feminine skills of conversation, music, art, and literature was essential. Just

as trade with China offered a space for the remaking of self and family through economic success, so the relative social anonymity of Macau allowed for a fair degree of lassitude for personal remaking through sociability. James P. Sturgis intimated as much respecting the social position of Harriet Low and her aunt. In this sphere, the education into domesticity discussed in chapter three takes on new significance.

In Macau, socializing was an occupation. While manners in Macau—unlike in Canton—were quite informal, social engagements were currency. Harriet Low once remarked that the only respite from visiting in Macau was to get ready for a ball.⁷²⁷ She and her aunt complained that, contrary to New England norms, residents of Macau spent the day paying and receiving calls even on Sunday. So much for the day of rest. Being a woman, especially a young unmarried woman, made it difficult to say no to anything. Initially the Low ladies resisted the lure of the social whirl. They declined an invitation to a ball when first formally greeted by representatives of the East India Company upon their arrival in Macau. But they found it hard if not impossible to find a middle ground between social activity and reclusion. When in 1832 the Low ladies finally threw a party themselves, they felt pressured into reciprocating the many parties they had attended themselves. Yet Harriet Low confessed to her sister that such constant gaiety could be terribly lonely. She only felt kinship with a few individuals, including Mrs. Emily Davis and a Mr. Vachell.⁷²⁸

There were many social divisions in Macau. Lines of race, class, and nation, between Portuguese from Portugal and those who had “gone native” and formed families

⁷²⁷ Lamas, *Everything in Style*, 108.

⁷²⁸ Lamas, *Everything in Style*, 109.

in Macau, political splits between Company traders and private British merchants engaged in the “country” trade between India and China, and more. Thus, despite the small community, petty infighting abounded. When Elizabeth Fearon arrived in Macau in 1826 with her husband, British “country trader” Christopher Fearon, for example, she faced an uphill battle gaining acceptance from the Company wives.⁷²⁹ According to Susannah Hoe, until 1830, Elizabeth Fearon “had not been part of that surprisingly gracious and elegant, though small society that revolved around the Company.”⁷³⁰ Harriet Low described Elizabeth as “well-born and well bred,” “with one of the sweetest dispositions possible.” Her husband, however, had a “foolish and ostentatious disposition,” seemed inclined to live beyond their means, and told “everyone that his wife was the daughter of a baronet and a general officer.”⁷³¹ Thus, it was likely for her husband and not for herself that Elizabeth Fearon received a cold reception.

Nation itself became an important identifier in the context of life abroad. Americans were at often pains to distinguish themselves from their British counterparts, but they nonetheless lived within a British-dominated social world in Macau. When Harriet Low and her aunt arrived, they were the only American women in residence. Harriet vacillated between fearing or disdaining the aristocratic pretensions of the British in residence and basking in their attentions. In October 1829, soon after her arrival, Harriet proclaimed that her opinion of the English had been utterly transformed: “We have found none stiff, as we anticipated. On the contrary, affable, polite, and pleasant.”

⁷²⁹ A “country trader” was a private trader operating between China and India. This trade often focused on opium and was highly lucrative.

⁷³⁰ Hoe, *The Private Life of Old Hong Kong*, 9.

⁷³¹ Lamas, *Everything in Style*, 210.

Part of her delight stemmed from socializing with Lady Claridge who was about her age and, though titled, did not hold herself above Harriet.⁷³²

The ability to consume and to consume well was another form of social expression. The ladies as much as the men took pleasure in displaying their wealth, donning opulent dresses and jewels simply because they could. Homes, gardens, and entertaining all expressed aspiration and means. Servants were relatively inexpensive, available, and, most importantly, socially expected. Harriet reported that it was impossible to keep up with the extravagance of their social circle at Macau and while she had no wish to do so, her uncle insisted. “All I wish is to make a decent appearance,” she confided to her sister, “but Uncle wishes us to have everything handsome, but had much rather save the money to help us to get home for I cannot say that I have any desire to spend my life here.”⁷³³ Harriet’s uncle understood that the ability to sustain a certain lifestyle for his wife and niece in Macau—and the key was sustain—sent a message of creditworthiness to potential business partners.

The experience of the “ladies” at Macau was quite apart from that of their menfolk and, interestingly enough, was *less* formal. When the traders made their seasonal departure to Canton, Western women at Macau entertained themselves. Harriet Low described a “lady party” at Mrs. Thornhill’s villa on a November evening in 1831 as follows: “We took our tea at the center table, then had a couch on each side of the table, Mrs. Fearon on one, Mrs. Davis on another, Mrs. Low on the third, Miss Low [herself] on

⁷³² Lamas, *Everything in Style*, 209.

⁷³³ Lamas, *Everything in Style*, 107.

the fourth, our feet up, which is generally the custom when no gents are present.”⁷³⁴ And Macau, like Manila, was famous for keeping Latin hours and a Latin pace: revelers socialized into the wee hours of the night and slept late in the morning and even into the afternoon. While the “bachelor society” at Canton demanded greater formality, the women at Macau took the opportunity of their “ladies’ society” to relax social constraints.

Yet this ladies’ society also offered an opportunity for remaking oneself through sociability. The party Harriet Low attended at Mrs. Thornhill’s villa brought together the Low ladies with the previously socially excluded Mrs. Fearon. To what extent did the presence of American women disrupt hierarchies set within British social circles? And to what extent did mingling between the ladies create business opportunities for the menfolk? As the next example will show, Russell Sturgis saw his wife’s social appeal as part of his own business potential.

Mary Greene Hubbard Sturgis

Mary Greene Hubbard was Russell Sturgis’s second wife and traveled with him to the East Indies between 1833 and 1837. The couple first lived in Manila while Sturgis worked for Russell & Sturgis before moving to China where, due to the prohibition on Western women in Canton, the two lived apart. Mary and the children settled into a villa on Macau as Russell moved into one of the factories where the traders lived and worked in Canton. The couple arrived in May 1834, almost a year after Harriet Low departed in November of 1833. The separation was difficult for Russell and Mary, but the distance

⁷³⁴ Harriet Low’s journal entry, 1 November 1831. Hodges and Hummel, eds., *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life*.

gave rise to a correspondence that sheds light on their views of marriage, parenting, and their place within the foreign community at Macau in the early nineteenth century. Living abroad shaped their understanding of their responsibilities to each other, to their children, and to Russell's business. But for Russell Sturgis, having Mary in Macau also provided a unique opportunity: Mary's sociability with other merchants' wives provided him a social opening as well, and a potential competitive edge. As one of the few English-speaking women in Macau and the only American for a time, Mary depended upon the British ladies for social intercourse. Englishwomen in Macau, by and large, were wives to the wealthier and more powerful merchants. Russell thus monitored his wife's sociability carefully.

Despite the proximity between Canton and Macau, the separation fostered a sense of love in peril, of trials and tribulations akin to those faced in novels.⁷³⁵ The couple wrote almost daily between Canton and Macau, and at times more frequently even than that. As he first sailed away from his wife for Canton, Russell worried about that the sacrifice she made for him. He had written to her at the moment of his arrival in Canton, but sat down again the next day. Perhaps "I have asked too much of you in bringing you away from home, and leaving you away from me at Macau," he worried.⁷³⁶ "If by writing I can at any time help to make my dearest wife's banishment less heavy and painful, I am sure I ought not to lose a chance by doing so." He, too, was homesick, and

⁷³⁵ There were counterexamples to Mary and Russell's saccharine romance. Wife jokes were rampant in Canton and Macau. The most famous was George Chinnery's story, which Chinnery himself perpetuated. Chinnery was a well-known painter who settled in Macau. According to local lore, he was in Macau to escape his wife. While he was no looker, he boasted that his wife's beauty "surpassed even my beauty." When rumor held that she was to visit Macau, the story goes, he fled to Hong Kong. In fact, Chinnery lived abroad to escape not his wife, but his debts. But the men of Canton and Macau far preferred a tale of a haggish wife than looming debts. See Austin Coates, *Macau & the British*, 147.

⁷³⁶ Russell Sturgis to Mary Greene Hubbard Sturgis, 19 May 1834, no. 2. Correspondence of Russell and Mary Sturgis, Folder 1. BAT.

the two wrote almost daily of their longing to be together. In October 1834, six months after her arrival in Macau, Mary wrote to her husband that she missed him, that what she feared had come to pass: “we have parted without knowing when we shall again meet.”⁷³⁷ As far as she had come to be with him, they were still apart.

Russell Sturgis was the oldest son of Nathaniel Russell Sturgis, and was grandson to Russell Sturgis and Betsy Perkins, the eldest sister of James and Thomas Perkins. He must have been a charming man, or at least a dashing one: he married three times and set the men about him grumbling with jealousy each time.⁷³⁸ Sturgis trained in law at Harvard and became a partner at Jonathan Amory & Sons in Boston. At the time he and Mary wed in 1829, he was a recent widower.⁷³⁹ Mary Hubbard may well have been peculiarly suited to a man who gave up law for a career in international trade. On the one hand, Mary came from such wealth that one might assume her delicate. When the Marquis de Lafayette came to visit Boston in 1824, the town borrowed her family’s chaise. The Hubbards were one of the few families to still have liveried servants. But she grew up with one foot in Boston and another abroad. Her father had inherited Plantation Mainstay, a sugar plantation in the British colony of Demerara on the northeast coast of South America (present-day Guyana). The family often wintered at their

⁷³⁷ Mary Greene Hubbard Sturgis to Russell Sturgis October 1834. Correspondence of Russell and Mary Sturgis, Folder 1. BAT.

⁷³⁸ This was especially true with his last wife, Julia Boit. See for example the comments made by Henry Adams in *The Education of Henry Adams*.

⁷³⁹ Robert Apthorp Boit, *Chronicles of the Boit Family and Their Descendents* (Boston: S.J. Parkhill & Co., 1915), 92. According to one family story, his first wife, Lucy Lyman Paine, was a favorite cousin. She was ill with consumption well before their nuptials and thus the two knew the marriage would not last. Four months after their marriage, Lucy passed away. Russell and Mary named their first daughter after Lucy.

plantation, and at least one of her siblings was born there. If Russell Sturgis had ever hoped for a wife accustomed to sea travel and life abroad, Mary fit the bill.

While living in Macau, Mary raised their children Russell, Jr., Lucy, and John. Of the three children, Russell, Jr. was born in Boston in 1831, Lucy was born in Manila in 1833, and John was born in Macau in 1834. Their children were part of how they explained their distance from their family circles to each other. Russell confided to his wife: “In coming to this country we may be considered as having come to the conclusion that we have to live for each other and our children only. I feel, I know, that I have only one great object in life, the welfare of my children and the happiness of her who daily and hourly gives me proofs of her anxious wishes to consult my views, even at the sacrifice of personal comfort. Believe me, dearest, I appreciate your endeavors to prove you’re content.”⁷⁴⁰ The two shared parental authority, even across the distance: Russell and his eldest son had an ongoing correspondence at the bottom of the letters. Russell warned his son not to “wake up every morning shouting ‘Naughty Rority,’” to mind his mother and look after his sister and baby brother. He expressed pride that his son worked on his letters with his mother, and should teach them to his younger sister. And young Russell, the more rambunctious child of the three, repeatedly sought his father’s approval in the letters. One has an image of Mary telling Russell, Jr. to just wait until his father got home . . . from Canton. Even across the distance, Russell saw himself as guiding Mary, urging her to be firm, and to not let the children think they could play the two parents off each other to get their way.

⁷⁴⁰ Russell Sturgis to Mary Sturgis, 7 July 1834. Correspondence of Russell and Mary G. Sturgis, Box 1, Folder 2. BAT.

But Russell also advised Mary on how her daily behavior could improve his prospects. Repeatedly, he counseled her on decorum. Mary's behavior and sociability had very real implications for Russell's mercantile ambitions. He expressed pride when a business partner reported Mary made a splash in Macau: "I am confident that the longer her residence is at Macau, the more she will be esteemed and respected."⁷⁴¹ When Mary and their son were both ill, Russell urged her to mind her social obligations. "When you feel able you I think you had best return the visits of those ladies who have called a second time on you and let them know you have delayed by illness. Mrs. Davis, Mrs. Whiteman, and Lady R – as I do not wish to be outdone in courtesy."⁷⁴² By her mere presence, Mary represented Russell and his firm. Just as he shared his business prospects with her, "entre nous," he sought the details of her social engagements and the children's public as well as private behavior.

Further, Russell recognized the implications of their national identity for their social prospects. The English community dominated the social scene of Macau, even after the British East India Company lost its monopoly in 1833. In a letter to Joshua Bates, the Perkins's London banker and the husband to a Sturgis cousin, Russell revealed his desire to ingratiate himself with English merchants in Macau and Canton.

My wife finds Macau much more agreeable than she had anticipated. Mine is the only American family in the place, and the attentions and kindness of the English ladies to them has been marked & constant and have given by all without an exception. My forced residence there during the troubles brought me much in contact also with English Gentlemen who manifested a readiness to meet me in terms which have placed my family and myself on a most agreeable footing there. I have

⁷⁴¹ Russell Sturgis to Mary Sturgis, 6 November 1834. Correspondence of Russell and Mary G. Sturgis, Box 1, Folder 11. BAT.

⁷⁴² Russell Sturgis to Mary Sturgis, 4 July 1834. Correspondence of Russell and Mary G. Sturgis, Box 1, Folder 2. BAT.

also the pleasure of being on the most pleasant terms with our neighbours here in Canton.⁷⁴³

Sociability and business went hand in hand. On the 4th of July, Russell urged Mary, “You are the Representative of America you know (today is 4th July you observe) and must do honor to our ‘great and happy country.’”⁷⁴⁴ When Mary wrote to Russell of her wariness of singing at a gathering, he replied that they should discuss this: “You must not sing sometimes and refuse at others for it looks like coquetry.”⁷⁴⁵ Mary’s presence abroad enabled Russell to participate in a world of sociability with British officers who also had wives and families abroad.

While the Sturgis example makes it tempting to think that all men would want to bring wives, there were several reasons why they might not. Not all wives wanted to go. This was likely the case for John Murray Forbes. Forbes first traveled to Canton in 1830, returned to Boston in 1833, before returning to Canton in 1834 for two more years. While in Boston, he married Sarah Hathaway. Forbes was in a position where he might well have brought Sarah, but claimed she got too seasick for such a voyage. Forbes was reluctant to return himself, and Sarah likely did not want to leave her twin sister. But a more significant reason is the one suggested by the experience of Valeria Wright Forbes, wife to John’s cousin Sieman: the cost of maintaining a wife in Macau. If life was extravagant for men abroad, the financial requirements for a wife were exorbitant. According to Suresh Ghosh, expense was one of the reasons so few Englishmen married

⁷⁴³ Russell Sturgis to Joshua Bates, 7 November 1834. House Correspondence 6.1.8a. Baring.

⁷⁴⁴ Russell Sturgis to Mary Sturgis, 4 July 1834. Correspondence of Russell and Mary G. Sturgis, Box 1, Folder 2. BAT.

⁷⁴⁵ Russell Sturgis to Mary Sturgis, 28 April 1835. Correspondence of Russell and Mary G. Sturgis, Box 1, Folder 35. BAT.

Englishwomen abroad, even those who traveled in search of a more advantageous marriage market. The upkeep for an English wife in Calcutta was simply too expensive.⁷⁴⁶ Yet this fact also meant that a wife abroad could be the ultimate status symbol, for those with the means.

Valeria Wright Forbes

Valeria traveled with two of her children to Canton in the years just following the end of Canton's heyday and the rise of the treaty port era in China's trade with the West. The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing brought peace following the Opium War between China and Great Britain. The Americans followed in 1844 with a similar treaty, the Treaty of Wangxia, the French with the Treaty of Whampoa, and others followed. The treaties included a variety of concessions from the Chinese government, from the opening of a variety of new ports to foreign merchants to allowing the presence of foreign women in China. Thus, by the time of Valeria's arrival in 1846, women were allowed to reside in the factories in Canton with their husbands. The sea breeze and more comfortable environment of Macau still attracted traders and their families, but the establishment of a British outpost at Hong Kong signaled Macau's decline. Still, foreign men far outnumbered women in the region. To Valeria, the social obligations were far more extensive than in any of the myriad places she had called home, from Boston to Baltimore, New York, or Rio de Janeiro. Women were much in demand, whether married or single.⁷⁴⁷ But Valeria's husband traveled to Canton at a very different

⁷⁴⁶Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The British in Bengal : A Study of the British Society and Life in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1998).

⁷⁴⁷ This is much like other sex-skewed situations, such as the social world of gold rush California.

personal and political moment than Russell Sturgis. Considering Valeria's experience not only gives us a sense of the meanings of being and bring a foreign wife in the trading community in southern China, but also the changes taking place in Canton.

Valeria Wright Forbes was the daughter of one of Baltimore's first families, and grew up in the world of foreign commerce as much if not more than Mary Howard Sturgis. Valeria's mother was the daughter of John Warner, a ship captain and merchant of Delaware who served as American consul to both Havana and Puerto Rico.⁷⁴⁸ When her father died, Valeria's mother married William Henry DeCourcy Wright, the youngest son of Maryland Governor Robert Wright and Sarah DeCourcy. Valeria's stepfather was the U. S. Consul to Rio de Janeiro from 1825 to 1834 and a founding partner of Maxwell, Wright & Co. With Joseph Maxwell, an Englishman, Wright is said to have begun the Brazilian coffee industry. Even after the end of his consular appointment, Wright continued to be one of the most important Americans in South America. It was here, in South America, that Valeria met Paul Sieman Forbes. In 1835, the two married.

Paul Sieman Forbes first traveled to China in 1843. He did not send for Valeria, she lobbied to be able to join him. Not long after Sieman embarked, Valeria wrote to her husband's cousin that her place was with her husband, in China. Warren Delano, another partner in her husband's firm, had taken *his* wife to China. Should she not also be by her husband's side? The letter circled within the family from the cousin who had received the letter (John M. Forbes) to his brother (R. Bennet Forbes) who in turn responded to Sieman with the expectation that the "no" would then make its way from Boston to China

⁷⁴⁸ Stella Pickett Hardy, *Colonial Families of the Southern States of America* (New York: Tobias Wright Printer and Publisher, 1911), 538. *Association of Centenary Firms and Corporations of the United States* (Philadelphia: Charles Sower Company, 1916, 2d. ed), p. 103-4. James F. Hopkins, et. al., *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. 4 Secretary of State (1972). Political Graveyard.com: U.S. Agent for Commerce and Seamen (Consul) in San Juan, 1815-18; Havana, 1821-25.

and back to Baltimore where Valeria and the children resided with her parents. “Valeria in writing to John draws a parallel between Delano’s taking his wife out and her not going – but she must be aware of the difference of your positions,” Bennet Forbes commented. “I look on her remark as a good joke.”⁷⁴⁹ While Delano returned to China with a considerable nest egg and a new wife, the Forbes cousins sought to mask the fact that Sieman’s financial troubles drew him to China.

The three cousins all had a stake in the Canton-based commission house, Russell & Co., which was why Valeria had hoped the cousins might smooth her path to China to be with her husband. The cousins were the ones who sent her husband to China in the first place, when his own South American business dealings fell apart. Sieman Forbes literally escaped to China, leaving his creditors behind. He hoped for a fresh start in a new circuit of trade. At the moment when Valeria sent her plea, her husband was in dire financial straits, propped up by his cousins who hoped to help him back onto his feet. Both John and Bennet Forbes made their fortunes in Russell & Co. through their Perkins family connections. In backing Sieman with letters, influence, and funds, they also needed Sieman to succeed. Bennet Forbes attempted to explain the issue as follows: “Retirement and economy must be her lot for a time and it is far better for her to live in retirement here – it cannot be done respectably in China.”⁷⁵⁰

A wife was not just a partner in family life, but a symbol of her husband’s social and economic status. If Valeria joined her husband in China, her husband would be required to provide for his wife and children at a level he could not then afford. They

⁷⁴⁹ Robert Bennet Forbes to Paul Sieman Forbes, 10 November 1843. Forbes Family Papers, Folder 46. Baker.

⁷⁵⁰ Robert Bennet Forbes to Paul Sieman Forbes, 10 November 1843. Forbes Family Papers, Folder 46. Baker.

would become a drain on capital he did not have. A fashionable lifestyle and wardrobe would be a necessary business expense, an investment even, in order to provide a visible display of the firm's financial health. And life amongst Western traders in China and Macau was incredibly expensive. The situation of Warren Delano's wife, referred to above, was a case in point. The Delanos lived in a grand villa in Macau with Warren's younger sister Deborah.⁷⁵¹ The villa went by the name of "Arrowdale" and had extensive grounds complete with geese, turkeys, pheasants, calves, deer, horses, and monkeys.⁷⁵² It was one thing for Valeria and the children to live with her family while her husband was away, quite another for them to live "in retirement" while in China, where the expectations of sociability and status were much higher. With so few women abroad, social engagement with Western and Chinese merchants and their families was required. And until Sieman could establish himself and build up his own capital, he needed his family to live quietly and cheaply.

No one was more aware of the lavish lifestyles of Canton and Macau than Sieman himself. He reported in a journal entry for May 18, 1843, that his first response to Canton was a deep, visceral disappointment. "When I see men about me who are about returning with fortunes and the same fortune has been at my command at any time during the last 10 years if I had only chosen to come and get it and then think that during that time I have been wasting my time, energy and breath, not only to no good purpose, but to

⁷⁵¹ Lesley, *Memoir of the Life of Mrs. Anne Jean Lyman*. Anne Lyman's letters shed some insight on her daughter Catherine's marriage to Delano and voyage to China. Catherine indicated to her mother that she traveled out of duty to her husband and prayed for courage. When she arrived in Macau, however, she quite liked it: the harbor and hillside replete with white houses with white shutters reminded her of Nahant.

⁷⁵² This per Rebecca Kinsman, wife of Captain Nathaniel Kinsman, quoted in Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 51.

a bad one that is in involving myself in pecuniary matters.”⁷⁵³ In 1837, Sieman’s cousin John had written to him that of hearing of his luck in both marriage and markets, he felt bad for trying to persuade him to leave for “villainous Canton.”⁷⁵⁴ Sieman turned John down, and now regretted that decision bitterly. Now, finally in Canton, he saw opportunity about him, but on the wane: now, “just as I am on the ground, the tide is about changing, the trade is becoming divided and full of risk and uncertainty and I have the laboring oar to stem the current.”⁷⁵⁵ Still, he resolved to do his best, for himself, for his family, and for his cousins. His youth had passed him by, but here was a chance to start again.

Sieman reported that in the early months of his residence at the factories, despite the end of the formal prohibition, foreign women were still barely tolerated in Canton. Women who sought to enter or leave Canton still had to do so under the cover of night as the boatmen feared being “squeezed” by the Mandarins. And once in Canton, they had to keep to the factories until night, when the Chinese men had retired. Only then could they stretch their legs walking in the garden in front of the factories.⁷⁵⁶

This careful negotiation of public space was no trivial matter. In the handful of riots that followed the August 29, 1842 signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, rioters targeted foreign women. The treaty signaled the defeat and concessions of the Chinese to the British aggressors and thus rioting against the women’s presence was one way to protest

⁷⁵³ Paul Sieman Forbes, Journal, 18 May 1843. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 65. Baker.

⁷⁵⁴ John Murray Forbes to Paul Sieman Forbes, 26 March 1837. Forbes Family Papers, John Murray Forbes Letterbook, v. F-7. Baker.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 11 May 1843.

the treaty. To local residents, the foreign women may well have embodied the treaty concessions.⁷⁵⁷ In the riot of December 7, 1842, for example, the arrival of foreign women may well have caused the riot.⁷⁵⁸ A dispute between Chinese locals and several lascars (Indian sailors) provided the spark.⁷⁵⁹ Protesters vandalized both the American and the Creek factories and set them ablaze. But according to Englishman William Hall, commander of the *Nemesis*, anonymous Chinese posters plastered the walls behind the factories in the days prior to the violence. Hall claims that the posters “misstated the terms of the treaty, and asserted the belief, that foreigners were hereafter coming to build houses for themselves at Canton, and to reside there *with their families*.”⁷⁶⁰ Hall connected this to the “bad feeling” that followed a parade of three or four wives of ship captains and their children up China Street near the factories of Canton. It was not that the novelty of foreign women was shocking, he felt, but that “not even Chinese ladies are ever to be seen in public, except in sedan-chairs.”⁷⁶¹ The first factory attacked was the one hosting the ladies. While the women and children escaped, “the mob destroyed and tore into shreds every article of their wardrobe which they could find.”⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁷ Hoe, *The Private Life of Old Hong Kong*, 47.

⁷⁵⁸ W. D. Bernard, *Narrative of the Voyages and Services of the Nemesis, from 1840 to 1843; and the of the Combined Naval and Military Operations in China: Comprising a Complete Account of the Colony of Hong Kong and Remarks on the Character and Habits of the Chinese. From the Notes of Commander W.H. Hall.*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, 1844), 467.

⁷⁵⁹ According to Hall, *ibid.*, the conflict with the lascars arose over the petty trade between a group of lascars and local shopmen who were discontented with the bargain made.

⁷⁶⁰ Bernard, *Narrative of the Voyages and Services of the Nemesis, from 1840 to 1843*, 468-469. Italics his.

⁷⁶¹ Bernard, *Narrative of the Voyages and Services of the Nemesis, from 1840 to 1843*, 469.

⁷⁶² Bernard, *Narrative of the Voyages and Services of the Nemesis, from 1840 to 1843*, 470.

One of the ladies who escaped the riot was the first foreign woman to move to Canton following the treaty's signing, the American Harriet Parker, wife to the well-known medical missionary, Peter Parker.⁷⁶³ Peter Parker had worked with the local Chinese population for years. As he and his wife explained to a Chinese linguist sent by Houqua and Puantingqua to ascertain their intentions, they intended to be as discreet as possible. Mrs. Parker would not venture into the streets or into the public eye. The emperor had promised families could reside with foreigners. Imperial officials charged the linguist with stemming any riots that arose from the foreigners' travels. In November, Peter noted in his journal his relief that while his wife's nighttime walks on the veranda could be seen by Chinese residents from the river, from the street, and from rooftops, no discontent or rude expressions could be seen, but rather people remarking on her appearance such as how she dressed her hair.⁷⁶⁴

To the Parkers, the cause of the disturbance was "our proximity to the English, who, in the course of the late war, had rendered themselves particularly obnoxious to the Chinese."⁷⁶⁵ The lascars, not the ladies, were to blame. Where Hall emphasized the burning of the American factory, Parker wrote of the burning of the English (Creek) factory and the theft of nearly half a million silver dollars. Harriet escaped with an English friend of hers, Mrs. Isaacson, via Mingqua's factory, where they were secreted down river to Whampoa. While Parker soothed his sister by noting that it was unlikely

⁷⁶³ George Barker Stevens and W. Fisher Markwick, *The Life, Letters, and Journals of the Rev. And Hon. Peter Parker* (Boston and Chicago,: Congregational Sunday-school and publishing society, 1896), 229.

⁷⁶⁴ Stevens and Markwick, *The Life, Letters, and Journals of the Rev. And Hon. Peter Parker*, 197, 230. Mrs. Parker had dark eyes and hair. At least in the United States, she wore her hair in curls.

⁷⁶⁵ Peter Parker to his sister, Maria. 23 December 1842, as quoted in Stevens and Markwick, *The Life, Letters, and Journals of the Rev. And Hon. Peter Parker*, 231-232.

such violence would occur again and that he had “so many friends among the Chinese, as well as foreigners, that, on the approach of a similar riot, it would be easy for her to escape,” it was clear that he recognized the danger Harriet faced. A mere four days later he wrote his sister again, noting that Harriet had already returned (on Christmas), but hidden from the Chinese and living secluded in her chambers. “For the present, it would not be prudent for her to be seen abroad.”⁷⁶⁶ Despite their assertions otherwise, the Parkers clearly felt that the riots had been about more than the lascars.

The transition between 1842 and 1846 seems to have been relatively gradual. Catherine (Katie) Delano and her sister-in-law traveled to live in China with her husband Warren, arriving in December 1843. Originally the ladies settled in at Warren Delano’s estate at Macau, the lavish Arrowdale. But when Arrowdale burned to the ground with all of their belongings, the entire family took up residence in the Canton factory. Even as the formal rules relaxed regarding foreigners, allowing freer travel, Warren insisted that the ladies remain within the foreign compound that housed the factories on the outskirts of Canton, for their own safety.⁷⁶⁷

By the time Valeria Forbes arrived in 1846, relations had relaxed considerably. Valeria described a less inhibited social existence than seemed possible in 1842 and perhaps even 1844. In 1847, Valeria reported attending a dinner party given by Houqua II (son of Houqua). Houqua II was an esteemed merchant in his own right, and she bragged to her sister-in-law that he had deigned to call upon her, but not on Warren Delano’s wife. This was quite an honor, as was the invitation to the dinner party. Mrs.

⁷⁶⁶ Peter Parker to his sister, Maria. 27 December 1842, as quoted in Stevens and Markwick, *The Life, Letters, and Journals of the Rev. And Hon. Peter Parker*, 232.

⁷⁶⁷ Lesley, *Memoir of the Life of Mrs. Anne Jean Lyman*, 443-447, Geoffrey C. Ward, *Before the Trumpet: Young Franklin Roosevelt, 1882-1905*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 78-80.

Forbes was not the only foreign woman in attendance, and her young daughter Nell also attended. Prior to the dinner, the foreign women joined the Chinese women and female children in a separate chamber. “We were fortunate in having very good interpreters in some missionary ladies,” reported Valeria.

They asked a great many questions, wanted to know if our small waists and tight dresses did not hurt us. Miss Bale told them it was not half as bad as their small feet. They put on our gloves and laughed like children at them, took our bonnets and tried to put them on, and got them hind part before. Miss Deblois was with me, and her hair curls. They said they did not like it, it was not as smooth and nice as mine.⁷⁶⁸

Nell at first was upset and shy in company, but when a Chinese girl of about six was placed next to her and bowed “chin chin,” Nell quieted down and took the girl’s hand. Apparently Nell warmed up quite a bit, and amused the dinner crowd with her quick facility with chop sticks.

Yet being a woman in Canton was work. For one, Valeria complained that for having traveled half the world, she had little contact with her husband. Sieman did not come to bed for hours after she retired. “I think women in such cases should be allowed more than one husband so that one could always be with the wife,” she despaired to her sister-in-law.⁷⁶⁹ For another, she constantly had to entertain and let others entertain her lest they think her rude. In February 1847, she already reported that she was tired of the “company, company, company all the time.” Whenever a visitor to Russell & Co. passed through, Valeria had to invite them for tea and entertain them. It was good for business,

⁷⁶⁸ Valeria Wright Forbes to Josephine Forbes, 12 March 1847. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 55. Baker.

⁷⁶⁹ Valeria Wright Forbes to Josephine Forbes, 23 July 1846. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 55. Baker.

but combined with her responsibilities with the children, socializing was exhausting.⁷⁷⁰ Returning visits from other ladies—and more ladies seemed to arrive every day—organizing whist parties, attending and hosting parties for Chinese and Western merchants: somehow voluntary socializing had become part of her list of duties and she wondered that she could not pass them along to someone else.⁷⁷¹ Yet even as she protested her labors, Valeria's tone suggested her own success. She was busy because she was in demand, she hinted. Amongst the Americans, the English, and the Chinese who made up the majority of people with whom she socialized, she had made a splash.

Her complaint about her husband's work schedule, however, was sincere. While several individuals (such as Russell Sturgis, above) noted that the English set the terms of the social calendar, Valeria contended that the Americans set the terms of the business calendar. "I must agree with the English when they say all an American thinks of is dollars and cents," she wrote.⁷⁷² The Yankees had changed the tenor of work, she had learned. There was no longer a difference between Sunday and Monday. They worked all the time. This was certainly true of her husband. But it was true of her as well. As Harriet Low and Mary Sturgis discovered before her, being a woman in the foreign trading community in southern China was hard work.

Few American China traders brought their wives with them abroad, but for the wives of those that did, they discovered that they were expected to commit themselves to their husbands' enterprise. Domestic pursuits of music and literature, proper

⁷⁷⁰ Valeria Wright Forbes to Josephine Forbes, 1 February 1847. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 55. Baker.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid. This letter is actually more of a journal and runs the course of two months.

⁷⁷² Valeria Wright Forbes to Josephine Forbes, 1 February 1847. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 55. Baker.

comportment, and social ease all were in high demand in the mercantile society of Canton and Macau. One imagines that, as Russell Sturgis well knew, having womenfolk in residence in foreign ports opened social spheres that also opened business opportunities. While Sieman Forbes himself never remarked on this, Valeria certainly saw her labors as important. One wonders that even little Nell, charming a dinner crowd with her ease with chopsticks, did not help single out Sieman as he negotiated business with fellow merchants at that very table. Yet at the same time that foreign women were allowed—and increasingly able—to live in Canton, Canton itself became less significant as a trading center. The Treaty of Nanjing between the Chinese and the British opened up five new treaty ports. Shanghai (as well as Hong Kong) soon became the new center of China's foreign trade. Still, as treaty port scholars are quick to note, many of the practices and structural legacies of Canton made their way to Shanghai and beyond.

Conclusion

Many regulations governing the foreign community in Canton in the early nineteenth century proved fluid, but the prohibition on foreign women was not. The Chinese government enforced the rule against women. While this rule likely aimed to limit the ability of foreigners to settle in China, the result was the development of a foreign community in nearby Macau connected to the traders at Canton. The tensions that arose over the rule against the presence of foreign women in Canton, over the actual presence of foreign women in Canton both before and after the Treaty of Nanjing, and over the sexual behavior of foreign men in Canton suggest that these issues did have the potential to incite considerable conflict. Yet the two communities were not necessarily what one might expect. The “bachelor society” of Canton was intentionally formal,

while homosocial gatherings of ladies at Macau provided a respite from proper decorum. This itself suggests that the gendered dynamics may not have been all they seemed: the advent of an Anglo-American community of women at Macau may not have been the reserve of decorum Austin Coates supposed it to be.

It mattered that social experiences in both Canton and Macau provided opportunities to remake self and family by mobilizing economic and social capital in the trading enclave and, hopefully, the metropole. The boomtown environment of Canton combined with its necessarily temporary nature may well have made it all the more of a geopolitical hothouse. When traders wondered repeatedly in letters to kith and kin whether or not they had wasted their prime away in the hopes of making their fortune, these frustrations spilled into other relationships. And the gendered sociability of Macau opened particular opportunities for men able to maintain wives abroad. Traveling abroad as a family could be a comfort and support to both spouses. But the level of consumption required for traders who brought wives and families was prohibitive: not every merchant could afford the extravagance of bringing a wife to live in Macau.

Ultimately, however, this chapter raises more questions than it answers. The social norms of Macau were not the same as Boston or even London. While norms and meanings seemed specific to Macau, how did they also connect to metropolises in Britain, the United States, and Portugal, as well as broader colonial circuits of British and Portuguese India? To what extent did Americans disrupt the social and political worlds of British residents abroad as they did in commerce? What difference did it make that commercial rather than colonial relationships appear to have predominated in Macau?

CHAPTER 6.
FREE TRADE AS A WAY OF LIFE:
AMERICANS AND THE EAST INDIA COMPANY MONOPOLY IN CHINA

Free as the winds, and chainless as the sea,
 Should trade and commerce unrestricted be;
 Wherever land is found, or oceans roll,
 Or man exists, from Indus to the pole,
 Open to all, with no false ties to bind,
 THE WORLD SHOULD BE THE MARKET OF MANKIND.⁷⁷³

--*Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* (1842).

In the summer of 1839, as tensions in southern China sizzled over the “opium question,” Robert Bennet Forbes took up the mantle as head partner of Russell & Co. of Canton. It fell to the thirty-five year old Forbes to answer for his firm as British merchants departed for Macau and Hong Kong and called on the Americans to leave, too. Forbes famously refused. The British chief Superintendent of Trade, Charles Elliot, personally entreated the partners of Russell & Co. to join them in the dramatic gesture. “If your house goes, all will go, and we shall soon bring these rascally Chinese to terms.” But Forbes demurred, replying that he had “not come to China for health or pleasure, and that I should remain at my post as long as I could sell a yard of goods or buy a pound of tea; that we Yankees had no Queen to guarantee our losses.”⁷⁷⁴ The quote was one Forbes himself relished.⁷⁷⁵ He gambled that American merchants would

⁷⁷³ “Free Trade,” *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 6, No. 2 (February 1842): 27.

⁷⁷⁴ Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 149. Forbes had made a fortune in the early 1830s as captain of the ship *Lintin*, smuggling opium, but lost it in the Panic of 1837. He returned to China in June 1838 in order to recoup his losses.

⁷⁷⁵ On July 8, 1839, Bennet wrote to his wife that noted that if she read the late China papers, she would see letters from their house and would recognize said quote from him. The quote in the letter, however, is rather different from that in his memoirs: “I did not come here for my health; neither to effect a reform, moral or political, but to get the needful where with all to be useful & happy at home & I shall stay as long as I can carry on my business in safety & consider myself as safe in China as in any place of

be able to continue to trade in the absence of their British competitors and he was right. Russell & Co. profited from both their American clients as well as new British commissions. But the quote offers a departure for thinking about the position of international traders as carriers of the nation-state and particular understandings of trade. The partners of Russell & Co. found themselves in the middle of war between the British and the Chinese and, in lieu of siding with one or the other, attempted to chart a middle path.

In many ways, this anecdote epitomizes the Anglo-American relationship from the birth of the American republic. Anglophobia and Anglophilia were both part of the American sentiment toward their erstwhile mother country.⁷⁷⁶ Whether or not Americans had a “special relationship” with China, they sincerely believed they did. Leading

the world.” Forbes and Kerr, *Letters from China : The Canton-Boston Correspondence of Robert Bennet Forbes, 1838-1840*, 142.

Susanna Hoe notes that Elliot’s verbiage per Forbes was not entirely in character for the British statesman, but the two quotes given here already give a sense of the audience-specific embellishment Forbes found to be his prerogative in the matter. Forbes and Kerr, *Letters from China : The Canton-Boston Correspondence of Robert Bennet Forbes, 1838-1840*, 142, Susanna Hoe and Derek Roebuck, *The Taking of Hong Kong : Charles and Clara Elliot in China Waters* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 87.

⁷⁷⁶ There continues to be considerable debate in the diplomatic literature over how seriously to take American fears of British expansionism in the 1840s. Warren I. Cohen et al., *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, 4 vols. (Cambridge [England] ; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Hietala, *Manifest Design : Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*. Recently, Macabe Keliher challenged the long-held orthodoxy per John Fairbank that Americans followed British actions in practice if not in principle. Keliher challenges with a barrage of evidence of American anglophobia. Yet Keliher’s arguments do not successfully overthrow Fairbank and followers. However much Americans wished to differentiate themselves from such British aggressions in China, they also wished to take advantage of it. And in fact, this middle path, following the British in practice but explicitly not in principle, shaped American’s later sense of themselves as what Engseng Ho terms an “invisible empire.” John King Fairbank, “The American Approach to China, Ca. 1840-1860,” in *Conference on American East Asian Relations* (Cuernavaca: 1970), John King Fairbank, “‘American China Policy’ to 1898: A Misconception,” *Pacific Historical Review* 39, no. 4 (1970): 409-420, Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast : The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854*, Engseng Ho, “Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat,” *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 46, no. 2 (2004): 210-246, Macabe Keliher, “Anglo-American Rivalry and the Origins of U.S. China Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 227-257, May, *America’s China Trade in Historical Perspective : The Chinese and American Performance*, James Claude Thomson, Peter W. Stanley, and John Curtis Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists : The American Experience in East Asia*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

merchants with experience in the region urged American officials to mediate the tensions between Britain and China as friends to both, provoking neither.⁷⁷⁷ It was a difficult position to maintain, yet for much of the nineteenth century, this stance allowed American merchants to take advantage of European diplomacy and aggression—especially British—while imagining themselves apart from the fray in China and beyond.

This final chapter examines the dialectic between British and American observers of Anglo-American trade in Asia and the Pacific over meanings and methods of trade itself. Participants in the Perkins network did not write of themselves as “free traders.” Rather, they depicted themselves as ordinary merchants—often downplaying the extent to which the American state *was* willing to support American merchants abroad—seeking to keep trade open to all comers against the threats of imperial powers. This “open trade” argument was central to private rationalizations of smuggling as well as public arguments legitimating American diplomatic and naval practice in Asia from the 1830s to the 1850s and beyond. The Tyler Doctrine of 1842, for example, was an early example of what, in the late nineteenth century, would be termed the “Open Door” policy. As Americans themselves debated the appropriate role of the state in trade during the Anglo-American Opium Wars of 1840-1842 and again in 1856-1860, participants in the Perkins network advised American officials. To historian Michael Hunt, the Perkinses and their counterparts were part of the early “Open Door constituency.”⁷⁷⁸ As Lars Magnusson has argued, the concept of “free trade” is something that needs to be historicized within its

⁷⁷⁷ The Americans and the Chinese played a similar game of seeking to negotiate a space between larger powers. As Michael Hunt argues, Chinese diplomats gave treaty concessions to all comers akin to those conceded to the British in 1842 and again in 1856 specifically to diffuse British power in the region. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship : The United States and China to 1914*.

⁷⁷⁸ Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship : The United States and China to 1914*.

practical manifestations—that is to say, not simply within the writings of theorists, but also in the logs of mariners and the consequences of merchants’ actions.⁷⁷⁹ This chapter provides that more personal account, looking at debates over monopolism in trade and its connections to notions of imperialism through the experiences of the Perkinses. Despite this narrow focus, the insights the Perkinses help to provide are surprisingly rich.

Participants in the Perkins network actively lobbied for specific policy stances, but they also served a symbolic function. The Perkinses—Perkins & Co. and later Russell & Co.—featured frequently as exemplar American merchants. Yet the Perkinses could not control how others represented them. British opponents of the East India Company monopoly referenced the Perkinses to demonstrate the promise of “free trade.” Americans cited the success (and failure) of firms and traders to tout the promise of American involvement in the Pacific and the perils of European empire and state-backed commerce. Whatever their specific political influence, the Perkinses were embedded in much larger debates about fairness in trade.

Monopoly, Markets & Niche Trading

From the nation’s founding, many Americans remained suspicious of monopoly power.⁷⁸⁰ The Perkinses did not share this disquiet. The Perkinses recognized that

⁷⁷⁹ Magnusson, *The Tradition of Free Trade*.

⁷⁸⁰ Thomas Jefferson, for example, suggested to a correspondent in February 1788 that he wished to as part of the bill of rights (then as a “declaration of rights”) attached to the Constitution with such rights included as “freedom of commerce against monopolies.” Thomas Jefferson to A. Donald, 7 February 1788, as quoted in H. A. Washington Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Maury, 1853), 355. As James Fichter notes, early debates over the first Bank of the United States grappled with the issue of whether or not the bank would set a precedent that would allow for the establishment of West Indian or East Indian chartered monopolies. Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 42.

having the run of a market—with government assistance if possible—was good for business. As a commercial network, the Perkinses time and again attempted to construct monopolies around specific markets and commodities, from furs and ginseng to quicksilver and opium. When letters discussed cornering the market for a specific commodity, they had no compunction about touting their “monopoly.”⁷⁸¹ On numerous occasions the Perkinses wielded the influence rooted in their broader network to dominate a market or commodity. The associational power of their regular collaboration often worked to this advantage. But they were not reticent to solicit state support for their trade as well, whether in lobbying for favorable maritime duties and policies, petitioning for consular posts or diplomatic support, or, as I showed in chapter two, in turning to the courts to enforce a contractual monopoly. Yet the Perkinses were also cognizant of the potential to be had in locating preexisting “niche markets.” Foreign monopolies by their very nature restricted competition and sometimes created niches for non-nationals to profit. The Perkinses shaped debates about monopolism in trade through their niche trading and smuggling.

Americans who favored commercial monopolies did so on the grounds that certain markets required monopolism to be competitive.⁷⁸² Some contended that state

⁷⁸¹ Examples of each include J. & T.H. Perkins to J. D. Clifford & Dr. Walter Brunhear, of Philadelphia, 14 April 1818, to F.W. Paine, 8 May 1818, JEC Extracts. The Perkinses agreed to an interest in a ginseng speculation with the Philadelphia merchants, provided that a monopoly of the article could be secured and the business would be put in the hands of Perkins & Co. of Canton. They instructed Paine to attempt to negotiate a monopoly in quicksilver with the Austrian government. Fur and opium will be dealt with more thoroughly below.

⁷⁸² Pauline Maier’s research on debates over early American corporations sheds insight on rationales for concerns over state-backed commercial monopolies. She demonstrates the transatlantic nature of arguments favoring and opposing early corporations as well as the immense variety of viewpoints of what a corporation should and should not be. Maier argues that the debate reflected little hostility to commerce, but rather a rethinking of the corporate form in terms of American institutions. Pauline Maier, “The Revolutionary Origins of the American Corporation,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1993): 51-84.

support for rivals of other nations made it difficult to gain entry into especially lucrative markets. Thus, in 1789, Thomas Randall was not the first but the second merchant to propose the United States should charter an East India Company of its own.⁷⁸³ John Jacob Astor's rationalization for seeking state support for Astoria in 1808 relied upon this logic as well.⁷⁸⁴ As British and Russian competitors in the fur trade had state backing, Astor argued that he needed support from his own government to be able to enter the market on equal footing. An alternative argument, used by the Perkinses, suggested that uncontrolled traffic threatened to destabilize an otherwise profitable trade within specific markets. Thus, when the Perkinses turned to the judiciary to enforce their contract-based efforts to monopolize the fur trade in the Pacific Northwest, as discussed in chapter two, this was precisely the claim they made: the trade was fragile; it could support six ships annually at best. State-support to limit the trade was thereby justified.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, John Jacob Astor and the Perkinses similarly sought to corner the market in furs of the Pacific Northwest. When Astor drew up plans for the Pacific Fur Company and his famed Astoria experiment, he explicitly used British mercantilist companies such as the North West Company and the Hudson Bay Company as his model.⁷⁸⁵ Thus the Pacific Fur Company planned to establish a trail of trading posts along the path blazed by Lewis and Clark in 1806, down the Missouri, over the continental divide, to the Columbia River through to the Pacific Ocean. The

⁷⁸³ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 42.

⁷⁸⁴ *Perkins v. Lyman* (1813) 9 Mass. 522.

⁷⁸⁵ Eric Jay Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), John D. Haeger, "Business Strategy and Practice in the Early Republic: John Jacob Astor and the American Fur Trade," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1988): 183-202, Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *John Jacob Astor, Business Man* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), James P. Ronda, *Astoria & Empire* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 39.

company would set up an outpost for trappers to collect furs year round (Astoria), with company ships bringing in supplies and carrying out the furs for trade in China and Europe. Even without a state-chartered monopoly, Astor felt, a monopoly could be constructed through commercial and political muscle. And according to historian James Ronda, Astor desired more than incorporation; he desired the “approbation” and implicit backing of the United States government.⁷⁸⁶

Whatever their feelings about monopolies, the Perkinses recognized that European chartered monopolies created an opportunity for them as Americans. The monopolies restricted access to nationals within specific markets, and thus restricted competition. As Cathy Matson and Peter Onuf have argued, smuggling could be a “colorful and conspicuous” argument against trade restrictions, whether or not smugglers

⁷⁸⁶ What Astor left vague in letters to Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, he made more transparent in testing letters to New York governor De Witt Clinton, a confidant of his: his intention to employ Canadian trappers, an open hand to monopolize the trade to the exclusion of both British Canadian and American traders, and military protection against British competitors, especially during the War of 1812. To James Ronda, “Nowhere was there a more eloquent silence [in Astor’s letters to Jefferson] than on the question of monopoly. Astor never intended the Pacific Fur Company to be a public venture. Nor did he want any competitors. What he sought was total control of the western trade. Such monopolistic aims would surely have offended Jefferson. Astor knew that and wisely steered clear of even the slightest hint of monopoly.” Ronda, *Astoria & Empire*, 40-41.

Jefferson lauded the potential of Astor’s project for the nation and replied in equally vague terms: “I consider it as highly desirable to have that trade centred (sic) in the hands of our own citizens. ... You may be assured that in order to get the whole of this business passed into the hands of our own citizens, and to oust foreign traders, who so much abuse their privilege by endeavoring to excite the Indians to war on us, every reasonable patronage and facility in the power of the Executive will be afforded.” Thomas Jefferson to John Jacob Astor, 13 April 1808 as quoted in H. A. Washington Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Maury, 1853), 269-270.

The test of the federal government’s “approbation” of Astor’s Pacific enterprise came with the War of 1812. In early 1813, rumors reached Astor that the British North West Company sought British naval support to attack Astoria. Initially, the Madison government ignored Astor’s requests for a frigate with forty to fifty men to join with the men of Astoria and repel British invasion. News that the British government agreed, in fact, to send ships to avail the North West Company may have changed things. By March of 1813, President James Madison ordered the frigate *Adams* to support the Astorians. While this wartime support in no way implied government backing for Astor’s monopolistic ambitions, federal support of what was in fact a private enterprise are significant. Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*, 213-214.

intended them as such.⁷⁸⁷ Similarly, by taking advantage of the “niches” opened up by chartered trading company-based monopolies, the Perkinses and merchants like them nonetheless functioned as a critique of the system. Perkins schemes at niche trading did not always bear fruit, as with speculations to ship goods between the Philippines and Spanish America. But they recognized that mercantilist companies created barriers for certain competitors and thus opportunity for themselves. They sought out such niches of trade for themselves. Accordingly, the Perkinses were able to ship furs into the jurisdiction of the East India Company monopoly in China on behalf of the British North West Company. And thus the East India Company monopoly in Indian opium allowed the Perkinses to build a market for themselves selling Turkish and Persian opium in China.

Furs: the North West Company & the East India Company

The Pacific fur trade is one example of a niche trade created by competition between British mercantilist trading companies. From 1815 to 1822, the Perkins network shipped furs on behalf of the British North West Company (NWC) from the Columbia River to China.⁷⁸⁸ In crossing the Pacific Ocean or “South Seas” to Asia, the furs arrived in the jurisdiction of the British East India Company (EIC)⁷⁸⁹, a competing corporation

⁷⁸⁷ Matson and Onuf, *A Union of Interests*, 23.

⁷⁸⁸ James & Thomas H. Perkins & Co., Boston to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., Montreal, May 22, 1816. JEC Extracts. “Our agreement is to send a vessel from hence to the Columbia River; the skins to be carried to Canton, and there disposed of by the House of P. & Co., who are to charge a commission of 5 per cent, but no commission on investing the proceeds, which are to be invested, 1/3 in fine teas, 1/3 in silks, and 1/3 nankins, consigned in the same vessel to us. We are to make sale, charging a commission of 5% but no other charge, and to account with you for 3/4 of the net sales, and retain the other 1/4 in lieu of freight.”

⁷⁸⁹ The British East India Company is traditionally shortened to “the Company.” I use “EIC” here to avoid confusion with the other “companies” discussed, here, namely, the North West Company and the Levant Company.

with monopoly rights delineated by the British government and thus applicable only to British nationals.⁷⁹⁰ East India Company officials willingly licensed NWC vessels to trade furs into China, albeit reserving the right to sell them at a hefty commission. But they prohibited the more profitable leg of the trade: importing tea home to Great Britain. To circumvent the costs of dealing with the East India Company directly, NWC fur trappers hired American merchants to supply them with provisions and ship their furs across the Pacific. The situation proved highly profitable to the Americans, less so to the British.

The British East India Company jealously guarded its hard won trading privileges in the East Indies and it is little wonder why. The EIC began in 1600 with a royal charter and a mandate to assist England in preventing a Dutch stranglehold on the spice trade. The English had just defeated the Spanish Armada. Yet, as K. N. Chaudhuri has written, English confidence in their naval prospects did not blind the newly styled East Indiamen to the fact that they proposed to compete with not only with powerful Dutch financial interests, but also with the then joined Spanish-Portuguese Crown.⁷⁹¹ The EIC grew tremendously over the course of the seventeenth century, but faced increasing challenges from outsiders culminating in the successful rise of a competing company in 1698.⁷⁹²

While the two trading companies merged in 1708 (the first company essentially bought

⁷⁹⁰ There was also ambiguity about the monopoly rights of the then-defunct South Seas Company, and some aspiring British merchants hedged their bets by seeking permission to enter the trade from that company as well.

⁷⁹¹ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company; the Study of an Early Joint-Stock Company, 1600-1640* (New York,: Reprints of Economic Classics, 1965), 3-4, 10.

⁷⁹² K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 434.

up the stock of the second), this was not the first or last challenge the Company would face at home or abroad.

British fur traders based in North America tried on several occasions to partner with the EIC to sell furs in China, both before and after their engagement with American shippers, but with little success. As early as 1789 Alexander Dalrymple published his *Plans for Promoting the Fur-Trade and Securing It to This Country by Uniting the Operations of the East India and the Hudson's Bay Companies*. As hydrographer to the East India Company since 1779, Dalrymple knew the markets for the fur trade well. Dalrymple proposed that a combined effort between the Hudson's Bay and East India Companies could cut Russian middlemen out of a trade between London and Beijing via Russia. In 1793, the Hudson's Bay Company and the EIC tried just such a joint venture, but with poor results.⁷⁹³ The fur shipment received little attention from the EIC supercargoes, and thus received poor prices. Worse, EIC supercargoes charged a hefty commission for their efforts. As one ship captain complained, furs valued at \$80-90 brought only an approximate \$20 to the speculator.⁷⁹⁴

Between 1792 and 1798, a second company, the North West Company, experimented with methods for sending furs to China.⁷⁹⁵ The North West Company officially commenced business in Montreal in 1783 as a competitor to the older Hudson's

⁷⁹³ Gough, "The North West Company's 'Adventure to China'," 314.

⁷⁹⁴ This per Captain Portlock of the *King George* and *Queen Charlotte* as discussed in Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 25.

⁷⁹⁵ Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains : The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793-1843*, 13, fn 18.

Bay Company, but its leaders increasingly shifted their attention to the Pacific.⁷⁹⁶ Representatives of the NWC even lobbied the British government for Lord Macartney, scheduled to embark on a diplomatic mission to Beijing in 1793, to seek rights for British merchants to sell furs directly into northern China to compete with the Russians. Macartney made little headway in his mission, however, and instead became famous for refusing the *kowtow* before the Chinese Emperor, Qianlong.⁷⁹⁷ Thus, as other methods failed, NWC officials turned to Americans. According to James Gibson, the NWC employed Americans to carry furs to China from 1792-1822, save the 1802-3 season and 1810-12.⁷⁹⁸ The earlier trade seems to have been furs smuggled from Montreal to New York, with local merchants such as John Jacob Astor shipping the furs to Canton on NWC account.⁷⁹⁹

As early as 1809, Colonel Perkins proposed to the company's leaders that Perkins & Co. might be hired to assist the NWC establish themselves near the Columbia River. In a letter to William McGillvray in August of that year, Perkins tisked at McGillvray's "unfavorable accounts" of visits NWC traders had paid to the Columbia River. NWC employees lacked experience in this particular trade, he implied, overlooking the "many

⁷⁹⁶ G. C. Davidson traces the roots of the North West Company back to a series of annual contracts beginning in 1779, but notes that the first contractual use of the name the North West Company was in 1783. G. C. Davidson, *The North West Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918), 9-11.

⁷⁹⁷ Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*. Between 1792 and 1797, the NWC shipped over £40,000 worth of furs to China via the Russian route: through Moscow to Irkutsk and then to Beijing. The downside of this route paralleled that of shipping via the EIC. Russian middlemen extracted significant commission fees.

⁷⁹⁸ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 26. Gibson cites "Account of Beaver Skins Returns from the Trade of the NWCO..." 1 September 1823, HBCA A.7/1. This source may or may not list who the Americans were that the NWC collaborated with at different points.

⁷⁹⁹ According to Barry Gough, in 1797 the NWC began smuggling furs south from Montreal to John Jacob Astor in New York who then transshipped the furs to Canton. Gough, "The North West Company's 'Adventure to China'," 315.

inconveniences that w'd attend so distant excursions; the inconvenience of returns, the precarious support the country affords, etc.” Perkins reminded McGillvray that not only had he warned Simon McTavish of these risks, at a later meeting with Mr. R. Mackensie in New York, he had proposed a partnership. “I suggested an Establishment for supplying the Traders with goods, by way of Cape Horn, and taking the furs to China.” Perkins warned that they both faced Russian competition. While the primary Russian settlement was at Kodiak where they employed Onalaski Indians as hunters, Russians were pushing south and intent on establishing a trading post at the Columbia River. “It is to be feared that unless superseded, they will engross the whole trade.”⁸⁰⁰ Once again, Perkins proposed collaboration. In 1809, McGillvray declined offers from both Perkins and John Jacob Astor.⁸⁰¹

In 1815, perhaps due to the end of the War of 1812, the Perkinses reached an agreement with McGillvray.⁸⁰² Under special arrangement with the NWC and the firm McTarret, McGillvray & Co., the Perkinses purchased provisions for the British Canadian trappers at Fort George (formerly Astoria) as well as commodities for trade with the local Haida Indians, especially beads, iron, clothing, and rifles. In exchange, New England mariners took on board NWC beaver, land otter, seal skins, and some sea otter pelts and carried the cargo to Canton as well as some to Smyrna. In China, middlemen shipped the furs north to be used as winter coats for Chinese consumers. Varying qualities of skins and pelts allowed for the manufacture of coats for Chinese

⁸⁰⁰ Thomas H. Perkins, Boston, to William McGillvray, Montreal, 16 August 1809. JEC Extracts.

⁸⁰¹ According to Dolin, Astor also made an offer in 1809 that the NWC refused because they desired to keep the entire trade in their hands. Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*, 196.

⁸⁰² Thomas H. Perkins, Boston, to William McGillvray, Montreal, 14 November 1815, to James Keith, Fort George, Columbia River, October 1816. JEC Extracts.

buyers at varying income levels. The diversity of the market was part of what allowed the fur trade to continue as long as it did. Zealous hunters drove the finer sea otters to the brink of extinction by the early 1830s.

When convenient for them, the Perkins vessels stopped at the Sandwich Islands for kanaka (Hawaiian) mariners. NWC officials promoted the practice, arguing that the kanaka mariners were “more vigilant than our men” respecting the Chinook hunters and traders of the Pacific Northwest. “As they both fear and abhor the N.W. Indians,” one letter related, “they keep a constant eye upon them in guard against surprise.”⁸⁰³ Yet the kanakas were also a skilled maritime labor force and worked for cheaper wages than Yankee mariners. Richard Henry Dana, who did his time aboard a Bryant & Sturgis ship in his research for *Two Years before the Mast*, told several stories of his experiences and friendships with Sandwich Islanders. In one memorable anecdote, Dana relayed his memorable first experience landing a boat on a California beach. As the sun melted into the ocean, Dana and part of his ship’s crew waited in a small outrigger just outside the surf. They were trying to figure out how to land the thing without crashing into the shore. Along came a boat “with a crew of dusky Sandwich Islanders, talking and hallooing in their outlandish tongue. They knew that we were novices in this kind of boating, and waited to see us go in. The second mate, however, who steered our boat, determined to have the advantage of their experience, and would not go in first.” The Yankee sailors watched and learned, but this would not be the last time Dana would find

⁸⁰³ J & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to McTavish, McGillivray & Co., Montreal, 6 September 1816. JEC Extracts.

himself impressed by the prowess of kanakas.⁸⁰⁴ The Perkinses, however, expressed ambivalence about the Hawaiians. The Perkinses were amongst the early American merchants to recognize the potential of the Sandwich Island products in trade, especially sandalwood, but they also urged their ship captains to spend as little time there as possible.⁸⁰⁵ While part of this may have been a fear of desertion by crew members, James and Thomas H. Perkins both came of age with stories of Captain Cook's grisly death at the hands of Hawaiians.

For the Perkinses, their contract with the NWC allowed them to profit in a market they likely would have otherwise abandoned. The NWC trappers themselves faced declining yields. Their annual shipment of pelts averaged as follows: 36,822 pelts between 1792-96, 20-25,000 1804-1808 and 15,000 1813-1823.⁸⁰⁶ And these numbers mask a bigger shift: the depopulation of the more lucrative species and targeting of alternative animal populations. ... In early 1816, the Perkinses dispatched their first such vessel: the *Alexander* under Captain John C. Bancroft. In the years 1819 and 1820, James & T.H. Perkins & Co. sent the *Hamilton*, *Levant*, *Nautilus*, and *Augusta* to carry \$124,042.84 worth of furs and sandalwood.⁸⁰⁷

The collaboration between the NWC and the Perkinses ended in 1822. That year the United States imposed an *ad valorem* duty of 50 per cent on three-quarters of the

⁸⁰⁴ Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast and Other Voyages* (New York: Library of America : Distributed to the trade in the United States by Penguin Putnam, 2005), chapter IX.

⁸⁰⁵ See for example Letter of Instruction to Captain Jos. Ingraham, Brigantine Hope for NW Coast, 14 September 1790. Thomas Handasyd Perkins Papers. MHS. Charles Bullard to Bryant, Sturgis & Co. 20 March 1821 to August 25. Charles Bullard Letterbook, Hawaii and Canton. PEM. Harold Whitman Bradley, *The American Frontier in Hawaii; the Pioneers, 1789-1843* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1942).

⁸⁰⁶ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*.

⁸⁰⁷ J. & T.H. Perkins & Co. Ledger, 1819-1822. Thomas H. Perkins Papers, Reel 10. MHS.

profits. At about the same time, the Hudson's Bay Company absorbed the NWC. Ironically, the new combined Company once again tried to collaborate with the East India Company to the same effect. In 1824 and 1825, the HBC shipped 20,000 beaver and 7,000 otter skins to China to be sold by the EIC. But the EIC agents in Canton had little experience selling furs and viewed such a small cargo as insignificant. The prices they got for the goods brought a profit to neither the HBC nor the EIC.

The East India Company's monopoly in China meant that to ship furs to China, the NWC and HBC required a license and employ EIC agents in China or had to seek out alternate modes of trade. Thus, as ridiculous as it felt to British observers and even to the Americans, Canadian companies still fared better paying American merchants to carry their goods than to deal with the EIC. Little wonder then that as the East India Company's monopoly came up for discussion in Parliament, American niche trading emerged as a sore spot.

Opium: the British Levant Company & the East India Company

Turkish opium was yet another boom commodity that the Perkinses aimed to control, purchased in another "niche" market where competition between larger powers provided an opening. Further, it is another example of how maintaining a robust mercantile network increased the influence of the core participants. By the 1817-1818 season, the Perkinses virtually controlled the Chinese market in Turkish opium.⁸⁰⁸ They did so through a combination of betting that increased stringency in anti-opium efforts by the Chinese government would scare off competitors—which it did, including such wealthy American merchants as Stephen Girard—and by employing a bit of muscle in

⁸⁰⁸ Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40," 426.

their business tactics. Ironically, the existence of the British East India Company's monopoly once again enabled this niche market. Company officials clamped down on British competition in importing opium from other regions into its jurisdiction in order to protect the Company's own interest in Bengali opium.⁸⁰⁹ The devastation of the French Wars limited European competition, thus creating a niche market for American merchants. Further, in a second irony, Americans traded in Smyrna under the protection of the British Levant Company.

While the East India Company and the Levant Company shared obligations to Britain and to their respective shareholders, they did not necessarily owe allegiance to each other. Yet clearly the matter was not so simple: in December of 1809, the consul-general of the Levant Company, Isaac Morier, defended extensively the practice of providing protection to Americans in a letter to the British ambassador. Morier explained that if Americans did not receive protection from them, they would only go to the French, Swedish, Dutch, Austrian, or Danish. Thus, why not reap the benefits of the American trade for themselves? He asserted that the Americans brought only colonial articles and thus did not compete with British exports, namely, manufactures. Besides, "our Government would probably prefer to avoid fresh occasions of dispute with America." But there were tangible benefits as well. First, the Americans consigned their cargoes to British firms and the Levant Company in Smyrna and Constantinople. And second, the

⁸⁰⁹ The Company's charter excluded British private traders from trade between Europe and China. But after a few abortive attempts in the late eighteenth century, the Company also refused to carry opium in its own vessels. As Charles Stelle writes, the two combined "to produce a situation in which private English shipping could not, and the Company's vessels would not, carry the drug to China. As a result, Americans were assured freedom from English competition—which amounted to freedom from any important competition." Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, 10-11, Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, Prior to 1820," 430.

Levant Company received a duty paid to their treasurer.⁸¹⁰ After 1811, the British Levant Company no longer allowed foreign vessels to sail the Union Jack in Turkish ports, but they continued to offer merchants their protection in exchange for a consular fee of approximately 1% of imported and exported cargoes. While relatively affordable for merchants, the fees still provided a decent income for the Company. Between 1799 and 1810, the Levant Company received \$65,500 in fees from American merchants alone.⁸¹¹

The Perkinses tested opium from Smyrna (modern-day Izmir), Persia, and India in order to locate the most promising supplies.⁸¹² While they experimented in opium trading during the French Wars, shipping the drug to South East Asian ports as well as to China, their dealings in opium accelerated rapidly following the peace treaties of 1815.⁸¹³ As early as 1807, the Secret Committee of the East India Company Court of Directors in London directed their representatives in Canton to monitor the American trade. Initially,

⁸¹⁰ Isaac Morier to Mr. Adair, 6 December 1809, quoted in Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles in 1810," 213-214.

⁸¹¹ Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles in 1810," 212, 223.

⁸¹² In September 1817, for example, the Perkinses directed Edward Newton of Samuel G. Perkins & Co. to look into the prospects of opium from the Gulf of Persia. By 1817, Newton was stationed in Calcutta, although much of his dealings seem to have been in cotton, indigo, and similar types of Indian produce, but not, as far as I can tell, opium. Perkins & Co., Boston, to E. A. Newton, 8 September 1817. JEC Extracts. Persian opium was cheaper even than Turkish opium. While the Perkinses managed a successful venture in Persian opium in 1818, this seems to have been an outlying venture. Their early experiments in Indian opium seem to have been largely for sale in South East Asian ports (Batavia, Borneo, Siam, Sumatra), with the exception of a venture of 1819 in which the Perkinses inquired after purchasing Bengali opium in London. J. & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston to Charles Cabot, January 1804; Charles Cabot to J. & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston, 1 December 1804. JEC Extracts. In the 1820s, however, they did report selling Malwa and Patna opium. See, for example, Thomas H. Perkins Memorandum Book, January 1824 – April 1828. Thomas H. Perkins Papers, Reel 5, Volume 31. MHS. Stephen H. Higginson operated out of Calcutta in the late 1820s, but the Perkinses also worked with Parsee merchants as well such as Hormajee Dorabjee and others.

⁸¹³ In 1811, they wrote to Joseph Langdon, supercargo for the *John Adams*, to look into exchanging nankeens for opium or quicksilver at Malta. But their next record of inquiries into opium was their August of 1815 instructions to John Hurrod, the supercargo of the Brig *Monkey* to invest the proceeds of coffee and sugar sales into opium and quicksilver at Malta. J. & T. H. Perkins, Boston, to Joseph Langdon, 15 November 1811, to John Hurrod, 23 August 1815. JEC Extracts.

the Company Supercargoes at Canton dismissed the Americans as a threat, noting that Turkish opium was known to be inferior, was held in low estimation by the Chinese, and was largely used to adulterate their own product of Bengali opium. Jefferson's 1808 Embargo cut down any threat of American competition at this earlier date, but by 1818, Company officials were not so sanguine. Estimates of the opium traffic are notoriously unreliable, but, according to Charles Stelle, the level of American importations of opium to China shifted from 2-4% of the total imports in the seasons 1805 to 1807 to between 10 and 30% in the seasons 1816 to 1818.⁸¹⁴ There were three varieties of Indian opium sold in China: the higher quality Patna and Benares varieties which became the Company trademark and the Malwa opium produced by the Indian Native States, usually sold by the Portuguese.⁸¹⁵ Yet because the East India Company's separated opium production in India from the selling opium in China to subcontracted private traders, the Company had few strategies at its disposal for reining in American competition. Instead, they increased yields of the Bengal drug in India.⁸¹⁶ While the Americans increased their trade of Turkish opium in the 1820s, its percentage within the overall traffic declined.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁴ Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, Prior to 1820," 433, 442. Of course, the market tanked in 1819 from the overplying of the earlier seasons. Where Stelle estimates that the Perkinses alone imported 1,350 piculs of opium in 1817, by 1819, Company supercargoes estimated the Americans brought only 180 piculs of Turkish opium.

⁸¹⁵ Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, 108.

⁸¹⁶ David Iglar, "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004): 693-719, Charles C. Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, 1821-1839," *Pacific Historical Review* 10 (1941): 57-74, Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, Prior to 1820," 443.

⁸¹⁷ Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, 1821-1839," 57. Stelle quotes the figures from Hosea Morse's *International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1, p. 209 as follows: the total imported chests of opium tabulated by the Company surged from 4,244 in 1821 to 5,959 in 1822, 7,773 in 1823, 9,035 in 1824, and 12,434 in 1825.

By the late 1810s, most local American commission firms, from Samuel Russell & Co. to Wilcocks & Latimer, accepted the leadership of John Perkins Cushing in the Chinese opium market.⁸¹⁸ For merchants willing to brave confiscation of their entire cargo, Cushing pressured arriving agents to accept prices as set by the Perkinses. Those who refused risked being ruined anyway: the Perkinses would use their own supply and contacts to drive down prices below what arriving agents could accept, often purchasing the opium themselves. As Benjamin Latimer reflected in 1833, “the agent had to come into some arrangement with them to sell conjointly . . . or be obliged to dispose of it, at much below what the quotations just previous to arrival led him to expect, and then immediately after he has sold out, and before his Drug has been delivered, greatly to his mortification the market rises without any apparent cause.”⁸¹⁹ It helped that the Perkinses had loyal agents in Boston, London, Leghorn, Canton, and Macau, thus providing for a smooth flow of products and information: agents were usually aware of potential competitors well before their arrival.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁸ Before Perkins & Co. and Samuel Russell & Co. merged after the tragic death of Thomas Tunno Forbes in 1828, the two firms nonetheless worked together often. When John Perkins Cushing left China in 1828, he told Forbes to turn to Samuel Russell as a mentor. John Perkins Cushing, “Memo for Mr. Forbes respecting Canton affairs,” 21 March 1828. The Papers of Robert Bennet Forbes, Reel 12. MHS. Note that there were some British merchants who risked smuggling Turkish opium into China—but according to Jacques Downs, even they succumbed to Cushing’s leadership in the sale of Turkish opium. Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, 123.

⁸¹⁹ John R. Latimer to G.G. & S. Howland and Elisha Tibbets, 12 September 1833 quoted in Downs, “American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40,” 431.

⁸²⁰ The Perkinses used a variety of agents and correspondents in order to manage their opium trade, but their first official agent to the Mediterranean was a young nephew of James Perkins’s wife by the name of Frederick W. Paine. Paine lived in Leghorn beginning in 1817, but oversaw the Perkinses opium trade in conjunction with Woodman & Offley of Smyrna and Grant, Pillans & Co. of Leghorn. Paine first traveled the Mediterranean in March of 1817 as supercargo for the Brig *Adriana*. The Perkinses also directed Paine to inquire with Perkins & Co. of Smyrna, but they relied upon them less than their more regular correspondents of Woodman & Offley and Grant, Pillans & Co. J. & T. H. Perkins & Co., Boston, to F. W. Paine, 10 March 1817, 16 March 1817, 4 February 1818, 24 March 1818, 8 May 1818, 5 January

Two linked changes shook up the Anglo-American trade in ways that revealed precisely how significant opium was to merchants of both nations, the Chinese, and the continued importance of the East India Company in framing American strategies. First, the Chinese imperial government clamped down on the opium trade. While the Emperor (Yongzheng) issued an edict against trafficking opium as early as 1729, enforcement was erratic. Of course, the nature of the traffic changed considerably over the course of the eighteenth century. On March 24, 1811, the then Emperor (Jiaqing) issued a new edict ordering the superintendents of maritime customs to enforce the prohibition on opium.⁸²¹ Chinese memorialists in Beijing wrote that opium threatened “China like a poison, draining the people’s wealth and destroying their lives,” challenging the Qing government’s very legitimacy.⁸²² Foreign merchants in China countered that local Chinese officials alternately cracked down on the opium trade and abetted its existence. To them, the willingness of Chinese officials to “wink” at the opium trade (and profit from it) justified the trade’s existence.⁸²³

1819, 14 April 1819. Perkins & Co., Canton to F. W. Paine, 20, 21, 25, 26, 29 September 1820. JEC Extracts.

In 1823, Joseph W. Langdon became their agent in the region. As mentioned above, James and Thomas Perkins had employed Langdon as early as 1811 when he served as a supercargo for their ship the *John Adams*, bound for Gibraltar. By the 1820s, Langdon was one of the most prominent American merchants in Smyrna. The Perkinses relied upon Langdon at least through 1832.

⁸²¹ Lo-shu Fu, *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-Western Relations, 1644-1820* (Tucson,: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1966), 381. See also Hsin-pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964).

⁸²² See Chen, "Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Western Knowledge of Chinese Law and Society, 1750–1900," 373.

⁸²³ See for example Robert Bennet Forbes’s commentary on precisely this to his wife on 12 December 1838, as quoted in Forbes and Kerr, *Letters from China : The Canton-Boston Correspondence of Robert Bennet Forbes, 1838-1840*, 75-76.

Americans were deeply implicated in the crackdown, as was the vast majority of the foreign trading community at Canton. The *Wabash* affair of 1817 and the *Emily* (or Terranova) incident of 1821 both led to surges in anti-opium crackdowns by Chinese officials. In the former case, Chinese pirates captured and ransacked the *Wabash*, a Baltimore ship, off the coast of southern China. In the latter, a member of the *Emily*'s crew (Francis Terranova) reportedly dropped a pot on a Chinese peddler woman's head and killed her. In both, controversy opened cargoes from American vessels to public view and both vessels carried opium. In both, Chinese trials and executions became public spectacles over the nature of Chinese justice. To a number of scholars, these trials drove British and American merchants together⁸²⁴ The official response focused critiques of the Chinese government as lawless and corrupt. Foreigners complained that Chinese law was unnecessarily severe, inconsistent, and thus despotic.⁸²⁵ After all, local Chinese officials normally colluded with the trade. Their participation made it possible. Opium smuggling was not a foreign project, but a hybrid, Chinese-Western enterprise. Complaints against the opium crackdowns thus intersected with a number of regulations that seemed less about morality or statecraft than about enriching venal mandarins—including the prohibition of women as discussed in chapter five, but also including

⁸²⁴ To Jacques Downs, the incidents forged a newfound sympathy between British and American observers. Downs, *The Golden Ghetto*, 121. From a legal history perspective, see Eileen P. Scully, *Bargaining with the State from Afar : American Citizenship in Treaty Port China, 1844-1942* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 36-38.

⁸²⁵ For more on the "sensitivity" of foreign observers, see Chen, "Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Western Knowledge of Chinese Law and Society, 1750–1900." Chen's dissertation is an inspiring, insightful project, but he is interested in the developing culture of imperialism to the exclusion of developing commercial ideologies as also cultural. In attempting to push past arguments about property rights and economic interest, he misses an opportunity to note that these are also being produced in these spaces as well.

prohibitions on trading with shopkeepers rather than Hong merchants, limits on geographic mobility, and more.

The 1817 and 1821 crack downs successfully frightened off Hong merchants now refused to serve as security merchants on foreign cargoes known to include opium. From 1817 to 1819, Houqua joined with the Perkinses to purchase Turkish opium.⁸²⁶ But these early ventures did not last. By October 1818, John Perkins Cushing formed a co-partnership with James Perkins Sturgis that allowed Houqua to maintain his interest in Perkins & Co. without involvement in the opium trade. That would be handled by James P. Sturgis & Co. But Cushing considered a variety of other mechanisms for limiting risk in opium importations as well.⁸²⁷ At issue was not a desire to end the trade, but safer methods for smuggling.

Second, as a result of the crackdowns on opium trading, British and subsequently American merchants set up what H. B. Morse referred to as “the Lintin system.” Under this mode of smuggling, opium importers brought their cargoes to a ship docked off of Lintin Island downriver from Whampoa and Canton. The storeship would hold the opium while the vessels, opium-free could proceed upriver with their legal commerce. Chinese brokers would then purchase quantities of opium from merchants upriver and send separate “fast crab” or “smuggling dragon” boats to pick up the goods. These boats were long, narrow highly maneuverable (and heavily armed) crafts well-suited to their illegal purpose. The boats pulled alongside the storeship, presented “opium chits” as

⁸²⁶ The letters above between the Perkinses and F. W. Paine include several inclusions of Houqua as an interested party. Further, their ledgers include a “Houqua opium account,” Thomas H. Perkins Papers, Reel 7. MHS.

⁸²⁷ Perkins & Co., Canton to J. & T.H. Perkins & Co., Boston 17 November 1821. Perkins-Russell Papers, Perkins & Co. Letterbook, vol. 20. BL.

evidence of purchase, pay off requisite cumshas and any balance due, and sidle away with the contraband. Thus, stowage owners made money off demurrage fees and a commission paid by the opium importers. And thus the Chinese opium brokers dealt with the elements of the trade that made the Western merchants most uncomfortable: paying off officials, transporting the opium into China, delivering the good to consumers.⁸²⁸ The British initiated this system, Americans quickly followed. But as Charles Stelle argued, the Americans once again reaped the benefit of the British East India Company's policies: British vessels were not allowed to handle Turkish opium which might threaten the Company's investment in the production of Indian opium. "By the grace of the East India Company, Americans were assured the same freedom from English competition in the storage of Turkish opium at the outer anchorages as they already enjoyed in the carriage of the drug."⁸²⁹

Americans opium importations to China were small relative to the British, but their participation in the trade significantly shaped the nature of the trade overall. From their entrance into the trade until the end of the East India Company monopoly on importing Chinese tea into Britain in 1833, Americans were by far the largest purchasers of Turkish opium, and Perkins & Company alone comprised anywhere from a half to three-quarters of this trade.⁸³⁰ To Jacques Downs, the American opium trade was significant in two primary respects. First, even if Americans did not believe they

⁸²⁸ Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, 122-123.

⁸²⁹ Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, 1821-1839," 62.

⁸³⁰ Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40," 432. Chapter three of Downs's book is based on this article. See Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*.

supported British aggression against China and demands for restitution for confiscated opium, private American involvement in opium trade nonetheless shaped the American posture toward diplomacy with China and ultimately other nations as well. Second, American actions shaped British behavior as well by demonstrating that Chinese consumers were willing to absorb more opium than the British had believed possible, by fostering new sources of opium supply, and by spurring the British in India to greater opium cultivation through competition.⁸³¹

These niches in trade became sore spots for British merchants who felt this commerce should have been rightfully theirs. As we have seen, the existence of foreign monopolies actually proved beneficial for numerous American traders who, like the Perkinses, located niches of trade as “free” and neutral merchants. British complaints about Americans in many ways echoed a longer-standing ebb and flow of jealousies of Dutch free trade in the seventeenth century and the French and Spanish in the eighteenth century.⁸³² As one “anti-Jonathan” wrote, the “peculiar advantages” of American merchants ranged from cheaper freight costs, better behaved mariners, and a toleration for smuggling and commercial avarice to the ability to profit from trade routes that *should* be in British hands.⁸³³ In parliamentary debates over the state of British trade and the value of the British East India Company, American niche trading surfaced as a primary example of everything that was wrong with mercantilism. To critics of the EIC,

⁸³¹ Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-40," 419.

⁸³² Koot, "A 'Dangerous Principle': Free Trade Discourses in Barbados and the English Leeward Islands, 1650-1689," Matson and Onuf, *A Union of Interests*. Americans joined in this vacillating critique of British mercantilist policy, with criticisms abating as the policies seemed to foster prosperity.

⁸³³ "American Trade with China," *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies* 13, no. 77 (May 1822): 417-8. *The Asiatic Journal* was an East India Company paper.

American “free traders” demonstrated the superiority of commerce without state-chartered monopolies.

Americans “free traders” & the end of the East India Company monopoly in China

In the early nineteenth century, when Americans spoke of “free traders,” they often referred to British merchants who operated on the outskirts of the East India Company monopoly. Also known as “country” or “private” traders, British free traders profited from carrying cotton, indigo, and opium between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Many of these British firms began through principals who worked with the East India Company before striking out on their own: William Fairlie and John Fergusson of Fairlie, Fergusson & Co.—themselves connected to Beale-Magniac and Jardine Matheson—to John Palmer of Palmer & Co.⁸³⁴ Parsee merchants such as Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy also dominated this trade. The East India Company retained the cream of the China trade for itself by monopolizing the direct trade from China to Britain, but they conveniently outsourced the traffic of its Indian opium crops with China to these private firms. For decades, the arrangement profited both. By the 1810s, however, the division of labor increasingly chafed British free traders who wondered that they couldn’t handle the Company’s trade better than the Company itself. To them, Americans were the real free traders. And the grass was infinitely greener.

American China traders provided an important foil for British opponents to the East India Company’s monopoly on trade with China. The French Wars cleared international waters of Britain’s traditional rivals, France, Spain, and Holland, providing

⁸³⁴ Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, 35-36.

commercial opportunities for not only British traders, but also Americans. In East India Company correspondence between London and foreign outposts, attention to rivals shifted from the Dutch, the French, and the Portuguese in the 1790s, to the Americans in the 1810s. A central argument, made in 1813, 1821 and then again and again in the 1830 Parliamentary hearings on the Company monopoly on Chinese tea sold in the British empire, was that free trade was necessary to allow British traders to compete with Americans who themselves demonstrated the advantages of a free and open trade. Monopoly opponents described American merchants as evidence of the advantages to be had in foreign trade without the fetters of the East India Company's monopoly. The Perkinses may not have referred to themselves as free traders, but this did not stop others from depicting them as demonstrating the promise of trade without the barriers of chartered monopolies.

In a recently published history of Anglo-American involvement in the East Indies trade, James Fichter argues that American trade with India “was one of the primary reasons that in 1813 Parliament revoked the Company's monopoly on Indian trade.”⁸³⁵ The historiography on the demise of the Company's monopoly in India usually turns on the lobbying of British manufacturers, but Fichter counters that “Even Leeds's manufacturers failed to make the strictly industrial argument against the Company that one might have expected.” Instead, manufacturers themselves promoted the view that “The extensive and flourishing commerce which the citizens of America have carried on for several years with India, and particularly with the Chinese empire, without any sort of restraint, is a proof that these expectations of the advantages to be obtained from the

⁸³⁵ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 232.

exertions of private individuals are not unfounded.’’⁸³⁶ And the Company’s detractors were right. With the end of the Company’s monopoly in India, British exports surged. In the years 1814-1822, British exports to Asia grew to an average of £2.9 million, up from an average of £1.8 million for the period 1804-1812.⁸³⁷

American competition was a genuine source of concern. By official count, American imports from China peaked at about \$5.2 million in 1821-22. The trade vacillated over the next two decades, but by 1841-1842, the final years of the Opium War between Britain and China, imports stood just shy of \$4.9 million. The total American trade in China outstripped that of the East India Company before the Company lost its China monopoly in 1834.⁸³⁸ At the same time, preoccupation with American merchants served as a foil for domestic debates about the appropriate role of the British state in trade. The 1813 debates connected to a number of domestic political concerns, from dissatisfaction with government subsidies for the Company, to concerns over the stoppage of cotton and wheat imports and other unrest coming out of war with the United

⁸³⁶ “A Petition of the merchants, ship-owners, and traders of King’s Lynn,” 9 February 1813, Hansard, vol. 24, cols. 416-7 as quoted in Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 234. The tensions between London financial interests and provincial manufacturers is at the core of the Cain and Hopkins’ thesis of “gentlemanly capitalists.” A Cain and Hopkins student, Anthony Webster, amends their thesis in important respects. To Webster, the 1813 charter fight had more to do with changes within the government than a victory of the provincial interest—who he notes did not really begin their 1812 campaign until after the decision to end the India charter had already been basically made. The provincial interests were more significant in the 1833 campaign. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism : Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, Gallagher, “The Imperialism of Free Trade.”, Kumagai, “The Lobbying Activities of Provincial Mercantile and Manufacturing Interests against the Renewal of the East India Company’s Charter, 1812-1813 and 1829-1833. .”, Webster, *The Debate on the Rise of the British Empire*, Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790-1860*.

⁸³⁷ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit : How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism*, 250-251.

⁸³⁸ David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement : American Economic Expansion across the Pacific, 1784-1900* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 11.

States, to frustrations over the stymieing of the Canadian fur trade's China connection.⁸³⁹ Yet two things are interesting here. First, the decisions were not merely instrumental but also bound up in ideological shifts over the possibilities of liberalization for expanding trade overall. Thus, as Anthony Webster has shown, the "gentlemanly capitalists" of London took complex political stances rooted in a hedging of bets within different markets. Company directors increasingly had a foot in the Company and another in private trade as well. Second, British and American thinkers were more self-referential than scholars tend to allow—especially British historians who, as Fichter argues, have tended to see Americans as producers (of cotton, especially) and as purchasers, but have skipped over the discussions of American merchants within the historical record.

Ironically, as James Fichter notes, East India Company officials' penchant for recording and tracking competitors large and small made their own records a potent source for its detractors. One example of the "American threat" as revealed in the Company records was a surge in the East India knock off goods being smuggled into China by American merchants. In April of 1820, the East India Company's Secret Committee in London complained of a discovery that Americans were selling imitation Company textiles in China.⁸⁴⁰ The knock-offs accorded to Company specifications in

⁸³⁹ Anthony Webster, "The Political Economy of Trade Liberalization: The East India Company Charter Act of 1813," *The Economic History Review* 43, no. 3 (1990): 404-419, Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790-1860*. Webster and Fichter provide rather different political readings of the changes taking place. To Fichter, Robert Dundas, Lord Melville, was the key figure, even after Buckinghamshire took over. Both advocated an end to the Company's monopoly. To Webster, the London interests were less inept and more indecisive with some Company directors themselves favoring an end to the monopoly.

⁸⁴⁰ Minutes of the Secret Commercial Committee in London, 18 April 1820. L/P&S/1/14 [India Office: Political and Secret Department Records 1756-c1950]. British Library, London. On early American attitudes toward trademarks and other intellectual property measures, see Doron S. Ben-Atar, *Trade Secrets : Intellectual Piracy and the Origins of American Industrial Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

shape, size, and even in packaging, complete with an insignia designed to match the Company's mark with the slight adjustment of replacing the "V" with an "N" [see photograph below]. The object, the London Committee felt, was to pass "inferior Articles the character and value of those of superior description exported by the Company," thus capitalizing on (and compromising) the Company's reputation.⁸⁴¹ The insult to the injury was that the articles—bombazetts, long ells, camlets, and other woolen cloths—were made not in the United States, but in Britain, and exported out of London and Liverpool. Two ships they knew to carry such goods were the *Ophelia* and the *Robert Edwards*. One ship alone carried £40,691 worth of textiles.⁸⁴² The *Ophelia* was a Perkins vessel.⁸⁴³



IMAGE 5. 1791 Copper Coin showing the British East India Company trademark.

Source: Coinarchives.com

⁸⁴¹ Minutes of the Secret Commercial Committee in London, 18 April 1820, pp. 228-9. L/P&S/1/14 [India Office: Political and Secret Department Records 1756-c1950]. BL.

⁸⁴² Minutes of the Secret Commercial Committee in London, 18 April 1820. L/P&S/1/14 [India Office: Political and Secret Department Records 1756-c1950]. BL.

⁸⁴³ The cargo of the *Ophelia* was split between J. & T.H. Perkins & Co., Samuel G. Perkins & Co., and Bryant, Sturgis & Co.

The knock-off goods forced Company officials to examine their business practices. London directed the EIC secretary in Canton, N. H. C. Plowden, to inform the Chinese Hong merchants of the ruse immediately and to warn them that while the merchandise was known to be carried under the American flag, it was not unlikely that vessels bearing other flags might try as much as well. Worse, committee members worried that the Hong merchants themselves might consider it more profitable to traffic in the imitation goods than the originals. Thus the London committee members advised Plowden that “it will be highly desirable that you should consult with such of the Hong Merchants are the most unconnected with the American trade.”⁸⁴⁴ Two years later, the market was particularly tough: a letter from the Select Committee in China informed London of price drops on textiles of all descriptions ranging from 20-30% lower than the preceding season. The supercargoes in China offered two reasons for the crash in the textile market: “the impoverished state of the Dealers and the alarming and increased importation of Woollens (sic) by American ships.”⁸⁴⁵ The letter discussed at the April 24 meeting defended that “considerable quantities of Broad Cloth are imported under the American Flag, but the greater part are smuggled from the ships at Whampoa.”⁸⁴⁶ By

⁸⁴⁴ Minutes of the Secret Commercial Committee in London, 18 April 1820, pp. 230-1. L/P&S/1/14 [India Office: Political and Secret Department Records 1756-c1950]. British Library, London. Ironically given this concern, the minutes also list several suggestions made by Houqua, including not increasing the numbers of scarlet imports because of the symbolic use of red in Chinese culture – that these textiles would only be purchased for women’s clothing or chairs and tables for mandarins – and that they should limit their import of textiles overall in order to stabilize prices. This the committee dismissed as simply opening the door for American competition. See 22 April 1822 minutes.

⁸⁴⁵ Minutes of the Secret Commercial Committee in London, 24 April 1820, p. 271. L/P&S/1/14 [India Office: Political and Secret Department Records 1756-c1950]. BL.

⁸⁴⁶ Minutes of the Secret Commercial Committee in London, 24 April 1820. L/P&S/1/14 [India Office: Political and Secret Department Records 1756-c1950]. BL.

smuggling the goods into Canton and avoiding the regular duties of the trade, knock-off goods outcompeted Company merchandise.

The knock off goods not only compromised the Company's reputation, they depreciated prices for the Company's textiles as well. The Company thus employed a "confidential Chinese" to spy on the Americans. Company agents instructed the man to purchase a selection of patterns of the imitation woollens and to report on the prices, sizes, and "relative estimation in which the Company's and American Woollens (sic) are held by the Chinese in Canton."⁸⁴⁷ Through this informant, the Company learned that 5-6,000 pieces had been imported in the 1821-2 season. In addition to the staple patterns sold by the Company, the Americans had introduced new colors such as olive, light green, and a variety of mixed-pattern fabrics. This was not cause for concern however, "as these Colors are chiefly adapted for particular purposes, principally for the use of Women they have only been brought in small quantities, and are entirely approved for the purpose intended."⁸⁴⁸ The American goods were "decidedly inferior" and could not compete "on fair terms"—the smugglers succeeded only through the evasion of duties.

As a further step, the Superintendent of Imports called on the resident agent in Canton for the *Ophelia*, "a Person of great respectability long resident in China, and who had besides been more largely engaged in the Woollen (sic) Trade than any of his Countrymen, to gain what information he could on the subject."⁸⁴⁹ Given the fact that the *Ophelia* was a Perkins vessel, it is quite likely that this agent was John Perkins Cushing.

⁸⁴⁷ EIC Secret Committee Letters, 10 April 1822. G/12/284 [EIC Factory Records: Secret Committee's Letters Received from China, June 27, 1821 – Feb. 6, 1823]. BL.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid.

By 1822 Cushing was one of the most established, esteemed Americans in Canton. The Company felt from the “great respectability of the authority” that they could trust the American gentleman and hoped that the woolens trade would return to normal. According to the Superintendent, the American informed him that the early voyages had been profitable, but that the overstocked state of the market meant that the more recent ventures had been losses. The American claimed that on the news of the low prices to be had, their London agents had attempted to sell off a more recent cargo in Britain at 15% below cost. Unable to find a buyer even at that price, the agent decided to send along the goods and try the Chinese market. The American concluded that “there was little chance of their interfering anymore with the Company in the Woollen (sic) Trade, that past experience had taught them it was not to be carried on on a permanent footing whilst such a preference was always given to the Company’s Woollens (sic), and he likewise believed that every other American House that had been concerned it would soon be compelled to adopt the same course.”⁸⁵⁰ At the time of the interview, the drop in prices would have been enough to turn any casual trader away from woolens. Yet if the American was indeed Cushing, the Perkinses did not stay out of the woolens trade, at least not in the long run.⁸⁵¹

The Secret Commercial Committee recommended two remedies. First, the Company could take action to ensure that foreign vessels, especially American and Dutch traders, could not carry British manufactures to China. This seemed impracticable: foreigners could transship goods legally. Second the Company could reduce the amount

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁵¹ For a future order for such goods, see for example Thomas H. Perkins to Joshua Bates, 27 January 1827. House Correspondence, Folder 5.1.31.58. Baring.

of staples exported to China. But this seemed opposed to the purpose of the East India Company: if foreign merchants could profit from British manufacturers, the Company should be able to do so as well. Given the end of the Company's India monopoly in 1813 and the subsequent surge in British textiles exported to those ports, this was not a politically viable option.⁸⁵² How could the Company demand a monopoly of the Chinese tea trade if Parliament could argue that they had failed to provide as many British manufactures as were demanded by the Chinese?⁸⁵³

Concern over this encroachment by Americans was no small thing. The imitation goods combined with the near doubling in American vessels arriving in Canton from 1821 to 1822 to forty-two vessels total roused Company agents to action.⁸⁵⁴ By their estimate, Americans brought imports into Canton valued at \$7,413,096 compared with the Company's own \$6,199,242 that season. According to David Iglar, this perceived threat led the Company to increase its dependence on the highly addictive Patna opium in order to maintain profitability.⁸⁵⁵ But the specter of American competition also structured British debates over monopoly and trade. After all, if Americans could profit from selling British manufactures in China (and this was a question), was there not room for British private traders to profit as well? Was American competition not an indication

⁸⁵² Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790-1860*.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, 281-2.

⁸⁵⁴ See "List of American Vessels at the Port of Canton, Season 1821, 1822," and "Estimate of the Import Trade on American Vessels at the Port of Canton, Season 1821, 1822," in *Canton Diary for Season 1821/1822*. BL. As quoted in Iglar, "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850," 712.

⁸⁵⁵ Iglar, "Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850," 712-713. Iglar draws on March 19 and April 18, 1822 letters between London and Canton in Box G/12/284 and "Statement of Opium Imported into China Season 1821, 1822," G/12/225. BL.

of the Company's laxity in marketing British goods abroad? Did it not indicate that the monopoly hampered British entrepreneurialism, both in manufacturing and in trading? In testimony before Parliament in 1821 and again in 1830, Company officials and other observers continued to look at American traders to understand what was right and what was wrong with the East India Company's monopoly on the Chinese tea trade.

1821 hearings on Expanding British Trade in Asia

In 1820 and 1821, a Select Committee of the House of Lords gathered with the purpose of investigating prospects for expanding British trade in Asia.⁸⁵⁶ The Committee claimed not to be interested in the East India Company specifically, save in respect to the "present state of and future prospects of free trade," but the Company could not help but be a focus. When the 1813 Charter Act ended the East India Company's commercial monopoly in India, exports of British manufactures in India tripled. Thus, a keen area of interest to the Select Committee was whether or not the Company's monopoly hindered the export of British manufactures in Asia. Americans featured in the hearings as both competitors and as exemplars of free trade in action.

The hearings questioned witnesses on the structure and profitability of trade by various merchants throughout Asia. The central issue was what an end to the Company's monopoly would mean: would an end to the Company's monopoly "enable the British free trader to enter into an immediate and successful competition with those of other countries, and more particularly of the United States, by whom these branches of

⁸⁵⁶ Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 11 April 1821.", Henry M. Lansdowne Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Second Report [Relative to the Silk and Wine Trade,] from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the Means of Extending and Securing the Foreign Trade of the Country, and to Report to the House; Together with the Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Said Committee:--8th June 1821," in *Document type: HOUSE OF COMMONS PAPERS; REPORTS OF COMMITTEES* (1821)

commerce have been carried on for some years past” as private British traders claimed? Or, by ending the stable relationship between the British Company and Chinese Hong merchants, would an end to the monopoly drive up the prices while degrading the quality of teas available in Britain?⁸⁵⁷ Did the *existence* of the EIC monopoly enable American free traders to outcompete their British counterparts? Of the twenty-seven witnesses who testified before the Select Committee, ranging from British ship captains to American commission merchants to members of Parliament and of the EIC’s court of directors, all received questions about the American trade.

Members of the 1821 Select Committee were interested in precisely the type of niches in trade discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, Edward Ellice, a member of the House of Commons, testified on the cost of the EIC’s monopoly to the North West Company’s fur trading. Ellice seemed unaware of the North West Company’s relatively recent practice of hiring American vessels to carry furs to China on their behalf. He argued nonetheless that the necessity of receiving a license from the EIC to carry on such trade in British vessels “greatly impeded” such trade and that it “most assuredly” created an advantage for American and Russian merchants. To Ellice, the Pacific trade was on the rise, not the decline, and could readily be extended by carrying East Indian produce to South America. “Those who can carry on the trade at least expense, and with the fewest restrictions, will succeed”: the Americans possessed no natural advantage here, Ellice argued; the trade could and should be British.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁷ Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 11 April 1821," 5-7.

⁸⁵⁸ Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 11 April 1821," 92-94.

Concerns about the smuggled textiles surfaced as well. During his testimony, EIC employee James Goddard answered questions specifically about the Perkinses, Houqua, and shipments of British manufactures to China. The Marquess of Lansdowne quizzed Goddard as follows:

- Are you acquainted with a house at Canton of the name Perkins? – Yes.
- Do you know a merchant of the name Howqua? –Yes, he is a merchant of the Chinese Hong. ...
- Do you know of any agreement entered into between those persons and the house of Perkins and Co. with this country, for the export of a large quantity of manufactured goods from hence? –I am not particularly acquainted with it; I have heard of such a thing existing, but the particulars have not come to my knowledge.
- Would you be surprized (sic) at hearing that an agreement has been entered into by the house of Perkins and Co. in conjunction with Howqua the Hong merchant, to be supplied with goods of British manufacture, to the amount of nearly a million sterling, within one year, and through the Americans? –Certainly not; because I know American have for several years past been in the habit of supplying themselves with the goods of English market, of English manufactures, for the China seas and Canton.⁸⁵⁹

The Company's own reports on American competition came back in the hearings as evidence of Company weakness. While Goddard argued that the EIC monopoly enabled the British market to acquire the first selection of fine teas brought to market, he suggested that the China market held untold potential for selling British woolens and cottons, if only given the opportunity. The EIC did no great service to British manufacturers.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁹ Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 11 April 1821," 11.

⁸⁶⁰ Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 11 April 1821," 11-15.

For each argument Company officials made for the necessity of their monopoly, they received questions about those pesky Americans. How was it that Americans were able to profit from the trade without a monopoly when the Company ostensibly had all the advantages? If Americans did not have a governing body in order to maintain order amongst merchants and mariners abroad, why did their British counterparts require such oversight? Americans, the defense came, were both lawless smugglers and better behaved than the infamously quarrelsome British mariners, thus lawful mediated by an American consul.⁸⁶¹ It was not until 1830, however, that the opposition to the East India Company's China monopoly really organized.

1830 Hearings and the End of the Company's China Monopoly

In 1830, Parliament once more reviewed the East India Company's monopoly on the Chinese tea trade to Britain. The outcome of these hearings was the 1833 Reform Act, legislation that ended the Company's lucrative monopoly on Chinese tea. Following this, the East India Company morphed into a purely administrative body whose central purpose was the governance of colonial India. In the hearings, a variety of witnesses came forth to testify as to the benefits and impediments of the Company's monopoly to trade and stability in the region, to domestic manufactures and prospects for their exports, and to the state in general. Americans featured once again as a central example of what could be done without a monopoly. A variety of Americans and British familiar with American traders answered questions as to the profitability of American trade with China and what the Americans revealed about Company weaknesses.

⁸⁶¹ Petty-Fitzmaurice, "Second Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 8th June 1821," 107, 111.

According to historian Anthony Webster, Joshua Bates was one of the most influential of the witnesses to appear before Parliament in the 1830 hearings in large part because he was *not* associated with the free trade campaign.⁸⁶² Joshua Bates was an American partner for the British banking powerhouse, Baring Brothers. And, as discussed in more depth in chapter 4, Bates was also connected to the Perkins network through friendship and professional connection, as well as marriage to Lucretia Sturgis. Bates testified before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on three separate occasions in 1830 – March 15, March 30, and June 3 – before appearing before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on June 10. In these hearings, Bates spoke on the nature of American involvement in trade in the East Indies, especially China and Manila, relative to East India Company. His specific reference point was the trade of Perkins & Company.

Bates favored an end to the Company monopoly. He used his experience with Perkins & Company to repeatedly suggest that the monopoly left the British at a disadvantage. Bates argued that unfettered access to China for British traders would not only allow private merchants to compete on a par with other “free traders,” namely the Americans, but would likely increase the demand for British manufactures in China overall.⁸⁶³

⁸⁶² Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790-1860*, 98. Certainly this was the opinion of the Glasgow East India Association, which wrote that given Bates’s mercantile success, his testimony before the committees would surely “have more weight.” As quoted in Kumagai, “The Lobbying Activities of Provincial Mercantile and Manufacturing Interests against the Renewal of the East India Company’s Charter, 1812-1813 and 1829-1833.,” 144.

⁸⁶³ “Report [Relative to the Affairs of the East India Company Report] before the House of Lords, Together with Minutes of Evidence, 10 June 1830,” (London: Journal of the House of Lords, 1830), 546-566, especially 563, 1112-1120.

Bates was no doctrinaire free trader. In 1832 he scoffed at the reductions in tariffs that were likely to come in response to the protests against the “tariff of abominations” (and South Carolina’s threat of secession). The American textile industry would do well enough, he felt, “but for the power of the large capitalists engaged in the business on this side who will glut your market as soon as the duties are reduced for no other purpose than to crush your infant establishments.”⁸⁶⁴ More dangerous than Britain’s industrialists, however, were British political economists “who calculate to raise themselves into importance on the cry of free trade in Corn and everything else. Our ministers do not agree to these doctrines but Poulett Thomson, Hume, Doct. Bowring, and a few worthless people of that stain who never could take care of their own money ... think themselves fully competent to guide others.” The threat, Bates felt, was that these men would take advantage of the political turmoil in the United States to push British ministers into some proposal that America’s popular government could not refuse.⁸⁶⁵

Rather than ideological advocacy, two other explanations for Bates’s support for the Reform Act seem more likely. First, Baring Brothers aspired to broaden its interests in China on its own account. Bates himself proposed a China trade plan with his partners in 1833 following the passage of the Reform Act. He wrote the details in his diary: “My plan is to engage those manufacturers who have hitherto supplied the Company to ship on consignment the returns to be made in Tea for superintending the business we to have. 1 ½ on the shipment outward and 2 ½ when we make an advance and 2 ½ % on the returns suppose we were to ship £400,000 at 2%; £8000, returns 600,000 – 2 ½ 15000, going by

⁸⁶⁴ Joshua Bates to Thomas Wren Ward, 4 January 1832. Box 10, Folder 7. Thomas Wren Ward Papers. MHS.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid.

ships 3000, total £26,000. To effect this we should require a capital of £100,000 to be employed.”⁸⁶⁶ While this might put the Barings in competition with their clients in the region, especially the Perkins firms of Perkins & Co. (Russell & Co. as of 1830), Bryant & Sturgis, and Russell & Sturgis, Bates did not see this as a problem. In an 1832 letter to the Barings’ agent in the United States, Bates congratulated himself and the Barings for having established their Liverpool house in advance of the Browns: Liverpool, not London, was the future. But in closing the letter, he directed Ward to share the details of the China business with William Sturgis, hardly the actions of someone who saw himself as breaking ties.⁸⁶⁷

Bates directed the new order of trade with China in other behind-the-scenes roles as well. In April 1832, for example, Bates wrote to the Barings’ American agent, Thomas Wren Ward, that he had played an important role in the shape of the new post-EIC trade in China through his consultations with British officials. “As to the opening of the China trade,” he wrote, “Mr. Grant has consulted me and desired I would give in a plan opening it with a system of duties which I have done and he tells me that the deputies from Liverpool, Glasgow, etc. have come to the conclusion that the plan I submitted is the best one and the only way to do it.” According to Bates, it was his idea that the China trade should be opened by April 1835, that the government should announced fixed periods for dispensing surplus tea (and that it was better to allow the monopoly prices here to fade away in order to promote good relations with the Chinese),

⁸⁶⁶ 25 May 1833 Entry. Diary of Joshua Bates, Volume 1. Baring.

⁸⁶⁷ Joshua Bates to Thomas Wren Ward, 20 April 1832. Thomas Wren Ward Papers, Box 10, Folder 7. MHS.

and that the trade should be confined to ships above 400 tons in order to “insure respectability” in the merchants entering the trade.⁸⁶⁸

Letters from Company officials in Macau to the London-based Court of Directors decried the attempts to end the Company’s monopoly. On November 17, 1831, the Secret Committee headed by Charles Millett and William Baynes wrote that unrestricted trade would make China a refuge for men bankrupt both “in circumstance and character,” and that while British law could catch these men in India, they would be as lost to authorities in China as in the Americas. “Under what is called a Free Trade,” they surmised, “such instances would no longer be of rare occurrence.”⁸⁶⁹ While these comments ring of sour grapes, they were not unfounded. Following the termination of the EIC’s monopoly in India, local agency houses faced an onslaught of competition. Traders with little capital and perhaps only a single vessel leapt at the opportunity, flooding the market with British manufactures. Many of the agency houses had poured capital into shipping in anticipation of freer trade following the 1813 act, leaving even reputable firms stretched thin.⁸⁷⁰

The fact of the matter was, no one knew what the end of the Company’s monopoly in China would mean. In 1833, when Goodhue & Company of New York wrote to Jardine Matheson & Co. as to their expectations of the repercussions from the end of the Company’s China monopoly for the United States, they confessed they were at

⁸⁶⁸ Joshua Bates to Thomas Wren Ward, 20 April 1832. Thomas Wren Ward Papers, Box 10, Folder 7. MHS.

⁸⁶⁹ Letter to the Court of Directors of the East India Company by Charles Millett, William Baynes, etc. at Macao, 17 November 1831. East India Company Secret Committee Letters. G/12/287. BL.

⁸⁷⁰ Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790-1860*, 71-72.

a loss.⁸⁷¹ Sam Cabot, a lead partner at the Perkins & Company Boston office, wrote to Joshua Bates on the subject in March of 1832. Cabot did not expect much change and, to the contrary, felt the Americans could still do well shipping British manufactures for tea and silks for the American trade, undercutting “British Corsicans” through cheaper freight, commissions, etc.⁸⁷² But only a month prior, one of the China trading partners argued the reverse from Canton. As small as the foreign community at Canton was, he wrote, “it is our world, and that the stoppage of the Company’s trade would affect us more here than the appearance in Europe of a second Napoleon, or the Embargo upon every port on the Continent.”⁸⁷³

The Perkinses were not critics of the East India Company’s monopoly, but their mode of trade provided a potent example for those who were. While the American threat was surely exaggerated in parliamentary testimony, this matters less than the larger debates about the nature and modalities of trade. The American model seemed to spotlight everything that was wrong with British trade and thus shaped British arguments of how trade should operate. To American merchants, the threat was that the British would use their naval and financial prowess to push them out of global markets. In the 1830s and 1840s, the United States was a rapidly growing commercial and industrializing nation. Americans grappled with the changing meanings and moralities of commerce in their daily lives. In many ways, Americans continued to do so in Britain’s shadow.

⁸⁷¹ Goodhue & Co. to Jardine Matheson & Co., 4 September 1833. Jardine Matheson & Co. Papers, Reel 477. Cambridge.

⁸⁷² Samuel Cabot, Jr. to Joshua Bates, 28 March 1832. House Correspondence Folder 5.1.10b. Baring.

⁸⁷³ Forbes, *Reminiscences of John Murray Forbes* 154.

American Perspectives on Trade and the “Commercial Interest”

The Perkins firms and their alumni were on the front lines of views of trade at home as well. The firms produced a handful of prominent individuals who contributed to newspapers, lobbied and advised politicians, and served in consular posts abroad. Not surprisingly, they particularly aimed to shape views related to China. In the 1830s and 1840s, China continued to occupy a privileged space in the American imagination as a source of luxuries and philosophy, a political foil as a distant, despotic empire, and, increasingly, as a prospective market for American produce and manufactures. Yet much of American opinion and diplomacy filtered through a relationship closer to home: Anglo-American ties. When tensions flared between Britain and China over official seizures of smuggled opium in 1838, for Americans, the conflict was one of a number of British actions around the globe that bore on American interests. Part of what was interesting about these Perkins merchants was that, in spite of their own diversity of views, they came together to advocate a common policy stance on relations with China.

Viewing the past through the mirror of history, scholars tend to see the Opium War as a wedge issue for “opening China” for “the West” and a step toward overt imperialism in the Pacific for the United States.⁸⁷⁴ This is because, in practice, it was. At the time, however, many Americans disdained what they saw as British aggression against China. John Quincy Adams advocated American support for the British cause and elicited outrage as much as support. Secretary of State Daniel Webster oversaw a diplomatic policy that attempted to garner benefits from British military action while

⁸⁷⁴ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues : The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), Frederic E. Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate : Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861*, 2nd paperback printing ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

maintaining trade relations with China. The aftermath of the conflict, however, was a sequence of formal declarations of American interest in the Pacific beginning with the Tyler Doctrine of 1842, the advent of American extraterritoriality in China through the Treaty of Wangxia in 1844, and several foreign policy stances abroad in accord and alliance with British policy abroad, including American naval incursions “opening” Korea and Japan to foreign trade.

The Opium War attracted Americans’ interest not only because of national commercial and missionary involvement in the region, but also for the war’s moral and geopolitical implications. The distant war between Britain and China may have seemed a remote concern both literally and figuratively, but tensions with Britain hit home. The Opium War began at a time of considerable controversy with Great Britain over a host of issues: disagreements over the borders of Maine and Oregon, British support for Mexico in disputes over Texas, and the British navy’s assertion of the right to search American vessels off the coast of Africa.⁸⁷⁵ To some scholars, the events of the early 1840s provided a final conclusion to enduring tensions between the Americans and British born in the American Revolution.⁸⁷⁶ Undeniably, tensions between the two nations rode high during these years. Whether viewed as the poor downtrodden Chinese or the corrupt, despotic Chinese, few Americans seemed to see the Chinese as offering much resistance to the British naval juggernaut. The Opium War thus represented more than China or opium to Americans, but also the question of whether Americans naturally allied with the

⁸⁷⁵ Hietala, *Manifest Design : Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*, Howard Jones and Donald A. Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny : Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1997), David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation; Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* ([Columbia]: University of Missouri Press, 1973).

⁸⁷⁶ Jones and Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny : Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s*, xiii.

British in questions of empire and international law or whether this was an example of British imperial incursion that Americans, in the legacy of the Revolution, should oppose.⁸⁷⁷

Participants in the Perkins network found themselves in the thick of this controversy. They were well-known China traders, relative experts on the region, and traffickers in opium. Much of the news on the conflict to reach the United States came from British newspapers, China papers, and letters from merchants and missionaries abroad.⁸⁷⁸ To most scholars, the Perkinses formed part of the “commercial interest” within the budding “open door constituency,” but what this meant in the 1840s was considerably different from what it would mean in the 1890s or even 1870s. While Americans eyed Asian markets as a space for surplus production, industrial overproduction was not as much of an issue as it would be by the century’s end.⁸⁷⁹ Yet the controversies at mid-century were significant in laying the groundwork for ideas about fairness in trade and diplomacy.

⁸⁷⁷ Kinley J. Brauer, "The United States and British Expansionism, 1815-1860," *Diplomatic History* 12, no. Winter (1988): 19-37.

⁸⁷⁸ See for example, “Canton; Messrs. Forbes, et. al.” 5 December 1839 *The North American*, p. 2, which included excerpts of merchant letters; “Late from China,” *New York Spectator* 6 February 1840, p. 1 which was one of many to include the letter of protest from American merchants against the British blockade of Canton and submitted to the United States Congress; “Important from China,” *Salem Gazette* 26 October 1841, p. 2, an article that included a republished article from the *Boston Daily Advertiser* with details on the conflict from Robert Bennet Forbes.

⁸⁷⁹ This is not to deny that Americans viewed Asian consumers as potential outlets for American manufactures at this point. As noted in chapter 4 as well as below, the Perkinses themselves viewed Canton and Manila as potential outlets for American textiles. LaFeber, *The New Empire : An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market : America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901*, 1st Quadrangle pbk. ed. (Chicago, [Ill.]: Quadrangle Books, 1970). On how Americans perceived China as a trade partner in the 1840s, see John M. Belohlavek, *Let the Eagle Soar! : The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), Mary W. M. Hargreaves, *The Presidency of John Quincy Adams* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1985), Fletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement : American Economic Expansion across the Pacific, 1784-1900*, William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1992).

Merchants did not dictate policy, but their experiences were influential to how Americans imagined their involvement in the Pacific and global trade. More than this, merchants mattered more than distant policymakers and periodic envoys in engaging in practices that shaped policy needs. To take opium smuggling as an example, one of the critiques leveled at members of Russell & Co. who served as American consuls in China was that the firm itself engaged in opium smuggling. This was a practice unbecoming representatives of the American government. For those who made the critique, the complaint likely had more to do with jealousy and a desire to break the firm's hold on the consulship than wounded national honor.⁸⁸⁰ Yet it was nonetheless true. When questioned by the State Department via letter in 1854, Paul Sieman Forbes lied. Noting that the communiqué targeted Russell & Co., he would confine his remarks to a defense of the house. "I would state that it has never to my knowledge smuggled a single Chest of Opium, nor would I have permitted it, had the attempt ever been made."⁸⁸¹ As Forbes himself knew, however, the firm did continue to sell opium.⁸⁸² Whatever the official

⁸⁸⁰ See "Extracts from a Communication Addressed to the Secretary of State," 1854. Forbes Family Collection, Box 2, Folder 18. Baker. Paul Varg also mentions direct communication on the matter to Senator John Calhoun. Paul A. Varg, *New England and Foreign Relations, 1789-1850* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983). "The American Consul at Canton is Mr. P.S. Forbes, and during his absence Mr. Daniel Spooner is the Acting Consul. At Shanghai Mr. J.N.A. Griswold is our Consul with Mr. E. Cunningham for his Vice Consul, and these four persons are co-partners in the American House of Russell & Co. which is established both at Canton and Shanghai. The House of Russell & Co. is now, and has been for many years past engaged in the illicit traffic of Opium that great curse of China, and when the British Superintendent of Trade in 1839 surrendered the Opium to the Chinese, Mr. Forbes, the then American Consul and a Co-partner of Russell & Co. gave up some 4000 chests of the drug. The House of Russell & Co. own and employ two opium receiving ships...."

⁸⁸¹ Paul Sieman Forbes to the State Department, 13 March 1854. Forbes Family Collection, Box 2, Folder 18. Baker.

⁸⁸² As early as 1843, when Forbes first received the consulship appointment at the behest of his cousins, Paul Sieman Forbes noted in his journal that he knew well the argument that his house trafficked in opium would be an argument of jealousy against his acceptance of the post. His rebuttal to himself echoed comments from Robert Bennet Forbes a few years prior. The concept that the "trade is illegal and consequently that Chinese look unfavorably on it. ... is all humbug. The Opium trade is permitted by the

policy of the United States government, merchants and missionaries abroad were largely left to set the terms of relationships abroad themselves. Still, diplomatic and naval missions could have profound effects.

While looking at this handful of New England merchants would seem to tell us little save perhaps a more personal vantage on the so-called “commercial interest,” the diversity of their views shows that their understandings of tensions in China developed in conjunction with changing self-perceptions of themselves as Americans in the world. But these shifts transpired in conjunction with changing ideas about Britain and commerce itself. Consider, for example, John Murray Forbes words to his wife Sarah in 1836. “I used to think the English our superiors, but faith I am changing my mind fast the more I see and know of them” he wrote. “They are almost as much governed by old custom as the Chinese are, while we are daily advancing.”⁸⁸³ In the same letter, John delights in noting his boat’s victory in a recent sailing contest on the Pearl River. If only his countinghouse could out trade the English, he writes, “the Bulls will have less to say against Yankee notions.”⁸⁸⁴ British expectations of superiority formed one part of Forbes’s complaint, but just as significant were these “Yankee notions.” By the 1820s and 1830s especially, Americans expressed exuberance at their prospects *as* Americans. The United States seemed a nation on the rise. American merchants abroad embraced perceptions of the United States as a commercial republic, as open to change and

Chinese Government and what is the most peculiar about it is that it is the Mandarin boats which smuggle it. The very boats which out to prevent it.” Journal Entry, 11 November 1843. Forbes Family Papers, Box 6, Folder 65. Baker.

⁸⁸³ John Murray Forbes to Sarah Hathaway Forbes, 25 March 1836 as quoted in Forbes and Hughes, *Letters (Supplementary) : Of John Murray Forbes*, vol. 1, 25-26.

⁸⁸⁴ John Murray Forbes to Sarah Hathaway Forbes, 25 March 1836 as quoted in Forbes and Hughes, *Letters (Supplementary) : Of John Murray Forbes*, vol. 1, 25-26.

progress via trade. The Chinese and the British both provided convenient foils as closed, tradition-bound societies, less amenable to progress as the young and vigorous American entrepreneurs.⁸⁸⁵

Yet also by the 1830s, some Americans saw naval force as a viable strategy in Asia. Between 1819 and 1830, American merchants in Canton shifted from the view that their trade was precarious and existed at the pleasure of Chinese officials to the view that their position in China was negotiable and best handled with a veiled threat of force. Part of the reticence American merchants initially felt toward naval support was the common perception that Americans had a special relationship with China. To American observers, arrogance kept British merchants at loggerheads with the Chinese. Americans saw themselves as an alternative to the British—but in an increasingly measured way as the bluster seemed to achieve results.⁸⁸⁶ As mentioned above, the Perkinses were not reticent to seek state support for their trade, but desires for such support was highly contingent.

⁸⁸⁵ According to Stuart Creighton Miller, this notion of a “shift” in opinion used to be the historical orthodoxy, but to him, in fact, Americans always had a negative view of the Chinese. Certainly there was no shortage of quotes disdaining China and the Chinese people. But views were more complicated than a search for the roots of racism allows. The more useful conceptualization is provided by Frederic Wakeman, who argued that Western views of China had more to do with how Westerners perceived themselves. Thus, China could both feature as a source of enlightenment thought, beautiful things, and clever merchants, or, just as readily, a despotic government, a preindustrial people, and a cunning, manipulative people. Similarly, the British could feature as an arbiter of civilization and as an antiquated empire in its own right. Alfred Owen Aldridge, *The Dragon and the Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), Merle and John Stalker Curti, “The Flowery Flag Devils’: The American Image in China, 1840-1900,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 96, no. 6 (1952): 663-690, Graham, *American Ideas of a Special Relationship with China, 1784-1900*, Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, Stuart Creighton Miller, “The American Trader’s Image of China, 1785-1840,” *Pacific Historical Review* 36, no. 4 (1967): 375-395, Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant; the American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1969), Frederic Wakeman, “The Chinese Mirror,” *Proceedings of the American Political Science* 31, no. 1 (1973): 208-219, Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate : Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861*.

⁸⁸⁶ In tracing the rise of the “open door constituency,” Michael Hunt argues that by the 1830s, the common wisdom seemed to be, as China trader Augustine Heard remarked, that “disinterestedness is all very well, but the first element to impress the oriental is power.” Yet the question seems to be how that received wisdom became common. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship : The United States and China to 1914*, 35.

American merchants trading in China initially refused offers of naval support out of fear that the Chinese government would perceive naval presence as a threat and revoke trading privileges. While Americans living in Asia cannot be said to be a single, coherent community, merchants largely opposed a state presence—until it became evident to them that the British naval bluster was achieving results.

The first American naval missions to Asia sailed during wartime to protect American merchants from European belligerents halfway across the world. The first such ship was the *Essex*, a frigate charged with traveling to Java during the Quasi-War with France to escort a convoy of American merchantmen safely home. This the *Essex* did. The frigate arrived in the Sunda Straits in the summer of 1800 and departed soon after. The next such vessel, the *Peacock*, arrived during the War of 1812 to answer British depredations on American shipping in Asia. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the War of 1812 between the United States and Britain was a global conflict: confrontations transpired wherever nationals from the two countries came into contact. Thus American merchants sent Letters of Marque—private ships with authorization from their government to plunder foreign belligerents—and the navy sent a sloop of war, the *Peacock*. The *Peacock* captured four British vessels in Asian waters, but, again, had no permanent mission in the region. Following the war, the United States re-deployed its frigates into permanent squadrons to protect American merchants in the Mediterranean (1815), the Pacific off of Latin America (1821), the West Indies (1822), and a South Atlantic Squadron near Rio de Janeiro in Brazil (1826). An East Indies Squadron was not formed until 1835.⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁷ Robert Erwin Johnson, *Far China Station : The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters, 1800-1898* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1979), 1-4, John H. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire : The*

There were three primary reasons for an American naval presence in Asia in the early nineteenth century. First, pirates in Asian waters were even more prolific than their more famous Caribbean counterparts. Second, European wars also manifested in Asia and the Pacific, leaving Americans abroad vulnerable to attack by European belligerents. And, finally, as the British repeatedly attempted, an official presence could be used to force intercourse with foreign governments abroad. It was the last that American merchants in Asia, in China especially, originally aimed to avoid.

In 1819, the United States sent its first peacetime mission to the South China Sea to offer American merchant vessels protection from local pirates. On November 3, 1819, the U.S. frigate *Congress* arrived at the mouth of the Pearl River leading to Canton. Despite the *Congress*'s ostensible purpose of supporting merchant mariners in Asia, Captain John Henley and his men received a chilly reception from Chinese officials and Americans alike. To the Americans trading out of China, their situation was precarious. They recognized that they operated at the sufferance of the Chinese government. If Chinese officials chose to order American merchants out of Canton, to refuse them trade, confiscate their property, or even arrest them, they had little recourse. The United States was not likely to go to war to ensure their access to the trade or even to indemnify their losses. Thus, the naval protection offered by Captain Henley presented serious risks for little gain.

For his part, the Chinese viceroy ordered the *Congress* to depart immediately. In 1816, a mere three years' prior, the British H.M.S. *Alceste* had demanded entrance to

Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829-1861 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), Harold Hance Sprout and Margaret Tuttle Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 1966), 94-95. Further squadrons were the Home Squadron (1841) and the African Squadron (1843). While under a single command, the squadrons usually comprised two to three vessels usually acted independently.

Canton and forced her way up the river.⁸⁸⁸ Chinese officials no doubt feared a similar effort by the Americans. The American consul reluctantly allowed that the *Congress* would surely be sold supplies out of Canton, and the vessel pressed north. Henley secured food, fresh water, and firewood, but was compelled to depart for Manila with a broken mizzenmast. For much of the spring and summer of 1820, the *Congress* cruised the South China Sea, but in September, Captain Henley again sought supplies from Canton and advertised safe passage for any vessels returning to the United States. None accepted: when the *Congress* set sail for home, she returned alone.⁸⁸⁹

Yet when the U.S. frigate *Vincennes* arrived in Canton in January 1830, American merchants in China felt rather differently. The *Vincennes* sailed as part of the Pacific Squadron, commissioned to protect American merchants, mariners, and whalers abroad. Unlike the unfortunate Captain Henley, American expatriates—then mostly in Macau for the off-season—received Commander W.C.B. Finch and his crew warmly. Rather than viewing the naval vessels as a threat to their ability to remain in China, occasional visits by American frigates such as the *Vincennes* demonstrated to the Chinese that the United States was a nation of consequence. It improved the stature of the merchants as Americans. In 1832, when the *Peacock* arrived in 1832, her arrival marked the start of a continuous American naval presence in the region.⁸⁹⁰ This did not imply any real naval

⁸⁸⁸ On the tensions of British efforts to gain recognition from Beijing, from Lord Macartney (1793) to Lord Napier (1834) on, see Chen, "Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Western Knowledge of Chinese Law and Society, 1750–1900.", Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar : Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*, Hevia, *English Lessons : The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*, Liu, *The Clash of Empires : The Invention of China in Modern World Making*, Melancon, *Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis : Balancing Drugs, Violence and National Honour, 1833-1840*.

⁸⁸⁹ Johnson, *Far China Station : The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters, 1800-1898*, 4.

⁸⁹⁰ Johnson, *Far China Station : The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters, 1800-1898*, 5-6.

power in the region: the naval budget yo-yoed with presidential administrations and was frequently stripped to the bone. Rather, the change in attitude of the merchants themselves is significant.

Force ebbed and flowed as a politically viable weapon for establishing American presence in Asia. Thus, for example, well before the naval missions of Commodore Lawrence Kearney to China in 1842 (to protect Americans but prevent opium smuggling) or James Biddle's unsuccessful attempt to "open" Japan in 1846⁸⁹¹, the United States government had already expressed a willingness to use the state to expand the commercial prospects of American nationals abroad. On February 6, 1832, under orders from Washington, the U.S.S. *Potomac* leveled the Sumatran village of Quallah Battoo in retaliation for the attack and looting of a private vessel, the *Friendship* of Salem. In their attack, the *Potomac* killed more than 150 Sumatran villagers with two American casualties. The mission was explicitly punitive. Commodore John Downes had orders to take on Sumatran offenders en route. The Secretary of the Navy, Levi Woodbury, recommended that funds be set aside for a regular naval force to patrol the Indian Ocean and South China Sea in order to protect American vessels from such insecurities.⁸⁹²

To historian David Pletcher, China held a "magnetic" appeal to Americans in the 1840s, foremost as a promising export market.⁸⁹³ Yet views on appropriate relations with China in these years were more diverse than this implies. Take, for example, reactions to

⁸⁹¹ Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement : American Economic Expansion across the Pacific, 1784-1900*, 15, 153. The more famous mission being, of course, Matthew Perry's successful mission in 1853, but in 1849, James Glynn also led a mission to Japan.

⁸⁹² Johnson, *Far China Station : The U.S. Navy in Asian Waters, 1800-1898*, 1-2.

⁸⁹³ Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement : American Economic Expansion across the Pacific, 1784-1900*, 97.

John Quincy Adams's speech on the Opium War. On November 22, 1841, a miserably wet Monday night, John Quincy Adams stood before a packed house at Boston's Masonic Temple. In spite of the inclement weather, a curious audience huddled together to hear the former president and then chair of the House Committee on Foreign Relations explain his views of the war raging in the South China Sea between Britain and China. In the speech, Adams unabashedly took the side of Great Britain against China. He argued that the Opium War had little to nothing to do with the British opium trade and everything to do with China's arrogance. China saw itself as above other nations, as exemplified in the kowtow. Citing theorists of international law and Christian morality, Adams suggested that Her Majesty's Navy did the world a service by humbling the Chinese and forcing them to open ports to foreign trade and influence. This call for open trade as an international right seems like something Americans might be expected to support. But many did not.⁸⁹⁴

Adams knew that his opinion would spark controversy, but even he was surprised at the extent of the reaction.⁸⁹⁵ John Palfrey, the editor of the *North American Review* who had originally asked him to put pen to paper on the controversy, delicately withdrew his invitation to publish the piece.⁸⁹⁶ Editorials popped up in newspapers all across the

⁸⁹⁴ Special thanks to Dael Norwood who generously shared a paper of his on the public reaction to Adams's speech.

⁸⁹⁵ Adams wrote that he expected his views were "so adverse to the prevailing prejudices of the time and place that I expect to bring a storm upon my head worse than that which I am already afflicted." Two weeks later he confessed, "The excitement of public opinion, and feeling by the delivery of this lecture far exceeds any expectation that I had formed although I did expect that it would be considerable." 20 November 1841, 3 December 1841, John Quincy Adams diary 41, page 531, 544 *John Quincy Adams Diary: An Electronic Archive*. Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2010. <http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries>.

⁸⁹⁶ On 3 December 1841, Adams wrote in his diary as follows: "I received this day two letters from Dr. John Palfrey, editor of the *North American Review*, intimating in a very delicate manner his

nation expressing everything from measured support to outrage. The *Baltimore Sun* complained that prior to Adams's speech, the American public opposed Britain's aggression. But after the "Honorable eccentric or the eccentric Honorable, whichever the reader may see fit to consider him, 'defined his position,'" suddenly, it was "as clear as mud" that the Chinese emperor had no moral right to prohibit smuggling or interdict opium. "What!" the *Sun*'s editors mocked, "He, a barbarian, and the ruler of the barbarians! Why should he refuse to have his people *civilized* (!) after whatever fashion England might see fit to prescribe? ... Such views of human rights may do for England; they are in character, and they are also necessary to the accomplishment of her ambitious views, her purposes of commercial supremacy ... but who would have dreamed of ever seeing her seconded in these designs by any portion of the American press?"⁸⁹⁷ "The old man must be getting out of his senses!" exclaimed a letter in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*.⁸⁹⁸ By contrast, the *Boston Atlas* and the *Boston Courier* both lauded Adams, writing that while the former president countered prevailing opinion that disagreements over opium caused the war, he "clearly showed that in the Chinese War, Great Britain had right on her side."⁸⁹⁹ As reactions to Adams's speech show, there was no single American view on the war.⁹⁰⁰

unwillingness to publish in that periodical journal, my lecture on the War between Great Britain and China and in a letter to Charles, he proposes to return the manuscript."

⁸⁹⁷ "The Press and the War on China," *The Baltimore Sun*. December 28, 1841, p. 2.

⁸⁹⁸ "Opinion: John Quincy Adams," 26 November 1841 *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, November 26, 1841, p. 2. Similar opinions were expressed by the *Alexandria Gazette* November 30, 1841, p. 3.

⁸⁹⁹ As quoted in "Public Lectures," *New Hampshire Sentinel* December 1, 1841, p. 1. The *Sentinel*, like many papers, reprinted articles published in other newspapers.

⁹⁰⁰ Opinions on the piece circulated from November 1841 into April and even July of 1842. Charles Adams wrote of his father's speech as a "tremendous triumph," and Adams himself confided a sense of ambivalence in his journal lest he take "profusions of veneration" to heart. Paul C. Nagel, *John*

For the handful of Perkins merchants observing the Opium War controversy, opinions on the conflict similarly ran the gambit—at least, amongst themselves. John Q. Adams reported in his journal that Col. Thomas H. Perkins, then a stalwart seventy-two years of age, attended his lecture and approached him at the close along with Abbott Lawrence and Francis Parkman.⁹⁰¹ Adams reported only praise that night, so one presumes Perkins offered kind words. A letter the elderly merchant wrote to his nephew in Canton indicates that he sympathized with Adams in at least one key respect: the Chinese needed to be “taught a lesson.”⁹⁰² “Altho’ I think the extent to which the Opium trade has been carried on has been of great moral evil ... the manner of pulling it down, has been ... unjustifiable,” he wrote. “I should like exceedingly to see the high and disrespectable tone of the Chinese brought down, and if the British could get with their ships within striking distance of Peking (sic), I think the Gov. would be taught a lesson, she would long remember.”⁹⁰³ However, Perkins predicted this was not realistic, that the British would resort to a blockade and attack on Canton. The British would not be able to

Quincy Adams : A Public Life, a Private Life, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1997), 384. By November 27, Adams reported that popular opinion seemed not to be approbation, but curiosity. On January 14, 1842, William Adam lectured on the topic of the war which, as the advertisements noted, specifically responded to John Q. Adams’s talk. Adam had been a Scottish missionary to Calcutta, but settled in Boston with his family where he became a professor of Oriental literature at Harvard University. “Lectures on the Chinese War,” *Boston Courier* January 13, 1842, p. 3.

When the Boston Chinese Museum opened in 1845, the popular exhibition site depicted opium as the unambiguously the cause of the war. Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “Between ‘Crockery-Dom’ and Barnum: Boston’s Chinese Museum, 1845-47,” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2004): 271-307.

⁹⁰¹ 22 November 1841, John Quincy Adams diary 41, page 533, *John Quincy Adams Diary: An Electronic Archive*. Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2010. <http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries>.

⁹⁰² Note that this language resonates with what sinologist James Hevia found to be thematic in British imperial understanding in China at mid-century. Hevia, *English Lessons : The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*.

⁹⁰³ Col. Thomas H. Perkins to Robert Bennet Forbes, 12 November 1839. Samuel Cabot Papers, Reel 2, Folder 8. MHS.

stop neutrals from continuing the trade without a declaration of war, thus opening a space for American traders. Stemming the opium trade would impede the China trade “as Bills will not be wanted and Specie is not to be had.” But there was an even better silver lining: American domestic manufactures might well replace British imports in exchange for tea. Ever the shrewd merchant, even in retirement, Perkins noted that American weavers used a crude cotton better suited for the China market than British manufactures. British war in China promised to open opportunities for American merchants.

For Robert Bennet Forbes, the so-called China question was personal. Bennet made much of his early fortune off of smuggling opium into China on behalf of the Perkins inner circle. He took the public censures of opium trafficking to heart. He wrote gentle letters to his wife, asking her to not think too poorly of him. He explained himself as follows, so that she “may speak learnedly”:

The import of Opium has gradually increased under the connivance of the local authorities until the quantity has amounted to near 50,000 Chests worth nearly 15 million dollars- it has been in general use & although contrary to Law the trade has been carried on with greater facility than any other branch of business here ... all at once the Gov determined to cut off this trade which has been demoralizing the minds, destroying the bodies, & destroying the country of money – the trade has been carried on by the most respectable merchants here & the great & honorable East India Company who have been the Lords of the East has been the cultivator of the drug in India consequently there has been no moral feeling of indignation connected with the business & if anything were wanting to give it respectability in your eyes I would mention that I made my first fortune by the same.⁹⁰⁴

Several of the rationalizations made in the letters crystallized into a public argument that he made in his 1844 “Remarks on the China Trade.” Specifically, Bennet argued that respectable men engaged in opium trading, that the Chinese government enabled and

⁹⁰⁴ Robert Bennet Forbes to Rose Greene Forbes, 10 March 1839, as quoted in Forbes and Kerr, *Letters from China : The Canton-Boston Correspondence of Robert Bennet Forbes, 1838-1840*.

even participated in the trade, and, most famously, that opium was no worse than alcohol.⁹⁰⁵ Even his memoirs, first published in 1879, reverberate with the concern that his life would be reduced to Robert Bennet Forbes, opium trader. One central argument made by Bennet resounded amongst both British and American merchants who partook in the opium trade (that is to say, most all): the involvement of Cantonese officials in opium selling seemed to sanction the drug. Thus, to these men, for the Chinese government to now confiscate chests of opium seemed hypocritical. Indeed, the misunderstandings of motives and layers of government bureaucracy for both the British and the Chinese were profound.⁹⁰⁶

By the time of Adams's speech, Bennet Forbes had returned to Boston and thus arranged to meet with the American statesman to discuss China's predicament. Notes in Adams's journal indicate that, in writing his lecture, he especially relied upon British sources for his understanding of the conflict. He read through thick stacks of parliamentary records, news articles, and published histories such as Sir John Francis Davis's 1836 *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and Its Inhabitants*.⁹⁰⁷ Adams consulted with Forbes and John Perkins Cushing, but after the speech. There is no indication that the meetings altered his views. While he detailed the visit to Cushing's Belmont mansion in his diary—specifically writing on the gardens and

⁹⁰⁵ R. B. Forbes, *Remarks on China and the China Trade* (Boston: Samuel N. Dickinson, Printer, 1844).

⁹⁰⁶ Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate : Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861*.

⁹⁰⁷ 15, 17, 18 November 1841, John Quincy Adams diary 41, page 526-9 *John Quincy Adams Diary: An Electronic Archive*. Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2010. <http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries>. As the chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Relations, however, Adams had already received access to many of the political documents and reports concerning American political relations with China. Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia; a Critical Study of the Policy of the United States with Reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th Century*, 105.

greenhouses—he offered no particulars of their advice.⁹⁰⁸ Ben Forbes and John Cushing may well have preferred Adams’s explanation for the war to those that centered on the immorality of the opium trade. It is possible they did not alter his views because they affirmed them.

But not everyone agreed. Another Perkins nephew, Russell Sturgis, wrote an extensive rebuttal to Adams’s speech. Sturgis never completed his remarks much less published them, yet they are of interest as the perspective of a China trader in accord with many of the editorial criticisms of Adams. At the time he put his reflections to paper, Sturgis had lived in Asia in 1834 as a partner in Russell, Sturgis & Co. of Canton as well as Russell & Sturgis of Manila. He would join Russell & Co. in 1842. First and foremost, Sturgis argued, the war was undeniably about opium. If the conflict really turned on the principles of the law of nations and the law of nature as Adams contended, the British would be at war with Japan—a far more “closed” country than China. Second, Sturgis refused the popular contention that the Chinese caused the war by refusing to accept the principles of international law. Rather, the law of nature applied to the matter *because* the Chinese refused to accept the law of nations as universal. To Sturgis, the law of nations existed to facilitate commerce and interaction between civilized nations. But if a nation desired to refuse such connections, Sturgis argued, the nation should be allowed to do so. “Is such a nation to be forced to adopt these arbitrary

⁹⁰⁸ 26 November 1841, John Quincy Adams diary 41, page 537 *John Quincy Adams Diary: An Electronic Archive*. Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2010. <http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries>.

rules, the necessity of which is not felt, or has she a natural right to say how far she will admit foreign intercourse?”⁹⁰⁹

The most circumspect of the group was John Murray Forbes, who wrote his brother Bennet a cautioning letter in December of 1839. At the time, Robert Bennet Forbes still resided in Canton as the head of Russell & Co. John noted that he had had a hard time convincing clients at home that his more hot-headed brother would “let John Bull fight his own battles and that your only idea is money (and this I hope is true) that you will neither be wheedled nor frightened out of Canton.” Just think, John soothed, if the Akbar arrives in Boston while the blockade is on, they will do quite well. “But this is moonshine ... I would not risk the chance of competence for the chance of wealth unless the risk of loss was small under the worst aspect and the prospect it gave very good.”⁹¹⁰ John, like Colonel Perkins, sought a measured policy stance that would best allow for Americans to press their advantage in trade.

With the exception of Russell Sturgis who was in China at the time, all of these merchants signed on to a letter written by John Murray Forbes to Daniel Webster with advice for the proposed mission to China. In 1842, when the United States Secretary of State Daniel Webster needed to consider potential responses to war between Britain and China, he turned to the nation’s foremost experts in China and Chinese-American

⁹⁰⁹ Sturgis, *From the Books and Papers of Russell Sturgis*, 220-227.

⁹¹⁰ John Murray Forbes to Robert Bennet Forbes, 20 December 1839. Forbes Family Papers, John Murray Forbes Letterbook, 1839-1849, F-8. Baker. This was a good six months after Bennet wrote to his wife that he had told Charles Elliot as much. In private letters, however, Bennet indicated horror at the losses faced for the opium confiscated by British officials and that he supported the British cause and rather wished he could take up arms on their behalf—no wonder John worried about him. Robert Bennet Forbes to Paul Sieman Forbes, John Murray Forbes, 2 April 1830, 28 May 1839. Forbes Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 46. Baker.

relations: the merchants and missionaries who had long been active in the region.⁹¹¹ In addition to the missionary Peter Parker, merchants connected to the Perkins network and Russell & Co. predominated.⁹¹² The most influential letter came from the hand of John Murray Forbes with the signatures of a number of Boston merchants connected to trade with China: Thomas Handasyd Perkins, Robert Bennet Forbes, Samuel Cabot, William Appleton, Nathan Appleton, and John Lowell Gardner.⁹¹³ The instructions Webster drew up for Caleb Cushing, the American envoy to China, laid out the first official policy of the United States toward China in addition to laying the groundwork for the 1844 Treaty of Wangxia.⁹¹⁴ And in writing those instructions, Webster borrowed extensively from Forbes's letter.

Forbes offered a variety of advice, from the technical—the best season for sailing to China, the hiring of translators, protocol in dealing with provincial versus imperial authorities—to overarching strategies.⁹¹⁵ Many of the strategies Forbes suggested

⁹¹¹ On March 20, 1843, Webster sent out an official circular from the Department of State seeking advice.

⁹¹² The Forbes brothers consulted with Peter Parker and Caleb Cushing as well as John Quincy Adams and Daniel Webster. John M. Forbes, for example, wrote to Houqua that he “took occasion to inform [Cushing] how friendly [Houqua] had always been toward the Americans.” If Cushing could benefit Houqua in any way, this would only be repaying a small part of the debt American merchants owed to the venerable Chinese merchant. Forbes gave a letter of introduction to Houqua for Daniel Webster's son who was to accompany the American envoy to China. Forbes hoped that by connecting these individuals, he might smooth the path to solidified Sino-American trade relations. John Murray Forbes to Houqua, 5 August 1843. Forbes Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 24b. Baker.

⁹¹³ John Murray Forbes, et al., Boston to Daniel Webster, 29 April 1843 in Daniel Webster et al., *The Papers of Daniel Webster* (Hanover, N.H.: Published for Dartmouth College by the University Press of New England, 1974), 917-921.

⁹¹⁴ Edward P. Crapol suggests Caleb Cushing and John Perkins Cushing were cousins, but this was not the case. It is not clear that John Perkins Cushing was in touch with Cushing relations at all. Edward P. Crapol, *John Tyler : The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 165.

⁹¹⁵ John Murray Forbes, et al., Boston to Daniel Webster, 29 April 1843 in Webster et al., *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 917-921.

emerged out of lessons Americans developed out of decades of observing British-Chinese relations. First, Forbes suggested sending a sizeable naval force to accompany the diplomatic envoy, for example, at least three to four square rigged vessel and a small schooner to carry messages. Here, Forbes made explicit the rationale visible amongst American traders based in Canton as early as 1830: “The Chinese think we have few ships of war having never seen more than two at a time, one of these always being a small vessel.” In order to make an impression of national prowess, the mission required a respectable entourage. Second, Forbes recommended the mission not send “presents ... as such, lest the Chinese should call them tribute.” Rather, Americans should send scientific drawings, models, and, if possible, an engineer who could explain recent advances in casting technology. The chief lesson Americans had learned from observing the British, apparently, was the need to negotiate from a position of strength.

Yet more than this, Forbes advised a careful mediation between Chinese and British powers. The letter signers aspired to the benefits of British concessions while maintaining their “special relationship” with the Chinese.⁹¹⁶ “All we could ask,” Forbes wrote, “would be to admit our trade upon the same footing with the most favored nation & we think it would be impolitic to accept anything less.” The letter signers feared that sending an envoy was a gamble: if left alone, they felt confident they would be allowed any advantages granted to other nations. So why send an envoy? “We can only say that the time now seems more favorable than ever before for sending an envoy and securing by treaty what we otherwise will only enjoy through sufferance.” Thus, the best path was

⁹¹⁶ As noted earlier, whether or not the United States and China ever really had a “special relationship,” Americans thought that they did. As Michael Hunt shows in *The Making of a Special Relationship*, the Americans and the Chinese both sought to play larger powers off one another in navigating nineteenth century geopolitical contests.

to allow the British to take the lead in sending an envoy to Beijing and thereby secure the same terms allowed in an Anglo-Chinese treaty. On the one hand, the letter urged supporting the Chinese cause in the war: “The Chinese look at us as friends, but fear encroachment. If we could support their defense without angering the British, it would open the eyes of the Emperor [Dao Guang] to the value of an Alliance with us, more than the prospect of increasing their trade one hundred fold.”⁹¹⁷ Yet on the other hand, the letter resounded with concern that the British might out the Americans by telling the Chinese: ““Make your own terms with these Americans, their government is so different from ours that there is no possibility of their going to War.”” The Americans recognized their dependence upon British good will. They wanted to have it both ways: to benefit from British belligerence while still being “special friends” with the Chinese.

Comparing Forbes’s recommendations to the letter that Secretary of State Daniel Webster delivered to the American special envoy demonstrates either Forbes’s influence or alliance of views with Webster. On May 8, 1843, Webster wrote two letters to Cushing, the first explaining structural details, the second delineating the goals of the mission and offering advice. Webster’s measured stance matches that of Forbes, following the bulk of the Bostonian China trader’s recommendations.⁹¹⁸ The central goal

⁹¹⁷ Forbes underscored that both the Chinese and the British had been down this road before and were skilled in diplomatic niceties: “Let the envoy remember he is in no way stronger than those who have gone before.” John Murray Forbes, et al., Boston to Daniel Webster, 29 April 1843 in Webster et al., *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 917-921.

⁹¹⁸ Thomas H. Perkins to Secretary of State Daniel Webster, 3 April 1843, and Edwin M. Lewis to Daniel Webster, 20 April 1843 in Kenneth E. Shewmaker, ed., *The Papers of Daniel Webster: Diplomatic Papers, 1841-1843*, vol. 1 (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983), 903-904, 912-915. Edwin Lewis listed ambitious reforms, including an entire new system of tariffs and regulations for the Chinese government. Colonel Perkins signed on to the Forbes letter, but also sent a second, personal note to Webster, respecting concerns that foreigners in Canton had no legal means of recourse if debts went unpaid or contracts ignored. He expected that the British envoy, Henry Pottinger, would address the issue of law, but urged Webster to ensure the American envoy addressed it as well. Webster included none of these recommendations in his letter to Cushing. Perkins had a longstanding relationship

of the mission was to receive official permission to trade in the treaty ports opened to British nationals. Cushing should try to meet the emperor, but this was not of the essence. Rather, Webster urged Cushing to at all times express respect and pacific intentions while, at the same time, resisting any pressure to take an inferior position be it through the *kow-tow* or demands for tribute. Webster recognized the need for discretion according to circumstance, but he recommended explaining that the nations differed in religious observances and that he could not do anything his religion or his nation's sentiments of honor forbade.⁹¹⁹ Included in the small circle of voluntary attachés were engineers, as Forbes recommended, and Webster set aside \$1500 "for the purchase of models of machinery, instruments of arts and sciences, or other articles ... such as may be supposed most useful in intercourse with the Chinese."⁹²⁰ The first Webster letter has been noted for its import as the first official exposition of American foreign policy ideals respecting Asia and as a step toward the Tyler Doctrine. Yet for all that the letter is a rather tepid document. Webster, like Forbes, urged the American envoy to take a measured stance between the British and the Chinese in order to benefit from both and offend neither.

Yet the fact of the matter was, pragmatism guided the stance advocated by Webster and the Forbes letter. Detractors in Congress already complained about the expense of the Cushing mission; war had never been an option or a desirable outcome.

with Webster and, indeed, helped to make him as a politician. By 1843, however, the elderly Perkins was far less influential.

⁹¹⁹ Daniel Webster to Caleb Cushing, 8 May 1843 quoted in Shewmaker, ed., *The Papers of Daniel Webster: Diplomatic Papers, 1841-1843*, 922-926.

⁹²⁰ Daniel Webster to Fletcher Webster, 24 April 1843 as quoted in Curti, "'The Flowery Flag Devils': The American Image in China, 1840-1900," 665.

While some scholars argue that Daniel Webster's instructions to Cushing made official a foreign policy with China of nothing much—most favored nation status—it was a positive policy stance at a time when Webster's detractors would have preferred no action at all.⁹²¹ Of course, the actual Treaty of Wangxia did much more than this. The treaty ensured Americans most of the same treaty rights secured by the British under the Treaty of Nanjing of 1842 and the addendum Treaty of the Bogue of 1843. Amongst the new treaty rights were access to additional Chinese ports and extraterritoriality.⁹²²

In those few early years before his resignation in 1842, Daniel Webster set the tone for America's political relations in the Pacific.⁹²³ Webster's influence was evident in American diplomatic negotiations with China. Even the 1843 letter from President John Tyler to the Daoguang Emperor via the new secretary of state, A. P. Upshur, was in fact written by Webster. But Webster also directed key interactions with envoys from Hawai'i seeking diplomatic recognition from the United States and British emissaries respecting the Canadian border with American claims in Oregon and Maine.⁹²⁴ Furthermore, Webster wrote what would become known as "the Tyler Doctrine." In a special message to the House of Representatives, Tyler explicitly pronounced a national interest in protecting American mercantile interests in China and in maintaining

⁹²¹ Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia; a Critical Study of the Policy of the United States with Reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th Century*.

⁹²² For a recent study of extraterritoriality in China that points to a longer history of the East India Company soliciting extraterritorial rights in Asia, see Li Chen, "Law, Empire, and Historiography of Modern Sino-Western Relations: A Case Study of the *Lady Hughes* Controversy in 1784," *Law and History Review* 27, no. 1 (2009): 1-53.

⁹²³ Ken Shewmaker argues that Webster resigned because he could not countenance Tyler's desire to annex Texas or, more to the point, to protect slavery there.

⁹²⁴ Kenneth Shewmaker, "Forging the 'Great Chain': Daniel Webster and the Origins of American Foreign Policy toward East Asia and the Pacific, 1841-52," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 129, no. 3 (1985): 225-259.

Hawaiian independence as a central provisioning point en route to China. Often seen as presaging the “open door” policy of late in the century, the message presented the United States as a commercial nation in alliance with other commercial peoples who favored engagement in a free and open trade: “It cannot but be in conformity with the interest and wishes of the Government and the people of the United States that this community [Hawai’i], thus existing in the midst of a vast expanse of ocean, should be respected and all its rights strictly and conscientiously regarded; and this must also be the true interest of all other commercial states.”⁹²⁵ Like the Monroe Doctrine before it, the Tyler Doctrine presented an ideal of the United States as a protector of adjacent lands and waters against imperial incursion. The 1823 Monroe Doctrine targeted South and Central America; the Tyler Doctrine extended the American “sphere of influence” to the Pacific.

Webster wrote President Tyler’s message to congress in the context of negotiations with British officials on a number of issues, a strong thread of which pertained to a sense of American destiny in the Pacific. The 1842 Webster-Ashburton treaty resolved several border disputes between the United States and Canada, especially those of Oregon and Maine, as well as prohibiting slave trading on the high seas. Oregon, like Hawai’i, was seen as a necessary stepping stone for continued American trade with China and Asia. This sense of a Pacific-American destiny was not imagined as one of empire or even necessarily expansion, but it was always one of trade.

Conclusion

⁹²⁵ Message from the President of the United States, December 30, 1842, *Cong. Globe*, 27th Cong., 3d Sess. 103 (1842). Technically, on December 31, 1842, the Speaker of the House delivered the message, a letter from President Tyler to the members of the House, written by Secretary of State Webster.

Free trade as a concept has a long, contested legacy within American history. As Cathy Matson has emphasized, mercantilism and liberalism in trade were not sequential economic systems, but complex and contradictory rationalizations.⁹²⁶ This chapter has shown that in considering the evolution of free trade thought and practice, American merchants had greater influence than is apparent by simply looking at dollar amounts or percentages of trade in the early nineteenth century. For the Perkinses, their commercial network enabled a more extensive mercantile apparatus for cornering niche markets. They were conscious of opportunities presented by competing monopolies. Little wonder then that their activities, and those of merchants like them, excited the jealousy of foreign competitors. The Perkinses were more influential advocates of “free trade” as smugglers and niche traders than by pushing policies.

By the time the Perkinses engaged in opium smuggling in China in the early nineteenth century, smuggling was not a new strategy developed to grapple with China’s unique legal and trading regime—as was argued during the first Opium War—but a mercantile strategy with a direct legacy for many of those same merchants, including Americans. If we see continuity in smuggling as a tool, the implication is that smuggling practices had less to do with the exigencies of demand or corruption in the China market than the character and capaciousness of mercantile capitalism itself. The question becomes not, why would they smuggle opium, but why would they not?⁹²⁷

⁹²⁶ Matson, *Merchants & Empire : Trading in Colonial New York*.

⁹²⁷ Bello, *Opium and the Limits of Empire : Drug Prohibition in the Chinese Interior, 1729-1850*, Chen, "Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Western Knowledge of Chinese Law and Society, 1750–1900.", Downs, *The Golden Ghetto : The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*, Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800-42*, Peter Lee, *Opium Culture : The Art and Ritual of the Chinese Tradition* (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 2006), Melancon, *Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis : Balancing Drugs, Violence and*

As I have shown here, Perkins merchants were also part of a commercial interest favoring state efforts to guarantee trading privileges. In 1897, in the twilight years of his life, John Murray Forbes wrote to William Rathbone of Liverpool that he hoped to find his old friend “still a leader in progress and still able to show that Liberal Englishmen still stand shoulder to shoulder with those of advanced opinions on this side of the Atlantic.”⁹²⁸ The great question of the day, Forbes felt, was how to keep the United States and Britain “in cordial alliance against the autocrats of the old world.”⁹²⁹ Forbes and Rathbone both began their careers in trade, rode waves of industrialization to even greater wealth and influence, and actively participated in politics and great reform movements of the nineteenth century. Long active in debates over trade and foreign policy, Forbes’s explanation of progress turned on free trade, but a particular vision of free trade as openness:

“My idea is the very simple one that we Americans ought to avoid entangling alliances with the European powers East of us, but that on the Pacific, the United States ought to insist upon holding that sea open to the commerce of the world.”⁹³⁰

Forbes’s vision for American provenance in the Pacific was not unique, but rather was embedded in a longer trajectory of American foreign policy: the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the Tyler Doctrine (1842), and late in the century, the Open Door Notes (1899).

National Honour, 1833-1840, Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy : A Study of the Asian Opium Trade, 1750-1950*, Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China*.

⁹²⁸ John Murray Forbes to William Rathbone, 24 July 1897. Letter IX.7.116. Rathbone Collection. Liverpool.

⁹²⁹ Forbes no doubt referred to recent incursions into China by the Japanese and Russians as well as further threats by the Germans. McCormick, *China Market : America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901*.

⁹³⁰ John Murray Forbes to William Rathbone, 24 July 1897. Letter IX.7.116. Rathbone Collection. Liverpool.

These proclamations of American diplomatic doctrine were more principles than policy, but they served an important idyllic function nonetheless. They typified how Americans tended to imagine themselves: as a commercial nation guaranteeing markets open to all.

CONCLUSION

Few people remember the name Perkins today. In Boston, there are landmarks: the Perkins School for the Blind, the stones memorializing an old Perkins estate on the banks of Jamaica Pond, and Perkins Street cutting through Brookline and Jamaica Plain. The name appears on the fine print for paintings, sculptures, and any number of Boston cultural bulwarks from Harvard University and the Fine Arts Museum to the Boston Athenaeum and the Massachusetts Historical Society. But we know this family better than we think. Through literature, landscapes, and institutions, the Perkinses and their commercial network became embedded in America's self-fashioning of the nineteenth century. Richard Henry Dana sailed in a Bryant & Sturgis ship in *Two Years before the Mast*. Herman Melville, himself inspired by Dana, drew upon Perkins' sea voyages in his novels as well, specifically referencing the 1790 *Hope* in his maritime escapade, *Typee*.⁹³¹ Few writers complete a work on the "fabled" American China trade without a mention of Robert Bennet Forbes's personal memoirs, himself a Perkins nephew and legacy.⁹³² Money made through Perkins connections financed involvement in the utopian experiment Brook Farm and Transcendental circles. However we remember them, if we remember them at all, the Perkinses are a part of America's cultural fabric.

This study has suggested that the Perkinses are a part of the nation's cultural fabric as capitalists as well. Peers accepted merchants connected to the network—

⁹³¹ They also connected to the Delano clan who provided the inspiration for Melville's *Benito Cereno*. Dana, *Two Years before the Mast and Other Voyages*, Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life. During a Four Months' Residence in a Valley of the Marquesas* (New York,: Wiley and Putnam; [etc.], 1846), Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (Barre, Mass.: Imprint Society, 1972 [1856]).

⁹³² Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*.

Thomas Handasyd Perkins, William Sturgis, John Murray Forbes, Russell Sturgis—as capitalist icons to model. In 1845, for example, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story held up Thomas H. Perkins as an exemplar of the values connected to a commercial life well-lived.⁹³³ Story dedicated his commentaries on the laws of promissory notes to Perkins with the following words:

You justly stand at the head of our commercial community; and you have achieved this enviable distinction by a life of successful enterprise, in which one knows not which most to praise, the skill, and intelligence, and integrity, which have deserved that success, or the liberal spirit, and unostentatious hospitality, which have constantly been its accompaniments.⁹³⁴

In addition to his influence on the Supreme Court, Joseph Story published widely in the field of commercial law. Story felt his manuscript on promissory notes seemed admirably suited as a tribute to the 81-year old Perkins. “Sir,” Story penned, “It has long been my intention to ask your permission to dedicate some one of my works on Commercial Law to you.” Thus, to a justice of the Supreme Court noted for his role in overseeing the legal facet of the market revolution, Colonel Perkins epitomized economic man.⁹³⁵ Yet Story aimed not merely to recognize Perkins’s economic prowess, but to

⁹³³ R. Kent Newmyer, *Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story : Statesman of the Old Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 326.

⁹³⁴ Joseph Story, *Commentaries on the Law of Promissory Notes*, 3d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton and Haywood, 1851, 1845), viii.

⁹³⁵ This vision of Perkins receives support from the paeans to Colonel Perkins at his funeral in 1854. There were certainly wealthier men—Peter C. Brooks, John Jacob Astor, Stephen Girard, and many of these men also received similar tributes—but many New Englanders recognized Thomas H. Perkins during his lifetime and beyond as a commercial leader and pioneer. He opened paths of commerce to younger, upwardly-striving men. Perkins and others like him were held up by his son’s generation and more as a trailblazer of early American capitalism. Not all views were complimentary of course; Perkins played a very visible role in advancing Federalist causes. See letters from Daniel Webster, the commemoration of Perkins held at the Boston Merchants’ Exchange following his death as quoted in Cary, *Memoir of Thomas Handasyd Perkins*, 263-269. Where much of the scholarship on “*homo economicus*” uses history to find the roots of rational economic man, scholars like the Tuckers increasingly suggest the need to examine historicize entrepreneurs within the values of their own times. See Joseph Persky, “Retrospectives: The Ethology of Homo Economicus,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9, no. 2

extol Perkins's public character, his "noble charity," and his "elevated principles of action." Invisible to this view was the fact that Perkins's story was rooted in a larger group. He owed much of his success to capital from his and his wife's families, the hard work of his mother, and his involvement in a broader commercial network. Perkins was economic man, but of his era. For early nineteenth century capitalists of New England, with great wealth came great civic responsibility.

What are we to make of this seeming contradiction between views of Perkins as a reputable merchant, civic patriarch, and family man with the possibility of coexisting images of Perkins and his allies as shadow traders and even smugglers?⁹³⁶ How different were they from the "citizens of the world" that David Hancock described as "marginal, opportunistic, global, improving, and integrative"?⁹³⁷ The fact of the matter is, not much. But in spite of their Atlantic and later Pacific trade, the Boston-based Perkinses found themselves outside Hancock's "British Atlantic community." This made a tremendous difference in the types of mercantile strategies open to them. This dissertation has shown that the Perkinses deliberately sought out a space for themselves within the margins of European, especially British, commercial interests. Through their own brand of opportunism, striving, as well as good fortune, the Perkinses sought out advantages in trade rooted in their peripheral geopolitical position: as Americans.

Family Values

(1995): 221-231, Tucker, "The Limits of Homo Economicus: An Appraisal of Early American Entrepreneurship."

⁹³⁶ In Alan Karras's study of smuggling, he argues that illicit trade proved an "essential source of state building" by providing cheap, desired goods to a consuming public, even as they deprived states' of revenue through duties and fees. Karras, *Smuggling : Contraband and Corruption in World History*.

⁹³⁷ David Hancock, *Citizens of the World : London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14.

For the Perkinses, the success of their commercial network relied upon their ability to mobilize kinship-based and kinship-like strategies to minimize risk and maximize loyalties. Cultural and social capital—knowledge and connections—and not just financial capital formed the basis of attempts to maintain bonds of trust and obligation over space as well as time.⁹³⁸ This was not surprising in the context of the late eighteenth and even the early nineteenth centuries, a time when formal institutions for amassing capital and protecting interests across long distances were still developing. Yet, as we saw, many kinship-based strategies continued in both trade and industry well after banks, insurance companies, and other institutions and technologies would seem to have obviated their need. This dissertation has argued that rather than approach the relationship between family and capitalism as one of a past stage of economic history, that we should recognize the dynamic ways that they evolved together. And more specifically, in considering early American merchant capitalism, that trust and obligation did not derive axiomatically from kinship, but that kinship provided a fertile field for the production of both. In considering the internal strategies and experiences of the Perkinses, we saw that this connection thus had far-reaching consequences.

An examination of the Perkinses' social strategies revealed several things. First, we saw that obligation and responsibility did not emerge effortlessly from family ties. Such responsiveness took work.⁹³⁹ Leaders within the commercial network mobilized

⁹³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258.

⁹³⁹For two examples of the rich potential of taking seriously the social meanings of obligation, see Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation : The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*, "Report [Relative to the Affairs of the East India Company Report] before the House of Lords, Together with Minutes of Evidence, 10 June 1830."

kinship, paternalism, and other hierarchical social ties as forms of obligation. But this obligation went both ways: bottom-up as well as top-down. Younger kin and employees made claims on their elders just as parents and employers, patriarchs and matriarchs, sought fidelity and contributions from them. Internal tensions and inequalities within families themselves served as levers for invoking obligation and compliance. Thus, economic inequalities not simply between families but also within them shaped marketplace opportunities—hence the geographic split between sons and cousins as cousins were stationed abroad, for example. And thus, obligation was itself gendered, not simply in terms of the divergence of expectations as daughters and sons, but in the use of gender to exhort kin into compliance. Strategies and values of gender and commerce were thus yoked together as manly duty and motherly care. Thus, the tensions and divisions within familial and business circles did not just draw upon norms of social difference, but did essential work to produce them.

Second, the Perkinses' private correspondence exposes the importance of behind-the-scenes interventions to business choices. Putting personal and business lives into conversation at times transforms explanations for cause and effect. Beyond the familiar negotiations of uncles, brothers, and cousins, we see the “maternal networking” of mothers and sisters shaping the very choices that young people recognized in their lives, from career paths and education to marital options and more. The importance of private networking is not surprising, but it points to the need to think about the variety of types of entrepreneurialism available not only to individuals but to groups. Of course, these hidden sources of influence must be approached with cynicism. When did women navigate personal connections because they provided the only mechanism of influence

available, as opposed to being assessed more effectively? In recent years, scholars have attacked the concept of separate spheres as inadequate for understanding gender in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹⁴⁰ At a time when the concept has become static, glossed over, and yet still a staple of history writing and teaching, this revitalized literature is exciting. While some of these works elide the extent to which individuals at the time used the very phrase to understand their own lives, others offer new analytical frameworks for thinking about gendered dynamics of the Victorian era through examinations of urban geography, literature, and politics. The problem is, many of these new works tend to privilege the public to the exclusion of the social, behind-the-scenes work done by women as well as men. For the Perkinses, gender proved a strong fault line of the types of influence available to women. Changes in women's educational and commercial opportunities created very real vulnerabilities for several Perkins women and their children. Yet this should not shroud the clout of charismatic women who may not

⁹⁴⁰ For an excellent if now dated historiography, see Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History." Kerber calls for more precision, distinguishing between separate spheres as a tool scholars use to understand the past and separate spheres as a discourse historical actors employed themselves.

For critiques of separate spheres as a historical construct, see Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig, and Alastair Owens, *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres*, English ed. (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006), Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, *No More Separate Spheres! A Next Wave American Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), Monika M. Elbert, *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), Elizabeth Klimasmith, *At Home in the City: Urban Domesticity in American Literature and Culture, 1850-1930* (Durham, N.H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), Alison Piepmeier, *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), Scott and Keates, *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere*, Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1998). On women in early American (largely the eighteenth century) business, see the special forum on women's economies in North America before 1820 in the Fall 2006 *Early American Studies* as well as the special section on gender and business in the September 1998 *The Business History Review*.

have run a business in their own right, but who guided family and even community decision making.

Further, the experiences of the Perkinses suggest that risk, profit, and even the exigencies of the path to becoming a merchant itself must be understood within the aspirations and expectations of life cycles.⁹⁴¹ The majority of the youth who traveled abroad voiced doubts and regrets at being exiled from family and friends. Time and again they argued that their sacrifice was not simply about lucre, but about family. Even discounting the extent to which such protests were intended as a balm for distant kin, persistent expressions of impatience and doubt remind us that most of the men who traveled really did aim to make their fortune and return quickly home. Meanings of domesticity for men become all the more apparent when considered not simply as a perk of marriage, but as a marker of independence, maturity, and achievement.⁹⁴² Not just anyone could marry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rather, marriage required stable wealth or a source of income to support a family. Risk and

⁹⁴¹ A wave of scholarship on sensibility and emotions as historically articulated phenomena underscores the rich complexity of psychic as well as social meanings within this intersection of personal and commercial worlds during this period. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility : Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Ditz, "Formative Ventures: Mercantile Letters and the Articulation of Experience.", Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale : Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, Elana Shever, "Powerful Motors: Kinship, Citizenship and the Transformation of the Argentine Oil Industry" (University of California, Berkeley, 1999). This work is indebted to the earlier historiography of family history, including Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work : Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism : Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860*, Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes : Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Farber, *Guardians of Virtue: Salem Families in 1800*, Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class : The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*.

⁹⁴²The work of Toby Ditz is especially useful in thinking about this aspect of masculinity. Ditz, "Shipwrecked: Imperiled Masculinity and the Representation of Business Failures among Philadelphia's Eighteenth-Century Merchants.", Ditz, "Secret Selves, Credible Personas: The Problematics of Trust and Public Display in the Writing of Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Merchants.", Ditz, "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Remedies from Early American Gender History."

profit could not help but be social concepts in a world in which failure was often seen as a marker of poor character and profit carried with it clear social obligations.⁹⁴³ For the Perkinses, families rather than simply individuals grappled with the evolving question of how to protect vulnerable kin (and the family itself) from the vicissitudes of markets.

While firms bearing the Perkins name disappeared by the 1840s, the commercial network itself continued through Cary, Sturgis, and especially Forbes kin into the final decade of the nineteenth century. As the network shifted hands from the Perkinses to the Forbeses, there were continuities as well as changes. John Murray Forbes & Co. served as a training ground for Forbes's sons and son-in-laws just as much as James & T. H. Perkins & Co. of Boston had, but meanings shifted. A compelling example of how these ideals shifted remains the coming of age letters from parents to children. Where Colonel Thomas H. Perkins called upon his son to be virtuous in order to protect the reputations of his mother and sisters and to earn his fatherly respect, John Murray Forbes saw his children's duties as to society.⁹⁴⁴ Forbes cousins played key roles in Russell & Co. of Canton until that firm's bankruptcy in 1891. William F. Cary & Co. of New York closed in 1881, not long after the tragic death of the heir apparent, William Cary, Jr. And while Russell & Sturgis of Manila failed in 1875, the firm sparked the careers of a number of Sturgis cousins, with varying degrees of success. Thus, nodes of commerce continued in the latter half of the century, but those who bore the Perkins name retained only the

⁹⁴³ Balleisen, *Navigating Failure : Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America*, Ditz, "Shipwrecked: Imperiled Masculinity and the Representation of Business Failures among Philadelphia's Eighteenth-Century Merchants.", Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War*, Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees; Two Generations of Massachusetts Merchants, 1765-1844*, Sheidley, *Sectional Nationalism*.

⁹⁴⁴ Note, however, that Lisa Wilson finds a longer history of the language of "usefulness." See Lisa Wilson, *Ye Heart of a Man : The Domestic Life of Men in Colonial New England* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1999).

capital, prestige, and consumer legacies of their involvement within the commercial network.

If we follow the capital, rather than simply the trade network, the story continues along a somewhat different path. By the 1840s, the balance of investments tipped from overseas trade to domestic stocks and bonds. Increasingly, specific kin with training in law or finance became investors for larger family clusters or oversaw investments handled through trusts, especially the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company. These funds could provide a financial backbone for maintaining familial wealth and thus allowing daughters as well as sons to engage pursuits other than business. And, as the experience of John Murray Forbes showed in chapter four, social and kin-based networks still provided an important mechanism for accessing substantive sums of capital. William Sturgis is a similar case in point. Both Forbes and Sturgis proved influential in shaping the flow of Boston capital far beyond their own means by adapting their commercial connections into investment networks. Trusts proved an increasingly important legal mechanism for mediating between families and markets, or between family members themselves. Stocks and bonds were more fungible investments than trade or land, but they carried their own risks. How wealthy families invested their money had serious implications for social and human capital requirements within business networks.

Free Trade

Kinship and kinship-like strategies enabled the Perkinses to establish a trade and investment network of global proportions. But the norms that guided their mercantile operations were also significant. The merchants studied in this project were not anti-

statist. They had no qualms about turning to state representatives for support in protecting their property at home and abroad, lobbying for preferential duties and barriers, and soliciting consular posts for themselves and their allies. But when federal officials hindered their ability to trade, as they felt the Jefferson and Madison administrations did during the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, they willingly undermined their own government by seeking out means to skirt federal prohibitions on trade.⁹⁴⁵ To say that these merchants had a relatively instrumental view of the role of states' in protecting trade is not to argue that they were *only* instrumental. But from their position as Americans, on the periphery of established circuits of European trade, seeking out niche markets made sense.

The Perkinses consciously acted on their position as neutrals during the French Wars. Following the American Revolution, merchants within the family shifted from a transatlantic fur trade to the French West Indies. Thus, their firms were especially fortunate in being well-placed to take advantage of the United States' political neutrality during the French Wars. From 1793 to 1807, neutrality allowed American merchants to reap the windfall from new export opportunities.⁹⁴⁶ The wars enabled a virtually monopoly of the re-export trade between European powers and their American colonies, especially those in the West Indies. Such trade was incredibly dangerous and not without controversy, but also immensely lucrative. More than their economic resources, the

⁹⁴⁵ Gautham Rao, "Visible Hands: Customhouses, the National Market, and Federal Power in Antebellum America" (University of Chicago, 2008).

⁹⁴⁶ For a decade and a half, from 1793 to 1815, shipping itself accounted for approximately one-third of American international credits. But even as the maritime sector declined, as postwar competition and renewed navigation laws chipped away at wartime gains, it remained significant until the Civil War. Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860*, Albion, Baker, and Labaree, *New England and the Sea, North, The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860*.

Perkines had considerable social resources on which to build: established firms in the French West Indies, an existing network of correspondents and creditors, a broad circle of kin, and political connections. To Douglass North, the significance of American wartime opportunity was more than simply the immense influx of profits from a carrying trade enabled by the French Wars, but the channeling of that capital into domestic industry and financial institutions.⁹⁴⁷ As I showed in chapter two, the Perkines certainly provide evidence of this. Yet the Perkines also used the wars as an opportunity to experiment and expand their interests—especially by usurping Asian and South American trade routes disrupted by the European wars.

While scholars usually see this type of mercantile outlook as ending with the peace of 1815, the Perkines reveal otherwise. Their firms deliberately sought out re-export trading opportunities rooted in their geopolitical position as Americans. Thus, they were “neutral traders” during the war, but they were also “niche traders” in that they sought out niches of mercantile opportunity created by competition between larger powers. The Perkines also colluded with foreign merchants and officials to smuggle contraband goods before, during, and after the wars. They were not alone in this range of illicit and licit commerce, by any means. But the Perkins’ correspondence laid out the

⁹⁴⁷ Debate over the meaning of neutrality for American merchants has centered on the question of whether or not the benefits of wartime profits were as widespread as North intimated. In 1980, first Claudia Goldin and Frank Lewis and then Douglas R. Adams responded with essays countering that the capital disproportionately accrued to a small number of wealthier merchants. Douglas R. Adams, “American Neutrality and Prosperity, 1793-1808: A Reconsideration,” *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 4 (1980): 713-737, Lewis, “The Role of Exports in American Economic Growth During the Napoleonic Wars, 1793 to 1807.” In a 2006 essay, James Fichter countered that the war’s boon to wealthier merchants concentrated profits in a way that allowed for greater liquidity. Fichter, “Dreams of Avarice: The First Generation of American Millionaires, 1792-1802.” Other claims made by North in this text came in for more thoroughgoing criticism, particularly his argument that regions within the United States developed into microeconomies rooted in comparative advantage.

maritime and mercantile strategies that enabled this contraband trade and the role of illicit practices within their broader range of business interests.

The Perkinses' position as Americans enabled other trading opportunities as well. In their close, cultivated ties with the fabulously wealthy Wu Bingjian, the Hong merchant better known as Houqua, their national and geographic status likely proved appealing on several fronts. For one, Americans tended to carry silver to China, imported at considerable cost through South American channels. For another, because Americans were *not* British, a connection with American merchants allowed Houqua to diversify his interests away from the British East India Company—especially during the French Revolutionary Wars, when most other European merchants disappeared. Their relationship with Houqua and his family firm, the I-he Hong, gave the Perkinses greater financial clout far beyond China. Houqua suggested they establish a satellite firm in Manila. He smoothed introductions and ties with Parsee merchants based out of Calcutta. Perhaps ironically, his favor made them *more* appealing to British bankers such as Baring Brothers & Co.

More than simply profit from niche markets, the Perkinses and merchants like them excited the jealousy of competitors, especially the British. Where the Perkinses used the term “free traders” to refer to British merchants operating outside the bounds of the monopolies of chartered trading companies, to British observers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, American merchants were the real free traders. While Americans lacked the kinds of naval and diplomatic supports offered by more active European states, they benefitted from the work of those states without facing the obstacles of foreign monopolies. The Perkinses did not advocate trade liberalization for

the United States, Great Britain, or other states. Nor were their mercantile strategies unfamiliar to the British themselves. But their actions as neutral traders, niche traders, and smugglers shaped arguments at home and abroad about the appropriate relationship between the state and trade.

In recent years, scholars have integrated New England into the Atlantic World; this project demonstrates the importance of New Englanders in shaping American involvement in the Pacific as well. The Pacific continues to be a central space of American empire and influence, from former colonies to trust territories. Its history merits a more robust place in American historical consciousness. Perkins firms played a significant role in pushing American interests west. When President John Tyler announced the “Tyler Doctrine” in a special message to Congress in 1842, he argued that the interests of American merchants in Hawai’i and China legitimated American involvement in the region. Much like the Monroe Doctrine and later Open Door Policy, the Tyler Doctrine declared a policy of enforced noninterference and free trade in a region—in this case, the Pacific. And the Perkinses were amongst the principal experts that state officials turned to for advice in handling conflicts over China and Oregon. The Perkins network advanced not only American interests into the region, but also contributed to universalizing discourses of commerce and diplomacy.

This project has followed two integrated yet distinct lines of analysis. The first centered on the geopolitical implications of early American mercantile strategies. The second focused on the social strategies employed by the Perkinses in navigating commerce, especially as their investments shifted from transatlantic to global trade. These stories help us to understand worlds that seemed to diverge in the eighteenth

century: mercantile capitalism and family economies. The Perkins network embodied them both. Tracing the rise and passing of the trade network established by an extensive circle of Perkins kith and kin suggests the intimacy of evolving capitalist strategies and the value of American family life to remaining competitive in global trade. Indeed, for the Perkinses, these stories were two sides of the same coin.

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APPENDICES

I. GLOSSARY

Bill of Exchange: A proof of debt; specifically, a written order that binds one person (the acceptor, in that this person accepts the obligation of paying the bill) to pay a fixed amount of money to another at a specified future date.

Bill of Lading: a document issued by a carrier (ship captain, firm) to certify that a specific cargo has been received on board a ship to be carried to a specified recipient or consignee.

Brig or Brigantine: a larger vessel with two square rigged masts.

Blotter: a diary of transactions divided into cash and non-cash; transactions were first recorded into waste books, blotters, or diaries, and then transferred into ledgers and journals and as such were the only account books admissible in court. (See also, waste book.)

Catty: a standard measure of weight of 16 taels, or 1.33 pounds.

Chop: most commonly refers to a Chinese seal stamped to make a document official, but was often akin to a signature as well. A “Chop House” was a customs house.

Co-Hong (see also Hong merchants): here, the guild of Chinese merchants authorized by the central government to trade with foreign merchants in Canton (Guangzhou) between 1684 and 1843.

Commission House: a firm that buys and sells for customers, not on its own account.

Comprador: Chinese employees of foreign factories in China who kept the accounts for all domestic and household transactions, and operated as an intermediary in business.

Double-entry Bookkeeping: a double entry includes a “charge” and a “discharge,” and affects two or more accounts in the ledger. A charge is when a merchant sells an article on credit, making the purchaser a debtor for the account. When the purchaser pays for the item, the merchant discharges their debt by crediting the purchaser’s account for the amount paid, and debits the inventory.

Factory: in a trading entrepôt, a factory houses factors and is thus akin to a countinghouse; it is not a space of production.

Hong merchants (see Co-Hong). Hong (hang in pinyin) literally translates as company or firm, but in English commonly refers to members of the Co-Hong.

Hoppo: Chinese official who oversaw the collection of customs duties.

Journal: account book of information taken from all diaries, blotters, or waste books arranged systematically.

Junk: a Chinese sailing vessel known for its horizontally constructed sails or “battens.” They varied tremendously in size. The “junk trade” is another common term for inter-Asian trade for the common use of these vessels in Asian waters.

Ledger: book of current accounts, systematically arranged by account.

Letter of Marque: official license from a state to a private person or vessel to act as a privateer and thus attack and plunder belligerent vessels during wartime, although also used to describe the vessel itself.

Linguist: Chinese employees licensed to mediate between foreign merchants and the Chinese state. While they might act as translators, this was only one of a number of duties that included helping foreign merchants negotiate the complex terms of trade, fee system, arrange audiences with the Hoppo, and more.

Malwa: a kind of opium grown in northwest India, commonly exported out of Bombay.

Patna: a kind of opium grown in Bengal under the direction of the East India Company, sold in Calcutta for shipment to Canton.

Picul: a picul is a standard measure of weight, equaling 100 catties or 133 1/3 pound.

Pirate: a private person or vessel who attacks or plunders other persons or vessels outside the bounds of state approval (thus, as opposed to those acting on a state’s behalf or privately but with authorization from a state).

Privateer: a private person or vessel authorized by a state by a letter of marque to attack and plunder belligerent vessels during wartime.

Profit & Loss Account: on the debtor side is posted the amount lost; on the credit side the amount gained; the difference between the two is the amount lost or gained.

Remittance: sending of money to remove an obligation.

Schooner: a larger fore-and-aft rigged vessel with two or more masts.

Spanish Dollar: a high quality silver coin made from Spanish American silver. Between 1619 and 1815, Spanish dollars invoiced at 5s. per dollar or £1 = \$4. From 1815 it was invoiced at the actual cost per ounce. Bills on the East India Company in London were issued at rates ranging from 4s. 10d. to 6s. per dollar, for bills payable at 365 days after sight.

Supercargo: a superintendent of the cargo; a shipboard sales’ agent.

Tael: the trade name for the “liang” or ounce in Mandarin Chinese; it thus also stood for the currency, a silver tael, which meant one tael of standard silver. Treated in accounts as 6s. 8d. (1£ =Tls. 3), Tls. 100 – 120.8 ounces troy.

Waste book: a diary of transactions divided into cash and non-cash; transactions were first recorded into waste books, blotters, or diaries, and then transferred into ledgers and journals and as such were the only account books admissible in court.

II. KEY GENEALOGIES

PECK-PERKINS GENEALOGY

Generation 1: Peck

- Thomas Handasyd PECK (ca. 1712-1777), m. Elizabeth Spurrier (?-1788) in 1733.

Generation 2: Peck-Perkins

- John Peck (1735- 1768), m. ? Brewer.
 - Elizabeth Peck (1736-1807), m. James PERKINS (1733-1773) in 1755.

PERKINS GENEALOGY

Generation 3: Elizabeth Peck, m. James Perkins in 1755.

- Elizabeth Perkins (1756-1843), m. Russell STURGIS (1750-1826) in 1773.
 - Ann (Nancy) Maynard Perkins (1759-1793), m. Captain Robert CUSHING (1755-?) in 1781?
 - James Perkins (1761-1822), m. Sarah PAINE (1764?-1841) in 1786.
 - John Peck (1763-1763).
 - Thomas Handasyd Perkins (1764-1854), m. Sarah (Sally) ELLIOT (1768-1852) in 1788.
 - Samuel Gardner Perkins (1767-1847), m. Barbara HIGGINSON (1774-1843) in 1795.
 - Mary Perkins (1769-1863), m. Benjamin ABBOT (1762-1849) in 1797.
 - Esther Perkins (1771-1810), m. Captain Thomas DOUBLEDAY (1769-1790), m. Josiah STURGIS (1767-1835) in 1795.
 - Margaret Perkins (1773-1856), m. Ralph Bennet FORBES (1773-1824) in 1801.

Generation 4: James Perkins, m. Sarah Paine in 1786.

- Sarah Perkins (died in infancy).
 - Sarah Perkins (1789-1812).
 - James Perkins, Jr. (1791-1828), m. Eliza Green Callahan (1789-1860) in 1812.

Generation 4: Thomas H. Perkins, m. Sally Elliot in 1788.

- Sarah Elliot Perkins (1788-1792).
 - Elizabeth Perkins (1791-1885), m. Samuel CABOT (1784-1863) in 1812.
 - Sarah Elliot Perkins (1792-1856).
 - Ann Cushing Perkins (1794-1799).
 - Thomas H. Perkins, Jr. (1796-1850), m. Jane Frances DUMARESQ (1799-1856) in 1820.

- Mary Ann Cushing Perkins (1798-1860), m. Thomas Graves CARY (1791-1882) in 1820.
- Caroline Perkins (1800-1867), m. William H. GARDINER (1794-1882) in 1823.
- Charles Elliot Perkins (1801-1803).
- George Cabot Perkins (1803-1868).
- Ann (Nancy) Cushing Perkins (1806-1889), m. William Ferdinand CARY (1795-1881).
- James Elliot Perkins (1809-1809).

Generation 4: Samuel G. Perkins, m. Barbara Higginson in 1795.

- Barbara Higginson Perkins (1796-1822), m. Walter Channing (1786-1876) in 1823.
- Susan Cleveland Perkins (1798-1825), m. George Searle (1788-1858).
- Elizabeth Peck Perkins (1798-after 1846).
- Nancy Maynard Perkins (1801-1887).
- Stephen Higginson Perkins (1804-1877), m. Sarah Sullivan, m. Elizabeth Welles, m. Elizabeth Sumner Waters.
- James Handasyd Perkins (1810-1849), m. Sarah H. Elliott (1814-1885) in 1834.

STURGIS GENEALOGY

Generation 3: Thomas Sturgis, III, m. Sarah (Sally) Paine in 1745.

- William Sturgis (1748-1826), m. Sarah Burdick in 1777, m. Hannah Mills.
- Russell Sturgis (1750-1826), m. Elizabeth PERKINS (1756-1843) in 1773.
- Abigail Sturgis (1752-1793), m. Christopher Lovell in 1774.
- Thomas Sturgis (1755-1821), m. Elizabeth Jackson (1768-1844) in 1786.
- John Sturgis (1757-?), m. Rebecca Simpson in 1794.
- Elizabeth Sturgis (1759-?).
- Samuel Sturgis (1762-1825), m. Lucretia Jennings (1764-1811) in 1786.
- Josiah Sturgis (1767-1835), m. Esther PERKINS Doubleday (1771-1810) in 1795.

Generation 4: - William Sturgis, m. Sarah Burdick in 1777, m. Hannah Mills.

- Sarah Pope (Burdick).
- William F. Sturgis (1782-1863), m. Elizabeth Marston Davis (?-?) in 1811.
- Hannah Sturgis, m. Isaac Hinckley.

Generation 4: Russell Sturgis, m. Elizabeth PERKINS in 1773.

- James Perkins Sturgis (1774-1790).
- Elizabeth Peck Sturgis (1776-1776).
- Nathaniel Russell Sturgis (1779-1856), m. Susan Shaw Parkman (1780-1827) in 1804.

- Thomas Sturgis (1781-1782).
- Charles Sturgis (1784-1801).
- Sarah Paine Sturgis (1786-1855), m. Elisha Pope.
- Elizabeth Perkins Sturgis (1788-1873).
- Henry Sturgis (1790-1819).
- James Perkins Sturgis (1791-1851).
- George Washington Sturgis (1793-1826), m. Mary Ann CHANNING in 1824.
- Ann (Nancy) Sturgis (1797-1892), m. Frederick W. PAINE.
- Mary Perkins (1800-1801).

Generation 4: Thomas Sturgis, m. Elizabeth Jackson in 1786.

- Nancy Sturgis (1786-1866).
- Hezekiah Jackson Sturgis (1789-1829).
- Thomas Sturgis (1781-1792).
- Elizabeth Jackson Sturgis (1793-1870), m. Russell Freeman.
- Martha Russell Sturgis (1797-1846).
- Catherine Sturgis (1801-1880).
- Russell Sturgis (1804-1872).
- William Sturgis (1806-1895), m. Elizabeth Knight Hinckley in 1831, m. Catherine Gore Torrey in 1857, m. Jane Lay McChesney in 1873.

Generation 4: Samuel Sturgis, m. Lucretia Jennings in 1786.

- Thomas Sturgis (1786-1805).
- Lucretia Sturgis (1788-1863), m. Joshua BATES (1788-1864) in 1811.
- Nancy Sturgis (1789-1857), m. Philip Tewksbury in 1819.
- Samuel Sturgis, Jr. (1791-1822).
- Hannah Bourne Sturgis (1793-1803).
- Josiah Sturgis (1794-1850).
- Abigail Lovell Sturgis (1795-1875), m. John Tewksbury.
- Eliza Sturgis (1797-1875), m. Barnabas Turner Pratt.
- Harriot Hinckley Sturgis (1798-1877).
- Mary Paine Sturgis (1798-1819)
- John Sturgis (1799-1851), m. ?
- Sally Hill Sturgis (1800-1879), m. S. Tewksbury
- Charles Russell Sturgis (1803-1870), m. Mary J. Gray.
- Hannah Bourne Sturgis (1805-?) m. Thomas Floyd.

PAINE GENEALOGY

Generation 3: Judge Timothy Paine, m. Sarah Chandler in 1749.

- Dr. William Fitz Paine (1750-1833), m. Lois Orne (1756-1822) in ?.
- Timothy Paine (1752-1775).
- Samuel Paine (1754-1807).
- Hannah Paine (1755-1841), m. Ebenezer Bradish.
- Nathaniel Paine (1755-1757).

- Hon. Nathaniel Paine (1759?-1840), m. Elizabeth ?.
- Anthony Paine (1760?-1788).
- John Paine (1762-1832).
- Sarah Paine (1764-1841), m. James PERKINS (1761-1822) in 1786.

Generation 4: Dr. William Fitz Paine, m. Lois Orne.

- William Fitz Paine (1783-1837).
- Frederick William Paine (1788-1869), m. Ann (Nancy) Cushing STURGIS (1797-1873) in 1822.

ELLIOT GENEALOGY

Generation 3: Major General Simon Elliot, m. Sarah Wilson.

- Simon Elliot (1762-1832), m. Eliza Barnard (1768-1852).
- Sally Elliot (1768-1852), m. Thomas Handasyd PERKINS (1764-1854) in 1788.

HIGGINSON GENEALOGY

Generation 3: Hon. Stephen Higginson, m. Susan Cleveland in 1741, m. Elizabeth Perkins in 1789, m. Sarah Perkins in 1792.

- John Higginson (1765-1810?), m. 1796 or 1797 Josephine de Breget, m. Elizabeth ? in 1808?
- Sarah Higginson (1766-1808), m. Hon. Dudley Atkins Tyng (1760-1829) in 1792.
- Nathaniel Higginson (1768-1794), m. Sarah Rhea (1769-1844) in 1792.
- Stephen Higginson, Jr. (1770-1834), m. Martha Salisbury (1771-1803) in 1794, m. Louisa Storrow (1786-1864) in 1806.
- Barbara Cooper Higginson (1774-1843), m. Samuel Gardner PERKINS (1767-1863) in 1795.
- Elizabeth Higginson (1776-1842), m. Hon. Dudley Atkins Tyng (1760-1829) in 1809, Rev. James Morss in 1831 (1779-1842).
- George Higginson (1779-1812), m. Mary Hubbard Babcock (1781-1863) in 1800.
- Henry Higginson (1781-1838), m. Anne (Nancy) Maynard CUSHING (1782-1847) in 1803.
- Susan Cleveland Higginson (1783-1865), m. Francis Dana Channing (1775-1810) in 1806.
- James Perkins Higginson (1791-1878), m. Mary Hubbard Babcock (1781-1863) in 1813.

Generation 4: Henry Higginson, m. Nancy CUSHING in 1803.

- Henry Higginson (1807-1824).
- Samuel Perkins Higginson (1808-1893), m. Freeloove Wiggins Smith (1822-

1909) in 1841.
 - Stephen Cleveland Higginson (1811-1863), m. Jane Rosalind Cardin (1821-1896) in 1848.
 - John Cushing Higginson (1813-1874), m. Charlotte Brown (1828-1860), m. Anne E. Brown (1832-1874) in 1863.
 - George Maynard Higginson (1815-1897), m. Anna Elizabeth Tyng (1822-1881) in 1845.

FORBES GENEALOGY

Generation 3: Rev. John Forbes, m. Dorothy Murray in 1769.

- Col. James Grant Forbes (1769-1825), m. Frances Elizabeth Blackwell (?-1845), in 1804.
 - John Murray Forbes (1771-1831).
 - Ralph Bennet Forbes (1773-1824), m. Margaret PERKINS (1773-1856) in 1801.

Generation 4: James Grant Forbes, m. Frances Elizabeth Blackwell in 1804.

- Rev. John Murray Forbes (1807-1885), m. Anne Howell (?-1849) in 1838.
 - Paul Sieman (Sieman) Forbes (1808-1886), m. Valeria Wright (?-1888) in 1835.
 - Mary Josephine (Josephine) Forbes.
 - Frances (Fanny) Blackwell Forbes.

Generation 4: Ralph Bennet Forbes, m. Margaret Perkins in 1801.

- Emma Forbes (1801-1847).
 - Thomas Tunno Forbes (1803-1829).
 - Robert Bennet Forbes (1804-1889), m. Rose Greene Smith (1802-1885) in 1834.
 - Margaret Forbes (1806-?).
 - John Murray Forbes (1813-1898), m. Sarah Swain Hathaway (1813-1900) in 1837.
 - Mary Abbot Forbes (1814-1904), m. Rev. Francis Cunningham (?) in 1843.
 - Frances (Fanny) Cordelia Forbes.

III. MAJOR FIRMS CONNECTED TO/EMERGING OUT OF THE PERKINS NETWORK

Cape Francis, Santo Domingo

Perkins, Burling & Perkins, May 1, 1786-August 15, 1788. Partners: James Perkins, Walter Burling, Thomas H. Perkins.

Perkins, Burling & Co., August 15, 1788-June 21, 1793. Partners: James Perkins, Walter Burling, Samuel G. Perkins.

Boston, Massachusetts

T. H. Perkins & James Magee, August 15, 1788-n.d. Partners: Thomas H. Perkins & James Magee.

James & Thomas H. Perkins, Sept. 29, 1792-August 1, 1822. Partners: James and Thomas H. Perkins.

S. Cabot, Jr., J. & T. H. Perkins January 1, 1817-January 1821. Partners: Samuel Cabot, Jr., James and Thomas H. Perkins, Jr.

J. & T. H. Perkins & Sons, January 1821-February 20, 1823 (1st est.). Partners: James Perkins, Thomas H. Perkins, Samuel Cabot, James Perkins, Jr. Thomas H. Perkins, Jr.

J. & T. H. Perkins & Sons, February 20, 1823-June 22, 1828 (2nd establishment). Partners: T. H. Perkins, Samuel Cabot, James Perkins, Jr., T. H. Perkins, Jr.

J. & T. H. Perkins & Sons, June 22, 1828-January 1, 1838 (3rd est.). Partners: Samuel Cabot, Thomas G. Cary, T. H. Perkins, Jr.

Bryant, Sturgis, & Co., 1811-1841. Partners: John Bryant and William Sturgis.

Bryant, Sturgis & Co. Partners: John Bryant, William Sturgis, John Bryant, Jr., Samuel Hooper.

Bryant & Sturgis, 1841-1863. Partners: John Bryant and William Sturgis.

William Appleton & Co., 1841-1866. Partners: William Appleton, James Amory Appleton, and Samuel Hooper.

Samuel G. Perkins & Co., August 2, 1813-May 1, 1822, Boston, Calcutta. Partners: Samuel G. Perkins, Edward A. Newton, James Perkins Higginson.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Hazard & Cabot, December 1, 1806, partnership agreement for seven years. Partners: Sam Hazard and Sam Cabot, Jr.

Perit & Cabot, March 20, 1815 - January 1821. Partners: John Webster Perit of Philadelphia, Joseph Cabot, and Samuel Cabot, Jr.

New York, New York

Perkins & Sturgis, 1827-May 25, 1830. Partners: George C. Perkins & John Sturgis.

Thomas G. & William F. Cary & Co., 1818-1881. Partners at various points: Thomas Graves Cary, William F. Cary, Henry Cary, Samuel Carey, William F. Cary, Jr.

HP Sturgis & Co., 1859-? (NY and Boston). Partners: Henry P. Sturgis, James Sturgis, Robert S. Sturgis, Chandler Robbins.

Charleston, South Carolina

Sturgis & Lovell, January 1804-August 1816: Josiah Sturgis, J. Lovell.

Canton/Guanzhou, China

Ephraim Bumstead & Co., July 15, 1803-December 5, 1805. Partners: Ephraim Bumstead, James and TH Perkins.

Perkins & Co., December 6, 1805-August 1, 1822 (1st Establishment). Partners: James and Thomas H. Perkins, John P. Cushing.

Perkins & Co., February 20, 1823-June 22, 1828 (2nd est.). Partners: James Perkins, Jr., TH Perkins, John P. Cushing.

Russell & Co, Canton, 1823-1891. Partners:

Samuel Russell (1823-36)

Philip Ammidon (1824-30)

William H. Low (1830-3)

Augustine Heard (1831-36)

John C. Green (1834-39)

John M. Forbes (1834-38)

Joseph Coolidge (1834-39)

A.A. Low (1837-9)

William C. Hunter (1837-42)

Edward King (1837-42)

Robert B. Forbes (1830-2, captain of the *Lintin*, 1839-44, 1849-54)

Warren Delano, Jr. (1840-46, 1861-66)

Russell Sturgis, Jr. (1842-44)

William H. King (1843-9)

Daniel N. Spooner (1843-5, 1852-7)

Joseph T. Gilman (1843-5)

Edward Delano (1844-46)

Paul S. Forbes (1844-73)

George Perkins (1846-49)

Russell, Sturgis & Co. May 1, 1834-1840. Copartnership in connection with Russell & Sturgis of Manila. Partners: John W. Perit, George R. Russell, Russell Sturgis, Henry P. Sturgis.

Macau, China

JP Sturgis & Co. October 26, 1818-1851? Partners: James P. Sturgis, George W. Sturgis, Henry Sturgis.

Manila, Philippines

Russell & Sturgis. July 1, 1828 - 1875, Manila. Partners: George Robert Russell and Henry P. Sturgis.