The Legacy of Timothy Dwight: A Reappraisal

BY WILLIAM GRIIBBIN*

Lyman Beecher’s daughter drew a pathetic account of how New England’s faithful received the news of the death of Yale’s President in January, 1817. Her father was notified while in his pulpit at the close of Sabbath services and told his congregation, “Dr. Dwight is gone! My father! my father! the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!” The assembly, as Catherine remembered it, “with an electric impulse, rose to their feet, and many eyes were bathed in tears.” When Timothy Dwight was buried, the shops of New Haven were closed; ministers came from all over Connecticut to walk in procession; and Yale’s alumni gathered in towns as far away as Albany to pay their respects. Editors declared that “the loss is severely felt not only by his family and friends, but by the University over which he presided, and by the community at large.” Many journalists reprinted as their own expression the lament of the Religions Intelligencer: “From the cloud of gloom which overshadows us, we can only say that ‘a great man has fallen this day in Israel.’” Papers of strong Republican sympathies, however, took little note of his passing. In death as in life, this champion of political and theological orthodoxy had friends and foes aplenty, but few neutral analysts.

Dwight’s posthumous fame has been no different. Biographers for generations sang his praises, while scholars of a later era have been similarly unanimous in berating the shortcomings of his intellect and the shortsightedness of his partisanship. Soon after his passing, his son was at work composing a filial memoir, and Sereno Dwight’s facts (though not always his judgments) have provided later writers with a handy source of material. William B. Sprague, one of America’s most prolific biographers, drew substantially the same portrait. As late as the Civil War, those who cherished the memory of Timothy Dwight could affirm that “his fame as a theologian, his eloquence as a preacher, his success as President of Yale College, and his excellence as

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a man and Christian are known throughout the land." Even in the heyday of Jacksonian Democracy, a justice of Connecticut's Supreme Court could declare "that no man except the Father of his Country" had conferred greater benefits on our nation than President Dwight." Before assuming that Roger Sherman's apotheosis of his old fellow Federalist was eccentric, we should recall that Dwight's magnum opus, his multi-volume Theology, was widely popular in its twelfth edition long after Jackson was gone and was bold testimony even in the age of Lincoln to his author's enduring influence. And doubtless there were few readers of it who were not pleased by Sereno's paintings still predating it.

Obeying Carl Becker's aphorism with a vengeance, a later generation of scholars followed the lead of Vernon Louis Parrington, who thus re wrote Dwight's history for his own purposes: "A great thinker, a steadfast friend of truth in whatever garb it might appear, a generous kindly soul loving even publicans and sinners, regardless of others and forgetful of self, he assuredly was not." Dwight's major recent biographer, as well as his foremost literary critic, have not dissented from that judgment. Those who write about the Federal period usually mention Dwight; they can hardly avoid it, so large did he loom then. Some excerpt from his poetry, often from the tendentious Triumph of Infidelity, is invariably included in anthologies of early American literature. A recent fine edition of his voluminous travel diary, long a rich source of informative odds and ends, promises further working of this lode. But after the recent appearance of an exhaustive study of his writings, it seems that no more attention need be paid to the man who represented some of the most surely lost of all lost causes.

It is not likely that a brief re-examination of Dwight can substantially alter our opinion of him, and that is not the purpose of this essay. There is a more pressing task: to understand his importance in the early Republic and to appreciate what he meant to thousands of his countrymen. At a time when our contemporary upheaval has jarred out of place one settled structuring of the American past and not quite replaced it with another, Dwight deserves another look, along with all our other heroes and villains. A freshened familiarity with him might aid our attempts to relate to citizens of an earlier Republic at once bold and doubtful, humane and oppressive, powerful and torn at heart.

It must be admitted that modern readers are apt to have limited sensitivity to Dwight. His opinions are not those they value; his values not those they cherish. Distrust of majoritarian democracy, for example, is no longer respectable, though it be ever so common among those who most deplore it. Belief that leadership should lie in the hands of those fitted for it by birth, education, and wealth is rarely avowed now, no matter how much it may be practiced by egalitarian heroes. The role Dwight played as clerical participant in non-reform movements, for which he was called the Protestant Pope of Connecticut, has been repudiated by libertarians, although more than ever the American ministry shares Dwight's sense that one ordination outweighs a thousand votes, that true believing supersedes the electoral process. Dwight's rhetoric of crisis, invective, conspiracy surely has little pertinence for later citizens whose politics are more bland and whose partisanship less desperate, even if some of them, settled in institutions of learning, have recently feared that elections would be suspended by presidential fiat.

In addition to this lack of sympathy for Dwight, there is another barrier to our entering his mind and, through it, the world in which he thundered. Too distant in time for us to have shared the patterns of his thought, he is yet too near for comfort. He is not safely, entirely consigned to the ages, like the Puritan divines whom Perry Miller could so thoroughly appreciate, even though their treatment of him, had they been able to reverse his time warp, would doubtless have been less humane. Rather, Dwight's world is curiously undead; and the modern critic may find it exasperating to conduct his positivist dissection upon a body of ideas that refuse to expire. Dwight's voice can still be heard all over the country at the turn of a radio dial in sermons employing his logic, accepting his premises, and pinning scarlet letters to the same wickedness he had rebuked. An awkward situation, indeed, if students of the past ever advert to it. Be that as it may, in confronting Dwight we may be like some antique hunters, cherishing the relics of ancients with whom they have no ties but brusquely uninterested in their grandpa's old tools, which are yet too personal and all too likely still to fit their uncalled hands.

To understand Dwight we need not attend further to the Jacobin hunter, the literalateur, the inveterate traveler compiling his notebook miscellanies. As Ralph Henry Gabriel has said of him, he "was not a scholar, he was a prophet." He was in charge of an institution of Christian learning, which meant for him a certain specific mission, a none too flexible purpose in American society. That purpose is easily seen if we put ourselves in his place. Disappointed by the electorate's repeated choice of Virginian infidels to the presidency, saddened by the decline of New England's traditional leadership, appalled by the falling of restraints on behavior as geographic mobility and economic change uprooted sons and daughters from the apparatus of community supervision, what alternatives remained for him in a world so bent on its own destruction? Surely not a pessimistic fatalism, washing his hands of the perverse populace and letting a wayward generation meet its doom. Such weakness of will was not to be found in him. What might be expected, then, but a resolve to plant seeds so numerous and vital and pregnant with determined ambition that a far-off harvest of righteousness would somehow compensate for present moral famine?

This explains Dwight's role as an educator. He dominated the college during his tenure there, as many testified, and left his impress on almost every student who passed through its doors, as even his critics have admitted. "Students matured under his instruction and, as one of them said, 'had his principles, literary, political, moral, and religious, settled for life.'" It is worth remembering that "after four years in that climate, they carried his influence into every phase of the nation's life"; but we must extend his reach beyond the fact that "he exercised a remarkable influence upon his own generation." His labors were directed toward a generation to come, to secure victories he would not himself celebrate.

This was an early decision on his part. In July, 1776, the young scholar told Yale's graduating class of their role in mankind's future. Though they might not live to see their country's full glory, he cautioned, their labors "are not to be confined by the narrow bounds of the present age, but to comprehend succeeding generations, and to be pointed to immortality." If this sounds like the oft repeated rhetoric of commencement exercises, in this case
it was true; and the orator based his life’s work on the expectation that his labor would eventually vindicate him. He believed, in the phrase of a later, like-minded man, that history would absolve him.

His friends emphasized this very point in their mourning for him. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions listed first among his accomplishments “his distinguished instrumentality in enlisting under the banner of the cross many young men, destined for public action.” “How great a number of his students, residing in every part of our country,” his friends recalled, “looked up to him with affectionate attachment, as to a parent.” Very many, indeed, as Gardiner Spring assured those who gathered to honor Dwight’s memory in New York City, “No inconsiderable portion of the youthful ministry of reconciliation in our country, and especially in New England and the western parts of the State of New-York” were the fruit of Dwight’s efforts. It was with an eye to the influence of those protégés in public affairs that Roger Sherman later thought that only Washington had better served the Republic than Dwight. If that seems an astounding exaggeration, we do well to consider how Dwight’s students justified his hopes.

This does not apply to all of them, of course, nor even to most of them in the sense that they deliberately carried on his work. He would have taken little pride in the career of a slaver like John Calhoun or a Unitarian like Horace Holley. But alumnists like those were vastly outnumbered by paragons of Christian citizenship like Benjamin Silliman and Jeremiah Evarts, by humanitarians like Thomas Gallaudet and Heman Humphrey, by Senator John Davis as he voted against war with Mexico, by Roger Baldwin as he sought liberty for the Africans aboard the Amistad, by Samuel Morse as he crusaded against Popery. It is easy to make too much of this. It can be said that Dwight did not make these men what they were, that birth and breeding shaped their attitudes. But it is not controllable that, for whatever reasons, many of Dwight’s students lived out the commitments which he shared with them, that they made realities of the projects he had discussed with them. This is not to lay the laurels or blame at his feet, but to recognize him as a cultural avatar, the embodiment of forces which, though he did not create them, were focused through him and in the process magnified.

Thus there is validity in Lyman Beecher’s statement that Dwight’s influence “was extensive and beneficent beyond that of any other man in New England.” Beecher was not always a reliable judge of things, but in this case his opinion is supported by his own accomplishments and those of Dwight’s other disciples. Elihu Baldwin, President of Wabash College, was not the only molder of young minds who throughout his career modeled his discourses upon those of his teacher at Yale. Both Bennett Tyler, leader of the Old Divinity wing of Congregationalism in the years before the Civil War, and Nathaniel Taylor, his “liberal” counterpart, were devoted to Dwight, who was much more than a professor to both of them. The children of the Reverend David Dudley Field recalled that their father “looked up to Dwight as a king of men. No one felt his influence more than Field, and the impression remained to the end of his life.” It is tempting to speculate whether this reverence for Dwight touched Field’s children, who so vividly remembered it as a tool of science, government, and on the Supreme Wondershow many students came out from Dwight’s tutelage “deeply interested in every reform and saw very clearly that the anti-slavery agitation which began in 1832 would shake our country to its foundations.” That at least was the experience of Thomas Grimké, who returned from college when his sister Sarah was almost fifteen, “bringing with him many new ideas, most of them quite original, and which he at once set to work to study more closely, with a view to putting them into practical operation. Sarah was his confidante and amanuensis; and, looking up to him almost as to a demi-god, she readily fell in with his opinions, and made many of them her own.”

We may be attributing to Dwight’s influence what properly belongs to the wills of other men. And yet, respected among abolitionists, honored among educators, quoted by savants, remembered by common folk, he left his dreams to a succeeding generation. They came to share his two fundamental concepts: the role of Christian citizens in the Republic and the role of Christian America in the world. The brothers Duyckinck remarked in their cyclopedia that Dwight’s “literary compositions are represented by two leading ideas—his religion and his patriotism.” Three of his works are especially demonstrative in this regard; and, quickly summarized, they may help us understand the legacy he left his followers.

His best known sermon, The Duty of Americans at the Present Crisis, was a Fourth of July address delivered in 1798 during the quasi-war with France and is often quoted as an example of Federalist hysteria over the crisis. Its intense invective against France and her Jeffersonian admirers has been cited with relish by historians, who seem as indefatigable scourges of his orthodoxy as he was of infidelity. But it is nonetheless possible to read the sermon as a perceptive introduction to the issues of the next century, revealing the axioms which shaped Dwight’s thought and which in turn gave form to the education of a rising generation. The sermon anticipated the onrushing showdown predicted by St. John from his exile on Patmos. In this expectation Dwight was joined by a great many Americans who might quarrel over the exact date of the event, but who assumed that the course of human affairs since the Reformation pointed to the nineteenth century as the time of Apocalypse. We may call their vision quaint, but we dare not ignore it. For if we mock Dwight’s hopes of 1798, we thereby take lightly the millions like him who long thereafter lived out his beliefs. We also lessen our chance to comprehend the nation that was ripped and convulsed under the impact of their righteousness.

Under its millennial jargon, The Duty of Americans was based on hard-headed principles, the first being that moral probity is requisite for a nation’s well-being. Hence the title. As Dwight put it in a favorite allusion of American preachers, “if ten righteous persons, found in the polluted cities of the vale of Sodom, would have saved them from destruction, the personal conduct of no individual can be insignificant to the safety and happiness of a nation.” This may have seemed to John Adams an absurd way to cope with the threat of French power; but it is sobering to think that, during the administration of his son John Quincy, many Americans still agreed with Dwight’s premise and formed powerful movements of reform to carry it out. Equally essential to the sermon was the notion that America was somehow distinct, the only refuge of pure religion and republicanism. As Dwight called the roll of fallen republics—Belgium, Batavia, Switzerland, Venice—he was expressing a constant concern of his countrymen: the uniqueness of the New World’s enterprise and the threat which the rest of mankind presented to its
institutions. We are now expected to laugh off Dwight's panic in the face of French radicalism and the Bavarian Illuminati, and indeed it was a bit pathetic. But there is no way to dismiss the secularized version of his fear, eventually shared by most Americans, that they were pitted against a hostile world because, as Dwight fondly hoped, their civil and religious example challenged tyranny everywhere.

Dwight's two principles—the individual's responsibility for the moral condition of his community and thus for the safety of his commonwealth and the American's assurance of his nation's special place under Heaven—together made a volatile compound. With the proper catalysts, it could prove devastating, demanding respect even from those who considered Dwight a leftover of colonial Connecticut. More than anyone else, he produced the catalysts, taught them his dogmas, and armed them with his own mission. We can feel the force of *The Duty of Americans* if we apply its meaning not just to the crisis of 1798 but also to the prolonged contest for control of American culture, the struggle to shape institutions and direct values that continued throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. For Dwight's influence over hundreds of participants in that contest played a great role in determining the outcome.

The major literary channel of that influence was the repeated series of sermons he preached at Yale which later became *Theology*. This sermon of divinity "contributed significantly to the reestablishment of Protestantism as a vital force in American life" and presented "to successive generations of students who furnished the most numerous group of Congregational ministers, gave him a wide influence as a theologian." Even a modern antagonist has noted the importance of these volumes, albeit critically, complaining that "during his early life he had kept his religious and social beliefs fairly well separated. His *Theology* marked the final union of the two." It marked as well the development of a corps of Christian professionals who would go on buying, reading, and teaching Dwight's systematized wisdom.

Because the *Theology* was a schematic of its author's mind, its emphasis upon duty is not surprising. It differed from previous expositions of New England's orthodoxy in that only part of it concerned the "system of faith" while almost half comprised a "system of duties," making it "a complete system of practical ethics." Much of it is trite and no pleasure to read, but it does remind us why Dwight was so powerful a force. More than any of his contemporaries, he condensed a system of belief into a code of behavior, stressing the application of dogma to men's lives, emphasizing especially the duties of Christian citizens. Granted, this was not a profound accomplishment. In fact, one may wonder whether his deserved praise for his usefulness or censure for the dull rigidity implied in any codifying of faith into regulations. Leaving that problem to others, we can safely note that the *Theology*, in both its faults and merits, spoke to the society which fostered it. It was no coincidence that Dwight's matter-of-fact exposition of Christian duty, uncluttered by frivolous speculation, dominated the field of moral theology through a time in which Scottish Common Sense Realism, with its equally down-to-earth practicality, was the means by which Americans assured themselves of man's ability to know, appraise, and shape reality. So too the *Theology* can be read as a handbook for knowing religious truth, discerning one's responsibilities, and forging a new order of things.

If the *Theology* was Dwight's prosaic guide for fulfilling the responsibilities he had outlined in *The Duty of Americans*, the intended results were lyrically anticipated in *Greenfield Hill*. Generally considered his best piece, this long pastoral has had ample notice from critics. They have remarked its pomposity and imitativeness, its sincerity and occasional forcefulness, its local charm and cultural nationalism. One interpreter has called attention to its view of America as a "redeemer nation," which is the poem's central statement. All that remains is to examine how Dwight lived out the ideas he put into *Greenfield Hill*, how his lines of 1794 foreshadow his career to 1817 and the direction of his followers thereafter.

This is especially true with regard to America's role in world affairs; for though his was not a unique vision, his endorsement could sanctify a commonplace notion with special vitality. In the afterglow of independence, Dwight's readers were subjected to sentiments like, "All hail, thou western world! by heaven design'd, / Th' example bright to renovate mankind." But Dwight extrapolated from this least common denominator to chart his own graph of the future:

Soon shall thy sons across the mainland roam;  
And claim, on far Pacific shores, their home;  
Their rule, religion, manners, arts, convey  
And spread their freedom to the Asian sea.

Proud Commerce' mole the western surges lave;  
The long, white spire lie imag'd on the wave;  
O'er morn's pellicul'd main expand their sails,  
And the star'd ensign court Korean gales.

These lines offer a fine example of the way in which Dwight's seeming fantasies were grounded upon fact. Shortly before he began his poem, the first American ship returned to New York from Canton, carrying tea, silk, and a commercial virus so infectious that, in the single year of 1789, sixteen Yankee vessels docked in China. While Dwight was composing in 1787 and 1788, Captains Gray and Kendrick had already left Boston for the Pacific Northwest, laying foundations for the fur trade with the Orient and in their second voyage entering the river which was to bear their ship's name, *Columbia*. Polishing his verses before publication, Dwight must have found great meaning in the event; for just as early explorers had sailed for cross and crown, so too, he thought, American expansion would be for "the long white spire" of New England's faith, as well as for the "star'd ensign."

A reader familiar with only Dwight's better publicized opinions might be surprised to hear this high priest of reaction declaim,

Then to new climes the bliss shall trace its way,  
And tartar desarts hail the rising day;  
From the long torpor startled China wake;  
Her chains of misery rous'd Peruivia break;  
Man link to man; with bosom bosom twine;  
And one great bond the house of Adam join;
The sacred promise full completion know,  
And peace, and piety, the world o'erflow.

If, as some have suggested, Dwight's dark view of human nature caused him to despair of democratic government, he nonetheless experienced moments of confidence. Contrary to the usual wisdom, he did not grow more conservative as he grew older. In 1810, with his poetry behind him, he was a founder of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the country's first evangelical society to carry out the work of conversion beyond the national boundaries. The Board was appropriately centered in Boston, where the ships of the Orient trade, much like the Polos of an earlier era, were newly returned with news of the world to be won for Christ and markets waiting for New England. Dwight himself took into his home a Polynesian lad, who could learn from his host a republican creed as well as experimental religion. All this was, of course, only part of a more extensive missionary interest in Pacific lands, which ever afterward would fascinate America's Christians, sea captains, and men of state.

Given Dwight's penchant for proselytizing, we can imagine how extensively he fostered his view of America's future among his students, to whom national expansion would seem the working out of a divine plan. This presumption is the more plausible because his internationalism was not confined to a few passages in Greenfield Hill. It suffused the whole poem, spilled over into sermons and essays, gave coherence to his politics and urgency to his crusades. It should make a great deal of difference in our estimation of him whether the evangelical world mission of Greenfield Hill was the passing fancy of a mediocre poet or the lifelong vision of a great teacher. Although he stopped composing metered hymns to America's millennium, he never relinquished the dream that had first inspired them. What if he made real the projects he so poorly versified? What are we to think of the messianism of Greenfield Hill if, instead of dying with the eighteenth century, it formed mighty organizations to carry America's presence overseas long before the nation's politicians tried their hand at the task? What if it thrilled those future leaders who confessed their lifelong debt to Dwight? Instead of berating the shortcomings of his Federal verse, we might find in it the heart of Romantic America and discover in its author the intellectual transmitter through whom the weakened faith of one era was preserved and amplified for a later time. For by and by, his countrymen too would discover the Orient and with him avow that,

Yet there, even there, Columbia's bliss shall spring,  
Rous'd from dull sleep, astonish'd Europe sing,  
O'er Asia burst the renovating morn,  
And startled Afric in a day be born.

If the legacy of Timothy Dwight was so cherished by so many, we should no longer consign him to the world of derelict Federalism and decomposing Calvinism.

Our evaluation of any leader is usually based upon how accurately he saw the problems facing his community and how effectively he worked for their solution. Thus Jefferson, for all his faults, is forgiven much by sympathetic historians who admire prophetic visions like, "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever. . . ." Unlike that rhetoric, Dwight's words are not apt to be carved on memorial walls. But his assessment of America's future and of the individual believer's role in achieving it was equally astute and doubtless had more enduring effect upon those who later jotted a hesitant nation toward its calling.

Their times, the four or five decades after Dwight's death in 1817, have been variously labeled. By now it is clear that, if it was an age of egalitarianism, it was also a time of elitism, when minorities organized to direct the thrust of an untutored popular will. If it was the age of the common man, it was at the same time marked by a flow of power and wealth into the hands of a raw leadership of ambition and daring. If it saw the increased democratization of public affairs, it also saw the perfecting of techniques for political manipulation by those who knew what they wanted. In any case, our view of those decades must take into account how often Dwight's memory was invoked, how the problems he attacked and the solutions he proposed, perhaps altered by time and men's adaptability, outlived him. So it is proper tribute to his influence as an educator and prophet that those years after his death, when his country awkwardly came to grips with the questions he had confronted, be considered the age of Dwight as well as the age of Jackson. For succeeding years revealed, not just the brute power of an expansive majoritarianism, but also the elemental force of a dedicated few, who had been well schooled in their mission by the personal example and literary testament of a man who his enemies thought had been defeated.

NOTE: This article, with footnotes, may be consulted at The Connecticut Historical Society.

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The Reuben Humphrey Portraits

In the Society's 1970 Annual Report, Thompson R. Harlow, Director, noted the acquisition of a pair of portraits from the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, which they had received from Mrs. Frank Willis of Oak Park, Illinois. The subjects, Major Reuben Humphrey and his wife, Anna (Humphrey) Humphrey were the great-great-grandparents of Mrs. Willis and it was her desire that the paintings be returned to their native state. The portraits arrived in November 1969, and the following April they were in the hands of Roger Dennis, Conservator of Painting at the Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, who, over the years, has restored nearly 100 of the Society's paintings, many of them through a grant to the Society in 1959 from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

In every way these portraits have an unusual story to tell. Major Reuben Humphrey (1757-1832) was born in West Simsbury (now Canton,) the son of Honorable Oliver and Sarah (Garratt) Humphrey. He married Anna Humphrey, his first cousin, and they were the parents of 12 children, ten of whom were born in Canton. He served as a private in the Revolution and fought at the Battle of Long Island. Between the years 1784 and 1795, he was a captain, major, brigade major and inspector of the First Division of the Connecticut Militia. He retained his title of Major throughout his life, although he was also "Judge" Humphrey, due to his appointment as the first judge of Onondaga County, New York, in 1804.

The Major is described in the Humphrey genealogy by Frederick Humphreys, 1883, as "a large, muscular, and portly man whose usual weight in the prime of life was about two hundred and fifty pounds..." He was a man of considerable humor, occasionally given to lamenting the size of his large family. His grandmother, Sarah (Mills) Tuller Garratt Woodford, who lived to be 101 years old, once chided him with, "Why, Reuben, children are a blessing," to which the Major agreed, but added, "So is snow, but who wants it twelve feet deep."

About 1796 Major Humphrey made arrangements to move to the Genesee country in Western New York on land owned by the Wadsworth family. The plan did not materialize, owing to his new appointment as Superintendent, or "Keeper," of Newgate Prison in what is now East Granby. It was probably one of the most challenging jobs of his career, for Newgate, the only prison in the State at that time, had already gone through various vicissitudes. Established by the General Assembly in 1773 at the deserted copper mine in Simsbury, it housed deep in its caverns many as 40 Tories during the American Revolution. By November 1782 it had burned down three times, and more than half the convicts incarcerated there had made their escape one way or another. By 1790 it was designated a permanent State prison, for which the Legislature appropriated £750. New buildings were erected, a keeper and ten guards were appointed, and the place was generally secured with a wooden palisade mounted with iron spikes.

Major Humphrey, the third Superintendent of Newgate Prison, took over the position from Peter Curtis in October of 1796. Curtis's declining health pushed him out of the job and eight months later he died. On the 24th of October, 1796, Newgate Prison offered a reward of $10 each for the return of any or all of six prisoners who had escaped. The notice in the American Mercury of that date was signed by Peter Curtis, "Prison Keeper," and whether this was his last official act, or the Major's first problem, is unknown. As far as the newspaper accounts are concerned, the next five years under Major Humphrey were relatively quiet, for no escapes, conflagrations, or riots took place. However, at the very end of the Major's career at Newgate he reported a plot to overthrow the prison, a long account of which is given in the American Mercury of June 26, 1800.

Impression from the Major Reuben Humphrey bookplate, now at the New Haven Colony Historical Society. The "RB" in lower right hand corner indicates that the bookplate was engraved by Richard Branton.

The culprits, in this case, were Samuel Tramp, John Grubb, and Philip P. Newton who had robbed the store of Michael and Thomas Bull, merchants of Hartford, of $600 worth of goods on May 2, 1800. Keys of all descriptions were found on them and a special Superior Court lost no time in sending them to Newgate for the next two to two-and-a-half years. This prospect proved too much for Tramp and Grubb and, after several abortive efforts, they worked out a serious and elaborate plan of escape. They succeeded in making a complete set of keys to the prison—first by making impressions of all the locks out of bread dough, and then melting down all the pewter they could find, including buttons from their clothing and the spoons in use at the prison. With a nail red (Newgate was famous for its hand-made nails produced by
the prisoners and sold throughout the State;) they cut a mold into a pine board, poured the pewter into the mold, and so cast the keys with which to effect their departure. Later, all three were remanded to the State Prison in New York City from which they had so unceremoniously come in the first place. Major Humphrey, therefore, could boast that the plot had failed but the incident, too, closed out his career at Newgate, as it had that of his predecessor, and he went on to other things.

During those five years, there were the quieter moments at Newgate when the Major and his wife sat for their portraits, believed to have been painted by a convict of uncertain origins who served his time for counterfeiting from 1799 to 1801. Richard Brunton (1756-1832) was particularly adept at engraving bookplates and, in Albert C. Bates's *An Early Connecticut Engraver and his Works*, 1906, some two dozen are illustrated, as well as several silver ornaments, two family registers, a watch, and Brunton's engraving of Newgate Prison which is owned by this Society. William L. Warren in his article, "Richard Brunton—Itinerant Craftsman," *Art in America*, April 1951, uncovered new information on the engraver, including two silver memento mori pieces of the Humphrey family owned by descendants. In all, Brunton engraved for Major Humphrey: his bookplate, now at the New Haven Colony Historical Society, a Masonic plate, and a memento mori; for other members of the family: three silver ornaments (Mrs. Jonathan Humphrey and daughters, Laura and Nancy,) a silver ornament (Jonathan Humphrey, the Major's cousin,) and still another memento mori (Oliver Humphrey, father of Major Reuben). Add to these the portraits of the Major and his wife, and one has evidence of a close relationship existing between Brunton and the family. Surely his work, crude in some aspects but highly original in others, was admired by them, otherwise no portraits (the only ones extant by Brunton) could have been created. The engraver, turned artist in this case, carried over into his paintings a fondness for heraldry, a fussiness for detail and, perhaps for the first time in his life, an eye for color. The paintings have all these characteristics, including Brunton's inability to paint a face. Few, however, were revealed until the full restoration was done and Mr. Dennis, whose report follows, uncovered the portraits as Brunton painted them, c. 1800.

REPORT OF RESTORATION
THE REUBEN HUMPHREY PORTRAITS

PROCEDURE OF EXAMINATION: The first step taken in the restoration of the portraits of Major and Mrs. Reuben Humphrey were black and white photographs and 35 mm color slides. This was followed by Infra-red and Ultra-violier photos. X-rays of the head area in the Major's portrait were taken in June 1970, revealing a slight shift in the position of his head and features.

When the painting was removed from the frame, the ½ inch of canvas which was obscured by the rabat of the frame became visible, and confirmed that the Major was in uniform, as illustrated in the Humphrey bookplate reproduced in *An Early Connecticut Engraver and his Works* by Albert C. Bates, 1906.

The head, hat and uniform area had been overpainted with a brown pigment, possibly Van Dyke or bitumen. The large, half-
Spot cleaning of the portrait reveals the appearance of Mrs. Humphrey's hat, wig, and the gold leaf of the border and urn on the mirror. The detail of the table, tea set, etc., is not yet apparent.

Spot cleaning of the Major's portrait already shows his new hat, almost half of his uniform, as well as the red curtains and additional detail outside the window.

Major Reuben Humphrey (1757–1832). This is the final restoration of the portrait and as it was painted by Richard Brunton, c. 1800. 44\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 41 inches.

Detail of the head of Mrs. Humphrey shows a double ear, indicating that the later artist shifted the position.

Detail of the head in the Major's portrait shows two noses, indicating a similar shift in the features as painted by the later artist.

Mrs. Reuben (Anna Humphrey) Humphrey (c. 1759–1827). This is the final restoration of the portrait and as it was painted by Richard Brunton, c. 1800. 44\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 40\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches.
circle hat was evident, as well as part of the uniform. None of these had appeared under Ultra-violet, Infra-red, or X-ray radiation because the overpaint in the portrait contained too much lead. At one point in test cleaning, two right eyes were uncovered, two noses, and two ears at the beginning of the original hat, showing that a later artist had attempted to change the position of the Major’s head. When the portrait was 1/3 cleaned, it showed the new hat and plume, the uniform, and the village scene outside the window. Test cleaning also indicated that the crazing in the head area was much thicker and deeper than in any other paint area. Test areas throughout the head showed an altogether different paint area, comparable to the original, or rest of the painting.

TREATMENT: In removing the Major’s painting from its frame, it was found that hand-made nails had been driven through the side of the frame to the stretcher. The nails, and other tacks were removed and saved. When the canvas was taken off its stretcher, it was lined on two layers of fiber glass with a wax resin adhesive. With this new mount for stability, much of the loose paint was re-attached to the portrait and the repair of some small tears was made. Cleaning of the paint layer was then begun, using a 3% solution of cleaning agent to remove the dust, dirt and grime from the portrait. Cellosolve and mineral spirits were next use to remove old varnish and underneath dirt. In some areas a solution of Di Methyl Formamide took off the hardened overpaint. The head and hand areas of overpaint were removed with instruments under high magnification. This was the longest and most tedious part of the restoration, done piece by piece in half-inch squares in order to get down to the original paint on the canvas.

With the overpaint removed, the painting was placed on a heat vacuum table for a second impregnation and consolidation of adhesive. It was next placed on its new stretcher, the edges ironed down, and the stretcher tightened. An initial surface coating of Dammar in Toluene was applied by spray. inpainting of pigment losses followed and the pigment losses were filled in with dry colors in A.Y.A.C. in Toluene. The final surface coating, again applied by spray, consisted of B67 and B72 in Toluene and Petroleum Benzine.

The finished portrait of Major Humphrey shows his military uniform, with epauletts, a black stock, a sword with handle, a garnet ring, a new cocked hat with plume, red curtains and a village scene showing a church, houses and people outside the window. Also shown is a belt, medallion and buckle, a cane, a tie-back for the drapes, books labeled Trumbull’s History of Connecticut, and, finally, the Humphrey coat-of-arms which was never changed.

The portrait of Mrs. Humphrey was given the identical examination and treatment as that of her husband. It was revealed that the figures of both the mother and baby were overpainted. During test cleaning a different hat on Mrs. Humphrey presented itself, a table with its tea set and pharamelia, and a gold-leaf border on the Chippendale mirror. There was a slight shift in her features, showing an extra ear and nose, and the baby showed a change in fingers, nose and eyes. A part of the child’s dress was evident under the rabbet of the frame, indicating that at one point the folds of material dropped down, instead of extending across the painting.

The portraits are now in their original state.
Roger Dennis, Conservator of Painting
Lyman Allyn Museum, New London

The Humphrey genealogy (1883) describes the portraits as “repainted” by an unknown artist in order to show the subjects as older persons. As Mr. Dennis has indicated, entirely gone was the Major’s military uniform, consisting of a buff-colored waistcoat and breeches, a dark blue uniform coat with buff facing, a black stock at his throat, and a black leather sword belt. Also missing were his cocked hat with its white plume, and his sword. Instead, he was dressed in a sober black suit and striped waistcoat, a white shirt with a white bow tie, and he was bareheaded. Mrs. Humphrey, as originally painted, was attired in a dark green, high waisted gown, the front almost entirely covered by a white fichu trimmed in thread lace and held at the neck by a small posy. She wore a high-crowned, wide brimmed hat with a large plume on the front. The repainted version showed her wearing a black dress with a simpler-styled fichu, a small choker-necklace of gold beads, a white lace cap elaborately trimmed with ribbons and with long, united strings. The headress of the repainted portrait, at least, is reminiscent of the 1825 period. The baby, Eliza, born in Canton in 1799, went through some alteration, including a new lace collar, a shorter length of dress, and those changes noted in the restoration report.

In addition to the changes in clothing, Mr. Dennis found astonishing details. In the painting of the Major we see a table on which are three books and a spy glass. Brilliant red curtains appear at the left of the portrait, framing the charming village scene visible outside the window. Mrs. Humphrey, seated in a Windsor chair, is primly placed, with her baby on her lap, beside a tea table set with flowered china, silver sugar tongs, a plate of sliced lemons, all delicately arranged on a sprigged table covering. The Humphrey family coat-of-arms in the Major’s portrait was unchanged by the later artist, as was the mirror in Mrs. Humphrey’s portrait, although cleaning brought to light the gold leaf on the urn in the mirror frame and the lovely brass holders which held the frame to the wall. Completely obscured in the repainted portraits were the rings which both the Major and his wife wore, as well as the gold-headed cane held in Humphrey’s left hand, and the sword hanging from the belt at his left hip.

Major Reuben Humphrey, his wife, and their ten children left Connecticut about 1801, settling in Onondaga Hill, four miles east of Marcellus, Onondaga County, New York. The portraits of course went with them, as did many other family items. About 1808 he moved into Marcellus, making it his summer residence, finally occupying the house known for 40 years as the ‘Green House’ because of its color. His last two children, Hugh and Senn, were born in 1804 and 1807 respectively, making a family of 12 in all. Judge Humphrey, as he was now known, went on to serve two terms as a Representative to Congress from the 16th District of New York, as well as serving the New York State Senate, 1811–1815, in the 34th to 37th Sessions. Mrs. Humphrey died April 1, 1827, ‘fully equal to her husband in intellectual
powers," according to the Humphrey genealogy. The Major, after a long and fruitful life, died in Marcellus August 11, 1832.

After his stint at Newgate Prison, the whereabouts of Richard Brunton is fairly well surrounded in mystery. He did produce an engraving, signed "Brunton Sc" for a broadside advertising the Boston, Plymouth & Sandwich Mail Stage. The broadside is dated November 24, 1810, but as Mr. Warren has pointed out, it need not necessarily have been done then. The Groton, Massachusetts, Town Records, on December 2, 1815, show that the Selectmen agreed to board Brunton for a year at $1.00 a week. Time, then, was not being charitable to the engraver even at this date and, for the next 17 years, he is strangely absent from the records. The last known fact is his death in the Groton Poor House September 8, 1832—oddly enough, only a few weeks after the demise of his old friend from Newgate, Major Reuben Humphrey, in Marcellus, New York.

When all is said and done, one may rightfully wonder: how do we know the portraits were painted by the engraver-artist, Richard Brunton? All paintings are attributions unless signed by the artist, and Brunton lived in that period of "non-signed" portraits which have greatly confounded the experts ever since. In the case of the Humphrey portraits, family tradition, via the Humphrey genealogy, confused the issue by stating that the Humphrey bookplate, containing the family coat-of-arms, was engraved by "one Mr. Stiles who was a convict at Newgate Prison." Later it was seen, and it may have been Mr. Bates who made the observation, that the plate is clearly initialed "RB" in the lower right hand corner, entirely dispelling the "Stiles" of family tradition. Is it possible that "Stiles" was the "unknown" artist who repainted the portraits later in the subjects' lives?

It is on the basis of the Humphrey bookplate that we attribute these fine portraits to Richard Brunton. Although the impression of the bookplate is printed in reverse, it matches, in a much simplified manner, the family coat-of-arms in the portrait of the Major, his same military cocked hat, his same uniform and waistcoat, and even the same black stock he wears, c. 1800. We believe the attribution of the portraits to Richard Brunton to be firmer ground than most. We trust, too, that the splendid restorations by Mr. Dennis have corrected a misconception which certainly would have disturbed the unlucky Brunton—assigning his marvelous portraits, now in the Society's Collections, to the wrong artist.—P.K.
Technological Innovation in the Woolen Industry

The Middletown Manufacturing Company

By Howard Dickman*

Woolen cloth manufacturing developed slowly in the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The years between 1760 and 1830 saw the slow rise of factory production, and the era was characterized by rapid technological change.

Here we follow the story of the Middletown Manufacturing Company, whose enterprising founders established the first woolen mill to utilize steam power to run its machinery. A creature of the trade disturbances engendered by the Napoleonic wars and the War of 1812, the company was until 1815 a technological "front runner" and "the largest manufactory of fine cloths and cassimers in operation in New England, if not in the country...."

The most influential founder of the Middletown Manufacturing Company was Arthur Magill. He was born in North Ireland in 1743 and emigrated to the British colonies, settling in the river port of Middletown, Connecticut. By 1768 he was a partner in the merchant firm of Josiah Williams and Co., whose operations included the North American coastal trade as well as Europe. Magill married Esther Wetmore in 1771, and had two children. His son and future business partner, Arthur W. Magill, was born in 1772; a daughter, Esther, was born in 1774 who eventually married into the Williams family.

Magill's affairs prospered in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and during the first decade of the nineteenth. With his commercial profits he accumulated property in the environs of Middletown, engaging in the practice of buying and selling land continuously. Middletown in those years was a prosperous city with a large volume of trade. As the town (and thus the potential market) grew, we note the signature of Arthur Magill, appearing on numerous road-building petitions sent to the Hartford legislature in this decade. As early as 1804 Magill became involved in a wholesale importing store—the first definite evidence of his interest in textile goods. He was basically a merchant, and while his son lived to have even greater manufacturing interests than the father, both maintained throughout their careers intimate connections with the retailing of general goods.

Until the Embargo and Non-Intercourse Acts seriously curtailed trade with Europe, fine woolen goods such as broadcloth were supplied to Americans almost solely by the British. During this time a domestic market grew for these goods which was to nurture and sustain American "infant industries" in the 1807–1815 years. Commencing in 1806, the supply of fine woolen goods grew scarce, threatening transatlantic merchants such as Magill with ruin. As

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if this were not enough, a founding member of Williams' firm, Captain Stephen Clay, died in 1809, forcing the company to dissolve in that same year. With only dismally commercial prospects, Magill and other merchants decided to put their capital into manufacturing. Appropriately enough he decided to manufacture woolen and cotton-woolen cloths, the commodity with which he was best acquainted.

An Act of October 1810 incorporated the Middletown Manufacturing Company. The officers were Arthur Magill, Joel Barlow, Alexander Wolcott, Daniel Buck, Arthur W. Magill, and Isaac Sanford. The capital stock of the Company was not to exceed $200,000, each share being valued at $1,000, while the value of the real estate of the Company was limited to $50,000. The Company could begin operating when $40,000 of its capital stock was paid in, and the debts contracted by the Company were not to exceed the value of the capital stock actually paid in. Stockholders were made liable to assessment only up to the value of their stock. Article Twelve of the Act of Incorporation held the Company directors responsible for providing three months of schooling for the children they employed. The precedent for this policy had been set in the May 1810 session by David Humphreys, in the incorporation of his Humphreysville Manufacturing Company (Seymour, Connecticut). Originally an incentive offered to attract child labor, the policy was made a general law of the State in 1813.

The Middletown Manufacturing Company was located on Washington Street in Middletown, at the site then called "deep hollow." Its principal building, originally a sugar house, was a brick structure 40' x 36' of five stories; this was connected to a rear building, 40' x 20'. In addition to various outbuildings, there was a separate dye house. The dyeing operations were conducted by a Mr. Partridge, originally from the west of England, and considered an expert in his trade.

What made this establishment noteworthy, apart from its size, was the fact that it was the first woolen factory in the country to use a steam engine to run its machinery. In 1802 Oliver Evans, the "Watt of America" had developed and built his high pressure "Columbian" steam engine for industrial use. These engines (with water temperature of 302 degrees Fahrenheit) generated steam pressure of 120 pounds per square inch of piston and were able to "carry a load from fifty to one hundred lbs. to the inch area." By the use of an ingenious rotary valve, steam was directed alternately to either end of the piston. In this way, both strokes of the engine "worked," and there was no need for a condenser. The engines had the additional advantage of requiring "not more than one-fourth of the usual quantity of water." Evans' machines were expensive, but their small size made them capable of wide use, including water transportation, and by 1810 there were ten of Evans' engines in use, with more being built.

The directors of the Middletown Manufacturing Company procured a twenty-four horsepower engine from Evans and had it operating by June, 1811. The engine cost the Company between $15,000 and $17,000; a large part of this sum represented transportation costs.

Isaac Sanford, an incorporating partner, was originally an English mechanic who had worked with Watt's engines. Soon after the Middletown engine was installed, Sanford wrote an enthusiastic letter to Evans:
as to the engine we had from you, it continues to perform with increasing credit, and thus far exceeds anything of the kind I ever saw. It is my opinion that it will continue superior to all other modes of constructing steam engines; as to all former constructions for that purpose, they are as far inferior, in my opinion, that I would not take them at a gift, could I obtain yours at a price.

In February, 1812, Arthur W. Magill (in his capacity as Factory Superintendent) also wrote to Evans, providing some interesting information on the operation, maintenance, and advantages of his steam engine:

It is now nine months since we have had your improved steam engine in operation at our wooden factory; during which period, we have been gradually loading it with machinery of different kinds. . . . Its simplicity is such, that any lad of common parts can take care of it, with a day’s instruction. Very little sediment collect in the boilers, and an examination of them twice a year is sufficient—the piston requires packing once a month.

Our engine requires about 96 feet of oak wood, or three fourths of a cord, to work twelve hours with our present machinery. We derive great advantages in using your steam engine in preference to water power, in our wooden manufacturer—the heat escapes from under the boilers, and the steam that has done its work enables us to warm our rooms in winter, so that the risque from fire is greatly lessened—and we have a temperature that is very advantageous to us in working wool in winter. Our factory is not liable to be carried away by freshets (note: a spring flash flood) and in using steam, we have an agent always at our command, that will neither freeze up in winter, nor be affected by draught in the summer.

Isaac Sanford had taken out a patent on a "brushing machine for dressing cloth" in 1799, and this device was utilized in the Middletown factory, as reported in Niles Weekly Register:

[the steam was] applied in connection with the brushing machine in finishing [the] cloth, without adopting the method of oiling and hot pressing as is commonly practiced in England. In this method of finishing the cloth does not require the processes before it is made up.

The finished product of this process did not have the "disagreeable gloss" of English cloths; it was considered at least the equal of them, and was displayed for sale in the warehouse of the Domestic Society in Philadelphia.

Carding machines, introduced in this country by Arthur and John Scholle of Montville in the 1790s, had long been used in woolen mills, but getting the carded wool to the spinning machines, by rolling or condensing the wool into "ropes" was a production bottleneck. A "billy", or "roping machine" was in general use in 1810; it was inefficient and hand-run, and ropes rolled on the billy were only slowly formed and were often uneven in quality. Arthur W. Magill came up with a "perpetual roller" process in 1810, aimed at joining the carding and condensing processes into a single operation. The final solution to this problem in mechanization did not come until 1826 with John Gould's "Condenser," but it, too, was based on the idea of a perpetual roller.

We might mention in this context that rolling the carded wool on the billy was the main job of the children employed in the wooden mills. Mechanizing this process was a key step in eliminating the need for child labor in the woolen industry.

Evans reported in 1812 that the steam engine of the Middletown Manufacturing Company drove "all the machinery for carding, spinning, reeling, weaving, washing, fulling, dyeing, shearing, dressing, and finishing." This claim cannot be fully verified, however, due to the fragmentary knowledge we have concerning what machinery was in fact mechanized before 1815.

Power driven spinning "jennies" were a rarity, and a power-driven "jack" (predominantly the "mule") was not reported in industrial operation until late 1814. Power-driven looms (water power) are not otherwise known to have been used before 1816, and then in Massachusetts. Furthermore, power-driven broadlooms (and the Middletown Manufacturing Company made broadcloth rather than the narrower fabrics like satinet) were not reported in use until 1820. If not power driven, then, it is still true that weaving was done on the premises of the Middletown factory; this is itself a novelty, because weaving was normally "put out" to private weavers in this era. In sum, it can only be claimed with reasonable assurance that washing, carding, reeling, fulling, and the finishing processes were steam driven.

Interestingly enough, Isaac Sanford (with Mr. Partridge) installed the second steam engine used in the wooden industry, a thirty horsepower machine obtained by the Providence Woolen Manufacturing Company in 1812. Also a maker of broadcloth, the Providence concern did not survive the post-war price collapse and shut down in 1815 with heavy loss to the owners.

Obtaining a supply of wool suitable for fine woolens had long been one of the problems of domestic manufacturers, and only a trickle of Spanish merino sheep came into the country before 1807. A "merino mania" was set off after this date, however, as the prices of wool soared. The manufacturers were instrumental in the heavy importations of 1810–1811 that brought down prices and speculation. One device utilized to insure a steady wool supply was to acquire merinos and rent them out to farmers, buying up all the fleece at a guaranteed price. Arthur W. Magill tried this method, though with what success we do not know. Another policy of Magill’s was to accept flax and hemp in payment for the various dry goods and groceries sold in his store; this material could be used in mixed-material manufacture. It is worth noting that during the war years Arthur W. Magill and Christopher Wolcott maintained a general store, in addition to the woolen factory.

Arthur Magill, Sr., died February, 1812, leaving his share of the Company ownership with his family. Two months later, the Company bought out the Magill shares; Arthur W. Magill remained with the firm as its business agent (and possibly as a creditor), but no longer in the capacity of owner-director.

As the woolen goods supply from Great Britain was shut off, the number of chartered factories grew from a handful in the years 1787–1807 to over two hundred by 1815. War years were prosperous for the newcomers. The prices of wool goods, which had been anywhere between $1.00 and $10.00 per yard (1800–1810) went up to $8.00–$12.00 between 1812 and 1814, reaching $18.00 at one point. In 1813 prices hovered around $12.00 to $15.00. Profits were made, "notwithstanding the rise of 20%–50% in the wages of operatives (200%–300% in mill seats), and of many raw materials in the same proportion."

A rough idea of the revenue and costs of the Middletown Manufacturing Company in its first years can be presented from the scattered data this author has collected. The Company in a very good year (1812, for example) employed between sixty and eighty hands, and manufactured daily between
thirty and forty yards of broadcloth. They could sell this cloth for $9.00 to $10.00 a yard by the piece. A cord of oak wood sold in Middletown for some-what over $4.00; since the firm only used 3/4 cord per day, we will estimate generously their fuel costs at $4.00 per day. Precise data on wages for factory operatives could not be found; neither is it known what proportion of the labor force was female or child. This would make a difference, for they were as a rule paid less. Nevertheless, adult male labor in 1812 was probably not more than $20.00 per month. For purposes of computation we will assume all eighty operatives were male, and were employed all year round (six-day week). The final important cost is raw wool. Two pounds of wool were necessary to produce one yard of cloth and at the end of 1812, raw wool sold in Connecticut for $1.50 per pound.

If the firm produced thirty yards in a day and sold it for $9.00 per yard, their revenue would be $270.00. Wool costs would be $90.00, and labor costs $68.00 ($0.85 x 35/day). A day's gross profits would thus be approximately $108.00 (higher of course, if they sold at $10.00, or if they could vary their labor input). If the work year was approximately 300 days, this would mean $81,000 income, and $32,400 gross profit (there would certainly be other costs, such as rent, advertising, etc.). We must also remember that the wool price cost of the wool changed in 1813-1815. However, these estimates are probably within reason. David D. Field, writing in 1819, maintained that the Company manufactured about $70,000 worth of cloth in a year; he does not say what year, however, and he is not the source for the prices of the final goods.

It is reported that Company profits were used to purchase two hotels, one of them being the Washington Hotel on Main Street, Middletown. This author can find no record of the transaction, other than a purchase of two shares of stock in the Washington Hotel Co by Arthur W. Magill in 1814.

When the war ended in 1815, British manufacturers naturally wished to unload their inventories of unsold goods and recapture lost markets. Chester W. Wright in Wool Growing and the Tariff states, "The ups and downs of the British woolen trade resulted in the shipping of vast quantities of English goods to the American market which frequently sold at a price that did not even cover cost." 1815 was the year of heaviest wool imports, when the value of imports, (4,200,000 pounds sterling) was far in excess of the preceding three years. The Middletown Manufacturing Company, though undoubtedly adversely affected, managed to survive this crisis.* A period of

* There is some confusion on this point. Alice Bridge Richter in A History of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Middletown, Conn. and J. E. Berry, History of Middlesex County, Connecticut imply that the Company went out of business soon after the war ended. This is not the case, and is contradicted by evidence by John S. Pace and John M. Niles in A Gazetteer of the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island, 1815, and various references in the legal battles of Arthur W. Magill after 1820. It is probably true, as David D. Field says in 1819 that the Company was never very profitable after 1815. What might have confused these authors was the fact that in April, 1813, the "firm" of "Magill and Wolcott" dissolved (Middletown Gazette, April 20, 1815). This was the merchant dry goods store, however, and it was Christopher Wolcott, a relative of Alexander Wolcott, Magill had previously entered into another dry-goods business with Samuel Williams, in March 1815 (Middletown Gazette, March 23, 1815). Besides the name confusion involved, April was the month when the Company (mill) announced stockholder business to be dissolved in May, April 20, 1816, and so the time to announce a dissolution, in order for the stockholders to be on hand for the general stockholder meeting in May.

THE CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

painful readjustment was to follow, and there was a clamor for protection resulting in the Tariff of 1816 which imposed a 25% ad valorem duty on imported woolen manufactures. In 1816, prior to the passage of the Tariff, Arthur W. Magill and William Young, another woolen manufacturer, authorized a memorial to the Chairman of the House Committee on Commerce, pleading the importance of the woolen industry to the Connecticut economy.

The Tariff was considered by many to be insufficient, and State Legislatures "assisted" their infant industries by relieving them from State-imposed duties. Connecticut passed a law in 1817 relieving workmen employed in cotton and woolen manufacturing of the poll tax and military duty for four years. In 1818, a general limited liability law was enacted for all joint-stock manufacturing companies in the State. Privately, voluntary associations were formed to "protect the industry," such as the one in Middletown in 1820. To be sure, manufacturers adopted improved machinery such as power looms and spinning machines and it is the opinion of most historians that domestic technology was ultimately responsible for the survival of the woolen industry in these years. The cold wind of competition blew despite the insulation of the Tariff. As it to the predictions of the advocates of greater Tariff protection, capital continued to flow into the textile industry. Arthur W. Magill, Samuel Williams, and Joshua Starr began a cotton factory in Berlin, Connecticut, in 1818, with a capital stock of $50,000. By this time, wool prices had dropped from their wartime high of $18.00 to $6.00 per yard (broadcloth).

The Middletown Manufacturing Company continued its operations well into the 1820s but by this time had sunk into obscurity. The trend in the 1820s was toward larger and larger productive units, consuming greater and greater amounts of wool. Indeed, close to 15,000,000 pounds of wool were used in factory production in 1830, versus about 400,000 pounds in 1810. The capital invested in woolen factory production probably quadrupled in this time. The "factory system" was still a distant dream, however; even in 1830 domestic factory production supplied only a third of the total demand for wool cloths while the rest was from importations or household manufacture.

The first really successful post-war steam mill was opened in 1819 in Steubenville, Ohio. Like the Middletown Manufacturing Company, the Steubenville concern began by manufacturing broadcloth; eventually, however, it shifted to the coarser fabrics, for which a greater market existed. Also, like the Middletown factory in its heyday, the Steubenville factory "stood out as (a) conspicuous establishment(s), even for the whole American industry." The final years of the Middletown Manufacturing Company are a legal story, rather than an economic-technological one, but some brief comments are appropriate. In August, 1820, Arthur W. Magill received ownership of the Company from a private damage suit. The damages awarded against the Company amounted to some $17,000; the land, buildings, and machinery of the Company were appraised at the shrunken value of $2,885. Alexander Wolcott and his son, Henry, continued in their capacities of President and clerk, respectively. Interestingly here is the fact that Arthur W. Magill’s wife was Alexander Wolcott’s daughter.

Meanwhile, Arthur W. Magill had been a bonded cashier in one of the offices of discount and deposit in the Middletown branch of the United States Bank (he was also a county Justice of the Peace.) In October, 1820, the President and Directors of the Bank discovered that he was guilty of "gross breach
of trust" in "knowingly suffering overdrafts to be made by individuals; also by making overdrafts himself." Suspended from his post and required to forfeit the $50,000 penalty bond, plus interest, that he and his sureties (Joshua Stow, Elisha Coe, and Nathan Starr) had pledged, a court battle ensued which was ultimately settled by a Supreme Court decision in 1827. The judgment was in favor of the Bank.

In November, 1820, the Bank had seized Magill's estate, including the woolen factory, but his property was restored to him in March, 1821, on first appeal. The case dragged through the Courts; in 1822 Arthur W. Magill left Middletown with his wife, eventually settling in Ottawa, La Salle County, Illinois. Control of the woolen factory was left in Wolcott's hands, and it was from him that the Bank finally received it in 1826. At this time the value of the land, buildings, and machinery had depreciated further to $2,650.

This is the last record we have of the Middletown Manufacturing Company. The factors in its decline and ultimate disappearance were no doubt personal as well as "economic." Arthur W. Magill ended his days under the cloud of scandal, an unfortunate end for a man who was considered a "leading light." His involvement in other business activities cost the Middletown Manufacturing Company a good deal of its original talent. The Post-war period was a difficult one generally for textile manufacturers, though not so catastrophic as some would believe (witness the success of the Steubenville concern). One might have supposed that the Middletown Manufacturing Company would have had a large advantage over new entries into the industry—but past achievements did not, and do not, assure the success of any business establishment in competitive industry.

NOTE: This article, with footnotes, may be consulted at the Connecticut Historical Society.

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THE CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Connecticut Captain in a Pennsylvania Court

By William M. Fowler, Jr.*

From the inception of the American Revolution it was obvious that since both privateers and public warships were sailing under various authorities, state and congressional, there would arise numerous conflicts and altercations among contending parties in the adjudication of prizes. Prior to the war when the captain of a privateer (i.e., a private vessel sailing under government authority to attack and seize enemy vessels during wartime) took an enemy vessel he would bring it into port and ask that the local Royal Court of Vice Admiralcy condemn the ship and declare it to be a lawful prize. Once this was accomplished the captured vessel and its cargo could be sold with the proceeds going to the captain, the crew and others who had invested in the voyage, and the actual distribution of the profits being carried out according to the number of shares held by each individual. When the Revolution severed American ties with the Vice Admiralcy Courts new institutions had to be created to perform this judicial function.

The problem became immediate when Washington wrote to the continental Congress from Boston on November 11, 1775 suggesting that the Congress should establish a court "to take cognizance of the Prizes made by the Continental vessels..." The General's letter was referred to committee and on their recommendation Congress agreed to a series of resolves on November 25, 1775. These resolves authorized captures at sea and legalized those already made. In cases of piracy and felonies trials would be held in state courts with no mention of appeal. The schedule for distributing the prize money was established and an appeal to Congress was allowed in all cases. The Congress also recommended in the same set of resolves that the states either establish courts to hear prize cases or extend the jurisdiction of already existing courts to include these cases. Additionally, Congress recommended that "all trials in such cases be held by a jury." This was a direct reversal of British procedure where cases in Vice-Admiralty were heard without a jury. These non-jury trials had been introduced into America by the Navigation Act of 1696. In America, where it was a fixed idea "that trial by jury was fundamental to the dispensing of justice" these proceedings were generally repugnant. Even in seventeenth-century England they were looked upon as contrary to common law principles and "the admiralty courts as prerogative courts sitting without juries, were associated in the popular mind with the prerogative claims of the Stuarts." However, in defense of the courts it should be noted that their decisions were apparently always made in strict conformity with the law. That their decisions were always rendered fairly and impartially is supported by the research of the most noted historian of the courts in America, Charles

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THE CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

M. Andrews, who observed that he could find no "instance of manifest parti- sanship or injustice on the part of a colonial judge of vice-admiralty..." As we shall shortly see this claim of judicial fairness cannot be made for the American courts of admiralty.

Notwithstanding their effectiveness, or perhaps because of it, the courts were dislikied in the colonies and doubly so when they became instruments in the stricter enforcement of the imperial regulations after 1763. The expansion of their jurisdiction and the creation of new courts in 1767 further aggravated the problem and added still another coal to fuel the fires of revolution. It was to avoid what were thought to be the evils of this system that Congress recommended trials by jury. Nearly all of the states heeded Congress's advice and established courts stipulating that the trials would be by jury, but, while following the congressional resolves in this respect they were not as amenable to the suggestion that appeals be allowed to Congress in all cases, and many granted appeals only when the capture was by a Continental vessel.

Initially Congress tried to hear the appeals as a body, but this proved a time-consuming task and the work was turned over to special committees. These special committees heard approximately eight appeals until finally on January 30, 1777 Congress appointed:

a standing committee to consist of five members... appointed to hear and determine upon appeals brought against sentences passed on libels in the courts of Admiralty in the respective states, etc.

During its lifetime the committee had fifty-five cases brought before it. Fifty-four of these were handled in a fairly routine manner with the committee functioning as an appellate court and frequently reversing decisions handed down in the state courts. The committee's activities provide a rare example of the states acquiescing to Congressional authority, and, exercising national jurisdiction as it did, the committee can to some degree be regarded as an ancestor to the United States Supreme Court. These routine proceedings, however, were interrupted by case number thirty-nine involving the sloop Active and a Connecticut sea-captain Gideon Olmstead. This case was to become a challenge to the authority of Congress and a catalyst in the creation of a permanent court of appeals.

Olmstead, a stern taciturn man with light colored long hair and a fair complexion, stood nearly six feet tall. He was a native of East Haddam, Connecticut but the sea was his life and the quarterdeck his home. Early in the Revolution he, like so many of his fellow Yankee captains, decided to turn his talents to the very lucrative but dangerous business of privateering.

In the winter of 1777 Olmstead applied to the Connecticut Council of Safety for permission to take on board his sloop Seaflower forty shoats that he intended to take to the French island of Martinique where he undoubtedly planned to exchange them for desperately needed military supplies. The council granted permission and Olmstead weighed anchor bound for the West Indies with his cargo. Somewhere between Long Island and Martinique (most likely in the Caribbean) Olmstead was overtaken and captured by a British man-of-war. Undaunted he managed to get free of his captors and a short time later Olmstead appears sailing in the West Indies as the commander of a French privateer. But again his luck failed and his vessel was taken by the British sloop Ostrich. He, along with his vessel and crew, were taken to Jamaica. The authorities decided that Olmstead should be sent to New York to be confined on a prison hulk in the harbor where hundreds of his countrymen were already rotting.

Olmstead and three other Americans were put aboard the sloop Active bound for New York with Captain Underwood in command. Aside from the four Americans, Active carried, in addition to her captain, a mate, three male passengers and a black slave. Underwood left Montego Bay on August 1, 1778 and charted his course for New York. A month later off the New Jersey coast they spoke with the British brig Tyron and were cautioned to keep a sharp eye for American privateers reported to be cruising in the area. Two nights later while still off the New Jersey coast Olmstead and two other Americans were on deck with only a lone sailor at the helm. Suddenly Olmstead pulled up the ladder leading below and trapped the rest of the crew and passengers on the lower deck. He then took the helm and steered towards the New Jersey coast. At the first sign of daylight the Englishmen below fired their pistols through the deck hoping to force the Americans to release them. Olmstead, hardly a man to be trifled with, thundered back at the captive Englishmen that unless they put their pistols away he would turn one of the dinghies on them. Have his way, he allowed back "Fire and be d—d!" Olmstead did just that. While the air was still pungent with the smell of gunpowder Underwood threatened to blow up the vessel unless Olmstead surrendered. The Connecticut captain answered that he could go ahead and be "d—d!" Olmstead punctuated this last ultimatum with another round from the cannon. Underwood then jammed the rudder from below but finally had to relent when Olmstead and his companions began to tear up the deck to get at the cantankerous Englishmen. With Olmstead in full control of the situation Underwood had to bow to the inevitable and within a few hours Active was within sight of Cape May bound on a course to the American port of Egg Harbor.

As they approached shore one of Olmstead's lookouts sighted two strange ships on the horizon. As they came nearer they were identified as the Pennsylvania state warship Convention and the privateer Le Geron. Against Olmstead's vigorous protests these two ships took possession of Active and escorted her into Philadelphia as their prize. The captain of Convention, Thomas Houston, claimed the sloop as his prize, basing his case on the assertion that Olmstead's capture could not have been complete since it was "abundant to suppose that four men could have abduded fourteen." To this allegation Olmstead simply replied that "the facts were as stated and that the British captain had surrendered."

The case was tried in the admiralty court of Pennsylvania with Judge George Ross presiding. Pennsylvania, like her sister states, was jealous of the sovereignty of her courts. In prize cases the state was willing to allow appeals to Congress, but only on certain conditions. One of these conditions was contained in an act passed by the Pennsylvania Assembly only nine days before this case was brought before Judge Ross. It stipulated that "an appeal upon
questions of law could be carried to Congress yet the ‘finding of the facts by the jury shall be without re-examination or appeal.’ When the jury came in Olmstead found himself the victim of a brand of local justice. He was awarded only one quarter of the prize and the rest was to be divided among the owners and crew of Le Gerard, Convention and the state of Pennsylvania. Olmstead, outraged at this judicial robbery, decided to try a bit of extralegal maneuvering. He contacted a fellow Connecticutman General Benedict Arnold, the American military commander of Philadelphia, and offered to sell the general a share in the case if he could engineer an appeal to Congress circumventing the Pennsylvania statute prohibiting such an appeal. Arnold, already an unpopular figure in the city, but always eager to turn another dollar, took up the offer in partnership with the prominent merchant Stephen Collins. Despite the fuming and outrage their machinations caused, together they were able to muster sufficient influence to get the case before the Congressional Appeals Committee.

On December 12, 1778, in the State House at Philadelphia the Committee of Appeals assembled to hear the case. The men presiding were William Ellery of Rhode Island; William Henry Drayton of South Carolina; John Henry of Maryland; and Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut. They heard the case and after a three day recess they reconvened on December 15 and announced that "the Judgment or Sentence of the Court of Admiralty be in all its parts revoked and annulled." The entire prize, after deduction of costs, was to be turned over to Olmstead et al (i.e. Arnold and Collins). The Pennsylvania authorities were indignant since according to their own law Congress had no authority to re-examine the facts as found by a jury, yet that was exactly what the Appeals Committee had done. The Pennsylvania Court had found that Olmstead had not been in full control of Active but the Appeals Committee by their decision found exactly the opposite to be true. There was no question of law here, it was a question of fact. Furthermore the state officials were incensed at Arnold’s influence peddling. Whether or not Drayton, Henry and Ellsworth were susceptible to Arnold’s arguments is not certain, however, Ellery was certainly in a position to be swayed. Not only was Arnold’s partner in this affair, Stephen Collins, a friend of Ellery’s but at the same time while he was sitting on this case Ellery was a house guest in Collins’ home. Moreover, his fellow lodger, the other Rhode Island delegate and long time associate of Ellery’s was John Collins, a kinsman of Stephen Collins.

The Pennsylvania Court, ignoring an injunction signed by Ellery, Drayton and Henry went ahead and sold the sloop. The Appeals Committee was powerless to halt the sale while all Arnold and Collins could do was fume at being out-maneuvered.

Clearly Olmstead had been cheated. There is no evidence to suggest that he and his fellow prisoners were not in full control of Active when Le Gerard and Convention dispossessed him of his lawful prize. The finding of the jury was obviously influenced more by local sentiments than by the rule of law. Arnold’s role in the proceedings contributed nothing except to cause more bitterness. His engineered appeal was illegal and despite the fairness of the committee’s findings they were nevertheless attempting to exercise jurisdiction over an issue where they had none. Ellery, of course, was guilty of an apparent conflict of interest, sitting in judgment on a case in which his friend and host had such a vital concern.

The most significant long term result of this case was to illustrate the error of trying admiralty cases before juries. In 1775 democratic and popular sentiment had induced Congress to call for jury trials, but now in a more conservative and experienced mood they were forced to reconsider their position. Late in 1779, while Congress and Pennsylvania were still disputing this case, William C. Houston, a New Jersey delegate, wrote that when it came to a choice between jury and non-jury trials in these cases he believed that juries were "often worse qualified to decide . . . than any other." After the Active imbroglio most members of Congress were inclined to agree with Houston. As a result in January 1780 when Congress was in the process of establishing a permanent court of appeals under the Articles of Confederation, a report in Oliver Ellsworth’s writing was overwhelmingly approved calling for trials "according to the usage of nations and not by Jury." In a little more than four years the Congress had come full circle.

Olmstead beaten in court returned to Connecticut and in the spring of 1780 he resumed his privateering career and took command of the sloop Hawk, 12 guns and sixty men. Hawk’s voyage was profitable and Olmstead captured at least two enemy vessels. He lost his sloop in the winter of 1780 when he was driven ashore on Long Island while trying to escape capture by a British frigate. He and his crew landed and were able to find safety ashore. During the remaining years of the war Olmstead continued his privateering career commanding several vessels and taking numerous prizes.

Despite the success of his later voyages Olmstead never forgot the injustice that had been done to him in Philadelphia. When Judge Ross died in 1790 he brought suit against the estate in the Court of Common Pleas of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. After a hiatus of ten years the case of the Active was dragged forth again and for the next eighteen years the litigation continued. Finally the case reached the United States Supreme Court where a decision was handed down in favor of Olmstead. Pennsylvania was still reluctant to acquiesce and only after the intervention of President Madison and the threat of force did Olmstead finally get his due. Nearly thirty years after the event, 1809, Gideon Olmstead received what had been rightfully his all along. The old privateersman, undoubtedly jubilant over his victory, retired to his home in East Haddam and remained there passing away only four days short of his 97th birthday on February 8, 1845.

NOTE: This article, with footnotes, may be consulted at The Connecticut Historical Society.
Book Review

THE CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF NEWINGTON CONNECTICUT
1971, compiled and edited by Elizabeth Sweetser Baxter. Introduction by
xxvii +316. Illustrated. Appendix. Index. $6.95. Reviewed by Malcomson W.

Newington as a town in its own right was exactly one hundred years old in
1971, but Mrs. Baxter's history is far more than a centenary commemoration. With the help of Deborah Eddy she backtracks into geologic time, to an
era when dinosaurs roamed Beckley Quarry in the climate of a sub-tropical
spa. At least one glacier changed all that, abrading away all but the durable
trap-rock of Cedar Mountain and leaving a flat plain covered with rich topsoil.
Therefore it is no wonder that a number of the early settlers-farmers of
Wethersfield were attracted a few miles to the westward, where they found
sparkling streams, fertile meadows, and tall stands of hardwood.

In the second chapter of her book, entitled "In Their Majesties Colony,
1671-1771," Mrs. Baxter deals with the colonial history of Wethersfield. An
other hundred years—from 1771 to 1871—are accounted for in Chapter 6,
"The Second Society—Community of Concern." and subsequent "developmental"
themes are presented in Chapter 11, called, simply, "Growth and Progress.

Other chapters of The Centennial History tell the story of specific and significant
influences—like religion, education, architecture, politics, transportation,
and civic services. To research these topics and tap the reservoirs of
available information, Mrs. Baxter has called on other people (like Mrs. Eddy
who wrote the "geography") whose expertise especially qualified them for
their assignments. Without exception, the chapters they wrote reveal their
knowledge of a subject and their enthusiasm for it. To achieve a balance of
emphasis and an overall unity, Mrs. Baxter has wisely exercised the preroga-
tive of an editor, and these various facets of town history from different points
of view could not have been presented more felicitously.

Over the years, leaders of real stature have served Newington—from the
pulpits of its churches, in the armed forces it recruited, in matters of environ-
mental concern and community enterprise, and in a number of other ways.
Never has Newington been out of the mainstream of the national economy. It
has known good times and depressions. The success-failure story of the in-
terurban trolley was told in Newington as well as on the prairies of Illinois
and Indiana. All these are told, as well as many other experiences the town
shared with a wider world than that of Greater Wethersfield, and Mrs. Baxter
has been alert to include them in her history.

As a result, this is a highly readable and delightfully informative volume.
It is very well illustrated, featuring two maps for its end papers. The typogra-
phy is most agreeable, and the reproduction of halftones is excellent. A log of
important dates in local history, a useful appendix, and a thoroughly ade-
quate index also appear in this handsome book. In short, it is one of the best
Connecticut town histories in print, and to have been asked to review it is a
privilege.

THE GENEALOGY OF THE KIMBERLY FAMILY. Compiled by Donald
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GENEALOGY OF THE MALLORYS OF VIRGINIA. Compiled by Henry
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