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EDWIN A. CHURCHILL

CRAFTS IN TRANSITION:

*A CASE STUDY OF TWO PORTLAND SILVERSMITHS
IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY*

Portland began the nineteenth century as a promising, vibrant city. Although devastated by a massive British naval bombardment in 1775, the town had recovered rapidly. By 1797 the community counted 409 houses, 86 mechanics' shops, 76 stores and shops, 3 rope factories, 2 distilleries, and a multitude of other structures. Rapid development continued into the 1800s, with the number of houses growing to 459 in 1800 and 622 in 1805. Shipping also grew dramatically. In 1785 the town claimed no full-rigged ships, the only local shipping being represented by a brig or two and some small schooners and sloops. By 1793, townsmen owned 10,727 tonnage, including thirteen ships, twenty-four brigs, twenty-three schooners, and twenty sloops. In 1807 local ownership had reached 39,009 tons.¹

The city's bright future was noted by contemporaries, including widely traveled Dr. Timothy Dwight, who visited in 1797 and reported that "no American town is more entirely commercial, and of course none is more sprightly."² A decade later, Dwight was even more lavish in his praise, stating that "no place in our route hitherto could for its improvement be compared with Portland. We found the buildings . . . doubled in their number, and still more increased in their appearance. . . Its wealth and business are probably quadrupled."³

Portland's growth and busy atmosphere masked certain difficulties. The most critical — a problem shared by other American micropolitan centers — was the lack of adequate local capital and markets.⁴ A contemporary traveler, the French Duke de la Rochefoucault, commented upon the impact of Portland's weak capital and marketing situation:

The merchants of Portland are numerous; but none among them possess great capital. As Portland,

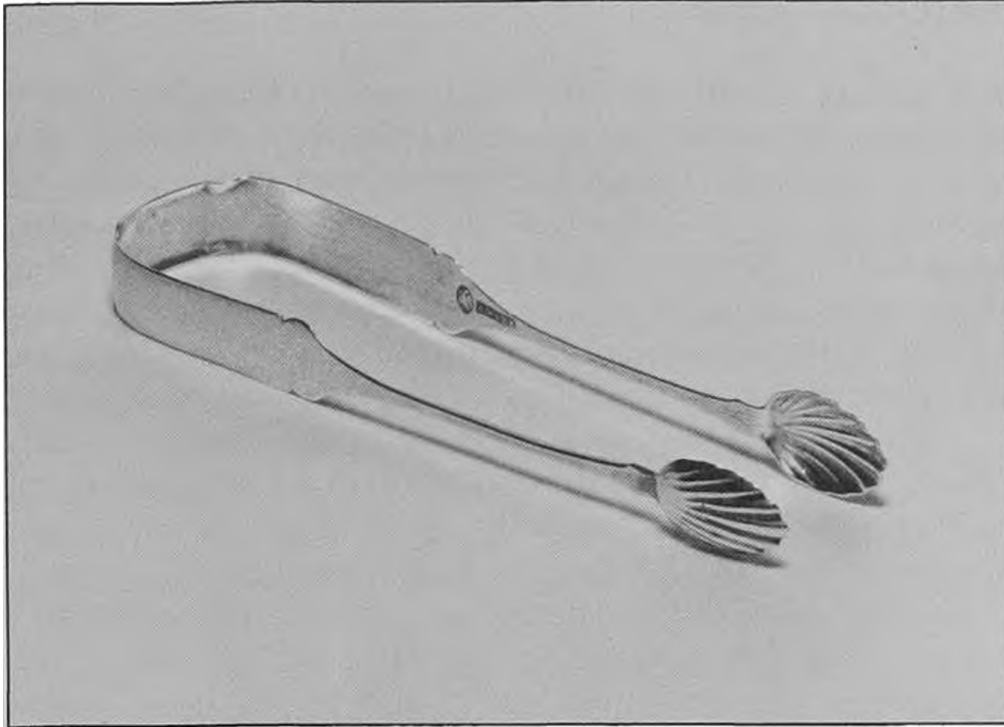


Fig. 1. Wyer sugar tongs (1803-1814; 7" long). All photographs, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Maine State Museum.

and the parts adjacent, are not equal to the consumption of the cargoes which the ships import in return for the exports; these are generally carried to Boston, which is the principal market for foreign commodities. The want of money occasions a greater proportion of them to be sent to the Capitol than is for the advantage of the place; and hence while the storehouses of Portland are neglected, the goods which might be here bought and sold at a more reasonable rate, are bought by the people of this neighborhood at an exorbitant price in Boston.⁵

Heavy reliance on commerce would also leave the city vulnerable during the years of embargo, nonintercourse, and the War of 1812, when Portland shipping fell off drastically and many of the largest commercial houses failed.⁶

Nevertheless, Portland continued to grow after the war and its economy became more regional and diversified. One indication of the new prosperity was the increasing number

and variety of artisans arriving in town. They had begun appearing in substantial numbers from the early 1800s and, with a slight reduction during the war years, continued doing so as the century progressed.⁷ By the early 1820s the community supported a wide spectrum of specialized craftsmen, including thirty-three furniture makers, four coppersmiths and brass founders, five tin workers, three gunsmiths, two tool makers, ten chaise and wagon builders, an engraver, and an armorer.⁸

The influx of new, usually young artisans into Portland is exemplified by the immigration of fine and precision metal workers, including silversmiths, goldsmiths, jewelers, and watch and clock makers. Prior to the Revolution, only five such craftsmen had established businesses in town, and by 1800 only ten more had arrived. However, in the next two decades twenty-one metal craftsmen settled locally, and during the following twenty years thirty-six more arrived. Obviously, over time some died, some left, and others shifted to different trades. Nonetheless, the influx was continuous and grew steadily.⁹ Underscoring this expansion of the artisan community was the establishment of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association in 1815, to relieve "the distress of unfortunate mechanics and their families, to promote inventions and improvements in the Mechanic Arts, . . . and to assist young Mechanics with loans of money."¹⁰

Among the newly arrived artisans were two young silversmiths, Eleazer Wyer, Jr. and Charles Farley, both of whom would rise to levels of local prominence in their professions and would eventually see their careers interrelated.

The two men had been trained through traditional craft preparations. Eleazer Wyer, Jr., born in 1786, was the fifth child of Boston silversmith Eleazer Wyer and Lydia (Austin) Wyer and was trained in the craft by his father. Eleazer Sr. was himself closely allied with other local silversmiths. Although it is not known with whom he trained, he married the daughter of a Charlestown silversmith, Josiah Austin. Furthermore, their second child, Lydia, married Boston silversmith Timothy Keith. Thus, Eleazer Jr.'s predilection to carry on the craft hardly seems surprising.¹¹

Charles Farley was born in Ipswich, Massachusetts, on June 14, 1791, and went to Salem at the age of fourteen, apprenticing there to silversmith Robert Brookhouse for seven years. A second Farley, Edward, also a silversmith, bought out Brookhouse in 1819 and soon after moved to Portland for a short time before disappearing from the records. Edward may have been related to Brookhouse's wife, Martha (Farley), from Newcastle, Maine, and very likely was related to Charles also.¹²

Eleazer Wyer arrived in Portland in late 1806, advertising on December 25 that he had set up business as a goldsmith and jeweler at the head of Ingraham's Wharf and would be selling jewelry, plated and Britannia wares, and silver objects. These, he stated, would be "sold as cheap as in this or any other town," and he expressed the hope that "by attention to his business [he would] ... merit a share of the public patronage." He specifically noted that he made "Silver tea, salt and mustard spoons —sugar tongs ... Gold Necklaces, Stone Knobs, Silver Thimbles and Sleeve buttons."¹³ [Fig. 1] Wyer's business seems to have prospered. In 1809 he moved "to the shop lately occupied by Mr. Joseph Lovis, in Fish Street," where he could accommodate his customers "much better than it has been in his power heretofore."¹⁴ Two years later he had achieved a middleman role, offering to supply country traders with his advertised wares "at a liberal discount," an offer repeated in 1812.¹⁵

Wyer became involved in an interesting relationship in 1812. John Hall of nearby North Yarmouth was actively pursuing the development of a breech-loading rifle with interchangeable parts. On July 6, Wyer advertised that he was selling "HALL's New Patent improved Rifles and Fowling pieces" and "Bullets of all sizes." The relationship continued at least two years, for on June 23, 1814, prospective customers were told that Hall's guns might be purchased from Eleazer Wyer in Portland or John H. Hall in North Yarmouth.¹⁶ It is possible that Wyer executed the silver work for these pieces, although there are others who might have done the work.¹⁷

Although Wyer's relationship with Hall remains murky, it fits well with the silversmith's interest in military goods. In

1808 he offered "a few elegant gilt mounted Swords; white and yellow Epauettes; do sword Knots; do Hat Tassels ... ; worsted Sashes [and] Primary Wires and Brushes." Similar advertisements appearing at later dates emphasize Wyer's commitment to military goods and place his decision to carry Hall's rifles in a logical context.¹⁵

In the fall of 1813, Charles Farley arrived in town fresh from his apprenticeship with Salem silversmith Robert Brookhouse. He established a shop on Middle Street where he manufactured and offered for sale "JEWELRY & SILVERWARE of all kinds."¹⁹ In March of the following year, Farley and Eleazer Wyer announced they "had formed a connection in trade and that in future their business [would]... be conducted at the store lately occupied by ... Wyer, in Exchange Street."²⁰ Besides offering a large selection of goods on hand, they indicated a substantially expanded list of items which they would manufacture, including:

gold Watch Chains, Keys and Seals of every description; Cornelian and other stones set in gold and filigree; Silver Tumblers and Cups; soup, gravy & cream Ladles; table, dessert, coffee and tea Spoons; Sugar Tongs, Salt Spoons and Mustard Ladles ... ; [and] Gold Necklaces ...

They also continued to supply dealers with goods at a liberal discount.²¹ Over time, the partners moved increasingly into military goods; an 1816 advertisement called attention to "an extensive assortment of Military and other Goods, viz. Rich gold and silver Epauettes, ... Steel and gilt Swivels for belts — Sashes and Plumes, Swords, Hangers, Chains, &c." In the following December, Wyer and Farley began dabbling in yet another line, offering "a few 10 plate and box cast IRON STOVES" they had just received from Philadelphia.²²

The firm seems to have done quite well until early 1818. In March, the two men announced that their "copartnership" would be dissolved by mutual consent on the 25th of February.²³ Both continued their trade for several years, Wyer selling "Gold, Silver and Plated Ware, Jewelry, Military Goods, [and]

Looking Glasses, ... at his former stand in Exchange Street” and Farley retailing “JEWELRY AND SILVERWARE — MILITARY GOODS & LOOKING GLASSES” at his store in Middle Street.²⁴ [Fig. 2]

The advertisements of Wyer and Farley illustrate the basic activities of early nineteenth-century Maine silversmiths. According to their announcements, the two men manufactured a substantial list of silver and gold objects, many of which are verified by extant examples. Flatware made up much of their production. Table, tea, dessert, mustard, and salt spoons were staple items, as were sugar tongs and soup, gravy, and cream ladles.²⁵ Farley once offered fish knives, and at another time he and Wyer listed coffee spoons as a product. Besides flatware, the two men produced a variety of minor items, including thimbles, sleeve buttons, pencil cases, toothpicks, spectacles, and medals. [Fig. 3]

Of a few of the flatware items, there are no known examples. But for many, especially spoons and sugar tongs, there are numerous specimens. The spoons that Wyer and Farley produced illustrate an important feature in silversmithing: the



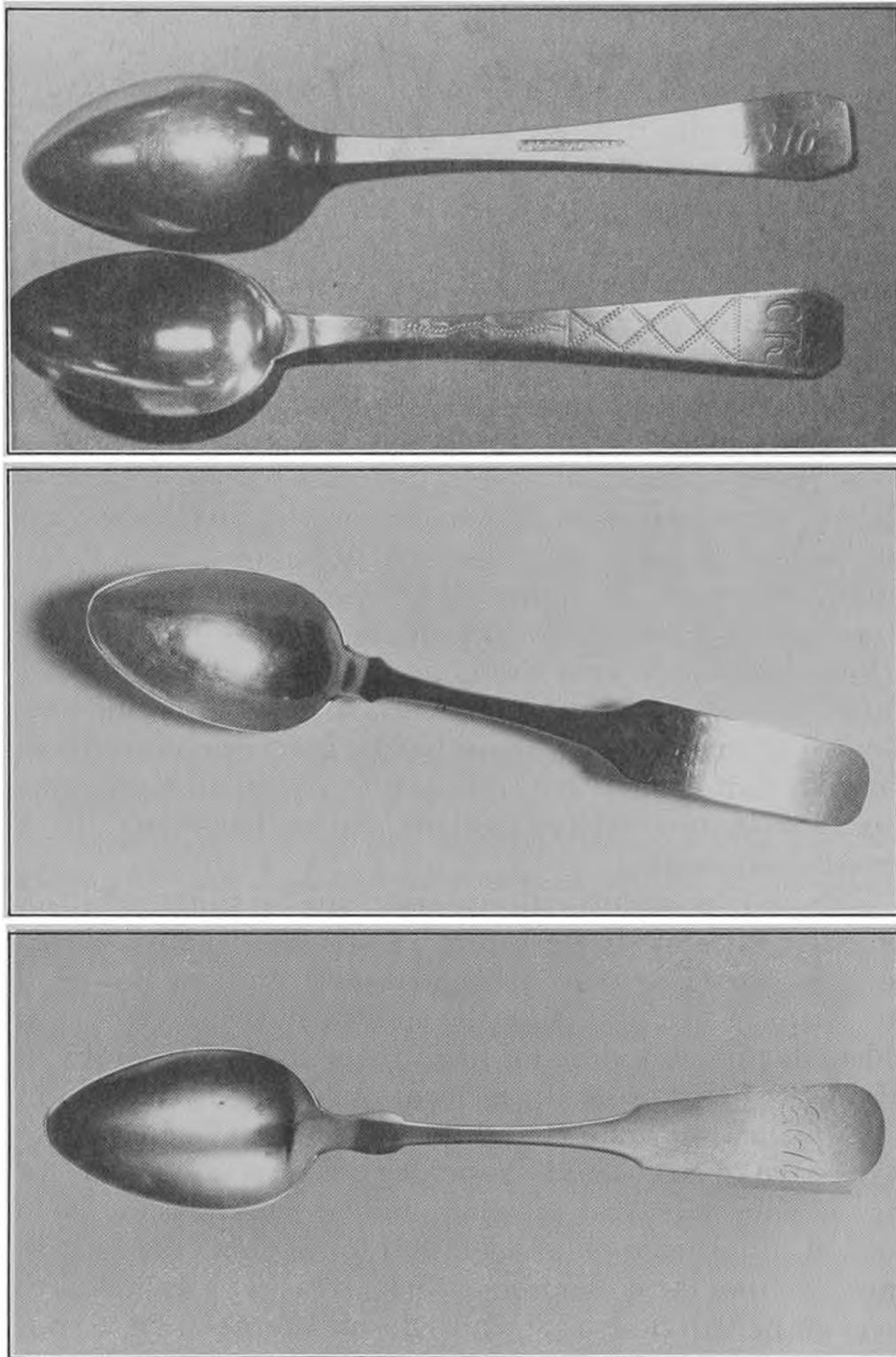
Figs. 2-3. Left to right: Farley beaker (1818-1830; 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " high) and Farley medal (1826).

need to keep up with current fashions. Quite often the products of artisans away from major urban centers such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia lagged behind in the adoption of new styles; however, that was much less true for silver. Silver wares were seen as the expression of discretionary funds and evidence of economic affluence. Purchasers wanted their new objects to be in the “newest patterns” and the “latest styles,” a desire acknowledged in many of the Wyer and Farley advertisements and more pointedly in the flatware they produced.²⁶

By changing their patterns to emulate contemporary styles, both men produced objects that were up-to-date. When Farley was an apprentice, his master, Robert Brookhouse, was probably producing the currently popular coffin-end spoon and presumably was teaching his young trainee in the same manner. Bolstering that probability is Farley’s earliest documented spoon, an 1816-date example with a coffin-end handle marked by him and Wyer. [Fig. 4] However, the two men were also making the more current narrow fiddle-handled spoons as well. [Fig. 5] When Farley went out on his own in the late 1810s and the 1820s, he began producing the increasingly popular wide fiddle-handled spoons. [Fig. 6] Wyer, too, was acutely aware of stylish fashions, and his flatware similarly echoed current desires.

Jewelry was another category of production. Gold necklaces and gold beads appeared in nearly as many advertisements as did spoons; gold and silver watch chains, keys, and seals were almost as frequently noted. Other specific wares included stone knobs, pearl, paste, jet, and other finger-rings and earrings; breast pins; and cornelian and other stones set in gold and filigree. A number of advertisements simply indicated the manufacture of “jewelry” and “fancy articles.” Wyer and Farley also offered to repair damaged jewelry and other objects in the silver line.

Hair-work jewelry was a related line of manufacture in which both men were active. Wyer provided a fairly detailed description of his wares in an 1809 advertisement in which he indicated that:



Figs. 4-6. Top to bottom: Wyer and Farley spoons (1816); Wyer and Farley narrow fiddle-handled spoon (ca. 1814); Farley fiddle-handled spoon (1818-1830). Fig. 6 courtesy Winterthur Museum Library.

All kinds of Fancy Hair Work [is] executed, viz. — elegant elastic and plain Hair Hoops, Bracelets, Necklaces, and Watch Chains, mounted with gold. Any person wishing to preserve a friend's hair, will do well to call, as it is manufactured in the shop in any manner they wish, and at the shortest notice.²⁷

As significant as what Wyer and Farley manufactured is what they did not. Excepting a small number of tumblers, cups, creamers, and sugar bowls, they made little hollow ware.²⁸ [Fig. 7] There were a number of interrelated reasons. Unlike flatware, jewelry, and small objects, there was limited demand in the region for large silver pieces; the potential clientele was less numerous and less wealthy than that of Boston or even Portsmouth. Moreover, the Maine residents interested in such wares were generally well-to-do, mobile, and highly fashion conscious; when they went shopping, they looked for products from England or from colonial centers such as Boston and New York.²⁹ The more rural artisans had far fewer opportunities to produce major pieces, and very possibly lacked the tools, practice, familiarity with latest patterns, and perhaps even skills to execute such wares.

Period documents reflected the desire for imported silver objects.³⁰ Eliza Southgate Bowne, a Scarborough native, moved to New York City after her marriage to William Bowne, a merchant in that city. Both she and her husband spent considerable time shopping for items requested by her family in Maine. Following the engagement of her sister, Octavia, in 1805, Eliza wrote home concerning silver tea and tablewares to be ordered in New York: "Yesterday the silversmith came for instructions respecting the plate, and bro't patterns for me to look at. I ordered a set of tea-things for Mamma the same as mine; I think them handsomer than any I see. The man is to send me patterns to look at which he thinks are similar to your description."³¹

Examples of such acquisitions abound. For instance, there are a number of English-made items belonging to the McLellan family that survive at the Portland Museum of Art. Among

these are a pair of sauce boats made by William Holmes of London in 1781-1782 and several items bearing the hallmark of Robert and David Hennell and a mark for London, 1800-1801. The York Institute Museum in Saco has a number of Cleaves family pieces produced by Massachusetts makers. A cream pot attributed to a Portsmouth maker in the collection of the Sayward-Wheeler House in York is thought to have been given as a wedding gift to Jonathan Sayward Burrell and Mary Plummer in 1795. Especially interesting are a pair of silver wine cans and a cream pot made by Paul Revere for Captain Stephen Jones of Machias in 1783. A six-inch-high Revere wine can in the collection of the Heritage Plantation of Sandwich, Massachusetts, has an engraved "SDS" on the front for Stephen and Deborah Ellis Smith, and is probably one of the pair made for the Captain. Similarly, a privately owned pitcher illustrated in Francis Bigelow's *Historic Silver of the Colonies*, with an entwined "SDS," is most likely the cream pot recorded in Revere's day book.³²

Still, manufacture was only a part of the silversmiths' activities. They also served as dealers of goods. When Wyer arrived in Portland, his first advertisement read that he was offering for sale "a general assortment of the most fashionable Jewelry, Plated and Britanna [sic] ware &c. Chosen from the latest Importations."³³ In Portland generally, the vast majority of advertised broaches, rings, cruet stands, candlesticks, Britania tea pots, japanned snuff boxes, hair combs, knee buckles, and other items had been purchased for resale. [Fig. 8]

Europe was clearly the source of much of the silversmith's retail stock. In his advertisements Wyer mentions "the latest arrivals from Europe" and, more specifically, "English hair combs." His local contemporaries published similar notices. In 1804 silversmith Enoch Moulton indicated he had received a long list of items "by the ship *Kingston*, from London," and in 1809 stated that he had "just received by Packet, from Liverpool, a handsome assortment of Plated and Japanned Ware, Jewelry, &c. &c." Similarly, in 1807 clockmaker Thomas Hunter stated that he had "for sale, a quantity of the best Planish'd Tin Ware ever imported from London," and fellow townsman



Figs. 7-8. Top to bottom: Farley cup (1818-1830; 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " high) and Wyer and Farley advertisement, *Portland Gazette*, 1815. Fig. 7 courtesy Cleveland Museum of Art; gift of Hollis French. Fig. 8 courtesy American Antiquarian Society and Martha Gandy Fales.

Josiah Lovis indicated that he had "just received an excellent assortment of the best warranted *English Watches* for sale."³⁴

Although Moulton's advertisements would suggest that European goods were being shipped directly to Portland, it is more probable that the wares were coming via Boston. In instances where specific vessels are named, none were recorded as having entered at Portland.³⁵ Also, in several ads by contemporary Portland merchants the Boston connection was explicitly stated. Upholsterer Edward Howe reported that he had "just received by brig *Gov. Carver*, arrived in Boston from Havre, a large & elegant assortment of Paper Hangings." Fancy goods dealer E. C. Attwood stated that he had "recently received from Liverpool, by ships *Margaret* and *Ceres*, via Boston, an extensive assortment of China, Glass & Crockery Ware."³⁶ If this was the predominate pattern, it fits closely the Duke de la Rochefoucault's description of the import of foreign goods through Boston.

Apparently Boston was also the major source and entrepôt for American-made wares sold by Portland merchants, although the evidence is somewhat sparse. At one point Wyer and Farley offered to sell their wares "at Boston factory prices" and elsewhere Farley promoted timepieces built by Boston clock maker Simon Willard.³⁷ A number of local craftsmen and dealers stated that they had received goods from Boston; however, they did not indicate whether the items were American or European.³⁸

Unfortunately, we know little regarding the financial, work, and trade patterns of Portland's early nineteenth-century smiths. Only once, through the reminiscences of the Reverend Cyrus Hamlin, are we given a brief glimpse into the organization and daily activity of one of these shops. Prior to his decision to enter the ministry, Hamlin had apprenticed under his brother-in-law, Charles Farley, from 1828 to 1829.³⁹ Farley's establishment was divided into two sections, with the "sales store" in the front and the work area in the rear. The downstairs of the sale area was apparently stocked with silver wares and fancy goods; upstairs had been set up as a "military goods rooms."

PORTLAND SILVERSMITHS

The workshop was the scene of manufacture and repair work, and served as the center of the apprentices' activities (when they were not working on the sales floor — a fairly frequent occurrence). The young men were gradually trained in all aspects of the craft. Hamlin began his apprenticeship by making small, popular items such as sleeve buttons and mounting hair necklaces and wristlets. He then moved to the production of spoons, which he considered one of the key manufactured lines of the shop. Hamlin also learned repair work, casting, and filing. Finally, the young apprentice learned the time-consuming labor of refining — smelting out the 20 to 25 percent of alloys from a large bag of Mexican dollars. Hamlin was proud of his work, stating that “the melted mass in the firing pot retained a brilliant surface that perfectly reflected my face when I looked into it. No alloy remained to form an oxide and obscure the brilliancy.”

Farley had four apprentices at various stages of training, and if Hamlin's experiences were typical, Farley was a good master. When Hamlin faced early frustration with his seemingly slow progress, the young apprentice was told: “Don't hurry. Learn to do a thing well, and then learn to do it fast.” Farley also seemed to know when to let his trainees try new challenges. When a customer brought in a key in need of repair, Hamlin set out to repair it, even though not thoroughly trained. Farley returned from lunch and let Hamlin finish his project unhindered (and unassisted). The key worked, and the young apprentice gained substantial self-esteem.

Farley also looked to his apprentices for possible future partners. He informed Hamlin that when he had learned the trade, the young apprentice could join him in the business. He told Hamlin that he would probably be sent to Geneva, Paris, and other European cities to acquire jewelry and military goods, a prospect the boy found highly attractive. In the end, all plans went for naught, as Hamlin decided to enter the ministry. However, another of Farley's apprentices, Edward Baker, did stay on to form a partnership with his previous master.⁴⁰ Some of the other trainees did less well. A young man named

Cutter, although a decent workman, managed through heedlessness to “break more things in one month than all the rest had done in their entire apprenticeship.” A second, named Kibby Dodge, was caught taking money from the cash drawer, an act he confessed he had done many times previously. Both boys were soon gone.⁴¹

By the 1820s and 1830s, Wyer and Farley were feeling the effects of a major shift in the silver and fancy wares industry: a steady move away from the manufacture of wares in preference for merchandising. In retrospect, the change seems inevitable. The small smith/dealer found an increasingly diverse and relatively inexpensive assortment of manufactured goods available to him. The steady industrial rationalization of silver manufacture, occurring at first in England and to a lesser degree in other European nations and finally in America, increased the supply of imported items, frequently produced at prices competitive with traditional hand-crafted counterparts.⁴² The large quantities of British wares and smaller amounts of American goods already being sold by Portland smiths and their contemporaries presaged new patterns in the industry.

English craftsmen, in fact, had been developing manufacturing techniques for about a half century. Adopting the use of rolling mills and drop presses and allying these with steam power, the manufacturers were able to produce at high speed and at a fraction of the cost of traditional craft technology. Thomas Fletcher of Philadelphia reported in 1815 that Rundell, Bridge and Rundell, England’s most prestigious silver-smithing firm, had a ten-ton steam-powered press “to strike up vegetable dishes at a blow.”⁴³ The overall integration of the factory system was even more graphically evident in Fletcher’s description of one of Sheffield’s plated ware manufactories. The buildings were

from 80 to 100 feet in length, divided into five or six different apartments, [in which there were] from 100 to 120 workmen, women & boys The lower room or cellar contains about 20 stamps or downfall sliding weights and a vast quantity of steel dies used for

striking up parts of articles of various kinds. The copper [is] plated in bars about 8 inches long & rolled into sheets of 18 by 24 inches and cut up by patterns into the proper size and shape wanted, after which the larger vessels are raised, soldered and swedged as we do our silver work The whole process of manufacturing Plated Ware appears extremely simple and easily obtained by those who have been in the habit of making silver work.⁴⁴

Similar developments were occurring in the very competitive Britannia industry. James Dixon and contemporary producers in Sheffield and Birmingham increasingly turned to machines to make wares that sharply rivaled the silver and silver-plated products.⁴⁵ The rapid adoption of machinery and integrated factory operations in the various fine metals and fancy goods industries, along with a large pool of labor, allowed the English to produce great quantities of wares for the United States market, and it was probably largely with these goods that Portland's silversmiths, jewelers, and clock makers filled their retail needs in the early 1800s.

Although substantially behind the English, a small but growing number of American makers began moving from traditional craft patterns to those of wholesale producers. Local smiths had exchanged services and traded among themselves since the seventeenth century. However, by the late 1700s some operations had begun wholesaling products to other silversmiths and fancy goods stores, including outlying micropolitan and village establishments. Operating between 1761 and 1801, Elias Pelletreau of Long Island was among the earlier American silversmiths to send quantities of his manufactures to other outlets. Consisting largely of jewelry, spoons, and tortoise shell work, these goods were distributed to out-of-town merchants and shopkeepers through commissioned agents.⁴⁶

Such activities became more common in the early nineteenth century. Thomas Fletcher and Sidney Gardiner, who operated a fancy-hardware store and plate and jewelry manufactory in Boston between 1808 and 1811, almost immediately

began supplying silversmiths in Boston and surrounding towns. Moving to Philadelphia in 1811, they expanded their operations, sending manufactured goods to customers from North Carolina to Massachusetts. Contemporaneously, Philadelphia silversmith Samuel Williamson was shipping his wares by coasters to firms all the way from Boston to Richmond.⁴⁷

In the 1810s Jabez Gorham of Providence, Rhode Island, began manufacturing jewelry with an eye on the New England market. Producing gold beads, earrings, breast pins, finger rings, and “French Filigree” jewelry, he employed peddlers and traveled himself in an effort to develop markets for his goods. Gorham was not singular in his search for new customers. In the mid-1820s Charles Fletcher became a “traveling jeweller” for Fletcher and Gardiner to promote the firm’s jewelry and plate. On the other hand, it is likely that a substantial number of the micropolitan silversmiths and jewelers traveled to the urban centers to acquire their shop merchandise. Advertisements by Maine fine and technical metal workers leave a similar impression.⁴⁸

These new wholesale producers were larger “retail-manufacturing” shops. All continued very active and even growing retail operations; however, they were also developing an increasingly separate capacity for large-scale, often specialized production.⁴⁹ The work force in these firms was substantially larger; in 1816 Fletcher and Gardiner employed four journeymen, sixteen apprentices, and six burnishers. In 1811 Williamson was using eleven apprentices and hired craftsmen, and in the late 1810s Gorham had about a half-dozen employees. At the same time, Jabez Baldwin had operations in Salem, Boston, and Providence, and employed perhaps four to six specialists and apprentices at each location.⁵⁰

Increasingly, these firms organized their production in terms of specific specialties. In 1795 Philadelphia silversmith Joseph Cooke advertised for a long list of specialists, including “Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, Jewelers, Engravers, Bucklemakers, ... Spoon-makers ... [and] Lapidaries.”⁵¹ A few years later,

townsman Samuel Williamson had his workers manufacturing silver products based upon a limited number of shapes and decorations and separated his workers between those making flatware and those producing hollow ware.⁵² For the workers in the retail-manufacturing firms, a fundamental change was occurring. Rather than independent craftsmen, they were increasingly viewed as shop employees, a fact emphasized by Baldwin's repeated references to his "workmen."⁵³

Corresponding with the growing size and specialization of the larger shops was the increasing mechanization of the silver industry. In 1810, Tench Coxe, editor and compiler of the *Federal Census of American Manufacturers*, reported that "the use of rollers and other contrivances to save labor has been gradually introduced into the gold and silver manufactory; and being numerous, they have, though small, at length reached to a considerable aggregate importance." However, he also noted that the introduction of machinery could have been more successful had not frequent changes in taste and fashion rendered it "unsafe to make too large a stock of goods."⁵⁴

The mechanization Coxe described had been under way for some time. Flattening, or rolling mills for the production of sheet silver were in use by the mid-eighteenth century and may even have been introduced in America by the 1730s. By the early nineteenth century, such mills were in wide use, as were such tools as cutting presses for creating narrow strips of sheet silver and gadroon mills, which fashioned these into beading and other stamped or pierced ornamented borders.⁵⁵ Thomas Fletcher was most anxious to incorporate these machines into his operation. While in England in 1815, he purchased a ten-inch flattening mill, two small mills, and a letter press, which he planned to alter to a cutting press.⁵⁶ Such mills were being used in small communities as well as large. On June 15, 1807, Enoch Moulton of Portland advertised that he had "procured a large ROLLING MILL" capable of rolling up to twelve-inch sheets. With an eye on maximizing its productivity, he also offered to make it available to local builders for rolling lead.⁵⁷

Still, it is important to realize that unlike English machinery these smaller tools were usually hand, rather than steam

powered. At best, some producers integrated horse or water power, but it was midcentury before American operations reached the level of sophistication enjoyed by the English.⁵⁸

Spoon manufacture, although it too had English connections, was much more an American story, in large part because the British were not that much advanced in production techniques. At least one early English silversmith, William Darby, made a serious effort to produce machine-made spoons. In 1785 he patented a “new method of manufacturing spoons and other articles,” which involved a combination of rolling and stamping. Darby did produce some spoons, but it appears that the quantity was not large and that few others followed up on his efforts. It would not be until the 1840s that Sheffield silver manufacturers would mass produce flatware on a large scale. Efforts at producing plated flatware were equally unsuccessful. According to silver authority Seymour Wyler, the flimsy teaspoons and sugar tongs that were produced soon discouraged further interest in such wares until the introduction of electroplating.⁵⁹

In America, the development of mechanized spoon making was similarly slow. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, handmade spoons represented one of the basic manufactured products of many micropolitan and village silversmiths, a situation that remained largely unchanged through the 1820s. However, during those decades the groundwork was laid for significant change. On September 14, 1801, a Charleston, Maryland, dentist, Thomas Bruff, obtained the first United States patent for the manufacture of spoons. According to Bruff’s advertisements, the machine would “turn out from a flat bar, a spoon in a minute, ready for the punch, with the seal and name impression upon it.” A contemporary observer stated that the device was “25 to one faster than with the hammer.”⁶⁰ Other inventors, including Isaiah Bisbee of Bath, soon offered their own solutions. It appears that presses were used on many early spoon-making machines and proved especially useful for accurate duplication of complex dies. Patents entered in 1830 by Archibald Little of Bridgeton, New Jersey, and Robert

Butcher of Philadelphia registered devices suitable for die stamping.⁶¹

Rolling mills may have come into general use somewhat later than presses, but various individuals were working on the idea from early in the nineteenth century. In 1813 Jacob Perkins of Newburyport combined press and roller principles in a patented spoon-making device. In 1826 William Gale of New York developed a machine with two steel rollers for imprinting bas relief ornamentation on spoon blanks, after which they had "only to be shaped, the bowl to be formed and fine polished."⁶² In the mid-1830s Josephus Brockway of Troy, New York, and Sanford Boon of Hamilton, New York, patented rolling machines for swaging spoons. By the 1850s such mills were coming into general use and may have been acquired by Portland silversmiths Moses and Thomas Pearson. Advertising the manufacture of "forks, spoons, ladles, &c.," they were able, in 1850, to produce 2,200 ounces of silverware. Among the specific wares made were swaged tea-, salt-, mustard-, dessert-, and table-spoons. They might have been made by hand, but more probably they were shaped and ornamented by rolling mills.⁶³

The multiple developments in the silver industry, including the growth in manufacturing firms, the shift to wholesale production, the increasing specialization of labor, and the steady mechanization of product fabrication, made American wares increasingly competitive with English imports. The general effect was to steadily increase the quantity and variety of wares available to the micropolitan and village smith dealers and to lessen the advantages of manufacturing silver, jewelry, and other items in the shops. More specifically, the mechanization of spoon making and its inclusion in the production of larger firms usurped the major staple item manufactured in the smaller shops. The cessation of local spoon making symbolized the passing of the traditional silversmith.

That the new manufacturers saw Maine as a likely market for their goods is clearly indicated in an 1833 report on manufacturers submitted to the House of Representatives. Four

major Boston silversmiths reported that they produced silver spoons, forks, and other objects to the value of \$115,000, one-third of which was sent to Maine and other New England states. Similarly, Newburyport manufacturers sent one-fourth of their silver spoons and thimbles to Maine and one-fourth of their gold beads to Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.⁶⁴

These changes in the silver and fancy goods trades were reflected in the inventories and activities of smiths and dealers of Portland and neighboring communities. As the amount and variety of such wares increased, local smiths, jewelers, and watchmakers were forced to carry larger and wider inventories to remain competitive. With the need for more capital and larger offerings, Portland's silversmiths turned increasingly to partnerships.⁶⁵

Several of the new partnerships reflected another pressure felt by the smaller smiths: a need to specialize in order to handle expanding demands. In several cases, alliances were forged between silversmiths and watchmakers. In 1809, Eleazer Wyer joined in a partnership with watchmaker John Bailey in the shop previously operated by watchmaker Josiah Lovis. Two years later watchmaker John Dalrymple indicated that he had "engaged ... one of the best working Jewelers and Goldsmiths in the United States." Another watchmaker, Albert Titcomb, struck up a partnership with silversmith David Ilsley in 1825 and repaired watches for Charles Farley in 1828 and 1829. In the same period, Henry Pearson, a watch and mathematical instrument maker, joined with watchmaker-silversmith Parker Roberts. Like the other partnerships, they offered an extensive line of fancy goods, watch and jewelry repair, and locally manufactured gold beads and silver spoons.⁶⁶

The pressures to specialize also impacted on those who continued manufacturing efforts. No longer would one find an advertisement such as that by Enoch Moulton, who in 1810 offered a wide line of silver flatware, gold necklaces, gold watch chains and keys, silver thimbles, hooks, and rings, all of his own manufacture.⁶⁷ More typical was the 1829 announcement by Henry S. Pearson and Parker Roberts, who advertised "Gold

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Beads and Silver Spoons manufactured and sold wholesale and retail.”⁶⁸ Jeweler/watchmaker Edward P. Banks and jeweler William H. H. Hatch clearly responded to the new market parameters when they combined in 1844. They consolidated their fancy goods operations, but they also established a specialized manufactory for the production of “an extensive assortment of SILVER TEA, TABLE, DESSERT, SUGAR, MUSTARD and SALT SPOONS,” a business they continued into the next decade.⁶⁹

Still, the major shift during the first half of the nineteenth century — and one revealed in Portland’s newspapers and city directories — was the replacement of traditional silversmiths with jeweler/dealers.⁷⁰ The 1760-1840 period saw a rough equivalency between the two groups. However, between 1840 and 1850 the silver and fancy goods business underwent a dramatic change. In 1840 the newspapers and directories listed seven silversmiths and six jeweler/watchmakers (dealers). Ten years later the number of silversmiths had risen to eight, but the number of jeweler/watchmakers had increased to twenty. This change becomes even more dramatic when one investigates internal shifts in the silversmith category through the decade. Five of the individuals listed as smiths in 1840 had almost certainly given up manufacture of silverwares and jewelry by 1850 and were simply operating as dealers. Only two, Edward P. Banks and William Steele, were still making merchandise at midcentury, and ironically their activities accentuated the death of the traditional craft more than its continuation. Banks joined with William H. H. Hatch in the production of spoons and other flatware, while Steele specialized in the manufacture of jewelry. Two other midcentury smiths, Thomas and Moses Pearson, were also involved in wholesale flatware manufacture; thus, five of the eight recorded midcentury smiths had focused on specialized quantity production. Of the other three individuals, one was a goldsmith apprentice and two listed themselves as silversmiths, but all other evidence suggested that their careers, then and later, were largely concerned with merchandising rather than manufacture.

One new source of information in 1850 was the federal census. This listed ten previously unrecorded names and provided emphatic evidence of the changing patterns. Of the ten people listed, five were jewelers and watchmakers — four of whom were in their twenties. The other five were jewelers' apprentices, aged sixteen to twenty-four. It would be to those individuals that Portland's fancy-goods trade would pass.

Several of Portland's silversmiths had difficulties in adjusting to the changing conditions. Thomas Bowman, a Portland goldsmith, was one of the early unfortunates facing economic troubles. In April and May of 1806, he found himself in the Cumberland County jail for debt. But his record of ill fortune pales beside that of Jeremiah Sands. A silversmith and watchmaker, Sands lived in Brunswick, Portland, and Gorham between 1804 and 1806, and was hauled off to jail for debt from each of these communities. Goldsmith/watchmaker Josiah Lovis had a less habitual relationship with the county "goal," but after eight years in Portland he was incarcerated in 1810 for debt and the next year disappeared from the records. Others similarly afflicted with debt problems included silversmith Abel Hall and watchmaker Richard Goodhue.⁷¹

Whereas economic difficulties may have forced Lovis and Sands from silversmithing, Wyer and Farley were better prepared to respond to the evolving patterns in their trade. However, instead of specialized silver goods manufacture or straight merchandising, both eventually turned to other fields of metalworking, which they supplemented with mercantile activities and land speculation. Their entrepreneurial willingness to move in new directions, coupled with their previous success in silversmith and jewelry operations, explains the unusual aptitude in the two men for new, nontraditional fields of endeavor.

Wyer acted first. On June 5, 1821, he formed a partnership with Joseph Noble, a solidly established Portland coppersmith and brass founder.⁷² Noble was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1793 and was apprenticed to a coppersmith at age

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sixteen. Unlike Wyer and Farley, he worked only three years before striking out on his own. Young Noble arrived in Portland in the summer of 1812 and took a store on Fore Street, where he commenced “the business of Copper Smith, Plumbing and Foundering in executing Composition, Copper, Brass, and Lead work.”⁷³ In 1814, Noble listed a wide assortment of wares that he provided, many of them apparently of his manufacture. Representing a variety of metals, the list included “Brass Andirons, Shovels & tongs, Hooks [and] Candlesticks, Copper stills ... , Kettles and Nails, Sheet Iron Stoves, Funnels, Pans and Room Warmers, Lead Spouts [and] Fishing Leads.” He also produced substantial quantities of “composition and ship’s lead work, such as Hauser Leads, Scuppers, Bolts, Spikes, Cogs, Sheaves, Pindles, and Braces for Rudders.” Another advertisement indicated “all kinds of Composition and Brass Castings for Machinery.”⁷⁴ Noble hired “a first rate workman ... [able] to manufacture as good work, and at as low a price as at any foundry in Boston.” He also began investing surplus funds in real estate, establishing what was to become a highly lucrative supplement to his income.⁷⁵

The partnership between Wyer and Noble had great potential, bringing together the assets of two of Portland’s more successful metalworkers. But even more significant was the fact that the two men had decided to focus on the rapidly growing cast iron stove industry.⁷⁶ Wyer and Noble were not content to simply sell stoves. Like numerous other small founders across the young nation, the two men had determined to set up a stove foundry, thereby casting, as well as assembling and selling their wares. By August 1822, they had established their “Stove Factory Warehouse” and were offering a wide variety of cast iron stoves, including “elegant Franklin, Pipe Franklin, Double back *STOVES*; 5 sizes, Plain top, cone and Urn Franklin [stoves] ... From their own patterns.” As if to emphasize this new focus, nearly all references to other base-metal work disappeared from that and subsequent advertisements.⁷⁷ [Fig. 9]

Wyer was rather hesitant about breaking away from his previous activities. Over two years after the partnership was

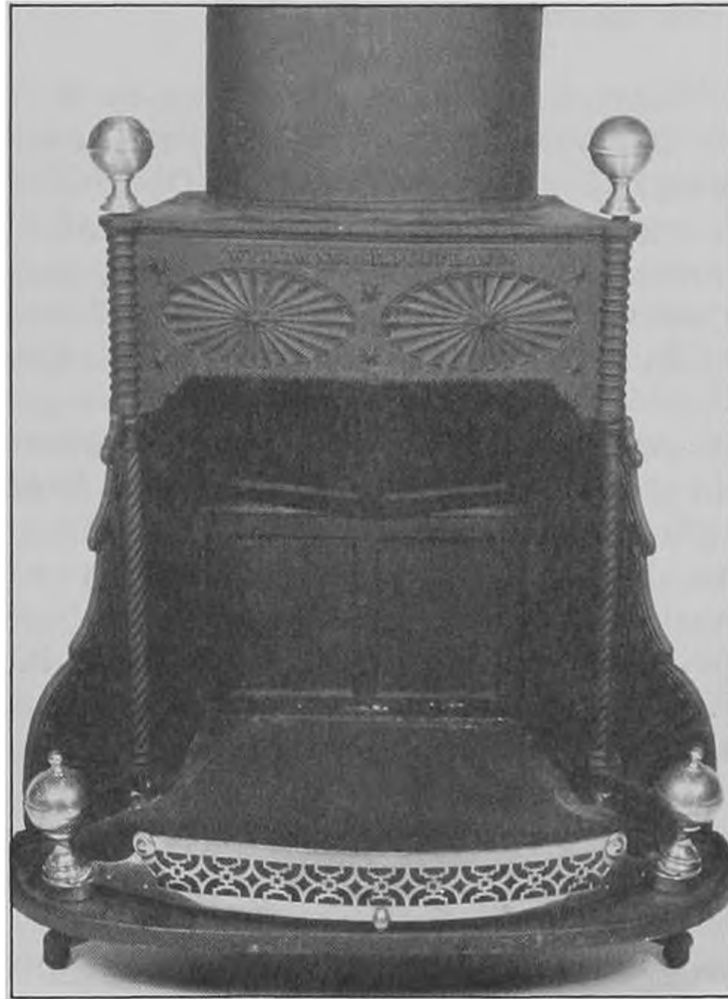


Fig. 9. Wyer and Noble stove (1822-1828).

formed, he continued running advertisements, under the name of Wyer and Noble, in which he offered a wide line of fancy wares and military goods, as well as silver objects and jewelry of his own manufacture. His last offering of this sort came in mid-1823, after which he shifted completely into stove and other base-metal sales and production.⁷⁸

The decision to specialize in stoves may not have been for the best. Although the stove foundry continued until the late 1820s, there were signs of change only four years after the operation was established. Having taken on Gorham merchant Joseph M. Gerrish as another partner, Wyer, Noble and Company once again began offering as diverse a group of other base-metal products as Noble had advertised prior to the partnerships. Furthermore, they stated that:

In addition to the above can be had at the *Iron Foundry*, head of Union-Wharf, under the superintendence of Mr. Samuel Edwards, IRON WORK for Mills and Vessels; and MACHINERY of all kinds cast to any pattern and superior workmanship. Also, all kinds of Copper, Brass, Composition, Lead and Sheet Iron Work, Clothiers and Hatters Kettles, Stills, and Worms at the shortest notice.⁷⁹

Sometime around 1829 or 1830, Gerrish departed the firm, leaving the original partnership. As Wyer and Noble moved into the 1830s, the list of non-stove products steadily increased. Meanwhile, the manufacture of stoves had clearly given way to the wholesaling of imported products.⁸⁰ As in the silver and fancy goods trades, in all probability it was the availability of a wide variety of stoves and stove parts at competitive prices that doomed the Wyer and Noble operation. As the industry developed nationally, the manufacture of stove products was generally centralized in fewer, larger, more efficient firms, and numerous small operations fell by the way. That apparently was the fate of Wyer and Noble.

Almost as if to accent the shift in focus, the firm became involved in a wholly divergent role as a clearinghouse for agricultural goods and other interests. In March 1834, James E. Robinson was offering for sale "Superior Cast Iron Ploughs of his own Manufacture," and potential customers were invited to view the ploughs at Wyer and Noble's store.⁸¹ Contemporaneously, J. B. Cross, identifying himself as a "Farmer's Agent," was merchandising "SCREWED AND COMPRESSED HAY." Managing his operation from the Wyer and Noble firm, he had 2,000 tons of hay stored and for sale.⁸² Cross also promoted the Portland, Scarborough, and Phippsburg Mining Company. "Desirous of facilitating the Mining interests of Maine, and of ascertaining the natural deposits of Coals, Ores, Minerals, and Fossils, which are now found in this State," Cross and William Colledge, agents for the company, urged "Farmers and others" to send them specimens of coals, ores, minerals, and fossils. This operation too was headquartered at Wyer and Noble.⁸³

By September 1834, advertisements for the mining venture seem to have ceased, and at about the same time ties with Wyer and Noble were apparently severed. Soon after, Cross ran advertisements that suggested economic difficulties and announced a larger partnership for the mining operation. However, Cross was no longer advertising by the end of the year, and after 1837, he appeared in the *Portland Directories* with no listed occupation.⁸⁴

Wyer had not relied solely on manufacture and merchandising for the whole of his income. Shortly after arriving in Portland, Eleazer married Nancy, possibly the daughter of Peter and Eunice Warren. Within a year, he apparently had joined his in-laws in the first of several land transactions. By the late teens, he had expanded into purchasing mortgages as well as properties. By the mid-1830s, Wyer's real estate activities peaked in a series of transactions with associates Noble and Gerrish, involving lots from a recent subdivision on Bramhall's Hill, the inner end of Portland neck.⁸⁵

Wyer, often in conjunction with Noble and Gerrish, also lent money to numerous local inhabitants and more than a few times took debtors to court in order to force payment. A typical case was that of yeoman Benaiah Merrill, who in March 1831 was sued for a \$40 note. Cabinetmaker Jacob Card was summoned to the June 1829 court for a \$64.27 loan given in the previous February. In some instances delinquent debtors experienced rather severe handling. According to William Harnder, a Portland joiner, on June 4, 1831, Wyer and three other gentlemen entered his shop and "without the privilege of trial or of seeing the charges or accusations alleged against him," they incarcerated him in the Portland alms house and house of correction, where he was put to hard labor for fifteen days. Wyer and associates claimed they were not guilty, and the jury agreed. But whatever the actual situation, it is clear that a debt to Wyer was one to be paid.⁸⁶

Unfortunately, this flurry of activities signaled not new promise but a definite downturn in Wyer's economic fortune. He and Noble officially parted on December 31, 1835, and the

latter moved to Boston by mid-1836 to pursue other business. About mid-1835, Wyer joined with local founder Horace V. Bartol, apparently to continue the coppersmith and foundry business. He also developed substantial new funding by selling Noble \$8,500 worth of real estate and securing a mortgage on other holdings from in-law Thomas Warren and others for another \$11,000.⁸⁷ It is not clear whether Wyer needed the money for outstanding debts or for capitalization of his business. Either way, the source of Wyer's funding underlines his key weakness, and that of many contemporary small manufacturers: the lack of liquid assets and of capitalization monies in general.

Despite his best efforts, Wyer found himself sliding inexorably toward economic disaster. By late 1835, Bartol apparently had dissolved his ties with Wyer and had begun a new and ultimately successful foundry operation with blacksmith Charles Staples.⁸⁸ Bartol's rather rapid change of partners probably was prompted by Wyer's disintegrating finances, the seriousness of which was revealed in a court action brought by ex-partner Joseph Noble on October 23, 1837. Wyer, in fact, was deeply indebted to Noble, and Noble was further liable for, among other things, "engagements and promises" made by himself for Wyer as part of Wyer and Noble. Furthermore, Wyer had acquired debts during his partnership with Bartol. Faced with these problems, Wyer agreed, for five dollars paid by Noble, to assign to the latter all "Real Estate, goods, wares, effects, merchandize, debts, bills, accounts, [and] sum or sums of money" belonging to Wyer by reason of their late partnership.⁸⁹

Noble soon after brought suits against a number of debtors to the previous firm of Wyer and Noble and consistently received favorable judgments. Also, it was almost certainly due to his efforts that the ex-partners were able to defeat an action brought against them by a creditor of Cross. Meanwhile, Wyer and Bartol were able to bring successful suits against three of their debtors.⁹⁰

On his own, however, Wyer experienced repeated misfortunes. In early 1838, he received two unfavorable judgments

on unpaid mortgages, losing \$11,000 worth of property, and in July the Bank of Cumberland took Wyer to court for a small note.⁹¹ Meantime, the hapless entrepreneur suddenly found himself unable to collect from his own debtors. In June 1841 Wyer charged Bangor merchants Hyde and Head with an unpaid obligation of \$1,798.⁹² His case must have been weak because he was “given leave to discontinue this action” and then told to pay the defendants cost of suit of \$28.89. He had equally bad luck in pursuing two defendants holding unpaid Cross notes, although he intended to appeal the negative decisions. Even as these decisions went against him, Wyer took out another mortgage of \$400.⁹²

Finally, Eleazer Wyer exhausted his resources. On May 17, 1842, he found himself at the District Court of the United States, District of Maine. Noting personal debts and those emanating from his roles in Wyer and Noble; Noble and Company; Wyer and Bartol; and John B. Cross and Company, the court announced him bankrupt for himself and as a member of the several partnerships. On June 8 townman Nathaniel Mitchell was appointed assignee of Wyer’s affairs.⁹³

Apparently no longer weighted by overwhelming debts, Wyer soon reestablished himself and a new partner, James R. Milliken, as stove dealers and coppersmiths. Operating as early as 1844, the partners offered a wide variety of services and products to their customers. Calling themselves coppersmiths and brass founders, they announced that “Ship Builders [would be] furnished with CAST IRON AND LEAD WORK, AND COPPER AND COMPOSITION FASTENINGS.” The partners also sold various types of sheet metal as well as utilitarian base-metal wares, including kettles, pumps, and composition spikes. Finally, they indicated that they had the new Washington air-tight, summer and winter cooking stove, for wood or coal — “THE LATEST AND THE BEST” cooking stove on the market. This was Wyer’s last business venture. A year later he retired, leaving the operation to Milliken and his new partner, A. G. Warren. On February 28, 1848, the old silversmith died, aged sixty-two.⁹⁴

Charles Farley moved later, but more abruptly than Wyer, from silversmithing into new ventures. After parting with Wyer in 1818, Farley continued with the silversmith and jewelry business into the early 1830s, taking a previous apprentice, Edward Baker, as a partner in 1829.⁹⁵

Early in 1831, the connection with Baker was severed, and Farley broke cleanly away from his old craft, establishing a ship chandlery at the head of Long Wharf. He sold a wide variety of shipping and fishing paraphernalia and an equally extensive list of hardware items.⁹⁶

By 1834 Farley had shifted into the mercantile business, taking on local merchant George Hammett as a partner.⁹⁷ Farley had enjoyed substantial success, making a number of fortuitous investments in the Cuban trade, and his future looked most favorable. All that suddenly changed. Farley was persuaded to endorse the efforts of a merchant who attempted to corner the molasses market. The adventure failed, the ruined merchant leaped to his death in the Kennebec, and Charles Farley suddenly found himself facing a debt of \$80,000.⁹⁸

The identity of the ill-starred merchant is not known, although it may have been Hammett. There is an indication of economic difficulties in an advertisement by Farley and Hammett on June 16, 1835. They were offering for sale the 135-ton coasting vessel *Florida*, "as she came from sea." On October 9, the firm of Farley and Hammett was dissolved, and Farley stated that all bills were to be sent to him. Less than a month later, Farley was offering for sale a 250-ton bark lying in Bath, where it had been built, a vessel he was still trying to sell the following January.⁹⁹ To date, no subsequent mention of Hammett after October 1835 has surfaced; overall, circumstantial evidence points to him as the dreamer of a molasses monopoly.

The next few years were probably extremely difficult for Farley. He managed to repay the huge debts left him, only to lose a vessel at sea, which nearly impoverished him. With little capital, Farley established himself as an auctioneer and a commission merchant. He held his first auction in late January,

1836, selling an assortment of fabrics, minor garments, and a variety of other items. Soon after, he was selling a house organ as he moved into his new career.¹⁰⁰

In 1844 Farley gave up his mercantile activities, moving to Waterford where he purchased a farm. In May 1845 he moved again, this time to Harrison where Harrison Blake gave him a two-year lease to “The Wier [wire] factory and annealing house standing on the outlet of Anonymous Pond in Harrison Village, with all the machinery, utensins [sic] now in or connected with the said building.” The factory, which had been founded by Grinfall Blake and Charles Washburn in 1834, was apparently run down and not operating, because Farley was to “put the property in good condition and occupy and improve [it] for two years, repair the water conductor [and] share one-third [of the] dam and flume expenses.”¹⁰¹ The next September, Farley, along with Boston merchants Philip Greeley, Jr. and George F. Guild, purchased the wire factory and annealing house as well as a sawmill for \$3,000. Ownership was divided, with Farley holding half and his two Boston backers a quarter each. A few days later the three men purchased a brick store in town, and the next summer they acquired a grist mill, mill site, and water conductor. Farley took complete control two years later, buying out Greeley’s and Guild’s half interests in the several properties. In August 1849 he resold a half interest to townsman Philander Tolman, thereby gaining “an expert workman” and an experienced wire maker.¹⁰²

The factory was well established by midcentury. According to the 1850 industrial census, the water-powered Farley and Tolman operation employed eleven men in the processing of fifty tons of iron rod into forty-nine tons of wire.¹⁰³ The fairly straightforward technology used by these men and their contemporaries elsewhere was clearly delineated in an 1864 description.

The first operation ... is heating [the quarter inch rod] ... to about a bright red heat, in a furnace ... by which it is softened. It is next cleaned with an acid to remove all oxide from its surface, after which it is

coated with rye-flour and dried in a special apparatus. It is now ready for drawing, which consists in reducing the ... rod to a much less diameter and at the same time greatly extending its length. One end of the rod is first pointed on an anvil down to the size or number to which it is to be drawn on the "gauge plate."

The wire, after it has been pointed, is passed through a hole of the proper size in a steel draw-plate As the [drawing] block revolves it winds the ... rod around it and pulls it through the hole in the steel draw-plate, reducing its size to wire gauges It is then drawn through a smaller hole in a draw-plate and reduced two sizes, and so on until it has been reduced to the requisite size, and what was a few yards in length has been extended to two thousand yards.¹⁰⁴

In deciding the type of wire to produce, Farley and Tolman could have focused on a number of local and regional markets. The rapidly growing Maine and New England textile industry, with its countless cards, reeds, fliers, etc., needed great quantities of wire. So too did several Portland piano forte makers, who required dozens of strings for every soundboard. Finally, there was a large tinware center in Westbrook, needing wire to strengthen the multitude of trunks, boxes, cans, pails, and sundry other wares coming from the numerous shops in the area.

Two types of wire which Farley and Tolman were making are known, because in September 1854 they received a bronze medal at the Second Exhibit and Fair of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association. They provided specimens of card and piano forte wire which, according to the judges "were of surpassing evenness and beauty, showing the high state of perfection to which the enterprising manufacturers have attained."¹⁰⁵

An expression of great expectations, the judges' appraisal proved, instead, the obituary of the Farley and Tolman effort. In March 1855, sons Charles H. and Alfred D. F. Farley acquired Tolman's half interest in the factory and other properties, which they with their father mortgaged for \$4,000. The

move, which seems initially aimed at further consolidation of family control, proved quite otherwise. After an abortive effort to sell the property to Hannibal Hamlin, the three Farleys soon sold the property to Jacob Hazen of Bridgton.¹⁰⁶

The reason for the sudden moves (if not a complete understanding of all the machinations) soon became evident. Once again, Charles Farley had suffered from a series of economic reversals, this time "precipitated mainly by the failures of parties in Boston," according to the old entrepreneur's biographer.

Unlike his earlier misfortune, this instance proved to be beyond Farley's resources. With all his recorded properties already obligated with mortgages, he did not have the necessary reserves to cushion the crisis.¹⁰⁷ On April 22, 1856, the unpaid mortgage on Farley's house in Harrison was purchased by Jacob Hazen through a sheriff's sale. Hazen then sold it to Ives Hathaway. Less than a month later, Farley made an agreement with Hathaway whereby for a fifty-dollar fee the latter would not pursue payment of the mortgage in court.¹⁰⁸ Farley's problems continued for several more years. In 1858 foreclosure proceedings were instituted regarding an 1854 mortgage against the long-sold wire factory. The next year, a second action, also against the wire factory, was begun on another \$1,000 mortgage, taken in 1847 from Bridgton widow Nancy Farnsworth.¹⁰⁹

Striving to manage his debts, sixty-two-year-old Farley established himself as a broker in 1856. Taking on a partner, John E. Dow, he continued in that business until the mid-1860s. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, Farley was running a boarding house. In 1873 he retired and moved to Boston, where he resided until his death on December 20, 1877.¹¹⁰

Only a few years after Farley's death, artisans in the Arts and Crafts movement sought to rediscover the spirit and technology of the craft which he had practiced as a young man. It is the very possibility that such a movement could exist that jolts one to the tremendous changes that had come to the silver trade and many of the other hand-craft industries during the nineteenth century.

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When Farley, Wyer, and their contemporaries established themselves in Portland during the early decades of the 1800s, they expected to combine traditionally learned silversmith skills and fancy goods merchandising in carrying on their occupations. As the century progressed, it was the latter that overwhelmingly prevailed. First English, and then larger American firms incorporated the advantages of machinery, specialization, and wholesale production, the result of which was the greatest outpouring of silver and related fancy goods in the history of the industry. Micropolitan and village smiths, with limited capital and clientele and growing demands for a wide variety of items, were forced from manufacturing to merchandising. By midcentury there were few in the fancy goods trade who were more than jewelers and watch repairers. The few Portland silver manufacturers left were small-scale specialists, such as spoon makers Thomas and Moses Pearson and jewelry maker William Steele. For all intents and purposes, the traditional silversmith had vanished.

Of Portland's silversmiths, Wyer and Farley responded most creatively to the radically changing industry. Displaying substantial entrepreneurial insight, both selected new, highly promising fields, which offered them the opportunity to utilize past metal working experience in carrying on their new activities. Wyer, with his new partner, Joseph Noble, was among the earlier New England stove founders, and Farley may well have been without peer in northern New England when he set up his wire factory in Harrison. Unfortunately, both men had severe handicaps — the first of which was strong competition. Stove production had been well established in the middle Atlantic states for a quarter of a century when Wyer and Noble began making stoves, and the Washburn Company in Worcester, Massachusetts, was producing more wire in a week than Farley and Tolman did in a year.¹¹¹ Second, costs of raw materials, transportation, and facilities were higher in northern New England than further south. Finally, neither Wyer nor Farley had the reserve capital to expand to larger, more efficient operations or to weather any kind of substantial economic reversals.

In retrospect, it is fairly easy to see why the two men failed in their new businesses. However, at a time of great economic change and unpredictability, their ventures almost certainly seemed to fall within the parameters of acceptable risk. Furthermore, their efforts were appreciated by contemporaries. When Farley faced foreclosure on his house in Harrison, Jacob Hazen of that town and Ives Hathaway of Portland acquired the overdue mortgage and held it without demanding repayment. Four years later, Farley was appointed as one of the judges at the Maine Charitable Mechanic's Fourth Exhibition and Fair and, along with merchant Gardiner Jordan and watchmaker E. P. Haines, was responsible for rating the silver and plated wares exhibit.¹¹²

Similarly, when his finances were in chaos in the late 1830s, Wyer received crucial help from ex-partner Joseph Noble, and in 1850, two years after Wyer's death, Noble took charge of Wyer's post-mortem economic affairs, very probably for the benefit of the old silversmith's widow.¹¹³ It was not only Noble who cared, for when Wyer died in 1848 he was remembered by fellow townsmen "as an enterprising business man in the community."¹¹⁴

A commendation of Wyer's entrepreneurial career, this epitaph could have been dedicated as appropriately to his old partner, Charles Farley. Even though both men did well as silversmiths and jewelers, they were willing to risk new venture in the hope of still greater success. Unlike the contemporary smiths turned dealers, in their forays into new manufactures Wyer and Farley were very much in the spirit of the rapidly emerging American Age of Industry. Unfortunately, they were also its victims.

NOTES

¹William Willis, *The History of Portland* (Portland: Bailey and Noyes, 1865), pp. 550-53, 560-61; William Goold, "Reminiscences of Old Portland," in *Successful Business Houses of Portland*, edited by Edward H. Elwell (Portland: W. S. Jones, 1875), p. 186.

²Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New York*, vol. 2 (New Haven: T. Dwight, 1821-1822), p. 114.

³*Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴The term "micropolitan," as distinct from truly "metropolitan" centers such as Boston and New York, is borrowed from Gerald W. R. Ward, "Silver and Society in Salem, Massachusetts, 1630-1820: A Case Study of the Consumer and the Craft," Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1984, pp. 184-85.

⁵Duke de la Rochefoucault, *Travels Through the United States of North America and Canada, in 1795, 1796, and 1797*, 2d ed., vol. 2 (London: R. Phillips, 1800), p. 216. The disadvantageous trade conditions are also noted in William D. Barry, *A Vignetted History of Portland Business, 1632-1932* (New York: The Newcomen Society in North America, 1982), p. 10; and Edwin A. Churchill, "Merchants and Commerce in Falmouth (1740-1775)," *Maine Historical Society Newsletter* 9 (May 1970): 98-100.

⁶Willis, *Portland*, pp. 574-76.

⁷Barry, *Portland*, p. 11.

⁸*Portland Directory*, 1823.

⁹Data compiled from "Maine Silver Files," MSS, Maine State Museum, Augusta.

¹⁰*Constitution and History of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association* (Portland: Bryan Press, 1965), p. 3.

¹¹Henry N. Flynt and Martha Gandy Fales, *The Heritage Foundation Collection of Silver* (Deerfield, Massachusetts: Heritage Foundation, 1968), pp. 147, 260-61, 363; Thomas B. Wyman, *Genealogies and Estates of Charleston, in the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1629-1818* (Boston: D. Clapp and Son, 1879), p. 1055.

¹²Flynt and Fales, *Heritage Foundation Silver*, pp. 167, 216; *Portland Gazette*, January 9, September 18, 1821.

¹³[Portland] *Eastern Argus*, December 25, 1806.

¹⁴*Portland Gazette*, October 23, 1809.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, November 4, 1811, June 28, 1812.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, July 6, 1812; *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1812; Ronald J. Kley, "John H. Hall: Buckets to Breechloaders," in preparation for 1986.

¹⁷One such example, a flintlock pistol with a silver trigger guard and nose cap, is in the collection of the Maine State Museum (MSM 81.148.1). See also *Portland Gazette*, January 2, 1816.

¹⁸*Portland Gazette*, March 21, 1808. For examples, see *ibid.*, October 23, 1809, November 4, 1811; *Eastern Argus*, September 2, 1810.

¹⁹*Eastern Argus*, October 2, 1813.

²⁰*Portland Gazette*, March 28, 1814.

²¹*Ibid.*, March 28, 1814, July 17, 1815, June 18, 1816, June 24, 1817.

²²*Ibid.*, June 18, December 14, 1816.

²³*Ibid.*, March 3, 1818.

²⁴*Ibid.*, March 3, 17, 1818.

²⁵'Maine Silver Files'; information on the wares produced by Wyer and Farley came from advertisements in the *Eastern Argus* and *Portland Gazette* for the years 1803-1824. Copies are included in the "Maine Silver Files."

²⁶*Eastern Argus*, December 13, 1819; *Portland Gazette*, October 3, 1810, November 4, 1811, June 24, 1817, May 4, 1819.

²⁷*Portland Gazette*, October 23, 1809.

²⁸This statement is based on the lack of references to hollow ware manufacture in the advertisements of other silversmiths (most of whom, like Wyer and Farley, indicated what they made) and the paucity of extant hollow ware pieces by these individuals.

²⁹See Ward, "Silver and Society in Salem," pp. 185-88. Salem people turned to metropolitan (especially Boston) makers for larger items.

³⁰Enoch Preble, "Expense Book, 1800-1804," MSS no. 401, Maine Historical Society, Portland. Several of the examples and documentation of hollow ware imported to Maine discussed in this and the following section were provided by Laura F. Sprague, who developed the data while researching the "Maine Fine and Decorative Arts Catalogue," MSS funded by the Maine Humanities Council and housed at the Maine State Museum.

³¹Eliza Southgate Bowne and Clarence Cook, eds., *A Girl's Life Eighty Years Ago* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), p. 205.

³²Pair of sauce boats by William Holmes, London (1781), 1974. 149, 150; cruet stand with casters by Robert and Daniel Hennell, London (1800), 1974.148, Portland Museum of Art; three-piece silver tea service by Jones, Lowell, and Ball, Boston (1835), 78 a-c, York Institute Museum, Saco, Maine; helmet-shaped cream pot (1795), 1977.422 (gift of heirs of Elizabeth Cheever Wheeler, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities), cited in Penny J. Sander, *Elegant Embellishments: Furnishings from New England Homes, 1660-1860* (Boston: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1982), p. 70; "Paul Revere Day Book, 1783-1797," MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society, p. 6; Eleanor Gustafson, "Museum Accessions," *Magazine Antiques* 115 (February 1979), p. 316; Francis Hill Bigelow, *Historic Silver of the Colonies and Its Makers* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1917), pp. 410, 412. The connection between the Revere Day Book entries and

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the Smith pieces was made by Michael K. Brown, who also identified James Avery and Colonel John Allen of Machias and silversmith David Howe of Castine as Revere's customers. Correspondence from Brown, December 7, 1984.

³³*Eastern Argus*, December 25, 1806.

³⁴*Ibid.*; *Portland Gazette*, July 30, 1810; *Eastern Argus*, June 14, 1804, August 13, September 3, 1807, December 14, 1809.

³⁵*Eastern Argus*, June 2, 1808, December 14, 1809, December 20, 1815.

³⁶*Ibid.*, December 27, 1815, May 19, 1819.

³⁷*Portland Gazette*, June 24, 1817, June 19, 1820.

³⁸*Eastern Argus*, November 25, 1803, June 24, 1805.

³⁹The following description of the shop and its activities is derived from Cyrus Hamlin, *My Life and Times* (Boston: Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society [c. 1893]), pp. 55-92.

⁴⁰[Semiweekly] *Eastern Argus*, May 12, 1829 to February 1, 1832; *Portland Directory*, 1831.

⁴¹Hamlin, *Life and Times*, p. 57.

⁴²"Maine Silver Files," Maine State Museum.

⁴³Donald L. Fennimore, "Elegant Patterns of Uncommon Good Taste: Domestic Silver by Thomas Fletcher and Sidney Gardiner," MA thesis, University of Delaware, 1972, p. 40.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁵Nancy A. Goynes, "Britannia in America: The Introduction of a New Alloy and a New Industry," *Winterthur Portfolio* 2 (1965): 164, 175, 180, 184.

⁴⁶Dean Frederick Failey, "Elias Pelletreau, Long Island Silversmith," MA thesis, University of Delaware, 1971, pp. 57-61.

⁴⁷Fennimore, "Elegant Patterns," pp. 5, 12; Ellen Beasley, "Samuel Williamson: Philadelphia Silversmith, 1794-1813," MA thesis, University of Delaware, 1974, pp. 40-49.

⁴⁸Charles H. Carpenter, Jr., *Gorham Silver, 1831-1981* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1982), pp. 24-25; Fennimore, "Elegant Patterns," p. 12; communication with Donald L. Fennimore, November 27, 1984; Hamlin, *Life and Times*, p. 56; "Maine Silver Files."

⁴⁹The term "retail-manufacturing shops" comes from Ward, "Silver and Society in Salem," pp. 222-23.

⁵⁰Fennimore, "Elegant Patterns," p. 43; Beasley, "Samuel Williamson," pp. 266-69; communication with Gerald W. R. Ward, November 25, 1984.

⁵¹Beasley, "Samuel Williamson," pp. 29-30.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 23, 27.

⁵³Ward, "Silver and Society in Salem," p. 236.

⁵⁴Tench Coxe, *A Statement of the Arts and Manufacturers of the United States of America for the Year 1810* (Philadelphia: A. Cornman, Jr., 1814), pp. xxxiv-xxxxv.

⁵⁵Stephen K. Victor, "From the Shop to the Manufactory: Silver and Industry, 1800-1970," in *Silver in American Life*, edited by Barbara M. Ward and Gerald W. R. Ward (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979), p. 23.

⁵⁶Fennimore, "Elegant Forms," pp. 41-42.

⁵⁷*Portland Gazette*, June 15, 1807.

⁵⁸Fennimore, "Elegant Forms," p. 34; Carpenter, *Gorham Silver*, pp. 30-31, 37-39, chapter 4; Goynes, "Britannia in America," pp. 175-77, 179-81, 183-84.

⁵⁹Ian Pickford, *Silver Flatware: English, Irish, and Scottish, 1660-1980* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, Ltd., 1983), pp. 20-22; Seymour B. Wyler, *The Book of Sheffield Plate* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949), pp. 54-55.

⁶⁰Deborah D. Waters, "From Pure Coin: The Manufacture of American Silver Flatware, 1800-1860," *Winterthur Portfolio* 12 (1977): 27.

⁶¹Dorothy T. Rainwater and H. Ivan Rainwater, *American Silverplate* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1968), p. 75; William B. Lapham, *Family Records of Some of the Descendants of Thomas Besbedge (Bisbee) of Scituate, Mass., in 1634* (Augusta: Press & Homan & Badger, 1876), p. 26; Waters, "From Pure Coin," p. 27.

⁶²Waters, "From Pure Coin," pp. 27-29.

⁶³Invoices: Moses and Thomas Pearson to Charles Swift, February 10, January 18, May 27, August 16, 1853, in Charles Swift Papers, MSS, Maine State Museum; 1850 Federal Industrial Census (Portland), p. [6].

⁶⁴U. S. Congress, House, Documents Relative to the Manufactures of the United States, 22 Cong., 1 sess., 1883, House doc. 308, pp. 246, 249, 462-63.

⁶⁵Ward, "Silver and Society in Salem," pp. 223-24, also noted the increase in partnerships in the early nineteenth century.

⁶⁶*Portland Gazette*, October 23, 1809; *Eastern Argus*, December 12, 1811; [semiweekly] *Eastern Argus*, November 11, 1825; Hamlin, *Life and Times*, pp. 59-60, 65; *Portland Directories*, 1823, 1827, 1834; [semiweekly] *Eastern Argus*, October 2, 1829.

⁶⁷*Eastern Argus*, December 20, 1810.

⁶⁸[Semiweekly] *Eastern Argus*, October 2, 1829.

⁶⁹*Portland Directories*, 1834, 1837, 1841, 1844, 1846, 1847/8, 1850/1, 1852/3.

⁷⁰"Maine Silver Files."

⁷¹Naomi Payton-Glixman, "Incarcerated Craftsmen, Extracted from the 'Cumberland County Sheriff's Calendar of Prisoners, 1795-1825' in the Maine Historical Society," typescript, Portland Museum of Art, 1976.

⁷²*Portland Gazette*, June 5, 1821.

⁷³Flynt and Fales, *Heritage Foundation Silver*, p. 288; Lucius M. Boltwood, *History and Genealogy of the Family of Thomas Noble, of Westfield, Massachusetts* (Hartford, Connecticut: Case, Lockwood & Brainerd, 1878), pp. 742-43; *Portland Gazette*, June 29, 1812.

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⁷⁴*Portland Gazette*, March 21, 1814; *Eastern Argus*, June 26, 1816.

⁷⁵*Portland Gazette*, April 3, 1821; *Cumberland County Registry of Deeds* [hereafter cited as CCRD], 76: 449, 76: 569, 79: 489, 82: 42, passim.

⁷⁶*Portland Gazette*, November 6, 1821.

⁷⁷*Portland Gazette*, August 27, 1822. See also *Eastern Argus*, November 25, 1823; [semiweekly] *Eastern Argus*, January 13, 1826.

⁷⁸*Portland Gazette*, July 17, 1821, July 30, 1822; *Eastern Argus*, September 2, 1823.

⁷⁹[Semiweekly] *Eastern Argus*, August 25, 1826. See also *ibid.*, June 9, 1825, January 13, 1826.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, January 14, 1831; [triweekly] *Eastern Argus*, February 5, 1834.

⁸¹[Weekly] *Eastern Argus*, March 18, 1834.

⁸²[Triweekly] *Eastern Argus*, March 19, 1834.

⁸³*Ibid.*, May 6, 1834. See also [weekly] *Eastern Argus*, April 8, 1834.

⁸⁴[Weekly] *Eastern Argus*, May 26, July 21, August 26, 1834.

⁸⁵CCRD, 69: 229, 71: 171, 75: 235, 76: 305, 81: 280, 139: 199, 142: 536, 144: 481, passim.

⁸⁶*Cumberland County Court of Common Pleas* [hereafter cited as CCCCCP], 37: 126, 32: 509, 36: 61. Wyer and Noble were also involved in mercantile activities. Unfortunately, the extent of the activities is unknown, the only extant document being an 1829 notification that their new ship, *Cumberland*, had cleared the port of Portland on its way to Charleston ([Brunswick] *Androscoggin Free Press*, February 4, 1829).

⁸⁷[Weekly] *Eastern Argus*, December 29, 1835; CCRD 149: 23; 179: 131; CCCCCP 43: 430; CCRD, 147: 352, 149: 23, 149: 24, 149: 25.

⁸⁸[Triweekly] *Eastern Argus*, January 4, 1836; *Portland Directories*, 1837, 1844, 1846. There is one court document that suggests that Wyer and Bartol may have maintained some ties into 1836 (CCCCP, 46: 100).

⁸⁹CCRD, 179: 131.

⁹⁰CCCCP, 44: 3, 45: 395, 45: 398, 49: 168, 43: 430, 47: 100, 47: 101.

⁹¹CCRD, 158: 205, 158: 325; CCCCCP, 44: 258.

⁹²CCCCP, 50: 263, 50: 453, 51: 352; CCRD, 171: 517.

⁹³CCRD, 226: 463.

⁹⁴*Portland Directories*, 1844, 1846, pp. 32, 34, 94; 1846, p. 223.

⁹⁵[Weekly] *Eastern Argus*, May 12, 1829, February 1, 1831.

⁹⁶[Semiweekly] *Eastern Argus*, January 4, 1831; *Portland Directory*, 1831.

⁹⁷*Portland Directory*, 1834.

⁹⁸Alphonso Moulton, Howard L. Sampson, and Granville Fernald, *Centennial History of Harrison, Maine* (Portland: Southworth Printing, 1909), pp. 458-59.

⁹⁹[Weekly] *Eastern Argus*, June 16, October 9, November 2, 1835; [triweekly] *Eastern Argus*, January 11, 1836.

¹⁰⁰Moulton, Sampson, and Fernald, *Harrison*, p. 207; CCRD, 184: 522; [triweekly] *Eastern Argus*, January 25, February 17, 1836; *Portland Directory*, 1837.

¹⁰¹Moulton, Sampson, and Fernald, *Harrison*, p. 207; CCRD, 184: 522.

¹⁰²CCRD, 189: 504, 192: 44, 195: 490, 209: 158, 209: 164, 221: 491.

¹⁰³1850 Federal Industrial Census (Harrison), p. [2].

¹⁰⁴John Leander Bishop, *A History of American Manufactures from 1608 to 1860* (Philadelphia: Edward Young and Company, 1864), pp. 695-96. Information provided in Moulton, Sampson, and Fernald, *Harrison*, p. 549, indicates that Farley's methods were similar to those described by Bishop.

¹⁰⁵[*Second*] *Exhibition and Fair of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association ... in the City of Portland, September, 1854* (Portland: Ira Berry, 1855), p. 11.

¹⁰⁶CCRD, 260: 494, 261: 305, 262: 129, 264: 74, 266: 175.

¹⁰⁷Moulton, Sampson, and Fernald, *Harrison*, p. 462; CCRD, 205: 471. 227: 276, 227: 364, 252: 321.

¹⁰⁸CCRD, 272: 66, 272: 76, 272: 149.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 291: 178, 294: 38.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 272: 149; *Portland Directory*, 1858/9, 1869, 1871; *Boston Directory*, 1873-1878; *Eastern Argus*, December 22, 1872.

¹¹¹Will Curtis and Jane Curtis, *Antique Woodstoves: Artistry and Iron* (Ashville, Maine: Cobblesmith, 1975), pp. 5-11; Bishop, *American Manufacture*, pp. 694-97.

¹¹²[*Fourth*] *Exhibition and Fair of the M. C. Mechanic Association ... in the City of Portland, October, 1859* (Portland: Ira Berry and Son, 1860), pp. 25-26.

¹¹³CCRD, 226: 463.

¹¹⁴*Portland Directory*, 1850/51, p. 223.

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