

**RECALLING THE PAST:
MEMORIES AND ANTIQUARIAN OBJECTS IN
THE FORMER PLYMOUTH COLONY,
1692-1824**

by
Benjamin Colman

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in American Material Culture

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ABSTRACT

The former Plymouth Colony was a place where memory mattered in many forms. Founded in 1620, published accounts as early as 1669 began to record the stories and personae of the colony's early years. Diminished from its early prominence by national and imperial forces when it became part of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay in 1692, the people there looked back in time to narrate their past through things. Theories of historical memory offer new ways of thinking about the symbolic use of objects in the region during the long eighteenth century. Building on the writings of Pierre Nora, Joseph Roach and others, this thesis interrogates the different objects and techniques the people of the former Plymouth Colony used to construct a memorial past.

This study examines three groups of objects used or made in the former Plymouth Colony in the eighteenth century. The first chapter explores the use of a seventeenth-century chair once owned by colonial governor William Bradford in the 1769 celebration of Forefather's Day in Plymouth. Used as a prop for a public performance, the chair allowed eighteenth-century men to lay claim to the memory of the colony's founding. The second chapter examines the portraits of the Winslow family of Marshfield. Painted across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these portraits represent a domestic practice maintained by many generations of the Winslow family. Acting as a living memorial, these portraits gave visual form to a family tree. The final chapter looks at a group of painted chests made in Taunton

between 1729 and 1745, reading them into the landscape surrounding the town. With a rich history of indigenous cultures, these chests evoke a landscape filled with artifacts of pre-colonial indigenous cultures.

Made in different media and used in different towns across the former Plymouth Colony, these groups of objects show the different ways that memorial practices inflected the material practices of the region. In public and private, these things allowed the people there to reconstruct the past.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Landing in the winter of 1620, possibly on a rock, the Pilgrims of Plymouth hold a monumental place in the American historical imagination. Though their story is well known in many forms, their true place in the history of the English colonization of North America is often difficult to locate. Clouded by myth and memory, narrative and history, many writers have grappled with the story of the Plymouth Colony. This thesis seeks to reexamine the history of the Plymouth Colony by situating the foundational narrative of the colony in the realm of historical memory, locating its construction in the material practices of the long eighteenth century. The scope of my study begins with the political dissolution of the Colony in 1692 and ends with the founding of the Pilgrim Hall museum in 1824. With a presciently antiquarian interest in objects associated with the Colony's founders, the people of the Plymouth Colony selectively deployed objects throughout the eighteenth century to cultivate a deliberate narrative of history and antiquity. Long after Boston superseded Plymouth as the intellectual, economic, and cultural center of colonial New England, the people of Plymouth used things to claim their central place in the story of the region.

Plymouth was a place where memory mattered in many forms. Diminished from its early prominence by national and imperial forces, the people there reached back in time to restore its prior luster. Theories of historical memory offer new ways of thinking about the symbolic use of objects in the Plymouth Colony during the long

eighteenth century. Pierre Nora introduced his influential essay, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*” with the notion that memory emerges within the popular imagination following rifts—social, economical, technological, or literary—that mark changes in the practice of everyday life. Contrasted with history, a rational, academic examination, memory is molded from a mix of local practices, myths, and materials. By complicating the triangular relationship between objects, individuals, and narratives, Nora outlines what is at stake when history and things meet; given the loss of traditional practice and privilege, objects are endowed with the power to “buttress” what has become the past.¹

In eighteenth-century Plymouth, objects became testing grounds for memory. Framing modern subjects with the authority of their ancestors, historical objects were crucial elements in performing the past. A seventeenth-century turned chair once belonging to William Bradford was used to gird the status of Plymouth men during public performances in 1769. Associated corporeally with a founder of the colony, the chair became a prop for men to claim a lineal link to the early history of the place. While sitters were empowered by the history of the chair, the chair itself became an important reliquary object through public use and narration. The family portraits of the Winslows in Marshfield maintained a continuous dialogue throughout the eighteenth century. Including the faces of two Plymouth Colony governors and other members of the prominent family, the Winslow portrait group acted as a private, domestic memorial for a limited audience. It simultaneously rooted modern portraits in a historical lineage while also maintaining the modern significance of seventeenth-

¹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*,” *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989), 7.

century likenesses. In the hinterlands of the Plymouth Colony in Taunton, a group of painted chests from the 1730s evoked and invoked the pre-English landscape of the region. Suggesting an encounter with the carved and inscribed landscape that recorded the presence of indigenous communities, these chests mediate the semiotics of pre-colonial artifacts. These three groups of objects represent three very different realizations of memorial practices in the Plymouth Colony, a fitting treatment for a landscape densely packed with registers of remembrance.

The things of this study have been often examined and exhibited as important objects, sometimes together. William Bradford's chair has long been featured at the Pilgrim Hall Museum in Plymouth, where a visitor can also see many of the Winslow family portraits. The painted chests of Taunton are displayed in most major collections of American furniture for their value as imaginative eighteenth-century vernacular forms. How and why did they obtain this significance? This thesis seeks to examine cultural mechanisms that rendered these objects—and not others—important. A fundamental sense of place is a crucial element of this process. These artifacts are made of different media, and were made in different towns. At first glance it seems that a painted pine chest made in rural Bristol County in 1730 would have little in common with a delicate portrait painted in London in 1651. Yet all of these objects share a connection to a place—the region of Massachusetts that formerly constituted the autonomous Plymouth Colony—and a phenomenon—the careful cultivation of historical memory in the eighteenth century. If Edward Winslow's portrait has little in common with William Bradford's turned chair, both objects were crucial elements in the formation of a material narrative of Plymouth's founders in the eighteenth century. If these objects are notable works of art, their significance relative to other

seventeenth-century portraits or eighteenth-century chests owes something to their eighteenth century meanings. In an era when these objects were hardly antique, they were deliberately constructed as signifiers of the past. In a place where the past mattered soon after its start, objects took on narrative significance as carriers of memory at an early date.

The political remapping of New England in 1692 sits at the root of the memorial reconsideration of objects in Plymouth. When the New England colonies were reorganized into the Dominion of New England in 1684, existing colonial charters, many of which granted considerable local autonomy, were nullified in support of a regional governing system. After the Dominion of New England collapsed in 1689 following popular uprisings in New York and Boston, Plymouth briefly reclaimed self-governance before being incorporated into the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay in 1692. With the realized loss of structures of authority, residents reclaimed ownership of their narrative past by figuring objects as carriers of memories. Functioning in different ways, these sites of memory worked to redefine the past from the onslaught of rational history. With a limited population marginalized economically, socially, and intellectually by the greater resources of the Massachusetts Bay in Boston, Plymouth claimed its primacy in the realm of memory. Objects played a fundamental role in this practice.

By the early nineteenth century, public institutions emerged as formal repositories for historic artifacts in towns and cities across New England. In Plymouth, the Pilgrim Hall Museum was constructed in 1824 to preserve the relics and history of the Plymouth Colony. Though it was similar to other early historical institutions in the United States, early accounts tell a story deeply indebted to the eighteenth-century use

of local artifacts in the former Plymouth Colony. The Boston newspaper *Columbian Centinel* noted in its September 8, 1824 issue the “laying [of] the CORNER STONE of the Monumental Edifice, to be erected under the direction of the Trustees of the Pilgrim Society, to commemorate the Pilgrim Fathers.” The two-story rusticated granite building, still standing in part, was designed in the neoclassical fashion of the day with a “Doric” portico. It was situated with an eye to the landscape, “commanding a full view of the harbors, the promontories which form the bay, and nearly the whole shore washed by its waters.”²

The laying of the cornerstone represented the realization of a plan initiated four years prior when the Pilgrim Society was founded. A genealogical society of direct male descendents of early Plymouth settlers, one of its founding goals was to, “erect a building in Plymouth, adapted to the public needs of the Society; and also to erect *durable Monuments* there.” An 1820 broadsheet, printed in anticipation of the bicentennial of the landing at Plymouth, indicated that members were keenly aware of the year’s symbolic importance for the town: “the Pilgrim Society are desirous to meet the approaching centennial period, in a manner suited to the occasion” with the stated intent of giving “a more satisfactory reception to all who may be induced to visit the *cradle of New England*, to unite in the reverential observances to be there perpetuated.”³ Though their founding goal was the eventual erection of “durable

² “Pilgrim Hall,” *Columbian Centinel American Federalist* (Boston, Sep. 8, 1824), 1. America’s Historical Newspapers, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>. (accessed: January 14, 2012).

³ “Pilgrim Society,” Boston, 1820. America’s Historical Imprints, American Broadsheds and Ephemera, Series 1, no. 2454. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>. (accessed: January 14, 2012). All italics original

monuments,” the attention dedicated to performances and historical objects at the Museum’s founding hints at the importance of ephemeral registers of memory.

As reported in the *Columbian Centinel*, the building constructed by the Pilgrim Society to serve as Pilgrim Hall was a carefully considered structure. It was placed with an eye for the landscape, located in the center of modern Plymouth while maintaining clear views to the harbor in which the Pilgrims landed. Built with a neoclassical “Doric Portico” that would have resonated with the popular styles of public buildings in the era, its stone was to be “un-wrought split granite,” unpolished to simulate the rustication of age. The cornerstone was inscribed to, “our *Ancestors* who *exiled* themselves from their native country, for the *sake of Religion*; and here successfully laid the foundation of Freedom and Empire.” The cornerstone had a hollow center, and symbolic objects were placed in at that the installation. Most of the objects were printed matters, including the “Sermon delivered at Plymouth by Robert Cushman, December 12, 1621,” a copy of Plymouth’s first newspaper,” “Daniel Webster’s Century Oration for 1820,” and map of Plymouth and its surrounding towns. The only non-printed objects were Federal and state coins.⁴ Simulating an archaeological approach to history, historical objects were embedded within the very fabric of the building. Mostly paper objects hidden within a porous stone, it is doubtful that they could survive to be read in the future; but that seems hardly the point. It was not important that they record and preserve information for the future, but that the building be seen to burst physically with the records of history.

⁴ “Pilgrim Hall,” *Columbian Centinel American Federalist*.

Not to be outdone by the building itself, the Pilgrim Society arrived with suitable ceremony: “The Society, escorted by the Standish Guards, first proceeded to the House of God, where prayers were offered by the Rev. Mr. Kendall.” At the meetinghouse, “a hymn, sung to the tune of *Old Hundred*, after the ancient manner, closed these services.” The Society then marched to the site of Pilgrim Hall led by a group of students from the local school.⁵ Incorporating the militia company named for Myles Standish, sermons delivered at the Unitarian First Parish Church that traced its congregational history to 1620, hymns chosen for their vernacular local heritage, and a parade of children, the procession was carefully staged to magnify the narrative authority of its constituent parts. Shepherded from the oldest church to the site of the museum by school children, the intergenerational group articulated the importance of historical lineage. To consecrate a modern building with an artificially aged façade, the Society embedded old objects in a modern stone. While the new stone was anointed with the force of history, the old objects were given a modern significance. Memory of the Pilgrims was not passively received by the people of Plymouth in the early nineteenth century, but actively shaped by material practices. Endowing every participant, stone, and procession with historical meaning, the events of that day evoke the earlier use of historic objects in Plymouth. Using theatrical presentations, a careful consideration of context, and an artificially aged façade, Pilgrim Hall in 1824 responded to the eighteenth-century uses of historic objects in Plymouth. As a coda to the period examined in this thesis, the founding of Pilgrim Hall formalized the work that objects did earlier in that town.

⁵ Ibid.. All italics original.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine a chair used in public performances dedicated to retaining a sense of history and memory. A small group of Plymouth men formed the Old Colony Club in 1769, a largely social group that organized the earliest known celebration of Forefathers Day, also called Old Colony Day. Intended to commemorate the landing at Plymouth Rock, though miscalculated to take place on December 22, 1769, the group publicly saluted the founders of the Plymouth Colony, drank toasts to their names, and raised a flag to celebrate the 1620 founding. Sermons were delivered and later published to commemorate the event in the first several decades of celebration. A chair said to have belonged to William Bradford, then still in the possession of his descendents, was brought to the celebration. A great-chair made of lathe-turned elements, primarily ash, the Bradford chair would have been an imposing element in the Bradford family home during the seventeenth century. In its eighteenth-century use, these details were superfluous to its meaning. The chair was not significant as a work of craft or design, but as a reliquary object signifying its past sitters.

The relationship between objects and memory was not always engaged in public performance, but also involved the private domestic maintenance of historical object groups. The second chapter will examine the portraits of the Winslow family as a living group that combined seventeenth-century English and Colonial likenesses with later eighteenth-century pictures on the walls of the family home, Careswell. Creating a pictorial conversation, the conventions and formal practices of the earlier portraits inform the meanings embedded within later pieces. Simultaneously the addition of new portraits maintains the relevance of the earlier paintings. As an assembled memorial, the logic of the Winslow portraits forms a *gestalt* beyond the

details of its constituent parts. By adding new faces to the wall, the Winslow family maintained the memorial function of the earlier portraits. As seventeenth century portraits fell to antiquarian neglect in other families, the painted Winslows remained a powerful, living group.

The final chapter will examine objects that evocatively suggest history and age, narrating the past with painted surfaces. The painted pine chests associated with Taunton, Massachusetts will illustrate this idea. Made of inexpensive local woods roughly joined in the simplest manner, the painted surfaces of these chests transform a simple utilitarian object into an evocative presence; stained with a brown base, the surfaces were additionally ornamented with linear red, green, white, and blue paints to represent images on the facades.⁶ Drawing from a wide variety of sources, the local context of these chests illustrates a deeper historical implication for the use of pictographic decoration. By the late seventeenth century, Taunton's geography had become a site of interest to scientifically minded English colonists. A large rock in the Taunton River dubbed Dighton Rock in the nineteenth century, partially submerged at high tide, was discovered to retain carved lines that were thought to suggest written language. Indecipherable to this day, early visitors and scholars like John Danforth, Cotton Mather, Ezra Stiles, and Isaac Greenwood elaborated theories throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries about the origins of the carvings. Though no claim has ever gained significant force of evidence, the writings surrounding Dighton Rock in the period articulate the historical importance granted to carved and inscribed surfaces in Taunton. Reading these texts with the Crosman chests in mind helps link

⁶ Brock Jobe, Gary Sullivan, et al., *Harbor and Homes: Furniture of Southeastern Massachusetts, 1710-1850* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2009), 175-176.

these chests to a larger discussion about the past. Given their context, the chests may be understood as sites of memory installed in homes throughout the town, recalling material encounters with the historical landscape of Taunton. They suggest the indecipherable remnants of history, instantly legible as image and surface but not as text.

.....

Pierre Nora argues in his essay “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*” that memorial practice demands an awareness that the contemporary moment is notably and irrevocably different than that which came before it. He terms this phenomenon self-consciousness. Though this consciousness in Nora’s conception is a process that “always already” began with the passing of generations, the development of modernity accelerated its progress. Nora’s self-consciousness is not an ephemeral quality, but is given form. This form, termed *les lieux de memoire*, the sites of memory, exists “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself.” These sites can be physical, performed, or social sites that give form to historical rift. This rift is messy and inconsistent, and reveals itself where the past is physically embodied, and renders itself legible.⁷ Sites of memory develop where the past has been consciously altered, and record the former presence of something lost.

Memory and history, central to Nora’s theory, are far from identical. In his system, “memory is life, born by living societies founded in its name. It remains in

⁷ Nora, 7.

permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting.” History, in contrast, “is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.” History is found in the mimetic, or textual representation of the past, while memory is located in the “eternal present” of lived experience. Memory is selective, and incorporates only those aspects of the past that fit its larger purpose. History is “an intellectual and secular production” that “calls for analysis and criticism.”⁸ Memory is fluid, performed, dialectical, and unstable; it is better considered as a processual social practice than a fixed conception. History is rational, academic, and tied to quantifiable facts that can be stably recorded and retold as the past. For Nora, memory is constantly under attack from history, converting the ritualized practices of traditional society into the detached retelling of the past.

The *lieux de memoire* sit at the nexus of history and memory, ossifying the location of memories about to be lost to the onslaught of time.⁹ The sites of memory emerge because “we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally.” Historical practice becomes modern performance, reduced to a ritualized, self-conscious evocation of the past used to construct identities under threat of erasure. As traditional practices are lost to make way for modern life, they take with them historic signifiers of identity. The site of memory is created to preserve

⁸ Ibid, 8-9.

⁹ Ibid, 12.

recognition of these signifiers.¹⁰ Reduced to its essence, Nora's essay argues that, "the task of remembering makes everyone his own historian."¹¹

If Nora's thinking has deeply shaped the form of memory studies, it is by no means a complete representation of the field. In 2001, Hue-Tam Ho Tai argued that Nora's larger project—to encyclopedically document the places where the French nation stored its memories—falls short in its limited ethnic, national, and religious scope. If the legacies of empire, immigration, and modern industry have made France a multiethnic, theologically diverse, and polyglot nation, Nora's text is not concerned with the ways that these register in the historical record.¹² If this critique identifies a shortfall in the application of Nora's theories, it serves as a pointed warning for scholars working within his framework. Memories operate within a political, economic, religious, and ethnic framework, and are informed by the values associated with these factors. Memory works both positively and negatively. Remembering the French nation through places of Catholic Mass and warm pots of *cassoulet* is also to forget the signs that the Muslim call to prayer and West African cuisines leave on the landscape.

The same myopia inflects the historical memory for the Plymouth Colony, as it does all historical narratives. In order to craft a clear, linear story from complicated, conflicting details, some facts are deliberately remembered while others are forcefully neglected. In order to root the founding of Plymouth in the tradition of men like

¹⁰ Ibid.12.

¹¹ Ibid, 15.

¹² Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory," *The American Historical Review* 106:3 (Jun. 2001), 910.

William Bradford, eighteenth-century accounts willfully neglected the stories of the colony's founding women, and the enslaved Africans brought to the region against their will. To write a story of heroic founding, difficult facts were conveniently erased and forgotten.

Historical remembering fundamentally implies a corollary act of forgetting. Sociologist Paul Connerton suggests that forgetting is not merely a matter of lost memory, but is as fundamental to structures of society as memory itself. Simply put, the logic of social order demands that some memories are more expendable than others. Connerton identifies this in patrilineal genealogical practices, like those of the British aristocracy or the Nuer people of South Sudan, which forget maternal lineages in favor of the paternal. If that type of structural forgetting designates a relative evaluation, Connerton argues that not all forgetting is a matter of loss. Instead, forgetting is “constitutive in the formation of new identities.”¹³ Individuals forget extraneous details in favor of more expedient ideas. Forgetting in the Plymouth Colony was essential to the construction of the modern story of the Pilgrims of Plymouth. In order to remember Plymouth Rock and the courtship of Myles Standish, the people of Plymouth worked to forget the countless other names and places that would have created a messy narrative.

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¹³ Paul Connerton, “Cultural Memory,” in Tilley, Keane, et al. ed. *Handbook of Material Culture* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2006), 320-321.

Though the facts of Plymouth's history were undoubtedly complicated, a long published tradition has told the story in easily consumed narrative form. Within the official histories of the region, the Plymouth Colony occupies a peripheral status between that of a historical curiosity and symbolic birthplace of the New England colonies. Continually looking back to the founding, Plymouth developed narrative tools to account for its past from an early date. In 1669, for instance, to introduce Nathaniel Morton's *New-England's Memorial* for its Boston publication, the ministers Thomas Thatcher and John Higginson praised Morton's project for its foresight; "it is very expedient, that (while sundry of the Eldest Planters are yet living), *Records* and *Memorials of Remarkable Providences* be preserved and published," for the purpose that, "the true Originals of these Plantations may not be lost, that *New England*, in all times to come, may remember the day of her smallest things."¹⁴ Rooting that remembrance in an oratorical tradition, Morton's textual authority is derived from an unbroken chain of personal memory maintained by "sundry of the Eldest Planters." Secretary of the Plymouth Colony and an early settler, Morton's historical project was to inscribe Plymouth as the theological origin of New England. His dedication to Plymouth Governor Thomas Prentice identifies "the weight of duty that lieth upon us, to commemorate to future generations the memorable passages of God's providence to us [...] in the beginning of this plantation." His authority came not only from his official position, but also from the larger goals of the community; "yourselves (especially some of you) are fully acquainted with many of the particulars, both concerning persons and things, inserted in the following narrative, and can, on your

¹⁴ Nathaniel Morton, *New England's Memorial* (Boston: Congregational Board of Publications, 1855), iv. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed: January 15, 2012).

own knowledge, assert them for truth.”¹⁵ Morton’s goal was not to record facts, but to resituate the narrative of origin for the region. He notes his desire, “to publish to the world something of the very first beginnings of the great actions of God in New England, begun at New Plymouth.” Writing less than 50 years after the founding of the colony, in an era when the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut were rapidly expanding settlement with new towns along inland waterways, Plymouth looked back. Morton warns in his introduction that his text will not describe the landscape, economy, or weather of the Colony.¹⁶ Instead of making claims for future growth or extraction of resources, he argues for the regional importance of the Plymouth Colony based on its relative antiquity.

Following in 1702, Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* again situates Plymouth as the theological birthplace of New England, when compared to its cultural center of Boston. Plymouth is described in Biblical terms, with William Bradford cast as Moses leading the Israelites to the Promised Land: “if a Moses had not led the People of Plymouth Colony, when this Worthy Person was their Governour.”¹⁷ The Massachusetts Bay colony was described in classical terms, with John “Winthrop, a Lawgiver, as patient as Lycurgus, but not admitting any of his Criminal Disorders; as Devout as Numa, but not liable to any of his Heathenish Madnesses.”¹⁸ The Plymouth Colony becomes the spiritual foundation of New

¹⁵ Ibid. 1-2.

¹⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, 1702), 5. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed: January 15, 2012).

¹⁸ Ibid. 8.

England like the biblical Israelites, a curious, necessary step in the progression from untamed wilderness to City Upon a Hill. It was significant for its antiquity, but its theological eccentricity placed it slightly beyond the fold. In contrast John Winthrop, the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay, was an improved iteration of classical sagacity for his judicious political leadership tempered by proper Puritan theology and learning. Plymouth's importance was symbolic, while Boston charted a place in the modern circum-Atlantic world.

A growing historiographic awareness appeared in nineteenth century histories of the Plymouth Colony. Francis Baylies introduced his multivolume 1830 *Historical Memoir of the Colony of New Plymouth* with the justification that, "no small commonwealth ever afforded to history in so short a period, so many materials alike interesting and instructive."¹⁹ Explaining his motivation for taking a minute focus in his text, Baylies theorizes that, "events which are obscured by the duskiness of antiquity excite an indescribable, peculiar, romantic, and mysterious interest." European historians could not record the precise location where classical Roman or Medieval English events had occurred.²⁰ The task of the American historian in this sense was to capture American history in its fullest detail from its earliest moments that it might be better placed than Rome or England when it reached its imperial maturity. Taking lessons from those nations the young republic sought to emulate, the historian could stem the loss of historical awareness that plagued the founding narratives of those earlier empires. Baylies portrays the founders as heroic in their

¹⁹ Francis Baylies, *An Historical Memoir of the Colony of New Plymouth* vol. 1 (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins, 1830), iii. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed: January 10, 2012).

²⁰ *Ibid.* viii.

unique achievements. About the *Mayflower Compact*, he waxes, “On the bleak shores of a barren wilderness, in the midst of desolation, with the blasts of winter howling around them, and surrounded with dangers in their most awful and appalling forms, the pilgrims of Leyden laid the foundation of American liberty.”²¹ Though he provides an extensive list of primary sources and documents used to verify facts, he pens his story in vividly dramatic detail for a reader more interested in narrative than historical process.

About Plymouth Rock, Baylies writes that the *Mayflower* passenger, “left the vessel and landed on a rock near the shore, which now bears a consecrated character, to which pilgrimages are made.”²² Two years later, writing his *History of the Town of Plymouth*, James Thatcher argued that, “The identical rock, on which the sea wearied Pilgrims first leaped from the shallop coming from the *Mayflower*, has never been a subject of doubtful designation.”²³ This certainty comes not from documentation or unique features of the Rock itself, but from oral history. Thatcher writes that the identity of the Rock was passed from father to son, “particularly in the instance of Elder Faunce.” At the age of 95 in 1741, Faunce was carried to “the rock directly under the bank of Cole’s Hill, which his father had assured him was that which had received the footsteps of our fathers on their first arrival” and he “bedewed it with his tears and bid to it an everlasting adieu.” These tears were seen by Deacon Spooner at the age of fifteen, deceased by the time of publication, who survived to identify the

²¹ Ibid. 30.

²² Ibid., 60.

²³ James Thatcher, *History of the Town of Plymouth* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1832), 29-30. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed: January 17, 2012).

rock for Thatcher.²⁴ The authority of the story is not given by facts or figures, but through an assertion of vernacular continuity. If Baylies argued that antiquity can “excite an indescribable, peculiar, romantic, and mysterious interest,” Thatcher locates the site of that antiquity in the method of preserving popular memory. The historian takes on the role of community patriarch, preserving antiquity by preserving the direct line of communication from one generation to the next.

These historical accounts of the Plymouth Colony have received considerable scholarly consideration for the ways they represent, and misrepresent, the founding of Plymouth. Along with work that trouble early histories of the colony, contemporary scholarship on the Plymouth Colony has been shaped by academic practices in social history, folklore studies, and historic archaeology, often combining the three. Works like James and Patricia Deetz’s *The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death In Plymouth* mine the records of public documents, published historic accounts, archaeological findings, and historic collections to examine the people of the Plymouth Colony historically. Tightly bounded geographically, culturally, genealogically, and historically, with a limited population and lifespan, the Plymouth Colony provides a useful body of information for such studies. With finite limits, it is knowable and examinable in a way that no other colony is. These studies uniformly make a point of attacking the sentimental legacy of the Plymouth memorial narrative and the modern Thanksgiving holiday. As the Deetzes argue, “Thanksgiving as we think of it today is largely a myth. But this does not mean that being mythical is

²⁴ Ibid., 30.

bad.”²⁵ While these texts focus on undermining the popular narrative of the Pilgrims, most ignore the process of narrative formation and mythmaking that facilitated sentimental commemoration. Rather than being the product of Victorian sentimentality, this commemorative practice was fundamentally rooted in the dialectic of memory and history in the material world of eighteenth-century Plymouth.

Plymouth has also been examined within the broader scholarship concerning the art, culture, and material cultures of New England. Artifacts from the Plymouth Colony, including many explored in this thesis, are some of the most iconic artifacts of seventeenth-century New England life. The catalogue published to accompany the seminal 1982 exhibition *New England Begins* at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston includes discussions of the William Bradford chair and portrait of Elizabeth Paddy Wensley, both loaned from the Pilgrim Hall Museum in Plymouth. About the portrait, the catalogue dryly records its provenance while making claims for the synchronic iconographic meanings of the image.²⁶ About the Bradford chair, the catalogue obsessively catalogues its formal and stylistic relationship to other turned New England chairs of the seventeenth century and speculates a possible maker.²⁷ If both discussions include important information about the objects, they are also typical of the scholarship on this material. Objects made and used in the Plymouth Colony are most often described for their relationships to the larger New England world. Instead

²⁵ James Deetz and Patricia Scott Deetz, *The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in the Plymouth Colony* (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 2000), 9.

²⁶ Jonathan Fairbanks and Robert F. Trent, *New England Begins* vol. 3 (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), 466.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 550.

of considering the specific regional history and material culture of Plymouth against the larger trajectory of New England, these pieces are made to fit comfortably within a grand narrative. Their lives in the eighteenth-century are treated as curious footnotes to their important roles as signifiers of seventeenth-century style. This thesis builds upon studies like *New England Begins* by looking at the complicated lives these objects lived between their fabrication and installation in public museums. Though they certainly are important signifiers of seventeenth-century style, their modern important has everything to do with their cultural work in the eighteenth-century.

. . . .

The Plymouth Colony was a place where the past was always already historic. As early as 1669, recent events were recorded with an understanding that the future would look back. By the eighteenth century, the former Plymouth colony retained traces of its early history in tactical ways. Once all immediate corporeal links to the founding of the colony were lost, vernacular discourse emerged to replace the disappearing personal narrative. Deploying theatrical objects, evocative images, and simulated surfaces, *things* became crucial elements in the lived practice of historical commemoration. Operating on multivalent spectra, these different types of objects become sites of memory, carrying commemorative, historical meanings in both public and private spheres. Though the Plymouth Colony ceased to exist politically in 1692, its residents crafted narratives to reclaim their place in a larger story. Deploying memory, pliable, plastic and inconsistent, they celebrated a phenomenal past quickly marginalized by historical writing.

Chapter 2

MEMORY PERFORMED

As an object in use, the turned-wood William Bradford (1590-1657) chair functions as frame, stage, and cage. (*fig. 1*) With row upon row of decorative turned spindle, it framed and enclosed a sitter within its trapezoidal form, keeping the body elevated and upright. Grandly raised above most other seats in the seventeenth century, such pieces of seating furniture were intended to convey a sense of prominence and power through scale and materiality. Monumental in scale, the turned chair today stands at 45 inches tall and 24 ½ inches wide that taper slightly towards the back to form a trapezoidal seat. It was possibly made between 1630 and 1655, but the maker is as of yet unidentified. Though it was long said to have been made in England and carried on the *Mayflower*, modern analysis of its composition have identified its turned elements as red ash and black ash grown on North America.²⁸ With the exception of a pine plank seat replaced at some point in its history, the elements of the chair are entirely turned, and joined with round mortis and tenon joints. The chair descended in the family of William Bradford, second governor of the Plymouth Colony, and has long been said to be his personal seat. As a richly theatrical object, the

²⁸ Fairbanks and Trent, *New England Begins*, 549-550.

Bradford chair was a fitting foil for the public performances like the December 1769 celebration of Forefather's Day in Plymouth. Framing its sitters with memory and

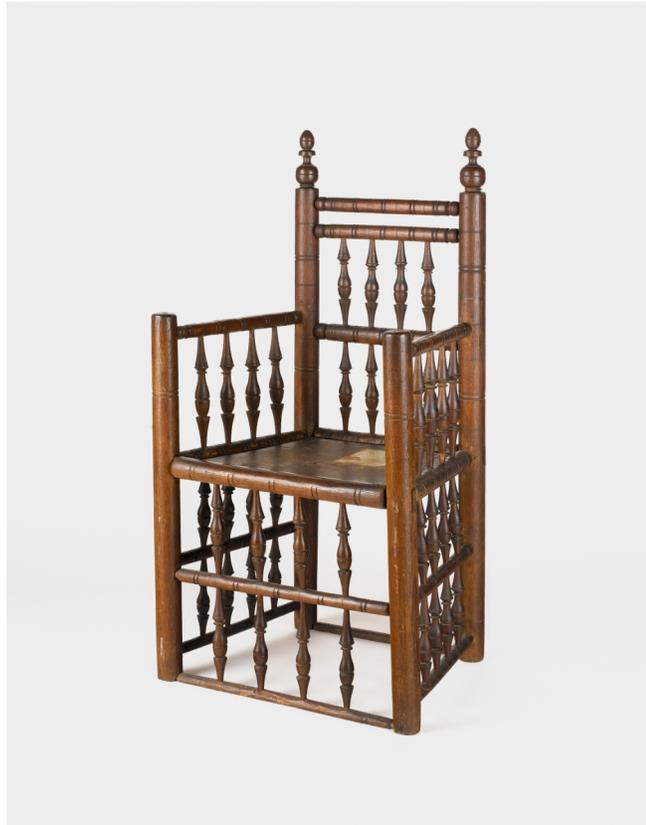


Figure 1 *Chair*, 1630-1655. Maker Unknown, American (Plymouth Colony). Ash. H: 45 in. W: 24 ½ in. D: 18 ½ in. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

metonymic association, public performances used objects like this to stir memories of the founders of the colony.

Along with the so-called Winslow, Carver, and Brewster chairs, the Bradford chair is part of a group of similar chairs with long histories in the founding families of the Plymouth Colony. Driven by the power of their historical associations, these chairs

received considerable attention as historic relics in the nineteenth century. A December 1853 article in *Harper's* titled "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth" notes that the Brewster and Carver chairs at Pilgrim Hall "undoubtedly came over in the Mayflower," most likely untrue, and that they had "suffered from the pilferings of whittling tourists."²⁹ Samuel Adams Drake's *Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast* (1897), aimed at tourists interested in regional history, observed in his chapter on Plymouth that the Carver and Brewster chairs "are good specimens of the uncomfortable yet quaint furniture of their time."³⁰ While other accounts treat the chairs as details in a larger story about the founding of Plymouth, an anonymously published article in the December 1856 issue of *Emerson's Magazine* simply titled "Pilgrim Chairs" makes grand claims for the importance of three other chairs at the Pilgrim Hall Museum. Illustrating the Carver, Winslow, and Brewster chairs with wood engravings, the author argues that, "a glance at the chair which is placed at the head of our article carries us back to the age of the Pilgrims, when the chair was truly symbolic of the times."³¹ About the turned "Carver Chair" said to have been owned by Governor John Carver the author claims "it is unquestionably of Dutch Origin, having that substantial frame and broad-embracing aspect which distinguishes that rotund and genial people." About the frame-and-panel "Winslow Chair," a reader learns "This chair came over also in the May Flower, as the property of Edward Winslow, who

²⁹ Calvin Philleo, "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 43:8 (Dec. 1853), 45. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed March 21, 2012).

³⁰ Samuel Adams Drake, *Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), 265. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed March 21, 2012).

³¹ "Pilgrim Chairs," *Emerson's United States Magazine* 3:6 (December, 1856), 533. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed March 21, 2012).

seems to have been well esteemed by his compeers.” Examining a turned chair with a history in the family of William Brewster, the author concludes that Brewster “seems to have been of a robust mind and elegant carriage, accustomed to courts, and well versed in the subtle diplomacy of the period.”³² Looking at old objects to locate the personal, the author was interpreting these chairs just as the people of Plymouth had for many decades.

The relevance of these chairs for *Emerson's* reader was their ability to shape modern bodies according to historical principles. The article in concludes with the observation that, “the passer down Broadway may at any time see an excellent revival of the Pilgrim chair at the store of J.C. Cummerford.” These modern “Pilgrim” chairs were not the mechanically mass-produced chairs of the mid-nineteenth century, but “are made of well-seasoned oak” leaving “no doubt our Pilgrim families are ready to supply themselves with so good a model.” Though a modern Pilgrim chair could be easily purchased, the author fears that, “ease-loving, luxurious Young America will esteem the straight back and uncushioned seat as altogether too still and hard for dainty limbs.” The author closes, “It might not be amiss, however, to strengthen the back-bone a trifle by means of the Pilgrim Chair before the next Presidential Campaign”³³ that would elect James Buchanan. The Pilgrim Chair in this sense is not a formal and visual experience, but rather a haptic simulation of historical corporeality. Looking to the aged example for clues, the author cheekily notes the merits of using a reproduction to “strengthen the backbone.” Sitting in such a chair

³² Ibid. 534-535.

³³ Ibid. 535.

becomes a formative gesture, situating the pious, strengthened backbone in relation to that of the popularly unimpeachable Pilgrim Fathers. When used in a public context, as the Bradford chair was in 1769, it becomes a performative gesture, simulating that relationship between historic and modern sitters for the public sphere.

Slipping metonymically between the chairs and their owners, the *Emerson's* author was not concerned with the chairs as objects. They were valuable instead for the historic seats they held and personae they shaped. Looking at the carefully turned finials of the Carver chair, a viewer might intuit the years spent in Leiden by the Separatist Pilgrims before coming to North America. Looking at the weighty materials of the Winslow joined-chair, a viewer might think that it must have been designed to withstand a voyage at sea. Looking at the repeating courses of turned spindles on the front, sides, and back of the Brewster chair, a viewer might suppose a sophisticated visual taste in refined goods. The chairs were not stylistic remnants of a laudable age; they were the personal relics of laudable men. Their significance was derived from a system of metonymical thinking that elided the space between object and previous owner, permitting a cycle of identification between the physical relic and the persona derived from historical writing. Instead of looking to the letters of William Bradford, a nineteenth century viewer simulated a relational exchange with Bradford across time and space through the emulative gesture of taking a seat. That association could also burnish the public reputations of modern sitters. Starting in 1769, public celebrations of Forefather's Day in Plymouth used a chair that belonged to William Bradford. Along with public parades, songs, and the firing of canons, members of the newly formed Old Colony Club sat in the chair to raise toasts in honor of their ancestors. Incorporating the chair into carefully symbolic celebrations, the people of Plymouth

performed the same slippage later published in *Emerson's Magazine*. The chairs carried a reliquary power for public ritual, and kept the colony's founding men present in eighteenth-century discourse. Used as a carefully deployed prop, the chair conveyed historical authenticity through association within a public ritual.

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Using domestic objects for public performance, the performance in Plymouth was staged to emphasize the significance of personal and familiar connections with the past. In a usage dating to the seventeenth century, the Oxford English Dictionary defines performance as “an instance of performing a play, piece of music, etc., in front of an audience; an occasion on which such a work is presented.”³⁴ As both an action and an event, a performance requires that something be presented, and that an audience experience it. For the celebration of Forefather's Day in Plymouth, the male members of the Old Colony Club choreographed a performance to make the past present. In his book *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach argues that “culture reproduces and re-creates itself by a process that can be best described by the word *surrogation*.”³⁵ A system of substitution in which memory is acted and reenacted in a constant search to replace something lost, surrogation “does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that

³⁴ "performance, n." OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140783?redirectedFrom=performance> (accessed March 24, 2012).

³⁵ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.

constitute the social fabric.”³⁶ It is not a private experience, but a public performance of replacement, restoring something lost through a communal engagement in an unconscious theater of memory. Performance is used to embody that which is lost, and works by crafting representative substitutes. In Plymouth, performance was used to replace the adulated founders of the town. Using chairs with powerful historical associations, sitters became surrogates for men like William Bradford. Sitting in the chair conferred the status of historic authority upon a modern man.

This is not a simple process in Roach’s theory, and is closely linked with memory. Surrogates will always function by association with the essential qualities of the object, event, and entity represented. They are almost the same for the purposes of performance, but lack the quality of “authenticity” that buttresses the formation of public memories.³⁷ For Roach, performance will always be “the doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins.”³⁸ Rather than arguing that performed surrogation is ineffectual, this process works by acknowledging a shared absence, and using the next best thing in its stead. William Bradford’s chair, or any of the other Pilgrim chairs, were empowered through a formal and linguistic slippage between past and present. Looking at chair forms, nineteenth-century authors crafted wordy portraits of the men who used them in the seventeenth century. Looking at the chair, feeling their parts, or sitting in their seats activated a link across time. William Bradford’s chair was not important because it was impressively scaled or turned, but

³⁶ Ibid. 2.

³⁷ Ibid. 3-4.

³⁸ Ibid. 3.

because it worked as a suitable surrogate for the man himself. The performance of surrogate forms took many shapes in the Plymouth Colony. For *Emerson's Magazine* in 1856, the symbolic link between historic objects and personae was clear enough to warrant a short, pithy article for a wide audience.

.....

In eighteenth-century Plymouth, the use of chair-as-surrogate for historical figures was a crucial component of public performances commemorating the town's founding. The January 25, 1770 issue of *The Boston News-Letter* included an article detailing a story circulating throughout the colonies in the early days of 1770. It begins, "We hear from Plymouth, That the 22d day of December last was there observed, by a number of Gentlemen, by the name of the OLD COLONY CLUB, in commemoration of the landing of their ancestors in that place: on the morning of said day, a cannon was discharged, and an elegant silk flag hoisted at their Hall, with the following inscription, 'OLD COLONY, 1620.'"³⁹ Miscalculated to correspond to the landing at Plymouth in 1620, the celebration would become a yearly event in Plymouth under the name of Forefather's Day, or Old Colony Day. On that first celebration in 1769, the undertaking was modest in scale. At eleven o'clock in the morning, "the members of the club met at the hall, and from thence proceeded to the house of Mr. Howland," a location of symbolic importance as the site of the first licensed tavern in the colony. Having marched to the symbolic birthplace of convivial

³⁹ "We Hear from Plymouth," *The Boston News-Letter*, Jan. 25, 1770, 1. America's Historical Newspapers, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>. (accessed January 21, 2012).

gathering in the Plymouth Colony, they ate a large luncheon in the mid-afternoon. The meal consisted of whortle berry pudding, succotash, cod, clams, oysters, a haunch of venison “roasted by the first jack brought to the Colony”, sea birds, “frostfish,” and eels. The food was, “dress’d in the plainest manner; all appearance of luxury and extravagance being avoided, in imitation of their worthy ancestors.” After the meal, “carrying a folio volume of the laws of the old Colony,” the Club joined hands and walked to their hall where a crowd of descendents of Plymouth’s first colonists, “drew up in a regular file and discharged a volley of small arms, succeeded by three cheers, which were returned by the Club.” A group of boys from the local school joined the procession to sing a song, and the general crowd dispersed at sunset after a canon was fired.⁴⁰

The members of the club retired to the hall to raise toasts in honor of the occasion. The President of the Club, Isaac Lothrop, was “seated in a large and venerable Chair formerly possessed by WILLIAM BRADFORD the second Governor of the Old Colony,” which has been “presented to the Club by Dr. LeBarron” of Plymouth. Seated in the Bradford chair, Lothrop delivered an extensive number of toasts to a long list of honorees. The Club drank toasts “to the memory of our brave and pious ancestors the first settlers of the Old Colony,” to Governor Carver, to Nathaniel Morton, the author of *New England Memorial*, “To the memory of Sachem Massasoit, our first and best friend and ally,” that the “Colonies be speedily relieved from all the burthens and oppressions they now labour under,” and “A speedy and lasting Union between Great Britain and her Colonies” along many others. The

⁴⁰ Ibid.

celebration ended at eleven o'clock that evening when, "a Cannon was again fired, three Cheers given, and the Company withdrew."⁴¹

Layering performances of history into every aspect of the ritual, the first celebration of Forefather's Day in 1769 used evocative objects in an exercise of memorial surrogation *par excellence*: the Club members placed their bodies in William Bradford's chair while invoking the spirit of his peers, and ate meat roasted on "the first jack brought to the Colony." Using old things to secure the status of a new club, the pageant-like events of the day carefully deployed local historical memory.

Though the members of the Old Colony Club charted a careful lineage between its membership and the founding of the Colony, the Club itself was less than a year old at the first celebration. Chartered January 13, 1769 by seven members who had, "seriously considered the many disadvantages and inconveniences that arise from intermixing with the company at the taverns in this town," and who knew that, "a well regulated club will have a tendency to prevent the same,"⁴² the male members of the club came from some of Plymouth's first families. The seven members at the founding were local historian Isaac Lothrop, Pelham Winslow, Thomas Lothrop, Elkanah Cushman, John Thomas, Edward Winslow, Jr., and John Watson. Their membership tripled on Forefather's Day that year, when fourteen additional members were officially welcomed into the Club.

As a public performance, the celebration of Forefather's Day in 1769 was carefully choreographed to delineate levels of access along lines of gender, class, race,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Thatcher, 179.

and genealogy. The event was overtly organized to praise publicly the memory of the male founders of the Plymouth colony on the anniversary of their landing in the town. Punctuated by processions between the private space of the Old Colony Club and the public spaces of the town, the event made clear that though the founding of the town was to be celebrated by all, control of the story rested in the hands of a smaller group. The events began by marking the hall with a silk flag painted with the inscription “OLD COLONY. 1620.”⁴³ The twenty-one members of the club then marched publicly through the streets to a private luncheon rich with symbolism. Leaving the meal in a show of convivial homosociality, the members of the club marched hand-in-hand to a hall, outside of which the general public of the town joined their procession. The two groups—Old Colony Club and the town at large—bandied cheers, prayers, and songs back and forth, before a symbolic cannon firing marked the end of the public event at sunset. The Club members returned to the interior of their hall, wherein Isaac Lothrop sat in William Bradford’s chair and raised toasts in celebration of the Colony’s founding and its male founders. The entire undertaking, public and private, was then condensed into a brief article circulated throughout the British North American colonies through printing in multiple newspapers.

The chair sits at the nexus of the celebration as a meaningful historic object used publicly. The significance of the chair would not have been lost on Isaac Lothrop. Born in Plymouth in 1736, he was descended from the Rev. John Lothrop who landed in Boston in 1634 and pastored the church at Barnstable in the Plymouth Colony. Isaac apprenticed with a merchant in Boston as a young man, but practiced his

⁴³ The location of the flag is currently unknown, if it survives.

trade in Plymouth. He became a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society at its founding in 1791. His 1808 obituary recorded both his patriotism and obsessive interest in the history of Plymouth. About the former, it noted “he exhibited the purest patriotism and an unshaken confidence in the rectitude and ultimate success of the cause of his country.” About the latter, it recalled that “so exalted was his veneration of the pious planters of New-England who first landed in this town, that he delighted in tracing their every foot-step.”⁴⁴ With a keen eye for keeping the historic present, reputedly reverting to the antique spelling of “Lothrop” long after his family had switched to “Lathrop,” Isaac was a fitting sitter for the Bradford chair. As a local antiquarian he performed a function similar to that of the Bradford chair in the eighteenth century. He carried stories and narratives of the past, recalling and retelling them in modern words.

As Laura Rigal argues in her account of the 1788 Grand Federal Processions supporting the ratification of the United States Constitution, “the people must see themselves together in order to love themselves collectively.”⁴⁵ Writing about a fervently republican performance following the American Revolution, Rigal argues that the Grand Federal Procession in Philadelphia demanded an image of popular unity to urge a program of national cohesion. Yet two decades earlier in Plymouth, the Old Colony Club used controlled access to articulate a different message. The people of Plymouth were not seen together to convey the notion of a stable whole, but were

⁴⁴ “Biographical Notes of Isaac Lothrop, Esq.” in *Collections of Massachusetts Historical Society* vol. 1 series 2 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1838), 258-259. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed March 9, 2012).

⁴⁵ Laura Rigal, ““Raising the Roof”: Authors, Spectators and Artisans in the Grand Federal Procession of 1788,” *Theater Works* 48:3 (Oct. 1996), 259.

rather carefully parsed throughout the day according to categories of access. Women were barred from access to the Club, but would have had access as observers to the public marches of the day, and to the written accounts of the event. Men who were not members of the Club because of race, class, lineage, or personal preference would have been able to engage as observers and participants in the public marches and chants. The purpose of the celebration was not to create the impression of an overall collective identity, but to force an awareness of who did or did not belong with whom. The members of the Old Colony Club needed to be seen as a unit to reiterate their privileged status, and such negotiated status only retains meaning if a corresponding group of non-members was made clear.

In forcing this notion, the Old Colony Club filled their celebration with historic meaning. A meal was taken on the site of the colony's first tavern, and the food served was chosen to reflect the assumed tastes of the first settlers, plainly dressing common game, fish, and produce. The venison served was roasted on a spit supposed to be the first in the colony. The defunct law folio of the Plymouth Colony was carried through the streets by the Club in a symbolic show of past authority. Sitting in the chair of William Bradford, Isaac Lothrop raised toasts in honor of the founding men of the Plymouth Colony to an assembled group of their direct descendents. The performed surrogation of the event was not implied, but stated outright throughout the day; using the tools of the colony's founders on the day of the founding, their male heirs claimed ownership of Plymouth's founding narrative. Applying historical narrative to things used in a public performance, the Old Colony Club shaped the form of Plymouth's historical memory in their image. It was not so important that the jack used to roast the venison was actually the first brought to Plymouth, or that the chair Lothrop sat in was

the actual chair of William Brewster, but that they were recorded in the popular memory as holding these distinctions.

The imposing mass of the chair and its exuberant turned ornamentation would have made the Brewster chair a fitting prop in the theater of Plymouth's Forefather's Day Celebration. In form and style, with significant massing and multi-course repetition of turned spindles, modern scholars have linked this chair type with a Dutch tradition of elaborate turned chairs. While other New England colonies cultivated more directly English chair types by the end of the seventeenth century, this form was in continuous production in the Plymouth Colony, and later Plymouth County, well into the eighteenth century. It has been speculated that such a tradition has its roots in the Leyden years of the original Plymouth separatists.⁴⁶ Showing a continuity of craft practice unique to the story of the Plymouth Pilgrims, such a chair might have acted as a marker of distinction and difference by the middle of the eighteenth century. As a relic linked to William Bradford, the second governor of the Plymouth Colony, it functioned as a marker of lineage. As a carrier of late Medieval Dutch style and craft tradition, it isolated the products of the Plymouth Colony from those of greater New England.

If the form of the chair made it a suitable prop, it was of greater importance to the memorial and narrative project of the day that the chair belonged to William Bradford. As a performance that survived in written accounts, the nominal links between Bradford, the chair, and the modern sitter carried a meaningful link across time. The chair helps create an embodied surrogate, pulling William Bradford into the

⁴⁶ Robert Trent and Karin Goldstein, "Notes About New 'Tinkham' Chairs," *American Furniture* (1998), 215.

modern celebration through a system of metonymical thinking. Sitting in the chair and offering toasts, Isaac Lothrop was not merely suggesting a symbolic connection between modern and historic sitter, but also performing the character of the chair's original owner.

The physical act of sitting in the chair was central to this connection. Instead of merely narrating a lineage from the founders, Lothrop used his body to prove the immediacy of that link. Instead of using words to articulate a history of Plymouth, the Old Colony engaged directly with the site of memory that housed the past. Critiquing the limits of historical analysis, Jules Prown argues that history is only able to recall discrete events, and fails to communicate “emotions and sensations and spirit.” Instead, Prown suggests that these more ephemeral aspects of the past can be found in objects. By engaging with form, and interpreting formal metaphor, a modern mind can begin to reconstruct past feelings.⁴⁷ As practiced in Plymouth in 1769, the engagement with historic objects walked a fine line between form and narrative. Sitting in the Bradford chair, the members of the Old Colony Club used historic objects to legitimate their link to the founding of the colony. The chair was used as originally intended—holding a sitter—but the experience was mediated by the deliberate manipulation of historical memory. The chair did not merely hold Isaac Lothrop, it held Isaac Lothrop just as it had William Bradford. The Old Colony Club needed objects to carry history, but they needed objects to carry a specific historical trajectory. The chair functioned as an authentic historic fact, publicly marking the members of the

⁴⁷ Jules Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture,” *Art As Evidence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 224.

Old Colony Club with the authority of the Colony's founders on the celebration of Forefather's Day.

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Touching, using, and narrating historic relics was a crucial part of this celebration, intended to suggest a continuity of practice and genealogy to the proceedings. This mode of thinking was not unique to Plymouth, but carried over into later accounts of reliquary interactions. In Washington Irving's 1820 short story "Stratford-on-Avon," published in his *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, a narrator visits the titular English town on a literary pilgrimage. Visiting the house where William Shakespeare was said to have been born, he was welcomed by a woman "particularly assiduous in exhibiting the relics with which this, like all other celebrated shrines, abounds." The proprietress of the house shows him "the sword also with which he played Hamlet," the "lantern with which Friar Laurence discovered Romeo and Juliet at the tomb," and the "matchlock with which Shakspeare shot the deer."⁴⁸ Yet among all the relics, "the most favourite object of curiosity, however, is Shakspeare's chair." He imagines, "here he may many a time have sat when a boy, watching the slowly revolving spit with all the longing of an urchin." Or maybe, "listening to the crones and gossips of Stratford, dealing forth churchyard tales and legendary anecdotes of the troublesome times of England." The chair was not a delicate relic. "In this chair" he notes "it is the custom of every one that visits the

⁴⁸ Washington Irving, "Stratford-on-Avon," *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* vol. 2 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1822), 150. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 9, 2012).

house to sit: whether this be done with the hope of imbibing any of the inspiration of the bard I am at a loss to say.” The proprietress warns him that, “though built of solid oak, such was the fervent zeal of devotees, that the chair had to be new bottomed at least once in three years.”⁴⁹ Such details hardly seem to matter. Instead, the narrator focuses on the chair as an embodied object, carrying the physical memory of the bard’s young life, offering the hope of conveying similar genius to a modern sitter.

The narrator wryly observes, “in the history of this extraordinary chair, that it partakes something of the volatile nature of the Santa Casa of Loretto,” in that “though sold some few years since to a northern princess, yet strange to tell, it has found its way back again to the old chimney corner.” Rather than be dissuaded of its importance, the narrator plainly states, “I am always of easy faith in such matters, and am ever willing to be deceived, where the deceit is pleasant and costs nothing.” He continues, “I am therefore a ready believer in relics, legends, and local anecdotes of goblins and great men.” The thing itself was not so important to him as the experience fabricated by its surrounding narrative. It did not matter whether the seat on Shakespeare’s chair had been recently replaced, or if it was Shakespeare’s chair at all. Instead he asks, “What is it to us, whether these stories be true or false, so long as we can persuade ourselves into the belief of them, and enjoy the charm of the reality?”⁵⁰ Couched in humor, Irving makes a prescient claim in favor of the theatrical practice of memory performed that Pierre Nora and Joseph Roach would argue many years later.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 151.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 152.

The object itself was significant, but not so important in this process as the memories that it carries, and the memories it performs when deployed for an audience.⁵¹

As Joseph Roach argues, “surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitute the social fabric.”⁵² Similarly, the site of memory must be continually endowed with living memory or risk losing its potency. Such was the fate of William Bradford’s chair. Though used to evocative effect in the 1769 celebration of Forefather’s Day in Plymouth, later celebration substituted the theatrical use of historic objects with emotionally charged sermons delivered by the great orators of the day. Celebrating the formal gifting of Henry Sargent’s monumental history painting *The Landing of the Pilgrims* (fig. 2) to Pilgrim Hall in 1835, an anonymous commentator in the newspaper *Old Colony Memorial* bemoans the uninspiring state of the museum. He writes, “this temple, which was erected to the memory of the Fathers, which was meant to be a sacred depository for the scattered relics of the Mayflower, has heretofore failed to interest the imagination and to excite those deep emotions of the soul, which, independent of time or place, or any other circumstance, annihilate the present and bring before the mind the actual past, the ideal future, in most vivid and living reality.”⁵³ The chairs no longer carried the same magic that they did for the Old Colony Club in the eighteenth century. The author notes, “The chair, the sword and the

⁵¹ Unlike Shakespeare’s chair in Irving’s tale, scholars have few doubts about the veracity of the Bradford Chair’s lineage, in part due to the age of this designation, and its correspondence to objects recorded in Bradford family inventories. (Fairbanks and Trent 550)

⁵² Roach, 2.

⁵³ Labeled and dated clipping found in Accession Files, Henry Sargent, *The Landing of the Pilgrims*, 0039. Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.



Figure 2 *Landing of the Pilgrims*, 1818-1822. Henry Sargent, American. Oil on canvas. H: 13 ft. W: 16 ft. From the Collection of the Pilgrim Society, Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

staff of the puritans are indeed interesting in association. [...] But these do not carry us back to the scene so much as to the time of the landing.” Presented to a wide audience in a formal historical context, the relics of deep local significance lost their specific relevance. The author recalls observations from the museum itself, noting, “How often have we seen the stranger who has come on a pilgrimage to the “Land of the Fathers,” seat himself composedly in the “Great Chair” of magisterial renown, and vainly wait

to feel come over him the expected inspiration. [...] He has not felt that glow of enthusiasm, which, “like a holy ablution” purifies and lightens the soul.”⁵⁴

By 1835, the chair had lost some of its historical resonance. Placed in a granite museum temple, the chair was an ossified object of worth by association. It joined the swords, books, letters, and sundry goods of the Pilgrim founders in the somber, historical space of the museum. Incorporated into a clear, linear, published account of the town, the chair became a site of discursive history, not a carrier of inconsistent, vernacular, corporeal memory. A visitor could sit in it, but the act of sitting was removed from the on-looking public. A performance must be seen. Isaac Lothrop might have felt a personal connection to Bradford’s persona sitting in the chair in private, but such a feeling would have been of little consequence to the town at large. Sitting in the chair before a crowd, he held a place of authority as a carrier of local stories. Lothrop ably performed his role in the celebration, but his performance was only meaningful inasmuch as it was observed and embedded in popular discourse. Pierre Nora argued that memory, rather than history, is found in the continuous practices and narratives of traditional societies. With symbolic meanings attributed to places, objects, and words for their local lineage, the celebration of Forefather’s Day performed the personae, spaces, and activities of eras past. The “Bradford Chair,” a noumenal artifact separate from the physical chair used by William Bradford, was largely symbolic as an abstract notion. Formally, there is little to separate it from the other so-called

⁵⁴ Acc. file, Henry Sargent, *The Landing of the Pilgrims*, 0039. Pilgraim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA

Pilgrim Chairs. It became meaningful when activated by toasts, songs, cheers, meals, and observed bodies sitting on its planks. Without these elements, a chair is just a chair.

It was surpassed in evocative significance by a monumental history painting showing the moment of landing in striking detail, with specific attention paid to the historic figures represented. If the anonymous commentator criticizes the impact of sitting in the Pilgrim chairs in 1835, he also provides a clear picture of what the chair was expected to do for sitters in the past. What had been lost—what the chair had inspired for earlier an generation—was a relational link between the past and present. Sargent's painting was a fitting substitute. Painted on a larger than life-size scale, the figures of his canvas tower over the viewer. Carrying swords, scabbards, and pikes while wearing metal helmets and felt hats, the things of the painting replicate many of the objects on view in the museum. Yet in the painting, they are active objects used, dented, damaged, and askew as the central characters of the scene do the work of landing on Plymouth Rock. The things, relics for a nineteenth century viewer, are the accouterments of a human drama. They are meaningful as vivid details of a larger story, not isolated facts presented with reliquary significance. Sargent's painting simulates the meaningful social elements that Forefather's Day provided for the Bradford chair in 1769. The things are shown in use, surrounded by boisterous crowds in a messy assemblage of figure and landscape. With vivid hues and grand scale, the composition physically envelops a viewer within the scene. Placed in a temple-like building that privileged isolated looking over boisterous use,

Sargent's painting simulates the people, noises, textures, and objects of the past better than the actual things viewed in isolation. If that context was empowering to a grand history painting, it was enervating to the Bradford chair in 1835. Taken from the performative context of a celebratory parade, the chair could no longer do the work that the theatrically staged painting could.

Chapter 3

MEMORY MAINTAINED

Though memory in the Plymouth Colony was performed in grand public displays, it was also maintained in private domestic settings through the perpetuation of historical practice. For the Winslow family of Marshfield in the eighteenth century, descending from two seventeenth-century governors of the colony, historical memory was expressed in a growing collection of portraits hanging on the walls of the family home, Careswell. Portraits first entered the house in 1655, when Josiah Winslow returned from London with likenesses of himself and his new wife Penelope as well as that of his recently deceased father Edward. Hanging his father's face on the walls of the home he built, the portraits functioned for Winslow as a living memorial from the start; simulating and suggesting a deceased patriarch, Edward's likeness maintained his presence in the home. The same would be true for Josiah and Penelope, when the portraits were bequeathed to their son Isaac. Rather than become historical objects of antiquarian interest, the memorial meaning of the group was maintained through the continual addition of new members throughout the eighteenth century. Placed within the context of older portraits, new additions became meaningful members of an existing pictorial lineage. Similarly, the addition of new portraits with each generation preserved the power of the earlier paintings. Instead of falling to neglect as historical curiosities, the entire group was maintained as a meaningful collection.

The history of the Winslow family is intimately connected with the early history of the Plymouth Colony. Edward Winslow (1595-1655) and his son Josiah (1628-1680) both served as governors of the colony. Educated, literate, well connected, and married to women from similarly prominent families, both men loomed large in the political and social spheres of their day. By the eighteenth century, however, family dynamics shifted with the times. If Winslows in the former Plymouth Colony remained important local figures, some attaining regional prominence as political and military leaders, their wealth and influence was overshadowed by their cousins in Boston who built vast mercantile fortunes. In that new context, the Winslow portraits in Marshfield served several memorial functions. Individual portraits served to commemorate specific sitters, like Edward's that came to the house only after his death. They took on a separate logic as a group. Viewed in a domestic setting in the eighteenth century, the assembled portraits created a visual record of the family's early importance. If the eighteenth-century Winslows in Marshfield would not attain the same public prominence as their forebears, they could insert their likeness within that pictorial lineage. A new face on the walls served to magnify the importance of the modern sitter situated among important ancestors, while it also maintained the line established by earlier generations.

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The first published record of the Winslow portraits occurred in 1838 when they were lent to the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston. At that time, there were seven portraits in the group. About the portrait of Edward Winslow (*fig. 3*) patriarch of

the Plymouth clan, the Historical Society notes that it was, “an original, painted in London in the year 1651, when he was agent for the Colony of Plymouth, in England; as was also that of Josiah Winslow, his son.” Noting that the painting is inscribed, “A.D. 1651: Aetatis suae 57,” the catalogue reports that the portraits, “have been ascribed to Vandyke, but it is said incorrectly.”⁵⁵ Winslow is shown in half-length view, angled slightly forward with his left shoulder. Standing in front of a deep brown background that has darkened with age, his face and hands appear in sharply lit relief against the black coat he wears. Smoothly modeled to create a lively form, his face is framed by his long parted hair and starkly white folded collar. Only the ruffled cuff of his right hand is visible, and his roughly limned left hand, almost wooden in appearance, holds a letter canted towards the viewer. Largely illegible, the last line of the text was crisply painted to read, “From yr loving wife Susanna.” The edge of his collar is picked out with delicate golden threads and two gold tassels which hang over a long line of textured gold buttons fastening his coat.

Born in 1595 near Worcester in England, the Susanna of the letter was Susanna White, widow of William White, whom Edward married in May 1621. Winslow had left Plymouth for England in 1650 as agent for the colony, leaving Susanna to helm the family estate in Marshfield. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell stationed him with a Caribbean-bound fleet, where he died of a fever near Jamaica.⁵⁶ A worldly

⁵⁵ “List of Portraits in the Hall of the Society,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* vol. 3 series 3 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1838), 286. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 18, 2012).

⁵⁶ Charles Knowles Bolton, *The Founders: Portraits of Persons Born Abroad Who Came to the Colonies in North American Before the Year 1701* vol. 2 (Boston: The Boston Atheneum, 1919), 507-508. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 15, 2012).

man closely involved with colonial, national, and imperial politics, Edward Winslow appears not as a dour Pilgrim, but as a wealthy gentleman.

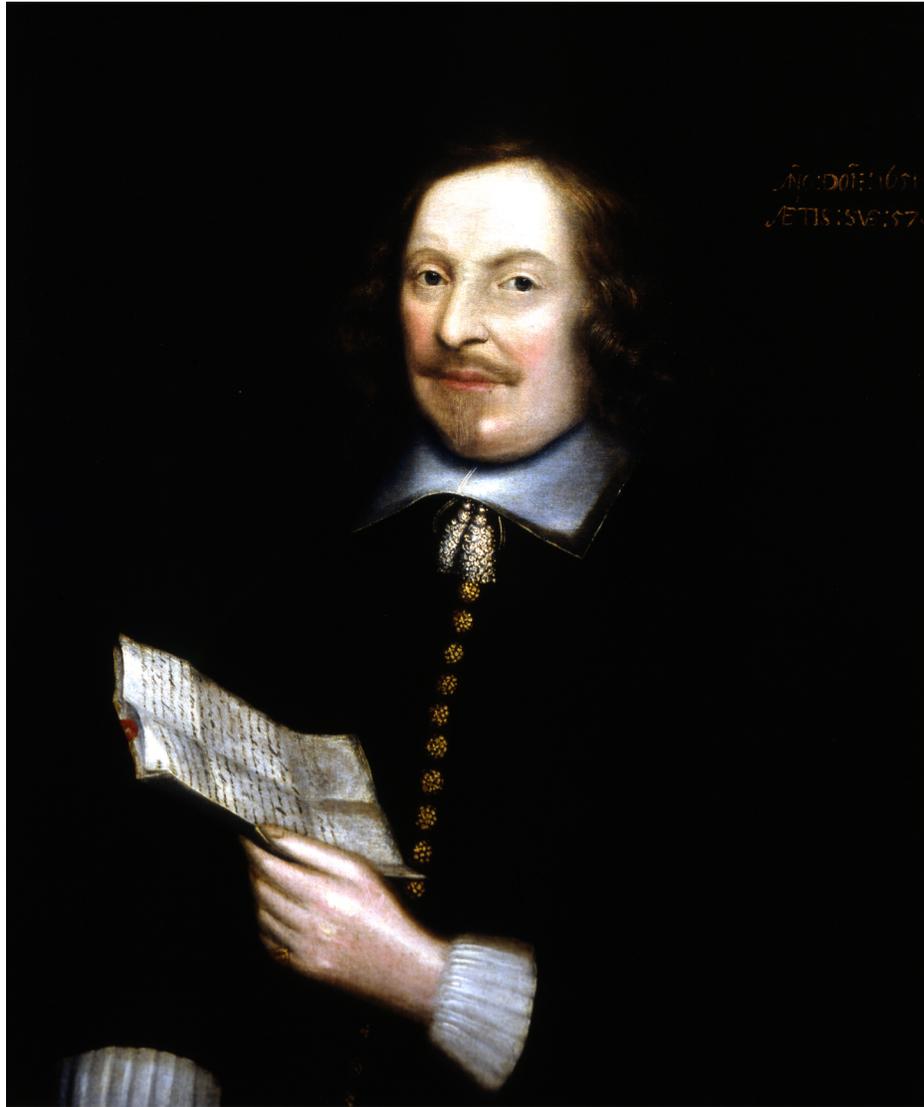


Figure 3 *Portrait of Edward Winslow*, 1651. Artist Unknown, London. Oil on Canvas, 38 in. x 32 ½ in. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA. .

Smaller in scale and more modest in detail than that of his father, Josiah's portrait (*fig. 4*) was described through the genealogy and accomplishments of the sitter. Based on their perceived merits, the portraits received different treatments in the 1838 text. If Edward's portrait inspired speculations over artistry, Josiah's prompted less ambitious questions. The text incorrectly states that he was born in 1629, and was elected "Governor from 1673, seven years—being the first Governor who was a native of New England." Finally, it reports that, "he has been styled 'the most accomplished man of his day, in New England.'"⁵⁷ His portrait is similar to that of his father, though on a more modest scale. Like his father, he is shown in a half-length view. Like his father's portrait, the painter dedicated considerable attention to rendering the sitter's face in lifelike detail in sharp contrast to his dark background and costume. He wears a folded white collar over a black cloak, like his father, and nearly identical golden tassels hang from his neck. He holds his roughly limned right hand over his chest, leaving his left hand beyond the picture. If Edward's portrait was significant for its sophisticated painterly technique, Josiah's was meaningful by association to the family lineage and achievements of the sitter. Josiah was born in Marshfield in 1630, the son of Edward Winslow and Susanna (White) Winslow. He was enrolled at Harvard in the class of 1642, but never earned a degree.⁵⁸ When he died in Marshfield in 1680, his will made no mention of his or any other portrait. He willed "my pockett watch, that was sometimes our honored fathers" to his sister Elizabeth Curwin, his "spannish rapier & buffe belt with silver Claspes" to his half-brother Peregrine White, one cow

⁵⁷ "List of Portraits in the Hall of the Society," 286.

⁵⁸ John Langdon Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University* vol. 1 (Cambridge: University Bookstore, 1873), 13.

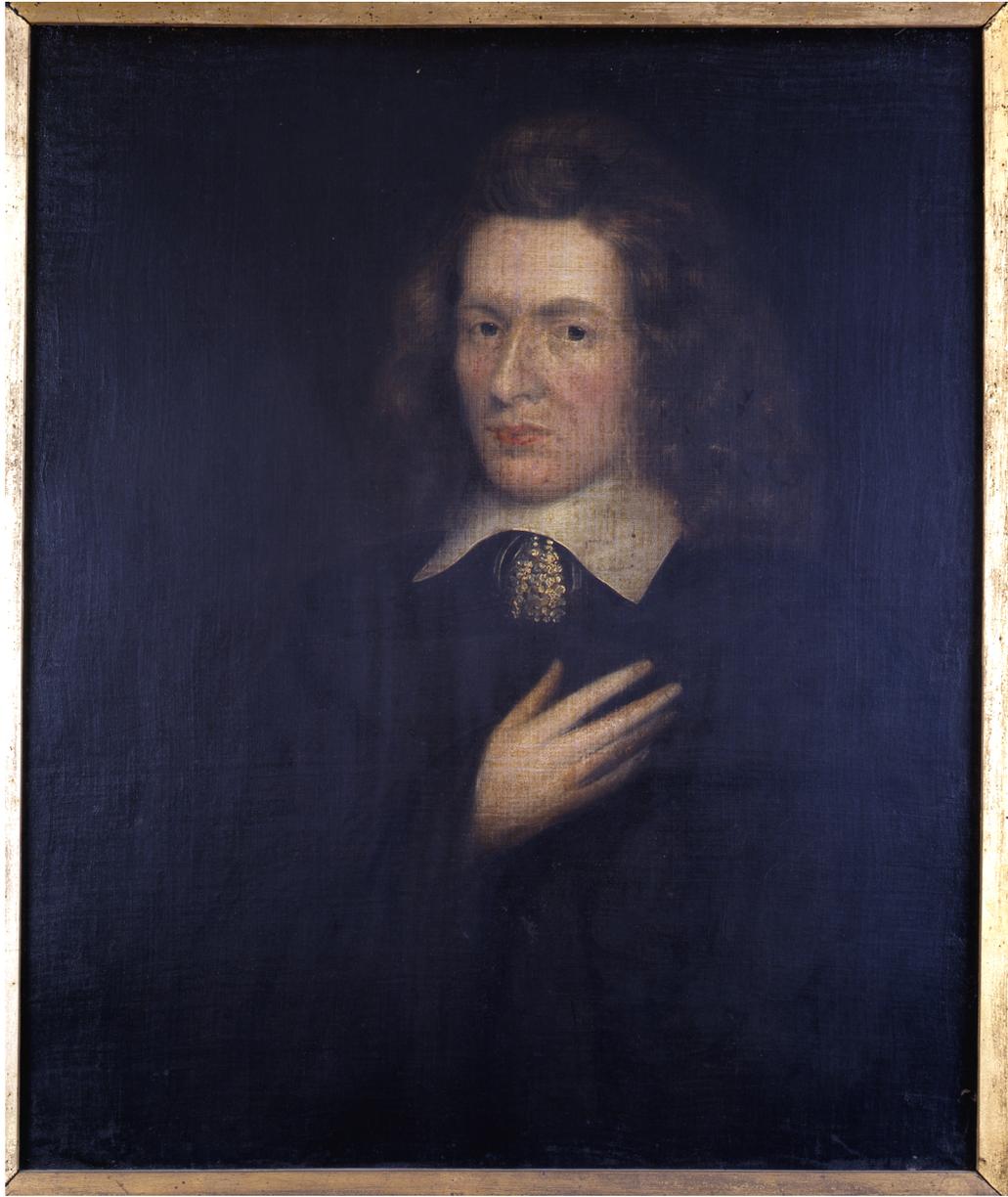


Figure 4 *Portrait of Josiah Winslow*, 1651. Artist Unknown, London. Oil on Canvas, 37 in. x 32 in. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

“to the poor of this Towne of Marshfeild” among many other small bequests. The bulk of his estate was willed to his wife Penelope, including “my houseing and lands goods Chattles and whatsoever be in the present possession.”⁵⁹ This category would have included the family portraits, and included the provision that the estate passes to their son Isaac when he reached legal age.

The portrait of Josiah’s wife Penelope (Pelham) Winslow received a similarly genealogical treatment in the 1838 catalogue (*fig. 5*). It notes cursorily that she “was nearly related to the Duke of New-Castle.”⁶⁰ Though painted as a pendant to the portrait of her husband by the same artist, the two sitters were depicted in wildly different ways. Josiah’s face was carefully portrayed in naturalistically modeled tones, giving only passing attention to his loosely limned attire and embellishments. Penelope, in contrast, is represented with lush attention dedicated to her attire and jewelry. Using pale tones, the painter represented her face with a boldly linear style to outline her nose, eyes, and mouth. She is dressed in rich attire, with the draped edges of her shift revealed around the billowing sleeves and low-cut neckline of a green velvet gown. Though her face was limned with broad linear detail, the scarf was painstakingly represented to highlight the cost and visual effect of the textile. Highlighting the sheen of the surface in exaggerated detail and clear form, the painter emphasizes the form of her costume at the expense of her person, leaving her raised left hand lightly distended and out of focus with a paucity of detail. She wears a string

⁵⁹ George Ernest Bowman, “Governor Josiah Winslow’s Will and Inventory,” *The Mayflower Descendant* 5 (1903), 82-83. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 3, 2012).

⁶⁰ “List of Portraits in the Hall of the Society,” 286.

of gold beads around her neck, and has a strand of pearls wrapped around the crown of her head.



Figure 5 *Portrait of Penelope Pelham Winslow, 1651.* Artist Unknown, London. Oil on Canvas, 37 in. x 32 in. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

Whether real or imagined, these details cast Penelope as a consumer of refined goods in contrast to the specifically personal portraits of her husband and father in law. Married in England in 1651, the Winslow and Pelham families led similarly transatlantic lives. Josiah was born in Plymouth, Penelope in Suffolk, England in 1630. Josiah's father was a leader of the Plymouth colony both in North America and England, while Penelope's grandfather married the sister of the Lord de la Warr, first governor of the Virginia Company. Penelope's aunt Penelope married Richard Bellingham, then governor of Massachusetts, and her father served as treasurer of Harvard College when he lived in Boston with his children from 1638-1649. Family legend tells that the couple met in England in 1651, and returned to the Plymouth Colony in 1655 with portraits in tow after Josiah inherited the Winslow family estate in Marshfield.⁶¹

The style of seventeenth-century portraits in New England was not just a matter of taste. Scholars traditionally divide the portraits of seventeenth-century New England into two categories based on their manner of rendering. One anachronistic method preserved from an Elizabethan model used flat, linear forms that highlight the basic physical attributes of a sitter. The second method used naturalistic renderings of forms in space to emulate the visual experience of looking at the body of the sitter. If the linear style draws a plethora of surface details to entice the eye of a viewer, the naturalistic style carefully directs the eye to several sharply focused details, like the face of a sitter, or the most significant articles of adornment. Art historian Wendy Katz

⁶¹ Lemuel Shattuck, "Genealogical Memoir of the Descendants of Edward Winslow, Governor of Plymouth Colony," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 5:5 (October, 1850), 297-298. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 15, 2012). Bolton, 511-512.

places the three London Winslow portraits in the naturalistic group that responded to the fashionable London portraits of the era painted by Continentally trained artists.⁶² The specific portraits commissioned by the Winslows—beyond the fact that they commissioned them at all—were meaningful decisions in the seventeenth century. The decision to commission a fashionable portrait painted to trick the eye of the viewer marks a taste for refined goods, even as such portraits sat at odds with the *plain style* of Puritan theological rhetoric. That plain style in rhetoric rejected the ornate prose of metaphysical investigation in favor of an immediate encounter between preacher and sacred text.⁶³ Running counter to the prevalent manner of speech and image, the style of the Winslow portraits suggests the work they were to do in the family home. Viewed by an audience of family, friends, neighbors, and peers who would have known the sitters, the portraits were conceived to simulate the physical presence of the subject. Even as artifice, tricks, and visual simulation roused the suspicions of Puritan theologians, the Winslows commissioned artificial representations simulate the presence of a sitter in the family home.

In portraits, as Wendy Katz argues, the *plain style* is seen in the linear manner of painting popular in Boston starting in the 1660s.⁶⁴ Using flat, descriptive details to represent a sitter, these portraits use the picture plane as a two-dimensional space to outline the essential details of a phenomenal encounter. If Edward, Josiah, and

⁶² Wendy Katz, "Portraits and the Production of the Civil Self," *Winterthur Portfolio* 39:2-3 (Summer-Autumn 2004), 101-103.

⁶³ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 332-333.

⁶⁴ Katz, 103.

Penelope were painted in a fashionably artificial style, the portrait of Elizabeth (Paddy) Wensley (*fig. 6*) uses the plain linear style to depict the ornate costume of the sitter. Described in 1838 as “Mrs. Alice Wensley” shown in “an original portrait in the full dress and costume of olden time”⁶⁵ this painting is now considered to show Elizabeth. Grand in scale, Elizabeth’s portrait entered the Winslow family group when her daughter Sarah Wensley (1673-1753) married Isaac Winslow (1671–1738). Possibly painted as a pendant to a portrait of her husband John Wensley, Elizabeth is depicted in three-quarters view standing in an imagined space set into a picturesque landscape.

The direct linear style of this and other portraits presents formal and stylistic details in easily accessed way. To show the lace used in his dress, the painter neatly traced each line of a lace pattern onto the canvas with limited perspectival allowances. As Wayne Craven argues when examining the Boston portraits of John, Elizabeth, and Mary Freake, this mode of representation provides instant access to the materiality of the sitter and their costume. When used to depict wealthy merchants draped in lush textiles, it functions as a clearly limned representation of wealth.⁶⁶ Instead of failing to depict the face of Elizabeth (Paddy) Wensley, the painter uses style to focus attention on the markers of prosperity displayed on her body. The flatness of the portrait is not a painterly failure, but a deliberate choice to serve a conspicuous end.

Born in Plymouth in 1641 to William Paddy, Elizabeth removed to Boston when she married the mariner John Wensley. Wensley was prosperous in his trade,

⁶⁵ “List of Portraits in the Hall of the Society,” 286.

⁶⁶ Wayne Craven, *Colonial American Portraiture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 39-42.



Figure 6 *Portrait of Elizabeth Paddy Wensley, c. 1670.* Boston c. 1670. Boston, Artist Unknown. Oil on Canvas, 41 in. x 33 ½ in. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

owning warehouses and wharves in addition to his house in Boston's North End. When he died in 1686, the inventory of his estate included eighteen chairs with woven Turkey-work covers in the hall, and twenty-five leather covered chairs in the middle-room of his ground floor.⁶⁷ The inventory makes no reference to the portrait of his wife, though it must have passed to their daughter Sarah Wensley, who married Isaac Winslow in 1700.⁶⁸ Her will, entered into county probate records in 1754 following her 1753 death, included her bequest "to my son John Winslow the four pictures, and my Great Black Walnut table."⁶⁹ These items were subsequently inventoried in 1756 with a value of 5 pounds, 6 shillings and 8 pence for the portraits, and 2 pounds, 13 shillings and 4 pence for the table.⁷⁰ Sarah's "four pictures" have been identified by family tradition as the portrait of her mother and the portraits of Edwards, Josiah, and Penelope Winslow inherited from her husband's family. Though her portrait was misidentified as her mother Alice Wensley in the nineteenth century, it has been subsequently reattributed to an unidentified Boston painter active between 1670 and 1680 based on costume and relationship to portraits of the Savage, Patteshall, Curwin, and Smith families of Boston. Based on that date, Elizabeth is the only likely sitter for the portrait given its known line of descent.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Fairbanks and Trent, 565-566.

⁶⁸ Shattuck, 301-302.

⁶⁹ The "Great Black Walnut table" is now in the collections of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

⁷⁰ Louisa Dresser, *XVIIIth Century Painting in New England* (Worcester: Worcester Art Museum, 1934), 149-150.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 150.

Sarah and Isaac Winslow are absent from the portrait group, but their son added his portrait around 1750 (*fig. 7*). About the portrait of John Winslow, the 1838 catalogue mostly notes his military career. It states, “In 1755, he was second in command in the expedition against Nova Scotia. The next year, he commanded Fort William Henry, on Lake George.”⁷² Intermittently and inconsistently attributed to Joseph Blackburn, the half-length oval-format portrait of John, the rectangular canvas was completed with painted brown spandrels in the corners. His face was unevenly rendered, achieving strikingly sculptural detail in passages around his nose, and resting in flat linearity in his mouth, chin, and neck. Later generations are also represented by later portraits like a circa 1778 portrait of John’s son Doctor Isaac Winslow of Marshfield, “a physician of eminence,” attributed to the Boston painter John Johnston, and Isaac’s son John, painted around 1810, who “became an eminent Lawyer, and died at Natches, Mississippi.” The catalogue also notes that these portraits had been loaned by the latter John’s son Isaac along with “a large round table, and an antique chair of Gov. Edward Winslow’s brought from England, in the cabin of the ‘Mayflower.’”⁷³ Though marred by factual inaccuracy, such as the misidentified portrait of Elizabeth Wensley as Alice Wensley and the assertion that Edward Winslow’s English armchair was carried on the *Mayflower*, the catalogue provides important clues as to the lives these portraits lived in the course of the eighteenth century.

⁷² “List of Portraits in the Hall of the Society,” 286.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 286.



Figure 7 *Portrait of Gen. John Winslow*, c. 1750. Boston or Marshfield, MA, attrib. Joseph Blackburn. Oil on Canvas, 38 in. x 34 in. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

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Instead of acting as a static unit, the larger group developed with intergenerational additions and substitutions. Unlike the Boston portrait groups of the Freake or Shrimpton families formed with one ambitious campaign, the Winslow portraits in the Plymouth Colony developed as a living collection through the maintenance of material practice across many generations. Commissioning, bequeathing, adding, and regrouping, the Winslow portraits grew to include a member of another family, a large walnut table, and an English-made chair⁷⁴ by the time the group was loaned to the Massachusetts Historical Society. As Margareta Lovell argues about intergenerational portrait group of the Bull and Henshaw families in Boston, the insertion of new members into a preexisting group can be considered as a *textual* gesture. While the painted portraits of deceased family members keep their memory alive, they also work to legitimate lineage and give form to a family tree. Inserting new faces into these groups is not a matter of expanding an assemblage, but fundamentally altering the “visual text” of the paintings.⁷⁵ As a representation of a family across time, the portraits lose fundamental meanings when considered in isolation.

Indeed, a new portrait added to an existing group achieves two ends. The newer likeness is buttressed by the power of lineage and history carried by the older

⁷⁴ Edward Winslow’s English-made chair is the in the collections of the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, MA.

⁷⁵ Margareta Lovell, *Art In a Season of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 117.

pictures. At the same time, the older pictures are given a modern relevance. Adding General John Winslow to the walls of Careswell maintains the logic of the existing group. Rather than become reliquary objects through the veil of age, the earlier Winslow portraits remained part of a vital entity. The visual text of the group was altered with the addition of each new member, while those additional parts preserved the earlier contextual logic of the whole.

The original members of the portrait group, Edward, Josiah, and Penelope, were painted in London when portrait likenesses were rare in New England. Though the actual records of their commission have been lost, the correspondence of the Shrimpton-Roberts family of Boston and London provides clues as to what these portraits would have represented in their day. In July 1671, London merchant Nicholas Roberts sent a letter to his son-in-law Samuel Shrimpton in Boston, husband to his daughter Elizabeth. “My pictur is drawn to send you,” he writes, “if I could prevail with your mother to have hers drawne would have sent it now.” He continues “If I cannot prevail I shall send you mine (therefore tell Betty) I have not forgot my promise.”⁷⁶ Though spare in language, this letter reveals a great deal about the purpose, sentiments, and practicalities of the transatlantic portrait exchange in the seventeenth century. Robert reports that his portraits had been completed and would be on the next ship to Boston, except that it was missing its pendant match depicting his wife. His wife Elizabeth (Baker) Roberts was apparently reluctant to sit for her portrait at the time, leaving Nicholas’ portrait unmatched. Using a familiar nickname, he asks Shrimpton to “tell Betty” that “I have not forgot my promise.” The portraits to

⁷⁶ Andrew Oliver et al., *Portraits in the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1988), 13.

be sent were ascribed a specifically meaningful purpose, fulfilling a fatherly promise to a daughter who had removed from a prosperous family home in Bethnal Green to a new city on a largely unknown continent. The portraits were not mere likenesses, but links reinforcing a relationship that could not be maintained in person. Markers of affection intended to maintain the integrity of a family unit separated by time and space, the portrait works as a placeholder.

The exchange continued three years later, when Roberts wrote to Shrimpton in September 1674 to ask that he “tell my daughter that he mother’s picture is now drawn and mine also and I shall send them by the next conveyance we have.” The portraits were not limited to the likenesses of Nicholas and his wife, but “if Capt Foster goe not before the frames are finished shall come by him your two sisters will send afterwards if desired.”⁷⁷ Later that year Roberts once again wrote to inform Shrimpton that, “You will receive by Capt. foster case sewed up in canvas with your marke upon it in which is mine & your mother’s picktures.” He added a modest assessment of the portraits, writing “your mother is dun well & I leav you to give your judgment of mine.”⁷⁸ The pair of portraits was expanded in 1675, when Roberts once again wrote to report that, “I have sent you in a case yours & your wifes picktures with your grandmothers & your three sisters.” One of the portraits was of a young girl who had died in infancy, and Roberts observes, “your sister Katherines was drawn wee littell thought the curtaine would have been soe soon drawn ovr that yet being intended for you hath sent it you that you may see by the shadow what a likely sweet babe it was to live.”⁷⁹ The

⁷⁷ Ibid. 13

⁷⁸ Ibid. 14

⁷⁹ Ibid. 14

eight collected pictures comprised a large, intergenerational grouping of the Shrimpton, Roberts, and Baker families. They range from Elizabeth Shrimpton's maternal grandmother to her deceased sister painted in infancy.

As a documentary group, Nicholas Roberts' letters to his son-in-law in Boston provide the most complete picture of the transatlantic portrait exchange that survives. He details why the pictures were sent, fulfilling a promised request to his daughter, but also leaves clues as to their more ephemeral contemporary meanings. A portrait of a deceased sister was sent "that you may see by the shadow what a likely sweet babe it was to live." Yet the child Katherine had died without ever meeting her sister in Boston. The portrait was not intended as a sentimental reminder of a loved one lost, never having known her sister, but served as the only face she would ever know for her. The portrait was more than a mere representation. It embodied an unknown girl for installation on the walls of a home that was not her own. Painted at significant expense and shipped across the Atlantic, Katherine is a curious presence in the larger group. Her sister in Boston never knew her, but her absence would have compromised the meanings of the assembled portraits. Representing a total family group it was sufficiently meaningful in 1671 to justify the cost.

Shared among a small group of wealthy and prominent Bostonians during the seventeenth century, the practice of installing English portraits in New England homes was a marker of distinction on a social level. On a personal level, the portraits also served to represent an intergenerational family unit that had lost its traditional unity to colonization. The family portrait group becomes a meaningful whole beyond the logic of its parts in the preservation of a personal narrative, situating the displaced individual within a continuum of genealogy. The group carries meanings beyond those

of its individual parts. Experienced daily by the Winslow family and sporadically by friends and peers, the portraits maintained a sense of continuity in Careswell even as the estate passed to new hands with each generation. As individual paintings, the Winslow portraits are not extraordinary pictures. Edward Winslow's portrait would have served a memorial function similar to that of other contemporary posthumous portraits. Elizabeth Paddy Wensley's portrait shows a conspicuous consumption of luxury goods shared with the portrait of Elizabeth Freake. Yet as a group the Winslow portraits carry meaning beyond that of the individual parts. They form an intergenerational family unit, changing with each addition to retain their logic as a representation of a family tree.

Accreting memory as social objects with the gradual passing of time, the Winslow family portraits represent the maintenance of a memorial practice across six generations in Marshfield. As an evolving set, the Winslow family portraits represent a living, shifting memorial practice. In 1655, when the portraits of Edward, Penelope, and Josiah first came to Careswell, the grouping would have served as a poignant tableau while Susanna Winslow continued to live in the home. It also established a visual text and context for the home. Additional portraits brought to the home would not enter a blank slate. Instead, they would respond to and change a preexisting visual context. Painted in London of a sitter who would die abroad, Edward's picture might have served the same function as that of the young Katherine Roberts. Joined by the portraits of his son and daughter-in-law, the grouping enacted a pictorial passing of the torch to pattern the literal passing of the family estate from father to son. An emotional placeholder, the deceased Edward's portrait would have evoked his presence. In

addition, it rooted the Winslow family portrait tradition in the realm of surrogation, asking the painted portrait to represent a lost family unity.

Descending to Josiah's son Isaac, the group was not expanded by a new family portrait, but by the addition of an old portrait given contemporary importance to the Winslow family. Elizabeth Paddy Wensley would have been keenly familiar with the Winslow family, having been born in Plymouth to a prosperous father in 1641 when Edward Winslow loomed large over the colony. Yet her portrait entered the collection at Careswell after her death, inserting tangential narrative into the visual family history hanging on the wall. Continuing the memorial practice of collecting family portraits, Isaac looked back rather than forward. Instead of placing his own face on the walls, he expanded the seventeenth-century story of the family to include the grandmother of his children. Though traditional scholarship has emphasized that portrait groups in the English tradition served to reinforce the dominance of patrilineal authority, Kate Rhetford argues that these pictures were also collected to record "the important connections, titles, land, and wealth transferred into the family through marital unions."⁸⁰ Hanging Elizabeth alongside Edward and Josiah, Isaac and his wife maintained the family practice through retroactive inclusion of a matrilineal line.

By the time the portraits passed to the General John Winslow in 1756, they had achieved a complicated status as anachronistic objects. Instead of marking the presence of familiar relatives, they became family antiquities like the monumental walnut table with a history in the Winslow family. Marcia Poynton argues that,

⁸⁰ Kate Rhetford, "Patrilineal Portraiture? Gender and Genealogy in the Eighteenth-Century English Country House," in John Styles and Amanda Vickery, ed. *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2006), 319.

“knowing when and where objects were seen, and in relation to which other artifacts they were apprehended” is fundamental, as it “allows the historian to begin to grasp their specific historical meanings.”⁸¹ In her will, Sarah Wensley Winslow provided just that information. In addition to reiterating the grouping of the four portraits together, her will makes clear that the portraits were included within a larger world of historic objects with specific family histories. Given this relationship, the portrait John Winslow added to the group is particularly significant. Commissioned shortly after he inherited the family portraits from his mother with a clear articulation of their memorial meaning to the family, he chose to include his own face where his mother and father had not.

As was true for Edward in 1651, the choice of painterly style was a meaningful one for John. When his cousin Isaac Winslow in Boston posed for Robert Feke in 1748, the resulting portrait was grand in scale and ambition; dressed in an imported brocaded silk waistcoat, gesturing towards a bustling commercial harbor, his portrait was calculated to deliver maximum visual impact as a luxury object.⁸² In stark contrast, John commissioned a simply proportioned picture in a plain style. Whether by choice or economic necessity, it is clear that the portrait’s true impact lay in its place within the larger collection of family portraits. While Isaac in Boston commissioned a singularly bold visual statement, John made a small inclusion within an already powerful gathering. When Edward, Josiah, and Penelope commissioned

⁸¹ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 13.

⁸² Carol Troyen, *The Boston Tradition: American Paintings from The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (New York: American Federation of the Arts, 1980), 50.

portraits in a naturalistic style to trick the eye of a viewer, they emulated the fashionable portraits of their day. When John commissioned a portrait in the plain style, he rejected the fashionable style of his Boston cousins in favor of a portrait more closely aligned in format, scale, and modeling with those of his forbears.

Cultivated within a living group, the seventeenth-century Winslow portraits remained in active conversation with later additions into the nineteenth century. They were not antiquarian objects of historical curiosity, but part of a lived family practice that rendered them vital actors in a visual discussion of genealogy, lineage, and family lore. This was not true for all seventeenth century portraits in New England. In the summer of 1802, minister William Bentley began to travel around Salem to collect the portraits of its founders. On August 11, he “went up to Endicott’s farm to borrow the portrait of the Governour from his descendant. The favor was granted.” Walking around the ancestral family lands, he saw the family cemetery. He observed “The family have reserved the right of burial here. But as the property is chiefly gone & the greater part of the family has removed, there will be left few to claim it.”⁸³ Also visiting the Thatcher and Curwin families, Bentley borrowed their singular family portraits so that the Neapolitan painter Michele Felice Corne could produce copies for his own collection.⁸⁴ Noting the decay of both the portraits and the descendant families in a town bustling with the wealth of the China trade, these observations would not have been made about the Winslow portraits in Marshfield. While Endicott family objects fell to neglect and disrepair, the Winslows preserved their portraits by

⁸³ William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1907), 442-443. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 29, 2012).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 453.

maintaining their familial significance. On October 12, 1802, Bentley recorded that he, “Delivered to Mr. Corne the original painting in oil of Mr. George Curwin, who came to Salem in 1633 & died in 1685.” About the painting, he reports, “the original was much injured, the extreme parts were separated & only a half length preserved.” Isolated from the larger material life of the town by antiquity and neglect, the seventeenth-century portraits of John Endicott and George Curwin fell into disrepair.

In practice, the Winslows maintained the portrait tradition begun by Edward, adding new members with subsequent generations and incorporating domestic objects into a memorial assemblage. Where the Endicotts and Curwins of 1802 had isolated the antique past from their daily lives, the Winslows perpetuated an older tradition. The memorial function of these portraits is not purely in their ability to inspire remembrance and contemplation, though this original memorial meaning is certainly part of their impact. As an assembled group, their memorial function is additionally embedded in a carefully replicated practice deployed by subsequent generations. The Winslow family portraits are individual portraits of Edward, Josiah, Penelope, Elizabeth, John, and other. Though these individual works have specific meanings, as a group they form a living portrait of a family across time.

Chapter 4

MEMORY INVOKED

A large group of painted chests with histories in the Plymouth Colony town of Taunton, Massachusetts first earned widespread attention in 1933, when Esther Stevens Fraser published her article, “The Tantalizing Chests of Taunton,” in the May issue of *The Magazine Antiques*. Fraser identified four characteristic features for this group of chests in their painted ornamentation. They have scrolling lines interspersed with painted dots to suggest vines and berries, which Fraser described as a “mound of wavy lines resembling the ground customarily found in Jacobean tree-of-life patterns.” Where the larger tradition of baroque ornamentation made extensive use of the scrolled and layered acanthus leaved, the Taunton chests used less ornate C-scrolls painted across the surface, often with painted dots in clusters at the ends of the scrolls. In addition to these shared features, “in later chests, a bird motive [sic] is usually introduced.” More abstractly, she identifies “a strong fondness for curves and an avoidance of straight lines.” Though the painter’s decoration used asymmetry, the resulting images were “nevertheless, expertly and perfectly balanced.”⁸⁵

If these chests clearly respond to a growing interest in the sophisticated painted surfaces of japanned and polychrome painted furniture popular in London and Boston in the same era, their local context adds meaning to the painted finish and design. An

⁸⁵ Esther Stevens Fraser, “The Tantalizing Chests of Taunton,” *Antiques* 23:4 (Apr. 1933), 137.

engraved surface in Taunton was filled with signification and suggestions of narrative. Born from a landscape that included an illegibly carved pre-colonial rock later dubbed Dighton Rock, an inscribed surface in Taunton could be rich with historical signification. Evoking the material encounter with the undecipherable language of these carvings in a domestic sphere, the painted chests of Taunton suggest signifiers of age and antiquity. Made in the eighteenth century, their formal language responds to the ancient history of the place. Though articulated in different media, the carvings on Dighton Rock and the painted ornament on the surface of the chests presented similar interpretive challenges. The chests adopt a partially legible alphabet of decorative symbols, and use the ornamented surface of a piece of furniture to create a text.

Made of thick pine boards, most of the chests in this group take the form of a blanket chest with drawer. The earliest date to the middle 1720s, and dated examples were produced into the 1740s. While blanket chests with drawers were made in many New England towns, this tradition of chest making is defined by the all-over painted motif applied to the fronts of the chests. With top, sides, and front stained a deep brown, the chests were then ornamented with the linear polychrome decoration that Fraser identified in her article. Painted with large scrolled lines to depict flowers, trees, foliage, or an abstracted landscape, the decoration on the chests evoke both the Asian-inflected motifs of japanned furniture popular in Boston at the time, and the all-over decorative schemata rich with lush ornament that defines the English baroque taste. When new, the chests would have looked somewhat different than they do today. Though the ground color on the front, top, and sides has darkened to a deep black, the iron pigments used in the stain would have appeared as a rich, red-brown

ground for the elaborate designs. Recent analysis determined that the painted motifs were applied with vermilion red, copper green, lead white, and azurite blue.⁸⁶

In their painted surfaces, these chests carefully negotiate a space between the popular ornamentation of their day, and esoteric suggestions of the Taunton landscape. The “A.W.” chest at the Old Colony Historical Society in Taunton is typical of this approach (*fig. 8*), using the dark ground and fanciful natural motifs of japanned furniture alongside abstract geometric forms. Made of inexpensive and possibly local white pine boards, the form is a blanket chest with drawer. All visible surfaces of the chest, top, sides, and front, were then covered in a red-brown stain, and polychrome painted scene applied to the front. Designed with vertical symmetry, the scene is divided into three panels of birds and abstracted trees to correspond to the three suggested drawer fronts. The top panel is dominated by the large inverted triangle in the center composed of wavy lines, within which the painter included “A W/ 1729.” The triangle is flanked by two red and white trees articulated with C-curved limbs and elongated ovoid leaves. The heads and wings of two birds cross under the applied molding from the panel below, angled towards the central inscription. The middle panel shows three trees, the left and right trees each with three birds on their limbs and

⁸⁶ Brock Jobe, Gary Sullivan, et al. *Harbor and Homes: Furniture of Southeastern Massachusetts 1710-1850* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2009), 176. Polychrome painted surfaces were produced in many regions of New England throughout its history. Painted abstract furniture from Essex and Suffolk Counties in Massachusetts survive from the middle seventeenth century. Though most have compromised surfaces, there is evidence of polychrome decoration on late-seventeenth century Plymouth County case furniture. In form and painted surface, the Taunton chests relate to several other groups of painted New England furniture. A group of chests from Saybrook or Guilford, Connecticut dated to the first half of the eighteenth century are similar in their use of linear white decoration on a stained pine forms. A variety of forms from the Hartford and Windsor region of Connecticut dated to the middle of the eighteenth century also survive with elaborate polychrome floral and faunal decoration on a dark stained surface. Further investigation is required to unpack the possible connections between these traditions, and the local contexts that produced each.

a fourth approaching in flight. The front of the functional drawer is painted with three trees, the splayed center tree bearing large red fruit, and the smaller flanking trees with white and red berries.



Figure 8 *Chest with Drawer*, 1729. Taunton, MA, attrib. Robert Crosman. White pine, H: 32 ½ in. W: 37 ¾ in. D: 17 ½ in. From the Collection of the Old Colony Historical Society, Taunton, MA.

A later chest attributed to the same group at Winterthur (*fig. 9*) shows a similar pattern of construction, but a wildly different approach to the painted motif. Dated 1742, with two functional drawers instead of one, the front of this chest with drawers has a unified painted motif. Unlike the earlier chest, on which the painting is neatly divided into three different panels, the painting on this piece forms a single image across the fronts of the drawers and chest. The scene is organized with vertical symmetry around two scrolling vines that emanate from the central brass pull on the lower drawer. With a series of C-curves, the vine scrolls up the surface of the chest until it terminates in many smaller C-curves flanking the key escutcheon, some holding roughly painted tulips, red berries, or other flowers. The date “1742” is painted below the brass pull on the upper drawer, and two birds fly towards the center of the lower drawer.

In decorating the chest, the painter used bold strokes of color to represent his pattern. In painting tulips, he deployed broad strokes of red and white paint to indicate the colors of the flower’s petals. Though the subject matter is similar to that of the “A.W.” chest, the painterly approaches are markedly different. The painting on the “A.W.” chest is composed of many interlaced, attenuated fine white lines to indicate form and ground. In leaving space for the inscription, the painter employed negative space within his armorially suggestive inverted triangle. The initials and dates were not merely painted on the surface, but painted within a purposefully created erasure within the larger decorative pattern. Such an approach indicates a sophisticated concept of the relationship between form, line, and text on the surface of the chest.



Figure 9 *Chest with Drawers*, 1742. Taunton, MA, attrib. Robert Crosman. White pine, red oak, chestnut, H: 24 ¼ in. W: 24 in. D: 14 in. From the Collection the Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library, Winterthur, DE.

Though certain aspects of the painted motifs are instantly legible, others remain just beyond the pale of signification. If the birds or trees on the “A.W.” chest clearly represent something beyond the painted surface, setting a tone for the scene,

illegible elements suggest inaccessible meanings inscribed throughout the composition. Situated in the town of Taunton, this approach invokes illegible signs of pre-colonial Wampanoag culture found in the landscape. An encounter with the chest approximates an encounter with an inscribed landscape. While the lines and images signify the presence of a text, the meanings of that text are inaccessible. The painted ornament carefully structures the encounter between object, viewer, and landscape. Given the meanings suggested by these chests within their original context, the connection between form and environment is essential to their meanings. Nevertheless, their histories were obscured in the nineteenth century as they were sold away from Taunton in the antiques market.

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Prior to Esther Stevens Fraser's article, these chests were intermittently attributed to coastal western Connecticut. Fraser reattributed them to Taunton based on a single inscribed example. That small chest was in the collection of Natalie Knowlton Blair of Tuxedo Park New York when on display in Boston in 1925. Diminutive in scale, Fraser proclaimed that, "delicacy as well as assurance of touch is observable in the decoration." Described as a milestone in the career of the maker, she argues, "for the first time the master permits his scrolls to ignore divisional boundaries and to ramble over the entire façade of the piece," while also achieving a careful unity to the overall motif. Describing a sophisticated touch in the application of an all-over decorative scheme to the front and side of the chest, her enthusiasm may have been informed in part by the less ornate painting on the back of the chest. On the upper of

the two wide, horizontal pine boards that make up the back of the chest, the maker had quickly applied a roughly rectangular patch of brown paint, acting as a ground for the white painted inscription of “TaunTon/R.C./1729.”⁸⁷

With this tantalizing tidbit, Fraser began to look at the area surrounding Taunton. She found a number of similar chests attributed to other regions which had “come to light in New England communities not far from Taunton, such as Attleboro, Middleboro, Bridgewater, Plymouth, and even as far away as Greenfield.” Taking a broad survey of the public records for Taunton and the surrounding towns, Fraser identified six individuals for whom the initials “R.C.” could have been painted; Robert Crosman, who died in Taunton in 1736, Ruth Cary, who died in Bristol in 1737, Robert Corbin, who died in Rehoboth in 1758, Richard Cornell, who died in Swansea in 1761, and Robert Crosman of Taunton, 1707-1799. Of the six, only the two Roberts Crosman would have had cause to sign a chest “TaunTon.” Of the two Roberts, the elder being the grandfather of the younger, Fraser identifies the younger Robert as the maker of these chests, given that several include dates after his grandfather’s 1736 death. Known as a drum-maker, Robert Crosman was the grandson of a carpenter and drum-maker, and son-in-law to a French-trained Huguenot ship carpenter.⁸⁸ Surviving American painted drums from the early eighteenth century indicate the skill required for the painting of armorial insignia and other motifs on instruments intended for

⁸⁷ Fraser, 137.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 137.

military use. Such a skill would have easily translated to the linear painting style of these chests.⁸⁹

Though they relate to other groups of painted New England pine furniture, the unique landscape of Taunton richly inflects the meanings of these chests. Located in the heart of the Plymouth Colony due west of the town of Plymouth, the history of the town of Taunton differs somewhat from the other towns of the Colony. Once the site of significant indigenous populations, by the time Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins passed through the land that would become Taunton in July 1621 to visit the sachem Massasoit to the west, their populations had been decimated. They noted land that was “for the most part being cleared,” leading to the assumption that “thousands of men have lived there, which dyed in a great plague not long since.”⁹⁰ When John Winthrop, Jr., son of the governor of Massachusetts, traveled to the area in April 1636, he referred to it by Tetiquet, the Native American name for the region surrounding the Taunton River. With deep inland water, he noted in a letter to his father that “a ship of 500 tunnes may come up about 10 or 12 miles in the narrow river.”⁹¹

Though better accessible by the deepwater ports of the Taunton River than much of the Plymouth Colony, that land that would become Taunton was unsettled by Europeans until 1637 when John Winthrop noted, “This year a plantation was begun at Tetequett, by a gentle woman, an ancient maid, one Miss Poole. She went late thither

⁸⁹ Additionally, it is possible that the signed “R.C.” on the back of the chest from the Natalie Knowlton Blair collection refers not to the cabinetmaker or joiner who made the case, but to the ornamental painter who decorated the surface.

⁹⁰ William Hanna, *A History of Taunton, Massachusetts* (Taunton; Old Colony Historical Society, 2007), 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 5.

and endured much hardships.” This refers to Elizabeth Pole, born 1588 to wealthy parents William and Mary Peryham Pole in Devonshire.⁹² Though the actual details and date of her settlement in the lands that would become Taunton remain unclear in the historical record, her story sets a pattern that defined the early years of Taunton; coming from England to Dorchester in the Massachusetts Bay before moving south to Taunton, she came for uncolonized land rather than religious and personal autonomy. In its early years, Taunton remained more culturally and theologically allied with the Puritans of Massachusetts and Connecticut than the early Separatists of Plymouth. Proximity eventually begat affinity, and in 1690 the people of Taunton pledged money to fund the effort to secure a distinct Plymouth Colony charter in the wake of the Glorious Revolution, rather than become incorporated into the Massachusetts Bay.⁹³

The uncolonized land divided by deep-water rivers that attracted Elizabeth Pole to the area was the source of both Taunton’s prosperity and eventual geographical diminution in the early years of the eighteenth century. In 1652, large deposits of bog iron were discovered in the town, leading to the establishment of a number of iron works. The first iron works in Taunton, established as a joint-stock company began production in 1656. A second forge was built by James Leonard in 1678, a third in 1696, and a fourth opened in East Taunton in 1724.⁹⁴ The river itself was a driving force in Taunton’s economic growth in the eighteenth century. Thomas Coram, who later in life used his fortune to found the Foundling Hospital in London and become a

⁹² Ibid. 7.

⁹³ Ibid. 63.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 24-28.

trustee of Georgia, established a shipbuilding concern on the Taunton River in 1697.⁹⁵ Making use of its both deepwater ports and easy access to lucrative natural resources, the people who settled in Taunton cultivated a level of industry early on that would have been alien to the scattered planters of Plymouth, Marshfield, Duxbury, and other towns started by early Separatist colonists. While Plymouth claimed a narrative of heroic foundation by the middle seventeenth century, Taunton's early history was situated in its geography and landscape. Instead of looking back to secure a place of importance, Taunton looked into the ground, and into the deep waters of the Taunton River to find its place among the colonies.

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Peering into the bogs and rivers that supported its prosperity, Taunton inadvertently began to look back. The catalyst was the discovery of a carved rock that would confuse scholars for centuries (*fig. 10*). In October, 1680, John Danforth of Dorchester, Massachusetts made a rough sketch of a rock in the Taunton River which he sent to The Royal Society in London. Depicting a set of curious carvings on the exposed face of the rock, Danforth's description opened a series of questions that remain unanswered today. Now in the collections of the British Museum, a contemporary letter describes its contents as, "the uppermost of ye Engravings of a Rock in ye river Assonet six miles below Tanton in New England. Taken out sometime in October 1680 by John Danforth." Adding a speculative local history

⁹⁵ Ibid. 68-70.

using the Native American name for the Taunton River, the author continues, “it is reported from the Tradition of old Indians, yt yr came a wooden house, (&men of another country in it) swimming up the river Asonet,” possibly referring to pre-Plymouth Colony visitors arriving by boat. Reaching the Taunton River, the “men of another country” “fought ye Indians & slew yr Saunchem. &c.” Linking the oral history with the drawing, the letter notes, “Some recon the figures here to be Hieroglyphicall.” He adds specific correspondences, giving specific meaning to certain carved elements; “the first figure representing a Ship, without masts, & meer Wrack cast upon the Shoales. The second representing an head of Land, possibly a cape with a peninsula.”⁹⁶ Though it seems that the description accompanying Danforth’s drawing was not made by him, its familiarity with his theories concerning the origin of the rock and a local oral history suggests a writer deeply familiar with his Taunton investigation.

Dubbed Dighton Rock in the nineteenth century, the rock sat off the shores of the Taunton River between the modern towns of Dighton and Berkley. The Dighton Rock was a source of confusion, speculation, and amazement for New Englanders concerned with the curiosities of the region throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. For John Danforth, the mystery of the rock offered an opportunity for historical reflection. Seeking to apply meaning to a set of carvings that resembled shapes and images but denied easy textual interpretation, John Danforth sought out an indigenous oral history beyond the scope of written history. Appealing to the authority of “the Tradition of old Indians,” Danforth’s investigation implicitly

⁹⁶ Edmund Burke Delabarre, *Dighton Rock: A Study of the Written Rocks of New England* (New York: Walter Neale, 1928), 30.

acknowledges that the depth of the Plymouth Colony's history lay beyond Nathaniel Morton's *New-England Memorial*. Confronted with the tangible material evidence of a narrative predating their own, Danforth constructs an account to suit the needs of his artifact.



Figure 10 *Seth Eastman at Dighton Rock, July 7, 1853. Taunton, MA, Horatio B. King. Daguerreotype, H: 3 ½ in. W: 4 ¾ in. From the Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA.*

Cotton Mather first referenced Dighton Rock in the 1690 introduction to his sermon, *The Wonderful Words of God Commemorated*. He notes, “Among the other Curiosities of *New-England*, One is that of a mighty *Rock* on a perpendicular side whereof by a River, what at High Tide covers part of it.” He describes about the rock, “there are very deeply Engraved, no man alive knows How or *When*, about half a score *Lines*, near Ten Foot Long filled with strange Characters.” Reproducing the carvings of the rock, he speculates that they “suggest as *odd Thoughts* about them that were here before us, as there are *odd shapes* in that Elaborate Monument.” Writing in the published sermon’s dedication to an English benefactor, Mather encourages, “that the English people here will study to have the Kindnesses of their Benefactors, not less Durably, but more Intelligibly Recorded with them.”⁹⁷

Mather did not dispute that the carvings on Dighton Rock represented language. It seemed clear to him that the carvings must have been made by Native Americans, and they must have offered a dedication or prayer. His complaint is not with their linguistic qualities, but with their legibility. Written with the best of intentions, the language in which the carvings had been made was no longer understood. The meanings and sentiments of the carvings had been lost with the language. This becomes a rhetorical tool in Mather’s hands, and functions as a warning about the longevity of the written word. The carvers were wise to carve in stone, giving the shape on their letters a long life, but Mather is more concerned with the lack of readers; confronted by a text with no meaning, his worry becomes

⁹⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Wonderful Works of God Commemorated* (Boston: Printed by S. Green, 1690), pages unnumbered. Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>. (accessed January 25, 2012).

reflexive. Just as the carvings can no longer be understood, he clearly fears that his own texts will someday meet the same fate.

In December 1730, Harvard professor Isaac Greenwood took a rigorously scientific approach to describe and decipher Dighton Rock in a series of letters sent to the Royal Society in London. Using a lettered notation system, he records that the carved surface of the rock is “in length from B to D 11 ½ feet and in Depth from C to E 4 ½ feet.” It was suitable for carving, as it “seems to have been left by Nature very smooth & is certainly in its substance very uniform, compact & durable.” He reports difficulty in deciphering the carvings, noting, “In determining the characters of Figures I found some difficulty for the Indentures are not at present very considerable nor I think equally deep.” To accommodate for the erosion of the rock surface in the running water, he worked “carefully to trace out and Chalk all such places and those only which I believed were real Indentures.” Rather than err on the side of caution and ignore areas that showed discoloration and disfigurement, he “thought it more advisable to give such parts of these Characters as were real, that thereby the whole might be obtain’d.” About the carvings themselves, he reports that, “the bounds being scarcely perceivable in some,” they were difficult to outline.⁹⁸ In outlining the physical attributes of the rock, Greenwood deliberately articulated a rational, regular approach. Having described the rock, he attempted to decipher its purpose. About its meaning, he reports that “two opinions prevail most.” The first stated that, “these figures are the undesigning and artless Impressions of some of the Natives out of mere curiosity or for some particular use,” and stemmed from the reports of John Danforth

⁹⁸ David I. Bushnell, Jr., “An Early Account of Dighton Rock,” *American Anthropologist* 10 (New Series 1908), 251-252. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 25, 2012).

and Cotton Mather. The second, “that they are a memorial in proper Sculpture of some remarkable Transactions or accident,” appealed to more modern theories about the dispersal of lost nations of the classical world.⁹⁹

Greenwood was skeptical of the first theory for reasons tinged with racist dismissiveness. He believed the carvings on the rock to be a conscious work of sculpture, and also believed that, “the Natives of this country were altogether ignorant of Sculpture and thense of Iron.” Countering arguments that they could have made the carvings with stone tools, he claims, “none that ever I have seen are Capable (in much better hands than theirs) of forming so accurate an Inscription.” If the Native Americans were to carve symbols on stones, Greenwood believed “their Curiosity would have led them to the Representation of Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Trees &c which we have since found to be their prevailing Genius.” They would not have carved “figures quite different from the Objects of their Senses.” Finally, such carvings would have required hours of careful work, and “they were a Nation too idle & irresolute for a work of so much industry & apparent Design.”¹⁰⁰ Cotton Mather or John Danforth would not have written such derisive accounts of the local Native American people, with memories of the bloody violence of King Phillips War fresh in their minds. Though Mather worried that the Wampanoag people of New England lacked a preserved written language, he quickly concluded that they must have made the carvings with a deliberate language in mind. Buffeted by expansion and the displacement of indigenous communities, Greenwood felt comfortable dismissing and

⁹⁹ Ibid. 252.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 252-253.

diminishing the labors of the Native Americans who occupied the region before colonization.

As for the second theory, Greenwood notes “the likenesses of several, from the Parallelism & Conformity of the Stroakes one with another in each” carried a remarkable similarity to, “the equal Irregularity of some of the Oriental Characters.” Unwilling to espouse such a theory directly, Greenwood deferred to “the extraordinary Skill & Ingenuity of Mr. La Croze in the Alphabet both antient & modern in the Oriental Tongues.”¹⁰¹ That challenge would be met later in the century, when Stephen Sewall, professor of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic at Harvard began a close correspondence with Parisian philosopher Antoine Court de Gebelin, sending drawings of the carvings to France. Interpreting the carvings as pictograms, Gebelin deciphered a story of a Carthaginian ship that landed in ancient Taunton, and returned to the Phoenician coast after consulting with an oracle. Gebelin claimed, “this is a Phoenician monument and doubtless a Carthaginian one divided into three scenes, one past, one present, one future.”¹⁰²

Such arguments proved convincing to Ezra Stiles, a prominent Newport minister and President of Yale College who outlined the history of North American colonization in a 1783 sermon. Acknowledging theories about Siberian nomads and Viking explorers, he reminded his listeners to remember the “still greater antiquity” of the “Phoenicians, who charge the Dighton rock and other rocks in Narragansett-bay

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 253.

¹⁰² Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *James Bowdoin and the Patriot Philosophers* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2004), 196-197.

with *Punic* inscriptions, remaining to this day.” For Stiles, the carvings were evidence, “that the ancient Carthaginians once visited these distance regions.”¹⁰³

With each passing generation, Dighton Rock took on a new set of meanings. For John Danforth and Cotton Mather, writing in the closing years of the seventeenth century, the Rock was a standing monument left by an indigenous culture. Fresh from years of bloody conflicts between the Native peoples of the region and English colonizers, both men held a certain respect for the complexity of the cultures that preceded them in New England. By 1783, with rising adulation of Greek and Roman civilization in the new republic, it seemed only logical that Dighton Rock should become evidence of classical cultures in North America. Predating even the Plymouth Colony, such a legacy served to ground the laws of the new nation on the precedent of classical antiquity.

Though these authors came to very different conclusions, they share a mode of historical thinking. Looking at an undecipherable inscription, they see evidence of a local history beyond the scope of published historical text. The incised line, reflecting shifting meanings in its illegibility, becomes the perfect vehicle for expressing the history of the Taunton landscape. As the town changed, evolving from a small outpost to an active center of production, the mutable meaning of Dighton Rock could change with it.

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¹⁰³ Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor* (New Haven: Printed by Thomas and Samuel Green, 1783), 12-13. Archive of Americana, America’s Historical Imprints. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>. (accessed January 26, 2012).

Articulated in different media, the carvings on Dighton Rock and the painted ornament on the surface of the chests attributed to Robert Crosman's shop presented similar interpretive challenges to the people of Taunton. Both objects—rock and chest—represent familiar forms rendered extraordinary through surface inscription. Carved by an unknown hand, the surface of Dighton Rock became a reflective, contemplative site for New England scholars to investigate the pre-colonial history of the region. Read as illegible signifiers, interpreters were free to identify what might have been signified. Early accounts identified the carvings as Native American script, while later accounts determined them to be the remnants of a Phoenician expedition. It is telling that in 1730, when Isaac Greenwood presented both explanations in his critical account of the Rock, Crosman had just begun to ornament his chests with linear ornament that alternated with great facility between naturalistic representation and abstract, linguistic signifiers.

Just as Dighton Rock asked its colonial viewers to consider the fungibility of inscribed signs, the motifs used on the "A.W" chest force a viewer to consider the space between legible and illegible alphabets. If certain elements, like the painted birds and trees, are instantly legible, others, like the inverted triangle and waving lines, suggest forms but do not carry clear referents. As a decorative technique, the staining and painting on this chest suggests many things. With light images on a dark ground, it approaches the formal logic of japanned furniture. With polychrome painting on a pine base, it uses materials common in vernacular New England furniture. It is almost a japanned chest, but not quite. It is almost like the polychrome painted furniture of seventeenth-century New England, but not quite. Instead it reuses bits of form and

surface from disparate sources to create something new. To the period eye, it might have suggested all of these sources while denying easy categorization.

Each material and iconographic source for the Taunton chests added a new layer of signification. By the end of the seventeenth century, several writers in England attributed verbal qualities to a japanned surface. In their 1688 *Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing*, John Stalker and George Parker provide clear indications as to the narrative qualities attributed to painted surfaces in the era of the Taunton chest and Dighton Rock. Arguing that a painted japanned surface can be, “Majestick” and “delightful and ornamental beyond expression,” they attribute textual qualities to the larger composition of the japanned surface. About the design, they claim it contains “eratta,” “passages,” and “conclusions.” The japanner is identified as an “author,” and his brush a “pen.”¹⁰⁴ Describing the art of the japanning, in which layers of red, black, white, red, blue, and green pigments were combined to emulate Asian lacquered wares, Stalker and Parker claim a linguistic place for their art. They worked in an alphabet of decorative symbols, and their text was the ornamented surface of a piece of furniture.

Though the Taunton chests bear a resemblance to refined japanned wares, they also show notable differences. While japanned chests use a complicated language of human figures, landscapes, structures, a small bestiary of animals, and a varied use of flora, Crosman relies on a more limited vocabulary of linear birds, stylized tulips, and abstract geometric forms, coupled with the Roman alphabet and Arabic numerals.

¹⁰⁴ as analyzed in Ethan Lasser, “Reading Japanned Furniture,” *American Furniture* (2007), 171-172.

Though the painted surfaces of these chests emulate the surface of a japanned chest, they do so with a distinctly negotiated vocabulary.

In 1730, Dighton Rock was nebulously defined as either the linguistic carvings of a lost Native American tribe, or the pictogrammatical language of an Asian sailing ship that landed in Taunton long before English colonization. It was either evidence of a deep local history, or a record of Asian cultures planting a foothold in North America. Or, it was a reflection of Taunton itself. Receiving different interpretations as Taunton grew from a small agricultural outpost to bustling inland port for shipbuilding and iron forging, the town at once looked in, and looked out. Caught between a myopic past and geographically scattered future, the Rock became a reflection of a town in conflict.

Such conflict and ambiguity is internalized in the painted surface of the Crosman chests. Motivated to look beyond the town limits by a growing market culture that valued luxury goods with exotic provenances, the painter of these chests interpreted high-style japanning with a vernacular painterly language. Writing in 1730, Isaac Greenwood believed that carvings by Native Americans would reflect, “the Objects of their senses.” Looking out at the local landscape, “their Curiosity would have lead them to the Representation of Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Trees &c.” In emulating the japanned surfaces of formal furniture for his local production, Robert Crosman appealed to the objects of his senses. Looking out on the local landscape, he represented birds, trees, leaves, berries, and scattered branches dripping colorful leaves across a painted surface. Using a visual language attributed in his day to the illiterate Native American carvers of Taunton’s past, his chests function as miniature Dighton Rocks scattered across the parlors of Taunton and its surrounding towns.

Mediating a space between a phenomenal visual language of birds, trees, beasts, and fishes with an imported painters' pen, he created something that encouraged asymmetrical legibility and access to the multivalent meanings of his chests. For an outsider looking in, the chests would have resembled nothing more than a rural attempt at urbane japanning, unevenly executed and failing to fool the eye of a stylish contemporary. For a local viewer, the chest might have achieved something different. Evoking the illegible surface of Dighton Rock, it suggested a lineage that was at once exotic, and deeply haptic. Showing birds and trees, the "the objects of their senses," with an Asian vocabulary, the chests hint at a local narrative that was very much under dispute.

In this way, the chests functioned as simulated historical objects, modern *lieu de memoire* that presented a false antiquity. Speaking in a formal language informed by the local landscape, they invoke the carved surface of Dighton Rock that stood as evidence of Taunton's history before the Plymouth Colony. In this way, they serve to claim a complicated lineage and history beyond the scope of European colonization. Looking back before 1620, they respond to the sophistication of local cultures lost to war, disease, and conflict. Employing a textual vocabulary from a European craft, the ambiguous surfaces of these chests provoke an encounter. Selective legibility allows these chests to suggest historical writing but reject easy historical interpretation. Rather than evoke memories of specific historic events, they represent an abstracted historical presence. Painted in Taunton, beyond the historical center of the Plymouth Colony with its heroic narrative of founding, these chests make claims for a pre-historic lineage of place.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

In 1838, the yearly published *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* reprinted a poem written by William Bradford. Titled “Of Boston in New England,” Bradford’s poem warns about the dangers of a city growing too fast. Though undated, the poem was written by 1657 when Bradford willed, “a little booke with a blacke covere wherein there is a word to Plymouth a word to Boston and a word to New England with sundry usefull verses” to Thomas Prence, Thomas Willett, and Thomas Southworth.¹⁰⁵ Written when the Plymouth Colony was only 27 years old, Bradford already feared the influence of worldly aspirations in New England.

He opens, “O Boston, though thou now art grown/ To be a great and wealthy town,/ Yet I have seen thee a void place,/ Shrubs and bushes covering thy face.” Like Plymouth at its founding, the earliest settlement of Boston was a humble place of functional buildings. Though it would grow in leaps and bounds, Bradford wants the wealthy colonists of Boston to remember their recent past. A rough settlement carved out of an uncolonized wilderness, Boston at its founding represented an antidote to the

¹⁰⁵ George Ernest Bowman, “Governor William Bradford’s Will and Inventory,” *The Mayflower Descendant* 2 (1900), 228-229. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 29, 2012).

corrupt luxury of England. It was a place where, “We lodged freely where we would,/ All things were free and nothing sold.”¹⁰⁶

By the time Bradford wrote his poem, Boston had grown beyond its founding roots, and had surpassed Plymouth as the center of New England. With a young college, printing press, and rapidly growing population, the town was poised to expand with commerce and culture. Where others saw the laudable signs of progress and affluence, Bradford warns against the hazards of growth, exhorting that though “Thou now hast growne in wealth and store,/ Doe not forger that thou wast poore,/ And list not up thyselpe in price,/From truth and justice turne not aside.” Appealing to the virtues of the town’s founders, Bradford advises the town to “Remember thou a Cotton had,/ Which made the hearts of many glad.” “A Winthrop once in thee was knowne,” he recalls, “Who unto thee was as a crowne.” Fearing that the memories of these men were fading, his closing stanza encourages the city to remember that “The trade is all in your own hand,/ Take heed ye doe not wrong the land.”¹⁰⁷

Writing at the middle of the seventeenth century, Bradford predicted the end of his era, and feared for the future of New England. Established by religious dissidents seeking distance and freedom from the Church of England, both Boston and Plymouth claimed virtue and piety at their founding. With time, the towns diverged. As Boston became a powerful port town looking out to the greater Atlantic world, Plymouth began to look back. With a prescient gaze, Bradford’s elegiac tone predicts a larger

¹⁰⁶ William Bradford, “A Word To Boston,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* vol. III, Series 3 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1838), 27. <http://books.google.com>. (accessed January 29, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 27-28.

attitude towards the past that would pervade the material practices of the former Plymouth Colony in the eighteenth century. Ceasing to exist as a political entity in 1692, the legacy of the Plymouth Colony was continually reenacted by a community that valued history above all else. With carefully choreographed performances, the members of the Old Colony Club stimulated a local historical memory that placed Plymouth at the center of a regional narrative. William Bradford's turned chair was not significant to them as an aesthetic object. Rather, it was an evocative place that cultivated a relational link between the past and present. Memory was performed, using things as carriers of a narrative lost in official texts.

For the Winslow family in Marshfield, the past was continually present through the maintenance of historical practice. Starting in 1651, the Winslow family commissioned portraits of members that survived as a fluid unit. New and old faces were added as the family changed, but their place on the walls stayed the same. Memory—of family, ancestors, time and place—was embedded within an evolving collection of portraits on the walls of Careswell, the family home. Memory was maintained by the continual practice throughout the eighteenth century. Though public performances presented a clearly visible surrogation of the past within the ritual of the present, the domestic site of memory was quietly maintained.

In Taunton, which followed a different historical trajectory, memory was stored in the very landscape of the town. Looking back to an unknown era through carvings on rocks, the town explored a local past that predated the Plymouth Colony. With no legible record, this history existed in the realms of speculation, oration, and a physical engagement with artifacts. The chests painted in the town invoked signs of

that past. With selectively legible surfaces, they force an evocative encounter with objects to suggest an antiquity just out of reach.

In the Plymouth Colony, the past was always already historic. By 1657, when Boston was a small provincial port only twenty seven years old, William Bradford feared that all memory of its founding might be lost. With the rise of prosperity and luxury that came with growing trade, Bradford's fears would be realized. The same was not true in Plymouth. Looking back from the beginning, the people of Plymouth cultivated a complex material language to address their past. Giving new meaning to old things, and old meanings to new things, the material landscape of the former Plymouth Colony was rich with memorial meaning. When Pilgrim Hall opened its doors in 1824, it was an institution thoroughly of its day. Yet it also appealed to the long established historical practices of the region in its simulation, performance, and maintenance of historical memory.

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