



THE FORGOTTEN SOUTHERNER: MIDDLE-CLASS
ASSOCIATIONALISM IN ANTEBELLUM NORFOLK, VIRGINIA

By

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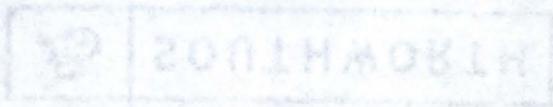
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The middle class of the antebellum South has been largely neglected in the scholarly literature. Historians have argued that a middle class only existed in the antebellum period in large, urban environments such as those in the North with manufacturing and diverse populations. A middle class does not emerge in the South, it has been theorized, until the postwar New South era when merchants, businessmen, and professionals wrested political, economic, and social power away from the planter elites. This study demonstrates that a middle class comprised of merchants, proprietors, businessmen, and professionals existed in the antebellum South by examining associationalism in the decades leading to the Civil War in the southern port city of Norfolk, Virginia.

A key element in the process of class formation and identity, the middle class in benevolent, improvement, and fraternal associations cultivated and instilled shared values of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety, promoted these beliefs in others throughout the community, socialized prospective members, engendered a sense of community in a changing world, and made connections with others of similar beliefs and behaviors around the country. An examination of a sample of 400 male association members from 1845 to 1854 illustrates that organizational rosters chiefly were composed of a native, married, middle-aged (in their thirties and forties) middle class of merchants, proprietors, and professionals with families, who owned slaves, and who possessed modest—but not extreme—wealth. Many joined more than one association, and multiple office-holding was prevalent. Organization leaders also used these institutions to prepare them for leadership roles in local public offices.

This research demonstrates that a middle class emerged in the antebellum South despite its small cities, homogeneous population, commercial economic foundation, and the presence of slavery. Although a nineteenth-century southern middle class would reach its apex during the New South years, their origins are seen in the antebellum period. The findings of this investigation ultimately suggest that while the North and South had their differences, perhaps they shared more culturally than has previously been theorized.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

When examining the nineteenth-century antebellum South historians most often paint a picture of a society divided into sharp dichotomies. The region was not only bisected along racial lines, but also separated in terms of class whereby the white community included only the wealthy planter elites and a mass of poverty-stricken whites.¹ There is little mention by scholars examining the South of a “middle class” of urban merchants, professionals, and skilled artisans in the years leading up to the Civil War. If the concept of a southern middle class is discussed by historians at all it is in the context of a post-Civil War New South era when they seized political, economic, and social hegemony from the planter elites.

For their part, scholars who specialize in examining the emergence, behaviors, and belief systems of a nineteenth-century middle class neglect the South as well, preferring instead to focus on the northeastern cities of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, and increasingly the Midwest and West. These cities possessed the rapid urbanization, industrialization, and dramatic increases in population, especially as a result

¹ See for example David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers, Southern City and Region, 1607–1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), and Larsen, *The Urban South: A History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990).

of foreign immigration, viewed by historians as being crucial to the development of a middle class.

This scholarly neglect has created a need to explore the presence of a southern middle class that emerged during the antebellum years and subsequently continued into the postwar New South period. A middle class did exist in the South despite the lack of large and diverse urban environments, the presence of a predominantly commercial rather than industrial economic base, and the existence of slavery, a cultural and economic system antithetical to the reform minded, free-market North. The antebellum middle class of the South—defined here as a middle socio-economic layer of merchant/proprietors, professionals, and skilled artisans—shared an economic niche situated between the aristocratic planter elites and poor whites. Beyond their economic status, they believed in thrift, industry, sobriety, and piety, shared similar consumer habits, and participated in a culture of associationalism that provided a means for them to rationalize their environment, promote their values, socialize prospective members, engender a sense of community in a changing world, and connect them with like-minded persons in other areas of the country. The present study will focus on the middle class of the antebellum South—the “forgotten southerners”—by examining associationalism in the commercial port city of Norfolk, Virginia, from 1840 to the eve of the Civil War.

Defining the existence of a middle class, and determining when it emerged, has been a part of the historical scholarship for decades. Consensus historians such as Louis Hartz argued that the United States was a classless society, insisting that the entire

country comprised a middle class without an aristocracy or destitute laboring class.² In contrast, historians coming out of the New Social History of the 1960s argued that economic differences existed in the society that manifested themselves not only in terms of wealth, but also socially and politically, thus creating different classes. This was especially true within the Marxist framework in which the two classes of elite owners and laboring working class existed in conflict with one another along a divide relative to the means of production. According to Marxist theory a middle class could not exist as a distinct permanent class, but only as a temporary condition moving toward one of the two poles.³

Extending a conception of class beyond economic parameters, Anthony Giddens developed his model of structuration that allows for multiple class levels in a given society to be structured along indices of means of production, authority, and patterns of consumption. By extension members of a class not only are connected to each other (and related to others) in economic terms, but also through beliefs, experiences, and patterns of

² Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1955), 50–64. See also C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 3–12, 63–76.

³ See Dale L. Johnson, “Class Relations and the Middle Classes,” in *Class and Social Development: A New Theory of the Middle Class*, ed. Dale L. Johnson (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1982), 87–107.

relations.⁴ Giddens's theoretical work allows not only for the existence of multiple classes but, perhaps more importantly for our purposes, expands the potentialities for uniting these classes beyond simply economic relations into the more subtle realm of social relations and value systems.

According to prevailing theoretical models, a middle class of merchants, proprietors, manufacturers, white-collar businessmen, and professional emerged during the antebellum period because of a confluence of rapid industrialization and urbanization in northeastern cities like New York and Philadelphia that separated those who had manual occupations from those who worked in non-manual positions. Broad patterns of migration from the countryside and foreign immigration intensified this dichotomy of occupation. This manifested itself into a growing economic divergence in the workforce as salaried managers increasingly withdrew from production to supervise the work of wage earners or to distribute the goods made by others. Corresponding to this development was a physical separation in manual and non-manual work environments arising from the specialization of duties. Moreover, the common work experiences and the personal connections that could have mediated economic and perceived social differences were being severed. Increasingly these merchants, professionals, clerks, and

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 100–12, 177–97. For similar discussion see Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8–11; and Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 347, n. 68.

small business proprietors did not fit into either the nascent working or traditional elite classes.⁵

Occupying an economic niche between the patrician aristocracy and the laboring poor and believing in certain values, the members of the middle class sought to define themselves apart from those above and below. They spurned the idle rich who embodied extravagance, dissipation, and a belief in deference to their authority as well as the poor who were viewed as intemperate, idle, and self-indulgent. The middle class created distinguishable social networks in which their families lived in the same neighborhoods, went to the same churches, sent their children to the same schools, and shared similar patterns of consumption (e.g., home furnishings, clothes, entertainment). By adhering to certain ideals and values, the middle class could maintain they were separating themselves from those above and especially below because of morality and (proper) behaviors rather than economic status. This allowed them to deny the existence of a formal economic class system, although many of those denied admission happened to be from the ranks of the poor and nouveau riche.⁶

Scholars such as Stuart Blumin try to distinguish between a new upper class of businessmen and the emerging middling class as the latter group could not be lumped in with the laboring poor or the mercantile elite because they traveled in contrasting social

⁵ See Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 13, 68–71, 83–91, 107–21, 249, 295. Similar themes relating to the nature of changes in the workplace are included in Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York: 1813–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) and John S. Gilkeson, Jr., *Middle-Class Providence, 1820–1940* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 23–32.

⁶ Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 129–63; Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 12–13, 29–32; Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), 195.

and economic orbits. He is unsuccessful in separating these two classes, however, as they were not divided socially and economically, but simply operated at different levels of the same system. Even he admits that the “economic world they [members of the middle class] inhabited was much closer to the elite’s in function, style, and urban space” than to the working class. In short, these mercantile elites are simply the highest tier of the emerging middle class. Sharing similar occupations (though differing levels), beliefs, and a desire to instill their values into the society at large, both groups differentiated themselves from the patrician aristocracy and laboring poor. Although he contends that association membership was separate, the mercantile elite occupied positions of leadership in many organizations that included middle-class persons as rank and file members. He even writes that it is difficult to draw a line between the mercantile elite and middle class in association membership. Blumin writes that the mercantile elites were not the middle class, but he does admit that in “their values, their behavior, and perhaps too in their network of associations, they may have confused somewhat the otherwise clear boundary between the city’s upper and middle classes.” The real dividing line, it appears, was between the manual and non-manual occupations that united the groups and separated them from the rich and working class.⁷

Integral to the formation and development of a middle-class identity were the reform, benevolent, and fraternal organizations proliferating during the antebellum period. Voluntary associations served as mechanisms for accepting and socializing new middle-class members and as such defined who was a member of the middle class. They served as crucibles for instilling shared beliefs and cultivating a middle-class

⁷ Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 137, 194–6, 204–40, 255.

consciousness.⁸ Acting as a primary gateway for entry into the middle class, membership requirements and associational affiliation limited the numbers of working class and poor among their ranks. In Providence, Rhode Island, associations were “instrumental in the coalescence and propagation of a distinctive middle-class culture in the second third of the nineteenth century” and “the agencies by which middle-class Americans disseminated their values and defended their class interests whenever those appeared to be threatened by the special interests . . . at the social margins.”⁹ In Poughkeepsie, New York, voluntary associations divided themselves along class lines as the city’s upper-middle classes established societies like the Young Men’s Christian Association, benevolent associations, and literary and special clubs devoted to such activities as debating, horticulture, and driving. Skilled artisans and “merchants of modest prosperity” joined volunteer fire and militia companies as well as establishing their own social clubs.¹⁰

⁸ Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 192–229; Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 3–10, 353; Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825–1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 190–3; Timothy R. Mahoney, *Provincial Lives: Middle-class Experience in the Antebellum Middle West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3–5, 62–113.

⁹ Gilkeson, Jr., *Middle-Class Providence*, 53–83.

¹⁰ Voluntary associations, however, did not always confine themselves to middle-class membership. In Poughkeepsie both the middle and working classes joined the fraternal orders such as the Masons and Odd Fellows. Still, specific chapter lodges within the city were divided by class and ethnic groups. Clive Griffen and Sally Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers: The Ordering of Opportunity in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Poughkeepsie* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), 40. In Buffalo, political parties and temperance reform organizations included members from across class, ethnic, and gender lines. Mediating the differences between these disparate groups associations helped to create a stable social order; David A. Gerber, *The Making of an American Pluralism: Buffalo, New York, 1825–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 102–9.

As a means of rationalizing their rapidly changing world, members of the middle class used voluntary associations such as temperance, benevolent, and Bible and tract societies to define the social and moral character of the society by instilling their values and behaviors, especially in the lower classes, through moral suasion, legislation, and institutional reform. The bourgeoisie began to shape public opinion on various issues (a task previously belonging to the upper-class aristocracy), mediate the social and cultural growth of the community, and develop institutions in the urban environment to serve these activities (e.g., libraries, museums, and lyceums). Associations also provided social order to the diverse and mobile populations of the expanding cities of the East and the nascent cities of the West and Midwest. For those who did not accept the emerging community value system, middle-class local governments expanded public institutions such as asylums and jails.¹¹

¹¹ Doyle, *Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 12–14, 156–7, 190–5; Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 9–10, 83–95; Peter R. Decker, *Fortunes and Failures: White-Collar Mobility in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), viii, 9, 24, 30–34, 61, 107–8; Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 3–5. Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), i, viii, 1–15, 65–68, 77–94, 108–19, 221–5, 236–49. David J. Rothman argues that during the Jacksonian period changes in the urban environment triggered a belief that the informal, local colonial mechanisms for maintaining “social control” were obsolete. Deviant behavior such as criminality, lunacy, and pauperism came to be seen not as a permanent manifestation of God’s will, but rather as a product of the environment in that affected individuals could not adapt to the changing times. Institutions such as asylums, penitentiaries, orphanages, and redesigned almshouses emerged as solutions. To elevate the deviant, he was placed in spartan, functional building separated from family and the corruption of the community. These institutions shared many similarities in physical structure and program design, stressing a rehabilitation program consisting of a strict daily routine, rigid rules and regulations, respect for authority, and steady discipline that would transform inmates’ character. Rothman explains that these institutions not only existed to reform the “inmates,” but to serve as a model to for a well-ordered republican society; *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order in the New Republic*, rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1990), 3–14, 30–35, 56–84, 103–8, 133–42, 180–4, 206–24.

Associations also rendered a mechanism for the class of merchants, professionals, and skilled artisans to become municipal officials and community leaders. Acting as leaders in associations they learned organizational principles, public speaking, parliamentary procedures, and conflict resolution methods. Reflecting their commitment to the community, and their own concomitant prosperity, the members of the middle class dominated the ranks of urban boosters. They pushed for internal improvements and expanded public services, and often led the way in elevating the poor, which helped laborers to become better persons, better workers, and better citizens. Boosterism from middle-class leaders not only spurred development of the town, but also mediated internal conflict by creating a sense of community among the divergent populations as they came to believe their city was an important place.¹²

For the northern middle class, these associations provided a way for them to rationalize their own existence in the rapidly changing urban environment and achieve a sense of identity and place in the antebellum city. Associationalism engendered a nurturing atmosphere in the increasingly forbidding public sphere in which to make friends, become part of a community of like-minded individuals within the anonymous city, and to participate in socially meaningful work. The positive environment of organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association was especially beneficial, it was believed, to the thousands of young men migrating to the city who might be tempted

¹² See Doyle, *Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 64, 190–2, 225–6, 269; Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 83–87.

with the drinking, gambling, and prostitution of the streets.¹³ Indeed, organizations such as the fire and militia companies existed not only to protect persons and property, but also to serve a social purpose in providing comradeship, peer approval, and even an environment for cultivating business contacts and perhaps even matrimonial connections. Being in an association reflected a strength of character that would further help a person climb the socio-economic ladder. Also, organizations such as the Freemasons and Odd Fellows and temperance, Bible, and tract societies were affiliated with larger state and national organizations that provided one with a connection beyond the town's borders. Even for those who were not members, these national associations, like boosterism,

¹³ The concerns about the young men of the city were elevated because of the increasingly crowded urban environment that eliminated the traditional face-to-face community. The result was that the middle class suffered a restlessness that came with no fixed identity in the social system. Their insecurity was symbolized in the archetypal confidence men and painted women who aspired to a higher social status, but who only simulated appropriate behaviors rather than truly adopt middle-class values and ideology. In seeking to define themselves and determine how to interact with others in the treacherous city, an ideology of perfectly sincere behavior was delineated during the 1830s through etiquette manuals, advice books, and fashion magazines published in northeastern cities. These periodicals outlined a wide range of proper behaviors and specific rules for genteel conduct and espoused the importance of a sincere display of feeling that countered the hypocrisy of the confidence men and painted women. Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, xiv–xvii, 192–7. Similarly John F. Kasson argues that during this time a Horatio Alger spirit inspired the publication of materials to aid individuals in improving their lives materially and socially. A host of magazines and etiquette manuals standardized and dispensed advice on grooming practices, behavior, and fashionable consumer goods. Aimed at a predominantly middle-class audience periodicals distilled methods for interacting with others in the society, for managing the urban environment, and for behaving in a more cosmopolitan, rather than provincial, manner. Similar to Haltunnen, these rules of proper behavior provided a sense of identity in an urban environment that was increasingly anonymous and delineated the social hierarchy; Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 5–7, 37–55, 68–71, 100–104, 115, 166–182.

instilled a sense of community identity and a sense that their city was an important place.¹⁴

For a time during the antebellum era northern associationalism was the “cradle” of the middle class, as Mary P. Ryan characterizes it. As the Erie Canal transformed Utica, New York, from a village to a small industrial city by mid-century, industrial capitalism divided the society into public and private spheres along gender roles whereby husbands ventured into the public sphere to earn a living, while their wives remained in the home to raise the family and teach values to their children. The reforming impulses arising from the Second Great Awakening pushed the middle class to form voluntary associations during the 1830s and 1840s, providing a gathering place in the expanding public domain. Ryan argues that associationalism was the first mechanism incorporated by the middling sorts to rationalize the changes occurring around them in the urban environment. Beyond simply being a unifying force for the nascent middle class, associationalism provided the very fabric of middle-class culture as it inculcated a new set of values including sobriety, sexual restraint, and industry that would enable the children to move into the ranks of shopkeepers and white-collar occupations. As the community became more complex, however, many came to believe that associations were not enough to overcome the detrimental effects of the burgeoning society. They retreated back to the safety of the home to instill and propagate the values developed in association. As Ryan explains, “the association itself helped to usher the ultimate

¹⁴ Decker, *Fortunes and Failures*, 107–12; Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 61–64; Stuart M. Blumin, *The Urban Threshold: Growth and Change in a Nineteenth-Century American Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 45–46; Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 62–112; Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 108–19.

triumph of the privatized home," as the domestic sphere would emerge as the ultimate caretaker of these new middle-class values.¹⁵

Voluntary associationalism played a crucial role in the development of an urban public sphere as members were the dominant organizers and participants in public events such as festivals, parades, anniversary celebrations, and a host of fairs. Public celebrations such as parades, groundbreaking ceremonies, festivals, and funeral processions for nationally-known politicians engendered a larger civic consciousness and cohesion amongst the townspeople as they shared a common experience. This meant, however, that taking part in this public consciousness often was confined to the mostly white male association members rather than women, African Americans, and the working class. Restrictions notwithstanding, participation in the public associations helped bind a complex community comprised of competing groups into a larger public domain. This public identity connected disparate groups in the community and served as a foundation for future civic, economic, and political undertakings.¹⁶

¹⁵ Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), xi–xii, 5, 14–15, 231–40. See also Timothy R. Mahoney's study of the antebellum Middle West in which he stresses the role of the private sphere in middle-class formation. Only in marriage could the gentleman and genteel woman truly enter the middle class because it was only as a couple that they possessed the proper values and behaviors required for gentility. Marriage between different middle class genteel families propagated and solidified their class and marriage into a genteel family was a means for an upwardly mobile young man to enter the middle-class social order. Mahoney also delineates separate gender roles whereby the domestic hearth and family provided the gentleman husband the dominant reason to work and a refuge away from the dangerous, immoral public sphere he encountered each day. As the holder of the piety and virtue, the genteel woman was responsible for instilling proper values in her husband and children; Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 114–5, 120–9, 134–9, 155, 245–7.

¹⁶ Political associations and clubs also enabled more citizens who might be denied the right to vote for reasons of birthplace, property restrictions, race, or gender to exercise what Ryan termed their political citizenship in public spaces via political parades, rallies,

As can be seen, the scholarship relating to middle-class formation and corresponding associationalism has been confined to cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and West. Consequently, this research on a professional and business class does not include southern cities. Representative of this perspective is Sven Beckert's examination of the New York bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century—defined as elite merchants and manufacturers—where he implicitly argues that the South could not have developed an elite merchant class. The bourgeoisie merchants and businessmen of the antebellum period espoused beliefs in republicanism, progress, and, most of all, a social and economic mobility based upon a free-labor meritocracy. They also shared many characteristics including consumption patterns, common neighborhoods, and voluntary associations that bound them together. For Beckert these characteristics, beliefs, and behaviors were antithetical to the slaveholding, aristocratic, static (if not backward), plantation South.¹⁷

and ward meetings; Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 15–22, 60, 95–96, 129. In his examination of Kingston's transformation from rural to urban environment Stuart Blumin also illustrates how associations play an integral role in the public life of the city through their organization and participation in public events. He points out that the public calendar was highlighted by musical concerts as well as intellectual entertainment and enrichment with lectures and debates at the lyceum and literary associations. Blumin, *The Urban Threshold*, 31–33, 45, 146, 150–65, 188–9.

¹⁷ During the antebellum period, Beckert's bourgeoisie resembles the upper end of the middle-class spectrum of mostly merchants, businessmen, professionals and industrialists. In post-Civil War era, the elimination of slavery as a basis of southern economic and political power accelerated a process whereby these groups, especially industrialists, whose wealth enabled them to become the elite upper class of society possessing economic, social, and political hegemony; Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 2–7, 21–47, 56–75, 90–91, 158–9.

Scholars examining the middle class have ignored the South because the region possessed fewer and smaller cities, the population was not as diverse, industry was minimal, and the presence of slavery embodied a belief system contrary to reform—all necessary characteristics in sustaining a viable middle class. These issues have received only partial attention from historians focusing on southern history who either have argued that a middle class did not emerge until after the Civil War, or have ignored the idea of a middle class in the region altogether. Laying the foundation for the former position was C. Vann Woodward's view of discontinuity whereby a profound change in the South occurred following the Civil War in outlook, institutions, and leadership. During the postwar year the elite landholders relinquished their power and control to an emerging middle class of merchants and manufacturers.¹⁸

Taking a cue from Woodward, Lawrence H. Larsen argues that during the New South period those who lived in cities were developing a sense of being urban as opposed to their counterparts who remained in the country. The former articulated a sense of community as they shopped together at the same stores, read the same newspapers, and shared cultural interests such as taverns, restaurants, theatres, music, and sporting events. These were the beginnings of a small middle class that shared similar values and gave rise to a distinctive urban culture.¹⁹

Expanding upon this theme in great detail, Don H. Doyle contends that in cities such as Atlanta and Nashville there was a change from an Old South of planter-

¹⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 107–43.

¹⁹ Larsen, *The Urban South: A History*, 78–79.

dominated market towns with no designs on cultivating growth to a postwar New South in which mercantile boosterism and expanded commercialism developed as the hallmarks of an aggressive plan for city building. Echoing Woodward, central to this New South was the rise of “new men” comprised of a mercantile elite who claimed positions of leadership from the planter class. Rising to their positions in society by virtue of their accomplishments in business, they could be contrasted with what Doyle terms an “overlapping upper class” of old money whose status was derived from who they were and to which family they belonged.²⁰

Similar to that described by middle-class scholars previously discussed, the business elite lived in the same suburban neighborhoods, sent their children to the same schools, and joined the same charitable associations, social clubs, and churches. Voluntary associations functioned as socializing agents and screening mechanisms for those wishing to be recognized in the business elite. In addition to their social roles, these “new men” were leaders in local government and business, occupying positions in municipal government, heading local business organizations, and sitting on each other’s corporate boards. As civic boosters, their goals were to expand the cities’ commercial, industrial, and urban sectors. It would be these new men who would create a new world in the postwar South, separate and apart from its antebellum roots. Doyle’s postwar new men strongly resemble the northern middle class as this business elite comprised the upper end of an emerging middle class.²¹

²⁰ Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South, 1860–1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), xiv, 189–225.

²¹ *ibid.*

An urban middle class also existed in other cities in the postwar New South. Middle-ranking businessmen and professionals controlled political power in Birmingham, Alabama during the city's first half-century from 1871 to 1921. Espousing booster rhetoric, an upper-middle-class elite was responsible for developing cotton mills and market towns in upcountry South Carolina. Some in the Piedmont mill towns advocated reform efforts including temperance, health services, compulsory education, and child-labor actions. The New South middle class, rather than planter elites or former Confederate leaders, also was responsible for cultivating the ideology of the Lost Cause as they organized various associations such as the United Confederate Veterans. African-American merchants and professionals in the postwar decades also developed a middle class in their own communities such as Richmond's Jackson Ward. They became the community leaders and, similar to their white counterparts, were connected by friendship, marriage, business, and kinship. Further mirroring white middle-class perceptions of the working-class poor, there was conflict between middle-class and poorer blacks along issues of morals, temperance, industriousness, and education.²²

²² Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871–1921* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 59–63, 88–90, 124–5, 148–73, 186–270; David Carlton, “Builders of a New State—The Town Classes and Early Industrialization of South Carolina, 1880–1907,” in *From the Old South to the New: Essays on the Transitional South*, ed. Walter J. Fraser, Jr. and Winfred B. Moore, Jr. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 43–57; David R. Goldfield, “Urbanization in a Rural Culture: Suburban Cities and County Cosmopolites,” in *The South for New Southerners*, ed. Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 79–80; Gaines, M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865–1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 7, 80, 93, 107–8, 114; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 99–116, 238–49.

While a middle class clearly has been delineated in the New South, there has been little direct examination of these forgotten southerners during the antebellum period. Several scholars have described individuals much like the so-called "new men" of the postwar years in southern cities during the Old South years. They have not, however, defined them specifically as members of the middle class. In antebellum Atlanta, Mobile, Houston, and Galveston urban leaders came from the commercial ranks, rather than planters, who shared the same neighborhoods, joined similar benevolent associations and temperance societies, and enjoyed common leisure activities. Acting as socializing agents, these institutions exerted much influence over the course of events in these cities, providing the means not only for making business contacts, but the avenue by which prospective members could gain acceptance in the mercantile elite community. The importance of family name and background diminished as individuals could achieve positions of local leadership by accumulation of wealth, service on the boards of business and in government, and membership in voluntary organizations.²³

While the antebellum mercantile leadership in these cities shared many similarities, perhaps the most important was their preoccupation with the individual pursuit of wealth. They worked in white-collar occupations, arriving with some start-up capital and experience, looking to make their fortune. Moreover, they devoted their time to developing the city itself because of a shared belief that urban development and

²³ Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile* (University of Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 58–68; James M. Russell, *Atlanta, 1847–1890: City Building in the Old South and the New* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 70–87, 106; Kenneth W. Wheeler, *To Wear a City's Crown: The Beginnings of Urban Growth in Texas, 1836–1865* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 23–34, 57–66, 105–14, 126–33.

prosperity could only enhance their personal wealth. Like those in the New South they served in positions of political, economic, and social leadership and acted as the city's boosters, continually attempting to engineer commercial and urban growth by expanding direct trade routes, encouraging the development of industry, and obtaining capital for railroads, wharves, and warehouses. In addition to these physical improvements, they developed many aids to commerce such as forming chambers of commerce and merchants' exchanges; developing business directories; and building amenities like saloons, theaters, and hotels. While these ventures had little success in expanding these southern cities and making them competitive with those of the North, they do underscore the industrious nature of this mercantile class of civic leaders similar to those living in the Northeast and Midwest.²⁴

Although exhibiting middle-class characteristics, these mercantile elites of Mobile, Houston, and Galveston are not described in these terms in their respective community studies. Conversely, James M. Russell does incorporate the term middle class in describing the mercantile civic boosters in Atlanta, although he does this in a contradictory manner. At one point he contends that the antebellum period possessed a "vigorous upper-middle-class leadership." Later, however, he suggests a dual class system of workers and owners when he argues that the Civil War caused tremendous inflation which widened the economic and social disparity between the two groups. To complicate matters further he writes, in a manner reminiscent of Woodward, that an

²⁴ Amos, *Cotton City*, 26–45, 70–75; Russell, *Atlanta, 1847–1890*, 49–58; Wheeler, *To Wear a City's Crown*, 2–24, 38, 69–70, 91–102; Harold L. Platt, *City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Service in Houston, Texas, 1830–1910* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 9–17, 76–77.

important social change following the Civil War was the development of an urban middle class that would take positions of economic and political importance in the city. While he never does define what the middle class comprised, it appears to be the mercantile elite who “showed little interest in the culture of the plantation South” and thus was present in the Old and New South.²⁵

Even more puzzling is the shift in perspective by southern urban historian David R. Goldfield. In his *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism, Virginia 1847–1861* he identifies an antebellum mercantile elite that economically and politically dominated cities like Richmond, Norfolk, and Wheeling and who shared similar lifestyles, beliefs, and goals, especially that of accumulating wealth through boosterism and internal improvements. These men could be termed the upper end of a middle-class like that in the North and the postwar South. Goldfield, however, soon would advocate the position that there was no middle class in the South. In *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers, Southern City and Region*, he emphasizes the continuity of southern urban development whereby the South of the postwar era remained the same planter-dominated, lifeless, and unimportant region that existed in the antebellum period. As he stresses the static nature of the region’s urban life throughout the course of the nineteenth century, Goldfield ignores the businessmen, proprietors, and professionals in southern cities.²⁶

Middle-class associations dedicated to benevolent and temperance reform existed in the antebellum South despite their connection to radical northern abolitionism that was

²⁵ Russell, *Atlanta, 1847–1890*, 89, 106, 263.

²⁶ See David R. Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism, Virginia 1847–1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 29–36; Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 3–8, 29–132.

perceived to weaken reform in the region.²⁷ While southerners were not going to embrace abolitionist reform as a group, the existence of abolition in the North did not taint the reformist impulse for southerners regarding non-slaveholding issues. As we have seen from several communities studies previously examined evangelical reform movements with Bible and tract societies and Sabbath schools, as well as temperance organizations, were present in the Old South. Addressing this issue directly in a recent comparative analysis John W. Quist finds that in antebellum Tuscaloosa County, Alabama temperance and evangelical benevolence reform societies existed on a level similar to that in Washtenaw County, Michigan. Accentuating the non-effects of the peculiar institution on reform activities, most of the leaders, directors, contributors, and volunteers to such endeavors were slaveholders. Membership rolls in both areas revealed a parallel of sorts in that Washtenaw's temperance proponents were dominated by abolitionists in comparison to their overall presence in the community, just as slaveholders dominated the ranks of temperance organizations in Tuscaloosa.²⁸

Some historians have indeed described a middle class presence in the antebellum South. In St. Louis Jeffrey S. Adler explains that the lure of large profits brought many upper- and middle-class men from northeastern cities like New York and Boston. In an

²⁷ Those arguing for a weak antebellum reform in the South include John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1982), and Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 192–217.

²⁸ Quist concludes that the intensity to which benevolent associations acted was related more to economic fluctuations than the existence of slavery or perceptions of these endeavors as subversive northern institutions; John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 1–21, 38–39, 100–1, 195–6, 210, 234, 302.

effort to cultivate a society like that back east conforming to their middle-class values, these merchants established voluntary associations and reform movements relating to temperance, literacy, antislavery, and the establishment of Sunday schools.²⁹ Gregg D. Kimball includes brief mentions of a middle class of professionals, merchants, and businessmen who joined fraternal, benevolent, political, militia, and temperance associations in antebellum Richmond.³⁰

Camilla Townsend describes an elite merchant class—a “rising upper bourgeoisie”—who emerged in Baltimore in the decades prior to the Civil War and demonstrated their wealth and status by directing benevolent societies, organizing civic improvement projects, hosting balls, possessing fine houses, and in the excellent treatment of their slaves and servants. A “middling rank” of artisans, lower level entrepreneurs, and professionals (attorneys, physicians, teachers) also existed in Baltimore. They participated in the antebellum public life of the city in associations such as the militia and fire companies.³¹

²⁹ In addition to not originally being from St. Louis, these middle-class entrepreneurs would not remain in the city permanently as antebellum sectionalism sent these Yankees to the another “can’t miss” opportunity for adventure and prosperity: Chicago; Jeffrey S. Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 102–7, 141–4, 173–4.

³⁰ Like their counterparts in the North, these organizations provided fraternal association, social camaraderie, and opportunities to make business contacts as well as participating in the civic life of the city through parades, banquets, and dinners; Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 37–38, 46–48, 55–57, 185–92, 196–7, 256.

³¹ At home the mercantile elites were industrious and efficient, continually looking for ways in their budgets to economize and still maintain and publicly demonstrate their status; Camilla Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities: Race and Economic Culture in Early Republican North and South America: Guayaquil, Ecuador, and Baltimore, Maryland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 101–13, 121–2, 158–9, 163–72.

Scholars have demonstrated the emergence of a middle class during the antebellum period whose members were similar in terms of wealth and occupations, who shared similar values, who possessed similar goals for themselves and their cities, and who rationalized their rapidly changing environments by establishing associations. Studies of a middle class have been confined to northeastern, midwestern, and western cities, however, because the South did not possess substantial urban expansion, industrialization, and immigration—three foundational elements perceived as necessary for middle-class development. Historians who study the South also have neglected to examine an antebellum middle class, focusing instead on the aristocratic planters and poor whites. When a southern middle class is discussed usually it is in a context of their emergence in the postwar New South era.

What many southern urban scholars refer to as a “mercantile elite” in the antebellum era actually represents the upper tier of a middle class that possessed similar characteristics, beliefs, and associational behaviors to that which existed in the pre-Civil War Northeast, and to their later New South brethren. Beyond the inclusion of these business elites as an upper-middle class there is little discussion in the southern urban literature of the low- to mid-level middling shopkeepers, small-business proprietors, and lesser white-collar employees (e.g. clerks) who were not as wealthy as the mercantile elite, but were not members of the working class. They rounded out middle-class membership in the antebellum South as they occupied non-manual positions and shared the same beliefs. Beyond occupying an economic niche below the upper-middle class

mercantile elite, they also served as the rank and file members of voluntary organizations and supported mercantile elite boosterism efforts at engineering urban growth.

The present study seeks to examine the presence of a middle class in the antebellum South by focusing on associationalism in the port city of Norfolk, Virginia, from 1840 to 1860. By studying this most crucial—and public—characteristic of the middle class, we will see residents in this mid-size southern commercial port city form benevolent, fraternal, service, and improvement associations that engendered a shared identity and community, socialized newcomers, and promoted their emerging boosterism ethos. Through an examination of associationalism we can also delineate the methods by which they inculcated these values not only amongst themselves, but to the larger society.

The present study will demonstrate that the country's associational culture as described by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* was indeed a characteristic of the whole nation and not just the purview of the Northeast.³² Additionally, while a southern middle class may have reached its zenith during the postwar New South period, this examination will delineate its presence in the Old South. By establishing a middle class in the antebellum period, it can then be argued that perhaps the New South was not so new after all. Moreover, if the antebellum South could sustain a viable middle class with similar characteristics to those in the northeastern cities, then perhaps the two regions had more in common than has been previously suggested, despite the South's smaller cities, a want of substantial industry, and the presence of slavery.

³² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. by J. P. Mayer (New York: Harper Perennial, 1968), 513–7.

CHAPTER 2 NORFOLK: THE SUNRISE CITY BY THE SEA

Taken from an early twentieth-century boosterism pamphlet, this characterization of Norfolk reflects the irrepressible optimism of the city's residents.¹ With a combination of advantageous geography, mild climate, bountiful hinterland, and wide harbor, Norfolkkians have believed throughout the city's history that they would achieve prominence among the nation's urban centers. The Tidewater port did enjoy economic success during the colonial and early republic years, but fell on hard times following the War of 1812 with business remaining stagnant through the Mexican War. Norfolk's residents worked feverishly during the antebellum period to reclaim their early glory but a deadly epidemic, the Civil War, and the economic, social, and political difficulties of the postwar years crippled their advancement.

Norfolk's tribulations, early promise and persistent efforts to restore colonial success, and the social and cultural foundation of slavery resembled other port cities in the American South such as Charleston, Mobile, and Savannah. Like its Deep South sisters, Norfolk was caught in a web of slavery, economic stagnation, and commercial dependence on the North. The desire to prosper at a time of rising sectionalism spurred southerners to seek remedies through expansion of public projects, direct trade schemes, and attempts at diversified manufacturing. Beyond the immediate benefits of these

¹ Virginia Industrial Commission, *Norfolk, Virginia: The Sunrise City By the Sea* (Norfolk: Press of Burke & Gregory, 1914).

programs southerners, and Virginians in particular, hoped to recapture the lost glory of the colonial and early national eras. These goals remained elusive for decades, however. Not until the twentieth century did the city begin to reclaim some level of importance in the country. As the United States emerged a world military power through two world wars, Norfolk became home to naval and air bases as well as expanding shipyards that enabled it to carve out a special niche in the national economy and public consciousness.²

Norfolk, Virginia is a flat peninsula situated on the North bank of the Elizabeth River, approximately 1,000 to 1,200 feet wide, with the Chesapeake Bay lying just north of the harbor.³ In 1840 Norfolk had 10,920 residents, including 3,709 slaves (34 percent) and 1,026 free blacks (9.4 percent). By 1850 the population had increased to 14,326, but the rate of growth for the 4,295 slaves was slower than that for the white population thus

² For a discussion of Virginia cities' efforts to expand economically during the 1840s and 1850s in the context of North-South sectionalism, see David R. Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*. An expansion on this theme, but with a negative analytical framework and expanded to include the rest of the South can be found in Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, esp. "Urbanization without Cities," 29–79. During the twentieth century expanded federal military expenditures and commercial interests promoted development for other southern port cities, especially in the Sunbelt. See Goldfield, "Urbanization in a Rural Culture," 67–93; Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

³ Norfolk is eighty-one miles from Petersburg and 102 miles from Richmond, the capital of the state and the city's chief urban rival. Centrally located along the eastern seaboard, Norfolk is 178 miles from Baltimore, 270 miles from Philadelphia, 300 miles from New York, and to the south 350 miles from Charleston; H. W. Burton, *The History of Norfolk, Virginia: A Review of Important Events and Incidents which occurred from 1736 to 1877; Also a Record of Reminiscences and Political, Commercial, and Curious Facts* (Norfolk: Norfolk Virginian, 1877), 1; Andrew Morrison, *Norfolk, Portsmouth, and the Tidewater Country* (Norfolk: George Engelhardt, 1889), 29; Thomas C. Parramore, Peter C. Stewart, and Tommy Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 169.

reducing their proportion of the population down to 30 percent. The population would remain at the same level (14,620) in 1860, yet it would have increased during the decade if not for a disastrous yellow fever epidemic in 1855 in which more than two thousand residents lost their lives. While the white population continued to increase during the 1850s, the number and proportion of slaves declined to 3,284 (22.5 percent) as Virginians increasingly sold slaves to the Deep South. The number of free blacks rose from its 1850 level of 956 to 1,046 in 1860. Slaves and free blacks labored in the shipping trade and served as cooks, chambermaids, waiters, stevedores, porters, and coachmen.⁴

The origins of Norfolk date back to June 1680 when the Virginia House of Burgesses passed “An Act for Cohabitation, Trade and Manufacture” and permitted the purchase of fifty acres of land in various counties to establish towns and storehouses. One of those named was the establishment of a town in Norfolk County on the Elizabeth River. In October 1705 the Burgesses formally incorporated Norfolk and by 1730 it was already a bustling little port enjoying a primary trade with the West Indies that provided steadily expanding commercial business until the American Revolution. The town received a Royal Charter on 15 September 1736 elevating it to a borough, replacing

⁴ See Table 1 for Norfolk population statistics during the antebellum period. Population figures from United States Census Office, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as Obtained at the Department of State, From the Returns of the Sixth Census* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), 32–34; United States Census Office, *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Embracing a Statistical View of Each of the States and Territories* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), 258; United States Census Office, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), 519; Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1931), 139–40. For an examination of the Virginia practice of selling slaves to the Deep South see Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 120–2, and the *Norfolk Daily Southern Argus*, 27 April 1857.

governance from the county and allowing property holders to elect a representative to the House of Burgesses.⁵ On 13 February 1845 the General Assembly passed an act making Norfolk a city and two months later on 14 April 1845 the voters ratified a new charter. Key alterations included popular election of the mayor by qualified voters and a division of the municipal duties between the seventeen-member Common Council and a newly-established eleven-member Select Council.⁶ These landmark dates became celebratory anniversaries for residents with grand parades, speeches, music, fireworks, militia gun salutes, and even “grand aquatic excursions” of boats and barges.⁷

⁵ William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being A Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, vol. 2, (New York: R. & W. & G Bartow, 1823), 471–8, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Thomas Desilver, 1823), 404–419; the Charter of the Borough of Norfolk reprinted in Brent Tarter, ed., *The Order Book and Related Papers of the Common Hall of the Borough of Norfolk, Virginia, 1736–1798* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1979), 6, 7, 35–41. Norfolk’s 1705 incorporation date makes it one of the first incorporated towns of any long-term significance in the colonies. Williamsburg was incorporated in 1699 and Richmond in 1752; C. W. Tazewell, ed., *Vignettes from the Shadows—Glimpses of Norfolk’s Past* (Norfolk: W. S. Dawson Company, 1992), 8. Tazewell incorrectly states that Norfolk became an incorporated town on 8 June 1680, but at this date the House of Burgesses simply allowed for settlement of a town in Norfolk County. See also Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 2–3, 35; and Cary W. Jones, *Norfolk as a Business Centre: Its Principal Industries and Trades* (Norfolk: Virginian Job Presses, 1880), 12–13.

⁶ William S. Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity, Portsmouth and the Adjacent Counties, During a Period of Two Hundred Years* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1853), 221–4; W. H. T. Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk: Historical Norfolk—1636–1936* (Norfolk: Norfolk Advertising Board, 1936), 42; Ella Blow Freeman Cooke, *Histories Recollections and Anecdotes of Old Norfolk* (Norfolk: Arthur B. Riddick, 1937), 12.

⁷ In his contemporary history of Norfolk William S. Forrest describes in great detail the centennial celebration of the charter held in Norfolk on 15 September 1836. See his *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 200–6. See also Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 8, and Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 39.

Politically and economically the city was little affected by England's wars with France in the mid-eighteenth century. Prior to the American Revolution Norfolk consisted of four hundred houses in 1765 and thirteen hundred dwellings worth £124,000 a decade later. Reflecting the extent of colonial trade with the West Indies, the imports for Virginia in 1769, almost wholly through Norfolk, were valued at £851,000. On the eve of the war Norfolk was the eighth largest city in the colonies and a primary eastern commercial port. In February 1776, the *Virginia Gazette* proclaimed, "It is the most flourishing and richest town in the colony. Its happy site, combining all those natural advantages which invite and promote navigation and commerce, have been actively seconded by the industry and enterprise of its inhabitants. . . . Its population exceeds 6,000 citizens, many of whom possess affluent fortunes."⁸

During the Revolutionary period Norfolkkians enthusiastically adopted resolutions protesting the Stamp Act in 1765, formed their own Sons of Liberty the following year, and in 1774 established a committee of public safety in response to the Intolerable Acts. Support for the patriots had diminished by October 1775 when Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, destroyed a printing office in the city with no interference from residents. The next month the governor took control of the borough as thousands from the area pledged their oath of allegiance to governor and king. At the Battle of Great Bridge (eight miles south of Norfolk) on 9 December 1775 Virginia militiamen led by Colonel William Woodford soundly defeated a British force under Dunmore's command and forced their evacuation from the borough. Seeking revenge for this defeat, on

⁸ Robert W. Lamb, ed., *Our Twin Cities of the Nineteenth Century: Norfolk and Portsmouth, Their Past, Present, and Future* (Norfolk: Barcroft, 1887), 6-8; Tarter, *Order Book*, 11-12; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 9 February 1776.

1 January 1776 Dunmore commenced a bombardment of the port. Militiamen plundered and ran wild through the borough, setting fires to loyalist businesses and houses as they went. Ninety percent of the town was destroyed in a conflagration that raged for three days, burning 863 buildings and causing damages estimated at £300,000. The only structure of any significance left standing was the Old Parish Church, built in 1739. Eventually becoming known as Old St. Paul's Church, it stood well into the twentieth century complete with embedded cannon balls and pock marks, a symbol of Norfolk's brief but devastating frontline role in the American Revolution.⁹

By the turn of the century the citizens of Norfolk had rebuilt their borough to its prewar level. There were one thousand houses containing 6,926 residents as it maintained its place as the largest town in Virginia.¹⁰ Beginning a lengthy partnership with Norfolk, in 1801 the United States government established a navy yard at nearby Gosport on the southern part of the Elizabeth River.¹¹ During the early republic years Norfolk continued to prosper commercially and be a primary port for trade in Virginia and along the eastern seaboard. By 1791 exports from Norfolk equaled about \$1 million, increasing to \$1.8 million in 1795, and more than \$4 million in 1800, and ranging from \$5 million to \$7 million from 1804–1807. Beginning in 1807 trade decreased as the Embargo Act closed off all the American ports to foreign ships and limited trading only to other states. Following the War of 1812 international trade resumed and prosperity

⁹ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 4–5; Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 9–10; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 75, 86–94; Tarter, *Order Book*, 14.

¹⁰ Tarter, *Order Book*, 17.

¹¹ Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 10.

returned for several years. Navigation and non-intercourse laws of the 1820s damaged the borough's economic prosperity, however, as international commerce to the West Indies was curtailed once again by British commercial restrictions.¹² The Panic of 1839 and the failure of the United States Bank that same year further crippled Norfolk's economy. The Mexican War would spur commercial growth as Norfolk's shipping was rejuvenated, new banks established, homes built, and business activity increased.¹³

Despite this moderate success, in the decades between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, Norfolk became increasingly dependent on northeastern cities for its economic livelihood as its place in the national economy diminished. In 1769 the value of imports coming into Virginia, predominantly through Norfolk, accounted for over \$4 million compared with less than \$945,000 for New York. By 1832 the situation had reversed itself as Virginia's imports decreased to just over \$1.2 million while New York's dramatically increased to \$57 million. The amount of imports in Virginia dropped from 33,000 tons in 1791 to only 7,000 tons in 1838, at which time New York counted 500,000 import tons. In 1846 New York exported \$38 million worth of domestic produce compared to only \$3.5 million for Virginia. Similarly, direct trade was almost non-existent for the Old Dominion as it exported only \$1,500 in foreign produce in 1851 while New York exported \$14 million. In terms of internal improvements the Empire

¹² Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 5; Tarter, *Order Book*, 17; Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 10–14; Andrew Morrison, *Norfolk, Portsmouth, and the Tidewater Country*, 28.

¹³ Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 41–42.

State could boast of 1,200 miles of railroads and 900 miles of canals in 1840 compared to Virginia, which could only muster 400 miles of railroad and 200 miles of canal.¹⁴

While Norfolk's commercial trade life was dependent upon northern cities like other southern ports, its chief commodity was not cotton, tobacco, or other staple crops, but a thriving vegetable or truck trade. In New York and Baltimore the Virginia port was referred to as the "Atlantic Garden." Peas, cucumbers, beans, tomatoes, radishes, apples, pears, peaches, etc. were grown in the rich hinterland of the Tidewater and shipped out of Norfolk's harbor. In 1858 the value of the fruit and vegetable exports totaled over \$450,000 (out of a total city export figure of \$535,000), with almost 93 percent going to Baltimore and New York, along with Philadelphia and Richmond, to be shipped elsewhere. Norfolk also enjoyed a thriving grain trade during the antebellum years. The corn exports during the year ending in May 1858, reportedly a very poor crop yield, were over two million bushels for foreign and coastwise trade and 150,000 for home consumption. The flour trade produced an export of 20,719 barrels for the same period. Other grains exported in great amounts in 1858 included 117,284 bushels of peanuts and 20,203 bushels of oats. Direct trade to foreign ports was difficult for perishable products such as fruits and vegetables. Consequently, in 1858 the city only directly exported \$20,000 worth of goods, \$19,000 of which were staves, to other countries. Cotton

¹⁴ Forrest, *The Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852: Containing the Names, Professions, Places of Business, and Residences of the Merchants, Traders, and Manufacturers, Mechanics, Heads of Families, &c., Together with a List of the Public Buildings, the Names and Situations of the Streets, Lanes, and Wharves; and a Register of the Public Officers, Companies, and Associations, in the City of Norfolk. Also, Information Relative to Portsmouth: with a Variety of other Useful, Statistical and Miscellaneous Information* (Norfolk: William S. Forrest, 1851), 114.

accounted for only 252 bales exported in that year.¹⁵ In terms of manufacturing Norfolk did have a small industrial presence that included steam mills, a cotton factory, an iron factory, harness and carriage works, and a tannery. These industries were small compared with Richmond, the most industrialized city in the South, and certainly no comparison with the North.¹⁶

When examining the wealth of Norfolk, its residents appear to have been extremely successful during the antebellum period. The per capita wealth of the city increased from \$417 in 1850 to over \$900 in 1859, a greater rise than in New York or Boston.¹⁷ Per capita wealth figures do not provide a true indication of the relative success of a city and its people, however. Like other southern cities, Norfolk and her Virginia neighbors were playing catch-up to the North economically and were dependent upon northern cities for their livelihood. While merchants in the South enjoyed rising market prices during the 1850s that increased their wealth, southern cities did not have the permanent economic infrastructure such as railroads, direct trade connections, liberal

¹⁵ The destination, number of packets, and market values of garden products exported from Norfolk for 1858 were: Baltimore (67,424, \$235,984.00), New York (52,301, \$183,053.50), Philadelphia (7,305, \$25,567.50), and Richmond (1,565, \$5,477.50); W. Eugene Ferslew, comp., *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk, to Which is Added a Business Directory for 1859* (Norfolk, Virginia: Vickery & Company, 1859), 25–26; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 238; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 192.

¹⁶ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 189.

¹⁷ This compares to 1850/1860 figures of \$706.15/\$779.29 for New York, \$1,296.93/\$1,543.77 for Boston, \$801.30/\$1,593.42 for Richmond (the third highest per capita wealth in the country), and \$793.15/\$1,623.31 for Lynchburg (the second highest per capita wealth in the country). New Bedford, Massachusetts was the wealthiest city in the country in terms of per capita wealth; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 201.

financial system, manufacturing and processing factories, and a ready supply of labor to assure long-term, steady growth. Reflecting Virginia's shrinking role in American commerce, exports from Norfolk and Richmond were insignificant during the antebellum period.¹⁸ In 1840 exports for the two Virginia cities totaled \$4 million, just 3 percent of the total value of American exports. In 1860 exports increased to \$5 million, but their percentage of the total value of the country's exports decreased to 1.3 percent.¹⁹

Although Norfolk never would regain its colonial trade preeminence during the antebellum period, residents continually tried to boost the city's economic fortunes with a number of internal improvement endeavors. One of the key projects was the Dismal Swamp Canal. A joint venture between Virginia and North Carolina, it connected the Elizabeth River (and by extension the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean) with the

¹⁸ Virginia's overall share of American trade continued to decline throughout the decade leading to the Civil War. In 1851 the state comprised only .8 percent of the national trade, while New York controlled 52 percent. Ten years later the figures were even worse for the Old Dominion as its share of the country's trade dropped slightly to .7 percent, but New York's leapt dramatically to 67.7 percent. Of course other northern states could not compete with New York either, but their shares of the national commercial trade outstripped Virginia's by a significant margin. Pennsylvania's figures for 1851 and 1861 were 4.5 and 3.8 percent, respectively, while the Massachusetts share for 1851 was 10.3 percent and for 1861 was 10.5 percent. Border city Maryland's commercial share actually rose from 2.8 percent in 1851 to 3.8 percent in 1861; Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 122-3.

¹⁹ These export figures do not compare favorably to New Orleans (\$34 million and 25.8 percent in 1840 and \$107 million and 26.8 percent in 1860), Baltimore (\$5 million/3.8 percent in 1840 and \$9 million/2.3 percent in 1860), Charleston (\$10 million/7.6 percent in 1840 and \$21 million/5.3 percent in 1860), Mobile (\$12 million/9.1 percent in 1840 and \$38 million/9.5 percent in 1860), and Savannah (\$6 million/4.5 percent in 1840 and \$18 million/4.5 percent in 1860). Lack of local patronage of goods was a problem as residents of southern cities favored northern goods. Even during the sectional crisis of the 1850s merchants and consumers across the South desired what they perceived to be a large assortment of quality goods at a cheaper price from northern markets; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 241-6.

Albemarle Sound and the principle rivers of North Carolina with their bountiful hinterlands. On 1 December 1787 the General Assembly passed an act permitting the cutting of a canal and incorporated the Dismal Swamp Canal Company. The project would be plagued by years of construction delays, however. Bureaucratic bungling, financial and labor shortages, and poor management proved ruinous. It would take four decades and significant stock purchases by the federal government for it to be fully operational by 1829. Ultimately, the canal did not live up to its promise of economic riches as the moderate tolls collected during the 1840s and 1850s did not recoup the costs incurred during construction. Adding to the canal's difficulties, emerging rail lines such as the Portsmouth and Roanoke, and Norfolk and Petersburg Railroads sought to take away business. Worse yet it later faced competition from the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal that commenced operation in 1859. This canal was able to handle larger ships and required a shorter distance over flat land to connect the Elizabeth River with the North River and Albemarle Sound in North Carolina.²⁰

During the antebellum years Norfolkians did recognize the importance of railroads to the local economy and expansion of trade. In April 1833 the Common Council subscribed \$60,000 worth of shares in the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad

²⁰ Citing commercial and military uses the federal government bought six hundred shares of stock in 1826 and another two hundred in 1829. President Andrew Jackson even took a tour of the Dismal Swamp Canal in July 1829. There were also plans to use the canal in conjunction with the new dry dock at the Gosport Naval Yard (first in America completed in 1833). During the antebellum period the Dismal Swamp Canal incurred costs of over \$1.1 million, but only earned \$631,000. For a study on the Dismal Swamp Canal see Alexander Crosby Brown, *The Dismal Swamp Canal* (Chesapeake, Virginia: Norfolk County Historical Society, 1970), especially 31–39, 56–64, 87–96. See also Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 147–51, 158–60; Peter Crawford Stewart, “The Commercial History of Hampton Roads, Virginia, 1815–1860” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967), 90, 95; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 31.

Company (sometimes referred to as the Norfolk and Weldon Railroad) and another \$40,000 that December. In January 1834 the Assembly authorized the construction of the railroad causing great jubilation in Norfolk as well as in Portsmouth and Roanoke, North Carolina. The railroad was designed to connect the Elizabeth River with Weldon, North Carolina and that state's eastern rivers and sounds. The connection to Weldon was not completed until 1837 and the revenue expected failed to materialize in the face of an economic depression, excessive operational costs, rate wars, large debts, and competition from the Petersburg and Roanoke Railroad. The railroad declared bankruptcy by 1845 and was sold to Boston and New York interests who reorganized it as the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad. The line was reconstructed along a more direct eastern route to Weldon and completed by November 1851. The railroad would be a part of the foundation for the Seaboard Air Line Railway around the turn of the twentieth century.²¹

²¹ See Stewart, *The Commercial History of Hampton Roads*, 70–82. The city of Norfolk and individual investors received no dividends after about \$1 million in investments; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 161–4, 172–4. Severely damaged during the Civil War, the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad was repaired and in the postwar years became a main component of Norfolk trade; Jones, *Norfolk as a Business Centre*, 27. There was jubilation by the people on the passage of the railroad construction bill in January 1834, but eventually heartbreak as Robert Lamb reported, “Though it was the Sabbath, so great was the joy of our people both in Norfolk and Portsmouth over the victory won, that was to bring a brighter future, full of the most cheering anticipations of prosperity, wealth and commercial greatness, that the bells all rang out a merry peal. . . . Bonfires blazed on all the wharves and principal streets, and rockets illuminated the air, and for more than two hours the towns were almost wild in their exhibitions of joy. Unfortunately, however, the result proved that the rejoicing was premature; for despite its brilliant auspices, the difficulties subsequently encountered proved insurmountable, the road had to be abandoned, and our most sanguine hopes were all blasted;” Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 17. See also Charles W. Turner, “The Early Railroad Movement in Eastern Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 55 (1947): 363–5; Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*, 282; and Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 8.

In December 1852 the city subscribed \$200,000 to the capital stock of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad Company, chartered in March 1851. Construction on the eighty-mile railroad began in 1852, but was not completed until 1859. It would be the first railroad to run all the way into the city and be Norfolk's only rail connection to the west. It traveled to Petersburg where it connected with the Southside line that ran from Petersburg to Lynchburg. From there it met the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad that ran to Bristol. Despite the potential of these railroads to bring profits to all concerned, each was owned by different interests that minimized cooperation and subsequently receipts. The end of the Civil War found the railroads out of money and credit, tracks physically damaged, and bridges destroyed. After limping along for several years outside interests consolidated the three lines into the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio railroad in 1870. It connected Norfolk with Bristol via the old lines, and from there to Chattanooga by way of the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad, and from there to Memphis where it connected with the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. The expanded system would dramatically increase Norfolk's exports of cotton in the postwar years. Nonetheless, market garden vegetable and fruit products shipped along the Atlantic coast would continue to be a key export for the city.²²

²² In the years prior to the Civil War and for several years after Norfolk was a not a substantial exporter of cotton. In 1858–1859 receipts equaled 6,174 bales, in 1859–1860 the figure increased to a still small 17,777 bales, and in 1860–1861 it nearly doubled to 33,193 bales. After the war in 1865–1866 the cotton exported rose to 59,096 bales, but in 1866–1867 there was a dramatic expansion to 126,287 bales. Receipts rapidly increased each year to 472,446 bales in 1873–1874 where it consistently stayed in the 400,000–500,000 range throughout the nineteenth century; Jones, *Norfolk as a Business Centre*, 21–24, 105, 134; Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 26, 28; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 13, 15; Stewart, *The Commercial History of Hampton Roads*, 88–89, 97–98.

In addition to transportation improvements the citizens of Norfolk promoted their city by sponsoring various commercial conventions. The first exhibition of the Norfolk Agricultural Society occurred in November 1854 at the fair grounds. Over six thousand people attended the three-day event. In November 1859 the Seaboard Agricultural Society held its fifth annual exhibition at the fair grounds. The city also hosted state commercial conventions in 1838 and 1854. At the 1838 convention, with John Tyler (the former governor and future president) present, the conventions passed resolutions pledging to promote direct trade routes, increase hinterland agricultural production and manufacturing, develop internal improvements such as railroads and canals, and expand state banking capital. In 1854 key issues at the convention included connecting the Ohio River and Chesapeake Bay via a system of canals and establishing a steamer connection between Norfolk and Europe.²³

During the antebellum years and into the postwar decades the economic rivalry between Norfolk and Richmond and Petersburg was seen as one of the chief problems facing the Tidewater port. The Fall Line cities controlled the General Assembly that inhibited the beneficial commercial development of Norfolk by denying assistance for railroads and other internal improvements. Their advantageous industrial concerns, access to cash crops like tobacco and cotton, and larger capital reserves precluded Norfolk from politically challenging their upcountry neighbors. In 1849 and 1850 there was even talk about Norfolk seeking annexation by North Carolina, which was seen as

²³ *Proceedings of the Commercial Convention of the States of Virginia and North Carolina, Held in Norfolk, Virginia on the 14th, 15th, and 16th of November 1838* (Norfolk: T. G. Broughton, 1839); Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 16–19; Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 26, 28.

more commercially compatible and more receptive to the city's economic and improvement needs than the Old Dominion.²⁴

Commerce and the very life of the city would be tested in the summer of 1855 as Norfolk suffered through a yellow fever epidemic that killed thousands of citizens and crippled its economy. In early June 1855 the disease was brought to Norfolk by the steamer *Benjamin Franklin* that had arrived from the fever plagued Virgin Islands. The steamer proceeded to dock for repairs after being quarantined for twelve days. There were two hidden cases of the fever on board, however, and the disease steadily spread through the city. By the time the fever had ended in late October about two-thirds of the population, nearly ten thousand people, had contracted the disease and deaths occurred at frightening rates. Burials kept up as best they could, but there was no time for funerals. According to contemporary George D. Armstrong, coffins also were in short supply and many of the dead were buried up to four in a plain box or even buried in pits. Ultimately two thousand souls perished including Mayor Hunter Woodis, prominent businessmen, and more than half the physicians and ministers who had been caring for the sick.²⁵

²⁴ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 173–4; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 205–6.

²⁵ The yellow fever spread by means of mosquitoes biting the infected sailors on board the *Benjamin Franklin* and then carrying the virus to shore transmitting from person to person. Works on the yellow fever epidemic in Norfolk include David Goldfield, "Disease and Urban Image: Yellow Fever in Norfolk, 1855," *Virginia Cavalcade* 23 (Autumn 1973): 34–41; Charles A. Nicholson, "The Tragic Summer of 1855 at Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia," *Genealogical Society of Tidewater, Virginia Bulletin* 10 (December 1979): 171–88. For contemporary accounts see George D. Armstrong, *The Summer of the Pestilence: A History of the Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk, Virginia, A.D. 1855*, 3d ed. (Virginia Beach: W. S. Dawson & Co., 1994) and Forrest, *The Great Pestilence in Virginia: Being an Historical Account of the Origin, General Character, and Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1855; Together with Sketches of Some of the Victims* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1856).

As if the human toll was not enough, the economic damage to the city would haunt Norfolk residents for years. Following the official pronouncement of the epidemic late in July, cities in Virginia and along the eastern seaboard stopped trading with Norfolk and turned away fleeing refugees. Keenly aware of these responses, Norfolk's local leaders withheld an official announcement for more than a month after the first cases were discovered and the pro-boosterism *Daily Southern Argus* suppressed news of the epidemic for six weeks. As the fever raged throughout the summer, Norfolknians who could leave the city did so and most businesses closed for months. Few ships entered the harbor and those that did brought more coffins and the mail rather than trade. Even when the epidemic subsided in the autumn and residents returned, economic progress was stunted as commerce did not recover its pre-fever levels until the end of the decade. On the surface the population remained about the same for 1850 and 1860 (14,326 and 14,620, respectively), but in reality there was a significant population increase that made up for the yellow fever deaths. Norfolk did bounce back by the early 1860s, just in time for the onset of a civil war.²⁶

²⁶ Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 153; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 178, 181, 192; Goldfield, "Yellow Fever in Norfolk, 1855," 38–39; Armstrong, *The Summer of the Pestilence*, 40. Following this devastating yellow fever epidemic that crippled the city, the winter of 1856–1857 brought a severe winter storm that wreaked more havoc on Norfolk's economy. In mid-January 1857 a rare blizzard snowstorm buried Norfolk and Portsmouth, with as much as twenty-foot snowdrifts in some places. The Elizabeth River froze over and closed these ports through mid February and the Chesapeake Bay was frozen for a mile and a half from shore. The blizzard became legendary and one often-told tale involves the bar in the center of the Elizabeth River. The frozen river became a winter wonderland where residents ventured onto the ice to visit, sleigh, and skate. An entrepreneur established a temporary booth on the ice about midway between Norfolk and Portsmouth where distilled spirits were sold to the thirsty, and, most assuredly, the cold residents. The ice bar was said to have done a very good business, but also caused many fights and unsteady legs among those who overly imbibed. Legend also says that an enterprising

Commercial trade was not the only concern for improvement during the antebellum years as Norfolkians sought to enhance their city physically. In the spring of 1839 the Common Council filled Back Cove, a pond that had previously been an unsightly and noxious public nuisance thought by residents to breed disease. On its spot a public square was built decorated with shade trees, sidewalks, and iron railings. By 1850 the public square would contain the new City Hall and other smaller (and fire-proof) buildings housing the clerk's and register's offices. Classical in design, the new City Hall was eighty feet by sixty feet with a portico supported by six Tuscan columns and a roof-top dome that was thirty-two feet in diameter and one hundred and ten feet high. At a cost of \$50,000 it was paid for by selling the old Court House and an assessment of one dollar on each qualified Norfolk voter. Serving the community for over a century, contemporaries commented that the City Hall signified Norfolk's elevation from a borough to a city.²⁷

Antebellum public building construction also included a new Custom House to replace the previous aging and dilapidated structure. In October 1850 Congress appropriated \$50,000 its erection with the funds being increased to \$100,000 two years later. Construction was completed by December 1857 and the building also was classical in design containing a long flight of stairs to the entrance, a portico, and six columns with

black family made money using its donkey cart to ferry the inebriated back to dry land. George Holbert Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights, 1584-1881* (Norfolk: Norfolk Historical Society, 1972), 75-76; *Daily Southern Argus*, 26 January 1857.

²⁷ The cornerstone for the building was laid in August 1847 amidst the typical great fanfare of the time. There was a grand occasion with a parade and ceremony that included local leaders, fraternal organizations, militia units, naval officers, and prominent citizens; Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 211-2, 255; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 9; Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 70-72.

Corinthian capitals.²⁸ By March 1860 merchants were pleased with the completion of a new iron market house where farmers could sell their crops. At a cost of \$19,000 it was 210 feet long and forty feet wide containing seventy-two stalls for rent to local farmers and butchers. In general, Norfolk could boast of new and larger residences, larger stores, and well-paved streets.²⁹ As was the case in other antebellum cities street paving in Norfolk generally was divided between businesses or individuals and the city. In the early 1850s, however, city fathers allocated public funds for paving of the streets in the business district because of a perception that muddy streets were connected to the spread of diseases that struck the city.³⁰

Improvements in how Norfolknians commenced business came with a board of trade to regulate and promote commerce in the city (1854), the establishment of a Corn Exchange (1857), and expansion of the city's police force to twenty men, proportionately larger than Richmond's police force (1854).³¹ City directories were published in 1851, 1859, and 1860 facilitating not only day-to-day business, but advertising the city to

²⁸ Wertebaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*, 146–7; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 29; Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*, 264.

²⁹ Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 106, 111–3; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 18; Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*, 213, 309.

³⁰ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 37; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 149.

³¹ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 27; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 181–2. Of particular importance to be sure was the 1852 Cow Law ordinance maintaining that these animals were to be kept in enclosures or outside of city limits. Previously they had “been allowed to go at large in every part of the city, and get into all kinds of mischief, to the great annoyance of the citizens, generally, and to the women and children, particularly;” Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*, 282, 285.

outsiders. Similarly, Williams S. Forrest's *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity* served as an important tool for merchants in the decade before the Civil War. Published in 1853 it told the history of Norfolk in true booster style as it trumpeted the city's exemplary origins, glossed over its difficult times, and fawned over the growth since the early 1840s in terms of population, commerce, new buildings, port facilities, and its advantageous geography that gave it the highest potential for shipping and ironically even healthfulness.³²

Utility improvements included the installation of an artesian well and pipes in the Market Square in 1843 and the introduction of gas lighting. The Norfolk Gas Works was established on Briggs' Point in the eastern part of the city and in early October 1849 stores along Main Street were illuminated with gas light. Observers described it as a jolly spectacle and great festival bringing out spectators of all ages, men and women, white and black. It was said to be "very brilliant" and showed off "to a great advantage the pretty things in the different stores in which it was used."³³ Despite the early success of gas illumination, not everything associated with the new technology proved beneficial.

³² Forrest, *Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852 and Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*; Ferslew, *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . for 1859*; E. M. Coffield & Co. comp., *Second Annual Directory for the City of Norfolk, To Which is Added a Business Directory for 1860* (Norfolk: John R. Hathaway, 1860).

³³ *The American Beacon and Norfolk and Portsmouth Daily Advertiser*, 3 October 1849. By March 1850 Freemason Street was the first street illuminated by gas lighting and in true boosterism fashion its benefits were loudly proclaimed. "It is really a comfort and a pleasure to promenade after dark on Freemason Street. . . . Aside from their convenience and the air of cheerfulness they shed, they contribute materially to the safety of property. And, in the largest cities, both in this country and Europe, they are considered more efficient in preventing crime than all the police employed for that purpose;" *Daily Southern Argus*, 5 March 1850. See also Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*, 246.

Residents living near the gas works complained that it created a nuisance with its smoke and soot. They sued the company, but lost in a court case that lasted over a year.

Citizens threatened another lawsuit and the Norfolk Gas Company settled by purchasing the land of the complainants. Another difficulty was that the use of rosin caused the gas works to burn down three times, twice in 1852 alone. By March 1853 the gas works had solved these problems by moving to a different location and using coal in the gas production.³⁴

An important area where Norfolk did make strides in the years just before the Civil War was public education. During most of the antebellum period Norfolk, like most southern cities, did not have a system of public education. Children of city residents could attend any one of a number of private schools and academies in the city and the surrounding counties. An early effort at some public education occurred in 1851 when several Norfolk business leaders organized a manual labor school for indigent boys. It served the dual purpose of teaching boys how to use machinery for factory jobs to be developed in the city (thus alleviating the labor shortage resulting from selling slaves to the Deep South) and also as a means of curbing their propensity for roaming the streets. Their wild behavior was not only bad for the citizens, but boosters believed their actions did not present a positive picture to visitors and prospective trading partners. It does appear, however, to have been a short-lived enterprise.³⁵

³⁴ *Daily Southern Argus*, 5 March 1850; Tazewell, *Vignettes from the Shadows*, 21; Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 217.

³⁵ Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 118–23.

The city also could boast of a private Lancastrian School that operated from about 1815 to 1856. Incorporating the monitorial system developed by Englishman John Lancaster, the school's curriculum included spelling, reading, arithmetic, writing, catechism, and Bible verses. The Lancastrian School received some state monies and local funding in the amount of \$3,000 initial appropriation for a school house and yearly allocations of \$400 from the city councils. Throughout its existence, however, private contributions were necessary to sustain the school's existence. The Lancastrian School could be classified as a charitable institution in that some who could not afford it were educated there for free or little charge. As such, this was the city's version of a free school for most of the antebellum period.³⁶

The most celebrated and enduring private school was the Norfolk Academy. Established in 1786, its enrollment declined in the 1830s and the school building was in disrepair. A movement emerged to sell the old Academy property, purchase a new lot, and build a new school using public subscriptions. On 25 May 1840 the cornerstone was laid for the new Norfolk Academy with an elaborate ceremony complete with a parade, speeches by public officials, bands, associations, and hundreds of school children. Completed by June 1841, the building was of a classical design, being modeled after the temple of Theseus at Athens. It stood ninety-one feet long by forty-seven, containing two porticos with six Doric columns each. The Academy interior included a library, large lecture hall, and four classrooms. Teachers taught the standard subjects for a classical

³⁶ Henry S. Rorer, *History of Norfolk Public Schools, 1681-1968* (Norfolk: Henry S. Rorer, 1968), 21-24, 31; Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 109-10.

English education, along with military courses. The building housed the Academy until 1877 when it became the Norfolk Public Library.³⁷

In 1850 the General Assembly of Virginia passed a law encouraging any city in the state with a corporation court to establish a free school system. Municipal leaders in Norfolk conducted a poll to determine if there was sufficient interest in free schools in the city and a majority voted in the affirmative. It was not until three years later in August 1853, however, that the Common and Select Councils appointed a committee to develop a plan to establish public schools. Over a year later in the fall of 1854 the School Committee recommended “the establishment of a Free School in each of the four wards and the building of suitable houses for the purpose, and the employment of competent teachers.”³⁸ After another year-long delay, in January 1856 the Norfolk councils passed resolutions for the establishment of free public schools, one in each of four districts, that would teach reading, writing, English, grammar, history, arithmetic, geography, and physical science. The first public school system in the Commonwealth, funds would come from a special two dollar tax designated for the schools on every white male in Norfolk over the age of twenty-one. The resolution said that any white child from 6 to 21

³⁷ Thomas U. Walker, an architect from Philadelphia who had worked on the Capitol in Washington, D. C., designed the new Academy building. The old Norfolk Academy building currently is home to the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce. *American Beacon*, 16 June 1841; Rorer, *History of Norfolk Public Schools*, 15–16, Edward Wilson James, ed., *The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary* (Norfolk: The Friedenwald Company, 1902) 27–32; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 9; Wertebaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*, 152–3.

³⁸ Norfolk Public Schools information from C. W. Mason, Superintendent of Schools in 1936, in Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 248–9. See also Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 166–7.

years of age could attend and that the city would provide books and stationery free of charge.³⁹

In May 1857 the city opened its first public school on the grounds of Ashland Hall with two teachers (one for each sex) and about one hundred students (seventy-six boys and twenty-two girls). Several months later the councils increased the school tax to four dollars (and still later to six dollars) and if more was required, up to 4 percent of the general taxes collected in the city. While books and stationery were paid for by the city, there was a two-dollar charge for each child attending and generally a limit of two children per family. The new school system not only would educate children, but, once again, be a device to get underage boys off the streets as only 40 percent between the ages of six and sixteen attended school.⁴⁰ Although strides would be made in public education, it would not be until 1870 that the Norfolk Library Association was organized and the first truly public library would be established in the city. During the antebellum period several associations operated subscription libraries throughout. The Norfolk Athenaeum established such a library beginning in January 1816 and operated it until the Athenaeum closed in 1842. The Norfolk Lyceum sponsored a subscription library from 1827 to about 1839, and following this the Washington Institute and Library Association

³⁹ Rorer, *History of Norfolk Public Schools*, 31; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 167.

⁴⁰ The new Virginia constitution adopted in 1869 authorized the first statewide public school system; Rorer, *History of Norfolk Public Schools*, 31–37, 60. See also Norfolk public school section written by C. W. Mason, Superintendent of Schools in 1936, in Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 248–9; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 184–5.

organized a library that lasted from 1835 to 1855, at which time the yellow fever epidemic forced its closure.⁴¹

Norfolkians enjoyed the usual entertainment available during the antebellum period such as traveling opera companies, minstrel shows, performances by such contemporary acts as ten-year-old Adelina Patti and Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, and local orchestral performances by the Norfolk Philharmonic Association and the Norfolk Musical Association. The Avon Theatre was Norfolk's premier place for theatrical and musical amusement for over a decade. Seating 1,200 and classic in architecture with its Doric columns, the Avon opened in October 1839 with a performance of Knowles's *Hunchback*. The theatre played host to the greatest performers of the day including Junius Brutus Booth before burning down in 1850. That same year the Mechanical Society completed its construction of Mechanics' Hall, a venue that quickly took the Avon's place for entertainment as well as housing exhibitions, lectures, fairs, and various association meetings. Mechanics' Hall remained standing in Norfolk until 1960 when it was torn down, its final years spent as the burlesque Gaiety Theater. The last theater erected prior to the Civil War was the Norfolk Varieties. It opened in 1856, promptly changed its name the next year to Odd Fellows' Hall, and changed it once again in 1859 to the Church Street Opera House. The Opera House showcased theatrical troupes, musical and comedy reviews, and minstrel shows until 1880 when it was eclipsed by the newly-built Academy of Music. Some of the finest actors of the antebellum period

⁴¹ Prominent citizens such as Littleton W. Tazewell, William Wirt, and William B. Lamb also had libraries; Stewart, *History of Norfolk County, Virginia*, 186; Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 118.

performed at the Opera House including James E. Murdoch, D. W. Waller, and Mary Devlin.⁴²

Norfolk's antebellum population included significant numbers of non-whites and non-Protestants. The city's Jewish population grew during the first half of the nineteenth century, principally on account of an influx of German Jewish immigrants to the United States. By 1820 they had established a cemetery on the outskirts of town in nearby Berkley and in 1850 the larger Hebrew Cemetery was opened with many of the bodies from the Berkley cemetery transplanted there. Norfolk Jews convinced a recently arrived Orthodox German Jew named Jacob Umstädter to become the Kosher butcher and Cantor for the community. A regular congregation began in 1848 as they rented two rooms in the home of one of its members. The congregation would grow and move into space at the former Norfolk Lyceum and later the Odd Fellows' Hall. Following the destruction of the Odd Fellows' Hall in February 1859, the Jewish congregation purchased a lot where they built the city's first Jewish synagogue, led by Umstädter.⁴³

Race relations in Norfolk during the two decades prior to the Civil War were much like they were in other southern cities. Several modern Norfolk historians put it succinctly when they wrote that "Blacks annoyed some whites by their very existence." Whites in Norfolk were continually concerned with blacks congregating in large or small

⁴² Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 49, 52–53; Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*, 251; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*, 131; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 25, 29, 31, 34; Stephen M. Archer, *Junius Brutus Booth: Theatrical Prometheus* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 268, 275. According to Gordon Samples, *Lust for Fame: The Stage Career of John Wilkes Booth* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1982), the younger Booth never performed in Norfolk.

⁴³ Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 101–3; Ferslew, *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . for 1859*, 164.

groups, that they not be allowed to drink distilled spirits, with what they carried (such as canes), and even what black women wore (e.g. no bonnets). Hiring out of slaves and employing free blacks in craft trades was another concern for whites as black artisans could be hired at cheaper rates, thus displacing white workers. Some even called on the legislature to bar blacks from all trades in 1851. Generally free blacks lived in shanty towns in the northern half of the city. The areas were necessarily near their places of work and interspersed with white businesses and homes.⁴⁴

Free blacks worshipped alongside whites in Norfolk's first Baptist congregation in 1800. White members of this interracial church separated in 1816, however, and formed Cumberland Street Baptist Church. The free blacks continued on as an independent congregation being ministered to by a white clergyman. This would be the predecessor to modern black Baptist churches in the city. By 1851 there were four evangelical churches serving blacks where they played leadership roles as deacons and trustees. The Cumberland Street Methodist Church established a missionary church for slaves in 1840 that would evolve into the St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1848. The Catholic Church allowed black members and occasionally even permitted illegal marriages between slaves and free blacks.⁴⁵

Although educating free blacks and slaves was illegal, educational opportunities for free blacks did exist occasionally prior to the Civil War. Margaret Douglass, a white teacher from Charleston, South Carolina who had lived in Norfolk for eight years, began

⁴⁴ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 182–4.

⁴⁵ Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 122; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 184.

educating free blacks at her school in 1853. Arrested for teaching slaves and free blacks, the case received national attention as Douglass was found guilty, sentenced to one month in the city jail, and following her release moved to Philadelphia. Christ Church and Bute Street Baptist Church also operated illegal Sunday Schools for blacks.⁴⁶

Federal occupation during the Civil War brought Norfolk its first free public schools for blacks. Opened in 1863 classes were held in the free schools formerly teaching white children before the war. These schools came to an end in 1865 with the cessation of hostilities. It would take two more years for education to be provided to blacks when the American Missionary Association established schools in 1867. These schools continued until 1871 when city councils established one public school in each ward for the city's black children.⁴⁷

Politically, in an otherwise Democratic state, there was a longstanding dominance by the Whigs in Norfolk. By 1854, however, the American Party had won control of city government. The Know-Nothings were elected by some who agreed with their anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration platform. Much of their support came from displaced Whigs looking for a party to oppose Democrats and those who supported the Know-Nothings' Unionist position. The American Party maintained control of the councils and most city offices even in 1855 when the Democratic gubernatorial candidate Henry A. Wise won a resounding victory, and Democrat Hunter Woodis beat Know-Nothing Simon Stubbs (a former Whig) in the mayoral race.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 185.

⁴⁷ Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 121; Rorer, *History of Norfolk Public Schools*, 58–59.

⁴⁸ Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 180–1.

The sectional crisis was a topic of much concern during the 1850s, but impacted Norfolk directly when on 26 November 1859 militia companies from the city and Portsmouth reported for duty to Harpers Ferry where John Brown was being tried for treason and insurrection. The Norfolk Riflemen sent sixty-four of their number while the Portsmouth Grays mustered fifty-nine militiamen as Brown was hanged on 2 December.⁴⁹

During the tempestuous months leading to Virginia's secession, the local newspapers, like others across the South debated the issues. On 10 November 1860 Abram F. Leonard and William Lamb, editors of the states' rights newspaper, the *Daily Southern Argus*, wrote that "Sooner or later the ties which now link together the North and South must be sundered. How closely the inevitable effect will follow the cause, may be a matter of speculation, but it can only be a matter of time." After South Carolina seceded from the Union in December 1860, Leonard and Lamb cheered the state's decision, proclaiming "Right nobly the proud and brave sons of South Carolina met the emergency. At one stroke they have severed the chains which bind them to a tyrannous North, and they now stand before the world an independent people." In sharp contrast Thomas G. Broughton, editor of the Unionist *Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald* asked why Virginia should "dance crazily out of the Union to the fiddling of South Carolina?"⁵⁰

During the election of 1860 the majority of Norfolkians and the rest of the Old Dominion, elected John Bell of the Old Line Whigs' Constitutional Union party to the

⁴⁹ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 35–36.

⁵⁰ Leonard and Lamb quotes from Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 89–90. Broughton quote in Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 199.

presidency with 986 votes. Southern Democratic candidate John C. Breckinridge received 438 votes while Stephen A. Douglas, the Northern Democratic candidate, received only 232 votes. Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln received no votes in Norfolk.⁵¹

On 4 February 1861 residents elected Unionist candidate George Blow over secessionist proponent James R. Hubbard to represent the city at the upcoming state convention in Richmond to decide the issue of secession. Sentiment favoring secession from the Union grew in Norfolk over the next two months, however. On 2 April a Confederate flag was hung from one of the residences on Wolfe Street and two days later a gathering of citizens at Mechanics' Hall adopted resolutions instructing Blow to vote for secession. Nevertheless, on 4 April the Norfolk delegate voted with majority (88 to 45) against seceding from the Union. Events in South Carolina would change the city's and state's course of action, however. When word reached Norfolk that Fort Sumter had been bombed and that General Pierre G. T. Beauregard had demanded its surrender, contemporary historian H. W. Burton wrote that the news "caused great excitement in the city" and described the war feeling as growing to a "fever pitch." On 17 April 1861 following Lincoln's call for troops to subdue the Palmetto state, Blow and a majority of the convention delegates voted 88 to 55 for an Ordinance of Secession.⁵²

⁵¹ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 41; Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 45.

⁵² Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 43–45, 55; Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion. A History from 1607 to the Present* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1971), 291–4. Secession convention votes in George H. Reese, ed., *Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965), 3:163 (4 April 1861 vote) and 4:144 (17 April 1861 vote).

Beyond the firing on Fort Sumter, the idea of secession appealed to many, especially in urban communities, who had plans to expand commercial trade free from perceived northeastern and governmental restraints. Like other southern port cities, even though Norfolk depended on the North for commerce, businessmen wanted to remove themselves from the colonial economic relationship with the northeastern cities and expand their trade networks within the South as well as to the West and foreign ports, thus eventually bringing about economic (and by extension political) sectional equality. After Sumter Norfolkiens fully supported the southern cause as Confederate flags were raised and citizens rejoiced at the news of Virginia's decision to secede. They stood behind a secessionist who wrote to the *Argus* in early December that "if I thought my life would be free forever from any interference from the North, I would gladly give it."⁵³

Following the Old Dominion's secession, Richmond would be chosen as the new capital and by June it was the seat of power for the new Confederacy. Norfolk's active participation in the war would be short-lived, however. On April 19 Lincoln ordered a blockade of southern ports and two days later evacuating federal forces at the Gosport Naval Yard set fire to the naval stores, arms, and several ships. The March 1862 battle between the ironclads USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia* (*Merrimack*) was the only significant ocean battle of the war and the draw sealed Norfolk's fate. Believing now that the city could not be held against Union forces coming from the south and north, there was little Confederate defense of the port. Norfolk was captured by Union forces, with

⁵³ Secessionist quote in Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 199. For a discussion of Virginia cities, economic dependence, and sectionalism issues on the eve of secession see Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 246–69.

the formal capitulation by Mayor William W. Lamb occurring on 10 May 1862. Lincoln rode through the streets of Norfolk the following day. Federal troops and control of the city would remain until June 1865.⁵⁴

From this brief historical review, we can see how Norfolk closely resembled many other southern port cities during the antebellum period in its demographic, social, and economic characteristics. In his work on southern urbanization, David R. Goldfield argues that race, agriculture, and a subservient role in the national economy have dominated the character, and subsequently limited the growth, of southern cities. Urban slavery and postwar labor systems squandered human resources by devaluing human capital and producing a large block of nonconsumers in the South. This curtailed the development of southern cities by reducing commercial demand and capital accumulation, and limiting geographic and occupational mobility. Socially and culturally biracialism turned the South into a region distinguished by rigid resistance to change, individualism, intensified religious beliefs, a contempt for laws and legality, and the acceptance of labor as an exploitable resource.⁵⁵

Because of its dependence on staple crop agriculture, the South was limited by its subservient colonial role in the national economy that had been centered in the northern cities, especially New York, since the 1840s. Southern cities developed regional

⁵⁴ Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 91; Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 29; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 206–8.

⁵⁵ Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 6–7.

specialization whereby they mainly produced, but rarely processed, raw materials. They were dependent on northern cities for everything from manufactured goods to credit. Acting as mere conduits between southern farmers and the northern economic centers had the effect of limiting capital accumulation and investment, and with these opportunities for regional growth. To counter this subservient economic role southern city leaders, Goldfield argues, “became obsessed with the growth ethic—an exaggerated form of boosterism that doted . . . on any scheme that could possibly stimulate growth and hence lessen dependency.”⁵⁶

Norfolk displayed these same characteristics as the city had a sizeable slave and free black population whose purchasing power was reduced or non-existent.⁵⁷ Although Norfolk’s economy was not dominated by staple agriculture such as cotton in the Deep South or tobacco in the Upper South, the city’s market garden economy produced the same results. Norfolk’s vegetable and fruit trade dominated the economy in that most businesses in the city were directly or indirectly affected by this commercial entity. The city was subservient to the northeastern economy as it was only a commercial stopover for goods heading toward New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Norfolk processed little of the agricultural products and did not directly ship them to northern cities, foreign destinations, or even the South. Like most southern cities, the exception being

⁵⁶ Staple crop agriculture such as tobacco and cotton underscored the Jeffersonian ideal of agriculture as the foundation of a republican society, but limited the development of southern cities as urban environments only grew to serve the basic marketing needs of the farmer and planter and determined their character as they moved to the seasonal rhythms of staple crop harvesting; *ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 6–7, 47–52; Wertebaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*, 139–40; Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 139–40.

Richmond, the Tidewater port did not possess significant manufacturing enterprises of any significance and those that did exist were small and confined to agricultural production.⁵⁸

During the two decades leading to the Civil War Norfolk, like its southern brethren, would embark on numerous, mostly failing, boosterism improvement projects within a context of sectionalism to become economically independent. Little did they realize, however, that New York and the other northern cities were too far ahead and trade routes too embedded to ever be threatened by southern commerce. Southern cities would grow physically, population would increase, and internal improvements developed, but they never would catch up to their northern counterparts—the latter's head start and subsequent development were too much to overcome. In fact, despite their best efforts and grandiose dreams, on the eve of the Civil War southern cities would be farther behind the North than ever before.⁵⁹

Norfolk also shared many attributes with its southern neighbors such as heightened susceptibility to economic downturns, greater risk of epidemics, and lack of public support and corresponding dependence on private efforts for relief of the poor, infirmed, and orphans. Education was another similarity as most southern states did not

⁵⁸ Norfolk had by far the lowest level of manufacturing of any major city in the South. United States Census Office, *Statistics of the United States, Including Mortality, Property, &c., in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns and Being the Final Exhibit of the Eighth Census* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), xviii. See Table 2 for a table providing the value of manufacturing products in 1860 for southern cities over 10,000.

⁵⁹ Goldfield explains that during the 1840s and 1850s nearly every large and small southern city was guilty of amassing huge amounts of debt resulting from to internal improvement projects such as railroads, turnpikes, and canals, many of which failed, thus driving the cities further into debt; *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 33–34, 43–44, 58–64.

establish public school systems during the antebellum period. Virginia was somewhat ahead of the rest of the South in this regard as its legislature passed an act allowing for localities to establish public schools. The only city to do so was Norfolk, but not until 1857 were they established. Still, the efforts of the city and state on this issue do not compare to the public school systems developed in the North.⁶⁰

Ultimately Norfolk shared a great many characteristics with other southern port cities such as the dependence on commercial agricultural as its driving economic force, lack of significant manufacturing enterprises, the presence of slaves and free blacks that influenced all aspects of society, colonial economic dependence on northeastern cities, and an aggressive boosterism borne out of sectionalism that drove the cities into massive debts. In terms of population, both white and black, free and slave, Norfolk was neither the largest nor the smallest compared to the other major cities and towns in the South.⁶¹ While the region is too complex to describe a “typical” southern urban environment, during the antebellum period Norfolk shared the basic and recognizable characteristics associated with the region to be called “southern.”

⁶⁰ In describing these characteristics Goldfield uses a number of Upper and Deep South states such as New Orleans, Mobile, Richmond, Norfolk, Charleston, and Savannah. He also uses the Norfolk Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor as an example of how severe these private organizations were in that assistance would only be given to those who could aid from it, Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 40–42.

⁶¹ See Table 3 for a table displaying the population statistics for southern cities in 1860.

TABLE 1
Norfolk Population Statistics

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Total Population</u> | <u>Whites</u> | <u>Slaves</u> | <u>Free Blacks</u> |
|-------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1821 | 8,608 | 4748 (55.1%) | 3,261 (37.9%) | 599 (7%) |
| 1830 | 9,816 | 5131 (52.3%) | 3,757 (38.3%) | 928 (9.4%) |
| 1840 | 10,920 | 6185 (56.6%) | 3,709 (34%) | 1,026 (9.4%) |
| 1850 | 14,326 | 9075 (63.3%) | 4,295 (30%) | 956 (6.7%) |
| 1860 | 14,620 | 10290 (70.4%) | 3,284 (22.5%) | 1,046 (7.1%) |

United States Census Office, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as Obtained at the Department of State, From the Returns of the Sixth Census* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), 32–34

United States Census Office, *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Embracing a Statistical View of Each of the States and Territories* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), 258.

United States Census Office, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), 519.

Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1931), 139–40.

TABLE 2
 Manufactured Product Values (1860)
 for Southern Cities Over 10,000

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Mobile | \$1.36 million |
| Savannah | \$1.91 million |
| Memphis | \$1.67 million |
| Nashville | \$1.84 million |
| Richmond | \$12.8 million |
| Petersburg | \$3.53 million |
| Norfolk | \$447,381 |
| Charleston | \$1.06 million |
| New Orleans | \$10.93 million |
| St. Louis | \$21.77 million |
| Louisville | \$12.93 million |
| Washington, D.C. | \$3.41 million |
| Baltimore | \$21.08 million |
| Covington, Ky | \$1.75 million |
| Wheeling | \$3.53 million |
| Alexandria | \$751,370 |
| Augusta, Ga. | \$1.31 million |

United States Census Office, *Statistics of the United States, Including Mortality, Property, &c., in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns and Being the Final Exhibit of the Eighth Census* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990), xviii.

TABLE 3
Southern Population Statistics for 1860

| <u>City</u> | <u>Total Pop.</u> | <u>Free</u> | <u>Slave</u> | <u>Foreign</u> |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Alexandria | 12,654 | 11,266 (89%) 1,415 free blacks | 1,386 (11.0%) | |
| Atlanta | 9,554 | 7,640 (80%) 25 free blacks | 1,914 (20%) | 605 (5.3% in Co.) |
| Charleston | 39,870 | 23,210 (58.2%) 3,219 (8.1%) | 13,441 (33.7%) | |
| Memphis | 22,623 | 18,939 (83.7%) 198 free blacks | 3,684 (16.3%) | 6,938 (30.7%) |
| Mobile | 29,258 | 21,671 (74.19%) 817 free blacks | 7,587 (25.9%) | 7,061 (24.1%) |
| Norfolk | 14,620 | 11,336 (77.5%) 1,046 free blacks | 3,284 (22.5%) | |
| New Orleans | 168,675 | 155,290 (92.1%) 10,689 free blacks | 13,385 (7.9%) | 64,621 (38.3%) |
| Richmond | 37,910 | 26,211 (69.1%) 2,576 free blacks | 11,699 (30.9%) | 4,956 (13%) |
| Savannah | 22,292 | 14,580 (65.4%) 705 free blacks | 7,712 (34.6%) | 4,652 (20.9%) |
| Wilmington | 9,552 | 5,775 (60.5%) | 3,777 (39.5%) | 511 (6.1%) |

United States Census Office, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (New York: Norman Ross Publishing, 1990); Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Jason Poole, "On Borrowed Ground: Free African-American Life in Charleston, South Carolina," *Essays in History*, 36 (1994): 1-33.

CHAPTER 3 BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES IN ANTEBELLUM NORFOLK

During the two decades leading to the Civil War benevolent societies throughout the country were essential to assisting those in physical need. Often inspired by the reforming impulses of the Second Great Awakening, middle-class elites organized benevolent societies that provided assistance beyond what local governments would not or could not render.¹ Throughout the South especially municipal governments did not allocate sufficient funds for public services to aid the needy. They believed that private organizations and associations should bear the burden of taking care of the poor, disabled, mentally ill, and destitute. What local funds that did exist usually were

¹ Camilla Townsend writes that in Baltimore an elite class of merchants who possessed wealth and power—a “rising upper bourgeoisie”—became active in moral and benevolent causes because of the effects of the Second Great Awakening; *Tales of Two Cities*, 101–3, 109–10. In Poughkeepsie, New York, the city's upper and “more comfortable” middle classes established civic organizations like the benevolent societies such as the Home for the Friendless and the Old Ladies Home; Clive Griffen and Sally Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers*, 40. In her study of the family in Oneida, New York, Mary P. Ryan writes that the reforming impulses arising from the Second Great Awakening pushed individuals out of their homes and domestic lives to form voluntary associations during the 1830s and 1840s, providing a context for gathering together outside the home and civic domains; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, xii, 236–7. The religious fervor surround the Second Great Awakening also spurred the development of what Paul Boyer terms “evangelical voluntarism” of Bible and tract societies and Sabbath schools during the Jacksonian Era that was the first attempt at shaping the moral character of the poor of the society; Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 1–2, 10–15. For discussion of the Great Awakening and benevolent activities see Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium* and Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), 14–29, 126–37.

allocated for commercial improvements in streets, docks, warehouses, market-houses, hotels, and especially canals and railroad facilities.²

The middle class responded with benevolent organizations that provided the physical necessities of life such as fuel, food, and clothing to the needy. In their methods of service provision and the characteristics they sought in the recipients of aid the middle class promoted their values of industry, thrift, sobriety, and self-discipline. Not all who required assistance received it as benevolent societies increasingly gave only to those deemed to be the *worthy poor*. Misfortune, unemployment, loss or death of a bread winner, and other external factors could explain penury but personal failings disqualified the rest.³ These associations served to improve the material conditions of these persons

² In a previous chapter, we have discussed Norfolk's multitude of efforts at physically improving the city. John S. Gilkeson argues that middle-class associations acted as surrogates for the weak governmental authority that existed for much of the nineteenth century; *Middle-Class Providence*, 7–10, 55–56. David R. Goldfield and Lawrence H. Larsen discuss extensively the spending habits of southern urban governments in their regional overviews. See Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, esp. 5–7, 37–45, and Larsen, *The Urban South*, esp. 40–42. For specific examples of southern cities allocating funds to these types of projects see James M. Russell, *Atlanta, 1847–1890*, 49–58 and Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City*, 26–45, 70–75.

³ In Baltimore the upper bourgeoisie directed benevolent societies to assist needy women and children and petitioned the city council for firewood to be provided to “poor and worthy citizens” during the winter months; Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities*, 102–3. John W. Quist explains in his work on Washtenaw, Michigan, and Tuscaloosa that prior to the Civil War benevolent societies existed in the North and South that doled out assistance to the “worthy poor” of the community such as women who were elderly, infirmed, or widowed and thus not responsible for their predicament; *Restless Visionaries*, 81–86. Paul Boyer explains that the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP), organized in 1843, provided assistance to those poor who were destitute for reasons beyond their control such as the loss of a breadwinner; *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 86–94; In *The Web of Progress: Private Values and Public Styles in Boston and Charleston, 1828–1843* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease explain that in Boston provision of assistance was based on the idea of providing temporary aid to those worthy poor who deserved it. This was done in a context of

and also sought to instill or elevate middle-class beliefs. In a context of antebellum boosterism, benevolent societies not only hoped to improve the individual for his own sake, but also to create a better citizen to contribute positively to the larger community and, correspondingly, not be a drain to the resources and spirit of the town.⁴

Norfolk exemplified these characteristics in the benevolent societies that existed there during the two decades leading to the Civil War. These organizations provided necessary food, fuel, and clothing to the needy and destitute for whom the town council did not allocate sufficient funds. The middle-class organizers exhibited and promoted

maintaining social stability and religious obligation. In contrast, benevolent societies and individuals in Charleston provided relief to those who required it within a context of paternalistic noblesse oblige and personal obligation; 145–52. For other studies on benevolent societies promoting middle-class values also see Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, esp. 9–55 and Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 192–206.

⁴ In his examination of Jacksonville, Illinois, Don H. Doyle, explains how civic boosters pushed for internal improvements in the town, expanded public services, and led the way in the elevation of the lower orders that would help the town grow. Their elevation not only enabled them to contribute to the economy of the town, but also helped to mediate internal conflict by creating a sense of community among the divergent populations. All of these would help make Jacksonville more attractive to outsiders and prospective trade partners; *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 64, 225–6. Paul Boyer explains that when establishing the New York AICP, compassion for the urban poor did not motivate middle-class leaders who believed that individual poverty, neighborhood slums, and being poor mostly were a result of character failings that led to moral depravity. Ultimately they threatened the stability of the larger society and the concomitant crime, vice, riots, and gang wars. Financial assistance and counseling from the AICP instructed the morally bankrupt poor to improve their character, altering their detrimental vice-ridden daily habits and instilling in them with such values and habits as industry, thrift, and sobriety; *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*, 86–94. John W. Quist argues that in parallel with the North benevolent societies attempted to instill self-control in the poor and working classes in order for them to contribute to the progress of the community and national market economy. They also stressed spiritual improvement that would parallel the material and technological improvement and mediate the potential for social turmoil in this age of dramatic changes. Like their Whig counterparts in the North, Alabama's benevolent workers believed that by attacking poverty with their programs, they were aiding in the spiritual growth and economic development of the individual and by extension the country as a whole; *Restless Visionaries*, 71–77.

their values of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety by their methods of service provision and limiting recipients to the designated worthy poor. The provision of basic items for survival was seen by local boosters as a way of helping these individuals become productive members of society and contribute to the elevation of the community.

The Norfolk Humane Society (or Association as it was sometimes styled) was the predominant organization devoted to assisting the poor or those in distress during the antebellum period. The society existed the entire year to address specific relief efforts. Generally it would lie dormant during the spring through autumn months and then reorganize sometime in November and December to provide assistance for the upcoming winter. Prior to each year's reorganizational meeting the managers placed notices in the local newspapers asking for contributions and inviting those who were interested in assisting the poor to attend the meeting. The society's officers divided the city into wards for the purposes of soliciting contributions and committees were formed to carry out specific tasks such as the purchasing and distribution of wood.⁵

A letter from "V" to the *American Beacon* late in 1840 extolled the virtues of the Humane Society in helping the unfortunate of the city, especially the women, children, and widows in dire straits. "V" closed with a plea not to wait for the society's solicitors to come and ask for donations, but to send them in forthwith. On this same date, William E. Cunningham, editor of the *American Beacon*, called attention to the organization and appealed to those who would waste money on luxuries to instead donate to philanthropic

⁵ *American Beacon*, 14 January, 19, 29 November 1839, 14 January, 4 February, 11, 18 December 1840, 3 November, 19 December 1842, 19 December 1843, 11, 13 December 1845.

causes such as the society. In encouraging the public to alleviate the suffering of the poor and destitute, Cunningham explained that charity began at home and that “the rich should never forget that in the vicissitudes of their mortal career they know not what in their future condition and circumstances may be.” While riches were fleeting, Cunningham preached, those who gave to the poor would be repaid by the Lord.⁶

About the time of the season reorganizational meeting for the 1841–1842 winter, a long commentary in the *American Beacon* appeared reiterating the good works of the society and urging citizens to support the association in its upcoming activities on behalf of the poor. The anonymous writer argued that the most useful undertaking that an individual could perform was to relieve human distress. The author explained that when virtuous and elevated philanthropists reviewed what they had performed in their lives, those who garnered the greatest pleasure were those alleviators of human misery. Even in hours of sadness, they could reflect upon the deeds that sprang “up before the mind, like a green and refreshing oasis, in a waste and weary land.”⁷

One of the highest priorities for the Humane Society was extending relief to the “widowed friendless mother” who required assistance during the harsh winter months. Widows were described as barely surviving during the summer, but during the inclement winter their needs were greater and requisite earnings harder to find. The society

⁶ *ibid.*, 22 December 1840. Cunningham was correct on the fragility of wealth for most during this period. In trying to explain the difficulty of defining the middle class, Paul Boyer contends that many who considered themselves middle class were very near the laboring class. There was no assurance as to middle-class respectability, he argued, for many like the young white-collar clerk could just as easily fall back to the laboring class with some financial misfortune, illness, or succumbing to temptation as he is to steadily rise up the socio-economic ladder; *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 60–61.

⁷ *American Beacon*, 12 December 1841.

furnished needed relief that supplemented what little the city doled out. The *Beacon* observer hoped that the liberality of the people would move them to support the men pledged to collect contributions, being assured that the society “invites the confidence of the public, and affords a channel for their charity, free of objection, and certain of reaching worthy recipients.”⁸

This issue of the quality of the recipients of charity and philanthropy would plague benevolent endeavors throughout the antebellum period. Prior to the winter of 1849, a declaration was made by “C” in the *Daily Southern Argus* for an improved and systematic plan for the distribution of aid to Norfolk’s poor because of “great evils and unsatisfactory results” in past years. There was an “uncertainty as to the worthiness of the recipient; [an] inability on the part of the benefactor to trace the blessing of his charity in the physical or moral improvement of the individual; there is, oftentimes, the actual encouragement of idleness, vagrancy, drunkenness. . . . indiscriminate alms-giving is far more productive of evil than good.” These actions, it was asserted, caused many Christian philanthropists to stop giving to the relief of the poor. The solution was to develop a system that would both provide physical assistance and elevate the moral health of those who were needy and worthy recipients.⁹

Using the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP) as a guide, the first step according to “C” was the formation of a new association with a suggested name of The Norfolk Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor to be based upon three fundamental principles inspired by the New York AICP.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 27 November 1848.

The first principle was the sound and judicious discrimination in affording relief, meaning that no persons would receive aid without “an intimate acquaintance with their character, history, and habits of life.” It further meant that the association would provide only necessary items of food, fuel, and clothing, rather than money, which could be abused (e.g. to buy alcohol), to give assistance that would be inferior to what could be acquired by labor, to refrain from giving to those who would not exhibit improvement because of the aid provided, and “never, under any circumstances to give to the street beggar or vagrant.” The second principle was that aid should be donated through a systematic unity of action so that assistance could be provided by numerous sources, thoroughly organized and working in concert, thus spreading out the division of labor to many. The last fundamental principle was that aid would be provided via personal intercourse with the poor at their homes. This would be done by dividing the city into districts and appointing visitors who interviewed those requesting assistance and provided written reports on those applying and receiving aid to the solicitors and managers. “C” emphasized that the system had been tried with success in other cities.¹⁰

¹⁰ *ibid.* When the New York AICP was established in 1843 middle-class bankers, professionals, and merchants developed a system whereby visitors went out into assigned districts to call on the poor and provide financial assistance to some—usually those few seen as destitute for reasons beyond their control such as the loss of the breadwinner—and counsel and instruct the morally bankrupt poor to improve their character, alter their detrimental vice-ridden daily habits, and instill in them such values and habits as industry, thrift, and sobriety. These visitors also sent back reports to a main office so that these individuals could not receive assistance from other groups. Paul Boyer writes that with this systematic rational approach “the AICP represented an institutional mechanism for transmitting the values of the city's middle and upper strata downward into the ranks of the poor.” By 1860, the New York AICP had divided the city into 337 sections and visitors assigned to each. Similarly, in the early 1850s the Philadelphia Union Benevolent Association had divided the city into districts and sent out 5,000 volunteers to conduct a census of each poor family in the city; *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*, 86–94. John W. Quist explains that members of the Female Benevolent Society

The next month Samuel T. Sawyer, the editor of the *Daily Southern Argus*, commented on the plight of the poor and this new plan being contemplated to assist them. He wrote that the proudest cities and societies provided services to its less fortunate citizens by some private or public venture. Implying a worthiness in those the society aimed to help, he further insisted that the situation continued year after year as vice and intemperance were inflicted upon “our innocent mothers and helpless children.” Less subtle was his assertion that one of merits to this reorganizational plan was that the association would provide for the *virtuous poor* (his italics), though it would sometimes be difficult to escape the deceptions of the impostor. He did emphasize that even this occasional deception was better than for any individual of merit to suffer on account of a lack of food, shelter, and clothing. Sawyer emphasized that another positive element was that the association was not bound by any single religious denomination, but was “as broad and bounding as charity itself.”¹¹

The *Argus* editor continued by asserting that the association had been formed under favorable conditions with earnestness, a kind spirit, and judicious officers with only the best motives to discharge their duties. The real question, he asked, was if and

in Tuscaloosa that existed from 1853 to 1867 collected money from the middle-class and elite women there, using it to buy goods and giving them out to the “worthy poor” of the community. Members would evaluate those needing assistance and would later follow up on their situation. Quist points out that organizations like this existed in the North and South through the antebellum period; *Restless Visionaries*, 81–86. See also Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 75–77; Pease and Pease, *Web of Progress*, 146–52; Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 156–93; Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 192–206.

¹¹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 5 December 1848. The Catholics of Norfolk did establish their own beneficial and charitable association called the St Patrick’s Society in January 1852. It stressed the duties of man as required by religion, morality, and humanity; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 257.

how the citizens of Norfolk would respond to the call to assist these virtuous poor—not only with their encouragement, but also with their monetary contributions. Explaining the benefits of charity to the recipient, the benefactor, and the larger society Sawyer—in true booster fashion—answered in the affirmative proclaiming that “every act of generous philanthropy, while it tends to promote the happiness of others, likewise contributes to the advantage, and ennobles the person who bestows—yields an inestimable consciousness of internal excellence and dignity, and is the best proof of public spirit and patriotic views.”¹²

As a result of society members’ dissatisfaction with the current system and dwindling public contributions, and no doubt aided by the multitude of letters and editorials in local newspapers, the Norfolk Humane Society was in fact reborn in 1848 as the Norfolk Humane Association for the Relief and Improvement of the Poor. Complete with a new constitution and by-laws, its members upheld the focus on helping only the virtuous, industrious poor. For purposes of soliciting more contributions, managers stressed to the public that this association would replace the old society and that its purposes and methods would be more comprehensive. The managers of the association divided the city into twelve wards and assigned a committee of solicitors and visitors. Solicitors asked for contributions from individuals in their respective wards. Visitors examined the needs and circumstances of the poor in their districts, provided the necessary relief, and presented monthly reports to the managers. Another change was that the new system of assistance would not be confined to the winter months alone, but would continue throughout the year. For their part those wishing assistance had to apply

¹² *Daily Southern Argus*, 5 December 1848.

to the visitor of their ward for aid. The visitor then interviewed the applicants at their homes to determine if aid could and should be provided. Only with a written report by the visitor could relief be provided in the form of food, clothing, wood for fuel, and dry goods.¹³

At the regular meeting of the Board of Managers in January 1849 the organization's financial difficulties occupied the agenda. There was a belief that some solicitors had not collected money for the support of the poor. Moreover, distributions had already exceeded half the funds collected and it was still early in the winter season. In an effort to rally support and raise more money, the association called on the citizens of Norfolk with pleas in the newspapers to aid the society in its efforts. Editors like Samuel T. Sawyer wrote columns explaining that during these harsh winter months when the poor and destitute suffer the most because of a lack of the common comforts of life, the community, known for its benevolent and charitable liberality, was generally ignorant of the conditions of poverty in Norfolk. When made aware of the situation, however, the citizens of the city would rally to relieve the suffering and necessities of the poor.¹⁴

Despite such public entreaties the situation would only get worse, however, as outlays exceeded contributions by a significant margin over the next two years. At the end of January 1849 only fifty cents remained from the \$800 collected during the previous two months and the winter season was just beginning. In March 1850 the association required a sum of \$600 to meet its debts. Even with these difficulties, however, the society continued to assist many individuals. In December 1848 and

¹³ *ibid.*; Forrest, *The Norfolk Directory, For 1851-1852*, 96-97.

¹⁴ *Daily Southern Argus*, 9, 10 January 1849.

January 1849 the visitors granted relief to 281 families totaling 599 persons and distributed 200 cords of wood, groceries valued at \$143, along with dry goods, clothing, and shoes. In one ward alone during the winter of 1850 the society provided relief to 113 families comprising 317 individuals with contributions of 250 cords of wood and 36 orders for groceries.¹⁵

By the end of 1850 the association's financial health was declining to the point that one of the founding principles of the reconstituted association from two years prior had been abandoned. The Humane Association's goal now became the provision of assistance only during the winter season, rather than year-round. Moreover, managers reemphasized the temporary nature of assistance in a public notice asking for contributions, explaining that "The design of the Association is not to support the poor of the city, but only to give the relief and assistance from time to time. Persons who have no means of subsistence, and no near prospect of better circumstances, must be entrusted to the care of their friends and relatives, or be sent to the Alms House." The city remained divided into districts each with its own visitor and solicitor to ensure that the evaluation of those desiring aid did not overwhelm the process.¹⁶

Throughout the remaining antebellum years the Humane Association of Norfolk would operate on the same principles and methods: hibernating, as it were, during the spring and summer months and reviving when the cold winds blew into the city. During the winter leaders continually asked for contributions through the efforts of solicitors and newspaper articles and notices. The society also held benefits to raise funds that include

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 21 February 1849, 16 March 1850.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 14, 18 December 1850.

panorama shows and musical concerts. The general tone of giving stressed not only what it would do for the needy, but also what contributing to the society could do for the donor as it was an opportunity to bring honor to the benefactor and indulge in “all the nobler attributes of our nature.”¹⁷

In terms of practical operations the reorganized Norfolk Humane Association for the Relief and Improvement of the Poor exemplified middle-class ideas of organization, frugality, and efficiency. Described as improved, systematic, sound, and judicious, the rationalization of the organization encompassed a board of directors (managers), a number of committees to carry out certain functions like the purchasing and distribution of wood (often two separate committees), the division of the city into wards, and assigning visitors and solicitors, each with his own task, to each district. There was no randomness to this endeavor—it was calculated for maximum efficiency and assistance was doled out relative to the needs of the individual or family as determined by the visitor. Application by an individual in need demonstrated to the visitor an initiative in desiring to better themselves by seeking temporary assistance. The two-step process of deciding on provision of aid—the initial visitor report and subsequent evaluation by the Board of Managers—ensured that the visitor had not made an unwise decision, such as granting assistance to one who was unworthy, but who tricked the visitor. Also, the written reports on each applicant and subsequent monthly reports on recipients by the visitors guaranteed that individuals and families were using the assistance wisely, that they were continuing to live appropriately (e.g. not drinking liquor), and that Humane

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 8 December 1851, 20, 22, 24 December 1853, 16 January 1854, 11, 13, 16 December 1854, 21, 24, 26 January 1856.

Society aid continued to match the relative needs of the family. Assistance in the form of wood, food, and clothing rather than actual money guarded against wastefulness or inappropriate purchases. These characteristics of the reorganized Humane Association guaranteed, at least on paper, that only the virtuous, industrious poor receive aid.

To be sure, underlying this framework for giving was a certain degree of social control. As the urban society was advancing, and concomitantly producing increasing numbers of poor, distressed, and needy, the middle class and its associations sought to bring order, stability, and control to this changing urban landscape. The benevolent associations played their parts in this process as well. The Norfolk Humane Society reorganized the methods by which assistance was provided so that literally there were more controls over who received what. More importantly, the strict adherence to providing assistance to the worthy poor implicitly (or perhaps explicitly) sent a message to the unworthy beggars and vagrants that they would not be given a free ride.¹⁸

Another key element of middle-class values that can be seen in the Humane Society was that during the reorganization its name was changed to the Norfolk Humane Association for the Relief and Improvement of the Poor. The term "relief" explains that assistance was only a temporary measure, with those requiring more banished out of mainstream society to the almshouse. Including "improvement" specifically highlights

¹⁸ For other studies relating the issue of social control to middle-class institutions see David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*; Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*; Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*; Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968); Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963); 36–60; Rowland T. Berthoff, *An Unsettled People: Social Order and Disorder in American History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 254–74, 426–43.

the society's intention that aid would be a temporary helping hand enabling the recipients to improve themselves and their situation in order that they could make it on their own. In the end improvement would assist them and by extension the community as a whole, thus creating a better citizen.

Essential to the middle-class ideology was the belief that helping and improving others enhanced the life of the donors as well. As exemplified in numerous editorials and letters, those who gave to the relief of the suffering poor of Norfolk felt themselves closer to God than those who did not. Giving donations offered the benefactor identifiable moments of their lives where they elevated the condition of someone in their community, and by extension their own condition as well. Present in this context was a not-so-subtle implication that the most virtuous individuals in the community donated to benevolent causes and that the final reward would be greater for those who gave rather than those who did not. There were many entreaties in local newspapers for individuals not to spend their extra monies on frivolous luxuries, but to give to philanthropic causes. The members of the Humane Association, especially those visitors and solicitors who were most directly responsible for the provision of assistance, were saluted as being among the most virtuous citizens in the community. Additionally, there was a belief that the donation process reflected on the city as a whole in that Norfolk's citizens were portrayed as benevolent individuals who would give when made aware of the problems of their community. Tying in to the booster ethos of the time it was argued that the proudest cities provided for the less fortunate of their citizenry by some public or private means.

While Norfolk's men directed good works with the Humane Association, the women of the city developed their own organizations devoted to helping the destitute.

Established in 1811 the Dorcas Society dedicated itself to alleviating the needs of the “suffering poor” during the winter months and in times of crisis. Consisting of Norfolk’s “charitable ladies,” many the wives of civic leaders and from all religious denominations, its members visited the homes of the afflicted and suffering, often weekly, to supply their needs. They provided clean clothing (frequently what they had made themselves), food, medical assistance, and religious ministrings. The latter was of the utmost importance to the society as the group attempted to provide temporal comfort as well as endeavoring to “impress upon the minds of the poor the necessity of religion, and to put their trust and confidence in God.” Further echoing the improvement goal of their work, members reported that they hoped those being assisted would find their way to God and subsequently speak of their positive experience with the “thoughtless and impenitent.”¹⁹

Associationalism for the women of Norfolk was not limited to the Dorcas Society, however. They became involved in church auxiliaries that met regularly and raised monies for a variety of congregational and community-related causes. Working as individual church auxiliaries or in concert with other churches and even denominations, the chief method of fund raising was the fair and feast. The goals of these fairs ranged from church renovations or new sanctuaries to charitable endeavors such as aiding the

¹⁹ Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 161–2. Similar to the Humane Association support came from the newspapers. Abram F. Leonard, editor of the *Daily Southern Argus* wrote that contributions of money, fabric, and old clothes would be helpful to assist the society’s endeavors; *Argus*, 12 November 1851, 3, 12 January 1856. Monetary gifts of any size were always appreciated such as when a gift of fifty dollars was anonymously donated to the Dorcas Society in October 1851. The organization placed a notice in a local newspaper gratefully acknowledging the gift and praying that the donor be abundantly blessed; *Argus*, 15 October 1851.

poor and destitute, orphan asylums, and the local voluntary militia companies like the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues.²⁰

These Ladies Fair events included simple occasions where the auxiliaries sold baked goods, foodstuffs, and “useful and handsome articles” as well as grand celebrations like that hosted by the Ladies of the Freemason Street Baptist Church in April 1850. The auxiliary presented the Norfolk Sacred Musical Society that conducted a concert at Mechanics’ Hall where they performed works by Mozart and Hayden, along with various hymns and religious anthems.²¹ That same month the ladies of St. Patrick’s Church held a Catholic Fair, which *Daily Southern Argus* editor Samuel T. Sawyer described as “one of the most brilliant and magnificent fairs ever held in this city.” He proclaimed that never before had he seen such a grand gathering of people enjoy such a wide variety of food, fabrics, and other articles. A letter to the editor from “Philo” commented on how successful the fair was and encouraged citizens to participate. General Winfield Scott even visited the fair while on a visit to Norfolk.²²

²⁰ *American Beacon*, 13, 22 June 1841, 5, 6 February, 26 April 1847; *Daily Southern Argus*, 6, 9, 10 January, 10 April 1849, 27 June 1851, 22 October 1852. With respect to the benefit for the NLA Blues held in the spring of 1844, the *Beacon’s* editor William E. Cunningham commented that the collection of articles included some beautiful items imported from Europe expressly for the fair, which ran for ten days, a long time relative to other fairs; *American Beacon*, 19 April 1844.

²¹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 1 April 1850.

²² *ibid.*, 24, 25 April 1850. These fairs could be extremely successful, such as when the Ladies and Friends of the Methodist Protestant Church held a fair at the Mechanics’ Hall offering the usual “variety of useful and fancy articles.” The fair, organized to raise money for a new church, reported over \$1,000 in profits; *Daily Southern Argus*, 24 May 1854, 2 June 1854.

These occasions helped to create a sense of community among the women's auxiliaries as different churches and even different denominations would assist each other in organizing a fair. During the summer of 1842 the Ladies of the Catholic Church hosted a fair to help with costs incurred in erecting a new sanctuary. On this occasion women from all over Norfolk helped by "preparing useful and handsome articles" for sale at the fair. *American Beacon* editor William E. Cunningham wrote that "The noble and holy object, to which the proceeds of the skill, taste, and industry of the fair ladies who are engaged in the work are to be devoted, furnishes a guarantee that their labors will not go unrewarded."²³ The language used to describe these women and their benevolent activities exemplifies how the middle-class belief systems could bind together persons of different denominations and faiths. Perhaps more importantly the benevolent Dorcas Society and church-oriented ladies' auxiliaries provided an avenue by which antebellum women could be active in the public sphere of society.²⁴

The fairs also created a larger sense of community within the city as a whole. When the Ladies of the Freemason Street Baptist Church hosted a festival, the

²³ *American Beacon*, 20 June 1842.

²⁴ A number of studies examine the roles women played in associations and how these organizations expanded the role they could and would play throughout the nineteenth into the twentieth century. For example see Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder: Temperance Reform in Cincinnati from the Washingtonian Revival to the WCTU* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 180-233; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981); Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

advertisement stressed not only the edible delicacies that would be provided, but also the opportunity for patrons to “regale themselves with an hour or two of delightful sociability with the fairer portion of our population.” *Southern Argus* editor Samuel T. Sawyer further noted that “Those who would enjoy a feast of spirit and a flow of soul, should attend this entertainment, where they will not only be served with all the delicacies in the edible line of the hands of the “fairer portion of our population,” but regale themselves with an hour of two of delightful sociability.”²⁵ Certainly these commentaries are pointed toward men stressing the opportunity to hobnob with the women organizing and attending the fairs. They also suggest, however, a larger context of socialization whereby likeminded members of the community with similar beliefs and socio-economic levels could fraternize, inculcate new residents, make business contacts, and perhaps even cultivate romantic endeavors. Ultimately, these ladies’ organizations engendered a sense of community between their own groups, but also within the larger urban environment.

Fairs and festivals were continually being held for various local benevolent institutions. Among the most popular that received aid from local women’s organizations were the various orphan asylums of Norfolk. During the antebellum years these included the Norfolk Female Orphan Asylum, the St. Mary’s Catholic Orphan Asylum, and the Jackson Female Orphan Asylum. Benefits continually sponsored to raise money for these asylums included dramatic performances, musical events, pleasure excursions, and fairs conducted by the ladies’ auxiliaries of Norfolk’s churches as well as female schools

²⁵ *Daily Southern Argus*, 1 April 1850.

and seminaries.²⁶ The Female Orphan Asylum organized a benefit in 1847 to repair its deteriorating building. The cost was estimated at \$4,000 and to raise this money the ladies of the different religious denominations combined to hold a Union Fair. They sold foodstuffs, needle work, and the standard “useful and fashionable commodities for house keeping.” An anonymous letter writer commended the ladies for their “patient industry and generous devotion of time, labor, and money.”²⁷

Like the Humane Association, providing assistance for orphans reflected middle-class values. Contributing to the Orphan Asylum was portrayed in a context of these children being innocent victims of circumstances that left them without parents and stressed how giving to them was a noble act of charity by those who had been more blessed by Providence. Inextricably tied in with this were ideals of improving the children through the inculcation of industry and moral and religious virtues. Echoing these sentiments in 1840, *American Beacon* editor William E. Cunningham wrote that to give the necessary assistance to the innocent children was a fine action, but that “to bestow it, as a reward, in some measure, of industry, taste and skill, is better.”²⁸ Similarly, in March 1842 Cunningham, in calling for donations to the asylum, wrote that “There could scarcely be devised a more effectual plan for relieving the wants of the

²⁶ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 223–6. A fair in 1855 to benefit St. Mary’s even published a corresponding newspaper (one per day of the six-day event) entitled *The Fair Offering* devoted to literature, instruction, and amusement; *Daily Southern Argus*, 16 May 1855. See fairs announced in *American Beacon*, 22 March, 1839, 3, 4 May 1841, 6, 28 May 1842, 2 September 1846, 5, 9, 13, 16 April 1847; *Daily Southern Argus*, 20 October 1853, 7 January, 9, 15, 16 November 1854.

²⁷ *American Beacon*, 27 January, 22 March 1847.

²⁸ *American Beacon*, 6, 8 May 1840; *Daily Southern Argus*, 9 November 1854.

poor, and encouraging the growth of virtue in that class. To instill in [the orphan's] soul the purity of principle, moral and religious, and imbue its mind with the elevation of knowledge . . . are among the most privileged labors of the philanthropic."²⁹

In a letter to the *American Beacon* in April 1847, an individual identified as "Q" further exemplified the improvement ideology when suggesting how the Orphan Asylum could be altered in such a way that would aid the institution and the children living there. "Q" wrote that a large lot within the city could be purchased and a new building erected. The lot also had enough space to cultivate a garden of vegetables and flowers that older orphans could work themselves. This would enable the institution to support itself and perhaps even be able to accept more orphans to house and educate. "Q" pointed out that a similar plan was believed to have been adopted by the new asylum in Richmond.³⁰

Simply providing a place for orphans to be raised was not enough, however. Without parents the child would be at risk of becoming intemperate, lazy, morally bankrupt, and without religion—in short a danger to society. The orphan asylums, however, would take the place of the departed parents and teach the children the conventions of the day. They would mold their charges into an industrious, virtuous, useful, and intelligent member of society. Similarly, the institution itself was seen in the context of improvement as "Q's" plan for buying a larger lot, building new buildings and developing a garden would make it self-sufficient and able to serve more children.³¹

²⁹ *American Beacon*, 5 March 1842. For other appeals see *American Beacon*, 6 May 1846.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 12 April 1847.

³¹ These operations of the orphan asylum reflected the changing nature and role of asylums from the colonial to the antebellum period. David J. Rothman argues that during

As the various women's auxiliaries and the Humane Society provided benevolent aid to the worthy poor and suffering of Norfolk for most of the antebellum years, one of the most enduring of Norfolk's benevolent associations was organized late in this period during one of the darkest times in the city's history. In the summer of 1855 Norfolk suffered a terrible yellow fever epidemic that was so overwhelming it required citizens to ban together in organizations to relieve the suffering of their fellow residents. From June until October nearly ten thousand people, about two-thirds of the population, contracted the disease and more than two thousand perished.³²

the Jacksonian period the family model of the colonial era was done away with in favor of institutions such as asylums, penitentiaries, and orphanages. These institutions shared many similarities in physical structure and program design. In all, the physical structure changed from a home-like dwelling to a large, spartan, and functional building. The rehabilitation program developed along a model comprising a strict daily routine, rigid rules and regulations, respect for authority, and steady discipline that would transform inmates' character. Rothman explains that these institutions not only existed to reform the "inmates," but to serve as a model for a well-ordered republican society. The various rehabilitative programs were strikingly similar with only a few alterations. For the criminal deviant was added hard labor duties, often harsh discipline, and nearly total isolation from the society (which could not be trusted) and other corrupting inmates. In the case of insanity, the asylum's social organization created a well-ordered institution with a simple and fixed routine to alleviate the distress seen as causing a physical ailment in the brain. Incorporating order, discipline, and an exacting routine able-bodied inmates of the almshouse would be required to do work and thus be taught the virtue of labor making them diligent, hardworking citizens. The children in the orphanages and houses of refuge were seen as current and potential deviants. These institutions would provide shelter and reform using rehabilitation, discipline, and teaching obedience to make them respectable citizens; *Discovery of the Asylum*, 3-14, 30-35, 56-84, 103-8, 133-42, 180-4, 206-24.

³² Many works concerning the yellow fever epidemic have been published including David Goldfield, "Disease and Urban Image: Yellow Fever in Norfolk, 1855," *Virginia Cavalcade* 23 (Autumn 1973): 34-41; Charles A. Nicholson, "The Tragic Summer of 1855 at Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia," *Genealogical Society of Tidewater, Virginia Bulletin* 10 (December 1979): 171-88. For contemporary accounts see George D. Armstrong, *The Summer of the Pestilence: A History of the Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk, Virginia, A.D. 1855* 3d ed. (Virginia Beach, Virginia: W. S. Dawson & Co., 1994); William S. Forrest, *The Great Pestilence in Virginia: Being an Historical*

Informally established in August 1855, but formally reorganized in September with a constitution and bylaws, the Howard Association was the main organization established to alleviate the suffering.³³ It turned Norfolk's largest hotel into a hospital, set up other medical facilities in buildings at the Julappi Race Course on Lambert's Point several miles from the city, distributed vast amounts of monies (about \$160,000) and supplies sent from all over the country, and built another orphan asylum to house children who lost parents in the epidemic. The association also paid for the burial of about 2,300 individuals who died (including its first president William B. Ferguson) and the following winter it distributed food and fuel relief to about five hundred families.³⁴

Account of the Origin, General Character, and Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1855; Together with Sketches of Some of the Victims (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1856); and Norfolk (Va.) Committee to Investigate the Cause and Origin of the Yellow Fever of 1855, *Report on the Origin of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk During the Summer of 1855, made to City Councils by a Committee of Physicians* (Richmond: Ritchie and Dunnivant, 1857).

³³ Named after British social reformer John Howard (1726–1790) these associations developed in the first half of the nineteenth century in most major cities around the country such as Boston (established in 1812), Washington, D.C. (1825), New Orleans (1837), New York (1843), and Philadelphia (1858), concerning themselves with issues related to prison reform, crime, and especially public health. See Sidney Lee, ed., *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 28 (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1891), 44–48; Flora B. Hildreth, “The Howard Association of New Orleans, 1837–1878” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1975), esp. 48–69; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 162–3.

³⁴ *Report of the Howard Association of Norfolk, Va., to all Contributors Who Gave their Valuable Aid in Behalf of the Sufferers from Epidemic Yellow Fever During the Summer of 1855* (Philadelphia: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1857); Nicholson, “The Tragic Summer of 1855,” 172; Edward Wilson James, ed., *The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, vol. 5 (Baltimore: The Friedenwald Company, 1904), 24–25; *Daily Southern Argus*, 26 October 1855; Tazewell, *Vignettes from the Shadows*, 46; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 176–80, 190.

After the crisis had passed, the Howard Association moved forward becoming a year-round benevolent society attending to the needs of the poor by using the remaining funds left over from the epidemic contributions (about \$67,000). Out of this sum, the association's officers invested \$50,000 whose interest enabled the organization to pursue its charitable endeavors well into the twentieth century. The association used the remaining \$17,000 to maintain the Howard Asylum that funded the education of children orphaned by the epidemic. The asylum continued until 1861 when expenses became prohibitive and the remaining twenty-nine inmates (as they were often referred to) were turned over the Norfolk Female Asylum. The Howard Association contracted to support the orphans in the asylum until they were eighteen years old (or adopted) with reportedly about \$2,500 per year initially in monetary support.³⁵

Even though the Howard Association directed many good works during the yellow fever epidemic, some observers believed that the organization did not receive its fair recognition. In an early 1856 letter to the *Daily Southern Argus* an individual identified as "Refugee" wrote that the association had been slighted and not appreciated for its work helping others during the epidemic, especially in light of the public praise that had been heaped on others. "Refugee," undoubtedly someone who received aid, wrote that the group deserved an ovation of some kind, but that the association had been subjected to the contemptible taunts and jeers and sneers by the public, even by "that very respectable body of citizens, who have usually had the management of all places of trust

³⁵ Except for funds from private sources, the Howard Association appropriation would be the only monies received by the Norfolk Female Orphan asylum during the war years, Tazewell, *Vignettes from the Shadows*, 46; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 223-4; see also Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 162-3.

in our city.” Some of the refugees assisted by the organization, however, believed that the association was “miserably incompetent to transact its peculiar duties” in aiding the suffering, displaced, and poor.³⁶

The Howard Association did obtain positive notice not long afterwards when the association’s orphans attended St. Paul’s Church. The seventy-eight boys and girls were reported to be neatly dressed, appeared happy and contented, and among them were “many very interesting and beautiful children.” Through the use of donations, including funds from other cities, the organization obtained a dwelling and a matron to oversee the children. Everything had been done to relieve their daily needs and alleviate the grief connected with the losses of their parents.³⁷ In May of that year another newspaper reported that fifty Howard Association orphans were attending St. Paul’s Church. As before the children were described as healthy and tidily groomed and dressed. They were also said to exhibit “orderly and correct behavior . . . [evincing] the good effects of the parental care bestowed upon them.”³⁸

³⁶ *Daily Southern Argus*, 18 January 1856. “Refugee” saluted the Howard Association in other newspaper editions for their good and heroic works during the yellow fever epidemic, see *Weekly Southern Argus*, 24 January 1856. Rev. George D. Armstrong also recognized the good works of the Howard Association for his Presbyterian Church in his history of yellow fever epidemic. He wrote that the “members of the Howard Association, left nothing undone which they could do for us;” Armstrong, *The Great Pestilence*, 52.

³⁷ *Daily Southern Argus*, 29 January 1856. Similarly, Rev. George D. Armstrong wrote that one day in his service there were sixty orphans under the care of the Howard Association ranging in age from two to fourteen years old. To describe the horror these children endured he explained that some of the orphans were found in their families’ homes in the presence of the dead bodies of remaining parents, Armstrong, *The Summer of Pestilence*, 59–60.

³⁸ *Daily Southern Argus*, 6 May 1856.

The Howard Association was important because it was one of the few, if not only, charities to dispense assistance without any preconceived notions concerning the worthiness of the recipients as it doled out fuel and food to about five hundred families during the winter of 1855–1856. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that the yellow fever was so devastating, striking Norfolk residents of all backgrounds, wealth, and occupations, that aid simply could not be held back from those normally considered unworthy. Given the magnitude of the tragedy, everyone was worthy at this particular time.³⁹

It is possible that some of the criticism directed toward the Howard Association came from those who believed that assistance provided to the sick and refugees of the epidemic should have been more selective, perhaps limiting aid given to the infected poor, thus allowing for more resources to be given to the perceived better elements of the community. Middle-class ideals did emerge with respect to the Howard Association. Recall that the association got some measure of positive recognition when the children were taken to church, a middle-class behavior itself that promoted piety. Moreover, just as with the Orphan Asylums, there was an emphasis on the children possessing a robust and neat demeanor. The implication being that if they attended church in a disheveled, ill-mannered, or slovenly appearance then the association's orphanage had failed.

³⁹ Indeed, one resident wrote that the fever had taken physicians, blacks, and noted that “by degrees some of the most enterprising of the Norfolk merchants are dropping.” He further observed that “nearly every person you see at the post office now seem[s] to have had the fever. The white people of Norfolk seem to be at present a regular set of invalids . . . Captain Ferris is very sick this morning and he tells me he has ordered his coffin.” See letter from John Shanks to Debee Taylor, 20 September 1855, Virginia Historical Society.

Norfolk's citizens supported a benevolent association network during the two decades prior to the Civil War. From the various incarnations of the Humane Association to the Dorcas Society to the Howard Association, these organizations provided physical assistance to the needy of Norfolk. They did so, however, generally in a context of middle-class beliefs, stressing not only the improvement of the physical well-being of the individual, but also the moral and spiritual elevation of the person's character. Moreover, with the exception of the Howard Association, assistance was provided only to those worthy poor and needy who upheld the middle-class values of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety. Those who were lazy or possessed a questionable work ethic, were drunkards and spendthrifts, or lacking piety were seen as not fit to receive aid. Civic boosters viewed benevolent giving as a way to elevate the status of the city in concert with the elevation of the needy. By providing a temporary helping hand, the worthy poor, given the opportunity, would subsequently become productive members of society and contribute to the development of the community. For those volunteering their time to benevolent societies or making contributions, these efforts not only elevated their feelings of self-worth, they reinforced one's character and improved one's chances for an improved reward in Heaven.

CHAPTER 4 IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATIONS IN ANTEBELLUM NORFOLK

The benevolent associations of Norfolk provided physical assistance to the city's worthy poor and also attempted to instill or elevate middle-class values. Meanwhile other associations in Norfolk specifically had as their purpose the direct improvement of not necessarily the needy, but the larger population of the community. A variety of temperance, religious, intellectual, and business societies endeavored to promote their middle-class beliefs of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety in the working class, young men arriving in the city open to temptation and vice, and intemperate fathers who injured their families with their battles with the bottle. Like the benevolent societies, these improvement associations not only elevated the condition of the individual, but advanced the status of the community as well. These organizations further bound the middle-class citizens of Norfolk with each other as well as connect them with like-minded persons in other cities and states in the South and even North.

Throughout the antebellum United States the middle class developed reform associations as it sought to remake society. In Jacksonville, Illinois, the merchants, businessmen, and professionals had voluntarily accepted these values and felt it their duty to instill these ideals in those parts of society that had not accepted them. With this process, they believed, would come self-discipline and growth for the individual and social order for the community. The methods used by these reformers ranged from moral suasion and informational lectures to legal restrictions and ultimately to incarceration for

those not adopting societal values, increasingly defined by members of the middle-class who were emerging as political, economic, and social leaders.¹

With these voluntary organizations the middle class of Providence established for itself the high moral ground as they refined and promoted old values such as industry, frugality, and temperance along with new ideas such as abolitionism. In associations they sought to define the social and moral character of the society, mediate the social and cultural growth of the community, and develop institutions such as libraries, museums, and lyceums to serve these activities. John S. Gilkeson concluded that “voluntary associations were thus the agencies by which middle-class Americans disseminated their values and defended their class interests.”² In the South, the Tuscaloosa Bible and tract societies as well as Sabbath schools were designed to instill the Protestant faith as well as moral values that would modify behaviors seen as pushing individuals into a condition of

¹ Doyle, *Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 193–5. Note that Doyle sometimes refers to the process as reforming the lower orders. The phrase lower orders is restrictive in that those targeted, as we shall see, often were young people (mostly men) who were coming of age (or just arriving) in the urban environment and subject to the temptations of the city that would drag them away from these values. They also could be working class heads of households ruining their homes and families with their abuse of liquor.

² Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 9–10, 353. He contends that by the 1850s the North celebrated itself as a middle-class society. By the eve of the Civil War middle-class reforms would take hold with the rise of abolitionism and prohibition being the law in thirteen northern states and territories. Public schools were established in many northern states where the diffusion of useful knowledge would not only be a form of self-improvement, but also would be connected to moral advancement. The Republican Party—the party of the middle class—claimed the presidency and locally shopkeepers and artisan producers replaced the elite professionals and merchants in public offices. Middle-class reformers also successfully redefined how leisure time was spent, moving away from the drinking, gambling, and bloodsports of the pre-industrial era to purposeful rational leisure activities that provided self improvement such as lyceums, libraries, musical performances, lectures, and joining associations such as the Young Men's Christian Association; *Middle-Class Providence*, 53–83, 87, 92.

poverty (such as gambling, laziness, and drinking) by inculcating habits of industry, thrift, and temperance, thus creating a social cohesion and discipline in the community.³

During the antebellum years temperance was perhaps the most important, or at least the most visible, middle-class value reformers sought to inculcate in the population.⁴ Drunkenness was seen as the root cause for many of society's ills such as crime, laziness, lack of piety, and vice. The intemperate did not work industriously (if at all), did not take care of their families (spending what little money they had on drink), and did not seek to improve themselves morally, spiritually, or intellectually. Instead of contributing to the advancement of the larger community they were a drain on society. Like most cities and towns of the antebellum period temperance organizations were established to remove this blight from the urban environment by moral suasion and even through legislative prohibition. Associations devoted to the temperance cause were crucial in promoting and instilling middle-class attitudes in the community, and perhaps more importantly, in defining what the middle class was and delineating its role in society.⁵ In this regard, Norfolk would be no different from its neighbors around the country.

³ Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 13–21, 31–49, 65–69, 78–79.

⁴ Studies examining temperance reform include Ian S. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800–1860* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979); Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder*; W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁵ As Doyle succinctly describes, “The temperance crusade became more than a negation of the saloon and liquor; it was an affirmation of a larger middle-class ethos of domesticity, self-control, social mobility, and public order.” He further contends that temperance, chief among other values, symbolically and practically gave civic leaders a clear, visible reason to expand public control over moral behavior and to instill their values in the lower classes that did not accept them; *Social Order of a Frontier*

By November 1841 reformers could attend a meeting of the Norfolk Total Abstinence Society (also called the Norfolk Temperance Society). A temperance society for young people also was organized by 1846 under the name of the Young Men's Temperance Society (also referred to as the Norfolk Juvenile Total Abstinence Society). In the early 1840s, young teetotalers also could join the Virginia Guard, the first militia company organized in the state strictly adhering to the principles of abstinence.⁶

Norfolk also could boast of the first Virginia branch—and one of the earliest nationally—of the Sons of Temperance when the Washington Division was chartered in April 1843, just months after the organization was established in New York. Although growth was slow over the next two years, in 1845 the five divisions in the state comprising 242 members held the first meeting in Richmond of the Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance of Virginia. The order expanded rapidly and by early 1848 there were over one hundred divisions across the Commonwealth with over four thousand

Community, 226. The Tuscaloosa Society for the Promotion of Temperance was established in April 1829. Anti-temperance groups believed that independence meant the freedom to do what one wanted to do, but temperance advocates believed that independence meant freedom from those deleterious things that prevented self-improvement. Temperance would provide a means for social control over the expanding population, many of whom were mobile young men with no personal, familial, or religious constraints and perceived to be more susceptible to the evils of drink. Abstinence also merged with the ideals of the market economy as sober workers performed their jobs more efficiently and would invest their money in the community rather than wasting it on liquor. Evangelical Protestantism influenced temperance advocates in that a drunkard could not adequately ask and receive God's blessings. In addition, many saw temperance as a humanitarian endeavor that helped individuals overcome personal vices that not only could ruin their lives, but hurt society as well; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 158–63, 169–70, 204, 207, 229.

⁶ George G. Stevens, Jr., "The Temperance Movement in Norfolk, Virginia, 1880–1916" (M.A. thesis, Old Dominion College, 1968), 5; *American Beacon*, 1 November, 12 December 1841, 16 March, 9 July 1842, 8 February, 19 May 1843, 7 April, 1846, 1 January 1847; *Daily Southern Argus*, 24, 25 January 1851.

members. The Washington Division comprised thirty-seven contributing members, while the other Norfolk branch, the Wesleyan Division formed in April 1847, already had twenty-five members. By 1850 the membership for the Washington branch was seventy-three and that for the Wesleyan was thirty temperate souls.⁷

The Norfolk Total Abstinence Society met at least monthly, and usually more frequently. Often at these meetings lecturers and reformed drunkards from Virginia and elsewhere (such as Baltimore and New York) would address the society including such contemporary temperance advocates as John B. Gough, David Pollard, and John W. Bear, "The Black-Eye Blacksmith." Associations invited all persons "friendly or unfriendly to temperance" to attend these meetings, especially encouraging Norfolk's young men to attend.⁸ The local newspapers often reported that there were large and delighted audiences present or that the meetings were attended by a full audience of the "highest respectability."⁹ The Sons of Temperance and Total Abstinence Society held processions and celebrations, usually to commemorate anniversaries of various societies, laying of

⁷ Thomas J. Evans, *A Digest of the Resolutions and Decisions of the National Division of the Sons of Temperance of the United States and the Grand Division of Virginia Embracing A Brief History of the Origin, Progress and Present Attainment of the Order* (Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1847), 2-7, 156-7; *Minutes of the Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance of the State of Virginia, at their First Meeting, Held in the City of Richmond, January 29, 1845* (Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1845), 3; *Minutes of the Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance, of the State of Virginia, at a Regular Quarterly Session Held in the Town of Alexandria Jan. 26, 1848* (Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1848), 5; *Minutes of the Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance, of the State of Virginia, at a Regularly Quarterly Session, Held in the Town of Lynchburg, April 17, 1850* (Richmond: MacFarlane and Ferguson, 1850), 156-7.

⁸ *American Beacon*, 25 February, 2 March, 10 June, 5, 12 December 1842, 7 March 1843, 25 March 1844, 16 January 1847; *Daily Southern Argus*, 2 March 1848.

⁹ *American Beacon*, 25 February, 2 March 1842, 2, 4, 6, 10, 14 April 1846; *Daily Southern Argus*, 2 March 1848.

building cornerstones, and public holidays.¹⁰ Signing up new members was a key element in the meeting rituals of the temperance organizations. In early 1847 the Total Abstinence Society conducted a series of meetings “crowded to suffocation” where the association had seventy-three people sign their names to the Total Abstinence Pledge.¹¹

Norfolkians could read a temperance newspaper by May 1847 when the weekly *Virginia Temperance Advocate* commenced publication. Established by local historian and member of the Total Abstinence Society William S. Forrest, he described it as a paper devoted to “temperance, morality, literature, health, etc.” It received positive notices from newspapers like the *Daily Southern Argus* and initially was well received by the community at large. Forrest wrote that the subscription list “included many of the most intelligent citizens in town and country.”¹²

¹⁰ William S. Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 235; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 18; *American Beacon*, 17 May 1844.

¹¹ Both the Sons of Temperance and Total Abstinence Society (TAS) required a pledge of abstinence for membership. The Temperance Pledge of the TAS was: “We, the undersigned, do agree that we will not use intoxicating liquors as a beverage, not to traffic in them; that we will not provide them as an article of entertainment, or for persons of our employment, and that we will, in all suitable ways, discontinue their use throughout the community;” Stevens, “Temperance Movement in Norfolk,” 5–6; *American Beacon*, 22, 25 February, 9, 11, 18, 26 March, 8 April 1847.

¹² According to newspaper articles and advertisements the *Virginia Temperance Advocate* lasted until the autumn of 1848. In his review of Virginia newspapers, Lester J. Cappon could find no extant copies and his description came from Burton’s, *History of Norfolk*. See Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers, 1821–1935: A Bibliography with Historical Introduction and Notes* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1936), 142. Also it would not be mentioned in Forrest’s, *The Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852*. For mentions of the *Virginia Temperance Advocate* see Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 10; Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 232; *Daily Southern Argus*, 19 June, 25 September 1848.

The Norfolk temperance associations not only promoted abstinence within the confines of the city, they advanced the cause across Virginia through attendance at statewide gatherings. Norfolk itself hosted a Total Abstinence Convention in December 1843 for all teetotalers as well as the general public.¹³ The city hosted conventions of the Virginia Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance in 1845, 1851, and October 1860, in what would be its last meeting before the Civil War. These conventions helped to connect the Norfolk temperance advocates with like-minded crusaders from across the state. Moreover, the Sons of Temperance united temperate Virginians with those throughout the country as the state division sent representatives, including Norfolkkians, to the national conventions throughout the antebellum period.¹⁴

Similar to temperance organizations around the country, the Norfolk Total Abstinence Society and the Sons of Temperance moved beyond promoting abstinence by moral suasion to legal sanctions and ultimately advocating statewide prohibition.¹⁵ At a

¹³ *American Beacon*, 26 January, 11 December 1843.

¹⁴ Evans, *A Digest of the Resolutions and Decisions of the National Division of the Sons of Temperance*, 6; *Daily Southern Argus*, 24, 25 January 1851; Stevens, "Temperance Movement in Norfolk," 8-9; *Journal of the Proceedings of National Division of the Sons of Temperance* (New Jersey: B. F. & J. S. Yard, 1846); *Journal of the Proceedings of National Division of the Sons of Temperance* (Philadelphia: William F. Geddes, 1847); *Journal of the Proceedings of National Division of the Sons of Temperance* (Philadelphia: Jos. Severns & Co., 1848); *Journal of the Proceedings of National Division of the Sons of Temperance of North America, Fourteenth Annual Session* (New York: Isaac J. Oliver, 1857).

¹⁵ Since their beginnings in the late 1820s temperance societies in Tuscaloosa used moral suasion and focused on hard liquor only. By the end of the decade, however, proponents pushed for total abstinence of all spirits and called for legislation to prohibit liquor sales. Legal coercion failed, however, and temperance groups such as the Sons of Temperance and the Washingtonians once again used moral suasion as a tool to end drunkenness. By the late 1840s the pendulum swung back toward legislative action to abolish liquor sales by raising liquor-license fees to an exorbitant level, with the same unsuccessful results.

meeting in 1847 the members of the Total Abstinence Society resolved "that license laws, respecting the traffic in intoxicating liquors ought to be repealed, and a law enacted prohibiting the traffic in them."¹⁶ Like most antebellum attempts to legislatively prohibit alcohol consumption, especially in the South, the temperance societies of Norfolk and Virginia did not attain their goal as prohibition laws never were enacted.¹⁷

In trying to delineate the reasons for this lack of success, George Stevens writes that "It is difficult to explain why Virginia, a natural area for prohibition, a state with a high percentage of rural, Protestant, native born, middle-class residents, did not pass such laws." He suggests that conservative Virginians were stubborn in their efforts to preserve their traditions such as convivial hospitality, the limited role of women in society, and the right to own slaves. Alcohol prohibition would curb hospitality that often incorporated some consumption of distilled spirits. The temperance cause allowed women to participate in the public sphere traditionally dominated by men. Lastly, Virginians

Temperance advocates in Washtenaw County, Michigan, however, managed victories of sorts with a local-option law in 1845 and statewide prohibition laws during the next decade, but authorities were unable to adequately enforce these laws; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 14–15. In Kingston, New York, the temperance movement, which included the Ulster County Temperance Society and Temperance Society of Kingston Academy, reached its peak in the latter 1840s, but failed to achieve legal local prohibition; Blumin, *The Urban Threshold*, 31, 146, 150–1, 159–60. For studies relating to the shift in temperance societies incorporating legal and political strategies advocating prohibition over moral suasion see for example Ian S. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 252–83; and Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder*, 69–99.

¹⁶ Stevens, "Temperance Movement in Norfolk," 5–6.

¹⁷ By 1855 prohibition laws were passed in thirteen states and territories in the North. They were based upon the Maine Law of 1851 that was the first statewide prohibition against the sale or manufacture of alcohol. By the next decade, however, the prohibitionist fever waned and laws were repealed or modified in most states that enacted laws based on the Maine model; Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 252, 282; Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder*, 98–99.

intensely believed in personal rights and any restrictions in personal freedoms made temperance reform difficult to achieve by legislative means.¹⁸

According to Stevens another difficulty was that Virginia's newspaper editors did not support temperance reform. They focused more on national politics and events rather than state issues and social reforms. This limited the influence that editors, important individuals in their locality and state, could have as well as the general publicity newspapers could bring to an issue.¹⁹ While it is true that the Norfolk newspapers, like all newspapers of the day, focused more on politics, they did support the cause of temperance during the 1840s, especially the *American Beacon*—the most important and widely-read paper in the city during this time. Editor William E. Cunningham promoted the efforts of the Total Abstinence Society by publishing notices of meetings, extracts from other newspapers and books, and news about temperance from around the nation that helped to bind adherents together from different parts of the country.²⁰

¹⁸ Stevens, "Temperance Movement in Norfolk," 6–7. For studies on women and temperance see Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance*; Ian S. Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). For a discussion of conservatism and ideas of personal liberty in Virginia and the South see Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1940), 32–61; and Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790–1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 295–324.

¹⁹ Stevens, "Temperance Movement in Norfolk," 7–8.

²⁰ In the spring of 1842 he commented enthusiastically about the temperance efforts in Hampton and Suffolk as well as a report of a Great Temperance Procession in Cincinnati of 7,000 to 10,000 people. The paper also reprinted temperance correspondence between the "Great Apostle of Temperance" Father Theobald Mathew and the Catholic Total Abstinence Association of the District of Columbia; *American Beacon*, 13, 16 April, 2 May 1842. Cunningham also wrote a number of editorials on the subject himself. One memorable attack defined intemperance as "a domestic tyrant now traversing the fairest districts of our country—consuming the young and vital energies; treading down the

In September 1846 he made an arrangement with the Total Abstinence Society to devote newspaper space three times a week to temperance. He explained his purpose as wanting to "afford the friends of this philanthropic enterprise the medium through which to communicate the spread of temperance intelligence, by which the great and good cause is impelled forward in its noble career of rescuing suffering humanity from the fangs of...monster intemperance." True to his word, there would be substantial temperance material in almost every edition of the *Beacon* until the winter of 1847. Cunningham commented that "this arrangement, we trust, will prove highly acceptable to our readers generally, who, we doubt not, if not members per se of the society itself, are nevertheless like ourselves, ever ready to acknowledge every good word, although...somewhat slow to enlist in the cause itself."²¹

Despite the best efforts of temperance advocates like William Cunningham and William Forrest, contributing membership in the Virginia Sons of Temperance declined during the decade leading to the Civil War from over 17,400 in mid-1852, to about 7,100 by the autumn of 1855, to just under 6,500 by the end of 1857.²² Like the issue of failed legal proscriptions Stevens attributes this trend to the connection of temperance with the northern abolition movement. He also argues that the cause was largely forgotten in the

blossom of its hopes; undermining its free institutions; setting at defiance all its authorities; multiplying engines of torture; fencing off grave yards; and breathing pestilence upon every acre of our goodly heritage;" *American Beacon*, 11 March 1847.

²¹ *ibid.*, 29 September 1846.

1850s as national events with respect to sectionalism overshadowed all other local, state, and national issues. Stevens concludes that although the Civil War effectively ended the cause of temperance reform in Virginia, associations like the Sons of Temperance and Total Abstinence Society had established a foundation for future temperance efforts.²³

Within the framework of antebellum improvement, elevating the mind was a significant focal point for middle-class reform efforts. Intellectual advancement not only helped the individual, but like temperance made him a more responsible member of the community. Development of the mind also went hand-in-hand with industry, sobriety, and piety in that a person who continually sought to improve himself intellectually also was likely to be hard-working, temperate, and God-fearing. Conversely, one who was lazy, intemperate, and lacked piety was not likely to be interested in elevating the mind. Within this belief system was the crucial element of responsibility for an individual to fully use the God-given gift that was a human's intellect.

Throughout the antebellum period Norfolk's residents established many cultural institutions that sought the intellectual improvement of their fellow citizens.

Predominantly aimed at the young men of the city, developing the mind was promoted through organizations that presented lectures, experiments, debates, and most importantly, but also financially problematic, subscription libraries. Few lasted longer

²² *Minutes of the Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance, of the State of Virginia, at its Annual Session, Held in the City of Richmond, October 26, 1855* (Richmond: MacFarlane and Ferguson, 1855), 114; *Minutes of the Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance, of the State of Virginia, at its Annual Session, Held in Lexington, October 28, 1857* (Richmond: MacFarlane and Ferguson, 1857), 238; *Journal of the Proceedings of the National Division of the Sons of Temperance of North America, Fourteenth Annual Session* (New York: Isaac J Oliver, 1857), 1094.

²³ Stevens, "Temperance Movement in Norfolk," 8-9.

than a decade, however, during the first half of the nineteenth century. A pattern developed in Norfolk whereby intellectual societies formed, flourished briefly, and disbanded only to be replaced soon thereafter by a similar institution. Thus, although there was not a consistent, single intellectual body, there were few years during the antebellum period when there was not a literary or scientific organization, subscription library, or lecture/debating society in the city.

The oldest intellectual association was the Norfolk Athenaeum, which opened early in 1816. Meeting monthly, the Athenaeum operated a subscription library for its stockholders that was open for several hours daily and presented lectures on various intellectual, literary, and scientific subjects. The original appropriation for purchasing books was \$1,500 raised from an assessment of twenty-five dollars from the initial subscribers. By 1841 the Athenaeum, like most of the intellectual associations of the time, experienced financial difficulties (especially on account of subscribers failing to pay their assessments) and was forced to require members to pay more (usually five dollars per share) to keep the institution open. The lack of a permanent home for the Athenaeum also was problematic as each president moved the library for his own convenience.²⁴ Difficulties continued in the spring of 1842 when there was a proposition made to the stockholders to dissolve the Athenaeum, sell the books, and divide the

²⁴ Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 118; *American Beacon*, 4, 8 January 1839, 30 December 1840, 21 June 1841. See also letters dated 26 March and 5 April 1830 referring to activities at the Athenaeum in Hugh Blair Grigsby diary, 1806–1881, 12 May 1830 to 25 June 1832, 105, 115, Virginia Historical Society.

proceeds among the stockholders. The Athenaeum avoided dissolution that day, but it would not last the year and its book collections were sold at auction.²⁵

The closing of institutions such as the Athenaeum spurred many to speak out for more cultural and intellectual venues. This included the young men of Norfolk who were often the intended beneficiaries of such endeavors. "A Young Man" wrote to the *American Beacon* in 1840 asserting that organizing a Young Men's Debating Society founded by "discreet sober-minded officers" in the city would be beneficial to those whose time after work "is generally consumed unprofitably by resort to places where nothing can accrue conducive to intellectual improvement; the time thus thrown away [that] might be more advantageously employed." He explained that he occasionally went to these public places and was sure that many young men like himself would readily spend time in an environment where they could better themselves.²⁶ He was not alone as another letter writer "A" pointed out there were thriving debating societies in Suffolk and Wheeling. He further urged *Beacon* editor Hugh Blair Grigsby to organize a debating society in Norfolk, "ready as he always is to engage in a philanthropic cause."²⁷

The desire for new intellectual and cultural institutions only began with young men, however, as calls for improvement in this area of public life occurred throughout the antebellum era. In the latter part of 1842 and again early in 1843 local physician Dr.

²⁵ There was a newspaper notice in June placed by Hugh Blair Grigsby, E. O. Balfour, and John S. Millson informing members to return a number of books that were "absent" from the Athenaeum for a long time, presumably so they could be sold; *American Beacon*, 19 April 1842, 2 June 1842; Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 118.

²⁶ *American Beacon*, 18 February 1840.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 2 March 1840.

Maurice Fitz Gibbon published a "Prospectus of the Norfolk Lyceum" in the *American Beacon*. Organized to be kept open one evening per week from April through June and October through December, the lyceum would be a permanent institution where lectures and experiments on various literary and scientific subjects could be given by competent local persons and individuals from the colleges. If a sufficient number of tickets were sold the cost for a season of about thirty lectures would only be five dollars, he explained. Fitz Gibbon proclaimed confidently that the goal was to establish a lyceum in Norfolk that would rank with similar institutions in northern cities.²⁸

By April 1843 the Norfolk Lyceum Society was a reality with a weekly lecture series given by local men on mostly scientific and medical topics such as light, optics, telescopes, microscopes, suspended animation, resuscitation, respiration, and blood circulation. Generally subscribers were admitted for free and non-members charged fifty cents.²⁹ In an editorial to promote the final lecture of the 1843 summer season (a Fitz Gibbon program on acoustics) the *Beacon's* William E. Cunningham observed that there

²⁸ *American Beacon*, 28 November 1842, 10 January 1843. It is important to note that Norfolk did have lectures given on cultural and scientific subjects not affiliated with a specific association during this period. Fitz Gibbon wanted to develop a permanent institution where lectures could be given. This would actually be the second Norfolk Lyceum, the first being established in 1827 by William Maxwell, a prominent lawyer and editor of the *Virginia Historical Register*. Before it closed in 1839, the lyceum contained a subscription library and served as a central meeting place for literary associations in the area; Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 113–4.

²⁹ For notices and advertisements of various lectures see *American Beacon*, 7, 17, 24, 29 April, 3, 15, 22, 29 May, 1, 5 June, 3, 10, 20 October 1843.

had been increasing interest in the lyceum in the community and that the lectures had been attended by “many of the most intelligent of our community.”³⁰

During this time, there was a letter to the editor from “A Friend to the Lyceum” that glowingly reviewed a recent lecture given there on the history of Alchemy and Chemistry. “A Friend” exclaimed that as a citizen of Norfolk he was proud that after a few failed efforts and a long-felt necessity for an institution of this kind, the city now could boast of a literary and scientific lecture room that could promote Norfolk as an intellectual and cultured community. In true booster fashion he boldly insisted that the Norfolk Lyceum compared favorably to similar institutions in New York and Boston. Despite his lavish praise the Norfolk Lyceum lasted only through its inaugural year.³¹

Taking up the intellectual standard from the Norfolk Lyceum was the Washington Literary Institute. Formed in 1845, the Institute sponsored a debating society and presented lectures on a variety of subjects such as mental dietetics, the growth of plants, social issues, commerce, and literature, and the culture of other countries.³² The

³⁰ *ibid.*, 12 June 1843. Intellectual and cultural associations that enriched the public life of the urban environment not only furnished entertainment, but also provided a sense of local identity to the city or town; Blumin, *The Urban Threshold*, 31–33, 150–9.

³¹ *American Beacon*, 5 October 1843. There would be no mentions of the lyceum in Norfolk newspapers and it would not be mentioned in William Forrest’s city directory of 1851–1852.

³² *Daily Southern Argus*, 6 May 1851, 22 May 1852, 3 March 1854. For year of organization, see *Argus*, 1 March 1856. In March 1852, the George D. Armstrong gave two separate lectures at the Norfolk Academy titled “Mental Dietetics” and “Growth of Plants,” *Argus*, 18, 22 March 1852. In May of that year there was a lecture before the institute at the Academy Hall by L. H. Chandler on “Tom Moore, the Patriot, the Root, the Man,” *Argus*, 30 May 1852. Gregory W. Wortabet, billed as the “Syrian Traveler,” gave a lecture on Syria and the Holy Land at Ashland Hall as part of the Washington Institute lecture series. The topic was “Habits, Customs, Manners and Social Life of His Countrymen,” *Argus*, 22 November 1853.

Washington Institute also contained a subscription library for a cost of five dollars per year or 50 cents per month. The library possessed about one thousand “useful and instructive” books including standard literary works and material related to history, biography, theology, science, art, and poetry as well as newspapers, reviews, and magazines from around the country and England.³³

The association did not receive total support from the community, however. According to a *Daily Southern Argus* editorial the library was not being patronized as hoped. With some exasperation, Samuel T. Sawyer commented that “the young men of this city grumble at having no place to spend their idle hours, grumble at the scarcity of places of amusement and pleasure, and would, if there was no such a place, grumble at the want of an interesting public library.” Since the city did not have a public library he encouraged them to become members of this “highly commendable association.”³⁴

Difficulties attracting young men to join the Washington Institute Library continued into the spring of 1854. Another *Argus* editorial at that time invited young men to take advantage of the library for the purpose of obtaining knowledge and entertainment that was of a most useful and substantial nature. Editor T. M. Crowder argued “how much precious time which is more valuable than gold, is recklessly thrown away by the young in the vain pursuit of pleasure,” and succinctly implored them to “read and be something.”³⁵

³³ *Daily Southern Argus*, 22 August 1853, 4 May 1854.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 22 August 1853.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 4 May 1854.

A key reason for the promotion of libraries was the belief that many in the city, especially young people, were choosing to read “demoralizing cheap literature of the day” from the northern, eastern, and European presses instead of books, essays, poetry, and prose that would enlighten a person’s mind and cultivate his character. Instead the youth were diverted from useful knowledge toward the debilitating “light, chaffy” material that prevented improvement, made them unfit for business, drove them from religion, and prompted licentiousness.³⁶

Even with these entreaties the Washington Institute Library would not continue. The following November a notice in the *Argus* from the institute’s secretary announced that the library’s book collection would be sold to cover expenses and that the library would close at the end of the year. Crowder insisted that this closure was not creditable to young men and those who controlled their leisure hours. With much exasperation he exclaimed, “Cannot one public library be supported in this community? Shall this one door to the treasury of knowledge be closed for the want of patronage, while the price of admission is so low?” He further asked “How much better it would be for . . . the minds and the souls, the financial and physical condition of the hundreds of young men and boys, apprentices, clerks, and journeymen, who throng our streets by night, assemble at the corners, visit places of amusement, and waste their health and money . . . if they would spend the fleeting and precious moments of early life in a library?”³⁷

³⁶ Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 347.

³⁷ *Daily Southern Argus*, 28 November 1854. Crowder’s use of “public library” signifies a subscription library for white men who could afford to pay the dues that were seen as inexpensive for the middle-class businessmen and the young men of the city.

Crowder further emphasized that during the long winter nights, the youth of the city should study and learn. Another consideration was that the ten-hour system had been adopted in Norfolk and some believed that one of the reasons for this was to allow the working man time to read and improve his mind during his expanded leisure hours. Instead of improvement, however, Crowder argued that these hours were a "criminal waste of time," rather than the cultivation of the mind. He spoke of the ironic "headless youth, vainly dreaming of influence, respectability, and usefulness in society, with so empty a head or an uncultured brain." He stressed how important it was to "lay the foundation of knowledge and virtue in youth, and prepare to erect a secure, structure of goodness and usefulness in the afterlife, than to lay the foundation of disease and premature old age, and thus prepare the way for a miserable and unlamented death." Reiterating his disgust ("it is an unpleasant topic, and we throw down our pen, surprised and mortified") Crowder complained that once again Norfolk could not support a public library and ended his editorial almost begging someone in the community to come in and save it. His appeal found no supporters and by mid-December the Washington Institute voted that if anyone would pay the debts of the library amounting to \$400, the society would transfer to the party all the property and books.³⁸

Although the library of the Washington Institute did not succeed, the Institute itself was surviving as it presented lectures and programs. In a notice of a meeting in March 1856, the officers extended an invitation to all those who might wish to join and to "lend a helping hand in the cause of our Institute, which has battled nine years against that fate peculiar to such Institutions." By this date, the institute appears to have once

³⁸ *Daily Southern Argus*, 28 November, 14 December 1854.

again organized a large library for “any young man who may desire to devote his leisure hours to literary pursuits.”³⁹

Other intellectual associations present in the city during the 1840s included the Norfolk Bible Society, the Madison Society, and the Wirt Institute. During the early years of the decade the Norfolk Bible Society met regularly at local churches, studied the Bible, presented lectures at meetings, and operated a book depository and library. Members believed that it was important that Christians continue to promote the word of God throughout the state and world. The society also placed notices that it possessed ornamented and common Bibles that were sold and distributed to the poor. Despite its best intentions the group disbanded by the early 1850s.⁴⁰

In the early 1840s the Madison Society was a popular organization that presented lectures, but whose key activity was its participation in Norfolk’s Independence Day activities. On July 4th the society would sponsor a celebration consisting of local dignitaries reading the Declaration of Independence, delivering speeches on the history of Virginia and the United States, and treating invited guests to a dinner complete with toasts and more speeches.⁴¹ In a June 1841 editorial on a series of lectures being given at the society, *American Beacon* editor William E. Cunningham saluted the members for

³⁹ *ibid.*, 1 March 1856.

⁴⁰ According to newspaper accounts the society was present at least through early 1849. The Norfolk Bible Society was not mentioned in William S. Forrest’s city directory for 1851–1852. For meetings of the society see *American Beacon*, 25, 30 January 1841, 21 February 1844; *Daily Southern Argus*, 6 January 1849.

⁴¹ *American Beacon*, 7 July 1840, 7 July 1841.

their efforts “to improve and elevate the literary taste of our Borough, and to aid in more generally diffusing the means of scientific and literary enhancement.”⁴²

For its part the Wirt Institute was present in Norfolk by the autumn of 1846 and survived for several years.⁴³ In February 1848 the *Daily Southern Argus* reviewed a talk given by the Rev. S. J. P. Anderson before the Institute on “The Importance of a Pure Literature.” The newspaper reported that Anderson strongly condemned biographical, philosophical, and scientific works as well as newspapers and magazines. Reflecting the middle-class ideology of the time, he did not want to suppress light literature, but rather wanted to purify and elevate literature to a high moral character where it would improve the mind and purify the heart. Anderson remarked, however, that pure religious and moral literature did not occur quickly, but must slowly develop in a moral and Christian community. This reformation is what the citizens of Norfolk should strive for, he appealed, to elevate the city and its people.⁴⁴

Although it would disband by the fall of 1849, the Wirt Institute existed long enough that its demise elicited strong defenders and continued the pattern for renewed calls for a literary institution that would “contribute greatly to our social and intellectual

⁴² *ibid.*, 10, 25 June, 16 July 1841.

⁴³ An association named the Marshall Institute appears briefly in 1846, welcoming all those who had an “interest in the literary improvement of the city” and explaining that “societies of a similar character in other cities have done much to create and cultivate a taste for literature;” *ibid.*, 9 March 1846.

⁴⁴ Notice and review of lecture in *Daily Southern Argus*, 21, 23 February 1848. Also, see review reprinted in Edward Wilson James, ed., *The Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: The Friedenwald Company, 1902), 27–28n. Another lecture advertised in the *Argus* of 7 February 1848 by the Rev. Caldwell. The newspaper reported that the lecture “we have no doubt that he will do it ample justice, and all who will take the trouble to attend will be richly repaid.”

enjoyments.” Letter writer “Wirt” encouraged the former president of the Institute to reorganize that association or something along similar lines.⁴⁵ “A Subscriber” responded with the question “where is the president of the Wirt Institute?” and supported the call for a reorganized literary institution that would improve its members and “give a higher tone to the character of our public entertainments.”⁴⁶

In addition to the Washington Institute, which continued through the 1850s, there were a variety of societies dedicated to intellectual pursuits during the decade that included the Literary and Library Society, the Norfolk Club, and the Southgate Institute Debating Society.⁴⁷ The publishers of the *Daily Southern Argus* also tried to encourage intellectual growth with the establishment of the *Weekly Southern Argus* in early 1856. Its masthead described it as “A Family Newspaper, Devoted to Literature and Commercial, Political, and General Intelligence.” In introducing the newspaper, *Argus* editor William Lamb invited the young and old women of the city to obtain the *Weekly Southern Argus* for their families to read as it contained literature as well as Norfolk

⁴⁵ *American Beacon*, 9 October 1846; Wirt’s letter in *American Beacon*, 12 September 1849.

⁴⁶ In the letter “A Subscriber” also entreated people to see Edgar Allen Poe and give him a large turn out when he performed in the city. He reported that Poe had been favorably received in Richmond by “large and fashionable audiences” and Norfolk’s residents should be quick to patronize an individual so well known throughout the literary world, *Daily Southern Argus*, 14 September 1849.

⁴⁷ The Literary and Library Society heard a lecture by Professor N. B. Webster of the Virginia Collegiate Institute that was described as “characteristics of the high accomplishments of the erudite scholar and scientific mind.” In May 1856 the society sponsored what was described as a “very interesting and instructive lecture” of G. P. R. James before a “large and intelligent audience” who “listened with the utmost attraction and much pleasure;” *Daily Southern Argus*, 12 June 1855, 12, 14 May 1856. For the Norfolk Club, see *Argus*, 10 November 1854. For the Southgate Institute Debating Society, see *Argus*, 16, 31 May 1856.

“chit-chat,” advertisements, and philosophic commentaries of their own. Like most intellectual endeavors attempted in Norfolk during the antebellum years, the *Weekly Southern Argus* would not last long, being discontinued by January 1857.⁴⁸

Among these efforts at improving the intellectual opportunities in the city was a proposal in 1852 to establish a Mercantile Library Association such as existed in other cities. The proposal’s author, “G. D. C.,” reaffirmed that the main intellectual need in Norfolk was for a public library and he insisted that every professional man believed there was a necessity for such an institution. He argued that the lack of a library “is one that must be felt by every educated young man in our community, and by every one who has a thirst for knowledge and mental improvements.”⁴⁹

“G. D. C.” further explained that public libraries were the “measure and test of the intellectual advancement of every community” and pointed out that Boston and New Haven had five libraries, Cambridge had four, and Providence had three. He suggested using the Boston Mercantile Library Association as a model for how Norfolk should proceed. The Boston library had 7,000 volumes, along with eighty-nine newspapers and twenty-one magazines. Its members contributed one dollar each quarter (“who could not afford a dollar a quarter”) and though recently organized, the funds raised amounted to \$16,000. The library also presented a yearly program of distinguished lecturers. According to “G. D. C.” his proposed library was not meant to be confined to one class, but open to all in the community as he encouraged the enlistment rolls be open to all groups of the city—merchants, professionals, mechanics, and naval officers (but no

⁴⁸ *Weekly Southern Argus*, 3 January 1856; Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers*, 141.

⁴⁹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 30 April 1852.

mention of seamen). He did favor designating the body as the Mercantile Library Association because the “most numerous class of the community is engaged in mercantile pursuits.” He emphasized that young merchants would form the backbone of its active supporting members. In proposing this idea and seeking public favor, he underscored that the Norfolk library would start small, beginning with book donations from city residents, but within a few years the library would be a most valued institution to the citizens of Norfolk and reflect creditably on the city.⁵⁰

Combining intellectual improvement with that of spiritual growth, Norfolk could boast of a branch of the Young Men’s Christian Association by the early 1850s.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *ibid.* Despite the repeated calls for a permanent public library during the antebellum years, it would not be until 1870 that the Norfolk Public Library would be established; Andrew Morrison, *Norfolk, Portsmouth, and the Tidewater Country*, 37; Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 234.

⁵¹ Formed in 1841 in England, the Young Men's Christian Association was brought to New York ten years later and established as a national organization in 1855. There were over two hundred branches across the country with 25,000 members by 1860. The YMCA was designed to provide an alternative to the temptation of the streets by alleviating the loneliness young men endured with its libraries, reading rooms, and lectures. They not only received practical instruction in dealing with the city, but also moral instruction and a positive environment in which to congregate with others in their situation, engendering them with a sense of community. Once a member the young men did have to abide by strict rules of behavior and commit themselves to YMCA moral outreach programs; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*, 108–19. Gilkeson argues that the YMCA was one of the key ways that middle-class reformers successfully redefined how leisure time was spent, moving away from the drinking, gambling, and bloodsports of the pre-industrial era to purposeful rational leisure activities that provided self improvement; Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 53–83, 87, 92. In Poughkeepsie the city's upper and “more comfortable” middle classes established civic organizations like the YMCA; Griffen and Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers*, 40. In Oneida County, New York, organizations such as the YMCA promoted new forms of social interaction that extended beyond or perhaps substituted for the family. They also subverted hierarchical roles in the society as these organizations equalized the relations among men as they became peers and brothers. But they also could be seen as undermining, or at least challenging, the influence of the family individually and in the society; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle-Class*, xii, 236–7.

Southern Argus editor Samuel T. Sawyer announced that the association was attempting to raise enough funds to open a library as a "place of resort for the young, where hours of leisure and recreation may be improved by reading and instruction, instead of being spend in dissipation and vice." He criticized residents writing that "it is a reproach to Norfolk, that with her population it does not contain a solitary public library." He continued by stating that if a band of Ethiopian singers came to town, thousands of citizens would go to see it, but if there was any presentation of an intellectual nature then the residents would slight it and watch it whither away.⁵² Despite his concerns the YMCA often held lectures by local ministers on such topics as "Christianity," "The Unity of the Races," and "Christian Beneficence." They received good reviews by the *Argus*, which usually noted the "large and attentive audience" in attendance.⁵³

During the yellow fever epidemic of 1855 the YMCA, like much of Norfolk, languished under the weight of the summer's devastation. An editorial by *Argus* editor William Lamb early the next year provided general information on the YMCA, seemingly in an attempt to promote the association and spur its rebirth in the city. The article said that there were sixty associations in Canada and the United States with the number of members about 20,000. Boston was a particularly strong YMCA town with 1600 members during the previous year. The association in Richmond was only a year

⁵² *Daily Southern Argus*, 18 March 1852.

⁵³ Speaking during this series was the Rev. T. G. Jones of the Freemason Street Baptist Church who spoke on "Christianity," the Rev. George D. Armstrong at the Presbyterian Church lecturing on "The Unity of the Races," Dr. Minnegrode at Christ Church, the Rev. L. Rosser, Rev. William McGee on "Christian Beneficence," and Rev. D. P. Wills, *Daily Southern Argus*, 20, 26 February, 19, 26 March, 3, 5, 9 April, 10, 15, 19 May, 12 June 1855.

old and already boasted 440 members (229 active). Improvement was the order of the day as the objective of the association was to bring God and the Bible to young men, influencing them in the ways of Christianity through prayer meetings, Bible classes, and lectures. Their future impact on the community also was stressed as the YMCA was especially looking to care for "stranger youths and young men, whose first associations upon entering city life may decide their temporal and eternal welfare, and their influence for good or evil upon the community at large."⁵⁴

To further promote its rebirth Lamb noted that in a spirit of Christian usefulness and philanthropy the YMCA of other cities provided aid and comfort to Norfolians during the yellow fever epidemic. Also, where it had been formed the YMCA endeavored to provide attractive reading rooms, furnishing them with religious and moral reading materials (along with approved secular literature), and organized lecture courses related to moral, religious, and scientific subjects. Overall, the YMCA made every effort to foster moral and intellectual improvement in its members and the general public.

Lamb argued that an association such as this needed to be reorganized in Norfolk to serve the city's own young men, including sailors, who "would willingly exchange their cable parlors for the pleasant room of a Young Men's Christian Association." He insisted that there were enough resources to support such an enterprise and that Norfolk was "a

⁵⁴ Lamb explained that he got his information from the report of the Corresponding Secretary of the Richmond YMCA, *Daily Southern Argus*, 25 January 1856. No doubt middle-class reformers were worried that young men in the urban environment would be subject to temptation from the archetypal confidence men and painted women who preyed on them, usually new arrivals to the city away from family, friends, and community; Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), xiv-xv.

commercial city. . . . Let us not be behind our sister cities—nor behind less favored countries in this noble enterprise.”⁵⁵

Coinciding with this editorial a meeting did take place in January 1856 to reconstitute the Norfolk YMCA. The formal reorganization occurred the next month as seventy persons signed up to become members and later that spring the association tallied \$130 in its treasury. In May Lamb published a report on the new YMCA noting that its efforts to exert a moral influence on the community would be felt for years to come. Special attention would be given to children in need and young men visiting or moving to Norfolk who needed employment, proper housing, and medical attention. The YMCA would employ methods “best calculated to benefit the ignorant, the needy, the distressed, as well as to assert a moral influence that will tend specially to benefit young men.” The YMCA did establish a library that was reported to be large, airy, and well-furnished.⁵⁶

Lectures once again were an integral part of the reborn YMCA in Norfolk. Local ministers and others gave public lectures on a number of topics such as religion, education, philosophy, ethics, and psychology. An April 1856 letter to the *Southern Argus* from “Zoe” glowingly praised the YMCA, saying “we regard as a special Godsend of our people. We bless it—and in the bosoms of generations yet to come, will its need be planted and cherished.” In May 1856 “J.” wrote that although the YMCA had been reorganized for only a short time, its influence would be felt in the rising generation.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Daily Southern Argus*, 25 January 1856.

⁵⁶ Stewart, *History of Norfolk County*, 252; *Weekly Southern Argus*, 24, 31 January, 7 February 1856; *Daily Southern Argus*, 21 January, 25 February, 16 April, 8 May 1856.

⁵⁷ *Daily Southern Argus*, 24 March, 3, 8 April, 28 May 1856.

The library also was a focal point of concern among its supporters. "J." proposed a Union Fair be held by the ladies of the city to raise money to improve the library so that it would "reflect honor upon the Society and immortal praise to themselves." "J." reasoned that mothers and sisters would help in improving the library and the YMCA because it would be their sons and brothers who would benefit. "Many young men coming to this city and having had no one to care for their souls have plunged themselves into the lowest sewers of iniquity, and have soon, quenched the fire of their existence and gone down to their graves in the bloom of their youth." "J." further insisted that young male strangers were especially important to the YMCA as the association "endeavors to turn them from the ways of sin and death and place them in respectable society."⁵⁸

Intellectual pursuits in Norfolk were not limited to books and lectures, but also extended to music as several such societies contributed to the cultural life of the city. By 1847 residents could listen to the Norfolk Philharmonic Association that in June 1848 performed a concert at the National Hotel to benefit the victims of a horrific fire that destroyed sixty buildings and left many homeless. In 1853 Norfolk historian William S. Forrest commented that the association was "composed of young gentlemen whose native musical genius has been carefully cultivated." In describing the performance he wrote that the hotel "was crowded by a fashionable audience, who appeared much delighted with the concord of sweet sounds," and that the highly interesting musical entertainment produced "a thrilling effect upon those in attendance."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 28 May 1856.

⁵⁹ Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 239. See also James Robert Hines, "Musical Activity in Norfolk, Virginia, 1680–1973" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1974), 54, 94. By 1851 the city also had the Norfolk

In 1856 the Norfolk Musical Association was formed with a goal of cultivating vocal and instrumental talent. At the time of its organization there were forty-five members that met weekly, some well-known for their “superior musical skill and attainments.” A notice presenting the organization announced that members soon would be performing for the citizens of Norfolk that would be a “source of uncommon happiness and delight.”⁶⁰ In May the association did perform a concert that *Argus* editor William Lamb described as fine music and powerful female voices that filled the hall with a rich volume. He advised the public to forget about their daily lives for a brief moment and attend a concert. The audience “will be taken from such dull things and placed upon for different objects—of past days and hours of joyousness, of scenes of brightness and beauty, and hopes of future happiness, peace and love.”⁶¹

If the Norfolk Musical Association was among the newer antebellum societies, among the oldest existing improvement organizations in the city was the Mechanical Benevolent Society. Dating back to 1816, the association was not devoted to aiding the physical needs of the mechanic as its name might imply, but rather to the intellectual, moral, and habitual uplifting of mechanics and working men of the city. These goals were exemplified in the society’s anniversary celebrations each year that drew scores of guests, including many local civic leaders. At a typical affair held early in 1839 the one

Corcordia Association, Forrest, *Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852*, 97. In early 1855 a Norfolk Glee Club was organized that performed in February of that year. The group appears to have disbanded when the yellow fever epidemic struck the city that summer; Hines, “Musical Activity in Norfolk,” 94.

⁶⁰ The notice also stated that honorary members would be admitted for a fee of five dollars, *Daily Southern Argus*, 1 March, 19 April 1856.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 12 May 1856.

hundred attendees included the mayor, president of the Common Council, officers of the Marine Society, newspaper editors, and others “of our most valuable and esteemed citizens, who had devoted their youth to the acquisition of some useful trade, and who . . . had assembled to honor their youthful purpose, and to sanction. . . . the early and earnest devotion of youth to the mechanic arts.” Those in attendance drank a variety of toasts to “The March of Improvement,” “Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures, and Mechanic Arts—the schools in which nature educates her nobles,” “Internal Improvement—may its progress be as successful in the minds and hearts of the people, as in promoting their commercial prosperity,” “Education—the light by which genius and industry are sped to the highest objects of their ambition.” At the society’s thirty-third anniversary celebration in 1849, *Southern Argus* editor Samuel T. Sawyer wrote that the evening passed delightfully with upright “conversation, mirth, song and sentiment, tempered with sobriety and good humor.” The gathering departed “at a reasonable hour, in perfect good order and with those fraternal feelings which have always prevailed among the members of this benevolent institution.”⁶²

Industry and intelligence would be instilled in the mechanic through education, lectures, intellectual programs, etc. sponsored by the society as they participated in the “march of improvement.” As was publicized in the newspaper reports many of the invited guests at these celebrations began their occupational careers as mechanics, but with diligent work and self-improvement they became prosperous civic and business

⁶² *American Beacon*, 16 January 1839, 16 January 1840, 12 January 1843, 18 January 1847; *Daily Southern Argus*, 13 January 1849, 10 January 1852. Note that the city directory for 1851–52 has the organization date as 1809; Forrest, *Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852*, 96.

leaders. These successful men set a good example for the mechanics at their gatherings, which were "tempered with sobriety" and ended at a "reasonable hour" in "good order." Despite differences in occupations and politics, like the Humane Association and ladies' auxiliaries, the Mechanical Benevolent Society promoted a strong connection that created a sense of community.

Concern for the improvement of Norfolk's mechanics and working men did not end with permanent citizens as there were societies devoted to the needs of merchant and naval sailors who temporarily inhabited the area. Their main purpose was to protect seamen from the immoral temptations of vice and crime they especially could encounter in port unless taken care of by the community. A letter to the *American Beacon* from "U. S. N." relating to "The Cause of Seamen" in early 1843 explained that while the northern cities had taken steps for the benevolent advancement of seamen, Norfolk had done little (an ineffective Marine Society notwithstanding) even though the Virginia port city owed its economic prosperity to shipping more than any other entity. Sailor's homes had been built in New York and Boston where the seamen could reside, being furnished with comfortable dwellings that were well-stocked with foodstuffs, billiard rooms, and bath houses all with the goal of keeping the normally industrious seamen away from the vice-ridden temptations of the docks. When in Norfolk, "U. S. N." argued, the only places one could stay were the "moral stinks" near the harbor. Because of this "better classes" of seamen, when discharged from naval ships quickly left for the North, while only the most degraded sailors remained "to become the inmates of the brothel or grog shop." He heartily approved of the idea of a Sailor's Bethel then being discussed in the

community, but said that a Seamen's Home ample enough for one hundred men should be a higher priority than the establishment of a church.⁶³

Responding these types of concerns a Seamen's Friend Society was chartered in February 1843. Soon thereafter a Union Bethel Fair and several ladies' fairs were held to benefit a new Mariners' Church.⁶⁴ The association's board of managers was represented by four prominent religious denominations—Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Presbyterian. The main objective of the society was to “ameliorate the temporal condition as well as to improve the moral and religious character of seamen.”⁶⁵ By June 1845 a Seamen's Bethel had been established for the religious enrichment of sailors as pastors from different denominations performed at least two services on each Sabbath. By the mid-1850s, however, the Bethel often was closed as it proved difficult to keep clergymen engaged in ministering to the sailors⁶⁶

With the completion of the Seamen's Bethel Church there were renewed calls for a Sailor's Home to be established. In the autumn of 1846 appeared a letter from “Observer” about the need for a Seamen's Temperance Home in Norfolk such as that established in New York. Incorporating boosterism-style rhetoric, “Observer” commented that such a place in an “improving commercial port city” such as Norfolk would be an appropriate companion to the “beautiful and commodious Bethel” that

⁶³ *American Beacon*, 9 February 1843. Seamen's Friends Societies in Boston and Charleston are also mentioned briefly in Pease and Pease, *Web of Progress*, 150–4.

⁶⁴ *American Beacon*, 27 February, 17, 21 April, 4 March 1843, 25 November 1844.

⁶⁵ *Daily Southern Argus*, 3 May 1854.

⁶⁶ *American Beacon*, 9 June 1845; *Daily Southern Argus*, 16 May 1855, 24 March 1856.

demonstrated the liberality of the city and “deep interest” in the spiritual welfare of the mariner. A Seamen’s Home, suitably furnished with the flag of temperance and operated by a “staunch teetotaler” would present “an attraction to the sailor never before offered and no doubt its influence would be most salutary, and its effects manifested in a way which would be most pleasing to all who really feel concerned in the welfare of [this] interesting class of men.”⁶⁷

The issue of a Sailor’s Home would be revisited from time to time throughout the 1840s and 1850s. At an early 1848 meeting the Seamen’s Friend Society members argued that a seamen’s boarding house should be established “to be conducted on temperance principles, and with a strict regard to neatness, convenience, and order.” The society resolved that the ladies of the society would organize a fair to raise funds for the establishment of a dwelling with suitable accommodation away from the temptations of the streets.⁶⁸ This organizational push did not produce results either as the decision was still pending in September 1854 when the Seamen’s Friend Society brought in a traveling speaker to raise funds for the home—a Mr. Elliot of Washington who was in town trying to get subscribers for his *Sailor’s Magazine*. Despite these efforts to establish a Seamen’s Home in Norfolk, one would not be built during the antebellum years.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *American Beacon*, 6 November 1846.

⁶⁸ *Daily Southern Argus*, 26 January, 15 May 1848.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 19 September 1854. No Seamen’s Home is listed in Coffield, *Second Annual Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1860*. Inaction on the construction of a Sailor’s Home could be attributed to the financial difficulties resulting from the Panics of 1837 and 1857 as well as the effects of the yellow fever epidemic in 1855.

Although never established in Norfolk, the principles and objectives of the Seamen's Friend Society are important as they reflected the middle-class improvement ideal of the time. Without such institutions as a Seamen's Bethel or Home the sailor, like the young men targeted by the YMCA, would fall victim to the prototypical confidence men and painted women. Populating the rundown tenements, saloons, houses of prostitution, and gambling dens the naïve sailor would be corrupted soon after leaving his ship. To carry this comparison even further, like children placed in asylums, a seamen's home also would remove these young men from the deleterious environment where they could be a danger to society. Instead they would live in a safe and instructive setting where proper behaviors could be strengthened (or inculcated) and the seamen could improve themselves. Moreover, the sailors were portrayed in a context of hardworking young men who *deserved* assistance, especially since Norfolk and its citizens heavily depended on shipping. In a real sense, many believed that the city owed it to the seamen to provide a home where they could improve themselves. Similarly, reflective of the boosterism ideology of improvement, if the city possessed institutions such as these Norfolk would be elevated in reputation as a better class of sailors would elect to remain when their jobs were done as they did in northeastern cities and become productive members of the community.

Improvement reached beyond the lofty elevation of the mind, body, and soul to more practical avenues as well. Similar to many other cities around the country, Norfolk's merchant middle class embraced the booster ideology of the time. As the most stable residents in the community they became boosters in order to develop the town and correspondingly their own business prospects. As we have seen they believed that

improving the individual not only elevated the community, but also further helped to mediate internal conflict by creating a sense of community among the divergent populations.⁷⁰ In a more tangible way urban promoters sought to establish direct trade domestically and to foreign ports, expand the railroads, canals, wharves, harbors and docks, and augment the city with such projects as a new city hall, a gas works, hotels and theaters, and an artesian well system. These internal and civic initiatives not only helped to expand business opportunities for the city and individuals, they also elevated the status of Norfolk in the state, especially in comparison to arch-rival Richmond, and the country as a whole.⁷¹

Commercial associations were essential to boosterism improvement in the antebellum South and Norfolk could boast of a Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange by the late 1850s. The association's members comprised the various mercantile and

⁷⁰ Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 62–64. Timothy R. Mahoney explains that in the Middle West, booster projects such as railroads advanced the comingling of middle-class lawyers, entrepreneurs, and merchants with urban boosters in other localities to establish an integrated regional system with goals couched in Christianity, gentility, capitalism, and republicanism; *Provincial Lives*, 4–5, 131, 134, 169, 217–24, 239–40. For general discussions of booster ideology, see Amos, *Cotton City*; Pease and Pease, *Web of Progress*; Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*; Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*; Russell, *Atlanta, 1847–1890*; Wheeler, *To Wear a City's Crown*; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*.

⁷¹ Richmond was the natural competitor for Norfolk in terms of commerce, population, and status. This rivalry would not be quelled by the yellow fever epidemic or Civil War as H. W. Burton commented in 1877 that, "From the time that the Borough became a city [February 13, 1845], it began to improve rapidly, and had it not been retarded in its growth by unwise legislation (of both State and General Governments), the ravages of the yellow fever (1855) and the late civil war between the States...it would now be nearly as large as Richmond," Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 10. See also Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism*, 206–16 for a discussion of urban rivalries in Virginia, especially between Norfolk and Richmond—the capital city being seen by the Tidewater port as controlling the state legislature and denying Norfolk access to appropriations for railroads and other internal improvements.

artisanal occupations including commission dealers, merchants, grocers, clothiers, millers, ships chandlers, stone masons, and blacksmiths. In its second annual report, the board of directors congratulated the members of the Exchange for its success in advancing the prosperity of the city. The Exchange was described as providing the merchants and mechanics of Norfolk with a unity of purpose and action that had not been present before. It had provided a bond for the businessmen of the city and served as a medium for communicating information to them and the general public. So sure were the board members of ultimate commercial success and the growth of Norfolk they boldly proclaimed, "Through the agency of this association of individuals, animated by the same spirit, fired by the same generous ambition, and uniting their efforts to accomplish the same glorious results, the trade of Norfolk may be extended almost indefinitely, and its commerce be made to vie with that of the most prosperous cities of the country."⁷²

Not surprisingly, the report went on to explain how Norfolk had many natural advantages as to geographical location, proximity to the sea, accessibility of the harbor, the vast and fertile interior, and a mild climate that destined Norfolk to be a great commercial port. By forming the Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange—they explained to readers of this report, surely to be published in local newspapers—these men of Norfolk realized that they could not depend on the natural advantages of the city alone for prosperity as they had done in the past. Rather, they had to combine these advantages

⁷² Board of Directors of the Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange, comp. *Second Annual Report of the Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange of Norfolk Virginia* (Norfolk, Virginia: Board of Directors of the Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange, 1859), 5–6, 39–40.

with an energetic “spirit of progress” and judicious application of capital to spur commercial development.⁷³

Association and boosterism fervor also included the rural hinterland when the Norfolk County Agricultural Club was formed in September 1849 by county farmers and city men to advance the interests of farmers (which would in turn advance the interests of town folk). The *Southern Argus* congratulated the farmers for moving from their lethargy and forming this society that could improve their situation. Editor Samuel T. Sawyer wrote that one of the benefits of such an association would be to develop better cultivation systems that, along with more skill and industry, could greatly enhance the production, and thus profitability, of the rich lands in Norfolk County. As a result, he predicted, the agricultural production would soon be comparable to any other section or state in the country.⁷⁴

Apparently not satisfied with the work of this county agricultural club, by May 1851 Sawyer called for the establishment of an Agricultural Society in Norfolk that would sponsor fairs, stressing that there were institutions of this kind in the northern states.⁷⁵ In November 1853 the Norfolk Agricultural Society (also referred to as the Seaboard Agricultural Society) was a reality and held its first exhibition that month.

⁷³ *Second Annual Report*, 7. At this point the report turned into even more of a standard boosteristic document. The report focused on Norfolk’s advantages in geographic location, wharves and warehouses, streets, buildings, bountiful hinterland, wide variety of goods, railroad connections throughout the Deep South and to the Mississippi River, canal traffic into the interior and steamboat trade up and down the Atlantic coast, physical health of the city, free schools, associations, churches, and even modest attempts at manufacturing (e.g., processing agricultural products like flour); *Second Annual Report*, 7, 18–22, 25–32, 36–38.

⁷⁴ *Daily Southern Argus*, 7 September 1849.

Held for three days it drew over six thousand people and was an economic success for the city. There would be expanded week-long Agricultural Fairs each year until 1859, complete with parades by the military and fire companies of the city and drawing thousands of visitors from all parts of the state. In 1859 there was even a jousting tournament that drew twenty knights (along with accompanying maidens of honor) who engaged in a spirited and friendly contest.⁷⁶

Norfolk boosters attended numerous regional commercial conventions—a form of temporary association—during the antebellum period and also hosted statewide commercial conventions in 1838 and 1854. The 1838 convention was presided over by former governor and future president John Tyler and included delegates from many Virginia and a few North Carolina localities. The primary issues discussed at the convention included expanding direct trade, state banking capital, manufacturing, agriculture, and especially internal improvements. The delegates understood the economic and trade imbalance enjoyed by the northeast cities and largely blamed this on the federal government and its laws that concentrated capital, trade, and commerce in the Northeast.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 2 May 1851.

⁷⁶ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 16, 18, 26, 29, 35; *Daily Southern Argus*, 22 September 1853, 10 August 1854, 20 June 1855. Decades later boosters would write, “It may truly be said of this Society and its successors, that they conferred a permanent and incalculable benefit upon the city and the surrounding country by fostering and encouraging agriculture in all its branches, and in developing the various mechanical industries upon which the tillers of the soil depend for their very existence;” Cary W. Jones and Edward Pollock, eds., *Norfolk as a Business Center* (Norfolk: Landmark Press, 1884), 17.

They did, however, recognize that southerners bore some measure of responsibility for this state of affairs because of actions (or inaction) concerning banking capital and credit practices, lack of support for manufacturers and internal improvements, and the purchasing of northern and foreign products versus those produced locally. Characteristic of boosterism there existed a fervent optimism among the delegates as they proclaimed that Virginia and the South as a whole had displayed an intense interest in commercial development and they did not doubt that successful action would coincide with their resolve. The Committee on Direct Trade proclaimed that restoring trade, but not infringing on the rights of other states' citizens in the process, "will be another great example of the Old Dominion, which will be followed by her suffering sisters; and our equal prosperity and success will abate all sectional jealousy or envy, and preserve our UNION forever."⁷⁷

Norfolk's associational life even extended to residents becoming involved with issues beyond the city and even country. In March 1844 the Norfolk and Portsmouth Repeal Association was organized to cooperate with the Loyal National Repeal Association in Ireland. The group resolved to support the Irish people seeking to restore their national rights and legislative independence against the outrages of the British government. The situation, the organizers exclaimed, "render it not only necessary that the friends of civil liberty should sympathize with the oppressed millions of Ireland, but

⁷⁷ See pamphlet entitled *Proceedings of the Commercial Convention of the States of Virginia and North Carolina, Held in Norfolk, Virginia on the 14th, 15th, and 16th of November 1838* (Norfolk: T. G. Broughton, 1839), 1–30, 31–32 (preserve Union quote). The principal goal of the Internal Improvement Convention held in Norfolk in the autumn of 1854 was the connection of Chesapeake Bay with the Ohio River and the establishment of ocean steamer direct trade between Norfolk and European ports; Lamb, *Our Twin Cities*, 26–28; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 19.

that more evident demonstrations should be now offered in this Ireland's hour of trial and distress." Maurice Fitz Gibbon, chair of the Committee of Arrangements, announced that collections would be taken up for the cause and those who joined would have their names forwarded to the parent society in Ireland.⁷⁸

Another Irish Association, probably a reorganized version of the Repeal Association, emerged in 1848 as the Friends of Ireland in Norfolk. Reported as an Irish Sympathy Meeting, the *Southern Argus* commented that several individuals addressed the meeting with "much force and eloquence, which aroused the sympathies of a free people on behalf of a suffering and oppressed nation." A committee was appointed to draft an appeal to the citizens of Norfolk and Portsmouth to contribute to aid Irish liberty and another committee was appointed to receive these contributions. *Argus* editor S. T. Sawyer reported, however, that the attendance at the meeting to support Ireland was not as large and enthusiastic as they would have expected. Still, it was a "very respectable" attendance with a "fine spirit" prevailing and a "liberal amount" contributed.⁷⁹

The antebellum improvement and reform associations existed to elevate the industriousness, intelligence, religious, temperance, and commercial character of

⁷⁸ *American Beacon*, 29 November 1843, 14 February 1844. At a Relief Meeting for Ireland in early 1847 a more organized method was devised to collect money from citizens and a committee of solicitors was appointed. The solicitors eventually collected nearly one thousand dollars for Irish Relief; *American Beacon*, 17, 24, 27 February 1847. Irish relief connected associations in different cities as there was a column describing a meeting of the New York Friends of Ireland, *Daily Southern Argus*, 10 June 1848.

⁷⁹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 24, 26 August 1848. Many in the Repeal Association and Friends of Ireland probably were members of the Natives of the Emerald Isle who celebrated St. Patrick's Day in 1845 and 1851; *American Beacon*, 6 March 1845; *Argus*, 8 March 1851.

Norfolk's residents and the community as a whole. The Sons of Temperance and Total Abstinence Society fought to remove the threat of alcohol from society; the various library, lecture, and musical associations devoted themselves to expanding the intellectual and cultural climate of the city; the YMCA and Seamen's Friend Society merged intellectual and religious improvement in an effort to better the lives of the young men growing up in Norfolk, newly migrating to the city, or temporarily a resident at this port of call; the Mechanical Benevolent Society attended to the intellectual and moral needs of the working class; and boosters working in groups such as the Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange and as convention members sought the commercial expansion of the city, while at the same time profiting themselves.

These societies exemplified and promoted middle-class values of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety among the citizens of Norfolk, and not just the poor as the benevolent societies had done. The collective organization of individuals in voluntary associations who shared similar beliefs and (as we shall see) characteristics helped develop a middle-class consciousness. These ideas of improvement not only bound together the middle class of Norfolk, but in also connected them to like-minded individuals in other cities and states, North and South. Across the country societies existed that were devoted to temperance, where the YMCA and Seamen's Friend organizations had been founded, and where civic boosters had established similar mercantile associations to expand their cities. Similar to the benevolent societies, these associations not only served to better the individual for his own sake, but also contributed to the public order, and developed a better Norfolkian who would become a more useful member of the community and contribute to the growth of the city.

CHAPTER 5 FRATERNAL ASSOCIATIONS IN ANTEBELLUM NORFOLK

Benevolent and improvement associations in Norfolk promoted and instilled the middle-class values of the antebellum period and provided aid and comfort to those worthy poor in a context of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety. The city also could boast of fraternal organizations that had these values as their guiding principles and served as mediums of socialization. They bound together persons with like-minded beliefs, defined who was a part of the middle class, and provided a means for individuals to climb the social, economic, and political ladder. Fraternal associations like the Freemasons and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows connected members with others around the state and country. Although they were established for military protection, fire safety, and election of candidates, militia units, fire companies, and political clubs also were fraternal in nature. Their stated objectives became less of a reason to join their ranks than the opportunity to become part of a larger group that engendered comradeship, peer approval, and that served as a means for socializing newcomers, making business contacts, and promoting boosterism. As John S. Gilkeson concludes, “voluntary associations did cut across established ties of family, friendship, and work to forge a larger community. Indeed, they were instrumental in the coalescence and propagation of a distinctive middle-class culture in the second third of the nineteenth century.”¹

¹ Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 92–93. See also Decker, *Fortunes and Failures*, 109–12; and Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 4–5, 62–63, 81–84, 105, 114–5.

Middle-class associations such as lodges, reform societies, and literary clubs acted as a “community of limited liability” in that individuals could interact and socialize with others on a level more superficial than that of kinship or neighborhood, joining or leaving these organizations as they desired. Within proscribed ethnic, race, and class boundaries these societies selected the most prosperous, stable, and mature individuals who became part of the core residents of the community, while selecting out the young, unstable, and poor who often comprised the working class. These institutions served only those who wanted to join and who could afford to join, thus denoting individual status and defining the social boundaries of the community. The central role of associations, according to Don H. Doyle, was that “they allowed the voluntary community to shuffle members in and out with ease, and, at the same time, provided this mobile, diverse, and seemingly disorderly swirl of individuals with a cohesive and constant form of social order.”²

On a higher level than other antebellum associations fraternal orders instilled middle-class values of respect for authority as well as group and personal self-discipline. While persons voluntarily joined these organizations they had to adopt certain rules of behavior. These “training agencies,” as Doyle refers to them, promoted boosterism, local pride, and the notion of living by laws and yielding to electing leaders. These virtues were instilled via lectures, speeches, fines, suspensions, and expulsions. Being instructed to respect authority and follow the rules of law of the fraternal association helped to groom association and later civic leaders. They taught organizational principles, public speaking skills, rules of parliamentary procedures, and conflict resolution. Formal

² Doyle, *Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 12–14, 156–7; Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 92–93.

organizational procedures further contributed to the social order by providing group discipline among diverse individuals who possessed differing ideas on a subject. They also provided social stature that would benefit them in the future in that many who were leaders in business and politics were first associational leaders.³

In defining what makes a community an urban environment, Stuart Blumin highlights the role of associationalism in antebellum Kingston especially after 1845 with the emergence of fraternal, militia, intellectual, and religious societies. These associations helped to provide a sense of identity and fraternity as city growth resulting from urbanizing, industrializing, and immigration forces diminished social intimacy. Many of these organizations also were connected to larger state and national organizations that cultivated a further connection to individuals beyond the town border. These associations also engendered a sense of community identity and a sense that Kingston was an important place even for those who were not members. As Blumin states, "Kingston developed a voluntary institutional structure that reinforced the *presence* of the town in the minds of its citizens."⁴

Corresponding to the increase in the number of fraternal associations were their expanding roles in the public life of the city. These organizations proved crucial to the public arena as they participated in, and often organized, festivals, parades, fairs, and Fourth of July and George Washington's birthday celebrations. For the Independence Day holidays committees of arrangements would organize elaborate celebrations featuring speeches, a reading of the Declaration of Independence, fireworks, public

³ Doyle, *Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 12–14, 190–2, 269.

⁴ Blumin, *The Urban Threshold*, 31, 45, 146, 150–1, 159–65, 188–9.

dinners, and a grand parade involving the city's associational community, most notably the fire and militia companies in full dress uniforms. The militia companies promoted a sense of community identity as they represented Norfolk publicly in numerous parades, encampments, drills, military maneuvers, balls, and excursions to other cities and towns.⁵

Volunteer military organizations were perhaps the most popular, or at least most recognizable, fraternal antebellum association in Norfolk. During the two decades leading to the Civil War, the city could boast of such militia companies as the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues, Norfolk Juniors, Norfolk Riflemen, Virginia Guard, Woodis Riflemen, and Israelite Guards that met monthly and participated in maneuvers and parades separately, with each other, and with volunteer companies from other cities. During this time the state required that voting men serve in a military capacity either as members of the state militia or in city and county volunteer companies. Even with that the state requirement, these volunteer companies generally were considered to be exclusive clubs, and it was common for men to apply to whichever company appealed to their "social as well as their martial interests."⁶

⁵ *ibid.*, 31–33, 150–9. See also, Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars*, where she explains that political parties, associations, and clubs participated in the civic life of the city, allowing different groups with their contrasting ideas to congregate in public areas and compete for political hegemony in the urban environment; 94–96, 129.

⁶ John Walters, *Norfolk Blues: The Civil War Diary of the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues*, Kenneth Wiley, ed. (Byrd Street Press, 1997), 1–2; Dugald McPhail, Secretary, *Historical Sketch of the Volunteers of Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia* (Norfolk: Privately printed, n.d.), 7–8. In San Francisco the militia served an important social purpose in the burgeoning city. Leading merchants commanded these units, giving members a sense of status. They wore impressive uniforms, their armory became a second home for members, and they went on excursions to other towns. To further raise their public profile, and probably to raise contributions, they held parades and sponsored balls, concerts, banquets, and receptions; Decker, *Fortunes and Failures*, 109–12.

The most prominent and longstanding voluntary military company was the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues (NLA Blues). Organized in September 1829, the first public appearance of the Blues was on 22 February of the next year at a celebration for Washington's Birthday, which from that point constituted the organization's date of birth as well. The activities of the Blues in the decades leading to the Civil War exemplified that of other militia units around the country, consisting mostly of parades, drills, camp life, and parties, but on occasion being called out in cases of a severe fire or civil disturbance. On major holidays such as Washington's Birthday, Independence Day, and Yorktown Victory Day (19 October) the Blues began the day's celebration with a ceremonial cannon blast and then proceeded to parade and host a festive ball. In July 1838 the company acted as an escort for President Martin Van Buren, and members were received by him at his hotel. In that same year the Common Council donated to the company a lot behind the Court House and the governor appropriated \$1,000 for the construction of a building for a gun room.⁷

The company often traveled to other Virginia cities to celebrate with militia units and reciprocated by hosting corps from around the state and country. In 1837 the Blues took their first trip when they traveled to Williamsburg as guests of that city's Light Infantry Blues. Visiting and hosting quickly became regular events of the company. During the early 1850s the Blues especially enjoyed comradeship with the Petersburg Grays as the two companies exchanged visits during the Independence Day anniversaries.

⁷ The Blues' name arose from its easily transported field cannons and other artillery and the color of their uniforms. Gray and Blue were popular colors for militia companies in Virginia with seventy-nine using the former and fourteen companies using the latter; Walters, *Norfolk Blues*, 2-3; McPhail, *Historical Sketch of the Volunteers*, 10.

They would participate in parades, drills, and enjoy celebratory feasts, with the Blues captains always claiming them enjoyable occasions.⁸

One noteworthy visit exemplifying the bonds developed in fraternal association came in February 1850 when the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues hosted one hundred Virginia Military Institute Cadets in the city for three days. The two groups had been visiting Richmond for the laying of the cornerstone of the Washington Monument there and the Cadets traveled to Norfolk as guests of the Blues. They paraded, conducted maneuvering drills, and participated in entertaining feasts each evening. Upon returning to Lexington the cadets wrote back to thank the Blues and the citizens of Norfolk for their hospitality, writing that “elsewhere, we were received as friends—you received us as brothers . . . we felt that, among you, we were really and truly at home. Ties were formed [and] friendships linked together, which the lapse of years can only render stronger.”⁹

In October 1858 the Blues visited Petersburg to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of Yorktown with the Grays. During the 4th of July anniversary in 1860 the Blues traveled to Smithfield as guests of the Old Dominion Light Artillery Blues. Hospitality was the order of the day as the two companies celebrated as “feast followed feast and libation and the beautiful women strove with the men in extending welcome to their homes.” This would, however, be the last trip the Blues would take before the outbreak of the Civil War.¹⁰

⁸ *Daily Southern Argus*, 20, 25 February, 3, 6, 19 July 1850, 28 June 1851, 3, 7 July, 10, 14 August 1852. In July 1855 the Richmond Greys came to Norfolk as guests of the Blues for the July 4th celebration, *Daily Southern Argus*, 31 May 1855.

⁹ Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, 252–3.

¹⁰ McPhail, *Historical Sketch of the Volunteers*, 10–11.

The Blues were just one, even if they were the most popular, of a number of voluntary militia associations in Norfolk during the antebellum period. The oldest in Norfolk (and one of the oldest in Virginia) was the Norfolk Junior Volunteers. Organized in 1802 it was composed chiefly of young business clerks. During the first few years after its organization the Juniors enjoyed so much early membership that years later *Southern Argus* editor Samuel T. Sawyer proudly proclaimed that back then "To be a Junior was a title as much of boast, as in olden times to be a Roman."¹¹

With the group's success, however, other volunteer companies were organized in the vicinity and their officers generally came from the ranks of the Juniors. The group would suffer through a period of stagnation during the 1820s, however. The decline was perceived as resulting from a number of factors including a sense of security where the spirit of business supplanted the pride of battle, the fascination with the far west and the spread of the young population throughout the country, and mostly to the overall decline of militia associations because of inadequate encouragement from the state legislature. The Juniors would be reorganized in 1831 and again in 1852, remaining active until the Civil War, holding anniversary celebrations to commemorate their "Phoenix-like" rebirth.¹²

In an *Argus* editorial in 1849 Sawyer argued that the Juniors were one of the finest trained and drilled companies anywhere. He further asserted, however, that this volunteer company had been little appreciated by residents for the service it provided for

¹¹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 22 October 1849.

¹² *American Beacon*, 21 October 1844; Coffield, *Second Annual Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1860*, 139. The second rebirth was celebrated with a grand parade around the city reported in *Daily Southern Argus*, 15 September 1852.

nearly fifty years of war and peace, and proving to be one of the most efficient companies in Virginia.¹³ Like the NLA Blues, the Juniors traveled to other areas during major holidays to visit militia companies and host these “Brother Volunteers” with parades, military exercises, and feasts. During the 1840s and 1850s, the Juniors hosted or were hosted by such companies as the Hampton Light Infantry Guards, Petersburg Grays, Raleigh Volunteers, Richmond Light Infantry Blues, Smithfield Artillery Company, and Williamsburg Light Infantry Guards.¹⁴

In addition to the Blues and Juniors, the city counted the Norfolk Riflemen and Virginia Guard among its local voluntary military associations early in the 1840s. Little is known about the Riflemen who are seldom mentioned in the public record. Similar to the other companies they held meetings, drilled, and paraded but did not seem to have their own meeting house. Instead, they gathered at local hotels. The group may have had a problem with military discipline because a public notice of a meeting included an announcement that punctual attendance was required.¹⁵

The Virginia Guard was formed late in 1841 with an initial membership of about fifty. What made the Guard unique was that the company was formed on a strict adherence to “the holy cause of temperance.” According to an article by *American Beacon* editor William E. Cunningham, the guiding principle of the Guard was “to

¹³ *Daily Southern Argus*, 22 October 1849.

¹⁴ Burton, *History of Norfolk, Virginia*, 39; *American Beacon*, 9 October 1841, 14 October 1845; *Daily Southern Argus*, 21 October 1852, 15 July 1853, 20, 27 February 1855.

¹⁵ The punctuality warning was not seen in other companies’ public notices; *American Beacon*, 11, 17 January, 21 February 1839, 19 August 1841.

abstain entirely, as a company, from the use of ardent spirits” and that this principle “is a very populist one, and there can be no doubt that their ranks will always be filled.” The Guard was said to be the first temperance company organized in the country.¹⁶

In addition to visiting and hosting other units outside Norfolk, the city’s companies often held combined regimental parades. One such event occurred in May 1843 at Smith's Point causing “An Old Volunteer” to write that the companies accorded themselves very well in size and ability. He said that the Juniors “presented a very imposing appearance” and that the Blues were impressive with their four horse-drawn brass artillery pieces. He also complemented the Virginia Guard for its fourteen-piece brass band.¹⁷

The community became involved with the militia associations in a number of ways. Local businessman George Spies threw a Grand Civic Ball at the Arcade Assembly and invited the members of the volunteer companies to attend (they were asked to come in full uniform). In April 1844 there was a ladies’ fair to be held for the benefit the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues where the wives, daughters, and sisters sold useful and fancy articles they made and some goods received from Europe for the occasion.¹⁸ The general public and the military companies also hosted combined affairs such as the Grand

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 12 December 1841, 16 March 1842, 19 May 1843. Like the Juniors and Blues the Guard participated in visitations with other militia companies. In 1842 the Guard hosted the Independent Blues of Baltimore during the Independence Day holiday. The groups conducted drills, the Baltimore band played, and they had a dinner with much fellowship and many celebratory toasts; *American Beacon*, 9 July 1842.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 19 May 1843.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 22 February 1843, 16 April 1844.

Military and Civic Ball, cosponsored by the Junior Volunteers at Mechanics' Hall in March 1851.¹⁹

The Riflemen and Virginia Guard disbanded by mid-1850 apparently because of a lack of membership.²⁰ The NLA Blues and Junior Volunteers continued as the only militia companies for the first half of the decade. They continued to drill, parade, celebrate major holidays, visit and host companies from around the state and beyond, and attend state militia conventions. In February 1858 the Blues left for Richmond to celebrate the unveiling of the Washington statue along with more than thirty other units. The Baltimore City Guards also participated in the event, but first went to Norfolk where they were hosted by the Juniors complete with an elegant dinner, speeches, and church services. The two companies, along with many private citizens, then traveled to Richmond for the dedication of the Washington Monument.²¹

Interest in voluntary militia companies grew as the sectional crisis intensified during the 1850s. The Old Dominion Guard was organized in the summer of 1855 and the Woodis Riflemen formed in March 1858. Although the Old Dominion Guard disbanded by 1859, by that time the city could boast of a Jewish militia company, the

¹⁹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 8 March 1851.

²⁰ In commenting on this state of affairs, *Argus* editor S. T. Sawyer regretted that the public and local government authorities provided little encouragement to Norfolk's volunteer companies. To remedy the situation he called on the citizens to provide some visible support for the companies at the Independence Day celebration such as banners and stands of colors to stimulate and encourage local young men to join the ranks and become "Citizen Soldiers;" *Daily Southern Argus*, 14 June 1850.

²¹ Burton, *History of Norfolk, Virginia*, 15, 24, 30; *Daily Southern Argus*, 10, 21 October 1850, 3 April 1851. According to newspaper reports there were thirty-four militia units present at the unveiling of Washington's statue. See Kimball's *American City, Southern Place*, 7.

Israelite Guards.²² For its part the NLA Blues had reached a plateau of some sixty members, about half of which were truly active. Not surprisingly this situation reversed itself dramatically following abolitionist John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in October 1859. Fears that Brown's conspiracy would incite slaves to take up arms grew to nearly hysterical proportions and stimulated a new martial spirit in Norfolk. Applicants for the Blues subsequently increased at nearly every meeting and in November and December new voluntary militia companies were organized including the Norfolk Greys, Washington Light Infantry Guard, the Independent Greys, and the Southern Guard (by April 1861 reorganized as the Old Dominion State Guard). In November 1859 the Woodis Riflemen (sixty-four men mustered) and the Portsmouth National Grays (fifty-nine men) traveled to Charlestown for duty during John Brown's trial. The Blues were one of the first companies to respond to Governor John Letcher's call-up of the state militia units and volunteer companies following Virginia's secession from the Union.²³

A key component of associational life in Norfolk during the antebellum period was the collection of voluntary fire companies serving the city at any one time. Fire

²² Burton, *History of Norfolk, Virginia*, 30, 33; *Daily Southern Argus*, 25 June 1855; Ferslew, *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk*, 160. The Guard would not be listed in the 1860 city directory and presumably disbanded by that date; Coffield, *Second Annual Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1860*, 139.

²³ Norfolk's militia companies would become part of the 54th Regiment Virginia Militia. By the summer of 1861 preparations for war were in full effect by the companies and their supporters around the city. Ladies' auxiliaries were formed for the various units, providing Confederate battle flags as well as supplies to the local companies as well as to those in Yorktown, Williamsburg, and even to the Second Regiment, North Carolina Volunteers. The women of Norfolk established a Ladies' Aid society that organized benefits and fairs that drew large audiences to assist sick and needy soldiers, Burton, *History of Norfolk, Virginia*, 35–37, 45; Coffield, *Second Annual Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1860*, 139; Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 198; Walters, *Norfolk Blues*, 4–6.

companies in the city dated back to 1787 when Fire Company No. 1, later known as the Union Fire Company, was established. About 1803 the Franklin Fire Company was formed, its name reflecting the street where the company's small engine was stored. Later in 1824 the Phoenix Fire Company was organized, possessing the first suction engine in the city.²⁴ These companies served Norfolk for many years, but two dramatic fires in 1836 and 1846 underscored the need for more protection. The result was that in 1846 and 1847, respectively, the Franklin and Phoenix Fire Companies disbanded with their members joining the newly organized Hope, Aid, and Relief Fire Companies. The White Fire Company was formed in 1849, while the Independent and United Fire Companies were established in 1850. At the end of the 1850s the companies serving Norfolk included the Aid, Hope, Union, and United Fire Companies. These companies flourished until 1861 when most of their members volunteered for service during the Civil War.²⁵

In his work on Norfolk's fire department Thomas B. Rowland explains that during these antebellum years Norfolk's companies were similar to those in many other emerging cities throughout the country. Urban young men were becoming restless and asserting themselves, but they enjoyed few places of amusement or recreation, "so like in

²⁴ Thomas B. Rowland, *History of the Fire Department of Norfolk, Virginia* (Norfolk: Norfolk Firemen's Relief Association, 1915), 9; Stewart, *History of Norfolk County*, 358; *Daily Southern Argus*, 8 September 1854.

²⁵ From the beginning of the Civil War until the Federal occupation of Norfolk began in 1862 the fire companies consisted of men too old for war and free blacks, Rowland, *History of the Fire Department of Norfolk*, 10–12; J. H. Bradley, ed., *Official History of the Norfolk Fire Department, From 1740 to the Present Day Illustrating and Describing the Equipment of the Fire Department of To-Day* (Norfolk: n.p., 1897), n. p; *Daily Southern Argus*, 25 October 1849, March 12, 1850; Stewart, *History of Norfolk County*, 359; Ferslew, *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1859*, 159.

other towns growing to be cities, they resorted to the fire houses by way of clubs and meeting places.” One of key change that promoted fraternity was that blacks were no longer hired by the hour to do the manual labor. The formation of all-white companies by 1846 led to rivalries that were maintained until the advent of the Civil War.²⁶

The Aid Fire Company, Rowland argues, was the first to understand the situation and encouraged such gatherings to the point that it rapidly developed into the largest fire company in the city. The company moved from its original location into new buildings constructed on city property where they had room for all members as well as meeting space and fire-fighting equipment. The company soon outclassed others in terms of fighting fires and was praised by local newspapers for its organization principles and encouraged other companies to follow its example. Other fire companies enjoyed as much camaraderie among its members. The United Fire Company even formed a Fishing Club that took excursions to Baltimore. At the other end of the fraternal spectrum the Union and Relief Companies withered away as they had no plan to recruit what Rowland calls “Young America” and soon both of these companies disbanded.²⁷

²⁶ Rowland, *History of the Fire Department of Norfolk*, 11–12; Bradley, *Official History of the Norfolk Fire Department*, n. p. In San Francisco the fire companies were staffed by the leading merchants of the city and thus emerged as exclusive social clubs that granted status on members. These companies served a social purpose providing comradeship, peer approval, and a means for socializing newcomers. They also served a commercial purpose as these associations provided an environment for making business contacts. The fire companies were very competitive in their uniforms and their response time to fires. Companies constructed large fire houses with well-stocked libraries and provided sick benefits and death benefits to widows and children. They held parades, parties, concerts, and banquets to let the public know who and what they were, and probably hoped for contributions; Decker, *Fortunes and Failures*, 109–12.

²⁷ The United Fire Company also was cited by Rowland as a fine company with the superior equipment and efficient volunteers. The Aid Fire Company would grow so large that a group of individuals became discontent and left to form another company that they

In terms of day-to-day associational activities, the fire companies participated (alone and jointly) in monthly meetings, drills, and parades.²⁸ In the autumn of 1853, the Norfolk fire companies held a parade in conjunction with the second day of the Cattle and Agricultural Exhibition. *Southern Argus* editor T. M. Crowder commented that this display showed the interest “this worthy class of citizens” had taken in the city’s welfare. He continued that these volunteer firemen enjoyed and deserved the “confidence of a community who know full well their worth.”²⁹ Participating in the public life of Norfolk, the fire companies held many celebrations throughout the antebellum period, some of the largest occurring when each celebrated the date of its formation. Early in 1851 the United Fire Company celebrated its first anniversary with a torch-light procession in full uniform to the engine house, followed by a dinner with Keyston’s Cotillion Band for entertainment. Three years later the company marked its fourth anniversary with a celebration that included the Hope, Aid, and Union Fire Companies in attendance.³⁰

Like the militia units, civilians also were included in celebrations as in the case of the Grand Firemen and Citizens’ Fireman’s Ball given by the Aid Fire Company at Walters’ Arcade Saloon late in 1849. For two dollars (per threesome of a gentleman and

called the Stingers. They shared space with the Hope Fire Company, but success spurred their numbers to grow and they moved into their own engine house. See Rowland, *History of the Fire Department of Norfolk*, 10–12; *Daily Southern Argus*, 4 January 1850, 8 September 1854.

²⁸ *American Beacon*, 7 October 1839, 16 June 1847; *Daily Southern Argus*, 1 April, 10 October 1850, 3 January 1851, 15, 22 January 1852, 1 February, 5, 23 April 1855, 8 May 1856.

²⁹ *Daily Southern Argus*, 26 October 1853.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 3, 6 January 1851, 5 January, 25 October 1854.

two ladies) guests enjoyed a dinner and musical performance by Keyston's Cotillion Band and ballet master F. A. Karn of Philadelphia.³¹ About this time, the Hope Fire Company held a supper of its own at Military Hall to commemorate the reorganization of the company. The dinner included a wide variety of food that was described as tastefully presented with members being outfitted in their full uniforms. There was much sentiment, song, and gay jesting that provoked joyous laughter. In describing the dinners of the two fire companies, *Argus* editor Samuel T. Sawyer wrote that "the Hope Company, as well as the Aid, are composed of some of our most worthy and heroic young citizens, and these guardians and protectors to the property and safety of the city are eminently worthy of the fostering care and approving countenances of the whole community."³²

There was a sense by some, however, that the citizens of Norfolk did not adequately appreciate the volunteer fire companies. Sawyer described the firemen as the "strength and the life and soul of the community" and commented that they were "bound together as a bond of brothers" as they underwent the same toils, hardships, and struggles in providing public safety and serving the public good. He expressed surprise that the firemen were not more highly appreciated and encouraged by the citizens of Norfolk and called on the Council and residents to provide more support to these courageous men.³³ The lack of public support apparently occurred once again in the spring of 1851 when the Firemen's Charitable Association was organized to aid firemen who were disabled or

³¹ *ibid.*, 7 December 1849.

³² *ibid.*, 11 February 1850.

³³ *ibid.*, 4 January 1850.

injured in the line of duty. Sawyer applauded this action, but also recommended the establishment of a library association to be formed by Norfolk's firemen to provide themselves opportunities for reading to acquire useful information.³⁴

Another form of association established for practical reasons, but also would serve a social purpose were Norfolk's political parties and their corresponding clubs. These organizations went beyond simply promoting a particular candidate to providing a context for fraternal fellowship. Moreover, political associations and clubs, as well as their expanded campaign methods such as parades, slogans (Tippecanoe and Tyler Too), and symbols like the Hickory Pole, signaled a shift to mass politics that accompanied the expansion of suffrage among white males.³⁵

During much of the antebellum period these political associations became a medium by which the middle class could become active in the public life of the city. When individuals of the antebellum period gathered in public spaces for political parades, rallies, and ward meetings to support a candidate they were exercising what Mary P. Ryan called their political citizenship. Along with the right to vote for males, these public activities enabled the individual to participate in self-government. Thus, associationalism, either formally organized parties and clubs or informal gatherings, was inherently tied to politics and a key element in the development of antebellum political culture. Civic organizations allowed more people to become involved in the democratic public consciousness that was previously restricted to birthplace and property. Although

³⁴ *ibid.*, 7 May 1851.

³⁵ Blumin, *The Urban Threshold*, 3–5, 86. In Norfolk the *American Beacon* was a Whig newspaper, while the *Daily Southern Argus* supported the Democrats.

still limiting themselves by race and gender these organizations of the citizenry served the important purpose of providing a venue for heterogeneous groups to gather in the public space to oppose contrasting interests. These groups, with their differing views and goals, competed for political hegemony in the community. These contests were crucial to the development of the democratic experiment.³⁶

In Norfolk the Whigs were the dominant political force for much of the antebellum period, controlling the local offices and spurring the party vote in state and national elections. But the Whigs also had a vocal challenger in the Democratic party and when the former collapsed in the 1850s many of its members joined the new American Party (Know-Nothings), which for a brief period had a fierce presence in the city. These party organizations formally elected candidates and sent representatives to local, district, state, and national conventions. The political parties also spurred affiliated political associations and clubs amongst their members to further promote their candidates and beliefs, and especially to cultivate party loyalty and unity at well-attended parades, barbecues, rallies, ladies' auxiliary events, and monthly meetings (which during the election season convened weekly or daily).³⁷

³⁶ Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars*, 95–96, 129. In the 1850s and 1860s the minor civic wars would erupt into violent struggles for political power as riots, vigilantism, etc. ripped through the urban public spaces. After 1865 the public democratic life of the community splintered into competing interest groups defined by race, gender, and class. Gone were the days of unifying civic ceremonies, parades, groundbreaking, and national funerals in which the entire community, despite contrasting beliefs and interests, could participate. As the city grew larger and more diverse associations of groups did not define the public spaces in a unified environment of minor civic wars. Rather it was these divergent interest groups that competed in the public democratic life for their specific issues; *ibid.*, 136–8, 226.

³⁷ The first district, to which Norfolk belonged also included Portsmouth, Princess Anne, and the counties of Norfolk, Isle of Wight, Surry, Nansemond, Prince George,

The clubs and associations formed by the Whigs usually lasted for one election, being named after their presidential candidate that year. In 1840 the Whigs organized the Tippecanoe Club, named after William Henry Harrison. At their numerous meetings and rallies members strongly supported Harrison for president and John Tyler for vice president in that year's election and resolved "to break up the corrupt and profligate dynasty which seeks to sustain itself by the prostration of the most sacred obligations which should bind a People together for their EQUAL RIGHTS AND COMMON GOOD."³⁸ In 1843 the Whigs supported Henry Clay for president and organized the Clay Club, No. 1 and Washington Clay Club, No. 2. Four years later they formed the Rough and Ready Club of Norfolk, after General Zachary Taylor.³⁹

Northampton, Southampton, and Sussex. Often the number of delegates attending the state convention numbered about one hundred. For various political party activities in Norfolk during the antebellum see the diary of William M. Whiting, entry for 5 April 1848, Virginia Historical Society; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 15–16, 33; *American Beacon*, 21 March 1842, 18, 23 January, 13, 20 February, 17 March 1843, 11 May 1844, 5, 10, 17, 24 March 1845; *Daily Southern Argus*, 12 February, 6 May 1848, 20 January 1849, 11, 24 April 1850, 4 June 1851, 27 March, 5, 15 April 1852, 16, 19 May 1856; *Weekly Southern Argus*, 21 February 1856.

³⁸ *American Beacon*, 10, 17, 26, 28 March 1840. The Whigs celebrated the election of Harrison with a grand illumination and parade on 19 November 1840. Their joy would be short-lived, however, as he died a month after his inauguration and was succeeded by John Tyler. Even though Tyler would ally himself with the Democrats, he was considered a good Virginia man and thus his actions were acceptable to Norfolk Whigs; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 9.

³⁹ *American Beacon*, 30 October, 6 November 1843, 20 April 1847. In June 1848 the Democratic *Southern Argus* took a shot at a meeting of the Rough and Ready Club where the Whigs nominated Taylor for president and Millard Filmore for vice president. Samuel T. Sawyer commented that many Whigs attended the meeting, but that the Democrats who were present out of curiosity reported that it was a "decidedly cold and spiritless affair;" *Daily Southern Argus*, 15 June 1848.

For its part the Democrats of Norfolk formed the Democratic Association of Norfolk in 1843 with the stated goal of opposing the Whigs and the election of Henry Clay as president. Those at the first meeting proclaimed that they held to a "strict construction of the constitution as the first and great conservative principle of our government, and by which alone its integrity can be preserved." Continuing to use the rhetoric of the 1800 election, they pledged that they would "resist until defeat shall arrest our struggles, or a glorious victory proclaim the downfall of Federalism."⁴⁰

Both the Whigs and Democrats formed corresponding organizations directed toward the young men in the community. The Tippecanoe Boys were organized by the spring of 1840 and sent one hundred delegates to attend a Young Men's National Convention. In September 1844 the Norfolk Junior Clay Club was founded and in 1852 the Junior Whig Club was established. With the formation of the Junior Whig Club, the Democratic *Argus* opined that it was calculated to revive the enthusiasm of local Whig leader (and rival *American Beacon* editor) William E Cunningham, and that "supporting General Scott for the presidency is unquestionably a juvenile affair."⁴¹

The Democrats were even more active in developing political clubs for the young men of Norfolk. In September 1844 the Young Hickory Club of Norfolk was organized, pledging its support for the nomination of James K. Polk to be the party's nominee for the presidential election. Four years later the Norfolk Junior Democratic Association was

⁴⁰ *American Beacon*, 31 October 1843. In contrast to the Whigs, the Democratic associations would not change their names every election to reflect the candidate, but generally were called the Democrat Association of Norfolk.

⁴¹ *American Beacon*, 23 April 1840, 13 September 1844; *Daily Southern Argus*, 30 July 1852.

formed and several days later its members helped sponsor (along with party regulars) a rally where they heard an oration from the party's electoral delegate and future congressman, John S. Millson. The Junior Granite Hill Club was formed in August 1852 and the Young Men's Democratic Club (also referred to as the Young Men's Jefferson Club) was organized in April 1856. The Democratic *Argus* applauded the establishment of the latter group but mentioned that other cities had already organized their young men's democratic clubs for that election season and so the newly-formed Norfolk club would have to move quickly in order to prepare for the upcoming race.⁴²

The young men of both parties were indeed active in demonstrating support for their candidates. Prior to the election of 1840 Hugh Blair Grigsby described how supporters of both parties paraded through the streets with torches, lanterns, drums, and fifes. He commented that "when the young rascals reach the door of an opponent, they groan with all their might, and cheer at the dwelling of a friend. Political parties here had regular meetings every night, a sort of anxious meeting at which all doubters were invited to attend. Such scenes I never saw before."⁴³

⁴² *American Beacon*, 21 September 1844; *Daily Southern Argus*, 4, 9 August 1848, 11, 13, 25 August 1852, 11, 15, 24, 26 April, 21 June 1856. Part of the reason for the formation of the "junior" associations was to cultivate future voters. Conducted in a context of republicanism, the constitution of the Norfolk Junior Clay Club stressed that while the people were the source of political power and that government must respond to the will of the people, the people must understand their rights and responsibilities. As rising voters young men therefore must be educated and prepared to exercise their political power with sound judgment. Of course, the teaching of Whig principles was central to this education and preparation; *American Beacon*, 13 September 1844.

⁴³ Letter from Hugh Blair Grigsby in Norfolk to (his later wife) Mary Venable Carrington in Charlotte County dated 2 November 1840, from Grigsby Family Papers, Hugh Blair Grigsby, 1806–1881, correspondence, Virginia Historical Society.

Associational activities beyond the regular meetings were essential for Whig and Democratic political parties and their clubs to develop support for their candidate and issues. They also engendered a spirit of camaraderie and fraternity amongst the members. During election season, Vigilance Committees existed for both parties that helped get out the voters and monitor the election activities.⁴⁴ Other activities included large rallies, grand torch light processions, and musical concerts. A notable event occurred in May 1844 when a Whig and Miscellaneous Concert at the Clay Club Room featured the vocalist Mr. Duffield of Maryland. Many of the songs were of a Whig nature such as "Patriotic Song," "Kentucky Gentleman," "Clay Waltz," and "Ladies' Whig Song."⁴⁵

Barbecues were an especially popular activity among the political associations of Norfolk and often were combined with other events such as rallies and torch light processions. At a Democratic barbecue in Hampton in October 1848, the party's newspaper, the *Southern Argus*, reported that the "young men of Norfolk and Portsmouth appeared in imposing procession, with bands of music, their banners, and beautiful

⁴⁴ In San Francisco Vigilance Committees were especially important. These committees received more support from merchants than any other organization in the city including the fire and militia companies, church organizations, benevolent societies, and political parties. These committees helped the mercantile elites to gain political power via illegal activities, disruption of democratic voting procedures, and even the use of violence; Decker, *Fortunes and Failures*, 108, 120, 142, 245–9, 254. Philip J. Ethington argues that the San Francisco Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856 were organized more on the basis of political rather than social precepts. These organizations were manifestations of what he termed the republican-liberal culture and defined as a combination of liberal—individualism in the pursuit of self interest— and republican—civic virtue in the pursuit of the common good; *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7, 15, 39.

⁴⁵ *American Beacon*, 21 May 1844, 27 September, 25, 26 October, 25 November 1844.

transparencies.”⁴⁶ Later that month the Democratic Association of Norfolk organized a free barbecue at the Democratic Pavilion on Land’s End that the *Argus* reported as a “feast of reason . . . a flow of soul . . . a glorious political festival.” Leading up to the barbecue was a procession to the Pavilion that included a very large number of men and women with Democratic flags as well as bands playing inspiring music and leaders giving stirring speeches.⁴⁷

Grand processions were routinely held to rally the voters before the election and to celebrate following a political victory. A fine example of the latter can be seen in a Democratic Grand Torchlight Procession held in January 1852 to celebrate the party’s victory in the election of the state’s three highest offices. In a clearly partisan, but revealing review of the procession, *Argus* editor Samuel T. Sawyer wrote that the parade route was crowded with spectators along the streets and from balconies and windows who cheered enthusiastically. He exclaimed that “It was one of the longest processions of the kind ever witnessed in our city, numbering nearly a thousand persons. Houses were illuminated in different parts of the town, and hundreds of bonfires sent above their lurid blaze. The pageant was grand and picturesque. . . . The eighth of January, 1852, will be ever memorable in the annals of our city.”⁴⁸

Not only did the political associations of Norfolk sponsor activities that brought persons closer together on the city and state level, each association’s ward members also participated in activities in their neighborhoods. One of the more popular for the

⁴⁶ *Daily Southern Argus*, 6 October 1848.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 14, 28 October, 4, 7 November 1848, 28 November, 8 December 1851.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 8, 10 January 1852.

Democrats was the raising of a Hickory Pole. The pole raising was an elaborate event that included a procession, ceremony, music, and speeches. At the height of the 1852 campaign the four Democratic ward groups each increased their meetings to every week (in addition to general party meetings and city-wide club meetings) and each erected a Hickory Pole. The *Argus* reported that the raising of a Hickory Pole by the Democrats of the fourth ward in September 1852 brought out more than two thousand people in attendance.⁴⁹ Not wanting to be left out, the Junior Democrats raised their own Hickory Pole, with the *Argus* reporting that a large spirited crowd in attendance as speeches were given by party leaders along with a parade by the Granite Hill Club.⁵⁰

Political associations also connected Norfolk residents with those from other areas around Virginia and beyond the state's borders. There were rallies and barbecues sponsored by Whig and Democratic Associations of the entire first district with the associations often hearing speakers from other Virginia locales and other states.⁵¹ Norfolk politicians also went to other areas of the Commonwealth to speak on behalf of their parties. In the autumn of 1848 John S. Millson visited Southampton County and reported at a Norfolk Democratic rally the positive events occurring in that county, including new members of the party.⁵²

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 28 August, 1, 7, 10, 13, 15, 17 September 1852.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 4 October 1852.

⁵¹ *American Beacon*, 21 September 1844; *Daily Southern Argus*, 6, 14, 28 October, 4, 7 November 1848, 28 November, 8 December 1851, 4, 20 October 1852.

⁵² The *Argus* proclaimed that "Never have we known the Democracy of our city more enthusiastic and buoyant with hope than they are at present. Every one is determined on doing his whole duty in the good cause, and to recognize not such worked in their vocabulary, as "Fail;" *Daily Southern Argus*, 19 October 1848.

In addition to these personal connections the Norfolk newspapers kept their readers apprised of national party events and news occurring in other states.⁵³ The political parties even helped to connect northerners and southerners. In a *Southern Argus* editorial in October 1852 Samuel T. Sawyer echoed the sentiments of the *Boston Post* and stressed that the success of the Democracy should not deter Whig party members from being diligent as election day approached in November.⁵⁴

During the 1850s the American (Know-Nothing) Party developed a strong, but brief presence in Norfolk. Like their Democratic counterparts and Whig predecessors they held regular meetings, sponsored rallies, divided the city into wards, and held district, state, and national conventions.⁵⁵ The Know-Nothings emerged as a viable political party in Virginia when the state was one of those (New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, and the District of Columbia being the others) that sent representatives to a convention in May 1854. At the next national meeting in June seven more states were represented and a Virginian was elected the party's vice president. By the end of 1854 estimates of the party's members numbered some 60,000 out of a voting population of about 170,000. The beginnings of Know-Nothing power in Norfolk began in the summer of 1854 when the party swept out the mayor and many councilmen, installing its own candidates in office. Most of the incumbents in the four wards lost to Know-Nothings candidates, while holdovers who did emerge victorious had been supported by the upstart party. The victory in the municipal elections of 1854 was

⁵³ *Daily Southern Argus*, 28 October 1848, September 27, 1852.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 20 October 1852.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 2, 8 April, 24 May 1855, 11 April 1856.

overwhelming and could be attributed to local issues and dissatisfaction with the incumbents. Also, similar to other cities and states, the decline of the Whig Party nationally provided a political vacuum for those seeking a challenger to the Democrats. For several years Norfolk would be a key stronghold for Know-Nothings in Virginia, comprised chiefly of former Whigs.⁵⁶

The party was not strong enough, however, to extend its influence to the gubernatorial election of 1855 and national election the next year. With respect to the governor's race, the American Party was victorious in Norfolk and Richmond, but Democrat Henry A. Wise won the statewide elections by over ten thousand ballots. In the Tidewater area Know-Nothing candidates still were elected to the Virginia House of Delegates and state Senate.⁵⁷ The Know-Nothings of Norfolk made their last stand

⁵⁶ Michael B. Connolly, *A Love Affair With Sam: Know-Nothings in Norfolk, 1854–1856* (Norfolk: Connolly, 1986), 1–6, 14. See also W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 54, 75–76, 91–95; and Parramore, Stewart, and Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries*, 180–1. For Know-Nothing membership estimates see Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 926. Holt argues, however, that in Virginia as a whole many Democrats—between one-third and two-fifths—joined the Know-Nothings, rather than displaced Whigs as in Norfolk. He attributes this to Whig concerns that the Know-Nothings would run ex-Democrats for office, as well as the new party's adherence to exclusiveness and secrecy. Still, Holt does explain that some Whigs joined the American Party because of its nativist agenda or, for politicians, a chance to get elected. Others hoped to maintain a Whig presence by cooperating with the Know-Nothings—an effort that would fail; Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 926–7. The two perspectives are not incompatible because of Norfolk's distinctive political culture during the antebellum period. Just as the city was a Whig stronghold in an otherwise Democratic state, it could also have been the case that the city's many Whigs joined the Know-Nothings, in contrast to the rest of the state where the former joined the Democratic Party.

⁵⁷ Connolly, *A Love Affair With Sam*, 12–14. See also *American Beacon*, 26 May 1855; and James P. Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise, with a History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 360–2.

during the presidential election of 1856 when American Party candidate Millard Fillmore garnered 787 votes and Democrat James Buchanan received 644 votes in the city. Next door in Norfolk County, however, Buchanan earned a victory with 1230 to 1008 votes. The Know-Nothings would lose the statewide election and come in a distant third in the national election, dealing the final blow to the American Party.⁵⁸

Fraternal organizations were an integral part of the associational life of Norfolk during the antebellum years. The city could boast of a number of fraternal orders including the Freemasons, the Royal United Arch affiliate of the Masons, and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The Masons, and their affiliated Royal United Arch, enjoyed thriving chapters throughout the period. The Masonic Norfolk Lodge, No. 1 was chartered on 1 June 1741 by the Grand Lodge of England, and perhaps was the first Masonic chapter chartered in America.⁵⁹ The Nephtali Lodge, No. 56 received its charter on 11 December 1798, but would dissolve in December 1849. The last Masonic lodge chartered in Norfolk before the Civil War was the Atlantic Lodge, No. 2, being officially

⁵⁸ Despite electing several representatives to the General Assembly in 1855 and running Fillmore in the 1856 national presidential race, the end of the Know-Nothings in the state effectively began with their loss in the gubernatorial election of 1855 when Wise dealt them a crushing defeat chiefly because of his anti-Know-Nothing stance; Connolly, *A Love Affair*, 7–10; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 18–19; Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 7–27, 93, 353.

⁵⁹ The issue of exactly when the Norfolk lodge was founded and whether or not it was the first Masonic lodge chartered in America are topics that have been debated by Masonic scholars for years. The 1 June 1741 date is the official date accepted by the Grand Lodge of Virginia and the chapter was at least one of the first to be established in America. For a balanced and recent look at the controversy see Richard A. Rutyna and Peter C. Stewart, *History of Freemasonry in Virginia* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1998), 29–44.

recognized on 13 December 1854.⁶⁰ The Norfolk Grand United Royal Arch, No. 1 was organized in 1820. A more exclusive extension of the Freemasons, members had to be affiliated with a regular Masonic lodge to be eligible for the Royal Arch chapters.⁶¹

Membership in the Grand Lodge of Virginia was 1,170 in 1840, but increased steadily through the antebellum period peaking at 6,711 on the eve of the Civil War.⁶²

⁶⁰ Norfolk's sister city also had a Masonic lodge, the Portsmouth Naval Lodge, No. 100, chartered on 14 December 1814, Bernard L. Odend'hal, Jr. comp., *Register of Lodges Chartered and Under Dispensation of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, Ancient Free & Accepted Masons of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1778–1972* (s. l.: s. n., 1972); Right Worthy Henry L. Turner, P. M., "Historical Sketch of Atlantic Lodge, No. 2," in *Grand Lodge of Virginia Convention in 1902* (Richmond: n.p., 1903), cxii–cxvi; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 236–7.

⁶¹ Burton writes that the Norfolk United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1 was organized and chartered on 10 March 1820; Stewart, *History of Norfolk County*, 251 has the charter date as 18 January 1820. William Moseley Brown, *Freemasonry in Virginia (1733–1936)* (Richmond: Masonic Home Press, Inc., 1936) has the date of organization as 1808, the same year that the Grand United Royal Arch was established in Virginia.

⁶² The membership in the Grand Lodge of Virginia on the eve of the nineteenth century was 1,674. It steadily declined to 1,200 in 1815, before rebounding to 1,914 five years later, peaking in that era with 2,276 in 1825. Once again the membership declined to 1,170 in 1840, and then began another upward swing that would last for two decades steadily increasing to 1,473 in 1845, to 2,718 in 1850, to 4,395 in 1855, and 6,711 in 1861. The decline in membership during the late 1820s and early 1830s could be attributed to Antimasonry. Despite any effects it had on association rolls, however, Antimasonry did not evolve into a political force in Virginia. The main culprit to the movement's lack of success was the political weakness of Masons in the state, in contrast to their political strength in New England; Rutyna and Stewart, *History of Freemasonry in Virginia*, 245–256, 433. William Preston Vaughn argues that Antimasonry did not take hold in the South because the regional culture—inherently tied to slavery—spurred a distrust of northern reform movements that often were linked to abolitionism; *The Anti-Masonic Party in the United States, 1826–1843* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 170. As Rutyna and Stewart point out, however, slavery had little influence on either Masonry or Antimasonry. The southern Piedmont with its many slaves had a strong Masonic presence, while the James River valley and northern Piedmont, with its comparatively fewer slaves, was more influenced by Antimasonry in terms of membership rolls; *History of Freemasonry in Virginia*, 500, n. 6.

The Masons of Norfolk lived by a certain set of rules published as Ahiman Rezon, or The Constitution of Masonry. Those who wished to be Masons had to firmly believe in the Eternal God, accepting Him as the “architect” of the universe. They were, however, allowed to worship with different denominations as long as these essentials of religion were followed. They were to be “good men and true—men of honour and honesty” who always abided the Golden Rule of doing unto all men that which you would have done to yourself. Obligations of religion and love were strengthened by Masonry as it became the “center of union among brethren,” and a means of gathering men together who might have remained distant from each other. In terms of his obligations as a citizen, a Mason was instructed to be “a lover of quiet, peaceable and obedient to the civil powers,” as long as obedience did not expand beyond the bounds of reason and religion. The welfare of his country was a singular responsibility for the Mason and so no real Craftsman could be involved in plots against the government or disrespectful of lawful authority.⁶³

The Masons believed in many of the qualities and virtues that have been ascribed to the middle class. The first lesson taught in Masonry was that truth was considered a divine attribute and the foundation to all other virtues and behaviors. After understanding truth, a Mason was instructed to walk humbly and to avoid intemperance or excess that could interfere with the duties of the Masonic craft or lead him into actions that would reflect dishonor on the Order. He was to work industriously at his profession and be true to his employer. When the Mason did have some leisurely hours, he was to spend it

⁶³ John Dove, *The Masonic Text Book of Virginia* (Richmond: Grand Lodge of Virginia, 1847), 77–78.

“studying the arts and science with a diligent mind, that he may better perform all his duties . . . to his Creator, his country, his neighbor and himself.”⁶⁴

The Mason was to acquire patience, self-denial, and forbearance. These virtues would enable him to gain self-control, govern his family with affection, dignity, and prudence, and promote the love and service of Masonic brotherhood. Similarly, the worthy Mason was expected to give comfort to the distressed, help the lost traveler, and to “divide our bread with the industrious poor.” He had to abstain from malice, slander, and “ungodly language” and know how to obey those individuals who were of a higher Masonic rank, no matter the worldly rank. Indeed, the Order did not strip any man of temporal titles and positions, and even highly respected them. Yet it was the level of virtue and knowledge in the Masonic arts that was considered the arbiter of position in the lodge. The last and what they deemed perhaps the most important characteristic for a brother was secrecy as to activities and membership of the Order.⁶⁵

The specific rules of daily Masonic behavior reflected these beliefs related to humility, respect, values, and industriousness. The brethren were instructed to attend all regular meetings unless they were sick, lame, or out of town. They were mandated to work diligently and honestly on working days so that they may live in an appropriately reputable manner on holidays. They were to complete all the work asked of them, not complain about the wages received, and not be jealous of a brother’s prosperity. These same rules applied to behavior in the lodge as well in that when the lodge was open and attending to official Masonic business, no speaking not related to the business at hand

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 79–80, 166.

and no behavior which was not solemn and serious was tolerated. When the lodge was closed and the labors and business of the day were done, but before the members left for home, they could engage in "innocent mirth," while making sure to avoid excessive behavior that may be blamed on the lodge. When they did return home they were expected to be moral men and act as good husbands, parents, sons, and neighbors. They were not to stay away from home too long (meaning at taverns) and similarly avoid all excessive actions that would be harmful to them or their families. To even become an apprentice in a lodge a person had to be fully employed and come from a moral family.⁶⁶

The contradiction that was the American antebellum South is evident in the Masonic definition of Brotherly Love, whereby the members were "taught to regard the whole human species as one common family, the high, the low, the rich and poor, who, as created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are sent into the world to aid, support and protect each other." On this principle, they continue, "Free Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion."⁶⁷ Missing were African Americans who lived in the South as slaves and free blacks.

The Masonic handbook explained what the brethren call alternately the Four Perfect Points or Cardinal Virtues necessary to learn the Masonic philosophy and become a Mason. At the top of the list was Temperance which they believed restrained an individual's affections and passions and allowed him to remain tame and governable. Intemperance caused a person to lose the self-control and humility that they valued so

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 94–98, 102.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 166.

much and led to vice, licentiousness, and excess.⁶⁸ Fortitude meant that one was able to withstand any pain or danger, but only when deemed prudent and expedient. In this sense fortitude was the opposite of cowardice and also rashness. Underlying the Fortitude was Prudence, which taught them how to live a life of reason whereby decisions were prudently and wisely made, keeping in mind present and future happiness. Last among the Cardinal Virtues was Justice, defined as giving “every man his just due without distinction.” Justice was said to not only be consistent with heavenly and moral laws, but was the foundation of civil society. As such, each Mason should never deviate from the “minutest principles” of justice.⁶⁹

In February 1846 an editorial appeared in the *American Beacon* about a recent Masonic Celebration where the Rev. Caldwell spoke about Free Masonry, its purpose, and the principles of brotherhood that binds the Mason no matter his religion, whether Christian, Jew, or Barbarian. Editor William E. Cunningham was left with “the most vivid impressions of the noble and generous impulses that bound every mason, each to the other and to his fellow man.”⁷⁰ The bonds of fraternal brotherhood of which Cunningham spoke were even present between northern and southern branches on the eve of the Civil War. The Grand Master of Massachusetts, Winslow Lewis, sent a letter in early December 1860 to John R. McDaniel, Grand Master for Virginia on the subject of the “National Troubles.” Lewis lamented what he described as the fanaticism in both regions that threatened to dissolve the Union and lead to war. He assured Daniel that

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 167.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 168–70.

⁷⁰ *American Beacon*, 25 February 1846.

they would cling to their brothers in Virginia, writing that all Masons remember the lesson "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."⁷¹ McDaniel replied in late December 1860 mourning the loss of the Union, but still hoping for a peaceful separation. Regardless of the outcome, he proclaimed that Masonry would remain unshaken and that they could "continue to live in the full existence of Brotherly Love without regard to geographical bounds or political divisions."⁷²

Like the other fraternal organizations, the Masons often hosted celebrations and participated in such activities as parades, dinners, and groundbreaking ceremonies. In April 1841 they participated in a large parade to honor William Henry Harrison. In April 1854 the Masons were present at the laying of the cornerstone of the Methodist Protestant Church. On 4 July of that year they even participated in the laying of the cornerstone of the new Odd Fellows' Hall that took place following the Independence Day parade. In early November 1852, the Masons of Norfolk and Portsmouth came together to celebrate the centennial anniversary of George Washington's initiation into the order. They conducted a procession through the streets of Norfolk, heard speeches, and later the group of 200 brethren enjoyed a supper prepared at Mechanics' Hall.⁷³

During the yellow fever epidemic in the summer of 1855 the Masons were very active in providing assistance to the suffering of Norfolk. Members of the Atlantic

⁷¹ Letter printed in *Proceedings of a Grand Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, Begun and Held in the Mason's Hall, in the City of Richmond, on Monday the 9th Day of December, A. L. 5861, A. D. 1861* (Richmond: Chas. H. Wynne, 1861), 29–30.

⁷² *ibid.*, 30–31.

⁷³ *American Beacon*, 10, 15 April 1841; *Daily Southern Argus*, 26 October, 6 November 1852, 4, 6 July 1854; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 16, 18, 26, 240–2.

Lodge worked among the sick and dying trying to help in any way possible. In fact the Worshipful Master Dr. George L. Upshur treated the sick and dying, ultimately losing his life. Atlantic Lodge Masons Reuben M. Butler and John Andrews also died during the epidemic. As a result of these losses the lodge was draped in mourning for one year and members wore badges of mourning for ninety days. Also the Norfolk Lodge and Atlantic Lodge erected a monument in Elmwood Cemetery to Worshipful Master Upshur, dedicating it in December 1856.⁷⁴

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) had even more thriving chapters than the Masons during the antebellum period.⁷⁵ By the time that the Lafayette Lodge was celebrating its first anniversary in February 1839, the Washington Lodge and Jerusalem Encampment were being invited to the celebration.⁷⁶ A letter to the *American Beacon* described the oration given by the Rev. Robert S. Thompson at the anniversary as he outlined the principles of the Odd Fellows. These included friendship, love, truth, and charity toward its members who were duty bound to provide assistance to widows and orphans of its members as well as the sick and afflicted of society. In response to some

⁷⁴ Turner, "Historical Sketch of Atlantic Lodge," cxvi–cxviii; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 236.

⁷⁵ A number of other fraternal associations of lesser importance, or of lesser duration, existed in Norfolk during the antebellum years. The city had a branch of the Improved Order of Red Men, the Tecumseh Tribe, that was organized in 1852 with the help of Portsmouth Metamora Tribe. In the early 1850s, Norfolk also had three branches of the Independent Order of Rechabites (Mount Vernon Encampment, Palestine Tent, and Olive Branch Tent) and by 1859 the city's branches included the Palestine Tent and Arabian Encampment; *Daily Southern Argus*, 7 June 1851; Forrest, *The Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852*, 97; Ferslew, *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1859*, 168.

⁷⁶ *American Beacon*, 4 February 1839.

who had objected to secret societies, Thompson further explained that the Odd Fellows were interested in the welfare of the community.⁷⁷

From the late 1840s through the Civil War the IOOF had five chapters in Norfolk including Jerusalem Encampment, Social Encampment, Washington Lodge, Lafayette Lodge, and Harmony Lodge.⁷⁸ The city's Washington Lodge was the second oldest Odd Fellows' lodge in the state (Washington Lodge, No. 1 in what became West Virginia was the oldest), being chartered on 3 September 1833 by the Grand Lodge of the United States. When seven lodges were organized a Virginia Grand Lodge was formed and granted its state lodge charter on 14 July 1837. The Jerusalem Encampment was chartered in October 1837 (receiving its state lodge charter in 1842), the Lafayette Lodge received its charter in January 1838, and the Harmony Lodge was chartered in March 1840. During the Civil War the Washington Lodge was the only group that maintained its regular meetings, but upon war's end the other lodges resumed operations.⁷⁹

The various Norfolk branches of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows met regularly during the 1840s and 1850s and their public activities including dedication ceremonies (such as the Norfolk Academy Building and new Odd Fellows' Hall in April 1840 and September 1856, respectively), participation in parades (Independence Day, paying tribute to William Henry Harrison after his death, etc.), ceremonies paying tribute to fallen brothers (especially during the yellow fever epidemic), and elaborate

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 8 February 1839.

⁷⁸ Forrest, *Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852*, 97; Ferslew, *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1859*, 167–8; *Daily Southern Argus*, 14 September 1848.

⁷⁹ Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 26, 240–2.

celebrations commemorating the anniversaries of local, state, and national IOOF lodges.⁸⁰

A published extract from the *Baltimore Sun* early in 1842, whose editors admitted they were not members of the IOOF, characterized the organization as among the best in the country for the purposes of charity and benevolence. The *American Beacon* reprinted the article that explained the purpose of the association was for mutual assistance. An individual would pay an amount to join a local lodge along with monthly dues. In return each member was entitled to a sum of money for interment and disbursement to families in case of sickness or death. Additionally, the member and his family were provided with watchers among the members to ensure the well-being of the sick brother or his family. The *Sun* proclaimed that the "Odd Fellows Association may be safely pronounced as among the most excellent and efficient charitable associations in existence."⁸¹

Agreeing with this sentiment, *Southern Argus* editor Samuel T. Sawyer, who was not a member, wrote that "the advancement of the empire of universal charity, is the great object of Odd Fellowship throughout the globe." Charity was seen as the highest virtue and was as much the goal of Odd Fellows as benevolence was the object of a church. In response to criticism that members only took care of their own, Sawyer stressed that while they were indeed bound together by a fraternal bond, it connected them to all mankind as well. The soul of this organization was charity and their efforts continued to

⁸⁰ *American Beacon*, 25 April 1840, 14, 15 April 1841, 24 April 1843, 27 April 1846; *Daily Southern Argus*, 12 January 1856.

⁸¹ *American Beacon*, 10 February 1842.

grow and “strengthen even greater than the strength of this vigorous republic, in its gigantic strides of grandeur.”⁸²

Early in 1851 the *Argus* reprinted an article from an Odd Fellows newspaper printed in Philadelphia explaining that although many of the church denominations were separating into northern and southern organizations, the Odd Fellows were standing unified and their numbers were increasing all over the country in both regions. “Allied by the strongest ties which bind brother to brother,” the article exclaimed, “they are not to be estranged by sectional jealousies or agitation.” The newspaper also implored, “To our northern friends, who are acting from impulse, not reason, we say, you are mistaken in the course you are pursuing. Every threat and bitter invective is [making] the chains of the slave tighter; every curse you breathe against the institutions of slavery is an attack on the character of your fathers who had their full share in inflicting the evil on our southern brethren.” Sawyer highlighted this article as he beseeched people to “disregard all feeling of sectional animosity” and to resolve the problems of the country by amending the constitutional laws of the land rather than destroying them.⁸³

Other private insurance associations existed in the city to provide benefits to members and their families after they passed away. By the mid-1850s Norfolk could boast of two such mutual benefit associations including the Washington Insurance Company, formed in April 1854, and the Norfolk Provident Society, by far the most enduring and most successful private life insurance organization in the city. Founded in 1819 and incorporated the next year, the Norfolk Provident Society paid more than sixty

⁸² *Daily Southern Argus*, 10 September 1850.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 4 February 1851.

thousand dollars to the families of eighty deceased members over the next thirty-five years. By March 1854, the entire amount paid in by all the society's members was \$33,792 and the amount of capital invested in stocks and other securities was \$33,814.81. In early 1856 the society reported that it paid out about \$15,000 to the heirs of the twenty-eight members who died in the recent yellow fever epidemic.⁸⁴

An early 1856 editorial in the *Southern Argus* discussed the benefits of the society and strongly suggested that young men in the city should join this "excellent association" because the benefits, even if they were not very large, would be crucial to the family of the deceased member when his labor for the family was gone. *Argus* editors Abram F. Leonard and William Lamb reported that the society had survived various national economic upheavals, bankruptcy, and epidemics, but had remained safe and solvent and that the society would continue to be useful for years to come.⁸⁵

There was a key difference between the Norfolk Provident Society and the Odd Fellows, even though both were essentially private insurance associations. The Norfolk Provident Society was an organization open to all who could afford the membership fees. In contrast, the IOOF was a secret society where those who wished to join had to be

⁸⁴ The Norfolk Provident Society met monthly throughout the antebellum period with the predominant order of business hearing the financial reports. In terms of dues and payments, its members paid ten dollars at the time they joined and one dollar per month thereafter. When a member died within one year of joining, he sacrificed the sum he had paid into the society. If a member died within three years, his family received twice the amount of his regular payments, and if a member died after three years' membership, his widow and orphans got three times the amount he had contributed. The payments could not be withdrawn and if dues were not made for twelve months, the member was removed from the society and forfeited his previous contributions; *Daily Southern Argus*, 26, 27 April 1854. See also the yellow fever report in *Argus*, 26, 31 January 1856.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 26, 31 January 1856.

accepted by members and follow strict rules, thus creating a more fraternal community among the Odd Fellows. The Norfolk Provident Society was much more of a formal business arrangement than a club and the bonds between the members were much less important. Although there were some key differences, the Norfolk Provident Society did encompass many of the various middle-class characteristics of other associations such as participating in public celebrations and parades and targeting the young men of the city for membership.⁸⁶ Moreover, the men who joined the society were portrayed as individuals who were making arrangements to provide for their families following their deaths. Taking responsibility for one's family went hand-in-hand with middle-class beliefs. The good head of household showed great industry and acted as a good Christian to provide for his family, was thrifty in managing money wisely for his family's future use rather than spending this money on luxuries, and surely no intemperate man thought enough to provide for his family in the present, let alone the future when he died.⁸⁷

These fraternal organizations were a crucial setting for the socialization of the middle class by instilling its values in members. Even those organizations such as militia and fire companies, originally established to protect person and property, were equally important as places for men to gather with like-minded peers in friendship and

⁸⁶ See, for example, the Norfolk's Provident Society's participation in the procession and ceremony to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone of a new Baptist Church in *Daily Southern Argus*, 14 August 1848.

⁸⁷ Don H. Doyle argues that these mutual benefit associations were the predecessors of modern national life insurance companies. In an age of rapid change that frayed the traditional kinship ties, these associations helped to support the nuclear family by providing assurances of financial assistance to surviving family members; Doyle, "Social Functions in a Nineteenth Century Town," *Social Science History* 1 (Spring 1977): 347.

camaraderie. With restrictions on who may be a member these fraternal associations gave status to their members and defined who was a part of the middle class and who was not. They further aided in cultivating urban leaders as many of those who became mayors and councilmen learned the necessary skills and gained experience in associations. These organizations served a very prominent role in Norfolk's public life through their participation in, and often organization of, parades, ceremonies, celebrations, and other public events. With their statewide and national memberships, fraternal associations bound together not only the men of Norfolk, but also connected them with those of other cities and states around the country, these bonds even holding until the coming of the Civil War.

CHAPTER 6
CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

In towns like Jacksonville and Providence associational membership consisted of the upwardly mobile middle-class such as merchants, professionals, shopkeepers, skilled mechanics, small manufacturers, and clerks rather than the old money traditional elite merchants and gentlemen leaders of the community. Ethnic, racial, and class boundaries limited who could become a member of a lodge, reform society, or literary club, and correspondingly, a civic and business leader. Voluntary associations selected the most prosperous, stable, and mature individuals, who became part of the core residents of the community, and selected out the young and poor. These membership requirements limited the numbers of working class, immigrants, and poor.¹ Multiple office-holding, or what Peter Decker terms an “interlocking directorate,” existed among association leaders in San Francisco and other cities. Also their wives, daughters, and sisters established their own women's auxiliaries and societies.²

Associational and civic leaders in Jacksonville shared characteristics in that most were native, Protestant, in their thirties or forties, had families with three or more children, were landowners, and demographic persisters from one generation to the next. Occupationally there existed a wider variety as the town's officeholders not only included

¹ Doyle, *Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 12–14, 156–7, 261–2. Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 12–13, 29–32, 92–93.

² Decker, *Fortunes and Failures*, 108–9.

professionals, merchants, and bankers, but also a sizeable number of skilled craftsmen such as blacksmiths, cabinetmakers, carpenters, and brick masons. These skilled artisans were not simply laborers, however, but proprietors who successfully owned their own shops and were accumulating wealth. Doyle explains that they were essentially middle class in stature and many were trying to “change their titles to reflect their middle-class aspirations.”³

In Poughkeepsie voluntary associations divided themselves along class lines. The city's upper and more comfortable middle classes established civic organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association, benevolent societies such as the Home for the Friendless and the Old Ladies Home, literary societies, and leisure clubs devoted to horticulture, boating, and driving. Skilled artisans and “merchants of modest prosperity” were the majority in volunteer fire and militia companies, and established their own leisure social clubs. Both classes joined the fraternal orders such as the Masons and Odd

³ In his study of Jacksonville Don Doyle defined the middle class along occupational lines. Using Merle Curti's *The Making of an American Community* as a starting point (he broke Curti's twelve categories into five and added a property qualification, \$500 combined real and personal property, to distinguish between artisan proprietors from other skilled laborers) he described several types of occupational classes. At the top the business-professionals included professionals such as attorneys, physicians, teachers, clergy, and government officials and businessmen like manufacturers, grocers, hotel owners, mill proprietors, and property-owing farmers and stock raisers. Skilled laborers were broken down into proprietors and non-proprietors and the general category of skilled laborer included specialized skills in building, metal, wood, leather, food processing, and clothing trades, mechanics, apprentices, barbers, and clerks. Unskilled laborers included general laborers, draymen, railroad laborers, and domestic servants. Doyle characterized the business-professional and skilled craftsman/proprietor as white collar and the skilled craftsman/non-proprietor and unskilled laborer as blue collar; Doyle, *Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 64, 190–2, 225–6, 261–70.

Fellows, but the specific chapter lodges within the city were divided by class and even ethnic groups.⁴

Paul Boyer explains that during the Jacksonian Era religious voluntary organizations such as Bible and tract societies and Sabbath schools were organized by local clergy as well as elite merchants, businessmen, and professionals of the community. Working just under these associational leaders as Sabbath school teachers, Bible and tract distributors, office volunteers, and smaller contributors on the “exposed front lines of the struggle” was a large “dedicated army of urban-morality foot soldiers” made up of lower level professionals and white-collar workers (e.g., clerks, bank tellers) as well as many women from the community. For its part, the leadership of the YMCA in the two decades prior to the Civil War consisted primarily of the upper middle-class proprietors, businessmen, and professionals. The membership, those being served by the YMCA, mostly comprised the lower end of the middle class, or at least those with middle-class ambitions, such as clerks, salesmen, skilled artisans, and students. The YMCA did not include significant numbers of working class factory workers or unskilled laborers.⁵

In Tuscaloosa the leaders of the Bible and tract societies, and Sabbath schools were not the white plantation slaveowners, but Whiggish professionals and merchants who did own slaves and who were members of other intellectual and improvement associations. The white women of Tuscaloosa also had their own religious, benevolent,

⁴ In the postwar period the working-class would come to dominate the fire companies. As industrialization reduced the opportunities for upward mobility in Poughkeepsie fire companies provided a sense of solidarity among the working class and a sense of status among the community at large for their good works; Griffen and Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers*, 40–43.

⁵ Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 1–15, 108–19.

and improvement societies. Temperance organizations comprised different groups of people depending on which association is examined. Members of the more established Tuscaloosa Temperance Society and the Alabama Total Abstinence Society came from the most stable and highest status groups in the town, most of whom were older (in their thirties or forties), and had occupations as professionals (along with a few proprietors, artisans, and farmers). The members of the Tuscaloosa's Young Men's Total Abstinence Society, however, were younger, lower level professionals (presumably not as established), and included substantial numbers of shopkeepers, artisans, and farmers. While the majority did own slaves, the numbers of slaves owned was less than that for the elites. The Sons of Temperance drew an even younger age cohort, and while it had more members from artisan and farmer occupations, professionals still composed the largest single group. The wealth holdings (little or no real estate) and slaveholdings (the majority did own slaves) was less than that for the other groups. Quist explains that the temperance movement in Tuscaloosa mirrored that in Washtenaw County as it had a membership dominated by elite professionals tied to the national economy and who, in comparison with the general population, owned more real estate. Lastly, in a parallel of sorts with Tuscaloosa slaveholding teetotalers, Washtenaw's temperance proponents were dominated by abolitionists.⁶

In antebellum Baltimore a rising upper middle class that contrasted the traditional elite established benevolent societies to assist the worthy poor and a Chamber of Commerce to assist in development of the city. For their part the middling ranks of

⁶ These elite members seemingly possessed a class bias as they sought to limit hard liquor alcohol consumption among the lower classes, but did not seek action against their wine; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 13–21, 31–49, 65–86, 221–8, 234, 302.

artisans, lower level entrepreneurs, and professionals formed their own associations.

Artisans established informal guilds, militia and fire companies, agricultural, economic, and Newtonian Societies, as well as clubs for young people.⁷

In Kingston what Stuart Blumin calls the upper and middle classes of the community dominated the membership rolls in the voluntary associations. The most active participants were county natives and longtime resident immigrants who held occupations such as professionals and proprietors. Mid-level participants included those with occupations such as skilled craftsmen and clerks, while those in the lower semiskilled and unskilled occupations rarely participated in the associational life of the town. Leadership in these associations was more prevalent in the native-born rather than immigrants, who often held lower-level unskilled occupations. Men defined to be in high-ranking occupations such as professionals, merchant proprietors, and manufacturers constituted only 15 percent of the adult population in 1860, but constituted the majority, and oftentimes much more, of the membership in the various associations and municipal offices. In terms of wealth Blumin explains that men in the high-ranking occupations may have been proprietors who owned their own shops, but were not necessarily the richest persons in the community. About 20 to 25 percent of associational membership (in the fire companies about 5 percent) could be considered wealthy, possessing over \$10,000 in real estate and personal property. This constituted about 4 percent of the population. Those in leadership positions were better off, however, as almost 40 percent

⁷ Societies also were formed by excluded ethnic groups such as Jews after 1830 legislation permitted them to organize such bodies. Blacks formed the mutual aid societies for men and women organized around churches or occupations (such as barbers and porters); Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities*, 101–22, 158–72.

of leaders owned property worth more than \$10,000. Although they may not have consistently been the wealthiest, property ownership was a sharp indicator of association participation as those with \$10,000 in real and personal property were overwhelmingly association members, and among natives many were leaders. In contrast those reporting \$1,000 or less were much less involved in associations and few were leaders.⁸

A sample of 400 men who were members of associations between 1845 and 1854, drawn from membership rolls, newspapers, and local histories of these organizations and the city, presents the typology. Age, nativity, marital status, children, occupation, real estate wealth, and slaveownership were collected using the 1850 manuscript census and city directories. These variables were analyzed together with association characteristics such as the number of associations joined during the decade, years of membership, and leadership positions held. Although not an exhaustive collection of persons who were involved in the associational life, the sample does reflect the general characteristics of those who joined during the antebellum period in Norfolk.⁹

⁸ For Blumin the upper class refers to the elite entrepreneurs at the high end of the middle class spectrum, while the middle class refers to the mid-level lower white-collar types of the middle class. They did not dominate the fire companies, however, which were the most prevalent organization for immigrant membership; Blumin, *The Urban Threshold*, 46, 174–82. Sven Beckert also considers \$10,000 in real estate and personal property a dividing line for distinguishing the economic elites; *The Monied Metropolis*, 20–21, 31.

⁹ More associational names were obtained from the various sources than the sample of 400 examined. However, to delineate various personal characteristics only those who could be found in the 1850 manuscript census were included in order to indicate such details as marital status, children (if any), occupation, real estate holdings, and place of origin. Also, names were collected only for those persons who were in associations from 1845 through 1854. By using this ten-year period surrounding the 1850 census their characteristics would be more relevant than using individuals who were members of associations in the early 1840s or late 1850s, further away in time from the 1850 census when their occupations and wealth could have been substantially different. Data on the 400 members in this sample also were taken from the 1850 manuscript slave census and

To gauge the level of participation, the number of associations joined by those in the sample of 400 was collected. Seventy-one percent (n=284) joined only one association, while 29 percent (n=116) joined between two and five organizations (see Table 4 for a breakdown of the number of associations joined by the sample). Newton C. King was the most prolific joiner during this period. A retail merchant specializing in patent medicines, the thirty-eight year-old King owned \$3,800 in real estate property and two slaves. Involved in five associations, he was a captain in the Hope Fire Company, president of the Aid Fire Company, a lieutenant in the Virginia Militia, on the executive committee of the Norfolk Tract Union, and a member of the Vigilance Committee of the Democratic Party. He was also a member of the city's Select Council in 1852.¹⁰ Another active joiner was forty-three year-old Richard H. Chamberlaine. A married father of six children, he was a cashier with the Norfolk branch of the Farmers' Bank of Virginia as well as a councilman, possessing \$17,500 in real estate and owning nineteen slaves. Busy in four associations, he was a member of the Norfolk Provident Society, a manager of both the Seamen's Friend Society and Norfolk Tract Union, and a vice president of the Norfolk Humane Association. At the other end of the economic spectrum was Samuel R. Borum. An active young twenty-one year-old merchant with no wife, children, or real

the 1850 personal property tax rolls. The 1850 census and personal property records were selected over that from the 1860 census because the 1855 yellow fever epidemic killed thousands, including many association leaders and members, thus possibly skewing the results.

¹⁰ It should be noted that although it falls out of our decade under study, King also was a solicitor for the Humane Association in 1839-1840, a member of the Whig Committee in 1840, and a subscriber to the Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange in 1859.

estate holdings (though he did own one female slave) Borum exemplified the young upstart looking to move up the socio-economic ladder in the city. Although only in his early twenties already he was a Master Mason with the Norfolk Lodge, a private in the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues, and a secretary and treasurer of the Norfolk Musical Association. Interested in politics he served on a Vigilance Committee of the Democratic Party and as a secretary and finance committee member of the Democratic Association's third ward.¹¹

The level of participation also was analyzed with respect the number of years persons were involved in associations within the 1845–1854 period. One-third of the sample (n=131) were part of an organization for only one year, while 20 percent (n=78) and 17 percent (n=69) persisted for two and three years, respectively (see Table 5 for a breakdown of years of association membership). At the other end of the spectrum, several men belonged to associations from ten to thirteen years.¹² The most active was Peter P. Mayo, a fifty-two year-old attorney with no real estate holdings, but four slaves. He was a member of the Norfolk Masonic Lodge for nine years as a Master Mason and then a Junior and Senior Warden. He was a member of the Seamen's Friend Society for four years, serving as a manager for two years.¹³ Another busy association member was William Dey, a forty-year-old tailor/proprietor with \$40,000 in real estate property and

¹¹ Borum would rise to positions of importance in the city, becoming a director of the Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange in 1859–1860.

¹² The figures of more than ten years are possible because a person could be in multiple associations each for several years.

¹³ Although they fell outside our target decade, it should be noted that Mayo also was a member of the Norfolk Bible Society in 1841 and on the correspondence committee for the Whig Tippecanoe Club in 1840.

six slaves. He was a combined twelve-year member of the Humane Association, Seamen's Friend Society, the Norfolk Tract Union, and Vigilance Committee of the Democratic Party. Dey also was a leader in these associations at one time being a president of the Humane Association, manager of the Seamen's Friend Society, and on the Executive Committee of the Norfolk Tract Union. Those lower on the socio-economic scale also could be active in various associations. William P. Stewart, a forty-nine year-old merchant with only fifty dollars in real estate and one slave, was an association member for eleven years, being a Master Mason with the Norfolk Lodge for seven years and a manager for the Humane Association for four years.

Leadership was a final measurement of general participation.¹⁴ In the sample, 30 percent (n=120) were classified as leaders in an association at one time from 1845 to 1854. As found in other studies, multiple office-holding was prevalent. George L. Upshur, a twenty-nine year-old physician who owned \$5,500 in real estate and ten slaves, was a very active leader in several organizations. He was a Junior and Senior Warden with the Norfolk Masonic Lodge in the late 1840s and when the Atlantic Lodge was established in 1854 he became Most Worshipful Master of that fraternal order. Participating in benevolent and political causes, Upshur was a manager with the Humane Association and corresponding secretary for the Democratic Association. Another active organizational leader was Thomas D. Toy, a thirty-six year-old druggist/merchant who owned \$3,500 in real estate and four slaves. During the decade under study, Toy was a

¹⁴ Leadership is defined in this study as being an officer such as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, manager, trustee, solicitor, and visitor of the various voluntary associations, Junior and Senior Wardens and Most Worshipful Master in Masonic Lodges, and a ranked officer (e.g., captain, lieutenant, etc.) in militia and fire companies.

secretary for the Seamen's Friend Society, a vice president for the Norfolk Musical Association, and a manager for the Norfolk Tract Union, along with being a solicitor and visitor for the Humane Association.

The basic associational indices described above—number, duration, and leadership of associations—also were analyzed in conjunction with the personal characteristics of sample members. The average (and median) age of the association sample from the 1850 census was 39 years old. The age range extended from nineteen-year-old John B. Upshur, a young merchant who would become a Senior Warden with the Masonic Norfolk Lodge by 1853, to seventy-seven-year-old John Southgate, a well-established merchant and leader in the city who was president of the Norfolk Humane Association in 1849. A breakdown by age cohort reveals that those in their thirties and forties dominated associational rosters with 37 percent and 26 percent, respectively—nearly two-thirds of the sample (see Table 6 for a breakdown by age cohort).

There was little difference in the median over-thirty-nine and under-thirty-nine age cohorts with respect to measures of number of associations joined (single versus multiple) and number of years in association during the decade. In comparing leadership and age, perhaps surprisingly the older age category did not possess the majority of leadership positions. Roughly following their split in the general sample, 54 percent of the associational leaders were under thirty-nine years old, while 46 percent in leadership positions were over thirty-nine.

Turning to nativity, Americans, and especially Virginians, comprised most of the association rosters. Of the 400 in the sample 87 percent ($n=346$) were born in the United States and out of this number 80 percent ($n=276$) were from the Old Dominion. Thus, 69

percent of the entire sample consisted of Virginians. Norfolk's associations included seventy migrants from the eastern seaboard from Maine to South Carolina and west to Kentucky, as well as fifty-four immigrants from Europe, Canada, and the West Indies.¹⁵ Immigrants joined a variety of associations in Norfolk, but by far the most popular association for foreign newcomers was the Democratic Party as 67 percent of the fifty-four were members, serving mostly on Vigilance Committees. The next largest organization joined was the Norfolk Masonic Lodge, which attracted 26 percent of the immigrants in the sample.¹⁶

There was a deep disparity with respect to leadership between immigrants and native-born Americans. Of the fifty-four immigrants in the sample only five held office in an association (9 percent of their number) compared with 115 American officers (33 percent of their number). An even more dramatic figure is that native-born Americans constituted 96 percent of the leadership positions in the sample. This is not surprising taking into account that the Democratic Party and Norfolk Masonic Lodge were the most popular associations for immigrants in this sample, but difficult to rise up into leadership roles. Only one immigrant was an officer (a Junior Deacon) in a Masonic lodge. Most immigrants held ranking positions in such organizations as the Irish Repeal Association,

¹⁵ Southern border neighbor North Carolina contributed the most migrants to Norfolk (n=17), followed by Massachusetts (n=9) and northern neighbors Maryland (n=8) and Pennsylvania (n=8). Of the fifty-four immigrants in the sample Ireland (n=23) and Germany (n=11) contributed the largest single proportions. Other countries represented included Canada, England, France, Holland, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and the West Indies. See Table 7 for a division of the nativity of the association sample.

¹⁶ Other organizations joined by immigrants included the Humane Society, Masonic lodges, fire companies, militia companies, Irish Relief and Repeal organizations, Mechanical Benevolent Association, Improved Order of Red Men, Seamen's Friend Society, Norfolk Bible Society, and Norfolk Tract Union.

Friends of Ireland, United Fire Company, Norfolk Tract Union, and Seamen's Friend Society.¹⁷

The sample association members overwhelmingly were family men with 87 percent being married (including seven widowers) and 72 percent having children. Because of their large proportion of the sample, married men dominated all of the associational measures. For example, they accounted for 89 percent of those involved in multiple associations, but also 86 percent of those involved in only one association. Similarly, those who were married comprised 88 percent of the officeholders in the sample, but at the same time 86 percent of those who were not leaders also were married.

The fathers in the sample had an average number of 2.6 children (the median equaled two), with a range of one to twelve offspring. More than two-thirds of these men (68 percent) had between one and four children (see Table 8 for a breakdown of sample children). Similar to the case for marriage, because such a large proportion of the sample members had children there was little difference within these groups along measures of associational activity. Three-quarters of the sample members who were involved in more than one association had children, but 71 percent of those in only one association also had children. Similarly, 74 percent of the leaders had families, while 71 percent of non-leaders also had families.

¹⁷ Similar to their native neighbors, immigrants worked mostly in the mercantile and artisanal ranks. Forty-one percent of the immigrants were proprietors (especially merchants and grocers), while 30 percent were skilled craftsmen (especially tailors), by far their largest occupational categories. Immigrants adopted the slaveholding culture of Virginia as 61 percent owned slaves (as compared to the almost-75 percent among natives, to be discussed below). In terms of wealth, only 28 percent of immigrants owned real estate property, compared to 44 percent of native Americans (to be discussed).

Our father of twelve children was a forty-two year-old grocer from New York named William D. Seal. A Master Mason with the Norfolk Lodge, he did not possess any real estate, but did own four slaves. Henry B. Reardon, a fifty-seven year-old merchant also had a large family with nine children, while owning over \$30,000 in real estate and eight slaves. Active in the public life of the city Reardon was a visitor and solicitor for the Norfolk Humane Association, a vice president of the Friends of Ireland, and a corporal with the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues. He also sat on the city council and Board of Health in 1852. At the other end of the familial spectrum (among those who had children) was Moses P. Robertson, a twenty-eight year-old merchant with one child, no real estate or slaves, but who was a solicitor assigned to the first ward for the Humane Association. Thirty-seven year-old Joseph Kehoe was an Irish immigrant tailor in Norfolk also with only child. He did not own slaves or possess any real estate, but like many immigrants he joined the Democratic Vigilance Committee.

In terms of wealth association members probably lived comfortably, but were not the richest men in the community. According to the 1850 manuscript census 42 percent (n=168) owned real estate property, with the average value of such property being \$7,600 and the median being about \$4,400 (see Table 9 for a breakdown of property holdings). Samuel T. Sawyer, the editor for the *Daily Southern Argus* had the lowest amount of real estate (of those who had property) valued at twenty-five dollars, but who also owned three slaves. He was a Master Mason with the Norfolk Lodge, a member of the Friends of Ireland, and very active in political organizations serving as secretary for the Democratic Association, being on the party's Vigilance Committee, and acting as vice president of the Common Council. Possessing the largest amount of real estate, about

\$61,000 worth, was John Southgate, the seventy-seven year-old merchant who also was the oldest person found in the sample. An owner of ten slaves, Southgate served as president of the Norfolk Humane Society in 1849.

Those in the sample who owned real estate were somewhat more likely to be members of multiple associations, while those with no real property were more likely to join only one association. Of those who joined more than one association, 53 percent were property owners. Conversely, of those who joined one association 63 percent did not possess real estate. The relationship between those who owned real estate and number of years as an association member displayed no clear patterns. The relationship was more visible when examining leadership, however, as property owners were more likely to hold positions of leadership in an association. Of those who were association leaders at one time or another, 52 percent were real property owners compared to 48 percent who did not own property. Looking at it from another perspective that accentuates the disparity, 37 percent of property owners became leaders compared to 25 percent of non-property owners who held associational office.

Personal property tax assessments provided another measure of wealth of the sample.¹⁸ Seventy-seven percent of the sample did have some amount of personal property assessment in 1850, but the average was only seven dollars and the median even lower at two dollars. The average and median can be lowered further with the elimination of two individuals who had by far the highest assessments in the sample. One

¹⁸ Personal property values were not collected until the 1860 manuscript census and while personal property tax lists include the number of possessions (slaves, horses, oxen, carriages, household items, jewelry, etc.), they do not include monetary figures in 1850, just the amount taxed.

of these was Nicholas W. Parker, a fifty-two-year-old commission merchant and alderman who incurred a tax assessment of \$746. He owned five slaves according to the 1850 census and was taxed on seven slaves according the personal property records, and also owned \$18,600 in real estate property. The next highest assessment belonged to Thomas F. Andrews, a fifty-three year-old physician who was assessed \$107. Andrews owned eleven slaves (four were taxed as personal property) and \$28,700 in real estate property.¹⁹ When the figures for Parker and Andrews are removed from this analysis, the average personal property assessment is reduced dramatically to \$4.55 and the median drops slightly to \$1.90. Of those in the sample who were assessed some amount, Thomas H. G. Cock, a twenty-nine-year-old caulker was assessed the lowest figure at twelve cents. His association participation involved working on the Vigilance Committee for the Democratic Party in 1847.

There was a strong relationship between those who were assessed personal property taxes in 1850 and membership in more than one organization. Of those who were members of multiple associations (n=116), 88 percent were assessed some property tax. From another perspective, of those who were assessed a property tax, 33 percent were involved in multiple associations compared to only 15 percent of those with no assessment.²⁰ A strong relationship also existed for personal property tax assessment and

¹⁹ They held by far the highest assessments in the sample with the next highest being \$56.57 belonging to John Southgate, the previously-mentioned seventy-seven year-old merchant with \$61,000 in real estate and ten slaves according to the census and three according to the tax assessment.

²⁰ Because of their numerical superiority in the sample, those who were assessed a personal property tax held the overwhelming majority for each cohort of number of years of associational membership.

leadership. Of those who were in leadership positions (n=120), 90 percent were assessed some personal property tax. Looking from a different angle, of those who incurred a property tax 35 percent were officers, while only 13 percent of those who did not have any assessment became organizational leaders.²¹

Slave ownership was prevalent among the association sample with almost three-fourths (n=292) owning a total of 1,401 slaves (see Table 10 for slaveholding statistics). According to the manuscript slave census and personal property tax lists for 1850 the average number of slaves owned was about five with a median of three, with a range of one to thirty-one slaves. Sixty-seven percent of slaveholders owned between one and four slaves, while 89 percent owned between one to eight slaves. Over half (58 percent) of the slaves owned by the association members were females with 63 percent being adults (defined as sixteen years of age or older).²² The average age for slaves was twenty-five years old with an age range of one-month old infants to several slaves in their eighties. Slave children (fifteen and under) accounted for the largest age cohort (37 percent) of the

²¹ Nicholas W. Parker, who had the highest assessment, was a member of the Whig Clay Club in 1843 and a member of the Humane Association from 1840 to 1846, with a leadership role as treasurer in the last three years.

²² The age and gender analyses come solely from the 1850 manuscript census records. The personal property tax lists, which were used in addition to census records to determine general slave ownership by individuals, do not provide gender or specific age breakdowns (for the latter only providing number of "slaves above twelve" and "slaves above sixteen" years of age). Thus, those whose information was gathered from the personal property tax records are not included in this section. The result is that the age and gender statistics contain thirty-two fewer slaves in the analysis, which is the number of slaves obtained from the personal property tax lists.

total number of slaves (n=1369).²³ Analyzing these figures by age and gender, female adult slaves comprised the largest individual group with about 37 percent of the slaves owned by association members. This suggests that most slaves were used in domestic roles or perhaps in mercantile shops and businesses, not surprising considering the urban commercial environment that was Norfolk.

Fifty individuals owned at least one slave including Nathan Angel, a fifty-seven year-old sailmaker from Connecticut with no real estate and small personal property assessment tax (twenty-five cents). Angel was a Junior Warden with the Naphtali Masonic Lodge in 1841 and a Master Mason with the Norfolk Lodge from 1848 to 1854. Thirty-seven year-old Willis J. C. Moody also owned one slave. An upholsterer with no real estate property he was a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows, the Whig Clay Club, a treasurer of the Washington Clay Club, and upon that party's demise a member of a Democratic Vigilance Committee. The largest slaveholders in the sample were John G. H. Hatton and Nathaniel Nash. Hatton was a forty-year-old teller at the Norfolk branch of the Farmers' Bank of Virginia who owned thirty-one slaves and also \$10,000 in real estate property. He served as treasurer and secretary of the Norfolk Humane Association, manager of the Seamen's Friend Society, and was president of Select Council in 1852. Nash was thirty-six year-old carpenter who owned twenty-nine slaves and \$9,000 in real estate. Although listed as a carpenter in the 1850 census, Nash probably had moved from skilled craftsmen to being a manufacturer/proprietor who used slaves in his shop. He was a solicitor with the Humane Association and Master Mason.

²³ The number of slaves declined as their age advanced and so following slave children were those from sixteen to twenty-nine (26 percent), those in their thirties (14 percent), forties (12 percent), fifties (7 percent), and sixty and over (4 percent).

Similar to marriage and family, slaveholders dominated the various associational measures. They comprised 84 percent of those belonging to multiple organizations, while 82 percent of non-slaveholders belonged to only one association. Slaveholders also substantially led in each category of number of years' membership in associations with percentages ranging from 59 percent (two years) to 100 percent for six and eight through thirteen years. In terms of leadership, there were dramatic results as slaveholders accounted for 88 percent of all those who were association officers.

The occupation of each person in the sample was determined using the 1850 manuscript census and William S. Forrest's *Norfolk Directory for 1851-1852*. They were then divided into categories using a modified version of the systems used by Peter R. Knights in *The Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860: A Study in City Growth* (1971) and Stephan Thernstrom in *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (1973). Both historians divided occupations into categories of professionals, major proprietors/managers/government officials, semi-professionals, clerk/salesmen, petty proprietors/managers/officials, skilled craftsmen, semi-skilled workers, and unskilled laborers. Knights separated major and minor proprietors on the basis of \$1,000 in real estate and personal property, while Thernstrom used a figure of \$5,000. Thernstrom further divided his occupations into white collar and blue collar categories. High white-collar occupations included professionals and major

proprietors/managers/officials, while low white-collar included clerks/salesman, semi-professionals, and minor proprietors/managers/officials.²⁴

Like that utilized by Thernstrom and Knights, wealth (in this case real estate property) was incorporated to determine the level of proprietorship. The dollar amount used to delineate major and minor proprietors was the \$1,000 figure adopted by Knights in his antebellum study of Boston rather than Thernstrom's \$5,000 figure employed in his examination of latter-nineteenth and twentieth century Bostonians. Similar to Thernstrom, from this combination of wealth and occupational classifications, those in the sample were divided into high and low white-collar and high and low blue-collar categories. In addition to delineating major and minor proprietors, wealth also could elevate an artisan from the skilled craftsmen category. In some instances artisans such as carpenters and blacksmiths owned substantial real estate, operated a store where they sold the goods they made, and advertised their wares for sale. Thus, they were more proprietors or small-scale manufacturers than simply skilled artisans working for someone else on a piecemeal basis. These individuals could further be classified as major or minor proprietors depending on the amount of property they possessed.

Several occupations stood out in terms of representation in the sample. Not surprising in a commercial port city, the largest groups out of ninety-six different occupations present were merchants (n=64) and grocers (n=28). In terms of skilled craftsmen, carpenters (n=30), tailors (n=17), shoemakers (n=11), and painters (n=10) led

²⁴ See Peter R. Knights, *The Plain People of Boston, 1830–1860: A Study in City Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 149, and Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880–1970* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), 290–5.

the way. Attorneys (n=16) and physicians (n=15) dominated the professional ranks, while seamen (not including captains) and riggers were the largest occupations present in the semi-skilled category.

Because of their dominance of the overall sample, merchants held the plurality of those occupations involved in various associational categories. Merchants represented 19 percent of the all those involved in multiple associations and 14 percent of those involved in only one association. Of those who were leaders in various associations, a full 25 percent were merchants with attorneys being the next largest group at 11 percent. The large number of merchants distorts these results, however, as attorneys proportionately held a larger share of leadership positions. Of those in the sample who were merchants 47 percent achieved leadership positions. In contrast 81 percent of attorneys (n=13) became leaders. For their part skilled artisans held few associational offices. Of the thirty carpenters in the sample, only three became leaders and of the eleven shoemakers in the sample, only one was an officer.

Expanding the analysis to occupational categories, the largest categories were the mercantile proprietors who comprised 38 percent of the sample (n=151) and skilled artisans at 24 percent (n=96). The proprietor figures include thirty-five skilled craftsmen such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and jewelers who owned more than one thousand dollars in real estate property. These financial figures suggest that they were, in fact, shopkeepers who sold the various items they made such as furniture, cabinets, iron- and tinware, clothing, and jewelry (see Table 11 for a breakdown of occupational categories and descriptions of occupations in each).

Lewis Salusbury was one such artisan who elevated himself to manufacturing and proprietor status. Listed in the 1850 census as a furniture maker he reported \$15,200 in real estate and owned ten slaves. But in June 1848 the R. G. Dun credit service had previously described him as a merchant and commented that he had the largest store in Norfolk before it burned down. The following year the Dun evaluator characterized him as "having a good moral character" and explained that he was working with his younger brother John, "doing a considerable business, and that both were good men of some means."²⁵

Indeed, the brothers operated L. Salusbury & Bro., a furniture making operation that advertised "splendid and rich cabinet furniture" and other "fashionable assortment of articles" for sale that "compared favorably with any manufactured in this country, North or South, and at prices lower than usual." The company proclaimed that "inducements shall be offered as would make it the advantage of purchasers to patronize a manufactory South." The brothers boasted that they employed thirty-eight men from around the country and Europe who constructed the latest styles and patterns using the latest machines invented for such purposes. Also noted in their advertisement in the 1851–1852 Norfolk city directory, the company sold pianos and provided undertaking services.²⁶ Salusbury was very active in the associational life of Norfolk as a member of the Whig Committee, the International Order of Odd Fellows, Seamen's Friend Society, and Merchants' and Mechanics' Exchange.

²⁵ Manuscript Census, Norfolk County, 1850; R. G. Dun credit reports, Norfolk County, 296d, Baker Library, Harvard University.

²⁶ Advertisement in "City Advertiser Section" of Forrest, *Norfolk Directory for 1851–1852*, 2.

Examining the occupational categories along the several associational measures, proprietors (including qualified artisans) dominated both single and multiple association. Of those who joined a single association, 36 percent were proprietors, followed by skilled artisans (27 percent) and professionals (11 percent). Of those who were members in multiple associations, proprietors once again led the way with 42 percent. Despite having fewer representatives in the sample, professionals (n=54) comprised 21 percent of those who joined multiple associations compared to skilled craftsmen (n=96) at 17 percent. In fact professionals, mostly attorneys, joined multiple associations at a rate higher than that for both skilled artisans and proprietors. Forty-four percent of professionals joined more than one association compared to 33 percent of proprietors and 21 percent of skilled craftsmen.

With respect to leadership there were some striking differences between the three largest occupational categories of proprietors, skilled workers, and professionals. Because of their sheer numbers, proprietors accounted for 41 percent of all those in the sample who became leaders in an association. Professionals, again with a lower sample number than skilled workers, comprised 22 percent of the leaders, while skilled workers constituted 15 percent of officeholders. As before professionals (attorneys) were more likely to be leaders. Of those who were professionals nearly half (48 percent) were leaders, compared to only 33 percent who were leaders among proprietors and 19 percent among artisans.

Turning to the general high/low white collar and blue collar categories, high white-collar persons held the majority of the association memberships with 44.5 percent

(n=178) of the sample.²⁷ Perhaps somewhat surprising, the next highest category was low blue-collar with 31.5 percent (n=126) of the sample, followed by those classed as low white-collar comprising 21 percent (n=84) of the sample (see Table 12 displaying the statistics for high/low white collar and blue collar categories).

When examining the "collared" categories along the various associational measures, the high white-collar category dominated the findings. This group comprised 59 percent of those who were in multiple organizations. By far the largest of any category, the next highest was the low blue-collar group at 22 percent of the sample. With respect to leadership, those in high white-collar occupations constituted 60 percent of associational officeholders, followed at a distance by low white-collars (23 percent) and low blue-collars (18 percent). Altering our perspective, 40 percent of high white-collars became leaders compared to 32 percent of low white-collars and 17 percent of low blue-collars.

What emerges from this analysis of association members in Norfolk from the mid-1840s to the mid-1850s is that like other cities during the antebellum period the

²⁷ High white-collar occupations included major proprietors (mostly merchants), managers (bankers and brokers), major government officials (mayors, magistrates), professionals (attorneys, physicians), as well as semi-professionals (dentists, newspapermen), clerks/salesmen, and skilled craftsmen (carpenters, blacksmiths, etc.) with more than \$1,000 in real estate property. The low white-collar classification included petty proprietors (grocers), minor government officials (various inspectors, etc.), semi-professionals, and clerks/salesmen with less than \$1,000 in real estate property. High blue-collar association members included skilled craftsmen with less than \$1,000 in real estate as well as semiskilled workers with more than \$1,000 in real estate property. Low blue-collar included semiskilled and service workers (barbers, sailors, oystermen, and policemen), and unskilled laborers with less than \$1,000 in real estate. High- and low-miscellaneous categories (gentlemen, retirees, no occupation) were delineated with its members being divided along the \$1,000 property-holding line.

benevolent, improvement, and fraternal organizations were dominated by a group chiefly composed of a native, married, middle-aged (in their thirties and forties) group of merchants, proprietors, and professionals with families, who owned slaves, and who possessed modest—but not extreme—wealth. Many joined more than one association and multiple office-holding was prevalent. Organization leaders used these institutions to prepare them for leadership roles in local public offices such as the Select and Common Councils.

There were fewer older men of “gentlemanly” wealth joining and leading associations. Also not included in significant numbers were the working class, unmarried, young men of the city with little prospects and a dim future.²⁸ Those in their twenties who were members of associations were enterprising young men working their way up the socio-economic ladder holding such occupations as clerks or professionals just starting their careers. In contrast to northern cities, merchant-proprietors and professionals dominated the membership roles, with few manufacturers present. This is not surprising in a southern port city that focused on commerce and tried, with little significant effect, to develop manufacturing enterprises. These proprietors included a significant number of skilled artisans who owned shops.

Slave ownership was not antithetical to associationalism or even reform organizations that might be tied to northern cities. In contrast to other studies immigrants did not dominate the ranks of the fire companies, probably because of their fewer

²⁸ It could be argued that the lack of working class membership in associations occurred because there were fewer laborers than in the northeast where they often were immigrants or African Americans. While the city did not have many immigrants or free blacks, there were working class laborers toiling away in various commercial enterprises, especially along the docks.

numbers in the general population. Immigrants did not hold leadership positions, either, but they were active in the Democratic Party and Irish Repeal organizations. This may appear contradictory, but perhaps it reflects their desire to become integrated into their adopted country, but not forget their homelands.

In contrast to other cities where there were significant differences in membership of some associations based on class Norfolk's benevolent, improvement, and fraternal associations were comprised of merchant-proprietors, professionals, and artisans of varying levels of wealth. As in previous studies, however, associational leaders were more likely to own real estate property and especially personal property. Their property holdings, however, were not enough to remove them from the middle class into an elite upper class. Those in leadership roles could be described as the upper tier of a middle class. The majority of the sample members possessed real estate property and personal property upon which they were taxed, but their financial holdings do not rise to the level of wealth enjoyed by planters in the South. The average and median real property levels fall far below \$10,000, a conservative estimate for elite wealth in antebellum America. Thus, the relative absence of those on the socio-economic extremes as members of various organizations reinforces the middle-class nature of associationalism in the decades prior to the Civil War.

TABLE 4
Number of Associations Joined by Sample (1845-1854)

| <u>Number of Associations</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| One | 284 | 71.0 % |
| Two | 80 | 20.0 % |
| Three | 26 | 6.5 % |
| Four | 9 | 2.3 % |
| Five | 1 | .3 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 %* |

*The total percentage may not add to 100 % because of rounding.

TABLE 5
Years of Association Membership (1845-1854)

| <u>Number of Years</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| One | 131 | 32.8 % |
| Two | 78 | 19.5 % |
| Three | 69 | 17.3 % |
| Four | 27 | 6.8 % |
| Five | 28 | 7.0 % |
| Six | 18 | 4.5 % |
| Seven | 26 | 6.5 % |
| Eight | 11 | 2.8 % |
| Nine | 7 | 1.8 % |
| Ten | 2 | .5 % |
| Eleven | 1 | .3 % |
| Twelve | 1 | .3 % |
| Thirteen | 1 | .3 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 % |

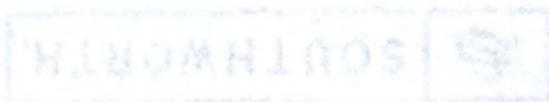


TABLE 6
Age Cohorts of Sample

| <u>Age Cohort</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Twenties | 72 | 18.0 % |
| Thirties | 150 | 37.5 % |
| Forties | 104 | 26.0 % |
| Fifties | 52 | 13.0 % |
| Sixties | 19 | 4.8 % |
| Seventies | 3 | .8 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 % |

TABLE 7
Nativity of Sample

| <u>Place of Origin</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Virginia | 276 | 69.0 % |
| Ireland | 23 | 5.8 % |
| North Carolina | 17 | 4.3 % |
| Germany | 11 | 2.8 % |
| Massachusetts | 9 | 2.3 % |
| Maryland | 8 | 2.0 % |
| Pennsylvania | 8 | 2.0 % |
| Scotland | 7 | 1.8 % |
| Connecticut | 6 | 1.5 % |
| England | 5 | 1.3 % |
| New Hampshire | 5 | 1.3 % |
| New York | 5 | 1.3 % |
| Maine | 4 | 1.0 % |
| District of Columbia | 3 | .8 % |
| Holland | 2 | .5 % |
| Canada | 1 | .3 % |
| Delaware | 1 | .3 % |
| France | 1 | .3 % |
| Kentucky | 1 | .3 % |
| New England | 1 | .3 % |
| Portugal | 1 | .3 % |
| Rhode Island | 1 | .3 % |
| South Carolina | 1 | .3 % |
| Spain | 1 | .3 % |
| Sweden | 1 | .3 % |
| West Indies | 1 | .3 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 % |

TABLE 8
Number of Children of Sample Members

| <u>Number of Children</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| None | 111 | 27.8 % |
| One | 51 | 12.8 % |
| Two | 55 | 13.8 % |
| Three | 48 | 12.0 % |
| Four | 44 | 11.0 % |
| Five | 35 | 8.8 % |
| Six | 35 | 8.8 % |
| Seven | 14 | 3.5 % |
| Eight | 4 | 1.0 % |
| Nine | 2 | .5 % |
| Twelve | 1 | .3 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 % |

100% Cotton Fiber

COLLECTION

SOUTHWORTH

COMMISSION

TABLE 9
Property Holding Wealth of Sample Members

| <u>Real Estate Property Value</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| No property wealth | 232 | 58.0 % |
| 1-\$1,000 | 20 | 5.0 % |
| \$1,001-\$2,000 | 30 | 7.5 % |
| \$2,001-\$3,000 | 13 | 3.25 % |
| \$3,001-\$4,000 | 20 | 5.0 % |
| \$4,001-\$5,000 | 16 | 4.0 % |
| \$5,001-\$6,000 | 11 | 2.75 % |
| \$6,001-\$7,000 | 8 | 2.0 % |
| \$7,001-\$8,000 | 1 | .25 % |
| \$8,001-\$9,000 | 8 | 2.0 % |
| \$9,001-\$10,000 | 2 | .50 % |
| \$10,001-\$15,000 | 14 | 3.5 % |
| \$15,001-\$20,000 | 12 | 3.0 % |
| \$20,001-\$30,000 | 5 | 1.25 % |
| \$30,001-\$40,000 | 6 | 1.5 % |
| \$50,001-\$60,000 | 1 | .25 % |
| \$60,001-\$70,000 | 1 | .25 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100 % |

TABLE 10
Slaveholding by Sample Members

| <u>Number of Slaves Owned</u> | <u>Number of Slaveholders</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| no slaves | 108 non-slaveholders |
| 1 | 50 |
| 2 | 53 |
| 3 | 45 |
| 4 | 47 |
| 5 | 18 |
| 6 | 16 |
| 7 | 15 |
| 8 | 16 |
| 9 | 3 |
| 10 | 6 |
| 11 | 2 |
| 12 | 4 |
| 13 | 3 |
| 14 | 1 |
| 17 | 2 |
| 18 | 1 |
| 19 | 2 |
| 20 | 1 |
| 21 | 1 |
| 23 | 1 |
| 25 | 1 |
| 26 | 1 |
| 28 | 1 |
| 29 | 1 |
| 31 | 1 |
| | ----- |
| Total | 400 |

TABLE 11
Occupational Categories of Sample

| <u>Occupational Category*</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Proprietor | 151 | 38.0 % |
| Skilled artisan | 96 | 24.0 % |
| Professional | 54 | 14.0 % |
| Semi-skilled worker | 37 | 9.0 % |
| Clerk/salesman | 23 | 6.0 % |
| Government official | 16 | 4.0 % |
| Manager | 10 | 3.0 % |
| Semi-professional | 6 | 2.0 % |
| Miscellaneous | 4 | 1.0 % |
| Unskilled laborers | 3 | 1.0 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 %** |

Proprietors include merchants, grocers, manufacturers, hotel keepers, saloon owners, etc. and those skilled artisans who owned more than \$1,000 in real estate property.

Skilled artisans include carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, painters, blacksmiths, jewelers, farmers, ropemakers, sailmakers, etc. who did not possess more than \$1,000 in real estate property.

Professionals include physicians, attorneys, clergymen, engineers, teachers, newspaper publishers/editors.

Semi-skilled workers include sailors, rigger, oystermen, barber, cook, policemen, and soldiers (except officers).

Clerks and salesmen include clerks, salesmen, bank teller, agent, bill collector, bookkeeper, and customs house officer

Government officials include mayor, magistrate, inspectors of various products, such as fruit, vegetables, staves, cotton, and tobacco.

Managers include ship captains, harbor masters, and military officers.

Semi-professionals include dentists, reporters.

Miscellaneous includes gentlemen, retired, student, unknown.

**Columns may add to more than 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 12
High/Low White Collar and Blue Collar Categories

| <u>Collared Classification</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Highwc | 178 | 44.5 % |
| Lowbc | 126 | 31.5 % |
| Lowwc | 84 | 21.0 % |
| Highbc | 8 | 2.0 % |
| Highmisc | 3 | .8 % |
| Lowmisc | 1 | .3 % |
| | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 400 | 100 %** |

High white-collar occupations included major proprietors (mostly merchants), managers (bankers and brokers), major government officials (mayors, magistrates), professionals (attorneys, physicians), as well as semi-professionals (dentists, newspapermen), clerks/salesmen, and skilled craftsmen (carpenters, blacksmiths, etc.) with more than \$1,000 in real estate property.

Low blue-collar included semiskilled and service workers (barbers, sailors, oystermen, and policemen), and unskilled laborers with less than \$1,000 in real estate.

Low white-collar included petty proprietors (grocers), minor government officials (various inspectors, etc.), semi-professionals, and clerks/salesmen with less than \$1,000 in real estate property.

High blue-collar skilled craftsmen with less than \$1,000 in real estate as well as semiskilled workers with more than \$1,000 in real estate property.

A high- and low-miscellaneous category (gentlemen, retirees, no occupation, student) was delineated with its members being divided along the \$1,000 property holding line.

**Columns may add to more than 100% because of rounding.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

From this analysis of Norfolk's associational life in the two decades prior to the Civil War, we can see the public activities of a middle class of merchants, proprietors, and professionals who shared similar values of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety. In various benevolent, improvement, and fraternal societies they cultivated and strengthened their beliefs and subsequently sought to instill these ideals in other members of the community, especially the perceived idle rich and lazy poor, as well as young men subject to the temptations of the wickedness of the city.

Inspired by the Second Great Awakening, the members of the middle class developed benevolent societies to help ameliorate the physical needs of those in distress in the community. Within a context of middle-class beliefs only those who were deemed the worthy poor—usually the widow, orphan, or infirmed in dire straits through no fault of their own—were provided assistance. Even then, they were not wholly trusted as aid was in the form of wood, food, and clothing, but seldom money that could be wasted. Those who were deemed lazy, intemperate, and profligate were not deemed worthy to receive aid. In addition to providing physical comforts those in the Humane Association or Dorcas Society attempted to elevate the moral and spiritual character of the worthy poor. By donating their time, money, and gifts society members further intensified their middle-class beliefs by improving themselves as they served the will of God.

The middle class also organized improvement associations that exemplified and promoted their values in antebellum Norfolk. The Total Abstinence Society and Sons of Temperance tried, but ultimately failed, to reduce alcohol consumption, believed to be a cause of many of society's ills, by moral suasion and legislative prohibition. In addition, a succession of library, literary, and musical organizations sought to elevate the cultural and literary life of Norfolk. Lastly, institutions such as the Young Men's Christian Association and Seamen's Friend Society worked to keep young males away from the wicked temptations of the city and improve their intellectual and moral character.

In fraternal organizations such as the Masons and Odd Fellows members cultivated a brotherly sense of camaraderie that spread across city, state, and regional lines. Despite being formed for the protection of the public or to elect candidates, militia and fire companies and political parties and clubs evolved into fraternal bodies. These associations further reinforced middle-class values and the limitations for inclusion allowed for peer approval, socialization of newcomers, and definition of who was a part of the middle class. Leadership skills cultivated in association assisted many in becoming civic and business leaders. Fraternal organizations further played a large role in the public life of the community by their participation in parades, galas, and various anniversary celebrations. Political associations served as a means by which many in the community could become active in the political (and public) life of Norfolk beyond simply voting (if they could vote at all) through their work on Vigilance Committees, at barbecues and parties, and at meetings and rallies.

Association members were primarily native merchants, proprietors, and professionals in their thirties and forties, who were married with families and who owned

slaves, but were not the richest men in town. A number of the proprietors were skilled craftsmen who operated their own shops to sell the goods they made. Their occupations and real estate and personal property holdings placed association members in the middle of the socio-economic spectrum. They possessed real and personal property, which put them ahead of many in the working class, but in general they did not own so much so as to rise to level of planter elites or "gentlemen." Multiple association membership and office-holding were prevalent. Ownership of slaves was not contrary to associational life, even though many societies had their start in the abolitionist Northeast. Young men, the working class, the elite, and the poor were present in fewer numbers in Norfolk's organizations.

This examination of associational membership and leadership supports the hypothesis of a multi-layered middle class. Those in leadership roles possessed more real estate and personal property than the rest of the organizations' membership rosters. They also held higher level mercantile, proprietor, and professional occupations and thus could be termed the upper end of the middle-class spectrum. In contrast, those who were the rank and file members, comprising the bulk of the middle class and association membership, held less property and lower occupational levels even though they were of a similar non-manual labor type, such as merchants and proprietors on a smaller scale, white-collar clerks, or artisans who owned their own shops.

Organizational leaders were the mercantile elites that have been described in the historiography who perhaps possessed wealth approaching the patrician planter aristocracy, but who possessed different values and occupations, who promoted ideas such a civic boosterism, and who were wresting political, economic, and social power

away from the old guard. As their leadership in associations demonstrates, the middle-class elites did not travel in entirely contrasting orbits from the rest of the middle class, but simply different levels. Moreover, most worked their way up the socio-economic ladder from the lower echelons of the middle class or perhaps even the artisanal working class (what could be theorized to be the highest level of the working class). For their part the lower- and mid-level middle classes occupied an economic niche below the upper-middle class, but worked in similar occupations, believed in the same values, joined the same associations (serving as rank and file members, but certainly with hopes of moving up), and supported the mercantile elite's boosterism efforts at commercial, industrial, and urban growth.

The wives and sisters of these association members established their own benevolent societies and also participated in the functions of other organizations, such as assisting the militia and fire companies by organizing fairs to raise money, by making decorative banners and flags, and by making garments and food. In a letter to a friend living in Charlotte County, Mary McPhail Smith wrote that she did not correspond more often because she was involved in too many activities. She commented that in addition to domestic chores, she attended the Education Society meeting on Mondays, a Bible class on Tuesdays, the Dorcas Society on Wednesdays, and prepared for her Sabbath School class on Saturdays. Still, she admitted that although she had little free time, "I know that I daily spend too much in idle thoughts which should be better employed. I often feel unhappy to think how many thoughts are given to the world and how few to God."¹

¹ See letter from Mary (McPhail) Smith of Norfolk to Mary Venable Carrington in Roanoke Bridge, Charlotte Court House dated January 30, 1832; Carrington Family Papers, Section 26, doc. 55, Virginia Historical Society.

The middle-class associationalism of Norfolk not only bound together like-minded individuals within the city, but also connected them with those in other societies around the state and country. Militia companies from the city traveled to, and hosted, units from other cities across the state in maneuvers, parades, and banquets that provided a sense of fraternity among the men that most surely assisted them during the Civil War. Organizations like the Masons, Odd Fellows, YMCA, Seamen's Friend Society, and Sons of Temperance were national in scope and branches from around country contacted each other, exchanged literature and information, and forged their own brotherly spirit that would only be broken, but temporarily, by the Civil War.

Boosterism was an essential ingredient to life in middle-class associations in Norfolk. One of the hallmarks of middle-class values was improvement and civic boosters sought to improve the city with various projects such as railroads, canals, street paving, new municipal buildings, and public gas works. Booster ideals of civic improvement also were felt in the other associations as well. Norfolk's urban promoters, like many in the country, believed that crime, vice, and poverty reflected poorly on a city and thus if benevolent and temperance organizations could elevate the worthy poor (the unworthy poor would find their way to prisons and asylums soon enough) and reform the intemperate, if the YMCA and Seamen's Friend Society could protect the young men, and if the literary and cultural institutions could be sustained then these improvements would reflect positively on Norfolk, raising the status of the city and drawing people and business there. Moreover, if these same associations could improve the individual by elevating their industry, sobriety, thriftiness, and piety then that would not only help the

individual, but also help enhance the welfare and growth of Norfolk by making them a productive member of the community.

Beyond what was cultivated in association, preliminary investigations reveal that middle-class values of industry, thrift, sobriety, and piety were present in other ways as well in antebellum Norfolk. Local newspapers continually reprinted feature articles, literary short stories, poems, and various advice columns outlining these beliefs through material first published in northern books, pamphlets, and newspapers. One typical article had the title of "Get Married" and was taken from the *Norwich Aurora* in 1840. Fairly lengthy, it stressed that getting married was good for a woman, good for a man, and good for society. "Man never becomes a member of society until he is married. Unmarried, he is looked upon with distrust. He has no home, no abiding place, no anchor to hold him. . . . If you are desirous of wealth, get married, for a good wife promotes habits of industry and economy."²

Similarly, the *Southern Argus* printed an article entitled "Good Advice to Apprentices" that advised young men to "stock your mind with useful information" during apprenticeships, "be industrious in your business, be frugal, be economical."³ Even in his city directory for 1851–1852 William S. Forrest included short essays on how to be a good husband, wife, and parent; directions on the proper methods for walking, cutting a rose, or saving a drowning victim; the necessity of education for the young;

² *American Beacon*, 30 May 1840.

³ *Daily Southern Argus*, 30 May 1856.

advice on how to be a better merchant or mechanic; and rules for living a good, successful life, accentuating perseverance.⁴

Newspaper editorials and advertisements for various publications, again mostly coming from the Northeast, highlighted middle-class values or acted as guides to develop these values and proper behaviors. An editorial in the *Southern Argus* wrote glowingly about the latest issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, noting that its literary writings were notable not only "for the purity and beauty of their style, but are really valuable on account of the moral lessons which they convey. . . . we observe by the last number, that it has even found its way into the golden regions of California. As a parlor journal it is invaluable."⁵ One typical advertisement from bookseller J. Vickery noted that he had available for twenty-five cents *Mrs. Ellis's House Keeping Made Easy* containing "complete instructions in all branches of cookery and domestic economy, containing the modern and improved receipts of daily service in all families."⁶ Throughout the antebellum period a multitude of improvement manuals, self-help guides, and etiquette publications were published by northeastern presses and sold in Norfolk including encyclopedia sets, housekeeping and cooking guides, children's books, and commercial reviews.⁷

⁴ Forrest, *The Norfolk Directory, For 1851-1852*, 122-30.

⁵ *Daily Southern Argus*, 24 January 1850.

⁶ *American Beacon*, 27 May 1845.

⁷ The numerous improvement publications included titles such as *The Family Instructor, or Manual of the Duties of Domestic Life*, *The Christian Guide to Heaven*, or *A Manual of Spiritual Exercises for Catholics* (*American Beacon*, 15 February 1844); *Penny Cyclopaedia* from the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (*Beacon*, 5 April 1844); *Graham's Magazine*, *Union Magazine*, *Ladies' National Magazine* (*Argus*, 31

Preliminary research also demonstrates that middle-class values were highly desirable in Norfolk's financial circles as well. In 1849 a local R. G. Dun credit rater said of thirty-three year-old jeweler G. Mayer that he was "good for small amounts, clever fellow and good business." The following year he was described as having limited means and no real estate, but possessing of "good moral character and sober habits . . . estimable man and worthy of all confidence." William H. Broughton, a druggist, who received excellent credit reports for the antebellum period, was characterized by an agent for the firm in 1848 as a "good, young, married man" with a "fine business." The writer also reported that Broughton's father-in-law described him as possessing "good character," "attentive to business," with "high moral standing." In sharp contrast that same year a Dun reporter described Francis Butt, a milliner, as a "cypher," but his wife was characterized as a "smart business women." In 1852 another agent described the situation in much the same terms as Butt was "a man of straw, lounges about the store and loafes about the streets. Calls his own what was made by his wife, but stands in his name. Mrs. is a smart deserving woman, married 20 years. They have a son a pretender to medical study. But pretty much a loafer, never made a \$, or never will by industry."⁸

October 1848); *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine*, *Knickerbocker Magazine*, *Metropolitan Magazine*, (*Argus*, 2 March 1849); *DeBow's Commercial Review* (*Argus*, 28 March 1850); *The Young American Library* that included biographies of historical figures such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, William Penn, and Andrew Jackson (*Argus*, 12 October 1852); and *Arthur's Juvenile Library*, a collection that included such stories as "Haven't Time and Don't Be in a Hurry," "Who are the Happiest," "The Last Penny," and "The Lost Children" (*Argus*, 7 November 1853); and the *Southern Literary Messenger*, one of the few magazines published in the South (*Argus*, 23 December 1849).

⁸ R. G. Dun credit rating book, Norfolk County, vol. 31, 73, 75, 295; Baker Library, Harvard University.

Thirty-year-old tinner George L. Crow was described in 1850 as being an apprentice two years prior, but now “in business 18 months, poor but strictly honest, industrious, and trustworthy, will be rich if he lives. Considered perfectly safe for what he offers to buy.” In 1857 Irishman Thomas Patton was described as “a small trader, keeps a rum mill and takes too much of it himself. Don’t pay, would not advise credit.” Ten years later, however, he is characterized as being “worth 5m, industrious and attentive to business, and thought good for small bills.” W. J. Reynolds, manager of a local hotel was described in 1854 by a Dun agent, “know him well. I have seen him on several frolicking expeditions . . . and have always regarded him as a trifling fellow, boisterous and talks loudly. Don’t know his means, but think they are limited. He is not the man to add to what he has. He has a great many friends, and is popular among a certain class.”⁹

Good character often made up for few assets as in the case of Thomas F. Owens, a grocer. In 1851 he was described as “a young man commenced without means, good habits, fine, honest, member of Methodist Church, considered safe relying entirely upon his character.” The next year he was again characterized as “a very industrious, young man, deserving of credit on account of his habits.” On the other hand possessing a successful business, but poor behaviors could hurt an entrepreneur’s credit rating. Thomas J. D. Reilly and John C. Ehrbeck were tobacconists who had some level of credit, but whose actions influenced their rating. In January 1854 they were described as having “nothing unfavorable to their credit, Reilly and Ehrbeck both too fond of drink. Would advise caution.” In a May 1854 follow-up report, the credit agent wrote that he

⁹ *ibid.*, 89, 129, 135.

“would give advice of caution [Reilly] has some means, the extent not exactly known, may be worth 25m as supposed. E. has but little means if any, but both R & E are drunkards [emphasis rater] and I would advise caution in dealing with men of such habits. Things may go well with such men, but the chances are against them. Advice of Caution given more in reference to their habits than means.” By 1858 Reilly was in business for himself and the Dun creditor reported that “Have examined into his affairs, and assured of the opinion the debt is good and the money can be made. He has some 5m worth of property here, though do not consider him reliable to sell to, as he is fond of sport and neglects his business, and is gradually wasting his means.” This assessment was correct in that later he was sued for debts and by July 1858 he “failed and sold out under deed of assignment.”¹⁰

Perhaps the grandest form of the middle-class ideology of improvement was that of a community bettering itself. As has been demonstrated in this study various associations promoted civic boosterism either explicitly through commercial organizations and commercial conventions or implicitly through the elevation of the individual and, by consequence, the society. Urban boosterism not only was promoted in association, but also through local histories, city directories, and newspaper articles. In 1853 William S. Forrest published his *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity* that provided a history of the city along with current descriptions of people, commerce, and public institutions to highlight the commercial potential of Norfolk. Two years earlier he had published a city directory in which he stressed the improvement philosophy that exemplified the booster rhetoric of the time. Forrest wrote that he was

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 98, 120.

providing a public service in publishing the directory, insisting that the necessity and utility of such a reference work for a growing city like Norfolk would be generally acknowledged, especially by well-informed citizens. The only exceptions, he argued, were those who opposed all attempts at improving the city. Forrest insisted, however, that “for the best interests of the city, the number of this description of its inhabitants is decreasing, and she moves steadily on against the contrary winds of prejudice and the retarded current of opposing influences. Anti-progressive principles . . . are now less regarded than ever before.”¹¹

The city’s newspaper editors published numerous editorials, articles, and letters related to internal and civic improvements. They exemplified the boosterism ethos of the antebellum period, serving to promote the advancement of the city and advertise its untapped potential to the rest of the country and even the world. The newspapers reported on commercial conventions in Virginia and around the country, annually wrote about (and observed with great excitement) the improvements the city underwent (e.g., new buildings), noted when new items arrived at the local stores, promoted the development of internal improvements such as railroads, called for direct trade to Europe, and compared Norfolk with other cities, North and South. Not surprisingly, the boosterism rhetoric would increase during the 1850s as sectional disparities in commerce and the colonial trade dependence on the Northeast expanded.¹²

¹¹ Forrest, *Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852*, 2. Other antebellum city directories included Ferslew, *Vickery’s Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1859*; Coffield, *Second Annual Directory for the City of Norfolk . . . 1860*.

¹² For several examples of newspaper boosterism among many see the *American Beacon*, 9 January 1840, 24 February 1843, 13 February 1846; *Daily Southern Argus*, 15 February 1848, 19 August 1853, 4 May 1854, 14 June 1855, 25 February 1856.

This research presents a number of conclusions. The presence of a middle class of merchants, proprietors, and professionals in a southern, commercial town like Norfolk demonstrates that an industrial environment was not a necessary ingredient for the development of a middle class. This group was present in Norfolk without the separation of manual laborers from management asserted by scholars studying the emergence of a middle class in northeastern cities. The question then can be asked, how did Norfolk's characteristics of commercial economic foundation, a lack of capital, and especially slavery—found in most southern cities and towns—influence the emergence and functionality of the middle-class associationalism? As John W. Quist found in his study of Tuscaloosa the existence of slavery did not alter the development of associations like temperance societies because there may have been some connection to the Northeast and abolitionism. Perhaps one effect could be the instability of institutions devoted to culture, literature, and the arts that could not be maintained for extended periods of time. It should be stressed, however, that although specific libraries, lyceums, etc. did not endure, there was always another one to take its place. Thus, the goals, attitudes, and values were indeed present in Norfolk's antebellum urban environment.

This study also illustrates that the middle class in the South did not emerge in the post-Civil War New South era. While the New South of middle-class businessmen with their shared values and lifestyles, along with their aggressive commerce and boosterism, may have reached its zenith during the latter-nineteenth century each of its characteristics was present in the Old South. Thus, we can also suggest that the New South was not so new after all.

While differences exist between northern and southern cities, as there would be for any comparison between two cities, this research suggests that the two regions were not worlds apart. John W. Quist also highlighted this point in his comparison of Tuscaloosa and Washtenaw, demonstrating the associational similarities the two regions shared. Contemporaries also commented on similarities between southern businessmen and their counterparts in the North. On a visit to Norfolk two northern booksellers commented that “there are many professional men in the South, at least as far as we have been. . . . there is a good deal of the Yankee among many, when necessity pushes them. If one thing don’t succeed, they try another.”¹³

Examinations of issues relating to southern class can serve as a bridge to connect the historiographical divide that separates northern and southern studies. Because of its agrarian economy, the presence of slavery, the perceived planter hegemony, and the dearth of statistically-large urban areas, the antebellum South has been viewed as inherently and irrevocably lacking a coherent urban environment and, consequently, a multi-level class structure. It is no small irony that just as the major differences of the nineteenth century were sectional, this historiographical divergence also occurs along a North-South geographical divide. Thus, as Darrett B. Rutman cogently explained, the

¹³ In much less flattering tones they also observed that the “the poor cry out, but are not heard.” Some subscribers, they wrote, order “for what he does not desire, to go with the popular rush; and when the subscription is due, aims to evade its payment.” Others, they bitterly characterized as a “light-hearted, rosy-cheeked, and baby-faced merchant, who dresses his ninny wife in satins, sends the pay for his book, with a word that he must have it twenty-five cents cheaper than the usual price.” The booksellers were two women from the North, traveling through the South selling their publications. They were in Norfolk for a couple of months during the summer of 1854. See Misses Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life, By Two Young Ladies—Misses Mendell and Hosmer* (New York: n.p., 1854), 254.

South has not only been perceived as being “different” from the North, but ultimately “a world apart.” Incredulously, Rutman correctly asked how we could know that the South was that different if it has been studied in isolation and that all questions have not been asked.¹⁴

Future works concerning the South can remedy this state of affairs. These studies could expand upon the issues of class formation in the region looking at issues of consumer behaviors, living spaces, public spending, and delineation of values of the elites, middle class, and working class. Expanded studies on class are needed to eliminate the perception that the South was strictly a bipolar society consisting solely of poor whites and a planter aristocracy. Studies also could examine how classes and their public and private institutions competed for the “public sphere” to extend Mary P. Ryan’s study beyond New Orleans to the rest of the region. Also, similar to what Timothy Mahoney did for the Midwest class, institutional, and general urban development in the South should be examined within hinterland, regional, and national contexts. While communication and transportation lagged in the South, can we simply assume, as has been the case, that southern towns and cities existed in a vacuum, isolated from each other and only connected to the Northeast? Also, understanding how southern cities fit into the web of urban competition is important because, as Mahoney explains, this process has been a part of the larger evolution of American nineteenth-century urbanization. Lastly, by understanding southern cities in various regional contexts, and

¹⁴ For more discussion concerning the disparity between what is examined in northern and southern urban studies see Rutman’s *Small Worlds, Large Questions: Explorations in Early American Social History, 1600–1850* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994). See also, Darrett B. and Anita V. Rutman, *A Place in Time, Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1984).

not just simply as one Solid South, economic, social, and political differentiation among towns and cities can be delineated.

Expanded research in southern class and urbanization will result in more similarities than differences when the North and South are compared. More extensive southern research studies will provide a better understanding of the people, class alignments, institutions, and the urban environments, with the result being a dilution of regional differences and an integration of southern literature into the larger class and urban historiography.

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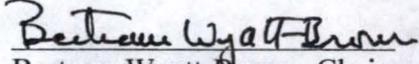
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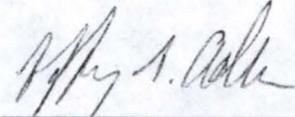
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born in Richmond, Virginia, in October 1965. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of Richmond in 1988. He was awarded a Master of Arts degree in psychology in May 1990 from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. From September 1990 to May 1995 the author worked as a Planner for the Virginia Department of Youth and Family Services. In 1995 he left state service to complete a graduate degree in history and received a Master of Arts degree from the University of Richmond in May 1996. The following autumn he entered the doctoral program of the Department of History at the University of Florida, Gainesville. From June 2000 to the present the author has worked as an assistant editor for the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, a multi-volume reference work being published by the Library of Virginia.

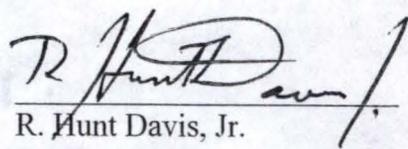
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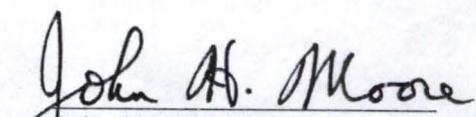
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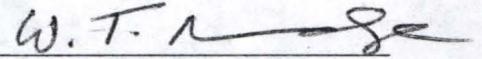
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 2003

Dean, Graduate School

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