



## Butter, Milk, and a “Spare Ribb”: Women’s Work and the Transatlantic Economic Transition in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts

JAMES E. MCWILLIAMS

---

ONE spring afternoon in 1705, Thomas Maule reached his breaking point. In his capacity as Salem’s market clerk, he had repeatedly accused Elizabeth Haskett of selling bread without allowing the market assistant to weigh it. Out of patience on this particular day, Maule stormed over to Haskett’s house and “read the law to her touching her baking bread.” Haskett scoffed, responding that “she had no bread to weigh,” a comment blatantly belied by the pile of “biskett” conspicuously stacked behind her in the kitchen. The dishonest affront was more than Maule could take, but he retreated. Later that day, however, when he saw “a negroman of Elizabeth Haskett in the market street with a bagg of white biskett on his head,” he seized it and hauled it to his shop “in order to weigh it.” He would show *her* who was in charge at the market.

The slave returned home, and Haskett, after learning of the confiscation, took the news badly. According to Maule’s testimony, she sent her servant, Elizabeth Darby, to handle the matter. Darby, according to Maule, proceeded to “come into my shop and in a violent manner took me by my throat and with her fist punched me in my breast so that I was faint for want of breath.” After Darby “beat my fingers from my bagg of bread” (something she did so powerfully that “it is questionable as to whether I shall have the use of my finger again”), she “carried away said bag biskett,” returning it to its rightful owner,

Elizabeth Haskett.<sup>1</sup> The bread was never weighed, Maule's finger healed, and the event faded into the court records.

Perhaps Haskett and Maule had a history of fighting; perhaps their contretemps was essentially personal. Still, tensions such as those that broke out between them were not uncommon in the Bay Colony. Cases of women behaving aggressively in market settings reflected their increased economic activity in the commercial settings of colonial Massachusetts. In the end, housewives may have "commanded a limited domain," as Laurel Ulrich writes, "[b]ut they were neither isolated nor self-sufficient" in their work routines. Perhaps more so than in England, colonial economic conditions on the commercializing periphery of British empire pushed women "into the houses of neighbors and into the cartways of a village or town."<sup>2</sup> Or, one could add, beyond these boundaries into the bustling throng of the Salem market. Gloria Main points out that women frequently worked alongside men to accomplish tasks necessary to farm building and community subsistence, especially during the early phases of settlement. These assessments, while in no way directly supporting a "golden age theory"—that is, the idea that women had a rare moment of economic empowerment which they would soon lose—nevertheless acknowledge the possibility that, as Mary Beth Norton summarizes it, "rigid sex-role distinctions could not exist" under the novel imperatives of settlement. Even those who have objected to the golden age thesis, as Linda Kerber has, admit that "women in the American colonies had a broader range of choices" as well as "more economic opportunities" than their English counterparts.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup>"Clerk of the Market v. Elizabeth Haskett," 23 March 1705, as recorded in the Account Book of Thomas Maule, p. 134, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

<sup>2</sup>Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650–1750* (New York: Vintage, 1980), p. 14. The assumption of self-sufficiency has been thoroughly debunked in recent years. See Carole Shammas, "How Self-Sufficient was Early America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 13 (1982): 247–72.

<sup>3</sup>Gloria Main, "Gender, Work, and Wages in Colonial New England," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 51 (1994): 61–65; Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *American Historical Review* 89

experience of settlement and early development, in short, encouraged a modest distortion of traditional gendered norms in commercial Massachusetts, norms of which Haskett and Darby were just cases in point.

Historians have, however, carefully qualified this claim with another line of analysis. For all the comparative economic opportunities that prevailed in coastal towns, most women in Massachusetts quickly came to occupy a social environment bounded by traditional English constraints. Throughout Massachusetts, demographic, religious, legal, and familial forces converged to inform a civil code, Norton contends, "striking in its expression of the patriarchal ideal that women's private interests had to be subordinated to the greater familial whole." "Godly men," Carol Karlsen writes, "needed helpmeets, not hindrances; companions, not competitors; alter egos, not autonomous mates." The dictates of a "family covenant" and an orderly social structure ensured that the entirety of women's work was reduced to "the work of a wife." Although many Massachusetts women may have enjoyed an expanded economic influence, the roles to which they were confined—roles aptly described by Ulrich as housewife, deputy husband, consort, mother, mistress, Christian, neighbor, and heroine—ultimately structured their social world and shaped their identities in the New World of covenanted and commercialized townships.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, new opportunity; on the other, familiar regulation. Although by no means obvious, these seemingly contradictory colonial realities complemented one another. Haskett and Darby lived and worked in a milieu that brooked a modest share of women's public economic participation while relying on customary strictures to reinforce their primary status as helpmeets. One might very well leave the matter at that. There is, however, more to be learned from the

---

(1984): 593–94; Linda Kerber, review of Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800*, in *Washington Post Book World*, 4 January 1981.

<sup>4</sup>Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience," p. 598; Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), p. 165; and Ulrich, *Good Wives*, pp. 9–10.

Haskett-Darby anecdote regarding the relationship between women's work and New England's economic development. The way in which women's economic activity shaped their social status is well understood, but how their economic activity influenced seventeenth-century Massachusetts' integration into the transatlantic market remains unexplored. The primary reason for this imbalance has had little to do with a lack of curiosity; it has everything to do with the choice of sources. The documents that historians have conventionally used to explore the nature of women's work in early Massachusetts—probate records, court records, diaries, sermons, and family letters—have illuminated the domestic economy and the social norms structuring it, but given their very nature, they provide scant insight into how women contributed to macro-economic transformations—changes that influenced the lives of Massachusetts settlers as they attempted to create a commercial economy on a par with their tobacco-planting neighbors to the south and their fellow yeomen back in England. About a dozen account books housed in the collections of the Phillips Library of the Peabody Essex Museum and of the American Antiquarian Society, however, help us broaden our view of women's work in early Massachusetts and allow us to examine in microcosm the critical connection between local “subsistence” activities and proto-capitalistic endeavors.

### *Thomas Barnard and Andover's Local Economy*

As a farmer making ends meet in Andover, Massachusetts, Thomas Barnard knew his neighbors well. He had little choice in the matter. The inland agriculture of seventeenth-century New England stressed subsistence over surplus, mixed husbandry over plantation farming, and tradition over innovation. The bustling commercial hubs of Boston and Salem were worlds away, and so Andover's residents could do little more than imagine life in the transatlantic fast lane. To achieve a healthy competence on a distant fringe of the home country, Barnard and his neighbors had to cultivate intricate networks of exchange, networks that required specialization, interaction,

and vigilant bookkeeping. Barnard, his accounts reveal, had mastered those economic habits.<sup>5</sup>

In a sense, Barnard's behavior reflects the traditional framework that historians have referred to as a moral economy. Early New England farmers, according to this interpretation, pursued a relatively primitive mode of production that adequately met material needs while preserving the spiritual foundation of a covenanted community. James Henretta pioneered this analysis over twenty-five years ago with his compelling argument that colonial farmers sought to promote a mentalité of community-conscious freeholders rather than a marketplace of grasping entrepreneurs. According to Henretta, "there was no alternative to subsistence or semi-subsistence production" in colonial America; farmers maintained a "system of local exchange [that] did not constitute a market economy in the full sense of the term." Husbandmen committed to the basic tenets of community cohesion lived and worked in a milieu where "their goal was not profit but the acquisition of a needed item for use."<sup>6</sup> In concrete terms—manifested in patterns of trade, goods traded, and the financial arrangements binding daily

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Barnard, Account Book, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. The best descriptions of New England's mixed agriculture and the culture it shaped are Darrett B. Rutman, "Governor Winthrop's Garden Crop: The Significance of Agriculture in the Early Commerce of Massachusetts Bay," *William and Mary Quarterly* 20 (July 1963): 396–415; James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (January 1978): 3–32; and Michael Merrill, "Putting 'Capitalism' in Its Place: A Review of Recent Literature," *William and Mary Quarterly* 52 (April 1995): 315–26. On Andover in particular, see Philip J. Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970). My notion of "competence" comes from Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 30–35.

<sup>6</sup>Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," p. 15. See also, Sumner C. Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963); Greven, *Four Generations*, pp. 40–102; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Christopher M. Jedrey, *The World of John Cleaveland: Family and Community in Eighteenth-Century New England* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979). Overviews of this expansive literature can be found in Merrill, "Putting 'Capitalism' in Its Place," pp. 315–26; Joyce Appleby, "The Vexed History of Capitalism as Told by American Historians," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (2001): 1–18; and E. P. Thomson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76–136.

transactions—Barnard’s behavior conforms to this commonly held conception of the early American economy.

But historians have developed another model of New England’s economic progress, baldly epitomized by Charles Grant’s contention that early America was comprised of “a population raised on an economic tradition of land speculation and individualistic venturing.” The “drive for profits” structured economic behavior more than the need for subsistence goods. “One sees in certain of the Kent [Connecticut] settlers,” wrote Grant, “not so much the contented yeoman” but rather “the embryo of John D. Rockefeller.” With rather more nuance, Stephen Innes has argued that Bay colonists effectively folded the profit motive into the region’s unique “civic ecology,” thus connecting “economic development with moral, spiritual, and religious imperatives.” Innes’s work builds on the scholarship of John Frederick Martin—who stresses the “pragmatic bent of Puritanism”—and Christine Heyrman—who posits a peaceful relationship between “commerce and culture.” In the commercialized economy these scholars sketch, Thomas Barnard appears to be little more than an outside observer.<sup>7</sup>

Once Barnard’s activity is recast in a strictly *economic* perspective, however, it no longer reflects a purely “premodern”

<sup>7</sup>Charles S. Grant, *Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 53, 171; Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), p. 7; John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 120; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), pp. 13–28. See also Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, pp. 14–23; Stephen Innes, *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670–1780* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 14–32; Margaret Ellen Newell, *From Dependency to Independence: Economic Revolution in Colonial New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 55–71; Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and Winifred B. Rothenberg, “The Emergence of Capital Markets in Rural Massachusetts, 1730–1838,” *Journal of Economic History* 45 (December 1985): 781–808, and *From Market Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

mindset. To the contrary, the burden of economic development in the Massachusetts Bay demanded that settlers such as Barnard pioneer a subsistence-like economy capable of keeping residents materially satisfied *at the same time as it laid a foundation for proto-capitalistic endeavors*. In fact, merchants routinely relied on that foundation in their efforts to exploit markets in the transatlantic economy. For example, when merchants needed foodstuffs to trade, bridges to cross, oxen to pull their cargo, beer and beef to provision sailors, and artisans to build and repair their ships, they instinctively drew on local economies that had been providing these services for several generations. The ongoing challenge of meeting local demand thus helped establish the commercial infrastructure requisite for New England's integration into larger markets.

Considered in isolation, Barnard's economic activity might seem exclusively devoted to the demands of a covenanted community trying to meet basic needs and, thus, unrelated to larger market developments. Reoriented in the larger context of the region's intricately structured economic progress, however, it thrives at the vital center of New England's commercializing endeavors.<sup>8</sup> With this crucial shift—a shift that account books from the likes of Barnard confirm—"women's work" suddenly comes into focus as an innovative aspect of the region's most important economic trend.

### *Men, Women, and Local Exchange*

The market venues in which Barnard and other settlers throughout seventeenth-century New England operated were constricted. Rarely having occasion to venture beyond the tight pale of Essex County, he effectively met his material needs through a systematic exchange with about thirty neighbors. The transactions he conducted between 1688 and 1710, as recorded

<sup>8</sup>I have elaborated this refinement of the subsistence-capitalistic framework in my "New England's First Depression: Beyond an Export-Led Interpretation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2002 (33): 1–20.

in his account book, were frequent, small in value, and notably cashless.<sup>9</sup>

Reciprocation was essential to the smooth functioning of the region's economy. Specializing in grain and wool production, Barnard traded his goods with neighbors who in turn performed for him the critical tasks of weaving, spinning, brewing, and slaughtering. He covered his modest transportation costs by trading meat, wool, grain, and beer with two individuals who offered services including "carting 3 loads of hay," "helping to cart one load out of the pasture," and furnishing "a mare his journey to Salem." To meet labor demands, Barnard nurtured relationships with several families eager to lease their sons and daughters as day laborers in a flexible market. In October 1700, for example, Barnard noted "4 dayes work viz. John Johnson, Ben Russell, John Russell, Josiah Holt." To "swingle" and "dress" his flax crop at appropriate intervals, Barnard called on John Johnson, William Barker, Daniel Bixby, and Thomas Chandler. Thomas Johnson, Hooker Osgood, and Henry Chandler provided the apples Barnard required to keep his cider supply adequately stocked. Samuel Marble, Samuel Brown, and William Blunt were reliably on hand to repair Barnard's barn, gate, and "lean-to" for payments in grain and wool. Francis Johnson could always be counted on for "helping to kill and cut out hoggs." Through such sundry arrangements, the gears of Barnard's economic world turned. The man never became rich, but by means of these timeworn stratagems, he and his family achieved a competence.

For Massachusetts farmers such as Barnard, occupational flexibility and ready access to a wide range of locally produced goods were indispensable to economic security and opportunity. Throughout the colonial era, but especially in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Massachusetts Bay

<sup>9</sup>Background on Barnard comes from Sarah Loring Bailey, *Historical Sketches of Andover* (New York: Riverside Press, 1880). Another especially well-documented example of a single family's attempt to negotiate the local economy can be found in my "Work, Family, and Economic Improvement in Late-Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay: The Case of Joshua Buffum," *New England Quarterly* 74 (September 2001): 355-84.



economy demanded, even as it grew increasingly specialized, that residents—women no less than men—maintain the ability to acquire several basic commodities and provide several basic services throughout the year. And so, it comes as no surprise that a significant number of Barnard's trading partners were women. Throughout his accounts, Barnard routinely lists Hannah Abbott as a creditor for the spinning she performed on a parcel of wool he had purchased from another neighbor. Abigail Faulkner made jackets for his sons, killed a calf for him, and cut cloth for "linsey-woolsey jackets and breeches." In April 1696, he accepted a £2 loan from a Mrs. Oliver, and three years later he "borrowed of Ms. Mary Coker in money at Newbury Court to be paid in two months." Another local housewife knitted him a pair of stockings and sold him wool she had obtained in the nearby town of Ipswich. The regularity with which women appear in Barnard's accounts indicates that they were active participants in their local economy.<sup>10</sup>

Barnard's economic relationship with Andover's Abigail Faulkner characterizes the systematic exchange in which women and men customarily engaged. Barnard records transactions with Abigail's husband Francis, but separate and distinct dealings with Abigail command ample space in Barnard's meticulous account book. In exchange for "money lent her" (6s.), "oxen one day," a bushel of turnips, and his son "swingling 14 li of flax," Barnard credited Abigail for "making Stephens linen britches," "cutting out two pr of britches for John," and "making John's coat, jackit, and britches." A few months later, Barnard provided Abigail "1/2 bu ground malt" in exchange for "bringing one barrel of salt from Salem" and six bushels of apples. When Abigail and her daughter Alice dedicated a day and half to making a "tweed coat" for Barnard, he entered a debt for "my horse for Alice to go to Salem and another journey to bring her home." After Abigail and Barnard had a "reckoning" on 4 June 1706, Barnard learned that he owed her 9 shillings. As the two residents continued to trade throughout the first decade of the eighteenth century, they routinely

<sup>10</sup>See Ulrich, *Good Wives*, pp. 35–51.

noted their respective debts. “Reckoned with Mrs. Faulkner 11 March 07,” Barnard wrote, “and then due to me in money 0-1-8”; the following year, the balance tilted in Faulkner’s favor. Barnard and Faulkner met on an almost weekly basis, traded as equals in the context of the local economy, and, throughout the process, nurtured an economic relationship that sustained each as well as other residents of Andover.

Abigail Faulkner and Thomas Barnard’s relationship was no anomaly. The account books of other Massachusetts farmers and artisans confirm the essential role that women played in maintaining networks of local exchange. Richard Hobart, a blacksmith from Salisbury, registered a debt for over £2 for nails he received from Ms. Wonser. He also noted his “account with Ms. Wonsworth and there is past due her 1-6-2,” recorded receiving “3 pounds in money” from a Ms. Bosont, and debited an unidentified woman for 4 gallons of wine and 6 pounds of sugar.<sup>11</sup> John Pickering of Salem credited John Downing for, as his account puts it, “received of your wife in money 0-10-0” and “received of your wife in money 0-10-11.” Additionally, he paid Lois Burvall cash “for heels and thred to mending one pr of soles” and for “mending Hannah[’s] shoes.”<sup>12</sup> Salem’s John Burnham credited “John Russell’s wife” for “a pr shoes mended” and, in another entry, “Mary Russell” for “2 quarts wheat.” To his own wife, Pickering entered a credit for “corn upon Nathaniel Perkins account.”<sup>13</sup>

John Gould of Marblehead, who was in the market for lamb, noted in his book that “Goodwife Cary had 13 sheep and 8 lambs.” He also mentioned how he was indebted to “Mrs. Peabody for making one w[ai]stcoat, 2 jackits” and that, “when father was sick,” he had purchased “sheeps wool of

<sup>11</sup>Robert Hobart, Account Book, 1699–1701, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum: accounts for John Hubbard for the Wonser reference; Wonsworth (25 July 1700); Bosont (17 August 1699); and a woman’s account identified only as “Ms.” (November 1699).

<sup>12</sup>John Pickering, Account Book, 1684–1716, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum: accounts for John Downing (13 June 1696), and John Neale for the Lois Burvall reference (1686).

<sup>13</sup>John Burnham, Account Book, 1698–1700, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum: account for John Russell (7 April 1703).

Aunt Andrews.”<sup>14</sup> John Flint, a farmer and wood supplier from Salem, sold to Goodwife Harwich “1 load wood” for 4 shillings.<sup>15</sup> Newbury’s Jacob Adams, a farmer who also specialized in shoe production, kept open-ended accounts with a number of women ranging from Newbury to Haverhill to Rowley. Over the course of three months in 1676, he traded goods with Hannah Morse, Elizabeth Wiles, “John Noyes wife,” “John Haynes’ wife,” Nathaniel Britig’s wife,” “Seman Kent’s wife,” “Benjamin Lowell’s wife,” “S. Pettingill’s wife,” “George White’s girl,” and “Elenor Phelps.” His account book includes sales for specialized shoes, including “1 pair French heeled,” “2 pair of pumps,” and others with “English heels” and “rounded heels.”<sup>16</sup> The bartered nature of the trade, the relative absence of high interest charges, the neighborly quality of the transactions, and the rather small circumference within which trade was enacted were all factors endemic to the exchange, but these qualities should not be taken to suggest that the work was distinct from larger economic developments.

### *Merchants, Women, and Extra-Local Exchange*

By the mid 1650s, merchants such as George Corwin, Philip English, John Hull, and Robert Gibbs were coming of age in Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup> In their effort to reach external markets, they were eager to transform places like Andover, men like Barnard, and women like Abigail Faulkner into integral players in the drama of transatlantic economic expansion. As merchants

<sup>14</sup>John Gould, Account Book, 1697–1733, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, pp. 137 (1706), 145 (April 1702), and 149 (20 July 1689).

<sup>15</sup>John Flint Account Book, 1679–84, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

<sup>16</sup>Jacob Adams, Account Book, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Boston, Mass. The examples are chosen from entries late December 1675 to early March 1676.

<sup>17</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955); Jacob Price, “What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660–1790,” *Journal of Economic History* 49 (June 1989): 267–84. “A Note on the Value of Colonial Exports of Shipping,” *Journal of Economic History* 36 (September 1976): 704–24, and *Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962); and Ralph Davis, “English Foreign Trade, 1700–1774,” *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 15 (December 1962): 285–303.

pulled agricultural locales into the emerging transatlantic market, women planted one foot in the traditional economy and the other on the broad stage of international commerce.<sup>18</sup>

The connection between merchant's and women's work has traditionally been obscured by a misperception of the Massachusetts merchant, who has typically been portrayed as a renegade outsider who entered a community intent on undermining its internal dynamics of localism, traditionalism, cohesion, and relative economic equity with modern, outward-looking, explicitly capitalistic endeavors and mentalities.<sup>19</sup> The reality of daily economic life as revealed in merchants' account books, however, tells quite a different story. Indeed, rather than undermining the status quo, merchants respected it as a necessary component of meeting demand in distant markets. Instead of forcing a new rationale on local economies, merchants adapted their practices to the patterns and habits residents such as Barnard and Faulkner had inherited and refined.<sup>20</sup> During this gradual merging of inland markets and coastal ones, the local economy remained stable and, thus, the

<sup>18</sup>As Innes has shown (*Creating the Commonwealth*), armed with a "civic ecology" that enabled them to negotiate whatever challenges mammon imposed, Puritans touted the very virtues that inspired economic gain—hard work, frugality, and a pervasive belief in the benefits of commercial development—and then incorporated them into their communal ethos. As values coalesced, so did economies, with local and transatlantic activities becoming inextricably linked. One result of this convergence was a fortuitous preparation among subsistence-oriented communities for the inexorable and generally welcome intrusion of overtly profit-driven merchants.

<sup>19</sup>See Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World*, pp. 71–81, and Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, chap. 5; the thesis is especially well developed, albeit for a later period, in Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 80–93. Discussions of the "declension" thesis can be found in Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 55–56; Perry Miller, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth," in *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 25–30; Stephen Foster, "New England versus the New England Mind: The Myth of Declension," *Journal of Social History* 3 (January 1970): 95–108; Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 275–76; Stephen Foster, *Their Solitary Way: The Puritan Social Ethic in the First Century of Settlement in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), intro.; and Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

<sup>20</sup>See Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth*, and Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness*.

relevance of women's work to the larger process of transatlantic integration was enhanced.

George Corwin's accounts exemplify this process with particular clarity. In time, Corwin became one of the Bay Colony's most powerful merchants, accumulating extraordinary wealth by exporting what would eventually become the region's two staple products, fish and timber.<sup>21</sup> The accounts he recorded during his early years as a trader (1653–57), which capture his activities before his export business took off, disclose a businessman equally involved in the patterns of local exchange as in the channels of the transatlantic world. As a sample of 132 of Corwin's accounts reveals, the same goods Bay colonists traded among themselves within the confines of their local economy—things like basic foodstuffs and raw materials for building and making clothing—were present in overwhelming quantities in the payments he received from his clients. Forty-two percent of Corwin's clients between 1653 and 1657 made returns in some form of livestock—be it beef, pork, bacon, cows, or hogs. Even more, 47 percent, issued payment in grain—Indian corn, wheat, rye, or oats. Twenty-eight percent did so in eggs and butter, whereas 19 percent paid Corwin with beer, barley, or malt. Six percent of returns came through, oddly enough, peas.<sup>22</sup> When returns were made in the form of such products, their percentage within the overall account was substantial. Dairy payments averaged 45 percent of each account in which they appeared; beer products averaged 50 percent, as did grain; and livestock, finally, comprised 48 percent of the accounts in which it was traded as reimbursement.

Given his reliance on local patterns of exchange, Corwin regularly dealt with women. On 28 January 1654, for example, he purchased a firkin of butter, pork, Indian corn, rye, malt and

<sup>21</sup>For background information on Corwin, see Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World*, pp. 41–48; Richard Gildrie, *Salem, Massachusetts, 1626–1683: A Covenanted Community* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985), pp. 103–7; and Sidney J. Perley, *History of Salem, Massachusetts*, vol. 2 (Salem: Sidney Perleyau, 1929), p. 221.

<sup>22</sup>George Corwin, account sample, 1653–57, from Account Books, 1652–84, in Letters, Bills, Ledgers, and Day Books, 1651–84.

hops, and wheat from Mary Knowlton of Ipswich. Eight months later, as he prepared ships for an early fall journey to Barbados, he visited Elizabeth Hardy, of Salem, to procure cheese, Indian corn, wheat, and a few cows. In 1655, the up-and-coming merchant cultivated trading relationships with three additional Salem women and, in Ipswich, Alice Ward, who sold him some pork, butter, corn, and wheat in January 1655. On the same day, down in Salem, he bought from Abigail Averill a calf, a pig, a steer, wheat, butter, and Indian corn—again, all products in high demand throughout the West Indies, a trading destination that was focusing its own energies almost exclusively on sugar. Five months later, Rebecca Brown sold Corwin a team of oxen, cows, swine, wheat, Indian corn, and a cart and plow.<sup>23</sup> Working within the local markets' established customs of exchange to acquire goods needed in a distant land, Corwin was not transforming local economies but situating them—and the women like Knowlton, Hardy, Ward, Averill, and Brown who participated in them—closer to the pulse of Massachusetts' most conspicuous entrepreneurial developments.

Robert Gibbs, a Boston merchant, was even more adept at tapping local economies for goods vital to his transatlantic trade. He purchased leftover quintals of cod from a range of fishing companies, and from individuals living in the heavily wooded northern towns of New England, he accumulated extensive cargoes of timber. In exchange for these products, both of which were in heavy demand in Barbados and the Iberian Peninsula by the 1670s, Gibbs offered, largely through a general store he maintained, locally produced goods to his sea- and land-based suppliers, who were too fully employed to furnish those necessities for themselves. As economic opportunities broadened and Gibbs's stocks swelled—stocks, that is, of the imported textiles, foreign manufactured goods, and luxury goods (tableware, chairs, tablecloths, clocks, silver tankards) gaining vogue among the merchant class—his means of acquiring the goods

<sup>23</sup>Corwin, Account Book, 1653–56: accounts for Mary Knowlton (28 January 1654); Elizabeth Hardy (9 November 1654); Alice Ward (27 January 1655); Abigail Averill (27 January 1655); and Rebecca Brown (10 May 1655)

that would feed slaves in the West Indies and power the mills that reinforced their enslavement flourished, thus launching him into the ranks of New England's merchant elite.

Gibbs's evolution from general store proprietor to international merchant was an arc of ambition that intersected regularly with women traders and the products they customarily controlled. Of the forty-one clients with whom Gibbs traded between 1674 and 1677, no less than twenty were women. Reflecting habits that had been forged in the local economy, transactions with these women were small, frequent, and comprised of goods that had been circulating in local venues from the onset of settlement. With "Goodman Seever's daughter," for example, Gibbs exchanged Holland cloth, calves, and sugar for butter, eggs, and milk. Goody Spring sold Gibbs eggs, pork, butter, and apples and received in turn needles and cloth. Goody Cole provided "2 1/2 days of work, yarn, and eggs" for candlesticks, cloth, and a "pr. of drawers." Cakes, bran, bread, and gingerbread earned for Goody Gavate a parcel of molasses, sugar, wheat, and ginger. Goody Cooke acquired a handkerchief, linen, white bone lace, speckled calico, and "black and white thread" in exchange for "suckling the child 9 weeks." For a whale bone to set her dresses, Margaret Tomkins sold Gibbs a parcel of eggs. Linen, sugar, and kersey were delivered to Goody Seever for the apples, butter, fowl, Indian corn, milk, corn meal, and, of all things, "a spare rib," she provided.<sup>24</sup> Gibbs's accounts are replete with such examples, which show that, as men like Gibbs and Corwin moved into the transatlantic world, the internal trading routines that supported their ambitions depended, in turn, upon the goods, services, and trades executed, on the local level, by women, women who readily adjusted their habits to accommodate new demands.

Products normally associated with local production—goods such as eggs, butter, Indian corn, milk, garden vegetables,

<sup>24</sup>Gibbs, *General Store Account Book, 1669–1708*: accounts for Goodman Seever (19 July 1673); Goody Spring (no date); Gilbert Cole for Goody Cole (May 1676); undated entries for Goody Gavate, Goody Cooke, and Margaret Tompkins; and Goody Seever (19 September 1674).

and fruit—became critical, if understated, components of Massachusetts’ integration into export markets. The impact of this dependency becomes particularly clear in the decentralized fish market.<sup>25</sup> In an especially complete 1669 account (May and June), Gibbs lists the following fish purchases at Marblehead and Winter Island: on 28 and 29 May, he purchased 114 and 18 quintals from George Alley and Company and another 50 from William Waters and Company; between 2 and 4 June, he bought 23 quintals from William Waters and Company, 68 from William Clater and Company, and 90 from John Roads and Company. These kinds of purchases, from seven more companies and dozens of individual suppliers, took place on ten other days in June; the average purchase was 23 quintals of fish, and the total amounted to about 803 quintals. To obtain this quantity of fish, Gibbs had to shuffle among Boston, Marblehead, and Winter Island, deal with dozens of fish companies and individuals, and make scores of small purchases—all in a period of about two months. After obtaining these parcels of fish, Gibbs consolidated and sold them to nine merchants. He did so in quantities ranging from 11 to 522 quintals.<sup>26</sup> It is only in light of this internal anatomy of the fish trade that the role of eggs, butter, and a “spare rib” becomes fully evident, for it is through these goods that women strengthened the ligaments of the transatlantic trade.

### *Merchants, Women, and Transatlantic Exchange*

Merchants not only drew on local produce to provision fishing voyages run by established companies, but they also relied on local produce, much of it crafted by women’s hands, to procure catches from individual fishermen. When acquiring a parcel of fish from William Henfield, for example, John Higginson paid

<sup>25</sup>The single existing study of the seventeenth-century fishing trade is Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*. Vickers is primarily concerned with demonstrating how merchants secured labor for their fishing voyages. His analysis, as thorough as it is on this point, reveals little about the internal structure of the fishing industry.

<sup>26</sup>Gibbs, Business Records, 1659–1708, box 2, folder 14, “An account of fish received in 1669.”



part of his bill in locally obtained butter and pork. John Trask provided Higginson fish in partial exchange for Indian corn. Higginson sold Ezekial Wallers malt so Wallers could brew beer for the companies' voyages.<sup>27</sup> Samuel Ingersoll, another prominent merchant, conducted his business in like fashion. In 1692, Ingersoll inventoried "goodes landed in my store." These commodities, which he used to acquire fish for an August venture, included apples, pork, tobacco, cider, beef, beer, bread, and peas. He sold these products, mixed in with some imported merchandise, to "Mr. Stone, Mr. Cole, Mr. Prouse" in exchange for about sixty quintals of cod and mackerel.<sup>28</sup>

An investigation of the supply chain that supported the export trade thus confirms that the local economy continued to function in familiar ways and that merchants were conversant with them. Without the benefit of local exchange—transactions to which women were essential—gathering fish for export would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. Women produced and swapped the goods necessary for maintaining local economies and for integrating them with extra-local economies as well. Producing and processing commodities like butter, cheese, cider, beer, eggs, cornmeal, and meat may have fostered a gendered sense of occupational identity in women, but as they trucked their products, or had them trucked, they also became key players in a larger economic transition.

Elinor Hollingsworth, wife of the wealthy merchant William Hollingsworth of Salem, is a case in point. William's appreciation for his wife's business sense is evident in one typical letter from Barbados. "Fish now at present bares a good rate by reason of the Newfoundlandmen," he wrote. The price, he explained, "will be low enuffe in about three months hence," and thus his timeliness, he bragged, "proved very seasonably." After surveying a variety of other economic conditions and

<sup>27</sup>John Higginson, Account Book: accounts for William Henfield (25 March–17 December 1681); John Trask (29 July–13 August 1681); and Ezekial Wallers (5 April–5 February 1681).

<sup>28</sup>Samuel Ingersoll, Account Book, 1685–1715; August 1692, "Goodes landed in my store (1692)."

prospects, he turned to the major intent of his letter: “send a half a quintle of caske and some apples.”<sup>29</sup> Filling such orders from afar was only one role that Elinor fulfilled to complement her husband’s enterprise. On a much more routine basis, as her ample receipts record, she supplied a couple dozen merchants with beer, a necessity for the voyages they were organizing.

Hollingsworth’s accounts with one loyal client, Captain John Price, capture the scale of her brewing activity. Over a three-year period, she sold him beer on seven separate occasions. In September 1686, as he prepared a voyage to Barbados, she sold him fourteen barrels of beer. Thirteen months later, as Price loaded the last quintals of fish onto his ship, she sold him a full £7 worth of beer. In April 1688, as he planned a shorter trip into the Newfoundland region, she noted “four barrels of beer on the acct. of Capt. Price.” In August 1689, it was “five barrels of ship beare” for the *Mayflower*, and in October of that year (again, for the long voyage to Barbados), Price purchased twenty-two barrels of beer from Hollingsworth.<sup>30</sup> Given that Price was just one of Hollingsworth’s many clients, it is not difficult to gauge the extent of her involvement in the merchant world. Critical to that involvement was the fact that brewing beer was an activity initially forged in the context of local exchange, one that required constant interaction with neighbors, participation in the region’s subsistence goals, and, in the long run, a willingness to seek external markets.

Hollingsworth’s exploitation of a transatlantic opportunity reflects rather than bucks a larger trend, a trend that, on the surface, appears to challenge the conventional historical wisdom that women’s work in the local economy was domestically based, centered on subsistence activities, bound by rigid patriarchal norms, and reinforced by traditional conceptions of family.<sup>31</sup> In Thomas Barnard’s Andover, and throughout New

<sup>29</sup>William Hollingsworth to Elinor Hollingsworth, 19 September 1687, Hollingsworth Family Papers, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

<sup>30</sup>Hollingsworth Family Papers, box 1 folder 1.

<sup>31</sup>Norton, “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience,” p. 602, and Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, pp. 163–65.

England for that matter, economic realities did not conform neatly to a subsistence/capitalistic dichotomy but arranged themselves along a continuum of economic behavior. By portraying Andover and similar communities as isolated from and insignificant to the larger transatlantic endeavors that drew Massachusetts into the Atlantic world, scholars have neglected the details. They have neglected the mechanics—mechanics that, at the most fundamental level, involved women in almost equal measure to men—of how the local economy abetted emerging entrepreneurial initiatives.<sup>32</sup> As merchant and farmer account books prove, women filled direct, niche-oriented roles in fostering Massachusetts' integration into the transatlantic economy. In so doing, they preserved local-external bridges that would prove integral to the growth and development of the New England economy as a whole.

But what to make of Elizabeth Haskett's outburst? Her aggressive response to having her bread weighed, leading as it did to a fistfight with the market clerk, hardly reinforced neighborly norms. The scene may, however, signal the tensions that accompanied the incorporation of external demands into local economies, where customary routines did not require that a woman's produce be weighed and registered in a town's books. The kind of transactions in which women had normally been engaged were bound by trust, relied on people they knew well, and were recorded in private account books. The new requirement, which granted authority to a male town functionary, prompted Haskett to lash out at a system that threatened to disrupt the familiar flow of trade. Haskett was protesting the new social order, in other words, in an ultimately futile effort to preserve ways more commensurate with the founding values of her once small town of Salem. But Haskett, unaware of the

<sup>32</sup>See John McCusker and Russell Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), intro. On the many varieties of economic experiences in New England, see Main, "Gender, Work, and Wages," pp. 39–66, and Virginia Anderson, *New England's Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

role she was playing in larger, more impersonal developments, could not halt their inexorable drive toward a globalizing economy, an economy that would assert itself in the fullness of its promise and despite its numerous perils.

James E. McWilliams, *Associate Professor of History at Texas State University–San Marcos, is the author of, among other books, BUILDING THE BAY COLONY: ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN EARLY MASSACHUSETTS.*