

THE FAMILY BACKGROUNDS OF FOUR LEADERS IN THE EARLY SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT

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Thomas Gaskill Shearman (b. 1834), Louis Freeland Post (b. 1849), Charles Frederic Adams (b. 1851), and Edward Lawson Purdy (b. 1863) practiced law in New York City. They achieved economic success in varying degrees and enjoyed renown in their time but are now largely forgotten. Shearman was a shrewd corporate lawyer and Adams excelled in international law, whereas Post never built a sustainable practice. Purdy was recognized nationally for both his theoretical and practical work in public finance at the municipal level.

Like some others, these men believed the nation was straying from the ideals of its founders. They were taken with the economic analysis of Henry George (b. 1839) and each gained recognition among his followers. None of their siblings participated in the campaigns in support of George's ideas. Within the lineage of the four men, only Tom Shearman's father and sister participated actively in broad social movements. John Hosking Shearman's powerful speeches in England were sometimes noticed in American organs of the temperance crusade. Julia Shearman affiliated with the American Missionary Society at Oberlin College and served during Reconstruction in the South as a teacher in schools for Freedmen and, later, in Turkey.

Joining the Georgist crusade was but one of their efforts to improve the lot of the downtrodden. All four men lectured and wrote about aspects of the proper relationship between labor, capital, government, and civil liberties in an increasingly urban, industrial society. To what extent might aspects of their family backgrounds account for their reformist activities? Very little, for members of their extended families found their place over the years within the leadership of existing institutions.

There were exceptions. Tom's sister was quick to call attention to the deficiencies of her supervisors' performance during her missionary work. Tom's brother, William Henry, joined for a time a dissident faction within and then outside his church.

ANCESTRY

Members of the Shearman family struggled to overcome their deprivation. The economic outlook of Tom's father, John Hosking Shearman, was unstable in September 1827, when he married Sarah Price in England. The next year, he was listed as a "physician and apothecary" among several bankrupts. Their prospects were not much better, when the family moved in two stages to New York City. Of their five children, only Julia, age fourteen, remained in England, perhaps with grandparents. John Hosking, "surgeon" and William, nearly thirteen, arrived in January 1844. In November, Sarah brought John Felix, sixteen, James, going on twelve, and Tommy, eleven. By 1850, the parents were living apart; John Hosking, "surgeon" was living alone, while James and Tommy resided with their mother.¹

The Post, Adams, and Purdy families, in contrast, were Old Stock American. Stephen Post (b. 1604) emigrated in 1633 from Kent, England to Boston with some 700 other followers of Thomas Hooker. In 1635 Post moved with most of the Hooker colony to the "wilds of Connecticut." Francis Adams (b. 1643) left England at age fifteen as an indentured servant; he died a landowner and planter in Charles County, Maryland. Francis Purdy (b. 1595) arrived in Massachusetts Colony and in 1632 settled in Connecticut.²

Five generations of Post's direct ancestors attained distinction in Connecticut as craftsmen, merchants, landowners, or militiamen. Great-grandfather Asa Chapman Post modified this pattern. He became a physician and left the state soon after he and Mary Holcomb of Middlesex County married in early 1793. They moved to Panton Township, Addison County on the southeastern shore of Lake Champlain in western Vermont. Asa and his family moved in 1804 across Lake Champlain to the tiny New Russia settlement, in New York. To treat a growing population, a physician was needed in this isolated, hilly area, which contains the highest peak in the Adirondacks as well as Lake Placid. Dr. Post obtained a certificate to practice medicine and opened two offices in Essex County, one in his rural home and the other in the more prosperous Elizabethtown,

¹ London *Gazette*, June 17, 1828, 479; New York Passenger Lists, January 19, 1844 and November 14, 1844.

John Hosking Shearman was born July 29, 1802 to Thomas and Mary Shearman, according to the record (St. Marylebone Parish Register, Westminster) of his christening on 18 Jan 1819 at Mansfield, Nottingham, England; the New York State Census of 1855 indicated he was born about 1805.

² Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information was found in standard sources.

less than five miles away to the north. He maintained both for some fifty years and was active in local politics.³

Grandfather Lewis Post (b. 1797), first studied medicine with his father and, according to pension files, served in the War of 1812 as a surgeon. Lewis completed his medical training at the University of Vermont. For a time, the young doctor stayed in Elizabethtown and then attempted unsuccessfully to establish a practice in New York City. Lewis moved his family to the frontier, first to Belvidere near Rockford, Illinois and then to Chicago. Following another stint in New York, the family relocated to St. Louis, Missouri.

From the waters of the Chesapeake basin, the descendants of Francis Adams engaged in phases of the overseas trade, mainly with the West Indies. Fred's grandfather, Francis Adams (b. 1793), a native of Matanzas, Cuba, served in the War of 1812, was U.S. consul at Trieste, Italy, and finally, became U.S. consular commercial agent at Matanzas.

Francis Purdy's five sons journeyed about thirty-five miles south to pioneer in Westchester County, New York. Lawson was a descendant of Joseph, who was twice a member of the colonial legislature, a justice of the peace, a town supervisor in Rye, and a devout Episcopalian. Despite such an impressive pedigree, Lawson was the namesake of a noted Episcopal clergyman, Reverend Lawson Carter—his maternal grandfather.⁴

Dr. Lewis Post and Theodocia Ann Steele, had two daughters and three sons. Each of the boys had some preliminary military training, which enabled Judson S. Post to be directly commissioned in September 1861 as an assistant paymaster in the Union Navy. He advanced to full paymaster and, after the Civil War, remained in the service for a time.⁵

³ H. P. Smith, *History of Essex County* (Syracuse, NY: Mason, 1885), 312, 467 (some inaccuracies), 486; George Levi Brown, *Pleasant Valley: A History of Elizabethtown, New York* (Elizabethtown: Post & Gazette, 1905), photo and caption, "Dr. Asa Post, Pleasant Valley's Pioneer Physician," 8, *passim*; Nettie Leitch Major, *C.W. Post--The Hour and the Man, A Biography with Genealogical Supplement* (Washington, DC: Judd & Detweiler, 1963).

L.F. Post and C.W. Post, the cereal king of Battle Creek, Michigan are descendants of two brothers in the ninth generation. Dr. Asa Post (1767-1859) and Mary Holcomb (1775-1842) are buried in Boquet Cemetery, Elizabethtown.

⁴ Maureen McKernan, "The Purdy Family," Peekskill, New York *Evening Star*, August 7, 1951. Lawson is buried with his wife, child, parents, grandparents, and other Purdy relatives in the Christ Church Plot, Greenwood Union Cemetery, Rye, Westchester County, New York.

⁵ Dr. Lewis Post moved to California and later remarried without a divorce; Theodocia remained in St. Louis. By January 3, 1868, she had returned to Stamford, Connecticut and, in church records, was listed as a "widow, Mrs. Theodosia [sic] A. Post."

Eugene Jerome Post (Looie's father) and Frederick Steele Post were born in Elizabethtown and prepared for college in Chicago. In 1840, both entered "The American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy" (today, Norwich University) of Norwich, Vermont and left after two years without graduating with their Class of 1843.

Frederick enlisted in 1846 during the Mexican War as a sergeant in a volunteer unit recruited in New York. Upon his discharge in 1848 at Monterey, he stayed in California, joined the Police Department. and then the Post Office.⁶

Eugene returned to Chicago and commenced a career in business as a clerk in a store. He married in January 1849 Elizabeth Freeland, daughter of David Freeland and Sarah Vliet. The Freelands owned land near Vienna, Warren County, New Jersey, part of which had been granted to Sarah's grandfather, Daniel Vliet, a veteran of the Revolutionary War.

For income, Eugene sold agricultural equipment and, later, sewing machines. In both 1850 and 1860, he was listed as a "merchant," living in the Freeland household. The Posts moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where Eugene became a sales manager with a sewing machine manufacturer.

He made contacts in Hartford in the commercial real estate field and, in the late 1880s, returned to New York City, where he and others opened a real estate brokerage and title company. In his last dozen working years, Eugene managed a warehouse in New York City, which he and a Hartford real estate investor owned. In retirement, Eugene and Elizabeth returned to her ancestral farm in Warren County, New Jersey; he died in 1895 at age 69.

Eugene's sisters married within their circle. Louise Eugenie Post's spouse, John I. Davenport, was a ninth generation descendent of an important Connecticut family, for whom his father, Amzi Benedict Davenport, compiled a definitive genealogy. In Brooklyn, Amzi established an extremely profitable real estate business. He also founded--with two other Congregationalists--Plymouth Church and in 1847 called Henry Ward Beecher to Brooklyn from Indianapolis. Amzi held, just as Tom Shearman would, important lay offices during Beecher's pastorate.

According to Senate Report No. 843 (1881), Judson S. Post was courts martialed and dismissed after an anonymous informant accused him of habitual drunkenness.

⁶ "Eugene Jerome Post" and "First Sergeant Frederick Steele Post," in ". . . Sketches of Past Cadets," v. II, and "Class of 1834, Those Who Did Not Graduate," v. III, William A. Ellis, comp., "The American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy, 1820-1834," *Norwich University, 1819-1911: Her History, Her Graduates, Her Roll of Honor* (Montpelier, VT: Capital City, 1911).

Mary Stickney Post's husband, Ned Underhill, was descended from John Underhill, a founder of New Haven, Connecticut. Ned had lost fingers on his left hand in 1847 at age sixteen, during the first week of his apprenticeship in a woolen factory. He never intended to be an ordinary factory worker, for his father had placed him there to build a foundation for advancing in the field. After the accident, Ned switched his vocational aspirations from manufacturing to stenography and law. He studied the latest texts, published in 1842 and 1847, under the tutelage of a leading American advocate of the Pitman method. He was an apt student, perhaps his teacher's best.⁷

Sir Isaac Pitman had developed in the 1850's a phonetic approach to recording speech. Benjamin "Benn" Pitman had helped his brother develop the system and, to promote its use in America, had established the Phonographic Institute in Cincinnati. Benn had gained attention by recording and publishing in 1865 the testimony in the trial of the conspirators in the assassination of President Lincoln.⁸

Underhill's pamphlet, *Scientific and Uniform Modifications of Phonography* (1863, 1865), and his association with Benn Pittman helped him to become a well-known practitioner. He was chosen the official stenographer for the New York state constitutional convention of 1867-1868 and served at times as the stenographic Clerk of New York's General Assembly as well as a stenographer for the state's higher courts.⁹

Fred's father, William Newton Adams (b. 1818), left at age nineteen his parent's home in Alexandria, Virginia and embarked on a career in international commerce that took him first to Venezuela. In 1844 he married Carmen, a daughter of the president of the Trade Court in Caracas. Don Vicente Michelena was also an Administrator of Customs and was said to be a descendant of Spanish nobility. In 1848, William, Carmen, and their young children moved in haste to Cuba to avoid the potentially dreadful consequences of a revolution in Venezuela. William eventually became a partner in a mercantile house on the island, as well as the American Consul in Santiago de Cuba, where Fred was born.¹⁰

⁷ *The Underhill Society of America: First Annual Report of the Secretary* (The Society, 1893).

⁸ Benn Pitman, recorder, *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, & Baldwin, 1865).

⁹ "Edward Underhill Dead," *New York Times*, June 19, 1898.

¹⁰ "William Newton Adams," *The Chronotype*, v. I No. 6. (June-July 1873), 175; William Newton Adams, Jr., "Adams Family," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, v. VIII, No. 3 (January 1901), 312-314; "Charles Frederic Adams," *The Public*, June 10, 1910, 532-535.

While Fred's Venezuelan mother spoke little English, she had studied in France; his father was fluent in several languages, including Greek. William communicated easily in Latin with officials of the Catholic Church and in Spanish with the Cuban establishment. The household in Cuba included the couple's thirteen children and a large domestic staff.

Of this brood, six would spend their adult years in the United States. The Adams family moved, when Fred was about age ten, from Cuba to New York City and then to a more congenial property in Brooklyn, one with spacious grounds. William, a principal in a leading New York banking house, became a well-known citizen of the Borough.

Susan Bard Johnson Purdy, the first wife of Reverend James Souveraine Purdy, passed away in 1860, during the seventh year of their union. The couple had two girls, one of whom died in infancy. The other entered at age twenty-seven the Episcopal Community of St. John the Baptist and was "professed" after two years: Sister Elisa Monica.

In late 1862, James married Frances Hannah Carter. Lawson, their only child, was born a year later in Hyde Park, Dutchess County, New York. Life must have been pleasant there, for they had two servants and James ministered to wealthy parishioners, including some of the Roosevelt clan.¹¹

The Adams family of Maryland, Virginia, and Cuba was sometimes confused with the Adams family of Massachusetts.

¹¹ "Reverend James S. Purdy, D.D.," *Historical Notes of Saint James Parish: Hyde Park-On-Hudson, New York* (Poughkeepsie, NY: 1913), 25-26; "Deaths: Elisa Monica, CSJB," *The Living Church*, v. CXIII, (October 13, 1946), 28-29.

Susan Bard Johnson (1829-1860) was a daughter of Peter Roosevelt Johnson, M.D. (1827-1905) of Dutchess County, NY, who was a distant relative of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

FAMILY LIFE

The career of Tom Shearman illustrates the way in which a talented, persevering young man might succeed in the middle of the nineteenth century. He and James were educated at home by their mother, who taught school to help support them. He was a precocious learner; it was said that he could read the New Testament at age four. Tom received formal instruction for only six months or so and left the public school in June 1847 at age twelve. The need was critical, for he had to give his mother most of what he earned as an office boy at a law office. He started at a dollar but was making three dollars a week when he left three years later.¹²

Throughout this period Tom used his spare change to buy used paperbound books written by such authors as Macaulay, Bunyan, Carlyle, and Tennyson. He, like a few other ambitious young men, studied fine literature in order to improve his own style. He read Horace Greeley's *Tribune* more often than any other newspaper, because he agreed with the editor's opposition to slavery and to wars of aggression. He became an American citizen in 1855, and after the law firm, Shearman worked in turn as a low paid clerk or bookkeeper for a number of small businesses. The last of these let him go during the financial crisis of 1857.¹³

Two attorneys, not much older than Shearman, allowed him to read law in their library. They also introduced him to an editor of the *New York Times* who needed a law reporter, one who could write intelligibly about complicated cases. On one of his early assignments, Tom successfully covered an extended murder trial and thus secured his place. Through observing this and other judicial routine, he learned the mechanics of court procedure.¹⁴

The law partners hired Shearman over the next couple of years to read and digest cases for their multi-volume work on New York law. They also introduced him to the aged librarian of the Law Institute who engaged Tom to write under his guidance the first volume of *Tillinghast and Shearman's Practice*. The Institute had been founded in 1828 by

¹² "England, Select Births & Christenings, 1538-1975," (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014); Post, "Personal: Thomas G. Shearman," *New York Standard*, March 23, 1892, 9-10.

This series of portraits in the *New York Standard* was based on data solicited by Post from each subject.

¹³ Walter K. Earle, *Shearman and Sterling: How They Grew* (New York: Shearman and Sterling, 1963), 45-46, 49-50, 56-57, 59-63; U.S. Naturalizations, 1791-1992, New York: March 7, 1955.

¹⁴ Earle, *Shearman*, 46.

member firms to create a first-rate library and to facilitate professional growth; it was a precursor of the bar association. John L. Tillinghast knew the subject, but he was not a polished author. Their two volumes, published in 1860 and 1868, would sell well enough to justify the printing of several editions. Tom, according to his memoir, "often laughed to recall," that he, "a mere beginner in the study of law, [was] writing a book to teach lawyers and even judges how that practice should be conducted." To supplement his uncertain income, Tom wrote a daily commentary on new decisions for a law paper in New York. These tasks and other studies enabled him at age twenty-five to pass the New York bar in December 1859, the same year his mother died; John Hosking passed the next year.¹⁵

In New York City, Tom, James, and their mother attended the nearby Tabernacle Baptist Church most Sunday mornings. Sometimes the boys and Sarah also attended an evening service at Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, even though the trip might include a long walk to and from the ferry. They were captivated by Beecher's message and delivery. They moved in 1857 to Brooklyn, where they could live more cheaply than in Manhattan and hear spellbinding sermons every week!¹⁶

Interest in the worldwide temperance movement was uneven within the Shearman family. William Henry Shearman joined first a Baptist congregation upon his arrival in California and a bit later the Mormons in Utah; both groups vigorously opposed the consumption of alcohol. Julia Shearman, ordinarily a teetotaler, found it necessary to "take some ale" from time to time in order to relieve the stress of her missionary work.

In spite of Beecher's convincing talks on the subject, Tom later dismissed the efficacy of laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol:

¹⁵ Quoted in Earle, *Shearman*, 46-47; Thomas Francis Gordon, *Gazetteer of the State of New York*, (New York: The author, 1836), 550.

¹⁶ St. Marylebone Parish Register, Westminster; *London Gazette*, June 17, 1828, 479; NY Passenger Lists, January 19, 1844 and November 14, 1844; Earle, *Shearman*, 60, 67, 119; George H. Hansell, *Reminiscences of Baptist Churches: Baptist Leaders in New York City, 1835-1898* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 62-70; Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 338.

John Hosking Shearman was born July 29, 1802 to Thomas and Mary Shearman, according to the record of his christening on January 18, 1819 at Mansfield, Nottingham, England; the NY State Census of 1855 indicated he was born about 1805. As a young man, Tom Shearman studied Horace Greeley's religious works. Perhaps he had a passing curiosity about the intellectual aspects of spirituality.

. . . Why do men generally drink to intoxication? The great mass of evil caused by the use of liquor will be found in two classes—one the very rich and the other very poor. The rich are tempted to drink by reason of luxury and idleness; the poor are driven to drink by their degradation, weariness, and despondency. Wherever men are ground down by excessive taxation, low wages, high rent, unhealthy tenements, and foul air, they always did and always will drink excessively, no matter what laws you pass against the traffic.¹⁷

Post at first had no playmates his own age, so he spent hours with his maternal grandfather, David Freeland. “With my little hand in his wrinkled one, for he was fast approaching his middle sixties,” Post wrote, “I saw and heard much that interested me” about “the family farm and miles beyond. He helped me appreciate the bubbling spring . . . [that fed] the narrow brook that flowed . . . through our stone milk-house . . . and rippled along the western edge of our farm into the Pequest Creek.” The Pequest widened near the sawmills, flowed under the main road at Vienna, and finally emptied into the Delaware River at Belvidere.¹⁸

Years later he would draw upon these experiences to illustrate the economic benefits of trade: “Do you remember those trips 'over to town' that we used to make with my grandfather when we were boys, usually in the old truck wagon, sometimes on top of a moving mountain of hay, and in the truck body on bob-sleds when sleighing was good? . . . Sometimes he took over a load of hay, at other times a load of apples, at others bags of grain, once in a while corn on the cob. And now and then, you know, grandmother would go along with butter and eggs. No doubt you remember how we used to come back with West India sugar, and New Orleans molasses, and New England codfish . . . sometimes with a bit of furniture for the parlor, or a bolt of cloth for clothing, and at long intervals with a load of anthracite coal for the sitting room fire.”¹⁹

Post and his grandparents developed a strong bond. David offered a quiet, spiritual outlook, one that valued the logical order present in nature more than the chaos that often accompanied the pursuit of material wealth. Yet he was known to “rail at 'communists' in his good-natured way, without knowing much of anything about them except that they were trying to make strange rules for business . . . in which he played in a modest way.” Sarah Vliet Freeland on occasion would display the

¹⁷ Shearman, “Free Trade: The Road to Temperance and Prosperity for All Classes,” a speech by Thomas G. Shearman at Des Moines, Iowa, October 2, 1883.

¹⁸ Post, “Life,” 30-31, 38.

¹⁹ Post, *Social Service* (New York: A. Wessels, 1909), 162-64.

strength so characteristic of her father, Daniel Vliet, and take charge when action was needed. Louis thought their predilections offset one another perfectly.²⁰

Looie blamed the common schools of rural Warren County for not adequately preparing him for high school. Whatever the reason, he ended his formal education after the first semester, just as Tom Shearman had done. His father obtained an apprenticeship for him at the Hackettstown *Gazette*.²¹

Looie could have worked in northwestern New Jersey for the rest of his life. He seemed to have been an ideal candidate for the desk of the folksy country editor and publisher. The standing in Warren County of his mother's extended family was a significant advantage. Judging by his articles that would appear over the next few years in the *Gazette*, he was adept at describing the twists in human behavior that he observed in commonplace activities. Post also had the knack, one that is important to those interested in the latest gossip about local politics, of writing in such a way that readers might surmise that he knew more than he was telling.

Post moved on to a greater challenge in New York at Bradstreet's "printing office." After a couple of months, he obtained an even better assignment in the job printing office of the Brooklyn *Union*. He left the *Union* in the fall of 1866 when his "one-man strike" failed to convince his employer that a lad of seventeen ought to receive a journeyman's rate.²²

Post's father then arranged for him to read law in an office of an established firm in New York City in order to pass the Bar, as Shearman had done. Foregoing preparation for college fairly well determined the course of their working lives. Tom, through talent, hard work, and determination, became a spectacular success in law. Looie appeared to be unable to choose between the fields of journalism and law.

Shearman's professional standing and wealth would assure him an audience among the elite, who in the nineteenth century tended to read the *North American Review*, *Harper's*, and *Atlantic Monthly*. As a journalist, Post's readers were from the laboring and middle classes. He would become increasingly conscious of the line between college men and those without formal training in political economy. He did not express in writing regret that he had not attended college. Instead, he sometimes disparaged the airs of new graduates and the lack of practical knowledge apparent in the writings of their professors. Accordingly, those in

²⁰ Post, *Social Service*, 235.

²¹ Portner, *Post*, 14-16; Post, "Life," 68.

²² Post, "Life," 70-74, "Great Men," Hackettstown, NJ *Gazette*, May 18, 1865, and "Treason," Belvidere, NJ *Intelligencer*, July 20, 1865.

academic circles would often give less weight to Post's views on economic subjects because he did not have a degree.²³

Fred Adams prepared for college at one of the few private day schools for boys which did not resort to corporal punishment. The faculty at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute offered a rigorous curriculum that included the study of modern languages as well as mathematics, sciences, engineering, and some courses at the college level. When he entered Harvard at age nineteen, he was proficient in English, Spanish, French, and Italian.²⁴

Fred earned at Columbia University a Bachelor of Laws "by examination" in 1871, a year that was darkened by the passing of his mother in Cuba. Despite suffering from cancer, she had bravely made what all knew would be her last visit to the island. To compound the family heartbreak, William lost heavily when an associate betrayed his trust and investments once deemed sound failed during the Panic of 1873. A chastened William Newton Adams died four years later.

Along with his work in Washington with the Civil Service Commission, Fred joined a group that advised the Secretary of the Interior in regard to appeals related to cases originating in the Land, Patent, Pension, and Indian Offices. His earnest approach to government matters stood Fred well in 1890 when he accepted from the Secretary of State an appointment as editor of the published version of the proceedings of the First Pan American Conference.

During the summer of 1885, Fred and Henrietta Frances Rozier married in the District of Columbia. Henrietta lived with her parents on their farm near Rockville, the county seat of rural Montgomery County, Maryland. While her father may not have had ties there other than his ownership of land, the surnames of her mother's extended family still grace some streets in old Rockville.²⁵

The newlyweds welcomed the next year the first of their six children; of the three boys, only one would live to maturity. Charles Frederic, Jr., born in Rockville, lacked intelligible speech and would die at

²³ Post, "The College Graduate," *Ethics of Democracy: A Series of Optimistic Essays on the Natural Laws of Human Society* (Chicago: L. S. Dickey & Co., 2d ed., 1903), 23-25; Charles Albro Barker, *Henry George* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 309-10.

²⁴ *First Quarter Century of the Brooklyn Collegiate and Polytechnic Institute* (Brooklyn: The Institute, 1880), 7-14; "Thomas Brooks Adams," John W. Leonard, ed., *Men of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporaries* (New York: L.R. Hamersley, 1908).

²⁵ E.g., Anderson and Beall Avenues.

age twenty-four. William Newton Adams, III, their youngest, passed before his ninth birthday.

In 1892, the family of three moved from Washington to Brooklyn. Fred rejoined the Coudert Brothers, a major New York firm specializing in international law. For most men with his abilities, education, and experience, this affiliation would have culminated in a senior partnership and a commensurate share of the annual profit. Instead, Fred bypassed this opportunity and agreed to serve “Of Counsel,” at not much more than a chief clerk’s salary. This financial sacrifice enabled him to participate only in the cases of his choosing, the most intellectually challenging.

Fred’s close friend, Paul Fuller, facilitated this unusual arrangement. Fuller’s career path was much like Shearman’s. Born poor, each read widely and early on became a bibliophile. Fuller also did not attend college and instead read law in the office of Coudert Brothers. He had started there at age fourteen as an office boy. Both men rose to be the managing partner of their firm, were especially active in their church, generously shared their wealth with those in need, and participated in a number of causes.

In addition to their interest in reforming aspects of government and society, Adams and Fuller bonded because they spent their childhoods in a multilingual environment. Like Fred, Paul read Spanish as well as French literature in the original languages. Paul had lived with two foster families and had absorbed their cultures separately: a Hispanic household during his first nine years in California and in New York with Charles Coudert, a schoolmaster and father of the three brothers. Charles did not adopt Paul; with marriage in 1877 to Leonie Caudert, Paul formally joined the family as a son-in-law and the law firm, as a brother-in-law and ultimately, a partner.

In religion, Charles Frederic Adams ventured well beyond Post’s rejection of formal creeds, rituals, and hierarchies. According to one Adams daughter’s recollection, hers was an “agnostic household,” a milieu quite different from that of her grandparent’s family in Santiago de Cuba.

Fred and his siblings were reared within a dual tradition of service in his father’s Episcopal Communion and his mother’s Roman Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, his brother, Frederic Augustus Adams, became a deacon of the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church, where he was a member for thirty-three years. William Newton Adams, Jr. was a vestryman of historic St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Brooklyn. Amelia Louise Adams and her husband, James Linklater Truslow, were active in their Episcopal church in Summit, New Jersey. Reverend Henry Austin

Adams became rector of the Church of the Redeemer (Episcopal) in New York City, the religious home of Lawson Purdy.

Before Fred moved from Brooklyn to Washington, D.C., he was associated with groups within the “free thought” continuum. In late 1875, when he was twenty-five, Fred helped a dozen other men form the Philosophy Club of Brooklyn. Most were lawyers or businessmen, not academics, who wished to provide a setting for discussing “all philosophical subjects,” especially “modern thought.”

There was some overlap in sentiment and membership between the Philosophy Club of Brooklyn and the older Free Religious Association of Boston. The organizers of the FRA in 1868 believed that the world was transitioning “from Christianity to Free Religion” and thus the Association ought to recognize “no authority but reason and right.” The leaders clothed themselves in the intellectual garb of New England’s Transcendentalists, thus it was fitting the name of Ralph Waldo Emerson topped the roll and the thought of the late Theodore Parker was the main intellectual wellspring. Membership was offered to everyone, with or without religious affiliation, for one dollar per year.

In one letter to an editor, Fred sarcastically referred to the Pope as “that ‘infallible’ old gentleman in the Vatican.” For professional reasons in general and because his mentor, Paul Fuller, was a devout Roman Catholic, Fred did not otherwise publicize his interest in free thought. As late as 1911, however, Fred was known well enough within these circles to be chosen to deliver the major address at the dedication of a statue to honor Colonel Robert Green Ingersoll, once the nation’s best-known agnostic and citizen of his birthplace, Peoria, Illinois.

The following day, some in the daily press mistakenly reported that one Charles F. Adams, a descendant of presidents, had been the featured speaker. More telling, the locals in Peoria as well as at the Brooklyn *Eagle* did not believe that a ceremony honoring the memory of an outspoken agnostic was an occasion important enough to summarize in print the substance of Fred’s speech, even if the oration were credited, erroneously, to a notable member of the famous Massachusetts family.

Just before Lawson Purdy’s thirteenth birthday, his mother died. Lawson and his father ultimately moved into the home of Lawson’s unmarried aunts in Rye, New York, where his father died in 1883 at age fifty-seven. The early deaths of his parents and the lack of siblings largely account for Purdy’s close affiliation with his wife’s family and two elite institutions.²⁶

²⁶ “Necrology, 1882-1883: James Souveraine Purdy,” *The Church Almanac: Protestant Episcopal Church Society*, v. LIII (1984), 102-103.

At St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire, an Episcopal boarding school, its stern headmaster ruled with a velvet hand. The conservative priest and a gifted faculty, mainly clerics, endeavored for nearly four decades to produce "Christian gentlemen." The boys subsisted on a steady diet of Latin and Greek literature and ancient history, studies that Looie Post found unpalatable at a public high school. At St. Paul's Anniversary Celebration in 1952, Lawson was recognized as the eldest alum present and for his years of service as a "Form Agent." He led the parade of old timers "without recourse to crutches, cane, or chair" in their ceremonial march behind a brass band!²⁷

Lawson had a life-long, very personal relationship with Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. His father, Reverend James S. Purdy, had once been a tutor at Trinity. Its nearly one hundred students could study the natural sciences in addition to the classics, for which schools like St. Paul's had prepared them so well.

Less than a year after his graduation from the "Little Ivy," he and Mary Jacobs McCrackan married in Brooklyn. Mary and Lawson had known each other for some time, since her younger brother, William Denison McCrackan, had been one class behind Lawson at both St. Paul's and at Trinity. Her older brother, John Henry McCrackan, was one class ahead at Trinity.²⁸

There were other connections. Lawson and Mary's two siblings were fraternity brothers in Psi Upsilon. Later, Purdy established at Trinity an endowment in honor of his brother-in-law, Reverend John Henry McCrackan, Class of 1882.²⁹

During the first year or so of their marriage, Lawson and Mary toured countries in Europe and Asia Minor and then returned to Trinity for graduate study. He received his master's degree in 1887 and, in 1908, an honorary LL.D. That year, alums in New York City elected him president

²⁷ James P. Conover, *Memories of a Great Schoolmaster: Dr. Henry A. Coit*, (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1906). St. Paul's School, *Alumni Horae*, "Anniversary 1952," v. 32 (Summer 1952), 45-48; "1958 Alumni Fund, Form Agent," v. 38 (Spring 1958), 26; and "Obituary: Lawson Purdy," v. 39 (Autumn 1959), 2.

²⁸ ". . . History of the Manhattan Single Tax Club," *Single Tax Review*, XIV (January-February, 1914), 35-39, and "William Denison McCracken," XXIII (July-August, 1923), 105.

Hamlin Garland introduced author William Denison McCracken and Lawson Purdy to the writings of Henry George. Purdy joined the Manhattan Single Tax Club on April 28, 1893 and McCracken on August 26, 1894. Both would serve as its president.

²⁹ *Trinity College Bulletin*, v. I (July 1953), 1; "Chapel," *Trinity College Endowment Report of the Treasurer, 2012-2013*.

of their organization. Lawson served Trinity, beginning in 1933, as a Life Trustee and was recognized for several years as the oldest alum.³⁰

Like Shearman among the Congregationalists, Lawson Purdy was an archetypal leader within his Protestant Episcopal faith. Before 1914, he was the junior warden of a relatively small, “ritualistic” congregation in New York City. When the number of members declined, the Vestry arranged a merger with another struggling church, but retained the name, “Church of the Redeemer.” A general division within the Communion turned on the extent to which parishioners wished to be associated with Roman Catholic traditions yet remain within the Episcopalian fold. While there were broad liturgical and linguistic issues, it was local demographic change that posed the greatest threat to Redeemer’s economic viability. While some wished to drop “Protestant,” a growing number of affluent parishioners were relocating and thus taking their substantial pew rents from churches in the city to those in the suburbs.

These and other uncertainties led the brother of Charles Frederic Adams, Reverend Henry Austin Adams in 1892 to sever his relationship with the Church of the Redeemer and embrace the Roman Catholic faith. According to press accounts, Henry readily admitted he was not a theologian. He was troubled, however, by disputes between professors at the seminary as well as officials of the church, who could not reach agreement concerning issues important to him. He also complained about the occupants of pews of many “high” Episcopal churches, his strong preference, which were filled with wealthy, self-satisfied congregants. Few displayed a proper concern for the needy.

In June 1910, the Vestry of the Church of the Redeemer offered its property for sale. The congregation hoped either to join another or secure a building at a more promising location. Warden Lawson Purdy was well equipped by training, experience, and temperament to tackle the legal and financial issues confronting the shrunken congregation. In 1914 the Vestry at last found a ready and willing buyer. Since the proceeds barely covered the mortgage, its Bishop disestablished the Church of the Redeemer. Purdy thereupon joined the much larger and more prosperous congregation at Trinity Church, located on the corner of Broadway and Wall. Beginning in 1919, Lawson served in turn as vestryman, junior warden, and comptroller.

SIBLINGS

³⁰ Mary and Lawson had one child, Mary Sanford Purdy, who never married and in 1930 resided in a psychiatric hospital in Dutchess County, New York.

John Felix Shearman (b. 1828) first studied medicine, probably with his father. He then became interested in mechanical drawing and engineering. In 1850, he was employed as a “draughtsman” and living with his wife, Caroline Bridgden Shearman, in her parents’ home in New York City. John Felix was a widower in the New York state census of 1855 and did not remarry.³¹

He continued his professional career in a department of New York City’s government and eventually became a project superintendent for a private company that subcontracted engineering services for such major public undertakings as an inter-borough bridge. He also gained a reputation in his later years as a knowledgeable contributor to technical journals in the power industries (nom de plume: Peter Van Brock). John Felix spent some time around 1910 with his distant Shearman cousins, pioneer farmers in Greene County, Iowa. When John Felix died in Columbia County, New York in 1914, the identity of Peter Van Brock was at last revealed. There seems to be no record of his membership in a religious organization.³²

William Henry Shearman (b. 1831) lived in New York with his father until he joined at age eighteen a relatively small group of forty-niners. The men organized themselves, like others of their time, as though they were members of a volunteer militia. They elected their leaders, pooled their resources, and enthusiastically set out on the arduous overland journey to California. When they were nearly overwhelmed by an outbreak of cholera, the sojourners took refuge in the Mormon settlement at Salt Lake City. Once recovered, Shearman and a few comrades joined a much larger wagon train and resumed their trek, via the southern route through Los Angeles and then north to the gold fields near Sacramento. His first contact with anyone of the Mormon faith came during his long journey to California. William learned more from friends living in the relatively large colony of believers near Sacramento; he was baptized in 1855.

Tom and his brother, William, left the Baptists for different reasons. While Beecher’s preaching attracted Tom, it was the mysticism

³¹ *Maritime News*, (San Francisco, CA: Maritime National Historical Park, March-April-May 2013), 2.

A number of John Felix Shearman’s renderings of varieties of steam engines are in the museum of the Maritime National Park in San Francisco.

³² “Obituary: John F. Shearman,” *Power*, v. 39 No. 12 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1914), 430.

of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that first interested William. He himself had once experienced a vision of Jesus Christ.

Elder William Shearman first embarked on a two-year proselytizing mission in California. In 1860, he moved to Salt Lake City, where he married a daughter of an English confidant of both Prophet Joseph Smith and President Brigham Young. In 1862, William led a mission to England that lasted nearly three-years. Thereafter, he navigated artfully between commercial ventures and Church politics.

When William and a dozen other men expressed in print their disenchantment with some aspects of Brigham Young's leadership style, they were excommunicated in 1869. William, along with the others, became interested in the international spiritualist movement. They were fascinated with the prospect of communicating through séances with the late Prophet Joseph Smith as well as with Biblical personages. During this period, the Shearman family attended an Episcopal church in Salt Lake City. William also served as a trustee of the parish's elementary school. In his frail, last years, William did rejoin the Saints.

Julia Anne Shearman (b. 1830) pursued in turn many of the opportunities available to an assertive, single woman: Christian missionary and teacher, keeper of a boarding house, sometime poet, essayist, and peace advocate. She alone among the Shearman children retained her British citizenship, even though she lived for a few years in the United States. Julia moved on to Rome and then to Switzerland, but after 1900 returned to England.

James Augustine Shearman (b. 1833) was an artist and lithographer. He and his family moved in 1886 from the United States to London, so James could study the techniques of the great European masters. They later joined a colony of artists in Florence, Italy, where they lived until they returned in 1916 to the United States.

Tom and Elmira were as close to his siblings as travel in the nineteenth century would allow. Their custom after 1872 of spending summers in Italy and Switzerland afforded them opportunities for extended visits with his sister and brother. Tom left a trust for each of them in his will and likely subsidized their activities abroad. In 1889, Julia bought a small hotel in a village on a lake in Switzerland and operated it for about five years. Brother Tom probably supplied most, if not all, of the capital for its purchase, for what at times was likely the Shearman family home abroad.

Of the Eugene and Elizabeth Post's four children, only their daughter, Sarah Theodosia Post, stayed in Warren County. "Docia" married in 1883 Lewis Barnes Hoagland. He became a widely admired

country doctor who developed a lucrative practice centered in Oxford, about fifteen miles southwest of Hackettstown.³³

Edward Semore (Seymour) Jesse Post, went to New York City and in 1875 at age twenty-one joined the post office. Over the next forty-seven years, he progressed from clerk to assistant postmaster. He took sick leave in 1922 because of a circulatory condition and never returned to duty. More than 300 friends, mainly postal employees and fellow Masons, did come from New York to attend what was then Hackettstown's largest funeral.³⁴

The careers of the youngest, David Judson Post, reflected the trend in consumer tastes. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Hartford, Connecticut area was in its "Golden Age" as a manufacturing center. David started as a clerk in the office of a sewing machine factory, where his father, Eugene, was a manager in the sales department. However, the market for sewing machines collapsed from overproduction. Albert Pope, formerly an importer of velocipedes, began production in 1878 of the first American bicycle, the "Columbia," in an unused section of the huge plant. His Pope Manufacturing Company became New England's largest employer.

By 1897, David was the treasurer of the Veeder Manufacturing Company of Hartford. Curtis H. Veeder, an inventor and the founder, was supplying counting devices only to the textile industry when he noticed the increasing popularity of bicycles as evidenced by the growth of the Pope Manufacturing Company. Serious riders, he thought, would like to know how many miles they had pedaled. Veeder utilized the underlying principles of his loom counters to design in 1895 a simple odometer, the "cyclometer," for bicycles. After the turn of the century, he developed the first odometer for automobiles. Veeder Manufacturing expanded until it was producing a full line of counting devices for several industries besides textiles, bicycles, and automobiles. At the beginning of the twentieth century, David also formed his own company, Post & Lester, which, during the "brass era" of early automobile design, built the shiny carbide gas headlights that were used by some manufacturers and are prized by collectors.³⁵

³³ James P. Snell, *History of Sussex and Warren Counties* (Everts & Peck, 1881), 742-43; *Historical Sites of Warren County* (Belvidere NJ: Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders, 1965), 91-2.

³⁴ Post, "Life," 23, and "Journal," March 2 and October 26, 1922, and November 18 and 25, 1923.

³⁵ Post, "Journal," March 2 and November 15, 1922.

In New York City, William Newton Adams, Jr. (b. 1846) was less successful in banking than his father and turned to real estate brokerage. Thomas Brooks Adams (b. 1852), on the other hand, went to the mountain West. He became treasurer of the American Smelting and Refining Company and a state legislator in Wyoming. Thomas married a daughter of the president of the Bank of America, returned to New York City, and on Wall Street prospered far more than any of his brothers.

Ernest Henry Adams (b. 1857) and Henry Austin Adams (b. 1861), for idiosyncratic reasons, had indifferent careers as a bookkeeper and a clergyman respectively. The youngest, Amelia Louise Adams (b. 1850), married James Linklater Truslow, Jr., a son of a wealthy cork wholesaler, whose company later became Armstrong Cork.³⁶

³⁶ Allan Nevins, "The Busy Career of James Truslow Adams: A Personal Memoir," in *James Truslow Adams: Select Correspondence* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1968; reprint: Transaction, 2012), 1-7.

The historian, James Truslow Adams, was a nephew of Charles Frederic Adams and a grandson of William Newton Adams.