



The Very Ambitious Mellen Chamberlain

Mellen Chamberlain may have seldom pleased his demanding father or posted a stream of letters to his family and former friends in Peacham, but he did join the ranks of a new American elite: the deal makers.

By JOE SHERMAN

Six feet tall, hair light, forehead high, eyes blue, nose straight, mouth large, chin prominent. So described by the American consul in Athens in late December 1838, Mellen Chamberlain was handed an official document to assist his travels through the Ottoman Empire pitching an invention as marvelous in its own way as the flying carpet associated with his final destination, Constantinople.¹ The invention was the electromagnetic telegraph, patented earlier that year in Washington by Samuel Morse. Embossed, signed by Chamberlain, and wax sealed, the document requested that its bearer “in case of need be given all lawful aid & protection.”²

The forty-three-year-old Vermonter would need it.

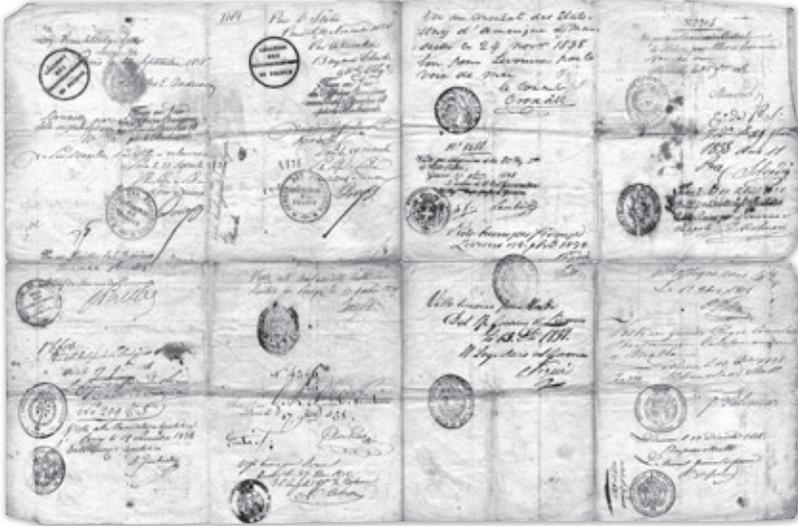
The following week, the first in 1839, he arrived in Alexandria and entered the exotic and turbulent Ottoman Empire, which was on a long, slow decline. Exactly why Chamberlain was there trying to sell a so-

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Passport issued in Washington D.C. "on the 56th year of the Independence of the United States." Note Chamberlain's signature on the lower left, page 1. Permission for him to travel in Italy in 1838 is on the upper right. On the reverse, signatures and stamps reveal Chamberlain's itinerary abroad. Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73:7.2, Vermont Historical Society.



called “infidel invention” was no mystery. He was a businessman and had just concluded five years of success selling platform scales, the key components made in Vermont and shipped by rail and water west of the Allegheny Mountains. The experience had prepared him to repeat the pattern, a futuristic telegraph replacing the platform scale, everywhere east of France, which included the Ottoman Empire. Or so he thought.

The telegraph he hauled around on stagecoaches, steamers, and packet boats was not ready for show time. A cumbersome contraption fabricated from piano parts, cannon balls, rolling tables, and a concise pen and ink setup that revolved electronically, the device left a code of dots and dashes. Morse himself had helped build the prototype in Paris, once he and Chamberlain negotiated a contract. In early November the Vermonter had set off with a sidekick half his age, a graduate of Dartmouth College named Sam Brown.³ Two possible investors, a Mr. Swords of New York and a Mr. Bennett of Charleston, South Carolina, soon joined them.⁴ The marketing adventure could, if successful, elevate Chamberlain into the ranks of the richest men in the world, many of whom were making fortunes from the Industrial Revolution.⁵

For six months Chamberlain and Brown demonstrated the telegraph in Florence, Athens, Alexandria, Beirut, Damascus, Constantinople, and elsewhere. In Athens, a twenty-four-pound cannon ball broke free from the wires and almost injured the eighteen-year-old queen of Greece. In a letter to a friend in Paris, Chamberlain made light of the incident. The cannon ball, he said, “came near falling on Her Majesty’s toes, but happily missed, as we, perhaps, escaped a prison.”⁶ Once the team reached Cairo, Chamberlain told his friend, he intended to show the telegraph to Muhammad Ali. He hoped that Ali, the Egyptian pasha and viceroy, would offer him money for the demonstration, along with “a beauty from his seraglio.”⁷ Ali’s harem was infamous. He had nine wives and ninety-six children. He also had a reputation for savagery, having plotted the slaughter of Egypt’s Mamelukes, the camel-riding slave soldiers who protected the country’s ruling elite, in 1811.⁸ No evidence exists of Chamberlain achieving either of his goals in Cairo.

Once in Constantinople, efforts to secure a meeting with Sultan Mahmud II proved futile. A demonstration did take place in a partially-built Congregational seminary overlooking the Bosphorus. Commenting on the event, Reverend Cyrus Hamlin, a missionary known for his mechanical aptitude, said that the device “did not work with precision, nor with very satisfactory results. Instead of the steel point marking the paper . . . the mark was blurred, and sometimes there was no mark at all. Still, it was a demonstration of what could be done, and as such it was extremely interesting.”⁹

Not long afterwards, on May 14, 1839, the sales odyssey ended abruptly on the Danube River. When a packet boat capsized in rapids downstream of Vienna, Chamberlain, the prototype, Swords and Bennett, and all records, orders, and notes from the trip, including any possible sales, went to a watery grave. The group had been en route to Paris in response to a letter from Morse urging Chamberlain to return promptly because Tsar Nicholas was interested in the telegraph and a trip to St. Petersburg was imminent.¹⁰ Not all of Chamberlain's party died in the rapids, however. Sam Brown survived, having left the others early to return to Dartmouth, where he soon became a professor of Oratory and Belles-Lettres.

The disaster quashed Morse's hope that his invention would succeed in the Orient. It would be five more years before he found supporters as committed to the telegraph as Mellen Chamberlain had been after first laying eyes on the device in Paris. He immediately had seen the beauty and potential of what, in Sam Brown's words, was "quite a rough affair—rude and incomplete."¹¹

I first became aware of Mellen Chamberlain in 2001. At the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge, I was checking out the exhibitions and, purely by chance, stuck my head into a small, inconspicuous tent. There, by itself, was a photograph. On closer inspection, it was a photo of a portrait. Chamberlain looked about thirty, and had the appearance of a Roman senator, complete with the hauteur and forehead curls. He was posed, confident, a bit arrogant looking, and very intriguing.

The brief narrative made my head spin. Basically, it framed the above tale, absent substantiating details. There were just enough facts to make the story mesmerizing. I soon spent a day doing research in the Vermont Historical Society archives. I found the immensely informative research done by Yakup Bektas on the 1838 and 1839 travels, just published in the *British Journal of the History of Science*, including the meet-up of Chamberlain and Morse in Paris, the construction of the prototype in Morse's flat (assisted by Sam Brown), colorful anecdotal bits about how they got all the parts, and the launch of the adventurous



Mellen Chamberlain (1795-1839,) a portrait. Artist unknown. Vermont Historical Society.

sales trip, first to Italy, then to Greece, Egypt, the Levant, and on to Constantinople. Any personal correspondence from Chamberlain, however, which I had hoped to find to assist me in bringing the man alive on the page, was not in the archives. The sole letter written in his hand had been sent from Dartmouth College to a younger sister, Abigail, when he was a seventeen-year-old first-year student.

The spirited letter is worth quoting at length, for it gives us a sample of Chamberlain's voice and persona as a young man ribbing his sister, as siblings often do.

Sister Abigail Chamberlain

A communication from me so soon will doubtless produce some surprise and I will honestly confess that its more from necessity than friendship that I now write. On Monday last I found at the tavern a packet directed to me and on opening it I found a muff. It appears to be sable skin and is lined with flannel. Notwithstanding all my researches I cannot find from whence it came nor where it should be sent. It came in the southern mail and from that I conclude it came from Peacham. If you can by any means inform me whose it is I wish you would be expeditious for it would relieve me from great perplexity. My acquaintances are very kind. I have not been obliged to pay a single postage since I have been here nor break a wax seal which is a matter of great convenience to such a lazy and covetous fellow as I am How it has happened that one who professes to be so great a scribbler as you has not written I cannot conceive. I rather think however that you are so much taken up by a fine house or some fine person or thing that you cannot find time to address poor I. If I do not hear something from Peacham soon I shall conclude you are in want of paper and will send some soon.

Your humble Servant Mellen Chamberlin¹²

In 2006 I hiked the shore of the Danube River close to where Chamberlain drowned. I pondered the rapids, which were barely discernible. I wondered if he could swim. How large was the packet boat? What had his wife Catherine and their daughter Katty thought as they awaited his return to Paris? Hadn't they come to Europe for the Grand Tour, not to be stuck all winter in the gray, damp European capital?

For the next decade I thought of Chamberlain irregularly. In our era of entrepreneurial mania, I saw him as tragic, an ambitious young businessman who had lost his life for a dream, not just for money. I began to feel an intrinsic connection to him for reasons difficult to explain yet welcomed. I think it was his romanticism, the business savvy blinded by emotion, the hunger for adventure, the willingness to put emotions above intellect, to be stupid in pursuit of the improbable.

Then, in 2015, the story got a break. The Chamberlain family archives had been enriched. I called the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury to ask about their archival materials for Fairbanks Scales in the



Packet boat on the Danube River, 1842, painted by William Henry Bartlett. An illustrator of topographical views, Bartlett traveled extensively in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire. He romanticized Devin Castle overlooking the confluence of the Danube and Morava Rivers, roughly thirty miles downstream of the rapids in which Chamberlain's packet boat capsized on May 14, 1839. Courtesy of the author.

1830s and was informed that they were being transferred to a new location, the St. Johnsbury History and Heritage Center. Apologizing for the temporary disorganization, just before she hung up, the director of the center, Patty Pearl, said, “Oh, wait, wait. There might be something. Alan Yale . . . yes . . . Alan wrote a book about Fairbanks Scales.”¹³

A very good book, it turned out. Yale, graciously, met with me and shared his manuscript and information relevant to the time frame of my interest. It was exciting to finally talk to a living person who was familiar with the mysterious Mellen Chamberlain. With the two boosts, the refreshed Vermont Historical Society holdings and Yale’s historical digging done for his Ph.D., I applied for the VHS’s Weston Cate Fellowship and was awarded it in the fall of 2016.

AMBITION AND MASCULINITY

I never cease to be surprised that the America Lafayette observed in the early 1830s is, in most respects, recognizably the America at the end of the Twentieth Century—even though the demographic and ethnographic composition of the country has totally changed.

—Susan Sontag, interview in *The Paris Review*, 1995¹⁴

“He was all about masculinity,” said Jill Mudgett, after I described Mellen Chamberlain to her. An independent historian with a rich knowledge of Vermont in the 1820s and 1830s, Mudgett said that the definition of manhood changed while Chamberlain was growing up. In-

stead of staying on the farm, being loyal to the family, a town, and the soil, some young men across New England left the farms and the hills and settled in new territories. Territories in which there were cities that radiated “the power of opportunity. You stayed in Peacham, you were going to be a loser. A man was supposed to have get up and go.”¹⁵

Mellen Chamberlain had plenty of get up and go. He also had deep roots in Peacham, or as deep as possible in a town established only a few decades earlier, in 1763, when New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth had granted the hill town a charter. William Chamberlain, Mellen’s father, was a veteran of the Revolutionary War, and fought in the battles of Lexington and Bennington. A surveyor by trade, self-educated, once he settled in Peacham William Chamberlain bought large tracts of land, as well as acreage alongside streams that could provide water power. He lobbied for the first church in Peacham, which was Congregational; he championed a public school, the Peacham Academy, which accepted students of both sexes eight years and older. He experienced the full gauntlet of public service, becoming a justice of the peace in Caledonia County, a Vermont state representative, a U.S. congressman, and, finally, the lieutenant governor of Vermont.¹⁶ Few individuals were more intertwined with life in Peacham in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than William Chamberlain. His civic service, with travel by horseback and carriage over rough roads, kept the father busy. His wife Jane raised their three boys and four girls.

Mellen was the oldest son. After attending Peacham Academy, he went to Dartmouth College. He started as a medical student but switched to law,¹⁷ graduated in 1816, and returned home, where he soon became the headmaster of Peacham Academy. His father was a trustee, his siblings were students, and old friends and his family circle became the matrix of daily life. After one year, though, Chamberlain left Peacham for good. He went south to Litchfield, Connecticut, and studied at the Litchfield Law School, then to Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, where he briefly taught school.¹⁸ He returned north again, but only to Montpelier. He read law with Samuel Prentiss,¹⁹ a highly esteemed judge, before moving to Castine, Maine, a lively, affluent shire town overlooking Penobscot Bay. It was a far cry from rural Vermont. Ships regularly sailed from Castine to Portland, Portsmouth, Boston, New York, and beyond. Prosperous and lively, with the county courthouse located there, the town brought Chamberlain plenty of legal work as a new attorney.²⁰ His tenure in Castine, which began in 1821, ended twelve years later, when he signed an agreement with Erastus and Thaddeus Fairbanks in St. Johnsbury, about fifteen miles from his birthplace, and launched his career as an entrepreneur.²¹

It was a career path that allied Chamberlain firmly with his contemporaries who were abandoning rural New England for opportunities elsewhere, mainly in cities. The new path seemed to ruffle William Chamberlain's temperament, as it did the temperaments of other fathers upset by the tradition-altering moves of restless sons. One letter signaling William's discontent was posted to his son on February 25, 1821, shortly after Mellen had settled in Castine. Foregoing paternal tactfulness, William castigated his son in the opening sentences, then calmed down:

I have abundant reason to scold you for your abominable remissness in writing. It is now a whole year since you left your paternal home and two letters is all I have from you, and whether you have ever received mine as I have written several times, I cannot tell as you have not acknowledged their receipt . . . what can be the reason of all this. Have you forgotten your friends or are you so immersed in laziness that you cannot find time to drop a line or two to let us know something . . . or are you really in such a forlorn situation that you do not mean we shall be humbled with your misfortunes. But whatever may be the cause of this neglect it certainly would be pleasing to hear from you often to know your real situation and prospects.²²

Misfortunes were not hounding the young lawyer. Outside the orbit of his father, he was maturing. One of his first feats in Castine had been to evade a state mandate requiring a new attorney in the Pine Tree State to clerk with an established one before hanging out his own shingle.²³

A second interesting letter from William Chamberlain, more than a year later, followed a visit to Castine, during which he saw his son in action. The letter was a blend of praise, criticism, and advice on morality with Biblical references.

My Dear Son,

When I left you in Castine it was with a heavy heart. Reflecting on my situation, my age [68] and infirmity, I had much reason to expect it might be the last parting. The distance between us is so great as in all probability [it will] prevent my ever attempting such another journey. I know it is both inconvenient and expensive for you to leave your office for a long time. I can not, however, relinquish the hope of again seeing you here among your friends—But why should I be very anxious on this subject? The mere pleasure of seeing you without being able to do you any substantial good is nearly counterbalanced by the pain of parting. . . .

I was highly pleased with the civility and respect shown to me on your account and with your general prospects in business. But I well know that young men at your age and circumstances are exposed to many temptations, and I fear that in your situation you are peculiarly so. I do not know indeed but all your ladies are as chaste as Diana and though I would fain believe your principles of virtue and honor are such as to forbid your becoming a seducer, yet it is far from impossible that you may be seduced—you will know from the hints I gave you, to what I allude—such is the

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native depravity and propensity of the human race that they sometimes become so fascinated as to lose all sense of fine conduct and . . . often precipitate [on] themselves infamy and ruin . . .

However ill-founded my suspicions may be to some persons this advice can do you no harm. . . . Retire with your Bible in hand and read with serious attention the character of the foolish woman in the 7th chapter of Proverbs and the advice given by the wise man on that subject to his son—and think not that you stand secure in your own strength against the wiles of the temptors unless you refrain your foot from their path.

William’s letter warns against “entangling alliances” in Maine, and then wishes his oldest son the same happiness that he observed between Mellen’s brother, William Jr., and Sarah, his new wife, in Wells, Maine, on the trip. The letter ends with the suggestion that Mellen visit a certain family in Concord, New Hampshire, and their daughter Mary. “She is in my view a very Charming Girl if you think of her as I do . . . [and if] you would endeavor to become acquainted with her.”²⁴

The letter reveals that Mellen Chamberlain was not yet married nor involved. His response to his father’s suggestions has been lost. Mary of Concord stays very much in the shadows, as does Catherine Crosby, the daughter of a wealthy Castine businessman, whom he soon courted and married.

In his late twenties Chamberlain set his own course, one, in his day, followed only by men. Letters from associates and cousins allude to details in his life. They confirm a romantic disposition, a talent for negotiation, success at making business deals, and an ascent in the eyes of others as a force to be reckoned with, just like his father was in Vermont. William obviously loved his son deeply, missed him, and prayed for his soul. As the son entered his thirties, he was self-aware and dutiful, though less to place than to desire. The fast track he was on no longer allotted him time to take the long dirt road north to Peacham. Letters posted to him from up north by the youngest brother, Ezra, who stayed in Peacham and tended to the family’s needs, were witty, self-deprecating, and occasionally described their father in his declining days. One posted February 1, 1827, reported:

Father and mother have lately moved and Abigail and I are helping keep up appearances at the old place. It would be with real pleasure could I tell you that our parents are spending the last years of their lives in peace and quietness, but father’s capriciousness of disposition increases with his years whilst his other faculties are continually failing. These things are the cause of much unhappiness to those who live with him. Should he continue long of his present temper the worst is to be feared, but we hope that the kindly influence of religion or some other course will effect a change in his feelings. At any rate if you were here I believe you might be the means of doing him essential good, besides pulling our solemn brows out of continence by showing us your cheerful face again.²⁵

It was not to be: William Chamberlain died in 1828, leaving his heirs well taken care of with a thoughtful dispersion of cash, extensive properties, and several homes.²⁶

Then came the dynamic 1830s.

Mudgett describes the times rather colorfully. Ambition was the new novelty, she said, an adventurous, emotional road that motivated people to migrate. “It’s a big theme in Vermont. The 1820s was the decade you saw the out-migration kick in. It dominates the 1830s, the 1840s. Mellen Chamberlain seems right in line with that. The promise of opportunity was the Industrial Age’s new drug. A stimulant you lived, rather than imbibed. And to feel promise, engage with it—for most young men that meant travel, mobility.”²⁷

A network of canals and rivers made such mobility possible. It was a brief era, one that competed with the horse and would soon be eclipsed by the railroads. Though short, the era had a tremendous impact on the future of Vermont. It put cracks in the unyielding belief in sons assuming the farm and challenged the patriarchy. As for Chamberlain’s generation becoming businessmen, Mudgett said she thought the Peacham native was in a distinct minority. “A lot of young people became missionaries. The less moral became businessmen. Yet how cramped the women were. They were home bound. You confront their emotions in their long, plaintive, over-flowing letters.”²⁸

I certainly found plenty of emotion in the Chamberlain family letters by women. Some, like the youngest sister, Abigail, wrote letters so long that the sentences filled both sides of a standard sheet, then invaded the margins like vines, the words getting smaller and smaller, filled with thoughts and feelings the writer squeezed into the dwindling space. Overall, however, the letters often circled in on themselves and on family matters rather than reflecting on the larger culture of rapidly changing times.

At the time, now called the Early Republic, spanning forty years from the late 1780s to the late 1820s, asceticism and ceaseless work, two bedrock attributes of Puritan-anchored New England, came under sustained pressure from forces of change that included industrial growth and westward expansion. A core emotion driving the new era was pride. Pride had been considered a sin in colonial New England. Children had been taught to fear pride in the new world.²⁹ Two hundred years later, pride and greed began to congeal into ambition, like iron and carbon made steel. The tandem emotions were good for progress and easier on the soul, granting it freedom. An ambitious young man like Mellen Chamberlain could praise or demonize pride and greed as he saw fit for his own purposes without being ostracized. Industry was

especially fond of pride because it fueled ambition. As J. M. Opal wrote in *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England*, “From pride grew ambition, the ‘predominant vice’ of adolescents and headstrong youth [and] the best answer to ambition, of course, was industry.”³⁰

A crucial thing to remember is that when Chamberlain came of age the meaning of industry was undergoing a radical transition. Before the Industrial Age, “to be industrious was to be a reliable contributor to the working household, not a go-getter with discrete aspirations [who fled to the city.]” Industrious farmers, Opal wrote, were “‘fixed in one spot’ and accepted and were satisfied with the ‘narrow limits’ of their lives . . . industry applied more often and effectively *inside* the household, where it advised youth that their path in life, as in work, led from and then back to the household.”³¹

Beyond the Farm follows the lives of six young men who grew up in New England in the early nineteenth century and got beyond the spot, pushing the narrow limits of their time and paying for it in contrasting ways. For me, a writer with a Masters of Business Administration degree in marketing, reading Opal and listening to Mudgett was enlightening. I had always presumed that ambition was as American as apple pie and came over on the Mayflower. Not one course I ever took in business school mentioned otherwise or challenged that conviction. A professor who did so would have upset the glorified narrative of capitalistic righteousness as a natural force hiding inside the agrarian soul, awaiting mobility and technology and the lure of wealth to bring it forth. That was a subtext preached by the titans of the Industrial Age, which was already well launched and reshaping Britain and the European continent before the United States jumped on the coal-fired bandwagon. That I knew so little about the social and religious convictions that gave rise to ambition startled me. The protracted impacts rippling off this relatively recent phenomenon changed the history of our nation and the world. The new industrialism begat ambition in varying degrees in the states that formed the United States, which was expanding and wiping out the native Americans who refused to move westward beyond the Mississippi River. In our expanding nation, industry was a paragon of capitalism. Mellen Chamberlain was a new capitalist seemingly free of guilt over leaving Peacham and his rural roots. In the 1820s and 1830s his home state, conservative and agricultural, found its dominant way of life being gradually left behind. One small Vermont town, St. Johnsbury, refused to live in the past and began manufacturing platform scales, selling them throughout the young nation that was experiencing a ferocious expansion.

FIVE YEARS OF GREAT GOOD FORTUNE: 1833-1838

The most brilliant man who ever went out from the town.

—Oliver Johnson, fiery abolitionist from Peacham
on Mellen Chamberlain³²

Two of Chamberlain's contemporaries, Erastus and Thaddeus Fairbanks of St. Johnsbury, were start-up industrialists in northern Vermont. In the early 1830s the brothers expanded their scale-making operation and partnered with four agents who managed distinct territories. On August 16, 1833, they signed an agreement with Chamberlain to create the Chamberlain and Fairbanks Territory.³³ He was thirty-eight and still heavily invested in Maine. He had his law practice there, investments that included a mill, and a home in Castine with a wife and child. Yet he lacked a stellar personal success to elevate him to the upper ranks of the era's businessmen. He did not, however, lack cash.

The extant exchanges between Chamberlain and the Fairbanks brothers tell us little about the details or negotiations. From the documents we do have, we know that Chamberlain gave E&T Fairbanks the equivalent of \$10,000 in exchange for the rights to "make, sell & convey our Platform scales or weighing machines in all that section of country west of the Allegheny mountains, including Alabama and excepting Michigan." A sense of how much money that was is suggested by the fact that the average wage in New England for a laborer then was \$1.00 a day, for a carpenter \$1.45 a day, and for a mason \$1.62 a day. Attesting to the inequality of pay by gender, recruiters hired Vermont women from ages fifteen to thirty-five to work in the woolen mills of Massachusetts and Maine, starting at \$1.00 a week, plus board and a free ride south. Many women took the offer because the options at home were limited and paid even less. Wages for Fairbanks employees were good, notes Yale; in the late 1830s they averaged \$1.15 per day, as much or more than many other workers in New England "and considerably more than full-time Vermont farm workers."³⁴

Whether Chamberlain or one of the Fairbanks brothers initiated the deal between them is unclear. The brothers were growing a company, which also made stoves and plows, and contracted with four agents. One was responsible for America's eastern seaboard, from northern Pennsylvania east of the Allegheny Mountains to the southern tip of Florida. Chamberlain's territory was everywhere west of that, with the exception of Michigan.³⁵ His territory was vast, unexploited, and accessible by a network of rivers. Pittsburgh, located on the confluence of the Ohio, Monongahela, and Allegheny Rivers, became the hub. The recently completed Main Line Canal, part of Pennsylvania's extensive

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Chamberlain & Fairbanks Territory. In August 1833, Erastus and Thaddeus Fairbanks assigned the rights to manufacture and sell their company's platform scales throughout the vast territory to Chamberlain. The region extended west of the Allegheny Mountains to the Mississippi River and south to New Orleans. Fairbanks Papers, Vermont Historical Society.

transportation plan, linked Pittsburgh with Philadelphia, which was connected to New York City by train. The canal included an exciting out-of-water climb, with the canal boats riding on flatbed railroad cars up and over the Allegheny divide, the power provided by steam engines.³⁶

The platform scales made in Vermont were shipped from St. Johnsbury by stage, rail, or water. The precision parts were small. For a single large platform scale they could be carried in the saddle bags of a horse, if necessary.³⁷ On-site construction of platform scales was the rule. The materials were mostly wood, which came from near the site. As for the market for the scales, Yale claimed that the Fairbanks brothers didn't "have a clue in the 1830s that the company was going to get as big and rich as it did."³⁸

Chamberlain may have possessed a better sense of imminent success than his partners. A month after inking the contract he was in Pittsburgh. The trip from Vermont would have been quite easy: catch a steam-powered ferry in Burlington, go south on Lake Champlain, cross to the Hudson River via the Champlain Canal, go south by boat on the Hudson River to the Erie Canal, then west via a packet boat through Utica, New York, then overland by coach. Or continue down the Hudson River, take a train from New York City to Philadelphia, then enjoy the new canal from there to Pittsburgh.³⁹ However he got to his destination, Chamberlain promptly showed his business acumen.

On October 29, 1833, the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* published an ordinance concerning the weighing of hay. The preface reveals Chamberlain's extraordinary persuasive skills:

Whereas, Mellen Chamberlain has proposed to the corporate authorities of the Borough of Allegheny, to erect, at his own expense, in a public part of the town, a hay scale, for public use, provided he shall, for three years, have the receipts arising from same, charging the same rates for weighing that are charged in the city of Pittsburgh.⁴⁰

All the hay sold in Allegheny City had to be weighed on the scale. Anyone caught selling unweighed hay would forfeit the load and pay a ten dollar fine. Anyone found careless or negligent in the weighing of hay, whether they worked for Chamberlain or not, would be fined twenty dollars. The agent for Fairbanks Scales could install his measuring instrument where he saw fit and use as much of the park as he deemed necessary. He might also enjoy the view, for the park overlooked the confluence of the Ohio and Allegheny Rivers. Pittsburgh proper was on the far shore.⁴¹ The scale, installed by the first of November, also weighed wagons, carts and sleds.

At the time Pittsburgh, formerly Fort Pitt, an outpost for fighting Native Americans, was growing. Its population climbed from 13,000 in 1830 to 43,000 in 1837. About half the residents were native-born Americans, like the lanky, light-haired, blue-eyed Vermonter who may have had a north-country Vermont accent or picked up some down-east phrases from his decade in Castine. Not that accents were rare in Pittsburgh. The smoky, windy, hilly city, with its forges, factories, and jobs, drew large numbers of immigrants, most from Europe, along with freed slaves from the North and runaway slaves from the South, the Mason-Dixon line being about seventy miles away.⁴²

There were hotels, though most were pretty rough. This wasn't New England or New York City, with fancy inns and toll roads, but the rugged Midwest, with immigrant settlers and riverside towns being established along the Ohio River, which flowed for 900 miles to the Mississippi River. In a few cities like Cincinnati, if a traveler was lucky he might find a clean room for the night. "Hotels then were getting more comfortable," Dona Brown, a University of Vermont history professor and expert on 1830s travel, told me. "Hotels were small, though. The Bible sellers were out in the hinterland more than the merchants."⁴³ As for Chamberlain hauling Catherine along with him from Pittsburgh to, say, Louisville, aboard a plush packet boat with roof-deck

Fairbanks Hay Scale. The most popular scale sold, mostly by itinerant salesmen, throughout the Chamberlain & Fairbanks Territory. Fairbanks Scales papers, St. Johnsbury History & Heritage Center.



seating and sleeping accommodations, she probably would have been a bad fit in the masculine crowd wheeling and dealing on a watery world. There is no mention of Catherine in any correspondence for the period, nor of siblings or friends. There are only fragments of bookkeeping that suggest the faintest outline of an ambitious man on the move making money.

The records do show that Chamberlain hired two local sales agents in Pittsburgh who, in turn, hired itinerant agents who traveled west on the Ohio River and its tributaries. The itinerant agents, numbering in the dozens, pitched, sold, and installed mostly hay scales in Dayton, Louisville, Nashville, and other places alongside the Mississippi River, all the way to New Orleans.⁴⁴ The agents relied on ferries, barges, and packet boats to get around. The busy scale weighing hay in the park in Allegheny was a strong advertisement; it also brought in a steady cash flow as Chamberlain grew his business. To his main agents, Moses Atwood of Pittsburgh and L. R. Livingston, he soon sold one-tenth of his rights to market and make Fairbanks scales throughout the Chamberlain and Fairbanks Territory. The middleman system that they implemented introduced efficiencies and organizational methods that the agents benefited from administratively and financially. Yale wrote, "Mellen Chamberlain was accountable to E & T Fairbanks and Company. Moses Atwood sent accounts to Mellen Chamberlain. In turn, several agents reported sales to Atwood. In an account to Mellen Chamberlain, Moses Atwood reported the sale [of] fifty-nine scales sold by twelve other agents. One itinerant agent accounted for sixty-four of the sales. The advantage of this pyramid system was that E & T Fairbanks only had to deal with Chamberlain rather than corresponding with dozens of agents."⁴⁵

L. R. Livingston, however, would prove trying. Chamberlain's heirs would dicker with the shifty middleman over money and sales well into the 1840s, long after the Danube tragedy.

Business correspondence and personal letters pinpointing Chamberlain's exact movements are scant. A letter to him in Louisville provides hard evidence that he did travel west, presumably by water; the letter also mentions care being given to his daughter Katty.⁴⁶ He was back in St. Johnsbury in 1834. The records that Fairbanks kept to monitor its transportation department mention M. Chamberlain arriving in town on a wagon hauled by D. Rowland, a teamster, on August 21.

Relying on the thorough descriptions of the Fairbanks operation alongside the Sleeper River provided by Yale, we can picture Chamberlain returning to his home turf, having had a successful first year as an agent in the Midwest. Possibly he spent some time in the iron works,

which was the size of a modest barn, twenty-five feet by sixty feet. Inside the building two forges heated iron, and noisy, water-driven hammers pounded it into parts. The precision finish work took place in the adjacent grist mill on grindstones and with hand files and punches. A dozen workmen, including a few blacksmiths, handled and worked the iron.⁴⁷ Much of it went into the making of stoves and plows, which were still mainstays of the company's sales, the market for the platform scales just taking off.

Thaddeus Fairbanks, the inventor brother, could often be found at the iron works. A stickler for quality, he once claimed, "Faulty work was sure to be sent out, unless I was watching all the time."⁴⁸ He watched closely and kept quality high.

It is illuminating to consider the similarities and differences between a platform scale and a prototype of the telegraph, since Chamberlain got rich on the former and lost his life over the latter. The hay scale in a park in Pennsylvania and the one-off telegraph pieced together in a flat in Paris were both big and bulky, yet their key parts were small and precise. The electromagnetic telegraph, though, was a sophisticated device of the future, with copper wires to provide and transmit electricity. The seed invention of the new communication age demanded a venue of considerable size to demonstrate its functionality. A palace, for instance. Or a train depot. It needed someone both to tap out Morse code on one end and to record the code on the other end. Needless to say, to do that, you had to know Morse code, a new language of dots and dashes, and be able to translate it. In contrast, the platform hay scale was a product of manufactured parts, a pattern, shipping, and assembly, with local labor capable of installation and operation. No cannon balls flew off such a scale and threatened the toes of curious bystanders. The scale was safe. A telegraph prototype came with dangers having to do with the unexpected. Of course, once the telegraph became reliable and production of its components routinized, it too shed its moments of embarrassing, exciting, and sometimes dangerous, performance. Comparing the two devices as concepts that Chamberlain recognized as commercially viable, we can appreciate how advanced and reliable the platform scale was, whereas the complex affair that Sam Brown repeatedly helped piece together, fine tune, and plug in was often as reliable as a flying carpet.

Regrettably, there are no details about Chamberlain's office, living quarters, or social haunts in Pittsburgh or out in the territory. All we know for certain is that financially he did pretty well for himself, his agents, their itinerant agents, and the Fairbanks brothers in Vermont. The extant sales reports are impressive, identifying cities and the num-

ber of scales installed.⁴⁹ After five busy years, one of which, 1837, ignited a financial panic that closed banks and torched the dreams of many aspiring businessmen, Chamberlain emerged relatively unscathed and eager to expand his horizons.⁵⁰

In the spring of 1838 he cut his ties to Pittsburgh, although he retained ownership of eighty percent of the sales territory, and arranged the fateful trip to Europe with Catherine and Katty—a trip initially planned to take the family on the Grand Tour. Before sailing, he got letters of introduction from well-connected business acquaintances and associates. Some confirmed that he was ambitious, flexible, and could be trusted. One alluded to his ability to thrive in the competitive marketplaces of an industrialized world.⁵¹ Mellen Chamberlain may have seldom pleased his demanding father, nor have posted a stream of letters to his family and former friends in Peacham, but he did join the ranks of a new American elite: the deal makers.

Why did Chamberlain go abroad? Although he left behind no record of his thinking, it is clear that he had excelled in the Chamberlain and Fairbanks Territory to a degree that opened his eyes to potential opportunities that were as vast conceptually as his territory west of the Alleghenies had been physically. But he could seize new fruit only by traveling to new places. In Europe, and especially in the Ottoman Empire, the traditions and rules he had lived by could be jettisoned, at least for a while. Traveling for adventure on the Grand Tour and traveling for gain, should an option present itself, were both appealing. Also, it is reasonable to think that pitching scales in the Midwest no longer engaged him; that he longed for novelty, new faces, and new places. At age forty-two, the romantic in him may have cried out for tending and he surrendered to the call.

AN UNFINISHED MAN

The very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Looking more deeply into Chamberlain as a new breed of ambitious American during the early nineteenth century, it is clear that family was not high on his agenda. Cultivating himself as a man of his time was. His years as a lawyer, businessman, and agent for Fairbanks Scales gave him ample hours to reflect and to acquire an impressive skill set. He negotiated well and opportunistically. He took charge: the risks high but manageable; the rewards, financial and psychological, pleasurable on a scale attained by only a handful of men. Signing on with the Fairbanks brothers, he made a deal that tested his mettle and proved it. Once allied with Samuel Morse, if Chamberlain had not drowned, his

new career in the communications industry, then in its infancy, might have made him super rich. Though maybe not. Given his adventurous spirit and entrepreneurial eye, Chamberlain could have tried anything that engaged him. His attention might have shifted to the railroads. Or perhaps to steamships, since he seemed to love the sea. Like another Vermonter, George Perkins Marsh, whose skills as a diplomat blossomed abroad as the US minister to Italy, where he also managed to complete in Genoa the pioneering environmental book for which he remains widely known, *Man and Nature*,⁵² Chamberlain could have settled by the Mediterranean Sea and sought an ambassadorship. Or even become a bon vivant out of a Henry James novel.

As much as Chamberlain's life suggests a romantic temperament, we don't know if he read Shelley or Coleridge or Lord Byron, European romantics of his era. An essay-ish piece written while he was at Dartmouth College in Hanover in New Hampshire, confirms that he had a literary mind; he shifted from one field of literature to another, from biography to history for instance, and compared the different degrees of literary authority.⁵³ He had a knack for stirring people's emotions. Yet personal letters mentioning him evoke the image of a young man with little time to write back, and even less inclination to do so. He also had an eye for the ladies. That he desired access to the seraglio of Muhammad Ali in Egypt, a pasha with a very unchristian-like number of wives and children, is not surprising. That he longed for an erotic night with an odalisque, and, in one of the surviving letters written by him, told a friend about it, alters our vision of him considerably. It makes him contemporary and complex. Despite being a family man and a Congregationalist raised on sermons of hellfire, brimstone, and fealty to the Lord, no record confirms he attended church after he left Peacham. One would think so, but we do not know.

Heightened self-awareness was a unifying theme in the European romantics. It was also a theme embraced by young men in New England fleeing family farm for opportunities and pleasures in new places. Chamberlain didn't flee from a farm and his self-awareness is hard to gauge, due in part to the lack of telling letters, which a broader research effort, one that included European, Egyptian, and Turkish archives, might change. The course of his short life, however, lends credence to his self-absorption, though he rarely demonstrated greed. He left Peacham while his siblings stayed (his brother William Jr. being an exception, though his flight was only to Dartmouth College where he became a Professor of Latin and Greek). The younger brother Ezra was dubbed "an eagle among the ravens" and "a man of taste and letters among farmers," by William Jr.⁵⁴ As the son who stayed, Ezra fit the

eighteenth-century definition of a man of industry. Ezra lived his whole life in Peacham, except for three years at Dartmouth, took care of the homestead and his parents, and was his brother Mellen's administrator after his death. The dutiful son and brother made certain that neither Catherine nor Katty Chamberlain lacked financial support and family sympathy for the rest of their lives.

When the packet boat capsized in rapids on the Danube River downstream of Vienna, Chamberlain was suffused with the new industrial alchemy that made men rich beyond their forebears' wildest dreams. With an oval face, prominent nose and chin, curled bangs over his forehead, and a successful man's self-confidence, he was a head turner.

As Opal writes, "The restless sons were the focal points of the changes and conflicts at hand because they, more than their sisters, stood to inherit both the local properties that brought independence and the national society that promised something more."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it must have been painful to be reminded regularly by your father who loved land, Vermont land in particular, and had made his fortune from it, that you had abandoned the soil. No wonder Chamberlain rarely went north. Better to live by the sea, by rivers; they weren't owned, offered a fast escape, were always moving. An undiscussed gap between father and son over how one should live seems to have shadowed both men until their respective deaths. The conflict between powerful fathers and powerful sons was not an unusual story, then or now.

A hundred and eighty years after Mellen Chamberlain's death, we know few details of what happened. Whatever the cause of the tragedy, in the pre-telegraph age it took a week or more for word to reach Catherine and Katty in Paris, then an additional month for the tragedy to touch the rest of the family, most living in Peacham and Hanover, New Hampshire. Moved to impassioned oratory by the loss, Sarah Chamberlain, a widow herself (William Chamberlain Jr. had died in 1830 at the age of thirty-three), wrote to Abigail about a "subject that possesses my thoughts a great deal."

I refer to the expediency of making an attempt to procure the remains of our beloved brother. I know that to many this would seem not only unnecessary but foolish, yet I confess it does not so strike me. True, what remains is only the mortal and earthly and is no longer lovely but is it not sacred and precious to us? The Patriarch[s] thought it not immaterial where their bones were deposited and all history furnishes proof that it is a sentiment of ours to cherish a tender affection a—veneration I had almost said—for the body, which, though sown in weakness is to be raised in power and I can not think there is any thing in the revelations of christianity that should make us more indifferent to it. I do not know indeed that we have any reason to assume the departed spirit is at all affected by

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the condition of the body while it sleeps in death, but we must suppose it retains an affection for it. And then we have such an earnest desire yet to do something in token of our affection to those dear friends who were ready to do anything for us. I should feel very differently in respect to this if brother's remains had been deposited where christian friends might be enabled, now and then to visit them, but in so remote and out of the way a place in the midst of rude strangers, superstition, catholics, where none of his relatives can be expected ever to go, is it not painful?

I have made inquiry of several individuals with regard to the functionality of the thing and it is apprehended that it would be attended with no difficulty unless it might be in getting permission to remove it from the cemetery. The expense of transportation too would be trifling, so far as it could be removed by water. . . . It seems to me that a letter of enquiry, quite particular, as to how the thing can be accomplished, could at best do no possible harm.

You will excuse me I know for making these suggestions. I could not rest until I had done so. Perhaps you will all think the feeling a foolish one. If so, pardon it. It would be a great alleviation, I think, if the body, in case it might not be thought best to bring it home, could be removed to Constantinople under the eye of one of our missionaries.⁵⁶

Sarah lost the fight to bring the body home.
Mellen Chamberlain's remains remain in Vienna.

NOTES

¹ Mellen Chamberlain passport for the Ottoman Empire, Athens, December 28, 1838, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73:7.2, Collections of Vermont Historical Society, Barre, VT (hereafter: VHS). In Alexandria, Egypt, a few weeks later, on January 16, 1839, a second consulate of the United States signed the same document to ease travel south to Cairo. In the nineteenth century such assistance was crucial, according to Nicole Phelps, an associate professor of history at the University of Vermont. Such documents from consulates smoothed border crossings, assured border officials that a traveler could be trusted, and helped "individuals cope with jarring disruptions . . . from natural catastrophes and shipwrecks to illnesses and other personal misfortunes," Phelps writes in "One Service, Three Systems, Many Empires: The US Consular Service and the Growth of US Global Power, 1789-1924," Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 35-58.

² Chamberlain passport.

³ Yakup Bektas, "Displaying the American Genius: The Electromagnetic Telegraph in the Wider World," *British Journal of the History of Science* 34 (2001): 204-8. Bektas brings into clear focus Paris as a hotspot for new technology in the summer and fall of 1838. Samuel Morse was displaying his electromagnetic telegraph and Louis Daguerre his camera obscura, a predecessor to the camera. The French Academy of Science approved Morse's telegraph and both inventors received patents, granting their efforts political and legal approval along with financial leverage.

⁴ Morse and Chamberlain agreement, September 12, 1838, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73:7.1. The agreement granted Chamberlain exclusive sales rights over a vast territory east and south of France, including Northern Africa, the Levant, and Russia. Sam Brown, a graduate from and son of a famous president of Dartmouth College, Francis Brown, witnessed the signing.

⁵ Morse and Chamberlain's familiarity with each other before Paris remains unclear, although there is some speculation that they first met in Paris. Bektas writes: "A genealogical record of Chamberlain suggests that he had already become a partner with Morse before their departure to Europe in 1838, and that Chamberlain traveled there in the interest of the firm. See Guy S. Rix, comp., *History and Genealogy of the Eastman Family of America* (Concord, NH: [I. C. Evans],

1901), 31, quoted in Bektas, “Displaying the American Genius,” note 29. The Morse Papers, however, mention no previous business dealings between the two men.

⁶ Mellen Chamberlain to Lovering, January 9, 1939, quoted in Bektas, *ibid.*, 210. A friend of Chamberlain, Lovering was still in Paris. Chamberlain wrote him about the Athens demonstration of the telegraph to the king and queen. Expanding on the melodrama, Bektas said, “Chamberlain’s Morse apparatus was unpredictable, and could even threaten the safety of the operators and spectators. However, the delight it produced was well worth the risk.”

In contrast to the details he shared with Lovering, Chamberlain was subdued while writing to Morse about the same incident. “Yesterday evening the King and Queen of Greece were highly delighted with its performance,” he said in his last letter to Morse. “We have shown it to the principal inhabitants also, by all of whom it is much admired. Fame, however, is all you get from these poor countries. We think of starting in a few days for Alexandria and hope to obtain something more substantial from Mehmet Ali.” Bektas, “Displaying the American Genius,” 210.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Mehmet Ali, also Muhammad Ali, was 70 in 1839. His dynasty would rule Egypt for over a century, keeping the nation independent of the Ottoman Empire and friendly with Europe, in part because of laws established to protect Christians who lived there. The dynasty ending in 1952, with a coup d’état led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ali_of_Egypt.

⁹ Cyrus Hamlin, *Among the Turks* (New York: 1878); reprint (London: Forgotten Books, 2017), 85.

¹⁰ Bektas, “Displaying the American Genius,” 208-9. Russia was indirectly to blame for Chamberlain’s death on the Danube River. While he was in Constantinople, seeking an audience with the sultan, Tsar Nicholas I expressed an interest in the telegraph and a Russian representative, Baron Alexander de Meyendorff, secured Morse’s word that he would promptly bring one to St. Petersburg for a demonstration. Hence, Morse sent a note to Chamberlain in February 1839, urging him to return to Paris promptly. By the time Chamberlain responded to the request, the Tsar had already withdrawn the invitation.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 209. The quote from Brown was made in a letter to Morse years later when the two men were exchanging letters. See S. G. Brown to Samuel Morse, August 31, 1853, in Papers of Samuel F. B. Morse, Department of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

¹² Mellen Chamberlain to Abigail Chamberlain, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73:9.

Chamberlain signed his last name Chamberlin in the letter. By the 1820s, the Chamberlain spelling was used in his letters and on official documents, like his passport. The first evidence of the change appears in a letter from his brother, William Chamberlain Jr. See William Chamberlain Jr. to Mellen Chamberlain, August 30, 1823, William Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73.6. Interestingly, the family patriarch signed his name William Chamberlin throughout his life and on his will.

¹³ Telephone conversation with Patty Pearl, St. Johnsbury History and Heritage Center, July 27, 2017.

¹⁴ Edward Hirsch, “Susan Sontag, The Art of Fiction No. 143,” *Paris Review*, 137 (Winter 1995).

¹⁵ Interview with Jill Mudgett, Morrisville, VT, July 31, 2017.

¹⁶ Ernest L. Bogart, *Peacham: The Story of a Vermont Hill Town* (Peacham, VT: Peacham Historical Society, 1981), 105-6.

¹⁷ <https://www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/ledger/students/544>. In the 1810s, the average graduating class at Dartmouth was thirty students. Medical studies were popular, the War of 1812 having only recently ended and the need for surgeons to remove limbs and save lives in future conflicts a noble goal. However, medical studies were often dropped swiftly, for surgeons’ incomes were low, operations primitive, and medical advances—cleanliness of hands and the operating theater, anesthetics of any kind—were decades in the future. Chamberlain switched from medical studies to law.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Kenneth A. Degree, “Danville and the Beginnings of the Anti-Masonic Movement,” *Vermont History* 85 (Spring/Fall 2017): 106-7. Samuel Prentiss, born in Connecticut and raised in Massachusetts, where he began to read the law, migrated north, first to Brattleboro, then Montpelier. There he emerged “as a brilliant lawyer . . . was chosen to become a member of the Vermont Supreme Court in 1822 . . . turned down the offer, arguing that the ‘meager’ salary would not support his large family.” For Chamberlain reading the law with Prentiss was a testimonial to the elite circles he moved in while becoming a lawyer. Prentiss became a U.S. senator in 1831, a position he

held until 1842, when he became judge of the United States District Court for the State of Vermont.

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castine,_Maine. Castine was the shire town of Hancock County and a hub of Penobscot Bay. After the War of 1812 the town prospered from shipbuilding, coastal trade, the lumber business, and fishing fleets, which used Castine as a port from which to reach the Grand Banks.

²¹ Allen R. Yale Jr., *Ingenious & Enterprising Mechanics: A Case Study of Industrialization in Rural Vermont, 1815—1900*. Self-published Ph.D. dissertation (University of Connecticut, 1995), 61-62.

²² William Chamberlain to Mellen Chamberlain, February 25, 1821, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73.6.

²³ George B. Shaw to Mellen Chamberlain, March 22, 1822, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73:7.1. A letter from a young lawyer, George B. Shaw, from Vermont but then in Portland, Maine, asks Chamberlain how he joined the bar. Having been told he needed to clerk for two years with a Maine attorney for that to happen, Shaw hoped to learn how Chamberlain had flanked the hurdle. “You came to this state, I believe, under the same circumstances as myself. Whether the statute, to which I have just alluded, had been then enacted, I know not—I write to you for information upon this subject. If it were then in operation, allow me to inquire how you evaded it?” A good question. There is no evidence of Chamberlain replying to George Shaw.

²⁴ William Chamberlain to Mellen Chamberlain, July 30, 1823, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73.6.

²⁵ Ezra Chamberlain to Mellen Chamberlain, February 1, 1827, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73.8.1.

²⁶ William Chamberlain’s will, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73.1. The will is undated. Distributions of the father to family members and others included real estate in towns of Vermont and New Hampshire and vast holdings in the wilderness. William Chamberlain had a surveyor’s eye for valuable land “well located for future development. He showed his business acumen by choosing potential mill sites” (Bogart, *Peacham*, 106, n34a).

²⁷ Mudgett interview.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ David Hall, “Literacy, Religion, and the Plain Style,” in Jonathan Fairbanks and Robert Trent, eds., *New England Begins: The Seventeenth Century*, 3 vols. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), 2: 102-5. Hall describes the ascent to power of religious primers in seventeenth-century New England, including *Spiritual Milk for Babes*, by the devout Calvinist John Cotton. Read by the young to absorb the principles of the Bible and to mend one’s life by repenting sins, the primer preached the Calvinist doctrine of self-denial and feeling the cursed state of being human, a state in which “The struggle against pride and feelings of self-worth was intense and painful.” Cotton, a Boston preacher, urged his congregation to feel their “cursed estate.”

³⁰ J. M. Opal, *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

³² Bogart, *Peacham*, 253.

³³ Mellen Chamberlain contract with E&T Fairbanks, August 15, 1833: Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73:7.1 and 73:7.2. See also: Yale, *Ingenious & Enterprising Mechanics*, 61. Commenting on the financial agreement, Yale writes, “the Fairbankses signed a power-of-attorney with Mellen Chamberlain. . . . terms of the agreement are not clear, but Chamberlain may have given Fairbanks notes worth \$10,000 in exchange for an assignment of patent rights or a license to manufacture Fairbanks scales. The result of this agreement was the establishment of the partnership of Chamberlain and Fairbanks.”

³⁴ Stanley Lebergott, “Wage Trends, 1800-1900,” *Trends in the American Economy in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960): 457-62; also <https://www.nber.org/chapters/c2486.pdf>. See Yale, *Ingenious & Enterprising Mechanics*, 38, for wages paid to Fairbanks workers in late 1830s. For Vermont women’s pay by textile mills in Massachusetts and Maine, see John Duffy and Vincent Feeney, *Vermont: An Illustrated History* (Sun Valley, CA: American Historical Press, 2000), 83-88. In this book, social change in Vermont between 1812 and 1861 is presented as series of interwoven movements, with religious and political elements. These included a temperance crusade to reduce drunkenness and debauchery, especially in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Reformers demanded restraint of “a rambunctious frontier society . . . a faithless, heathenish, irreverent place prone to blasphemy, drunkenness, licentiousness,

and atheism.” There was gambling, whoring, and drinking in some towns, with Manchester given as an example.

³⁵ Yale, *Ingenious & Enterprising Mechanics*, 61-62.

³⁶ The Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works and Canal System was a system of canals, dams, locks, and tow paths which, in the mid-1830s, incorporated railroads. Often called “the Main Line,” it linked Pittsburgh to Philadelphia in 1834. The link included a 36-mile section, called the Allegheny Portage Railroad, that used stationary steam engines to haul wheeled flat cars, on which canal boats had been hoisted, up and over the top of the Allegheny Mountains, elevation 2,100 feet. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania_Canal.

³⁷ Yale, *Ingenious & Enterprising Mechanics*, 19.

³⁸ Conversation with Allen Yale, March 16, 2016.

³⁹ Conversation with Scott McLaughlin, director, Granite Museum, Barre, Vt., May 2017.

⁴⁰ “An ordinance concerning the weighing of hay,” *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, October 29, 1833.

⁴¹ Allegheny City was separated from Pittsburgh by the Ohio and Allegheny Rivers. Allegheny City officially merged with Pittsburgh in 1907.

⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Pittsburgh. Confirmed by “Pittsburgh Department” at the Carnegie Public Library.

⁴³ Interview with Dona Brown, Burlington, Vermont, November 27, 2017.

⁴⁴ Yale, *Ingenious & Enterprising Mechanics*, 61-62

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53. Settling Chamberlain’s estate involved protracted unsettled issues with L. R. Livingston, the subagent in Pittsburgh. Chamberlain’s executor, Ezra Chamberlain, exchanged letters with Livingston until the late 1840s. See Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73.8.2.

⁴⁶ MTN to Mellen Chamberlain, June 17, 1837, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73.6. The writer, signing MTN, sent the letter to Chamberlain in care of Hamilton Smith in Louisville, Kentucky, which is on the Ohio River.

⁴⁷ Yale, *Ingenious & Enterprising Mechanic*, 8-19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁹ L. R. Livingston to Ezra Chamberlain, October 26, 1842, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73.8.2.

⁵⁰ Dona Brown interview. She talked about the Panic of 1837, which produced America’s worst depression up to that time.

⁵¹ Robert Grant to Mellen Chamberlain, Chamberlain Family Papers, March 15, 1838, Doc. 73.7.1. Grant’s letter of introduction announces Chamberlain’s planned visit to Europe, proclaims that “Mr. Chamberlain is worthy of unlimited confidences,” and hopes any and all meetings are “mutually beneficial.”

⁵² David Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 216-20. Five years younger than Chamberlain, George Perkins Marsh was a fellow Vermonter and Dartmouth College graduate. Marsh was appointed the Minister to Italy by President Lincoln in March 1861. Leaving a civil war just beginning for another in progress, Marsh never returned to the United States. He saw the unification of Italy through, served as America’s envoy for twenty-one years, and “also fulfilled his destiny as a mighty prophet of environmental reform,” notes Lowenthal.

The writing of *Man and Nature* began in Vermont in 1860, then was set aside because of pressing issues. The writing resumed on the peaceful Riviera in late 1862, where Marsh lived in a hotel in Pegli, adjacent to Genoa. Again, he “set to work in earnest, [often] pacing along the Pegli strand.” He wanted the book “to show the evils resulting from too much clearing and cultivation, and often so-called improvements in new countries like the United States,” he wrote to W. H. Seward, the U.S. secretary of state, on July 7, 1863, the day the proofs were mailed. Lowenthal, *ibid.* 267-70.

⁵³ Mellen Chamberlain to Abigail Chamberlain, not dated, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc. 73.9.

⁵⁴ William Chamberlain Jr. to Ezra Chamberlain, June 11, 1820, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73.8.1.

⁵⁵ Opal, *Beyond the Farm*, ix.

⁵⁶ Sarah Chamberlain to Abigail Chamberlain, December 23, 1839, Chamberlain Family Papers, Doc 73.9. Although Sarah affectionately refers to Mellen as “our brother” in the letter, she was his sister-in-law. And, as noted, a widow, her husband having died in 1830.