"The Higher Court of Heaven": Dr. Henry Ingersoll Bowditch and Violent Abolition

Daniel Bever

College of William and Mary

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“THE HIGHER COURT OF HEAVEN”: DR. HENRY INGERSOLL BOWDITCH AND VIOLENT ABOLITION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in History from the College of William and Mary in Virginia,

by

Daniel A. Bever

Accepted for ______________________

_________________________ Director
Chandos Brown, Ph.D.

_________________________
Melvin Ely, Ph.D.

Williamsburg, Virginia
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Christopher Howard, Ph.D.
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Chapter 1 | National Context: Growing up in a Nation Characterized by Change

“Progress” was a double-edged sword. Throughout the antebellum era, the United States’ population grew, urbanized, and moved west.\(^1\) Railroads, canals, and telegraphs diminished the psychological distance between different regions of the country, creating a link between local and regional politics that abolitionist leaders such as Henry I. Bowditch could not ignore.\(^2\) As the son of an industrialist, Bowditch embraced this process of change; however, he realized the normative ambiguity of modernity.\(^3\) Railroad construction, telegraphs, and western migration allowed him to collaborate with abolitionists from New York to Kansas.\(^4\) However, these innovations also made slavery more lucrative by enabling planters in Texas to arrange the details of


shipping and selling cotton with greater efficiency. For Bowditch, the complementary expansion of industrial and slave-based economic systems threatened the core principles of the Republic, even though it brought about unprecedented affluence. Transient party systems removed a sense of ideological stability from government and a widespread religious revival suggested that individual voters could reconfigure their personal paradigms of morality and identity. This national process of reconceptualization was both an opportunity and a threat: abolitionist ideals could wither or prosper. Bowditch assumed leadership in the movement to assure that the latter occurred rather than the former.

Economics: The Relationship between Industrialization and Slave-Based Agriculture

The United States underwent an industrial revolution in the antebellum period. In 1793, Samuel Slater built the first American factory in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, after memorizing the designs for a British yarn-producing machine. Shortly thereafter, a group of influential businessmen that modern historians refer to as the Boston Associates built the first large-scale American power-weaving factory in Waltham, Massachusetts. The Boston Associates constructed entire towns around their manufacturing plants. Lowell, Massachusetts, became the first such municipality when it developed into a city with thousands of workers during the 1820s and 1830s. By 1860, the North represented the second most industrialized region in the world. The rise of manufacturing defined the economic culture of Bowditch’s Boston community.

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8 Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free*, 70.
The rise of Northern industry relied on a steady supply of cotton from the South’s expanding slave economy. In 1860, the South produced two-thirds of the world’s cotton. This increase in Southern cotton output created a need for more labor; it encouraged the slave system to expand. During the antebellum period, the United States’ slave population tripled and masters forced one million slaves to migrate with the institution into the West. Although only a small proportion of Southerners owned slaves, these individuals wielded tremendous economic influence. Slaveholders controlled over 90 percent of the South’s capital. This economic power brought political puissance. The modern, mechanized North depended on a Southern economy driven by physical coercion and controlled by formidable elites.

Slaves endured harsh day-to-day realities. The vast majority of slaves worked as field laborers. Solomon Northup described his experiences working on a Louisiana plantation: “The lash is flying from morning until night, the whole day long.”

Oversleeping, falling behind other slaves while picking cotton, or bringing a low haul to

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12 Only 26 percent of Southerners owned slaves. See, Kolchin, American Slavery, 1619-1877, 180. Less than 10 percent of the Southern population owned the majority of the region’s slaves. Slave owners possessed five times the wealth of the average Northerner and nearly ten times the wealth of the average non-slave owning Southerner. See, Levine, Half Slave and Half Free, 22, 23.
13 Solomon Northup was a free black, but men posing as potential employers lured him to Washington, D.C., where they forced him into slavery. He worked as a slave for twelve years under various Southern masters before regaining his freedom. See, Solomon Northup, Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup (Auburn, NY: Derby & Miller, 1853), 17-20, 35-39, 90, 165. Quote from page 165.
the cotton gin could precipitate corporal punishment. Each crop brought its own unique hardships. Thousands labored in the sugarcane fields of Louisiana. This arduous toil dramatically diminished a slave’s life expectancy; Louisiana represented the only state in the Union with a natural decrease in its slave population. Oftentimes, the threat of contracting malaria in the rice swamps of Georgia and South Carolina prompted white overseers to flee the area, even though this decision allowed their slaves to work without supervision. The everyday lives of enslaved field laborers violated Bowditch’s perception of justice.

Race

The South discriminated against blacks, but the region’s systemic inequalities contained a few wrinkles. For instance, Southern whites generally banned free blacks from working in professional labor. In New Orleans, the growth of systematic racism during the 1850s doomed numerous black businesses that had previously earned considerable profits. Virginia law supplemented these restrictions on professional labor by forbidding free blacks from voting, serving on juries, or joining militias. Yet, in some regions, blacks had a degree of political and economic efficacy. Free blacks in Prince Edward County, Virginia, owned land, earned competitive wages, rented slaves,

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14 Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 170-1.
married whites, owned firearms, and won court cases against whites.\textsuperscript{21} Prince Edward County failed to enforce several pro-slavery laws, including legislation that required newly emancipated slaves to emigrate from Virginia.\textsuperscript{22} Free black businessmen controlled 40 percent of the commerce coming into Farmville, Virginia, and owned one-third of the region’s fleet, demonstrating the locale’s limited tolerance of skilled black labor.\textsuperscript{23} Southern society was prejudiced, but it possessed some semblances of equality.

As in the South, racial inequality permeated life in the free, industrial North. It created economic barriers. Northern whites barred free blacks from participating in professional, skilled, and industrial labor.\textsuperscript{24} Racial discrimination also had social implications. A free black named David Ruggles tried to sit in the cabin of a Nantucket Steamer, but the ship’s operators forced him out of this whites-only area.\textsuperscript{25} In 1843, Frederick Douglass walked down the streets of Boston with Henry Ingersoll Bowditch; both men incurred condemning stares from passers-by for violating a cultural taboo.\textsuperscript{26} By supporting civil rights, Bowditch defied entrenched racial mores that permeated the North and the South.

\textsuperscript{22} Ely, \textit{Israel on the Appomattox}, 42, 179-180.
\textsuperscript{23} Ely, \textit{Israel on the Appomattox}, 156.
\textsuperscript{24} Herbert Gutman, “Persistent Myths about the Afro-American Family,” in \textit{The Slavery Reader}, eds. Gad Heuman and James Walvin (New York: Routledge, 2003), 268. Statistics gathered by the \textit{African Repository} in 1830 indicated that a mere 11 percent of black New Englanders found employment in professional or skilled trades. Similarly, according to the Colored National Convention in 1855, only 4.5 percent of free blacks worked at skilled and professional trades in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. See, Joanne Pope Melish, \textit{Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 135.
Politics and Religion

The political landscape of the United States underwent dramatic shifts between 1790 and 1860. In the 1790s, the United States split into two parties: the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Democrats. During an election dubbed “The Revolution of 1800,” the country witnessed its first transfer of power from one party to another. After 1800, the Federalist Party never regained the presidency. A new party system arose during the 1830s that pitted the Jacksonian Democrats against the Whigs. However, by 1860, the Whig Party ceased to function as a national entity. Instead, Republicans, Constitutional Unionists, Northern Democrats, and Southern Democrats served as the primary parties running presidential candidates. As political parties rose, fell, and died, Bowditch could not rely on a stable, dominant party to defend his definition of the national’s foundational values, pushing him closer towards the abolitionist movement.

During Bowditch’s lifetime, the United States also underwent a religious upheaval—the Second Great Awakening. Spiritual attitudes changed because of revival meetings organized by Evangelical Protestants. These Evangelicals, led by influential preachers such as Lyman Beecher and Charles Finney, reinterpreted older Calvinist

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29 “Historical Election Results: Electoral Box Scores 1789-1996.”
30 Michael F. Holt, Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 38-44, 257.
31 Levine, Half Slave and Half Free, 216-221.
doctrines centering on predestination. Predestination asserted that God alone dictated who would obtain salvation. They qualified predestination through the doctrines of free will and perfectionism. Free will taught that men could control their eternal destinies by choosing to follow God. Perfectionism asserted that men could lead a sinless life by exerting free moral agency and choosing to submit to Jesus Christ. 33 These ideas reshaped antebellum religious discourse. They also precipitated denominational infighting. Evangelical Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and “Christians”—a sect that preferred literal biblical interpretation to the complex creedal structures of many denominations—participated in a cycle of mutual defamation. 34 The Second Great Awakening, driven by the concepts of free will and perfectionism, augmented the size of Evangelical churches and increased the amount of acrimony between them. Bowditch grew up in a nation heavily influenced by Evangelical thought that stressed an individual’s ability to choose right from wrong, obedience from disobedience. This climate may have affected Bowditch’s readiness to ask Americans to choose between slavery and abolition. 35

While Catholicism never grew large enough to seriously compete with Protestantism as the dominant religious system of the United States, its expansion during the nineteenth century still threatened many Protestants. 36 Its expansion sparked a Protestant backlash. Numerous Protestant newspapers such as The Protestant, The New

36 Between 1776 and 1850, the number of Catholics living in the United States increased from 25,000 to 1.75 million. See, Mintz, Moralists and Moralizers, 42-44.
York Protestant Vindicator, and the Downfall of Babylon habitually published anti-Catholic articles. Politicians spread rumors of Catholic conspiracies to obtain Protestant votes. In 1834, a mob attacked and burned the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts. American Protestants generally had little tolerance for Catholicism.

Bowditch judged the depth of America’s newfound religiosity through political events. He believed that God opposed slavery; Congress passed the gag rule and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. The gag rule banned debate on slavery in the House of Representatives, and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 required Northerners to assist in capturing fugitive slaves who sought sanctuary in their communities. In response to Boston’s compliance with these federal proslavery ordinances, Bowditch wrote: “My indignation has been aroused at the damnable deeds of lawyers and clergymen in this city. It is a city without God, and yet [it] impiously calls itself Christian.” For Bowditch, politics proved the hypocrisy, not the piety, of the Republic and the city of Boston.

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38 Walters, American Reformers, 34.
Chapter 2 | The Local Context: Comparing the Young Lives of Drs. Henry Ingersoll Bowditch and Samuel Gridley Howe

Before discussing Henry I. Bowditch’s participation in the Committee of Vigilance and the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League, this thesis will address the cultural context of early nineteenth century Massachusetts by juxtaposing the early life of Bowditch against that of Samuel Gridley Howe. Bowditch and Howe held much in common. Howe was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on November 10, 1801. Bowditch was born nearby in the port of Salem, Massachusetts, on August 9, 1808.¹ Both could trace their lineages in the Old Bay State back to the seventeenth century.² They matured in a local culture that accepted the use of violence as a social and political tool. They graduated from Harvard Medical School, became active social reformers, and joined the Committee of Vigilance.³ Bowditch had access to more privilege than Howe because of the influence of his father Nathaniel Bowditch. Bowditch and Howe’s encounters with the aftermath of European revolutions instilled an awareness within them that revolutionary principles could disappear from a nation’s consciousness. Comparing the lives of these men elucidates why a Massachusetts elite might join abolition.

Violence

Neither Bowditch nor Howe displayed an aversion to violence during their childhood. Howe defended the smaller children of his neighborhood against bullies. He

³ *Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston, With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time* (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
admitted his non-altruistic motivations with frankness; he wanted public approbation, not justice. Similarly, Bowditch paraded through the streets of Salem, Massachusetts, on Guy Fawkes Day with a small group of friends and a stick on his shoulder as he sang the folk tune “Remember, Remember the Fifth of November”:

        Oh!  Don’t you remember the fifth of November
        When Gun-Powder Treason was plot!
        And this is the reason that Gunpowder Treason
        Should never be forgot!

Guy Fawkes Day Parades, also called Pope Day Parades, represented raucous affairs that included a public burning of three effigies: Guy Fawkes, the Pope, and the Devil. During the 1760s, an unruly Pope Day Parade in Plymouth, Massachusetts, broke the windows of numerous non-participatory households. In Boston, the members of the North End and South End parades regularly fought against one another as each faction tried to steal the other’s papal effigy. A sailor died in the North End-South End fight of 1752 and, in 1764, a parade cart crushed a child to death. Although Pope Day Parades lost popularity during the late eighteenth century, this tradition persisted into the nineteenth century. By marching through Salem singing “Remember, Remember the Fifth of November,” Bowditch mimicked a fierce local ritual.

        A stern-faced but merciful constable ended young Bowditch’s Pope Day Parade.

The constable told Bowditch to lay down his stick—doubly useful as a weapon in a cross-town fight or as kindling for a bonfire—and warned the child not to organize

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4 Schwartz, Samuel Gridley Howe, 2.
5 Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1822-1903, Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 1, “Memoir of a Visit to Salem, 1889.”
another Pope Day procession. Although the constable threatened to arrest Bowditch, he just happened to let the delinquent escape. As an adult, Bowditch recalled this episode in a memoir: “We boys thought we had a right to do [our parade] on Guy Fawkes night!….we felt somewhat aggrieved and somewhat insulted that our right as true and loyal boys had been trampled upon. For was it not right still to sing of Guy Fawkes and his wicked plot? [Bowditch’s emphasis].”7 This memory may have come with an ironic smirk. The Boston police would have responded very differently to Bowditch’s conspiracy of kidnapping law-abiding slave hunters—that is, if they had managed to discover it.8

Education and Social Status

Howe grew up in the shadow of the upper elite.9 Joseph Howe, the father of Samuel Gridley, suffered crippling financial losses during the War of 1812 by selling rope to the federal government, which never remunerated him. Therefore, Joseph Howe could only afford to send one of his three sons to college. He chose Samuel.10 Samuel Gridley Howe’s position as the lone brother to attend college qualified the status he gleaned from studying at Brown. Politics also discounted the advantages he acquired from his collegiate education by forcing Howe to matriculate at Brown College in Providence, Rhode Island, rather than at Harvard College—an institution only a few miles away from his childhood home. Federalists dominated Harvard Yard. The Howes

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7 Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1822-1903, Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 1, “Memoir of a Visit to Salem, 1889.”
10 Richards, Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe, 14.
were Jeffersonian Democrats. Samuel had to attend Brown. Adhering to a minority party was a dangerous undertaking. During Howe’s pre-collegiate schooling, a group of Federalist students collected their Jeffersonian Democratic colleagues and threatened to flog them unless they embraced the Federalist Party. When Howe refused to change his allegiances, Federalist students threw him headfirst down a flight of stairs. The school headmaster saw the fracas but did not interfere.\textsuperscript{11} Howe knew his brothers would not attend college because the federal government swindled his father, and he could not attend Harvard because of political complications. As a marginal elite, Howe incurred snubs and disappointments.

These frustrations help to explain Howe’s college experiences and attraction toward Unitarianism. Inhabiting a restrictive social location can spur mediocre performance and rebellious behavior. Though he excelled in Latin, Howe did not obtain general academic honors at Brown. Instead, he spent his time carrying out pranks that he dubbed “monkey shrines.” In one instance, he stole the horse of the college president and stashed it in the fourth story of an academic building.\textsuperscript{12} Howe’s college correspondence reveals that he was gravitating towards Unitarianism, a religious movement that was gaining popularity amongst the Old Bay State’s upper strata. Though class anxieties cannot completely explain this religious attraction, they do elucidate a vital aspect of Unitarianism’s appeal. When Howe died, he was a member of the Unitarian Church.\textsuperscript{13}

Between 1843-1844, the acclaimed abolitionist and Unitarian minister Theodore Parker

\textsuperscript{11} Richards, \textit{Letters and Journals}, 14-15. See also, Berry, \textit{Yankee Stargazer}, 204.

\textsuperscript{12} Richards, \textit{Letters and Journals}, 15-17, 19.

christened Howe’s firstborn child and became Howe’s traveling companion during a trip to Rome.\textsuperscript{14} Besides explaining a lackluster academic performance, Howe’s collegiate aggravations about social status may have pushed him towards Unitarianism and helped him to befriend fervent abolitionists, such as Theodore Parker.

Henry I. Bowditch inhabited a more exclusive section of the Boston elite than Howe because of the renown of his father Nathaniel Bowditch. Nathaniel rose to prominence from humble origins.\textsuperscript{15} Beginning as a sailor, Nathaniel Bowditch taught himself French and Latin. He mastered Mathematics by reading Latin texts such as \textit{Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica} by Sir Isaac Newton and \textit{The Elements} by Euclid.\textsuperscript{16} Nathaniel Bowditch drew on his knowledge of sailing and mathematics to correct the errors of John Hamilton Moore’s \textit{The Practical Navigator}, an authoritative text on marine navigation, in a new manual entitled \textit{The New American Practical Navigator}. \textit{The Seaman’s Bible} and \textit{Bowditch} became sobriquets for \textit{The New American Practical Navigator}—a testament to the work’s influence in its field and on Nathaniel’s social position.\textsuperscript{17}

Benefiting from newfound acclaim, Nathaniel Bowditch moved his family from Salem, Massachusetts, into Boston and joined a powerful group of industrialists and businessmen later known as the Boston Associates.\textsuperscript{18} Nathaniel Bowditch became chief actuary and director at Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance, or MHLI, an organization

\textsuperscript{15} Berry, \textit{Yankee Stargazer}, 14-15, 96.
\textsuperscript{16} Berry, \textit{Yankee Stargazer}, 29-31.
\textsuperscript{17} Berry, \textit{Yankee Stargazer}, 80-1, 94, 111.
that functioned as a bank for Boston’s industrial leaders. During his tenure, MHLI
gained a new nickname, “The Bowditch Office.” Under Bowditch’s leadership, the
firm increased its capital tenfold from $500,000 to $5,000,000, expanded its share of
Massachusetts’s total savings deposits to 42 percent, and authorized multi-million dollar
loans to the industrial ventures of the Boston Associates. Bowditch became an
influential member of Boston’s business elite.

As Nathaniel Bowditch became an established businessman, he also acquired
social prestige. He served as a Harvard Overseer. He joined the Harvard
Corporation—the college’s seven-member governing board—and became the president
of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Royal Academy of Edinburgh, the
Royal Society of London, and the Royal Irish Academy inducted Nathaniel Bowditch
into their ranks. He refused offers to teach as a professor of mathematics at Harvard,
West Point, and the University of Virginia; the honors he declined illustrate as much
about his reputation as those he accepted. Nathaniel Bowditch would not have turned
down these positions before the publication of The New American Practical Navigator
when he worked as a sailor. He financed the publication of his English translation of
Mécanique Céleste, an authoritative text on celestial mechanics written in French by
Pierre-Simon Laplace. This endeavor cost Bowditch $12,000 in cash, a tidy sum for the

19 Robert F. Dalzell, Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made (Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press, 1987), 80-82, 100, 103, 234.
20 Berry, Yankee Stargazer, 202.
21 Dalzell, Enterprising Elite, 100, 202.
22 Berry, Yankee Stargazer, 167, 192.
23 Berry, Yankee Stargazer, 186, 203, 212, 214. See also, Dalzell, Enterprising Elite, 234.
24 Dalzell, Enterprising Elite, 234. See also, Berry, Yankee Stargazer, 154-155.
early nineteenth century. Nathaniel knew how to use his wealth and academic prestige; he had enough assets to give his progeny access to privilege.

Henry I. Bowditch began attending Harvard as a seventeen-year-old in 1825—a decade after his father began serving as a Harvard Overseer and one year before his father joined the Harvard Corporation. Henry I. Bowditch did not encounter the same political difficulties as Howe because Nathaniel Bowditch belonged to the Federalist Party. Like Howe, Bowditch fared well in Latin but won little recognition in his undergraduate studies. He preferred the pleasures of college to academic rigor and distinction, writing: “Ye who seek College Honors, Behold what a Bore….Oh Crikey!” Bowditch also grew bored with Unitarianism during his time at Harvard. He wrote the following about the chapels led by Rev. Henry Ware, the first Unitarian to fill the Hollis Professorship of Divinity: “Dr. Ware preached one of his dry sermons. It put me in mind of [a] spinning glass, where out of a little piece they spin several thousand yards.” This accusation against Ware of spinning long sermons of “several thousand yards” from “a little piece” suggests that Bowditch viewed institutional Unitarianism with more than a little skepticism. Bowditch did not thrive academically or grow closer to the religion of the Massachusetts elite during his time at Harvard.

25 Berry, Yankee Stargazer, 211.
27 Berry, Yankee Stargazer, 146.
28 Bowditch, The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, 11, 13.
After graduating from Harvard College in 1828, Bowditch entered Harvard Medical School. Bowditch’s interest in medicine blossomed after Dr. James Jackson, a cofounder of the Massachusetts General Hospital and a critical advocate for smallpox vaccination, showed him the interior of a forearm during a dissection. Bowditch later served as an intern under Jackson at Massachusetts General Hospital. This hospital received sizeable donations from “The Bowditch Office” and, in 1827, elected Nathaniel Bowditch to its Board of Trustees—circumstances that could not have harmed Henry I. Bowditch’s medical prospects.

Howe also attended Harvard Medical School. He excelled in his studies, especially in dissection and anatomy. To supplement Harvard’s scant supply of human cadavers, Howe utilized his considerable skills in grave looting—a grisly but necessary task. The experiences of John Collins Warren, one of Howe’s instructors at Harvard Medical School, illustrate the danger and secrecy associated with grave looting. Warner disinterred corpses under the cover of night while other students kept watch for locals. New Englanders hated having their cemeteries harvested for medical specimens; a mob attacked the campus of Yale in 1790 after medical students exhumed the corpse of a young woman for dissection. However, a physician-in-training could not dissect or

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32 Berry, *Yankee Stargazer*, 202. See also, Vincent Y. Bowditch, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch*, 10. See also, Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, *A History of the Massachusetts General Hospital* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1851), 400.
master anatomy without cadavers. At medical school, Howe learned that meaningful service could elicit contempt as well as commendation.

European Revolutions and American Reforms

Bowditch and Howe both witnessed European revolutions as young adults. Howe became a physician and a combatant in the Greek revolution.\(^{36}\) He improved public sanitation, oversaw repairs to the port at Ægina, and attempted to establish a colony at Hexamilia known by two names: “Columbia” and “Washingtonia.”\(^{37}\) In the revolution’s aftermath, a corrupt, indigenous governing class abandoned the original ideals of the Hellenic struggle.\(^{38}\) A lack of support from political elites doomed Howe’s efforts to settle a colony at Hexamilia.\(^{39}\) Towards the western end of the continent, Bowditch observed the outcomes of the French Revolution of 1830 as he studied medicine in Europe between 1832 and 1834. Witnessing the \textit{fêtes} meant to commemorate this struggle, Bowditch noted that the influence of the uprising’s original principles had disappeared like “a shadow that has vanished away.”\(^{40}\) The new French regime neglected its popular mandate and lost the support of its people. As the \textit{fêtes} progressed, the Parisian crowds did not join in the army’s shouts of \textit{vive}, or “live,” for the constitutional monarch King Louis Philippe I.\(^{41}\) In Europe, Bowditch and Howe learned that unintended revolutionary goals, whether in Greece or in France, could fade.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \(^{36}\) Schwartz, \textit{Samuel Gridley Howe}, 14, 21-22, 28
  \item \(^{37}\) Schwartz, \textit{Samuel Gridley Howe}, 33-8. See also, Richards, \textit{Samuel Gridley Howe}, 36-37, 49.
  \item \(^{38}\) Schwartz, \textit{Samuel Gridley Howe}, 32, 35-6.
  \item \(^{40}\) Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. “Letter from Henry I. Bowditch to Mary Bowditch, August 7, 1832,” in \textit{The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch}, by Vincent Y. Bowditch (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), 24. See also, Bowditch, \textit{The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch}, 14, 82.
  \item \(^{41}\) Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. “Letter from Henry Ingersoll Bowditch to His Sister Mary Bowditch, October 6, 1832,” in \textit{The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch}, by Vincent Y. Bowditch (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), 29.
\end{itemize}
Bowditch and Howe learned about the influence of individual European leaders. Howe witnessed the French Revolution of 1830 and helped escort the Marquis de Lafayette to the Hôtel de Ville. At the Hôtel de Ville, Lafayette refused to become the dictator of France and approved the selection of Louis Philippe I as the country’s new constitutional monarch. Nearly half a century before the French Revolution of 1830, Lafayette fought beside George Washington during the Battle of Yorktown. Howe must have wondered if his generation could produce timeless republicans such as Lafayette, who had advanced the cause of liberty on two different continents in two different centuries. Bowditch underwent a similar, moving experience. He attended the funeral of William Wilberforce, a leading abolitionist in British Parliament who pushed Great Britain to outlaw the slave trade in 1808 and abolish slavery in 1833. Bowditch recorded his frustrated expectations for Wilberforce’s funeral service:

I went to Westminster Abbey to attend the funeral of Wilberforce, the great and constant advocate for the abolition of slavery. I anticipated a great deal….When the coffin was about to be borne in at the great door of the old Abby, and the organ sounded, and the lords of the land opened to let it pass, the effect was very solemn. It was pleasant to see the mighty aristocrats of England thus reverencing the virtuous dead. Soon the priests began to chant, and they had such an air of indifference that, with all my efforts, other feelings than those of solemnity pressed themselves upon me.

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43 Harlow Giles Unger, Lafayette (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), 156.
Bowditch admired the “virtuous” Wilberforce but despised the “indifference” with which the Westminster clergy went about his service. During the service, Bowditch must have wondered who would become the American Wilberforce; a smug and complacent clergy, whether Anglican or Unitarian, certainly would not spearhead the reform. Bowditch and Howe witnessed the importance of leadership in European revolutions and reforms. These encounters primed them to take up leadership roles in the abolitionist vanguard.

Bowditch also witnessed an academic revolution in France. He attended the lectures of the eminent French doctor Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis, who proposed grounding medicine in empiricism rather than abstract theory. Bowditch adored Louis, referring to him as “an earnest, truth-loving man” and a “friend as well as a teacher.” Bowditch attended Louis’s Société d’Observation, which taught medical students how to make precise medical observations. The Société d’Observation affected Bowditch so profoundly that he established a sister organization in Massachusetts called the Boston Society for Medical Observation. Bowditch hoped that his society would mimic the rigorous criticism of Louis’s organization and allow doctors to exhort each other to avoid sloppy, incomplete medical observations. Despite his hopes, Bowditch believed that comparisons between the proceedings of the Société d’Observation and the tentative debates of the Boston Society for Medical Observation left his organization looking

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45 This thesis will later address Bowditch’s medical education in Paris in more detail in the fourth chapter. See, Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
46 Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
“emasculated.” Dedicated to the spirit of French reforms, Bowditch aimed to transform the culture of American medicine, not establish an ineffectual institution with empty ideals.

After completing their medical educations and returning from Europe, Howe and Bowditch pursued social reforms. Howe forsook his medical training and established the Perkins’ School, where he discovered breakthrough techniques in caring for and educating the blind. Bowditch stayed in medicine, serving as an admitting physician at Massachusetts General Hospital, the institution founded by his instructor Dr. James Jackson and financed by “The Bowditch Firm.” In 1833, his oldest brother Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch became one of the establishment’s trustees. In 1841, Massachusetts General Hospital enacted a new policy: it would no longer admit black patients. After receiving a reprimand for admitting a black patient into the hospital, Henry I. Bowditch promised the institution that he would abide by its new regulation. However, he soon reneged on this promise and threatened to resign in protest of the new policy:

In my admission of patients until that law was passed, I (with your permission) always regarded the colored man or woman in the same light that I looked upon other men and women….I must leave, for, under the action of that rule, I have been the means this day of excluding a poor girl from that charity, which, as it seems to me, belongs as much to her as to any other person….I cannot, you will

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48 Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
49 Schwartz, Samuel Gridley Howe, 49.
50 Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, A History of Massachusetts General Hospital (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1851), 112.
readily see, consent to do this again, or to remain longer in a situation where I may be obliged to violate thus my views of justice.\textsuperscript{51}

The Board of Trustees relented and changed its policy.\textsuperscript{52} The influence of his mentor, father, and brother qualified the risk of this maneuver but did not guarantee a desirable outcome. By arguing for racial equality in a prejudiced society, Bowditch risked his career to maintain his convictions.

As he fought for civil rights at Massachusetts General Hospital, Bowditch also advocated on behalf of the interests of black students through his position on the Boston School Committee. When the majority of this body recommended continuing a policy of public school segregation, Bowditch published a minority opinion with another committee member named Edmund Jackson that argued for integration.\textsuperscript{53} Jackson, like Bowditch, had ties to the Committee of Vigilance, an abolitionist organization dedicated to opposing the practice of slave hunting.\textsuperscript{54} Bowditch and Jackson asserted that segregation violated core civic principles:

It is the peculiar advantage of our republican system, that it confers civil equality and legal rights upon every citizen—that it knows no privileged class, and no degraded class—that it confers no distinction, and creates no difference, between rich and poor, learned and ignorant, white and black; but places all upon the same level, and considers them alike entitled to its protection and its benefits.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{52} Bowditch, \textit{The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch}, 130, 132.

\textsuperscript{53} Edmund Jackson and Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, \textit{Report of the Minority of the Committee of the Primary School Board on the Caste Schools} (Boston: A.J. Wright’s Steam Press, 1846), 2-3.


\textsuperscript{55} Jackson and Bowditch, \textit{Report}, 4.
Bowditch and Jackson argued that to remain a free, republican society, Boston needed to build institutions that prevented the creation of privileged and degraded classes. The city had to equitably distribute “its protection and its benefits.” Bowditch and Jackson asserted that an integrated public school system performed a vital function in the maintenance of a free society by providing a place for community members to meet on an equal plane. It gave no preferences to the rich and withheld no benefits from the poor.\(^{56}\)

Calling attention to the inequality and partiality of the Boston School Committee’s policies, Bowditch and Jackson lambasted segregation as quintessentially unrepublican—the “peculiar institution” of Boston.\(^{57}\)

Bowditch and Jackson relied on the reports and opinions of others to supplement their testimony. In an appendix to their work, Bowditch and Jackson presented letters from different members of the School Committees surrounding Boston. This evidence-based argumentation bears the mark of Bowditch’s mentor Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis, who stressed the importance of rigorous observation.\(^{58}\) John H. Shaw of the Nantucket School Committee reported that black school attendance increased considerably after integration without negatively affecting white attendance. This finding contradicted the assumption that whites would leave schools after supposedly intellectually inferior black students gained access to the classroom.\(^{59}\) J. Mann, a member of the Salem School Committee, also noted that his city experienced no drop in


white attendance after integration.\textsuperscript{60} John F. Emerson and Thomas A. Greene of the New Bedford School Committee emphasized the congruent academic successes enjoyed by black and white children; a black student ranked among the top achievers in New Bedford’s Grammar Schools.\textsuperscript{61} The towns surrounding Boston disproved myths of racial inferiority that the Boston School Committee propagated. Bowditch and Jackson allowed Wendell Phillips, a preeminent abolitionist orator, to write a brief addendum to follow these written testimonies. Realizing that segregation produced no positive social effects, Phillips denounced politicians who supported segregated public schools as “narrow-minded and prejudiced men.”\textsuperscript{62} Bowditch’s role in coordinating this broad coalition against segregation demonstrates his status as a leading reformer in Boston.

Bowditch and Howe grew up with access to elite resources, they witnessed European revolutions, and they held leadership positions in social reform movements. For these men, social status was an asset. However, they risked their elite status by embracing unpopular radical reform movements. On the other hand, his lessons from abroad and his experiences leading other reforms strengthened his dedication to abolitionism and equipped him to capably advance the abolitionist agenda.

Chapter 3 | Unitarianism, Boston, and the Bowditch Family

Unitarianism shaped Bowditch’s religious and moral ideology. After a messy rise to power, this liberal branch of Christianity came to dominate Boston. While downplaying the importance of doctrine, Unitarianism stressed controversial beliefs that contradicted the theology of the numerous Evangelical and Calvinist sects. Bowditch’s parents adhered to a cosmopolitan form of Unitarianism. His father tolerated Catholicism and his mother was a free spirit who read a broad range of literature. This unique religious background formed a central part of Henry I. Bowditch’s identity and influenced his decision to embrace radical abolition.

Unitarianism and Calvinism

Calvinism, the theological rival to eighteenth century Unitarianism, evolved throughout the antebellum period. Calvinists believed that the Bible included everything an individual needed to know about salvation and morality. ¹ They argued for predestination, which asserted that depraved humans could not lead holy lives without God’s intervention. According to predestination, an omnipotent God decided who would—and who would not—receive salvation.² This tenet caused many Calvinists to fear that they were outside of God’s chosen few, in spite of their religious efforts.³ In the 1820s, theologians and preachers such as Nathaniel Taylor and Lyman Beecher began to advocate for New Haven Theology. They claimed that individual agency affected salvation through the doctrine of free will. Charles Finney, another influential antebellum preacher, claimed that man’s will, not God’s, represented the most important

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factor in determining an individual’s salvation. However, despite New School Theology’s popularity and its doctrinal similarities with stricter forms of Calvinism—it upheld the Trinity, the authority of the Bible, and the existence of hell—the Presbyterian Church voted to exclude this movement in 1837.\footnote{Johnson, \textit{Redeeming America}, 57-60, 63.} Antebellum Calvinism represented a prominent, diverse, and divided ideology.

Like Calvinism, Unitarianism upheld contentious doctrinal positions despite its famous motto: “deeds, not creeds.”\footnote{Steven Mintz, \textit{Moralists and Modernizers: America’s Pre-Civil War Reformers} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 23.} This denomination rejected the Trinity and believed in a single, unitary God.\footnote{Daniel Walker Howe, \textit{The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 42, 89-92.} Rev. Joseph Steven Buckminster, a Bostonian Unitarian, asserted that the literal substance of the gospels possessed no value. The gospels’ only source of worth, he argued, derived from their ability to inspire individuals to lead moral lives. This stance complemented the Unitarian position that humankind moved progressively closer to God throughout history. Additionally, it justified Unitarianism’s claim that Old Testament references to a vengeful God and that New Testament statements about the divinity of Jesus Christ comprised tools to help relatively unenlightened generations grasp elementary moral knowledge. These portions of Scripture held no intrinsic truth in themselves.\footnote{Howe, \textit{The Unitarian Conscience}, 7, 89-91, 99-100.} Unitarians generally considered beliefs about hell, Scripture, the incarnation, and the Trinity as “ugly, tyrannical, and outmoded.”\footnote{Daniel Walker Howe, \textit{The Political Culture of the American Whigs} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 160.} Some Unitarians advanced their positions with vitriol. Rev. William Ellery Channing described Calvinists who believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ and in his

\begin{footnotes}
\item Johnson, \textit{Redeeming America}, 57-60, 63.
\item Howe, \textit{The Unitarian Conscience}, 7, 89-91, 99-100.
\end{footnotes}
atonating death for the sins of the world as pagans.\textsuperscript{9} Unitarians passionately defended their particular view of religion.

Unitarianism divided within itself.\textsuperscript{10} One disagreement centered on the moral senses. This Unitarian concept asserted that individuals could distinguish right from wrong through an internal moral sense without needing any further justification in the same way that individuals could discern colors through their physical senses alone. Rev. William Ellery Channing led a group that claimed the moral senses, like their physical counterparts, would grow dull unless constantly trained. Rev. Theodore Parker led a rival school that asserted the moral senses could not atrophy.\textsuperscript{11} Divisions within Unitarianism stemmed from more than just doctrine. Politics created a rift between the Jeffersonian Democrats in Salem and the Unitarian Federalists of Boston.\textsuperscript{12} Nathaniel Bowditch left the Unitarian congregation of his Salem mentor, Rev. William Bentley, after becoming the Federalist candidate for the local office of representative: Rev. Bentley supported the Jeffersonian Democrats.\textsuperscript{13} Unitarianism did not present a unified response to slavery and vacillated between its dual desires to oppose slavery and avoid controversy.\textsuperscript{14} This division later led Bowditch to stop attending public Unitarian worship services.\textsuperscript{15} For him, Unitarianism was anything but unified.

\textsuperscript{9} Howe, \textit{The Unitarian Conscience}, 42.
\textsuperscript{11} Howe, \textit{The Unitarian Conscience}, 54.
\textsuperscript{12} Howe, introduction, 8.
\textsuperscript{14} Howe, \textit{The Unitarian Conscience}, 285, 289-294, 296.
\textsuperscript{15} Vincent Y. Bowditch, \textit{The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch} (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), 116-119, 120-121, 125.
Unitarianism remained the dominant belief system of the Boston elite throughout the antebellum period.\textsuperscript{16} President John Quincy Adams, a Massachusetts native, publicly confessed his fidelity to the Unitarian Church in 1826.\textsuperscript{17} Boston Unitarians included intellectuals such as Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster, the founder of the Boston Athenaeum; literary giants such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Oliver Wendell Holmes; and countless influential businessmen.\textsuperscript{18} Unitarianism exerted a hegemonic influence at Harvard College. The Hollis Professor of Divinity was one of the oldest, most influential positions at Harvard.\textsuperscript{19} Several Fellows of the Harvard Corporation—one of Harvard’s decision-making bodies—objected to installing a Unitarian as the Hollis Professor of Divinity, because John Hollis, who endowed the position, adhered to Calvinism. This opinion gained little traction; the majority of the Fellows of the Harvard Corporation were Unitarian. The Corporation selected the Unitarian Reverend Henry Ware to fill the position in 1805.\textsuperscript{20} A year later, the Harvard Corporation cemented the college’s Unitarian disposition by selecting another Unitarian, Rev. Samuel Webber, as the institution’s president.\textsuperscript{21} Despite its divided soul, Unitarianism remained a formidable ideology in Bowditch’s world.

\textit{Nathaniel and Mary Ingersoll Bowditch’s Opposition to Slavery}

Nathaniel Bowditch, Henry I. Bowditch’s father, despised slavery. After spotting a slave ship in 1796, he wrote, “God grant that detestable traffic which she pursued may soon cease and that the tawny Sons of Africa may be permitted quietly to enjoy the

\textsuperscript{16} Howe, introduction, 7.
\textsuperscript{17} Howe, \textit{The Political Culture of the American Whigs}, 58.
\textsuperscript{18} Howe, \textit{The Unitarian Conscience}, 174, 176. See also, Howe, introduction, 10-12.
\textsuperscript{19} Howe, introduction, 4-5.
blessings of liberty in their native country.” While docked at the Île de Bourbon, Nathaniel Bowditch again raged against slavery. He lambasted the French for fighting in the name of liberté, égalité, et fraternité on the European continent while hypocritically forcing their slaves to live in nakedness and in chains on that African island. He believed that slavery undermined the right to liberty and the principles of the French Revolution of 1789 in the same way that Henry I. Bowditch later condemned slavery for undercutting the civic ideals of the American Revolution.

Henry I. Bowditch’s mother, Mary Ingersoll, framed her opposition to slavery on moral grounds. Although Mary never told Henry about her abolitionist sentiments, Bowditch thought “the silent-influence of such thoughts [from Mary] as they promote mercy, all unconsciously, have influenced me to Antislavery [Bowditch’s emphasis].” His mother’s moral protest lucidly presents itself in a poem that she copied into her commonplace journal by Robert Merry entitled “The Slaves”:

Then why suppose Yourselves the chosen few
To deal Oppression’s poisn’d arrows round,
To gall with Iron bonds the weaker crew,
Enforce the labour and inflict the wound?

Merry’s poem depicts slave traders and slave owners as uncivilized, a breed of savages shooting “poisn’d arrows.” With Calvinist condemnation, it suggests that slave traders

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23 Berry, Yankee Stargazer, 57-8.
24 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
remained outside of God’s “chosen few” because they elected to “gall” and enslave captured Africans “with Iron bonds.” Henry I. Bowditch made similar claims. The Constitution of the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League, an abolitionist organization that Bowditch founded in 1854, lambasted slave hunting as “an offense against Christianity, [and] a reproof to civilization.”

Bowditch’s activism reflected the unspoken abolitionism of his mother. Mary copied another abolitionist poem into her commonplace journal by Edward Jerningham entitled “The African Boy.” Jerningham’s poem conveyed the ethical mandate for manumission through its narrative of a colony established by free blacks:

‘Tis said the num’rous Captive Train
Late bound by the degrading Chain
Triumphant comes, with swelling sails,
‘Mid smiling skies, and western gales;
They come with festive heart and glee,
Their hands unshackled—minds as free;
They come at Mercy’s great command,
To repossess their native land.

The phrase “Mercy’s great command” justifies abolition on moral grounds, either through a reference to God or, more simply, through an invocation of virtue. The “smiling skies” that marked the freed slaves’ arrival indicate God’s approval of the event and the “glee” felt by freed slaves suggests a dispensation of holy joy. Henry I. Bowditch’s religious

explications of abolition and his work resettling former slaves in Haiti mirrors themes from his mother’s commonplace journal.29

*Nathaniel Bowditch: The Liberal Unitarian*

*American National Biography Online*, or *ANB Online*, describes the relationship between the faith of Henry I. Bowditch and his parents: “Bowditch had largely shed the creedal framework of his Protestant religious upbringing by his late twenties, but throughout his life he retained a pietistic sense of mission and zealous Christian moralism.”30 Despite the implications of this claim, Bowditch’s faith overlapped with his father’s beliefs in significant ways.

To borrow the terminology of *ANB Online*, Nathaniel Bowditch constructed an atypical “creedal framework” in an antebellum period characterized by the Evangelicalism of the Second Great Awakening. Nathaniel adhered to Unitarianism throughout his life.31 Rev. William Bentley, an eighteenth century Unitarian minister who forcefully opposed the then-popular doctrines of Calvinism, mentored Nathaniel Bowditch while he lived in Salem as a young adult.32 In Boston, Nathaniel Bowditch attended the Church on the Green, a Unitarian parish led by Rev. Alexander Young.33 One of Henry I. Bowditch’s colleagues noted that Nathaniel Bowditch “had not…the Puritanic [sic] or the Calvinistic austerity so common in New England in his

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31 Berry, *Yankee Stargazer*, 198-199.

32 Berry, *Yankee Stargazer*, 25.

33 Berry, *Yankee Stargazer*, 198
Nathaniel’s disposition in a similar fashion: “[he] held, for those days…rather liberal views.” Nathaniel, like many Unitarians, was reluctant to accept a superficial, literal understanding of the English Bible; he translated twenty-five different English versions of the Bible based on his collection of foreign editions of the Good Book. Despite his knowledge of Scripture, Nathaniel shied away from firm creedal positions and remained true to the Unitarian ideal: “deeds, not creeds.” On his deathbed, he refused to answer questions about the afterlife, including a relatively benign inquiry on the subject of recognizing friends in heaven. If Henry I. Bowditch “shed the creedal framework” of his father—to again quote ANB Online—he shed a liberal, cerebral faith that did not characterize the dominant beliefs of a nation in the throes of an Evangelical awakening.

Nathaniel Bowditch’s tolerance towards Catholicism differed from widely held Protestant sentiment. Lyman Beecher, a prominent preacher of New Haven Theology, believed that Unitarians and Calvinists harbored so much animosity towards Catholicism that their mutual acrimony could serve as a starting point for reunifying the two denominations. Rev. William Bentley, Nathaniel Bowditch’s mentor as a young adult, precipitated a local scandal by hosting a Roman Catholic bishop. Anti-Catholicism could turn violent. In Boston, a Protestant mob burned down the Ursuline Convent in 1834 during the tenure of Father Benedict Fenwick; the crowd accused the convent of

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36 Berry, *Yankee Stargazer*, 216.
40 Berry, *Yankee Stargazer*, 25.
torturing a young woman in a secret dungeon. However, Nathaniel Bowditch developed a strong relationship with Bishop Fenwick. Their friendship became a close one. Father Fenwick even issued orders to still the bells in the Boston Cathedral during the Lenten season to create a quiet, peaceful environment for Nathaniel Bowditch as he lay dying on March 16, 1838. Nathaniel Bowditch resisted the rampant anti-Catholic sentiment of the antebellum era.

Although Henry I. Bowditch supplemented his father’s beliefs, he never discarded them. Bowditch harbored firm convictions on the afterlife and the meaning of Scripture, despite his father’s tentativeness. James J. Putnam, a pioneer in American neurology and psychoanalysis, enjoyed listening to Bowditch’s sermons and devotions. According to his brother William, Henry I. Bowditch believed in an immortal soul and that “God responded to his prayer for help even in the smallest matters.” The Massachusetts Medical Society claimed that Bowditch possessed a robust faith influenced by a strong knowledge of Scripture and Unitarianism’s de-emphasis on rigid denominational creeds. It noted that Bowditch “was always a reader and lover of the Psalms and other books of the Bible, but that he ‘did not believe in creeds made by men.’” To claim that Henry I. Bowditch shed his father’s beliefs ignores the liberal tenor of Bowditch’s

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religion as well as the process of adjusting a childhood faith to meet the demands of adulthood.

Bowditch emulated his father’s tolerance of Catholicism. In 1832, while he studied medicine in France, Bowditch admired how the Sœurs de la Charité distributed bread amongst the poor.\(^\text{47}\) During a brief trip to Rome in 1834, he took pleasure in hearing nuns chant “Miserere Mei, Deus,” a seventeenth century choral piece based on Psalm 51.\(^\text{48}\) Seventeen years later, Bowditch led a group of Catholics, Calvinists, Unitarians, and religious skeptics in public prayer after the ship carrying a fugitive slave named Thomas Sims sailed from Boston harbor to return Sims to the South. Bowditch later organized an interdenominational religious service to help abolitionists mourn the Sims tragedy.\(^\text{49}\) As a physician, Bowditch worked with numerous hospitals run by nuns despite the prohibition on consulting with female physicians in the Massachusetts Medical Society’s ethical code.\(^\text{50}\) Bowditch assisted in founding the Notre Dame Institute in Boston and the St. Vincent Orphan Asylum, two institutions operated by Catholic sisterhoods.\(^\text{51}\) When the St. Vincent Orphan Asylum became The Carney Hospital, Bowditch volunteered to assist the institution as a visiting physician and as the


\(^{48}\) Bowditch, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch*, 79-80.


president of staff.52 Although Bowditch’s tolerance contradicted the anti-Catholicism practiced by many antebellum Protestants, it mirrored his father’s religious sentiment.

_The Moral Character of Mary Ingersoll Bowditch_

Historian John T. Cumbler dedicates little space to Mary Ingersoll Bowditch during his treatment of Henry I. Bowditch in his work _From Abolition to Rights for All: The Making of a Reform Community in the Nineteenth Century_. Cumbler describes Mary as “a religious woman” with a “prohibition against playing outside on the Sabbath” because her children “were expected to be at church on Sunday.”53 This brief description, full of rules, implies that Mary Ingersoll Bowditch maintained a rigid, priggish faith when, in reality, she exhibited a warm, cosmopolitan religious sensibility. A full understanding of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch requires an awareness of his mother’s intellect and nonconformist disposition, insight that Cumbler’s laconic depiction of Mary Ingersoll fails to supply.

Mary had a considerable effect on Henry I. Bowditch’s ideology. Although she never spoke about her abolitionism, Henry accredits her salient sentiments with nurturing his own convictions against slavery.54 Bowditch saw his mother as a religious model, increasing the likelihood that he might perceive abolition as a moral cause. When Bowditch was ten years old, his family believed that Mary was dying. At this time, she

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gave Bowditch the Bible that he used throughout his life. Bowditch’s personal notes in this Bible illustrate his admiration of Mary’s faith: “My mother died April 16, 1834. Never has a more lovely spirit quitted this earth.” As an elderly man, Bowditch visited his birthplace in Salem and reminisced about his mother’s “lovely spirit.” He confided, “The thought of the dear, sainted mother who had given the book [the Bible] and of her long-sufferings and of her deep love for me—was rather more than I could bear. Hoards of sweet memories floated…I fear I should have broken down.” Mary’s example of authentic spirituality helped Bowditch to construct a framework through which he later criticized religious institutions and developed a personal faith that was devout, educated, and flexible.

Mary’s policy about staying indoors on Sundays was not unique in Northern culture. Large portions of the North passed laws banning cooking and—with the exception of traveling to and from church—walking outside between Saturday night and Sunday night. Even in a commercial hub like Boston, few people left their homes on Sundays. During a visit to America in 1831, French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville observed, “Boston on Sunday has, literally, the appearance of a deserted town.” Many Northerners followed a narrow observance of the Sabbath that forbade any non-religious activity on that day. For instance, the Evangelical preacher Lyman Beecher refused to let

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his children play with their toys on the Lord’s Day. Newly organized “Sabbatarians” promoted their zealous views by lobbying Congress to ban the Sunday mail and organizing boycotts on transport companies that operated seven days a week. Mary Ingersoll adopted a more relaxed observance of the Sabbath. She only required a personal cessation from work—explaining why her children played carelessly in the attic on Sunday afternoons. This observance countered her husband’s example of unrelenting labor. Despite his permissive faith, Nathaniel Bowditch was a “gruff, humorless man, an autodidact.” Mary’s rules about Sabbath observance taught her children how to incorporate rest into their lives. Considering Northern culture, narrow interpretation of the Sabbath, and Nathaniel’s character, it seems that Mary observed the Sabbath with moderation.

Mary’s lesson about the Sabbath stayed with Henry I. Bowditch after he grew disillusioned with the formal Unitarian church. As an adult, Bowditch initially felt drawn to a Unitarian church called Warren Street Chapel because of its charitable work. However, Warren Street Chapel did not share Bowditch’s racially egalitarian convictions. Although the church invited white children from across the Boston area to take part in its annual Fourth of July parade, Warren Street Chapel forbade black children from

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60 Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 119.
participating in their procession. The establishment placed restrictions on black children who wanted to join Sunday School and Bible Classes. Seeking to ameliorate the church’s silence about slavery, Bowditch asked permission to deliver a series of abolitionist lectures. The leadership committee of Warren Street Chapel refused, claiming abolition was too sectarian and inconsistent with its commitment to human brotherhood. Bowditch quit Warren Street Chapel and dismissed its rebuke as “nonsense.” However, he still set Sundays aside as a personal day of rest despite his efforts in medicine and abolition—an indication of how deeply Mary’s faith influenced him. Her moderate Sabbath observance helped Bowditch to maintain balance during his adult life. Bowditch abandoned hypocritical Unitarian institutions but continued to practice the principles that Mary imbued within him.

Henry I. Bowditch’s ability to think independently and question institutional norms reflects his mother’s nonconformist character. Mary collected numerous literary excerpts in her commonplace journals that challenged dominant societal perceptions about sexuality. These selections come from works intended exclusively for a male audience. One entry in Mary’s commonplace journal derides the virtue of a man who abandons an “unsuspecting girl…after winning her affections and esteem by the soft and prevailing rhetoric.” The text challenged the conception of marriage as a formal ritual:

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68 Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. “Journal, October 18, 1842,”


71 Massachusetts Historical Society, Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887, Call Number: Ms. N-1898, Folder 3 of 3, “Sonnet to Sensibility.”
“[by establishing] the reasonable supposition that he intended making her his wife, the contract is, in the sight of heaven, of equal Force.”\textsuperscript{72} The text tactfully omits references to any specific action that would create a “reasonable supposition” of marriage in an unsuspecting girl without formal ceremony. These same words appear in the 35\textsuperscript{th} volume of \textit{The London Magazine, or, Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer} within an article entitled: “An Admonition to Those Who Glory in Seducing the Affections of the Fair and Then Deserting Them.”\textsuperscript{73} Mary was reading literature intended for men. She copied a poem into her commonplace journal entitled “Eloisa to Abelard” by Alexander Pope, a Catholic author renowned for trying to bridge the theological gap between Protestantism and Catholicism in his \textit{Essay on Man}.\textsuperscript{74} Mary may have been intrigued by Pope’s reflections on religious toleration. It explained how “stern Religion quench’d th’ unwilling flame” of sensual desire between two lovers.\textsuperscript{75} Pope’s poem examines, among other subjects, the boundaries of carnal love.\textsuperscript{76} By copying excerpts from \textit{The London Magazine} and Alexander Pope, Mary Ingersoll demonstrated her willingness to rethink societal prohibitions on proper reading material and traditional religious teachings on sexuality and marriage.

Mary reconsidered preconceived gender roles regarding power and female submission. In the back folds of the cover of her adolescent math book, Mary hid a

\textsuperscript{72} Massachusetts Historical Society, \textit{Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887}, Call Number: Ms. N-1898, Folder 3 of 3, “Sonnet to Sensibility.”


\textsuperscript{75} Massachusetts Historical Society, \textit{Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887}, Ms. N-1898, Narrow Box, Folder 3. Mary Ingersoll Bowditch inserted an extra “u” into the first word of the title of this poem so that it reads: “Elouisa to Abelard [emphasis mine].”

\textsuperscript{76} Schmidt, “Religious Culture in Early America,” 47-48.
detailed picture of a richly dressed, foreign princess. Its caption read: “Habit of a Princess of the Mogul’s Empire.”77 This exotic princess adorned herself with flowers, large earrings, a pearl bracelet, and two pearl necklaces. Her clothes clash with the simple, modest dress enforced by stricter Christian sects amongst Calvinists, Baptists, Quakers, Mennonites, and Seventh-Day Adventists.78 In the picture, the Mogul princess self-assuredly inspects a plant that a barefoot man presents to her within a porcelain vase. Behind her, two male servants deferentially bow their heads and support a rich canopy to shade her.79 Older men in the background of the image stop their business and stare at her. This picture challenges eighteenth century conceptualizations of gender roles by depicting a powerful woman with a taste for material pleasure.

Mary’s use of a journal decorated with a cover image of a sea battle suggests a tolerance for violence that her son would later exhibit in his behavior as a youth and middle-aged man. In this image, the broken mast of a submerged ship appears closest to the reader. Cannon smoke fills the center of the image and a battered ship sinks in the left-hand portion of the illustration. The caption appears in a dynamic typeface that applies print, cursive, boldface, italics, and all caps: “Sir GEORGE BYNG DESTROYING the SPANISH FLEET in SICILY.”80 This horrific representation of naval warfare upsets certain popular expectations of feminine benevolence.81 Henry Bowditch founded organizations that threatened the violent undoing of the Fugitive Slave

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77 Massachusetts Historical Society, Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887, Call Number: Ms. N-1898, Folder 1 of 3 in narrow box. This picture is hidden in the back folds of the book.
79 Massachusetts Historical Society, Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887, Call Number: Ms. N-1898, Folder 1 of 3 in Narrow Box.
80 Massachusetts Historical Society, Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887, Call Number: Ms. N-1898, Folder 2 of 3 in Narrow Box.
Law of 1793 and 1850, two pieces of federal legislation. Bowditch, like his mother, thought for himself instead of abiding by societal constraints.

Mary kept a personal correspondence that addressed Calvinist doctrine in detail. A letter to Mary from William Bowditch, the uncle of Henry I. Bowditch, reads:

Death should be the Standard whereby to try every thing I no; therefore this Question should often be put, ‘how shall I esteem this conduct upon a dying or at the day of judgment? Or if I arrive at the regions of happiness, how shall I look upon this thing, or this Conduct this question should often be put to myself [sic].”

William’s focus on “the day of judgment” indicates a belief in eternal punishment, which contradicts the Unitarian belief of hell as a symbolic rather than literal place. It corresponds with Calvinist theology that encouraged individuals to soberly contemplate the fate of their souls. This language represents the Calvinist influence that pervaded Massachusetts’s culture during Mary’s childhood, before Unitarianism became the predominant sect of the Boston elite. Another letter written by William to Mary Ingersoll Bowditch on April 20, 1795, expands upon the importance of meditating on eternity:

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82 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” in The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, by Vincent Y. Bowditch (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), 272.


84 Massachusetts Historical Society, Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887, Ms-1898, Narrow Box, Folder 3. See also, Massachusetts Historical Society, Bowditch Family Papers, 1834-1882, Call Number: Ms. N-49.61, “Genealogical Charts.”

85 Howe, The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861, 4-5.
Why do men neglect religion, and their own souls?...Why will mortal men neglect religion and risk their eternal interest and live as it were without God? disobeying in the first cause of Existance and laying a foundation for eternal misery. Oh how solemn and dreadful is the thought of launching into eternity unprepared and there to stand before the bar of Jehovah! [sic].

William evokes Calvinist concepts of hell and a final judgment through phrases such as “the bar of Jehovah” and “eternal misery.” Building on a doctrine similar to that of free will, William Bowditch inquires: “Why will mortal men neglect religion and risk their eternal interest?” This question mirrors the teachings of New School theology about the role of individual choice in salvation. Mary Ingersoll Bowditch’s correspondence with William Bowditch suggests a cultivated religious disposition; she was willing to examine multiple theological perspectives.

Unitarianism gave Bowditch a distinctive religious upbringing in the antebellum period. Bowditch’s family background encouraged him to transcend formal ecclesiastical institutions that failed to apply Unitarian principles and remain true to the broad-minded, abolitionist faith of his mother and father.

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86 Massachusetts Historical Society, Mary Ingersoll Papers, 1779-1887, Call Number: Ms. N-1898, Narrow Box, Folder 2 of 3.
87 Cross, The Burned-Over District, 27. See also, Johnson, Redeeming America, 57-60.
Chapter 4 | Studies in Paris

Henry I. Bowditch encountered a revolution in medical science when he studied in France with the Paris médicale from 1832-1834. Before the reforms of the Paris médicale took hold, humoral theory and heroic medicine dominated medical discourse. Humoral theory postulated that infirmities stemmed from an imbalance in at least one of four humors within the human body: phlegm, blood, bile, and black bile. Heroic medicine instructed physicians to fight infirmities through drastic, “heroic” treatments such as bleeding, purging, vomiting, and mercury rubs. Influential advocates such as Benjamin Rush, a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, supported heroic medicine. Rush had recovered from a case of yellow fever after following through with a round of self-prescribed bleeding. Bowditch’s education in Paris overturned the assumptions of heroic medicine. Parisian medicine prospered under the tutelage of revolutionary researchers such as Marie Françoise Xavier Bichat and Gaspard Laurent Bayle. Bowditch matured under the instruction of the relentless empiricist Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis and his Société d’Observation. In France, Bowditch began to question accepted medical truths—even those backed by founding fathers such as Rush. This experience prepared him to reconsider antebellum assumptions towards race and slavery that had existed since the genesis of the American nation.

1 Vincent Y. Bowditch, The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), 14, 82-3.
French Medical Revolutions in Anatomy, Pathology, and Empiricism

The availability of human cadavers for medical dissections helped to facilitate the onslaught of French discovery. By the 1830s, a medical student could buy a cadaver for 50 sou at the École Pratique d’Anatomie. This ready supply enabled French researchers such as Marie Françoise Xavier Bichat to perform numerous autopsies. In the winter before his death, Bichat performed 600 dissections. He published the results of his work in Traité de membranes in 1801. This composition contained groundbreaking findings about the internal workings of the human body. Bichat published similar conclusions from his autopsies in influential works such as Anatomie générale and Anatomie descriptive. Gaspard Laurent Bayle complemented Bichat’s research on the human body with his studies in pathology. Bayle based his conclusions on the results of 900 dissections he performed on cadavers that died from consumption, or pulmonary tuberculosis. He disclosed his research in 1810 through a publication entitled Recherches sur la phthisie pulmonaire. These opportunities for dissection did not exist in New England, where a mob attacked Yale in the 1790s because its medical students—desperately strapped for human cadavers—had disinterred a corpse from a nearby cemetery. When Bowditch went to France, he gained access to a wealth of knowledge and research opportunities that American universities could not offer.

Beyond dissection, studying in Paris gave Bowditch the opportunity to study techniques for investigating the interior of a living patient through European innovations such as percussion and auscultation. Auscultation is a medical process of listening to the internal workings of the body, especially through a stethoscope. Percussion, a method

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5 Dowling, Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris, 15-16.
6 Dowling, Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris, 35.
7 Dowling, Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris, 15.
introduced by Leopold Auenbrugger, involved tapping a patient’s chest to evaluate its degree of congestion. A resonant sound signified a healthy chest. A dull reverberation indicated heavy congestion and respiratory illness.\textsuperscript{8} René-Théophile-Hyacinthe Laënnec, a doctor who practiced at the Parisian hospital of La Charité, created a new way to listen to the workings of the heart and lungs by inventing the stethoscope.\textsuperscript{9} Marie Bichat and Gaspard Bayle, the anatomist and pathologist, mentored René Laënnec, the inventor of the stethoscope, who in turn carefully instructed his foreign English-speaking students. One French transformation in medicine hastened another.

Paris produced competing innovations. François-Joseph-Victor Broussais developed \textit{la medicine physiologique}, a medical theory postulating that gastro-intestinal lesions served as a universal explanation of disease. \textit{La medicine physiologique} justified the application of therapeutic bloodletting as a treatment for every nearly every illness.\textsuperscript{10} Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis challenged this theory through \textit{la méthode numérique}. Louis’s technique required an empirical study of medical treatments that employed vigorous observations to rule out alternative variables that might explain a patient’s recovery.\textsuperscript{11} Louis recorded the results of therapeutic bleeding through \textit{la méthode numérique} and found, contrary to a nearly unanimous medical assumption, that it did not improve a patient’s prognosis. In 1835, Louis published his findings in \textit{Recherches sur les effets de la saignée dans quelques maladies inflammatoires, et sur l’action de l’émétique et des vésicatoires dans la pneumonie}.\textsuperscript{12} When Bowditch arrived in France

\textsuperscript{8} Dowling, \textit{Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris}, 33-35.
\textsuperscript{11} Dowling \textit{Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris}, 32.
during the spring of 1832, Pierre Louis had already discredited François Broussais’s theory of *la medicine physiologique* before the next generation of Parisian doctors.  

The details of Louis’s study on bloodletting offer insight into the rigorous empiricism infused within *la méthode numérique*. Before publishing his results in 1835, Louis observed seventy-seven patients with pneumonia. According to Louis’s records, 44 percent of patients who received a treatment of therapeutic bleeding between the first and fourth days died. Conversely, of those bled between the fifth and ninth days, only 25 percent died. Louis recorded the age, sex, physical condition, and medical history of his patients to distinguish if any factor besides bloodletting could have affected their outcomes. The implications of this study on *la medicine physiologique* outraged François Broussias. Broussias claimed that Louis’s investigations disproved concepts but failed to establish new medical truths. Louis conceded the point. Unlike Broussias, he did not aspire to discover a new, absolute medical “truth.” He sought only to cultivate a well-informed opinion. Louis not only invalidated the practice of therapeutic bleeding and *la medicine physiologique*, he restructured the goals of medical research.

*Bowditch’s Studies Under Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis*

Bowditch considered Louis an “excellent teacher” and one of his “closest friends.” Bowditch admired the thoroughness of Louis, which may have reminded him of his father’s exactitude in translating Pierre-Simon Laplace’s multivolume work on

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13 Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, Bowditch, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch*, 14.


16 Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
celestial navigation, *Mécanique Céleste*. A relentless proponent of Louis’s *méthode numérique*, Bowditch wrote:

No one has the least conception in Boston of the power that a person can gain by following Louis….It is an observing and calculating spirit, which examines with the utmost exactness the symptoms of disease at the bedside, weighs the different values of them, under different circumstances….[Louis] is, in fact, what he wishes to be considered, a careful observer of facts, and [he] deduces from these facts the laws which regulate disease.\textsuperscript{17}

Bowditch saw Louis as a “renovator of the science of medicine.”\textsuperscript{18} Louis inspired Bowditch to pursue medicine with an augmented vigor by introducing him to the precision of empiricism.\textsuperscript{19}

Bowditch attended the *Société d’Observation* in Paris, an association of medical students overseen by Louis and dedicated to *la méthode numérique*. This organization taught physicians-in-training how to make rigorous medical observations. At each meeting, a different student would present his medical observations. Afterward, each member of the society took turns criticizing his notes, ready to expose “the most trivial omission or…too inconsiderate deduction.”\textsuperscript{20} Louis ended the exercise by offering two rounds of critiques. First, Louis explained the deficiencies of his students’ evaluations. Then, he offered his own analysis. Bowditch accredited these assessments with teaching

\textsuperscript{17} Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. “Letter from Henry Ingersoll Bowditch to His Parents, January 27, 1833,” in *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch*, by Vincent Y. Bowditch (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company), 37.

\textsuperscript{18} Bowditch, “Letter from Henry Ingersoll Bowditch to His Parents, January 27, 1833,” 38.


\textsuperscript{20} *Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago* (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
him to take criticism seriously but not personally. Bowditch recalled the first time that he presented his medical observations to the Société d’Observation:

I had ceased reading [my observations], and Louis proceeded to ask each member in turn to state the errors he had noticed in the paper. With this commenced a running fire of the severest kind of criticism. All of it was made in the most gentlemanly manner and evidently in no captious spirit, but simply with the determination to make as much out of the occasion as could be made towards the clearest elucidation of the subject.

Bowditch propagated Louis’s teachings in the United States. Between 1836 and 1840, Bowditch translated several works by Louis into English including: Anatomical, Pathological and Therapeutic Researches upon the Disease Known under the Name of Gastro-Enterite, Putrid, Adynamic, Ataxic, or Typhoid Fever, Etc.; Pathological Researchers on Phthisis; and Proper Method of Examining a Patient. Bowditch defended the conclusions of Louis from ridicule in the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal. In 1840, Bowditch founded a sister organization to the Société d’Observation in

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21 Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.

22 Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.

Massachusetts called The Boston Observation Society. In 1846, Bowditch drew from his Parisian studies as well as his own experiences as a practitioner of *la méthode numérique* to present “a summary of the essentials” in the first American handbook on auscultation, *The Young Stethoscopist; or, The Student’s Aid to Auscultation*. Auscultation emerged from disrepute and became a mainstream medical practice by the middle 1840s because of the efforts exerted by Bowditch and other Americans trained by Louis. Bowditch helped reshape American medicine by carrying the spirit of Louis and the innovations of the *Paris médicale* to Massachusetts.

Louis’s teachings had a profound effect on the United States. Oliver Wendell Holmes, a Bostonian who studied under Louis with Bowditch, returned to Massachusetts determined to question traditional medical treatments with a “spirit of skeptical empiricism.” Holmes went on to found The American Statistical Society with George Shattuck, Jr.—another Bostonian trained by Louis. Holmes opposed the practices of heroic medicine, such as bloodletting, and other non-objective forms of medicine, like homeopathy. Harvard Medical School, inspired by the lectures of Louis, began to hold Clinical Conferences in 1859. Louis changed American medical theory, practice, and education.

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26 Henry I. Bowditch, preface to *The Young Stethoscopist; or, The Student’s Aid to Auscultation* (Boston: William D. Ticknor & Co., 1846), vii.
29 Dowling, *Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris*, 103.
30 Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
As Louis’s teachings spilled over from medicine into statistics through Oliver Wendell Holmes and George Shattuck, Jr., they may have influenced abolition through Bowditch. Louis taught his students to question the medical status quo and approach the field’s latest reforms with tentativeness. *La méthode numérique* espoused pragmatic empiricism and entertained no reverence for grand theories. The *Société d’Observation* encouraged Bowditch to question whether his colleagues had mastered the fundamental skill of observation. These concepts primed Bowditch to approach the issue of slavery and competing abolitionist philosophies with a frank leeriness.
Chapter 5 | Pragmatic Justifications: Religion, Civic Duty, Regionalism, and the Resolves of the Committee of Vigilance

A public meeting held in Boston at Faneuil Hall on September 22, 1846, chaired by Congressman and former President John Quincy Adams, who had earned the sobriquet “Old Man Eloquence,” created the Committee of Vigilance, or CV. Henry Ingersoll Bowditch described the event as “densely crowded and enthusiastic.” It passed a series of resolutions condemning the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 and the practice of slave hunting as antithetical to the national values of liberty and equality. John A. Andrew, the future governor of Massachusetts during the Civil War, presented these resolutions to the participants of the Faneuil Hall meeting. Bowditch’s participation in the CV marked one of the most significant accomplishments of his abolitionist career. Bowditch served as the organization’s secretary. He was also a member of its Executive and Finance Committees. The CV included two members of the so-called “Secret Six” who helped to fund John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry: Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe and Rev. Theodore Parker. Samuel Gridley Howe served as the president of the CV and, like Bowditch, was a member of its Executive Committee. Gerrit Smith, the chief financier of John Brown’s raid, wrote the CV and offered to help fund its operations. The renowned transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote an elegant letter to the organization detailing his approval of the public meeting at Faneuil Hall, but he did not offer to assist the CV. Despite Ralph Waldo Emerson’s passivity, his cousin George

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Barrell Emerson joined the organization. The committee included Garrisonians—individuals who followed the teachings of the prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison—such as Ellis Gray Loring, Samuel May, Samuel Sewall, and Francis Jackson. Wendell Phillips, another renowned Garrisonian, declined an invitation to join the CV.

The central principles of Garrisonianism included nonresistance, which demanded nonviolence and nonparticipation in politics, and moral suasion, a method of persuasion that appealed solely to conscience. By actively resisting the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, the CV embraced practical action that pushed the boundaries of the more rarified abolitionism of Garrison and Emerson.

Religious and Patriotic Ambiguities

Bowditch and the CV had to pursue their goal to stop slave hunting by disregarding the United States Constitution—or at least the sections of it that supported the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. Article IV, Section 2 of the Constitution states:

No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.

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6 Robert Fanuzzi, Abolition’s Public Sphere (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1. See also, James Brewer Stewart, Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 17.

7 U.S. Const., art. IV, § 2. Note that, in 1865, the 13th Amendment supplanted this portion of Article IV, Section 2.
This text almost makes the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 redundant. Slaves are “held to Service or Labor” by virtue of their social station. Their masters, “the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due,” could demand their rendition after these slaves escaped into Massachusetts. Article VI of the Constitution established the Congressional ordinances as “the Supreme Law of the land...Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.” By participating in the public meeting at Faneuil Hall and the CV, Bowditch attempted to overturn this “Supreme Law” by disobeying the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. To make matters worse, the Faneuil Hall resolutions lacked the legitimacy of state law—the rival center of legislative power referenced in Article VI. If overturning federal law through state law was unconstitutional, upending state law and constitutional texts through an ad hoc meeting was unimaginable.

Despite its moral convictions regarding the immoral nature of slavery, the CV had to reconcile their actions with Biblical texts commanding submission to government authorities. Romans 3:12 explains that God established all governing authorities and that Christians should obey those authorities. The text in 1 Peter 2:13 asks Christians to submit to kings and governors out of respect to God. However, Moses defied Pharaoh and led the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt under God’s command. The Magi disregarded King Herod by refusing to return to his palace and tell him the location of the infant Jesus after receiving instructions from an angelic vision. Before telling others to resist the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, Bowditch had to consider whether his actions aligned with God’s will. Bowditch’s participation in the Committee of Vigilance did not reflect ideological simplicity. He had to reason through difficult portions of Scripture to

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8 U.S. Const., art. VI.
9 Exodus 14:8-15, King James Version.
10 Matthew 2:1-12, King James Version.
justify his behavior, reflecting the kind of mature contemplation encouraged by his cosmopolitan religious upbringing that this thesis addressed in Chapter 3.¹¹

*The Resolutions of the Committee of Vigilance*

The resolutions of the Committee of Vigilance capitalized on appeals to regionalism, civic duty, and religion in its denunciation of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. The text’s passionate appeals embody the emotional tenor that characterized Massachusetts abolitionism after 1830.¹² These resolutions did not subscribe to a purely secular or divine ideology; rather, they appealed to religion and civic duty to convince as many individuals as possible to join the CV and oppose slave hunting.

The CV demonized the South. Its first resolution established that “protecting personal liberty comprised the first duty of all government” and that removing free blacks assaulted personal liberties—the bastion of a government’s legitimacy.¹³ The next resolution depicted the state governments of the South as a cohesive foreign entity, distinct from the North. It lambasted Southern law and sentiment, asserting that neither could “justify nor excuse any violation of the smallest right or privilege of the humblest individual within the borders of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”¹⁴ The South threatened Massachusetts’s individual liberties and the Commonwealth’s ability to fulfill essential civic responsibilities. This volatile regionalist language suggests a son-of-the-

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¹¹ Massachusetts Historical Society, *Henry I. Bowditch Papers*, Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 1, “Bible.” Bowditch placed dots next to certain verses in his Bible, which seems to mean that some verses carried a special significance for Bowditch.


soil mentality associated with CV members such as Bowditch, a native Old Bayer who could trace his Massachusetts lineage back to 1639.\textsuperscript{15} It recalls the lost ideals of the French and Greek Revolutions that Howe and Bowditch observed during their time in Europe.\textsuperscript{16} Men like Bowditch and Howe had to protect their state from Southern encroachment.

The CV resolutions shamed Massachusetts for straying from its founding principles and Christian obligations. One portion reads: “Resolved, That the spirit of justice and freedom will be dead amongst us, when an injury done to the least individual, shall cease to be felt as a wrong to the whole community.”\textsuperscript{17} This appeal on behalf of “the spirit of justice and freedom” and “the least individual” targets the spiritual sentiment of its audience. God commands justice throughout the Bible, both in the Old Testament, which Bostonian Unitarians saw as a text originally intended for morally primitive generations, and the New Testament, which liberal Protestants perceived as a purer distillation of religious truth.\textsuperscript{18} By viewing “the injury done to the least individual” with indifference, Bostonians would have neglected the Unitarian doctrine of human brotherhood. Rev. William Ellery Channing, one of Boston’s preeminent Unitarian preachers, taught that human brotherhood represented the most vital part of Jesus’s

\textsuperscript{15} Massachusetts Historical Society, \textit{Henry I. Bowditch Papers}, Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 1, “Bible.”
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time} (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
\textsuperscript{18} See, Leviticus 11:45, 2 Samuel 23:3, 1 Kings 10:9, 2 Chronicles 9:8, Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:48, 1 Peter 1:16, King James Version.
teachings. He called it “the great Christian principle,” and argued that this virtue could banish warfare and introduce an age of permanent peace. The accusation of practicing injustice by disregarding the rights of the marginalized could provoke local Unitarian outrage. The implications of these arguments spilled over into the concept of civic duty. The Declaration of Independence claimed that King George III lost his right to rule because he “obstructed the administration of justice.” Similarly, the Preamble of the Constitution explained the need to “establish justice…[and] provide for the common defense and promote the general welfare.” Massachusetts’s failure to offer aide to politically vulnerable free blacks from the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 contradicted this Constitutional commitment to the “common defense” and the “general welfare.” Southern slave hunters threatened to undermine the Christian obligations and civic duties of Massachusetts’s citizens.

The final resolution of the Faneuil Hall assembly sanctioned the creation of a Committee of Vigilance to protect Boston’s fugitive slaves from man hunters. This Committee of Vigilance, the CV, would defy the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, the Federal Government that enacted it, and the Constitution that set it apart as “the Supreme Law of the land.” The CV mirrored the political institutions of the American War of Independence by grounding its legitimacy in the people rather than in corrupted

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23 U.S. Const., art. VI. See also, Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
government structures. This strategy suggests that Bostonians identified strongly with the Revolutionary War, a phenomenon adeptly described by historian Harold Schwartz:

Bostonians were never more conscious of their traditional position in the United States as a Cradle of Liberty than during the 1850's when the Fugitive Slave Law was in effect….Worshipping in the same churches as the patriots, and walking the very streets they trod, the descendants of the Minute Men of ’75 could never forget their heritage. 24

Schwartz’s comments hold relevance for the CV, which came about only four years before 1850. The CV hoped that Boston would become the focal point for revolutionary, abolitionist resistance just as it served as the center of resistance against Great Britain—abolitionists even had an Adams to lead the vanguard. Bowditch disregarded old structures and built new organizations such as the CV to better preserve the ideals of the American Revolution, or, more precisely, his perception of them. Bowditch maintained a fidelity to the aspirations of the founding fathers, not the operational minutiae of government.

Eager to preserve his interpretation of the Spirit of ‘76 and avoid the revolutionary atrophy of France and Greece, Bowditch worked around institutions that opposed his perception of core national ideals. This pragmatic attitude and willingness to question the status quo reflects the empiricism of his medical training under Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis and the free spirit of his mother Mary Ingersoll Bowditch. His passionate, inclusive religious adjurations mirror the religious tolerance of his father and the Unitarian emphasis on deeds over belief that he imbued as a child. Bowditch’s

upbringing and education primed him to join radical organizations such as the Committee of Vigilance.
Chapter 6 | The Address of the Committee Appointed by a Public Meeting

In 1846, Henry Ingersoll Bowditch wrote a declaration to justify the Committee of Vigilance, or the CV, to the Northern public. John A. Andrew, the future governor of Massachusetts during the Civil War, helped Bowditch to edit the document, titled “The Address of the Committee Appointed by a Public Meeting, Held at Faneuil Hall, September 24, 1846, for the Purpose of Considering the Recent Case of Kidnapping from Our Soil, and of Taking Measures to Prevent the Recurrence of Similar Outrages.” This thesis will refer to this text through a shortened title: “The Address.” The CV sent “The Address” to 46 newspapers in Boston, 89 newspapers in Massachusetts, 28 governors, 512 merchants, 97 clergymen, 4 members of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and 9 members of the United States Supreme Court. ¹ Many recipients of “The Address” opposed the principles of the CV. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney oversaw the United States Supreme Court when it upheld the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 in Prigg v. Pennsylvania.² Texas Governor James Henderson administered a slave state that, despite abolitionists’ objections, had joined the Union in 1845.³ The CV did not record the names of the Bostonian newspapers that received a copy of “The Address.” However, the large number of Massachusetts newspapers contacted by the CV suggests that William Lloyd Garrison—the editor of a prominent abolitionist newspaper entitled the Liberator—almost certainly received the document. By 1846, Garrison had won control over the American Anti-Slavery Society from conservative abolitionists, making him one

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of the most powerful abolitionists in the United States. The CV wanted political, religious, and media institutions to understand why the CV opposed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, whether these organizations supported abolition or not. Thus, the CV influenced the national dialogue about slavery.

Bowditch began “The Address” by establishing his audience. His language employed strong emotive appeals:

FELLOW CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES: A shameful outrage upon the sacred rights of Humanity has lately been perpetrated in our borders. It was one of those cases in which the wrong done to one man, puts into danger the rights of thousands of others, and affects principles dear to all. It was a case, which, if passed over in silence, would seem to show that we refuse to grant to others those rights which we would die to maintain for ourselves and our children.

The first words of “The Address” create an inclusive appeal to Bowditch’s “FELLOW CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES.” This introduction looked beyond the judges and newspaper editors who received “The Address”; it targeted the country as a whole. In Bowditch’s mind, however, this nation of “FELLOW CITIZENS” was restricted to the North. Bowditch perceived the South as a merely nominal region of the United States that had lost the essence of Americanism. He explained how Southerners had “perpetrated our [Northern] borders” and violated “the sacred rights of Humanity.” The CV sent “The Address” to Southerners such as Texas Governor James Henderson to

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5 *Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846* (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, *Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time* (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
condemn the apostate South for abandoning the essence of Americanism and embracing slave hunting. While Bowditch would have welcomed a Southern denunciation of slave hunting, the chief reason that the CV sent “The Address” South was to inform the region that Boston had created an organization to oppose man hunting.

“The Address” condemned kidnapping as “a shameful outrage.” This denunciation overlapped with an argument that William Lloyd Garrison employed in his “Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Convention.” Garrison wrote, “Every American citizen, who detains a human being in involuntary bondage as his property, is, according to Scripture, (Ex. xxi. 16,) a man-stealer.” Bowditch’s reference to “the wrong done to one man” and the concept of leaving these injustices “passed over in silence” echoes the biblical concept of sin by omission. Northerners, according to Bowditch, responded to man stealing with sinful passivity.

“The Address” frames slave hunting as un-republican by invoking foundational documents of American governance. Bowditch’s invocation of “the sacred rights of Humanity” and “principles dear to all” overlaps with the principles of the Declaration of Independence: “all men…are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” The unlawful seizure of a person contradicted the atmosphere of “justice,” “domestic tranquility,” and “general welfare” that the Preamble resolved to establish. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 imperiled the Fourth Amendment of the Bill of Rights, which

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7 For example, see James 4:17, KJV – “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”


9 U.S. Const, preamble.
declared: “The right of the people to be secure in their persons...against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated [emphasis mine].”\textsuperscript{10} Slave hunting violated the universal rights of the Declaration of Independence, the protection against unreasonable seizures guaranteed by the Fourth Amendment, and the promises of the Preamble. Bowditch depicted slave hunting as a practice that ran counter to the civic duty of patriotic Northerners.\textsuperscript{11}

Bowditch mixed his adjurations to religion and civic duty. For instance, Bowditch explained the plight of a fugitive slave named Joseph, who came to Boston in search of a sanctuary from Southern oppression.\textsuperscript{12} “The Address” described Joseph’s sense of security as he beheld “the dome of the State House, which seemed a temple of liberty.”\textsuperscript{13} This “State House” and “temple of liberty” represented quintessential national values of justice and freedom that the North needed to preserve. This argument about justice became even clearer as Bowditch described “the spires of the churches where a JUST GOD was worshipped.”\textsuperscript{14} This “JUST GOD” received worship throughout the Christian North. Slave catching in Boston and throughout the North threatened the United States’ status as a free, democratic, and Christian society.

Bowditch condemned the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 with religious language that applied to several denominational backgrounds. Referring to slave hunting, Bowditch

\textsuperscript{10} U.S. Const, amend. IV.
\textsuperscript{11} Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
\textsuperscript{12} Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time. (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
\textsuperscript{13} Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
\textsuperscript{14} Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
candidly wrote: “the religion of Jesus forbids it.” According to the Unitarian Rev. Theodore Parker’s doctrine of incorruptible religious senses, Bowditch’s audience would naturally see the truthfulness of his moral assertion. In case the moral senses of his audience proved dull—as suggested by the theology of celebrated Unitarian Rev. William Ellery Channing—Bowditch justified his claim through broad spiritual ideals like love, justice, and compassion. Bowditch outlined why the North should oppose slave hunting: “our sense of duty, our love of our fellow-beings, and our obligations to God, the common father of all men, bid us.” Bowditch’s repeated use of the first person plural possessive pronoun “our” in this excerpt strengthened his argument that the Northern community needed to oppose slave hunting for religious reasons. Bowditch intentionally applied inclusive theological appeals throughout his manifesto. He avoided references to the Trinitarian or Unitarian nature of the Divine. Instead, he stressed good deeds and the importance of helping fugitive slaves. By omitting direct Scriptural quotations, “The Address” denied its audience the opportunity to develop alternative interpretations to a few key verses and rationalize away the document’s religious assertions. By invoking broad concepts, Bowditch invited his diverse audience to justify abolition with their own spiritual vocabulary. “The Address” cast a wide theological net

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15 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
17 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
18 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, Howe, The Unitarian Conscience, 54.
in the hopes of winning support for the CV’s struggle against man hunting from as many sects as possible.19

“The Address” provided numerous justifications for resisting the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. This resistance, Bowditch argued, would improve the United States by aligning the North with God’s will:

We will not allow our free soil to be polluted by the slave-hunter and by the crimes of kidnapping and enslaving human beings, without doing all that becomes men and Christians to prevent it. We say crimes, because, though the highest court in the land may declare such deeds to be legal, the higher Court of Heaven overrules the decision and declares them to be infamous and wicked. What God, speaking through the enlightened consciences of all men, declares to be wrong, not all the tribunals of the earth can make right.20

This text avoids explicitly Calvinist or Unitarian language. Instead, Bowditch applies phrases that his audience could connect to their specific sect of Protestantism. Bowditch’s absolute denunciation of slavery as “infamous and wicked” imbues the document with an air of Calvinist condemnation. Likewise, Bowditch’s plea to “the enlightened consciences of all men” catered to the Unitarian doctrines of progressive morality and the moral senses.21 Drawing from a cosmopolitan religious background,

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19 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.

20 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number. See also, Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time (1.Ha.412.No.2), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.

21 Howe, The Unitarian Conscience, 7, 89-91, 99-100.
Bowditch filled his discourse with neutral language that resonated with both Calvinists and Unitarians. Bowditch attempted to unite his religiously divided audience through regionalism. Southern slave hunters, Bowditch argued, polluted the “free soil” of the North. Northerners had do everything in their power as “men and Christians” to stop man hunters from defiling sacred land. “The Address” tried to exploit a common distrust of Southern values to unite the ecclesiastically disparate citizens of the North.

Bowditch realized that targeting judges with a religious argument could advance his crusade against slave hunting.22 The Supreme Court upheld the Fugitive Slave Law through various cases such as Prigg vs. Pennsylvania, decided in 1842.23 State courts ruled similarly in cases such as Wright v. Deacon, which the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decided in 1819.24 In response, “The Address” emphasized how “the Higher Court of Heaven” had ruled against the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. Bowditch also elucidated the chasm between slave hunting and true republicanism, another discourse that could allure jurists. “The Address” reiterated how slave catching violated the Fifth Amendment by facilitating unreasonable seizures and undermining “due process of law [Bowditch’s emphasis].”25 Bowditch condemned the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 for forbidding accused slaves from testifying on their own behalf, receiving a trial by jury, or filing for an appeal. He denounced fugitive slave trials for abandoning the principle of innocent until proven guilty by laying the burden of proof upon fugitive slaves instead of slave.

25 U.S. Const., amend. V.
hunters. Cognizant of jurists’ ability to overturn the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, Bowditch specifically targeted judges throughout “The Address.”

“The Address” made apt use of other appeals beyond civic duty and religion. Working around the issue of race, Bowditch capitalized on manhood to garner support for the CV. “The Address” asked Northern whites to imagine a slave hunter accusing their daughters of fugitive slave status. These daughters would have no right to appeal, no right to habeas corpus, and no right to a trial by jury. Deprived of legal alternatives, Northern white men would, no doubt, consider “forcibly resisting the law” to fulfill their paternal duties and protect their daughters’ freedom. Although “The Address” does not explicitly make this claim, it suggests that tyrannical Southerners could proceed to steal white women if their oppression of free blacks under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 went uncontested. By waiting, white men placed their families at the mercy of malicious Southerners, men who were not true Christians or authentic Americans. The CV could prevent this situation by immediately resisting Southern man hunters in a manner consistent with antebellum masculinity. Bowditch’s literary maneuver played on his audience’s conceptualization of manhood and regional prejudice to convince white Northerners to oppose slave hunting and defend free blacks, a demographic that attracted little sympathy from the average Northerner.

As the United States was experiencing dramatic changes through industrialization, urbanization, and the Second Great Awakening, Bowditch pushed for a political transformation to preserve the nation’s core values of justice and equality. He had

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26 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
27 Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846 (1.Ha.406.No.3), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
witnessed the *Paris médicale* overturn heroic medicine in France. He had seen *la méthode numérique* survive attacks from the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*. Bowditch worked to preserve the spirit of the American Revolution—or, rather, his conceptualization of it—from un-republican slave hunters.
Chapter 7| The Actions of the Committee of Vigilance

Fashionable Boston society scorned abolitionists. The definition of a “vigilante” given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a member of a vigilance committee” elucidates the radical nature of Bowditch’s decision to join the Committee of Vigilance.¹ The CV held its meetings in Bowditch’s home at 8 Otis Place. Numerous Bostonians protested his public abolitionism by discontinuing their patronage of his medical practice.² Other abolitionists endured severer consequences. Theodore Parker and Wendell Phillips, two abolitionists associated with the CV, faced indictment for speaking against the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.³ Bowditch sacrificed in terms of business and social status, but he also risked going to trial—a consequence that would have destroyed his reputation.

Elite members of the CV sacrificed in terms of social standing and financial capital. Boston’s elite had a history of opposing outspoken abolitionists. In 1835, they tried to lynch William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of an influential abolitionist newspaper entitled the *Liberator*.⁴ While upper class members of the CV incurred little danger of lynching, they lost access to many of Boston’s exclusive circles.⁵ Elite members also

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needed to supply the CV with financial capital. The CV offered rewards to the public in exchange for information about runaway slaves, which gave the organization an advantage in protecting fugitives from bounty hunters. By February 6, 1847, less than a year after the public meeting at Faneuil Hall had created the CV, a report by committee member John W. Browne indicated that the CV helped an average of two slaves per week. This set the CV on pace to assist over one hundred slaves in a year. Browne’s report suggests that the CV possessed considerable resources. Respected Bostonians like Bowditch gave up treasure and public esteem to create a formidable organization.\(^6\)

The CV exerted international influence in abolition by relocating international fugitive slaves. After escaping from a ship bound for Brazil, a group of fugitive slaves fled to New York City. New York abolitionists, fearing for the safety of these fugitive slaves, transferred them to the care of the CV in Boston—an indication of the organization’s national repute. A controversy arose within the CV regarding whether the fugitive slaves should stay in Boston. It learned that a merchant named Mr. Childs owned vessels bound for the Caribbean. Childs offered to provide passage for these fugitive slaves and find them employment in the free republic of Haiti. He would perform his services free of charge. After meeting with the fugitive slaves to learn their opinions regarding the situation, the CV sent them to Haiti with Childs to lead freer, safer lives than they could in Boston.\(^7\)

The CV tried to create a dialogue with these fugitive slaves about the possibility of immigrating to Haiti. They told the CV that they approved of Childs’s offer. A record

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of their meeting states: “A sub-committee visited the poor fellows and learned from them that they had no objection to go anywhere where they could find liberty.” These slaves may have been telling powerful white abolitionists what they wanted to hear. After all, it would have been easier for the CV to transport these fugitives to Haiti with Childs rather than protect them from bounty hunters in Boston or pay for their passage out of Massachusetts. The extent to which the CV succeeded in executing a racially egalitarian dialogue in a Northern culture saturated with white supremacy remains uncertain, but its desire to do so remains clear. This aspiration aligns with Bowditch’s desire for greater racial equality, demonstrated by his advocacy in Massachusetts General Hospital and on the Boston School Committee. Like Bowditch, the CV strove to undercut salient antebellum racial norms.

The international fugitive episode illustrates the practicality of the CV and its readiness to discard the rigidity of Garrisonianism. The organization could accept Childs’s offer to relocate these fugitive slaves to Haiti free of charge, pay to transport the fugitive slaves to another country, or accept the costs of protecting these fugitives from man hunters in Boston. The CV had contracted a debt in 1846 worth $125, no trivial sum. For the CV, money mattered. It needed to choose a course of action that would not augment its debt or, at the very least, increase it by the smallest degree possible. However, Childs’s offer bore uncomfortable parallels with colonization, which had lost popularity among abolitionists by the 1840s. William Lloyd Garrison frequently attacked

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colonization, calling it “an ungodly combination” of “hypocrisy, villainy…impiety” and the “handmaiden of slavery.” Ideological opposition to colonization, such as that displayed by Garrison, would have spoiled the CV’s opportunity to assist these fugitive slaves. The CV was not reluctant about implementing pragmatic solutions that clashed with popular abolitionist thought. It formulated a plan based on a serendipitous offer, limited means, and the expressed will of fugitive slaves.

The influences of Bowditch’s childhood and education prepared him to join this vigilante association. Nathaniel Bowditch built a firm that changed New England through the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company. Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis fashioned the Société d’Observation and transformed a generation of medical students into empiricists. Henry I. Bowditch helped establish the Committee of Vigilance, an organization that played a significant role in domestic and international abolitionism. For Bowditch, founding an association to advance a reform movement was merely a matter of following the precedents of his father and mentor.

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Figure 1| A diagram that shows the positions that the members of Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League planned to take while kidnapping a slave hunter. The slave hunter’s position is represented with the letters “SH.” The letter “S” represents the speaker, the leader of this expedition. The individuals in the inner circle aimed at securing the arms, feet, and head of the slave hunter. The abolitionists in the outer circle pretended to defend the slave hunter to prevent bystanders from entering the fray. From, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League Records*, Call Number: Ms. N-1875, Oversize, "Diagram to Show the Drill the Anti-Man-Hunting League Had for the Running Off of a Slave or Man-Hunter..., ca. 1854-1859."
Figure 2] A closer image of the diagram from Figure 1. See, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League Records*, Call Number: Ms. N-1875, Oversize, "Diagram to Show the Drill the Anti-Man-Hunting League Had for the Running Off of a Slave or Man-Hunter..., ca. 1854-1859."
Figure 3 | A billy club used by the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League and the Massachusetts League of Freemen. These instruments were originally intended for the police force of Salem, Massachusetts. See, "Billy Club," The Massachusetts Historical Society, accessed April 11, 2011, http://www.masshist.org/database/1696use-onview-id.
The Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League, or BAMHL, was a secret organization dedicated to promoting abolition by violently resisting the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850. It conspired to kidnap man hunters and hold them ransom for the freedom of fugitive slaves. Bowditch founded BAMHL in 1854 during the aftermath of the rendition of a fugitive slave named Anthony Burns. Nearly fifty thousand people lined the streets of Boston to protest Burns’s re-enslavement. Apprehension about an abolitionist attempt to free Burns led United States marshals, marines, infantry, artillerymen, and cannon to supplement the escort provided by local law enforcement officials to deliver Burns to his Virginia-bound ship. Slave hunters capitalized on the physical force of state and national governments to capture fugitive slaves. Bowditch needed to respond.

BAMHL represented the first “organized action of a physical character against the Slaveholder himself [Bowditch’s emphasis].” BAMHL included numerous acclaimed abolitionists such as Amos Bronson Alcott, Rev. Theodore Parker, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Elizur Wright. Bowditch noted that many Bostonian abolitionists chose not to constrain themselves to the ideology of “[Liberator editor William Lloyd]….”

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Garrison, the ‘non-resistant,’ and…others indisposed to use any arguments but ‘moral
suasion.””8 Non-resistance required a pledge of nonviolence and nonparticipation in
government.9 Moral suasion sought to advance abolition by appealing to the conscience
of slave owners.10 By transcending Garrisonian ideology, BAMHL became a center of
coercive abolition in Massachusetts that would eventually expand into a statewide
organization, the Massachusetts League of Freemen.

The BAMHL Conspiracy

BAMHL created a precise plan to capture slave hunters. Its members would learn
the name of the hotel where a slave hunter resided and rent several rooms from that
establishment. BAMHL members would then quietly fill the hotel lobby as the
Committee of Six, chosen from within the league, discharged its responsibilities. The
Committee of Six needed to entreat the bounty hunter to call off his pursuit and, if
necessary, offer to purchase the fugitive slave’s freedom. If the slave hunter responded
positively, BAMHL would leave the hotel. However, if the man hunter proved obstinate,
the Committee of Six would seize him. BAMHL members from the lobby would
surround the scuffle and pretend to defend the slave hunter to dissuade genuine
bystanders from entering the fracas. After capturing the slave hunter, the Committee of
Six needed to move him out of the hotel to a carriage stationed nearby the establishment.
This carriage would transport the slave hunter into the countryside, where BAMHL tried
to avoid detection by moving the man stealer to a different small town or village each

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8 Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” in The Life and Correspondence of
9 Robert Fanuzzi, Abolition’s Public Sphere (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.
10 James Brewer Stewart, Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War (Amherst, MA: University
of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 17.
Bowditch acknowledged the danger of the plan and admitted that, “probably all the committee [of six] would be arrested.”\(^{12}\) Once BAMHL had captured the bounty hunter, it could only hope his patron would pay the ransom before law enforcement officials discovered his location. For league members, enduring a few years of incarceration constituted an acceptable risk to secure the freedom of a fugitive slave.

BAMHL held surreptitious, biweekly meetings on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. A drill designed to simulate kidnapping comprised the main activity in these gatherings. One volunteer impersonated a bounty hunter while six others practiced executing the duties of the Committee of Six. As the faux slave hunter repeatedly refused the committee’s appeals, the committee leader signaled to the other five members of the committee to attack.\(^ {13}\) A 45½ inch by 39⅝ inch BAMHL diagram demonstrated the logic behind this five-member attack: it allotted one person for each foot, one for each arm, and one for the head of the man stealer (See Figures 1 and 2).\(^ {14}\) BAMHL members became adept in this clandestine maneuver. Using stocky farmers and urban laborers as substitute slave hunters, BAMHL immobilized their targets in less than thirty seconds. Bowditch’s conspiracy might have been able to capture real slave hunters more quickly—they would not have been expecting an attack.\(^ {15}\)

\(^{11}\) Bowditch, “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” 274-278.

\(^{12}\) Bowditch, “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” 276.


This league had access to considerable resources. It obtained police issue, lead-filled, oaken billy clubs from Lynn, Massachusetts (See Figure 3). An abolitionist agent from “Bleeding Kansas” asked BAMHL to contribute towards his purchase of 200 Sharps rifles—a request reflecting the assets of his anticipated patron. BAMHL members bought a ship appropriately christened the Moby Dick to smuggle fugitive slaves out of Boston Harbor and placed it under the control of Captain Lyon Cass Barse. In one daring escapade, BAMHL mobilized the Moby Dick to confiscate a fugitive slave from a vessel belonging to John H. Pearson and spirit him to freedom. Pearson, stuck on shore, observed the ordeal through his periscope with disbelief.

BAMHL records do not contain an account of kidnapping a slave hunter; however, bounty hunters did not extradite any fugitive slaves from Boston between the league’s formation in 1854 and its final meeting in 1861. Rumors of vigilante kidnappers may have traveled south from the Revere House—slave hunters’ hotel of choice—and encouraged man hunters to think twice before coming to Boston. However, league records do report a confrontation between BAMHL and a suspected slave hunter during the fledgling years of the organization. The last portion of this report, which may have discussed the details of the meeting, is missing from league records.

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16 Bowditch, “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” 280.
19 Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry I. Bowditch Papers, Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 3 of 3, “Letters and Newspaper Clippings about the ‘Life and Correspondence of Henry I. Bowditch’ Collected for Possible Preservation in the ‘Memorial Cabinet.’”
21 Bowditch, “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” 276.
BAMHL may have conducted a messy negotiation with their billy clubs and private ship that it later wished to expunge from the written record.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Diversity and Religion}

BAMHL was a diverse organization. It included members of the Massachusetts elite such as Dr. Samuel Cabot, Rev. Theodore Parker, Bronson Alcott, and John A. Andrew, the future governor of Massachusetts during the Civil War. BAMHL incorporated individuals from a broad range of social classes. Lawyers, doctors, and laborers all joined this organization.\textsuperscript{23} Black abolitionists such as J.B. Swill, who would later enter Boston’s most competitive culinary circles, also participated in BAMHL.\textsuperscript{24}

Women may have swelled the ranks as well; procedures for the league and its affiliated associations required keeping a strict count of male and female members.\textsuperscript{25} This tolerance may have stemmed from abolitionism’s lack of popularity. Boston police arrested Samuel E. Sewell, a Committee of Vigilance member, because he asked for the time when the trail of a fugitive slave would begin.\textsuperscript{26} Kidnapping would have elicited a much harsher response from the municipality’s authorities.

The oath taken by new members found in Article 2, Section 2 of the BAMHL Constitution elucidates this organization’s broad theology:

\begin{quote}
I ______ do solemnly promise without reservation in the presence of Almighty God and of these witnesses to keep forever secret even at the risk of civil
\end{quote}


penalties all the proceedings of the “Boston Anti-Man-Hunting-League”—and I do also Engage to the best of my ability in carrying out the purposes of the League [sic].

This oath stressed the “presence of Almighty God” to reinforce the conviction of BAMHL’s new members. They pledged “without reservation” to resist the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 even if their actions prompted painful “civil penalties.” While BAMHL tolerated different types of theism, it wanted its members to attack slave hunting with religious conviction. BAMHL cared about the substance and passion of their members’ religious beliefs, not cumbersome doctrinal details.

BAMHL cast a wide theological net. Article 2, Section 1 of the Constitution of the Boston Anti-Man Hunting League states: “Any person having attained the age of Eighteen years, who believes that man cannot by legislative enactments annul his allegiance to God and who clings to the faith that God’s laws should be obeyed shall be Eligible as a candidate for membership.” Membership in the league did not depend upon allegiance to Calvinism, Unitarianism, or even Protestantism; a person only needed to adhere “to the faith that God’s laws should be obeyed.” BAMHL made pleas towards general religious sentiment, not specific creedal positions. It did not needlessly alienate potential members.

BAMHL used universal, emotive religious appeals to justify its mission to its members and secure their fidelity. The Constitution of the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting

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League denounced slavery and slave catching as “an outrage against the nature of man and a rebellion against the sovereignty of God.” BAMHL condemned the enforcers of the Fugitive Slave Law as opponents to Christianity and the core values of the Massachusetts Commonwealth:

the presence of the ‘Man Hunter’ in our mist is an offense against Christianity, a reproach to civilization and a deep disgrace to the good old State of
Massachusetts and thus as citizens and Christians we form a league and make it difficult for the Slave hunter to come or remain among us.\(^{30}\)

The words here are simple but charged. The mere “presence” of a slave hunter was “a deep disgrace” and “an offense against Christianity.” BAMHL members had to unite and take action because they were “citizens and Christians” of a godly republic. This language appeals to Evangelicals, Unitarians, Whigs, Democrats, and Republicans alike.

Despite its openness, BAMHL did exclude at least one group. It did not allow “any ‘non resisters’ like Garrison to join.”\(^{31}\) Bowditch founded BAMHL as an alternative to Garrisonianism. The pleas of moral suasion, Bowditch observed, only precipitated physical attacks against abolitionists, including the near lynching of Garrison himself in 1835.\(^{32}\) Non-resistance accomplished little in its struggle against bounty hunters supported by the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850 and “the whole power of the Federal Government.”\(^{33}\) Compounding its failures, Garrisonianism objected to violence—needlessly removing a tool that could advance abolition. Bowditch wanted to

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\(^{33}\) Bowditch, “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” 272-4. The quote is from Bowditch, “Thirty Years War of Anti-Slavery,” 273.
employ “all proper measures for rendering difficult or impossible the coming or the remaining” of slave hunters in Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{34} In a letter he wrote on June 15, 1889, to Garrison’s son, Francis Garrison, Bowditch remarked: “I not unfrequently differed from him [William Lloyd Garrison] in thought and action… I honor, love, and respect him… but I kicked against the others when they used perhaps his language.”\textsuperscript{35} He would not allow ambivalent members to question his organization’s methodology and dilute its religious zeal.

\textit{A Secret Organization}

The league maintained secrecy to ensure the safety of its members because radical abolitionism was dangerous work. Wendell Phillips and Theodore Parker faced charges for speaking against the Fugitive Slave Law in Boston.\textsuperscript{36} Bowditch treasured a daguerreotype of a hand branded with the letters “S.S.” by a Southern marshal, signifying abolitionist Jonathon Walker’s criminal status as a “Slave Stealer.”\textsuperscript{37} Charles Torrey died in a Maryland prison while serving a sentence for helping fugitive slaves escape into the North.\textsuperscript{38} An extrajudicial mob killed Rev. Elijah Lovejoy and nearly lynched William

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Visit to Whittier by an Old Abolitionist with Prefatory Remarks on Garrison and Early Antislavery Letters to and from FJ Garrison, F Douglass and Clippings} (1.Ha.415.No.16), Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Conway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
\textsuperscript{36} Theodore Parker, \textit{The Trial of Theodore Parker for the ‘Misdemeanor’ of A Speech in Faneuil Hall against Kidnapping, before the Circuit Court of the United States, at Boston, April 3, 1855, with Defence} (Boston: Allen and Farnham, 1855), 7. See also, John Weiss, \textit{Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker: Minister of the Twenty-Eighth Congregationalist Society} (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1864), 146-147. See also, Dean Grodzins, preface to \textit{American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism}, by Dean Grodzins, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), ix. See also, Massachusetts Historical Society, \textit{Boston Anti-Man Hunting League Records, 1846-1887}, Call Number Ms. N-1875, “The Defensive League of Freedom.”
\textsuperscript{37} Massachusetts Historical Society, \textit{Bowditch Memorial Catalog}, Call Number Ma. SBd-61, pp. 84 (no. 109, Comp 4).
Lloyd Garrison.\textsuperscript{39} Therefore, BAMHL took several precautions to ensure the confidentiality of its meetings. A league representative administered an oath to prospective members wherein they pledged not to “divulge, make known to any person, or persons, by speaking, writing, printing, or in any manner, any knowledge which you have acquired concerning such League excepting as you may hereafter be so permitted, and authorized by such League.”\textsuperscript{40} BAMHL developed passwords and signs that members had to give to league wardens and sentinels who guarded the inner and outer doors of its meetings.\textsuperscript{41} The association assigned numbers to newly initiated members for use in league record books to preserve their anonymity in case the police intercepted BAMHL’s manuscripts.\textsuperscript{42} Bowditch’s brother, William, even had to request permission to tell his wife that he was in the Boston Anti-Man Hunting League.\textsuperscript{43} The risk of discovery required the league to enforce rigid procedures to maintain secrecy.

\textit{A Statewide Organization: The Massachusetts League of Freemen}

The Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League grew and eventually founded enough sister organizations to form a statewide association called the Massachusetts League of Freemen, or the MLF. The Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League established affiliates in 29 cities across Massachusetts including Arlington, Plymouth, West Roxbury, Chelsea,

\textsuperscript{39} Steven Mintz, \textit{Moralists and Modernizers: America’s Pre-Civil War Reformers} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 130.
Springfield, Lynn, Concord, Salem, Newburyport, and Worcester.\textsuperscript{44} BAMHL’s first efforts towards regional expansion date to Nov. 21, 1854, when it sent delegates to Plymouth and Worcester. On Wednesday, August 2, 1854, a man asked to form a similar league in Cambridge. BAMHL sent an agent to Boylston on October 4, 1854. On December 7, 1854, BAMHL voted to allow #14, Henry P. Triask, to form a sister league in Cambridge. On Wednesday, January 10, 1855, BAMHL received a letter from Bridgewater and Abington requesting permission to become affiliate organizations.\textsuperscript{45} By the time BAMHL and the MLF disbanded in 1861, they possessed 469 members.\textsuperscript{46} The MLF developed into a large federation in terms of membership and geographical reach. It was a powerful underground movement.

The MLF had a complex leadership structure. The Senate, comprised of representatives from each member organization, selected a president, a vice president, a treasurer, and a secretary, as well as three “councillors” from within its ranks. The powers of the three councillors included calling emergency meetings, appointing a “chief” and other officers to execute Senatorial resolutions, and developing new passwords and signs. These latter two responsibilities indicate the importance of maintaining secrecy. The Senate of the MLF could only disclose their proceedings to the public through a special vote.\textsuperscript{47} The leadership structure of the MLF proved effective and

\textsuperscript{46} Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League, Records 1846-1887, Call Number: Ms. N-1875, “Book 2: Records 1854-1856.”
helped the organization to formulate strategies to protect endangered fugitives and abolitionists.

This leadership structure departs from the arrangement of the American federal government. Its method of selecting an executive officer from a single assembly of legislators resembles British Parliament more than the Electoral College. The role of the three councilors mirrors the Roman triumvirate more than any institution found in American governance. The secrecy of these meetings, lifted only through a special vote, departs from the open nature of Congress ensured by its public viewing galleries. The MLF did not view every aspect of American government to be sacred—only the values of freedom and justice. For Bowditch, Article IV of the Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850 represented antithetical aspects of the American legal framework. Likewise, the literal operating procedures of Congress and the federal government remained separate from the quintessential essence of the nation. As Unitarian Rev. Joseph Buckminster insisted on looking past the literal meaning of Scripture to see the spirit of Christianity, the MLF shed the structure of American governance to enable its leaders to defend the spirit of the Republic.

Bowditch’s background prepared him to establish BAMHL and the MLF. As he grew up, his country increased in size, in wealth, and in economic reliance upon slavery. Bowditch had seen France retreat from the ideals of freedom and justice; he did not want the same for his country. Trained in la méthode numérique, Bowditch knew how Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis had discredited therapeutic bleeding by reporting its nonsuccess

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rate. Bowditch observed that Garrisonianism was not working. Churches and major political parties had also failed effectively to oppose slave hunting. He had tried the methods of the Committee of Vigilance, but abolition needed something more drastic. The Unitarian principles of his youth urged him to disregard ideology and pursue action. Bowditch’s culture of Pope Day Parades and anti-Catholic mobs sanctioned violence. Bowditch fashioned an association dedicated to abolition, action, and coercion. He established the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League, the core of the Massachusetts League of Freedom.

Although Bowditch would live into his early eighties, his participation in BAMHL and the MLF represented the culmination of his life’s work in abolition. Sentiment, sensibility, knowledge, and experience all appeared to license the application of violence in defense of a higher calling: in this case, for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of the very soul of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. That Bowditch had, in effect, adopted the techniques of the slave hunters he so deplored seems never to have compromised his moral certainty.
Chapter 9 | Conclusions

Bowditch lived in a dynamic nation. His country could have progressed or devolved in an unprecedented fashion. He embraced the economic prosperity and the technological innovation that the industrialization of New England seemed to promise, but he despaired at its dependence upon an entrenched slave system in the South, which hopelessly compromised the social justice that Bowditch reflexively associated with progress.1 Religious revivals convinced individuals to embrace their personal obligations towards God; they also revealed a disturbing tendency to embrace new normative paradigms that merely perpetuated old prejudices under the guise of new orthodoxies.2 The political party system constantly remade itself; however, its fluctuations failed to create an established, dominant faction that might have achieved Bowditch’s vision for the Republic’s future. A wide chasm separated abolitionists from the mainstream religious and political views of the nation.3 This disparity, this uncertainty about the nation’s future pushed Bowditch towards abolitionism.

Bowditch’s background prepared him to assume leadership within this movement. He, like the prominent abolitionist Samuel Gridley Howe, grew up as a member of the Boston elite. Bowditch and Howe both acquired undergraduate and medical degrees

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from respected New England institutions. During their visits to Europe, they learned how untended revolutionary values could fade away. When they returned to their childhood home in Massachusetts, they participated in social reform movements to uphold their perception of republican values and civic duty. Bowditch opposed the racist polices of Massachusetts General Hospital and Boston’s Public Schools to defend the rights of marginalized free blacks. Bowditch and Howe’s exposure to Unitarianism led them to believe that Boston was an enlightened city in a nation deluded and misdirected by other theologies. As historian Daniel Walker Howe observed, Unitarians generally viewed Calvinist beliefs—such as the provision of salvation through the crucifixion of God—as “ugly, tyrannical, and outmoded.” Unitarianism also taught Bowditch and Howe to value action over belief, even though the ministers in this sect were too often distracted by doctrinal squabbles. Bowditch had social capital, personal ties to Massachusetts, a fear that liberty would dissipate, and experience in leading

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unpopular reform movements. His youth and young adulthood prepared him to become an influential abolitionist.

Bowditch’s family may have exerted the largest influence over his view of the world in which faith and abolitionism had necessarily to conjoin. His parents loathed slavery.10 His father Nathaniel Bowditch was a religious liberal with a deep knowledge of Scripture. He was tolerant of Catholicism despite the rampant prejudice of the antebellum era against those who followed the Pope.11 Henry I. Bowditch’s willingness to serve in hospitals run by nuns and the inclusive religious nature of the Committee of Vigilance and the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League mirrored his father’s cosmopolitan faith.12 Henry saw his mother Mary Ingersoll Bowditch as a model Christian.13 Mary’s commonplace journals reveal a free spirit and a broad-minded religiosity.14 Her son displayed similar nonconformist attitudes as he left Warren Street Chapel in response to its racist policies and opposed slavery in a distinctly anti-Garrisonian fashion.15

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14 Massachusetts Historical Society, *Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers*, 1779-1887, Ms. N-1898, Narrow Box, Folders 1, 2, and 3.
Bowditch’s medical education in France served as a catalyst for abolition. Under the Paris médicale, he saw the fall of an old order and the ascent of new medical understandings and methodologies.\textsuperscript{16} He imbibed the skepticism of Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis and the Société d’Observation. He learned to challenge traditional theories and even to query the accuracy of his own observations.\textsuperscript{17} This leeriness translated from medicine into social reform movements. It helped Bowditch to question the legitimacy of “un-American” legislation—such as the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850—and ineffective abolitionist ideologies.

Bowditch’s readiness to dispute popular assumptions about race and slavery led him to participate in abolitionist organizations, such as the Committee of Vigilance and the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League. These associations swore to defend the very soul of the Christian religion and the American Republic through its opposition to slave hunting.\textsuperscript{18} Bowditch was a leader in the Committee of Vigilance, or the CV. The CV met in his home. He served as its secretary and wrote “The Address of the Committee Appointed by a Public Meeting, Held at Faneuil Hall, September 24, 1846, for the Purpose of Considering the Recent Case of Kidnapping from Our Soil, and of Taking


\textsuperscript{17} Bowditch, The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, 14, 82-3. See also, William C. Dowling, Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris: Medicine, Theology, and The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), 15-16, 33-35.

Measures to Prevent the Recurrence of Similar Outrages” to justify the operations of this ad hoc group to the public of the United States. In 1854, Bowditch took the extreme nature of his participation in abolition a step further by founding the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League, or BAMHL. BAMHL was a clandestine association dedicated to protecting fugitive slaves by kidnapping potential slave hunters. Slave hunters failed to remove a single fugitive slave out of Boston after BAMHL’s establishment. This confederation expanded into a statewide organization called the Massachusetts League of Freemen, or the MLF. Apart from preventing slave hunting, these groups furthered Bowditch’s definition of American values by facilitating interactions that transcended racial and economic barriers. Bowditch took this violence for granted, seeing it as yet another instrument of social reform. After participating in BAMHL, few members could have recoiled from the coercive emancipation of the Civil War.

Bowditch’s method of justifying his opposition to slavery made him unique.

Whereas Garrison developed new ways of understanding the world through novel ideologies such as non-resistance, Bowditch embraced abolition as a natural consequence

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of the values that he internalized as a youth. This ideological framework gave Bowditch greater flexibility. It allowed him to build on a communal acceptance of physical force by leading violent abolitionist organizations, such as BAMHL and the MLF. From a broader, societal perspective, these associations were nothing short of fanatical, but to Bowditch they represented a natural, legitimate response to the evil of slave hunting. For Dr. Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, pragmatism and radicalism went hand in hand.

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This thesis’s primary source research drew extensively from the collections at the Center for the History of Medicine at Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine and the Massachusetts Historical Society. At the Center for the History of Medicine at Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, the manuscripts entitled *Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting* and *Documents Relating to the Hannum and Pearson Case of Kidnapping in Boston. With Autograph Letters from Noted Men of the Time* had a considerable influence on this thesis. Both are bound scrapbooks. The acidity of the papers in these collections made them fragile and required careful handling. At the Massachusetts Historical Society, the manuscript collections entitled *Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League Records, 1846-1887; Henry I. Bowditch Papers; Mary Ingersoll Bowditch Papers, 1779-1887*; and *Bowditch Family Papers, 1834-1882* proved invaluable. *Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League Records, 1846-1887* includes a diagram demonstrating how to capture a slave hunter; records of the Committee of Vigilance; the minutes of the meetings of the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League; a membership book of the members of the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League; a copy of the constitution from the Boston Anti-Man-Hunting League; and a copy of the constitution of the Massachusetts League of Freemen. *Henry I. Bowditch Papers* includes a scrapbook to commemorate the deaths of Henry I. Bowditch and his wife Olivia Yardley Bowditch; a scrapbook to commemorate the publishing of *The Life and Correspondence of Henry I. Bowditch*; Henry I. Bowditch’s memoir of a visit to Salem, Massachusetts, that he wrote as an elderly man; the Bible given to Henry I. Bowditch by his mother Mary Ingersoll Bowditch; Henry I. Bowditch’s passport; Bowditch’s childhood journal; and a document relating to a Civil War soldiers’ relief organization called the New England Refugees’ Aid Society. *Bowditch Family Papers, 1834-1882* includes a genealogical chart of the Bowditch family and a petition for the freedom of George Latimer, a fugitive slave. *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch* by Vincent Y. Bowditch contains extended excerpts from the journals and letters of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch.

*Address Accepted by the Vigilance Committee at their Meeting, Oct. 20, 1846* (1.Ha.406.No.3). Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.

*An Apology for the Medical Profession, as a Means of Developing the Whole Nature of War: a Valedictory Address to the Graduating Medical Class of Harvard University, March 11, 1863: With Additional Remarks on a Topic of Importance at the Present Hour* (1.Ha.409.No.27). Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.


Brief Memories of Louis and Some of His Contemporaries in the Parisian School of Medicine of Forty Years Ago (1.Ha.408.No.30). Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.


Clippings and Letters in Regard to the State Board of Health (1.Ha.411.No.15). Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.


Howe, Samuel et al., Address of the Committee Appointed by a Public Meeting Held at Faneuil Hall, September 24, 1846: For the Purpose of Considering the Recent Case of Kidnapping from our Soil and of Taking Measures to Prevent the Recurrence of Similar Outrages. Boston: White and Potter Printers, 1846.


Letter from L. Foster of Michigan on the Admission of Women to the Massachusetts Medical Society, and Dr. Bowditch’s Reply (1.Ha.410.No.16-16a). Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.

Letters and Papers by Others on Various Subjects as Well as…(1.Ha.409.No.38). Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.


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N-1875, Oversize. "Diagram to Show the Drill the Anti-Man-Hunting League Had for
the Running Off of a Slave or Man-Hunter..., ca. 1854-1859."

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49.61. “Genealogical Charts.”

Massachusetts Historical Society. Henry I. Bowditch Papers. Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 1
of 3. “Bible: Materials from inside Bible.”

Massachusetts Historical Society. Henry I. Bowditch Papers. Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 1

Massachusetts Historical Society. Henry I. Bowditch Papers. Call Number: Ms. N-1896, Box 1,
Folder 7. “Memoir of Visit to Salem, 1889.”

of 3. “Letter from William L. Bowditch to Vincent Bowditch, January 8, 1903.”

“Scrapbook Compiled in Memory of Henry I. and Olivia Y. Bowditch, 1894.”

of 3. “Henry I. Bowditch, M.D.: Memorial Meeting of the Section for Clinical Medicine,
Pathology and Hygiene of the Massachusetts Medical Society, Suffolk District.
Reprinted from the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal of August 25, 1892.”

of 3. “Letters and Newspaper Clippings about the ‘Life and Correspondence of Henry I.
Bowditch’ Collected for Possible Preservation in the ‘Memorial Cabinet.’”


*Visit to Whittier by an Old Abolitionist with Prefatory Remarks on Garrison and Early Antislavery Letters to and from FJ Garrison, F Douglass and Clippings* (1.Ha.415.No.16). Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Conway Library of Medicine, no box number, no folder number.
Secondary Sources

This thesis endeavored to draw from a variety of secondary sources. Multiple journals, such as the *Journal of the Early Republic*, *The New England Quarterly*, and *Church History* were consulted. Government data about elections and demographic trends was accessed online through the US Bureau of the Census, UC San Diego Libraries, and the US National Archives and Records Administration. Books formed the core of this thesis’s secondary research. The following is a brief description of the books that proved especially valuable during the writing of this thesis. Although it was published over a century ago, *Life and Correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch* by Vincent Y. Bowditch remains the most thorough biography of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch. *Yankee Stargazer: The Life of Nathaniel Bowditch* by Robert Elton Berry provides excellent background on the life of Nathaniel Bowditch. *Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris: Medicine, Theology, and The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table* by William C. Dowling provides an unrivaled analysis of the *Paris médicale*. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* by Eric Foner and *Moralists and Modernizers: America’s Pre-Civil War Reformers* by Steven Mintz both provide excellent overviews of the antebellum period. *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* by Daniel Walker Howe covers the role of Unitarianism in the Boston Community and Harvard College in the nineteenth century. *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War* by Curtis D. Johnson skillfully explains the nuances of Evangelicalism during the Second Great Awakening and its influence on social reforms, such as the movement to abolish slavery. *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* by James Brewer Stewart and *Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1870* by Lawrence J. Friedman present valuable overviews of the abolitionist movement.


Richards, Laura E. *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe during the Greek Revolution*. London: John Lane, 1907.


