'What Is Done in My Absence?' Levi Lincoln's Oakham, Massachusetts, Farm Workers, 1807–20

RICHARD B. LYMAN, JR.

INTRODUCTION

WE TEND to think about the evolution of the American economy in linear terms: first there was an agricultural phase, then an industrial, followed currently by a post-industrial and high-technology stage. Even in leading articles on the rural history of the early nineteenth century, a powerful dichotomy is made explicit between 'farm communities and the modern world of money, markets, and merchants,'[1] or between 'household production and family interests' and 'profit-oriented . . . capitalist production.'[2]

This straightforward model is, however, highly misleading when one tries to understand the moment of interconnection be-

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1. In 'Commercial Farming and the "Agrarian Myth" in the Early Republic,' *Journal of American History* 68 (1982): 835, Joyce Appleby describes work by 'the new interpreters of early America.'
2. Christopher Clark, 'Household Economy, Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800–1860,' *Journal of Social History* 13 (1979): 170.

RICHARD B. LYMAN, JR., is professor of history at Simmons College.

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tween any two of the phases, in the case of this paper, between the agricultural and industrial.[3] Nor does a picture of a series of discrete developmental phases moving in simple linear progression fit very well the specific world described in the account books of individual farmers. A better approach is the more complex notion of a network of two-way paths, interconnecting and diverging, and perhaps meeting later again. Rural individuals in the early decades of the nineteenth century seem to have moved fluidly among activities we now would characterize either as archaic or modern, agrarian or capitalistic, rural or urban. Thus, their lives may not have appeared to them to have offered so stark a set of choices as many historians now perceive, and it is of course their actual experience that we must strive to understand and explain.[4] This paper tests this more flexible approach by looking in detail at the records of one farm in the period 1807–20, the Merino sheep operation at Oakham, Massachusetts, that was owned and sometimes supervised by Levi Lincoln of Worcester.

3. In recent years there has been increasing sophistication in the scholarship on this topic. The agricultural phase is no longer seen as ever having been characterized by 'self-sufficiency.' But even in as excellent a book as Jonathan Prude's *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts*, 1810–1860 (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1983), an echo of that bias remains: 'On the contrary, those involved in agriculture in this period retained the pattern—widespread in the Northeast throughout the colonial period—of orienting their labor as much around domestic consumption and production for use as around commercial gain' (p. 10). However, early industrialism in Massachusetts depended heavily on small-scale commercialism in agriculture, small-town-based manufacturing, and mercantile trading arrangements. A fine case is Jepthah Bacon, early operator of the Dudley Merino Wool Manufacturing Company, whose business was financed at the outset by local farmers. Bacon's account book for the period 1812–31 held at the American Antiquarian Society shows him engaged in the following activities: wholesale delivery of milk, rental of horse and sleigh, butter distribution, owner/operator of a fulling mill, wholesaler of pork, landlord of bed-space rentals, butcher, general store operator, constable, witness in lawsuits, preparer of legal documents, manufacturer of clothing, appraiser of estates being contested in probate, plower of garden plots. These several activities were undertaken in no particular sequence throughout the period, suggesting that Bacon had no concept of developing from agriculturalist through village official to manufacturer. For a more general discussion of this issue, see Joyce Appleby, 'Commercial Farming and the "Agrarian Myth" in the Early Republic.' The ideological implications of her argument are discussed by Donald Winch in 'Economic Liberalism as Ideology: The Appleby Version,' *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 38 (1985): 287–97.

4. Rona S. Weiss, 'The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750–1850: Comment,' *Journal of Economic History* 43 (1983): 475–78. After conceding the 'significant addition to previous work' afforded by Winifred Rothenberg's 'empirical research and econometric analysis,' Weiss proceeds with a sharp critique organized around the failure of Rothenberg's data to conform to classical Marxist models. See footnote 6.

According to this interactive approach to the economy of the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the industrial transformation of New England did not occur in an agrarian vacuum. Rather, agriculture had to develop in a variety of ways, more or less simultaneously with industry, for factory life to proceed. Not only was agriculture a precondition but it was also a substantive factor in the industrial revolution.[5] Indeed, virtually all the leaders of early industrial activities of rural New England sought ways to make the production or refinement of agricultural products faster, larger in volume, and more efficient and economical.

But of course 'agriculture'was no more a monolithic enterprise than was 'industry.'[6] There were at least four distinct types of agricultural activity in Worcester County in the period 1790–1840. First, in the early decades of the nineteenth century in central Massachusetts, some agricultural products indeed seem to fit within definitions of self-sufficiency and subsistence crops, in the sense that virtually every locality grew its own crops. Hay for draft animals is a fine example of such a product.[7] Secondly, in several

5. Anthony Wallace has a brief but very interesting discussion of 'communal industrialism' and 'a balanced agricultural-industrial economy' in *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), pp. 293–95. However, he quickly emphasizes the 'romanticism'in the reformers who thought such a social organization was possible and discusses the impact of steam power and 'certain fundamental contradictions' such as the need for rational and efficient organization of workers whether in factory or on farm. By the middle of the nineteenth century, especially in the leading areas that Wallace describes, the possibilities for interactive balance between farm and factory may indeed have been fading. But earlier and elsewhere, a very different case can be made. See, for example, the argument of Maxine Berg about England in *The Age of Manufactures, 1700–1820* (London: Fontana, 1985), especially chaps. 3 and 4. Berg points out that the 'chronology of improvement now makes a strong case for the close interdependence of agriculture and manufacturing, with the springs of much manufacturing improvement to be found in the early dynamism of the agricultural sector' (pp. 93–94).

6. Winifred B. Rothenberg, in a series of influential articles, has sparked much debate and cast fine light on the problems encountered in a study of early Massachusetts farming. Most pertinent for this article is 'The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750–1855,' *Journal of Economic History* 41 (1981): 283–314.

7. A study of the hay and grain production for fifty-five towns of Worcester County for the period 1790–1850 reveals that hay was almost never produced in amounts greater than that which correlates tightly with the number of local draft animals (oxen plus horses) and the size of the town's population. The only exceptions, as the period proceeds, were rapidly growing cities such as Worcester or Fitchburg or manufacturing villages like Webster. In such cases, the supply of hay apparently came from the immediately adjacent towns. This outcome is hardly surprising, since hay is a very ordinary as well as bulky crop that can be grown in a wide variety of locations.

of the fifty-five towns of Worcester County that were incorporated by 1840, there was a tendency toward moderate local specialization. Included in this second form of agricultural activity are the harvesting of wood in Hubbardston (to support chair making and the market for handles on farm implements) and the growing of hops in several towns. These local specialties served a modest area, were characteristically limited to several contiguous towns, but were not unusual or remarkable enough to command broad commercial attention or influence patterns of industrial growth in the larger region. No long-range trade or significant capital investment developed directly from these useful but ultimately ordinary specializations. But they may well have served as an impetus to regional growth in manufacturing technique, style, craftsmanship, and marketing, all of which later translated into access to certain larger markets; one thinks of the Hitchcock chairs made in nearby Connecticut or the spectacular later growth of farm-tool manufacture in the city of Worcester.

A third kind of agricultural activity in the early nineteenth century has in some respects continued to the present day. As localities grew, especially after the 1820s, and as railroads began to penetrate the region, some farmers began to grow vegetable produce specifically for sale in the population centers. As Jack Larkin's paper demonstrates, the Ward family of Shrewsbury became immersed in this activity about this time. The opportunity for market gardening grew rapidly because the region was changing from a countryside comprised of small towns rarely numbering over 3,000 into an area dominated by a few major centers organized around manufacturing, increasingly connected by railroads, and characterized by significant shifts in the composition of the labor force.

A few farmers put their energies into a fourth kind of agricultural activity that directly and exclusively supported the rising industrial activity. Chief among these at the outset was the raising of large numbers of sheep for their wool. Since the wool industry was the first to become mechanized in the rural areas of New England, and since that mechanization began after 1790 in small

towns, the interconnectedness of husbandry and industry in the case of wool seems highly probable.[8]

The central focus of this paper is on the organization of the farm labor that was necessary to support this fourth development. In correlation with the several types of agricultural activity that were available in Massachusetts in the new republic, there were several varieties of farm labor arrangements in place. The simplest of these is the family farm. By definition, it was run largely by family members, with augmentation at times of agricultural crisis such as harvest by neighbors and relatives. Although there are some variations, the Ebenezer Parkman farm in Westborough largely fits this type. A second form of the farm that moved slowly toward a specialty crop, such as marketable produce for the nearby industrial towns, supplemented the family farm system with hired help, which was often contracted on an annual basis. The Ward farm of

8. Of course cotton played the original and principal role in the mechanization of textile manufacture. Much attention has been given to theories about the monogenesis of the New England cotton textile industry, theories that explain so much through the arrival of Samuel Slater with the new technology. An important recent study, in addition to that by Jonathan Prude, is Barbara M. Tucker, *Samuel Slater and the Origins of the American Textile Industry, 1790–1860* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984). Wool, however, presents some problems both for spinning and for weaving that do not occur with cotton, due to the physical structure and properties of the raw material. It was unlikely that cotton would entirely replace wool in New England because of the utility of the end product in a cold, damp climate as well as the long-standing presence of sheep in the region. Moreover, the development of wool manufacturing depended on a long series of additional and specific inventions designed to convert manufacturing techniques from cotton to wool, and many of these developments took place in the New England countryside. For example, consider the role of Pliny Earle of Leicester in the development of the wool card, a critically essential tool in the new manufacturing technology. (The 'card' was the device by which the wool was combed, with the individual strands lined up in parallel.) In the several steps toward an efficient manufacture of woolen clothing, the carding operation was the first, and perhaps likeliest, to be automated. From northern Leicester in central Massachusetts, Earle developed several crucial features of the card and is credited with making the first card-clothing machine in America in 1789. See Charles G. Washburn, *Industrial Worcester* (Worcester: Davis Press, 1917), pp. 72–77, and the claim by Earle's son in *Memoirs of Pliny Earle, M.D.*, ed. F. B. Sanborn (Boston: Damrell and Upham, 1898), ch. 1. Therefore, although Samuel Slater brought a crucial idea with him about textile manufacture, he cannot be credited as the sole impetus for its development in New England. Highly suggestive data on the different patterns of distribution of cotton and wool manufacturing activities can be found in Robert G. LeBlanc, *Location of Manufacturing in New England in the Nineteenth Century* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Department of Geography, 1969).

Shrewsbury fits this type rather well during much of its long history.

This paper will consider a third type of farm, the commercialized operation directly connected as a supplier to the emerging industries: the Oakham, Massachusetts, Merino sheep complex owned by Levi Lincoln.[9] For this farm to work, the existing labor arrangements (family and specialty farming) had to be adapted to a group of evolving and dimly perceived economic demands and requirements.

OAKHAM AND LEVI LINCOLN

Oakham is a small town in western Worcester County.[10] Always an agricultural, rural, and ingrown town, small-scale farming has been its predominant economic activity since its settlement in 1713. Lacking a central mill site (although the substantial Paxton Falls mill-power site lay just over the border in an adjacent town), Oakham's development into the nineteenth century consequently was slow and marked by archaic social and economic practices.

The prominent and active Levi Lincoln contrasts sharply with this image of Oakham. Lincoln served as attorney general under Jefferson and was also a governor of Massachusetts. Between 1785 and 1860, the Worcester branch of the Lincoln family was at the center of the new countryside elite that had replaced the old Tory families of the eighteenth century.[11]

Like so many of his generation, Lincoln regarded himself less a public servant and lawyer than an agriculturalist. When presented with a choice whether to serve on the United States Su-

9. Excellent records of Lincoln's Oakham operation are held by the American Antiquarian Society, covering the period 1807–20. That farm and those records are the basis for the remainder of this discussion. See footnote 17.

10. Although relatively insignificant in broader historical terms, Oakham has been well served by its outstanding town history, *The Settlement and Story of Oakham, Massachusetts*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Ernest L. Hayward, 1947), by H. B. Wright and E. D. Harvey. The volumes provide general town history and genealogy as well as an impressive collection of maps.

11. A solid study of this transition in its early stages is Kevin Joseph MacWade's 'Worcester County, 1750–1774: A Study of a Provincial Patronage Elite' (Ph. D. diss., Boston University, 1974).

preme Court or to operate an experimental sheep farm, he chose the latter.[12] When embroiled in a dispute during his term as Jefferson's attorney general, he entitled his remarks *Letters to the People, by a Farmer.*[13] And he, as well as his sons, almost entirely missed the new opportunities available in manufacturing and finance. At first glance, then, Lincoln presents a fine example of the rather agrarian and conservative Jeffersonian men (despite Lincoln's undeserved political reputation as a radical Republican[14]) who served as brokers between the older, lost world of an English-style aristocracy and the new men of the 1820s and beyond who turned to banking and finance or industrial leadership.[15]

Let us take a closer look at Levi Lincoln. Born in 1749 at Hingham, Massachusetts, he was apprenticed to an ironsmith, but his love of reading eventually earned him a place as one of the older students in the Harvard Class of 1772. After graduation, he practiced law in Newburyport, Northampton, and Worcester. During the Revolution, he served as a minuteman as well as a judge of probate and member of the Massachusetts constitutional convention. From this creditable but rather conventional background for a man of his social rank, he emerged in 1781 as the lawyer in three famous antislavery cases. By 1800, his legal and public career had

12. His youngest son, William, knew him well in his last years, since Levi was both tutoring William in preparation for his entry into Harvard College and teaching him how to run the family farms by having William share in the supervision and record-keeping. Later, William wrote of his father's Supreme Court decision: 'Weakness of sight, terminating in almost total blindness, rendered it necessary to decline even such solicitation, and to retire from public life. Partial restoration of vision, enabled him to resume the cultivation of the farm and the classical studies, both objects of passionate attachment, and among the fields and with the pages of his favorite Latin authors, to alleviate the infirmities of decaying health and pressing age.' William Lincoln, *History of Worcester, Massachusetts, from Its Earliest Settlement to September 1836* (Worcester: Charles Hersey, 1862), p. 196.

13. Published in 1802, this was an attack on the political activity of the clergy.

14. Cf. the insightful discussion of Lincoln's political reputation in Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s–1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 76–79.

15. A highly suggestive study of this generation, although from the perspective of its political ideology, is Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978). For a comparison with the coming order of these 'new men,' see Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), and Joshua S. Chasan, *Civilizing Worcester: The Creation of Institutional and Cultural Order, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1848–1876* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1975).

expanded to include service in the Sixth Congress; and under Jefferson he served briefly as secretary of state before his four years as attorney general of the United States. Lincoln returned to Massachusetts in 1805, where he served as a member of the governor's council, then as lieutenant governor, and subsequently as governor. In 1812, strongly recommended to Madison by Jefferson, he declined a Supreme Court appointment, thus ending the public phase of his career.[16]

In his personal life, he was a fortunate man. In 1781, he married Martha Waldo of Boston, by whom he had seven children who survived to adulthood. Of these, two sons, Levi and Enoch, became prominent state governors. Another son, John, matured into a leading citizen and agriculturalist of Worcester. A fourth son, William, was an eminent local historian with a special interest in American Indian culture, a man of letters, and a highly regarded public commentator on agricultural issues. Lincoln's daughters married well, and his sons may be seen as dividing the many facets of their father's career among themselves and following one or two aspects apiece. Unlike the Parkman family three generations earlier, the sons were not expected to assist directly with the farmwork. Only the youngest, William, helped directly with his father's farming, as a record-keeper, and that was probably an aspect of the father's explicit tutorial program that gained the son direct admission as a junior in the Harvard Class of 1822. Later in life, William pursued agriculture in research and public commentary but never in direct activity.

The main thread that runs through Lincoln's private life is agriculture, but he was not merely pursuing an outmoded profession. Rather, he saw in rational and scientific agriculture an excellent opportunity not only for himself but also for the country. His interest in commercialized agriculture seemed to many contemporaries and peers as more significant, appropriate, and likely of

16. Biographical details about Lincoln's life are located in most nineteenth-century histories of Worcester city and county; an especially convenient account can be found in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. 'Levi Lincoln.' In some respects, the most interesting account is that written by his son William in his *History of Worcester*.

success than the new-fangled and often unimpressive or unsuccessful ventures in mechanization. Additionally, by the time Lincoln reached adulthood many American observers of industrial England were becoming alarmed at the social costs associated with factories and were determined to avoid paying the same price.

Lincoln was a collector of farms, especially sheep farms. At his death, his overall worth in farms and farm gear came to $54,000. This included outright ownership of five farms, much land in Worcester, and a sawmill. Because he was an excellent keeper of records, Lincoln's approach to agricultural business and to the people who worked for him can be partially reconstructed.[17] To begin, he was a careful, even jealous supervisor. His records display suspicions that he was being ill-served or worse by his agents and hirelings. Surprise visits to his farms confirmed for him how unreliable his local supervisors were. For example, on October 13, 1807, he found that several loads of manure had spent the spring and summer in the cider mill rather than out on the fields. Lincoln blamed 'the unfaithfulness of labourer' as well as 'Baily ... the master workmen [*sic*].' On the subsequent November 2, he discovered that workmen Couse and Dean had absented themselves until ten in the morning, leaving the calf unsuckled, the hogs and cattle unfed, and the horses unwatered. He complained, 'This is an instance of unfaithfulness when I was at home—what is done in my absence?'[18]

Lincoln kept very close track of workers and inventory. Even when he loaned out his books to relatives or friends, all these transactions were duly noted. When William Hart Lynn, a contracted servant, ran away to sea in 1815, Lincoln recorded what must have been every article of clothing that 'Hart' took away with him on his back. The lawyer in Lincoln surfaced as he traced

17. The relevant documents in the Lincoln Family Papers, held at the American Antiquarian Society, are: the 'Account Book 1810–19' (folio 8) and 'Receipt Book' for the Oakham farm (the most important sources for this paper; 20 pages stitched into folio 8), and Levi Lincoln's more general farm inventories, 1820, and Farm Diary, 1807–19 (written between the lines of the printed volume of 'slip bills' for Massachusetts for 1805, folio 7).

18. Lincoln's Farm Diary, 1807–19, is the source of these and the subsequent anecdotal quotations.

Hart's every move, noting that 'he was bound to me and left me without my consent or knowledge.' The violation of contract surely bothered him even more than the loss of a few items of clothing, just as 'unfaithfulness' represented a breach of trust that eroded the bonds of agricultural and republican society for Lincoln. Further, those who worked for Lincoln on a daily-rate basis (apparently, standard contemporary practice) were paid strictly for the work accomplished. If a man 'had a headache all day, or so he said,' or if he were 'unwell [and thus did] little or nothing all day,' he was marked down and not paid.[19] Even the farm manager Joseph Clapp lost six days' pay in 1810 for the following causes of absences: musters and other military trainings, a lame ankle, attending at a court session, and another legal proceeding. Despite even the long-range contractual arrangement Lincoln made with his resident managers, he continued to think of their services effectively as if they were just units of piecework, accountable day by day. Shorter-term employees were obviously all the more vulnerable unless they had some system of economic assurance beyond the Lincoln farm.

As Lincoln aged, his parsimonious instincts increased. By 1818, he kept a formal 'Chapter of Accidents' in which to register his complaints about workers and animals. Everyone seemed to conspire against him: wagons and sleighs were broken, the sled was 'shod Satturday ruined on Monday,' 'horse team went into the woods agst directions coming back got set broke collar & trace pair of traces & had to get help,' 'glass lantern broke every square by __ noboddy,' and even the 'great mare corked so as not able to work.'

In the last full year of Lincoln's life, he entered into a kind of employer-employee warfare with one of his Worcester 'Home Farm' regulars on loan to the Oakham farm, Philip Fay.[20] In March of 1819, Lincoln discovered that eight Oakham lambs were missing, and only three of the losses could be explained. According to

19. The Oakham farm Account Book is the source for this and the following information.
20. See Lincoln's Farm Diary, 1807–19.

the retired attorney general, Fay 'acknowledged that 6 had died of which no account had been given. . . . He says that the six lambs laid in the back part of the front sheep pen (No. 1) untill the day before yesterday (Wednesday March 4) that he then removed them & threw them behind the same barn where they now lie. . . . Four of the lambs bear evident marks of violence having blood on their noses & in their nostrils.' When a similar incident had occurred the previous year, Lincoln had vented his anger in a diatribe in the account book: 'April 6, 1818— . . . sheep . . . grosly neglected—. . . . Capt Green says $1000 would not compensate for the consequences of this neglect and deception.' By 1819, Lincoln had experienced enough of Fay's stewardship. Biding his time, he waited for a fatal error. This time, we can only guess at the incident, but the account book is brutally eloquent in its simplicity: '1819 Sept 16th Thursday at night Philip Fay left work taken on a charge of stealing money & comitted to jail—worked but little this week myself at Oakham.'

This review of Lincoln's career suggests that he was not merely playing at shepherd, but rather was a man who deliberately left public service and the practice of law to do two things that mattered a great deal to him: farming, especially if it involved a systematic effort to improve the blood lines of his sheep in keeping with the latest style in agricultural improvement, and building up the landed wealth of his family. But he was more interested in improving land and livestock than in handling people in day-to-day operations. No clear picture emerges of how Lincoln spent his day. We catch only glimpses of him in the accounts and diaries, feeding neglected livestock, selecting timber in the woods in midwinter, haying with the crew for an hour in the morning, or monitoring account books. When the book says 'I drove 287 sheep to Worcester,' additional notations make it clear that it is the farm manager who actually did the work, rather than Lincoln himself. There is no evidence of continuous supervision by Lincoln or of direct involvement beyond random inspections. He lived most of the time at his Home Farm in Worcester, in a house far grander

than anything available in Oakham, surrounded by friends and relatives of his class. From his son's observations, it seems likely he spent considerable time away from hands-on farming: categorizing his fruit-tree experiments, reading treatises on agricultural improvement, mulling over the classics, socializing in Worcester, traveling to Boston, and keeping track of local legal and political developments. Although we must remember that we are inferring many of his attitudes from financial records, workers appear as individuals in his accounts only as miscreants and as people who labored for a specific time or provided goods or services.

Lincoln believed that the careful management of land and livestock would produce higher levels of income and that the capital could be invested in extended and upgraded livestock, more farms, and better tools. But in actual practice, the farm at Oakham slowly went downhill over the course of the decade for which we have records. Was it reasonable for him to have hoped to make money from the farm? Although the financial records are not complete enough to allow a formal audit of the business, there are several ways in which we can gain substantial understanding of the financial prospects for the farm. A 'Receipt Book' exists for the farm, covering the period September 1814 to December 1819. Here we can see that Lincoln's average annual Oakham cash outlay (almost entirely for labor) between 1815 and 1819 was $515 per year but that his listed cash inflow amounted only to $120. If he was seeking a cash balance, he therefore had a nominal annual shortfall of $395, which would have to be made up by the value of produce sold. Of course, considerable value was coming to Lincoln in the form of goods and services, some of which were also recorded in the receipt book.

Lincoln's sheep records provide a second insight into the financial worth of the farm operation. For the four years providing data (1811, 1815, 1817, and 1818), his average flock size at the end of the year was 498. His recorded loss rate due to death was a negligible 3.2 percent (on average, 16 sheep lost each year). In 1818, 27

percent of his sheep at the end of the year were lambs (114/413), and in the next year, he sold 331 pounds of mutton and 24 pounds of wool (at $.78 per pound) to Oakham locals. In 1811, at a 'sorting' of all his sheep on August 15, we find that 255 fleeces had been produced the preceding June from a total of 413 sheep, which meant that 62 percent of his sheep produced wool that year. If an average fleece weighed two pounds after cleaning, then his sheep produced about 500 pounds of wool that year.[21] Wool of 'second quality common' fetched $.50 per pound at the Merino Wool Manufacturing Company in 1812.[22] Putting these data together, it is possible to infer that Lincoln stood to make a minimum of about $310 from wool produced by the 62 percent of the productive sheep in his average flock of 498. To improve his monetary yield, he would have to have been able to command the higher prices available for 'first or second quality one-half blood' Merino-blend wool ($1 per pound). That would have doubled his annual yield to roughly $620, whereupon he would be breaking even or better. Given the ability of the flock to produce 25 percent of its number in new lambs each year, another way to increase his revenue would have been through enlarging the size of the flock. Many of Lincoln's costs were fixed, and would not have escalated with the increase in the number of sheep. And as his breeding program proceeded, he could have sold pure-blooded rams for considerable cash. In his diary he recorded a sale on November 10, 1814, of a full-blooded, two-year-old buck for $100, while a month earlier he had sold a full-blooded lamb for $50. By 1815, he had on hand 16 full-blooded Merino bucks, and 46 full-blooded ewes, to which he had recently added 34 full-blooded lambs (20

21. James Burnley, in *The History of Wool and Wool Combing* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889), says that a 'fleece fresh from the hands of the shearer will weight from 6 lbs. to 12 lbs., but after being cleansed of its impurities in the mill will not weigh more than from 2 lbs. to 4 lbs'(p. 7). The low numbers have been used here, since there was considerable improvement in sheep breeding during the nineteenth century.

22. 'Accounts of the Merino Wool Manufacturing Company, 1812–1815,' the Jepthah Bacon file, American Antiquarian Society, p. 3. Since Lincoln's flock in 1811 was of very mixed blood, the use of second-quality common as a price marker is conservative but fair.

ewes and 14 bucks). Clearly this pure-bred flock represented a significant capital resource, convertible to cash almost at will.

To raise additional money, Lincoln could have sold meat from his swine for $.07 per pound (pig fat brought double that price). In 1820, his estate inventory shows that Oakham housed twenty-three swine with an average weight of 105 pounds.[23] By the end of the decade, there were horned cattle of all descriptions at the Oakham farm that represented an additional $515 in total capital value. His farm diary shows he was producing significant quantities of cheese (about 1,500 pounds a year) from his Home Farm in Worcester, and we may assume that some of the Oakham cattle were contributing value for him in this way. In such activities, his farming operations fall into an intermediate category that is akin to the Ward experience and do not qualify as a full commercial farm catering solely and directly to industry.

Theoretically, the farm should have made money, although cash flow and market vagaries would have kept the margins close. Why then did the production of the farm shift partially away from sheep breeding (634 in 1815, down to 287 in 1820) and toward horned cattle and miscellaneous general crops? Why did the farm shift to production for urban centers and away from specialty supply to the woolen industry? Doubtless, one powerful reason was the downturn in New England textile prices after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. If the market for high-quality wool was erratic or temporarily closing, the sheep became as valuable for mutton as for wool, even though mutton seems to have commanded a very low price. The smaller flock of 1820 would have produced not a great amount more than $150 in wool, creating a probable net deficit for the farm. Only an economy of scale was likely to have made the operation financially successful, and Lincoln was heading in the opposite direction. An additional discouragement for Lincoln may have been the painstaking work required to upgrade and record the flock in order to command higher prices at the mill,

23. Although this factors out to $169, obviously not all of a pig can be converted into value, so the estate correctly records that the swine are worth $102.

and to breed sheep whose fleece yield was of greater volume and better quality. Finally, toward the end of his life, aided by none of his sons after William went off to college, Lincoln's difficulty with workers must have made such an effort seem beyond reach.

In retrospect, it is clear where Lincoln went wrong. The timing of his life cycle was unfortunate. Unlike Parkman, he was unable to claim the working support of his sons. Unlike Ward in 1829, he was able to dragoon no reluctant namesake to return to the farm in the patriarch's old age. Commercial farming supervised from a distance or through surrogates in central New England in the early nineteenth century was almost inevitably marginal due to problems with workers, which compounded the more general difficulties with soil, climate, and transportation that everyone faced. And Lincoln's particular product was especially vulnerable to international market forces beyond his control.

Moreover, Lincoln's rather elitist management of the upgraded blood lines of his sheep, carried out through record-keeping and spot checks on his several farms, was unlikely to produce capital results parallel to those that his manufacturing contemporaries in neighboring Leicester were achieving by living in or near their factories and coming to work every day. Lincoln was a tough, stubborn man, with a strong sense of his place in the social scale, and he therefore was not likely to strike out after the new but socially unimpressive business fashions such as woolen card manufacture. But for all that, he was willing to experiment and to give a shot at entrepreneurship of a sort, and the latest agricultural style in this period was experimental sheep breeding.

SHEPHERDS AND SHEEP IN THE NEW REPUBLIC

The central problem with the pre-Revolutionary sheep stock of New England was its coarse and short staple.[24] Efforts to upgrade the stock had met with vigorous resistance from England.[25] But

24. Staple is a measure of the length and fineness of the individual fiber strands.

25. Jared Eliot had reported as early as 1747: 'A better breed of sheep is what we want. The English breed of Cotswold sheep cannot be obtained, or at least with great difficulty; for wool and live animals are contraband goods, which all strangers are prohibited from

American farmers knew that of all the wool available in the Western world at that time, the Merino variety was the best. It had the longest, smoothest, and finest staple, and the Merino sheep had evolved over centuries of Spanish breeding into a stock hardy enough to do well in a Mediterranean climate.[26] The early postwar efforts to import Merino sheep into the newly independent United States were complex and difficult, even occasionally ludicrous. (One early recipient of a gift Merino ram had eaten it.) But by the period 1809–11, enough Merino sheep were in New England to begin the process of transforming the region's flocks.[27]

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carrying out on pain of having the right hand cut off.' This was quoted in A. D. Bolles, *Industrial History of the United States* (Norwich, Conn.: Henry Bill, 1881), p. 151.

26. To survive well in northern climates, however, the Merino had to be cross-bred with one of the several varieties (English or Scandinavian in origin) that were better able to handle the lower temperatures. Thus, for example, the famous 'Cotswold Lion,' probably descended from a Roman Longwool, may have been crossed with Merinos in the Middle Ages and later still was further upgraded by crosses with the Leicester and Hampshire Downs varieties. Lincoln, in actively carrying out breeding experiments, was therefore following in an old tradition. Robert Jennings, *Sheep, Swine, and Poultry: Embracing the History and Varieties of Each* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1864), and pamphlets from the Rare Breeds Survival Trust at Guiting Power, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, and the Yorkshire Museum of Farming, Murton, Yorkshire.

27. In 1785, a South Carolina Society for the Promotion of Agriculture offered a medal to the first keeper of a Merino flock, but there were no claimants. In 1793, William Foster of Boston brought from Cadiz two full-blooded Merino ewes and a Merino ram. Although they almost died on the seventy-five-day passage, a French veterinarian cured them with some kind of injection. Foster presented the sheep to his friend Andrew Craigie of Cambridge and then returned to France. Years later, Foster met Craigie at a sheep auction where Craigie had just bought a Merino ram for $1,000. Craigie confessed that he had not known earlier the value of the original imported Merinos and 'simply ate them.' Only one Merino ram survived in the United States by 1801, ending up in Kingston, New York, and so the first significant impact from upbreeding derived from David Humphreys's shipment of ninety-one Merinos in 1802. Humphreys had been ambassador to Spain and then retired with his sheep to Derby, Connecticut. With one half-million dollars of capital, he started a woolen manufacturing business in the Naugatuck Valley. A few other Merinos came into the region in the subsequent few years, but it is only in the period 1809–11 that the New England stock was transformed. William Jarvis, ambassador to Portugal, obtained permission to begin whole-scale importation, and so, just before the War of 1812, hundreds of Merino rams and ewes became available (Bolles, *Industrial History*, pp. 149–56). Lincoln's farm journal, 1807–19 (manuscript p. 43), provides an 'account of sheep,' dated January 1, 1810. At his Home Farm he had 137 sheep, of which fourteen were Merinos. Some were yearling lambs of three-quarters (Merino) blood, others of one-half blood, valued in total by him at $380. At his Stearns Farm he had seventy-nine 'Common' sheep, with two, three-quarters Merino blood rams. In other words, by 1810, Lincoln was already well along in the process of interbreeding Merinos and thereby upgrading his flock. From the fact that he already owned several part-Merinos at the beginning of 1810, we safely may con-

Sheep raising for the production of wool is an agricultural activity that is quite labor-intensive and is therefore vulnerable to marginal rates of return. The only way to have made money in sheep, as we see in hindsight, would have been to combine an efficient use of workers with a breeding breakthrough, carried out with a large flock. Lincoln's records show he was carefully working to improve the quality of his livestock by systematically introducing Merino blood. At one high point (1815), his flock numbered 634, which certainly compared favorably with other sheep operations of the time and region. At that moment, his fortunes seemed to be improving and the numbers of his sheep increasing. What then of the labor force needed to run his experimental sheep farms? [28]

We may divide the Oakham farm labor history that we possess into at least two divisions. In the first, the very detailed records make it explicit that Lincoln was trying to run a 'modern' sheep farm, based on careful cross-breeding of 'common' or 'poor' sheep with Merinos. Nonetheless, as he aged, Lincoln's ability and perhaps willingness to control the farm directly, supervise its animal inventory, and analyze its production declined. Doubtless, any inherent problems in the farming operation were exacerbated by the downturn in market conditions for local wool, caused by the effort of British manufacturers to recapture the New England market after the Napoleonic Wars. In the period after 1815, the farm increasingly turned into a more ordinary mixed-production

clude that Lincoln's Merino flock was one of the earliest working collections in the United States.

28. The subsequent section of this paper is based on a detailed study of the 109 individuals who appear in the Oakham farm Account Book. The analysis focuses on the Oakham operation because it has the most complete records. It is clear, however, that Lincoln moved his sheep and his workers around, at the least among the Oakham, Stearns, and Home farms, and so we cannot assume that the Oakham farm was isolated as the explicitly experimental operation. Seventy-five of these Oakham individual workers have been located in other records, such as the vital records of twenty-nine nearby towns, the various town genealogies, real estate maps, and the like. Some of the individuals are difficult to categorize. Philip Fay, for example, seems to have served as head shepherd in the period 1815–19. He moved the flock semiannually between Oakham and its outlying pasturage and Worcester, where it wintered over or from which some sheep were sold (records do not exist for this aspect of the business). Thus Fay appears variously at the Oakham and Home farms, depending on seasonal assignment. Lincoln's Farm Diary lists many additional individuals beyond these 109, but in most cases it is clear that they are primarily

enterprise, producing fully as much of predictable general field crops as of the prized Merino wool. Significant quantities of mutton appear in the records (mainly acquired by the major workers), and by the end of the decade almost as much effort was placed in cattle as in sheep. In this second phase, 1816–20, the farm's labor arrangements came to resemble those found on almost any large family farm of the period, such as we see with the Wards in Shrewsbury. Throughout, however, it seems to have been financially the most powerful farming business in its immediate region, and certainly it was the most extensive. The entire farm was a coalition of properties that stretched out on either side of about six thousand feet of roadway, with the surviving fields and stone walls suggesting no fewer than eleven twenty-acre units available for direct use. Beyond this acreage, the farm operator occasionally contracted with owners of other local fields for the use of their pasturage. Since sheep are destructive grazers, and since the farm also supported significant numbers of horned cattle, hogs, and horses, this total of two to three hundred acres is, if anything, probably understated.[29]

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associated with one or another of Lincoln's four other farms. The 109 individuals can be listed in many ways, but the following will suggest one general shape of the group:

Identified resident of Oakham	39	Probably double-counted [Roo-Munroe, Allen-Eling]	3
Identified resident of Spencer	28	Levi Lincoln	1
Identified resident of Douglas	1	A worker on loan from Worcester	1
Identified resident of Hubbardston	1	Activity suggesting that the man was local	11
Identified resident of New Braintree	2	Name suggesting a local connection	8
Identified resident of Warren	1	Geographic identification probable	5
Oakham residents in partnerships	3	No information, no clue	3
Illegible names	2		

29. Only the sheep records are fairly full for the whole decade. In 1811, there were 8 horses in residence on April 16. On April 28, 1813, 10 hogs were driven from Worcester to Oakham, and on June 11, 7 more were added. An account of horned cattle dated December 14, 1812, lists 27 oxen, 10 cows and heifers, and 1 calf; the next February 4, 32 head of cattle and 1 calf were driven to Worcester, presumably to market. Since the animals were continually being moved about, it is difficult to be confident of a precise census. And in any event, animals were used as more than marketable commodities. For example, Lincoln's diary entry for December 8, 1813, notes 'Wiliam Witcher [Whittaker] took of one them cws [*sic*].' Presumably, that cow served as payment for Whittaker's extensive work on the farm that year, for no other compensation is identified in the account book.

THE LABOR FORCE AT THE OAKHAM FARM

The labor force of a farm can be divided into two categories, both of which can be considerably subdivided. The first category is what we might think of as the staff, composed of men hired for relatively long periods of time. Housing and food were often part of their contract. The great advantages for these workers were the stability of their employment and several perquisites available to them as regular workers. One disadvantage, at least if Levi Lincoln were the employer, was that close and even cranky supervision of the sort illustrated earlier could lead to harassment or even summary dismissal and imprisonment. The other general category of farm workers is what we may call the temporary hired hands. These people, often but not always local individuals, could do spot work somewhat at their own convenience, thereby augmenting a living that primarily relied on the yield of other property. The temporary hired hands could usually bargain for a higher rate of pay, but of course they had job security only for the specific task at hand, providing that they performed it satisfactorily.

One of the easiest ways to differentiate staff and temporary workers is to consider their method of payment. Numerous arrangements appear in Lincoln's account book. At first assessment, we can see that the types of pay for farm labor at Oakham show the following areas of potential flexibility: 1) variable day rates (depending on task, time of the season, and the age, status, and skill of the particular worker); 2) the presence or absence of additional workers from (or responsible to) the same family; 3) pay for different quantities of (as opposed to time expended on) piecework produced (e.g., cutting, shocking, tying); 4) the opportunity for accumulating overtime pay (requiring a specific definition of a workday both in hours and by worker status); and 5) payment in kind.[30]

30. The following section of the paper has been greatly informed by the scholarly literature about nineteenth-century English farm practices. Writings about farming details, while always in danger of degenerating into romanticism or antiquarianism, have often been carried out at a high level of scholarship in England in recent years. On the

What distinguishes the temporary hands from the long-term staff is that the temporary or day laborers might more freely combine fragments of these payment arrangements, and could switch among them more fluidly. The long-term staff, however, had certain advantages in their work schedules: they could, in unusual circumstances, notably connected with health or weather, turn down work and remain employed; they could, and at Oakham often did, add family workers for extra pay; they might earn more by working faster on tasks that were compensated by piece rather than by time expended; and they might, as a group, bargain for better rates, as, for example, when a head of family—Joseph Clapp or Samuel Dean, for example—applied for employment as supervisor. The long-term staff members were housed, fed, and employed even in February, when they were often occupied with make-work, but they must, on the other hand, normally do whatever work might be required by the owner and supervisor.

By contrast, there were a number of advantages to being a temporary laborer. A temporary worker could—and many at Oakham did—maintain his own farm. He could negotiate for improved wages. We can infer from the Oakham records that individualized bargaining may have taken place at the moment of contract for temporary work. The records indicate that the terms of employment for identical tasks clearly are not rigidly established but rather vary both by the individual and sometimes also by the time of year.[31] By his short-term labor, a temporary worker could raise 'spot' cash or goods without significant disruption to the rest of his life. He was less vulnerable to the capricious orders of a difficult

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other hand, there is always peril in assuming a coincidence between English and postcolonial agricultural practices. The single most helpful article for this paper has been David H. Morgan, 'The Place of Harvesters in Nineteenth-Century Village Life,' in *Village Life and Labour*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 27–72. Also cf. Thomas E. Kebbel, *The Agricultural Labourer* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870).

31. One such regular break in the calendar of wages is in mid-August. Haying before the fifteenth of that month commands about 25 percent more money than after that date, regardless of the individual or his status—adult or youth, regular employee or previously unknown, skilled or journeyman, economically established or economically vulnerable. The generality of this wage break suggests, of course, that pay for haying work in August was not negotiable. Many other farm tasks, however, display no such pattern.

supervisor or owner because he could walk away with greater financial impunity.

Let us now look in greater detail at the Oakham records to refine these two broad divisions of 'staff' or long-term and 'temporary' or day workers. The long-term individuals who stand out are Lincoln's on-site agents and managers. He provided, at least to the senior of them, a small house—one of several that he owned in the neighborhood—and a modest annual income. In return, the manager was required to keep precise records, supervise the work chores, perform as much as he could of the physical work, and arrange for the movement of flocks of sheep and other livestock to Worcester, if required, on at least a seasonal basis. The pay for these agents and managers was annualized, and took the form of a salary as well as housing and the right to take certain produce for their own support.

A second category of long-term worker contains the semipermanent but nonsupervisory hired employees. As noted earlier, we usually encounter them in Lincoln's records when they cause trouble. Since their work was contracted on a longer-range basis, these workers do not often show up in the account books, except when they are hired or paid off. We are more likely to encounter them in the farm diary, since that record deals with a broader range of activity regardless of the mode of payment.[32] Even in the depths of winter, after the seasonal workers disappeared, the names of these long-term individuals may occur in the account-book records. Sometimes they are credited for working alongside Levi Lincoln himself in such tasks as hauling firewood out of the woods or clearing brush from a reclaimed pasture. Their pay came in the

32. Account books usually contain information about a farmer's external economic relationships, especially those involving the transfer of cash or goods or the development of an obligation or debit. Therefore, for information about the workers who would have seemed internal to the farmer's world, we would need to look at a farmer's receipt books or farm diaries. However, these theoretical distinctions between account and diary records do not always hold in practice, since the one may take on temporarily the characteristics of the other. It is unusual to find records for a single farm that cover this whole spectrum of data; therefore, the Lincoln records for Oakham provide an excellent opportunity to see more of a whole agricultural universe for this period.

form of a cash settlement, made at the end of a long period, usually no less than a month, and as long as a year.

In a third category are the local farmers who occasionally worked on the Lincoln farm on a day-by-day basis but who lived on their own farms and had other economic and social commitments besides their voluntary one to the Lincoln farm. These people could often raise additional money by having a son come along to help with a job. In a few instances, a local farmer would send along his hired man to earn money on his Lincoln farm account, while presumably the farmer himself stayed on his own property. Some of these local farmers seemed to use the Lincoln farm in Oakham as a workplace where they could raise capital for investment in their own farmsteads, especially while they were first getting established. Elisha Prouty, for example, worked twenty-four days in 1810, but by 1817 his work schedule was down to three days. Ephraim Browning worked for Lincoln for forty-seven days in 1816, more than twice as much as any other man from the neighborhood that year, but John Boyd's work pace remained constant at about ten days a year throughout the whole decade. There seems to have been no social stigma to working as a day laborer for Lincoln; many of the men in this group held minor town offices. The payment method for such individuals was rather varied. Some might contract for a month's work. Others would carry their earnings over a long period, possibly beyond a year, against which credit they would 'charge' seed grain, cash advances, or access to such services as a cider mill.[33] Thus, it is clear that men in this category were following different economic strategies, which correspond closely to their ages and to their traceable or evolving status as independent farmers.

A fourth category of farm laborers includes young men who were getting started in the town by using the farm to produce both cash and credit. Elijah Dean worked so much for Lincoln in the period 1810–13 that it is impossible to believe he had a viable farm

33. These individuals' behavior conforms most closely to Christopher Clark's description in his 'Household Economy,' cited in footnote 2.

of his own. For example, he worked twenty-six days for Lincoln in August 1813. Later in the decade, his days dropped off markedly. Then he often took his pay in seed grains. Such grain payments were entirely missing from his accounts at the beginning of the decade, suggesting that he had later acquired his own farmland on which to sow. The pay of these individuals was in the form of cash or grain, settled within a month of the labor performed. As was the case with the Ward family employees, these men needed and got their pay in a form that could readily be converted to their own uses and ambitions.

A fifth worker category is that of men with special artisanal skills: millers, blacksmiths, and masons. Their place in the accounts is very specific and specialized. About one half-mile west of the site of the Lincoln farm caretaker's cottage was a modest millsite, where a dammed-up wet area provided a small head of water. The outflow was sent along a small channel to offer additional spots for taking power from the flow. The Lincoln farm used the millers John Brooks and Lewis Fales at this site for grinding and sawing work. The farm had its own cider mill that was substantial enough to produce a considerable annual volume. Lincoln also rented the use of the cider mill to local farmers. Presumably in support of the cider milling activity, which was both a source of cash for the farm and of labor (local men worked off their 'purchase' of barrels of cider), Jonas Munroe was hired for cooperage work in 1810. Additionally, a local mason, Reuben Cuningham, was hired when chimney work was required, and David Hollowell spent two days 'laying wall' in 1814.[34] Jonas Clap, a brother of the man who was caretaker between 1810 and 1812, provided some modest blacksmithing work in 1815–16. As remains the case in the modern world, the Lincoln farm operators seemed to have understood that it was prudent to pay these skilled and essential craftsmen promptly, and in cash.

34. Laying wall may have been a common skill, more in the range of brute labor than professional-level masonry. John Macumber also provided this service in 1815 and Read Rich in 1816. Macumber was a jack-of-all-trades for the farm during 1810–18, and Rich also dug potatoes.

In a sixth category of workers are men who used their labor to acquire a specific item or line of credit. A remarkably high number (17 of 109) fit into this particular category. Zenas Draper, for example, shows up in the account books only once, in the last week of August 1812. He worked for two days in haying, for which he was credited $1.50. On August 29, at the end of these two days, he was charged for one barrel of cider, at the same price of $1.50. (The barrel of cider would have been useful to him on his own farm, as beverage for his own haying workers.) Others directly exchanged their labor for such commodities as wool, ashes, hay, seed (rye, corn, potatoes), or payment of highway taxes. These individuals came to work sporadically during the agricultural year, suggesting that the initiative was their own and not some need at the Lincoln farm. Their payment was direct—rarely in cash but rather in whatever commodity brought them to perform the labor in the first place—and immediate.

MARGINAL, SELF-SUFFICIENT, AND MIGRANT PEOPLE

Finally, there is a group of marginal people, marginal at least to the historian.[35] Are these migrant workers? If minor license is allowed, the Oakham group of thirty-four workers not positively identified shrinks dramatically. Eight are almost certainly local individuals who were not fully cited in the accounts.[36] Eleven uncertified individuals are engaged in activities that make it very likely that they are local farmers.[37] Five other individuals can be associated with local families but are not certainly identifiable.[38]

35. Of the 109 individuals mentioned in the records, this handful has given the most difficulty. One can learn little about them or positively assert much more than their names. See footnote 28 for one breakdown of the group.

36. E.g., 'Deacon' Dean, 'Mrs.' Dean, or several other Deans presumably belonging to one or another of the four separate and unrelated Dean families in Oakham.

37. E.g., S. Haskins brought eight bushels of potatoes, probably for seed, Cargel carted potatoes to Leicester, Solomon Munroe bought 300 pounds of hay, and Mr. Reden hired the use of a Lincoln bull for his cows.

38. E.g., 'Parker and Kingsley'drove stock and bought seed oats and are very likely Reuben Parker and Samuel Kingsley, two young men of Oakham; another local worker was John Dammon, probably related to the Damon family of Oakham and very likely the husband of Esther Richardson Dammon, formerly of Warren.

Therefore, the original, unidentified group of candidates for migrancy shrinks to three individuals (perhaps five, with the addition of two whose names are illegible). None of these exchange their labor for seed grain or cider, which would be a certain clue that they are nearby farmers. None of them appears more often than at their one moment in the account. They cannot be located even tentatively or inferentially in the records of twenty-nine nearby towns, nor do they possess last names that would allow the presumption that they are relatives of local people. They may fit into the category that is rather romantically described as the 'strolling poor.'[39]

Beyond their probable absence from local records, there are major problems of definition, research, and analysis to be handled before we may assume that these unidentified workers are representatives of migrancy among farm workers in Massachusetts in the early nineteenth century.[40] Might we recognize migrant workers by their behavior? A 'true migrant' worker should be habitually itinerant, moving seasonally and perhaps even randomly. He would necessarily acquire his work without relying on personal connections, and could be vulnerable to unfavorably negotiated labor terms. He should not be residential in any nearby towns. However, even with these criteria, it is difficult to trace such an individual through an employment season.[41]

39. Cf. the author's paper 'Migrant Farm Workers in Massachusetts 1800–1850,' given at the 1986 Dublin Seminar meetings on 'The Farm.' Some material from that essay has been incorporated into this paper. See also Douglas L. Jones, 'The Strolling Poor: Transiency in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,' *Journal of Social History* 9 (1975): 28–54.

40. Perhaps the most influential study of this phenomenon is Douglas Jones's work on transiency in eighteenth-century Massachusetts. His research model is a 'top-down' and inferential one. By studying persistence rates in selected communities in premodern New England, and by supplementing these with court records of transient individuals warned out of two counties (Essex and Hampshire, Massachusetts), he seeks to position himself to identify a portion of the population that *must have been* transient, migratory, 'tramping,' or 'strolling' because there is no other logical explanation for them. Naturally, given his research design, Jones's individuals turn out to be of low economic condition and unskilled. Even so, he finds that most domestic transients traveled 'usually not more than ten miles from the town of last residence.' Jones, 'The Strolling Poor,' p. 39. See further discussion in the appendix.

41. If these qualities characterize the migrant worker, then the research problems are likely to be staggering. First of all, migrant workers are those about whom we probably

Beyond the research obstacles lie conceptual difficulties. Many have locked onto a mental image of vagabond workers wandering the countryside in early America.[42] But are migrants really there in early nineteenth-century Massachusetts? Two small case studies appended to this paper suggest that the very low level of migrancy in Lincoln's world is far from unique.[43] Only as changes in New England's labor situation develop toward the middle of the nineteenth century, as Jack Larkin's essay shows, does migrancy return. It may well be the case that migrancy is a by-product of certain moments of economic and cultural development. Douglas Jones's study demonstrates that some sections of eighteenth-century New England were experiencing population pressure on available land that was sufficient enough to force young men to go out in search of employment with strangers. Larkin's study shows that after 1830 new forces connected with the growth of industrial cities and the increase of immigration apparently created a set of conditions that promoted migrancy. The early years of the nineteenth century in central Massachusetts, then, may have seen a modest equilibrium favoring the community-based system for supplying farm laborers. Migrancy may have been temporarily unnecessary in that particular time and place.

Another conceptual issue, closely related to migrancy, is associated with the matter of 'self-sufficiency.' Probably the heyday for this assumption was late in the nineteenth century, when the generation that had lived through the peak of the industrial revo-

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know the least. By definition they are not usually found in local records, and they are toward the bottom of the economic scale. Often we have to infer their rootlessness from other evidence. A significant second problem is associated with the condition of the records. Frequently, we have only last names. Often, spelling is highly unreliable, and the penmanship of farmers can present a powerful challenge to patience and imagination.

42. For comparison, see Pamela Horn, *The Rural World 1780–1850* (London: Macmillan, 1980) and *Life and Labour in Rural England, 1760–1850* (London: Macmillan, 1987); K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1946).

43. Despite the tradition of 'strolling poor'in early American history, the practice was perhaps more common in medieval Europe than in New England. The classic book on the subject remains J. J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1950). On migrancy in Massachusetts, see Jones, 'The Strolling Poor.'

lution in New England wrote its nostalgic and frequently overblown memoirs.[44] Obviously, a truly self-sufficient farm, by definition, had no need for occasional or random labor. Virtually all the goods required would come from the farm itself, with support only from a village store and a blacksmith. In recent years, self-sufficiency has received considerable scholarly attention, with the result that the issue is generally dismissed from serious consideration.[45] If there was self-sufficiency in the early nineteenth century, it was more likely to have been symbolic and psychological, manifested in a feeling of partial countryside autonomy in contrast to the urban-commercial world. In any event, the research for this paper has turned up no fully self-sufficient farms in central Massachusetts in the early nineteenth century, implying that theoretically there could have been room in the rural economic history of the Commonwealth for migrant farm laborers.

The concept of marginality presents a final hurdle. Historical studies have frequently focused on successful individuals, for the obvious reasons that they are more emotionally satisfying to study and easier to document. For approximately the last twenty years, however, historians have learned much about women, children, old people, witches, members of minority religious or ethnic groups, criminals, the mentally disabled, and the sexually different.

44. Traditionally, for the period of this essay, large families provided the requisite manpower, save only for that supplied by spinsters or younger relatives who were boarding with a family. Fine examples of this genre are the reprint of E. H. Arr's [Ellen H. Rollins] 1883 edition of her *New England Bygones: Country Life in the 1840's* (Stockbridge, Mass.: Berkshire Traveller Press, 1977), and Keyes Danforth, *Boyhood Reminiscences: Pictures of New England Life in the Olden Times in Williamstown* (New York: Gazlay Brothers, 1895). Surely such nostalgic authors missed the irony that we find in their outlook. It was ambivalence about commercialism (from which they had derived the financial success that gave them opportunity and, subsequently, the belief that their lives were worth memorializing) that led them to overemphasize and romanticize their allegedly self-sufficient and rural childhoods.

45. Much has been written on this subject. Cf. especially Rodney C. Loehr, 'Self-Sufficiency on the Farm,' *Agricultural History* 26 (1952): 37–41; Christopher Clark, 'Household Economy,' cited in footnote 2; Michael Merrill, 'Cash Is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States,' *Radical History Review* 14 (1977): 42–71; Winifred B. Rothenberg, 'The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750–1855,' cited in footnote 6; Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, 'Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 12 (1984): 333–64; and Carole Shammas, 'How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 13 (1982): 247–72.

It is extremely difficult to understand, let alone to document with precision, the lives of those who subsist on the economic fringes, away from the urban centers, out of sight in the hills and on the road.[46] Can we retrieve meaningful information about truly migrant workers who do not, at least later in their lives, become record-worthy?

If we now turn to look at the Oakham records for specific evidence of migrant workers, we immediately encounter all of these problems. The Oakham record is sketchy about almost all the candidate migrants. Alexander Campbell, possibly from Dudley, worked for one month in the summer of 1811. William Atkins worked for Lincoln during the winter of 1814–15. When he left, he 'told Mr. Powers on his way that Hart had gone up country, that he expected to meet him on the road & if he did not expected to find him at his father's house in Warwick when he got home.'[47] Elijah Couse, who is often noted in other Lincoln records, especially for the Home Farm in Worcester, worked the month of September 1815 for $10. Silas Eling (who might possibly be the Spencer farmer named Silas *Allen* who shows up elsewhere in the Oakham records) spent two days digging in 1814. John N. Fairbanks engaged to work for two months, at $12 a month, in August 1817. Abraham Hunter, 'come to work for John Macumber,' subsequently worked alongside Macumber for Lincoln for five days in midsummer 1811. None of these workers, and others like them, are recorded as exchanging their labor for seed grain or cider. Rather, they are paid in cash at the end of their usually brief period of employment at a rate that is negotiated and recorded in advance. Given their mode of payment, it is quite possible to rule out such individuals as local farmers who have slipped through a patchy research net.

Such as these are candidate migrant laborers. At most, they

46. A superb piece of writing and analysis that shows how much can be done with such people is Paul E. Johnson, 'The Modernization of Mayo Greenleaf Patch: Land, Family, and Marginality in New England, 1766–1818,' *New England Quarterly* 55 (1982): 488–516.

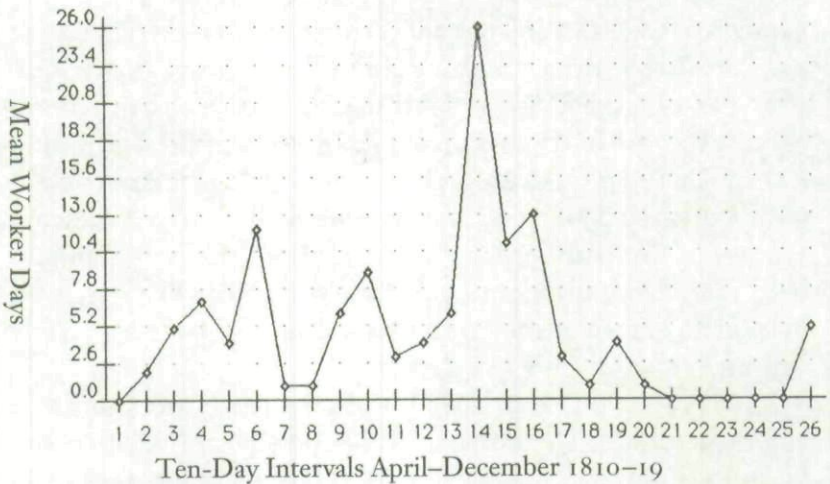
47. Warwick, Massachusetts, is a few miles north of Orange, nearly forty miles from the Oakham farm.

represent 3 to 5 percent of the total labor force on the Oakham farm. And prudence surely suggests that there should be generous allowance for record and research error, which would reduce that percentage to a virtual vanishing point. Where, then, are the migrant workers? They are so hard to find in these farm records because they are relatively scarce at this moment in New England's history. Consider Oakham's strong, complex, and vigorous neighborhood labor pool. It is flexible, and, in the early nineteenth century in this place, it is substantial. How likely would it have been that migrant workers could have competed effectively with local men, known in the neighborhood and available over many seasons?

But there is another consideration. Since specific work activities are frequently cited in the daybook, it is possible to create a rough measure of the size and duration of the demand for short-term laborers. If we add up the number of these workers hired during every ten-day period between April and December each year and then average out these results over the entire period 1810–19, a clear pattern emerges of episodic employment opportunities tied to seasonal farm chores. The following graph, which expresses the decade's mean for each ten-day interval, conceals the fact that in six percent of the intervals the actual number of man-days was greater than twenty-six, and twice reached into the lower forties. However, these high points of opportunity all clustered in the days of later summer, and were invariably connected with haying.

Therefore, we can see that the opportunity for a migrant worker to find employment was present only sporadically during the spring and early summer months and was strong only in August. During other times of the year, he would have had to find alternative work. (Later, he might exist on the fringes of the industrial world, as did the Shrewsbury shoemakers.) This tendency toward a limited opportunity pattern during the first two decades of the nineteenth century was due to the narrow crop selection of central Massachusetts. Gangs of Irish migrants in England at the same period could move from hay to wheat to corn harvesting, but such

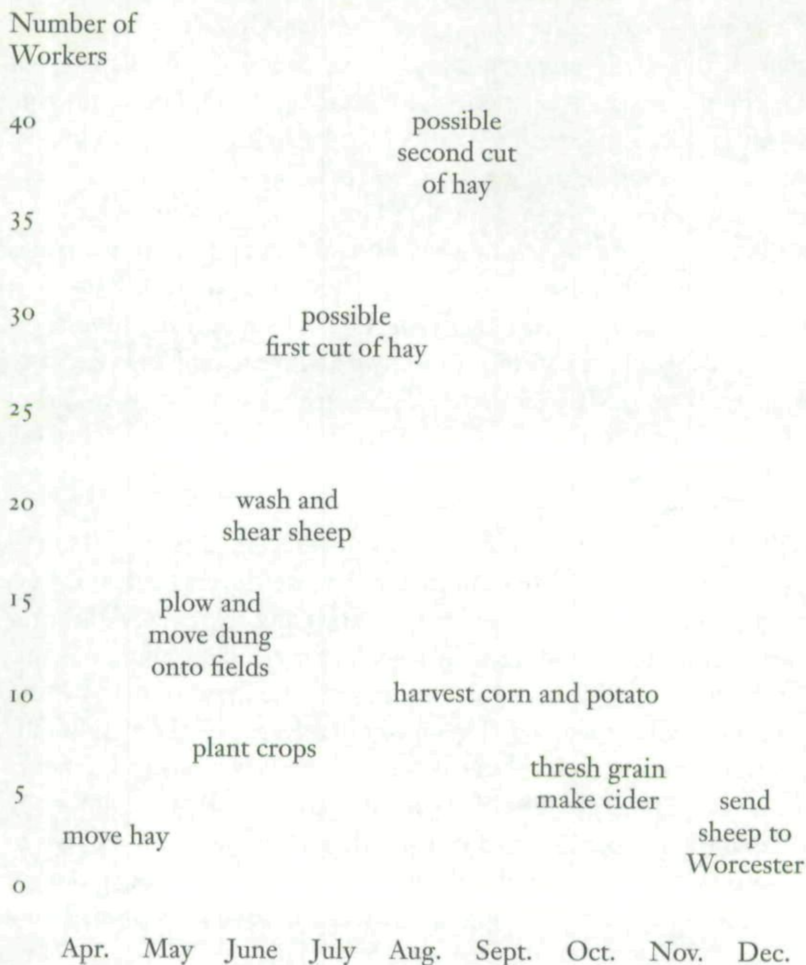
SEASONAL DEMAND FOR SHORT-TERM LABOR



◆ Mean N Workers

crop diversity was not present in central New England at this time. Here, the only true labor crisis occurred at haying time, which is notoriously variable and is highly dependent on good drying weather. How should, how could, a migrant labor force of any appreciable dimension have responded to such a volatile and unpredictable schedule as was represented by any specific haying season throughout the region? And it is important to remember that whatever haying work that was available would tend to occur simultaneously throughout the single climatic entity of central Massachusetts. Plowing and planting at Oakham seem to have been handled easily by the resident labor force, augmented slightly by local farmers looking for some ready cash or credit. Harvesting, whether the crop was wool or relatively minor quantities of potatoes or corn, was on a small enough scale to be manageable within the framework of the extended neighborhood. Only haying provided a problem for the labor force of the immediate locale, and only haying would have required the use of migrant workers as long as that neighborhood system was in place. Furthermore,

Seasonal Farm Labor Tasks



Lincoln could and did move workers around among his several farms, additionally reducing the likelihood that he would have had to take a chance on an unknown vagabond of the road.

This pattern becomes explicit when the personnel requirements are matched with each month's predominant agricultural activity at the Oakham farm, as the above graph illustrates.

Therefore, the only likely migrancy in the Oakham farm labor force came from a tiny handful of men working their way day by day through the countryside. The so-called migrant group at Oakham consisted of men like Alexander Campbell (probably from Dudley), John N. Fairbanks (conceivably related to a local Fairbanks family), or Elijah Couse (possibly of Sutton, and very probably an employee at Lincoln's Home Farm in Worcester) who would work for a month or a season and then, probably, return to their original homes and settle down. Between 1810 and 1820, if there were people who really needed or wanted to migrate in search of work, apparently there were more promising places to look than rural Massachusetts. Only after 1830 does this situation change dramatically.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering these seven categories of laborers, it is clear that the men in a number of them had much greater leverage than others in determining their working conditions and their rates of remuneration. Lincoln would hardly have been personally aware of some of them as individuals, while others were the focus of his wrathful and undivided attention. The most effectively protected individuals were those who lived in the area on their own farms. For some the farm served as a kind of bank and grange cooperative for the locality. They could go to it not only to borrow cash but also to take on credit such commodities as hay, cider, seed, as well as to seek out episodic labor opportunities. These local farmers had a strength of community that was largely denied to others. The long-term hired workers below the level of farm manager seem to have been the most vulnerable. Men like Philip Fay or William Hart were quite dependent on the Lincoln farm, with relatively few alternatives available to them. By contrast, those people who wander briefly in and out of the Oakham farm record, most of whom can positively be identified as local farming men or independent countryside artisans, had some other solid occupation to which they returned or proceeded. They could bargain for pay and work, and could escape at will from the system.

Given his problems with this complex labor force, we can see one of the major reasons why Lincoln as farmer did not succeed more fully than he did. Although he would sometimes stay overnight at the manager's house in Oakham, Lincoln's main residence was in Worcester, part of a day's travel from the sheep and fields. Ordinarily, communal reciprocity would have helped the Lincoln farm through the rough places in its economic life. In this case, however, in both economic matters as well as in social life, reciprocity was reduced both by the outscale size and economic dominance of the Lincoln operation and by the physical remoteness and the political prestige of the owner. Absentee ownership, therefore, was a key problem. Like both Parkman and Ward, Lincoln needed to live nearer to the farm and watch the work more closely. Given the actual circumstances of his life, the labor practices at Oakham were nearly impossible for Lincoln to control tightly or directly.

Skilled workers were almost all part-timers, with their final and fundamental loyalties to their own family farms or their local businesses. The temporary work force was unstable and much of it tended to be unskilled at the point of first hiring. As these workers developed skill, they applied it to their own concerns and left the Lincoln labor pool. Even the senior men, the on-site managers, seemed to prefer to own their own farms, for two of them proceeded to acquire their own places and to leave Lincoln's employment as soon as they were able. With such a complex and shifting work force, it is no wonder that Lincoln was driven to exclaim in disgust: 'What is done in my absence?' Had he been younger, or thinking more like the rising factory managers in the nearby towns or the more traditional farmers described by Ross Beales and Jack Larkin, he might have addressed that question by increasing his personal attention and restricting his periods of absence. However, Lincoln apparently did not prefer direct residential management.

Even with an efficient and competent on-site manager, as was the case in the early part of the farm's history under Lincoln's ownership, the local farmers who supplied such a crucial quantity

of the labor force and such a useful level of skills were unwilling to subject themselves to labor-force discipline. The records, especially those dealing with the long-term workers, frequently report late arrivals to daily work, early departures, no-show days, too-cold days, sicknesses, and irregular patterns of substituting labor by children and hired hands for the contracted work of an experienced adult male worker. The temporary help was of course more constrained by the nature of their pay basis to deliver the labor services identified and required, and thus might seem a group that could have been disciplined into efficiency. They were, however, by definition a group that could not accumulate and deliver skill or expertise to the Lincoln operation. Rather, as soon as they became skilled and capitalized enough, they went off to run their own farms.

In a perhaps mythical balanced farming community, the behaviors of the farm managers, whether owners or agents, would be shaped by interactions based on community values, shared family ties, and mutual financial needs. In such a world, Lincoln could have made the farm succeed either by managing it directly himself or by hiring good agents. But he would not live at the farm, and his agents treated the job only as a stepping-stone to personal autonomy on their own property. Without that level of labor-force discipline such as New England soon was to see in the mills, how was a new and fairly complex sheep-breeding program to be implemented, and thereby the marginal yield of a New England farm to be increased? Lincoln's elder sons were right about this: it was easier to run for state governor than to run an efficient Merino sheep farm in central Massachusetts.

Appendix

Migrant Labor Conditions in Massachusetts, 1812–24: Two Examples

On April 21, 1824, Moses Porter of Danvers 'went to market. Bought 1 haddock at 4 ½ on my way home in the North fields. Met 2 men with packs on in search of business. Talked with them, and the one whom I

liked best concluded to come home with me and see if we could agree upon terms.'[48] With this encounter, Moses Porter began an experience with a classically migrant farm laborer that lasted at least through the remainder of 1824. For that year, 1824, we possess quite a full diary of his life on a farm in Danvers, Massachusetts. When he kept the diary, Porter was twenty-nine, unmarried, and living with his parents and younger brother. Through his diary we can trace the patterns of work and hired labor of a typical Massachusetts farm early in the nineteenth century.

The man Porter chose on April 21 was a Mr. Ellis, who stayed on through the remainder of the year.[49] The only recorded personal encounter between Ellis and anyone else from the community occurred on October 24, when a Mr. Woodman, perhaps Ellis's backpacking companion from April 21, arrived for a visit. 'When I got home found Mr. Woodman here, he having come to tell Mr. Ellis that he had Concluded to stay down there this winter,' Porter noted in his diary.[50] Ellis's apparent social isolation surely is one characteristic of a migrant worker, which reinforces the impression that he was not from the community or nearby region.

There is a second candidate migrant worker in Moses Porter's diary, a Mr. Orne, but he is less likely than Ellis to be a true migrant.[51] Orne first appears in the diary as a boarder at Mrs. Millet's and Mr. Jewett's. He engaged on September 7 to come to work as a carpenter, but was 'still too ill to do anything' until six days later. Orne worked for the Porters for the rest of the year, with the last entry occurring on December 29. It seems likely that Orne, if indeed the the diary and the vital records depict the same person, had been distraught after the death of his wife, or, even more likely, was still suffering from whatever disease had caused his wife's death. If these suppositions are true, then that Orne in Porter's diary who was boarding and seeking work, while ill, fits rather neatly with the aggrieved and presumably unhappy man in the vital records. But if all this is accurate, Orne probably belonged to some category of laborer

48. 'Diary for the Year 1824, Kept by Moses Porter,' *The Historical Collections of the Danvers Historical Society*, 43 vols. (Danvers, Mass.: The Danvers Historical Society, 1913–67), 1: 31–51.

49. Although the vital records for Danvers list several Ellises in the Danvers area, none of them have the right dates to be our fellow, who, in any event, is not given a first name in the diary. *Vital Records of Danvers, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849*, 2 vols. (Salem, Mass.: The Essex Institute, 1909–10).

50. *Historical Collections of Danvers*, 2: 54–63.

51. From the *Vital Records of Danvers*, we learn that in 1819 a William Orne, Jr., had married one Sally Mayhew, who died May 7, 1824, at age twenty-seven.

other than the true migrant. The Porter entry of April 21 is highly unusual in its clear identification of two male itinerant farm workers. Much more often we have to infer workers' rootlessness from other evidence. However, in the two cases of Orne and Ellis we have only their last names, thus making positive identification essentially impossible.

There is another migratory worker noted in the diary. Although a tin peddler should possibly be regarded more as a circuit merchant than a true migrant, nonetheless, his presence suggests a countryside marked by ambulatory individuals. On April 20, Porter noted, 'Mr Thompson, the tin Pedlar, left soon after breakfast. He come last night just as we set down to supper, but as we were going to meeting we couldn't wait on him so he had to put his horse up himself.'[52] In this case, the peddler is known by name, spent the night, and clearly is regarded by the Porters more as a guest than an outside intruder to be interviewed with care.

A second example of a migratory farm laborer comes from the diary of Benjamin Goddard of Brookline, Massachusetts.[53] Goddard was a man of considerably greater means and presumption than Moses Porter. On March 13, 1815, for instance, the gap between master and worker is manifestly clear: 'Myself and man at home;—he assorting potatoes, myself transcribing a genealogical account of the Goddard family in my Fathers Bible from the first that come from England down to the present day.'[54] This 'man,' like others whom Goddard hired, was required to provide his own spirits, as well as to attend the church meeting.[55] Goddard lived on what is today Route 9 in Brookline, even then a busy turnpike. He had frequent callers, whom he clearly distinguished from transients, whom he calls 'squatters.' It is clear that he housed people, however reluctantly, as they passed his way heading west on the turnpike to Worcester. His occasional formal callers are surely not migrant workers, but friends and social companions. One entry in his diary reads, 'Sabbath, March 28, 1813: No company from Boston—none to dine and for a rarity home in the evening—it being very rainy and the travelling

52. Moses Porter, 'Diary,' vol. 1.

53. Edward W. Baker, comp., 'Extracts from the Diary of Benjamin Goddard of Brookline, 1812–1821,' *Proceedings of the Brookline Historical Society* 18 (Brookline, Mass.: The Brookline Historical Society, 1911): 16–47. The entire diary runs from 1812 to 1854. Goddard (1766–1861) was a man with substantial connections; for example, he was invited to an eighty-fifth birthday party for former President John Adams in 1820. He made his living as a dry-goods merchant and farmer.

54. Ibid., p. 18.

55. Ibid., p. 21.

very bad.' When such callers do arrive, he can write of their visit (September 5 the same year), 'We sang and spent the evening rationally.' [56]

Goddard hired many workers, and their precarious position is manifest in the labor contracts. In 1812, Grosvenor Daniels was employed for eight months, with Goddard 'holding the right to discharge him at any time.' And later that same year, a certain Johnson is hired 'on condition that if this price [$12 a month] is too low in my opinion I am to give him a half a dollar a month in addition thereto.' The following spring, Goddard 'agreed with Job—to labor by the day at 50c per day.'[57] Possibly these are migrants.

The closest Goddard came to dealing with itinerant workers occurred in 1812 and 1814 when he needed to hire a kitchen helper. He traveled to Boston the first time, but in 1814, he and his wife ventured out to Lincoln and Sudbury 'a girl hunting and did not succeed.' Three days later, they were off to Dorchester, where they likewise failed. But two days later, 'Hannah Bent commenced her services.' [58] In the same year, Goddard noted that he had 'two men at home in the forenoon jobbing.' But since 'in the afternoon they went a-training,' it may be inferred that these men were well enough grounded in the community to be identified for military exercises.[59] Thus, it appears that truly migrant individuals do not compose any large part of Benjamin Goddard's world. Brookline was already connected with a major port city and engaged in mercantile pursuits, and thus had already become too specialized to support itinerant agricultural laborers.

56. Ibid., p. 36.
57. Ibid., p. 40.
58. Ibid., pp. 40–41.
59. Ibid., p. 45.

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