

## AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

### They Sought Fortunes Elsewhere

by spencer grey

When we think of Chatham men seeking their fortunes in distant places, the early mariners who sailed to all parts of the world come to mind, but even before the heyday of Chatham sea captains, some traveled to other places to find new opportunities.

When Daniel Sears died in 1761, his widow remarried and moved to Boston with her children. Her eldest son, Richard, soon returned to Chatham, but his brothers, David and Daniel, remained in Boston. At their home on the corner of Tremont Street and Temple Place, they were raised by their mother and step-father, who gave them such effective early training that when David was 12 years old, he started in business, for which he displayed an exceptional ability. His efforts were so unremitting and his management of his investments so skillful that by the time he was 22 he had accumulated a sizeable fortune. In 1775, wishing to avoid the unrest of the years leading up to the American Revolution, he sailed to London and conducted his business there and on the continent, while making his business connections useful to his country.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, he returned to the newly created United States and engaged in privateering and later was active in the India and Canton trade. Closer to home, he was active in Boston ventures, such as being the director of the First Bank of the United States from its beginning. When he died in 1826, he left an estate larger than any other at that time in Boston, thereby establishing the Sears dominance in finance that lasted into the 20th century.

Another son of Chatham who made his fortune elsewhere was Captain Benjamin Godfrey, nephew of Colonel Benjamin Godfrey, who built and operated the mill on the hill above his house. Born in December 1794, he ran away to sea at the age of nine to join the crew of a ship that sailed to Ireland, where he lived for nine years. When the War of 1812 brought him home, he studied with his uncle, acquiring a practical education including knowledge of navigation. He then spent many years at sea in command of merchant ships making voyages to various parts of the world, including Italy and Spain. On his last voyage he was shipwrecked and lost nearly all he had and almost lost his life.

In 1826 he retired from sea and settled in Matamore, Mexico, where he acquired a large fortune. Once when carrying silver across the country he was attacked by guerrillas, who stole the silver, worth some \$200,000. Soured on Mexico, he moved to New Orleans, where he lived until 1832 and acquired a second fortune. Becoming aware of the opportunities in the developing west, he moved to Alton, Ill. and founded with W. S. Gilman the trading company of Godfrey and Gilman. With his fortune still growing, he gave generously to his community, including building a large stone church that was used jointly by the Presbyterians and the Baptists.

After marrying and starting a family, he became aware of the great importance of mothers in raising and educating their children. As he wrote at that time, "To a very great extent women govern and control our society." Because of this realization, he decided to do what he could to contribute to the education of young women. He founded in 1832 the Monticello Female Seminary, with its first building being erected in 1835 and its doors opening in 1838. This was the first institution for the education of women outside of Massachusetts, where Wheaton Seminary for Girls had been established in 1835 and Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1837.

Because at that the time it was considered folly to spend so much money on educating women, people jeered at the idea and referred to Monticello Seminary as “Godfrey’s Folly.” The fledging school was located in an area adjacent to Alton in what became known as Godfrey, Ill. At the time of its 75th anniversary in 1913, Godfrey’s female seminary graduated over 500 pupils and was one of the most flourishing institutions of its kind. Equally ambitious and enterprising was Alpheus Hardy, who was born in Chatham on Nov. 1, 1815, the son of Captain Isaac and Betsy Hardy. He attended the village schools until he was 12 years old, at which time he began working in his father’s store that was located a few hundred yards north of the twin lights on the wharf that was then at the foot of Water Street.

He was so ambitious that when he was 16, he went to Boston to work in a store there, but shortly after beginning his work he had an accident that resulted in a crushed foot. Being unable to work, he decided while he was recuperating to attend Phillips Andover Academy to prepare for college. He studied for such long hours, however, that he became seriously ill and had to withdraw from the Academy. Not one to remain idle for long, he went to sea for three months. At the end of that time, when he was 19, he became an agent for the Philadelphia and Southern Packet Line, enabling him to acquire knowledge of shipping, which led him to form his own trading company, along with two friends, Captain Ezra Baker and Charles Morrill, under the name of Hardy, Baker, and Morrill. Beginning in coastal trade, they soon expanded to international trade by buying a small and fast ship that could make the voyage to the Mediterranean and back so quickly that they soon captured much of the fruit importing business. When that partnership was dissolved, Hardy founded his own company, Alpheus Hardy & Company, that at its peak had a fleet of 15 vessels, nearly all of them commanded by Chatham men.

His most famous ship was the Wild Rover that under Captain Horace Taylor brought Neesima Shimeta back to Boston, where Hardy sponsored him through his education from Andover Academy through the Andover Theological Seminary. Upon completing his education, Neesima returned to Japan and founded Doshisha University, which today is an internationally recognized institution with some 30,000 students.

Unlike the many Chatham mariners who sought their fortunes by sailing to all parts of the globe, these men stayed closer to home, where they made their fortunes and participated in the activities and organizations in their communities.



**NEED STORAGE?**

- STATE-OF-THE-ART Security
- Brand New • Ultra Clean

rates starting at **\$99** a month

**CUSTOM SELF STORAGE**  
104 Falmouth Road Mashpee, Cape Cod MA  
[www.customcarstorage.com](http://www.customcarstorage.com) • 508-539-9700

