

THE WINPENNYS OF MANAYUNK: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH IN THE BURGEONING NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN TEXTILE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The Winpennys of Manayunk provide a case study of three generations of early industrialists who produced woolen goods along the banks of the Schuylkill between 1808 and 1884. Family know-how and family networking greased the wheels of commerce. They pursued their patriotic duty and kept the Quartermaster well supplied -- even in peacetime. The small mills were a fascinating alternative to the Lowell model.

Not long after the American Revolution the young republic witnessed the first evidence of modern industrialization. Textile mills, always the first step in an industrial revolution, could be seen springing up along the Merrimac north of Boston, along the Schuylkill north of Philadelphia, along the Brandywine just outside of Wilmington, and in the heart of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Water power applied to factories and their spinning and weaving machinery (designs "borrowed" from England) made possible the efficient production of a variety of cotton and woolen textiles. As these fledgling enterprises grew and prospered, America began the long transformation from a rural agrarian to an urban industrial society.

As historians look back on these early textile mills they often seem to assume that the one "correct" or "appropriate" model must have been the one at Lowell where the Boston Associates invested large sums of money and built huge mills in the early 1800s. These vast operations required literally thousands of Yankee farm girls who were willing and even anxious to leave their family for a few years, live in supervised dormitories, and earn money just prior to marriage. In the early days at Lowell life seemed idyllic or rather perfect as young women not only labored, but improved their minds. They wrote short stories, poetry, hymns, and published a literary magazine *The Lowell Offering*.¹ They were accountable to house mothers who demanded an upright and moral life, and generally church attendance on Sunday. They had to avoid both evil and the appearance of evil. (Any rumors of low moral standards would have made future recruiting impossible.)

The problem with the much romanticized and idealized Lowell was that it was grossly inflexible. That is, in an economic downturn it was not easy to simply close down and send the girls home. The mortgages on the mills had to be paid, and young women had been expensive to recruit. Put another way, the Lowell Mills impressed many foreign visitors, but they were unwieldy and cumbersome at the same time.

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2001)

A better alternative, it might be argued, could be found along the Falls of the Schuylkill in Manayunk where some very small textile mills were analagous to "the artful dodger." That is, they were financially agile. They didn't require a lot of land or a lot of money or a lot of workers. If the demand for cotton or woolen goods diminished, they simply closed down -- and started up again three months later. For this reason some scholars (Scranton, Cochran, Winpenny)² believe that the mills of Manayunk made more economic sense than the famous Lowell Mills.

Into this setting in 1808 came Samuel Winpenny, a woolen manufacturer from Leeds and Yorkshire in England. He had arrived in America on December 17, 1806 and spent a few years poking around North Carolina studying the cotton gin and textile production in the South before moving to the Philadelphia area. In 1808 he purchased his first mill -- Kelley's Mills in Germantown -- with funds most likely derived from either the sale of a mill back in England or from his in-laws. (His wife, Ellen Bolton Winpenny, was the daughter of James Bolton, an artist and member of the Royal Academy at Edinburgh.) Samuel descended from a long line of woolen producers, including his father Samuel. (Some contend that the Winpenny family had their hand in textile manufacturing as far back as the early 1700s, and operated in Flanders prior to Yorkshire.)

On a bitter cold day, November 28, 1810, Samuel's wife, Ellen Bolton Winpenny and their two sons John (b. 1800) and Samuel (b. 1804) arrived at the port of Philadelphia from Liverpool aboard Captain Tower's ship the *Jupiter*. Three additional sons would be born in this country: William (b. 1811), Joseph (b. 1815), and James B. (b. 1819).³

Samuel and his five sons, and some of Samuel's grandsons, would all seek their fortune in the textile business, generally in Manayunk. When the Falls of the Schuylkill seemed too confining, William wandered off to Indiana and started his own textile business. Samuel wandered off into the Wabash region of western Ohio for a time, and James had a reasonably brief sojourn into Virginia -- where he worked at construction and bridge building. Apart from these distractions, three generations of Winpennys produced woolen goods along the Schuylkill River between 1808 and 1884.

As experienced and networked businessmen who participated in politics, they once owned Kelley's Mills, Arcola Mills, Hagner's Mill, Wabash Mills, Stoever's Mill, and McDowell's Mill. They bought and sold mills and went in and out of business at a vertiginous rate. The similarity in their names (James Bolton Winpenny, John B. Winpenny, J.B. Winpenny) utterly confused some area bankers and those who wrote credit reports for the new R.G. Dun and Company, later Dun and Bradstreet.⁴

While it would be tempting to pretend that Winpenny enterprises prospered for 76 years in Manayunk, the truth is different. Indeed, the patriarch in America, Samuel, only enjoyed good years at Kelley's Mills between 1808 and 1815 or 1816. During these years his goods were consistently protected from foreign competition by a series of historical developments: Jefferson's Embargo of 1807, the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809, and the War of 1812. When protection disappeared after 1815, the British dumped their textile production on the American market and hurt or destroyed fledg-

THE WINPENNYS OF MANAYUNK

ling manufacturers such as Samuel Winpenny. Parenthetically, while Samuel is listed in *British Aliens in the United States During the War of 1812*⁵ and he did not become a citizen until March 15, 1813, it is believed that he filled contracts for blankets and woolen cloth for the U.S. Quartermaster during the conflict.

Apparently, the federal tariff passed by the Congress in 1816 was too mild to keep Samuel from ruin and by about 1818 he faced financial destruction, conceivably a heartbeat ahead of the Panic of 1819. Bankrupt by age 41, and most likely emotionally devastated, it would now be up to his sons to rebuild the family's financial standing. (By 1829 Samuel was dead at age 52 and his widow had opened a retail shop in an effort to sustain herself.)

Samuel's sons fared better. For example, John and Samuel teamed up as partners in the 1830s to make blankets, blue cloths, and kerseys for the federal government, with John being an expert at weaving woolen goods, and Samuel being a recognized leader in the highly specialized field of blue dyeing. In the late 1830s they purchased the Hagner's Mill to manufacture broadcloths and kerseys. Though their mills burned to the ground on three occasions, they nevertheless were able to prosper. (Cynthia Shelton writing in *The Mills of Manayunk* suggests the fires were the work of an incendiary retaliating against worker exploitation.)⁶

James B. Winpenny manufactured cotton warps in Manayunk as early as the mid 1840s. A November 3, 1856 credit report noted that his machinery was tightly packed together and that he "never spends a dime that can be avoided." His financial standing was solid until the Panic of 1857 when there were several judgments against him in favor of his brother Samuel. By December of 1857 his property was sold by the Sheriff.

Presumably, as the Panic of 1857 abated, James returned to manufacturing. Financing might have been provided by a family member or the Germantown National Bank. The cotton manufacturing enterprise maintained sound credit through the 1860s and 1870s, apparently withstanding the pressures of the Panic of 1873. By November of 1875, roughly three years after his nephew Bolton had left manufacturing and moved downtown, James was still running a yarn mill at Main and Centre Streets and was reputed to have real estate worth \$100,000, part of this encumbered by a mortgage.⁷

An 1871 *Philadelphia City Directory* identifies James B. Winpenny as president of the Manufacturers Mutual Fire Insurance Company. Whether this mutual insurance company covered firms in Manayunk or a substantial number throughout the city is unclear.

Professor Philip Scranton, writing in *Proprietary Capitalism*, reports that in 1854 John was awarded a contract from the U.S. Quartermaster for 30,000 yards of sky blue indigo dyed twilled woolen cloth at \$1.35 per yard. This was followed by a contract for 10,000 grey woolen army blankets with black 4" letters: US. These blankets were to measure 5' by 7' and weigh 5 pounds each. John was to be paid \$2.48 per blanket.⁸ This history of doing business with the Quartermaster would pay huge dividends during the Civil War.

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2001)

Parenthetically, the Winpennys are legendary for their consistent ability to “feed at the public trough.” They surely had to be one of the foremost industrial families in America in garnering government contracts in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War. Indeed, Scranton’s *Proprietary Capitalism* devotes an entire chapter to the Winpenny family’s contract work during the war between the states. It would be erroneous, however, to conclude that all Winpenny wealth originated in the 1860s, for it is quite clear that John Winpenny’s will of 1856 and R.G. Dun and Company reports reveal his considerable financial standing in the decade before the Civil War. How much of this wealth was amassed as early as the 1830s and 1840s is less clear.

To summarize the industrial portion of this family saga, three generations of the Winpenny family utilized their skill and experience in woolen textile production to build a modest dynasty along the banks of the Schuylkill for three-quarters of a century. Their kinship network, though imperfect, carried them through most financial setbacks and at least three fires. They were serious participants in local politics (another source of influence.) For example, James B. Winpenny served several terms on Manayunk Borough Council and two decades as a school director. John Winpenny, a close associate of Pennsylvania’s Governor John Bigler in the mid 1850s, served as Chief Burgess of Manayunk until his death in 1856. It further seems likely that a long association with U.S. Quartermasters (including Montgomery C. Meigs in the 1860s) made the difference between surviving in the textile industry and generating significant wealth.

OTHER INTERESTS AND INVESTMENTS

Winpenny family interests and investments in the community went far beyond textile mills. In addition to residences, some of John’s property appears on an 1875 map of Manayunk as 14 tidy row houses on Wabash Street, with another 4 lots on Centre Street -- all part of the same city block.

Now it would have made perfectly good sense to operate these properties as company housing -- a common practice in the 19th century. Company housing might have helped the family attract workers and, of course, control them. But, as far as this author knows, there is no evidence to prove the point. The other distinct possibility is that the 14 contiguous properties simply represented a solid investment to offset the perils of fluctuating textile prices, panics, and bank failures.

References to a Winpenny-owned farm and hardware store are not supported by documentation, but a substantial home sitting on a few acres with out buildings and animals might have been referred to as a “farm.” For example, John Winpenny’s will of February 28, 1856⁹ mentions a mansion and grounds northwest of Green Lane and Darrah or Centre Street. The document suggests that one future option would be to carve the grounds into building lots and sell them to provide money for the children.

Another major family “investment” was the forty foot high monument to Lucy Winpenny in Laurel Hill Cemetery, erected about 1882, close to the front entrance. Lucy had died in her early thirties, quite likely leaving Bolton (third generation) grief-

THE WINPENNY'S OF MANAYUNK

stricken. He commissioned the monument that included a likeness of Lucy at the top. This spectacular structure, still standing and in good condition, inspired at least one detailed newspaper story. (The creator of the monument was Thomas Delahunty of Philadelphia, who carried out his design in Italian marble.)¹⁰ There are lesser Winpenny monuments in Laurel Hill, a distinguished elevated burial ground that prospered in the 1830s when Philadelphia's church cemeteries became overcrowded and contamination made its way into waters beyond the church yards.

PERPETUATING THE GOOD START

Prospering in textiles over many decades and several generations was no small task. The primary problems were twofold: (1) alluring profits caused the textile industry to boom thereby attracting many new entrants, leading to overproduction and falling prices periodically, and (2) finding capable business leaders generation after generation. This concern manifested itself in John's 1856 will (mentioned earlier.) He desperately wanted someone to carry on, but fretted over the shortcomings of his older sons. For example, John considered John Jr. "worthless" and cut him out of the will -- with the fascinating caveat that if John Jr. (age 27) changed his ways, he was to be given \$200 per year, perhaps "walking around money" in 1856 when an unskilled worker earned about \$320 per year. Son Joseph (age 34) did not generate strong feelings from his father, though Joseph's failure in the dry goods business was a disappointment.¹¹ R.G. Dun and Company's credit report described Joseph as inattentive and something of a politician.¹² In the will, John forgave Joseph's debts and bequeathed him \$500.

By contrast, J. Bolton (age 18) was the fair-haired offspring that father wanted to take over. Bolton's particular character traits were not enumerated, but the will provided for a loan of \$5,000 at 6 percent interest per year should he decide to take over father's textile mill. Further, the will suggested that perhaps the mill will have to be sold (sale price estimated at \$18,000), but clearly there was the hope that Bolton (third generation in America) would take it over -- and he did.¹³

Parenthetically, Samuel's son William (second generation) went into the textile business in Millersville, a neighborhood in the northeast section of Indianapolis. The author has no idea how long the mill operated, but William was back in Manayunk in 1873 working as an engineer.

AN INSIGHT FROM R.G.DUN AND COMPANY

One of the extraordinary sources of information on the Winpenny family resides in the credit reports of R.G.Dun and Company, the parent firm of the now famous Dun and Bradstreet. The original records are in the Baker Library at Harvard, but microfilm copies are available at the Hagley Library in Greenville, Delaware. Returning once again to John Winpenny, Sr., a January, 1854 Dun and Company report

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2001)

referred to him as one of the best businessmen in the community, and further indicated that John does a large business and owns real estate valued at \$50,000.¹⁴

Far more critical was the hint that late in life John might have declined mentally. (This was the basis for Joseph's unsuccessful challenge to John's will.) A January 1856 Dun and Company report noted that John had been regarded as a rich man and was still considered well off. However, his capital was considerably diminished.¹⁵ (Why?) The report concluded that his habits were not calculated to sustain a first class credit. (Was this an indirect reference to the onset of senility, a gambling problem, excessive drinking, or poor business practice?)

Admittedly, Dun and Company reports were highly subjective and incorporated both impressions and speculation. But the fact remains that a local observer saw behavior that led him to believe that an otherwise wealthy and respected 55 year old industrialist was departing from his established ways. Again, Joseph, the eldest son at age 34, believed his father was suffering from what today we would call "diminished capacity" and challenged the will unsuccessfully.

MOVING BEYOND MANAYUNK

The Winpennys of Manayunk wielded considerable influence in the community as suggested by Professor Philip Scranton's book. This influence was not only economic but political -- and perhaps social. Not only did they hold local offices, but John was acquainted with Governor Bigler (as noted earlier) and played a role in the consolidation of Philadelphia and outlying areas in 1855, a major benefit to Manayunk -- particularly if city services and utilities could be acquired. Bolton, incidently, was cited at the end of Theodore Dreiser's novel *The Financier*, as part of a cadre of businessmen making their influence felt in Harrisburg in 1873 by pressuring Governor John Hartranft to pardon convicted felon and traction magnate Charles T. Yerkes. The novel ended with Winpenny and associates greeting Yerkes at the prison gate upon his release.¹⁶ In theory, Dreiser is writing fiction. In reality, there is rarely any fiction in Dreiser's fiction.

By the 1870s and 1880s, however, when a third generation (Samuel's grandchildren) had come to the fore, Winpennys began to filter out of Manayunk. Arguably, the mills were not as profitable without war-time contracts, the machinery was aging if not obsolete, and the third generation, perhaps short on motivation, had not garnered the required know-how to remain competitive. The family's most noteworthy development involved J. Bolton's selling the mills on February 23, 1872 and moving to 1432 North Broad Street, roughly Broad and Girard. This relocation signaled a shift in Bolton's interest from manufacturing to business. The new address could also have been prompted by social considerations. Perhaps it was time to abandon the "wilds of the northwest" for a more civilized and fashionable part of town. In the early 1870s Bolton was married to Lucy Sutton Winpenny (his second wife) who passed away circa 1880. In a major social event in Jackson, Michigan on October 12, 1882, he married

THE WINPENNYS OF MANAYUNK

his third wife Susan Shoemaker Winpenny. Together, they managed a house full of children (6), and either earned the social position or displayed the style of life to warrant inclusion in Philadelphia's *Blue Book* (1883-84) and later the *Social Register* (1908, 1926.)¹⁷

Life at 1432 N. Broad, however, must have been far from tranquil. Susan left Bolton at least once, harboring a fear of his anger and displays of temper. The children had a privileged existence that included the DeLancey School and higher education if desired. Yet, aside from the eldest, Marshall Shoemaker Winpenny, who attended Harvard and became a Philadelphia lawyer, the remaining five children (Bruce Wisner Winpenny -- University of Pennsylvania, Bolton Sutton Winpenny, James Harold Winpenny, Laura Winpenny, and Marion Winpenny) were apparently less distinguished and on the "family dole" at \$100 per month.¹⁸

Many other Winpennys drifted into the highly civilized confines of Germantown, a magnificent neighborhood featuring wide tree-lined streets and spacious Victorian homes. It is highly unlikely that they possessed the wealth of Bolton. City directories list names, addresses, and occupations such as "engineer" and "inspector." Essentially the Winpennys blended into the Germantown landscape with average means and respectable job titles. Several Winpenny women pursued careers in public school teaching.

Some Winpenny wealth resurfaced in Bolton's half ownership of the former Arch Street Opera House or the Trocadero at 10th and Arch Streets between 1872 and 1910. This theatre, with a seating capacity of 1,000, put on shows that can best be described as "burlesque." (Bolton garnered \$21,782 in profits from the 1909 - 1910 season.)¹⁹

Considerable monies were invested in the Union Passenger Railway Company (\$249,000), the Citizens Passenger Railway Company (\$129,625), the Union Traction Company (\$44,100), the Continental Passenger Railway Company (\$23,718), the Ridge Avenue Passenger Railway Company (\$14,850), the Frankford and Southwark Passenger Railway Company (\$14,040), and the West Philadelphia Passenger Railway Company (\$13,530) -- all more commonly known as urban traction, urban railways, or trolley car lines.²⁰ In a compromise approved in the Orphans' Court of Philadelphia County in 1939 the trustees of the estate of J. Bolton Winpenny agreed to vote their traction stock as "underliers" in support of a 1939 reorganization plan, giving up stocks and stock trust certificates in the bankrupt Philadelphia Rapid Transit in exchange for bonds and stocks in the newly formed Philadelphia Transportation Company.²¹ While the author knows of no documentation that characterizes Bolton's work and investment in traction lines, history strongly suggests that trolley lines or the traction business at the turn of the century operated on the borders of ethical practice, at best. The basic goal of traction magnates was to use influence in City Hall to gain the right to run a trolley line and establish a monopoly.

Bolton also held mortgages on 93 residential properties in Philadelphia and rented out another 98. He owned stock in the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company

ESSAYS IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS HISTORY (2001)

(\$137,012), the Reading Company (\$123,000), Cambria Steel (\$32,640), and Bell Telephone (\$16,588).²² He also had extensive bond holdings and a partnership with George W. Shaw in "gas fixtures" in center city between 1883 and 1888. In addition, on January 1, 1868 Bolton became a partner in the firm of William Yelland and Company, commission merchants in New York City. Essentially, in moving from Manayunk to North Broad Street, Bolton made the transition from industrialist to businessman. This may seem like a small distinction, but it is not. Veblen argued that industrialists produce something of value for society while businessmen were simply clever at shuffling paper and making profits through slight of hand, basically benefitting no one in society but themselves.²³

AFTERMATH

Some estimates suggest the estate that Bolton left was worth \$1,600,000. His will dated May 1, 1909, named his wife and sons Marshall and Bruce as Executors. His death occurred on April 9, 1910 (age 71.) Wife Susan inherited 1432 N. Broad, the furniture, books, paintings, horses, and carriages. She was also to receive one third of the balance of the estate, and one third of a Trust created to distribute the remainder of the wealth to the children. Son Bolton Sutton, a source of scandal and embarrassment, was to receive \$60 per week for the rest of his life. The remaining five children were to carve up the rest -- to be paid quarterly.²⁴ A cache of letters exchanged by his widow and children shortly after Bolton's death (the stationary bordered in black) painted a picture of roughly five of the six children (the fourth generation) as people who generally tried to fill idle time and lived off family money. (Marshall was the exception.) They liked to travel, and complained a lot about aches and pains. So, readers learned of their fear of lightning, the pain of rheumatism, the expense of pew rent at St Mark's Episcopal, and the fact that the "monument is dirty and will be expensive to clean."²⁵ In brief, the story of Bolton's kids or the fourth generation, as portrayed in the cache of letters, was a bit sad, almost depressing.

CONCLUSION

The Winpennys of Manayunk provide a case study of three generations of early industrialists who produced woolen goods along the banks of the Schuylkill between 1808 and 1884. Family know-how and family networking together with political office holding greased the wheels of commerce. Furthermore, they pursued their "patriotic duty" and kept the Quartermaster well supplied -- even in peacetime. A few members of the family managed to become wealthy and socially prominent.

As a contribution to scholarship, this case reminds industrial historians that perhaps the "artful dodgers" of Manayunk had some advantages over the "Lowells" of their world. It is also a much needed, though gentle, reminder that the roots of the Industrial Revolution are as deep and as old in the Delaware Valley as they are in New

THE WINPENNY'S OF MANAYUNK

England.

Notes

1. Two of the better books on Lowell are Thomas Dublin's award winning *Women at Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979) and Robert Dalzell's *Enterprising Elite* (New York : Norton, 1987.)

2. See Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Thomas Cochran, *Frontiers of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.) The author of this paper holds the same view, but has not published, to date, on the subject.

3. A lot of biographical information on the Winpennys can be found in *Manufactories and Manufacturers of Pennsylvania in the 19th Century* (Philadelphia: Galaxy Press, 1875), 463-464. The Scranton book also contains quite a bit.

4. R.G. Dun and Company records for Manayunk can be found on microfilm at the Hagley Library, Greenville, Delaware. The original manuscripts are in the Baker Library at Harvard University.

5. See *British Aliens in the United States During the War of 1812* (Baltimore : Genealogical Publishing Company, 1979.)

6. See Cynthia Shelton, *The Mills of Manayunk* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1.

7. R.G. Dun and Company reports, Manayunk, Philadelphia, November 3, 1856 through November 17, 1875.

8. Scranton, 275-276. Scranton's Chapter 8: "The Sixties: War and Prosperity" deals extensively with Winpenny textile enterprises and contracts just before, during, and after the Civil War.

9. The author owns a photocopy of John Winpenny's 1856 will. The original document is at the 10. *The Suburban Press-Roxborough* on July 22, 1937 carried a story about the monument as it appeared in another local paper on June 23, 1882.

11. John Winpenny's will.

12. R.G. Dun and Company report, Manayunk, Philadelphia, May 12, 1865.

13. John Winpenny's will.

14. R.G. Dun and Company report, Manayunk, Philadelphia, January, 1854.

15. *Ibid.*, January 5, 1856.

16. Theodore Dreiser, *The Financier* (New York, 1912.)

17. These citations were garnered from a random collection of Philadelphia's *Blue Book* and *Social Register* in the holdings of the Hagley Library. I assume that a more complete run of the volumes would have contained additional listings.

18. This information has been gathered from the Susan Shoemaker Winpenny *Correspondence* and from J. Bolton Winpenny's will dated May 1, 1909.

19. See *Estate of J. Bolton Winpenny*, copy in possession of author.

20. *Ibid.*

21. See , *Orphans' Court Records* Philadelphia County, 1911 and 1939.

22. *Estate of J. Bolton Winpenny*.

23. See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (New York, 1904.)

24. J. Bolton Winpenny's will.

25. Assorted observations glean from the *Correspondence* of Susan Shoemaker Winpenny, circa 1911.

