The "Sharper" Image: Yankee Peddlers, Southern Consumers, and the Market Revolution

Joseph T. Rainer[1]
American Studies Program
College of William & Mary

As the Industrial Revolution was gearing up in New England shops and factories in the early nineteenth century, the increased production by manufacturers of clocks, tinware, and other Yankee "notions" found a market outlet through thousands of young men who peddled these wares across the entire United States. Yankee peddlers were familiar figures on the American landscape in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. Timothy Dwight noted in 1821 how Yankee tin peddlers boxed the compass of the young republic:

> Every inhabited part of the United States is visited by these men. I have seen them on the peninsula of Cape Cod and in the neighborhood of Lake Erie, distant from each other more than six hundred miles. They make their way to Detroit, four hundred miles farther, to Canada, to Kentucky, and, if I mistake not, to New Orleans and St. Louis.

Yankee clock peddlers practiced their own "Manifest Destiny" to sell clocks on the very fringes of Anglo-American settlement. Shortly after hearing, in June 1836, of the capture of Santa Anna at the battle of San Jacinto, clock peddler John Case wrote to his partner Hiram Barber that Texas would offer "a field for speculation." Indeed, clock peddlers worked any and all markets within their reach. Two Massachusetts peddlers, Washington Stevens and Elihu White, carried Samuel Terry clocks to the island of Cuba in 1834 [Dwight, 1969, vol. 2, p. 33; S. Terry, 3/24/1834; Bates, 6/1/1836].

The Yankee peddling system was a manifestation of the "market revolution" that took place in the quarter century after the War of 1812. Yankee entrepreneurs adapted the timeworn practice of peddling to distribute the output of New England's nascent industries, overcoming the limitations of the early nineteenth-century transportation infrastructure and cumbersome banking facilities to distribute their products in virtually every market in the country. Young men in their early twenties who peddled for wages were the main source of labor in this long-distance distribution system. The exploitative nature of the contractual relationship between the young peddlers and their

[1] I thank the American Antiquarian Society, the Virginia Historical Society, and the Massachusetts Historical Society for support.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC HISTORY, Volume twenty-six, no. 1, Fall 1997.
 ISSN 0894-6825.

employers pushed these itinerant hawkers into "overreaching" their customers. Given the long lasting success of Yankee peddlers in the South, most Southerners probably accepted their presence in trade and social relations. Some southerners, however, did not appreciate the Yankee peddler or his "notions." Nullifiers saw the Yankee peddling system as an invasion of "Commercial Scythians" intent on prostrating the agricultural South under a yoke of Yankee manufactures. The relations between yankee peddlers and their employers and southern consumers were both molded by market forces and shaped the market itself; Yankee peddlers were both agents and authors of the market revolution. Investigating the business and the reception of Yankee peddlers reveals how Americans behaved in the new world of market relations and how they reacted to the spread of national market networks into local exchange networks.

New England's tin peddling system dates back to the 1740s, when an Irish immigrant, William Pattison, set up a tin shop in Berlin, Connecticut. Pattison made more tinware than the households of Berlin demanded, so he hired peddlers to hawk his merchandise in neighboring towns. By the turn of the century, the tinware industry was reaching markets outside of New England. In the search for new markets, tinware manufacturers set up temporary tinsmith shops in towns and cities across the continent, where tin workers made wares to supply the peddlers hired to sell the stock. A tinsmith shop had been established in Charleston, South Carolina by 1810. New England manufacturers established tin depots in Baltimore, Columbia, New Bern, Norfolk, Petersburg, Philadelphia, Richmond, Savannah, and many other locations. These tin depots operated about nine months out of the year from fall to spring; when summer arrived, the proprietor, the peddlers, and the tinsmiths closed shop and returned to New England and usually to agricultural pursuits. Through its complement of twenty or thirty peddlers, a tin depot served a broad hinterland clientele with tin pots, pans, cups, patent ovens, candle sticks, lanterns, graters, and other utensils. Peddlers made numerous trips back to the tin depot to restock their outfits of tinware and other notions [Keir, 1913, p. 256; DeVoe, 1968, pp. 13, 24; Dwight, 1969, vol. 2, pp. 33-34; Filley; R.U. Peck; Alderman, 1992, p. 20; Peck Family].

Like antebellum alchemists, Yankee peddlers turned tin into silver. Epaphroditus Peck cleared one hundred dollars "all in Silver" on a peddling expedition around Columbia, South Carolina in 1810. A peddler by the name of Holmes left the Petersburg, Virginia tin depot of Richard and Benjamin Wilcox in 1819 with a load of tinware worth eighty dollars and returned with one hundred and ninety dollars, including eighty-two dollars in "Spanish Mills." Yankee peddlers also transformed tin into silver in a less legitimate manner, fobbing off articles made of tin for silver. A popular story was of peddlers' selling "silver" sidesaddles that were actually trimmed with tin. William Andrus Alcott, who peddled tinware in Virginia in the early 1820s, met a woman in Suffolk County, Virginia who paid a Yankee peddler twelve dollars for a silver toddy stick. If the tin toddy stick "ever had any silver about it," wrote Alcott, "the value of the whole could not have been twenty-five cents" [Peck Family, 12/5/1810; Wilcox, 4/17/1819; Greene, 1833, p. 26; Alcott, 1851, p. 111].

Within five years after Eli Terry developed the machinery to mass produce wooden works clocks in 1807, peddlers were selling the clocks in southern markets. Initially, the wooden clockworks were sold without cases; hung up they were known as a "wag on the wall." Clock manufacturers were not able to relocate their shops in southern cities as tinware makers did, because the machinery was bulky and required a power source. New England cabinet makers relocated to southern towns and cities to case the works and sell the clocks. Z. Bronson made cases in a shop at the courthouse in Mecklenburg, Virginia for clock works shipped to Virginia by Lamson, Sperry & Co., clockmakers of Waterbury, Connecticut. Bronson predicted "handsome proffits" from clock peddling in 1812. Bronson claimed that "clocks afford a greater proffit than any thing I can sell," and said that if he had "one good man to carry them about the country I make no doubt but a great many might be sold" [Lamson, 11/2/1812]. By 1812 Gideon Roberts of Bristol, Connecticut was shipping clock movements in bulk to Richmond, Virginia, where his sons assembled and sold tall case clocks in the surrounding countryside. This saved the expense of shipping completed, cased clocks [Buell and Barr, n.d., p. 6]. Chauncey and Noble Jerome established a clock "factory" in Richmond in 1835. The "factory" was actually an assembly plant where clock movements, cases, and faces manufactured in Bristol, Connecticut were made into complete clocks. The Jerome's motivation was not to lessen the expense of shipping completed clocks to Virginia, but to avoid Virginia's tax of one hundred dollars per county per year on peddlers of "foreign" clocks [Jerome, 1860, p. 54].

Middle to upper-class Yankee entrepreneurs started clock peddling companies on their own capital (or credit), or entered a contractual relationship with a clockmaker to sell clocks. Independent peddler-entrepreneurs bought lots of ten or twenty clocks to sell on their own, but most Yankee clocks were sold through the large firms [S. Terry, 11/23/1825]. In a given year, a clock manufacturer sold hundreds of clocks to a peddling business on six- to twelve-month credit. One of the partners in the peddling concern acted as agent, directing the clock manufacturer on the number and styles of clocks to ship and where to send them. Allen Case was the agent of Gunn, Mattoon, Gilbert & Company, a clock peddling firm based in early 1838 in Lexington, Virginia. Typically, a shipment of Eli Terry Jr. clocks began its trip from Terryville, Connecticut, to Lexington, Virginia, aboard a wagon which took them to a forwarding agent in New Haven. There the agent insured the clocks and sent them on to an agent in New York City. From New York the clocks were shipped to Charles M. Mitchell, probably a forwarding agent or merchant, of Richmond. The clocks finally ended up in the hands of Simon W. Gunn in Lexington, who distributed them to the company peddlers [E. Terry, 12/12/1837, 2/14/1838]. Seth Wheeler contracted with Chauncy and Lawson C. Ives to sell their clocks in Kentucky in the late 1830s and early 1840s. If the Ohio river was open to traffic, C. & L.C. Ives shipped their clocks from Bristol, Connecticut, to New York City, to Baltimore, to Wheeling, to Maysville, Kentucky. In winter the clocks went from New York, to New Orleans, to Louisville, Kentucky. From his headquarters in Paris, Kentucky, Wheeler kept track of receipts and expenses, paid peddlers and allocated clocks to them. In 1838, for instance, Wheeler disbursed about seventy-five to one hundred clocks to each of his six peddlers, four hundred and sixty-eight clocks in total [Wheeler, 11/5/1836, 12/3/1836, 1/13/1837, 3/4/1837, 1/8/1838]. Peddling clocks became an industry in itself. A farmer in Orangeburg, South Carolina, in 1825 described the multiple services which clock peddling gave rise to:

> these clocks were introduced by pedlars from Connecticut, and in succeeding years they brought fresh supplies accompanied by cases, stating that the clocks would be injured by the dust and moisture of the atmosphere; another would pass along who 'cleaned clocks,' and get a job of every man who owned one; and, lastly, one would go the rounds bushing the pivot-holes with brass, after which the machine was thought to be complete [Schwaab, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 184-5].

By the 1810s clockmakers could manufacture a shelf clock for five dollars. Yankee peddlers sold these clocks in the South at enormous advances. A fictional clock peddler in a newspaper story paid two dollars and fifty cents for each of his clocks, "on which he expected to make a profit of what he called ten per cent, that is ten times as much as they cost." Chauncey Jerome heard that his Bronze Looking-Glass clock "sold in Mississippi and Louisiana as high as one hundred and one hundred and fifteen dollars, which was a good advance on the first cost." Southern consumers had no gauge as to the fair price of such commodities, and Yankee peddlers took advantage of their naïveté, as an interview with a South Carolina planter in 1843 attests:

> 'What do you think I gave for that?' asked an ignorant planter in Sumpter district, while pointing to a Connecticut wooden clock which stood upon a shelf in the corner of the room. 'I don't know,' was my answer; 'twenty dollars, or very likely twenty-five!' '*Twenty-five dollars*, stranger!' replied the planter; 'why, what do you mean? Come, guess fair and I'll tell you *true*!' I answered again that twenty-five dollars was a high price for such a clock, as I had often seen them sold for a quarter of that sum. The man was astonished 'Stranger,' said he, 'I gave one hundred and forty-four dollars for that clock, and thought I got it cheap at that! Let me tell you how it was. We had always used sun-dials hereabout, till twelve or fourteen years ago, when a man came along with clocks to sell. I thought at first I wouldn't buy one, but after haggling about the price for a while, he agreed to take sixteen dollars less than what he asked, for his selling price was one hundred and sixty dollars; and as I had just sold my cotton at thirty-four cents, I concluded to strike a bargain. It's a powerful clock, but I reckon I gave a heap of money for it!' [Schwaab, 1973, vol. 2, p. 330].

In some regions at certain periods of time, competition among clock peddlers drove prices downward. David Bell sold clocks in Tennessee in 1824 for which he paid $3.25 apiece for as little as eight dollars per clock [Leavenworth, 2/7/1824]. Milo Holcomb noted that clock peddlers were "very thick" in southwestern Pennsylvania and western Virginia in 1831, but had confidence in overcoming the competition: "we have some champions in our company and we can do our part of the business" [Holcomb, 1/29/1831]. One of Holcomb's competitors, perhaps, was Frederick Kellogg. He also complained that western Pennsylvania was "over run with pedlars which are selling their clocks for whatever they can get" [Harrison, 11/11/1831]. By the mid-1830s many markets of the United States had been filled with wooden works clocks. A.L. Brown found the market saturated in Louisiana in 1834. Around this time Connecticut clock manufacturers began mass producing clocks with brass movements, which revitalized the clock peddling business. Brown discovered that brass clocks were "a very good article" in Louisiana and could be sold for from forty to seventy dollars each on a credit of nine to twelve months [Lewis, 5/12/1834]. Seth Wheeler and his peddlers sold hundreds of brass clocks in Kentucky from 1836 to 1841; in over half the transactions, customers traded in an old wooden shelf clock in partial payment for the brass clock. From sundials, to caseless "wags on the wall" to cased wooden works clocks to brass works clocks, Yankee peddlers might have initiated the consumer practice of the technological upgrade.

Peddling fever gripped the young men of New England in the 1810s. William Andrus Alcott, who participated in this rush for wealth, later compared the peddling rage to the California gold rush. Peddling was a manifestation of the broader cultural trend of "seeking the main chance" through the unbridled individualistic pursuit of success. The desire for speculative success infected Phineas T. Barnum, a contemporary of many of these young peddlers:

> My disposition was of that speculative character which refused to be satisfied unless I was engaged in some business where my profits might be enhanced, or, at least, made to depend upon my energy, perseverance, attention to business, tact, and 'calculation' [Barnum, 1930, p. 18].

It was common for "enterprising young men" in early nineteenth-century New England "to start off South, in the fall season, and spend the winter in some of the southern States, on trading expeditions, and return in the spring with the fruits of their industry and enterprise" [Douglas, 1856, p. 25]. A rising generation of speculators hoped they could mimic the success of the few peddlers who created "great estates" out of "the pencil box, and the orange basket," wrote William Andrus Alcott in 1834. Thousands of young men, most barely out of their teens, loaded up wagons with combs, clocks, tinware, and other Yankee notions, which they sold in the South and West "rapidly, at large prices and great profits," and "some of them appeared to be getting rich."(Alcott, 1834, pp. 136-137; Alcott, 1851, pp. 14-15]. Asa Upson noted that the half dozen peddlers who returned to Bristol, Connecticut in 1823 looked like they had "come as Clean as the Cat Come out of the Cream" [Upson, 4/6/1823]. William Sherman and his three peddling partners cleared three thousand dollars each in 1818 in the Mississippi Territory. Sherman boasted of his success to friends back home:

> This in Massachusetts would be calld a pretty little fortune but we consider it here only as a tolerable good business for young men just embarking in business with a small capital & no credit and all strangers in the country & to the business we have been in [Sherman-Tabor, 11/21/1818].

Peddling fever spread as successful peddlers returned or wrote home from the South. Returns of thirty-three percent or more on a stock of goods were common. Bronson Alcott claimed that his "Articles afford escclusive of Expenses 1/3rd or 33 1/3 per cent profit" [Herrnstadt, 1969, pp. 1-2]. Samuel Peck estimated that peddling would earn his brother twenty-five to thirty percent profits, far greater than the returns from the more steady occupation of farming [R.U. Peck, 8/6/1826]. Thomas Douglas of Wallingsford, Connecticut, cleared $1,200 on $500 worth of goods that he carried through western Virginia during the War of 1812 [Douglas, 1856, p. 32]. Milton Bates was "wide awake to goin on to the south" after hearing of his brother Carlos' success peddling clocks in Virginia [Bates, 3/15/1831]. Truman Alderman urged his brother Manna to "pluck up courage & go to georgia or some other place" where other Yankee peddlers were making "a Good Deal of money" [Alderman, 1992, p. 11]. The lure of wealth and social pressures to succeed compelled many young New England men "seek the main chance" at peddling.

Most of the New England men who took up peddling were in their early twenties. Until a young man reached the age of twenty-one, he could not enter contracts and obligations legally as an individual. "Infant" sons under the age of consent had to seek their parents' permission to engage in a peddling career. Employers were careful to have parents of underage sons or sons with no assets give security for their son's debts. Truman Alderman counseled his brother Manna that Manna's former employer Elisha Dunham could not recover damages from Manna because he "was under age" when he peddled tin for Dunham, and Dunham "did not ful fil his agreement" [ibid., p. 7]. Burrage Yale, who hired about eight young men each year to peddle tin from his shop in South Reading, Massachusetts, specifically advertised for "young men of lawful age," twenty-one to thirty years old [New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette, 1/19/1829, 1/28/1833]. The youth of Yankee peddlers can be quantified from the published lists of peddlers licensed to trade in Georgia between 1826 and 1831 [*Georgia Journal*, 1/6/1826-12/21/1831]. Of the one hundred and sixty-seven peddlers listed in Georgia newspapers between 1826 and 1831, only nine were minors; fully half were between twenty one and twenty-six years of age; and four-fifths of them were thirty or younger (see Table 1). The youngest licensed peddler was eighteen, the oldest was fifty-six. The median age for this group was approximately twenty-four, and the mean age was about twenty-six and a half.

Table 1: Ages of Peddlers in Georgia, 1825-1831[2]

Age Range	Number (N=167)	Percentage
Under 21:	9	5.4
21 to 25:	84	50.3
26 to 30:	42	25.1
31 to 35:	22	13.2
Over 35:	10	6.0

These young peddlers were in need of guidance as well as capital. Peddling was an alternative to clerking in a store. Elijah Kellog offered a peddling contract to N. Collins provided Collins would "come at a low price" of one hundred, twenty-five dollars per year. There was not "sufficient encouragement" in Kellog's offer to attract Collins, who decided to take a position as a clerk instead. His friends, who did not "speak very flattering of" peddling affected Collins' decision as well [Harrison, 3/6/1822, 3/16/1822]. Phineas T. Barnum described his plight as a young, fatherless, yet ambitious teen in 1826 in his autobiography:

> I was in that uneasy, transitory state between boyhood and manhood when I had unbounded confidence in my own abilities, and yet needed a discreet counselor, adviser and friend [Barnum, 1930, p. 18].

Yankee entrepreneurs tapped into this reserve of youthful energy and ambition. William Andrus Alcott claimed that "there is generally in the neighborhood some hawk-eyed money dealer, who knows that he cannot better invest his funds than in the hands of active young men" [Alcott, 1834, p. 90]. Bronson Alcott's view of such mercantile mentorships was jaded by his dealings with Joseph T. Allyn, a transplanted Yankee merchant who operated a store in Norfolk, Virginia. Bronson felt himself the "gudgeon" to this "shrewd dealer in fancy goods." Having been cheated by Allyn, mused Alcott: "Why should he hesitate, why need repent, To sell in turn at thirty-three percent?" Bronson Alcott was unsuccessful at peddling fancy goods and tinware in Virginia, and in 1822 had to relinquish his horse, wagon, and goods to Allyn for his outstanding debts to Allyn. Alcott's father had to pay off two hundred and seventy dollars of Bronson's debt to Allyn [Alcott, 1881, pp. 180-181, 211; Wagner, 1979, p. 252].

"Arithmetic," presumed Thomas Hamilton of the Yankees, came "by instinct among this guessing, reckoning, expecting, and calculating people" [Hamilton, 1833, p. 127]. Despite the Yankees' reputation for being "born to calculate shillings and pence," peddling did not come natural to young New England men [Murat, 1833, p. 6]. Selling almanacs in Norfolk, Virginia

[2] 202 licenses were found. Individuals who appeared in more than one year are represented once at their youngest age. There were doubtless many more peddlers in Georgia in this period than the 167 who obtained licenses.

"required more confidence, at first," wrote Bronson Alcott, "than I could readily summon, to accost a person and offer my trifle. Habit, however, soon gave facility, even something of dignity, to my attitude, and won respect." Joseph T. Allyn provided Alcott with "Directions for selling certain Articles," suggesting prices for violin strings, beads, watch chains, pins and needles [Alcott, 1881, p. 180; Alcott, 1823, p. 107]. Such petty salesmanship was a school for scandal, wrote Timothy Dwight:

> Men who begin life with bargaining for small wares will almost invariably become sharpers. The commanding aim of every such man will soon be to make a good bargain, and he will speedily consider every gainful bargain as a good one. The tricks of fraud will assume in his mind the same place which commercial skill and an honorable system of dealing hold in the mind of a merchant [Dwight, 1969, vol. 1, p. 223].

Tinware and clock manufacturers and entrepreneurs often had to train their new peddlers in the arts and mystery of peddling. Hezekiah Griswold asked tinware manufacturer Oliver Filley to give his son "all the instructions and informations that you may think proper and necessary for him respecting the articles he may take and the manner in which he ought to proceed – He is young and unacquainted with business and needs instruction and I shall count it a great favor to have you take the liberty to talk with him" [Filley, 4/14/1824]. Chapin G. Deming was a "new hand" at clock peddling in 1839, who needed "instructions in relation to putting up clocks &c." C.&C. Ives suggested to Seth Wheeler that he take Deming under his wing:

> in order that he might become a little acquainted how to manage business, would it not be better for you to go out with him awhile that he may start right, and if not consistent with you to go, let him go out at first with some other good hand [Wheeler, 2/12/1839].

"New hands" at peddling could also learn from relatives experienced at peddling. Unfortunately, perhaps, for Chatfield Alcott, his older brother Bronson saw it as his duty to show him the ropes at peddling [Hermstadt, 1969, pp. 1-2]. Albert and Milton Bates queried their brother Carlos about the prospects for peddling clocks in the South in 1831:

> give me all the information you can about what kind of clocks and what they are worth there and what kind of watches and how much they will fetch. I wish you to give us the best information you can about what state will be the best and what part to land the property. I would wish you to inform me in what way to gone on in an open wagon or a coverd one. And about what time in the season to go on and what capital would be necessary for us to start with. I would not confine you to any one article but

> would have you inform me of those you think the best for profit [Bates, 3/15/1831].

The wages paid to tin peddlers ranged from twenty-five to fifty dollars per month. Payment came at the expiration of the contracted period of six to nine months. Wages were in cash, or, as in the case of Chauncey Buck, two-thirds in cash and "the residue in Truck." As an added incentive to aggressive salesmanship, the peddler could keep half of what he was able to clear above his wages and the wholesale value of the tinware. Contracts often included harsh stipulations concerning the wages of inefficient or profligate salesmen. In his 1818 contract to peddle for Oliver Filley, Andrew Hays promised "not to sink s[ai]d Filley anything more than his wages." Hays's 1820 contract stipulated that Filley "shall not loose anything by me more than my wages and should there be any further loss I will make it up." Thomas Frazier contracted to sell tin for Filley for fifty dollars a month for six months. Frazier's contract stated that if he failed to clear his wages in sales, he would have to make up half his salary – one hundred fifty dollars – to Filley. If Frazier cleared more than his salary in his sales, Frazier would receive half the profits [Filley; R.U. Peck; Alderman, 1992, p. 20; Keir, 1913, p. 256].

Clock peddlers were generally better paid than tinware peddlers. Seth Wheeler's employees earned from fifty to seventy-five dollars per month peddling clocks in Kentucky. If a peddler could prove himself capable in making sales, Wheeler increased his salary. Deforest Wolcott's contract of 1836 promised him a salary of fifty-five dollars per month. However, if Wolcott could perform as well as Ebenezer Plumb, another peddler in Wheeler's employ, Wolcott would receive a bonus of five dollars per month. Wolcott had to conduct "a first rate business," making "as many sales and on as good terms as to prices and length of credits and as safe debts" as Plumb. Wolcott performed satisfactorily, and in the following year his contract promised him a salary of $62.50 per month. As they gained experience and skill at making a sale, clock peddlers could demand better wages. Timothy Colvin began peddling clocks for Wheeler in 1836 at fifty-five dollars per month. The following year Wheeler increased Colvin's compensation to sixty dollars per month, and in 1839 Colvin earned $67.50 per month [Wheeler].

Employers compensated their peddlers for concomitant traveling expenses, such as board, lodging, and license fees, but usually not for medical expenses, clothing, or keeping their own wagon in repair. In Nathaniel Clark's contract to peddle tinware for Oliver Filley, Clarke's expenses were to be "borne out of the load he peddles from" [Filley]. Rather than compensate peddlers for their expenses, employers usually provided peddlers with an assortment of cheap "notions," the sale of which was meant to cover the peddler's expenses. A fictional account of the kinds of wares meant to cover expenses is probably faithful to reality:

> on the lid was placed a bag full of whip lashes, a few parcels of cigars, and a number of boxes containing all the variety of combs, from coarse horn louse traps to superfine ivory and high

> finished tortise shell... The box contained an assortment on the profits of which he was to subsist himself and horse, and consisted of a great variety of 'good-for-nothing' things which women are so fond of purchasing – such as beads, ear rings, breast pins, and all the little et ceteras of jewelry; besides a good store of essences, shaving soap, scissors, thread, needles, pins & stilettos [*Georgia Journal*, 4/5/1832].

Seth Wheeler provided his clock peddlers with dozens of combs to meet their traveling expenses. The peddlers kept accounts of selling the combs for about a dollar apiece, and often recorded swapping combs outright for a tavern bill. This was indeed economical, given that Wheeler paid about six and a quarter cents each for brass combs and less than fifteen cents for silver combs [Wheeler, 7/24/1837].

Burrage Yale of Reading, Massachusetts sought to hire peddlers through advertisements from 1823 to 1844. Yale wanted young men of "undoubted moral character," who were "capable," "honest," "trust-worthy," "industrious," and "well qualified to make good traders." As proof of such character, the potential peddlers had to produce "recommendations from the Selectmen of their town, and countersigned by a minister of the same place, that they possess the above qualifications" [*New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette*, 1823-1844]. Russell Upson Peck promised in his contract to peddle tinware "to be Prudent Faithful & Industrious" to his employer, James Brooks [R.U. Peck, 9/26/1826. As a further protection against loss from dishonest peddlers, employers often required a parent or some other person to give security. Elijah Kellog's "caution of hiring pedlers is to have them give security that is provided I am not acquainted with them, and shall calculate the young man will procure such a recommend that will hold the security accountable for his performance" [Harrison, 3/6/1822]. On occasion, employers lost property to dishonest peddlers. Harvey Filley planned to take a trip in the Spring of 1821 in western Virginia to find his "stray" and "runaway" peddlers, who had not returned to his Philadelphia tin depot. Filley figured these "doubtful debt[or]s" would not come to Philadelphia to pay him, so he resolved "to go after them" [Filley, 2/14/1821]. Richard Wilcox was cheated by a peddler, Mr. Bartlett, who peddled out of his Petersburg, Virginia tin depot. Wilcox discharged Bartlett in 1820, and in 1821 heard that he had "bit" his new employers "as well as he did us & I think he will bite any one that hires him" [Wilcox, 11/19/1821].

A peddler's bottom line was earning his wages in sales, or at least recouping the value of the load of tinware. Richard Wilcox kept his brother abreast of the profitability of their peddlers' performances, telling Benjamin Wilcox who cleared their wages and who came short. The Wilcoxes had a good Winter in 1822 when Richard Wilcox calculated that: "Our Peddlers I think will the most of them clear there wages this season." The performance of hired peddlers attracted the particular attention of manufacturers of tinware. The foreman of the Filley's Elizabethtown, New Jersey, tin shop reported to Oliver Filley in 1810 that "Joab has not done bad but very well for a new pedler."

Initially L. Burr's performance at peddling worried Harvey Filley. On his first trip, Burr was out two months, and "did not fetch in anything." On a subsequent trip Burr regained the confidence of Filley by making one hundred dollars during a "middling good trip" of three weeks. Harvey Filley assured Oliver Filley that Burr "will gain the point after a while." Richard Wilcox criticized David Kelsey for not earning "money quite to the chalk." Though Wilcox supposed Kelsey was "good," he did not want to allow Kelsey's debts to run too far. Mr. Pardy, another Wilcox peddler, "did not pay up into fifty dollars for his loads." Thomas T. Hubbard was a bigger disappointment to Richard Wilcox. Not only did Hubbard bring in an inadequate amount of cash for a load of tinware, but some of the money was counterfeit. Richard Wilcox threatened: "if he does not come in better this time I shall Discharge him when he comes in again." Wilcox denied Mr. Whiting his wages entirely. Wilcox justified his actions on Whiting's performance as follows: "he did not quite clear his property, and as he quit peddling sooner than the time mentioned when we bargained with him, as he had a good oppertunity of selling wagon & horse, I think it no more than justice not to pay him any wages at all" [R.U. Peck; Filley, 10/26/1818, 1/31/1819, 12/23/1810; Wilcox, 4/17/1819, 12/15/1819, 12/25/1819, 2/19/1822, 3/22/1822, 3/11/1823].

Many Southerners viewed Yankee peddlers as part of a larger problem of an imbalance of trade with the manufacturing and financial centers of the Northeast. Northern agents dominated the export trade of staple crops from Southern cities. Yankees and other "foreigners" composed the bulk of the mercantile class in southern cities, which were viewed as appendages of Northern seaports, "places where their agents and factors do business, and who, having but little local interest, withdraw from them after a few years residence, with all their gains, to swell the wealth of the place of their early affection and attachment" [Russell, 1923, pp. 19-20, 99-100; Sydnor, 1948; Potter, 1976]. Yankee peddlers added a personal dimension, a face on which Southerners could place the blame for their economic woes.

Peddlers were probably the only Yankees most Southerners ever met face to face. From accumulated encounters with Yankee peddlers in the first three decades of the nineteenth century many Southerners acquired a negative impression of all New Englanders. The editors of the *National Intelligencer* claimed to have heard Southerners use the expression "Damned Yankees…a thousand times" in 1829. "Damned Yankees" was popularized by "the mass of the people, who derive their notions of 'the Yankees' from tin-pedlars and wooden-nutmeg venders" [*National Intelligencer*, 6/18/1829]. The *Camden Journal* of South Carolina also imputed the "disadvantageous impression of Northern character" upon "the petty cheating, the low lived imposition, and two penny trickery of the Connecticut peddlers." "By no very unnatural course of reasoning," the *Camden Journal* went on, "they have identified the Northern character with that of the Wallingford pedlers of Tin Ware and Wooden Wheeled Clocks" [reprinted in *Georgia Journal*, 3/30/1830]. The Yankee peddler, complained a northern critic, "is the most common object of the jeers and jokes of our Southern brethren, whose mythical and highly imaginative notions of the men of the North it seems quite impossible to correct" [*North American Review*, 1844, p. 211]. As a northern defender of New England character noted in 1837, since the Yankee peddler stereotype was "capable of producing a political effect," it bore "a charmed life" [*North American Review*, 1837, p. 241].

Tales of Yankee tricks and fraudulent bargains were current throughout the country, but were especially virulent in the South. These stories catalogued an enormous range of bogus goods that Yankee peddlers imposed upon southern consumers. Kentucky, noted Timothy Flint in 1826, was full of "fine stories about Yankee tricks, and Yankee finesse" [Flint, 1968, pp. 26, 52-53]. Peddlers of tinware and clocks figured prominently in these tales. William Gilmore Simms created a character named Jared Bunce, a Connecticut peddler, in his novel of frontier Georgia, *Guy Rivers*. Georgia Regulators seize Bunce and try him in the "court of Judge Lynch." Witness after witness accuses Bunce of frauds committed against them. Bunce had sold a Colonel Blundell "a coffee-pot and two tin cups, all of which went to pieces – the solder melting off at the very sight of the hot water." Bunce claims that the tinware was built for a northern climate and posits that the Georgians boil their water "quite too hot" for his tinware. Bunce promises that his next lot of tinware "shall be calkilated on purpose to suit the climate." Bunce's wooden clocks are likewise deemed trash. Bunce sold a clock to a planter's wife and not two days had passed since Bunce left, "before the said clock began to go whiz, whiz, whiz, and commenced striking, whizzing all the while, and never stopped till it had struck clear thirty-one, and since that time it will neither whiz, nor strike, nor do anything" [Simms, n.d., pp. 77, 79].

Asa Green parodies the encounters between South Carolina planters and Yankee peddlers in his novel, *A Yankee among the Nullifiers*. A Yankee peddler sells a "St. Killigrew's clock" to a planter and warrants that the clock would never stop if he would set it running on that saint's day, and promised if the clock varied one minute over six months, he would refund the planter his forty dollars. The planter looks in his almanac and can find no St. Killigrew, and to his further chagrin, the clock will not run at all. When the peddler returns a year later, the planter demands a refund. The crafty Yankee replies that if the clock "has stood *stock still* all the time, it sartinly could'nt a *varied* any," and refuses to refund the money. Another Yankee peddler sold this same planter's wife a counterfeit tortoise shell comb. Wearing the comb in her hair in a rainstorm, "she found the comb had all dissolved, and it took three weeks to clear her hair of the sticky mass of glue, sugar, and gum arabic, out of which it was composed" [Greene, 1833, pp. 67-68, 70-71].

Southerners accused Yankee peddlers of passing a huge variety of bogus goods made out of wood: wooden nutmegs, wooden hams, wooden cheese, wooden garden seeds, and wooden candlesticks. The Yankees' counterfeit goods were made in other media as well: oakleaf cigars, horn gunflints, stonecoal indigo, and so on. In his 1832 novel, *Memoirs of a Nullifier*, Algernon Sydney Johnston also puts a Yankee on trial, not in a Regulators' court, but before the Judgement seat of Rhadamanthus. Rhadamanthus reads from a ledger "a terribly long account against" a Yankee peddler named Virgil Hoskins.

> To selling, in the course of one peddling expedition, 497,368 wooden nutmegs, 281,532 Spanish cigars made of oak leaves, and 647 wooden clocks... To stealing an old grindstone, smearing it over with butter, and then selling it as a cheese... To making a counterfeit dollar of pewter, when you were six years old, and cheating your own father with it... To taking a worn out pair of shoes, which you found in the road, and selling them to a pious old lady, as being actually the shoes of Saint Paul... To taking an empty old watch case, putting a live cricket into it, and then selling it as a patent lever in full motion.

Rhadamanthus declares his exasperation with New England, which gives him "more trouble than all the rest of the world put together." He sentences Hoskins "to be thrown into a lake of boiling molasses, where nearly all your countrymen already are, with that same old grindstone tied to your neck, and to remain there forever" [Johnston, 1832, p. 40]. The *Georgia Journal* printed in humorous detail the composition of a fraudulent wooden candle as: "A piece of white oak wood turned in the shape of a candle, with a snug little wick in each end, cover'd with just about tallow enough to grease the bill of a Longe Island misketer!" [*Georgia Journal*, 2/21/1833].

The wooden composition of these bogus goods is significant in that wood was a medium of the early mechanization of New England industry. Wooden clocks, gun stocks, bowls, shoe lasts, and other commodities were churned out of the newly patented machinery running New England's industry [Hindle, 1975, pp. 3-12]. Southerners and others hostile to the protectionism of New England manufacturers denigrated the flood of patents in the early nineteenth century as mechanical absurdities. Southerners were not Luddites, but they questioned the uses to which Yankees put their lathes and other machinery. Actual products evoked this ridicule, such as the foot stove advertised by Joseph B. Gilbert in the *Connecticut Courant* in 1812. Gilbert claimed that his tin box was "so constructed as to combine all the necessary properties of a foot-stove, tea boiler, chafing dish, plate warmer, and butter or liquor cooler, as the season may be" [*Connecticut Courant*, 11/30/1812]. A frequent target of these patents were their ludicrous, sesquipedalian names. Jacob Engelbrecht of Frederick, Maryland observed in 1825 "a Machine to prevent cows from Poking – It was an Iron Bow, Extending from the Extremity of one horn to the other in a Semi-circular form." Engelbrecht reckoned the contraption would be called "the patent Preventing Poker" [Quynn, 1976, 3/28/1825]. In the humor of the period, these Yankee devices promised a fabulous, yet worthless, mechanization of the mundane. The Virginia and North Carolina Almanack for 1834 described a fantastic contraption called the "New-England Sausage and Scrubbing Brush Machine... Into the centre of this machine ...you drive a hog; set the screws a going, and it will produce *ready made sausages* from one end, and *patent scrubbing brushes* from the other" [Warrock, 1834]. The protagonist of Johnston's *Memoirs of a Nullifier* invests $20,000 of his inheritance into the factory of a Yankee inventor named Increase Hooker. The factory will produce "Hooker's Patent Self animated Philanthropic Frying Pans." This was "a frying pan, upon a new and wonderful principle. The mechanism is such that the slices of bacon, when exactly half done, turn themselves over on the other side simultaneously." In a moment of fictional, wishful thinking, Johnston writes that the frying pan is a flop in the South Carolina market. The frying pans "were sold for next to nothing, amidst the ridicule of the assembly, who declared themselves resolved to stick to the real good old frying-pan of their forefathers" [Johnston, 1832, pp. 7, 8, 13].

State legislatures tried to regulate the peddlers out of business by raising license fees to prohibitive levels, up to one thousand dollars per year in some states. Clock peddlers had to pay high license fees of one hundred dollars per year per county in Virginia after 1832. The fees were meant in part to recirculate the large amount of cash that clock peddlers supposedly drained from the local economy. To evade restrictive licensing laws against selling clocks, Yankee peddlers, according to a long-lived, popular joke, switched to leasing clocks for ninety-nine years [*Georgia Journal*, 11/20/1833; *Lexington Gazette*, 8/5/1841]. Some Anti-Tariff Southerners suggested that the legal precedent for an extensive boycott of Western goods lie in anti-peddler legislation, and that "a very slight alteration" in these laws "would effectually control the horse, hog, mule, cattle, bagging, and bacon trade of the west" [*Nile's Weekly Register*, 1828, p. 301].

For forty years Virginians complained to their state legislature that peddlers were draining specie from the commonwealth. In 1806 petitioners in Campbell, Cumberland, and Spotsylvania Counties estimated that peddlers removed $300,000 in "ready cash...not only out of the neighborhood, but out of the state." This depletion of hard currency adversely affected not only the internal circulation of money, but even the established banks were "constantly drained of their specie!" Frederick County petitioners in 1822 claimed that "at the lowest calculation," tin peddlers alone took away $75,000 annually from Virginia in cash as well as in other commodities, such as "Furs, Beeswax, Feathers, Old Copper, and Pewter, and indeed every valuable article of trade they can lay their hands on." A few years later petitioners from Brunswick, Fauquier, Prince William, and Shenandoah Counties complained that Yankee peddlers had "actually produced a balance of trade against the interior of the Commonwealth." As the Nullification crisis heated sectional tensions, Southerners began to point out how northern manufacturers benefitted at southern expense through the peddler trade. Hugh Henry Brackenridge opined in 1831 that: "The money of the southern farmer is at present collected and carried away, to reward the industry of the northern manufacturer; southern notes are taken, sold to the north at a discount, and sent back to cramp the operations of the southern banks" [Schwaab, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 244-245]. Petitioners from Fauquier County, Virginia added this sentiment to the traditional catalogue of complaints against Yankee peddlers:

> Amongst the evils arising from them may be enumerated with certainty; an extensive and unlawful traffick with the slaves, who are their principal dealers; the collection and transmission of the specia change in large quantities from the commonwealth; the introduction of the small note currency known as shinplasters and its circulation amongst ignorant persons; the interception of the business of the regular retail merchants; the imposition of counterfeit and insubstantial articles of wear and ornament upon purchasers; and finally, the removal of their gains to other states to whose wealth and advancement they contribute at our cost.

Southerners fought the inundation of Yankee manufactures in several ways: boycotts, restrictive legislation, and the encouragement of home manufactures. In Johnston's work of fiction, the people of South Carolina seem to naturally reject Increase Hooker's frying pans. But in reality such consumer boycotts were led by sectionalist southern leaders opposed to protectionist tariffs. However, there were certainly cases in which an aggrieved southern consumer might make such decisions on his or her own. James Dowdell made the kind of public notice expected by southern society of a man whose domestic domain had been violated. In a notice to peddlers published in the *Georgia Journal* on July 11, 1826, Dowdell protested that a "clan of designing, unprincipled mischief-makers" had "influence[d], misguide[d] and induce[d]" his fifteen-year-old wife to purchase a large quantity of merchandise without his "knowledge or approbation." Dowdell waited what he considered a sufficient amount of time for the peddlers "to reflect, repent and make amends" for their intrusion into his domain, but to no avail. The only satisfaction Dowdell could extract from these interlopers for taking advantage of his young wife was to boycott the purchase of any such commodities by his household for the space of eighteen months [*Georgia Journal*, 7/11/1826]. Southern planters led by example, dressing themselves in homespun or English imports. A Nullifier gentleman "would sooner go fifty miles and pay a hundred per cent more than a thing is worth if it be only imported, than have a similar article of American manufacture brought to [his] very door and sold at a fair price," claimed Asa Greene. A common joke of the Nullification era was of the Yankee peddler who pointed out all the New England made items in a Southern planter's supposedly Yankee-free vestments [Greene, 1833, pp. 39-41]. *Niles Register* joined in the attack on Anti-tariff boycotts by reporting that a Yankee inventor was earning "about 2,000 dollars a year by the manufacture of *shaving boxes* to assist the operation of *nullificating* the beards of southern gentlemen" [*Nile's Register*, 1831, p. 149].

Home manufactures were encouraged to staunch the flow of northern goods into the South, and southern wealth to the Northeast. Homespun garments might have made appearances at political rallies and other public events, but northern clothes still appeared on southern backs. The southern criticism of Yankee's bogus goods reached a paranoid pitch in 1828 when Georgia newspapers issued the following caution to southern consumers: "Sample

Patterns of our Domestic cloth, have been sent on to the Northern manufactories, that they may be made there, and sent here to be impose on us as *Southern Homespun.* Therefore *beware of Counterfits* [sic] – they will soon be here." To fend off such impositions, the article advised consumers to purchase goods "only from the manufacturer, or such store keepers, whose veracity they can depend upon, when asked where their homespun was made." They certainly did not have Yankee peddlers in mind [*Georgia Journal*, 9/15/1828]. Petitioners from Frederick County, Virginia complained in 1842 that "even the poor Widdow who has earned an humble support for her orphan children by the industrious use of the needle is denied that priveledge" by the flood of northern merchandize into southern homes [VA Legislative Petitions].

The plight of southern mechanics against Yankee competition was reiterated time and again in the early nineteenth century. In 1821 the tinsmiths of Frederick County protested that the "vast monopoly" wrought by the tin peddling system rendered the livelihood of Virginia tinsmiths precarious. The petitioners complained that only the largest towns and cities of Virginia could support a native tinsmith, while in the absence of the tin peddlers and their depots, the towns, hamlets, and county courthouses of Virginia potentially could have supported thirty or forty additional, "regular" tinsmiths. Henry Marie Brackenridge noted with concern in 1831 that small shops and stores filled with northern goods had taken the place of local mechanics in the South. Local artisans could not compete with the Yankee "hats, boots, shoes, ploughs, axes, hoes, buckets, tin-ware, ready made clothing, and a thousand articles of the first necessity," that stocked southern stores. The impact went beyond the cares of the local mechanic, and led to the decline of southern cities and towns [Schwaab, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 244-245]. In 1842 one hundred ninety-nine mechanics and others of Winchester, Virginia importuned the state legislature for an additional tax on peddlers and shopkeepers who sold northern manufactured goods. Judging by the enumerated list of goods, the sector of the artisan population that felt the competition of northern manufacturers had widened. The petitioners called for restrictions on the sale of boots, shoes, hats, caps, ready-made clothing, saddles, harnesses, saddletrees, chairs, "all description of cabinet furniture" and copper and tinware [VA Legislative Petitions].

Yankee peddlers aggravated southern animosity over the imbalance of trade between North and South. William Gilmore Simms claimed in 1850 that "the southern people have long stood in nearly the same relation to the Northern States of this confederacy, that the whole of the colonies, in 1775, occupied to Great Britain." "Any nation that defers thus wholly to another," foreboded Simms, "is soon emasculated, and finally subdued" [Schwaab, 1973, vol. 2, p. 470]. The Yankee peddler, often a hired hand merely trying to make a start in life, was accused of acting as the agent of Northern colonization of the South. Agents of Northern Aggression, Abolitionist firebrands, slave stealers, counterfeiters, seducing rakes – Southerners attributed many anti-social behaviors to Yankee peddlers. Most of these young men were not born sharpers, but displaced New England farmboys who were initially as ignorant of market values and behaviors as their southern customers reputedly were.

The many stories of tricks and fraudulent goods sold by Yankee peddlers had a kernel of social truth. They reveal the anxieties antebellum Americans, particularly Southerners, had as they warily embraced and were encompassed by National markets.

References

Alcott, A.B., "Autobiographical Collections," vol. 1-2 (1799-1823), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

———, *New Connecticut. An Autobiographical Poem* (Boston, 1881).

Alcott, W.A., *The Young Man's Guide* (Boston, 1834).

———, *Recollection of Rambles at the South* (New York, 1851).

Alderman, M., *Letters from a Burlington Peddler who Traveled to North Carolina to Sell his Wares* (Burlington, 1992).

Barnum, P.T., *Struggles and Triumphs or, Forty Years' Recollections of p. T. Barnum* (New York, 1930).

Buell, C.W. and L. Barr, "Gideon Roberts: Clockmaker of Bristol, Connecticut," (n.d.) Manuscript in the American Clock and Watch Museum.

Carlos Bates Papers, Connecticut State Library.

[Hartford] *Connecticut Courant.*

DeVoe, S.S., *The Tinsmiths of Connecticut* (Middletown, 1968).

Douglas, T., *Autobiography of Thomas Douglas, Late Judge of the Supreme Court of Florida* (New York, 1856).

Dwight, T., in B.M. Solomon and P.M. King, eds., *Travels in New England and New York* (reprint, Cambridge, 1969).

Filley Family Papers, Connecticut Historical Society.

Flint, T., *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Valley of the Mississippi* (Carbondale, IL, 1968; reprint of Boston, 1826).

[Milledgeville] *Georgia Journal.*

Greene, A., *A Yankee among the Nullifiers: An Autobiography* (New York, 1833).

Hamilton, T., *Men and Manners in America* (Edinburgh, 1833).

Elihu Harrison Business Papers, Litchfield Historical Society.

Herrnstadt, R.L., ed., *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott* (Ames, Iowa, 1969).

Hindle, B., ed., *America's Wooden Age: Aspects of its Early Technology* (Tarrytown, NY, 1975).

Holcomb Family Papers, Connecticut Historical Society.

Jerome, C., *History of the American Clock Business for the Past Sixty Years, and Life of Chauncey Jerome, Written by Himself* (New Haven, 1860).

Johnston, A.S., *Memoirs of a Nullifier; written by himself* (Columbia, 1832).

Keir, R.M., "The Tin Peddler," *Journal of Political Economy* 21 (1913), 255-258.

Lamson, Sperry, & Co. Papers, Mattatuck Historical Society.

Mark Leavenworth Clockmaking Accounts, Mattatuck Historical Society.

Legislative Petitions, Library of Virginia.

Milo Lewis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

Lexington [VA] Gazette.

Murat, A., *A Moral and Political Sketch of the United States of North America* (London, 1833).

[Washington, DC] *National Intelligencer.*

[Concord] *New Hampshire Patriot State Gazette.*

Nile's Weekly Register 34 (1828).

Nile's Register, 41 (1831).

The North American Review, 44 (1837).

The North American Review, 58 (1844).

Russell Upson Peck Papers, Connecticut Historical Society.

Peck Family Papers, Bristol [CT] Public Library.
Potter, D.M., *The Impending Crisis 1848-1861* (New York, 1976).
Quynn, W.R., ed., *The Diary of Jacob Engelbrecht 1818-1878* (Frederick, 1976).
Russell, R.R., "Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-1861," *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences* 11 (1923).
Schwaab, E.L., ed., *Travels in the Old South*, (Louisville, 1973).
Sherman-Tabor Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
Simms, W.G., *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia* (New York, n.d.).
Sydnor, C.S., *The Development of Southern Sectionalism 1819-1848* (Baton Rouge, 1948).
Eli Terry, Jr., Letter Books, American Clock and Watch Museum.
Samuel Terry Collection, American Clock and Watch Museum.
George Rensseleaer Upson Papers, Connecticut State Library.
Seth Wheeler Papers, Connecticut State Library.
Wagner, F., "Eighty-Six Letters (1814-1882) of A. Bronson Alcott (Part One)," in Joel Myerson, ed., *Studies in the American Renaissance* (Boston, 1979), 239-308.
Warrock, J., "Virginia and North Carolina Almanack," (Richmond, 1834).
Wilcox Papers, Berlin [CT] Historical Society.