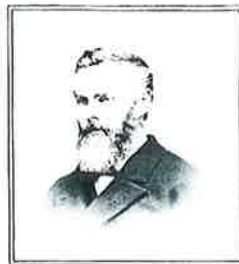


LAWSON VALENTINE

A Study for a Future Biography

by

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FOREWORD

Convention has it that the birth of modern marketing took place in New York City in the early 20th Century. However, when Madison Avenue was still barely a cow path, industrialist Lawson Valentine's marketing acumen and scientific approach produced innovations that enabled American manufacturing to capture business from its theretofore-dominant British competition. Even more remarkable, he achieved this success simultaneously in two very disparate industries – varnish manufacturing and book publishing.

Valentine and Company focused on marketing its varnish product to the transportation trade and, with superior technology and innovative marketing, captured important customers from English suppliers.

Almost simultaneously, Valentine drove Houghton-Mifflin to successfully challenge British publishing houses—with exclusive, up-market, illustrated, limited editions from a vast pool of noted authors, which he marketed in a uniquely prestigious book parlor in a prestigious neighborhood of New York City.

Valentine's legacy is the triumph of American entrepreneurialism and innovation over the previously-dominant European business model. Today both of his businesses survive—Valentine and Company as Valspar Corporation, and Houghton-Mifflin as part of a global communications conglomerate.

Yet, in contrast to the popular characterization of late 19th century American businessmen as “robber barons,” Valentine achieved his successes while exhibiting high ethical standards in both his business partnerships and his employee relations. His generosity was evidenced in his patronage of artist Winslow Homer, and his positive moral character influenced author William Dean Howells' characterization of the fictional business hero, Silas Lapham.

Lawson Valentine has been described as “...a genius, a seer in business, an electric dynamo, a fascinating enigma...” (Abbott *Reminiscences* 340). As American business powers into a new century, perhaps it might champion Lawson Valentine as a better business (and personal) model than the recent crop of chief executives who sought mainly to build their own, elaborate houses of cards in the quicksand of financial chicanery.

INTRODUCTION



Making Varnish

Lawson Valentine died suddenly and unexpectedly, at the age of 64, on May 5, 1891, at his country home, Houghton Farm, in Mountainville, Orange County, New York (Abbott eulogy). As the *New York Times*' obituary noted, "... many men in art and business life owed their starts to him" (2). The *Times* noted that a special train, with ferry service from New York City, would be available to carry mourners to the funeral service at the Farm.

The Rev. Abbott noted in his eulogy, "Business was to him a form of energy, not a game for money. Everything he touched...farming...manufacturing or journalism was peculiar, original, vital." Those who knew him knew that "...in Lawson Valentine faith, hope, and love were life" (10).

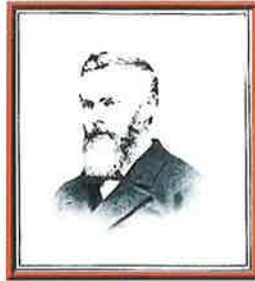
Abbott's description of Valentine, as a businessman, contrasts sharply with the vocabulary commonly used in popular American History texts to characterize Valentine's more famous business contemporaries. Jay Gould, who died in 1892, was the archetype "robber baron," said to have used financial double-dealing and stock manipulation to bilk naïve investors for personal enrichment. The "robber barons" were said to have brought "... the cunning of a pickpocket, and the audacity of a burglar to the world of high finance" (Calkins 283). While today, history looks more kindly on the likes of J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and J.D. Rockefeller, Calkins suggests that this may be merely the legacy of their obvious self-promotion through high-profile

philanthropy—an approach eschewed by Lawson Valentine. Perhaps his preference for action over self-promotion is why, in contrast to the previously mentioned businessmen, no biography of Lawson Valentine yet exists.

Valentine used his wealth to push the boundaries of industrial research and support others in whom he believed, rather than for control, publicity, or power. Although, as noted above, there is yet no formal biography of Lawson Valentine, his deeds live on in three separate arenas: the success of Valspar Varnish; his patronage of Winslow Homer; and the founding of Houghton-Mifflin Publishing. This paper unites these topics and amplifies Valentine's unique relationship with the author William Dean Howells and the latter's protagonist, Silas Lapham.

LAWSON VALENTINE

Study for a Future Biography



CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

The Valentine and Homer families each settled in Cambridge in the 1840's and became both friends and neighbors (Hendricks 10-12). In 1852, after more than a decade with the Burlington, Vermont, *Free Press*, Henry Houghton moved to Massachusetts to open a printing plant that he called The Riverside Press, in the Old Cambridge Poorhouse (Miller 8). Similarly, author William Dean Howells brought his talents to Cambridge, in 1866, where he joined the *Atlantic Monthly* (Kirk cci).

“Old” Cambridge, even before it consolidated, in 1846, around Harvard University, had developed an attitude of cultural and intellectual superiority, and a stance of social elitism, when dealing with its bucolic neighbors (Sutton 3).

In 1866, when William Dean Howells moved to Sacramento Street, he wrote,

...it was taken for granted that everyone in Old Cambridge society must be of good family, or he could not be there; perhaps his mere residence tacitly ennobled him; certainly his acceptance was an informal patent of gentility. To my mind, the structure of society was almost ideal (Sutton 72).



To Howells, the newcomer from the West, the Valentines and the Homers represented the local elite, and were the people whom the upwardly mobile would need to cultivate.

When Winslow Homer moved from Boston to Cambridge, in 1842, at the age of 6, he lived on Main Street. The Cambridge Chronicle described Main Street as “filled on both sides with elegant buildings that testify at once to good taste and the wealth of their owners.” The most impressive residence on the street, however, was not that of the Homer’s, but rather a “... big wooden house with pseudo-classical portico,” that belonged to the neighboring Valentines. Their house at Prospect and Main was, according to the newspaper, “...by far the most elegant and costly in Cambridge” (Hendricks 16,17). Howells eventually moved to another address in Cambridge, and the Homers lived in several other residences in the city. However, given the community’s small size, they were all within a half-mile of Harvard Square and the Commons (see [map, previous page](#)). The Commons was the principle stop on the horse railway to Boston.

Transportation between Cambridge and Boston was augmented, in the 1860’s, by a horse rail line that connected Harvard Square to Boston’s Bowdoin Square, along Main Street (Sutton 62). Howells commented, in *Suburban Sketches*, that, while the horse rail cars were modern, they were overcrowded, polluted, and foul. He noted, on one occasion, after boarding the car in Bowdoin Square, “...two adopted citizens, far gone in drink, who have the aspect and smell of having passed the day in an ash heap... [These two] challenged the conductor[,] when asked for the fare[,] to...step out and be shown that matter of men they were” (110-111).

So journalist Howells and industrialist Valentine traveled daily from the comfort and tranquility of rural “Old” Cambridge to their offices, through the vulgar realities of the new, industrialized Boston. This new metropolis offered each of them fresh opportunities. Not surprisingly, then, it was in Boston, in the varnish and paint business, where Lawson Valentine first invested his interests, energy, and talent.

The Varnish and Paint Industry

In 1867, a year after Howells joined the *Atlantic*, Valentine established Valentine and Company, at 96 Fulton Street, in Boston (*Valspar 160 Years*).

Varnish, according to T.O. Green, in *The Birth of the American Paint Industry*, has been known from antiquity. In its simplest form, varnish is a natural solution of gums or resins made spreadable by heat. These volatile solvents, when air-dried, develop a thin, glossy, protective film. The addition of pigment produces color, providing decorative, as well as protective, advantages (Connolly 12).

In Colonial America, an itinerant varnish maker would have to travel from factory to factory with a mixing stick and a bag of gums. He would set up his kettle in a factory yard to cook up a year’s supply of varnish before moving on to the next customer. Generally, each varnish maker had a particular set of customers, and businesses were built on trust and reputation (4).

In the 17th century, transportation conveyances became a particularly important source of business for varnish makers. By the end of that century, coaches, buggies, and sedan chairs proliferated, and wealthy patrons required both practical and ornamental decoration for their conveyances. The desire for ever-more conspicuous display among patrons spurred competition among conveyance manufacturers, who, in turn, demanded new and better varnish quality from their varnish makers (30). Rivalry to produce the best product and to hold the best customers grew fierce.



At the turn of the 18th century, English varnish makers dominated the transportation market, both in Europe and the Colonies. However, in Boston, in 1700, Thomas Child established the first American paint mill to compete with the British imports (52). New England shipbuilding helped to concentrate the paint and varnish business in Boston. Lithographs of Boston in 1816 show the exterior walls of buildings covered with advertising slogans for paint and varnish. One such message, from 1853, promoted its longevity with the claim, “Morris Tinted Paint—15 Year Trial” (34).

Not surprisingly, Lawson Valentine gained his initial exposure to the paint and varnish business in Boston.

Valentine and Company

The origins of today’s Valspar Corporation lie in Boston.

In 1806, Samuel Tuck shifted his product focus from beeswax, used to coat the ropes of sailing vessels, to paint. He called his new operation “Paint and Color.” (Connolly 1).

In 1847, at age 19, Valentine began his career in Boston’s paint business. In 1850, he moved to the firm of Wadsworth, Nye and Company. In 1852, he formed a partnership with Augustus G. Stimson and Otis W. Merriam, under the name Stimson, Valentine and Company, with offices in the same building used by Samuel Tuck almost a half century earlier.

Merriam had previously been associated with a small varnish factory in Cambridge, at the site of the village blacksmith shop, in the city center. This shop, made famous by poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and captured in a woodcut attributed to Winslow Homer (*figure at left*), began producing varnish in 1820. The founders of this business, David McClure and Franklin Houghton, produced a European formula purchased from a French chemist (*Valspar 160 Years*).



In 1859, that company relocated to 36 India Street, in Boston (*figure at right*), and, shortly thereafter, Henry C. Valentine, Lawson’s brother, joined the firm. By 1866 both Stimson and Merriam had retired, leaving the Valentine brothers as sole partners of the company. In 1867, Valentine and Company was founded, with offices at 96 Fulton Street in Boston, and a varnish factory in Brighton, Massachusetts. That factory was captured, according to company history, in an early [Winslow Homer](#) woodcut (*see figure* pg. 17).



Charles S. Homer Jr.

From the founding of American industry through the year 1870, no American varnish could compete with the quality of the English product. In 1870, however, Lawson Valentine announced that he had produced the first varnish to equal the best of the English products. Valentine publicly declared that his varnish would “...drive out the imported article” (*Tribune* 7). When his boast proved to be premature, Charles Homer saved the company’s reputation.

Lawson, like all manufacturers, wrestled with the “black art” aspects of varnish manufacture and quality control. At each company, the head varnish maker used more art than science to manage the process and deliver the final product. Lawson, being a “hands-on” manager, observed, on his daily rounds through the factory, that the head varnish maker always dropped something into the cooking kettles to judge the progress of the varnish. When he learned that a slice of potato was used to establish product readiness, he decided that science would be a better foundation for product quality rather than the sputtering of a cooking potato. With perhaps only 100 chemists working in all of American Industry and none in the varnish business, Valentine’s hiring of Charles Homer was both daring and innovative.

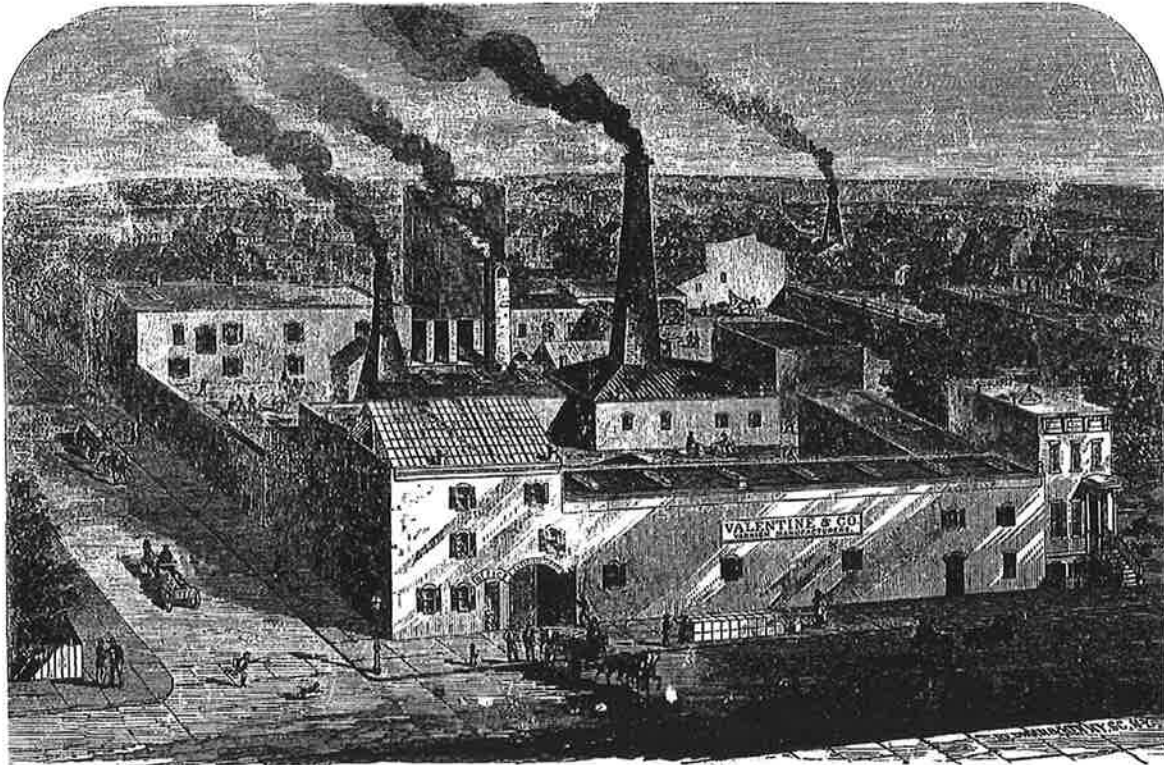
Valentine attracted Homer with the significant salary of \$5,000 per year (Connolly 1-2). One might imagine the Homer family’s reaction to this improbable offer. Yet, the scientific methods employed by Homer produced, for the Valentine Company, the first varnishes that could be poured directly from the can to any part of a carriage, with a smooth flow that dried to perfection. With this product, the company was ready to take on the world—and would soon do so from New York City, America’s emerging world center for commerce and industry.



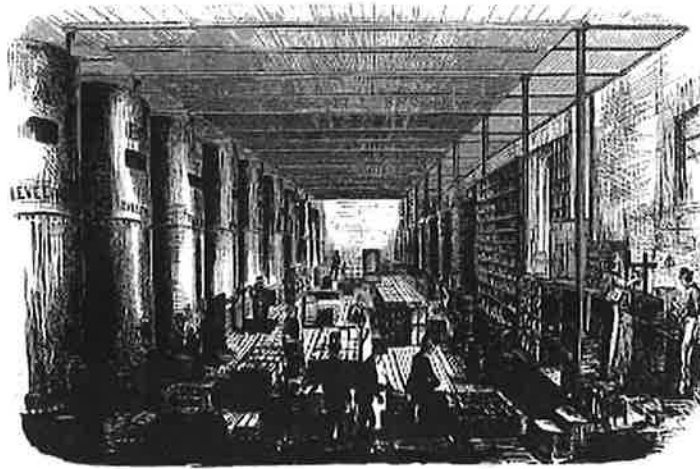
Painter's Closet.

NEW YORK CITY

In the years following 1870, the union of Valentine and Homer forged a competitive advantage for the Valentine varnish business. Drawn by the growth of New York and spurred by a fire at their Massachusetts factory, the Valentine Company moved from Boston to New York between 1870 and 1872 (Gould 44). The company set up offices at 88 Chambers Street, and Lawson moved into 19 Fifth Avenue (Trows 1872). By 1873, Charles Homer resided at 36 Washington Square South. The company history also illustrates a substantial Valentine Varnish Factory at 364 Ewen Street in Brooklyn (Hendricks 124) (*see figure below*).



The competitive advantages of New York appear to have been substantial, given the apparent size of the packing department (*see figure next page*). The move to New York City enabled the company to devise and execute an aggressive, growth-oriented marketing plan.



**Interior of Packing Department:
Valentine & Company's Varnish Factory**

Many the discouraged business men who have thrown up the sponge and cried 'Hold!' just at the critical moment when Fortune, long hid in ambush, had begun to unfold the white flag. — *HarpWeek*

Valentine's strategy was classic in its simplicity and focus—pick a market segment, focus on the market leader, and aggressively advertise product superiority. His execution was equally innovative and creative. A hard-hitting market approach characterized the Valentine business for future decades, culminating in the successful introduction of the patented Valspar product in 1907 (see [Figure 6: Patent](#)). An 1873, cartoon-style advertisement illustrates this approach. Beneath the headline, "The Coachmakers Valentine," a series of vignettes reinforce the role of science in raising their product's technical superiority above the English competition, and proclaims the Valentine product to be the "standard" for the world (see figure at right).

The company history states that Valentine and Company began to specialize in vehicle finishes in 1876. In 1877, the company moved their offices to 323 Pearl Street, and, the following year, Lawson's residence is listed as 64 Fifth Avenue. That year, they also opened a Chicago Office at 66 Lake Street, to serve western markets.

A Valentine company magazine from 1880, entitled *Around the World*, captured the strength of the company's approach to the market. The magazine consisted of 100 plus pages of endorsement letters, illustrations of



Valentine Company capabilities, advertising slogans, and reproductions of international awards for quality that the company's products had won (see figures below). For example, letter #356, from J & F Allen in London, states that Valentine Varnishes "...are the best I have ever used in my more than fifty's [sic] year's experience." In 1882, the company again began to manufacture varnish in Boston (*Valspar History*).



As a businessman, Valentine was well ahead of his time. He created a modern workplace that brought out the best in his employees, with gymnasiums and recreation rooms for workers, telephones and typewriters for the clerical staff, and the latest scientific equipment in the factories (Connolly 2). He published a magazine for the transportation industry, titled *The Hub*, which provided useful information to his clients while featuring Valentine products. It was a clever use of an editorial format to promote a brand name. *The Hub* was printed at the Pearl Street location and promoted in company literature (see figure, next page).

To stimulate competition among his manufacturing clients, Valentine reported sales of varnish products in the magazine, broken down by the individual towns that produced buggies and carriages (Connolly 2). Like any industry, the carriage manufacturing trade had its geographic centers of concentration. According to C.M.Snyder, in *Buggy Town*, a book about Mifflinburg, Pennsylvania, one such center was north-central Pennsylvania. In Mifflinburg, says Snyder, manufacturer William Heiss, adopted "...Valentine's Vanadium Varnishes of New York that catered to the buggy business" in the belief that Valentine's Varnishes would boost his own sales (152).



Valentine created, and mastered, sales promotion techniques to increase customer loyalty. He once literally sent out keys to his factory to varnish painters and invited them to visit "their" factory. He also knew how to turn contemporary events into public relations windfalls, such as the time he offered free paint to homeowners who had suffered damage in the Johnstown Flood.

The introduction of Valentine's "Numerical Varnishes" in 1889 proved to be his best marketing strategy, demonstrating true insight into the psyches of vehicle varnish painters. Numbers from 10-100, rather than fanciful names, identified this new line of varnishes. A painter's guide indulged the customer's creative instincts and desire to mix product to suit local conditions and perceived needs. This allowed each vehicle manufacturer to claim a unique finishing formula (Connolly 3). In 1890, Valentine Numerical Varnishes were broadly featured in New York City directories and magazines.

Occasionally, however, Valentine went too far and had to retreat, as when he disparaged the British Lion and English products in an advertisement. The ad was quickly dropped when he received international criticism (Connolly 4).

Lawson Valentine had proved himself a master marketer and accomplished businessman. In 1880, he was ready to expand his horizons to other ventures.

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION.
PHILADELPHIA, 1876.

The United States Centennial Commission has examined the report of the Judges, and accepted the following reasons, and decreed an award in conformity therewith.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 21st Dec 1877.

REPORT ON AWARDS.

Product, *Coach and Car Varnishes*

Name and address of Exhibitor, *Valentine & Company, New York City, New York*

The undersigned, having examined the product herein described, respectfully recommends the same to the United States Centennial Commission for Award, for the following reasons, viz:

A full display of Varnishes for the Carriage and Railway Car makers use, the merits and qualities of these Varnishes are fully sustained by numerous testimonials, and affidavits of parties who have used them and by the presence in the Exhibition of many carriages, by the best makers in the Country which have been finished with them, and furnish further positive proof of the great excellence of these Varnishes, in working, quality, color, brilliancy and durability.

Thomas J. Roddard

Signature of the Judge

APPROVAL OF GROUP JUDGES.

B. J. Morris
W. H. West
William Duffus

[Signature lines]

A true Copy of the record.

Thomas J. Roddard

Chief of the Bureau of Awards

Given by authority of the United States Centennial Commission.

A. T. GOSHORN,
Director-General.

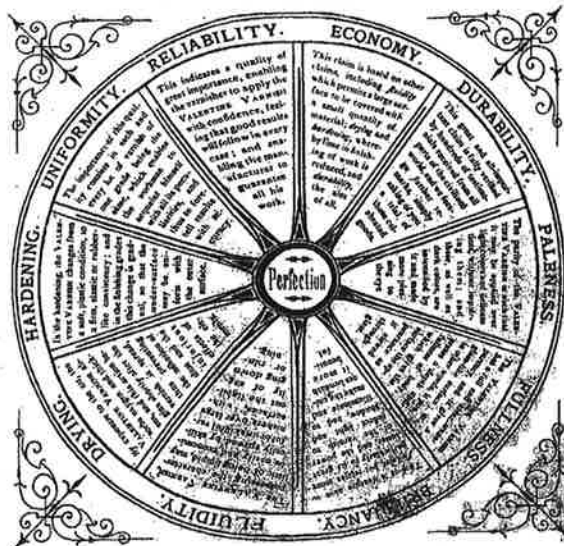
J. L. CAMPBELL,
Secretary.

J. R. HAWLEY,
President.

Houghton-Mifflin

Lawson Valentine showed that his interests went far beyond varnish when he helped in the formation of the Houghton-Mifflin Publishing Company. This venerable Boston institution had

VALENTINE BRAND OF VARNISH
ARE FOUND, COMMERCE,
ALL QUALITIES DEMANDED
BY THE BEST CARRIAGE AND CAR-BUILDERS, BEST VARNISHERS, AND ALL OWNERS OF VEHICLES:
THE MOST PROMINENT OF WHICH ARE ENUMERATED BELOW:



SUPPORTED BY THESE NUMEROUS GOOD QUALITIES,
VALENTINE VARNISHES
Best and latest make also sold in the
BEST COACH AND CAR FACORIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

Chicago. **Valentine & Company**, New-York.

its origins on the corner of Washington and School Streets in 1832, when John Allen and William Ticknor bought the Old Corner Bookshop. Ticknor’s eventual partnership with James T. Fields produced a publishing house that would carry the finest authors in America – Longfellow, Holmes, Emerson, Stowe, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Twain. An important partner to the firm was The Riverside Press, started in Cambridge, in 1852, by Henry Houghton (Miller 7-8).

Houghton skillfully managed to develop several publishing partnerships and eventually succeeded in gaining control of the works of these important authors. Unfortunately, in 1880, the company, in partnership with James R. Osgood, was already laboring under extremely heavy debt when it suffered a disastrous fire in its Boston facility. The partnership was dissolved, and Henry Houghton knew that without an immediate infusion of capital, all would be lost (Ballou 2-3). At that very moment, it was reported, “In

New York, a prosperous paint manufacturer and former Cambridge friend of Houghton’s, learning of the Houghton, Osgood’s catastrophe, entrained for Boston” (270).

Lawson Valentine guaranteed \$200,000 in partnership capital, which allowed Houghton to create Houghton, Mifflin & Company. The news of the new firm prompted one industry critic to comment on “...the wonder that a man in varnish was now to put a little polish on the minds of men as well as carriages”(277).

The new firm also owned the rights to books authored by William Dean Howells, and published the *Atlantic Magazine*, of which Howells was then editor (290). Thus, in 1880, Houghton, Howells, and Valentine were united in business and bolstered by a common connection with Cambridge. The euphoria of this union was not long lasting, however, as the economic turmoil of that era finally reached Lawson Valentine.

“Reported Failure of L. Valentine”

Page one of the *New York Daily Tribune* on December 24, 1882, announced the business failure of Lawson Valentine. The article described his property holdings and confirmed that he had turned the varnish company over to his brother. He was known to be wealthy, and he, therefore, presumably had large liabilities.

This failure had potentially severe implications for Houghton, Mifflin & Company. Ellen Ballou describes this episode, saying, “In the business downturn of 1882, a loan of \$90,000 made by Valentine to an associate was defaulted, forcing him to sell his interest in the varnish business to cover his liabilities” (283). Valentine’s total debt was, in a large part, the result of the agricultural and cattle activities at Houghton Farm. The *Tribune* article mentioned that the farm’s previous owner, Robert H. Berdell, ex-president of the Erie Railroad, had suffered in a similar manner (1). Henry Houghton, in support of his friend, called the loan defaulter “a thief,” but, nevertheless, his partner was in deep financial trouble (Ballou 285).

Lawson Valentine’s response to this potentially devastating event revealed his strength of character and high moral integrity. His actions contrast starkly with prevailing perceptions of the business ethics and practices at the time. Rather than calling on his Houghton-Mifflin capital to settle his liabilities, Valentine sacrificed his position in the company to ensure that the highly leveraged publishing firm, itself, did not fall into bankruptcy. This courageous act could not have gone unnoticed by his new associate, William Dean Howells.

Silas Lapham

In 1884, as William Dean Howells was writing *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, he understood well the causes of most business failure, as well as the ethics of most businessmen. He belonged to the Realist school of literature, which eschewed the false sentiment and moralizing that characterized romantic literature (Ballou 301). While Howells could not call on personal experiences in writing about the paint business, as he had done in earlier novels, he did not have to look far for relevant experience. Boston was the center for New England’s paint and varnish business, and, of course, he had a direct association with Lawson Valentine, through the publishing house.

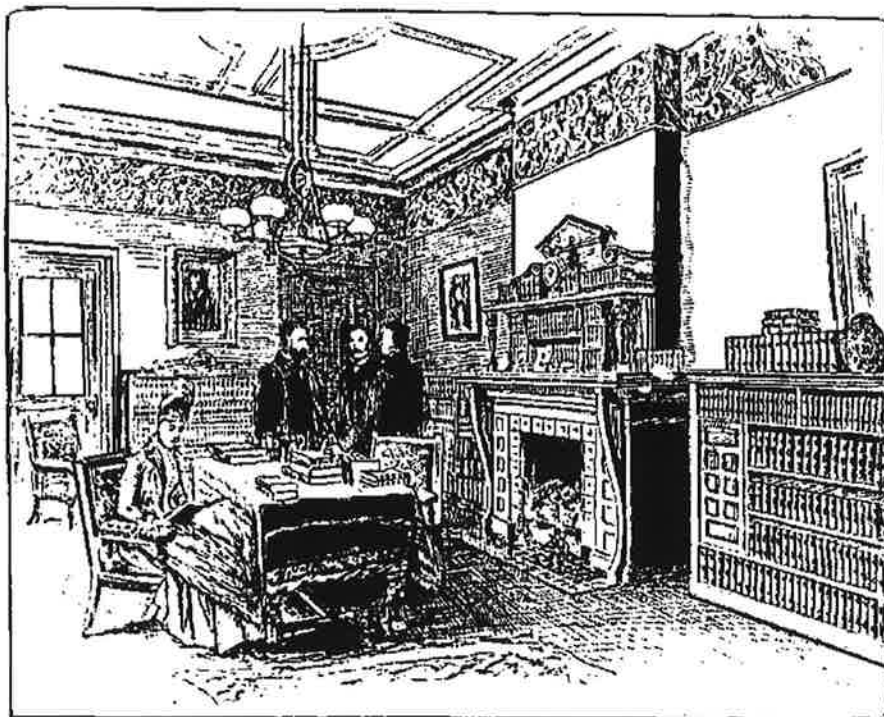
George L. Gould, in his 1914 speech, “Historical Sketch,” about the origins of Boston’s paint business, provided further evidence of this connection. “I well remember reading the story of the excursion as told by the delightful author William Dean Howells in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* thirty years or more ago...He [Howells] interviewed certain paint men, and thus obtained useful information as to paint, which he used shrewdly” (4). Gould goes on to identify Lawson Valentine as one of those men, relating Valentine’s factory fire, and subsequent move to New York City (95).

Ellen Ballou further states that Howells’ books contain specific information that he personally gathered from a variety of sources. She quotes Howells as saying that “...an author is merely one who has the fortune to remember more...A good many critics will tell you that writing is inventing; but I know it is more than that; it is only remembering ... the history of your own life” (271).

Howells’ novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* portrays a businessman’s ultimate moral rise, at the expense of his material well-being, when he forsakes a deceptive transaction. His business is paint, and the story centers on his home in Cambridge and offices in Boston. Howells’ familiarity with specific industry jargon and practices required a level of access to the paint and varnish business that was readily available in Lawson Valentine. The fictional Silas Lapham, like the real Lawson Valentine, demonstrated true strength of character, unlike the amorality typically associated with the robber baron era.

Fortunately, Lawson Valentine’s financial setback proved to be temporary, and he was soon to recover from his reported “failure.”

THE NEW YORK BOOK PARLOR



A Room in the New York Office, No. 11 East Seventeenth Street.

The restructuring of the Valentine Varnish business, with his brother Henry in the role of president, provided Lawson the opportunity to shift his focus to artistic and literary endeavors. This change is evident in the New York City Directory of 1882, which lists his occupation as “books,” at 11 East 17th Street. While Lawson Valentine, as a “financial partner” in Houghton-Mifflin, was not required to participate actively in the business, he did so as a matter of choice. Lawson believed that he could bring his focused marketing approach to the selling of books. His Boston partners thought just the opposite and sought to minimize exposure there. However, Valentine pressed Houghton so persuasively that the company soon opened its first “Book Parlor,” on 17th Street. Lawson’s enthusiasm for this project was recorded in a telegram to Boston announcing, “I am ready for action, action!” (Ballou 306).

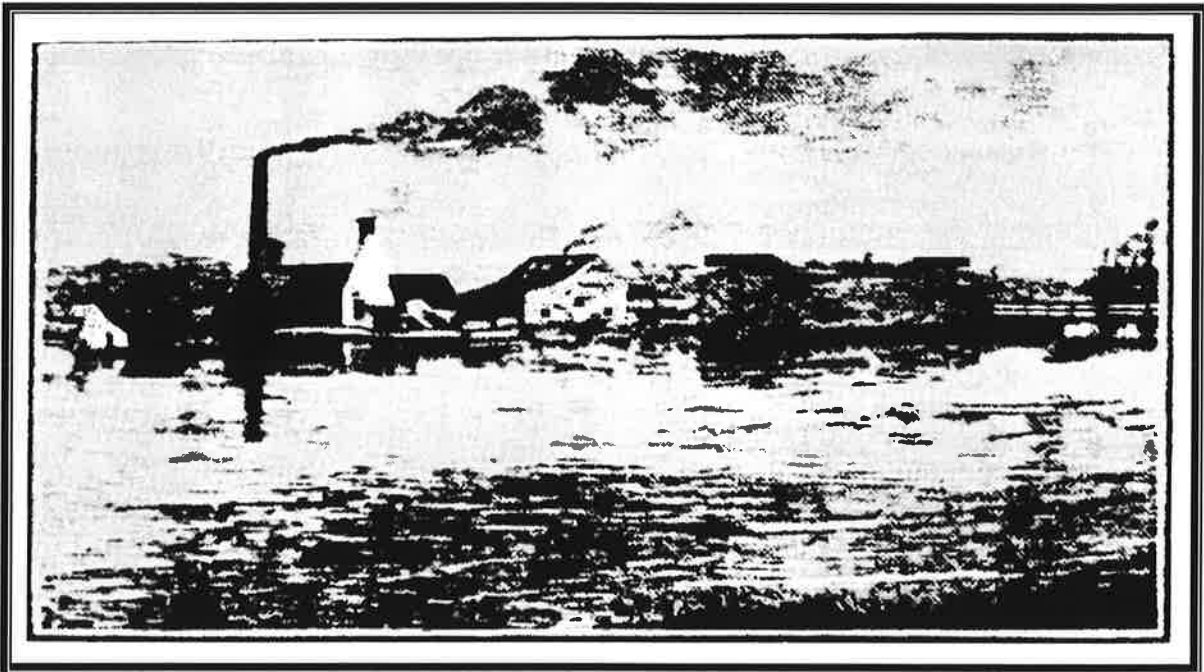
His plan was to market Houghton-Mifflin authors to the wealthy with high-priced, high-quality, limited edition, illustrated books and exclusive subscriptions sold in innovative book parlors. The upscale book parlors were designed to appeal to the new business elite, including, August Belmont, Nicholas Roosevelt, and T.A. Havemeyer (Ballou 307). Lawson Valentine’s membership in the exclusive Union League Club provided needed access to this audience.

A company pamphlet, *The Sketch of the Firm*, described The Houghton-Mifflin Book Parlor, at its opening, as being "...as luxurious as a private library. The walls were papered with Pompeian design in light brown with a green frieze, and comfortable chairs in front of an open fire invited a book lover to sit and leaf through some handsomely bound books displayed on the cherry table" (see *figure on previous page*). The Book Parlor's opening reception "...made it seem...as if a large bit of the intellectual life of Boston had been transferred to New York." The guests included a number of authors and critics, among whom were Dr. Morgan Dix, Justin Winsor of Cambridge, Helen Hunt, Abby Sage Richardson, E.C. Stedman, Richard Grant White, and W.D. Howells (30). This reference to Howells in Valentine's bookshop provides further evidence of their association.

When the Boston partners began pressing Valentine for his future plans in New York City, his reply revealed his aggressive entrepreneurial instincts. "You know as well as I do," he answered, "that no fellow can define how he is going to fight and win a battle beforehand. A good general would rather be shot on the spot than undertake to tell a committee how and what he is going to do to win" (Ballou 307).

The "general" prevailed. Lawson Valentine, once again, devised a winning business strategy that brought strong American competition to a market segment previously controlled by English publishing houses. The extensive Houghton-Mifflin library of authors and titles proved to be excellent sources for limited editions "*de luxe*." Thus, Valentine's vision taught Houghton-Mifflin that a profitable market existed for limited editions—the more limited, the more lucrative.

Lawson's positive association with literary circles carried over into the arts; that discussion, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper.



Woodcut of the first factory to bear the Valentine & Company name; attributed to Winslow Homer.

Winslow Homer



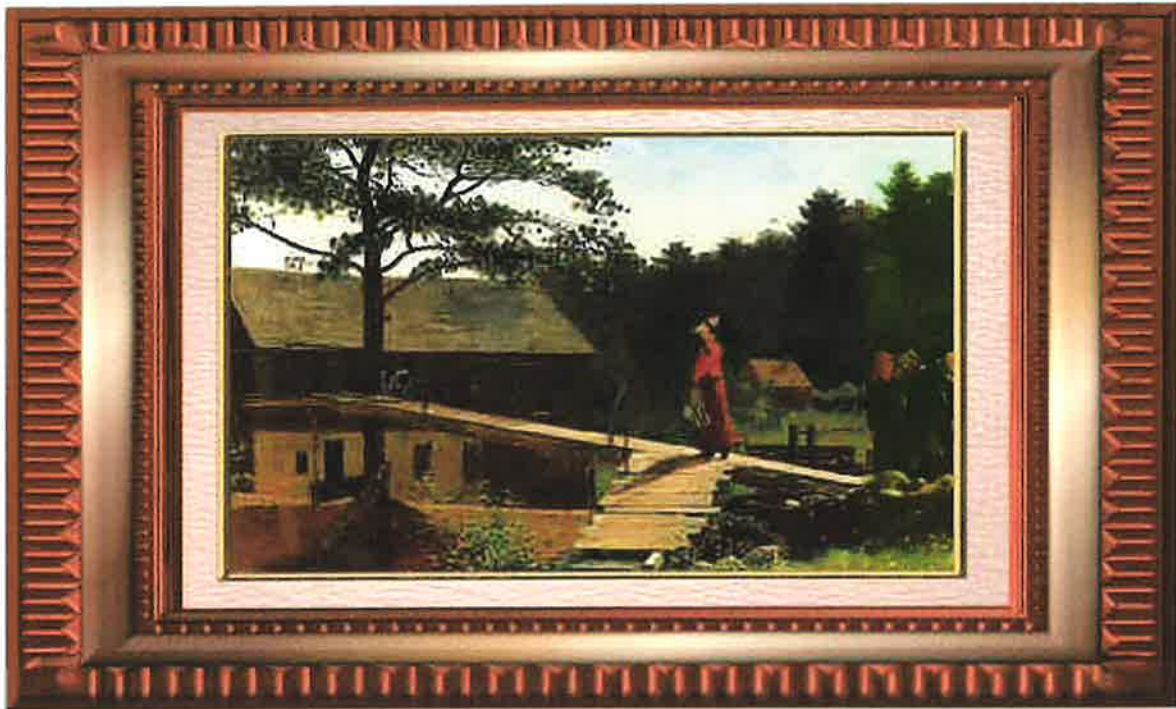
Homer preceded his Cambridge friend to New York City by more than a decade, moving, in 1860, to #8 University Building. Gordon Hendricks reported that, in 1859, Homer spent some time in New York, residing at 52 East 16th Street, while taking art lessons in Brooklyn, on Nassau Street (263). In 1882 he moved to 79 Washington Square. Once again, the Valentines and Homers were neighbors, only now in New York City.

Winslow Homer's professional career dates back to 1854, in Boston. His father, Charles S. Homer, was never in a financial position to support the young artist's career. His Boston hardware business failed, and he never struck it rich in California, panning for gold. A European scheme with the adventurer John C. Fremont once again proved fruitless, and his business career floundered (Hendricks 70). Thus Winslow Homer would have to seek support from another source to pursue his career. Evidence that Homer produced a popular woodcut of a Valentine Varnish Factory (see [figure above](#), page 17) suggests a very early, formal relationship between Winslow and Lawson (Ayers, 73).

Linda Ayers states, "Lawson and his brother Henry have long been credited as important early patrons of the artist providing necessary support ...before Homer was well known"(19). Lawson is reported to have acquired almost forty of Homer's paintings, especially works done at Houghton Farm in the late 1870's. Homer is known to have visited with the Valentine family in the summer of 1874, at Walden, New York. In 1877, Lawson's wife, Lucy Houghton Valentine, commissioned Homer to paint family portraits in their Fifth Avenue residence (20). However, the purchase of the farm, in 1876, provided the greatest support for the artist's career. In 1878, Winslow Homer spent considerable time there, working in his own studio, provided by the Valentines (21).

The Valentines took an active interest in the artist's career, and they remained, throughout their lives, among his most steadfast patrons. The *Times* obituary credited Lawson Valentine with being generous and providing the means to enable men prominent in art to succeed. Considering the stature of Winslow Homer today, this aspect, alone, of Valentine's life makes him most worthy of recognition.





Homer's "Morning Bell" captures a group of young women on their way to work at the mill.

The Gilded Age

Lawson Valentine's success in the varnish business, his influential role with W.D. Howells and Houghton-Mifflin, and his patronage of Winslow Homer are all symbolized in the move from rural Cambridge to New York. The 1880s have been called the Gilded Age, an age marked by conspicuous consumption from the newly wealthy, particularly the Rockefellers, Carnegies, and Vanderbilts. Following the Panic of 1873, and the economic slump that continued for the rest of that decade, the 1880's were remarkably prosperous. Innovations such as the steam elevator, the telephone, electricity, and the elevated railroad completely transformed both business and residential life. New York City grew into a distinctly modern, international city as a result its culture, finance, and manufacturing (Stern 8-11). Lawson Valentine was a manifestation of this new world, at ease with its pace and demands. His life in New York, his contacts, and his achievements are inseparable.

The rewards for his many successes were evident in his selection of residences and lifestyle. His two homes on Fifth Avenue, first at #19 and then #64, were in a neighborhood made famous by Delmonico's Restaurant, which "...played a pivotal role in teaching New Yorkers – and the still young and puritanical nation as a whole – how to enjoy itself in public" (Stern 731). His homes were close to The Ladies' Mile, and just a short carriage ride up Fifth Avenue to his Union League Club, at 39th Street. It was a most desirable neighborhood. The portraits painted by Homer at the residence at #64 indicate a prosperous lifestyle (Ayers 21).

Valentine's temporary retreat from New York City to Houghton Farm as a principle residence, in 1887 and 1888, is only relative, considering the scale of this country facility. When the farm was purchased in 1876, it was 514 acres; by 1903 it had been expanded to 850 acres. The Erie Railroad serviced the farm, and, in the summer, guests arrived on the Hudson River Steamer. The region surrounding the farm was popular with the New York elite. Houghton

Farm contained a spacious main house, a studio-guest house used by Homer, and many buildings dedicated to “scientific” agriculture (Hendricks 125). The farm, or agricultural station, as it was called, was under the direction of Henry E. Alvord. Alvord has been credited with organizing the first dairy cooperative, inventing the glass milk bottle, and pioneering the development of oleomargarine (Hendricks 125). Lawson Valentine’s breadth of intellectual curiosity and exploration would appear to have been endless.



The Pumpkin Patch (1878)

Painted at Houghton Farm

In 1888, the Valentine primary residence returned to New York, to an apartment at 155 West 58th Street. At this time a booming real estate market, new building technology, and the acceptance by the wealthy of apartment living produced landmark apartment structures such as the Dakota and Chelsea (Stern 564). William Dean Howells commented that “the New York ideal of a flat...was inflexibly seven rooms and a bath. One or two rooms might be at the front, the rest crooked and cornered backward through increasing then decreasing darkness until they reached a light bedroom or kitchen in the rear.” Howells spoke from firsthand experience, for, like the Valentines, he and his wife chose this form of residence and its attendant life style. Howells, it is reported, looked at nearly 100 options before settling on the Chelsea at 222 West 23rd Street. This apartment, or “home club,” featured rich ornamentation, a French chef, and a roof garden (Stern 567).

The Valentine’s next moved into the “Spanish Flats,” an eight building complex on Central Park. The individual buildings all were arranged around central courtyards that were fully

landscaped with trees and fountains. The complex generated its own electricity, pumped its own water from wells, and created its own steam heat. The individual apartments were enormous, many with a drawing room, reception hall, library, dining room, kitchen, and six bedrooms. The servants' rooms were separate. The building, itself, was made of granite, brownstone, and brick, designed in the Queen Anne Style. It attracted the most prestigious families in the City and facilitated the right contacts (Stern 550-553).



Girl Picking Clover (at Houghton Farm) by Winslow Homer

LAWSON VALENTINE COMPANY

In 1889, the Lawson Valentine Company was founded. The City Directory of that year lists Lawson as President and William Hadwin Houghton as Treasurer. The firm's capitalization is listed at \$100,000, with offices at 1713 Broadway. Valentine and Company, with brother Henry as President, and Charles S. Homer, Jr., as a Director, had capitalization of \$500,00 with offices at 245 Broadway. At this time, the Lawson Valentine Company advertised in the City Directory its line of "numerical polishes." In addition to the varnish business, Lawson remained engaged in publishing, with the 11 East 17th Street address as the business office for that enterprise. In subsequent years, the Lawson Valentine Varnish business moved first to 30 Lafayette Place, and then to 47 Park Row, with a factory at Hunter's Point.

Both business entities survived Lawson Valentine's death in 1891 and are listed in the City Directory until 1897. Thereafter, Valentine and Company became the sole continuing business organization. By 1899, the capital stock of Valentine and Company was \$1,250,000 (*Valspar History*). The Valentine family remained active in the former affairs of Lawson, including publishing and the Houghton Farm (Ayers 24). Lucy Houghton Valentine died in 1911, in their apartment at 155 West 58th Street. In 1896, she was listed as a director in the varnish company. In 1908, when Houghton-Mifflin incorporated, Lucy Valentine received 1056 shares of \$100 par value stock (Ballou 494). Clearly, Lawson Valentine's business ventures had flourished!

In 1910 Winslow Homer died, and, like his friend Lawson Valentine, his body was returned to Cambridge, for internment at Mount Auburn Cemetery (Ayers 26).



Photo of a hand-soldered can of paint from the 1880's. The company claims that the paint inside is still usable.

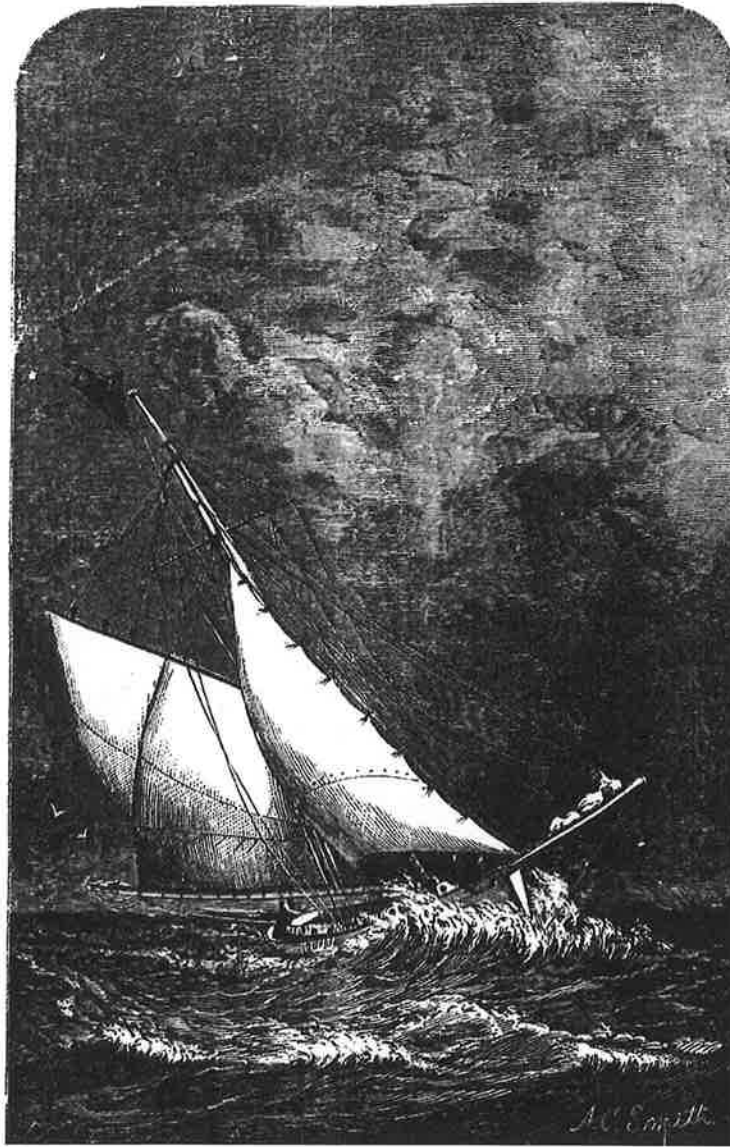
Valspar

Today the Valspar Corporation, a \$2 billion, worldwide business, is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

According to *Valspar 160 Years*, in 1903, Lawson Valentine Pulsifer, the grandson of Lawson Valentine, having majored in chemistry at Harvard, joined the firm, working under the direction of Charles S. Homer, Jr. He was granted permission to work on creating a varnish that would not whiten. That attribute had eluded industry chemists, including Homer, since its inception. Pulsifer began experimenting with an old jar of Chinese tung oil, which eventually unlocked the secret to Valspar, "the varnish that won't turn white." It was none other than Lyman Abbott who suggested the name, a blending of "Valentine" and "spar." At that time, "spar varnishes" represented the most durable product available, the varnishes used to protect ships' spars from the harsh sea

weather and salt spray (Connolly 5) (see [figure below](#)).

The company originally marketed Valspar as a marine varnish. However, when advertising great A.W. Erickson came up with the signature demonstration, showing a man pouring boiling water on the top of a table to an amazed lady, his mass advertising turned the brand into a household word (Connolly 6). That demonstration, with its simple slogan, and its claim to be “The Varnish that won’t turn white,” has sustained the brand for almost a century (*see composite advertisement*, showing how that ad has changed, and yet remained the same, over the years). The Valspar patent (*see Figure 6: Patent*) indicates a first use in 1907, and the company history describes its successful product launch at the Grand Rapids Furniture Show in 1908. The corporate history of McCann-Erickson Advertising, *Truth Well Told*, by Stewart Alter, lists the Valspar advertising and the Valentine Company relationship as important to both companies’ early success. It states, “Valentine was also one of Erickson’s client companies in which he would become involved as a stockholder and a director” (9). Lawson Valentine’s legacy was able to attract and hold talent long after he had passed.



“A Wet Sheet and a Flowing Sea.”



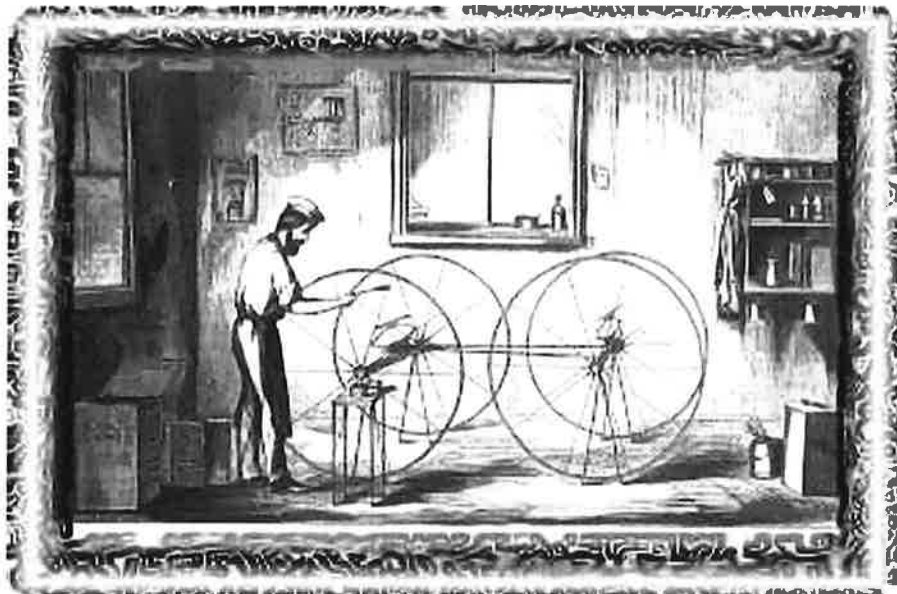
AFTERWORD

This paper presents the life of a remarkable 19th century businessman and gentleman, Lawson Valentine. Conventional histories of this period emphasize the role of business trusts in gaining monopoly positions in major markets and characterize business leaders as “robber barons.” Jay Gould personifies this breed of businessman, and his notoriety persists as “the most hated man in America” (Calkins 283).

Valentine, however, eschewed this approach and built a successful varnish business with innovation and creativity. He also used his resources positively to enhance and sustain the Houghton-Mifflin partnership, when self interest and preservation would have directed the opposite tack. His achievements and character influenced William Dean Howells’ novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, in which the lead character, a paint and varnish businessman, given the choice, chose morality over wealth. Valentine’s support allowed Winslow Homer to develop his artistic talents and become an important, American figure in the international art world. Valentine’s death, at 64, cut short his agricultural experiments; one can only wonder where they would have led. The Age of the American Renaissance is symbolized in Lawson Valentine’s life and legacy. His achievements, methods, and influence merit further study and documentation.

More research will be needed to chronicle the contributions of Valentine’s extended family and determine the family and social relationships of the many Houghtons who are referenced. To date, this researcher has identified archives in Boston, Cambridge, Minneapolis, Newburg, New York, and Colby College which contain family correspondence and other sources that await investigation. Furthermore, Valentine family members have told this researcher that they are willing to cooperate and would be available for interviews.

All these will be pursued in time.



Applying paint to a carriage in the Gear Room

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Valspar Patent

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Linda Ayres provided me a copy of the *Golden Threads* lecture and the Lyman Abbott eulogy, both of which I had been unable to locate. Jay Vawter introduced me to Allen Doyle and the Valentine family. Dawn C. Warnke at the Valspar Corporation kindly agreed to supply company history. My wife, Pat, and Stephen Ellerin of The Great American Publishing Society (www.gramps.org) did the final editing. Thank you all.

R.M.P.