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Providential Progress
The Post-Revolutionary World of Robert Crawford

May 2012

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Providential Progress

The Post-Revolutionary World of Robert Crawford

AN HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, MESSIAH
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In 1776, Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence. It included the now famous words “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Upon the successful completion of the Revolutionary War, the government and people of the United States had to implement these words into their daily lives. The Revolution created new opportunities in education and industry for regular people to seek “the pursuit of Happiness.” Such revolutionary ambition has often been explained in terms of “self-made” individuals who work to “make it” on their own. This ambition has been understood as the product of the Enlightenment, an eighteenth-century movement in which self-improvement was considered possible without divine intervention or a life of faith. However, to explain the social mobility of the post-revolutionary generation in purely secular terms misses the important role that religion played in the lives of the early republic’s most ambitious men. Some believed in a providential God who controlled their lives and orchestrated their successes. And, to explain this generation in purely individualistic terms misses the centrality of friends and mentors to these peoples’ accomplishments.

Robert Crawford (1804-1896), a New England minister who kept an extensive memoir and diary, is an example of the way ambition, providential faith, and community merged in the early republic. Crawford is representative of a generation of Americans born after the Revolution who blended a modern commitment to self-improvement with a deeply held faith in a God who directs the lives of his creation according to his will. For Crawford, American ambition and God’s providence were not incompatible ideas. Both informed his pursuit of an “American dream” and both were grounded in community.

Historiography

Born in 1804, Crawford shared the world view of the young people described by Joyce Appleby as the “First Generation of Americans.” Appleby studied the autobiographies and memoirs of the first generation of children to discover how their lives differed from those of their parents. These young people had to find for themselves the meaning of the Revolution. They came of age in a country which valued individualism and democracy, and chose to fashion their lives around these ideals. Many of these young men and women grew up on family farms, and they continued to farm during their adolescence and early adulthood years. But they wanted more. Although some were unable to break free of the farm because of their particular circumstances, many used education and teaching jobs as a way out of their agricultural lives. Because these new Americans grew up surrounded by the ideals of the Revolution, they were, as Appleby writes, “psychologically ready for innovations,” and this willingness to accept change “endowed them with the special burden of fulfilling American predictions of progress.”¹ As we will see later, Crawford was influenced by these American ideals of progress and success.²

Many of these young people wrote memoirs and autobiographies describing their social rise. Appleby notes that memoir writers self-consciously wrote to share their life stories with future generations. In other words, their memoirs were “crafted as literary backward glances – at once artful and reflective, often introspective and sometimes quite compelling.”³ Appleby noticed a number of similar themes in her survey of early republic memoirs. Many described distant fathers, supportive mothers, intensely passionate feelings towards God, the pressure for

¹ Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 121.

² Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*.

³ *Ibid.*, 164.

success, the importance of new transportation and communication systems, temperance, and slavery.⁴ Crawford, clearly influenced by those around him, referenced all of these ideas in his writings. Of all these common themes, Appleby's description of this cohort's intense religious experiences is crucial. She notes that "the most passionate feelings that men and women in the first generation expressed in print came when they wrote about their relations with God."⁵ Appleby describes the intense revivals that Christians experienced during this time, and shows that these spiritual awakenings influenced various reform movements like temperance and eventually abolition. While these ideas were integral to moral and social reform, Appleby fails to observe that these spiritual beliefs could also work in harmony with ideas about personal progress and ambition.

As has been mentioned, ambition was one of the key aspects of these early Americans' worldview. J. M. Opal notes that "ambition is central to the American self-concept...the United States has undergone profound changes since the formation of the republic....somehow, ambition arrived with the modern, and with the nation."⁶ In other words, ambition, while a key aspect of American culture today, did not always exist. It formed after the Revolution as more opportunities for education and non-agricultural careers became available. Far from inevitable, the journey "beyond the farm" was difficult. Upwardly mobile young people had to struggle against eighteenth-century ideas about priorities and progress which valued virtue and viewed ambition as greedy. Eighteenth-century British colonists in the Americas viewed ambition negatively because it "sought the elusive esteem of strangers more than the grounded respect of

⁴ Ibid., 165, 172-174, 194-195, 235.

⁵ Ibid., 165, 182, 194-195, 235.

⁶ J. M. Opal, *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), vii.

kin.”⁷ Writers of the time continually encouraged people to be content with their circumstances rather than to envy the opportunities, land, and material goods of others. Despite this negative connotation, young people gradually began to strive towards bigger and better things. They went to college, created their own businesses, founded new villages, and built roads and canals. Even the religious, such as pastors, were not immune from the effects of ambition. Opal writes that “the ambition to serve God across imagined historical space became a positive distinction for young pastors.”⁸ Ministers traveled from town to town and switched denominations as better opportunities arose throughout their careers. Few invested in one particular community for their entire lives. Thus, Opal, like Appleby, references Christianity as an important part of the worldview of Americans and notes that even ministers felt the call of ambition on their lives. However, when it comes to the role that faith played in the lives of young people in the early republic, Opal’s argument lacks nuance. Ministers had motivations to serve God, and they sought to follow God’s providential wisdom in their ambitious career moves.⁹

Success, ambition, and independence were made possible in the early Republic by new educational opportunities. David Allmendinger Jr. uses the phrase “pauper scholars” to describe a specific group of students in New England who left the farm to go to college. Even though they did not have enough money for tuition, they left home because there was not enough work for them to do on the farm. This cohort could not depend on their families for money to pay their college bills, but instead had to look for funds from the American Education Society or fend for themselves. This made students more self-sufficient, independent, and frugal. They boarded

⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁸ Ibid., 162-163.

⁹ Opal, *Beyond the Farm*.

with families during the school year to save money, and scattered across the countryside when school was not in session to teach younger students and earn money for tuition.¹⁰

Because these “pauper scholars” had similar experiences, they tended to form lifelong friendships which facilitated their later careers. A specific subset of this group, evangelical males like Crawford, formed unique friendships. Because these men had a shared faith, Jessica Warner notes that they formed life-long relationships. Warner’s study focused on men involved with the American Temperance Society in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. She found that most of these men were born in rural towns to poor farm families in the decades after the American Revolution. They worked their way through college (and were often the first in their family to strive for a college education) in order to get away from the farm. While in college, they bonded over shared evangelical experience and an understanding of each others’ intense relationship with God. These men’s friendships continued to grow after college because they were grounded in this similar, strong faith. Not only were these relationships important for personal reasons, but they provided crucial career opportunities as well. Many of these men went on to pursue careers in the ministry. Thus, they traded pulpits, went to conferences together, encouraged each other to keep learning, and wrote regular letters of encouragement. Their successful careers were dependent upon each other, and upon their common faith.¹¹

These friendships gained power because they were grounded in specific social communities, in this case the community of educated, Christian men in New England. According to historians Jane Nylander and Karen Hansen, community was integral to daily life

¹⁰ David F. Allmendinger, Jr., *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975).

¹¹ Jessica Warner, “Evangelical Male Friendships in America’s First Age of Reform,” *Journal of Social History* 43, no 2 (Spring 2010): 681-705.

after the Revolution. Nylander argues that, “if New England households depended for their subsistence on an extended family and an interchange of goods and services among relatives and neighbors, there was also a strong web of mutual concern and lively social intercourse, which both developed out of this system and nurtured it.”¹² Hansen notes that friendships were strong because they were imbedded within networks of reciprocity. Both men and women called upon each other for help, and offered their own services in return. People depended upon each other for survival, but also valued regular social visits. Town ministers like Crawford played an important role in this social web and were expected to care for the entire community’s well being. People came to him, and his wife, for theological as well as practical advice. Communities in the antebellum era differed from their pre-revolutionary forerunners. They were in continual flux because of the available geographic mobility in the region. When people moved for the promise of a better life, they had to leave behind their networks of friends and form new relationships in new communities.¹³

Because faith was so integral to the New England community as well as young evangelical friendships, it is important to understand what these young men actually believed. Two important aspects of faith for Crawford, and many of these young, newly educated men, were providentialism and belief in an “orthodox” theology. Crawford believed in a providential God who controlled his personal life, as well as the course of the United States. Nicholas Guyatt refers to these beliefs as “personal providentialism” and “national providentialism”

¹² Jane C. Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 221.

¹³ Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside*; Karen V. Hansen, *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

respectively.¹⁴ He writes that Americans at the time had a strong sense of national providentialism and saw God's hand intervening in the history of the nation from the beginnings of the British Colonies through the American Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War. This allowed them to create an imagined history of positive moments. These moments directly related to American identity and caused Americans to believe that God was always on their side. The concept of personal providentialism, the idea that God regularly intervened in the lives of individuals had a shorter history in America. Even though Americans held on to their national providentialism, they began to see personal providentialism as irrational. However, Crawford's story shows that some Americans were willing to maintain this belief long after it fell out of popular use.¹⁵

Providentialism was only one aspect of Crawford's faith. He was also deeply invested in preserving "orthodox" theology as he watched his friends and churches turn toward more liberal Unitarian theology. Orthodox theology began with the original settlers to Massachusetts and some of the other British colonies in North America. In New England it was both Protestant and Calvinist. A few of its key beliefs were the Bible's authority, justification through faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, original sin, predestination, and salvation for the elect. By the 1800s, Unitarians had abandoned many of these core convictions because, according to them, they did not conform to Enlightenment reason. They denied the divinity of Jesus, believed in a strict monotheism and so rejected the Trinity, and emphasized the inherent goodness of humanity. In this new theological interpretation, Christ became an important moral teacher and

¹⁴ Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5, 7, 51, 257-260, 326.

salvation was achieved through following his example. Most disturbing to Calvinists, Unitarians believed that salvation was available to all, not just to the elect. As we will later see, the orthodox fight against Unitarian theology came to define Crawford's career.¹⁶

The early republic in America was a world of opportunity and education, independence and ambition, deep evangelical friendships and intertwined communities, and strong religious beliefs. Previous historians have compartmentalized these ideas. They understand this time in American history as an era of opportunity. They also understand it as a time of evangelical interest. However, they fail to see that the same people seeking opportunity were simultaneously empowered by religious convictions, and that they were not seeking self-improvement alone, but through a reliance upon their friends and communities. Robert Crawford is an example of a man with deeply held religious beliefs which kept him from fully embracing unlimited progress, but also facilitated his ambitious career.

Life before the United States

I may state here that I had a very thorough religious bringing up. My parents were conscientious in the religious training of their children...Besides attendance at church we children were set to read good books, learn verses of Scripture or hymns...On the whole I think it was of great use in familiarizing our minds with religious truth, & impressing us with the reality of the things pertaining to religion...They tended, doubtless not a little, to keep alive in my mind the desire of some time entering the gospel ministry, to which my parents had taught me to look forward. They had dedicated me to that service at my birth, if God should please to call me to it. - *Memoir*, 1889¹⁷

¹⁶ William K. B. Stoeber, *The Evangelical-Unitarian Division in the Town of Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1807-1835* (Deerfield, MA: Historic Deerfield Summer Fellowship Program, 1962), 15-21; Charles H. Lippy, Robert Choquette, and Stafford Poole, *Christianity Comes to the Americas* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 262-285; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3-16, 162-193.

¹⁷ Robert Crawford, *Memoir* (Deerfield, Massachusetts: Historic Deerfield, 1999-2000), 19-20.

Robert Crawford was born November 24, 1804 in Paisley, Scotland to James and Jane Crawford. His parents valued education and faith, and taught Crawford about Christianity from a young age. At age four, Crawford was enrolled in the local school where he studied reading, writing, and arithmetic. He later transferred to a school in Paisley where he learned English and Latin grammar. Crawford grew up attending church in Linwood where he learned scripture, hymns, and theology at Sabbath School. Because he was raised in this religious environment, Christianity was a part of his life from a very early age and, unlike many of his peers, he was unable to point to a specific moment of conversion. The education that Crawford gained in his early years provided an intellectual base for the rest of his life. From an early age, Crawford learned that education was important, but that it should be understood in connection with faith.¹⁸

In 1821 Robert Crawford and his family, attracted by the promise of inexpensive land and travel expenses provided by the British government, migrated to Canada. The family bought land in rural Lanark and became pioneer farmers. They built themselves a house and helped to develop the town. While striving to improve their farm and land, the Crawfords were careful to rely on God, rather than endeavor for complete self-sufficiency. Writing later, Crawford noted that it was “providential” that the family had enough food to survive the first winter because without this help they could not have done it by themselves. As Lanark grew into a bustling town, Crawford grew into an adult. The town developed a school system, three churches, and a temperance society. Crawford had his first job outside of the farm working on a canal, developed a social life with local young people, and joined the temperance society.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 1-21.

¹⁹ Ibid., 35-68.

By 1826, at the age of twenty-two, Crawford Left the farm and set out to create his own life. He did not have a lot of money because his wages had gone “most willingly” to his family, so he needed to find a job. A number of neighbor boys left home and found work in textile factories in New York. Because of this precedent, and because he had some experience with cotton factories in Scotland, he decided to travel to New York in search of textile factory work.²⁰

The Crawford family’s immigrant experience sheds light on this delicate balance between the quest for new opportunities and a belief in the guidance of a providential God. Violence had recently broken out in their area of Scotland, and Crawford’s parents wanted to escape this bloodshed in order to better their children’s lives. Crawford notes that his father “was buoyed up with the hope of bettering his & our condition” and his mother hoped that the move would allow her to “keep her children about her as they grew up” because “there was plenty of land where we were going” and there was very little land left in Scotland.²¹ In other words, the family was on the move, both literally and figuratively. They were moving to a different continent, and they anticipated that this physical move would bring prosperity. Canada had land, and land could be used to improve oneself and help the family rise socially. However, while the Crawfords were in search of opportunity, or as others might phrase it, “the American Dream,” they did not lose sight of their belief in God’s providential guidance. Throughout this time, Crawford regularly references “Providence” and observes that even when his life did not go as he planned, his God was still in control and guiding him. Unlike some of their fellow immigrants who simply wanted to get ahead in life, the Crawford family’s deep faith informed their decision to immigrate. For

²⁰ Ibid., 68.

²¹ Ibid., 36.

James and Jane Crawford and their children, hope for prosperity in the future was always understood in tandem with a respect for their God’s providential wisdom.

Life as a Factory Worker

I have been impressed, then & ever since, with the amazing importance of the results that have followed, & the wonderful goodness of God in ordering the whole matter, as I firmly believe He did. I cannot express, as I wish I could, my deep sense of this, & my thanksgiving for the result as I view it. It was one of the turning points of my life, carrying with it consequences that will reach on through all the ages. Laus Deo, I say with emphasis. – *Memoir*, 1889²²

With only a change of clothes, food for a few days, his Bible, and about \$5 or \$6 in his pockets, Robert Crawford left home in 1826 to search for factory jobs in America, specifically in New York. Traveling by foot, he first went to New Hartford, but was unable to find work at the cotton factory. He next found himself in Albany where his friend Thomas Muir lived, but felt uncomfortable there because the people were “very free” with alcohol, and the Scottish community was too focused on clinging to their Scottish heritage instead of embracing new American ideals. Thanks to “good providence,” there were no available factory jobs in Albany either, so Crawford ventured towards Hoosic Falls where he had heard of openings at a textile factory owned by a fellow Scotsman named Mr. Gordon. Mr. Gordon agreed to hire Crawford for a few trial months during which he would do odds jobs around the factory, with the possibility of a more permanent position in the future. Although he would not be paid, the Gordon family provided him with housing and food. Crawford grew close to the Gordon family

²² Ibid., 76.

and after Mr. Gordon was forced to declare bankruptcy and moved to North Bennington, Vermont to start a new factory, Crawford joined him there. Crawford assisted Mr. Gordon with finances and implemented a payroll system at this new factory. By this point, he was so close to the Gordons that other factory workers mistook him for a son. In the early 1830s, Crawford applied for an overseer position in the North Bennington factory only to find out that the position had already been filled. While initially disappointed by this setback, he understood this as a “providential” turning point which led him to his next life stage: college.²³

This brief era of Crawford’s life again shows his ability to synthesize ambition and faith. As he began his factory career, he worked odd jobs at a factory and gradually was entrusted with more responsibility. He writes, “I made such rapid progress in learning, & very soon I was left to myself... I felt gratified myself, for I knew that the kind of work commanded good wages.”²⁴ By the end, he was in charge of the finances for the entire factory owned by Mr. Gordon. Although working in the factory was a temporary life stage (he was only in the factories for six years before leaving to pursue education), Crawford was not content to continue doing the entry level tasks. Rather, he worked his way up through various jobs in the factory in search of more money and social status.

While devoting himself to his factory jobs, Crawford did not forget to invest himself in his faith. He attended numerous churches in the area and involved himself with the local religious community as much as his busy work schedule allowed. Crawford also continued to look for God’s providence in the opportunities which were offered to him; he was careful to follow what he believed God would have him do, even when his mother and others offered

²³ Ibid., 69-105.

²⁴ Ibid., 79.

different advice. When Crawford became aware of the possibility of education and a career in the ministry, he was open to this idea because it would allow him to continue to better himself, and also incorporated his faith.

Education

As was to be expected, my preparation for college being so imperfect, I had to work very hard, burning the midnight & also the early morning oil, to keep up with my class...Besides our ordinary college studies we had some other sources of mental improvements, such as our literary societies, debating clubs, &c. I availed myself of these as much as I well could, giving time & study for the duties required. And so I found that college life, for any one that seeks to fulfill its requirements is any thing [sic] but one of ease or listlessness. – *Memoir*, 1889²⁵

Thomas Gordon, Mr. Gordon's son who was a few years older than Robert Crawford, entered Williams College in 1830 in hopes of going on to seminary and becoming a minister. While at home on a break from school, he talked with Crawford about educational opportunities and encouraged Crawford to seriously consider training for the ministry. After taking some time to think and pray, Crawford decided to take Thomas's advice. Crawford wrote, "my mind gradually became settled, & I, as I trust, dedicated myself to that blessed work. How imperfect, & how unworthy I was! But I trust God accepted the dedication, & I have never had cause to regret that I made it."²⁶ Even after the decision was made, Crawford felt unprepared for college. While he had been educated as a child, he was away from the world of education while on the family farm in Canada and as a factory worker, so he was not ready for the rigors of a college curriculum. Therefore, Thomas Gordon offered to tutor him in arithmetic, geography, Latin

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

grammar, English, and Greek to prepare him to take the entrance exam. Due in part to Gordon's help, Crawford passed the examination and was admitted to Williams College in 1832.²⁷

Robert Crawford's four years at Williams College were some of the most important in his life. Although he struggled at first because he was not as prepared for school as his classmates were, he soon found a home for himself at Williams. The regular curriculum was composed of languages, classic literature, mathematics, and science. Crawford was not content to only take classes, however. To improve himself outside of the classroom, Crawford participated regularly in literary societies, debate clubs, and prayer meetings. He even travelled to the Bay of Fundy on a school sponsored trip to learn about geography and science. Because an education at Williams was expensive and he was not being supported by his poor agricultural family, Crawford had to work as a teacher over breaks from classes to pay for his education. He taught at numerous schools throughout western Massachusetts. The network which he crafted while working at these schools gave him important connections and helped his later ministerial career.²⁸

As a young man hoping to become a minister, Christian faith played an integral role in Crawford's education. He attended regular Sunday services, Friday evening prayer meetings, daily prayer meetings at noon, and various special revival meetings at Williams. He was also involved in the church community at large and regularly spoke during breaks from school at various churches throughout Massachusetts and Canada. When Crawford graduated from

²⁷ Crawford, *Memoir*, 106-111; *Student Register*, vol. 144, 1796-1892 (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Archive).

²⁸ Crawford, *Memoir*, 106-132; *Catalog of Officers and Students of Williams College*, March 1822-1840 (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Archive); *Student's Ledger* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Archive).

Williams College in 1836, his commencement speech entitled “Religion and Science” incorporated everything that he had been learning about how to combine faith and intellect.²⁹

As Crawford advanced through college, he learned to embrace the life of the mind, although he never would have applied that phrase to his appreciation for education. The Enlightenment belief in optimism, progress, and reason had fully permeated society by the time that Crawford entered college and seminary. He and his classmates learned to embrace new ideas because new knowledge would bring betterment for all. They lived out their individual pursuits of happiness through education. Crawford valued education so highly that after he attended college and then seminary, he continued his education informally by reading, attending meetings with other educated men, and writing letters to his college and ministry friends. He passed on his love of learning to the next generation and sent all of his children, both his sons and daughters, to college. Even after retirement, when he was no longer using the information that he was learning to influence a church community on a regular basis, he continued to seek intellectual improvement.

Robert Crawford did more than study while at school. He also developed a number of important friendships. Thomas Gordon, who helped prepare Crawford for school, continued to tutor him throughout his time at Williams. He also assisted Crawford with networking and provided him with his first summer teaching job. Throughout their careers, the two men stayed in touch and regularly traded pulpits. Crawford so highly valued Gordon’s influence on his life that he named his third son “Robert Gordon.” Gordon reciprocated this gesture by visiting and

²⁹ Crawford, *Memoir*, 106-107, 113, 132.

baptizing the child. When Gordon died a few months after the child's baptism, Crawford mourned "his death as that of a dear brother."³⁰

Crawford developed similar relationships with John Tatlock and T. J. Clark. Tatlock and Crawford initially bonded because they were both born outside of the United States, and were not well prepared for college because of similar poor, farming backgrounds. After their graduation from Williams, Tatlock and Crawford worked together to tutor the incoming class and make the transition to college easier for the younger students. Tatlock eventually became a professor at Williams College and regularly preached for Crawford when needed.³¹ T. J. Clark and Crawford were roommates during their junior year of college and continued to be good friends throughout their lives. Crawford and Clark habitually exchanged pulpits, their families visited each other regularly, and the Clarks spent a year living in Deerfield with the Crawfords.³²

Not only did Robert Crawford have long lasting friendships with his fellow Williams College students, but he had important mentor relationships with professors as well. Although Edward Dorr Griffin, the president of Williams College and Crawford's future father in law, was very old and ill by the time that Crawford arrived at Williams, he still had a profound impact on Crawford's religious beliefs. Crawford remembered hearing him preach numerous times and remarked that "it was always a great treat to hear him." Once he was moved to tears by one of Griffin's sermons. Although Crawford's reflections on Griffin's life may be a bit distorted because of his later relationship with Griffin's daughter, the influence that Griffin had on Crawford is still important to note. Griffin inspired Crawford to be a better Christian and minister. He also opened Crawford's eyes to good preaching. Throughout his life, Crawford

³⁰ Ibid., 93-95, 105-108, 111, 115-116, 121, 146-147, 184, 185, 206, 243-244.

³¹ Ibid., 112, 132, 142-144, 148, 163-165, 206, 255, 291, 293, 314-315, 347, 445.

³² Ibid., 122-123, 264, 358, 365, 389, 441-444.

read sermons written by Griffin to improve his own preaching style. Also, Crawford's marriage to Griffin's daughter later gave Crawford money and opportunities that he otherwise would not have had.³³

Crawford's relationship with Dr. Mark Hopkins, a professor and later president of Williams College, was equally influential. Hopkins, considered by Crawford to be the "prince of teachers," taught Crawford's Williams class for all four years. Once Crawford left Williams, Hopkins continued to be a caring mentor. He went to hear Crawford preach and gave him feedback on his sermons, preached at Crawford's North Adams Congregational Church ordination, and regularly exchanged pulpits with him. This stable and long lasting mentor relationship was crucial to Crawford's development as a church leader.³⁴

When historians discuss ambition and social mobility in the early republic, they often refer to these ideas in individualistic terms. Opal describes young individuals who had to break free from their local communities which were "at once empathetic and cruel, cooperative and testy, supportive and suffocating" in order to make it on their own beyond the farm.³⁵ Likewise, Appleby writes of young people relying on "individual initiative" to achieve their goals.³⁶ Although these historians note the existence of traditional, rural communities, they fail to see that young people formed equally important intellectual communities to support their studies and future careers. Friends like Thomas Gordon, John Tatlock, and T. J. Clark supported Crawford with his education, and helped him later in his career. Similarly, mentors like Edward Dorr Griffin and Mark Hopkins provided support which encouraged Crawford to continue his

³³ Ibid., 4-5, 79, 105, 109-110, 132-134, 177, 362.

³⁴ Ibid., 131-132, 143-144, 165, 189, 206, 214, 255, 285.

³⁵ Opal, *Beyond the Farm*, 32-33.

³⁶ Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 5.

education. Aside from Griffin who died early, these men all continued to play pivotal roles throughout Crawford's life. They made him the man and the minister that he became. For Crawford, ambition and the quest for improvement would have been difficult without these friends and mentors.

Crawford continued to grow intellectually and spiritually while at seminary. After graduating from Williams College, he enrolled at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. Five months after his arrival at Princeton, his brother died and Crawford inherited the family farm in Canada. He left Princeton and returned home to care for his family and the land. While in Canada, Crawford spent time preaching at various churches and schools near Lanark. Because he was uninterested in farming, he passed the property to his younger brother. Then, instead of immediately returning to Princeton, Crawford went back to Williams to help tutor the freshman class with his friend Tatlock. He enjoyed helping the younger students learn and making their transition smoother than his had been. He also valued the experience as it helped prepare him for seminary and future work. Writing later about his time as a tutor at Williams, Crawford noted, "I took pleasure in my work of teaching & valued it very much as a means of self-improvement. I was looking forward all the while to the consummation in my entering upon the work of the ministry. Human learning or culture is not all that is essential to that, but I felt that I needed all I could get."³⁷ Although he enjoyed tutoring and being in an educational environment, Crawford also participated in the larger life of the church in New England by working as a temporary pastor at a church in Charlemont, Massachusetts. This was a helpful

³⁷ Crawford, *Memoir*, 47.

experience for him even though he was not yet fully educated or trained because he had the opportunity to network with other Christians and ministers in western Massachusetts.³⁸

After his plan to return to Princeton did not work out as planned, Crawford decided to go to New York Theological Seminary in New York City the following fall. This was another “providential” moment for him because it allowed him to be near Ellen Maria Griffin, Edward Dorr Griffin’s daughter who lived in Newark, New Jersey. The pair met earlier while Crawford was serving as a tutor at Williams. Since her family had connections with the school, Ellen Maria was visiting and needed someone to escort her around the town. Crawford was assigned to the task and the two became close friends. While at New York Theological Seminary, Crawford did more than spend time with Ellen Maria. He also took classes in Bible, theology, Hebrew, and church history which “broadened & systemized” his religious views.³⁹ He involved himself in the community by preaching at various churches in New York City and joining some moral reform movements. By the end of 1839, Crawford was licensed to preach by the Presbyterian Church and began to preach as a candidate at various churches in New England and Canada. Also, after his graduation from New York Theological Seminary, Crawford married Ellen Maria Griffin on September 30, 1840. Ellen Maria became a vital part of Crawford’s ministry because she helped Crawford make connections with people within his church communities.⁴⁰

Crawford’s experience in education once again shows his commitment to both ambition and faith. As he was studying, he was continually looking to bigger and brighter things: new schools to teach at during breaks, new churches to practice preaching at throughout the school

³⁸ Ibid., 132-149.

³⁹ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 149-161, 169-474.

year, and new people to come in contact with in order to learn about Christianity and how to be a more effective minister. As he was working his way through academia, he was simultaneously working his way up the social ladder. At the beginning of his college experience, he was a poor farm boy hoping to work on breaks to pay for his education. By the end, he had become a member of the elite New England ministerial class through education, marriage, and other personal connections. However, while bettering himself, Crawford continually used faith to understand the purpose of this social rising. He firmly believed that God was leading him through his educational experience and that God was preparing him to serve in ministry.

Ministry

Monday, Aug. 20 [1866] – That anniversary once again of my Ordination to the work of the gospel ministry. What have I accomplished all these 26 years? & what am I personally compared with what I was when the hands of the Presbytery were laid on me. God help me, make me faithful in my work, & grant me richly of His grace that I may grow therein. It is a solemn thing to be a gospel minister!⁴¹

After finishing his education at New York Theological Seminary, Robert Crawford turned to his New England connections to find a job. The Congregational Church in North Adams, Massachusetts near Williams College offered him the position of pastor. He accepted and was ordained to preach on August 20, 1840. In general, Crawford enjoyed his time at North Adams and he continued as that congregation's pastor for fifteen years. However, the beginning of his ministry was a little bit unstable since he was more theologically conservative than some members of his congregation. As he describes it, they asked him to preach in "a more liberal

⁴¹ Ibid., 448.

cast [to be] more attractive to worldly people than the plain gospel truth I was accustomed to preach.”⁴² Believing that he was not a good fit for the church, Crawford submitted his resignation in 1843, but the portion of the community that appreciated his preaching asked him to withdraw the letter. Taking this as a sign from God, Crawford agreed to stay. He continued to work with his congregation and teach them traditional “orthodox” theology. While caring for the North Adams congregation, he nurtured the ill and comforted the mourning, facilitated the conversion and membership of young and old alike, traded pulpits with area ministers to share the gospel with different people, and involved himself in regional church leadership councils such as the Massachusetts General Association to the Congregational Union of Canada East.⁴³

Although generally well-liked by his North Adams congregation, Crawford continued to have problems with about ten percent of the congregation who disapproved of his theology. As early as 1845, he wrote that he hoped for “release for the prejudices & discontent of a very few of my people.”⁴⁴ By 1855 he decided to leave and accepted a call the Presbyterian Church in Crookville, Pennsylvania. Originally, this seemed like a good opportunity. Because the congregation was smaller than in North Adams, he would be able to spend more time with his family. The larger salary and free parsonage were also incentives for moving to Pennsylvania. But, this transition to Pennsylvania was difficult for the Crawford family. They found themselves without their social network and in a different type of Christian denomination. Having regularly interacted with dozens of other New England ministers for years, living near only three local clergymen was a challenge. And, having spent fifteen years with

⁴² Ibid., 190.

⁴³ Ibid., 162-308; William Lawrence Tenney. *Addresses and Papers Presented at the Diamond Jubilee, 1827-1902, May 11-14* (Advance Press, 1902), 78-86.

⁴⁴ Crawford, *Memoir*, 306.

Congregationalists, Crawford found it hard to work with Presbyterians. He regularly attended meetings of the Presbyterian Synod of Pennsylvania, but thought that they were overly formal and had “less of the fraternal, the social, & I may add the spiritual” camaraderie than he was used to in Congregational associations and councils.⁴⁵ To make matters worse, the mills in Crookville shut down and the church eventually broke up despite Crawford’s best efforts to keep the people organized. Crawford spent the majority of 1857 looking for a new church leadership position. After officially being dismissed from the Crookville Presbyterian Church in April 1857, Crawford wrote “Times looked dark...Yet I was not sad. I wondered, at times, if I was not stoical. But grace it was, indoubtedly, that sustained me.”⁴⁶ This was one of the most difficult times of his life, but Crawford, at least as he tells his own story in the memoir, never lost sight of his faith and his belief that God would guide his career.⁴⁷

Immediately after being dismissed from the Crookville church, Crawford received an invitation to preach as a candidate at the Congregational Church in Deerfield, Massachusetts. He, as usual, described the invitation as a “providential” turn of events. Deerfield was a stark contrast to Crookville and after meeting part of the congregation, Crawford wrote, “I soon found I was among friends.”⁴⁸ Despite the fact that the Congregational Church at Deerfield had been without a minister for nearly three years, the members of the small congregation remained devoted to one another. In December 1857, the Crawford family arrived in Deerfield and on

⁴⁵ Ibid., 312-314.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 325.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 309-328.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 329.

January 12 and 13, 1858, Robert Crawford was officially installed as minister at the Deerfield Congregational Church.⁴⁹

When Crawford assumed the position of pastor at the Orthodox Congregational Church in Deerfield, the church was struggling, both internally, in that the congregation was small, and externally, in its relationship with the nearby Unitarian church. The Congregational church was born when it broke away from the First Congregational Parish on June 2, 1835. After years of conflict over the selection of a more liberal clergyman as pastor, eighteen members finally left and created their own church. Throughout its life, the Orthodox Church continued to grapple with low levels of membership, and consequently financial problems as well.⁵⁰

Because of these differences in theology and the manner in which the Congregational church was formed, a great deal of tension existed between Orthodox and Unitarian believers in Deerfield. Even twenty two years later, when Robert Crawford was installed in the Orthodox Church, the bitterness was still apparent. Although a firm believer in a more theologically conservative view of Christianity, Crawford worked hard to overcome this theological divide in the town.

Relations between the two congregations improved in 1860 when James Kendall Hosmer was installed as pastor of the Unitarian Church. According to Crawford's memoir, Hosmer was a firm Unitarian who believed that the Bible was not infallible, denied the total depravity of humanity, appreciated Christ for his moral teachings alone, and emphasized the importance of

⁴⁹ Crawford, *Memoir*, 328-340; "Rev. Robert Crawford; Adams; Congregational Church; Deerfield," *Pittsfield Sun* (Pittsfield, Massachusetts), Nov. 26, 1857; "Religious Intelligence," *The Barre Gazette* (Barre, Massachusetts), Feb. 12, 1858; "Installation," *Gazette and Courier* (Greenfield, MA), Jan. 18, 1858; "Installation," *Franklin Democrat* (Greenfield, MA), Jan. 18, 1858.

⁵⁰ Stoever, *The Evangelical-Unitarian Division in the Town of Deerfield, Massachusetts; Records of the Orthodox Congregational Church in Deerfield, 1835-1898* (Deerfield, MA: Heritage Foundation), 2-6; Heritage Foundation, *The Old Deerfield Meeting House 1838-1958*, 3-7; Crawford, *Memoir*, 333-334.

the inner light rather than the Bible as the ultimate source of religious truth. Despite their stark theological differences of opinion, Hosmer and Crawford became very good friends. While they never traded pulpits, the men interacted regularly and succeeded in getting their congregations to cooperate as well. The national days of prayer and fasting during the Civil War show this collaboration. Each year of the conflict, the two congregations united on this day to pray and fast together. This image of solidarity during a national civil dispute was surely not lost on the townspeople. Although these ministers and community members disagreed greatly on theology, they were able to unite behind larger national ideas.⁵¹

This tension between Congregationalists and Unitarians in Deerfield shows that while embracing education and new ideas, Crawford had distinct intellectual boundaries that he was unwilling to cross. The Enlightenment stressed reason and scientific empiricism. When applied to traditional orthodox beliefs, reason led some Christians to reject a belief in the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, and embrace Unitarianism. Crawford firmly denied these ideas and maintained his belief in traditional, orthodox theology which upheld the Trinity and Christ's divinity, among other ideas. In other words, Crawford maintained his Trinitarian faith amidst the rise of New England Unitarianism.

Crawford did not allow himself to focus solely on his congregation; he concerned himself with the local and regional community outside of the church as well. In 1862, Crawford was nominated, without his knowledge, to be a Massachusetts state senator. *The Greenfield Gazette and Courier* enthusiastically endorsed him as a candidate stating:

His patriotic impulses are strong...His kindness of heart makes him everybody's friend, and therefore affable, polite, and ready to render a service wherever and to whomsoever

⁵¹ Crawford, *Memoir*, 371-374, 434; "A Sermon by Rev. Dr. R. Crawford," *Gazette and Courier* (Greenfield, MA), December 14, 1874.

he can do any good... In short, he is a good, Christian, kind-hearted, intelligent, trusty, affable man, just what every legislator ought to be. – October 27, 1862⁵²

Partly thanks to this support, Crawford was successfully elected on the Republican ticket as the senator for Franklin District. Crawford accepted this position, but was quick to remind himself that he was first and foremost a minister and man of God. This mindset guided his year-long political career. Although nominated on the Republican ticket, he was careful to vote according to his moral code and beliefs, and not according to party wishes. He also made an effort to prevent lobbyists from affecting his allegiance. During his time in Boston in 1863, Crawford served as chaplain for the senate, Chairman of Committee on Parishes and Religious Societies, and a member of the Committee for State Libraries. While busy with politics in Boston, Crawford made sure that he did not forget his first priority: the Deerfield Orthodox Church. He travelled home nearly every other weekend to preach, and arranged for a pastor from Montague, Reverend Eli Moody, to fill the pulpit on the other Sundays.⁵³

Crawford also participated in other aspects of the Deerfield community. He served as President of the Board of Trustees for Deerfield Academy, a local preparatory school, from 1861 to 1888, a position that he valued highly. In 1866, immediately after the Civil War ended, Crawford was elected at a town meeting to chair the committee to erect a soldier's monument. This monument celebrated the men from Deerfield who died in the Civil War and in other wars throughout the town's history. In 1870 he helped found the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association (PVMA), Deerfield's first historical preservation organization. He would serve as corresponding secretary for thirteen years and a council member for six more. Crawford's

⁵² "Senatorial," *Gazette and Courier* (Greenfield, MA), Oct. 27, 1862.

⁵³ Crawford, *Memoir*, 378, 381, 412-421, 425, 451; "Vote for Senator," *Gazette and Courier* (Greenfield, MA), Nov. 10, 1862; "Senatorial," *Gazette and Courier* (Greenfield, MA), Oct. 27, 1862.

community awareness shows his passion and sense of vocation. Although interested in and opinionated about the Civil War and abolition, he was not called to directly participate on behalf of those causes. Instead, Crawford believed that he had been called by God to be a minister and so his first priorities were always to his church.⁵⁴

Robert Crawford's deep connection to his Deerfield church and community offer another nuance to the historiography of life at this time. Opal writes that nineteenth-century ministers were more likely than their eighteenth-century predecessors to change positions throughout their careers and involve themselves in regional and national church leadership. They had "ambition to serve God across imagined historical space – to labor in a field that encompassed many homes and even reached into them."⁵⁵ While it is true that Crawford held several positions throughout his career, and that he maintained regional and national connections to Christian organizations, he was primarily concerned with finding a community that he could spend his life caring for. By leading the Orthodox Congregational Church and caring for the community through service with the state senate, Deerfield Academy, and PVMA, Crawford fulfilled what he perceived to be God's calling on his life. He believed that God had providentially led him to that place in order for him to invest his life teaching the Gospel to the people of Deerfield. This differs from others at the time who felt called to minister at numerous places and continually searched for better positions. While he was on the rise socially in Deerfield, Crawford's ambitions were limited by

⁵⁴*History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association 1870-1879*, vol. I (Deerfield, MA: PVMA, 1890), 7-9, 15-17, 66-67, 150-151, 202, 275-276, 321, 328, 363, 398, 436, 440-444; *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association 1880-1889*, vol. II (Deerfield, MA: PVMA, 1890), 7, 40, 51, 62, 99, 189, 213, 224, 332-332, 410; *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association 1890-1898*, vol. III (Deerfield, MA: PVMA, 1901), 1, 43, 116, 155, 214, 274, 334, 405; "Address by Rev. Lyndon S. Crawford," *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association 1899-1904*, vol. IV. (Deerfield, MA: PVMA, 1905), 4-8.

⁵⁵ Opal, *Beyond the Farm*, 162-163.

his perception of God's will. He did not want to rise indefinitely but focused on caring for a specific congregation.

Retirement

January 1, 1886 - The time has gone by pleasantly & I trust not altogether without profit. I read a good deal, perhaps too much. Certainly I forget much that I read, however interesting it may be in the reading. Even when forgotten the reading may have its uses in quickening the mind, & lodging facts therein which on occasion may come to the front again. Still I am conscious that I read much in a superficial way, not digesting the matter but simply passing over it, an error against which we are often warned & ought to be on our guard. I am aware too that I read to [sic] much for my health & my poor eyes, but what else can I do?⁵⁶

As Robert Crawford grew older, he gave up his official church position in 1882, but continued to involve himself in the church world, cultivate his mind through education, and hold tight to his faith. While in retirement, Crawford travelled between his children's homes. In each of his children's towns, Crawford engaged himself in local churches and communities. Although he appreciated interacting with different groups of people, he was especially happy when staying with his daughter Nellie because she lived near Deerfield. When living with her, he could continue to care for the Deerfield Orthodox Church and assist with communion, Sunday School, and other services. Regardless of where he was staying, Crawford also continued to attend regional church conferences and meetings to keep himself informed about current debates within the church world. When he was not well enough to travel to conferences or even to make it to the local church, Crawford read books, newspapers, sermons, hymnals, and anything else that he could find from which he could learn. This kept him involved in the world of education, and also furthered his faith. He also corresponded regularly with his family as well as friends like

⁵⁶ Robert Crawford, *Diary January 1886-April 1886*, (Deerfield, MA: Historic Deerfield), 1.

John Tatlock and J. J. Dana, a neighboring minister from North Adams who Crawford corresponded with for more than thirty years. These correspondences allowed him to maintain awareness of church affairs across the United States, further his intellect, and be encouraged in his faith. As he experienced retirement, Crawford's faith grew because he began to rely on God for more aspects of his life, including his health and the health of his family and friends. As his health began to falter and after his wife died, Crawford learned to say "Laus Deo" and trust that God was in control. Thus, even in retirement, Crawford continued to exemplify the major themes of his life: intellectual improvement, faith in a providential God, and reliance on friends and community. The values that he learned as an immigrant and young man in early nineteenth-century America affected the rest of his life.⁵⁷

Epilogue

Robert Crawford died in 1896 at the home of his daughter Frances in Connecticut. He is buried with his wife's family in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Newark, New Jersey.⁵⁸ However, his death is not the end of the story. The lives of Crawford's children's provide a fitting conclusion to his life's story. Crawford's four children who lived to adulthood, Ellen ("Nellie"), Frances ("Fannie"), James, and Lyndon, inherited his worldview. Throughout their lives they worked to further his ideas about education, community, and Christianity across the globe. Ellen married a local businessman and continued to involve herself in the local Greenfield and Deerfield community. Although she and her family transferred their membership to an Episcopal Church in Greenfield, they remained closely connected with her father's congregation.

⁵⁷ Robert Crawford, *Diary 1879, 1884-1888, 1894-1896* (Deerfield, MA: Historic Deerfield).

⁵⁸ Linda Hall, e-mail message to author, April 11, 2012.

Frances married a preacher and settled with him in Connecticut. Her husband regularly interacted with the ministers whom Crawford knew during his ministry and he helped Crawford remain involved in the larger Congregational Church of New England. James went to Williams College and eventually moved to Illinois to be a pastor at a church in Chicago. Lyndon also attended Williams College, became a pastor, and eventually moved to the Ottoman Empire to work as a missionary. The story of Ellen, Frances, James, and Lyndon shows that Crawford successfully passed his values on to the next generation. His children learned to appreciate education and the opportunities that it created for ambitious progress. They learned to invest themselves in communities. And, perhaps most importantly to Crawford, they learned how search for God's providential hand in their lives and follow what they believed to be His will. Because of the opportunities that were afforded to Crawford in the early republic which trickled down to his family, the Crawford children were able to follow their own individual pursuits of happiness. But at the same time, they understood those ambitious pursuits as limited by a providential God and supported by the surrounding community.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Robert Crawford, *Diary 1879, 1884-1888, 1894-1896* (Deerfield, MA: Historic Deerfield).