

Dalzell, Robert F., Jr. *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987. Pp. xviii, 298. Illustrations

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latest addition to the fleets. Ironically, the piers into the Hudson River had become so long and the strait so narrow by the continuous infilling of the waterlots to create more docklands that larger ships could not be manoeuvred into the births on the Upper West Side.

A large section of this book is devoted to the plans for the west side of the Island of Manhattan known in the book as the West Wall. Beginning with the struggle for Riverside Park and leading ultimately to the contemporary development proposals of the likes of Donald Trump and Associates, this section of the book provides a glimpse of the social and political ferment that accompanied physical planning and development.

Plans for the West Wall began in an era of growing prosperity and during a period of fervent urban reform. The clash between mercantile interests and reformers provides a rewarding case study of the groups and the individual personalities who contributed to the moulding of the waterfront in this part of the city.

It is also interesting here to note how history can be influenced by the historian. Buitenhuis has a nice passage on the importance of women in the cause of urban reform, recounting the efforts of progressive women's groups in imagining and securing a more humane built environment for the many who were resigned to inhabit the squalor of the waterfront slums.

For such a small book on such a large topic, *Manhattan Water-Bound* does an admirable job. Complete with abundant figures, photographs, and tables to guide the reader through what could be rather tedious factual matters, the text is very readable.

The only sharp criticism that can be made of the presentation has to do with the maps. Though abundant and much appreciated, the maps are virtually unreadable. The print is

too small and the contextual information too laconic. In fact, when one sits to read this book one would be well advised to have at hand a good, large tourist-style map of Manhattan Island, especially if one does not have a detailed grasp of Manhattan's fairly logical street system. There are many textual references that would be rather befuddling to the non-New Yorker.

In literary terms, the work, though pleasantly written, lacks something of the romanticism and earthiness that one would hope for in an account of what is surely one of the more colourful and picturesque parts of a colourful and picturesque city. Instead, the people in this book are primarily drawn from the New York elite, and although some of the official intrigue reported provides interesting reading, one cannot help but get the impression that this is a much sanitized or at least innocent version of the planning and development of the Manhattan waterfront.

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Dalzell, Robert F., Jr. *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987. Pp. xviii, 298. Illustrations.

Enterprising Elite, by R. F. Dalzell, offers an important and provocative interpretation of the social origins of industrial capitalism and the ability of capitalism to reconstruct and consolidate a passing social order. The author argues that a desire to preserve their social positions and that of their children motivated the Boston Associates, already successful as merchants, to assemble between 1810 to 1860 a business complex of textile manufacturing, transportation companies, and financial institutions. More than this, the sum of individual efforts to assert social leadership and to protect their heirs throughout this period, created layers of

classes and class consciousness. Entrepreneurial innovation and class formation, thus, expressed a cultural and social conservatism.

In examining the industrial espionage of Francis Cabot Lowell, the promotion of America's first modern factory, the introduction of the Waltham-Lowell system of labour, and the application of the corporate model to various forms of capital mobilization, Dalzell has wrought a careful synthesis of a well-developed fund of secondary literature. Yet, in so doing, he disputes the conventional interpretation found in the work of Caroline Ware, Robert Sobel, and Francis W. Gregory, among others, that the declining profitability of mercantile enterprise promoted the migration of merchant capital into manufacturing investments in early 19th-century New England. Manufacturing, he contends, did not offer more profitable returns than commerce, and indeed shipping figures reveal no evidence of a flight of Boston investment from mercantile enterprise. If this was the case, what then explains such calculated diversification?

Dalzell presents another dimension to the familiar theme of New England inter-generational mobility; the enterprising elite might well be identified — after Philip Greven in his work on colonial Andover, Massachusetts — as the fifth and sixth generations. Perpetuation of social position required new forms of business. Whereas commerce had provided both the financial wherewithal and leisure for Boston's pre-Revolutionary elite to exercise political and cultural leadership, early 19th century merchants confronted a no less profitable, but far more risky and stressful, field of endeavour. Moreover, republican politics demanded more time, just when the press of business made freeing one's energies for public life more difficult. To play a public role as their fathers had done, the Boston Associates needed to find some new enterprise, less time-consuming, less psychologically absorbing, and more

predictable in its operations. Beyond personal ambitions lay concerns for the generation to follow. The danger of partitioning a life's capital into bequests too small to sustain one's progeny economically or socially worried Boston merchants, as it had New England farmers before them. The Boston Associates willed their heirs the corporation and the trust.

The solution may have been suggested to Francis Cabot Lowell, a successful merchant, during a trip to Scotland in 1810. Textile manufacturing, and the transportation and financial institutions which facilitated its operations, afforded dependable returns on investment with decentralized management. The corporation, with shares that were easily divided, and the trust, preventing an inept heir from squandering his inheritance and weakening the pool of capital which enriched himself and his relatives, solved the problem that had so troubled earlier generations. Yet, this strategy gave children far less control over their patrimony than their fathers had received. Dalzell might have more directly addressed the factors which explained one generation placing less confidence in the next generation than it had itself enjoyed. Was patriarchy cyclical?

The corporation and the trust were forms of entail that bestowed the status of *rentier* upon future generations and gave them an interest in the collective well-being of the caste to which their fortunes were tied. Class consciousness coalesced as individuals learned from the example of others and chose similar solutions to similar problems. The theory of the corporation and the trust as the core of class cohesion qualifies the similar interpretation advanced by Peter D. Hall; for Dalzell, these were the cause rather than the product of consciousness.

Class consolidation was displayed not just in business, but also by the mid 1840s in philanthropy and politics. Initially the philanthropic commitments of the Associates denied the significance of divisions and

strove to sustain at least the pretence of community action. The major example of this was their support for Massachusetts General Hospital. A conviction that the community should solve its own problems led the Associates to seek a wide participation in the subscription of hospital stock. Later philanthropic causes displayed no such sensitivity to the appearance of social consensus and accepted social division.

Their subsequent generosity carefully balanced charitable donations for the relief of "the deserving poor" with contributions to those institutions that offered services from which they themselves and their heirs might benefit. Harvard University, for example, became an especially favoured recipient. Perhaps nothing revealed a more rigid social outlook than their unsuccessful resistance to the campaign to convert the Boston Atheneum, their private reading club, into a public library. Similarly, the electoral consensus that the Associates had assembled in the 1830s behind the Massachusetts Whig Party failed in the 1850s.

The major weakness of *Enterprising Elite* is that, for a study purporting to be a collective biography, it avoids many of those methods associated with modern prosopography. An appendix on the corporate affiliations of 83 Boston Associates is not a complete list of their membership; other names appear frequently in the text. The reader asks in vain: how large was the elite; how many came from towns, from farms, or from Boston; what was a breakdown of their backgrounds; did endogamy increase or decrease over time; how large were their estates; how effective was their inter-generational strategy in bequeathing elite membership? With quantification now more fully accepted as an adjunct in many areas of inquiry previously proud to be free from its taint, Dalzell's study appears methodologically old-fashioned. The heritage of case-study analysis may make business history resistant to new approaches, but *Enterprising Elite* poses a

question and advances a provocative thesis, both of which cry out for the sophisticated methodologies long associated with the study of the New England family.

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