

A Short Sketch of the Life of
Benjamin Alden Nourse
From 1858 to 1876

Alexander Nourse Gross

Hamilton College

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Benjamin Alden Nourse was born on July 19, 1836 in Westboro, Massachusetts to Joseph Joslin Nourse and Sarah Merriam. Joseph was a farmer who worked an 82-acre parcel of farmland in southeast Westboro that was first cultivated by his ancestors Ebenezer and William Nurse in 1722. Two years after Benjamin Alden's birth, Joseph passed away from pneumonia and the daily care of the farm was left to his wife Sarah and his father Benjamin until Benjamin Alden became old enough to farm it for himself. In his youth Benjamin was a dedicated student who attended the public central schools and wished to pursue a higher education even though he had to quit school and help manage the farm after receiving only a primary education. Yet even had he been able to go on to college it is doubtful that his mother would have been able to afford to send him. Despite having to abandon his dream of higher education for a while, Benjamin sought the private tutelage of S.C. Stone, the first teacher of the public high school in Westboro, and received a high school level education. This relationship must have been more than the typical student-teacher relationship for in later years S.C. Stone was a frequent guest of the Nourse household on Thanksgiving and Christmas and the two men maintained a correspondence. Tax records indicate that Benjamin Alden's grandfather Benjamin Nourse paid the taxes on the farm until 1858 when Benjamin Alden first appears in the records. Thus it can be reasonably assumed that at this point, and at twenty-two years of age, Benjamin Alden became the master of the Nourse Farm. Two years later he married Jane Fay of Grafton, the sister of Jasper Fay, a farmer and friend who owned land adjacent to Benjamin's. Throughout his life, and in all aspects of his character, Benjamin demonstrated that he was patient, self-controlled, honest, trustworthy and hard working. These characteristics emerged in all aspects of his life from his farming business to his church and community involvement to his career as a selectman and representative. It is on account of these qualities that Benjamin was able to create such a productive farm and give back to his community as much as he did. The following pages contain a rough sketch of his life and character and the story of how a simple farmer without a college education turned a small farm into a thriving business, which competed with other farms on the local, regional and national level.

Benjamin Alden kept a series of journals chronicling his daily activities from 1862 until 1876, with only three missing years: 1864, 1865 and 1867. These journals reveal the struggles and triumphs that came with modernizing and expanding an old farm as well as providing one perspective on the town of Westboro during and after the Civil War. Benjamin prominently records the activity around the farm, but other topics find their way into his records as well. He discusses his role in the community and meticulously records information about Church on Sunday. The diaries have an objective tone to them: Benjamin rarely gives his opinion on a matter, rather opting to simply record what happened. Yet in seeing which events were important enough to make it into Benjamin's journals and the subtle changes he makes in recording them over time one can begin to see what his priorities may have been. For instance, in the early years his records about the farm are mostly about the growing of the crops: plowing, sowing, reaping, etc. However, around 1870 the types of observations that Benjamin makes become more about the running of the farm, the organization of labor and the selling of goods at a market rather than on the farm. While he still records the daily activities of farming, from seeing how Benjamin approaches the subject one can see his

transformation from a simple farmer to a businessman. In addition to the journals, some letters to Benjamin and his wife Jane have survived. Many of these letters provide valuable insight into the more personal aspects of Benjamin's life that the journals do not contain. Finally, two memoirs of Benjamin Alden's grandchildren Arthur Lesure and Lucy Merriam contain short summaries of Benjamin's life. All of these sources will be used to try to bring out details from all aspects of Benjamin's life.

When the journals begin in 1862, Benjamin had been the manager of the farm for four years and had been married for two. He was still young, but was already gaining a reputation for himself. In 1860 he was appointed a "special police officer to assist in enforcing the law in relation to cattle disease," demonstrating that even at the age of 22 the community believed him to be trustworthy enough to enforce the law and protect the community. He had already begun to gain the respect and trust of the community, two characteristics which came to define his personality in later years.

Benjamin had a passion for all types of education and continued learning all through his adult life. As one who only informally completed the high school curriculum, he continued to work on his grammar and spelling beyond his private lessons with S.C. Stone (i.e. on August 31st, 1863 Benjamin "practiced [sic] grammar at Father's & Jasper's.") In addition to improving on his basic education, Benjamin learned more about farming techniques through the Agricultural Committee and Grange Society and was a devout student of the Bible throughout his life. However, more than just wanting to learn himself, he sought to provide more educational opportunities for the entire community. On March 3rd, 1862 he was guaranteed a spot on the school committee for two years having already been chosen clerk and treasurer on January 25th. His responsibilities were to travel around the town examining each of the ten district schools as well as the high school. In his examinations he would evaluate the physical condition of the schoolhouse and books as well as interview teachers who wished to work in the Westboro schools. He was also involved in the end of the year examinations, which determined whether an applicant would successfully graduate. In June of 1862 the school committee was considering switching the reader employed in the district schools from the Tower Reader to the Hillards Reader. Through in his first year on the school committee, Benjamin was involved in the process: examining both sets of readers and personally delivering the one selected to the district schools. Benjamin took his job as a school committee member seriously and demonstrated his dedication to what he was doing by regularly visiting all ten district schools as well as the high school, even visiting "school in No. 6" on Christmas Eve in 1862.

Benjamin Alden was the sort of person who was always trying out new methods and crops on his farm. When he inherited the farm in 1858 he owned 82 acres of land, within twelve years Benjamin had nearly tripled the size of the farm to 230 acres. In addition to the physical expansion of the farm, Benjamin also diversified the crops grown on it. When he first started farming the land, Benjamin was primarily growing potatoes, various types of grain, corn, tomatoes, peppers, peas, beans, and hay. In 1862 Benjamin began to diversify his crops by planting more fruit trees and vines as well as different types of corn. In May of 1862 he bought Delaware and Concord grape vines and over 50 apples trees. Then in 1863 he started planting strawberries, squashes and melons – crops

that have been moneymakers for the farm even to this day. One of these crops, apples, was especially profitable for Benjamin and became the most important crop on the farm as his career went on. In the early years of his life Benjamin would sell them by the barrel at his farm or would take a few barrels to the Worcester market every few weeks; however, his apples would eventually be shipped all over the Northeast and even found their way to markets in Europe.

Benjamin also tried to educate himself about new farming methods. He attended Agricultural Society meetings and used the resources of the Agricultural Library to broaden his knowledge – at one point in 1863 accidentally removing a book on draining to learn more about irrigation. On December 29th, 1862 he bought a copy of the *Albany Cultivator*, a popular farming periodical whose reading population of around 100,000 “tended to be men, practical farmers, and more affluent than average.”¹ While Benjamin Alden was not more affluent than most of his neighbors, he certainly was a practical farmer who sought to make his land more fertile and productive. In addition to experimenting with different farming methods, Benjamin also made use of new farming technologies. Between June 20th and October 8th, 1863 Benjamin bought three machines that mechanized work that had previously been done by hand. He bought a mowing machine, a threshing machine, and a hay cutter. These new tools enabled Benjamin to work his land more efficiently and may have been one reason that he was able to expand the land he had under cultivation.

Another way that Benjamin was able to farm more land was that he routinely hired boys to work on the farm in the months between sessions of school. One contemporary author recalled that Benjamin “was a man of good natural ability, sound judgment and business ability. He helped many young men to success in life by teaching them the right way to conduct a farm.”² In the way he managed his summer help, Benjamin strove to impart these qualities on his young charges to make them responsible and productive members of society regardless of their future profession. One of the boys who spent multiple summers on the farm was Daniel “Dannie” March, a distant cousin of Benjamin Alden. Dannie worked on the farm for more than one summer and through his letters one can see how much he enjoyed these breaks from school. On May 26th, 1863 Dannie wrote “I was very glad to get your letter and to know that I could come there next vacation for I know that I shall have a good time. I did not get so sick of farming as you imagine, last summer. I can not hardly wait for vacation to come” and a month later on July 26th, “I have got tired of studying, for this term at least, and shall be heartily glad of a change. I suppose that I am rather late in the season for haying &c. that I shall lose the greatest sport of farming.” Dannie saw going to a farm during summer recess as an escape from the monotony of school, something exciting like a sporting event, and a chance to have some fun with his cousins. Benjamin had many boys just like Dannie working on his farm for various periods of time and at various pay scales. Some boys like Dannie received 34 dollars a month with their living expenses taken out of it while other (and usually older) boys were hired for longer periods of time for more money: a man

¹ Stoll, Steven. *Larding the Lean Earth*. Macmillian. 2002. p. 24

² *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Personal Memoirs of Worcester County*. Crane. Ellery Bicknell. New York: The Lewis Publishing Company. 1907. p. 83.

named Peter was hired “for 10 months from Feb. 1 for \$150.00.” Other boys were paid for the amount of work they did such as “laying wall on hill @ 50 cts. per rod” or “digging potatoes @ 10 cts. pr. bush.” Occasionally Benjamin would hire girls to work around the house for a few weeks at a time. He hired two sisters, Maggie and Sarah Sever, at \$2.00 and \$2.50 per week respectively. While he doesn’t record what they did to earn their wages, one can reasonably assume that were it not for these girls working in the house and the boys helping with the farm Benjamin would not have been able to expand his farm as much as he did or devote his time to matters of the community.

Benjamin was a dedicated churchgoer who only missed church four times between 1862 and 1876: twice on account of personal ailments which kept him bedridden, once to sit by his dying grandmother’s bed and once to look after his gravely sick son. Nothing less than excruciating personal ailments or a serious threat to the health of a family member could keep Benjamin away from church on Sunday morning. His journals reveal the meticulous way Benjamin approached his spiritual life. He kept records for over 25 years of who preached and what the subject of their sermon was, the number of people who attended his Sunday school class, as well as the total collection. Benjamin was elected deacon for the first time on April 4th, 1862 and he held this position for the rest of his life. On account of this lifelong service he is only referred to in his eulogy as “Dea. Nourse.” Obtaining the office of deacon at only 26 years of age was a sign that Benjamin was widely trusted and known to have good judgment by the congregation. He was also one of the members of his church to go to the annual Conference of Churches in Grafton in late October – a responsibility that made him and his wife the face of their congregation.

Like most people who went to church every Sunday, Benjamin donated a small amount each week ranging from as little as one cent to as much as thirty cents. He also took special interest in where the church donations were going and how they were helping the community. This information was also recorded in his journals and the money went mostly to the local poor farm (a public farm maintained to house, employ, and feed the poor)³ or to freedmen. Benjamin also financially supported religious causes in the community beyond his weekly church donation by donating money to address more specific problems. For instance on April 23, 1862 he gave \$1.00 for the Sunday School library – 100 times the one cent that he donated at church the next Sunday. Less than a month later he donated \$2.00 to the Home Missions, a group that aimed to convert people in the Westboro area, and soon afterwards he gave another \$2.50 to the Bible Society. Always concerned with the wellbeing of others not as well of as him, on November 8th, 1863 Benjamin “gave \$1.25 for poor of church,” a sizeable sum at the time, but a standard act of caring for Benjamin.

Benjamin was especially dedicated to religious education and taught a Sunday school class after church services for years. His dedication to his class was such that in mid 1863 he bought a book of sermons in order to “reorganize [his] S.S. class.” Benjamin appears to have done well as a teacher and won the affection of his students, for many of them wrote to him during the period between 1861 and 1862, telling him of their

³ Allen, Kristina. On the Beaten Path. Westboro: Westboro Historical Society. 1984.p. 85.

involvement in the war and reflecting fondly on the days of his Sunday afternoon classes. Many of the pupils who kept in contact with Benjamin were involved in fighting in the Civil War and this is one of the few ways that this subject enters Benjamin's life.

Benjamin Alden had a penchant for staying up to date on national and regional affairs in addition to his prominent role in local affairs. He attended meetings of the Presidential Committee for the election of 1864 as well as participating in the gubernatorial nomination and election proceedings. He was also a part of the committee that revised the town constitution on April 6th, 1863. He was involved in the local, regional and statewide affairs of Massachusetts, but was also keenly aware of the major national issue of the day: the Civil War.

As Benjamin lived in the rather secure Northeast, he was in no immediate danger and saw the war only through the eyes of those who wrote to him. As this was the case, the war seems to have had little impact of his daily life other than his going to the occasional soldiers' meeting and hearing tidbits about the war from his correspondents, many of whom had been pupils of Benjamin in his Sunday classes. Eugene Petus in 1862 wrote, "I had left Westboro not because I wished to get away from my Sunday school chaps, but because I hated to live where I did. I hate the town. Now I am off again, and where do you spose I am going this time? Well I am going into the Navy, to try and whip the rebels and help save my country." While some of Benjamin's old pupils were directly involved with the fighting, others such as W.L. Mood were out of the action, but still gave Benjamin updates on what they had heard about the course of the war as well as the exploits of soldiers from Westboro. On February 2nd, 1862 Mood related that, "I have heard of the death of some of the Westboro Co. but have not heard as they have had much fighting to do." Even out of sight of the fighting, Benjamin still received news about the war especially regarding Westboro companies.

While Benjamin was of age to fight during the war, he was not able to because he had to look after the farm; nonetheless, the war was still a subject that he discussed with his friends. In 1861 he received a letter from S.N. Pierce comparing the wartime efforts of Westboro and Mt. Pleasant, Pierce's hometown. He writes, "But I suppose there is no topic like war. Westboro has done well for the war. – You are in a good neighborhood so it seems since I left...I hope it doesn't make your town as dull to have the soldiers leave as it does this city." Westboro sent a total of 337 men to fight in the Civil War and many of the townspeople who did not fight supported the war effort through other means.⁴ For instance, a group of more than 200 Westboro women called the Soldiers' Sewing Society sewed together everything needed for the soldiers from Westboro and also sent shipments of clothes to the Sanitary Commission in Boston.⁵ Through their support soldiers from Westboro and others fighting for the North received the basic supplies that they needed to survive. Benjamin's wife Jane was a member of this sewing society and even held meetings in her own home. In 1863 Benjamin purchased a sewing machine for Jane, perhaps to increase the amount of garments she was able to put out for the war effort.

⁴ Allen. p. 81.

⁵ Allen. p. 79-80.

It seems that Benjamin and his friends supported the abolitionist mood that the war took after the Emancipation Proclamation even before this shift in the motivation for war. In 1861 the wife of S.N. Pierce writing to Benjamin's mother said of the war, "It is very sad. It will cause an innumerable amount of suffering; still I can but hope in the end it will have a glorious result. If slavery can but be abolished it will indeed be glorious & thousands be made to rejoice." The fact that she put this in a letter to the Nourse family demonstrates that they most likely thought the same thing about slavery. To further corroborate how the Nourse's may have felt about racial equality, Benjamin records that "Jane & Mother went to hear a colored man lecture" on November 1st, 1863 and their church voted to give its collection for the first quarter of 1868 to freedmen. Thus it seems quite likely that the Nourses supported racial equality and the end of slavery.

Since the journals for 1864 and 1865 are missing, the record picks back up after the conclusion of the war in 1866, a time in Benjamin's life when he cemented his reputation as an honest and hardworking individual. By the late 1860's, the schools were in need of many improvements from better buildings to better teachers and Benjamin tried to find the money to make the necessary changes. On March 2nd, 1868 he "raised 29 dol for com. schools, \$12.50 for high schools" and a town meeting later the next month voted to build a new schoolhouse. Throughout the late summer and early fall Benjamin was very active in his role as school board member. He traveled to many towns to examine teachers and finally found one in Wellesley that met the school committee's requirements and hired her to teach the grammar school for 12 dollars a month. Then on October 16th of the same year he attended a teachers' convention in Boston, suggesting that he was teaching classes in the public schools. Over the next few months he continued to visit schools as the winter term progressed. Perhaps because of his heavy involvement in 1868, on March 2nd, 1869 at the first meeting of the school committee Benjamin "was chosen chairman" of the committee.

Despite being chairman, Benjamin did not comment much on the actions of the school committee and it wasn't until late November 1870 that he again comments on school business other than visiting schools. On November 21st, a meeting of the town voted to build another schoolhouse. After this entry, Benjamin does not comment on the public schools until 1874 when he mentions that he "visited one school" on January 20th and was quiet on the subject again until October 29th, 1875 when he again visited a school. However, in the years from 1862 to 1870, Benjamin would say that he *examined* a school, meaning that he was there on school committee business. However, these last two entries about the schools say that he *visited* them which casts a doubt on whether Benjamin was still a member of the school committee. Yet since the years from 1874-1876 are more sparse than Benjamin's previous annals, it is possible that he just didn't have the time to record why he visited the two schools.

Benjamin had a lifelong dedication to studying the Bible and teaching its lessons to others. In late 1866 Benjamin bought a copy of Kittoe's Bible History of the Holy Land – a book that discussed the Jews and the history of Jerusalem. Benjamin wanted something that would last and that he could study alongside the Bible for years so he paid an extra \$4.20 for a more sturdy leather binding – a large sum for a farmer at the time. The fact that he spent a large sum of money on this book demonstrates how important it

must have been to him. In 1871 Benjamin subscribed for Goodrich's *Kingdom Illustrated*, an annual Christian publication. While Benjamin was a lifelong student of the Bible, he also sought out other sources of information about biblical history. This dedication to his own personal study is likely the reason that he was chosen to teach the town's children in Sunday school.

Soon after he began teaching on Sunday afternoons, Benjamin was given more responsibilities around the church. On April 3rd, 1868 Benjamin records that after a meeting of the church he "was again chosen superintendent of Sunday school." The fact that he says *again* demonstrates that he had held this post before, most likely the year before, for he was elected again the next three years. This gave Benjamin the responsibility for the religious education of all members of his church – a task that he was likely quite excited about. Around the time that he became superintendent of the Sunday school, Benjamin began to attend various types of regional Sunday school meetings and seminars. He traveled to Woburn, Haverhill, and Lynn among towns to attend these conferences and from his character in other aspects of his life one can reasonably assume that he brought back what he learned in these conferences and applied it to the running of the Sunday school at the Congregational church.

When Benjamin began teaching his pupils numbered under 10 with around three or four in attendance on average. By 1871 his attendance had skyrocketed to around 200 and occasionally even more would show up. This may have been because of Benjamin's ability to teach a good Sunday school class or it may have been the fact that his church had expanded its capacity and its membership. A letter to Benjamin from Daniel March on September 14th, 1860 reveals that Benjamin's church could only seat around 660, but in 1868 the church underwent renovations "to enlarge and repair the church" and always a charitable spirit, Benjamin donated \$500 to the repairs. With a larger church, more people were able to attend as evidenced by the fact that Benjamin records that around 1868 people were uniting with the church. The expansion of Church membership is one possibility for why Benjamin's Sunday school class expanded so much in the late 1860's and early 1870's; however, it has also been amply demonstrated that he was an able teacher who was always trying to improve his own religious knowledge and impart it on the children who attended his classes on Sunday afternoons.

Benjamin was involved in the Young Men's Christian Association in Westboro for the duration of his journals, but towards the late 1860's he began to accumulate more responsibilities. He regularly attended the annual conventions of the local YMCA and was chosen president of the Westboro chapter at the end of 1868. From this point on, Benjamin began to attend more regional meetings including an "executive meeting of YMCA" in May of 1873 and a statewide convention in September of the same year. Then in November he was again elected president of the "YMCA of Worcester Co." In addition to being an active member Benjamin donated money to the YMCA, at one point in 1868 giving a hefty sum of \$25. His involvement in the YMCA demonstrates many qualities that are elsewhere exemplified: he was trusted, dedicated to what he was doing, and generous in his donations.

As a deacon of his church Benjamin was a public figure who had a reputation for being able to be trusted and his church believed that he would be a good representative

for their congregation. In 1866 and 1868 Benjamin attended the Massachusetts Christian Convention in Boston as the representative from his church. The next year this event was held in Westboro and Benjamin was the President of the convention. He spent weeks before preparing for it, making arraignments for special programs and responding to a slew of letters concerning the convention. Benjamin and his wife also regularly attended quarterly Conferences of Churches. To do this, Benjamin had to travel all around New England, often on trips that took a couple days to complete. Thus he attended the conferences more often in the winter when he didn't have to worry about running the farm; however, around 1872/1873 Benjamin began to attend the summer and fall meetings as well as those during the winter. This was most likely the case because he had found a system for running the farm in his absence and was more occupied with the business aspects of farming than the day-to-day farming activities.

In the early 1870's Benjamin made an interesting transition from a simple farmer to a businessman. This change is manifest in many aspects of his life, but most notably in his selling of milk and apples. When Benjamin inherited the farm in 1858 he owned 10 cows and produced around 9 cans of milk a day on average. As time went on Benjamin expanded his cattle herd and began to produce more milk, as much as 25 cans a day in 1870. In addition to producing more milk, Benjamin began to experiment with alternative uses for milk. In July 1866 Benjamin noted that he had begun to send milk to a factory, most likely to make whey and cheese. Benjamin was a part of a milk committee that regulated milk production and sales in Westboro. In March 1868 Benjamin was appointed to an internal committee responsible for selling the milk. He began to travel to Boston and other towns in the area to sell Westboro milk. This was an important step from local farmer towards regional businessman. In 1870 Benjamin met with the N.E. Milk Producer Association on one of his trips to Boston, likely to discuss regional sales of milk. The next year the Westboro Milk Committee met with "the Boston Co.", but "no trade was made." Apparently Benjamin tried to get this trade to happen, for he visited Boston multiple times and went to a milk conference there in November 1871. However, it seems he was unable to make a trade with the Boston Company so in the month between February 6th and March 9th, 1872 Benjamin visited Axon, Ashland, Cochituate, Grafton, Hudson, Framingham, Boston and So. Framingham. It is likely that on one of these trips Benjamin reached an agreement to sell milk regionally because he only records the number of cans sold at the farm one more time after January 1872, which seems to mean that he was no longer selling individual cans, but rather selling in bulk to a regional distributor. Benjamin continued to travel to Boston for meetings regarding milk; however, he never again notes that they were unable to make a trade. When he first inherited the farm, Benjamin sold milk locally by the can; however, as time went on and he needed more money to expand the farm, Benjamin started selling milk regionally. This demonstrates the introduction of milk into the regional market as well as a change in Benjamin from a farmer to a businessman.

The more significant example of how Benjamin turned a small farm into a business that competed in the local, regional and international markets is his apple business. Benjamin first started planting apple trees on his farm in 1862. At the time he would sell the apples by the barrel on the farm to local patrons for between \$1.50 and \$2.00 and would also use the apples to make applesauce and cider. By the time the

journals pick back up again in 1866 Benjamin had begun bringing barrels of apples to markets in Worcester and selling them there in addition to on the farm. This marks the beginning of a trend towards globalization in the market for apples. For soon afterwards, in 1868, Benjamin began to ship his apples to a Boston trader by the name of J.G. Darling who sold them in the Boston area for him. While at first he would send Mr. Darling around a dozen barrels at a time, by 1870 he was sending twenty or more barrels each time, once sending 50 barrels in the span of 6 days. In the later years of his life Benjamin took the diffusion of his apples one step further when he began to sell them via Newlands, Thomas & Co. a trading group that dealt with the international trade of apples. According to receipts from 1896, Benjamin was now sending hundreds of barrels at a time, even sending 515 barrels in September of 1896. It seems that this company sold the apples internationally for their letterhead advertises that its ships sail to Glasgow and Liverpool. In addition to international shipment, this company introduced international competition for quality and price of apples. In a letter to Benjamin in November 1896 they discuss the competition with Canadian apples: “judging from the quality of Canadian fruit, and the prices that it is selling at, we consider that Boston apples are making a fair price, and will not likely make more, unless the Canadian fruit goes higher.” Sadly Benjamin died three months later so his international apple business never had a chance to become a steady enterprise. However, as is true in many aspects of his life Benjamin expanded his farming business beyond the borders of his farm and found more profitable ways to sell apples than on the side of the road. This speaks to his entrepreneurial and innovative attitude towards farming by which Nourse Farm became one of the most efficient and productive farms in the region.

Benjamin expanded the farm multiple times during his life, both in acres under cultivation as well as in terms of variety of produce. When he inherited the farm it was 82 acres with an 8-acre meadow. He first expanded it in 1866 when he bought a 50-acre plot from J. Staples. This purchase does not appear in his journal for the year, but is recorded in the annual assessor’s report. However, there is a record on March 16th of that year when Benjamin wrote Mr. Staples a note for \$500, perhaps for this plot of land. Two years later in 1868 Benjamin again expanded the acreage of the farm by buying a 19-acre pasture from Lorenzo Whitney for \$300. This purchase brought the farm to 159 acres. Over the next two years, Benjamin was very busy cultivating all of his new land. During this time he had at least three workers on the payroll at all times and spent much less time recording other activities such as his Church involvement. In addition to a physical expansion of the farm, Benjamin also expanded the variety of plants grown on the farm: planting blackberries, different varieties of strawberries, cranberries, watermelon and grapes between 1868 and 1870. Then in 1870 Benjamin again bought an adjacent property to enlarge his own, this time buying the farm of his uncle, David Nourse. When Benjamin Alden’s grandfather Benjamin had divided the farm between his two living sons in 1812, he had given David the plot north of the street and Joseph the house and fields south. Fifty-eight years later Benjamin Alden reunited the farm and expanded the land under his control to 230 acres.

In addition to expanding the physical size of the farm, Benjamin experimented with new farming technologies and tools. In the 1870’s, Benjamin began to attend more farmer’s conventions in a wider array of places. He learned many new farming

techniques such as one that he recorded in his journal in May of 1870: “For bugs on vines use cobs soaked in coal tar.” Benjamin tried out new farming tools in addition to new farming methods. In 1869 Benjamin “went to Upton to see Mr. Knowlton’s farming operations” to observe new technologies at work. Benjamin was able to mechanize labor-intensive tasks that had had to be done by hand before which allowed him to cultivate the land he purchased with minimal additions to his hired help. From 1862 until 1869 Benjamin had employed three farm hands per summer; however, from 1870 until 1873 he employed an average of two. This reduction in employees may have been a response to the harder economic times or it may have been made possible by mechanization. More evidence that it may have been the recession rather than mechanization that caused Benjamin to reduce his labor force is the fact that between February and April of 1871 Benjamin sold off four plows. Then in 1872 he sold off the David Nourse farm, another plow and 4 of his 20 cows: 20 percent of his milk and cheese production. This tendency which matches up with the economic recession of the early 1870’s seems to indicate that the recession hit Benjamin hard and forced him to sell of many of his possessions that he had fought hard for: most notably the second half to his ancestral farm.

Benjamin Alden was heavily involved in public service to his town and county. He was a referee in various legal cases from 1866 until 1871, a responsibility that signaled the trust of the community and a reputation for level handedness. In 1871 he was chosen assessor of the town of Westboro, a position that required similar characteristics. The next year he was chosen one of the selectman of Westboro. As a selectman Benjamin’s responsibilities included visiting and evaluating the poor farm, examining the boarders of the town, enforcing the law, etc. Benjamin held the title of selectman from 1872 until November 1875 when he was elected representative of Worcester County. This was a step up from the mainly local leadership that Benjamin had provided so far in his life.

In January of 1876 Benjamin “went to Boston as representative” and was likely traveling to and from Boston a lot between January and March. Later in the summer Benjamin attended a meeting of the General Assembly in Lowell and this was one of the last meaningful entries in his journal for in October the record ends and the rest of the journal is blank. Regardless of the years that Benjamin did not record, there is a trend in the rest of his life of responsibility and trustworthiness that elevated Benjamin to great heights. His life of public service began as a special commissioner to enforce laws about milk and he climbed the political ladder until he was the representative to the legislature in Boston, quite an accomplishment for simple farmer without a college education. Yet if there is any one reason for Benjamin’s success that stands out above the others it was his trustworthiness and self-control in all of his affairs that gained him the trust of his community.

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