William Sumner Appleton and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities: Professionalism and Labor

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by

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Introduction

Historic preservation has seen (over its long history) the constant evolution of heritage values. Many of these values are rooted in tradition and a sense of antiquarianism while others are interjected through contemporary opinions and sentiments. Within that history, The Society for the Preservation of New England antiquities has contributed greatly to preservation by incorporating the aspirations and values for its founder, William Sumner Appleton Jr. Through his Society, Appleton contributed to the development of historic preservation by modernizing preservation with scientific and organizational values.

The different milestones in preservation in the United States all have different qualities that reflect their corresponding period. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association was founded in the mid-nineteenth century and sought to memorialize George Washington through his historic homestead as the American Revolution was slipping toward the distant past. The Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the New York City Landmarks Law of 1965 correspond with the concept of history as a public benefit both in response to and enabled by urban renewal land use policies. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities marked a point when heritage was the responsibility of private citizens.

This project analyzes the historic context of SPNEA’s founding. Appleton’s place in society during this time of social change in Boston infused the organization with the values of a capitalist Yankee responding to the increasing influence of newer European immigrants and labor reform movements. This paper explores Appleton’s noted contributions to preservation, the projects undertaken by SPNEA during these early years and the historic context of Boston during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.
This project started with the investigation of the relationship between the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. The original hypothesis was that the two movements, which were complimentary in Britain and disjointed later in the United States, may have shared common goals and associations in Boston during the early twentieth century. When further investigation revealed that the two organizations had limited and superficial connections, the research focus shifted to SPNEA's history and practices. Research on restoration projects demonstrated that labor and craft values were dismissed, while these themes were a driving philosophy in the Arts and Crafts movement. Ultimately, SPNEA's historic contribution to preservation is related to the objective values attributed to historic houses which in-turn alienates labor in restoration projects. By exploring the professional contributions, restoration practices and historical context of SPNEA it is determined that the Society was driven by capitalist, objective and scientific values that largely excluded any focus on the betterment of the worker. As a result, SPNEA had a lasting influence in the development, practice and perception of preservation.

Appleton and SPNEA is a notable contribution in preservation history because of the emphasis placed on documentation of historic structures. Additionally, Appleton formed the Society in a way that effectively managed campaigns, buildings and restoration projects across the New England region. Scientific principles of documentation and formalized business practiced by the SPNEA lead to the general acceptance of Appleton being considered the first professional preservationist in the United States.

The projects undertaken by Appleton and SPNEA reflect the values held by the society. Through the restorations of numerous houses, SPNEA employed a labor structure
of supervisory experts and contracted workmen to accomplish their restoration goals. The professional aspect of preservation in these projects was the actions of the architects and consultants like Appleton, knowledgeable in historic buildings, while the workers served as a means of heritage production. By ignoring specific issues about the training or conditions of the worker, SPNEA maintained its professional authority while effectively and economically reaching their goal to preserve historic houses.

Appleton modernized preservation by evaluating material and aesthetic authenticity in restoration projects as well as utilizing documentation and organizational. Based on the scientific principles adopted by other fields like archaeology, Appleton created a field that focused on the inherent values of historic buildings themselves rather than association values of the families and people who lived within them. By exploring how these values relate to labor practices within SPNEA’s projects, this paper exposes patterns that align with the historical context of the organization’s development and with contemporary preservation practice. As preservation continues to develop and adapt to new social, cultural and political influences, it serves the field to be conscientious of the values that have shaped and persist within the field.

This project has inherent limitations and presents future opportunities for research. Appleton was an enigmatic figure with little available information concerning his personal views. There is no known collection of personal correspondence of Appleton, only professional correspondence. Because of the business nature of the archival information, Appleton rarely reveals his true personal opinions. The best available information on Appleton’s personal sentiments lies in scrapbooks with indirect suggestions of his interests like ticket stubs and newspaper clippings highlighting his interests and associations. The
next step beyond this work would be to study the day-to-day business records of the organization to understand the operational attitudes of Appleton and the organization. This project prompts the need for further work in understanding the motives and mechanisms of early professional preservation.

Chapter 1: Appleton, and the Professional Management of Preservation

William Sumner Appleton Jr. has long been considered by scholars of the history of historic preservation as a pioneer in creating a professionalized preservation field.¹ In 1910, Appleton founded the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and began to redefine historic preservation practice. With his financial independence and position as the Society’s “Corresponding Secretary” he was still very much a wealthy amateur delving into patriotic historical endeavors. Yet while his social position and wealth categorized him as an amateur, Appleton is credited by historians of the preservation movement with developing a professional approach to preservation. He brought a scientific process into the practice of preservation. He also instituted a framework to bring preservation to a regional scale. Appleton’s professionalization of preservation is based in the institution of object-oriented scientific methods and a managerial division of labor that resulted in a corporate hierarchy consisting of administration, educated experts and contracted labor. This was a novel approach to preservation and marked one of Appleton’s major contributions to the field. While Appleton took his cues from other architects and historians researching and preserving buildings, he adopted scientific principles for more organized deployment through SPNEA. As historians of historic preservation have noted Appleton’s contribution to the professionalization of preservation, this project seeks to expand this understanding by analyzing the labor relationships developed by the organization and implemented in its restoration projects.

Appleton originally approached preservation as an enthusiast for protecting historic buildings like the Old State House and the Paul Revere House, both in his home town of Boston, Massachusetts. A trust fund allowed him the flexibility to entertain such civic endeavors but preservation work drew him to develop the interest that led to his life’s work and founding of SPNEA. Preservation historian Charles B. Hosmer writes of Appleton:

“William Sumner Appleton of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities came the closest to professional status, but he was an amateur living off a personal trust fund that freed him to donate all of his time to worthy causes. Appleton had not been trained as an architect, historian or archaeologist. He simply came to understand buildings in his native New England through constant travel and frequent contacts with the small number of architects who had been engaged in preservation work.”

Appleton was an amateur in only a slight sense. While having no training in these fields, he was at least partially exposed to the principles through his education at Harvard. Appleton took two courses in Fine Arts under Charles Eliot Norton who founded the Archaeological Institute of America and lectured on arts and culture.

Michael Holleran, in chronicling *Boston’s Changeful Times*, names Appleton as a professional while categorizing others as amateurs as amateurs. “Appleton was not America’s first full-time preservationist—that was surely Ann Pamela Cunningham, of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association—but he became the first professional preservationist. He brought to the field systematic methods and a standing institution independent of any particular cause.”

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perspective. The systematic methods of documentation and institutional administration of Appleton’s organization are what qualified him as a professional. His work was thought by preservation historian William Murtagh to have a scientific quality in preventing demolition, restoration, and finding suitable stewards for historic buildings across the region.

In *Keeping Time*, William Murtagh agrees with Hosmer’s assessment of Appleton’s contributions to preservation. He too describes how Appleton’s success in the field of preservation comes from a scientific approach and a flexible organizational structure.

“Almost single-handedly, Appleton dragged the historic house museum into the twentieth century and gave its existence as scholarly foundation... Appleton promoted the historic house as an indispensable link in the chain of material culture, parallel in importance to written documentation. Equally important, his Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities developed a network of historic house museums throughout New England, centrally administered from Boston. This created for the first time a critical mass of preserved architecture (or at least perception of it) that testified to the serious purpose of the endeavor.”

With these two ideas, Appleton pushed preservation from patriotic antiquarianism toward a structured field.

Appleton was a major actor in the facilitation of this shift toward a new scientific model. Historian James M. Lindgren describes this shift as shifting from personalism to professionalism. Lindgren identifies Appleton as the turning point from a nostalgia-oriented preservation, to a scientific preservation where men are interested in “...architectural aesthetics, craftsmanship, and scientific, business-minded expertise.” It is clear that Appleton’s interests and concerns with historic properties were somewhat

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different from previous preservation efforts. Compared with the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and other historical and patriotic societies, Appleton wanted SPNEA to save houses because of their physical features. Lindgren further develops the importance of the Society in *Preserving Historic New England*:

> “Appleton and SPNEA did slowly transform the field and break loose from earlier work, which was ad hoc in planning, unscientific in method, and romantic in its reading of history. They advocated corporate organization, meritocratic control, scientific method, and business-minded principles, and these features were adopted by later organizations such as the National Park Service and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. In so doing, SPNEA spurred the creation of a profession that still serves as custodians of this material culture.”

He was involved with other historic organizations like the Sons of the Revolution and the Massachusetts Historical Society, but primarily chose to steer away from the genealogical ties of historic buildings and focus on their physical qualities of craftsmanship and aesthetics.

Appleton’s education was influential on his thinking of preservation. His education at Harvard included English, history and philosophy that emphasized traditionalism and the importance of class. Most influential on Appleton’s later preservation philosophy was the fine arts courses he took under Charles Elliot Norton. Norton emphasized the connections between the arts and humanities with society and culture. Norton also encouraged preservation and archaeology, and was the first president of the Archaeological Institute of America. Appleton returned to Harvard to take graduate courses in mining but instead took a class under Denman Ross titled: “Theory of Pure Design.” This class emphasized the inseparable nature of art and society, and despite his poor performance in

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7 Ibid. 19-20.
the class, it inspired Appleton to further consider traditionalism and aesthetics. Overall this education in history and art would coalesce to form the underpinnings of his preservation philosophy.

Having been exposed to the traditionalism at Harvard and Norton's ideas on art and archaeology, Appleton viewed preservation as an archeological activity. In 1919, he contributed an article to the journal *Art & Archeology* detailing the old houses being lost and preserved in New England. In explaining the artistic and archeological nature of his work, Appleton asserted that preservation involved them both. “To readers of *Art and Archaeology* surely no defense of the preservation of meritorious old houses is necessary. Such preservation is all part of proper archaeological and antiquarian work, and in many cases the preservation involves also a house which may be deemed a work of art as well.”

Appleton was attempting to legitimize preservation work as a professional endeavor. Aside from a few architects that were particularly interested in historic buildings like Joseph Chandler, Norman Morrison Isham and Henry Charles Dean, architects at the time were mainly concerned with adapting historic themes to contemporary fashions through the Colonial Revival. Appleton wanted to convey the value of archeological and artistic qualities of historic houses that had previously been valued for patriotic and genealogical associations.

This scientific valuation of historic houses essentially changed how preservationists understood these buildings. Previous historical societies valued historic sites for their associations with patriots and local historic figures. Appleton was very concerned with the

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tangible values that old houses retained from the past. In addition to the aesthetic and architectural merits which he valued so highly, Appleton also appreciated the practical elements of framing and construction. Murtagh describes this approach in terms of paleontology, while Appleton keenly saw his work as relying on archeological principles.

“By the end of his career, he had learned to study a house in the same manner as paleontologist might study skeletal remains—a mode of examination now taken for granted by preservation professionals. Together with his insistence on the importance of “reading” a house, Appleton fought the impulse, which was shared by many of his supporters, to prettify or clean up an old building, in the process destroying its teaching potential.”

The “reading” of a house is another testament to Appleton’s treatment of a structure as document. Included in the many images of old buildings Appleton chose to publish in the Bulletin, are numerous illustrations of seemingly mundane features of the houses. This demonstrates Appleton’s focus on artifactual characteristics of the historic houses.

Appleton’s interest in the archaeological nature of buildings was strongly influenced by other architects working on restoration projects. Perhaps the most influential figure for Appleton was architect and colleague, Norman Morrison Isham. Isham authored early books on Early Rhode Island Houses (1895) and Early Connecticut Houses in addition to practicing as an architect of Colonial Revival buildings and supervising restoration projects. Isham took an archaeological approach to historic architecture and was a strong force in shaping Appleton’s view on preservation. For example, Appleton includes Isham’s written description and illustrations of the Thomas Lee House in East Lyme, Connecticut. Isham not only shows the overall form of the house but also focus heavily on the details of construction. These details include window details, chamfering patterns on beams, the

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construction of the joinery, various mortises and details that would not be visible as architectural features on the completed project.13 This attention to the minutia of the construction methods of historic houses demonstrates that Isham and Appleton not only valued the overall architectural quality of the house, but also its material history and hidden qualities.

**Documentation**

In addition to valuing structures as physical historical documents, Appleton put a heavy emphasis on the need for other documentation of historic houses. As part of SPNEA’s mission, Appleton sought to collect images of historic buildings for the Society’s library.

“Finally, there is an enormous amount of work to be done in the way of preservation of antiquities along the lines of photography and measured drawing. Strangely enough, this is a comparatively neglected field and there is no one place (though there should be several) where an inquirer can go with a certainty of finding photographs in large quantities of all the antiquities in the country. Even scarcer are the collections of measured drawings. It has been the custom of local historical societies to gather tolerably good photographic collections of the antiquities in their own neighborhoods, and although this has never been done as systematically as should be the case, yet how invaluable is this photographic record.”14

Through donations by photographers and members, Appleton sought as many old images as a record of both how buildings had changed and also buildings that had since been demolished. Appleton had an amateur enthusiasm for photography and often took pictures of old buildings. However, Appleton found it was important to hire professional photographers to document buildings as part of restoration projects.

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Appleton emphasized the value of measured drawings for historic New England buildings. In addition to receiving donations of measured drawings and illustrations of historic houses, Appleton announced in April of 1914 that the Boston Society of Architects had suggested having member firms create measured drawings of houses suggested by SPNEA. Through this cooperation, the two societies developed a joint committee to select houses worthy of documentation with the expectation that each member architectural firm could complete one house annually on a volunteer basis. Thus, SPNEA gathered and developed important documentation for historic structures.

The second facet of Appleton’s work to professionalize preservation was the corporate organizational structure that he gave to SPNEA, which allowed it to function as a flexible framework for regional preservation. A tiered system of organization and administration allowed SPNEA to operate from a central office in Boston and administrate a variety of branches throughout the region. The different states throughout the region had vice presidents to serve as a connection between the central administration in Boston and other interests throughout New England. These vice presidents were chosen for their social influence and good financial standing in order to engage their locals, contribute money and raise funds. Appleton’s goal was to have influence and fundraising capabilities throughout the region, but found himself bearing most of the responsibilities. Through this organization, Appleton effectively managed restoration projects, fundraising campaigns and real estate transactions from SPNEA’s office in Boston.

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In the first *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, Appleton describes the purpose of his new organization and how he perceived it to differ from previous preservation efforts.

“Our New England antiquities are fast disappearing because no society has made their preservation its exclusive object. That is the reason for the formation of this society. Historical, ancestral, patriotic, and similar societies have been frequently organized, of whose work that of preservation is only a part. These societies are practically powerless to meet the situation as it faces us today on account of the other objects which require and receive their attention. Only rarely does one of them save some old building, probably to be its headquarters, and when this is accomplished other local landmarks are likely to be neglected.”

When mentioning “similar societies,” Appleton was referring to many different organizations. An obvious national model for preservation had been the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, which succeeded in its mission to “save some old building” but whose scope was limited to a single cause. Appleton followed this passage by giving two local examples: The Paul Revere House in Boston, MA and the Royall House in Medford, MA. After playing a key role in the preservation of the Revere House, Appleton sought to increase the scope of preservation work by implementing the same preservation strategies on a larger scale. In mentioning the two campaigns he said, “This is splendid as far as it goes, but since the mechanism is elaborate it is seldom used, and it is wasteful because without much more elaboration it can be used to cover the whole field.”

Rather than create a building-specific preservation organization for each threatened house, Appleton wanted to create a group whose mission was to quickly respond to any worthy preservation cause in New England.

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18 Ibid. 4.
From this statement it is easy to understand that Appleton sought to create an administrative framework for such campaigns. Previously, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) had been established in 1889 as the nation’s first statewide preservation organization. The structure of APVA was as largely a social organization. Taking its cues from the MVLA, the organization was established as a women’s group to advance patriotic commemoration through the preservation of the historic buildings and monuments in Virginia. In addition to the group of women who made up the organization there was a Gentleman’s Advisory Board consisting of men to give guidance to the organization. Although there was no requirement for specific ancestry as with the Daughter’s of the American Revolution, the society was restrictive on who would be admitted to the society by requiring an invitation to join.\(^{19}\) As a result, the organization as a whole began as a social organization with a patriotic and civic goal.

In contrast to the APVA, SPNEA had an open membership. Although Appleton chose officers, board members and vice presidents for their social influence, he also chose them for their expertise and financial resources. SPNEA not only took a more scientific approach to preservation, but also moved beyond the social nature of the organization into a more corporate structure involving officers and board members. This push toward a corporate efficiency in the management of heritage was part of how Appleton was able to create a professional model for preservation. This management structure can be seen as a modernization of the historical society model, where local factions of preservation efforts are unified under a central organization. This differed from the previous societies that sought to preserve singular buildings. Appleton’s experience with saving the Revere House

highlighted inefficiency in this singular-building model of preservation. With limited extra organizational and administrative effort, the networks of fundraising and cooperation used to save one building could be retained for use on other buildings across a larger scope.

The Appleton family legacy provided William Sumner Jr. with a predisposition toward a corporate efficiency in the management of preservation. Appleton’s father was a noted antiquarian, genealogist and numismatist and a founding member the Bostonian Society. Additionally the Appleton family’s prosperity was the product of the New England textile industry. Appleton was a business and industry-minded individual. He was educated at Harvard, a bastion of Brahmin ideology. He later began a career in real estate until suffering a nervous breakdown. Appleton eventually returned to Harvard to pursue an education in the mining industry. While he never attended the mining courses, he had traveled to visit mining operations in the West. Appleton’s interaction with his peers, experience in business and interest in industry enabled him to understand the importance of corporate organization in establishing his Society.

Despite Appleton’s acquisition of knowledge of historic New England buildings and keen interest in the minutia inherent in the old handcrafted structures, his ultimate role was that of administration. Under Appleton, SPNEA operated like a real estate trust, employing many techniques to preserve old houses. Some houses were purchased outright for ownership by the society. The Society’s first house, the Swett-Ilsely House was purchased, restored and subsequently leased to tenants for use as a tearoom. Other houses were leased to caretakers for a low rent, insuring that the houses would be occupied while

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providing some income for the Society.22 Other methods used by the society included buying houses and selling them with restrictions on how they must be maintained in addition to simply connecting endangered houses with people and societies that had the means and interest in saving them. The Hooper-Hathaway House in Salem, MA is an example of a building that was preserved by the intervention of SPNEA without direct stewardship. When the building, known at the time as the Old Bakery, was threatened with demolition, Appleton bought it for $500. He then persuaded SPNEA member Caroline Emmerton, to buy the house and relocate it to a site next to another historic house she already owned, the House of Seven Gables.23 In the case of the Fowler House in Danvers, MA, SPNEA purchased the house with an arrangement where the Society granted lifetime occupancy to two Fowler sisters under the condition that the occupants were responsible for maintenance.24

His regional approach to preservation paralleled the approach of the Massachusetts Trustees of Reservations, which made its primary goal the preservation of landscapes.25 SPNEA, like the Trustees of Reservations and other private philanthropic organizations, had a divided structure with appointed officers, a board of trustees as well as supporting members. This structure gave SPNEA the ability to appeal to the influence and finances of many interested supporting members, while centralizing decision-making and operations of the society.

The focus on houses as an historic object brought a scientific creditability to preservation and the organizational and administrative structure brought a corporate

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24 Ibid. 79.
efficiency previously unachieved by local preservation societies. Both of these approaches involved the alienation of the historic objects from their historic associations and means of production in addition to reorganizing preservation decision making and centralizing influence.
Chapter 2: The Restoration Process and the Alienation of Labor

Appleton’s approach to restoring historic houses differed from previous preservation and historical societies in his appreciation of vernacular architecture and the built fabric. While he was building upon the ideas of architect Norman M. Isham and Charles Elliot Norton in his archeological approach to preservation, he was able to institutionalize this preservation philosophy with the founding of the SPNEA. Because these aesthetic and material characteristics represent home building and design in pre-industrial America, the houses embody historic craftsmanship. While Appleton considered historic buildings as historic documents, the history they document is the history of design and construction in Colonial New England in addition to the genealogical history celebrated by earlier groups.

Despite Appleton’s interest in buildings as craft objects, he neglected to consider craftsmanship in many stages of the preservation process. In the restoration projects of the Boardman House, Harrison Gray Otis House, and Abraham Brown House it is clear that SPNEA did not seek to develop any system of preservation education or technical training beyond the supervision of workers. Architect Henry Charles Dean, with Appleton providing administrative oversight, led the Boardman House and the early part of the Otis House projects. Appleton was in charge of the Brown House restoration with the advice of his colleagues. While Appleton valued the historic materials and construction techniques of the original, he chose to invest in the skills necessary to appropriately reproduce these artisanal methods. Through contract bidding, the utilization of multiple general contractors, and general lack of interest in the workmen involved in various house restoration projects, Appleton and SPNEA separated the tradespeople of restoration
projects from what it meant to be a professionals in preservation. Correspondence with contractors and architects show that the finances were the primary concern for awarding contracts for the work.26

Appleton’s focus on physical artifacts was made clear in his advice to Celeste Bush of East Lyme, CT, regarding her 1914 project to preserve an old house and the re-internment of remains in an ancestral cemetery. Appleton, unable to see value in the “sacred ashes” replied stating that the grave markers were the only remaining significant historic features and that she would find “a thin layer of slime over the bottom of the vault and in this a few metal buttons.”27 This statement by Appleton illustrates the divide in his thinking from the other historical and commemorative societies at the time. Bush sought to honor the history of the site by giving a new order and appearance to the cemetery while Appleton felt that the site’s physical characteristics were what gave it value. This corresponds with his thoughts on historical archeology as well as his dismissal of genealogy and patriotism as the prime values of historic sites.

It is important to note that Appleton’s valorization of historic objects was through the understanding of the buildings as vernacular architecture. It was not, in other words, concerned with authorship, but rather with a relatively anonymous sense of archeological


technology. The quality of craftsmanship likely represented the hard work and perseverance of the early colonial settlers.

“At Norwich Town [Rhode Island] there has been preserved the old shop of Joseph Carpenter, silversmith. As the exterior only has been repaired up to the present an account of this may well be postponed. Its interest in the whole field of such work comes, however, from the fact of its being but a simple old-fashioned country shop of the days when so many men were their own masters. Doubtless at the close of the war enough money will be raised to repair the inside as successfully as the outside.”\(^{28}\)

In this excerpt from his piece in *Art and Archaeology*, Appleton briefly addresses the “simple old fashioned” labor conditions where the silversmith was a skilled and independent laborer. Joseph Carpenter, the craftsman in question and original owner of the building, was for Appleton only a cipher, representing a larger social reality. Yet despite his apparent enthusiasm for old-time craft-work, Appleton did not advocate for the recovery of artisanal processes as a valuable contribution to his contemporary society. While other groups saw the development of artisanal craftwork as a way to change and shape society, Appleton was only concerned with preserving the past vestiges of New England craft and ingenuity.\(^{29}\)

The three case studies that follow show a range in degree of intervention and were viewed as important pieces of the SPNEA collection. Appleton viewed the Boardman House as a remarkably intact house that needed little restorative work. The Harrison Gray Otis House was an architecturally significant building, needed moderate work and also proved and ideal location for the Society to use as its headquarters. Finally the Abraham Brown House provides an example of a house that need extensive reconstruction and restoration.


\(^{29}\) Ibid. 160.
and is considered one of the first scientific restoration projects in the United States.

Through the close study of each project, we gain an understanding of Appleton’s thinking. Each project tested Appleton’s views in different ways by forcing decisions about managing a restoration project and offered him with opportunities to test and implement a model of preservation project management based on the systematic division of labor. In all three case study projects, Appleton placed little value on the craftsmanship, labor associations or training on the workers carrying out the physical restoration work under his professional society.

The Boardman House

Appleton and SPNEA first became interested in a Saugus, MA house known as the Bennett-Boardman House in 1914. Appleton described the house in the *Bulletin* as “a magnificent specimen of our early architecture which has come down to us practically unchanged.”30 Appleton’s language here reinforces his scientific evaluation of the house, not as an ancestral home, but as an object to be studied. By April of 1915, Appleton made another appeal for additional funds to purchase and restore the structure. By May of 1916, the Society had raised the money to purchase the house, which it had acquired through the use of its emergency funds.31

Appleton hints as to the qualifications of the restoration carpenters who worked on the Boardman House project. In *Bulletin* Appleton states, “All this carpentering was under the supervision of Mr. Frederick R. Mosher, whose previous work on very old houses gave

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him rare qualifications for it.”  While attempting to triumph the quality of the restoration project, Appleton still carefully invokes the stratified levels of labor that Appleton has produced for the preservation.

![Image 2: The Boardman House, Saugus, MA. Undated. From the Collection of Historic New England](image)

Architect Henry Charles Dean led the Boardman project but Appleton insisted Dean to also consult Norman M. Isham, Joseph Chandler and George Francis Dow to express a consensus on its restoration. Appleton oversaw the administration of the project while Dean led the restoration with consulting parties. Another step down the ladder of labor in the project was Mr. Mosher who Appleton claimed had “rare qualifications” for supervising the carpentry work on historic buildings. Notes for a bill for work performed show that Mr.

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Mosher was a supervisor under a general contractor, I. H. Bogart & Son. Regardless of the validity of Mr. Mosher’s qualifications for performing the work, the administration of the project marginalizes the workmen and places emphasis on the importance of Appleton, Dean and the other consulting experts.

Appleton valued this house for its architecture and construction techniques since he made the compelling case for the building’s importance. The 1915 appeal in the Bulletin described the house’s significance:

“The house is without the slightest doubt one of the most worthy of preservation in all New England, as well as one of the most picturesque. The secretary knows of no house of the seventeenth century that has come down to us so little altered and still retaining so many of its valuable features—such as original chimney, many original doors, much original sheeting, original sills, unplastered ceilings, fine and varied old hinges, etc.”

The aesthetic and material (as opposed to patriotic or sentimental) qualities that Appleton noted are values that mark preservation’s professional turn. At this point in time, the Bulletin described the building as the Bennett-Boardman House and the appeal to members solicits for information on anyone bearing the names of Bennett or Boardman so they can be contacted for fundraising purposes. While the organization relied on the genealogy and history of the houses’ inhabitants, this was a means to a fundraising end for Appleton, allowing him to move forward with his preservation of the house as a “specimen.” Relying on an alternate history of the house where the original occupants were Scottish indentured servants working at the Saugus Iron Works, Appleton used the house a symbol of the Americanization of hard working immigrants in contrast to how he viewed his contemporaries. He additionally used the narrative of Scottish ironworkers to solicit

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money from Scottish-American steel tycoon and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie.\textsuperscript{36} The genealogical features of the house seem fluid to Appleton, who was primarily concerned with funding the house in order to preserve the physical fabric. Appleton even uses the phrase “valuable features” to describe the structure of the house. He did not base his assignment of value on whether the elements were visible. In fact, most of the fabric he was interested in was concealed: the original sheathing, meaning the wood boards underneath the siding would always be covered from view, except during restoration. He was interested in the degree of integrity of the house, understood as the relative amount of original historic material it contained.

“The “Scotch”-Boardman house is a superlatively fine example of the type with structural overhang along the entire front, amounting in this case to 17 ½ inches. A leanto was at some time added, but of other changes there have been far fewer than is usual in old houses. The window openings and outer doors have been altered, as also the mantel ends of the lower main rooms. An astonishing lot of old sheathing still remains, as well as old doors, and much old hardware. While the chimney may possibly not be original, it is certainly very ancient.”\textsuperscript{37}

Appleton’s careful descriptions of the handcrafted timber-framed structure in the Boardman House suggest that he strongly valued craftsmanship. However, this theoretical interest did not carry through into practical work on the house. Partly, this could be attributed to the fact that the Boardman House was in such good condition when SPNEA acquired the building, There was no large-scale restoration; only smaller repairs and maintenance were necessary. “What little we have been able to do to the house has been almost entirely in the way of vital repairs, with a little restoration work. The sills received the first attention. Several were found to be original, but of these only those at the


\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities} 9 no. 1 (November 1918): 18
southwest corner could be retained. The rest were all renewed in oak, hand hewn as were the old, so that the continuity of appearance is preserved.”38

Appleton hints as to the qualifications of the restoration carpenters that worked on the Boardman House project. In Bulletin Appleton states, “All this carpentering was under the supervision of Mr. Frederick R. Mosher, whose previous work on very old houses gave him rare qualifications for it.”39 While attempting to triumph the quality of the restoration project, Appleton still carefully invokes the stratified levels of labor that he has produced for the preservation.

The closest Appleton came to appreciating the true craftwork nature of the restoration project is in locating traditionally produced clapboard for the Boardman House. In December of 1916, he wrote to the postmaster of Hallowell, ME in an attempt to locate hand-riven clapboard.

“Dear Sir:
I am informed that in some town in the vicinity of Augusta it is possible to buy hand-split clapboards of pine or oak, and write to ask if you know of anyone in your town who makes such clapboards. Should you happen to know of such a person may I trouble you to send me the name and address in the enclosed stamped envelope.”40

This exchange is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, that Appleton sought to buy hand-split boards reinforces that the carpenters and contractors who Appleton hired for the restoration were unable to replicate the clapboard using traditional techniques. Appleton’s search for the handcrafted object was driven by the desire for aesthetic effect, rather than any understanding of how it was produced—he did not inquire about how the product was made, but whether it could be purchased. To Appleton, the clapboard was a

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39 Ibid.
product to be purchased rather than a restoration skill to be developed or retained for his projects.

Appleton queried his friend and architect Norman Isham about how to install the clapboard. Although Appleton's letter to Isham is missing, one can surmise from the latter's response that Appleton inquired whether it would be possible to install the clapboard using modern attachments. The latter responded on June 20, 1917, “I suppose you are trying for an absolutely correct restoration so you must not worry too much about modern ideas.” Isham’s solution was to hang the clapboard on the gable front of the house with simple shiplap end joints. While Appleton seemingly went to great lengths to locate clapboard produced with traditional methods, his goal was the historic appearance, not fidelity to the historic building technique. This approach comes off as contradictory to his understanding of the building as a historic document by focusing on the buildings aesthetic.

The First Harrison Grey Otis House

In 1916, SPNEA acquired the first Harrison Gray Otis House to serve as its headquarters at Cambridge and Lynde Streets in Boston, MA. The Otis House provided an opportunity for SPNEA to secure a location for the society in its own building. Despite owning several other historic properties by this time, it was clear that Appleton wanted the SPNEA headquarters to remain in Boston. In April 1915, he detailed the need for more office, museum and library space by proposing a solution common of many historic societies. “Even a small town like New London, Conn., only lately raised $33,000 to buy the Shaw House and grounds as headquarters for its Historical Society and Museum. This is

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almost exactly the sum needed for similar work in Boston, since thirty to forty thousand dollars should suffice for a suitable building somewhere on Beacon Hill.”42 As Beacon Hill was (and remains to this day) the historic elite power center of Boston, it is clear that Appleton saw proximity to high society as an asset.43 In December 1916, Appleton celebrated the acquisition of the stately federal-styled home. “From our Society’s point of view by far the most important event of the summer was the acquisition as its future home of the house built in 1795 by Harrison Gray Otis on the corner of Cambridge and Lynde streets, Boston.”44

Image 3: First Harrison Gray Otis House, Boston, MA. Undated. From the Collection of Historic New England

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43 It is not clear if Appleton had already identified the Otis House as an option when speculating a location and purchase price.
By 1920, the Society owned seven historic properties and restoration work had begun at the Otis House. The work undertaken was more involved than that of the Boardman House and the restoration process was documented in greater detail. The project began under Dean who was killed during the 1919 influenza epidemic. The restoration work itself was not undertaken by a single restoration team but was contracted out to multiple firms, assigned separate projects throughout the house. This strategy would have allowed the Society to search for the best price for each necessary task. One requirement of the restoration was the replacement of many windows. In a letter dated March 27, 1920, Appleton received notice from the contractors who fabricated the replacement window frames. Richard Gibson & Son was to furnish and deliver ten windows frames in addition to frames made previously for the Otis House. Additional correspondence shows the window frames were installed at the Otis House by the Horn Brothers firm at 23 Miner Street, Boston. This difference in the manufacturing of the window frames by a firm off site and installation by a different contractor expresses how Appleton’s was complacent in utilizing modern manufacturing practices to replace historic materials. As in considering alternatives for clapboard installation at the Boardman house, Appleton seemed to have been concerned with implementing the most modern practices in construction management and building contracting. By dividing the labor force according to discrete construction tasks, such as fabrication and installation, Appleton assumed the role of manager, coordinating with Browne and the various contractors.

Appleton’s views on the value of replicating historic building technique are also apparent in other contracts awarded for work on the Otis House project. Despite

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Appleton’s endorsement of Frederick Mosher as someone with “rare qualifications” for work on old houses, much of the restoration and repair work on the Otis House was sent out to bid, soliciting different contractors in order to drive down prices. Appleton sent a letter of inquiry to Mosher at I. H. Bogart & Son inquiring if he was going to submit a bid. In another letter to a contacting firm, in this case W. L. Waples Co., Appleton asked if the bid included painting and waterproofing and wanted to know more details about the waterproofing process.\textsuperscript{46} Eventually Appleton and SPNEA accepted the bid from I. H. Bogart & Son, the same contractor they had used in the Boardman House restoration, but not without performing due diligence in ensuring the economic efficiency of the project. Had Appleton truly thought Mosher as the best qualified person to supervise the restoration work, SPNEA would have likely already settled on I. H. Bogart & Son from the start. One additional contracting firm, Graham & Cameron was added in 1920,\textsuperscript{47} such that a total of four separate firms worked on the restoration of the Otis House in that year, not including others specializing in roofing, landscaping or reproduced materials.

Such severe division across the different restoration projects at the Otis House reinforce the notion that Appleton was concerned with practicality and economic prudence rather than the specific nature of the carpentry and repair work being done. The financial restrictions of the organization and the frugal nature of Appleton required that the contracts were awarded for their economic viability. Architect for the project, Herbert Browne of Little & Browne sent Appleton a letter describing his feelings on a contract with the firm of Graham & Cameron. Browne said, “Cameron came in here again and was very

much pleased at the idea of doing the work. He takes a real interest in the building and is by far the best man I know of to undertake it, but, as I told you over the ‘phone, labor has advanced 25% and the cost of material 25%, so that the problem has become more difficult.” Browne knew that Graham & Cameron was the best firm to perform the work and was excited that Cameron has such enthusiasm for the old house, but the financial situation restricted decision-making based on qualifications alone. With so much attention on the construction methods and details as highlighted in written descriptions and illustrations of historic houses, the value placed on the original work is on craftsmanship where the decisions about the restoration work is very largely based on finances.

Appleton’s benign apathy toward labor concerns on the project is displayed through a letter to Mosher in July, 1920. “Please telephone before you plan beginning, for we have a non-union painter at work here and it might make trouble if he were working at the same time as your union carpenters and masons.” Appleton was thoroughly aware of the importance of labor associations in the progressive era, but ultimately had decided that it was not important for the professionalization of historic preservation to show a commitment to the sort of fair labor practices upheld by unions. In evaluating the best options for the building, Appleton again seems to have made his decision based solely on economy and expediency.

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The Abraham Brown House

The Abraham Brown House in Watertown, MA was a pet project of Appleton’s and in some ways is considered the first “scientific” restoration. Former Director of SPNEA Abbott Lowell Cummings (1970-1984) said of the Brown House: “This became the first completely documented restoration in American history. I don’t know of any other earlier than that. Photographs taken at ten, fifteen, twenty minute intervals as evidence is being uncovered, with elaborate notes. It’s aboveground archaeology from the word ‘go.’” The project encompassed the documentation ideals that Appleton and SPNEA are credited for implementing in preservation. Yet the building was all but falling down when Appleton sought to save it and the board members of SPNEA found it to be too risky a project. As a result, Appleton sought to save the building with the intent of improving it to a point that SPNEA would accept it as part of its collection of properties. Appleton attempted to leverage his position by convincing the local historical society to purchase the house, but they too realized that the project was too ambitious for their capacities. Appleton wrote of the offer: “Certain our members who were desirous of helping preserve the house held a consultation with the president of the local historical society and the writer. These members offered to lend the local society the purchase price of $3,000 dollars without interest for several years, provided its members would raise the mere cost of repairs and restoration.” There is little doubt that “our members desirous” were members who agreed with Appleton’s vision to save the house, but were in the minority in voting for the society to purchase the structure outright. “The historical society, at a special meeting

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called to consider the questions, declined to accept this generous proposal, preferring to abandon the house to its fate.”52 Here, Appleton did his best to paint the historical society as negligent, but as some photographs from the time show, it would be understandable for the Watertown Historical Society to deem the house a lot cause.

Eventually, Appleton alluded to his effort to save the house in a footnote in the *Bulletin* by stating: “Since writing the above the house has been bought to be offered, if possible as a gift to our society, and the restoration is well under way.”53 This is also a

strange way for Appleton to phrase this news since it was Appleton along with other members of the Society that purchased the house in hope that a successful restoration would lead to its acquisition by the Society.

Appleton’s defense of the house and appeal to readers of its worthiness betrays the ruinous state of the structure.

“We have in New England old houses by the score – picturesque houses and houses of great educational and architectural value. Even so, the Brown House offers a combination of all these desirable elements, surpasses, in the writer’s opinion, in no case except that of the Fairbanks House in Dedham. Those familiar with the Brown House in its present condition may find it hard to believe so sweeping a statement, but it is based on a knowledge of what has been done elsewhere with material fully as unpromising. It would be a great mistake to permit the destruction of the Brown House.”

In contrast to other houses Appleton had advocated for, like the Boardman House, “which has come down to us practically unchanged,” Appleton accepted that there was a great deal of work to be done and that he was writing to a skeptical audience. Still Appleton insisted that projects had “been done elsewhere with material fully as unpromising.”

When Appleton realized that many latches were needed for doors throughout the house, he wrote to the supervising architect, W. W. Cordingley to choose the best existing latches and to ask his friend, Eugene Dow of Topsfield, MA to have his local mechanic fabricate new ones. Appleton wrote that he thought it might be difficult to find suitable latches despite keeping notes of various vendors and advertisements for hardware. He also had a relationship with Wallace Nutting, who was a strong ally and member of SPNEA and who was proprietor of Saugus Iron Works. The Saugus Iron Works advertised itself under the category of “Artistic Wrought Iron Work, Original and Reproductions” and it is known

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that Appleton purchased five angle irons for the Boardman House restoration in 1917.\textsuperscript{56}

Nutting had founded the Ironworks to capitalize on his restoration of the Ironworks House in Saugus. Another impetus was the difficulty Nutting had in finding reproduction hardware for his restoration projects at historic houses. Nutting was driven to restoration for emotional and aesthetic reasons and was motivated by the romance of preindustrial craftsmanship.\textsuperscript{57} While Appleton had available to him the ability to have pieces reproduced for him through a reputable firm, he instead chose to take an easy and likely


inexpensive route through his acquaintance Mr. Dow. Appleton often clashed with Nutting over proper treatment of historic houses and while Appleton was focused on his scientific approach, Nutting wanted dramatic and romantic restorations and Appleton found him difficult to deal with. Eventually in 1922, Nutting’s blacksmith, Edward Guy accused him in an open letter of passing off reproduction ironwork as original, showing how Nutting’s fidelity to the past contrasted with Appleton.\(^{58}\)

The restoration itself was largely scientific in the sense of utilizing extensive documentation. Expenses on the Brown House Account from May 15, 1919 to April 13, 1921 show some of the procedures incorporated into the project. There are expenses for the creation of measured drawings as well as photography. There are two billing entries for photography with one being defined as “photography for circulars.” The other photography cost was the extensive photographic documentation that Appleton sought to obtain.\(^{59}\) The collection of photography from the Abraham Brown House shows how much Appleton believed that photographic documentation was important in preservation work. There are many photographs that were collected that depict the house’s historic condition before its serious deterioration. Many photographs were secured from sources like the Halliday Historic Photograph Company that show images of the house from as early as 1895. Other photographs were taken at various stages of work. There is a detailed set of before-pictures that show the exterior and interior of the house in a ruinous state. There are many photographs of the completed restoration both from shortly after the project ended and for many years following. The most interesting, however, are photographs that


show the restoration in progress with new work having been done, yet without completed finishes. Unlike, before and after photographs, these images of work in process allow viewers to comprehend some aspect of the process of restoration as something performed to the object that influences its condition. This multilayered photographic documentation provided for an extensive record of the existing conditions and restorative and reconstructive effort.

Yet despite Appleton’s emphasis on showing all stages of restoration, the photographs of the work in progress lack any visible workmen, tools or visible evidence of historic building techniques or processes being used. Even through the physical processes of restoration, the goal was not to document the methods, techniques or craftsmanship, but the historic object and its material conditions. By hiring professional photographers, in this case J. H. Thurston and F. P. Lemont, rather than relying on his amateur photography skills, he emphasized the value of expertise in the documentation project, and thus gave credence to the idea that preservation work should be reserved to professionals. But this emphasis on using professional labor stopped at the builders. Appleton did not conceive of the carpenter’s work as “professional,” but rather as that of an unskilled laborer who must be supervised by a manager. Appleton did not document the building process as much as simply differences in the physical appearance of the historic object from start to finish. As Abbott Lowell Cummings noted of the Brown House project: “Photographs taken at ten, fifteen, twenty minute intervals as evidence is being uncovered, with elaborate notes.”

The documentation and photography was to document the physical materials of the building as they examined and removed material, but photographs did not explicitly show the methods or process of the interventions being implemented.

The “professionals” specifically engaged in this project were consistent with education, professional association and learned skill. Appleton managed the whole project as a Harvard educated alumnus with some real estate experience. The supervising architect for the project was William Wade Cordingley, a Harvard trained architect who worked for a time for Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, but was otherwise not a prominent

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figure in Boston-area architecture. Additionally, professionally created drawings and documentation support the claim that this restoration was approached scientifically and professionally. However the real work carried out by the carpenters, masons and tradespeople are overall absent from documentation available on these restoration projects.

These three restoration projects suggest that Appleton’s primary objective revolves around the end product of the restorations. This is in keeping with the professional qualities that he brought to SPNEA and the field of preservation. By concentrating objectively on the historic fabric of the houses as scientifically valuable in their materiality, the restored house is valuable in terms of the remaining historic fabric and the aesthetic appearance of the final product. The professionalism that Appleton and his hired experts brought to the restoration project was the guidance on determining the control of the final product. In maintaining a modern division and hierarchy of labor within the restoration projects, Appleton and SPNEA stratify the preservation work at the project level in the same way the Society utilized a corporate structure in administration, fundraising, acquisition and other decision-making.

Appleton sought to introduce modern ideals of scientific documentation and corporate organization to preserve the pre-industrial past. In doing so, Appleton was effective in developing a successful approach to tackling complicated preservation projects on structures over a relatively large area. By neglecting craft ideals and focusing on

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modernizing the process of restoration to make it more cost-efficient, Appleton and SPNEA were able to implement restoration projects throughout their regional purview.
Chapter 3: Historical Context

For Appleton, bringing a professional approach to preservation was a way to insulate the work of the SPNEA from the social and political debates about labor of the progressive era. While Appleton’s upbringing, wealth and social position placed him at odds with labor reforms and the new political landscape of Boston, his use of efficient, commoditized labor followed the capitalist labor model of the New England mill system while seeking to appear relatively neutral toward political and social rivals.

Appleton and SPNEA’s move to professionalize preservation while marginalizing restoration workers comes at a time in Boston’s history when social and labor forces were in tension. These tensions have a history dating back to the 1840s, with an influx of European immigrants escaped the “Spring of Nations.” At the turn of the century, this large influx of new residents upset the social structure of Boston politics. The Irish were the first group to arrive in Boston, followed by the Italians and other Europeans. Previously, Boston had experienced growth by drawing the youth of rural farm communities to settle in the city. This demographic was replaced by Europeans as the predominant incoming resident.63

Many Bostonians perceived the influx of immigrants as hostile toward their way of life and social order. The nativist sentiment had driven an interest among traditional Yankee residents to promote the old ways of the New England past to assert the Anglo-Saxon roots of the region. The initial restoration of the Paul Revere House in 1905 was an

opportunity to display the old colonial history of the city in the North End area of Boston, which had by that time had become a center of the Italian-American population.\(^6^4\)

This era also saw the prevalence of progressive movements, which sought to fix or organize society through social and physical engineering. Progressive reform came in many forms that sought to incorporate scientific and capitalistic values into an improved society. James Lindgren argues in *Preserving Historic New England* that the development of preservation during this time was just as much related to these ethnic tensions and progressive ideology as it was about love of architectural history. \(^6^5\)

Appleton was very much a part of the Anglo-Saxon Boston elite class known as the Boston Brahmin. The shift in the cultural and demographic nature of the city upset the balance of power, leaving the Brahmin uneasy about their place in society. By the 1880s and 1890s, Boston had a high enough Irish population to begin influencing politics. Boston’s first Irish mayor, John F. Fitzgerald was openly critical of the Boston Brahmin, attributing the city’s descent into greed to the “lords of the loom” and “lords of the Long Wharf.”\(^6^6\) Appleton’s family, deriving its wealth from the looms on the Merrimack River, was certainly part of the aristocracy that the Irish fought for power and respect within the Boston political scene.

Much of this political and cultural struggle was related directly to labor. The Lowell system, beginning it the 1820s, relied on young women from rural farm communities who agreed to work in the factories of the New England mill towns with the intent of returning to their homes with extra income after several years. The organization of the textile


\(^{65}\) Ibid. 26.

\(^{66}\) Ibid. 33.
industry was a stratified corporate structure (as described in *Mill and Mansion*) that was later echoed by SPNEA:

“When the time came, Lowell was organized into five distinct classes. At the top was the tight little oligarchy of corporation executives, under the leadership of “His Imperial High Mightiness,” Boott. As the stockholders were for the most part merchants living at some distance (it was a day’s trip to Boston), these executives were not immediately responsible to anybody. They formed an isolated and compact group, which had complete immediate control over the community. Next to this small aristocracy there was a gentry made up of the skilled employees, that is, everybody from junior executives to mere foremen. Beneath them were the mill hands, the thousands of sturdy farm girls who were actually responsible for production and who formed a yeomanry. Finally there were the day laborers, a proletariat of Irish immigrants, who dug the canals and built the mills.”

Eventually, as the Irish and European immigrants came in large numbers, they would prove to be a cheap source of labor would replace these “mill girls” as the primary worker in the textile mills. Economics dictated that the frugal New England industrialists welcomed these immigrants, but while the workers from rural New England generally held similar values to those running the mills, the immigrants did not hold Yankee values and turned to ethic associations and labor unions.

Strikes were not uncommon in the textile mills. The progressive period experienced large-scale labor organization to combat exploitative labor conditions in the capitalistic mills and factories. In 1912, during the still early years of SPNEA’s existence, a dramatic and large-scale labor struggle took place thirty miles outside Boston at the American Woolen Company in Lawrence, MA. The work force of the four textile mills under American Woolen consisted of immigrant families. Workers were Portuguese, French-Canadian, Irish, Russian, Italian, Syrian, Lithuanian, German, Polish and Belgian

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immigrants. Under the organizational support of the Industrial Workers of the World labor union, tens of thousands of these textile workers went on strike in for over two months in 1912, eventually forcing the American Woolen Company to increase wages.\textsuperscript{69} With the increased power of recent immigrants and the influx of ‘foreign’ ideas of labor organization and socialism, the way of life for Appleton and other Boston elites was threatened. Rather than completely stand against immigration, Appleton favored assimilation of immigrants and favored “the Americanizing processes so very much needed among our newcomers.”\textsuperscript{70} The Revere House restoration, for which Appleton led the charge, was intended to Americanize the immigrants of the North End by celebrating an American role model.

\textbf{The Arts and Crafts}

The history of preservation has a strong connection with the history of the Arts and Crafts movement. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings set a strong precedent for private preservation advocacy groups. William Morris, a founding member of the SPAB, was a pioneer of the British Arts and Crafts movement, inspired by philosophies of A. G. Pugin and John Ruskin. Prompted by the demolition of several classical Christopher Wren designed churches, Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877.\textsuperscript{71} The philosophies of Ruskin were paramount in Morris developing an Arts and Crafts movement within England, but also in his preservation sentiments and architectural valuation of old structures. The philosophies of both SPAB and the SPNEA rely heavily on Ruskin’s ideal of “truth” or authenticity of material in which buildings derive their

significance from material values, although SPNEA would take a different approach to preservation than SPAB.\(^7\) While SPAB was opposed to restoration work and focused primarily on stabilizing and maintaining historic buildings, SPNEA focused on the existing building fabric as documentary evidence to guide restoration work.

At the point in time when he founded SPNEA, Appleton would have known of SPAB as well as the ideals of William Morris. Likewise, Charles Eliot Norton was a friend of John Ruskin and sought to foster Arts and Crafts ideals in the United States out of inspiration from the British movement. Norton was even an early proponent in saving the old houses of New England. Appleton’s Harvard education and inspiration from Norton versed him well in the Arts and Crafts ideology as well as earlier approaches to preservation.

Since both the Arts and Crafts and preservation developed almost simultaneously in Boston, it seems likely that their shared philosophies would have persisted from their predecessors in Britain. Yet the differing political stances during Progressive-Era Boston provided a likely explanation as to why the relationship between the two movements was essentially non-existent in the United States. As Morris was a revolutionary and propagandist of socialist ideology, his more radical labor views labor were watered down when imported to Boston. The political climate in New England fostered different interpretations of other ideologies including socialism. Bostonian Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* portrayed a socialist utopia based on the collection of wealth by corporations and the redistribution of this wealth to the public through a syndicate. Also

key to this utopian model was the rise of technology, which increased efficiency and reduced labor demand, thus increasing leisure time.\textsuperscript{73}

Morris wrote his utopian romance, \textit{News From Nowhere}, in direct response to \textit{Looking Backward}. In this piece, he critiqued the model of socialism depicted in Bellamy's work. Morris' vision of a socialist utopia was an antiquarian one that looked to craft and dignity in labor as the source of happiness and meaning. Additionally, the socialist society depicted was attained not by corporate success and beneficence, but by revolution. Morris’ socialist sentiments rejected state socialism and supported the concept of the General Strike. The General Strike, employed by the citizens in \textit{News From Nowhere}, was the seizure of the means of production by the labor unions by starving the military-industrial complex of labor power.\textsuperscript{74} While Morris’ radical views on socialism and labor influenced some of his contemporaries in England, the political climate in Boston was overall unfavorable to his pro-union radicalism.

While the Arts and Crafts movement of Boston relied heavily on the principles and philosophies of its predecessor in England, Morris' more radical views of labor were left behind. Ralph Adams Cram believed that elevation of the worker would diminish the power of labor unions and help maintain the current social order. Appleton had numerous preservation precedents to draw on for the establishment of his Society. While the Arts and Crafts movement adapted its model from its single British precedent. Appleton drew from his knowledge of archeology, the writings of Norton, The Society for Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, the Trustees of Reservations and other preservation groups to as inspiration in addition to SPAB. Appleton certainly did not wish to follow the traditions of


any one organization and forged his own society that was unlike SPAB or APVA. SPAB was known also as “Anti-Scrape” for their policy of retaining later additions to historic structures as part of the historic evolution of the building. APVA was focused entirely on using the buildings and monuments of Virginia to advance their own social agenda, often reconstructing buildings on conjecture for their symbolism alone. SPNEA ultimately fell somewhere between these two societies by restoring buildings based on archeological and scientific methodology. The result was an organization that placed emphasis on documentation and existing evidence within the structure itself. With this goal, SPNEA passed over labor or craft issues for economic prudence and scientific principles to define professionalism in preservation.

Despite the trademark Bostonian organizational structure and elitist intellectual figureheads, the Society of Arts and Crafts seemed to be a much more radical organization than the SPNEA, especially when concerned with labor. The mutual beneficial relations concept had tones more reminiscent of socialism than the Yankee capitalism that drove the economy of nineteenth-century New England. Despite Cram’s assertion that elevating the worker was a way to combat the prevalence of labor unions, the organization of skilled workers under the Society was an attempt at more equitable labor practices. The Society of Arts and Crafts specifically encouraged workers to break from larger firms for more favorable work conditions. “The salesroom was established in 1900 largely for the purpose of encouraging trained craftsmen to leave the large shops and establish themselves independently.”

76 Papers of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston. Boston Public Library. Roll 300, Page 263.
The large shops that the movement intended for workers to abandon are the same types of firms that would have produced the window frames for Appleton’s restoration of the Otis House. While not every good produced in New England could have easily been given this artisanal Arts and Crafts treatment, enticing workers to improve their craft and work individually sought to upset the labor structure of New England. Workers once alienated from their labor effort, their technique and their final product could leave the factory for better conditions and more dignity in their craft. Yet the large factory model and division of labor strategy was the system that had produced so much wealth for the region relied on relatively unskilled laborers working in mills for low wages. By the time Norton founded the SAC, the majority of mill workers in New England were European and French-Canadian immigrants and when Appleton founded SPNEA, Boston had already had elected its first Irish-Catholic mayor.

In the years prior to the formation of the SPNEA the Arts and Crafts movement coalesced in Boston and sought to improve labor conditions and revise labor practices. The Society of Arts and Crafts was founded in 1897 the successful Arts and Crafts Exhibition held in Boston, marking the first such exhibition in the United States. The Arts and Crafts movement that had grown around the work of Morris in England in the second half of the nineteenth century found its way to Boston in the final years of the century. Boston’s close historical ties with English culture and a class of wealthy educated and cultured society made the city ripe for the introduction of the Arts and Crafts ideals to the nation. The philanthropists of Boston who contributed to this artistic movement believed
in an aesthetic progress and a traditional morality that was categorized as a “rebellious traditionalism.”

Through the Arts and Crafts, Boston’s educated and cultured leaders sought to maintain their positions of authority through the development of aesthetic and artistic ideals. Art historian Edward S. Cooke, Jr. describes how the Boston elite turned toward aesthetic and other artistic reforms to assert their place at the top of a changing society.

“Much of the interest accompanied the city’s leadership’s transformation from an elite to a social class whose members had abdicated a political role, and parlayed the economic success of their ancestors into building non-profit organizations that defined appropriate taste and educated others who formed a community distinct from their own, and who used their positions of authority to maintain their unassailable status. They were not manufacturing, railroad, or financial entrepreneurs but rather, cultural capitalists, linked by common backgrounds, Harvard educations, intermarriage and board membership.”

For the most part, this description fits with one of Appleton, and gives some insight into why SPNEA avoided making any meaningful or lasting connections with the socialist-leaning Arts and Crafts movement. The Society of Arts and Crafts itself suffered from internal conflict on the goals of the movement. Norton and later SAC president H. Langford Warren were not focused on Morris’ goals of industrial democracy and improving the social equality of workers. Other Arts and Crafts leaders, Arthur Astor Carey (SAC President in 1900) and Mary Ware Dennett supported the ethical goals of Morris’ arts and crafts movement as well as aesthetics. Carey took a holistic approach to the arts and crafts asking craftspeople to consider, “do I care so much for the pleasure of making beautiful, useful things, that I am content never to be rich in money,” while asking SAC members to

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conversely remember that “every object of combined beauty and use which they buy has a
history behind it, and is the result of good or evil conditions.”80 While these views were not
held in consensus by the Society of Arts and Crafts, the socialist themes were still strongly
attached. SPNEA and the leading Arts and Crafts organization, the Society of Arts and
Crafts, seemed as though they would have had parallel progressions, but despite some
overlapping of membership, there was no real effort to reconcile the ideals of the Arts and
Crafts and historic preservation.

The Society of Arts and Crafts’ founder, Charles Elliot Norton, was a close friend of
John Ruskin, Professor of Fine Arts at Harvard and founder of the Archaeological Institute
of America. Norton made a strong influence on Appleton during his education at Harvard
and likely led to Appleton’s fascination with the field of Archaeology. Yet despite the
common interests shared by the two, Norton’s influence on the Arts and Crafts was not
strong enough to totally distance the movement from its socialist attitudes. Warren
lamented that, “the Arts and Crafts movement has suffered very much from being
associated, as it has come to be in the eyes of a great many, with socialism.”81 The perceived
links to a socialist agenda, whether real or imaged would have discouraged Appleton from
embracing the ideals of the Arts and Crafts. The Arts and Crafts were a means of improving
society and design through the elevation of designer-craftsman relations. Appleton’s goals
revolved around the historic house as a preserved object and symbol of the ideals SPNEA
wanted to promote. Appleton likely appreciated restoration as a means to the end, and
while striving for accuracy through documentation and research, financial restrictions

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80 Eileen Boris. *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris and the Craftsman Ideal in America.* (Philadelphia: Temple
81 Ibid. 40.
limited focus to final result. The Arts and Crafts were a promotion of education and design philosophies and a process of craftsmen development. Appleton and SPNEA were simply to cheap and goal oriented to get lost in Arts and Crafts ideology that was also so aligned questionable socialist politics.

In 1889, Norton wrote an article for *Scribner’s Monthly* titled “The Lack of Old Homes In America.” Norton described his perception of the phenomenon: “This lack of hereditary homes—homes of one family for more than one generation—is a novel and significant feature of American society. In its effect on the disposition of the people and on the quality of our civilization it has not received the attention it deserves.”82 In discussing “old homes,” Norton did not address old structures that were in need of care or archeological remains of past residences, but to him the old homes were about ancestral homesteads. “In Boston and New York, for example, scarcely a house remains that was a home at the beginning of the century, and of the few of this sort that may still exist very few, if any, are occupied by person of the same social position, and hardly a single one by persons of the same family that dwelt in its fifty years.”83 Norton’s call to protect historic homes is said to have inspired the preservation of New England homes that Appleton would take on as his mission.84 It seems with these words, Norton understood the value of old homes in America much in the same sense as the Mount Vernon Ladies Association or patriotic societies; as buildings that represent families, ancestry and social values. When we compare that to Appleton’s evaluation of old houses based on aesthetics and material age, it is clear that the two have fundamentally different ideas of the value of old homes.

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83 Ibid.
The overall agenda of the Arts and Crafts movement was not limited to aesthetics, but very aligned with the improvement of labor conditions. Boston’s foremost contribution to the Arts and Crafts movement was not the development of a style or aesthetic, but the development and dissemination of ideas through establishing an education network. Through education the Arts and Crafts movement sought to advance the worker to a master level of craft. While the factory system of Lowell and the industrial revolution in general had alienated the worker from their final product, the Arts and Crafts movement aimed to revive the skilled worker who would take pride in the crafting of their product. Leaders in the Arts and Crafts espoused the theory that a skilled worker who was proud of his work would not only live a more fulfilling life, but would also be uninterested in joining the trade unions or upsetting the social order. Through the Arts and Crafts, craftspeople would still execute the designs of the educated elite, but would have a satisfactory social status when compared to the factory work of industrial production.

Ralph Adams Cram, architect, Society of Arts and Crafts member and brief board member at SPNEA pleaded the Society to incorporate more handwork of the Arts and Crafts into preservation. It was at an annual meeting of SPNEA where Cram made the argument that promoting craftwork was a way to combat the labor unions. Yet despite his suggestion, the summary of Cram’s lecture in the Bulletin failed to make note of the content of the talk. Appleton chose not to bring Cram’s message to the attention of members who were not in attendance. The May, 1916 Bulletin revealed that “Mr. Ralph

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Adams Cram has resigned from the Board because pressure of business made it impossible for him to attend meetings."89 While his architectural career is certainly a reasonable cause for his resignation, it is also possible that Cram felt his ideas about the integration of craft into the historic preservation field were not being well received. It is known that Cram was not very knowledgeable specifically in New England vernacular architecture and his philosophy of restoration depended more on designing with good taste than attempting a true reproduction.90 While this may not have been the reason for his departure from the board, it is clear that he did not view SPNEA as a worthwhile use of his time. Cram failed to mention SPNEA at all in his autobiography, My Life in Architecture.91

The Arts and Crafts took a dissimilar approach to aesthetic and material culture than Appleton and SPNEA. The Annual Report includes the mission of the society upon its incorporation:

“This Society was incorporated for the purpose of promoting artistic work in all branches of handicraft. It hopes to bring Designers and Workmen into mutually helpful relations, and to encourage workmen to execute designs of their own. It endeavors to stimulate in workmen an appreciation of the dignity and value of good design; to counteract the popular impatience of Law and Form, and the desire for over-ornamentation and specious originality. It will insist upon the necessity of sobriety and restraint, of ordered arrangement, of due regard for the relation between the form of an object and its use, and of harmony and fitness in the decoration put upon it.”92

While the objectives of the society seem driven largely by aesthetic, much of the rhetoric focused on how the elite designer class consisting of people such as Norton and Cram could impact the workmen in a mutually beneficial way. The focus is on "stimulating... an

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appreciation of the dignity and value of good design.” This essentially aimed to educate workmen in the merits of design and in craftsmanship. The ultimate goal was to cultivate craftsmen capable of executing refined designs while elevating to worker to a more dignified level.

However beneficial to the workman as the mission statement stated, the SAC still followed the familiar tiered structure typical of corporate-style Boston entities like SPNEA or the Trustees of Reservations. Headed by a Council of Officers, the remainder of the organization was divided into three member classifications. However, unlike SPNEA, members had to apply for their membership in the society based on merit and potential contribution to the Arts and Crafts.

“The membership of the Society is divided into three classes,--Craftsman Masters, and Associates. The grade of Craftsmen is held to include designers as well as those practicing some branch of applied decorative art. Persons desiring to join the Society as Craftsmen are required to specify the particular craft under which admission is sought, and to submit evidence of his or her qualifications, which shall be, whenever practicable, in the form of specimens, photographs, or drawings of work. Members of firms, not qualified as Craftsmen, may apply for membership as Associates. The title and privileges of Master lie within the grant of the Council alone, and are conferred only upon a person previously admitted to membership as a Craftsman, who shall have clearly established by contributions to the Society’s exhibitions, or otherwise, a standard of excellence approved by the Council. Persons interested in the aims of the Society, but not habitually employed as designers or craftsmen, may join the Society as Associates.”

The different levels of membership and hierarchy are familiar organizational techniques, but the requirements are more similar to a professional association or guild. The society gained it members based on merit, but still allowed for unskilled supporters to join as Associates. With the annual fee for Craftsmen at three dollars and Associates at ten, it is

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apparent that the Society viewed craft ability as a valuable asset to the society, while unqualified supporters could join for a premium.

**Political Interaction**

Appleton would have run-ins with another Irish-Catholic Boston mayor, James Michael Curley, and had to emphasize the charitable nature of the organization in order to justify SPNEA’s agenda. The Shirley-Eustis house in Boston was condemned presumably out of spite on the part of the Irish-American administration. Additionally, when restoring the Otis House facade to an earlier aesthetic, SPNEA petitioned for an exemption from the fire code in order to use wood in the reconstruction of the portico. Later, when the city of Boston used eminent domain to widen Cambridge Street, threatening the demolition of the Otis House, Appleton needed to appeal to the Mayor’s office for an extension in order to adequately prepare for moving the structure. With tension and conflict between the Mayor’s office and the Brahmin class, it was important for Appleton to maintain a civil working relationship in order to accomplish the work of his Society.

Through the work of SPNEA, Appleton made an effort to isolate himself from adopting a firm stance on labor issues by considering his restoration projects as economic and scientific endeavors. While SPNEA unofficially adopted an anti-union sentiment, the organization showed no preference toward or against unionized workers. They made decisions based on contract bidding and factors of economy and expediency. SPNEA allowed Appleton to take steps to celebrate his Yankee heritage while avoiding some of the more politicized issues around craftsmanship and labor. Regarding old buildings as aesthetic and scientific objects allowed Appleton to gather support and raise funds for the

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95 Correspondence with City of Boston Mayor’s Office. Historic New England Archives. Otis House File.
preservation of his ancestral artifacts while maintaining a semblance of a neutral agenda on ethic tensions and labor issues. His commodification of labor throughout the restoration process also allowed him to support existing labor organizational structures.
Chapter 4: Contemporary Implications

The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities ushered preservation into the twentieth century and introduced modern ideas of documentation and organizational efficiency. Based on these objective principles, Appleton and SPNEA systematically managed and restored numerous historic houses across New England. While SPNEA’s pursuit of objectivity and professionalism aimed to place its work above the fray of politics, it was not entirely. Occasionally, Appleton was tempted to betray his own principles of valuing historic materials in favor of using modern techniques or materials for restorations. This shows how Appleton’s personal and political sentiments were manifested through the restoration process. The principles Appleton chose to drive his society alienated his labor force, maintaining and promoting the capitalist labor model despite increasing opposition from new immigrants and new political leaders. These principles led to the success of SPNEA while also influencing lasting paradigms. SPNEA also created a successful model for restoration and conservation work remains apparent in present-day preservation practice.

The history of SPNEA is also applicable in the contemporary context of preservation practice. The difference in attitudes toward craft and labor explains why the link between preservation and the Arts and Crafts stopped with Morris and Ruskin in England. Appleton’s rejection of craft and labor principles severed connection that had been established in England between preservation and the Arts and Crafts. Present day preservation has circled back to craft ideals and trade education through programs such as the preservation carpentry program at the North Bennett Street School in Boston’s North End. Historic New England (the updated name for SPNEA) has internalized the
preservation and conservation duties while maintaining the distinction from administrative and other departments. The field of architectural conservation continues to rely on a hierarchy of professionals to perform work, with preservation projects often including several preservation consultants to supervise contractors.

It is arguable that this objective, scientific, managerial approach to preservation contributes to the continued perception of preservation efforts as elitist. Preservation is often regarded as a vehicle of gentrification that saves buildings while neglecting relevant social factors. SPNEA’s conception of professionalism contributed to this perception inasmuch as the Society valued original materials and aesthetics above the workers who crafted the houses or the stories of people and communities that inhabited within. Restoration projects at Colonial Williamsburg followed the model of preserving and restoring aesthetics, neglecting unappealing aspects of history in favor of a beautiful reconstruction. A report compiled for the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation in 2011 showed: “In spite of labor intensity, historic preservation seems to have weak support among labor unions.”96 With hostility toward labor unions and desire to maintain the social status quo, the concept of professionalism that SPNEA set into motion in America continues to influence how preservation is practiced (and perceived) a century later.

Knowing that Appleton and SPNEA were not driven to improve the lives of laborers does not inherently belittle the organizations contribution to preservation. Thinking about the marriage of Arts and Crafts with preservation as Cram proposed, SPNEA could have trained carpenters and masons in preservation work from the beginning, retaining them as

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a team of restoration tradespeople; professionals in their own right. Yet it’s impossible to know if SPNEA would have been financially sustainable under this model. Today, government grants and historic preservation tax credits exist to fund restoration projects, but at the moment of its founding, SPNEA functioned entirely on the principles and conditions of capitalism and philanthropy. Training craftsmen in the art of restoration in the same manner as furniture designers and other artists could have fostered a more subjective approach to preservation that would undermine the archeological and scientific principles that preservation currently operates on. Placing heavy emphasis on hiring unionized labor also would not have be acceptable to the Brahmin members and donors to the Society. Fanciful, design-driven restorations were the impetus for the founding of SPAB. The society was also known as Anti-scrape in its denunciation of stripping a building of its later features in order to restore it to a more “pure” historic aesthetic.

The way that SPNEA evolved and professionalized continues to be a relevant subject of study because past influences and practices should be considered in re-assessing the values that drive the field today. Re-interpreting the contributions of previous preservation efforts and examining the way they influence current practices is just as important and the implementation of new techniques, technologies and values in the future development of the field. Understanding how SPNEA’s professionalization helped establish a scientific and objective managerial approach to preservation while neglecting social implications suggests that preservationists today should further acknowledge the need for considerations of social sustainability.

The modern concept of preservation education is born out of the ideal of preservation management. Founder of the first historic preservation program at Columbia
University, James Marston Fitch, chose to title his seminal work on the field *Historic Preservation: The Curatorial Management of the Built Environment*. With preservation education today the emphasis is placed on this concept of management. The goal of the preservation professional today is to understand as much about architecture, conservation and policy to initiate facilitate and guide preservation projects. Preservation trades and craft skills are now fostered through various educational programs but the University educated preservationist emerges as an expert or consultant rather than a skilled craftsman.

William Sumner Appleton’s contributions to historic preservation include professionalizing and developing scientific and organization methods for managing and executing and documenting historic preservation projects. Through these projects, he and his society utilized contract labor and a hierarchy of oversight and administration to efficiently restore and preserve New England’s historic houses. Understanding principles of past preservation practice may influence the current state of the field and highlight the need to address social concerns within a current context that increasingly values social sustainability.
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