CHAPTER THREE

"Rugged Industries"

The Commercial Revolution in Kings County, 1797–1876

In times gone by, they were a kind-hearted, quiet people, fond of amusement, always looking upon the bright side of things, never worrying over coming misfortunes, but content to live in abiding faith upon a literal rendering of that Scripture which says: "Take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Take no thought, saying What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?"

Thus it happened too often that want came, and improvidence brought with it many misfortunes; and they have begun to dwindle away and disappear before the rugged industries in which neither their taste nor their physical strength enables them to take a share.

—Gertrude Lefferts Vanderbilt, *Social History of Flatbush*

It is not an inconsiderable advantage, either, resulting from The Fair, that Brooklyn has been made known by it to the country at large, as it was not before; as a city of wealth, liberality, energy, and great public spirit; young in years, but rapidly striding toward a foremost place among the foremost of our great and prosperous American towns. It is not a mere dormitory for New York merchants.

The Drum Beat
March 5, 1864

On Thursday afternoon, September 1, 1859, Captain Thomas Smith called the New York Harbor Police to the schooner *Neptune's Bride*, which was docked at Atlantic Basin in Brooklyn. On board they were shown the decaying corpse of a black man seated upright atop a freight of turpentine and rosin with his head bowed to his chest and his right arm resting on a barrel. "It was dressed in blue shirt and overalls, and on one side was a kettle of soup; under his head was a small bundle of clothing, and on the other side was a

bag of Indian meal," read the *New York Tribune*.[1] Almost immediately it was deduced that the unknown man was a fugitive from slavery.

A coroner's inquest revealed the details of the death. The young man, about 23 years old, boarded either in St. Mary's, Georgia, or in North Carolina. He was likely from Georgia as the crew attested that the hold was not opened after clearing that port. He hid behind the cargo after it was loaded, the hatches were sealed with him inside, and during transport the deadly turpentine fumes filled the space. The crew, knowing the volatility of their freight, never opened the hold. The man was overcome while taking his meal. When the ship docked in Brooklyn, stevedores unsealed the cargo and were met by a foul smell of unknown source, reported the *New York Times*. While unloading the barrels they discovered the body and "a stampede from the hold took place." *The Evening Post* estimated that the corpse had been decaying for eleven days. It was so decomposed that the frightened crew refused to help with its removal or return to work. A police officer from the Third Precinct in Brooklyn finally convinced some of the men to help clear the remains. The coroner was notified.[2]

It is grimly appropriate that the body of a black man who met one of the many pitfalls of a freedom journey was delivered to one of Brooklyn's busiest ports sealed in a commercial ship. These events might suggest that Brooklyn was a destination for black Southerners who sought freedom; in fact, the corpse was a gruesome reminder that Brooklyn was one of a number of Northern cities that consumed, received, traded, and vied for commercial dominance over the products of slavery. The route that the runaway took connected Brooklyn's economy to that of the South. It was a link that white Brooklynites knew well—they saw slavery's yield enter their city's ports and fill its storage houses and expand its commerce and create its jobs and give rise within it to wholly new classes of men with wholly new relationships to their fellows and change its very physical appearance. White Brooklynites' way of life and their ambitions tied them to the South and, ultimately, to African bondage; and, their economic dependence upon the Southern trade was the catalyst of their belief that nature intended black people for servitude rather than free labor.

Death is not a fitting substitute for freedom yet this man risked his life for liberty; not political freedom, but that fundamental individual hegemony upon which all else rested. A man who was enslaved in Georgia arrived dead in Brooklyn, and his story does not easily fit into Northern or Southern

history. It belongs to the greater record of the contest to control and define the labor of Africans in the United States, a history that encompasses both region and race.

This enslaved African was the victim of a struggle for commercial greatness that began during the Revolution. The United States had no London and that fact was not lost to many of those who hungered for independence. They understood that urbanization was the shadow of economic success. They also knew that there were few towns or cities in North America with enough significance to impose their names on the common culture and none with the commercial grandeur to attract free workers. During the 1790s London gained its one-millionth inhabitant while New York City began the decade with only 45,000. The most significant commercial cities of the nation—Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Baltimore, and New York—barely approached the size and productivity of second-tier British cities like Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, and Manchester. In 1776 Adam Smith seized a chance to ridicule the colonials by noting that the populations of Peruvian and Mexican cities "exceed greatly those of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, the three greatest cities of the English colonies." He did not trouble himself to extend a comparison to England and the Continent.[3]

Brooklyn was so insignificant that its name remained undetermined, wrote a long-time resident, having gone through an evolution that included "Breukelen, Breukland, Breuklyn, Broucklen, Brookland, Brookline, and even Brocklandia." In 1780 when Alexander Hamilton, a New York resident and a graduate of Kings (Columbia) College who fought in Kings County during the Battle of Long Island, proposed a counterattack on Brooklyn to George Washington, he used three different spellings for the target of the assault.[4]

Over time Brooklyn earned a reputation as a major commercial and industrial city, but its path to wealth tied it to slavery for the rest of that institution's history in the United States. "Practically all Brooklynites were against slavery but few wished to make a fuss about it," wrote Ralph Foster Weld in 1950.[5] His assertion was based more on faith than fact. White Brooklynites continued to seek prosperity in the subordination of black people, now in the South. Race remained the ideological medium of social relations because a new exploitative relationship had emerged. Kings County's rise as an industrial center placed its white residents in a dilemma:

their commercial revolution was directly tied to Southern slavery, yet industrial capitalism and its attendant free-labor ideology challenged the primacy of bondage in the nation. Thus, they viewed servitude in complex terms that never allowed for a simple choice between slavery and freedom. They judged bondage against local concerns about urban development, employment, the concentration of wealth, and commercial expansion; regional biases over national banks, currency, tariffs, and Westward expansion; and broader issues like immigration, national growth, and political stability. Immigrant workers recorded their support for slavery in vulgar statements and violent acts. Native-born white Protestants shrank toward an amoral defense of bondage as an issue of property rights, but that was not an abstract stance and to assume that it was is to credit them with an objectivity that they never actually enjoyed. Their loyalty to slavery and the wealth that it produced was affirmed in the decades after emancipation in New York State. Constitutional polemics could bring a moral innocence to the city's relationship to African bondage but the anger and violence with which white and immigrant Brooklynites greeted slavery's detractors proved that they were neither antislavery nor indifferent.

In the decades before the Civil War, Brooklynites shifted their investments from people and land into commercial activities driven by Southern slavery. At the center of this transition was a number of local banks that stabilized the money and credit markets and secured investments. The rise of professional banking was an important step in capitalizing the county's business transformation. Some of Kings County's most prominent families played key roles in bringing savings and commercial banks to the region (see table 3.1). Brooklyn industrialist Whitehead J. Cornell—of the old Dutch, slaveholding Duyckinck and Cornell families—was typical. By 1853 he held a $10,000 stock investment in Brooklyn's Atlantic Bank alone. Brooklyn and Williamsburg followed New York into a banking revolution that culminated, in October 1853, with the opening of the New York Clearing House, an association organized by the major banks to process checks, keep debit and credit ledgers, and drastically reduce the exchange of money and notes between banks. In its first full year of operation the Clearing House handled $5.7 billion in bank transactions and at the close of the Civil War that number exceeded $26 billion.[6]

TABLE 3.1

Slaveowning Families Among the Founders of Kings County Banks

Institution	Date	Select Founders and Officers
Long Island Bank	1824	Leffert Lefferts, pres.; John Vandeveer, Jacob Hicks, Nehemiah Denton, Silas Butler, David Baylis, John and Samuel Gerritson, Barnet Johnson, George Sampson, Gerrit Smith, and John Vanderbilt.
LI Farmers and Mechanics'	1824	Jeremiah Lott, Losee Van Nostrand.
Brooklyn Savings Bank	1827	Adrian Van Sinderin, pres.; Abraham Vandeveer, treas.; Hezekiah Pierrepont, Joshua Sands, Adam Mercein, Losee Van Nostrand, Charles Doughty, Clarence Sackett, Alden Spooner, Thomas Everit.
Atlantic State Bank	1836	John Schenck, 2nd pres.; Peter Cornell, John and Jeremiah Lott, George Bergen, Samuel Smith.
Brooklyn Bank	1836	Sidney Cornell, R. B. Duyckinck, E. D. White, and Thomas Clark.
Bank of Williamsburgh	1839	Bank charter never actually activated.
South Brooklyn Savings	1850	Tunis Bergen, John Skillman, James Van Nostrand.
City Bank of Brooklyn	1850	John Skillman, pres.; James Van Nostrand, Henry Boerum, Garret Bergen.
Williamsburgh Savings Bank	1851	Richard Ten Eyck, Norman Van Nostrand, Nicholas Wyckoff.
Mechanics' Bank	1852	Joseph Johnson, George and John Bergen, Abraham Bergen, Loomis Ballard, Daniel Chauncey.
Williamsburgh City Bank	1852	Richard Berry, William Covert, John Furman, William Pease, Abraham Vandervoort, Nicholas Wyckoff.
Farmers and Citizens' Bank of Long Island	1852	George Vandeverg, Jr., Thomas Van Sant, William Tyson, John Seaman.
Manufacturers' National Bank of New York	1853	Aaron Underhill, John DeBevoise, Edwin Johnson.
Dime Savings Bank	1859	Abraham Beekman, George Bergen.
Nassau National Bank	1859	A. M. White, and Moses Odell.
Kings County Savings Instit.	1860	John Furman, Jeremiah Johnson, Jr.
Dime Savings of W'burg.	1864	George Smith, Silas Brainard, George Nichols.
German Savings Bank	1866	None
Germania Savings Bank	1867	None
Greenpoint Savings	1868	Archibald Meserole, pres.; William Meserole, C. Von Bergen.
Commercial Bank	1868	Alexander Underhill, William Bogert, Job Johnson.
Fulton Bank of Brooklyn	1870	None.
Bushwick Savings Bank	1873	Peter Wyckoff, A. M. Suydam, John Nostrand.

Source: Henry Reed Stiles, ed., *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, N.Y., From*

1683 to 1884, 2 Vols. (New York: W. W. Munsell, 1884), 1: 619–28; Henry Reed Stiles, *A History of the City of Brooklyn. Including the Old Town and Village of Brooklyn, the Town of Bushwick, and the Village and City of Williamsburgh*, 3 Vols. (Brooklyn: published by subscription, 1867–1870), 2: passim; William H. Smith, comp., *The Brooklyn City and Kings County Record: A Budget of General Information; with a Map of the City, an Almanac, and an Appendix, containing the New City Charter* (Brooklyn: William H. Smith, 1855), 65–70.

Many of Brooklyn's better men quickly learned the lucrative business of being New York's neighbor. Brooklyn was "the first and most important of the modern 'ferry suburbs,' " writes Kenneth T. Jackson. In 1816 it was officially chartered as a village. Within a decade the lords of Brooklyn Heights—Hezekiah Pierrepont, Jacob Hicks, Joshua Sands, David Leavitt, George Hall, Tunis Joralemon, and Adrian Van Sinderen to name a few—who dominated the waterfront and the government, were already imagining Brooklyn as a city and a commercial rival of New York. Dividing up the valuable lands, Pierrepont and his fellows advertised the village's bucolic spaces, river views, and proximity to Manhattan. In 1826 David Leavitt purchased multiple lots at Brooklyn Heights along Columbia, Clark, and Willow Streets. "With Mr. Hezekiah Pierrepont, Mr. Van Sinderen, and perhaps one other, he controlled the land on the waterside, from Fulton Street to about the present Remsen Street," recalled his daughter Elizabeth Leavitt Howe. By 1853 Whitehead J. Cornell held fifty prime Brooklyn lots valued at well over $50,000. Brooklyn's lower costs and taxes attracted Manhattanites. Its shore constantly seduced businesses to leave crowded New York and many companies erected "large, custom-built plants," contend two of the area's historians, where "all the processes of production could be centralized." In the following decades the rest of the shore was slowly filled by the excess trade of New York. Aggressive advertising drew residents like the Manhattan master craftsman Duncan Phyfe, who by 1815 had a sizable investment in Brooklyn realty, and affluent China trader Abiel Abbott Low.7

Hezekiah Beers Pierrepont was unarguably Brooklyn's chief promoter and the first to fully exploit its real estate. He was the great-grandson of James Pierpont, a seventeenth-century New Haven minister and a founder of Yale College. But Hezekiah Pierrepont was a ruined Manhattan merchant—the house of Leffingwell & Pierrepont having been destroyed by piracy—when he met Anna Marie Constable. By marrying the daughter of William Constable, New York State's largest landowner, Pierrepont acquired about a half million acres of upstate property. He purchased a mansion in Brooklyn Heights and immediately moved to the center of local business and politics. He was on the committee that secured Brooklyn's village charter, and, "combining the roles of land speculator and local politician," he governed the planning and devel-

opment of the village into a city while carefully insuring his own financial success. As chair of a street committee, Pierrepont even employed his own surveyor to create a counter proposal to a village street plan and maximize the value of his holdings. He then drove his plan past his colleagues. Real estate soon became Pierrepont's primary occupation and he and his sons, Henry and William, regularly visited all of the holdings. Pierrepont targeted his investments by gleaning information about transportation improvements, particularly those affecting the Southern and Western commerce through the Erie Canal, the local port, and the wharves. When he died on August 11, 1838 Pierrepont's estate included sixty acres of prime Brooklyn property; the towns of Pierrepont, Lewisville, and Stockholm; and additional lands in Oswego, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, and Franklin counties.[8]

Henry Waring, another early business failure, was saved by the Southern commerce. In 1813, at the age of 36, he moved to Brooklyn to partner in a naval store. Waring's investment paid off when he began winning large contracts to transport Southern goods. He dedicated his ships to that trade, and in less than a decade he was one of the better men of Brooklyn. He served a five-year stint as a village trustee. He was a director of Long Island Bank at its founding and one of the first trustees of Brooklyn Savings Bank.[9]

A descendant of the county's largest slaveowning family, Leffert Lefferts enjoyed a far lengthier family tradition of governing Kings County (particularly Bedford and Flatbush) by blending personal interests with the public trust. He descended from two of the county's largest slaveowning families, being born, on April 12, 1774, the fifth child of Leffert Lefferts (II) and Dorothy (Cowenhoven) Lefferts. He finished Columbia College at age twenty and then read law in the offices of Egbert Benson. On April 5, 1800 Lefferts was appointed to his father's former position as county clerk. He conducted the people's business from an upper room in the Lefferts' Bedford Corners (today's Central Brooklyn) home. Five years later he became a commissioner in the chancery. In 1823 Lefferts was appointed judge of Kings County. He began the movement to charter a local bank which bore fruit in the Long Island Bank (1824) under his presidency. By 1847 Leffert Lefferts, David Leavitt, and Peter Schermerhorn were among the handful of Brooklynites worth a half-million dollars, and the Lefferts family, claiming about three-quarters of a million, sat with the Schermerhorns, whose combined wealth was over a million, at the top of the Kings County elite.[10]

In 1809 Samuel Smith left his family's Huntington, Long Island, home and his work as a cooper to come to Brooklyn. His career as an itinerant tenant farmer ended in 1811 when he married Eliza, the daughter of Tunis Joralemon,

one of Brooklyn's leading property owners. A year later he paid $6,000 for fourteen acres of Fort Greene land. In 1815 he enlarged his holdings by buying six acres for $3,000. In 1818 $10,000 bought him eight additional acres. In less than a decade Smith acquired real estate that stretched from Fort Greene to Brooklyn Heights and included what would become central commercial and transportation arteries. The latter was guaranteed when Smith was appointed commissioner of highways in Brooklyn, a post that he held for eight years. Smith was also president of the Atlantic Bank and a director of the Brooklyn Bank.[11]

Across the East River, where Brooklyn, even after its city charter was granted in 1834, was being derided as New York's "bed chamber," a "dormitory," or, more insulting to Brooklyn's elite men of wealth, a "woman's city" dominated by residential matters rather than the *manly* art of commerce, concern over the growth and potential of Kings County was already brewing. Gendered descriptions did not eliminate the fact that New York's advantages over Brooklyn were slight and often artificial, nor did they lessen the pull that the self-described City of Churches had on Manhattan's wealthiest families.

The longest lasting of the many conflicts between the two—New York's control of the East River and a large strip of the Brooklyn shore as granted by ancient charters—dated back to the seventeenth century and had sporadically flared ever since. In 1814 the successful voyage of Robert Fulton's steam-powered ferry, the *Nassau*—funded in part by Hezekiah Pierrepont, who anticipated the ferry's impact upon his waterfront lands—sparked the river war once again. "The inhabitants of Long Island, particularly, will find this a most interesting improvement; as the ferries, heretofore, however well conducted, have been inconvenient, and to many a subject of dread," noted the *Long Island Star*. Walt Whitman, who was born on Long Island in 1819 and grew up in Brooklyn, recalled the ferry as one of the passions of his childhood. A lengthy poem to the Brooklyn ferry and its riders, included in Whitman's famous *Leaves of Grass*, described

> Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!
> On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose,
> And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose.

By 1840 four ferries joined Brooklyn to Manhattan: the Fulton, the Main

Street, the Navy Yard, and the South. The ferries were connected to each other and to the major roads by horse-drawn omnibuses. (George Johnson was one of the few black men to have worked as an omnibus driver.) Lydia Maria Child, author and abolitionist, innocent of the river wars around her, became a regular ferry traveler during her stays in New York and Brooklyn. She wrote in 1841, "for six cents one can exchange the hot and dusty city [of New York] for Staten Island, Jersey, or Hoboken; three cents will convey you to Brooklyn, and twelve and a half cents pays for a most beautiful sail of ten miles, to Fort Lee. In addition to the charm of rural beauty, all these places are bathed by deep waters."[12]

The old families who held on to Kings County land for two centuries profited handsomely from Manhattan's commercial explosion. Brooklyn Heights, noted Child, was not just heavenly, it had "a magnificent view of the city of New-York, the neighboring islands, and the harbour; and . . . they are never unvisited by a refreshing and invigorating breeze." Land speculation ran wild across the Heights, and farms quickly gave way to streets, lots, and brick row houses. "A few years ago, these salubrious heights might have been purchased by the city [of New York] at a very low price, and converted into a promenade, of beauty unrivaled throughout the world; but speculators have now laid hands upon them, and they are digging them away to make room for stores, with convenient landings from the river." Not all Kings County's residents wanted to be a lesser New York. On a trip to visit the sculptured Greenwood Cemetery—of which Hezekiah Pierrepont's son was a trustee—Child picked up the apocryphal tale of an old farmer in Gowanus who was offered $70,000 for his estate by speculators convinced of Brooklyn's destiny. Underscoring the uneasiness that many residents had with urban growth, the story claimed that

> $10,000 in silver and gold, were placed on the table before him; he looked at them, fingered them over, seemed bewildered, and agreed to give a decisive answer on the morrow. The next morning found him a raving maniac! And thus he now roams about, recklessly tearing up the flowers he once loved so dearly, and keeping his family in continual terror.[13]

Northern Kings County underwent a similar process. In 1827 Abraham Meserole and a small committee of men secured Williamsburg's village charter and had themselves appointed trustees. As in Brooklyn, land speculation was uncontrolled in Williamsburg and Bushwick. In 1851 Williamsburg was chartered as a city. The great coup of Brooklyn's developers

was the 1854 annexation of the City of Williamsburg and the Town of Bushwick, making Brooklyn one of the five largest cities in the nation and a key commercial center in its own right.[14]

For families like the Meseroles this brought even greater fortune. In 1726 Jan Meserole III, son-in-law of Pieter Praa, controlled three-quarters of Greenpoint and the family's home at Key Kuits farm and meadow. "There in the old homestead of his Grandfather and father[,] he and his wife Elizabeth Praa lived about forty years, and there his large family of five sons and five daughters were born, reared and married. The daughters all married young men of their native town whose names are recognized among the most respectable and leading families of the town of Bushwick during the succeeding one hundred years," wrote Walter Monfort Meserole of his family origins. The output of these lands alone left the Meserole clan comfortable and well provided for, but with time the value of the properties inflated. "The old 'Key Kuits' farm was oc[c]upied by the emigrant Jan Meserole and his descendants continuously for nearly One hundred and seventy five years," noted Meserole. That succession was broken by the bounty of the antebellum years. In 1850 Abraham Meserole—a clerk at the New York Customs House whose salary "is one paid by the merchants"—and Maria and John Miller (Meserole descendants) imposed a street grid onto Key Kuits and sold it. The family still had major real estate holdings in Kings County well into the twentieth century.[15]

Brooklynites were uncomfortably impressed with the velocity of slavery's wealth in the two cities: the fantastic rise of trans-Atlantic commerce and the results on banking, shipbuilding, insurance, warehousing, and manufacturing. For most white people in Kings County simple material interests more than balanced any moral hyperbole about individual freedom and justice. The money, the goods, the ships, the industry, the smoke, the crowds, the misery, the bustle, the political agitation, the swelling population, the vision of men falling, the stories of men rising, land speculation, and the prosperity of local farmers all made it difficult to see slavery in anything but complex terms. They agreed with George Templeton Strong, the Manhattan attorney and frequent visitor to Brooklyn, who confessed to his diary that "slave-holding is no sin" and "the designs of Northern Abolitionists are very particularly false, foolish, wicked, and unchristian." In 1846 Isaac Van Anden, the publisher of the Democratic, proslavery *Brooklyn Eagle*, ended the brief tenure of its proslavery, Democratic, editor Walt Whitman because of his sympathy for the Wilmot

Proviso, a measure introduced in Congress to bar slavery from any territories acquired in the Mexican-American War.[16] Whitman was fired for not being proslavery enough. After all, given the way that slavery shaped their lives, Brooklynites could hate but still surrender to bondage.

The local business community had definite proslavery leanings. Philip S. Foner, in *Business and Slavery*, exposed the ways in which commerce generated Southern sympathies among Manhattan businessmen, loyalties that spawned political defenses of and financial participation in an illegal slave trade and put New York businessmen in the position of resisting any government efforts to disrupt or police slaving. The New York–Long Island area remained a haven for those trafficking in human beings. As early as 1800 the Standing Committee of the New York Manumission Society was decrying the "very general" practice of cheating the manumission law by transporting "Negroes from this to the Southern states . . . from whence they are reshipped to the West Indies." The city also kept an open door for slave smugglers. "Any day of the week, slaves could be discovered stowed in the holds on board ships docked in New York harbor. They were brought from Africa, the West Indies, South America, and the American South, bound for reshipment to Southern plantations," notes Anthony Gronowicz in his history of pre-Civil War Manhattan politics. Looking at the period from 1857 to 1862, Robert Trent Vinson argues that "New York City enjoyed the dubious distinction of being one of the world's leading slaving ports." Sympathetic federal judges and a bustling economy attracted these unsavory merchants to the Empire City, and from Manhattan illegal ventures were directed, financed, and insured almost unmolested. Official leniency was guaranteed when President James Buchanan appointed Tammany gangster and proslavery thug Isaiah Rynders as United States marshal for the New York Southern District. "Many of the slavers were fitted out in New York City," writes Kenneth Stampp, "and some of their cargoes were unloaded with scarcely any attempt at secrecy." As late as 1861 the *Augusta* was impounded and its crew arrested for illegally importing the enslaved at Greenport, Long Island.[17]

Trafficking in people was a logical outgrowth of an economy fueled by enslaved labor. The product of unfree people's toil fed commercial activity in New York. Local merchants monopolized the export trade of the South. Slavery's yield—especially cotton, sugar, and tobacco—daily passed through their harbor. By the 1820s Southern enslaved laborers were feeding the world cotton market. Within two decades cotton was more than half of the United

States' entire export trade. England was the world's cotton textile producer and the South was its supplier, providing better than 70 percent of all England's staple imports. The South had an even greater command of the short-staple cotton market. However Manhattan financed, transported, and traded the crop and as a result built many of its great financial and futures houses. "From New York's vast capital resources—and the resources that it was able to tap in Europe—came the credit necessary for the operation of the plantation system," writes Harold D. Woodman. New York businessmen controlled the "Cotton Triangle," shipping the crop from Southern port cities to Europe where they exchanged it for finished goods and immigrants, transporting those to New York, and, finally, returning to the South with merchandise from the Empire City. At times the process was reversed and cotton was brought directly to New York where it was stored. Henry Wysham Lanier, in his history of New York banking, wrote, that "Cotton was 'king,' indeed, both in New York and in the South: a lot would change owners half a dozen times in a week without leaving the factor's hands." In the antebellum decades warehouses on both banks of the East River were giving space to cotton.[18]

Brooklynites wanted only a piece of the Southern trade that passed through the harbor. In the late eighteenth century Brooklyn and Williamsburg became storage centers for Southern and Caribbean goods. In 1797 Jonathan Thompson—born in Suffolk County, Long Island in 1773—opened the Brooklyn warehousing firm of Gardiner, Thompson and Co. Three years later Thompson was the sole owner of the business. In 1820 President James Monroe appointed Thompson collector of the New York Customs House, a position that he held for a decade and that he used to bolster his investment in the local commercial storage industry. In July 1823 Collector Thompson moved one of the Customs House's stores to a building that he had constructed on Furman Street in Brooklyn. After leaving office in 1829, Thompson took advantage of that new relationship by purchasing riverside property, expanding his old houses, and building new stores. Although commonly called the "White Cotton Stores," Thompson's houses also received large quantities of sugar. Thompson's first major rival was Hezekiah Pierrepont. In 1819 when Pierrepont's gin distillery folded, he attempted to find a business suitable to that prime Brooklyn location. Eventually the Pierrepont stores appeared, winning government and private contracts for cotton and sugar. Among the Kings County sugar warehouses that followed were Roberts stores; Prentice; Woodruf & Robinson; Baltic; Union; and

Schencks. The Fulton stores housed tobacco.[19] Within a generation, Brooklyn's businessmen had snatched the lucrative commercial storage industry.

Warehousing was the embryo of the local commercial revolution. The business fed off the obvious fact that, besides storing goods awaiting inspection at the Customs House, warehouses could hold such commodities while Wall Street brokers negotiated their sale, speculated in their futures, or waited for market changes. An excellent example is available at Brooklyn's Atlantic Docks, a vast stretch of piers and stores that Daniel Richards erected in the Twelfth Ward over the opposition of many New York businessmen. Opened in 1844, Atlantic Docks provided warehouses for new businesses needing waterfront space and sped up the process by which Kings County came to dominate the storage of merchandise passing through the port of New York. One of the immediate results was Brooklyn's absolute control of the profitable business of storing Western wheat and grain. By the Civil War, the Pioneer Tobacco Manufactory, at Atlantic, was storing tobacco being carried through New York, producing tobacco goods, and exploiting the New York Tobacco Exchange by wholesaling through the Wall Street brokerage firm of H. W. Hunt & Co. Moreover, Brooklyn's Empire Stores alone handled 90 percent of the tobacco that entered the city.[20]

TABLE 3.2

Sugar Leaving the Port of New York, May-November 1863

Month	Sugar (lbs.)	Molasses (lbs.)	% of all Commerce
May	2,683,300	1,500,800	27.5
June	2,853,900	1,093,300	37.4
July	2,557,000	807,500	39.6
August	1,703,800	999,700	26.4
September	1,375,200	551,800	13.3
October	2,116,400	886,600	14.2
November	851,800	371,100	14.1

Source: New York State Office of the Auditor of the Canal Department, "Weekly Statements of Canal Shipments," 1863, New York State Archives, Albany.

Sugar bound Kings County's welfare even more tightly to that of Southern and Caribbean planters (see table 3.2). On the eve of the Panic of 1857, and the subsequent depression, sugar was clogging Brooklyn's warehouses. "I have just made a visit to several of the warehouses in Brooklyn—Thompsons, Baxters,

Fords and Pierreponts—I cannot hire any additional stores in Brooklyn, nor elsewhere for sugar and mollases," wrote Herman J. Redfield, collector of the New York Customs House. "There are now eleven cargos of sugar and molasses at the Brooklyn wharfs awaiting an opportunity of being discharged, and I have just been informed that at least fifty additional cargos may be expected in the course of a few days." For at least a decade the Customs House had been keeping sugar in specially outfitted stores at Brooklyn's Atlantic Docks. By 1856 there were six stores at Atlantic but those too were filled. The Secretary of the Treasury gave Redfield permission to rent space at any available yards and to increase security details during the evenings.21

If cotton was king in New York, Queen Sugar reigned across the East River as warehousing accelerated the rise of manufacturing. Brooklyn and Williamsburg flooded the market for refined sugars and syrups of all grades (see table 3.3). That refining dominance began in the early part of the century. William and Frederick C. Havemeyer, London-trained sugar bakers of German ancestry, came to New York after the turn of the century and were hired at Manhattan's Messr. Seaman & Co., which produced sugar loaves. On January 1, 1807 the sugar bakery of Wm. and F. C. Havemeyer opened on a lot at 87 Vandam Street leased from Trinity Church. Within three years the Havemeyer shops expanded to three lots on Vandam and produced 4,000 pounds of sugar loaf each day. In 1841 William Havemeyer left the partnership for politics. Frederick Havemeyer kept the Vandam house until 1856 when he gambled on revolutionary changes in sugar refining occurring in London. The new technology demanded large capital investments, riverside property, and labor, all of which attracted Havemeyer to Williamsburg with its expansive shore and large German working class. In 1856 he established Havemeyer, Townsend & Co. with investor William Townsend. The following year it opened, producing 300,000 pounds of refined sugar each day and unloading tons of cane sugar shipments at its own docks. In 1863 Townsend left the company and it was restructured as Havemeyer & Elder. Other major refineries came to neighbor Havemeyer's. William Dick took on a partner and moved the small Manhattan sugar house that he had opened in 1858 to Williamsburg. Toward the end of the Civil War, and in spite of the lull in sugar demands, Dick brought together the capital to open Wintjen, Dick and Schumaker in a new Williamsburg refinery with a daily capacity of 200,000 pounds. "By 1866 American importers of sugar were sending down agents to the British West Indies to buy sugar on the spot," writes a historian of the British Caribbean sugar industry.[22]

TABLE 3.3

Output of Brooklyn Sugar Refiners, 1857–1876

Refinery	Founded	Daily Capacity
Havemeyer &Townsend	1857	300,000 lbs.
Havemeyer & Elder (formerly H&T)	1863	1,000,000+
Havemeyer & Elder (rebuilt after fire)	1883	3,000,000
Dick & Meyer	1863	900,000
Wintjen, Dick, and Schumacher	1865	200,000
Cuba Sugar Refining	pre-1867	[b]75,000
Long Island Sugar Refining Company	pre-1867	[b]200,000
Burgher, Hurlbut, & Livingston	pre-1867	[b]100,000
Gandy, Sheppard & Co.	pre-1867	[b]100,000
Moller, Sierck & Company	ca. 1868	450,000
John Mollenhauer & Sons	1869	
[a]DeCastro & Donner 1	1870	
[a]DeCastro & Donner 2	1873	1,200,000 (combined)
[a]Greenpoint Sugar Refining Company	1871	1,500,000
Fulton Sugar Refining Company	pre-1876	
Brooklyn Sugar Refinery (formerly LISR)	1876	600,000

[a]Eventually taken over by the Havemeyers.
[b]Estimated from tax assessment of plant.
Source: Henry Reed Stiles, ed., *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, N.Y., From 1683 to 1884*, 2 Vols. (New York: W. W. Munsell, 1884), 1: 669–672; Monthly List, 1867, July to December, Collection District No. 3 of the State of New York, Internal Revenue Service Tax Assessment Lists, 1862–1917, Records of the Internal Revenue Service, RG 58, US National Archives (New York); Harry W. Havemeyer, *Merchants of Williamsburgh: Frederick C. Havemeyer, Jr., William Dick, John Mollenhauer, Henry O. Havemeyer* (privately published, 1989), 31–41.

Sugar refineries successfully competed for space on the Brooklyn-Williamsburg waterfront and quickly became the county's foremost industry. Havemeyer and Elder was the largest sugar refinery in the world. By the close of the Civil War, it was producing more than a million pounds of sugar a day, 50 percent of the nation's total. In 1865 two Brooklyn refineries—Havemeyer & Elder and Dick & Meyer—produced the bulk of the 733 million pounds of refined sugar manufactured in the United States. That capacity was soon augmented by the Long Island (later Brooklyn) Sugar Refinery on South Street in Williamsburg and the Cuba Sugar Refinery on Gold Street in Brooklyn. In 1873 William Dick increased his investment in refining, opening the new Dick & Meyer with a daily capacity of nearly a million pounds. At about the same time, DeCastro and Donner's two plants and the Greenpoint Sugar works joined the slate of major refineries in Kings County. An almost endless list of minor sugar and molasses plants also

peppered the city. In Manhattan's busy financial district, Brooklyn companies like DeCastro & Donner; Dick & Meyer; Moller, Sierck & Co.; and the Wintjen plant kept brokerage offices next to the Havemeyers' three Wall Street firms. By the 1880s 2,600 tons of refined sugar left Brooklyn daily, three-quarters of a million tons each year, and sugar refineries accounted for a third—$59,711,168 of $179,188,685—of Brooklyn's annual industrial production.[23]

In the decades before the Civil War a handful of ambitious and enterprising men became a commercial elite, but the means of their rise made the City of Churches an interested party in the politics of the nation's foremost social question. Sugar grown in the unfree and semi-feudal plantation South and Caribbean transformed daily life in Kings County. In 1823 William Dick was born in Hanover, Germany. He came to New York when he was 22 and entered the grocery business. Dick invested the profits in the sugar trade. By the Civil War, Dick was a wealthy Williamsburg merchant and a major employer of the German immigrant workers of that district. In 1841 William F. Havemeyer left his family's sugar business to enter politics. Four years later sugar money and immigrant votes bought Havemeyer the New York City mayoralty. The sugar barons enjoyed an unprecedented economic and political rise. In 1887 Henry O. Havemeyer brought seventeen plants into the Sugar Refineries Company, a national trust to regulate prices and production. Out of the trust Havemeyer organized the American Sugar Refining Company (1891), a single refinery stretching across the Williamsburg shore.[24] Within a few years the Brooklyn sugar lords were being attacked by anti-monopoly forces in New York State and then in the United States Congress but they had already sparked a commercial revolution that sprang from unfree and quasi-free black labor and a deep loyalty to the party that protected that trade.

From the antebellum period through the era of Reconstruction, Brooklyn's economic health was tied to the misfortune of black labor in the plantation world, and white Brooklynites' economic interests were closely aligned to those of the planter class.