Biography of Moses Brown

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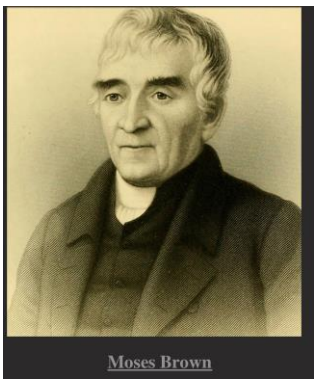


Moses Brown was born in 1742 and was at first a chaisemaker by trade (Chaisemakers created wicker carts). In the years just before the Revolution he invested some of his earnings in molasses and sugar cargoes, which he sold at a good profit. Tradition claims that when Brown was repairing one of Tristram Dalton's several carriages before the Revolution, the merchant showed the chaisemaker around his estate. Carried away by enthusiasm, Brown forgot his place enough to assert that he would one day own the property himself, a prophesy made good in 1791 when he purchased the Dalton mansion for £1700.

Brown made his fortune primarily in the importation of sugar and molasses, which he in turn sold to several of the town's ten distilleries. By 1793 he ranked close behind William Bartlet in wealth, with real estate worth £204 annually and a personal property assessed at £ 1080, having redoubled his holdings in the seven years since 1786."

A committee of local merchants, headed by William Bartlet and Moses Brown, was apparently the first such group in the country to suggest the private construction of ships-of-war to be turned over to the government for enhancement of the nation's navy."

Following the war he turned full time to mercantile activities and by 1790 he ranked second in wealth to William Bartlet. During the period of neutral trade Brown's holdings increased fourfold to $272,500 in 1807, but after 1812, like most of his colleagues, he suffered heavy losses. Brown carried on an extensive trade between the West Indies and northern Europe, transferring the cargoes at his wharf at the foot of Green Street. In 1810 his ship Nancy cleared for Sumatra, returning with pepper the following year.

Brown invested his profits in local real estate and in such undertakings as the Newburyport Woolen Manufactory, the Merrimack Bank, the Newburyport Marine Insurance Company and the Plum Island Turnpike. In 1791 fulfilling the prophecy, Brown bought Tristram Dalton's mansion at 94 State Street, which he occupied until his death in 1827 at the age of eighty-four. He was a loyal Federalist, although he took little part in political activities.

# References:

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Posted on May 25, 2009.

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*The Mayors of Newburyport 1851 to the Present.*

Compiled and edited by Jerie J. Larsen and Todd Woodworth, 1997.

This volume includes fifty-two mayors of Newbury, forty-eight obituaries, and six brief biographies from Caleb Cushing to Lisa Mead. 110 pp., spiral bound. Currently out of print.