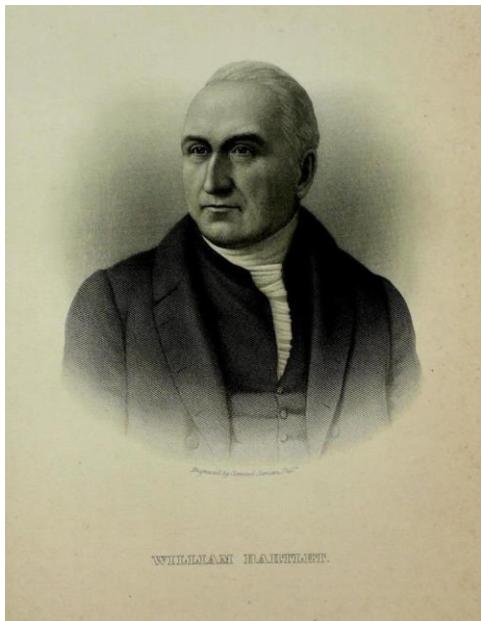


## Biography of William Bartlet

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Bartlet was born in Newburyport, the son of Edmund, a cordwainer (shoemaker), and Hannah Bartlet on January 20th, 1746. Bartlet attended school briefly and then apprenticed with his father to learn about the shoemaker's trade. Considering that the industrial revolution would lead to large scale shoe production later in Newburyport, this put William in the direct path toward being at the cuff of the rapidly expanding mills in the region. By the age of twenty-one, he decided to expand his interest in being a merchant and was actively engaged in trade. By the time the Revolution came to its conclusion, Bartlet owned a fleet of vessels involved with the West Indies and with Europe. Some historians claim he had a hundred ships at sea at the peak of his trading career.

During the war, he contributed and outfitted two privateers alongside his compatriot, William Coombs, who also sent them out from his wharf at the end of present-day Lime Street. He married Lydia, William's sister, in 1774 and ended up co-owning with his brother-in-law several privateers.

Unlike other merchants, both Bartlet and Coombs prospered greatly from their efforts during the war. Later, in 1787 William Bartlet purchased land at the foot of Federal Street from Stephen Cross, a shipbuilder. Bartlet then built a wharf and erected large warehouses for the storage of sugar, molasses, coffee and hemp. This became known as the Lower Bartlet Wharf. (Present National Grid property)

Out of the profits from privateering, in 1778 he built his home on 19 Federal St considered the second grandest mansion in Newburyport in a town known for having many mansions. The largest was owned by Caleb Cushing on High Street. He built it in the grand Georgian-style architecture.

When it was proposed, in 1798, that the town should present the federal government with a ship of war, he was with the foremost in building the frigate "Merrimac"; when piers were needed for the harbor, he loosed his purse strings; when light-houses were called for on Plum Island, before the government had assumed their care, his donation was so large that the town voted "that William Bartlet appoint the light tender."



Wildly prosperous, Bartlet went on to dabble in politics and served as a representative to the General Court between 1800 and 1802.

William Bartlet was a very devout Christian but not an active member of any church in town though he was a devote Calvinist. But in the spirit of community would often attend the Armenian-Theology leaning St. Paul's Episcopal Church on High Street. He had heard Rev. Whitefield preach with his mother when he was a young man. He admired the work of Rev. Whitefield all his life.



When in Philadelphia on one of his ships, he spotted a design by William Strictland for a mausoleum memorial, at that time one of the nation's leading architects. Completely paying for it, he had it made by a local marble company, placed on one of his ships and brought up by oxen and placed inside the Old South Presbyterian Church, called the Whitefield Church. Previously, in 1770, the Rev. Whitefield was buried in a crypt directly below the pulpit. Bartlet commissioned Ebenezer Porter, a professor at the newly established Seminary near Andover, to create a tribute to the Great Awakening Minister. The completed memorial called a Cenotaph still stands directly to the left of the church's pulpit. (A cenotaph is a memorial to the dead but not where the deceased is buried.)

Bartlet contributed twenty thousand dollars to the Andover Theological Seminary when it was founded in 1808. He became the President of the American Tract Society that would eventually relocate to New York City. He was also on the nation's very first mission board that sent out missionaries outside of the United States and was present when they were dedicated in Newburyport at the Old South.

When other merchants went bankrupt due to Jefferson's disastrous 1807 embargo; and many were selling their warehouses and wharves in 1809-10; because of his investment in cotton mills and shoe factories in town; he ended up snatching up these properties making him one of the largest property owners in town. He ended up owning shares in two shoe factories, two woolen mills, two banks, two insurance companies and his shipyard at the bottom of Federal Street.

In 1807, he was officially considered the richest man in Newburyport at \$300,000. The second richest was Moses Brown at \$272,000.

He was the largest stockholder in the Wessacumcon Mill which was located at the corner of Pleasant and Inn Street, generally where the Montessori School exists today. This large steam mill was built in 1837. When a second building was added to the Mill complex in 1840, Bartlet subscribed for five hundred additional shares becoming the largest stockholder, and the corporation was renamed the Bartlet Steam Mills. This entire complex ran



from Inn Street all the way to the Universalists Church basically encompassing the east part of the present-day Green Street municipal lot.

He became the greatest merchant Newburyport ever had, surpassed by none of his time in Massachusetts, unless William Grey, of Salem, and later of Boston, might have been the single exception. He gave away and lost at sea more property than any estate probated in the county of Essex to that date, and still was a millionaire, when there were not so many millionaires in the whole country.

He had a powerful, confident, no-nonsense, and moral personality mixed with humor. Mr. Bartlet spelled his name with one t. To deflect the many inquiries at the uniqueness of his last name, he said there was no use in making two letters where one would do as well.

He never was able to see the massive mill prosper and died February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1841, at the age of 93. Sadly, the entire complex was destroyed in a fire in March of 1881.

He is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery; his memorial identification is 167226354.

His largess did not stop at his death. When his will was read; he dedicated massive sums to the City of Newburyport to install brick sidewalks throughout the town and to intersperse them with street trees for shade. At that time in 1851, most people walked rather than fussed with carriages and horseback. The streets were a morass of horse manure, mud and sometimes sewage. He wanted the community to be able to travel safely without the danger of being trampled or susceptible to disease.



Newburyport's unique look today is thanks to William Bartlet.

He also donated extensively to the Phillips Library in Salem and other charitable groups in the state. He also donated to the Massachusetts Atheneum near the State Capitol Building, a large private library still in existence today.

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