



“**A**S A SHOE AND LEATHER MARKETPLACE, BOSTON IS paramount in America. More than this, there is no city in the world, not even London, that sells so many boots and shoes, and so much leather as the Massachusetts capital. The city's position as distribution center of the state's great industries has not been achieved by accident, but is the fruit of energy grafted upon primary conditions.

“In colonial times the manufacture of boots and shoes was a well-established industry in New England, and with it naturally also the tanning of leather. This trade

of the city in the early days of the 18th century had developed relative importance. Shoes were shipped by packets to New York and the southern markets, and hides were brought in to supplement the native supply.

“The shoe and leather trade centered

Bank Happenings

A 19th Century Expositor Explains Why You Find Hide and Leather and Shoe and Leather Boston Nationals

Submitted by Bob Cochran

Above, \$5 note on the National Hide and Leather Bank of Boston, Charles E. Finney, Cashier, and George Ripley, President.

tered naturally in the city's North End. There one can still see on John Street an almost obliterated sign, *Shoe and Leather Street*, which was at the center of that business. During the 1860s this trade outgrew the facilities afforded in this location, and there was a general emigration south.

“Pearl Street became the seat of the boot and shoe business, while Congress, Purchase and High Streets became the leather mart. This section remains the location of the business, though Pearl Street has been virtually abandoned by the shoe trade, which is now centered around Summer and Lincoln Streets, and the leather trade has overflowed into South Street.

“The boot and shoe business was never more firmly entrenched here than it is today. It seems singular at first thought that an industry requiring such a relatively small expenditure for permanent plant as does a leather shoe factory, in comparison with, say a cotton or rolling-mill, should not only hold its ground in this corner of our great country, but increase with the growth of the country.

“Such, however, is the fact, and nowhere in the United States can boots and shoes be manufactured so cheaply as in New England. No better goods are made either, than are turned out by factories in Lynn and other towns in this vicinity.

“The main product of this New England industry handled in Boston is the solid and substantial type (of shoe) which is worn by the great majority of the American people. It is for the purchase of these goods that dealers from all the states of the Union flock to Boston.

“The amount of boots and shoes sold in this city annually is a matter of conjecture. We know that there shipped from this city last year (ca. 1899) to points outside of New England, 3,940,179 cases of boots and shoes, but to this must be added a large

unknown number of cases shipped West and South from the factories, in other ways than through Boston, besides the quantity consumed by the five million inhabitants of New England.

"Even were the number of cases known, it would give no key to the number of pairs of boots and shoes represented, as the cases contain anywhere from one dozen to sixty pairs each. We may, however, reach an approximation of the value of the trade, by assuming that all the factory product of New England is sold in Boston. This is within measure, also, from the fact that the product of factories of States outside of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, etc., are sold here. Now, by the Census of the United States in 1890, the value of the New England factory product is given for the year as \$140,932,656. It is a fair presumption that the trade of the city in these items amounts to not less than \$150 million at the present time.

"We have, in these figures, not considered the rubber boot and shoe business, which in 1890 was credited with a product of \$19,632,060, the bulk of which was marketed from Boston.

"Turning now to the leather trade, we are confronted by an absolute absence of statistics, but it is fair to assume that the value of leather sold in this city approximates a hundred million dollars annually. In the last fifteen years the importance of Boston as a leather market has been greatly enhanced. Before that time, New York was looked to by our shoe manufacturers to supply considerable sole and imported leather.

"One by one, however, the houses there found that their interests required them to open stores in Boston, which in many cases soon dwarfed the parent establishments in both size and importance. The morocco manufacturers of Philadelphia and of Wilmington, Del., found their interest in the same direction; so, too, with great tanners of Chicago and Milwaukee.

"Indeed, leather tanned in California is sent to Boston to be sold. New York and Pennsylvania are full of sole and upper leather tanneries, whose whole product is marketed in this city. In Michigan, West Virginia, North Carolina and other states, are tanneries either operated by Boston houses, or whose product is sent here to be sold.

"What we may call the local production of leather is not receding either. Our home tanners are changing their product somewhat; they are making more of the lighter, finer grades, but it may be doubted if Salem, Peabody, Winchester and Woburn ever made more leather than they do today.

"Besides its domestic trade, Boston has an important foreign business in leather. In fact, some of the large English dealers keep representatives here; others make regular pilgrimages to the Puritan City, besides maintaining constant communication with our houses. The exports of leather from Boston last year reached \$8,183,343.

"As a hide market Boston is of the first importance, but as an entrepot distinctively, we are ranked by New York and Chicago. Yet a large amount of hides held in those cities are sold through Boston brokers, while a vast majority of the hides collected at the numerous western and southern centers, such as St. Louis, Kansas City, Quincy, Ill., Nashville, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Richmond, Va., etc., are sold in the same manner. Most of these hides are never seen in Boston until they reach our warehouses in the form of leather.

"This city has always been important as an importer of hides, but of late the receipts of African hides have declined, owing to the disturbances in Madagascar and from other causes, but the imports from the River Platte are maintained, as vessels taking lumber hence load hides on their return. In calf and sheepskins the city has a large trade, and in goatskins the expansion of our local morocco manufacture has given a considerable impetus to this branch of business."

AS REPORTED BY

Davis, W.T. (ed.). *The New England States*. Boston: D.H. Hurd & Co, (ca. 1900). ♦



James E. Patch, Cashier, and James C. Elms, President, signed this \$5 note on the Shoe and Leather National Bank of Boston.