



Reconsiderations

JAMES K. POLK AND THE MYSTERY OF AMOR PATRIÆ

MICHAEL DAVID COHEN

IT was a strange letter.

President James K. Polk, of course, received numerous letters. As the United States' leading politician, he kept up a correspondence with diplomats, congressmen, state legislators, inventors, journalists, and other prominent Americans. Many people wrote to him asking for government jobs; others, seeking charity or autographs. Just a month earlier, the mail had brought him a gift of Spanish cigars.¹ But of all the notes and packages he received, this letter was, perhaps, the strangest.

Dated 25 July 1845, it was urgent in tone. The letter warned that a growing opposition to slavery endangered the nation. Northerners, it asserted, intimidated Southern clergymen with the prospect of excommunication from their churches. Britons vowed, in the event of war with America, to end slavery by force. Northern capitalists were hostile toward the South's agricultural economy. Abolitionists "threatened invasion."²

To alert his countrymen to this "hydra headed Monster, Abolitionism," the author enclosed a manuscript article with his letter.

I thank Linda Smith Rhoads for her editorial work on this essay; Tom Chaffin for reviewing a draft; and Thomas Coens, Elizabeth More, Charlene Peacock, and Irene Wainwright for helping me to access sources.

¹Edward H. Barton to Polk, 1 July 1845, calendared in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 10, *July–December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), p. 452.

²This and the following paragraphs discuss *Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 25 July 1845, James K. Polk Papers, Library of Congress. Emphasis in all quotations in this article is from the original documents. The separation of Northern and Southern churches, the writer acknowledged, had alleviated the threat of Southerners' excommunication.

He asked Polk to forward the article to the *Washington Union*, the newspaper that served as the administration's official organ, and recommend it for publication. A postscript to the article requested that the *Union's* editor encourage other papers to reprint it.³ Moreover, the letter advised, the president should discuss slavery in his Annual Message to Congress, have the article read before that body, and urge legislators to send a million copies to the nation's clergy and other well-placed individuals. The article would shed "*necessary* light" on slavery. The abolitionists, who had "locked up" that light from Americans "*fraudulently*," would be defeated. With a blend of egotism and flattery, the author predicted that if Polk did as suggested, the country would reap so much profit as to render him the most popular president since George Washington.

Who was so brazen as to make such appeals? Who was tapping the president of the United States to be his literary agent and publicist? Polk did not know. This, as much as the letter's content, was what made it so strange. Both the letter and the article omitted the author's name. They bore only a pseudonym: "Amor Patriæ," Latin for "Love of One's Country."⁴

The letter promised that one day Polk and its author would "talk over these matters *face to face*." For now, though, he (I use the masculine pronoun for convenience) preferred to "remain incognito." Polk was to reply in care of a friend of the author's, A. Lane of New Haven, Connecticut. Thus was the mystery of Amor Patriæ's identity let loose on the world. Over the next one and two-thirds centuries, that mystery would attract the curiosity of politicians, readers, librarians, and historians. Most, like Polk, never learned the writer's name. But I, a historian and an editor, would do my best to discover it.



Under the best of circumstances, editing a collection of historical documents is a demanding task. Documentary editing, as we call our academic field—not to be confused with the work of nonfiction film creators—involves several steps. We find all documents matching certain criteria, select which among them to publish, transcribe those, and research and compose annotations to aid the comprehension of

³Amor Patriæ to Francis Wayland, [ca. July 1845], Polk Papers, p. 27.

⁴The author later used the grapheme æ, making his pseudonym "Amor Patriæ." In the text of this article I use æ except when quoting an instance of the alternate spelling.

modern readers. The result is a series of volumes—such as the project to which I contribute, the *Correspondence of James K. Polk*—that makes primary sources available and accessible to scholars, students, and others with an interest in history. The job of a documentary editor requires multiple talents, including skill in deciphering handwriting, aptitude for research, attention to detail, and patience. Occasionally, he or she must even become a detective. Researching long-forgotten celebrities can be challenging; researching people who were obscure even in their own time, more so. But researching those who actively tried to hide their identities, from contemporaries and from posterity, requires both diligence and luck.

Amor Patriæ was not Polk's only anonymous correspondent. In an age when most white Americans were literate, voter turnouts were high, presidents claimed to represent all the people, and postage to the White House was free, Americans of varied social backgrounds wrote to their chief executive.⁵ In addition to those asking for jobs, money, or autographs, others—some of whom thought it prudent not to divulge their names—shared their political views. A month before Amor Patriæ's letter arrived, for example, a pseudonymous correspondent called Polk "a lying scoundrel" for not appointing a certain individual to office as allegedly promised. Later in his tenure, Polk received a report of an assassination plot, an exposé of a drunken U.S. diplomat, and an invective from a "Quaker Woman" for his support of slavery and the Mexican War, none of which carried the name of its author. Most interesting, perhaps, was a notification of Polk's condemnation to hell, signed "The Devil" and accompanied by counterfeit money designated "to defray your expenses to hell."⁶

⁵On literacy, see David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 52, table 3; on presidents as representatives, see Paul H. Bergeron, *The Presidency of James K. Polk* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), p. xiii; on voter turnouts, see Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 332. Most mail was paid for by recipients until 1847, and the franking privilege permitted the president to receive his mail for free. See Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 160–61; many letters in the Polk Papers bear franks.

⁶John Smith to Polk, 14 June 1845, calendared in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 9, *January–June 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), pp. 567–68; "Liberty" and Friendship to Polk, 11 October 1846, calendared in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 11, 1846, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), p. 496; P. Ny. to Polk, 3 June 1847, Quaker Woman to Polk, 1 January 1847, and The Devil to Polk, [ca. 19 April 1847], all in *Correspondence of*

Polk—and his secretary—had grown accustomed to such miscellaneous anonymity.

Amor Patriæ, though, stood out. Most anonymous correspondents wrote to the president once, then disappeared from view. Not Amor Patriæ. After his initial missive of 1845, he sent three more in 1846, two in 1847, and one in 1848. He continued to write pseudonymously for publication, too, becoming known both to the president and to the public as a staunch supporter of slavery.

Amor Patriæ had been studying the slavery question since the 1830s.⁷ But a recent book by two Baptist ministers had impelled the antiabolitionist to begin sharing his views. In November 1844 Richard Fuller, a doctor of divinity and a slaveholder in South Carolina, wrote to the *Christian Reflector*, an antislavery newspaper in Boston, to defend the morality of slavery. Over the next several months, Francis Wayland, also a doctor of divinity and president of Brown University in Rhode Island, submitted eight letters in rebuttal. Fuller wrote six more in defense of his position, then Wayland wrote another summarizing the two men's points of disagreement. The *Christian Reflector* and at least one other paper printed all the letters. In 1845 the letters were issued in book form, with an introduction by Wayland. Amor Patriæ read the book "with a good deal of pleasure" and praised the "truth," "verity," and "logic" of the arguments advanced and the "christian and gentlemanly manner" in which the conversation had been conducted.⁸ Thus inspired, he sat down to write the twenty-seven-page response that he would send to Polk.

Fuller and Wayland's debate about the morality of slavery pivoted on two points of dissent. First, they defined *slavery* differently. Fuller adopted a simple definition that had been popularized by William Paley in the eighteenth century: slavery was forced, uncontracted labor. Wayland went further. Slavery, he argued, connoted the master's absolute control over the slave's "intellectual, social, and moral

James K. Polk, vol. 12, *January–July 1847*, ed. Tom Chaffin and Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), forthcoming.

⁷Amor Patriæ to Polk, 1 January 1846, Polk Papers; Amor Patriæ, *The Blasphemy of Abolitionism Exposed: Servitude, and the Rights of the South, Vindicated . . .* (New York, 1850), p. 23.

⁸"A Discussion on Slavery," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), 1 January 1845; for further exchanges, see *Vermont Chronicle*, 8, 15, 22, and 29 January and 5, 12, 19, and 26 February, and 12, 19, and 26 March, and 2, 9, 16, and 23 April 1845. *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution: In a Correspondence between the Rev. Richard Fuller, of Beaufort, S.C., and the Rev. Francis Wayland, of Providence, R.I.* (New York: Colby, 1845). Amor Patriæ to Wayland, p. 1.

nature”—a control that Fuller considered an abuse of slavery, not the phenomenon itself—and thus violated the human rights and relationships ordained by God.

The second point of contention concerned the Bible’s instructions regarding slavery. According to Fuller, God endorsed slavery. In the Old Testament, he instructed the Hebrews to enslave the Canaanites and permitted Abraham and his descendants to keep slaves; Moses’ laws regulated slavery. In the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles countenanced the Roman Empire’s practice of slavery. Clearly, Fuller concluded, God approved of the institution. Otherwise he would explicitly have forbidden it. Wayland, by contrast, argued that God had enlightened humanity over time: although slavery had been tolerated in ancient times, the New Testament had introduced Christian values that ultimately required its abolition. God’s allowing the Hebrews to enslave the Canaanites applied only to those two peoples, not to all nations. To obey the Bible’s dictates, Wayland concluded, the United States must end slavery.⁹

Despite his initial tribute to the book, *Amor Patriæ* went on to disparage it. He structured his objections as a dialogue with the biblical Father Abraham and addressed the pages to Wayland—but, fearing that the university president “would ‘flare up’ and throw them in the fire,” he sent them to the U.S. president instead.¹⁰ He derided “doctors, *most learned and venerable doctors*,” who twisted the meaning of the Bible to justify their predetermined conclusions. The Bible, he asserted, was “*so plain that a wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein.*” It needed no scholar to interpret it. By following its simple guidance to “*right & wrong*,” Americans could avoid the disastrous consequences of a continued controversy over slavery.¹¹

In *Amor Patriæ*’s view, consenting to Abraham’s people’s holding others in bondage and introducing laws regulating slavery so clearly indicated God’s sanction for the institution that to question its legitimacy was “almost *blasphemous*.” The writer even went so far as to suggest that a slaveowner was “a better Christian” than a man who could afford a slave but chose not to purchase one. Slavery was right

⁹*Domestic Slavery*, pp. 7–9, 139–46, 26–31, 111–16, 232–35, 3–4, 175–79, 187–96, 170–71, 205, 207, 209, 213, 217, 49–53, 73–74, 92–95, 102–4; quotation p. 232. For Paley’s definition of *slavery*, see *Moral and Political Philosophy*, in *The Works of William Paley, D.D., Archdeacon of Carlisle* (Edinburgh: Nelson and Brown, 1828), p. 48.

¹⁰Quotations from *Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 25 July 1845; *Amor Patriæ* to Wayland.

¹¹*Amor Patriæ* to Wayland, pp. 1–2, quotations p. 1.

for all societies in all times. God authorized the Hebrews to enslave even their own people to punish a crime or recover a debt, a practice not replicated in the United States—though Father Abraham thought it an appropriate penalty for corrupt, profit-hungry Northern industrialists.¹²

To establish his position, Amor Patriæ quoted extensively from the Old and New Testaments, arriving, ironically, at a definition of *slavery* that was closer to Wayland's than to Fuller's. Rejecting Paley's definition—"to hold men . . . 'against their contract and consent'"—Amor Patriæ asserted that, long ago, warriors had mutually agreed that victors would take possession of their opponents. Moreover, as Wayland had written, slavery granted the master "absolute power over" his slaves; however, that exercise of authority was not illegitimate but rather biblically ordained. Abraham, for example, could rightly send his slaves to war and punish them "*severely*" if they disobeyed. Such absolute power did not, Amor Patriæ insisted, trigger abuse. Surely, a man would treat a horse he owned better than one he had hired. The master's self-interest in the animal's long-term welfare extended to slaves as well. Indeed, he claimed, the living conditions of Southern slaves were no worse than those endured in the North by immigrants, Catholics, convicts, domestic servants, and victims of rape.¹³

Since God had mandated slavery, Northern states violated his will in banning it. Amor Patriæ thus advised Northerners to petition their state governments to legalize it, which would end the controversy over slavery by creating "*one common interest.*" Thereafter, Northerners and Southerners could band together to purchase new slaves from Africa, Christianize them, and return them to Africa to spread the faith. The writer turned colonization, a notion initially popular among whites ambivalent about slavery, into a mechanism for slavery's expansion and renewal as well as for blacks' improvement.¹⁴

Amor Patriæ went further than most proslavery writers. Although many Americans (mostly Southerners) wrote apologies for the institution, virtually all of them relying on the Bible's sanction of slavery

¹²Amor Patriæ to Wayland, pp. 2–5, 12, 25, quotations pp. 3, 12.

¹³Amor Patriæ to Wayland, pp. 12–15, 6, 3–4, 9, 21, quotations pp. 6, 3.

¹⁴Amor Patriæ to Wayland, pp. 12, 20, quotation p. 20; John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), pp. 34–35; Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 19.

and many citing the benefits it supposedly brought to Africans, few found it universally defensible. They condemned both the Atlantic slave trade, by then banned, and the practice of slavery in other times and places; the conditions and racial makeup of the American South, however, made it suitable for slavery.¹⁵ *Amor Patriæ*, in contrast, contended that a renewed Atlantic slave trade and a wider scope for slavery would benefit both Africa and America.

Anyone who disputed the Bible's approval of slavery, *Amor Patriæ* asserted, was either "a crazy headed fanatic, or [a] knave presuming upon the ignorance of the people." Abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Abby Kelly Foster self-righteously described their tactics as "'moral suasion'—no strife—no politics," but their moral suasion amounted to "the most immoral blackguardry, billingsgate and blasphemy!" By aiding and encouraging fugitive slaves, they were guilty of theft. *Amor Patriæ* ridiculed them for enlisting Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave, as a speaker and decried the Liberty Party, which had run James G. Birney for president in 1840 and 1844 on an antislavery platform, as moral suasion's "offshoot." Ministers such as Wayland, who opposed slavery but belonged to no abolitionist organization, were far from innocent. If a thief told a court "that he belonged to no regular band of robbers," the judge would convict him nonetheless. These doctors of divinity, having stolen many a slave "or induce[d] him to steal himself," had committed theft and deserved to be imprisoned. Having "pervert[ed]" the Bible to oppose slavery, such ministers were responsible for the rise of abolitionism.¹⁶

Why had these clergymen—bound "to tell the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing but the *truth*"—preached false lessons? *Amor Patriæ* blamed their education. Before being called by a congregation, ministers typically entered a theological seminary, where they trained for three years. There they were taught to "make up the principal part of their sermons out of other men's brains," a recipe for error. (The writer cited as evidence a sermon given in Cincinnati and subsequently published that not only was "replete with *libel* on the South, and *perversions* of God's words" but also falsely claimed that

¹⁵Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, pp. 2–4, 31, 36, 51, 64–66; Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 33–36, 54–56, 61–63.

¹⁶*Amor Patriæ* to Wayland, pp. 1–3, 15, 8–10, quotations pp. 3, 8, 10, 15. On Birney's campaigns, see Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840–1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), pp. 7–21, 35–47.

the Roman Empire had not practiced slavery.)¹⁷ Some even earned doctorates from “some log cabin college, who wanted their partizan influence.” Instead, Amor Patriæ argued, men who wanted to bring religion to the people should spend one year studying the scriptures, then become itinerant preachers so they could “learn the *human character*.” They should refrain from voting and from sharing their political opinions. Men thus educated and disciplined would teach only the true lessons of God.¹⁸

Ineffectively trained clergymen and lying abolitionists had created a rift in America. The North and the South had come to loggerheads over slavery. They thus relied on a balance of power in Congress, with abolitionists objecting to the admission of another slave state (and its two senators) and Southerners to another free state. Amor Patriæ believed that sectional compromise had left the South under-represented: the Constitutionally mandated policy of counting only three-fifths of a state’s slaves unfairly gave Maine eight congressmen but Louisiana only four. He supported the admission of Texas (whose annexation Congress recently had approved) as multiple slave states to sway the congressional balance back toward the South and predicted that if Mexico, which still claimed Texas, challenged the United States’ right to annex it, the resulting war would last a mere ninety days.¹⁹

But if the debate over slavery persisted, a much grander war would ensue. “[O]ur beloved republic,” Amor Patriæ worried, “is in danger of being rent asunder and deluged in fraternal blood!” The Liberty Party had “hinted at sending a peper & salt army to Mason & Dixon’s line—with banners displaying . . . ‘*Freedom to the Slaves!*’” A Southern biracial army, Amor Patriæ forecast, would meet the Northerners with its own banner proclaiming “*Freedom to all poor white men, . . . [t]o the penitentiary convicts, . . . to Irish Catholics, to foreigners in general.*” Armed slaves, threatened with execution should they

¹⁷Amor Patriæ to Wayland, pp. 15–16. Amor Patriæ referred to a sermon of 1843 by Edward Smith, who in fact denied only that Roman slavery had been extended to certain provinces of the empire. See Smith, *The Bible against Slavery*, quoted in Thomas J. Taylor, *Essay on Slavery: as Connected with the Moral and Providential Government of God . . .* (New York: Longking, 1851), pp. 77–78.

¹⁸Amor Patriæ to Wayland, pp. 10, 16, 18, quotations pp. 10, 16. Amor Patriæ, like many writers of the era, did not adhere to standard spelling or capitalization. Quotations in this article reproduce original spelling and capitalization without the intrusive “[sic].”

¹⁹Amor Patriæ to Wayland, pp. 15, 26–27, 21–23. On Congress’s approval of annexation, see Bergeron, *Presidency of James K. Polk*, pp. 54–55.

disobey, would fire on their would-be liberators. The South would win the war. Virtually every abolitionist would die. And the clergymen who had denied the Bible's support for slavery would be to blame. Amor Patriæ was not the first to fear race war, but he went beyond most in the 1840s in linking it to a sectional conflict that would bring even broader political and social revolution.²⁰



Polk, a proslavery president and himself a slaveholder, may have read the letter and article with interest. But he seems not to have responded to Amor Patriæ, forwarded the article to the *Union*, or recommended it to Congress.²¹ No evidence exists to suggest that Polk puzzled over the author's identity either. If he did, he had little to go on. Apparently Amor Patriæ lived in or near New Haven, given that a friend in that city would receive and deliver any letters addressed to him. He was well versed in the Bible and familiar with pastoral education but, considering his call for ministers to remain politically silent, it is unlikely that he was one. Perhaps Amor Patriæ had some connection with the locations the article mentioned: Ohio, Maine, Louisiana, Texas. The defense of slavery suggested that he may once have lived in the South, but that was far from certain. He liked to refer to judges and brandish courtroom language though not to a degree that proved experience with the law.

But more clues were to come. In the next year and a half, Amor Patriæ wrote Polk four more letters. On 1 January 1846, responding to Polk's recent Annual Message to Congress, the writer discussed topics

²⁰Amor Patriæ to Wayland, pp. 2, 9, 15, quotations pp. 2, 9; Patricia Roberts-Miller, *Fanatical Schemes: Proslavery Rhetoric and the Tragedy of Consensus* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 73; Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, p. 138. In his claim about the Liberty Party's military plans, Amor Patriæ may have been alluding to the party's platform of 1844, which had referred vaguely to people's fighting at some future date "for Liberty" or to some party leaders' support for slave rebellions. See Johnson, *Liberty Party*, pp. 251, 332, 343, 382, and quotation from "National Liberty Party Platform, 1844" therein, p. 321; John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, introduction to *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America*, ed. McKivigan and Harrold (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), pp. 16–17.

²¹Amor Patriæ to Polk, 1 January 1846; *Washington Daily Union*, July–December 1845; James K. Polk, *First Annual Message*, 2 December 1845, in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789–1897*, ed. James D. Richardson, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), pp. 385–416. On Polk and slavery, see William Dusing, *Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

ranging from the annexation of Texas and the Oregon boundary dispute with the United Kingdom to the South's overreliance on cotton agriculture and its consequent economic stagnation. Lamenting the overly partisan nature of American politics, he confessed that "I have not given a vote for a long time"—a remark that, given the era's restrictions on suffrage, confirms at least that *Amor Patriæ* was male.²²

Sharing information about his investigation into slavery, *Amor Patriæ* reported that, in the past decade, he had traveled to every state in the union, gathering people's opinions and discovering how widespread—but not popular—abolitionism had become. He had attended abolitionist meetings, then sent "anonymous letters . . . to conspicuous clergyman and other eminent men, [which] have chopped off some, and brought out others against Abolitionism." Armed conflict, he went on, continued to loom as a threat; but now he also warned of disunion. If the U.S. and the U.K. battled over Oregon and if the U.S. lowered its tariff, the free states might secede, possibly even joining the British against the remaining united states, though the slave states would ultimately prevail in any war with the North and would, moreover, take over Canada. To forestall that tragedy, he reminded Polk of his article, asking the president to edit it and send it to Congress for distribution throughout the country. As before, Polk seems to have taken no action.²³

On 6 April 1846, *Amor Patriæ* reacted to a speech delivered to the U.S. Senate about Oregon by John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Calhoun, *Amor Patriæ* believed, had insulted Polk and ruined the senator's chances of becoming president. In this letter he went on to discuss a proposed national bank, the subtreasury system, the tariff, and other topics in domestic and international politics. On 20 October he penned another letter almost entirely devoted to the Mexican War, a conflict that had extended beyond the ninety days he had forecast into five months (it would last another fifteen). He recommended a strategy generous to Mexican civilians and focused on holding and taxing Mexican ports. Such policies would pay for the war, inculcate support for it among Americans, and possibly inspire Mexicans to seek annexation to the United States.²⁴

²²This and the following paragraph discuss *Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 1 January 1846.

²³*Congressional Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., 1846. *Amor Patriæ* also mentioned having earlier written two or three articles favoring Texas annexation; neither those nor the anonymous letters have been found.

²⁴*Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 6 April 1846, and *Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 20 October 1846, both in Polk Papers.

Then on 1 January 1847, prompted by Polk's new Annual Message, Amor Patriæ wrote a lengthy letter addressing the tariff, the subtreasury system, the telegraph, and the war (he now supported taking Mexico's capital and establishing military rule, aided by an elected legislature). He noted that he was pleased that Polk had "adopt[ed] my suggestions" in some areas—though any congruence between Polk's policies and Amor Patriæ's recommendations was almost certainly coincidental. He also returned to his favorite topic: slavery. He denounced the Wilmot Proviso, a measure antislavery members of Congress had unsuccessfully tried to pass the previous year, which would have banned slavery in all territory acquired from Mexico. Were he in Congress, Amor Patriæ announced, he would form an alliance of Southern, western, and mid-Atlantic members against the abolitionists of New England. He would declare,

We of the South . . . are quite tired of this purile and evil, contemptable slang and insult, that has been heaped upon us by a set of pseudo masters, ever since the formation of this government. . . . And as Holy Writ says—That, "A house divided against itself cannot stand"—perhaps it will be better before we arrive at open collusion, like two christian brothers, to divide the parental estate in peace and quickness, leaving each to manage his own affairs in his own way, having as little to do with each other as possible, for the future.²⁵

In 1845 Amor Patriæ had warned of civil war; in 1846 he had warned of both war and secession. Now, in 1847, he was *advocating* secession to *avoid* war. He no longer believed that all the free states would band together. Instead, most would join the South. New England would thus become "[a] pretty little nation" of abolitionists, forced to pay high tariffs to export its manufactures to the rest of the former United States—unless "Great Britain will be kind enough to re-*annex* you to the Canadas." Here, Amor Patriæ displayed his most radical thinking. Americans had discussed the possibility of disunion since soon after their nation's founding. Some, mostly South Carolinians, even had threatened to secede. But they had done so more to gain leverage than to signal a firm intention. Only at moments of particular sectional fervor, such as during the Missouri Compromise debates of 1819–21, the Nullification Crisis of 1828–33, and the Texas annexation debates of 1844–45, had Southern politicians genuinely considered secession. After Polk left office, discussions leading

²⁵This and the following paragraph discuss Amor Patriæ to Polk, 1 January 1847, in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 12. On the Wilmot Proviso, see Bergeron, *Presidency of James K. Polk*, pp. 85–89.

to the Compromise of 1850 reawakened and reinvigorated intimations of disunion, which would culminate in the secession of eleven states a decade later. But until 1860, true secessionists were rare. Most proslavery writers, however much they hated abolitionists, did not doubt that New England and the South belonged to one nation.²⁶ Amor Patriæ was beginning to question that assumption.



Polk did not record any reactions to these letters, though his nephew and secretary wrote on the last of them, “some sense in it.” If Polk or his nephew wondered who the author might be, they now had a few more clues to go on. In addition to having divulged his gender, Amor Patriæ wrote at the top of the April 1846 letter “New Haven, Conn.,” thus confirming his place of residence. He made it clear in the January and April 1846 and January 1847 letters that he was a Democrat, although he was open to Whig ideas. In April 1846 and January 1847, he asked Polk to give a job to former Connecticut governor Henry W. Edwards, whom he first described as a longtime acquaintance but later only as an acquaintance of his friend and mail forwarder, A. Lane. He noted in the April letter, “I am a stranger here,” indicating a former home outside of New Haven or of Connecticut. He again mentioned Cincinnati, in April as the location of a poorly stocked subtreasury and in January 1847 as an example of a prosperous city in the West.

Amor Patriæ also offered some more specific biographical details. He told Polk his birthdate, in April 1846 mentioning that he would turn fifty on the fourteenth of that month (also boasting that he had a full head of hair that had yet to turn gray). He noted in the same letter that he once had been “appointed to office for life” but had resigned after a year, leaving it to a younger brother. Most important, in January 1846 he revealed that his brother was a Louisiana planter

²⁶Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 1–2, 5, 7–9; Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 14, 50–52, 8; John C. Waugh, *On the Brink of Civil War: The Compromise of 1850 and How It Changed the Course of American History* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2003), pp. 4–12, 72–73; Robert V. Remini, *At the Edge of the Precipice: Henry Clay and the Compromise That Saved the Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), pp. 3, 5, 13–15, 61; Roberts-Miller, *Fanatical Schemes*, pp. 73, 43; Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, pp. 137–38, 102; Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843–1846* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 111–12, 159.

and that he himself “had a plantation of some two or three thousand acres of land and over a hundred negroes given me a few years ago.” He stressed that among his chief concerns was that “the negroes are well fed and clothed.” These hints about Amor Patriæ’s identity may have whet Polk’s curiosity, but they were insufficient to sate it. Amor Patriæ remained, as he signed postscripts to the first two 1846 letters, “L’Inconnu”: “The Unknown.”²⁷

Then he and Polk met. Really. But this was hardly the encounter he had implied when promising a “*face to face*” conversation. On 3 August 1847, a month after Polk had taken a tour of the Northern states, Amor Patriæ wrote the president another letter. It began, “I was at New Haven when you arrived there and had the pleasure of seeing you and taking you by the hand, although, little did you think, that you were shaking the hand of your correspondent, *Amor Patriæ*.”²⁸ He was taunting the president. So many people had thronged New Haven’s city hall on 28 June that, according to a secretary, “the rush was almost suffocating.”²⁹ Without introducing himself, the New Havener had hidden before Polk’s eyes—and clearly enjoyed doing so.

After quoting a judge who had commented on Polk’s “haggard and gray” appearance and complaining about the loud Independence Day celebrations in New Haven and Boston, the writer moved on to serious subjects. These included the Mexican War (he recommended “civilizing [and] christianising” the Mexicans while introducing freedom of religion and opening schools) and, of course, slavery. While visiting Boston, he related, he had told manufacturer and Whig Abbott Lawrence that “the Union would not have lasted one year” had the Wilmot Proviso passed.³⁰ Had the proviso been enacted, the South would have demanded a Constitutional amendment (1) counting slaves in full for congressional apportionment (Amor Patriæ again mentioned Maine’s unfair representation relative to Louisiana’s) and (2) making it “*Treason* . . . to meddle with the domestic concerns of a neighbouring state, and especially with *slavery*, by word or deed.” The amendment, he was convinced, would have been ratified, but New

²⁷He wrote “Le’inconnu” on 1 January and “L’Inconnu” on 6 April.

²⁸Amor Patriæ to Polk, 3 August 1847, Polk Papers.

²⁹*North for Union: John Appleton’s Journal Of a Tour to New England Made by President Polk In June and July 1847*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1986), p. 41.

³⁰On Lawrence, see Holt, *Rise and Fall of the Whig Party*, pp. 97, 149, 226, 366.

England would have seceded in protest. Thus abolitionists' "blasphemy" would have dissolved the Union. Though the letter was an important document with regard to his political views, it gave no further biographical information about the author, except that he knew Lawrence.³¹ Amor Patriæ's identity remained as inscrutable as ever.



In 1848, the mystery spread beyond the White House. Amor Patriæ's 1845 manuscript had never made it into print, but now many of the same ideas appeared, under the same pseudonym, in *A Comparison of Slavery with Abolitionism; Together with Reflections Deduced from the Premises, Touching the Several Interests of the United States*. In a letter dated 4 October 1848, he told Polk, "the rights of the South I think are fairly vindicated; and the only means of maintaining [them] clearly and distinctly pointed out."³² Amor Patriæ was finally reaching the larger audience he had long desired.

The author composed his pamphlet as a letter "[t]o my venerable friend, Lyman Beecher, D.D. President of Lane Seminary, Cincinnati, Ohio." He began with the observation that ever since a newspaper report of 1847 had declared that slaves were not ill used, abolitionists had emphasized the evil of slavery itself rather than slavemasters' failings. But, he once more insisted, slavery was no sin. Taking the Bible as his "standard" and "guide," he quoted the Old and New Testaments to affirm God's approval of the institution. To twist the Bible to argue against slavery is "fraudulent." Slavery, as anyone can see, is a blessing to all Americans: Southern masters and Northern manufacturers profit from it; slaves enjoy better treatment, and receive a larger portion of their own produce, than free workers.³³

Alluding to the Wilmot Proviso, which members of Congress had reintroduced in 1847 and which again had failed, Amor Patriæ predicted that injecting abolitionism into Congress would cause "blood [to] be shed" there and "through the length and breadth of the land." Once more he argued that the South would demand a Constitutional amendment, which would embrace not just the apportionment and treason provisions he had raised with Lawrence and Polk but also one

³¹ Amor Patriæ to Polk, 3 August 1847.

³² Amor Patriæ to Polk, 4 October 1848, Polk Papers.

³³ Amor Patriæ, *A Comparison of Slavery with Abolitionism; Together with Reflections Deduced from the Premises, Touching the Several Interests of the United States* (New York, 1848), pp. 3–9, 12, quotations pp. 3, 5.

“guarantee[ing] to the South the peaceable possession of their property” and promising federal reimbursement for any fugitive slaves who were not returned. If the amendment failed, the result would be secession, with all states except those in New England following “their interest” by joining the South. He called on clergymen “to preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth,” which included the Bible’s unequivocal mandate for slavery. Before closing, he assured readers that abolitionism, “if unarrested, is sure to deluge this our beloved country in suicidal and fraternal blood.”³⁴

In his letter introducing it, the author sought Polk’s help in distributing the pamphlet. Of the thousand copies that had been printed, *Amor Patriæ* had sent several hundred to Congress. In that body, he had heard, the pamphlet had won “many extravagant compliments, and it is quite amusing to hear them gessing at the author. All agree . . . that it is one of the best things they ever saw, and *unanswerable*; and ought to be put into every house in the United States.” They also acknowledged that if the pamphlet were widely distributed and read carefully, “there would be peace quietness and brotherly affection the whole length and breadth of the country.” Given (supposedly) such rousing congressional endorsements, *Amor Patriæ* urged Polk to recommend in his next Annual Message that legislators appropriate money to put the pamphlet in every home. As usual, Polk did not do so, and Congress took no action.³⁵



Amor Patriæ never again wrote to Polk. Polk left office in March 1849 and died of cholera three months later, never having learned his correspondent’s name. But that correspondent continued to urge the public against abolitionism from behind his pseudonym. In 1851 he wrote to the *New-York Tribune* defending Daniel Webster, who as a senator and then secretary of state had supported the Compromise of 1850, including the Fugitive Slave Act. The paper printed only one sentence of *Amor Patriæ*’s six-page letter.³⁶ But he continued to write.

³⁴*Amor Patriæ, Comparison of Slavery with Abolitionism*, pp. 9–12.

³⁵*Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 4 October 1848; James K. Polk, *Fourth Annual Message*, 5 December 1848, in Richardson, *Compilation of Messages and Papers*, pp. 629–70; *Congressional Globe*, 30th Cong., 1st and 2d sess., 1848–49. The author may have enclosed the pamphlet with his letter or mailed it separately.

³⁶“The Old and the New Webster,” *New-York Tribune*, 31 March 1851. On Webster and the Compromise of 1850, see Holt, *Rise and Fall of the Whig Party*, esp. pp. 488–89, 553, 557, and the speech that prompted *Amor Patriæ*’s letter, “Mr. Webster’s Speech at Annapolis,” *New-York Tribune*, 28 March 1851.

Another pamphlet appeared under his pseudonym in 1850. Entitled *Blasphemy of Abolitionism Exposed*, it expanded upon the 1848 text, restoring several points originally set forth in the manuscript of 1845: a description of the coming civil war; criticism of “ambitious priests, with Rev’d. at the head, and D.D. at the tail of their cognomen—which I look upon as little short of blasphemy”; and a call to reestablish the African slave trade. The pamphlet also included a biblical defense of the return of fugitive slaves (“Lawyers well understand this”); a dismissal of claims that the Declaration of Independence included slaves among those “created equal”; a plea for slavery in California; and a demand for “a *positive equilibrium*” of sectional representation in the Senate. Amor Patriæ stressed that the abolitionists “who withheld” rights, not the slaveholders “who demand” them, “are the *disunionists*.” Structuring the pamphlet as a letter to the president (now Zachary Taylor or Millard Fillmore) and Congress, to whom he apparently sent copies, he asked them “to place a copy in every house of your constituents.” He asked other readers to petition Congress to do so. If the government refused to pay for printing, he offered to donate a million copies that it might distribute. Congress, unsurprisingly, did nothing.³⁷

Eight years later, Amor Patriæ released yet another pamphlet. Taking as his text a published sermon by Joseph P. Thompson of New York City, which asserted that the Bible disapproved of slavery, Amor Patriæ interspersed his own commentary, drawn from his previously published work, with the intention of discrediting Thompson as “either mistaken in his Scriptural references” or having “intentionally perverted the true construction of them.” *Slavery, Con. and Pro. or, A Sermon and its Answer* included little new material, though the proslavery writer did add a final note in which—probably in light of the admission of a free Minnesota and the failure to admit a proslavery Kansas in 1858—he disavowed his earlier concern about a sectional imbalance in Congress. Because “[t]he North will always be divided,” he argued, a united Southern minority “will always hold the balance of power.” The introduction to the pamphlet, meanwhile, confirms one suspicion about the author’s past: he was “a gentleman of the North, who formerly resided at the South.”³⁸

³⁷ Amor Patriæ, *Blasphemy of Abolitionism Exposed*, pp. 13–14, 20, 7, 18, 23–25, 3, quotations pp. 14, 7, 24, 3; *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st and 2d sess., 1850–51.

³⁸ Amor Patriæ, *Slavery, Con. and Pro. or, A Sermon and its Answer* (Washington, D.C.: Polkinhorn, 1858), pp. 3, 44. On Minnesota and Kansas, see Matthew Glassman,

Then he disappeared. *Amor Patriæ* published nothing after 1858.³⁹ He could not have been too happy about the events of the next few years: the secession and civil war he had forecast came to pass, but the abolitionists whom he hated triumphed. But, if he was still alive, *Amor Patriæ* apparently did not react publicly. Nor did any known obituary reveal his name. The mystery persisted.

Amor Patriæ kept his secret for the next century and a half. Many enigmatic writers were exposed during that time by enterprising editors who produced dictionaries of pseudonyms. A review of such works published between 1885 and 2009, however—even the massive, sixteen-volume *International Encyclopedia of Pseudonyms* (2006–9)—uncovered no entry for Polk’s wily correspondent. Two listed “*Amor Patriæ*,” but the only lover of country with whom they identified it was Thomas Crowley, an English political writer who had used the pseudonym in the eighteenth century. Long dead by the 1840s, he was not the right man.⁴⁰

A bibliography of books about America, published in 1868, listed two of *Amor Patriæ*’s pamphlets under that pseudonym. But his real name was nowhere to be found. A history of economics and morality

“Beyond the Balance Rule: Congress, Statehood, and Slavery, 1850–1859,” in *Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), pp. 91–92.

³⁹Several other works appeared in the nineteenth century under the pseudonym *Amor Patriæ*. They are clearly by different authors, with the possible but unlikely exception of an 1824 article about the importance of religion to patriotism and of individual character to the nation. *Amor Patriæ*, “National Anniversary,” *Literary and Evangelical Magazine*, July 1824, p. 337.

⁴⁰William Cushing, *Initials and Pseudonyms: A Dictionary of Literary Disguises* (New York: Crowell, 1885), p. 15; William Cushing, *Initials and Pseudonyms: A Dictionary of Literary Disguises*, 2nd ser. (New York: Crowell, 1888), p. 7; William Cushing, *Anonyms: A Dictionary of Revealed Authorship* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cushing, 1890); Andrew Bauer, comp., *The Hawthorn Dictionary of Pseudonyms* (New York: Hawthorn, 1971); Harold S. Sharp, comp., *Handbook of Pseudonyms and Personal Nicknames*, 2 vols. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1972); Harold S. Sharp, comp., *Handbook of Pseudonyms and Personal Nicknames: First Supplement*, 2 vols. (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1975); Harold S. Sharp, comp., *Handbook of Pseudonyms and Personal Nicknames: Second Supplement* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1982); Frank Atkinson, *Dictionary of Literary Pseudonyms: A Selection of Popular Modern Writers in English*, 4th ed. (London: Library Association Publishing, 1987); Pat Hawk, *Hawk’s Authors’ Pseudonyms III: A Comprehensive Reference of Modern Authors’ Pseudonyms*, ed. Donna Hawk (n.p., 1999); T. J. Carty, *A Dictionary of Literary Pseudonyms in the English Language*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000); Adrian Room, *Dictionary of Pseudonyms: 11,000 Assumed Names and Their Origins*, 4th ed. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004); Michael Peschke, comp., *International Encyclopedia of Pseudonyms*, 16 vols. (Munich: Saur/Gale, 2006–9).

published in 1998 referred to him only as “[a] writer calling himself Amor Patriæ.”⁴¹ As the twenty-first century dawned, this nineteenth-century writer still managed to—as he had written in 1845—“remain incognito.”

But not much longer.



It is rude to taunt a president. But it is dangerous to taunt a historian. One hundred fifty years after Amor Patriæ withdrew from the literary scene, a team of historians rediscovered him. It was only a short time before I joined that team and reopened the old mystery. If I did my job well, the man’s long-hidden identity would soon be exposed.

A fastidious man as well as a busy one, Polk kept most of the letters he received while president. Because he died only three months after leaving office, any plans he may have had to cull his correspondence during retirement went unfulfilled. Polk’s papers remained in the possession of his widow until 1891 and of their niece until 1903, when she sold many of them to the Library of Congress. That library procured additional documents over the coming decades; other libraries, archives, and private collectors acquired miscellaneous items.⁴²

The Correspondence of James K. Polk Project began in 1958. Launched by Herbert Weaver, continued by Wayne Cutler, and now directed by Tom Chaffin, it shares with many documentary editing projects a twofold purpose. First, it aims to locate all extant letters written by or to the eleventh president; second, it publishes annotated transcriptions of selected letters and summaries of all others. Eleven volumes of the *Correspondence of James K. Polk* have appeared so far, covering Polk’s life up to 1846. Three volumes remain, with the one covering January to July 1847 slated for release in 2013.

Annotations in the *Correspondence* identify, to the extent possible, all individuals, organizations, events, and concepts mentioned in the published letters. Most letters to Polk have legible signatures; most letters by him, legible addresses. Research focusing on these named

⁴¹Joseph Sabin, *A Dictionary of Books Relating to America, from its Discovery to the Present Time*, vol. 1 (New York: Sabin, 1868), p. 168; Patricia O’Toole, *Money & Morals in America: A History* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1998), p. 114.

⁴²On the Library of Congress’s acquisition of Polk materials, see *Index to the James K. Polk Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1969), pp. ix–xiv.

authors and recipients is more or less straightforward. Unsigned letters are generally more challenging. Some correspondents simply forgot to write their names or had their signatures clipped by autograph collectors, but their familiar handwriting, styles, and interests help us to identify them. However, other anonymous letters—the exposé of the drunken diplomat, the Quaker’s criticism, and the devil’s damnation that I mentioned earlier, for example—give insufficient clues. These letters will appear in our next volume, but their authors remain nameless. With seven letters, three pamphlets, one article, and one letter to the editor to his credit, though, Amor Patriæ should not. So I set to work.



First, I had to transcribe the long and heavily faded letter of 1 January 1847, which will appear in the forthcoming volume. That done, I consulted Amor Patriæ’s other letters for clues. Because they, too, were sometimes faded and the pseudonymous signatures difficult to read, picking them out from among the many anonymous letters in our collection was no simple task. Amor Patriæ’s final letter led me to his pamphlets, and a search of newspaper databases brought up his *New-York Tribune* complaint. Extensive searching yielded no more correspondence or publications by the target of my investigation.

What clues did these sources give me? Amor Patriæ lived in New Haven during Polk’s administration but earlier had lived in the South; by 1846 he owned a plantation. His brother was a Louisiana planter, and other possible connections with Louisiana, Maine, especially Cincinnati, and perhaps Texas had surfaced. He seemed familiar with a courtroom, and his Bible was well read. His friends and acquaintances included Abbott Lawrence, Lyman Beecher of Cincinnati’s Lane Theological Seminary, A. Lane of New Haven, and probably former Connecticut governor Henry W. Edwards. A Democrat, he once had held appointed office for a year and had a younger brother who had succeeded him in it. He was born on 14 April 1796, and in the 1840s he still had a full head of black hair. Given the timing of his silence, he may have died soon after 1858.

The clues were tantalizing. They led to a couple of suspects. John E. Lovell, who had taught Lyman Beecher’s son in New Haven, was born within a year of Amor Patriæ’s claimed birthdate.⁴³ J. Hazzard

⁴³Joseph Anderson, ed., *The Town and City of Waterbury, Connecticut, from the Aboriginal Period to the Year Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-Five*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Price and Lee, 1896), pp. 540–41.

of New Haven, a former resident of Georgia, accused abolitionist Frederick Douglass of lying about the condition of slaves during a speech by Douglass in 1845.⁴⁴ Neither finding was conclusive, though the latter seemed especially promising. Beecher and Amor Patriæ's other friends seemed likely prospects for further research. Beecher's autobiography contained no mention of Amor Patriæ (at least by that name),⁴⁵ but a thorough review of the friends' papers might yield results.

Before beginning a long and uncertain manuscript search, however, I returned to the published pamphlets. While Amor Patriæ's letters had been making their way to the Library of Congress, his published works had found archival homes, too. A million copies had not been printed, as he had hoped, but a modest number were extant; these could be found in a number of research libraries and are catalogued by his pseudonym because his true name was unknown.⁴⁶ But occasionally readers make notations in books, and librarians write in information such as donors' names. Two of Harvard University's copies, for example, are labeled as gifts from, respectively, Charles Sumner and Simon Greenleaf.⁴⁷ Neither the vehemently antislavery senator nor the legal scholar who died in 1853 (five years before Amor Patriæ's last pamphlet) could be the author, but one or both may have been acquainted with him.⁴⁸ I added their names to my list of possible leads, but as with my other avenues of inquiry, I suspected that I would reach a dead end.

Then, in 2011, came a break in the investigation: I found a knowledgeable witness. Isaac Toucey, a Hartford lawyer and Democrat, was

⁴⁴Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, 1 September 1845, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ser. 3, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, 1842–1852, ed. John R. McKivigan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 49, 52. Tom Chaffin, author of a forthcoming book on Douglass's trip to the British Isles in 1845–47, discovered this tidbit.

⁴⁵*Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1864–65).

⁴⁶For many libraries' holdings, see the listings for the three pamphlets cited above in WorldCat (through a subscription proxy). That consolidated catalogue, as well as individual catalogues for the American Antiquarian Society (<http://catalog.mwa.org>), Newberry Library (<http://www.newberry.org/catalogs-and-guides>), Library of Congress (<http://catalog.loc.gov>), and British Library (<http://explore.bl.uk>), was accessed 19 January 2012.

⁴⁷Amor Patriæ, *Blasphemy of Abolitionism Exposed*, and Amor Patriæ, *Comparison of Slavery with Abolitionism*, at Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

⁴⁸On Greenleaf, see "Remarks of George P. Sanger, Esq., On the Death of Hon. Simon Greenleaf," *Boston Daily Atlas*, 11 October 1853.

known to me as one of Polk's correspondents. During an extensive political career, he served as Connecticut governor, as attorney general under Polk, and as secretary of the navy under James Buchanan. He also, it turned out, was familiar with *Amor Patriæ*. Around 1858, while in Buchanan's cabinet, he sent a copy of the writer's third pamphlet to the *Washington National Intelligencer*. Both the pamphlet and Toucey's enclosed note, marked "(Private)," are now at the Connecticut Historical Society (CHS). Thanks to the note, CHS does not catalogue the pamphlet as anonymous. That note reads:

The pamphlet of *Amor Patriæ* is the production of Judge Andrew Lane of New Haven Con. He has published 1000 copies of *this* for gratuitous distribution. *Please notice it.*⁴⁹

The case was solved. And, as with most good mysteries, the culprit was someone we had known all along but hardly suspected. *Amor Patriæ*, who had remained anonymous throughout his thirteen years of writing, had inscribed his own name in his very first letter to Polk. There he had asked Polk to reply "to the care of Mr. A. Lane" of New Haven, whom he described as "a friend of mine."⁵⁰ A very close friend, indeed. Simply by referring to himself in the third person, he had hidden in plain sight for 166 years.

Once I knew his name, sketching the contours of Andrew Lane's life was relatively easy. Census records, newspapers, genealogical accounts, city directories, federal documents, and other sources set forth a busy life that corroborated the few facts *Amor Patriæ* had divulged about himself and helped explain his political and social views. An institutional archive also included signed letters by Lane in handwriting that matched that of *Amor Patriæ*. If Toucey's note left any doubt about the writer's identity, the survey of Lane's life left none. My case was airtight.



Andrew Lane was born in New Gloucester, Maine (then part of Massachusetts), on 14 April 1796. He was one of nine children of Ebenezer Lane Jr., a farmer and logger who co-owned several mills, and Margaret Graffan Lane. While in New Gloucester, Andrew may have known Simon Greenleaf, who had moved there a few years after

⁴⁹Isaac Toucey, note placed in *Amor Patriæ, Slavery, Con. and Pro.*, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford. The *Intelligencer* did not print a notice of the pamphlet.

⁵⁰*Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 25 July 1845.

Andrew was born and who later donated one of his pamphlets to Harvard. In any event, one by one, the Lanes soon began leaving Maine. In the 1810s the eldest brother, named Ebenezer for his father, gave up a local wheelwright practice to become a schoolteacher in Illinois, near St. Louis. Andrew followed Ebenezer there, probably after 1816, with plans to trade in St. Louis. Soon, though, both brothers relocated to New Orleans, where they operated successful shipping, grocery, and mercantile businesses under the names Lane, Lovell & Co. (in partnership with Joseph Lovell) and E. Lane & Co. A third brother, William Allen Lane, whom Ebenezer and Andrew had supported through Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, Maine, briefly taught at the College of Louisiana, in Jackson, before joining his brothers' firm.⁵¹

While in Louisiana, Andrew extended his horizons beyond New Orleans and beyond trade. He lived in Ouachita Parish in the northern part of the state around 1829 and probably also in 1823. The plantation with its over one hundred slaves that he described to Polk may have been located in that parish, though he probably acquired it later. William bought a cotton plantation, the one Andrew mentioned in the same letter, in East Feliciana Parish. While in New Orleans, Andrew studied the law and obtained a judicial appointment—hence the legal

⁵¹James P. Lane, "James Lane of North Yarmouth, Me., and His Descendants," *New-England Historical and Genealogical Register* 42 (April 1888): 150; James Hill Fitts, comp., *Lane Genealogies*, vol. 3 (Exeter, N.H.: News-Letter Press, 1902), pp. 222, 261–62, 326–27; "List of Letters Remaining in the Post-Office, Portland, March 25th, 1817," *Portland [Maine] Eastern Argus*, 8 April 1817; Nehemiah Cleveland, *History of Bowdoin College. With Biographical Sketches of Its Graduates from 1800 to 1879. Inclusive*, ed. and comp. Alpheus Spring Packard (Boston: Osgood, 1882), pp. 271–72; *History of the Foundation and Endowment of the Lane Theological Seminary* (Cincinnati: Ben Franklin Printing House, 1848), p. 3; Ovid R. Sellers, *The Fifth Quarter Century of McCormick: The Story of the Years 1929–1954 at McCormick Theological Seminary* (Chicago: McCormick Theological Seminary, 1955), p. 20; U.S. Census Bureau, "1830 United States Federal Census," Schedule 4 for New Orleans, p. 254, and Schedule 4 for Upper Suburbs of New Orleans, p. 63; "1824 New Orleans City Directory–Orleans Parish," USGenWeb Archives Projects for the New Orleans Public Library, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/la/orleans/history/directory/1824nood.txt>; Paxton's New Orleans city directories for 1827 and 1830, New Orleans Public Library; Survey of Federal Archives in Louisiana, *Ship Registers and Enrollments of New Orleans, Louisiana*, vol. 2, 1821–1830 (University: Louisiana State University, 1942), p. 98; Marine Register, *Louisiana State Gazette* (New Orleans), 22 November 1825 and 23 August 1836; classified advertisements and Marine Journal, *Louisiana Advertiser* (New Orleans), 1826–28; Marine Register, *New-Orleans Argus*, 19 January, 25 September, 23 October, 27 October, and 13 November 1828; docket 1372 for *Flower et al. v. Lane et al.*, June 1827, Historical Archives of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, DSpace at the University of New Orleans–Earl K. Long Library, <http://libweb.uno.edu/jspui/handle/123456789/9976>.

language in his letters.⁵² Presumably this was the post that, he later told Polk, he resigned after one year and William then assumed.

After their success in Louisiana, the Lanes turned their attention north. Since the first decade of the nineteenth century, a national movement to found theological seminaries had been gaining momentum, fueled by a broader initiative to expand educational access by establishing primary schools, high schools, colleges, and other institutions. Given Americans' steady migration west, religiously disposed philanthropists were especially eager to found institutions that would supply ministers for the growing and multiplying communities beyond the Appalachians. The Presbyterian Church, which required its clergy to attain a high level of education, began contemplating a western seminary in the early 1820s. The Western Theological Seminary opened in Alleghanytown, Pennsylvania, in 1827. Dissatisfaction within the church over its location, however, quickly led to plans for additional seminaries.⁵³

While traveling in the North, Ebenezer learned of the West's need for educated ministers. Having accumulated enough money through their New Orleans business to make a substantial donation, he and William decided in 1828 to found a western seminary (Andrew was not involved with E. Lane & Co. at the time). The two brothers visited Cincinnati, one of the locations the Presbyterian Church had rejected in favor of Alleghanytown, to gauge interest. The Lane family was Baptist—which helps explain Andrew's engagement with Baptists Wayland and Fuller—and Ebenezer and William hoped to found an institution under joint Baptist and Presbyterian auspices. When only Presbyterians responded, however, they agreed to donate four thousand dollars over the next four years and one-fourth of their income thereafter to establish a Presbyterian seminary. A board of trustees formed, accepted the donation, and agreed to the Lanes' stipulation that the school build manual labor into its curriculum, a practice that other institutions of higher learning had pioneered. Early

⁵²Cleveland, *History of Bowdoin College*, p. 272; *Maison Rouge and Bastrop's Grants*, 24th Cong., 1st sess., 1836, H. Doc. 50, pp. 4, 6; *Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office . . .*, 32nd Cong., 2nd sess., 1852, Sen. Ex. Doc. 4, pp. 182–83.

⁵³Lawrence Thomas Lesick, *The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1980), pp. 26–28. See also Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), chaps. 2–3, and John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), chap. 2.

in 1829, Ohio granted a state charter to Lane Theological Seminary (the trustees, not the donors, chose the name).⁵⁴

In due course, Andrew became involved. The coincidence (which I hardly had noticed) between A. Lane, Amor Patriæ's friend, and Lane Theological Seminary, Lyman Beecher's institution, was no coincidence at all. By the end of 1829, Ebenezer and William were facing financial difficulties; as they closed their New Orleans firm, they withdrew their offer of lifelong support for the seminary. They did not renege on their promise of the initial four thousand, however, and in November 1829, having obtained land from other donors, Lane Theological Seminary opened its doors in the Cincinnati suburb of Walnut Hills. The trustees offered the presidency to Beecher the following year and, after fulfilling his obligations in Boston, he traveled west and took office at the end of 1832. Ebenezer and Andrew Lane also moved to Cincinnati, the latter after taking a trip to Europe in 1831. Assuming William's share of the original donation, Andrew gave the seminary two thousand dollars that year, as did Ebenezer, and in 1833 Andrew loaned it several hundred dollars.⁵⁵

Soon, however, the Lane brothers' enthusiasm for the seminary began to wane. The manual labor component of its curriculum was never as strong as Ebenezer had wanted, and eventually it was abandoned altogether. He moved to Oxford, Ohio, and had no further role in the school. Andrew's diminishing involvement related to slavery. His later complaints about theological seminaries' producing antislavery clergy had their origins in the school he had helped found.

In 1834 Lane Theological Seminary rose to national prominence in the growing debate over slavery. In February and March, Lane's students debated the respective merits of abolitionism and colonization. Cincinnati, though located in a free state, had close economic and

⁵⁴*History of the Foundation and Endowment*, pp. 3–6; Lesick, *Lane Rebels*, pp. 28–31; Ebenezer Lane to D. H. Allen, 14 October 1847, Lane Theological Seminary Records (hereafter cited as LTS Records), folder 1, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia; Abraham A. Habrey to James Warren, 4 January 1830, LTS Records, folder 1; Sellers, *Fifth Quarter Century*, p. 20; Fitts, *Lane Genealogies*, pp. 327–28; Lane, "James Lane," p. 151.

⁵⁵Habrey to Warren; Lesick, *Lane Rebels*, pp. 29–30, 32–34, 36, 39, 48–49; *History of the Foundation and Endowment*, p. 6; Cleveland, *History of Bowdoin College*, p. 272; Ebenezer Davies, *American Scenes, and Christian Slavery: A Recent Tour of Four Thousand Miles in the United States* (London: Snow, 1849), p. 143; Lane, "James Lane," p. 150; Fitts, *Lane Genealogies*, pp. 261, 327; Andrew Lane to Franklin Y. Vail, February 1834, LTS Records, folder 1; Andrew Lane to Franklin Y. Vail, 28 November 1834, LTS Records, folder 1; William Hook to U.S. secretary of state, 23 May 1831, Passport Applications, 1795–1905, record group 59, National Archives.

cultural ties to the South. Nonetheless, students concluded their deliberations by voting overwhelmingly in favor of abolition and against colonization. They formed an abolitionist society and began teaching literacy and religion to Cincinnati's African Americans. In August, concerned that the students' controversial actions would imperil the seminary's survival, the trustees proscribed all antislavery activities and discussions. The students, unwilling to abandon their cause, walked out: 94 of the 102 students enrolled in the seminary withdrew. About a third of the deserters absconded to the new, biracial Oberlin Collegiate Institute; many remained active, and some became prominent, abolitionists. In January 1835 they published an account of the previous year's events, including a defense of their actions and of open dialogue in general.⁵⁶

Andrew's support for the seminary ended. In 1834, he wrote twice to one of the trustees. These letters, among the seminary's papers at the Presbyterian Historical Society, bear the handwriting that confirms his identity as Amor Patriæ. In early February, just before the student debates, he reminded the trustees about the loan he had proffered. Now needing the money, he asked that it promptly be repaid; were the circumstances different, he wrote, he "would give the money out & out." In November, after the abolitionist students had departed, his tone darkened. He instructed the seminary to repay the loan immediately, "before any unfriendly feelings grow out of it." "I regret now," he added, "that I ever suffered myself to be . . . persuaded to loan the use of that note." He did not mention the abolitionist affair, but given his later ownership of slaves and criticism of both abolitionists and seminaries, the matter almost certainly influenced his decision to distance himself from the school. Thereafter, with the exception of donating a map to the library in 1835, he seems not to have had any involvement with Lane Theological Seminary.⁵⁷

Having lost interest in the seminary, Andrew had little reason to stay in Ohio. Sometime between 1834 and 1840, he left Cincinnati for New York City. He was probably the Andrew Lane involved in a consortium of mercantile firms in New York, New Orleans, and Natchez, Mississippi, in 1838. The New York firm, which existed from

⁵⁶Lane, "James Lane," pp. 149–51; Fitts, *Lane Genealogies*, pp. 327–28; "1850 United States Federal Census," Schedule 1 for Oxford Township, Ohio, p. 83; Lesick, *Lane Rebels*, pp. 30, 1–2, 79–82, 21, 88–89, 126–31, 170–71, 235–37, 135–36.

⁵⁷Lane to Vail, February 1834; Lane to Vail, 28 November 1834; Earle Hilgert, "Calvin Ellis Stowe: Pioneer Librarian of the Old West," *Library Quarterly* 50.3 (1980): 335n; Lesick, *Lane Rebels*, p. 30.

1837 to 1838, was styled Laidlaw, Lane & Co.; the New Orleans firm was Lane, Van Wyck & Co., possibly indicating the involvement of William, the one brother still residing in Louisiana.⁵⁸ Andrew married Semor (or Seymour or Senior) Amarinthia Rogers of Georgia in 1840. The same year he became a lifetime member of the American Bible Society, an organization committed to distributing Bibles to people throughout the United States (including some slaves) and beyond; he continued donating to that organization over the next dozen years. While in New York, he retained a nominal link to Cincinnati as a bank stockholder, last noted in 1843.⁵⁹

Having resided in Maine, Illinois, Louisiana, Ohio, and New York, Lane now returned to New England. Between 1843 and 1845, he moved to his final home of New Haven. While there, he wrote his letters to Polk and his pamphlets. Around 1850 his wife Semor, who had returned to Georgia, sued for divorce; by 1860 Andrew apparently had married Maria L. Ward and was living with her and two children, probably Maria's from an earlier marriage. By 1860 he also had resumed practicing law. I have found no evidence that he held a judgeship in Connecticut; Toucey, in calling him "Judge Andrew Lane," probably referred to the earlier New Orleans appointment. But Lane did attain one of the highest distinctions for practicing lawyers: on 6 March 1861, he was admitted to the bar of the U.S.

⁵⁸Account of Moneys, *Sailor's Magazine*, June 1840, p. 326; classified advertisement, *Natchez* [Miss.] *Daily Courier*, 31 August and 1 September 1838; Ship News, *New York Morning Herald*, 1 November 1837 and 12 March 1838; Domestic Importations, *New York Morning Herald*, 12 April and 14 May 1838; Shipping Intelligence, *New-York Spectator*, 15 February and 19 July 1838. Publications of the American Bible Society listed Lane's location in 1840 as Cincinnati, probably an error. *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the American Bible Society . . .* (New York: Fanshaw, 1840), p. 144; Receipts, *Extracts from the Correspondence of the American Bible Society*, May 1840, p. 366.

⁵⁹Marriages, *Worcester* [Mass.] *National Aegis*, 16 September 1840; Married, *New England Weekly Review* (Hartford), 12 September 1840; Marriages, *Hartford Daily Courant*, 5 September 1840; Married, *New World*, 5 September 1840; Receipts, *Extracts*, May 1840, p. 366, July 1842, p. 573, May 1844, p. 61, July 1844, p. 77, and May 1846, p. 172; "Moneys Received by the Treasurer of the American Bible Society During the month of March, 1852," *Bible Society Records*, April 1852, p. 136; B. Latham, *Special Report of the Bank Commissioners, in Reply to a Call of the Senate, Showing the Indebtedness of Directors and Officers of the Banks . . .*, 1844, Doc. 32, p. 9, in *Documents, Messages and Other Communications Made to the Forty Second General Assembly of the State of Ohio. Printed in a Separate Volume, by Act of December 16, 1836*, vol. 8 (Columbus: Medary, 1844). See also *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Bible Society . . .* (New York: Fanshaw, 1842), pp. 29, 155, 191; *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the American Bible Society . . .* (New York: Fanshaw, 1843), pp. 169, 186; W. P. Strickland, *History of the American Bible Society, from Its Organization to the Present Time* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1849), esp. pp. 79–80, 85–88.

Supreme Court. He never argued a case before the court, though. On 1 February 1862, after a long illness, Andrew Lane died.⁶⁰



While preparing the forthcoming volume of Polk's correspondence, I quite enjoyed deleting "From Anonymous" at the top of the transcription of *Amor Patriæ's* January 1847 letter to Polk and replacing it with "From Andrew Lane." Even without the author's name, the letter had been interesting. It addressed domestic politics, international relations, technology, race, religion, and sectional identities, among other topics. But now, the letter helps illuminate the biography of a merchant, lawyer, slaveholder, and seminary founder who lived, variously, in the North, South, East, and West. And in turn, his background illuminates the letter. The mystery surrounding *Amor Patriæ* and its solution remind us that a documentary edition can reveal new information about a variety of subjects and people in addition to the individual on whom it centers. A president's letters can be a window into America in his time—and can help us learn things even he did not know.

⁶⁰*Amor Patriæ* to Polk, 25 July 1845; J. Madison Patten, comp., *Benham's New Haven City Directory* . . . (title varies), 1846/47–1861/62 (New Haven: Benham, 1846–61), esp. 1861/62, p. 179; J. Smith, "Bryan Superior Court—April Term, 1850," classified advertisement, *Savannah* [Ga.] *Republican*, 24 April, 5 and 19 June, and 10 and 12 July 1850; U.S. Census Bureau, "1860 United States Federal Census," Schedule 1 for New Haven, p. 20; "Supreme Court of the United States," *New York Herald*, 11 March 1861; Benjamin C. Howard, *Reports of Cases Argued and Adjudged in the Supreme Court of the United States*, vol. 24, *December Term, 1860* (Washington, D.C.: Morrison, 1861), p. xiii; Deaths, *New Haven* [Conn.] *Columbian Register*, 8 February 1862; Died, *Middletown* [Conn.] *Constitution*, 12 February 1862. See also *Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the American Bible Society* . . . (New York: American Bible Society, 1860), p. 220, and *Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Bible Society* . . . (New York: American Bible Society, 1862), p. 88.

Michael David Cohen is Assistant Research Professor of History and Assistant Editor of the *Correspondence of James K. Polk at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville*. His first book, *RECONSTRUCTING THE CAMPUS: HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR*, was published in 2012 by the University of Virginia Press. *THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JAMES K. POLK, vol. 12, JANUARY–JULY 1847*, which he coedited with Tom Chaffin, will be published this year by the University of Tennessee Press.