Midwifery and Medicine in Boston

Amalie M. Kass

Published by Northeastern University Press

Kass, Amalie M.
Midwifery and Medicine in Boston: Walter Channing, M.D., 1786-1876.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/68424.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/68424
Chapter 1

Youth

When I was a boy everything was different from what is common now. We had just come out of the Revolution and all things were new. The times were hard enough. Everybody had to work.

—Walter Channing to his grandson, June 17, 1863

NEWPORT was still recovering from the devastation of war when Walter Channing was born there on April 15, 1786, less than three years after Great Britain granted independence to the American colonies. The Rhode Island town had suffered severely from occupation by marauding British troops during the early years of the war, as well as from the French and American batteries that attempted to dislodge them. Homes and shops had been destroyed, churches damaged. The exodus of Tory sympathizers and the flight of families seeking safer environs had reduced the population to half the prewar number. In the harbor, once a bustling scene of maritime enterprise, only a few ships were loading or unloading their goods.

For most of the eighteenth century, Newport was a flourishing commercial and cultural center. Three generations of Channings had helped to make it so. Walter's great-grandparents, John Channing and Mary Antram, had arrived in Boston from England in 1712, after a nine-month voyage prolonged by hostilities between the British and the French and a floundering ship that required repairs en route. They married and soon after moved to Newport, where they prospered. At his death in 1731, John Channing was known not only for his success as a merchant, but also for his corpulence, greater than that of any other man in Newport.

The next generation, Walter's paternal grandparents, were also named John and Mary Channing. This Mary was born Mary Chaloner and had been
the widow of Dr. James Robinson, the only physician member of the family, tangential though he was, prior to Walter. John Channing, like his father before him, was highly respected in Newport society. He owned a warehouse located directly at the wharf and a dry goods store closer to the center of town. His wife, assisted by several clerks, directed the retail operation, a practice that was not uncommon in pre-Revolutionary New England. The threat posed to Newport's prosperity by British trade policy during the decade before the outbreak of the Revolution incited many merchants to band together in opposition to imperial rule. John Channing was one of the early leaders of the Sons of Liberty in Newport.⁴

Walter's father, William, born in 1751, was the first Channing to opt for higher education and a profession. He studied at Nassau Hall (later Princeton), then returned to Rhode Island to read law and begin a legal practice. In May 1773 he married Lucy Ellery. As tension mounted during the years before the outbreak of hostilities with Great Britain, William Channing was a vociferous champion of colonial rights, and when war broke out he became an officer in one of the volunteer companies formed for the defense of Newport.⁵

On his mother's side, Walter inherited a pedigree equally well suited for his post-Revolutionary generation.⁶ Through his grandmother, Ann Remington Ellery, Walter could trace his ancestry to Thomas Dudley, who came to Boston in 1630 on board the Arbella with John Winthrop and the original
settlers of Massachusetts Bay Colony. As deputy governor, Dudley took part in the banishments of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, both of whom threatened religious control by the Puritan oligarchy in Massachusetts Bay. Williams then migrated southward to establish the colony of Rhode Island on principles of religious toleration and to attract Englishmen such as the Channings who welcomed religious liberty as well as economic opportunity. The descendants of Thomas Dudley bore illustrious New England names such as Bradstreet, Remington, and Trowbridge and were distinguished governors, judges, and ministers. Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Dudley’s oldest daughter, achieved lasting renown as colonial New England’s first poet.

Of all his forebears, William Ellery, Walter’s maternal grandfather, most clearly embodied the spirit of the Revolution. The Ellerys too had migrated from Massachusetts to Rhode Island during the early years of the eighteenth century and a previous William had been a deputy governor of the colony. Like the Channings, they too acquired wealth as merchants. William Ellery graduated from Harvard College in 1747 and was a successful businessman in his own right until the disruption of trade that accompanied the escalating dispute over British revenue acts and colonial nonimportation agreements forced him to turn to the practice of law so that he could better support his family. Ellery was one of Rhode Island’s most active patriots in the years prior to the outbreak of war and in 1776 he was chosen a delegate to the Second Continental Congress. A monthlong horseback journey took him to Philadelphia, where he participated in the deliberations that led to the Declaration of Independence and signed the document on behalf of Rhode Island. In retaliation for that courageous deed, the British burned his house in Newport.

Known thenceforth as “the Signer,” Ellery continued as a member of the Continental Congress until 1785 and thus became well acquainted with the important political figures of the new nation. President George Washington appointed him Collector of the Customs for the District of Newport, an office he held until his death in 1820. As the most long-lived of Walter’s grandparents, William Ellery was an important influence on Walter and his siblings. From the Signer they learned to venerate Washington, Adams, Hamilton, and the other leaders of the early Republic and became staunch Federalists when political parties developed at the end of the eighteenth century.

Newport’s location in Narragansett Bay, at the southern end of Aquidneck Island, with a protected harbor on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other, was a great advantage in the development of coastal and overseas trade. Much of its prosperity depended on its pivotal position in the so-called Triangular Trade. Newport shipped vast quantities of rum to the west coast of Africa, where it was exchanged for slaves, who were then transported to sugar
plantations in the West Indies. The sugar and molasses produced there by slave labor was shipped north to Newport distilleries, where it was used to manufacture the rum and complete the triangle. Newport’s role in the slave trade extended to the sale of black men and women in the southern colonies and to a far lesser degree in Rhode Island itself.\textsuperscript{11}

The wealth produced by the slave trade, as well as by conventional seafaring activities and commercial enterprises, enabled Newport’s merchants, the Channings included, to live in fine homes and to enjoy the arts, literature, and other intellectual pursuits.\textsuperscript{12} The Redwood Library, built at mid-century to resemble a Roman temple and open for public enjoyment, was emblematic of the town’s cultural aspirations. The natural beauty of the island, with the open sea stretching eastward, beaches extending for miles around, and rocky ledges above, added to its appeal.

By the year of Walter’s birth, slavery had been abolished in Rhode Island and the Channings had freed their own black servants. Some remained with the family, including “the Duchess,” so named because of her regal bearing. She was a particular favorite who became a mainstay of the rapidly expanding Channing household.\textsuperscript{13}

Walter’s father, William, was one of Rhode Island’s most admired and popular lawyers. After independence, he served simultaneously as the elected attorney general for Rhode Island and as the appointed United States district attorney. His many civic duties brought esteem but not much remuneration. Lucy Ellery Channing, educated “in the stern school of Puritanism,”\textsuperscript{14} was by nature and circumstances forced to be extremely careful with money, a habit she passed on to her children. She was a woman of great firmness and inflexible integrity who detested the slightest deviation from truthfulness. The family was the center of her life, which was made “happy or wrecked” by the success or failure of her children.\textsuperscript{15} She claimed their reverence “as an act beneficial to them.”\textsuperscript{16} They, in turn, cherished her company and welcomed her advice. Lucy was also a woman who observed the social proprieties, entertaining formally at dinner and tea her husband’s professional and political friends. Her ready wit, forthright conversation, and genuine interest in those about her were fondly remembered by her children and grandchildren long after her death.\textsuperscript{17}

The Channing home on School Street did not reflect Newport’s economic troubles. It was large and gracious, befitting the attorney general and his growing family.\textsuperscript{18} Francis Dana was born in 1775, Ann in 1778, William Ellery in 1780, Mary in 1782, and Henry in 1784. Following Walter’s birth in 1786 came Lucy in 1787, George Gibbs in 1789, and Edward Tyrrel in 1790. Circumstances and individual traits caused each of the boys to follow a different path, Francis to the law, William to the ministry, Henry to trade, Walter to medi-
cine, George to a varied and often problematic career in business, publishing, and the ministry, and Edward to academia. The three girls were expected to marry, and they all did.¹⁹

Walter remembered his father as “upright in a high sense of the word. He was of a most amiable temper, and though the times exacted an implicit obedience in children . . . yet he was kind and indulgent. I remember he would stop at my school door sometimes before school broke up, and take me home on horseback with him. I feared my father, but there was a lesson of love in the severest of his instructions.” ²⁰

The lessons of love were abruptly ended by his father’s death in 1793, when Walter was only seven years old. William Channing’s unidentified but fatal illness was sudden and severe. His mind was so deranged that Walter and the other children were kept from his bedside. After his death one of the servants, probably the Duchess, insisted on taking the boy to gaze on what he would “never see again on earth” and cautioned him “to make this last sad sight an everlasting lesson in virtue and piety.” Instead, the child saw only “a face transfigured by death . . . pale, shrunken, dead.” Long into adulthood Walter fervently prayed for a vision of his father “such as he was in the happiest days of mine when the light of his countenance was my light, and my joy.” ²¹ Older brothers, a loving grandfather, and myriad uncles could not replace the father so early removed from Walter’s life. It was the first of many losses, each depriving him of love, each rendering him more lonely.

Lucy Ellery Channing was left to raise the family alone, but her inner strength and the support of many Channings and Ellerys sustained her and her children. Nonetheless, her financial situation was difficult. William Channing had accumulated a remarkable law library and some real estate, but there was little money.²² The United States Treasury was unwilling or unable to pay the widow for her husband’s service as attorney general and the rents from farmland he had owned were small.²³ Though birth and breeding placed her and her children among the best of Newport society, genteel poverty was the reality of her condition. Francis was in his third year at Harvard when his father died, and William had already left the family circle for New London to
prepare for college under the tutelage of an uncle, the Reverend Henry Channing. Though the two eldest brothers were acutely aware of their obligations to their mother and the other children, each was expected to continue his studies, assisted by loans and other subsidies from family connections. 

Walter had been named for one of his father’s brothers, a Newport merchant who was co-owner of Gibbs and Channing. Uncle Walter’s partner and brother-in-law, George Gibbs (Gibbs had married Mary Channing), was among the most successful merchants in New England. It was a fortuitous naming, for Uncle Walter was a wealthy man despite the ups and downs of commerce during the unsettled postwar period. Thus it was to him that many members of the family turned for counsel and loans.

Grandfather William Ellery lived less than a mile from the Channings and he continued to play an important role in the lives of his daughter’s children. “There is nothing that concerns my grandchildren in which I do not feel myself interested,” he later wrote. “I rejoice with those of them who do rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn.” The Signer could be a lively and amusing personality, regaling them with stories of his own youthful escapades and his adventures en route to sessions of the Continental Congress. He read Latin and Greek classics as well as English philosophers, historians, poets, and scientists, and he encouraged young Walter’s intellectual curiosity while supervising some of his studies. “How well is that time, and those studies and recitation remembered. Never before nor since, has such or any intellectual work been to me so wholly attractive, or more cheerfully done.” Walter began to study Greek with his grandfather, and was soon reading “with some ease.” His training in classical languages provided a lifelong ability to use medical words correctly, even to the point of telling his colleagues when they strayed from the original Greek.

In contrast to the Channing family, William Ellery opposed slavery, a situation that might have caused conflict with his son-in-law, had he lived longer. As watchdog of the port, Ellery brought suit against merchants who continued in the by then illegal slave trade, whereas William Channing, who had treated his own blacks well and saw nothing wrong with slavery, had been their defender. The antipathy to slavery that Walter and his brother William showed later in their lives owed much to the influence of their grandfather.

Grandfather Ellery was deeply devout, another trait he passed on to his progeny. He read the Bible daily throughout his long life and freely demonstrated his familiarity with its verses and his understanding of its lessons. The family worshiped at the Second Congregational Meeting House, which was badly desecrated by British soldiers during the occupation of Newport but had since been restored. The Reverend William Patten, successor to Ezra Stiles,
preached dry, expository sermons on points of Calvinist theology that held little interest for the younger members of the congregation. "We sat shivering in the winter through a long service, in a large barn-like building, without stoves, furnaces, or carpets, listening to discourses which older heads might not always fully comprehend." The service was intolerably tedious and seemed to Walter like "the eternal punishment and eternal misery of which the minister spoke most, especially of the first."31

Samuel Hopkins also had a small congregation in Newport and though his extreme Calvinist beliefs had no appeal to the Channings, his doctrine of "disinterested benevolence and self-sacrificing charity . . . [and his] exhaustless love, kindness, and charity" made a lasting impression on young Walter.32 Despite its Congregational majority, Newport's tradition of religious tolerance meant that from childhood Walter was acquainted with the practices of Jews, Quakers, Baptists, and Episcopalians as well as several other denominations.

Though the Sabbath was strictly observed, with no activity permitted but prayer and meditation, Walter and his brothers had plenty of opportunities to play. The beach beckoned in summer and the frozen ponds in winter. Lucy issued firm orders about swimming, and though William obeyed her commands, Walter and his next younger brother, George, were often caught with wet hair and sent supperless to bed. A more dangerous escapade nearly ended in disaster when the two youngsters were skating without permission. Trying to outskate one of the other boys, Walter ventured out on thin ice, fell through, and might have drowned had George not lain down on a safer spot and pushed a long pole out to his older brother. Once again they were punished; Lucy took seriously her solitary responsibility for their conduct and safety.33

In his early years, Walter attended a school near home where a Scot named John Frazer was the master. As was customary, Frazer was a strict disciplinarian and the boys, Walter among them, were whipped for infractions of the rules. He was neither an outstanding nor a poor student.34 However, he was beginning to demonstrate the strong sense of independence and self-direction that characterized his entire life. One day when he was about twelve years old,
he entered his mother's wainscoted front parlor smoking a cigar. Queried about his conduct, he showed no embarrassment, asserting only that indeed he was smoking. Lucy must not have been offended, for she indicated that he could do as he pleased. The incident was emblematic of his entire life. His mother's unwillingness to interfere reinforced an emerging insistence on self-reliance. A few years later, he decided to leave school. Again there was no opposition. He claimed that he wanted to assist his mother in the management of the family property, but more likely he was bored by school.

With his days relatively unstructured, Walter showed a romantic flair then still unusual among descendants of New England Puritans. He began by painting, indulging for a brief time the notion that he might become a great artist. When that dream was squashed by unappreciative relatives and friends, he turned to literature, writing poetry, plays, and fiction. Again he received little encouragement, though he continued to pursue his literary interests throughout his life. He spent long and solitary days in the Redwood Library, but the classics and weighty books of philosophy, read without guidance or purpose, made little impression.

He keenly felt the absence of his brother William who, after graduation at the head of his class at Harvard College, spent a year and a half as a tutor in Virginia before returning to Cambridge in 1802 to study divinity. Walter wrote to his serious and scholarly brother about the books he was reading, seeking William's approbation and advice. "Do write me often... let your letters be moral essays. I am young, susceptible to every feeling & want the aid of your cool philosophic mind." On occasion he added a plea for small amounts of money so that he might buy a toothbrush or wood to heat his room. "I am a poor fellow," he added, "but heaven may bless my studies & here after any good which it may be in my power to do to man may make it possible for me to repay the kindness of my friends." He was afraid to seek help from Francis, the eldest brother, lest he be accused "of an excellent faculty for begging." Despite an outward gregariousness, Walter often preferred to withdraw from society. After hours reading at the Redwood Library, he would take off for the beach "and there among the rocks, the sands and the waves indulge in such speculation, as the scene, or my strange studies, or my own fancy might suggest. I have been there in the storm and the calm with wide and boundless ocean before me, nor used I to leave it till in the darkness of evening, nothing remained for me but its ceaseless roar. There was something in this kind of life that strongly attracted me. It inclined me to avoid men."

Gradually, he realized that medicine genuinely interested him. He began to read anatomy, physiology, and medical theory, though without adequate guidance, and soon discovered that "he never studied harder [and] never
learned less." With no physicians (except Dr. Robinson) in either the Channing or the Ellery families and none of his brothers sharing a similar interest, Walter had begun on his own, unique path, and should he pursue it he would have to find his way in a world very different from the one he had known. That may well have been part of its attraction for a young man eager to demonstrate his independence.

Nonetheless, he felt compelled to justify his commitment to medicine rather than the more traditional careers in law or the ministry. Writing to William in 1803, he explained that he would study "a profession that has been stigmatized with the character of an irreligious one but by my manner of education I hope to be an exception. A physician can perform too [sic] important duties... by an acquaintance with physic he can ease the pains incident to the body & by an acquaintance with the comforts of religion he may make the pains of dying much easier." Not only might he bring relief and solace to the sick and dying, but as a physician he would be fulfilling his duty to society, another of the precepts thoroughly inculcated in young New Englanders like him.

Newport had known distinguished physicians in the past and for several of them Walter Channing had a particular affinity. Dr. William Hunter, a Scot educated at Edinburgh, settled in Newport in 1752 and practiced medicine, including obstetrics, for twenty-four years. Though most of Newport's babies were delivered by midwives in the years before the Revolution, Hunter was reputed to have about fifty childbearing women under his care annually. He also gave a series of anatomy lectures in 1754–1756 deemed to have been the first systematic medical course in the colonies. He included midwifery in his lectures, although the topic was considered inappropriate by many in the community. Channing was born too late ever to have known William Hunter, but he knew enough about him to appreciate his pioneering work, though he would not have approved his strong Tory principles.

Benjamin Waterhouse, one of Newport's most illustrious medical sons, had already abandoned its limited environment by the time Channing was born, but eventually they became well acquainted as instructor and pupil in medicine. During his childhood years, the most important physician was Dr. Isaac Senter, who was called whenever Lucy's home remedies were not sufficient to cure a sick child. Lucy trusted him implicitly and the children loved him despite the harsh medicines he prescribed. To Walter, his "excellent and cultivated mind, his contributions to the London Medical Journal... his gentleness, his widely reputed professional skill and the large confidence he enjoyed" made him a model to be imitated if at all possible.

As Walter's interest in medicine became known, several local physicians
allowed him to accompany them on their visits to patients. Initially he thought surgery would be his calling, but the idea was quickly abandoned when he witnessed two horrific operations. In the first case, he fainted while a young boy’s protruding blind eye was incised in an effort to remove nonexistent fluid. The boy suffered horribly from the procedure and others that followed and eventually died of infection and exhaustion. The second case was a compound fracture of the leg, the result of a carriage accident near the Channing home. The victim was brought into the house, where the bone was set. Afterward he was carried to his own house but the leg had to be reset. Tetanus developed and in time this patient too expired, leaving an indelible memory of the agony produced by rampant infection. Thereupon young Walter Channing decided to avoid surgical cases and focused his interest on physic (that is, internal medicine).

In 1803 William Ellery Channing was ordained minister of Boston’s Federal Street Church, and shortly thereafter he invited his mother and the children still living in Newport to join him. This meant leaving the familiarity of the home and garden that had given comfort and pleasure, despite their adverse circumstances, and the friends and relatives who had known and sustained them for many years. But Lucy was eager to have her children together again and accepted William’s offer.

[I]t will be very advantageous to your younger Brothers to reside in Boston. Henry when he shall return would there find a home. Walter would be with us while he is studying physic and George, if he cannot be received into a store without my boarding him, can be boarded by me and when Edward shall enter College he will be under our eyes, and we can wash and mend his clothes. Francis . . . will live in Boston and board with me—and it may be more for your interest and comfort to be with me than to board out. . . . Your GrandPapa says that [it] is more likely that the girls will get good husbands in Boston than at Newport. . . . I shall not object to my sons or daughters marrying when the former can get good wives & the latter good husbands but matrimony is at present out of the question.

So Lucy became mistress of the house on Berry Street, purchased by the parish to accommodate their new minister’s family. William, who continued to feel responsible for the well-being of his entire family, made his salary available for the needs of his younger sisters and brothers and paid board to his mother for lodging him. Newport remained forever an important place in all their lives, reclaimed by frequent visits, especially in summer, to renew family
ties and friendships. But it was now a backwater community and could not match the opportunities that Boston offered. Lucy made the right decision. Thenceforth Boston would be the locale for Channing accomplishments. The descendants of merchants and politicians would make their mark in more intellectual pursuits—the ministry, academia, and medicine. 47

SERIOUS study was necessary if Walter was to pursue a medical career. Medicine was just emerging from its colonial status: the absence of educational requirements and professional standards meant that anyone could call himself a physician and seek patients. Most practitioners, however, had spent several years apprenticed to an experienced physician and had received a certificate of accomplishment from their preceptors, which indicated acceptable morals as well as familiarity with the basic literature of medicine. It was not uncommon for an apprentice to begin training in his mid-teens, with little preliminary education beyond grammar school. The apprenticeship system worked reasonably well for its time, but more formal studies, as in law and the ministry, were necessary if medicine was to achieve recognition as a profession.

The Revolutionary War and establishment of a new nation led to important changes, especially in Boston. The wartime experiences of many physicians had underscored the deficiencies in medical training and several of them sought reform. Dr. John Warren took the lead. Warren, a graduate of Harvard College, had apprenticed in medicine to his brother Joseph, the patriot-physician killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and had served as surgeon and head of the army hospital in Boston. In 1781 Warren delivered a series of public lectures on anatomy, similar to lectures he had previously given to his staff. The number of attendees, which included the president of Harvard, and their enthusiasm for the subject affirmed the need for a proper medical school in Massachusetts. (Pennsylvania and New York each had a medical school dating from 1765 and 1767, respectively.)

In 1782, the year following Warren's lectures, the Harvard Corporation voted to create three professorships: anatomy and surgery, physic and theory of medicine, and chemistry and materia medica. They also authorized the granting of medical degrees. Admission to the lectures was restricted to upperclassmen, college graduates, and noncollegians twenty-one years old or more. Those who intended to practice medicine were already apprenticed to physicians and the lectures supplemented the instruction they received from their preceptors. Massachusetts now had the beginnings of formal education leading to a degree in medicine, and Harvard became the third medical school in the nation, the first since independence from England. It was hardly an auspicious beginning, for the school lacked anatomical exhibits and chemical apparatus
as well as a medical library, and it had no funds to purchase them, relying instead on the professors' personal accouterments. An earlier legacy from a physician named Ezekiel Hersey eventually provided salaries for two of the professors, but student fees were the primary source of income for the faculty. 48

The establishment of the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1781 was another attempt to improve professional standards. It was empowered by the legislature to examine candidates for membership but had no power to prevent nonmembers from practicing medicine. For those who sought admission to the society and the cachet membership bestowed, knowledge of Latin and Greek, mathematics and natural science, plus a three-year apprenticeship with a "respectable" physician were considered sufficient preparation. 49 A three-year licentiate period preceded full fellowship. In time, men who held medical degrees from Harvard were entitled to membership without examination.

The beginnings of a medical school at Harvard notwithstanding, the easiest and most economical route to becoming a physician was to pay apprenticeship fees to an acceptable physician, study his medical books, observe some of his cases, and, at the end of three years, be examined by the Censors of the Massachusetts Medical Society. Undoubtedly this was what Lucy had expected when she wrote that "Walter can be with us while he is studying physic." Although college education was not a necessary precursor to a medical career, Walter Channing thought otherwise. An academic degree, he insisted, "would aid my professional progress." 50

Friends and family tried to dissuade him from his academic ambitions, although Francis and William had attended Harvard and it was assumed that Edward would do the same. Perhaps Walter's previous lack of regular scholarship suggested that he would not take advantage of a college education. Perhaps they did not deem medicine as worthy a profession as the law or ministry. 51 Perhaps there did not seem to be enough money available to support Walter and Edward simultaneously. Nonetheless, he persisted in seeking the same educational opportunities that his brothers had enjoyed and expected the advantage they bestowed to place him at a higher level among Boston's physicians once he completed his training. Fortunately, just when his prospects seemed most bleak, Uncle Walter offered to meet his expenses.

His heretofore haphazard schooling made remedial study necessary before he could be admitted to the college, and so he spent seven months living with a clergyman in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, known to successfully prepare young scholars for college entrance. The Reverend Sanger charged a dollar and a half per week for instruction, board, and incidentals. Initially, Walter was lonely and homesick, his misery intensified by the distance between Bridge-
water and the seacoast, with its familiar smell of salt air, but he gradually settled into a routine. By February 1805 his studies with Sanger were sufficient to win him a place among the freshmen who had already spent one term at Harvard. His classmates included his brother Edward and his cousin Richard Henry Dana.

It was a fractious period in the history of Harvard, precipitated by two deaths, those of the Reverend David Tappan, the incumbent Hollis Professor of Divinity, in August 1803 and of Joseph Willard, who had been president of the university for twenty-three years, in September 1804. In recent years New England had experienced increasing tension between orthodox Congregationalists who adhered to Calvinist doctrines, including belief in the wickedness of mankind and a wrathful God, manifest in the Trinity, who punished sinners for their transgressions, and the growing number of more liberal ministers whose theology embraced free will and a merciful God whose Son exemplified the perfection of human existence. Harvard, having been founded in large measure for the education of ministers, was a great battleground for the growing schism that eventually resulted in two denominations, orthodox Trinitarian and Unitarian. The Channings, led by William, would become Unitarians.

Appointments of the Hollis Professor and the president were delayed by a bitter debate, for it was evident that whoever should be selected would determine the character and direction of the university far into the future. The six-member Corporation, responsible for nominating the replacements, was evenly divided between Calvinists and liberals, which led to weeks of intense discussion, repeated balloting, and abortive compromise. In the end the liberal view prevailed and, early in 1805, the Reverend Henry Ware was chosen to be the Hollis Professor of Divinity. Subsequently, the Board of Overseers, also divided between the orthodox and liberals, officially approved the selection. The following year Samuel Webber, Professor of Mathematics, a man "without friends or enemies" but with liberal religious views, was named president.

At the same time, Harvard's governance remained firmly in the hands of Boston's Federalists, who bitterly resented the embargo acts imposed by Jefferson's administration to preserve American neutrality in the growing conflict between France and Great Britain and deeply mistrusted Jeffersonian/Republican admiration for the French. Fearful of the excesses of the French Revolution, sympathetic to British representation of order and stability, and thoroughly angered by the restrictions on trade and commerce on which so many Boston fortunes depended, the men who controlled Harvard, liberal in theology but conservative in politics, represented the same elite class that would dominate Boston business and society for many decades.
young men are unlikely to pay much attention to affairs that seem to be concerns of their elders. The daily grind of memorization, recitation, and examination was much more compelling than the theological and political issues that surrounded them. Channing and his fellow students were required to study Latin, Greek, grammar, natural science, and mathematics. The faculty was small and the graduating classes never numbered more than forty-five. Law and the ministry were the most acceptable pursuits; the study of medicine was not much encouraged, except for the lectures available in the senior year at the fledgling medical college.\textsuperscript{58}

Channing quickly tired of academic life. He was fined three times for absence from public worship and admonished for indecent noise and disorderly conduct at evening commons. He was older than most of the students in his class and this may have contributed to his disenchantment. Despite the months of instruction with Rev. Sanger, he still felt unprepared, and after working hard to avoid embarrassment in the classroom, he began to doubt his reasons for being there. Additionally, he was absent for more than thirteen weeks when illness, diagnosed as typhus fever, forced him to return from Cambridge to the parsonage on Berry Street.\textsuperscript{59} The delirium, weakness, headache, lack of appetite, and dependence on others he experienced while ill stuck in his memory for the rest of his life, for he generally prided himself on good health. The true nature of his illness is impossible to ascertain, since fevers and rashes could not then be clearly differentiated. The family physician, Samuel Danforth, thought that the disease was caused by a disturbance of the stomach and prescribed an emetic-cathartic, to which he attributed Channing's eventual recovery.\textsuperscript{60}

In Channing's eyes, President Webber was unsuited for his new responsibilities. "He had passed his whole life in the retirement of C. [Cambridge] and in the pursuit of abstract, and exact Science. His favorite pursuits had kept him away from men, and he knew less how to direct the physique and morale of . . . young men than any body in the community."\textsuperscript{61} Certainly he was inadequate to deal with the "Rotten Cabbage" rebellion that erupted in March 1807, springtime being then as now the season most propitious for student unrest. The initial problem was "unwholesome . . . nauseous" food, in particular some especially bad cabbage soup that provoked the students to quit the dining hall and form a committee to protest to the college authorities. They cited the filthy appearance of the cook and steward, and the bad meat as well as the offensive soup.

Channing later admitted a secondary cause. "We were predisposed . . . to resist government, and the college fare offered the best reason for rebellion." According to Channing's grandson, writing about the episode more than a
hundred years later, "A committee waited upon the immediate head of the college . . . with a sample of the soup in the bowl. One of the committee held the bowl, the chairman made a speech, and my grandfather held a spoonful of the mixture under President Webber's nose." It may well be that the grandson enjoyed imagining his grandfather as an impudent rebel, but it is certain that Walter Channing was heavily involved. 62

The rebellion quickly assumed political overtones. At first the Corporation demanded that the students withdraw their petition. The students refused. Instead, they issued a public statement that began: "As we, the Students of Harvard University are about to dissolve the ties which have hitherto bound us to that institution, we think that a decent regard to the opinion of the public and especially for those who are more deeply and dearly interested, requires that we should give a fair and impartial statement of the causes which have brought us to this our present, important and unusual resolution." 63 One hundred and forty-seven students signed this "appeal for a cool and impartial decision." Among the juniors were Walter and Edward Channing and Richard Henry Dana.

Everyone in Cambridge and Boston knew well the declaration that the students had imitated. But rebellion against Great Britain was one thing, rebellion against Harvard was another. There was fear that indulging the students would lead to more protests and demands for an even greater variety of food. "Plainness of diet . . . made acceptable by evening sobriety and early rising . . . is the universal rule of this place," opined the administration. 64 To the Federalist-controlled Corporation the episode seemed to threaten general disorder, and they were determined to restore authority. Tension increased when they voted to dismiss the students who had taken part in the rebellion, with a provision that those who would acknowledge their effrontery and promise never again to oppose college rules would be readmitted. Fathers and guardians of the rebellious students were summoned to a meeting designed to "reduce [them] to obedience." Many students, among them Edward T. Channing, agreed to seek pardon. 65 Walter did not.

The Rotten Cabbage rebellion had special significance for Channing: "during all this time of trial nobody appeared for me, and I was left pretty much to my own guidance." 66 He ignored advice from some of the family, fearing that it would contradict his stubborn refusal to give in. Their attempted interference reminded him of previous episodes in which he had experienced "much harshness, much severity" when he had expressed his views or opinions on issues with which others disagreed. He did not want to repeat those unpleasant occasions. Instead, he once more made his own decision and stood by it. On April 15, 1807, President Webber signed a formal letter of dismissal sent to William
Ellery Channing. "It appears that your brother Walter Channing was a party in the offence, and that he has not chosen to comply with the terms, required by the Corporation. The painful office therefore devolves on me of announcing to you, that his connexion with the College, pursuant to a vote of the Corporation, is dissolved." By coincidence the letter was written on Walter's twenty-first birthday.

Many years later Walter Channing would advocate a strong liberal arts education as essential preparation for professional life, but in 1807, when he had already begun to tire of college studies and with another year in Cambridge ahead of him, he may well have found the rebellion a good excuse to quit. However, he had his family to face and returned to the parsonage with some trepidation. There his younger sister, Lucy, greeted him with welcome news. "Walter, we have voted not to hear a single word about the late affairs at Cambridge." Whether the family had already forgiven him or had concluded that his conduct had shown the wisdom of their initial opposition to his attendance at college, their apparent lack of interest was consistent with their previous attitude toward his conduct and further strengthened his independent spirit.

But a course had to be charted. He was of legal age, with no money of his own and no inheritance at his disposal. He had not altered his goal, but he had to change the means of achieving it. His interest in medicine remained strong and he well knew he could proceed without the Harvard College degree. He had learned to manage for himself and he quickly formed a plan. On April 20, 1807, he became a pupil of Dr. James Jackson, already one of Boston's leading medical men, who would soon become the quintessential physician in antebellum Boston. It was one of the best decisions he ever made.