MATERIAL CULTURE AND PUBLIC MEMORY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY HISTORICAL SOCIETIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of American historical societies in collecting and preserving history during the nineteenth century. By looking at what these organizations accrued and how they presented their collections, we can better understand how people in the nineteenth century viewed their past. This dissertation, however, argues that historical societies did more than compile and conserve the past. It contends that these historical agencies, through various methods, influenced the way the public perceived and, consequently, believed to be true about their history. I utilized office files, newspapers, original correspondence, pamphlets, legislative materials, and contemporary accounts to prove this point. I combined these primary sources with a solid background of secondary-source literature on various social, political, and cultural aspects of the nineteenth century. My findings reveal that nineteenth-century historical societies, despite their reluctance to admit it, directly shaped public memory. These conclusions are illustrated in a case study of one such institution—the Tennessee Historical Society.

Museums, libraries, and lyceums had a profound influence on nineteenth-century historical societies—an impact assayed in this dissertation. Also, the material culture and public memory of nineteenth-century historical societies centered on a version of history that remained constant throughout the century. This interpretation focused on the narrative of the American Revolution and early settlement of the frontier as the key to understanding American progress and order. Furthermore, the accomplishments achieved by the founding generation were divinely inspired and best left to the patrician class to preserve and disseminate.

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INTRODUCTION

In October 1857 at the State Fair Grounds in Nashville, Tennessee, crowds gathered to witness William Moore, a veteran of the War of 1812, donate a regimental flag to the Tennessee Historical Society. In 1812 the ladies of Lincoln County had presented the flag to Moore, in his capacity as captain of the Second Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers. According to the veteran, this standard flew in all the campaigns led by General Andrew Jackson, including the Creek War and those against the British at New Orleans. "And though this banner exhibits the wreck of time and the scars of wars," Moore avowed, "it is the richest offering that I can bring in the declivity of my life, to be deposited in the archives of the State by the Historical Society."[1]

Dr. J. B. Lindsley, in accepting the relic on behalf of the Society, waxed poetic on the flag's true significance. Addressing William Moore and the listening audience, Lindsley said:

> Forty-five years ago, under vastly different circumstances, you received as the gift of your fair country women . . . this flag, since borne so gallantly and successfully through many a glorious field. . . . All along our borders lurked the wily and blood-thirsty savage, loath to give up this splendid, but unimproved heritage. . . . Alarm, anxiety, almost dismay everywhere, naturally prevailed. Along with hundreds and thousands of your noble compeers, you volunteered and hastened to the scene of the conflict. And right speedily did you give assurance of victory, and peace, and safety. Today, you behold the splendid results of those patriotic self-sacrifices.[2]

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[1] Account taken from the "Societies and Their Proceedings" section of the *Historical Magazine* 1 (December 1857): 370-371. All subsequent references to this event are taken from this source.

[2] Ibid.

Then Dr. Lindsley, speaking for the historical society, pledged to carefully preserve the flag and "place it where its presence will serve to recall to thousands the vivid recollection of a most glorious period in the history of Tennessee, and to provoke them to emulate the gallant deeds of the early inhabitants of this State."

The reverence paid to past generations, the donation of historic "relics," the patriotic rhetoric, and the ritualistic ceremony displayed that day in 1857 represented major components of what John Bodnar called "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past and its present, and, by implication, its future."[3] What did Dr. Lindsley's allusions to the "blood-thirsty savage" or "gallant deeds" of the early settlers of Tennessee signify in 1857? His depiction of an era when alarm, anxiety, and dismay prevailed set the tone for a narrative in which the heroes (Moore and his fellow volunteers) "hastened to the scene of conflict" to chastise the villains (Creek Indians) thereby restoring peace and tranquility across the frontier. The assurance of progress and civilization resulted from the noble deeds and patriotic sacrifices of the early Tennesseans. Moore lived long enough to witness the "splendid results" of his generation's efforts. For Moore, Lindsley, and their Tennessee audience, the story was that simple.

And what of the flag—a faded, shredded banner of worn, silken cloth—that weathered "the wreck of time and the scars of wars"? The flag represented a link—a trust of honor—between those who made it (the ladies of Lincoln County) and those they lionized, the Tennessee volunteers, an artifact of material culture expressing "the values,

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[3] John Bodnar, "Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 76.

ideas, attitudes, and assumptions of a particular community . . . across time."[4] What belief systems already existed as Tennesseans of the 1850s gazed at the tattered flag presented by a War of 1812 veteran? A flag is a primary symbol and core of collective identity, but its effect in 1812 paled in comparison to what it later epitomized. The "colors" transformed into a near-sacred icon by the middle of the nineteenth century.[5]

Artifacts possess powerful emotions and meanings, as do memories. The difficulty comes in learning how to read objects as historical evidence. Furthermore, the meanings artifacts carry change with time (Moore's regimental flag being an excellent example). When people of the nineteenth century looked at and touched historic objects, did what they saw and felt correspond to what those in the next century saw and felt? By knowing how a population perceived the past, we better understand how they discerned their present and how they envisioned their future. One of the goals of this dissertation is to study material culture and public memory as seen through the eyes of the collectors, preservers, and disseminators of historical knowledge in the nineteenth century—the cultural institutions known as historical societies. As keepers of the past, historical societies defined and shaped the parameters of collective memory. Social forces affected these societies in ways that determined the compilation, retention, and propagation of history. One of these institutions, the Tennessee Historical Society [THS], provides a window within a window to the nineteenth century. By looking at how THS members

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[4] Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture Studies in America, 1876-1976," in *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 3.

[5] For the importance of the flag in public memory, see Michael Frisch, "American History and the Structures of Collective Memory: A Modest Exercise in Empirical Iconography," in *Memory and American History*, ed. David Thelen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 17.

looked at the past, we catch a glimpse of how they dealt with their todays and how they pictured their tomorrows.

"Never before or since," according to one historian, "has history occupied such a vital place in the thinking of the American people as during the first half of the nineteenth century."[6] Americans embraced history and, as such, sought materials that reflected their beliefs about the past. Founded in 1849, the Tennessee Historical Society typifies the rise of learned societies to gather and preserve historical materials in the nineteenth century, particularly in the antebellum period. At least seventy-two such societies existed on the eve of the Civil War, whose membership usually consisted of a cross-section of a community's most prominent men.

The roots of THS go back further than the mid-century point. Twentieth-century chroniclers of THS acknowledge the Tennessee Antiquarian Society (1820-1822) and the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge (1835-1837) as the forerunners of THS. Both of these forbearers formed in Nashville, where the Tennessee Historical Society organized.[7]

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[6] Quote by George H. Calcott, *History in the United States 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 25. David Van Tassel refers to the founding of historical societies up to 1860 as "a national pastime." See Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Societies in America 1607-1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 100. Van Tassel's book represents one of the seminal works on the history of historical societies in the United States. Another indispensable work on antebellum historical societies is H. G. Jones, ed., *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society, Inc. and North Carolina Collection, 1995). Also seminal is Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies 1790-1869* (1944; reprint, Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974). Another key work is Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962). Other useful sources include Clifford L. Lord and Carl Ubbelohde, *Clio's Servant: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1846-1954* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967); and the essays in Clifford L. Lord, ed., *Keepers of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

[7] Ann Toplovich, "The Tennessee Historical Society at 150: Tennessee History 'Just and True,'" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 58 (Fall 1999): 196-215. Toplovich makes the case for this link by pointing out that at least six members of THS, as established in 1849, were former members of both the Tennessee

The THS office files contain the meeting minutes of both the Tennessee Antiquarian Society [TAS] and the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge [SDK], making a strong case for the apparent coupling of these institutions. This bond provides an excellent opportunity to examine the role played by libraries, museums, and lyceums in the nineteenth century, as TAS, SDK, and THS fit into those categories in one form or another.

To make sense of these organizations, it must be understood that the way we define libraries and museums and, hence, historical societies today, is dissimilar to the interpretation by nineteenth-century Americans. The first chapter of this dissertation, therefore, traces the background of American historical societies in the nineteenth century by examining the influence of Europe museums on those in America; the rise of the library system in the United States; and the role played by the American lyceum movement. The second chapter tells the "story" of the Tennessee Historical Society in terms of its history, goals, membership, and ideology. Comparisons will be made between THS and other state societies, pinpointing differences as well as similarities. Chapter three takes on the crucial issues of how and why nineteenth-century historical societies collected what they did and how they "diffused" (to use a popular word of the times) their ideals to the public. The last two chapters place the focus back on the Tennessee Historical Society in terms of material culture (chapter four) and public

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Antiquarian Society and the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge. In addition, THS adopted a similar language to the other organizations in terms of its objectives. Harriet Chappell Owsley made the same case earlier in her article, "The Tennessee Historical Society: Its Origin, Progress, and Present Condition," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 29 (Fall 1970): 227-242. Recorders of THS history in the nineteenth century also mentioned the ties between the organizations. See, for instance, "The Tennessee Historical Society," in *Nashville City and Business Directory, for 1860-61, Volume V* (Nashville: L. P. Williams & Co., 1860), 41-43.

memory (chapter five). What did THS collect and how did the Society procure and preserve what they acquired? Moreover, in what forms did THS promote its ideology to the public at large? Answering these questions identifies what role the past played in the nineteenth century and how the legacy of nineteenth-century interpretations of history influenced future generations. It is telling, for instance, that THS members wrote most of the histories about Tennessee in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[8]

Doing such a case study has obvious limitations as it is difficult to assert that some particular organization is a miniature model of some larger historical empyrean.[9] It is not the intention of this dissertation to declare THS as emblematic of all historical societies of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the organization falls short of the scope and success of many sister societies in the nation. Furthermore, the regional duality of Tennessee, both a "western" society and a "southern" one, make it even more problematic to assign a broader significance to its story. That said, the organizational and acquisition-inspired agendas of THS genuinely reflect similar preservation associations of the nineteenth century.

Three recurring themes run through this body of work—societal touchstones especially germane to the nineteenth century—progress, order, and elitism. Defining these ideas, as they are used in this dissertation, is of primary importance. Nineteenth-century writers, for example, defined progress as "the belief in the movement over time

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[8] It is significant, for instance, that THS members wrote most of the histories about Tennessee in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. These include John Haywood, A. W. Putnam, J. G. M. Ramsey, Gerard Troost, Anson Nelson, John Berrien Lindsley, Joseph Buckner Killebrew, J. G. Cisco, William M. Clayton, J. Wooldridge, and John Allison. See Owsley, "Tennessee Historical Society," 235.

[9] See, for example, the introduction in Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many?: Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9. McKenzie realizes that readers are often not impressed "by the intense examination of obviously idiosyncratic subjects" and, thus, the temptation is for authors to overstate their case.

of some aspect or aspects of human existence, within a social setting, toward a better condition."[10] Progress advances steadily, naturally, and through successive stages, toward something new or a goal. In history, this implies a pervasive optimizing tendency.[11] Nineteenth-century progress, in the form of useful arts, linked itself to the inventions associated with the Industrial Revolution—new plows, threshing machines, turnpikes, canals, power-looms, advances in the iron and steel industry, steam engines—all touted in the newspapers of the day.

Most nineteenth-century Americans considered God as the source of this progress, with earthly affairs as providential in nature (at least until Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*). They believed God had a slow, deliberate plan that envisioned America as the City on the Hill for the world to exemplify. American uniqueness, a defining characteristic of the nation and progress, became the center of this vision. Nineteenth-century Americans "anticipated a dramatic and infinite national climb, because America's enterprise, morals, and traditions, they declared, were perfectly suited to the laws of progress."[12]

Defining the concept of order, the second touchstone of the nineteenth century, is more problematic than defining progress. In its most simplistic terms, order indicates a

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[10] David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 6.

[11] Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, & Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 44-45. The idea of progress has its roots in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the notion that "progress" had no existence before modern times. This was challenged in the twentieth century, when it was determined there was no real idea of "progress." For an explanation of this, see W. Warren Wagar, "Modern Views of the Origins of the Idea of Progress," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (January-March 1967): 55-70.

[12] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Segmented Society: An Introduction to the Meaning of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3-4.

place for everything and everything in its place. However, the ramifications of "order" are too complex for a simple definition. The word often implied conformity, as an 1883 address by the chairman of the American Social Science Association's Department of Education stated: "Without conformity of the individual's will . . . to the will of the whole, society is impossible."[13] Despite its reputation of rugged individualism, America consisted of a nation of joiners. By the 1870s, hundreds of thousands of Americans belonged to at least one lodge, club, fraternity, or society.[14] The old order of self-sufficient, independent, hierarchical island communities, with independent farmers and craftsmen (along with some small businessmen) supplying the needs of the community, broke down after the Civil War. In the nineteenth century, a new order of national organizations consisting of middle-class professionals and managers who emphasized efficiency, regularity, order, and action replaced the old school of thought.[15]

This transition, coupled with rapidly changing technology, migration to the cities, growing consumerism, and cyclical periods of depression, defied the moral authority of the old order where each person knew his or her rank and place. This upheaval traumatized unsettled members of historical societies in the nineteenth century. "In the main, they were sorely troubled by the sprawling, turbulent, heterogeneous character of the industrializing nineteenth-century cities," according to historian Gary Nash, "and they

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[13] W. T. Harris, "Moral Education in the Common Schools," *Journal of Social Science* 18 (May 1884), 122.

[14] For a look at this phenomenon, see Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Expansion of Everyday Life 1860-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 236-238. Michael Kammen terms the paradox of American individuality versus conformity as "collective individualism"—the wanting to belong yet wanting to be free—in his work *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 115-116.

[15] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

considered the collecting of books, manuscripts, and objects of the past a way to restore some sense—their own sense—of unity and order through the preservation of a less trammeled, more virtuous, and less materialistic era."[16]

Those who, because of wealth and education, can generate the moral authority necessary to create and maintain order are often referred to as elites. The properties of elitism include wealth, income, occupation, the ability to command, style of life, kinship, education, and the power to protect the community.[17] There is no question that nineteenth-century historical societies served as bastions for the elite and, thus, became favorite targets of historians, imbued with history-from-the-bottom-up training, in the following century. Lewis Perry, in his analysis of the rise of historical societies in the 1840s/50s, is correct in pointing out that membership came out of only one segment of the population—male, prosperous, and professional. However, this dissertation challenges Perry's notion that the impetus of these societies "was largely internal; the societies existed for the edification of the men who belonged."[18] By taking exception to this popular conjecture, this dissertation must explain that historical societies of the nineteenth century, while "guilty" of a patrician membership, stayed keenly aware of the role they played as "keepers of the past"—a role that entailed not only the preservation of

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[16] Gary B. Nash, "Behind the Velvet Curtain: Academic History, Historical Societies, and the Presentation of the Past," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 (January 1990), 6.

[17] Edward Shils, "Charisma, Order, and Status," *American Sociological Review* 30 (April 1965): 199-213. In economic terms, the historical society reflected the nation's "newly gained wealth and leisure, both of which are required to celebrate one's forefathers properly." See Lyman H. Butterfield, "Archival and Editorial Enterprise in 1850 and in 1950: Some Comparisons and Contrasts," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98 (June 1954), 162.

[18] Lewis Perry, *Boats Against the Current: American Culture Between Revolution and Modernity, 1820-1860* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49-50. Because elitism acquired such a negative reputation in the last century, this dissertation frequently substitutes the word "patrician" for "elite."

history but its interpretation as well. In his inaugural address to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in June 1837, Peter S. Du Ponceau, the Society's second president, emphatically stated: "We are not historians. . . . Our first duty is to collect and preserve materials for future history."[19] And what historical societies collected, how they preserved it, and how they disseminated it to the public determined, to a large degree, the writing and remembrance of history.

To accomplish this lesson, this dissertation examines one such society, the Tennessee Historical Society, through its office files, the personal and public papers of some of its members, the newspapers of the day, and a comparative investigation of similar societies. Some, but not all, of the cultural forces serving as background to this study include the problem of national identity, Jacksonian democracy, civil strife, and the rise of professionalism. If nothing else, this dissertation hopes to set the record straight in regard to nineteenth-century historical societies functioning not only as elite keepers of the past but shapers of the past, as well.

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[19] Quoted in Hampton L. Carson, *A History of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1940), I: 5.

CHAPTER I

MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES, AND LYCEUMS

In 1860, Jeremiah George Harris, a purser in the U. S. Navy, obtained a mummy in Cairo, Egypt, and shipped it to the Tennessee Historical Society [THS] in Nashville where the Society "enthusiastically received" it. Harris, a member of THS, wanted the Society to obtain the mummy because, as he put it, "nearly all our Historical Societies have one." Pleased with the unusual gift, THS members in 1877 granted Harris a life membership (without dues) "in consequence of his valuable present some years ago, of an Egyptian mummy, and other donations." In that same year, THS president John M. Lea called an unscheduled meeting of the Historical Society for the purpose of discussing a rather disturbing turn of events. Lea disclosed a letter which claimed that Harris was not the donor of the Egyptian mummy. William Williams of Knoxville, the author of the letter, insisted his brother, John, sent the artifact to the Society while serving as a United States foreign minister at Constantinople. The shocked members resolved to form a committee to look into the matter and announce their findings at the next regular meeting. At that gathering, a relieved committee reported that the records established Harris as the rightful donor. The meeting minutes of 7 February 1860 indicated Harris made the donation in January of that year, although the committee could not find any correspondence between Harris and A. W. Putnam, then president of THS. The letter did turn up later. After further investigation, it became apparent that John Williams *did* send a mummy from Egypt, via New Orleans in 1861, but it never reached Nashville. The

committee recommended "that steps be taken without delay to ascertain what has become of it, and if possible secure it."[1] The incident signifies more than a lively footnote in THS history—or poor record keeping—it demonstrates the vogue for Egyptian culture in America during the nineteenth century.[2]

That an historical society eagerly sought to obtain museum pieces, such as Egyptian mummies, typifies the varied dimensions of a nineteenth-century learned society. A twenty-first-century visitor to an historical society expects to find processed collections consisting mostly of primary materials: diaries, correspondence, public and private documents, newspapers, and, perhaps, old photographs. A nineteenth-century visitor to an historical society—assuming he or she had an invitation—accessed similar materials but had to sift through numerous boxes (or crates) filled with bundles of jumbled papers. But objects, more than documents, dominated the collections of nineteenth-century historical societies: displays of ancient coins, geological specimens, aged books, stuffed birds, sea shells, zoological fossils, Indian artifacts, swords, flags, and portraits. Actually, these items epitomized some of the tamer objects acquired.

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[1] Tennessee Historical Society Office Files 1790-1985, Tennessee Historical Society (Nashville) [hereafter cited as THS Office Files], Box 16, Folders 1, 4. When Harris indicated that all other historical societies had Egyptian artifacts such as mummies, he did not exaggerate. In the late 1850s, the New-York Historical Society spent a great deal of money to acquire Egyptian antiquities, including three mummified bulls. The Western Reserve Historical Society at Cleveland obtained an Egyptian mummy in the 1870s, as well as some Babylonian bricks. See Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962), 49, 207. The "other" mummy sent to THS has never been located.

[2] This Western fascination with Egyptian culture and history, commonly referred to as Egyptomania, prevailed throughout the nineteenth century and influenced American literature, art, and architecture (William Strickland designed the First Presbyterian Church [1849-1851] in downtown Nashville utilizing the Egyptian Revival style). Egyptomania also influenced race, gender, and national identity. For this, see Scott Driskell Trafton, *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egyptomania* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). The allure of procuring mummies preceded nineteenth-century Egyptomania; in fact, practically every seventeenth-century British museum housed a mummy—a highly-prized and profoundly potent object. See Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 135.

Every historical society of the nineteenth century had its share of oddities—things that defied the logic behind the societies' prime mission of procuring and preserving history. The Minnesota Historical Society, between the period of the Civil War and 1881, acquired an assortment of items including Polynesian artifacts, a fragment of a boiler from a steamboat that exploded in 1864, a tree knot shaped like a human face, a piece of oak with a deer's head imbedded in it, and a watch chain made from the hair of an Indian hanged in 1862.[3] More distinguished historical societies fared no differently in their collection policies. The American Antiquarian Society received a jaw bone and tusk of a wild hog in 1815. In 1847, the New-York Historical Society flaunted a bullet said to have been swallowed twice by a British soldier during the Revolutionary War.[4]

Often resembling museums, nineteenth-century historical societies served a multitude of purposes. Societies housed objects of natural history as well as artifacts attached to history (no matter how remote); they functioned as private libraries and ad hoc art galleries; and their members presented papers and public lectures on a variety of topics. Nineteenth-century historical societies, in effect, resembled the museums, libraries, and lyceums of their day. In fact, all these associations overlapped each other in terms of purpose and presentation. In order to understand how historical societies functioned in the nineteenth-century, it is necessary to first examine the background and activities of museums, libraries, and lyceums.

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[3] Mary Wheelhouse Berthel and Harold Dean Cater, "The Minnesota Historical Society: Highlights of a Century," *Minnesota History* 30 (December 1949), 312-313. All of these items were (mercifully) lost in an 1881 fire at the Society's library in the state capitol.

[4] Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies 1790-1860* (1944; reprint, Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 74. Dunlap makes this telling statement: "Relics and specimens of natural history which belonged in rubbish piles were sent to historical societies where they were often preserved."

It is not much of a stretch to say that American historical societies of the nineteenth century bear a direct link to the museums of Renaissance Europe. These museums, sometimes referred to as "cabinets of curiosity," demonstrated the preoccupation for Renaissance learning and collecting. Collecting, a product of the social and educated elite, expressed a key to understanding the world. Accumulating objects of nature became a way of controlling and measuring the natural world. The collector's interest in the natural world and products of antiquity reflected an aim of universality: the desire to establish the position of mankind in the grand scheme of things. Hence, a fondness for unusual items stood along side an eagerness for Roman coins and Egyptian mummies. The lives of prominent personalities of the past turned into objects of intense scrutiny. Artifacts associated with historical figures, especially painted portraits, became sought-after items.[5]

The earliest science museums appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in Italy where the Renaissance tradition of curiosity provided a valid premise for intellectual inquiry. By the eighteenth century, museums went public and concentrated more on order and classification (via Enlightenment scientists such as George Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon and Carl Linnaeus). By then, the Renaissance naturalists seemed more of a novelty.[6] Going public, however, had its price—literally. The cultural climate in eighteenth-century England, for instance, encouraged the pursuit

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[5] See the introduction to *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinets of Curiosities in Sixteenth-and-Seventeenth Century Europe*, eds. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1-4. For the development of museums up to the nineteenth century, see Dillon Ripley, *The Sacred Grove: Essays on Museums* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969). For an overall history of museums from the time of the Greeks to the twentieth century, consult Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age*, trans. Jane van Nuis Cahill (New York: Universe Books, 1967).

[6] Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

of knowledge but, at the same time, sanctioned for-profit displays of private collections ranging from curios and other artifacts to specimens of fauna and flora. This exhibition craze accompanied the rise of dozens of "improving" societies throughout Britain, all permeated in one way or the other by a spirit of progress. Museums provided space for scholars and gentlemen to study and meet on topics of similar interests, while allowing audiences to enter this "laboratory." Thus, museums resembled libraries and lecture theatres.[7]

Didier Maleuvre defines museums as "institutions devoted to the protection, preservation, exhibition, and furtherance of what a community agrees to identify as works of artistic or historical value."[8] Museums as we know them began as a break with the aristocratic past in the late eighteenth century and aided in providing a national character to fledging nations—the Louve in France (1793), the Prado Museum in Spain (1820), the National Gallery in Britain (1824), and the Atles Museum in Berlin (1830). This breaking away had the effect of politicizing the contents of artworks as examples of civic, republican values. People saw their national heritage and collective identity embodied in museums—an identity prefabricated and handed down to the people.[9]

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[7] David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 79-84; and Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious*, 28-29.

[8] Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9. Joel J. Orosz defines a museum as "an institution that collects tangible objects, makes them available for scholarly research, and exhibits them to the general public as a means of popular education." See Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 3. Orosz's book is a good source for the development of the American museum up to 1870. For a look at the complexities surrounding the definition of a museum, see G. Ellis Burcaw, ed., *Introduction to Museum Work*, 3rd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997), 18-21.

[9] Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, 9-11, 107. For a further look at the progression of the modern museum as an amalgamation of Renaissance humanism and nineteenth-century democracy, see Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1979), 6-11.

In the early American republic, the Enlightenment ideas about the gentlemanly pursuit of knowledge worked not to satisfy curiosity, but to act as an instrument of religious worship. Scientists collected products of creation to better understand the Creator. The organization and arrangement of natural history reflected an understanding of the natural order of things. For this reason, early museums focused on objects not people—antiquities not histories.[10] Museums contained specimens of natural science, botany, zoology, geology, the fine arts, coins, manuscripts, and curiosities. As schools of "useful knowledge" and amusement, museums stood at the intersection of scientific instruction and entertainment.[11]

Charleston, South Carolina lays claim to the first museum in America. Established in 1773, the Charleston Library Society decided "to collect materials for a full and accurate natural history of South Carolina" [Note that the first American museum stemmed from a library society]. Early acquisitions included an Indian hatchet, a Hawaiian woven helmet, a telescope, and the skull and bones of a fossilized man from Guadeloupe.[12] This hodgepodge collection of articles makes it difficult to accept the notion the Charleston Library Society focused strictly on "materials for a full and

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[10] This is further explained in Steven Conn's *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 37-43. As Gaynor Kavanagh observed, the shift to social and cultural histories in museums did not take place until the postwar years of the twentieth century—a process that required considerable adjustment in museum theory and practice. Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (London, UK: Leicester University Press, 2000), 7.

[11] Herbert Katz and Marjorie Katz, *Museums, U.S.A.: A History and Guide* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Co., 1965), 1-20; and Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 126-127.

[12] Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 47-48. There is some evidence a museum operated under Pierre Eugene DuSimitiere in Philadelphia a decade before the Charleston museum. See Joseph Ewan, "The Growth of Learned and Scientific Societies in the Southeastern United States to 1860" in *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the Early American Republic: American Scientific and Learned Societies from Colonial Times to the Civil War*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and Sanborn C. Brown (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 212, 217n30.

accurate natural history of South Carolina." Yet, this pattern repeated itself through other museums and historical societies in the nineteenth century, making it almost impossible to conceive of museums in that era as reflective of community identities. The acquisitions reflected the personal view of the museum keepers rather than the community at large.[13] There is also a surprising similarity in the circumstances of museums across the nation during the period of the early republic, so much so that imitations abounded in terms of what was considered an attractive museum. A popular museum could be, at the same time, an art gallery, a geological display, a taxidermist's showcase, or a circus-like sideshow.

Charles Willson Peale's museum in Philadelphia became the prototype for American museums during the early republic. Peale (1741-1827), a naturalist and artist, opened his museum of natural curiosities in Philadelphia in 1786. Displays included collections of fossils, shells, gems, stuffed quadrupeds, Indian artifacts, and oil paintings. By the turn of the century, Peale's Museum became a must-see stop for any tourist to Philadelphia. One foreign visitor who frequented the museum noted: "No traveller [*sic*] has entered this city without awarding the proprietor his due meed of praise."[14] This became especially true after Peale acquired his crowning jewel, the skeleton of the "Mammoth" recovered in Ulster County, New York, in 1801. Peale advertised it as "the

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[13] But museum keepers are members of the community. If so, then it stands to reason that community identities emerge out of personal identities. This concept is ably explained in Ivan Karp, "On Civil Society and Social Memory," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, eds. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 19-33.

[14] John Bernard, *Retrospections of America 1797-1811*, ed. Mrs. Bayle Bernard (1887; reprint, New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1969), 200. The best contemporary account of Peale's Museum is from James Mease's guide book of Philadelphia, *The Picture of Philadelphia, Giving an Account of its Origin, Increase and Improvements in Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, Commerce and Revenue* (1811; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 311-314.

carnivorous elephant of the North" when, in fact, the remains were of an herbivorous mastodon. So renowned was Peale's Mammoth, one British scientist referred to it as America's "natural treasure."[15]

Peale's vision of a museum not only included displays of nature, but also a showcase of live animals, a library for study, a gallery of paintings, and regular public meetings. Peale became the first museum keeper to display birds and small animals with realistic modeled foregrounds and painted watercolor backdrops. He combined art and natural history with entertainment venues such as scientific demonstrations, music, drama, and vaudeville-like performances. The Philadelphia museum reached its peak around 1816 when it profited nearly $12,000 and drew 50,000 visitors.[16]

A modern interpretation of Peale's Museum concludes that it expressed an attempt to show the orderliness of nature as seen by the fact that all the display cases were of equal size and dimension—even the paintings of Revolutionary War heroes rested in identical frames. Was Peale trying to teach his audience the rules of similarity, graduation, and natural precision? Was this a vision of Peale's world in miniature? Perhaps Peale intended his audience to learn the rules of nature so that they could play an active and enlightened role in shaping the republic through a vision of order.[17] Peale's penchant for the odd and the curious—entertainment value notwithstanding—served as a

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[15] Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influences* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 57-58.

[16] Ibid., 53, 56, 61-63. The best secondary source on Peale's museum remains Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979). Also, see David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and Its Audience* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

[17] Mark P. Leone and Barbara J. Little, "Artifacts as Expressions of Society and Culture: Subversive Genealogy and the Value of History," in *History From Things: Essays on Material Culture*, eds. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 168-170.

testament to the Creator's capacity for order amidst diversity. If so, then Peale's museum was not a random collection of curios. "In fact," as one historian notes, "the museum was a metaphor for the order, stability, and coherence that Peale valued most highly, an institutionalization of Peale's republican ideal, comprised entirely of American artifacts."[18]

Museums may have served as places of useful knowledge, but they thrived only when incorporating crowd-pleasing attractions. Peale, for instance, realized the economic necessity of presenting "magic lantern" shows—a display designed to illustrate principles of astronomy and science, featuring mock thunderstorms, a collapsing miniature house, and the firing of a brass cannon.[19] Other similar establishments followed suit. A museum in Cincinnati attracted large crowds in the 1820s/30s through a sideshow-like display called the "Infernal Regions," a depiction of Hell with automation, sound effects, and wax-like figures depicting Lucifer and his demons.[20] In Nashville, "Dr. Troost's Museum" featured a valuable collection of minerals and "other curious and rare productions of nature and art," including the "Phantasmagoria." The local newspaper announced the exhibit in this fashion: "This very amusing display of several

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[18] Joseph J. Ellis, *After the Revolution: Profiles of Early American Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 69. Also, see Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History Museum Exhibits from Peale to the Present," in *History Museums in the United States—A Critical Assessment*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 4.

[19] Ellis, *After the Revolution*, 70. A lantern show—images from hand-painted glass slides projected on a wall or screen—were often referred to as a phantasmagoria (or ghost show). Slides were projected from behind a translucent screen, with several lanterns used simultaneously to produce a composite image. See Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird & Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 118-119.

[20] Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 127-131; also, see Michael Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States: Being a Series of Letters on North America* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, and Company, 1839), 193.

objects, represented in motion and in every variety of attitude, by means of shadows thrown upon an illuminated spot and witnessed by the spectators in a darkened room, cannot fail to be pleasing and attractive to those who have not been accustomed to such exhibitions."[21] By the middle of the nineteenth century, the term "museum" deteriorated to mean "heterogeneous collections of objects, animate as well as inanimate, and which are in some instances used for theatrical performances," according to the *New American Cyclopaedia* of 1857.[22]

The ties between museums and historical societies remained constant throughout the nineteenth century—in 1876 there were seventy-eight such societies in the nation with half of them possessing museums.[23] Displays of natural history specimens became a common denominator linking the two. A cabinet exhibiting a variety of minerals became a staple in museums and historical societies in the early republic. "The vogue for cabinets of minerals was so widespread in the United States in the first quarter of the nineteenth-century that rarely was an American college or academy found without one," according to Leslie Dunlap.[24] For example, British traveler John Duncan visited Yale's cabinet of minerals in 1818 and declared it to be the finest of its kind in America—with

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[21] *National Banner & Nashville Whig* (Nashville, TN), 20 June 1828. Dr. Gerard Troost (1776-1850) was professor of chemistry and mineralogy at the University of Nashville from 1827-1850.

[22] Cited in Henry D. Shapiro, "Putting the Past Under Glass: Preservation and the Idea of History in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Prospects* 10 (1985), 268. The fact that showman P. T. Barnum eventually acquired most of Peale's exhibits in the 1840s reveals the interesting connection between serious historical education and public entertainment. For the significance of this, see Barbara Clark Smith, "The Authority of History: The Changing Public Face of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 (January 1990), 42.

[23] Edward P. Alexander, *The Museum: A Living Book of History* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Historical Society, 1959), 8. Also, see Julian P. Boyd, "State and Local Historical Societies in the United States," *American Historical Review* 40 (October 1934), 24.

[24] Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 73.

18,000 specimens—rivaling those in Europe. Duncan next toured New York City, where he found another display of natural history samplings at the Lyceum of Natural History and even more specimens (along with stuffed birds and an Indian mummy taken from a saltpeter cave in Kentucky) at Scudder's Museum.[25]

Antebellum universities organized natural history artifacts in the drawers and shelves of a cabinet to keep out dirt and insects. The term "cabinets" came to represent the collection itself; indeed, the words "collection" and "museum" became interchangeable in the early republic.[26] To further complicate the issue, these cabinets often resided in the university's library. Maine minister Jonathan Fisher returned to his alma mater, Harvard, in 1833 to see a museum exhibit. "My curiosity was gratified and my astonishment excited by the view of the grand library," he wrote, "and the almost innumerable specimens of productions from the bowels of the earth in the great Cabinet of Minerals."[27]

Gems did not constitute the only contents of a cabinet. The showcases at the Tennessee Historical Society, referred to as the "Cabinet of the Society," held the Society's Indian relics, swords, coins, and old books.[28] On a broader scale, the National

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[25] John M. Duncan, *Travels Through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819*, 2 vols. (New York: W. B. Giley, 1823), I: 150-151, II: 293-294.

[26] Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "Curiosities and Cabinets: Natural History Museums and Education on the Antebellum Campus," *Isis* 79 (September 1988), 409. Kohlstedt's article points out that, by the 1850s, natural history collections, including the collecting and analyzing of specimens, became a fundamental learning experience in antebellum universities.

[27] Quoted in Mary Ellen Chase, *Jonathan Fisher: Maine Parson, 1768-1847* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), 188.

[28] "The Tennessee Historical Society," in *Nashville City and Business Directory, for 1860-61—Volume V* (Nashville: L. P. Williams & Co., 1860), 42-43. An 1857 petition from THS to the Tennessee General Assembly, seeking funds, refers to its collection as the *Cabinet of Curiosities*. See Legislative Petitions, Record Group 60, Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville), File 8-1857.

Cabinet of Curiosities, housed on the second floor of the United States Patent Office, displayed the uniform of George Washington along side of Native American ornaments. This "Cabinet" eventually served as the nucleus of the Smithsonian Museum in 1846.[29]

Many cabinets of natural history remained in private hands, such as the collection accumulated by Samuel Prescott Hildreth in Ohio, who feverishly acquired fossils, insects, shells, and plants in the 1830s. By the end of the decade, his cabinet grew to include over 4,000 specimens—all arranged in cases and drawers, labeled, numbered, and catalogued.[30] Hildreth's fastidiousness and dedication to orderliness reflects the passion collectors evinced toward their acquisitions. Through immersion of their accessions, collectors escape into a form of control over the immediate environment—a control rarely available in the outside world. A collection, with its clarity, completeness, and order, serves as an identity formation, and provides the intangibles of goodness, beauty, or truth.[31]

Attachment to possessions often involves displaced meanings. That is, dissatisfied with the present moment, we displace our hopes and ideals to another time and place. Objects help bring alive a period of the past with which we identify and, hence, reify our sense of the past.[32] Can the same principles apply to historical societies

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[29] Frederick von Raumer, *America and the American People*, trans. William W. Turner (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1846), 432: and Ewan, "Growth of Learned and Scientific Societies," 215.

[30] S. P. Hildreth, "Biographical Sketches of the Early Physicians of Marietta, Ohio," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 3 (April 1849), 144-145.

[31] Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 137-138.

[32] Russell W. Belk, "Attachment to Possessions," in *Place Attachment*, eds. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 45-48. Belk refers to museums as "cathedrals where we worship material objects."

and museums? In the nineteenth century, museums almost always represented one-man's vision (Charles Willson Peale, for example). Historical societies fell under the same influence (to be discussed more fully in chapter three). The ideals behind an historical society revealed a passion for the self-transcendent—the need to restore a past the members felt explained who they were via a selected view of the past's successes and (rarely) failures. The more chaotic the world seemed around them, the more order they sought in the past. No wonder, then, that post-bellum museums exuded a greater sense of order—long rows of glass cases containing labeled specimens neatly arranged—an attempt to reaffirm a collective identity in an updated version of progress.

The version of progress instilled in nineteenth-century learned societies involved an eclectic program of utility. The Boston Athenaeum, incorporated in 1807, fostered scholarship in literature, science, and the visual arts. The founders projected a headquarters that would house a library, a cabinet of natural history and curiosities, a gallery of paintings and sculptures, a scientific laboratory, and a lecture room.[33] Another "Atheneum," this one in Lexington, Kentucky, served as the city's reading room in 1818. It was well-furnished with newspapers, periodicals, and scientific journals. The Atheneum had, according to one visitor, "a small collection of objects of Natural History" and some Indian dresses and artifacts attached to it—a museum, in effect.[34]

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[33] Louis Leonard Tucker, "Massachusetts," in *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861*, ed. H. G. Jones (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society, Inc. and North Carolina Collection, 1995), 13. The Boston Athenaeum remains one of the oldest independent libraries in the United States (although there is now no chemistry lab).

[34] James Flint, *Letters from America, Containing Observations on the Climate and Agriculture of the Western States, the Manners of the People, the Prospects of Emigrants, &c.* (1822; reprinted in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels—Volume IX* [Cleveland, OH: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904]), 137.

In colonial America, subscription libraries, owned and supported by shareholders, loaned books to dues-paying members. These patrician organizations geared themselves towards promoting "useful knowledge." Reading matter consisted of scientific journals and magazines, along with a generous supply of ancient histories. By the 1760s, commercial circulating libraries appeared where patrons could borrow books for a modest fee. The reading material tended to be more popular in format—novels, for instance. Because of this competition, the subscription libraries changed some of their policies to lure readers to their facilities. When the economic instability of the 1780s and 1790s, caused by the Revolutionary War, created a major setback for the commercial libraries, only the subscription method survived.[35]

During the early republic, this colonial holdover evidenced itself in the formation of library "companies." The number of shares one owned determined the number of books one could borrow. In Tennessee, the Nashville Library Company, incorporated in October 1813, existed under the directorship of seven members, one of whom was Wilkins Tannehill. The town's leading merchant and scholar, Tannehill later became instrumental in forming the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge, and the Tennessee Historical Society. Other members of the Nashville Library Company included a local elected official, a philanthropist, and the owner of one of the largest library collections in the state—the patricians of the community. At one point in its existence, the library headquartered itself at "Dr. St. Leger's Museum," further evidence of the link between libraries and museums in the nineteenth century.

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[35] James Green, "Subscription Libraries and Commercial Circulating Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York," in *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, eds. Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 53-71.

Similar associations sprang up elsewhere in Tennessee, including the Dickson Library Company (1815) and the Knoxville Library Company (1817), the latter having the distinction of a female member—probably the first female member of a library company in the state.[36] According to statistics taken at the mid-century point, there were twenty-one such libraries in the state with a total of 47,356 volumes.[37]

The Tennessee State Library, holding approximately 8,000 of those volumes, had a profound impact on the Tennessee Historical Society. Created in the 1850s, the State Library housed its collection at the state capitol in a room across from the State Supreme Court chambers. The Library contained the archival records of the state, as well as books, maps, charts, and legislative materials. According to a public act of 1856, the State Library received an annual appropriation of $500 to increase its holdings, with a state librarian appointed at the salary of $500 per year. The public had access to the library every day of the year except holidays, but no materials could be checked out except by General Assembly members during a legislative session.

Since the Tennessee Historical Society shared space with the State Library at the Capitol, the fortunes of the two organizations intertwined. Membership in THS usually included the state librarian, a role initially filled by Return J. Meigs, a former attorney and state reporter who became the first State Librarian in 1856. This membership connection continued when Paralee Haskell, widow of orator William T. Haskell, took

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[36] Mary Daniel Moore, "The First Century of Library History in Tennessee, 1813-1913," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 16 (1944), 3-5. Also, see Jane Gardner Flener, "A History of Libraries in Tennessee Before the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1963), 22-25. The Knoxville Library Company had a salaried librarian on staff, Reverend David A. Sherman, who received $20.00 per year.

[37] Richard Swainson Fisher, *The Progress of the United States of America, from the Earliest Periods. Geographical, Statistical, and Historical* (New York: J.H. Colton & Company, 1854), 268.

over the post of State Librarian in 1871. Paralee Haskell became the first female member of THS.[38]

An impressive library became the key to a successful historical society in the nineteenth century. Addressing the New-England Historical and Genealogical Society in 1870, Edmund Slater, corresponding secretary of the organization, reiterated the main objective of the society during its genesis twenty-five years earlier as being "the formation of a library of New-England history" which was to be "the foundation of all future success."[39] At the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, one of the first areas of concentration involved the creation of an expansive library.[40] In Tennessee, Ralph E. W. Earl filled the office of Librarian of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, beginning in 1820, a post the society's constitution stated "shall have charge of the Books and pamphlets of the society."[41] Earl owned and operated a museum in Nashville where the Tennessee Antiquarian Society often met, another illustration of the museum/library connection. The Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge stated in an 1835 report that the formation of libraries across the state of Tennessee should be an important feature in its

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[38] *Acts of the State of Tennessee, Passed at the First Session of the Thirty-First General Assembly, for the Years 1855-56* (Nashville: G. C. Torbett and Company, 1856), 236; and *Public Acts of the State of Tennessee, Passed at the First Session of the Thirty-Third General Assembly for the Years 1859-60* (Nashville: E. G. Eastman & Co., 1860), 247. For more on the State Library's connection to the THS, see Mary Daniel Moore, "The Tennessee State Library in the Capitol," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 12 (March 1953): 4-14.

[39] Edmund F. Slater, *Discourse Delivered Before the New-England Historic, Genealogical Society, Boston, March 18, 1870, on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of its Incorporation* (Boston: New-England Historic, Genealogical Society, 1870), 14-15, 31. Antebellum historical societies paid a great deal of attention to the building of a competent library. For more on this, see Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 70-73.

[40] Clifford Lord and Carl Ubbelohde, *Clio's Servant's: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin 1846-1954* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967), 16-17.

[41] Minutes and Proceedings of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, 1820-1837, Tennessee Historical Society (Nashville).

organizational plans. The committee authoring the report stated that the organization of such libraries would greatly benefit communities across the state:

> What immense advantage would accrue to the community, were a Library established in every town in the State! How many idle hours would be spread among all classes; and what an impulse would be imparted to the cause of education, by substituting intellectual, in the place of grosser amusements, and by enlisting the hearts and the energies of so many rising communities in this all important enterprise.[42]

The library frequently represented the most important building in a town because it symbolized a commitment to knowledge and education and reflected the basis of the town's prosperity.[43] And, ultimately, a library represented a visible sign of progress—but progress for whom?

The philosophy of having an informed citizenry to safeguard republicanism meant literature needed to have some usefulness. This aspect lent itself well to newspapers and pamphlets, which could be widely disseminated. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, books did not fit the criteria for simple and concise learning, as books involved expense. Thus, literature remained the domain of the patrician class. In Nashville, for instance, William Berry ran a bookstore from c1835-1876 with a well-stocked reading room filled with books purchased from eastern cities who imported them from Europe. Berry's bookstore became *the* literary center and gentleman's club of Nashville, a diversion for politicians and other notable patricians. By mid-century, however, advances in book publishing directly changed the dynamics of libraries, as accessibility

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[42] Minutes of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge, 1835-1837, THS Office Files, Box 5, Folder 1.

[43] David P. Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 99.

to printed material by the public became widespread. Whereas libraries had been the personal possession of learned gentlemen and professionals, by the 1850s the public library movement demanded democratic access to books. In conjunction with this came the growth of lyceums and libraries associated with mechanic's organizations in the 1830s and 1840s.[44]

The library of the Tennessee Historical Society contained a plethora of magazines, newspapers, biographies, histories, scientific journals, pamphlets, and circulars but no novels except the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott. The romantic, historical novels of Scott, with their fervent nationalism and use of historical materials, took America by storm in the early nineteenth century. His popularity resulted in vast book sales—a half million volumes before 1823—and a wave of adoration that verged on a mania. Schools required students to memorize passages from his books; at least thirty-five towns in the South bore the name Waverly; infant girls were named Rowena; and many entrepreneurs christened their steamboats *Rob Roy*.[45] One cannot overestimate

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[44] The bulk of this paragraph is based on Carl Ostrowski, *Books, Maps, and Politics: A Cultural History of the Library of Congress, 1783-1861* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 32-37, 139-141, 176-177. For more on the commercialization of American literature, see Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 6-12. The segment on Berry's Bookstore is from David Marshall Stewart, "William T. Berry and His Fabulous Bookstore: An Early Nashville Literary Emporium Without Parallel," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 37 (Spring 1978): 36-48.

As the American scholar relied on obtaining books for his own research—a costly enterprise—the bookseller became an integral part of the process as his specialized knowledge often substituted for formal bibliographical tools. See Arthur E. Bestro, Jr., "The Transformation of American Scholarship, 1875-1917," *Library Quarterly* 23 (July 1953), 168. Because of their expense, books were considered a "luxury" item in colonial America—for this , see Cynthia Z. Stiverson and Gregory A. Stiverson, "The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, eds. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 132-173.

[45] Russell Blaine Nye, *The Cultural Life of the New Nation 1776-1830* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 254-255.

Scott's influence, particularly below the Mason-Dixon Line, where Scott's novels, with their flowery style depicting a world of heroic nobility, matched the chivalrous atmosphere associated with antebellum South. His *Waverly* novels inspired castellated architecture, a code of honor, and the enshrinement of women, making history a popular interest in the South. First editions of Scott's works sold within hours, and so familiar were his novels to readers that one southern belle in Savannah claimed in 1837 she felt "as if I had known him intimately from my childhood."[46]

Scott's Gothic novels reflected the way historians in antebellum America approached history; in fact, most circles of readers considered Scott more an historian than writer of fiction (an historian could take liberties with the past in order to point to timeless moral conclusions). The historian had the obligation to impart a high moral lesson from the past—not details as much as principles—so that history could be seen in terms of what ethical laws it might illustrate. "Attention to precise detail was less important," according to one observer, "than capturing the spirit and moral lesson of an event." History in this Romantic period revolved around feeling, the historical writer being passionate, emotional, and possessing subjective intuition. As one critic observed, "History was storytelling in the early nineteenth century."[47]

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[46] Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 152-153; Wendell Garrett, *Victorian America: Classical Romanticism to Gilded Opulence*, ed. David Larkin (New York: Universe Publishing, 1995), 8-9; and Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 180-181. There are very specific links between the Tennessee Historical Society and Sir Walter Scott: the state library room in Tennessee's state capitol (where THS held meetings) supposedly took its design from Scott's personal library, and THS president A. W. Putnam, an avid Scott reader, purchased an estate in Nashville in 1839 that he named "Waverly Place."

[47] Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 29. George H. Calcott, *History in the United States 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970),

The Romantic writers of history included Washington Irving, George Ticknor, George Bancroft, William Prescott, Richard Hildreth, Jared Sparks, and Edward Everett—a group referred to as "the heroic generation of American historians." Faulted for being too dramatic and colorful in their writings, this generation of historians did have the conviction that histories ought to be founded on exhaustive exploration of archival sources.[48] These sources could naturally be found at state historical societies, and it is no coincidence that societies such as THS offered honorary memberships to historians of Bancroft's ilk.

The nineteenth century promoted the idea of America's "grand narrative" in a romance format composed of two strands of thought. The first comprised the story of Western progress, a liberal story of growing commercial development, representative political institutions, and the diffusion of knowledge—processes projected to remake the entire world. American exceptionalism made up the second, the special place held by the United States based on the heritage of Anglo-Saxon institutions, a continent of uncultivated land, and the opportunities of a free market—a specialness derived from divine favor beginning with the Puritan mission and sealed by the American Revolution and Constitution.[49] No historian distilled this synthesis more successfully than George

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141. Also see Lewis Perry, *Boats Against the Current: American Culture Between Revolution and Modernity, 1820-1860* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), 53; and Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 73-74.

[48] Donald R. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 285-293. Kelley makes the astute observation that all these historians were educated at Harvard (Sparks and Everett were later its president).

[49] Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty," *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995), 652. Similarly, David Noble argues that the central tradition of American history from the 1830s onward is based on the Puritan covenant with God

Bancroft who, according to one early twentieth-century historian, "possesses the best claim to the title of national historian."[50] Another twentieth-century historian, Daniel Boorstin, refers to Bancroft as the "high priest of American nationality," whose international fame based itself on the success of his multi-volume *History of the United States of America* (1834-1866) in which he depicts the history of America as that of an undertaking for human freedom—a mission for mankind and a symbol for national purpose.[51] The point of Bancroft's work was "to explain how the change in the condition of our land has been accomplished, and . . . to follow the steps by which a favoring Providence, calling our institutions into being, has conducted the country to its present happiness and glory."[52]

Although Bancroft included no footnotes in his works, he did consult primary sources for his writings. He visited most of the original thirteen states and examined their archives, as well as the public records in Britain, Parliament proceedings, manuscripts at

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which delivered them from the evils of the Old World, as long as they kept their society pure and simple. This was replaced by the Enlightenment belief that society rested on natural principles and that the new republic emerging in America had a covenant with nature freeing it from the burdens of European history, as long as its citizens avoided complexity. See David W. Noble, *Historians Against History: The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant in American Historical Writing Since 1830* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965). That God played a special role in American uniqueness permeated the writings of antebellum histories. In the preface to Benjamin Trumbull's *A General History of the United States of America* (1810), he states the reason for writing such a history: "After the revolutionary war it was the desire of many pious men, that the remarkable deliverances, which the United States of America had experienced might be fully exhibited to the public, as a tribute to their Great Deliverer, and for the instruction of posterity." Cited in Michael Kraus, *The Writing of American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 61.

[50] G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (1913; reprint, New York: Peter Smith, 1949), 403. Bancroft (1800-1891) was a Harvard-educated, German-trained historian and staunch Jacksonian. The classic work on George Bancroft is Russel B. Nye, *George Bancroft, Brahmin Rebel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944).

[51] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965), 369-373.

[52] Bancroft cited in Harvey Wish, *The American Historian: A Social-Intellectual History of the Writing of the American Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 79.

the British museum, private papers, and the archives of the French Ministry. The research came at an exorbitant price—Bancroft estimated he spent $50,000-75,000 in obtaining source material.[53] Bancroft elevated the status of the historian by insinuating that Providence ordained the occupation. "It is because God is visible in History that its office is the noblest except that of the poet," Bancroft once deliberated.[54]

Because of the renown established by historians of Bancroft's caliber, antebellum historical societies felt empowered to further promote their sacred trust to preserve the past. "Historical societies, such as have been formed, and are forming rapidly in all the States of this confederacy, may do much for the procurement, selection and preservation of all facts and records, proper and necessary, for the use and guidance of the future Bancrofts," wrote a contributor to an 1846 periodical.[55] Americans responded to histories that read like adventure novels and told readers what they wanted to believe about themselves and their past. Between 1800 and 1860, over one-fourth of the most popular books dealt with historical themes.[56]

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[53] Watt Stewart, "George Bancroft," in *The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography by His Former Students at the University of Chicago*, ed. William T. Hutchinson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 14-15. Although coming from a Federalist stronghold, Bancroft was an avid supporter of Jacksonian democratic ideals. During the administration of President James K. Polk, he served as Secretary of the Navy and then as minister to England. Because of the wealth he acquired through marriage, Bancroft was able to hire assistants to examine and copy historic documents. Later, his fame and political connections opened doors to large private collections. See Wish, *American Historian*, 76-78. For a further analysis of Bancroft's methods, consult N. H. Dawes and F. T. Nichols, "Revaluing George Bancroft," *New England Quarterly* 6 (June 1933): 278-293.

[54] Quote from an oration delivered before the New-York Historical Society, 20 November 1854, in George Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 492.

[55] S. Henry Dickson, "An Essay on the Difficulties in the Way of the Historian," *Southern and Western Literary Messenger and Review* 12 (February 1846), 111. Note that Dickson's analysis of historical societies never goes beyond "the procurement, selection and preservation" of the past.

[56] Walter A. McDougall, *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era 1829-1877* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 200.

If the general public could not afford to purchase these histories, they could obtain them in the libraries that mushroomed across the nation. Libraries and museums thus became places for the promotion of social progress, as well as for the education of history students. Frederic De Peyster, president of the New-York Historical Society, spoke in 1865 on the topic "The Moral and Intellectual Influence of Libraries Upon Social Progress."[57] He defined libraries as "depositories of literature, science and art; in short, all the products of intellect and imagination which can be brought together for the pleasure and instruction of man." In the same address, De Peyster pointed to museums as institutions of "intellectual stimulus." In Jacksonian America these intellectual incentives were not confined to the patrician class or educated professionals. Artisans and mechanics also displayed a commitment to their own ideas of a knowledgeable, informed citizenry through the lyceum movement and public lectures.

A number of learned societies, dealing with philosophy, science, and history, using laboratories and libraries as meeting places, appeared in seventeenth-century Europe. These "seats of knowledge" (as they were termed) provided opportunities for new ideas and new topics but, most importantly, they encouraged discussion and helped form a collective identity.[58] In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the mechanic's institute movement formed in Britain, providing practical scientific instruction for workmen, via lectures and demonstration courses, in order to create a more intelligent worker as well as a better product. In America, the movement emerged

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[57] Quoted in Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 218-219. All subsequent references to De Peyster's speech are from this source.

[58] Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 43-44.

under the guidance of Josiah Holbrook, a Connecticut-born scientist, who began sponsoring lyceums in New England during the 1820s. His manifesto first appeared in an 1826 issue of the *American Journal of Education* where he pronounced the objectives of such societies, including the goals "to procure for youths an economical and practical education, and to diffuse rational and useful information through the community generally." In 1829 Holbrook defined what a lyceum should be:

> A Town Lyceum is a voluntary association of individuals disposed to improve each other in useful knowledge, and to advance the interests of their schools. To gain the first object, they hold weekly or other stated meetings, for reading, conversation, discussion, illustrating the sciences, or other exercises designed for their mutual benefit; and, as it is found convenient, they collect a cabinet, consisting of apparatus for illustrating the sciences, books, minerals, plants, or other natural or artificial productions. [59]

Note the text of Holbrook's language includes the word "cabinet," a hint of museum-like space, and an allusion to libraries and historical societies.

The Mechanics' Institute and Library Association of Nashville, Tennessee, incorporated in 1844, published its constitution ten years later. The first article of the constitution stated the purpose of the organization: "Its objects shall be general instruction in popular and useful Science, and its application to the Arts and Manufactures, by means of Lectures, Classes, Schools, Conversational Meetings, Reading-Rooms, a Library, a Museum, Models of Machinery, Apparatus, and such other methods as may be devised for the promotion of this object."[60] The reference to a library

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[59] Josiah Holbrook, *The American Lyceum, or Society for the Improvement of Schools and Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (Boston: Directors of the Old South Work, 1903), 1. This work is a reprint of an 1829 pamphlet published in Boston by T. R. Marvin. Also, see Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), especially chapter one.

[60] *Constitution of the Mechanics' Institute and Library Association of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville: J. F. Morgan, 1854), 7. This organization offered a course of twenty-four lectures available with

and museum indicates an organization along similar lines to an historical society. In fact, historical societies often used the public lecture forum to drum up support, despite the objections of some members to having their society open to the public. Most historical societies presented lectures for public awareness. Admissions generally covered the cost of refreshments, but some societies, such as the New-York Historical Society, raised money to pay off debts by featuring notable speakers like Daniel Webster and Herman Melville.[61]

It is estimated over three thousand lyceum organizations operated across the United States by the 1840s.[62] The *National Banner and Nashville Whig* lit the spark for Nashville in its 26 July 1830 issue through an editorial which stated such an organization should meet at least once a week "for the delivery of plain instruction upon geography, history, natural philosophy, chemistry, and other branches of science and literature—that meetings likewise be held for conversation, reading, or debating." The Nashville Lyceum officially organized at the Davidson County courthouse (where the Tennessee Antiquarian Society formed) in August 1830. The Lyceum's main officers—Wilkins

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a family season ticket at the cost of $2.50. Books from its library could be taken out by members. See Flener, "History of Libraries in Tennessee," 33-34.

[61] Clement M. Silvestro, "Other New England States: Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont," in *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic*, 38, 43-44; and James J. Heslin, "New York," in ibid., 55. The original intent of the lyceum was to provide practical scientific knowledge to the workingman and farmer, but by the late 1830s the lyceum became the arena for the popular lecturer who offered entertainment or pseudo-science—a change due to popular demand. See James D. Wilkinson, "Useful Knowledge? Concepts, Values, and Access in American Education, 1776-1840," *History of Education Quarterly* 30 (Autumn 1990), 368. Although the lyceum movement seemed to run counter to the patrician tastes of antebellum historical societies, many men found themselves members in both institutions.

[62] Andrew Chamberlain Rieser, "Lyceums, Chautauquas, and Institutes for Useful Knowledge," in *Encyclopedia of American Culture and Intellectual History*, 3 vols., eds. Mary Kupiec Cayton and Peter W. Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), III: 354.

Tannehill, Nathaniel Cross, Philip Lindsley, and Dr. Gerald Troost—would help create the Tennessee Historical Society nearly twenty years later.

The first season of the Lyceum devoted itself almost entirely to weekly lectures delivered from the ranks of the community's professional men and officers of the Lyceum. The range of topics included American history, anatomy, architecture, the habits of animals, American poets, physiology, chemistry, and education. By spring 1832, attendance dropped to the degree that the 20 April 1832 issue of the *National Banner and Nashville Daily Advertiser* proclaimed: "Lyceums—It appears that these useful institutions are flourishing every where except in Nashville! Nashville, we believe, took the lead in forming a Lyceum and we regret to say that she is the first to allow it to sink through the listlessness of its members."[63]

Historical societies often used the lyceum format to publicize their agendas. When the *National Banner and Nashville Daily Advertiser* condemned the community for allowing the Nashville Lyceum to disintegrate, the newspaper invoked civic pride to shake the city out of its lethargy. Historical societies often used the same ploy to promote themselves. A letter to a Savannah newspaper in 1867 by R. D. Arnold, chairman of the Georgia Historical Society, promulgated public lectures by using a liberal dose of sectional rivalry to infuse the post-bellum South.[64] "The Northern people, in a flush of conquest and the pride of prosperity," Arnold pointed out, "still continue a regular system of public lecturing." Arnold then advertised a lecture program at the

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[63] Cited in Milton L. Baughn, "An Early Experiment in Adult Education: The Nashville Lyceum, 1830-1832," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 11 (September 1952): 235-245. Despite efforts to revive it, including a visit from Josiah Holbrook late in 1831, the Nashville Lyceum faded into obscurity.

[64] *Daily News and Herald* (Savannah, GA), 27 March 1867. All subsequent references to Arnold's letter are from this source.

Society designed to be "of absorbing interest" by a Professor Holmes, who "with the aid of scientific apparatus . . . will be able to blend amusement with instruction."

The popularity of lectures is not surprising in a nation where oral tradition reigned supreme—with sermons from the pulpit and political speeches from the stump lasting for hours—and where written records were at a premium. Michael Kammen reminds us that the dramatic rise in oral histories during the 1840s points to the lack of documentation of the rhetoric from the colonial era. This prompted the desire to record oral interviews with survivors of the American Revolution.[65] Tocqueville, the great observer of the American scene, wrote in the 1830s:

> The public administration is, so to speak, oral and traditional. But little is committed to writing, and that little is soon wafted away forever. . . . I am convinced that in fifty years it will be more difficult to collect authentic documents concerning the social condition of the Americana at the present day than it is to find remains of the administration of France during the Middle Ages.[66]

Tocqueville went on to condemn the fact that no public archives or methodical system for preserving documents existed in America. As proof, he cited the case of being given *original* documents by public offices in response to his inquiries for copies. Most of the antebellum historical societies attempted to preserve as many of the narratives and oral traditions of the early settlers as they could procure. The 1857 constitution of the State Historical Society of Iowa called for one of the Society's primary objects "to rescue from

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[65] Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 292n54. For the importance of oratory in the nineteenth century, see Gilman Ostrander, *A Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1775-1865* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1999).

[66] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols., ed. Phillips Bradley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), I: 211-212, hereafter cited in text.

oblivion the memory of its early pioneers; to obtain and preserve narratives of their exploits, perils and hardy adventures."[67]

In the nineteenth century, the power of the spoken word kept pace with the importance of the written word. The public lecture system served as an authoritative cultural institution in which the rhetorical experience could be considered "an intellectual drama."[68] A learned society, wanting to disseminate its "useful knowledge" to the public, took advantage of the lecture system. Future THS members realized the full potential of such venues. A Nashville newspaper advertised a lecture presented by the city's Lyceum on "American History" in 1831.[69] The speaker, Wilkins Tannehill, once belonged to the Tennessee Antiquarian Society and later helped found the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge as well as the Tennessee Historical Society. Tannehill, through the medium of the lyceum, offered his version of American history to a willing audience. Another future member (and president) of THS, Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey, utilized the lecture system offered by the Knoxville Lyceum in 1831 to espouse *his* version of history. A Knoxville newspaper announced the upcoming lectures by the Knoxville Lyceum (to be held in a Presbyterian church) that featured topics on popular education, mineralogy, astronomy, and "on the Antiquarian and History of Tennessee"—the latter to be presented by Dr. Ramsey.[70]

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[67] Cited in Benjamin F. Shambaugh, "A Brief History of the State Historical Society of Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 1 (April 1903), 143.

[68] For an explanation of this, see Donald M. Scott, "Print and the Public Lecture System, 1840-60," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, eds. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 278-299.

[69] *National Banner and Nashville Daily Advertiser*, 24 March 1831.

[70] *Knoxville* (TN) *Register*, 13 April 1831.

According to Carl Bode, the state of Tennessee lay barren of any lyceum activity in the nineteenth century, except for Nashville and Knoxville.[71] A closer inspection of the state's records, however, reveals some major flaws in Bode's research. In Carroll County, the Huntingdon Lyceum formed in 1858 "for the promotion of education, science and morals, and particularly for the improvement of elocution, and the polemic exercises."[72] In early 1881, the Jackson Literary and Lecture Association formed "to contribute to profitable entertainment of the enlightened public by having lectures delivered on various topics by the talent that can be secured."[73] And, in a better-late-than-never move, Memphis initiated a system of lyceum lectures in 1897, stating in the city newspaper that "though starting late, Memphis will soon catch up and give a good account of herself."[74] Not confined merely to the 1830s/40s, the lyceum movement in Tennessee ran the course of the nineteenth century.

Thus, museums in the nineteenth century consisted of more than mere objects; libraries functioned on the basis of more than printed materials; and lyceums were not solely the product of the spoken word (the Nashville Lyceum, for example, opened its own library in May 1831). Nineteenth-century historical societies consisted of components of all these learned societies, and, at times, resembled a museum, a lyceum, a library, or all three. With this interchangeability of terms, it often becomes difficult to know exactly the functions of each entity. To make matters even more confusing, other

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[71] Bode, *American Lyceum*, 160.

[72] *Public Acts of the State of Tennessee, Passed at the First Session of the Thirty-Second General Assembly, for the Years 1857-8* (Nashville: G. C. Torbert & Company, 1858), 233.

[73] *Tribune and Sun* (Jackson, TN), 11 February 1881.

[74] *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN), 17 October 1897. Note the element of civic pride in the *Appeal*'s appeal.

organizations, reflecting interests in history and literature, came and went on the scene. In Tennessee, the popularity of such societies became evident through the state's acts of incorporation from December 1843 to January 1844. During this extremely brief period of time, the state sanctioned several societies—the Young Men's Literary Society of Knoxville, the Mechanic's Union Society of Columbia, the Memphis Lyceum, the Mechanic's Library Association of Nashville, the Lincoln Library Association, and the Pulaski Mechanics Library Association.[75] Certainly, it appeared as if there were enough "useful knowledge" to spread around and more than enough organizations to do the spreading.

The rise of historical societies in America rests on one basic premise—collecting. Whether books, documents, coins, Indian artifacts, autographs, or even mummies, collecting (and preserving) objects lies at the heart of the purpose of these organizations. There is no mystery behind the fact that practically all the great instigators of historical societies in the nineteenth century fervently collected manuscripts and/or artifacts.[76] This passion for acquisition could be a partial reason for the eclecticism in the collections of early historical societies *and* the reason for the existence of the societies in the first place.[77] George Calcott regards the collection and preservation of historical material as

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[75] *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, 1843-4* (Nashville: L. Gifford and E. G. Eastman, 1844), 31, 95, 100, 246-247.

[76] G. Ellis Burcaw, in his text on museology, insists there are two related, universal, and timeless instincts people seem to have: "These are the desire to accumulate objects and the desire to show them to other people." See Burcaw, *Introduction to Museum Work*, 24.

[77] Newspaper publisher and bookseller Isaiah Thomas (1749-1831) amassed such a huge library that, by 1812, he needed a "home" for his collection. The formation of the American Antiquarian Society in that same year may have been his solution. See Douglas C. McMurtrie, *The Book: The Story of Printing & Bookmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), 432. It was no surprise that Thomas, upon his death in 1831, bequeathed his entire library and expansive collection of early newspapers to the Society.

the main motivation for antebellum historical societies, along with the diffusion of knowledge.[78] This estimation plainly ties in with Burcaw's observation of people's desire to collect and show. Even modern historical societies fall under the category of "surrogate attics for storing the miscellaneous debris of human activity."[79]

The zeal for collecting historical documents became a national obsession in the first half of the nineteenth century—a condition dubbed "documania" by historian David Van Tassel.[80] The dusty documents located in the early nineteenth century held an excitement and drama because no professional commentaries or interpretations existed. Facts were fresh and exciting. First discovery created a joy that impelled eager men to find more. Intimacy in detail rather than momentous events also played a role. Finally, there was a sense of service to society and patriotism—a realization that no great history could be written until the materials were gathered.[81]

The great gatherers of historical materials became known as antiquarians. This group has been defined as "academically untrained collectors and preservers of reminiscences and documents and artifacts, founders and officers of historical societies, and compilers, editors, and writers of local history."[82] The founders of the earliest

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[78] Callcott, *History in the United States*, 40-45.

[79] Richard J. Cox, *Closing an Era: Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 104.

[80] David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America 1607-1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 103-110. For a broader analysis of "documania," see Callcott, *History in the United States*, chapter 6.

[81] George H. Callcott, "Antiquarianism and Documents in the Age of Literary History," *American Archivist* 21 (January 1958), 25-28

[82] David J. Russo, *Keepers of Our Past: Local Historical Writing in the United States, 1820s-1930s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), 3.

historical societies in the United States were antiquarians in the strictest sense, although they came from different occupations: Jeremy Belknap of the Massachusetts Historical Society (1791) served as a Congregational minister; John Pintard of the New-York Historical Society was a wealthy dry goods merchant; and Isaiah Thomas of the American Antiquarian Society (1812) worked as a printer and bookseller. All belonged to the patrician class.

The title of quintessential antiquarian may belong to either Jared Sparks or Peter Force, both of whom represent the collection of "documentary" history at its finest in antebellum America. Sparks (1789-1860), an educator and Unitarian minister, pioneered the large-scale collecting of historical materials. Considered "the founder of historical scholarship in the United States," Sparks' reputation rests mostly on his twelve-volume work, *Life and Writings of George Washington* (1834-1837). Sparks worked on this opus for several years, utilizing manuscripts he collected and official documents he copied, to produce a rather pious and reverential version of Washington's life that came under attack in the 1850s.[83]

Peter Force (1790-1868), a newspaper editor and politician, represents one of the preeminent collectors of the nineteenth century. He organized his own collection of

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[83] Boorstin, *The Americans*, 346-349. Sparks persuaded Justice Bushrod Johnson, owner of Washington's papers, to hand them over for editing. The seventy volumes of papers, some 20,000 letters, and other miscellaneous manuscripts resulted in the twelve-volume work on Washington. Critics later accused Sparks of changing the text of the letters for readability and of omitting unflattering or critical letters. He also tore off pieces of the letters to send to friends—all acceptable practices of the era—yet his work sold very well. See Wish, *American Historian*, 46-50. In his quest to find original documentation on the era of George Washington, Sparks traveled to the South as far as Georgia, into the New England states, and throughout the mid-Atlantic states. Armed with letters of introduction, he went to the state public offices pouring through state archives, libraries of historical societies, college libraries, and private collections. For a fascinating recounting of Sparks' research trips, see Herbert B. Adams, *The Life and Writings of Jared Sparks: Comprising Selections from His Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols. (1893; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), I: 414-545.

historical materials—proclaimed by contemporaries as the largest of its kind—chronologically within geographical and topical groupings (his arrangement scheme became the basis of the first archival manual). Force's huge collection of manuscripts and documents led him to wonder about their fate as he grew older. After several failed offers, including a bid from the New-York Historical Society, a congressional bill (passed in 1867) appropriated $100,000 for the collection, and Force transferred it to the Library of Congress.[84]

Although Sparks and Force both wrote histories, neither would have been referred to as an "historian." Before 1860, documentary history and narrative history maintained a strict divergence. The words "antiquarian" and "historian" implied distinct professions. Antiquarians would not be so presumptuous as to call themselves historians. Instead, they referred to themselves as compilers of materials for use by some future historian (Bancroft, perhaps?) who added their literary prowess in making it "true" history. This line of reasoning applied to historical societies as well. During the nineteenth century they attempted to place the jumbled collections of the antiquarians and their "stories" into some context. This paralleled the idea of order and organization coming out of early nineteenth-century Germany, where associations of historical preservationists formed to collect historical objects and become "guardians" of history. Thus, the individual collector amassing historical objects gave way to associations with a shared historical

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[84] Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 13. Force was not without his share of critics. In his presidential address before the American Historical Association in May 1887, Justin Winsor criticized the defects of early historians, such as Force, who failed to provide verification of his documents or any analysis. See Justin Winsor, "Manuscript Sources of American History," *Magazine of American History With Notes and Queries* 18 (July 1887), 21.[85] Susan A. Crane, "Story, History, and the Passionate Collector," in *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700-1850*, eds. Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 187-203.

perception (an historical society). This, in turn, gave way to professional historians who distrusted the collectors' scholarly abilities.[85] This scenario, in a nut-shell fashion, describes the evolution of the American historical society in the nineteenth century. But before a discussion unfolds of how the social/cultural forces of the century determined the shape and focus of historical societies, the questions of how and why historical societies formed in the first place must be addressed.

In his assessment of antebellum historical societies, George Calcott claims they "provided one of the most active cultural endeavors in ante-bellum America."[86] "Active" remains the key word in describing the genesis of the early societies. Jeremy Belknap, founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society [MHS], in 1791, emphasized his depth of commitment in a letter written the same year: "We intend to be an active, not a passive literary body." "There is nothing like having a good repository, and keeping a good look-out," Belknap reiterated four years later, "not waiting at home for things to fall into the lap, but prowling about like a wolf for prey."[87] Reverend Belknap's plan was broad and ambitious. He planned for the society to collect "specimens of natural and artificial curiosities" (indicating a museum or "cabinet" as a chief component); the acquisition of a vast range of historical sources such as books, pamphlets, manuscripts, maps, and broadsides; and the creation of a national network of societies. A circular sent out by

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[85] Susan A. Crane, "Story, History, and the Passionate Collector," in *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700-1850*, eds. Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 187-203.

[86] Callcott, *History in the United States*, 35. Callcott provides an overview of antebellum societies on pp. 35-45. For further review of the earliest historical societies, consult Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past*, 59-66. According to the appendix of this work (p. 181), Tennessee had the first historical society west of the Alleghenies.

[87] Quoted in Stephen T. Riley, "Jeremy Belknap," in *Keepers of the Past*, ed. Clifford L. Lord (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 28-29.

MHS in November 1791 defined the Society's mission "to collect, preserve and communicate, materials for a complete history of this country."[88]

The rise of historical societies in America at the turn of the nineteenth century is tied directly to the problem of national identity. "Of all historical problems," historian Henry Adams once wrote, "the nature of national character is the most difficult and the most important."[89] At the turn of the nineteenth century, Americans faced the dilemma of explaining what being an American actually meant. Without the ancient traditions that the Old World possessed, the fledging United States could not turn to the past for inspiration—at least not a distant past. Americans *did* have the American Revolution, but even that saga faced the disinterest of a nation on the move. Still, concerned circles sought to invoke a sense of urgency in preserving the "story" of the Revolution. One Boston magazine, in 1804, suggested that the records of the American Revolution "be sacredly preserved." The editorial referred to the Revolution as "the noblest monument of our national glory."[90] Not surprisingly, the Revolutionary War became the birth-story of the United States and soon also took on mammoth proportions in terms of its scope and significance. The narrative became one that (most) Americans could accept and share with pride.[91] The search for documentation about the American Revolution became

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[88] Massachusetts Historical Society Circular, printed and published in November 1791. Available at http://www.masshist.org/online/gallery/doc-viewer.php?pid=16&item_id=65 (accessed 6 October 2009).

[89] Henry Adams, *History of the United States*, 9 vols. (1891-1896; reprint, New York: Antiquarian Press, 1962), I: 176.

[90] *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* 1 (October 1804), 557. Cited in Kammen, *Season of Youth*, 16-17.

[91] For example, David Ramsey's *History of the American Revolution* (1789) provided a version of the nation's past that promoted republicanism and national unity in the form of a myth: Englishmen came to the New World where a unique physical environment and civil government nurtured a freedom-loving

a priority for most historical societies in the nineteenth century, and one could say many antebellum societies established themselves out of a sense of patriotism. In a 16 December 1817 letter to his daughter, New-York Historical Society founder, John Pintard, wrote: "I bend my chief efforts towards procuring the documents relative to that period [the Revolutionary War], of which I know the full value, and the collections already made will prove a most important legacy to posterity."[92] The Historical Society of the University of North Carolina, formed in 1884, sought to preserve the history of North Carolina "and, especially, all the records, documents and papers to be found within the State, that may tend to elucidate the history of the American Revolution."[93] An address in December 1831 by George Tucker to the Virginia Historical & Philosophical Society stated the object of the society was "to collect and preserve materials for the civil and physical history of Virginia . . . especially during the Revolution."[94]

Tucker's plea for the collection and preservation of historical materials of the Revolution came *after* the statement about the civil and physical history of Virginia. The emphasis on the historical society's own state became a familiar pattern in antebellum

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people. When, after 1765, the colonists perceived a conspiracy to enslave them, they were forced to choose independence through war and, afterwards, secured nationhood through the Constitution. By downplaying internal conflicts and cultural differences, Ramsey gave to American history a coherence that accentuated natural bonds of unity. See Arthur H. Shaffer, *To Be an American: David Ramsey and the Making of the American Consciousness* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), chapter eight.

[92] Quoted in R. W. G. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday: A Sesqui-Centennial History of the New-York Historical Society, 1804-1954* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1954), 55.

[93] *Raleigh* [NC] *Register*, 26 January 1844. Cited in H. G. Jones, *For History's Sake: The Preservation and Publication of North Carolina History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 243.

[94] William M. E. Rachal, ed., "Early Records of the Virginia Historical Society," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 67 (January 1959), 7.

America.[95] The Massachusetts Historical Society formed itself "to mark the genius, delineate the manners, and trace the progress of society in the United States." Although the goal seemed nationalistic, the society's emphasis, from the beginning, focused on New England. The idea behind the American Antiquarian Society involved an historical society with a nation-wide membership and a national point of view, but it too became victim to the state-by-state approach to America's past.[96] Other early historical societies followed suit.[97] There can be little doubt that in the antebellum period, at least, state pride took precedence over nationalistic fervor. The Maine Historical Society, incorporated in 1822, sought to collect and preserve "any department of civil, ecclesiastical and natural history, especially of this State and of the United States." The Rhode Island Historical Society, founded in the same year, stated its purpose as "procuring and preserving whatever relates to the topography, antiquities, and natural civil and ecclesiastical history of this State." Conceived in 1839, the Georgia Historical Society issued a circular soliciting "contributions of books, manuscripts, pamphlets, newspapers, and every thing which can elucidate the history of America generally, as well as Georgia in particular." Founded in 1836, the Kentucky State Historical Society

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[95] David Van Tassel refers to antebellum historical societies as "bastions of Localism." See Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past*, 95.

[96] Boorstin, *The Americans*, 363-365.

[97] All quotes hereafter cited in text are from Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies*, 89, 94. The idea that an historical society intimated a national interest but emphasized their own state proved to be endemic in antebellum America. The 1804 constitution of the New-York Historical Society stated the Society's object be "to discover, procure, and preserve whatever may relate to the natural, civil, literary, and ecclesiastical history of the United States in general, and of this State in particular." Quoted in Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 451. The object of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, as stated by an 1845 circular, was "to collect whatever written, printed, or traditionary [*sic*] evidence, may be attainable in relation to the early settlement, progress, and present condition of the United States and Territories, but particularly of Pennsylvania." From "The Society's Circular" in *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Volume IV, Part II* (Philadelphia: Henry C. Baird, 1850), 105.

set out "to collect and preserve authentic information and facts connected with the early history of the State."[98]

The striking similarities of the mission statements of the various antebellum historical societies reflect the influence of the older, successful historical societies—the emphasis being on success. The founding of the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1791 served as a template for others that followed. In a public address by the New-York Historical Society, as published in 13 February 1805 issue of the *New-York Herald*, the Society acknowledged MHS as its inspiration for "collecting and preserving whatever may be useful to others in the different branches of historical inquiry." "We feel encouraged to follow this path by the honourable example of the Massachusetts Society," the proclamation went on, "whose labours will abridge those of the future historian a thousand lights to guide him through the dubious track of unrecorded time."[99] The accomplishments of MHS—not only in collecting historical materials, but in publishing historical papers based on their collections and proceedings—impressed other historical societies who adopted a copy-cat system of organizational matters. Historical societies communicated and consulted with one another, obtaining copies of constitutions and

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[98] Quoted in John Wilson Townsend, *Kentuckians in History and Literature* (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1907), 129. The Kentucky State Historical Society adopted another revealing initial resolution: "One of the main objects of the Association shall be to celebrate . . . the anniversary of the first settlement of Kentucky on the spot where that settlement was made." Historic dates tended to play an important role in the formation of some historical societies. When George Garrison, a professor of history at the University of Texas, attempted to form an historical society in Texas in 1897, he chose March 2 as the date for the organizational meeting—the anniversary of the day when independence was declared from Mexico. See Richard B. McCaslin, *At the Heart of Texas: One Hundred Years of the Texas State Historical Association, 1897-1997* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2007), 19. The Georgia Historical Society, incorporated in December 1839, held its first meeting on 12 February 1840 (the anniversary of the founding of the colony by James Oglethorpe in 1733). See Spencer B. King, Jr., "The Georgia Historical Society: Achievements and Aspirations," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 47 (September 1963), 294-295.

[99] Quoted in Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies*, 39.

transmitting publications, the newer ones seeking assistance from the older institutions.[100] The members of the newly-formed Tennessee Historical Society, for example, began corresponding in 1850 with the New-York Historical Society and other, older societies to investigate how they conducted their business.[101]

As previously noted, the antiquarian-minded founders of early historical societies may have sponsored the formation of such institutions to spotlight their own collections in an environment conducive to the preservation and import of their treasures. One such group consisted of autograph collectors, those individuals obsessed with accumulating the original signatures of historical figures. Autograph collectors went to great lengths and expense to satisfy their avidity in what could be considered a mania in the nineteenth century. Collectors often ruined historic documents and correspondence by literally tearing off sections of manuscripts containing signatures. "The autograph collector, as such, has been, historically speaking, not only an unmitigated nuisance, but a positive menace as well," according to one twentieth-century critic.[102] Observers in the nineteenth century seemed more forgiving. In an essay about autograph collecting, author Caroline Gilman pointed out that the hobby had its usefulness. In their quest,

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[100] Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 109-114. Such relations were not always cordial, as there was often competition and jealousy between organizations. In the 1850s, for instance, the envy of the Massachusetts Historical Society over the progress of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society resulted in a concerted effort of the former to obstruct the proceedings in the state's General Court to grant a new charter for the New England society that wished to change its name from the New England Historic-Genealogical Society to the New England Historical and Genealogical Society. For more on this incident and others, see ibid., 114-116.

[101] Mary Daniel Moore, "The Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-1918," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (September 1944), 200.

[102] J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "Three Centuries of Southern Records, 1607-1907," *Journal of Southern History* 10 (February 1944), 26. For an opposite view, see David C. Mearns, "Nineteenth Century Comments on Autographs and Collectors," *Autograph Collectors' Journal* 4 (Winter 1952): 49-50. Mearns is quick to point out that autograph collectors were responsible for some outstanding folios of material that eventually wound up in noted institutions such as the Library of Congress.

collectors often brought to light some valuable literary or historical document. Furthermore, many autograph seekers tried to obtain whole letters or documents of value rather than just signatures on scraps of paper.[103]

The scope of these collections bordered on the amazing. Israel K. Teft acquired between 25,000-30,000 autographs by the time of his death in 1867. More importantly, Teft became one of the founders of the Georgia Historical Society in 1839. Another great collector, Robert Gilmor, Jr., of Baltimore, founded the Maryland Historical Society and donated the first major manuscript collection to the Society in 1845.[104] Lyman Draper, the genius behind the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, earnestly collected autographs and acquired an impressive collection of Revolutionary-era names.[105]

Motivation for historical societies often came from one man, whether an antiquarian, autograph collector, minister, editor, doctor, or lawyer. Isaiah Thomas, president of the American Antiquarian Society from 1812 until his death in 1831, took a fanatical interest in the organization's day-to-day operations. In addition to generously giving his own money and collections, Thomas could be found slavishly sorting through acquisitions, cataloging, and even cutting the grass (at age 79) of the library's grounds. During the first four decades of the New Jersey Historical Society (founded 1845),

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[103] Caroline Gilman, *The Poetry of Travelling in the United States* (New York: S. Colman, 1838), 373-430. Gilman refers to autograph collections as "among the last intellectual luxuries grafted on a high growth of refinement and civilization."

[104] Richard J. Cox, "Other Atlantic States: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, and South Carolina" in *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic*, 104-105.

[105] William B. Hesseltine, *Pioneer's Mission: The Story of Lyman Copeland Draper* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954), 126-127, 299-300. In a 22 September 1879 letter to Draper, fellow collector J. G. M. Ramsey sought autographs from Draper of "Western heroes" including George Rogers Clark, Daniel Boone, James Robertson and John Sevier. See William B. Hesseltine, ed., *Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey—Autobiography and Letters* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 320.

corresponding secretary William A. Whitehead championed that society's cause by compiling documents, writing, and editing several volumes of the *Collections*, and initiating the Society's *Proceedings*.[106] One member of the American Antiquarian Society, John H. Farnham, became the sole motivator behind the formation of the Indiana Historical Society in 1830. As the Society's corresponding secretary, Farnham ran the show until his death in 1833.[107] D. L. Swain, president of the University of North Carolina, founded the North Carolina Historical Society in 1844 and, by all accounts, *was* the Society. Solely through his efforts, the Society gathered the largest and most valuable collection of colonial and revolutionary materials in North Carolina.[108] In Virginia, Robert Alonzo Brock served as corresponding secretary of the Virginia Historical Society from 1870 to the early 1890s. At the same time, he held the position of secretary at the Southern Historical Society in Richmond. Brock became recognized as "one of the most zealous workers in the historic field of his State."[109] Last, but not least, Lyman Draper served as secretary of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin from 1854-1886, where he amassed a library from virtually nothing to 118,000 volumes.[110]

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[106] Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies*, 70-72, 154-155.

[107] Lana Ruegamer, *A History of the Indiana Historical Society 1830-1980* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1980), 31-42.

[108] J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "The Preservation of North Carolina History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 4 (January 1927), 6-7.

[109] J. B. Henneman, "Historical Studies in the South Since the War," *Sewanee Review* 1 (May 1893), 326. As should be apparent from these examples, the office of corresponding secretary was a post that held the most importance in terms of meaningful activities. Leslie Dunlap confirms that the corresponding secretary was usually the most active officer at an historical society and was sometimes paid for his work or given an assistant. See Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 41.

[110] Bert James Loewenberg, *American History in American Thought: Christopher Columbus to Henry Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 334.

Patriotism, state and local pride, antiquarian aggression, individual inspiration, peer pressure, and the desire to preserve the past may account for most of the reasons why historical societies sprouted up in the nineteenth century—but not all. The factor of "snob appeal" must also be considered, particularly in the societies that looked to the prestige of historical societies in the East. In an attempt to achieve distinction, some societies formed in territories even before statehood. In March 1849 the United States government formed the Minnesota Territory and, by November of that year, the Minnesota Historical Society received a charter of incorporation.[111] The Filson Club in Louisville formed in 1884 for reasons, perhaps, concerning social status. Ostensibly established "for the purpose of collecting and preserving the history of Kentucky," meetings were held at the home of Colonel R. T. Durrent, a prominent Louisville attorney and the club's first president. The gatherings, attended by the elite of the community, took the form of a business meeting followed by the reading of a paper and concluded with a session of drinking and cigar smoking.[112] In 1860s Missouri, an association of newspapermen desired to organize their profession and eventually formed the Missouri Press Association. This group's interest in their own history stimulated a yearning to collect and preserve materials significant to the state. In time, they established the State Historical Society of Missouri.[113] An 1830 Congressional act allowed for the distribution of the published diplomatic correspondence of the American Revolution to various entities, including "each corporation university, college, historical or antiquarian society

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[111] Berthel and Cater, "Minnesota Historical Society," 293-296.

[112] Townsend, *Kentuckians in History and Literature*, 113-116.

[113] William H. Taft, "The Missouri Press Association and the Origins of the State Historical Society," *Missouri Historical Review* 60 (April 1966): 269-282.

and athenaeum." This boon served as impetus for the formation of the Indiana Historical Society and possibly historical societies in Ohio and Virginia.[114] Contrary to this incentive, the founding of Virginia Historical Society may have had more to do with the centennial of George Washington's birth—a circumstance not beyond belief as many societies sprang up in the 1820s due to the fiftieth anniversary of the American Revolution in 1826 and the much-publicized visit of French general Marquis de Lafayette in 1824-1825.[115]

The formation of one historical society deserves special attention because of its pervading influence in the South. In 1869, a group of southern Civil War generals founded the Southern Historical Society at New Orleans. According to their papers, the organization intended to collect and preserve records from the war "illustrating the nature of the struggle from which the country has just emerged, defining and vindicating the principles which lay beneath it."[116] In light of all the northern versions of the Civil War coming into print, this society sought to insure a "southern" interpretation. Hampered by the loss of Confederate documents confiscated by the Federal government, which consistently refused access to representatives of the Southern Historical Society, the Society appealed to the public for historical material relating to the Confederacy. The result, beginning in January 1876, consisted of the publication of documents in its

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[114] Ruegamer, "History of the Indiana Historical Society," 25. The act can be found in Statutes at Large, 21st Congress, 1st sess., chap. 107, p. 407.

[115] William M. S. Rasmussen and Robert S. Tilton, *George Washington: The Man Behind the Myth* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 284. Silvestro, "Other New England States," 30. For details of Lafayette's visit, as recorded by his secretary, see A. Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825; or, Journal of a Voyage to the United States*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1829).

[116] Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past*, 155.

monthly journal, the *Southern Historical Society Papers*.[117] The Society served as an example for other southern historical societies to write histories and publish magazines vindicating the South's role in the Civil War.[118] J. G. M. Ramsey, as president of the Tennessee Historical Society, made repeated (but failed) attempts, beginning in 1874, to have THS become an auxiliary of the Southern Historical Society.[119]

That the Tennessee Historical Society failed to fall under the pressure of Ramsey's persuasion is but one minor incident in its quest to achieve autonomy and esteem. The ups and downs of THS are a story worth telling. It is an account about history in the nineteenth century, and one that does not end with 1900. Before that tale can be told, however, there must be an appreciation for the institutions that served as paradigms for historical societies of the nineteenth century. This chapter has been an attempt to do just that.

Before we can discuss the material culture of THS, we must acknowledge the contributions of museums to the ever-present quest for "useful knowledge." With a background steeped in Renaissance traditions, the museums of the early republic offered the public their own version of order in the natural world. This world consisted of a hodgepodge of artifacts and objects—often displayed in "cabinets of curiosity"—

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[117] E. Merton Coulter, "What the South Has Done About Its History," *Journal of Southern History* 2 (February 1936), 19-24. Coulter contends the organization might as well have been called the "Confederate Historical Society."

[118] Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret Their Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 77. One historian claims that the Southern Historical Society's publications were "a conscious effort to prevent the victors from writing history." See John R. Neff, *Honoring the Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 160; also, see David M. Potter, *The South and Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 177.

[119] David Lawson Eubanks, "Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey of East Tennessee: A Career of Public Service" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1965), 342.

providing intellectual stimulus for the patrician and the erudite. Museums slipped into a nugatory coma when the entertainment value began to outweigh the educational value.

Like museums, the libraries of the nineteenth century progressed from the domain of the "gentleman" to the working man. Mechanics' organizations paved the way to a more democratic access to what libraries had to offer. What they advanced consisted of a profusion of useful knowledge mixed with a popular dose of fiction. The Gothic-like novels parodied the "romantic" histories of the era, and vice-versa, creating a demand for the past. But who's past? How would it be told? Where were the historical materials needed to tell it? Historical societies provided a logical answer to the last question.

The printed word may have been one of the ways historical societies achieved their impact on the past, but the spoken word cannot be ruled out as an effective method. Through the lessons learned during the lyceum movement, proponents of the dissemination of useful knowledge utilized the lecture system to their advantage. Many members of historical societies frequently spoke on topics of history designed to influence the willing listener. Once again, however, popular demand deprecated the seriousness of the medium and caused staid speakers to retreat back into the confines of the historical society's patrician atmosphere.

Besides accusations of being bulwarks for gentility, historical societies facilitated numerous roles, to say the least. The Antiquarian and Historic Society of the State of Arkansas, formed in 1837, owned a large collection of fossils, Indian artifacts, coins, and other miscellaneous objects. In addition to an adequate library, the institution envisioned

a chemical laboratory for making experiments in natural philosophy and chemistry.[120] The multifaceted dimensions of this society should come as no surprise. On the contrary, a learned society that had the earmarks of a museum, a library, a lyceum, an art gallery, or even a laboratory, defined itself as an "historical society." To "collect and preserve" lay at the heart of all historical-society mission statements, but these consortiums embodied elements far beyond that core.

[120] Diana Sherwood, "Historical Societies in Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 11 (Summer 1952), 131-133.

CHAPTER II

THE TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

On the first of May in 1849, a few of the citizens of Nashville assembled at the rooms of the Merchants Library. Nathaniel Cross, a professor at the University of Nashville, chaired the meeting designed "to form a Society, having for its objects, the collection and preservation of facts connected with the history and antiquities of the State of Tennessee."[1] The attendees signed a membership list after listening to a few remarks by Cross and several others concerning the importance of establishing such a society. A committee then formed to prepare the rules and regulations for the government of the proposed organization. After the meeting, the membership list remained at the Library "for the signature[s] of such of the citizens who may be desirous of co-operating in the design." By the time of the next meeting, two weeks later, forty men had signed their names to the list. Thus was born the "Historical Society of Tennessee".[2]

Of the several daily newspapers in Nashville at the time, only one covered the event in any detail—the *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig.* Did this lack of interest on the part of the newspapers reflect the popular view of the day? Why, at this point in time, did a group of Nashville citizens—all male, all prosperous, and all white—take it

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[1] *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, 4 May 1849.

[2] The official name of the organization remained the "Historical Society of Tennessee" until 1874 when it inexplicably changed to the "Tennessee Historical Society." The emphasis of putting the state's name first may have something to do with state pride. For the sake of clarity, this dissertation will refer to the Society throughout the paper as the Tennessee Historical Society or THS.

upon themselves to create an agency devoted to procuring and preserving the past? What led to this formation and how did it fare throughout the nineteenth century?

This chapter tells the "story" of the Tennessee Historical Society from its predecessors (the Tennessee Antiquarian Society and the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge) to its inception in 1849 and through its up-and-down career in the second half of the nineteenth century. The story of THS has been told before.[3] Each version provides a who's who and timetable of significant episodes in the saga of THS. What makes the version in this chapter different is context. Facts speak only when the historian calls on them—which facts are chosen and in what context and order they are presented. The interpretation of the nineteenth-century THS offered here focuses much on ideology.

A study of who these men were and what they did must be appended by *why* they did it. This is not an easy task, even with the availability of meeting minutes and personal correspondence. Actions and words can be interpreted in a number of ways. Rather than clear-cut reality, history is often a consensus of accepted judgments. To understand what the members of THS in the nineteenth century read into their past, we must have a grasp on how they saw their here-and-now. A learned organization such as an historical society may be about the past, but it must be examined as a product of the present.

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[3] Several well written articles have been published about THS, all providing a narrative of the Society's key events and players. They include: Ann Toplovich, "The Tennessee Historical Society at 150: Tennessee History 'Just and True,'" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 58 (Fall 1999): 196-215; Harriet Chappell Owsley, "The Tennessee Historical Society: Its Origin, Progress, and Present Condition," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 29 (Fall 1970): 227-242; Mary Daniel Moore, "The Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-1918," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (September 1944): 195-225; and John M. Lea, "History of the Tennessee Historical Society," *American Historical Magazine* 6 (October 1901): 353-362. Of the authors mentioned, two of them have direct links to THS: John Lea served as the Society's president from 1884 to 1903; and Ann Toplovich is the current Executive Director of the Society. Toplovich's article is also available in electronic form at http://www.tennesseehistory.org/images/uploads/HistoryofTHS.pdf.

This chapter will concentrate on four distinct periods of THS history, combined with an analysis of the social background to each interval. The first period centers on the Tennessee Antiquarian Society and spans the years from Tennessee's statehood (1796) through the 1820s. Diverse antiquarian interests, a quest for a national (and regional) identity, and a surge of interest in natural history will be some of the components under discussion. The second stage revolves around the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge (the period of the 1830s and 1840s) and considers the topics of western identity, the search for order, and the impact of voluntary associations. The third stage of the story covers the period from the beginnings of THS in 1849 to 1884. Increasing sectional discord, the Civil War, and Reconstruction form the background to this era. The fourth period starts in 1884—the year of the founding of the American Historical Association—and ends with the Tennessee Centennial Exposition of 1897 in which THS played a significant role. This interval includes the rise of professionalism, the new "scientific" history, and the slow-but-sure increase of minority voices. The concepts of progress, order, and patricianism remain visible throughout all the periods.

In answering the question *why* the men of the Tennessee Historical Society did what they did, or, to put it another way, why they held the past so dearly, we must be careful not to overanalyze. Some may have resorted to the past as a means of resisting change while some defined their personal (or national) identity through a love of history. In any event, we must remain ever mindful of what Michael Kammen once posited: "Being a custodian of the past is primarily its own reward."[4]

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[4] Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 10.

The Davidson County Courthouse in Nashville served as the meeting place for the founding of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society [TAS]. The date, 1 July 1820, had no special significance. Sixteen men, led by Judge John Haywood, proposed to form a Society "for the collection and preservation of important events in the history of the State of Tennessee; and enquires into the antiquities of the Western Country."[5] Haywood (1762-1826), a legal scholar, historian, and land owner, moved to Tennessee from North Carolina around 1807. He contributed two major works to the historiography of his adopted state, both published in 1823: *The Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee* and *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee.* As companion pieces, the first book traces the history of the state to the beginnings of white settlement in Tennessee, while the second work picks up from there and concludes with Tennessee's statehood in 1796.[6]

Calling themselves the "Tennessee Antiquarian Society," the sixteen men adopted a system of rules and regulations—a constitution—for the government of the Society. Without realizing it, the plan TAS endorsed later served as a template for its offspring

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[5] Proceedings of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, Tennessee Historical Society Office Files 1790-1985, Tennessee Historical Society (Nashville), Box 15, Folder 1 [hereafter cited as Proceedings of TAS]. The minutes indicate that Wilkins Tannehill, a founding member of TAS, possessed the original proceedings. Upon his death, W. T. Berry & Company ("Berry's Book Store"), as executors of Tannehill's estate, presented the material to THS in July 1858. The Berry and Tannehill families were related through marriage.

[6] The full title of John Haywood's first volume is *The Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee Up to the First Settlements Therein by the White People in the Year 1768* (Nashville: George Wilson, 1823). The complete title of the follow-up work is *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee from the Earliest Settlement Up to the Year 1796, Including the Boundaries of the State* (Knoxville: Heiskell and Brown, 1823). Haywood also produced the first important legal texts for Tennessee and the first compilations of the state's statutes. For more on Haywood and his works, see Ned L. Irwin, "Voice in the Wilderness: John Haywood and Preservation of Early Tennessee History," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 58 (Fall 1999): 238-253. Also, see Mary U. Rothrock, "John Haywood, Historian of the Western Country," in John Haywood, *The Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee* (1823; reprint, Kingsport, TN: F. M. Hill-Books, 1973), xi-xxvii.

organizations, the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge and the Tennessee Historical Society. Article II of the constitution stated the reason for establishing the organization:

> The objects of this society shall be, First, to procure and preserve historical facts relative to the early history of Tennessee, its settlement, and the conflicts of the first settlers with the Indians. Second, to institute enquiries into the remains of antiquity in the western country, and particularly in the State of Tennessee. Third, to procure and preserve topographical descriptions of the different sections of the State of Tennessee. Fourth, whatever else may relate to its natural and civil history; and Fifth, whatever may tend to a knowledge of the different systems of general education adopted in Europe and America . . .[7]

The constitution then went on to name the various offices of the Society and their duties, a schedule of meetings, procedures for admission of new members, and admission fees. The Society also resolved to arrange and copy all their information into a book in the form of essays, written by the members, to be published at a later time.

Expectedly, John Haywood became president of the Society by a unanimous vote. Other key members included Wilkins Tannehill, a wealthy businessman-turned-politician and president of the Bank of Nashville, and Ralph E. W. Earl, a portraitist and museum operator.[8] A legal jurist with a penchant for geology and archaeology, a wealthy

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[7] Proceedings of TAS, 1 July 1820.

[8] Tannehill (1787-1858) was born in Pennsylvania and became involved in the family's salt works business in Illinois. He settled in Nashville in 1810 where he opened a warehouse for the sale of salt. He became a high-ranking Mason, joined the Presbyterian Church, and dabbled in local politics (serving as alderman and then as mayor of Nashville in 1825). By the 1820s, Tannehill more or less retired from commercial life to take up literary pursuits, including newspaper editing and writing books on literature. He moved to Louisville, Kentucky in 1832 but returned to Nashville in 1841 where he lived as a "gentleman scholar" and newspaper publisher. He devoted a great deal of his time to promoting education and was one of the first in Nashville to urge the establishment of a school for training teachers. See Alfred Crabb, "Wilkins Tannehill, Business and Cultural Leader," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 7 (December 1948): 314-321. Tannehill later helped form the SDK and THS.

Ralph Eleaser Whiteside Earl (c1788-1838), the son of a famous Connecticut painter, Ralph Earl, studied in England under Benjamin West and John Trumbull. Upon his return to the United States in 1815, he became an itinerant portrait painter in the South. His reputation solidified upon the completion, in 1817, of a full-length portrait of Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. He married into the Jackson family and remained at Jackson's estate, the Hermitage, where he turned out several more paintings of Jackson. From 1818 until 1827, he directed the Nashville Museum on the public square. It contained Earl's

businessman who spent his leisure time as a dilettante in cultural affairs, and an artist who ran an establishment filled with rocks, minerals, and stuffed animals—three men determined to promote "useful knowledge" in Tennessee.

The eclectic discernment of TAS reflects the diversity of antiquarianism during the early republic. A look at the Lexington, Kentucky journal known as the *Western Minerva* reveals some idea of this variegation. Published in 1820, the same year as the formation of TAS, the journal contained material on astronomy, physics, mineralogy, archaeology, politics, philosophy, poetry, history, and literature. The title page stated the aims of the publication: "Containing Original Essays upon Science, the Arts, Literature, and subjects connected with the Civil and Natural History of the Western States." In the preface, the editor declared an anxiousness "to promote the diffusion of useful knowledge."[9]

The key behind this concern for diffusion rested in the idea of an informed citizenry, without whom a republic could not survive. Education became the remedy for the potential ills of an unenlightened society. This concept, originating in eighteenth-century Britain, resonates in the TAS declaration to "tend to a knowledge of the different systems of general education adopted in Europe and America." With a strong tie of morals to education, an improved mind meant a virtuous mind; thus, education offered a way to produce social progress—a progress whose source, to most nineteenth-century

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portraits along with "natural and artificial curiosities." Information on Earl taken from Jerome R. MacBeth, "Portraits of Ralph E. W. Earl," *Antiques* 100 (September 1971): 390-393; and James C. Kelley, "Ralph E. W. Earl," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 271. Earl served as Librarian for TAS, and many of the meetings were held at his museum, including the last recorded meeting on 22 August 1822.

[9] C. S. Rafinesque, ed., *Western Minerva, or American Annals of Knowledge and Literature* (1820; reprint, New York: Peter Smith, 1949), quotes from p. 7.

American thinkers, emanated from God.[10] During Lafayette's much publicized visit to America in 1825, he stopped in Nashville in early May to be feted by the community. At one of the many dinners given to the Revolutionary hero, someone offered this toast: "The general diffusion of Knowledge—Essential to the existence of a republic; the best security of the liberties of a people."[11]

At another dinner in May 1825, Wilkins Tannehill spoke of Tennessee as "but recently emerged from savage rule."[12] As a frontier state, Tennessee attempted to make great strides to incorporate a literate, knowledgeable society. During the September 1806 session of the Tennessee General Assembly, twenty-seven counties established academies in the state.[13] Library companies formed; patrons subscribed to reading rooms; museums attracted audiences; and newspapers pronounced civilization as thriving in the wilderness. An advertisement announcing a proposed newspaper called *The Pioneer*, to be published in Madison County, offered this testament to progress in the West: "In that fertile and widely extended domain, where but yesterday prowled the savage Indian in nature's rudeness, it is proposed to establish the Press, the constant attendant of civilization wherever it has progressed."[14] "People here are generally

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[10] David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 174-176, 248-251, 348-354.

[11] Edgar Ewing Brandon, comp. and ed., *A Pilgrimage of Liberty: A Contemporary Account of the Triumphal Tour of General Lafayette Through the Southern and Western States in 1825, as Reported by the Local Newspapers* (Athens, OH: Lawhead Press, 1944), 235.

[12] Ibid., 237.

[13] *Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Sixth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee Began and Held at Knoxville on Monday the Twenty-Eighth Day of July, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Six* (Knoxville: J. B. Hood, 1806), 74-82.

[14] *Nashville Whig*, 6 February 1822. The advertisement added: "The *Pioneer* will be printed nearly in the center of the late Chickasaw purchase, in the heart of a rich and fertile country . . ."

orderly," one recently arrived emigrant to Tennessee concluded in 1815, "& in no part of the world, where I have been, are they more forward in encouraging literature."[15] One traveler, passing through Nashville in 1826, described the town as "flourishing" and "the seat of talent and fashion."[16]

Other observers countered this idyllic picture. Philip Lindsley, a Princeton-trained educator, relocated to Nashville in 1824, noting "that Providence has declared me for the West." Lindsley's first impressions of the frontier community were not so divine. Gambling, drinking, and dueling prevailed. Ill-mannered and crude people populated a migratory and chaotic society. "Nothing but cotton, tobacco, corn, whiskey, Negroes, and swine," complained the young educator, "and these not worth the growing."[17] The resolutions of TAS, with its "enquiries into the antiquities of the Western Country" made plain the fact that Tennessee was a western state in the 1820s. Nashville, despite good intentions from the patrician element, remained a frontier town in the 1820s. The community exhibited the characteristics of a western town: exalted individualism, religious intolerance, and a general suspicion of Easterners.[18]

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[15] Christopher Houston to Samuel Young, 24 January 1815, cited in Kristopher Ray, *Middle Tennessee 1775-1825: Progress and Popular Democracy on the Southern Frontier* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 117. By virtue of the major roads leading into Nashville, the city had closer ties to the Northeast than any other city in the South.

[16] Samuel C. Williams, ed., "Journal of Events (1825-1873) of David Anderson Deaderick," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 8 (1936), 128.

[17] Richard H. Haunton, "Education and Democracy: The Views of Philip Lindsley," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 21 (June 1962): 131-139. Lindsley had visions of spreading intellectual and cultural progress throughout the (Old) Southwest. To Lindsley, real democracy evidenced itself in majority rule, and to make better citizens required them to be better educated. Lindsley eventually became president of the University of Nashville and a founder of THS.

[18] F. Gavin Davenport, *Cultural Life in Nashville on the Eve of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 7, 10.

Naturally sensitive to criticism, westerners aspired to present a picture of the West as a region prone to intellectual stimulus—not in spite of, but because of, being the frontier. Free from the long accustomed forms and class distinctions of the East, emigrants to the West expressed more liberal views and, therefore, republican freedom acquired strength as it advanced into the interior.[19] Natural history became one area of intellectual concentration the West could participate in during the early republic, and Tennessee had its share of natural history and historians. Peale's Museum in Philadelphia displayed at least one archaeological artifact from Tennessee.[20] Moses Fisk, a transplanted Tennessean from Massachusetts, had his paper, "Conjectures Respecting the Ancient Inhabitants of North America," read before the American Antiquarian Society in 1815.[21]

The members of TAS reflected this interest through the artifacts they acquired and the papers they presented at the Society's meetings. Some of the objects collected in the period of 1820-1822 included a petrified sea turtle, ancient coins and buttons, skeletal remains, and pieces of pottery. The papers given by the members expounded on these acquisitions: John Haywood communicated his findings about the petrified sea turtle; Archibald Roane discussed the details of an "Indian idol" artifact; and John Overton revealed his analysis of the "pigmie bones" sent to the Society from White County,

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[19] See, for example, William Gibbes Hunt, *An Address, Delivered at Nashville, Tenn. April 6, 1831, at the Request of the Literary Societies of the University of Nashville* (Nashville: Hunt, Tardiff & Co., 1831), 9-10.

[20] Charles William Janson, *The Stranger in America 1793-1806* (1807; reprint, New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1935), 200. Janson noted "curiously fabricated earthen pots" in the Antique Room.

[21] The paper also appeared in the first volume of the American Antiquarian Society's *Transactions and Collections*. See Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962), 69, 75. Fisk became an honorary member of TAS in October 1820.

Tennessee. Other topics ranged from the geology of Davidson County, to Indian mounds in Ohio, to the subject of a live toad "enclosed in a solid mass of spar" found in Illinois.[22] All of these subjects and objects fit neatly into the category of "antiquities." Potentially, all of the artifacts could be housed in any museum of the day.[23]

At the TAS meeting of 21 October 1820, John Haywood devised a plan to gather information on the topics of zoology, geology, history, government, laws, customs, manners, religion, arts, sciences, ancient civilizations, and Indian conflicts. Haywood assigned TAS members to scour every district of the state—divided into six sections using surveyors' districts and judicial circuits—for any and all data pertaining to these subjects. Haywood set his scheme in motion, and TAS members began their quest with a passion akin to Forty-Niners panning for gold on their first day. Moses Fisk of Overton County collected relics in his area, and even Ralph Earl took time from his portrait painting to excavate Indian mounds. Haywood appointed some TAS members to gather information by correspondence with persons outside of Tennessee, while he himself interviewed old settlers for their memoirs and reminiscences. Haywood planned for the collected material to be arranged in chronological order for publication.[24]

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[22] Communications read before the Tennessee Antiquarian Society as found in the Proceedings of TAS. The Society communicated with scientists such as naturalist Dr. Samuel Mitchell and botanist Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, both of whom the Society conferred an honorary membership. Other correspondents included Isaiah Thomas of the American Antiquarian Society and Dr. James H. McCulloch, Jr., curator of the Maryland Academy of Science.

[23] A museum in Raleigh (NC), for instance, listed its donations and donors for the year 1802. The items included old Roman coins, Indian arrow heads, copper Indian ornaments, a starfish, sea-shells, two beaver's teeth, a tooth of a "mammoth," a bezoar stone from the stomach of a deer, an ostrich egg, and the ten-inch bill of a wild fowl. See *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 23 November 1802. A "John Haywood" is credited with donating the sea-shells and starfish to the museum. This is no doubt Judge Haywood, as he resided in Raleigh at the time.

[24] Owsley, "Tennessee Historical Society," 228-229; and Rothrock, "John Haywood," xviii, xx.

The results of this intense survey culminated in the printing of Haywood's two histories of Tennessee, both published in 1823 (less than three months apart). It is fairly agreed that Haywood founded TAS for the specific purpose of compiling data for his books, although there is no direct evidence to corroborate that charge.[25] Interestingly, an editorial in a Nashville newspaper, the *Nashville Whig*, written four months *before* the inception of TAS, urged the "Elders" of the state to submit narratives of the early history of the state to the newspaper's office. The editor received assurances from "a company of gentlemen who are willing to devote some time to it," that they would "throw them [the memoirs] into a historical form."[26] The "company of gentlemen" eventually became the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, indicating John Haywood (and others) planned to publish a history of Tennessee right from the beginning of the Society. Several days after the Society's formation, an article contributed by "J. H." appeared in the *Nashville Whig*, entitled "Antiquities of Tennessee." The article, without any mention of TAS, discussed the aboriginal graves recently discovered in White County.[27] Much of the information found in the article reappeared three years later in Haywood's *Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee*. On more than one occasion, Haywood used the newspaper to solicit materials for his books, even to the point of convincing the *Whig* to advertise his

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[25] George H. Calcott, *History in the United States 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 36. To be fair, other examples of this type of motivation exist. In the case of the Georgia Historical Society, incorporated in 1839, one its founders, Bishop William Bacon Stevens, wanted to write a history of Georgia and felt an organization for gathering historical documents would be the best method. For this, see Spencer B. King, Jr., "The Georgia Historical Society: Achievements and Inspirations," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 47 (September 1963), 295.

[26] *Nashville Whig*, 1 March 1820. The editorial made the plea for these transmissions on the basis that the "elders" were "one by one, leaving the stage" and it was imperative that the recollections provide "a faithful record, for the contemplation of posterity."

[27] Ibid., 5 July 1820.

yet unpublished work for sale to the public.[28] No records exist on how other TAS members regarded Haywood's use of the Society's machinery. Perhaps they knew all along what Haywood's plan implied and willingly aided him in his efforts, knowing Haywood to be the logical choice for authorship. In any event, they could share in the gratification of having a published work of (western) intellect sitting on their shelves and, hopefully, being read by fellow antiquarians across the state and beyond. The very existence of the book marked an auspicious event for "western" society—one that TAS members no doubt relished.

The two histories remained the crowning contribution of John Haywood (and TAS) to the knowledge of the aboriginal and pioneer periods of Trans-Appalachia, despite the later accusations of errors in the text.[29] *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee*, the more popular of the two works, set the standard for the "story" of Tennessee's founding to be retold for the next century and a half—the subjugation of the Indians by white settlers intent on bringing civilization to the wilderness. In the first chapter of this work, Haywood indicated that the history of Tennessee reveals "that men, educated in poverty and almost in ignorance of literature of any sort, are yet capable of great achievements." Brimming with democratic ideals served up in Enlightenment terminology, Haywood insisted that "all ranks in society, like the larger and smaller wheels in a time-piece, are necessary to the production of beneficial results."[30] The work

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[28] Rothrock, "John Haywood," xx-xxi. The fact that this notice appeared in the 24 October 1821 issue of the *Nashville Whig* indicates Haywood had completed his work on both volumes by then.

[29] For a look at the errors compiled by Haywood, see John Haywood Papers, 1768-1796, Tennessee Historical Society (Nashville), Folder 6.

[30] Haywood, *Civil and Political History* (reprint version), 15.

declared the West's superiority by portraying westerners as true Americans, justified in their contest to remove Indians in order to advance civilization.[31]

Regardless of Haywood's lip service to the common man, the emphasis on the frontier's elite class took precedence over all. One biographer of Haywood suggests that Haywood's preference is based on the notion that the common man/woman did not keep records and, thus, less material existed to collect about them. Furthermore, it is unlikely Haywood ran in the same circles as the commoner. This emphasis on the elite profoundly effected historians who followed Haywood, who inherited materials weighed heavily in favor of politics, public figures, and events of the era.[32]

The legacy of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society belongs to the efforts of John Haywood. When Haywood died in 1826, he left behind an estate bulging with land, slaves, and his personal possessions—including books deposited with different persons to be sold. It is uncertain whether these included the two histories of Tennessee, as copies of Haywood's works grew scarce over the years.[33] The Society's real heritage lies in its aptitude for the popularization of natural science to the community. As one observer eloquently put it, TAS "was the western outpost for the growing spirit of scientific

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[31] Lynn Nelson, "'Actions . . . Conducive to the Prosperity and Character of the Nation': John Haywood's Telling of Tennessee's Early History," *Border States* 15 (2005): 36-47.

[32] Ned Irwin, "Collecting Memory: Antiquarians and the Preservation of the Early History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier," *Journal of East Tennessee History* 72 (2000), 68-69. While I agree with Irwin's suggestion that historians fell into the trap of focusing on politics and public figures because there was more available material, I find fault with the notion that Haywood knew little about the "common" man. As a lawyer, judge, and legal scholar, Haywood was bound to have come in contact with "everyday" people and, therefore, exposed to different points of view.

[33] In 1857 the assistant librarian at the New York State Library requested a copy of Haywood's "History of Tennessee" from Return Jonathan Meigs, Tennessee's State Librarian (and THS member). Meigs replied by saying a copy of Haywood's book was as hard to procure as "an extra copy of the 'Martin Bible' of the 15th century." See Meigs to John H. Hickon, 11 February 1857, Return Jonathan Meigs Papers, 1820-1891, Record Group 188, Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville) [TSLA].

investigation; it was the connecting link between the leaders of scientific thought in the Western County and those in the nation's most advanced centers."[34]

In the 1830s, Tennessee continued to carry the label of "frontier." In Memphis, most of the houses consisted of log cabins, and bears still roamed the streets.[35] "I found the country rugged and barren," complained a U. S. Army recruiter in West Tennessee in 1833, "in spite of the map, I repeatedly lost my way among paths scarcely discernable, on the hard and stony hills." The recruiting officer also confronted another frontier attribute—violence. After an altercation with the landlord of the inn over an exorbitant bill, an elderly person pulled the soldier aside and showed him a series of multiple scars on his chest, saying, "I came to this country, like you, young, fiery, and impatient; and these are the consequences—take a friendly warning."[36]

In Nashville, still a somewhat frontier community, a group of doctors, lawyers, educators, business men, and newspapermen advocated intellectual pursuits while visualizing the town as a cultural center. Throughout the 1820s, Nashvillians could attend exhibitions and public lectures, some offered by university professors, who opened their introductory lectures to the community. And, in Nashville, like many places in the antebellum South, a number of learned societies beckoned those with more erudite tastes.[37] The overall lack of large, prosperous communities in the South, where men

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[34] Rothrock, "John Haywood," xix.

[35] Gerald M. Capers, Jr., *The Biography of a River Town—Memphis: Its Heroic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 62.

[36] P. G. Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army; or Romance of Military Life* (1857; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973), 198, 202.

[37] For a brief survey of intellectual life in Nashville in the 1820s/30s, see Milton L. Baughn, "An Early Experiment in Adult Education: The Nashville Lyceum, 1830-1832," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*

could devote more resources, explains the brevity of most southern societies. Most of the frontier historical societies suffered from a lack of support. However, their very existence took precedence over their efforts. These societies served as evidence that "civilization" had reached the West.[38]

One such organization flourished in Nashville in the mid-1830s. Titled the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge [SDK], this forerunner of THS represented the goals and complexities of Jacksonian America. According to surviving minutes of the meetings, the Society began in December 1835 at the room of the Philomathic Society "for the purpose of deliberating on the best and most effectual means to promote Science and general Literature."[39] Adrian Van Sinderen Lindsley (who normally went by "A. V. S."), a prominent Nashville lawyer and son of Dr. Philip Lindsley, chaired the gathering of an unspecified number of men. On a motion, the meeting formed itself into the Society for the Advancement of Literature and Science. They resolved to meet in three days to make a report on the Society's rules and regulations.

At that time, a committee presented a report stating the Society's mission: ". . . for the purpose of promoting the general interests of education and knowledge."[40] The proposed plan called for a "parent society," based in Nashville, with auxiliary branches

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11 (September 1952), 238-239. For a review of the learned/scientific societies in the antebellum South, see Joseph Ewan, "The Growth of Learned and Scientific Societies in the Southeastern United States to 1860," in *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the Early American Republic: American Scientific and Learned Societies from Colonial Times to the Civil War*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and Sanborn C. Brown (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 208-218.

[38] David Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America 1607-1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 96-99.

[39] "Minutes of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge, 1835-1837," Tennessee Historical Office Files, Box 5, Folder 1 [hereafter cited as Minutes of SDK], 1-17.

[40] Ibid.

across the state, each responsible for its own operations and materials. Public debates and lectures on literary and scientific subjects played a key role in the plan, as did the collection of information on the progress of education and schools in the communities. Other important aspects included the creation of a library at each society branch, and a regularly-published literary periodical.

Just how the Society for the Advancement of Literature and Science became the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge remains unclear. The meeting minutes reveal nothing in terms of a name change as, beginning with the first meeting in January 1836, the minutes always referred to the organization as "the Society." We do know that "the Society" formed on 23 December 1835 and discontinued on 2 May 1837, according to the meeting minutes and an 1858 letter by SDK's first president, Return J. Meigs.[41] One researcher has challenged these dates, stating that SDK remained active until December 1842, but this has not been verified.[42] This murkiness surrounding SDK makes it the weakest link on the chain connecting it to THS, particularly in light of the Society's lack of accomplishments. Still, the primary mission of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge rested on its ability to collect and preserve the past. The significance of SDK lies not in when or how long it existed, or even what it did, but in what it *attempted* to do. As such, SDK sheds light on the cultural complexities of a nation in transition.

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[41] Return J. Meigs to Charles B. Norton, 10 February 1858, Tennessee Historical Society Miscellaneous Files, 1688-1951, Tennessee Historical Society, Box 10, M-64. The second, and last, SDK president was Nathaniel Cross, elected in January 1837. Cross later became president of THS.

[42] Jane Gardner Flener, "A History of Libraries in Tennessee Before the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1963), 29-32. Flener acknowledges the existence of the Society for the Advancement of Literature and Science from 1835-1837. However, she insists that a Nashville newspaper mentions a "Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge" in 1834 (not 1835) and that this organization remained active until December 1842. In fact, Flener doubts that SDK and the Society for the Advancement of Literature were the same organization. Unfortunately, Flener does not cite the newspaper that indicates an 1834 inception date nor does she provide the basis for placing its termination in 1842.

"It is emphatically the age of progress—or rather, of movement," proclaimed one professor to his graduating class in 1846, "all things are in motion."[43] To be sure, Americans *were* in motion. Migration from the East to the West became the rage, and Tennessee, at a geographical crossroads, felt the brunt of it. As people surged through the state, many Tennessee residents followed. "The rage now seems for Indiana, Illinois and Missouri," complained one East Tennessean who moved to the western region of the state only to quickly relocate in Missouri.[44] To many Americans, the West represented renewal—an erasure of the past rather than an extension of it. Because of this, Americans viewed the West in mythical proportions.[45] Advances in transportation and communication facilitated this progress, but not without a cost. As the boundaries of the nation expanded, the old order of society began breaking down. Author and editor William Gilmore Simms expressed his fears of a too-large America obsessed with emigration in 1831: "It not only conflicts with, and prevents the formation of society, but destroys that which is already well established."[46]

A nation on the move indicates a state of always looking to the future. Was the past of any use in a present obsessed with the future? An 1835 SDK report reflected this concern. "The spirit of change which is breathing over the face of the Land is fast

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[43] Robert Saunders, "Baccalaureate Address: Delivered to the Graduates of William and Mary College, in the College Chapel, 4th July, 1846," *Southern and Western Literary Messenger and Review* 12 (September 1846), 543.

[44] Williams, ed., "Journal of Events of David Anderson Deaderick," 133, 135. Texas also lured many Tennesseans into migration at this time—Sam Houston and David Crockett just being two examples.

[45] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 279.

[46] Quoted in William Stanley Hoole, "Alabama and W. Gilmore Simms," *Alabama Review* 16 (April 1963), 91.

obliterating the records of other times; and the march of improvement is so rapid as scarcely to leave a trace of the succession of its steps," the report lamented.[47] To remedy the situation the Society actively sought written and oral communications from those with recollections of early Tennessee settlement, and to obtain "relics of antiquity and other naturalia." The SDK did this from an awareness "that the facts connected with the early settlement of Tennessee, its antiquities, civil & natural history . . . and the early settlers, whose memories are the sole depositories of many of these facts, are fast passing from the present stage of existence." In a world that appeared to be constantly changing, the SDK viewed the past as an "anchor" society needed in order to keep steadfast. The past transformed into more than mere curiosity—it became essential to the nation's wellbeing.

The other issue revolved around the continuing sensitivity of westerners. Members of SDK, who "suffered more than our share of insidious detraction," sought to organize a literary society to dignify the western character via their narrative of the West. "The professed histories of America scarcely reach beyond the Alleghany mountains and the great valley of the West with its boundless territory, its unmeasured resources, its magic transformations, and its stupendous projects is left to run the career of greatness without a chronicler of its course," read the SDK report.[48] The accomplishment of this task necessitated historical materials, and institutions such as SDK served as the conduit for all incoming memorabilia. Time became a factor. Memories of the past rapidly dimmed as those able to recount the "early days" faded from the scene. An SDK circular, seeking any and all facts relating to the early history of Tennessee, urged it be done

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[47] Minutes of SDK, 8, 41-42. All subsequent references to the report are from this source.

[48] Ibid., 8, 11-12. The notion of collecting and preserving, in this case, revolved around the idea that the past be chronicled to show the greatness of the West—much the same idea as John Haywood had.

quickly because "the early settlers whose memories are the sole depositories of many of these facts, are fast passing from the stage of existence."[49]

The Western theme of civilization conquering the wilderness implies the element of progress, but it also indicates the desire for order in the early republic. Civilization itself implies order. The depiction of frontiersmen as taking matters into their own hands is tempered by the rationale that they remained patriotic and orderly during their struggles (or, at least, most of the time). In a new, frontier community, the jail usually became the first public structure to be constructed, followed by the courthouse—a case of order before law. And while individuality stood as the cornerstone of the fictional American character, the importance of knowing one's "place" while maintaining a degree of decorum took precedence over all.

The learned societies formed in antebellum America, such as SDK, stressed structure and control within their undertakings. These fraternities followed an almost identical pattern of accord: a group met for a specific purpose, assigned themselves a name, elected officers, devised a constitution with precise rules and regulations, became incorporated to establish legality, met at regular intervals, collected dues, divided into committees to tackle separate issues, and kept a written record of their activities. Working together as a group perhaps set a standard beyond individual aspirations. Ideologically, America represented a land of promise and change, but individuals still craved a sense of identity and belonging—a safe haven from controversy and debate.

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[49] Circular of the Tennessee Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge in the Lyman C. Draper Manuscript Collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison), 6XX75. The SDK placed a great value on "oral communications," noting that "the actors and eye witnesses, from whom alone, much of this intelligence can be procured, from their weight of years, infirmity, weakness of sight, consequent upon age, or from other causes, will, many of them, be unable to commit to writing what their memories will unerrilingly dictate."

The Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge encouraged such controversy and debate—to a point. The Society endorsed the reading of essays (preferably by members only), followed by a debate, but it resolved never to present papers revolving around politics or religion. The Society sought young men to join but recommended SDK "be formed under the auspices of the most learned and influential men" in the community.[50] This step eliminated the chance that young "hotheads" might infiltrate the sanctum. It is also an indication of a caste system within historical societies of the nineteenth century. Less likely to foment imbroglios, those of the patrician class handled matters in a more "polite" manner. In February 1837, one SDK member found himself expelled from the Society after he left Nashville "under circumstances of a suspicious character charged with acts totally unworthy of a member of this Society."[51] Curiously, this type of moral policing does not show up in any of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society or Tennessee Historical Society proceedings.

The decorum demanded by SDK echoes the same propriety found in that other Jacksonian learned circle—the debating society. Typical of such organizations in Tennessee was the Franklin Debating Society, formed in 1830 at Franklin "for the promotion of Literature & Virtue." Members (males only) chose sides on a topic, debated them, and the "house" then voted in favor of one side or the other. The debated topics ranged from the esoteric—"Are talents hereditary or not?"—to contemporary issues, such as "Ought the slave trade be tolerated or not?" However, the Society's constitution specified that "no query of a religious nature . . . shall be admitted"—the

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[50] Minutes of SDK, 13, 48.

[51] Ibid., 44-45. Unfortunately, the meeting minutes do not reveal what "acts" were committed.

same admonition adopted by SDK several years later. Another debating society held out this warning: "No member shall be tolerated to quote scripture in any of his debates."[52]

Most of these associations had a written constitution with lengthy rules and regulations. Failure to pay dues or absenteeism resulted in fines or dismissal. Punishment for "ungentlemanly conduct" always meant expulsion. In one sense, societies acted as a moral compass where individual behavior became the domain of the group. One debating society promised "a free interchange of thoughts and opinions" but expelled any member "guilty of any grossly immoral conduct."[53] Since a "grossly immoral conduct" had little chance of being committed during a society's meeting, the implication here focused on a man's behavior outside the organization. The Carthage Polemic Society made it clearer: ejection occurred when any member was found "guilty of any gross immorality or irregularity of conduct out of [the] society."[54] "Associations, according to historian Lewis Saum, "strengthened 'society' and confirmed the discipline necessary to it."[55]

The Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge had grandiose plans to form auxiliaries across the state—another unsuccessful venture that merits examination as a product of its time. "The whole framework of civil society in the present age,

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[52] "Franklin Debating Society, Franklin, Tennessee, 1830," Manuscripts, TSLA. "Franklin Polemical Society—Bedford County, Tennessee, 1821-1827," Manuscripts, TSLA. The Franklin Debating Society's constitution stated "no query of a religious nature . . . shall be admitted."

[53] "Winchester Polemick Society Constitution and Minutes 1845-1846," Manuscripts, TSLA. Members were fined five cents for smoking or chewing tobacco.

[54] "Carthage Literary Society Minutes 1824-1831," Manuscripts, TSLA.

[55] Lewis O. Saum, *The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 127. Saum also points out that debating societies avoided controversial issues because of possible disorder from the audience; thus, abstract topics were often chosen. Ibid., 123-127, 145-146.

particularly in our country, is supported by voluntary association," proclaimed the 1835 SDK report, "This principle is now revolutionizing the fact of the world. . . . Let us take advantage of the popular current in the formation of voluntary Societies for the diffusion of useful knowledge—all with the same objects in view, with a bond of union and sympathy between them."[56] This altruistic outlook exemplifies the popularity of voluntary associations and the spirit of social reform in the 1830s and 1840s.[57] These associations, a community of the "competent," offered its members protection against the tyranny of public opinion and made them seemingly independent of the masses. But, at the same time, the members deliberately become more dependent on their peers and less able to resist the consensus of the competent.[58] As demonstrated, these learned societies involved a voluntary embrace of some sort of self-discipline. In the absence of strong social or political institutions, such self-discipline provided both personal identity as well as a sense of social order.[59]

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[56] Minutes of SDK, 5-6.

[57] An interesting analysis of this surge of social reform can be found in John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1965): 656-681. Thomas correctly points out that the "romantic" reform in America traced its origins to a religious impulse which was both politically and socially conservative—a reaction to egalitarianism and the rising demands for church disestablishment.

[58] Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 75n29. Historian Patricia Click offers this thought: "In addition to social interaction, nineteenth-century clubs offered opportunities for expressing social status, for control and regulation of others, and for framing a new economic and social order." Patricia C. Click, *The Spirit of the Times: Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 73.

[59] Daniel Walker Howe, "Protestantism, Voluntarism, and Personal Identity in Antebellum America," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, eds. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 206-226. Again, Click: "Participation in clubs provided a simple method of self-definition. . . . The irony is that club membership, one of the most open expressions of democracy, helped to erect and maintain a social order based on a fairly rigid social stratification." Click, *Spirit of the Times*, 86.

In the first volume of his *Democracy in America*, Toqueville keenly pointed out the tendency of Americans to conform and their penchant for intellectual sterility. By being "equal" with others, they justified their dissent from the masses: "I know of no country in which there is so little true independence of mind and freedom of discussion as in America." But Tocqueville possibly misunderstood the meaning of individualism in the Jacksonian period. American individualism emerged in the period after the Revolution to the 1830s, when a more mobile and heterogeneous society created wider networks that forged bonds unlike the traditional economic activity and political authority. With the power of rooted communities waning, many Americans took an inner direction—individualism—a feeling that a man's fate was in his own hands. This, however, did not imply self-sufficiency; on the contrary, cooperation and association became necessary to attain individual goals.[60]

The "failure" of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge may lie in the fact that no one individual or individuals took the reins of control (if the meeting minutes are to be trusted). As a result, no single vision drove the institution forward. Rather, a series of optimistic notions about public lectures on literary and scientific subjects, the creation of phantom libraries across the state, and the collection of educational information for possible publication occupied the group's time. With no political or state authority to challenge an interpretation of historical memory, the Society had an opportunity to promote its own version of history, much like that accomplished by John Haywood and TAS. Granted, the Society found itself in a time of change and reform—a time when

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[60] This viewpoint is ably explained in Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 6-12. Tocqueville cited in Haskell, *Emergence of Professional Social Science*, 75.

extreme optimism also produced despair and anxiety.[61] Still, the organization's disappointing record of achievement reflects its unwillingness to sacrifice a sense of order in an age of progress—its understanding of the future marred by the unyielding conformity of the present.

Twelve years after the demise of SDK, its two former presidents, Return J. Meigs and Nathaniel Cross, helped form the Tennessee Historical Society. Meigs (1801-1891), a Kentucky-born lawyer, came to Tennessee in 1823 to set up law practice. In the nearly forty years he resided in Tennessee, Meigs held the office of Attorney General and Court Reporter for the state; was appointed a U. S. Attorney for Middle Tennessee; was elected state senator for Davidson County; and served as the first State Librarian. He resigned the last post in 1860 due to his pro-Union stance. He left Tennessee, never to return, in the next year. Meigs purchased the initial collection of books and materials for the State Library, beginning in 1856, adding many books from his own personal library. In addition to having served as president of SDK, Meigs held the position of corresponding secretary of THS in the latter part of the 1850s.[62]

Nathaniel D. Cross (1802-1866), a Princeton graduate born in New Jersey, came to Nashville in 1824 to tutor at Cumberland College. He held the post of professor of languages at the University of Nashville between 1826 and 1831 and for the next several years ran a school for boys in Nashville. In 1838, he established a classical and mathematical school in Nashville known as Bandusia Seminary (where he taught until his

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[61] David Briton Davis, "Some Ideological Functions of Prejudice in Ante-Bellum America," *American Quarterly* 15 (Summer 1963): 115-125.

[62] Biographical sketch from the Tennessee State Library State Librarian's Records (Return J. Meigs) 1841-1879, Record Group 188, TSLA.

death). He resumed his professorial post at the University in Nashville in 1838, teaching there until 1850. Cross, as librarian at the university, amassed a huge collection of books and manuscripts—nearly 10,000 volumes by the 1850s. Cross held the title of first president of SDK and the newly-formed Tennessee Historical Society in 1849.[63]

Meigs and Cross, as librarians, seemed the logical choice to head an historical society, given the close connection between libraries and learned societies in the nineteenth century. This would be particularly true in the case of SDK, an organization that stressed literary efforts and promoted a system of libraries across the state. The lackluster record of SDK proved that a passion for books does not necessarily qualify one for leadership. So what made the formation of an historical society different in 1849 than in 1835? After all, both organizations had the same president (Nathaniel Cross). For one thing, THS returned to the original mission of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society. The THS constitution stated in Article II: "The objects of this Society shall be First, to procure and preserve historical facts relative to the early history of Tennessee, its settlement, and the conflicts of the first settlers with the Indians."[64] This mission statement not only mirrors that of TAS, it is *identical*. In fact, the other four "goals" of the THS constitution are word-for-word repetitions of the TAS constitution. Curiously, the THS constitution stops short after the fourth goal of TAS, opting to omit the fifth, the

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[63] Nathaniel D. Cross Journals & Record Books, 1829-1866, TSLA; and Flener, "History of Libraries in Tennessee," 72-76.

[64] Tennessee Historical Society Office Files 1790-1985, Tennessee Historical Society (Nashville) [hereafter cited as THS Office Files], Box 15, Folder 5. The act of incorporation for THS states the Society was established "for the collection and preservation of facts, documents and materials, relating to the natural, civil and aboriginal history of the State of Tennessee." See *Acts of the State of Tennessee, Passed at the First Session of the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly, for the Years 1849-50* (Nashville: McKennie & Watterson, 1850), 366. Similarly, the current mission statement of THS states the Society's purpose is to "promote interest in and preservation of all matters relating to the history of Tennessee." Available online at: http://www.tennesseehistory.org/about.htm (accessed 21 July 2009).

one referring to "a knowledge of the different systems of general education." This omission is noteworthy. While SDK formed itself for the specific purpose of "promoting the general interests of education," the body of THS decided to leave this topic alone, despite the inclusion of educators such as Cross. To be sure, the issue was a political hot potato of the day.

In a letter dated 6 May 1849 from "A Father of Five Sons" to the editor of the *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, the writer commended the newspaper for advocating the formation of an historical society, adding: "But it is not enough to have a meeting; more must be done, or it will die away like other things." To prove the point, the "Father" mentioned the public school referendum voted on by the city in 1848 but never acted upon by the mayor and city council. "Something must be done! We must have the Public School!" he desperately stated, "I voted for it! My ward voted for it! Six hundred men out of eight hundred voted for it! Why then has the matter been suffered for the long period of eight months, to rest? It is time to speak out!"[65] In avoiding a tie of

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[65] *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, 8 May 1849. The public school (or "common school") controversy had its roots in the colonial South, where educational opportunities were limited to academies or the tutorial system, both reserved for the well-to-do. The apprenticeship system absorbed the indigent who received industrial and vocational training—such activities gave rise to the so-called "pauper schools" or charity schools (following an English precedent). To many, however, the idea of a charity school was deplorable—a kind of philanthropy that stripped its recipients of personal dignity. School reform faced many obstacles in the South, including taxation, a lack of funds, and sectional bias within the states. In Tennessee, the 1830 School Act levied taxes that only East Tennessee seemed willing to support. Fraud and embezzlement marred the system through the 1830s and 1840s, until the 1854 School Act established a system of common schools throughout the state. See Kathryn A. Pippin, "The Common School Movement in the South, 1840-1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1977), 25-40, 176-178. For more on the apathy and distrust of public schooling in the antebellum South, see William R. Taylor, "Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy: The Patrician South and the Common Schools," *Harvard Educational Review* 36 (1966): 412-426; Frederick M. Binder, *The Age of the Common School, 1830-1865* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), 12, 16-17, 135-142; Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 192-215; and Timothy James Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 170-178. For a look at Tennessee's public school system in the nineteenth century, see Thaddeus P. Thomas, "The Public School System of Tennessee" in *Higher Education in Tennessee*, ed. Lucius

the school controversy to THS, it may be that the historical society sought to invest its stock solely in the past.

The first stage of the Tennessee Historical Society lasted from May 1849 to nearly the end of 1852. The priorities focused on presenting papers, building a library, and acquiring artifacts—some of a dubious historical nature. Meeting at the Merchants Library Rooms—a facility owned by Wilkins Tannehill—the presentation of papers prepared mostly by THS members occupied much of the monthly proceedings. Topics included the early records of Davidson County, a lunar rainbow, cholera in Nashville, and the admission of Tennessee into the Union. President Cross, an experienced speaker at University of Nashville functions, presented many of the lectures. The audience for most of the lectures never went beyond THS members. When one member suggested a forum of public lectures for presentation by the Society every three months, a committee formed to look into the matter. The committee, in reporting back to the body, deemed the proposed plan "impracticable."[66]

Salisbury Merriam (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893), 282-287. For a good review of the legislation revolving around the common school laws of antebellum Tennessee, consult A. P. Whitaker, "The Public School System of Tennessee, 1834-1860," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 2 (March 1916): 1-30. The story of Nashville's public school system in the 1850s is covered in Davenport, *Cultural Life in Nashville*, 52-55. Actually, despite such institutions as Peale's Museum and some literary/learned societies, most antebellum historical societies showed little interest in public education. See Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present" in *History Museums in the United States—A Critical Assessment*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 6-7.

[66] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5. For Cross as a THS lecturer, see Henry Grady Rooker, "Nathaniel Cross, the Father of the Tennessee Historical Society," *Tennessee Magazine*, 2nd ser., 3 (April 1935), 141. Examples of addresses at the University of Nashville by Nathaniel Cross include *An Address Delivered Before the Agatheridan & Erosophian Societies of the Nashville University, on the Thirty-First of March, 1834* (Nashville: Western Methodist Office, 1834) and *An Address, Delivered Before the Alumni Society of the University of Nashville, October 7, 1846* (Nashville: Burton & Billings, 1846). Most of the addresses delivered by Cross dealt with themes of morality. Cross was a particularly religious person, routinely reading a chapter from the Bible every morning before family prayer. See entry of 24 February 1849 in "Diary, 1849-1852, of Nathaniel Davison Cross" in Nathaniel D. Cross Journals & Records, TSLA.

Books, pamphlets, and newspapers slowly came into the Society and, minus a home of its own, the Society temporarily placed the materials in the care of President Cross, who served as librarian at the University of Nashville. Some historical gems fell into the hands of the Society amongst the acquisitions, including original letters of Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston. Some artifacts—such as a cross made from wood of the frigate *U. S. S. Constitution*—only managed to fill up space in a fledging society that really had no space to fill. A. W. Putnam, THS vice-president and future president, tantalized the Society by bringing in several valuable items "not for deposit (at present)" from his personal collection, including the original Cumberland Compact.[67]

Nashville's culturally charged atmosphere at the century's mid-point helps to explain a desire for the rebirth of an historical society. During the decade of the 1850s, Nashville became a cultural center in the South. The medical school at the University of Nashville opened; the Nashville Female Academy reached its height of development; the public supported the theater as never before; and the city became an important publishing hub. Two THS members, Dr. Philip Lindsley and Dr. Gerard Troost, helped lay the foundations for Nashville's intellectual development prior to the 1850s. [68]

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[67] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5. Albigence Waldo Putnam (1799-1869) was a lawyer, businessman, public official, historian, and writer. Born and educated in Ohio, he was the grandson of Israel Putnam, a major general in the Revolutionary Army. Before relocating to Nashville in 1836, he lived in Mississippi, where he married Catherine Ann Sevier (granddaughter of John Sevier) in 1825. Upon her death in 1834, he married her sister and moved to Nashville where he bought an estate he named Waverly Place (in honor of his affection for the novels of Sir Walter Scott). He remarried again after his second wife died in 1846. In the year he was elected vice-president of the Tennessee Historical Society (1849), he erected a marble monument in Nashville to commemorate John Sevier. He moved from Nashville, briefly, during the Civil War and returned to be employed as Deputy Collector at the U. S. Internal Revenue Collector's Office in Nashville until his death in 1869. He is best remembered for his publication of the *History of Middle Tennessee or Life and Time of General James Robertson* in 1859. Details taken from the biographical sketch in the Albigence Waldo Putnam Papers 1775-1869, Tennessee Historical Society.

[68] F. Garvin Davenport, "Cultural Life in Nashville on the Eve of the Civil War," *Journal of Southern History* 3 (August 1937): 326-347.

Identifying Nashville as a refined center of the "South" implies that Tennessee's days as a western state had vanished—almost. In one review of the city, Nashville's healthy climate, the "beautiful cultivation" surrounding the town, and the prosperity of its 12,000 citizens all culminated in the beauty of the new state capitol building: "There is not perhaps in the *West*, a more interesting view than that commanded from the summit of the Capitol Hill."[69]

Set on the crest of the tallest hill in central city, the Capitol represented a building of great significance in the history of American architecture. Renowned architect William Strickland designed the structure, modeled after a Greek Ionic temple, making extensive use of limestone from a quarry near the site.[70] Workers laid the cornerstone of the building in July 1845, and construction continued until 1859. Although much work needed to be completed, the General Assembly first met there in October 1853, about the same time the State Library relocated from the Davidson County Courthouse. According to Strickland's architectural plans, the Library Room contained space measuring 35 feet by 35 feet but subdivided to form two smaller rooms at each end—each room slightly over 16 feet by 35 feet (the height was 23 feet). A spiral staircase, with ornamental iron work, led to balconies and balustrades. Records from 1859 show the library remained the last room to be furnished, taking right up to the end of the year.[71]

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[69] J. D. B. De Bow, *The Industrial Resources, Etc., of the Southern and Western States; Embracing a View of Their Commerce, Agriculture, Manufactures, Internal Improvements, Slave and Free Labor, Slavery Institutions, Products, Etc., of the South*, 3 vols. (New Orleans: Office of De Bow's Review, 1852-53), II: 185 [emphasis is mine].

[70] For an architectural history of the Capitol, see Mary Ellen Gadski, "The Tennessee State Capitol: An Architectural History," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 47 (Summer 1988): 67-120.

[71] Tennessee State Building Commission, *Tennessee State Capitol: Historic Structure Report* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of General Services, 1986), 14, 35-36, 221, 332.

This library room became THS headquarters until the 1880s. Having THS holdings in the prestigious Capitol obviously lent an air of legitimacy to the Society and provided a much-needed headquarters of operation. Yet, sharing space with the State Library proved detrimental, not only in terms of usable space but, also, in regard to separating what materials belonged to THS and what belonged to the State Library—a situation that proved quite frustrating for the Society. In the meantime, however, THS meetings ceased at the end of 1851. Not until February 1857 did the Society reorganize.

Like its predecessors (TAS and SDK), the Tennessee Historical Society of 1849 had about a two-year run, reorganizing in 1857. The Civil War and Reconstruction then interrupted activities until 1874. Historical societies in the nineteenth century evidenced this type of irregularity.[72] The dwindling attendance at THS meetings, leading to its demise in 1851, may have reflected the unbridled prosperity Nashville enjoyed during the 1850s. Even though THS members encompassed the patrician class, that did not mean they had an abundance of leisure hours. Most of them were lawyers, businessmen, editors, and clergymen, occupations that demanded much of their time. The needs of the present caused them to temporarily turn their backs on the past. J. G. M. Ramsey sarcastically acknowledged this possibility in an 18 September 1851 letter to Lyman Draper:

> The Historical Society at Nashville had a hasty accouchement, breathed once after it got into its nurse's lap, gave a convulsive gasp to let its aunts and its cousins know that it had vitality enough to squeal, gave a wild stare upon its seniors, and suddenly swooned away. Some of the doctors say expired. I hear nothing of it since. Don't you observe that *Commerce* chokes the growth of any

[72] For example, the Indiana Historical Society, formed in 1830, met in only twelve of the fifty-six years between 1830-1886, and only once in the decade of the 1860s. Lana Ruegamer, *A History of the Indiana Historical Society, 1830-1980* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1980), 30.

> such infants? It does not furnish the pabulum by which science and literature are nourished.[73]

Ironically, Dr. Ramsey would become the "physician" who revived the patient, twenty years later, during the Society's 1874 reorganization.

The reestablishment of THS in 1857 brought several important changes: A. W. Putnam replaced Nathaniel Cross as president; R. J. Meigs filled the new position of THS Librarian; the Society began meeting at the State Capitol; and Anson Nelson took over duties as recording secretary—a post he devotedly held until 1888. Under Putnam's leadership, the Society plunged into a period of incomparable activity. Artifacts began to pour in, some of a military nature such as flags and swords, while others remained the more traditional acquisitions of books, pamphlets, maps, and newspapers. Portraits of Tennessee governors and historic figures occupied space on the walls of the recently-completed library room at the Capitol. The Society initiated an aggressive policy of acquiring valuable papers from Andrew Jackson's Hermitage and the ancestors of James Robertson. Glass cases helped preserve the more valuable acquisitions (items now being stamped with an official THS mark). Correspondence reached out to sister state societies and institutions such as the Smithsonian for advice and information. The Society mailed a slew of honorary memberships to the likes of George Bancroft, Jared Sparks, Peter Force, and Richard Hildreth, among others.[74]

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[73] William B. Hesseltine, ed., *Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey—Autobiography and Letters* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 63 [emphasis is original]. Ramsey seldom referred to THS as the "Tennessee Historical Society," often calling it the "Nashville Historical Society." At the time of this letter, Ramsey was a corresponding member of THS, but it is obvious from a survey of his correspondence that Ramsey held areas outside of his beloved East Tennessee in contempt, despite his insistence that his chief loyalty belonged to the state of Tennessee.

[74] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5. The move to elect Meigs as THS Librarian made sense in light of the fact that he was State Librarian and thus could better oversee THS collections housed with the

This bustle came to an abrupt halt on the eve of the Civil War. In the midst of the intense sectional conflict preceding the declaration of war, THS remained silent on secessionist issues. This is partly explained by the anti-slavery proclivities of THS leadership in the 1850s. Philip Lindsley and Nathaniel Cross belonged to the Tennessee State Colonization Society—Lindsley as president, Cross as secretary. R. J. Meigs and Wilkins Tannehill were also members. An auxiliary to the American Colonization Society, the organization raised funds to relocate free blacks to Liberia.[75] Lindsley, Cross, and Meigs had the distinction of being Yankees, a label that did not escape the careful examination of pro-Southern Tennesseans. Lindsley, an educated easterner, came under special scrutiny. In 1849, an irate contributor to the *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig* called for a new Nashville University president, one with a "dash of chivalry" and "one who understands well the subject of our domestic institution of slavery."[76] Clearly, if THS had accommodated any "secesh" notions before the war, the mind-set of its leadership overshadowed them.

State Library holdings at the Capitol. Anson Nelson's appointment is important for two reasons: one, his tireless efforts to promote THS activities played no small role in the success of THS in the second half of the nineteenth century; and, two, the dedication to his duties as THS secretary left researchers a valuable, in-depth look at the Society through the meeting minutes he recorded. Nelson (1821-1892) was born in East Tennessee where he learned the printing trade. He came to Nashville in 1840 where he worked at several newspapers. He served the elected post of revenue collector for the city of Nashville 1853-1862 and engaged in the realty business from 1864 to 1869. In October of that year he was elected City Treasurer, an office he held continuously until 1883. His other outstanding activities included the presidency of the South Nashville Street Railway, the directorship of the Second National Bank of Nashville, and board manager for the city's Centennial Exposition in 1880. A born joiner, Nelson affiliated himself with the Masons, the Baptist Church, Goodman's Business College, the Royal Arcanum, the Davidson County Association of Farmers, Gardeners, Mechanics and Artists, and the Mount Olivet City Cemetery Company. He wrote several published pieces, including a sketch of the history of Nashville and a statistical view of Nashville. Biographical details on Nelson taken from THS Office Files, Box 17, Folder 2.

[75] [Nashville] *Republican Banner*, 19 March 1849.

[76] Cited in John F. Woolverton, "Philip Lindsley and the Cause of Education in the Old Southwest," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 19 (March 1960), 8. Lindsley did resign from his position in

The Union occupation of Nashville occurred in February 1862, and, consequently, the Capitol building transformed into a fortress complete with artillery. As the Northern army approached the city, Anson Nelson and a companion ran into the Library Room and grabbed whatever artifacts they could jam in their pockets and handkerchiefs—in this case, some rare coins and minerals—and took them to the home of Sarah Childress Polk for safekeeping. Sarah Polk benefitted from her status as the widow of former president James K. Polk, and her estate received official protection from any looting or wanton destruction. The seizure of the Capitol proved detrimental to THS holdings in that Union soldiers committed random acts of ransacking during the occupation, and some THS collections were destroyed, looted, or mixed with other state records.[77]

Southern Reconstruction and "redemption" evolved into a pattern designed to restore order. Changes in the political structure, coupled with educational and legal reform, faced the response of a Democratic restoration. The ideal of a unified, more egalitarian nation ran head-on into the nineteenth-century values like laissez-faire,

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1850 but only because a cholera epidemic closed down operations at the University of Nashville. Another "Yankee," A. W. Putnam expressed his Unionist views in a February 1861 letter to then-U.S. Senator Andrew Johnson. "I have contended for 'The Union and our Rights in the Union,' and have written and spoken freely and boldly," admitted Putnam, "I was warned that I should be 'spotted,' as a traitor to the South, and might get myself into trouble." A. W. Putnam to Andrew Johnson, 11 February 1861, in Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson—Volume 4, 1860-1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 278. At the time of this letter, Putnam sought the job of postmaster of Nashville from the incoming administration (a position he failed to get). He revealed a much more neutral stance on the war in his diary. Writing in 1863, Putnam blamed both sides for a "wicked, as well as unwise and ruinous" war, referring to "the fanaticism and mischievous interceding spirit of the North, and the ambitious, arrogant spirit of the South." Diary extract from Albigence Waldo Putnam Papers, Folder 7.

[77] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1; also, Ann Toplovich, "The Tennessee Historical Society at 150: Tennessee History 'Just and True,'" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 58 (Fall 1999), 202-203. The occupation of Nashville is covered in excellent books by Walter T. Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City, 1862-1863* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008) and *Reluctant Partners: Nashville and the Union, 1863-1865* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008). Most of the state archives were removed to Memphis in early 1862 and returned to the state Capitol in May 1865. For this, see [Memphis] *Commercial Appeal* (31 August 1898). Mary Gadski contends that while it is no doubt true that individual Union soldiers took some books from the library at the Capitol, there is no documented evidence of any wholesale destruction of the building. See Gadski, "Tennessee State Capitol," 119n134.

individualism and assumptions of African-American's and women's inferiority.[78] Out of the maelstrom of this ideological scuffling emerged a revamped THS, charged with new leadership and ready to restore the past in a new image.

Cross and Putnam had died shortly after the Civil War, and, with the old leadership gone, THS took stock of itself during a few preliminary meetings beginning in March 1874. The Society reviewed its own history and attempted to sort through its many manuscripts, pamphlets, books, and artifacts, all tangled up with the State Library's holdings. New faces appeared on the scene, including Paralee Haskell, the Society's first woman member (and the only one until the 1890s).[79] Given the fact that Haskell held the position of State Librarian (1871-1879), her selection to THS speaks more of practicality than forward thinking. This is especially true considering the cataloging nightmare facing THS in trying to extract their holdings from the State Library.

The election of J. G. M. Ramsey is what represented the biggest change in the reorganized Historical Society. During his life, Ramsey wore many different guises: physician, antiquarian, frontier patrician, historian, agrarian, and worshipper of the Lost Cause.[80] Perhaps as a gesture to Ramsey, THS shifted its meeting place outside of

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[78] Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), chapter six, "The Southern Experience,"197-237.

[79] Toplovich, "Tennessee Historical Society at 150," 205.

[80] James Gettys McGready Ramsey (1797-1884) was born in Washington County (East Tennessee) where he received his education before beginning an apprenticeship in medicine. He obtained a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1819 and opened an office in Knoxville the next year. Ramsey pursued a medical practice, on and off, for most of his life while dabbling in farming, banking, and railroad promotion. In 1834 he supported the formation of the East Tennessee Historical and Antiquarian Society, which he served as recording secretary. He accumulated a vast storehouse of documents and relics at his estate, "Mecklenburg" (near Knoxville), which also served as the site for the library and museum of the East Tennessee Society. In 1853 Ramsey authored *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, his tribute to the state's history of early settlement. A staunch secessionist, Ramsey served in the Confederate Army as a treasury agent and field surgeon but the war

Nashville for the first (but not last) time. On 16 June 1874, the Society met at Staub's Opera House in Knoxville where President Ramsey called the meeting to order. At that meeting a THS circular, "To the People of Tennessee," made its debut. This committee-prepared document, designed to spell out the Society's objectives and goals, implored Tennesseans to donate historical items to THS. The Society sought books, pamphlets, manuscripts, newspaper files, and information on Indian culture. Interestingly, almost as an afterthought, the Society recommended the formation, in each county, of a "County Lyceum, or auxiliary society," a holdover from the days of SDK. The circular concluded with a plea of urgency. Many of the old settlers had passed on and there remained the problem of Tennesseans emigrating from the state "into the great Western Interior."[81]

Although THS returned to Nashville for subsequent meetings, Dr. Ramsey remained in Knoxville. Now in his late seventies, a crippling injury from a fall off a horse acerbated Ramsey's declining health. Still, the old antiquarian evinced a

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proved disastrous—a son was killed and Union troops burned Mecklenburg to the ground. The fire destroyed a library of four thousand volumes and the museum collection. In exile during and shortly after the war, Ramsey worked on his autobiography before returning to Knoxville in the early 1870s. He continued his life of public service, involving himself with medical societies, universities, and, of course, THS. The best biography of Ramsey is David Lawson Eubanks, "Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey of East Tennessee: A Career of Public Service" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1965). The Tennessee Historical Commission published Ramsey's autobiography in 1954, edited by William B. Hesseltine, *Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey—Autobiography and Letters* (reissued by the University of Tennessee Press in 2002). For an interesting look at the material culture of Ramsey's "Mecklenberg," see Charles H. Faulkner, *The Ramseys at Swan Pond: The Archaeology and History of an East Tennessee Farm* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008).

[81] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1. The Society's concern about emigration was justified. By 1860, for every immigrant entering Tennessee, there were three who left, making the state one of the slowest growing states in the Union on the eve of the Civil War. See Tommy W. Rogers, "Origin and Destination of Tennessee Migrants, 1850-1860," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 27 (Summer 1968): 118-122. After the war, migration out of the state grew worse, the 1870 census showing that half of all native born Tennesseans were living outside of Tennessee. For this, see Robert H. White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee 1869-1883* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1963), 658. Tennessee made a concerted effort to lure immigrants to the state through immigration societies, a state-run immigration bureau, and appointed agents, all of which failed miserably. For a detailed look at these efforts, see C. G. Belissary, "Tennessee and Immigration, 1865-1880," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 7 (September 1948): 229-248.

determination to do well, confessing to Lyman Draper in an 1874 letter: "The failure will mortify me the more as I never touched any public enterprise which did not succeed." In a later letter to Draper, Ramsey vowed "to galvanize the old body into new life and activity." Ramsey's admiration for Draper and the success of the Historical Society of Wisconsin stirred up the competitive spirit in the aging historian. "When I compare your achievements for Wisconsin with the little that has been effected for Tennessee," Ramsey admitted to Draper in 1873, "I blush and feel mortified, exceedingly so."[82]

Ramsey's desire to play catch-up with Draper and Wisconsin's historical society precipitated the surge of artifacts and documents that poured into the Society's holdings. Typically, the quantity of items outmatched the quality. Valuable correspondence of Andrew Jackson and John Sevier mingled with a whale's tooth and "the hammer with which George E. Miller, a clerk in the Union Bank at Jackson, Tenn. was killed (in the bank) of Feby. 3 rd., 1859."[83] From his bed at home, Ramsey communicated with THS through letters flowing with instructions and ideas, along with donations from his private collection. John M. Lea, the THS vice-president, presided over the Nashville meetings in Ramsey's absence, but seemed keen on following the dictates from East Tennessee.[84] Despite repeated attempts of Ramsey to step down as president of THS, Lea insisted that Ramsey remain the Society's head man, even suggesting that Ramsey hold the title of

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[82] J. G. M. Ramsey to Lyman Draper, 3 February 1873, 25 May 1874, and 8 July 1874, in Hesseltine, ed., *Ramsey Autobiography and Letters*, 273, 281-282.

[83] Tennessee Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1.

[84] John McCormick Lea (1818-1903) was a lawyer, born in East Tennessee, whose career encompassed several jobs: U. S. Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, 1842-1844; mayor of Nashville, 1848-1850; and a Davidson County Circuit Court Judge. Both he and Ramsey were born in Knoxville and that may partially explain Lea's devotion to Ramsey. Sadly, no one has compiled a biographical monograph on this interesting and pivotal character in Tennessee's history.

"honorary" president when Ramsey's health made him all but ineffective in 1882. Upon Ramsey's death in April 1884, the flag at the state Capitol flew at half mast, and at least a dozen THS members made the trip to Knoxville to attend the funeral.[85]

Inadequate funding and public apathy marred Ramsey's legacy. Receiving little public support or state monies, THS failed to publish any of their transactions—always a sign of a successful historical society. Still, Ramsey brought his unbridled enthusiasm to a faltering society and contributed most of the historical papers he had salvaged or collected since the Civil War, usually undertaking to organize them first. Ramsey's passion for collecting relics explained why THS put an unwarranted emphasis on objects over manuscripts at this time. Even Judge Lea cautioned Ramsey, on occasion, that historical documents were of more value than relics.[86] Ramsey felt it his patriotic and filial duty to tell the story of Tennessee through *his* vision of the state's history by collecting and preserving the materials *he* thought best told that story.[87]

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[85] Eubanks, "Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey of East Tennessee," 347-350. Details of the funeral can be found in the Knoxville *Daily Chronicle* of 15 April 1884. The *Chronicle* called the funeral procession "one of the largest ever witnessed in Knoxville."

[86] Ibid. Ramsey gave or secured for THS such items as the cane his grandfather used during the Revolutionary War, the desk used by his father as secretary of the Franklin Convention which met at Jonesboro (TN), a flag from the Mexican War, a military coat tailored by Andrew Johnson, autographs of famous Americans, old currency, and other items. After his death, his wife continued to present similar objects to the Society.

[87] For a good analysis of Ramsey's legacy, see Erin R. Lawrimore, "'Let us hasten to redeem the time that is lost': J. G. M. Ramsey's Role in the Collection and Promotion of Tennessee History," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 41 (Fall 2006), esp. pp. 431-434. What Eubanks, Hesseltine, and Lawrimore fail to emphasize, to any large degree, is the effect on THS of Ramsey's fervid attachment to the Confederacy. Ramsey's service during the Civil War, the fact that "Yankees" burned his home and killed a son, his justification of slavery, and his devotion to the Lost Cause spun a covering over THS that labeled the organization a strictly "southern" historical society. Ramsey almost persuaded THS to become a branch of the Confederate-minded Southern Historical Society See, for instance, THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 5, which records a 1878 THS meeting whereby the Society pledged its cooperation "in every way possible" to the Southern Historical Society

The year of Ramsey's death, 1884, not only marked a new age for THS but for all historical societies. In the summer of that year a handful of members of the American Social Science Association met at Saratoga, New York, to establish an organization of professors, teachers, and others interested in the advancement of history. According to one of the driving forces behind this new enterprise, Herbert Baxter Adams (a professor at Johns Hopkins University), the purpose of the organization was "the exchange of ideas and the widening of acquaintance, the discussion of methods and original papers."[88] That meeting spawned the American Historical Association [AHA], an institution that, from the beginning, became dominated by historians employed at colleges and universities whose objective consisted of defining their occupation as a profession. According to historian John Spencer Bassett, the year of AHA's formation marked a dividing point between two periods of historical endeavor, with the scientific spirit overtaking the patriotic school.[89] Perhaps even more telling, in 1884 the construction of a new facility for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia began, designed as a research library to serve the needs of professional, scientific research.[90]

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[88] Adams quoted in James J. Sheedan, "The AHA and Its Public—Part I," *Perspectives* (February 2005), available online at: http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2005/0502/0502pre1.cfm (accessed 14 July 2009). Sheedan obtained his material from an unpublished manuscript by David Van Tassel on AHA. Van Tassel did publish an article about the early years of AHA—see David D. Van Tassel, "From Learned Society to Professional Organization: The American Historical Association, 1884-1900," *American Historical Review* 89 (October 1984): 929-956. For a look at the AHA's influence on the writing of history, see Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past*, 171-179. It should be pointed out at this juncture that while THS corresponded with AHA and received literature from that organization, no evidence can be found that any THS member actually joined the AHA in the nineteenth century.

[89] John Spencer Bassett, *Middle Group of American Historians* (1917; Freeport, NY: Books of Libraries Press, 1966). Bassett (1867-1928) was a product of the scientific history, having studied at Duke University (then Trinity College) in North Carolina before receiving a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins under the tutelage of Herbert Baxter Adams.

[90] Henry D. Shapiro, "Putting the Past Under Glass: Preservation and the Idea of History in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Prospects* 10 (1985), 265.

What did this new professional, scientific research entail and what did it mean for historical societies like THS? The premise behind the "new history" of the late nineteenth century declared the establishment of history as a science, a philosophy promoted in Europe (especially at German universities). Scientific discourse and historical discourse belonged to the same logical order. Historians now employed scientific terms and metaphors to drive home their points—mainly, that historical science had to strive for truth more than interpretation. American students at German universities brought home this Rankean method, named after German historian Leopold von Ranke, the leading expositor of this hypothesis.[91] The Rankean method placed a reliance on primary sources, an emphasis on narrative history, and a strong focus on politics. Facts now took precedence over philosophy and theory. History could no longer be concerned about teaching a moral lesson. Historians took to "dissecting" historical documents in libraries, archives, and historical societies as if in a laboratory.[92] With the advent of new-breed "scientific" historians, came a clash between historical societies, possessive of their holdings, and the brashness of "professional" historians who demanded access to materials. Some societies began to realize that access to materials might affect the willingness of potential donors. [93]

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[91] Philip Jerome Borden, "Rite Words in Rote Order: Rankean History in America, 1870-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1968), chapter one, esp. pp. 7-12. By the 1870s, there were a thousand American students in Germany—a figure that doubled in the next decade. See ibid., 112. For more on the influence of German universities on American studies in the nineteenth century, see Sigmund Skard, *The American Myth and the European Mind: American Studies in Europe 1776-1960* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1961), 29-30, 48-51.

[92] Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 72-76.

[93] Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies*, 20-21. Whitehill offers this telling example of the council of the Massachusetts Historical Society, who acknowledged the friction between historical societies

Suddenly, young professional historians started banging on the doors of learned societies not used to having their precious collections scrutinized. Historical societies needed a systemization for arranging, cataloging, and securing materials—factors never strongly considered before. If history, indeed, required professionalization, then historical societies needed to be more—what is the word—"professional."

At THS, Ramsey's death brought about the ascendency of John M. Lea to the presidency. Lea's priorities included a new working space—the Library Rooms being completely cramped—and the ever-present specter of funding. In a flourish of fate and finagling, both issues abruptly resolved themselves. In 1886, the Society obtained permanent quarters at the Watkins Institute in Nashville—a building constructed through the dying wishes of reputedly the richest man in Nashville, Samuel Watkins. The three commissioners suggested by Watkins to equip the building—James Whitworth, John M. Lea, and William P. Cooper—all hailed as THS members. Another windfall, in the form of $4,000, fell into the Society's coffers during the previous year when another Nashville philanthropist, Colonel M. H. Howard, bequeathed that sum to THS.

In terms of acquisitions, THS still invested its resources in obtaining an array of "relics" and historical documents. In 1881, the Society received its most (arguably) trivial contribution: Mrs. Margery Settle of Lebanon, Tennessee, brought two eggs found in the roof of an old house, recently torn down in Lebanon, "evidently placed there while

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and scientific historians in 1893: "While it is our duty to see to the careful preservation of our possessions, while we must safeguard their use with such precautions as may insure their safety, our policy as to the manuscripts in our hands should be thoroughly generous. This only will secure the continued reception by us of valuable manuscripts. The rooms of this Society are not now the only possible place of deposit for family papers and historical material. Testators and donors can find other repositories and will do so, if we do not let our light shine before men."

the house was being built forty or fifty years ago."[94] But by the 1890s, THS records indicate that procurements became less trivial in nature and more of an historical value. Books, newspapers, private papers, portraits, government publications, Indian artifacts, and family Bibles overtook the more mundane items that still managed to sneak in—an Italian calendar for 1892 and a portion of brick from the Coliseum in Rome, for instance. Perhaps the professionalism espoused by such organizations as AHA infiltrated into the acquisition policies of southern historical societies.

Although John Lea retained his post as THS president for the rest of the century, the driving force behind the Society fell into different hands. General Gates P. Thruston and A. S. Colyar exemplified the type of new, professional men who permeated Victorian America and organizations such as THS.[95] Anglo-Saxonism and Protestanism characterize the Victorian culture, along with urbanization, bourgeois leanings, and a capitalistic nature (steady work, punctuality, etc.). There was also a strong emphasis on managing time and maintaining a sense of order (it was in 1883 that the United States

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[94] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 8.

[95] Gates Philip Thruston (1835-1912) was born in Ohio and studied law in Cincinnati before serving in the Civil War where he rose to the rank brevet brigadier general in the Union Army. He settled in Nashville after the war and married into Nashville society. He worked as a lawyer, banker, and a partner in the State Insurance Company. Despite his being a Yankee, Thruston had the capacity to ingratiate himself into the Nashville community, joining several civic organizations. He had a passion for Native American artifacts and amassed a world-renown antiquities collection which he left to Vanderbilt University before his death in 1913. See Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 107-108.

Arthur St. Clair Colyar (1818-1907) was born in Jonesboro (TN), studied law and established a practice in Coffee County where he eventually acquired a plantation of 1,000 acres and about thirty slaves. He served in the Confederate Congress during the Civil War. He moved to Nashville after the war and established a large cotton mill there. He also ran the Tennessee Coal and Railroad Company—the largest corporation in the South—expanding his interests in the 1880s by becoming director of the North Carolina & St. Louis Railroad. At different periods he edited two Nashville newspapers and belonged to several clubs. In 1904 he published a two-volume biography of Andrew Jackson. See Thomas Woodrow Davis, "Arthur S. Colyar and the New South, 1860-1905" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1962).

adopted standard time zones).[96] Gates and Colyar fit these criteria. Having held important positions in the Civil War, they both benefitted from learning the skills of conceiving and managing large-scale enterprises. The war provided the institutional models for the new, managerial social order through the generation of vast human and material resources. This spawned a new generation of effectual entrepreneurs, engineers, and managers.[97]

Thurston and Colyar brought their penchant for organization and getting-things-done approach to THS. Both possessed a take-charge attitude that seemed to counter Judge Lea's nonchalant style of presentation. G. P. Thruston rarely missed a meeting during the 1880s and 1890s, often presiding on committees appointed to tackle important Society issues. Meeting minutes also show him as a member always eager to make a motion before the body, including those concerning the subject of assorting, arranging, and cataloging the Society's expanding collection. He also initiated the THS policy regarding permanent ownership of relics and documents. Thruston's deep interest in aboriginal history sparked several presentations and demonstrations on the topic which, in turn, led to a book. A. S. Colyar's attendance at THS meetings did not match Thruston's regularity, but the lawyer-turned-businessman made his presence felt when he did participate. Colyar sat in on many committee decisions, such as removing the remains of John Sevier's body from Alabama to Tennessee, and the decision to urge legislative action regarding history books in schools. The lawyer side of Colyar

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[96] Daniel Walker Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture," *American Quarterly* 27 (December 1975): 507-532.

[97] Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 294.

prompted him to introduce papers on a number of areas of study ranging from the life of Sevier (to whom he was genealogically tied) to a talk about the wives of the leading men in history. The timeliness of the latter topic dovetailed nicely with the Society's decision to allow the election of women as THS members—this occurred in 1891 with Sarah Polk receiving the first notification.

The ever-present Anson Nelson died in 1892, but not before the Society conferred the office of vice-president on him in 1888. Referred to by Lea as the Society's *Fidus Achates* ("trusty friend"), a reticent Nelson thanked the body for his promotion saying it represented his greatest ambition. General Thruston took over Nelson's corresponding secretary duties in 1888 and the vice-presidency upon Nelson's demise. As for John Lea, he presided over the meetings with his usual dignity and reserve, every now and then regaling the audience with his anecdotes of Andrew Jackson—it was hard to find a man in the 1890s that *actually* met and talked with Old Hickory on more than one occasion.

The Society had money in the bank, although a degree of bitterness over the state assembly's constant refusal concerning funding paled over the organization. THS enjoyed the surroundings of their own quarters, despite the nagging reality that even the Watkins Institute proved too confining for the Society's collections. Public access to presentations and exhibits escalated dramatically, as did newspaper coverage. Attendance at the monthly meetings increased during the last two decades of the century—almost as many as twenty or thirty on certain occasions—with an average of about a dozen members taking their seats. A major cataloging undertaking occurred in 1895, the Society implementing the new-fangled "card file" system. In the next year, THS made an agreement to have the *American Historical Magazine* serve as the

Society's official publication—the fulfillment of a dream stemming back to the days of TAS and SDK. The Society also played a conspicuous part in the 1897 festivities of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, a world's-fair type of celebration marking the state's one-hundredth anniversary.

At the end of the century, THS marked its own anniversary of fifty years, looking back to a period of some successes and some failures. Ahead, the Society faced the prospect of the new, scientific-history proponents challenging the tenets of the old school historical societies whose major goal remained to collect and preserve the past. But THS felt gratified knowing they established an institution capable of preserving the past throughout a future-oriented century.

Success of the Society founded in 1849 has been built on previous attempts by TAs and SDK to procure and preserve the history of Tennessee.[98] All three of these affiliations had, as their inspiration, the museums, libraries, lyceums, "cabinets," reading rooms, and debating societies of antebellum America. From our perspective, an historical society in the nineteenth century contained elements of all these consortiums. This disparity helps to explain the diverse interests—and collections—of historical

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[98] Many historical societies claimed "forerunners." For example, the Buffalo Historical Society, founded in 1862, traced its origin to the Buffalo Lyceum (formed in 1830) by city notables. The Lyceum sponsored lectures on various subjects while collecting geological specimens. A fire at the home of one of its members, who housed the Lyceum's specimens, ended the society. The Lyceum's constitution stated the organizational goals to be the "mutual improvement in useful knowledge, the advancement of popular education, and the promotion of science generally." [Note how similar these goals were to those of Tennessee's SDK.] See Frank H. Severance, *Studies of the Niagara Frontier* (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo Historical Society, 1911), 326-328.

Buffalo's destructive fire recalls the situation of the East Tennessee Historical Society and its evolution. This organization, originally titled the East Tennessee and Antiquarian Society, established itself in 1834 at Knoxville for the purpose "of procuring and perpetuating all that relates to the early History and Antiquities of Tennessee." J. G. M. Ramsey, the recording secretary, kept the Society's holdings at his home which was destroyed in the Civil War. The Society disbanded only to be revived in 1883 under the new moniker of the East Tennessee Historical Society. After twenty years, this organization lapsed into inactivity, reforming once again in 1925. See W. Todd Grace, "East Tennessee Historical Society" in West, ed., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*, 272.

societies beyond the scope of studying local or state history. In the circumstances of their evolution; the wording of their mission statements; their membership makeup; and even in their name changes, these societies shared commonalities inseparably linking them.

The fact that practically all of these organizations utilized the word "Society" in their titles reflects an attempt to recreate, as a group, what they could not replicate as individuals in "society" at large. Not everyone could join a society like THS—only the "better" people—meaning white, male, and Anglo-Saxon Protestant (although Rabbi J. S. Goldammer remained a loyal member for many years). This allowed for a brotherhood of like-minded individuals, minimizing the risk that radical concepts could interfere with the business at hand. Rules and regulations ensured order and propriety, and improper behavior entailed consequences ranging from fines to expulsion from the group. The moral code of conduct often subverted by the "real world" reinstated itself in this home away from home. Even the notion of auxiliary branches stemming from a "parent" association lent a familial aspect to these organizations.

Meeting and working as a group required leadership, and THS, like other historical societies, came under the auspices of men whose agendas guided the Society through their operations. The fact that John Haywood "used" the Tennessee Antiquarian Society for his own purposes is not to be quickly condemned, for others did it as well. Gathering and collecting historical evidence is of no use unless something is done with it. Haywood and TAS *did* something with it and, in the process, expanded the base of knowledge for their contemporaries. However, the SDK lacked forceful directorship and, consequently, fell short of its varied goals. At a later time when progress ran rampant

across the nation, shattering the ranks of economic and social uniformity, voluntary associations like SDK offered a renewed sense of order and morality.

The Tennessee Historical Society formed at Nashville in the midst of unparalleled prosperity in the region—perhaps too prosperous, as THS lasted only a few years before apathy and the distractions of a material world temporarily shut it down. Revived in the late 1850s under A. W. Putnam, the Society succeeded in establishing itself as an institution bent on feverishly acquiring any and all historical items, often at the expense of quantity over quality. The ruinous effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction halted the progress of THS until the 1870s, when J. G. M. Ramsey, an antiquarian of the old school, recharged the Society back into activity. Ramsey's own passion for collecting infused the Society to new heights of acquisition, allowing for some extremely valuable finds to see the light of day, as well as relics better suited to the attics of the past. Ramsey's demise coincided with a major shift in the ideology of historical thinking. Adopting the current, more "professional" viewpoint, THS struggled to preserve its patrician roots while, at the same time, allowing for some technological and organizational changes.

The question posed at the beginning of this chapter as to what motivated the men of THS concerned Judge John M. Lea in 1886. At the annual meeting of THS, on May 7 of that year, he presented a talk reflecting on the Society's past members and their accomplishments. Admitting he knew little of the "science of the mind," Lea credited "self-love or altruism—to coin a newly coined word," as the possible answer to the Society's motivation. Lea turned to the spiritual side of human nature, "which finds its pleasure and duty in promoting education, in patronizing the liberal arts, and in diffusing

throughout the world the blessings of our Christian civilization."[99] Here, Lea reasoned, existed "this principle which inspires patriotism and serves as the incitements to every noble deed which has illumined the page of history." Lea referred to the work of historical societies as "this most intellectual and interesting field of labor."

Lea's rhetoric idealized the driving forces behind the conception of an historical society in nineteenth century Tennessee. The agendas promoted by THS and its predecessors, TAS and SDK, reflected a more realistic approach to the pedantic mien of the state. John Haywood's TAS, for instance, popularized the study of natural science through Haywood's publications. The Society attempted to erase the stigma of Tennessee's status as a "western" state by flaunting the area's natural history and focusing on its unique antiquities. The SDK, with its emphasis on public lectures and auxiliaries scattered across the state, mirrored the Jacksonian ideals of democratic suffrage and manifest destiny. The laisser-faire attitude of the era was tempered, however, by strict adherence to structure and control. The formation of THS at the mid-century point initiated an aggressive acquisition program that matched the inquisitive nature of its members—men bent on collecting and preserving *anything* to do with Tennessee's past. Mixed with the relics and artifacts of dubious value were priceless documents of the state's heritage. With the advent of scientific history, the professionalism of societies such as THS came under scrutiny. At the end of the nineteenth century, Society members, while consenting to some technological innovations, stood by their shibboleth of preservation being their sole incentive for the organization's existence. But there was much more to the story.

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[99] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 13. Subsequent references in this paragraph are from this file.

CHAPTER III

MATERIAL CULTURE AND PUBLIC MEMORY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Henry Mercer (1856-1930), an archaeologist of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, collected old tools. His extensive collection of agricultural tools and implements became the foundation for the museum at the Bucks County Historical Society, a society he helped establish while working at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Mercer, who also dabbled in ceramics, thought of himself as an historian who pursued history through objects. He scoffed at the traditional military/political histories of the type George Bancroft penned. Instead, Mercer focused on the histories of the ordinary laborer. His now-famous 1897 exhibit, "Tools of the Nation Maker," displayed the simple implements of the American pioneer. For Mercer, objects had a meaning, and history could be systematized and ordered through those objects.[1] Today, Henry Mercer would be known as a material culturist.

Objects have always played a central role in the memories of cultures and individuals. Such artifacts survive in ways unintended by their makers and owners to become evidence on which interpretations of the past can be reconstructed. In and of themselves, objects may be deemed unworthy of direct contemplation, but they can be used to frame social networks. That is, artifacts serve as "the material aspects of the

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[1] Steven Conn, *Museums and Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 162-173. Mercer was also part of the folklore movement that began in the 1880s, the period when the American Folklore Society emerged. For a clear example of the fruits of that movement in material culture studies, see Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).

relationships in which people act together, the object of the 'attitude' engendered by their interest and ideals."[2] "Human-made things are far more than mere tools," one historian simply noted, "they are complex bundles of individual, social, and cultural meanings grafted onto something that can be seen, touched, and owned."[3]

While Henry Mercer reflected on the old tools he collected, and pondered on their true significance, others looked at past events much in much the same manner. Events are human-generated and can be "used" to interpret the past. In 1889, on the site of a Civil War battlefield in Franklin, Tennessee, the dedication of an academy brought forth an argument by former Tennessee governor William Bate for the necessity of written histories about the Confederacy. Bate concluded his address with a plea for the construction of more public monuments:

> Then, not only let Southern pens write truthful Confederate history, but let the chisel of sculptors make our marble speak and the brush of artists make the canvas glow in the preservation of Confederate history. . . . That is the way to teach our children and our children's children the history of our great struggle, and make them remember with pride the noble deeds of their Confederate ancestry and reserve their memoires as patriots and heroes.[4]

His speech illustrates the power of public memory, which Richard Cox refers to as "the perceptions and uses of the past by the public—both government and citizens."[5]

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[2] Alan Radley, "Artefacts, Memory and a Sense of the Past," in *Collective Remembering*, eds., David Middleton and Derek Edwards (London, UK: Sage Publications, 1990), 46-59 (quote on p. 56).

[3] Ann Smart Martin, "Material Things and Cultural Meanings: Notes on the Study of Early American Material Culture," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 53 (January 1996), 5-6.

[4] *Address Delivered by General Wm. B. Bate, on the Occasion of Dedicating the "Battle-Ground Academy," on the Field of Franklin. Franklin, Tennessee, Saturday, October 5, 1889* (Franklin, TN: Citizens of Franklin, 1889), 15. William B. Bate (1826-1905) was a U. S. Senator at the time of this speech. A general in the Civil War, he also fought in the Mexican War.

[5] Richard J. Cox, "The Concept of Pubic Memory and Its Impact on Archival Pubic Programming," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), 122.

According to Paul Shackel, "public memory can be viewed as tactical power that controls social settings." He added that it is "more of a reflection of present political and social relations than a true reconstruction of the past."[6]

This chapter draws on studies of material culture and public memory to examine the eclectic array of acquisitions collected by THS and its predecessors in the context of the meaning these societies bestowed on their collections.[7] In addition, it surveys those acquisitions in terms of how societies obtained their collections, and how they were preserved. Also, this chapter looks at how these societies promulgated their version of the past to the general public through these acquisitions. As private gentlemen's clubs, historical societies, in their own way, managed to influence the way society looked at their past—through historical writings they produced; circulars they published; portraits they exhibited; and commemorations they sponsored. Progress, order, and patricianism remain reoccurring ideas throughout the chapter.

At the annual meeting of the Virginia Historical & Philosophical Society on 6 January 1834, the Society announced its acquisitions for the past year. The list of donations included geology reports, petrified shells, Indian antiquities, various mineral

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[6] Paul A. Shackel, *Memory on Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek: CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 11, 13.

[7] Some of the works on material culture utilized as background for this chapter include: Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture—A Research Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985); Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America, 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, eds., *History From Things: Essays on Material Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); and Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman, eds., *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000).

Some of the works dealing with public memory consulted in this chapter are: David Thelen, ed., *Memory and American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), chapter two; John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Diane F. Britton, "Public History and Public Memory," *Public Historian* 19 (Summer 1997): 11-23.

specimens, the fangs of a rattlesnake, several manuscripts, a copy of John Marshall's *Life of Washington*, and "a fungus growing upon decayed Sugar trees."[8] The increased interest, during the early republic, in antiquities and natural science explains the reasoning behind accepting most of these items. With a tradition stemming back to Renaissance Europe, nineteenth-century historical societies gathered up these cabinets-of-curiosities articles to fill their glass cases in the hopes of impressing their fellow antiquarians. To their eyes, these oddities represented a deistic sense of nature's order.

When the Historical Society of Delaware released a circular in 1864, requesting artifacts and other historical objects, gifts came in on the order of a piece of the boat in which George Washington crossed the Delaware River during the Revolutionary War and the bow and arrow of a Comanche chief killed by a friend of the donor near El Paso.[9] In particular, the piece of Washington's boat bears scrutiny. While there is no indication of the exact size of this piece of wood, or any recorded reactions to its significance, there are some definite inferences that can be postulated. First, the geographic attachment to the incident at hand—Washington crossing the Delaware before the Battle of Trenton in December 1776 occurred in New Jersey, but the Historical Society of Delaware could make a connection (albeit, a thin one) for the historic event having taken place on the *Delaware* River. In addition, Emanuel Leutze's famous 1851 painting of the crossing

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[8] William M. E. Rachal, ed., "Early Records of the Virginia Historical Society," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 67 (April 1959), 192-194. The Society also accepted "a sample of Uranium" but ultimately rejected Dr. Benjamin Dolbeare's offer of a bagful of rattlesnakes from Randolph County (records do not indicate if the snakes were alive or not). See Virginius Cornick Hall, Jr., "The Virginia Historical Society: An Anniversary Narrative of Its First Century and a Half," *Virginia Magazine of History & Biography* 90 (January 1982), 14. Hall wrote of the uranium that it was "disquieting to think [that it] may have been emitting radiation in the Society's rooms for the past century and a half."

[9] Richard C. Simmons, "The Historical Society of Delaware 1864-1964," *Delaware History* 11 (April 1964), 8.

created an iconic image in the public's mind, increasing popular interest in the incident. The most salient feature of the object, however, involved its association to George Washington and the American Revolution. The United States emerged from the turbulent birthing known as the Revolutionary War and, in the process, fashioned a mythology based on ideological inspiration and heroic deeds. For historical societies of the nineteenth century, the American Revolution became *the* past most worthy of emulation and preservation.

Fifty years after the "birth" of the United States, the unprecedented growth and staggering prosperity of the new nation weakened rather than strengthened the ties to the Revolutionary era. Indeed, the material advantages enjoyed by most Americans in their own time made them feel anxious about their relationship to earlier, heroic eras. The founders of the Historical Society of Pennsylvanian in the 1820s were prompted not by "a sense of continuity with the nation's Revolutionary past but rather a fear of discontinuity, a sense of distance from that history."[10] That "distance" implied a deterioration of national morale and the ruination of republican institutions. To counter this, a revival of patriotism, prompted by the rereading of the personal sacrifices of the nation's founders, needed to transpire. Education in science, literature, and politics would keep an informed citizenry learned enough to appreciate the offerings of the past. As one contributor to a New England publication stated, Americans "are bound, by the most solemn obligations, to maintain, unimpaired, the rich inheritance bequeathed to them by their fathers."[11]

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[10] Barbara Clark Smith, "The Authority of History: The Changing Face of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 (January 1990), 44-45. These are Smith's words.

[11] A., "The Perilous Condition of the Republic," *New-England Magazine* 1 (October 1831), 289.

The generation born and socialized in the period from the mid-1820s to the Civil War, while the memory of the Revolution remained fresh, represented the "sons" to the Revolutionary "fathers." But in the 1820s the fathers began to rapidly die out (Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in 1826, for example), and a feeling of an era being closed enveloped the nation. The sons eulogized the fathers in an attempt to strengthen the psychological ties between the two generations, the newer generation deeming it their duty to preserve the achievements of the older generation. At the same time, the sons wanted to carve a niche for themselves—a path that lead mostly only to wealth or political power. Thus, the newer generation defined their role as preservationists, not creators. Charles Francis Adams said in 1834, "It is for us to preserve and not to create."[12]

The sentiments of Adams sound uncannily like those of the historical societies of the nineteenth century which insisted their main objective consisted in preserving, not writing or interpreting, history. The monumental task of recording the noble deeds of the heroic age belonged to better-equipped men to tackle—historians such as George Bancroft, for instance. Historians of Bancroft's ilk knew the pressure they worked under, especially as they witnessed the Revolutionary generation vanishing from their sight. "The Men of the American revolution are no more," Bancroft sadly proclaimed in 1845, "That age of creative power has passed away."[13] The sense of urgency to recover the recollections, artifacts, and narratives of the Revolutionary generation transferred to the

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[12] George B. Forgie, *Patricide in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979). Adams quoted on p. 67.

[13] George Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 444. Bancroft made these statements as the opening to an oration delivered at the commemoration, in June 1845, of the death of Andrew Jackson.

"western" historical societies, whose members could claim little or no involvement in the American Revolution. Instead, their emphasis lay on the pioneer generation, the "Frontier Fathers" who took on mythical proportions in the narrative of western conquest and settlement. In 1834 Tennessee, J. G. M. Ramsey implored his listeners of the East Tennessee Historical and Antiquarian Society to aid in compiling a civil history of the state through the narratives of older citizens. "In few years more the last of these venerable relics of another age will have retired from these scenes of earth," Ramsey lamented, "Let us hasten to redeem the time that is lost."[14]

There is another element to the acquisition of the piece of Washington's boat by the Historical Society of Delaware—timing. The artifact, sent to the Society during the Civil War, prompts a comparison between the two conflicts. The Civil War, at this time, seemed to be the nation's darkest hour and an indication of a divided nation. The American Revolution, on the other hand, created and unified a nation.[15] At the onset of the Civil War, Americans wondered if the nation could produce leaders on the scale of a George Washington—heroes who can only be chiseled out in times requiring heroes. "If we have ceased to produce great men," pondered one New Englander, "it is because we have not, since we became a nation, been forced to pay the terrible price at which alone

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[14] J. G. M. Ramsey, "Address Delivered Before the 'East Tennessee Historical and Antiquarian Society,' at its First Annual Meeting in Knoxville, May 5th, 1834," *Journal of East Tennessee* 61 (1991), 111. Ramsey's reference to older citizens as "relics" was no insult; on the contrary, it was meant to be a high compliment. I coined the term "Frontier Fathers" to make the distinction *and* connection between the founding fathers and the early generation of Tennessee leadership that forged settlement and statehood. See Tom Kanon, "Frontier Fathers and Martial Sons: Indian Hating on the Frontier Prior to the War of 1812" (M.A. thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2003). Actually, Tennessee did have a claim to the Revolutionary War via the battle at King's Mountain (discussed in chapter five of this dissertation).

[15] Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 256-259. Taking Kammen's ideas one step further, it is interesting how American history has transformed the American Revolution into a justified war against evil oppressors, while the Civil War has been portrayed (for the most part) as an unjustifiable conflict.

they can be bought."[16] In the South, Confederates claimed George Washington as one of their own, using genealogical links to explain their role as guardians of the Revolutionary tradition. To them, it was the North that had corrupted the principles of the founders.[17] Holding a piece of wood from the boat Washington used to cross the Delaware conjured a multitude of meanings, depending on *who* held it and *when* they looked at it.

The bow and arrow of a Comanche chief killed by a friend of the donor presents their own interesting connotations. The association with Native American culture qualified the artifacts as objects of antiquity, but the fact that they were weapons increased the significance of the items. Tied to the American conquest of the continent, warring Indians played the role of villains in the saga for the subjugation of the wilderness and the valiant attempt to civilize and Christianize the West. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the image of the "bloodthirsty" savage transformed into the "noble" savage—a proud but doomed race (at least east of the Mississippi). The bow and arrow taken from a dead Comanche, killed by a white person, items now residing in the collection of an historical society, became tangible proof of the Euro-American superiority over the fated American Indian.

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[16] J. R. Lowell, "Self-Possession vs. Prepossession," *Atlantic Monthly* 8 (December 1861), 761-763.

[17] For a look at how the Confederacy justified and promoted their actions through the use of the Revolutionary tradition, see Anne Sarah Rubin, "Seventy-six and Sixty-one: Confederates Remember the American Revolution," in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, ed., W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 85-105. Rubin keenly points out that connecting the American Revolution and the Civil War placed the issue of slavery in the background where it did not have to be dealt. For example, in his speech in Franklin, Tennessee in 1889, ex-Confederate general William Bate reminded his audience that the South had "an equal share of sacrifices made and glory won by revolutionary ancestry." He mentions Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and George Washington as southern patriots and cites the Battle of King's Mountain as having turned the tide of war: "Such assured historic facts nerved the Confederate arm to deeds of valor, as it struck for home-rule, or local self-government, under the Constitution." *Address Delivered by General Wm. B. Bate*, 9-10.

Even as the writers of the early Indian wars sensationalized their narratives of Indian cruelty and bloodlust, there emerged a kind of sympathy toward Native Americans that bordered on white guilt.[18] Of course, this compassion fell short of any attempt to actually accept Native Americans on *their* terms, particularly when most of the Euro-American population considered Indians unsalvageable. Efforts to portray Indians as a race with a valid, living culture—such as the Smithsonian Institute display at Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial—dramatically backfired.[19]

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[18] No better example of this can be found than in John Frost's 1850s book on the early Indian conflicts. In a narrative that depicts Indian warfare with all its horrors (accompanied by many illustrations), Frost offers this plea in his preface: "Unless an enlightened public sentiment shall be awakened, and the benevolent exertions of the American people shall be interposed to civilize and reclaim these tribes, there is every reason to fear that they will ultimately become extinct. . . . But while they are regarded as enemies, possessing desirable lands, or as mere hunters of furs for white people, subjects of conquest or speculation merely, there is little hope for the poor Indian." Frost then concludes his preface with a moral lesson to be learned from reading the book: "The qualities which we abhor in a hostile Indian are not peculiar to Indians. They are possessed by all men, they exist in all societies. Civilization modifies, perhaps lessens them in the white man; and if by exhibiting the evils of their unlimited license in the poor Indian, we could teach our own people to prize the blessings of civilization; if we could induce the young to apply those blessings to the extirpation of their own wild passions, then would the moral of our 'Thrilling Adventures' be complete." John Frost, *Thrilling Adventures Among the Indians: Comprising the Most Remarkable Personal Narratives of Events in the Early Indian Wars, as Well as of Incidents in the Most Recent Indian Hostilities in Mexico and Texas* (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1854), 3-4, 10-11.

Others were not as sympathetic as Frost. Noted nineteenth-century physician Charles Caldwell predicted extinction for a race he deemed incapable of becoming civilized: "The native bent of Caucasians is to civilization. Of the North American Indians, the reverse is true. Savagism, a roaming life, and a home in the forest, are as natural to them, and as essential to their existence, as to the buffalo, or the bear. Civilization is destined to exterminate them, in common with the wild animals among which they have lived, and on which they have subsisted. . . . Every effort hitherto made to civilize and educate the Indians, has but deteriorated them, and tended to annihilate them as a people. And such, from their moral constitution, must continue to be the case, until the race shall become extinct." See Charles Caldwell, *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race*, 2nd ed. (Cincinnati: J. A. and U. P. James, 1852), 80. Unfortunately, Caldwell's position seemed to be the more prominent one in nineteenth-century America.

[19] The idea to have an exhibit that favorably portrayed the American Indian included a plan to have living natives come to the Centennial to demonstrate crafts, dances, and customs. Congressional rejection of funding stymied this idea and, instead, the Smithsonian chose to crowd Indian artifacts together in a haphazard fashion with weapons and hideous mannequin portrayals. Thus, the display incorporated most of the white prejudices against the Indian and treated the Indian as if he were no longer living. See Robert A. Trennert, Jr., "A Grand Failure: The Centennial Indian Exhibition of 1876," *Prologue* 6 (Summer 1974): 118-129; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 24-27; and Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Expansion of Everyday Life 1860-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 267-268.

Merged with the story of frontier conflict is the notion of Indians as an impediment to American progress. In the November 1828 issue of the *Southern Review*, one contributor observed: "We can perceive neither justice, nor wisdom, nor humanity, in arresting the progress of order and science, that unproductive and barren wastes may be reserved for the roaming barbarian."[20] Thirty years later Democrat expansionist Caleb Cushing proclaimed to the Virginia Agricultural Society:

> Where is Powhatan? Where Massasoit? Where Sassacus? Is not the occupation of any portion of the earth by those competent to hold and till it, a providential law of national life? Can you say to the tide that it ought not to flow, or the rain to fall? I reply, *it must*! And so it is with well-constituted, and, therefore, progressive and expansive nations. They cannot help advancing; it is the condition of their existence.[21]

Most Americans preferred the dreams of the future than the history of the past.

For most of the nineteenth century, antique objects were admired not for themselves but for their association with famous people, places, events, or the foreign and exotic. Mid-century charity fairs and bazaars featured alleged items such as George Washington's hair or cane, Voltaire's blanket, Napoleon's chair, an American Indian pipe, and nails from a Pompeian house. All the objects in the "New England Kitchen" of the Old Log Cabin exhibit at the 1876 Centennial were associated with famous people: John Alden's desk, Governor Endicott's folding chair, a silver pitcher used by Lafayette, and the cradle of the first child born on the *Mayflower*.[22]

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[20] Cited in Arthur Alphonse Ekirch, Jr., *The Idea of Progress in America, 1815-1860* (1944; reprint, New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 42, 63.

[21] Ibid., 63. Emphasis is original.

[22] Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers: The Lives and Careers, the Deals, the Finds, the Collections of Men and Women Who Were Responsible for the Changing Taste in American Antiques, 1850-1930* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), xii, 4-9, 15. The Delaware Historical Society's piece of wood from Washington's boat held a sense of fascination because of its connection to a person (George Washington)

A writer for the 27 April 1889 issue of *Harper's Weekly* tried to answer the question as to *why* such objects, with vague historical links, should be treasured:

> In this hard matter-of-fact world, it is well that one should idealize something, be it the sword a hero has worn or the spurs he drove into his horse's flanks when he urged on his steed fighting for a just cause. The shreds of cloth worked with gold, though stained and tarnished, are more then mere shoulder straps. They are the real live pictures, the active illustrations, of a national drama.[23]

Fittingly, this report came from a review of an exhibition of relics at New York's Metropolitan Museum for the centennial celebration of Washington's inauguration.

The remarks about artifacts being "the real live pictures" and "the active illustrations" are the key to this interpretation of the idealization of historic objects. In a world where the story of the national drama confined itself to the spoken word (speeches, sermons, etc.) and the written word (books, poems, etc.), limitations on the visual aspects were striking. Paintings, murals, woodcut illustrations, and, later, photography could take the nineteenth-century viewer to the event or place depicted, but with a three-dimensional object, one might actually touch history, feel history, and connect to history, perhaps even escape to history.

Before the founding of the Tennessee Historical Society in 1849, a Nashville newspaper published an editorial concerning the upcoming formation of the organization. In it, the editor discussed how society at the time "looked" at historical relics:

> No one can look upon such fragments of the mighty past without deep emotion.—Preserved with a care worthy of the associations connected with it,

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and an event (a famous battle in the Revolutionary War). The Comanche bow and arrow probably fit into the "foreign and exotic" category.

[23] Ibid., 48-49. Compare this analysis with one from the late twentieth century on the study of artifacts. See David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 156.

> there is to be found in the archives of one of the these Societies the antiquated gun-lock which almost decided the fate of that Indian Supremacy which recognized as its last rallying cry the war-shout of King Philip, of Pokanoket; and gazing upon this then potent, but now corroded relic of the past, what reflections arise in the mind, when we consider that by aid of it, a voice was stilled which thrilled through the forests of New England to rally the red-men for a last struggle to sustain their waning empire. [24]

The editorial gets bogged down in the overly dramatic style of writing, but the message clearly indicates that historical analysis (at least, in the modern sense) did not apply to relics of the past—emotion did. The power of the rusted gun-lock gave every indication of being more potent in memory than when it had been used two centuries earlier to kill Indians.

The power of the past transmitted through historic relics also manifested itself in historic sites. Benjamin Lossing compiled materials in the early 1850s for his massive *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, spending five months visiting the battlefields of the Revolutionary War. The inspiration for Lossing's opus occurred in 1848 when he came across an old stone stairway cut into a Connecticut valley. An aged Revolutionary War veteran explained to Lossing that the stairway had been used by General Israel Putnam to escape the British. At that moment, Lossing "felt an irrepressible desire to seek and find such mementos of the great conflict for freedom and independence, wherever they exist, and to snatch their lineaments from the grasp of Decay before it should be too late."[25] Places as artifacts spurred the imagination of history seekers and souvenir hunters alike. During the two-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the Jamestown

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[24] *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, 27 April 1849.

[25] Quoted in Alexander Davidson, Jr., "How Benson J. Lossing Wrote His 'Field Books' of the Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Civil War," *Papers of the Biographical Society of America* 32 (1938), 58.

founding in 1857, visitors made off with chunks of slabs from the old cemetery and pieces of brick from the old church tower.[26]

In terms of place as artifact, no other historic site matched George Washington's home, Mount Vernon—indeed, the site verged on sacredness to its visitors. In 1831 one such caller, Hungarian nationalist Sandor Farkas, made the pilgrimage to Mount Vernon, a locale he called "a sacred place in America frequented by citizens and foreigners full of noble feelings."[27] Farkas visited Washington's tomb, which consisted of a vault with a brick front and gate, overgrown with tufts of grass and surrounded by trees stripped so bare that there was a sign imploring relic-seekers to spare the trees. Despite this warning, Farkas broke off a cedar bough and gathered a bouquet of holly (after "rewarding" the Negro guide). The vault itself had been closed for some time due to visitors chipping away at the coffin. Farkas recalled his thoughts as he stood before the tomb:

> There flashed through my mind America's suffering and struggle, its triumphant happy present, and rich legacy to mankind. I felt my heart pound. The man in front of whose earthly remains we stood played an enormous role in all of this. Only the cool counsel of reason kept me from prostrating myself before his grave.[28]

Farkas also noted the dilapidated condition of the estate—a situation counter to the esteem placed on the site by its pilgrim-visitors.

Unfortunately, most Americans did not share the same enthusiasm as Farkas. The president of the South Carolina Historical Society declared in 1858: "The public mind, in

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[26] Ralph Hardy Rives, "The Jamestown Celebration of 1857," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 66 (July 1958), 265.

[27] Sandor Boloni Farkas, *Journey in North America, 1831*, trans. and ed. Arpad Kadarkay (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1978), 202.

[28] Ibid., 203.

our country, is far more occupied with the future than the past."[29] This helps to explain how Philadelphia's Independence Hall could almost fall into the hands of commercial developers during the War of 1812. Protests saved the building but not before two wings had been demolished and the woodwork stripped from the room where the Declaration of Independence was signed.[30] By the 1850s, Americans were losing touch with the Revolutionary spirit, especially as that Revolutionary generation rapidly faded from the scene. Historical societies did what they could, considering their limited finances, to restore historic sites or, at least, to support preservationist groups who did have the financial backing. After the Civil War, for instance, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania initiated the return of some artifacts taken from Independence Hall after the capital removed to Harrisburg.[31]

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[29] James Louis Petigru, "Oration Delivered on the Third Anniversary of the South-Carolina Historical Society, Thursday Evening, May 27, 1858," *Collections of the South-Carolina Historical Society* 2 (1858), 13.

[30] Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," *Radical History Review* 25 (Winter 1980-81), 64. It also helps to explain why the tomb of Thomas Jefferson lay in disrepair in the 1840s. One visitor to Monticello in 1844 stopped before Jefferson's tomb and recalled: "A place enclosed with a half-decayed wall attracted our attention. A half-sunken tomb, neglected and disordered, was there, and a damaged granite pyramid, already inclined to one side, with a partly defaced inscription containing the date of a birth and a death." From Frederick von Raumer, *America and the American People*, trans. William W. Turner (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1846), 427.

[31] Hampton L. Carson, *A History of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1940), I: 333. Some mention must be made of the tremendous efforts by women's groups in the preservation of historic sites in the nineteenth century. The restoration effort by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association is a story onto itself. Ann Pamela Cunningham of South Carolina made the initial plea in 1853 to preserve George Washington's estate. In 1856 the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union was chartered, and the organization received moral and financial support from influential people such as the noted orator Edward Everettt, who raised nearly $70,000 for the purchase price of Mount Vernon. The Association eventually obtained title to the property in the midst of the heated sectional debates on the eve of the Civil War. See Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 41-54; Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Makers: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 177-204; and Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 1-37. For a biography of Cunningham, see Judith Anne Mitchell, "Ann Pamela Cunningham: 'A Southern Matron's' Legacy" (M.A. thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1993).

Efforts such as preserving Independence Hall and Mount Vernon indicated "symptoms of a loss of youthfulness in American culture," according to John Higham.[32] If Higham is correct in his assumption, did this loss of youthfulness imply a loss of youthful emotion as well? With the emergence of industrialization and urbanization in the middle of the nineteenth century came the need for a more stable and organized environment. A professional consciousness, reinforced through scientific materialism and industrial technology, eventually emerged with its closed space, fixed principles, and formal manners. The interpretation of artifacts and historic sites became more analytical and less emotional. The "romance" of history metamorphosed into the "science" of history. The piece of wood from Washington's boat once painted an emotionally-charged picture (much like Emanuel Leutze's mythical painting) in the minds of its beholders. And, as the colors of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* faded in time, so would the sentiments about a piece of wood.

Professional historians near the end of the nineteenth century bemoaned the fact that the new, scientific history met some resistance.[33] One of these new historians, Justin Winsor, snobbishly complained to the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1890: "It is the romance of history which attracts the half educated and secures the publisher."[34] John Franklin Jameson, in a scathing diatribe on the shortcomings of historical societies, blamed the societies for focusing too much on local history ("fussy antiquarianism") and for too

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[32] John Higham, *From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture 1848-1860* (Ann Arbor, MI: William L. Clements Library, 1969), 17-18.

[33] Although the term "New History" traditionally begins with James Harvey Robinson's *New History* (1912), the roots can be traced to the late nineteenth century, especially in the works of John Franklin Jameson, and Frederick Jackson Turner. For this, see Donald R. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 310-312.

[34] Justin Winsor, "The Perils of Historical Narrative," *Atlantic Monthly* 66 (September 1890), 291.

much emphasis on the American Revolution.[35] "Doubtless, there are many persons to whose dim minds the phrase 'American history' brings up instantly and solely the image of the Revolutionary war," Jameson grumbled. Jameson and others failed to give credit to historical societies for doing what they did best—preserve the past, even if they seemed too "emotional" about it at times. Jameson also complained about the lack of cooperation between historical societies and professional historians. Surely, his cutting remarks did little to help bridge the gap. Of course, the situation worked both ways. Lyman Draper, who sat on a vast collection of primary materials at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, had little regard for the American Historical Association, and mostly ignored requests from Ph.D. students of the era.[36]

The material culture of nineteenth-century historical societies faced major obstacles in merely surviving. Much of it had to do with the mindset at the time towards historic preservation. The maintenance of perhaps America's most treasured document, the Declaration of Independence, is a case in point. In the period of the early republic, the Department of State became the official repository of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the papers of the Continental Congress. Responsibility for their safekeeping fell into the hands of petty officials. John Qunicy Adams read passages from the original, unfaded Declaration during a Fourth of July oration in 1821.[37]

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[35] J. F. Jameson, "The Functions of State and Local Historical Societies with Respect to Research and Publication," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1897* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898): 51-59. Quotes by Jameson in this paragraph are from this source.

[36] William B. Hesseltine, *Pioneer's Mission: The Story of Lyman Copland Draper* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954), 289.

[37] Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1991), 75. Also, see Andrew Burstein, *America's Jubilee* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 144.

And no one seemed too concerned about the document's ability to withstand repeated handling—it is said the Declaration of Independence lay in a drawer in the Secretary of State's office where visitors could view it upon request.[38] As the century progressed, however, professional historians instilled more public awareness of archival preservation. The proposed showing of the original copy of the Declaration (along with the original Constitution) at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago brought a rash of protest from the historic community.[39]

The mantra of nineteenth-century historical societies—collecting and preserving—deserves a fuller treatment than has been offered so far. The acquisition phase is easy to explain. Historical societies distributed a circular or published a notice in the newspapers seeking artifacts and historical materials from the public. The public, in turn, mailed their donations to the organizations. Sometimes they offered the gift in person or passed it on to a society member who then presented it on behalf of the individual. Lyman Draper ingeniously set up a system whereby donors had ten depositories, from Boston to Chicago, to drop off their contributions for transmission to Madison.[40]

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[38] The wife of a British Naval officer came unannounced to the Secretary's office in 1828 to view the document but, unfortunately, the Secretary (Henry Clay) was absent and the office closed. Margaret Hunter Hall, *The Aristocratic Journey: Being the Outspoken Letters of Mrs. Basil Hall Written During a Fourteen Months' Sojourn in America 1827-1828*, ed. Una Pope-Hennessey (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), 185.

[39] For example, the 15 March 1893 letter from A. Howard Clark, of the American Historical Association, to historian Herbert Baxter Adams, in which Clark wrote: "To speak plain it is pure vandalism to risk transportation by rail, and to exhibit these records in a non-fire proof building." W. Stull Holt, ed., *Historical Scholarship in the United States, 1876-1901: As Revealed in the Correspondence of Herbert B. Adams* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 196-197.

[40] Hesseltine, *Pioneer's Mission*, 124. Compared to the relatively easy method of procuring donations in the nineteenth century, modern acquisition involves a complicated process of solicitation, much letter writing (or emailing), phone calls, copes of deed of gift, and visits with the donor. The process

Nineteenth-century historical societies rarely, if ever, turned down donations. Of course, members themselves often donated items from their own collections—Dr. Ramsey of THS being an excellent example. Donors' names frequently appeared in the local newspaper, thus providing a further impetus for contributions. Very often societies collected manuscripts and artifacts not so much for historic value but because they were there for the taking and needed a home. Great quantities of objects and paper made for an impressive collection,[41] and having solicited the public for contributions, it would have been awkward for historical societies to then turn down a potential donor's gift. In fact, refusing any donation might label the society as too elitist. An accept-anything policy helps to explain the hodge-podge of acquisitions that nineteenth-century historical societies accumulated.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the preservation of historic material did not have any artistic or intellectual basis. The desire to recapture the presumed unity of the early days of nationhood and patriotism formed the basis for the simple, but critical, step of saving records.[42] The overall destruction of pubic papers and other historical documents in the early republic presents a frightening picture—one marvels at the quantity of material that *did* survive. Carelessness and apathy contributed heavily to these losses, but fire represented the most notorious culprit. The ravages of war played an obvious role in the destruction of historical records. Custodial ignorance

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can sometimes take years. For a look at modern soliciting and acquisition, see Debra Newman Ham, "Manuscript Curators and Specialists," in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, eds. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1999), 178-181.

[41] Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962), 427-428.

[42] Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 19-20, 31-32.

and neglect also destroyed numerous public records. There are many incidents of papers being thrown away, used to start fires, or sold as waste paper.[43]

Damp and crowded conditions acerbated the situation as storage facilities often meant crypt-like basements for groupings of papers without any order or organization. In the best circumstances, iron chests provided protection from the elements while boxes, blankets, and barrels sufficed in other instances.[44] Some historical societies wrestled with the problem of simply *having* a storage area. The Tennessee Historical Society, petitioning the state legislature for funds in 1857, confessed that much of the materials in the possession of the Society "are nailed up in good boxes because the Society possesses no room with cases or shelves wherein to arrange them."[45] The lack of storage facilities matched the inability of historical societies to find a permanent base of operations.[46]

Nineteenth-century historical societies, nonetheless, constituted the first form of archival repositories in American cultural institutions.[47] Not until after the Civil War, when professionalism and advanced management systems took root, did historical

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[43] Philip M. Hamer, "The Records of Southern History," *Journal of Southern History* 5 (February 1939), 7-8. Also, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "Three Centuries of Southern Records, 1607-1907," *Journal of Southern History* 10 (February 1944), 4-23; Aubrey Lee Brooks and Hugh Talmage Lefler, eds., *The Papers of Walter Clark*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), I: 493-494; and William Carroll Hill, *A Century of Genealogical Progress: Being a History of the New England Historic Genealogical Society 1845-1945* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1945), 14-15.

[44] J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "The Preservation of North Carolina History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 4 (January 1927), 6-7.

[45] Legislative Petitions, Record Group 60, Tennessee State Library and Archives, File 8-1857.

[46] For instance, the Virginia Historical Society (1831) moved a total of six times before the Civil War. See Charles F. Bryan, Jr., "Virginia," in *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861*, ed. H. G. Jones (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society, Inc., and North Carolina Collection, 1995), 85. The Tennessee Historical Society had a similar history of wanderings, meeting at courthouses, bookstores, libraries, the state house, and private homes.

[47] Richard J. Cox, *Closing an Era: Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 105.

societies add "access" to their mantra of collecting and preserving.[48] Of course, these societies still maintained a "selective" open-door policy. In a discourse delivered to the New-England Historic, Genealogical Society in 1870, corresponding secretary Edmund Slater recognized that historical societies were moving beyond mere preservation. Slater said it was also necessary "to render this crude material accessible to the historical student, to bring it within practical reach of the numerous investigators in our line of study." To accomplish this goal of accessibility, Slater insisted "it was necessary to subject it to a careful inspection and analysis, to bring together the scattered fragments of history, to classify, arrange, and unite them in their proper order; and beyond all this, to secure their broadest usefulness."[49]

Nineteenth-century Americans responded to historic relics with an empathy mirroring the romantic era in which they lived. They were no less emotional about their memories of the historic past. People interpret the past in terms of the present, and they can selectively recall and interpret events in ways that satisfy their personal needs. This self-serving "creative remembering" utilizes the past as a resource that people can adopt for current purposes.[50] How did historical societies employ the past for their purposes? What designs or intentions did they have in using the past? How successful were they in their attempts?

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[48] T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 83-84.

[49] Edmund F. Slater, *Discourse Delivered Before the New-England Historic, Genealogical Society, Boston, March 18, 1870, on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of its Incorporation* (Boston: New-England Historic, Genealogical Society, 1870), 16.

[50] Michael Ross and Roger Buehler, "Creative Remembering," in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, eds. Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 205-235.

From the beginning, the Massachusetts Historical Society chose to publish their collections not so much to disseminate knowledge but to insure the continuation of the text of the documents.[51] In the first volume of the Society's *Collections* (1792), an introductory address lamented the various ways documents can be ruined or lost—neglect, intentional destruction, fires—thus making preservation of original materials paramount. "There is no sure way of preserving historical records and materials, but by *multiplying the copies*," the writer indicated, "Impressed with this idea, the members of the HISTORICAL SOCIETY have determined not only to collect, but to *diffuse* the various species of historical information, which are within their reach."[52]

Beyond the survival of historical materials, however, historical society publications involved more intricate meanings.[53] Historical societies reprinted the documents, histories, and recollections they gathered from other sources. The publication of such documents and histories by an historical society granted legitimacy and authenticity to the society, providing it with an identity.[54] Those societies failing to publish their collections—the nineteenth-century THS being one—fell short of the

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[51] This type of attitude would help to explain why individuals and institutions were willing to allow historians and collectors to take original documents if replaced by copies. See, for instance, Lyman H. Butterfield, "Archival and Editorial Enterprise in 1850 and in 1950: Some Comparisons and Contrasts," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98 (June 1954), 162-163; and H. G. Jones, *For History's Sake: The Preservation and Publication of North Carolina History, 1663-1903* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 84, 117. Apparently, at least in antebellum America, the documents themselves were not as sacred as the message they contained.

[52] "Introductory Address from the Historical Society to the Public," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 1 (1792), 3 [emphasis is from the original text].

[53] With a collection of documents, histories could be written; yet the message sent out by most societies in the early republic denied the urge to write history.

[54] Elisabeth Kaplan, "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity," *American Archivist* 63 (Spring/Summer 2000), 149. For a survey of the types of historical society publications, consult Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies 1790-1860* (1944; reprint, Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), chapter eight.

standards that epitomized a "successful" organization. That historical societies sent copies of their publications to societies in other states exemplifies the ties that bound these institutions together; but it may also represent an opportunity for a society to "show off," as it were, its achievements—a printed, bound volume being no cheap affair.[55] The popularity of history as literature—as indicated by the impact of Scott's romances—gave impetus for learned societies to tread the waters of the publishing world. Books on civil history accounted for over one-fourth of the holdings at the Library of Congress in 1812—by far the largest category in its catalog. By 1860, nearly 440 editions of history textbooks could be found in schools, two-thirds of that coming between 1830 and 1860.[56]

The magazine format also served as a catalyst for the melding of historical societies and the printing press. The United States had nearly six thousand newspapers and magazines in publication by 1870, the most popular magazines being *Harper's Monthly*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Scribner's Monthly*.[57] *The Historical Magazine, and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America* satisfied the need for a monthly publication entirely devoted to history. Begun in January

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[55] There is a copy of the second volume of the *Collections of the South-Carolina Historical Society* at the Tennessee State Library and Archives whose title page has the ink-penned inscription on the title page, "From the South Carolina Historical Society—June 7, 1859, to the Tenn. Hist. Society." A similar dedication is in the first volume. Notice how the historical society in South Carolina wrote out its full name while that of the Tennessee society is abbreviated—a subtle, yet potent, indication that the historical society in South Carolina deemed itself superior to the society in Tennessee. The Tennessee Historical Society, while glad to accept the donation from a sister society, needed no reminder of its inability to produce a similar collection.

[56] Library of Congress numbers taken from Carl Ostrowski, *Books, Maps, and Politics: A Cultural History of the Library of Congress, 1783-1861* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 61, 66. The figures on history textbooks are found in George H. Calcott, *History in the United States 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 61. Calcott points out that, by the 1830s, Romantic historians were well aware they were writing to please and entertain their audiences; thus, the popularity of the narrative style. Ibid., 195-197.

[57] Sutherland, *Expansion of Everyday Life*, 74.

1857 as a scholarly journal for the community of historical societies, *The Historical Magazine* attempted to keep the societies informed with each other's progress. During the first years of publication, the magazine reprinted extracts of addresses given at various historical society meetings. [See the opening to this dissertation.] It also had a "Notes and Queries" section dedicated to antiquarian and genealogical questions.[58]

Although the *Historical Magazine* had connections to the New England Historical and Genealogical Society, the assumption that historical society publications touted genealogy is false. Despite the obvious link to genealogy that historical societies later established, very few early societies organized on this basis.[59] It would be a mistake, however, to completely ignore the genealogical implications found within nineteenth-century historical societies. J. G. M. Ramsey's mission to collect, preserve, and promote the early history of Tennessee is based on his genealogical roots. Ramsey believed it was his patriotic *and* filial duty to preserve Tennessee's past. At the first meeting of the East Tennessee Historical and Antiquarian Society, in 1834, he appealed to citizens for contributions to the cause of the Society: "We appeal to the gratitude of every son of Tennessee—We appeal to his state preferences and to his *ancestral* pride."[60]

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[58] Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 121-122. Also, see David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America 1607-1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 131-132. The publication was the inspiration of Boston publisher Charles B. Richardson, who developed it in conjunction with the New England Historical and Genealogical Society.

[59] Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 19. Indeed, colonial Americans ridiculed genealogical records because they bore the mark of aristocracy and self-importance. There was a general aversion to the cultivation of any degree of ancestral or family history because of its connection to hereditary titles and landed gentry of the Old World. For a further explanation of this, see Hill, *Century of Genealogical Progress*, 7-8.

[60] Quoted in Erin R. Lawrence , "'Let us hasten to redeem the time that is lost': J. G. M. Ramsey's Role in the Collection and Promotion of Tennessee History," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 41 (Fall 2006), 420-423, 433 [emphasis is mine].

The Civil War brought about an interest in military exploits of the past and a quest for ancestral lineage. Genealogical publications increased dramatically as genealogical organizations sprouted up, often as a reaction to the hordes of immigrants pouring into the nation (thus posing a threat to the established, democratic order). These organizations served as exponents of "Americanism" and defenders of the old against the new.[61] Many of the lineage societies—Daughters of the American Revolution and the Colonial Dames of America—established themselves in the 1890s. This passion for genealogy was based not only on social climbing or a desire to affirm high status; but also on the belief in the biological implications of bloodlines.[62]

If early historical societies spurned genealogy, the second quarter of the nineteenth century did feature what an 1830 issue of the *New York Mirror* called "biography mania." Jared Sparks referred to biography as "only another form of history."[63] Biography became the medium that allowed people to learn about public figures and, thus, defined the nation's identity while shaping individual character. It helped Americans imagine their own lives as well as the ones about which they wrote and read. Because biography implied truth, it provided a way to place characters in the historical record, particularly at a time when history demanded more objectivity.[64] Being

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[61] Lester J. Cappon, "Genealogy, Handmaid of History," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 45 (March 1957), 5-6.

[62] Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 220-221.

[63] Michael Kraus, *The Writing of American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 140-141. "And what biography is to individuals, general history is to nations," announced one academic to the Indiana Historical Society in 1831. See Andrew Wylie, "The Uses of History," *Indiana Historical Society Publications* 1 (1897), 83.

[64] Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

beneficial to youth, biographies served as examples of how to act (or how not to act). Biographies, it was thought, delved into the inner workings of man and provided a glimpse of the personal motivations behind the actions of history. In an 1850 history of the American Revolution, featuring a sketch of the life of George Washington, the author made this revealing statement concerning biographies: "Biography is indeed the best part of history. . . . History is the dial-plate, on which grand results are marked: biography lays open the interior, and shows us the secret springs within."[65] Biographies taught humanity and, as such, authors wrote them with a civic duty in mind, especially when dealing with the lives of the Founding Fathers—superior men being the quintessential emanation of a nation's people.[66]

The promotion of biographies by historical societies manifested itself in the publication of memoirs and recollections, particularly oral narratives. Individuals who participated in the Revolutionary War or settled on the early frontier became the focus of most of these reminiscences. The elevation of the character of these individuals became the purpose of such narrations. This trend began with the popular histories of the American Revolution and early frontier narratives. To complete his work on the history

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[65] Charles Peterson, *The Military Heroes of the Revolution: With a Narrative of the War of Independence* (Philadelphia: William A. Leary, 1850), 173.

[66] This became particularly true of the antebellum South, where many southern intellectuals saw the need for biographies as an inspiration for role models, and as a better understanding to national character. For more on this, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 77-79. "Southerners grew up with biography as a staple of their intellectual diet," according to Michael O' Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), II: 654-655.

I think it interesting that the peak of "biography mania" occurred during the era of Jacksonian Democracy, when the idea took root that opportunity in America was open to everyone. Individualism had been the cornerstone of what made an "American" from the time of the Revolutionary period. Biographies reinforced that individualism and promoted the myth of the self-made man. For more on this myth, see Irvin G. Wylie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New York: Free Press, 1966).

of the American Revolution, for example, Lossing not only consulted printed and manuscript sources, but also spent a great deal of time interviewing as many people as he could find associated with the events of the war or who had knowledge of them.[67] In 1846, a group of men in Wisconsin planted the seeds for an historical society when they related to the local newspaper they wanted to form an organization whose purpose would be "to collect from the pioneers then alive, such facts in regard to the early history of Wisconsin as they might possess, as well as to treasure up those concerning the future."[68] Most antiquarians and Romantic historians never concerned themselves with the obvious pitfalls of oral recollections—the inaccuracies or the inclusion of a personal "agenda." Instead, they tended to agree with J. G. M. Ramsey, who warned the East Tennessee Historical and Antiquarian Society in 1834 that "some of the most brilliant incidents in early history are unrecorded and if not soon rescued from oblivion will be lost to the present generation."[69]

Ramsey's concern for incidents "lost to the present generation" indicates the desire for more than mere preservation—the past was to be "used" in the present. What message(s) did the American past hold for those living in the present? There are three themes that permeate the dialogues and retrospections of the era. First, the Revolutionary/pioneer generation made enormous sacrifices to build the nation. In a

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[67] Davidson, Jr., "How Benson J. Lossing Wrote His 'Field Books,'" 58-61.

[68] Quoted in Reuben G. Thwaites, *The State Historical Society of Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: Democrat Printing Company, 1898), 3. It is significant that the early pioneers would be consulted to "treasure up" their concerns for the future, thus placing them in the role of teachers, like biographers.

[69] Quoted in Lawrimore, "'Let us hasten to redeem the time that is lost,'"424. For the pitfalls of recollections as historical evidence, see William Moss, "Oral History: An Appreciation," *American Archivist* 40 (October 1977), 431-432; and Gaynor Kavanaugh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* (London, UK: University Press, 2000), 35-40.

journal published in the mid-nineteenth century by Wilkins Tannehill, one contributor referred to the first settlers of Tennessee as "a band of brothers—PATRIOTS, in the true sense of that term—united for the purpose of protecting all they held dear or sacred on earth. . . . Many of the noblest spirits of the land sold their lives at a fearless price in defending the infant—or rather embryonic—state against the depredations of the Indians."[70] Second, the present generation should be grateful for the earlier sacrifices made and, as a tribute, try to emulate their deeds. A speaker addressing the alumni of Nashville University in 1838 lamented over the nation's lack of veneration, calling it "one of the most deplorable and dangerous symptoms of the times."[71] Last, the drama of the country's past points to an American "uniqueness" without equal in history. On the occasion of laying the cornerstone for a new court house at Waverly, Tennessee, Judge Josephus Guild called America "a Republic unparalleled in the greatness of its extent, and unequal in the wisdom, justice and humanity its institutions—for this great heritage we are indebted to Washington and his noble compatriots."[72]

The creation and publication of collections of documents by historical societies aided scholars and added to the historiography of the United States while it promoted the society itself and its mission.[73] The history community looked favorably on those

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[70] Harry Oldschool, "Early Times in Tennessee," *The Port Folio; or Journal of Freemasonry, and General Literature* 2 (July 1848), 29 [emphasis is original]. The writer of this piece signed his name as "Harry Oldschool of Knoxville." There is a possibility this was a pseudonym for Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey.

[71] A. Stephens, *Address to the Alumni Society of Nashville University, on the Influence of Institutions for High Letters on the Mental and Moral Character of the Nation, and the Obligations of Government to Endow and Sustain Them* (Nashville: B. R. McKennie, 1838), 25.

[72] *Address Delivered by the Hon. Jo. C. Guild, at Waverly, Tenn., on July 4th, 1877, on the Occasion of Laying the Corner-Stone of a New Court-House* (Gallatin, TN: A. A. Lewis & Son, 1877), 7.

[73] Kraus, *Writing of American History*, 158.

societies that could afford to publish, considering them flushed with success. Since many nineteenth-century historical societies did not have the means to market their wares, they turned to other modes of communication to call attention to themselves. One of the most common devices involved the use of circulars—broadsheets, advertisements and letters printed in quantity for extensive dispersion. The issuance of circulars usually marked the first step taken by historical societies to collect historical materials. These circulars itemized what the societies sought.[74]

The utilization of circulars by nineteenth-century historical societies, however, involved more than an advertisement for donations. Circulars represented an aid to imposing system on people and processes.[75] These handbills defined the organization; set guidelines for what they actively sought to collect; and, more importantly, influenced the collective memory of the public by announcing what they deemed significant about history. As an authoritative body, the historical society listed the topics and objects of history most important to them, thereby persuading the public to think likewise.

Circulars announced the formation of an historical society—an obvious sign of prestige and culture to a community—and then stated its mission (to collect and preserve). Circulars specified the types of materials acceptable to the societies for their collections, usually items specific to that state or region. A circular issued by the Florida Historical Society in 1857 indicated the Society organized "for the purpose of collecting and preserving Books, Pamphlets, Manuscripts, maps, Relics, and other materials and

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[74] Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 66-67, 69.

[75] JoAnne Yates, *Control Through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 65-71. Although Yates briefly discusses the importance of circulars as a form of internal communication, no one (to my knowledge) has done any in-depth study on the use of circulars by historical societies.

memorials connected especially with the history of Florida, and the diffusion of information thus obtained."[76]

The "wanted" lists were impressive. The circular sent out by the Maryland Historical Society in 1844, for instance, asked for "manuscripts, original letters, pamphlets and books relative to any epochs of the history of Maryland, of other States, or of the Union." This list also included legislative proceedings, autographs, coins, orations, sermons, poems, narratives of Indian wars, antiquities, weapons, magazines, newspapers, family genealogies, and "especially biographical memoirs and anecdotes of distinguished persons in the State."[77] There is little doubt that the reason behind the eclectic holdings of most nineteenth-century historical societies emanated from the "instructions" found on circulars.

Most circulars enumerated *things* the historical societies solicited for, but these broadsides also put forward *ideas* to the public about the past. At the very least, historical society circulars reinforced commonly held perceptions of the public's memory. This occurred when circulars went beyond their mission statement and specifications for donations. When the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge issued its

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[76] *The Early History of Florida. An Introductory Lecture, Delivered by George R. Fairbanks, Esq., Before the Florida Historical Society, April 15th, 1857* (St. Augustine: Florida Historical Society, 1857), 32. The Society also sought "ancient coins, curiosities, Indian implements and weapons, etc., etc." The 1839 circular of the Georgia Historical Society stated that the Society formed "to collect, preserve, and diffuse information relating to the History of the State of Georgia." The 1839 circular is available at http:// www. georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2526 (accessed 10 June 2009).

[77] *Constitution, By-Laws, Charter, Circular and Members of the Maryland Historical Society* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1844), 15-17. Note the emphasis on biographical materials. The Georgia Historical Society's 1839 circular listed about one hundred types of historical material. By contrast, the Kentucky Historical Society's circular of 1838 simply asked the public for books, papers, and documents for the Society's "Library or Cabinet." See *Act of Incorporation, and Constitution and By-Laws of the Kentucky Historical Society, Organized March, 1838, at Louisville, Kentucky* (Louisville: Prentice and Weissinger, 1838), 11-12. The 1838 act to incorporate this society, by the way, lists Wilkins Tannehill as a founding member. See ibid, 3.

circular in the mid-1830s, it asked the public for early newspapers, manuscripts, and information relative to the early settlement of Tennessee.[78] The circular listed fifteen areas of concentration, the first five being:

> 1st In relation to the Forts, Stations, or Stockades erected by the pioneers or early settlers, for the defense of themselves and families—the period when founded and by whom—the attacks made upon them by Indians—instances of individual prowess, of cruelty, of generosity—anecdotes, characteristic of the manners, customs and spirit of the times, with names and dates, so far as practicable.
>
> 2nd Domestic manners of the pioneers—their dress, household and table furniture—amusements and pastimes—private feuds and the modes of settling them—characteristic anecdotes.
>
> 3rd Expeditions fitted out from Tennessee to chastise the Indians in Tennessee or in Districts bordering on Tennessee.
>
> 4th History of the Indian tribes in Tennessee—their migrations, habits and customs—their wars among themselves and against the whites.
>
> 5th History of Courts of Justice—the bar—medical faculty—churches and ministers of the gospel—fees and salaries—weddings, how celebrated, and marriage fees.[79]

Initially, one notices that three of the five subjects dealt with Indian relations on the frontier. Settlers are either defending themselves from Indian attacks or setting out to "chastise" Indians for depredations committed against whites. Anecdotes—from the white point of view, of course—are sought to lend authenticity to the narratives. When Indians are mentioned in a more anthropological fashion, phrases such as "their wars among themselves," and "instances of prowess, of cruelty, of generosity" stamp the

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[78] "Circular of the Tennessee Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge" in Lyman C. Draper Manuscript Collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison), 6XX75. While there is no date attached to this circular, the language of the text indicates it was probably published shortly after the conception of the SDK in December 1835.

[79] Ibid. The other ten topics were: 6. Navigation of the Cumberland, Tennessee, Mississippi and other rivers; 7. Private papers or journals of the early settlers; 8. Early schools and academies, male and female; 9. Aaron Burr's visit to Tennessee; 10. Intercourse of the early settlers with the French on the North and Spaniards on the South; 11. Errors in Haywood's Histories of Tennessee; 12. Natural History of Tennessee; 13. Procurement of early newspapers; 14. Intelligence relative to the Suwanee Indians; 15. Facts connected with the history of the State of Franklin.

image of Native Americans as being worthy of admiration but not respect.[80] That respect was reserved to the frontier fathers who fought for home and family against "savages."

Interestingly, the SDK circular alludes to the material culture of the early pioneers in seeking information on their dress, furniture, and pastimes. The public memory of the pioneers needed little aggrandizement.[81] The harshness of pioneer life necessitated self-sacrifice and self-reliance—eminent characteristics of a "western" society. The social history of the frontier exposed the need for culture but evinced a virtue bordering on heroism. The clothing of the frontier, especially the hunting shirt, became associated with self-sufficiency and adaptability in harsh environment conditions. It suggested that men could thrive and fight as fiercely as Indians.[82]

The fifth topic contained in the SDK circular denotes progress and order on the frontier. Progress in the form of Christianity and order in the form of a court system, both bringing civilization and justice to an area only a generation removed from a wilderness phase marked by violence and discord. A nod to the influence of the church completed the frontier narrative. One Tennessean, who grew up in rural Jackson County during the mid-nineteenth century, recalled: "I was born in the very lap of Christianity. Everybody in the community were Church members. Everyone went to Church on

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[80] Note a toast made in Knoxville on that city's fiftieth anniversary: "The red men of the forest.—With all their savage cruelty, the heroic fortitude and filial devotion with which they defended the graves of their fathers, challenges our admiration." [Knoxville] *Argus and Commercial Herald*, 28 April 1840.

[81] One orator in 1858 referred to the popular image of the West being "tomahawks and wigwams, sharp-shooting and hard fights, log cabins, rough speech, dare-devil boldness, bear-hunting and corn-husking, prairie flowers, bandits, lynch law and no-law-at-all, miscellaneously mixed." William T. Coggeshall, *The Protective Policy in Literature: A Discourse on the Social and Moral Advantages of the Cultivation of Local Literature* (Columbus, OH: Follett, Foster and Company, 1859), 10.

[82] For more on this, see Linda R. Baumgarten, "Leather Stockings and Hunting Shirts" in *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, eds. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997), 268-269.

Sunday. I just waited to get old enough to join the Church. I was afraid I might die before I was baptized."[83]

Law and order played no lesser a role than the church in fostering "civilization" on the frontier. A Tennessee reverend, who bought land in Marshall County around 1812, established a modest plantation he dubbed "Civil Order" because (as family lore has it) he proclaimed, "Here I will have law and order."[84] Even the reference to a "medical faculty" signified a mark of civilization, particularly in a society where life expectancy peaked at age forty-five, and diseases such as cholera could wipe out one-fourth of a town's population. Furthermore, the cures for sickness were often as deadly as the diseases themselves. As crude and ineffective as medical remedies might be, at least the presence of a doctor indicated professional assistance.[85] The SDK circular sent out a clear and distinct message: the early settlers transformed a land, rife with natural obstacles and inhabited by a wolfish race, into a domesticated *patria* where (as one later publication stated) "one vast wilderness covered with dense and dreary forests, without roads to direct the adventurous pioneers . . . [whose] steps were beset by lurking savages . . . now present beautiful cities, towns, and cultivated fields."[86]

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[83] "Memoirs of Kibbie Tinsley Williams Gardenhire, 1939," Manuscripts, Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville) [TSLA].

[84] Beulah Williams Howland, comp., "History of Rev. James Williams and His Family," Williams Family Papers 1835-1907, Manuscripts, TSLA.

[85] Sutherland, *Expansion of Everyday Life*, 127, 216-218. Cholera, coupled with small pox and yellow fever, constituted the most deadly diseases in the nineteenth century. Therapies and cures for these and other ills involved the practice of bleeding, the use of emetics, spirits of nitre, antimony, and large doses of calomel. For a fascinating look at the medical practice on the frontier, see "Diary and Journal of Samuel Henderson, 1834-1876" [typescript copy], Library Collection, TSLA.

[86] "The Progress of Improvement," *The Port Folio; or Journal of Freemasonry, and General Literature* 3 (April 1850), 309.

What the SDK circular *omitted* is as telling as what it included. No mention is made of slavery—an issue bound to tear the fabric of the nation. Nor is there any hint of a bitter rivalry within Tennessee, even though the 1830s witnessed intense political bickering between the different sections of the state.[87] The SDK sought no information on economic depressions, land frauds, forced Indian removals, religious schisms, or plague-like epidemics—all of which also comprised Tennessee's past.

The image of the pioneer became "the most powerful historical symbol" expressed in the second half of the nineteenth century. The image consisted of ordinary people praised for starting families and communities rather than founding a nation. John Bodnar insists this symbol became strongest where the economic and professional elites had the least influence, such as the Midwest and Great Plains.[88] Yet, in the 1830s, the Tennessee-based SDK sought to reinforce this perception of the ordinary settler as heroic by requesting anecdotal accounts of their extraordinary deeds. By elevating the common to the uncommon, the history-minded community created a pantheon of luminaries worthy of adoration and emulation. This escalation provided an explanation for the prosperity enjoyed by the descendants of the frontier fathers. In 1845, Congressman Edwin H. Ewing took the occasion of the laying of the corner-stone of the state capitol to encourage his audience to ruminate on the how far the region had progressed since its beginnings:

> It is now just eighty years since the blue smoke from the first camp fire of the white man curled above the trees, proclaiming as it rose, the advance of civilization toward the virgin territory. . . . Then appeared our Robertsons, our

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[87] Stanley John Folmsbee, *Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee 1796-1845* (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1939), 137-138, 195-197.

[88] Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 33-35.

> Buchanans, our Bledsoes, our Weakleys, our Hickmans, our Rains, our Castlemans, our Spencers, our Seviers, our Cockes, our Tiptons, and soon our Jacksons, our Whites, our Crutchers, our Overtons, our McNairys, our McClungs, with a host of others whose names will go down to posterity in Tennessee, as the hardy and enterprising fathers of a great and populous State.[89]

In pronouncing the names of the frontier fathers, Ewing took them beyond the status of ordinary, setting them apart from the rest of the early settlers. At the same time, he designated them as "our" fathers so that his listeners could share in the glory of the past.

Another method adopted by historical societies to promote their version of the past came through the portraits they so eagerly sought to adorn the walls of their meeting places. The uniqueness attributed to the early founders and leaders by antiquarian historians and patrician societies manifested itself in oils on canvas. Portraits evinced a sign of reverence. At Charles Willson Peale's museum, his portraits of Revolutionary War heroes hung in a double row just below the ceiling, overlooking Peale's "natural order" of things. The positioning of the portraits represented places of honor.[90] In keeping with English tastes, portraiture in America became more popular than landscapes. Furthermore, framed pictures constituted a sign of affluence, stemming from the time of colonial New England, where framed portraits denoted an obvious indication of wealth.[91]

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[89] Quoted in George Dardis, *Description of the State Capitol of Tennessee*, comp. Return Jonathan Meigs (Nashville: Cameron & Co., 1859), 20. Ewing was a lawyer and president of the University of Nashville. At the time of this speech, he was a Whig representative in the U. S. Congress.

[90] Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present," in *History-Museums in the United States—A Critical Assessment*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 4-5.

[91] Wendell Garrett, *Victorian America: Classical Romanticism to Gilded Opulence*, ed., David Larkin (New York: Universe Publishing, 1995), 12. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 236.

The nineteenth-century South had "a passion for portraiture," according to one art historian.[92] Despite the expense it entailed, most southerners desired portraits and sought the services of accomplished painters. Some artists traveled from area to area while others were associated with a particular locale. In some ways, because of the frequent mortality in the South, portraits represented a way of capturing the life of a person. In addition, the mania for portraiture reflects the similar fixation on biographies in the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-century historical societies also fell under the spell of portrait-mania, a situation not always welcomed.[93] Besides the obvious expense of commissioning artists to utilize their services (plus the cost of framing), or purchasing finished portraits, the selection of immortalizing someone had little to do with history. As patrician institutions, historical societies sought works by distinguished artists in order to build up their own prestige. By the 1850s the Virginia Historical Society accumulated an impressive array of portraits by artists such as Charles Willson Peale, Gilbert Stuart, and Thomas Sully. The Society placed so much emphasis on the portraits that library and manuscript acquisitions lagged drastically during this period.[94] When J. G. M. Ramsey took over the leadership of the reformed Tennessee Historical Society in 1874, he

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[92] Jessie Poesch, *The Art of the Old South: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, and the Products of Craftsmen, 1560-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 261-264, 269. Painters in antebellum America felt stifled by the "reign of portraiture" which they felt cheapened their profession—although it did pay the bills—it also put them in an obliging, condescending, and servile position. For more on this aspect, see Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society—The Formative Years 1790-1860* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1966), 66-67. The exception to this concept would be Ralph E. W. Earl, who shrugged off his servile position by marrying into his patron's (Andrew Jackson) family.

[93] Dunlap, *American Historical Societies*, 73-74.

[94] Hall, Jr., "Virginia Historical Society," 31-35.

confessed to Lyman Draper that the Society might fail due to debts incurred by commissioning paintings of Tennessee governors.[95]

The wrong man to complain to, Draper evidenced an inordinate pride in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's portrait gallery. In the mid-1850s, Draper attempted to lure artist Robert M. Sully away from Virginia to take up residence in Wisconsin. Draper desired an in-house artist at the historical society, but Sully died on the way to Madison.[96] The State Historical Society of Wisconsin nevertheless managed to accumulate well over a hundred portraits, as indicated by an 1878 catalog devoted entirely to their "picture gallery." Persons depicted included politicians, military leaders, frontier entrepreneurs, and a few Indians.[97] Ten years later, the Society had increased their gallery holdings to nearly 150 oil and crayon portraits. In the same year, the New-York Historical Society reported acquiring six oil paintings in one month's time.[98] Historical societies took pride in their art acquisitions and took every opportunity to boast about them. Like the ability to publish their collections, a portrait gallery signified "success" and an organization worthy of envy and esteem. Reuben Gold Thwaites, of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, admitted in the late 1890s that the Society maintained its museum and portrait

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[95] Ramsey to Draper, 25 May 1874, in Hesseltine, ed., *Ramsey Autobiography and Letters*, 281. The commissioning of portraits by THS became a rather sticky issue in the 1880s and will be covered more in chapter five of this dissertation.

[96] Hesseltine, *Pioneer's Mission*, 139.

[97] *Catalogue of the Picture Gallery of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, January 1, 1878* (Madison: State Historical of Wisconsin, 1878). In describing the portraits, this sixteen-page catalog provides brief biographies of the persons portrayed, but contains no information about the painting itself, with the exception of an occasional "Painted by Brookes" at the end the entry. The catalog also lists over a dozen busts and statutes as part of the gallery.

[98] Information taken from the "Societies" section of *Magazine of American History* 19 (March 1888), 262-264.

gallery "chiefly as popular attractions, knowing that the public cared little for the library," but he referred to the library as "the chief strength of the society."[99]

Because of the popularity of portraiture in the nineteenth century, historical societies often used their art collections as a public relations device, opening their doors on special occasions to exhibit their galleries. Usually an entrance fee helped defray expenses for the event and fill the societies' treasuries. Newspapers willingly advertised these events, which amounted to a validation that culture thrived in the community. This became particularly important in regions where the wilderness-to-civilization transition still lingered in the public's memory.

The Tennessee Historical Society celebrated its tenth anniversary on 1 May 1859 with a gala at the state capitol.[100] Randal W. McGavock, Nashville's mayor and grandson of famed Tennessee politician and jurist, Felix Grundy, presented a full-length portrait of Judge Grundy to THS on behalf of his family. An eloquent oration and appropriate music entertained the immense crowd that came to witness the event.[101] By paying tribute to Felix Grundy in such a fanciful manner the Society not only declared Grundy one of Tennessee's most respected politicians, it also induced the public to come

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[99] Reuben Gold Thwaites, "State-Supported Historical Societies and Their Functions," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1897* (1898), 67. Thwaites served as editor of the *Wisconsin Historical Collections.*

[100] Mary Daniel Moore, "The Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-1918," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (September 1944), 204-205.

[101] McGavock's diary entry for May 2 read: "Occupied nearly the whole day in making preparations for the presentation of Hon Felix Grundy's likeness to the State Historical Society. At 8 oc this evening I went to the City Hotel and escorted Jno M. Bright, the Orator of the occasion to the Capitol, where I found assembled the largest crowd that has ever yet congregated in that spacious building. At least one half of those that went failed to get in. I presented the picture in a few brief remarks, which were responded to by Col Putnam. Mr. Bright then delivered an oration upon the life and public services of Felix Grundy. It was truly a splendid production and delivered in a masterly manner. Every one seemed pleased, and the whole affair went off well." From Herschel Gower and Jack Allen, eds., *Pen and Sword: The Life and Journals of Randal W. McGavock* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1959), 518.

to the same conclusion. A realistic likeness enclosed in a gilt-edged frame, occupying a place of honor and lauded by dignitaries, could be more effectual than a dozen literary tributes read only by a limited following. In surrounding themselves with portraits of governors, leading statesmen, military heroes, and past members, historical-society patricians posted a visible reminder of *who* in the past brought about the progress and order relished by the present generation. Gazing into the silent stare of these favorite sons, suspended on the walls, an aware public paid deference to the heroes of the past—heroes immortalized on canvas. Moreover, a society fascinated with biographies seemed capable of a similar allure to portraiture.

The unveiling of Grundy's portrait at the state capitol, sponsored by THS, served to awaken public interest in historical matters. Historical societies of the nineteenth century supported functions of this type to draw attention to their organizations and to promote their visions of the past. Iconic commemoration can be a key to collective unconsciousness. "While the object of commemoration is usually to be found in the past," notes Barry Schwartz, "the issue which motivates its selection and shaping is usually to be found among the concerns of the present."[102] The Lexington, Kentucky chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution sponsored a "King's Mountain Celebration" in October 1899. This commemoration of a Revolutionary War battle had, as the highlight of the day, a military drill of the State College students. Reflecting on the spectacle, one Daughter wrote:

> Standing there that perfect day, with the most glorious land in the world stretching out before us, and realizing our freedom and that it was our land, the

[102] Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61 (December 1982), 377, 395.

> feeling uppermost in our hearts was to lift up our voices in praise and thanks for the courage and endurance of the men and women who first made it theirs and then gave it to us. It has occurred to me that maybe in the time to come, the future generations in the proud and glorious existence that is sure to be the heritage of those who live in the most powerful, free and civilized land under the sun . . . that they will look back to us, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and our efforts to keep the beacon of liberty trimmed and burning on every height with the same reverence and patriotic gratitude as we now do the Puritans.[103]

While paying tribute to the "courage and endurance" of the Revolutionary generation, the obvious concern here involved the future acknowledgement of the Daughters' efforts "to keep the beacon of liberty trimmed and burning." What was the use of celebrating the past in the present if the future would not appreciate it?

Designed to bring people together for a common cause, commemorations represented an opportunity to cement strained relations under the guise of honoring the past. Historian George Bancroft's visit to the battle site of King's Mountain in October 1855 resulted in an enthusiastic greeting by southerners. Some viewed this as a sign of mending regional differences: "All harsher feelings of sectional difference were checked in his presence, while the amenity and genial heartiness of his manners won a kind feeling wherever he went."[104] In this case, the visit by the northerner Bancroft to a southern Revolutionary War battlefield transformed the commemoration into a temporary truce in the midst of an intense sectional rivalry.

Historical societies vied for the opportunity to involve themselves in important commemorations. For the two-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the Jamestown settlement, to be celebrated in 1857, the Jamestown Society of Washington first starting making

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[103] Hannah Boswell, "King's Mountain Celebration, October 7, 1899," *American Monthly Magazine* 16 (February 1900), 145-146.

[104] "Mr. Bancroft at King's Mountain," *Southern Literary Messenger* 22 (March 1856), 165.

plans as early as 1854. The Virginia Historical Society, in the meantime, conferred to finalize its own arrangements. Sensing the competition, the Virginia Historical Society offered to meet with the Jamestown Society to collaborate on a program; but it soon became apparent the Jamestown Society wanted to call the shots. The two groups even disputed over the correct day for the celebration—May 13 versus May 23—caused by the transition from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. The Virginia Historical Society preferred May 23, but the Jamestown Society prevailed, and May 13 became the anniversary date.[105] The bickering of the two societies created a riff between them and, somewhere in the contest of wills, the significance of the celebration faded.

Commemorations honored past battles, anniversary dates of famous events, and historical figures. The planning behind the rituals of these affairs highlights the mindset of the planners. Take, for instance, the tenth anniversary of the Tennessee Historical Society on 3 May 1859—the event featuring the unveiling of the full-length portrait of Felix Grundy. The Society's program for the celebration involved an oration on the life of Grundy and a reception hosted by Society president A. W. Putnam, along with musical accompaniment. The hall of the Tennessee House of Representatives at the Capitol remained open to the public to witness the spectacle. The galleries of the hall were reserved "for the female schools and the ladies" while the military and invited guests received assigned places on the floor. Meanwhile, the general public gawked at the "curiosities of the Society," placed on exhibition in the elaborately decorated library room.[106]

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[105] Rives, "Jamestown Celebration of 1857," 259-261.

[106] *Nashville Daily Gazette* (3 May 1859).

The placement of the ladies in the galleries and the military on the floor of the House underscores the social order of the day. A Nashville Baptist magazine of the 1850s reminded its female readers that, unlike men, women "need not enter the bustle and dissipation of life. . . . Her mission is in the pure atmosphere of home."[107] By literally stationing women above (and away from) the bustle of the proceedings on the floor, THS members acknowledged the true sphere of womanhood in the mid-nineteenth century.[108] The placement of the military on the main floor, on the other hand, denoted the southern admiration for martial exploits and politics. According to one observer of the times, the southern gentleman "is most enamoured [*sic*] of politics and the Army; and it is owing to this cause, that the South has furnished us with all out great generals, from Washington to Scott, as well as most of our leading statesmen, from Jefferson to Calhoun."[109] The Society paid deference to this concept by allowing the military guests to mingle on the main floor of the Capitol.

Honoring the dead constituted the main impetus behind nineteenth-century commemorations. This was especially true after the tragedy and devastation of the Civil War. In the South, the idealization of the Confederacy helped to minimize the aspect of defeat and make meaningful the loss of men in the war. It also publicized the virtues of

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[107] Gertrude, "Female Piety," *The Parlor Visitor* 1 (February 1854): 38.

[108] For more on this topic, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-174. Welter examines woman's magazines and related literature from this period and exposes a manipulation of women for them to aspire to "true womanhood:" a condition that contained four cardinal virtues, i.e., piety, purity, submissiveness, and domestication. It was only through these virtues that a woman could find happiness and power. A woman's place was in the home raising virtuous and patriotic children, preferably with the Bible as a guide.

[109] D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (1860; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973), 49. For more on military tradition and the South, consult Jennifer R. Green, *Military Education and the Emerging Middle Class in the Old South* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the Confederate soldier at a time when southerners worried about their portrayal in the written (or yet-to-be-written) historical accounts of the war. Confederate monuments began springing up on courthouse lawns across the post-bellum South. Most of these memorials consisted of a marble or granite shaft (both of which were more affordable than bronze) topped with the likeness of a Confederate soldier. Typically, the soldier poses at rest with a musket by his side and is depicted as well-groomed and well-fed.[110]

As in most commemorations, the dedication of a monument often seemed more about those who placed them there than their subjects. At the unveiling of a Confederate monument on the public square in Franklin, Tennessee in November 1899, for example, the United Daughters of the Confederacy proclaimed that the obelisk had been erected so "that our children might know by daily observation of this monument that their fathers and mothers regarded the Confederate soldier as the grandest character in all history."[111] For this speaker, like the orator at the King's Mountain celebration, the emphasis rested on those who did the honoring rather than those being honored.

Historical societies seldom had the wherewithal to fund the costs of erecting monuments. Still, their support of such efforts, whether as a body or through individual

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[110] Stephen Davis suggests the period of Confederate monument building is in conflict with prosperity of the so-called Gilded Age, which was seen as the principle enemy of memorialization—the selflessness of the Lost Cause versus the drive for material gain. Monument-building was supposed to counter the materialistic tendencies of the era; yet, as monuments tended to get larger, they became costlier. See Davis, "Empty Eyes, Marble Hand: The Confederate Monument and the South," *Journal of Popular Culture* 16 (Winter 1982): 2-21. Ironically, many Confederate monuments were manufactured by northern firms. For this, see Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 117-118. For more on Confederate memorials in post-bellum U. S., see Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*, 36-37.

[111] "Daughters at Franklin—Address Made for Them at Monument Dedication," *Confederate Veteran* 8 (April 1900), 172. It is significant that while the United Daughters of the Confederacy [UDC] raised the funds for this memorial, a male speaker (J. H. Henderson) presented the speech on their behalf. For more on the dedication ceremony and speech, see "Confederate Monument at Franklin," *Confederate Veteran* 8 (January 1900): 5-13. For an excellent examination of the history and impact of the UDC, see Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

members, revealed their desire to espouse the popular causes of the day. S. A. Cunningham, editor of the *Confederate Veteran* and THS member, worked feverishly in the latter part of the nineteenth century to get a monument erected in honor of Sam Davis, a Confederate soldier hung as a spy during the Civil War. Cunningham used the *Confederate Veteran* magazine, as well as the support of THS, to have a monument placed on the Capitol grounds at Nashville, which finally occurred in 1909.[112]

Memorials in the nineteenth century reveal the ties between public memory and material culture. Monuments not only represent memories or, rather, idealizations of memories, but are also physical, visible reminders of how a generation responds to those idealizations. Historical societies promoted their versions of history through the medium of print (publications and circulars), the display of objects (portraits and artifacts), and celebratory events (anniversaries and commemorations). In each instance, the message carried by the messenger nurtured a definite interpretation of the past designed to channel the public's attention. Historical societies, in ordering the past, transmitted knowledge—albeit selective knowledge—to create an historical memory. They infused objects and places with commemorative significance to underscore their version of history.

Material culture within nineteenth-century historical societies held an emotional fascination for members. In an 1857 address, the recording secretary of the South Carolina Historical Society declared: "To the historian nothing is insignificant, nothing

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[112] Sumner Archibald Cunningham (1843-1913), a Tennessee-born veteran of the Confederate Army, found his niche in journalism after the war, working for various newspapers until settling with the *Nashville American* in 1884 where he became that newspaper's top reporter. He started the *Confederate Veteran* in 1893 as an outgrowth of efforts to raise a memorial for Jefferson Davis. Eventually, the publication became the official organ of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, UDC, and other like-minded organizations. Cunningham joined THS in 1880 and presented papers relating to the Civil War. See John A. Simpson, *S. A. Cunningham and the Confederate Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1944).

valueless. Every relic of past times, however humble, tells its own story, and in the absence of the living tongue reveals no small portion of the inner life of the people."[113] Similarly, a twentieth-century art historian argued that "figuratively speaking, we put ourselves inside the bodies of the individuals who made or used these objects; we see with their eyes and touch with their hands."[114] Both men captured the essence of material culture studies—using the words "inner" and "inside"—that is, exploring the values, ideas, and attitudes of the past through material productions. The 1857 quote, however, places an emphasis on "story," an indication of the strength of romantic narrative during the nineteenth century. The speaker also signifies that objects are substitutes "in the absence of the living tongue," a nod to the preeminence oral recollections had in piecing together history—an object being a poor second. The 1857 speaker insists that every relic, "however humble," is significant; but historical societies consistently acquired artifacts that linked themselves to some person or event of importance—not just any chair from the 1700s, but a chair sat upon by George Washington.

The period of the American Revolution and the early settlement of the West held a particular absorption for societies which believed in progress and order. America emerged from a fire through divine intervention and a determination to be the guiding light of liberty across the world. Americans accomplished this through a sense of commitment and order—attributes fostered by the founding generation. The singularity of purpose, embodied in the commitment and order necessary to maintain a democracy,

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[113] F. A. Porcher, "Address Pronounced at the Inauguration of the South-Carolina Historical Society, June 28, 1857," *Collections of the South-Carolina Historical Society* 1 (1857), 14.

[114] Jules David Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" in *American Artifacts*, eds., Prown and Hartman, 26.

became fractured by the various interests that dominated the politics of the nineteenth century. Sectional rivalry, the rise of a professional class, and the concerns of ordinary workers belied the notion of a nation progressing toward peace and prosperity for everyone. The public memory of the American Revolution as a creation myth attempted to unify these diverse elements. Nineteenth-century historical societies, as patrician keepers of the past, pushed the idea of America's grand narrative in a romance format. Societies, keen on diffusing their knowledge to the public, did so through publications, circulars, exhibitions, and commemorations.

The heroes of the Revolution and early settlement became figures worthy of emulation amidst the agitation of the nineteenth century. After the Civil War, commemoration changed, as outstanding regional (as opposed to national) figures received recognition. Through it all, conceptions of the past served the needs of the present. The nineteenth-century public memory of early American history insisted on maintaining these heroes as noble and esteemed.[115]

Artifacts received the same type of veneration attributed to Revolutionary heroes and frontier fathers. Historical societies shared a common mission to collect and preserve the past. What they collected and how they preserved it circumscribed the future.

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[115] Yet, some nineteenth-century thinkers did question the trend of making American heroes invulnerable. Charles Francis Adams, in his 1841 work, *Letters of John Adams Addressed to His Wife*, articulated the pitfalls of casting historical figures in marbled glory: "We are beginning to forget that the patriots of former days were men like ourselves, acting and acted upon like the present race, and we are almost irresistibly led to ascribe to them in our imaginations certain gigantic proportions and superhuman qualities, without reflecting that this at once robs their characters of consistency and their virtues of all merit." Quoted in Butterfield, "Archival and Editorial Enterprise," 168.

CHAPTER IV

MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Anson Nelson, the Tennessee Historical Society's corresponding secretary extraordinaire, wrote a thank-you note to a THS donor in January 1885, acknowledging a recent contribution. In the letter, Nelson displayed a keen awareness of material culture studies: "It is very interesting and entertaining to study the manners and habits and deeds of the people who lived on earth years and years ago, and of whom nothing is left but some of the books they wrote and read, or the articles they made, or the ruins of houses where they lived. So it will be with us a hundred years hence."[1] Nelson knew what historians of material culture know: documents alone cannot explain the real past—they give shape but not the essence. Only the study of material life makes history a more ethical and noble pursuit.[2]

This chapter deals with the world of material culture as seen through the eyes of the Tennessee Historical Society in the nineteenth century. The previous chapter examined what "meaning" historical societies ascribed to their acquisitions, as well as how they obtained and preserved them. The discussion on preservation included information about how historical societies stored their collections, how they kept track of

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[1] Cited in Harriet Chappell Owsley, "The Tennessee Historical Society: Its Origin, Progress, and Present Condition," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 29 (Fall 1970), 234.

[2] See Henry Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifacts Place in American Studies," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860,* ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 63-92. For an excellent example of how material culture can be used effectively with documentary evidence, see Laurie A. Wilkie, *Creating Freedom: Material Culture and African American Identity at Oakley Plantation, Louisiana, 1840-1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

their holdings, and how they made the materials accessible. This chapter magnifies those aspects by focusing on one particular historical society as a case study. The objects THS collected during the century ranged from the historical to the hysterical—at least from a modern viewpoint. To THS members, however, each artifact held some worthwhile meaning or value. This chapter seeks to analyze their collections through their eyes. The frustrations of accomplishing this are amplified by the fact that THS members never actually recorded what they thought while surveying any of the artifacts in their holdings. What they did pass on, however, consists of meeting minutes, catalogs, addresses, and papers on a number of topics. Making sense of their interpretations involves the risk of not "getting it right." But by getting an idea of how society at large considered the past though objects, we get an idea of how THS members viewed material culture. Knowing this helps to expand our understanding of the human experience in the nineteenth century.

Since the roots of THS go back to 1820, this survey encompasses most of the nineteenth century. This chronological approach is necessary because the meanings attributed to artifacts not only depend on *who* does the collecting but, also, on *when* they are doing it. Relics acquired in the 1820s held a different significance that those acquired in the 1880s. Preserving the past did not mean living in the past. Indeed, the previous chapter revealed how the past is often used to reflect the trends of the present. The timeline of THS stretches from American adolescence in the 1820s, through the idealism of Romanticism in the 1830s and 1840s, into the sectional rivalry and Manifest Destiny of the 1850s, beyond the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction, to the New South of the Victorian era, and the Progressivism of the 1890s. Also, the issue of historical societies turning from localism to nationalism defines THS in the nineteenth century.

The material culture of THS, as examined in this chapter, breaks down into four divisions.[3] The first section concentrates on the period of TAS, SDK, and the two reformations of THS in 1849 and 1874. The museum-like aspects of historical-society acquisitions, prominent in the first half of the nineteenth century, are considered, along with artifacts obtained in the pre-Civil War period. The next segment deals with accessions from the Ramsey era (1874-1884) and focuses on the way in which the historic associations to the artifacts collected during this period reflected the antiquarian tastes of J. G. M. Ramsey. Donations made to THS in the time frame of 1884 to the end of the century comprise the third segment. Taking on a more professional, archival persona, THS became receptive to newer ideas and fewer "things" in their collection. The final part of the chapter focuses on how THS obtained their holdings and how they preserved and cataloged them for accessibility. A look at their history of finding suitable quarters also receives attention. And, as in the previous chapters, the three major components of progress, order, and patricianism make their presence known.

Thomas Schlereth, a disciple of material culture studies, posits that the principal task of these studies is "an attempt to know what can be known about and from the past and present creations of mankind."[4] If we perceive THS members of the nineteenth century as "students" of material culture studies, then we must concede that they, too, attempted to know something about the past from the artifacts they collected. This chapter attempts to see what they saw and, perhaps, why they saw it that way.

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[3] "Material culture" is not only the study of artifacts—the term frequently refers to artifacts themselves. See Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Spring 1982), 1.

[4] Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research," in *Material Culture—A Research Guide*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 7.

Ralph E. W. Earl, one of the founding members of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, owned and operated a museum in Nashville from 1818 to 1827. The museum doubled as a meeting place for TAS on several occasions. Like most museums of that time period, Earl's establishment stored a hodgepodge of specimens ranging from rocks and seashells to Indian artifacts and portrait paintings (the latter a product of Earl's primary occupation). In January 1820, several months before the formation of TAS, Earl published a notice in a Nashville newspaper endorsing his museum and championing his cause to continue and enlarge his operations.[5] Earl insisted his institution meant a great deal to the public. First, and foremost, it saved "valuable relics" from neglect and destruction. These relics included Indian objects that, according to Earl, "transmit to posterity, a knowledge of manners, customs, manufactures, and state of improvements of those nations." A sense of urgency accompanied the plea for preservation for, as Earl indicates, "that what *to-day* may be preserved with ease, on to-morrow, when its value may be duly appreciated, may be lost beyond recovery."

Beyond the act of preservation, Earl's museum provided another meaningful service. "An institution of this kind, concentrates to one point, from all sections of the country, a vast variety of natural and artificial curiosities," Earl aggrandized, "which are unimportant to the individuals possessing them singly, and which can be of little value, unless brought together for comparison and contrast." Natural history specimens, individually, presented no great interest but, collectively, these curiosities encompassed a long history of different and distinct phases of the earth before the present world came into existence—a history preceding the human species itself.

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[5] *Nashville Whig*, 12 January 1820. All subsequent quotes by Earl are from this source.

Ralph Earl concluded his endorsement with a pitch to several different age groups and occupations:

> Such an institution is useful to youth, as an object exciting curiosity, and stimulating to enquiry. It is useful to the philosopher, because he finds the productions of nature under new forms. It is useful to the physician, in mineralogy and comparative anatomy. It is useful to the lawyer, because municipal regulations have their real foundation in the universal laws and philosophy of nature. It is useful to the farmer, when it can be made to set before him, the fossil and vegetable kingdoms and their analysis.[6]

Earl's evaluation is more than mere sales talk—it represents the intricate meanings attached to material culture in antebellum historical societies. What Earl postulated in 1820 could easily be attached to the ethos of TAS, SDK, and THS.

The need for preservation, key to the formation of antebellum historical societies, infused the desire to collect. Without a "collection," there could be no preservation. The Tennessee Antiquarian Society's first order of business demanded that members "procure and preserve" historical facts and objects. When a member such as Ralph Earl or John Haywood examined an Indian relic, their initial thought may have been one of conservancy—this object may not be a great value *today*, but tomorrow, who knows? The very act of examining an Indian artifact conjured up images of aboriginal manners and customs but, as a keeper of the past, an historical-society member also acknowledged his responsibility to safeguard a piece of history. Complications arose when a determination had to be made as to *what* constituted a piece of history.

The museum became the perfect venue for collecting, preserving, and exhibiting historical objects, natural or otherwise. A museum represented a literal storehouse of knowledge, and often the eclecticism of the holdings seemed overwhelming. Insects,

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[6] Ibid.

birds, a stuffed cougar, Native American weapons, and the trunk of a large sycamore tree might be seen, all at the same time, in a museum. "Numberless ideas and reflections were called up to our minds by these inanimate but instructive specimens of nature and art around," observed one museum visitor in 1824, "and we went away not a little gratified with the banquet of mental nourishment which had been so copiously served up to us."[7] As "instructive" parcels of "mental nourishment," museum artifacts possessed the power of knowledge. So it was with objects placed in an historical society.

The museum-like qualities of antebellum historical societies designated these institutions as places of useful knowledge. Like a museum, the historical society took an artifact from the past and gave it an aura of sacredness, so that these societies, in essence, manufactured history by claiming things as "historical" simply on the basis that they survived history.[8] Because an object resided in a collection of an historical society, it

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[7] D. Wilkie, *Sketches of a Summer Trip to New York and the Canadas* (London, UK: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1837), 46-49. Wilkie based his observations on a trip to New York in 1824. In November 1826, the Tennessee legislature received a petition seeking financial support for the Nashville Museum operated by a Dr. de St. Leger. The petition stated the museum was "eminently calculated to transmit to future generations the most important information, as well as to extend and diffuse among our citizens an acquaintance with the character and conditions of the aborigines and early settlers of the country." The document indicated that St. Leger's museum was "composed of the natural curiosities, Indian utensils, and monuments of antiquity." See Legislative Petitions, Record Group 60, Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville) [TSLA], File 32-1826. It is not certain whether St. Leger took over Earl's Museum at this time or operated one of his own. Earl's establishment also went by the name "Nashville Museum," as evidenced by a newspaper notice of 1822 stating Earl's Nashville Museum would be relocating its collection of "Natural and Artificial Curiosities" from Earl's former residence on Cedar Street to a site above Decker's Confectionary Store on the city square. See *Nashville Whig*, 16 January 1822. That the Nashville Museum should be quartered above a confectionary store was not a step down in status. On the contrary, Decker's contained a reading room, open to subscribers, filled with a selection of newspapers and magazines. See Jane Gardner Flener, "A History of Libraries in Tennessee Before the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1963), 25-26. There was more than one museum in Nashville in the 1820s: geologist Dr. Gerard Troost housed his impressive collection of natural specimens at a "Museum" on Nashville's square, beginning in 1828, until it was moved to the University of Nashville campus.

[8] Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 12-13.

took on the character of historical conspicuousness. An "historical" article quickly became an "historic" article simply by being in the collection of an historical society.

Because historical societies also possessed works of art—portraits, sculptures, busts—membership required a certain amount of panache and expertise. Paintings, hung in the midst the stuffed animals and shelves of rocks, lent an air of sophistication to any institution and contributed to the patrician aspect of nineteenth-century historical societies. Only men of education and experience could fully appreciate the natural history and art that surrounded them. Restricted membership allowed them to see themselves as a successful, patrician body of men rather than an unsuccessful attempt at some popular movement. When a THS-joiner studied an artifact, he "saw" it through a pair of eyes *qualified* to see it. His membership in the club reinforced this estimate.

While geological and zoological specimens dominated the collection of TAS, SDK seemed to care little for *any* artifacts, concentrating instead on building up a strong library. SDK leadership comprised of academics steeped in university training, where a good library became central to good scholarship. Furthermore, the stigma of being a "western" society prompted SDK to concentrate on literary pursuits rather than fashioning a museum of fossils and rocks. Ironically, the "western" blemish did not dissipate once Tennessee became a "southern" state. One art journalist commented in 1856 that "the people of the South, generally, are very little interested in any thing that pertains to either Art or Literature."[9] Misrepresentations such as this sparked southern localities like Nashville to establish learned societies. The appearance of a library in a

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[9] "Cosmopolitan Correspondence," *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 1 (November 1856), 69. Quoted in Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 231.

town went a long way toward establishing a community's self esteem and lessening the sting of barbs against its lack of culture.

Tennessee, in the unique position of having been both a "western" and a "southern" state, tended to gravitate toward a local, rather than national, nexus.[10] Southerners, traditionally, thought in terms of locality and states and usually referred to their home state as feminine—an implication of nativity. A speaker at the 1839 commencement of the University of Nashville appealed to state pride through his elocutionary skills. "And who that was born beneath the bright sky of Tennessee is not proud of his birthright?" he asked, "Who does not feel proud that she has her immortal Jackson & a host of others, as noble & as brave spirits as ever fought or bled in their country's cause?"[11] Artifacts connected to Tennessee history—or even Middle Tennessee (the location of Nashville) history—became sought-after items. Bound volumes of Tennessee newspapers and some hand-drawn maps of Nashville, presented to THS in 1857, delighted the membership.[12]

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[10] Tennessee has been labeled as a state in the Middle South, comprising of parts resembling the Lower South (western Tennessee) and the Border South (eastern Tennessee). For an explanation of this, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 17-18. Freehling refers the Middle South as "truly a land between." He also describes Nashville in 1850 as "a town too much in the middle of other worlds to define its own identity." Ibid., 482.

[11] Samuel H. Stout Papers, 1819-1954, Tennessee Historical Society (Nashville), Box 2, Folder 11. Also, a 16 September 1858 letter from Mitchell King to J. G. M. Ramsey, in which King admonishes Ramsey to continue writing his *Annals of Tennessee*: "Your state I am sure expects it from you. Do not I pray you permit *her* to be disappointed." Cited in Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), I: 359 [emphasis added].

[12] Tennessee Historical Society Office Files 1790-1985, Tennessee Historical Society [hereafter cited as THS Office Files], Box 15, Folder 5. J. G. M. Ramsey once noted: "My allegiance has always been . . . first to my native Tennessee and second and through her to the United States." Quoted in William B. Hesseltine, ed., *Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey—Autobiography and Letters* (1954; reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 99n3.

More interesting to the Society than maps and newspapers were relics of the pioneer period, especially implements symbolizing the Indian wars. Just prior to the formation of THS in 1849, William Wales, editor of the *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig* (and soon-to-be THS member), touted the idea of an historical society "for the purpose mainly of preserving in some safe form, the relics of the early settlement of Tennessee, such as arms and other interesting mementos of the early struggles of the pioneers."[13] Swords and Indian artifacts became visible reminders of the early conflicts. In 1858, THS accepted the donation of a piece of pine tree with a bullet in it found at an old Indian battleground in McMinn County.[14] What contemplations came across the minds of Society members as they gazed at this relic? Obviously, the bullet missed its intended target. Was it shot by a sturdy pioneer, defending his home from savages skulking near the woods? Or was it from a musket in the hands of a Cherokee Indian, bent on destroying settlers encroaching on his lands?

Perhaps Society members reflected on the words of Dr. Ramsey's early history of Tennessee, written the same decade as the acquisition of the bullet:

> Savage barbarity drenched the frontier with the blood of the first emigrants, and the hardy soldier, alike with the helpless female and child, became victims to the scalping knife and tomahawk of the Indian. . . . Every valley became the avenue of Indian aggression, and every mountain a lurking place for the merciless Cherokee. [15]

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[13] *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, 7 April 1849.

[14] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 10.

[15] J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century Comprising Its Settlement, as the Watauga Association, from 1769 to 1777; a Part of North-Carolina, from 1777 to 1784; the State of Franklin, from 1784 to 1788; a Part of North-Carolina, from 1788 to 1790; the Territory of the U. States, South of the Ohio, from 1790 to 1796; the State of Tennessee, from 1796 to 1800* (1853; reprint, Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1967), 2-3. All subsequent quotes by Ramsey in this paragraph are from this source.

Ramsey wrote of this Indian aggression as the "common danger" from which "the industrious husband-man derived no immunity." At first, white settlers endured ruthless treatment from the savages, until the victims became the invaders. Through "their daring adventure, their prowess and their triumph," the frontier fathers finally brought civilization to Tennessee. So, while the relic conjured up images of savage barbarity, it also reminded the observer of the early settlers' valiant deeds that transformed Indian battlefields into pastures of plenty. Again, Ramsey:

> The war-paths of his ancestors have been converted into the channels of a gainful commerce; in the place of their extinguished council fires, are seen the courts of justice; in the place of their extinguished Pagan temples, churches, consecrated to the worship of the true God, elevate their spires in the direction of the Christian's hope—to heaven.[16]

Notice how order, in the form of "the courts of justice," replaced the chaos of the frontier. Furthermore, Ramsey symbolized progress through the appearance of church spires towering over the landscape.

To society in the mid-nineteenth century, history consisted of a progression ordained by God; and if Providence determined this forward movement, then the future must always be better than the past. "That God has dwelt and dwells with humanity is not only the noblest illustration of its nature, but the perfect guarantee for its progress," George Bancroft professed in an 1854 oration before the New-York Historical Society.[17] In Tennessee, Reverend Herschel Porter expounded similar sentiments while speaking at Cumberland University in 1852:

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[16] Ibid., 2.

[17] George Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 505, 516.

> The work of creation, we have a right to believe, from Scripture and analogy, is progressive, and doubtless is still going on. . . . Every College, every Museum, every library, every literary and scientific association, every railway, every telegraph, every steam vessel, and every labor saving machine unitedly declare the same fact.[18]

According to Porter, every museum, library, and, by implication, every historical society, represented "progress." Historical societies served to preserve the past so that future generations might trace the upward advancement of humanity.

In order to illustrate the advancements of science and technology—important facets in arriving at the golden age—historical societies collected more than relics from the past. In 1858, THS acquired a specimen of the first transatlantic cable about to be laid down.[19] The first transmission of a telegraphic message across the Atlantic in August 1858 became "one of the great events of the world," according to a Nashville newspaper editorial celebrating the occasion. Although man-made, the cable's technology *had* to be providentially inspired. The editorial stated that the event demonstrated "a great moral, religious, social, commercial, and political blessing to man . . . and fixed upon by Divine Providence as a new and powerful auxiliary to human progress."[20] The nineteenth century American view of technology never escaped this

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[18] Herschel S. Porter, *Address by Rev. Herschel S. Porter, Delivered Before the Literary Societies of Cumberland University, at Lebanon, Tennessee, July 28, 1852* (Louisville, KY: Morton & Griswold, 1852), 20, 40. In his address, Porter makes a brilliant allusion to a train as representative of nineteenth-century progress: "The nineteenth century may be regarded as a magnificent steam car, which is moving forward, in grandeur and majesty, bearing onward the interests of the whole human race, whirling away toward the great depot of the next century, in many an ample curve and sweep. There at the next depot, the beginning of the next century, a train of greater magnificence will be in readiness to roll on the growing interests of the human race, toward a point of ultimate perfection that is at least no ordinary happiness to contemplate, if we in our life time shall never see." Ibid., 45. This millennial idea of future perfection was tied to the destiny of the United States.

[19] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 10.

[20] *Nashville Daily Gazette*, 17 August 1858. The editorial added: "We cannot apprehend that harm will fall upon it. . . . We have no dread that the great Architect will not shield it from the storm."

Puritan-like view of the world—the link between religion and science—despite attempts by new scientific disciplines and Darwinian evolution to dethrone the Bible in the middle of the century.[21]

No matter how divinely inspired the future seemed, cracks appeared in the structure of the nation by the century's half-way point. The sectional controversy over slavery, the idea that maybe America stretched too far across the continent, the increasing lure of materialism, the rise of industrialism—all these factors, and others, presented problems for those insistent that the nation had no limitations on good fortune. Uncertainty about the future crept into the social psyche, as leadership searched for commonalities to bring the disparate factions of the country together. The past, in the form of the American Revolution, offered one solution. The grand narrative of the Revolution provided drama and instruction for the Jacksonian generation. Nathaniel Cross, THS president and university professor, admonished his students to strive to imitate the character of a Benjamin Franklin or a George Washington.[22]

Artifacts associated with the Revolution dominated the interests of THS for most of the period from the 1850s to the 1880s. In December 1849, THS obtained a pair of spectacles once belonging to General Nathanael Greene. The donation, a gift from a Mrs. Robert Martin, intrigued the Society to the point of ordering an engraving made on the glasses. The following month, the relic reappeared with the inscription: "Genl. Nathaniel

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[21] Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 43-51. Organizations such as the American Bible Society, founded in 1816, made sure of the Bible's continued influence—by the mid-1850s nearly 250,000 Bibles were issued and nearly 430,000 New Testaments were sold at cost or given away. See Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 142.

[22] Nathaniel Cross, *An Address Delivered Before the Agatheridan and Erosophian Societies of the Nashville University, on the Thirty-first of March, 1834* (Nashville: Western Methodist Office, 1834), 15.

Green's Spectacles, presented by his daughter, Mrs. Littlefield, to Dr. Wm. G. Dickinson of Nashville, now presented to the Historical Society of Tennessee by Mrs. Robert Martin, daughter of Dr. Dickinson, Decr. 4, 1849."[23]

Aside from the genealogical implications of the engraving (or how the engraver managed to get the lengthy inscription on a pair of glasses), the spectacles served as a tangible link to the Revolution. Holding these glasses in one's hands, or maybe daring to try them on, THS members could relive the great romance of the war. Unlike the bloody images of the early Indian wars, the American Revolution summoned mental impressions more noble and sacred in nature. The handler of the spectacles may not have had any single vivid intuition, but he sensed he held something worthy of veneration. In the midst of the progress revolving around the day, the glasses made time stand still for a moment, connecting the past with the present. At the same time that THS members were examining the spectacles, Benson Lossing assembled his notes for his history of the American Revolution. Concerned over the growing lack of public interest in the Revolution, Lossing stated his reasons for compiling this work:

> I knew that the genius of our people was the reverse of antiquarian reverence for things of the past; that the glowing future, all sunlight and eminence, absorbed their thoughts and energies. . . . I knew that the invisible fingers of decay, the plow of agriculture, and the behests of Mammon, unrestrained in their operations by the prevailing spirit of our people, would soon sweep away every tangible vestige of the Revolution.[24]

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[23] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5. Nathanael Greene was a major general of the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, rising from the rank of a private in the militia in Rhode Island. He served with Washington at Valley Forge before being selected by Washington as commander in the South. There he amassed an impressive record of making the British retreat despite some American setbacks.

[24] Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution; or, Illustrations, by Pen and Pencil, of the History, Biography, Scenery, Relics, and Traditions of the War for Independence*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), I: viii.

Other Revolutionary War relics made their way to THS, including an old musket captured from a Hessian soldier at the Battle of Guilford Court House (North Carolina) in 1781 ("It is still a good old weapon.") and a small parcel of charred rye destroyed by Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton under orders from Lord Cornwallis.[25]

The Battle of Kings Mountain (7 October 1780) became Tennessee's most identifiable link to the Revolutionary War. In this contest, Patriot forces, led by frontier colonels John Sevier and Isaac Shelby, soundly defeated a Loyalist army commanded by Major Patrick Ferguson near Blacksburg, South Carolina. Because future "Tennesseans" such as Sevier participated in the battle (along with some Georgians and Virginians), the affair at Kings Mountain reached almost mythical proportions in history of the American Revolution in the South. Claiming Kings Mountain as *the* pivotal battle in the South, historians such as John Haywood exaggerated the victory at Kings Mountain in order to validate Tennessee's role in the American Revolution.[26] Haywood, and others who followed, created an image of the westerner—oppressed but overly patriotic—who marched to the cause without government support. Numerous papers delivered at THS meetings over the years concerned Kings Mountain.[27] Relics dealing with the battle

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[25] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folders 5, 10. The bizarreness of the latter "relic" denotes just how slim the thread could be linking the Revolutionary War to nineteenth-century historical societies.

[26] Lynn Nelson, "'Actions . . . Conducive to the Prosperity and Character of the Nation': John Haywood's Telling of Tennessee's Early History," *Border States* 15 (2005), 39-42. Lyman Draper, of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, seemed obsessed by the topic and, indeed, the only book he published dealt with the conflict. Draper's book is entitled *King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th 1780, and the Events Which Led to It* (Cincinnati: P. G. Thompson, 1881). Both "King's" and "Kings" appear to have been accepted as an accurate spelling. A detailed account of the battle can be found in John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Court House: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 202-241.

[27] One of the very first papers read at a THS meeting (5 June 1849) concerned the Battle of Kings Mountain. See THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5. The fascination with Kings Mountain never dissipated during the century. The official guide to the 1897 Tennessee Centennial celebration lists the swords of

became sought-after items by the Tennessee Historical Society. Touching a sword from the battle tied the handler to an event deemed central to the Revolutionary conflict: rugged "Over mountain Men" marching through rain-soaked forests to battle against American Loyalists.

Artifacts from other wars poured into THS during the Ramsey era: a sword belonging to Major Lemuel Montgomery, killed at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend during the Creek War; a muster roll from the War of 1812; flags flown in combat in the Mexican War; and, of course, Civil War relics ranging from the brass key of the powder magazine at Fort Donelson to parts of a Federal shell, shot into Bowling Green, Kentucky, upon the city's evacuation and recovered "while yet hot, almost immediately after the explosion" by a Mrs. W. B. Kline of Nashville.[28] Each item presented the possessor with its own particular visualization but, collectively, they harkened to the military spirit of Tennessee, known by this time as the Volunteer State.

When the son of John Sevier, Tennessee's frontier father, died in 1849, a Nashville newspaper carried the obituary. The newspaper noted that George Washington Sevier passed the earlier part of his career "among the hardy pioneers" like his father. His subsequent military career suffered from the fact that "no opportunity presented itself for the display of those gallant qualities which he inherited from his father, and to test his

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British officers Colonel DePeyster and Major Ferguson as part of the THS exhibit, along with the red silk sash taken from Ferguson's body after the battle. See *Official Guide to the Centennial and International Exposition and City of Nashville* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Co., 1897), 70.

[28] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folders 1-6. Other Civil War artifacts collected at this time included the cap of General Cleburne who fell at the Battle of Franklin, an "Arkansas tooth-pick" or Bowie knife taken from the battlefield at Fort Donelson, the brass eagle from the tip of the U. S. flagstaff picked up at Chickamauga, official correspondence (collected for autographs of the officers), a piece of corner stone of the Zion Church at the Shiloh battlefield, Confederate postage stamps, money, bullets, and grapeshot.

skill in battle."[29] Not winning any martial laurels slighted the legacy of George Washington Sevier. Tennesseans honored its fighters and their weapons of war. Articles associated with conflict—be it a battle flag or a cannon shell—reinforced the notion that life was a struggle requiring masculine attributes. The men of THS vicariously fought those struggles through the acquisition of items relating to bloodshed and war.

Ramsey's antiquarian reverence for things of the past put no restrictions on the number of artifacts collected by THS. The variety of acquisitions during the era when he dominated THS bordered on the astonishing: diaries, newspapers, city directories, autographed letters, rare coins, Indian pottery and arrowheads, books, pamphlets, a piece from the sill of the front entrance to Mount Vernon, a stone from Gibraltar, a silk dress worn by the mother of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, flint-lock pistols from the Revolutionary War, the quill of an eagle which became the pen used by President Polk to sign his first message to Congress, a petrified mammoth tooth, the head of a four-horned sheep, a wolf skin, a specimen of wire-cloth "fused on the great fire in Chicago," a snuff box made from the tree under which William Penn conducted his treaty with the Indians in Philadelphia, and a "singular excrescence from a cow's back."[30]

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[29] [Nashville] *Republican Banner*, 23 March 1849. The fact that John Sevier's son is named after George Washington—a very common circumstance in the period of the early republic—further reflects the impact of the Revolutionary generation on the next.

[30] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folders 1-6. As one might expect, relics of an unusual nature crept into the Civil War holdings of THS. In 1889 a man from Lexington, Virginia, sent a piece of wood from a tree near the grave of Stonewall Jackson along with a bizarre story of how Jackson's widow had the tree removed in 1887 only to discover that one of the roots had penetrated the coffin, forced open the lid, and proceeded to reach the center of the body's breast where it grew down in Jackson's shape, even branching to make legs. The sexton of the cemetery had the portion of the wood that lay on the bones of the breast removed, and the man persuaded him to sell the piece then given to THS (other pieces were owned by various museums and Jackson's widow). This macabre account is found in a letter from F. S. Harris to J. S. Carels, 14 April 1889, Robert T. Quarles, Jr. Papers, Tennessee Historical Society, Box 1, Folder 5.

Being tied to an historic event, person, or even time frame made an object extraordinary. In 1880, for example, THS received a number of donations centered around events pertinent to the history of the Old Southwest: the clapper of the old Court House bell in Nashville "broken in the joy of ringing it at the news of the victory at New Orleans" (Tennessee's version of the Liberty Bell?); an old pepper box said to have been used by Daniel Boone at Fort Boonesboro in Kentucky; and a table cloth said to have been made in Nashville in 1780.[31] The bell achieved significance only because it broke ringing out the news of Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans. The value of the pepper box rested on its supposed use by Daniel Boone, not as an artifact from the early settlement of Kentucky. THS accepted the tablecloth not as an item of material culture of the frontier period but, rather, because its manufactured date was 1780—the year attributed to the founding of Nashville. Another acquisition from 1880 was a cast iron kettle, supposedly brought over on the Mayflower in 1620 by a John Mason, and later removed to Jamestown, Virginia.[32] Subsequently, the kettle made its way to French Lick (the original name for Nashville), where it served as a cooking vessel in the fort built by Colonel James Robertson. The historical associations surrounding this object are almost dizzying: the Mayflower, Jamestown, early Nashville, and Tennessee's frontier father James Robertson. Supposedly, the kettle remained in the Mason family from the time of their arrival on the Mayflower in 1620, until its donation to THS by Major E. B. Mason of Dyer County, Tennessee. Minus these associations, the kettle

[31] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 7.

[32] Ibid.

remained nothing more than a black cooking pot, but *with* these historic affiliations, it became a priceless heirloom.[33]

Many acquisitions came from donors who offered more than one item, and the Tennessee Historical Society *never* turned any of them down. In order to obtain the one item deemed historic, the society may have felt obligated to accept the not-so-valued artifact as well. In any event, THS welcomed all contributions, no matter how obscure. In 1886, Judge Samuel R. Kirkpatrick of Jonesboro, Tennessee, donated two items of interest—one historical and one absurd. Kirkpatrick submitted the first ballot-box ever used in an election during the pre-statehood of Tennessee, presumably 1778 or 1779. With it, he also offered "a natural hand in corn cob, which grew in that shape, and with a little work by a pocket knife made the finger, hand and wrist complete." Actually, this was the second corn cob in the shape of a human hand THS acquired, having received one from a donor five years before Judge Kirkpatrick's gift.[34]

The THS ledger for acquisitions in 1880 lists 564 items, ranging from a pebble from the Jordan River to a chair used by Millard Fillmore.[35] Conjectures about how THS

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[33] Mason previously donated a handsaw brought to French Lick by James Robertson in 1780. Supposedly, the saw helped construct the first house at the settlement. Mason even provided a "history" of the saw: it fell into the hands of one of Nashville's early settlers, David Hood, and from there to James Martin, who settled in Nashville in 1790. William Martin, son of James, acquired it and removed to Dyer County, Tennessee in the 1820s, where it was handed down to his oldest child, Elizabeth C. Cribbs. Cribbs, in turn, gave it to Mason with the promise "that I would send it to the Historical Society at Nashville." See E. B. Mason "to the President of the Historical Society at Nashville, Tennessee," 10 February 1876, Tennessee Historical Society Miscellaneous Files 1688-1951, Tennessee Historical Society [hereafter cited as THS Misc. Files], Box 10, File M-39.

[34] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folders 8, 13. In 1877 THS received an 1805 diary kept by a Kentuckian of his trip from Bardstown to Washington, but the excitement of obtaining such a treasure may have been tempered by the donor's other gift: a whale's tooth. See ibid, Box 16, Folder 4.

[35] THS Office Files, Box 5, Folder 2. It should be pointed out that the 564 items did not account for multiplicity. In other words, a bundle of letters from Andrew Jackson was considered as one item, as was a bundle of newspapers and letters from a donor.

members looked upon the variety of objects in their collection prove complex considering that, in the same year, a committee on cataloging the effects of the Society encountered "a very large number of letters and relics which they thought almost worthless." Considerable discussion on the topic ensued, until the body adopted a resolution authorizing a sub-committee on cataloging "to classify and catalogue all MSS. and autographs and other effects of the T.H.S. and that any MSS. or document they think not worthy, will be submitted to the Society for their action."[36]

Yet, during the 1880s, THS continued to acquire an abundance of materials. The obligatory geological specimens, old coins, bank notes, maps, and manuscripts turned up, along with the usual array of military memorabilia, such a gun used in the Creek War, a Mexican lance picked up on the field at the Battle of Monterey, and a hickory cane cut from the tree near where Colonel Ferguson died at Kings Mountain. In addition, a bevy of curiosities found their way into THS holdings: a lock of hair from Dr. Felix Robertson (the first white child born in the Cumberland settlements); a "handsomely inscribed" inkstand from the Alamo; a piece of granite from the grave of Seminole chief Osceola, who died at Fort Moultrie in 1838; a large tusk of a giant hog raised and killed by C. R. Puckett of Nashville in 1853; a white hawk "to be stuffed" by the Society; and a vest made by Mrs. Sarah Stewart for her husband, Andrew, in 1800 near the mouth of the Harpeth River in Cheatham County.[37]

The last-mentioned item nearly passes for an example of material culture based on nothing more than the vest representing homespun clothing on the frontier. However, a

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[36] Ibid., Box 5, Folder 2.

[37] Ibid., Box 16, Folders 7-16.

note accompanying the artifact stated that Mrs. Stewart was the daughter of Jonathan Drake, "an early settler who was killed by the Indians nearly one hundred years ago."[38] Thus, the piece of clothing achieved distinction not as an example of frontier domesticity, but as a product of the offspring of a pioneer killed by Indians.

The information about Drake and his daughter came from the donor (presumably a descendant of Mrs. Stewart). The Society took it on face value that the facts were correct. How many acquisitions came through the doors of THS based on faulty evidence? One can only guess.[39] The THS meeting minutes of 23 March 1880 record this acquisition from S. S. Hall of Davidson County: "An old watch, obtained from an old Revolutionary soldier named Copeland, who died at Lee's Tavern in this county, on the Gallatin turnpike, in 1840. He said it once belonged to Gen. Washington, which is doubtless incorrect."[40] Despite the Society's skepticism, the item became part of the THS collection—perhaps on the basis that an "an old Revolutionary soldier" once owned it (even if that soldier was not George Washington). Hall also donated an old deed, dated 1791, to a tract of land, as well as an Indian arrowhead. The Society likely accepted one item in order to get the others.

Historical societies seldom questioned the source or background of acquisitions (in archival and museum terms, its provenance). The absence of scrutiny no doubt led to a number of suspect accretions. Members of THS were not, after all, professional

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[38] Ibid., Box 16, Folder 7.

[39] Historical societies of the nineteenth century failed to "screen" most of their donations for authenticity. The Virginia Historical Society received a brass, single barrel pistol in the 1830s, supposedly used by Captain John Smith. Later investigation s revealed it to be an English pistol from the mid-eighteenth century. See "History of the Virginia Historical Society," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 39 (October 1931), 298.

[40] THS Office Files Box 16, Folder 7.

curators (there being no such profession at the time); nor did they have the leisure to track down the facts behind every gift and donation. Perhaps the trust put into the donors' claims harked back to the same type of faith placed or oral recollections, so popular during the romantic phase of narrative history. An object's history came solely from the donor and thereby influenced the way Society members viewed the item.

When E. B. Mason sent THS the "Battle Axe" once owned by William Martin, he included a letter detailing the history of the weapon. After the War of 1812, Martin took his axe to Dyer County where "he did not have a neighbor living nearer than 8 miles except his brother-in-law Jeremiah Pearce," according to Mason. Then Mason related this incident: "he was a good hunter and one ocassion when his Powder got wet and his gun would not make fire his faithfull Dogs having attacked a Savage Bare and was geting the worst of the Fight he drawed his faithfull Axe and Rushed forward and Slew the Monster whith as much ease as David Slough Goliath."[41] Mason does not explain how *he* obtained this anecdote—from others or Martin himself—nor does he mention exactly when or where the episode took place. In any event, these details cast an added allure to the object already rife with historic connotations. When a THS member examined Martin's "Battle Axe," the weapon not only invoked scenes of warfare, but an adventure stereotypical of the frontier—a lone pioneer coming face to face with a ferocious bear, then killing the wild animal. The story could have jumped off the pages of a David Crockett dime novel. Oddly enough, Mason reported to the Society in his letter that he

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[41] Letter of 10 February from E. B. Mason to President of the Tennessee Historical Society, THS Misc. Files, Box 10, File M-39. Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization are true to the original letter. Mason provided other details on Martin's life, such as his age, number of children, death date, religious affiliation, and the fact that Martin was the first justice of the peace in Dyer County. Particulars such as these proved to be a boon to genealogists.

had "some prospect of obtaining Col. David Crockett's old hunting gun." He promised he would forward the rifle to the Society if, and when, he got his hands on it.

The fact that William Martin moved to Dyer County (in West Tennessee) sometime after the War of 1812 becomes a factor in analyzing how THS members "saw" the axe as a relic. Once used to kill Indians, the weapon then proceeded to conquer the wilderness (as well as bears) by becoming a tool to cut down trees. As Mason put it, Martin "lived to see the country he settled in change from a wilderness to a country well settled with good substantial citizens."[42] The movability expressed in Martin's relocation reminded THS members that America's greatness drew from its mobility. Mobile Europeans came to America in the first place, and mobile Americans migrated across the country. Portability gave Americans freedom to experiment with new ways of doing things; if something did not work out in one place, you could move to another. Movement thus became a symbol of freedom.[43]

Just as movement worked in space, so it did in time—toward the future. Americans in the nineteenth-century imagined their future as their true national territory. Scientific works displaced biblical chronology, and the technology-driven "clock time," became central to society by the end of the century.[44] William Martin's axe also moved in time and space. As a weapon, it existed through the War of 1812 into the future where, as a different kind of weapon, it felled trees, carving civilization out of a

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[42] Ibid.

[43] See Pierce Lewis, "Defining a Sense of Place," *Southern Quarterly* 17 (Spring-Summer 1979), 30-33.

[44] Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). In an 1839 essay for the *United States Democratic Review*, "The Great Nation of Futurity," journalist John O'Sullivan wrote: "The far-reaching, the boundless future will be an era of American greatness." Cited in ibid., 17.

wilderness. The axe journeyed from Tennessee to the Indian territory of what would become Alabama, to the Battle of New Orleans, and back to wilds of western Tennessee.

The Historical Society also actively sought genealogical materials, and donor information usually included some genealogical data about the ownership of an historic relic. A THS pamphlet published in 1880 came with a "Special Notice" from Recording Secretary Anson Nelson: "Persons having printed or written Family Histories, will confer a favor by sending a copy to the Tennessee Historical Society for preservation and reference."[45] The social climbing of the Gilded Age stimulated upper class pride in ancestry. At a time when parvenus clamored for admission to the choicest circles, there remained a measure of status in associating one's personal lineage with the original fount of national greatness—a kind of "patrician nationalism."[46]

For the most part, the membership of THS, during the post-bellum period, consisted of the nouveaux riches of the Gilded Age. *But* it maintained a sense of patrician discernment through the marriage vows exchanged between the social climbers

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[45] Back cover of *The Charter and By-Laws of the Tennessee Historical Society, Revised October, 1878. With a List of Members* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1880).

[46] For this, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 32, 138-140. The term "Gilded Age" is borrowed from Mark Twain's 1873 novel of the same title that satirized get-rich schemes and corruption in Washington, suggesting that America glittered on the outside while it rotted at the core. Historians generally attribute the Gilded Age roughly from 1865-1890. See Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4, 6. Edwards writes: "Much that is familiar about the United States that we know today emerged after the Civil War, both because of what Americans did in those decades and also because of the dreams they relinquished and the paths they did not take." Ibid., 6. Edwards is keen to point out the paradox of the Gilded Age: that despite a troubled economic and social transformation, filled with strife and racial/ethnic tensions, this period was also a time of enormous optimism for ordinary Americans. Geoffrey Blodgett, in his historiographic essay on the Gilded Age, sees this period as an era that sought stability and equilibrium beyond the turbulence of war and reconstruction: "In any given era a society seeks its own equilibrium, its own special cluster of inhibitions, anxieties and urgencies, its own sense of what is possible and what is appropriate. In searching out terms of equilibrium for the Gilded Age, we should bear in mind that people act on memory more than prophecy. The age is best understood not as a dark prelude to Progressivism but rather as a somber sequel to the Civil War." See Blodgett, "A New Look at the American Gilded Age," *Historical Reflections* 1 (Winter 1974): 231-244 [quote on p. 238].

and the established Nashville elite. A. W. Putnam, already a figure of note because of his family connections to the Revolutionary War, married John Sevier's granddaughter. John M. Lea married into the Overton family, a distinguished Middle Tennessee clan. Another prominent THS member, John M. Bass, married Felix Grundy's daughter.[47]

Historian J. H. Plumb reminds us that genealogical fever breaks out when new classes are emerging into status or when the established ruling class feels threatened by the nouveaux riches.[48] Unlike a gentility prescribed by birth, the new gentility achieved a status through education and labor (a "natural" rather than an "artificial" aristocracy).[49] In the case of THS, the genealogical implications stemmed from a combination of new urban-class and old ruling-class mentalities. When some THS members gazed upon a letter written by James Robertson, or a uniform once worn by John Sevier, they conjured a familial link that no "ordinary" person could.

Members of the Tennessee Historical Society considered themselves as professionals. Professionalization has been defined as a three-part process "by which a community of inquirers is established, distinguishes itself from other groups and from society at large, and enhances communication among its members, organizing and

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[47] See Jane H. Thomas, *Old Days in Nashville, Tenn.—Reminiscences* (1897; reprint, Nashville: Charles Elder, 1960). These and other examples are scattered throughout the book. Some members were directly tied to the frontier fathers. A. S. Colyar's mother, for instance, was a niece of "Bonny Kate" Sherrill, second wife of John Sevier. See Thomas Woodrow Davis, "Arthur S. Colyar and the New South, 1860-1905" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1962), 5. Gates Thruston married into a noted Nashville family but, because he had been a Union general, some people recall him being "very arrogant." See William Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 166.

[48] J. H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), 30-35. J. G. M. Ramsey once wrote: "I believe in Blood—noble blood." Quoted in David Lawson Eubanks, "Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey of East Tennessee: A Career of Public Service" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1965), 75-76.

[49] Daniel Walker Howe, "The Genteel Tradition," *Reviews in American History* 2 (June 1974), 245.

disciplining them, and heightening their credibility in the eyes of the public."[50] As early as the 1840s, a Nashville newspaper remarked on the "strong propensity among the young men of the United States to become what are called professional men."[51] The European pattern of science and scholarship, tempered by the egalitarian requirements of American society, produced professionalism by the last third of the century.[52] Lawyers who had played an active role in the development of corporate capitalism, came to regard themselves as chief engineers of the new business economy. Concerned about their image, especially in terms of political associations, they fostered more professional standards.[53] Did they, as "professional" men—lawyers, bankers, railroad executives—represent a new way of looking at the past? Lawyers, in particular, made up the majority of THS membership in the second half of the nineteenth century.

At the reformation of THS in 1874, the Society issued a circular announcing the goals of THS. A committee of three—J. G. M. Ramsey, Dr. R. C. Foster, and John M. Lea—formulated the contents of the circular with Ramsey spearheading the efforts. But

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[50] Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 19.

[51] *Nashville Whig*, 29 October 1842.

[52] John Higham, "The Matrix of Specialization," in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 3-18.

[53] Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 349-353. I base my statement that lawyers comprised the majority of THS membership on an analysis of city directories, census records, and personal data as found in various vertical files at the Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville).

The prevalence in the United States of the system of common law stimulated in its practitioners an interest in American history; also, the bar was the profession that attracted the greatest number of able men and since historical societies attracted men of ability, it is reasonable that lawyers constituted the high percentage of members. For this, see Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies 1790-1860* (1944; reprint, Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 23-24.

a letter from Lea to Ramsey, written a few days before the announcement of the circular, indicates the real author of the circular's ideas.[54] Lea cleverly offered several ideas "merely as suggestions." The "suggestions" consisted of seven pages outlining key issues of the Society that Lea, ever the shrewd lawyer, insisted were "crude and hasty," requiring Ramsey's "superior knowledge and judgment in the matter" to add polish to the product—a product already capably drawn up by Lea.

"By no possible ingenuity of constitution-making or of legislation can a society made up of ruffians and boors be raised to the intellectual and moral level of a society made up of well-bred merchants and yeomen, parson and lawyers," historian John Fiske wrote in 1897.[55] The sense of professionalism, tied to the social breeding imparted by the rising nouveau riches, provided a greater sense of authority to organizations such as THS. Outsiders began to look at THS as a competent, highly-specialized group of individuals, capable of offering knowledge and advice on historical matters—this, despite the fact that no "professional" historian resided among them. For instance, in 1880, Washington County sought the counsel of THS regarding the care and preservation of old county records dating back to 1778—documents containing the names of James Robertson and John Sevier, among others.[56] Gates Thruston, an expert on Indian antiquities, frequently

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[54] John M. Lea to J. G. M. Ramsey, 12 June 1874, THS Misc. Files, Box 9, File L-25.

[55] Taken from Fiske's *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors* and cited in Harvey Wish, *The American Historian: A Social-Intellectual History of the Writing of the American Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 113. Fiske added: "Without genealogy the study of history is lifeless."

[56] See letter of John Allison, Jr. to Anson Nelson, 9 February 1880, THS Misc. Files, Box 1, File A-21. Eventually, THS bore all expenses to transfer the records to Nashville to preserve them through publication. See Mary Daniel Moore, "The Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-1918," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (September 1944), 215.

received requests for his opinion relating to ancient Indian mounds and prehistoric Native American artifacts.[57]

The professionalism and specialization espoused by THS in the latter part of the nineteenth century led to more "academic" acquisitions in the 1890s. For instance, the Society acquired reports of the American Historical Association, copies of the *Historical Register* and the *American Register*, bulletins from the Essex Institute, and volumes from the *American Historical Magazine*.[58] Records indicate donations became less trivial in nature and more historical in value. The quantity of books, newspapers, private papers, portraits, government publications, Indian relics, and family Bibles began to overtake such accretions as lava from Mount Vesuvius or a "fungus growth from the heart of an oak tree grown on the farm of Dr. Clark, Franklin Pike . . . very curious."[59] For the first time, perhaps, THS members looked at these curiosities as trifles of little or no import, concentrating more on the documents and manuscripts essential to historical research.

The new, professional historians, who subscribed to the theory that history must be reconstructed in the context of the past, made a major commitment to discover facts through research in primary documents.[60] This meant that facilities such as THS became

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[57] Thruston amassed an impressive collection of aboriginal artifacts composed of about 1,000 objects. He received national attention after the publication of his book on Indian antiquities in 1890. In 1893 he received a bronze medal for his exhibition at the Columbian Historical Exposition in Madrid and, in 1897, he won the gold medal at the Tennessee Centennial for his collection. See Kevin Smith, "Gates P. Thruston Collection of Vanderbilt University" in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 976.

[58] *Nashville Banner*, 13 April 1898. I can find no evidence that any THS member belonged to the American Historical Association at this time.

[59] THS Office Files, Box 5, Folder 3. The usual military artifacts continued to roll in, such as a sword from the Mexican War and a lead casing from a shell found on the Civil War battlefield at Nashville.

[60] Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 267.

more significant as an archives rather than a museum beginning in the late 1880s. John Franklin Jameson, proponent of the New History, attributed this steady advance to several factors: the heightened sense of national importance and unity that followed the Civil War and Reconstruction, the influence of German scholarship in history, and the impulse toward the formation of national societies of specialists, such as archaeologists, historians, and geologists.[61] Jameson observed in his *History of Historical Writing in America* (1891) that "our naïve grandfathers' ideas of what is necessary to preserve are to us as the poke bonnets and spinning wheels of all old garrets."[62]

Clearly, the "professional" historian posed a threat to the antiquarian way of historic preservation. The Ramseys and Putnams of historical societies like THS had to make way for professionals such as Stephen B. Weeks of North Carolina. Weeks graduated from Johns Hopkins in 1891, having studied under Herbert Baxter Adams, and became a teacher of history/political science at Trinity College. An avid collector and writer of history, he helped found the Southern Historical Association in 1896.[63]

By the late nineteenth century, professionals entering the history field began to redefine the standards of preserving history. With a focus more on business and science than the human bonds of personalism, this shift indicated a movement from the

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[61] J. Franklin Jameson, "Early Days of the American Historical Association, 1884-1895," *American Historical Review* 40 (October 1934), 2. By the late nineteenth century, professional historians began increasingly to reduce their generalizations to specialized areas of their interest; hence, history tended to become a study for professionals by professionals—the old philosophic Enlightenment attitude that history should interpret the destiny of mankind was replaced by the task of making sense of the past. See Plumb, *Death of the Past*, 132-134.

[62] Quoted in Clifford L. Lord, ed., *Keepers of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 94n6.

[63] H. G. Jones, "Stephen Beauregard Weeks: North Carolina's First 'Professional' Historian," *North Carolina Historical Review* 42 (October 1965): 410-423.

antiquarian, amateur historian to a new elite whose adoption of business and scientific thought incorporated changes through professional organizations.[64] As the history profession became institutionalized late in the century, the historical society's helter-skelter way of collecting came under fire. In Washington, at the 1888 meeting of the American Historical Association, Smithsonian Assistant Secretary George Brown Goode told his audience that "historical museums now in existence contain, as a rule, chance accumulations, like too many natural-history museums of the present, like all in the past."[65]

This redefinition of preserving history, on a national level, filtered down to state and local historical societies, now peopled by mostly professional men. Earlier historical societies had had no qualms about their "chance accumulations" because there was no voice to challenge them as there would be in the 1880s and 1890s with the rise of professional historians. Now, historical societies had to do more than preserve materials for history—their most important function became that of "cultivating a spirit of historical research."[66] Indeed, professional historians began trying to dictate to historical

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[64] James M. Lindgren, "'A New Departure in Historic, Patriotic Work': Personalism, Professionalism, and Conflicting Concepts of Material Culture in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Public Historian* 18 (Spring 1996): 41-60.

[65] Herbert Katz and Marjorie Katz, *Museums, U. S. A.: A History and Guide* ((Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 176-177.

[66] W. I. Fletcher, "Historical Societies in the United States: General Considerations Respecting Historical Research," in *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition, and Management—Special Report*, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1876), 328. Fletcher, assistant librarian at the Watkinson Library in Hartford, Connecticut also made this telling statement in his essay: "The greatest difficulty encountered by the student of history is the want of contemporary materials. These are of so much greater value than oral traditions or histories written after the event that they are the great object of search on the part of one who wishes to get at the truth concerning the past." Ibid., 325.

societies what they should represent. In 1897, John Franklin Jameson addressed a society of fellow professional historians about the functions of historical societies:

> They must collect and preserve historical material, printed and manuscript, and must maintain libraries and museums, well catalogued and accessible; they must print and publish; they must arouse public interest, and keep alive a patriotic regard for local history; they must take part in celebrations; they must accumulate biographical and obituary records; they must attract money and members.[67]

The tone of Jameson's words insinuated demands more than suggestions. As a professional historian, he "knew" what historical societies should be doing.

Actually, Jameson's message specified what most historical societies had been doing (or trying to do) throughout the century. Collecting and preserving had long been the mantra of nineteenth-century historical societies. The original focus of the earliest societies centered on maintaining a good library. With their interest in science and natural history, most antiquarian societies already had a collection of what one might find in a museum. By the end of the century, historical societies made serious attempts at cataloging and accessibility. The goal of publishing their collections went back to the first historical societies. Societies aroused public interest in several ways: exhibitions, circulars, public commemorations, to name a few—all keeping alive a patriotic interest in local history. Genealogical records could always be found at historical societies. And any historical-society member could have told Jameson that attracting money and members had *always* been a priority.

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[67] J. F. Jameson, "The Functions of State and Local Historical Societies with Respect to Research and Publication" in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1897* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 53. Jameson (1859-1937) was a disciple of Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins University, where Jameson received his doctorate in 1882. He helped found the American Historical Association in 1884, and became the first managing editor of the *American Historical Review* (1895-1901). At the time of this essay, he was a professor at Brown University. The most comprehensive work on Jameson is Morey Rothberg and Jacqueline Goggin, eds., *John Franklin Jameson and the Development of Humanistic Scholarship*, 3 vols. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

So, did Jameson say anything that historical societies did not already know? It was not so much a case of the message, as it was the messenger. Jameson epitomized the professional historian who pursued "objective" historical truths based on scientific methods for history. The old guard preservationists of history perceived this as an intimidation. Ironically, a class bond existed between the two groups (both being "patricians"), but the professionals eventually saw themselves as devotees of historical truth contending with history buffs who were purveyors of romantic myths.[68] Men such as John Lea, A. S. Colyar, and Gates Thruston, professionals in their own right, surely felt capable enough to be the rightful keepers of Tennessee's past, possessing more knowledge about the state than most doctoral students.[69] No one had questioned their expertise—until now.

Still, the way THS members viewed their material culture reflected the changing times. The most obvious adjustment came in the type of acquisitions the Society allowed through its doors. At the November 1890 meeting, for instance, the list of donations consisted of clippings from a Gallatin, Tennessee newspaper, two original letters of Thomas Jefferson, and proceedings and reports from several other historical societies. The April 1895 meeting netted newspapers from Sparta, Tennessee, a letter written by Felix Grundy, proceedings from the Rhode Island Historical Society, and a topographical

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[68] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 122-129.

[69] A Tennessee publication described one active THS member, John Allison, as "one of the best informed men in the State in regard to our early State history, in which subject he has taken great interest, it being told of him that he has ridden on horseback as far as sixty miles to obtain a single fact." See W. E. K. Doak, comp., "A Dictionary of Tennessee Biography," *Magazine of Tennessee History and Biography* 1 (January 1895), 10. Allison, by the way, was a lawyer in Nashville.

map of the Stones River battlefield, dated January 1863.[70] The increase in communications from other state historical societies reflects another transformation occurring at historical societies in the latter part of the nineteenth century—that of looking more at the national scene than a local one. Historical societies still acted as keepers of the past for their region, state, or locality, but proponents of the New History made society members aware that the antiquarian approach to history had rarely viewed the bigger (national or even international) picture.[71]

The Tennessee Historical Society's mission statement of 1850 versus that of 1880 echoes this alteration. The charter of incorporation for THS, enacted in 1850, established the Society "for the collection and preservation of facts, documents and materials, relating to the natural, civil and aboriginal history of the state of Tennessee." Thirty years later, THS stated: "The object of the Society is to discover, procure and preserve whatever relates to the natural, aboriginal, civil, political, literary and ecclesiastical history *of the United States in general*, and of the State of Tennessee in particular."[72]

Another indication of this changing trend involves the subjects of the papers delivered at the monthly meetings. During the 1890s, THS members routinely listened to

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[70] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 17; and Box 17, Folder 5. This is not to say that THS stopped acquiring curiosities. In 1898 the Society received a small splinter of the flagstaff from Fort Sumter, offered "as a memento of the past *unpleasantness*." Ibid., Box 1, Folder 5. In 1885, THS obtained a canteen of water (hermetically sealed) from the Dead Sea and another from the Jordan River. For this, see Tennessee Historical Society, *Proceedings of the Tennessee Historical Society, at Murfreesboro, Tenn., December 8, 1885* (Nashville: James T. Camp, 1886), 12.

[71] Ned Irwin, "Collecting Memory: Antiquarians and the Preservation of the Early History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier," *Journal of East Tennessee History* 72 (2000), 78. I also believe that historical societies "bonded" more in the last part of the nineteenth century after coming under attack by the professional history community.

[72] *The Charter and By-Laws of the Tennessee Historical Society, Revised October, 1878, with a List of Members* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1880), 13 [emphasis is mine]. This pamphlet indicated that THS had over 130 active members at that time.

addresses such as "The Early History of Tennessee" or "The Early History of Nashville," along with the life of John Sevier and the career of William Cocke, an early Tennessee pioneer. But members also heard A. S. Colyar's "Adoption of the Federal Constitution of 1787" and a discourse on "The Beginning of Literature in the Southern Ohio Valley." Speakers offered biographies on John Quincy Adams and Aaron Burr, while some lecturers spoke about life in Ecuador and Japan.[73]

Did this tendency toward a more national scope of history influence the way THS members viewed their material culture? All the indications previously delineated—the pressure applied by history professionals, the increased contact with other state historical societies, the decrease of curiosity donations, and the widened interest in diverse topics—attest to the obvious conclusion that the historical outlook of Society members *was* changing. The romantic view of history no longer supported the new, scientific way of looking at the past. Members preferred not to be labeled as antiquarians whose impetus "was simply to celebrate the past rather than actually think about it."[74] As men at the top of their professions, THS constituents possessed the skills and confidence to maintain their prestige as community leaders. Ensconced in their own patrician world, they may not have felt intimidated by what outsiders thought of them or their antiquated ways. Still, these were men of progress and vision, always with an eye toward the future. Looking at the past may have been an avocation to most of them, but they took their

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[73] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 17; and Box 17, Folders 1-9.

[74] Barbara Clark Smith, "The Authority of History: The Changing Public Face of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 (January 1990), 55. There is a revealing entry in the THS meeting minutes for 13 May 1890. The Society received specimens of "shell heaps" found in Florida which, according to the minutes, "were made the subject of an interesting discussion by the antiquarians of the society." See THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 17. This entry equates "antiquarians" with those attracted to natural history—a John Haywood type—indicating they were unique (or different) from other THS members.

hobby seriously enough to qualify themselves as the nineteenth-century version of material culturalists.

How did THS obtain their artifacts and documents? What was the procedure, if any, for gathering up the "stuff" that embodied the Society's holdings at THS? While members generously contributed to THS from their own collections, most acquisitions came from the general public—a process that required getting the word out about THS. Broadsides, circulars, and the press became invaluable aids for this, particularly the latter. J. G. M. Ramsey touted the importance of press coverage. "We are powerless without its assistance," Ramsey wrote in 1874, "and do not hesitate to invoke its genius, its spirit and its influence to come at once to our rescue and to the support of our efforts."[75] From the beginning, THS depended on newspapers for getting the word out about the Society and its activities. The fact that William Wales, one of the initial members of THS in 1849, edited the *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig* proved to be invaluable, as did A. S. Colyar's ownership of two Nashville newspapers—the *Nashville American* and the *Nashville Union*—in the 1880s.

The Society often granted "honorary" memberships to those individuals whose names might lend some stature to the organization and, perhaps, some contributions. The partial list of men elected honorary members at one THS meeting in 1858 included Peter Force, Richard Hildreth, Washington Irving, Henry Schoolcraft, Jared Sparks, and George Tickman.[76] These famous antiquarians, authors, historians, and politicians, once

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[75] Ibid.,, Box 16, Folder 1. Since newspapers often published the names of THS donors, that in itself proved to be a selling point in obtaining donations.

[76] Ibid., Box 13, Folder 1. "Active" members had to be persons residing in the state of Tennessee who paid annual dues; "corresponding" members resided outside of Nashville and Tennessee; and

notified of their membership into THS, hopefully felt obligated to donate some of their works to the Society. Nineteenth-century historical societies made awarding honorary memberships a common practice.[77]

Solicitations often took the form of private correspondence between the Society and individuals or institutions where historic documents and relics existed, such as George Washington's Mount Vernon or Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. In the case of the former, the Society received a letter from John A. Washington in 1858 saying he had no Washington relics to spare. In that same year, a committee of five made a trip to the Hermitage to see if they could procure any Jackson documents or relics for the Society. Although the Society never recorded the success or failure of its mission, another committee of five members made the journey to the Hermitage in 1876 to confer with Jackson's descendants about the possible purchase of Jackson memorabilia—again, with no mention of the outcome of this parley.[78] Correspondence in 1874 with Sarah Childress Polk, widow of the late President James K. Polk, produced more positive results when she responded favorably to the Society's request for the manuscripts of James K. Polk. The aging widow promised to leave the papers with THS; yet, upon her death in 1891, the will specified that her husband's library go "to the state of Tennessee." As a consolation, THS received portraits of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. All of

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"honorary" members could reside in Nashville or elsewhere. The last two categories paid no dues. The membership rolls for 1880 listed 119 active members (over 60% of whom lived in Nashville, by my estimation), 43 corresponding members, and 27 honorary members. See *Charter and By-Laws*, 13, 18-24.

[77] Philip D. Mason, "Trans-Mountain States: Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee," in *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861*, ed. H. G. Jones (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society, Inc. and North Carolina Collection, 1995), 126.

[78] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5; and Box 16, Folder 3. THS also solicited members of Congress and the Smithsonian Institute for donations.

this occurred in spite of the fact that THS conferred an honorary membership on Mrs. Polk in 1885.[79]

Even when the Tennessee Historical Society received valuable papers, they sometimes had to settle for "edited" versions. In 1849, the Society learned of a collection of papers belonging to the late Tennessee Governor William Carroll "arranged by years or dates and put up in a very convenient and perfect manner." Eager to obtain these records, THS contacted Carroll's sons who declined to deposit the documents for the present because they had to examine them "lest they should contain something that ought not to be made public." The same scenario occurred when the son of General James Winchester said he could not possibly allow THS to have access to his late father's papers until he personally scrutinized them in order to extract "from them such as may be improper to be given to the public."[80]

Individuals delivered donations in person or sent them through the mail. Contributions were registered in the meeting minutes, along with the names of the donors. An extract from the minutes of the January 1875 meeting, written by recording secretary Anson Nelson, serves as a prime example of the Society's acquisition methods: "From Mrs. Henry L. Norvell—A package of original letters from Gen. Andrew Jackson, Gov. Sevier, Gov. Willie Blount, Maj. Grant, and others—valuable."[81] There is no indication of how many letters the package contained, the dates on the letters, the

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[79] Ibid., Box 16, Folders 1, 12; and Box 17, Folder 1.

[80] Paper read before the Tennessee Historical Society by Nathaniel Cross, 6 November 1849, in THS Misc. Files, Box 3, File C-198.

[81] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1.

condition of them, nor any idea of their contents. Nelson *was* keen enough, however, to note that the letters were "valuable."

As expected, this nonchalant system often led to curatorial dilemmas. The Tennessee Historical Society received a diamond ring and pair of earrings from Miss Sabina Dismukes of Nashville in 1875.[82] The jewelry apparently once belonged to the wife of Thomas Lynch, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Several years later, Miss Dismukes asked for the return of the gems. According to a note sent to Anson Nelson, Dismukes alleged the jewelry had been given to the Society for "safe keeping until I called for them."[83] A notation on the back of this letter, in Nelson's handwriting, indicates THS complied with the request: "All property to which Miss Sabina Dismukes has any claim has been this day returned to her in person. Aug. 9, 1882."[84]

This incident, and others like it, prompted the Society to take some course of action. In 1891, the Society took steps to "retain such articles by virtue of long possession"[85] and five years later decided to offer the following resolution:

> Prof. Fred K. Moore offered a resolution that in order to avoid misunderstanding as to the title to property in possession of the society, the Secretary be instructed hereafter to receive no book, manuscript, picture or relic unless absolute ownership thereof be vested in the society, irreclaimable either by the donor or his representatives, except where the article is lent to the society, in which case it shall be entered in a loan book to be kept for that purpose.[86]

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[82] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1.

[83] THS Misc. Files, Box 4, File D-55.

[84] Ibid.

[85] THS Office Files, Box 17, Folder 1.

[86] Ibid., Box 17, Folder 6. The minutes do not indicate, however, whether Professor Moore's resolution was adopted or not. Mary Daniel Moore is incorrect in stating the 1896 absolute gifts resolution

It may be that THS members felt these restrictions might hamper the acquisition process—a process that, in curatorial terms, may have been technically slipshod; but it was one, nonetheless, that satisfied the Society's passion for "collecting."

At first, THS had little need for storage facilities. At the time of the Society's founding, its entire collection sat on a shelf above the door of the library at the University of Nashville, where THS president Nathaniel Cross served as librarian. When the shelf filled, the Society made an application to the University for a room to house future holdings. Security for the more valuable manuscripts consisted of an iron safe (with a lock in need of repair), donated by a THS member.[87] The Society's move to the state capitol in 1857 meant storage space in the building's library—an area thirty-five feet by thirty-five feet—jointly occupied by the holdings of the State Library. From the beginning, the area proved to be too confining. A petition to the General Assembly, dated 9 November 1857, in which the Society sought state funding for its organization, stated that many of the materials already in the holdings of THS were "nailed up in good boxes because the Society possesses no room with cases or shelves wherein to arrange them." The Society further implied its organization merely served as an "appendage" to the State Library and should be entitled to its own space in the Capitol.[88] The legislature responded by promising the Society a larger area in the Federal Court Room, when that

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was adopted, (see Moore, "Tennessee Historical Society," 218-219). In looking through the minutes of that meeting, there is nothing in writing that states what action was taken on this proposal, one way or the other. The minutes use the word "adopted" in regard to two other resolutions proposed at that meeting, but not for Professor Moore's resolution.

[87] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5. The Society used the safe until 1858 when it was sold and the profits used to purchase some glass cases.

[88] Record Group 60, Legislative Petitions, TSLA, File 8-1857. The six-page document is signed by A. W. Putnam, Felix Robertson, and Anson Nelson. Felix Robertson was the son of James Robertson.

body vacated the Capitol—a room that would also house the State Cabinet of Agriculture and Geology. That room measured approximately thirty-five feet wide by fifty-three feet long, and sixteen feet high. The Society would gain about twenty extra feet of room length but still had to share its quarters with another state "appendage."[89]

After the Society's reformation in March 1874, an examination of THS holdings took place to determine the damage caused by the Federal forces occupation of the Capitol during the Civil War. The report revealed a sad state of affairs. Missing books and manuscripts added to the frustration of finding materials mixed in with those of the State Library.[90] Depleted of equipment, the Society had to borrow seven glass cases to exhibit their treasures during an 1877 convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. By 1880, the situation for storage space grew desperate enough that THS seriously considered the state's proposal that the basement of the Capitol, then housing the armory, might be utilized to hold the Society's belongings, provided they "be boxed up for the present."[91] Not only did this contemplated move mean peril to the conservation of the materials—the Capitol basement being notoriously damp and pest-infested—it also meant that accessibility to THS holdings would be at a bare minimum.

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[89] George Dardis, *Description of the State Capitol of Tennessee* (Nashville: Cameron & Co., 1859), 76-77. When the expected move to the Federal Court Room never materialized, THS sought alternative areas in the Capitol to store its belongings. A committee appointed to petition the General Assembly to furnish an alcove on the second floor of the Capitol dropped its plans when they realized the State Legislature would never agree to pay the required cost of $2,500. See THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1.

[90] The report was submitted at the May 1874 meeting. In part, it read: "Upon examination, it will be found that many of our manuscripts, pamphlets, book, etc., are missing. They were doubtless destroyed during the war, and after the war. Nearly all of our effects are so mixed with those of the Library of the State that it will prove a serious undertaking to assort and get them together." Ibid.

[91] Ibid., Box 16, Folders 4, 7.

When the Tennessee Historical Society relocated to the Watkins Institute in 1886, the "toilsome and tedious" task of removing the Society's materials from the State Library fell to THS member Robert Quarles. He received one hundred dollars for his efforts and a vote of thanks "for his valuable and faithful work." Many of the reclaimed THS books had the State Library seal on them and, apparently, Quarles failed to retrieve all the Society's books. In 1890 THS contemplated obtaining an order from the State Supreme Court, who governed the State Library, for the Society's books remaining at the Capitol. At the same time talks initiated between the Nashville Art Association and THS about the erection of a building for joint use. Evidently, the quarters at Watkins were *still* not adequate enough, as made plain in 1895 when a committee analyzing the accurate cataloging of property owned by the Society reported it was impracticable to do so due to insufficient room.[92]

The Tennessee Historical Society made two major attempts at codifying its holdings in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first time, in 1880, came about as a result of the upcoming centennial celebration of the founding of Nashville. In order to exhibit some of its relics, the Society had to determine exactly what it possessed and, in the process, try to discover each item's provenance. A sub-committee of seven members worked from January 20 to March 1 (with an eighth member coming on board at the midway point), three nights a week from seven to eleven in the evening—arranging, labeling, and stamping manuscripts, documents, pamphlets, and storing items in boxes which could not be cared for in the library. In order to operate systematically,

[92] Ibid., Box 16, Folders 13-14, 17; and Box 17, Folder 5. In 1887, the Society insured its holdings for the relatively paltry sum of $3,000 against loss by fire.

two of the committee members took on the duty of cataloging the books belonging to THS, sorting through every book on the shelves of the State Library while marking and labeling those belonging to the Society. They completed this task in the daylight hours while the rest of the subcommittee worked at night, devoting themselves to arranging, labeling, and cataloging the rest of the Society's property—manuscripts, documents, flags, relics, etc.—recording and numbering each article in a ledger book. The catalogers stamped each item with "Tennessee Historical Society." Then, according to the subcommittee's report, all the items were "carefully put away in suitable boxes for preservation." The committee gave itself a pat on the back, noting that they "had to encounter wind and weather, and one very enthusiastic member from East Nashville had to encounter also the inconveniences of cold suppers." In the absence of any archival training, the dedicated little band of THS members did their best to try to bring order to the disarray that comprised the holdings of the Historical Society. [93]

Another impending occasion—in this case, the centennial of Tennessee's statehood—brought about the Society's second attempt at cataloging at the end of 1895. Despite the complaint that very little space existed to conduct a proper assessment, the committee assigned to the task adopted what they thought to be a workable plan. They indicated it would cost $600 "to make a modern card catalogue of the books, pamphlets and manuscripts of the society."[94] Noteworthy is the inventory's focus on the "books,

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[93] Moore, "Tennessee Historical Society," 211-212; and THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 7. The ledger was supposed to include a description of the item, along with the name of the donor, and the date it was presented. The ledger as it exists, however, rarely supplies presentation dates and provides the presenter's name only if known—an indication of inadequate recordkeeping throughout the Society's history in the nineteenth century. The ledger can be found in Box 5, Folder 2 of the THS Office Files.

[94] THS Office Files, Box 17, Folder 5.

pamphlets and manuscripts" of the Society—a sign that THS began to place more of an emphasis on its scholarly holdings, no doubt a result of the rise of professionalism within the historic community at the end of the nineteenth century.

The committee's proposed hiring of a "competent and intelligent person" to do the actual arranging signals either an admission that the Society believed itself ill-trained to handle such a chore or a reluctance to tackle what seemed like a Herculean task. Given the Society's propensity to take on such assignments in the past, it would appear the former explanation is the logical one. The committee's report confessed "that from what it could learn of the card system, such [a] system would be permanent in character & of unlimited expansibility." The members seemed wise enough to see the advantages of the card-filing system over one that would have to be revised every few years as the holdings increased. The committee also showed some archival savvy by basing their estimate "on the idea that the articles are to be numbered and placed either upon the shelves or in cases or boxes and that cards corresponding in number with index & cross reference both as to names & subjects are to be used by which to find any designated book or paper." The Society at large agreed to this plan and, in January 1896, doled out the necessary cash. It had taken nearly fifty years, but the Tennessee Historical Society could now present a semblance of order for a major portion of their collections.[95]

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[95] Ibid., Box 17, Folders 5-6. The 1895/1896 cataloging at THS reflects the influence of modern record keeping techniques developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. The pubic card catalog, a dictionary of loose cards, traces back to the Harvard Library in 1861. A revolutionary concept, it facilitated the distribution of specialized knowledge by permitting anyone, starting with an author's name or topic, to acquaint himself with the current authorities on any subject, and guided readers to the most up-to-date works. This system not only represented "order," it also implied "control." For more on this, see Higham, "Matrix of Specialization," 14. The so-called Ainsworth card-record system came from the Chief of the Record and Pension Division of the Surgeon General's Office, Captain Fred C. Ainsworth, who had to deal with information about pension applicants. The wear and tear on records caused by numerous searches led Ainsworth to devise "index-slips" or cards containing extracts (obtained from hospital registers) of the

Who actually used the Society's archives? Without any visitor's registers or meeting minutes indicating visitations, it is almost impossible to answer this question. To be sure, membership granted certain privileges in terms of individual private research. Beginning with John Haywood's employment of the resources gathered by the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, those THS members researching and writing about Tennessee's history had the distinct advantage of having a wealth of primary sources at their fingertips—J. G. M. Ramsey and A. W. Putnam included. In April 1887, famed historian George Bancroft visited Nashville in order to persuade James K. Polk's widow to loan President Polk's personal papers to him in order that he might do a book on his administration (Bancroft was Polk's Secretary of Navy). The Tennessee Historical Society selected a special committee to welcome Bancroft to Nashville and, upon his arrival, took him on a tour of the city. The entourage visited the Capitol, several colleges and universities, and the Belle Meade plantation. The Society feted the Boston Brahmin at the Watkins Institute on the evening of April 19. No mention is made of Bancroft availing himself of the research materials at THS, but it seems unlikely the historian would not have at least made a cursory examination of the records while in the city.[96]

One historian, noted for his political acumen, who did utilize the manuscripts at THS was Theodore Roosevelt. The "well-known New-Yorker," as he was described by a

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medical history of soldiers. Each extract was copied on a separate card and arranged by regiment and then by soldier's name. The Adjutant General's Office, which had to deal with over 400,000 muster rolls from the Civil War, adopted this system. See Harold T. Pinkett, "Investigations of Federal Recordkeeping, 1887-1906," *American Archivist* 21 (April 1958), 168-170.

[96] M. A. DeWolfe Howe, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 2 vols. (1908; reprint, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971), II: 312-313; and THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 14. The Society's connection with Bancroft goes back to 1857, when he was made an honorary member of THS. In 1880 the Society adopted a resolution "to address the Board of Education on the importance of teaching Bancroft's History." See ibid., Box 15, Folder 5; and Box 16, Folder 7.

Nashville newspaper, came to the city in March 1888 seeking materials for his opus, *The Winning of the West*. According to the *Nashville Banner*, Roosevelt visited Mrs. James K. Polk, Judge John M. Lea, and Dr. J. Berrien Lindsley (the last two being THS members). Later, Roosevelt claimed that Judge Lea provided him with "every assistance in his power" during his stay in Nashville.[97]

Aside from the occasional special visitor and the infrequent public exhibitions of selected items, the material culture of THS remained within the domain of its membership. This exclusivity may account for members being possessive or even defensive about their holdings. The collections of an historical society determine its uniqueness, its character, and its reputation. Naturally, the interests of the collectors (members) direct the type of acquisitions accepted into the agency. In the early part of the nineteenth century, antiquarian predilections for natural history and the "curious" resulted in the acquisition of geological and zoological specimens, aboriginal artifacts, and oddities of nature. These tendencies remained throughout the rest of the century, tempered by the romantic lure of narrative history, and the introduction of "scientific" history, inspiring a surge in collecting historic relics and valuable manuscripts.

From the perspective of the late-nineteenth-century professional historian, historical societies collected seemingly useless items. From the viewpoint of the eighteenth century, however, what these societies accomplished *was* new—new institutional forms designed to deal with history. Society collections represented reminders of the pastness of the past—proof of the reality of progress. These societies

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[97] *Nashville Banner*, 26 March 1888; and Theodore Roosevelt to Charles Anderson Dana, 10 October 1889, in Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951-1954), I: 194-197. THS meeting minutes make no mention of Roosevelt's research at the Society, although it seems highly unlikely that he would not have examined its holdings.

served their age by keeping the past in its place—in closed containers and bound volumes—where it could not interfere with the course of progress or confuse the conscience of the present.

Early historical societies thus built up storehouses of information supposedly useful to the present, as it could show human action worthy of emulation or action to be avoided. As the century wore on, the historical society became less a storehouse of knowledge than a collection of items for historical disciplines and as sources for historical accuracy—generators of quintessentially useless knowledge (or curiosities). With no one to challenge them, historical societies had no qualms about collecting such artifacts.[98]

Gazing at these "useless" objects from the past reaffirmed the spirit of the present. Any reminder of the American Revolution embodied the independent enterprise of a nation born under fire—of people whose determination and courage planted the seeds of democracy for the world to envy and emulate. An Indian weapon provided concrete evidence for the truth of a saga borne on the words of countless oral traditions—a story of ordinary people thrust into extraordinary circumstances and heroically coming through it. As connectors between today and yesterday, then, these relics *did* have their usefulness. Historical societies may have kept the past separate from the present, but they could not keep the present out of the past.

The struggle to keep the material culture of the past preserved indicates the attachment of historical societies to their collections. The story of THS in the nineteenth

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[98] This paragraph and the one before it is an amalgamation of my own ideas and those inspired by the reading of Henry D. Shapirio, "Putting the Past Under Glass: Preservation and the Idea of History in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Prospects* 10 (1985): 243-278.

century is one of constantly seeking adequate space for their possessions as well as suitable quarters for the Society's business. The Society experienced a progression from objects stored at a member's home, to shelf space at a university library, to ornate (but inadequate) surroundings at the state capitol, to a state-of-the-art habitation in downtown Nashville. Did *where* one view these artifacts affect the perception of the object? A portrait leaning against the wall surrounded by other un-hung paintings no doubt detracted from the effect projected by a gilt-edged framed picture displayed prominently on the wall with other similar likenesses. In a society that stressed order, any object lost in the clutter demeaned its true significance. The fact that THS began to "properly" catalog their holdings in the 1880s and 1890s reflects a desire to scrutinize objects in an orderly and meaningful fashion.[99]

The patrician population of THS looked at the past and saw what they wanted to see: a genesis story about where they came from; evidence of a progression divinely inspired; an orderliness explaining the historic laws and forces in place; and examples of how to maintain the national blessings they inherited from a valiant generation. How they then took those ideals and translated them into palatable concepts for the public comprises the subject of the next chapter.

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[99] For more on this last statement, see Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 241-242.

CHAPTER V

PUBLIC MEMORY AND THE TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

On 1 May 1858 the city of Nashville witnessed a day-long celebration marking the anniversary of its first settlement on 1 May 1780. On that day in 1780, the articles of agreement, known as the Cumberland Compact, set up a provisional government in the wilds of what later became Middle Tennessee. The commemoration included military music, orations, and a presentation of the flag carried by Tennessee volunteers during the Mexican War. The Nashville *Daily Union and American* reported: "The first day of May, 1858 will long be remembered as a sign-post in the path of time, by thousands of the noble and beautiful daughters and warm-hearted and chivalrous sons of Tennessee as the occasion of a renewal of the patriotic fires upon the altar of Liberty."[1]

The Historical Society—celebrating its own anniversary—had organized the festivities down to details such as the parade's order of march, its rendezvous points and route, and the type of food required to feed the estimated crowd of five thousand. The May-Day Festival characterizes one way in which THS used the past to promote its version of how history should be contemplated by the general public. By controlling the parameters of the public's remembrance of the event, the Society helped to construct that memory—not reproduce it.[2]

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[1] Cited in Mary Daniel Moore, "The Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-1918," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (September 1944), 203. For more details, see *Nashville Daily News*, 4 May 1858.

[2] For more on public memory as being constructed, consult David Thelan, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75 (March 1989): 1117-1129.

This chapter charts this and other methods utilized by THS to construct public memory of the past in the nineteenth century, beginning with writings of THS papers presented at Society meetings (some of which were published in the newspapers) and works authored by THS members such as John Haywood, A. W. Putnam, J. G. M. Ramsey, and Gates Thruston. The circulars published by THS drummed up public support for the organization, but they also delineated the type of history the Society deemed worthy of remembrance. The portraits collected by THS also depicted, to a lesser extent, a version of history by visually displaying *who* the Society considered to be eminent figures. By far, the most influential method of persuasion came in the form of the commemorations THS involved itself with or sponsored. These events included anniversary celebrations, monument and statue dedications, even grave removals. In all these ways, THS impacted the collective memory of Tennesseans looking back at their history.

Robert Archibald said that "memories are the cords that bind individuals together as neighbors, communities, and even larger groups."[3] If, indeed, THS sought to manipulate those cords, whether consciously or not, it signifies that nineteenth-century historical societies did not exist in a vacuum of elitist ideals. Instead, it lays bare the fact that learned societies purposely exposed their patrician paradigms to direct the public's attention to their rendition of the past and/or to reinforce their power of authority.

Daniel Webster once declared in 1825: "We can win no laurels in a war for independence. Earlier and worthier hands have gathered them all. Nor are there places

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[3] Robert A. Archibald, "A Personal History of Memory," in *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 78. Archibald is keen to add: "Conversely, mutually exclusive or conflicting memories can create mistrust and divisions between people."

for us by the side of Solon, and Alfred, and other founders of states. Our fathers have filled them. But there remains to us a great duty of defence [*sic*] and preservation."[4] Webster's remarks epitomize the 1820s as a time of relative peace, expansion, and prosperity in direct opposition to the heroic days of the Revolution. Americans worried about the possible degeneration of those revolutionary ideals once there was no longer any need for them. What the post-Revolutionary generation could, and should, do consisted of keeping the revolutionary principles alive by repeating the dramatic narrative of the American Revolution.

Tennessee, not even a state at the time of the Revolution, could not share in the founding story of the nation (with the notable exception of Kings Mountain). Instead, the point of concentration zeroed in on the settling of Tennessee in conjunction with the resulting Indian conflicts. The frontier fathers of Tennessee, as depicted in John Haywood's *Civil and Political History*, suffered countless Indian depredations before taking matters into their own hands. Despite the illegality of James Robertson's ruthless campaign against the Cherokee nation in 1794 (the so-called Nickajack Expedition), Haywood painted the settlers as vigilantes reacting to the unwillingness of the government to provide aid.[5] This streak of independence—modified by the notion of a lack of support by the established authorities—permeated the writings of Tennessee history throughout the nineteenth century. The Society often portrayed itself in a similar fashion while reciting its struggle with the Tennessee legislature for state aid.

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[4] Quoted in Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61 (December 1982), 386.

[5] Lynn Nelson, "'Actions . . . Conducive to the Prosperity and Character of the Nation': John Haywood's Telling of Tennessee's Early History," *Border States* 15 (2005), 42-43.

One finds this spirit in the sensitivity exhibited by the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge, fighting off the stigma of being labeled a "western" institution by eastern establishments. One even finds it in THS when it condemned its own state government for not supporting the Society's efforts. An 1886 speech by John M. Lea proudly stated that "our little treasury has never been enriched by the receipt of one dollar from the State." "Perhaps the indifference of the General Assembly, made manifest on more than one occasion," observed Lea, "taught that self-reliance has not only enabled us to live, but to prosper under adverse circumstances."[6] Lea, in letting his audience share in his displeasure of governmental apathy, echoed sentiments expressed by Haywood sixty years earlier.

The early historians of Tennessee interpreted the motivations of the early settlers in ways that portrayed the founding generation as *consciously* making an effort to conduct their lives for posterity. This sort of deification became one of the cornerstones of the Society's ideology. An 1849 essay by THS member A. W. Putnam characterized the pioneers as a "noble race" who "bore the burden and the heat of the day,—that they, with a noble spirit devoted their lives their labor and their property, that we might enjoy so rich a heritage."[7] Ten years later, in his history of Middle Tennessee, Putnam pronounced: "We certainly believe that these pioneers were 'foreordained,' 'predestined' . . . to be the 'forerunners,' and 'to prepare the way before,' and for the people which

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[6] Tennessee Historical Society Office Files 1790-1985, Tennessee Historical Society (Nashville) [hereafter cited as THS Office Files], Box 16, Folder 13. The Society made several attempts, over the course of their existence, for state funding that was never forthcoming. See ibid., Box 15, Folders 5, 10. Ironically, THS approached the General Assembly in 1886 to fund the re-printing of Haywood's *Aboriginal History of Tennessee*. Ibid., Box 16, Folder 9.

[7] A. W. Putnam, "Reminiscences of Davidson County," *The Port Folio; or Journal of Freemasonry, and General Literature* 3 (August 1849), 59.

should come after them."[8] In the same vein, J. G. M. Ramsey envisioned the past as a theater where historical figures strutted and fretted like Shakespearean characters across the stage. His *Annals*, for instance, portrays John Sevier as a gallant, ambitious man who, because of these traits, "at once became a favourite [*sic*] in the wilds of Watauga, where a theatre presented itself for the exercise of the talents and principles which characterized 'that portly young stranger from Williamsburg.'"[9]

These bits of self-serving historical writing elevated the stature of the pioneers while, at the same time, established a method by which future historians could portray the past in a positive fashion. Romantic historians such as Ramsey, Jared Sparks, and George Bancroft only "told the American people what they wished to hear about their past."[10] The people had no need for a past that no longer exerted a decisive influence on their beliefs or practices—indeed, the past seemed irrelevant to most people.

Apparently, what the people wanted to hear about their past—or, at least what they were given—consisted of adventures and hero-worshipping. Larger-than-life

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[8] A. W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee; or, Life and Times of Gen. James Robertson* (1859; reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 125-126.

[9] J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century Comprising Its Settlement, as the Watauga Association, from 1769 to 1777; a Part of North-Carolina, from 1777 to 1784; the State of Franklin, from 1784 to 1788;a Part of North-Carolina, from 1788 to 1790; the Territory of the U. States, South of the Ohio, from 1790 to 1796; the State of Tennessee. From 1796 to 1800* (1853; reprint, Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1967), 109. Ramsey applied this notion to his everyday affairs, as evidence in this communication to his son: "At that day every one hewed out his own fortune by his sword—his many energies or his noble self-reliance. In every department of life a field was opened for the display of abilities—& a theatre presented to the aspiring." From J. G. M. Ramsey to J. Crozier, 27 July 1850, cited in David L. Eubanks, ed., "J. G. M. Ramsey as a Bond Agent: Selections from the Ramsey Papers," *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* 33 (1961), 87.

[10] Michael Kraus, *The Writing of American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 108. The notion of history as romance traversed the writings of nineteenth-century authors until the end of the 1800s. In a review of James Phelan's *The History of Tennessee* (1888), the anonymous reviewer begins with this statement: "The history of no state in the Union is more romantically interesting than that of Tennessee." See "Review of *The History of Tennessee: The Making of a State* by James Phelan," *Magazine of American History* 20 (October 1888): 342.

characters performing larger-than-life deeds of daring filled the pages of early Tennessee history. In Ramsey's *Annals*, the antiquarian historian portrays a 1774 encounter with the Shawnee in dramatic fashion:

> In the evening, General Lewis ordered the companies commanded by Captains Shelby, Matthews and Stewart, to advance up the Kenhawa River, under the shelter of the bank and the undergrowth, so as to gain the rear of the Indians, and pour in a destructive fire upon them. In the execution of this order, the men were exposed to a galling fire from some Indians, who had taken a position behind a rude breast-work of old logs and bushes, and were from that point giving a deadly fire. One of Shelby's men, the late John Sawyers, of Knox county, wishing to shorten the conflict, obtained permission to take a few others and dislodge the Indians from the shelter which protected them. His bold conception was gallantly executed. A desperate charge was made—the dislodgement of the Indians was effected, and the three companies having gained the enemy's rear, poured in upon the savages a destructive fire. The Indians fled with great precipitation across the Ohio, and retreated to their towns on the Scioto.[11]

According to the early historians, only a special breed of men could carry out such acts of boldness. That these intrepid men should appear on the scene at that time in history could not be coincidental, according to A. W. Putnam:

> A wise Providence had raised them up for these positions. The training they needed and received was not in schools of learning. *Roughness and toughness*, *blunt* and *brave*, sums up their character. . . . There was no place here for timid men or idle women; courage and energy were required in all. The ordination of heaven had provided for such exigencies; the pieces were made to fit, to match. Such was their own judgment of themselves, and they acted up to this impression.[12]

Putnam added that these capacities "could not have been fully tested, except in such times and circumstances as these." Putnam's insistence that the frontier fathers were

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[11] Ramsey, *Annals of Tennessee*, 115. In this incident, note how the author specifically names the "heroes" of this skirmish (particularly the commanders) while never mentioning any Indian leadership. Also, Ramsey sets the scene by pointing out that the Indians concealed themselves "behind a rude breast work of old logs and bushes"—an indication of the stereotype that Native Americans "lurked" in the woods waiting to ambush innocent whites.

[12] Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee*, 152 [emphasis is Putnam's].

heaven-sent reaffirmed the power of tradition in the mid-nineteenth century—a reaction to the dramatic geological findings that questioned spiritual authority.[13]

By the 1880s the estimation of the earliest settlers cooled a bit, becoming more realistic in its reckoning. James Phelan's *History of Tennessee* removed the deific aura that earlier historians bestowed on the pioneer generation:

> They were not heroes or heroines to themselves, neither had they any idea of founding a great empire. They recognized in themselves merely commonplace people, actuated by commonplace motives. They thought to improve their condition, and they were willing to run what risks might come to them from the casualties of tomahawk and rifle, for the sake of the experiment.[14]

"But to us, who see them through a lapse of time which in our history wraps them in mists of a hoary antiquity," Phelan reasoned, "they are a picturesque group filled with great motives and suggestive of great ideas."[15] Phelan represented an exponent of the New History—one steeped in scientific research and objectivity. Furthermore, he was not a THS member.

Most Americans, like Tennesseans, loved their heroes and held onto the romantic notions associated with them. When the "new" historians began to write biographies more realistic than the hero-worshipping profiles earlier in the century, even the *American Historical Review* protested. One reviewer of Paul Ford's 1896 biography of

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[13] Roger Lundin, *From Nature to Experience: The American Search for Cultural Authority* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); also, Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Worlds Before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). The stunning discoveries geologists made include the unearthing of the first dinosaur fossils, the glacial theory of the last ice age, and the significance of igneous rocks—all of which highlighted the immensely long history of the earth and the recent arrival of human life.

[14] James Phelan, *History of Tennessee: The Making of a State* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 21. Phelan (1865-1891) was born in Mississippi and received a Ph.D. from the University of Leipzig in 1878. He became a lawyer and, at the same time, owner of *The Avalanche*, a Memphis newspaper. He also served in the U. S. House of Representatives from Tennessee until his early death.

[15] Ibid.

George Washington, for example, insisted that "the great idealizations of history far from being sources of evil are sources of great good."[16] The popularity of biographies evidenced itself in the attempts by THS to stock its own library with books on the lives of historical figures.[17] In fact, THS writings proclaimed that biography *was* history. Naturally, the Society believed the best theme for biography could be found in "the manly self-reliance, and the daring courage of the Tennessee pioneer."[18] And Tennessee had no shortage of heroes to worship or write biographies about: James Robertson, John Sevier, Joseph McMinn, William Cocke, John McNairy, William Blount, James White, and ("greatest of them all") Andrew Jackson.[19] The biographical writings sponsored by THS—usually papers presented at meetings and sometimes printed in the newspapers—combined with histories published by members, had their effect. An 1897 essay on Tennessee, published in the prestigious *Century Magazine*, remarked on "self-sufficiency" being the hallmark of Tennesseans.[20]

Every hero requires the one component necessary to elevate himself to that status—a villain. In the case of the early Tennessee histories, Native Americans satisfied

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[16] Quoted in Howard N. Rabinowitz, "George Washington as Icon: 1865-1900," in *Icons of America*, eds. Ray B. Browne and Marshall Fishwick (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1978), 82.

[17] At its February 1859 meeting, THS resolved to "accumulate a large general library and . . . a collection of Biography . . . and thus form that which is perhaps the most deficient in Libraries—namely, a good collection of Biography." See THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5.

[18] Quoted from an 1874 THS circular as found in ibid., Box 16, Folder 1.

[19] *Address of J. M. Dickinson. The Centennial of the Admission of the State of Tennessee into the Union. Delivered at Nashville, Tenn., June 1, 1896* (Nashville: n.p., 1896). 13. The orator, Jacob McGavock Dickinson, added: "They founded a State in the wilderness, and made that epoch in our history which we celebrate today." Ibid., 14.

[20] Marks White Handly, "Tennessee and Its Centennial," *Century Magazine* 54 (May 1897), 94. Handly added: "Obstinate faith in native endowments, a mettle and zest for any enterprise in the face of whatever odds, and a grip on destiny which never loosens this side of victory or death—these qualities have shaped the history of the State, and constitute the most brilliant virtues of its public men."

that role with ease. The writings of Haywood, Ramsey, and Putnam, indicative of their era, poured out venomous diatribes against Indians. What is more interesting is how the distorted image of Indians lasted throughout the nineteenth century, especially in light of the attempts at Indian assimilation toward the end of the century.[21] Beginning in the 1880s, an increased interest in Native American lore, art, and, especially, archaeology developed, no doubt a reaction to the disappearance of "real" Indians by this time.[22] In 1892 a Nashville newspaper announced the reading of a paper at the THS rooms in the Watkins Institute by W. E. Myer of Carthage, Tennessee, who made extensive diggings of Indian mounds at Castalian Springs in Sumner County. He planned on exhibiting the artifacts found there, such as shell gorges and a breast ornament—with the public invited to attend.[23] Gates P. Thruston, the in-house expert on Indian antiquities at THS,

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[21] The solution for the "Indian problem" in post-bellum America involved "Americanizing" the trans-Mississippi tribes by supervising their affairs on reservations through agencies that administered major changes in Indian landholding, education in the form of federally-schools or boarding schools, and the advancement of Christianity. To this there was Indian resistance that amounted to violence, in some cases, or milder forms of protest, such as the Ghost dancers in 1890. The appearance of organizations such as the Women's National Indian Association (1879), the Indian Rights Association (1882), and the National Indian Defense Association (1885) shows the genuine desire of whites to deal fairly with the Indian problem, but they all took an unrealistic view of Native Americans. Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian School, explained: "There is no good reason why the Indians should remain Indians." See Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), chapter two; Edmund J. Danziger, Jr., "Native American Resistance and Accommodation During the Late Nineteenth Century," in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1996), 163-184; and John A. Garraty, *The New Commonwealth 1877-1890* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 18-19. [The quote by Pratt is cited in ibid., 18.] The wife of Anson Nelson served as vice-president of the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA). For more on this group, see Valerie Sherer Mathes, "Nineteenth Century Women and Reform: The Women's National Indian Association," *American Indian Quarterly* 14 (Winter 1990): 1-18.

[22] The Ohio Historical Society was originally established as the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society in 1885 with the goal of "promoting a knowledge of Archaeology and History, especially of Ohio." Its formation was no doubt a result of the spectacular Indian mounds of the state. See Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962), 282.

[23] [Nashville] *Daily American*, 10 May 1892. The fact that the public was invited to attend reflects the more open approach taken by THS at the end of the nineteenth century.

frequently presented papers for Society members and, at their urging, published a book on his extensive research. The work reveals a sophisticated product, replete with diagrams, graphs, footnotes, a general index, and nearly 250 illustrations, including more than fifteen photographs.[24] Thruston's study of pre-Columbian Indian culture, however, did not alter his overall view of Native Americans. In the introductory chapter of his book, Thruston summarized his study of ancient mounds and cemeteries: "The result is disappointing to any one searching for evidences of ancient civilization among the remains of the Mississippi Valley. He will find only the remains of ancient savagery or barbarism, with here and there a glimpse of semi-civilization."[25]

Thruston's fellow THS members wholeheartedly agreed with his findings. John M. Lea, in a paper presented before the Society in 1885, showed little compunction when he said: "If anyone thinks our red brothers were treated unjustly, let him bear in mind that the ends of Providence are subserved by the triumph of civilization over barbarism."[26] Lea followed this paper with a similar one in 1891 (later published), in which he referred to Indians as "copper-colored brothers" who were defeated by the frontier fathers in "exhibitions of manhood."[27] Of white intrusion on Indian land, Lea explains: "These encroachments seem at first view scarcely right, but really no injustice was done by the

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[24] The book is entitled *The Antiquities of Tennessee and the Adjacent State and the State of Aboriginal Society in the Scale of Civilization Represented by Them—A Series of Historical and Ethnological Studies* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1890). Thruston dedicated the book to THS and, especially, John M. Lea: "Their encouraging words first suggested its publication, and have constantly relieved the labors of its preparation." Ibid., iii.

[25] Ibid., 26.

[26] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 12. Notice how Lea works in the notion of divine Providence into the argument.

[27] John M. Lea, "Indian Treaties of Tennessee," *American Historical Magazine* 6 (October 1910), 372, 374-375.

appropriation, for the lands were only roamed over and not permanently occupied by the Indians." The rich, fertile lands of Middle Tennessee were "never intended as a perpetual hunting ground for savage Indians," Lea emphatically stated.[28]

The absence of any real Indian threat east of the Mississippi makes one question the animosity of Anglo-Americans toward Indians at the end of the nineteenth century. The answer could be a racial one. Lea's reference to "our red brothers" and "copper-colored brothers" smacks of ethnic overtones at a time when Jim Crowism ruled the South. Lea, himself, acknowledges this possibility in 1891. "The Indian has gone, but the African remains," he wrote, "May the same Providence which carried us safely through the Indian troubles give us wisdom to deal justly and humanely in the solution of the still greater problem presented for consideration—the presence of the African as a citizen in the Republic of America."[29] While Indian artifacts could readily be found in THS collections, African-American material culture was practically nonexistent, limited to a photograph of the Fisk Jubilee Singers donated in 1880 along with a copy of "The Story of the Jubilee Singers" and a walking cane owned by a servant named "Frank" of Captain William Brannon in Washington's Continental Army.[30] This reveals that while

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[28] Ibid., 374-375. Theodore Roosevelt, in his acclaimed *Winning of the West*, wrote: "The Indians never had any real title to the soil. . . . This great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages." Cited in Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 206.

[29] Lea, "Indian Treaties," 380. Many southerners saw the emancipation of blacks as the downfall of that race because of the belief that whites and blacks could not live together and, hence, some southerners predicted a race war in which the blacks would be exterminated. The Selma *Southern Argus* of 7 July 1869 predicted "that the time is not far distant when the black face and wooly head of the African will be as great a curiosity in Alabama as a wandering Creek or Choctaw Indian now is." See Mitchell Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen, and Southern Whites: Race and Nationality in the Era of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 132-133.

[30] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 7.

blacks and Indians were both racially inferior in the eyes of THS members, the Indian clearly played a more important role in the story of Tennessee's history. What is less surprising is that, although the 1874 THS by-laws did not limit membership by gender *or* race, the organization remained strictly white and male.[31]

Getting the message of THS out to the public proved to be a daunting task throughout the nineteenth century. Historical societies that published papers from their collections held each other in higher esteem than those that did not. Southern learned institutions suffered more from this dilemma than their northern counterparts—funding being the major, but not the only, issue.[32] The Tennessee Antiquarian Society made no attempt to publish their papers, but they did record the members' essays in their minutes. John Haywood's dual publications, based on TAS findings, represented the bulk of research done by TAS members. In the 1830s, the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge specified in its initial report that "the publication of a literary periodical" defined the organization's most important goal. This mission failed, however, despite numerous attempts at funding.[33] The Tennessee Historical Society of the 1850s discussed publishing a "Monthly Bulletin." In 1874, THS appointed a Publishing

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[31]The 1901 revised laws of THS did restrict membership to "any white person, eighteen years of age, who is a resident of the state of Tennessee." Cited in Ann Toplovich, "The Tennessee Historical Society at 150: Tennessee History 'Just and True,'" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1999), 204-205.

[32] Susan B. Riley, "The Hazards of Periodical Publishing in the South During the Nineteenth Century," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 21 (December 1962): 365-376. Riley attributes this to a shortage of paper, a lack of wide appeal, a failure to establish a regional literature, and a preference for northern publications. In his 20 September 1875 letter to Lyman Draper, J. G. M. Ramsey insisted that northern publishers "do not like to touch anything wearing Southern features or promotive of Southern interests and character." Cited in William B. Hesseltine, ed. *Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey—Autobiography and Letters* (1954; reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 290.

[33] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 2. Harriet Chappell Owsley, "The Tennessee Historical Society: Its Origin, Progress, and Present Condition," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 29 (Fall 1970), 230.

Committee to "devise ways and means, if possible, to publish a volume of transactions of this Society."[34] Finally, in 1896, THS adopted a resolution making the *American Historical Magazine*, published in Nashville by Professor W. B. Garrett, "the special representative of this society."[35]

With published transactions of its collections not feasible for most of the century, THS made its influence felt in other forms of publication. The massive work on the history of Davidson County, completed in 1880 by Professor W. W. Clayton, is a case in point. In late 1879, the Philadelphia publishing firm of J. H. Lewis offered to put the finished product before THS for final approval "in order that all the facts, statistics, &c may be authenticated; upon the faith of which proposition all subscriptions are to be made." The Society accepted the proposition and encouraged public subscriptions. Two committees examined Clatron's material and, at the May 1880 meeting, "it was tacitly agreed" that the Society merely approve "the general spirit of the work." At the next month's meeting, the Society issued a formal approval of the work that found its way into the final publication.[36]

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[34] THS Office Files, Box 15, Folder 5; and Box 16, Folder 1.

[35] Ibid., Box 17, Folder 6. William B. Garret (1839-1904) was a Nashville educator and THS member who started the magazine in 1896 with state funds. When the magazine got into financial trouble in 1902, he handed the operations over to A. V. Goodpasture, another THS member. At that time, the magazine became the official publication of THS (and the forerunner of the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*). See Albert V. Goodpasture, "William Robertson Garret, A.M., PH.D.: Founder of the American Historical Magazine," *American Historical Magazine* 9 (April 1904): 105-112.

[36] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folders 6-7. The work, authored by W. W. Clayton is titled *History of Davidson County, Tennessee, With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1880). W. Woodford Clayton was one in a stable of writers hired by the publishing firm of Louis H. Everts, who made a fortune in publishing atlases and county histories. Everts advanced the money to J. H. Lewis to publish Clayton's *History of Davidson County*. See Jefferson M. Moak, "Louis H. Everts: American Atlas Publisher and Entrepreneur," *Coordinates*, ser. B, 11. Available on line at: http://www.purl.oclc.org/coordinates/b11.htm (accessed 6 August 2009).

The Society also heavily promoted the 1891 reissue of John Haywood's *Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee* which, by the 1890s, had become a rarity in the literary field. Haywood's great-grandson reproduced the work after obtaining the Society's lone copy of the original 1823 edition. In response, the reprint's dedication thanked THS for their cooperation. In addition, the revised work featured a biographical sketch of John Haywood written by THS member A. S. Colyar.[37]

In February 1885, John M. Lea presented a paper, designed to be a resolution to the Tennessee General Assembly, before the THS membership. The proposed resolution asked for a state-sponsored text book on the history of Tennessee. The Society insisted that the school book be "meritorious and faithful, impartial, free from all party or political feeling." The Society unanimously approved Lea's paper.[38] The proposed resolution came hard on the heels of a public outcry for school reform in the state—a reform that demanded a more "southern" outlook.[39] "What we need is a history of the country from

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[37] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 17. Haywood's great-grandson, W. H. Haywood, published the reprinted version and sold it on a subscription basis.

[38] Ibid., Box 16, Folder 12. In 1851, the General Assembly considered a bill "to provide for the complete history of the State of Tennessee." The bill, stipulating $1,000 to carry out the project, passed the Senate in January 1852, but the House indefinitely postponed it the following month. See Robert H. White, *Messengers of the Governors of Tennessee 1845-1857* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1957), 475-480.

[39] One Clarksville citizen, upset that county school trustees were about to contract with a Cincinnati publishing firm to supply text books, asked why southern publishing firms could not be utilized instead. "A history has been used in our schools confessed to be unfair to the South, and untruthful," he complained, "and yet our Children were taught it." *Clarksville* [TN] *Semi-Weekly Tobacco Leaf*, 29 May 1883. The main issue was financial. The ineffectiveness of the Reconstruction government in Tennessee meant than less than half of the school taxes collected from 1866-1869 were actually spent on schools, leading to the abolition of the general tax for schools in 1869. The counties thereafter resorted to local taxation—never a popular process. See William K. Boyd, "Some Phases of Educational History in the South Since 1865" in *Studies in Southern History and Politics*, ed. William Archibald Dunning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), 262, 265, 268. By 1872 only a third of Tennessee counties levied school taxes and more than two-thirds of the state's children did not attend school. See Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 234.

the beginning," decried a Nashville minister, "which shall show the wonderful part the South had in its conquest and development, and the patriotic spirit and great sacrifices made by the South for the Union."[40] In 1887, THS reinforced their stand by presenting another resolution to the General Assembly. The Society's position, however, stayed clear of any Lost-Cause rhetoric, preferring to retreat to the standard romantic narrative approach to Tennessee history:

> The history of the State of Tennessee, in its early pioneer stage, is full incidents partaking of romance, its mark, however, being for the gallantry of the people in the struggle of the American colonies for independence; and since its organization as a State, no recital of events which reflect honor upon the name of the American Republic can be written without mention of the name of her sons, her eminence alike being civil and military. Such a history is national, rather than local, and there is no school boy in Tennessee whose education should be complete, unless he be furnished with all the events and incidents which have distinguished our progress from the Watauga Settlements to the present period of hopeful out-look and assured prosperity.[41]

The resolution is revealing in a number of points. By concentrating solely on the early settlement and Revolutionary periods, THS avoids any controversy regarding sectional conflict. Indeed, the Society insisted the history of Tennessee be part of the national picture—a reflection of historical societies in the late nineteenth century turning towards national, rather than state or local, themes.[42] Spicing the language of the text with words like "romance" and "gallantry," THS harkened back to an historical

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[40] J. H. McNeilly, "Need of a United States History," *Confederate Veteran* 2 (April 1894), 127. For other examples of such rhetoric, see the *Columbia Herald*, 20 May 1892 and the *Maury Democrat*, 22 April 1897 [both Columbia, TN]. See also the speech of Thomas Nelson Page in his *The Old South: Essays Social and Political* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 253-273.

[41] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 14.

[42] During the 1880s and 1890s, a new breed of professionally-trained "liberal" southern historians evolved, such as William P. Trent and John Spencer Bassett. They espoused themes of nationalism, sectional reconciliation, and integration of the South into the national pattern of life. See Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret Their Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 150-162.

consciousness earlier in the century. Furthermore, the use of the term "school boy" indicates the absence of women as part of the scheme to educate Tennessee's youth. The Society may have been forward-looking in its thinking but was ultimately conservative in its approach.[43]

When not dealing directly with the legislators or potential history writers, THS took its message to the people through the various circulars distributed from time to time. Within the context of these broadsides, the Society not only stated its objectives and drummed up support, it also modified the public memory of Tennessee's past. In the 1830s the East Tennessee Historical and Antiquarian Society [ETHAS], a forerunner of THS, distributed a circular defining the Society's mission, goals, and philosophy.[44] The Society sought contributions for its "Library and Museum" concerning aboriginal culture, early settlement patterns, and local histories. The circular also advocated the formation of County Lyceums as auxiliaries to ETHAS. Specific requests followed the pattern taken by most historical societies of the nineteenth century. For instance, the interest in Native American culture focused on "authentic accounts of the Aboriginal inhabitants that here resided within our boundaries—their wars—whether among themselves, or with the adventurers and emigrants that first visited the country." Ramsey stressed the fact

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[43] Legislative action on the issue stalled, despite another response by THS in 1889, until the act of 21 March 1891 which classified schooling into primary and secondary schools. For the first time in the state's history, the study of Tennessee History became mandatory. *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed by the Forty-Seventh General Assembly 1891* (Nashville: Albert B. Tavel, 1891), 295.

[44] "Circular of the E. T. Historical and Antiquarian Society," in the Lyman C. Draper Manuscript Collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison), 6XX24. Subsequent quotes are from this document. The circular of this organization is used here for two reasons: one, it was authored, for the most part, by J. G. M. Ramsey; and, two, the ETHAS has been recognized as another forerunner of THS. In a 7 May 1886 speech by John M. Lea, the THS president attributes ETHAS as being the foundation for THS. See THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 13. Lea probably drew this conclusion because of the connection Ramsey had to both institutions as corresponding secretary of ETHAS and as president of THS.

that the Indians resided within *our* boundaries, thereby portraying the aboriginal tribes as outsiders. Spotlighting the wars of Native Americans followed the stereotype depicting Indians as bloodthirsty savages. Countering these villains were the "first approaches of civilization to the present State of Tennessee." The Society wanted information on "the adventures and exploits of the hunter—trader—traveller [*sic*] . . . their privations—captivities. . . . Their reception by the natives—first causes of hostility—the names and exact location of the several stations, forts, and garrisons built upon the different frontiers—the battle grounds—the several campaigns." In short, the Society sought any accounts and relics relating to Indian wars on the frontier.[45] The Society also desired background to "the part taken by the infant settlements in the Revolutionary war" and "sketches of the lives of all eminent persons who have lived in the state, or who are identified with its history." Here, Ramsey seeks tributes to the contributions Tennesseans made to the American Revolution and, at the same time, makes a plea for biographies.

The ETHAS circular mirrors the traditional, historical apperception of antebellum America: its fascination with the early conflicts between Indians and settlers; its desire to portray the American Revolution as *the* story of the United States; and its passion for biographies. That is the history ETHAS wanted the public to remember, but what of the history forgotten?[46] Aside from the fact that the key issue of slavery is entirely avoided,

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[45] In addition to glorifying the exploits of the early settlers, this quest for materials on the Indian wars reflected the conventional literature of the day—blazing trails, fighting Indians, clearing the wilderness—popularized in stories such as James Hall's *Legends of the West* and James K. Paulding's *Westward Ho!* (both published in 1832). See David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America 1607-1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 54-55.

[46] Quoting historian Lonnie Bunch: "You can tell a great deal about a country or a people by what they deem important enough to remember. . . . Yet I would argue that we learn even more about a country by what it chooses to forget. This desire to omit—to forget disappointments, moments of evil, and great

the topics the circular encompasses are deficient. For example, no mention is made of the Native American contributions to Anglo-America culture nor any controversy regarding the Revolutionary War, and only biographies "of the leaders of the day" seemed worth collecting.

J. G. M. Ramsey put his stamp on another circular issued forty years later. In 1874, the reformed THS distributed one thousand copies of a circular labeled "To the People of Tennessee."[47] The circular was the brainchild of Ramsey and John M. Lea, and although Lea's input is prominent, he no doubt took inspiration from the ETHAS circular. The 1874 version is remarkable for its similarity to the ETHAS version—even down to the request for county lyceums—only lengthier in its dialogue. Two points bear further examination, however. The circular ends with a tribute to the predominance of the press:

> And we especially appeal to the enlightened and liberal Press of Tennessee to assist us with its inappreciable strength and effectiveness. The Press has already become not only a power in the land, but the great leading power in all its efficiency in achieving whatever is good, excellent and desirable in this behalf. Its potentiality is admitted. We are powerless without its assistance, and do not hesitate to invoke its genius, its sprit and its influence to come to our rescue, and to the support of our efforts.[48]

This deference (one might say pandering) THS paid to the press is an admission of the influence newspapers had on public opinion. Significantly, the first act of THS, when formed in 1849, involved the preparation of a history of Tennessee newspapers, as well as the acquisition of as many early editions as could be procured, a policy that continued

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missteps—is both natural and instructive." See Lonnie Bunch, "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums," *Museums & Social Issues* 2 (Spring 2007), 47.

[47] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1.

[48] Ibid.

in the 1870s. Tennessee newspapers responded, in kind, by publicizing THS events, meetings, and donation lists.[49] In retrospect, newspapers became one of the most effective links to the public employed by THS in the nineteenth century.

The other factor of the 1874 circular worthy of further analysis comes at the beginning of the text:

> From the dawn of civilization and government in what is now Tennessee, the least attentive student of her progress, growth and maturity, will discover that the pioneers and frontier-men of our proud State, were a remarkable race of men—peculiarly qualified for the high and novel duties of founding in the wilderness new political community, and of governing it well—a race of men whose civic, not less than their martial achievements, are of commemoration—a race of men whose services and sacrifices for the country have been only equaled by their public and private virtues.[50]

The glorification of the pioneer traits echo the sentiments of the 1830s but then the focus stayed mostly on military feats—formidable settlers battling savage Indians. In the 1870s, the concentration on "civic" accomplishments reveals not so much a decline in military spirit as it does a glimmer of the rise of the New South—the movement to portray the South as part of the modern national economy.[51] Tennesseans, according to the circular, celebrated a proud past in organization, management, and government. Also, when the circular employs the use of the word "race" three times in the paragraph,

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[49] Ibid., Box 15, Folder 5; and Box 16, Folder 3. The Society even passed a resolution in 1879 tendering thanks to the *Nashville American*, the *Nashville Banner*, and the *Knoxville Daily Tribune* for their continued support. See ibid., Box 16, Folder 6.

[50] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 1.

[51] Much of the New South involved industrialization capabilities and attempts to lure manufacturing to the South—cheap credit, low taxes, tax exemptions, cheap labor, and, especially, railroads. For the importance of railroads to the New South, see Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 122-13 and Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 81-109. THS member A. S. Colyar was heavily involved in the railroad business. One also wonders if the deflection off of the martial exploits involves an endeavor to downplay the disastrous defeat of the South in the Civil War. To focus solely on militarist memories necessitate a dialogue about the Lost Cause—a topic THS tended to avoid, if possible.

it reflects the ascendancy of Anglo-Saxonism in the South—in Tennessee, the Scotch-Irish in particular. Tennessee patricians, in an attempt to reaffirm their identity, turned to their ethnic legacy.[52]

Southern reformers concerned themselves with a contemporary social decline in the latter part of the nineteenth century.[53] By underscoring the public and private virtues of Tennessee's founding generation, THS hoped to revive a sense of patriotism, surely; but, at the same time, it aspired to remind the public that these virtues came to men peculiarly qualified. Only a divine source could provide the moral fortitude necessary to establish a new political community in the wilderness. In the 1880s, Tennessee historians still fostered the image that, on the early frontier, the Bible and the rifle went hand in hand.

Twenty years after the 1874 circular, THS issued a circular letter in conjunction with the state's upcoming centennial celebration. The Society solicited "a collection of papers . . . which may faithfully set forth the history of the State from the time of its first settlement down to the present day."[54] The Society wished to go beyond the Tennessee

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[52] In 1880 THS requested the Board of Education to stress the importance of teaching Bancroft's history "so far as it relates to the merits of the Scotch Irish." Quoted in Moore, "Tennessee Historical Society," 213. In the same year, C. D. Elliott, Nashville educator and THS member, noted "that every company fighting at King's Mountain was from a Scotch-Irish settlement." See C. D. Elliott, *Family-Craft; or the Scotch-Irish in Education in Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, from 1780 to 1880* (Nashville: George B. Staddan & Co., 1880), 17. Note this reference to the Scotch-Irish by Confederate ex-President Jefferson Davis to the St. Andrew's Society in Memphis: "I heard a gentleman remark this evening that he was of the worst stock—he was Scoto-Irish. Scoto-Irish! What was Monroe? What was Jackson?—both Andrew and Stonewall. (Applause.) And who was the greatest genius that ever graced the American Parliament, J. C. Calhoun?—Scoto-Irish to the bone. (Applause.)." Jefferson Davis, *Scotland & the Scottish People. An Address Delivered in the City of Memphis, Tennessee, on St. Andrew's-Day, 1875* (Glasgow, Scotland: Anderson and Mackay, 1876), 25-26.

[53] See, for example, William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 51-57.

[54] THS Office Files, Box 17, Folder 4.

histories already in print and seek "original sources for the kind of information that gives life and interest to the annals of a hardy, brave and liberty-loving people." To do this, THS developed a schema outlining the general range of inquiry. The circular included these categories: 1. The Indian-Pioneer and Colonial Period; 2. Governmental History; 3. Religious History; 4. Educational History; 5. Military History; 6. Public Press; 7. Political Parties; 8. Banking and Finance; 9. Agriculture; 10. Manufactures; and a miscellaneous category.

What stands out in comparing the criteria of 1894 to those of previous circulars is the unprecedented emphasis on banking, agriculture, and manufacturing. The glimmer of the New South apparent in the 1874 circular became a sunburst twenty years later. The Society, for the first time, announced to the public that businessmen—once the proud inheritors of Tennessee's legacy—were now entitled to the same esteem reserved for the frontier fathers. "Spirit and blood have united with energy and muscle," proclaimed a Tennessee text book of the 1890s, "and it makes a good team—the best all-round team the South has ever had."[55]

This is not to say that the martial spirit of Tennessee, so powerful in the state's history, waned in the last half of the nineteenth century. John Lea, in an 1886 address, bragged about Tennessee's military legacy: "The name of Jackson and New Orleans condenses more within a word than could be expressed in a volume of eulogy," Lea said

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[55] George D. Free, *History of Tennessee, From Its Earliest Discoveries and Settlements*, rev. ed. (Nashville: pub. by author, 1896), 226. Free's book depicts antebellum Tennessee as divided into aristocracy and commoners, with the Civil War leveling the playing field so that southern aristocrats, who lost their families and fortunes, "heroically" descended to the level of the common man. From this evolved "a new and hardier stock" constituting "modern self-made Southerners." Southern cities, like Nashville, became centers of opportunity for the "new" southern man trying to make his way to the top of the business hierarchy. For more on southern cities, see Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

with button-popping pride.[56] But the days of glory in the field seemed to be at an end, and new heroes had to be found behind the mahogany desks in railroad company offices or presiding over board meetings—men such as those at the Tennessee Historical Society. "Deprived of a chance to make a name for themselves on the battlefield, they focused their energies on the marketplace," observed historian Edward Ayers.[57]

Another unique aspect of the Society's 1894 circular involved the solicitation of essays "written by persons familiar with the subjects and interested in them," according to Dr. J. P. Dake at a preliminary meeting before the release of the circular. Dake planned to place the submissions in bound volumes, containing paper "of uniform size and quality . . . properly indexed for the library shelf."[58] Dake's committee aimed to sift through the submitted papers, select the ones deemed best for the project, and arrange them in published, indexed volumes—an archival process, in effect. By so doing, the Tennessee Historical Society would shape social memory. "We are literally creating archives," as one present-day archivist stated about the profession, "We are deciding

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[56]John M. Lea, "History of the Tennessee Historical Society," *American Historical Magazine* 6 (October 1901), 362. Lea made this address on 7 May 1886 to honor the move of THS to Watkins Institute.

[57] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 64. In the last American conflict of the nineteenth century, the Spanish-American War, four Tennessee regiments played a role, but only a minor one. At the October 1898 THS meeting, President Lea remarked that "it was the first war since Tennessee had become a State that her sons had not distinguished themselves in, and this time it was only because the opportunity was wanting." At the next month's meeting, THS member and ex-Governor of Tennessee, James D. Porter, declared: "Our men were ready to fight in the war with Spain, but the opportunity was not accorded to them. . . . The history of this war, so splendid in result, will be written, and no Tennessee organization will be named outside of a camp of instruction." The disappointed Society contented itself with a few relics of the war, donated in 1899: a few bullets found in the trenches south of Manila and a piece of steam pipe from the battleship *Maine*, destroyed in the harbor of Havana. THS Office Files, Box 17, Folders 8-9.

[58] Ibid., Box 17, Folder 4. Dake's idea to bind the papers in indexed volumes of uniform size indicates THS moving more toward a library-and-archives direction than toward a museum (although it should be pointed out that the Society appointed a separate committee dealing with exhibitions at the Centennial).

what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible, who has a voice and who does not."[59] Whether Dake or his committee knew it or not, their appraisal and arrangement of the records cast them in the category of archivists and, as such, they reshaped the "archives" of THS.[60]

The other obvious factor in the circular's proposal concerns the Society's entreaty to have writers from other organizations and institutions submit their work on various historical topics. This follows the Society's—to be sure, most historical societies—long-standing credo of collect and preserve history but do not write about it. The circular requested any potential author to first inform THS of the proposed topic and provide "some references as an assurance of ability and trustworthiness." One wonders what criteria constituted "ability" and "trustworthiness." And, of course, the work must be "a labor of love," the circular stated, as no monetary compensation would exchange hands. Having one's work in the archives of THS "for the enlightenment of future historians" would be reward enough. John Lea echoed the Society's willingness to collect materials for tomorrow's history writers in his 1886 address before THS members: "What use were the pen of the historian unless the facts were preserved to be elaborated into history? Historical societies discharge this duty, and such is the reason for their establishment in every state of the union."[61]

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[59] Terry Cook, "Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Role of Archives in Constructing Social Memory," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, eds. Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 169.

[60] "An archival collection is an organic whole, a living organism, which grows, takes shape, and undergoes changes in accordance with fixed rules," according to Dutch archivists S. Muller, J. A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, 2nd ed., trans. Arthur H. Leavitt (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1940), 19.

[61] Lea, "History of the Tennessee Historical Society," 361.

The membership of THS did manage to "write" history in ways they were not conscious of or did not seek to intentionally do. One subtle, yet noteworthy, means of conveying their ideals came through the commissioning, accrual, and display of portrait paintings. As visual aids to historical consciousness, paintings constituted a definite impress on public memory. By the late nineteenth century, the impact of science and the implications of Darwinsim forced religion to take a back seat to history as a source of inspirational value. This meant that pilgrimages to historic sites, pageants, and anniversary celebrations all had religious overtones.[62] With this hypothesis in mind, it requires no great stretch of imagination to perceive historical portraits as iconic in nature and impressive in their impact on the population.

In the case of THS, portraits consistently remained a fundamental aspect of its holdings. Going back to the period of Tennessee Antiquarian Society, Ralph Earl's museum prominently featured the artist's portraits for public viewing. In fact, Earl advertised his establishment as a *Gallery of Paintings*.[63] In the 1850s, THS utilized much time and money to accumulate portraits, especially those of past Tennessee governors.[64]

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[62] Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 194-206. While I agree with Kammen's basic premise here, I would caution the reader to consider that in the South, at least, religion remained overtly traditional and deeply entrenched in society. For an affirmation of this, see Kenneth K. Bailey, "Southern White Protestantism at the Turn of the Century," *American Historical Review* 68 (April 1963): 618-635.

[63] *Nashville Whig*, 12 January 1820.

[64] The goal of having all the governors portrayed in oil almost became an obsession and involved THS in a financial quandary that went on for over thirty years. The tale began in 1858 when THS learned that noted artist Washington Cooper had portraits of the governors of Tennessee, ten in number, for sale at $75.00 each (minus the frames). Since THS was never a money-making organization—the society's treasurer reported slightly less than thirty dollars in the coffers in 1857—the portraits were purchased without full payment, and the debt owed to Cooper became a thorn in the financial side of THS. The paper trail picks up in 1875, after the reformation of THS, when fifty dollars was ordered to be paid to "Mr. Cooper, artist, on his debt against the Society for the portraits of the Governors of Tennessee" (somehow, along the way, THS managed to purchase four more portraits from Cooper). Two years later, the Society

On several occasions, THS brought out its collection of paintings for public exhibition, usually to raise much-needed funds. In the fall of 1858, for example, THS displayed its collection of "pictures, relics and curiosities," managing to add $325.00 to its treasury, presumably to purchase more paintings. Nashville newspapers generously covered the event and provided detailed accounts.[65]

In addition to Tennessee governors, other politicians' portraits graced the walls of the Society (such as Felix Grundy), as well as Society members. Having a portrait commissioned constituted one of the Society's greatest accolades bestowed on members. A portrait hanging in the THS collection indicated a place of honor. In 1885 THS received a financial windfall in the form of a $4,000 donation from New York philanthropist M. H. Howard, formerly of Nashville. The Society showed its

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attempted to obtain state aid for paying off the debt, but without success. In 1880, $300 was appropriated from the THS treasury in payment to Cooper and another $100 two years later. In 1883 Cooper claimed THS still owed him about $1,600 "provided it bought all the pictures in the Library of the Capitol, of his painting, in addition to those already bought." It seems that of the portraits hanging in the library of the state capitol (where THS was headquartered), some were still owned by Washington Cooper and some by THS. State Librarian Robert T. Quarles admitted there was some "uncertainty" as to which was which. Frustrated over the situation, THS ordered its treasurer to settle the account "with Mr. W. B. Cooper, artist, and take his receipt in full." A committee met with Cooper to inform him that fourteen portraits were purchased from him at the price of $900 before the Civil War, most of which had already been paid. Cooper pled to a faulty memory but said he would look into the matter. Upon further investigation by THS of its files, they discovered the original purchase in 1859 consisted of ten portraits (nine of which were governors) for the fee of $900. Furthermore, the records proved Cooper had been paid most of that amount except for seventy dollars which THS promptly gave him in March 1884. The whole affair would have come to an end at that point except for a memo in the THS meeting minutes of 13 January 1885: "Mr. Carles moved that a committee be appointed to propose to the Legislature of Tennessee, now in session, the propriety of buying from the Society the ten portraits of Governors of Tennessee, purchased from W. B. Cooper, the artist. Adopted." Now that THS had finally rightfully acquired the portraits, they sought to unload them for money. The legislature declined the offer on the grounds of the state's poor economy. The epilog to the story came in 1889 when Washington Cooper presented a portrait of himself to the Tennessee Historical Society—fortunately, with no fees attached. THS Office Files Box 15, Folder 5; and Box 16, Folders 2, 4, 6-12, 16. It should be mentioned that Cooper's brother, William, was a prominent THS member. The meeting minutes of 1894 reveal that THS still possessed the paintings and needed eight more governor's portraits to complete their collection. Ibid., Box 17, Folder 4.

[65] For newspaper accounts, see ibid., Box 15, Folder 10. The Society resolved in 1858 that all portraits have a "suitable label" attached to them denoting the person's name, the name of the donor or presenter, and the date of presentation. This is a further indication that THS donations were often just as much about the donor as it was the object itself.

appreciation by commissioning a portrait of Howard in the next year (he had since died) to be displayed in the Nashville library named after him, the Howard Library. Tennessee Historical Society treasurer and librarian Joseph S. Carels received such a tribute in 1899 for his "efficient and zealous service." The Society provided a "suitable frame" for the portrait of Carels and vowed to give the picture "a prominent place in the rooms of the society."[66]

In that same year, the Society surprised President John M. Lea with a likeness painted by a prominent young painter in Rome.[67] In acknowledging their role in obtaining Lea's portrait, a THS committee indicated that "its chief value to the society lies in the fact that it will be the means of perpetuating for us and for those who shall follow us in after years the pictured features of our best beloved and most honored member."[68] By receiving a place of honor, Lea's standing as the Society's "best loved and most honored member" became assured. Future viewers would look at the painting and know who the man was, but it would not reveal what he accomplished. Or did it? Through the portrait's association with THS, Lea became not just another keeper of the

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[66] Ibid., Box 17, Folder 9. The "room" of the Society referred to in these minutes was, no doubt, the THS room at Watkins Institute. A contemporary description of the room noted "lofty ceilings of purest white" with framed portraits of the governors "occupying the most prominent places." The room displayed "richly carved walnut wainscoting, book and show-cases" as well as bronze casts of Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, Clark Mills, and John J. Bell—one in each corner of the room. The "finely finished book-cases" contained rare volumes owned by THS and "old armor, rare coins, bric-a-brac and other relics" filled the glass cases. "Numerous brilliant gas jets" provided light and a "handsome oil cloth" covered the floor. See ibid., Box 16, Folder 13. It is also significant that the second-floor neighbor of THS at Watkins was the Nashville Art Association, featuring its own works of art.

[67] Ibid., Box 17, Folder 9. General Thruston made the surprise presentation to Lea and followed with a paper on the early history of Nashville. For details of this meeting, see the *Nashville Banner*, 15 November 1899.

[68] THS Office Files, Box 17, Folder 9.

past but a very influential keeper of the past—one worthy to take his place among the other honored men of history.

Collectively, THS portraits constituted a who's who of Tennessee's history. Public exhibitions of the portraits informed the audience which historical figures they should hold in esteem. As visual aids to historical consciousness, paintings constituted a definite impress on public memory. Lined up in a row upon the wall, the portrayed figures represented an orderly evolution of the state's progress—a progression made possible through the energy and talents of elite leadership.[69]

Of course, no THS portrait collection could be complete without some representation of Tennessee's frontier fathers. In 1858, THS acquired a likeness of John Buchanan, leader of the frontier outpost, Buchanan's Station, established in the 1790s. The local newspaper acknowledged the gift with the comment: "All honor to the patriotic defenders of our early settlements. Their portraits will nobly grace the walls of our Capitol."[70] A. S. Colyar believed the images of Tennessee pioneers should not be confined to the walls of an historical society. In accepting a life-size portrait of John

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[69] One is reminded of the iconic 1862 "Men of Progress" painting by artist Christian Schussele. Commissioned in 1857 by Jordan L. Mott, inventor of coal-burning stoves, the portrait contains figures of nineteen men (including Mott) whose inventions and designs impacted American culture. The figures included Samuel Colt, Cyrus McCormick, Charles Goodyear and Samuel Morse. The artist portrayed the group in the Great Hall of the U. S. Patent Office with the artifacts associated with each individual (Colt's revolver, McCormick's reaper, Morse's telegraph). Reproductions of the painting appeared all over America, and it came to represent a model for endurance, hard work, and hope. See Henry Petroski, "Men and Women of Progress," *American Scientist* 82 (May-June 1994): 216-219. Petroski is quick to point out that all nineteen figures were white men raised in the northeastern states and "all part of the same old-boy network . . . possibly belonging to many of the same clubs and sharing many of the same ideals."

[70] *Nashville Daily News* (8 October 1858). These remarks coincide with the beginnings of the push to have the South write its own history. The South Carolina Historical Society made this plea in 1857: "Fellow citizens, the people of the South have in many respects been false to themselves, and in none more than this, that utterly regardless of their own past, they have consented to receive their instructions from others, and under interested teachers their history has been falsified." From F. A. Porcher, "Address Pronounced at the Inauguration of the South-Carolina Historical Society, June 28, 1857," *Collections of the South-Carolina Historical Society* 1 (1857), 15.

Sevier on behalf of THS in 1891, Colyar said he "would like to see the pictures of John Sevier, Davy Crockett, Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston in every university in the state."[71] Colyar, in his biographical sketch of John Haywood in the 1891 edition of Haywood's *Civil and Political History of Tennessee*, evidenced concern for the loss of patriotism in Tennessee. "Tennessee is badly in need of a revival in the religion which intensifies *love of country* and binds us to our dead heroes," Colyar lamented.[72] Portraits of dead heroes on university walls, it was hoped, could provide the impetus to spark the revival of patriotism Colyar feared to be on the wane.[73]

The Tennessee Historical Society paid tribute to one of Tennessee's dead heroes by initiating the removal of the remains of John Sevier from Alabama back to Tennessee. The story began in late 1874 when THS president J. G. M. Ramsey received a letter from

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[71] THS Office Files Box 17, Folder 1. Coylar's remarks dovetailed with actions taken by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution [DAR] about the same time. Margaret Pilcher, the DAR's Tennessee State Regent, reported to the Daughter's Ninth Continental Congress in February 1900 that her chapter in Nashville was "continuing the good work of placing portraits of heroes of the Revolution of '76 in the public schools of the city." Margaret Campbell Pilcher, "Annual Reports of State Regents," *American Monthly Magazine* 16 (April 1900), 1118.

[72] John Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee from its Earliest Settlement Up to the Year 1796: Including the Boundaries of the State; Exact Reprint of the Edition of 1823, Published by W. H. Haywood, Great-Grandson of the Author; With a Biographical Sketch of Judge John Haywood, by Col. A. S. Colyar* (Nashville: W. H. Haywood, 1891), 14. Note the use of the word "religion" in Colyar's statement—a confirmation of Kammen's theory about history's religious overtones.

[73] There is an underlying meaning to Colyar's remark that warrants further thought. A new social-economic elite of wealthy financiers and businessmen began to displace the gentry class by the late nineteenth century. The latter's reliance on a concept of an ordered, stable cosmos of fixed principles made it difficult for the gentry to adjust to the new scientific world of flux and relativity. Those who clung to the older view of a gentleman as a man of varied concerns and talents began to seem like mere amateurs. As their political power started to decline, the old order began to affiliate with institutions that would serve as guardians of conservative literary ideals—libraries and historical societies, for example. See Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 12-14. Colyar, in my estimation, represents a cross between the two worlds of old, patrician interests and the new man of the South. Indeed, the Tennessee Historical Society in the late nineteenth century seems to constantly straddle this boundary line. On one hand, the members showed signs of changing with the times, as it were (through the adoption of new, "archival" methods and approaches, for example); yet, at the same time, they often demonstrated a reluctance to stray very far from the fold of old-line ideation.

a former Tennessean, Colonel William Garrett, then living in Alabama. Garrett informed Ramsey that the grave of John Sevier, Tennessee's famed frontier father, had been located.[74] The Society appointed a committee, headed by Gates Thruston, to follow up on this revelation. The committee reported in April 1875 that they tried to contact Judge Littleberry Strange, of Macon County, Alabama, about the present condition of Sevier's gravesite. No action on the matter took place until ten years later when, in January 1885, another THS committee looked into the affair. In following year, THS asked the Tennessee legislature for its commitment by making a "suitable appropriation to remove the remains of Gov. Sevier to our capitol grounds and place a monument over the same." Tennessee Governor Robert Taylor consented to his involvement and agreed to work with THS in hammering out the details with the General Assembly. Some political maneuvering ensued and, in one of the rare instances where THS and the state government joined forces, the legislature appropriated funds for the removal. However, the remains' final resting place changed to Knoxville, not the capitol in Nashville.

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[74] Sevier died in September, 1815, in present-day Alabama while surveying the boundary of the Creek nation. He was buried on the eastern bank of the Tallapoosa River near Fort Decatur (Macon County). Garrett received a letter in early December 1874 from Littleberry Strange of Macon County, in response to Garrett's request for information concerning the exact location of Sevier's grave. Strange recounted how in the summer of 1834, when he was living near old Fort Decatur, a Captain William Walker and his nephew, John Harbinson, came to find Sevier's resting place. Harbinson had been present at Sevier's death and assisted in the burial. He stated that, before the grave was filled, he took an oak log or stump with a charred end from a fire and placed it at the head of the grave with the charred end downward. The small party went to the spot and dug until they came across a charred stump about two feet long. Walker then took a light wood knot about two feet long and placed it in the spot where they found the stump, declaring he would someday install a marble slab there. In 1836 Walker died during the Seminole War in Florida, and sometime thereafter Harbinson died. In 1841 Strange placed a marble stone at the site of the grave. Garrett's letter to Ramsey (dated 16 December 1874) stated that Ramsey's *Annals of Tennessee* had inspired Garrett to relocate Sevier's grave and that he would be happy to assist in getting the site properly marked. In gratitude, Ramsey wrote back to Garrett on 24 December 1874 indicating that he was going to make Garrett an honorary member of THS. See S. G. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Company, 1920), I: 353-356. A copy of the letter from Strange to Garrett, dated 5 December 1874, is located in the Tennessee Historical Society Miscellaneous Files 1688-1951, Box 14, File S-156.

Meanwhile, THS bowed to the East Tennessee Historical Society's wish that the life-size portrait of John Sevier, owned by THS, be put on display at Knoxville for the interment ceremony.[75]

In mid-June 1889 the remains of John Sevier journeyed to Knoxville where an estimated crowd of 10,000 waited on the courthouse grounds. The procession consisted of military companies, carriages with pall-bearers, and a funeral car. The ceremony featured music, addresses, orations, a poem, and, of course, the reinterment. Members of THS attended the affair, bringing with them Sevier's portrait and a sword given to Sevier by the state of North Carolina for his participation at King's Mountain.[76] The Tennessee Historical Society, after fifteen years of trying, had succeeded in moving Sevier's body to its proper resting place, where "he protected the women and children from the Indians' tomahawks," according to A. S. Colyar.[77] Through persistence and political clout, THS members discovered they could do more than collect and preserve the past—they could become *involved* with the past.

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[75] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folders 2, 12-14, 16. In January 1887 the House of the Tennessee General Assembly rejected a resolution to remove Sevier's remains. The legislature later overturned the rejection by a vote of 55-30. See *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Forty-Fifth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, Which Convened in the Capitol at Nashville on the First Monday in January, A.D. 1887* (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce, 1887), 313. A joint resolution of 1 April 1889, approved by Governor Taylor, specified that Sevier's remains be moved from Alabama to the National Cemetery at Knoxville at the expense of $500. It further stated that a private subscription be allowed to erect a monument on the capitol grounds at Nashville to Sevier's memory. See *Acts of the State of Tennessee, Passed by the Forty-Sixth General Assembly, 1889* (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce, 1889), 514-515.

[76] For details of the removal of Sevier's remains and the reinterment, see Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, I: 356-360.

[77] Haywood, *Civil and Political History* (1891 ed.), 14. At the September 1889 meeting, THS accepted the following donations: a section of the plum tree growing over the tomb of John Sevier in Alabama (cut in order to take up his remains) and several photographs showing the removal of Sevier's remains and the reinterment at Knoxville. See THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 16.

The Society largely confined its involvement with commemorations and anniversary celebrations. Nashville's May Day festivities—May 1 being the anniversary of the establishment of the provisional government at Nashville (1780) and the anniversary of THS (1849)—provided THS with an opportunity to flex its political muscles within the community. Many Nashville businesses closed for the occasion, and a morning parade always preceded the presentations and orations that made up the bulk of the festival. The 1858 May Day illustrates the influence THS had over how the city celebrated this auspicious occasion.[78] The procession on this particular May 1 began at the public square and marched through the city to Watkins Grove, where a stand had been erected with an awning whose banner named the states of the Union. The order of procession, programmed by THS, signified the importance of each designated group.[79]

At Watkins Grove, Reverend C. D. Elliott, principle of the Nashville Female Academy (and THS member), presented the Mexican War flag of the First Regiment of Tennessee Volunteer to Colonel William B. Campbell, who led the regiment. The Female Academy originally gave the flag to the regiment which, in turn, returned it to the

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[78] Details taken from the [Nashville] *Republican Banner*, 1 May and 4 May 1858.

[79] The order, as specified: the Shelby Guards, teachers and pupils of the city's public schools, mayor and alderman of Nashville, the Tennessee Historical Society, teachers and ladies of Nashville Female Institute, the Typographical Society, pioneer settlers and soldiers of the War of 1812, soldiers of the Mexican and Seminole Wars, the Cadet Military Institute, the Philomathian Society, Nashville firemen, citizens on foot, and citizens in carriages. Not surprisingly, the military is represented prominently. What *is* surprising is the prominence given to the city's public schools. This could be a reaction to the rising interest in southern public education in the 1850s. Southern educational reformers were imbued with a sectional prejudice and, as the divide between the North and South deepened, they became more concerned about northern educational influences. The need to ensure proper "southern" teaching was acute, especially since a free education would be confined to whites only, thus tying the elite whites (whose money would sponsor the schools) to the non-elite whites. See Timothy James Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 203-208. Assigning the city's schools a conspicuous position may have been a way of conveying the importance of southern education. Note, also, the deference paid to the press through the inclusion of the Typographical Society. And, finally, notice the high standing the Society allowed itself, just behind the political powers of the city.

Academy after the war. Campbell presented the flag—just a few cloth remnants left on a staff held by brass tacks—to THS president A. W. Putnam. A dinner followed the elaborate production.[80] By dictating who could actively participate in the celebration and the manner of ceremony to be observed, THS helped create a new public sphere of nationalistic ritual—one that offered, on the surface, a collective identity and a temporary sense of unity. The observance represented an attempt by the patricians of Nashville, i.e., the Historical Society, to maintain their hold on power.[81]

After the reformation of THS in the 1870s, the Society further immersed itself in civic events, as evidenced in the role THS played in Nashville's Centennial of 1880. As early as 1878 a Centennial committee, appointed by THS, arranged the program for the commemoration. The production called for parades, orations, and the reading of papers. In the following year, the committee pressured the governor to take some official action in assisting with the formalities. In recognition of the impact of industry in Tennessee,

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[80] Rev. Elliott alluded to the significance of the flag in his remarks: "Standing for the last time myself beneath its folds, I say: Let the area of freedom be extended! The Bible of God and of American freedom are convertible phrases. Where one is the other must necessarily be. . . . Let the area of freedom be extended! Let it be extended until all the present disorganized and anarchical governments on this Continent shall be united together and harmonized into one great Republic under the folds of the standard of American freedom." From [Nashville] *Republican Banner*, 5 May 1858. Two aspects of Elliott's remarks deserve attention: first, his emphasis on the Bible and its relationship to American freedom; and, second, his plea to have "all the present disorganized and anarchical governments" united. Both comments reflect THS ideology at this time.

During the Civil War, Elliott refused to take a loyalty oath demanded by provisional governor Andrew Johnson and was confined in jail for a brief period. Elliott then served as a chaplain in the Confederate Army. In March 1863 two of his daughters were exiled from Nashville for being "fanatical lady rebels." Elliott's forty-five acre country home was damaged and all the trees (1,500) on his estate were cut down. See Walter T. Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City, 1862-1863* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 154, 156, 257-258; and idem, *Reluctant Partners: Nashville and the Union, 1863-1865* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 260.

[81] The background to the construction of nationalism via public celebrations is ably laid out in David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

THS also suggested the Nashville city council and mayor hold an industrial exposition in conjunction with the Centennial festivities. The Historical Society's recommendation for an industrial show reflects a tribute to the rise of industry in post-bellum Tennessee. Despite the failure to lure northern capital and immigrants, coupled with poor economic conditions, Tennessee managed to develop its manufacturing to the point that, by 1890, the value of manufactured products surpassed the value of agriculture for the first time. This transition occurred through the motivation of many self-made men.[82] Some of these men belonged to the Historical Society. The Society even had a hand in *when* the celebration would take place. A disagreement arose whether to schedule it on April 24 (the day of the arrival of John Donelson's flotilla of settlers) or May 1 (the signing of the Cumberland Compact). Since the Society's anniversary date was the first of May, it came as no surprise that THS demanded May 1 as the date for the 1880 event.[83]

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[82] Constantine G. Belissary, "The Rise of Industry and the Industrial Spirit in Tennessee, 1865-1885," *Journal of Southern History* 19 (May 1953): 193-215.

[83] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folders 5-7. The Nashville Centennial came on the heels of the popular 1876 Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia (its official name was the International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine). Ostensibly, the exposition celebrated the first century of the United States but, with its emphasis on mechanical marvels and machinery, the fair looked to the future more than the past. The symbol for the fair was the massive Corliss engine—the greatest achievement in steam technology—powering hundreds of other machines on display. Only a few relics of the Revolutionary era were displayed—some Revolutionary War uniforms, the contents of a c1776 New England kitchen, and a pair of false teeth worn by George Washington. Thomas Sclereth wrote: "Manufactured objects dominated the multi-million dollar display. It resembled a giant trade exposition, a four-hundred-acre shopping mall, and P.T. Barnum carnival, all rolled into one event." See Thomas J. Schlereth, *Artifacts and the American Past* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980), 137-140. Also, see Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Expansion of Everyday Life 1860-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 263-267 and, especially, John Maas, *The Glorious Enterprise: The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and H. J. Schwarzmann, Architect-in-Chief* (Watkins Glen, NY: American Life Foundation, 1973). The state of Tennessee declined to be represented at the Centennial Exposition. The state's dire financial situation no doubt played a major role in this decision. There might also have been a bit of sectional inferiority in play. Indeed, The state's only involvement with the exposition was the acquisition, in March 1876, of four Centennial medals manufactured in Philadelphia. See THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 3.

At the same time THS deliberated on commemoration plans for Nashville's Centennial, another opportunity for THS to involve itself in the state's public memory arose. In January 1879, General Marcus J. Wright of Washington informed the Society that the equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson, designed by Clark Mills, was up for sale.[84] The Society discussed the possibility of purchasing the statue in July 1879 but had to decline due to lack of funds—the going price being $12,000 and the Society having a balance of $17.76 on hand.[85] After haggling unsuccessfully with the Tennessee legislature, the Society opted to take the issue before the people and ask for contributions. The Society shrewdly took advantage of popular interest in the upcoming centenary of Nashville and appealed to the public—with the aid of the local press—arguing that the statue could be the crowning glory of the affair. Contributions began to roll in, much to the delight of THS. Added elation came when, after lengthy negotiations, THS managed to get Mills to reduce his $12,000 fee to the dirt-cheap price of $5,000 (THS meeting minutes do not reveal how the Society did this). During the spring of 1880, the Society worked tirelessly to raise the money. Their efforts netted them slightly over $5,500. This sum did not quite cover the additional expenses of transportation and securing a pedestal. The Society incurred a $630 debt it promised to pay after the ceremony. On 19 May

[84] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 7. The statue in question, depicting Andrew Jackson in full military array atop a high-rearing horse, was one of three cast by famed sculptor Clark Mills. The original statue was dedicated in 1853 and placed near the White House in Washington. The second one was dedicated in New Orleans three years later. Mills received $12,000 for the original statue. See Carl Bode. *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 96.

[85] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 6.

1880, in the presence of "a vast assemblage of people" (including Clark Mills), the Tennessee Historical Society unveiled the statue.[86]

The episode of the Jackson equestrian statue signified, in one regard, the Society's coming of age. The organization had proved beyond a doubt that it could be an effective civic force in the community. Evincing tremendous initiative, political savvy, and a dogged resoluteness, THS set out to preserve the legacy of one of Tennessee's most famous sons. And they did it without any help from the state government.[87]

The relationship between the state government and THS never improved throughout the nineteenth century. The Tennessee General Assembly cannot be blamed entirely for their noncompliance in THS matters. While it is true the state repeatedly turned down the Society's requests for funding, the government did allow THS to house its collections in the capitol until the Society's move in the 1880s. Furthermore, the state usually had its own financial woes to overcome. On its part, THS seemed to do little to ameliorate tensions between the two entities. For example, THS, unlike the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, seldom invited (or accepted) active politicians into their

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[86] Ibid., Box 16, Folder 7. John Lea called the unveiling "a red-letter day in the annals of Nashville—an event worthy to link the past with the succeeding centenary of our beautiful city." The *Nashville Banner* of 19 May 1880 contained a detailed account of the day's events, replete with a drawing of the statue. Significantly, the newspaper listed the order of procession of the parade to the capitol grounds. The newspaper made the rather dubious claim that 80,000 persons attended the unveiling. Photographs of the occasion do reveal a huge throng of spectators packed into the grounds, as well as the capitol building which was literally covered with onlookers.

[87] Perhaps out of guilt, the Tennessee legislature passed an act in April 1881 to provide $2,000 for a marble or granite base for the statue, to replace the wooden structure originally erected with the statue. The act provided that the project be put under the direction of several individuals, including such THS members as John Lea. The project stalled until 1883 when Governor Alvin Hawkins implored the General Assembly to resurrect the act. See Robert H. White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee 1869-1883* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1963), 715-716. Finally, in 1885, the marble pedestal was put in place. The equestrian statue still stands on the east grounds of the capitol building.

select body.[88] It may have been a case of the patricians not finding the down-and-dirty politicians suitable for their club.

At times the veiled animosity lifted, as in May 1876 when the state legislature, on behalf of THS, provided money to purchase a monument erected in Clarksville to honor Willie Blount, the governor of Tennessee during the War of 1812. At the ceremony, Governor James D. Porter and ex-Governor Neil Brown addressed the crowd, while St. Joseph's Total Abstinence Band provided "excellent music."[89] The legislature trumped the Society the next year, when it passed an act to have Blount's remains relocated to Greenwood Cemetery in Clarksville.[90]

In June 1880, Tennessee governor Albert Smith Marks relayed a request from the Cowpens Centennial Committee in Charleston for a contribution of $250 toward a memorial on the Cowpens battlefield in celebration of the battle's centennial in 1881.[91] The Society agreed to borrow the money and send it to South Carolina with the understanding the state of Tennessee would refund THS. In January 1881, in his

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[88] The State Historical Society of Wisconsin came into being during the 1849 legislative session in Wisconsin (the same year THS formed). Wisconsin's governor served as president of the society, along with twenty-five vice presidents, each of whom was a legislator sent by his county. Scheduled meetings coincided with annual legislative sessions. With this background, it is no wonder the Wisconsin state government footed the bill for the society. See Herbert Katz and Marjorie Katz, *Museums, U. S. A.: A History and Guide* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 169-172. Although THS had a few ex-governors in its ranks, I find no evidence of any significant numbers of active politicians on the membership rolls. Generally, those men invited to join THS were prominent businessmen, lawyers, judges, and educators with an occasional cleric.

[89] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 3; and Moore, "Tennessee Historical Society," 210.

[90] The act, passed in March 1877, funded the removal of Willie Blount's remains from a grave marked only by a "small slab" located outside of Clarksville to Greenwood Cemetery. The act also called for the erection of a monument not to cost more than $500. *Acts of the State of Tennessee, Passed by the Fortieth General Assembly, 1877* (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1877), 48-49.

[91] THS Office Files, Box 16, Folder 7. The Battle of Cowpens occurred in January 1781 in South Carolina near the border of North Carolina. This Revolutionary War battle, fought by British regiments against American Continentals and militia, was an overwhelming American victory.

legislative message, Governor Marks made mention of the centennial monument erected at Cowpens. He urged the General Assembly to repay what THS spent and, later that year, the Society received $262—the amount it contributed, plus interest.[92]

The Tennessee Centennial Exposition of 1897 marked the high-water point for Nashville and THS in the nineteenth century. Conceived as a celebration of one hundred years of Tennessee's statehood (1796-1896), the exposition did not take place until 1897, a situation caused by the financial difficulties emanating from the panic of 1893. Indeed, diverting the people from their economic woes became one of the fair's incentives.[93] This exposition, like other international expositions in the South (specifically, New Orleans and Atlanta), attempted to present an image of the New South imbued with a spirit of progress and patriotism. The image depicted the economic development of the South as contingent on the nation's prosperity as a whole. Industrially speaking, the country was on the move, and many businessmen in the South feared being left behind. Fittingly, backing for the exposition came, in part, from the railroads. George Pullman made cash contributions, and John W. Thomas, president of the exposition, also served as president of the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railway. Thomas appointed his railroad's chairman of the board, Major Eugene Castner, as director-general of the centennial celebration.[94]

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[92] White, *Messages of the Governors 1869-1883*, 625, 648-649.

[93] Labor disputes exacerbated Tennessee's economic woes in the early 1890s, as evidenced by the formation of a Farmer's Alliance (consisting of farmers who believed their interests were being neglected, and laborers dissatisfied with working conditions in mines and factories) and four miners' insurrections requiring the calling out of the state militia. See Walter Chandler, "A Century of the Tennessee Historical Society and of Tennessee History," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 9 (March 1950), 6.

[94] Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 73-80. For more organizational

The "official" history of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, compiled by promotional chief Herman Justi, denied any ulterior motive for the fair:

> Whatever motive may have inspired great expositions elsewhere, the one underlying and overshadowing motive of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition was pure patriotism. The desire to advertise and develop the matchless and boundless resources of Tennessee, to increase its population by inviting desirable settlers, and to increase its wealth by tempting foreign capital—was an afterthought, and subordinate to the noble object of honoring the memories and commemorating the deeds of pioneers of a great Commonwealth.[95]

Justi cleverly stated the fair's true purposes by downplaying those same reasons.

The Tennessee Centennial claimed itself to be the first large exposition in the nation to organize a special Department of History, and from the conceptual stages of the Centennial, the Historical Society made its presence keenly felt.[96] In May 1894, THS member J. P. Dake devised a plan for the Centennial calling for a fine arts and history department to be quartered in Nashville, which he hoped would become a permanent fixture known as the Tennessee Academy of History and Fine Arts. The Society also appointed various fair-related committees, as well as the distribution of a circular about the Centennial.

In November 1895, THS began to work directly with the Exposition Committee on Art, History, and Architecture, asking for a separate building to house the history and archaeology displays. "We have a big collection and can make a big show," Gates

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background to the exposition, see William Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 103-106.

[95] Herman Justi, ed., *Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition—Opened May 1, and Closed October 30, 1897* (Nashville: Tennessee Centennial Exposition Committee on Publication, 1898), 3.

[96] Gates P. Thruston, THS vice-president, headed the Centennial's Committee on History and Antiquties, while Robert Quarles, the Society's corresponding secretary, became curator of the fair's History Building. The History and Antiquities Committee also included THS member W. R. Garrett. Justi condemned the state government by pointing out that the legislature "not withstanding the glorious history of the State, have turned a deaf ear to all appeals for State aid." Ibid., 129-131.

Thruston boasted at a monthly meeting, promising to exhibit his own personal collection of aboriginal artifacts. In early 1896, the Society resolved to cooperate with other patriotic organizations—Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, Sons of the Confederate Veterans, and others—with a view of having a mass representation at the Centennial. Later that year, a Society committee looked into plans for the Centennial parade and reported that THS had been assured "a conspicuous place in the procession."[97] Throughout all the months and years of preparation, THS displayed a sense of professionalism worthy of notice: marshalling its own resources, offering suggestions to the Exposition Company, cooperating with other organizations, and guaranteeing itself a visible role in the proceedings. By having a generous say in what sort of history the Centennial represented, THS comprised a formidable socio-political force in the state.

The Society initially complained about the cramped quarters in the 4,200 square foot History Building at the Centennial, which it shared with the Confederate Memorial Association, the Colonial Dames, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Ladies Hermitage Association, and the family of Andrew Jackson. The Society nonetheless managed to put together "a splendid and most notable historic exhibit—one that will be a credit to the Centennial and the State."[98] What did THS exhibit? The Society displayed its portraits of Tennessee governors, pioneers and statesmen, John Sevier's sword, some

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[97] THS Office Files, Box 17, Folders 4-6. The committee secured ten carriages in which it proposed to seat forty THS members, including the eight officers of the Society, twenty local members, and twelve members from other sections of the state. Of course, all THS members received an invitation to participate in the Centennial's festivities.

[98] Ibid., Box 17, Folder 7; and Toplovich, "Tennessee Historical Society," 206. Specific details about the exhibits in the History Building can be found in Justi, ed., *Official History*, 131-133.

Confederate money, an 1840 letter of Abraham Lincoln, rare gems, historic manuscripts, and a collection of guns and Indian relics.[99]

The expositions of the late nineteenth century occurred at a time when there was a search for order, a result of the increasing industrialization and cyclical depressions of the era. Economic growth and racial dominance formed the fairs' vision of progress.[100] Contemporaries pointed out the "paramount significance" of having a Negro Building at the Tennessee Centennial, referring to it as "the first exhibition by the negro race in America."[101] Yet, the Old Plantation exhibit at the Centennial, "an exact reproduction of an old plantation 'befo' da wah,'" stereotyped African-Americans in the most typical fashion of the day. "Here is the little pickaninny learning to hoe, and the old gray headed darkies picking cotton," stated the *Official Guide*, "Inside of the old cabin is seen a very good troup of negro minstrels, and at night an old fashioned cake walk."[102] Racial

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[99] *Official Guide to the Centennial and International Exposition and City of Nashville* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce, 1897), 69-71; THS Office Files, Box 17, Folder 7; and *Nashville Banner*, 23 April 1897. It is noteworthy how these sources differed in their emphasis on the Society's exhibit. The THS meeting minutes stress the inclusion of "the fine portraits" of the Society: "They will aid most effectively in making the exhibit attractive and useful in an educating way." The *Official Guide* and *Nashville Banner*, on the other hand, stressed the artifacts of the Confederacy—the *Guide* citing the "frowning group of guns from the battlefields of Shiloh and Murfreesboro," while the *Banner* went into great detail about "the famous Whitworth guns used by the sharp-shooters of the Confederate Army." Obviously, the *Official Guide* and the newspaper appealed to the popular "Lost Cause" memory narrative while the Historical Society seemed to downplay that aspect of the New South.

The paintings, geological specimens, manuscripts, and military artifacts exhibited at the Centennial, reflected the museum-like mien of nineteenth-century historical societies. Since the 1870s, practically every large fair has spawned museums. The Centennial Exposition of 1876, for example, spurred the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Furthermore, fairs generally led to public support of museums. See G. Ellis Burcaw, *Introduction to Museum Work*, 3rd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997), 27-30.

[100] Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 2-8. Rydell claims these expositions offered fairgoers "an opportunity to reaffirm their collective national identity in an updated synthesis of progress and white supremacy." Ibid., 4.

[101] Handly, "Tennessee and Its Centennial," 96.

[102] *Official Guide*, 90.

superiority also reflected itself in the manner Native Americans were depicted at the Centennial. The portraits and relics of Tennessee pioneers and heroes depicted Indians, through association, as "bloodthirsty savages," an "embittered" race "with whom Robertson and Sevier had to deal." A schoolbook being read by Tennessee pupils at the same time of the Centennial conveyed a similar estimation of Native Americans. "When not upon the war path the warriors were shiftless and indolent," the text went, "Nothing aroused them but necessity or excitement."[103]

When fairgoers shuffled through the History Building and glanced at the framed images of Robertson, Sevier, and Jackson staring down at them from the walls, or peered into the glass cases holding the swords and sashes once worn by military champions, they pondered on the history of Tennessee that members of THS wanted them to see—an inspiring history filled with heroic deeds of the state's gallant sons.

Before the close of the century, THS had one more anniversary to celebrate. In May 1899, the Society marked its fiftieth anniversary. At its regular monthly meeting at the Watkins Institute, the governor and other distinguished guests joined THS members in looking back over the past half century. The Society reflected on its difficulties and discouragements and patted itself on the back for having "furnished many notable workers in the local historical field, and its collecting of books, manuscripts and traditions." The names of Nathaniel Cross, A. W. Putnam, J. G. M. Ramsey, and John Lea received some deserved attention. The Society acknowledged their patrician status by claiming "some of the most cultured and scholarly men in the State" belonged to the

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[103] Dickinson, *Address of J. M. Dickinson*, 5-6. Justi, ed., *Official History*, 5. Free, *History of Tennessee*, 14.

organization. The most important work done by the Society, according to a consensus of the group, had been "the collecting of rare and valuable manuscripts relating to the historical events of this State."[104] The Society made no mention of the stuffed birds, charred rye, or whale's tooth that gathered dust in the storage spaces on the floor above the meeting room.

Nor did the Society acknowledge its *second* most important accomplishment: the shaping of Tennessee history through historical memory. Memory, as understood today, is an active, ongoing way of ordering the past. Historical memory is the product of intentional creation that forges identity, justifies privileges, and sustains cultural norms. It transmits selective knowledge about the past by willfully recalling some parts and deliberately forgetting others. It infuses objects and places with commemorative significance to underscore a unique version of the past.[105] The Tennessee Historical Society disseminated its construction of the past through subtle, yet potent, means.

Individuals in the Society—Haywood, Putnam, Ramsey, Thruston—published their own versions of Tennessee history, and papers presented at Society meetings often made their way into the newspapers. The Society also put its stamp of approval on certain works devoted to Tennessee's past and sponsored efforts to get Tennessee history as a part of the public school curriculum. Through the distribution of circulars, the Historical Society informed the public of what topics and relics of history deserved serious consideration. The portrait collection belonging to the Society provided a visual

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[104] THS Office Files, Box 17, Folder 9.

[105] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 4-6. Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote: "The ways in which what happened and that which is said to have happened are and are not the same may be itself historical." From Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 4.

stimulus to that narrative. Awarding a position of rank to certain individuals raised their status in the public's consciousness. The Society's engagement with commemorative events displayed the organization's influence in regulating the public's participation in remembering the past. By supporting the erection of monuments, arranging the order of parades, and exhibiting its collections, THS reaffirmed its authority as it manipulated the past.

What "history" did the Society want to transmit? The narrative that THS kept alive involved a rugged, determined class of Anglo-Europeans who came to settle the territory of Tennessee despite the violent savagery they encountered in the Native American tribes that inhabited the rugged land. Through their grit and resolve, divinely inspired, they built a free, democratic empire where opportunity had no bounds. Tennesseans could even claim a share of the glory spawned by the American Revolution through their ancestral participation in some of the Revolutionary War battles. The fruits of this pioneering spirit translated itself into the next century, as the population grew, cities formed, and the economy flourished. The progress and order established in the nineteenth century owed their existence to the frontier fathers whose exploits and sacrifices deserved to be remembered by succeeding generations.

In perpetuating these traditions and beliefs, did the Historical Society construct a memory for the public or affirm what the public wanted to hear? Who guides the process of remembering and towards what end? These are questions that are the most logical to ask but the hardest to answer. Certainly they are not questions the Historical Society likely asked. Throughout the nineteenth century, TAS, SDK, and THS insisted their existence depended on the desire and the necessity to only collect and preserve the past.

Until the last part of the century, no one questioned the authority of these organizations. With the appearance of professional historians, the scenario changed. Suddenly, the keepers of the past faced a scrutiny they never had to endure before. Labeled as "antiquarians," historical society members retreated into an enclave of patrician principles marked by a conservative mindset. At their May 1899 meeting, THS members acknowledged their responsibilities as preservers of history and the prestige they envisioned went with it: "As the years go by the value of the preservative work and research done by the society becomes more and more apparent, and to be a member of the body is a distinguished honor."[106] After years of seeking suitable quarters; finding a safe haven for their precious relics; learning the dos-and-don'ts of archival processing; and finally making their collections more accessible, historical societies came to the end of the century struggling to sustain a dignity at which so-called professionals thumbed their noses. The bone of contention consisted of a past the "keepers of the past" could no longer keep to themselves.

[106] *Nashville American*, 10 May 1899.

CONCLUSION

In 1884, historian and intellectual Henry Adams told Francis Parkman that "the more I write, the more confident I feel that before long a new school of history will arise which will leave us antiquated."[1] Adams wrote these prophetic words in the same year as the formation of the American Historical Association. Ten years later Adams became its president. The use of the word "antiquated" in Adams' comment seems more than appropriate. The era of the antiquarian ended in post-bellum America. New historians, like John Franklin Jameson, bitterly complained about the "fussy antiquarianism" of the late nineteenth-century historical societies, charging them with catering only to genealogists.[2] Jameson's finger-pointing did little to amend the growing rift between "amateur" and "professional" historians.[3] Yet there is little doubt that the advent of professionalism—not only in the academic field but also in the business world—

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[1] Cited in Donald R. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 303.

[2] "It is a ticklish business to take up one's parable against them in these days, when many an historical society is finding that by far the greater number of those who resort to its library come there for no other purpose than to hunt up their genealogies and to prove their right to entrance into the charmed circle of the Sons of This or the Daughters of That. But nevertheless no historical society has the right to use its research and publication funds in furthering the purposes of these people, or, as one society does, to buy almost nothing but genealogies with its library fund. . . . The addiction of historical societies to genealogists arises not from devotion to the primary and public purposes for which they were instituted, but from a weak desire to placate people who . . . may in time . . . begin to take an interest in history." J. F. Jameson, "The Functions of State and Local Historical Societies with Respect to Research and Publication," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1897* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 57-58.

[3] Laurence Veysey makes the case that the so-called amateurs actually represented the generalized monopoly of learning among the members of the older professions. Resistance to newer forms of professionalization, appearing in the 1870s and 1880s, were merely a response of certain professionals to others, all of them sharing the same underlying genteel social code. See Laurence Veysey, "The Plural Organized Worlds of the Humanities," in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 58.

produced striking changes in the functions of historical societies. At the Tennessee Historical Society, for example, the organization installed cataloging procedures and methods to bring order and accessibility to its normally chaotic collections. In 1896 THS passed a resolution prohibiting the acceptance of any donation unless it came as an absolute gift. Before this, the Society had no policy regarding acquisitions and, as a result, many persons attempted to recall donations given by others within their family to the Society.[4]

At the turn of the twentieth century, the dynamics of southern historical societies experienced some dramatic developments. Rising bureaucratic organizations and the collecting of objective information created the need for systematic and institutional records. This, in turn, led to the surge of state-sponsored historical agencies in the South.[5] An additional factor in this development generated from the historical renaissance in the late nineteenth century. The growing industrialization of the South provided the resources necessary for greater educational advancement, but it also bred the fear of losing a southern identity. Men such as Thomas M. Owen in Alabama and Franklin L. Riley in Mississippi took advantage of these circumstances to promote state-supported historical bureaus.[6]

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[4] Mary Daniel Moore, "The Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-1918," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (September 1944), 218-219. While this step may seem trivial, it suggests the sort of professional housekeeping the Society administered in the last two decades of the century.

[5] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge. MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 105-118.

[6] In 1901, Alabama became the first state to form a separate department responsible for preserving its history, the State Department of Archives and History. It was the brainchild of amateur historian and lawyer Thomas McAdory Owen, who helped revive the Alabama Historical Society in 1898, serving as its secretary and treasurer. Through Owen's tireless efforts, he obtained state financial aid for the society and, eventually, legislation creating this department. For a look at his activities, see Peter A. Brannon, "The

In Tennessee, the state legislature appropriated $1,200 in 1903 for the preservation of the state's archives. Four years later the state allotted $4,000 for the establishment of "the Department of History and Archives." Robert T. Quarles, Superintendant of the Capitol (and THS member), accepted the position as state archivist, although the legislature never officially enacted the department. The archives were housed in the attic of the Capitol until 1919, when they were transferred to the State Library. The Division of Library and Archives (an agency of the Department of Education) assumed the functions of the State Library in 1923. And, in 1927, the Library and Archives took over the collections of the Tennessee Historical Society.[7]

A Nashville guide book of 1912 listed the Museum of the Tennessee Historical Society (at Watkins Institute) as open to the public from 2-4 p.m. every day except Sundays. The guide mentions some the relics a tourist might see there: Daniel Boone's musket, John Sevier's sword, the chair of Nathanael Greene, as well as the Society's collection of manuscripts, newspapers, books portraits and, of course, the Egyptian

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Alabama Department of Archives and History: Some References to the Origin and the First Years of the Department," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 24 (Spring 1962): 1-15. Also, see Alden Monroe, "Thomas Owen and the Founding of the Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Provenance* 21 (2003): 22-35 and Robert R. Simpson, "The Origin of the Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 34 (Summer 1972): 155-170.

In Mississippi, Franklin L. Riley, a University of Mississippi history professor, revived the Mississippi Historical Society in 1897, working closely with Thomas M. Owen in Alabama, whose work Riley modeled. Riley managed to get the state legislature to establish the Mississippi Historical Commission in 1899 which recommended a state department of archives and history charged with acquiring, arranging, and preserving the state's historical records. The Mississippi Department of Archives and History began in 1902 under the leadership of amateur historian and lawyer Dunbar Rowland (a post he held for thirty-five years until his death in 1937). Rowland devised the so-called "Mississippi Plan," a term used by Rowland in a 1905 address delivered before the Tennessee General Assembly and THS. The plan called for the state archives and the historical society to function as two separate state-supported entities—the archives devoted to collecting, classifying, and preserving historical materials while the other engaged in publishing the results of the research. Eventually, other southern states, including Tennessee, adopted this plan. See Lisa Speer and Heather Mitchell, "The 'Mississippi Plan': Dunbar Rowland and the Creation of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History," *Provenance* 22 (2004): 51-72.

[7] Ernest Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 256-257.

mummy. Under the heading "Organizations: Historical, Educational and Patriotic," only six sentences are devoted to THS, including the statement that the date of the original organization is not known. Also, the book erroneously gives May 1857 as the reorganization date for THS.[8] It is interesting that the Society should be billed as the "Museum of the Tennessee Historical Society," an indication of the Society's focus having come full circle from the early days of Ralph Earl's museum on the public square. The mentioning of Sevier's sword and Greene's chair incorrectly signals little change in the material culture and public memory of the Society. The guide book's blunder about the Society's reorganization date reveals, perhaps, a decline in status amidst the ascendency of other men's social clubs in Nashville.[9]

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[8] Ida Clyde Clarke, *All About Nashville: A Complete Historical Guide Book to the City* (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce Company, 1912), 42-44, 149. The artifacts of THS became the foundation for the Tennessee State Museum, established in 1937. For this, see Ann Toplovich, "The Tennessee Historical Society at 150: 'Just and True,'" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 58 (Fall 1999), 196.

[9] Beginning in the 1880s, men's social clubs, composed of the "cream of Nashville society" sprouted up in Nashville. Among them were the Hermitage Club, the Capitol Club, and the Watauga Club. See Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 211-213.

The 1912 guide book also mentions the Tennessee Woman's Historical Association, formed in 1903. Information on this organization is sketchy but, according to its constitution, its object was "to assist specifically in creating a museum at the Centennial Park, and to aid the Park Commissioner in increasing the interest in said Park." From what can be garnered from the meeting minutes of this society, the members attempted to utilize the History Building from the Centennial Exposition to serve as a public museum. They also took an active interest in preserving the old City Cemetery. The organization declared it was "in no sense a rival to other patriotic societies in our city." The society's constitution was patterned after the THS constitution. Further details are located in the Annie L. Crutcher Papers c1906-1952, Tennessee State Library and Archives (Nashville), Box 3, Folder 11. Beyond the year 1912, I could find no further information about this group.

An acknowledgement of this association provides this dissertation a reason to expound on the role of women in THS in the nineteenth century. Mention has been made that the Society had only one female member (Paralee Haskell), along with some token honorary memberships, until 1890 when THS granted full membership to women. In the mid-1880s, the Society passed a resolution extending invitations to the members' wives, daughters, and sweethearts to attend each alternate meeting, especially when papers were to be read. See Moore, "Tennessee Historical Society," 215. After 1890, when the Society elected Mrs. James K. Polk as a member, women were accepted as members, but the numbers remained extremely low. In the post-bellum era, THS members began meeting at each other's homes. Once ensconced in the comfortable Victorian parlors of these fashionable homes, the gentlemen strayed from their work-place environment into the woman's domain. Granted, the ladies were often relegated to the "refreshment table,"

Just as THS experienced different stages of development, so did the history of Tennessee. In truth, "the law of development," as characterized by nineteenth-century historians, became the basis for history in general—the state of the primitive to the civilized. "Its processes and its results," wrote James Phelan in 1888, "form the real history of Tennessee."[10] The credit for the progress enjoyed by Tennesseans went to the Revolutionary generation and the frontier fathers whose "toils and sacrifices" perpetuated "the principles and the virtues which actuated & adorned the patriot band by whose instrumentality these unparalleled blessings have been achieved for so many millions of our race."[11] The speaker of these words, Philip Lindsley, held a membership in both the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge and the Tennessee Historical Society. By race, Lindsley referred to the Anglo-Saxon who, in the march of progress, composed the front ranks—a situation essential to both liberty and progress. Modern inventions extolled the virtues of scientific progress by mid-century and some depicted a golden age where "the telegraph, the [railway] car, and the steamboat, will be stronger than compromise resolutions, federal bonds, and the federal constitution, to preserve in unbroken unity, our great republic, to be the home of liberty, morality, and religion."[12] The progress of America appeared to be unstoppable. A Greenville, Tennessee newspaper, commenting

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but they *were* participating in the proceedings. Surely, the discussions at the meetings held in the homes of members entailed more than the business at hand.

[10] James Phelan, *History of Tennessee: The Making of a State* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 2-3.

[11] Edgar Ewing Brandon, ed. and comp., *A Pilgrimage of Liberty: A Contemporary Account of the Triumphal Tour of General Lafayette Through the Southern and Western States in 1825, as Reported by the Local Newspapers* (Athens, OH: Lawhead Press, 1944), 246.

[12] Herschel S. Porter, *Address by Rev. Herschel S. Porter, Delivered Before the Literary Societies of Cumberland University, at Lebanon, Tennessee, July 28, 1852* (Louisville, KY: Morton & Griswold, 1852), 25.

on the 1876 centennial celebration in Philadelphia, spoke of America as a nation in motion: "They move onward! *onward*! to the final consummation of the desired object. Thus it has been with our people. The spirit of Progress has been gradually moving onward to a 'more perfect Union,' a more perfect Republic."[13]

This progress could only be sustained though order. The prospect of man's future progress came from Enlightenment ideals—a hope that an orderly way could be discovered to direct man's progress, making use of the forces of nature and human nature to do it. The fact that Americans (and Tennesseans) had carved a nation out of the wilderness reinforced this idea. To be sure, American uniqueness came from the premise that America had the human and material resources to maintain a society in which the principles of liberty, equality, and justice dominated. America's mission or "purpose" decreed that these ideals be spread world-wide.[14] The variety and scope of America's material resources found their way into the museums and historical societies of the nineteenth century. They served as mute testimony to the Creator's divine scheme, where everything had a place. Order evidenced itself through the teachings of the Bible. "While THIS is the habit and spirit of the people," shouted a Bible-toting Tennessee judge in 1876, "all will be well with us as a Nation."[15] Only men with morals and self-

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[13] [Greenville] *Union and American*, 13 July 1876 [emphasis is original].

[14] Russell Blaine Nye, *The Cultural Life of the New Nation 1776-1830* (New York: Harper & Brothers. 1960), 29-32, 43-49.

[15] *Centennial Celebration, 4th of July, 1876. Shelbyville, Bedford County, Tenn. Embracing Opening Address of Hon. Thos. H. Coldwell, President of the Day. Address of Hon. Edmund Cooper. In Connection with his Reading the Declaration of Independence. Original Poem by Hon. G. N. Tillman. Concluding with Historical Address of Hon. H. L. Davidson, Under Joint Resolution of Congress, Passed March 18, 1876* (Chattanooga, TN: W. I. Crandall, 1877), 4.

discipline could provide a sense of social order—the type of moral responsibility found in the lyceums, debating societies, and historical societies of the era.

It took men of this caliber to make up the patrician class. The elites of the community took on the serious business of collecting and preserving the past. The officers of such societies had to demonstrate a competency and capability usually reserved for men in high positions.[16] At the Tennessee Historical Society, the leading figures functioned as lawyers, judges, professors, clergymen, and businessmen. These men worked in the same district, lived in the same neighborhoods, and socialized in the same circles. A passion for history and the relics of the past motivated them to spend some of their leisure hours in the pursuit of acquiring and perpetuating antiquity.

"The past is always a created ideology with a purpose," according to J. H. Plumb, "designed to control individuals, or motivate societies, or inspire classes."[17] Despite the insistence of historical societies that they merely collected and preserved, their domination of historical memory allowed them to direct the public's attention to predetermined areas of concentration for most of the nineteenth century. Only toward the end of the century did the authority of historical societies face opposition. The antagonism expressed by this new class of patricians—the professional historians—caused historical societies to revamp their procedures and review their goals.[18]

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[16] The first president of the Maine Historical Society, incorporated in 1822, was the governor of the state; other officers were a clergyman, a chief justice, and a lawyer. College professors usually served as librarians. See Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962), 89.

[17] J. H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), 17. Plumb also wrote: "The past has always been the handmaid of authority." Ibid., 40.

[18] Despite low salaries and somewhat obscure backgrounds, professional scholars of the post-bellum period were classed as patricians and "gentlemen" due to their European training and dedication to

The story of the Tennessee Historical Society presents a unique glimpse into the historical consciousness of the nineteenth century. Spanning most of the century, the organizations associated with the preservation of Tennessee's history—the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge, and the Tennessee Historical Society—constitute a microcosm of how learned societies operated and performed. The variety of roles taken on by these societies—museum, library, and lyceum—confuses the modern-day researcher. Furthermore, the type of artifacts collected by historical societies defies modern sensibilities as to their purpose or significance. Only when we trace the derivation of learned institutions to the European cabinets of curiosities do we find a logical link as to why societies collected the "stuff" that they did. And only when we acknowledge that libraries were more than repositories for books and manuscripts do we understand why collections of fossils and gems could be found at "libraries." Finally, only when we discover how the lyceum movement influenced the role of oration within these societies, do we comprehend the importance of the papers presented at society meetings.

The Tennessee Historical Society, typical as it may have been, did not epitomize *all* historical societies in the nineteenth century. Situated at a geographic crossroads, the state of Tennessee represented "western" interests for most of the antebellum period and, then, "southern" interests just before and after the Civil War. Only with the advent of Progressivism did THS attempt to shed its local concerns for a more national outlook. In so doing, the Society recognized the impact of the New History advanced by

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learning and high culture. David D. Van Tassel, "From Learned Society to Professional Organization: The American Historical Association, 1884-1900," *American Historical Review* 89 (October 1984), 930-931.

professionally trained historians and national organizations such as the American Historical Association (although there were no THS members in the AHA).

The material culture at THS comprised an array of items, relics, and artifacts that ran the gamut from the historically priceless to the hysterically useless. Yet the Society had its reasons for accumulating every acquisition that came its way. Often the Society secured artifacts on the basis of some remote connection to an historical figure or event. In some cases, THS accepted one relatively worthless item to secure a more valuable one. In other cases, it was a matter of building up collections based on quantity over quality. Preservation issues always created a dilemma for the Society, which failed to ensure a safe storage area for its possessions for most of the century. Lacking any archival training, THS members struggled with making their materials orderly and accessible. Still, THS must be commended for the accumulation and preservation of some of the state's most important and valuable historical resources.

The Tennessee Historical Society participated in developing the public memory of the state's history. The individual writings of THS members, the circulars the Society distributed, the portraits shown at exhibitions, and the commemorations THS sponsored all contributed to the way Tennesseans remembered their past. Through these mechanizations, THS perpetuated its own version of history. Emphatic in their insistence that they merely collected and preserved, historical society members interpreted history by emphasizing which elements of the past were worthy of veneration and emulation. Without a doubt, members of the Society envisioned themselves as heirs to the breed of character that made the progress of the past possible. By perpetuating the legacy of the frontier fathers, Society members ensured their own status as elite keepers of the past. It

was a role they felt altogether qualified for and a task they took seriously enough to leave a permanent imprint on the way the story of Tennessee would be told.

That day in October 1857, when William Moore presented his old, tattered regimental flag to the Tennessee Historical Society, marked the remembrance of an historic epoch in Tennessee's past. Yet, the remembrance itself became historic. The crowds witnessing the event, and those who participated in it, while attempting to capture time, became captives of time. Perhaps it is too easy for us, as public historians, to sit in judgment of THS members who, to our minds' eye, appear narrow-minded, bigoted, and elitist. Perhaps they were. But they also collected, preserved, and disseminated important historical evidence—indeed, history itself. Before we start casting first stones, we need to be mindful that, as judges of history-makers, we should know that someday the judges will be judged.

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