BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

BEYOND THE VALLEY OF *THE DOLLMAKER*: TWO UNPUBLISHED WORKS BY HARRIETTE SIMPSON ARNOW

Matt Sutton
University of Kentucky

All too often, a collection of an author's papers kept by a library's Special Collections Department is merely that: a collection of papers. Ephemeral scraps, false starts and banal letters (often asking publishers, family and acquaintances for money) abound. Therefore, the University of Kentucky's Special Collections Department is lucky to have a collection as well-rounded and significant as the Harriette Simpson Arnow collection. While it would be important to preserve virtually any written memento by the author of *The Dollmaker*, still one of the most well-received and enduring novels to come out of Kentucky, the collection is especially notable for its depth. Over seventy feet of shelf space is given to complete manuscripts and typescripts of Arnow's published work, letters to and from literati like Robert Penn Warren and Alfred Knopf and letters to inquiring readers, all crucial to our understanding of this often overlooked author. But what is truly exciting about this collection is what has up to now been disregarded; three very different unpublished novels, over a dozen unpublished short stories and a wealth of autobiographical material spanning the length of Arnow's career, from the mid-1930s to the early 1980s.

Just the volume of work alone makes this collection unique; indeed, the number of unpublished works in advanced stages of completion rivals the number of published Arnow works. We can only speculate on the reasons why so many quality works went unpublished. One reason may be simple geography: living in Burnside, Kentucky, then Cincinnati and finally Ann Arbor, Michigan, placed her "out of the loop" of the New York-centered publishing establishment. A more intriguing reason, though, is the author's own dogged determination and fierce pride in her work. We can look at the years of Arnow's artistic maturity, from the publication of "The Washerwoman's Day" in the *Southern Review* in 1935 to her death in 1986, and not find one instance of work that caves in to the whims of the marketplace. Whether or not Appalachia was in the forefront of public consciousness at the time, Arnow spent over fifty years writing with commitment and conviction about her home region; long before the phrase became a critic's cliche, works like *Mountain Path* (1936) demonstrated true "sense of place" by balancing social critique with humane and multifaceted portrayals of rural Kentuckians. Her commitment and iconoclasm shine through in the two unpublished works that bookend her career: an apprentice short story called "The Goat Who Was a Cow" and a novel, titled *Belle*, left uncompleted at her death. Though written almost half a century apart, these two seemingly disparate works share the same vision. The early short story observes Appalachia with a perspective and skill extraordinary for such a young writer. *Belle* not only keeps the focus of the earlier work (as well as her best-known novels) but filters her version of "place" through the conventions of several different genres. Collectively, the two works demonstrate that Arnow balanced high artistic ideals with sympathetic portrayals of rural people throughout her career.

Though it has never received publication or critical attention, the somewhat awkwardly titled "The Goat Who Was a Cow," dating from a time in the early 1930s when Arnow taught in rural Kentucky, displays an assurance and self-awareness of the region that some of the more visible, polemical Southern fiction of the time missed. In the

story, a southern Kentucky girl named Jezebel laconically tells her teacher a story in which she and her brother David knowingly lead a Northerner on a wild goose chase in search of moonshine. As if to punish the brusque interloper, Jezebel and David (who share a symbiotic relationship not unlike the one Harper Lee constructed for Jem and Scout twenty-five years later in *To Kill a Mockingbird*) ramble through hills, brush and marshes, with the Northerner barely in tow. The children's undisguised glee at making a mockery of the intruder's patronization is compounded by the man's petulant protests as the trip goes on. Expecting the world of Ma and Pa Kettle and coonskin caps, the Northerner (never identified by name and wryly nicknamed "the thirsty man") has instead found himself in a heart of darkness, with two very mischievous children leading the way. After finally leading the man to an old moonshiner, Jezebel must go so far as to negotiate the deal for the Northerner, making her a true bootlegger. After making his purchase and hurriedly paying the children, "the thirsty man" vanishes, scared but smarter. On their way home, the children intercept one of their family's wayward cows. Though her overnight trip is now justified (and well-reimbursed), Jezebel feels pangs of conscience as she returns home and again as she relates her wild tale to her teacher.

What Arnow does so effectively in this brief story is much like what she does in her later, published work: create a nuanced portrait of both a time and a place. Though set in Prohibition, "The Goat Who Was a Cow" never descends to an exaggerated moonshiner tale or a "local color" story told from a distance for the amusement of outsiders. The story's conflict refers to something more timeless: the tenuous relationship and mutual misunderstandings between neighboring but unequal societies. The Jezebel character has a narrative voice far more complicated than the standard "yarn spinner" or dialect voice. Jezebel tunes in to the Northerner's pretentiousness just as she detects the do-gooder attitude of her narratee, the schoolteacher, and twists her story to both fit and conflict with the teacher's anachronistic view of the "hill people." Tongue-in-cheek, she "thanks" her teacher for not seeing her and her region as "half civilized." Her wild tale, then, becomes a wry tale that "signifies" on the teacher's unspoken prejudices. Having lived and taught both in and out of the region, Arnow was especially capable of seeing both sides of the conflict and creating this type of convincing dialogue and characterization. In Jezebel, Arnow creates one of her more intriguing characters, one who illustrates both the narrowness and breadth of the culture gap. Jezebel is acquainted enough with the land to lead the Northerner through the brush expertly, canny enough to exaggerate her dialect in order to give both the Northern interloper and the schoolteacher a true "down-home" experience to take back with them, and articulate enough to tell the story to the captivated teacher. Given this character's depth and sophistication (especially notable when created by a still-developing author), one cannot help but wonder if Arnow's fictional analogue is less the patient schoolteacher and more the observant, savvy mountain girl who tells fascinating, deceptively simple stories.

While one might easily understand the existence of an unpublished early short story among Arnow's papers, the presence of *Belle*, a fully developed manuscript novel, requires some explanation. Almost five decades separated "The Goat Who Was a Cow" and *Belle*, years which brought much success for Arnow and established her painstaking method of work. Arnow published *The Dollmaker* in 1955 to critical and popular acclaim. She had spent nearly five years in constant, arduous rewriting of that manuscript, and even threatened to withhold the book when faced with undue editorial influence from Macmillan. Partly in reaction to this, Arnow published two dense volumes of social history, *Seedtime on the Cumberland* (1960) and *Flowering of the Cumberland* (1963), both the result of exhaustive research. After a hiatus, Arnow returned to fiction in 1970 with *The Weedkiller's Daughter*, followed by another work of history, *Old Burnside* (1976). *Old Burnside* was an uneasy compromise between Arnow and the University Press of Kentucky, in which Arnow rather reluctantly introduced autobiographical material alongside a general history of the town. The advantage of the *Old Burnside* project is that the short book refocused her energies from the encyclopedic detail of the *Cumberland* books to a more direct inquiry on the past, centered on the universal themes that drove her fiction and fleshed out with accurate portrayals.

This meticulous attention to detail and her solitary method of working, which had characterized all Arnow's major works since *The Dollmaker*, partly explain why *Belle* remained unfinished at Arnow's death in 1986, despite the fact she had been working on it for at least eight years. Considering, though, that these years coincided with the death of her husband, Harold, in 1985, two major illnesses and an unprecedented crush of publicity and interviews that surrounded the TV-movie adaptation of *The Dollmaker* in 1984, we are lucky to have the 876-page manuscript in any form. What emerges in these pages is a novel entering its final stages of development. There are minor points of confusion, however: some characters' names had not been settled on yet, key scenes had not been definitively put in order, an ending was not finalized, etc.[1] Despite these confusions, the novel offers much for consideration. Intriguingly, the work was left at the stage where characters start to interact rather than merely orbit one another, speak naturally rather than ornately and where scenes start to flow together. From all appearances, *Belle* appears to be a work designed as a culmination of a career, rather than an exercise or experiment. If this speculation is true, it is interesting to note the subject matter of *Belle*, since on the surface it is that staple of Southern fiction: the Civil War novel. Though her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace* (1974) was set in the era of the American Revolution, *Belle* has no link to that previous work of historical fiction. Therefore, *Belle* becomes especially notable; with the exception of her unpublished pseudo-science-fiction novella *To You No Place* (circa 1960), this is the only instance of Arnow choosing to write in an established genre or subgenre.

The novel itself is focalized through the character Belle Goodwood, who holds together her Kentucky home while her husband and son are off fighting for the Confederacy and her oldest daughter is away at school. Reading the manuscript, one cannot help but note the similarity between Belle and Gertie Nevels, the strong-willed, resilient heroine who anchors *The Dollmaker*. The theme of self-reliance in the face of adversity-natural, social and interpersonal-is everpresent in both works. The quietly independent Belle becomes a rock for her family and neighbors amid a series of crisis. Her strength is tested further by existing institutions, such as church and school, which hinder rather than help outsiders. Perhaps recalling Gertie's rejection of fire-and-brimstone fundamentalism in *The Dollmaker*, Arnow set the opening scene of *Belle* in a country church. There, Belle swallows her anger as the preacher curses the town's "harlots" and Eve's role in original sin while the men sit impassively on the opposite aisle of the congregation. As angered by the hellfire-and-brimstone sermon as the preacher's personal hypocrisy, Belle takes up and creates her own Sunday morning service at home to turn her children's attention back to Christian compassion. Likewise, when the war intensifies, she runs her own one-room schoolhouse, teaching alike her children, "white trash" and the children of her house slaves.[2] By novel's end, Belle has withdrawn almost fully into her own home, the one place where she is free of outside interference.

As these incidents suggest, Belle, whether by design or not, comes across less as an Everywoman, and more as an emblematic figure. There is no evidence in the notes or correspondence relating to *Belle* that the character was based on a real person; instead, the character seems to be a composite of figures gleaned from her years of researching women and families of the Cumberland region. Such concerns are minimal, though, in the novel's overall scheme. Using the limited omniscient voice, as she had in *The Dollmaker*, to get inside the main character's mind, Arnow quickly gets the reader to assume all that Belle assumes. Hence, Belle's seemingly unlimited resourcefulness - spent raising five children and running the makeshift church, a school, and a homestead of thousands of acres - rarely becomes an issue within the novel. Like many other Arnow heroines, Belle seems innately and unshakably capable.

Certainly Arnow was aware that a completely flawless character would be static, and it is interesting to note the imperfections Arnow was beginning to introduce into the character in these final drafts. A few chapters have Belle habitually drinking strong toddies at the end of the day, while each progressive draft significantly changes a subplot involving Belle and the married man whom she loves from afar, Jean Paul Gaudais. Perhaps Arnow was reacting to the criticism she had faced in her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace*, which featured a protagonist,

Leslie Collins, who fit the straitlaced, taciturn frontiersman role in the grand tradition of Daniel Boone and the work of James Fenimore Cooper. Arnow's championing of a seemingly flawless frontiersmen in the age of the antihero irritated many book reviewers, who overlooked the book's historical accuracy to attack the character's one-dimensionality. Arnow's task in this subsequent attempt at historical fiction, then, was a complex one. First, she had to recreate the Civil War era for a modern audience without specifically invoking the war's battles or key figures, in essence forgoing the fictional equivalent of her *Cumberland* social histories. Then she had to shed light on the relatively undocumented domestic facet of the war.[3] Finally, she had to recast characters for an audience increasingly receptive to - even expectant of - complex and strong women protagonists while heeding the established historical record. At the state it was left in, *Belle* seemed to promise all of these things. And while the book can get top-heavy with historical detail, it rarely stops to make didactic points. At its most lugubrious, *Belle* wears its accuracy on its sleeve, with its extensive descriptions of gun stocks and smokehouses loosely integrated with the story proper and signalling lulls in the plot. Arnow, then, was faced with the enviable problem of having to subordinate her proven skills as a historian to her fiction-writing prowess. The various drafts of the novel reflect Arnow's increasing weariness with minutiae and, as a result, the more historically bound passages of the book are pared down in the last working draft.

While a reader familiar with Arnow's published work would more than likely feel comfortable with the familiar Arnow themes of individualism and empowerment in *Belle*, the depiction of slavery in the manuscripts is much more ambiguous. Arnow probably shared in this ambiguity. Signalling, perhaps, the difficulty in getting a handle on a character, Arnow gave the house-cook character the rather cliched name "Beulah" in the first typescript draft (this draft exists only in fragments in the UK collection), changing it in the final draft to "Victoria."[4] Though it is obvious that the relationship between Belle, Victoria, and Victoria's family is a master-slave relationship and that Victoria's children maintain Belle's ornate, half-empty house and grounds, both the characters and the omniscient narrator consistently refer to Victoria and her family as "help," not slaves. Why this insistence on euphemism? Within the work, the euphemism makes some sense. If the reader is to sympathize with Belle's plight (and a plight it is, since she deals with abandonment, dismemberment of a son in battle, supply shortages, and invasions from Northern soldiers), the reader must put aside the objection to the ownership of slaves and see it as a "curious institution" or "necessary evil." Running the house in tandem against seemingly impossible odds, Belle and Victoria must draw upon the same resources and each other, making Belle's relationship with Victoria more symbiotic than parasitic. But if Victoria is to be a double for Belle (as seems to be the case, given their inseparability throughout much of the work), the characterization of Victoria leaves much to be desired. Despite her more politically correct job description, Victoria's character is almost never focalized and never seen in a capacity outside her role to Belle. Unlike Belle, we never see Victoria fulfill her role as mother, outside of marshalling her children to perform tasks for Belle with machine-like efficiency. When Victoria's domestic duties are done, she promptly vanishes from the scene. This, coupled with her showy, finger-wagging fussiness towards outsiders, brings the depiction uncomfortably close at times to Margaret Mitchell's Mammy. Considering the round, dignified portrayals of women Arnow created throughout her career, Victoria's stasis is especially puzzling and a rare instance of Arnow employing a stock character.

Such shortcomings are the pitfalls of historical fiction, especially Civil War fiction written from the Southern point of view. Not only are we well aware of how the actual war turned out, we know how the war turned out in subsequent fiction. Scarlett, Rhett and the shadow of Tara loom large in our preconceptions, with Faulkner's misfit Southerners from *The Unvanquished* and *Flags in the Dust* nearby. So many shortcomings of *Belle* come about not because of any lapse of authorial skill, but the reader's own predisposition and conditioning, leaving perfectly "round" characters and otherwise believable situations predictable. Not all resemblances between *Belle* and *Gone With the Wind* are negative, however. Chapter X of *Belle* includes a delightful scene where Belle entertains her neighbors in a spirited "Christmas sing" that recalls the ebullient party on the eve of the war in *Gone With the*

Wind. Other similarities hurt the work, though, largely through a capitulation to melodrama. For example, we recognize right off that Belle has sent three men off to war - her gruff husband Barstow (who married Belle through an arrangement with Belle's father), her overeager son William and the man she really loves, a dashing colonel named Jean Paul Gaudais. Jean Paul plays the sensitive Ashley Wilkes role to the hilt, offering the supportive advice and sympathy that Barstow seems wholly incapable of, so it is quite foreseeable from the earliest stages of the work that Jean Paul will die in battle, his own love for Belle unrequited and undeclared, save for a letter Belle receives after his demise. Likewise, early scenes of the brash, gung-ho William are a studied contrast to his scenes upon return, where he returns bitter and maimed, another burden for Belle to bear. Finally, scenes where Belle protects her homeplace and heritage from a succession of intruders - Yankee deserters, scalawags and rapacious white trash alike - strike familiar chords among *Gone With the Wind* readers.

Yet, judging from the typescripts of *Belle*, these similarities to Mitchell's work were not lost on Arnow as she was writing: each of these aforementioned scenes underwent several major revisions, all of which marked significant changes in tone. (Most significant among these changes was the eventual omission of a scene that hinted at an extramarital affair between Belle and Jean Paul.) These heavily edited and re-edited scenes, none of which apparently satisfied Arnow enough to be considered finished, illustrate the diligence and order she put into this work and, above all, the elusive stamp of originality she was aiming for.

Taken as a whole, the work cannot be relegated, along with decades' worth of mindless bodice-rippers, as a cheap imitation of sentimental Civil War fiction. Instead, it stands more as a character-driven piece. Though Belle fully supports the Confederate cause, the book is far from an apology for the Old South. If we look for a sense of place in *Belle*, we find it in the depictions of the family home, not in fanciful descriptions of rolling fields and lush magnolias. In this way, then, Arnow succeeds in creating an image of domestic pastoral, a welcome sanctuary from war and division. Belle and Victoria quietly personify in their home the values - respect, honor and self-determination - that the war is supposedly fought over. As Sandra L. Ballard rightly pointed out in the only published study of *Belle* to date, Belle can neither be pigeonholed as a spoiled child of the South nor as Confederacy incarnate. In fact, the book's best stand-alone scene comes when Belle gives aid and comfort to some Union guerillas.[5] With a minimum of narrative sermonizing, Belle practices what she preaches in her home church and subordinates her allegiance to the Confederate cause to the Christian duty toward "strangers in our midst." Her other duty in this scene is that of surrogate mother to the soldiers, seeing much of her son William in the faces of these boys. Though her portrayal in this scene reminds readers of popular portrayals of Southern women during the war as feminine stalwarts of their family and their cause, in that order, Belle cannot be accurately described as a pioneer feminist character, since Arnow had no use for convenient labels, ideological or otherwise. As she is portrayed, Belle is simply a tireless force of nature, guiding her family through a time of extreme adversity led by her faith and inner courage.

Though by the time she was writing *Belle* Arnow may well have dismissed "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as an apprentice work, a certain harmony is struck when the two works are compared side by side. The foremost similarity is the attention to character nuance and Arnow's ability to situate characters in place. At both ends of her career, Arnow avowedly avoided the temptation to burden her work with excessive pathos or paint her characters with the broad brush of "local color." Portraying Jezebel in "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as a backwards, lazy hill girl would likely have raised a chuckle from big-city readers, but Arnow knew her region well enough to recognize its values (not the least of which was pride) and imbue the character with these same values. Likewise, Belle easily could have been a one-dimensional Southern belle or a long-suffering wife/mother had Arnow ignored both her research and her upbringing. "Place" in these two works refers less to superficial trappings like dialect and more to an ethos of self-reliance and forthrightness that Arnow shared with her best fictional creations. In this way, then, it seems preferable to read *Belle* outside of the canon of Civil War historical fiction and instead cast Belle in the

mold of *The Dollmaker*'s Gertie Nevels. Both characters personify courage and resourcefulness, virtually define the phrase "strong woman," and typify the best qualities of their region.

While one admires Arnow's own persistence in undertaking such an ambitious project as *Belle* while in her seventies (at a time when she was hounded by professors, students and journalists, all claiming to have "rediscovered" *The Dollmaker*), one also wishes she had called a truce with the editorial process and found a sympathetic editor to polish this work into a fully realized novel. Given this intervention, the work may have attained more consistency and an adequate ending. Had this help been forthcoming, southern Kentucky may well have had its own great Civil War novel. But if this unfinished novel does not offer as bracing an artistic jolt as the best of her work or stand undisputed as The Great Lost Arnow Novel, it still deserves our attention. After fifty years of writing about the region she considered home, the best parts of *Belle* prove that Arnow still had many insights on the Kentucky/Tennessee region to share. Besides, after all Harriette Simpson Arnow did for this region's literature and people, her work is owed nothing less. Though it may be convenient or fashionable in this post-postmodern age to dismiss her work as anachronistic, such a judgment minimizes or overlooks the themes that keep her work beloved by many readers: family, faith, love and place. If works that reflect these themes are anachronistic, perhaps it is time we set the clock back.

Special thanks to Kate Black of the University of Kentucky Library for her guidance and assistance in this project.

Notes

1. For example, Belle's husband is alternately called William Barstow and Barstow Goodwood, another character vacillates between Jean Paul Gaudais and Jean Paul Vauban. One character is amusingly called "young Dr. Name" in lieu of a permanent moniker (568).

2. An early draft of one of the schoolroom scenes was published in the Spring 1980 issue of the journal Adena as "Interruptions to School at Home" and remains the only fragment of *Belle* yet published.

3. One need only compare Arnow's copious historical notes with a recent history of domestic life in the South like Catherine Clinton's *Tara Revisited* (1995) to see that Arnow was well ahead of her time in terms of her historical interests and attentions.

4. There is every possibility, though, that this name-in-progress was meant to be ironic. Certainly the name "Belle" is tinged with irony, since her practicality and responsible nature clash with the stereotypical and one-dimensional coy mistresses of the South.

5. Harriette Arnow, *Belle* "final" ts. (Harriette Arnow Collection, University of Kentucky), 72-101.

Bibliography

Arnow, Harriette. *Belle*, ts. Harriette Arnow Collection. University of Kentucky, Lexington.

---. *The Dollmaker*. New York: Macmillan, 1954.

---. *Old Burnside*. Lexington: U P of Kentucky, 1977.

Ballard, Sandra L. "Arnow's Last Novel: Harriette Simpson Arnow's Unpublished Final Novel, *Belle*." *Appalachian Journal* 25.1 (1997): 48-61.

Chung, Haeja K., ed. *Harriette Simpson Arnow: Critical Essays on Her Work*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1995.

Oates, Joyce Carol. *New Heaven, New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature*. New York: Vanguard, 1974.

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

BEYOND THE VALLEY OF *THE DOLLMAKER*: TWO UNPUBLISHED WORKS BY HARRIETTE SIMPSON ARNOW

Matt Sutton
University of Kentucky

All too often, a collection of an author's papers kept by a library's Special Collections Department is merely that: a collection of papers. Ephemeral scraps, false starts and banal letters (often asking publishers, family and acquaintances for money) abound. Therefore, the University of Kentucky's Special Collections Department is lucky to have a collection as well-rounded and significant as the Harriette Simpson Arnow collection. While it would be important to preserve virtually any written memento by the author of *The Dollmaker*, still one of the most well-received and enduring novels to come out of Kentucky, the collection is especially notable for its depth. Over seventy feet of shelf space is given to complete manuscripts and typescripts of Arnow's published work, letters to and from literati like Robert Penn Warren and Alfred Knopf and letters to inquiring readers, all crucial to our understanding of this often overlooked author. But what is truly exciting about this collection is what has up to now been disregarded; three very different unpublished novels, over a dozen unpublished short stories and a wealth of autobiographical material spanning the length of Arnow's career, from the mid-1930s to the early 1980s.

Just the volume of work alone makes this collection unique; indeed, the number of unpublished works in advanced stages of completion rivals the number of published Arnow works. We can only speculate on the reasons why so

many quality works went unpublished. One reason may be simple geography: living in Burnside, Kentucky, then Cincinnati and finally Ann Arbor, Michigan, placed her "out of the loop" of the New York-centered publishing establishment. A more intriguing reason, though, is the author's own dogged determination and fierce pride in her work. We can look at the years of Arnow's artistic maturity, from the publication of "The Washerwoman's Day" in the *Southern Review* in 1935 to her death in 1986, and not find one instance of work that caves in to the whims of the marketplace. Whether or not Appalachia was in the forefront of public consciousness at the time, Arnow spent over fifty years writing with commitment and conviction about her home region; long before the phrase became a critic's cliche, works like *Mountain Path* (1936) demonstrated true "sense of place" by balancing social critique with humane and multifaceted portrayals of rural Kentuckians. Her commitment and iconoclasm shine through in the two unpublished works that bookend her career: an apprentice short story called "The Goat Who Was a Cow" and a novel, titled *Belle*, left uncompleted at her death. Though written almost half a century apart, these two seemingly disparate works share the same vision. The early short story observes Appalachia with a perspective and skill extraordinary for such a young writer. *Belle* not only keeps the focus of the earlier work (as well as her best-known novels) but filters her version of "place" through the conventions of several different genres. Collectively, the two works demonstrate that Arnow balanced high artistic ideals with sympathetic portrayals of rural people throughout her career.

Though it has never received publication or critical attention, the somewhat awkwardly titled "The Goat Who Was a Cow," dating from a time in the early 1930s when Arnow taught in rural Kentucky, displays an assurance and self-awareness of the region that some of the more visible, polemical Southern fiction of the time missed. In the story, a southern Kentucky girl named Jezebel laconically tells her teacher a story in which she and her brother David knowingly lead a Northerner on a wild goose chase in search of moonshine. As if to punish the brusque interloper, Jezebel and David (who share a symbiotic relationship not unlike the one Harper Lee constructed for Jem and Scout twenty-five years later in *To Kill a Mockingbird*) ramble through hills, brush and marshes, with the Northerner barely in tow. The children's undisguised glee at making a mockery of the intruder's patronization is compounded by the man's petulant protests as the trip goes on. Expecting the world of Ma and Pa Kettle and coonskin caps, the Northerner (never identified by name and wryly nicknamed "the thirsty man") has instead found himself in a heart of darkness, with two very mischievous children leading the way. After finally leading the man to an old moonshiner, Jezebel must go so far as to negotiate the deal for the Northerner, making her a true bootlegger. After making his purchase and hurriedly paying the children, "the thirsty man" vanishes, scared but smarter. On their way home, the children intercept one of their family's wayward cows. Though her overnight trip is now justified (and well-reimbursed), Jezebel feels pangs of conscience as she returns home and again as she relates her wild tale to her teacher.

What Arnow does so effectively in this brief story is much like what she does in her later, published work: create a nuanced portrait of both a time and a place. Though set in Prohibition, "The Goat Who Was a Cow" never descends to an exaggerated moonshiner tale or a "local color" story told from a distance for the amusement of outsiders. The story's conflict refers to something more timeless: the tenuous relationship and mutual misunderstandings between neighboring but unequal societies. The Jezebel character has a narrative voice far more complicated than the standard "yarn spinner" or dialect voice. Jezebel tunes in to the Northerner's pretentiousness just as she detects the do-gooder attitude of her narratee, the schoolteacher, and twists her story to both fit and conflict with the teacher's anachronistic view of the "hill people." Tongue-in-cheek, she "thanks" her teacher for not seeing her and her region as "half civilized." Her wild tale, then, becomes a wry tale that "signifies" on the teacher's unspoken prejudices. Having lived and taught both in and out of the region, Arnow was especially capable of seeing both sides of the conflict and creating this type of convincing dialogue and characterization. In Jezebel, Arnow creates one of her more intriguing characters, one who illustrates both the narrowness and breadth of the culture gap. Jezebel is acquainted enough with the land to lead the Northerner through the brush expertly,

canny enough to exaggerate her dialect in order to give both the Northern interloper and the schoolteacher a true "down-home" experience to take back with them, and articulate enough to tell the story to the captivated teacher. Given this character's depth and sophistication (especially notable when created by a still-developing author), one cannot help but wonder if Arnow's fictional analogue is less the patient schoolteacher and more the observant, savvy mountain girl who tells fascinating, deceptively simple stories.

While one might easily understand the existence of an unpublished early short story among Arnow's papers, the presence of *Belle*, a fully developed manuscript novel, requires some explanation. Almost five decades separated "The Goat Who Was a Cow" and *Belle*, years which brought much success for Arnow and established her painstaking method of work. Arnow published *The Dollmaker* in 1955 to critical and popular acclaim. She had spent nearly five years in constant, arduous rewriting of that manuscript, and even threatened to withhold the book when faced with undue editorial influence from Macmillan. Partly in reaction to this, Arnow published two dense volumes of social history, *Seedtime on the Cumberland* (1960) and *Flowering of the Cumberland* (1963), both the result of exhaustive research. After a hiatus, Arnow returned to fiction in 1970 with *The Weedkiller's Daughter*, followed by another work of history, *Old Burnside* (1976). *Old Burnside* was an uneasy compromise between Arnow and the University Press of Kentucky, in which Arnow rather reluctantly introduced autobiographical material alongside a general history of the town. The advantage of the *Old Burnside* project is that the short book refocused her energies from the encyclopedic detail of the *Cumberland* books to a more direct inquiry on the past, centered on the universal themes that drove her fiction and fleshed out with accurate portrayals.

This meticulous attention to detail and her solitary method of working, which had characterized all Arnow's major works since *The Dollmaker*, partly explain why *Belle* remained unfinished at Arnow's death in 1986, despite the fact she had been working on it for at least eight years. Considering, though, that these years coincided with the death of her husband, Harold, in 1985, two major illnesses and an unprecedented crush of publicity and interviews that surrounded the TV-movie adaptation of *The Dollmaker* in 1984, we are lucky to have the 876-page manuscript in any form. What emerges in these pages is a novel entering its final stages of development. There are minor points of confusion, however: some characters' names had not been settled on yet, key scenes had not been definitively put in order, an ending was not finalized, etc.[1] Despite these confusions, the novel offers much for consideration. Intriguingly, the work was left at the stage where characters start to interact rather than merely orbit one another, speak naturally rather than ornately and where scenes start to flow together. From all appearances, *Belle* appears to be a work designed as a culmination of a career, rather than an exercise or experiment. If this speculation is true, it is interesting to note the subject matter of *Belle*, since on the surface it is that staple of Southern fiction: the Civil War novel. Though her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace* (1974) was set in the era of the American Revolution, *Belle* has no link to that previous work of historical fiction. Therefore, *Belle* becomes especially notable; with the exception of her unpublished pseudo-science-fiction novella *To You No Place* (circa 1960), this is the only instance of Arnow choosing to write in an established genre or subgenre.

The novel itself is focalized through the character Belle Goodwood, who holds together her Kentucky home while her husband and son are off fighting for the Confederacy and her oldest daughter is away at school. Reading the manuscript, one cannot help but note the similarity between Belle and Gertie Nevels, the strong-willed, resilient heroine who anchors *The Dollmaker*. The theme of self-reliance in the face of adversity-natural, social and interpersonal-is everpresent in both works. The quietly independent Belle becomes a rock for her family and neighbors amid a series of crisis. Her strength is tested further by existing institutions, such as church and school, which hinder rather than help outsiders. Perhaps recalling Gertie's rejection of fire-and-brimstone fundamentalism in *The Dollmaker*, Arnow set the opening scene of *Belle* in a country church. There, Belle swallows her anger as the preacher curses the town's "harlots" and Eve's role in original sin while the men sit impassively on the opposite aisle of the congregation. As angered by the hellfire-and-brimstone sermon as the preacher's personal hypocrisy,

Belle takes up and creates her own Sunday morning service at home to turn her children's attention back to Christian compassion. Likewise, when the war intensifies, she runs her own one-room schoolhouse, teaching alike her children, "white trash" and the children of her house slaves.[2] By novel's end, Belle has withdrawn almost fully into her own home, the one place where she is free of outside interference.

As these incidents suggest, Belle, whether by design or not, comes across less as an Everywoman, and more as an emblematic figure. There is no evidence in the notes or correspondence relating to *Belle* that the character was based on a real person; instead, the character seems to be a composite of figures gleaned from her years of researching women and families of the Cumberland region. Such concerns are minimal, though, in the novel's overall scheme. Using the limited omniscient voice, as she had in *The Dollmaker*, to get inside the main character's mind, Arnow quickly gets the reader to assume all that Belle assumes. Hence, Belle's seemingly unlimited resourcefulness - spent raising five children and running the makeshift church, a school, and a homestead of thousands of acres - rarely becomes an issue within the novel. Like many other Arnow heroines, Belle seems innately and unshakably capable.

Certainly Arnow was aware that a completely flawless character would be static, and it is interesting to note the imperfections Arnow was beginning to introduce into the character in these final drafts. A few chapters have Belle habitually drinking strong toddies at the end of the day, while each progressive draft significantly changes a subplot involving Belle and the married man whom she loves from afar, Jean Paul Gaudais. Perhaps Arnow was reacting to the criticism she had faced in her previous novel, *The Kentucky Trace*, which featured a protagonist, Leslie Collins, who fit the straitlaced, taciturn frontiersman role in the grand tradition of Daniel Boone and the work of James Fenimore Cooper. Arnow's championing of a seemingly flawless frontiersmen in the age of the antihero irritated many book reviewers, who overlooked the book's historical accuracy to attack the character's one-dimensionality. Arnow's task in this subsequent attempt at historical fiction, then, was a complex one. First, she had to recreate the Civil War era for a modern audience without specifically invoking the war's battles or key figures, in essence forgoing the fictional equivalent of her *Cumberland* social histories. Then she had to shed light on the relatively undocumented domestic facet of the war.[3] Finally, she had to recast characters for an audience increasingly receptive to - even expectant of - complex and strong women protagonists while heeding the established historical record. At the state it was left in, *Belle* seemed to promise all of these things. And while the book can get top-heavy with historical detail, it rarely stops to make didactic points. At its most lugubrious, *Belle* wears its accuracy on its sleeve, with its extensive descriptions of gun stocks and smokehouses loosely integrated with the story proper and signalling lulls in the plot. Arnow, then, was faced with the enviable problem of having to subordinate her proven skills as a historian to her fiction-writing prowess. The various drafts of the novel reflect Arnow's increasing weariness with minutiae and, as a result, the more historically bound passages of the book are pared down in the last working draft.

While a reader familiar with Arnow's published work would more than likely feel comfortable with the familiar Arnow themes of individualism and empowerment in *Belle*, the depiction of slavery in the manuscripts is much more ambiguous. Arnow probably shared in this ambiguity. Signalling, perhaps, the difficulty in getting a handle on a character, Arnow gave the house-cook character the rather cliched name "Beulah" in the first typescript draft (this draft exists only in fragments in the UK collection), changing it in the final draft to "Victoria."[4] Though it is obvious that the relationship between Belle, Victoria, and Victoria's family is a master-slave relationship and that Victoria's children maintain Belle's ornate, half-empty house and grounds, both the characters and the omniscient narrator consistently refer to Victoria and her family as "help," not slaves. Why this insistence on euphemism? Within the work, the euphemism makes some sense. If the reader is to sympathize with Belle's plight (and a plight it is, since she deals with abandonment, dismemberment of a son in battle, supply shortages, and invasions from Northern soldiers), the reader must put aside the objection to the ownership of slaves and see it as a "curious

institution" or "necessary evil." Running the house in tandem against seemingly impossible odds, Belle and Victoria must draw upon the same resources and each other, making Belle's relationship with Victoria more symbiotic than parasitic. But if Victoria is to be a double for Belle (as seems to be the case, given their inseparability throughout much of the work), the characterization of Victoria leaves much to be desired. Despite her more politically correct job description, Victoria's character is almost never focalized and never seen in a capacity outside her role to Belle. Unlike Belle, we never see Victoria fulfill her role as mother, outside of marshalling her children to perform tasks for Belle with machine-like efficiency. When Victoria's domestic duties are done, she promptly vanishes from the scene. This, coupled with her showy, finger-wagging fussiness towards outsiders, brings the depiction uncomfortably close at times to Margaret Mitchell's Mammy. Considering the round, dignified portrayals of women Arnow created throughout her career, Victoria's stasis is especially puzzling and a rare instance of Arnow employing a stock character.

Such shortcomings are the pitfalls of historical fiction, especially Civil War fiction written from the Southern point of view. Not only are we well aware of how the actual war turned out, we know how the war turned out in subsequent fiction. Scarlett, Rhett and the shadow of Tara loom large in our preconceptions, with Faulkner's misfit Southerners from *The Unvanquished* and *Flags in the Dust* nearby. So many shortcomings of *Belle* come about not because of any lapse of authorial skill, but the reader's own predisposition and conditioning, leaving perfectly "round" characters and otherwise believable situations predictable. Not all resemblances between *Belle* and *Gone With the Wind* are negative, however. Chapter X of *Belle* includes a delightful scene where Belle entertains her neighbors in a spirited "Christmas sing" that recalls the ebullient party on the eve of the war in *Gone With the Wind*. Other similarities hurt the work, though, largely through a capitulation to melodrama. For example, we recognize right off that Belle has sent three men off to war - her gruff husband Barstow (who married Belle through an arrangement with Belle's father), her overeager son William and the man she really loves, a dashing colonel named Jean Paul Gaudais. Jean Paul plays the sensitive Ashley Wilkes role to the hilt, offering the supportive advice and sympathy that Barstow seems wholly incapable of, so it is quite foreseeable from the earliest stages of the work that Jean Paul will die in battle, his own love for Belle unrequited and undeclared, save for a letter Belle receives after his demise. Likewise, early scenes of the brash, gung-ho William are a studied contrast to his scenes upon return, where he returns bitter and maimed, another burden for Belle to bear. Finally, scenes where Belle protects her homeplace and heritage from a succession of intruders - Yankee deserters, scalawags and rapacious white trash alike - strike familiar chords among *Gone With the Wind* readers.

Yet, judging from the typescripts of *Belle*, these similarities to Mitchell's work were not lost on Arnow as she was writing: each of these aforementioned scenes underwent several major revisions, all of which marked significant changes in tone. (Most significant among these changes was the eventual omission of a scene that hinted at an extramarital affair between Belle and Jean Paul.) These heavily edited and re-edited scenes, none of which apparently satisfied Arnow enough to be considered finished, illustrate the diligence and order she put into this work and, above all, the elusive stamp of originality she was aiming for.

Taken as a whole, the work cannot be relegated, along with decades' worth of mindless bodice-rippers, as a cheap imitation of sentimental Civil War fiction. Instead, it stands more as a character-driven piece. Though Belle fully supports the Confederate cause, the book is far from an apology for the Old South. If we look for a sense of place in *Belle*, we find it in the depictions of the family home, not in fanciful descriptions of rolling fields and lush magnolias. In this way, then, Arnow succeeds in creating an image of domestic pastoral, a welcome sanctuary from war and division. Belle and Victoria quietly personify in their home the values - respect, honor and self-determination - that the war is supposedly fought over. As Sandra L. Ballard rightly pointed out in the only published study of *Belle* to date, Belle can neither be pigeonholed as a spoiled child of the South nor as Confederacy incarnate. In fact, the book's best stand-alone scene comes when Belle gives aid and comfort to some

Union guerillas.[5] With a minimum of narrative sermonizing, Belle practices what she preaches in her home church and subordinates her allegiance to the Confederate cause to the Christian duty toward "strangers in our midst." Her other duty in this scene is that of surrogate mother to the soldiers, seeing much of her son William in the faces of these boys. Though her portrayal in this scene reminds readers of popular portrayals of Southern women during the war as feminine stalwarts of their family and their cause, in that order, Belle cannot be accurately described as a pioneer feminist character, since Arnow had no use for convenient labels, ideological or otherwise. As she is portrayed, Belle is simply a tireless force of nature, guiding her family through a time of extreme adversity led by her faith and inner courage.

Though by the time she was writing *Belle* Arnow may well have dismissed "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as an apprentice work, a certain harmony is struck when the two works are compared side by side. The foremost similarity is the attention to character nuance and Arnow's ability to situate characters in place. At both ends of her career, Arnow avowedly avoided the temptation to burden her work with excessive pathos or paint her characters with the broad brush of "local color." Portraying Jezebel in "The Goat Who Was a Cow" as a backwards, lazy hill girl would likely have raised a chuckle from big-city readers, but Arnow knew her region well enough to recognize its values (not the least of which was pride) and imbue the character with these same values. Likewise, Belle easily could have been a one-dimensional Southern belle or a long-suffering wife/mother had Arnow ignored both her research and her upbringing. "Place" in these two works refers less to superficial trappings like dialect and more to an ethos of self-reliance and forthrightness that Arnow shared with her best fictional creations. In this way, then, it seems preferable to read *Belle* outside of the canon of Civil War historical fiction and instead cast Belle in the mold of *The Dollmaker*'s Gertie Nevels. Both characters personify courage and resourcefulness, virtually define the phrase "strong woman," and typify the best qualities of their region.

While one admires Arnow's own persistence in undertaking such an ambitious project as *Belle* while in her seventies (at a time when she was hounded by professors, students and journalists, all claiming to have "rediscovered" *The Dollmaker*), one also wishes she had called a truce with the editorial process and found a sympathetic editor to polish this work into a fully realized novel. Given this intervention, the work may have attained more consistency and an adequate ending. Had this help been forthcoming, southern Kentucky may well have had its own great Civil War novel. But if this unfinished novel does not offer as bracing an artistic jolt as the best of her work or stand undisputed as The Great Lost Arnow Novel, it still deserves our attention. After fifty years of writing about the region she considered home, the best parts of *Belle* prove that Arnow still had many insights on the Kentucky/Tennessee region to share. Besides, after all Harriette Simpson Arnow did for this region's literature and people, her work is owed nothing less. Though it may be convenient or fashionable in this post-postmodern age to dismiss her work as anachronistic, such a judgment minimizes or overlooks the themes that keep her work beloved by many readers: family, faith, love and place. If works that reflect these themes are anachronistic, perhaps it is time we set the clock back.

Special thanks to Kate Black of the University of Kentucky Library for her guidance and assistance in this project.

Notes

1. For example, Belle's husband is alternately called William Barstow and Barstow Goodwood, another character vacillates between Jean Paul Gaudais and Jean Paul Vauban. One character is amusingly called "young Dr. Name" in lieu of a permanent moniker (568).

2. An early draft of one of the schoolroom scenes was published in the Spring 1980 issue of the journal Adena as

"Interruptions to School at Home" and remains the only fragment of *Belle* yet published.

3. One need only compare Arnow's copious historical notes with a recent history of domestic life in the South like Catherine Clinton's *Tara Revisited* (1995) to see that Arnow was well ahead of her time in terms of her historical interests and attentions.

4. There is every possibility, though, that this name-in-progress was meant to be ironic. Certainly the name "Belle" is tinged with irony, since her practicality and responsible nature clash with the stereotypical and one-dimensional coy mistresses of the South.

5. Harriette Arnow, *Belle* "final" ts. (Harriette Arnow Collection, University of Kentucky), 72-101.

Bibliography

Arnow, Harriette. *Belle*, ts. Harriette Arnow Collection. University of Kentucky, Lexington.

---. *The Dollmaker*. New York: Macmillan, 1954.

---. *Old Burnside*. Lexington: U P of Kentucky, 1977.

Ballard, Sandra L. "Arnow's Last Novel: Harriette Simpson Arnow's Unpublished Final Novel, *Belle*." *Appalachian Journal* 25.1 (1997): 48-61.

Chung, Haeja K., ed. *Harriette Simpson Arnow: Critical Essays on Her Work*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1995.

Oates, Joyce Carol. *New Heaven, New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature*. New York: Vanguard, 1974.

This web page is maintained by
Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075
E-mail: htallant@georgetowncollege.edu

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

IN SMALL THINGS NEARLY FORGOTTEN: THE RICHMOND FAMILY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

Beverly W. Brannan

1950-51: The academic year my father used the GI bill to get a master's degree at the University of Kentucky, the year I spent in my grandparents' home and at their general store, the year the Upland South stamped my life and work. My mother, little brother and I lived with my maternal grandparents in Beckton, Kentucky, a town of about twenty-five at the time, located in the farm country between Glasgow and Bowling Green, Kentucky. In our household, three generations lived together in a multigenerational household typical of farm families for hundreds of years.

The extended family gathered in the evenings in the front room where we continued supper conversations until bedtime. In this time before television, the grown-ups spent the evenings talking while the youngsters played on the floor. In summer, we'd go outside to enjoy the relative cool of the evening. The grown ups would sit in wooden lawn chairs while we children played on pallets on the ground or lay on our backs looking up at the stars in the sky.

Each evening the talk followed the same pattern: who had traded in the store that day, who they were related to, what land they owned, and who'd owned it before them, and before them. The group included two storekeepers, a patent medicine salesman, three secretaries in offices that did extensive face-to-face business, and a farmer who gathered with fellow farmers loafing at the store at the end of the workday. Beckton had been their home throughout their lives and they shared many acquaintances whom they saw frequently. Their talk wove a network of local connections that covered the Barren, Warren, and Allen County area and reached back to a time before the Civil War.

Sometimes talk would turn to the "olden days" when my grandmother's family had lived in Tennessee. My great uncle, her brother, was a storyteller and patent medicine salesman. He would talk of "Little John," as they referred to their grandfather John Ruskin Richmond (Figure 1). One story still vivid in my mind was of Little John at age 10, whose father and older brothers sent him from the field where they were working to a nearby neighbor's to bring them a jug of whiskey. The neighbor was away when Little John arrived and the latch string was drawn. Determined to get inside, he climbed up the stick chimney, dropped down into the unused fireplace, filled his jug, went out the door, and took the whiskey

Figure 1. Photographer unknown. "Little" John Ruskin Richmond with daughter Cora (left) and wife Mary Ann (nee Pare) in front of their house at Kepler, near Smiths Grove, Warren County, Kentucky, about 1898. Photograph from copy negative in private collection. Source of original unknown.

home.

The next morning while the family was seated at breakfast, the neighbor arrived demanding payment for the whole barrel of whiskey. Little John had neglected to shut off the spigot completely and the rest of the whiskey had run onto the floor. The owner figured Little John must have done it because other neighbors had seen him headed toward the house swinging a jug and saw him lugging it home later.

From my earliest memory I wanted to write down stories like those but because I heard only the one year's talk, I needed to gather more information to give the story body and to understand the role plain people play in history. Academic histories in the early 1970s offered little of value so I turned to records close at hand-oral histories and material culture. A few years later anthropologist James Deetz made an important contribution to understanding the nature of the history of ordinary people in his book, *In Small Things Forgotten*.[1] It is in the small things *nearly* forgotten that we can make the connections between the daily lives of ordinary families and the national record of the American peoples.

In the South, families are so important that it seems only natural to study them and take seriously the materials they have saved from their pasts. Collecting and integrating the history of our extended family has taken me and the members of my immediate family on an amazing journey into Jackson County, Tennessee, a county that supposedly has no surviving historical records. By adapting the historians' concept of sources to fit the kinds of data prevalent in the Upland South, the history of the plain folk in the Old South can be vividly reconstructed.

This paper has two objectives: to show how rich the history of ordinary families can be when we combine traditional with non-traditional sources, and to show how the history of ordinary Americans illuminates our national history. Generational history offers the advantage of providing natural networks of associates and kin that are often difficult to establish in standard histories. Expanded, they can become regional histories, showing migration motives and paths. Histories of ordinary people that can inform histories of ideas, religion, politics, or transportation can be compiled even when direct ancestral lines are not available. For example, my maternal grandparents died by the time I began my project but enough of their generation were still living to corroborate earlier oral traditions. They sent me to talk with their friends and to visit family sites, and explained discrepancies in census and military records, maps, and other people's stories. I began fitting the pieces together in the early 1980s, while working on a degree in American Studies. The discipline's broad interpretation of "data" offers a viable framework for doing this kind of historical research.

Research on the Richmond family began with traditional sources but we quickly moved to less traditional sources for more accurate information. Census records for Tennessee in 1840 and 1850 located Little John with his parents in Jackson County. However, unable to account for the several brothers working in the field that he was supposed to be getting the whiskey for, we drove to Hartsville where we knew that some Richmonds lived, and stopped at a Richmond's general store to inquire about possible connections. We were referred to Mrs. Richmond who was at the house tending to her canning. She set it aside and accompanied us to her husband's uncle who told us he had

just the Bible records we needed. But he would not share them with us for fear we would make money selling his information and not share the profit with him. Instead we had to gather names and dates at the Hartsville cemetery.

A visit to a distant cousin produced an unpublished family history based on oral traditions gathered by the late 1930s that we were permitted to copy. The search for corroboration of its many anecdotes has led us to church histories, court depositions, local histories and historians, and letters tucked into Bibles. The verifiable connections between people, locations, and ideas that these sources provide outweigh the various errors of fact we discover along the way.

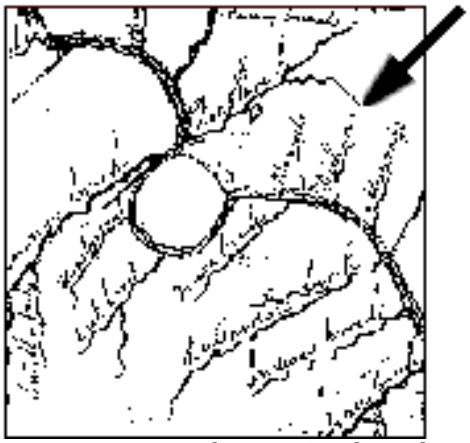

Figure 2. Note Richman's Creek, Jackson County, Tennesssee, 1836. This is the approximate site of the Richmond's farm at Rough Point. Source: Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Site visits made us familiar with the lay of the land, comfortable with the people, and able to envision the events we were learning about. A Richmond descendant in Cookeville, Tennessee, took us to Little John's great-grandfather John's home site on Flynn's Creek in Jackson County where the first Tennessee Richmonds lived. Two Smith County Richmond descendants drove us to Little John's adolescent home near Dixon Springs (Figure 2). Smith County historian R. D. Brooks told us things large and small that brought meaning to records long overlooked in Bibles, court houses, and archives.

After each visit to a storyteller or historian, I mailed a narrative of the information we collected about each site and person to our hosts who would return a corrected, modified, and expanded version to me. My aunt searched the Tennessee archives for related documents for me to integrate, my mother and another aunt located Kentucky family documents and sites almost forgotten, and I consulted social, cultural, economic, political, religious, and transportation histories in libraries and archives. When all the scattered evidence was gathered, the Richmond family history fit into coherent episodes in the events that make up our American history and helped to form our national identity.

The stories of ordinary people can be reclaimed. We have corresponded with other Richmonds who identified unlabeled photos that our ancestors had saved for generations; they often had similar poses from the same sitting or event. Queries about southern Richmonds in a New England family-name newsletter published for several years in the late 1970s enabled us to cast a net broad enough to confirm our South Carolina origin and to establish contact with many of the Richmonds descended from the South Carolina ancestors our branch left behind in about 1800.

A few instances from Little John's family line show how family-centered research can establish direct connections to broader topics. Oral tradition and civic documents combined to reveal how Little John's father's odd behavior was typical of frontier experiences that gave rise to the American tall tale. Until I read John Moore Richmond's Jackson County Court records for the 1830s and 1840s, I had thought northern writers penned imaginative myths about the South to make it seem exotic to the likes of *Harper's Weekly* readers, but the court records disclosed episodes in the lives of our own ancestors that could easily have been written by Mark Twain or Bret Hart.

Figure 3. Ruth B. Wood, photographer. Records in the Jackson County, Tennessee, courthouse, September 1996. Source of original: Beverly Brannan, Washington, D.C.

Jackson County is notorious for its lack of civil records but I felt we had to go to the courthouse to confirm the lack for ourselves. Once there, we found several basement rooms packed with records in unmarked boxes. With very little time before the courthouse closed for the weekend, I reached out for a box that caught my eye. I experienced, as one friend called it, an epiphanic archival moment; it was the "R" box with a fat "Richmond" folder that we copied entirely (Figure 3).

These court records disclosed that Little John's father, John Moore Richmond, went by his middle name Moore. In 1831, Moore Richmond was operating a liquor store from his house on Gainesboro town lot #1, where he lived with his young family. On Christmas eve 1837, he sold his house and business to two men I'll call buyer A and buyer B for the sake of brevity. Buyer B was not present at the sale. Moore accepted in payment a promissory note for $550 extended by a third man, also absent from the sale. I was shocked to learn from Moore's deposition that he sold his house and business to complete strangers in return for a second-hand promissory note from yet another stranger!

Over the course of the next four years, buyer A plied the region by steamboat-from Louisville to Nashville-producing stock, mostly "spiritous liquor," for the store he operated with his brother-in-law who was buyer B. When the note fell due and Moore tried to collect, the buyers escaped with all their possessions in a small boat on the Cumberland River. They went to Arkansas where buyer A was killed before he could be brought back for trial. The man who had extended the promissory note used in the initial payment could not be found either, and like the buyers, he had left no property to attach. To complicate matters further, buyer B had sold a portion of the property to a fourth party who claimed he had paid cash to buyer B and therefore owed nothing to Moore Richmond. In a sale of the property on the courthouse steps, Moore Richmond's father Robert purchased it for $600.[2]

This episode is only a prelude to Moore's many land and property transactions, conducted more for their braggadocio effect on drinking partners, it seems, than out of any good business sense. If we recall the ego-enhancing function of inflated claims, we realize that records of land purchase can tell us about both the anxieties involved in being seen as a man whose word was his bond and the litigious nature of frontier communities. Honoring oral agreements, even those made under the influence of "spiritous liquor," was a way to uphold status in the backwoods communities of the time, a phenomenon that writers have analyzed for more than one hundred years in studies of independence, honor, and violence in the Old South. Elliott Gorn catches the vicious nature of the fighting in his wonderfully titled article, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry."[3] Tracing the transaction of Moore's property provided a meaningful context for the family tradition that Little John's father used to "fight to see who was the better man."

Initially it seemed odd that when referring to such a rough-and-tumble society, people consistently cited their ancestors' religious affiliations. First I used this to calculate the distance between their dwellings and their churches. Later I realized that religious affiliations were related to the same fierce sense of personal independence that prompted frontier gentry to duel and backwoodsmen to gouge out each other's eyes to defend their honor.

The simple declaration in our unpublished family history that the Richmonds were "first Presbyterian by faith and

then Methodists" opened a window onto our ancestors' world.[4] We had discovered that Little John's great-grandfather was a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian who lived in South Carolina beginning in 1754. Specialized histories explained the nature of the religious beliefs and political philosophies in conflict in England, Scotland, and Ireland starting in the 1600s. Over a two hundred year period, the predominant religions-Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist-represented a progressive search for greater independence in mobility, economics, intellect, and faith. Sequentially they moved from ritual, symbol, and clerical intercession with the Heavenly Father toward simplicity of worship and direct communication with God.

From their religious affiliation and dates, we can situate the Richmonds in this progression. They had lived in the South Carolina community of White Oak for more than a decade when Anglican preacher Charles Woodmason described the fierce resistance Scotch-Irish Presbyterians mounted to his efforts from 1766 until 1772 to draw them into the established Church of England. Presbyterian resistance tactics included acts just short of guerilla warfare, such as unleashing fifty-seven fighting dogs in the sanctuary while Woodmason was conducting services.[5] The Richmonds must have known about such episodes in their tiny community, and possibly participated in them, resisting every effort to diminish their self-determination. After six years, Woodmason returned to England, acknowledging the futility of trying to bring American colonists into the heirarchical, class-conscious, state-supported church. On the eve of the Revolutionary War, American colonists demanded greater freedom, both in religion and in politics.

After the Revolution, the Richmonds provide a personal connection to America's religious revolution, the Second Great Awakening, which swept through the South from about 1800 through 1812. In *America: Religions and Religion*, Catherine Albanese explains that people living on the frontier valued a theology of action over one of intellect, and that the churches that grew most rapidly filled that need. The Methodist Church grew faster than any other in the early part of the nineteenth century because it successfully combined the optimism that accompanied the new century and the new nation with a careful balance of key concerns of the day, such as desires for the perfection of mankind, concern with restoring religious practice to the basics developed in the first century after Christ, missionary zeal, and a simple organizational structure.[6]

By 1802 the Richmonds had moved to the new frontier of Tennessee, settling in Jackson County. On the frontier where people's spiritual needs were not being met regularly by any religious institutions, Methodists led other denominations in holding informal mass camp meetings out of doors. People gathered annually at camp meetings for up to a week to listen to preaching, to pray and sing together, and to socialize. From 1800 until 1813 southern Presbyterians and Methodists held joint camp meetings, including in the Cumberland River area of Tennessee where Francis Asbury, who established the Methodist Church in America, conducted meetings himself. During this period the Richmonds switched from Presbyterianism (which held that individuals are pre-ordained by God for eternal salvation) to Methodism (which posits that eternal salvation is available to all who profess faith and follow the steps prescribed for a godly life). The place and timing of the Richmonds' switch from Presbyterians to Methodists places them squarely in the mainstream of American religious tradition.

Hundreds attended the camp meetings so singing schools were set up to teach people common sets of songs and how to sing them together. The English-based shaped note musical notation system and singing style spread from these camp meetings. Group singing was one of the most emotionally charged aspects of the meetings, resulting in far more conversions than would a camp meeting without a preliminary songfest. The southern shaped note singing tradition represents American heritage and regional culture, economic and social class culture, the culture of religious dissent, and a communion with the past.

Figure 4. Photographer unknown. J. C. Richmond's family in Oklahoma, about 1908. Henry Kennedy Richmond, center, with daughter, Clera left, and wife, Genie Ray Richmond, right. Photograph from copy negative in private collection. Source of original: Jeanne Lee, Carthage, Tennessee.

Two generations later we can name individual songleading Richmonds who carried on this largely southern tradition. Little John and many of his relatives left Tennessee after the Civil War but his cousin Pole (Napoleon Bonaparte Richmond, 1848-1929) remained in Jackson County, as did Pole's son Johny [his spelling] Richmond (1881-1937). Johny stayed with the widowed Pole on the family farm at Rough Point on the Cumberland River in Jackson County and bought out his brothers' interests. Johny and his wife Clio Draper were members of the Church of Christ, a denomination that grew out of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Johny and Clio gave the land for and helped build the Richmond Chapel Church of Christ at Rough Point in Jackson County and performed many weekly tasks such as laundering altar clothes, maintaining the church property, and visiting shut-ins.[7] Johny trained to be a singing school teacher in the conservative four-shaped note tradition. This style of singing was important because it facilitated group singing in a church that did not permit musical accompaniment, and because it symbolized southern cultural tradition in an era of great change at the end of the nineteenth century. Johny was one of several song leaders in the extended Richmond family and many other Richmonds attended "singing school" in the more genteel era that followed the settling of the frontier.

Johny relied on farming and shipping for his income. The side of his farm facing the Cumberland River is the site of Richmond Landing, where steamboats stopped to load crops and unload manufactured goods. His wife Clio cooked excellent meals for the passengers who lighted and came in to visit while the crops and goods were being transferred. Isolated as Richmond's Landing may seem, Tennesseans carried with them memories of its Upland South culture when they migrated: Little John to Kentucky; his father, Moore, to Arkansas; Pole's son Henry to Oklahoma territory. Henry Richmond married Eugenia "Genie" Ray in January 1903 and lived on the Richmond family farm for a year and a half. After their first child was born in May 1904, they joined Genie's father and family who had settled in Wanette in Oklahoma Territory. In 1997 I received a letter from 87-year old J. C. Richmond, son of Henry who settled in Oklahoma just before it became a state (Figure 4). J. C. recalled his parents' life history and his family's trip back to Tennessee when his parents were deciding where to settle permanently:

> My Dad got here too late in the year to start a crop so he ran a saloon for the rest of 1904. We kids knew nothing about it for about 30 years . . . . My folks bought a small farm. It was low land near the South Canadian river. About the time I was born [1910], the river went on a rampage and ruined the farm. The South Canadian is known for changing channels. [Dad] sold it for almost nothing. Old grand Pa Ray's health failed, so he went back to Tennessee and we lived on his farm . . . .
>
> Grandpa Ray died in 1917. We were on his place and it had to be sold so we went back to Tennessee by train. Got to Nashville, took a boat up the Cumberland River to Richmond Landing. We got there in the early morning. Aunt Clio "Draper" was cooking bacon and eggs for breakfast.

> We moved into one of the rent houses. We lived there 9 months. I enjoyed the time we were there. My Dad had a corn crop by the river. I stayed there when he was working and watched the boats pass up and down the river. [Dad] sold out to Uncle Johny and we went back to Oklahoma.
>
> About the middle of September 1917, we left for Oklahoma. We went across the river to the railroad at Cookeville, I think. Uncle Johny drove a T model, Uncle [Mayburn] Webb drove a T model, [and] a renter on the place took some things that we shipped in a wagon. Buster [Earl Stanton Richmond (1907-1993), J. C.'s cousin] and I rode in a wagon. [Buster] told me they got back home late in the night. It was quite a trip.[8]

The Richmond stories we have gathered and shared over the years have taken us on a trip through time and distance. With their stories in mind and the valuable information from the many traditional and non-traditional resources left to us, we tell about their lives in rich detail and almost watch the procession of time through their eyes. They illuminate our national history, bearing out again and again Edward Ayers's descriptions in The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction of politics, economics, transportation, employment, daily life, entertainment and more.[9] Like Ayers's southerners, most Richmonds have clung to tradition. Most joined the Confederacy to fight for their familiar way of life. Most continued farming after the Civil War, ever hopeful that encroaching industrialization would cease before it forced them off their land. Most voted for Democrats who promised them agricultural support. They participated in churches. They visited their cousins, making it possible to chronicle this family history.

As people led me to one Richmond after another and gave me bits and pieces of information-often magnificent but bits and pieces, nonetheless-I remembered the many women in my family who are quilters and kept thinking I was creating a crazy quilt of narratives as I connected the various stories: from Little John to John Moore to Robert to John the Patriot, and back and back. Gradually, though, patterns emerged that show what characterizes the people and culture of the Upland South and how our migrations, agricultural background, conservatism, family networks and New South opportunism have contributed to the metaphoric quilt of our national history. To paraphrase the title of the millennium history project launched by the National Endowment for the Humanities, "our history is America's history."

NOTES

1. James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (Garden City, New York, 1977).

2. Moore Richmond vs. Pinckney McCarver, Iris Bond, December 20, 1840, Circuit Court Records, Gainesboro, Jackson County, Tennessee.

3. Elliott J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review* 90 (Feb.-June 1985): 18-43; Arthur K. Moore, *The Frontier Mind* (New York, 1957); Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (New York, 1982); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982).

4. Victor Moulder, "A Chronological History of Our Relatives From the Earliest Colonial Times to the Present Day," unpublished typescript, September 25, 1940, p. 1. (Copied from Anna Laura Moulder Grinstead, Three Forks, Kentucky, August 1976. Copy in possession of the author.)

5. Parke Rouse, Jr., *The Great Wagon Road from Philadelphia To the South* (New York, 1973), 201-209.

6. Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA, 1992), 161.

7. Jeanne Sadler Lee, Carthage, Tennessee, in conversations and correspondence with Beverly Brannan, 1996-1997.

8. J. C. Richmond (Oklahoma), correspondence to Byron Richmond and Beverly Brannan, 1997.

9. Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York, 1992).

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

IN SMALL THINGS NEARLY FORGOTTEN: THE RICHMOND FAMILY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

Beverly W. Brannan

1950-51: The academic year my father used the GI bill to get a master's degree at the University of Kentucky, the year I spent in my grandparents' home and at their general store, the year the Upland South stamped my life and work. My mother, little brother and I lived with my maternal grandparents in Beckton, Kentucky, a town of about twenty-five at the time, located in the farm country between Glasgow and Bowling Green, Kentucky. In our household, three generations lived together in a multigenerational household typical of farm families for hundreds of years.

The extended family gathered in the evenings in the front room where we continued supper conversations until bedtime. In this time before television, the grown-ups spent the evenings talking while the youngsters played on the floor. In summer, we'd go outside to enjoy the relative cool of the evening. The grown ups would sit in wooden lawn chairs while we children played on pallets on the ground or lay on our backs looking up at the stars in the sky.

Each evening the talk followed the same pattern: who had traded in the store that day, who they were related to, what land they owned, and who'd owned it before them, and before them. The group included two storekeepers, a patent medicine salesman, three secretaries in offices that did extensive face-to-face business, and a farmer who gathered with fellow farmers loafing at the store at the end of the workday. Beckton had been their home throughout their lives and they shared many acquaintances whom they saw frequently. Their talk wove a network of local connections that covered the Barren, Warren, and Allen County area and reached back to a time before the Civil War.

Figure 1. Photographer unknown. "Little" John Ruskin Richmond with daughter Cora (left) and wife Mary Ann (nee Pare) in front of their house at Kepler, near Smiths Grove, Warren County, Kentucky, about 1898. Photograph from copy negative in private collection. Source of original unknown.

Sometimes talk would turn to the "olden days" when my grandmother's family had lived in Tennessee. My great uncle, her brother, was a storyteller and patent medicine salesman. He would talk of "Little John," as they referred to their grandfather John Ruskin Richmond (Figure 1). One story still vivid in my mind was of Little John at age 10, whose father and older brothers sent him from the field where they were working to a nearby neighbor's to bring them a jug of whiskey. The neighbor was away when Little John arrived and the latch string was drawn. Determined to get inside, he climbed up the stick chimney, dropped down into the unused fireplace, filled his jug, went out the door, and took the whiskey home.

The next morning while the family was seated at breakfast, the neighbor arrived demanding payment for the whole barrel of whiskey. Little John had neglected to shut off the spigot completely and the rest of the whiskey had run onto the floor. The owner figured Little John must have done it because other neighbors had seen him headed toward the house swinging a jug and saw him lugging it home later.

From my earliest memory I wanted to write down stories like those but because I heard only the one year's talk, I needed to gather more information to give the story body and to understand the role plain people play in history. Academic histories in the early 1970s offered little of value so I turned to records close at hand-oral histories and material culture. A few years later anthropologist James Deetz made an important contribution to understanding the nature of the history of ordinary people in his book, *In Small Things Forgotten*.[1] It is in the small things *nearly* forgotten that we can make the connections between the daily lives of ordinary families and the national record of the American peoples.

In the South, families are so important that it seems only natural to study them and take seriously the materials they have saved from their pasts. Collecting and integrating the history of our extended family has taken me and the members of my immediate family on an amazing journey into Jackson County, Tennessee, a county that supposedly has no surviving historical records. By adapting the historians' concept of sources to fit the kinds of data prevalent in the Upland South, the history of the plain folk in the Old South can be vividly reconstructed.

This paper has two objectives: to show how rich the history of ordinary families can be when we combine traditional with non-traditional sources, and to show how the history of ordinary Americans illuminates our national history. Generational history offers the advantage of providing natural networks of associates and kin that are often difficult to establish in standard histories. Expanded, they can become regional histories, showing migration motives and paths. Histories of ordinary people that can inform histories of ideas, religion, politics, or transportation can be compiled even when direct ancestral lines are not available. For example, my maternal grandparents died by the time I began my project but enough of their generation were still living to corroborate earlier oral traditions. They sent me to talk with their friends and to visit family sites, and explained discrepancies in census and military records, maps, and other people's stories. I began fitting the pieces together in the early 1980s, while working on a degree in American Studies. The discipline's broad interpretation of "data" offers a viable framework for doing this kind of historical research.

Research on the Richmond family began with traditional sources but we quickly moved to less traditional sources for more accurate information. Census records for Tennessee in 1840 and 1850 located Little John with his parents in Jackson County. However, unable to account for the several brothers working in the field that he was supposed to be getting the whiskey for, we drove to Hartsville where we knew that some Richmonds lived, and stopped at a Richmond's general store to inquire about possible connections. We were referred to Mrs. Richmond who was at the house tending to her canning. She set it aside and accompanied us to her husband's uncle who told us he had just the Bible records we needed. But he would not share them with us for fear we would make money selling his information and not share the profit with him. Instead we had to gather names and dates at the Hartsville cemetery.

A visit to a distant cousin produced an unpublished family history based on oral traditions gathered by the late 1930s that we were permitted to copy. The search for corroboration of its many anecdotes has led us to church histories, court depositions, local histories and historians, and letters tucked into Bibles. The verifiable connections between people, locations, and ideas that these sources provide outweigh the various errors of fact we discover along the way.

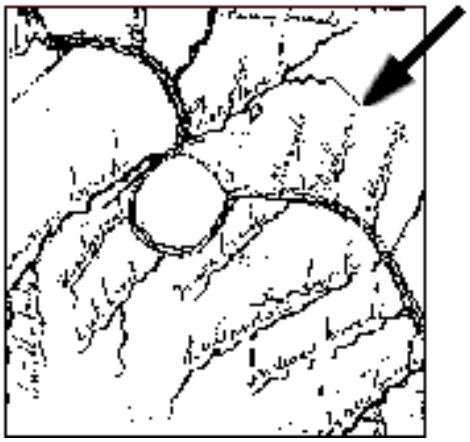

Figure 2. Note Richman's Creek, Jackson County, Tennesssee, 1836. This is the approximate site of the Richmond's farm at Rough Point. Source: Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Site visits made us familiar with the lay of the land, comfortable with the people, and able to envision the events we were learning about. A Richmond descendant in Cookeville, Tennessee, took us to Little John's great-grandfather John's home site on Flynn's Creek in Jackson County where the first Tennessee Richmonds lived. Two Smith County Richmond descendants drove us to Little John's adolescent home near Dixon Springs (Figure 2). Smith County historian R. D. Brooks told us things large and small that brought meaning to records long overlooked in Bibles, court houses, and archives.

After each visit to a storyteller or historian, I mailed a narrative of the information we collected about each site and person to our hosts who would return a corrected, modified, and expanded version to me. My aunt searched the Tennessee archives for related documents for me to integrate, my mother and another aunt located Kentucky family documents and sites almost forgotten, and I consulted social, cultural, economic, political, religious, and transportation histories in libraries and archives. When all the scattered evidence was gathered, the Richmond

family history fit into coherent episodes in the events that make up our American history and helped to form our national identity.

The stories of ordinary people can be reclaimed. We have corresponded with other Richmonds who identified unlabeled photos that our ancestors had saved for generations; they often had similar poses from the same sitting or event. Queries about southern Richmonds in a New England family-name newsletter published for several years in the late 1970s enabled us to cast a net broad enough to confirm our South Carolina origin and to establish contact with many of the Richmonds descended from the South Carolina ancestors our branch left behind in about 1800.

A few instances from Little John's family line show how family-centered research can establish direct connections to broader topics. Oral tradition and civic documents combined to reveal how Little John's father's odd behavior was typical of frontier experiences that gave rise to the American tall tale. Until I read John Moore Richmond's Jackson County Court records for the 1830s and 1840s, I had thought northern writers penned imaginative myths about the South to make it seem exotic to the likes of *Harper's Weekly* readers, but the court records disclosed episodes in the lives of our own ancestors that could easily have been written by Mark Twain or Bret Hart.

Figure 3. Ruth B. Wood, photographer. Records in the Jackson County, Tennessee, courthouse, September 1996. Source of original: Beverly Brannan, Washington, D.C.

Jackson County is notorious for its lack of civil records but I felt we had to go to the courthouse to confirm the lack for ourselves. Once there, we found several basement rooms packed with records in unmarked boxes. With very little time before the courthouse closed for the weekend, I reached out for a box that caught my eye. I experienced, as one friend called it, an epiphanic archival moment; it was the "R" box with a fat "Richmond" folder that we copied entirely (Figure 3).

These court records disclosed that Little John's father, John Moore Richmond, went by his middle name Moore. In 1831, Moore Richmond was operating a liquor store from his house on Gainesboro town lot #1, where he lived with his young family. On Christmas eve 1837, he sold his house and business to two men I'll call buyer A and buyer B for the sake of brevity. Buyer B was not present at the sale. Moore accepted in payment a promissory note for $550 extended by a third man, also absent from the sale. I was shocked to learn from Moore's deposition that he sold his house and business to complete strangers in return for a second-hand promissory note from yet another stranger!

Over the course of the next four years, buyer A plied the region by steamboat-from Louisville to Nashville-producing stock, mostly "spiritous liquor," for the store he operated with his brother-in-law who was buyer B. When the note fell due and Moore tried to collect, the buyers escaped with all their possessions in a small boat on the Cumberland River. They went to Arkansas where buyer A was killed before he could be brought back for trial. The man who had extended the promissory note used in the initial payment could not be found either, and like the buyers, he had left no property to attach. To complicate matters further, buyer B had sold a portion of the property to a fourth party who claimed he had paid cash to buyer B and therefore owed nothing to Moore Richmond. In a sale of the property on the courthouse steps, Moore Richmond's father Robert purchased it for $600.[2]

This episode is only a prelude to Moore's many land and property transactions, conducted more for their braggadocio effect on drinking partners, it seems, than out of any good business sense. If we recall the ego-enhancing function of inflated claims, we realize that records of land purchase can tell us about both the anxieties involved in being seen as a man whose word was his bond and the litigious nature of frontier communities. Honoring oral agreements, even those made under the influence of "spiritous liquor," was a way to uphold status in the backwoods communities of the time, a phenomenon that writers have analyzed for more than one hundred years in studies of independence, honor, and violence in the Old South. Elliott Gorn catches the vicious nature of the fighting in his wonderfully titled article, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry."[3] Tracing the transaction of Moore's property provided a meaningful context for the family tradition that Little John's father used to "fight to see who was the better man."

Initially it seemed odd that when referring to such a rough-and-tumble society, people consistently cited their ancestors' religious affiliations. First I used this to calculate the distance between their dwellings and their churches. Later I realized that religious affiliations were related to the same fierce sense of personal independence that prompted frontier gentry to duel and backwoodsmen to gouge out each other's eyes to defend their honor.

The simple declaration in our unpublished family history that the Richmonds were "first Presbyterian by faith and then Methodists" opened a window onto our ancestors' world.[4] We had discovered that Little John's great-grandfather was a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian who lived in South Carolina beginning in 1754. Specialized histories explained the nature of the religious beliefs and political philosophies in conflict in England, Scotland, and Ireland starting in the 1600s. Over a two hundred year period, the predominant religions-Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist-represented a progressive search for greater independence in mobility, economics, intellect, and faith. Sequentially they moved from ritual, symbol, and clerical intercession with the Heavenly Father toward simplicity of worship and direct communication with God.

From their religious affiliation and dates, we can situate the Richmonds in this progression. They had lived in the South Carolina community of White Oak for more than a decade when Anglican preacher Charles Woodmason described the fierce resistance Scotch-Irish Presbyterians mounted to his efforts from 1766 until 1772 to draw them into the established Church of England. Presbyterian resistance tactics included acts just short of guerilla warfare, such as unleashing fifty-seven fighting dogs in the sanctuary while Woodmason was conducting services.[5] The Richmonds must have known about such episodes in their tiny community, and possibly participated in them, resisting every effort to diminish their self-determination. After six years, Woodmason returned to England, acknowledging the futility of trying to bring American colonists into the heirarchical, class-conscious, state-supported church. On the eve of the Revolutionary War, American colonists demanded greater freedom, both in religion and in politics.

After the Revolution, the Richmonds provide a personal connection to America's religious revolution, the Second Great Awakening, which swept through the South from about 1800 through 1812. In *America: Religions and Religion*, Catherine Albanese explains that people living on the frontier valued a theology of action over one of intellect, and that the churches that grew most rapidly filled that need. The Methodist Church grew faster than any other in the early part of the nineteenth century because it successfully combined the optimism that accompanied the new century and the new nation with a careful balance of key concerns of the day, such as desires for the perfection of mankind, concern with restoring religious practice to the basics developed in the first century after Christ, missionary zeal, and a simple organizational structure.[6]

By 1802 the Richmonds had moved to the new frontier of Tennessee, settling in Jackson County. On the frontier

where people's spiritual needs were not being met regularly by any religious institutions, Methodists led other denominations in holding informal mass camp meetings out of doors. People gathered annually at camp meetings for up to a week to listen to preaching, to pray and sing together, and to socialize. From 1800 until 1813 southern Presbyterians and Methodists held joint camp meetings, including in the Cumberland River area of Tennessee where Francis Asbury, who established the Methodist Church in America, conducted meetings himself. During this period the Richmonds switched from Presbyterianism (which held that individuals are pre-ordained by God for eternal salvation) to Methodism (which posits that eternal salvation is available to all who profess faith and follow the steps prescribed for a godly life). The place and timing of the Richmonds' switch from Presbyterians to Methodists places them squarely in the mainstream of American religious tradition.

Hundreds attended the camp meetings so singing schools were set up to teach people common sets of songs and how to sing them together. The English-based shaped note musical notation system and singing style spread from these camp meetings. Group singing was one of the most emotionally charged aspects of the meetings, resulting in far more conversions than would a camp meeting without a preliminary songfest. The southern shaped note singing tradition represents American heritage and regional culture, economic and social class culture, the culture of religious dissent, and a communion with the past.

Figure 4. Photographer unknown. J. C. Richmond's family in Oklahoma, about 1908. Henry Kennedy Richmond, center, with daughter, Clera left, and wife, Genie Ray Richmond, right. Photograph from copy negative in private collection. Source of original: Jeanne Lee, Carthage, Tennessee.

Two generations later we can name individual songleading Richmonds who carried on this largely southern tradition. Little John and many of his relatives left Tennessee after the Civil War but his cousin Pole (Napoleon Bonaparte Richmond, 1848-1929) remained in Jackson County, as did Pole's son Johny [his spelling] Richmond (1881-1937). Johny stayed with the widowed Pole on the family farm at Rough Point on the Cumberland River in Jackson County and bought out his brothers' interests. Johny and his wife Clio Draper were members of the Church of Christ, a denomination that grew out of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Johny and Clio gave the land for and helped build the Richmond Chapel Church of Christ at Rough Point in Jackson County and performed many weekly tasks such as laundering altar clothes, maintaining the church property, and visiting shut-ins.[7] Johny trained to be a singing school teacher in the conservative four-shaped note tradition. This style of singing was important because it facilitated group singing in a church that did not permit musical accompaniment, and because it symbolized southern cultural tradition in an era of great change at the end of the nineteenth century. Johny was one of several song leaders in the extended Richmond family and many other Richmonds attended "singing school" in the more genteel era that followed the settling of the frontier.

Johny relied on farming and shipping for his income. The side of his farm facing the Cumberland River is the site of Richmond Landing, where steamboats stopped to load crops and unload manufactured goods. His wife Clio cooked excellent meals for the passengers who lighted and came in to visit while the crops and goods were being transferred. Isolated as Richmond's Landing may seem, Tennesseans carried with them memories of its Upland South culture when they migrated: Little John to Kentucky; his father, Moore, to Arkansas; Pole's son

Henry to Oklahoma territory. Henry Richmond married Eugenia "Genie" Ray in January 1903 and lived on the Richmond family farm for a year and a half. After their first child was born in May 1904, they joined Genie's father and family who had settled in Wanette in Oklahoma Territory. In 1997 I received a letter from 87-year old J. C. Richmond, son of Henry who settled in Oklahoma just before it became a state (Figure 4). J. C. recalled his parents' life history and his family's trip back to Tennessee when his parents were deciding where to settle permanently:

> My Dad got here too late in the year to start a crop so he ran a saloon for the rest of 1904. We kids knew nothing about it for about 30 years . . . . My folks bought a small farm. It was low land near the South Canadian river. About the time I was born [1910], the river went on a rampage and ruined the farm. The South Canadian is known for changing channels. [Dad] sold it for almost nothing. Old grand Pa Ray's health failed, so he went back to Tennessee and we lived on his farm . . . .
>
> Grandpa Ray died in 1917. We were on his place and it had to be sold so we went back to Tennessee by train. Got to Nashville, took a boat up the Cumberland River to Richmond Landing. We got there in the early morning. Aunt Clio "Draper" was cooking bacon and eggs for breakfast. We moved into one of the rent houses. We lived there 9 months. I enjoyed the time we were there. My Dad had a corn crop by the river. I stayed there when he was working and watched the boats pass up and down the river. [Dad] sold out to Uncle Johny and we went back to Oklahoma.
>
> About the middle of September 1917, we left for Oklahoma. We went across the river to the railroad at Cookeville, I think. Uncle Johny drove a T model, Uncle [Mayburn] Webb drove a T model, [and] a renter on the place took some things that we shipped in a wagon. Buster [Earl Stanton Richmond (1907-1993), J. C.'s cousin] and I rode in a wagon. [Buster] told me they got back home late in the night. It was quite a trip.[8]

The Richmond stories we have gathered and shared over the years have taken us on a trip through time and distance. With their stories in mind and the valuable information from the many traditional and non-traditional resources left to us, we tell about their lives in rich detail and almost watch the procession of time through their eyes. They illuminate our national history, bearing out again and again Edward Ayers's descriptions in The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction of politics, economics, transportation, employment, daily life, entertainment and more.[9] Like Ayers's southerners, most Richmonds have clung to tradition. Most joined the Confederacy to fight for their familiar way of life. Most continued farming after the Civil War, ever hopeful that encroaching industrialization would cease before it forced them off their land. Most voted for Democrats who promised them agricultural support. They participated in churches. They visited their cousins, making it possible to chronicle this family history.

As people led me to one Richmond after another and gave me bits and pieces of information-often magnificent but bits and pieces, nonetheless-I remembered the many women in my family who are quilters and kept thinking I was creating a crazy quilt of narratives as I connected the various stories: from Little John to John Moore to Robert to John the Patriot, and back and back. Gradually, though, patterns emerged that show what characterizes the people and culture of the Upland South and how our migrations, agricultural background, conservatism, family networks and New South opportunism have contributed to the metaphoric quilt of our national history. To paraphrase the title of the millennium history project launched by the National Endowment for the Humanities, "our history is America's history."

NOTES

1. James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (Garden City, New York, 1977).

2. Moore Richmond vs. Pinckney McCarver, Iris Bond, December 20, 1840, Circuit Court Records, Gainesboro, Jackson County, Tennessee.

3. Elliott J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review* 90 (Feb.-June 1985): 18-43; Arthur K. Moore, *The Frontier Mind* (New York, 1957); Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (New York, 1982); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982).

4. Victor Moulder, "A Chronological History of Our Relatives From the Earliest Colonial Times to the Present Day," unpublished typescript, September 25, 1940, p. 1. (Copied from Anna Laura Moulder Grinstead, Three Forks, Kentucky, August 1976. Copy in possession of the author.)

5. Parke Rouse, Jr., *The Great Wagon Road from Philadelphia To the South* (New York, 1973), 201-209.

6. Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA, 1992), 161.

7. Jeanne Sadler Lee, Carthage, Tennessee, in conversations and correspondence with Beverly Brannan, 1996-1997.

8. J. C. Richmond (Oklahoma), correspondence to Byron Richmond and Beverly Brannan, 1997.

9. Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York, 1992).

This web page is maintained by
Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075
E-mail: htallant@georgetowncollege.edu

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

LEONARD TATE: THE GENTLE POET FROM GRUNDY COUNTY

Dennis Loyd
Lipscomb University

Leonard Tate, long recognized as the unofficial poet laureate of Grundy County, Tennessee, best described the people of his region in "Mountain People" with lines that are direct, blunt, and accurate:

> We are mountain people.
> We are a boorish set, they tell us-
> Hard-bitten, coarse of feature and speech,
> Shallow and brawling as the mountain streams,
> With morale friable as our sandstone.
>
> All my life I have wanted to tell them:
> That we are mountain people,
> That mountain streams have pools of deep quietness,
> And that beneath the sandstone of our hills
> There is granite. (33)*

With such insight and keen powers of observation, this quiet mountain poet captured the spirit of the world of nature as well as the hearts of his own people in his many brief verses written over a span of five decades.

Possibly a poet whose personal life was marked by shyness and who preferred relative obscurity could have blossomed only in a place like Beersheba Springs in Grundy County. In the midst of this world of mountain beauty and promise, Leonard Leon Tate was born on April 19, 1912, on the same place where 77 years later he died on November 30, 1989. He was the youngest of five children born to William M. Tate and his second wife Martha Belle Smith Tate, the first librarian in Beersheba Springs. His formal education ended at Grundy County High School where he began writing poetry. Following graduation in 1932, he worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps in Sevierville, but after the United States entered World War II, Tate enlisted in the Air Force and served in North Africa. Many of his most effective poems came from his war experiences.

Following his military service, Tate returned to the world of peace and quiet at Beersheba Springs where he felt most at home. He supported himself by doing odd jobs for the summer people in that mountain resort. Two groups of people have always personified that community-the summer people, those whose homes were in Nashville, Chattanooga, or points farther away but who found their summer escape on the mountain, and the locals or the "mountain people," to use Tate's label, those who lived there year round. The locals provided essential services for the summer people, such as home repairs, yard work, gardening, caretaking of a house during the absence of the owner. Tate found employment in these ways and still had ample time to write his poetry, his way of escaping. Never gregarious but not reclusive either, he sought no public recognition nor honors. Though his poems were

widely published, he sent them to publications more inclined to accept occasional work from determined but not driven poets. His poems appeared in such publications as the *Southern Agriculturist*, *Poetry Digest Anthology of Verse*, *Century Anthology of Verse*, *Midland Poetry Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Poetry was always an avocation for him, enabling him to express his own deep feelings without having to satisfy another's tastes or preferences. While no formal collection appeared in his lifetime, in 1980 he gathered over one hundred of his titles with an aim of possible publication. These works were in typed form and bound for family and friends under the title "Shadows in the Wind." A few years later, James Nicholson, former publisher of the *Grundy County Herald*, approached Tate with a plan to publish a volume of his verse. Tate's response continued his long-standing refusal to seek recognition or attention. In a letter dated January 26, 1987, nearly three years before his death, Tate declined Nicholson's offer to prepare an edition for publication and did so, in part, on the basis of his health:

> By this time you may have the opinion that I am indifferent, or unappreciative of your gracious letter and your work in re-typing some of the verses . . . . During these past several weeks I have thought much about your proposal to show the poems to others, and have been hoping I would feel well enough-in several ways-to participate in what this involvement would engender, now and later on. But I must tell you that I can not initiate anything-not even correspondence-at this time, nor in the very near future. This is regretted very much.

The tenor of the refusal suggests that Tate was reluctant to face the public at large with his work either from a sense of uncertainty over his talent or a determination to keep his own privacy.

Thus the shy and gentle poet kept his work to himself except for occasional pieces that escaped to the outside world through some periodical or some determined friend sharing his own private copy. Only after Tate's death in 1989 did two long-standing friends, both summer people on the mountain, prepare a volume to offer to the larger public. Dr. Benjamin Caldwell, a Nashville physician who had spoken at Tate's funeral, and Herschel Gower, long-time member of the English faculty at Vanderbilt University, co-edited the volume, *All the Lost Octobers and Other Poems*, published by the Beersheba Springs Historical Society in 1990. The book is dedicated to Tate's two surviving sisters, an action that would have pleased him greatly since in notes left for those planning his funeral and settling his affairs he directed that credit be given his two sisters for their loving support. His note specifies, "I request the minister conducting my services to tell all listeners that I want it known I could not have carried on during my last years without the loving care of my dear sisters Ruth and Clara Belle. Only God, besides myself, knows how very much they have done for me."

As unrecognized as he was for his work throughout most of his life, those who encountered his poetry often had high praise for it. Prominent members of the writing community recognized the strengths in his verse and urged wider awareness and appreciation. Among the scattered tributes collected by family members are remarks such as the following by Harry Harrison Kroll, Tennessee novelist and teacher, who said, "Leonard Tate is a perfectionist, and a powerful and beautiful poet. He is a shy, retiring soul, but his best poetry is as good as anything I have ever read." Similarly, Dr. Edwin Mims, long-time member of the Vanderbilt English faculty, said, "I read the poems with intense interest and delight. I have decided hopes that he will distinguish himself as a poet. He is intellectual as well as emotional. I am struck by his deep feeling and the maturity of his mind." More recently Nicholson, still wishing he had arranged publication of the poems in the 1980s, wrote of his verse, "Of course every line Leonard wrote was deeply felt and sincere-everything lyrical. Would he have been more at home in the time of Wordsworth than in that of the other mountain Tate?" That last reference is obviously to Fugitive poet and critic Allen Tate of nearby Sewanee.

Still the poetry more than the man attracts attention to Tate. His themes are those most often identified with nature poets: the seasons, the changes in the weather, the plant and animal life so plentiful in his environment. He also writes of his mother who must have been the single most important person in his life. According to family sources, his father was aloof and detached, perhaps never understanding Tate's devotion to the poetic. In the published volume, only one poem refers to his father, but several are obviously inspired by and in tribute to his mother. Most notable is "Mountain Mother" which honors his mother's heritage, her work, her influence, and her memory. The poem begins with the assertion, "My mother is a daughter of the hills," before going on to describe her years among the mountain people. Then addressing her in her later years, he says, "Dear sleeping mother, how I love you so! / My heart is wise and full of gentleness / Because of you, I ask no heritage / Except the world may know I am your son" (34). That tribute stands in stark contrast to the poem "Birth Mark" which addresses the reluctance of some family member, obviously his father, to accept Tate's poetic talent, which was his birthmark:

> Were I so lucky to have had a son
> Predestined to express himself in verse,
> My duty to him never could be done
> To help alleviate his natal curse.
>
> To fly, the swift must alternate his wings,
> Not synchronize them, as the other birds;
> So, too, the human maverick who sings,
> For each defies conventions of the herds.
>
> For were my son poetic, gay, or blind-
> No matter what the difference, by name-
> The Philistines would jeopardize his chance
> To speak convictions of his heart and mind;
> No wound hurts more when one is not to blame,
> No sin more deadly than intolerance. (56)

Without support and encouragement, the poet often retreats all the more into himself. Tate viewed his poetic talent as a curse from birth, a curse he could not escape. It sprang from nature's making him a "maverick" as he says in the poem. To live with that difference from other people is painful enough, but to live without the appreciation and acknowledgment of those closest to him was even more painful. His mother apparently never failed him, and because of her loyalty he was determined to do nothing to engender her disappointment in him. During his three years of military service when he flew nearly a thousand missions over Morocco, Algeria, Corsica, and southern France, he was reluctant to let his mother know the fears and uncertainties experienced by servicemen. In a poem written from Tunisia and apparently in response to one of her inquiries, he said,

> Your letter wants to know if soldiers weep . . .
> How can I answer so you understand?
> Surely the submarines that haunt the deep
> Gave us a fear we never knew on land,
> And here, where days are as so many years,
> Where we are ever pitted against death-
> This is no time to dim our sight with tears,
> Here words are but a wasting of the breath.

Yes, soldiers weep. And let me speak for all:
We shall not cry to give our heart release,
Nor when we hear them read the scroll of fame:
It will be after we, beyond the call
Of duty, have secured the lasting peace.
It will be when I hear you speak my name. (54)

One other poem influenced by his mother reminds the reader of the means of sending messages during the war; this one is called "V-Mail to God":

Forgive me when my letters say I'm well,
And take everything in easy strides;
And please, for Mother's sake, don't ever tell,
She wouldn't like it if she knew I lied.

I cannot take her face within my hands
Or smooth her hair, or kiss her tired eyes;
Nothing to send her from these foreign lands
But reassurance through my little lies.

Dear Master, it was she who told me first
Of You-that You could heal the blind and lame,
That You had pity for a soul accursed,
Your grace was all-sufficient for his shame.
So when I lie to shield her from the worst
Oh, please don't write it down against my name! (119)

The tenderness of his devotion to his mother rings through such poems with an intensity of emotion but always stopping short of sheer sentimentality. The reader must be impressed with the genuineness in his concerns and in his openness.

Tate enjoyed the sonnet form, writing many of his poems in that concise and structured manner, including one section of eighteen sonnets appearing under the title "The Unfound Door: Unrhymed Sonnets." The terseness and orderliness of the sonnet appear in these but without the deliberateness and predetermined rhyme scheme the ear has learned to anticipate. Beyond his interest in the sonnet, most of his other poems are done in a simple lyric form. Rhyme follows a fairly consistent pattern.

Among his numerous nature poems, Tate has preference for the fall of the year and especially for the month of October. This last observation is evident in the book's title poem, "All the Lost Octobers." In that verse and many of his other poems, a sadness deriving from the failure to recognize and to appreciate the beauty of the lost seasons haunts the speaker. Those times of brilliance blended with the sadness for their neglect pass by without proper respect for what is now gone.

One of the most intriguing parts of the collection must be the large number of poems devoted to some unnamed or otherwise unidentified love. According to family accounts, Tate fell in love with a young woman during the war.

While she apparently inspired many of these poems, there is no indication she is the lone inspiration. According to family members, "Jonquils," written in Algeria, is one of the poems with the young woman as the focus:

> We met them as we climbed the lovely hill:
> Children, with jonquils in their hands and hair;
> They smiled at us-the grass was green and still,
> For it was spring, with jonquils everywhere.
> Upon the hill we stopped; you took my hand,
> The wind made all the jonquils dance and sway;
> Something there was we did not understand-
> So much we felt, so little could we say.
>
> Sometimes I wake and find it still is true:
> My dream was but a dream, and it may be
> That all I left unsaid that day to you
> May not be spoken till eternity.
> Yet always in my heart, and in the air
> There will be spring, with jonquils everywhere. (63)

With no specific dates to identify the composition of these obviously very personal poems, the reader can only speculate as to the persona addressed. Since "Jonquils" indicates its place of composition, the date is narrowed down a bit. But others offer no such clues. Yet, several poems are filled with the same intense affection and emotion, some based on a lost love and some stressing the poet's own unfailing love. "The Day Was Autumn" begins with the lines "I thought of you today, for in my heart / The echo of your words will ever be, / Although you tore my universe apart / The day you took your love away from me" (80). As for his own constancy, he offers marked evidence in "When I Have Ceased to Love You":

> When I have ceased to love you, not again
> Will breath of lilacs through my open door
> Bring tears for vanished Aprils; nevermore
> Will mountains, seen through stripes of silver rain,
> Challenge my soul, in happiness or pain
> To greater heights; nor will I then explore
> Old depths of beauty I had known before
> The light went out in hand and heart and brain.
>
> So this you may remember, dear, and know;
> My slightest word or deed is but a token
> Reminding you, through days that come and go,
> Love does not fade, however cold and broken
> The heart may be, nor can it die, although
> All deeds be done, and every word be spoken. (81)

Religious allusions and themes appear in a number of his poems as well as some surprising references to modern social problems. In the poem "Precedent" Tate combines a tribute to Mary the mother of Jesus with his own comment on the legalization of abortion. The poem begins with this quatrain:

In olden times there was a gentle maid
Whose purity had never been betrayed;
She lived a pious life, and in her plan
Was faithful to a certain righteous man.

After telling in poetic lines the announcement by Gabriel and the acceptance of that message by Joseph, Tate concludes the poem:

There were no marriage counselors to see,
No wish with God's design to disagree,
And so she waited, till she felt the grip
Of labor pains while on a business trip.

It was ordained that no obstetric knife
Should break the precedent of right to life;
Where would we be, had Mary been a cynic,
With credit cards at some abortion clinic! (121)

One rather brief poem addresses space exploration and explains that God's will must be considered as man reaches out to the stars.

Select any star in the firmament-dim it, conceal it, or bind it,
Keep it obscure, commonplace as a granule of sand,
Assured that one day, if God wills, some earthling will find it
And land. (122)

For one who kept his own lawn, bemoaned any cut tree or wildflower, never owned a car much less learned to drive one, maintained the quiet life he was born to, Tate seems indeed the "anachronism" Caldwell calls him in his preface to the published poems. Perhaps it is no longer possible for such a man to live in the modern world and eschew all the demands of modernity. Tate explained his aversion to city life and its demands when he wrote "Thoughts from a City":

What is there here to wake the heart to sing?
Captive in concrete, city trees all stand
Waiting for earthquakes, and on every hand
Men against steel-their crying all day long.

Rumble and clang . . . the noises of the street . . .
Louder than any human cry is loud,
Till all identity within this crowd
Is lost among the surge of restless feet.

Yet some day, not too long distant, I will go
Upward to mountain heights-to lyric flow
Of lonely streams. Bareheaded, in the breeze,

Rest eyes, like tired birds, on greening trees;
Cooling my face against unfevered stone return,
O heart of mine, unto our own! (18)

That return to the mountain and its comforting assurance renewed him daily. He understood the misperceptions of mountain people that brought mockery and pity, but he also knew the depth of hearts in tune with the natural and real world. He heard the music and knew the peace of his environment. And he wanted so much to let others hear that music and share that peace, if only through his verbal depictions. As he explained in "Mountain People," he knew those on the mountain were often described as "boorish," "hard-bitten," "coarse," "shallow and brawling." But he wanted readers to know that like the mountain streams, his people knew "deep quietness" and strength like that of "granite." James Nicholson is absolutely correct when he says of Leonard Tate, "He was a very private individual-a mountain thrush who did his singing from a hidden place." An apt image for Tate, the thrush, for it reminds us that above all else this Grundy County singer was a gentle man and a gentle poet.

*_All the Lost Octobers and Other Poems_; all subsequent poems are also found in this collection. Only page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

Works Consulted

Coppinger, Margaret Brown, et al. *Beersheba Springs: 150 Years 1833-1981: A History and a Celebration*. Beersheba Springs, TN: Beersheba Springs Historical Society, 1983.

Nicholson, James L. *Grundy County*. Memphis: Memphis State U P, 1982.

---. Personal Letters.

Tate, Leonard L. *All the Lost Octobers and Other Poems*. Benjamin H. Caldwell, Jr., and Herschel Gower, eds. Beersheba Springs, TN: Beersheba Springs Historical Society, 1990.

---. Personal Papers. Collection of Marilyn (Mrs. John R.) Sturdivant.

---. "Shadows in the Wind." Typescript. April 1980.

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

LEONARD TATE: THE GENTLE POET FROM GRUNDY COUNTY

Dennis Loyd
Lipscomb University

Leonard Tate, long recognized as the unofficial poet laureate of Grundy County, Tennessee, best described the people of his region in "Mountain People" with lines that are direct, blunt, and accurate:

> We are mountain people.
> We are a boorish set, they tell us-
> Hard-bitten, coarse of feature and speech,
> Shallow and brawling as the mountain streams,
> With morale friable as our sandstone.
>
> All my life I have wanted to tell them:
> That we are mountain people,
> That mountain streams have pools of deep quietness,
> And that beneath the sandstone of our hills
> There is granite. (33)*

With such insight and keen powers of observation, this quiet mountain poet captured the spirit of the world of nature as well as the hearts of his own people in his many brief verses written over a span of five decades.

Possibly a poet whose personal life was marked by shyness and who preferred relative obscurity could have blossomed only in a place like Beersheba Springs in Grundy County. In the midst of this world of mountain beauty and promise, Leonard Leon Tate was born on April 19, 1912, on the same place where 77 years later he died on November 30, 1989. He was the youngest of five children born to William M. Tate and his second wife Martha Belle Smith Tate, the first librarian in Beersheba Springs. His formal education ended at Grundy County High School where he began writing poetry. Following graduation in 1932, he worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps in Sevierville, but after the United States entered World War II, Tate enlisted in the Air Force and served in North Africa. Many of his most effective poems came from his war experiences.

Following his military service, Tate returned to the world of peace and quiet at Beersheba Springs where he felt most at home. He supported himself by doing odd jobs for the summer people in that mountain resort. Two groups of people have always personified that community-the summer people, those whose homes were in Nashville, Chattanooga, or points farther away but who found their summer escape on the mountain, and the locals or the "mountain people," to use Tate's label, those who lived there year round. The locals provided essential services for the summer people, such as home repairs, yard work, gardening, caretaking of a house during the absence of the owner. Tate found employment in these ways and still had ample time to write his poetry, his way of escaping. Never gregarious but not reclusive either, he sought no public recognition nor honors. Though his poems were widely published, he sent them to publications more inclined to accept occasional work from determined but not

driven poets. His poems appeared in such publications as the *Southern Agriculturist*, *Poetry Digest Anthology of Verse*, *Century Anthology of Verse*, *Midland Poetry Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Poetry was always an avocation for him, enabling him to express his own deep feelings without having to satisfy another's tastes or preferences. While no formal collection appeared in his lifetime, in 1980 he gathered over one hundred of his titles with an aim of possible publication. These works were in typed form and bound for family and friends under the title "Shadows in the Wind." A few years later, James Nicholson, former publisher of the *Grundy County Herald*, approached Tate with a plan to publish a volume of his verse. Tate's response continued his long-standing refusal to seek recognition or attention. In a letter dated January 26, 1987, nearly three years before his death, Tate declined Nicholson's offer to prepare an edition for publication and did so, in part, on the basis of his health:

> By this time you may have the opinion that I am indifferent, or unappreciative of your gracious letter and your work in re-typing some of the verses . . . . During these past several weeks I have thought much about your proposal to show the poems to others, and have been hoping I would feel well enough-in several ways-to participate in what this involvement would engender, now and later on. But I must tell you that I can not initiate anything-not even correspondence-at this time, nor in the very near future. This is regretted very much.

The tenor of the refusal suggests that Tate was reluctant to face the public at large with his work either from a sense of uncertainty over his talent or a determination to keep his own privacy.

Thus the shy and gentle poet kept his work to himself except for occasional pieces that escaped to the outside world through some periodical or some determined friend sharing his own private copy. Only after Tate's death in 1989 did two long-standing friends, both summer people on the mountain, prepare a volume to offer to the larger public. Dr. Benjamin Caldwell, a Nashville physician who had spoken at Tate's funeral, and Herschel Gower, long-time member of the English faculty at Vanderbilt University, co-edited the volume, *All the Lost Octobers and Other Poems*, published by the Beersheba Springs Historical Society in 1990. The book is dedicated to Tate's two surviving sisters, an action that would have pleased him greatly since in notes left for those planning his funeral and settling his affairs he directed that credit be given his two sisters for their loving support. His note specifies, "I request the minister conducting my services to tell all listeners that I want it known I could not have carried on during my last years without the loving care of my dear sisters Ruth and Clara Belle. Only God, besides myself, knows how very much they have done for me."

As unrecognized as he was for his work throughout most of his life, those who encountered his poetry often had high praise for it. Prominent members of the writing community recognized the strengths in his verse and urged wider awareness and appreciation. Among the scattered tributes collected by family members are remarks such as the following by Harry Harrison Kroll, Tennessee novelist and teacher, who said, "Leonard Tate is a perfectionist, and a powerful and beautiful poet. He is a shy, retiring soul, but his best poetry is as good as anything I have ever read." Similarly, Dr. Edwin Mims, long-time member of the Vanderbilt English faculty, said, "I read the poems with intense interest and delight. I have decided hopes that he will distinguish himself as a poet. He is intellectual as well as emotional. I am struck by his deep feeling and the maturity of his mind." More recently Nicholson, still wishing he had arranged publication of the poems in the 1980s, wrote of his verse, "Of course every line Leonard wrote was deeply felt and sincere-everything lyrical. Would he have been more at home in the time of Wordsworth than in that of the other mountain Tate?" That last reference is obviously to Fugitive poet and critic Allen Tate of nearby Sewanee.

Still the poetry more than the man attracts attention to Tate. His themes are those most often identified with nature

poets: the seasons, the changes in the weather, the plant and animal life so plentiful in his environment. He also writes of his mother who must have been the single most important person in his life. According to family sources, his father was aloof and detached, perhaps never understanding Tate's devotion to the poetic. In the published volume, only one poem refers to his father, but several are obviously inspired by and in tribute to his mother. Most notable is "Mountain Mother" which honors his mother's heritage, her work, her influence, and her memory. The poem begins with the assertion, "My mother is a daughter of the hills," before going on to describe her years among the mountain people. Then addressing her in her later years, he says, "Dear sleeping mother, how I love you so! / My heart is wise and full of gentleness / Because of you, I ask no heritage / Except the world may know I am your son" (34). That tribute stands in stark contrast to the poem "Birth Mark" which addresses the reluctance of some family member, obviously his father, to accept Tate's poetic talent, which was his birthmark:

> Were I so lucky to have had a son
> Predestined to express himself in verse,
> My duty to him never could be done
> To help alleviate his natal curse.
>
> To fly, the swift must alternate his wings,
> Not synchronize them, as the other birds;
> So, too, the human maverick who sings,
> For each defies conventions of the herds.
>
> For were my son poetic, gay, or blind-
> No matter what the difference, by name-
> The Philistines would jeopardize his chance
> To speak convictions of his heart and mind;
> No wound hurts more when one is not to blame,
> No sin more deadly than intolerance. (56)

Without support and encouragement, the poet often retreats all the more into himself. Tate viewed his poetic talent as a curse from birth, a curse he could not escape. It sprang from nature's making him a "maverick" as he says in the poem. To live with that difference from other people is painful enough, but to live without the appreciation and acknowledgment of those closest to him was even more painful. His mother apparently never failed him, and because of her loyalty he was determined to do nothing to engender her disappointment in him. During his three years of military service when he flew nearly a thousand missions over Morocco, Algeria, Corsica, and southern France, he was reluctant to let his mother know the fears and uncertainties experienced by servicemen. In a poem written from Tunisia and apparently in response to one of her inquiries, he said,

> Your letter wants to know if soldiers weep . . .
> How can I answer so you understand?
> Surely the submarines that haunt the deep
> Gave us a fear we never knew on land,
> And here, where days are as so many years,
> Where we are ever pitted against death-
> This is no time to dim our sight with tears,
> Here words are but a wasting of the breath.

Yes, soldiers weep. And let me speak for all:
We shall not cry to give our heart release,
Nor when we hear them read the scroll of fame:
It will be after we, beyond the call
Of duty, have secured the lasting peace.
It will be when I hear you speak my name. (54)

One other poem influenced by his mother reminds the reader of the means of sending messages during the war; this one is called "V-Mail to God":

Forgive me when my letters say I'm well,
And take everything in easy strides;
And please, for Mother's sake, don't ever tell,
She wouldn't like it if she knew I lied.

I cannot take her face within my hands
Or smooth her hair, or kiss her tired eyes;
Nothing to send her from these foreign lands
But reassurance through my little lies.

Dear Master, it was she who told me first
Of You-that You could heal the blind and lame,
That You had pity for a soul accursed,
Your grace was all-sufficient for his shame.
So when I lie to shield her from the worst
Oh, please don't write it down against my name! (119)

The tenderness of his devotion to his mother rings through such poems with an intensity of emotion but always stopping short of sheer sentimentality. The reader must be impressed with the genuineness in his concerns and in his openness.

Tate enjoyed the sonnet form, writing many of his poems in that concise and structured manner, including one section of eighteen sonnets appearing under the title "The Unfound Door: Unrhymed Sonnets." The terseness and orderliness of the sonnet appear in these but without the deliberateness and predetermined rhyme scheme the ear has learned to anticipate. Beyond his interest in the sonnet, most of his other poems are done in a simple lyric form. Rhyme follows a fairly consistent pattern.

Among his numerous nature poems, Tate has preference for the fall of the year and especially for the month of October. This last observation is evident in the book's title poem, "All the Lost Octobers." In that verse and many of his other poems, a sadness deriving from the failure to recognize and to appreciate the beauty of the lost seasons haunts the speaker. Those times of brilliance blended with the sadness for their neglect pass by without proper respect for what is now gone.

One of the most intriguing parts of the collection must be the large number of poems devoted to some unnamed or otherwise unidentified love. According to family accounts, Tate fell in love with a young woman during the war. While she apparently inspired many of these poems, there is no indication she is the lone inspiration. According to

family members, "Jonquils," written in Algeria, is one of the poems with the young woman as the focus:

> We met them as we climbed the lovely hill:
> Children, with jonquils in their hands and hair;
> They smiled at us-the grass was green and still,
> For it was spring, with jonquils everywhere.
> Upon the hill we stopped; you took my hand,
> The wind made all the jonquils dance and sway;
> Something there was we did not understand-
> So much we felt, so little could we say.
>
> Sometimes I wake and find it still is true:
> My dream was but a dream, and it may be
> That all I left unsaid that day to you
> May not be spoken till eternity.
> Yet always in my heart, and in the air
> There will be spring, with jonquils everywhere. (63)

With no specific dates to identify the composition of these obviously very personal poems, the reader can only speculate as to the persona addressed. Since "Jonquils" indicates its place of composition, the date is narrowed down a bit. But others offer no such clues. Yet, several poems are filled with the same intense affection and emotion, some based on a lost love and some stressing the poet's own unfailing love. "The Day Was Autumn" begins with the lines "I thought of you today, for in my heart / The echo of your words will ever be, / Although you tore my universe apart / The day you took your love away from me" (80). As for his own constancy, he offers marked evidence in "When I Have Ceased to Love You":

> When I have ceased to love you, not again
> Will breath of lilacs through my open door
> Bring tears for vanished Aprils; nevermore
> Will mountains, seen through stripes of silver rain,
> Challenge my soul, in happiness or pain
> To greater heights; nor will I then explore
> Old depths of beauty I had known before
> The light went out in hand and heart and brain.
>
> So this you may remember, dear, and know;
> My slightest word or deed is but a token
> Reminding you, through days that come and go,
> Love does not fade, however cold and broken
> The heart may be, nor can it die, although
> All deeds be done, and every word be spoken. (81)

Religious allusions and themes appear in a number of his poems as well as some surprising references to modern social problems. In the poem "Precedent" Tate combines a tribute to Mary the mother of Jesus with his own comment on the legalization of abortion. The poem begins with this quatrain:

In olden times there was a gentle maid
Whose purity had never been betrayed;
She lived a pious life, and in her plan
Was faithful to a certain righteous man.

After telling in poetic lines the announcement by Gabriel and the acceptance of that message by Joseph, Tate concludes the poem:

There were no marriage counselors to see,
No wish with God's design to disagree,
And so she waited, till she felt the grip
Of labor pains while on a business trip.

It was ordained that no obstetric knife
Should break the precedent of right to life;
Where would we be, had Mary been a cynic,
With credit cards at some abortion clinic! (121)

One rather brief poem addresses space exploration and explains that God's will must be considered as man reaches out to the stars.

Select any star in the firmament-dim it, conceal it, or bind it,
Keep it obscure, commonplace as a granule of sand,
Assured that one day, if God wills, some earthling will find it
And land. (122)

For one who kept his own lawn, bemoaned any cut tree or wildflower, never owned a car much less learned to drive one, maintained the quiet life he was born to, Tate seems indeed the "anachronism" Caldwell calls him in his preface to the published poems. Perhaps it is no longer possible for such a man to live in the modern world and eschew all the demands of modernity. Tate explained his aversion to city life and its demands when he wrote "Thoughts from a City":

What is there here to wake the heart to sing?
Captive in concrete, city trees all stand
Waiting for earthquakes, and on every hand
Men against steel-their crying all day long.

Rumble and clang . . . the noises of the street . . .
Louder than any human cry is loud,
Till all identity within this crowd
Is lost among the surge of restless feet.

Yet some day, not too long distant, I will go
Upward to mountain heights-to lyric flow
Of lonely streams. Bareheaded, in the breeze,

Rest eyes, like tired birds, on greening trees;
Cooling my face against unfevered stone return,
O heart of mine, unto our own! (18)

That return to the mountain and its comforting assurance renewed him daily. He understood the misperceptions of mountain people that brought mockery and pity, but he also knew the depth of hearts in tune with the natural and real world. He heard the music and knew the peace of his environment. And he wanted so much to let others hear that music and share that peace, if only through his verbal depictions. As he explained in "Mountain People," he knew those on the mountain were often described as "boorish," "hard-bitten," "coarse," "shallow and brawling." But he wanted readers to know that like the mountain streams, his people knew "deep quietness" and strength like that of "granite." James Nicholson is absolutely correct when he says of Leonard Tate, "He was a very private individual-a mountain thrush who did his singing from a hidden place." An apt image for Tate, the thrush, for it reminds us that above all else this Grundy County singer was a gentle man and a gentle poet.

*_All the Lost Octobers and Other Poems_; all subsequent poems are also found in this collection. Only page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

Works Consulted

Coppinger, Margaret Brown, et al. *Beersheba Springs: 150 Years 1833-1981: A History and a Celebration*. Beersheba Springs, TN: Beersheba Springs Historical Society, 1983.

Nicholson, James L. *Grundy County*. Memphis: Memphis State U P, 1982.

---. Personal Letters.

Tate, Leonard L. *All the Lost Octobers and Other Poems*. Benjamin H. Caldwell, Jr., and Herschel Gower, eds. Beersheba Springs, TN: Beersheba Springs Historical Society, 1990.

---. Personal Papers. Collection of Marilyn (Mrs. John R.) Sturdivant.

---. "Shadows in the Wind." Typescript. April 1980.

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

MASON'S CHARACTERS GET SOME COLLEGE

Scott Vander Ploeg
Madisonville Community College

When surveying the fiction of Bobbie Ann Mason, it becomes evident to most readers that her characters have a marked tendency to stay close to home. Farmstead, neighborhood, country church, family kitchen and TV/living room-these are typical settings for stories in which Mason creates characters that have little contact with what in this context would be ironically called the "greater world." By focusing so exclusively on these locales, she gives the region a priority that suggests thematic implications. In Mason's stories, there is no world greater than that of western Kentucky-or rather, western Kentucky doesn't place much value on places far away.

The dominant stereotypic image of the Kentuckian, today as in the past, is that of the "hillbilly." The derivation of this term and its referent is debatable-some attribute the type to lands to the north and east of Kentucky, and the Hatfield versus McCoy legend is woven into the image. No matter what the true point of origin may be, nor its biased misrepresentation of a people, the term is commonly applied to Kentuckians, and it is a perception about which the residents are quite self-consciously aware. The "hillbilly" is uncouth, agrarian, short-tempered, loyal to kith and kin, and most emphatically uneducated. The compassion we may note in Mason's nearly exclusive treatment of characters who live in Kentucky provides a challenge to the hillbilly stereotype. She deftly shows their human natures, and in doing so argues against the denigration provided by a high-culture elitism. But on the question of education she is curiously ambivalent. In fact, in the world Mason creates, educational attainment is divisive at best, generally irrelevant, and often harmful to the positive values found in family, place, and self-image.

This preference for the indigenous folk of the region of western Kentucky is a salient characteristic that Barbara Kingsolver, a contemporary and expatriate Kentuckian, has found especially appealing in Mason's work:

> It must have been in 1981 I read *Shiloh and Other Stories*, Bobbie Ann Mason's first collection, and that was a life-changing moment for me, because I suddenly understood that what moved me about those stories was not so much the style or the execution: it was the respect that she has for her people-her characters who are her people-and the simple fact that she deemed them worthy of serious literature. My jaw sort of dropped open . . . . What moves me most about Bobbie Ann Mason's work is that when her characters speak, I hear them exactly. I'm hearing exact inflections, and it makes me homesick. ("Barbara Kingsolver" 157-158)

Kingsolver goes on to explain that, in contrast to Mason, the impetus behind her own fiction involves articulating truths for those, regardless of place, who have been marginalized by society. Whereas Kingsolver will treat racial or cultural or economic differences, Mason relies on region to establish her characters' isolation. What is particularly noteworthy here is that the gritty reality of lower middle class rural society is a particular choice Mason finds compelling. The question we are asked to ask is "Why?" Does Mason ask us to develop a respect for

her characters similar to that evoked in Kingsolver's reaction? Should we accept these characters, warts and all?

It is tempting to ascribe provincialism to Mason because it is so embedded in her characters, but it is abundantly clear that she has been out in the greater world-it is her characters who tend to stay home. Mason left her home in western Kentucky to attend undergraduate school at the University of Kentucky. She next worked as a journalist in New York, and attained a Ph.D. in modern literature from the University of Connecticut, eventually establishing her scholarly credentials with critical works on Nabokov's *Ada*, and on girls' juvenile detective fiction. After marrying, she and her husband taught college English in Pennsylvania before moving back to Kentucky ("Bobbie Ann Mason" *CLC* 232-233). While seeking her education and living in the northeast, she wrote exclusively about under-educated Kentuckians who rarely venture out of county, let alone out of state. Her most frequently mentioned place-name is the small community of Hopewell-the name symbolic of the western Kentucky ethos.

College students might first meet Mason's work in the contemporary short story section of a Norton or similar anthology, while more worldly readers might have encountered her fiction in *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Mother Jones*, *Harper's*, or *Paris Review*. She has achieved a stature in the realm of serious literature that many writers would envy, notably a success that has been fostered by the eastern literary establishment-a cultural context that is completely alien to Mason's characters. Despite this obvious success, little critical work exists. Her fiction is typically considered along with other contemporary women writers, such as Ann Tyler, in doctoral dissertations that rarely see print, or as review articles in the aforementioned journals. Critics may be put off by such overtly low-brow and unapologetically "popular" materials. Her characters don't achieve the kind of depth we find in Faulkner or Flannery O'Connor, and perhaps that is part of their essential personalities.

By her regular use of the western Kentucky locale, Mason runs the risk of being labeled a regional writer, and yet there is something transcendent in her use of this setting, something that intimates universal truths without creating improbable actions and false heroes and heroines. I suspect this clear intention to write about lower-class characters, and her sympathetic yet unsentimental treatments, strike non-Kentuckian readers as heartwarming and starkly human, while comfortably confirming many of the regional stereotypes of a people who are culturally inferior, bereft of the finer and predominantly east or west coast urbanities. It may also be due to Mason's artistic agenda of minimalism that the characters seem to live primarily on their surface motivations. Certainly spare in the descriptions and development Mason crafts for them, the characters tend to match their outward facades, which is to say that they really are not factitious beyond the most limited divisions between self and society. They generally *are how they behave*.

Though New Yorkers may find the characters appealing because of the flaws they perceive in them, Kentucky readers are more ambivalent. They don't enjoy being categorized as constituting "K-Mart realism," a term that Mason rejects as the snobbery of people who exclusively shop at Sak's Fifth Avenue (*Signature*).

Certainly, a strong concern over the value of place runs through nearly all of her fiction. By the narrative focus or regional point of view she adopts, Mason establishes a world as seen through the eyes of the isolated and often unsophisticated western Kentuckian. This emphasis produces a tension between home and the outer world, and this is most evident in how she treats higher education. It isn't a meaningful part of this home-world, and thus when her characters confront higher education, we are left to consider an ironic disjunction between ourselves as educated readers and the uneducated subjects in the fiction. Gremore describes this as a matter of objectification of working-class structures-so that the characters "seem to confirm for us the personhood we have won by making the transition from 'their' culture to 'ours'" (Gremore 8), a kind of smug, self-satisfied attitude of "there but for the grace of God go I." Gremore adds that our canonical acceptance of Mason's work may be due in part to an

affective component wherein we may attach a greater importance to these working-class fictions because of our own sense of having been close to those concerns. This presumes that the academy has been flooded with scholars from the middle class, an assumption that seems in keeping with the increased availability of higher education.

"Shiloh," the title story in the collection that Kingsolver so admired, offers immediate relevance to western Kentucky readers. The characters can be found at the local mall or during any county fair. The women in her stories tend to marry young, and the men gladly engage in manual labor. They pervade the landscape-both that of her creation and that of the actual culture of the region. If these residents become students and read Mason's works, they experience a poignant moment of self-recognition. Suddenly, literature is not some distant, attenuated study. Some Kentucky readers are bothered by the frank and unsentimental depiction of lower class people-a culture that is full of grimy coal industry work, popular music, farming, beer-drinking, television, big trucks; the favored activities of the characters involve going to the mall, renting movies on videotape, deer-hunting, church socials, and adulterous sex. Norma Jean, the main character of "Shiloh," with a name clearly meant to raise the busty specter of Marilyn Monroe, begins taking classes at Paducah Community College including English classes, where she writes a good "B"-grade essay on baking a cream soup casserole-standard fare in this region. Her husband, Leroy, has a bum leg. He's an ironic "king," like so many men in the region who have been disabled in mining accidents. A truck driver in the past, he is out of work. He smokes locally-grown marijuana, watches television, and makes popsicle-stick models of log cabins he would like to build. He is not fond of his wife's new direction and lurks in the background while she attends class.

Norma Jean's attempt at higher education is not the wedge that ultimately separates the couple, but it obviously represents a tension that exists when people move away from their early life choices. We might hope that her college-inspired intellectual capabilities would allow her to better know herself and her husband, and would serve to strengthen their marriage. Instead of improving the lives of the populace in Mason's world, education erodes their communal values, separates them from their families, and introduces them to newfangled ideas that only confuse and frustrate. Mason's characters gain little personal enrichment from any higher studies they pursue. Norma Jean learns to be dissatisfied with the limits she and her society have conspired to set for her. By story's end, she intends to divorce Leroy.

"The Rookers," second in the *Shiloh* collection, is more emphatic about the immiscibility of western Kentucky and higher education. Mary Lou and Mack Skaggs have sent their daughter, Judy, to Murray State University for her freshman year. Judy is absorbing a great deal of education, including the theories of sub-atomic particle physics. She is fascinated by matter that only exists within groups, explaining this to her mother and father who cannot comprehend what their daughter has been learning at the university. Later, Mary Lou realizes that her husband is similarly in danger of losing his existence, for he is unable to deal with his daughter's absence, and reveals his latent agoraphobia and the degree to which he is powerless among women. Though Judy seems to be gaining something vaguely positive from her academic pursuits, this growth is subverted when Mason has her gladly join in the communal card game, Rook. Mason's particular choice of game is sure to suggest the rookery from which Judy derives her lineage. Education has little effect on her basic life pattern, for she metaphorically returns to the nest. In contrast, her roommate withdraws from school in mid-semester, rather like the self-destructive Marita of a later story. In at least eight of the sixteen stories that comprise the *Shiloh and Other Stories* collection, education is a thematic element associated with loss or exile.

Mason thus offers us a challenge in depicting this culture as one in which educational effort is more likely to be destructive to essential communal values than a positive force for individual success. And this may be due to her own experience, for when she left a teaching position in Pennsylvania to return to Kentucky, it was partly because of having been made to feel inferior for her southern accent. In one interview, she intimates her dislike of teaching,

her anxiety over holding class and dealing with student writers (*Signature*). When she left Pennsylvania, she fled from higher education and found refuge in a full-time writing career. Toward the end of another interview, when asked, "What haven't we discussed that you think might be important for people to know about you?" Mason says of herself: "I'm not very sophisticated or I don't live in a very literary world, and I don't talk literature and I don't talk on a university level with adults" ("Bobbie Ann Mason," *Conversations* 200). So it is not just from a particular college post that she defected, but from the whole university context. Her life since then has been a conscious avoidance of higher education.

In addition to this repudiation or disgust with higher education, it is fair to say that Mason accurately depicts the popular notions held by the citizenry of this region. Education in western Kentucky is perceived as an obligation, not an aspiration. None of Mason's characters catch fire from what D. H. Lawrence ironically termed "the eternal flame of the high ideal." Instead, Mason writes about the real world of Kentucky in which higher education is primarily a mark of class distinction, a relatively meaningless label attached to wealth and power-goals her characters do not valorize and have little chance of attaining. Though Morphew suggests a trend in Mason's depiction of characters, so that the more educated the woman, the more refined and introspective she is (47, 49), this does not indicate Mason's preference for those characters, nor do we see her depicting them with increasing frequency. These few educated women are emotional and spiritual wrecks. They are just as benighted as the less-educated, and the dubious advantage that education grants them is that they may more fully apprehend their limitations.

Such, we may suppose, is the case with Mason herself. The irony is forceful. A university- trained Ph.D. who closely studies matters as esoteric as Nabokov's fiction chooses to write her own fictions about modest, homespun characters and their bourgeois aspirations. It is as if Mason and her characters have faced the overwhelming impact of modern society and admitted defeat in retreat. This is reminiscent of Levine's recountings of country folk who say, in response to seeing stage melodramas and visiting the 1890s Columbia Exposition: "I have had as much as I can hold . . . . Take me home, I can't stand any more of it." Levine infers from this distancing effect that we are looking at "cultural worlds moving farther and farther apart; worlds with less and less tolerance for or understanding of each other" (212-213). Mason's stories imply this same condition of division across the American scene.

In Mason's fiction, educational attainment is a divisive activity, and is regularly related to the reasons people move away. Residents think of those who emigrate from the Paducah flatlands of western Kentucky as people in exile; they describe the expatriates as lost or irrelevant. Mason excludes these exiles from priority in the plot-lines of her fiction. Instead, she focuses on those who stay or those who return. The emigres' absences are noted as sad flaws: whatever happiness they may find in their foreign existence is insufficient to balance the wrong of leaving the area. The locals tend to condescend regarding these unfortunate outcasts.

Such is true in Mason's most widely distributed story, the novel *In Country*, produced as a film in 1989. The protagonist, a teen-age woman named "Sam," faces the usual post high school indecision. Like Dean, in "Piano Fingers," she "feels suspended somewhere between childhood and old age, not knowing which direction [s]he is facing" (*Love Life* 84). Her mother, who has remarried and moved to Lexington where she is a student, encourages Sam to go to college. In at least six instances, Sam questions the value of pursuing a degree. Higher education is not sufficient motivation in and of itself-at best it offers a dimly perceived opportunity in which Sam is flatly not interested. She first needs to work out some problems involving her own identity, and especially her grief for her father who had died as a soldier in Vietnam. She resists leaving her home in Hopewell, partly because that would mean leaving her war-syndrome distressed uncle. Even with the positive conclusion to their quest, there is no

reason to believe Sam will take advantage of the educational opportunity her mother offers her. Her first duty is to family, not to an educated self. Like soldiers who might "get some" action during a tour of duty, Sam may choose to "get some" college. (This is in fact how many college students would phrase their enrollment activity today.)

This family ethic makes the mother's defection even more painful. The mother's new life is focused on a suburban subdivision reminiscent of the '50s-a kind of Ozzie and Harriet world of small yards, unremarkable houses, bland people. Tied down to her home and new baby, Sam's mother isn't able to go with Sam, Emmett, and their aunt, on their journey to Washington D.C. to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Her big-city affiliations-tied to higher education-prevent her from participating in the other characters' quest for resolution. Though a student, there is little mention of a point or direction or goal in her studies. She gives Sam a credit card to help them if they get in a jam, but this is the most she can offer after having sold out to the world outside their ancestral Hopewell home. In terms of the quest structure, Sam's mother is reduced to the status of a helper.

And what would idealized education offer these or any of Mason's characters? They only want job-training and wealth sufficient to purchase a home entertainment system and cable television. Knowledge of other facts, other fields of study, is only distraction to those bent on vocations instead of educations. As Brinkmeyer points out, Mason's characters have no historical sense, and thus every event is radically new, as if they are the first people to have ever encountered such events (22). For example, Leroy and Norma Jean have little concept of what the Shiloh battlefield commemorated, no way to contextualize the world outside their localized present. They don't recognize that their imminent separation is in some ways similar to the Civil War that the battlefield represents. They haven't learned from history. Even in the few cases when the characters do become interested in their historical connections, the insight gained is fleeting and not important in their psychological development.

In a more recent story, "Thunder Snow" (March, 1997), Mason chooses a setting farther from home-the Lexington area-and only the husband, Boogie, has direct ties to western Kentucky. Despite these minor changes, the value of education has not improved. Boogie regrets not having gone to college for the sole reason that he is therefore unable to be a helicopter pilot in the reserves. Loftier educational attainment is beyond his interest. It is tempting to see this as a correlation between flight and learning, but the story doesn't support it. Boogie doesn't need higher education to fly; he needs training.

Mason offers the reader several women characters who do appreciate book learning. In her lengthiest novel so far, *Feather Crowns*, the main character, Christie Wheeler, is described as a child who enjoyed school so much that she even stayed on after graduating and took extra tutorial help from the teacher. The family's reaction to this unusual interest in education is typical of the world Mason evokes:

> Papa shook his head. "Wash Simmons down at the sawmill told me I needed to marry ye off to get ye out of that schoolhouse. Wash says he never seed a girl to keep on after the twelfth grade, when it's done over with." (42)

Of course, in the turn-of-the-century period in which the novel is set, women who sought higher education were unusual, and marriage was the expectation. At best Christie could have hoped to become a schoolteacher, a role she enacts with her soon-to-be husband in a simple moment of their courting. Later, when they wed, she notices a grasshopper caught by a spider over the head of the minister performing the ceremony. Presumably this mirrors her own situation, which she happily contemplates. There is no resentment in this character for loss of what she might have become. She has no inclination to resist the reproductive fate awaiting her.

College or university offers nothing of value to the Hopewell residents. In "Marita," fourth of the stories collected in *Love Life*, going away to school has been an annoying complication for the title character. She returns home after half of her first semester, disgusted by a slovenly roommate and her own contact with interchangeable binge-drinking fraternity boys, one of whom has gotten her pregnant. There are no high ideals or benefits from intellectual attainment suggested in her abortive experience of life at the university. She contemplates beauty school as an equally valid choice. Mason implies in this leveling of educational options that the Hopewell resident places other desires at the heart of her existence, and these are more often tied to family and region than to what the larger world calls success.

Place is more than a convenience, instead functioning as a powerful aspect of Mason's characters. They are tied to their land as surely as Antaeus derived his strength from his contact with the earth. When they move away, they are estranged, cut loose, disenfranchised from the residents, as well as themselves. In her stories, the perspective taken is always that of the resident or returnee, the story told from this vantage looking outward.

The value Mason attributes to place is most clearly defined in her short novel, *Spence + Lila*. Lila is in the hospital, recovering from a modified radical mastectomy. She faces an even more dangerous operation to remove blockage from the carotid arteries leading to her brain. Her husband, Spence, stewing in anxiety, has returned to their farm to do the usual chores. When left alone, he conjures up vivid images of his wife performing simple tasks around the farmstead. Then he walks across his land:

> He follows the creek line down toward the back fields. In the center of one of the middle fields is a rise with a large, brooding old oak tree surrounded by a thicket of blackberry briers. From the rise, he looks out over his place. This is it. This is all there is in the world-it contains everything there is to know or possess, yet everywhere people are knocking their brains out trying to find something different, something better. His kids all scattered, looking for it. Everyone always wants a way out of something like this, but what he has here is the main thing there is-just the way things grow and die, the way the sun comes up and goes down every day. These are the facts of life. They are so simple they are almost impossible to grasp. It's like looking up at the stars at night, seeing them strung out like seed corn, sprinkled randomly across the sky. Stars seem simple, even monotonous, because there's no way to understand them. The ocean was like that too, blank and deep and easy. (132-133)

Though this seems to be much of Spence's internal monologue, it is also a kind of authorial commentary, and one that is consistent with the bulk of Mason's fictions. Mason admits as much in an interview when she agrees that this passage captures her sense of her homeland's power over her imagination (Lyons and Oliver, 257-258).

Spence's moment of reflection shows him the essential value of his home as it relates to universal greatness. This land transcends its particular limitations, and becomes a cosmos unto itself. The simile Mason uses to equate the stars to seed corn subsumes the greater universe into a Kentucky agricultural paradigm. As noted by Gerrard, when Spence later flies over his land as a guest of a neighbor crop-duster pilot, he notices how the land suggests the shape of a woman: tree-covered area as hair, two creeks as legs, house and barn as nipples (34). He has returned to the sacred tree, the world navel, the archetypal well-spring of all life, and drawing on its proximate strength, he re-interprets the world around him. The descriptions suggest the land as a type of the Great Mother archetype, the tree a female image of growth and rebirth: "the creative principle of the spirit, as of consciousness . . . was viewed genealogically as derived from the chaos or primeval ocean of the unconscious, as a son-principle, born of the Feminine . . . . The goddess as the tree that confers nourishment on souls" (Neumann 241).

Clearly there is a great division between this world and the world that is other than this, the world that is away, the world where people restlessly struggle to become successful in their lives. Though Mason crafts it as the focal point, the region is hardly a *locus amenous*, is certainly a flawed land full of flawed people. In other words, Mason doesn't glamorize life in western Kentucky. Giannone offers, "Her rural characters are caught between an incomprehensible other-worldly force and the actual loss sustained by their this-worldly anguish" (554). Where is there room for New York in this context? These characters have enough to deal with in facing the terrors of bad harvests, unpredictable weather, declining health, unplanned pregnancy, death. They don't seek complication through book learning. Higher education and foreign travel serve no purpose in their lives. Perhaps it is this simplicity that is so attractive to those who live in more sophisticated, more complicated, more confusing, less hillbilly parts of the world.

Works Cited

"Barbara Kingsolver." 150-71 in *Conversations with Kentucky Writers*. Ed. L. Elisabeth Beattie. Lexington: U Kentucky P, 1996.

"Bobbie Ann Mason." 232-33 in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers*, vol. 82. Ed. James P. Draper. Detroit: Gale, 1994.

"Bobbie Ann Mason." 188-201 in *Conversations with Kentucky Writers*. Ed. L. Elisabeth Beattie. Lexington: U Kentucky P, 1996.

Brinkmeyer, Robert H., Jr. "Finding One's History: Bobbie Ann Mason and Contemporary Southern Literature." *Southern Literary Journal* 19.2 (Spring, 1987): 20-33.

Gerrard, Nicci. "Love Among the Pumpkins." *New Statesman and Society* 2.79 (1989): 34.

Giannone, Richard. "Bobbie Ann Mason and the Recovery of Mystery." *Studies in Short Fiction* 27.4 (Fall, 1990): 553-566.

Gremore, Bob. "Bobbie Ann Mason's Stories: Working-class Literature and the Academic Audience." Working-Class Culture: Love, Motherhood, and Class Mobility Session. PCAS/ACAS Annual Conference. Orlando, Florida. April 10, 1998.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard U P, 1988.

Lyons, Bonnie and Bill Oliver. "An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason." *Contemporary Literature* 32 (1991): 449-470. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers*, vol. 82. Ed. James P. Draper. Detroit: Gale 1994. 250-258.

Mason, Bobbie Ann. *Feather Crowns*. 1993. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994.

---. *In Country*. 1985. New York: HarperPerennial, 1993.

---. *Love Life*. 1989. New York: HarperPerennial, 1990.

---.*Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to "Ada."* Ann Arbor: Ardis P, 1974.

---. *Shiloh and Other Stories*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.

---. *Spence + Lila*. 1988. New York: HarperPerennial, 1989.

---. "Thunder Snow." *DoubleTake* 3.2 (Spring 1997): 106-110.

Morphew, G. O. "Downhome Feminists in 'Shiloh and Other Stories.'" *The Southern Literary Journal* 22.2 (Spring, 1989): 41-49.

Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. 1955. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1974.

Signature: Bobbie Ann Mason. Kentucky Educational Television, Videocassette. KET, Lexington, 1995.

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

MASON'S CHARACTERS GET SOME COLLEGE

Scott Vander Ploeg
Madisonville Community College

When surveying the fiction of Bobbie Ann Mason, it becomes evident to most readers that her characters have a marked tendency to stay close to home. Farmstead, neighborhood, country church, family kitchen and TV/living room-these are typical settings for stories in which Mason creates characters that have little contact with what in

this context would be ironically called the "greater world." By focusing so exclusively on these locales, she gives the region a priority that suggests thematic implications. In Mason's stories, there is no world greater than that of western Kentucky-or rather, western Kentucky doesn't place much value on places far away.

The dominant stereotypic image of the Kentuckian, today as in the past, is that of the "hillbilly." The derivation of this term and its referent is debatable-some attribute the type to lands to the north and east of Kentucky, and the Hatfield versus McCoy legend is woven into the image. No matter what the true point of origin may be, nor its biased misrepresentation of a people, the term is commonly applied to Kentuckians, and it is a perception about which the residents are quite self-consciously aware. The "hillbilly" is uncouth, agrarian, short-tempered, loyal to kith and kin, and most emphatically uneducated. The compassion we may note in Mason's nearly exclusive treatment of characters who live in Kentucky provides a challenge to the hillbilly stereotype. She deftly shows their human natures, and in doing so argues against the denigration provided by a high-culture elitism. But on the question of education she is curiously ambivalent. In fact, in the world Mason creates, educational attainment is divisive at best, generally irrelevant, and often harmful to the positive values found in family, place, and self-image.

This preference for the indigenous folk of the region of western Kentucky is a salient characteristic that Barbara Kingsolver, a contemporary and expatriate Kentuckian, has found especially appealing in Mason's work:

> It must have been in 1981 I read *Shiloh and Other Stories*, Bobbie Ann Mason's first collection, and that was a life-changing moment for me, because I suddenly understood that what moved me about those stories was not so much the style or the execution: it was the respect that she has for her people-her characters who are her people-and the simple fact that she deemed them worthy of serious literature. My jaw sort of dropped open . . . . What moves me most about Bobbie Ann Mason's work is that when her characters speak, I hear them exactly. I'm hearing exact inflections, and it makes me homesick. ("Barbara Kingsolver" 157-158)

Kingsolver goes on to explain that, in contrast to Mason, the impetus behind her own fiction involves articulating truths for those, regardless of place, who have been marginalized by society. Whereas Kingsolver will treat racial or cultural or economic differences, Mason relies on region to establish her characters' isolation. What is particularly noteworthy here is that the gritty reality of lower middle class rural society is a particular choice Mason finds compelling. The question we are asked to ask is "Why?" Does Mason ask us to develop a respect for her characters similar to that evoked in Kingsolver's reaction? Should we accept these characters, warts and all?

It is tempting to ascribe provincialism to Mason because it is so embedded in her characters, but it is abundantly clear that she has been out in the greater world-it is her characters who tend to stay home. Mason left her home in western Kentucky to attend undergraduate school at the University of Kentucky. She next worked as a journalist in New York, and attained a Ph.D. in modern literature from the University of Connecticut, eventually establishing her scholarly credentials with critical works on Nabokov's *Ada*, and on girls' juvenile detective fiction. After marrying, she and her husband taught college English in Pennsylvania before moving back to Kentucky ("Bobbie Ann Mason" *CLC* 232-233). While seeking her education and living in the northeast, she wrote exclusively about under-educated Kentuckians who rarely venture out of county, let alone out of state. Her most frequently mentioned place-name is the small community of Hopewell-the name symbolic of the western Kentucky ethos.

College students might first meet Mason's work in the contemporary short story section of a Norton or similar anthology, while more worldly readers might have encountered her fiction in *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*,

Mother Jones, *Harper's*, or *Paris Review*. She has achieved a stature in the realm of serious literature that many writers would envy, notably a success that has been fostered by the eastern literary establishment-a cultural context that is completely alien to Mason's characters. Despite this obvious success, little critical work exists. Her fiction is typically considered along with other contemporary women writers, such as Ann Tyler, in doctoral dissertations that rarely see print, or as review articles in the aforementioned journals. Critics may be put off by such overtly low-brow and unapologetically "popular" materials. Her characters don't achieve the kind of depth we find in Faulkner or Flannery O'Connor, and perhaps that is part of their essential personalities.

By her regular use of the western Kentucky locale, Mason runs the risk of being labeled a regional writer, and yet there is something transcendent in her use of this setting, something that intimates universal truths without creating improbable actions and false heroes and heroines. I suspect this clear intention to write about lower-class characters, and her sympathetic yet unsentimental treatments, strike non-Kentuckian readers as heartwarming and starkly human, while comfortably confirming many of the regional stereotypes of a people who are culturally inferior, bereft of the finer and predominantly east or west coast urbanities. It may also be due to Mason's artistic agenda of minimalism that the characters seem to live primarily on their surface motivations. Certainly spare in the descriptions and development Mason crafts for them, the characters tend to match their outward facades, which is to say that they really are not factitious beyond the most limited divisions between self and society. They generally *are how they behave*.

Though New Yorkers may find the characters appealing because of the flaws they perceive in them, Kentucky readers are more ambivalent. They don't enjoy being categorized as constituting "K-Mart realism," a term that Mason rejects as the snobbery of people who exclusively shop at Sak's Fifth Avenue (*Signature*).

Certainly, a strong concern over the value of place runs through nearly all of her fiction. By the narrative focus or regional point of view she adopts, Mason establishes a world as seen through the eyes of the isolated and often unsophisticated western Kentuckian. This emphasis produces a tension between home and the outer world, and this is most evident in how she treats higher education. It isn't a meaningful part of this home-world, and thus when her characters confront higher education, we are left to consider an ironic disjunction between ourselves as educated readers and the uneducated subjects in the fiction. Gremore describes this as a matter of objectification of working-class structures-so that the characters "seem to confirm for us the personhood we have won by making the transition from 'their' culture to 'ours'" (Gremore 8), a kind of smug, self-satisfied attitude of "there but for the grace of God go I." Gremore adds that our canonical acceptance of Mason's work may be due in part to an affective component wherein we may attach a greater importance to these working-class fictions because of our own sense of having been close to those concerns. This presumes that the academy has been flooded with scholars from the middle class, an assumption that seems in keeping with the increased availability of higher education.

"Shiloh," the title story in the collection that Kingsolver so admired, offers immediate relevance to western Kentucky readers. The characters can be found at the local mall or during any county fair. The women in her stories tend to marry young, and the men gladly engage in manual labor. They pervade the landscape-both that of her creation and that of the actual culture of the region. If these residents become students and read Mason's works, they experience a poignant moment of self-recognition. Suddenly, literature is not some distant, attenuated study. Some Kentucky readers are bothered by the frank and unsentimental depiction of lower class people-a culture that is full of grimy coal industry work, popular music, farming, beer-drinking, television, big trucks; the favored activities of the characters involve going to the mall, renting movies on videotape, deer-hunting, church socials, and adulterous sex. Norma Jean, the main character of "Shiloh," with a name clearly meant to raise the busty specter of Marilyn Monroe, begins taking classes at Paducah Community College including English classes, where

she writes a good "B"-grade essay on baking a cream soup casserole-standard fare in this region. Her husband, Leroy, has a bum leg. He's an ironic "king," like so many men in the region who have been disabled in mining accidents. A truck driver in the past, he is out of work. He smokes locally-grown marijuana, watches television, and makes popsicle-stick models of log cabins he would like to build. He is not fond of his wife's new direction and lurks in the background while she attends class.

Norma Jean's attempt at higher education is not the wedge that ultimately separates the couple, but it obviously represents a tension that exists when people move away from their early life choices. We might hope that her college-inspired intellectual capabilities would allow her to better know herself and her husband, and would serve to strengthen their marriage. Instead of improving the lives of the populace in Mason's world, education erodes their communal values, separates them from their families, and introduces them to newfangled ideas that only confuse and frustrate. Mason's characters gain little personal enrichment from any higher studies they pursue. Norma Jean learns to be dissatisfied with the limits she and her society have conspired to set for her. By story's end, she intends to divorce Leroy.

"The Rookers," second in the *Shiloh* collection, is more emphatic about the immiscibility of western Kentucky and higher education. Mary Lou and Mack Skaggs have sent their daughter, Judy, to Murray State University for her freshman year. Judy is absorbing a great deal of education, including the theories of sub-atomic particle physics. She is fascinated by matter that only exists within groups, explaining this to her mother and father who cannot comprehend what their daughter has been learning at the university. Later, Mary Lou realizes that her husband is similarly in danger of losing his existence, for he is unable to deal with his daughter's absence, and reveals his latent agoraphobia and the degree to which he is powerless among women. Though Judy seems to be gaining something vaguely positive from her academic pursuits, this growth is subverted when Mason has her gladly join in the communal card game, Rook. Mason's particular choice of game is sure to suggest the rookery from which Judy derives her lineage. Education has little effect on her basic life pattern, for she metaphorically returns to the nest. In contrast, her roommate withdraws from school in mid-semester, rather like the self-destructive Marita of a later story. In at least eight of the sixteen stories that comprise the *Shiloh and Other Stories* collection, education is a thematic element associated with loss or exile.

Mason thus offers us a challenge in depicting this culture as one in which educational effort is more likely to be destructive to essential communal values than a positive force for individual success. And this may be due to her own experience, for when she left a teaching position in Pennsylvania to return to Kentucky, it was partly because of having been made to feel inferior for her southern accent. In one interview, she intimates her dislike of teaching, her anxiety over holding class and dealing with student writers (*Signature*). When she left Pennsylvania, she fled from higher education and found refuge in a full-time writing career. Toward the end of another interview, when asked, "What haven't we discussed that you think might be important for people to know about you?" Mason says of herself: "I'm not very sophisticated or I don't live in a very literary world, and I don't talk literature and I don't talk on a university level with adults" ("Bobbie Ann Mason," *Conversations* 200). So it is not just from a particular college post that she defected, but from the whole university context. Her life since then has been a conscious avoidance of higher education.

In addition to this repudiation or disgust with higher education, it is fair to say that Mason accurately depicts the popular notions held by the citizenry of this region. Education in western Kentucky is perceived as an obligation, not an aspiration. None of Mason's characters catch fire from what D. H. Lawrence ironically termed "the eternal flame of the high ideal." Instead, Mason writes about the real world of Kentucky in which higher education is primarily a mark of class distinction, a relatively meaningless label attached to wealth and power-goals her

characters do not valorize and have little chance of attaining. Though Morphew suggests a trend in Mason's depiction of characters, so that the more educated the woman, the more refined and introspective she is (47, 49), this does not indicate Mason's preference for those characters, nor do we see her depicting them with increasing frequency. These few educated women are emotional and spiritual wrecks. They are just as benighted as the less-educated, and the dubious advantage that education grants them is that they may more fully apprehend their limitations.

Such, we may suppose, is the case with Mason herself. The irony is forceful. A university- trained Ph.D. who closely studies matters as esoteric as Nabokov's fiction chooses to write her own fictions about modest, homespun characters and their bourgeois aspirations. It is as if Mason and her characters have faced the overwhelming impact of modern society and admitted defeat in retreat. This is reminiscent of Levine's recountings of country folk who say, in response to seeing stage melodramas and visiting the 1890s Columbia Exposition: "I have had as much as I can hold . . . . Take me home, I can't stand any more of it." Levine infers from this distancing effect that we are looking at "cultural worlds moving farther and farther apart; worlds with less and less tolerance for or understanding of each other" (212-213). Mason's stories imply this same condition of division across the American scene.

In Mason's fiction, educational attainment is a divisive activity, and is regularly related to the reasons people move away. Residents think of those who emigrate from the Paducah flatlands of western Kentucky as people in exile; they describe the expatriates as lost or irrelevant. Mason excludes these exiles from priority in the plot-lines of her fiction. Instead, she focuses on those who stay or those who return. The emigres' absences are noted as sad flaws: whatever happiness they may find in their foreign existence is insufficient to balance the wrong of leaving the area. The locals tend to condescend regarding these unfortunate outcasts.

Such is true in Mason's most widely distributed story, the novel *In Country*, produced as a film in 1989. The protagonist, a teen-age woman named "Sam," faces the usual post high school indecision. Like Dean, in "Piano Fingers," she "feels suspended somewhere between childhood and old age, not knowing which direction [s]he is facing" (*Love Life* 84). Her mother, who has remarried and moved to Lexington where she is a student, encourages Sam to go to college. In at least six instances, Sam questions the value of pursuing a degree. Higher education is not sufficient motivation in and of itself-at best it offers a dimly perceived opportunity in which Sam is flatly not interested. She first needs to work out some problems involving her own identity, and especially her grief for her father who had died as a soldier in Vietnam. She resists leaving her home in Hopewell, partly because that would mean leaving her war-syndrome distressed uncle. Even with the positive conclusion to their quest, there is no reason to believe Sam will take advantage of the educational opportunity her mother offers her. Her first duty is to family, not to an educated self. Like soldiers who might "get some" action during a tour of duty, Sam may choose to "get some" college. (This is in fact how many college students would phrase their enrollment activity today.)

This family ethic makes the mother's defection even more painful. The mother's new life is focused on a suburban subdivision reminiscent of the '50s-a kind of Ozzie and Harriet world of small yards, unremarkable houses, bland people. Tied down to her home and new baby, Sam's mother isn't able to go with Sam, Emmett, and their aunt, on their journey to Washington D.C. to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Her big-city affiliations-tied to higher education-prevent her from participating in the other characters' quest for resolution. Though a student, there is little mention of a point or direction or goal in her studies. She gives Sam a credit card to help them if they get in a jam, but this is the most she can offer after having sold out to the world outside their ancestral Hopewell home. In terms of the quest structure, Sam's mother is reduced to the status of a helper.

And what would idealized education offer these or any of Mason's characters? They only want job-training and wealth sufficient to purchase a home entertainment system and cable television. Knowledge of other facts, other fields of study, is only distraction to those bent on vocations instead of educations. As Brinkmeyer points out, Mason's characters have no historical sense, and thus every event is radically new, as if they are the first people to have ever encountered such events (22). For example, Leroy and Norma Jean have little concept of what the Shiloh battlefield commemorated, no way to contextualize the world outside their localized present. They don't recognize that their imminent separation is in some ways similar to the Civil War that the battlefield represents. They haven't learned from history. Even in the few cases when the characters do become interested in their historical connections, the insight gained is fleeting and not important in their psychological development.

In a more recent story, "Thunder Snow" (March, 1997), Mason chooses a setting farther from home-the Lexington area-and only the husband, Boogie, has direct ties to western Kentucky. Despite these minor changes, the value of education has not improved. Boogie regrets not having gone to college for the sole reason that he is therefore unable to be a helicopter pilot in the reserves. Loftier educational attainment is beyond his interest. It is tempting to see this as a correlation between flight and learning, but the story doesn't support it. Boogie doesn't need higher education to fly; he needs training.

Mason offers the reader several women characters who do appreciate book learning. In her lengthiest novel so far, *Feather Crowns*, the main character, Christie Wheeler, is described as a child who enjoyed school so much that she even stayed on after graduating and took extra tutorial help from the teacher. The family's reaction to this unusual interest in education is typical of the world Mason evokes:

> Papa shook his head. "Wash Simmons down at the sawmill told me I needed to marry ye off to get ye out of that schoolhouse. Wash says he never seed a girl to keep on after the twelfth grade, when it's done over with." (42)

Of course, in the turn-of-the-century period in which the novel is set, women who sought higher education were unusual, and marriage was the expectation. At best Christie could have hoped to become a schoolteacher, a role she enacts with her soon-to-be husband in a simple moment of their courting. Later, when they wed, she notices a grasshopper caught by a spider over the head of the minister performing the ceremony. Presumably this mirrors her own situation, which she happily contemplates. There is no resentment in this character for loss of what she might have become. She has no inclination to resist the reproductive fate awaiting her.

College or university offers nothing of value to the Hopewell residents. In "Marita," fourth of the stories collected in *Love Life*, going away to school has been an annoying complication for the title character. She returns home after half of her first semester, disgusted by a slovenly roommate and her own contact with interchangeable binge-drinking fraternity boys, one of whom has gotten her pregnant. There are no high ideals or benefits from intellectual attainment suggested in her abortive experience of life at the university. She contemplates beauty school as an equally valid choice. Mason implies in this leveling of educational options that the Hopewell resident places other desires at the heart of her existence, and these are more often tied to family and region than to what the larger world calls success.

Place is more than a convenience, instead functioning as a powerful aspect of Mason's characters. They are tied to their land as surely as Antaeus derived his strength from his contact with the earth. When they move away, they are estranged, cut loose, disenfranchised from the residents, as well as themselves. In her stories, the perspective taken is always that of the resident or returnee, the story told from this vantage looking outward.

The value Mason attributes to place is most clearly defined in her short novel, *Spence + Lila*. Lila is in the hospital, recovering from a modified radical mastectomy. She faces an even more dangerous operation to remove blockage from the carotid arteries leading to her brain. Her husband, Spence, stewing in anxiety, has returned to their farm to do the usual chores. When left alone, he conjures up vivid images of his wife performing simple tasks around the farmstead. Then he walks across his land:

> He follows the creek line down toward the back fields. In the center of one of the middle fields is a rise with a large, brooding old oak tree surrounded by a thicket of blackberry briers. From the rise, he looks out over his place. This is it. This is all there is in the world-it contains everything there is to know or possess, yet everywhere people are knocking their brains out trying to find something different, something better. His kids all scattered, looking for it. Everyone always wants a way out of something like this, but what he has here is the main thing there is-just the way things grow and die, the way the sun comes up and goes down every day. These are the facts of life. They are so simple they are almost impossible to grasp. It's like looking up at the stars at night, seeing them strung out like seed corn, sprinkled randomly across the sky. Stars seem simple, even monotonous, because there's no way to understand them. The ocean was like that too, blank and deep and easy. (132-133)

Though this seems to be much of Spence's internal monologue, it is also a kind of authorial commentary, and one that is consistent with the bulk of Mason's fictions. Mason admits as much in an interview when she agrees that this passage captures her sense of her homeland's power over her imagination (Lyons and Oliver, 257-258).

Spence's moment of reflection shows him the essential value of his home as it relates to universal greatness. This land transcends its particular limitations, and becomes a cosmos unto itself. The simile Mason uses to equate the stars to seed corn subsumes the greater universe into a Kentucky agricultural paradigm. As noted by Gerrard, when Spence later flies over his land as a guest of a neighbor crop-duster pilot, he notices how the land suggests the shape of a woman: tree-covered area as hair, two creeks as legs, house and barn as nipples (34). He has returned to the sacred tree, the world navel, the archetypal well-spring of all life, and drawing on its proximate strength, he re-interprets the world around him. The descriptions suggest the land as a type of the Great Mother archetype, the tree a female image of growth and rebirth: "the creative principle of the spirit, as of consciousness . . . was viewed genealogically as derived from the chaos or primeval ocean of the unconscious, as a son-principle, born of the Feminine . . . . The goddess as the tree that confers nourishment on souls" (Neumann 241).

Clearly there is a great division between this world and the world that is other than this, the world that is away, the world where people restlessly struggle to become successful in their lives. Though Mason crafts it as the focal point, the region is hardly a *locus amenous*, is certainly a flawed land full of flawed people. In other words, Mason doesn't glamorize life in western Kentucky. Giannone offers, "Her rural characters are caught between an incomprehensible other-worldly force and the actual loss sustained by their this-worldly anguish" (554). Where is there room for New York in this context? These characters have enough to deal with in facing the terrors of bad harvests, unpredictable weather, declining health, unplanned pregnancy, death. They don't seek complication through book learning. Higher education and foreign travel serve no purpose in their lives. Perhaps it is this simplicity that is so attractive to those who live in more sophisticated, more complicated, more confusing, less hillbilly parts of the world.

Works Cited

"Barbara Kingsolver." 150-71 in *Conversations with Kentucky Writers*. Ed. L. Elisabeth Beattie. Lexington: U Kentucky P, 1996.

"Bobbie Ann Mason." 232-33 in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers*, vol. 82. Ed. James P. Draper. Detroit: Gale, 1994.

"Bobbie Ann Mason." 188-201 in *Conversations with Kentucky Writers*. Ed. L. Elisabeth Beattie. Lexington: U Kentucky P, 1996.

Brinkmeyer, Robert H., Jr. "Finding One's History: Bobbie Ann Mason and Contemporary Southern Literature." *Southern Literary Journal* 19.2 (Spring, 1987): 20-33.

Gerrard, Nicci. "Love Among the Pumpkins." *New Statesman and Society* 2.79 (1989): 34.

Giannone, Richard. "Bobbie Ann Mason and the Recovery of Mystery." *Studies in Short Fiction* 27.4 (Fall, 1990): 553-566.

Gremore, Bob. "Bobbie Ann Mason's Stories: Working-class Literature and the Academic Audience." Working-Class Culture: Love, Motherhood, and Class Mobility Session. PCAS/ACAS Annual Conference. Orlando, Florida. April 10, 1998.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard U P, 1988.

Lyons, Bonnie and Bill Oliver. "An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason." *Contemporary Literature* 32 (1991): 449-470. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers*, vol. 82. Ed. James P. Draper. Detroit: Gale 1994. 250-258.

Mason, Bobbie Ann. *Feather Crowns*. 1993. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994.

---. *In Country*. 1985. New York: HarperPerennial, 1993.

---. *Love Life*. 1989. New York: HarperPerennial, 1990.

---.*Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to "Ada."* Ann Arbor: Ardis P, 1974.

---. *Shiloh and Other Stories*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.

---. *Spence + Lila*. 1988. New York: HarperPerennial, 1989.

---. "Thunder Snow." *DoubleTake* 3.2 (Spring 1997): 106-110.

Morphew, G. O. "Downhome Feminists in 'Shiloh and Other Stories.'" *The Southern Literary Journal* 22.2 (Spring, 1989): 41-49.

Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. 1955. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1974.

Signature: Bobbie Ann Mason. Kentucky Educational Television, Videocassette. KET, Lexington, 1995.

This web page is maintained by
Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075
E-mail: htallant@georgetowncollege.edu

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

OUR WILDERNESS HOME: IMAGES OF HOME AMONG THE BROWN COUNTY URSULINES

Trudelle H. Thomas
Xavier University

One afternoon in 1976, I made my first trip from Cincinnati to the Ursuline convent in Brown County, Ohio. Driving along a state highway, I saw from a distance the half-mile lane, lined with towering ash trees, that led to the convent grounds. Rising out of cultivated farmland, that lane of trees signaled a European presence that seemed out of place along asphalt Ohio State Route 251. I drove up the lane, passing *Sancta Ursula*, a larger-than-life statue which guarded the entrance to the convent grounds. A legendary Nordic princess with thick braids and royal robes, Ursula stood with her arms extended, holding wide open her ankle-length cloak. Beneath the sheltering sweep of her arms on either side huddled a dozen girls in bas-relief.

Ahead was a maze of trees and lakes, and beyond, the labyrinth that was the red-brick convent. I parked my car, climbed the colonial portico, and rang the bell. Minutes later, a nun ushered me into a formal parlor. By now I was certain that I had entered a foreign world-an island of elegance, hospitality, and learning that was alien to anything I had ever experienced. I had no notion that summer afternoon that these nuns would become my mentors, this convent would become my spiritual home, and twenty years later I would still be trying to understand its hold on me.

I was in every way an outsider. Raised a Methodist, I'd never been in a convent before, never met a real nun. My images of nuns were shaped by movies like *The Trouble with Angels* or the 1960s TV show *The Flying Nun*. As I settled in at the Brown County convent for my week of silence, I was completely enchanted by what one person described as "an elegant little French world out in the middle of the woods" (Larkin). In the coming years I returned for many more solitary retreats and came to regard Brown County as a spiritual oasis.

When, in 1982 (eight years later), I learned that the historic convent and boarding school were scheduled for demolition, I decided to help preserve its history. My decision led to lengthy research: I stayed in the convent dozens of times, recording oral histories of the retired nuns and sorting through dusty archives. I sought out former sisters and alumnae of the boarding school and interviewed them. I read virtually everything that had ever been written about the Brown County Ursulines. All this research deepened my appreciation for the Brown County convent, reinforcing my sense that there was something almost magical about the place.

Initially, what made the strongest impression on me were the sisters themselves. I became acquainted with them first through chats in the dining room, and later through walks around the convent grounds and even taped interviews. I especially enjoyed getting to know the several retired sisters. I met, for example, Sister Dorothy, a stout and talkative woman in her seventies who delighted me with stories of her work as "mistress" of the younger children in the boarding school. In the course of fifty years in religious life, she had taught, entertained, and mothered many hundreds of elementary-aged girls, often sleeping in quarters adjoining their dormitory. Now in retirement she was trying to write books for children and sought my advice about publishing.

Or there was Sister Imelda. In her eighties, she took pride in the enormous convent flower garden which she had expanded year by year for maybe twenty years. Surrounded by tall privet hedges, the garden was off limits to all outsiders; I knew Sister Imelda trusted me when she gave me a key to her garden gate. Less than five feet tall, Imelda's elfin countenance made me think of Yoda of *Star Wars*' fame. She often spoke in riddles which tried the patience of other nuns. She told me the secret to her longevity was avoiding the "three Ds--the doctor, the devil, and the dumps." She gave me a book of prayers once in which she inscribed, "Count that day lost / Whose slow-descending sun, Finds from Thy hand / No worthy action done."

I worked closely with Sister Mary John. As assistant to the community's Superior, she controlled access to the community archives. Sister Mary John shared my fascination with historical documents. With her high forehead, sparkling blue eyes, and lilting Irish voice, she was one of the most charming women I had ever met. She had entered religious life late-in her thirties, after work in the theater-and spent happy decades teaching English in the boarding school. Now in her seventies, in addition to tending the community archives, she nurtured the convent cats, a hobby which earned her the nickname "Frisky" among the sisters. Or there was Sister Ann Maureen, a pretty and gracious woman in her thirties who gave me guidance on prayer and physical exercise and told me that "self-esteem is the beginning of true humility," a baffling insight to me at the age of twenty-four. She later pursued graduate studies in psychology and also served as a leader in the community.

Most memorable of all was Sister Miriam Thompson, a woman whom I eventually adopted as a mentor and spiritual director. She had served for many years as the "directress" of the boarding school and in her seventies and eighties ran a large-scale food bank for the rural poor. With her full-length black habit, glasses, and penetrating blue eyes, Miriam was a striking figure. She was known among the sisters and to many people far beyond the convent as a mystic because of her deep spirituality and her skill at providing spiritual counsel. A woman both brilliant and loving, Miriam soon told me fascinating stories about the history of the convent. Later she supplied me with books and documents about it.

I learned, for example, that the Brown County convent had been founded by an English woman named Julia Chatfield. Born in 1809 of distinguished Anglican parents, as a young woman Julia was sent with her six younger sisters to an Ursuline boarding school in Boulogne-sur-Mer in northern France, to complete her education and refine her French accent. According to Sister Miriam, Julia was so moved by the faith and kindness of the French Ursulines that she soon wrote her father of her desire to become a Roman Catholic. In response, he immediately brought her back to England and introduced her to London society. Julia held fast to her faith, the story goes, and her father disowned her. She worked briefly as a governess then ran away to Boulogne, this time planning to join the community as a novice, a choice which led to a permanent break from her family. Her biographer writes, "It seemed to the girl that she had stepped for a brief space into the realm of spiritual existence which she had always craved . . . the reality of Christ with all its throbbing life" (Maginnis 26). After a few years of initiation, in 1837, Julia Chatfield took her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the special Ursuline "fourth vow" of dedication to teaching.

Later Julia began to dream of becoming a missionary to America when she heard the preaching of a charismatic young American bishop, John Baptist Purcell, who was touring Europe to recruit religious communities to come to America to serve the growing Roman Catholic population. Purcell spoke with zeal about the beauty of the Ohio valley and the seething immigrant life that was springing up there. Especially pressing was the need for teachers and priests. The movement toward free public education was not yet firmly underway, and many of the schools which did exist discriminated against Catholic pupils. Soon Julia's good friend, Amédée Rappe, the convent chaplain, did go to America. For the next few years he wrote to Julia Chatfield encouraging her to come.

It took several years for her dream to become a reality, but finally in 1845, at the age of 36, Sister Julia led a group of eleven nuns to Ohio, intending to establish a girls' academy. Once the group of Ursulines arrived in Ohio, Purcell, now an Archbishop, gave the nuns a wooded tract of land (about 400 acres) fifty miles east of Cincinnati. Originally military lands donated to the bishop after the Revolutionary War, the property had been used for a time as a seminary but the remote location made it untenable. In 1846 the nuns built a motherhouse and an Academy for Young Ladies which lasted for a century. While parochial schools served all children, academies were geared to more privileged girls, sometimes boarding students. Girls came from all over the United States to receive what their families believed to be a superlative education. Early letters from Julia Chatfield suggest that she was very reluctant to accept the remote location; the nuns were used to a refined way of life, not primitive living conditions in an isolated area. But they adapted and in time were able to make a success of the location where the priests could not.

Figure 1. Original Brown County "Convent of the Ursulines and Academy for Young Ladies," ca. 1850. Collection of Trudelle H. Thomas.

Initially, the nuns constructed a building one hundred feet by one-hundred-twenty feet, four stories high (Figure 1). Over the first thirty years, they made additions to the main structure, including a large neo-gothic chapel, a "commencement hall," and a "play hall." They also added numerous out-buildings-barns, sheds, ice house, and stables-and for many decades the convent was a self-sufficient farm. Though the Brown County Academy attracted students from all over the United States and recruited nuns from Europe as well as the U.S., the community always remained small.

When I first visited the Brown County convent in 1976, the future of the academy had grown uncertain. Boarding schools for girls were no longer in style and enrollment was low. In 1981 the boarding school closed and the nuns deliberated the future of the gorgeous, rambling, costly-to-heat building. As a group, they came to the decision to raze the main building except for the adjoining Sacred Heart chapel and to construct on the grounds "Brescia"-a new, compact and comfortable building that would serve as a residence for the retired nuns, including those who were having health problems. (Brescia was named for the town in Italy where Angela Merici, founder of the Ursuline Order, had lived in the 1500s.)

The decision to raze the motherhouse was traumatic for many of the nuns. For some of the older ones, the place had been their home for five or six decades. By this time, the convent had also become a kind of second home to me, a "secular," and I mourned with them when the buildings furnishings were auctioned off and the building itself was leveled by bulldozers. We all felt bereft of our spiritual home. As time passed, I marveled at the older nuns' resilience as they adapted to their new home in Brescia. I became a regular visitor there, though I missed the secret hallways and Lady Chapel and the impressive public spaces of the old convent.

As I came to know the Ursulines, I was struck again and again by how consistently the sisters used the imagery of home when they spoke of their community. To outsiders, the motherhouse was a school, an institution-not a home. Yet the nuns, in their conversation and in their published records, consistently spoke of their "convent home" or their "wilderness home." One poster that I often saw during my visits bore this message: "If you open your hearts to the presence of the Lord here in this holy spot, in the midst of our wilderness, there is no limit to what he can do through you and with you." I was struck by the odd juxtaposition of "this holy spot" and "wilderness" and by the strange promise that opening one's heart to the presence of the Lord would lead to personal power and accomplishment. Though the poster did not actually use the word "home," it hinted that this place was both a haven and a hub.

As I pondered the way the Ursulines spoke of the wilderness, the concept of a "wilderness home" began to make sense, to seem less an oxymoron. Before coming to America, Julia Chatfield and her sister-nuns back in France had fantasized about risking their lives as missionaries on the American frontier; they had hoped to emulate Marie Guyart, a French Ursuline and mystic who had become famous for her work with Native Americans in Canada in the 1600s. Those first sisters never made it to America's western frontier, but where they did end up was no less forbidding: an isolated, unsettled, poor tract of land in rural Ohio. Forty-eight miles outside Cincinnati, Brown County is still rural today and remains one of the poorest counties in Ohio.

According to an early travelogue, when the nuns arrived there in 1845, it appeared desolate and uninhabitable. Surely they wondered why the Archbishop would assign them, cloistered nuns from France, many of them from privileged families, to this wooded, barren property out in the middle of nowhere. Still, those first Brown County Ursulines settled into the rough buildings that had once been a seminary and set about decorating their log church. Instead of deploring this wilderness tract, the nuns made up their minds to make a home of it. Indeed, the "wilderness" soon became part of their communal myth.

Religious historian Mircea Eliade observes that many religious groups see their environment as a foreign and hostile place- "a chaotic space peopled by ghosts, demons, and foreigners" (29). As newcomers to this strange terrain, the nuns saw it as a threatening wilderness, but in time they also began to see it as a gracious wilderness. Hadn't the children of Israel communed with God in the wilderness for forty years as they sought the Promised Land? Hadn't John the Baptist and later even Christ Himself withdrawn to the wilderness to wait, be tested, and receive special graces? The Brown County Ursulines responded to the wilderness by making it a home, their wilderness home, a place of grace.

But what sort of home might this be? A home without parents, certainly a home without fathers-with virtually no men at all. A home with no young children (the school started with six-year-olds). It was a home with no kitchen table, no living room, no actual bedrooms--a home with few of the creature comforts most humans associate with home. Neither did it offer much in the way of privacy or personal possessions. On the face of it, the convent was an institution, not a home at all. Yet the metaphor of home persisted more than 150 years, from 1845 to the present.

* * * *

I gained insight into the Ursulines' understanding of home by reading Helen Fiddymont Levy's *Fiction of the Home Place* (1992). A work of literary criticism, *Fiction of the Home Place* traces an ideal female community that Levy sees as an alternative to the American myth of the individual male who competes and dominates. Drawing upon the work of several twentieth-century female novelists, Levy outlines the attributes of this mythic "home place." It is a small, stable community characterized by what she calls "local language" and located in an ideal pastoral and

domestic setting. This ideal community is rooted in a sense of history, a history that celebrates a lineage of female creativity, and in this community materialism and possessions are downplayed. This community provides care for the young, old, sick, or discouraged; community members place great value on such caretaking. Finally, an elder "wise woman" presides over the entire community.

In *Fiction of the Home Place*, Levy is describing a fictional ideal-not an actual community, let alone a convent. But in reading Levy's book, I was struck by how many of these attributes belonged to the Brown County convent. It was a relatively small community--small as convents go, usually numbering between thirty and sixty nuns and under one hundred pupils (often far fewer). It was also very stable in that nuns who entered the community were likely to stay for life; nuns seldom were sent from the Brown County convent and, prior to the 1960s, few nuns left the order. And the community was made up entirely of women.

While the Ursulines at Brown County never practiced strict cloister, the convent was considered semi-cloistered; as a means of protecting the integrity of the community, the comings and goings of all individuals were strictly monitored. Nuns could not leave the convent grounds without permission and outsiders followed a prescribed procedure when visiting. The presence of men in particular was carefully regulated; in many parts of the convent and boarding school, no man ever set foot. Exceptions might be made for hired workmen (who ate in a separate workers' dining room), for visiting priests (who stayed in a nearby "priest's house" used for this purpose), or for a visiting father of a pupil (who might converse with Mother Superior in the parlor). Though men might visit briefly, the Brown County convent was a world of women.

This world of women was also a remarkably self-contained world, one with a distinctive identity. The church, school, work- and living-spaces all existed literally under one roof; except on family farms, this fusion of work and home would have become rare in the late nineteenth-century. Women and girls prayed, studied, did chores, ate, relaxed, and slept all in the same building. They developed an idiosyncratic and specialized vocabulary for talking about the various places on the convent grounds; any novice-member or alumna would be sure to know the location of "The Long Walk" or "St. Anne's Gallery" or "Sunnyside" or "Solomon's Run." Such language contributed to a sense of belonging.

Like the fictional "home place" that Levy describes, Brown County convent was located in a rural and somewhat idyllic environment. What had been desolate woods were transformed by the nuns' building, landscaping, and farming efforts; by the time I visited in the 1970s the convent boasted Canadian geese, cattle, and horses, in addition to landscaped slopes, lakes, trees, and flower gardens. Though Cincinnati, the only city nearby, had greatly expanded, the Brown County location was still rural.

Moreover, over the decades, the nuns had consciously set out to sanctify the convent grounds by the use of various blessing rituals, including Corpus Christi processions through meadow and woods, May crownings, and the ceremonial blessing of buildings. The nuns also placed shrines throughout the grounds and nearby woods. The unexpected presence of statues in fields and woods made even those places seem familiar and domestic. At the same time, the relative lack of statues inside the convent made it seem less like a convent and more like a home.

Within this idyllic setting, the Brown County convent was steeped in a sense of history, particularly in a lineage of female creativity. As a matter of course, both nuns and pupils were schooled in American history, European history, and Roman Catholic church history; they also celebrated historical events with pageants and parties, year after year. More importantly, they identified with a tradition of women, writing plays and poems to celebrate achievements of women such as Saint Ursula (legendary twelfth-century patroness), St. Angela (sixteenth-century foundress of the Ursulines), Saint Joan of Arc, foundress Julia Chatfield, and various other heroic women.

Although this tradition was limited to women recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, it valued women's contributions more than did secular institutions of the time.

In addition to writing poems and producing plays, women at Brown County found numerous channels for their creative energy: they sang and performed on musical instruments; they embellished furniture and the chapel walls and pews with their own intricate wood-carvings; they grew flowers to adorn the altars; they perfected needlework of every sort (Figure 2). In the 1880s, one farsighted nun, Sister Eulalia Dunn, drew up all the original plans for the Sacred Heart Chapel and oversaw its erection in 1885; the chapel is said to be, even today, the only Roman Catholic church in America designed by a woman (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Hand-carved door to Lady Chapel (Photo courtesy of Eric Weinberg.)

Figure 3. Interior of Sacred Heart Chapel, ca. 1984, still in use (Photo courtesy of Eric Weinberg).

Even as they celebrated a lineage of female creativity, nuns at Brown County de-emphasized materialism and personal possessions at times when the larger culture was increasingly materialistic. All the nuns took vows of poverty. The community itself actually was poor, unlike some religious groups which accumulated community wealth even though individual members took vows of poverty; Brown County convent's poverty was caused by its isolation and small numbers. In addition, the sisters did their best to downplay materialism among the pupils as well by discouraging extravagance in dress and in other possessions.

Like the ideal "home place" that Levy describes, the Brown County convent provided care and nurturance for women of all ages and conditions, ranging from six-year-old school girls to elderly nuns. The care and education of children was the academy's reason for existence. According to Sister Miriam, many of the academy's pupils regarded Brown County as a second family and second home, and it was not unusual for an alumna's daughters and even granddaughters to attend. Even now, most nuns who have spent their lives at Brown County return there to die, cared for by their sister Ursulines throughout their final hours.

Finally, an elder woman presided over the Brown County community: Mother Superior was seen as wise and, at times, inspired by God. From the time she led the first Ursulines to Brown County in 1845 until her death in 1878, Julia Chatfield served as Mother Superior and was known then and thereafter as "Notre Mere." Following Chatfield's death, the community was led by a series of Mothers Superior, respectfully addressed as "Mother." Whoever she might be, Mother Superior was advised and assisted by the Community Council, a group of women elected from among the ranks of the nuns. Important decisions were made by all the nuns together, voting at yearly "chapter meetings." (In recent decades, formal titles such as Mother have been dropped and leadership has become less hierarchical.) While Mother Superior presided over the community of nuns, another woman presided over the academy as the Directress.

Even as her successors assumed community leadership, Mother Julia Chatfield is seen as an important influence in the community, even today, a hundred years after her death. In their documents and in conversation, nuns often voice the belief that she is still alive, in spirit though not in body, and is able to offer guidance. For example, at times when I was wrestling with a problem, whether personal or scholarly, Sister Miriam routinely suggested that I pay a visit to Julia Chatfield's grave in the convent cemetery and "talk it over with Julia." On occasion, I have heard many other sisters casually make remarks about communication with Julia, Monica, Hyacinth, Augusta, and other important community leaders no longer alive. Initially I found this strange but in time I came to understand that the sisters believe the dead are part of the "communion of saints," alive in spirit though not visible.

The nuns' own sense of their "convent home" has changed over the decades. Early on, the nuns made a conscious effort to make the convent school an inviting, comforting home for the girls who attended the Academy. Early brochures advertising the school emphasized its home-like qualities and the motherly kindness of the nuns themselves. Julia Chatfield had inherited from her father, a London art dealer, good taste and a love of art, qualities she passed on to her successors. Displaying art, including the sisters' and students' own art, had the salutary effect of making the building more home-like and familiar.

In addition to being a home for the students, of course, the convent also was a home for the nuns who came there to spend their lives-to live, work, die, and be buried there. After her profession, a nun would not return to her family home.

And the nuns also desired that their convent and school should be a center of action for outsiders. According to Sister Joan Brosnan, even in Julia Chatfield's time the nuns felt a commitment not just to their boarding students but also to "the village" of St. Martin. Early on, the nuns operated in the convent a "day school" that served the local children. "The convent was never an island," says Brosnan. "We have always been committed to people in the local area, especially to women. We reached out to them, and we welcomed them." This commitment was more manifest in some decades than others. Beginning in the 1940s the Ursulines sponsored annual "Ladies Retreats" for adult women on the convent grounds, and in later decades they offered summer camps for girls.

The most significant change, of course, came following the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-65). In response to the Council's call to re-discover their founder's charism, the Ursulines, like nuns throughout America, entered a period of great upheaval, beginning with the change from the Latin liturgy to the vernacular and the change from long black habits to more relaxed dress for the nuns. As a result of the council, nuns who formerly had been forbidden to visit their family homes were now permitted to do so. Nuns began not just to visit their families, but also to work and eventually to live outside the convent walls. Brosnan was Superior of the community (1973-1979) during this period of change and recalls the nuns deciding to invite local people to use their facilities such as the play hall and the swimming pool. Rules about cloister relaxed during this time; access to places like the parlors and the nuns' refectory was less restricted than in the past. Eventually most traces

of cloister died out altogether.

The last twenty years have seen the most dramatic change in the Ursulines' idea of home. Now that the boarding school has closed, most of the nuns live in their own apartments and houses and only visit the old convent grounds for meetings or retreats. Still, among the nuns and others there remains the sense that Brown County is a spiritual and symbolic home. One old document (ca. 1920s) observes, "There is in dear old Brown County something that lives in its atmosphere, that draws hearts closely together; that gives the home feeling; that inspires faith in Divine Providence. . . . The Spirit that dear Notre Mere left us, our richest inheritance" (Necrology 4). The form and meaning of this "home feeling" continues to evolve. Even as I write this essay, a dwelling beside the chapel has been renamed "Springer House" and is being renovated as a house of prayer to be used for retreats. The nuns point out that the building I had always known as the "Priest's House" was in fact originally commissioned in 1865 by an alumna named Jenny Springer who wanted to visit the convent often and "keep alive the happy memory of my school-days." Soon it will serve as a haven for myself and others who consider Brown County their spiritual home.

* * * *

While Levy's literary emphasis sheds light upon the Ursulines' "wilderness home," further insights come from the sociology of architecture. Sociologist Daphne Spain observes that the use of architectural space shapes social life. Human beings' view of themselves and their relations with others is not only reflected in but is also shaped by their use of physical space. Space is a good indicator of what a group of people values, she says, and these values are preserved by the way a building's floor plan influences daily activities. The way that the Brown County Ursulines used the interior spaces of their buildings says a great deal about their values as a community and thus about the nature of their "wilderness home."

In her book, *Gendered Spaces* (1992) Spain points out that, in contrast to contemporary American architecture, homes built in the nineteenth century tended to have highly specialized spaces. Where a modern American home might have a living room or a multi-purpose "great room," affluent homes of the last century would have had a ladies' parlor, a library, and perhaps a smoking room or billiard room. Built in 1845, the Brown County motherhouse was similarly characterized by the specialized use of space. One example is the Ursulines' use of their two parlors to receive outsiders; such use of parlors was a long-standing tradition in many women's religious communities, dating back to the Counter-Reformation (perhaps further). Here Mother Superior might confer with parents or a merchant, for example, or a young girl might visit with her family.

At Brown County, two formal parlors flanked the vestibule where all visitors entered the convent. These parlors were elegantly decorated with carved chairs, velvet sofas, Oriental rugs, and large oil paintings in gilded frames. The tradition of formal parlors has roots reaching back through centuries of European convents; according to the Ursuline Rule, convents might boast up to four parlors, and nuns would speak to outsiders through a grille (a screen which separated insiders from visitors). This more relaxed American convent had no grille in the parlor, but formal behavior was still expected. Pupils entered the parlors only when invited, and were forbidden to wear aprons there. They curtsied when greeting guests.

Other parts of the convent were also highly specialized in purpose. The Commencement Hall (added to the main building in 1860) served as a combination library/auditorium. Here the commencement "awarding of premiums" was held each spring, wherein pupils were given recognition for their academic, artistic, and moral accomplishments. There were two different chapels as well. The small, intimate, and softly lit "Lady Chapel" served as a place for personal devotions, especially to the Virgin Mary who was represented by a prominently

placed life-size plaster statue. The vastly larger Chapel of the Sacred Heart was a gathering place for daily mass and for large liturgical gatherings, including choral performances.

The large and beautiful spaces set aside for public gatherings contrasted strongly with the almost complete absence of space for individuals. The nuns slept in tiny unadorned cells and spent all their waking hours in common rooms. The pupils slept in dormitories on the top (fourth) floor of the convent; long open rooms were divided by white curtains into small "efficiency alcoves," one per girl. Each alcove contained a bed, a bedside cabinet and little more. Bathrooms were communal and clothing was distributed from a nearby laundry storage room.

The values of the women living in the Brown County convent were clearly reflected in the way they appropriated their physical space. The presence of lush and elegant parlors suggested a gracious hospitality, albeit a hospitality carefully contained. The message of the convent parlor was not "Come in and make yourself at home," but rather "We're happy to see you but please keep your distance."

Similarly, the Brown County community placed tremendous value on large communal gatherings. These gatherings celebrated the life of the convent-community and sometimes welcomed outsiders as well. Such celebrations included public performances (such as choral and theatrical events), ceremonies associated with academic achievements, and, most of all, communal worship. Irene Mahoney, an Ursuline novelist, describes a convent chapel as seen through the eyes of a young sister. Although Mahoney is from another community and the scene is fictional, her description could well apply to the Brown County Sacred Heart Chapel:

> When their efforts to live angelically had worn [the nuns] to depression . . . they had the reaches of worship to set them free from their own limitations and immerse them in the splendor of adoration. Their chapel-with its aspiring arches and brilliant stained glass windows, its marble sanctuary and rich ornaments-had provided them with a beauty that compensated for their small unpainted cells and the dismal barrenness of their common rooms. Even that austerity [the young nun] had loved, glorying the fact that all the beauty that they knew was vested in the worship of God. (Mahoney 90)

The contrast between the ornate chapel and the "small unpainted cells" highlights the lack of value placed upon individuality, privacy, and personal relationships. What was valued at the Brown County convent was the life of the community, and even more, the worship of God.

I find it particularly interesting to examine the Brown County convent buildings in light of what they reveal about gender identity. Since time immemorial, cultures and societies have organized space around gender. According to Daphne Spain, nineteenth-century Victorian homes were highly segregated along gender lines. The design of such homes puts women in parlors, kitchens, and boudoir, while men inhabited the library, the study, and everywhere else. Such containment of women based on gender, according to Spain, cuts them off from access to knowledge and power. She argues that it results in a diminishment of women's power and status.

The all-female world of the Brown County convent challenges Spain's observations. Isolated by geography and church rules of cloister, the Ursuline women nonetheless exerted tremendous influence on the world around them. Within the convent, nuns certainly had power: Mother Superior, the Academy Directress, and the Community Council ran the entire school, farm, and convent. In this self-contained world, women and girls had access to every place in the communal buildings, while men had none.

It is true that, for much of its history, the nuns and the young women in their care were not directly involved in

public life, at least not in the arenas of business or politics. But through their work as caretakers of children and young women, and as educators, the nuns exerted powerful influence that radiated out from the convent. Because their pupils were continually in their care, day and night, throughout the school year, the nuns had the opportunity to shape their characters, tastes, and attitudes. Most alumnae went on to raise families of their own, often passing on the values they absorbed at Brown County. Because many of the pupils were daughters of the middle and upper classes, once they left the academy, many married into socially prominent families. Many also became active in volunteer and church organizations. The nuns' influence as nurturers and educators, though limited in scope, was tremendous in impact.

In addition to their roles as educators of young women, the nuns also lived lives of prayer, praying and singing Gregorian chant at several appointed times throughout each day. They believed that such prayer affected events and people beyond their convent walls. I agree with Spain that segregation based upon gender is an important influence, but in the case of the Ursulines such segregation did not undermine their power as women. Rather, segregation intensified it.

* * * *

Having observed and pondered the life of the Brown County Ursulines over the last two decades, I have come to appreciate the complex ways that the convent became a home to the women living there, whether during a pupil's school-years or during a nun's lifetime "in religion." The sense of home derives in part from the belief that inhabitants of Brown County are in a special and holy place. A priest speaking at an alumnae celebration at the Brown County convent in 1910, described it this way: "I see the Dove of Peace and the Phoenix of Rejuvenation hovering tonight over the confines of this sacred enclosure, consecrated to God and sanctified by the lives of so many daughters of St. Ursula" (*First Alumnae Year Book* 14-15).

Religious historian Mircea Eliade speaks of this sense of "sacred space" in a wider context when he observes, "The sacred is pre-eminently the real, at once power, efficacity [sic], the source of life and fecundity. [Our human] desire to live in the sacred is in fact [our] desire to take up our abode in objective reality" (28-29). Nuns and perhaps pupils as well saw themselves as living in "the sacred . . . the real . . . the source of life and fecundity." It was the grounding in a larger or deeper reality that gave the inhabitants a sense of home, an "abode in objective reality."

While nuns and church leaders might speak of home in theological terms, they actually experienced home in ways that were emotional and familiar. Novelist Anna Quindlen writes of "that greater meaning of home that we understand most purely when we are children, when it is a metaphor for all possible feelings of security, safety, of what is predictable, gentle, and good in life" (213). The security, gentleness, and predictability of life at Brown County did much to reinforce a sense of home.

With time I have come to appreciate the allure of the Brown County convent. Its sense of home had its source in the way it echoed a mythic or even archetypal ideal. Life at Brown County embodied an imaginative alternative to the individualistic, competitive, male model with which we are all too familiar. The same yearning for a mythic "home place" that inspired the novels in Levy's study also drew women and girls to the Brown County convent. The control of architectural space, through the use of cloister and specialized interior spaces, served to heighten the sense that this was a special, important, even sacred place. Theological associations and emotional reverberations all contributed to a multi-layered and complex conviction that the Brown County Ursuline convent was indeed a very appealing "home in the wilderness."

WORKS CITED

Archdeacon, Thomas J. *Becoming American: An Ethnic History*. New York: Free Press, 1983.

Brockman, Pat, O.S.U. Telephone conversation. 11 July 1998.

Brosnan, Joan, O.S.U. Telephone conversation. 9 July 1998.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959.

Ewens, Mary, O.P. "The Leadership of Nuns in Immigrant Catholicism." *Women and Religion in America*. Vol. 1. Ed. R. Ruether and R. Skinner Keller. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981. 101-149.

First Alumnae Yearbook. St. Martin, Ohio: Alumnae Association of the Ursulines of Brown County, Ohio, 1910.

Larkin, Sally Love [alumna]. Personal interview. 25 August 1985.

Levy, Helen Fiddymont. *Fiction of the Home Place*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1992.

Maginnis, Monica. *The Cross in the Wilderness*. New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1930.

Mahoney, Irene, O.S.U. *An Accidental Grace*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Necrology, 1845-1932. [approx. ninety entries]. Ed. Barringer, Mary Gonzaga. Brown County Ursuline Archives. St. Martin, Ohio.

Quindlen, Anna. *One True Thing*. New York: Random House, 1992.

Spain, Daphne. *Gendered Spaces*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1992.

Thompson, Miriam, O.S.U. Personal conversation. Feb.1977.

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

OUR WILDERNESS HOME: IMAGES OF HOME AMONG THE BROWN COUNTY URSULINES

Trudelle H. Thomas
Xavier University

One afternoon in 1976, I made my first trip from Cincinnati to the Ursuline convent in Brown County, Ohio. Driving along a state highway, I saw from a distance the half-mile lane, lined with towering ash trees, that led to the convent grounds. Rising out of cultivated farmland, that lane of trees signaled a European presence that seemed out of place along asphalt Ohio State Route 251. I drove up the lane, passing *Sancta Ursula*, a larger-than-life statue which guarded the entrance to the convent grounds. A legendary Nordic princess with thick braids and royal robes, Ursula stood with her arms extended, holding wide open her ankle-length cloak. Beneath the sheltering sweep of her arms on either side huddled a dozen girls in bas-relief.

Ahead was a maze of trees and lakes, and beyond, the labyrinth that was the red-brick convent. I parked my car, climbed the colonial portico, and rang the bell. Minutes later, a nun ushered me into a formal parlor. By now I was certain that I had entered a foreign world-an island of elegance, hospitality, and learning that was alien to anything I had ever experienced. I had no notion that summer afternoon that these nuns would become my mentors, this convent would become my spiritual home, and twenty years later I would still be trying to understand its hold on me.

I was in every way an outsider. Raised a Methodist, I'd never been in a convent before, never met a real nun. My images of nuns were shaped by movies like *The Trouble with Angels* or the 1960s TV show *The Flying Nun*. As I settled in at the Brown County convent for my week of silence, I was completely enchanted by what one person described as "an elegant little French world out in the middle of the woods" (Larkin). In the coming years I returned for many more solitary retreats and came to regard Brown County as a spiritual oasis.

When, in 1982 (eight years later), I learned that the historic convent and boarding school were scheduled for demolition, I decided to help preserve its history. My decision led to lengthy research: I stayed in the convent dozens of times, recording oral histories of the retired nuns and sorting through dusty archives. I sought out former sisters and alumnae of the boarding school and interviewed them. I read virtually everything that had ever been written about the Brown County Ursulines. All this research deepened my appreciation for the Brown County convent, reinforcing my sense that there was something almost magical about the place.

Initially, what made the strongest impression on me were the sisters themselves. I became acquainted with them first through chats in the dining room, and later through walks around the convent grounds and even taped interviews. I especially enjoyed getting to know the several retired sisters. I met, for example, Sister Dorothy, a stout and talkative woman in her seventies who delighted me with stories of her work as "mistress" of the younger children in the boarding school. In the course of fifty years in religious life, she had taught, entertained, and mothered many hundreds of elementary-aged girls, often sleeping in quarters adjoining their dormitory. Now in retirement she was trying to write books for children and sought my advice about publishing.

Or there was Sister Imelda. In her eighties, she took pride in the enormous convent flower garden which she had expanded year by year for maybe twenty years. Surrounded by tall privet hedges, the garden was off limits to all outsiders; I knew Sister Imelda trusted me when she gave me a key to her garden gate. Less than five feet tall, Imelda's elfin countenance made me think of Yoda of *Star Wars*' fame. She often spoke in riddles which tried the patience of other nuns. She told me the secret to her longevity was avoiding the "three Ds--the doctor, the devil, and the dumps." She gave me a book of prayers once in which she inscribed, "Count that day lost / Whose slow-descending sun, Finds from Thy hand / No worthy action done."

I worked closely with Sister Mary John. As assistant to the community's Superior, she controlled access to the community archives. Sister Mary John shared my fascination with historical documents. With her high forehead, sparkling blue eyes, and lilting Irish voice, she was one of the most charming women I had ever met. She had entered religious life late-in her thirties, after work in the theater-and spent happy decades teaching English in the boarding school. Now in her seventies, in addition to tending the community archives, she nurtured the convent cats, a hobby which earned her the nickname "Frisky" among the sisters. Or there was Sister Ann Maureen, a pretty and gracious woman in her thirties who gave me guidance on prayer and physical exercise and told me that "self-esteem is the beginning of true humility," a baffling insight to me at the age of twenty-four. She later pursued graduate studies in psychology and also served as a leader in the community.

Most memorable of all was Sister Miriam Thompson, a woman whom I eventually adopted as a mentor and spiritual director. She had served for many years as the "directress" of the boarding school and in her seventies and eighties ran a large-scale food bank for the rural poor. With her full-length black habit, glasses, and penetrating blue eyes, Miriam was a striking figure. She was known among the sisters and to many people far beyond the convent as a mystic because of her deep spirituality and her skill at providing spiritual counsel. A woman both brilliant and loving, Miriam soon told me fascinating stories about the history of the convent. Later she supplied me with books and documents about it.

I learned, for example, that the Brown County convent had been founded by an English woman named Julia Chatfield. Born in 1809 of distinguished Anglican parents, as a young woman Julia was sent with her six younger sisters to an Ursuline boarding school in Boulogne-sur-Mer in northern France, to complete her education and refine her French accent. According to Sister Miriam, Julia was so moved by the faith and kindness of the French Ursulines that she soon wrote her father of her desire to become a Roman Catholic. In response, he immediately brought her back to England and introduced her to London society. Julia held fast to her faith, the story goes, and her father disowned her. She worked briefly as a governess then ran away to Boulogne, this time planning to join the community as a novice, a choice which led to a permanent break from her family. Her biographer writes, "It seemed to the girl that she had stepped for a brief space into the realm of spiritual existence which she had always craved . . . the reality of Christ with all its throbbing life" (Maginnis 26). After a few years of initiation, in 1837, Julia Chatfield took her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the special Ursuline "fourth vow" of dedication to teaching.

Later Julia began to dream of becoming a missionary to America when she heard the preaching of a charismatic young American bishop, John Baptist Purcell, who was touring Europe to recruit religious communities to come to America to serve the growing Roman Catholic population. Purcell spoke with zeal about the beauty of the Ohio valley and the seething immigrant life that was springing up there. Especially pressing was the need for teachers and priests. The movement toward free public education was not yet firmly underway, and many of the schools which did exist discriminated against Catholic pupils. Soon Julia's good friend, Amédée Rappe, the convent chaplain, did go to America. For the next few years he wrote to Julia Chatfield encouraging her to come.

It took several years for her dream to become a reality, but finally in 1845, at the age of 36, Sister Julia led a group of eleven nuns to Ohio, intending to establish a girls' academy. Once the group of Ursulines arrived in Ohio, Purcell, now an Archbishop, gave the nuns a wooded tract of land (about 400 acres) fifty miles east of Cincinnati. Originally military lands donated to the bishop after the Revolutionary War, the property had been used for a time as a seminary but the remote location made it untenable. In 1846 the nuns built a motherhouse and an Academy for Young Ladies which lasted for a century. While parochial schools served all children, academies were geared to more privileged girls, sometimes boarding students. Girls came from all over the United States to receive what their families believed to be a superlative education. Early letters from Julia Chatfield suggest that she was very reluctant to accept the remote location; the nuns were used to a refined way of life, not primitive living conditions in an isolated area. But they adapted and in time were able to make a success of the location where the priests could not.

Figure 1. Original Brown County "Convent of the Ursulines and Academy for Young Ladies," ca. 1850. Collection of Trudelle H. Thomas.

Initially, the nuns constructed a building one hundred feet by one-hundred-twenty feet, four stories high (Figure 1). Over the first thirty years, they made additions to the main structure, including a large neo-gothic chapel, a "commencement hall," and a "play hall." They also added numerous out-buildings-barns, sheds, ice house, and stables-and for many decades the convent was a self-sufficient farm. Though the Brown County Academy attracted students from all over the United States and recruited nuns from Europe as well as the U.S., the community always remained small.

When I first visited the Brown County convent in 1976, the future of the academy had grown uncertain. Boarding schools for girls were no longer in style and enrollment was low. In 1981 the boarding school closed and the nuns deliberated the future of the gorgeous, rambling, costly-to-heat building. As a group, they came to the decision to raze the main building except for the adjoining Sacred Heart chapel and to construct on the grounds "Brescia"-a new, compact and comfortable building that would serve as a residence for the retired nuns, including those who were having health problems. (Brescia was named for the town in Italy where Angela Merici, founder of the Ursuline Order, had lived in the 1500s.)

The decision to raze the motherhouse was traumatic for many of the nuns. For some of the older ones, the place had been their home for five or six decades. By this time, the convent had also become a kind of second home to me, a "secular," and I mourned with them when the buildings furnishings were auctioned off and the building itself was leveled by bulldozers. We all felt bereft of our spiritual home. As time passed, I marveled at the older nuns' resilience as they adapted to their new home in Brescia. I became a regular visitor there, though I missed the secret hallways and Lady Chapel and the impressive public spaces of the old convent.

As I came to know the Ursulines, I was struck again and again by how consistently the sisters used the imagery of home when they spoke of their community. To outsiders, the motherhouse was a school, an institution-not a home. Yet the nuns, in their conversation and in their published records, consistently spoke of their "convent home" or their "wilderness home." One poster that I often saw during my visits bore this message: "If you open your hearts to the presence of the Lord here in this holy spot, in the midst of our wilderness, there is no limit to what he can do through you and with you." I was struck by the odd juxtaposition of "this holy spot" and "wilderness" and by the strange promise that opening one's heart to the presence of the Lord would lead to personal power and accomplishment. Though the poster did not actually use the word "home," it hinted that this place was both a haven and a hub.

As I pondered the way the Ursulines spoke of the wilderness, the concept of a "wilderness home" began to make sense, to seem less an oxymoron. Before coming to America, Julia Chatfield and her sister-nuns back in France had fantasized about risking their lives as missionaries on the American frontier; they had hoped to emulate Marie Guyart, a French Ursuline and mystic who had become famous for her work with Native Americans in Canada in the 1600s. Those first sisters never made it to America's western frontier, but where they did end up was no less forbidding: an isolated, unsettled, poor tract of land in rural Ohio. Forty-eight miles outside Cincinnati, Brown County is still rural today and remains one of the poorest counties in Ohio.

According to an early travelogue, when the nuns arrived there in 1845, it appeared desolate and uninhabitable. Surely they wondered why the Archbishop would assign them, cloistered nuns from France, many of them from privileged families, to this wooded, barren property out in the middle of nowhere. Still, those first Brown County Ursulines settled into the rough buildings that had once been a seminary and set about decorating their log church. Instead of deploring this wilderness tract, the nuns made up their minds to make a home of it. Indeed, the "wilderness" soon became part of their communal myth.

Religious historian Mircea Eliade observes that many religious groups see their environment as a foreign and hostile place- "a chaotic space peopled by ghosts, demons, and foreigners" (29). As newcomers to this strange terrain, the nuns saw it as a threatening wilderness, but in time they also began to see it as a gracious wilderness. Hadn't the children of Israel communed with God in the wilderness for forty years as they sought the Promised Land? Hadn't John the Baptist and later even Christ Himself withdrawn to the wilderness to wait, be tested, and receive special graces? The Brown County Ursulines responded to the wilderness by making it a home, their wilderness home, a place of grace.

But what sort of home might this be? A home without parents, certainly a home without fathers-with virtually no men at all. A home with no young children (the school started with six-year-olds). It was a home with no kitchen table, no living room, no actual bedrooms--a home with few of the creature comforts most humans associate with home. Neither did it offer much in the way of privacy or personal possessions. On the face of it, the convent was an institution, not a home at all. Yet the metaphor of home persisted more than 150 years, from 1845 to the present.

* * * *

I gained insight into the Ursulines' understanding of home by reading Helen Fiddymont Levy's *Fiction of the Home Place* (1992). A work of literary criticism, *Fiction of the Home Place* traces an ideal female community that Levy sees as an alternative to the American myth of the individual male who competes and dominates. Drawing upon the work of several twentieth-century female novelists, Levy outlines the attributes of this mythic "home place." It is a small, stable community characterized by what she calls "local language" and located in an ideal pastoral and

domestic setting. This ideal community is rooted in a sense of history, a history that celebrates a lineage of female creativity, and in this community materialism and possessions are downplayed. This community provides care for the young, old, sick, or discouraged; community members place great value on such caretaking. Finally, an elder "wise woman" presides over the entire community.

In *Fiction of the Home Place*, Levy is describing a fictional ideal-not an actual community, let alone a convent. But in reading Levy's book, I was struck by how many of these attributes belonged to the Brown County convent. It was a relatively small community--small as convents go, usually numbering between thirty and sixty nuns and under one hundred pupils (often far fewer). It was also very stable in that nuns who entered the community were likely to stay for life; nuns seldom were sent from the Brown County convent and, prior to the 1960s, few nuns left the order. And the community was made up entirely of women.

While the Ursulines at Brown County never practiced strict cloister, the convent was considered semi-cloistered; as a means of protecting the integrity of the community, the comings and goings of all individuals were strictly monitored. Nuns could not leave the convent grounds without permission and outsiders followed a prescribed procedure when visiting. The presence of men in particular was carefully regulated; in many parts of the convent and boarding school, no man ever set foot. Exceptions might be made for hired workmen (who ate in a separate workers' dining room), for visiting priests (who stayed in a nearby "priest's house" used for this purpose), or for a visiting father of a pupil (who might converse with Mother Superior in the parlor). Though men might visit briefly, the Brown County convent was a world of women.

This world of women was also a remarkably self-contained world, one with a distinctive identity. The church, school, work- and living-spaces all existed literally under one roof; except on family farms, this fusion of work and home would have become rare in the late nineteenth-century. Women and girls prayed, studied, did chores, ate, relaxed, and slept all in the same building. They developed an idiosyncratic and specialized vocabulary for talking about the various places on the convent grounds; any novice-member or alumna would be sure to know the location of "The Long Walk" or "St. Anne's Gallery" or "Sunnyside" or "Solomon's Run." Such language contributed to a sense of belonging.

Like the fictional "home place" that Levy describes, Brown County convent was located in a rural and somewhat idyllic environment. What had been desolate woods were transformed by the nuns' building, landscaping, and farming efforts; by the time I visited in the 1970s the convent boasted Canadian geese, cattle, and horses, in addition to landscaped slopes, lakes, trees, and flower gardens. Though Cincinnati, the only city nearby, had greatly expanded, the Brown County location was still rural.

Moreover, over the decades, the nuns had consciously set out to sanctify the convent grounds by the use of various blessing rituals, including Corpus Christi processions through meadow and woods, May crownings, and the ceremonial blessing of buildings. The nuns also placed shrines throughout the grounds and nearby woods. The unexpected presence of statues in fields and woods made even those places seem familiar and domestic. At the same time, the relative lack of statues inside the convent made it seem less like a convent and more like a home.

Within this idyllic setting, the Brown County convent was steeped in a sense of history, particularly in a lineage of female creativity. As a matter of course, both nuns and pupils were schooled in American history, European history, and Roman Catholic church history; they also celebrated historical events with pageants and parties, year after year. More importantly, they identified with a tradition of women, writing plays and poems to celebrate achievements of women such as Saint Ursula (legendary twelfth-century patroness), St. Angela (sixteenth-century foundress of the Ursulines), Saint Joan of Arc, foundress Julia Chatfield, and various other heroic women.

Although this tradition was limited to women recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, it valued women's contributions more than did secular institutions of the time.

In addition to writing poems and producing plays, women at Brown County found numerous channels for their creative energy: they sang and performed on musical instruments; they embellished furniture and the chapel walls and pews with their own intricate wood-carvings; they grew flowers to adorn the altars; they perfected needlework of every sort (Figure 2). In the 1880s, one farsighted nun, Sister Eulalia Dunn, drew up all the original plans for the Sacred Heart Chapel and oversaw its erection in 1885; the chapel is said to be, even today, the only Roman Catholic church in America designed by a woman (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Hand-carved door to Lady Chapel (Photo courtesy of Eric Weinberg.)

Figure 3. Interior of Sacred Heart Chapel, ca. 1984, still in use (Photo courtesy of Eric Weinberg).

Even as they celebrated a lineage of female creativity, nuns at Brown County de-emphasized materialism and personal possessions at times when the larger culture was increasingly materialistic. All the nuns took vows of poverty. The community itself actually was poor, unlike some religious groups which accumulated community wealth even though individual members took vows of poverty; Brown County convent's poverty was caused by its isolation and small numbers. In addition, the sisters did their best to downplay materialism among the pupils as well by discouraging extravagance in dress and in other possessions.

Like the ideal "home place" that Levy describes, the Brown County convent provided care and nurturance for women of all ages and conditions, ranging from six-year-old school girls to elderly nuns. The care and education of children was the academy's reason for existence. According to Sister Miriam, many of the academy's pupils regarded Brown County as a second family and second home, and it was not unusual for an alumna's daughters and even granddaughters to attend. Even now, most nuns who have spent their lives at Brown County return there to die, cared for by their sister Ursulines throughout their final hours.

Finally, an elder woman presided over the Brown County community: Mother Superior was seen as wise and, at times, inspired by God. From the time she led the first Ursulines to Brown County in 1845 until her death in 1878, Julia Chatfield served as Mother Superior and was known then and thereafter as "Notre Mere." Following Chatfield's death, the community was led by a series of Mothers Superior, respectfully addressed as "Mother." Whoever she might be, Mother Superior was advised and assisted by the Community Council, a group of women elected from among the ranks of the nuns. Important decisions were made by all the nuns together, voting at yearly "chapter meetings." (In recent decades, formal titles such as Mother have been dropped and leadership has become less hierarchical.) While Mother Superior presided over the community of nuns, another woman presided over the academy as the Directress.

Even as her successors assumed community leadership, Mother Julia Chatfield is seen as an important influence in the community, even today, a hundred years after her death. In their documents and in conversation, nuns often voice the belief that she is still alive, in spirit though not in body, and is able to offer guidance. For example, at times when I was wrestling with a problem, whether personal or scholarly, Sister Miriam routinely suggested that I pay a visit to Julia Chatfield's grave in the convent cemetery and "talk it over with Julia." On occasion, I have heard many other sisters casually make remarks about communication with Julia, Monica, Hyacinth, Augusta, and other important community leaders no longer alive. Initially I found this strange but in time I came to understand that the sisters believe the dead are part of the "communion of saints," alive in spirit though not visible.

The nuns' own sense of their "convent home" has changed over the decades. Early on, the nuns made a conscious effort to make the convent school an inviting, comforting home for the girls who attended the Academy. Early brochures advertising the school emphasized its home-like qualities and the motherly kindness of the nuns themselves. Julia Chatfield had inherited from her father, a London art dealer, good taste and a love of art, qualities she passed on to her successors. Displaying art, including the sisters' and students' own art, had the salutary effect of making the building more home-like and familiar.

In addition to being a home for the students, of course, the convent also was a home for the nuns who came there to spend their lives-to live, work, die, and be buried there. After her profession, a nun would not return to her family home.

And the nuns also desired that their convent and school should be a center of action for outsiders. According to Sister Joan Brosnan, even in Julia Chatfield's time the nuns felt a commitment not just to their boarding students but also to "the village" of St. Martin. Early on, the nuns operated in the convent a "day school" that served the local children. "The convent was never an island," says Brosnan. "We have always been committed to people in the local area, especially to women. We reached out to them, and we welcomed them." This commitment was more manifest in some decades than others. Beginning in the 1940s the Ursulines sponsored annual "Ladies Retreats" for adult women on the convent grounds, and in later decades they offered summer camps for girls.

The most significant change, of course, came following the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-65). In response to the Council's call to re-discover their founder's charism, the Ursulines, like nuns throughout America, entered a period of great upheaval, beginning with the change from the Latin liturgy to the vernacular and the change from long black habits to more relaxed dress for the nuns. As a result of the council, nuns who formerly had been forbidden to visit their family homes were now permitted to do so. Nuns began not just to visit their families, but also to work and eventually to live outside the convent walls. Brosnan was Superior of the community (1973-1979) during this period of change and recalls the nuns deciding to invite local people to use their facilities such as the play hall and the swimming pool. Rules about cloister relaxed during this time; access to places like the parlors and the nuns' refectory was less restricted than in the past. Eventually most traces

of cloister died out altogether.

The last twenty years have seen the most dramatic change in the Ursulines' idea of home. Now that the boarding school has closed, most of the nuns live in their own apartments and houses and only visit the old convent grounds for meetings or retreats. Still, among the nuns and others there remains the sense that Brown County is a spiritual and symbolic home. One old document (ca. 1920s) observes, "There is in dear old Brown County something that lives in its atmosphere, that draws hearts closely together; that gives the home feeling; that inspires faith in Divine Providence. . . . The Spirit that dear Notre Mere left us, our richest inheritance" (Necrology 4). The form and meaning of this "home feeling" continues to evolve. Even as I write this essay, a dwelling beside the chapel has been renamed "Springer House" and is being renovated as a house of prayer to be used for retreats. The nuns point out that the building I had always known as the "Priest's House" was in fact originally commissioned in 1865 by an alumna named Jenny Springer who wanted to visit the convent often and "keep alive the happy memory of my school-days." Soon it will serve as a haven for myself and others who consider Brown County their spiritual home.

* * * *

While Levy's literary emphasis sheds light upon the Ursulines' "wilderness home," further insights come from the sociology of architecture. Sociologist Daphne Spain observes that the use of architectural space shapes social life. Human beings' view of themselves and their relations with others is not only reflected in but is also shaped by their use of physical space. Space is a good indicator of what a group of people values, she says, and these values are preserved by the way a building's floor plan influences daily activities. The way that the Brown County Ursulines used the interior spaces of their buildings says a great deal about their values as a community and thus about the nature of their "wilderness home."

In her book, *Gendered Spaces* (1992) Spain points out that, in contrast to contemporary American architecture, homes built in the nineteenth century tended to have highly specialized spaces. Where a modern American home might have a living room or a multi-purpose "great room," affluent homes of the last century would have had a ladies' parlor, a library, and perhaps a smoking room or billiard room. Built in 1845, the Brown County motherhouse was similarly characterized by the specialized use of space. One example is the Ursulines' use of their two parlors to receive outsiders; such use of parlors was a long-standing tradition in many women's religious communities, dating back to the Counter-Reformation (perhaps further). Here Mother Superior might confer with parents or a merchant, for example, or a young girl might visit with her family.

At Brown County, two formal parlors flanked the vestibule where all visitors entered the convent. These parlors were elegantly decorated with carved chairs, velvet sofas, Oriental rugs, and large oil paintings in gilded frames. The tradition of formal parlors has roots reaching back through centuries of European convents; according to the Ursuline Rule, convents might boast up to four parlors, and nuns would speak to outsiders through a grille (a screen which separated insiders from visitors). This more relaxed American convent had no grille in the parlor, but formal behavior was still expected. Pupils entered the parlors only when invited, and were forbidden to wear aprons there. They curtsied when greeting guests.

Other parts of the convent were also highly specialized in purpose. The Commencement Hall (added to the main building in 1860) served as a combination library/auditorium. Here the commencement "awarding of premiums" was held each spring, wherein pupils were given recognition for their academic, artistic, and moral accomplishments. There were two different chapels as well. The small, intimate, and softly lit "Lady Chapel" served as a place for personal devotions, especially to the Virgin Mary who was represented by a prominently

placed life-size plaster statue. The vastly larger Chapel of the Sacred Heart was a gathering place for daily mass and for large liturgical gatherings, including choral performances.

The large and beautiful spaces set aside for public gatherings contrasted strongly with the almost complete absence of space for individuals. The nuns slept in tiny unadorned cells and spent all their waking hours in common rooms. The pupils slept in dormitories on the top (fourth) floor of the convent; long open rooms were divided by white curtains into small "efficiency alcoves," one per girl. Each alcove contained a bed, a bedside cabinet and little more. Bathrooms were communal and clothing was distributed from a nearby laundry storage room.

The values of the women living in the Brown County convent were clearly reflected in the way they appropriated their physical space. The presence of lush and elegant parlors suggested a gracious hospitality, albeit a hospitality carefully contained. The message of the convent parlor was not "Come in and make yourself at home," but rather "We're happy to see you but please keep your distance."

Similarly, the Brown County community placed tremendous value on large communal gatherings. These gatherings celebrated the life of the convent-community and sometimes welcomed outsiders as well. Such celebrations included public performances (such as choral and theatrical events), ceremonies associated with academic achievements, and, most of all, communal worship. Irene Mahoney, an Ursuline novelist, describes a convent chapel as seen through the eyes of a young sister. Although Mahoney is from another community and the scene is fictional, her description could well apply to the Brown County Sacred Heart Chapel:

> When their efforts to live angelically had worn [the nuns] to depression . . . they had the reaches of worship to set them free from their own limitations and immerse them in the splendor of adoration. Their chapel-with its aspiring arches and brilliant stained glass windows, its marble sanctuary and rich ornaments-had provided them with a beauty that compensated for their small unpainted cells and the dismal barrenness of their common rooms. Even that austerity [the young nun] had loved, glorying the fact that all the beauty that they knew was vested in the worship of God. (Mahoney 90)

The contrast between the ornate chapel and the "small unpainted cells" highlights the lack of value placed upon individuality, privacy, and personal relationships. What was valued at the Brown County convent was the life of the community, and even more, the worship of God.

I find it particularly interesting to examine the Brown County convent buildings in light of what they reveal about gender identity. Since time immemorial, cultures and societies have organized space around gender. According to Daphne Spain, nineteenth-century Victorian homes were highly segregated along gender lines. The design of such homes puts women in parlors, kitchens, and boudoir, while men inhabited the library, the study, and everywhere else. Such containment of women based on gender, according to Spain, cuts them off from access to knowledge and power. She argues that it results in a diminishment of women's power and status.

The all-female world of the Brown County convent challenges Spain's observations. Isolated by geography and church rules of cloister, the Ursuline women nonetheless exerted tremendous influence on the world around them. Within the convent, nuns certainly had power: Mother Superior, the Academy Directress, and the Community Council ran the entire school, farm, and convent. In this self-contained world, women and girls had access to every place in the communal buildings, while men had none.

It is true that, for much of its history, the nuns and the young women in their care were not directly involved in

public life, at least not in the arenas of business or politics. But through their work as caretakers of children and young women, and as educators, the nuns exerted powerful influence that radiated out from the convent. Because their pupils were continually in their care, day and night, throughout the school year, the nuns had the opportunity to shape their characters, tastes, and attitudes. Most alumnae went on to raise families of their own, often passing on the values they absorbed at Brown County. Because many of the pupils were daughters of the middle and upper classes, once they left the academy, many married into socially prominent families. Many also became active in volunteer and church organizations. The nuns' influence as nurturers and educators, though limited in scope, was tremendous in impact.

In addition to their roles as educators of young women, the nuns also lived lives of prayer, praying and singing Gregorian chant at several appointed times throughout each day. They believed that such prayer affected events and people beyond their convent walls. I agree with Spain that segregation based upon gender is an important influence, but in the case of the Ursulines such segregation did not undermine their power as women. Rather, segregation intensified it.

* * * *

Having observed and pondered the life of the Brown County Ursulines over the last two decades, I have come to appreciate the complex ways that the convent became a home to the women living there, whether during a pupil's school-years or during a nun's lifetime "in religion." The sense of home derives in part from the belief that inhabitants of Brown County are in a special and holy place. A priest speaking at an alumnae celebration at the Brown County convent in 1910, described it this way: "I see the Dove of Peace and the Phoenix of Rejuvenation hovering tonight over the confines of this sacred enclosure, consecrated to God and sanctified by the lives of so many daughters of St. Ursula" (*First Alumnae Year Book* 14-15).

Religious historian Mircea Eliade speaks of this sense of "sacred space" in a wider context when he observes, "The sacred is pre-eminently the real, at once power, efficacity [sic], the source of life and fecundity. [Our human] desire to live in the sacred is in fact [our] desire to take up our abode in objective reality" (28-29). Nuns and perhaps pupils as well saw themselves as living in "the sacred . . . the real . . . the source of life and fecundity." It was the grounding in a larger or deeper reality that gave the inhabitants a sense of home, an "abode in objective reality."

While nuns and church leaders might speak of home in theological terms, they actually experienced home in ways that were emotional and familiar. Novelist Anna Quindlen writes of "that greater meaning of home that we understand most purely when we are children, when it is a metaphor for all possible feelings of security, safety, of what is predictable, gentle, and good in life" (213). The security, gentleness, and predictability of life at Brown County did much to reinforce a sense of home.

With time I have come to appreciate the allure of the Brown County convent. Its sense of home had its source in the way it echoed a mythic or even archetypal ideal. Life at Brown County embodied an imaginative alternative to the individualistic, competitive, male model with which we are all too familiar. The same yearning for a mythic "home place" that inspired the novels in Levy's study also drew women and girls to the Brown County convent. The control of architectural space, through the use of cloister and specialized interior spaces, served to heighten the sense that this was a special, important, even sacred place. Theological associations and emotional reverberations all contributed to a multi-layered and complex conviction that the Brown County Ursuline convent was indeed a very appealing "home in the wilderness."

WORKS CITED

Archdeacon, Thomas J. *Becoming American: An Ethnic History*. New York: Free Press, 1983.

Brockman, Pat, O.S.U. Telephone conversation. 11 July 1998.

Brosnan, Joan, O.S.U. Telephone conversation. 9 July 1998.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959.

Ewens, Mary, O.P. "The Leadership of Nuns in Immigrant Catholicism." *Women and Religion in America*. Vol. 1. Ed. R. Ruether and R. Skinner Keller. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981. 101-149.

First Alumnae Yearbook. St. Martin, Ohio: Alumnae Association of the Ursulines of Brown County, Ohio, 1910.

Larkin, Sally Love [alumna]. Personal interview. 25 August 1985.

Levy, Helen Fiddymont. *Fiction of the Home Place*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1992.

Maginnis, Monica. *The Cross in the Wilderness*. New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1930.

Mahoney, Irene, O.S.U. *An Accidental Grace*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Necrology, 1845-1932. [approx. ninety entries]. Ed. Barringer, Mary Gonzaga. Brown County Ursuline Archives. St. Martin, Ohio.

Quindlen, Anna. *One True Thing*. New York: Random House, 1992.

Spain, Daphne. *Gendered Spaces*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1992.

Thompson, Miriam, O.S.U. Personal conversation. Feb.1977.

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

TENNESSEE DISTILLERIES: THEIR RISE, FALL, AND RE-EMERGENCE

Kay Baker Gaston

In modern times, distilling is more closely associated with Kentucky than Tennessee. Yet the two remaining producers of Tennessee sour mash whiskey, Jack Daniel and George Dickel, represent a much larger industry that was from earliest settlement an important contributor to the state's economic development. A study of the rise, fall, and re-emergence of Tennessee distilleries will demonstrate this industry's substantial and complex role in Tennessee's economic and political history.

The process of converting corn and small grains such as rye and barley into whiskey was well known to the predominantly Scots, Scotch-Irish, and Irish immigrants who poured into the Tennessee country from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North and South Carolina. Evan Shelby's East Tennessee distillery, located at Sapling Grove near Shelby's Station on the Holston, was in existence by 1771 and perhaps the earliest on record in the state.[1] By 1785 East Tennesseans were producing significant quantities of rye whiskey which they used to pay taxes at only two shillings, six pence per gallon.

Middle Tennessee was close behind. In 1787 the Red Heifer, a combined distillery and tavern, was established in Nashville by John "King" Boyd.[2] In October of 1792, Indians burned Frederick Stump's distillery, but by 1795-96 he was producing 600 gallons with four stills, on which he paid taxes of $41.93.[3] By 1799 there were sixty-one stills for less than 4,000 people in Davidson County, according to records kept by John Overton, who was then serving as Supervisor of Internal Revenue for the District of Tennessee.[4]

Both East and Middle Tennessee were well suited for the production of whiskey, having good soil for growing corn, an abundance of firewood, white oak for the manufacture of barrels, and a good network of rivers upon which to ship the whiskey to marketing centers like Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville, Memphis, and beyond. Many Tennesseans shipped their whiskey by flatboat to Natchez where it brought $2 a gallon, twice the going price in Nashville. On the farm the mash was fed to hogs and cattle which, in the form of salted meat and hides, were also suitable for export.

Always the demand exceeded the supply. As one old-timer said in more recent years, "They never did charge enough for it."[5] To the frontiersman, whiskey was more than a drink; it was an anesthetic, disinfectant, and either a stimulant or a tranquilizer, depending on the situation and the individual. Andrew Jackson even advised his old friend John Coffee, who was suffering from arthritis, to bathe himself in whiskey.[6]

During the Revolution and after, soldiers were partially paid in whiskey and expected their half pint daily. Most of it was consumed straight or mixed with sugar and water as a today. Although whiskey consumption was high, Harriette Simpson Arnow concludes in *Flowering of the Cumberland* that drunkenness was frowned on and relatively uncommon on the Tennessee frontier.[7]

Nonetheless, it should be noted that with the same Act of the Assembly establishing the Davidson County Court in 1784 another act was passed specifying that because of the shortage of grain there should be no distillation of alcohol in Davidson County. This act did not long remain in effect. Apparently it was passed at the instigation of General James Robertson, an early temperance advocate who argued that, no matter how large the supply of grain, its conversion into whiskey was "an unwarranted perversion-unserviceable to white men, devilish for Indians."[8]

As the frontier gave way to settlement, whiskey consumption increased, not only in Tennessee, but also throughout the nation. By 1810, 14,191 registered distilleries were producing 25.5 million gallons of whiskey, a five-fold increase over statistics for 1792.[9] Registration fees for the distilleries were high enough to discourage small private producers; increasingly what had begun as a home industry became a more large-scale industry, with some farm producers in some counties making the transition.

As production increased, so did consumption and drunkenness. Congregationalists and Quakers in New England and Pennsylvania were the first to oppose the use of whiskey altogether. Fledgling temperance and prohibition movements spread south and west, to be carried over the mountains to the earliest settlements by Methodist circuit riders like Bishop Francis Asbury, who first visited Tennessee in 1788.[10]

In 1829 the first temperance societies were established in Tennessee, with support increasing in the 1830s and 40s. In 1848 the legislature chartered the Sons and Daughters of Temperance, the strongest temperance group in the state. The movement scarcely had gotten started when the threat of war diverted attention from it, but the groundwork had been laid.

In the interim, Tennesseans were not only consuming more alcohol but they were becoming major producers as well. In 1820 the Fourth Census showed that New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Tennessee had more capital invested and employed more men in the production of spirits than any other states in the Union.[11] The industry continued to grow right up until the Civil War, gradually becoming concentrated in certain areas. One of these was Robertson County, extending north of Davidson County to the Kentucky line.

During the war, occupying Union forces banned the distillation of whiskey because corn and other grains were needed to feed both humans and livestock. In Robertson County, distilling was one of the first businesses to start up after Federal troops pulled out in April of 1865. It was late spring, the favored season for distilling. Limestone water, corn, and firewood were readily available and a still could be set up easily and cheaply. It seemed as though nearly everyone in the county went into making whiskey for the simple reason that it was the fastest way to make money and required virtually no capital.

A major advantage was the fine reputation that Robertson County distillers such as Wiley Woodard already enjoyed. The 249 gallons of whiskey Woodard shipped to Lyon & Company in Nashville on September 21, 1865, commanded $3.75 a gallon, compared to forty cents a gallon before the war.[12] Clearly his success would have been a stimulus to other producers.

Although Woodard continued to produce the finest Robertson County whiskey and apple and peach brandies, his production was eventually surpassed by aggressive new contenders, many of whom were his relatives. By 1874, these and other Robertson County distillers were producing 45,000 barrels of whiskey annually. They consumed so much corn that it became necessary to import large amounts from St. Louis and other markets. Before the war, there had been no wholesale whiskey dealers in Springfield, but by 1874 the business had grown to nearly one

million dollars in annual sales. The barrel business that had grown up at Coopertown now produced $125,000 in business annually. In 1872 the Springfield National Bank was established to cater to the liquor industry. Because of the whiskey deposits-the average deposit was over $100,000-the newly established bank never wavered during the financial panic of 1873.

The Robertson County distillery that grew to be the largest was located at Greenbrier. When it was started about 1867 by Charles Palmer of Springfield, its capacity was a modest five gallons a day. In 1870, Charles Nelson, a native of Mecklenburg, Germany, who had come to Nashville from Cincinnati, bought it to supply his wholesale grocery business in Nashville (at that time grocers sold whiskey). The whiskey was manufactured in Robertson County, but it was both bottled under the Greenbrier label and distributed from his Nashville warehouse on Second Avenue North. At its peak, the distillery employed a work force of fifteen to twenty-five men, including government inspectors and gaugers as well as the operators. By 1885 the Greenbrier Distillery manufactured 8,000 barrels of whiskey or a little less than 380,000 gallons a year, and paid annual taxes of over $341,000.

In 1886 the Nashville *Union* reported that the distilling industry was the largest manufacturing industry in the state of Tennessee, annually consuming 750,000 bushels of corn and 500,000 bushels of apples and peaches. By the late 1880s, however, the industry had begun to decline. Smaller and less successful distillers had gone into other businesses, faced with intense competition from the larger distillers on the one hand, and mounting pressure from church and temperance groups on the other. The Women's Christian Temperance Union had organized in the state in 1874 and would be joined by the Anti-Saloon League in 1899.[13]

In Robertson County, by 1894, only five distilleries were still depositing whiskey in warehouses, and two of those were run by widows: Louisa Nelson for Charles Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery, and Josephine Woodard Brown for J. S. Brown Distilleries on Wartrace Creek. As the distilleries closed down, the distillers or their families tended to transfer their considerable assets into banking.

In 1903, the Adams Law, which extended the Four Mile Law first passed in 1877 to towns of 5,000, closed the saloons of Springfield.[14] In 1909, with the state-wide prohibition on the manufacture of whiskey, the two remaining Robertson County distilleries, Nelson's Greenbrier and Pitt's Cave Spring, and all others in Tennessee went out of business, although some tried to conduct sales through retail and manufacturing activities in other states.

Only two Tennessee distilleries would revive after prohibition-Cascade, later to be identified solely by the name of its distributor, George Dickel & Company-and Jack Daniel. The Cascade Distillery was located a few miles from Tullahoma in Coffee County, and only about a mile from the tiny community of Normandy, on Gage Creek, later called Cascade Springs.[15] Around 1883 the distillery was acquired by Matthew Sims and McLin H. Davis. In 1888, Sims sold his share of the distillery to V. E. Shwab, a partner in George A. Dickel & Company; and in 1898 the heirs of McLin Davis sold his one-third interest to Shwab, who then became sole proprietor of the distillery.

Cascade was never owned by George A. Dickel, but its product was bottled and distributed by George A. Dickel and Company of Nashville. Dickel was a native of Germany like Charles Nelson and their pioneer predecessor, Frederick Stump. His employee, brother-in-law, and eventual partner was V. E. Shwab, a younger man whose family emigrated from Alsace-Lorraine. George Dickel died in 1894 and left no children. Shwab, who was on excellent terms with his widowed sister-in-law, Augusta Dickel, assumed complete control of the company in addition to his ownership of the distillery.

Cascade was the largest of several distilleries located in Coffee County. As in the case of Charles Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery, it prospered because of marketing and distribution through Nashville, in this case through George A. Dickel and Company. The whiskey also became very popular with soldiers during the Spanish-American War and its fame spread to the West Coast. There it was distributed out of San Francisco, described by Shwab's son-in-law Paul Davis as a "great whiskey town." In the early 1900s the company hired the D'Arcy Advertising Company of St. Louis, which had also begun the advertising campaign for Coca-Cola, to initiate an extensive advertising program for Cascade. Its distinctive slogan, "mellow as moonlight," was related to distiller McLin Davis's discovery that the whiskey was improved by allowing the mash to cool in the light of the moon.[16]

Soon after the manufacture of whiskey was prohibited in Tennessee in 1909, George A. Dickel and Company moved its operation, first to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and then to Louisville where it continued in production at the famed Stitzel distillery under the direction of V. E. Shwab's son, George, enjoying tremendous popularity until the Volstead Act was passed in 1919.[17]

In 1937, eighteen years after George A. Dickel and Company had ceased operation, Schenley, Inc., paid the Shwab family $100,000 for the company and the Cascade trademark. Fortunately the Shwabs were able to obtain the original recipe and process from local men in Coffee County who had distilled Cascade whiskey, and this information was transmitted to Schenley. The whiskey Schenley produced in Kentucky after prohibition was thought by some Tennesseans to be an inferior brand of bourbon rather than a *bona fide* Tennessee sour mash whiskey. Since 1958, however, after the passage of appropriate legislation, Tennessee sour mash whiskey has again been produced in a modern plant just outside of Normandy. Louisville distiller Ralph Dupps was given the assignment of re-establishing the Cascade Distillery, renamed the George Dickel Distillery, near its original location and, most importantly, its original water source.

Today the most famous, largest, and, for various reasons, most authentic Tennessee distillery is Jack Daniel, which is located at Lynchburg in Moore County. This distillery is in full operation on its original site and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its founder, Jack Daniel, was born in 1848 about five miles away from the distillery. At age twelve he went to work for Dan Call, who operated a distillery a few miles away at Louse Creek, and at age fourteen became a full partner with Call, who clearly was an important mentor. In 1866 Jack Daniel leased the famous Hollow and Cave Spring which continue to be the focal point of the distillery's operation. At the same time Daniel apparently was the first to reapply for a distillery license after the war, which has been the basis of the company's claim that it is the oldest registered distillery in the United States. On June 17, 1884, Jack Daniel purchased the Hollow and cave, including in all 142 acres at a price of $2,180.40 from Wilburn Hiles and his partner Berry, owners since 1817.[18]

Jack was fond of his own liquor, which he sweetened with sugar dissolved in a little branch water and garnished with bruised tansy, and of dancing with the ladies, but he remained a bachelor all of his life. From the age of twenty-one little Jack Daniel, who stood just over five feet tall, invariably dressed in a knee-length frock coat of black broadcloth and affected a high-rolled planter's hat, fawn-colored vest, and broad bow tie, just as he appears in the statue his nephew Lem Motlow commissioned in 1941. The statue, the cave spring, all aspects of the distillery operation, many of the citizens who work there, and even the ducks have been prominently featured over the years in the modern company's advertising, which was originally developed by the Gardner Advertising Agency of St. Louis.[19]

Although Jack Daniel grew to pre-eminence over all other Tennessee distillers, his was not an overnight success. In 1877, for example, Tolley & Eaton was producing 300 gallons a day and Jack was second in Moore County

with 83 gallons, with thirteen other distilleries together producing another 70 gallons. By 1896 the market for and reputation of Jack Daniel's famous sour mash whiskey had greatly increased, thanks in some measure to his agent, M. Ryan, in Nashville. In 1904 Jack took a couple of cases of his whiskey to the St. Louis Exposition, or World's Fair. The big distillers from other parts of the country were surprised and chagrined when Jack Daniel won the gold medal. Thereafter, Jack Daniel's whiskey won gold medals at Liege, Belgium, in 1905; Ghent in 1913, and at the Anglo-American Exposition in 1914, achieving world recognition on the eve of national prohibition.[20]

Meanwhile, Jack had kicked his safe one cold morning when it refused to open. He incurred such a severe clot in the arteries of his leg that it eventually had to be amputated. After that he left most of the management of the plant to his nephew, Lem Motlow, who had come to work for him at age 17, in 1887. In 1907 Jack Daniel deeded the company over to Lem Motlow and another nephew, Dick Daniel. Two years later, Lem bought out Dick's share.[21] In 1911, Jack passed away. It was Lem Motlow who saw the company through its moves to St. Louis, Missouri, and to Birmingham, Alabama, in an effort to escape the tightening net of prohibition. In 1933, when national prohibition was revoked, it was also Lem Motlow who accomplished the reopening of the modern distillery at its original location. Lem Motlow died in 1947 and the ownership of his distillery was continued by his sons, who operated it even after its sale in 1956 to Brown-Forman of Louisville, also a family-owned distillery, for $20,000,000.[22]

Thus today we have two survivors of a frontier industry, one of Tennessee's first and for a time in the 1880s its leading industry, brought here by Scots, Scotch-Irish, Irish, and, we must add in deference to Frederick Stump, German immigrants moving west. The prohibition movement virtually eliminated not only the product, but also modern awareness of the industry's extent and scope before prohibition.

The re-emergence of Tennessee distilleries after prohibition is in both cases one of modern business involving politics, advertising, and acquisition by larger companies from outside the state. The quality of the product was upheld: both distilleries utilize the leaching process through maple charcoal which is the most distinctive characteristic of Tennessee sour mash whiskey. Advertising has been a key ingredient for both, with Jack Daniel achieving an almost legendary success.

Most important were the human ingredients: Jack Daniel got his start in the pre-Civil War era and made the transition to the new postwar economy; Lem Motlow took over the reins at the onset of prohibition and guided the company to the modern era, passing it on to his sons who negotiated its sale to an eminently compatible company, Brown-Forman. George Dickel had a less sure route to success, but fortunately George B. Shwab was able to achieve the transfer to Schenley at the end of prohibition; then, when the move back to Normandy was undertaken, Schenley had the right man, Ralph Dupps, for that challenging assignment. So it is that these two historic companies, representing a pioneer industry that started about 1771, still provide a hint of the tastes and smells of Tennessee's past whenever Tennesseans enjoy their Jack Daniel's or George Dickel over ice.

NOTES

1. Henry C. Crowgey, *Kentucky Bourbon: The Early Years of Whiskey-Making* (Lexington, 1971), 23-24. Shelby's Station is the present site of Bristol, in Sullivan County.

2. J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Knoxville, reprint 1967), 284.

3. Ibid., 598. Stump was a member of the German community that settled White's Creek; today his log home can

be easily viewed from the Briley Parkway.

4. John Overton, "General Account of County Distilleries, 1795-1801," Jacob McGavock Dickinson Papers, Tennessee State Library & Archives.

5. This statement was attributed to Sam Krisle, Robertson County storekeeper, by George Henry Brown, author's grandfather.

6. Harriette Simpson Arnow, *Flowering of the Cumberland* (New York, 1963), 78.

7. Arnow, 280. She writes: "My own conclusion is that, though consumption of alcoholic beverages was heavy, there was among the Cumberland pioneers during the years 1780-1803 not only much less alcoholism than today, but even less than in most states during this same period."

8. A. W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee: or, Life and Times of General James Robertson* (Knoxville, reprint 1971), 237.

9. Herbert Asbury, *The Great Illusion: An Informal History of Prohibition* (Garden City, 1950). See pp. 3-12 for a discussion for the period 1750-1840, which he describes as "the most intemperate era in American history."

10. John Allen Krout, *The Origins of Prohibition* (New York, 1925), 36.

11. Asbury, 89.

12. Wiley Woodard, *Memorandum of Articles Delivered 1857-1865*, in possession of author. This and subsequent information about Robertson County distilleries is drawn from her article, "Robertson County Distilleries, 1796-1909," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XLIII (Spring 1984): 49-67.

13. Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York, 1976), 48-50, 93.

14. The Four Mile Law was the device through which anti-saloon leaders achieved prohibition; it outlawed the sale of liquor within four miles of any chartered institution of learning outside an incorporated town. In 1887 it was amended to include rural public schools, and in 1909 it was extended to all parts of the state. See Eric Russell Lacy, "Tennessee Teetotalism: Social Forces and the Politics of Progressivism," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XXIV (Fall 1965): 224, 229.

15. See Kay Baker Gaston, "George Dickel Tennessee Sour Mash Whiskey: The Story Behind the Label," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* LVIV (Fall 1998): 48-69.

16. Gaston interview with Thurman Davis, 1983.

17. Harry Harrison Kroll, *Bluegrass, Belles, and Bourbon* (New York, 1967), 208.

18. Ben A. Green, *Jack Daniel's Legacy* (Shelbyville, 1967), 207-208; Moore County Deed Book 3, pp. 130-31.

19. Green, 197.

20. "Rare Jack Daniel's," *Fortune*, July 1951, 105.

21. Ibid.

22. Green, 175.

This web page is maintained by
Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075
E-mail: htallant@georgetowncollege.edu

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

TENNESSEE DISTILLERIES: THEIR RISE, FALL, AND RE-EMERGENCE

Kay Baker Gaston

In modern times, distilling is more closely associated with Kentucky than Tennessee. Yet the two remaining producers of Tennessee sour mash whiskey, Jack Daniel and George Dickel, represent a much larger industry that was from earliest settlement an important contributor to the state's economic development. A study of the rise, fall, and re-emergence of Tennessee distilleries will demonstrate this industry's substantial and complex role in Tennessee's economic and political history.

The process of converting corn and small grains such as rye and barley into whiskey was well known to the predominantly Scots, Scotch-Irish, and Irish immigrants who poured into the Tennessee country from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North and South Carolina. Evan Shelby's East Tennessee distillery, located at Sapling Grove near Shelby's Station on the Holston, was in existence by 1771 and perhaps the earliest on record in the state.[1] By 1785 East Tennesseans were producing significant quantities of rye whiskey which they used to pay taxes at only two shillings, six pence per gallon.

Middle Tennessee was close behind. In 1787 the Red Heifer, a combined distillery and tavern, was established in

Nashville by John "King" Boyd.[2] In October of 1792, Indians burned Frederick Stump's distillery, but by 1795-96 he was producing 600 gallons with four stills, on which he paid taxes of $41.93.[3] By 1799 there were sixty-one stills for less than 4,000 people in Davidson County, according to records kept by John Overton, who was then serving as Supervisor of Internal Revenue for the District of Tennessee.[4]

Both East and Middle Tennessee were well suited for the production of whiskey, having good soil for growing corn, an abundance of firewood, white oak for the manufacture of barrels, and a good network of rivers upon which to ship the whiskey to marketing centers like Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville, Memphis, and beyond. Many Tennesseans shipped their whiskey by flatboat to Natchez where it brought $2 a gallon, twice the going price in Nashville. On the farm the mash was fed to hogs and cattle which, in the form of salted meat and hides, were also suitable for export.

Always the demand exceeded the supply. As one old-timer said in more recent years, "They never did charge enough for it."[5] To the frontiersman, whiskey was more than a drink; it was an anesthetic, disinfectant, and either a stimulant or a tranquilizer, depending on the situation and the individual. Andrew Jackson even advised his old friend John Coffee, who was suffering from arthritis, to bathe himself in whiskey.[6]

During the Revolution and after, soldiers were partially paid in whiskey and expected their half pint daily. Most of it was consumed straight or mixed with sugar and water as a today. Although whiskey consumption was high, Harriette Simpson Arnow concludes in *Flowering of the Cumberland* that drunkenness was frowned on and relatively uncommon on the Tennessee frontier.[7]

Nonetheless, it should be noted that with the same Act of the Assembly establishing the Davidson County Court in 1784 another act was passed specifying that because of the shortage of grain there should be no distillation of alcohol in Davidson County. This act did not long remain in effect. Apparently it was passed at the instigation of General James Robertson, an early temperance advocate who argued that, no matter how large the supply of grain, its conversion into whiskey was "an unwarranted perversion-unserviceable to white men, devilish for Indians."[8]

As the frontier gave way to settlement, whiskey consumption increased, not only in Tennessee, but also throughout the nation. By 1810, 14,191 registered distilleries were producing 25.5 million gallons of whiskey, a five-fold increase over statistics for 1792.[9] Registration fees for the distilleries were high enough to discourage small private producers; increasingly what had begun as a home industry became a more large-scale industry, with some farm producers in some counties making the transition.

As production increased, so did consumption and drunkenness. Congregationalists and Quakers in New England and Pennsylvania were the first to oppose the use of whiskey altogether. Fledgling temperance and prohibition movements spread south and west, to be carried over the mountains to the earliest settlements by Methodist circuit riders like Bishop Francis Asbury, who first visited Tennessee in 1788.[10]

In 1829 the first temperance societies were established in Tennessee, with support increasing in the 1830s and 40s. In 1848 the legislature chartered the Sons and Daughters of Temperance, the strongest temperance group in the state. The movement scarcely had gotten started when the threat of war diverted attention from it, but the groundwork had been laid.

In the interim, Tennesseans were not only consuming more alcohol but they were becoming major producers as

well. In 1820 the Fourth Census showed that New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Tennessee had more capital invested and employed more men in the production of spirits than any other states in the Union.[11] The industry continued to grow right up until the Civil War, gradually becoming concentrated in certain areas. One of these was Robertson County, extending north of Davidson County to the Kentucky line.

During the war, occupying Union forces banned the distillation of whiskey because corn and other grains were needed to feed both humans and livestock. In Robertson County, distilling was one of the first businesses to start up after Federal troops pulled out in April of 1865. It was late spring, the favored season for distilling. Limestone water, corn, and firewood were readily available and a still could be set up easily and cheaply. It seemed as though nearly everyone in the county went into making whiskey for the simple reason that it was the fastest way to make money and required virtually no capital.

A major advantage was the fine reputation that Robertson County distillers such as Wiley Woodard already enjoyed. The 249 gallons of whiskey Woodard shipped to Lyon & Company in Nashville on September 21, 1865, commanded $3.75 a gallon, compared to forty cents a gallon before the war.[12] Clearly his success would have been a stimulus to other producers.

Although Woodard continued to produce the finest Robertson County whiskey and apple and peach brandies, his production was eventually surpassed by aggressive new contenders, many of whom were his relatives. By 1874, these and other Robertson County distillers were producing 45,000 barrels of whiskey annually. They consumed so much corn that it became necessary to import large amounts from St. Louis and other markets. Before the war, there had been no wholesale whiskey dealers in Springfield, but by 1874 the business had grown to nearly one million dollars in annual sales. The barrel business that had grown up at Coopertown now produced $125,000 in business annually. In 1872 the Springfield National Bank was established to cater to the liquor industry. Because of the whiskey deposits-the average deposit was over $100,000-the newly established bank never wavered during the financial panic of 1873.

The Robertson County distillery that grew to be the largest was located at Greenbrier. When it was started about 1867 by Charles Palmer of Springfield, its capacity was a modest five gallons a day. In 1870, Charles Nelson, a native of Mecklenburg, Germany, who had come to Nashville from Cincinnati, bought it to supply his wholesale grocery business in Nashville (at that time grocers sold whiskey). The whiskey was manufactured in Robertson County, but it was both bottled under the Greenbrier label and distributed from his Nashville warehouse on Second Avenue North. At its peak, the distillery employed a work force of fifteen to twenty-five men, including government inspectors and gaugers as well as the operators. By 1885 the Greenbrier Distillery manufactured 8,000 barrels of whiskey or a little less than 380,000 gallons a year, and paid annual taxes of over $341,000.

In 1886 the Nashville *Union* reported that the distilling industry was the largest manufacturing industry in the state of Tennessee, annually consuming 750,000 bushels of corn and 500,000 bushels of apples and peaches. By the late 1880s, however, the industry had begun to decline. Smaller and less successful distillers had gone into other businesses, faced with intense competition from the larger distillers on the one hand, and mounting pressure from church and temperance groups on the other. The Women's Christian Temperance Union had organized in the state in 1874 and would be joined by the Anti-Saloon League in 1899.[13]

In Robertson County, by 1894, only five distilleries were still depositing whiskey in warehouses, and two of those were run by widows: Louisa Nelson for Charles Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery, and Josephine Woodard Brown for J. S. Brown Distilleries on Wartrace Creek. As the distilleries closed down, the distillers or their families tended to

transfer their considerable assets into banking.

In 1903, the Adams Law, which extended the Four Mile Law first passed in 1877 to towns of 5,000, closed the saloons of Springfield.[14] In 1909, with the state-wide prohibition on the manufacture of whiskey, the two remaining Robertson County distilleries, Nelson's Greenbrier and Pitt's Cave Spring, and all others in Tennessee went out of business, although some tried to conduct sales through retail and manufacturing activities in other states.

Only two Tennessee distilleries would revive after prohibition-Cascade, later to be identified solely by the name of its distributor, George Dickel & Company-and Jack Daniel. The Cascade Distillery was located a few miles from Tullahoma in Coffee County, and only about a mile from the tiny community of Normandy, on Gage Creek, later called Cascade Springs.[15] Around 1883 the distillery was acquired by Matthew Sims and McLin H. Davis. In 1888, Sims sold his share of the distillery to V. E. Shwab, a partner in George A. Dickel & Company; and in 1898 the heirs of McLin Davis sold his one-third interest to Shwab, who then became sole proprietor of the distillery.

Cascade was never owned by George A. Dickel, but its product was bottled and distributed by George A. Dickel and Company of Nashville. Dickel was a native of Germany like Charles Nelson and their pioneer predecessor, Frederick Stump. His employee, brother-in-law, and eventual partner was V. E. Shwab, a younger man whose family emigrated from Alsace-Lorraine. George Dickel died in 1894 and left no children. Shwab, who was on excellent terms with his widowed sister-in-law, Augusta Dickel, assumed complete control of the company in addition to his ownership of the distillery.

Cascade was the largest of several distilleries located in Coffee County. As in the case of Charles Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery, it prospered because of marketing and distribution through Nashville, in this case through George A. Dickel and Company. The whiskey also became very popular with soldiers during the Spanish-American War and its fame spread to the West Coast. There it was distributed out of San Francisco, described by Shwab's son-in-law Paul Davis as a "great whiskey town." In the early 1900s the company hired the D'Arcy Advertising Company of St. Louis, which had also begun the advertising campaign for Coca-Cola, to initiate an extensive advertising program for Cascade. Its distinctive slogan, "mellow as moonlight," was related to distiller McLin Davis's discovery that the whiskey was improved by allowing the mash to cool in the light of the moon.[16]

Soon after the manufacture of whiskey was prohibited in Tennessee in 1909, George A. Dickel and Company moved its operation, first to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and then to Louisville where it continued in production at the famed Stitzel distillery under the direction of V. E. Shwab's son, George, enjoying tremendous popularity until the Volstead Act was passed in 1919.[17]

In 1937, eighteen years after George A. Dickel and Company had ceased operation, Schenley, Inc., paid the Shwab family $100,000 for the company and the Cascade trademark. Fortunately the Shwabs were able to obtain the original recipe and process from local men in Coffee County who had distilled Cascade whiskey, and this information was transmitted to Schenley. The whiskey Schenley produced in Kentucky after prohibition was thought by some Tennesseans to be an inferior brand of bourbon rather than a *bona fide* Tennessee sour mash whiskey. Since 1958, however, after the passage of appropriate legislation, Tennessee sour mash whiskey has again been produced in a modern plant just outside of Normandy. Louisville distiller Ralph Dupps was given the assignment of re-establishing the Cascade Distillery, renamed the George Dickel Distillery, near its original location and, most importantly, its original water source.

Today the most famous, largest, and, for various reasons, most authentic Tennessee distillery is Jack Daniel, which is located at Lynchburg in Moore County. This distillery is in full operation on its original site and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its founder, Jack Daniel, was born in 1848 about five miles away from the distillery. At age twelve he went to work for Dan Call, who operated a distillery a few miles away at Louse Creek, and at age fourteen became a full partner with Call, who clearly was an important mentor. In 1866 Jack Daniel leased the famous Hollow and Cave Spring which continue to be the focal point of the distillery's operation. At the same time Daniel apparently was the first to reapply for a distillery license after the war, which has been the basis of the company's claim that it is the oldest registered distillery in the United States. On June 17, 1884, Jack Daniel purchased the Hollow and cave, including in all 142 acres at a price of $2,180.40 from Wilburn Hiles and his partner Berry, owners since 1817.[18]

Jack was fond of his own liquor, which he sweetened with sugar dissolved in a little branch water and garnished with bruised tansy, and of dancing with the ladies, but he remained a bachelor all of his life. From the age of twenty-one little Jack Daniel, who stood just over five feet tall, invariably dressed in a knee-length frock coat of black broadcloth and affected a high-rolled planter's hat, fawn-colored vest, and broad bow tie, just as he appears in the statue his nephew Lem Motlow commissioned in 1941. The statue, the cave spring, all aspects of the distillery operation, many of the citizens who work there, and even the ducks have been prominently featured over the years in the modern company's advertising, which was originally developed by the Gardner Advertising Agency of St. Louis.[19]

Although Jack Daniel grew to pre-eminence over all other Tennessee distillers, his was not an overnight success. In 1877, for example, Tolley & Eaton was producing 300 gallons a day and Jack was second in Moore County with 83 gallons, with thirteen other distilleries together producing another 70 gallons. By 1896 the market for and reputation of Jack Daniel's famous sour mash whiskey had greatly increased, thanks in some measure to his agent, M. Ryan, in Nashville. In 1904 Jack took a couple of cases of his whiskey to the St. Louis Exposition, or World's Fair. The big distillers from other parts of the country were surprised and chagrined when Jack Daniel won the gold medal. Thereafter, Jack Daniel's whiskey won gold medals at Liege, Belgium, in 1905; Ghent in 1913, and at the Anglo-American Exposition in 1914, achieving world recognition on the eve of national prohibition.[20]

Meanwhile, Jack had kicked his safe one cold morning when it refused to open. He incurred such a severe clot in the arteries of his leg that it eventually had to be amputated. After that he left most of the management of the plant to his nephew, Lem Motlow, who had come to work for him at age 17, in 1887. In 1907 Jack Daniel deeded the company over to Lem Motlow and another nephew, Dick Daniel. Two years later, Lem bought out Dick's share.[21] In 1911, Jack passed away. It was Lem Motlow who saw the company through its moves to St. Louis, Missouri, and to Birmingham, Alabama, in an effort to escape the tightening net of prohibition. In 1933, when national prohibition was revoked, it was also Lem Motlow who accomplished the reopening of the modern distillery at its original location. Lem Motlow died in 1947 and the ownership of his distillery was continued by his sons, who operated it even after its sale in 1956 to Brown-Forman of Louisville, also a family-owned distillery, for $20,000,000.[22]

Thus today we have two survivors of a frontier industry, one of Tennessee's first and for a time in the 1880s its leading industry, brought here by Scots, Scotch-Irish, Irish, and, we must add in deference to Frederick Stump, German immigrants moving west. The prohibition movement virtually eliminated not only the product, but also modern awareness of the industry's extent and scope before prohibition.

The re-emergence of Tennessee distilleries after prohibition is in both cases one of modern business involving

politics, advertising, and acquisition by larger companies from outside the state. The quality of the product was upheld: both distilleries utilize the leaching process through maple charcoal which is the most distinctive characteristic of Tennessee sour mash whiskey. Advertising has been a key ingredient for both, with Jack Daniel achieving an almost legendary success.

Most important were the human ingredients: Jack Daniel got his start in the pre-Civil War era and made the transition to the new postwar economy; Lem Motlow took over the reins at the onset of prohibition and guided the company to the modern era, passing it on to his sons who negotiated its sale to an eminently compatible company, Brown-Forman. George Dickel had a less sure route to success, but fortunately George B. Shwab was able to achieve the transfer to Schenley at the end of prohibition; then, when the move back to Normandy was undertaken, Schenley had the right man, Ralph Dupps, for that challenging assignment. So it is that these two historic companies, representing a pioneer industry that started about 1771, still provide a hint of the tastes and smells of Tennessee's past whenever Tennesseans enjoy their Jack Daniel's or George Dickel over ice.

NOTES

1. Henry C. Crowgey, *Kentucky Bourbon: The Early Years of Whiskey-Making* (Lexington, 1971), 23-24. Shelby's Station is the present site of Bristol, in Sullivan County.

2. J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Knoxville, reprint 1967), 284.

3. Ibid., 598. Stump was a member of the German community that settled White's Creek; today his log home can be easily viewed from the Briley Parkway.

4. John Overton, "General Account of County Distilleries, 1795-1801," Jacob McGavock Dickinson Papers, Tennessee State Library & Archives.

5. This statement was attributed to Sam Krisle, Robertson County storekeeper, by George Henry Brown, author's grandfather.

6. Harriette Simpson Arnow, *Flowering of the Cumberland* (New York, 1963), 78.

7. Arnow, 280. She writes: "My own conclusion is that, though consumption of alcoholic beverages was heavy, there was among the Cumberland pioneers during the years 1780-1803 not only much less alcoholism than today, but even less than in most states during this same period."

8. A. W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee: or, Life and Times of General James Robertson* (Knoxville, reprint 1971), 237.

9. Herbert Asbury, *The Great Illusion: An Informal History of Prohibition* (Garden City, 1950). See pp. 3-12 for a discussion for the period 1750-1840, which he describes as "the most intemperate era in American history."

10. John Allen Krout, *The Origins of Prohibition* (New York, 1925), 36.

11. Asbury, 89.

12. Wiley Woodard, *Memorandum of Articles Delivered 1857-1865*, in possession of author. This and subsequent information about Robertson County distilleries is drawn from her article, "Robertson County Distilleries, 1796-1909," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XLIII (Spring 1984): 49-67.

13. Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York, 1976), 48-50, 93.

14. The Four Mile Law was the device through which anti-saloon leaders achieved prohibition; it outlawed the sale of liquor within four miles of any chartered institution of learning outside an incorporated town. In 1887 it was amended to include rural public schools, and in 1909 it was extended to all parts of the state. See Eric Russell Lacy, "Tennessee Teetotalism: Social Forces and the Politics of Progressivism," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XXIV (Fall 1965): 224, 229.

15. See Kay Baker Gaston, "George Dickel Tennessee Sour Mash Whiskey: The Story Behind the Label," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* LVIV (Fall 1998): 48-69.

16. Gaston interview with Thurman Davis, 1983.

17. Harry Harrison Kroll, *Bluegrass, Belles, and Bourbon* (New York, 1967), 208.

18. Ben A. Green, *Jack Daniel's Legacy* (Shelbyville, 1967), 207-208; Moore County Deed Book 3, pp. 130-31.

19. Green, 197.

20. "Rare Jack Daniel's," *Fortune*, July 1951, 105.

21. Ibid.

22. Green, 175.

This web page is maintained by
Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075
E-mail: htallant@georgetowncollege.edu

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE (AND HEALTH) AT MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY MINERAL SPRINGS IN KENTUCKY AND WEST VIRGINIA

Art Wrobel
University of Kentucky

Among the Dicken-Troutman-Balke Family Papers (hereafter cited as Dicken) is a sequence of five sonnets, written anonymously, that traces the history of Drennon Springs (Henry County, Kentucky) from its primordial origins through its triumphant apotheosis as a mineral resort in the mid-nineteenth century to its melancholy decline. Clearly, these verses lack grace and technique; evidently written without Erato's aid, the poet instead turned to fondly remembered recollections for inspiration, most notably those of the pleasures and gaiety that this establishment offered its guests. The second sonnet conveys Drennon's atmosphere during its heyday as it no doubt does that of other popular spas:

> I hear again, O Drennon! treading feet;
> But not the feet of flocks and herds are they;
> Thy woods are felled, thy vines are cleared away,
> And in their stead thy stately buildings greet
> The morning's sun with pride and splendor meet;
> And still the glory of thy primal day
> Doth crown thee solidly; and neath thy sway
> The golden hours on gilded pinions fleet.
> For in thy voiceful chambers dance doth reign
> And Music's magic spell dispenseth powers;
> And though the sick thy quickening waters quaff,
> Seeking from them relief unto their pain,
> Thy halls are loud with mirth and merry laugh,
> And Love's acknowledged sovereign of the hour.

Indeed, sundry amusements, glittering dances and the promise of flirtations, rich boards and excellent wine selections, all found in elegant surroundings and among genial company, had as much drawing power for some as the mineral waters had for invalids hoping to find relief by drinking and bathing in their purportedly curative properties.

Originally, the healing virtues of these sites lured early settlers who, no doubt, took their cue from the behavior of animals near these waters. One reminiscence described the response of a rider's horse to the water of the Black Sulphur Spring at the same Drennon Springs:
The water of the Black Sulphur Spring is very salt and sulphurous with a strong smell like burnt powder or burning coal. All animals become very fond of it. Many times in after years, I have had to sit firm and hold my horse as we reached the ford, so eager was he to get to the water. The stream is very cold, and the horses would thrust in their

noses and drink and drink, then take a long breath and drink again as if they could never get enough . . . . All the cattle are fond of it and it is very good for them, and it was sought after by the buffaloes, deer, bears, panthers and smaller beasts, that used to get there in great numbers. (Dicken)

Speculators and entrepreneurs, readily recognizing the enhanced value and potential of the land on which these licks and springs were located, developed it and, in an astonishingly short period of time, established fashionable resorts modeled after the great eastern resorts such as Ballston Springs and Saratoga which, in turn, imitated the great spas of England-Bath and Harrogate-and those of the continent.

Attracting patrons became a highly competitive affair, each resort issuing promotional tracts and running newspaper advertisements that included appreciative testimonials written by the formerly sick and now miraculously restored, descriptions of newly-added amenities, facilities, and entertainments; and the chemical analyses of the waters by medical authorities who invariably and favorably compared the waters to celebrated European spas: for instance, the waters of Harrodsburg or Graham's Springs (Mercer County) measured up to Seidlitz in Bohemia (Drake 147), Lower Blue Lick (Nicholas County) to Stachelberg in Switzerland (Matson 208), Olympian Springs (Bath County) to Kaiserquelle at Aix la Chapelle (Matson 205), Graham Springs to Baden-Baden (*Medical Historical Research Project* 54). The most common mineral springs were salt, white, black, red, and salt sulphurs, chalybeate, vitriol, alum, copperas, iodide, and Epsom, which were used as diuretics, cathartics, and sudorifics (Coleman 12n). Springs with more than one type of mineral or sulphur could attract invalids with various disabilities without their having to travel to other spas. For instance, Paroquet Springs "boasted three springs which were impregnated with combinations of epsom, salt, sulfur and magnesia" (McDowell 404). Taken either internally or used externally, the curative properties of these waters were said to be efficacious in treating a whole panoply of ailments, the most common being "diseases of the stomach, liver and kidneys, as well as . . . asthma, jaundice, skin diseases, consumption, 'brain fever,' enlargement of the joints, chronic rheumatism, bronchitis, 'bilious disorders,' general debility, 'female weakness,' ague, 'autumnal fevers,' dropsy, gout, neuralgia, dyspepsia," (Coleman 13) and any number of other diseases. It would seem, from scanning the promotional brochures the spas issued, that sulphur waters constituted the whole of the nineteenth century's *materia medica*.

Treatments included douches, tub baths, steam baths, enclosed immersion pools, and/or the imbibing of considerable quantities of glasses of water (some doctors recommended drinking as many as twenty glasses of water a day (Roomet 2), though Dr. Daniel Drake urged "moderation" (144). Sallie H. Wooley, writing to her father Robert Wickliffe, described her early morning routine at Blue Licks so: "Margaret [her sister] and I are getting the full benefit of the water-We rise a little after four o'clock and walk two miles drinking the water both going and returning; besides taking it occasionally through the day.-We have fixed upon this daily walk. (Wickliffe-Preston Papers, Box 38, Fol. 8, hereafter cited as Wickliffe). Dr. Drake also urged perseverance in drinking the water-understandably so. By all accounts, the water, because of its high sulphur content, tasted very nearly as vile as it smelled (Meeks 6), users most commonly describing it as having the taste of burnt gunpowder. Constantine S. Rafinesque, a Transylvania University scientist, described the water at Big Bone Lick as having "a bluish cast-an abominable taste, although readily drunk by the idlers who come-to loiter, drink, bathe, and kill the game-very plenty yet on the hills" (qtd. in Coleman 62).

However, what undoubtedly contributed more to the restoration of health than glasses of water and body wraps was the society, the entertainment, the activities that these resorts provided. Here men struck business deals while both men and women diverted themselves with the business of snaring mates or flirting outrageously. In an August 23, 1837 letter to William Preston (later Ambassador to Spain, Brigadier-General, and Confederate Ambassador to

Mexico), Robert Wickliffe, Jr. (later chargé d'affaires to Sardinia who also fought a duel with Cassius Clay) writes:

> The company at the springs was almost entirely from Kentucky, the poor Southerners finding Mississippi more healthy this year than formerly. I never met at any watering place so much beauty refinement and intelligence. Louisville was well represented. Besides your party [Preston's mother and family members], there were several ladies from that place that were the cynosure of many eyes. For myself I flirted with Mrs. Ford & fell in love with Mrs. Fitzhugh. Indeed, Mrs. F. is a very sweet & interesting lady, & I more than once took her to task for her haste in tying the knot . . . . John Preston & myself were roommates & unequivocally looked upon ourselves as the handsomest in person, more elegant in dress & more irresistibly eloquent & fascinating with the girls than all the rest of the *cravatted* bipeds that crowded the Ball Room . . . . I might fill up a whole sheet in describing the beauties & scenes occurrences & anecdotes that I met with . . . . (Wickliffe Box 40, Fol. 1)

Planters and their families came to the springs to escape the periodic outbreaks of yellow fever and the malarial months between late May and early September that oppressed the deep South around New Orleans and the gulf coast. These planters would join guests from Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, the Carolinas, Arkansas, the mid-west and even New York. Kentucky was the furthest north ventured by families who brought with them their black coachman and maid, as many did. Appreciative guests wrote home or recalled brilliant balls, masquerades, stage productions, lavish boards, imported French wines and liquors, croquet, lawn bowling, horseshoes, shooting competitions, riding, hunting, gaming, and walking. Indeed, the line separating the mineral spas from hotels and downright pleasure resorts is difficult to draw.

In addition to its usual entertainments, Crab Orchard Springs (Lincoln County), offered summer and fall racing at the near-by Spring Hill Race Course; Graham Springs at Harrodsburg had cotillion parties conducted by a "professor of dancing" (qtd. in McDowell 391, 392); Greenville Springs in Mercer County announced a "regular theatrical company of respectable performers" as well as "the best band of music that can be procured" (qtd. in Coleman 38). Dr. Daniel Drake, sounding a bit stuffy, warned invalids against "the dissipation, which is so commonly practised by those who visit watering places for amusement only" (143), and a bit priggish when he upbraided proprietors of these resorts for tolerating gambling and, especially, the presence of the "gambling banditti, who periodically infest these places. These," he wrote, "call off the attention of husbands, fathers, and brothers, from those whom they had conducted thither for health; they draw the unwary into their snares with the greater facility, because of the idleness which prevails at such places; in fine, the very rumour of their presence, is offensive to the taste and feelings, of moral and religious invalids; and has often banished them from the springs, before a proper trial was completed" (161-62). He wasn't that far from the mark. Cerulean Springs (Trigg County), originally a black sulphur spring until the 1811 earthquake changed its color to light blue (hence the name), offered bowling and ten-pin alleys and an upstairs barroom called "Poker Flats" where, so rumors circulated, guests won and lost crop money, horses, and servants (Coleman 52-53).

As the emphasis on entertainment and gaiety gradually usurped the business of health management, the facilities were not only enlarged to accommodate the greater press of guests but also the increased opportunities for amusement. For instance, the main building at Lower Blue Lick Springs was 670 feet in length, three stories high, with about 1,800 feet of gallery; the dining room 100 by 36 feet, the ball room 80 by 26. The hotel accommodated as many as 400 to 600 guests at a time (Collins 2: 654). Harrodsburg Springs were located on approximately 280 acres. "During the late fall of 1842 and first months of 1843, there was added a new brick hotel, 'full four stories high,' with 'a massy colonnade, rich capitals, and lofty entablature' acclaimed to be 'the finest edifice in the West.'"

It included a ballroom, fifty by one hundred feet; and bowling alleys, walks, an artificial lake and "an elegant saloon for the accommodation of patients who may wish for other kinds of physical exercise" completed the adornments. Dr. Graham announced that the springs were "'now capable of accommodating one thousand persons,' at the rate of twenty dollars per month for board. These additions completed, the Harrodsburg Springs became an establishment so extensive that when illuminated at night it might be seen for miles" (VanArsdall 403-04). Lewis Collin's *Historical Sketches of Kentucky* (1847) added more to the description of Harrodsburg Springs:

> The grounds are elevated and extensive; adorned with every variety of shrubbery grown in America, interspersed with some of the most beautiful and rare exotics from Europe and Asia, and traversed by wide gravel walks, intersecting and crossing each other in every direction.A small and beautiful lake, three hundred yards long, one hundred yards in width, and fifteen feet deep, lately excavated, is well stored with fish of the finest flavor, and its glassy surface enlivened by the presence of many wild and tame waterfowls. (qtd. in VanArsdall 404)

Describing his reaction to Harrodsburg Springs the evening of his arrival, N. Parker Willis concluded that "I had stumbled upon a most unexpected mixture of paradise and public-house" (220). Facilities also included bath houses for the clientele, warm showers and vapor baths, and avenues of private cottages often built by wealthy southerners who brought their families and servants for the entire watering season (Dicken) which usually ran from mid-May to mid-September.

Drake's moral sniffing about card-playing and the pursuit of excessive pleasure, evidently, fell on the collective deaf ears of proprietors who vied in outdoing one another to provide the most entertaining distractions, many of which would seem to undermine the very reason for attending a health facility. Indeed, Nathaniel Parker Willis noted the genius of Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham, the famed proprietor of "The Saratoga of the West," namely Harrodsburg Springs, for first recognizing the connection between the pursuit of health and pleasure; Willis called this now-widespread phenomenon "*the general siamese between hydropathy and watering-place*." He went on to observe that "Few belles have papas and mammas of undamaged constitutions. Few flaunt in lace in the evening, who would not be fairer as well as healthier for a 'pack in a wet sheet' in the morning." The amenities, par excellence, for a successful watering spa, Willis wrote, included "a ball-room, a water-cure establishment, and a good table . . . ; [These] are the three supplied to combine, for a world that employs its summer solstice to flirt, freshen and fatten" (225).

And flirt and freshen and fatten they did. Without a doubt, one of the most comprehensive and detailed descriptions of social life at a nineteenth-century spa (for which reasons I will quote extensively from it) was left by R. Wickliffe Preston (aged 20), the only son of General William Preston and Margaret Wickliffe Preston. In this letter of July 26, 1871, written from Greenbriar White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, he wrote the following to his sister Jess:

> Sister Peggy and I are having a most delightful time, the Springs, having exceeded even our anticipations in point of gaiety. We have Germans in the morning and Balls in the evening, so you see we would be kept busy even if we had nothing to do but dance. There are however a variety of other amusements almost equally as pleasant-and so we are in a rush nearly all the time . . . . It is livelyer today than ever, for there is to be a large fancy-dress ball, tonight, and this fact has attracted crowds . . . . A costumer is here from Washington with quite a variety of fancy dresses most of which he has hired. The majority of gentlemen however . . . will appear in full-dress evening suits. The costumes will only be worn by those men who either through negligence or

> necessity have failed to bring their dress-suits with them. Sister Peggie will wear her dress impersonating "Winter" which you are already familiar with, and I have no doubt but that she will look very well, though she appeared a little fagged at dinner, from having talked too much in the parlor this morning . . . . I will now close, as I must take a short nap having fatigued myself by playing billiards & ten pins all the morning. Besides there are three card tables of noisy old gentlemen in full blast around me, which circumstance is not conducive to good letter writing.

Two days later, Robert Preston reported to his mother not only his morning's activities, but described the aforementioned ball in a letter dated Friday, July 28, 1871:

> At nine o/c. the ball commenced, and continued with the exception of thirty minutes for supper, without intermission until three o/c. in the morning. The costumes generally speaking were very beautiful, and there were as usual quite a number of Black Princes, Hamlets, peasant & flower girls, kings, queens, sultanas, Turks, &c &c. Also costumes "au naturelle" such as "Night," "Winter," &c. In addition to this there were quite a number of buffooning costumes such as newsboys, boot-blacks, Ethiopians, Harlequins, etc. all of the latter wearing masks. There were also numerous martial impersonations, such as Indian warriors; stately cavaliers, liberally booted and spurred; and Captains and Generals with epaulettes broader than their shoulders and swords longer than their legs:-All of these affected the majestic, and stalked about grandly mashing corns, and tearing dresses in the most terrific manner. In fact they were all a nuisance to themselves and everyone else. The Harlequins were also annoyingly agile, and in endeavoring to carry out their characters destroyed many yards of muslin and tarleton, and received very withering glances from the owners thereof. We all had a most delightful time however, notwithstanding these slight drawbacks.
>
> Sister Peggie's dress was beautiful as you yourself know, and was as much admired I believe as any in the room. She enjoyed herself greatly, and was looking very well, barring a slightly jaded look, which is attributable to the late hours she has recently been keeping. She and Mary Dudley both make the mistake of going with too much of a rush. Any one to see their eagerness for all manner of amusements would imagine they were here for only a week, instead of a month. Every day at dinner they invariably inform us that they "have had the nicest time today, since they arrived at the Springs."! This remark has now been repeated for seven consecutive days, so it is needless to say it is growing slightly monotonous . . . . One of the most amusing features of our fancy-ball was an amateur brass-band and corps of jig dancers who took possession of the ball-room floor, and danced a break-down to an amateur version of "Shoo-Fly." After this performance the whole company (about five hundred in number) adjourned to the dining-room, where they partook of an excellent supper furnished by the Hotel, gratis. After supper the square-dancers were driven into the corners, & the "German" was initiated with a musical flourish. The figures were very well selected, and the dance well led by a competent Richmond beau. We commenced at one o/c. and danced till three, at which time the ball ended. I saved my dress-suit so as to wear it for the first time on this occasion, though now that it has been so auspiciously broken in, I shall wear it every night. Another circumstance which conduces no little to my pleasure is that the patent-leather gaiters Marshall made me are as soft and comfortable as an old glove, and I can dance in them to the best advantage. They are the only pair of easy boots I ever knew or heard of his making. The matter of easy boots is no inconsiderable item to me for I believe I dance twenty, or at least fifteen miles daily. Every night we have a dance which is in reality a ball, and we have morning German's three times a week. There are fewer good dancers here however that I expected to find. In fact there

> is so far, only one really good dancer here, and this is a Miss Williams from Staunton, who not only excels in dancing but is also very pretty and entertaining. There are numerous Washingtonians, Baltimoreans, Philadelphians, and New Yorkers here, & with one single exception they all dance abominably. This exception is a Miss Sprague of New York, who (mirabile dictu) is sensible enough to wear very loose shoes, and is both pretty & graceful. The men are more skilled in the art of Terpsichore (or rather Turp-sip-ry, as Sister Peggie will spell it,) though I can already see that their steps like my own are being spoiled by the clumsy girls with whom they dance. Dancing in my eyes is as much of a Fine Art as painting and music, and should be respected accordingly. When I am dancing with a girl like Miss Williams, on a smooth and nicely waxed floor with the "Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz" in full blast I believe I am as perfectly happy as it is possible for me to be. But when I get with a partner who goes with a hop, skip, and a jump, and who does not know exactly what she wants you to do, or what she wants to do herself, I believe I am as much exruciated as a painter can be, whose brush loses its hairs, and whose colors will not mix; or as a musician, who is compelled to play on a squeaky violin; or a piano without tune. The moral of this (as Jess would say) is that girls should either dance well, or not at all . . . I find I grow more and more fascinated with this place every day, for I believe I could enjoy myself even if there were no girls, nor ball-room, nor music, for I would still have ten-pins, billiards, pure water, & Sulphur-water baths, beautiful walks, rides and drives, & congenial young men of my own age with whom to associate. In fact I never led a life that suited me more exactly, and I can imagine that a life passed in this manner would be even more luxuriously delightful than that which Tennyson ascribes to his lotus-eaters. At any moment you can be perfectly gay or perfectly solitary, which two qualities strike me as being about the most necessary requisites to earthly happiness. Were it not for one fact I would almost imagine myself in Paradise, but that fact is sufficiently material to banish all such ideas. It is simply that you can hardly pass a minute here without feeling in your pockets for greenbacks. Every thing is extra from boot-blacks, waiters, & dining room servants, to the expenses of the German, for which we pay the band & ball-room attendants extra. Everything drinkable from Spring-water to Champagne is extra, and everything eatable that's at all good (except for venison of which there is an abundance) is extra . . . . Such luxuries as hacks, saddle horses, billiards & ten-pins are of course extra, and even a Sulphur bath is extra to the amount of seventy five cents. So you see this is most decidedly an extra place, though everything is conducted on such a delightfully grand scale, that almost everyone is willing to put up with a slight amount of imposition.

The last stanza of "The Song of Saratoga" written in 1869 at Highgate Springs, Vermont,-captured well the world of these spas:

> In short--as it goes in the world-
> They eat, and they drink, and they sleep;
> They talk, and they walk, and they woo;
> They sigh, and they ride, and they dance
> (with other unspeakable things);
> They pray, and they play, and they pay,-
> And that's what they do at the Springs.
> (qtd. in Roomet 4)

*I am profoundly indebted to Ms. Randolph Hollingsworth who not only directed my attention to many of the letters and documents from which I have so liberally quoted, but for providing me with the details of the

genealogies of the Preston and Wickliffe families.

Works Cited

Coleman, J[ohn] Winston. *The Springs of Kentucky: An Account of the Famed Watering-Places of the Bluegrass State, 1800-1935*. Lexington, KY: Winburn Press, 1955.

Collins, Lewis. *History of Kentucky*. 2 Vols. Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1966.

Dicken-Troutman-Balke Papers. Miscellaneous, undated Material. Pamphlets, Pictures, etc. (56M316) Rare Book Room, U. of Kentucky, Lexington, KY. fol. 1.

Drake, Daniel. "Notice of the Principal Mineral Springs of Kentucky and Ohio." *The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences* 2.3 (June 1828): 142-67.

Hardy, Sallie E. Marshall. "Old Kentucky Watering Places." *The American Historical Register* 2 (1895): 1385-1400.

Matson, George Charlton. *Water Resources of the Blue Grass Region, Kentucky*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909.

McDowell, Andrea. "The Pursuit of Health and Happiness at the Paroquet Springs in Kentucky: 1838-1888." *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 69.4 (1995): 390-420.

Medical Historical Research Project of the Work Projects Administration. *Medicine and Its Development in Kentucky*. Louisville Standard Printing Co., 1940.

Meeks, Harold A. "Stagnant, Smelly and Successful: Vermont Mineral Springs." *Vermont History* 47.1 (1979): 5-20.

Roomet, Louise B. "Vermont as a Resort Area in the Nineteenth Century." *Vermont History* 44.1 (1976): 1-13.

VanArsdall, C.A. "A Medical History of the Harrodsburg Springs." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 23.4 (1949): 387-418.

Weiss, Harry B. and Howard R. Kemble. The Great American Water-Cure Craze: *A History of Hydropathy in the United States*. Trenton, NJ: The Past Times Press, 1967.

Wickliffe-Preston Family Papers, Rare Book Room, U. of Kentucky, Box 60, fol. 5.

Willis, N. Parker. *Health Trip to the Tropics*. New York: Scribner, 1853.

BORDER STATES ON-LINE

Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, No. 12 (1999)

THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE (AND HEALTH) AT MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY MINERAL SPRINGS IN KENTUCKY AND WEST VIRGINIA

Art Wrobel
University of Kentucky

Among the Dicken-Troutman-Balke Family Papers (hereafter cited as Dicken) is a sequence of five sonnets, written anonymously, that traces the history of Drennon Springs (Henry County, Kentucky) from its primordial origins through its triumphant apotheosis as a mineral resort in the mid-nineteenth century to its melancholy decline. Clearly, these verses lack grace and technique; evidently written without Erato's aid, the poet instead turned to fondly remembered recollections for inspiration, most notably those of the pleasures and gaiety that this establishment offered its guests. The second sonnet conveys Drennon's atmosphere during its heyday as it no doubt does that of other popular spas:

> I hear again, O Drennon! treading feet;
> But not the feet of flocks and herds are they;
> Thy woods are felled, thy vines are cleared away,
> And in their stead thy stately buildings greet
> The morning's sun with pride and splendor meet;
> And still the glory of thy primal day
> Doth crown thee solidly; and neath thy sway
> The golden hours on gilded pinions fleet.
> For in thy voiceful chambers dance doth reign
> And Music's magic spell dispenseth powers;
> And though the sick thy quickening waters quaff,
> Seeking from them relief unto their pain,
> Thy halls are loud with mirth and merry laugh,
> And Love's acknowledged sovereign of the hour.

Indeed, sundry amusements, glittering dances and the promise of flirtations, rich boards and excellent wine selections, all found in elegant surroundings and among genial company, had as much drawing power for some as

the mineral waters had for invalids hoping to find relief by drinking and bathing in their purportedly curative properties.

Originally, the healing virtues of these sites lured early settlers who, no doubt, took their cue from the behavior of animals near these waters. One reminiscence described the response of a rider's horse to the water of the Black Sulphur Spring at the same Drennon Springs:

The water of the Black Sulphur Spring is very salt and sulphurous with a strong smell like burnt powder or burning coal. All animals become very fond of it. Many times in after years, I have had to sit firm and hold my horse as we reached the ford, so eager was he to get to the water. The stream is very cold, and the horses would thrust in their noses and drink and drink, then take a long breath and drink again as if they could never get enough . . . . All the cattle are fond of it and it is very good for them, and it was sought after by the buffaloes, deer, bears, panthers and smaller beasts, that used to get there in great numbers. (Dicken)

Speculators and entrepreneurs, readily recognizing the enhanced value and potential of the land on which these licks and springs were located, developed it and, in an astonishingly short period of time, established fashionable resorts modeled after the great eastern resorts such as Ballston Springs and Saratoga which, in turn, imitated the great spas of England-Bath and Harrogate-and those of the continent.

Attracting patrons became a highly competitive affair, each resort issuing promotional tracts and running newspaper advertisements that included appreciative testimonials written by the formerly sick and now miraculously restored, descriptions of newly-added amenities, facilities, and entertainments; and the chemical analyses of the waters by medical authorities who invariably and favorably compared the waters to celebrated European spas: for instance, the waters of Harrodsburg or Graham's Springs (Mercer County) measured up to Seidlitz in Bohemia (Drake 147), Lower Blue Lick (Nicholas County) to Stachelberg in Switzerland (Matson 208), Olympian Springs (Bath County) to Kaiserquelle at Aix la Chapelle (Matson 205), Graham Springs to Baden-Baden (*Medical Historical Research Project* 54). The most common mineral springs were salt, white, black, red, and salt sulphurs, chalybeate, vitriol, alum, copperas, iodide, and Epsom, which were used as diuretics, cathartics, and sudorifics (Coleman 12n). Springs with more than one type of mineral or sulphur could attract invalids with various disabilities without their having to travel to other spas. For instance, Paroquet Springs "boasted three springs which were impregnated with combinations of epsom, salt, sulfur and magnesia" (McDowell 404). Taken either internally or used externally, the curative properties of these waters were said to be efficacious in treating a whole panoply of ailments, the most common being "diseases of the stomach, liver and kidneys, as well as . . . asthma, jaundice, skin diseases, consumption, 'brain fever,' enlargement of the joints, chronic rheumatism, bronchitis, 'bilious disorders,' general debility, 'female weakness,' ague, 'autumnal fevers,' dropsy, gout, neuralgia, dyspepsia," (Coleman 13) and any number of other diseases. It would seem, from scanning the promotional brochures the spas issued, that sulphur waters constituted the whole of the nineteenth century's *materia medica*.

Treatments included douches, tub baths, steam baths, enclosed immersion pools, and/or the imbibing of considerable quantities of glasses of water (some doctors recommended drinking as many as twenty glasses of water a day (Roomet 2), though Dr. Daniel Drake urged "moderation" (144). Sallie H. Wooley, writing to her father Robert Wickliffe, described her early morning routine at Blue Licks so: "Margaret [her sister] and I are getting the full benefit of the water-We rise a little after four o'clock and walk two miles drinking the water both going and returning; besides taking it occasionally through the day.-We have fixed upon this daily walk. (Wickliffe-Preston Papers, Box 38, Fol. 8, hereafter cited as Wickliffe). Dr. Drake also urged perseverance in drinking the water-understandably so. By all accounts, the water, because of its high sulphur content, tasted very nearly as vile as it smelled (Meeks 6), users most commonly describing it as having the taste of burnt gunpowder.

Constantine S. Rafinesque, a Transylvania University scientist, described the water at Big Bone Lick as having "a bluish cast-an abominable taste, although readily drunk by the idlers who come-to loiter, drink, bathe, and kill the game-very plenty yet on the hills" (qtd. in Coleman 62).

However, what undoubtedly contributed more to the restoration of health than glasses of water and body wraps was the society, the entertainment, the activities that these resorts provided. Here men struck business deals while both men and women diverted themselves with the business of snaring mates or flirting outrageously. In an August 23, 1837 letter to William Preston (later Ambassador to Spain, Brigadier-General, and Confederate Ambassador to Mexico), Robert Wickliffe, Jr. (later chargé d'affaires to Sardinia who also fought a duel with Cassius Clay) writes:

> The company at the springs was almost entirely from Kentucky, the poor Southerners finding Mississippi more healthy this year than formerly. I never met at any watering place so much beauty refinement and intelligence. Louisville was well represented. Besides your party [Preston's mother and family members], there were several ladies from that place that were the cynosure of many eyes. For myself I flirted with Mrs. Ford & fell in love with Mrs. Fitzhugh. Indeed, Mrs. F. is a very sweet & interesting lady, & I more than once took her to task for her haste in tying the knot . . . . John Preston & myself were roommates & unequivocally looked upon ourselves as the handsomest in person, more elegant in dress & more irresistibly eloquent & fascinating with the girls than all the rest of the *cravatted* bipeds that crowded the Ball Room . . . . I might fill up a whole sheet in describing the beauties & scenes occurrences & anecdotes that I met with . . . . (Wickliffe Box 40, Fol. 1)

Planters and their families came to the springs to escape the periodic outbreaks of yellow fever and the malarial months between late May and early September that oppressed the deep South around New Orleans and the gulf coast. These planters would join guests from Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, the Carolinas, Arkansas, the mid-west and even New York. Kentucky was the furthest north ventured by families who brought with them their black coachman and maid, as many did. Appreciative guests wrote home or recalled brilliant balls, masquerades, stage productions, lavish boards, imported French wines and liquors, croquet, lawn bowling, horseshoes, shooting competitions, riding, hunting, gaming, and walking. Indeed, the line separating the mineral spas from hotels and downright pleasure resorts is difficult to draw.

In addition to its usual entertainments, Crab Orchard Springs (Lincoln County), offered summer and fall racing at the near-by Spring Hill Race Course; Graham Springs at Harrodsburg had cotillion parties conducted by a "professor of dancing" (qtd. in McDowell 391, 392); Greenville Springs in Mercer County announced a "regular theatrical company of respectable performers" as well as "the best band of music that can be procured" (qtd. in Coleman 38). Dr. Daniel Drake, sounding a bit stuffy, warned invalids against "the dissipation, which is so commonly practised by those who visit watering places for amusement only" (143), and a bit priggish when he upbraided proprietors of these resorts for tolerating gambling and, especially, the presence of the "gambling banditti, who periodically infest these places. These," he wrote, "call off the attention of husbands, fathers, and brothers, from those whom they had conducted thither for health; they draw the unwary into their snares with the greater facility, because of the idleness which prevails at such places; in fine, the very rumour of their presence, is offensive to the taste and feelings, of moral and religious invalids; and has often banished them from the springs, before a proper trial was completed" (161-62). He wasn't that far from the mark. Cerulean Springs (Trigg County), originally a black sulphur spring until the 1811 earthquake changed its color to light blue (hence the name), offered bowling and ten-pin alleys and an upstairs barroom called "Poker Flats" where, so rumors circulated, guests won and lost crop money, horses, and servants (Coleman 52-53).

As the emphasis on entertainment and gaiety gradually usurped the business of health management, the facilities were not only enlarged to accommodate the greater press of guests but also the increased opportunities for amusement. For instance, the main building at Lower Blue Lick Springs was 670 feet in length, three stories high, with about 1,800 feet of gallery; the dining room 100 by 36 feet, the ball room 80 by 26. The hotel accommodated as many as 400 to 600 guests at a time (Collins 2: 654). Harrodsburg Springs were located on approximately 280 acres. "During the late fall of 1842 and first months of 1843, there was added a new brick hotel, 'full four stories high,' with 'a massy colonnade, rich capitals, and lofty entablature' acclaimed to be 'the finest edifice in the West.'" It included a ballroom, fifty by one hundred feet; and bowling alleys, walks, an artificial lake and "an elegant saloon for the accommodation of patients who may wish for other kinds of physical exercise" completed the adornments. Dr. Graham announced that the springs were "'now capable of accommodating one thousand persons,' at the rate of twenty dollars per month for board. These additions completed, the Harrodsburg Springs became an establishment so extensive that when illuminated at night it might be seen for miles" (VanArsdall 403-04). Lewis Collin's *Historical Sketches of Kentucky* (1847) added more to the description of Harrodsburg Springs:

> The grounds are elevated and extensive; adorned with every variety of shrubbery grown in America, interspersed with some of the most beautiful and rare exotics from Europe and Asia, and traversed by wide gravel walks, intersecting and crossing each other in every direction.A small and beautiful lake, three hundred yards long, one hundred yards in width, and fifteen feet deep, lately excavated, is well stored with fish of the finest flavor, and its glassy surface enlivened by the presence of many wild and tame waterfowls. (qtd. in VanArsdall 404)

Describing his reaction to Harrodsburg Springs the evening of his arrival, N. Parker Willis concluded that "I had stumbled upon a most unexpected mixture of paradise and public-house" (220). Facilities also included bath houses for the clientele, warm showers and vapor baths, and avenues of private cottages often built by wealthy southerners who brought their families and servants for the entire watering season (Dicken) which usually ran from mid-May to mid-September.

Drake's moral sniffing about card-playing and the pursuit of excessive pleasure, evidently, fell on the collective deaf ears of proprietors who vied in outdoing one another to provide the most entertaining distractions, many of which would seem to undermine the very reason for attending a health facility. Indeed, Nathaniel Parker Willis noted the genius of Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham, the famed proprietor of "The Saratoga of the West," namely Harrodsburg Springs, for first recognizing the connection between the pursuit of health and pleasure; Willis called this now-widespread phenomenon "*the general siamese between hydropathy and watering-place*." He went on to observe that "Few belles have papas and mammas of undamaged constitutions. Few flaunt in lace in the evening, who would not be fairer as well as healthier for a 'pack in a wet sheet' in the morning." The amenities, par excellence, for a successful watering spa, Willis wrote, included "a ball-room, a water-cure establishment, and a good table . . . ; [These] are the three supplied to combine, for a world that employs its summer solstice to flirt, freshen and fatten" (225).

And flirt and freshen and fatten they did. Without a doubt, one of the most comprehensive and detailed descriptions of social life at a nineteenth-century spa (for which reasons I will quote extensively from it) was left by R. Wickliffe Preston (aged 20), the only son of General William Preston and Margaret Wickliffe Preston. In this letter of July 26, 1871, written from Greenbriar White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, he wrote the following to his sister Jess:

> Sister Peggy and I are having a most delightful time, the Springs, having exceeded even our anticipations in point of gaiety. We have Germans in the morning and Balls in the evening, so you see we would be kept busy even if we had nothing to do but dance. There are however a variety of other amusements almost equally as pleasant-and so we are in a rush nearly all the time . . . . It is livelyer today than ever, for there is to be a large fancy-dress ball, tonight, and this fact has attracted crowds . . . . A costumer is here from Washington with quite a variety of fancy dresses most of which he has hired. The majority of gentlemen however . . . will appear in full-dress evening suits. The costumes will only be worn by those men who either through negligence or necessity have failed to bring their dress-suits with them. Sister Peggie will wear her dress impersonating "Winter" which you are already familiar with, and I have no doubt but that she will look very well, though she appeared a little fagged at dinner, from having talked too much in the parlor this morning . . . . I will now close, as I must take a short nap having fatigued myself by playing billiards & ten pins all the morning. Besides there are three card tables of noisy old gentlemen in full blast around me, which circumstance is not conducive to good letter writing.

Two days later, Robert Preston reported to his mother not only his morning's activities, but described the aforementioned ball in a letter dated Friday, July 28, 1871:

> At nine o/c. the ball commenced, and continued with the exception of thirty minutes for supper, without intermission until three o/c. in the morning. The costumes generally speaking were very beautiful, and there were as usual quite a number of Black Princes, Hamlets, peasant & flower girls, kings, queens, sultanas, Turks, &c &c. Also costumes "au naturelle" such as "Night," "Winter," &c. In addition to this there were quite a number of buffooning costumes such as newsboys, boot-blacks, Ethiopians, Harlequins, etc. all of the latter wearing masks. There were also numerous martial impersonations, such as Indian warriors; stately cavaliers, liberally booted and spurred; and Captains and Generals with epaulettes broader than their shoulders and swords longer than their legs:-All of these affected the majestic, and stalked about grandly mashing corns, and tearing dresses in the most terrific manner. In fact they were all a nuisance to themselves and everyone else. The Harlequins were also annoyingly agile, and in endeavoring to carry out their characters destroyed many yards of muslin and tarleton, and received very withering glances from the owners thereof. We all had a most delightful time however, notwithstanding these slight drawbacks.
>
> Sister Peggie's dress was beautiful as you yourself know, and was as much admired I believe as any in the room. She enjoyed herself greatly, and was looking very well, barring a slightly jaded look, which is attributable to the late hours she has recently been keeping. She and Mary Dudley both make the mistake of going with too much of a rush. Any one to see their eagerness for all manner of amusements would imagine they were here for only a week, instead of a month. Every day at dinner they invariably inform us that they "have had the nicest time today, since they arrived at the Springs."! This remark has now been repeated for seven consecutive days, so it is needless to say it is growing slightly monotonous . . . . One of the most amusing features of our fancy-ball was an amateur brass-band and corps of jig dancers who took possession of the ball-room floor, and danced a break-down to an amateur version of "Shoo-Fly." After this performance the whole company (about five hundred in number) adjourned to the dining-room, where they partook of an excellent supper furnished by the Hotel, gratis. After supper the square-dancers were driven into the corners, & the "German" was initiated with a musical flourish. The figures were very well selected, and the dance well led by a competent Richmond beau. We commenced at one o/c. and

> danced till three, at which time the ball ended. I saved my dress-suit so as to wear it for the first time on this occasion, though now that it has been so auspiciously broken in, I shall wear it every night. Another circumstance which conduces no little to my pleasure is that the patent-leather gaiters Marshall made me are as soft and comfortable as an old glove, and I can dance in them to the best advantage. They are the only pair of easy boots I ever knew or heard of his making. The matter of easy boots is no inconsiderable item to me for I believe I dance twenty, or at least fifteen miles daily. Every night we have a dance which is in reality a ball, and we have morning German's three times a week. There are fewer good dancers here however that I expected to find. In fact there is so far, only one really good dancer here, and this is a Miss Williams from Staunton, who not only excels in dancing but is also very pretty and entertaining. There are numerous Washingtonians, Baltimoreans, Philadelphians, and New Yorkers here, & with one single exception they all dance abominably. This exception is a Miss Sprague of New York, who (mirabile dictu) is sensible enough to wear very loose shoes, and is both pretty & graceful. The men are more skilled in the art of Terpsichore (or rather Turp-sip-ry, as Sister Peggie will spell it,) though I can already see that their steps like my own are being spoiled by the clumsy girls with whom they dance. Dancing in my eyes is as much of a Fine Art as painting and music, and should be respected accordingly. When I am dancing with a girl like Miss Williams, on a smooth and nicely waxed floor with the "Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz" in full blast I believe I am as perfectly happy as it is possible for me to be. But when I get with a partner who goes with a hop, skip, and a jump, and who does not know exactly what she wants you to do, or what she wants to do herself, I believe I am as much exruciated as a painter can be, whose brush loses its hairs, and whose colors will not mix; or as a musician, who is compelled to play on a squeaky violin; or a piano without tune. The moral of this (as Jess would say) is that girls should either dance well, or not at all . . . I find I grow more and more fascinated with this place every day, for I believe I could enjoy myself even if there were no girls, nor ball-room, nor music, for I would still have ten-pins, billiards, pure water, & Sulphur-water baths, beautiful walks, rides and drives, & congenial young men of my own age with whom to associate. In fact I never led a life that suited me more exactly, and I can imagine that a life passed in this manner would be even more luxuriously delightful than that which Tennyson ascribes to his lotus-eaters. At any moment you can be perfectly gay or perfectly solitary, which two qualities strike me as being about the most necessary requisites to earthly happiness. Were it not for one fact I would almost imagine myself in Paradise, but that fact is sufficiently material to banish all such ideas. It is simply that you can hardly pass a minute here without feeling in your pockets for greenbacks. Every thing is extra from boot-blacks, waiters, & dining room servants, to the expenses of the German, for which we pay the band & ball-room attendants extra. Everything drinkable from Spring-water to Champagne is extra, and everything eatable that's at all good (except for venison of which there is an abundance) is extra . . . . Such luxuries as hacks, saddle horses, billiards & ten-pins are of course extra, and even a Sulphur bath is extra to the amount of seventy five cents. So you see this is most decidedly an extra place, though everything is conducted on such a delightfully grand scale, that almost everyone is willing to put up with a slight amount of imposition.

The last stanza of "The Song of Saratoga" written in 1869 at Highgate Springs, Vermont,-captured well the world of these spas:

> In short--as it goes in the world-
> They eat, and they drink, and they sleep;
> They talk, and they walk, and they woo;

They sigh, and they ride, and they dance
(with other unspeakable things);
They pray, and they play, and they pay,-
And that's what they do at the Springs.
(qtd. in Roomet 4)

*I am profoundly indebted to Ms. Randolph Hollingsworth who not only directed my attention to many of the letters and documents from which I have so liberally quoted, but for providing me with the details of the genealogies of the Preston and Wickliffe families.

Works Cited

Coleman, J[ohn] Winston. *The Springs of Kentucky: An Account of the Famed Watering-Places of the Bluegrass State, 1800-1935*. Lexington, KY: Winburn Press, 1955.

Collins, Lewis. *History of Kentucky*. 2 Vols. Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1966.

Dicken-Troutman-Balke Papers. Miscellaneous, undated Material. Pamphlets, Pictures, etc. (56M316) Rare Book Room, U. of Kentucky, Lexington, KY. fol. 1.

Drake, Daniel. "Notice of the Principal Mineral Springs of Kentucky and Ohio." *The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences* 2.3 (June 1828): 142-67.

Hardy, Sallie E. Marshall. "Old Kentucky Watering Places." *The American Historical Register* 2 (1895): 1385-1400.

Matson, George Charlton. *Water Resources of the Blue Grass Region, Kentucky*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909.

McDowell, Andrea. "The Pursuit of Health and Happiness at the Paroquet Springs in Kentucky: 1838-1888." *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 69.4 (1995): 390-420.

Medical Historical Research Project of the Work Projects Administration. *Medicine and Its Development in Kentucky*. Louisville Standard Printing Co., 1940.

Meeks, Harold A. "Stagnant, Smelly and Successful: Vermont Mineral Springs." *Vermont History* 47.1 (1979): 5-20.

Roomet, Louise B. "Vermont as a Resort Area in the Nineteenth Century." *Vermont History* 44.1 (1976): 1-13.

VanArsdall, C.A. "A Medical History of the Harrodsburg Springs." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 23.4 (1949): 387-418.

Weiss, Harry B. and Howard R. Kemble. The Great American Water-Cure Craze: *A History of Hydropathy in the*

United States. Trenton, NJ: The Past Times Press, 1967.

Wickliffe-Preston Family Papers, Rare Book Room, U. of Kentucky, Box 60, fol. 5.

Willis, N. Parker. *Health Trip to the Tropics*. New York: Scribner, 1853.

This web page is maintained by
Dr. Harold D. Tallant, Department of History, Georgetown College
400 East College Street, Georgetown, KY 40324, (502) 863-8075
E-mail: htallant@georgetowncollege.edu