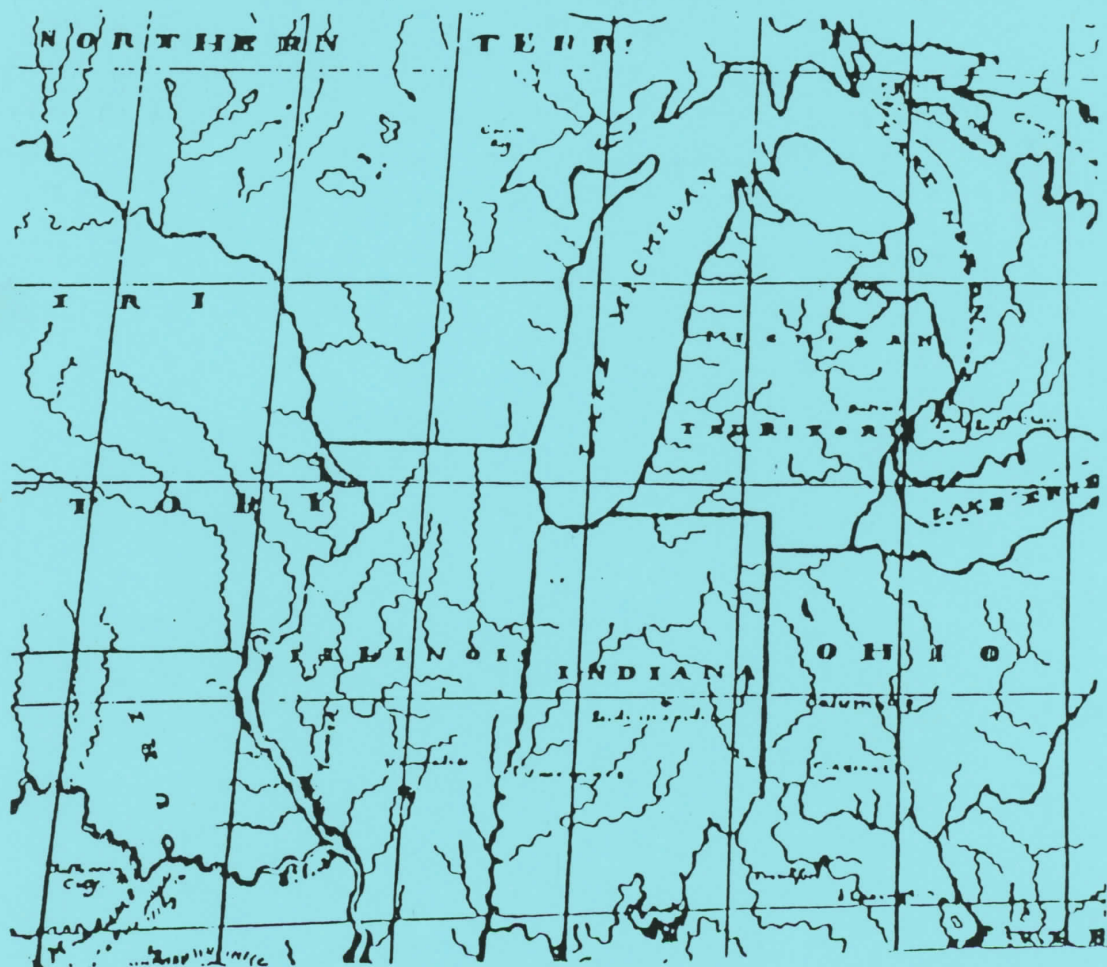


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Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Newsletter

Volume Twenty-Four
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Spring, 1994

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The Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference

The Twenty-fourth annual conference of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, the symposium "The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest" and the concurrent Midwest Poetry Festival, was held at the Union Building, Michigan State University, on May 12, 13, and 14, 1994. About 100 members participated by presenting papers, giving readings, and participating in the annual business meeting and the editorial meeting of the Dictionary of Midwestern Literature project.

Featured at the Awards Dinner on Friday, Evening, May 13, was the presentation of the Mid America Awards for 1994 for Distinguished Contributions to the Study of Midwestern Literature to Edgar M. Branch and to John E. Hallwas, both of whose work has not only contributed to our knowledge of the literature of the Midwest, but has brought distinction to the Society as well.

Also presented at the Awards Dinner was the Mark Twain Award for 1994 for Distinguished Contributions to Midwestern Literature to William Gass, author of In the Heart of Heart of the Country, Omensetter's Luck, Willis Masters' Lonesome Wife and numerous other works.

Also announced at the dinner were the new officers for 1994-95:

Mary DeJong Obuchowski, President
Ronald Grosh, Vice President and President-Elect
Mark Van Wormer, Executive Council
Thomas Pribek, Executive Council

At the annual convivium, held at the home of Roger and Mary Bresnahan on Saturday afternoon, May 14, announcement was made of the conference awards founded by Gwendolyn Brooks, the Midwest Heritage Award for the best paper read, the Midwest Poetry Award, for the best poem read, and the Midwest Fiction Award for the best story read. Winners and recipients of honorable mention are:

Midwest Poetry Award

Winner: Edward Haworth Hoepfner for "The Dead of Winter"
Honorable Mention: Skaidrite Stelzer for "Kalamazoo"
Honorable Mention: Florri McMillan for "Farmer's Thirst"

Midwest Fiction Award

Winner: Christopher Steiber for "Five Portraits:
Honorable Mention: Jim Gorman for "The Dickie Story"

At the business meeting, members voted a modest dues increase to partially offset the continuing deficit of the Society, and it was further voted that all future participants in the annual conference must be paid-up members. For the next conference, to be held on May 11-13, 1994, in East Lansing, Mary DeJong Obuchowski, president for 1994-95, will be in charge of the program, and Roger Bresnahan and Dave Anderson will handle local arrangements.

David D. Anderson

The MidAmerica Awards for 1994: Presented to Edgar M. Branch and John E. Hallwas

In 1977, at the Seventh Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, the MidAmerica Award was instituted to recognize those who have made major contributions to our understanding of the literature that we profess to study. The first recipients, John Flanagan of Illinois in 1977, Russel Nye of Michigan in 1978, Walter Havighurst of Ohio in 1979, and Harlan Hatcher of Ohio and Michigan in 1980, were those whose efforts were directed to defining the region as a cultural rather than geographic entity and identifying and understanding the literature that gives voice to that varied and yet uniquely singular region.

Tonight we are honoring two scholars of Midwestern literature, both of whom are very much in the tradition established by Flanagan, Nye, and the others. The first is Edgar M. Branch, native Midwesterner, Research Professor of English Emeritus at Miami University in Ohio, and continuing members of the Board of Directors of the Mark Twain Project at Berkeley as well as literary executor of the James T. Farrell estate.

Professor Branch has written fourteen books on Mark Twain and five on James T. Farrell, as well as scores of articles and papers on both. A truly distinguished contributor to the study of Midwestern Literature, I am pleased that one of the two MidAmerica Awards for 1994 is presented to Edgar M. Branch.

Professor Branch had fully intended to be here tonight, but emergency health crises in the past two weeks make it impossible. He sends greetings to you all and his gratitude for the recognition given his work. Typically, his letter concludes, "I think the remarkable work they [the membership] are doing is what truly deserves recognition.

Equally honored tonight is John E. Hallwas, Professor of English at Western Illinois University. A Midwesterner by choice as well as birth, his major interest is the literature of Illinois, with an additional interest in its history. Formerly editor of Western Illinois Regional Studies. Professor Hallwas has published 16 books on various topics in his fields of interest as well as literally hundreds of articles, essays, papers, monographs, and other works designed to further our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the literature of that state culturally as well as geographically central to the Midwest. I'm delighted that Professor Hallwas is the recipient of the MidAmerica Award tonight. I'd like Marcia Noe to come up and make the actual presentation.

David D. Anderson

The Mark Twain Award for 1994

In a remarkable essay in the May, 1994 issue of Harper's a well-known contemporary writer examines the state and nature of autobiography in America in the 1990s. In it, in tones sometimes reminiscent of the later Mark Twain, he comments that today, "History is now a comic book and autobiography the confessions of celluloid whores and boorish noisemakers whose tabloid lives are presented for our titillation by ghosts still undeservedly alive." The master of the well-turned phrase, the possessor of an ear keenly tuned to the language as well as the inner resonances of the human psyche, the recorder of the various nuances of our time and place, the only man capable of formulating such a defining phrase as In the Heart of the Heart of the Country and then going on to explicate that phrase in human terms and the author of that essay in Harper's is with us tonight. He is William Gass, who came out of Fargo, North Dakota to define, in the words of the late John T. Frederick, the Midwest, its experience, and its people, not only to the world but to Midwesterners themselves, and who does so in the living--and sometimes pithy--language that Mark Twain gave to the American mainstream.

Thus it is most appropriate that William Gass is the recipient of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature's Mark Twain Award for 1994. In the tradition of his predecessors who've won the award since Jack Conroy first received it in 1980 and Mona Van Dyne in 1993, William Gass had contributed richly to the literature that has come out of the Midwest to enrich and direct that of the nation. For Omensetter's Luck, for Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife, for In the Heart of the Heart of the Country, for the challenging essays in journals ranging from the Times Literary Supplement to Esquire--and, yes, to Harper's--and for the forthcoming novel The Tunnel, I am pleased to present the Mark Twain Award for 1994 to William Gass.

David D. Anderson

In Memoriam: William C. McCann

William C. "Bill" McCann, Chair Underwriter for the Michigan State Accident Fund, man of letters, and Founding Member of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, died at his home in East Lansing, Michigan, on May 15, 1994, at 81. Born in Irving, Michigan, on May 4, 1913, Bill graduated from Michigan State, where he played varsity baseball, in 1935. During his career with the State of Michigan, he was a regular contributor of reviews and essays to Michigan History, the Reporter, the Progressive, the Lansing State Journal, the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature Newsletter, and other journals, and he was a contributing editor to the Dictionary of American Biography. He edited Ambrose Bierce's Civil War in two editions and presented papers at SSML and PCA meetings well into his retirement from state service.

Bill also served on the Michigan Council for the Humanities and the Michigan Civil War Centennial Commission, and he was active in the MSU Alumni Association, the Varsity Alumni Club, the Old Times Baseball Association, and the George Ade Society. Surviving are his wife Isabelle, daughter Jane and her husband Randy, two grandsons, and a great grandson. He was buried in Rutland Township, Barry County, Michigan, near his birthplace.

Truly a man of letters rather than an academic, Bill's services to literature, to history, to the life of the mind and the organizations that support them were both significant and important, and he will be missed. His services, contributions, support, and encouragement in the early years of the Society are beyond measure, and his comments, criticism, and suggestions have helped give shape and direction to many historical, critical, and biographical studies, as the acknowledgments in many books by myself and numerous others give eloquent testimony. His passing leaves rich memories and a physical and intellectual void.

David D. Anderson

The Case of Earl Thompson

by

Tom Page

Shunned by academic critics, the populist novelist from Wichita, Kansas, Earl Thompson, who published four novels between 1970 and 1981 (three before his death in 1978, the last posthumously), is still in print and continues to be read. Thompson was a novelist in the tradition of American naturalism who attempted to understand his world and times. In his trilogy of autobiographical novels: *A Garden of Sand*, *Tattoo*, and *The Devil to Pay*, Thompson analyses his people and experience from the point of view of Cat, Jack, or Jarl--the various names given his central character: a thinly disguised Earl. In these novels Thompson relates the story of an incestuous relationship with his mother and his disgust of racism, homophobia, militarism, and imperialism. While *A Garden of Sand* has some rough spots, in *Tattoo*, *The Devil to Pay*, and *Caldo Largo*--the story of an alienated veteran who becomes a gun runner in the Caribbean--his novelistic skills are fully developed.

Who are Thompson's people? In an interview published in *Esquire* in 1970, Thompson said:

My persisting values are those of that class which is trapped between poverty that is a personal moral failure and the lure of material reward for citizenship they can never achieve. A class that is a persistent pain in the ass to all representative societies, whatever their ism. People who are so early frightened by violence anything short of death is a personal victory. And all have been wounded.

Jack, the protagonist of *A Garden of Sand*, is raised by his maternal grandparents in Wichita after his father's death. His grandfather is a proud, populist farmer on the outskirts of Wichita who loses his farm in the depression

Tom Page

of the 1930's and moves into the city. The grandfather, fiercely independent in the spirit of the old west that once prevailed in the city and the region, rails against all politicians and establishments. Not willing to humble himself by working on WPA projects, his family sinks ever lower on the social scale to live in a plywood trailer off an alley in north Wichita, where the old man dies in the early 1950's. The grandmother takes in sewing and works odd jobs to keep the family together.

Jack's mother becomes a prostitute, and for a time, Jack, precocious and old beyond his years, enters into a sexual relationship with her. Although relatively young, she dies of leukemia during Jack's youth. He is emotionally marked by the image of his mother and himself having sex, and the women that Jack loves find him cold and insensitive. In the third novel of the trilogy, he remarks on his inability to experience love, as opposed to lust. When *A Garden of Sand* and *Tattoo* were published in 1970 and 1974 respectively, denial that incest ever occurred was the norm. Mother-son sexual relationships, if and when they happened, were strongly repressed, but Earl Thompson had the guts and the nerve to publish his account of sexual abuse at a time when discussion of such relationships was taboo.

At the age of fourteen, in the last months of W.W.II, Jack lies to a recruiting officer and joins the navy. He sees duty in China; the misery and violence he witnesses there will influence his later attitudes concerning racism, militarism, and imperialism. His sexual education continues in China. While a crewman on a hospital ship, he is involved in an orgy with a drunken nurse; on shore he visits prostitutes. At home again a few years later, Jack fails in marriage and work. He is involved with another woman, and his wife leaves him. He doesn't seem to fit in, although he works hard, is the judgment of one of his bosses. Unable to stand life in Wichita, Jack goes to California where he joins the Army. He falls in love with an American woman in Germany, but the affair ends when he is ordered to Korea. *Tattoo* ends with a scene from the

Tom Page

retreat from the Yalu during the Korean War. Jack survives and is home on leave when his grandfather dies. He stays in the army and is promoted to the rank of Master Sergeant. As the youngest top sergeant in the army, Jack is courted by journalists and politicians. He realizes that it is his class, the poor, who are recruited to fight the cold war, and that America has come to depend on a military economy for its apparent prosperity. Deciding he wants an education and to become a journalist, Jack resigns from the army.

The Devil to Pay finds Jack as a student journalist at the University of Missouri; he writes a story about the campus police watching for "queers" behind two-way mirrors in the men's rooms. Censured by the administration, Jack leaves the university in disgust. He pursues journalism and becomes a military analyst for a Chicago area newspaper. There he learns the cold war is taken for a patriotic given and the military-industrial complex is a sacred cow. He opens a small business in Brooklyn and writes part-time. After forty rejections, Jack's first novel is accepted for publication, mainly because his girlfriend is the wife of an editor. He is against the war in Vietnam and admires the youth who take a stand against it, but feels strangely left out of events and powerless to influence them.

According to the entry for him in *Contemporary Authors*, "Earl Thompson's first novel was widely praised by critics and earned a National Book Award nomination. *Caldo Largo* received favorable reviews. Christopher Lehman-Haupt, quoted in *Contemporary Authors*, said, "he makes his Gulf waters seethe with wildlife, about which he has interesting lore to impart that even Melville forgot to mention." Thompson's social concerns also are noted by this reviewer:

What saves *Caldo Largo* from being merely an exciting yarn--assuming that it has to be rescued from such a state at all--is Mr. Thompson's refreshingly skeptical view of the American system, which serves to make entirely plausible the desperate pitch of his character's behavior. It is by no means propagandistic social realism that Mr. Thompson serves up. He couldn't write that drearily even if he set out to.

Tom Page

In the *Hudson Review* in 1975, William H. Pritchard, in a review essay of some fourteen novels, upholds Jamesian high art and pans *Tattoo*, although he admits it is "searingly honest." A reviewer of *The Devil to Pay*, in the *Wichita Eagle Beacon*, writing in 1982, fails in any meaningful sense to understand the novel: "it is like the fictionalized diary of a writer who appears to have had as much trouble dealing with success as with failure." Actually, this review says more about the reviewer than it does about Thompson, but suggests certain conclusions, too, about the novelist's ability as a writer: "When you realize that Cat is white, the novel makes less sense, although it makes more sense if you read *A Garden of Sand*, an earlier Thompson novel."

Meridel Le Sueur places Thompson in the tradition of Dreiser and the midwestern realists. His depiction of sex, violence, and the hypocrisy of American society as he experienced it, contribute to this view. Thompson's depiction of his coming of age in a poor family in Wichita, Kansas, during the 1930's and 40's speaks to the experience of the generation of GI's who struggled for an education and a piece of the American Dream. His realistic treatment of his times is unrelieved by the usual epiphanies that would be understood by middle-class critics. The high points of Thompson's work, as it were, are the scenes in which his grandfather rants against the government and politicians, and where Thompson himself questions post-W.W.II, Madison Avenue driven America.

Several weeks ago I bought a compendium entitled *399 Kansas Characters*. It is an interesting work, but in the section, "Authors, Artists, and Composers, there is no mention of Earl Thompson. What accounts for this neglect? Was Thompson a Kansan? Was he an important writer? Was he a national writer? The answer to these questions has to be a "yes, but."

As a Kansas writer, Thompson represents the underclass of urban, industrial Kansas. The factories and rail yards of Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita, and smaller cities such as Pittsburg and Salina, are the Kansas places of

Tom Page

his trilogy. The popular image of a bucolic Kansas of kindly farmers (there are very few left), small towns, and quilting bees is totally foreign to Thompson. He never experienced the small town world of a William Allen White and never bought into its mythology. But he does write, and write well, about his Kansas.

Was Thompson an important writer? Certainly he was, but a difficult one for readers with conventional attitudes. He makes them think! Nominated for a National Book Award and selected by the Book of the Month Club, he was difficult, recognized, and popular. Was Thompson a national writer? Yes, but an American writer with an international perspective. *Tattoo* deals in large part with Asia as seen through the eyes of young Jack. As he attempts to understand its problems, he also learns about imperialism and militarism. For example, when in Korea, Jack "watched an old woman put a dog in a sack and methodically beat it to death to make it tender enough to eat. . . . Jack thought she could have been *his* grandmother, if she had been Korean."

Earl Thompson died in 1978 at the age of forty-six after publishing three distinguished novels in eight years. He was a very promising writer who died at the peak of his career. His roots were with his grandfather, a Kansas populist; his experience that of contemporary urban America; his vision that of a better life for the dispossessed. Three of his novels are still in print.

Tom Page

By Earl Thompson:

A Garden of Sand. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970. Paperback edition:
New York: Carroll & Graf, 1991.

Tattoo. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974. Paperback edition: New York:
Carroll & Graf, 1991.

Caldo Largo. New York: G. P. Putnam's Son's, 1976. Paperback edition: New
York: Carroll & Graf, 1991.

The Devil to Pay. New York: New American Library, 1982.

Wichita, Kansas
July 3, 1994

**Neither a Summing-Up nor a Catching-Up:
Saul Bellow's Collected Non-Fiction
David D. Anderson**

Saul Bellow has been in the news more frequently in recent months than at any time in the past since he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976, and much of that attention has had nothing to do with his work: Bellow has been found guilty of political incorrectness. Not only has he, like his friend the late Allan Bloom, been criticized for "cultural conservatism," in Bellow's case presumably marking such works as Herzog, Mr. Sammler's Planet, and the Dean's December, but more recently he has been condemned for defaming the Third World in alleged remarks in 1988 that neither have the Zulus yet produced a Tolstoy nor have the Papuans produced a Proust.

To the earlier charge of cultural conservatism by Richard Poirier, Bellow responded that "People who stick labels on you are in the gumming business;" to the latter, the result of Alfred Kazin's resurrection of Bellow's 1988 remarks in the context of an attack on multiculturalism and echoed by Brent Staples in his memoir Parallel Time, widely disseminated in an excerpt published in the New York Times Magazine, Bellow has responded eloquently in the Times, a response that has been echoed by Keith Botsford in an extended essay in the Independent of London, by numerous letters to the editor of the Times, and in reviews of Bellow's latest book.

In his Op Ed piece in the Times Bellow speaks eloquently and to the point; nowhere in his writing do either Papuans or Zulus appear; in, however, an interview in which he, as the talented amateur anthropologist that he is (my observation), was discussing literate and pre-literate societies; his words, he asserts, were as distorted by an interviewer who listened as badly as by the many readers who read badly. He pointed out, too, that "It is generally assumed . . . that all the events and ideas of a novel are based on the life experiences and the opinions of the novelist himself," that, indeed, (again, my observation) talent and imagination, the two most important ingredients of literature, those that transmute experience into something greater, are of little or no significance in comparison to the purported facts of the fiction.

That transmutation of experience, tempered by memory and transformed by talent and imagination into literary art, is evident in Bellow's fiction from "Two Morning Monologues" of 1941 to "Something to Remember Me By" in 1990; it is equally evident in the non-fiction pieces he has selected for It All Adds Up, his most recent book, which, the sub-title comments, ranges "From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future."

Bellow's "dim past" is the early 1950s; the "Uncertain Future" must be post-1992, the last date of publication of one of the essays, and the essays in the collection are as much a record of the intellectual history of one of the last American idealists as they are the record of one of the few American writers in our

history who is at once an intellectual and above all, a literary artist. At the same time the essays, like Bellow's fiction, give the lie to those who would see Bellow as a polemicist of whatever popular or unpopular political persuasion may be extent at the moment.

The essays in the collection range as widely in subject matter as in time, and, as Bellow comments in the preface, many of them reflect points of view from which he has since departed radically, but they may be classed loosely (as Bellow does even more loosely) as essays dealing with places, with people, with events, and with ideas, all of them refracted through the eye of the artist and expressed in the language of one of the most original users of the language in our time.

Bellow sets the theme for the collection in his essay on Mozart, originally published in Bostonia in 1992, but which was delivered as a lecture at the Mozart Bicentennial in Florence in 1991. The essay is about Mozart as perceptive artist, and increasingly about the artist as the interpreter of experience, and finally about the artist as Bellow knows him from his own experience. He concludes,

What is attractive about Mozart. . . is that he is an individual. He learned for himself (as in *Così fan tutti*) the taste of disappointment, betrayal, suffering the weakness, foolishness, and vanity of flesh and blood, as well as the emptiness of cynicism. In him we see a person who has only himself to rely on. But what a self it is, and what an art it has generated. How deeply (beyond works) he speaks to us about the mysteries of our common nature. And how unstrained and easy his greatness is.

In spite of the fact that some of the essays were originally published as journalism about places and events—the Illinois countryside, his own Chicago, postwar Paris, the Six-Day War—, as lecturer about writing, the arts, and ideas,—in the Nobel and Jefferson lectures—, and as tributes to friends and fellow writers— John Berryman, Allan Bloom, Isaac Rosenfeld—, each is as much a part of the corpus of Bellow's literary work as it is an exercise in defining and describing, and each is as much about Bellow— about his perceptions, his insights, his remarkably keen observations transmitted into equally remarkable prose as it is about his subject. And much of that prose reflects the wonder with which Bellow has always approached life and experience—his own and that of the people who came out of his remarkable imagination to become prominent inhabitants of the literary life of our time.

The essays inevitably bring us back not only to Bellow the literary artist but to his fictions, to the life of the mind, the imagination, and the mastered language that produced them and that have made Bellow the spokesman for and the interpreter of our century that he is. But, as Bellow knows and made clear in his Op Ed piece in the Times, the language and the mastered language that produced them and that have Bellow the spokesman for and the interpreter of our century that he is. But, as Bellow knows and make clear in his Op Ed piece in the Times, the language and the substance of literature are overshadowed and denied by a new sort of Stalinism that demands a new truth, a new set of facts, a new language, and a new response. Nevertheless, the last words of It All Adds Up, those that do point to Bellow's uncertain future, are as clear as they are defiant:

Do I look or sound despairing? My spirits are as high as ever. Not despair—anger.

Contempt and rage. For this latest and longest betrayal by putty-headed academics and intellectuals.

Michigan State University

Lake Erie's Civil War

David D. Anderson

The land and lake scapes of Northwest Ohio are as haunted by memories of the War of 1812 as they are dominated by the Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial towering 352 feet into the sky over South Bass Island and the waters of Oliver Hazard Perry's victory over the British fleet on September 10, 1813. Defensive and muster sites, such as Mansfield's block house and Camp Avery on the Huron River, and forts, battle, burial, and battery sites such as those of Fort Defiance, Fort Meigs, Fort Stephenson, Fort Ball, Fort Findlay, and dozens of others have been restored, memorialized in monuments and place names, and remembered in local and regional folklore. In a peculiar way the War of 1812, the Second War for American Independence, remains Ohio's War.

Yet, half a century later Ohio was to send more volunteer troops to the Civil War and suffer more casualties than any other state; it was the site of a number of Confederate prisoner-of-war camps, including that on Johnson's Island, just off the Marblehead Peninsula; it suffered from the notorious Morgan raid of July, 1863; and for forty years its political life was dominated by the Republican Party and the series of Civil War generals and one major of volunteers it sent to the White House, even as virtually every city, town, and hamlet erected its memorial in the town square or crossroads, ranging from the elaborate monument in Public Square, Cleveland, to the ubiquitous Parrott guns and mass-produced infantrymen standing at parade rest and facing South, once often to the hazard of traffic but now more often moved to the local graveyard and forgotten.

If Northwest Ohio's relationship to the War of 1812 remains almost intimate, that to the Civil War seems more remote, perhaps befitting a war fought so far away in time and space. All but forgotten, however, is one of the most dramatic events of that war, one that did take place in Western Lake Erie and later in Port Clinton, Ohio and that threatened to open up a new war theatre even as its aftermath nearly gave the Confederacy the de facto recognition as a legitimate belligerent that the Federal government denied it.

The first event was the unsuccessful attempt by Confederate raiders in September, 1864, to capture USS *Michigan* off Johnson's Island, free the Confederate officers imprisoned there, and lay waste the Lake Erie shore; the second, in Port Clinton in the Spring of 1865, resulted in a blunt, no-nonsense declaration of the nature of the war in progress and recognition, however temporary, of the government of the Confederate States of America.

That Confederate expedition of September 18, 19, and 20, 1864, designed to capture the U.S.S. *Michigan* at Johnson's Island on Sandusky Bay and to free the Confederate officers held there, has long been regarded as one of the most daring if ill-planned ventures of the Civil War, but its internationally and

historically important aftermath in the Common Pleas Court of Ottawa County; Port Clinton, Ohio, is equally dramatic although considerably less sensational. For that reason and because it involved legal recognition of the Confederacy as a belligerent power it has been all but forgotten in spite of its uniqueness in American history. Not only was the court charged with determining whether a civil crime or a legitimate act of war had taken place during the raid, but more importantly the court was compelled to make a precedent-setting ruling potentially dangerous to the Federal course as it deliberated the fate of a young man named Bennet G. Burley, Acting Master, Confederate States Navy.

Burley, a husky young Scotsman and ex-prisoner of war, was second in command to John Y. Beall, also a Confederate naval officer, during the raid. In spite of its slight chances of success, it had started off promisingly for the Confederates. The two officers, and their hastily recruited force of twenty-eight men, mostly Canadians, had taken passage on the steamer *Philo Parsons*, downbound from Detroit. In mid-lake they took the ship over, and then, cruising about, boarded and captured the steamer *Island Queen*. After paroling the thirty-five members of the 130th Ohio Infantry whom they found on board the *Queen*, they put them ashore and proceeded toward Sandusky, from whence they expected a pre-arranged signal from Captain Charles Cole, a Confederate spy who was assigned to the job of disabling the *Michigan's* engines and drugging her officers, making her an easy prey for the raiders. Cole was aided by Annie Davis, a spy who lived in West House in Sandusky.

But Cole had been detected and captured, the signal did not come, and under pressure from their apprehensive crew, Beall and Burley were forced to turn back. The crew and passengers of the *Parsons* were put ashore on Fighting Island, and off the Canadian shore near Sandwich the *Parsons* was set afire and abandoned. Cole was taken to Johnson's Island, court martialled and sentenced to death, but later pardoned. The raid had come to its end. The repercussions, however, continued to the end of the war, placing a good deal of strain on Canadian-American relations and culminating in the Port Clinton criminal trial.

Confederate agents operating from Canada were never a serious threat to the Northern military effort, but they had been a continual annoyance, and the Lake Erie raid provided federal authorities with an opportunity to request Burley's extradition from the Canadian government. Testimony taken from the crewmen of the *Parsons* indicated that he had stepped beyond the bounds of military propriety when he relieved W.O. Ashley, clerk and part owner of the ship, of his personal watch as well as the ship's money. A charge of piracy was placed against him in the extradition court at Toronto, and Alfred Russell, U.S. District Attorney for Michigan, went to Canada to represent the United States.

Meanwhile Burley was still actively plotting against the *Michigan* in Canada, and while attempting to equip the steamer *Georgiana* for another attempt, he was arrested and put in irons to await the outcome of his hearing. Securing Canadian consent to Burley's extradition proved a difficult matter, however. Not only was there a good deal of sympathy for the Confederacy in Canada at the time, but Jacob Thompson, former U.S. Secretary of the Interior in the Buchanan Administration, who led the Confederate mission in Canada, was determined to defeat the extradition charges both because Burley was a good agent and because his

extradition might lead to successful prosecution of similar charges against Beall as well as the agents who had raided St. Albans, Vermont, robbing the local bank and provoking much of the then strained relations between the United States and Canada.

At first Russell's job seemed to be comparatively easy. Burley and his lawyers admitted the act, and Russell planned his strategy around the peculiar circumstances under which the watch and money were taken. They had simply moved forcibly from one pocket to the other, Russell maintained, and he argued that the Canadian authorities could not regard the transaction as a legitimate act of war but only as an act of piracy on the high seas. The statements of Ashley and D.C. Nichols, also an officer of the *Parsons*, were accepted in evidence, and the case seemed clearly to turn against Burley.

Thompson, meanwhile, secured a delay in the hearing so that documentary evidence to support his contention that the affair was a legitimate act of war might be secured from Richmond. Shortly after the first of January, 1865, the Confederate courier system delivered to Thompson two documents from Richmond. The first was a copy of Burley's commission as Acting Master in the Confederate Navy, accompanied by a certification signed by Stephen R. Mallory, Secretary of the Confederate Navy; the second was a manifesto that is one of the most curious documents of the war. Couched in legal phraseology and signed by Jefferson Davis, it read in part:

Whereas, It has been made known to me that Bennett G. Burley, an acting master in the navy of the Confederate States, is now under arrest in one of the British North American provinces on an application made by the government of the United States. . . charged with having committed the crimes of robbery and piracy in the jurisdiction of the United States. . .

Now, therefore, I, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, do hereby declare and make known . . . the expedition aforesaid, undertaken in the month of September last, for the capture of the armed steamer "Michigan," a vessel of war of the United States, and for the release of the prisoners of war, citizens of the Confederate States of America, . . . was a belligerent expedition. . . and that the Government of the Confederate States of America assumes that the responsibility for the acts and conduct of any of its officers engaged in said expedition, and especially of said Bennett G. Burley. . .

Davis concluded that the men were ordered to take ". . . such assistance as they might (you may) draw from the enemy's country" in order to achieve their aims. However, this manifesto did not explain the watch and money Burley was alleged to have taken, and Russell convinced the Canadian authorities that they were taken for private gain rather than military purposes. Burley was ordered to be extradited to stand trial, and he was returned to U.S. jurisdiction.

Complications continued to intervene, however. Thompson wrote an official protest to London while Russell debated his chances of securing a conviction on the piracy charge. The statutes covering piracy on the high seas did not specifically include the Great Lakes, and so he decided to play safe by having Burley tried for robbery, a felony under the laws of Ohio, within whose jurisdiction the act took place.

Burley was brought to trial in the Common Pleas Court of Ottawa County at Port Clinton, the county seat. The Federal Government did not withdraw from the trial, however. Arrayed against Burley for the

prosecution were Russell and the U.S. District Attorney for Cleveland, J.M. Root. For the defense Burley had secured Sylvester Larned of Detroit and Judge Rufus R. Ranney of Cleveland. Again the result was dependent upon the determination of whether an act of robbery or an act of war had transpired on board the *Parsons*.

At the point the Confederacy received its first and only official recognition as a government from a United States court. Judge John Fitch of Toledo, presiding, became annoyed at the constant wrangling between the prosecution and the defense as to whether the Confederacy was a government in fact and thus entitled to participate legitimately in warfare or whether it was a treasonable conspiracy and hence criminal. This issue had no bearing on the case, Judge Fitch ruled. The Confederacy was a government *de facto*, he pointed out, stating that the United States had recognized its existence by treating its captured soldiers as prisoners of war rather than as traitors. Therefore, Burley could not be held responsible under civil law for acts committed under the authority of Confederate Government. Accepting Jefferson Davis's manifesto as evidence that Burley was engaged in a legitimate act of war, he ruled that the issue was simply whether Burley had taken the watch and money for his own gain or to further the Confederate cause. He charged the jury to accept the existence of war as a fact and to limit its deliberation to the motive behind Burley's confiscation of the items. Later, in the newspapers he was subject to a great deal of public criticism, but the ruling stood.

This decision was a blow to the prosecution, of course, not only because of its bearing on the case but also because of the possible influence on other extradition hearings then being held or pending in Canada and because it did entail tacit legal recognition of the Confederacy itself, a precedent that might prevent later trials of the Confederate leaders. However, the trial continued, and after long deliberation the jury reported that it could not agree, eight voting that Burley was guilty of robbery under the laws of Ohio and four voting not guilty. Burley was remanded to the Ottawa County jail to await a new trial.

However, he did not wait to take his chances again. Instead he broke jail and escaped to Canada, aided, according to Russell, by "... a class of persons then called 'Copperheads'." He was re-arrested by Canadian authorities, but the United States seemed to have lost interest in his case. With the conclusion of the war American Diplomatic attention turned South, toward Maximilian and the French in Mexico. Released from Canadian custody, Burley went back to Scotland. The charges remained against him, but they were forgotten, and he ended his days as a member of Parliament.

The Port Clinton trial was important for a number of reasons. Not only did it result from eased tensions between the United States and Canada through mutual recognition of the rights of the two countries, but it afforded a brief moment of legal recognition of the Confederacy just as that government was disappearing forever. For Burley himself it had more significance than he then realized. Had he not been extradited he probably would have continued to serve with Beall, who was captured in Niagara Falls, New York, tried as a spy and pirate by a military court that was not concerned with legal definitions, found guilty, and executed on February 24, 1865.

WORKS CONSULTED

All quotations in this article are from John Robertson, *Michigan In the War* (Lansing, 1880), pp. 145-154. The article itself has been put together from incomplete and often varying accounts in Robertson; in Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Cincinnati, 1904), 360-362; and James D. Horan Confederate Agent (New York, 1954), 160-165 and 250-251. Contemporary newspaper accounts were valuable for avoiding the errors that had crept into each of the above accounts.

THE INCOMPLETE BOOK COLLECTOR

WILLIAM THOMAS

To the questions "Why do men climb mountains?" the traditional answer is "Because they're there." When I have been asked "Why do you collect books?" I have replied: "Because they are offered for sale."

That, of course, is not really an answer, but it implies the futility of explaining why one's tastes take this direction instead of another. I never thought of myself as a book collector until people began calling me that, and then made but a feeble effort to act the part. Over a long time I became possessed of a goodly number of books because with the pleasure of reading I had an esthetic pleasure in seeing and handling attractive specimens and a satisfaction in owning them.

I think that is a reasonable and honest statement as to "why". A book lover may make various rationalizations about convenience, ease of access, and so forth, but after a while he gives up doing so, and admits that he buys books for no better reason than that it is his fancy.

My remarks here apply to books that are "used", "secondhand", or "out-of-print". It is not that the collector scorns new books, but that they are easily obtainable and so long as the publisher's stock lasts can be bought at any time. If they are remaindered, so much the better for him—many modern first editions now high-priced went unwanted at twenty-nine or sixty-nine cents, and many remainders are, from any viewpoint, bargains.

But the true collector does not acquire books with thought of possible increase in value or the future monetary worth of his library. Men like Rosenbach are not really to be thought of as collectors, for the true collector must be a lover of books, and the booklover does not regard books as a commodity.

A book collector, then, is one who has acquired a lot of books by writers he likes, in bindings that are pleasing to see and handle, and with print that is agreeable to read. This definition leads directly to the often-asked question. "Do collectors read their books?" Yes, they most certainly do. There cannot really be any other justification for owning books. The kind of collector who is interested only in fine bindings, who concentrates on limited editions of classic authors, who seeks artificial rarities—has (and deserves) the scorn of the knowledgeable bookman. The true collector must be first of all a reader—for love of literature is the only strait and righteous way to book collecting.

At the same time, the man possessed of the true and ineffable spirit does not feel any obligation to peruse a book merely because he owns it. Naturally he buys it when it is offered him. But he may put it on a shelf or stow it away with the vague intent to read it next vacation, or after he gets his own book written, or gets free of a job, or without any such thought at all. If he has guilt feelings about the omission, he has not reached a state of grace. John Hill Burton's words are apropos, and I cannot do better than to quote them: "That one should possess no books beyond his power of perusal—that he should buy no faster than

as he can read straight through what he has already bought—is a supposition alike preposterous and unreasonable."

To the barbarian (Burton's term) who asks "Have you read them all?" that is the proper answer. The reader-collector is like the cat in the house who wants all the doors open—not because he wishes at the moment to go out or to another room. He wants things so that just in case the fancy should strike him—he can do what he wishes. The collector knows full well he will never get all his books read—but some time during life's journey we reconcile ourselves to the certainty that we must end it with many things undone.

What books to collect? This question does not require formulation, any more than the question as to whether to collect books or something else. One inevitably collects books on a subject which interests him, and it may be metallurgy, medieval art, or bee-keeping. My interest ranges pretty widely over the field of English and American literature, and I have the books of the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th-century authors, many in first or early editions. This brings us naturally to the reason for seeking first editions. The most sensible justification for desiring a first edition is that it is the dress in which an author, often wholly unknown, appeared first to the public eye. This little book, unpretentious, maybe poorly printed, represented him before he became a celebrity or a classic.

Though a book is not valuable merely because it is old, age sometimes gives it a pleasant association. I have a Purchas his Pilgrimage printed in 1613 (this is not the amplified, expensive, and sought-after edition); when I turn its pages I am conscious that I am handling something which existed while Shakespeare was living.

Though books printed earlier than the 17th century, and the most 17th-century books, are beyond the reach of the "impecunious amateur", many 18th-century books can be had at prices lower, comparatively, than their first owners paid for them. The second edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson appears fairly often at about four pounds. (The first costs in the neighborhood of thirty-five.) Theobald's Shakespeare, Johnson's Lives of the Poets, Percy's Reliques, Warton's History of English Poetry need only to be watched for. The collected Spectator, Tatler, and Guardian are common.

Not all works of literature, however, are to be sought or desired in their first or early editions. Most of the 19th century was not a time of good run-of-the-press bookmaking—though various of John Murray's publications, such as the 17-volume Byron (1832), are very attractive books. It would be entirely possible, I should guess, to assemble the Waverley novels in their first editions, but in my view that would be a misguided effort. The print is small, and tiring to read; Scott is more pleasurably read in one of the many collected editions of the 1890s and later. Mine is the 24-volume "Border" edition with Andrew Lang's introductions.

Much the same might be said about Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot. Several of Dickens' later novels are easily obtainable at two pounds or less (while at the same time a Pickwick in parts is a wealthy bookman's showpiece); nevertheless I prefer to read Dickens in my well-printed set, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1894. The first decades of the 20th century produced (and I write of "trade" editions,

not "fine bindings") some notably handsome books. The Thornton edition of the Brontes in twelve volumes (John Grant, 1911) is a joy to read in.

To collect a single author? Once again, you do not make a conscious decision. If you determine to acquire all the books of one writer, that is because he chooses you. My especial author is Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham. As an undergraduate I admired sketches by Graham met in essay collections; many years later my enthusiasm was renewed by the discussion of his books in Herbert Falconer West's Modern Book Collecting for the Impecunious Amateur. In the dozen years since, I have assembled thirty of Graham's thirty-seven titles in their first editions, at an average cost of a little over a pound. Eventually I shall have the others, though I am not in a hurry to get them. H. M. Tomlinson is another of my favorite essayists, and I have twenty-four of his thirty titles in their first editions, a few signed by him.

Both Graham and Tomlinson kept reprinting and rearranging their stuff under various titles (in Graham's case, collections were made by others), and a new title is not assurance of all new content. This reprinting of old pieces in new collections may be thought an imposition on the buyer. But it is not a practice with 20th-century writers generally, many of whose first editions can be cheaply got. Almost any of Galsworthy's novels after The Man of Property can be had at seven to ten shillings, as can those of Bennett after The Old Wives' Tale, both these authors being somewhat out of favor. Galsworthy would inscribe a book at anyone's request, and signed Galsworthys are frequently met.

Rediscovery of a writer by a new generation of readers can recreate a market for his books. This happened to F. Scott Fitzgerald, and first editions of This Side of Paradise and Beautiful and Damned are virtually unobtainable today. I predict that something like that is about to happen to Edith Wharton, and that the fine copies of The House of Mirth, The Fruit of the Tree, and The Custom of the Country which I bought at fifteen and twenty-five cents will command prices of five or seven dollars.

A collector's sources of supply are the British dealers. For a long time the exchange has been favorable to the American buyer, and will remain so. With the pound at \$2.80, the prices of books in British catalogs are low. The descriptions are generally trustworthy, though one is best advised not to order the cheapest books. (You just can't expect much for a shilling!) The booksellers themselves are the nicest people in the world to deal with. A prospective buyer needs only to give assurance that he is a responsible person, and the books ordered, if yet available, are sent, payment to be made after receipt.

"If yet available" is an important qualification, for the book market is a seller's market and several orders may be received for the same item. To be successful, one must order by air mail. Some booksellers advertise in The Times Literary Supplement, and their addresses can be obtained from it.

I have not been equally satisfied with buying by mail from American dealers, and have given it up. My best and most extensive purchases have been made by visits to bookshops, and I have dirtied my hands turning over old books in most cities of New England, the Atlantic Seaboard, and the Middle West. I don't do so much of that any more, because I'm confronted with diminishing returns: when you own four thousand books, wherever you go you see titles you already have.

At the risk of seeming pontifical, I am prompted to set down some principles which the collector will do well to stand on:

(1) Always buy and never sell. You never regret buying a book if it is fairly priced; you regret not buying, when the chance is gone. And you regret selling a book you have been satisfied to own, even when you get a lot more for it than you paid.

(2) Be content only with the best edition. Every collector, when young, accumulates cheap editions and reprints, but eventually gets rid of them. If it is a question solely of utility, that is a different matter.

(3) With the same logic, buy only books in good or fine condition. It is possible to hold to this rule for all books printed after 1700. Every time I have violated it, a better copy has turned up afterward. (I do not regard a signature or an inscription as a fault, although many collectors and booksellers apparently do. I like these marks of association, even if the former owner was undistinguished. My Lives of the Poets has the signature and bookplate of George Fergusson, Lord Hermand, who was notable enough to get into the Dictionary of National Biography.)

(4) Learn book values, and don't overpay for a particular title just to fill a spot. Sooner or later it will come to you. On the other hand, when you are offered a rarity at a price which is right, make any sacrifice in order to buy it. It will never be cheaper.

Knowledgeable booksellers are often themselves collectors, and can be very helpful in securing books you want. Their knowledge and aid, which you pay for as you would pay for legal advice, is usually worth its cost. But you are more likely to make a "find" in the shop where books are regarded simply as a commodity. I could write another essay on the joys of discovery—first editions of Browning's Men and Women, Jack London's John Barleycorn, Steinbeck's Cut of Gold, and so on. Book collecting has many rewards and aspects of satisfaction, and one is recognizing a gem that other people have overlooked.

Ohio State University / Marion
Emeritus

MY GRANDMOTHER AND THE PICTURE SALESMAN

WILLIAM THOMAS

In the days of walking peddlers and horse-and-buggy salesmen, we had many callers offering books, magazines, pictures, kitchen supplies, notions, and various household necessities; and my grandmother was an easy mark for them. To my mother's distress, she always bought more extracts, spices, and flavorings from the Rawleigh man and the Watkins man than we needed, and the large size bottles of witch hazel, camphor, and liniment when we already had a year's supply on hand. Anybody getting up a Larkin order could be sure of a sizable amount from her, and the shelves and drawers of the walnut cupboard in her room were filled with odd dishes, yards of calico and gingham remnants, bolts of bias tape, ends of lace edgings, and boxes, bottles, and jars of talcum powder, sachets, and smelling salts that she had bought at bargain prices.

When a man appeared at the door with something to sell, she couldn't say no. If pressed for an explanation as to why she had bought something we had no conceivable need for, she said she didn't want him to come all the way up the lane for nothing. My mother could say no, and did, emphatically and with vigor. When my mother met a salesman—other than the Rawleigh man and the Watkins man, whom we bought from regularly—he had small chance to get into the house. But if my grandmother answered his knock, about all the selling he had to do was to ask "How many?" One day a man came offering little rubber buttons which he said were to put into the ends of pillows to let air in and make them fluffier. "Will a gross be enough?" he asked my grandmother. So we had what might be called an overstock of those little rubber buttons. The sets of books called Studies in the Scriptures and Gospel Commentaries, which my grandmother, even, did not pretend to have read, had been acquired in the same way.

The afternoon the picture salesman came my mother was gone, and it was my grandmother who received him. He said he was offering oil paintings.

"We have several paintings," my grandmother remarked, with extraordinary lack of response.

"But not like what I offer you," he replied. "We take a small photograph—of a person, a scene, whatever your favorite subject may be—and make a beautiful painting from it." He went on to say that it wouldn't be like a picture bought in a store, The Grand Canyon or Custer's Last Stand, one of thousands of copies that had practically no meaning for anybody, but an intimate thing, the preservation in oil of a person's features—a son, a daughter, maybe, in childhood, perhaps one of the dear departed—always to remain vivid and lifelike, ever near to refresh one's memory.

My grandmother was singularly unaffected. "No, I don't think so," she replied. "We already have a lot

of pictures."

"But an oil painting—a dwelling perhaps, or a landscape."

"An oil painting, did you say? A real oil painting?"

"An oil painting." The salesman sensed that he had struck a nerve. "Sixteen by twenty inches, a fine gilt frame. A work of art befitting the walls of a palace or a house of the rich."

That last word was the one he needed. He didn't know it yet, but he had uttered the syllable my grandmother could not withstand. Of all the cosmic jokes the Fates had played on her, the poorest, she thought, was that which doomed her to end her life in poverty. To her, poverty was the absence of riches, as cold is the absence of heat; but there was no mean temperature, no in-between stage of comfort and moderate substance. The aspiration of her life was to possess great wealth, and she held to it after she had reached an age when it was manifestly unattainable. That throughout the years her material wants had been liberally provided-for she blithely disregarded, and we were always, according to her, on the road to the poorhouse.

"If Uncle Richard's estate had been settled property—" she began. I had heard this many times, and it was always preliminary to the story of her English uncle, which she now proceeded to recite to the picture salesman, oblivious of his bewilderment. The story was that Uncle Richard in his youth had been charged with, and convicted of, *lèse majesté* to the Prince Regent, and transported to Van Diemen's Land. Later the sentence was determined to be unjust, and he was given permission to return to England. He spurned it, stayed in Australia, and made a fortune, which, upon his death, went to the Commonwealth.

In earlier years my grandmother had conducted voluminous correspondence with Australian government officials and English solicitors, and explained her claim to the estate. Now she was fond of expounding this family legend, and believed it to be literally true, though all evidence of its truth or half-truth was forever lost in the well of time. Forgetting that the man sitting before her was there for his own reasons, she regarded him as a new audience and went on talking about Uncle Richard, her eyes glowing, her face animated.

"An oil painting," he said again. But it was no use.

"Uncle Richard started raising sheep in a small way and within a few years became a big sheep farmer. He wanted my brother Luke to come to him, but—"

"Something to cherish as long as—"

"—my mother couldn't bear to let him go. She was afraid she'd never see him again. And then—"

"—the heart was has feelings for bygone scenes and times."

"—Luke died of typhoid fever before he was twenty-one, and my mother—"

"An oil painting, in a fine gilt frame, for only ten dollars."

"—stopped writing to Uncle Richard, because she couldn't bear—"

"You pay only half the cost now, and the remainder—"

"—the thought that in Australia he would be—"

"—when the painting is delivered, in about three weeks."

"—still living, and heir to Uncle Richard's fortune."

"Just five dollars now. Sign here."

My grandmother absent-mindedly wrote her name with the indelible pencil the salesman proffered her.

"So we didn't know when Uncle Richard died, and nobody was on hand to—"

"Just five dollars."

"What's that you say?" My grandmother was at last jolted out of her private world and once more faced the sober reality that she had signed an order blank. "I'm not sure—"

"The painting will be delivered in about three weeks. Five dollars, please."

"Willie, will you get my purse out of my bureau drawer, the top one?"

She handed the salesman a five-dollar bill.

"Now," said he, carefully putting the money into his own billfold, "what is the picture you would like to reproduce?"

"Oh, I don't know. Willie, fetch me the basket of pictures off my bureau."

She turned over two or three, my cousin Chester as a baby, my father and my Uncle John when there were young men, and then took out a picture of the house.

"That will do nicely," said the salesman. "This will be returned with the painting. I'm sure you'll be very pleased with our work. Thank you. Good-day."

Three weeks later the "oil painting" was delivered—by another man than the salesman who had taken the order. It was a greatly enlarged photographic print, vividly colored, the sky an intense blue, the house a whitish gray, the chimneys vermilion, the lawn and trees a bluish green. It was under glass, in an ornate and garish frame, twenty-four by twenty-eight inches overall.

"I don't know whether I like that," said my grandmother, as she took another five-dollar bill from her purse. "Is that really an oil painting?"

"Those are oil colors, ma'am."

"On canvas?"

"No, ma'am. On heavy paper. You didn't think it was going to be on canvas, did you? Of course not." He left my grandmother staring doubtfully at her acquisition.

With all the other pictures and furniture in my grandmother's room, there was no place in it for the "oil painting." She suggested to my mother that it be hung in the parlor, but my mother ignored the suggestion. So it stood behind the door of my grandmother's room until spring cleaning relegated it to the assemblage of unseen and forgotten relics in the alcove of the upstairs hall.

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