Dateline: Chicago (Population 40)

The generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hastings, of Battle Creek, Michigan, has added a new collection to the Manuscript Division. Sixty-five letters, 1806-1828, trace the career of John Crafts, whose employment with John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company took him from his native New England west to Detroit, Michilimackinac, and Chicago. He first saw Chicago in 1818 (the year Illinois became a state), and as one of its forty-or-so inhabitants, lived in the former home of John Kinzie (1763-1828), the town’s first white settler. Crafts’ letters of this period written at Chicago were postmarked at Piqua, Ohio, and Ft. Wayne, Indiana — the nearest post offices. Mail service west of Ft. Wayne depended upon military post riders. When John Crafts died in Chicago from yellow fever in 1825, the village was still two decades away from its boom, and Crafts, oblivious of the historical significance of his own times, had frankly found the place rather dull.

Confederate Imprints

The Standard Bibliography of material printed within the Confederacy is Crandall’s Confederate Imprints (Boston, 1955), supplemented by Harwell’s More Confederate Imprints (Richmond, 1957). The reader leafing through these volumes finds an amazing variety of publications, ranging from legislative journals and military manuals to textbooks, sheet music, and novels. The variety in the types of publication is not necessarily matched, however, by the content: there is a natural emphasis on the rights of the Southern cause and the bravery and virtue of Southern heroes.

Bibliographies are never complete, and a project to revise and expand the Crandall-Harwell volumes is now underway. Reporting our holdings to the project has afforded us an opportunity to review our collection of Confederate imprints, with pleasing results. Despite the fact that Confederate imprints has not been one of our major collecting areas, we have increased our holdings from seventy-five to 186 over the years since the Crandall-Harwell bibliographies were published. Our collection of Confederate sheet music has grown from ten examples to fifty-four.

Furthermore, a number of our Confederate items appear to be hitherto unknown or unrecorded variants. Among these are a number of interesting broadsides recently received, including addresses to the troops on the eve of battle, announcements of wages for officer and crews of the C. S. Navy, circulars on recruiting and apprehending deserters, and resolutions of a North Carolina “Vigilance Association.”

The latter, dated June 1, 1861, testifies to the type and depth of feeling which prevailed in one locality at the outbreak of the war. It consists of three columns of fine print outlining the resolutions adopted by “a number of citizens of Guilford county” at a meeting on June 1, 1861, a few weeks after the firing on Fort Sumter and twelve days after the secession of North Carolina: “the time has come . . . that the citizens of the Southern States are compelled to be one thing or the other; they must all be for the South and her institutions, or they must be against them . . . .”

The meeting established a general Committee of Vigilance of “at least thirty of our most reliable and prudent citizens in each quarter-section of the county, any five of whom shall be authorized to hold meetings” to examine the opinions of individuals relative to Southern policy. Should any five of the general Vigilance Committee consider that such individuals had uttered “treasonable” statements, they were to be arrested and dealt with according to the “law made and provided for the punishment of treason, enacted . . . May, 1861.”

The resolutions were to be printed as handbills for distribution as well as being published in the local newspapers. Such publicity may well have discouraged any who harbored Union sentiments.
CORRECTION

We apologize to Mr. and Mrs. Russell Hastings of Battle Creek, Michigan, donors of the John Crafts Papers, for publishing their name incorrectly in the March, 1984, QUARTO.
Sewing Society Pokes Needle into Slavery

"Slavery is an Evil that ought not to exist, and is a violation of the inalienable rights of man." Thus began the constitution of the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Sewing Society, whose records have been catalogued by the Manuscript Division. Organized in 1851, the Society saw itself as a necessary catalyst to arouse anti-slavery sentiment in Rochester, New York, where in spite of Frederick Douglass’ Paper being published there, local sympathy for the anti-slavery cause was lukewarm at best.

The Society eventually dropped the word “Sewing” from its name, but handwork from needle and loom provided the bulk of goods whose sale at annual bazaars was a major source of income. With excellent businesswomen at the helm, the Society’s financial account book records impressive donations to Frederick Douglass’ Paper, as well as direct aid to fugitive slaves, over fifty of whom were passing annually through Rochester by the late 1850s.

When civil war erupted in 1861, the Society undertook a new mission: it sent corresponding secretary Julia A. Wilbur to Alexandria, Virginia, to work with the contraband slaves who were daily pouring behind Union lines. Miss Wilbur’s frequent and lengthy letters are a superb journal of her efforts to better the lot of the friendless blacks.

One letter received by the Society in 1853 expresses a valuable insight into the milieu of the anti-slavery movement. While publication statistics for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin are widely available, reviews by the common man are not. In this letter, Moses Anderson, a free black living in Greencastle, Pennsylvania, describes the impact of Mrs. Stowe’s novel:

“Antislavery Publications are read extensively here by the majority of the people. Uncle Tom’s Cabin and key [Mrs. Stowe published A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin in 1853] has been read by almost every person here it is known as the common house book of the majority of the families of this vicinity and it has stirred many to detest the cause now that stood indifferent to it before reading the Cabin. As one instance of the effects of the key upon the people I will tell you that the first talk I had with any person about it was with a merchant in our village who came from the state of Maryland about ten years ago... He asked me if I had seen Uncle Tom’s Cabin I told him I had not. He said that it was the greatest Book of the age and that no careful reader could read it without shedding tears.”

What today seems to be an innocent group of women was in its own era riddled with careful calculation and prudent law-breaking. The Society, took literally, the Biblical admonition, “Revenge shew not in thine own blood, and see that it be not known.”
Spring Meeting

The Spring Meeting will be held somewhat later than usual this year, on May 17, at 8:00 p.m., but it promises to be worth the wait. William H. Guthman, a longtime Associate, an authority on frontier warfare, and the preeminent authority and dealer in early American military Americana, will present an illustrated lecture on the carved powder horns of the eighteenth century. These naïvely, but skillfully, carved relics represent a particularly appealing early American folk art form, and there are fascinating connections between the carvings and contemporary printed sources.

In conjunction with his talk, we will open an exhibit on the colonial soldier, drawing upon not only the Library's manuscript and printed materials, but the exceptional collection of decorative horns assembled by Associate Thomas Segal.

Revolutionary Sideline Coach

Frustration is the common response when things do not go as hoped, but physical removal from a situation, and thus helplessness to effect any significant aid, multiplies frustration with a quality of exasperation. This is seen in a letter recently added to the manuscript collections, in which the author vents emotions about the early bad fortunes of the American Revolution.

Irish-born Rev. Hugh Knox (d.1790) came to America as a young man. He experienced conversion while mimicking a sermon by Presbyterian evangelist John Rodgers. Graduating from seminary in 1754, he was ordained the following year and sent as a Presbyterian missionary to the Reformed Dutch congregation on the West Indian island of Saba. Later, in St. Croix, he became tutor, advisor, and friend to the young Alexander Hamilton, and it was Knox who assisted Hamilton in going to New York for schooling in 1772.

Although Knox never lived on the mainland after 1755, like many of his fellow non-Anglican clergy, he became a staunch patriot. From his West Indian parsonage, he eagerly followed the progress of the war and did what he could to whipsaw local sentiment in favor of the colonists. But a residence in St. Croix placed him, at best, in an advisory position. And the early months of the Revolution seemed to indicate that some advice was needed. Knox's son arrived in St. Croix from America on Christmas Day, 1776, with the latest news of the war, and on January 17, 1777, Knox penned an impassioned letter to his fellow Presbyterian pastor, Joseph Caldwell (1734-1781), the "soldier parson" whose open sympathy with the Revolution indirectly resulted in not only his own murder, but that of his wife in 1780.

Knox's message was this: The early dis-appointments of the war — Washington's defeats (Long Island, New York, and White Plains), low pay, and poor equipage — were undercutting morale to the danger point, and a reversal of military fortunes was essential to fan the fires of the revolutionary spirit. Knox warned that while there were many patriots on St. Croix, "many are lately falling off, thro' an apprehension that the Americans themselves are falling off from their own principles, & are making either a sham or a Cowardly defence of their own independence. ... After hearing that the whole Country were up in arms, & warm & unanimous in the Cause of Liberty, we were astonished to find that General Howe met with so feeble an opposition at Long Island ... especially when the American States were so ... well inform'd of the force which was to oppose them, & the whole plan of their intended operations. ... We always believed you would be out-officer'd & out-artillery'd by Great Britain; but imagined you could have had 5 Americans in the field for one Briton or mercenary. It Surprized us also to hear that General Washington's Army, such as it was, should disband itself & leave him, Just on the pinch, when every brave man & true lover of liberty, would certainly stand forth, regardless of every mercenary or interested motive. All these Circumstances seem to persuade us that we have been much mistaken about the General spirit, firmness & unanimity of the Americans, & their unquenchable ardour in the Cause of Liberty."

The changes Knox saw as necessary had in fact already begun when he wrote his letter. But living 2000 miles from New York, he of course had not yet heard about Washington's impressive victories at Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey, on December 26 and January 3, which had an incalculable effect in restoring Patriot morale.

Publications

It is with great pleasure we announce that the Ford Fund has granted the Clements Library $25,000 in each of the next three years for publications.

For some time, the Director and the Executive Boards of both the Library and the Clements Library Associates have discussed ways in which the treasures of the Library could be shared with a broader public.

For the present, the building itself and our limited staffing make it impossible to enlarge our museum function. But through publications and reproductions of unique items, the Library could make its collections more widely known and useful to historians, collectors, and the general public.

Plans are yet in the formative stage, but the probable first stage will be replacement of the
present Quarto by an expanded, illustrated publication with broader, general appeal to collectors, bibliographers, and historians of early American history. The second stage will involve fine reproduction of unique maps, drawings, and possibly a series of edited source materials which would have general interest and marketability.

The next issue of the Quarto, which may be last or next to last in its current form, will have further details.

**Hail to the Chief**

*How Much Artistic License should be allowed in depicting the Great Moments of History?*

While it is clear that George Washington did not cross the Delaware River standing tall in his boat, that did not stop Emanuel Leutze from emblazoning the idea in oil on canvas, and forever fixing it in our minds. It was Washington’s enduring character that needed to be expressed, not absolute fidelity to the happenstance of factual details. Especially prior to photography, the artist was necessary as preserver of a nation’s memories, and if the art occasionally veered toward hagiolytary, that was not, after all, out of step with the didactic quality of written history.

However, in 1866 when famed cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840-1902) set about to sketch Abraham Lincoln’s entry into Richmond a year earlier, he wanted to be faithful to history. So he sent his sketch to Charles C. Coffin, who had walked on the President’s left in this triumphant pageant. We do not know what Nast’s original sketch contained, but we can compare the finished, published, piece with a critique Coffin prepared and wrote in a letter to Nast on July 19, 1866. This letter was recently given to the Library by Steve Resnick, of Cazenovia, New York.

Nast’s sketch shows Lincoln wearing exactly what Coffin recalled: “his overcoat which was quite long & reached below his knees, & a stove pipe hat.” Tad Lincoln is holding his father’s left hand, also as Coffin remembered it. He was critical about one detail: “I see that you have made one woman kissing his hand. I did not see that, although it might have taken place.” Since Coffin did not outright deny that it had happened, the pathos of that motif was too much for Nast to resist. Thus, in the drawing, a woman is seen kissing Lincoln’s right hand, thereby pushing Admiral David D. Porter (who had actually walked on Lincoln’s right) into a position some distance to the rear. But Porter fared better than the critic Coffin, who oddly enough does not appear at all in the published drawing. In spite of that, Coffin wrote, “Your conception is very fine & would answer quite as well as most pictures for historical truth.”

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**The Far Famed West**

In May of 1836, a family from Newark, New Jersey, set out on a journey to Ohio. They were not emigrating, but making an excursion for pleasure, “partly to see western friends, and partly to see the far famed West.” The quotation is from the travel diary kept by the daughter of the family during the trip of some 2000 miles. The diary, which gives a most interesting account of travel during the early days of the Republic, has recently been added to the Library’s manuscript collection on American travel.

The anonymous diarist’s writing style testifies that she was a young lady of some education; the fact that they could make such a journey for pleasure indicates that they were a family of some means. The diarist was conscientious in recording towns passed through, dates and times of arrivals, persons encountered, and interesting incidents along the way. The trip lasted for over two months, and the diary gives a day-by-day account of activities.

The journey was made chiefly by water, but employed such a variety of other modes of transportation that it could not have been made in the same way a few years earlier or later. In 1836 the major canal systems of New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio had been fully in operation for only a short time. Stage coaches and carriages were still the major form of ground transport, but railroad building had begun: a short rail line and a series of “inclined planes” crossed the crest of the Alleghenies and connected the eastern and western segments of the Pennsylvania Canal. Packet boats and steamers operated on the lakes and navigable rivers.

The travellers took advantage of each of these possibilities. They travelled the length of the Pennsylvania canal to Pittsburgh, and down the Ohio River to Cincinnati. Another canal brought them north to the Dayton area, where they went overland to their central Ohio relatives. Their visit over, they went north to Cleveland by the Ohio and Erie Canal, to Buffalo by lake steamer, and through New York State via the Erie Canal and Hudson River. “Portages” between the various water routes were accomplished by rail or stage coach.

A decade or so later, the decline of the canals had already begun, as railroad lines fanned out across the nation. If our young lady diarist had become a wife and mother by then, she and her family could have made the same trip with greater ease and speed, if less variety. And she could have told her children about the “old days” of canal boating and stage coaching, captured, as in a time capsule, in her 1836 diary.