HISTORY’S IMPRINT: THE COLONIAL BOOK AND THE WRITING OF AMERICAN HISTORY, 1790-1855

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

“History’s Imprint: The Colonial Book and the Writing of American History, 1790-1855” investigates the role that reprinted colonial texts played in the development of historical consciousness in nineteenth-century America. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, antiquarians and historians began to make a concerted effort to amass and preserve an American archive of manuscript and print material, in addition to other artifacts and “curiosities” from the colonial period. Publishers and editors also began to prepare new editions of colonial texts for publication, introducing nineteenth-century readers to these historical artifacts for the first time. My dissertation considers the role of antiquarian collecting and historical publishing—the reprinting of colonial texts—in the production of popular historical narratives. I study the competing narratives of America’s colonial origins that emerged between 1790 and 1855 as a result of this new commitment to historicism and antiquarianism. I argue that the acts of selecting, editing, and reprinting were ideologically charged as these colonial texts were introduced to new audiences. Instead of functioning as pure reproductions of colonial books, these texts were used to advocate specific religious, political, and cultural positions in the nineteenth century. In addition, these reprints and the stories they contained exposed the instability and heterogeneity of American history and challenged the myth of a unified national identity.
My dissertation is divided into three parts and each analyzes the nineteenth-century construction of a particular epoch of colonial history: Columbus’s discovery of the Caribbean, England’s settlement of Virginia, and the Puritans’ landing in New England. This organization reflects both the regional variations evident in nineteenth-century historical writing and the ideological underpinnings of these vastly different colonial narratives. My analysis reveals that colonial history became contested territory in the nineteenth century as writers and readers grappled with the notion of American exceptionalism—a belief in America’s unique role in modern history—and as they sought to locate the roots of democracy. Using the methodologies of book history and literary criticism, my dissertation enriches studies of American literary history, print culture, regionalism, and transnationalism.
DEDICATION

To Mike and my parents, for their love, patience, and encouragement
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INTRODUCTION

“There is no sure way of preserving historical records and materials, but by *multiplying the copies*. The art of printing affords a mode of preservation more effectual than Corinthian brass or Egyptian marble.”

Jeremy Belknap, Address to the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1792

A witness to the birth of the United States, publisher and antiquarian Ebenezer Hazard immediately recognized the new nation’s need to preserve colonial records. In a series of letters to Jeremy Belknap, co-founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Hazard discussed the idea of publishing a collection of colonial documents that might aid in writing the nation’s first histories. Belknap warned that the publication would be a “risque” but that “there is a necessity for a risque in all such cases” (235). While a narrative history would be “more popular and profitable than such a collection,” the collection would provide a crucial basis for understanding the “facts” of colonial history. As Hazard responded, “I think materials such as mine will, of themselves, form the best history that can be published, as they will furnish facts free from the glosses of commentators” (262). Though neither Hazard’s *Historical Collections* (1792-4) nor Belknap’s own *American Biography* (1794, 1798) sold well—for the very reasons Belknap had stated—their work established a tradition of historical publishing, or the reprinting of historical texts, that became tremendously influential in establishing an American historical tradition. In the minds of Belknap and Hazard, reprinting was the best method of preservation *and* public distribution, both of which were imperative to the
creation of a national historical consciousness. Thomas Jefferson had expressed a similar sentiment in correspondence with Hazard in 1791. With regards to the ravaged Virginia state papers, he wrote, “The lost cannot be recovered, but let us save what remains; not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident” (qtd. in Shelley 62). This philosophy, articulated again in the language of the Massachusetts Historical Society’s constitution, marked the beginning of organized antiquarian collecting in the U.S. As Belknap would write privately to Hazard in 1797, “It is in our power to furnish the public with much information, by republishing scarce and valuable pieces, and communicating original matter, which frequently comes into our hands” (364). Print ostensibly possessed the power to preserve, to distribute, to inform, and to inspire; it was seen as the vehicle through which the past could be made present in the minds of readers.

But why, in the wake of independence, would the nation desire to turn back to its colonial history at all? According to Gordon Wood, citizens of the early republic believed that “the colonial era was essential to an understanding of the whole progressive story of the United States” (145). While citizens agreed that America had been destined to break from England and establish a republic in the New World, they did not agree on how independence was achieved or to whom it could be traced. The differences that emerged between various historical narratives ultimately undermined attempts to foster national unity through a shared history. While literary scholars have often pointed to the dominance of particular historical narratives in the nineteenth century, they have not fully considered the methods by which these narratives achieved dominance. My research
reveals the extent to which history disrupted attempts at national unification in the early national and antebellum periods. By studying reprinted colonial texts in the context of specific ideological battles, I uncover the fraught landscape of colonial historiography in the nineteenth century. This project, which begins in 1790, just before the establishment of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and ends in 1855, at the height of sectionalist tensions before the Civil War, argues that this period of historical consciousness in America is best understood by examining the colonial texts and narratives that were reprinted and read during the critical years of nation formation. In five case studies, I examine why particular colonial texts were reprinted at specific moments in the nineteenth century, how they circulated alongside new histories of the colonial period, and how they were rhetorically employed to advance often-competing narratives of America’s colonial past. Each of these cases in historical publishing illustrates what I identify as a nationwide movement among historians, antiquarians, publishers, and readers both to reproduce an “authentic” history based on primary documents and to revise the historical record according to contemporary needs. “History’s Imprint” ultimately demonstrates that even as perceptions of nationhood were historically grounded, networks of antiquarians, historians, publishers, and readers imagined national history in radically different ways.

Until recently, the study of how nineteenth-century American citizens conceived of colonial history has been dominated by a totalizing narrative propagated by literary critics. This narrative rests on two assumptions: That the Puritans of New England were the most influential colonial community in shaping American identity and that this narrative was produced and sustained by an implied national consensus. The work begun
by Perry Miller and then revised by Sacvan Bercovitch privileged the influence of New England Puritanism in the development of American literary history and culture and, perhaps unconsciously, propagated the notion that nineteenth-century writers and readers also perceived colonial history this way. One reason to return to the roots of historical inquiry in the period is to uncover other popular colonial narratives that directly and sometimes aggressively challenged the New England story that was championed by Miller and Bercovitch. I argue that what Bercovitch sees as an “ideological consensus” of American exceptionalism, produced in New England and disseminated throughout the U.S., was shaped by the strategic preservation and reprinting of colonial texts (Jeremiad xii). My research further contends that while these reprinted texts were producing consensus in some cases, they also bred discord. As Peter Charles Hoffer has recently described, the notion of “consensus history” was critical to justifying the United States’ existence as a nation, and historians “scanned the historical record for clues and omens” of the revolution (17). But consensus did not exist with regards to a grand narrative of America’s developments from colony to nation and my study reveals a much more complex relationship between nineteenth-century Americans and colonial history than scholars have assumed. What historians did agree on in the nineteenth-century was that by studying the colonial period, they could identify how the nation came to be and then make some argument for how it ought to proceed. This process was fairly transparent in that historians were usually clear about the stakes of popularizing specific historical narratives. For, “historical writing has always been an instrument of political-party warfare,” writes Michael Krauss and Davis Joyce, “and its functions in ideological conflicts was clearly recognized by Americans” (64). Even within the tradition of
“consensus history,” the writing of history was not a disinterested process; instead, reconstructing colonial history had the potential to polarize the reading public.

Book historians and literary scholars alike have interrogated how print produced consensus in early America, and specifically how reading reinforced beliefs about nationhood and history. Studies of print culture and nation formation have tended to focus on political writing and novels in the early republican period, in part because both genres were often engaged in similar projects.¹ Michael Warner’s argument that print produced consensus—the “we the people” of the Constitution—was particularly influential in establishing the notion of a national print culture. Recently, Trish Loughran’s study, The Republic in Print (2007) has reconsidered the consensus-building potential of print and, through reconstructing the circulation of print in the early national and antebellum periods, argues that print culture was instead defined by “a proliferating variety of local and regional reading publics scattered across a vast and diverse geographical space” (xix). Loughran’s argument importantly asserts that print was not necessarily a unifying technology, but instead prompted pre- and post-revolutionary Americans to recognize the distance and differences that separated them. Taken together, Warner and Loughran’s projects point to the role of print in both uniting and fragmenting the nation, and both points are valuable to my study. The reprinting of colonial texts, I argue, was born of an attempt to support a synthesized master narrative of American history, but such efforts often resulted in further splintering of the nation along religious, political, and regional lines. Loughran’s argument for an understanding of print in early America as “provincial and plural” (23) correlates with this project’s claims for a “plural” understanding of how colonial history emerged after the revolution. In Part II of this
project, for example, I argue that the uneven development of “print culture” in the North and South precipitated a sectional battle in the antebellum period over America’s colonial identity and the birthplace of republicanism. Thus, just as print failed to create a unified, national “public” in the early national period, so too did history fail as a unifying force in the antebellum period.

My project also seeks to recover a significant segment of the publishing industry—historical reprints—that was quite prolific in the first half of the nineteenth century, but is largely ignored in literary history. When literary scholars analyze the inception of historical writing and the formation of national histories, they frequently turn to historical fiction for their primary source material. Indeed, historical fiction and professional historical writing reached their pinnacle around the same time, between 1820 and 1850. While Phillip Gould is accurate in his assessment that “historical fiction [was] an identifiable. . . mode of history-writing in the early republic,” it is also the case that other modes of historical writing were a prominent “outlet for cultural dissent” (13). Because of the ostensible authenticity of reprints, these texts became provocative pieces of evidence in particular cultural battles. By focusing only on the genre of historical fiction, scholars have neglected the variety of other historical texts circulating in the nineteenth century, like reprinted colonial texts, historical magazines, published accounts of commemorations and speeches, and regional histories produced outside of New England. My study engages with these different layers of printed historical material and places them within the category of “literary,” in part because the distinction between history and literature was by no means codified by the antebellum period.

As Gregory Pftizer’s study of popular history demonstrates, nineteenth-century
readers often viewed “fiction and history as inextricable linked” (4). The distinction between professional literary and historical writing is anachronistic insofar as it assumes a measure of objectivity and professionalism amongst historians that was only beginning to emerge in the early antebellum period. Eileen Ka-May Cheng’s important study of the emergence of historical writing in the early antebellum period suggests that the differences between viewing history as “truth” or as interpretation, did not necessarily break along strict generic lines. Cheng observes that antebellum historians grappled with two “seemingly contradictory views of truth—a belief in the existence of a truth that was independent of the historian’s interpretation and a belief that the historian played a role in creating and interpreting truth” (53). My work reveals a similar tension in the reproduction of particular colonial works. As I will discuss below, antiquarians sought to preserve and publish the raw materials of history because such materials facilitated the writing of “true” history, which “entailed the re-creation of the objective reality of the past” (Cheng 67). So, while readers would have clearly recognized a historical novel as history re-imagined, both the novel and the history were the products of invention to some extent. The reproduction of colonial texts can be read as part of this inventive history-making process.

Both writers of historical fiction and of scholarly history participated in what Hayden White calls “emplotment,” or the assignment of “specific kinds of plot structures” to historical events (85). I assert that the theory of emplotment applies to the study of reprinted historical texts as well because reprinting, like historical writing itself, “[endows] sets of past events with meanings, over and above whatever comprehension they provide by appeal to putative causal laws, by exploiting the metaphorical similarities
between sets of real events and the conventional structures of our fictions” (91). A key impetus for reprinting, then, was to draw “metaphorical similarities” between colonial events and national events by fashioning colonial actors into proto-revolutionary, proto-republican figures. The decision amongst antiquarians, editors, publishers, and writer concerning which texts to rescue from oblivion and publically circulate—and which to neglect—played a crucial role in the nineteenth-century production of colonial history. The historical artifacts that I discuss shaped and supported the “remarkable rise in historical consciousness” in nineteenth-century America and produced many possible colonial “plots,” some of which possessed greater staying power than others (Calcott vii).

The reprinting of colonial texts in the nineteenth century must be understood in the context of the antiquarian movement, begun just after the ratification of the Constitution. As Belknap and Hazard recognized, the ability to write national histories was wholly dependent on the availability of colonial materials—laws, letters, diaries, histories, pamphlets, newspapers, bills of exchange—none of which were widely accessible. As historian James Wilkinson put it, “Not everything in the past has left traces, and not all traces have survived. In the absence of remains, there can be no evidence, and in the absence of evidence, there can be no history” (80). Therefore, the urgency to collect “traces” of the past was acutely felt in the wake of a destructive revolution. In what follows, I trace the advent of these societies and their fundamental commitment to collecting and reproducing the “evidence” that made historical scholarship possible.

**Historical Societies and the Art of Preservation**

Printing in America has always been closely associated with the preservation of a
historical record. Isaiah Thomas made perhaps the earliest argument for this association in his *History of Printing in America* (1810). In the introduction, Thomas explains that the early establishment of the printing press in the colonies facilitated the eventual writing of national history. Printing allowed for the preservation of documents from the earliest days of the New England colonies that would otherwise have been lost; thus, the art of printing, Thomas writes, became the “preserver of all arts,” including the “art” of historical writing (3). The metaphors for print as preservation were numerous in the period, but all pointed to what was assumed to be the permanency of books, despite the irony that it was books that were so easily destroyed in the first place. In a 1843 lecture “On the Uncertainties of History,” historian Levi Woodbury claims,

> Had half the attention been bestowed, only in Egypt, for instance, on the faithful preservation of experiments and principles, in books—those mummies of the mind—which have been lavished on preserving the mere dross of departed spirits, how much more steadfast would not be the public faith? (11)

Like mummies of an entire nation, the printed historical record of American history would far outlast the people if they were carefully preserved. More than simply entombing events, historical artifacts should be reprinted. Levi contends that “one great engine, and probably the greatest to secure the preservation of history, has been the art of printing. Every year, as it has embodied truth, quicker, easier, and oftener, it has diffused it wider and at less expense; and has thus interested millions more in its safety” (21). Through “the multiplication of copies,” American citizens would become increasingly interested in history and invested in its preservation such that it would require that “the whole mass of any society must be extirpated before all its historical memorials could again perish” (21).
For historical preservation to be fully realized, the nation needed organized historical and antiquarian societies. The exchange between Belknap and Hazard that I cited initiated the establishment of the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1791, America’s first historical society. The formation of historical societies signaled a more public investment in historical inquiry and introduced the concept that historical preservation should be a civic duty. In the “Introductory Address from the Historical Society,” Belknap traced the history of colonial America’s early documents, emphasizing their vulnerability to destruction whether by war, fire, neglect, or even “the ravages of unprincipled men” (320). His call to replicate copies of original colonial documents then follows this brief narrative, emphasizing the importance of enshrining not only “names, dates, and fact” but also “principles and reasoning, causes and consequences” (320). Belknap makes a significant comparison of antiquarianism with patriotism; he believes that by preserving historical materials from destruction, the nation might also preserve the principles upon which it was founded.

After the War of 1812, the need to preserve historical artifacts seemed all the more acute. The initiative of organized antiquarian collecting and historical preservation flourished with the founding of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Not surprisingly, printer-publisher Isaiah Thomas was at the helm of the new society, emphasizing again the vital relationship between antiquarianism and print in the period. While the Massachusetts Historical Society had been a successful repository for New England artifacts, Thomas recognized a need for national and international participation in and contributions to the preservation of national archives. In addition, David Van Tassel writes that in the 1820s, local historians “stung national pride with the
revelation that England and other nations controlled many manuscripts and records pertinent to American colonial history” (103). As I will discuss in the Part II, efforts to reclaim these texts from libraries abroad were often led by individual states hoping to collect materials relevant to their own colonial history; the success of these efforts depended in large part on the extent to which they were funded. Collecting and also reproducing works printed in the colonies became the primary goal of the American Antiquarian Society, in addition to retaining a copy of everything being printed in the United States. Thomas asked members to collect periodicals and newspapers for the society and he implored “every author, every printer or publisher of a book, or publick journal” to send a copy of the society so that it might be “deposited in the best place possible for security and preservation” and “be a source of high gratification to Antiquaries of succeeding ages” (7). Thomas had the foresight to begin collecting contemporary books and periodicals for preservation because he had seen how quickly “thousands of editions of printed books” could recede into obscurity, “not a copy of them [now] to be found” (6).

Societies would continue to find ways to draw new members and contributions, not only to build the archives but also to stimulate interest in American history in general. Samuel Gardiner Drake, president of the Prince Society of Boston announced that the society would establish a subscription system which would be a feature of membership to the society; members would receive reprints of historical works and by virtue of their public circulation, these works would “encourage that taste for investigation, in which the proposed Publication Society finds it materials and sees its prospect of success” (Circular).³ The public’s interest in history clearly flourished because by 1860, 111
historical societies had been organized across the United States, and at least 90 of those societies published their proceedings, which often included reprinted works from the societies’ collections (Calcott 35-6).

George Calcott estimates that by 1860, 184 “major volumes,” or works over 200 pages, were published by historical societies in addition to over 650 pamphlets “containing minutes of meetings, lists of members, annual addresses, and the like” (42).

Several of the reprints I discuss were either funded by historical societies or were published or edited by active members of historical or antiquarian societies. These organizations made professional historical writing possible in the early republic and continue to do so in the twenty-first century.

It is important to observe that historians and antiquarians saw themselves as performing different scholarly functions and were frequently guided by different motives and methodologies. Calcott explains that in the nineteenth century, antiquarians “would never have presumed to call themselves historians” and were usually content to remain “anonymous” as they “quietly [collected] the annals of a local township” (112). Noted antiquarian Abiel Holmes articulated the difference this way:

We permit the entomologist to chase butterflies interminable, let us be permitted to quietly spell out inscriptions in old grave yards, to pour over musty books…to ransack the records of the days of other years. […] The study of antiquities is an auxiliary to history. The one furnishes a few of the valuable materials, with which the other constructs her superb edifice. (qtd. in Calcott 112-13)

The title “historian” held more prestige in the antebellum period, and so antiquarians imagined themselves as performing a supporting role in the writing of national history. Beyond prestige, though, lay a difference in the historians’ and antiquarians’ relationship to historical artifacts. Antiquarians saw the act of collecting as both a civic and moral
imperative, as they sought to facilitate the writing of accurate American histories. In its founding document, Isaiah Thomas wrote that the American Antiquarian Society existed in part to “assist the researches of the future historians of our country” (65) and to restore “history to its truth” (103). The idea that there is a “true” history (and, conversely, a false one) was important to antiquarians in particular, who read documents like criminologists read DNA—as irrevocable proof of human action in a given context. So while historical writing privileged the constructed narrative over the raw “data,” antiquarian collecting required a belief in the worth of documents as such. In a young nation that was rapidly changing, documents represented stasis and a tangible past. In addition, as Cheng has argued, antebellum historians were committed to “the ideal of impartial truth,” a truth that could be constructed “only through a systematic and critical analysis of original documents” (2).6

Finally, the imperative to collect was motivated by a belief in the moral and civic implications of preserving colonial history. Even with objectivity and precision as its goal, the discipline of collecting itself was linked to the preservation of core American values. According to Calcott, “Local antiquarians liked to justify history as a memorial to departed worthies. In one sense this was a way of saying that history supported principles, for the worthy were by definition men of virtue, religion, and patriotism” (189). Antiquarianism, then, was deeply invested in shaping narratives of colonial and early American history that reinforced the nation’s core beliefs about itself. Historian Abiel Holmes expressed this sentiment clearly in an 1814 speech to the young American Antiquarian Society. He asked that members of the society “preserve what is worthy of preservation” because “the time my come, when the sons of the pilgrims will revert to the
times of their forefathers for old principles. . . and search our repositories for the memorials, and the means, of a free, pure and prosperous republic” (26). In Holmes’s estimation, the value of antiquarianism lies in its preservation not just of artifacts, but of a kind of spirit or, to borrow from Walter Benjamin, an “aura” of a past age. Reminding citizens of the colonials’ plight against the world’s most powerful empire inspired a belief in America’s absolute right to exist as a free nation and affirmed its unique role in history. As I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, the mythology of exceptionalism was deeply embedded in historical discourse of the period. As America’s most prominent antebellum historian, George Bancroft, put it, “Our Independence was the fruit of centuries; the whole previous civilization of the world was the condition, under which the glorious event was possible. Let us gather up every fragment of its history; let us allow nothing to be lost” (86-7). While the motive behind archival preservation was frequently directed at proving America’s exceptionalism, antiquarians and historians also employed the “fragment[s] of history” to dispute the origins of exceptionalism.

This antiquarian movement and its dedication to preservation through print rested on the belief that the reprinted text was a reliable and authentic document. My study of reprints seeks to deconstruct the process by which texts were reproduced and, in turn, make claims about how particular reprints contributed to historical discourse. While the subject of copyright or “unauthorized” reproduction does not apply in the majority of the cases I examine, my project seeks to continue the kind of work begun by Meredith McGill in analyzing the production of texts that seem to elude “the enumerative strategies of bibliographers” (2). Studying reprinted colonial texts disables any attempts
at recreating authorial intention because the texts undergo so many permutations that it is nearly impossible to ascertain the “correct” edition. As I will show, not all of the colonial texts I discuss were even intended for publication, but became part of the printing-as-preservation effort nonetheless. The study of what McGill refers to as the “staggered temporality of [a text’s] production” is not primarily concerned with reconstructing the original urtext, if such a thing exists, but in understanding how reprinted texts were not only altered in their reproduction, but also recreated and sometimes revised to transmit a particular message to—or force a particular reading upon—contemporary readers. Because my project is concerned with reprinted colonial books, the concept of copyright is moot. Yet, the question of how to “authentically” reproduce a colonial book and how best to honor the spirit of its author, a major preoccupation in the age of filiopietism, was by no means a settled matter. Before the establishment of standards for textual editing, those wishing to reproduce early texts did so according to their own notions of how the text should function. As my project shows, the intended political, social, and religious functions of these texts tended to define the forms that they took.

With the addition of features like introductions, notes, and indexes, reprinted colonial texts also became more readable to the general reader. Much like digital reproduction today, reprinting granted readers unprecedented access to rare materials. However, where digital reproduction in the twenty-first century is wrapped up in debates about copyright, accuracy, access, reliability, and ownership, nineteenth-century reprints of colonial texts were considered wholly authentic. Editors and publishers believed that reprints were authentic insofar as they accurately reproduced the original. What I mean
by “original” is typically the first edition of a work, except for in the case of manuscripts that had never been transcribed for publication. Reproduction could entail a range of actions; sometimes it meant reprinting a work word-for-word, without the errata or explanatory notes; sometimes it meant “fixing” an older edition with an inaccurate transcription or transcribing a manuscript for a first printing; and sometimes it meant reprinting the original text but modernizing the typography, orthography, or spelling. Most often, the editor or publisher of the reprint did not have access to the author’s manuscript, or copy-text, so the modern principles of textual editing based on an author’s corrected manuscript or proofs did not apply. While a historical society or library would retain original manuscripts or texts for its archive, the reprint was to be taken as an authentic reproduction that could circulate beyond the walls of the library as a replica of the original. From a twentieth-century perspective, these assumptions about reproduction and authenticity appear flawed. As Walter Benjamin asserted, the age of mechanical reproduction created a crisis in authenticity because “the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical—and, of course, not only technical—reproducibility” (220) and by virtue of its reproduction “the quality of its presence is always depreciated” (221). Reading a reprinted edition of John Winthrop’s journal, for example, could never replicate the experience of encountering the original, hand-written journal. Yet, the question of authenticity was less critical for figures like Belknap and Hazard who believed that reprinted texts could be taken as authentic copies; their use of the language of preservation clearly illustrates this belief.

Because the texts I discuss often passed through many hands and underwent several permutations, I treat these reprints as what John Bryant calls “fluid texts.” Bryant asserts
that “a literary work invariably evolves, by the collaborative forces of individuals and the
culture, from one version to another” and that such evolution is a necessary condition of
the text not just because “words lend themselves to different meanings” but because
“writers, editors, publishers, translators, digesters, and adapters change those words
materially” (4). I am not primarily interested in how the reprinted works I discuss
compare textually to their originals; that is, I do not collate the texts in order to identify
specific textual variants. Instead, I examine both the circumstances surrounding the
production of a new edition and how the modern iteration of the text performs the “work”
of shaping particular historical narratives about colonial America. My project focuses on
a series of exchanges between groups of writers and groups of texts that helped to
produce a historical tradition in the nineteenth century. As William Charvat and,
recently, Michael Winship have shown, book publishing in the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries involved a network of agents, including authors, publishers, paper merchants,
printers, wholesalers, booksellers, readers, and others working together to produce and
circulate books. I argue that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the
construction of American history took place in a similar network of exchanges between
sets of writers and sets of texts. These include interactions between historians and
antiquarians; editors and publishers; colonial histories and antebellum historians;
northern historians and southern historians; American historians and European archives.
I have selected five case studies that illustrate how nineteenth-century writers and
scholars responded to, borrowed from, revised, reprinted, and sometimes venerated
colonial narratives in order shape to American historical discourse, setting agendas for
America’s future that did not always cohere with one another.
My study is divided into three parts that each examines the nineteenth-century construction of a key colonial epoch: Columbus’s discovery of the Caribbean, England’s settlement of Virginia, and the Puritans’ landing in New England. By considering several geographic and temporal positions in colonial history, my research reveals the many colonial American narratives circulating in print in the nineteenth century. The sections are arranged in reverse chronological order to illustrate the dominance of the New England narrative in the popular imagination, both in the nineteenth century and today; I then proceed to less frequently studied representations of colonial America.

Part one, “Puritanism Revisited: The Histories of Cotton Mather and John Winthrop in Antebellum New England,” explores the circumstances surrounding the nineteenth-century reprints of *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702, 1820), a text long out of print in America, and Winthrop’s *History of New England* (1825). The two chapters that comprise this section focus on the editors involved in these reprints, Thomas Robbins and James Savage, respectively, and the extent to which their individual political and religious convictions shaped the texts they edited. I situate the Mather reprint in the context of Robbins’s commitment to the evangelical message of the Second Great Awakening and his dedication to antiquarianism. By reprinting the *Magnalia* in 1820 and again in 1855, Robbins not only made an obscure colonial book accessible to a wider reading public, but also advocated Mather’s millenialist interpretation of American history. Next, I consider the work of James Savage, noted Massachusetts antiquarian, in transcribing and editing a complete edition of Winthrop’s journal for the first time in 1825. Under Savage’s often-heavy editorial hand, Winthrop’s governership is depicted as a prefiguration of the strong, federalist leadership of Washington and Adams, and is
placed solidly in the Unitarian tradition, of which Savage was a part. Even as both Robbins and Savage strove for historical authenticity in their reprints, both men marked the pages with their own political and religious views and, in turn, exemplify Puritanism’s contested legacy in the nineteenth century.

Part two, “Southern Roots of Republicanism: Historical Publishing and the Case for Independence,” considers how colonial history supported secessionist rhetoric in the decades leading up to the Civil War. Southern historians and intellectuals had long bemoaned the South’s deficient publishing industry and apparent disregard for historical matters. Accordingly, in the mid-nineteenth century, under the perceived threat of northern cultural imperialism and increased abolitionist sentiment, southern historians, politicians, and antiquarians turned to historical publishing as a means to assert a new narrative of America’s republican origins—a narrative located in Jamestown, not Plymouth or Massachusetts Bay. In the first chapter of this section, I analyze J.W. Randolph’s 1855 reprinting of Robert Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia, In Four Parts*, first published in 1705. Randolph, a prominent sectionalist publisher, used Beverley’s history to advocate the South’s cultural and political independence from the North. Beverley’s text reminded southern readers of their unique colonial history and defended their traditions and institutions, including slavery. His history also refuted northern-based accounts of America’s budding republicanism, locating the roots of democracy firmly in southern soil. The second chapter in this section examines how the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the premier literary periodical of the South, promoted southern publishing and became a vehicle for historical discourse. I argue that the *Messenger* turned to publishing historical texts, both original and reprinted, in order to
craft a narrative of southern exceptionalism that exploited the myth of an ancient and racialized discord between North and South. Both chapters highlight the extent to which colonial history became a metaphoric battleground on which the two regions staked the future of the nation.

Part three, “American Admiral: Christopher Columbus and Atlantic World History” considers Washington Irving’s biography *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828). Unlike the preceding parts, this section considers only one text which uniquely marries historical writing and antiquarianism in a work considered uncharacteristic of America’s first internationally acclaimed author. I situate Irving’s book in the context of the work of Spanish antiquarian Martín Fernández de Navarrete, whose transcription and publication of Spanish historical manuscripts encouraged American historians and antiquarians to reach across national boundaries to construct the American colonial narrative. With the assistance of Navarrete’s archive, Irving blended antiquarianism with imaginative invention to cast Columbus as a liminal figure floating in the Atlantic, at once European and American. Irving’s use of the Spanish archives at his disposal, coupled with his romantic fascination with Spanish history called into question the boundaries of “fact” and “fiction” in historical writing and publishing. In addition, I situate the book in the context of a growing interest in Hispanic studies in antebellum America, which forced U.S. historians and readers to consider the legacy of Spanish imperialism in Latin America and its potential impact on perceptions of U.S. expansion. Irving’s biography situated American history in a world-historical context and turned to Columbus as a figure who could embody the cultural and historical depth of the Old World and the liberty and modernity of the New World. But his own ambivalence
towards Columbus’s legacy and his vexed relationship with the Spanish archive itself produced a work riddled with uncertainties about American exceptionalism and, specifically, the nation’s continued defense of chattel slavery.

Each of these three sections illustrates the fact that printed texts, just like historical narratives, are fashioned by many agents. They are manipulated, abbreviated, augmented; some are preserved and treasured while others are forgotten entirely. The process by which some historical texts survive the test of time and others fade into “oblivion” provides a rich site of analysis for literary critics and book historians. Each reprint bears the unique marks of its selection and modification and each tells a unique story of its production and circulation. “History’s Imprint” reconstructs these stories in order to discern how colonial artifacts shaped American historiography in the first eighty years of nationhood.

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NOTES

1 Jay Feligelman’s *Prodigals and Pilgrims* (1982), Jane Tompkins’s *Sensational Designs* (1985) and Cathy Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word* (1987) promote these kinds of arguments. All of their influential studies function, in part, to recuperate and legitimize the much-maligned eighteenth and early nineteenth-century novels of now-canonical figures like Charles Brockden Brown and Susanna Rowson.

2 Gould’s assertion of the romance’s “cultural dissent” rests on an investment in the totalizing narrative discussed above; his suggestion is that romances were dissenting against what he sees as the dominant discourse, the ostensible “Puritan origins of the American self.” His claim assumes that narrative’s total supremacy in the American imagination, while my project seeks to recover historical narratives that challenged New England’s dominant role.

3 The record books of the Prince Society indicate some approximate costs of reprinted works around mid-century. One 1865 entry reads, “The first volume of the ‘Hutchinson Papers’ is now ready for delivery. The cost, to members of the club is $4.00. Upon receiving the above amount, the undersigned [Treasurer, Jeremiah Colburn] will forward the work as directed. The Edition consists of 10 copies on large paper, $12.50 per vol. 150 ‘small’–$4.00” (Slafter). The collection was a reprint of some of loyalist historian Thomas Hutchinson’s paper relating to the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1769).

4 The period between 1820 and 1850 marked the greatest period of growth for historical societies, with 100 societies springing up all over the country. According to Calcott, there were 22 societies in New England, 38 in the Mid-Atlantic States, 20 in the South, and 21 in the West (36).
Calcott is an excellent resource for figures on the number of historical journals published in the U.S., the dates of their publication, and their content. He cites seventeen different journals, which were typically published monthly and sponsored by local historical or genealogical societies (46).

Cheng further argues that far from being “Whiggish” and “partial,” antebellum historians, and I would include antiquarians, were dedicated to examining historical events from a critical distance, but a distance that nonetheless allowed for a kind of identification with past actors in history. Such identification would prevent historians from placing anachronistic political, social, or religious expectations on the figures about whom they were writing (10).

PART I
PURITANISM REVISITED: THE HISTORIES OF COTTON MATHER AND JOHN WINTHROP IN ANTEBELLUM NEW ENGLAND

“In this wilderness they instituted a commonwealth, which, though connected with a monarchy, was animated with the vital principle of civil liberty, that was ultimately to prepare it for a pure and distinct republic”
Abiel Holmes, “Two Discourses on the Completion of the Second Century from the Landing of the Forefathers of New England at Plymouth.” 1820

INTRODUCTION

In an 1838 article for the North American Review, celebrated historian George Bancroft claimed that “New England people, especially those of Massachusetts and Connecticut, have always been a documentary people” (“Documentary” 477). Though Bancroft does not connect this claim with the early establishment of the printing press in Massachusetts, it was this technology that enabled a “documentary people” to preserve a record of colonial events. But, of course, not all documents were printed or widely circulated. “Excellent Winthrop!” Bancroft proclaimed, recorded the earliest days of Massachusetts Bay in his diary because he was “anxious to retain the memory of the past” (478). Winthrop’s diary represents a shared desire amongst the Puritan separatists to record the unfolding history of God’s kingdom; they saw the events in the colonies as Providentially designed and typologically significant. The inclination to be a “documentary people,” then, was affirmed by biblical conviction and partially realized through the printing press. The combination of theology and technology led New England to become the dominant force in historical preservation and writing in the
eventual nation.

In the late eighteenth-century, historians like Isaiah Thomas, Jeremy Belknap, Ebenezer Hazard, and Abiel Holmes were thankful that the Puritans had left a paper trail. As John Seelye describes in his work on the legacy of Plymouth Rock, early Americans eagerly searched for symbols of “massive, monolithic permanence” as they “attempted to establish a republic whose foundation they fancied was laid by the forefathers” (17). New England antiquarians, publishers, and historians looked to colonial texts as symbols of “monolithic permanence” that anticipated the foundation of the nation. But unlike the rock, these documents were incredibly vulnerable and as such needed to be preserved and reproduced. As historical societies sprung up throughout New England, citizens of that region felt justified in claiming a kind of historical supremacy over their neighbors. As Holmes’s sermon proves, New Englanders in early America believed that the Puritans had been uniquely chosen to “prepare [the wilderness] for a pure and distinct republic” (20). According to Harlow Sheildley’s study, Sectional Nationalism, “New England’s conservative leaders fashioned, disseminated, and celebrated an epic American history intended to advance their social, cultural, and sectional cause” and, in turn, “advance their sectionalist claims to national preeminence” (119-20). New England historians, antiquarians, publishers, and even politicians were not shy about making claims for their region’s dominant role in both the past and the present. For example, in the 1839 introduction to a children’s edition of Washington Irving’s The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus—a book I discuss in the last chapter—a representative from the Massachusetts School board makes explicit his belief that New England was selected as the intellectual nucleus of the nation. Writing on the importance of publishing history
books for children, he claims, “It seems to be the design of Providence, that New England shall be the nursery of men for this whole nation” (xxix). The language of God’s providence, still thriving in the antebellum period, demonstrates that New England continued to view itself as exceptional relative to other regions, and with that exceptionalism came a call to civic duty.

The preservation of historical artifacts was considered part of good citizenship. Citizens of Massachusetts, for example, were asked to contribute documents and information to the historical society concerning their local town histories, wars with Native Americans, establishment of churches, births and deaths, topographical descriptions, modes of education, and any “remarkable events” (Belknap Circular 2). This information, along with original colonial documents collected by or donated to the society, helped to create an archive of colonial American texts that might reinforce the “design of Providence” that New England lead the way in historical pursuits. Reprinting, as I have shown, also played a significant role in stirring public interest in history. In 1792, Belknap began to publish the American Apollo, a magazine “containing the Publications of the Historical Society, Essays, Moral, Political, and Poetical, and the daily Occurrences in the natural, Civil, and Commercial World” (Proceedings 22). The magazine would eventually be published as Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society and would contain feature selections from the society’s archives. Volumes I and II contained such selections as a letter from Roger Williams, Francis Higginson’s New-England’s Plantation (1630), selected letters from Cotton Mather, King Philip, Thomas Prince, and John Winthrop, Jr., letters from the Cape Breton Expedition (1745) and Daniel Gookin’s “Indians in New England” (1674) (Handbook 9). Using Belknap’s press
in many cases, the society actively reproduced and circulated texts that were otherwise little-known, existed only in manuscript, or were in a fragile state.

These reprinted texts reminded readers that the Puritan legacy lay at the heart of their regional history. But even though New Englanders sought the stability of a “monolithic” historical narrative, reprinted colonial texts did not support just one overarching narrative. In Part I, I examine two examples of Puritan texts that, in their reprinted contexts, support distinct representations of colonial history and Puritan theology. These differences emerge when we examine the circumstances surrounding their reproduction and the particular theological and political beliefs of the editors who handled the texts. These texts clearly denote the contested legacy of Puritanism in the nineteenth century, but they also point to the reasons why New England historiography came to dominate the historical landscape during the rise of historical consciousness in America.

This part considers the reprinted histories of two of New England’s most prominent Puritan leaders: John Winthrop and Cotton Mather. In their original colonial contexts, John Winthrop’s History of New England and Cotton Mather’s Magnalia Christi Americana (1702) were both written from the perspective of the Puritan establishment but through the lens of two vastly different historical moments. Winthrop wrote his journal between 1630 and 1644, during the earliest days of the Massachusetts Colonies under Puritan governance; Mather wrote about these same events, but from the distance of two generations, and in the context of the colonies’ waning commitment to Puritanism. Winthrop’s History was never printed during his lifetime, but portions of it circulated in manuscript form amongst historians like Mather, William Hubbard, and
Belknap. Mather’s *Magnalia* was printed in 1702, but soon fell into obscurity. In the 1820s, as Americans’ interest in New England history was reaching its peak, two antiquarians took on the task of bringing Winthrop’s and Mather’s histories into print. In 1820, a Connecticut minister and antiquarian, Thomas Robbins, compiled a new and complete edition of the *Magnalia*. At the same time in Boston, another antiquarian, James Savage, was editing the first complete edition of John Winthrop’s journal, or the *History of New England*. Both texts had been nearly absent from public circulation until their nineteenth-century reprints, but for very different reasons. The *Magnalia* was unpopular, both because of its author’s damaged reputation and its outdated style. Winthrop’s journal, on the other hand, had not even been transcribed until the 1780s and, even then, the third volume of the journal was missing. Their reprinting in the nineteenth century offered prime examples of the importance of reproducing and circulating colonial texts, particularly as New England sought to establish its cultural primacy in the nation.

One critical difference between the nineteenth-century reprints of the *Magnalia* and Winthrop’s journal is that the *Magnalia* reprints were published despite a resistant market, while Winthrop’s journal was in high demand due to the growing interest in New England history. In fact, as Lawrence Buell argues, Savage’s edition of Winthrop’s journal served as a kind of alternative history to the *Magnalia*, undermining its authority and offering John Winthrop as the anti-Mather, or, as Buell puts it, “the George Washington of Massachusetts” (230). Thus, the act of publishing these works of Puritan history was loaded with both theological and political importance for their antebellum editors. Robbins, an enthusiastic participant in the Second Great Awakening and a dedicated antiquarian, hoped that the *Magnalia* reprint would contribute both to the
evangelical revival and to the growth of antiquarianism and book collecting in New England. He also thought it might redeem Cotton Mather from years of ridicule and revive the typological message of Puritan historiography. Savage, on the other hand, was a committed Unitarian and a staunch believer in Federalism. Under his editorial hand, Winthrop’s history represents a progressive theological view of Puritan history that stands in contrast to Robbins’s evangelicalism. Savage did not advocate a revival of Puritan orthodoxy, but rather a progressive elimination of its social and doctrinal strictures. In addition, Savage saw Winthrop as a prefiguration of the strong, centralized leadership of Washington or Adams, both of whom Savage deeply admired. Despite the differences between Robbins’ *Magnalia* and Savage’s *History*, both editors situate their reprints in the context of their respective theological concerns. Evidence of tension between the conservative Congregationalists and the liberal Unitarians can be found between the lines of these two reprints. How the history of the New England colonies would be told—and by whom it would be told—was one stake in a larger battle for theological primacy in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Comparing these two texts also reveals the extent to which both Mather and Winthrop’s reputations were formed by these nineteenth-century reprints. Savage fashioned Winthrop into the proto-nationalist hero of colonial New England; and despite Robbins’s efforts to legitimize Mather as a historian, Mather was still deemed the dogmatic fool of the witchcraft delusion. Yet, judging by nineteenth-century standards of religious tolerance and civil liberty, as many readers anachronistically did, Winthrop was by no means innocent. Why, then, was Winthrop spared the degree of criticism leveled at Mather? In many ways Winthrop was no less guilty of Puritan bigotry. Still, both
Unitarians and Congregationalists laid claim to John Winthrop as a pious hero. And, in fact, this designation resonated well into the twentieth century. Where David Levin had to make a “monster human” in his biography of Mather, Francis J. Bremer turned John Winthrop into “America’s Forgotten Founding Father.”¹ This chapter will explore the origins of these labels by examining how Robbins and Savage sought to shape perceptions of these colonial figures, and their books, in the nineteenth century and beyond. Robbins and Savage took two very different editorial approaches to these histories, and both marked the pages with their own religious and political convictions. Both editors wrestled with the problematic aspects of Puritan history, but sought to cement the public reputation of two men and two texts, which they believed had laid the foundation for a Christian republic.
CHAPTER 1: THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING AND MATHER’S
MAGNALIA CHRISTI AMERICANA

By the time Cotton Mather died in 1728, his two volume church history, the
Magnalia Christi Americana, had all but vanished in England and America. As one of
New England’s most prominent and controversial Puritan figures, Mather represented a
generation of colonists and a theological stance that, like his book, was quickly receding
into the past. The Magnalia is an exhaustive historical account of colonial New England
that includes descriptions of the founding of specific Puritan congregations and
seminaries, accounts of spiritual trials and martyrdom, and celebrations of God’s
providential care over the Puritans. But despite the prominence of its author, the
usefulness of its records, and the optimism of its theological message, a complete
American edition of the Magnalia did not exist until almost 120 years after its first
printing in London in 1702.

In 1820, the Magnalia was saved from obscurity by a Connecticut minister and
antiquarian, Thomas Robbins. Robbins’s decision to publish the first American edition of
the Magnalia was driven by his involvement in two significant national movements
between 1820 and 1855: The Second Great Awakening and the emergence of American
antiquarianism, or as David Van Tassel terms it, “Documania” (103). All who knew him
felt that Robbins represented the spirit of the Puritan fathers in his duties as pastor and
antiquarian. In a tribute to Robbins published in the Round Table on January 6, 1866, Dr.
Henry R. Stiles, a well-known Brooklyn historian and genealogist, wrote affectionately of an older Robbins pacing the halls of the Connecticut Historical Society, speaking with anyone willing to hear about his artifacts. Stiles depicted Robbins as “a venerable little white-haired man, in an old-fashioned costume of black, with small-clothes, white silk stockings, and knee-buckles” navigating the masses of “old portraits, old chairs and chests out of the Mayflower, Captain Miles Standish’s dinner-pot, Indian relics, worm-eaten manuscripts, old battle-flags… and scraps of ancient costume” (1081). All accounts of Robbins depict him as a kind of Puritan antiquity, “the last of a line of New England divines” (1082, 1084). In his obituary, Robbins is described as being “representative of the early generation of Puritan ministers” and a “connecting link between the present generation and the Puritan period of New England History” (Barnard 280). Surely Robbins’ commitment to the life of the Puritans (and his resemblance of that life) inspired his efforts to reprint the long-lost Magnalia.

While recent criticism situates the Magnalia reprints in the context of the American Renaissance and view its contributions as chiefly literary, I argue that the material circumstances of the book’s reprinting make it a participant in the multidimensional discourses of faith, history, and nation in antebellum New England. Evangelical revivalism and antiquarianism possessed similar motivations and characteristics in the early nineteenth century, not the least of which was a desire to establish a sustaining historical narrative of America’s development from colony to nation. However, the relationship between these movements, which have seemingly incongruent methodologies, has yet to be explored. The Second Great Awakening is known as an evangelically motivated movement marked by a millenialist theology and a
commitment to social concerns like temperance and prison reform, while the antiquarian movement is seen as part of the “remarkable rise of historical consciousness” in the antebellum period that yielded a surge in historical fiction and nonfiction (Calcott vii). Robbins’s reprinting of Mather’s *Magnalia* demonstrates the close relationship between antiquarianism and evangelical revivalism in the 1820s, a relationship fostered by American print culture.5

By reprinting the *Magnalia* in 1820 and again in 1855, Robbins not only made the book accessible to a wider reading public, but also circulated Mather’s ideas in the context of this emerging historical discourse and religious revival. In addition, changes made between the first and second American editions of the book denote the changing historical moments in which they were published. New features added to the 1855 edition suggest a shift in the book’s primary purpose, from largely religious to predominantly historical, as the revival died out and as the subject of New England’s history became popularized in fiction and nonfiction. Analyzing the circumstances surrounding the publication of both American editions of the *Magnalia* illuminates the relationship between print culture and New England’s complex historical and religious identity. Robbins’s efforts to bring the *Magnalia* back into print after years of neglect is indicative of a larger belief in the power of the printed text to shape America’s future by returning to its recorded past.

Both historians and evangelicals at this time had to reconcile themselves to Puritanism, as a historical symbol and religious tradition (favorable or not). Nineteenth-century historians and authors began to uncover a troubling Puritan history stained by bigotry, superstition, faction, and war. How these sins of the Puritan fathers would be
represented in history and literature became the key dilemma for writers of the early national and antebellum periods. Recent scholarship has suggested that nineteenth-century representations of Puritanism functioned as allegories of the early republic. Phillip Gould’s argument, that historical writing emerged in the 1820s to “[displace] Puritan history with early republican history,” is representative of this interpretive move (9). Puritan history was used, then, as a kind of stage on which contemporary political, social, and religious concerns were played out. In the case of the Magnalia, though, Puritan history was printed back into existence at a time when collectors, antiquarians, historians, and librarians were looking to construct a past based on printed texts. Instead of being “displaced,” Puritan history was being placed in the foreground of the efforts to revive America’s “authentic” history. Implicit in Robbins’s publishing effort was his belief that a lost Magnalia corresponded to a lost belief system and a lost historical foundation. Book publishing, then, represented a way to participate both in the recovery of colonial history and in the revival of Puritan faith.

Moreover, for Robbins, the Magnalia was itself a model of the coalescence of evangelicalism and antiquarianism. In the prefatory material to the Magnalia, Mather makes claims to the historical fidelity of the book and the important role of history in instructing posterity. A Latin quote in the general introduction reads, “History is the witness of periods of time, the messenger of antiquity, the light of truth, the life of memory, and the instructress of life” (1977 ed. 94). The stakes were exceedingly high for Mather’s church history, as he hoped it would instruct future generations in the theological tradition of the Puritan fathers—a tradition that he saw rapidly receding at the turn of the eighteenth century. Leading up to the book’s publication, Mather feared that
it would never be printed. Fearing that un-confessed sins were standing in the way of his finding a publisher or printer in London, Mather spent much of 1701 and 1702 in “Floods of Tears” and “Supplications” before God (409). Finally, when Thomas Parkhurst agreed to publish the work, a “bulky thing of about 250 sheets,” and Robert Hackshaw agreed to print it “at his own charge,” Mather’s Magnalia was ready for publication in the spring of 1702.⁶ Though subscriptions were few and the price was high (£1), Mather believed his book to be “sprinkled by the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Diary 366) and in a prayer printed in the general introduction, he asks that the book “serve thy Truths and Ways among they people, by that which thou has here prepared; for ‘tis THOU that has prepar’d it for them” (113). Granting his history biblical status—claiming for himself a kind of supernatural guidance from God and blessing from Christ—Mather imagined it would remain a work of tremendous historical and theological import for centuries to come. However, almost twenty years later, in his correspondence to friends, Mather acknowledged the ambivalent reaction to the book both in England and New England and wrote of his increasing concern that other histories will eventually outstrip his own.⁷ Mather’s hunch was correct; his book would never become the beacon of biblical truth or example or historical rigor that he had hoped.

Instead, by the early nineteenth century, Cotton Mather had become the illustrative figure of Puritan bigotry and an archaic theology.⁸ The Magnalia, especially, was heavily ridiculed for its surfeit of classical and biblical illusions and its antiquated style. While the book itself was difficult to find in the early nineteenth century, critiques of it were not. For example, in an article entitled “Books Relating to America,”
published in *The North American Review* in 1818, William Tudor criticized the *Magnalia* on these grounds:

> It is like traveling over an old road, where the few faces you meet are at once sour and gloomy […]. To those who are interested in the early history of our country, it may be well to remark, that for accuracy in historical occurrences, they will do well to rely upon other authorities; but if they wish to obtain a general view of the state of society and manners, they will probably nowhere find so many materials for their purpose, as in the work of this credulous, pedantick, and garrulous writer. (271-3)

Tudor then sarcastically quipped that he himself is likely “the last (and possibly the first) individual, who, bona fide, perused in regular course the whole of Mather’s *Magnalia,*” that “chaotic mass of history, biography, obsolete creeds, witchcraft, and Indian wars” (256-7). Later in the century, James Savage, a historian working on an edition of John Winthrop’s *History of New England* in 1853, charged Mather with sloppy historical work in recounting the life of Winthrop. Calling Mather “the unhappy author of *Magnalia Christi Americana,*” Savage censured Mather for having “preferred useless quotations of worthless books, two or three centuries older, or popular and corrupt traditions, to the full manner and precise statement of facts, dates, principles, and motives, furnished by authentic history” (ix). In 1879, in his *History of American Literature*, Moses Coit Tyler wrote of Mather’s “infinite credulity; infinite carelessness” and his “disposition to stain the chaste pages of history with the tints of his family friendships and his family feuds” (83). Nineteenth-century critics read Mather’s history as anything but disinterested, a characteristic considered essential to history writing. They also conclude that Mather himself got in the way of this potentially useful book and that he lacked discernment and understanding at every level, from the length of the book to its historical accuracy.
While its tainted reputation in the nineteenth century is clear, scholars have often overstated the *Magnalia*’s positive and sustaining influence in the period. Dorothy Baker has recently argued that the book’s original function was to revive a “devotion to the Puritan commonwealth” and that it “served the same role well into the nineteenth century, where it continued to hold the attention of American readers” (3).^9^ Baker further claims that the “providence tales” that comprise a large part of Mather’s book became the basis for the American gothic form, represented in works by Poe, Stowe, Hawthorne, Sedgwick, and Wharton. Likewise, Christopher Felker maintains that the *Magnalia* was one of the most influential texts in the formation of literary nationalism in the antebellum period.^10^ Felker understands Robbins’s reprinting effort as a contribution to the growing demand for “a uniquely ‘American’ literary tradition” (87). These studies of the *Magnalia* in the nineteenth century rest on the assumption that the book substantially shaped the American literary landscape and was explicitly sought out by key American authors. Both arguments rely on a flawed belief in the popularity (and availability) of the book in the nineteenth century. Not only was the book extremely scarce before 1820 when it was reprinted, but its reputation and that of its author had been consistently undermined even after its American editions were published. That Mather’s *Magnalia* underwent a rebirth in the nineteenth century is true, but the forces behind its reprinting had little to do with the growth of literary nationalism and a democratic readership, especially when we consider the particular circumstances under which Thomas Robbins ushered the book back into print. The *Magnalia*’s publication history suggests that in the nineteenth century it did not serve explicitly literary purposes, as both Felker and Baker contend, but instead was considered an artifact of both antiquarian and evangelical import.
at a time when the nation was newly committed to accessing its past through print. By focusing on the circumstances of the book’s reprinting we can reconstruct a historical narrative of its role in the nineteenth century that establishes new links between evangelical revivalism and antiquarianism.

The son of noted Connecticut theologian Ammi R. Robbins, Thomas Robbins was reared to be a scholar and theologian. After completing his education at Yale and Williams Colleges at the turn of the century, he held positions as a teacher, minister, and missionary throughout New England and in surrounding states. His passion for theology was matched only by his near-obsession with books. In college, he began to collect books, even saving his college textbooks, and he committed to acquiring 100 volumes a year throughout his life. In the years before his death in 1856, Robbins was working full time at the Connecticut Historical Society, to which he bequeathed his entire library of over 4,000 volumes and $1,000. Robbins’s diary, edited by historian and theologian Increase Tarbox, is full of entries detailing his daily life of sermon preparation, visiting parishioners at his various posts throughout Massachusetts and Connecticut, attending Bible society meetings, hunting down rare books, and commenting on the state of the weather and his health. What emerges from these diaries is a portrait of a man equally dedicated to the spiritual health of New England and to the development of historical study in America; book collecting represented the union of both interests.

Robbins’ diary indicates that he began reading the *Magnalia* in 1801 and continued to do so periodically until 1813. Robbins does not reveal from where or whom he borrowed a copy, but he notes that copies of the book were extremely difficult to come by. As Tarbox explains, “copies of the first edition, printed in England in 1701,
had become so rare that it was almost impossible for scholars to possess themselves of the work” (805). In the preface to the 1820 edition, Robbins writes that “the work is not to be obtained in England but with difficulty,” and in the United States, “those who have been desirous to possess, or even to read, the volume, have been unable to procure it” (v). In fact, Robbins admits that “a small part of the community, even, knew of the existence of the work” (vi). Robbins finally located a first edition on March 18, 1813. The day before, he wrote in his diary, “Tried to find a copy of Mather’s the Magnalia, but failed.” But the following day he “was very fortunate in finding a Magnalia at the booksellers’ in North Haven, Connecticut (546). Though he did not write a recommendation to Silas Andrus, the printer of the 1820 edition, until 1819, Robbins’s difficulty finding the book was the first indictor of the need for a new edition. From descriptions that we have of Robbins and his work, it becomes clear why he would have wanted to read Magnalia in the first place and why he might have especially identified with Mather’s view of history. Like Mather himself, Robbins saw the Magnalia as a book of fundamental importance to both the Christian and the historian. It is no wonder, then, that Robbins hoped the book would contribute to the cause of the Second Great Awakening spreading across the country in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.

In a diary entry on May 3, 1797, Robbins wrote, “The world [is] coming either to Christianity or infidelity, sects being laid aside” (33). Like many others of his religious background, Robbins felt an anxiety during the decades following the Revolution akin to Mather’s almost a century before. As Ruth Bloch has described, the revivalists of the Second Great Awakening believed in the future establishment of God’s kingdom on
earth, a belief stemming from Puritans like Mather (12). In a sermon preached in 1820, over two decades after the diary entry, Robbins still felt that the evangelical church was at a crossroads. He said to the congregants, “The labours and trials of his ministers, at the present day, are unusually great; but great and animating are their consolations. The conflict with the power of darkness is unusually animated; but the day of Zion’s peace is dawning, the year of her redemption drawth nigh” (25). Robbins’s statement represents the deep connection he recognized between theology and eschatology, a connection that Mather had firmly established in his *Magnalia*. Nothing signaled the end times and the second coming of Jesus Christ more prominently than a period of “labours and trials.” In the 1790s, the evangelical church faced a crisis caused by what Charles Keller describes as “the prevalence of heterodox doctrines, religious deadness, and what seemed to many a serious corruption of morals” (1). Beyond the question of morals, though, lay a fear that the developing nation could not sustain religious tradition. Thus, Donald Matthews argues that on a national scale, the Second Great Awakening served as an “organizing process that helped to give meaning and direction to people suffering in various degrees from the social strains of a nation on the move into new political, economic, and geographical areas” (27). For many leaders of the movement the concerns were also epistemological and theological. Timothy Dwight, President of Yale from 1795-1817 and a key figure in the awakening, fought a war of ideas, preaching vehemently against the Age of Reason and “the ungodliness which [he] associated with Jeffersonian democracy” (Keller 12). Responding to the threat of Deism, key religious leaders and scholars sought to re-energize the Protestant church by aggressively seeking converts and creating evangelical communities with which individuals could identity. The New
England branch of the reviver movement focused more on community outreach and scholasticism than mass conversion, which was more popular in the West. In particular, Robbins’s home state of Connecticut became a hub for the revival because it still upheld Puritan theology and values in its institutions. While the impact of the Second Great Awakening varied according to region, Edwin Gaustad claims that this movement is the key reason why “religious forces continued to dominate even most state institutions until well after the Civil War” (142).

Importantly, the Second Great Awakening also marked a harkening back to Puritanism, perhaps somewhat nostalgically. While the social reforms of Lyman Beecher and others would link the awakening with progressive causes in the minds of many historians, the theological thrust of the movement was conservative. As Daniel Walker Howe explains, an older generation of participants in the movement “saw evangelical Protestantism as the legatee of Puritanism, the core of American culture, the source of American democratic institutions, the primary engine of economic and political progress, and ultimately the hope of the world” (194). The Second Great Awakening, then, is just as historical as it is religious in its ideological thrust. An integral part of American Puritan theology is a belief in God’s guiding hand in history. This revival asked believers to imagine themselves as heirs to a legacy and as pioneers—a term of historical importance—in a complicated political and religious landscape. In addition, the revival emphasized the role of the individual will in evangelicalism. Moving away from the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, evangelists spread a message of “believe and receive,” emphasizing the individual’s conversion decision over God’s providential choosing. Spreading the message of salvation to the West was particularly important for
revivalists like Thomas Robbins who, as Bloch describes, believed that “God was sending civilization through the west precisely in order ‘to advance the glorious kingdom of the Redeemer’” (229). This “democratization” of Christianity helped to fortify the links between believers’ civic and religious devotion and gestured backward towards a time when God and government were inextricably linked. As Robbins believed, advancing the kingdom meant returning to the model of a Christian commonwealth. In 1814, Robbins published a pamphlet entitled, “An Historical View of the First Planters of New England” in which he praises the merging of civil and ecclesiastical government. He also imagines a time when the newly saved will join the long-deceased Puritan fathers in celebrating the second coming, saying, “A lineal descendant from one of the first planters, I contemplate four generations of progenitors, removed to the great congregation. Soon shall we join the countless throng. Soon shall we close our eyes […] to be awakened at the morning of our Lord’s appearing (iii). The revivalist message was one that harkened back to the “zeal” of the Puritans, without the notion of strict predestination, and looked towards the coming of Christ with great urgency.

The theological impetus behind Mather’s church history proved to be an essential touchstone in this new revival. In an opening section of the book entitled “An Attestation to this Church-History of New-England,” Puritan minister John Higginson testified to the historical and typological significance of the Puritan landing in Plymouth and the urgent need to rekindle the first generation’s commitment to the Puritan errand. In a preface that reads more like a jeremiad, Higginson acknowledges that in the third generation of separatists he has seen “the dark side” of “gradual degeneracy from that life and power of Godliness, that was in [our fathers]” (8). Even so, Higginson summons readers of the
*Magnalia* to recall their unique place in history and the promise that “[God] will be the God of his people and of their seed with them, and after them, in their generations” but only on “the condition of covenant-duties” (8). Higginson and Mather believed that they were living under the immediate threat of God’s withdrawal of care from New England. These concerns would echo again in the early nineteenth century and just as Mather turned to print as his method of disseminating this critical message, so, too, did supporters of the Second Great Awakening.

More than even the tent revivals and prayer meetings, the power of print served to transmit this revivalist message to the public, particularly in New England. In a “nation of readers” that was rapidly expanding in size, the medium of print crossed geographical boundaries and placed a common message (most frequently the Bible itself) into the hands of Americans (Zboray 36). In fact, evangelical printing became almost an entire industry unto itself, motivated in some part by what many saw as the “secular” nature of the mass printing.14 As David Paul Nord put it succinctly, “The enemy was cheap, popular publications; the weapon was the cheap, popular press” (243). Two print ventures were particularly significant during the revival: reprinting early Puritan works and establishing Bible and Tract Societies. Because the Second Great Awakening involved a collective look back towards New England’s Puritan religious roots, publishers began investing in printing new editions of some larger religious and historical works. Several Puritan histories were reprinted in the 1820s, including Mather’s *Magnalia* (1820), John Winthrop’s *History of New England* (1823), and Nathaniel Morton’s *New England’s Memorial* (1826) (Gould 117). Building or re-building a canon of American religious writing was recognized as a scholarly effort, and while this effort was a central feature to
the print movement during this period, it was not geared towards the masses. To reach the “common” reader—and the unevangelized—leaders of the revival founded Bible and tract societies. Around the turn of the century, missionaries and pastors began to complain of a Bible shortage in America (Keller 109). In response to the perceived shortage, Bible societies sprung up nationwide to raise money for printing more Bibles in more languages. By 1817, there were 750 Bible societies at work in the United States. In fact, Connecticut state law still required “that every family have a Bible, that every apprentice and indented child on becoming of age should be given a Bible, and that the Scriptures should be constantly used as a textbook in the common schools” (110).

Working in tandem with Bible societies, tract societies arose as a means to fund the printing and circulation of the revivalist message in America and abroad. In 1816, a group of ministers and congregants formed the Hartford Evangelical Tract Society, of which Robbins was a member. In 1823, the American Tract Society reported that it had printed 777,000 tracts that year (Keller 120). As a print form, tracts were geared towards the average congregant who perhaps could not afford a Bible and certainly could not afford the works of Jonathan Edwards or Mather. The didactic pocket-sermons addressed social issues important to the movement (i.e. “The Swearer’s Prayer” and “The Ruinous Consequences of Grambling”) and spiritual issues important to individuals (“God a Refuge” and “Contentment in Humble Life”) (Keller 121). To supplement the tract movement, several religious periodicals were founded by specific denominations, shaping denominational identities within specific communities. “In an era of national expansion,” Candy Gunther Brown explains, “denominational periodicals supplemented other church-building strategies such as preaching” (145). Brown estimates that 188
religious periodicals were established between 1820-1852 (Industrial 272). Magazines also supplemented Scripture reading in the home and in schools, such that literacy was entwined with spiritual growth in multiple contexts. Periodicals also helped in the evangelical effort to permeate the community with the gospel message. “Contrary to the assumption of many modern scholars that commercialization implicated Protestantism in secularization and cultural decline,” Brown explains, “evangelical Protestants configured commerce as a religious instrument, useful in competing against secular and religious alternatives” (273). These tracts and periodicals helped to support not only religious fervor but also the humanitarian efforts that characterized the Second Great Awakening. A belief in the nation’s unraveling moral fabric inspired a mixed outpouring of both condemnation and benevolence. Robbins, who was also involved in Lyman Beecher’s temperance movement, reports in his diaries the growing fervor for humanitarian societies like the Hartford Female Beneficent Society, which assisted poor girls in learning domestic skills and moral virtues, and societies for asylum and prison reforms.16 These reform movements were in many ways supported by print. Tracts and periodicals became the stage on which social, religious, and political issues were debated and promoted. Without the ability to circulate the message of the Awakening in print, the movement could not have achieved national and international influence.

It is not surprising, then, that the “age of pamphlets,” as Keller calls the Second Great Awakening, coincided with “documania,” or antiquarian collecting and publishing. Historically, these movements overlap in the 1820s, just as the Second Great Awakening was losing momentum and historical and antiquarian societies were springing up nationwide. Both movements were also rooted in New England, specifically in
Connecticut and Massachusetts, drawing some of the same participants to prayer meetings and book auctions. It could be argued that a belief in the value of print was the most significant characteristic shared by these two movements. The Second Great Awakening thrived, in part, because of the mass printing and distribution of pamphlets, periodicals, sermons, and Bibles. Likewise, the antiquarian movement, which began in earnest around 1812, was driven by printed texts—whether periodicals, proceedings of historical societies, or reprints of old books—and by efforts to amass anything printed in America to date. Collecting printed materials and publishing them, sometimes for the first time, became part of the same antiquarian project to bring lost or vanishing texts back into print, into libraries, and into public circulation. By 1860, 111 historical societies had been organized, and at least 90 of those societies published their proceedings, adding another layer to the accumulation of printed text celebrated by antiquarianism (Calcott 35-6). Both the Second Great Awakening and the antiquarian movement were driven to print by a longstanding belief in the primacy of the written word in the operations of both Protestantism and democracy. The earliest colonial printers, Ronald Zboray writes, were “held up as doing God’s work” and “by the nineteenth century, it was democracy’s work, as well” (36). The Second Great Awakening and the antiquarian movement demonstrated that God’s work and democracy’s work were two parts of the same national imperative to preserve the printed colonial past in the midst of increasing ideological and geographical fragmentation.17

Despite its powerful resonances in the early republic, nineteenth-century historians wrote with great ambivalence about the role that Puritanism should play in constructing history. With a growing interest in genealogy especially, it was difficult for
antebellum historians to break too suddenly with the closest thing European-Americans had to a common “ancestry.” And antiquarian collections contained a printed religious legacy that could not be ignored. Yet, as Lawrence Buell writes, “many New Englanders found the memory of the Pilgrim-Puritan father embarrassing” (205). Historians struggled to construct an “authentic” history that at once utilized the newly compiled archival material while offering a corrective to the histories contained therein. For example, Abiel Holmes’s *Annals of America* (1805) includes a lengthy passage condemning the witchcraft trails as “an affecting proof of the imbecility of the human mind, and the powerful influence of the passions” particularly given the “gloomy state of New England” under the Puritans (438). Representations of Puritan leaders as “superstitious” and too quick to judge were ubiquitous in early nineteenth-century American histories and fictions. Similar representations of Mather and the earlier generations of Puritan leadership appear in works by John Neal, James Fenimore Cooper, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Lydia Marie Child, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In much of the historical fiction of the 1820s and 1830s, the Puritan fathers were essentially caricatures, acting as foolish tyrants and stifling the desires of the outspoken and often rebellious heroes or heroines. But these were not the only portraits of the Puritan fathers circulating during this time and fiction was certainly not the only site for such historical and textual representations. Through printing and collecting primary historical documents, a recuperative process was also underway.

Thus, one of Robbins’s goals in reprinting the *Magnalia* was to reinstate Mather and his book as essential touchstones in the writing of colonial history in the nineteenth century. Despite his flaws, Mather was an antiquarian himself, whose storehouse of
primary source material needed to be preserved for posterity even if Mather’s reputation faltered. Jan Stievermann has written about the “highly intertextual quality” of Mather’s style, which, he notes, has also been the source of critique (264). Stievermann argues persuasively that Mather “sought to produce an encyclopedic master-text that would harmonize the different branches of knowledge with biblical revelation” (269). To this analysis, I would add that Mather also sought to preserve history itself in the pages of his “master-text” in much the same way that Robbins would work to preserve the Magnalia from obscurity. We know, for example, that Mather relied heavily on John Winthrop’s journal to construct his accounts of the Massachusetts colonies and to write his portrait of Winthrop. He also had access to other diaries and manuscript materials such as the diaries of Thomas Shepard, John Baily, Eleazer Mather, from which Mather quotes long portions in the Magnalia. In Volume 1, Book III Mather’s tributes to several first-generation ministers include excerpts from other original sources, including his father’s tribute, which he reproduced with the description, “Preserved by Cotton Mather” (1855 ed. 245). Mather’s book “preserved” a range of information that would have otherwise been lost, including lists of births and deaths in the colonies, lists of magistrates serving in Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, a catalogue of the first-generation ministers and their churches, and, more prominently, detailed biographies of dozens of Puritan figures. Thus, as a key work of both historical writing and historiography, Mather’s work resembled the kind of antiquarian preservation that Robbins sought to replicate at the Connecticut Historical Society.

Robbins’s new edition of Magnalia, then, would foreground the importance of the antiquarian program to the cause of the Second Great Awakening by highlighting its
usefulness as a primary text and its theological import. Robbins sought to reinstate the theological implications of Mather’s history, which could not be divorced from its historiographic approach. Robbins hoped to show that Mather rightly conceived of God’s role in the unfolding of history, and that antebellum New England was even now carrying the banner of the Puritan calling through its revived commitment to evangelicalism. In asserting that Mather’s Puritan historiography was still relevant, Robbins challenged popular historical discourse, which, as I have said, did not typically look fondly on the Puritan fathers or Mather. Robbins believed that both the historical and theological functions of the Magnalia were congruent with each other and perfectly in line with his own work of antiquarianism. Just as Mather imagined himself to be a latter-day Winthrop, whose diary of life in the colonies Mather had read in manuscript and wove into the Magnalia, so did Robbins identify with Mather’s antiquarianism and theology, placing Robbins himself in line with the typological unfolding of history.

Indeed, just as Mather believed the Magnalia to be “sprinkled by the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ,” Robbins imagined his antiquarian work to be blessed and guided by God (Diary 366). In his catalogue of holdings, Robbins describes two functions for his collection:

First, To assist the divinity students in the investigation of the Holy Scriptures, in the study of the history of the Church of Christ, and in such general services as may enable him to become an able and faithful minister of the gospel of salvation. Secondly, To assist the lover of history in his researches to discover the character of the Most High, and of man in the various events of Divine Providence. The design is now committed to God. I array for his holy approbation and blessing. (Barnard 281)

That history could reveal God’s character is a belief Robbins shared with Mather, and it is a belief that maintained some resonance in the nineteenth century, even as
historiography was becoming increasingly secularized. I take Sacvan Bercovitch’s argument concerning the resonance of typological history in the antebellum period to be true in this case; even into the nineteenth century, history could be “interpreted through the double focus of prophecies accomplished and prophecies unfolding” (Bercovitch 172). The reprinting of the Magnalia, then, offered one view of history in the nineteenth century, one that reinforced to the reading public that God’s plan for the nation was still unfolding. In the preface to the 1855 edition of the Magnalia, Robbins gestures towards his dispensational theology and historiography:

It is stated, in the Preface before us, that ‘The great object of the first Planters of new-England was to form A CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH.’ That is finely suggested by the Author, in the elegant quotation from the great Latin Poet, with a small variation, ‘Tantæ Molise erat, pro CHRISTO condere Gentem.’ And now we may say, by the favour of HEAVEN, THE WORK IS DONE. The world looks with amazement on a great Country, united in one territory, more extensive than Rome, a great population in rapid increase, all looking for Salvation in the name of the DIVINE NAZARENE.

Robbins here acknowledges that the Puritan errand into the wilderness has been successful on several levels. Not only did the “Planters of New-England” lay the seed for a Christian nation, but since then, Christians have tamed the vast wilderness (by a great effort, as the revised quote from Virgil suggests), multiplied its citizens, and created an empire, “more extensive than Rome.” The key for Robbins, though, is in the last phrase. Winthrop’s city on a hill, on which the “world looks with amazement,” is also still “looking for Salvation” in Christ. Though Robbins’s assessment of the nation is reductive—surely all are not looking—his expression here is consistent with the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening. The nation is still (and once again) “looking for Salvation,” and so the “work” is not “done” after all.
As evidenced in his prefaces and diaries, Robbins believed that printing and collecting served evangelical purposes, even if the “good news” was largely historical instead of religious. While I have shown that the revival was driven by the printing of tracts and Bibles, and antiquarianism was largely driven by collecting, both movements sought to make printed sources readily available to the public, and both movements believed that certain texts should be accessible (i.e., The Bible in every home; family histories in every state historical society). The availability of texts was part of every citizen’s right to information concerning faith, family, and country. Historical societies and antiquarian libraries, like those that Robbins sought to establish, centralized the information to promote easier access. These societies and libraries were meant to be used by students, scholars, and citizens eager to both discover and contribute to a kind of storehouse of national history and genealogy. What made antiquarianism so attractive to the public, according to Calcott, was that “every man was his own historian, searching for himself in the old manuscripts and colonial records, enjoying the mysterious lure of the unknown, standing at the frontier of knowledge” (115). Antiquarianism had epistemic implications, particularly because the pursuit of an individual’s origins or the origins of the nation (narratives that were often intertwined as we see in works like Franklin’s *Autobiography*) had to be rooted in primary documents, which were thought to be stable “records” of the past. Thus, to know the “truth” of New England’s colonial history, Robbins felt that readers had a right to access the *Magnalia*, without which the “authentic” history of New England Puritanism could never be written.

Thus, in 1819, the same year that Robbins was appointed a “receiving officer” of the American Antiquarian Society, he wrote to “Mr. Andrus, of Hartford” for the first
time, presumably to begin a correspondence concerning a first American edition of the *Magnalia*. A few months after his initial letter, he “wrote a recommendation of Mather’s *Magnalia* for a printer.” The editor of the diaries notes that “this was the preface for the edition of Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia*, which was issued in Hartford, by Silas Andrus, in the summer of 1820, a most important publication” (Tarbox 805). Robbins likely chose Andrus because of his fearlessness in printing large books of history and biography, in addition to Bibles, “complete works” of poetry and drama, and dictionaries. Felker’s estimation of Andrus as a “small publisher of antiquarian curiosities” is not entirely accurate, even in light of the number of historical reprints Andrus undertook. Like any smart printer of his time, Andrus put out editions of Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, as well as tales of “shipwrecks, fires, famines, calamities, providential deliverances, and lamentable disasters on the seas,” collections of English poetry (including the works of Lord Byron), *Don Quixote*, the dramatic works of Shakespeare, and several works of international and domestic history. It is difficult to determine the exact nature of Robbins’s financial arrangement with Andrus, but Robbins also had Andrus print a collection of Robbins’s sermons “On the Divinity of Christ” in 1820. In a diary entry on May 1, 1829, Robbins writes, “Walked to Hartford. Settled an old account with Silas Andrews [sic], mostly in 1820s. Paid him for books and some binding, $40. He allowed for my sermons on the Divinity of Christ in 1820, $25. And for writing a preface, etc., for Mather’s *Magnalia*, in 1821, a copy of the work at $5 and $2 in addition. Paid him now, $10.” It seems from this entry that Andrus allowed Robbins to have a copy of the 1820 for $7, which was apparently a discounted price.
Throughout the 1830s and 40s, Robbins continued to pay Andrus “for books and binding,” and Andrus printed the book again in 1853/55.

Andrus was almost certainly forced to consider the wisdom of printing a two-volume work of Puritan history and theology written by Cotton Mather. Robbins confesses in the preface to the first edition, “Many omissions in the original work have been recommended, but the publisher concludes to retain the whole—He is sensible of the risk of publishing so large a work, at the present time. But relying on the utility of the object, he entertains a hope that the liberality of the public will save him from loss” (vi). Robbins’s explanation suggests that he is the publisher, but this was not exactly the case. Robbins wrote a recommendation for the book to be published, and we know that he wrote the preface, but it is not clear if he funded the project, or, more precisely, it is not clear if either Robbins or Andrus bore the weight of the financial risk. In the first few sentences of the preface, Robbins again explains that “The Publisher” has “long been sensible of the great demand for the Work, both by literary men and all other who wish to be acquainted with the early history of our country.” Here, Robbins seems to be referring to his own sensibility to the demand, not Andrus’s. And if Increase Tarbox is correct in saying that the preface to the 1820 edition is the same document that Robbins originally submitted to Andrus as a proposal, then Robbins is speaking as publisher here, not editor or compiler. At the time of its printing, though, Robbins would not have had the funds to invest in this kind of project, nor had he begun receiving a salary from the Connecticut Historical Society or contributions towards antiquarian pursuits, as he later did. We can assume, then, that Andrus acted as publisher and printer and that he thought it worthwhile to print a second American edition in 1853/5 based on the sales of the 1820 edition. In
fact, Robbins writes in the preface to the second American edition, “When I encouraged Mr. Andrus, some thirty years since, to republish the Venerable Magnalia, it was supposed that few copies would be sold. [...] The most of the second edition was disposed of, and for some years past has been scarce. The demand for the work is now increasing.” There is little evidence to suggest that the 1820 book was widely advertised in newspapers and periodicals and, in fact, based on book notices for the second edition, there is some suggestion that the 1820 printing was not widely known. In an article in Graham’s Magazine published in 1846, the editors “take the liberty of suggestion to Messrs. Little & Brown that Mather’s Magnalia Christi Americana […] would be very acceptable to the public” (155). They continue to explain that “there has never been what in Boston passes for a ‘good edition’ of it” (155).

The 1820 edition was published in two quarto volumes, printed by Roberts & Burr. Though it is difficult to ascertain the print run of the book, we do know that the book sold relatively well or, at least, quickly became difficult for buyers to find. One notable buyer relates her account of the arrival of this new edition. In her novel Poganuc People, Harriet Beecher Stowe recalled the day that her father (Lyman Beecher) brought home “and set up in his book-case Cotton Mather’s ‘Magnalia,’ in a new edition of two volumes” full of “stories that made her feel that the very ground she trod on was consecrated by some special dealing of God’s providence” (qtd. in Baker 5). For the Beecher family, who likely had not owned the first British edition of the Magnalia, the new editions buffeted the revivalist movement, proving that a book could bridge the gap of centuries and make a new generation of believers feel that their modern world was yet “consecrated” by God.
Because Robbins desired that readers should experience the *Magnalia* as eighteenth-century readers might have, the 1820 edition was reprinted exactly from a 1702 copy of the book. Unfortunately for Robbins and Andrus, the 1702 copy that the printer worked from did not include the errata sheet, which only appeared in a handful of copies because Mather was not in London to superintend the printing. From an antiquarian’s perspective, though, Robbins may have preferred the “authenticity” of the copy; because the 1702 edition was so scarce, Robbins produced a kind of replica of the book as most people had read it, without the errata. Thus, the first edition was published as it appeared in 1702, though in a smaller format, and is without footnotes, index, or translations. Typographically, this edition also preserves words in italics and uses small caps consistent with the first British edition. These choices would garner some criticism as reviewers compared this edition with the later one; a reviewer for the *Christian Examiner* complained that the first edition was “disfigured by many and grievous typographical errors, especially in the quotations from foreign languages, and in dates” (151).

More than just a publication preference, though, Robbins’s desire for “authenticity” has significant historical and religious implications. Even in his work at the Connecticut Historical Society, Robbins is described as having “almost the personal interest of an eye-witness to the reality, these memorials of a past age” (Barnard 288). Robbins describes Mather as having a similar relationship in the 1820 preface:

> The work now presented to the American public contains the history of the Fathers of New-England, for about eighty years, in the most authentic form. No man since Dr. Mather’s time, has had so good an opportunity as he enjoyed to consult the most authentic documents. [...] The situation and character of the author afforded him the most favourable opportunities to
obtain the documents necessary for his undertaking. And no historian would pursue a similar design with greater industry and zeal. (3)

What Robbins seems to value most in Mather’s work is that Mather was in contact with the “authentic” documents of the past and was, in fact, an antiquarian, a man invested in the “facts” that the documents provided. Robbins believed that contact with authentic documents was the key to the writing of colonial history, both in 1702 and 1820, and Mather’s own vast collection of books was indicative of his investment in authenticity. Recognized as one of the largest and most important personal libraries in the nation, the Mather library—between 600-700 volumes—was purchased by Isaiah Thomas in 1816 for the American Antiquarian Society (Tucker 20). It is well known that the Mather family interests extended beyond theology into other realms of contemporary concern like science and medicine. However, according to Jan Stievermann, these “secular” pursuits always operated under the pretext of “[harmonizing] the different branches of knowledge with biblical revelation” (269). Mather’s theological message does not stand secondary to his antiquarian method, because the message and the method build toward the same goal and were in fact complimentary, as Robbins himself believed. According to both Mather and Robbins, only from the most “authentic” documents and “true” accounts can one see the working of God in history. Robbins also makes the point that Mather’s Magnalia acted as a preserving document for “written testimonies, many of which have since perished” (3). Like an antiquarian library unto itself, the Magnalia houses a wealth of information that would have been lost to generations hence had Mather not preserved it.
By the time Robbins was preparing the mid-century edition of the *Magnalia*, the fervor of the Second Great Awakening had waned, though its impact had been felt across America. The second edition, which Robbins felt was necessary given the strong (and surprising) sales of the first, reflects both Robbins’s growing personal and financial investment in antiquarianism and his desire for the book to be more accessible to a reading audience outside of the group of ministers and antiquarians first interested in the book. Robbins’s role in publishing the second edition is also more that of an editor than in the first edition; in this edition, Robbins altered the text itself and made editorial decisions that reshaped the book. The 1853/5 edition contains new supplemental material, featuring additional tools for readers and foregrounding the collaborative nature of antiquarian work. The book includes contributions from the distinguished antiquarian and genealogist Samuel Gardner Drake, and the work of American Antiquarian Society librarian Christopher Columbus Baldwin. After reintroducing this obscure book to the reading public, Robbins now widened the appeal of the book through editorial changes.

For example, following Robbins’s preface, the typographer notes that some of the typography has been altered in the new edition for the sake of clarity. He explains that since the last edition,

> Many material deviations have been made in the typography. Quotation marks have been introduced, in lieu of putting the numerous quotations in italic, to correspond with the antique style; and a difference has been made in the type for the original text and that for the documentary portion and extracts; thereby so distinctly marking each, that they cannot be easily confounded. (vi)
In addition, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin quotes have been translated for this edition—a
another important contribution to the second edition’s accessibility. Much more than the
1820 edition, the 1853/55 edition establishes the *Magnalia* as a readable and navigable
research tool with less emphasis on the “authentic” (with its flaws) and greater emphasis
on utility and accessibility. This shift in emphasis demonstrates the rapid growth of
interest in both Mather and in antiquarianism more generally in the thirty years between
the first and second editions. The features of the new edition are also indicative of
Robbins’s vocational shift from reverend to full-time collector and librarian. As he
became more invested in antiquarian work—and became a part of antiquarian
networks—he made additions and editorial changes to the *Magnalia* to make it a more
accessible book to a new crop of mid-century readers. In the preface to the 1855 edition,
Robbins also explained that the 1820 edition was now “scarce” and “the demand for the
work [was] now increasing” in the wake of documania and the national obsession with
history and genealogy (vi).

Reviews of the new edition emphasized the improvements made since its first
printing. One reviewer for *The Independent* in Boston writes that the 1820 “has long
been almost as rare in the market as the first” and that this second edition “will show
what progress the typographic art has made in this country since 1820” (112). A book
notice in the *Christian Advocate* highlighted one of the most useful features of the new
ingion, the “valuable accompaniments of the translations and notes, which are so
essential to the elucidation, and most able performed” (116). *The New England Register*,
though not losing an opportunity to highlight the “abuse” that Mather continued to suffer,
praises the new edition for its “excellent type, excellent paper” and “a beautiful portrait
of the Author accompanying it” (369). Interestingly, for a reviewer in the *Christian Examiner*, the new edition was still found wanting in regard to clarifying notes. He writes, “We ourselves wished that, if the work must have been reprinted, a very careful commentary should have accompanied it. But there will be purchasers enough to exhaust even a fourth edition” (151). This reviewer at least forecasts strong sales for the book, despite its deficiencies. As is clear from the number of reviews and notices in a range of magazines and newspapers, the *Magnalia* was finally finding a wider audience by mid-century.

As with the first American edition, Robbins provided the preface and occasional notes, but to this volume was added a short biography of Mather and a Mather genealogy by Drake. The book also includes an index “by another hand” which was supplied by Christopher Columbus Baldwin. Baldwin, librarian for the American Antiquarian Society from 1827 to 1835, compiled an index to the 1820 edition of the *Magnalia*. Baldwin was highly respected for his acquisition of the Walcutt collection, the extensive personal holdings of a founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Thomas Walcutt. Robbins and Baldwin had corresponded in 1834, but Baldwin was killed in a carriage accident the next year. At some time after Baldwin’s death, Robbins must have requested the index from the American Antiquarian Society, where the original handwritten copy still resides. The index in the 1853/5 edition allowed readers to use the *Magnalia* as a reference tool and to move through it topically or according to their interests. It became the “card catalogue” for the library contained between its covers. The index also allowed for the possibility of reading the *Magnalia* differently; not as a continuous linear historical narrative, but as a book of incidents and anecdotes, names
and dates to be referenced in new histories, sermons, and novels. More than the first edition, which focused on the book’s theological and historical significance, the second edition’s structure and supplements highlight the Magnalia’s usefulness and accessibility as a resource.

The Mather biography added to the second edition functions differently than the index. Drake’s contribution to the new edition emphasizes the objectivity with which readers should approach the character of Cotton Mather and, in turn, the content of his book. Drake was a scholar of early New England, publishing a new edition of Benjamin Church’s Entertaining History of King Philip’s War (1772) and thereafter writing several histories of Native American-English relations in the colonies. He established an antiquarian bookstore in Boston in 1830 and was a founding member of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, formed in 1845, and the periodical, the New-England Historical and Genealogical Register. He also edited two works by Increase Mather, Early History of New England and The History of King Philip’s War. His contribution to the second American edition is a piece entitled “Memoir of Cotton Mather, D.D., F.R.S,” taken from a book of the same name that Drake published in 1851. Drake also appended a family tree to the memoir. Interestingly, the memoir of Cotton Mather makes up only a fraction of what was published in the 1851 book. What follows the memoir is a ninety-two page list of “Books for Sale at the office of the New England Historical and Genealogical Register.” In this context, the memoir and family tree function as a kind of decoy to pique buyers’ interest in genealogy—a growing national obsession at the time. But largely the book is a free catalogue promoting Drake’s book store. The Mather memoir’s original context demonstrates that an interest in history, biography, and book
collecting was becoming mainstream and even the basis of new business for publishers and printers. In the context of the 1853/5 edition of the Magnalia, though, the memoir and genealogy seek to “recover” Mather from public misunderstanding and, indeed, to establish the Mather family line as one of the most important in New England history. But even in doing this, Drake turns Mather into a kind of “antiquarian curiosity.”

In his introductory remarks, Drake writes, “It is not proposed to enter at all into an examination or exhibition of the religious views and theories of Dr. Cotton Mather: those can be best understood by a perusal of his writing; while, at the same time, it is the duty of his biographer to rebuke those who, it is conceived, have calumniated him.”

Drake sees the biographer’s role as part of what I have been calling the recuperative effort of antiquarians. Drake is interested in Mather as a subject of study, and as such his offenses are merely indicative of the time in which he lived and wrote. Drake warns Mather’s critics that they are in danger of “having the windows in their own houses broken, by the very missiles they themselves have thrown.” He further explains that Mather’s many historical errors were likely a result of his working from “the store-house of his mind” because such sources as are now available were not in Mather’s day. Concerning Mather’s involvement in the witch trials, Drake explains that Mather was not the “author” of the public belief in witchcraft, but “he was himself one of the deluded; and this is the only charge that can lie against him relative to it.” For Drake, contemporary critiques of Mather were anachronistic, holding him accountable for his decisions by antebellum standards of logic. What, then, could be Cotton Mather’s relevance to the nineteenth century reader if indeed he is so displaced from his or her worldview? For Drake, Mather should be praised for the sheer amount of written and
collected material he left behind. That is, Mather’s contribution to antiquarians is that he documented a past that they could not otherwise access. Drake, like Robbins, sees Mather’s printed work as an invaluable resource for reconstructing the colonial past.

The genealogy likewise humanizes the Mathers and places them in a specific historical context. Drake bemoans the fact that “reviling Cotton Mather” had become “in vogue of late years” and the biography and genealogy work towards reversing the trend. Genealogies were becoming hugely popular in the general public as a way to create a sense of continuity among families and to promote national identity. People were eager to find out how far (and to whom) they could trace their own lineage, just as they were eager to be “their own historian,” as we have seen. Including the Mather family tree as part of the prefatory material helped readers to place the book in historical context (and perhaps forgive its errors) and allowed Robbins as the editor to tap into the growing trend of genealogy. In essence, the genealogy helps to convert Cotton Mather the metaphor (for any number of civic and religious errors) into Cotton Mather the man.

In order to write any history, familial or national, the public needed the print and manuscript materials that Robbins, Drake, Baldwin and many other antiquarians were striving to amass. The supplements to the 1853/5 edition of the Magnalia demonstrate the evolution of its function as a text and, consequently, its wider target audience. The 1820 edition was published in the context of the Second Great Awakening and at the start of a surge in historical interest; Robbins’s typological view of history and his desire for exact historical fidelity to the 1702 edition is also explicit in the first edition. The mid-century edition places the book at the heart of the historical movement and includes materials that foreground new approaches to historiography. This second edition was
also published at a time when many other colonial-era histories were being printed, when nearly every state in the union had established a historical society, and when Robbins himself had become a full-time collector and librarian. By comparing both nineteenth-century editions of the Magnalia, then, we can identify changes in historical and antiquarian discourse between the two editions. While the first edition foregrounds the importance of the Magnalia to evangelical revivalism, the second edition packages the work to reach a broader readership with the help of the collaborators, the index, the new typography, and the Mather genealogy.

We cannot know what would have become of Cotton Mather’s Magnalia Christi Americana, had Robbins not led the effort to reprint it at a time when the church was trying to recapture the Puritan spirit and the nation was trying to capture a sense of its own history. The antebellum reprints of the Magnalia also became part of a larger print revolution occurring throughout the nineteenth century which disseminated books, pamphlets, tracts, and periodicals more widely than ever before. That the book even warranted a second edition suggests the impact of its initial reprinting and the new readership it found in the mid-nineteenth century. Changes made between the first and second editions of the book also reflect changing approaches to the work of collecting books and antiquities and its relevance to the public as a resource and as a guidebook for future action. As Robbins articulated in an address to Williams College in 1843, the historian and antiquarian “will have an influence in forming the character of generations after he sleeps” (1714). Robbins believed that the Magnalia’s presence in libraries, public and personal, would shape “the character of generations.” Robbins was able to see the implicit continuity in Mather’s book between faith and history and, like Mather, he
hoped that by preserving historical narratives in print, he might restore a book, a man, and a theology to a prominent place in the writing of colonial history.
CHAPTER 2: PROGRESSIVE HISTORY AND THE REVISION OF JOHN WINTHROP’S JOURNAL

The figure of John Winthrop that we study in contemporary literary scholarship is in many ways a nineteenth-century construction. Prior to the journal’s first printing in 1790, accounts of Winthrop were constructed from historians’ private study of Winthrop’s notebooks. In the early eighteenth century, Cotton Mather famously made Winthrop into the Americanus Nehemius in his *Magnalia*, and in the nineteenth century, editor James Savage constructed a version of Winthrop that would align him with progressive theology and conservative politics. Into the twentieth century, Sacvan Bercovitch saw Winthrop as the representative American, whose own biography celebrated “the representative self as America, and [the] American self as the embodiment of a prophetic universal design” (136). Interestingly, he credits Mather with this formulation. In part, this chapter seeks to correct Bercovitch’s assertion about the legacy of John Winthrop. It was not Mather’s *Magnalia* that established Winthrop as a proto-nationalist hero; rather, James Savage’s edition of Winthrop’s journal crafted the Puritan leader into the representative American of Bercovitch’s narrative.

As I have argued, the reprinting of both the *Magnalia* and Winthrop’s journal were not merely acts of preservation on the part of Robbins and Savage, though both men were fully dedicated to meticulous antiquarian work. Robbins hoped the *Magnalia* would spark a renewed investment in Puritan theology and the redemption of Cotton
Mather. Savage, on the other hand, aligned himself with nineteenth-century Unitarians in his hatred for Mather and in his efforts to see religious history through the lens of progress and enlightenment. Buell describes this ideological battle over Puritan history in this key question: “Was that history to be seen as a process of evolution from worthy but defective original principles toward greater purification and enlightenment, or was it to be seen as an increasingly embattled attempt on the part of the faithful to maintain what was alleged to be the pristine piety of the founders?” (217). Interestingly, Buell argues that how nineteenth-century historians and antiquarians reacted to Cotton Mather himself was a key indicator for “differentiating between Arminian and orthodox approaches to Puritan history” (218). Conservative Congregationalists like Robbins were committed to humanizing Mather and restoring Mather’s typological view of history to a place of prominence. But this attempt at humanizing proved difficult, and, according to David Levin, continues to be so today. The “hazing of Cotton Mather,” as he calls it, has become a simple way to condemn the less desirable parts of Puritan history (57). As I will argue in this chapter, both the hazing of Mather and the praising of Winthrop were part of James Savage’s editorial project. Through his reprint of Winthrop’s journal, Savage sought to shape a version of colonial history that exemplified his own contemporary political and religious affiliations. This meant editing Winthrop’s journal in a way that met the needs of Unitarian historians who were writing a new history, one that made Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams the early heroes of an eventual republic and made Winthrop a proto-Federalist “founding father.” As we will see, though, Savage was even willing to risk his own reputation as a historian to defend Winthrop against accusations of wrongdoing.
All accounts of James Savage refer to him first as an “antiquary,” despite his having a vast résumé of other professional and civic occupations. For Savage, the title of “antiquary” meant something different than quietly wandering the halls of the historical society dressed in antique garb, like Thomas Robbins. In fact, Savage seemed to contradict the perception of antiquarians entirely. According to nineteenth-century literary critic E.P. Whipple, “It is curious that James Savage, the most eloquent of men when his soul was stirred to its depths, should now be particularly honored merely as an acute antiquarian . . . His hatred of iniquity sometimes blazed in a fury of wrathful eloquence which amazed those who specially esteemed him as a prodigy of genealogical knowledge” (405). His professional life prior to his antiquarian work was approached with no less “fury.” Born in Boston in 1784, Savage attended Harvard where he was briefly suspended for leading a protest against the punishment of a fellow student. He was readmitted after a brief period and graduated in 1803 as the valedictorian. He studied law after graduation and traveled to the West Indies on business where he barely survived yellow fever. Upon his return, he completed his studies in the law and was admitted to the bar in 1807. His biographer describes his dedication to the law as superficial, particularly because Savage’s “love of truth” prevented him from advocating a position he did not feel passionately about. “If he had had the power, he would not have borrowed the hues of rhetoric to enforce a position, of the truth of which he was not himself thoroughly convinced,” Hilliard explains (14). When Savage’s office was consumed in the fire of 1825, he quit his law practice permanently. Savage had long been interested in other pursuits. He was an associate editor of The Monthly Anthology (progenitor to the North American Review), a state representative and senator, a member...
of the school committee, an advocate for the establishment of Primary Schools and a proponent of children’s literacy, and the founder of the Provident Institution for Savings in Boston. As he participated in these civic duties, he became a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society (1813) and served as treasurer from 1820 to 1839 and president from 1841-1855.

In his lifetime, Savage was best known for his genealogical work. His four-volume work, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England*, published between 1860 and 1862, was the result of twenty years of research. The *North American Review* called it “the most stupendous work on genealogy ever compiled” (qtd. in Duycknink 81). It is obvious from his biography that Savage was always juggling several projects at once and was often overcommitted. In fact, Savage put his genealogical dictionary on hold for many years in service of the Winthrop journal. In 1853, when Savage was working on a new edition of Winthrop, he wrote to his daughter, “Winthrop so occupies my time, that I could hardly give two hours a day to the genealogy […] and I am quite easy […] to leave the big Dictionary to be published by another hand” (177). The Winthrop project was of particular importance to Savage because of its level of difficulty and in the scholarly reputation the project would grant him. He explained to his daughter in November 1852, “If the Genealogical Dictionary is published in my life time, some fair return for ten years work is more likely be got, if the public see, in my new devotion to Winthrop, that my diligence is not relaxed nor my judgment weakened by the long lapse of time” (168). The *Genealogical Dictionary* was published in his lifetime, between 1860-1862, and made him one of the most significant contributors to New England genealogy of his generation and future generations.25
Genealogy as a field of historical interest did not develop as rapidly as antiquarianism in New England but garnered many of the same participants. Van Tassel explains that the rise in popularity of genealogy was indicative of a nativist reaction to the sudden influx of immigrants in the 1830s and 40s. “Members of the declining merchant class, who long held unchallenged status, began an avid search for ancestral roots” (109). In 1845, a group of New England antiquarians founded the New England Historic Genealogical Society and its publication, the *New England Genealogical Register*, edited for a time by Samuel Gardner Drake, the Mather genealogist (109). Like antiquarian work, genealogical research was centered on the preservation of all documents relating to the early settlers of New England, but it was not always looked on favorably. In an article printed in the *North American Review* in 1856, noted historian and editor Worthington C. Ford writes that American genealogy as a field of study seems “at first sight a positive misnomer” because of the nature of American democracy. “What, in this land of equality, where every man is as good as every other, can it be possible that any man believes his ancestors to have been greater and better than himself and his friends?” (469). Though Ford’s article never gives a satisfactory answer to the question, he goes on to explain that America really does have its aristocracy, its “Winthrops, Wyllyses, Adamses, and Phillipses,” and that even families descended from governors, generals, or a “colonel of militia” tended to hold themselves in high regard (470). America’s myth of the self-made man was born of this tendency to see potential for greatness in every man and to see the story of America itself in the biographies of its founders. William Hill explains that the founders of the New England Historic Genealogical Society “realized that without an understanding of genealogical
relationships of a people no adequate history can be written. Biography was the very
essence of history” (8). The country’s interest in genealogy certainly informed Thomas
Robbins’s decision to publish the Mather family tree and short biography in his 1853
dition of the Magnalia. Similarly, James Savage’s investment in genealogy is evident in
the footnotes to the Winthrop journal, which frequently detail long family histories of
figures mentioned in the journal. Winthrop’s journal could certainly be construed as a
contribution to genealogy because, as Hill suggested, the biographies of great men stood
in for the story of America. In the hands of James Savage, this principle proved true of
Winthrop’s journal as well; Savage saw Winthrop’s personal history as both exceptional
among the lives of other Puritan fathers and as representative of a later generation of
founding fathers who would build a democratic state.

Savage’s political and religious affiliations heavily informed his genealogical and
antiquarian work. “Mr. Savage was commonly said to be a man of strong prejudices,”
writes his biographer, and these prejudices guided his scholarly pursuits. Growing up
during the French Revolution, Savage determined at a young age that he was a Federalist,
and he continued to be a political conservative after the party dissolved. Towards
Napoleon Bonaparte, his feelings bordered on “old-fashioned English Toryism” (Deane
38). As a young man, he loved Washington and Adams as much as he did Winthrop and,
“he had a corresponding distrust of the creed and policy of Jefferson” (37). Savage saw
Winthrop as a strong leader who had made difficult but necessary decisions based on the
preservation and peace of the colonies. As we will see, the footnotes to his editions of
the journal consistently attempt to clear Winthrop of culpability in the injustices of the
Puritan leadership. Despite what modern readers might recognize as Winthrop’s
prejudicial flaws, Savage’s early affection for the Federalist party led him to see Winthrop as a character similar to John Adams—making decisions that seemed to threaten personal liberty but ultimately protected citizens against widespread faction and discord.

Like many of his class and political affiliation, Savage was also a dedicated Unitarian. His choice of Harvard over Yale in the first decade of the nineteenth century certainly had theological implications. While Yale was becoming more theologically conservative in the midst of the Second Great Awakening, Harvard was pulling away from its Puritan roots. In fact, two of its Presidents in the nineteenth century, Josiah Quincy and Jared Sparks, were also noted historians (and members of the Massachusetts Historical Society) whose own histories were written from a Unitarian theological position, praising Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson and condemning Cotton Mather (Buell 221). According to his letters, Savage attended the Federal Street Church, a Unitarian church pastored by William Ellery Channing, the father of American Unitarianism. Later, the pastorate was transferred to Ezra Stiles Gannett, a good friend of Savage’s and grandson of the prominent Congregationalist minister and Yale president, Ezra Stiles. In one letter to his son, James junior, Savage writes, “We are quite engaged, I mean the religious society of Dr. Gannett, in looking round as to the probability of finding a site for the new church edifice we hope to erect. You may live to see it finished, but my desire is far stronger than expectation” (207). Savage was speaking of the eventual move to the Arlington Street location, where the church currently stands; the “religious society” is the American Unitarian Association, formed in 1825, to which Savage was a financial contributor. Savage was also a part of The Society for
Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians, established in 1787. He served as treasurer for the society in 1838-1841 and again in 1843-1850. What is particularly fascinating about this society is the sheer number of historians and antiquarians in its membership. Historians Jedediah Morse, Abiel Holmes, and Francis Parkman all served as secretaries to the society. Members included Jeremy Belknap, Elisha Ticknor, Daniel Webster, Josiah Quincy, William Ellery Channing, and Ezra Stiles Gannett. Representing a range of theological positions (Yale-trained Morse was staunchly Calvinist while Harvard-educated Channing was Arminian), this society supported missionary and educational work among Native American communities. The conglomerate of historians and antiquarians involved in this society suggests, again, the theological significance of historical work in the nineteenth century. This group also illustrates the network of historians, politicians, antiquarians, ministers, publishers, and professionals in Boston who were all participating in the same causes, whether missionary or scholarly. It is important to consider that these major historians, from Belknap to Savage, were all writing from distinct doctrinal positions, the significance of which became fully legible through their varied historical projects.

Savage’s involvement with the Unitarian church and his close association with other historians and antiquarians working on their own histories of New England certainly shaped his approach to editing the Winthrop journal. His work was participating in both the rapidly growing field of antiquarianism and in debates concerning the future of American Protestantism. In Savage’s view, theological progress in the nineteenth century meant moving past the conservative strictures of Puritanism and its modern manifestation, the Second Great Awakening, towards a more progressive and
inclusionary theology. Instead of calling for a resurrection of Puritan theology and historiography, Savage and other Unitarian historians were calling for its final interment.

Like many theological progressives of his day, Savage blamed one man for everything that was narrow-minded and harmful about American Puritanism: Cotton Mather. Savage notoriously and bitterly spoke out against Mather, frequently in the footnotes of Winthrop’s *History*. He deeply resented the *Magnalia* for its inaccuracies and its heavy-handed typological interpretation of historical events; he especially hated having to rely on the book for information concerning Winthrop and early life in the colonies. Savage’s disdain for Mather was so dramatic that almost every biography of Savage or reviewer of his work emphasizes it. In James Hosmer’s preface to the 1908 edition of the journal, he notes that Savage cannot even mention Mather “without dealing a stout Johnsonian cuff” (18). In a review of the 1853 edition of the journal, Samuel Garner Drake remarks that Mather has “as Hannibal against Rome, ‘sworn eternal war.’ He can never mention his name without a sneer or a jeer. This is a pity, but so it is. He seems never to have reflected that different trees are necessary and even useful, in the wilderness of mankind, as well as in the natural wilderness” (10). In a short biography of Savage, published in 1878, George Hilliard relates that there were two men “toward whom his feelings were akin to personal antipathy: these were Cotton Mather and John Hancock . . . Mr. Savage’s researches led him over the same ground which had been trodden by Cotton Mather, and he had frequent occasion to detect his want of trustworthiness” (38). Savage’s disdain for Cotton Mather, though felt by many historians and antiquarians of the period, was especially characteristic of Unitarian scholars, who sought to paint Mather’s “lack of rational theology” as indicative of the
“pathological nature of Calvinism” (Buell 221). Savage saw Mather’s behavior during the witchcraft trials as irrational and hysterical, everything antithetical to his belief in reason and order. Equally offended by what he perceived as Mather’s careless historical work, Savage only reluctantly relied on material from the Magnalia in his notes for Winthrop’s journal. Surely Savage hoped that the new edition of Winthrop’s journal would offer a corrective to the sloppy Magnalia and would ultimately replace it as the authority on New England’s colonial history.

Just as Savage went to great lengths to condemn Mather, he more passionately sought to praise Winthrop as both a “founding father” and a dear friend. In a review of the 1853 edition in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, the reviewer notes the remarkable intimacy between the editor and his subject: “It may be said of this work that the editor is no less happy in his author, than the author in his editor. They appear predestined to form the complements of each other” (857). Charles Adams, author of a late nineteenth-century book on the Antinomian controversy, observes that “John Winthrop was regarded by Savage with a warmth of admiration almost devout” and that an “innate sense of calling” led him to antiquarian pursuits (42). The language of providential choosing and religious devotion to one’s subject is not unprecedented. As I have shown, antiquarians often felt a sense of duty to spread the Gospel, so to speak, of historical inquiry. The pairing of Winthrop and Savage seemed ordained, and Savage felt himself personally connected to Winthrop. In letters to his wife, Savage sometimes referred to her as “sweet Mrs. Governor Winthrop” and to Winthrop himself as his “admirable friend.” In a letter to his wife, dated August 26, 1831, he writes, “I embrace my dear wife heartily as ever and with the blessing of Govr. Winthrop doubled upon you this night bid farewell from
yours, Jas. Savage” (34). Though his dedication to his subject was unmatched, Savage’s perceived personal connection with Winthrop frequently led him to lose the sense of objectivity thought necessary for good antiquarian work. James Hosmer, editor of the 1908 edition of the journal, calls Savage “blindly unconscious” of Winthrop’s shortcomings (18).

Savage was not alone in his impulse to defend the actions of the Puritan fathers. In a review of the 1826 edition of the journal, published in the *North American Review*, the critic is decidedly generous to the Puritan leadership, locating in them the origins of the revolutionary spirit. He writes, “It is only of late, that we have learned to trace our present free and happy condition, to its remote as well as its proximate causes, to acknowledge our obligations not only to the statesmen and soldiers, who conducted the war of independence, but to those sages from whom we derived the principles, institutions, and habits, which render independence desirable” (24). Criticism leveled against Winthrop, who is described as being of “naturally mild and benevolent disposition,” should take into account the “reigning spirit” of the age and the “desolate situation” that led to religious intolerance. In this reviewer’s estimation, “what politics were twenty years ago, theology was in 1640,” referring, of course, to the tumultuous 1800 election. Savage shared a similar view. He saw Winthrop as a prefiguration of Washington or Adams, and Winthrop’s early dealings with church factions laid the foundation for future political policy. This is not to say that Savage was not concerned with the theology of the journal, since we know that Savage saw it as contributing to the Unitarians’ call for a kind of progressive revisionist history. Ultimately, Savage viewed the journal through the lens of Unitarian historiography and viewed Winthrop himself
through the lens of a conservative political typology. In other words, the text clearly bears the stamp of Savage’s early Federalism and his dedicated Unitarianism.

As an antiquarian and a scholar of colonial history, Savage seized on the opportunity to edit Winthrop’s complete journals. In the preface to the first edition, published between 1825 and 1826, Savage explains that he took the job in large part because “the difficulty of transcribing it for the press seemed to appal several of the most competent members” of the Massachusetts Historical Society (iii). The circumstances of the manuscript’s circulation and reprinting give us a clear sense of the significance of Savage’s undertaking and, at the same time, demonstrate the mutability of the final product. Until their reprinting, the governor’s three notebooks circulated amongst some of the most important historical writers over two centuries, including William Hubbard, Cotton Mather, Thomas Prince, Ezra Stiles, and Jeremy Belknap (Dunn “Introduction” xi). The first transcription of the journal, completed by John Porter, secretary to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut, was published by Noah Webster in 1790, but had few useful annotations and was considered inaccurate in many instances. The edition, in fact, was so poor that in a letter to Ebenezer Hazard, Jeremy Belknap called the work “the worst executed, except one, that ever I saw” and thought Webster “ought to be ashamed” for printing it (233). Also, this first transcription was published while the third notebook was still missing. In 1803, the Winthrop family gave the first two notebooks to the Massachusetts Historical Society; in the spring of 1816, the third notebook was discovered amongst the papers of Thomas Prince. Now in possession of the complete journal, the society called for a new and complete edition. Savage proudly took on the difficult task of transcribing the journal, correcting the “numerous important errours” that
littered Webster’s edition. Unfortunately, when James Savage began his transcription work for the new edition, he made the fated decision to borrow the manuscripts from the Massachusetts Historical Society and work on them in his law office. On November 10, 1825, a massive fire broke out in Boston, consuming Savage’s law office and library and the second volume of Winthrop’s journal along with Savage’s transcriptions and notes. The fire also consumed a volume of early national historian Benjamin Trumbull’s manuscript collection, the first volume of Hazard’s Historical Collections, the first volume of Abiel Holmes’s Annals and a volume of colonial historian Thomas Hutchinson’s Curious Collections; the losses to the society were incalculable and emphasized, again, the imperative to “multiply the copies” of these works (Proceedings 393).

When the notebook was lost, Savage had published forty percent of it in the 1825 volume of the journals. However, for the remaining sixty percent, future editors had to rely on John Porter’s original transcription, which had always been considered flawed. Savage was devastated by the loss, writing to a friend, “I almost despair of ever enjoying again any such delights as my researches had afforded” (Savage Papers). He managed to continue his work on Winthrop, repeating his original labors, and his edition was published in two volumes, the first in 1825 and the second in 1826. According to the agreement with Boston printers Phelps and Farnham, the text numbered 800 pages and would be printed in two large octavo volumes on “paper of the best kind” (Savage Papers). The bill of sale indicates that the cost of the books and bindings—about 400 in boards and 250 in “sheep”—totaled $792. Just after publishing the first volume, however, Phelps and Farnham lost their shop in a fire. Thus, the 1826 volume was
published by Thomas B. Wait and Son. Savage prepared a second edition in 1853 with “additions and corrections” which was printed by Little, Brown, and Company. The completed book was a triumph of antiquarian work and a prime example of the importance of textual reproduction. Beyond that, though, the Winthrop journal itself filled what was once a gaping hole in colonial Puritan history. The book would become far more influential than Mather’s *Magnalia* as a primary source not only because of Savage’s influence in its reproduction, but also because of its intrinsic value as a first-hand account of the earliest days in Massachusetts Bay.

One key characteristic of the journal that attracted scholars to the journal, and certainly resonated with Savage, is its detached, somewhat disinterested style. Much more than Mather’s *Magnalia*, Winthrop’s journal has always been considered the most authoritative account of life in the early colonies precisely because it remains somewhat objective, even as the events are told from the perspective of a Puritan father. As Sargent Bush writes in his review of the Dunn/Yeandle edition, “Is any text as indispensable to our understanding of early Puritan New England than John Winthrop’s journal?” (97). Timothy Breen, another reviewer of the latest edition, calls the journal a part of our “national heritage,” writing that “however far we have traveled from that distant time, we can still appreciate the power of Winthrop’s vision” (para 11). For readers across three centuries, there is something about Winthrop’s journal that remains “indispensable,” where Mather’s *Magnalia* is expendable. Besides the obvious differences in the circumstances of their composition, one key characteristic distinguishes the Puritan histories discussed in this chapter. The bulk of Winthrop’s *History* is not explicitly typological and more closely resembles contemporary historiography; the *Magnalia*, by
contrast, consistently interprets events through a Biblical lens, alienating modern readers because of its theological slant and its difficult prose. Despite what some scholars see as the journal’s eventual turn towards biblical typology—which can be observed in some key moments—the journal never approaches the commitment to typological historiography that so dominates the *Magnalia*.

In contract to Mather’s work, Winthrop’s journal is surprisingly devoid of typological language. This is likely one major reason that Savage and his contemporaries were so interested in the journal. Dunn explains that in the first two years of the journal, Winthrop “played up the external challenges that the colonists face, and played down the internal divisions among them […] and at first he rarely discussed teleology” (“Introduction” xxxiii). Michael Colacurcio even compares Winthrop to John Smith, saying that early in the journal Winthrop “seems content at first to pronounce the natural sense of his new world in a few simple sentences” (153). Certainly Winthrop’s account of the early months in the colonies bears no resemblance to Mather’s account of the same, even though Mather relied heavily on Winthrop’s journal in his writing. Consider, for instance, Winthrop’s description of the extreme cold and the threat of famine during his first winter in the Massachusetts Bay colony:

*February* 10. The frost brake up and after that, though we had many snows and sharp frosts, yet they continued not, neither were the waters frozen up as before. […] The poorer sort of people (who lay long in tents, etc.) were much afflicted with scurvy and many died, especially at Boston and Charlestown, but when this ship came and brought store of juice of lemons many recovered speedily. It hath been always observed here that such as fell into discontent and lingered after their former conditions in England fell into the scurvy and died.

*February* 18. Of those which went back in the ships this summer for fear of death or famine, etc., many died by the way and after they were landed,
and others fell very sick and low, etc. The provisions which came to us this year came at excessive rates, in regard of the dearness of corn in England, so as every bushel of what meal stood us in 14s., peas <8>11s. etc. (35)

A few aspects of this record are noteworthy. First, Winthrop does not view the death of the “discontent” as a judgment from God. He does not take the opportunity to discuss the importance of trusting in God’s Providence or being industrious and contributing to the community as per the “Model” articulated on the Arabella. In addition, he does not explain the scarcity in terms of God’s testing of his people in the wilderness. Even when the provisions from England are overpriced, Winthrop makes no comparison to the “fleshpots of Egypt” and, in fact, is more interested in recording the actual cost than in interpreting what that cost represents.

Here, on the other hand, is how Mather describes similar circumstances:

Being happily arrived at New-England, our new Planters found the difficulties of a rough and hard Wilderness presently assaulting them: Of which the worst was the Sickliness which many of them had contracted by their other difficulties. […] One thing that sometimes extremely exercise them, was a Scarcity of Provisions; in which ‘twas wonderful to see their Dependence upon God, and God’s Mindfulness of them. (161)

What is present in Mather’s account is just as interesting as what is absent. First, even though he is relying on Winthrop’s account for much of this narrative, he does not mention specific aspects of the weather, the treatment of disease, or the price of provisions. Much of the Magnalia leaves out these details. Instead, Mather paints with a broad symbolic brush. The “Planters” land in the “hard Wilderness,” a favorite term of Mather but a term Winthrop uses only four times in the entirety of his journal. Also, in the Winthrop excerpt, the scarcity of provisions is only compounded by their rising cost, while Mather’s excerpt emphasizes “God’s Mindfulness” of the colonists. Importantly,
too, Mather constantly insists on the colonists’ dedication to their mission. Shortly after this account, Mather describes the establishment of the First Church in Charlestown saying, “But where-ever they sat down, they were so mindful of their *Errand into the Wilderness*, that still one of their *First Works* was to gather a *Church* into the *Covenant and Order* of the Gospel” (163). In Winthrop’s journal, the entry reads, “*August 5 . . . The congregation of Boston and Charlestown began the meeting house at Boston for which and Mr. Wilson’s house they had made a voluntary contribution of about £120*” (50). Again, Mather’s narrative is distinguished by its particular language of Puritan historiography, which sees the establishment of the First Church as the first step towards fulfilling God’s promise. Winthrop’s entry, though, foregrounds the monetary investment in the enterprise and says nothing in particular of the larger teleological significance of the First Church.

These passages clearly point to a distinction between Winthrop’s and Mather’s points of view in narrating the early days of the Puritan settlement. Mather could write with a certain kind of assurance because he was writing after the fact, knowing that the infant colonies would eventually survive and thrive. Mather is also writing from the position of a Puritan historian with particularly rhetorical goals for his narrative. This seems like an obvious point, but it is important to note that, because of Mather’s account, we tend to think that the Puritan colonists were invested in the rhetoric of the errand in a way that penetrated their entire lived experience. But, Winthrop’s journal reveals that, as he was experiencing the events, he was not necessarily interpreting them typologically. In fact, it is not until later in the journal, when it seems clear that Winthrop is shifting towards writing a history, that we begin to see the typological language that we associate
with Puritan historiography seep into the narrative. But even as this shift occurs, Winthrop is not writing in the manner of Mather.

Winthrop’s journal began simply as a sea journal, which he copied and sent back to England to be distributed amongst friends and family (Dunn “John Winthrop” 193). Between 1630, when the journal was begun, and 1636 when he began the second notebook, Winthrop wrote three or four dated entries per month. But the tone, content, and format of the journal shift within the first few years of entries. Winthrop quickly falls out of using any personal pronouns and, for the majority of the manuscript, refers to himself as “the governor” and “Mr. Winthrop.” He eventually began dropping the dates and, as Dunn notes, “throughout the 1640s the majority of the entries were undated.

Increasingly he wrote for several pages on the same topic, so that his narrative became less segmented and more continuous” (xxiii). The second and third notebooks begin to read more like a history of the colonies and Winthrop’s personal life recedes almost entirely. Winthrop also begins writing in retrospect, recording events sometimes a year or more after they happened. It has long been thought that Winthrop intended to publish the journal, in part because the notebooks included papers and jottings that suggest Winthrop’s intention for an organizational structure. Samuel Gardner Drake, a fellow New England genealogist and antiquarian, certainly thought that Winthrop’s journal was meant to be published and, in fact, offers an apology for the haphazard notebooks. He writes, “That he intended such revision there cannot be much doubt; for no man, scholar as John Winthrop was, would have allowed his rough notes, made in the woods, and under every unfavorable circumstance, to go the press without being compiled anew” (5).
As Winthrop’s narrative evolved into a history, he becomes more invested in defending his actions as governor. Colacurcio explains this shift in terms of Winthrop’s growing sense of his own legacy, such that the journal “never goes very long without reminding us that its author is the chief executive officer of an important and still perilous political enterprise” (157). As Winthrop becomes further embroiled in colonial conflict, his journal, according to Dunn, becomes solely dedicated to “[defending] his administration,” and “as he pursued his critics his interpretation became increasingly one-sided” (“John Winthrop” 198). Most famously, he records his dealings with Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, painting them as threats to the public order and tests of faith. I will discuss how these events were perceived in the nineteenth century later, but it is important to note here the growing extent to which Winthrop began to rhetorically shape the record of his leadership in the colony. As the journal progresses into a history, Winthrop employs the language of providence and of God’s interventions, particularly in cases of sin. In 1638, he writes of “another plot the old serpent had against us, by sowing jealousies and differences between us and our friends in Connecticut” (151). When a man failed to observe the Lord’s day, Winthrop observed that “by a special hand of God” the man’s child was drowned in a well, prompting the man to “freely in the open congregation […] acknowledge it the righteous hand of God for his profaning His holy day against the checks of his own conscience” (345). Instances of law and order saturate the journal and become especially important as an indicator of God’s continued intervention. Winthrop writes, “As people increased, so sin abounded, and especially the sin of uncleanness, and still the providence of God found them out” (197). Recorded instances of sexual “deviance” and “monstrous birth” acted as reminders that both private
sin and public discord posed a threat to the Puritan community. Of course Providence was also at the hand of many successes in the colonies: numerous rescues, instances of healing, material provisions, and restorations of order. But instances of Satan’s demise are much more privileged in the late entries of Winthrop’s journal. In 1648, towards the end of the journal, Winthrop records a moment in which a snake entered the church during a sermon and is crushed on the head by an elder. Winthrop explains the moment typologically, writing, “The serpent is the devil, the synod the representation of the Churches of Christ in New England. The devil had formerly and lately attempted their disturbance and dissolution, but their faith in the seed of the woman overcame him and crushed his head” (342). Surely Winthrop’s Puritan theology and his belief in the errand into the wilderness informed his writing, but Winthrop’s journal cannot be compared to the Magnalia in terms of its typological interpretation of events. Though both texts are examples of Puritan historiography (Winthrop’s as first generation, Mather’s as third generation), Winthrop’s journal is less inflected with Puritan typology than Mather’s Magnalia. The evolving nature of the journal is indicative of Winthrop’s changing role in the colonies. Winthrop interpreted colonial events from the perspective of their chief actor, and in that sense Winthrop offers a construction of himself in the journal-turned-history, just as Mather and Savage would later construct him in their antiquarian work.

Savage’s personal affection for Winthrop heavily influenced his editorial approach. As the editor of the journal, Savage seized the opportunity to offer an alternative history of New England, fashioned by the very pen of Winthrop. Forasmuch as Savage was a dedicated antiquarian who sought to unravel the intricacies of the text, he could not help but seek to honor Winthrop at every turn. In the nineteenth century,
many historians and antiquarians saw “memorializing the worthy” as part of their task (Callcott 189). Often, writers of history “exaggerated the qualities of their subjects in order to promote virtue and inspire emulation” (190). But there was supposed to be a distinction between how antiquarians memorialized the worthies and how historians imaginatively constructed them. Wesley Craven explains, “Neither of them will admit a point not supported by evidence and on this the antiquarian may be more of a stickler than the historian, who recognizes that imagination has an appropriate part to play in any attempt to reconstruct the past. […] [The antiquarian] will tolerate no deviation from the faded manuscript, as more than one historian has known to his sorrow” (94). Craven, in fact, holds up James Savage himself as an example of rigorous commitment to the “faded manuscript.” Surely Savage’s work on the Winthrop journal enriches our understanding of the events contained in it, but Savage’s notes and even his editorial policies are extremely heavy-handed, particularly compared to Robbins’s work on the *Magnalia*. As Van Tassel describes, with all the claims made to protecting the “stern truth,” filio-pietism reigned in the writing of colonial and early republican history.

Both Unitarian and Congregationalist approaches to history saw past examples of virtue as valuable for contemporary life. For Unitarian historians, who held to a belief in the progress of civilization, the perfectibility of man could be achieved through “the emulation of worthy models” (72). Conservative Congregationalists, like Thomas Robbins, saw past worthies as representing the ideal that could again be achieved, if civilization could only reverse its moral decline. Savage’s filio-pietism is most evident in his footnotes, wherein he frequently defends Winthrop’s character and actions. Savage did not want to release the journal into circulation without a kind of contextual shield of
protection, thus he inflated the text with notes, clarifying, excusing, condemning, and praising the historical events it depicts. As I will discuss below, Savage’s annotations were controversial at the time, in part because they represented a new kind of textual editing; as Charles Deane wrote in an 1874 tribute to Savage, his edition of Winthrop “formed a new era in the history of annotation of our New England chronicles” (9). With the intention of guiding readers towards a better understanding of Winthrop and his time, Savage used textual annotations to offer his own reading of colonial events and their present-day implications.

Nowhere is Savage’s filio-pietism more evident than in his defense of Winthrop’s actions during the Antinomian controversy in the late 1630s. In fact, Savage risked his reputation as a respected New England antiquarian to clear Winthrop from being associated with that disgraceful episode in Puritan history. Eager to paint Winthrop as a progressive in theology and as a strong centralized leader, Savage famously, or infamously, misattributed a scurrilous book on the Antinomian crisis to the Reverend Thomas Welde. Welde, a non-conformist minister in Essex, emigrated to Boston in June, 1632 and took the church at Roxbury in 1633. He returned to England by 1641, but in the interim participated as an inquisitor in the trials of the Antinomians. Though there is no question that John Winthrop primarily authored the book, Savage continued to insist on Welde’s authorship, even in the face of strong material evidence. The book, entitled *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of Antinomians, Familists and Libertines, that Infected the Churches of New England*, was published anonymously in England in 1644 and contains a collection of documents relating to the Antinomian controversy, including an account of the proceedings against Anne Hutchinson. Of all the editorial choices
that Savage made in his edition of Winthrop, the choice to attribute this book to Welde was the most controversial, and it sparked a debate among his fellow antiquarians. Savage painted Welde in a negative light in the footnotes, claiming that Welde purposefully tricked readers into thinking that Winthrop was the author. Savage claimed that his arguments for Welde’s authorship were well supported by documentation, but other scholars of his time suspected that Savage was protecting Winthrop’s reputation from enduring the charges of intolerance that Savage so despised in Cotton Mather. Furthermore, Savage had traced his own family lineage back to Anne Hutchinson herself, his “great, great, great, great grandmother” (240). Intent on clearing Winthrop of wrongdoing while sympathizing with the plight of his ancestor, Savage sought to place on Welde’s shoulders the burden of Hutchinson’s banishment and the ruthless portrayal in the Short Story.

The Short Story begins with a preface by Welde, added to the second edition, which gives a brief account of the trials and banishment of John Wheelwright and Hutchinson and ends with a proclamation of God’s providence in allowing Hutchinson and her family to be killed by Native Americans. Also included in the preface are twenty-nine theological claims considered prosecutable by the government. It is important to note that while the “crimes” were mainly theological, both Welde and Winthrop insisted on the civil threat that the Antinomians posed to the public peace. Ultimately, it was Hutchinson’s claims of direct revelation from God and power of prophecy that served as grounds for banishment from the colony (Hall 311). After Welde’s opening remarks, the narrative continues with Winthrop’s enumeration of the eighty-two “errors” committed by the Antinomians and their attendant “confutations”
delivered by the Puritan leadership. Here, Winthrop attacked Hutchinson’s claims to direct revelation as evidence of salvation as well as Wheelwright’s belief that justification is by Christ alone and is not evidenced in outward sanctification (a “Covenant of Works”), but in the spirit (“Covenant of Faith”). In the end, Wheelwright’s “crime” was preaching a sermon suggesting that several of the ministers in New England were relying on their actions to prove their election and salvation. Both Hutchinson’s and Wheelwright’s theology represented a radically orthodox Calvinist position. Specifically, the Reformation tenet of the Priesthood of Believers was taken to mean not only the removal of an ordained mediator between Scripture and the believer, but also the removal of Scripture as the primary mediator between God and the believer. Hutchinson believed that there were truths still being revealed directly from God; nothing could be more threatening to the Puritan leadership than a woman speaking to both men and women from personal revelation in her home. The book gives an account of Wheelright’s and Hutchinson’s trials and also offers a justification for trying Wheelwright on charges of sedition (a civil charge), as opposed to simply censuring him for a misguided sermon. The book concludes with a typological interpretation of the entire controversy, offering praise to God for helping the Church to conquer “this American Jesabel” and, likewise, Satan, who was constantly testing the religious fortitude of God’s chosen people (310).

Much of what appears in the Short Story is taken from accounts in Winthrop’s journal, but the book is written in a different style. As Dunn explains, during the controversy Winthrop stayed rather “sober and controlled” in his journal and reserved his “fiercest denunciation” for the Short Story, where he denounces Hutchinson in the most severe terms (202). Winthrop and Welde constantly invoke her pride, obstinacy, and
desire to sabotage the church. In the book, Winthrop describes her as “a woman of a haughty and fierce carriage, of a nimble wit and active spirit, and a very voluble tongue, more bold than a man, though in understanding and judgment, inferiour to many women” (263). In the journal she is merely a woman of “ready wit and bold spirit,” and the entire account of her trial and excommunication is recounted with brevity and frankness. Moreover, in the journal Winthrop offers a detached reporting of facts about the trial and the passionate language of the Short Story is almost entirely absent. The threat to the church, which is heavily emphasized in the Short Story, is noticeably downplayed in the journal. In the book, Winthrop speculates that if the Antinomians had not been checked, the “old Serpent” would have soon “driven Christ and Gospel out of New England” resulting in the “repossessing of Satan in his ancient Kingdom” (280). No such language appears in the journal, which only reports the errors of the two parties, briefly summarizes the trials, and concludes with their banishment. This may be because Winthrop wanted the journal to emphasize his own ability to squelch a harmful uprising. The Short Story, on the other hand, was meant to circulate in England where it could warn fellow Puritans against Satan’s schemes. The Winthrop of the journal is certainly the Winthrop that Savage wanted to believe in: a man who maintained order and peace under great strain and who managed discord with an even hand. The author of the Short Story, who squelches anyone who posed a threat to the “hand of authority, guided by the finger of divine providence” bore no resemblance to the Winthrop Savage felt he knew. As historian Charles Adams put it, Savage “looked upon [the Short Story] as a discreditable literary production, the scurrilous product of a mind at once narrow, vindictive, virulent and malignant” (40).
The debate over the authorship of the *Short Story* began with a fairly brief footnote in the 1825/6 edition of the journal. Winthrop is describing a meeting of the magistrates in which eighty charges were read against the Antinomians. In reference to the eighty charges, Savage writes the following note:

If any in our times have such insatiable curiosity, as to desire more particular information of the incomprehensible jargon contained in these errors, the exact numeration of which was eighty-two, imputed to the followers of Cotton and supporters of Wheelwright, with the antinomian explanations of Mrs. Hutchinson, that she denied, the whole is written in ‘A *Short Story of the Rise, Reign and Ruine of Antinomians, Familists, and libertines, that infected the Churches of New England,*’ by Thomas Welde, who was one of the chief inquisitors. (238)

Throughout his notes on the trials, Savage points to the foolishness of the whole operation, highlighting the “erroneous zeal for God” that led to “tyrannical” resolutions (240). However, on one point Savage agrees with the assembly. Savage explains, “A *prophetical way* has been often followed, at meeting of women in Boston, and is, I think, in our days, without censure. The conduct of the female assembly in 1637, however, so much resembles party making, that the resolution of the synod is approved by the editor, though it bear hard on his great, great, great, great grandmother” (240). Here, Savage approaches the controversy from the position of a political conservative who sees the threat of political factions as the modern-day equivalent of the colonial-era doctrinal debates. Though he has no real stake in the theological hairsplitting of the controversy, which he calls “unintelligible,” Savage can sympathize with Winthrop’s fear of internal division from a purely political perspective. Savage’s Federalist sympathies made faction or “party-making” anathema to him, so he defends Winthrop on this score despite Savage’s own belief in religious toleration.
In every other respect, Savage sides with his ancestor and lambasts Welde in further references to the *Short Story*. He goes on to criticize Welde for using the title “Antinomian” to refer to the actions of John Cotton, Wheelright, and Hutchinson. In a note relating to the controversy, Savage issues this reminder to readers:

> We should never impute conclusions from the premises of one party, drawn by the adversary. With all his ardour against the errours of that time, Winthrop, who well understood them, has not used this term of reproach [Antinomian], though Welde and other inquisitors have trusted much to the influence of an odious name. It is the most common artifice of the ‘exquisite rancour of theological hatred. (216)

Savage accuses Welde of assigning the term “Antinomian” because of its inflammatory implications; Winthrop is, of course, pardoned from any imputation of “theological hatred.” Later in the notes, Savage refers to Welde as “the reverend casuist, whose judgment is so blinded by passion, that he seems an unfortunate advocate, rather than an impartial reporter” of the events of the controversy (245). In reference to Mary Dyer’s monstrous birth, which is recounted in detail in the *Short Story* and only briefly in the journal, Savage condemns Welde’s preface, which praises God for his judgment in giving both Dyer and Hutchinson “deformed monsters” resembling their “misshapen opinions” (*Short Story* 214). Such assumptions as these illustrated the Puritan superstitions which Savage sought to wipe from Winthrop’s record. In reference to the belief that Dyer was also a witch, Savage reluctantly notes, “I am very sorry to remark, that Winthrop himself, at a later period, 1640, gives countenance to the same absurdity” (263). Savage’s notes on Welde and the *Short Story* practically absolve Winthrop of involvement in the controversy, and if Winthrop is guilty of anything, it is of being persuaded to partake in the superstitions of the age. Though Savage does not dwell long on the *Short Story* or
Weld’s role in the trials, Savage’s antiquarian colleagues took issue with his misattribution, prompting a series of heated exchanges.

In 1854, Samuel Gardner Drake, who, as we have seen, contributed the Mather genealogy to the mid-century editions of the Magnalia, published a scathing review of Savage’s second edition of Winthrop. Among many criticisms of the second edition, Drake censures Savage’s discussion of the Short Story:

[...] In his first edition of Winthrop the Editor charges [the story] upon Thomas Welde, and abuses him in unmeasured terms for the virulence of its contents. Long before he published his second edition, his error in attributing to Welde was, we have good reason to believe, pointed out to him. Indeed, how one could read the ‘Short Story;’ in connection with Winthrop’s Journal, and then charge the authorship of the former to Thomas Welde, is, to say the least, most unaccountable, when the authorship of the body of that work is as clearly Winthrop’s as his own Journal. And, it may safely be affirmed, that if Welde wrote the Short Story, he also wrote Winthrop’s Journal. (14)

Nothing resembled bad antiquarian work more than Savage’s continued insistence on Welde’s authorship. Drake is especially infuriated by a note in Savage’s introduction to the second edition, which further defends his attribution: “Exposure of the infirmity of unhappy Thomas Welde, in his Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of Antinomianism, will compensate, I think, the curious hunter in bibliography” (vi). That Savage was claiming to be more clever than his fellow antiquarians led Drake to label Savage a kind of “Mather” figure. Drake writes, “There is nothing clearer that one has a bad cause, or that he has undertaken on the wrong side, than the fact that he resorts to abuse to sustain his assertions” (15). Drake is referring here to an extended footnote (a two page, single-spaced footnote) in the second edition depicting Welde as a “virulent pamphleteer” who intentionally tried to pass his work off as Winthrop’s. According to
Savage’s research, Welde authored “72 of [the Short Story’s] 85 pages;” Winthrop was only responsible for the “Brief Apology in Defense of the General Proceedings of the Court,” which defended the choice to try Wheelwright for sedition (298). Savage concludes the extended note with a self-congratulatory statement, admitting, “Perhaps the reader may think I have derived too much gratification from disclosing the shameless infirmity or petty malice of the ecclesiastical historian” (299). Drake’s disgust with Savage’s notes could hardly be masked, even in Drake’s own book, *The History and Antiquities of Boston*, published in 1856. In a section on the Antinomian controversy, Drake writes, “Much injustice has been done [Welde] by attributing to him the authorship of that book of ‘malignity’ […] it now fully appearing, from its own internal evidence, that Winthrop had a principal hand in it” (148). In a footnote to this passage, Drake continues, “To charge this book upon Mr. Welde, against his solemn testimony to the contrary, is as absurd as it is unjust. It is, indeed, criminal so to do, unless, first of all, Mr. Welde’s character be impeached, which, to the writer’s knowledge, has not been even attempted” (149). To besmirch Welde’s reputation, even centuries later, was the most despicable of antiquarian “crimes.” But Savage did not let Drake’s accusations go unanswered. In fact, in Savage’s own copy of Drake’s *History*, Savage wrote his own footnote, further defending his actions. The handwritten note reads:

> On the highest probability, charge it upon him. See my note on p. 249 of Winthrop’s Hist. Ed. Second, to which much subsequent inquiry has enabled me to add very high confirmation. To throw any mud at Gov. Winthrop was much of Mr. Drake’s pleasure in this work. But no reasonable doubt exists, that the reverend casuist wrote all of the Rise, Reign and Ruin, except the official documents.
Savage uses the same term “reverend casuist” here as he used in his footnotes to the journal and defends Winthrop against any imputation of guilt leveled by Drake in his book. Savage’s compulsion to write a note in his own copy of Drake’s book is also characteristic of his famous bull-headedness both in his antiquarian research and in his adoration for Winthrop. As Adams writes, “it was not in Mr. Savage’s nature to accept this correction, and revise his judgment” (49).38

Drake was not the only New England scholar to take issue with Savage’s claims. In 1857, an anonymous writer identifying himself as “Hutchinson” published a statement in The Historical Magazine regarding the Short Story. The writer, John Wingate Thornton, was a founding member of the New England Historic and Genealogical Society and a member of the American Antiquarian Society. He compiled several New England family genealogies and wrote histories of the colonies. It is unclear why Thornton wrote this piece several years after the second edition of the journal was published, but nonetheless, he seems intent on clearing Welde of all responsibility for authoring the notorious Short Story. Thornton points to several moments in Winthrop’s journal that closely resemble the text of the Short Story; he also invokes Winthrop’s own reference to the book in his journal, in which he remarks, “Divers writing were now published about these differences,” referring to the controversy (263). Thornton also argues that several of Welde and Winthrop’s contemporaries corroborated Winthrop’s authorship, and, ultimately, “everybody knew [it] to have been written by John Winthrop” (323). By examining the publication history of the Short Story, Thornton verifies that Welde did indeed only supply the preface and that Winthrop was responsible for the remaining portions of the book. In fact, Thornton suggests that Welde only
reluctantly published a new edition of the text after “earnest solicitations” from some other party (324). Thornton’s closing remarks are probably the most telling, though. He points to the crux Savage’s problem, which is his difficulty accepting Winthrop’s role not only in the trials themselves but in the authorship of an inflammatory book. Thornton concludes,

Winthrop was the leader against the ‘Antinomian and Familists,’ and the reader of his history of those events and of his part in them, will have no difficulty in believing him to be the author of the *Short Story*, however offensive portions of it may now be to a Christian spirit, or to good taste; but the severity of the notes of his editor on this morbid excrescence of the times is unjust. Doubtless Winthrop lived to regret much that was done. (324)

Speaking as “Hutchinson” beyond the grave, Thornton suggests that Winthrop has too long shirked responsibility for damning Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright. He also criticizes the “editor,” Savage himself, for attacking Welde with a “severity” that should have been reserved for Winthrop himself. Naturally, Savage could not let “Hutchinson’s” article go unanswered and two months later he published a reply to the article. Though he admits that he “cannot spare time, nor could your Magazine spare room, for restatement of the matter of argument at great length,” Savage nonetheless points to a few matters of minutia to illustrate his primary claim: Welde made it look as though he had printed the second edition from Winthrop’s original by manipulating the appearance of the title pages and adding a preface insisting on Winthrop’s authorship. In the brief rebuttal, Savage could only gesture towards the “thirty, forty, or more than fifty, if not one hundred, minute pieces of evidence” that supported his argument. He encourages “Hutchinson” to come forward and for the two to meet, so that “collision of
minds may strike out sparks of truth” and, more to the point, so that Savage might share
with him the “dozen pages” that prove his case.

Though the Welde/Winthrop controversy takes up only a few notes in the journal,
it dramatically represents Savage’s commitment to an idealized portrayal of John
Winthrop. While Winthrop may have played a key role in the rooting out of factions, he
was not the instigator, nor did he intentionally feed the fire of the controversy. For
Savage, this difference in action distinguished Winthrop’s involvement in the
Antinomian controversy from Mather’s involvement in the witchcraft trials. The
witchcraft trials, because of their macabre imagery and their sustaining metaphoric value
in the popular consciousness, were exhibit “A” of the magnitude of Puritan paranoia.
Thus, Mather’s “sin” seemed far more grave than Winthrop’s, even though both men
were at the center of controversy in their respective generations. We see from this
episode in Savage’s edition of Winthrop, though, the power of the editor to manipulate
historical texts and history itself. Savage’s interventions into the text were just as
interpretative as they were informational, and readers could discover in the footnotes
another history of New England, different from the one Winthrop wrote.

Savage took great pride in associating himself intimately with the Winthrop
journal. Savage believed that the best way to introduce the journal to a reading public
was to heavily mediate its production, even to the point of altering the text itself. The
necessity of an editor for the journal was always clear enough—Winthrop never intended
for his “rough notes, made in the woods” to be published as is—but in the nineteenth
century there were less stringent editing guidelines, leaving Savage with little
accountability in altering the text (Drake 5). We already know that under Savage’s care,
the entire second notebook was lost; thus, Savage was forever linked with the manuscript as the last man to handle it in its entirety and the man on whose authority future editions rested. Dunn and Yeandle, who have worked with the manuscript and Savage’s editions, note that Savage “took many liberties when modernizing Winthrop’s text: he altered his spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphing; he omitted many of his marginal comments; and he recorded few of his compositional deletions and insertions” (xii).

Drake, too, had made a similar observation in his review of the 1853 edition:

> We hold that it is a very great mistake in an editor to print a work like Winthrop’s Journal otherwise than he wrote it; we mean it is a great mistake to print such works without preserving their exact orthography. […] It is rarely if ever done by thorough antiquaries; --no matter what their orthography was. How are we to judge of the literature of those days without specimens of it? (9)

While the accuracy of Savage’s transcription has almost always been praised, especially in light of Winthrop’s notoriously illegible handwriting, his decision to edit the orthography without consistently recording changes he had made or explaining his editorial practices makes a “perfect” transcription unachievable.39 Despite what is widely recognized as Savage’s adept reading of Winthrop’s hand and his careful attention to accuracy, the journal is still a work in progress. Recently, Richard S. Dunn and Laetitia Yeandle created a new transcription for the 1996 edition of Winthrop’s History, which they entitled The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630-1649.40 The new edition is indicative of this manuscript’s evolving state and of historians’ continued commitment to produce a “correct” transcription of the journal, however illusive that goal may be. In fact, Dunn writes, “It is safe to say that no one will ever publish a satisfactory edition of this remarkable document” (Dunn “John Winthrop” 185).
Savage understood the value of an antiquarian’s attention to detail, and he assures readers in the preface to the first edition that “the integrity of the text has, indeed, been as great an object of my labour, as the preparation of notes” (vi). At several points in the footnotes, Savage even refers to the tediousness of the work. In one note referring to a passage on caterpillars eating up a large supply of corn, he writes, “Vexation of many days labour was necessary for a satisfactory transcription of this paragraph, the ink having spread through the paper, probably by injury from damp, so as it appears almost a perfect blot. On the word in italics [tassels] I spent more study than in many pages of any other part of this work, and consulted more friends than in the whole of the residue” (Vol. II, 268). Despite Savage’s dogged commitment to a faithful transcription, Drake raises a crucial concern on the subject of textual editing. Precedent did exist for reproducing a text exactly, as in the case of the 1820 edition of Mather’s Magnalia; Robbins had the 1820 edition printed word for word, even without the errata sheet. There are almost no clarifying footnotes in this first edition and certainly no commentary on the content. Though the mid-century editions included some textual editing, phrase translations, an index, and occasional notes, the text is still left relatively untouched. Clearly, Savage conceived of his role as editor in a drastically different way than did Robbins.

Along with textual editing, Savage dedicated much of his time to crafting footnotes to the journal. The notes are so extensive that, at times, they far exceed the amount of primary source material on the page. Because of this imbalance, Drake’s review primarily targets Savage’s footnotes, which he considered “opinionated” if not “invidious.” For other readers, though, the notes were one of Savage’s greatest triumphs. The reviewer from the North American Review praises Savage for his “good sense and
impartiality of his comments,” which “form a singular contrast to the strong and undiscriminating attachment, generally shown by editors towards every part of those productions, which they have employed their time and talents in illustrating” (27). An examination of the notes refutes this reviewer’s praise, to some extent. Savage makes almost no pretense to “impartiality” in his notes; his frequent attacks on the Magnalia and his judgment of figures being discussed in the journal prove this. As one contemporary of Savage expressed, Savage seemed to blend the impartiality of antiquarian work with the “higher qualities of an historian,” which includes moving beyond the “facts” of the journal (439). The writer continues, “His annotations to Winthrop’s History are a marvelous embodiment of facts and opinions, which show how thoroughly he understood the subject that he undertook to illustrate” (439). In Charles Adams’s study of Antinomianism, before he criticizes Savage’s attribution of the Short Story to Welde, he discusses the “individuality” expressed in the notes which “affords, indeed, a not unpleasant contrast with the text,—the latter calm, self-restrained and inclined to the prosaic; the former intense, outspoken, replete with pith, individuality, learning and prejudice. These notes are, and will always remain, delightful as well as instructive reading” (39). Savage’s notes, like his editorial style, are somewhat inconsistent. At times, Savage seems dedicated to his genealogical work, giving extended family backgrounds for persons mentioned in the journal. In other instances, Savage offers contemporary political or social commentary on the events depicted in the journal. He also uses the notes to refer to his myriad of other sources, including the colonial histories of Abiel Holmes, Jeremy Belknap, William Hubbard, Thomas Hutchinson, and Cotton
Mather. While he frequently differs with Mather, he seems especially partial to Hutchinson, the descendent of Anne and predecessor of Savage himself.

Not surprisingly, Savage also uses the footnotes as a place to pardon Winthrop’s actions. For example, in a passage justifying the banishment of the Antinomians, Winthrop uses an Old Testament example. He writes, “So, by the example of Lot in Abraham’s family, and after Hagar and Ishmael, he saw they must be sent away” (250). In the corresponding note, Savage asserts, “That such examples from the private history of the Jewish patriarchs were alleged as justification of the intolerance of the ruling party, should not lessen our esteem of the general prudence of Winthrop, which . . . is exhibited with great happiness, and must have satisfied, or silenced, all opponents” (250). Savage frequently insists on Winthrop’s “prudence” and “mildness,” rendering him thoughtful and fair where others were impulsive and judgmental. Even in moments where Winthrop explicitly criticizes others, Savage asks readers to consider how mild Winthrop’s responses were relative to his contemporaries. In another passage, Winthrop describes the Indian attack on settlers in Rhode Island, including Anne Hutchinson. About these settlers Winthrop writes this account:

These people had cast off ordinances and churches, and now at last their own people, and for larger accommodation had subjected themselves to the Dutch and dwelt scatteringly near a mile asunder; and some that escaped, who had removed only for want (as they said) of hay for their cattle which increased much, now coming back to Aquiday, they wanted cattle for their grass. (136)

Depicting the Rhode Island castaways as materialistic and irreligious, he suggests that perhaps this community deserved the attack. Savage’s footnote on this passage is telling: “Considering the gentle and catholic temper of Winthrop, who utters this sarcasm, we
might presume, that others, of less amiable disposition, indulged in greater abuse of the inhabitants of Rhode Island, and may wonder at the humility of the seceders” (136). Savage takes Winthrop entirely at his word, assuming that the “seceders” were likely pompous or greedy. In addition, Savage cannot imagine a context in which Winthrop could be blamed for judging too harshly; we can clearly see how his opinion of Winthrop’s character, which he has largely formulated from the journal itself, would prevent Savage from seeing him as the author of the Short Story.

Though Savage rarely faults Winthrop for his actions in the colonies, Savage is not afraid to offer general critiques of colonial governance and religious policy. By offering more abstract critiques, Savage could both absolve Winthrop of bigotry and align himself with the emerging tradition of Unitarian historiography. Savage in no way condones the actions of the Puritan fathers and does not advocate a return to Puritan theology; instead, he uses his notes to show the progress that Protestant theology—and New England civilization as a whole—has made from the age of the Antinomian controversy to the age of Unitarianism. Referencing a scene of corporal punishment, Savage writes, “It is in vain to regret, that such paragraphs are preserved in this History. The spirit of the age had prepared the people for such false impressions, and, in the perpetual glooms of the wilderness, their imagination gradually stole away the supremacy from judgment” (321). The emphasis on environmental determinism is interesting here, as well as the reference to the “spirit of the age,” which is a phrase historians frequently used to describe the Revolutionary era. This explanation for a loss of “judgment” also points to Savage’s belief in progress (versus continued corruption); once the “wilderness” was conquered, the “spirit of the age” was transferred from one of religious dogmatism to
one of democratic republicanism. In a passage on a disagreement between the colonial churches, Savage muses, “Whenever any course, that might proceed to a result of extreme injustice, cruelty, or tyranny, was contemplated by the civil rulers, the sanction of the churches of the elders was usually solicited, and too often obtained. Such is the consequence of uniting the wisdom of magistrates and ecclesiasticks in concerns belonging exclusively to either” (284). Savage’s note marks a contrast, again, between his and Robbins’s theology. Robbins and the participants of the Second Great Awakening were not necessarily advocating theocracy, but they certainly called for a return to conservative theology and social values so as to prepare the way for the second coming. Unitarians like Savage disliked the revivalist movement’s tendency towards anti-rationalism and saw the separation of church and state as fundamental to an enlightened society. Thus, we see Savage taking the position of figures like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, who argued for an even stricter separation of church and state.

The canonization of the “outcasts” began to dominate the more progressive vein of nineteenth-century historical writing. Buell explains this phenomenon as religiously motivated: “Liberal historians declared a semi-independence from [Puritan] authority through their urbanity and their sympathy, however patronizing, with the heretic. Indeed some heretics were looked upon by some liberals as more truly their ancestors than the pillars of the Puritan commonwealth” (217). Though Savage was no republican in politics, he celebrated the religious liberties advocated by Williams and condemned the Puritan settlers’ treatment of the Native Americans. Savage praises Williams’ work towards “vindicating the liberty of worshipping God according to the light of conscience”
and regrets that the biography of Williams has not received more attention. He further argues that had Belknap “lived to enlarge the number of volumes of his American Biography, his assiduity and judgment would have raised this pilgrim, whose name for some generations was oppressed with calumny, to a rank inferior, non longo intervallo, only to the two Winthrops, Bradford and Penn” (41). Savage forgets, of course, that Winthrop himself played a roll in “oppressing” Williams. He praises Williams for speaking out against the legal enforcement of the Sabbath, writing, “All, who are inclined to separate that connexion of secular concerns with the duties of religion . . . will think this opinion of Roger Williams redounds to his praise” (53). Williams’ progressive views of separating church and state and advocating religious tolerance placed him among the heroes of the nineteenth century. Calling for him to be held among the “Winthrops” and “Bradford” is especially surprising, given the fact that Winthrop himself participated in banishing Williams, who objected to the Massachusetts Bay Charter and the King’s claims to authority over the colony. Nonetheless, Savage saw no contradiction in holding up both Williams and Winthrop as exemplars of what would later be America’s democratic state. As McWilliams explains, the nineteenth-century historian’s “true concern is to ferret out the way New England (dis)honored individual rights at its moment of origin, yet subsequently maintained a cultural mission that kept Puritan culture at the vanguard of enlightened liberty and progress” (91).

The last major editorial decision that met with some controversy was Savage’s choice to title the work The History of New England instead of the Journal of John Winthrop. In the preface to the 1825/6 edition, Savage explains that this title reflects “the exact language of the author,” which appears in the second and third manuscript volumes.
“Both the other MS. volumes begin, in the writer’s own hand, ‘A Continuation of the history of New England’” (v). This indication combined with what appear to be Winthrop’s outline and his ever-changing compositional style (omitting dates and writing longer narratives) seem to support Savage’s claim. However, the question of whether the unfinished manuscript in its present condition could be titled The History of New England remained. Drake immediately addresses this issue in his review, arguing that the hand-written title was likely “an afterthought of Winthrop […] that at some future period his work might be used in compiling a History of New England” (5). Calling the book a collection of “memoranda,” he concludes, “Hence every one may reflect, that however important, and however valuable a work, or garment of a work may be, that importance or value does not authorize us to give it a false title” (5). Indeed, no other edition of Winthrop’s journal has ever been titled The History of New England, though the 1908 edition titles it, Winthrop’s Journal “The History of New England,” 1630-1649. It seems that one reason for Savage’s choice was simply that he felt it best reflected Winthrop’s intentions for the notebooks. In the 1820 edition, Savage appended to the second volume a section of “addendum” which contains “certain memoranda in [Winthrop’s] hand writing, some of which are sufficiently important for publication” (339). Savage claims that these memoranda were “designed most of them for publication” and surely would have been included in Winthrop’s eventual History (339). Also, Savage chose to append a series of personal letters from Winthrop to his friends and family in both volumes of the 1825-6 edition and 1853 edition. Savage does not explain his choice of particular letters, but in the preface to the 1825-6 edition, he does thank James Bowdoin for procuring most of the materials for the appendix; these letters, he explains, were
obtained by Bowdoin from Francis B. Winthrop. The addition of the letters grants the entire publication an additional worth for readers and historians, but it also presents an interesting divide between the Winthrop of the journal/history and the Winthrop of the letters. The letters are naturally more personal than the journal and it seems likely that Savage wanted to emphasize the difference between the two sets of documents. At a time when nineteenth-century historians were writing histories of New England and when other colonial histories were being reprinted, Savage wanted to situate Winthrop’s text in the tradition of history writing, not autobiography. Savage felt that if the text were a journal only, it could only be seen as subjective, as one man’s interpretation of colonial events. If the text were a “History” proper, it could represent the thinking of a generation and become a model of Puritan historiography. As a history, it could also replace Mather’s Magnalia as the source for material on Winthrop and his era of Puritan settlers. For antiquarians to no longer be forced to consult “that work of Mather” would be a triumph. Dividing the letters from the journal lends support to Savage’s belief that Winthrop intended to publish a history of New England and that the material for such a history was contained in the pages of his three notebooks. To publish the notebooks as a journal only was, in Savage’s estimation, to undermine Winthrop’s role as a historian and to devalue the book as the authoritative narrative of Puritan history.

The two histories of New England presented in this section were penned by two major Puritan figures writing at very different moments in colonial history. The Magnalia Christi Americana was written by a man witnessing the final decline of his faith and harkening back to a time when the Promised Land was rife with possibility for God’s chosen people. John Winthrop was writing in those first years, documenting the
early tribulations of the settlers and hoping that God would sustain them through growing discord and harsh conditions. Both histories failed to find a broad audience until the nineteenth century, when the still-young nation became interested in writing its history for the first time. Through the efforts of antiquarians Robbins and Savage, these books found new audiences and made an enduring contribution to nineteenth-century historiography. Despite the vastly different approaches that Robbins and Savage took to editing and publishing these works, what they share is a common entry into print culture in the nineteenth century. It is no coincidence that both Mather’s and Winthrop’s histories were published first in the 1820s and again in the early 1850s. Their publication signifies a larger printing effort led by antiquarians and historians to bring America’s written history into wide circulation. Both books’ mid-century reprinting indicates the continued interest in historical publications. These primary sources would become as much a part of nineteenth-century historiography as the works of Jeremy Belknap, Abiel Holmes, Jared Sparks, and George Bancroft, all of whom wrote foundational histories of America throughout the century. The Mather and Winthrop reprints were also the product of ongoing religious debates concerning New England’s relationship to orthodox Calvinism. By reprinting the histories of Mather and Winthrop, both editors were offering alternative accounts of colonial New England and, as a result, alternative versions of America’s development from colony to nation.

Notwithstanding these critical differences, both editors tended to agree on the primacy of New England’s history to the writing of American history more generally. As Savage once wrote, “Beyond New England, which alone is my country, I know little of the Histories” (Savage Papers). As we will see in the chapters that follow, though,
histories of New England were not the only colonial histories being revived and revised. Other editors, historians, antiquarians, and publishers were looking to produce histories of America’s colonies and biographies of America’s heroes that challenged the primacy of the New England narrative.

NOTES TO PART I


2 Interestingly, even as Mather composed the *Magnalia*, he felt a similar sense of urgency to preserve the message of first-generation American Puritanism. In a prefatory poem in the opening pages of the *Magnalia*, Nicholas Noyes, “teacher of the church at Salem” actually uses the language of revival in talking about Mather’s mission. He writes of Mather, “Whose piety, whose pains, and peerless pen/Revives New-England’s nigh-lost origin” (1820 edition, 15).

3 The first American edition was published in 1820, the second in 1853. The 1853 edition was re-issued in 1855, but only Volume I was altered significantly. The 1855 reissue of Volume I contains new material which I will discuss later in this essay.

4 Robbins had performed the wedding ceremony of Stiles’s parents, and Stiles did not meet Robbins until he was twelve years old, shortly before Robbins’s death.

5 I take my understanding of the sometimes overwrought term “print culture” from David Hall’s essays in the collection Cultures of Print (1996). Hall describes the relationship between the history of ideas and the history of the book, arguing that “the better we understand the production and consumption of books, the closer we come to a social history of culture” (1). “Print culture” marks the intersection of printed texts in their many forms with the reading public. As Hall explains, this intersection is complex because “in any given period of time, readers had available more than one representation or ideology of reading, texts, and writing” (185).

6 Thomas Holmes explains that Hackshaw, “had a warehouse of paper which had long lain upon his hands” and because he was hoping to get rid of it en masse, “[Parkhurst] paid little or nothing for the paper” which cut costs drastically (585). According to Mather’s diary, the impression of the book was to cost £600, but since the paper was free and the sale price of the book was so high, Parkhurst and Hackshaw must have believed they could still turn a profit, though Hackshaw supposedly did not donate the paper “with an Expectation to Gain to himself, but for the glory of God” (400).

7 He was especially bothered by Daniel Neil’s *History of New England*, which Mather accused of “gross falsehoods” and “Sadducean folly” particularly because it turned the New England’s history into a “dry political story” rather than an account of God’s providential care for His people (263, 313).

8 See Berkovitch, Puritan Origins of the American Self (1975) and Buell, New England Literary Culture (1986).

9 Baker’s larger contention is that these writers of historical and gothic fiction sought to rewrite the past in ways that exposed its flaws, “[rejecting] Mather’s vision of the ideal” (144).
Felker’s *Reinventing Cotton Mather in the American Renaissance* (1993) considers Mather’s *Magnalia* as a kind of palimpsest on which writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Elizabeth Stoddard wrote their own “political accents into narrative centers, keywords, and plot formulas” (9). He further argues that “the American edition was the crucial publication for the production of a new and highly self-conscious literature” (87). While *Magnalia* certainly informed the historical narratives of writers like Hawthorne and Stowe, it is difficult to demonstrate the extent of its influence as a “masterplot,” as Felker terms it (94). Felker’s book not only gives *Magnalia* a cultural and literary authority that seems unlikely given its reception in the nineteenth century, but it also assumes that Hawthorne, Stoddard, and Stowe imagined their works to be in direct conversation with Mather’s and, in fact, indebted to Mather for modeling ways to manage “democratic problems and potentials” (13).

The diary entry on October 14, 1801 makes the first mention of the *Magnalia*: “Read Mather’s the *Magnalia*.” The next mention is not until August 27, 1811. He names the book again in September, 1811 and then in February, 1813 just before he buys a copy himself. He does not cite the price for the first edition copy, but by 1844 the book was worth around $19.00 at auction and in 1886, the book could sell at auction for between $40 and $60, according to Increase Tarbox, editor of Robbins’s diary. Volume I, p. 488. He is always reading several works simultaneously, including his Bible, which he reads in its entirety every year.

Tarbox cites 1701 as the publication date, but the date printed on all copies of the first edition is 1702.

Bloch further argues that millennial rhetoric was employed by social and political movements in the nineteenth century, like abolition and early socialism, and was also associated with the language and mission of Manifest Destiny. Thus, millennial thought was not a wholly evangelical principle, and was somewhat secularized as the century progressed (230).


Timothy Dwight established one of the first tract societies in New England, the Connecticut Religious Tract Society based in New Haven, CT. (Keller 118).

Robbins was particularly dedicated to raising monetary support for the American Asylum for the insane, or the “Retreat” (173). He also lobbied heavily for the establishment of a chapel in Newgate Prison so that prisoners might be given Bibles and tracts and attend church (177).

Just as antiquarianism and history-writing are distinguished from each other in the nineteenth century, so too was antiquarian publishing and the publication of “popular history.” Historical writing was, indeed, a popular genre in the nineteenth century and as Gregory Pfitzer has argued, there was a huge market for such publications as “the commodification of literary and historical culture” was fed by the power of “mass production” and people’s new desire to “own books in impressive numbers” (7). There was not such a market for antiquarian publishing in part because rare books did not have mass appeal and in part because rare books could not be published cheaply or, in the case of the *Magnalia*, compactly. Thus, I place the Mather reprint in the context of antiquarianism and not popular history because I see these as two very different markets in historical book publishing. See Pfitzer, *Popular History & the Literary Marketplace: 1840-1920*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.

See Neal’s *Rachel Dyer* (1828), Cooper’s *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* (1829) Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1824), Child’s *Hobomok* (1824) and Hawthorne’s “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (1835)

There are close to 200 copies of the 1820 edition held in libraries worldwide, but there are no existing data concerning the total print run of either American editions.
20 See note one for an explanation of the dates. Only the 1855 reissue contains the supplements discussed above.

21 Drake estimates that Mather alone authored three hundred and eighty-two published works in his lifetime (xxix).

22 Several antiquarians like Robbins also participated in genealogical societies. According to Robbins’s diary, Drake wrote to inform him in February, 1845, that he was elected a member of the Historic Genealogical Society recently formed in Boston (770).

23 I am not suggesting that Robbins’s antiquarian work eventually conflicted with his theology or that the later editions are any less theologically significant for Robbins. However, the supplements add a further element of accessibility (both in terms of form and content) and clearly show Robbins’s new interest in genealogical work. Certainly a Christian motivation continued to drive Robbins’s antiquarian work, and he was not the only one. Sewall Harding, publisher of the 1855 edition of Morton’s New England’s Memorial was also a reverend. John Warner Barber, engraver and author of the best-selling Connecticut Historical Collections (1836), attended Robbins’s conservative church in Connecticut and Robbins was in regular contact with Barber throughout his life.

24 See also Levin, “Trying to Make a Monster Human: Judgment in the Biography of Cotton Mather.”

25 In the proposal for Savage’s Dictionary, Savage indicates that “the work will be published in four volumes, of about five hundred pages each” and that they will be sold by subscription for $2.50 per volume, bound in cloth or “$5.00 for each double volume in more substantial binding.” (Proposals 1-2).


27 See volume two of the Quarterly Journal of the American Unitarian Association, p. 322.

28 For more on the history of the society, its members, and bylaws, see The Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians and Others in North America (1887).

29 Hilliard continues to describe Savage’s objections to John Hancock, which were on the basis of Hancock’s “vanity and his love of popularity” and his hypocrisy (38).

30 The 1790 edition is entitled, A Journal of the Transactions and Occurrences in the Settlement of Massachusetts and the other New-England Colonies, from the year 1630 to 1644, written by John Winthrop, Esq. First Governor of Massachusetts: And now first published from a correct copy of the original Manuscript.

31 Even years after the journal was donated and reprinted, the Winthrop family feared it was not being properly cared for at the Society. In a letter to the Society dated April 9, 1857 from Robert C. Winthrop, he explains that upon finding the two notebooks with no “mark to distinguish them, or any cover to preserve them from injury--& fearing that they might, one day or other, be mislaid or mutilated” he was compelled to donate a special case for the manuscripts. The fragile journals are still contained in this case at the MHS.

32 The handwritten bill also indicates that Phelps and Farnham printed 195 copies of the proposal for Winthrop’s history. The bill lists Moody and Nye as the binders.
Passages quoted from Winthrop’s *Journal*, when they are not explicitly referring to portions of Savage’s editions, or *History*, are from Dunn and Yeandle’s abridged edition of the text.

The first notebook records the sea journey in 1630 through the September, 1636. The second notebook, lost in the fire, covers 1636 through the summer of 1644. The third notebook covers events from September 1644 to January 1649. Based on an analysis of the handwriting and Winthrop’s frequent mis-dating of events, Dunn believes that most of this last notebook was written retrospectively and in several longer writing sessions in mid-1648 (xxv).

Noah Webster’s preface to the 1790 edition also describes the journal this way: “This manuscript, as appears by some passage, was originally designed for publication” (x). Dunn also explains that several loose papers found in the second volume indicate that Winthrop was taking notes on particular incidents between 1643-1648 that he likely intended to record in a more polished version of the journals (“John Winthrop” 210-12).

The book was originally published in England in 1644 under the title *Antinomians and Familists Condemned By the Synod of Elders in New-England: with the Proceedings of the Magistrates against them, And their Apology for the same*. It is unclear how the manuscript made it to England originally, but Thomas Welde, then living in England, published a second edition with his preface that same year. According to David D. Hall, the first and second editions even seem to be “composed of identical sheets,” and only the preface and title change mark the difference between them (200). A third edition was reset and published again in 1644 and a fourth was published in 1692. I will be quoting from Hall’s anthology, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638*, 2nd ed., which uses the third edition of the book.

There is no evidence to suggest that Hutchinson or any others involved in the controversy were associated with the Familists. Surely the name was added to the title for dramatic effect, painting Hutchinson et. al. as dangerous heretics.

For a detailed discussion of Savage’s evidence for Welde’s authorship, as well as a clear refutation of this claim, see Adams, *Antinomianism in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1636-1638*, pp. 38-65.

Dunn and Yeandle report that, in collating Savage’s edition with the two surviving notebooks, they have “differed significantly from Savage’s reading in only about 225 instances” (xii). For the lost second notebook, though, Dunn and Yeandle had to rely on Savage’s partial transcription, which was done in part with the original manuscript and in part with Porter’s notoriously poor transcription. Sixty percent of the second notebook was taken from Porter’s transcription and some of Savage’s notes that had survived the fire, while the remaining forty had been printed in the first volume and was based on Savage’s own transcription work. To get a sense of the accuracy of Porter’s transcription relative to Savage’s, Dunn and Yeandle made this comparison: “In two samples of Savage’s ‘perfect’ second notebook text totaling 8,000 words […] he made 460 changes large and small in Porter’s printed text of 1790. But in two samples of Savage’s ‘imperfect’ second notebook text totaling 8,000 words […] he made only 153 changes large and small in Porter’s text” (xiii).

Dunn and Yeandle include James Savage as one of the editors of the 1996 edition. They also dedicated the book to his memory, despite acknowledging that his actions made a complete transcription impossible.

A single folded sheet is tipped into both the 1825/6 and 1853 editions. It bears a facsimile of a handwritten letter from Winthrop to his wife, dated 1630. Savage offers physical proof of the difficulty of the work he undertook.

All quoted material from Savage’s footnotes comes from the 1825/6 edition unless otherwise noted.
Interestingly, even in the case of the memoranda found in the pages of the manuscript, Savage was selective about what to publish in the 1820 edition and what to leave out.

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45 Interestingly, even in the case of the memoranda found in the pages of the manuscript, Savage was selective about what to publish in the 1820 edition and what to leave out.
PART II
SOUTHERN ROOTS OF THE REPUBLIC: HISTORICAL PUBLISHING AND THE CASE FOR INDEPENDENCE

“Shall Virginians surrender the palm to their brethren of the N. England states, who have instituted the feast of Pilgrims? Shall they celebrate the landing of their forefather at Plymouth; and shall the landing at Jamestown be completely neglected?”
A Richmond resident, 1807

INTRODUCTION

In his “Jubilee Oration” delivered on June 13, 1807 at Jamestown, Bishop James Madison called upon Virginians to recall the “glorious epoch, when their forefathers here first planted the tree of liberty and independence, whose branches shall not only cast their friendly shade over this new world, but shall extend their broad shelter to all the nations of the earth” (2). Emphasizing Virginia’s importance as the “first” colony, Madison calls to mind the first planters who encountered the “gloomy, impenetrable forest, the recess of the lawless savage” and with “daring and enterprising spirit” made “rapid progress in agriculture, commerce and the polite arts”—an enterprise that would extend “from one extreme of the continent to the other” (1). According to Madison’s narrative, Jamestown not only marked the first British settlement in North America, but its settlers exhibited a “spirit” that would eventually be called the “spirit of ’76.” Situating the narrative of America’s colonial story in Virginia became more important into the nineteenth century, when sectional tensions began to define “North” and “South” not just as separate regions, but as representative of opposing interests. As I demonstrated in Part I, New England
historians had long laid claim to the narrative of America’s development from colony to
nation, and twentieth-century literary scholarship has often reinforced the New England –
and particularly “Puritan” – origins of America’s national character. For many New
England historians and writers, the stories of Jamestown and Plymouth could not be more
different. Robert C. Winthrop, descendent of Governor John Winthrop, delivered a
Forefather’s Day address in 1839, highlighting these divergent narratives. Contrasting
the ground of Plymouth “shrouded with snow and crowned with ice” with the Virginian
soil, “teeming with every variety of production for food, for fragrance, for beauty, for
profit,” Winthrop praises the Pilgrims for reaping “a rich harvest of contentment,
harmony and happiness,” while the Virginians “reaped only disappointment, discord,
wretchedness” (33). To further heighten the contrast, Winthrop invokes the images of
two ships bearing people to the New World:

At the very time the May-flower with its precious burden, was engaged in
its perilous voyage to Plymouth, another ship, far otherwise laden, was
approaching the harbor of Virginia. It was a Dutch man-of-war, and its
cargo consisted in part of twenty slaves, which were subjected to sale on
their arrival, and with which the foundations of domestic slavery in North
America were laid. I see these two fate-freighted vessels […] I hear from
the one the sighs of wretchedness […] from the other the pleasant voices of
prayer and praise. (36)

Long before the South seceded from the Union, northern-based histories had depicted the
southern colonies as a stain on the pages of history. The South had produced few of its
own colonial histories, so in many ways its narrative was made silent, irrelevant in the
face of a New-England based program for defining America’s identity. Winthrop’s
passage reads like a parable in which seeds were planted in poor soil and rich soil; but the
seed sewn in rich soil with slave labor reaped only “wretchedness,” while the seed sewn
in poor soil with “prayer and praise” reaped “contentment” and, consequently, yielded an entire nation. Both Madison and Winthrop use the common metaphor of planting in their texts, but while Madison emphasizes the labor and industry involved in clearing the savage forests, Winthrop suggests that the “teeming” Virginian lands only encouraged slothfulness and, eventually, invited slavery into the colonies. Winthrop’s passage also illustrates the extent to which Northern historians were producing southern history long before the South became invested in writing its own version. It would be several decades after Madison’s 1807 oration until Virginian historians were no longer content to watch their history either go unwritten or be written by the likes of Winthrop. Mid-century historians, writers, and publishers would soon assert that Virginia was the birthplace of independence, progress, and industry; they would also vehemently denounce the implications of Winthrop’s two-ships metaphor. As sectional tensions arose in the decades leading up to the Civil War, Virginians began to press for a self-authored and uniquely southern historical identity. If historians, politicians, and writers could show that the American character was indeed rooted in the soil of Jamestown, then secession, just like independence from Britain, was a defining act of patriotism rather than a bitter rending of the Union. This part will examine the development of historical writing and publishing in Virginia and the significant role that colonial history played in the formation of a unified antebellum southern, and eventually confederate, identity.

The South’s depressed print culture was, I argue, the key contributor to its lack of historical production, even into the nineteenth century. Without print in the southern colonies, the South could not record and circulate narratives of its history as readily as the North, nor could it create the kind of mythology that New England had recorded from its
earliest days. As Van Tassel explains, in the 1830s when the southern states began to establish historical societies, “southern intellectuals had flayed the South for its careless disregard for the records of the past and excused the South because its sons had been too busy making history to gather or write it” (97). The catch-22 of celebrating southern agrarian culture while condemning its lack of intellectualism was keenly felt among southern intellectuals. Van Tassel goes on to quote one book agent who declared in 1826 that, “there will be no such thing as bookmaking in Virginia for a century to come. People here prefer talking to reading” (97). While southerners may have had a tradition of oral history, these histories could not be placed in archives, reproduced, or widely circulated; the fact that history had not been recorded for posterity, in the method of the northerners, meant that the South had little source material on which to build a historical tradition. The emphasis placed on being a people of action rather than introspection, of storytelling rather than bookmaking, was celebrated as a hallmark of the southern character, yet the agent’s comment highlights the absence of a print culture to sustain that character. While Virginia had a handful of colonial historians, their works were not originally printed in the colonies and first editions were difficult to find.

However, in the nineteenth century when historians across the nation began to push for the printing and collecting of southern documents, one history of Virginia consistently arose as the touchstone for southern historiography. The account is Robert Beverley’s *The History and Present State of Virginia, In Four Parts*, published in London in 1705 and then revised for a new edition in 1722. Beverley’s history had enjoyed moderate popularity in its day; in fact, the book went through several printings in England, France, and Amsterdam throughout the eighteenth century.² Yet, like any
number of colonial texts, it was little-known and difficult to find in print by the antebellum period. In 1855, Virginia publisher J.W. Randolph and Virginia historian Charles Campbell collaborated on a new edition of the book, for which Campbell provided the introduction. The publication of this new edition came at a time of growing tension between the North and South and coincided with a print renaissance in the South. The reprint of Beverley’s important work would meet a need in the South for a stable historical narrative of its origins and an independent print culture. Chapter three will begin with a look at the naissance of historical interest and print culture in Virginia. Then, I trace the life of Beverley’s book from its original printing to its reprinting in the years leading up to the Civil War. I particularly consider the extent to which Beverley’s representation of the Old Dominion continued to resonate with southern readers in the 1850s and the ways in which its historical account was strategically revised by contemporary historians like Campbell.

Chapter four will focus on another print venture that played a major role in constructing a southern historical consciousness: *The Southern Literary Messenger*. This periodical, perhaps more than any other mid-century object printed in the South, facilitated the spread of historical interest there and spurred what one scholar calls a “southern literary renaissance” dedicated to the “glorification of the Old South” (Brundage 1). I argue that in the case of both the Beverley reprint and the *Southern Literary Messenger*, southern historians, antiquarians, and publishers were for the first time recognizing the power of print and history to produce a uniquely southern historical identity. Furthermore, these printed histories drew on colonial events to make a case for the South’s exceptionalism and, in turn, its inevitable secession. Gathering historical
materials and making them accessible to the public was a strategic implement in the years preceding the war; crafting a collective memory from these materials would produce at least the semblance of a unified front and a united Southern identity.³

These efforts to reproduce Virginia’s colonial history came at a critical time in the development of American historical writing and in the political life of the South. Antebellum southern writers and historians struggled to locate a unifying history of colonial Virginia that possessed the powerful resonance of the Puritan errand into the wilderness, which, as we have seen, had already saturated popular culture. The history of Virginia was complicated, messy, and ignoble, even compared to the most unpleasant features of New England history. The question of why and by whom Virginia was founded appeared somewhat problematic to both southern and northern historians. As prominent Virginian historian Hugh Grigsby explained to a friend, the Jamestown settlement had, after all, been “essentially a trading venture” and bore no resemblance to the “grand and noble achievement” of the Pilgrims (qtd. in Craven 112). While the New England colonies were likewise dedicated to industry and economic growth (Bradford’s Of Plymouth Plantation notably speaks to economic concerns), the dominant colonial and nineteenth-century histories of the region consistently emphasized the typological significance of its settlement. The New England histories were couched in terms that made New England itself the lynchpin in God’s design for humankind henceforth.⁴

Grigsby’s embarrassment over the mercenary motives for immigrating to Virginia was likely influenced by a long tradition among northern historians of bypassing, and sometimes lambasting, the Virginia colony. David Van Tassel notes that Thomas Hutchinson’s famous history of the Massachusetts Bay colony nearly discounted the
Virginia colony in the establishment of a permanent British settlement in the Americas. Hutchinson, like other New England historians of colonial America, saw a contrasting relationship between the Massachusetts Bay colony, representing New England, and the Virginia colony, representing the South. According to Hutchinson, had it not been for the Puritan settlers, “it was doubtful whether Britain would have had any colonies in America,” as Virginia was “struggling for life” (Van Tassel 29). Thus, in addition to being inferior because it did not profess a grand religious or political cause, the colonial South was made to seem anemic, haphazard, and, perhaps, too British for too long. As mid-twentieth-century historian Wesley Craven explained, “The motivation inspiring the Virginia project is as complex a problem as that of explaining the entire English interest in America. It has not been easy to bring this question to a sharp focus on some single motive that is readily identified with the accepted ideals of later generations,” as in the case of the Puritan errand into the wilderness (5).

The root of Virginia’s problematic historical narrative was located in what both Grigsby and Craven identified as a failure to control the popular message. Craven noted in his 1956 book, that research still needed to be done on the “intriguing question of the failure of Virginia’s historians to control the development of popular tradition” (112). I contend that the answer to Craven’s question lies in an examination of the region’s relationship to history and print, beginning in the colonial period. Long before the myth of the New England errand into the wilderness was fashioned by historians and antiquarians, the balance was tipped towards the story of the Massachusetts colonies for one key reason: their early commitment to print. Isaiah Thomas’s *The History of Printing America* (1810) emphasizes this significant difference between print culture in
New England and Virginia in the colonial period. He writes, “As soon as [the New England settlers] had made those provisions that were necessary for their existence in this land, which was then a rude wilderness, their next objects were, the establishment of schools, and a printing press; the latter of which was not tolerated, till many years afterward, by the elder colony of Virginia” (14). In fact, Thomas concluded, “it does not appear that any printing was performed in Virginia from the year 1682 till about the year 1729,” and prior to that, printing was not allowed without direct permission from the crown (332).

For the Massachusetts colony, printing and higher education were established just as quickly as a church was erected. In Virginia, however, printing was slow to develop for two key reasons. First, scholars have often rightly argued that printed materials did not hold the same significance—religiously, politically, and culturally—in the Virginia colony as they did in New England. New writing coming from the colonies was also rarely directed inwards; that is, Virginia colonists were not typically writing with a domestic audience in mind. According to John Tebbel’s history of book publishing, there existed a “disinclination of literary men in the Virginia colony to have their work printed in the new land rather than in what many of them still thought of as home” (4). Tebbel’s statement perhaps overstates the number of writers looking to publish their work in the Virginia colony. In fact, there was little incentive to write or publish anything in the colonies that did not relate directly to governance, agriculture, or news. As David Rawson explains in his study of Virginian print culture, “The colony had a commercial-agriculture orientation from the beginning, one pursued initially by a wealth-seeking populace drawn from the illiterate outcasts of English society. Thus, it lacked the
religious motivations for reading and printing seen in the north” (73). And, of course, without writing, or the desire to record the activities of the colonies, there could be nothing to print. According to historian Louis B. Wright, “few settlers [in the Virginia colony] considered an account of their activities worth the writing. No compulsion existed, as in New England, to justify the ways of God to men. […] They showed little desire to record for posterity either the hardships or the blessing of life in the colony” (xii). In the New England colonies, print acted as a vehicle for the perpetuation of the mission—the call for continual confession and renewal, for a commitment to God’s providential plan. Whereas printing served a clear purpose in the New England colonies, it was not seen as imperative to the operations of the southern colonies, beyond its legislative function. This early “disinclination” for printing in the southern colonies would later become a source of frustration for southern writers who lamented the absence of local publishers and printers.

The second reason for the lack of a Virginian print culture was legal. Sir William Berkeley, mid-century colonial governor of Virginia, famously remarked, “But, I thank God, there are no free school nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience, and heresy, and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them, and libels against the best government. God keep us from both” (qtd. in Tebbel 1). According to Rawson, “Upon his departure in May of 1677, after thirty-five years in Virginia, Berkeley left behind a colony without ‘free schools’ or a printing press, just as he had intended” (21). Though Berkeley was later painted as a despot, or sometimes as a puppet of Charles I and II, his policies were left relatively unchanged in the colonies almost until the Revolution. In Berkeley’s formulation,
printing was a vehicle for inflammatory and anarchical material, though very little such material appears to have been written in the colonies. Berkeley’s statement does suggest that for the Virginian governing body, restricting print and education were part of the same mission to keep the common citizenry under control and maintain class hierarchies. This is not surprising, considering how closely Berkeley sought to resemble the monarchy. But Berkeley’s quote points to another way in which print was perceived differently in the South and North. Governor Winthrop also saw print as a vehicle of control, to the extent that he could control how his community and his church were being represented, but under his and others’ leadership in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, print played a vital role in civil and religious life for the general public. In Virginia, conversely, just a decade before the revolution, “there was but one printing house in the colony, and this was thought to be too much under the control of the governor,” Thomas writes (332). By 1810, Virginia had only four paper manufacturing mills, to Massachusetts’ forty (25). Even as late as 1859, prominent antiquarian and historian Charles Campbell wrote to a friend that he had to rely on a northern publisher for the printing and distribution of his work, since “Virginia is a poor field for selling books, there being few booksellers, & the most of them inefficient, & the county license tax upon resident agents selling books, being prohibitory.” Furthermore, “There are in Virginia a great many people, who will seldom, if ever, buy a book, unless carried to their door by an itinerating agent.”

Without a true center for publishing, printing, and circulating printed material in the South, it was difficult for readers to purchase books at all. A distinctly southern print culture did not exist until the mid-nineteenth century, and, even then, printers and publishers struggled to sustain a domestic periodical and book
market. Another contributing factor to this phenomenon was the significant international book trade and importation from the North, the convenience of which precluded the need for southern publishers.

As Campbell wrote in the preface to his own history of Virginia,

> Although Virginia must be content with a secondary and unpretending rank in the general department of history, yet in the abundance and the interest of her historical materials, she may, without presumption, claim pre-eminence among the Anglo-American colonies. […] Her documentary history, lying, much of it, scattered and fragmentary […] ought to be collected with pious care, and embalmed in the perpetuity of print. (xi)

No less important than the development of a southern colonial history was a declaration of independence from the northern monopoly on the “national” character. Daniel Whitaker best articulates the problem in an 1842 article for the *Southern Quarterly Review*. He asks his readers, “Does ‘the North American Review’, by the mere force of its comprehensive title, represent and maintain the interests, social, civil, and literary of all North America? […] Does it represent and sustain with good will, in good faith, or at all, the agricultural and slave-holding interests of the Southern States of this Union, guaranteed to them by the Constitution? […]” (71). The unique “interests” of the South, then, called for a unique new colonial story—a story that celebrated the enterprising and patriotic spirit of the Old Dominion, and found in its archives a justification for secession.
Virginia seemed plagued by an inability to preserve its state records. Prior to the Revolutionary War, the state house at Jamestown was destroyed and rebuilt no fewer than three times in the course of forty years. In 1747, the state house at Williamsburg was destroyed by fire, and in 1832 its replacement also burnt to the ground. Prior to the Civil War—which took the greatest toll on Virginia’s major cities, landmarks, and state papers—the Old Dominion’s historical artifacts were frequently salvaged and scattered. In a letter to Charles Campbell dated February 25, 1846, famed New England historian Jared Sparks explains the gravity of the ruin of Virginia’s printed records. He writes, “The loss of the Virginia papers […] is extremely to be regretted. It can be supplied now only by copies of such as are in the British offices. I wonder the patriotic Legislature of Virginia should not imitate the example of several other states, & procure these copies. Till that shall be done, it will be in vain to look for a complete history of the ‘Old Dominion.’” In the first half of the nineteenth century, Virginia historians and concerned citizens had indeed attempted to “imitate the example of other states” and begin to amass an archive and establish a historical society. Even before it was a public concern, Thomas Jefferson was extremely dedicated to this endeavor, listing his collection of 243 state documents dating from 1496 to 1768 in Notes on the State of Virginia (208). His personal acquisitions laid the foundations for collections at the
University of Virginia Library and the Library of Congress. For Jefferson, collecting and printing were both essential components to the preservation of the state archive. In a diary entry dated January 16, 1796, Jefferson asked, “What means will be most effectual for preserving these remains from future loss?” Recognizing the importance of reprinting historical materials, he exclaims, “How many of the precious works of antiquity were lost while they were preserved only in manuscript!” (qtd. in Davis 224). But even amidst fervent calls for historical pursuits in the South, Sparks was correct in suggesting that Virginia was falling far behind other states in the collecting of historical materials, particularly in comparison to New England’s efforts.

For Virginia, and the South generally, the reason to collect and preserve historical papers reached beyond a desire for reference material. The perception that Virginians disregarded historical pursuits confirmed a stereotype about them—that they were anti-intellectual. Historical consciousness, or conscientiousness, had become aligned with enlightenment, intellectualism, and culture. In 1824, writing as a “Country Correspondent,” Jonathan Cushing, future president of the Virginia Historical Society wrote to Richmond’s Literary and Evangelical Magazine to complain about the dearth of historical interest in Virginia, connecting Virginia’s lack of interest with a kind of moral deterioration. “Why is there no Antiquarian or Historical Society in Virginia?” he begins (40). The answer, he says, is that the Virginian has become “sensual, and selfish and sordid,” singing into “long slumbers” in which he “forgets himself, and his high destiny.” While other parts of the United States manifested “an aspiring spirit; a literary ardour, a reaching forward to higher things,” the South possessed “comparatively few, who seek an education,” and most “are content for the most part with moderate attainments. […] And
thus while others are rising, we are going down.” Calling for a literal “spring cleaning” of readers’ attics, the writer has “no doubt, but that there lie, mouldering in olde trunks, in closets and garrets, many letters and other manuscripts of men of former times, which a society, properly organized and well conducted, might bring out of obscurity, and preserve from destruction.” The writer raises several concerns on the minds of Virginian scholars, educators, historians, and lawmakers. The issue of Virginia’s potential “decline” or regression as a state (representing the South as a region) was particularly pertinent in the early nineteenth century when it was still believed that the warm weather and slave labor produced slothful landowners. The “literary ardour” of the North signified a commitment to enlightenment and a liberal arts education, while the South focused on “a trade to make money.” The writer notes what seemed to be a fundamental difference in educational values; for the South, schools emphasized learning a trade, while Northern schools—specifically, elite schools—fostered the study of religion, languages, literatures, philosophy, and history. Without an investment in history, both as an “intellectual stimulus” and as a catalyst for regional pride and a model of exemplary citizenship, Virginians may become base, ambitious, “gross and brutal” lovers of pleasure and money. At least according to this “country correspondent,” the stakes for introducing Virginians to their history were extremely high, particularly at a time when Virginia was losing some of its political and economic power.

According to Melvin Urofsky’s history of the Virginia Historical Society, another key reason for the slow development of historical organizations in Virginia was a rapid decrease in population due to westward migration. He explains, “All in all, more than a million people moved out of the Old Dominion between the end of the Revolution and
the beginning of the Civil War, dropping the state from first in population to fifth” (19). While cities in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania were growing and experiencing new economic growth, Virginia was declining. According to Urofsky, “just a few months before the organizing meeting of the Virginia Historical Society, Francis Eppes, a grandson of Thomas Jefferson, told a friend that ‘our children may grow rich under a different system, but we will never witness better times--here’” (19). The atmosphere of economic decline may have acted as both a deterrent and an incentive for the formation of a historical society in Virginia. While it was clear that only an elite few would likely be able to contribute to the society, those few sought to preserve Virginia’s heritage—and the heritage of the colonial South—with a strong sense of patriotism and regional pride.

On December 29, 1831 a small group of men gathered to form the Virginia Historical and Philosophical Society, appointing Chief Justice John Marshall as its first president and James Madison its first honorary member. Members of the society always saw their historical program as an up-hill battle; even in one of its founding documents, the writer concedes that the society may “fail to satisfy public expectation” but that, nonetheless, “the most successful enterprises have had their origin in humble beginnings” (5). Expectations were extraordinarily high for what the historical society could accomplish in Virginia and for what it might contribute to the writing of national history. As Conway Robinson, treasurer of the society, wrote to William Cabell Rives in 1841, “The truth is, I wish our Society to be eminent among historical societies. And I think this can be effected with reasonable efforts. We shall have the advantage of other societies in the chronological order of our Matter, its completeness and greater interest.”
There was a belief among leaders of the historical movement that of all the states, Virginia had the most valuable “matter” to contribute to the writing of the America’s early history. Thus, at least in its beginning stages, the society saw itself as contributing to both a regional and national commitment to antiquarianism.

In his address to the society in 1833, President Jonathan Cushing allays the group’s “fearing of failure” with this grand hope:

I shall look forward with pleasing anticipations to the time when our library will contain all the rare and valuable materials, […] when our anniversaries shall excite a lively interest throughout the state, and call into action its genius and erudition […] when, in a word, the combined operations of our members, shall tend powerfully to advance the various sciences, and the useful arts, and to create and diffuse such a taste for intellectual improvement among our citizens, as will assist in giving Virginia, that elevated standing among her sister states which her rich natural resources, no less than her moral worth and her political power so justly entitle her to maintain. (33)

Cushing’s address calls on all “patriots,” every “citizen who loves the Old Dominion and her institutions,” to contribute to this vision. The vision echoes that of the “country correspondent” and demonstrates the keen sense of inferiority saturating Virginian culture. Making historical work the work of average citizens was, indeed, the primary challenge for the society. Cultivating new “tastes” among Virginians required introducing them to their own history, perhaps for the first time. With the establishment of the historical society and a new initiative for printing historical material, Virginia began to collect, reproduce, and write its colonial history for the first time.

With Cushing’s call to widespread participation, the society hoped to expand its membership and bolster its revenues, since, in 1833, the society had only sixty-two members and was financially strapped. Unfortunately, its campaign failed, and in 1838,
the society disbanded under financial strain and a lack of commitment among its members. The Panic of 1837, among other economic and political strains (including continuing congressional debates over the expansion of slavery) certainly contributed to the society’s decline. It took a decade for the society to recover and find a permanent home in Richmond, where its membership increased from 252 to 360 by 1848. That year, the society began publishing its records in the *Virginia Historical Register*, which represented the first major print venture in Virginia focused solely on the distribution of historical material (Dunlap 215). The relationship between the Virginia Historical Society and the *Southern Literary Messenger* was also significant. An article in the *Messenger* published in January, 1835 announced the following “with great pleasure”:

> The Proprietor of the ‘Messenger’ is authorized, by a resolution of the Society, to insert from time to time in his paper, under the direction of the standing committee, such portions of the manuscripts, &c. belonging to the Society, as the committee may select for publication. […] It shall be our endeavor to urge the claims of the Society to the general attention and earnest regard of the public. (255)

As I will discuss in chapter four, the *Southern Literary Messenger* would become a key vehicle for the distribution of historical material as well as a forum for an appeal to history in the pro-slavery, pro-secession argument. Importantly, the society’s publications and new commitment to print in the late 1840s created a market for historical imprints in Virginia and throughout the South. By 1850, the VHS was publishing historical material in the *Messenger*, the *Register*, the *Virginia Historical Reporter*, and it had published monographs like Conway Robinson’s *An Account of Discoveries in the West until 1519*, and H.A. Washington’s address on “The Virginia Constitution of 1776” (*Organization* 1881).
Around this time, the society was increasingly interested in local and regional acquisitions. In an address to the society in 1848, Rives argued that it was time Virginia attended primarily to its own interests: “The false glare of national honors has been wont to dazzle the eyes of Virginians, and make them forget the duty and service they owe, primarily to their own State” (2). Rives then sets out a new program in which the “tendency of this Society” will be towards “the study and exhibition of our State history, to awaken a stronger feeling of State patriotism among us, and to call it into vigorous action for the restoration of the State to her former elevated position” (7). Appealing to Virginia’s celebrated past—the Virginia that produced Washington, Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and James Madison—Rives calls upon members of the society and readers of the *Register* to participate in fostering a distinctly Virginian culture. Virginians saw themselves as the descendants of the very first North American settlers and often characterized their status as representative of the South. Because Virginia was the birthplace of such eminent figures in colonial and U.S history, the state saw itself as uniquely positioned to represent southern interests and, in establishing the first historical society, it led the charge in promoting antiquarianism in the South. David Kiracofe as described this self-perception in his study of the Jamestown Jubilees; he argues, “Virginia had an obvious source of identity as the birthplace of the American experience. The commonwealth further capitalized on this foundation with a steady record of other ‘firsts’” like the first legislative body and the first to issue a declaration of independence” (40). In light of this illustrious record, Rives’ speech suggests that historical pursuits could, in fact, restore Virginia to a more prominent place in national life. With a greater understanding of history, citizens could work to reinstate the entire South to an “elevated
position” and fulfill its calling as the political heart of the nation and its economic backbone. Even as Rives makes claims to Virginia’s potential for national leadership, he acknowledges that the northern character, one essentially determined by the harsh physical environment, directly challenged the South’s grand plan for restoration. Rives admits that because of New England’s “constant conflict with the difficulties of nature,” the region thrived with a kind of “creative energy” that was lacking in the “indolent” and complacent South (6). Rives’ address signals the growing belief in the two regions’ irreconcilable differences. Eventually, as it became important to present a united front prior to the Civil War, the emphasis on state pride would merge with an emphasis on southern interests and the southern character; yet, historians and antiquarians would frequently turn to figures from Virginian history as illustrative of that character.

Coincident with a movement towards recapturing a Southern narrative of colonial history was the establishment of a stronger local print culture; these two phenomena were inextricably linked. Writers of all kinds had long bemoaned the want of southern publishers, particularly as southern writers and historians began to find a national audience with their work. Having to depend on northern publishing houses for printing and distribution was particularly irksome as northern print material became associated with the abolitionist cause. Though Amy Thomas suggests that southern writers’ choice to publish in the North reflected their “dual regional and American identities,” this decision more practically reflected writers’ lack of options in the South (379). Southern writers simply did not have domestic outlets for their work. In a letter to historian Lyman Draper, Campbell wrote, “My Va history ms has been ready for the press for some time, but we have no publishers in Virginia & I really do not know how to go to work to
propitiate one at the North” (79). Two years later, Campbell follows up with Draper, informing him that his history would finally be published, but not under ideal circumstances. He writes, “I can hardly say that I found a publisher, although I have managed to get into print. I sent my ms. to the Messrs Harpy, as Blackwood styles them;—they kept it awhile & declined it. About this time the edr of the S. Lit. Messenger proposed to me to publish it in his periodical, which I agreed to as a dernier resort & printed an Extra edition of 500 copies at my own expense” (83). Campbell’s first claim, that “we have not publishers in Virginia” designates the key difference between “printer” and “publisher.” Printers in Virginia did not have the capital to fund the kind of promotion, packaging, and distribution that made the “Harpys” so successful in the North. Campbell’s dilemma was shared by many southern writers—like William Gilmore Simms, for example—who would have liked to have fed the southern publishing industry with new, locally-produced works, but had few viable options.

Between 1830 and 1890, one of the only profitable publishers, printers, stationers and booksellers in Virginia was J.W. Randolph, whose shop performed all of these functions. His reprinting of Beverley’s History was one of many historical reprints issued from his press in the nineteenth century. Though known primarily for publishing law literature, including the prestigious Quarterly Law Journal, Randolph became a chief producer of Confederate imprints and a premier collector and seller of rare books in Virginia. Even prior to the outbreak of the war, though, Randolph’s printing house was committed to printing Virginiana. Fortunately, Randolph’s book catalogues and advertisements have survived, appended to copies of the Quarterly Law Journal, now housed at the Virginia Historical Society. These catalogues give some insight into the
breadth of Randolph’s holdings and his publication endeavors. If the catalogues are any indication of public taste, histories were one of most popular genres of the day; by 1856, Randolph had published new editions of Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, printed “from President Jefferson’s Copy,” Byrd’s *Westover Manuscripts*, the Virginia Conventions, and Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia*. His bookshop held hundreds of volumes of histories and rare books, and he was constantly soliciting “Old Books” from the public through advertisements. In one advertisement in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, he claims, “Will take in exchange for other works, any kind of old books. High prices in cash will be paid for the following: Burke’s History of Virginia, complete or odd volumes, Stith’s, Keith’s, or Jone’s [sic] History of Virginia […]” (481). One reviewer noted of Randolph in 1857, “The list of Mr. Randolph’s publications […] afford gratifying evidence of the prosperity of at least one publishing house in the South, and may, we hope, be regarded as an exponent of increasing literary activity in this section of the Confederacy” (*DeBow’s* 62). Randolph became a fixture in Richmond and he continued to publish and sell books even after his store was destroyed in the burning of Richmond in April, 1864. According to his obituary, “Mr. Randolph had for nearly half a century been one of the foremost citizens of Richmond, and was held in the highest esteem both in the business and social world” (*Publisher’s* 561).

Randolph’s contributions to publishing, though little recognized in contemporary scholarship, are significant for the study of book history and antiquarianism. Randolph boasted that his collection was “the largest and most valuable collection ever offered for sale by any other house in the United States;” and while this was certainly an exaggeration, the relative size and worth of his collection and the large output of his press
dwarfed many other publishers in the South and established him as the foremost printer, publisher, bookseller, stationer, and antiquarian collector in the region. His was also one of the only publishing houses to survive the Civil War relatively intact; according to Robert Strohm, “During the 1850s, J.W. Randolph so prospered that by the outbreak of hostilities in 1861 he was not only one of the leading bookmen in Virginia, but in the entire South as well” (10). But Randolph’s dedication to printing colonial works also marks him as a key contributor in the phenomenon of historical publishing in the nineteenth century. As I have shown, this phenomenon was connected to the advancement of particular colonial narratives, and thus, in Virginia, Randolph became a participant in shaping historical discourse through his publications.

Though this chapter discusses only one book from Randolph’s press, the book fully represents the inextricable relationship between history, printing, and politics both in the colonial period and in the antebellum period. Randolph’s reprint of Beverley’s *History* in 1855 was characteristic of his commitment to printing Virginian histories, but also indicative of the national push to preserve colonial works through reprinting. Randolph also collaborated on the reprint with Charles Campbell, whose status as a prominent antiquarian and historian lent greater credibility to the reprint. That is, the involvement of Charles Campbell highlighted the necessity to reproduce Beverley’s book in particular since Campbell was seen as the foremost antebellum expert in colonial Virginian history and was actively involved in historical publishing. In what follows, I reconstruct the circumstances behind the Beverley reprint and the specific features of both Beverley’s personal history and his interpretation of colonial history that made his work an important fixture in southern historiography and necessitated its reprinting. I
also place Beverley’s history in conversation with Campbell’s own *History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* (1847) to reveal the ways in which pre- and post-revolutionary interpretations of colonial history differed. Specifically, I consider the continuities and conflicts in each historian’s interpretation of Bacon’s Rebellion, a key colonial event that had a powerful legacy in the antebellum South. Beverley’s history took on new significance in the antebellum South, looking to construct its own colonial history, but it also clashed against contemporary interpretations of colonial Virginia that were emerging in direct response to sectionalist conflict.

As the son of a printer and bookseller in Petersburg, Virginia, Charles Campbell seemed destined to be a bibliophile. His father had written a brief history of Virginia in 1813, which perhaps sparked Campbell’s own interest in history. Though he trained for the law, he never practiced and he briefly edited and managed the *Petersburg American Statesman* until becoming a prominent teacher. Posthumous sketches of Campbell cast him as one of the most important Southern antiquarians and historians in the nineteenth century. An obituary published in *Potter’s American Monthly* in 1876 depicts Campbell as the true antiquarian who “loved to linger in the footsteps of his ancestors” (427). “Many of his vacations were spent in visiting the historic seats, the old grave-yards and the landmarks scattered along the lower James,” and his moments of leisure were spent “amidst his books, in culling chaste flowers from classic fields; in brightening some dull page or clearing some obscure point of history” (426). According to Edward Wyatt in a 1935 article on Campbell, “Unquestionably the influence of Campbell was largely responsible for the increasing interest in Virginia history” (8). Campbell’s *Introduction to the History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* was published serially in *The
Southern Literary Messenger in 1847 and also in book form by B.B. Minor, publisher of the Messenger. He then revised and expanded the history for an 1860 monograph published by J.B. Lippincott. The work was considered by many nineteenth and twentieth-century scholars to be “the most important work on the history of Virginia” and a “monument of scholarship” (“Campbell” 169). Campbell was also a regular contributor to the Southern Literary Messenger and the Virginia Historical Register and is credited with helping the Virginia legislature to obtain the colonial records of Virginia (Wyatt 7). His other substantial contribution to antiquarianism was his edition of the Theodorick Bland papers, published in 1840, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Campbell was well connected within literary and scholarly circles, and he was eager to have his work read by both northern and southern audiences. In fact, he wrote to Jared Sparks hoping that he would help Campbell convey a copy of his Introduction to George Bancroft; the book was also favorably reviewed in the Northern American Review. Given his stellar reputation and his access to a scholarly circle beyond the South, it is not surprising that Randolph would have wanted Campbell involved in the Beverly reprint. His standing amongst antiquarians and historians, coupled with Randolph’s reputation as the foremost distributor of historical materials, meant that the Beverly reprint would be truly representative of the spirit of historical inquiry in Virginia.

According to his private letters, Campbell received a proposal from Randolph to help edit the first American edition of Beverley’s History. Campbell and Randolph had been corresponding as early as 1851 with regards to Campbell’s interest in writing a history of Virginia “adapted to the use of schools,” which he hoped Randolph would publish. Randolph hoped that Campbell would write in introduction to the reprint, and
so, in 1853, Campbell set out to find anything he could relating to the life of Robert Beverley. In a letter to William B. Beverley, dated April 13, 1853, Campbell explains that, “A publisher proposed to bring out a new edition of Beverley’s History of Virginia & has applied to me to prepare a biographical sketch of Robert Beverley the author.” Unfortunately for Campbell, even a descendent of Beverley had little information on Robert Beverley, but the descendent mentions that he had heard of the History and “had much curiosity to read it, but could never find it in any bookstore.”

Throughout the month of April, Campbell sent out several inquiries for information on Beverley. A year later, Campbell contacted Randolph again with the news that he had completed the biographical sketch of Beverley and was “pleased to hear that [he is] going to republish that rare old history.” Knowing of Randolph’s growing interest in historical publications, Campbell even suggested that Randolph publish a new “modernised” edition of John Smith’s history. In later letters, Campbell and Randolph correspond about other possibilities for historical works, including a history of the Virginia governors and a reprint of Campbell’s own history, which Randolph eventually agreed to print. In fact, in an 1856 catalogue of books, under the banner “J.W. Randolph Publishes the Following Books,” Campbell’s History of Virginia is the first title listed, selling for $1.50, followed by Beverley’s History of Virginia for $2.50. Clearly, Campbell had found a friend in Randolph, one of the only southern printers who had the capital to publish, print, and advertise new publications and one who was particularly invested in historical publishing. Campbell’s relationship with Randolph was also one of mutual benefit. Campbell’s name could lend credibility to Randolph’s reprint, while Randolph could help circulate Campbell’s work more widely, placing it in context with some of the publishing house’s

Though Randolph had originally wanted Campbell to edit the Beverley reprint, Campbell mainly provided the introduction and some initial editing suggestions. Even though some sources list Campbell as the editor, he did not serve in this capacity. On May 28, 1854, Campbell sent Randolph the introduction, which consisted mainly of the biographical sketch, offering his opinion on why he shouldn’t be made “editor” of the book and making some editorial and printing recommendations. He writes,

I was not before aware, that you had any wish for me to be editor, & it is quite out of my power to occupy that position. It does not appear to me at all necessary to have any editor’s name on the title page, for I think that it is best to reprint the work verbatim et literatim, without any change of the spelling whatever. The orthography is not old enough to require modernizing. […] The typography, however, should be entirely modern—omitting all italiciks, all old-fashioned capitals and the beginning of common nouns, etc; I would have no notes at all. […] I would suggest to you the expedience of printing Beverley on very good paper. For the binding I should recommend, for part of the edition, plain, unornamented, good muslin, & for the rest, good leather. […]

It is clear from the letter that Campbell was less interested in putting his name on the book (he is reluctant to even include his name on the title page) than in Randolph’s fidelity to the original text. Campbell insists that Randolph avoid any major changes to the spelling or language, and he emphasizes the importance of uniformity in the orthography and typography. It is clear that Campbell wants the book to be of high quality, but still “saleable,” noting that the price should be reasonably low in order to increase sales. Campbell’s resistance to being the editor was likely driven by several factors. First, so little was known of Beverley or his history at the time, that it would
have been difficult to compile notes and annotations for the new edition. With Campbell’s own antiquarian research, his teaching, and his involvement in a number of historical projects, he may have declined simply because of his other commitments. However, Campbell’s letter also suggests that he did not think an editor was necessary, and, as in the case of the 1820 *Magnalia*, the book should simply be reprinted without emendation. Beverley’s history would speak for itself, without the modern interventions of an editor; nonetheless, the appearance of the book would make it attractive to modern readers. By reprinting the work “word for word, letter for letter,” Randolph would be reproducing this rare artifact for public circulation in the way that Belknap and Hazard had imagined in their early exchanges. Multiplying the copies of Beverley’s work would preserve it from future obscurity and restore it to a place of prominence in colonial American history.

One important choice that Randolph and Campbell made was to reprint the 1722 edition of Beverley’s history instead of the original 1705 edition. According to Wright, Beverley “softened his acidulous but often amusing comments upon his contemporaries” and also brought the account “up-to-date” (*History* xxiii). Wright believes that Campbell’s influence drove the decision to have the less offensive 1722 edition printed, based on his “Victorian feeling of decorum” (xxiii). However, this seems less likely than the fact that the 1722 more clearly represented Beverley’s final, authorized, version of the book. A second related factor is that the second edition is more objective, less impassioned and opinionated. In short, it is more characteristic of the nineteenth-century desire for historical impartiality. While it may be less “colorful,” Campbell probably perceived the second edition as more accurate for its lack of personal jabs. In fact,
Beverley himself saw the revision as a way of making the book more historically accurate. He writes in the preface to the 1722 edition, “I have also retrenched such particulars as related only to private transactions, and characters in the historical part, as being too diminutive to be transmitted to posterity, and set down the succession of the governors, with the more general incidents of their government, without reflection upon the private conduct of any person” (xx). In 1855, when the first America edition was published, Beverley was held up as a model of colonial, southern historiography. So little was known about Beverley then, that the first edition of the history may have read as idiosyncratic—satirical, even—requiring an insider’s knowledge of Beverley’s personal quarrels with colonial figures. By reprinting the second edition, Randolph and Campbell present Beverley as a legitimate colonial historian, one of only two or three, whose book would inform the public of a past that was relevant to their daily lives. As the “country correspondent” put it, “In every age the present is connected with the past,” and Beverley’s book helped cement this connection support the South’s historical awakening (41). In an 1856 advertisement for Beverley’s history, Randolph included a review of the book that emphasized the book’s role in historical preservation. The reviewer for the Richmond Examiner writes, “Mr. Randolph deserves the thanks of the people of Virginia for rescuing her early literature from the oblivion into which it is so rapidly falling.” The reviewer compares the value of the volume to “any painting of Raphael or Rembrandt in Art” and praises Beverley as the “very best authority of all early Virginia writers” (x). He describes the octavo as “illustrated precisely after the manner of the original, by engravings executed in lithograph with remarkable truthfulness and beauty. The typographical execution of the book is very chaste and neat.” We are
sure that no Virginia gentlemen of taste and learning will fail to add so valuable a volume to his library” (x). The target readership for the volume is made clear here. Readers of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and *Quarterly Law Review* would have seen advertisements in addition to readers of such works as Ruffin’s *Essay on Calciferous Manures* and other books on law, history, farming, and politics. Men of “taste and learning” were the audience for Beverley’s book, but as that same class of men had articulated in the founding of the Virginia Historical Society, these readers would help to promote an enthusiastic commitment to regional history that would saturate the entire state. Thus, while the reprint may not have the popular appeal of, say, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, or a novel by Sir Walter Scott, the reprint was far more valuable as a literary artifact which, because of its rarity, was truly a work of “art” saved from “oblivion” by the art of reproduction.

Dubbed the “very best authority of all early Virginia writers” by the above reviewer, Robert Beverley was a particularly good candidate as Virginia’s representative colonial historian, as he embodied the mix of nobility and proto-patriotism that defined Virginia’s historical perception of itself. He was the son of Major Robert Beverley, a clerk in the House of Burgesses and a justice of the peace in Middlesex County. A close friend of Governor Berkeley, Major Beverley served in the militia during Bacon’s Rebellion and had earned a reputation for his harsh treatment of the rebels. But shortly after the incident, and upon Berkeley’s removal from the governorship, Major Beverley became an advocate for farmers and an outspoken critic against abuses of power and high taxes in the colony. In fact, Harrison notes that in John Burk’s *History of Virginia* (1805), Beverley is characterized as “a protomartyr of resistance to arbitrary government
by the Crown” when he was arrested for his part in a conspiracy to cut down tobacco plants in order to drive up the falling price of tobacco (334). Beverley was considered the leader of a “people’s party” in Virginia, a permutation of the British Whig party (Gentlemen Wright 288). As a Whig, Major Beverley was an advocate for farmers and resisted the “aristocratic group” of which he should have been a member.

According to Wright, Robert Beverley II inherited his father’s knack for trouble-making. He was born in 1673 in Virginia, but was educated in England and returned again to his father’s plantation in 1692. Beverley held various public positions in Virginia, including clerk of the General Court and the General Assembly, but his best political and social move was his marriage to William Byrd’s daughter, Ursula in 1697. She died in childbirth and left Beverley with the important association with one of Virginia’s most prominent families. Beverley acquired several important properties in his life, including one in Elizabeth City that engaged him in litigation in England for more than a year. It was during his time in England that he encountered Oldmixon’s history, and he also began to criticize the governor and surveyor-general at home in Virginia for over-extending their authority and sending false reports back to England concerning the colony. In one letter, Beverley criticized the “many inventions and unsuspecting arguments that are constantly used in all letters and memorials to obtain a standing force, and a title of captain general over all the plantations on the continent” (Wright 294). The House of Burgesses were powerless to investigate the charges Beverley had laid against these leaders—who were heartily supported by the crown—and thus, Beverley left public life to live out his days in the country, “content to watch the intrigues of Virginia politics with satirical aloofness” (295). Wright claims that without
Beverley’s visit to England and without his political troubles at home, he may have never had the time or inclination to write his history.

Like his father, Beverley could have lived among the ruling class of Virginia, but chose to critique it instead. His “individualistic disregard” for the lifestyle of the landed gentry was driven by his conviction that a “Virginia gentleman, could and should make his own land supply his wants” (301). This claim would be the thesis of Beverley’s history. In fact, in the closing pages of the 1722 edition, he writes of the wealthy Virginians, “They receive no benefit, nor refreshment, from the sweets and precious things they have growing amongst them, but make use of the industry of England for all such things” (320). Though Beverley also used his history to air some personal grievances, he primarily sent a message to readers highlighting Virginia’s endless potential for independence, self-sufficiency, and profitability. This type of message was particularly popular in the nineteenth-century South, where revolutionary fervor was acutely felt. More so than appeals to the colonial past, references to the revolutionary era predominated in southern rhetoric, as we will see in Campbell’s history. But Beverley’s history offered a uniquely colonial perspective, distinguishing it from among other histories of Virginia like Burk’s, which was published after the Revolutionary war. Labeled a “patriot historian” and “iconoclast” by twentieth-century historians, Beverley embodies what many nineteenth-century southerners imagined to be the early fervor for independence that eventually manifested in the lives of the founding fathers.21

Robert Beverley’s decision to write a history was ultimately the result of both his patriotism and iconoclasm. He believed that no accurate history of the colony existed, and those that had been published were only damaging the colony’s international
reputation. While in England in 1703, Beverley met a publisher preparing to print John Oldmixon’s *The British Empire in America* (1708), and the publisher asked him to glance over the pages on Virginia and Carolina before they went to press. He found the account “faulty,” which was not surprising given that Oldmixon had famously invented or plagiarized a large portion of the book. Oldmixon’s history covered all of the regions under British control, including the West Indies, and, as Michael Krause and Davis Joyce explain, the book became “familiar to American writers, who usually quoted it only to condemn it.” (34). Nonetheless, the book functioned to “emphasize the value of the colonies to the mother country,” even if the historical facts were fabricated (34).

Beverley condemned the book particularly because it reinforced the belief among the English that “servants in Virginia are made to draw in cart and plow as horses and oxen do in England and that the country turns all people black who go to live there” (“Preface” 1722, xvii). 22 False reports of Beverley’s beloved ways of life in Virginia infuriated him; and if anyone were to criticize Virginia, it should be a native of the country, not a writer dependent on hearsay. In the preface to the 1705 edition, published in London, Beverley explains the need for a new history of Virginia:

> I wonder no Body has ever presented the World, with a tolerable Account of our Plantations. Nothing of that kind has yet appear'd, except some few General Descriptions, that have been calculated more for the Benefit of the Bookseller, than for the Information of Mankind. If I may judge of the rest, by what has been publish'd concerning Virginia, I will take the Liberty to say, that there's none of 'em either true, or so much as well invented. Such Accounts are as impertinent as ill Pictures, that resemble any Body, as much as the Persons they are drawn for. For my part, I have endeavour'd to hit the Likeness; though, perhaps, my Colouring may not have all the Life and Beauty I cou'd wish. (viii)
The metaphor of mimetic representation describes Beverley’s style fairly accurately. Though he is not gifted with poetical expression, he represents the colonies in the forthright and unaffected mode that he felt resembled the Virginian character. This is not to say that Beverley’s history is disinterested and detached, but the style is direct and informative, containing little of the verbose and metaphoric language we see in Mather, for example. Beverley makes only a customary—perhaps disingenuous—apology for his lack of refinement in language, spinning his weakness into the primary strength of the book. He explains, “I am an Indian, and don't pretend to be exact in my Language: But I hope the Plainness of my Dress, will give [the reader] the kinder Impressions of my Honesty, which is what I pretend to” (vii). Likewise, in the 1722 preface, Beverley boasts that he wrote his history without the “assistance of many original papers and memorials” that Oldmixon had used (xviii). The claims to both “Indian” language and a kind of intuitive historical accuracy highlight his status as a Virginian, deeply connected to colonial life and custom. Thus, the very characteristics that might have undermined Beverley’s authority in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seemed, instead, to contribute to its perceived veracity. Campbell reiterates this perception in the introduction to the reprint; he praises the book for its “earnest, downright, hearty, old-fashioned Virginia spirit” (6). This “spirit,” then, became a distinguishing feature of both Beverley’s book and of the self-styled Virginia character and its nineteenth-century permutation. As one contributor to the Richmond-based Southern Literary Messenger put it, “[Virginia] is unique. Whether for better or worse, it differs essentially from that of every other people under the sun” (“A History” 588). Beverley’s book represented the
distinctiveness of the Virginian people which had emerged from a vastly different colonial project than their northern neighbors.

In style and in historical interpretation, Beverley’s history stood apart from other colonial American histories from the period, and particularly those of New England. As Fairfax Harrison describes, “Beverley’s little book has been acclaimed for its lively style, its shrewd observation, its independent judgments, and, most of all, for its originality [...]. It is, indeed, a thoroughly American book” (338). Louis Wright, editor of the 1947 edition of Beverley’s history, called it “one of the earliest literary works that is self-consciously American” and “thoroughly secular and thoroughly realistic” (xxi). Claims to the book’s “Americananness” seem to reflect modern taste more than any belief in the book’s contribution to American literary history. However, these claims strike at a distinction between Beverley’s book and that of Mather’s, for example. As contemporary historian Bert James Loewenberg wrote, “Winthrop’s pages, filled with moral intensity, are seldom humorous. Mather is always learned but almost never urbane. [...] Beverley, on the other hand, is informative and witty, learned and humorous, and sufficiently cosmopolitan to be detached from petty affinities—qualities which scholars in all fields have ever striven to attain” (qtd. in Krause 34). Randolph and Campbell likely recognized these qualities as well, hoping that the book would stand as an example of southern historiography and draw out the comparison with northern historiography. If we take Beverley and Mather as the representative historians of colonial America (having published their histories in 1705 and 1702, respectively), we can immediately recognize a difference in writing style. First, instead of the filiopietistic tribute to the colonial founding fathers that we find in Mather, Beverley pays little attention to individuals and
focuses instead on recounting events and describing customs. Beverly begins with a chronological history of the Virginia colony, starting with Sir Walter Raleigh’s expedition to Virginia in 1584 and ending with the governorship of Alexander Spotswood (1710-1722). This history makes up Book I, while the remaining books discuss such topics as the “natural productions” of the region, the customs of the surrounding Native Americans groups, and, in the final book (Book IV), the “present state” of government, the citizens, and their land. In this way, the history is both a primary and secondary source, insofar as it contains a history of the Virginia colony and Beverley’s own observations of the colony’s continued growth in his lifetime.

I have already discussed the verbosity that characterizes the Magnalia; in contrast, Beverley’s history is direct and succinct. So succinct, in fact, that Thomas Jefferson complained in Notes on the State of Virginia that Beverley’s historical account was far too brief, comparing it to that of Rev. William Stith, the other major colonial historian of Virginia (207). Preferable to contemporary readers because of its artless style, Beverley’s book is nonetheless a poor example of rigorous scholarship. He rarely cites other material, drawing entirely on his own experience and knowledge, as I described above. Yet, it is the colloquial and sometimes bluntly critical mode that characterizes Beverley as “learned” in a more practical sense. In a passage describing John Smith’s settlement at Jamestown, Beverley writes, “They were no sooner settled in all this happiness and security, but they fell into jars and dissensions among themselves, by a greedy grasping at the Indian treasure, envying and overreaching one another in that trade” (20). Mocking the rapid change from “happiness” to “dissension,” Beverley highlights the fickleness and the insatiability of the early settlers. These types of subtle
jabs give Beverley’s work that characteristic “earnestness” and realism for which he was praised. In a very stark description of the Starving Time in Jamestown, Beverley writes that the colonists were forced to make meals of the “bodies of the Indians they had killed; and sometimes also upon a pinch they would not disdain to dig them up again, to make a homely meal, after they had been buried.” “Thus, a few months indiscreet management,” Beverley argues, had “brought such an infamy upon the country, that to this day it cannot be wiped away” (26). In recounting events in the colonies, Beverley’s historical narrative contains almost none of the typological language of providence found in Mather. He does not read the Starving Time as a lesson from God about the future of the colony, but rather as a lesson to learn from the settlers about learning proper methods of cultivation and keeping peace with Native Americans—issues that for Beverley continued to dominate colonial economics and politics. Likewise, Beverley is not interested in displaying his vast knowledge, citing countless sources, or appearing “learned.” Instead, he is dedicated to painting an accurate portrait of the “likeness” of Virginian life, even as he infuses this portrait with his own coloring.

Randolph and Campbell, in their efforts to support historical inquiry in Virginia and the South, chose a historical account that they felt embodied a specific southern aesthetic. The representation of Beverley as “old-fashioned” resonated with Virginians’ nostalgia for their past status in the colonies and early nation, a status that they thought was threatened in the antebellum period. Beverley’s history would remind readers not only of the important civic function of historical inquiry—as the Virginia Historical Society hoped to promote—but also of their continued responsibility to cultivate the land they had inherited. Specifically, Beverley raises the complicated relationship between
southerners and labor, highlighting not only the need for slave labor, but also the need to
develop a dedicated workforce amongst all of its citizens. Beverley’s call for greater
ingenuity and a hardier work ethic anticipate the same kinds of calls in the nineteenth
century amongst southern literary figures for greater cultural cultivation. The new call to
“creative energy,” as Rives put it, combined with the tradition of economic cultivation,
would resurrect the South from its “slumber” and place it once more in the seat of power.
Thus, Beverley’s reprinted history promoted the South’s own myth of exceptionalism,
which highlighted their distinctive relationship with the land and its cultivation, and their
calling to self-sufficiency and republicanism. In what follows, I examine how Beverley’s
history participated in shaping this exceptionalist message, but I also point to the
limitations of mapping his colonial history onto nineteenth-century political events and
the ways in which Campbell’s history re-read these events from a post-revolutionary
perspective.

One key use of colonial history was to justify present political decisions based on
precedent, and nothing demanded justification like slavery in the antebellum South.
Particularly in the 1850s, “much of the intellectual energy of southern thinkers […] was
devoted to proving the legitimacy of slavery” (Wells xii). The need to defend the
institution was less urgent in Beverley’s time, and his dispassionate and frank discussion
of slavery represented the level of discourse that southerners were eager to recapture.
Even in the early eighteenth century, slavery had become “unnatural” in the eyes of many
northerners, and, thus, instead of being an economic implement rising out of a natural
inequity of the races, as the South argued, the use of slave labor became a moral blight on
the nation. Beverley’s passage on slavery recalls a time in southern history in which
slavery was a kind of “invisible” institution. While Beverley’s history only briefly addresses the subject of slavery, he emphasizes its benignity and its natural part of Virginia life.  

At the end of Book I, Beverley mentions the passing of a law in 1705, which made slaves “real estate,” but he does not address the issue of slavery at length until Book IV, when he discusses the “present state” of Virginia. Chapter ten, entitled “Of the Servants as Slaves in Virginia” defines the difference between “servant” and “slave” strictly in racial terms. “Slaves are the negroes and their posterity, following the condition of the mother. […] They are called slaves, in respect of the time of their servitude, because it is for life,” Beverley describes (219). Male servants and slaves are only distinguishable by “their clothes, and food; but the work of both is no other than what the overseers, the freemen, and the planters themselves do” (219). White female servants, he says, are never put to work “in the ground” whereas “is a common thing to work a woman slave out of doors” (220). The distinction between servant and slave is most obvious in Beverley’s enumeration of the rights granted to indentured servants, which include protection against abuse and provisions upon their release from service. The only other discussions of slaves or “negroes” are in the context of tithing for the church, in which all slaves over the age of 16 are considered titheable, and in a discussion of paying the ministers, in which Beverly explains that parishioners would often donate “flocks of Cattle and Negroes, on the Glebes, which are also allowed to the Minister” (211).

The function of Beverley’s discussion of slavery is twofold: to describe an integral part of Virginia’s economic system, and to naturalize the institution of slavery.
This way of casting the slavery question (not as moral, but as economic) would be a major rhetorical tool for pro-slavery advocates in the nineteenth century. The most significant passage is one in which Beverley insists on the lawfulness and relative mildness of American slavery. He writes,

Because I have heard how strangely cruel and severe the service of this country is represented in some parts of England, I can’t forbear affirming, that the work of their servants and slaves is no other than what every common freeman does; [...] I can assure you, with great truth, that generally their slaves are not worked near so hard, nor so many hours in a days, as the husbandmen, and day laborers in England. (220)

Beverley asks Britons to turn the critical eye on their own class inequity, essentially arguing that enslaved Africans are more fairly treated because the southern states have not pretenses regarding their status in the colonies. Such a rhetorical move was extremely common in the antebellum South, where writers asked northerners to consider the poor conditions of working-class whites and freed slaves. In Beverley’s day, there was less of a need to justify slavery; here he is motivated by a desire to defend the colony from critique—particularly as it related to the humanity, gentility, and lawfulness of Virginians.

As Beverley explained in the preface, the perception that all emigrants to the South would decline morally and intellectually, and potentially turn “all people black” who lived there, was a powerful myth with serious implications. The phrase “turn all people black” could have several meanings. First, it anticipates Buffon’s theory of degeneration due to climate, which Jefferson would refute in his Notes on the State of Virginia. The phrase suggests that the people would turn “native;” that is, that colonists would adapt to the natural surroundings by living a more “primitive” life and, literally,
turn “black” from being exposed to the sun during their daily labors. The phrase could also suggest that settlers would turn morally “black;” outside of genteel society and free from surveillance, the wealthy would deteriorate into barbarians. Their deterioration would be most evident in the “strangely cruel and severe” treatment of slaves. Years after Beverley answered such accusations of abuse, abolitionist literature of the antebellum period would emphasize this moral deterioration. Arguments against slavery often appealed to the corrupting influence of slavery on the slaveholder. Foreshadowing both abolitionist and anti-abolitionist arguments regarding slavery, Beverley refutes the argument concerning moral deterioration and emphasizes the lawfulness, humaneness, and productivity of slavery.

While Beverley represents the enslavement of blacks as natural, he depicts the ousting of Native populations as fundamentally unnatural. In a second key series of passages in the History, Beverley discusses the slothfulness of British settlers and contrasts their incompetence with the resourcefulness of the Native Americans. His message concerning the relationship between Virginians and their potential for labor is fundamentally conflicted in these passages. Despite his argument for the natural and productive fit of the slave trade in the colonial economy, he nonetheless argues stringently for a stronger work ethic among Virginians and a greater respect for Native Americans. In essence, he only further highlights his belief—also held by nineteenth-century advocates of slavery—that enslaving Africans was part of the natural order of life in which whites held dominion over blacks. But, if white settlers were to claim dominion over the land, they had to contribute meaningfully to its cultivation and be willing to learn from its indigenous peoples. In several passages of the history, Beverley is
preoccupied with casting a new vision for settlement; this vision was marked by a greater respect for the Native Americans and, more importantly, a sea change in settlers’ attitudes towards trade and the domestic economy.

Beverley’s history frequently settles on the question of the Britons’ right to be in the Americas at all; in this respect, his point of view is fairly progressive. But we can quickly recognize that even as Beverley imagines the pre-colonial, virgin earth that the natives inhabited, he also believes in both the inevitability of colonization and the vast potential for profit that the land provides. His history, then, employs the image of the “vanishing native” that would dominate historical fiction in the 1820s. In the final chapter of Book II, Beverley includes a unique passage on Indian life before imperialism. He describes a scene of prelapsarian bliss and contentment:

This, and a great deal more, was the natural production of that country, which the native Indians enjoyed, without the curse of industry, their diversion alone, and not their labour, supplying their necessities. […] But none of the toils of husbandry were exercised by this happy people; except the bare planting a little corn, and melons, which took up only a few days in the summer, the rest being wholly spend in the pursuit of their pleasures. (126)

The natives’ intuitive connection with the land makes “toil” unnecessary, particularly because, as Beverley highlights in another passage, the natives did not see their crops in terms of monetary value but in terms of immediate need. Later he claims that only the English introduced “luxury” among them and “multiplied their wants” (185). The picture Beverley paints resembles the description of Eden in Genesis in which Adam and Eve did not toil for their food because all of their basic needs were met. Only when they succumbed to temptation did they recognize their nakedness and become discontent. For Beverley, the “fall” into what many colonial writers called “savagery” was the result of
the English, “by whose means they seem to have lost their felicity as well as their
innocence” (185).

Not only have the native populations undergone a loss of “innocence,” but their
land and resources have also been threatened by European imperialism. Of the British
settlements in Virginia Beverly writes, “And indeed all that the English have done, since
their going thither, has been only to make some of these native pleasure more scarce, by
an inordinate and unseasonable use of them; hardly making improvements equivalent to
that damage” (126). The lopsided nature of the settlers’ consumption is a key problem
for Beverley, who implicitly suggests here that scarcity and another “starving time”
might be on the horizon. In his concluding statement, he again emphasizes the natural
relationship between the native peoples and their land. He explains that the next book
will address the Indians and their customs, “so, both the country and its primitive
inhabitants may be considered together, in that original state of nature, in which the
English found them. Afterwards I will treat of the present state of the English there, and
the alterations, I can’t call them improvements, they have made at this day” (126). What
Beverley calls the “original state of nature” is what he perceived to be the natural
harmony between the native populations and the New World itself, a harmony that the
British were struggling to achieve.26 By representing the natives as “the English found
them,” Beverley is asking readers to view the Native Americans out of the context of
their bloody wars and “savage” rituals. There is no question that Beverley intended this
section as a lesson to Virginians. These passages serve to demonstrate Beverley’s desire
for British settlers to model the productivity and relationship to the land of their native
neighbors. But despite his admiration for the native populations of Virginia, it seems that
Beverley sees their loss of their “innocence” and their land as unfortunate but necessary byproducts of imperialism. Beverley certainly criticizes how the British have settled the land, but he does not disparage their right to be there.

In the introduction to Book II of the history, Beverley calls into question the profitability of the English settlements in Virginia. He writes, “This part of Virginia now inhabited, if we consider the improvements in the hands of the English, it cannot upon that score be commended; but if we consider its natural aptitude to be improved, it may with justice be accounted of the finest countries in the world” (92). Beverley highlights the potential of the land, but denigrates what he sees as the failures of the English to cultivate it. His narrative marks such a contrast to narratives of New England settlement, wherein the pilgrims are depicted as industrious, thrifty, and longsuffering in their labors to settle the land and establish thriving towns. For Beverley, this kind of Protestant work ethic, famously articulated by Weber, was absent in Virginia in part because of Virginians’ continuing relationship of dependency on Britain for goods. To emphasize the vast potential of the colony, Beverley claims Book IV, that Virginia shares the same latitude as Canaan, Persia, Spain, Japan, and the Barbary Coast, among others. Calling these destinations “the Gardens of the World,” Beverley paints Virginia as the “Land of Promise” not in a religious sense, but in terms of its geography and topography (204). Despite this, Beverley complains that with great privileges, “people easily forget their duty,” and in the wake of settlement “unpardonable sloth” has reigned in the colonies. “Virginia is unjustly neglected by its own Inhabitants, and abused by other people,” Beverley writes (241). In the same passage, he points to colonist’s embarrassing reliance on British imports, which highlights the extent of their wastefulness. Beverley describes
the fundamental irony of importing goods: “They have their clothing of all sorts from English, as linen, woollen, silk, hats, and leather: yet flax, and hemp grow no where in the world better than there. [...] The very furs that their hats are made of, perhaps go first from thence” (239). “They are such abominable ill-husbands” he continues, “that though their country be over-run with wood, yet they have all their wood ware from England” (239).

These passages have particular bearing for nineteenth-century writers and historians of the South, who frequently objected to their cultural and economic dependence on the North. The notion that the South had no historical or literary life of its own was due, in large part, to what I have already described as a weak domestic publishing industry and a lack of public support for cultural and historical programs. Inferiority to the North was keenly felt amongst southern writers, who often described the relationship between northern publications and southern readers as enslavement. As James Heath, first editor of the *Messenger*, asked of his readers in 1834, “Are we to be doomed forever to a kind of vassalage to our northern neighbors—a dependence for our literary food upon our brethren, whose superiority in all the great point of character,—in valor—eloquence and patriotism, we are no wise disposed to admit?” (49). Heath then looks towards a day when “we will rejoice in the emancipation of the south, from the shackles which either indolence, indifference, or the love of pleasure, have imposed upon us” (51). Two decades later William Gilmore Simms would sound a similar call, writing in 1858, “Independence [from the North] we never can assert or attain until our native mind begins to assert itself in correspondence with the local demand upon it. The material prosperity of every race depends wholly on its intellectual development!” (98).
The description of cultural and intellectual independence on the North is similar in character to Beverley’s call for economic independence from Britain in the late seventeenth century. What both Beverley and Simms are asking for is that southerns embrace the spirit of independence that led them first to settle the land as colonists and then free the land as revolutionaries. Writers like Heath and Simms may well have echoed Beverley’s sentiment that “people easily forget their duty” when they are prospering, and both writers use the language of dependence, slumber, and complacency to describe the South’s potential downfall. This is not to suggest that antebellum writers calling for “independence” were necessarily referring to Beverley, but it is clear that Beverley noted and anticipated the same dilemma of dependency that plagued antebellum southerners. Though over a century later and in the context of literary production, Heath articulates the problem succinctly: “If we continue to be consumers of northern productions, we shall never ourselves become producers” (50). Beverley’s *History* makes this argument as well from a colonial perspective, and while he regrets that settlement must come at the expense of the Native Americans, he ultimately calls upon Virginians to realize their potential and the potential of their “Eden” through cultivation and ingenuity.

Despite Beverley’s general resistance towards authority and his advocacy of a strong local culture and economy, he does not advocate political resistance to the crown. In fact, his description of Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676 points to the dangers of civil uprisings in the colony and would mark the key difference between colonial historiography from the pre-and post-revolutionary perspectives. As we will see from Charles Campbell’s narrative, Bacon’s Rebellion was often considered by future
historians as one of the first acts of rebellious republicanism in Virginia, acting as a progenitor to the Revolutionary War. In Beverley’s history, though, the event signals the danger of blind conformity to a fallacious cause. The disjunction between Beverley’s republicanism and his loyalty to Governor Berkeley can be explained in part by what Beverley saw as Bacon’s fundamental threat to the colonist’s liberty. In describing the event, it becomes clear that Beverley saw Bacon as a demagogue leading the ignorant masses towards needless violence. In his account of the rebellion, Beverley introduces Bacon as a man “in every way qualified to head a giddy and unthinking multitude” (64). Resembling John Adams more than Thomas Jefferson in politics, Beverley recounts the uprising as a cautionary tale against the dangers of demagoguery and faction. Beverley’s distaste for Bacon was rooted in two key factors. First, Beverley argues that Bacon unfairly characterized the colonists’ suffering at the hands of the Indians. Bacon publicly “aggravated the Indian mischiefs” and promised to fight them until “he had revenged their sufferings upon the Indians, and redressed all their other grievances” (64). Second, Beverley highlights the ease with which Bacon persuaded the masses to follow his cause against the natives and, implicitly, his cause against Governor Berkeley who opposed his mission. Beverley writes of Bacon’s eloquence as “having gained an absolute dominion of [the colonists’] hearts” (66). From this language, we can deduce that Beverley interprets Bacon as a kind of oppressive monarch whose ability to conjure up both hysteria and loyalty was dangerous to the health and freedom of the colony. In addition, Beverley objected to Bacon’s rhetorical appeals to the people; rather than staking his argument for war on the grounds of logic, he played on the emotions of the most vulnerable masses. For Beverley, Bacon was a self-serving upstart who cared more about
his own reputation than seeking redress for high taxes, abuses of power, and Indian attacks. In the aftermath of the rebellion, which ended with Bacon’s death, Beverley highlights two unintended consequences: a “neglect of husbandry” and a greater vulnerability to Indian attacks (69). The “civil war,” as Beverley calls it, caused “such a desolation, and put the country so far back” that even as he wrote his history in 1704, Virginia still felt the effects (70). Beverley belittles the grand cause of the rebellion, calling it only a plot to “destroy one another, and lay waste their infant country” (69). Distracting the colonists from their real duty, to cultivate the land, Bacon merely stirred up discontentment, which resulted in further imperial restrictions—contrary to the liberties Bacon had promised.

Nineteenth-century readers may have considered Beverley’s account of Bacon’s rebellion antiquated. Following the revolutionary war, the event would take on a different implication in the hands of antebellum historians, including Charles Campbell. In his Introduction to the History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia, published by B.B. Minor of the Southern Literary Messenger in 1848, Campbell uses Bacon’s Rebellion to highlight the South’s early leanings towards independence, a narrative which stood in contrast to histories which portrayed the South as fundamentally loyalist.27 In fact, many histories of Virginia published in the antebellum period emphasized Virginia’s key role in the war of independence and painted Virginia as the birthplace of true republicanism. Viewed in light of both the revolution of ’76 and the sectionalism of the fifties, Bacon’s Rebellion took on a new meaning for antebellum readers. In short, the appeal to history provided a justification for secession and war.
As Anne Rubin writes, “A war to re-create the glory of the Founders’ nation was more honorable and less divisive than a war to protect slaveholding prerogatives of a small percentage of the Confederate population” (86). Campbell’s interpretation of Bacon’s Rebellion can be read as an appeal to history in order to align the antebellum South more closely with the establishment of a democratic republic in America. He depicts the rebellion as a kind of grass-roots campaign for resistance to an abusive government who was failing to take action against the encroaching natives. He writes, “At length the people at the head of the James and the York, exasperated by the wrongs of a government so vigorous in oppression and so imbecile for defence, and alarmed at the slaughter of their neighbors […] rose tumultuously in their own defence and chose Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., for their leader” (82). While Beverley suggests that Bacon instigated the events, Campbell emphasizes the emergence of a democratic process. Campbell also calls Bacon “the most accomplished gentleman of his age in Virginia,” describing his “genius” in matters of politics (82). He also calls the claim that Bacon was seeking personal gain “unfounded,” arguing that “had he never set his foot on the soil of Virginia, there can be little doubt but that a rebellion would have occurred at this time” (83). Campbell directly refutes Beverley’s reading of the “first cause” of the revolution and suggests, too, that colonists’ grievances against abuses of power had a long history in the colonies. Thus, knowing the end of the story, as it were, Campbell can call this revolution “a miniature prototype of the revolution of 1688, in England, and of 1776, in Virginia itself” (83).

Another parallel between Bacon’s Rebellion and the revolution, Campbell writes, is the dates corresponding to the two events, for “the resolutions instructing the Virginia
delegates in congress to declare the colonies free and independent, were passed in June, 1776” and “the assembly, under Bacon’s influence, met in June, 1676” (86). The distance of a century, he suggests, did not squelch the republican spirit birthed in Virginia. Campbell continues in the narrative to mourn the “martyrs” who died fighting for Bacon, many of whom were captured and executed as traitors by Berkeley’s administration; he even calls the governor’s army “loyalists.” The ultimate outcome of the rebellion, in Campbell’s reading, was only a tightening of the local government’s reigns. Despite its ultimate failure, Bacon’s rebellion was the first signal of what he later calls the “inevitable” and “natural course of events” leading to a break with the British (134). This belief in the inevitability of schism also played a significant role in the South in years leading up to the Civil war. As Wells explains, “In what would be a common theme in the seething exchange of harsh words prior to the Civil war, many Americans came to believe that northerners and southerners differed not only on the issue of slavery, but that they represented two different races of people, with conflicting values, heritage, and beliefs” (xxii). The fundamental disjuncture between the interests of England and the interests of the American colonies led to inevitable war, and in the nineteenth century, such a fissure was developing between the North and South.

Campbell’s version of Bacon’s Rebellion is shaped by post-revolutionary teleology, which saw the events of colonial history culminating in the revolution. If we compare his impulse to identify Bacon with the revolution with Beverley’s impulse to read him as a demagogue, we can see these differences as a product of their times. However, one continuity exists between these two interpretations: both emphasize Virginia’s inclination to resist tyranny, whether it be the tyranny of the British crown or
the tyranny of a would-be dictator. Having preceded the war by two generations, Beverley sees Bacon as a type of monarch, ruling the people with fear. In this sense, Beverley could be associated with early republicanism, which resisted a strong central government in the name of blotting out tyranny. With his message of a strong and more insular domestic economy, his rejection of an upper-class ethos, and his resistance to a standing army, Beverley emerges as a figure of proto-republican makeup. Despite what appears to be his potentially loyalist leanings in the episode of Bacon’s Rebellion, it is more consistent with Beverley’s character, and would have been far more appealing to nineteenth-century readers, to align him with the political underpinnings of the republican and eventually the southern Democrats who feared the “tyranny” of the North.

Both Beverley and Campbell used appeals to colonial history to explain the South’s key role in the development of the American character. The reprint of Beverley’s history in 1855 not only contributed to a burgeoning domestic print culture, but it also became part of a southern historical discourse that was employed to justify and strengthen the confederacy. But Beverley’s book would not find as wide an audience as other books and magazines in the period. In the next chapter, I examine the influence of the South’s most successful literary magazine, the Southern Literary Messenger in the reproduction of colonial history. Just as Beverley expressed a fear of being beholden to the British for food and goods, so too did southern writers fear that they would never declare literary independence from the North. The fact that northerners were leading the way in writing colonial history was particularly distressing. In response to the publication of George Bancroft’s history, one contributor to the Messenger exclaimed, “How long shall it be before the ‘march of mind,’ as it is called, in its Juggernaut car,
shall pass over us, and crush and obliterate every trace of what our ancestors were, and what we ourselves have been, is hard to say. It may postpone that evil day, to resist any attempt to impress us with false notions of our early history, and the character of our ancestors” (588). The fear expressed by this writer is twofold: That the history of the South and the character of its ancestors would be lost and that the North would be responsible for its destruction. Reproducing colonial texts would help prevent that “evil day” from coming. Like J.W. Randolph’s historical reprints, the Messenger would thrust southern history into the public eye in the popular form of the periodical, if only to forestall the “Juggernaut car” of New England historiography and, with it, the northern political machine.
CHAPTER 4: THE SOUTHERN LITERARY MESSENGER AND THE NARRATIVE OF SOUTHERN EXCEPTIONALISM

In the first number of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, publisher T.W. White and editor James E. Heath saw fit to include endorsements from several prominent literary figures. The issue, published in August, 1834, began with a notice explaining that these endorsements ought to “awaken from its long slumber the literary exertion of this portion of our country” (1). One such endorsement from James Fenimore Cooper is rather an underhanded compliment, one that the South had come to expect from its northern neighbors. He writes, “The south is full of talent, and the leisure of its gentlemen ought to enable them to bring it freely to action. […] If some, who I could name, were to arouse from their lethargy, you would not be driven to apply to any one on this side of the Potomac for assistance” (1). The language of “leisure,” “lethargy,” and “slumber” was common in reference to both the southern character and to the South’s literary culture. Just as southern landowners were often characterized as lazy and slothful, so was southern “talent” depicted lolling in its proverbial rocking chair. The *Messenger* would invigorate this genius and would prove itself relevant on a national level. Though the magazine was to be the mouthpiece of the South, White and Heath always hoped that it would find a broad audience and become standard reading alongside the *North American Review*. Despite its rocky financial status, its ever-changing editorial philosophies, and its frequent identity crises, the *Messenger* managed to survive until 1864. The magazine
was a tremendous success by any definition, given the difficulty of maintaining a periodical in any region of the country. In the South in particular, where it was notoriously tough to conjure up subscribers to southern magazines, the Messenger became the lynchpin of antebellum southern culture and a symbol for southern independence from the North.

Though it did not begin as an explicitly sectional magazine, the Messenger eventually became strongly regional in its choice of writers, its editorial pieces, and its stance on slavery. The need to “awaken” the South to its literature was compounded by a feeling of “vassalage” to the North, articulated by more than one member of the Messenger’s editorial staff. As its most famous editor, Edgar Allan Poe, wrote in an 1835 article for the Messenger, “The most lukewarm friend of the State must perceive—if he perceives any thing—that the glory of the Ancient Dominion is in a fainting—is in a dying condition. Her once great name is becoming, in the North, a bye-word for imbecility” (66). The magazine faced the challenge of fostering southern talent while maintaining high aesthetic standards, representing southern culture while appealing to northern tastes, celebrating the “Ancient Dominion” while giving voice to the entire South and, eventually, West. Beyond these challenges, the magazine couldn’t even guarantee a southern readership because, as Wells explains, “Southerners subscribed most often not to local journals but to those published elsewhere, to popular New York publications such as Harper’s Monthly Magazine, and to Philadelphia’s Graham’s Magazine and Godey’s Ladies Magazine. And this was true not just for periodicals, but for books as well” (xv). The problem of how to attract southern readers to the magazine
was solved by B.B. Minor, under whose editorship from 1843 to 1847 the magazine took a strongly historical and sectional turn.

In the two decades leading up to the Civil War, the *Messenger* became dedicated not only to the promotion of southern literature, but also to articulating a historically and racially-based argument for southern exceptionalism, the belief that the South was made up of a distinct people who would play a unique role in the history of the modern world. Developing its own mythology for the first time, the South turned to colonial history to make a case for continuing its agrarian way of life, sustaining its “peculiar institution” of slavery, and spreading that way of life to the West, under the policy of Manifest Destiny. Especially between 1843 and 1861, the *Messenger* ran both historical reprints—colonial books or manuscripts reprinted for the magazine—and original pieces of historical scholarship. The original pieces of scholarship relied heavily on colonial histories and archival research; still, many of these pieces had a distinctly presentist thrust. That is, it became clear that colonial history was a tool with which to engage and debate the contemporary concerns of the antebellum South. Alongside these historical materials, the *Messenger* placed editorials justifying slavery, celebrating republicanism, and projecting a strict racial division between the histories and people of the North and South. The pairing of primary and secondary historical texts conveyed the message that the southern people and their way of life were now—and always had been—distinct from the North and that this distinction defined the two regions from the beginning of American colonization.

This chapter will first consider the founding and early mission of the *Messenger* and will trace its growing commitment to historical matters and to sectionalism. Next, I
look at the role that historical reprints and original historical scholarship played in the *Messenger* in addition to the magazine’s collaboration with the Virginia Historical Society and the contributions of Charles Campbell. By contextualizing the reprints within the increasingly hostile political climate, I aim to show how history became a figurative battleground in the fight for southern sovereignty. Scholar Robert Jacobs uses this metaphor as well in regards to the *Messenger*, claiming that what began as a “friendly rivalry with the North” was “carried on with varying degrees of urgency by all the editors of the *Messenger*, and it ended only when political imperatives negated literary ambitions and when the actual battlefield took the place of the literary arena” (68). The stakes of the battle went well beyond the survival or failure of the *Messenger*; at stake in the regional rivalry was the dominant narrative of America’s founding and with it the future of the Union.

The *Southern Literary Messenger* was always a risky venture. Even in its first issue, Heath anticipated a poor reception, worrying that its publisher, “as a kind of pioneer” would be “repulsed by the coldness and neglect of a Virginia public” (1). Heath also asked Virginians and southerners more broadly to consider the consequences of letting a magazine like the *Messenger* fade into just obscurity like the *Southern Review*, an acclaimed but short-lived periodical. Heath points to two key reasons why southerners should patronize the *Messenger* and they related to both print culture and history. Speaking on behalf of the South, he asserts,

We are not willing to borrow our political,—religious, or even our agricultural notions from the other side of Mason and Dixon’s line, and we generously patronize various domestic journals devoted to those several subjects. Why should we consider the worthy descendants of the pilgrims—of the Hollanders of Manhattan, or the German adventurers of
Though Heath insists that there is no bad blood between the South and the North, he believes that a continued dependence on the North for “literary supplies,” will dampen the “spirit of invention” among southerners (2). The argument he makes above touches on the correlation between the South’s underdeveloped print culture and its lack of historical awareness. Heath calls attention to the relationship between the circulation of printed materials and the circulation of ideas; whoever controls the print controls the message. This kind of question would be echoed in the pages of the Messenger and in other southern publications in the decades leading up to the Civil War. Heath’s question, it seems, is both rhetorical and literal. Rhetorically, it functions as a way to shame readers into admitting that they are wholly dependent on the North for their intellectual “food.” The question also literally asks readers if they can and will support a domestic periodical market. It is one thing to boast of regional pride, but to invest in regional products, especially literary ones, was another matter. The $5.00 price for an annual subscription proved too much for regular subscribers, many of whom would “patronize [the magazine] only in name”—that is, subscribe to the Messenger but fail to pay for it.

The problem of finding both regular contributors and a paying readership for the Messenger was in part caused by its fluctuating identity. The magazine was southern, but not too southern; it represented southern concerns, but it drew heavily on northern contributors and sought out northern subscribers. Under the editorships of Heath, Poe, Lucian Minor, and White (between 1834-1843), the magazine had garnered some northern interest and readily published literature from both the North and South.
production of the South, though, the magazine featured a disproportionate number of northern contributors in its early years. As Jacobs explains, to make the magazine marketable and competitive with popular northern magazines, White “would have to secure regular contributions from competent professional writers. There were not half-a-dozen of these in the South, and they usually published in the North—where they got paid” (71). In a letter to his ghost-editor Lucian Minor in 1835, White expressed anxiety about garnering contributors, saying, “I regret to tell you that my contributors are now either asleep, or what is worse are in a trance.—Really, I am at a loss to know how to get along” (232). Caught between a desire to promote southern literature and a desire to maintain the highest literary standards, the editors frequently neglected the “southern” mission in its early years in favor of keeping the magazine running; and that meant maintaining ties with the North. Poe played an important role in promoting the *Messenger* as a serious review; however, some felt that his harsh reviews only alienated northern contributors and perhaps damaged some of the ties that White and Heath had worked to establish. After all, as Wells notes, “the *Messenger* had a greater following among northern intellectuals than any other southern literary journal” (xx). Despite its role as the self-proclaimed “Patriarch of Southern Literature,” too few southerners and “northern intellectuals” were subscribing to the magazine to secure its future. Even White was only cautiously optimistic about the magazine’s potential for growth, writing to Minor in 1838, “I have gone through many a hard rub in the five years I have been toiling to raise up the ‘Messenger.’ My ‘pretentions’ have been laughed at and ridiculed by thousands of our race” (45). “Our race” appears to refer to southerners who had failed to patronize the magazine, a publication he had hoped would be the shining southern
contribution to a national literary culture. White had succeeded insofar as the Messenger had garnered some well-known contributors and, on a practical level, had maintained a regular publication schedule. However, when T.W. White died in 1843, it seemed likely the magazine would dissolve. Fortunately, Benjamin Blake Minor, freshly graduated from William and Mary, assumed the editorship of the Messenger and decisively shifted the message and the content of the magazine. With Minor at the helm, the Messenger finally began to exploit the term “Southern” in its title and move more towards what Frank Mott argues was the “ardently sectional” character that defined southern periodicals in the antebellum period (110).

Jacobs writes that upon the death of T.W. White, with the magazine in peril, Minor felt that “the most obvious measure of low-cost revival was to arouse sectional spirit in favor of the Messenger, and within two years Minor was doing just that, abandoning the ‘neutrality’ which White had attempted to maintain” (84). While his new philosophy may have driven away some northern subscribers, it provided the incentive southern subscribers needed to support this now more sectionalist magazine. According to Wells, “By the 1840s the journal was publishing defenses of slavery on a regular basis. Fiction, essays, reprinted political speeches and sermons, and even poems were devoted to upholding bondage” (xxii). As a result, this period marked “the most prosperous years of the journal” (xxiv). The magazine’s sectional turn, then, had garnered a more dedicated southern readership—along with financial stability—even though it meant abandoning the politically neutral, and more cosmopolitan flavor that White has first envisioned. Readers did not always agree with the Messenger’s stances, however. In 1845, Minor reprinted a letter from a subscriber expressing his disgust with the
magazine’s “rabid slavery essays,” declaring that “while Mr. White lived [the *Messenger*] was always neutral on exciting subjects” (61). He continues,

A public journal for general circulation, if it admit articles on controversial points, they should be pro and con. [...] I have nothing to do with abolition or any other fanaticism. But will take your [Number] no longer; go your own way; hug your barbaric arguments; sleep over a volcano; prepare for a revolution that shall shake your sunny hills to their aristocratic centres. (61)

This critique highlights the fact that sectionalist sentiment was not universally felt in the South and that the possibilities of “revolution” proved a threat to the public peace. The disgruntled reader fears that the *Messenger*, which he implies is the mouthpiece of the wealthy, will only succeed in stirring up dissension.

Minor answers this stunning critique by reminding readers that the magazine has always supported southern institutions, even under White’s editorship. He argues that White never pretended to be neutral on the subject of slavery but also never explicitly articulated his stance. Aware that the magazine had a literary reputation to uphold and ought not venture too far into the realm of politics, Minor carefully explains what “our Northern friends should expect from a Southern Journal.” He writes, “The *Messenger* is Southern and asks a Southern support. Not that we would array the South against the North—far, very far from it. [...] We will vindicate Southern interests from assault, Southern manners from aspersion and Southern Literature from disparagement” (62). In a memoir of the *Messenger* written by Minor and published posthumously, he articulates the “true position of the magazine” with this motto: “In the Union and For the Union; In the South and For the South” (131). Minor’s advocacy of the Union was typical of the period; only more radical Democrats like John C. Calhoun were calling for secession this
early. However, both this motto and Minor’s exchange with the subscriber reveals that the *Messenger* was unequivocally pro-slavery and that it was not afraid to publicly—that is, in print—challenge those who opposed this stance. Minor makes an example of the subscriber and reminds readers that the *Messenger* is not a “yea-nay—no-opinion affair,” but rather the preeminent literary organ of the South and as such, an advocate for a southern way of life. The nonpartisanship that White had envisioned was lost.

Having alienated many northern subscribers with these sectionalist proclamations, Minor turned to the West for support. Many Virginians had migrated to Western territories in the first few decades of the nineteenth century and provided a ready-made audience for the *Messenger*. In 1845, Minor briefly merged the *Messenger* with Simms’ *Monthly Magazine*, published by William Gilmore Simms of South Carolina. The merger yielded a magazine newly dedicated to the promotion of both southern and western literature entitled, *The Southern and Western Monthly Magazine and Review*. In a notice announcing the merger, Minor writes that “‘The Messenger,’ as is well known, has been scarcely less Western than Southern. It has, for many years, both Editorially and by its ablest contributors […] been addressing itself to the West” (760). Suddenly, it seemed as though the *Messenger* had always laid claim to both southern and western concerns and attracted both audiences. This merger also coincided with the annexation of Texas, supported by Minor in an editorial, which was admitted as a slave state into the Union in 1845. According to Wells, Minor particularly relied on contributors from Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Kentucky; all but Kentucky had been admitted as slave states within the last thirty years (xxiv). The merger reflected Minor’s push for greater
identification with citizens of the “frontier,” particularly as these citizens might be prone to advocate southern ideals and support southern institutions.

Minor also initiated a key shift in content, soliciting historical documents on the colonial history of Virginia and frequently reprinting them along with original works of historical fiction and nonfiction. Publishing works of history, both as primary and secondary documents, had long been a practice of the Messenger. On a practical level, publishing historical pieces was good business. As Michael O’Brien explains, “historical works formed about a third of all best-sellers sold between 1800 and 1860, which was about the proportion such volumes formed in the 1826 catalog of the Charleston Library Society” (591). The popularity of history as a genre did not necessarily ensure the popularity of southern histories, however. In fact, one Virginian observed to Charles Campbell that “Virginians knew more of European than Virginian history” even in the mid-nineteenth century (O’Brien 595). Thus, the Messenger’s decision to publish histories of the South was unique and, perhaps, risky. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Messenger had established a relationship with the Virginia Historical Society shortly after the magazine’s founding and had agreed to set aside space for “such portions of the manuscripts &c. belonging to the Society, as the committee may select for publication” (255).31 Such a partnership was not just beneficial to the Society and the Messenger as institutions, but also to individual researchers working on histories of the South. As Hugh Blair Grigsby once explained to Robert C. Winthrop, a prominent Massachusetts historian, “Such [historical] works with us who have not public libraries, and not depositories of letters, those Sybilline leaves of history, are very laborious. So antiquarianism with us is rather an expensive amusement; for I have to buy all my
authorities” (qtd. in O’Brien 635). That the Messenger could be a repository for antiquarians and common readers alike was part of both White’s and Minor’s vision. These historical reprints, he imagined, could provide support for antiquarian work and, ideally, encourage the common reader to participate in historical preservation. For example, in the February, 1835 issue, White ran the proceedings of the Historical Society and once again emphasized the importance of preserving history, reminding citizens of their duty to participate in this preservation. He asks, “What intelligent Virginian is there who does not feel inclined to co-operate in the attainment of so much good?” (257). This call to citizenship through historical appreciation would be echoed by all of the future editors of the Messenger, particularly as the South began to entertain secession.

The push for historical materials began early in Minor’s tenure as editor. In October, 1844, Minor published an open letter to the Virginia Legislature asking them to appeal to the “Liberality of the English Government” for the provision of all documents relation to Virginia’s colonial history. Insisting that “nothing so nearly touches the honor of a State as the due preservation of her historic archives,” Minor asks that an agent be sent to English to secure the record, “that it may be a monument for future times” (634). Minor also asks readers to write letters to the magazine expressing their interest in the matter. In the November 1844 and January 1845 issues, Minor published several letters from readers, including letters from President Tyler, Charles Campbell, and Conway Robinson of the Virginia Historical Society advocating the plan to procure Virginia’s colonial record. The primary concern, of course, was financial; what might such an endeavor cost? One solution, proposed by J. Romeyn Brodhead of New York, who had achieved recognition for recovering colonial documents from England, France, and the
Netherlands, was to ask the federal government to provide funds for collecting all of the colonial documents relating to North America. In response, Charles Campbell articulated his concern that the federal government could not adequately represent each state’s concern; the critique represented his own Democratic political position, only thinly veiled. He asks, “But is the scheme of one federal agent feasible? Could such an agent competently meet the wishes of a variety of States?” (48). Sounding like a Jeffersonian republican here, Campbell resists the plan for a federal retrieval effort and instead advocates individual state-funded efforts. This way, Campbell implies, the southern records will not be overlooked nor would the New England materials be privileged. The notion that Virginia lagged behind other states like New York, Massachusetts, and Georgia in this preservation effort, damaged state pride and reinforced the stereotype that Virginia “has slept as long and as sound as Rip Van Winkle” in matters of history (48).

As one contributor described it, “It is important that Virginia should not suffer herself to be anticipated by any other States. Being the oldest, she should have been the first to move in the matter; and having lost more of her records, she has the most to expect from it” (November 1844, 695).

It is notable that this entire exchange of letters and debate among a range of politicians, scholars, historians, and antiquarians, was played out on the pages of a literary magazine. This correspondence demonstrates the extent of the Messenger’s investment in promoting Virginia’s history and the ideological importance of this history in promoting southern letters and a southern historical identity. Writing under his favored pen-name “Americus South,” Minor quotes at length from a letter to the governor of Virginia, written by a concerned citizen in 1841; in it, the writer repeats the common
refrain concerning Virginia’s history: “Shall Virginia, the mother of heroes, statesmen and patriots linger in the race? And must her youth be taught to look for examples in the annals of fickle Greece or unprincipled Rome,--forgetful that their own land is full of every virtue which can dignify or elevate the human race?” (January 51). All of these quoted passages point to two key concerns taken up by the Messenger. The first is the concern that Virginia’s colonial history, standing in for southern history more generally, would be lost to future generations and, as a result, would play a diminished role in national history. The second concern, which is most evident in Campbell’s letter, is that Virginia and its southern neighbors would lose their political voices in the present if they could not draw on the political and cultural currency of the colonial past. Being the “oldest” and the “first” and the “mother” was not in itself a powerful argument for Virginia’s continued relevance. With this realization, Minor used the Messenger as a platform for Virginian history and antiquities as well as for addressing the controversial political, social, and economic conflicts plaguing the nation in the antebellum period. As an example of Minor’s commitment to publishing historical material, Jacobs reports that the “contents of the Messenger for August, 1846, were about eighty per cent historical” (86). Not all of the histories were southern histories, but nonetheless the new direction of the Messenger was clear—instead of primarily supporting belles lettres, the magazine would promote historical writing.

One method for gaining the support of readers was to call their attention to the accessibility and ubiquity of historical artifacts. The materials of history were thought to be everywhere—usually buried, rusting, moldering, just waiting for someone to find them. Readers were made to feel that they might contribute something significant to
southern history simply by looking through their grandfather’s trunk. The *Messenger* frequently played on the notion that antiquarianism was a civic duty in which all citizens should participate. Charles Campbell, whom I have already introduced, was an advocate of this notion and issued a call for each citizen to engage in antiquarian work. In a piece published in the *Messenger* in September, 1843, Campbell writes, “There are precious manuscripts, that ought to be snatched from the vortex of oblivion; there are local traditions and legends, and personal reminiscences which, unless soon rescued, may perish, and be forgotten. […] Individual efforts alone can be looked to in this behalf” (560). Just prior to writing this appeal, Campbell himself had secured one of the biggest finds in Virginia antiquities by excavating an old home and barn full of important revolutionary-era documents, including letters between George Washington and Virginia statesman Theodorick Bland. He describes the ruined state of the manuscripts he found in the home’s “enchanted chest” in the preface to his published collection, *The Bland Papers* (1840-1843). He recalls, “I found there a mass of musty documents, old accounts, ship letters, and the rubbish of a clerk’s office, mixed up with papers of interest and value. I winnowed the wheat from the chaff as well as I was able.” (vi). The “wheat,” as it happened, consisted of significant documents of Revolutionary history and personal correspondence between Bland and a number of military officers and statesmen. Campbell cites this reflection on the state of Virginia antiquities taken from a “New York Paper”: “Henceforth let no author feel himself aggrieved, should he find some of his choicest pages adorning the interior of a trunk, since we see that the manuscript letters of General Washington and his compeers to the proudest man in all Virginia, have been employed to line a poor negro’s egg basket” (ix). It seems likely that this line was
originally meant as a dig against Virginians, but Campbell quotes it to emphasize that Virginia’s antiquities can be found everywhere and that everyone who is “animated by a patriotic solicitude” can and should “contribute, each his quota, to the common stock” and thus preserve history for posterity (“Antiquities” 561). B.B. Minor wrote a favorable review of the Bland Papers for the Messenger, saying in the first line, “This is a Virginia book, in its matter, its Editor and its publication” (657). Since “a Virginia book” was perceived as a rare occurrence, Minor’s description is significant; the Bland Papers marked a major historical, antiquarian, and publishing achievement for the South.33 Minor praised Campbell’s meticulous editorial work on the manuscripts and defended the collection against criticism from the Boston Post, which had recently published an article “declaring the work dull reading” (657). Notably, Minor uses this critique as a way to illustrate northern hostility towards a growing southern print culture. He speculates that a similar work issued from a “Northern press” would not have been met with the same criticism. In fact, Minor argues, the North frequently praised its own “secondary characters” in the Revolutionary struggle even as it ignored one of the war’s chief actors, Colonel Bland. The Messenger’s advocacy for antiquarianism and its support of Campbell’s work made historical pursuits more mainstream and exposed readers to the “stuff” of history potentially lurking in their own attics.

Campbell enjoyed a long partnership with the Messenger, frequently contributing historical artifacts for reprinting in the magazine. In addition to submitting his own historical research, he often submitted more anecdotal pieces of history plucked from the archives. He particularly emphasized the need for reprinting histories of Virginia—a project he would help undertake with J.W. Randolph in 1855. Long before he became
involved in that publication, he wrote this appeal for the *Messenger*: “The old histories of Virginia are out of print, obsolete, seldom seen, more seldom read. While the press teems with myriads of ephemeral fictions, continually emerging on the face of the ocean, bubbles born only to expire, how long shall the old chronicles of Virginia, be doomed to slumber in oblivion?” (“History” 791). Campbell’s metaphor suggests that publishers are publishing the wrong kind of “ephemera;” instead of publishing fleeting fictions, they should be recovering and printing the “ephemera” found in those rusting trunks or lining the egg baskets. Campbell began contributing just such pieces of historical interest for the *Messenger* in 1839, including a series entitled “Virginia Antiquities” which appeared in several issues in 1843. These articles contain transcripts of inscriptions from the graves and monuments of notable Virginians. Campbell saw the *Messenger* as a vehicle for the transportation of these important artifacts to the hands of readers who may never have the occasion to venture to these monuments. These inscriptions also provided support for “good biography and history” because they represented the “most accurate and authentic” information obtainable (“Antiquities” 560). If Virginia’s citizens could not view the grave of William Byrd in Westover, Campbell brought a representation of that monument to the *Messenger*’s readers. Printing these transcriptions also emphasized the importance of celebrating and honoring Virginia’s greatest citizens.

Campbell’s most significant contribution to the *Messenger* was his “Introduction to the History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia,” which ran from February to December of 1847. In his announcement of Campbell’s series in the magazine, Minor makes it clear that the *Messenger* would continue to feed the flame of historical fervor with both original works of historical research and with the reproduction
of historical artifacts. He writes that while the “beneficial influence upon mind, conduct
and character, that may be exerted by the literary offerings of genius and talent, is
inestimable,” ultimately “these do not appear to us so desirable, so readily appreciable
[... ] as what may be termed, the Results, or Fruits of the Historical Spirit” (“Campbell’s
History” 57). Minor’s message is clear here: belles letters could not perform the same
kind of cultural work as history. The historical examples that antiquarian research could
provide for citizens of the South could not compare even to the fostering of new literary
talent. In Minor’s view, the work of historical pursuits would contribute more to
cultivating the southern character than that of “literary offerings.”

One of the Messenger’s first historical reprints was published in March, 1835 and
consisted of a few selections from the papers of the Virginia Historical and Philosophical
Society. In a brief introduction, the contributor suggests that one of the pieces, an
account of a small unit of the “Sons of Liberty,” ought to inspire readers to “cherish and
emulate” their “resistance to tyranny” (352). As political and economic pressures
mounted in the South and abolitionist rhetoric began to seep into the popular
consciousness, the editors, contributors, and readers of the Messenger turned to these
historical examples as a way to rally against northern “tyranny,” just as their ancestors
had resisted Mother England less than a century before. In the remainder of this chapter, I
consider how the Messenger used colonial and Revolutionary-era reprints and historical
articles to argue for the South’s inherent distinction from the North, which necessitated
disunion. I explore three historical themes that dominated the pages of the Messenger:
The fundamental difference between the cavaliers of the South and pilgrims of the North,
the South’s primary role in winning independence from Britain, and the historically
situating racial conflict between the southern Normans and northern Saxons—a mythology that emerged in the wake of Compromise of 1850.

In January, 1845, Minor published an advertisement and introduction for John Smith’s “True Relation,” which ran in the February issue. The advertisement celebrates the reprint’s “antiquarian, literary and historical” value, but also emphasizes its potential “pecuniary value” (66). Minor explains, “A few such historical tracts have recently been sold, in Boston, and bought, at very high prices, for Mr. Sparks and others, who had authorized them to be purchased at any price. The copy from which the following was printed cost upwards of ten dollars” (66). That publishing historical tracts could be a very lucrative business was perhaps an exaggeration, but it is revealing that Minor should cast historical publishing as a business venture, not purely a historical or antiquarian commitment. Ever-mindful of his readership, Minor sought to head off critiques about the magazine being fill with “worthless old matter” by demonstrating two things. First, printing “old matter” was being supported regularly in the North by the likes of Jared Sparks, one of the countries most prominent editors and historians. Second, there was a viable market for antiquarian collecting and publishing, and the South would do well to dig through the rusty trunks of Campbell’s descriptions and turn these artifacts into profit. If readers could not see the historical value of Smith’s “True Relation” they might see its monetary value as a rare document and its symbolic value as an artifact of the South, reprinted for southern readers by a southern publication.

Virginiana, in particular, was of great value because these materials stood for the history of the South writ large, as Minor himself argued. In the introduction to the Smith reprint, Minor asserted that “the History of Virginia was the history of North America” in
1608 when Smith’s narrative first appeared. Such a history “is intimately associated with the history of European enterprise and the destiny of this whole continent” (66). Minor’s words reiterate what many southerners began to hold true: that the colonial South played a unique and significant role in the establishment of the nation. Southern colonial settlers also possessed a different “spirit” or character than the Pilgrims of New England, for instance. Minor frames Smith’s narrative in the context of the “restless and romantic spirit” and the “genius and enterprise” which inspired the settlement of Jamestown and continues to drive the South (66). This very enterprising spirit, however, often causes southerners to neglect their past or forget it altogether. In the *Messenger*, Smith’s narrative served as a reminder of the importance of preserving Virginia’s history in part because of how quickly times change. While settlement and progress have ultimately improved the landscape, the past must be “impressed upon the mind” in order to “exhibit the wonderful contrast” between old and new (67). Like Smith’s narrative, the place of Jamestown, reduced to “the ruins of a church and a few tomb-stones” should also be preserved as a reminder of both the spirit that settled this land initially and the progress that has since been made (67). Smith’s narrative remained, then, as a symbol of the important role of the Virginia settlement in world history and its reprinting in the *Messenger* signified a physical commemoration of Smith’s settlement. Like Campbell’s gravestone inscriptions, the Smith reprints stood in place of the preservation of Virginia’s historical locations. Minor’s depiction of—and regret for—the decrepit Jamestown settlement was echoed among many contributors to the *Messenger*. In an article published in the August 1858 issue, a contributor writes to the editor at the time, John R. Thompson, to propose a monument at Jamestown in honor of John Smith. The writer
paints Smith as a “real knight errant” whose heroism, industry, and adventurous nature make him “the Columbus of Virginia colonization” (114). Smith advocated the growth of agriculture and commerce in the colonies while others chased “fool’s gold” (114). In this writer’s portrait, Smith is “the father of Virginia” just as Virginia is the “mother of States” (115). This writer’s account of the role of Virginia and Smith in the development of the nation points to the South’s notion of their own unique colonial character—a character embodied in the figure of the chivalric “knight errant,” or cavalier.

Beginning in the colonial period but particularly in the nineteenth-century, writers and historians of both the North and South popularized the notion that the two regions represented opposing sides of the English Revolution. Such a belief not only aligned the South with the crown—a belief that was by turns supported and denied in the nineteenth century—but it also gave the South a historic reason to clash with the “roundheads” of the North. William Taylor, in his study *Cavalier and Yankee* (1961), explains the various binaries that defined the cavalier myth:

The Yankee was a direct descendant of the Puritan Roundhead and the Southern gentleman of the English Cavalier, and the difference between the two was at least partly a matter of blood. The terminology sometimes varied, but contemporaries generally settled upon some such distinction as ‘Saxon’ or ‘Anglo-Saxon’ for the North and ‘Norman’ for the South. Under the stimulus of this divided heritage the North had developed a leveling, go-getting utilitarian society and the South had developed a society based on the values of the English country genre. It was commonly felt, furthermore, that these two ways of life had been steadily diverging since colonial times. (15)

Thus, the southern Cavalier was aligned with the Norman race and the northern Roundhead was aligned with the Saxon race in the mythology that supported sectionalism in the 1850s. As Reginald Horsman explains in his study of Anglo-Saxonism and
Manifest Destiny, this Saxon/Norman divide emerged at a time when European Romanticism was extremely popular in America and introduced new theories of race and nationalism to a country eager to identify itself in racial terms. A belief in Americans as a distinctive race “helped produce an overriding sense that the triumphant republic gained its inner force from the special inner characteristics of the American people” (164). Prior to 1850, the American people had identified themselves with the Anglo-Saxon tradition; but in the context of the 1850s and the rhetorical efforts to prove the incompatibility of the regions, southerners “became convinced between 1815 and 1850 that they belonged to a superior race” of Anglo-Normans (164). According to Ritchie Watson’s study Normans and Saxons (2008), the influence of polygenist racial theory, and particularly Robert Knox’s 1850 book, The Races of Men, had a tremendous impact on the creation of a Saxon/Norman divide in the southern consciousness. Southerners turned to Knox’s separation of the Celtic and Saxon races, which aligned the Celts with aristocracy and conquest, in order to define themselves as biologically distinguished from northerners. “Dixie’s concoction of a Norman-descended ‘southron’ race,” Watson asserts, “was the inevitable produce of bitter and dangerous sectional tensions” (46).

This racial designation had its share of detractors both in the North and South, most famously Hugh Blair Grigsby, President of the Virginia Historical Society. According to Michael O’Brien, Grigsby “was scathing towards the Cavalier theory,” because it suggested that it was the former king’s lackeys who settled the great colony; Grigsby claimed instead that “Virginia was created by those driven out by cavaliers and aristocratic oppression, was made by the plain folk” (647). Grisby’s view was consistent with other scholars like Campbell who, as I have discussed, saw the early murmuring of
Revolution in the events of Bacon’s Rebellion, an uprising of true Virginians against arbitrary power. In the southern imagination, these two narratives were not mutually exclusive. The South could be at once the birthplace of rebellion and of nobility. In this way, the Messenger’s appeals to historical veracity were obstructed by the disjointed myth of noble and “plain” descent that they, too, were advancing. Like Savage’s desire to turn the conservative Winthrop into a freedom-loving founding father, despite the historical error involved in such a claim, contributors to the Messenger sought to craft a myth of southern exceptionalism that accounted for two competing needs: The need to establish the South’s predestined status as aristocratic rulers, in the Norman tradition, and the need to cling to the republican underpinnings of their nineteenth-century political identity. The Messenger filled its passages with historical material that met both of these needs, propagating the Puritan/Cavalier and Saxon/Norman divide, and trumpeting the southern origins of the American Revolution.

In addition to representing the South’s noble origins, the cavalier figure was a useful literary icon that could represent the colonial South just as the Puritan figure represented New England. In poetry and literature, the cavalier figure reminded readers of the noble birth of their ancestors. In a poem entitled “The Old Dominion” published in the Messenger in 1841, the poet muses, “It is a weary time since first/We left Potomac’s side,/Where noble hearts are nobly nursed/By old Virginia’s pride:--/Where the blood of Charles’ cavaliers,/The jovial, true and bold,/Runs purely down the stream of years/As from the font it rolled:--/And men are of as princely sort/As ever ruled in regal court” (451). From this stanza we see that it is largely the association with European nobility that feeds “old Virginia’s pride.” The poet continues, “And let no scorners count my
fain, In boasting thus to tract/My father’s lineage back again/Amongst a regal race”

(451). Here, the writer traces his own line back to a “regal race” which, as Taylor argues, refers to the Norman bloodline. But the cavalier’s noble roots did not ensure his loyalty to the crown. Even as the cavalier figure represents that which is noble, regal, princely and courtly, his “[nature] free” provided the “spark” of eventual rebellion. In fact the cavalier’s spark was so intense that the Norman needed to unite with “the Saxon stern” to “steady” the flame of Revolution. This association of the cavalier with the revolutionary was not merely a literary trope; the Messenger frequently ran scholarly pieces on the differences between the cavalier and Puritan, the Norman and Saxon, and the roles of each in the eventual revolution. As we will see, pieces published closer to the outbreak of the Civil War exploited these differences further, making disunion seem not only necessary, but historically predetermined.

Despite having its roots in actual historical events, the cavalier figure in antebellum historical discourse was extremely malleable. As shown in the above poem, he came to represent both the bold and enterprising spirit of the colonists and the tempered gentility of the European elite. In some ways, the figure became completely disconnected from the actual story of Charles’ loyal émigrés or the impetus for their migration. That is, even as the cavalier figure bore strong associations with the British crown and with European nobility, as a colonial Virginian figure the cavalier/Norman also stood for the spirit of ’76 and Jeffersonian republicanism. Perhaps the most important historically grounded characteristic of the cavalier was his antipathy for the Puritan. In the nineteenth century, southern writers turned to the Puritan Roundhead figure to locate the roots of abolition, claiming that the “fanaticism” that had infiltrated
the Puritan community during the witchcraft delusion had now found its antebellum equivalent in abolitionism.

As early as its second number, the *Messenger* ran a piece entitled “The New England Character” in which the writer emphasizes this historic discord and its contemporary manifestations. The premise of the article is a response to several recent articles in the *North American Review* that articulated “a long and spirited defence of the character of the people of New England, against the misrepresentations of their enemies” (412). Generally, the article on New England character is even-handed, which was in keeping with White’s non-partisan editorial policy and his attentiveness to his northern readers. However, even as the writer finds much to admire in the New England character, he also reminds readers that regional tensions have always existed: “We, too, of the south, and especially we of Virginia, are the descendants, for the most part, of the old cavaliers—the enemies and persecutors of those old puritans—and entertain, perhaps, unwittingly, something of an hereditary and historical antipathy against the children, for their fathers’ sakes” (413). Though the writer calls for readers to temper their antipathy, he locates nineteenth-century discord between North and South within the cavalier/Puritan mythology. Towards the end of the article, the writer further exploits this difference and again turns to the Puritan figure. In discussing the spirit of religious “enthusiasm” characteristic of the New England fathers, the writer argues that their compulsion to “impose their own dogmas, and their own notions, upon others” has resonance in the nineteenth century. He writes, “Take for sample that real fanaticism, that fever, or rather frenzy of abolitionism which is, or was but lately, so rife among them, and which has threatened to disturb the peace of our state, and perhaps to destroy
our Union itself” (416). The choice of words, “fanaticism,” “fever,” and “frenzy,” had strong associations with the witchcraft trials, the banishment of Anne Hutchinson, the superstitions of writers like Cotton Mather, and the Puritans’ ill-treatment of the Quakers. The writer further argues that these historical delusions led to the most dangerous characteristic of all: The belief that they (the North) should “claim the right of thinking and acting for others” (416). The greatest threat to the southern way of life and southern institutions in the antebellum period, then, was the North’s predisposition towards fanatical belief, dogmatic control, and a false sense of moral superiority. Despite being bound together by the “golden cord” of the “federal compact,” there is no question that the North’s historically-grounded tradition of “thinking and acting for others” worried southern readers. As future contributors to the Messenger would argue, the golden cord of the federal compact was merely a synthetic binding stretched between two naturally opposing forces.

Another reason that the Puritan/Cavalier divide was so important to the South, and to the Messenger as its mouthpiece, was that it helped to rend the power of crafting America’s history from the hands of northern historians. Just as the writer above critiqued the northern tendency to think for others, the Messenger exposed northern historians who attempted to speak for the country as a whole. One primary example of the South’s resistance to northern historical accounts is White’s 1835 review of George Bancroft’s A History of the United States, published in Boston and London. Bancroft ascribed to a romantic view of American history rooted in the conviction that “the irresistible tendency of the human race is to advancement” (406). His master narrative of colonial history asserted that the colonies all contained the roots of democracy and that
all were working towards an eventual revolution. Despite the guise of an unbiased narrative, Bancroft’s preference for a New England-based account of this evolution betrayed his “sectional loyalties” and “defined the nation in terms of New England,” as Eileen Cheng argues (165). White’s review of Bancroft targets this sectionalism and accuses Bancroft of “[disposing] us to acquiesce in the new notion, ‘that the people of the colonies, all together, formed one body politic before the revolution.’” He continues, “Against this proposition, we feel bound to protest” (591). Such a notion, according to White, radically downplayed each colony’s unique relationship to the crown and especially Virginia’s difficulties during the Cromwellian protectorate. White’s critique is not based in an objection to the South’s republicanism, but in Bancroft’s failure to acknowledge cultural and racial difference between the Puritans and Cavaliers. White gives this account of the second phase of Virginia’s settlement during the English Civil War:

If we know anything (and we think we do) of the character of the early settlers of Virginia, they were a chivalrous and generous race, ever ready to resist the strong, to help the weak, to comfort the afflicted, and to lift up the fallen. In this spirit they had withstood the usurpation of Cromwell while resistance was practicable, and, when driven from their native country, they had bent their steps toward Virginia, as that part of the foreign dominions of England, where the spirit of loyalty was strongest. (587)

It is not that White wanted to entirely refute a narrative that placed Virginians as key actors in the eventual revolution, but rather that he wants to draw attention to complexities of southern colonial history about which Bancroft seems entirely ignorant. The historical question for both White and Bancroft is this: What was the response of the Virginia colony to the execution of Charles I and the establishment of the Commonwealth? Bancroft’s history, according to White, “infers that the Virginians were
entirely reconciled to Cromwell and his parliament” and that all accounts to the contrary, like Beverley’s history among others, are “pure fiction” (589). White admits that what Bancroft “intended to be a favorable account of our ancestors” is ultimately a gross misreading of the facts and a prime example of northern historians attempting to “crush and obliterate every trace of what our ancestors were” (588).

White closes this review with a question and a call. He inquires, “What is the meaning of this strange attempt to pervert the truth of history, and to represent Virginia as being as far gone in devotion to the parliament as Massachusetts herself?” (591). Here again, White resists Bancroft’s desire to unite all of the colonists together as unwavering supporters of the proto-democratic protectorate. Bucking against the trend among northern historians to either completely ignore Virginia or merely count it as an outpost of the more influential New England colonies, White answers this question with a call for readers to boycott northern histories. For, what becomes clear from White’s critique is that he is less concerned that Bancroft wants to romanticize the story of America’s democratic origins, but that Bancroft dared to speak for the state of the southern colonies at all. It is not surprising that White, as the editor of the South’s premier literary magazine and an advocate of southern publishing, would end with a statement about northern publications. He writes, “If this is the way to write history, we fear we shall have to leave our northern neighbors to tell the story their own way. It is a hard case. Let them write our books, and they become our masters. […] Our only defence is not to read. A more effectual security would be, not to buy” (591). In an article detailing the historical support for Virginia’s loyalty to the crown, it is a compelling final sentiment that illustrates the stakes of the battle of history. Why would Bancroft represent Virginia
as an eager convert to the Commonwealth? Because the act of telling becomes an act of ownership; in turn, the act of consuming this narrative only tightens the shackles. White is writing long before the idea of secession was feasible in the South, but the implication of northern rule over the South through the erasure of southern history, would lead both to the historical movement I have described and to eventual calls for southern sovereignty.

One method the *Messenger* used to promote history while also exploring the possibility of secession was reprinting revolutionary-era documents and forging links between Virginia’s cavalier identity and its revolutionary identity. Of course, historically, these two identities were inherently contradictory; thus, the *Messenger* juxtaposed accounts that illustrated how the core of these two myths—one noble, one democratic—could coexist in the southern historical character. When southern historians discussed the revolution, they frequently recognized Virginia as the birthplace of true republicanism and states’ rights. As Anne Rubin explains, “Confederates repeatedly stressed that the Union of the Founding Fathers was one of separate and sovereign states” and now that the union had proven untenable, secession was not only necessary, but in keeping with the true spirit of the Constitution (89). So, while the cavalier myth had certainly saturated popular culture and the pages of the *Messenger*, the seemingly contradictory narrative of the South as radical patriots also thrived. In fact, the early colonial and revolutionary periods were frequently discussed in tandem, perhaps with an attempt to downplay the loyalist implications of the cavalier by highlighting the “spirit” of independence that pervaded both periods. What writers retained about the cavalier in
these discussions was the chivalry and gentility that was thought to characterize the southern man.

In the June, 1857 issue of the *Messenger*, an article describing a recent celebration at Jamestown highlighted the continuities between the colonial and the independent Virginian. The event featured several orations on colonial history and, like many histories of the period, pointed to the importance of Bacon’s Rebellion in the eventual formation of the republic. Former President Tyler delivered a lengthy oration in which he declared, “Had Bacon lived a century later, he might have occupied the highest niche in the temple of fame. [...] The thrilling tones of his eloquence would have been heard seconding the resolutions of Mr. Henry in 1765, and his sword would afterwards have been seen flashing over the battlefields of the war for independence” (450). In the culminating passage of the speech, Tyler reminds his listeners that they are still responsible for protecting the freedoms that Bacon and Henry advocated. The South, he says, “is still a sentinel on the watch tower to repel the sappers and miners who would overthrow the great constitutional charter of these States. [...] Political demagogues may revile and abuse, but they cannot detract from the high and lofty fame which belongs to this time-honored Commonwealth, or disturb her in the continued advocacy of that course of policy, conservative and national as it is, which she has through all time pursued” (455). In the volunteer toasts that follow the speech, the crowd echoed Tyler’s sentiments. One citizen toasted to “The landing of the cavaliers in the New World—The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States; the three great events that have given most freedom, prosperity, and happiness to the family of mankind” (465). The citizen notably includes the cavaliers in his toast to “freedom,”
suggesting once more that the character of the cavalier was compatible with the revolutionary; the association suggests that the cavaliers were bravely seeking freedom from oppression (Cromwell’s oppression) in the “new world” of liberal-minded Virginians. Another toasted “The Constitution of the United States,” saying, “So long as it shall remain unprofaned, there will be no danger to the Union” (465). The common thread throughout this event is the continuity between various historical accounts in Virginia’s history. In the context of the celebration at Jamestown, the stories of John Smith, the cavaliers, Bacon’s rebellion, Patrick Henry’s speeches, and Jefferson’s presidency all pointed to one thing: The South’s inherent right to “repel the sappers and miners,” that is, to use whatever means necessary to protect their constitutional rights as they interpreted them.

The Messenger was eager to promote this historical appeal to the South’s primary role in the revolution, in part as an answer to what many contributors saw as a northern prejudice that downplayed Virginia’s contribution to the War of Independence. Revolutionary material had always peppered the pages of the Messenger from its earliest issues. Just as White expressed his disappointment in Bancroft’s romantic nationalism, so too did the Messenger critically evaluate other discriminatory narratives coming from the North. For example, in a response to Daniel Webster’s “Bunker Hill Oration” in 1843, a contributor to the Messenger argues that “whilst conceding that the heros [sic] of Bunker Hills have an equal claim upon our gratitude with the other colonists of the United States […] we never can consent to remain quiet and have it contended that those services were in themselves productive of such important consequences as to supersede the necessity of the hardy and daring exploits of our ancestors” (751). In short, the role
of southerners in the fight for liberty ought not be neglected. Thus, to commemorate the South’s unique place in the national story, the *Messenger* printed both archival and original historical pieces emphasizing Virginia’s contributions to American independence. Revolutionary reprints were becoming more popular in the mid-fifties and early sixties as publishers like J.W. Randolph worked with historians to publish both archival pieces and new accounts of revolutionary history. For instance, in 1855 Randolph published Hugh Blair Grigsby’s extremely popular speech on the Virginia Convention of 1776 and The Virginia Historical Society published the *Private Diaries of George Washington* (1861). Campbell, who had already put together the invaluable *Bland Papers*, also edited an orderly book from a soldier of the revolution, which he had privately printed in 1860. The book, which had been rescued from “oblivion,” would prove to readers the “dangers which then overshadowed the Colony.” While Campbell does not explicitly make a connection between the book and the current crisis, he does imply that this orderly book, like all revolutionary histories and artifacts, should remind the South of its heroism in fighting British oppression (x).

Perhaps the most significant historical series published by the *Messenger* consisted of portions of the Lee Papers and ran between December 1857 and May 1860. The series appears to first have been introduced by Charles Campbell, who wrote to the editor to indicate that he had a large collection of Richard Henry Lee’s personal papers which he thought might interest readers of the magazine. In a brief note preceding one installment of the papers, Campbell gives this guarantee: “Is it necessary to add, that your readers may be assured of the genuineness of what is laid before them—the copies having been faithfully compared with the originals in my possession?” (July 1858, 26).
As an antiquarian, it was important to Campbell that these reprints were perceived as accurate in part to emphasize that he was bringing readers manuscript materials that were not accessible elsewhere. The Lee Papers mainly consisted of private correspondence between Lee and other prominent revolutionary-era figures, including George Washington, Patrick Henry, and Lee’s brother, Arthur Lee, a diplomat during the war.

The papers touched on several significant historical and political themes that would have particularly resonated with southern readers. First, these papers stressed the importance of Virginians in the formation of the republic. Richard Henry Lee’s motion to declare independence from Britain was a direct progenitor to the writing of the Declaration of Independence. A member of the First and Second Continental Congresses, Lee joined Patrick Henry in his fierce promotion of independence on behalf of Virginia. It is not surprising, then, that the *Messenger* would publish the Lee Papers as textual evidence of Virginia’s leading role in the rebellion. As a fiery revolutionary and one of the first patriots to call for independence, Lee’s example illustrates the invaluable role of the Virginia delegates and South more generally, in the war against British tyranny. Locating revolutionary sentiment in the South would also prove essential to the case for secession.

Secondly, the reprinted Lee Papers contained an account of the War itself and, with it, the justifications for a republican form of government. Lee was a committed state’s rights advocate during the Constitutional debates, so his political position in the eighteenth century would have been favorable to antebellum readers. As the editor describes in a brief preface to an 1858 excerpt of the papers, “The old Government having ceased, a new one must be established, based on Republican principles and
adapted to our particular circumstances. […] And it was reserved for Virginia at length to present to the world the first example of a written Constitution of Republican Government” (250). Several excerpts highlight Lee’s advocacy for the preservation of liberties in addition to the exposure of abuses of power. In a fragment from a speech delivered to the House of Burgesses in 1766, for example, Lee describes the potential dangers of one person holding the dual position of Speaker of the House and Treasurer. Following a survey of historical examples, Lee argues that “the practice of those who had liberty in view, was to divide with great care offices of power and profit” (August 1858, 118). The editor offers his interpretation of the import of Lee’s speech, saying that it illustrates the importance of “[exposing] the sophistry of the upholders of venerable abuse” (120). In the context of the articles I have already discussed, which more explicitly outlined the South’s growing sense of victimization at the hands of Northern “fanatics,” the Lee Papers depict the South’s past resistance to tyranny and abuses of power and imply an impending revolution.

In a series of fragments reprinted in March, 1860, Lee’s articulation of the cause of the Revolution is particularly persuasive. In one fragment, apparently addressed to a fellow political leader just prior to declaring independence, Lee argues that when one colony suffers, all suffer. He writes that “with such pregnant proofs before you, of a permanent and complete subversion of your liberties, you cannot, without infatuation, […] demean yourselves into acquiescence and quiet” (170). “Never was a plan of despotism more absolute, and in itself complete; never were chains better forged,” Lee continues, calling ultimately for “determined, unanimous, permanent opposition” (172). The historical import alone makes this set of Lee’s writing significant to Messenger
readers. But in light of the impeding conflict, the Lee Papers act as a justification for a new kind of Declaration of Independence. In February, 1861, not long after the last installment of the Lee Papers was printed, the *Messenger* ran a piece entitled “The Disfederation of the States.” In this article, perhaps more than any other the magazine printed, the language of a new Revolution is apparent. The writer compares the North and South to Jacob and Esau, respectively. He claims that after the Revolution, South sold its birthright—its political power and cultural legacy—to the North, despite being the eldest colony.

Moreover, the writer remarks that “from the beginning of the government, every compromise has been proposed by the South; never one by the North. […] In all the compromises, the South, for peace, has always yielded her rights and given up all except her honour” (120). It was important for southern writers to point to a long list of grievances, in the tradition of the colonists; by demonstrating a tradition of tyranny over them, the South could make a more persuasive case for separation against the North. The writer argues that even Thomas Jefferson had predicted the eventual dissolution of the Union. Reproducing passages from Jefferson’s collected *Works*, the writer cites a letter to William Short in which Jefferson expresses his fear that the two regions would never reconcile and that, on the subject of slavery and the 1820 Missouri Compromise, “it would be recurring on every occasion and renewing irritations until it would kindle such mutual and mortal hatred as to render separation preferable to eternal discord” (129). In the concluding passage of the article, the writer cites Jefferson’s moving proclamation: “I have been among the most sanguine in believing that our Union would be of long duration. I now doubt it much, and see the event at no great distance. . . . My only
comfort and confidence is that I shall not live to see this” (129). What these passages illustrate in the context of “The Disfederation of the States” is that the possibility of dissolution had always existed in America. The writer boldly asserts, “The end, then, has been from the beginning” (120). For the writer, the Revolution was merely a prelude to the real contest for liberty in America. And like Lee, the writer here calls for opposition to the North, particularly New England, whom he calls despotic and cruel. In the context of the Messenger’s secessionist editorials, the Lee Papers take on new meaning. They not only provided an example of the South’s commitment to liberty and resistance to tyranny, but they also proved that there was precedence for what would soon occur—a war of independence.

These appeals to the South’s revolutionary spirit and to its historic political enmity with the North took a racial turn in the late 1850s and early 60s. As I have discussed above, pieces in the Messenger had already appealed to the divide between the Normans and the Saxons to assert the essential genetic and historical differences between the regions. But, articles published between 1860-1864 would assert not just difference, but hierarchy, placing the Normans in the position of conquerors and ultimately anticipating a victory in the Civil War. A series of articles published in the Messenger during this time imagined a future in which the North would be compelled to serve the South according to the natural racial order. Instead of using colonial history to paint themselves as merely victims of despotism, the Messenger appealed to colonial (and world) history to aggressively advocate their own racial superiority. Furthermore, these pronouncements on race were used to justify slavery. That is, the same theories used to support fundamental racial differences between the North and South were also employed
in support of slavery. Clearly the issue of slavery had historically divided the two regions, but, as Cheng describes, when the nation’s histories were being written, northern writers often “[set] up a contrast between the slaveholding south and a historically free New England” and ultimately “white New Englanders could claim superiority to the South as the antithesis of everything the nation represented” (175). Particularly between 1859 and 1861, the editors of the Messenger, John Rueben Thompson and George William Bagby, ran pieces that established the Civil War as a historic clash of warring races whose superiority would finally be determined in America, the one place where racial hybridization had been attempted and now failed.36

Before Virginia seceded in April, 1861, the magazine ran several pieces that spoke to the inevitability of secession based on historical and racial “facts.” In a satirical article published in September, 1859 entitled “Manifest Destiny of the World—Its Republic and Its Empire,” the author, “Mozis Addams,” the pseudonym of George William Bagby, imagines a future time wherein Virginia will rule a portion of the globe. Bagby explains that the South, “is the direct and legitimate offspring of the Old Dominion, where the true theory of Republican Government […] is still resident” (207). As such, Virginia will rule one half of the globe (Russia will rule the other half), and “all the inferior races, such as the Negro, the Yankee, and the various Incapables of Europe” will serve in various menial capacities (207). Under this new administration, The Republic of Virginia will retain the use of Negro slaves, since they had been “our earliest slave[s]” and Africa will be used as the “nursery of domesticatable savages, whose natural strength and unpolluted blood will constitute a perpetual reservoir from which we shall derive living streams to refresh and invigorate the effete working classes” (209).
Though the article is meant to read as a “piece of fun,” it is only a thinly veiled articulation of firmly held beliefs of racial determinism that also ran in the Messenger. The inevitability of southern conquest, based on a belief in the South’s Norman roots, was also the thesis of an editorial printed in June, 1860, most likely written by Bagby. In “The Difference of Race Between the Northern and Southern People,” the author suggests that the root of the nation’s present concerns is located in racial difference. Appealing to the cavalier myth, the author explains that the southern race “directly descended from the Norman Barons of William the Conqueror, a race distinguished, in its earliest history, for its warlike and fearless character. . . renowned for its gallantry, its chivalry, its honour, its gentleness and its intellect” (407). From these characteristics, the author argues that the Norman race possesses a “particular capacity for executive control, and their control of this particular institution of slavery” (403). Casting the Norman southerners as “the only people on this continent who can properly control [slavery],” the writer emphasizes the need for the Norman South to embrace their natural racial position as rulers and ultimately subdue the “uncontrollable” North (409). The writer calls on readers to remember the true terms of the current conflict—they are racial, not political, and they stem from a long-unequal yoke between two disparate races.

Only two months prior to running this piece, the Messenger published an essay by historian Henry A. Washington, editor of an edition of Thomas Jefferson’s papers, on “The Races of Men.” The essay was originally delivered as a speech in 1855, but given the recent turn of the magazine, the content was apt. Like the pieces above, Washington views the history of the world in racial terms. His thesis is twofold: “I do not believe that all men are by nature equal” and “The white races are superior to the brown, and the
brown to the black” (256, 260). Such an argument had long proven effective in anti-abolitionist writing. Washington emphasizes that it is neither environmental nor moral factors that distinguish the races, but “those natural and inherent differences which the God of nature has impressed up on the races” (256). This fact, he argues, is illustrated throughout human history and has culminated in the present situation—the enslavement of Africans. “The destinies of the world, the destinies of civilization,” he urges, “have been in the hands of White Races” (257). Though Washington makes no mention of the distinctions between the northern and southern races, Bagby’s decision to run the piece in the context of pieces like those above suggests that the same arguments that had long justified slavery would also justify succession on similar, seemingly “scientific” grounds. It is striking that both Washington’s piece and the articles above are eager to remove morality or politics from the race question. The current conflict was nothing more than the most recent manifestation of a historically inevitable conflict. Moreover, as Bagby’s satirical piece suggests, southerners believed that this latest clash might ultimately result in Norman supremacy over the fanatical Saxons. As one contributor put it, “It is the old English contest revived on this continent, of Norman and Saxon—Cavalier and Puritan. In England, the Puritan was victorious on most of the battle fields of the Revolution, yet he failed to maintain his power, or to establish his dynasty; and he is today the Saxon subject of a Norman government” (“True Question” 25).

Racial theory and colonial history functioned, then, not only as a call to arms, but as a strong appeal for a complete rending of the Union. As Washington argues, “This idea of human equality is the source of many of the most mischievous errors of our time” primarily because such an idea is antithetical to scientific fact as it has played out in all of
human history (254). In July, 1861, in an article entitled “The True Question: A Contest for the Supremacy of Race, As Between the Saxon Puritan of the North, and the Norman of the South,” the writer suggests that perhaps the most “mischievous error” of all time was the forced union of two incongruent regions and races. The “civil war and revolution” was not the result of the racial inequality inherent in the institution of slavery; instead, it stemmed from the fact that “two branches of the human race, differing as widely as possible, now people this part of the American continent, who, strangely enough, have been endeavoring to live together upon terms of political equality, under one government—but are at length, very naturally, precipitated into a contest for supremacy” (22). The writer employs the language of racial amalgamation to critique “that hybrid thing” called a “democratic republic” which has now become impracticable (24). That white supremacy would emerge from the conflict was clear, but the war would determine which “white” bloodline would dominate. The writer appeals again to the Norman/Saxon dichotomy to suggest that when the war is over, the natural order will be restored. He writes to southern readers, “We have then, to treat [the North] to some extent, as an inferior race, presenting an admixture of force and finesse. After this manner, the Norman has ever controlled the Saxon” (21). Differences between parties and policies, he writes, are merely symptomatic of inherent racial qualities; the Saxon’s apparent domination in recent years was merely the result of their “impudent, ferocious, meddling, fanatical” tendencies which ultimately trampled “the operation of Southern thought and character” (27).

In reference to northerners, the writer of “The True Question” uses the terms “Round-head,” “Saxon,” “Saxon Puritan,” and “Northern Puritan.” Clearly the appeal to
colonial history and racial determinism became powerful rhetorical tools in advocating secession. In this article the North is made to be the marginalized “other” in a system ultimately dominated by the southern Norman, the descendent of William the Conqueror. Just as the white race was imbued with power over the black, the South was destined to subdue the North, as “their whole past history calls for the presence of a severe authority” (27). The language of enslavement was particularly loaded. In fact, the writer ends his editorial with an explicit threat; if the North refuses to restore peace, “she must be whipped and well whipped” (27). As the inferior race, the North should be “broken” and then restored to its natural, subservient place in American culture and politics. For southerners, this new order was a historical and racial inevitability; losing the war was simply not a consideration. The historiographic reversal from depicting the South as victims of northern despotism to establishing their role as natural world conquerors demonstrates the extreme malleability of history as it became wrapped up in political policy. Yet, historical truth and historical artifacts were still valued as significant contributions to the life of the South, even in the midst of war. In fact, in 1863, a writer for the Messenger suggested that someone reprint William Stith’s The History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia, which had relied heavily on Beverley’s account (1747). The writer urges, “When the clouds of war shall have been dissipated, and Southern Independence established, it will be good service done to the Republic of Letters, and probably remunerative, if some enterprising house (like that of West & Johnston) will bring out such an edition. Charles Campbell could supply the notes” (554). According to this writer, in the new republic of letters, history would remain an important force in shaping confederate identity just as it had contributed to sectionalist
rhetoric. This illusive vision of “Southern Independence” would never be realized and Stith’s history would eventually be reprinted in New York in 1865, not in the war-torn South.

Beyond the physical destruction of the South, the shock shared by its citizens who had invested in the teleology of southern independence, was powerfully felt. In a letter to Hugh Blair Grigsby, Charles Campbell expressed his profound loss, but a slight hope for the future, writing, “How little did we before this war, expect to live to see our beloved Virginia so torn & rended, ravaged & desolated? But she has come, like gold, out of the fire & we have more reason to be proud of her & attached to her, than ever. When asked for her jewels she can point to her sons.”

Pointing to the past, which would continue to be a source of literary inspiration in the post-bellum South, Campbell appeals to the myth of the South as a kind of phoenix. Even the *Messenger*, which failed in the wake of the war, found new life in 1939; the introduction to the first issue offered a similar picture of resurrection. “The Southern Literary Messenger did not die,” the writer exclaims, it “sank into a sleep, like a legendary castle of enchantment, awaiting an awakening” (1).

The desire to write about the South and the magazine in mythological terms is consistent with how the South had viewed itself in the antebellum period. In fact, it was the region’s belief in their exceptionalism—their unique purpose in world history, their singular character, and the inevitability of their success—that led to their secession. The editors of the *Messenger* had fed that myth by publishing narratives of the colonial past and building a case for future sovereignty. The enmity that the *Messenger* consistently promoted between the South and New England also suggests that the quote from Jacobs at the beginning of the chapter was true after all: The *Messenger* declared a literary war
on New England before any real shots were fired. Perhaps the writer of “Disfederation of the States” put it best when he wrote of the fundamental disjunctur between the two regions’ histories: “What attraction could exist between Puritan and Cavalier, between Rev. Cotton Mather and Capt. John Smith [...]?” (119). By contrasting the histories and historians of these regions, the writer points to the absolute incompatibility between northern and southern colonial historiography. That is, neither region could write about colonial history in such a way as to fully represent or legitimate the presence of the other. That the writer would highlight this historical distinction in his call for a “disfederation of the states” signifies the crucial rhetorical function of colonial history in antebellum southern politics.

While the histories of New England and the American South can easily be seen in opposition to one another, another narrative of America’s colonial origins emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that moved beyond the borders of the United States and offered another view of American exceptionalism. This narrative centered on the figure of Christopher Columbus and the significance of European exploration in the New World. Situated in the context of a rapidly expanding nation and a complex global economy, the history of Columbus reminded U.S. citizens of their entanglement in the history and politics of the wider Atlantic world.

NOTES TO PART II

1 Qtd. in Waldstreicher, 267.

2 Wright also argues that the book was particularly attractive to French Huguenots and other potential emigrants who hoped to find large tracks of land and some measure of religious freedom in the southern colonies. Wright argues that Beverley may have intended for the history to serve as a piece of “propaganda” or perhaps just an advertisement for the colonies (xx). Because my focus is on the function
of the reprint, I have not sought to substantiate this claim; however, it seems likely that the book’s success on the European continent was due to its attractive representation of the settlements. I do not think that it was Beverley’s primary intention to market the book abroad for purposes of promoting the colonies, but it may have been an unintended, and not objectionable, consequence of its publication in London.

3 W. Fitzhugh Brundage has recently argued that the notion of collective memory became all the more imperative in the years following the Civil War, particularly as white and black southerners recalled very different versions of the antebellum South. While the subject of my work precedes Brundage’s chronologically, I too argue that collective memory became a divisive tool in the South to promote sectionalism, defend slavery, and ultimately encourage secession.

4 Even today, we rarely hear references to “our ancestors” landing in Virginia, or settling Roanoke or Jamestown. Instead, we are saturated with the language of Winthrop’s “City on a Hill” and “our ancestors” landing on Plymouth Rock. Sarah Vowell’s recent satirical history, The Wordy Shipmates addresses the continuing resonance of the Puritan errand in popular consciousness. Also see Seelye Memory’s Nation.

5 See William Clayton-Torrence, A Trial Bibliography of Colonial Virginia (1908).

6 Charles Campbell to Edmund Ruffin, June 17th, 1859.

7 I am using “South” and “Virginia” somewhat interchangeably, though I recognize that each of the southern states had a distinct print culture and sense of its own history. I am focusing on Virginia in the nineteenth century because it was one of the earliest states to establish a historical society and begin to publish historical works; Richmond was also the publishing hub of the South for many decades. However, I agree with Amy Thomas who writes, “Only by documenting the many Souths of the nineteenth century will we have a history of the book of this region commensurate with the richness of its peoples” (390).

8 Jared Sparks to Charles Campbell, 25 February, 1846.

9 See Richard Beale Davis, 192-232.

10 Letter IX of J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s Letters From an American Farmer (1782) illustrates this point clearly, depicting the excesses and leisure of southern life because of the temperate climate and because of slave labor.


12 Rawson explains that the South’s dependency on the North for printed material, particularly school textbooks, began to have serious political implications as Northern textbooks included passages that presented “scornful account[s] of plantation life in the South” (512). These representations led to an “anti-Northern-imprint reaction” in the South, which called attention to the need for southern printers (512). See also John Nerone, Violence Against the Press. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. Nerone writes that after the Nat Turner rebellion in particular, many southern states passed laws prohibiting or limiting the circulation of northern imprints (91). Anti-abolitionists frequently targeted northern printing houses for acts of violence, considering northern print culture a direct threat to the southern way of life.

13 See Strohm and Thomas for further discussions of Randolph’s publishing house.

14 Charles Campbell to Jared Sparks, 7 February, 1848.

15 William Beverley does give an interesting insight into why his family history had faded into obscurity. He writes, “Probably with the birth of our republican institutions, as aristocratic vanities passed away,
family genealogies were neglected & forgotten.” William Beverley’s view illustrates the vexed relationship between Virginians’ perceptions of themselves as republican revolutionaries and as descendants of the noble European cavaliers. The appeals to both a democratic and aristocratic spirit are never fully reconciled in the rhetoric of southern history.

16 John Holt Rice, a Presbyterian leader in Virginia, edited a new edition of Smith’s works entitled, The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captain John Smith, printed in Richmond in 1819. Though some selections from Smith’s work had been reprinted in the North, primarily Boston, this work was the only collection of Smith’s writings reprinted in the South in the nineteenth century. It is most likely this version that Randolph was selling in his shop, sold for $5 in 1856.

17 Sources that cite Campbell as the editor include Louis Wright’s 1947 reprint of Beverley’s history and a bibliographic description of Beverley’s work in a Trial Bibliography of Colonial Virginia, published in 1908.

18 From the catalogue, we see that Randolph charged $2.50 for new copies, but these may have also been the more finely bound copies that Campbell suggested. This price would have put the book well out of reach for many consumers, but, again, relatively few Virginians would have purchased first editions.

19 Few scholars have studied the history of the Beverley family since Louis B. Wright wrote his own extensive history of Virginia’s “first gentlemen” in 1940, which includes a chapter about Beverley titled, “Robert Beverley II: Historian & Iconoclast.” As I have mentioned, Wright also edited a new edition of Beverley’s History in 1947. Wright’s own material came, in part, from articles in the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography and other sources published out of Virginia in the early twentieth century and from archival documents from the colonial period. Virtually no other scholarly work on Beverley or his history exists.

20 All future citations from Beverley’s History refer to the 1855 reprint of the 1722 edition.

21 See Schell and Louise B. Wright for these characterizations of Beverley.

22 The preface to the 1722 edition contains a list indicating fifteen pages of Oldmixon’s history on which Beverley found “errors” and “falsities” (xviii). The list is, in part, a response to Oldmixon’s jabs at Beverley in print over Beverley’s criticisms of him; Oldmixon had also plagiarized Beverley’s material for his own history and then denied it in print. (Wright xix).

23 Stith’s The History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia: being an Essay towards a General History of this Colony was published in Williamsburg by William Parks in 1747.

24 In fact, Beverley only uses the term “slave” in three instances. He prefers to discuss slavery and servitude together.

25 Frederick Douglass’ description of the moral deterioration of Sophia Auld is exemplary of this trope in abolitionist writing.

26 The only other colonial text that takes a similar position is Roger Williams’ A Key Into the Language of America, published in London in 1643.

27 As I will discuss in chapter four, not all nineteenth-century historians agreed on the relationship between Virginia and the crown in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There were two kinds of narratives circulating in the period. The first emphasized Virginia’s cavalier origins, equating the founders of Virginia with the loyalist gentry of Britain, and the second emphasizing Virginia’s early republicanism, rooted in events like Bacon’s Rebellion.
Compared to the $3.00 annual cost of *Godey's Lady's Book* (in 1850), the subscription price was particularly steep.

This call for payment, under threat of being “purged” from the subscription list, frequented the magazine’s editor’s column. In 1843, when B.B. Minor took over the editorial seat, his first address gently reminded readers of the economic strains under which the magazine labored and expressed a hope that they would not take offense at “some little urging” from the publisher to “collect his dues.” See B.B. Minor, “Address to the Patrons of the Messenger.”

According to Frank Luther Mott, the *Messenger* was one of the only southern magazines to have “some northern circulation” but he maintains that “practically all southern periodicals were distinctly regional” because the “ardent southernism required of periodicals at the South prevented the attainment of national circulation and influence” (107).

According to B.B. Minor in his history of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the magazine and the Historical Society actually shared the same building in Richmond beginning in 1847. The overlap of contributors to both endeavors demonstrates the important reciprocal relationship between southern history and southern publishing.

According to O’Brien the notion that Southerners were more familiar with ancient history than their own was common. He explains that few educated Southerners would have been familiar with southern histories like those of Stith, Beverly, and Burk, “whereas not to have read Thucydides, Hume, and Gibbon would have been reprehensible. It followed that the Southern historical consciousness had a powerful sense of connection with times and places far beyond itself” (596).

The book was published by Petersburg, Virginia publishers Edmund and Julian C. Ruffin.

Though Grigsby was a well-respected historian, his argument against the cavalier myth was not as popular among laymen and, in fact, was criticized by the *Messenger*. In J.R. Thompson’s review of a speech Grigsby delivered in on the Virginia convention of 1776, he quarrels with Grigsby’s tone in criticizing the Cavalier narrative, calling it not “altogether as impartial as becomes history.” He writes, quite pointedly that “the tradition is uniform and unbroken that this Colony of Virginia was settled by a better class of people than any other, and until that tradition is refuted, we shall exercise the pleasing privilege of pinning our faith to it” (“Early History”110).

For example, in March, 1835, White published several “Selections from the papers of the Virginia Historical and Philosophical Society” including “an interesting record of the proceedings of a patriotic band in Norfolk Borough and Country in the early part of the Revolutionary war” (353). The piece, White hoped, would illustrate the “noble spirit of resistance to tyranny in our ancestors” (353).

After Minor left the magazine in 1847, Thompson “adopted the same expedient as had Minor,” according to Jacobs, and “endorsed a strongly sectional attitude” (94). Bagby, who assumed the editorship in 1860, is described as “an ardent southern nationalist” who “proudly maintained that this had been the first Virginia periodical to advocate secession” (Tucker 20).

Charles Campbell to Hugh Blair Grigsby. 7 September, 1866.

The *Messenger* was briefly revived from 1939-1944.
PART III
AMERICAN ADMIRAL:
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND ATLANTIC WORLD HISTORY

“The narrative of his troubled life is the link which connects the history
of the old world with that of the new.”
Washington Irving, *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*

INTRODUCTION

In 1697, Bartholomew Green’s shop printed Samuel Sewall’s *Pheanomena* *Quaedam Apocalyptica*, one of the earliest texts written in colonial New England on the subject of Christopher Columbus. The book discusses the second coming of Jesus Christ and the particular role that New England would play in the end times. In the millenialist view of history, which held that God’s Kingdom on earth was imminent in the New World, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and the landing of Columbus in the Caribbean were key events in this teleology. Sewell believed that the Jews ejected from Spain must have settled in the New World in the fifteenth century, followed by God’s newly chosen people, the Puritans, settling in New England in the seventeenth century. Such a union of God’s elect in the Americas would culminate in Christ’s return. Sewall imagines the triumphant moment when “the Messiah shall have gathered his Sheep belonging to this his American Fold: His Churches Musick being then compleat in the Harmony of Four Parts: The whole Universe shall ring again with seraphick
Acclamations, One Flock! One Shepherd!” (Frontmatter). For Sewell, the “Heroe Christopher Columbus a Genuese,” who was “manifestly Appointed of God to be the Finder of these Lands,” ultimately deserved praise for initiating what will be the establishment of the “New-Jerusalem” (47). This sermon demonstrates that for at least some of the New England Protestants, Columbus’s landing in the New World signified the first event in the establishment of God’s kingdom in the Americas. Columbus, like the Old Testament patriarchs, was a vessel in the unfolding of God’s providential plan for Christ’s return in the New World.

Following the American Revolution, some of the more explicit Protestant teleological language dropped out of accounts of America’s development from colony to nation; however, the notion that America did and would continue to possess a unique status in human history powerfully resounded in the new nation.¹ In the 1790s, Columbus’s role in the history of the Americas would undergo a revision in the context of post-revolutionary filiopietism. Instead of a vessel of God in the establishment of the New Jerusalem, Columbus was the independent genius whose own prowess and determination led to the establishment of an eventual democratic state. For instance, in an address to the Massachusetts Historical Society on October 23, 1792 Jeremy Belknap painted Columbus as a man of “vigorous mind,” whose “enterprising genius” enabled him to “comprehend the old systems, yet would not suffer him to rest in their decisions, however sanctified by time or by venerable names” (11). As a visionary who refused to be held back by European medievalism or the “old systems” of thought—regarding geography and astronomy, but also monarchy—Columbus became the paragon of the modern man. In the post-revolutionary construction, Columbus had boldly confronted a
world power to achieve his own impossible dream of discovery, fed by a spirit of independence and self-actualization that would eventually be sold as the American Dream itself. In the same discourse, Belknap emphasizes America’s role as a beacon of hope to other nations—a message not far removed from Sewell’s sentiments a century before. Belknap exclaims, “But we were designed by Providence for a nobler experiment still: Not only to open a door of safety to our European brethren here; but to show them that they are entitled to the same right in their native countries; and we have set them an example of a hazardous, but successful vindication of those rights, which are the gift of God to man” (37). Belknap’s speech contains the very sentiments of Winthrop’s “Model of Christian Charity” delivered on the Arabella in 1630 and, in turn, the language that has justified America’s involvement in world affairs throughout the twentieth century.

Paradoxically, Columbus’s status as a beaten down, mistreated, near-failure made him all the more attractive as an American hero. Part of the mythology of the American story in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the notion that at its core, America was a troubled space precisely because of God’s involvement in its establishment. As Sewall proclaimed in his theological tract, “Tho he Slay us, yet will we Trust in Him” (60). Sewall’s message is the essence of the Jeremiad, a literary form co-opted by the New England Puritans to underscore the dialectic of God’s love and chastisement within their community. The same kind of dialectic existed in representations of Columbus’s character; in his time, he was both praised for his genius and ingenuity and condemned for it, making him the ultimate symbol of the “burden” of being chosen for such a task as changing the known world. In 1828, in an oration at Charlestown on the fourth of July, famed speaker Edward Everett reminded the audience of Columbus’s doomed project: “If
he sink beneath the indifference of the great, the sneers of the wise, the enmity of the
mass, and the persecution of a host of adversaries, high and low, and give up the fruitless
and thankless pursuit of his noble vision, what a hope for mankind is blasted! But he
does not sink” (147). Exceptional because of their “election” by God and doomed by that
same election, the American colonies and Christopher Columbus shared similar stories in
North American historical discourse.

As I have previously described, in the years following the American Revolution
hero-worship was ubiquitous and Columbus, alongside George Washington, was a
natural choice for canonization. Much like the association of John Winthrop with John
Adams and Nathaniel Bacon with Patrick Henry, Columbus was drawn as a prefiguration
to Washington. Both men had chosen to embark on enterprises that would change the
world. Such parallels between Columbus’s voyages and the American Revolution were
common in the literature near the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1794, for example,
William Spotswood of Boston printed the text of a play written by Thomas Morton of
London entitled “Columbus: Or the Discovery of America,” in which Columbus bears
witness to American independence. The character Genius is describing the American
Revolution to which Columbus responds, “Oh! Could my life to those bright days,
extend,/To know their heroes-see their mighty deeds/’Twould all my dangers and my
wrongs repay” (8). In the final triumphant lines of the play, Columbus feels justified in
his discovery, despite the “woe” it had caused the Native Americans. He proclaims,
“That a great gen’rous nation yet unborn/Shall people my new earth, new empires
raise/On Freedom founded, teaching laws and arts,/And shielding nations from tyrannic
sway” (10). In this rendering, and in many others of this period, the era of oppression
and brutal conquest following Columbus’s discovery was an unfortunate but necessary progenitor to U.S. independence, which would “repay” the “wrongs” of conquest by ushering in an era of “freedom” or democracy.

In Joel Barlow’s famous tribute poem, *The Vision of Columbus* (1787), later revised and expanded into *The Columbiad* (1807), he blends “nationalist aims and Christian vision” by presenting Columbus in a dialogic exchange with an angel who can see into the future (Elliott 98). As Emory Elliott has described, Barlow used the encounter between an imprisoned and despondent Columbus and the angel to explore Barlow’s own “philosophical uncertainty and personal search for solutions to the cultural and social problems of America” (97). Elliott further argues that a key feature of the poem is the transition from “Christian interpretations of history to a more scientific understanding of the myth-making process that produced those religious stories” (102).

Thus, Barlow’s poem illustrates how Columbus became the vehicle through which citizens of the new nation might interrogate America’s role in history—whether it was providentially ordained or the result of the natural progression of reason and scientific inquiry. In the last stanza, it is Columbus’s spirit of discovery that the angel celebrates, showing Columbus the vast world he has uncovered:

Here, said the Angel with blissful smile,  
Behold the fruits of thy unwearied toil,  
To yon far regions of descending day,  
They swelling pinions let the untrodden way,  
And taught mankind adventurous deeds to dare,  
To trace new seas and peaceful empires rear; (257)

Both Morton’s play and Barlow’s poem express a belief that many early Americans shared: Columbus had been selected to usher in the age of “peaceful empires,” or
democracy. Thus, the teleological nature of the Columbian historical narrative fit well with other views of America’s exceptional history, which were rooted in New England or Virginia. Also, the fact that Columbus could never see the “fruits” of his “toil,” instead dying under the shadow of slavery and genocide in the colonies, made Columbus a sympathetic figure. In the context of eighteenth-century filiopietism, Columbus did not differ tremendously from the other founding fathers who, despite their flaws, were celebrated for their daring vision of a new democratic world.

Columbus’s voyage of discovery took on new significance in the early nineteenth century, in part, because of the nation’s changing perception of its role as an actor in world politics, economics, and history. As the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 asserted, America would consider it a right and responsibility to expand its territories westward. Expansion via the Louisiana Purchase—and the forcible removal of Native American populations—had already “eminently augmented [America’s] resources and added to [its] strength and respectability” just as admitting new states into the union had “greatly strengthened” the “basis of [its] system” (qtd. in Holden & Zolov 14). Even with the context of nineteenth-century expansionist policies as a backdrop, the colonial story of Spanish exploration and imperialism in the Caribbean raised questions about the relationship between U.S. history and Spanish imperial history; Columbus’s discovery of the Caribbean could not be easily read as a prefiguration of the other colonial settlements in North America whose histories had tended to dominate historical discourse in the nineteenth century. What, then, was Columbus’s role in the larger narrative of American history, as it unfolded in the nineteenth century?
This chapter considers this question by turning to Washington Irving’s *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), an example of both archival research and romantic historicism, a book concerned with material texts and with a compelling history of its own. One way of understanding Irving’s biography is to read it as an example of the “global remapping” of American history, to borrow from Paul Giles’s description. Undoubtedly, the question of America’s connectedness with South America (hemispheric) and Europe (transatlantic) has preoccupied scholarship on American literature and culture of late. Moving away from the privileging of “the nation” as a unit of study, studies of American literary history are increasingly occupied with what Donald Pease calls “the US’s embeddedness within transnational and transcultural forces” (20). While Pease explains this shift in literary studies as a consequence of a “newly globalized world,” it is unclear for whom this “globalized world” is “new” (20).² Irving’s biography serves as a prime example of how nineteenth-century historical writing took into account the relationship between colonial North American history and colonial South American history, particularly as events there pointed to the extension of democracy. This chapter shows, in part, that questions of America’s “embeddedness within transnational and transcultural forces” were on the forefront of writers, historians, politicians, and the reading public’s mind in the early national and early antebellum periods. Furthermore, this identification with transnationality existed simultaneously with convictions of America’s uniqueness; thus, I demonstrate how Irving attempts to negotiate both convictions.

Irving’s biography can also be read in the context of American antiquarianism and the development of historical writing in the early nineteenth century. Using Irving’s
biography as a representative text, this chapter inverts the relationship between archives and historians that I have featured in the preceding chapters by considering how Irving co-opted Spanish colonial records to craft his biography. In this way, the “reproduction” of texts is cast in a new light. Instead of reprinting colonial sources in his biography, Irving strategically made use of early modern Spanish documents to “authenticate” his work even as he creatively wove these archival sources into “romantic” historical narratives. Irving’s *Columbus*, I argue, is fundamentally a book about books; Irving is keenly concerned with the history of texts and the methods by which historians perform their research and integrate archival materials into their narratives. This chapter considers, then, the meta-commentary about historical writing that emerges within Irving’s work and the methodological debates that his biography prompted. Ultimately, the juxtaposition of the Spanish colonial archives with Irving’s biography of Christopher Columbus provides a rich site for examining the notion of U.S. exceptionalism—a myth propagated by all of the reprints I have discussed previously—in the context of Atlantic world history.

**The Evolution of Columbus**

Scholarship on the presence of Columbus in United States history flourished around the 500th anniversary of the landing in the Bahamas. In 1992, a number of scholars revisited the significance of Columbus and many pointed out the extent to which his identity was almost entirely constructed from some combination of archival evidence, speculation, and popular myth. In her comprehensive history, *America Discovers Columbus* (1992), Claudia Bushman argues rightly that “what we think of Columbus reflects what we think of ourselves” (190). Like history itself, the figure of Columbus was malleable according
to ideological positions and needs. Herbert Knust, in his study of eighteenth-century
Columbiads describes the binaries that characterize Columbus’s legacy:

Through inventive affiliation by his authors, Columbus had become an
agent of Catholicism, of Protestantism, and of scientific progress; of
rationality and of Rousseauism; of cultural self-affirmation and of
revolutionary activism; of heroic ideals and of bourgeois education; of
patriotic quests and of worldwide Unitarianism; of freedom and of
enslavement; of the creative spirit and of genocide; and of other currents,
shallows, and deep waters. (33-4)

As Knust’s description indicates, Columbus meant (and means) something different to
each nation and in each century. Because of this, Columbus can be studied as a kind of
invention, like America itself. As Edmundo O’Gorman argued in The Invention of
America (1961), America can be viewed as “an inspired invention of Western thought”
and not “the result of a purely physical discovery” (4). While this claim has been
commonly held for some time, particularly with the advent of post-colonial theory, it can
be effectively applied to my study of Columbus as a figure in the early American
republic. Like the New World itself, the Columbus that writers popularized in the
Western world was largely an invention. So little was known of the man himself and so
few “authentic” artifacts and accounts existed to create a stable identity; thus, he became
a kind of discursive invention that existed in texts produced for specific, but widely
varying, ideological purposes. As Matthew Dennis has argued, “Columbus as hero,
Columbia as symbol, and Columbianism as concept constituted, paradoxically, an
ahistorical use of history, one that proved to be easily deployed and momentarily useful,
if highly unstable in the end” (206). In fact, Americans knew little of Columbus’s story
outside of a few English-language accounts from the eighteenth century.
According to Bushman, Columbus became significant to Americans just after the revolution thanks in part to Scottish Historian William Robertson. His *History of America* (1777), Bushman argues, would have been the first comprehensive history of the Americas that made use of early archival material and translated it into English (40). To readers unfamiliar with Columbus’s voyages, Robertson’s history helped to cast him in the role of freedom-loving adventurer. Importantly, the figure of Columbus connected Americans to the “old” world, but because of his “outsider” status, he was free of the “taint from association with the European colonial powers” (Wilford 252). As Bushman describes it, following the Revolution, Americans clung to Washington and Columbus because “the combination of references to the new and old world gave stability to the nation’s identity” (53). But, still, Americans knew little about Columbus outside of Robertson’s account, which, as Joel Barlow noted in the preface to his poem *The Vision of Columbus*, was “not yet reprinted in America” as of 1787 “and therefore cannot be supposed to be in the hands of American readers in general” (vii). The American public’s muddied understanding of Columbus’s personal history helped to establish him as a mythical figure who could—and did—signify any number of hopes or anxieties in the U.S. In his study, *Narrating Discovery* (1992), Bruce Greenfield reiterates this perception of Columbus as a transitional and adaptable figure whose “boundlessness, in the positive sense of unlimited possibility, was accompanied by homelessness, a sense of loss as old familiar, communal, and institutional bases of identity were left behind” (117). This combination of opportunity and apprehension is echoed in some of the earliest epic poems produced in the new nation, including Barlow’s *The Vision of Columbus* and *The Columbiad* and Philip Freneau’s “The Pictures of Columbus: The Genoese” (1778). In
Ilan Stavans’s *Imagining Columbus: The Literary Voyage* (1993), Stavans argues that Columbus’s adventures were, “from the very beginning a literary event” and Columbus himself a “narrative entity with a thousand countenances” (xvi).

What was known about Columbus’s life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries came from a handful of early European sources, most of which were not translated into English even by the nineteenth century. The most influential yet most unreliable sources were Columbus’s son, Ferdinand’s biography of his father, published in 1571, and Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Historia de Las Indias*, written between 1527 and 1562, widely circulated, but not published until 1875. Las Casas was in possession of several significant sources, including portions of Columbus’s *Diario* and Ferdinand’s manuscript copy of the Columbus biography (Keen 183). Much like the Winthrop journal for New England historians, Las Casas’s manuscripts were the primary source for many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish historians. And like any manuscript, the more hands through which it passed and the more languages into which it was translated, the further it departed from the “authenticity” of an original hand-written document. Two other prominent histories that relied heavily on the above documents were Gonzálo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdes’s 1535 *Historia general y natural de las Indias* and Peter Martyr’s *Decades*, published in several editions and languages between 1504 and 1583 (Keen 176). Oviedo, whose history was sponsored by the Spanish crown, established Columbus as a hero of Spain, despite his Italian birth, and, “played into the royal hands by advancing the view that the Indies, then known as the Hesperides, had once before belonged to Spain” (177). Such a myth was helpful in combating the “Black Legend” of Spanish atrocities in the New World that Las Casas had established in his
own polemic, *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* 1552). These texts were not widely available in colonial America or even after the Revolution. Then, in the early nineteenth century, the Spanish government selected antiquarian Martín Fernández de Navarrete to comb the archives for material relating to Spanish exploration in the New World. Navarrete’s access to the previously closed archives ultimately produced a collection of documents on Spanish exploration entitled, *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde el fin del siglo XV*, published between 1825-1837. In 1824, Navarrete was selected as the director of the Royal Academy of History and began the most significant work of Spanish antiquarianism, *Colección de documentos inéditos*, published between 1842 and 1895 in 112 volumes. As I will discuss, Navarrete’s work proved invaluable to Washington Irving and historian William Prescott, America’s two most noted Hispanists. As Prescott wrote in his own *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic* (1838), his own work relied heavily on the “first fruits of [Navarrete’s] indefatigable researches” containing “letters, private journals, royal ordinances, and other original documents, illustrative of the discovery of America” (134). Prescott further notes that previous to the publication of Navarrete’s collections, Spanish archival materials “could not be met with out of Spain, nor in without much difficulty” (xi).

Navarrete faced several obstacles in compiling his collection, not the least of which was the poor condition of the artifacts. In an 1841 piece on the Navarrete archive in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the writer highlights the difficulty that Navarrete faced in editing the manuscripts which consisted of “letters, orders, memorials, decrees
and laws, exhumed from the literary catacombs where they had been so long interred, and deciphered from manuscripts, where the damps and decay of time have made almost illegible, characters, whose very meaning had nearly been forgotten” (232). The poor condition of what existed in the archive left researchers to depend entirely on Navarrete’s expertise for an understanding of the materials and their historical significance. In turn, the average American reader relied wholly on American writers like Irving and Prescott to relay these historical materials to the U.S., and still these writers were indebted to Spanish historians and American diplomats in Spain for supplying anything supplemental to the Navarrete materials. I emphasize the precariousness and scarcity of this archive to show, in part, the tremendous hindrances that historians faced in writing the history of Spain in the Americas. Importantly, Navarrete’s contribution to antiquarian research on the Spanish empire emerged just as that empire was crumbling in the Americas; thus, the political significance of the archive in this historical moment was keenly felt on both sides of the Atlantic and spurred the growth of Hispanism in the U.S.

In the 1820s, U.S. historians became more eager to write the history of the Spanish colonies because of the revolutionary events unfolding there. According to Anna Brickhouse, “A generation of US intellectuals simultaneously began to identify the revolutionary history of the United States with the histories of the Latin American states that had recently gained or were still fighting for their independence from Spain” (2). Some of the revolutionary rhetoric emerging from South America at this time resembled that of post-revolutionary fervor in the U.S. For example, in his address to the pan-American confederation in 1824, Venezuelan leader Simón Bolívar imagined a day “after a hundred centuries” when “posterity shall search for the origin of our public law, and
shall remember the compacts that solidified its destiny” (qtd. in Holden & Zolov 17). For Bolívar, just as it had been for the founding fathers in the U.S., political autonomy was the fulfillment of the country’s “destiny.” With the spirit of independence still lingering in the U.S., writers became interested in how the revolutions might effect relations between the two post-colonial regions. As Rolena Adorno points out, the U.S.’s involvement was not entirely disinterested. “U.S. interest focused on Spain because of hemispheric political motives,” Adorno argues. “Political intervention and economic ventures in the Americas made the United States the self-styled heir to Spain’s failed efforts, taking up where Spain’s Columbian legacy left off” (52).

Between 1800 and 1820, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico all achieved independence from imperial Spain. These newly independent nations held tremendous significance for the U.S. who was eager to rid the Americas of a European presence and engage the newly formed republics in unfettered trade. With Jared Sparks at its helm, the *North American Review* frequently brought revolutionary news to U.S. readers. In a letter to William Tudor in September, 1825, Sparks expressed a concern that U.S. citizens were unaware of the developments in Latin America and their immediate significance. He writes, “The increasing stability of the South American Republics makes it highly important, that as much knowledge as possible respecting them should be diffused among the people in this country” (Sparks Letter). Poor communication about the revolutions “have thus far kept the people of the United States in almost total ignorance of what has been doing at the South” and, most significantly, “hardly an editor in the country knows the Spanish language, and there is not to this day taken in Boston a single regular file of a newspaper
from the whole South American continent, or Mexico.” Arguing that there is an immediate audience for such content, Sparks informs Tutor that he is preparing a piece on Peru since “public interest is somewhat excited on the subject, and it is best to gratify it as far as it can be done.” Sparks’s letter reveals that while the public may not have known the details of the upheaval, they were captivated by the spread of independence throughout the Americas and, in turn, the possibility of further U.S. expansion. After all, the fervor for transnational relationships was also coupled with “the operations of imperialism” and Manifest Destiny (Brickhouse 29).

Accordingly, Columbus made for a useful symbol of U.S. interest in western and southern territories because, as Dennis puts it, he had come to be the patriarch of an “Empire of Liberty” (213). American citizens saw nothing wrong with such a formulation because nineteenth-century histories had hitherto demonstrated that all colonial events led to the Revolution which, in turn, justified expansion. Ralph Bauer has also argued that even contemporary anthologies of American literature have tended to reinforce “US American ideas of exceptionalism and manifest destiny, according to which the history of the entire colonial North America culminates in the foundation of the United States” (39). As I have shown in previous sections on New England and the American South, Bauer’s claim is largely accurate, given the compulsion to read and reproduce colonial history through the lens of America’s eventual independence. But Irving’s Columbus complicates this formulation somewhat. Situated throughout and between Europe and the West Indies, the colonial subjects of slavery, race, and empire are a key part of the narrative that Irving asks readers to acknowledge. By turning back to the fifteenth century and to Europe and the southern hemisphere for his biography of
Columbus, Irving revises the script that had traditionally placed separatism and revolution at the heart of U.S. history. Instead, discovery, conquest, and the moral quandaries surrounding slavery and the expulsion of Native American groups lie at the heart of Irving’s work and raise questions about the ethics of territorial expansion.

In this way, *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* anticipated, though did not fully explore, future objections to valorizing Columbus in the popular consciousness. In the late nineteenth century, representations of Columbus would shift once more historians became conscious and critical of the destruction wrought by imperialism as a system, not just by its Spanish manifestation in the West Indies. As Lilian Handlin has described, Columbus’s image evolved from patriot, to pilgrim, to working-class man, to asylum seeker, to tragic hero, to representative immigrant American, to the villain of the New World; American historians—she says the Massachusetts Historical Society in particular—were largely responsible for fashioning these versions (12). And when we contrast Belknap’s speech to the historical society in 1792 with that of Boston historian Charles Francis Adams in 1892, the evolution of Columbus is clear. Adams argues passionately that with regards to Columbus’s accomplishments, “honor has been unduly accorded while censure has been withheld” (24). If his speech is at all representative of the times, Columbus was falling quickly out of favor. Adams asks members of the society to consider the destruction that followed his discovery and conclude that “the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492, he then sailing in the service of Spain, instead of being an event of unqualified beneficence to mankind, was, upon the whole, one of the greatest misfortunes that has ever befallen the human race” (41). In Adams’s view, citizens of the U.S. should not overlook the years of
Spanish domination and the introduction of American slavery as mere necessary evils on the road to North American independence. Columbus did not know what he was looking for and could not effectively govern what he had found; he was by no means a figure to emulate. Thus, but by the end of the nineteenth century, Adams would call on the members of the historical community to question the alleged binary of empire and republic—looking increasingly like bedfellows—and instead interrogate the implicit oppressiveness of a system that produced inhumane systems of labor and fed the bottomless appetite of the wealthy. Speaking with the distance of thirty years from the America Civil War, Adams knew first-hand the divisions that slavery had brought in his own country and it seems clear, here, that he sees Columbus as its unwitting forefather.

While Irving does not go as far as Adams in his critique of Columbus, his biography implicitly asks readers to confront the past and present realities of European imperialism in the Americas. Irving’s book invites American readers to imagine and identify with a history that was not primarily Anglo-Saxon and that entwined the U.S. with a culturally rich, though politically turbulent, European history. I use the term “imagine” because just as Irving’s biography is the culmination of intense archival research, it is also a work of romance and imagination. In what follow, I particularly emphasize the tension between Irving’s romanticization of Europe and his desire to write an authentic history of the American character—a tension evident in his use of Spanish archival materials, his selective revision of these materials, and the romantic tenor of large portions of the narrative. A work of both scholarship and imagination, Irving’s biography of Columbus attempts to reconcile the popular narrative of American exceptionalism with the complex and violent political and religious history of New World
conquest. I argue that this reconciliation fails in part because of the presence of the Spanish archive itself, which testified to the destruction wrought by Columbus’s accidental landfall in the Caribbean, and in part because of Irving’s deep ambivalence about Columbus’s responsibility for that destruction.4
When Washington Irving moved to Madrid, Spain in the winter of 1826, he was broke, despondent, and desperate for a lucrative writing project. Few might have guessed that he would find it in the writing of a Columbus biography. Irving, after all, was not considered a legitimate historian and he was writing at a time when plenty of notable historians were flourishing in the U.S. Known for parodying the work of historical writing in *A History of New-York* (1809), Irving’s move to write, under his own name, a vigorously researched history was a challenge and a risk. A risk, in part, because Irving had seemed to pride himself on highlighting the constructed and unstable nature of historical archives. As Jeffrey Scraba has recently written, Irving’s invented historian, Knickerbocker, “[provided] an epistemological challenge to historical knowledge through his deluded reasoning” and Irving, in turn, “[provided] a generic challenge to historical reconstruction by celebrating the power of ambiguity, imagination, and fiction to shape understanding of the past” (398). In his immense history, *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), archives were at the heart of its perceived authenticity and “truth.” Publishing the biography under his own name, not that of Knickerbocker, Crayon, or any other pseudonym, signaled Irving’s turn from writing parodic histories and essayistic miscellanies to writing scholarly histories. To contemporary readers, this archival history came as a surprise from the celebrated author of such tales as *The Legend*
of Sleepy Hollow. According to a review of Columbus in the *New York Mirror*, Irving “turned to great advantage his movement toward serious history, although no one could have expected that development” (qtd. in Pfitzer 38). This “serious” turn, however, was more the result of a complex series of events—some economic, some global, some literary—than an intentional career change.

According to John McElroy, “The leading circumstance of this transformation in Irving’s career was an economic accident: The bursting of the South American Bubble in late 1825” (xviii). The collapse of the Bank of England, resulting in the Panic of 1825, was due in large part to risky, and often fraudulent, speculative investments in South America, a land seemingly teeming with commodities like cotton, silk, and wool (Haupert 512). The western world’s belief in the unlimited and ever-increasing economic value of Latin America had never really changed since Columbus’s time, but by the nineteenth century, world markets were tied together. A bank failure in London meant a global economic crisis. Irving not only had money tied up in the South American mines but also in the bank of Williams and Webb, which failed during the panic (McElroy xix). Having peered over the edge of financial ruin, Irving was struck with “a deep desire to have a substantial literary ‘property’ that would bring him steady, assured income over the years and be the foundation of an enduring reputation” (xx). Like Columbus himself, Irving needed a vehicle by which his legacy—financial and figurative—would be secured and, for both men, that vehicle was a popular history.⁵

Shortly after Irving’s economic meltdown, he received a letter from Alexander Everett, U.S. ambassador to Spain, informing him of a possible project. Everett explained that the work of Spanish antiquarian Don Martín Fernández de Navarrete was
going to press and that translating “a version of the work into English, by one of our own country, would be peculiarly desirable” (McElroy 3). Irving was not especially drawn towards a translation project but, as he revealed in a letter to John Howard Payne, “It is the best thing that could present in the form of a job, and just now I absolutely want money” (xxix). Irving and his brother, Peter, decided to leave France for Spain in the hopes that this translation project would secure them financially. But after just a few weeks with the materials, the project took a new turn. As Irving explains in the preface, Navarrete’s archive was a hodge-podge of “disconnected paper and official documents” which might have proved “repulsive to the general reader, who seeks for a clear and continued narrative” (3). A translation did not seem economically viable, nor did Irving seem invested in such a laborious project; he began to think seriously about a biography. One major factor in this decision was the influence and patronage of American Consul and bibliographer Obadiah Rich. He had amassed a private library that “contained about four thousand books, nearly a hundred manuscripts, and a large array of tracts relating to early Columbian America, and probably exceeded the Americana in any national library outside of Spain in the 1820s” (“Integrity” McElroy 4). Rich was almost single-handedly furnishing the materials for the historiographic efforts of U.S. Hispanists. William Hickling Prescott, whose degenerative eye condition prevented him from traveling abroad, composed his histories of Spanish conquest almost entirely from materials furnished from abroad by Rich. Aware of Irving’s original intention to translate the Navarrete collection, Rich invited the Irvings to stay in his home in Madrid for two years while Irving worked on the translation. Though Rich would eventually take credit for encouraging Irving to write a biography of Columbus, it is clear from Irving’s own letters
and the preface that the decision to abandon the translation was primarily commercial. John Murray, Irving’s publisher in London, would not accept Irving’s offer of a translation of the Navarrete collection; plus, Irving had not yet completed the translation—a daunting task—and wanted 1,000 guineas “sight unseen” for the material (xxxix). With no book deal and a mass of never-before-seen Spanish-American materials at his disposal, Irving took some time to consider his options. Within a month of his arrival in Spain and with no other project on the horizon, Irving began to sketch out a life of Columbus. And once he began, he did not stop writing. As McElroy describes it, “The next two years of [Irving’s] life would be the most industrious and solitary that he had ever lived” (xl). His chief worry through the entire writing process was that the American reading public would reject his stylistic sea-change; as he wrote in a letter to Henry Brevoort on the eve of Columbus’s publication, “[I] look forward to cold scrutiny & stern Criticism; and this is a line of writing in which I have not hitherto ascertained by own powers” (lxiii). Just after the publication, he expressed to Brevoort again the belief that if the book failed, it was because the public believed “it must be impossible for me to tell the truth with plausibility” (lxxiv). Irving feared that after a career of satire and pseudonyms, the public would neither recognize nor trust the name and authority of Washington Irving.

While the thoroughly researched biography marked a genre, tone, and style shift for Irving, its composition relied on Irving’s long-standing interest in antiquarianism. Forasmuch as he satirized the outcome of rummaging through the neglected papers of Deidrich Knickerbocker, the Sketchbook (1819-20) evidences a fascination with old things, particularly old British things. Jeffery Rubin-Dorsky argues in his psychological
study of Irving that his “celebrated love of antiquity” stemmed from his sense of homelessness in early nineteenth-century America (27). But Irving’s interest in antiquarianism seems less rooted in personal desire or loss, than a belief in the importance of historical preservation to which organizations like the American Antiquarian Society were so committed. The problem for antiquarians and for Irving, however, was that the United States was not an old country and had few remnants of antiquity, while Britain and Europe were full of old cemeteries and landscapes, old books and castles, old ruins and rulers. America’s “youth” implied that it was starting its national “life” anew without the burden of history; but, in turn, it signified a historical and literary shallowness that writers like Irving regretted. Irving’s personal sense of “homelessness” seems less acute than Irving’s sense of America’s insignificance historically, even as Americans trumpeted their exceptional status. It is not antiquarianism, then, that Irving is criticizing through Knickerbocker, but rather America’s pretentions to being “antique” at all. What scholars like Rubin-Dorsky have seen as Irving’s reluctance to “seriously [invoke] the American past” (unlike James Fenimore Cooper, for example) and in turn become the “official spokesmen for a national literature” could be described as a lack of faith in the productivity of that venture. Why must Americans become antiquarians at all? America should inspire feelings of the “sublime and beautiful” because of its “natural scenery,” writes Irving in “The Author’s Account of Himself” (Sketchbook 9). While in Europe, “were to be seen the masterpieces of art, the refinements of highly cultivated society, the quaint peculiarities of ancient and local custom.” Irving distinguishes the two worlds this way: “My native country was full of youthful promise; Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins
told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle” (9).

While American landscapes contained beauty, England’s landscapes contained history. This historical depth was frequently conflated with cultural superiority. As Irving biographer Andrew Burstein notes, “Even in Irving’s time, British prejudice caused some to think of the average American as closer to the American Indian than to the proper English gentleman” (162). The common association of America with nature and Europe with culture, led Irving (through Crayon) to seek historical subjects outside the U.S. where the work of antiquarianism thrived.

In “The Art of Bookmaking,” Crayon locates the nexus of antiquarian work and historical publishing at the British Library. In this essay, Crayon collapses the distinction between composing a text and printing it by referring to the work of writing as “bookmaking” itself. He observes a “little gentleman in bright coloured clothes” fashioning a book from “leaves of manuscripts, taking a morsel out of one, a morsel out of another” (63). Selecting “morsels” from various ancient texts, the historians and antiquarians at work in the British Library are creating new books from olds ones and allowing the “beauties and fine thoughts of ancient and obsolete writers” to once again “flourish and bear fruit” and “spring up under new forms” (63). This is very the “art of printing” that Jeremy Belknap described as being the great preserver of texts—a preservation effort that is necessary to the health of the nation and its archive. Crayon’s final analogy is particularly telling:

> What was formerly a ponderous history, revives in the shape of a romance—an old legend changes into a modern play, and a sober philosophical treatise, furnished the body for a whole series of bounding and sparkling essays. Thus it is in the clearing of our American
Here, Crayon discusses the use of antiquities in composing new works. His discussion speaks to the important work of historical publishing that would bring old texts to new readers. Reprinting or “bookmaking” can both alter the text—from history to romance, as Irving would do—and “polish” an old work until it is “sparkling.” The implication, here, is that antiquarian research furnishes the work of the historian or author. Irving unwittingly foreshadows the relationship he would eventually have with Navarrete and the Spanish archive. Notably, America is not the place where such antiquarianism is cultivated, as Irving describes of England, but where the land is cultivated instead.7 Thus, early in Irving’s writings we can observe an interest in antiquarianism, as it is practiced abroad, as a way to preserve the past. The Columbus biography offered to Irving a unique opportunity to locate his project in both the Old World and the New. He would glean antiquities from Europe and present them for the first time to an American reading audience who was primed to embrace Columbus as a hero. Irving would hold the distinction of being the first American to access the Spanish archives and then he would send “home” a serious and substantive biographical work that would legitimize American historical writing.8

It is difficult to disentangle Irving and the Columbus project from the growth of literary nationalism in the 1820s and tremendous growth of American writers writing on American subjects. Though Irving was not explicitly dedicated to a nationalist project, he was still cognizant of a need to write for an American audience, though not exclusively, and to represent the progress of American letters. As I will discuss, critics
have commonly held that Irving “Americanized” Columbus to this end. However, it seems more accurate to say that Irving secured the Spanish archive for American purposes in a kind of global transaction. In a letter to a friend, Irving explains the expanse of Obadiah Rich’s collection and how, “he has of recent Years made it a source of great profit, by supplying the Bibliomanics of London with the rich spoils of Spanish literature” (McElroy xlvii). Irving characterizes his work in the Spanish archive using the language of imperialism. Irving seems to be playfully evoking the language of Spain’s much-condemned lust for gold in the New World. To the non-Spanish historian, this archive was the “New World,” the uncharted territory of Latin American history. The Spanish archive of texts from the age of conquest, so long kept hidden, were now circulating relatively freely and, as in Irving’s rendering of the British library, were “[springing] up under new forms.” These “spoils” would furnish the work of history and, in Irving’s case, literal personal fortune. In 1903, John Boyd Thatcher, author of his own history of Columbus, critiqued this seemingly imbalanced relationship between the laborious work of Navarrete and that of American writers like Irving. He writes, “Navarrete did a greater work for the student than many Irvings, and yet it required the fascination of the American’s pen to fix the attention of the student on the vast field of information furnished by the Spanish scholar. . . Patience, toil, and unthanked labour, is the portion of Navarretes of all times” (qtd. in McElroy “Integrity” 12). I will later discuss the charges that some critics leveled, and continue to level, against Irving for his suspected “plagiarism” of Navarrete’s work, but here this sentiment from Thatcher points to the sometimes vexed relationship between antiquarian researcher and historian. Irving and other “bibliophiles” were ultimately reaping the harvest for which Navarrete had
toiled in the archive. Of course not just any “American pen” could spark the popular interest in such topics; Irving, the cosmopolitan expatriate whose prose style was nearly idolized, seemed to be the only writer capable of garnering mass appeal. For Irving, the Spanish archive was a physical representation of Europe’s rich cultural heritage, which he so admired, but the contents of that archive became, in his hands, an American inheritance. In this way, Irving was making transparent the mediation process between the archival material and the written historical narrative. While in the case of some reprints, the editorial process can be “hidden,” Irving seems interested in revealing the compositional mechanisms behind archival, historical writing and editing. Put simply, Irving saw himself as a “bookmaker” during the Columbus project. He writes in the preface that materials on Columbus’s life and voyages “while numerous” still “existed only in manuscript, or in the form of letters, journals and public documents” (3). Much like a reprint, then, Irving’s book would present these rare morsels to the public in an “authentic” way, but in the style of a popular history; and, because Irving’s prose and structure were famously excellent, his finished book would not show the “seams.”

Authenticity was important to Irving in part because his work was in competition with bona fide historians of the period. His main challenger was Prescott whose first history, *The History of Ferdinand and Isabella*, was not published until 1837, almost a decade after Irving’s *Columbus*, but was the result of ten years of intensive research and writing. Prescott was extremely anxious that his labors on *Ferdinand and Isabella* and his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843) would be in vain. In a letter to Obadiah Rich, Prescott informs him that Irving’s *The Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada* (1829) is currently “in the press” in Boston. Noting that “it looks like something between
Romance & History,” he asks Rich, “Can you tell me whether he is likely to occupy himself further with a discussion of the period on which I am engaged?—A person will fare poorly who comes after such a writer.” Prescott knew well the magic of Irving’s “American pen” and though Prescott himself was an established Hispanist, his work could not achieve the widespread popularity of Irving’s. In his own history of Ferdinand and Isabella, he includes a passage articulating a similar position on Irving:

Mr. Irving’s late publication, the ‘Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada,’ has superseded all further necessity for poetry, and unfortunately for me, for history. He has fully availed himself of all the picturesque and animating movements of this romantic era; and the reader, who will take the trouble to compare his Chronicle with the present more prosaic and literal narrative... The fictitious and romantic dress of his work enables him to make it the medium for reflecting more vividly the floating opinions and chimerical fancies of the age, which he has illuminated the picture with the dramatic brilliancy of coloring denied to sober history. (109)

Prescott’s note betrays his skepticism of the veracity of Irving’s historical work and, almost pathetically, his feelings of personal inferiority. He nearly apologizes for the “sober” tone of “literal narrative” on which history, as opposed to “poetry,” must rely. In a later passage in his history, he notes that Irving presented Navarrete’s research in a “lucid and attractive form which engages the interest of every reader” (134). However, most of the paragraph is dedicated to the brilliance of Navarrete and his “indefatigable researches,” from which Irving clearly profited. Prescott’s insecurity about the sober tone of his work, then, is combated by subtly questioning the rigor of Irving’s research; for Prescott, Irving was at his core a romancer who deserved credit primarily for popularizing Columbus, not for contributions to scholarship. Even before Irving published his biography, the North American Review ran a review of Navarrete’s archive
that emphasized the preference for historical “fact” over imaginative “fiction.” The reviewer explains that while “writings of finished elegance, and composed expressly for popular perusal, are more inviting, undoubtedly, to a large class of readers,” the archival material, “however repulsive to some by reason of their antiquated, rude, or unpolished style, are the only genuine sources of historical truth” (emphasis mine 268). This review echoes Prescott’s critique of Irving and represents one scholarly line on historical research in the period: the work of archival research is far more valuable and profitable than creative composition, even if the latter form reflects public taste.

As a pseudo-historian, Irving felt similar insecurities about Prescott’s work. In a letter to Prescott written in January, 1839, Irving informs Prescott that he had “always intended to write an account of the conquest of Mexico, as a suite to my Columbus” but had not gathered the necessary materials for the project while in Spain (Ticknor 168). Prescott was in the process of writing his history of the conquest and, interestingly, Irving covertly responds in the letter to the accusations of “romantic dress” that Prescott had leveled against him. He explains, “Indeed, the more I considered the subject, the more I became aware of the necessity of devoting it to great labour, patient research and watchful discrimination, to get at the truth and to dispel the magnificent mirage with which it is enveloped.” Irving fears that without such “labour” as Prescott was now undertaking, the book would be “liable to be subverted and superseded by subsequent works grounded on those documentary evidences that might be dug out of the chaotic archives of Spain” (168). He goes on to explain that he had always found the subject filled with “romantic charm” which “excited [his] imagination” but ultimately, the subject should be left to “extensive research and thorough investigation” which only
Prescott could carry out (169). Like Prescott’s passage above, Irving’s letter contains a note of condescension, suggesting that Irving held the rights to the Mexico story but was benevolently giving them up to Prescott. He states more than once that the subject had long captivated him and it seems he is quite taken with the “magnificent mirage” surrounding the history and not eager to “dispel” it, as good historical objectivity required of him. Prescott, the sober researcher, the dry investigator, would be left to write the history of the conquest of Mexico. And, as Anna Brickhouse reveals, Prescott leaned more towards an Irvingesque narrative style for Conquest, “[exploiting] a literary mode that its author repeatedly referred to as ‘the air of romance rather than of sober history’” (74). This exchange between Irving and Prescott also highlights the still-unclear distinction between history and romance in the 1820s and 1830s. Charles Brockden Brown, who had written at the turn of the nineteenth century on this subject, quite rightly noted that “history and romance are terms that have never been very clearly distinguished from each other” (251). That was perhaps no more true in Irving’s day than it had been in Brown’s. However, as historical writing became professionalized in the U.S., writers and readers of history began to solidify the rules and requirements of scholarly historical writing in part because of the increased availability of primary source documents.

Prescott and Irving’s discussion of romance also points to a significant reason why Hispanism thrived in the States. The era of empire building and exploration coupled with the “dramatic brilliancy” of Columbus’s story captured the imagination of historians and readers alike. In fact, Irving once wrote, “In the present day, when popular literature is running into the low levels of life. . . . I question whether it would not be of service for the reader occasionally to turn to these records of prouder times and loftier modes of
thinking, and to steep himself to the very lips in old Spanish romance” (Papers 457).\textsuperscript{12}

With this sentiment, we recognize Irving’s romanticization of early modern history, those “prouder times,” but also his sense that literary subjects must be “elevated” above the common. Irving felt that Spanish subjects would not only be appealing to U.S. readers, but would kindle their imaginations in ways that local subjects could not. As Pere Gifra-Adroher has argued, Irving’s romanticism would be most explicit in Tales of the Alhambra (1832), a text “waver ing between history and romance” (124). In this text, published after Columbus, Irving’s constructs an ideal Spain “in terms of a grandiose medieval past” and ignores the “appalling truths he had discovered there” regarding the Inquisition, colonization, and the expulsion of the Jews (123). As I will argue, we can explicitly see expressions of this dilemma in the pages of Columbus through Irving’s vacillation between romantic construction and archival research, between imagination and empiricism. Indeed, as the narrative progresses, Irving’s romantic perception of European history and his identification with European culture wanes; that is, as Richard McLamore describes, “Irving appears to have had little faith in the construction of an independent ‘America’ with concepts salvaged from the customhouse of European expansionism” (43). While the romance of Europe may have inspired Irving’s original conception of Columbus, Irving’s biography does not ultimately argue for a European model of American progress or identity. Instead of casting Columbus as an ideal model for national behavior, then, Irving paints Columbus as a flawed individual who vacillated between medievalism and enlightened rationalism and whose discovery of the New World was some combination of genius, predestination, and ill-fated accident.\textsuperscript{13}
The story of Spanish exploration in the West Indies had long held negative connotations for Americans in the U.S. in part because of the few colonial accounts that had circulated previous to the Navarrete publication. Specifically, books by Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, himself an antiquarian collector, implicated Spain in the worst crimes against humanity recorded in the modern world. His reinforcement of what was known as the “Black Legend” made him a hero in England—who would use his accounts to highlight the benignity of their own colonial project—and eventually the U.S. Las Casas’s father had accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to the West Indies and in 1502, Las Casas himself made his first trip there. In 1512, he was ordained in Hispaniola and charged with the mission of evangelizing the Amerindians through the infamous encomienda system (Donovan 4). In 1552, after years of speaking out against Spanish treatment of the native populations, he published The Devastation of the Indies, which was translated into several languages and ultimately spread the Black Legend across Europe; and, as legends are wont to do, this one had tremendous staying power. The Devastation of the Indies not only solidified the widely held belief in Spanish barbarism, but it made Las Casas the voice of Native American independence, and, eventually, all freedom from tyranny. As Daniel Castro points out, “In the nineteenth century, precursors of Indoamerican independence like Simón Bolívar in Venezuela and Fray Servando Teresa y Mier in Mexico often invoked his work as a paradigm of struggle and resistance to be emulated” (4). Yet, “as with all mythological figures” his characterization depends on “where one’s sympathies lie” (4). As Castro’s research indicates, Las Casas “rarely had direct contact with indigenous people” and many of his
efforts were “rarely translated into tangible gains for the natives” (6). Thus, far more than his actions, his words—his polemic—established him as a hero of the downtrodden.

Between 1527 and 1562, Las Casas was composing Historia de Las Indias, a massive history of Spanish colonialism that was not published until 1875. Because of his family’s connection with Columbus, he had access to two of the most valuable sources on Columbus’s life and voyages: portions of Columbus’s Diario and a manuscript copy of Ferdinand Columbus’s (also known as Fernando Colón’s) biography of his father (Keen 177). The Diario, which Benjamin Keen refers to as “an abstract, part summary and part direct quotation” was unreliable and, naturally, Ferdinand’s biography was profusely filiopietistic. Ferdinand was also a bibliophile, amassing over 15,000 books and manuscripts which were eventually willed to the cathedral chapter of Seville (“Preface” Keen viii). Ferdinand’s The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by His Son Ferdinand was the result of an admiration for his father, a love of scholarship, and a corresponding bitterness towards Ferdinand the Catholic and all others who had mistreated Columbus during his life (xiii). This romanticized history of Columbus heavily influenced Las Casas, who in turn influenced Spanish historian Antonio de Herrera, whose Historia (1615) relied in part on a manuscript of Las Casas’s unpublished history (“Columbus” Keen 178). Keen argues that these sources ultimately established a “durable apologetic tradition in the Columbian literature” which, in the nineteenth century, was “best illustrated by Washington Irving’s biography of Columbus” (175). Irving did rely heavily on Las Casas, Columbus, and Herrera, among others, in his biography, but not merely because they were part of the archival collections made available to him. Since the chief contributors to Columbian history were a dissenting
human rights activist and the zealous son of the admiral himself, Irving had to determine if his own biography would reinforce their ideological and historical positions or not. The decision of how to use the available Spanish sources was further complicated by Navarrete’s and other Spanish historians’ view of Las Casas and Spanish colonial history more generally.

For example, Robertson’s history (1777), which I briefly discussed above, was banned in Spain for its representation of the Spanish as “greedy and cruel” (Arias 129). In response to Robertson’s history, King Charles III appointed Spanish historian Juan Bautista Muñoz to compose his own colonial history, entitled Historia del Nuevo Mundo (1793). According to Santa Arias, Muñoz’s history was successful insofar as it relied on original sources, access to which was denied to Robertson; but in many ways it was too late to offer a “corrective history” of Spain, which had “suffered many years of criticism hurting its own national identity and image as a modern European power” (129). With this context, it is not surprising that the new unveiling of the Spanish archive would be controversial and politically charged. To a reviewer for the North American Review in 1827, the archive’s publication was clearly part of King Ferdinand VII’s attempt to secure the Spanish legacy. The collection, “a durable monument of Spanish greatness and power, and a work containing attractive instruction for the inhabitants of both hemispheres” couldn’t have come at a better time in the history of Spanish colonization (265). For, Spain was now lying “amid the ruins of her magnificent empire, stripped of those mighty colonial possessions, which were at once her pride and her shame, her glory and her disgrace, the source of all her riches and the instrument appointed to work her downfall” (266). Like colonial histories reprinted in North America, Spanish colonial
histories were meant to resurrect the glorious past and reinstate it in the present, if not materially than in the national imagination. Las Casas’s critical view of Spanish imperialism posed a tremendous threat to Spanish historians of the period. The review, written well before Las Casas’s *Historia de Las Indias* was published, indicates that the Spanish Academy of Spanish History intentionally kept Las Casas’s manuscripts from publication because of their “objectionable character” (278).16 Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, in his important study of Spanish nationalism and history in the nineteenth century, points to the conflict over Las Casas as a major quandary in Spanish historiography. Las Casas was considered by turns as Spain’s “most ardent patriot,” the first “American rebel” and, simply, “a bad historian and a bad Spaniard” (134-5). In fact, in 1821, Navarrete headed a committee of the Royal Academy of Spanish History that decided not to publish Las Casas’s historical work because it was a “touchstone for all those who envy and vilify Spain’s glories” (qtd. in 139). Thirty years later, the committee relented, worrying that the work would be printed first by “foreigners” and thus sully the “good reputation” of the academy (139).17 The Spanish crown had always been concerned about how Spanish colonial documents would be interpreted by the international community; thus, when Navarrete’s archive was released to the public, it included Navarrete’s gloss on the documents and the events they recited. As Schmidt-Nowara further explains, the introduction to Navarrete’s collection reads as a “defense of empire and nation” that emphasizes “the benevolence of Spain’s treatment of the Indians, the vainglory of Columbus and his family, the injustice of Bartolomé de las Casas’s criticism of conquistadors, the ingratitude of creole revolutionaries, and the bias and
ignorance of the European historians who pilloried Spain for its conduct in the New World” (32).

It is not surprising that Navarrete would mediate between text and reader in this way since, as I have demonstrated, this was part of the work of antiquarianism.

However, the reviewer from the North American Review takes issue with one particular instance of what he considers historical revisionism. The writer ends his review with an impassioned “protest against the attempt, which Señor Navarrete makes, to divert the indignation of posterity from the selfish conduct of Ferdinand” (287). From the U.S. perspective, King Ferdinand was the diabolical foil to Columbus, representing the power of greedy monarchs to squelch the independent, enterprising spirit. Admitting that not all “glorious lessons of heroism and patriotic devotion” throughout history are true, the writer nonetheless argues that the tyranny of Ferdinand—his “criminal enormities of power”—is no doubt an immutable historical fact. The writer blames Navarrete for trying to rewrite history by intentionally misreading the documents he is editing, all in the spirit of “interested sophistry” (287). Suddenly, the great antiquarian of Spain, whose meticulous research gained him universal praise, was being labeled a calculating revisionist. The reviewer then enumerates the many instances of Ferdinand’s injustice towards Columbus during his life and after his death, using the archive for support. In his final remarks, he paints Navarrete as a monarchist who, “in his zeal to vindicate the character of a Spanish king. . . .seems to have lost sight of the truly monstrous injuries, which Columbus was doomed to suffer” (290). Navarrete’s favorable representation of Ferdinand is colored as a “desperate task” that “should bring imputations upon his own candor and discrimination” (294). That the reviewer would call into question the
integrity of Navarrete’s project reveals the extent of the reviewer’s own prejudice against particular historical narratives. As a citizen of the U.S., the reviewer cannot abide a defense of monarchy, but especially a monarchy that may well have prevented the discovery of the Americas by refusing to support Columbus. Ferdinand seemed to represent everything that was objectionable about a monarchy—he stood in the way of progress, he was a warmonger, he was paranoid, he was hard-hearted, and he was gold-obsessed. Navarrete’s defense of his actions, then, highlighted the fundamental disjuncture between Spanish (colonizer) and American (colonized) interpretations of history. Navarrete’s own work, then, was at least partially informed by a recuperative historiographic project sponsored by the Spanish crown.

Likewise, the demands of the American reading public, eager for national heroes and national writers, forced Irving to consider how the Spanish archive could be used in service of both literary nationalism and the academic field of hispanism. Yet, the archive itself, to which Irving had unprecedented access, was just as much a source of vexation as it was inspiration in the writing of Columbus. The texts and manuscripts were themselves “unreliable” in the sense that they had survived nearly four centuries of being passed around, partially printed, revised, and translated; the Navarrete edition of archival material was potentially “unreliable” because of Navarrete’s editorial methods. These complications explain why Irving continued to revise his Columbus into the late 1840s. In the initial drafting stages, Irving did not seem overly concerned about properly citing or critically evaluating the sources material. According to McElroy, the main reason that Irving was able to draft “seven hundred pages of manuscript in two and a half months of research and writing” was that he closely followed the materials from Fernando
Columbus, Las Casas, Oviedo, and Peter Martyr (xlv). Navarrete himself was also an important resource for Irving and he frequently provided Irving with access to additional manuscript materials and feedback. But the project was constantly delayed by the nature of the research and volume of materials available to Irving. As the project progressed, Irving began to complain about “the dubieties and contrarieties of Columbian research materials,” notes McElroy (xlv). In a letter to good friend Thomas Storrow, Irving bemoans the fact that “there are so many points of dispute, and so many of a scientific nature into which I have been obliged to enter with great study and examination” (lxi). Added to these “scientific” labors was the constant pull between Irving the antiquarian and Irving the romance writer. Throughout *Columbus’s* composition, Irving was torn between fidelity to the archive and filling in the blanks with his own imaginative invention. In another letter to Storrow, Irving explains that he intends to be “scrupulously attentive & accurate, as I know I shall be expected to be careless in such particulars & to be apt to indulge in the imagination” (xlvii). In these letters, Irving acknowledges not only what readers might expect of him—to be “careless”—but also his own tendencies towards romance. Despite Irving’s insistence on the accuracy of his biography, by his own admittance the research materials contained “dubieties and contrarieties” that required his intervention, and with intervention comes interpretation. It was always clear that Columbus would be the “hero” of Irving’s story, but he also had to consider the extent to which he would reinforce, or question, the apologetic tradition I have described.

More broadly, Irving also needed communicate the value and function of the Columbus story to American readers. One metaphor that Irving used to describe the
biography of Columbus speaks to this question. In a letter to Colonel Thomas Aspinwall in 1827, Irving called the biography a “link in history that every complete library must have” (lxxxi). The metaphor of the link is useful in thinking about the function of Irving’s biography in the nineteenth century. In fact, scholarship on Irving’s *Columbus* tends to use this metaphor, or its equivalent permutations, to discuss the book. First, Columbus himself could be treated as a link between Europeans and Americans. As Schmidt-Nowara argues, Columbus was a safe choice as a “linking” figure because he “represented fraternal harmony between Spain and the Americas” (57). The book could also serve as a link between the contemporary literary worlds of Europe and America; according to Ilan Stavans, Irving “wanted to be recognized as the facilitator of communication between one side of the Atlantic and the other” (24). As Andrew Burstein posits, the book linked Irving to both Europe and America as he became “a ‘citizen of the world’” (221). For William Shurr, the book links young America directly to Columbus, who had “shown himself superior to kings” and “faced and subdued a wilderness” (para. 4). Finally, Adorno argues compellingly that the book represents “Navarrete’s and Irving’s mutual transatlantic gaze” which “reveals their complimentary desire to discover or reveal in history the foundations of a glorious past and mobilize them as harbingers of the national future” (86). Adorno’s argument, though, places Navarrete and Irving on “opposite vantage points in the Old World and the New,” but it is not clear from Irving’s career or his work that he is, in fact, the voice of the “New.” For, in this language of “linking,” we assume either seamless metaphorical comparisons (Columbus is George Washington) or strict binaries (America and Europe are the opposite of each other). This overarching metaphor which has defined studies of Irving’s
Columbus, ignores the fact that Irving and his book frequently vacillate between all of these positions. There are times when Irving’s narrative voice identifies clearly with the Spanish crown—and even Columbus’s devout Catholicism—and times when he writes as an enlightened, democratic, Protestant American; likewise there are instances in which Columbus is portrayed as irrational and superstitious and instances where he is praised for his scientific prowess and “natural genius” (13). Irving as the author/narrator even moves in between his identification with Europe and America, and sees this movement as natural and professionally necessary.

Irving’s biography likewise moves between different genres of writing. Placed in the context of antiquarianism and historical writing in the nineteenth century, Irving’s approach to his subject centers on the meticulous methodology of antiquarian research. Yet, the book’s romantic coloring also places it in the tradition of the historical romance. In this way, Irving’s biography does precisely the work that he describes in “The Art of Book-Making.” He takes the Spanish archive, “What was formerly a ponderous history,” and “revives [it] in the shape of a romance.” I would argue that it is the very act of “reviving” or bringing archival materials into the present, that gives them a romantic “shape.” Nathaniel Hawthorne, in the preface to The House of the Seven Gables defines the romance similarly, as a legend that “[attempts] to connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us” (3). Mathew Pethers’s analysis of The Sketchbook is also useful here; of Irving’s most famous work he observes that “Irving’s ability to recast European forms in an American hand, and his tendency to blur the lines between history and fiction, could be an artistic advantage in the formation of Americas national literature” (155). Thus, Irving reimagines and resituates the Spanish archive in
the context of a new American world that was rapidly changing from a mass of European colonies to independent nations. As was the case with Savage’s construction of Winthrop, or Campbell’s construction of Bacon, Irving’s post-revolutionary perspective informed his characterization of Columbus as an American “father,” despite the despair associated with his discovery.

Contemporary scholars have often pointed to Irving’s filiopietism as a core weakness of the Columbus biography. Claudia Bushman sarcastically claims that, “if Columbus had wanted to become an American hero . . . he could not have chosen a better biographer than Washington Irving” (107). In his 1990 biography of Columbus, Kirkpatrick Sale argues that Irving ultimately did the world a disservice by fashioning Columbus into an “American hero.” He views the biography as a “glaring abdication of the responsibility of the historian in favor of the license of the novelist” and Columbus himself as “an essentially fictional hero” (qtd. in Keen 187). In Sale’s assessment, the biography is fiction masking as fact—something he feels is almost morally objectionable. However, the notion of Irving’s “responsibility” to the subject matter or to the archives rests on an assumption that fiction and biographical history are two very different things and that their division must be maintained. As I have shown, the distinction between what we might call archival historicism and romantic historicism was only beginning to take shape in this period and in many ways Irving’s biography represents an early moment in its divergence—which, as I will explain below, is reflected in the book’s mixed reviews. In his portrait of Columbus, Irving attempts to reconcile the many versions of the admiral offered in the archive and then make interpretive claims about his character informed by both his scholarly research and his literary invention.
Irving strives to make Columbus both common and exceptional; to illustrate this, he emphasizes Columbus’s humble beginnings and his fated meeting with an important figure. In Chapter five, Irving describes a famous scene in which Columbus, having been rejected from the Spanish court, appears at the gate of a Franciscan convent in Andalusia. Irving describes the sentimental moment:

One day a stranger on foot, in humble guise, but of a distinguished air, accompanied by a small boy, stopped at the gate of the convent, and asked of the porter a little bread and water for his child. While receiving this humble refreshment, the prior of the convent, Friar Juan Perez de Marchena, happening to pass by, was struck with the appearance of the stranger, and observing from his air and accent and that he was a foreigner, entered into conversation with him, and soon learnt the particulars of his story. That stranger was Columbus. (59)

The authenticity of the anecdote has always been questioned, but Irving insists in a footnote on its accuracy by virtue of hand-written testimony from the period. This incident marks a turning point for Columbus because his connection to Juan Perez proves crucial to his being admitted once more before the royal court. Columbus, we are told “exchanged his threadbare garb for one more suited to the sphere of a court, and purchasing a mule, set out once more, reanimated by hopes, for the camp before Granada” (61). In addition to Columbus’s newfound patronage and wardrobe, the Conquest of Granada had reached an end and it now seemed more likely that the crown would fund his enterprise. The above anecdote is reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin’s arrival in Philadelphia, penniless and motivated. Here, Irving explains that Columbus may have appeared destitute, but he possessed a “distinguished air” that set him apart and captured the friar’s attention. In these scenes, the biography reads like the typical bildungsroman in which the young man, freshly outfitted, enters the wider world; and, in

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fact, Irving inserts a kind of “lesson” just a few chapters later, stating that “his example should encourage the enterprising never to despair” (69). Here, Adorno’s assessment that Irving hoped to craft Columbus into “an early modern version of the nineteenth-century self-made man” seems accurate (72). However, Irving’s characterization also entrenches Columbus in medievalism, characterized by his superstitions and wildly inaccurate understanding of his discoveries.

While Irving’s Columbus is a visionary, this characteristic crosses over into Quixotism at times.20 Irving makes it clear that Columbus’s beliefs were often shaped by gross misapprehensions and that he, like Cotton Mather in his *Magnalia*, interpreted events typologically. First, Irving emphasizes that Columbus felt uniquely called by God to discover a westward passage to Asia. In the opening chapter of the biography, Irving explains that Columbus felt an early and “irresistible inclination for the sea” which he attributed to an “impulse from the deity preparing him for the high decrees he was chosen to accomplish” (11). The language of providence is not Irving’s, here, but rather a recounting of the feelings Columbus expressed in his journals. It is unclear throughout the biography whether it is ultimately Columbus’s “strong natural genius” (13) or divine providence, or his “liberal curiosity” (17)—which later borders on the superstitious—that yields the “grandeur of his achievements” (13). Nevertheless, Irving reiterates Columbus’s compulsion to view himself as both a vessel of God’s providential plan and as exceptionally equipped to carry it out. Secondly, Irving recounts many instances in which Columbus projects divine lessons onto his encounters with natural phenomena. For example, in Book III, Chapter III, during the first voyage, they sailors are “struck with awe at beholding a meteor, or as Columbus calls it in his journal, a great flame of
fire, which seemed to fall from the sky into the sea, about four or five leagues distant” (79). Referencing Columbus’s diary, Irving later explains that Columbus saw these natural phenomena as “providentially ordered to allay the rising clamours of his crew; comparing it to that which so miraculously aided Moses when conducting the children of Israel out of the captivity of Europe” (84). Here, the crew is diverted by a powerful natural “sign” that seems to imbue the mission, and even Columbus, with divine authority. In this description, one recalls Melville’s Ahab and the “Candles” chapter of *Moby-Dick* in which the lightening is interpreted variously as a warning and a confirmation of the quest; and, in fact, Irving includes a brief passage that recounts the fears of the crew who, “in their secret conferences” declared Columbus a “desperado, bent, in a mad phantasy, upon doing something extravagant to render himself notorious” (85). Though Irving quickly dismisses this possibility—he almost never credits the sentiments of Columbus’s crew—he does suggest that Columbus was not equipped to understand what he was experiencing, and as a devout Catholic, he was only capable of interpreting the phenomena in biblical terms.

Irving devotes a substantial amount of time to Columbus’s Catholicism and, specifically, his desire to use the funds procured on his expedition to recover the holy sepulcher from Jerusalem and claim it for Christendom. Irving asserts that Columbus’s religious mission “is a curious and characteristic fact which has never been particularly noticed,” but that his desire to regain the sepulcher was, in Columbus’s view, “the main work for which he was chosen by heaven” (68). In this context, Columbus’s mission seems not so very disconnected from the Puritan mission a century and a half later; both imagined that they had been chosen by God to establish his kingdom in the New World.
Years after the first expedition, in an appeal for additional funds before Ferdinand and Isabella, Columbus reiterated his case for the Jerusalem crusade. As Irving tells it, “[Columbus] avowed in the fullest manner his persuasion that, from his earliest infancy he had been chosen by heaven for the accomplishment of these two great designs, the discovery of the new world, and the rescue of the holy sepulcher” (446). Columbus’s language resembles that of the Puritans of New England, whose millenialist view of history suggested that certain events would necessarily precede the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. For Columbus, the recovery of the holy sepulcher was just such a necessary development. While these passages seem to contradict the image of Columbus as a symbol of enlightened rationalism, Irving is quick to contextualize his religious enthusiasm, stating that with regards to recovering the sepulcher, “there was nothing, therefore, in the proposition of Columbus that could be regarded as preposterous, considering the period and the circumstances in which it was made, though it strongly illustrates his own enthusiastic and visionary character” (448). These portions of the narrative highlight Irving’s ambivalence over whether Columbus could stand as a model American at all. It is important to note that Columbus’s Catholicism is not represented as theologically flawed; Irving is not at all interested in indicting Catholic beliefs here, but instead, draws attention to all religious zeal as potentially dangerous. In these moments, Columbus resembles the eccentric Ichabod Crane, whose own superstitions—fed by reading Mather’s Magnalia—completely cloud his rational mind.

Irving forges a clear connection between Columbus’s religious fervor and his “ardent imagination,” which usually trumps his navigational skills (255). Irving makes no attempts to hide the fact that Columbus’s discovery was accidental and ultimately
misunderstood by the admiral himself. Upon landing in the West Indies on his first voyage, Columbus “concluded that he must have reached the main land of Asia, or as he termed it, India” (106). Irving emphasizes Columbus’s delusion throughout the narrative, claiming, “It is curious to observe how ingeniously the imagination of Columbus deceived him at every step, and how he wove every thing into a uniform web of false conclusions” (107). Later, we are told that “the ardent imagination of Columbus was always sallying in the advance, and suggesting some splendid track of enterprise” (255) and that even upon his death, he imagined that “Cuba and Terra Firma were but remote parts of Asia” (569). In Irving’s estimation, Columbus’s imagination was both his greatest strength and his Achilles heel; Columbus would not have set out his journey had he not imagined the possibilities of unchartered territory, but his imagination also opened him up to superstition and gullibility.

For example, in a passage in Book VII, Columbus is told that there is a community of Native Americans in Cuba who were clothed, which signified to Columbus that “he had at length come upon the traces of a civilized people” (252). Irving explains that “no tribe of Indians was ever discovered in Cuba wearing clothing” but that the story “made a deep impression on the mind of Columbus, who was predisposed to be deceived, and to believe everything that favoured the illusion of his being on the confines of a civilized country” (253). Columbus’s predisposition to be “deceived” by stories and his own imagination would denote his unsuitability for modern-day heroism. Yet, we are told in the concluding chapter that “If some of his conclusions were erroneous, they were at least ingenious and splendid” (564). We have to consider, then, why Irving does not find Columbus’s resemblance to an Ichabod Crane or a Don Quixote more distressing or
the worthy object of satire. The answer lies in part in his desire to craft Columbus as a type of poet or creative mind, much like Irving himself.

Irving suggests that a “poetical” point of view allows Columbus to see the beauty in his discoveries and appreciate the natives’ customs. This characteristic fundamentally sets him apart from the avaricious Spanish. In fact, it is this quality that makes Columbus such a tragic figure as he watches paradise descend into chaos. For example, in the course of Columbus’s first exploration of the Bahamas, we are told that the Spaniards were eager to trade their goods for gold, but the native inhabitants merely offered them food and water. Irving then makes this distinction between the Spaniards’ mode of thinking and, as he implies, Columbus’s attitude: “However pleasing this state of primeval poverty might be to the imagination of the poet, it was a source of continual disappointment to the Spaniards, whose avarice had been whetted to the quick by scanty specimens of gold” (100). Irving suggests here that the “poet” (Columbus) can perceive the artistic value of these “primitive” scenes, while the Spanish can only see economic value. In passages like this, Irving’s Columbus resembles the quintessential romantic poet more than a proto-patriot or a daring adventurer. In one of the final chapters, Irving reiterates this characteristic, claiming that Columbus possessed that “rare union” of “the practical man of business with the poetical projector” (565). As such, Columbus made a kind of ideal discoverer because he could appreciate the untouched beauty of the West Indies and intuitively know how to “harvest” it with as little damage done as possible. For a writer who was admittedly taken with the romantic “coloring” of this story, it is not surprising that Irving would craft Columbus as a man of imagination, like Irving himself. As
William Shurr argues, Irving’s characterization of Columbus suggests “a strong identification between biographer and subject” (para. 9).

Despite this sense of identification, Irving’s romantic hero is also fatally flawed in part because he cannot anticipate the impending destruction wrought by his discovery. The vision of the practical and the poetical unified in settling the New World fails because, as Irving implies, no one else share Columbus’s point of view. Irving dedicates a large portion of the second half of the biography to exposing the atrocities of the Spanish and even implicating Columbus in such acts because of his inept leadership. In these passages, Irving relies heavily on Las Casas and brings the narrative back to a reliance on the archive and the “facts” as told by Las Casas. His dependence on this source also indicates his alignment with Las Casas’s point of view; that is, unlike his Spanish counterparts, Irving as a historian has selected Las Casas to expose Spanish violence in the West Indies and to hold up Las Casas as the heroic advocate for Native American communities. Such a characterization participated in what Castro calls the “prevailing utopian fictions surrounding the historical origins of the New World” in which Columbus and Las Casas are cast as champions of Native American rights and the Spanish are demonized as gold-obsessed murderers (13).

One prevailing “fiction” propagated by Irving’s narrative are the tropes of the “noble savage” and “vanishing native,” which were so prominent in 1820s historical romances of the U.S. With works by James Fenimore Cooper, and novels like Child’s *Hobomok* (1824) and Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827) circulating at the time of Irving’s writing, it is clear that Irving was influenced by these narrative structures. In the earliest passages describing Columbus’s encounters with the Native Americans, Irving describes
their prelapsarian state. In Book X when Columbus is travelling along the coast of “Paria,” he believes he has reached “the primitive seat of human innocence and bliss, the Garden of Eden, or terrestrial paradise!” (345). Like the virgin soil, the inhabitants lived in innocence of any social, political, moral, or economic systems outside of their own. Irving writes that the Haitians, “existed in that state of primitive and savage simplicity, which some philosophers have fondly pictured as the most enviable on earth” (119). The Native Americans are generally described as curious, hospitable, and hard-working, but completely disinterested in material gain. They are “exempted from the cares and toils which civilized man inflicts upon himself, by his many artificial wants” and live in a kind of “pleasant dream” (129). The natives also act from “natural impulse” rather than “precept,” which articulates the exact assumption behind the “noble savage” label—they are, in fact, “savage,” but in that natural state they are just and good (373). Because of these natural characteristics, they “meekly and even cheerfully...resigned their rights to the white men,” according to Irving (353). This line is indicative of what Hayden White describes as the “fetishization” of the Native American and the pristine landscape that is only made possible “after the conflict between the Europeans and the natives had already been decided and when, therefore, it could no longer hamper the exploitation of the latter by the former” (186). Irving implies, here, that the Native Americans’ natural character was inclined to succumb to white conquerors, just like the land itself; perhaps this was tragic, but it was inevitable. As Gesa Mackenthun argues, this was a typical thread in early national U.S. letters, which articulated the “helpless recognition of African slavery and Indians dispossession as unavoidable ills accompanying imperial progress” and, I would add, national progress (342).
Irving confesses that his Edenic portrait of the land and its inhabitants before the “fall” might be “overcououred by the imagination.” But he further states that many contemporary historians—not just him—represent “the life of these islanders as approaching to the golden state of poetical felicity” (120). Even as he appeals to other historians’ views, Irving notably leaves out evidence from the archive in his discussion of the impending “doom” of the colonies. Instead, in Irving’s discussion of the vanishing native and the virgin landscape, his biography becomes infused with the teleological language of American history. The image of the doomed “Eden” proved a compelling poetical subject for Irving (like the British countryside in The Sketch Book); so, like Columbus, Irving becomes wrapped up in this portrait of the New World such that both men “overcouour” it with their imaginations. For Irving, the beauty of the Caribbean was heightened by its implicitly tragic condition. In a description of Haiti, for example, Irving calls it “one of the most beautiful islands in the world, and doomed to be one of the most unfortunate” (116). The parallels between Columbus, the colonies, and the native inhabitants are never lost on Irving; he frequently anticipates their collective downfalls, often ending his chapters with a reflection on their sublime ignorance of the pain that was to come. And in these moments, as Greenfield observes, Irving’s Columbus “comes perilously close to earning our pity rather than our admiration” (123). For instance, beginning in Book IV, he begins to heavily foreshadow Columbus’s fall from his lofty position as admiral of the New World. Columbus’s decision to build the fort La Navidad, precipitated by the shipwreck of one of his fleet, is made in anticipation of the “glorious fruits to be reaped from this seeming evil” (132). Irving tells us, however, that this event “linked his fortunes for the remainder of his life to this island,
which was doomed to be to him a scene of cares and troubles, to involve him in a thousand perplexities, and to becloud his declining years with humiliation and disappointment” (133). Here, Irving conflates the future of the islands with Columbus’s future; both are doomed by virtue of their contact with one another and both of their fates are linked to the “vile passions” of the Spaniards who “found a perfect paradise” and “filled [it] with horror and desolation” (535).

These “overcoloured” moments, juxtaposed with Irving’s references to primary sources in the archive, establish an inconsistent relationship between himself as narrator and his readers. There are passages in which Irving invites readers to exercise their own imaginations and passages where he guards them against it. A prime example appears in the opening chapter to Book VII in which Columbus is traveling around Cuba. In one of Irving’s direct addresses to the reader, which appear more frequently in the second half of the biography, he asks readers to participate in the scene:

We must transport ourselves to the time, and identify ourselves with Columbus, thus fearlessly launching into seas, where as yet a civilized sail had never been unfurled. We must accompany him, step by step, in his cautious, but bold advances along the bays and channels of an unknown coast, ignorant of the dangers which might lurk around. . . .In this way we may enjoy in imagination the delight of exploring unknown lands, where new wonders and beauties break upon us at every step. (239)

Irving not only asks readers to identify with Columbus and his feelings, but also to help create the scene itself by using their imaginations; they are asked to transcend their immediate surroundings and join in this specific moment of discovery and to imagine further discoveries. He asks this of readers so that they might “form an opinion of the character of this extraordinary man, and of the nature of his enterprises” (239). Irving
assumes, then, that readers may form a more accurate and favorable opinion of Columbus if they can imaginatively join him on his journey.

But these invitations to imagination are restricted in passages describing the Spaniards’ treatment of Native Americans. In these sections, Irving does not want readers to “imagine” the scenes and he consistently defers to Las Casas’s account in order to deflect the responsibility of narrating them. In a passage describing the rape, torture, and hard labor that characterized Native American slavery under the Spaniards, Irving exclaims,

It is impossible to pursue any further the picture drawn by the venerable Las Casas, not of what he had heard, but of what he had seen; nature and humanity revolt at the details. Suffice it to say that so intolerable were the toils and sufferings inflicted upon this weak and unoffending race, that they sank under them, dissolving as it were from the face of the earth. (529)

The vanishing native is imagined here not as an actual embodied person, but as a subject that is “impossible to pursue any further.” Yet, as Irving later indicates, the presence of Las Casas’s account in the archive necessitates the narration of these horrific events. The horror of the events disables Irving from narrating them, thus, he gestures strongly towards the archival evidence. For example, in a passage describing the Spaniards’ war with the Higuey (in the modern-day Dominican Republic), Irving appeals to the “veracity” of Las Casas’s narrative even as he withholds the facts of his account:

These are horrible details; yet a veil is drawn over others still more detestable. They are related circumstantially by Las Casas, who was an eyewitness. ... These details would have been withheld from the present work as disgraceful to human nature, and from an unwillingness to advance any thing which might convey a stigma upon a brave and generous nation. But it would be a departure from historical veracity, having the documents before my eyes, to pass silently over transactions so
atrocious, and vouched for by witnesses beyond all suspicion of falsehood.  
(540)

In essence, this passage identifies Irving’s problem with working in the archive. He must acknowledge that “disgraceful” accounts of Spanish imperialism exist, but he cannot reveal the details because they are “detestable” and may reflect poorly on the nation that had so openly lent its most coveted manuscripts. Irving must act as an editor here not just of text but of historical events themselves, deciding which details are appropriate to reveal and which must remain behind the “veil.” Here, Irving is particularly aware of his Spanish audience, on whom the “stigma” of the Black Legend still dwelt. Even so, he reaffirms the truthfulness of Las Casas’s “eyewitness” account and so validates it. Irving also appeals to his duty as a historian; he cannot “pass silently over” those accounts that lie “before [his] eyes” because that would violate his duty as an antiquarian researcher. Irving’s decision to draw a veil over the violence of conquest is symptomatic of what Machenthun calls “colonial amnesia,” in which the U.S.’s close ties to “slavery, race, and empire” were erased from the collective consciousness (348, 342). But instead of being a case of total erasure, Irving’s text acts as a palimpsest—the traces of the “horrible details” provided by Las Casas’s first-hand account are still visible on Irving’s pages.

The second half of the biography is dominated by Irving’s struggle to represent the violence of slavery to his readers. He knows his U.S. audience will include slaveholders and supporters of slavery and so he must choose carefully how to represent slavery in the West Indies. Irving is equally at pains to assess Columbus’s culpability in the establishment of that system. In a passage describing this introduction of Native American slavery, Irving explains that “in his eagerness to produce immediate profit” for
the crown, Columbus “sent, likewise, above five hundred Indian prisoners, who, he suggested, might be sold as slaves at Seville” (286). Irving then reflects on this moment regretfully, saying, “It is painful to find the brilliant renown of Columbus sullied by so foul a stain. The customs of the time, however, must be pleaded in his apology. The precedent had been given long before, by both Spaniards and Portuguese, in their African discoveries, wherein the traffic of slaves had formed one of the greatest sources of profit” (286). In the paragraph that follows, Irving appeals to historical precedent to justify Columbus’s behavior; notably, he also resorts to Las Casas’ assessment, saying, “Las Casas, the zealous and enthusiastic advocate of the Indians, who suffers no opportunity to escape him of exclaiming in vehement terms against their slavery, speaks with indulgence of Columbus on this head” (287). Strangely, though, Irving does not consider Las Casas culpable in the introduction of African slavery to the West Indies even as he explains the role of the Franciscan friars in negotiating that transaction. Irving writes that in order to provide some “relief of the Indians, [the Franciscan friars] encouraged a gross invasion of the rights and welfare of another race of human beings. Among their various decrees on this occasion, we find the first trace of negro slave in the new world” (443). Irving fails to acknowledge, here, that Las Casas was among those friars who hoped to “relieve” the Native population by enslaving Africans and, thus, what Castro calls just another “face of Spanish ecclesiastical imperialism” (8). Irving leaves no doubt of his position on the institution of slavery itself, however, and ends this section with a reminder to contemporary readers: “It is a fact worthy of observation, that Hispaniola, the place where this flagrant sin against nature and humanity was first introduced into the new world, has been the first to exhibit an awful retribution” (443). Here, Irving
references the slave rebellion during the Haitian Revolution at the turn of the eighteenth century—an event that had drawn tremendous attention in the U.S. and continued to act as both a cautionary tale to southern slaveholders and a symbol of hope to the enslaved.

In these passages on African slavery, Irving often breaks through the narrative to remark on the “lessons” that can be learned from the disastrous consequences of slavery in the Americas. According to Shurr, Irving may have been asserting an explicitly abolitionist position here. Shurr argues that Irving used “Columbus to expose and pillory the major social evil of his own era,” that of chattel slavery (para. 16). While there is little evidence to suggest Irving was aligned with the abolitionist movement in the U.S. or that he hoped *Columbus* would help advance an abolitionist message, Irving certainly identifies the advent of slavery as Columbus’s greatest failing and a major turning point in Atlantic world history. In a passage directly aimed at contemporary readers, Irving declares that human beings are capable of the gravest ills and that “every nation has in turn furnished proofs of this disgraceful truth.” As he articulates above, the sins of the Spanish fathers were violently revisited upon the sons and, he implies, the same may happen in the U.S. for the “flagrant sin against nature and humanity” that was chattel slavery. In Book XVII, chapter V, the final section of his massive tome, Irving revisits Columbus’s role in the initiation of the Native American slave trade:

In this spirit of bigotry he considered himself justified in making captives of the Indians, and transporting them to Spain to have them taught the doctrines of Christianity, and in selling them for slaves, if they pretended to resist his invasions. . . .These remarks in palliation of the conduct of Columbus are required by candour. It is proper to show him in connection with the age in which he lived, lest the errors of the times should be considered his individual abuses. It is not the intention of the author, however, to justify Columbus on a point where it is inexcusable to err. Let
it remain a blot on his illustrious name, and let other draw lessons from it (568).

This passage reveals Irving’s reticence to expose his hero to criticism (“these remarks...are required by candour”), his desire to mitigate readers’ critiques of Columbus (“in palliation of the conduct”), and his awareness that readers would stringently object to Columbus’s participating in the slave trade (“inexcusable to err”). Notice, too, that Irving’s remarks are not required by “historical truth” or by fidelity to the archive; instead, he feels compelled from the perspective of the nineteenth-century historian, both to exonerate Columbus on the basis of the “errors of the time” and to condemn him on the basis of the moral convictions of Irving’s time. His sentiments are further complicated in the next line, wherein Irving quotes a Spanish historian, saying, “[Columbus’s] soul was superior to the age in which he lived” (569). This concluding sentiment reveals Irving’s indecision about Columbus’s legacy and also the indefinite nature of early nineteenth-century antiquarianism and historical writing. Irving is enthralled with the romantic and tragic history of the Spanish empire and with Columbus’s quest, and he is also compelled to remain true to the authentic history before him in the archive. Additionally, he must consider the events from a contemporary perspective, anticipating the desires and objections of many sets of readers: the layman, the scholar, the America, the Brit, the Spaniard. Thus, the tug of war between archival history and romance is evident throughout the biography, despite Irving’s insistence on the authenticity of his account.

Irving’s use of the archive also involved him in the conflicting interpretations of Spanish history that I have described above. The legacy of Ferdinand was one such
contested topic to which Irving directly speaks in one of the last passages in the book. He writes:

Attempts have been made in recent days, by loyal Spanish writers, to vindicate the conduct of Ferdinand towards Columbus. They were doubtless well intended, but they have been futile, nor is their failure to be regretted. To screen such injustice in so eminent a character from the reprobation of mankind, is to deprive history of one of its most important uses. Let the ingratitude of Ferdinand stand recorded in its full extent, and endure throughout all time. The dark shadow which it casts upon his brilliant renown, will be a lesson to all rulers, teaching them what is important to their own fame in their treatment of illustrious men. (563)

As I explained above, Navarrete himself had participated in the recuperation of Ferdinand’s character in the introduction to his archival collection. Certainly, Navarrete was just the type of “loyal Spanish writer” to which Irving refers. The irony here is that throughout the biography, Irving chooses repeatedly to “screen” Columbus from “reprobation” even though Irving worked with the same materials as Navarrete. Two historians working with the same archival materials emerged with two opposing portraits of Ferdinand and Columbus, highlighting both historians’ inclination towards presentism. I highlight the above passage in particular because it illustrates Irving’s complicated relationship with the historical record before him; in this instance, he argues that Ferdinand’s ingratitude stands “recorded in its full extent” and will endure, presumably, in both the archive and in Irving’s biography. Yet, Navarrete himself insisted that the record showed no such ingratitude and he, instead, implicated Las Casas and Fernando Columbus in Ferdinand’s character assassination. The “authenticity” of the accounts, then, said nothing about their objectivity; so, while Irving took the accounts of Las Casas and Fernando at face value, Navarrete approached them skeptically. Interestingly, the methods by which Irving incorporated the Spanish archival material, and the extent of his
reliance on Navarrete, became the key points of critique in reviews of *Columbus*. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider specific nineteenth-century reviews that address the question of Irving’s historical fidelity and, ultimately, his own legacy as a historian.

After numerous setbacks and interruptions—some of which were the result of his writing *The Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada*—Irving completed his Columbus biography in July, 1827 and sent the manuscript for publication to London (Murray) and New York (G&C Carvill). Irving’s enthusiasm for Spain and for the Columbus project had cooled and now he was eager to leave Spain, the scene of his greatest and most prolonged literary labors. In a letter to Storrow, he complains, “I have been at times quite disheartened and out of Spirits, for I want to finish the work on many accounts. I want to produce something that will give satisfaction to the American public, I want to make a little money badly, and I want to get out Madrid and out of Spain” (qtd. in McElroy lxi).

The book’s publication seemed only to open a Pandora’s box of additional writing, revision, and republication. Over the next twenty years, Irving would continue to work on the biography, issuing a second edition in America in 1831 and a third, through George Putnam, in 1848-1849. The first London edition was printed in four octavo volumes and sold for 2 guineas, a “steep price tag,” according to biographer Brian Jay Jones (248). The American edition sold for $6.75. With the sale of the copyright and book sales in London and the U.S., McElroy estimates that Irving received around $23,000 for the first edition, a revised edition, and an abridgement (lxxviii). The book sold extremely well and was the “most commonly owned book,” according to Andrew Burstein’s survey of the “contents of American libraries, rural and urban alike, in the
mid-nineteenth century” (196). Altogether, the book was published in one form or another 175 times between 1828 and 1900 (196).

Irving’s biography was well received by the general reading public and the scholarly establishment alike. As William Cullen Bryant would put it in an 1860 tribute to Irving, “The work of Irving was at once in everybody’s hands and eagerly read” (28). In the immediate aftermath of its publication, Irving was made a corresponding member of the Real Academia de la Historia, received a gold medal from the Royal Society of Literature in London, and was granted an honorary doctorate from Oxford University (McElroy lxxxv). These were all honors from abroad; at home, reviewers enthusiastically claimed Irving for the United States. Even before the book’s publication, a citizen of Philadelphia wrote in to the Philadelphia Monthly Magazine to ask when this elusive Columbus biography would make its appearance. He wrote in primarily to marvel at the fact that “after the lapse of nearly three centuries and a half, it should be reserved for America, first to produce to the world, a full and complete delineation of the life, character, and actions of the illustrious Discoverer of the New Hemisphere” (245). That America would produce the first comprehensive study of Columbus seemed to suggest that the very subject of Columbus’s discovery was the province of the U.S. and no other country. With the publication of Columbus, Irving became the representative author of American letters, outstripping European historians in the race to write the history of the modern world’s most significant event. A review in the Atheneum primarily cites long passages from the biography in order to illustrate both the “spirited, elegant and interesting” content of the book, but also the fact that it is remarkably “grave in its character, and laborious in its execution” compared to previous works by Irving
The North American Review ran a lengthy notice in January, 1829 that begins with this telling sentiment: “This is one of those works, which are at the same time the delight of readers and despair of critics. It is as nearly perfect in its kind, as any work can well be” (103). For the Review, Irving’s biography proved to be “more honorable to the literature of the country, than any one that has hitherto appeared among us” (103). Even if Irving had not explicitly intended to participate in constructing American literary nationalism, he had done so by straddling both sides of the ocean and both history and romance, or what the reviewer calls, “a previously unexplored and untrodden path of intellectual labor” (104). Irving had put himself and this hybrid book on the proverbial map—one that illustrated the transatlantic world of which Columbus and he were a part.

This reviewer also takes the opportunity in the midst of his review to recite the narrative of America’s perceived cultural inferiority and the lack of “polite literature” that had hung over the heads of Irving and his contemporaries. The reviewer recounts the story of a “vast continent” that needed to be “subdued and cultivated; all the branches of mechanical industry. . . .to be commenced.” Surely, this was “business enough for the mass of the people” and politics much more than poetics became the province of the written word (105). Moving one by one through the early republic’s most noted writers, including Benjamin Franklin, Joel Barlow, Timothy Dwight, and Charles Brockden Brown, the reviewer explains how they were pulled away from belles lettres because of their commitment to public life (i.e. politics). Irving, the reviewer claims, was the first American author to free himself from these fetters of “interested motives” and to write “polite literature” from a position of total “originality,” the quality “which forms the real distinction, if there be one, between what we call genius and every other degree of
intellectual power” (110). The writer also emphasizes that while Irving has been accused of “hankering...after the aristocratic institutions and habits of Europe,” he has committed no “political heresy” and is firmly attached “to the republic institutions” of America (124).

Having thus established Irving’s dedication to American democracy, the reviewer sets out to categorize Irving’s biography. He begins by making a distinction between “philosophical history” and “narrative history,” the former of which teaches “general truths” while the latter offers a poetic “picture of events” (126). Irving’s biography, he argues, represents the most sophisticated version of the latter to the extent that he calls it “essentially a poem” because of it “poetical and romantic coloring” (128). The subject of Columbus’s life lends itself to such a form and the reviewer explicitly links Irving’s genius to that of his subject; he calls it a “beautiful coincidence” that Irving, the “earliest professed author of first-rate talent” in America should treat the “discoverer of our continent” (129). The final sentiment speaks to a desire amongst many of the literary establishment in America that Irving return home. He is pleased to learn that Irving’s “thoughts are still bent on the land of his birth” and extends the hope that “he will sooner or later fix his residence among us” and take up “subjects of strictly native origin” (134). Though Irving would eventually do so with A Tour on the Prairies (1835), Astoria (1836), The Adventures of Captain Bonneville (1837), and The Life of George Washington (1855-59), throughout the 1830s, he continued to publish books on Spanish subjects. He authored The Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada (1829), Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus (1831), and Tales of the Alhambra (1832), which is often described as Spanish version of The Sketch Book.
Professionally speaking, the choice to release several books on Spanish subjects made him very popular in both the U.S. and Spain. In William Cullen Bryant’s tribute to Irving, he recalls meeting a “distinguished Spaniard” that asked him, “Why do you not take as your agent the man whom all Spain admires, venerates, loves? I assure you, it would be difficult for our government to refuse anything which Irving should ask, and his signature would make almost any treaty acceptable to our people” (35). Irving would eventually be selected as a minister to Spain under John Tyler between 1842 and 1846. What Bryant’s anecdote reveals is the extent to which Irving’s desire to be a transatlantic bridge between U.S. and Spanish history and literature also translated into diplomacy. Spanish readers generally felt that Irving had neither damaged their historical reputation with his *Columbus* nor betrayed the trust of those who granted him access to the archive.

Praise for the book was by no means universal, however. Irving’s indebtedness to Navarrete’s research formed the basis for many critiques of the biography. Irving’s fidelity to the archives, his acknowledgement of Navarrete’s work, and his interpretation of particular colonial events all came under fire from sources within the U.S. According to Gregory Pftizer, “[Irving’s] critics worried about the implication of manipulating evidence for the sake of creating a ‘transcendent Columbus’” (38). In fact, this particular feature of Irving’s research and work continues to divide critics. While scholars like McElroy insist definitively, “Irving did *not* plagiarize Navarrete or perpetuate any ‘near-plagiarism,’” (xciv) Irving biographer Stanley Williams labeled him “an American poacher” of Spanish materials (qtd. in Adorno 61). Williams’s own assessment may have been influenced by Irving’s most nineteenth-century critic, Severn Teackle Wallis, a Maryland lawyer who submitted a series of critiques against Irving and his biography to
the *Southern Literary Messenger* between 1840 and 1842. Wallis’s primary objection to Irving was what Wallis saw as a failure to acknowledge Navarrete’s tremendous influence on Irving’s work; essentially, Wallis accuses Irving of plagiarism.

The heart of Wallis’s critique centers on the imbalance of labor between Irving and Navarrete. In his March, 1841 offering, Wallis praises Navarrete’s indefatigable research and in many ways contrasts it with Irving’s relative ease in composing the biography. Wallis invokes the image of a wheat thresher, laboring to select the best grain: “From the chaff of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of parchments and papers, [Navarrete] had winnowed out not less than forty-one folio volumes of copies, besides a mass of others, separate and distinct” (234). In comparison, he argues that Irving had merely “gone over the beaten track” of archival research that Navarrete had painstakingly paved and that Irving merely took “Navarrete as a text-book, for his most valuable documentary materials” (234-5). Wallis seems angered not only at Irving’s insufficient citations but also at what Irving’s historical labors might say about U.S. historical writing in general. He describes Irving as having taken advantage of Navarrete’s generosity and Spain’s vulnerability to misrepresentation in order to bolster his career rather than to advance the work of archival history. Americans, Wallis argues, are uniquely positioned to write impartial histories because no prejudices of “past ages” have “troubled the waters of truth” in America as they had in “the old nations” (238). Because of his self-interested use of another historian’s work, Irving had sullied the reputation of American historical objectivity, which could have been the jewel in America’s literary crown. As Wallis claims in another article, Irving had essentially “borrowed other men’s commodities, and sold them for his own” (“Spain” 305).
In that same article, Wallis quotes from a Spanish historian, Martinez de la Rosa, whose remarks on Irving’s *Columbus* supported Wallis’s position. According to la Rosa, Washington Irving was a “skilful *colorista*” and in a footnote he explains, “The word *colorista* is here used intentionally, for every one who may read the Collection of Voyages, by Navarrete, will be convinced that the narrative of Irving contains nothing that belongs to its author, save the coloring of his beautiful style” (305). Interestingly, la Rosa compares this “colorista” to Prescott, whom he calls “exact and dispassionate,” once again highlighting the style differences that were emerging in the U.S. hispanist tradition and in historical writing more generally. La Rosa’s quote reiterates Irving’s own insecurities about how his history would be perceived in light of Prescott’s more “sober” approach.

The question of Irving’s indebtedness to Navarrete’s labors was far from settled in Irving’s time and even now shapes perceptions of his abilities as a history writer. Bushman notes that modern-day historians have disregarded Irving’s account because of his “cavalier treatment of the evidence” (124) and Adorno notes that “Irving’s prefatory statement about receiving from Navarrete ‘various valuable and curious pieces of information’ has been viewed as too miserly an acknowledgment of a far greater debt” (59). In the revised 1848-1849 edition of *Columbus*, Irving was sure to address the charges of plagiarism and ingratitude in the preface. There, he cites a letter from Navarrete, expressing gratitude that his materials had “fallen into hands so able to appreciate their authenticity” and Irving also quotes from Navarrete’s introduction to volume three of his collections, in which he testifies to Irving’s “impartiality and exactness,” his “sound criticism, erudition and good taste” (5-6). While there is some
evidence to suggest that Navarrete was not pleased with all aspects of Irving’s work—at one point he suggested that Irving should consult volume three of the collection to “rectify” some of his opinions—he publicly supported Irving’s work and never attempted to undermine its authority (McElroy xci). However, according to Adorno, Navarrete did express his firm belief that “imagination had no role in the writing of history” (73).

The questions that Wallis’s articles raise regarding Irving’s legitimacy as a historian are symptomatic of the problems surrounding antiquarian work and historical publishing in the nineteenth century. As we saw with the Winthrop reprint, the intervention of an editor can change the meaning of a historical moment and can permanently alter public perceptions of key figures. Irving’s biography of Columbus represented the marriage—albeit troubled marriage—of archival research and historical romance, and as such introduced rare historical documents to a reading public and used them to produce a narrative that ordered the American experience. In this way, his biography differs only a little from that of the Winthrop reprint or the reprints in the Southern Literary Messenger; his book was made of artifacts situated into a narrative that helped make sense of both the distant past and the volatile present.

The grand unanswered question of Irving’s book centers on what Columbus’s character and his story of discovery could contribute to the writing of U.S. history. I say unanswered because Irving remains equivocal about whether his hero initiated a new epoch in human progress or if his discovery led to moral deterioration. Did the New World fall, like Eden, when Columbus arrived on its shores or did it begin the process of reaching its full potential? The sentiment that concludes Irving’s life of Columbus touches on this question. Irving’s final paragraph ends with the regret that Columbus had
“died in ignorance of the real grandeur of his discovery” and could never celebrate the “splendid empires which were to spread over the beautiful world he had discovered; and the nations, and tongues, and languages which were to fill its lands with his renown, and revere and bless his name to the latest posterity!” (569). The image of “splendid empires” “spreading” over the “beautiful world” anticipates further European colonization in the early modern period, but in the context of the 1820s, this image evokes U.S. territorial expansion into the South and West. According to Gregory Pfitzer, Irving certainly had this subject in mind and selected Columbus as his protagonist in order to be “part of a larger national agenda affirming the master narrative of Progress” which took the form of territorial expansion (38). Pfitzer’s claim seems feasible given antebellum historians’ preoccupation with proving this thesis of progress through historical examples. In George Bancroft’s 1838 essay “On the Progress of Civilization,” he argues that “The irresistible tendency of the human race is to advancement,” thus, “the world cannot retrograde; the dark ages cannot return, Dynasties perish; cities are buried; nations have been victims to error, or martyrs for right; Humanity has always been on the advance; its soul has always been gaining maturity and power” (406). Bancroft’s view of history would, in the U.S., evidence itself in the policy of Manifest Destiny, which entangled the tendency of advancement with the political right to expansion; thus, land acquisition was linked directly with “gaining maturity and power” as a nation. Yet, as Irving’s biography illustrates, Columbus’s discovery and its aftermath called into question the veracity of this historical teleology. Columbus may have inspired future discovery, and he may have initiated the spread of “vast empires,” but Irving makes it
clear that the policy of imperialism, distinguished from “discovery,” is fundamentally corrupt.

Furthermore, Irving’s biography illustrates that world history is cyclical. The initiation of slavery in the fifteenth-century Caribbean had returned to haunt the nineteenth-century United State, and the colonized were rising against the colonizer even as Irving wrote. Does a slave-holding country with a policy of expansion—often by force—represent the “advancement” of civilization, or the repetition of its gravest wrongs? Irving stops short of answering this question, but it nonetheless looms over his study of Columbus’s contribution to American history. What becomes clear in Irving’s biography is that U.S. historians and readers were increasingly cognizant of how their history might follow the dramatic—and traumatic—trajectory of European history. Ultimately, the justice of expansion and the validity of U.S. claims in the New World depended on how histories were written and with what raw materials; an archive, after all, could furnish almost any story imaginable.

NOTES TO PART III

1 In fact, during the ceremony to remove Columbus’s remains from St. Domingo to Havana, performed in 1796, the orator, Joseph Cavallero, proclaimed, “When I figure to myself the squadron of Columbus, crossing the ocean toward the west, in search of a new world, I seem to see him go out from the encampments of Israel, that body of men chosen from each of the tribes, to seek out and explore the promised land of Canaan.” The typological language of the Promised Land clearly resonated with both North and South American historians.

2 Sean Goudie’s study of the creole complex in early America, for example, points to the ways in which the literature and politics of early America were fundamentally shaped by their relationships to the West Indies and were actively responding to the nation’s “paracolonial” state as neither a wholly a postcolonial nation nor an imperial power (12). This type of hemispheric turn has also been coupled with a move towards the local; thus, the nation as a unit of analysis has been replaced by the globe and by the region/town in an effort to consider other networks of affiliation.

3 According to Stavans, in this Freneau poem and in “Columbus to Ferdinand,” Columbus is depicted as a “link between the old and the new, a man of reason and integrity who becomes a bridge, a communicating
vessel between Europe and the Americas” (61). For early national readers, Columbus’s sense of both endless possibility and fear of the known would have resembled their own feelings.

4 With regard to Irving’s ambivalence, John D. Hazlett’s article, “Literary Nationalism and Ambivalence in Washington Irving’s The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus” makes the most persuasive case. Hazlett argues rightly that Irving creates “two portraits of Columbus,” one that supports literary nationalism and one that rails against imperialism (564).

5 Gregory Pfitzer has written extensively about the advent of popular history and the relationship between fiction, popular history, and “professional” history. Pfitzer importantly demonstrates that writers of popular histories “possessed rhetorical gifts that were valued by many middle-class readers who viewed fiction and history as inextricably linked” (4).

6 I am quoting from the Twayne edition, published in 1981, which is the definitive scholarly edition of Irving’s Columbus. It contains a collation of the surviving manuscripts from the first and second British and American editions and the “Author’s Revised Edition,” the printing of which Irving oversaw, in 1848. It takes the revised edition as the most authoritative because it represents the most complete and clean rendering of Irving’s Columbus. This edition was published between 1848-1849 by George Putnam as part of Irving’s collected works (McElroy 575).

7 In a letter from Jared Sparks to Prescott (October 19, 1840), Sparks makes a similar observation in the Southern Literary Messenger. He observes, “In the reading-rooms of the British Museum are daily congregated more than a hundred readers and transcribers, of all nations and tongues. . . . When shall we see the like in the [Boston] Athenaeum of the ‘literary Emporium’?”

8 According to McElroy, Irving cited one hundred and fifty sources in his biography and had access to the following major archives and texts: The histories of Andrés Bernáldez, Pedro Mártir de Angelería, Fernando Colón (Columbus), Las Casas, and Oviedo; the manuscript notes of Muñoz; various manuscripts provided personally by Navarrete; the archives of Columbus’s descendants; the Biblioteca Real; Obadiah Rich’s collection; and the library of the Jesuits at the Colegio de San Isidro; and the first two volumes of Navarrete’s Colección (lxix). See McElroy’s “Introduction” to the Twayne edition of Columbus for a more detailed explanation of Irving’s sources and citations.

9 According to both David Levin and Cheng, Prescott was a member of the group of “Romantic historians” that included George Bancroft and Francis Parkman, among others (Cheng 66). Cheng explains that Prescott used imagination to “enter into the feelings of his subjects and present their experiences” and to “illuminate the reality of the past” but he did not “play any role in creating that reality” (67-9). We can see from the exchange between Irving and Prescott, that Irving’s work was conceived of as overly imaginative and perhaps closer in character to historical fiction.

10 In a book notice published in the Southern Literary Messenger in 1848, the editor highlights this distinction between Prescott and Irving. He writes of Prescott’s “poise of judgment, which belongs only to the true historian” and his “sober, earnest and philosophical” approach to historical writing. This style he compares to Irving whose “picturesque” style is “readable” and “charming” (760). As I will describe below, the Messenger had run several pieces between 1840 and 1842 criticizing Irving’s biography, so this book notice takes a much more generous tone despite what appears to be a critique of Irving’s amateurism.

11 Brown goes on to explain that historians are more like empirical observers or scientists who record actual, observable, material facts. Romancers, then, ascribe cause and effect to events and explain what is probably or possible. The distinction that Brown makes is closer to the ways that antiquarians were delineated from historians in the nineteenth century; as I have described in my introduction, antiquarians were likened to scientists or collectors while historians were likened to weavers or painters who could take the collection of facts and convert them into a narrative.

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In 1866, Pierre Irving, Washington’s nephew, published miscellaneous documents relating to Washington’s time in Spain under the title *Spanish Papers and Other Miscellanies, Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected*. New York: Putnam, 1866. In the preface, he writes that they were “nearly, though not full, prepared for the press” and that they represent his uncle’s “special fascination” with that “romantic country” of Spain (iv). The quoted passage comes from an essay titled “Spanish Romance.”

Tzvetan Todorov makes a similar argument in his study of Columbus’s diary. He concludes that while “there is a definite relation between the form of his faith in God and the strategy of his interpretations,” Columbus also draws upon his empirical observation of nature to interpret his surroundings. So, even as Columbus makes decisions based on “vigilant observation” he also interprets events through the lens of his Catholic faith, which attributed predetermined meanings to all that he observed (17-19).

For an extensive study of the life of Las Casas, and an indictment of his legacy, see Castro.

The full title of Herrera’s work is *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del Mar Oceano*.

The controversy concerning Las Casas’s manuscripts was apparently common knowledge because, in an 1827 printing of some of Columbus’s translated letters (Boston: Thomas B. Wait and Son, 1827), the editor notes that “the general strain of the writer’s representations is unfavorable to the character of the Spaniards” (v).

The writer for the *North American Review*, in fact, agrees that Las Casas has been overly praised in recent years for his advocacy for Native American rights. But his problem with Las Casas lies in the belief that he was primarily responsible for the “introduction of negro slaves in America for the relief of the original inhabitants” (277). A similar charge of introducing the notion of enslaving the Native Americans was frequently leveled at Columbus as well, and Irving attempts to address the issue in his biography by blaming the “customs of the time” and the sanction of “the sovereign under whom he served” (286-7).

It should be noted, too, that Irving was simultaneously drafting his *Conquest of Granada*, which was published in 1828, just after *Columbus*.

Irving later contrasts Columbus’s humble origins with the villainous Spanish cavaliers whose “noble birth” bred “arrogant deviance of authority” under Diego Columbus’s rule in the colonies (273). In these passages, Irving clearly links social station with character or morality in ways that resemble the sentimental novels of the late eighteenth century.

See William L. Hedges, “Irving’s *Columbus*: The Problem of Romantic Biography.”

Michael Dash describes this idealized depiction of the New World as part of a “tropicalist discourse” introducing the possibility of a “psychologically rehabilitative primitivism or a socially revolutionary wildness” that held a supreme attraction to modern intellectuals (27).

In a speech to the Tammany Society in 1809, William Marcy would argue that the Spanish ultimately spoiled any possibility of good relations between the Native Americans and, eventually, the New England colonizers. Marcy declared that “before the winds and waves had wafted the European invaders to these shores, [they] were a happy people” but, after they were tormented by the Spanish, “The Indians could not distinguish between the persecuted pilgrims, and the avaricious Spaniards” (18, 13).

McElroy notes that one reason for the delay in publication was that when a friend of Irving’s, Alexander Slidell, read the manuscript, he claimed it was “quite perfect in his judgment, with the exception of the
style, which he thought of unequal excellence” (lviii). Since Irving was more famous for his style of writing than almost anything else, he felt compelled to make extensive revisions over the next six months.

24 Bryant delivered the tribute address before the New York Historical Society on April 3, 1860, four months after Irving’s death. To Bryant, Irving’s writings provided an “assurance that we are still in the same world into which we were born; we read, and are quieted and consoled” (46).

25 McElroy, by contrast, is curiously compelled to defend Irving in both the introduction to the Twayne edition and in his article, “The Integrity of Columbus.” In the article, he argues that Wallis’s criticisms rested on a flawed conflation of Irving with his “Geoffrey Crayon” persona, and he concludes that it is “less than reasonable to charge with plagiarism an historian who cites 150 different sources 900 times—particularly when that historian was taken seriously by other historians who wrote on the same subject after him and used the same sources” (9).
CONCLUSION

“What is the truth in History? What does it show, on the momentous topics—Whence came we? When? Where? Why? Whither do we tend? What have been the chief instruments to advance or retard, the human race?”

Modern historians recognize that history is in many ways a “choice of fictions,” to borrow a phrase from historian James Wilkinson. But to historians of the early republican and antebellum periods, history was a choice of “facts” which could potentially answer the difficult questions posed by Levi Woodbury’s lecture, cited above. While historians recognized that they were choosing to advance particular historical narratives, they believed that their work was rooted in the truth found in the newly-formed American archives. As I quoted in my introduction, Ebenezer Hazard argued that what separated reprinted colonial texts from new, nineteenth-century histories was that primary sources “furnish[ed] facts free from the glosses of commentators” (262). The notion that the archives, made up of manuscript and print artifacts, contained the truth of history powerfully shaped perceptions of how and why those artifacts should be preserved for posterity. I have shown, however, that this ideal of objectivity, authenticity, and truth would never be fully realized in the reproduction of colonial texts. The reprinted artifact implicitly contained the “glosses of the commentators.” How the book was reproduced, how it was contextualized, who published it, the extent of the editors’ emendations or his fidelity to the archive all defined how the reproduced texts would be read for decades to come. These reproductions, in turn, fundamentally shaped
the writing of American history precisely because they were thought to contain its most authentic accounts, its truest portraits. My research reveals the extent to which the “facts” of the historical reprints were actively shaped by the “glosses” of the publication apparatus itself.

History and printing, I have argued, were necessary bedfellows in early America. While manuscripts and other forms of communication facilitated the recording of histories, private and public, these forms were also highly vulnerable; printing could grant permanence and reproducibility to otherwise tenuous artifacts. Beyond just providing resources for historians, efforts to reproduce colonial texts were rooted in the nation’s perception of itself as an advanced people. As Abiel Holmes proclaimed in an 1814 address to the American Antiquarian Society, “The most learned and polite people, the world ever knew, delighted in antiquities. Such is the description given by the Greeks of Tacitus. Who, then, will not respect the character, and encourage the pursuits, of the antiquary?” (3). Holmes’s rhetorical question speaks to his desire to involve American citizens in the preservation effort; he is calling for the nation—or in this case, New Englanders—to participate in building an archive which represents a people of learning. Likewise, in the “republic of letters,” the publication of archival artifacts would facilitate the broader circulation of information, which was critical to the health of the democracy. An example from the Massachusetts Board of Education reiterates this important relationship between history, printing, and citizenship. In the Marsh, Capen, Lyon & Webb edition of Washington Irving’s Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus (1839), there is an introductory essay composed by members of the board, who include Edward Everett, George Putnam, and Jared Sparks. The essay speaks to the significance of print
in enlightening the nation and in reconnecting readers with the past. It begins with this proclamation:

The lever, which moves the world of mind, is emphatically THE PRINTING PRESS. . . . When we consider the wonder-working power of books, while they could operate directly on but a small fractional proportion of mankind, how shall we set bounds to their effects, when they enter every cottage in every hamlet, giving light to the intellect, warmth to the heart, and fresh energy to all good purposes? (vi)

As I have shown, metaphors for the printing press were rife in the early national and antebellum periods, and here the press is represented as the “lever, which moves the world of mind.” It is granted an almost divine status, similar to the hand of God that guides the nation or even Adam Smith’s invisible hand of the economic market.

The “small fractional proportion of mankind” to which the writer refers is the United States, the only nation in which every citizen can read his “mother tongue” (vi).

Furthermore, the image of books, entering “every cottage in every hamlet” reflected the idea of America as a “republic of letters”—a nation of writers and readers, a people of the word. This image, in turn, fed the assumption (both in the early republic and today) that print creates a sense of simultaneity across the nation. As every citizen of the U.S. picks up a book and reads, he or she directly participates in the building of the nation, giving “fresh energy to all good purposes.”

However, what citizens are reading is just as important as the fact of their reading. The essay includes a passage from the Rev. William Ellery Channing explaining what citizens ought to be reading:

In the best books, great men talk to us, give us their most precious thoughts, and pour their souls into ours. God be thanked for books. They are the voices of the distant and the dead, and make us heirs of the spiritual life of past ages. Books are the true levelers. They give, to all

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who will faithfully use them, the society, the spiritual presence, of the greatest of our race. (xx)

Beyond the energizing or consensus-building force of printed books, for Channing their chief function was to make the past present in the lives of readers, and of all readers equally. Books both preserve “precious thoughts” in a state of permanence and resurrect those thoughts and create a sense of immediacy between the reader and the past. The historical book, the book that brought readers face to face with the Puritan fathers, the revolutionaries, the great explorers, held tremendous value in the republic of letters because of the ways it transported the “voices of the distant and the dead” into the presence of the modern reader.

In the context of my study, it seems likely that Channing is also referring to the reproduction of colonial texts. He is talking about what the technology of the printing press can do to shape the American mind across time and space. While the ideal of simultaneity through print is ultimately a fantasy, what this introductory essay says about the relationship between printing, history, reading, and nation-building was critical in the early nineteenth century. The essay assumes that print had some power to transcend space and time to create shared experiences. Channing’s sentiments brings into relief the ways in which print was employed not only to disseminate information or printed materials, but to preserve particular texts for posterity in ways that reflected the nation’s sense of its permanence, its exceptional status, and its diversity of origins. So while print may not have the power to uniformly fashion a nation, reprinted texts could foster simultaneity with past actors in American history. The description of history books that Channing gives suggests the physical embodiment of these actors inside the printed
object such that great men, “pour their souls” into that of the reader. This idolization of historical figures was common in nineteenth-century histories, but also evident in the methods of reproduction I have discussed. To create this encounter with the “souls” of “great men,” books must be available, portable, reproducible. Though I have not focused as intently on recreating reading experiences, Channing’s description ultimately demonstrates the “work” of history on a reader; for Channing, historical texts create an dynamic encounter between the past and the present. My study demonstrates how these encounters with the past were constructed in the early national and antebellum periods, but also how the ideal of an authentic encounter (through the writing or representation of deceased heroes) was disrupted by the interventions of editors, publishers, and more broadly, by divisive political, religious, and regional positions.

I have chosen to end my study just before the Civil War in order to highlight the divisive and problematic work of the emerging practice of American historiography. As my research unfolded, I noticed far more discontinuities than continuities among different reprinted historical texts and between these texts and nineteenth-century histories. I quickly realized that while there were overarching narratives of American colonial history, which I highlight in each of three parts, these narratives were not always born of the same set of materials nor were they representative of a broader national consciousness. That is, while the texts I discuss were cast as critical artifacts in the shaping of American historiography, they were likewise local and fraught with immediate, sometimes personal concerns. I have selected texts that represent these tensions between the local and the national and also between the global and the national; and ending just before Civil War only further highlights the tensions that were preventing
the effort to unify the nation through a shared history. There are, of course, many histories that go untold in the nineteenth century and in this dissertation. I chose to highlight three dominant narratives of colonial history that were all popular and accepted ways of understanding America’s colonial origins, even as they differed from each other. These dominant narratives show how disparate versions of the concept of exceptionalism circulated in the early national and antebellum periods and also how reprinted histories tended to privilege dominant colonial voices like Winthrop’s, Beverley’s, or even Columbus’s.

In the context of book history, I have sought to carve out a space for the study of reprints, which I have shown to be an important segment of the publishing industry in the early national and antebellum periods. My research fills a gap in American literary history by considering the “life” of texts across many periods. I have argued that reprinted texts were considered a critical part of many cultures of print in the U.S. and abroad, amongst the scholar and the layman alike. Most basically, this study reminds us that texts were not only read in their original context and that the facts surrounding their reproduction are not merely incidental to the complex network of the American book trade. Each instance of reproduction, I have argued, was the result of many people working together to bring the book back into circulation. When placed in the context of American antiquarianism and historical studies, these reproductions become all the more significant as they directly participated in the construction of colonial history in the nineteenth century. While scholars have long been interested in how history was reimagined in the nineteenth century, their work has privileged the historical novel as the primary site for understanding this phenomenon. The body of work I have discussed and
the editors, publishers, historians, and antiquarians involved in their production, contributes another significant element to these studies of the historical novel. The approach I have taken here not only demonstrates the fluidity of the categories of history and literature in the nineteenth century, but also points to the interpretive and often imaginative nature of historical writing. What Irving’s biography illustrates, for example, is that archival history could be infused with the same romantic historicism of Cooper, Sedgwick, and Hawthorne. Likewise, James Savage’s footnotes to John Winthrop’s journal, or Charles Campbell’s contemporary gloss on Bacon’s Rebellion reveal the ways in which historical reproduction in the nineteenth-century was infused with contemporary political and religious concerns and with a self-consciousness about how history itself could and should function locally, nationally, and globally.

“History’s Imprint” has demonstrated the fundamental relationship between historical writing and the reprinting of colonial texts in the nineteenth century. The juxtaposition of many versions of history asks us to interrogate what is meant by “colonial history” in the early national and antebellum periods and how its many permutations were revelatory of the ideological battles that characterized the young nation. By reading reprinted colonial texts as both products of the colonial period and products of the nineteenth century, and as both primary and secondary texts, we gain a more acute sense of how and why some historical narratives retain their power and authority and others fall into obscurity. My discussions of figures like Hazard, Belknap, Thomas, and others reveal what they perceived as the tremendously high stakes of preserving the historical record and preventing the permanent loss of colonial materials. Even though Emerson would eventually guard scholars against an act that sounds very
much like antiquarianism—groping “among the dry bones of the past”—the preservation of material texts and other antiquities was perceived as part and parcel of American progress (35). The very “original relation to the universe” of Emerson’s vision might be achieved in the archives themselves because the artifacts contained therein were thought to be the fundamental building blocks of a nation, a people, a past that would also determine a future. As Abiel Holmes affirmed, the archives themselves were in many ways constructed in anticipation of the future, not simply as a shrine to the past. Holmes writes, “If our antiquities have less rust than those of other countries, time is daily adding something to their value” (21). As these artifacts gained the patina of time and wear in the archives, they were also preserved in print. Enshrining the past in print created a sense of their permanence and their import. Holmes put it most poignantly in his 1820 forefather’s day address at Cambridge where he called on the attendees to spur on the pursuit of history amongst their fellow citizens: “To-day let us so interest them in the story of their forefathers, that their impression of it will never be erased from their memories, nor obliterated from their hearts” (26). The impression—or imprint—of history would, finally, find its most permanent form not in hearts, but in books.

NOTES

1 The notion of simultaneity, developed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983) and applied in the context of American nation-building and print culture by Michael Warner, was certainly propagated by writers and thinkers of the early republic; however, studies of how print actually circulated and the dearth of evidence of real readers and how they read complicates the “Imagined Communities” thesis.

2 To some extent, this project calls into question the current periodization used to designate courses, anthologies, and fields of study. Book history methodology, I would argue, gives us a way to consider texts outside of traditional periodic frameworks.
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