

# Border States

*Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*

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*Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee  
American Studies Association*

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*Border States*, the official journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association, is published biennially. Although preference is given to work previously presented as papers at the organization's annual meetings, the editors welcome the submission of manuscripts dealing with all aspects of the Kentucky-Tennessee region. Completed manuscripts of no more than fifteen double-spaced pages—including notes, works cited, or bibliography—should be submitted in duplicate. Send manuscripts to: Ellen Donovan (English) or Mary Hoffschwelle (History) in care of Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37132, by September 1, 2004. Manuscripts will be read by at least two members of the editorial board and, barring unforeseen problems, authors will receive notice of the board's decision in six to eight weeks.

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#### Editors' Notes

This fourteenth issue of *Border States* examines the relationship and interplay between the Kentucky-Tennessee region and the rest of the country. The essays in this issue examine not only the achievements of native sons and daughters, but also how their achievements affected people and ideas in other parts of the country. Similarly, ideas central to the nation as a whole shape the particularities of life for groups of people in the region.

The lead essay, by John Cawelti, examines the more central role southern culture plays in the United States. He surveys the way changing representations of the South in popular culture have moved the region from the margins to the heartland. Chad Barbour's essay looks back to Byrd's *Nick of the Woods* to show how that novel reflected political and social concerns of the nineteenth century. Barbour's analysis of family roles in the novel illuminates the ways in which the society attempted to manage and contain Native American populations. Also looking back is Benita Howell's essay on Franklin Webster Smith and his role in the establishment of Rugby. Howell explains how the generally overlooked Smith was initially involved in establishing the community. In our final historically focused essay of the issue, Lee Wilson reviews the life and career of famous newspaper woman Dorothy Dix, especially the ways in which her work influenced her reading public's responses to the social changes of the twentieth century.

We turn to contemporary subjects with essays by Richard A. Pride and Judith Hatchett. Pride analyzes the role of Elmo Stoll, the charismatic founder, in the rise and fall of a Christian community near Cookeville, Tennessee. Judith Hatchett turns to Bobbie Ann Mason's recent collection of short stories, *Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail*, to examine the ways in which Mason's regionalism is able to make suggestions about the role of popular culture in national identity.

Earlier versions of many of these essays were presented at the 46<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> annual meetings of the Kentucky Tennessee American Studies Association at Cumberland Falls State Park, Corbin, Kentucky, and Fall Creek Falls State Park, Pikeville, Tennessee, respectively. We hope that our readers enjoy these essays, which examine the various interactions between the border states, their inhabitants, and the country at large.

Ellen Donovan and Mary S. Hoffschwelle

## The Re-creation of Southern Tradition

John G. Cawelti  
Emeritus, University of Kentucky

New England, the South, the West, and the Middle West—such regions were of central importance in American history up until the beginning of the twentieth century. But in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the perception of regions and their relationship to each other began to change. Frederick Jackson Turner's famous 1893 announcement that the end of the frontier had closed a major era of American history and along with it the primary mythical significance of the West as a distinctive region appears in retrospect to symbolize a basic change in the meaning of regions in America. In the same decade the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 wrote racial segregation into American law and thus ended a major legal, if not actual, distinction between the South and the rest of the country. Even more broadly, the standardization of industrialism and the sense of America as a unified nation in a global structure of rival nation-states increasingly undercut the sense of distinctive American regions.

This process continued unabated through the first half of the twentieth century as America fought two world wars and a worldwide depression. During this period, areas hitherto less industrialized were rapidly transformed by the needs of war production and the populations of the different regions began to migrate more rapidly from one to another. During and after World War I increasing numbers of African-Americans migrated from the South to the North and the West in search of opportunity and greater freedom. After World War II, in a sort of reverse migration, middle-class whites gravitated from the Northeast and the Midwest to the areas of the South and the West that became known as the Sunbelt. In the aftermath of World War II, technological revolutions created new industries, like air conditioning, that made the steamy South and the great American deserts of the West places of pleasant and comfortable habitation, further eroding the significance of the distinctive ecological conditions of the different American regions. In addition, the concerted attack on the forms of racial segregation that had long distinguished the South from the rest of the country gradually eliminated the difference of social institutions between the different American regions. By 1974 the border state scholar John Egerton could write a book on the *Americanization of the South*, but conclude that it was hard to tell whether the South had become Americanized or that America had become southernized.

However, as this process of standardization, homogenization, and nationalization reached its climax in the 1960s, some important transformations began to occur in the definition of regions in America. Several trends of the 1970s reflected the dramatic political and economic changes the American South was undergoing and, in addition, indicated that the imaginative space the South occupied in American culture as a whole was shifting significantly. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the South had been primarily an arena of conflict over desegregation; however, by the mid-1970s the epicenter of racial conflict had shifted from the South to northern and western cities like Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit, and Chicago. Though the South remained massively segregated in many ways, the blatant patterns of Jim Crow, especially in public accommodations, were rapidly disappearing while southern African-Americans were making substantial gains in political power with the election of black officials and legislators. Once the overt conflict over desegregation had died down, a broader recognition of the fact that the South was undergoing a dramatic economic transformation challenged the image of the poverty-stricken Old South once characterized by the New Deal as America's number one economic problem. In its place emerged the

newly prosperous Sunbelt. Yet, ironically, this radical transformation of the southern economy was less in the forefront of the nation's consciousness than a sense of the South as representing fundamental American cultural and moral traditions in danger of being destroyed by economic and technological change.

The election in 1976 of Jimmy Carter and of Bill Clinton in 1994, as well as the 2000 campaign in which both candidates were southerners, reflected the new cultural significance of the South. The mid-1970s had several other signs of the South's changing image. On television, reruns of the perennially popular *Beverly Hillbillies* continued to delight audiences with gentle ridicule of the pretensions and suburban fantasies of an affluent urbanized America. The show prospered by transplanting the leading characters of Al Capp's beloved Dogpatch into sophisticated California, the ultimate embodiment of the postwar American dream of suburban happiness. The *Beverly Hillbillies* developed a theme that would be central to the new mythology of the South, the idea that in their very simplicity hillbillies possess a down-to-earth honesty and a dedication to family that resist the problems of rootless alienation and false materialism that afflict modern America.

*The Waltons*, one of the most popular television series of the mid-seventies, developed this theme more seriously as did the greatest television success of 1977: the miniseries inspired by Alex Haley's 1976 bestseller *Roots*. *Roots*, like *The Waltons*, dealt with southern groups subjected to oppression and marginalization, in one case African-Americans, in the other Appalachian mountaineers or "hillbillies." Both shows also centered around families attempting to maintain their traditions and values in the midst of troubled times and, especially in the case of *Roots*, in the face of terrible threats from the society itself. Yet, in spite of all these difficulties, the two families maintained their integrity, surmounted poverty and oppression, and passed on their wisdom, love and deep sense of morality to a younger generation. Significantly, in these series "family values" were not only associated with a troubled South, but with marginal groups. Later as the "family values" movement reached its moral and imaginative nadir in the ugly self-righteousness of the 1992 Republican convention, this association was lost and "family values" became a hollow slogan of affluent white suburbanites, North and South alike. However, in the 1970s, the new myth of the South gained force from the idea that many important traditional values were best preserved in a "backward" region among the poor and downtrodden.

This view was congruent with important cultural developments in two other areas: religion and music. The 1970s saw a great surge in the growth of television evangelism, before the Bakker and Swaggart scandals raised questions about the movement. Television evangelism was particularly associated with the South and its long tradition of Protestant oratory and revivalism. However, the new technology of cable television made possible the nationalizing of a southern form of revivalism that had earlier been limited to the periodic crusades of preachers like Billy Graham. In the 1970s many Protestant ministers expanded into television, gradually building a large and powerful movement that, by the middle 1970s, was beginning to flex its political muscle. Some liked to refer to this movement as the "silent" or "moral majority" to suggest that it represented an American consensus of long-standing moral and religious traditions which had lost or not yet found its voice.

Just as television evangelism swept the country in the 1970s, so did "country music" which also had powerful associations with the South. In terms of popular music, the 1960s had been, above all, the era of rock-and-roll, with New York, Los Angeles, Motown (Detroit) and even London as the musical centers. Wild orgiastic mass concerts culminated in Woodstock, rock-and-roll's archetypal musical extravaganza.

During the 1970s, however, Nashville became an increasingly important musical center and its Grand Old Opry on television along with other programs of country music and humor like *Hee-Haw* entered the mainstream of entertainment.

Country music with its "down-home" southern flavor implied a significant shift in cultural constellations and themes. It appealed to a broader range of Americans not only geographically but across age groups. Popular music since the 1920s had been largely a music for young people—the two major musical revolutions of jazz-swing and rock-and-roll had made generational conflict a major aspect of their cultural rhetoric. But country music pleased older Americans because of its relative simplicity and harmoniousness compared to rock-and-roll's dissonance and orgiastic quality. Country music also appealed to long-standing traditions rather than to change and novelty: its style and instrumentation remained highly traditional even when its musicians increasingly adapted electronic amplification and other new instrumental techniques. The way performers dressed and even the styles of dancing the music fostered had strong traditional overtones. No matter how encrusted with rhinestones, the costumes were clearly derived from traditional western or southern models. The dominant themes of the music were different too. Whereas rock-and-roll dealt mainly with passion, sex, drugs, alienation, and the faults of American culture, country music's lyrics concerned the failure of family, touching often on cheating, adultery, divorce, and the failure of love. In addition, country music had a strong religious orientation, as did the closely associated traditions of gospel music, which also grew out of southern black and white religious traditions.

Significantly, the single most popular musician of the sixties and seventies, Elvis Presley, bridged the traditions of country music and the new rock-and-roll, the latter strongly shaped by African-American popular music. The influence of Elvis as synthesizer of black and white musical traditions had a pervasive impact on the cultural scene by affirming the importance of the African-American presence in the history of the South. Many other phenomena reflected this redefinition of southern culture to acknowledge the contribution of blacks: African-American performers entered the hitherto lily-white domain of country music, some of them bringing along a flavor of the blues. The blues themselves, once largely produced and consumed as "race music" or "rhythm and blues" became increasingly popular with whites. This acknowledgement of the significance of African-American musical traditions led to such further developments as the establishment at the University of Mississippi of a program to archive and study southern blues. What a transformation in the university where in the early 1960s racist whites fought the "battle of Oxford" to prevent the enrollment of black students!

There are many other ways in which southern culture and traditions were recreated in the late twentieth century. The success of many regional and local magazines like *Southern Living*, the interest in regional cuisines, and the opening of restaurants specializing in regional cuisines at all levels from fast food to gourmet are instances of this process. The flourishing of regional music festivals and the creation of local and regional encyclopedias like *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, and *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* are also part of this grass roots struggle toward the re-creation of regional cultures. These changes have also been reflected in the rise of new forms of regional literature and the kind of reinterpretation of the history of regional literatures represented by books like Michael Kreyling's *Inventing Southern Literature* and Robert H. Brinkmeyer's *Remapping Southern Literature*. They have also led to the development of thriving schools of regional and local mystery and horror writers. For example, New Orleans is the background for mysteries by Julie Smith, Norman Donaldson, Barbara

Hambly and others, to say nothing of Vampire Queen Anne Rice whose vision of New Orleans is an essential part of her work. Other regions too have their mystery writers such as Margaret Maron of North Carolina and Sharyn McCrumb of Appalachia. All these writers create a definite regional atmosphere as a fundamental part of their mysteries. In some of her more recent work, such as *She Walks These Hills*, and *The Songcatcher*, McCrumb effectively uses the interplay between traditional ideas of Appalachian culture and the new emergent culture of the last decade as a background for her mysteries. In fact, the dialectic between criminals and detectives often becomes symbolic in her work of the complex and ambiguous interplay of the new Appalachia with the old.

The new significance of Appalachia in southern culture is one aspect of a far-reaching redefinition of what used to be the southern tradition. The idea of the "Solid South" was forged in the contentious struggle over abolition in the years before the Civil War and solidified in the historical experience of the War and Reconstruction. Events of the late nineteenth century such as the spread of Jim Crow and the continued southern dependence on cotton culture only reaffirmed the conception of a solid cultural tradition throughout the southern region of the country. Even states like Kentucky, that were border states during the Civil War, became part of the monolithic Solid South. As late as 1964 a professor at the University of Mississippi could publish a book called *The Closed Society*, arguing that Mississippi, and by implication the rest of the South, was obsessively unified in defense of its traditions. This however, changed rapidly with the Civil Rights Movement and the transformation of the southern economy in the 1960s and 1970s. Increasingly, the South is no longer perceived as single unity, but as a number of different sub-regions, each with its own distinctive style and pattern of culture: the Deep South, Texas (East and West), Appalachia, the border states, the tidewater, and several other divisions.

Thus, the last quarter of the twentieth century has brought about three major changes in the ideological situation of the South: first, from being a region apart, the South, along with the West, is now widely perceived as the American heartland; second, the perception of southern history has shifted drastically from the vision of the Lost Cause to an acknowledgement of the evils of slavery and of the great contributions of African-Americans and other ethnic groups to the creation of southern culture; finally, the once Solid South is now perceived as many different regions and traditions. While the residual struggle over the public display of the Confederate battle flag indicates that there are still some southerners who look back to the traditions of the Lost Cause and the Solid South, these groups are increasingly marginal. While the vaunted New South of the early twentieth century was based on an ideological reaffirmation of older southern traditions, and thus not really new at all, the South of the early twenty-first century is a new world still struggling to define itself.

## Family Relations and Indian-Killing in Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Wood*

Chad Barbour  
University of Kentucky

In 1831, the Supreme Court heard the case of *Cherokee Nation v. State of Georgia*. This case would mark a major milestone in the development of United States policy on the removal of indigenous peoples. *Cherokee Nation* sought an injunction against Georgia's attempt to take over land in Cherokee possession. The Cherokees' claim was that they existed as a nation independent of the laws of Georgia, and were able to stand as a legal party in court to argue this matter. Chief Justice Marshall, in delivering the opinion of the Court, ruled that the Cherokee nation was not independent and could hold no ground in a legal case. He stated that Indians and their tribes may not be denominated "foreign nations" but "more correctly, perhaps, be denominated domestic dependent nations."<sup>1</sup> He further explained the relationship of the U.S. government and indigenous peoples in this way: "Their relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian. They look to our government for protection; rely upon its kindness and its power; appeal to it for relief to their wants; and address the president as their great father." Marshall's language here represents a particular conception, rooted in antebellum United States culture, that views Native peoples of North America as children to the United States government. In this essay, I will explore how this familial metaphor creates a site of both stability and anxiety in the formation of national identity in early United States culture.

The concept of family circulates throughout early nineteenth-century American culture in a variety of ways. From metaphors for democracy and the republic to descriptions of white-indigenous relations, "family" exists as a complex and textured term in this period. While I am not able to discuss completely the various manifestations of the family in antebellum life, I want to focus on one particular familial metaphor that saw wide currency: the white-Native relationship figured as family (specifically parent-child).

Michael Rogin sets an important precedent in cultural studies of the Indian through his examination of the family metaphor. He describes the Indian-white relationship in Jacksonian America in psycho-analytic terms, as a "family romance." The Indian, for him, signifies three things: 1) a repressed other; 2) a childhood that must be conquered; and 3) an "inner double" or shadow.<sup>2</sup> Rogin's attention to the family metaphor and Indian relations has a strong historical base. In treaties and other documents pertaining to Native relations, Jackson was often referred to as the "Great Father" and Native peoples as his children. For example, Black Hawk's 1833 *Autobiography* carries this convention.<sup>3</sup> Lewis Henry Morgan suggests a similar relationship when he states that "[t]o the Indian department of the national government, the wardship of the whole Indian family is, in a great measure, committed."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most important manifestation of this metaphor comes in the Supreme Court decision for *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. Throughout these various accounts, the United States assumes the role of an adoptive parent for "wayward" and "abandoned" indigenous peoples.

To better understand some of the ramifications of this relationship, it is useful to explore how the familial metaphor works in one particular textual instance, Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods*

(1837). Family acts as a double figure in this novel, embodying the comfort of hierarchical relations while also containing the potential of radical mass equality. Bird's use of the family for white-Native relations works in two ways: Indians are alienated as non-familial (and non-familiar) and Indians represent improper familial relations. These interpretations of the family in Bird's novel serve two interlocking theses: 1) Indian-killing (whether metaphoric or real) is necessary in order to maintain national identity; and 2) an opposition between "good" family relations and "bad" family relations can signify proper democratic relations.

### Background: The Novel and Cultural Context

Bird's *Nick of the Woods* tells the story of a Virginian brother and sister, Roland and Edith Forrester, who have been swindled out of their inheritance and so have moved to frontier Kentucky to start anew. In Kentucky, they meet a variety of characters: the manly Colonel Bruce; Roarin' Ralph Stackpole, a southwestern comic type; Nathan Slaughter (or Bloody Nathan), a Quaker; and Telie Doe, a daughter who has been "orphaned" by her "Injunized" father. The title of the novel refers to a mysterious being who kills Indians. By novel's end, we discover it to be the Quaker, Nathan, who is avenging the massacre of his family by Indians. In addition, by novel's end the Forresters recover their rightful inheritance and all ends well: the Indians are subdued and rightful family relations are in place.

*Nick of the Woods* participates in two distinct historical periods. It is set in 1784 and was published in 1837. Both of these historical moments share a precariousness of national identity. In the earlier period, expansion, sectionalism, and territorial wars with indigenes threatened the formation of a viable, unified nation. The conflict with native peoples on the frontier, as well as threats of internal uprisings (Kentucky's own flirtation with Spanish alliance a few years later, for example) create a dangerous time for the creation and formation of a national identity. Parallel to this, the novel also appears in a somewhat precarious time for national order. Jacksonian democracy, along with indigenous removal, also brought into question national identity. This period witnessed the movement, at least in rhetoric, toward the "common man." Jackson's dichotomy of mass democracy versus privileged aristocracy threatened, at least in theory, a hierarchical order. James Bugg and Peter Stewart argue that Jackson's rhetoric represented democracy as stressing the virtues of the ordinary citizen, the ideal of equality, and the elimination of special privileges. According to this logic, the "common man" was the direct source of political power.<sup>5</sup> The threat of Indians and the threat of radical democratic potential work in a parallel fashion to destabilize a prospective national identity. *Nick* negotiates and mitigates these threats through its utilization of the family. Such negotiation occurs in one form through the alienating of Native peoples (as "Indians") from the American family.

### 1. Killing Indians, Creating Citizens

When figured as foreign or outside of U.S. citizenship, an Indian can serve as the antithesis to liberal democracy and to United States civilization. So, the creation of national identity springs out of alienating or exiling Indians from a perceived democratic order. With this kind of identifying apparatus (Indian as alien), a democratic subject maintains *his* integrity as a citizen by not "going native." With this dynamic of citizenship, becoming "Injunized" is a very real fear for United States subjects, or, perhaps, more appropriately, the white male U.S. subject. As Priscilla Wald has shown, official national narratives interact with and exclude "unofficial" persons.<sup>6</sup> Thus, how whites perceive and formulate Natives influences greatly a construction of national identity.

In *Nick*, "going native" presents a very real danger. For example, Telie's father has been "Injunized." And it is through this "Injunization" that Richard Braxley, the main villain, performs his machinations in his attempt to rob Roland Forrester of his inheritance and marry Edith Forrester. This question of inheritance encompasses Telie, too, who has no rightful inheritance since her supposed father has gone native (though this matter is resolved in the novel's end). Bird accentuates the instability of the line between "white" and "red" when Telie and the Forresters have been captured and she attempts to persuade her father of his whiteness: "[Y]ou are a white man, father, and not an Indian; yes, father, you are *no* Indian: and you promised no harm should be done—you did father, you *did* promise!" (226). Abel Doe's race changes with his allegiance (although his actual skin color does not change), and so Telie must try to convince him of his "true" racial affiliation. This instability of racial allegiance presents one threat to a unified national identity. Furthermore, the "renegade parent" here is, perhaps, an even greater threat. His promises cannot be trusted. He proves false. And the father who proves false is a danger to social order.

Bird rests the value system of the novel upon "the mighty fathers of the republic" whom Roland turns to in faith and spirit, "not [to] stoop to the meanness of falsehood and deception even in that moment of peril and fear" (379). The moment referred to here is when Abel Doe offers to free Roland if he would marry Telie, Abel's supposed daughter. Marrying Telie, then, would mean escape for Roland. His refusal to do so rests upon the "mighty fathers of the republic," who are cloaked in honesty, integrity, and uprightness. Bird invokes the "mighty fathers" as the guides and guardians of liberty and democracy. If they are corrupted, so too will be the nation. The "Injunized father" is a corrupted father and, therefore, is a direct threat to the nation's course.

Nevertheless, going native also becomes necessary for acts of war and violence. Nathan takes the tomahawk in hand to avenge the death of his family. Nathan, "unfathered," has no choice but to become savage, to lead a double life in order to exact revenge. So, while the paranoia of going native creates one anxiety of national development, it also becomes necessary. It functions in these cases as temporary insanity, as in Nathan's epileptic-like episodes, or as we can see in other instances in American literature such as Edgar Huntly's sleepwalking in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*.<sup>7</sup> This alternation of a fear and a necessity of becoming Indian is resolved in the novel through the reinstatement of the Forrester's inheritance. Richard Braxley and Abel Doe, who are aligned with the Indians in the novel, hatch a convoluted scheme to steal the inheritance from Roland and Edith. Braxley's designs almost succeed. Having captured the Forresters with his Indian allies, he places Edith in a position in which her only escape can be through marriage to him (paralleling Roland's chance for escape by marrying Telie). Edith, of course, resists. Nathan rescues her from Braxley, but both are then recaptured. Eventually, Bruce and the Kentuckians swoop in for one final rescue, the villains receive their just desserts, and the inheritance is restored. In this course of events, Roland and Edith are both offered marriage, but resist since that would create an improper familial alliance. The Forresters hold onto the proper inheritance from the father figure (their uncle, in this case) and refuse any possible horizontal alignments. This refusal of a certain familial arrangement affirms a proper democratic arrangement: a fathered democracy.

### 2. Proper Democracy is a Fathered Democracy

In the previous section I looked at how the figure of Indian as alien represented something outside the white American family, something that opposed a proper familial order. While this construction designated an Indian symbolics of the non-familial and unrelated, *Nick* also represents Indians as examples of improper familial relations, and thus sets up what democratic order should not be.



Indian symbolics work to represent what a white U.S. citizen could become, or, perhaps even more fearful, what the U.S. citizen desires to be. This novel engages in a doubleness in which the white characters traverse the line between “civilized white” and “red savage”: threats of marriage with “Injunized” whites, captivity, and resorts to violent savagery all walk the line between civilization and savagery. The revenge that Nathan seeks for his family, like James Hall’s Indian-hater, drives the white male to acts of violence and savagery. This raises a paradox: to kill the savage one must become the savage. This paradox describes a process in which a white male becomes what he hates in order to rid himself of the hateful thing.

When flattened into a liberal individualist conception, democracy runs a parallel circuit. Historically speaking, this version of democracy promised freedom and equality while upholding a system of slavery and land-theft. Along with such racial marginalization, liberal democracy also engendered a competitive economy between white men. This particular permutation of democracy, which has held hard and fast in the United States, produces competition along multiple axes of social arrangement, competition that might be best described as *savage* in its emphasis on survival of the fittest. Liberal democracy, like white men in their interaction with indigenous persons and each other, destroys the very things (equality, cooperation, community) it claims to create. In parallel fashion, an imaginary democracy and Indians may exist for the white democratic subject. While expressing a desire for equality, democratic order in this novel finally rests in hierarchy, thus refuting a promise of equality. This becomes visible in the bifurcation of familial relations between the whites and the Indians.

This bifurcation of familial categories resides in placing a proper family alignment in hierarchy and an improper family alignment in equality. The proper transmission of rights and privileges proceed from the father, while the improper transmission proceeds from the brother. This division marks a contrast between vertical and horizontal relations. In the novel, both types of relations contest each other, but in the end the vertical, top-down structure prevails.

In addition, this opposition of familial relations is divided along a white-Indian binary. Whites, in this case exemplified by the Forresters, maintain the hierarchical, paternal structure, while Indians represent an egalitarian, sibling structure. Roland’s invocation of “the mighty fathers of the republic” is a prime example of the paternal vision of family. In addition, the recovery at novel’s end of the vertically transmitted inheritance affirms hierarchical structure. The novel finds stability and security through a paternal transmission of rights and subjecthood. Marital and parent-child relationships are prioritized in relationship to each other, too. In one instance, Roland, considering a last resort if resistance against the Indians fails, listens to the flowing waters of a nearby river and thinks “that when resistance was no longer availing, there was yet refuge for his kinswoman within the dark bosom of those troubled waters, to which he felt, with the stern resolution of a Roman father rather than a Christian lover, that he could, when nothing else remained, consign her with his own hands” (179). The choice that arises here lies between Indian capture and death. If resistance against an Indian attack were to fail, Roland sees the only alternative as sending Edith to death, acting as the father who protects the virtue and honor of his daughter, rather than a lover who wishes to preserve his object of affection. Here, then, the horizontal relation of affection between lovers subordinates to the hierarchical demands of honor for father and daughter. The father must preserve the daughter’s dignity through death rather than risk that dignity due to affection or sympathy.

Such horizontal affection becomes further marginalized in the novel’s Indians. The novel’s movement toward the proper family must resist the possible familial arrangement of sibling equality, as represented by the novel’s Indians. In an attack preceding the example above, an Indian enters the cabin, that the protagonists have taken shelter in. With a “grim smile yet writhing on his features, [the Indian exclaims] with a mockery of friendly accost, ‘Bozhoo, brudders,—Injun good friend!’” (161). As this assault progresses, an Indian grabs Roland, clutches him “in the embrace of a bear,” suffocating Roland: “‘Brudder!’ growled the savage, and the foam flew from his grinning lips, advanced until they were almost in contact with the soldier’s face—‘Brudder!’ he cried, as he felt his triumph, and twined his arms still more tightly around Roland’s frame, ‘Long-knife nothing! hab a scalp, Shawnee!’” (163). The brotherly embrace of the savage means death for the white. “Brudder” is here a term of mockery and derision. In similar terms, Dana Nelson’s analysis of fraternity in *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of Men* demonstrates that equal relations among white men work to marginalize actual equality while maintaining hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> In *Nick*, fraternity truly endangers a stabilized and stratified social order. And the brotherly relationship Bird shows in his Indians threatens national order.

The contestation of white and Indian in the novel, then, can be read as a contestation of different forms of democratic possibility. On one hand, we have a hierarchical democracy, one that rests in the father-leader, that distrusts a radical equality and prefers a presidential democracy that rests power and transmission of rights in a vertical order. This is the democracy deemed proper according to the preferred familial arrangement in this novel. On the other hand, we have a more radical democracy that places all citizens on even footing, that transmits power and rights from citizen to citizen, brother to brother, sister to sister. This horizontal democracy is portrayed in the novel through an Indian that is dangerous and anarchic. This democracy is perceived as a savage one. Therefore, U.S. democracy must place itself in line with “the mighty fathers of the republic.” Only in a transmission from before (temporally) and above (socially) can a proper democratic order exist. And in response to Jacksonian democratic rhetoric, this novel’s answer is quite clear: a democracy based on the “common man” and not based on hierarchical relations is a dangerous one. (Although it also might be argued that a “common man” democracy is hierarchical, I believe that the perceived threat of Jacksonian democracy against aristocratic privilege contained this threat of horizontal, fraternal relations and mass equality.)

#### **Indian-Killing and Nation-Making: A Conclusion**

The threat of the Indian toward national identity and toward the course of democracy greatly informs Bird’s novel. This insecurity is reckoned with through Bird’s interpretations of the trans-Appalachian frontier, in which differences from an Indian produce a sense of national identity and democratic order based on a construction of familial arrangement that preserves hierarchy. Indians are both alienated outside of the white family and designated as maintaining improper family structure. Therefore, Indian-killing is a necessary process: both actually and symbolically. Indians as racial threat and adversaries for land must be exterminated in order to make way for the development of a United States nation. In addition, the Indian’s potential symbolics of an alternative social arrangement, one based on equal, sibling relations, must be marginalized or dampened to preserve a hierarchical order. This process parallels Richard Slotkin’s idea of “regeneration through violence.”<sup>9</sup> In this case, the threat of some non-stratified democratic potential becomes racialized, deadened, and rejected in order to sustain and invigorate the hierarchical democracy of the fathers.

This struggle over national identity and democratic order extends throughout antebellum American culture. From Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1837), to Black Hawk's *Autobiography* (1833) to the Supreme Court decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), the relationship of whites to Natives was characterized in familial terms that attempt to intimate the alien while maintaining detachment. The uncertainty produced by the alien Indian made even more necessary the formation of a model for the United States citizen. To kill an Indian is to kill the bad brother and preserve the good father. Killing the "Injunized" self privileges hierarchical over equal relations and maintains the deserved inheritance of citizenship from the "mighty fathers of the republic." Thus, a more stable, immobilized form of citizenship is constructed here that avoids the messy fluidity of radical democratic possibility.<sup>10</sup> The example of Bird demonstrates a democratic potential deadened or nullified through its categorization in familial terms. This set of terms domesticates democratic potential, producing a national identity that rests upon a desire to uphold the homogeneity of family against the foreign and the alien, thus negating the possibility of growth and change.

<sup>1</sup>*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1 (1831).

<sup>2</sup>Michael Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995; New York: Knopf, 1975).

<sup>3</sup>Black Hawk, *Autobiography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990; 1833).

<sup>4</sup>Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (Rochester, New York: Sage and Brother, 1851), 23.

<sup>5</sup>James L. Bugg and Peter C. Stewart, *Jacksonian Democracy* (Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1976), 6.

<sup>6</sup>Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup>This ambiguity about becoming savage is echoed by Roy Harvey Pearce's idea of pity and censure. He describes a white yearning for life free of the complexities of civilization; but with such desire comes a guilt and hatred of the temptation offered by the "savage." Pearce elucidates this ambiguity of white feeling toward Natives that oscillates between attraction and repulsion in *Savagism and Civilization* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 74. Philip Deloria explores this dynamic as well in *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup>Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup>Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).

<sup>10</sup>This idea of an immobilized citizenship finds articulation in Russ Castronovo, *NecroCitizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and idem, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

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Franklin Webster Smith of Boston:  
Architect of Tourism in Rugby, Tennessee

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Through the efforts of the non-profit organization, Historic Rugby, Inc., the Victorian village of Rugby in Morgan County, Tennessee, has become one of the most recognized tourist destinations on the Cumberland Plateau. In the past few years, journalists have written feature articles on Rugby for *Preservation*, *Southern Living*, and *Victoria Magazine*, while media outlets in Middle and East Tennessee regularly publicize its special events. Failure of the Rugby Colony to flourish in the 1880s ultimately became a boom for historic preservation. Several of the original buildings were still standing when the Rugby Restoration Association first formed in 1966.<sup>1</sup> The town plan was still visible on a landscape disturbed by farming and logging but little else. Rugby's physical attractions along with its romantic history as a Utopian British colony bound descendants of the nineteenth-century Rugbeians to this place and continued to attract summer residents into the middle of the twentieth century. In that sense, the village of Rugby never died. Preserved and promoted by the non-profit organization Historic Rugby, the National Register District architectural museum annually hosts about 68,000 visitors from all 50 states and 25 foreign countries.

The publicity that attracts visitors and the on-site interpretation they receive always begins with an introduction to the founder of the Rugby Colony, English author, statesman, and social reformer Thomas Hughes. As president of the London-based Board of Aid to Land Ownership that brought British colonists to Rugby in the early 1880s, Hughes intended to create a community free of Victorian Britain's rigid social class distinctions and based on Christian Socialist principles of cooperation. To fully understand Rugby's origins and its second century identity as tourist destination and retirement community, however, one must appreciate the colorful career of its lesser-known American founder, Franklin Webster Smith of Boston.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike most nineteenth-century American towns, Rugby did not grow up around a railroad depot or river crossing. The town itself was situated a rugged seven miles from the new Cincinnati Southern rail line, not a favorable location for prospective colonists who hoped to earn a living from farming and business enterprises. Why was the town laid out along the bluffs that overlooked the gorges of the Clear Fork River and White Oak Creeks? The simple answer is that Hughes joined a pre-existing American colonization scheme and had no part in choosing the town site. In fact, Smith deliberately chose the site for its natural and aesthetic qualities.

In response to the financial depression of the mid-1870s, Franklin Webster Smith, a supplier of marine hardware and board member of several Boston industrial firms, proposed resettling unemployed industrial workers in a rural area, returning them to farming. Through a series of articles published in the *Boston Advertiser* in 1877, he persuaded other Bostonians to join the original Board of Aid to Land Ownership. He proposed rural settlements modeled on the success of already-established planned communities at Vineland, New Jersey, and Greeley, Colorado. In December of 1877, the Boston Board of Aid to Land Ownership formed with Smith as its president. Smith's prospectus and Board letterhead announced the intent: "to divert workers from surplus in manufacturing to Tillage of the Earth—The Basis of All Industries, and the Primary Source of All Wealth."

A committee began making inquiries and inspecting possible locations for settlement in the western and southern states. By the following June they had decided to acquire land on the Cumberland Plateau, soon to be made more accessible by the Cincinnati Southern Railroad then under construction southward from Somerset, Kentucky. Cyrus Clarke, a Pennsylvania entrepreneur who was president of the New Castle and Franklin Railroad, had obtained options on land that he offered to the Board. One Rugby oral tradition explained that A. L. Crawford, a Clarke business associate, overheard members of Smith's party discussing their land quest while sharing a train car with them; Crawford introduced himself and suggested that they contact Clarke to inspect his property. However they met Cyrus Clarke, members of the Boston Board of Aid gathered information about the Cumberland Plateau, inspected the area with Clarke, and ultimately hired him as their land agent and general manager.



It was Smith, not Hughes, who visited Tennessee in 1878, chose the town site, and retained surveyor Rufus Cook of Newton, Massachusetts, to develop the original town plan.<sup>3</sup> Cook was not an unknown; five years earlier he had successfully completed a much larger project, laying out the town plan for Huntington, West Virginia. Smith also selected architect George F. Fuller, whose offices were located close to his in Pemberton Square, to design a hotel for the new town. By this time, the immediate financial crisis in Boston had passed and some of Smith's investors were having second thoughts about the Cumberland Plateau project, so Smith was seeking additional investors. In January of 1879 under a reorganized British-American partnership, Hughes and his London Board of Aid to Land Ownership became the principal investors while the Bostonians retained immediate management of the project. According to Thomas's brother Hastings Hughes, John Boyle, who had encountered Cyrus Clarke while seeking farmland to

purchase for his son, drew Hughes into the Bostonians' project. As representative of the London Board, Boyle visited the Cumberland Plateau in the autumn of 1878; his favorable report convinced Hughes and the British investors to merge with the Bostonians for the purpose of establishing an Anglo-American colony.

In recollections written twenty years after the fact, Hastings Hughes blamed Cyrus Clarke for leading his brother Thomas into the project that had nearly bankrupted him. But his "True Story of Rugby" provided misleading information about the relationship between Cyrus Clarke and Franklin Smith, much to Smith's detriment. Hastings Hughes assumed that these Americans were cronies who had conspired to take advantage of his brother's fame and defraud the British investors through shady real estate dealings. Working from the assumption that Smith was Clarke's partner or employee, Hastings explained the location of Rugby as a means to lure the colony from the railroad line westward toward Fentress County, where Clarke held options on land that he wished to sell (and subsequently did sell to the Germans who founded Allardt).

As President of the original Boston Board of Aid, Smith (not Clarke) traveled to London to conclude the merger with the British investors; it is unclear, however, when and how he first met Thomas Hughes. Was John Boyle's prior introduction to Cyrus Clarke the critical link between the presidents of the American and British Boards of Aid, or did Smith have other connections to Hughes and the British investors, connections that would have carried more weight than the brief business acquaintance between Clarke and Boyle?

It is possible that James Russell Lowell had introduced Smith to Thomas Hughes when Hughes visited Boston in 1870, but there is no evidence for this. There is, however, a plausible explanation for Smith having access to the London Board independent of Cyrus Clarke's supposed encounter with John Boyle. Russell Sturgis, Jr., a Bostonian who was a member of Smith's Board, might well have informed his father, Russell, Sr. that the Boston Board of Aid had land suitable for Hughes's American colony. Russell Sturgis, Sr. was a principal investor in the London Board, an American from one of the prominent New England families who had made their fortune in the China trade. He returned from China to Boston in the early 1840s to avoid the Opium War. Subsequently he joined the Baring Bank in London and lived out the remainder of his life there.

Having spent his childhood in China, Russell Sturgis, Jr. attended Harvard College when his father returned to Boston and then became a merchant in the city. Later he would serve as US consul in Canton, but as young businessmen in Boston, the Brahmin Sturgis and upwardly mobile Franklin Smith found common interests in Christian evangelism and social ministry to the working class. Their association can be traced back to the early 1850s when both were leaders in establishing the Young Men's Christian Association in Boston, the first chapter of that organization formed in the United States. Smith became the first president of the Boston YMCA in 1855; Sturgis was elected president in 1858. When the Boston Board formed to implement Smith's plan for relocation of unemployed industrial workers, Russell Sturgis, Jr. became a key supporter and investor. Thus Franklin Smith and Thomas Hughes, and their respective Boards, were linked through Russell Sturgis, Jr. and his father.

Was there evidence, aside from a character reference from Russell Sturgis, that Franklin Smith was an honest businessman? Bostonians had been shocked and outraged in 1864 when the Navy seized the civilian

Smith at his home and arrested him on charges of graft in supplying naval stores to the Charlestown shipyard. He had been incarcerated for two weeks, his home searched, and his business padlocked. Smith was tried and convicted in military court martial proceedings covered by the press in New York as well as Boston. Apparently, Naval officers were retaliating with trumped up charges for whistle blowing in which Smith had called attention to irregularities and testified before a Congressional committee about bid rigging between procurement officers and dishonest contractors. At the behest of Senator Charles Sumner, President Lincoln himself reviewed the proceedings, concluded that the charges were baseless, and overturned the conviction. When Lincoln was assassinated only a month later, Bostonians had chosen Franklin Smith to preside over their meeting to mourn the President's passing.<sup>4</sup> By 1877 when his *Boston Advertiser* articles were published, Smith was a respected leader of the Boston Board of Trade and a member of several corporation boards. In addition to Sturgis, other members of old Beacon Hill families joined Smith's Boston Board of Aid to Land Ownership.

Thomas Hughes was a member of the British gentry by birth, whereas Smith's parents had come to Boston from rural New Hampshire to join the rising middle class, but the two had much in common. They shared a commitment to abolition of slavery and to the moral uplift and betterment of the growing class of urban workers. Hughes through his support of Christian Socialism and the London Workingman's College and Smith through his work with the Young Men's Christian Association embraced and acted upon a common set of religiously grounded social principles. By the 1870s, the British working class had cultivated their own leadership and become more radical than the Christian Socialists. Hughes then had turned to the problem of underemployed public school men, hoping that an American colony would free impoverished second sons of British gentry from class conventions that prevented them from earning a living through agriculture or trades. Once the economic crisis in Boston had eased so that Smith's original project of resettling unemployed industrial workers was unnecessary, he too was ready to foster a classless (or more realistically, middle class) community on the Cumberland Plateau. According to the articles of incorporation that the merged Board of Aid adopted in January of 1879, Hughes and Smith intended to develop a joint Anglo-American colony "where cultivated persons of modest means could establish comfortable homes in a healthful country setting."<sup>5</sup>

Whereas John Boyle and other investors were keenly interested in the Cumberland Plateau's timber and mineral resources, Smith's philanthropic motives seemed compatible with those of Hughes, at least initially. But Smith's activities subsequent to the Rugby project suggest that he readily grasped the Plateau's appeal as a resort and site for retirement or vacation homes. He chose the most picturesque terrain for the town, despite its distance from the railroad, and he arranged for a formal town plan that would take advantage of site topography in the most attractive way. Having secured the services of architect George Fuller to design the Tabard Inn, Smith interceded with the London office to retain Mr. Fuller to superintend the inn's construction.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Smith appreciated that the Cincinnati Southern Railroad and the new wagon road could bring a steady stream of resort visitors to enjoy cool Plateau air, mountain vistas, and picturesque stream gorges. As with modern resorts, visitors who enjoyed their stay might purchase lots and become residents.

Hughes did not share Smith's interest in tourism. He questioned expenditure of time and money building bridle trails from the hotel into the stream gorges, and as preparations were being made for the colony's formal opening he wrote Smith in June of 1880: "You seem to assume that there will be need of more documents [promotional brochures]. We cannot agree to this view. It appears to us that those already

prepared, & of which you have doubtless plenty of spare copies, will be amply sufficient for all our requirements, & we must ask that there be no further outlay at present on publications."<sup>7</sup>

Frustrated in his dealings with Cyrus Clarke and the London Board and pleading ill health, Smith resolved to extricate himself from the Rugby project by the end of 1880, and did so.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently he launched more grandiose projects in other places to extend opportunities for tourism to the growing class of "cultivated persons of modest means." As a successful businessman, Smith was able to enjoy summer holidays at Newport and travel in Europe and the Middle East. He was intrigued by architectural and art history and took up building architectural scale models as a hobby. He was sufficiently adept as an amateur architect to have designed his Back Bay home.<sup>9</sup>

By 1883, Smith was a winter resident of St. Augustine, Florida, where he designed and built himself a residence, Villa Zorayda, a replica of the Zorayda tower of the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. Smith introduced poured concrete construction and the Moorish revival style that came to typify St. Augustine's hotel district. Railroad tycoon and developer Henry Flagler was following Smith's stylistic and technological lead in his grand Ponce de Leon hotel, built in 1885. Smith designed and built his own smaller hotel, the Casa Monica, but sold it to Flagler only a few months after opening it in 1888. The 138-room Casa Monica was refurbished and reopened in late 1899 to a flurry of press coverage that brought Smith to the attention of Floridians. Since then architectural historians have attributed some additional Moorish revival buildings in the King Street district of St. Augustine to Smith. But Smith's story does not end with his Florida retirement and creation of its Moorish revival architectural theme.

In 1888-89, Smith busied himself with creating an educational attraction in Saratoga Springs, New York, for vacationers who could not afford European travel. He built a full-scale Roman house replica, the House of Pansa, as described in Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, complete with interior decoration and furnishings. By then Saratoga Springs was no longer a destination favored by high society but a middle-class resort as described by William Howells in his novel, *An Open-Eyed Conspiracy: An Idyll of Saratoga*.<sup>10</sup>

Smith's philanthropic impulses increasingly revolved around enriching the lives of the growing middle class through cultural and educational experiences that prior to the Civil War had been accessible only to the wealthy. The scheme that engrossed Smith longest and ultimately exhausted his fortune, however, was an elaborate plan to "aggrandize" the capitol district in Washington, D.C. with replicas of Old World architectural monuments, for the benefit of teachers and others who could not afford international travel to visit the originals.<sup>11</sup> His vision for Washington, already taking shape by 1890, entailed a huge complex of museums, each cast concrete structure to replicate a different old-world style and to be filled with casts and models of statuary, architecture, and other art objects. Smith retained none other than the prominent architect James Renwick to prepare preliminary architectural drawings for a "National Gallery of History and Art."<sup>12</sup> A number of merchants endorsed Smith's ideas, and in 1898 S. Walter Woodward of Washington financed a single structure on New York Avenue, the Halls of the Ancients, each room of which displayed the art of a different ancient civilization. Smith lobbied Congress tirelessly for twenty years and expended all his financial resources promoting his plan for Washington.<sup>13</sup>

By the time of his death in 1911, Smith was living in poverty and obscurity in rural New Hampshire, repudiated by his family for his crackpot causes.<sup>14</sup> But when you are next in St. Augustine, visit the Casa

Monica. When you next visit the National Mall and the museums of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, remember Franklin Smith and his dream that the nation's capital should offer cultural enrichment to the masses. Remember him, too, when you next visit Rugby, where he is largely forgotten.

Aside from "Beacon Hill," the name of Rugby's hilltop park, most evidence of the Boston connection vanished when Robert Walton redrew the town plan, changing "Plateau City" to Rugby (the name chosen by Thomas Hughes in 1880) and substituting British names for many original street names on the Rufus Cook plan. Of the principal figures in the Boston Board of Aid, only Russell Sturgis, Jr. built in Rugby, the Ingleside cottage that is still standing today. From the standpoint of colonists who arrived in late 1880, Smith's connection with Rugby already was tenuous. As the Rugby colony struggled financially, other Rugbeians undoubtedly followed Hastings Hughes's lead in making Smith a target for blame along with Clarke. That viewpoint is reflected in the assessment of a researcher from Rugby School, who treated Tennessee Commissioner of Immigration J. B. Killebrew, Clarke, and Smith as equally culpable for hiding complications of land titles and disadvantages of Tennessee from Hughes and his London associates.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the reasons, Thomas Hughes's Utopian social ideals were embodied only briefly and imperfectly in the Rugby Colony. Certainly Franklin Smith's vision of a model town that would lure summer visitors and residents to the Cumberland Plateau was as impractical in 1880 as were Hughes's dreams for his young Englishmen. But almost a century and a quarter after Rugby's founding, the village still bears the stamp of Smith's aesthetic sensibility, and in large measure it has become the kind of tourist resort and retirement community that he imagined.<sup>16</sup> Rugby's "spirit of place" that residents and visitors so often remark upon depends as much on these enduring elements of physical design as on its historic British associations. Franklin Smith deserves to be remembered as Rugby's chief architect and this initial project connected with his later ones that influenced the development of cultural tourism in America.

<sup>1</sup> The non-profit organization is now known as Historic Rugby, Incorporated.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Curtis Dahl, professor of English at Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, for research into Smith's personal background, his architectural projects in Boston and Saratoga Springs, and his proposal for Washington.

<sup>3</sup> The original town plan hangs in the Board of Aid building in Rugby, and a small print is still displayed in the Christ Church Friendly House. This plan was included in the initial brochure that the Boston Board of Aid published for prospective colonists. The layout of streets was little changed when Robert Walton redrew the plan in 1882, but the original bears an informative legend "crafted by Rufus Cook, surveyor, Newton, Massachusetts" and uses the name "Plateau City" which Hughes considered "neither good English nor good Yankee" and discarded in favor of "Rugby." Only the Boston Board's Pemberton Square address (no London address) appears on the original plan.

<sup>4</sup> Senator Sumner was a staunch supporter of Lincoln and became involved in Franklin W. Smith's behalf during Naval Court Martial proceedings in 1864-65. These events and the transcript of the proceedings are discussed in Curtis Dahl, "Lincoln Saves a Reformer," *American Heritage* 23 (October 1972): 38-43, 104-105.

<sup>5</sup> "Colonization of the Cumberland Plateau." Bulletin #3 (Boston 1880) was one of a series of pamphlets produced and distributed by the Boston Board of Aid to Land Ownership to advertise the project.

<sup>6</sup> Franklin W. Smith to Cyrus Clark, June 10, 1880 and June 22, 1880.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hughes to F. W. Smith, June 18, 1880. Historic Rugby archives.

<sup>8</sup> Details based on correspondence are described in the author's article "Rugby, Tennessee's Master Planner: Franklin W. Smith of Boston," *Journal of East Tennessee History* No. 73 (2001): 23-38.

<sup>9</sup> Biographical details and photographs of houses occupied by Smith can be found in Curtis Dahl's article, "From Old North End to Water Side of Beacon: Four Boston Houses of Franklin Webster Smith," *The Drumlin Newsletter* 2 (Jan.-March 1977): 4-7.

<sup>10</sup> Curtis Dahl, "A Quartet of Pompeian Pastiche," *Journal of Architectural Historians* 14 (October 1955): 3-7. In *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, and Coney Island* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Jon Sternglass identifies Smith's House of Pansa as the prototype of themed amusements. Howells' novel was first published in 1897.

<sup>11</sup> Curtis Dahl, "Mr. Smith's American Acropolis," *American Heritage* 7 (June 1956): 38-43, 104-105.

<sup>12</sup> The originals are now part of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection.

<sup>13</sup> Curtis Dahl, "Mr. Smith's American Acropolis."

<sup>14</sup> Dahl, "From Old North End."

<sup>15</sup> T. D. Tosswill, "Annals of a Village: The History of Rugby, Tennessee," privately printed 1970.

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Benita J. Howell and Susan E. Neff, "Victorian Environmental Planning in Rugby, Tennessee: A Blueprint for the Future" in *Culture, Environment and Conservation in the Appalachian South*, ed. Benita J. Howell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 170-81.

## "Mother Confessor to Millions": The Life and Work of Dorothy Dix

Lee Wilson  
Independent Scholar

"I pondered for a long time on what line I should take [in my column]; and then it came to me that everything in the world had been written about women, and for women, except the truth. They had been celebrated as angels. They had been pitied as martyrs. They had been advised to be human doormats. I knew that women knew that they were not angels, and that they were tired of being martyrs and doormats. They were fed up on fulsome flattery and weary of suffering and being strong. So I began writing for my sex the truth, as I have seen it, about the relationship of men and women."<sup>1</sup>

—Dorothy Dix (Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer)

Although she would deny that she was anything more than a newspaperwoman, Dorothy Dix was a philosopher. For more than fifty years, Dix touched and affected as many lives as any spiritual leader or politician and, both within the U.S. and around the world, was as well-known as any other American of her day. Any objective assessment of her enormous effect on the millions who faithfully read her columns would judge her work beneficial and even revolutionary in shaping the daily lives of her contemporaries. Her enormous influence on society and in the lives of ordinary people during her long career was, in many ways, a sort of dissemination of the values and attitudes she developed during her formative years on the Tennessee-Kentucky border. Her later success and fame can be traced to her experiences in the idyllic little society of her childhood and the benevolent personalities and influences of those who reared her as well as to the stubbornly optimistic spirit and genuine sense of compassion that were contained in her little body.

The child who became Dorothy Dix was born Elizabeth Meriwether on November 18, 1861, in Montgomery County, Tennessee, on Woodstock, an eight-hundred-acre farm that straddled the border between Tennessee and Kentucky.<sup>2</sup> A tiny premature baby who was not expected to live, she remained small as a girl and never attained a height of more than four feet, eleven inches. However, from infancy Lizzie, as she was called, displayed a big personality. Although there were no large towns nearby, Woodstock was surrounded by the farms of relatives. Lizzie's playmates were her younger brother and sister, the many cousins her large, aristocratic, and somewhat impoverished extended family furnished her, and the children of former Woodstock slaves who continued to live at Woodstock. Lizzie was a tomboy who loved the outdoors. Her playmates, recognizing the command of a general in her manner, gladly trailed the little girl over the fields and through the woods of Woodstock. She later said that she learned how to ride before she learned to walk; her usual mount was a superannuated thoroughbred mare named Fraxinella who, Lizzie realized years later, had been as a young racehorse responsible for one of the grand triumphs of the Meriwether stables.<sup>3</sup>

Lizzie's mother, who was sick during most of Lizzie's childhood, died before she was a real influence on Lizzie or her siblings. The children were tended, scolded, and cosseted by their beloved "Mammy Emily," and by their grandmother Barker, an imposing woman who managed all the domestic affairs of Woodstock. "Grandma Barker" was an important influence on the little Lizzie. She was almost six feet tall, stately, intelligent, sweet-tempered, and philosophical; she loved to read and recounted tales

from history to her grandchildren and recited Scott and Byron to them. She also worked hard to feed and clothe the numerous inhabitants of Woodstock, black and white, in the tradition of the generations of plantation mistresses who preceded her.

Lizzie's father Will Meriwether was an ebullient man whose business affairs were somewhat erratic, but he was always cheerful and hopeful and interested in whatever life had to offer. Lizzie inherited his personality: she was determinedly optimistic, even as a child. However, the genteel poverty she experienced as a child and the actual poverty she encountered as a young woman<sup>4</sup> made her less improvident than her amiable father, who had grown to manhood before the Civil War and may have expected that his pleasant life of ease and plenty would last forever.<sup>5</sup>

Other than elementary instruction in reading and writing from her sickly mother and overburdened grandmother, Lizzie had no real education until an eccentric, bewhiskered, courtly older man whom Dix described as "a pensioner of my grandfather's,"<sup>6</sup> came to visit for a day or two and stayed for several years, until the Meriwethers left Woodstock. The old scholar noticed that the girl was bright and curious and asked intelligent questions. Under his tutelage Lizzie read almost the whole of her family's library by the age of twelve.<sup>7</sup> This library, assembled two generations earlier when money was more plentiful, allowed her to gain a familiarity with many of the classics of Western literature, philosophy, and history.<sup>8</sup> At sixteen Lizzie graduated from the fashionable Female Academy of Clarksville, Tennessee<sup>9</sup> and boarded a train to Virginia for college at Hollins Institute at Botetourt Springs. She was crushed to find that no one at the college had ever heard of her; inexplicably, her father had made no provision for her to be admitted there. The administrators of the college decided to let Lizzie stay and she began classes, ignoring as best she could the scorn of more fashionable students, who viewed the diminutive and unsophisticated country girl as a "runt," a "yokel," and an "upstart."<sup>10</sup> She later said that she had "cried enough tears to raise the water level in the ocean" and had been so homesick that "I thought I would die"; however, she came to view this humiliating episode in her life as a hard lesson that cured her of self-pity.<sup>11</sup> When she overheard a teacher ridiculing the idea that she was competing for a coveted literary prize, she was angered and became determined to win the competition; after writing and rewriting her essay, she left Virginia at the end of the school year with the prize in her luggage. She never forgot the humiliation of this experience, or that she had proven herself able to write well enough that even the teachers and students who had scoffed at the half-pint country girl were forced to show her respect.

She came home to Clarksville where, in 1882, she "tucked up my hair and got married, as was the tribal custom among my people, expecting to settle down on Main Street, and spend my life as a Main Streeter; but fate had other plans for me."<sup>12</sup> Lizzie married her stepmother's younger brother, George Gilmer, who was also her father's first cousin, and thus her first cousin once removed, following the established custom among members of her large extended family of marrying a distant relative.<sup>13</sup> Although Lizzie had "a strong nose, a small mouth, and black eyes, oddly raised at the corners, which were bright and sharp and penetrating,"<sup>14</sup> the tiny young woman had never considered herself attractive and was not known as a beauty or a charmer. Other than a devotion to red hats, she had little sense of style and, throughout her life, usually looked as if she had chosen her garments almost at random.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, her younger sister Mary was very popular and her beaux crowded the Meriwether home. The second Mrs. Meriwether, Lizzie's stepmother, decided that Lizzie could offer her brother the stability he lacked and that her brother could offer Lizzie a home. George Gilmer was ten years older than Lizzie, handsome, and had a history that was, to Lizzie, romantic.<sup>16</sup> Although she was not in love with George, Lizzie agreed to marry

him. At nearly twenty-one, she may have felt spinsterhood looming; what is certain is that it was more a marriage undertaken to please her family and fulfill the expectations of society than a love match.

The plan for the two to marry was formed with good intentions, but it resulted in disaster, at least for Lizzie.<sup>17</sup> Gilmer was intelligent and even gifted, but he was a dreamer and something of a misfit. He was also much more unbalanced than Lizzie's stepmother or other family members had realized. Despite his innate ability, he proved unable to hold a job. He was often moody and paranoid, suspecting even those closest to him of plotting against him.<sup>18</sup> He fought with his employers. He disappeared without notice. Then, periodically, he would regain his composure and decide that his future lay with some other job in some other town. Lizzie faithfully followed him from town to town, where she was usually bereft of friends or family and often without enough money to eat or clothe herself properly. During her wanderings, Lizzie occupied herself by reading everything she could find and, later, with her girlhood pastime of writing. Her stories depicted the South and, when she strayed from what she knew, were sometimes overwrought. However, she sold several to various southeastern newspapers and, eventually, placed first in a contest in the Nashville *American*. The prize was one hundred dollars, which she and George needed badly.<sup>19</sup>

Within only two years of marriage,<sup>20</sup> George had failed at jobs in several Tennessee towns as well as in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>21</sup> Gilmer's problems became severe and persistent enough that he became unemployable. After years of exile in shabby boarding houses, Lizzie realized that her husband's illness precluded any possibility of a conventional home. She was thirty-two and, having failed to gain security for herself as a wife, which was almost the only role open to respectable women of her day, Lizzie suffered a physical and mental breakdown.<sup>22</sup> As she recovered, she faced the fact that she would have to earn a living for both herself and her husband and discovered the means to do so.<sup>23</sup> How she earned a living for herself and her husband came as a surprise to everyone: Lizzie Meriwether Gilmer not only re-invented herself as Dorothy Dix, she also re-invented the literary genre that made her famous.<sup>24</sup>

Lizzie became Dorothy Dix almost by accident. Her father and stepmother took her to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, to recover. There she met Eliza Holbrook Poitevent Nicholson, who owned and edited the New Orleans *Picayune* newspaper.<sup>25</sup> After Lizzie showed her a fictionalized account of how a Meriwether slave had saved the family silver from Union soldiers by hiding it in a family tomb,<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Nicholson bought the story for three silver dollars.<sup>27</sup> Over the next months, Mrs. Nicholson and Lizzie grew to be close friends; Lizzie wrote more stories that were published in the *Picayune* and, when a popular "lady columnist" for the newspaper quit, Mrs. Nicholson hired Lizzie as a reporter. The paper's managing editor, Nathaniel Burbank, felt that the petite, gently reared Lizzie wasn't up to the demands of newspaper work and objected to the new hire, saying, "I need a roustabout, not a canary!"<sup>28</sup> But Lizzie's hard work and determination to succeed at even the humble reporting tasks she was first given soon won him over and gained her the respect of the newspaper staff. She was paid five dollars a week.<sup>29</sup>

At first Lizzie's family was somewhat dubious about her decision to support herself, but they "raised only mild and formal objection."<sup>30</sup> Respectable women, especially in the South, just did not work outside the home and no woman sought to see her name in print.<sup>31</sup> However, like countless women who have broken with convention, Lizzie had learned the hard way that tradition could not supply a template for her life; involuntarily liberated from the strictures of polite society, she felt free to follow her own course. Even so, she never considered divorce; it seems to have offended her deep sense of loyalty to contemplate



leaving her husband.<sup>32</sup> She lived very frugally, sending money to her family when she could to help them support George, and couldn't afford even the smallest treat. A friend from those days remembered that Lizzie wouldn't go with her to Royal Street to share an oyster loaf—Lizzie simply couldn't afford to split the cost of the giant sandwich, which was about twenty-five cents. When he was in New Orleans rather than being tended by their family, George shared her modest lodgings, a rented room in an unfashionable part of New Orleans.<sup>33</sup> He was often physically ill and emotionally unstable, and she worried about him. Her new friends thought him odd and wondered that the two had ever married, but they never heard them quarrel. Things only became worse; in 1929, after nearly fifty years of marriage and decades of bad mental and physical health, George died in an asylum, resentful of Dix and blaming her for all his troubles.

From the day she started her job as a *Picayune* reporter, Dix took her work seriously; she said, "I had a passion for newspaper work, and I set about learning my trade with the zeal of a fanatic."<sup>34</sup> She competed to collect news of more births and deaths than other newspaper staffers. She said, "I studied the backs off books of synonyms, and word books, and dictionaries. I memorized editorials that I liked. I followed big stories in every part of the country to see which paper played them up best. I dissected the work of the leading paragraphists to find what made them snappy."<sup>35</sup> She later recalled, "I lived newspapers, I ate newspapers, I dreamed newspapers."<sup>36</sup> Her hard work paid off. The newspaper's managing editor soon suggested that she write a weekly column for women; it debuted in 1895,<sup>37</sup> under the name "Sunday Salad."<sup>38</sup> The column contained Lizzie's views on a variety of topics of interest to women. It was shortly renamed "Dorothy Dix Talks."<sup>39</sup> The apprentice columnist jumped at the chance to replace "Lizzie," which she hated, with a more euphonious name. She said that she chose her pseudonym because she thought Dorothy was "musical but not mushy" and because she remembered the name of a Meriwether family servant named Dick whose wife sometimes called him "Mr. Dicks."<sup>40</sup> Soon she was signing even letters to friends and family with "Dorothy" or "Dolly."

The Dorothy Dix column soon became one of the most popular features the newspaper offered. Readers who liked her common-sense advice began to write her with questions. From the beginning, Dix decided to depart from the established style of newspaper advice columns of the era, which were usually written by women with alliterative names<sup>41</sup> and, in Dix's opinion, often offered timid, insufficient advice to questions about serious problems. Dix also discarded the pretentious, flowery "fine writing" style that had characterized the work of the "lady columnists" who preceded her, writing in a frank but sensitive style that reflected her down-to-earth but compassionate personality. She continued to write fiction, but usually published it under the name "Elizabeth M. Gilmer" in an effort to keep her two literary identities separate.

Dix's new take on "advice to the lovelorn" attracted attention outside New Orleans. After Dix had worked a few years at the *Picayune*, William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* offered her a job. The newspaper liked the content of her column and the style in which it was written.<sup>42</sup> At first she turned down the job offer, saying that she couldn't abandon Burbank, who had become her mentor;<sup>43</sup> but Burbank didn't object to her taking the new job. Some of her fellow *Picayune* staffers thought that she was simply intimidated by the idea of working for the big New York newspaper. Nevertheless, after Burbank died, she took the New York job at a salary much larger than any she had ever earned at the *Picayune*. She was almost forty years old, although few knew it because she had already begun her habit of being vague about her age.<sup>44</sup>

Dix arrived in New York in April of 1901.<sup>45</sup> Because she was worried that she wasn't up to competing and living in the big city, she kept a roll of cash in her stocking so that, if she were fired, she would be able to get home to New Orleans. At first she stayed within sight of Broadway, since it was the only street she knew and she was afraid of being lost in the city. She later said, "I was so green that if there had been cows in the street, they'd have chewed at me."<sup>46</sup> But she survived, and New York opened her eyes. She made many friends and became the center of a circle of noted writers, artists, and newspaper people who loved her for her personality as well as for her *café brûlot* parties, at which she served the traditional New Orleans flaming spiced-coffee-and-cognac drink from a silver bowl. During her stint in New York, she became more sophisticated and saw too much of life to remain the sheltered southern lady. She later attributed her insights to her experiences as a reporter:

I have been the confidante of the women who keep brothels and the girls in them. I have sat in prison cells and listened to the heart stories of murderesses and have sat in luxurious drawing rooms while the guest of millionaires' wives. I have seen women in their moments of triumph and in their hours of despair; and there is no joy or sorrow that can tear at the human heart that I do not know. All of this has given me a knowledge and an understanding of human nature that no young girl or woman who has led just a home life could have.<sup>47</sup>

In New York she continued writing "Dorothy Dix Talks," which appeared three times a week; by 1908, it was a daily feature.<sup>48</sup> She continued writing articles for women as well as human interest stories, and she began covering sensational murder trials.<sup>49</sup> It is evident from the stories that she told about her experiences that she relished this part of her career for the excitement it afforded her and the ingenuity and energy it required of her. People so wanted to read what she saw and heard and thought at the famous, scandalous trials she covered that she became the subject of a witticism: "Dorothy Dix has arrived. The trial may now proceed."<sup>50</sup> She became known as one of the premier "sob sister" newspaperwomen of the era.<sup>51</sup>

Dix published several books during her New York years. Primarily collections of light pieces she had written for the newspaper and for other periodicals, they were essentially witty presentations of her views on men, women, domestic life, and the foibles of society. *Fables of the Elite* (1902), was a collection of arch tales that featured animal characters whose escapades parodied the failings of the human species. The tales Dix tells are funny but the gentle satire they embody is on target. For example, the tale of a bear who wants to be an actress demonstrates Dix's understanding of the frailties of the stage struck:

Mrs. Bear grew discontented with the Domestic Sphere and began to Cast Sheep's eyes at a Career, so she went to Mr. Bear and thus addressed him: "I Perceive," she said, "that I have made a mistake in Marrying. I am not fitted for a Retired Life, and my Soul soars far above the petty Details of seeing about a house, and providing Food and Clothing for my family. I want to hear the Plaudits of the World instead of a Colicky Baby crying for Mother. I long to read the Boards, and get the Glad Hand from an Enthusiastic Audience instead of being annoyed by Sticky little Fingers, the smell of Bread and Butter, pulling at my Skirts. It is True I have a good Home, but what is Home to a Creature with aspirations: I do not blame you. You have done the Best you Knew to make my Happy, but you do not understand me. We are made of Different Clay."<sup>52</sup>

After her career as an actress proves disappointing, Mrs. Bear says, [t]his is not what I Signed For. I thought I had a Cinch on Fame, and that it would be Dead Easy, but it appears to have too much Boarding House Hash, and too many Cross Ties in it to suit my



Taste. Neither is a Career worth the Price they ask for it, so I will Telegraphy my Baby for the Wherewithal, and return Home and Resume the Profession of being a talented amature<sup>53</sup>

*Hearts a la Mode* (1915) cleverly dissected contemporary life by instructing readers how to handle various domestic situations in a series of "recipes." For example, two of the short chapters in *Hearts a la Mode* are named "To Can a Wife" and "To Preserve Husbands." "To Can A Wife" tells husbands how to "can" their wives; that is, it tells husbands what behavior will destroy their wives' confidence and love. A short excerpt gives the idea:

In getting a wife to can be very careful not to get a suffragist. Nobody can can a suffragist, and especially a man cannot can one. Having chosen your wife, take it home and put it up on the shelf by its lonely, and go off about your own affairs. Spend your days at your business and your evenings amusing yourself, and don't worry about what is happening to the wife at home. This process, if faithfully persisted in, will soften down any little hard spots of character that may have naturally been in the wife's disposition. There's nothing that reduces anything, human or vegetable, to such a state of acquiescent mush, as neglect.<sup>54</sup>

"To Preserve Husbands" advises wives how to keep their mates:

To properly preserve a husband begin by selecting your husband with great care. Do not pick out one that is too young, for it will be callow and flavorless, and it will soon pall upon your palate. Besides it requires too much watching to make it worth the trouble of preserving. Neither choose one that is too old, for it will be tough and cross-grained and soured by age. But choose a husband of medium age, not too young and not too old, and pay more attention to whether it is sound and sweet, and ripe and mellow and tender than you do to its looks. Be careful to see that the husband you pick out has not a rotten heart, and is neither tart and acid nor too mush, for neither of these specimens can be successfully preserved for home consumption. The only thing that can be done with them is to pickle them in alcohol.<sup>55</sup>

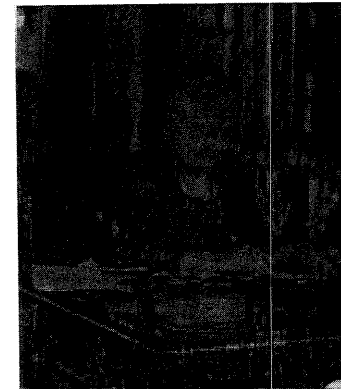
She published two collections of her "Mirandy" pieces: *Mirandy* (1914), and *Mirandy Exhorts* (1922). These examined family life through the eyes of Mirandy, a black woman "with a figure like a featherbed" who spoke in dialect. A little of Mirandy's dialogue is enough to demonstrate the "humorous" dialect Dix employed:

"[S]ome folks hold dat hit's de women's place to keep dere husbands fascinated by bein' beautiful . . . an' dat de way to do dat is to keep demselves lookin' lak a livin' skelton, an' I recond dat at de present time dere ain' no odder trouble dat women has got dat is equal to de affliction of getting' rid of deir fat. As for me, I don't hold wid none of dat foolishness, caze I done took notice dat, in de fust place, men ain't sot on scrawny women. Dey's dest natcherally drawn to a woman whut looks lak she knows how to put a heavy han' on de seasonin' in cookin', an' dat is too hefty to move' roun spry enough to keep up wid' em. Ef you will notice you will see dat most of de ole maids belongs to de raizor back class. Dere ain't nothin' 'bout one of dese heah po' strings, starved lookin' women dat makes a man think 'bout de comforts of home. As for me, I ain't botherin' myself 'bout gettin' fat, an' I ain't a pinchin' on whut I eats, caze ef I'se got to choose betwixt po'k chops, an' Ike, I'se gwine to choose po'k chops. Dere's mo' substance to 'em dan dere is to de love dat can't stand anodder inch in yo' waist measure."<sup>56</sup>

The "Mirandy" pieces, although they present black life and language as humorous, are, at base, much less racist than most presentations of black Americans in other popular media of the period. In presenting the everyday experiences and judgments of Mirandy and her family and friends, Dix does not imply that there

is less dignity in these fictitious lives than in the lives of white people; the people in the "Mirandy" pieces who are ridiculed are the foolish, and those who are admired are the ones who have and act according to common sense. Despite the fact that Mirandy and her family and friends, their dialect, and their doings are obviously supposed to be inherently comical, Mirandy herself is pretty astute. In fact, aside from her dated dialect, she sounds like Dorothy Dix, and her judgments and observations are sound.<sup>57</sup> Dix's "Mirandy" columns and books were extremely popular and Dix herself apparently thought they were her best work.

Although Dix was a success in New York, after a few years she wanted something more. She said, "I was dreadfully tired of murder stories. They didn't do anyone a bit of good and I did feel that my "Dorothy Dix Talks" [columns] were of help to people who needed help. Time and time again I received letters telling me how someone had taken my advice, and that it had solved his or her problem."<sup>58</sup> Mail for Dorothy Dix continued to pour in. During her years in New York, Dix worked grueling hours and the pressure of performing both as a columnist and a reporter began to affect her health. When her contract with the *Journal* expired, she accepted an offer from the Wheeler Syndicate.<sup>59</sup> She knew that this was her chance to return to New Orleans and write her advice column full-time. A trip to the Far East sandwiched between her departure from New York and her return to New Orleans yielded a travel book<sup>60</sup> and refreshed her for her work on her column, which by this time she had begun to take very seriously and to regard as a sacred duty imposed by the trust of her often naïve and bewildered readers. She returned to New Orleans in 1917.



She worked at home, first on Pershing Street in uptown New Orleans,<sup>61</sup> then at 6334 Prytania Street, in the Garden District of the city.<sup>62</sup> Three days a week she wrote a column offering her opinions on various topics; the other three days she published the actual letters she received from readers and her answers to the questions they contained.<sup>63</sup> Her workday typically began with the delivery from the post office of up to a thousand<sup>64</sup> letters addressed to "Dorothy Dix;" sometimes a truck was necessary to handle the day's mail. She answered any letter that was signed with a bona fide name and return address,<sup>65</sup> either personally with an individual reply or through publication in her newspaper column.<sup>66</sup> She employed

secretaries to assist her, partly because her spelling was so bad, but the answers and advice she gave were her own.<sup>67</sup> Recurring questions, such as what to do about interfering in-laws or how strictly parents should try to control teenagers, were answered by her secretary, using stock answers written by Dix.<sup>68</sup> She dictated recommendations for handling more unusual problems herself.<sup>69</sup> And at least partly because she viewed her work seriously, she prepared for her absences by preparing three months of columns in advance and to guard against her inability to write her column because of illness, deposited another three months of columns in a safety-deposit box.<sup>70</sup> Throughout her career, she treated the letters she received with care, taking pains to avoid letting them be read by anyone else, and preserved the confidences of those who wrote her,<sup>71</sup> never discussing specific letters or disclosing the names of those who wrote to her, although she was more than once pressured to do so, by the merely curious or by those who wanted to confirm that a particular letter had been written by a relative or friend or enemy.

Her column gained a wider audience in 1923, when she signed with the Ledger Syndicate of Philadelphia.<sup>72</sup> Soon it appeared in newspapers all over the world; in 1929, the newspaper syndicate that distributed her column said that her column "goes daily into the homes of 33,150,000 people, who read [it] in the leading newspapers of the United States, Great Britain, Australia, China, Mexico, Panama, Bermuda, Hawaii, [the] Philippine Islands, Porto [sic] Rico, and [Canada]" and boasted that "Dorothy Dix is not only the most widely read, but the most highly paid woman writing regularly for newspapers."<sup>73</sup> By 1939, she had sixty million readers in two hundred and seventy-three newspapers, and that year she received a million letters from readers.<sup>74</sup>

Her readers seemed to believe that she had the answer to any problem. She was often surprised by their questions and by their confidence in her. "People tell me things that you would think they wouldn't even tell to God," she said.<sup>75</sup> She was called the "confidante of the nation" and the "mother confessor to millions."<sup>76</sup> Her column was not aimed only at women; from the beginning, she received letters requesting advice from men as well as women.<sup>77</sup> Dix won her enormous audience because of her empathy and common sense<sup>78</sup> rather than her writing style, which was unadorned and sometimes seem dated. She stressed good conduct and fair dealing with others and appealed to her readers' self-respect, but her recommendations and advice sprang from a practical viewpoint rather than a philosophical platform. And although she was very popular<sup>79</sup> with millions of newspaper readers, which would seem to indicate that she offered advice that did not challenge conventional wisdom, she did not merely dispense platitudes or parrot the views of the Victorian era, in the manner of many advice columnists who flourished in the popular press during the late nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Having seen something of life's troubles,<sup>81</sup> she offered realistic counsel and fewer illusions<sup>82</sup> In fact, the content of Dix's columns was, for her day, often revolutionary.

Although she did not consider herself a feminist and is not today remembered primarily as a women's rights advocate, Dix may have done more than almost any of her contemporaries to put women on a more equal footing with men. She did this by pointing out the sheer impracticability of the views concerning appropriate conduct for women that her readers had inherited from an earlier era. In what they call "a typical column" for Dix, Kane and Arthur quote her account of her exasperation with a preacher who took up "the woman question" in his sermon and said that a woman "unsexed herself" when she left home "to battle with men for money." Dix commented,

I wanted to say: There are many thousands more women than men in the country. Are the superfluous multitudes of us to sit on the curbstones and suck our thumbs until some man comes along? I wanted to ask him if it was nobler to stay in the sacred precincts of home and starve, or

be the object of grudging charity, than it was to earn an honest, independent living. Finally, I wanted to tell him that chivalry isn't dead, and that no one sees more of it than the working woman. The chivalry that prompts a man to give his women employees reasonable hours and fair wages, and that shows them invariable courtesy, may not be as romantic and picturesque as that which sent a knight into the list with his lady's glove on his helmet, but it's a good deal more to the point, nowadays.<sup>83</sup>

Because she reached so many people, and because those people valued and followed her advice, she was able to effect changes in the opinions and conduct of her readers. Kane and Arthur report that "When the Lynds made their famous sociological study, Middletown, they found Dorothy Dix nearly everywhere in this supposedly typical American community, from beauty-parlor booth to streetcar to pulpit."<sup>84</sup> In a footnote to their chapter on marriage in Middleton, Lynd and Lynd described Dix's column:

perhaps the most potent single agency of diffusion from without, shaping the habits of thought of Middletown in regard to marriage, and [it] possibly represents Middletown's views on marriage more completely than any other one available source. Of the 109 wives of working men interviewed giving information on this point, 51 said that they read Dorothy Dix regularly and 17 occasionally, while of 29 wives of the business class answering on this point, 16 read this column regularly and 20 occasionally. Her advice is discussed by mothers and daughters as they dew together at Ladies' Aid meetings and many of them say her column is the first and sometimes the only thing which they read every day in the paper. Her remarks were quoted with approval in a Sunday morning sermon by the man commonly regarded as the "most intellectual" minister in town.<sup>85</sup>

She presided over the shift in relations between the sexes as a benevolent referee, gaining the confidence of her readers by her compassion and her hard-headed realism. In a 1937 interview Dix commented,

[T]he world has certainly changed since first I began to write. In the old days, a girl who had been what she called 'ruined.' Would write me that she had met a fate worse than death, and the only advice she wanted was how to force the blackhearted villain who had blighted her life to marry her and, presumably, bring up their child according to his own standards of villainy. Nowadays such a girl usually writes me that 'it was as much my fault as his, maybe more,' or perhaps quite frankly, 'we were both drinking.' She doesn't want to marry the man, and often declares she wouldn't spend the balance of her life with him under any consideration. In the 90's [the 1890s], a girl who married virtually retired from the world. Today she does not really enter the world until she marries. She runs her home efficiently and does a good job of bearing and rearing her children, but that no longer absorbs her entire existence."<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, she understood that "[W]hile there is a new woman who looks at everything in life from a new angle, there is no new man. Women have changed in their relationship to man, but men stand pat just where Adam did when it comes to dealing with women."<sup>87</sup> She presided over the shift in relations between the sexes as a benevolent referee, gaining the confidence of her readers by her compassion and her hard-headed realism.<sup>88</sup>

Her feminism was there, in her attitudes and actions, from the beginning. Her devotion to her work gave her little time for clubs and organizations,<sup>89</sup> but she found time to work for votes for women and

was an effective advocate for suffrage. In 1914 she spoke at the Women's Political Union in New York, where she countered a current anti-suffrage slogan: "Who will take care of Baby while Mother votes?" by pointing out that voting would consume very little of a mother's time and that "[A] pa is as much a pa as a ma is a ma."<sup>90</sup>

Dix's feminism was more practical than political. She had learned through hard experience that women needed to cultivate their minds as well as their looks<sup>91</sup> and that the best insurance for women who found themselves in bad marriages was self-sufficiency.<sup>92</sup> She advised: "Learn a trade, girls. . . . Being able to make your own living sets you free. Economic independence is the only independence in the world. As long as you must look to another for your food and clothes you are a slave to that person."<sup>93</sup> She recommended that women "go after the big salary by making yoursel[ves] worth it."<sup>94</sup> She also believed that many domestic discontents could be solved if housewives were paid for their work: "If every man paid his wife a fair wage for her services, as he does his stenographers and clerks, it would take the heaviest curse off matrimony for millions of wives."<sup>95</sup>

Her advice on some topics was conventional. For instance, she wrote "Marriage is the best protection that civilization has been able to devise to safeguard women and children, and women are mad to knock one prop out from under it."<sup>96</sup> In the same column, in answer to a woman who wrote complaining that her husband liked to select her clothes, Dix wrote, "No man, unless he runs a style shop or a millinery store, should have anything to do with his wife's clothes except to pay for them."<sup>97</sup> But she was a foe of the double standard, which was an important underpinning of relations between the sexes at the time. She observed that "[T]his double code of morals, which makes one standard for the woman and another for the man. . . . humorously enough, makes a husband feel that he has been exceedingly ill-used if he discovers that his wife has a past that matches his own."<sup>98</sup> She advised women to follow the example of men and keep any prior romantic escapades secret from their suitors.<sup>99</sup> She told her readers that marriage should be an equal partnership, that men could be victims as easily as women, and that not all women were sweet and gentle flowers who needed the support of big, strong men.<sup>100</sup> If she wrote on "Being a Good Wife," she also wrote on "How to Be a Good Husband."<sup>101</sup> And although she thought that a wife who has devoted her life to her husband deserved half of the marital property, she thought that alimony under other circumstances was "disgraceful." She was also in favor of prenuptial agreements.<sup>102</sup>

She also had a good, if intuitive, understanding of human psychology.<sup>103</sup> She advised that women should marry for love rather than money.<sup>104</sup> She told her readers that good husbands don't restrict their wives but, rather, encourage them to blossom and grow.<sup>105</sup> She campaigned against hasty marriages<sup>106</sup> and was just as firmly opposed to hasty divorces, advising troubled couples to try trial separations,<sup>107</sup> which she called "trial divorces."<sup>108</sup> Dix counseled that, for women, "divorce is often a jumping out of the frying pan into the fire" and that it was not a solution for women with children "unless conditions are absolutely intolerable."<sup>109</sup> She told wives that while they may yearn for romantic husbands, "a man marries to end romance"<sup>110</sup> and that they should stop making themselves miserable waiting for their perfectly serviceable husbands to become Romeos.<sup>111</sup> She told gullible young women that married men almost never leave their wives for their girlfriends.<sup>112</sup> She told young people that, while love is the basis of happy marriage, money is also handy.<sup>113</sup> She told mothers-in-law to keep their hands off the marriages of their children, and she advised those who had lost their mates to remarry because "human happiness is more important than romantic fidelity to a dead spouse."<sup>114</sup>

Dix said she tried in her work to be "a little friend to all the world."<sup>115</sup> She cheered those with small problems and counseled those with larger problems and, always, felt the desperation of those who wrote her seeking rescue from crushing despair;<sup>116</sup> often, she would handwrite a reply to these urgent requests for help and send her housekeeper immediately to the corner mailbox with the letter or would take it herself. Despite decades of receiving letters that recounted the same old, sad stories of human foolishness and misery, she never lost her empathy or her ability to look at the problem head-on and offer the best solution the situation permitted.<sup>117</sup> She said of the astonishing range of problems about which she was consulted, "People tell me things that you would think they wouldn't even tell God."<sup>118</sup> And she considered her column a public trust: "To me it seems a very serious matter to write what women will read in the privacy of their homes while they are rocking the baby to sleep; what working girls will read as they go to and come from their work; what men will read while trying to find some key that will unlock the riddle of the human conundrum to which they are married, and what men and women will read in the stress of great emotional upheavals, when they are sorely buffeted by temptation."<sup>119</sup>

Her personal characteristics were in large part responsible for her popularity and success as an advisor. The traits that enabled her to touch the hearts and minds of the millions who read what she thought and altered their lives accordingly were evident in her personality and life. She was a leader even as a child; she had her grandmother's sweet temper and grasp of the practical and her father's optimism and good cheer. She learned, after her humiliating experience in Virginia and following her breakdown, that misfortune can be overcome and that ingenuity and initiative can rescue even the most forlorn. She embodied loyalty. Her years as a columnist opened her eyes to the range of human behavior, good and bad, and gave her insight far beyond her own experiences; reporting on the sensational trials of her day taught her the price of flouting convention and the value of conventional morality. Through life in a loving family, she learned the healing power of love. And she employed her gifts conscientiously; she worked herself very hard<sup>120</sup> and prided herself on having never missed a deadline in her career.<sup>121</sup>

Dix was the most widely known woman writer of her generation.<sup>122</sup> In 1936, *Time* magazine asserted that "Dorothy Dix unquestionably has become the world's No. 1 newspaper confidante."<sup>123</sup> She was called the "Mother Confessor to Millions."<sup>124</sup> She wrote for more than fifty years, until April of 1949, and her syndicated column was read wherever English-language newspapers were published.<sup>125</sup> From obscurity on the Kentucky-Tennessee border, she became a venerated resident of one of the most sophisticated cities in the United States and an international celebrity.<sup>126</sup> In 1951, when she died at ninety in New Orleans, she left an estate of two and a half million dollars—the former five-dollar-a-week reporter had been paid ninety thousand dollars "or more" a year when she retired.<sup>127</sup> Her will provided that, after her death, no use was to be made of her name in connection with any column;<sup>128</sup> no one could replace Dorothy Dix.

*This essay is adapted from a chapter of Women Writers of Tennessee, 1830-1980, which the author is writing with Carolyn Taylor Wilson, director of the Beaman Library at David Lipscomb University.*

<sup>1</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 11. This pamphlet, presumably designed to be used as a tool to solicit new subscribers to Dix's syndicated column, collected specimens of her columns, quotations from Dix, and brief autobiographical pieces. A copy of the pamphlet may be found in the Dorothy Dix Collection at Woodward Library, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee.

<sup>2</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10; Kane and Arthur 17-18. Kane and Arthur's biography, *Dear Dorothy Dix: the Story of a Compassionate Woman*, is the only book-length biography of Dix ever published and is generally very reliable, probably because it was published shortly after Dix's death and because Kane and Arthur interviewed an exhaustive list of people who had known Dix. Harnett T. Kane was New Orleans novelist. Ella Bentley Arthur was a friend of Dix's who served as her chief secretary for more than twenty-two years; Dix regularly entrusted to Arthur the handling of responses to letters she received that contained recurring requests for advice. Unless otherwise noted, biographical information is derived from this source.

<sup>3</sup> Kane and Arthur 21; Deutsch 62.

<sup>4</sup> Kane and Arthur 43-45 and 155. After she became an established columnist, Dix once said "I know a lot about being poor. It hasn't been long since a nickel looked like a cartwheel to me."

<sup>5</sup> Will Meriwether's forbears were aristocratic and well-to-do (Kane and Arthur 17-18).

<sup>6</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10.

<sup>7</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10; Kane and Arthur 28.

<sup>8</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10; Kane and Arthur 28.

<sup>9</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10; Kane and Arthur 30-32.

<sup>10</sup> Kane and Arthur 33-34.

<sup>11</sup> Kane and Arthur 33-34.

<sup>12</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10.

<sup>13</sup> Kane and Arthur 38; Rose D9.

<sup>14</sup> Kane and Arthur 10.

<sup>15</sup> Kane and Arthur 39, 75, 299.

<sup>16</sup> Kane and Arthur 37-38; Deutsch 62.

<sup>17</sup> Dix characterized the first two years of her marriage as "[a] series of financial and domestic catastrophes." Dix, *Ledger* 10.

<sup>18</sup> Despite Dix's good treatment of this difficult man, he continued for years to view her as an enemy and blamed her for his troubles (Kane and Arthur 231). In the early 1920s, more than thirty years after they married and after several separations, including long periods when Dix had no idea where he was, Gilmer canvassed her friends by phone to find out what she was saying "against" him (Kane and Arthur 234). Gilmer died in 1929; they had been married nearly fifty years (Kane and Arthur 246).

<sup>19</sup> Kane and Arthur 45.

<sup>20</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires" 5.

<sup>21</sup> Lizzie and George Gilmer lived in Clarksville for a while, but do not specify the other Tennessee towns in which the couple lived; they say only that George Gilmer had connections with hardware companies, chemical firms, and, for a longer time than in most cases, the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company (Kane and Arthur 42).

<sup>22</sup> Kane and Arthur 46-51. Dix herself said only that she "grew ill." Dix, *Ledger* 10.

<sup>23</sup> Dix said that she was "chucked . . . out into the world, not only to earn my own living but to support others. I did not know a thing on earth to do to make a dollar" (Dix *Ledger* 10; Kane and Arthur 51-52).

<sup>24</sup> Rose D9.

<sup>25</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10; Kane and Arthur 47-48.

<sup>26</sup> Kane and Arthur 25; Deutsch 62.

<sup>27</sup> Dix said, "Three whole, round silver dollars . . . I still believe it is the largest sum ever paid for a piece of fiction" (Kane and Arthur 49-50; Dix, *Ledger* 10).

<sup>28</sup> Kane and Arthur 52.

<sup>29</sup> Although Kane and Arthur say that Dix was paid six dollars per week when she began reporting for the *Picayune* (52), Deutsch, who interviewed Dix in person for his article, says she was paid five dollars per week to begin (63), as do *Time* magazine (67) and the Dix entry in *Current Biography* (1940). It seems that Kane and Arthur were in error, since in an article based on an "interview" conducted by mail—which means, almost certainly, that Dix wrote out her answers to the questions she was asked—Dix said that she "started out at \$5 a week as the cubbiest of cub reporters" (Schuyler).

<sup>30</sup> Deutsch 62.

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<sup>31</sup> Deutsch implies that this was the reason newspaperwomen of the era almost universally used pseudonyms (63).

<sup>32</sup> Kane and Arthur 225-226. After she had been married for nearly forty years, Dorothy's friends urged her to get a divorce during a period when life with George was particularly trying. She refused, explaining, "I took a vow and I'm going to keep it. Besides, I'm supposed to advise others with troubles. How would it look for me to do a thing like that? . . . How could he take care of himself without me?" Her optimism also seems to have been a factor in her rejection of divorce as a solution. She wrote to a young relative about this period in her life, "When I was going through hell with George, I used to say—Well, plenty of other women have got devils for husbands and nothing good on the other side, and I've got a fine job, a good home, and my beloved family and know lots of interesting people. So I'll just forget the misery and concentrate on my blessings" (226).

<sup>33</sup> Kane and Arthur 74-75.

<sup>34</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10.

<sup>35</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 10-11.

<sup>37</sup> Rose D1; Kane and Arthur 9, 65.

<sup>38</sup> Kane and Arthur 58-59; Deutsch 63.

<sup>39</sup> Kane and Arthur 69; Deutsch 63.

<sup>40</sup> Kane and Arthur 25, 59; Deutsch 63.

<sup>41</sup> Kane and Arthur cite "Fanny Fearn, Jenny June, Catherine Cole." (59). Deutsch says the use by women's newspaper feature writers of alliterative names was especially prevalent in New Orleans, and cites Catherine Cole, Peggy Passe-Partout, Flo Field, Diana's Diary, and Barbara Brooks (63).

<sup>42</sup> Kane and Arthur 86-87, 112; Deutsch 63.

<sup>43</sup> Kane and Arthur 88; Deutsch 63; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>44</sup> Kane and Arthur 10, 85, 88, 300; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>45</sup> Kane and Arthur 98; Deutsch 63.

<sup>46</sup> Kane and Arthur 98; Deutsch relates an account of a conversation between Dix and the city editor of the *New York Journal* from this period. "She told me she'd never been to a theater, or more than twenty miles from home on a train, up to the time she went to this place just outside of New Orleans [Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, where she was taken by her father and stepmother to recover from her breakdown]."

<sup>47</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 11.

<sup>48</sup> Kane and Arthur 99; Deutsch 63.

<sup>49</sup> Deutsch 64; "Dorothy Dix Expires" 5; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>50</sup> "Decades of Dix."

<sup>51</sup> "Decades of Dix"; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>52</sup> Dix, *Fables*, 133-134.

<sup>53</sup> Dix, *Fables*, 137-138.

<sup>54</sup> Dix, *Hearts*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Dix, *Hearts*, 21-22.

<sup>56</sup> Dix, *Mirandy*, 45.

<sup>57</sup> Mirandy's evaluation of the place of romance in a well-conducted life is vintage Dorothy Dix: "[D]ere ain't nothin' de matter wid romance 'ceptin' folkses tries to make a whole meal on hit instid of nibblin' a mouthful or two of hit for dessert. Dat's de reason dey finds hit a kinder light diet dat makes 'em feel sorter weak, an' peevish, an' wid a kinder gone feelin' at de pit of deir stomachs, an' wid odder symptoms of starvation a segasuat in' aroun' deir systems dat makes em s'picion dat dey needs some odder lady, or genman beside de one dey is married to, for a heart tonic to brace 'em up. Romance . . . is de meringue on de lemon pie of life. Hit looks mighty good, an' hit's mighty sweet an' tasty, but hit ain't got no subjansst to hit. Dere ain't nothin' in hit dat'll stand by you when you's got to roll up yo' sleeves an' go to wuk to head off de bill-collector" (*Mirandy Exhorts* 168).

<sup>58</sup> "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>59</sup> *The Times-Picayune* 17 Dec. 1951: section 1, page 5.

<sup>60</sup> Dix, *Joy-Ride*; Kane and Arthur 221-227.

<sup>61</sup> Kane and Arthur 227.

<sup>62</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires"

<sup>63</sup> Deutsch 16.

<sup>64</sup> Deutsch 16; Kane and Arthur 267.

<sup>65</sup> Deutsch 64; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>66</sup> Deutsch 64.

<sup>67</sup> Kane and Arthur 261; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>68</sup> Kane and Arthur 260; Deutsch 64.

<sup>69</sup> Kane and Arthur 260; Deutsch 64.

<sup>70</sup> Deutsch 64; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>71</sup> At least by the time she had returned to New Orleans, she had her chauffeur regularly burn all but a few of the most interesting letters she received, in order to ensure that they would not fall into the hands of the curious. The letters she saved she kept near her, locked up (Kane and Arthur 261).

<sup>72</sup> "Decades of Dix"; Deutsch 64; "Dorothy Dix".

<sup>73</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 2. This statement occurred in an introductory section of a 1929 promotional pamphlet published by the newspaper syndicate that distributed the Dix column and was not written by Dix herself but was, rather, "signed" by the Ledger Syndicate. Later in the same pamphlet, Dix wrote, "If a preacher has a congregation of a couple of hundred of people on Sunday he thinks he has a good audience. If he preaches to a thousand people on Sundays, we consider him a popular preacher and speak of his great influence. Without vanity, I may say that six times a week I talk to millions of men and women who read the daily papers, all the way from New York to South Africa, and from London to Shanghai—wherever papers are published in the English language" (11).

<sup>74</sup> "Dorothy Dix."

<sup>75</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires."

<sup>76</sup> Pitts C8.

<sup>77</sup> Kane and Arthur 69. "'About half of the stream of letters which came to her desk were from men,' Mrs. Gilmer said, because 'men are as interested in having happy houses as women are . . . they really need more advice than women do about handling the opposite sex.'" ("Dorothy Dix Expires").

<sup>78</sup> Dix herself called what she wrote "the gospel of common sense" (Pitts C8).

<sup>79</sup> Kane and Arthur 232; Rose D1, D9; Dix's widespread popularity and name recognition had some interesting results. Kane tells the story of how Dix and the friends with whom she was traveling asked directions at a "tumble-down" cabin near Atlanta. From the cabin a woman called to a "puny" child in the yard, "If you don't get in this minute, I'll bus' your head wide open wid a brick, Dorothy Dix Giles!" Dix commented, "That's fame, you see" (Kane and Arthur 198). Pitts relates how, on a trip to North Carolina, Dix encountered Burma-Shave signs that said "Love and whiskers don't mix. Don't ask us, ask Dorothy Dix" (Pitts C8).

<sup>80</sup> Kane and Arthur 58-59; Pitts C8.

<sup>81</sup> Dix said, "Above all I have acquired a sense of humor, because there were so many things over which I had either to laugh or to cry. And when a woman can joke over her troubles instead of having hysterics, nothing can ever hurt her much again. So I do not regret the hardships I have known because through them I have touched life at every point. I have lived. And it was worth the price I had to pay." Dix, *Her Book* xxi-xxii.

<sup>82</sup> Dix said, "Sometimes I wonder what my correspondents would think if I answered their inquiries as I would have had to answer them forty years ago. And yet, essentially, the problems are just about what they have always been, and must be approached according of the gospel of common sense rather than according to whatever happens to be the ethical fashion of the day" (Deutsch 65).

<sup>83</sup> Kane and Arthur 61.

<sup>84</sup> Kane and Arthur 11.

<sup>85</sup> Lynd and Lynd, 116, n.10. In the lengthy 1929 book the Lynds wrote, they refer to Dix's newspaper columns as "the eagerly read, canny advice of Dorothy Dix" (159). Throughout the book they quote Dix on numerous topics, including marriage, divorce, child-rearing and housework, and equate her views with those of the inhabitants of Middletown. See, for example, pages 116, 128, 148, and 169.

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<sup>86</sup> Deutsch 65.

<sup>87</sup> She said, "When I first started my column, girls frequently asked, 'Should I help a gentleman on with his coat?' Eventually the question was more likely to be, 'Is it all right for me to spend a week end in Atlantic City with a boy friend?'" Kane and Arthur 9. She also said "The strangest thing in this age of strange things is the new relationship that is growing up between the sexes." Dix, *Her Book*, 301.

<sup>88</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 298.

<sup>89</sup> Although she guarded her time in order to save herself for her column, she did agree to assume the presidency of the Le Petit Salon du Vieux Carre in 1932, after the death of the previous president, Grace King (another well-known New Orleans author), but only after "considerable persuasion" ("Dorothy Dix Expires," 5; Kane and Arthur 255). Even then, she made it a condition of her acceptance that committee work would be handled by others (Kane and Arthur 255).

<sup>90</sup> Kane and Arthur 198-199.

<sup>91</sup> Dix said, "Be [i]ntelligent. Don't make the mistake of thinking that good looks are all the capital a woman needs to do business in life. . . . [I]f you want to be a woman who will be just as much sought after when you are fifty as you are at twenty, cultivate your mind. . . . It will do more to insure your popularity than being a perfect "swing" artist, for it will save you from becoming that pest of society, the female bore who can do nothing but simper. It will be money in your pay envelope if you are in business. It will make your husband vamp-proof. And it will insure your own happiness, because no woman who can say 'my mind to me a kingdom is' is ever helpless or lonely." Dix, *Husband*, 80-81.

<sup>92</sup> Dix said, "Be [s]elf-[s]upporting. Make yourself proficient in some gainful occupation by which you could support yourself comfortably if the necessity arose. That is the best insurance that any girl can take out against the hazards of life. It will give you independence and poise to know that you can stand on your own two feet and support yourself. It will enable you to get the good things that money buys for yourself, instead of having to wheedle them out of somebody else. It will keep you from having to marry to get a meal ticket and permit you to wait until Mr. Right comes along. If by chance you make a mistake and marry Mr. Wrong, you do not have to endure the martyrdom of an unhappy marriage, as do the women who have to go on living with men who mistreat them or men whom they have come to hate, because they would starve if they left them. Only the women who have a good trade are free women." Dix, *Husband* 85-86.

<sup>93</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 67-71.

<sup>94</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 74.

<sup>95</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 182.

<sup>96</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 3.

<sup>97</sup> Dix, *Ledger* 3.

<sup>98</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 111.

<sup>99</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 109-113; Kane and Arthur 282.

<sup>100</sup> Pitts C8.

<sup>101</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 195-199.

<sup>102</sup> Dix, *Husband*, 212.

<sup>103</sup> For example, in a chapter of *Dorothy Dix — Her Book* called "The Power of Suggestion," she advised parents not to glamorize risqué behavior in forbidding it to their children, not to turn children into invalids by emphasizing their health problems, and not to give children the idea that their parents expect them to fail (185-187).

<sup>104</sup> Dix, *Husband*, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Rose D9.

<sup>106</sup> In *How to Win and Hold a Husband*, Dix named three of her chapters "Being 'In Love' Is Not Enough," "Should Teens Marry, and "The Ideal Marrying Age." In general, she emphasized the desirability of couples marrying only when they had sufficient money to avoid the strictures of poverty, after the personalities and tastes of both partners were well-settled, and after both had had some experience of life. She believed that it is "safest" for both men and women to marry "around the thirties," and said of this period of life: "Then the heart still beats high. Romance has not lost its glamour. Tastes and habits are already formed. Men and women know what they want in life partners. Life has

- taught them suavity and forbearance. They are ready to settle down and put their heads and their hearts into making marriage a go" (Dix, *Husband*, 33).
- <sup>107</sup> Dix, *Husband*, 221-224. She said, "Just now we are going through a period of readjustment of the relationship between men and women in which it is inevitable that there shall be much war and bloodshed and many casualties. Many hallowed conventions are going into the discard. Many experiments are being tried out. New values are being substituted for old. But when the situation finally clears up and the new order is established we will not have more divorces, but fewer. For one thing, we shall have found out that divorce is not a cure-all for everything that ails us in life" (Dix, *Husband*, 201-202).
- <sup>108</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 76-80.
- <sup>109</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 36.
- <sup>110</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 170.
- <sup>111</sup> Dix, *Her Book*, 210-214; "Decades of Dix."
- <sup>112</sup> "Decades of Dix."
- <sup>113</sup> "Decades of Dix."
- <sup>114</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires."
- <sup>115</sup> Schuyler
- <sup>116</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires."
- <sup>117</sup> A good example is Dix's handling of a perpetual problem, that of the single girl involved with a married man: "[T]hrough all these years there has always been but one type of advice to give the poor girl who writes me that she has fallen in love with a married man. He has told her he loves her. He has promised to marry her after he gets around to divorcing his wife, and all the rest of it. There's no use preaching morality to that girl. I tell her that if he had the least idea of divorcing his wife, he would have done so before. I tell her to bear in mind that when she finds, as she will, that he has no further time for her, but has gone back to his wife and the assured social position the maintenance of his home carries with it, she will have her own future to look out for" (Deutsch 65).
- <sup>118</sup> Pitts C8.
- <sup>119</sup> Dix, *Ledger*, 11.
- <sup>120</sup> Kane and Arthur 53, 64, 114, 138-139, 263, 301; "Dorothy Dix Expires"; Rose D9. To young women who sought to follow in her shoes by working on a newspaper, she asked, "Have you the constitution of an ox? Can you go without sleep? Can you eat anything, or go without eating, work anywhere, no matter what the conditions? Can you do away with moods . . . and stay on a story through rain and shine and dark news and cold until you have collected every scrap of information? Can you work eighteen hours a day?—I did all of these things for many years (Kane and Arthur 114).
- <sup>121</sup> "Dorothy Dix"; "Dorothy Dix Expires"; Rose D9.
- <sup>122</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires." Rose states, "[S]he was quoted everywhere" (Rose D9).
- <sup>123</sup> "Decades of Dix".
- <sup>124</sup> Rose D9.
- <sup>125</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires."
- <sup>126</sup> New Orleans held a "Dorothy Dix Day" in 1928, where she was cheered by the crowd, presented with bouquets and an inscribed silver bowl and platter, and handed babies to kiss ("Dorothy Dix Expires"). Rose confirms that Dix "was an ambassador for the city and the newspaper [*The Times-Picayune*], a legend, a hero, and in the words of admiring journalist Ernie Pyle: 'a damn good newspaperman'" (Rose D9). Kane and Arthur state that "the sun never set on the Dorothy Dix columns" and that "[s]he was honored, or kidded, in cartoons from *Leslie's Weekly*, *Judge*, and the *New Yorker*, and was saluted, variously, by Odgen Nash, Heywood Brown, Arthur Brisbane, Irvine S. Cobb, and Ernie Pyle. In musical revues, popular songs, poems, and essays "Dear Dorothy Dix" became an American byword" (11-12).
- <sup>127</sup> Kane and Arthur 296. As a practical person who had known poverty, it is likely that Dix was very proud of the money she earned. Kane and Arthur say that she was "never extravagant" (Kane and Arthur 127). However, Dix said, "These letters [from my readers] are my real pay for my work, and make me feel that I wouldn't exchange jobs with the President" (Dix, *Ledger*, 11).
- <sup>128</sup> "Dorothy Dix Expires."

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## Elmo Stoll and the Christian Community at Cookeville

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Elmo Stoll was a prominent Old Order Amish bishop from Ontario, Canada who regularly wrote a column in *Family Life*, one of the principal periodicals serving plain people, and generally supported Amish theology and practice. Since he also authored three books, he was a lower-case intellectual in an essentially anti-intellectual Amish cultural setting. Although he lived a traditional Amish life, his vision became radical—he sought to expand otherwise closed Amish community life to include religious folks who were not from an Anabaptist tradition by renegotiating cultural and religious norms with them. In 1989, at the height of his power and influence, he sought to bring together people of diverse Christian backgrounds—both plain and non-plain—in order to build a faithful community modeled on the Gospel and writings of early church fathers. The communities that he began emphasized social cooperation, plain dress and simple living, faithful obedience to Biblical injunctions, and adult male participation in the councils of the church—cultural practices out of the Anabaptist tradition but informed by a literal reading of the Bible that men of all faiths could participate in. Most notably, the Christian communities were founded on the collective ownership of land.

The first of Elmo Stoll's Christian communities was located near Cookeville, Tennessee, in 1990. Four others followed as families from diverse backgrounds pressed to join.<sup>1</sup> People who were dissatisfied with the isolation, materialism, and secularism of mainstream culture were attracted to these communities as were Amish and Mennonites who wanted to open the door for outsiders to enter the plain life. Hundreds of people were involved in the five communities that Stoll founded before he died of a heart attack in 1998 at age 54.

From even this brief telling, questions arise: Who was the man and why did he do what he did? Why would he leave the Amish to start something new? Presently only one of the five communities still exists in faithful fellowship guided by Stoll's original vision, and it is moving to reenter a very traditional Anabaptist fellowship. What happened? What does it mean for the notion of a common life when men and women of good will, intense commitment, and high energy fail to sustain their work? Put more directly: Was Stoll's vision flawed or betrayed? Was Stoll's charisma the only thing that held it together?

I have reason to believe that I can give tentative answers to these and other important questions despite the insularity of plain communities. I first met Elmo Stoll in 1996 and spent many days over subsequent years in visits to Cookeville and other Christian communities. I gained the confidence of his family and others, and I interviewed prominent figures in Cookeville and other communities.<sup>2</sup> What follows is my report.<sup>3</sup>

### The Amish

In the sixteenth century, after the Protestant Reformation had largely succeeded, people who came to be known as Anabaptists broke away from established Protestant churches over the issue of adult baptism. Anabaptists believed that baptism should be reserved for those adults who were pledged to live a life of radical commitment to the teachings of Jesus, and they practiced these convictions in defiance of

Protestant leaders and their civil magistrates who insisted on continuing the practice of infant baptism. Anabaptists were extensively persecuted for the next hundred years. The Anabaptists themselves divided over the issue of shunning—Jacob Ammann taught that unrepentant sinners should be altogether banned from both Holy Communion and normal human relationships. His followers became known as the Amish.<sup>4</sup>

There are two cornerstones of the Amish religion: separation from the world, and obedience to church leaders and teachings. If members practice separation and obedience then they will receive God's blessings of peace and eternal life.<sup>5</sup>

Submission is the basic form of cultural practice in support of Amish religious views. Submit to the Ordnung, the rules of good practice. Submit to hierarchy. Submit to good order. If one fails to submit, then he is already slipping into the sins of pride and rebellion. Two recent books lay out the intersections of power and compliance with conceptual rigor and appropriate detail: *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, edited by Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop, and *On the Backroad to Heaven* by Donald Kraybill and Carl Bowman.<sup>6</sup>

For Old Order Amish, one of the most conservative Anabaptist affiliations, "drift" is something to be feared. Drift can occur along two dimensions—religious and technological. Indeed, among the Amish, drift along one dimension is often accompanied by movement along the other. Old Order Amish are quick to note members who begin to talk about wanting a richer spiritual life, and they are alarmed when they hear neighbors talk of wanting a personal relationship with Jesus or for the Holy Spirit to animate their lives. Such talk signals religious deviance, a fundamental lack of submission. Elmo Stoll wrote about this in his 1972 novel, *One-Way Street*.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, technological innovations are distrusted. In the 1890s the technological differences between the Amish and their "English" neighbors were not great, but in the twentieth-century, as the mainstream culture embraced technological innovations, plain people were continually challenged. The Amish negotiated with modernity incrementally and cautiously. They did not seek logical consistency in dealing with technology, but instead by accepting some technologies and not others they sought to preserve their separation from the world. Even today there is wider variation among Amish churches than is sometimes noticed by outsiders. Some churches permit bicycles, some do not. Some permit tractors to be used for lifting but not for plowing. Old Order Amish permit diesel engines to be used in the barn to power tools, either directly or via compressed air, but they do not permit electricity to be used in any way.<sup>8</sup>

In other ways, too, there may be some variety among plain churches, and these differences may be invoked as signs of drift toward worldliness. For instance, some Old Order Amish permit use of tobacco and beer, some do not. Some practice bed courtship, some do not.<sup>9</sup>

The church is the fundamental structure in plain communities. It typically consists of between twenty and thirty-five families. There may be several churches in one Amish settlement. Amish churches enter into fellowship with churches that share their views and rules for living. Preachers may preach and children may appropriately marry only within churches in fellowship.

There are normally four men in the ministry of the Amish church—a bishop (who may serve two churches), two ministers, and a deacon. The deacon does not preach, but he is instead concerned with the worldly affairs of the community and is the minister most likely to speak first to those who deviate from



community expectations. Usual practice dictates that the ministers talk among themselves about issues facing the community, and agreement is sought among the four before action is taken. Nevertheless, the bishop is the final authority. Among the Old Order Amish, ministers are selected by lot from among the men put forward by the heads of families. Those nominated are led before the assembled church, each chooses a hymnal from a stack. One hymnal in the stack contains a piece of paper, typically inscribed with a bible verse. Whoever finds the paper in his book when he opens it is chosen. In this way, God has the final say, not humankind.<sup>10</sup>

Despite common convictions, separation from the world, and modest dress, division and diversity are common among plain people. As Kraybill and Hostetter show, splits have occurred historically, and every generation seems to spawn new challenges to established culture.<sup>11</sup> Elmo Stoll's effort to chart a new course can be seen as another recent example of a more general process. What set it apart was both his influential national status and the direction of his movement—he took his followers toward more primitive and simple living standards and toward first century biblical practices. Other groups in the region, like the Lobelville, Tennessee, and Hestand, Kentucky, communities of plain people, were led by disaffected Amish men, not senior Amish bishops.<sup>12</sup> Even prominent members of the conservative Scottsville church, with which Elmo interacted, issued from a schismatic group. Their story is told in considerable detail by Fredrick J. Schrock in *The Amish Christian Church: Its History and Legacy*.<sup>13</sup>

### The Man

Elmo was a small man with blue eyes and a receptive manner. All who knew him thought him very intelligent, well-spoken, open-minded, and sympathetic. Most of all, by all accounts, he listened attentively and made everyone feel special. That trait may have been inherited.

Elmo's father, Peter, was also warm and outgoing. He got along with everyone, especially the non-Amish. He bought a farm in Massey, Ontario, about 400 miles north of his Amish settlement, in order to teach the Indians how to farm and otherwise cope. The Stoll family spent winters there. He had a big heart and felt a burden to work with people at the margins. Father Peter also had an interest in Latin America. He studied the Spanish language and founded an Amish community in Honduras. It lasted from 1968-78. Peter Stoll died there.<sup>14</sup>

Elmo was one of eleven children. He was a middle son, born in 1944. A younger brother reports that Elmo always had wild ideas, that Elmo always thought he was right and that everyone else was always wrong. In 1966-67 Elmo taught school in an Amish-Mennonite, "Beachy," church near Wellesley, Ontario. (The "Beachy" Amish are churches who have progressive views about spirituality and technology.) After that Elmo was part of a group of young people who passed out Christian tracts on the streets of London, Ontario, in the late 1960s—not something that orthodox Amish were likely to have done at that or any time.<sup>15</sup>

Joseph Stoll, Elmo's oldest brother, started the *Blackboard Bulletin* in 1957; it was a newsletter for Amish school teachers. David Wagler, an uncle, started a bookstore in 1961, and it became a booming success. Together, Joseph Stoll and David Wagler began Pathway Publishers in 1964. There was a great need for out-of-print religious books and schoolbooks once the Amish began to have their own schools in response to the school consolidation movement that swept rural America in that decade. They began

*Family Life* in 1968, with David Wagler as editor. By that time Elmo was editing an upper-grades reading series for use in Anabaptist schools.<sup>16</sup>

Elmo did not go to Honduras with his father to start the community there. Instead, he stayed and worked for Pathway. During the following years, he married, became a minister, and then a very loyal Old Order Amish bishop in turn. He kept to the traditional Amish practices and direction throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. He enforced a strict adherence to the Ordnung, especially on technology. He was the one who kept calculators out of the church. No digital readout: that was the line he drew—digital.<sup>17</sup>

### Movement

Elmo's generous heart allowed him to accept a French Canadian "seeker" named Marc Villeneuve into the Aylmer community, and Marc became influential. Marc was a very sincere and idealistic young man; he had read and thought a lot about Christianity. He set high goals for his wife, family, and community. He won Elmo's confidence, perhaps because he hooked into Elmo's "weakness." Marc sought to live into a primitive Christian message—brotherly love—even to the point of community of goods. Elmo's own sons, teenagers by now, also sought the fruits of the spirit. Elmo's boys raised issues with the church (just like Elmo once did).

Marc Villeneuve brought issues into focus. He came to the Amish with a very teachable spirit—he said he had everything to learn. The community was inspired by Marc and Sylvie, his wife; everyone accepted them. But Marc became increasingly frustrated, initially by the German language spoken among the Amish. His first language was French, his second, English. However, among the Amish, he was asked to learn German. The Amish conceded by translating church services into English just for him. Then, Marc began to challenge everything, encouraged by the young men, particularly Elmo's sons Caleb and Jonathon.<sup>18</sup>

A dynamic developed. Elmo's son Caleb described it like this. Caleb would ask, "Are we a scriptural church or aren't we? If we are, why do we have this rule that isn't scriptural?" And then he would proceed to explain at length, using Scripture, why a part of the Ordnung was not scripture—like taking a Bible to the church meeting. "Carrying a Bible to church—that was a funny thing to have a rule against, and in fact they didn't actually have a rule, but it was just a sense that you didn't do it. So, we young men did it anyway. And, they'd try to make us stop. Then, we'd make a big outcry—'Here we are, Christians, and we're not allowed to take a Bible in the church. Get real!'" And there was this, too: The young men began a program to memorize Bible verses. "We would memorize a subject a week and then get together and recite the verses. That was considered very threatening. Rebellious even." And, at the same time Marc Villeneuve came in and said to the ministers, "They are right and you are wrong."<sup>19</sup>

Elmo struggled with the issues and their implications. Protracted talks about religious belief and practice alarmed Elmo's brothers. Marc Villeneuve's hold over Elmo, the bishop, was clear and unsettling. One brother felt the excommunication of Marc was appropriate to the offense—Marc had seriously and persistently defied the Ordnung. Elmo, his brothers thought, was now unbalanced, not centered. Elmo, in turn, was fascinated by the historical Anabaptist movement, and said, "Suppose Marc is right: suppose we are the church doing the oppressing now."<sup>20</sup> Elmo portrayed Marc as an innocent victim of church authority. Elmo's family related their conclusion much later: Marc was not the source of change in Elmo,



he just showed up at the right time. Marc was not the Devil, just the opportunity for Elmo to return to ideas he had held as a young man.

There is some truth to the notion that Elmo moved away—to Cookeville—in order to keep his sons roped in. About the time that Mark Villeneuve raised religious/cultural issues, another family came to evangelize among the Old Order in Aylmer. Clandestine meetings were organized. Tracts were left in mailboxes. Tape recordings of evangelical preachers were offered to community members. Elmo was the bishop; he was called to deal with these challenges, but he temporized. The issue of “drift” among the young people became acute. Though Marc brought the issues to the fore, he did not cause them.<sup>21</sup>

In December 1989 the ministers of the Aylmer church met about the issues that Elmo then raised. They were:

1. Amish witness to the world: didn't the Amish have an obligation to be active witnesses to those outside the plain churches? Wasn't evangelizing a Scriptural injunction?
2. Language problem: shouldn't the Amish use English so that “seekers” could understand the service?
3. Community of goods: were not the Amish called to live out the words of the New Testament, particularly Acts of the Apostles?
4. Wearing of hats: Women were told to wear head cover (1 Cor. 11.7) but not the men. Hence, why were Amish men told by Ordnung to wear hats when there was no biblical mandate?
5. With whom should the Aylmer church be in fellowship? Elmo argued not just the Amish. He cited Gorrie and Scottsville Mennonites, who shared the simple lifestyle and Anabaptist roots, yet the Aylmer Amish were forbidden to worship or otherwise fellowship with them. Why would that be so?<sup>22</sup>

Elmo's questions endangered the stability of the community. He was its bishop, and yet he challenged the Ordnung. The real crisis came in July, 1990. Elmo sent a letter to the ministry. He laid out his ideas in a theological (and political) tract, “Let Us Reason Together.” In alarm, the ministers met and consulted outside bishops. In the end, Elmo decided to form a new community in Cookeville rather than tear apart his own church. In the wake of Elmo's leaving, three bishops came to counsel with Aylmer ministers about how to deal with the Cookeville situation. Their counsel was: (1) Elmo is not indispensable—the ministry in Aylmer could take hold and the community survive. (2) There was no need to excommunicate Elmo or his family because that decision could be taken later when the fruits of his work were known. (3) Use extreme caution with Elmo's group. Permit no one to go freely back and forth to Cookeville. Anyone wanting to come or go would need the minister's permission, especially young people.<sup>23</sup> These ideas were accepted by the ministry and, as a result, in Aylmer things settled down, but the door was left slightly ajar in case Elmo should want to come back.

#### Vision

Elmo's manifesto, called “Let Us Reason Together,” was 32 single-spaced pages. In it he diagnosed the problem of the Old Order Amish and specified the remedy:

1. The [Amish] church was a “cultural” church concerned only with “us and our children.” A “cultural” church lived by rules that divided good and moral people, such as conservative Mennonites, from fellowship with the Amish. What was wanted was a fellowship of faith among all true believers.

2. The plain people were on the brink of a genetic “disaster of truly gigantic proportions” because of generations of inbreeding. (A more diverse gene-pool could be found only by opening the church community to intermarriage with diverse backgrounds.)

3. The Amish frustrate and reject “seekers.” The Amish did not accept the burden put upon all Christians to share their faith with the lost world. The use of the German language in particular was an unscriptural barrier for even the most sincere and patient “seekers” to overcome.

4. The Amish spent too much time concerned with making money. It divided people within the church, and the need for money distracted otherwise good men. Therefore, a practice of a community of goods and disciplined poverty was warranted, albeit one that promoted families not individuals.

5. The Amish have not taken a strong enough stand against sin—neither communities nor individuals were reproved for using strong drink, or tobacco, or temptation-provoking courtship practices. Nor did the Amish testify against sin in the world.

6. The Amish must seek the truth, not follow the past blindly—whether manifested by traditional practices or church leaders. Instead, they should follow the Bible.

7. The Vision: “Our Anabaptist forefathers caught this vision, believed in it with all their might, and gave their lives for the cause. Today we need to catch that vision again, and to truly believe that God will call out and bless a people for his own. It must not be an Amish church, or a Mennonite church, or a Hutterite church. If we attempt to establish or build such a church, our thinking is carnal. It must be Christ's church, the Bride he loved and gave himself for. . . . We believe this church must be made up of those who have been truly born again, who have sincerely repented and mourned for their sins, and have received divine forgiveness and have been baptized. Such people of God will not be proud and puffed up, will not love the world nor the things in the world, but will be truly humble, meek and lowly . . . will be content with poverty, want, and suffering in order to be identified with Christ and his church.”<sup>24</sup>

#### The Community

Elmo, two sons, and two other men from Aylmer went searching for land, and by word of mouth they found a farm for sale fifteen miles north of Cookeville, Tennessee, that met their needs. They settled on the land in Fall 1990. Some lived in a rented house nearby, while others camped. They built four houses simultaneously with the sustained help of the men from the Scottsville, Kentucky, community of conservative Mennonites. Elmo had found some families there shared his vision, and he hoped to enter into fellowship with the Scottsville church. After two years, though, the Scottsville leadership withdrew from interest.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, several families broke off from Scottsville and formed the Holland Community under Elmo Stoll.

The land was held in common at Cookeville and in all the Christian communities subsequently established under Elmo's guidance. The men met and agreed to the division of land for houses and crops. At Cookeville, Elmo and Gerald Hochstetler, a minister from the Aylmer church who came with Elmo, put up the bulk of the money for the land. Each family built its own house, and if the family moved to another community or left the movement later, it sold the house to the next family for only the cost incurred. There was no notion of capital gains or sweat equity.<sup>26</sup>

The community agreed to a very simple life-style. They had cold water from a spring piped into each house. They had wood burning stoves with which to cook and heat. They had no electricity, and

used oil or kerosene lamps and candles to light the night. They had no indoor toilets. Initially they used only horses or waterpower to turn their saws. Later, they permitted steam engines for power, but unlike many Old Order communities, they never permitted diesel engines. They were strictly a horse-and-buggy people, but one could hire a "taxi" to carry groups on trips abroad.

During the first two years there was a common purse. Someone would go to town about once a week to purchase supplies, including food, seed, cloth for homemade clothing, or simple tools. One frustration soon emerged: people with nothing joined the community. Primitive communism is a noble principle, Elmo's band found, especially in the spiritual realm, and it clearly suited the enthusiasm of a new movement, but complications arose in the second year. Some people had more money, and others resented that. Some people worked harder than others and faulted their neighbor's sloth. Elmo had seen the communism of the Hutterites, and he did not favor it because their practices broke down the family unit. Or, his sons recalled later, to have real and effective communism one had to have a strong bureaucracy, and Elmo opposed that. So, after the first year or so, though communal distribution of land continued, each family became responsible for supporting itself economically. Those families that could not make it economically were helped by the community until they could get on their feet.<sup>27</sup>

Work and religious services organized the days and weeks in Cookeville. The regular Sunday service began at nine o'clock and ended just after noon in the community meeting house, after which a community lunch was served. There was harmonic community singing on Sunday evenings, and frequently there were Wednesday evening meetings to discuss Scripture and community rules. Gender separation was the norm. In the winter the men cut firewood communally and distributed it as needed. Throughout the year community work was scheduled on an ad-hoc basis by men who were given special responsibility for building infrastructure.<sup>28</sup>

Cookeville quickly grew to about twenty families, which was as large as Elmo thought it should be. The community seemed always to have visitors—both plain and not plain—partly because it issued UPDATE, a newsletter about the community, to hundreds of people who inquired. Indeed scores visited the community each year to see if this new vision could work and to see if they might like it there. When Cookeville got too large, it would spin off some of its members to found or join a daughter community elsewhere.<sup>29</sup>

### Seekers

The Amish and Mennonites who came to join Elmo were part of a general flux among the plain peoples. There is a surprising movement of individuals and families from community to community among these traditional people. Because change is normally so slow within churches, if folks became chronically dissatisfied within their community, then it became prudent to move on. The Old Order Amish might lose forty percent of their children to "the world," another thirty to forty percent simply move to another Old Order community.

Because Elmo and Gerald Hochstetler were Amish, the privileged position at Cookeville was implicitly Amish. The folks who came to Cookeville from the world, that is, those not born "plain," whether un-churched or evangelical Protestant families, were called "seekers" by the Amish and Mennonites. Inevitably "seekers" were drawn toward simple "horse and buggy" living by something powerful but barely discernible, something missing from their lives in the outside world. If seekers were faithful

Christians in their previous lives, Cookeville folks thought of them as "Protestants," whether they came from mainline churches (very few) or splinter fundamentalist sects. The main thing to note, though, was that they had not been Anabaptists.<sup>30</sup>

Some of the "seekers" came with financial resources, but many did not. Almost all had been on a long quest toward something barely definable. Jim McGie was one seeker. McGie related his story this way:

In the late 60s and early 70s, when I was a drug-addict hippie, my values were different. In 1972, God just worked in my heart: my values changed, my life just changed. It was a road-to-Damascus kind of event. It really was. When I was in high school, music was my life, it kept me in school—one man who knew me from [this high school band] saw me in the city park one night, and they had a church social going on, with homemade ice cream, and he came over and asked if I wanted ice cream. I never turned down ice cream, so I said sure. He brought me a little, handed it to me, kinda looked at me and said, "Jim, Jesus knows you." And I said, "Sure," and I took the ice cream walked off. The only way to explain it is that Holy Spirit hunkered down on my shoulder and began to tell me it was true, and I just said, "There is no way," and I argued against it. Yet, something kept pressing on me that what he said was really true, and it was probably a couple of hours argument until something snapped inside, and I submitted to it. I said, "If it's true, I want to know it!" and it was instantly there, a full awareness that it was true. Something inside rolled over and was different, and from that point my values changed. I found a Bible, started reading, and it became a living thing, a living book.<sup>31</sup>

Before Jim McGie came to Cookeville he was the leader of a small, non-denominational, home-based fellowship in Texas that struggled to live righteously amid the hurly-burly of modern life. They were committed to studying Scriptures and early church writings, and they tried to come to conclusions about doctrine and practice apart from any denominational influence. They supported each other in the trials of life but struggled especially with the physical distances between the families. Jim recalled, "We had an idea of how wonderful it would be if we were all close together. The idea of connection, of community! We'd sit around Sunday afternoons and discuss this wonderful idea."<sup>32</sup> In November, 1996, Jim and his family moved to the Stoll community at Cookeville to get a better sense of what a Christian community was like.

Martin Hadley was another seeker. He was raised a Baptist in Pensacola, Florida, became a computer programmer, and married Elaine. He continually sought a plain life, and the new family had no television and home-schooled the children to keep them from being corrupted. The couple met a Mennonite couple from Pennsylvania, and moved there to be close to their community. Hadley credited two things that moved them toward the radical life of Cookeville: "First, we were loners for so long out in the world, and I felt the need to be inside a committed church family. And second, from my youth on up, I've always had a concern with materialism—the teachings of Christ tell us 'where one's treasures are, there will his heart be also.' I wrote about this in UPDATE and in my essay called 'Kingdom Economics.' What I am saying is this: I had convictions even before I came to the Christian communities."<sup>33</sup>

A specific belief confirmed in Pennsylvania brought Hadley to Cookeville—this was his strongly held belief that the very idea of insurance showed lack of faith in God's fundamental goodness. "I became convicted about the error of insurance, and so I had none. I worked for the telephone company, and I

withdrew from the company's health insurance plan even while birthing children. I was still compelled by the state to have liability insurance on my car, and I resented that. I felt so offended by compulsory insurance that I thought about emigrating to Costa Rica to escape. When I talked to Elmo, he didn't regard my ideas as 'bizarre.' The Hadley family moved to Cookeville in February, 1992.

The Cookeville community believed that lending or taking money at interest was sinful, so they sought to avoid those practices, including use of banks themselves. One man was especially drawn to Cookeville because of this aspect of their common lives. Peter Vermont made his living by working as a computer technician before joining the Christian communities. He gave this testimony:

I had problems with sin—every kind—from smoking and drinking to drugs. I broke about all of them. I was raised Church of England—Anglican—but I was not converted to true Christianity that way. As I struggled, I became a Billy Graham kind of Christian, but it didn't take. Then, I was living in Alberta, Canada, in 1984, at age 26, and seeking something more by reading the Bible. I responded to the New Testament. I became attracted to Hutterites because they lived out a community-of-goods idea, but I couldn't handle the German language they used there. I visited the Bruderhof communities, which used English, but I didn't trust the deference to leadership that I found there. Leaders could sin and take the whole church in the wrong direction. Through a Mennonite connection I had, I heard about Elmo and Cookeville, and I learned more through UPDATE. I liked the Cookeville vision, especially the community of goods. 'Ours, not mine.' I found people there who shared more than just talk about sharing. Also I liked what was said about debt . . . I made a short visit, and I decided to move there without making a longer family visit.<sup>34</sup>

### Frustrations

Everyone who came to Cookeville was searching for the right way to worship and to live, but the whole notion of living by the Scripture proved problematic. Should members worship on the first day of the week or the last? That was discussed, and the Sunday Sabbath continued. But, baptism was a continual issue. The Amish and Mennonites believed that baptism by pouring was right; it was an outward sign of inward grace. German Baptists, on the other hand, believed that the act itself was cleansing and that full body immersion, including being immersed three times face forward, was necessary for this to happen. In short, Amish and Mennonite argued for obedience, then baptism—German Baptist argued baptism, as regeneration. After much discussion, they settled on one practice: the church would gather at the creek, prayers would be offered, those being baptized would wade into the creek with the bishop and minister then, as the person elected he or she would be bodily-immersed or pitcher-poured. Nevertheless, despite the compromise, resentments remained and accumulated.<sup>35</sup>

Women's dress also mattered. Everyone agreed that the Scripture said dress modestly, but it did not give details. The leading corps within the community tried to dictate styles of dress. What looked modest to some people was not modest to the rest. There were too many loopholes. Was a loose-fitting smock enough? By worldly standards, yes, but for many it was too clinging and revealed too much. Some women from Protestant backgrounds were unwilling to conform to strict codes; they felt their independence was at stake.<sup>36</sup>

A troublesome pattern developed: every time a new family came into the community, previously settled issues were opened up yet again. For Elmo especially, this became a burden. He was caught in the

middle of disputes. Moreover the very notion of Scriptural interpretation invited continuous disputation. Other men, especially those from Protestant backgrounds, proved that they knew the Bible and its possible interpretations better than he did. By 1997 Elmo became first distressed and then depressed, but he gave no outward sign. Those who knew him found that he still listened and cared for them.<sup>37</sup>

Elmo had not been able to establish fellowship with other plain churches including, most painfully, the conservative Mennonite "Hoover" church near Scottsville, Kentucky, only sixty miles away. He felt cut off and in need of support. Elmo had not been excommunicated from the Aylmer church. On his third visit back there, in 1997, he asked, "How can we get back together? What do I have to do to be at peace with the church here?"<sup>38</sup> He let his brothers know that he now respected the Aylmer church and all that it represented. He admitted that "mistakes had been made." Elmo told his brothers, "It takes longer to grow a tree than to cut it down." Elmo made it plain: "I am prepared to take your advice." He was very sincere, but very cautious. He felt like a traitor when he left Aylmer. He worried that he would feel like a traitor again if he abandoned his flock in Tennessee and led his own family back "home" to Aylmer, Ontario.

By 1997 Elmo was no threat to the Amish because so few Amish had rallied to his call or joined his movement. Elmo's ideas were not going to sweep through the Amish communities and tear everything apart. His brother Mark made himself plain: "I told him it was wrong to abandon his flock. He would feel guilty if he abandoned them." Instead, he would have to bring his flock, his community, with him on the road back to the Amish. Elmo responded by saying that although that move was virtually impossible, he was willing to try. "It's the right thing to do."<sup>39</sup>

Elmo died of a heart attack while riding a bicycle along the highway in chase of a mentally ill member of the community in October, 1998. Not long after that, his family found an entry in his journal that he had written a month or so before, as he returned from a trip to the northern communities. Elmo was sitting in a bus station in Washington, DC. In an emotional, almost poetic entry Elmo instructed his sons to return to the Amish. The old cultural patterns—the settled struggles they masked—were comforts to the human spirit. It was traditional practice that freed a man to live the good and righteous life.<sup>40</sup>

### The Crisis

Mark Stoll, Elmo's beloved younger brother, made his sentiments plain: "God looked down and saw Elmo had an impossible task and so He removed him. The community didn't realize it, but I think I did."<sup>41</sup>

Leadership, and implicitly the future of Cookeville, was immediately an issue after Elmo's passing. Gerald Hochstetler was the only minister then serving. At Elmo's funeral the Aylmer ministers were in a decisive place—their decision had huge consequences for the Cookeville Stolls and through them to the whole community. The Aylmer ministers were grieving family members but they spoke with the authority of the Amish church. Their advice to the community urged no dramatic action, grieve the loss, wait a year, then take a look. Mark Stoll said later, "I would not have been opposed if someone came up from the Decatur community to serve Cookeville, but not to ordain a new minister at Cookeville."<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the ministers from the Christian communities very next step was not to take the advice that Aylmer gave to them. They decided to ordain another minister to help Gerald Hochstetler, Elmo's old and trusted friend.

After consultation with the heads of the families, and contrary to the advice of the Aylmer ministers, David Oberholzer, bishop of the Decatur community, ordained Elmo's oldest son, Caleb, as the second minister at Cookeville just two months after Elmo's passing. All could see that a young Amish man, and more than that "a Stoll," was chosen to replace Elmo. A year later, after consultation with the heads of households found no consensus, and this time using the lot, Elmo's next oldest son, Jonathon, was selected and ordained a deacon at Cookeville. And with his ascendancy, deep feelings were loosed throughout the village.

Jonathon's new standing was problematic: he was another Amish man in the ministry, and he was comparatively rich. Despite his age, Jonathon had become a well-to-do businessman in the three most recent years by building mini-barns and especially by retailing metal to outsiders for the construction of roofs and pole barns. His gross income went well into six figures while other families skirted poverty. Hence, Jonathon's ascendancy to the ministry stimulated latent resentments over social class distinctions, especially since "merchandizing" was a practice frowned upon in the community for religious reasons because it added nothing new to the product by the hand of the plain-living man.

Within a few months of Jonathon Stoll's ordination, the German Baptists announced they would leave the community, and about the same time all of Elmo's married sons—Caleb, Jonathon, Andrew, and Aaron—and widow Elizabeth decided to return to the Amish in Canada. The Cookeville community was rent from top to bottom. Within the year, household goods, tools, and land were auctioned off. Cookeville was no more.<sup>43</sup>

### Denouement

Over the course of the next months each of the other communities had to adjust. The "seekers" left the Holland community, and the Mennonites remaining there returned, after a year's probation, to fellowship with the Scottsville church they had left years before. The Smyrna, Maine, community lost several non-Amish families, but the remainder there, mostly Amish, developed a fellowship with an Amish church in Michigan and came under the direction of its bishop. The Woodstock, New Brunswick, community split, sold off its houses and land, and disappeared as members joined other plain churches elsewhere in Canada.<sup>44</sup> Only Decatur stayed the course. It had always had strong leadership, and it had an economically successful mini-barn business that supplemented farming, so those resources gave it resiliency the others lacked. Decatur's bishop, David Oberholzer, came from Mennonite background and was ordained by Elmo Stoll first as minister and later as bishop. Martin Hadley was a "seeker" whom Elmo made a minister there. The other minister was Amish, and the deacon a Mennonite. These men sought ways to keep the community together, viable, and in fellowship with a more established church.<sup>45</sup> They found that relationship with the Scottsville "Hoover" church and served out a probation period before being admitted to "fellowship" and all that implied. The land and mini-barn business were still held in common, but otherwise they conformed to Scottsville's traditional and conservative Ordnung. The Decatur community recently purchased land in east Tennessee in order to expand their holdings to fit their new needs. Several families from Scottsville joined them on their new land.

As for the Stoll boys and their families — they returned to Canada, made their individual confessions to the assembled church, and sought to submit to the Ordnung of the Old Order Amish.

### Conclusion

Elmo Stoll had a bold vision, and he acted upon it. He attracted Amish, Mennonite, German Baptists, evangelical Protestants, and others to help him form and sustain communities that cooperated in all aspects of life, dressed modestly and plainly, and lived simply in faithful obedience to the Bible's teachings. Elmo wanted to establish a church informed by the spirit of love not constrained by the dictates of mindless cultural tradition. He found that it was not possible. The cultural traditions of each denomination held captive men's hearts and minds. Compromise among them could not hold. Negotiation and renegotiation left things unsettled and people anxious.

Perhaps Elmo could have held the community together had he lived. He was respected and loved, and he was immensely talented at soothing wounded souls. But his heart was no longer in it, and his magic dissipated. Elmo lost faith in his vision. He concluded that it was flawed. At his death, others had not come to this point. Many in Cookeville would have been surprised to hear of Elmo's wrenching disappointment in the way things had gone, but their enthusiasm for the community and its central vision was limited by their own ambition and vanity. The torch of committed and self-sacrificing leadership did not pass. Key members of the German Baptists and the Protestants had wanted to be ministers, yet they were passed over when Caleb was selected by the Decatur bishop, and they were disappointed again by the elevation of another Stoll son to the post of deacon. It meant that the Amish still controlled all the ministerial positions at Cookeville, and the erstwhile leaders could not let go of their disappointment and resentment—they could not submit. In this reading, the human heart betrayed the vision of Christian community.

In the end, for some, it was God's decision. God took Elmo, and God, through the lot, had chosen Jonathon to be deacon. Hence, dissolution was God's judgment—and that's what makes men and women of the Christian community wince most, because without exception in my interviews of them, they said that their days at Cookeville were the happiest and most fulfilling in their lives.

For my part, I too grieve the loss of the Cookeville community, and I fear even now to draw final conclusions about the viability of Elmo's vision. As a professional social scientist I know how precarious generalizations based on a single case can be. Nevertheless, tentatively, I have come to believe that the decisive turn for the whole enterprise came when Elmo lost faith in the viability of his own creation. His unbelief prevented him from ordaining new non-Amish ministers there, his turned face allowed his sons to develop very successful businesses that caused envy if not active resentments among other families and that modeled a self-serving sentiment quite different from the communal basis of the land-based economy, and his longing for stability caused him to direct his own sons toward the safety and security of Old Order Amish community and traditions. So, when the crisis came, no leaders emerged to tout hope and charity, to heal the wounds of bruised ambitions and corrosive envy, or to discipline those who challenged the communal spirit.

Elmo had flirted with the Beachy Amish when he was a young man and had, in the end, come home to the Amish chastened. Elmo's father has formed a community in Honduras and that community had failed and all the Aylmer Amish had returned to the safety of the old places and settled practices. For Elmo, for the Stolls, Cookeville was part of a pattern. Challenge and return.

<sup>1</sup> The five communities were established in Cookeville and Decatur, Tennessee; Holland, Kentucky; Woodstock, New Brunswick; and Smyrna, Maine.

<sup>2</sup> I personally interviewed almost all of the heads of families from the Cookeville and Woodstock communities in 2000-01, where the crisis manifested itself, and I personally interviewed the leaders of the other three Christian communities as well—together over 30 people representing perhaps 60 percent of the families then in community. In this way I covered the major participants in the communities' decisions and disputes. Only three heads of families were women. Generally interviews were conducted at the dining room table with male heads of households. Their wives often entered the conversations as time unfolded. In each case, I began taking their life histories and probed how personal events interacted with community life. I also interviewed ministers at Aylmer and Scottsville communities, since they interacted in important ways with Elmo and Cookeville. All transcripts of interviews remain in my possession.

<sup>3</sup> Another account of these communities can be found in Bryce Geiser, "The Christian Communities: A Brotherhood of Covenant and Commitment," *Old Order Notes*, No. 21, Spring/Summer, 2000, 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> John A. Hochstetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 25-48.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop, eds., *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and Donald Kraybill and Carl Bowman, *On the Backroad to Heaven* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Elmo Stoll, *One-Way Street* (Aylmer, Ontario: Pathway Press, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Kraybill, *Riddle*, 141-87.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Kraybill and C. Nelson Hostetter, *Anabaptist World USA* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-86.

<sup>11</sup> Kraybill and Hostetter, 53-66.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Beachy, "A Personal Testimony." Lecture delivered at Vanderbilt University, 30 Oct 2002. Self-published pamphlet, copy in Pride files.

<sup>13</sup> Fredrick J. Schrock, *The Amish Christian Church: Its History and Legacy* (Altamont, Tenn.: Ambassador Publishers, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Stoll, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 14 Oct. 2000; Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 10 July 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 8 Aug. 2000 and 26 Sept. 2000; Joseph Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 10 July 2001; Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 26 Sept. 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 8 Aug. 2000 and 26 Sept. 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 10 July 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 10 July 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Elmo Stoll, "Let Us Reason Together" (Self-published manuscript, copy held by the author), 26.

<sup>25</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 26 Sept. 2000; David Hoover, personal interview, Scottsville, Ken., 9 Jan. 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 8 August, 2000 and 26 September 2000; Clinton Wolfe, personal interview Stetsonville, Wis., 5 March 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 8 August 2000 and 26 September 2000; Clinton Wolfe,

personal interview, Stetsonville, Wis., 5 March 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Clinton Wolfe, personal interview, Stetsonville, Wis., 5 March 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 8 August 2000 and 26 September 2000; Kent Brubaker, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 9 September 2000; Darren Cook, personal interview, Gorrie, Ontario, 17 July 2001; Bryce Geiser, personal interview, Withee, Wis., 5 Mar. 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Bryce Geiser, personal interview, Withee, Wis., 5 Mar. 2001; Jim McGee, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 28 Oct. 2000 and 24 Mar. 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Jim McGee, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 28 Oct. 2000 and 24 Mar. 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Jim McGee, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 28 Oct. 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Hadley, personal interview, Decatur, Tenn., 30 Dec. 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Vermont, personal interview, Decatur, Tenn., 21 Jan. 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Kent Brubaker, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 9 Sept. 2000; Darren Cook, personal interview, Gorrie, Ontario, 17 July 2001; Bryce Geiser, personal interview, Withee, Wis., 5 Mar. 2001; and Martin Hadley, personal interview, Decatur, Tenn., 30 Dec. 2000.

<sup>36</sup> John Petre, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 4 Jan. 2001; Darren Cook, Gorrie, personal interview, Ontario, 17 July 2001; and Martin Hadley, personal interview, Decatur, Tenn., 30 Dec. 2000.

<sup>37</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 8 Aug. 2000 and 26 Sept. 2000; Darren Cook, personal interview, Gorrie, Ontario, 17 July 2001; and Martin Hadley, Decatur, Tenn., 30 Dec. 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Aaron Stoll, personal interview, Cookeville, Tenn., 26 Sept. 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Caleb Stoll, personal interviews, Cookeville, Tenn., 8 August 2000 and 26 September 2000; Bryce Geiser, personal interview, Withee, Wis., 5 Mar. 2001; Jon Stoll, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 24 Mar. 2001; David Oberholzer, personal interview, Decatur, Tenn., 30 Dec. 2000.

<sup>44</sup> John Weiler, personal interview, Aylmer, Ontario, 11 July 2001; Peter Gerber, personal interview, Gorrie, Ontario, 21 Jan. 2001; Bryce Geiser, personal interview, Withee, Wis., 5 Mar. 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Hadley, personal interview, Decatur, Tenn., 30 Dec. 2000.

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Pausing in the Twilight Zone: The Examined Life in Bobbie Ann  
Mason's *Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail*

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Flannery O'Connor has said that "the best American fiction has always been regional" because that perspective allows "the possibility of reading a small history in a universal light" (54). In a 1994 commencement address at the University of Kentucky, Bobbie Ann Mason accounted for her state's centrality in contemporary literature in a manner that reinforces O'Connor's claim: "Kentucky, which sits between North and South, not quite in the east and not quite in the Midwest, is very near the heart of America. We are a microcosm of this nation, both what's best about it and what's worst" (qtd. in Grubbs 20).

Bobbie Ann Mason has been called a Kmart realist, a minimalist, even a nihilist—yet in interviews and memoir she persistently rejects all labels and insists that she writes only of her time and place. That place is far western Kentucky, centered around her farm home outside Mayfield. The time is generally the mid-1940s to the present, with the carefully researched *Feather Crowns* and her memoir *Clear Spring* reaching back into the nineteenth century. Although many critics have declared her void of regional identity—because her themes are not the racial-moral ones they associate with the southern literary tradition—in many interviews and in her memoir, Mason makes clear that she defines herself always as a southerner and that that identity shapes her life's decisions. Another disconnect between Mason and some of her critics is represented by Laura Fine's statement that Mason's prose presents a "decidedly . . . and surprisingly bleak vision of contemporary American life" (2), while Mason continually describes her characters as hopeful and plucky. This divide can be partly explained by how one defines regionalism and how one views the scope of Mason's fiction.

Robert Penn Warren was the first to argue that Katherine Anne Porter's work—her short stories and single novel—should be viewed as a whole, as a fictional history of the twentieth century told through the eyes of ordinary people in ordinary places (14-15). In Porter's "Old Morality" Maria says that she and her sister "knew they were young, though they felt they had lived a long time. They had lived not only their own years; but their memories, it seemed to them, began years before they were born, in the lives of the grownups around them" (Porter 174). Similarly, Mason says, "your memories over time are really lost, or they're transformed. They become memories of memories, and you lose sight of the original" (Sims 2). For Porter, those memories go back to the upheaval of the Civil War, and then through the subsequent dislocations of the two World Wars. Mason casts her panoramic vision—in both fiction and memoir—back decades before her birth, beginning with pioneers who became small farmers, passing their land on to their children, leading to seemingly changeless lives that were then disrupted by world wars, by the war in Viet Nam, and by the rise of a mass popular culture which threatens to obliterate anything distinctive about the people and the place that are her subjects—and which would seemingly obliterate the possibility of regional literature.

Yet Mason's world still centers on a particular region. And it is that region's encounter with popular culture that forms the conflict in most of her early work. Mason has described her characters as "rural people

meeting the modern age and being thrown out" (Sims 2). The psychic crisis is humorously summed up by a character who claims that one day she was sitting on the porch shelling corn for the chickens and the next day was expected to know what wine went with what. Mason also notes that she writes about three generations and that for all three "culture shock is happening simultaneously" (2).

Historian James Klotter offers a window on Kentucky as it entered the twentieth century: four-fifths of its population lived in rural areas, and a child born then came into "a world built on community networks, kinship ties, and self-sufficiency" (76). In an interview Mason describes Mayfield as "isolated from the rest of the world. The nearest city is a hundred and fifty miles, I guess . . . so that little area of land down in Western Kentucky has been off on its own, it seems like, for a long time" (Beattie 189). Further, the turn-of-the-century world described by Klotter changed so slowly that Mason has claimed that "to write about the turn of the century in a farm family in Western Kentucky, I only have to remember my grandparents and my own life in the forties, because not a huge amount had changed" (Beattie 196).

Therefore, if the onslaught of popular culture is a major event of the twentieth century, Mason's isolated and tradition-bound region experienced it to the fullest and most telescoped intensity, three generations at once, and can indeed serve as a microcosm of the country at its best and worst. In her early short stories her characters cope as best they can as the new culture threatens the community, kinship networks, and self-sufficiency that have previously defined their lives. In defending regional literature against charges of escapism or mere local color, Richard Broadbent offers a definition that clearly applies to Mason:

Regionalism's representation of vernacular cultures as enclaves of tradition insulated from larger cultural contact is palpably a fiction . . . its public function was not just to mourn lost cultures but to purvey a certain story of contemporary cultures and of the relationships among them: . . . to tell local cultures into a history of their supersession by a modern order now risen to national dominance. (qtd. in McCullough, 19)

In the culture clashes depicted in her early fiction, Mason was chronicling Kentuckians' changing identities. These alterations are aptly described by Morris A. Grubbs in an essay on the Kentucky short story: But by the mid-1960s and 1970s a large part of the population had turned its gaze away from home to search for meaning and happiness—or by necessity toward industrial jobs. Some left home seeking a better life; others were lured away by journeying urges, awakened by the burgeoning mass media . . . In Kentucky, a traditionally insular state, the fragmentation was a consequence of two very different worlds: agrarian and industrial, or more broadly, local and mass cultures. (21) Or as put by Lexington *Herald Leader* columnist Don Edwards: "Looking back, I can see that the past half century of this state has been a case of rural culture gradually giving way to an urban culture like a farm truck being morphed into an SUV. And not always for the best" (E 3).

Yet as Grubbs' essay also points out, "by the early 1980s . . . many of the people who had left—and even those who had only courted the idea of leaving—began turning their eyes and hearts homeward again" (21). Bobbie Ann Mason was among this number, describing eloquently in *Clear Spring* how she fled her "exile" in the North and returned to her native state.

Naturally then, Mason's most recent collection of short stories, *Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail*, centers on characters who have grown up immersed in the duality of local and popular cultures, who have broken out of isolated regionalism into the wider arena, and who have returned home physically and or

psychically to reflect on the world and their place within it. Variouslly they refer to these interludes as retreats, withdrawals, or in one case "The Twilight Zone." Better educated, less addled than Mason's earlier characters, they realize they have reached some plateau, some stage in life calling for observation and reflection, even if the insight gained is painful. As Chrissy puts it in "With Jazz," "In between childhood and old age, you have this bubble of consciousness—and conscience. It's enough to drive you crazy" (4). In another story the husband, in a limbo created by his wife's departure and mixed signals about reunion or divorce, manages to embrace the situation: "I'm laying low, observing, retreating, going off for forty days and forty nights, descending into the cave, maybe into the dark night of the soul—whose clichés of mythic descent. I'm open to them all" (141).

The returning Kentuckians hope to find meaning from past events, or to discover that Kentucky—home—carries an authenticity they missed earlier and were unable to find in their wanderings. Home has not stood still, however. In "Night Flight," Wendy moves back to Kentucky after eight years in Florida and is shocked to find drugs and drug-related crime: "I thought moving back here would be like moving back in time," she says. Her friend Bob explains that the heartland location that once made Kentucky the major distribution point of bananas works equally well for drugs. Although the banana festival endures, he explains, "It's just like everything else nowadays, just something that's supposed to remind you of how things used to be" (178). More often examining the past brings understanding, however, as when Sandra in "The Funeral Side" learns that her father's dual business, funeral home and furniture store, which in her childhood had seemed only bizarre, has logical roots in the frontier era when carpenters made and sold both coffins and furniture. Artifacts from another era can also bring insight into the present. The collection's title comes from "With Jazz," wherein Chrissy feels faint upon seeing her personal history in the pattern of a quilt: "I felt strange, as though all my life I had been zigzagging down a wild trail to this particular place. I stared at the familiar pattern of the quilt, the scraps of the girls' dresses and the boys' shirts" (14-15). The quilt embodies a pattern she has not seen in her life itself. In "Window Lights" the abandoned husband pieces a quilt which becomes for him a link between the wisdom of the past and his hope for the future, when he will give the quilt to his wife and it will somehow reunite them, may even become a gift to their daughter upon her marriage.

In these stories one reason for examining the present in view of the past is to sort the authentic from the false, to know the difference between authentic life and life as play. This is not so easy. One character wonders whether return to Kentucky constitutes "romanticizing her memories of home, embracing what she had once rejected as provincial. She wondered if this was a case of reverse snobbery, or if it was another phase that would dissolve into something else" (171). In "The Funeral Side," Sandra reaches a similar conclusion about the darkness of her first Alaskan winter: "There was no pure division between light and dark. It was always becoming lighter or darker, like the moon inching through its phases" (122). Mason's other characters in this collection ultimately discover through their "interludes," "retreats," or "withdrawals" that there is likewise no pure division between knowledge and ignorance, certainty and uncertainty, even past and present. They do realize that they wish to be more carefully aware of life and that they are willing to give time and space to that awareness.

The difficulty of achieving that time and space now turns this discussion toward criticisms of Mason's fiction, toward frequently identified weaknesses. For example, Walter Kirn, in a New York *Times* book review entitled "Up From Kmart," praises the enlarged awareness of Mason's new characters, but complains that like their predecessors they "still watch too much TV, drink too much beer, and love too indiscrimi-

nately" (9). He recalls Tom Wolfe's charges that writers like Mason presented characters "with emotions anesthetized, given a shot of Novocain" (9).

One wonders how Kirn and Wolfe would respond to Thomas de Zengotita's essay in the April 2002 *Harper's* entitled "The Numbing of the American Mind: Culture as Anesthetic," which points out that "Today, your brain is, as a matter of brute fact, full of stuff that was *designed* to affect you. As opposed to the scattered furniture of nature and history that people once registered just because it happened to be there" (37). De Zengotita argues that even our reaction to the horrific events of September 11 "had to accommodate the fact that our inner lives are now largely constituted by effects" (37) and that the constant barrage of images—"by footage, by stories, by representations of all kinds"—results in a necessary spiritual numbness that allows us to move on to other, often quite moving, images and stories, just as news anchors lead their audiences through a day's events, efficiently signaling movement from tragedy to human interest. In his words, "moving on" is the "one reality" (39). He further argues that the compilation of information and images emphasizes that there is no important difference between fabrication and reality, between . . . role playing in marital therapy and playing your role as a spouse, between selling and making, campaigning and governing, expressing and existing" (34).

The ideas in de Zengotita's essay place the first line of the first story in Mason's collection—"I never paid much attention to current events, all the trouble in the world you hear about" (3)—in a far more complicated context. This narrator also claims to find insight about life through a women's group that practices "a sort of talk show format" (3). Mason, far from being simply a Kmart snapshooter of contemporary life, emerges as a prescient realist, rare in her willingness to include television, television watching, and the effects of that viewing on her characters.

Just as television series offer few characters who actually watch TV, such viewing is equally absent from literature. That Mason's characters do watch TV and talk about it, even admit its influence, has been assumed to signal their lack of education and working-class status. They often do exhibit the numbness de Zengotita describes, even amid game efforts to sort out the fabricated from the real. And though many academics and presumably New York *Times* literary critics never watch TV, most Americans do; they are profoundly influenced by it, and Mason is one of the few writers to incorporate that influence into her narratives.

In "American Fiction and Televisual Consciousness," Alan Nadel refers to the television watching as "flow"—"the sensation not of watching a specific drama or event but of entering into a flow of sensations disparate in form, content, and organization" (2). Nadel explains that by combining the serial with the episodic and with replays and reruns that allow effects to "constantly rehearse their causes" television flow "disrupts the fluidity of our sense of time, series, sequence upon which some cherished notions of narrative rely" (3).

Mason's early relationship with TV would have mirrored that of many of her characters—born in 1940 on an isolated farm, Mason and others like her must have felt far removed from the affairs of "real life." Paradoxically, they would first have encountered it in its virtual form—through television—before moving off to search for it on their own. Many of Mason's characters in *Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail* return to Kentucky uncertain whether their memories of Alaska, or Saudi Arabia, or that first marriage, were real or just play. For them, as for Chrissy in "With Jazz," time "leaps erratically back and forth" which is how Nadel



describes the out-of-sequence narrative of TV series, where “all new” episodes compete with “reruns of all the old episodes” (2). Staring at the reflection of her current lover, Chrissy realizes that her first husband was right for her but because of “ignorance of the imagination” she could not realize it (18). In “Tobrah,” Jackie speculates that “adulthood was a role people played. They forgot they were just pretending” (43). In “Thunder Snow” a husband looks for his wife on TV as she serves in the Gulf War. Later, the wife discovers his whereabouts during a snowstorm by seeing him on the local news. The lonely husband in “Window Lights” tells a friend “I get plenty of counseling from TV . . . I just wait at home till somebody on the tube tells me what I have to do. Isn’t that what everybody does? Turn on the TV and somebody says buy this, eat that, don’t eat that, watch this? What’s so strange? Do you find that strange?” (142-3).

Mason’s attention to “television consciousness” unsettles definitions of regionalism and provincialism. David Holman defines a regionalist as a writer who “is able to maintain this ‘we’ versus ‘they’ awareness in his work while at the same time showing in fundamental and important ways ‘we’ are ‘they’ as well” (12). He further explains that “failure to effect a relationship between the region presented and the world outside that region results in provincialism” (12). But when writer, subjects, and audience are united by a mass popular culture, what place is left for regional difference? Or as Don Edward asked in his column, “Don’t all Americans plug into the mass culture now and eat at McDonald’s and talk on cell phones and wear the same sports shoes and watch the same stuff on TV? Are Kentuckians really that different from the rest of the country any more? Or have we been conditioned, in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophecy, to think that we are—and so we act accordingly?” (E3).

The Nadel essay on television raises other questions by suggesting that those who ignore television are creating a new kind of isolation. Nadel asks: “How does one disregard completely the narratives of virtual America without virtually sacrificing citizenship in the nation’s only widely shared community?” (4). This insight identifies a new form of postmodern provincialism which also ignores that ‘we’ and ‘they’ are connected.

Mason creates characters she admires because they are willing, if not always successful, to break away from both the new and old provincialisms. She describes her characters in this collection as “poised for possibility” (Feinberg 3):

“Of course,” she explains, “many others would choose to stick to their own narrow, provincial worlds, but these aren’t the people I’m interested in. Most people are determined to close their eyes and put blinders on—to protect themselves from outside influences and stick to their old ways. But the ones I’m interested in . . . they’ll go to the casino, or they’ll take on new responsibilities. . . . That’s what makes them interesting.” (Feinberg 6).

The homecomings of Mason’s characters bring them hope that they can understand the reruns of their pasts and create a better future. Significantly, in accepting mass culture as providing possibilities and reconnecting with their roots at the same time, they avoid both the old and new provincialisms. In describing the changes brought to Kentucky after World War II—the time when Mason and many of her characters came of age—James Klotter reminds us of the danger in rejecting the new:

Correctly they [Kentuckians] saw their traditions, their folkways, their pasts as strengths that should not be cast aside. These elements provided needed stability and anchors from which to face the uncertain future. But problems arose when Kentuckians worshipped the old ways to the exclusions of any modification. That false god made them often forget that one great constant of their past has

been change—from frontier lifestyle to a settled one, from a slave system to a free one, from an agrarian world to an industrial one. Each generation had lived and thought in different ways than its predecessor; each also kept with it, at the same time, a vitally important common memory, shared with other generations. (342)

In coming home, the characters in *Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail* hope to recapture and draw strength from the common memory. Through stories, quilts, picnics at the lake—which is, after all, a twentieth-century, man-made body of water—these Kentuckians teach themselves to accept the decisions of their pasts and move on. They add their new experiences to the common memory that will sustain the next generation. After all, Thoreau never intended to stay at Walden Pond forever. He wanted to “purify, simplify, and retreat” (163)—the exact words used by one of Mason’s twenty-first century characters to describe a necessary reaction when life is full of change.

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