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ON THE COVER:
Rendering of the proposed Lincoln Gardens housing project. COURTESY WILLARD LIBRARY ARCHIVES, EVANSVILLE, INDIANA
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“For Ten Years Past I have Constantly Wished to Turn My Western Lands into Money”

Speculator Frustration and Settlers’ Bargaining Power in Ohio’s Virginia Military District, 1795-1810

Hanno Scheerer

On a December day in 1797, Virginian Richard Claiborne entered the auditor’s office in Frankfort, Kentucky, to register his “poor dab of 3000 acres” of military land for taxes. When the officer took out his book, Claiborne stumbled across a list of land holdings “as long as his arm” belonging to his friend, the Philadelphia land speculator Henry Banks. This discovery provoked playful mockery on Claiborne’s part:

Instead of your being Henry Banks the Farmer—the Legislator—and the Social Neighbour—you are Henry Banks, the Land Speculator! Upon my soul I am ashamed of your situation when I see what you might be! Even suppose you could be the Bingum of Philadelphia, what would that be compared with the standing you might have in Kentucky—nothing!! Your property invites you—society invites you—and your prudence and ability ought to prompt you. Become the respectable citizen—enjoy the blessings which the ample soil you possess invites you to—be useful in the Community.¹

Claiborne’s sarcastic criticism captures the widespread contemptuous view of early American absentee land speculators over the past two centuries. Historians have often joined this canon of criticism, arguing that absentee land speculators merely worked for their own economic gain and contributed nothing “useful” to society at large. Progressive historians of the early and mid-twentieth century set the general tone when they condemned absentee land speculators for their allegedly negative impact on frontier development. “One of the worst effects of speculation was that it held land out of the market for at least a time and so compelled settlement to pass around or across it,” Benjamin Hibbard lamented in 1924. As a result, “agriculture necessarily remained for an unnecessarily long
time in a backward condition under these circumstances.” Paul Wallace Gates, whose many publications on land speculation, tenancy, and public land policy remain influential, joined in the criticism, and concluded that land speculation had a negative effect on the single-family farm settler, resulting in widespread tenancy, dispersion of population, and heavy tax burdens. Today, neo-Marxist historians continue to voice updated versions of such negative assessments of land speculators. Oddly, the same historians who criticized land speculation for its negative impacts on frontier settlers also argued that land speculation often made for an unprofitable business. “For the most part speculation led to disappointment much more often than to affluence,” Benjamin Hibbard claimed, and not without a certain satisfaction. His conclusion seems surprising. It essentially
suggests that absentee land speculation in the American West produced lose-lose situations, with settlers suffering under high land prices and speculators unable to turn a profit. In short, progressive historians present land speculation in the early American West as a business with no winners, but only sufferers.\(^2\)

A group of historians usually known as “revisionists” has long criticized the progressives’ narrative. Replacing the lose-lose narrative with a win-win narrative, these scholars argue that speculators acted in symbiosis with frontier settlers by offering them land on credit and in small parcels, while at the same time drawing neat profits. Robert Swierenga employed cliometric methods to show that land speculation in frontier Iowa reaped profits outstripping those of bond and stock yields in the mid-nineteenth century. He simultaneously argued that speculators played a useful function in the American West by providing settlers with badly needed credit. Thus, these scholars completely reject the two central themes—oppressed settlers and frustrated speculators—introduced by the progressives.\(^3\)

Such reinterpretations notwithstanding, historians still need to grapple with the existence of the frustrated absentee speculator and the contempt with which his eighteenth and nineteenth century contemporaries often viewed him. Notably, revisionist scholars have mostly confined their analyses to mid-nineteenth century land speculation ventures, completely ignoring the early national period, although absentee land speculation proved rampant at that time. The revisionists’ preference for the mid-nineteenth century probably reflects the greater availability of source material for the later period (allowing for thorough statistical evaluation), but they may also have chosen that era because it better serves their win-win narrative than the early national period. Countless historical examples show that in the years after the Revolution absentee land speculation offered a hazardous business that left many speculators frustrated with low returns. The troubles with unruly settlers encountered by the proprietors of lands on the Maine frontier and the bankruptcies of large-scale speculators such as Robert Morris stand emblematic of the hazards encountered by absentee land speculators, but failure also occurred on a much smaller scale, such as in the Connecticut Western Reserve in Ohio, where the mid-size absentee land speculator Pierpont Edwards failed to realize profits from his land holdings over the course of decades.\(^4\)
While historians have tried to shed light on the individual causes for such failures, they have done much less to analyze how the speculators’ difficulties in making profits impacted settlers in the American West. Eric Hinderaker offers an important clue when he argues that “ordinary settlers” in the American West encountered a free and competitive land market, which endowed them with a range of “choices and opportunities.” Hinderaker reveals that settlers may have benefited from the speculators’ inability to generate profits from their lands. Thus, the progressives’ narrative of a static situation in which speculators refused to sell and settlers could not purchase needs modification, as does the revisionists’ win-win narrative. The first fails to acknowledge the many choices and opportunities the land market offered to settlers, while the latter fails to take into account the frustrations of absentee speculators in the early national period. Both ignore the free and competitive nature of the western land market, and how the bargaining process shaped land transactions in the early American West. Ultimately, speculators wished to sell their land and settlers wished to acquire this land, but the specific terms under which these land transfers took place remained subject to bargaining. By understanding the forces and factors that shaped the bargaining processes, historians can develop a more nuanced understanding of the impact of absentee land speculation on the early national West.

An in-depth look at a well-documented but little-known case of a frustrated absentee speculator in the early republic can help clarify the complex patterns of interaction between western settlers and absentee speculators. John Graham, a Scottish-born merchant and coal mine owner from Richmond, Virginia, represented the typical mid-size absentee land speculator of the early republic. Graham began investing his money in western lands in 1795, at a time when the moneyed elite all over the United States looked at land speculation as what Merrill Jensen has called their “major get-rich-quick activity.” The mid-1790s United States saw an enormous economic boom, and American merchants sought new ways to invest their surplus capital. Land speculation, according to Thomas Doerflinger, offered American merchants an “escapist flight from trade, a way to build up a fortune without enduring the drudgery and risks of day-to-day commerce.” While wholesale prices for tobacco and other staples varied greatly over the years, good quality land appeared to have something like intrinsic worth, and in a society that valued agriculture so highly always promised to be in demand. “Lands can neither be annihilated nor lose their value; on the contrary, they universally rise with population,” Thomas Paine pointed out as early as 1780, and many of his contemporaries apparently shared his viewpoint.

So did John Graham, who engrossed 35,071 acres of western lands within a few years. Graham targeted his interest toward a specific location: the Virginia Military District (hereafter also referred to as VMD) in the future state of Ohio. Congress granted this 4.2 million acre tract, located between the
Scioto and the Little Miami Rivers, to the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1784 as compensation for having ceded its remaining western land claims to the national government. Originally intended solely for providing Revolutionary War veterans with land for their military bounties, the District quickly turned into a hotbed of land speculation. The metes and bounds survey system employed in the District allowed land claimants to adjust locations to natural features, thus giving
them an opportunity to incorporate only first-rate land in one tract. Naturally, this possibility attracted speculators eager to claim only prime lands. In addition, absentee speculators could gain cheap and easy access to VMD lands by purchasing land warrants granted to Revolutionary War veterans on the East Coast. Virginia law specifically stipulated that land warrants were alienable, and soldiers in dire need of cash made ample use of this provision. Overall, only 28.4 percent of all land warrants used to claim land in the VMD between 1787 and 1810 still belonged to war veterans, pointing to an extremely high rate of land speculation.7
Even though speculation in VMD land warrants had begun as early as 1782 when the first warrants were drawn, the 1795 Treaty of Greenville was a decisive catalyst, spurring the interest of speculators and settlers alike. John Rose, a non-resident VMD landholder, believed that the “flattering prospect…of peace with the Indian Tribes” would “bring these Lands into demand.” Many wealthy Virginians and Kentuckians shared this view, including Robert Breckenridge who described western lands as “the most promising property in the country.” Their evaluation initially proved correct, for settlers began pouring into the District after 1795; Adams and Ross Counties, both chiefly carved out from land within the District, grew from almost no Euro-American inhabitants in 1795 to 3,432 (Adams) and 8,540 (Ross) in 1800, boosting the Virginia Military District to the second highest populated Ohio land subdivision behind the Miami Purchase. In this period of bright prospects John Graham began his heavy investments in VMD lands. In 1795, after having made the personal acquaintance of VMD deputy surveyor Nathaniel Massie, Graham determined to acquire at least thirty thousand acres of land northwest of the Ohio River. Massie had impressed upon Graham his belief in a “rise in the value of the lands NW of the Ohio,” which would allegedly guarantee good profits—profits outstripping those of United States Bank stocks, which yielded a minimum 12 percent dividend per annum.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Patteeen</th>
<th>No. of Patents</th>
<th>Total Acres*</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>Place of Residence†</th>
<th>Occupation‡</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nathaniel Massie</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>65,725</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<tr>
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<td>James Taylor Jr.</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>42</td>
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<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Duncan McArthur</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>26,898</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>26,022</td>
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<td>Green County, OH</td>
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Consequently, Graham began selling his United States Bank shares and investing the money in VMD lands. To do so, he realized he needed expert advice and assistance from someone acquainted with the land and capable not only of claiming first-rate land but also of subsequently selling it to fellow speculators or settlers in the West. In Nathaniel Massie, the most experienced VMD surveyor, Graham found an excellent partner. Graham entered into a land speculation partnership with Massie and fellow merchant James Heron of Norfolk. Graham and Heron were to provide the capital, and Nathaniel Massie the knowledge. The partners planned to acquire land in two ways. First, Massie, Heron, and Graham would jointly purchase choice lands that had already been surveyed in the names of war veterans, with each of the three men paying an equal third part and receiving a corresponding share of each tract. Second, Graham and Heron would buy land warrants on their own accounts and have them located and surveyed by Nathaniel Massie, who would receive one-third of the land as a reimbursement for his locating services. Massie also would act as the Kentucky and Ohio agent for Graham and Heron and sell their land to fellow speculators in Kentucky and directly to settlers in the Virginia Military District.*

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CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER
Land purchases on the East Coast—whether in the form of surveys or warrants—followed free market economy logic and required ready cash. When the first warrants were drawn in 1782, before a land office had been opened, warrant buying took on the character of speculation in any government-issued financial paper, and many merchants who traded in them also traded in military warrants. Newspaper advertisements of the early 1780s testify to the fact that speculators traded in warrants on an open market as far away from Virginia as New York, Connecticut, and South Carolina, but most trading took place in Philadelphia, the young nation’s financial and political center. Philadelphia-based brokers such as Clement Biddle heavily invested in VMD warrants but hardly ever had their land patented, preferring to sell either the warrants or the surveys to fellow speculators on the East Coast.¹⁰

When Graham entered the speculation scene in the mid-1790s, he had to adjust to this nationalized commercial warrant market. In 1796, Graham reported to Nathaniel Massie that the “prospect of procuring warrants” in Richmond was highly doubtful, and he had to rely on his Philadelphia business partner, William Maclure, for aid. Graham also realized that the laws of supply and demand governed the warrant market. With regard to the sale of his bank shares, he had already learned that “throwing much into the market at once has great weight in depressing” its price and he soon found out that the reverse mechanism worked to increase prices for warrants on the Philadelphia market. Graham and Massie originally agreed to pay no more than sixteen cents per acre for warrants in 1795, but in light of rising warrant prices, Graham first agreed to offer up to twenty cents per acre, then increased his maximum price to twenty-five to twenty-six cents per acre, and eventually ended up paying thirty cents per acre for warrants amounting to six thousand five hundred acres acquired through the agency of William Maclure in Philadelphia. In short, Graham’s “inquiring & buying” of warrants immediately raised their price, as word spread on the market that warrants were in high demand.¹¹

While rising warrant prices posed a still bearable nuisance, the situation grew much worse on the market for prime VMD land that had already been surveyed for war veterans. In the boom years of 1795 and 1796, everyone who owned money on the East Coast seemed to grab for land in the American West. When John Graham and Robert Means (a fellow land speculator from Richmond who frequently acted as Graham’s agent) tracked down war veterans in 1796 to purchase their Ohio military lands as suggested by Massie, they learned that hardly anyone would sell and then only at exorbitant prices. War veteran Churchill Jones, who owned a particularly desirable tract of land located immediately on the Little Miami River, refused to sell at all. He informed Means that he had sold another of his tracts (located on the Ohio River) in 1792 for one dollar per acre to Noble Grymes of Kentucky, who
had recently informed him that the same land had risen in value to eight dollars per acre. As a consequence, Jones would not “sell at any price” for fears of “making a like sacrifice as he formerly did.” Other war veterans inclined to sell would do so only at prices far beyond the limit agreed on by Massie, Graham, and Heron. In fact, land prices became so inflated that Graham suggested that Robert Means should only enquire for more claims if Massie agreed on raising their price limit by 50 percent.  

The general economic boom of the mid-1790s and the thriving market for western lands encouraged many East Coast merchants to purchase such land, but this desire was not irrational. Absentee land speculators made their purchases based on what they believed were careful and rational assessments of near future prospects. These assessments relied on a combination of past experience and interpretations of the present political and economic situation. “The Spanish Treaty must have a good effect [on land prices] as it will greatly encourage emigration from the Eastern States,” Graham concluded in 1796. While current political parameters could change, past experiences in Kentucky and Virginia still served as guarantees to Massie and Graham that the price of Ohio lands would increase naturally within the course of a few years. When Massie suggested using warrants to claim river bottoms in hilly regions of the District, Graham enthusiastically approved, assuring Massie that similar bottoms now sold for ten to fifteen dollars per acre in Virginia, even as far as one hundred fifty miles west of Richmond. Clearly, Graham expected a similar rise in the value of Ohio lands. Indeed, Massie further nourished Graham’s hopes, explaining that “not from a late opinion, but from existing facts” he was sure that simply the “advantage of a few years advanced in improvements” would raise the price of Ohio lands from one to between four and ten dollars per acre. Initially, such hopes proved warranted, and in 1796, Graham rejoiced that it was “very pleasing to see...an advance on the lands on the Ohio in little more than one year from one dollar to four [per acre].”  

Although the congressional decision to fix the minimum price for an acre of public land at two dollars per acre in 1796 dealt a blow to the speculators’ hopes for dramatic profits, they were still content with the level of possible profits in light of average warrant prices of thirty cents per acre. In addition, speculators continued in their hopes that simply the advancement of Euro-American settlement would raise the price of land within a few years. Clearly, absentee land speculators looked at their western lands as medium-term investments that needed but a few years to mature, and would then reap handsome profits. Sharing Thomas Paine’s believe that land could never lose its intrinsic value, they remained supremely confident they could always and easily sell their land, and that the decisive question was simply whether profits would be acceptable or outstanding.
Consequently, when speculators such as John Graham entered the land market in the mid-1790s, they initially ran their land business in exactly the manner that progressive historians later criticized—that is, they held on to their properties to wait for rising prices. Not even land leases to settlers seemed desirable to absentee speculators. When Massie suggested that Graham and Heron lease a tract of land to a settler for twenty-one years at an annual payment of ten pounds sterling per hundred acres in 1797, Graham and Heron emphatically declined, arguing that leasing land was “no object as it ties up the property, probably for life…when we think the same land a few years hence may sell for two or three times the sum we have paid for it.” In the first years after Euro-American settlement began in the District, speculators would simply not part with their land in the hopes of rising land prices in the near future.  

Such business conduct did not pass unnoticed by early Ohio settlers, and they protested as a result. In 1798, settlers who had illegally located on public lands east of the Scioto petitioned Congress for cheap land. Arguing that the congressional policy of selling land in large tracts of six hundred forty acres and at high prices of two dollars per acre put land acquisition out of reach for small-scale settlers, they added that the Virginia military lands west of the Scioto offered no alternative, as they were “held generally by persons who will neither sell or [sic] settle them.” Initially, then, developments on the VMD frontier seemed to follow the narrative developed by progressive historians, with settlement passing around the VMD and speculators refusing to sell any of their property at prices and on conditions that suited small-scale settlers. Yet the situation changed abruptly beginning in late 1797. In August 1796, Graham still assured Massie that he and his partner Heron did not have “any intention at this time to sell, except with the view of laying the money out on more lands,” and in May 1797, he refused Massie’s offer to lease land to settlers. But he suddenly changed his mind in December 1797, when he ordered Massie to dispose of several tracts they had purchased on their joint account, as well as land acquired through warrants amounting to eight thousand dollars.  

What had happened between August 1796 and December 1797 to convince Graham to change his strategy suddenly and sell considerable parts of his Ohio property as quickly as possible? Evidence suggests that Graham changed his strategy in response to a little-known but highly influential historic event: the Panic of 1797. Scholars have largely ignored this event, but Richard Chew has recently brought it to the attention of historians of the early American republic. Chew argues that the Panic of 1797 constituted a trans-Atlantic credit crunch triggered by the suspension of specie payments by the Bank of England in London. The American economic boom of the mid-1790s heavily relied upon the extension of credit from British to American merchants. The suspension of specie payments by the Bank of England in February 1797 deprived British
merchants of this important source of silver and gold, and they, in turn, suddenly stopped extending credit to their American trading partners. The merchants’ decision sparked a severe scarcity of cash in the United States, where banking remained in its infancy. The cash scarcity hit port-town merchants especially hard, but it extended into the backcountry and continued well into the early nineteenth century.17

Thus, Graham first instructed Massie to sell parts of his Ohio property in December 1797, when the consequences of the credit crunch began to be felt all over the United States. In February 1798, Graham again called on Massie to effect sales as quickly as possible, as they were “much wished for.” Suddenly, Graham did not concern himself with the rate of profits, as he relentlessly pressed Massie for quick cash sales, especially after a negative court judgment increased his need for cash. But with the general scarcity of specie in the United States, Graham’s fellow speculators, all of whom now strove to make quick money from their land holdings, shared his wish for cash sales. Within a few months, western land had turned from a liquid into a highly illiquid asset. Graham had purchased western lands based on the expectation that he could convert them into cash on a booming land market at any time, and that he would only have to wait for a few years to maximize profits. Yet the Panic of 1797 and the subsequent “disappearance of money” had, in the words of Massie, created a “real uneasiness” and purchasers for western lands became hard to find, leaving speculators land rich but money poor. Henry Massie, Nathaniel’s brother and himself a Chillicothe-based land speculator, summarized the speculators’ central dilemma: “If our Lands would command money we should find no difficulty…in getting out of debt.”18

The disappearance of specie in the United States, and the land speculators’ dire need for cash dramatically altered the situation on the western land market. Whereas settlers had faced a tight market with speculators uninclined to sell in the mid-1790s, they suddenly found themselves in a buyers’ market with ample choices and opportunities. In the May 13, 1805 edition of the Chillicothe Scioto Gazette, Robert Means and Nathaniel Massie advertised the sale of sixty-five tracts totaling 55,863 acres. These tracts, owned either by Means, Massie, Graham, or Graham’s deceased partner James Heron, were advertised as an “object particularly worthy the attention of the emigrant and actual settler.” With considerably more than fifty thousand acres thrown on the market by Massie, Means, Graham, and the administrator of James Heron alone, the VMD land market became crammed with sellers. As a result, bargaining power swung strongly in the direction of VMD settlers. Suddenly, acquiring land in the District no longer posed a problem, and settlers even pushed through many of their demands, including favorable legal arrangements, small parcel sizes, cheap land prices, and credit sales.19
Legal arrangements proved particularly important in the Virginia Military District, whose metes and bounds survey system was prone to interferences of claims, resulting in a possible loss of land for settlers. Purchasers managed to mitigate such troubles by resorting to general warranty deeds—that is, deeds that guaranteed the purchaser compensation if overlaps or interferences subsequently appeared. Speculators found general warranty deeds a costly nuisance because they left the responsibility for land titles in their hands even after the land had been sold. Thus they bore the risk of expensive lawsuits and compensation payments for settlers who lost their land due to interfering claims. Speculators wished to avoid them, but on the competitive VMD land market, settlers and not speculators dictated the terms of sale. “When I first began to make conveyances for my lands in Ohio, I endeavoured to keep clear of general guarantees, but I soon found myself obliged to come into the common course of the country,” Graham lamented. By 1808, he had learned that “Purchasers in the Western Country wish to have general warranties [sic]” and he realized that sales could not be accomplished at all if the sellers offered no sort of guarantee of ownership and right to sell.20

Similarly, settlers managed to push through their demand for small parcel sizes. Settlers continuously demanded the sale of congressional lands, originally sold in inconveniently large minimum tracts of six hundred forty acres, in small parcels.
When John Graham began his first sales in 1798, he originally sold his land in blocks no smaller than five hundred acres and at prices ranging from two dollars for larger to three dollars for smaller parcels, resulting in minimum purchase prices of fifteen hundred dollars. Yet with the stagnation of the western land market intensifying as a result of the Panic of 1797, the situation changed radically and Graham bowed to settler demands and sold many smaller parcels ranging from one to three hundred acres. Indeed, it generally became a common phrase in VMD land sale newspaper advertisements that surveys would be divided into “convenient” tracts to “suit” actual settlers.21

Along with smaller parcels came lower land prices. Oversupply on the VMD land market prevented the surge of land prices that Graham and Massie had predicted in the mid-1790s. As Thomas Massie (a relative of Nathaniel’s who had moved to Chillicothe in 1807) summarized, so much “good land” was “sacrificed by speculators who must have money that the price of land is kept down every where except in the neighbourhood of towns.” Gradually, Graham realized that on the VMD land market, “Old Butler’s” saying that the “value of any thing is just as much as it will bring” was more than just a flowery phrase; it had become a reality. Graham’s land sales reflected the low prices. His Ohio agent Massie managed to sell at least thirty-five tracts for him between 1798 and 1807 at an average price of $1.84 per acre. After subtracting five tracts sold to fellow speculators at high prices between two and three dollars in 1798, the remaining tracts sold at an average of a mere $1.67 per acre—thirty three cents below Congress’s minimum price. Settlers who purchased land in a single down payment enjoyed even larger discounts. By 1804, Graham had become so “anxious to get money for landed property” that he assured Massie that no sacrifices were too great, “provided the money paid in hand,” even if Massie had to sell at half cash price. As a result, Massie sold seven tracts at the low price of one dollar fifty cents per acre, and one high quality tract located on the Ohio River for the excessively low price of $1.33 per acre.22

For Graham, these low land prices proved acceptable because he had purchased most of his land on warrants at a much cheaper rate. In addition, Graham gradually abandoned the idea of hefty profits. Instead, he ran his business following a simple rule of thumb, which prescribed that profits from land speculation “should not be less than three for two.” Taking into account that Graham lost one-third of his land purchased on warrants to Nathaniel Massie as compensation for his locating services, this required that land acquired for thirty cents per acre on warrants had to sell for at least sixty-eight cents per acre, or for $1.13 if Graham expected a profit on top of his initial investment. In either case, what can be called Graham’s “blackjack rule” generally resulted in land prices that undercut the two dollar minimum demanded by Congress.23 Revisionist scholars have argued that low land prices in combination with even lower warrant prices
created a win-win situation, where settlers gained easy and comparatively cheap access to land and speculators enjoyed profits that still lay well within their expectations. But land speculators never actually saw much of the revenue generated by land sales because of settlers’ preference for credit purchases and their poor payment practices. The dubious dealings of the speculators’ Ohio agents—the VMD surveyors—also hurt speculators’ profit margins.

As frontier agents of absentee speculators, the VMD surveyors found themselves in a difficult position, decisive links between a barter-trade dominated frontier economy and the absentee speculators’ businesses, which relied on cash as a medium of exchange. In addition, VMD deputy surveyors such as Massie, William Lytle, Lucas Sullivant, and Duncan McArthur had originally crossed the Ohio from Kentucky not only to amass large landholdings by surveying land in the VMD, but also to establish themselves as economic, political, and social leaders of a new community. As historian Andrew Cayton argues, these men wanted to extend “the social and political world of colonial Virginia into the Northwest Territory,” and they envisioned themselves at the center of this new society as landed patriarchs. Consequently, VMD surveyors acted not merely as obedient agents of affluent absentee speculators, but as men of the local community who pursued their own interests and goals. Unfortunately for Graham, the surveyors’ interests did not always match those of absentee speculators. Even though absentee speculators constantly pressed for quick cash sales, VMD surveyors knew their clientele better and usually sold land on credit, with an initial down payment of one-fourth to one-half of the purchase price. Credit sales became the rule in the Virginia Military District, since few settlers could afford even low full-cash payments. While absentee speculators such as Graham never wished for credit sales, they had to bow to and accept frontier realities if they hoped to sell any land at all.24

The practice of credit sales in the Virginia Military District diametrically opposed the interests of absentee land speculators. Since notoriously cash-poor settlers hardly succeeded in generating cash from their agricultural output, they rarely managed to meet their second installments, and the surveyors, as agents for absentee speculators, granted them liberal credit extensions. In December 1805, Benjamin Adair, a settler from Virginia, disposed of one hundred twenty five dollars as a down payment to purchase 166 and two third acres of land on the North Fork of Paint Creek from Nathaniel Massie and John Graham at $1.66 and two thirds per acre. Yet he failed to meet his second installment, and Massie allowed him credit extensions until 1813. Such long credit extensions were no exception. In 1801, Duncan McArthur sold two hundred fifty acres of land...
to Joseph Waugh at $1.75 per acre. The agreement specified that the price would be raised to two dollars per acre if Waugh failed to meet his installments. Written notes on the back of the agreement testify to the difficulties settlers had in paying off their debts. Waugh failed to make even the first installment, paying just sixty dollars in cash and one hundred dollars in horses instead of two hundred ten dollars cash as agreed. Payments in small sums followed, sometimes as low as ten dollars per year, until 1817, when Lemon Waugh, a relative of Joseph’s, eventually paid off the debt “in a horse & three ox yoaks [sic].”

Of course, the surveys did not act out of purely altruistic motives. Credit sales often included interest and thus inflated land prices. Yet the surveys’ willingness to allow settlers to pay in merchandise instead of cash as agreed and to grant them credit extensions of fifteen years or more indicates a general relationship between surveys and settlers that did not reflect profit-orientation alone. Living within the District, the surveys formed an active part of the frontier community, and, as such, could not blatantly violate frontier community ethics without hurting their own social standing. Such concerns became more important for surveys such as Massie and Duncan McArthur who pursued political careers that depended on votes from their local constituents. By selling land on credit and by allowing debtors long extensions and payment in kind, the surveys created bonds of dependency between themselves and settlers. Territorial Governor Arthur St. Clair pointed to these dependencies when he voiced his concern that large landholders in the Northwest Territory commanded votes simply because many people owed them money and feared that their debts would be called in if they cast their vote for the wrong person. Whether such direct links between debts and votes really existed remains doubtful, but certainly surveys tried to conduct business in a way that proved to the settler populace that they were sincere and righteous businessmen and useful members of the community. During the Ohio Constitutional Convention elections of 1802, settler Thomas White argued in a letter published in the *Scioto Gazette* that Massie’s “interests bind him to ours,” indicating that surveys had succeeded in creating an image of themselves as the settlers’ companions.

The importance of this image became apparent in 1811, when an anonymous political foe attacked Duncan McArthur on the grounds that he had laid warrants on settled but unlocated land, thereby “harassing and swindling his neighbor’s money.” McArthur quickly replied that he had always paid settlers for their improvements or allowed them to purchase the land at the price of unimproved land, and had never dragged anyone to the “bar of a court of justice to answer to a plea of debt.” In other words, he had always valued the good of the community over his own monetary gain. Indeed, McArthur styled himself as a righteous and reliable business partner who frequently conducted deals with settlers on a handshake basis. Such behavior was in line with the surveyors’ general
self-depiction, envisioning themselves as landed patriarchs—indeed, Virginian gentlemen—who acted in accord with frontier community ethics and expected deferential behavior by the settler community in return. 27

As members of the frontier community, the surveyors experienced troubles similar to those of small-scale settlers in the West. Notoriously cash-poor themselves, they frequently failed to remit to their East Coast speculation partners the little cash they had received from settlers on their behalf. Again, the partnership between Massie and Graham serves as a telling example. The pattern began when Massie effected the first sale for Graham in May 1798. In that month, he sold a complete 1,170-acre survey at the high price of two dollars per acre to the young Thomas Worthington, then in the process of relocating from Virginia to Ohio. Initially “well pleased with the sale,” Graham soon learned that he would not see much of the purchase money. In January 1799, Massie reported to Graham that he had not yet received any money, but that Worthington had given him the “promise that it shall be paid in Philadelphia either in March or April…and that he has provided sufficient funds for that purpose.” In May 1799, Graham had “not yet heard a word of Major Worthington’s money,” and in June 1799, he again complained that his “not receiving the promised remittances” posed great inconvenience. By August 1799, Worthington had at least paid half of the purchase price to Massie, and in November 1799, Nathaniel’s brother Henry visited first Philadelphia and then Richmond, empowered by Nathaniel to collect “a considerable amount” on his way to pay Graham. However, he was “disappointed in every application.” In February 1800, Nathaniel promised to remit Graham two thousand dollars for Worthington’s and other tracts sold since, but in April, Graham had still not received anything. In an effort to create a working financial link between the West and the East Coast, Graham even suggested that Massie send the money on packhorses and take the horses in part for payment. Massie never responded to this naive proposition because he never possessed the money in specie. Not until May 1800 did Graham receive a mere two hundred dollars from Nathaniel, putting him into immense “pecuniary embarrassments.” 28

This pattern persisted throughout the Graham-Massie partnership. Although Massie sold at least thirty-five parcels of land amounting to 15,764 acres at prices ranging from $1.33 to three dollars per acre between 1798 and 1807, remittances remained meager. By 1805, Massie owed Graham the sum of $12,675, on which Massie executed a bond for payment by September 1806. This bond expired without Massie paying anything, and by June 1807
his debt had increased to $16,513. As part of a settlement negotiated by John Graham's nephew and new Ohio agent Walter Dun, Massie agreed to mortgage lands and execute a bond for $3,835, payable July 1809. Again, no evidence exists that Massie ever paid this bond. Accounts were only settled after Massie's death in 1813, when a good deal of his land was auctioned off to pay his debts to Graham. Ironically, bids for Massie's land proved so low that Graham's nephew jumped in and purchased much of his land on his uncle's behalf. As a result, Massie's dwelling place at the Falls of Paint Creek fell into the hands of an absentee speculator in 1816.29

Failing to remit money to Graham enabled Massie to navigate his difficult position as mediator between East Coast speculators and settlers in the West, while helping him sustain his social, political, and economic status in Ohio. Keeping Graham's accounts “in the utmost confusion,” and failing to provide Graham with a “particular account of sales, giving the date of sale, to whom sold, what number of acres sold, what tract, when & how payable &c,” Massie kept Graham in constant uncertainty about the state of his Ohio business. This allowed Massie to adopt a pyramid scheme. He never immediately remitted the little cash received from land sold on behalf of his East Coast customers, using it instead to meet his other engagements or invest in one of his countless frontier businesses, such as towns, saw-, grist-, and paper-mills, distilleries, and his own estate. The money also came in handy whenever settlers failed to meet their installments, enabling Massie to grant liberal credit extensions. He hoped to remit the money at a later date by allowing speculators such as Graham to collect money from other East Coast residents who owed Massie money—for instance, because he had paid their Ohio taxes. But the system rarely worked because his East Coast acquaintances often failed to honor his drafts. As a result, speculators received only meager remittances, and Massie fell more heavily in debt.30

Massie's financial troubles peaked in November 1807, seven months after Graham sacked him as his Ohio land agent. At that time, Massie stood in arrears for taxes in the sum of thirteen hundred dollars, and his land would have been forfeited had not his brother-in-law, James Meade, and Thomas Massie, provided him with eight and five hundred dollars, respectively. As Thomas Massie sarcastically noted, the “United States General Massie had no money,” a situation that prompted Nathaniel to offer for sale unsuccessfully all his land on Paint Creek to raise cash. Other VMD surveyors struggled, too, while attempting the difficult task of bridging frontier and East
Coast. Joseph Kerr had to file for bankruptcy and William Lytle of Clermont County became so fed up with the land business that he contemplated selling his Ohio property and leaving the state altogether. 31

Yet Massie was hit hardest. Suffering not only from debt but also from alcoholism, Massie could have been brought to the brink of bankruptcy had Graham not refrained from suing him. Although Graham had rational reasons not to sue Massie—he believed that “nothing could be got from quarreling” and thought that Massie’s knowledge was vital to run his Ohio land business—he also seems to have acted out of personal sympathy and a moral commitment to their business relationship. When another one of Massie’s creditors suggested that Graham sue, he declined on the grounds that he “never had any agent that resided in Ohio but General Massie” and added that he could not “take such a step without first hearing from him.” Thus, even though the historiography generally epitomizes the absentee land speculator as the quintessential ruthless American capitalist, his business conduct apparently followed what Bruce Mann has called “rules of etiquette”—that is, gentlemanly business ethics that stressed a mutual respect for the reputation of a business partner. Obviously, Graham shied away from suing Massie because he did not want to destroy his reputation as an honorable and reliable businessman, displaying a remarkable degree of consideration given Massie’s fraudulent handling of Graham’s business in Ohio. 32

Graham’s fruitless effort to reap profits from his Ohio lands is not an isolated case. His experiences strikingly resemble those of absentee land speculator Pierpont Edwards in the Connecticut Western Reserve. Although Graham’s difficulties certainly arose from factors peculiar to the Virginia Military District and the slack business conduct of Massie in particular, absentee land speculators in the early national period clearly faced common structural problems that prevented them from realizing profits. Similar to Graham, Edwards struggled with unreliable Ohio agents, low demand for land, the poor payment practices of settlers, cash scarcity, and a lack of a common medium of exchange between the West and the East Coast. That absentee speculators initially failed to see these integral problems probably reflects the immense economic boom of the mid-1790s, which blinded them to the realities of the western land market. 33

It follows that both the revisionists’ win-win as well as the progressives’ lose-lose narrative need revision for the early national period. Clearly, absentee speculators found themselves on the losing side, while settlers managed to capitalize on the speculators’ frustration to generate profits and achieved most of their demands. Equipped with enormous bargaining power because of speculators’ ardent wish for immediate cash returns, land acquisition in the Virginia Military District became fairly easy. As an early settler of Clermont County claimed, it was a “very rare occurrence to find a family living on ground they did not own” before 1815. Indeed, even those settlers too poor to purchase land on the favorable
conditions offered by speculators benefited from the buyers’ market in western lands, as they found ample opportunity to bargain for favorable land lease arrangements with landowners not as radically opposed to leases as Graham.34

Yet even answering to settler demands did not result in profits for speculators, who suffered from cash shortages and their frontier agents’ unreliability. Frustrated and completely fed up with the western land business, speculators such as Graham determined to quit their western properties no matter what the cost. “For ten years past I have constantly wished to turn my western lands into money,” Graham lamented in 1809, and six years later he burst into a tirade of hate against the western land market when he informed his nephew: “I am so disgusted at money lying & wasting in lands with you [in Ohio], that…you may dispose of my lands at any price, and remit at any loss, and put an end to this tantalizing ideal nonsense.” Three years before his death, Graham finally understood the speculators’ fallacy to which he had fallen prey. From “fatal experience” he had learned that “all those engaged in land speculation, eager to engross, ever overran their ability, in hopes of land rising in value & of returning money from sales, that prove illusory.” Unfortunately for Graham, this insight came long after the damage had been done.35

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3 Ray Allen Billington first challenged the progressive historians’ negative evaluation of the land speculator in “The Origin of the Land Speculator as a Frontier Type,” Agricultural History 19 (Oct. 1945), 204-12.


6 Merrill Jensen, “The Cession of the Old Northwest,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 23 (June 1936), 28; Thomas M. Doerflinger, A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 316; Thomas Paine, Public Good, Being an Examination into the Claim of Virginia to the Vacant Western Territory, and of the Right of the United States to the Same… (1780; London: R. Carlile, 1819), 31. For cursory biographical information about John Graham, see Ann Holman Dun Boone, Dun-Graham Genealogy (Seattle, Wa.: A. H. D. Boone, 1979), 4-6, 14. Graham resided in Virginia before the Revolutionary War, but moved back to Banton, Scotland (near Glasgow), during the conflict. He returned to Virginia in 1784. Comparatively wealthy, Graham owned a one thousand acre farm on the James River in Goochland County, Virginia, which housed coal pits of “established reputation,” operated with the manpower of one hundred slaves. A second plantation, known as Ryefield, stood on the James River in Goochland. It featured a freestone quarry which had supplied the stone used to build the capitol in Richmond. A third plantation of seven hundred acres located in Henrico County was operated during the conflict. He returned to Virginia in 1784. Comparatively wealthy, Graham owned a one thousand acre farm on the James River in Goochland County, Virginia, which housed coal pits of “established reputation,” operated with the manpower of one hundred slaves. A second plantation, known as Ryefield, stood on the James River in Goochland. It featured a freestone quarry which had supplied the stone used to build the capitol in Richmond. A third plantation of seven hundred acres located in Henrico County was operated by another fifty slaves. In addition, Graham owned five town lots in Richmond, on one of which he had built a “comfortable dwelling house.” See Letter of Attorney from William Cadell to John Graham, 1784, John Graham Records of Accounts for Coal Works and Sundries, 1797-1803, McKell Libray, Ross County Historical Society, Chillicothe, Oh. (hereafter RCHS); Daily National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.), Nov. 17, 30, 1820; Richmond Enquirer (Virginia), Feb. 6, 1821. On the economic boom of the mid-1790s, see Richard S. Chew, “Certain Victims of an International Contagion: The Panic of 1797 and the Hard Times of the Late 1790s in Baltimore,” Journal of the Early Republic 25 (Winter 2005), 574-81.

7 The most recent and comprehensive history of the Virginia Military District with particular emphasis on its surveying history is James L. Williams, Blazes, Posts, & Stones: A History of Ohio’s Original Land Subdivisions (Akron, Oh.: Akron University Press, 2013), 81-134. For older general assessments, see George W. Knepper, The Official Ohio Lands Book (Columbus: Ohio Auditor of State, 2002), 19-23; William E. Peters, Ohio Lands and Their Subdivision (Athens, Oh.: W. E. Peters, 1918), 102-17; C. E. Sherman, Original Ohio Land Subdivisions (Columbus: Press of the Ohio State Reformatory, 1925), 12-37. For the Virginia land act, see “An Act for Establishing a Land Office, and Ascertaining the Terms and Manner of Granting Waste and Unappropriated Lands,” May 1779, in William Waller Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619, 13 vols. (Richmond: Printer to the Commonwealth, 1809), 10:60. The data on warrant alienation is derived from the historical surveying records: Index of Virginia Military Bounty Land Warrants Issued and Patents for those Warrants, List of Military Bounty Land Warrants Issued by the State of Virginia, 1782-1829, Virginia Military District in Ohio; Virginia Military Bounty Land Warrants Surrendered to the Federal Government, both in Record Group 49 (hereafter RG), National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NA). Even though just 28.4 percent of all warrants used to survey land still belonged to war veterans, these amounted to 1,742,143 acres. This resulted from the fact that higher ranking officers who tended to hold on to their warrants received large warrants ranging from between 2,667 and fifteen thousand acres.


9 John Graham to William Machure, Nov. 4, 1795, Graham Letterbook, 1795-1805, RCHS. Unfortunately, the exact wording of the agreement is lost, but the stipulations of the agreement appear in the correspondence between Graham and Massie. See Graham Letterbook, 1795-1805; John Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820; and Walter Dun Manuscripts, all in RCHS. One-third was the common
fee for locating land in the Virginia Military District in 1795; see Copy of a Deposition of David Jones, Mar. 10, 1798, Nathaniel Massie Papers, 1783-1849, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus (hereafter OHS).


11 John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, Dec. 22, 1795, Jan. 10, 12, June 15, 1796, John Graham to William Maclure, Oct. 5, 1796, Aug. 5, 1796, in Graham Letterbook, 1795-1805, and John Graham to Walter Dun, Oct. 26, 1809, Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, both in RCHS. John Graham of Richmond was not John Graham, the diplomat and politician from Kentucky who moved to Washington, became secretary and chargé d’affaires in the U.S. legation to Spain, and subsequently held other offices in the administration. John Graham the diplomat also traded in Virginia military land and was a close friend of Nathaniel Massie’s, with whom he also entertained a business relationship. This homonymy has caused tremendous confusion among contemporaries and historians alike. John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, Nov. 20, 1797, Massie Papers, OHS; John Graham to John Davidson, Sept. 29, 1807, John Graham to John Graham, Feb. 12, 1808, John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, Aug. 15, 1808, and John Graham to Walter Dun, Mar. 14, 1809, all in Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, RCHS. Several historians have fallen prey to the confusion and attributed all land business conducted between Nathaniel Massie and John Graham to Graham, the diplomat. See William T. Hutchinson, *The Bounty Lands of the American Revolution in Ohio* (1927; New York: Arno Press, 1979); and Asa Lee Rubenstein, “Richard Clough Anderson, Nathaniel Massie, and the Panic of 1797,” 569. Virginia had just one chartered bank, which had opened its doors in 1792; see Crothers, “Banks and Economic Development,” 14-15. On the failure of port-town merchants, see Stuart Weems Bruchey, *Robert Oliver, Merchant of Baltimore, 1783–1819* (1956; New York: Arno Press, 1979), 189-91. On cash scarcity on the frontier as a consequence of the Panic of 1797, see Nathaniel Massie to John Graham, Jan. 7, 1799, Dun Manuscripts, RCHS.

12 John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, June 28, 1796, Graham Letterbook 1795-1805, RCHS. Tract 459 on the Ohio was surveyed for Jones and patented to Noble Grymes; Jones most likely referred to this tract of land, although Graham’s correspondence does not mention a specific survey number.

13 John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, Dec. 22, 1795, Mar. 5, Aug. 10, 1796, Graham Letterbook, 1795-1805, and Nathaniel Massie to John Graham, Apr. 6, 1796, Dun Manuscripts, both in RCHS. Graham referred to the 1795 treaty between Spain and the United States that guaranteed open navigation of the Mississippi River to both nations, thus allowing western farmers to ship their produce to the port city of New Orleans.

14 Copy of a Letter from Nathaniel Massie to [James Heron?], Dec. 31, 1795, Massie Papers, OHS. Mean warrant prices have been distilled from warrant assignments written on the back of warrants in Virginia Military District in Ohio; see Virginia Military Bounty Land Warrants Surrendered to the Federal Government, RG 49, NA. Americans in the early republic thought it a truism that even second- or third-rate land rose in value once the surrounding lands had been settled; *Annals of Congress*, 4th Cong., 1st sess., Mar. 2, 1796, p. 405.

15 John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, Jan. 12, 1796, May 15, 1797, Graham Letterbook, 1795-1805, RCHS.


19 *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, Oh.), May 13, 1805.

20 John Graham to James Taylor, Oct. 31, 1808, May 24, 1814, Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, RCHS. John McDougal stressed the importance of general warranty deeds for settlers in *The Farmer’s Assistant, or Every Man His Own Lawyer* (Chillicothe, Oh.: James Barnes, 1813), 7.

21 *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, Oh.), Aug. 22, Oct. 23, 1800, Dec. 19, 1803, Aug. 20, 1804, July 3, 1806; John Graham in Account with Nathaniel Massie, July 30, 1807, Massie Papers, OHS. William Henry Harrison, congressional representative of the Northwest Territory, reported it as a special service to his constituents that he...


23 John Graham to Walter Dun, Aug. 23, 1809, Dun Manuscripts, RCHS. For readers unfamiliar with gambling: a “blackjack” (an ace and a card valued at ten points) pays the player three to two. The minimum prices given here are theoretical figures derived from Graham's blackjack rule. The formula is: (Purchase Price per Acre / 0.66) x 1.5 = Minimum Retail Price. The division with 0.66 is necessary to account for the third lost to Massie for his locating services. Thus: (0.30 / 0.66) x 1.5 = 0.681. Assuming that Graham wanted the profit on top of his initial investment, the actual initial purchase price must be added to the minimum purchase price derived from the formula. The actual purchase price differs from the real price paid per acre, as one third of the land fell to Massie. It can be derived using the same formula without the factor of 1.5. Thus: 0.30 / 0.66 = 0.45; and 0.45 + 0.68 = 1.13. Of course, real profits were much lower, as Graham also had to pay annual taxes and fees to the surveyor general, Richard C. Anderson. It seems that Graham accounted for these costs in his simple rule of thumb.


27 Chillicothe Gazette (Chillicothe, Oh.), Oct. 2, 1802.

28 John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, June 18, 1798, May 6, June 22, Nov. 24, 1799, Feb. 22, Apr. 8, May 5, 26, Aug. 4, Dec. 5, 1800, Graham Letterbook, 1795-1809; and Nathaniel Massie to John Graham, May 6, 1798, Jan. 7, 1799, Dun Manuscripts, both RCHS.
29 John Graham in Account with Nathaniel Massie, July 30, 1807, Massie Papers, OHS; John Graham to Walter Dun, Nov. 3, 1816, and Abstract of Purchases made for John Graham by Walter Dun, n.d., in Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, RCHS; The Supporter (Chillicothe, Oh.), Oct. 15, 1816; Massie's Heirs v. Graham's Administrators et al., in Reports of Cases Argued and Decided in the Circuit Court of the United States, for the Seventh Circuit, John McLean, ed., 5 vols. (Cincinnati: Derby, Bradley & Co., 1847), 3:44. Massie owed an additional $5,023 to the estate of James Heron, with lands auctioned off in 1817 to pay the debt; see Rubenstein, “Western Land Speculation and Settlement,” 185; and The Supporter (Chillicothe, Oh.), July 1, 1817.

30 John Graham to Walter Dun, Apr. 10, 1809, John Graham to Nathaniel Massie, Sept. 28, 1805, Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, RCHS. Graham became aware of Massie's scheme as early as 1803: “I have reason to believe he [Massie] has got money from my property and intending it for me, his calls have been so urgent as to compel him to make use of it for himself”; John Graham to Robert Means, Dec. 26, 1803, Graham Letterbook, 1795-1805, RCHS. On Massie's mansion and his businesses, see David Meade Massie, Nathaniel Massie, a Pioneer of Ohio: A Sketch of His Life and Selections from His Correspondence (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Company, 1896), 104-106; and Rubenstein, “Western Land Speculation and Settlement,” 142.

31 Dr. Thomas Massie to Major Thomas Massie, Nov. 21, 1807, June 1, 1808, in Stampp, ed., Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations, ser. M, part 4, reel 39, sect. 7. Thomas attributed Nathaniel's financial troubles to a “procrastinating disposition” and added that he was “seriously wasting from indolence and intoxication,” which Thomas believed were the “fruits of his early labours.” He feared that Nathaniel would die poor if he lived much longer. Indeed, Massie suffered from illness and alcoholism from 1806 onward. When Graham met him for the last time in Richmond in May 1809 he “scarcely knew him”—most likely a reference to the fact that illness and alcoholism had aged Massie “twenty years in a few months.” While large parts of Massie's financial troubles may have resulted from these personal problems, the temporal link between the revocation of Graham's agency and Massie's major financial plight suggests a relation between the two. John Graham to Walter Dun, May 24, 1809, Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, RCHS. Graham revoked his agency on February 23, 1807; see McLean, ed. Reports of Cases Argued and Decided, 3:44. On Massie's alcoholism, see Jeffrey Paul Brown, “Frontier Politics: The Evolution of a Political Society in Ohio, 1788-1814” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1979), 338. On Kerr, see Marie Dickoré, ed., General Joseph Kerr of Chillicothe, Ohio: “Ohio’s Lost Senator” (Oxford, Oh.: Oxford Press, 1941). William Lytle became particularly disgusted with the land laws of the state; see William Lytle to Robert Means, July 18, 1805, Lytle Family Papers, 1750-1929, Cincinnati Historical Society Library (hereafter CHSL).

32 John Graham to Walter Dun, Oct. 11, 1808, Dun Manuscripts, and John Graham to John Graham, Feb. 12, 1808, Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, both RCHS; Bruce H. Mann, Republic of Debtors: Bankruptcy in the Age of American Independence (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 8-9. Not every surveyor proved as lucky as Massie in his choice of East Coast partners. William Lytle had to learn the hard way that many eastern financiers declined extending such generously favors when it came to the collection of debts. In 1798, Lytle owed money to speculator Henry Banks, known for his particularly ruthless business conduct. In January 1798, a Thursday, Banks threatened to order a suit against Lytle if he failed to pay his debt by Saturday. Lytle then signed a bond, which he failed to pay. In May 1798, Banks advised Lytle to pay the bond or he would “send it to the Market and get what it will command”; see Henry Banks to William Lytle, Jan. 18, May 5, 1798, Lytle Papers, CHSL.

33 Harte, "Land in the Old Northwest,” 114-39.

34 Benjamin Morris, "Pioneer Life in Clermont County," manuscript (copied and indexed by Alleen Whitt), p. 13, Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center, Fort Wayne, In. On the bargaining power of settlers willing to lease land, see Dr. Thomas Massie to Major Thomas Massie, Sept. 4, 1808, in Stampp, ed., Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations, ser. M, part 4, reel 39, sect. 7. Some renters even managed to capitalize on the insecure land titles in the Virginia Military District, obtaining favorable land lease arrangements in return for acknowledging a specific person as the legitimate land holder of a particular tract; see Deposition of David Hardy, Aug. 30, 1816, McArthur v. Browder Case File, Box 97, RG 267, NA.

35 John Graham to Walter Dun, Jan. 21, 1809, Dun Manuscripts, and John Graham to Walter Dun, Nov. 28, 1815, Oct. 5, 1817, Graham Letterbook, 1805-1820, both RCHS.
Toward the Second American Party System

Southern Jacksonians, the Election of 1832, and the Rise of the Democratic Party

William S. Belko

Three years into his first term, Andrew Jackson’s administration remained little more than a brittle coalition of disparate factions. The rivalry between John C. Calhoun and Martin Van Buren, two key architects of Jackson’s 1828 election and the two obvious successors of Old Hickory, revealed the fissures and the fragile alliances within Jackson’s ranks. A sensational cabinet reorganization in 1831 and the replacement of the Telegraph with the Globe as the official organ of the administration exacerbated cleavages in the party. The intensifying confrontation between the administration and the Bank of the United States and a tariff debate threatening disunion further undermined Jacksonian unity.

With a presidential election looming in 1832, Jackson and his closest supporters took action. In order to prevent the potential fracture of the president’s party, two of the most prominent and trusted advisers in Jackson’s inner circle, Amos Kendall and William B. Lewis, called for a national gathering of administration men, to meet in Baltimore in the spring of 1832. The Baltimore Convention would select

John C. Calhoun (1782-1850). CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER

Martin Van Buren (1782-1862). THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
a vice-presidential candidate who could help unify the friends of the administration. Yet even on this question, division threatened the party, as Jacksonians from various geographic regions, and with varied economic interests and personal loyalties rallied around their favorite vice-presidential candidate whom they believed best represented the policies and perceived principles of Jackson's Democracy. Choosing an acceptable vice-presidential candidate to accompany Jackson, therefore, became a crucial step in establishing a unified national political party, one with a recognizable and popular platform supported by a clear ideology.¹

Jackson men ultimately forged a cohesive party, but not at the Baltimore Convention. Even after the nomination of Van Buren for the second spot, Jackson's Democracy remained precarious. The president's uncompromising endorsement of Van Buren as his 1832 running mate perturbed many of Old Hickory's southern supporters. For a number of reasons, from the New Yorker's ostensible acceptance of the American System to his repugnant stance on the admission of Missouri, many southern politicians disliked and distrusted the “Magician.” In January 1832, some of the president's supporters in Virginia embarked on a campaign to replace Van Buren with one of the Old Dominion's favorite sons, Philip Pendleton Barbour. This coterie of influential Virginians supported the reelection of Old Hickory, but they opposed putting Van Buren on the ticket. The Jackson-Barbour crusade divided southern Jackson men during the 1832 campaign, threatening party unity and electoral victory. The future of a unified, national party remained far from certain throughout the election, and only after the administration successfully suppressed and then incorporated the Barbour movement into Jackson's Democracy did the second party system coalesce.²

In December 1831, a caucus of Virginia Jacksonians could not agree on a vice-presidential candidate, which spurred to action several of the state's pro-Jackson leaders averse to Van Buren. The recognized leader of the Barbour movement, Virginia Governor John Floyd, disdained Van Buren and preferred Calhoun. However, Thomas Ritchie, the editor of the Richmond Enquirer, proved the real power broker in selecting the vice-presidential candidate. Ritchie alone had the influence to sway Jackson partisans in Virginia, but he remained indecisive about Barbour's nomination. According to Floyd, “Ritchie and his party” worried about the prospect of a Barbour candidacy, yet since the indecisive December caucus “they have been frightened and
Indeed, throughout January 1832, a hesitant Ritchie appeared to favor Barbour over Van Buren. As Ritchie floundered, Jackson men in Virginia intervened and set the editor straight: Van Buren, not Barbour, was the vice-presidential candidate. Fellow Virginian and speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Andrew Stevenson, who had conferred with Jackson, convinced Ritchie to endorse Van Buren. Stevenson warned Ritchie that serious consequences would follow adding Barbour to the ticket, and he begged his friend to support the Magician and reject Barbour. Jackson had made his preferences for the second spot well known, Stevenson reminded Ritchie, and challenging the president would hurt Virginia’s role in his second administration. Supporting Van Buren, in contrast, would reap substantial patronage for Virginia.

Shortly after Stevenson’s admonition, Ritchie publicly endorsed Van Buren. The New Yorker’s “firm attachment to State Rights, his true and uniform interpretation of the principles of the Constitution, place him in the front rank of the republicans,” hailed the *Enquirer*. “He is Anti-Bank, Anti-Internal Improvement, Anti-Tariff.” For these reasons alone, “we would prefer him to any other man as V. President.” Such arguments carried little weight, however, among most Jackson men in Virginia who embraced Barbour’s ardent defense of states’ rights and his vehement opposition to the American System. While Van Buren appeared to waffle over the American System, Barbour had gained a reputation as one of the strongest opponents of the program, and his defense of the cherished Virginia Doctrine—the revered “Principles of ’98” that defined the nature of the Union as a compact of states and upheld the reserved powers through the Tenth Amendment—made him far more attractive than the New Yorker. Ritchie’s campaign to build support for Van Buren’s nomination faltered on ideological grounds, but another and more compelling argument drove his support for Van Buren. In 1832, National Republican leader Henry Clay and Calhoun actively conspired to divide and distract the Jackson party, employing the question of the vice-presidency “as a new weapon of mischief.” The opposition forces of Clay and Calhoun, the argument ran, knew they could not defeat a united Jackson-Van Buren ticket. But if they could push a Jackson-Barbour ticket and thus divide the Democracy, then no candidate could secure the necessary electoral votes, sending the decision for president into the U.S. Senate where they
hoped the National Republican vice-presidential candidate, John Sergeant, would prevail. Party unity and electoral victory, therefore, demanded that all Jacksonians support Van Buren as the vice-presidential candidate.⁴

Many Virginia Jacksonians agonized over the matter. They preferred Barbour to Van Buren, but they also wanted to avoid defeat in the general election. Ritchie, too, faced the anguish. “There is no one in the union, who has a higher opinion of P. P. Barbour, than we have,” the editor admitted. “But we must also look to the other elements of the calculation.” Only Virginia could secure the election of Van Buren, he concluded, as other regions of the country continued to push their favorite sons. The reelection of Jackson must, therefore, predominate over other considerations. But Ritchie’s ardent advocacy of Van Buren angered devout Barbour partisans who intensified the campaign on behalf of their fellow Virginian. By the end of February 1832, the scheduled date of the Virginia caucus, the battle lines in the state had been drawn. In an effort to settle the matter, Claiborne Gooch, a former partner of Ritchie’s, wrote Barbour and pleaded that he set the record straight and remove rumors that he intended to stand as a vice-presidential candidate. Gooch considered the Barbour movement a “miserable intrigue” playing on Barbour’s “high and popular character,” a Clay and Calhoun-formulated scheme to divide and conquer Jacksonians fighting to return the government to “its original and pure principles.” “Cast your eyes upon the political chess board, and make the true calculations on the subject,” he begged Barbour. See clearly the “efforts of the new coalition to repudiate and put down the reforming progress of Jackson’s administration.”⁵

Gooch’s appeal succeeded in drawing Barbour into the open. Barbour had stepped down as a congressman in 1830, accepting Jackson’s appointment as a federal judge for the Eastern District Court of Virginia, and he had no intention of returning to the political arena. “I thank God,” Barbour wrote Gooch, “that I have none of that restless ambition, which is perpetually thirsting after office, appreciating my country as of more value than self-aggrandizement.” He had retired from politics with the expectation of “fully remaining through life, in the Judiciary,” and he harbored “no political aspirations.” But the remainder of Barbour’s missive only muddied the waters. Despite having no desire for the office of vice president, Barbour declared that if selected he would “cheerfully accept” it. Although he “decidedly” favored “General Jackson” and would “do nothing calculated to embarrass or interfere with his election,” he would also “be unwilling to interfere with the wishes of my political friends,” feeling “a profound sense of obligation for that high mark of their regard,” if nominated. “I should still regret,” Barbour concluded, “that the election should be thrown into the Senate, in any degree through me as the cause.” The Magician himself could not have straddled the fence any better than Barbour, and the release of the letter spurred both sides in the contest.⁶
The Virginia caucus convened in Richmond in March 1832, and from the opening gavel a resolution seemed unreachable. The delegates quickly and unanimously nominated Jackson for a second term, but consensus quickly collapsed as they turned to picking a suitable running mate. Many favored Barbour because of his political record; an equal number leaned toward Van Buren in the name of party unity and electoral victory. Yet all agonized over the ultimate decision. The appeal of having one of their own on the presidential ticket obviously carried enormous weight at the caucus, and few administration supporters denied Barbour’s contributions to the Virginia Doctrine. He, more than any other figure in Virginia politics at the time, symbolized the state’s Old Republican tenets, and the delegates recognized Barbour for his steadfast service to their cause. Barbour’s close friend Peter V. Daniel declared that “every action of his long political life had been true and consistent” and “every sentiment he had ever uttered on the floor of Congress, had been perfectly consonant with the principle acknowledged by the people of Virginia.” Barbour also had his detractors, but they were few. One delegate chastised his fellow delegates for considering Barbour a “demi-god,” and expressed his disgust with the constant eulogies on his behalf. Barbour, in his view, was “not the favorite son of Virginia,” and they should all focus instead on getting Jackson reelected.7

This latter argument carried the most weight at the caucus, and securing a second term for Old Hickory influenced delegates’ final decision. While a substantial majority desired a candidate steeped in the Virginia principle, party unity and desire for victory prevailed. Most delegates believed that Barbour simply could not garner enough support outside Virginia. One delegate represented the common sentiment of the caucus when he confessed that he was “politically friendly” to Barbour, but could not vote for his nomination. “I am not a Van Buren man or a Barbour man; but I am a Virginian—and I will act in that manner to prevent, if possible, the division of the vote of the State. I will get a man who agrees with us in principles, if I can. I would take P. P. Barbour if he could be elected, and if the people of the Union would not sustain him, I would vote for the next—yes, I would vote, diabolical as it may seem, for Van Buren himself.” A delegate from Barbour’s Orange County agreed. “All my predilections are in his favor,” he professed, “and yet I cannot, under existing circumstances concur in the resolution nominating him as Vice President of the U.S…. [T]he success of our cause demands the sacrifice.” Ritchie’s argument that the election would be thrown into the Senate, result in the election of an opposition man, and threaten Jackson’s reelection overcame all considerations in Barbour’s favor. Although delegates broached the other part of Ritchie’s argument—that Clay and Calhoun men had concocted Barbour’s candidacy—most rejected any insinuation that Barbour was a Calhoun man.8
Despite concerns about party unity, Barbour partisans continued to push for his nomination. Some delegates publicly upbraided Barbour’s friends for their apparent uncompromising position and disregard for party harmony. But their voices far more than their numbers proved daunting, and delegates ultimately approved, by a vote of ninety-seven to thirty-seven, the motion of John T. Brown of Petersburg declaring it inexpedient to nominate a vice-presidential candidate. The delegates recommended Barbour to Virginians as “a fit person to be voted for as Vice President of the United States,” but if he could not obtain enough support “to ensure his being one of the two highest candidates,” then the electors could vote for a candidate who “approaches nearest those great political principles which Virginia has ever held dear.” The resolution secured party unity and appeased the Barbour men. “The caucus…has decided most wisely,” Ritchie proclaimed. “They declined all specific nomination. Not even the high character, the uniform principles, of P. P. Barbour, nor the attachment of the members to this distinguished Citizen, could swerve them from their course….They went for their country, the harmony of the Party, the securing of an election by the People, and the keeping it back from the Senate.” Still, Virginia Congressman John Strode Barbour, writing to his cousin James Barbour, lamented the “treachery of friends” who placed their kinsman “outside the pale of selection.” Had cousin Philip been nominated at Richmond, John Barbour predicted, he would have been elected vice president.9

In the weeks following the conclusion of the Virginia caucus, Ritchie’s satisfaction quickly turned to consternation, for the movement to put Barbour on the ticket with Jackson intensified. Floyd again led the charge. To his friend and ardent Barbour supporter, Thomas Walker Gilmer, he denounced the approaching Baltimore Convention, which “every sensible man must see” as a venue “gotten up exclusively and especially for the purpose of nominating Van Buren.” Floyd realized that leading Jackson men had called the convention to secure the nomination of the New Yorker and unify the party, but he refused to submit to such a fate. If Barbour wanted the decision decided by the people, then, Floyd declared, the people “ought to take up this matter at once,” and he recommended convening county meetings to enable the people to “say boldly what their ticket should be.” The Barbour movement continued.10

Barbour’s behavior in the weeks before the Baltimore Convention, which convened from May 21 to 23, 1832, complicated matters. He had announced that he would abide by the wishes of the national convention, but a week before
the event he left fellow Virginians Gilmer and John Tyler with the impression that he would accept a separate nomination. At the same time, he gave another friend, Thomas E. Burfoot, the impression that he would remain an innocent bystander and submit to the “silent and passive acquiescence in the will of the people.” Barbour’s course—a passive submission to the will of the people—reflected Jacksonian principles, encouraged Jackson supporters in Virginia who preferred Barbour to Van Buren, intrigued the Calhoun and Clay men who saw a Barbour movement as a way to undermine Jackson’s reelection, and continued to consternate those who settled on Van Buren in order to secure party unity and victory. Resolution of the vice-presidential quandary now fell on the shoulders of the delegates appointed to the Baltimore Convention.11

At the opening of the convention, the Virginia delegation remained as divided over the issue of the vice presidency as it had at the March caucus. During an early recess, the eighty-four Virginia delegates caucused at the Athenaeum, with Barbour’s friend Peter V. Daniel serving as chair. After rehashing all the arguments for and against the two candidates vying for the vice-presidency they voted. Forty-five supported Barbour; thirty-nine favored Van Buren. For the sake of unanimity, the Virginia delegation then decided to vote for Barbour on the first ballot and switch to Van Buren on the second. As soon as the convention reconvened, the balloting of the states commenced and Van Buren secured the necessary two-thirds majority to win. On the first ballot, the Magician garnered 208 votes to Barbour’s forty-nine. All of Virginia’s twenty-three votes went for Barbour. He also received three of Maryland’s ten votes, six of North Carolina’s fifteen, six of Alabama’s seven, and all eleven from South Carolina. The Barbour movement appeared over and national party unity secure, but the Baltimore Convention failed to solidify Jackson’s Democracy.12

Following Barbour’s defeat, the Virginia delegation promptly caucused, and voted fifty-four to thirty to confirm Van Buren’s nomination. At that point, thirty-one of Virginia’s delegates, all vehement Barbour supporters, departed for home. The remaining Virginia delegates rejoined their comrades on the convention floor and unanimously voted for the original motion nominating Van Buren for the vice presidency. Administration supporters had made, for all appearances, their final and official decision for Van Buren. Littleton Tazewell despaired “that Mr. Van Buren will not obtain a single vote south of the Potomack and Ohio, except the votes of Tennessee and Georgia.” He ultimately blamed the “blind policy of Mr. Ritchie” for the current course of events. “Had Mr. Barbour been nominated in lieu of Mr. Van Buren,” a dejected Tazewell wrote his brother in Norfolk, “his election by the people would have been certain—as it is however, no man living can say what will be the result.”13

The Barbour candidacy appeared over, but the distinctly sectional nature of the vote at the convention could not have eased the mind of either Jackson or
Van Buren. Along with his support in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, and Maryland, Barbour had a strong following in Old Hickory’s home state of Tennessee. When an acquaintance of James K. Polk’s expressed some consternation that Tennessee would go for Van Buren, he revealed that Barbour still had “many friends here.” Regardless of the official decision in Baltimore, the president’s southern faithful still opposed Van Buren’s candidacy and continued their efforts to replace the repugnant New Yorker with Barbour. The federal judge’s Virginia supporters mustered first. Gilmer assumed the leadership of the Barbour forces in the Old Dominion, and called county meetings to identify the will of the people, mobilize them in favor of their favorite son, and warn them of the threat Van Buren posed to their interests. They planned a statewide convention of Barbour supporters to convene on June 12 at Charlottesville when they would nominate a Jackson-Barbour ticket. Soon, Culpepper County, followed by the counties of Caroline, Halifax, Amherst, Brunswick, Orange, Spotsylvania, Albemarle, Louisa, and the cities of Norfolk, Williamsburg, and Lynchburg, had selected delegates to send to Charlottesville.

As orchestrated, the Charlottesville delegates unanimously nominated Jackson for president and Barbour for vice-president. In an address to the people of Virginia, the delegates declared that they had chosen an individual “whose eminent virtues as a man, and abilities as a statesman have been conspicuously exemplified in a life chiefly devoted to your service.” The bulk of the address, however, offered a scathing indictment of Van Buren, “whose claims to your confidence, rest, either on an indiscriminate hostility to, or an equivocal support of, every principle and interest which has been justly held dear by Virginians.” Even more repugnant to the delegates was that Virginians “are required…to elect to the second office of our government, a political enemy, who still bears the arms of hostility in his hands, and wears the laurels, fresh on his brow, which were won by his inveterate and relentless opposition to your rights, your interests, and your principles.” The Charlottesville men excoriated Van Buren’s political record, claiming that early in his career he had expressed a “systematic and indiscriminate hostility to the favorite measures and men of Virginia,” supporting an “insidious opposition” to James Madison’s administration, its reelection, and the war against England. On the Missouri question, the Magician had opposed the extension of slavery into the state, and he had “joined with the unrelenting and inexorable friends of the protective system,” supporting the 1827 Woolens Bill and the abominable Tariff of 1828. He had also advocated federal appropriations for internal improvements of a local nature. “Judged by his political acts,” the address concluded, Van Buren stood “fairly condemned.”

The counties and cities represented at the Charlottesville Convention revealed that most of Barbour’s support came from his former congressional district and the tidewater planter counties of southeastern Virginia. The “Charlottesville
Jackson and Barbour Convention,” as the delegates dubbed it, also created a “Central Standing Committee,” charged with appointing “Committees of Vigilance and Correspondence” in those counties of the state not represented at the convention. While “Hickory Clubs” throughout the nation championed the reelection of Jackson, employing new electioneering techniques that forever altered electoral behavior in the United States, Barbour men employed the same methods. “Barbour Clubs” recommended that other counties and towns follow their lead, call public meetings, form corresponding committees, and undertake what they deemed necessary to promote Barbour’s candidacy. Throughout the summer and into the fall of 1832, Barbour’s advocates, working under the direction of the Jackson-Barbour central corresponding committee, lobbied for the election of electors supportive of their candidate. As Gilmer told Barbour, after informing him of the convention’s decision to nominate him as vice president, “the crisis demanded that something should be done.”

Virginians like Ritchie, displeased with the proceedings at Charlottesville, described the “Barbour Convention” as a partisan ploy engineered by National Republicans and Calhoun men. Ritchie’s nemesis, John Hampden Pleasants, editor of the Richmond Whig, believed that the nomination of an independent Jackson-Barbour ticket gave Clay a better chance in Virginia. Although Pleasants expressed disgust over Barbour’s apparent “demagogism,” he still hoped the Virginian would carry the vice presidency over Van Buren. Yet just as John Strode Barbour had months before, Pleasants laid the ultimate blame on the March caucus. The “infatuated conduct” of the Virginia caucus at Richmond, he claimed, led directly to the division of the Jackson ticket at Charlottesville.

The Jackson-Barbour campaign soon spread to other southern states. Alabama Senator Gabriel Moore, like most of the Alabama delegation at the Baltimore Convention, had voted for Barbour because Van Buren’s political views did not accord with those of the South. Moreover, the Alabama state legislature had instructed its representatives at Baltimore not to cast a vote for anyone who supported the Tariff of 1828. After Moore and his cohorts returned to Alabama, a number of county conventions declared that the state’s electoral votes should go to Barbour and not to Van Buren. The Virginian’s supporters in South Carolina rallied as well. The arch-nullifier Robert Hayne endorsed his fellow southerner’s candidacy, emphasizing Barbour’s Old Republicanism. But Hayne’s support only buttressed charges that Calhoun and the opposition sought to undermine the election of Jackson. Most South Carolinians dismissed such allegations, arguing they pursued “a suitable candidate for the vice presidency of the United States.” The citizens of Laurens County expressed the prevailing sentiment of their state when they unanimously adopted a resolution condemning Van Buren’s long political record and belittling him as Jackson’s “obsequious flatterer.” Van Buren’s repugnant record left Barbour as “unquestionably the choice of this state.” His
long and distinguished public service, his “great moral worth,” and his “fidelity
to the constitution and the reserved rights of the states,” made him the “proper
candidate for the vice president.”

North Carolinians also jumped on the Barbour bandwagon. As in Virginia,
support for Barbour’s place on the ticket with Jackson commenced prior to the
Baltimore Convention. Supporters of the recently ousted secretary of the navy,
John Branch, insisted on an avid anti-tariff man for vice president, nearly two
months before the national convention. They found their candidate in Barbour
and quickly turned on the Baltimore Convention, just as the Virginians had.
Several weeks before administration supporters convened in Baltimore, former
congressman Willis Alston spearheaded a movement that denounced the con-
vention and nominated delegates to a state conference, scheduled to convene
in Raleigh in June and designed to support a Jackson-Barbour ticket. A num-
ber of favorable statewide newspapers conducted a brilliant propaganda cam-
paign, creating the illusion that North Carolinians favored Barbour over Van
Buren. In the meantime, North Carolinians who favored party unity attended
the Baltimore Convention. Despite the absence of any delegates from the Branch
fa
cion, Barbour still received six votes to Van Buren’s nine. Even Jackson stal-
wart and Van Buren supporter Romulus Saunders cast his ballot at Baltimore for
Barbour. “In North Carolina, the nomination of Mr. Van Buren is very ungra-
ciously received by many of the friends of the administration,” *Niles’ Register*
reported, “and if Virginia shall propose Mr. Barbour, it is said that he will soon
have a prevailing interest in this state.” Less than a week after the Charlottesville
Convention had adjourned, delegates from eighteen counties, including “a very
respectable number of very respectable gentlemen,” convened in Raleigh to
endorse their own ticket. The Raleigh Convention created a central correspond-
ing committee, condemned Van Buren for his pro-tariff record, praised Barbour
for his long opposition to the tariff, and endorsed a Jackson-Barbour ticket. Like
the Charlottesville Convention, the Raleigh conference called for county meet-
ings to choose electors favorable to their cause.

The Van Buren men in North Carolina employed another volatile political
issue, nullification, to kill the Barbour movement in their state. The war against
the second Bank of the United States colored the entire 1832 election. On this
question, Barbour’s record placed him within the ranks of Jackson’s party. In 1827,
he had introduced a resolution in Congress calling for a divorce between the gov-
ernment and national banking. Although defeated overwhelmingly, the resolution
revealed Barbour’s opposition to the National Bank, in contrast to Van Buren.
But the specter of nullification also lurked throughout the 1832 campaign, and it
proved the most relevant issue in North Carolina. Van Buren partisans in the state
hoped to trap Barbour and force him to come out in favor of nullification. Late in
August, a “large and respectable meeting” convened at Shocco Springs, in Warren
County, and solicited Van Buren and Barbour about their positions on several prominent political issues, including nullification. Both men promptly replied, and their responses quickly appeared in newspapers nationwide.20

Barbour stated unequivocally his opposition to nullification, a position shared by a majority of his fellow Virginians. If the term meant “to import the right of the several States, by interposing their sovereign power, to declare void, within their respective borders, any law which they may think unconstitutional,” then, he declared, “I am opposed to it.” When a question about the constitutionality of an act of Congress arose, Barbour argued, the judiciary must decide. But when the question was one between political entities such as the federal government and the states, then, Barbour argued, there could be no “judicial cognizance.” Because the people of the states “are parties to the federal compact, in their character of States,” and the Constitution “has not conferred upon the Judicial Department any political power whatever,” there could be “no common umpire” in questions of this nature. Barbour believed that states had no right to nullify an act of Congress passed in the mode directed by the Constitution. But with no “common umpire,” Barbour could offer only one remedy to resolve political disputes between the federal government and the states. “The only rightful remedy is that of secession,” Barbour argued, an opinion that accorded fully with his Old Republican proclivities to see the Union as a confederation of sovereign states and not a consolidated government. But Barbour also considered the right of secession a last resort: “this remedy should be applied only in cases of a hopeless extremity.”21

In the end, the Shocco Springs strategy backfired on the Van Buren men. Barbour not only opposed nullification, but his opposition to the American System sounded considerably more attuned to Jackson’s position and certainly more consistent than Van Buren’s. Indeed, Van Buren’s response, made over the objections of his closest supporters, hurt him politically, thereby delighting his southern detractors. Barbour partisans judged the Magician’s response equivocal and his defense of the protective tariff further alienated him in southern circles. The Raleigh Star reflected the prevailing sentiment in North Carolina when it described Barbour’s letter as “characteristic of the frankness and independence of its author.” His letter, the paper continued, “will throw a heavy damper upon the spirits of the Van Buremites, it will impart fresh zeal and encouragement to the friends of Barbour, who will overwhelm their adversaries at the polls on the 8th of November next.” Other Barbour movements in the South met with less success. Unionists in Georgia also pushed for a Jackson-Barbour ticket, but were soundly defeated nearly two-to-one when Georgians chose Jackson’s favored running mate. A small number of Jackson men in Mississippi hastily formed a Jackson-Barbour ticket as well. They desired, in the words of a Vicksburg newspaper, a vice president “located in the south and of southern feeling.” But as in Georgia, the Mississippi coterie of Barbour advocates suffered a sound defeat.22
Despite this mixed response in the South, by the end of summer the Clay camp still considered Barbour a real competitor for the vice presidency. “The matter is now made more complex by the rebellion of P. P. Barbour,” John Sergeant, vice presidential candidate on the Clay ticket, conjectured, and “so we must consider his contumacious determination to be a candidate.” Barbour’s actions—and inaction—in the months preceding the Baltimore Convention emboldened his supporters, but the machinations of those promoting his candidacy during the summer of 1832 reinforced Barbour’s vacillation. “I have been urged by some to decline, by others to persevere,” Barbour confided to his son-in-law. “After reflection, tho, I never have, and do not now, desire the office, nor do I expect it.” On the other hand, Barbour’s commitment to the will of the people apparently arrested any desire to make a public pronouncement either preventing or permitting the use of his name. “When two states have committed themselves to conventions in my favor,” he wrote, “and there is at least as good of excitement upon the subject in the country, I feel that I have no right to withdraw…without disparagement.” Barbour’s indecision, however, produced only more criticism in the months to come.23

When James Iredell notified Barbour that a convention of North Carolinians had nominated him for the vice presidency, he replied with his usual ambiguity, expressing a “deep sense of obligation” to those who had nominated him. He was gratified that his political course had met their approbation, and stated that he had pursued his record of service “from a thorough conviction, that it was correct in principle; that it was in true accord with the compact which binds the states together; and…that it was the only one, which, by restraining the federal and state governments within their respective spheres, would avoid those collisions so calculated to endanger the harmony of our union.” He added, “there dwells in my bosom no thirst for office, no longing after political advancement, and that I value this…unsolicited honor done me by your state much more for the evidence it bears of the estimation of that portion of my countrymen, than I do for any tendency which it may have towards my official promotion.” Barbour’s letter to the citizens of Raleigh convinced the editors of *Niles’ Register* that he “does not decline being a candidate for the vice presidency.” President Jackson’s organ, the *Globe*, responded that “whether Mr. Barbour is willing to lay hold of the president’s skirts, at the bidding…of his deadliest enemies, for the purpose of defeating the will of the republican party…remains to be seen.” But if the *Globe* remained uncertain, others concluded that Barbour’s prompt response to the citizens of Shocco Springs revealed his desire for a spot on the ticket with Jackson. “We observe nothing in Judge B.’s letter even intimating a wish that his friends would withdraw his name,” declared the editors of the *Raleigh Star*. Barbour’s letter, written so late in the political season, sounded more like a campaign speech than a reiteration of his political principles and positions.24
The continued use of Barbour’s name throughout the summer and into the early fall of 1832 peeved Barbour’s friends who remained loyal to the administration and who, on behalf of party unity and victory, accepted Van Buren as Jackson’s running mate. To party faithful and those still sitting on the fence they depicted the Barbour movement as an Opposition ploy. “I fear that our friend P. P. B. will do himself no service by permitting his name to be used by the Coalition, of which I now consider Mr. Calhoun to be a regularly installed member,” John Randolph of Roanoke wrote to President Jackson. Claiborne Gooch apprised Churchill C. Cambreleng, a Van Buren partisan, that in Virginia the “friends of Mr. Barbour (so called) are pursuing a mischievous course.” Those friendly to Calhoun, Gooch claimed, supported Barbour and a great majority of his supporters were disaffected from the Jackson administration. “The friends of Mr. Clay were very instrumental last winter in bringing Mr. Barbour forward,” Gooch told Cambreleng. “Perhaps…it was hoped that the union of the Calhoun men, the Clay men, & such of our party who prefer Mr. B…would constitute a majority & defeat Mr. V. B. in this state…. The small party which Mr. Clay has in this state are so envenomed and desperate that they could be induced to vote for the Jackson ticket with Barbour on it, merely to defeat Mr. V. B.” Ritchie continued the same charge in the columns of the *Richmond Enquirer*.25

Others touting the party line agreed with Randolph and Gooch’s assessment, arguing that Barbour hurt his standing within the party and possibly with the president, regardless of who proffered his name for vice president. In the wake of the Charlottesville and Raleigh conventions, many Jackson men friendly to Barbour grew confounded over the entire subject. “The editors of the Richmond *Enquirer* and Washington *Globe* seem greatly perplexed at the progress of public opinion in favor of Mr. Barbour, as a candidate for the vice presidency,” noted *Niles’ Register*. “The first is very sore with being called a ‘Judas who betrayed his master with a kiss’— and ‘the perfidious friends of P. P. Barbour,’ &c.” The editors assumed that Barbour would get the electoral votes of both the Carolinas.26

As for the president, he believed the summer maneuvers to promote Barbour would fail. “Virginia is sure to give her vote for Van Buren,” Jackson confidently stated. “The best of friends of Mr. Barber on my way thro Virginia assured me thus, for…altho they admire Mr. Barber and his republican principles, still knowing…that he cannot be elected, now, they will not divide the ranks of the democracy, and thereby throw the election of Vice P. into the Senate.
where Sergeant would be elected.” “In short,” Jackson concluded, “their republican principles are opposed to taking from the people the choice of the vice President and President.” Old Hickory intimated the same to Felix Grundy. “Virginia will sustain the nomination made at the Baltimore convention,” he predicted to the Tennessee congressman. In the same vein as Randolph, moreover, the president envisaged Barbour’s demise if he continued to allow his name to be used. “From what I could gather Barbour…has injured his popularity much in Virginia by not coming out at once, and saying to his fellow citizens that his name should not be used to divide the Republican ranks.”

Not all in Jackson’s circle, however, agreed with their leader. Some of the president’s closest confidants supported Barbour’s place on the ticket. Kendall, one of the proponents of forging party unity at the Baltimore Convention, “earnestly
recommended” Barbour to William Lewis, a staunch Van Buren supporter. Considering how close both men were to Jackson, and how closely the president relied on their advice, Old Hickory must have known that Van Buren faced a real threat, whether from the opposition or from within his own ranks. As for Lewis, he dismissed a Barbour candidacy on the assumption that Pennsylvania and New York, two critical states, would not accept the Virginian. Kendall’s support of Barbour nonetheless weakened considerably the prevailing argument that the Barbour movement represented a Clay and Calhoun conspiracy and undermined the party unity sought at Baltimore. Factionalism within of Jackson’s Democracy still remained a potential threat.28

The opposition also refuted the recurring allegation that Barbour’s candidacy was a plot to defeat Van Buren’s election, as did Duff Green, the president’s former editor and campaign manager and one of the more prominent men opposed to Jackson’s reelection. Green’s course during the 1832 campaign contradicted Ritchie’s imputations. Green initially saw Barbour as an acceptable candidate for the vice presidency, but his support quickly disappeared when he thought Barbour’s candidacy would strengthen the Democratic ticket. “It is very questionable with me how far it is proper to commit ourselves for Barbour & Jackson,” Green advised a friend. By building support for Barbour “as a candidate for the Vice-Presidency on the Jackson ticket, we but strengthen Jackson and uphold the malign influence [Van Buren] by placing Barbour as a new pillar, a prop under the falling concern.” In the weeks before the Baltimore Convention, Green continued to admonish his fellow political prognosticators against any movement to put Barbour on the ticket. “My own opinion is that we have no alternative but the maintenance of principles and I fear that an attempt to rally on Barbour will tend to give too much importance to the contest between Jackson & Clay.” “No movement can be made for Barbour as a friend of Jackson,” Duff concluded, “without giving additional strength to Jackson.” Green could support Barbour, but only if he ran as a candidate against the Baltimore Convention. The editor believed that a “strong demonstration” in favor of Barbour might deter the convention from nominating Van Buren, “and for my own part I would prefer Van B. to Barbour if the latter comes in as a whole hoss collar man.” These were strong words from a man who detested Van Buren and fought at every juncture the political elevation of the “malign influence” from New York.29
In May, when Barbour came out publicly and endorsed Jackson’s reelection, he infuriated Green and spurred the editor to further denunciations. After reading a speech delivered by Barbour in Amherst County supporting Jackson for a second term, Green declared that “my own opinion is decidedly that it will be better for us to let Barbour fall.” The Virginian had disgraced himself, argued Green, by pronouncing “gross and fulsome” flattery in favor of the president. “Barbour is the candidate of the Kitchen Cabinet.” The sardonic editor favored a strong southern candidate, such as Calhoun, Tazewell, or William Wirt, but not Barbour who had sold his soul to Jackson. “I support a venal flatterer of Jackson!!” barked Green, “No never.” Green even tried convincing Gilmer, the ringleader of the Barbour movement, to support a presidential ticket featuring Wirt rather than Jackson or Clay.30

Green also shared his opinions with the general public. In early August, as the Barbour campaign heated up across the South, Green published an editorial explaining his position on the question of the vice presidency. He denied the Globe’s assertions that he, in concert with others hostile to Jackson, actively promoted Barbour’s candidacy. “The nomination of Mr. Barbour upon the Jackson ticket, never received our approbation,” he wrote. “So far from having a tendency to defeat the wishes of the Jackson party, we foresaw that its tendency would be to strengthen the Jackson party.” For ourselves, Green declared, we “much prefer that the contest should be between Jackson and Clay, and between Van Buren and Sargeant.” As for Barbour, his “late deification” of Jackson merely confirmed Green’s misgivings “which heretofore prevented us from feeling any solicitude in his behalf.” Had Barbour stood on principle and opposed either Clay or Van Buren, had he “rallied for the purpose of rescuing the Constitution from Clayism or from Jacksonism,” then Green and company would have supported Barbour. Instead, Barbour had become the “humble disciple of Jackson.” Green concluded that Barbour’s election would not promote the “great interest of the south” because “he is under the control of circumstances, and may become, as Gen. Jackson has done, the instrument of dividing the south, and thus do much more than Mr. Van Buren or Mr. Clay could do to enslave the south.”

So much, then, for some historians’ claim that Barbour’s candidacy bolstered the cause of Clay or Calhoun.31

Such allegations amounted to naught, however, for Barbour finally intervened and resolved the issue. After what must have seemed an eternity to loyal Jackson men, Barbour officially declined to be a candidate for the vice presidency in late September. He hinted to Gilmer that...
he wanted to withdraw his name from consideration, believing he could not win Virginia while Ritchie and the party stood against him. “Upon the subject of the Vice Presidency,” Barbour wrote, “I will state to you in frankness…the course…I ought to pursue under the circumstances….Some of my friends urge me to acquiesce in the nomination of the Baltimore Convention, whilst others earnestly advise me to a different course. In this perplexity, were I to consult my own feelings alone, I should…never have felt a solicitude to obtain” the “honorable office” of vice president. He had yet to mail the letters when events in Richmond convinced him that he must withdraw. On October 16, the Virginia central committee released an official statement endorsing Van Buren’s nomination for the vice presidency and declaring that he had extensive political experience and an acceptable republican record. “As sure as the day comes,” Ritchie responded in the Enquirer, the Jackson-Van Buren ticket “will carry, by a strong majority—and all our regret will be, that a man so respected and worthy as P. P. Barbour…should permit himself to be placed in a situation in which his feelings will be so deeply wounded.” Barbour hesitated no longer. He immediately notified Gilmer of his desire to withdraw his name from consideration for the vice presidency. Eight days later, Gilmer had the letter published in the Virginia press.32

Barbour withdrew because he refused to countenance a divided ticket in Virginia. Like most Jackson men, his concern for party unity ultimately prevailed. “Within a very few days, and just upon the eve of the election, I perceive the opposition prints…congratulating themselves, upon this division in our ranks, and exultingly anticipating a triumph from that cause,” Barbour admitted to his fellow Virginians. “If…their anticipated triumph should be realized—if, in consequence of the divided ticket…the vote of Virginia should be lost to the present chief magistrate, it would be, to me, a source of the deepest regret. For…I have been opposed to taking any course, which would, in any degree, endanger his re-election.” Barbour asked that all his supporters in the state vote for Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren. For Ritchie, the withdrawal could not have come at a worse time. He could not publish Barbour’s letter until October 30, less than a week before the polls opened in Virginia. “We fear it is almost too late to reach the distant borders of the Commonwealth—and that therefore the supporters of Judge Barbour in those quarters may vote for his ticket,” worried the editor. “We know not what may be the amount of this division—and of course, the extent of injury which the split ticket may continue to do to the Jackson cause.” Under the circumstances, then, every friend of Jackson must “arouse himself, to run no risks,” and turn out to vote on Monday, November 5.33

Barbour’s official—and final—refusal to run, declared so late in the campaign, brought down on his head a torrent of criticism from his supporters in Virginia. “This man, so soon before the election, puts us, the States Rights party, in such a condition that no efficient measures can be taken to defeat the election of Jackson
and Van Buren, the latter a man...less governed by principles or the Constitution than any who are looked...to as a candidate for any respectable Station before the country,” confided John Floyd to his diary after reading Barbour’s withdrawal letter in the *Richmond Whig*. “Thus has the honest P. P. Barbour succumbed to power regardless of his principles.” Virginia congressman John M. Patton fumed to his friend Littleton Tazewell that Barbour “has left his friends in the lurch. His letter in my judgment was exceedingly unwise and ill timed. It has anguished many of his friends—gained him no credit with the Van Burenites and will sink him still lower with the opposition....I think he made a bad move.” Many shared Floyd’s assessment that Barbour withdrew as a result of a deal struck with the president. “Some...say that Jackson has promised him the office of Chief Justice of the United States should Marshall die or resign,” Floyd surmised. “I know he wishes that office.” Others, like Patton, believed that Barbour “was actuated by a fear of offending the republican party.”

As expected, once Barbour withdrew his name from consideration, backing for his candidacy collapsed. But some residual support still found its way to the ballot box. Barbour garnered one-third of the popular vote in Georgia, the largest tally he received in the 1832 election. Although he carried only a single county in Mississippi, the 1,571 votes he received accounted for 27 percent of the state's total, while 14 percent of Alabama voters cast a ballot for the Virginian. But in the two states, North Carolina and Virginia, that provided the bedrock of his support, Barbour made a dismal showing. In North Carolina, the Jackson-Van Buren ticket outpolled the Jackson-Barbour ticket 21,009 to 3,855. A ground-swell of opposition to his candidacy in the Old Dominion demonstrated the influence of Thomas Ritchie and revealed that party unity prevailed over other considerations. Virginian Daniel Steenrod boasted to Van Buren that he and his son had worked tirelessly in Ohio County to “countervail the imposition of the Clay men and ‘milk and water’ Jackson men who had deluged the county with the Barbour ticket.” The Virginia vote seemed a bad harbinger for Barbour’s political career, or so many pundits thought. Most agreed with the editors of *Niles’ Weekly Register* who commented shortly after the election that “Mr. Barbour is politically dead. [Mr. B’s policy, surely, was a strange one.]”

Barbour’s behavior during the 1832 election may have hurt his chances of earning an appointment as U.S. senator, a punishment delivered by both the Van Buren and anti-Van Buren forces in Virginia. In December 1832, the Virginia state legislature sought a replacement for Tazewell, who had resigned earlier that summer. Ritchie correctly judged the political winds when he informed William Cabell Rives that he, along with Barbour and Randolph, were the three leading choices to fill the vacancy. Ritchie conjectured that Randolph would not be a candidate, and that the choice would come down to Rives or Barbour. Under such circumstances, “I need not say I count with my best wishes and with almost
certainty on your success,” Ritchie concluded to Rives. Barbour’s action, or rather inaction, during the 1832 campaign helps explain why the Van Buren men in Virginia favored Rives. Likewise, the state’s anti-Van Buren men, those who had endorsed a Jackson-Barbour ticket and were most angry with Barbour’s late withdrawal in the campaign, supported Rives rather than Barbour for U.S. senator in December 1832. With widespread support from both sides of the aisle, Rives routed Barbour in the House of Delegates. The Virginia Senate unanimously chose Rives. Quite possibly, then, Gilmer sought to punish Barbour for his recent surrender to the Jackson-Van Buren ticket.36

Many of Barbour’s contemporaries, and scholars since, explained his potential candidacy for the vice-presidency on the Jackson ticket as an opposition ploy designed to defeat Old Hickory’s reelection. Barbour knew of such charges, but he had no part in the designs of the Calhoun or Clay men in Virginia or elsewhere. His lingering silence during the campaign, which threatened to unravel Jackson’s support for Barbour, resulted from his sense of duty. He did not oppose Van Buren as Jackson’s running mate, but the sentiment of Virginia voters prevailed above partisan politics. In addition, Barbour believed he represented a good ideological fit on the Jacksonian ticket, which prevented him from immediately distancing himself from plans to replace Van Buren. He came to his senses when he realized that the Jacksonians had a hegemonic hold on Virginia throughout 1832 and because of his loyalty to the administration and its policies. Worried about factional strife undermining party unity, Barbour in 1832 reaffirmed his loyalty to Jackson and his support for the Democratic Party creed. And his actions in 1832 never hurt his standing among Democrats. President Jackson elevated Barbour to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1835, where he joined Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney in promulgating Jacksonian Democracy until his death in 1841.

The suppression of the Barbour movement and the subsequent inclusion of a majority of his supporters in Jackson’s ranks solidified the Democratic Party, its policies and principles. While Floyd and Gilmer drifted into opposition to Jackson, they did so at the state level, and remained a minority in Virginia. Elected to Congress as a Tyler Whig in 1840, Gilmer switched to the Democratic Party when James K. Polk became president in 1844. Alabamians John McKinley and Gabriel Moore remained in Congress as loyal Jacksonians throughout Jackson’s presidency, as did North Carolinians Willis Alston, Romulus Saunders, and Jesse Speight. They followed Barbour into the Democratic fold and helped establish a powerful national political party with a distinct platform, an important step in the emergence of the second party system after 1832.

The exclusively southern foundation of the Barbour movement also reveals a great deal about the political policies and ideology of the Jackson administration. The “southern” interests that Van Buren threatened and Barbour protected were overwhelmingly economic in nature, reflecting southerners’ preoccupation with
the American System, especially the tariff. Slavery played a relatively small role in promoting the Barbour candidacy and opposing Van Buren. The prominent political issues and conflicts of the 1820s and 1830s revolved around economic questions, with the battle over the American System and the call for national “reform retrenchment and economy”—to employ Jackson’s terms—taking center stage. The citizens of Shocco Springs wanted to know where Van Buren and Barbour stood in regard to the prevailing political issues, specifically the national bank, the protective tariff and nullification, and federally sponsored internal improvements. The North Carolinians showed little concern for Indian Removal, slavery, or territorial expansion. The delegates at the Charlottesville and Raleigh Conventions, like other southern supporters of Barbour, likewise emphasized the tariff and internal improvements. These issues of national import stood at the forefront of southern minds in 1832, as the Barbour campaign testifies, and these issues became the central feature of Jackson’s presidency and Democratic Party policy and ideology. As a result, the South solidly backed Jackson’s reelection, even with Van Buren on the ticket. In the 1832 election, the Democratic Party solidified, adopting a distinct political program and ideological persuasion.37

The struggle to replace Van Buren with Barbour reflected a campaign centered on policy—repugnance for the American System—and constitutional considerations—the constitutionality of the American System. An Old Republican-turned-Jacksonian Democrat, Barbour’s primary concern in Congress was eliminating the American System. The Virginian believed the program inexpedient and dangerous to republican government. The American System posed a danger because it required a liberal and thus abusive constitutional construction. Concerned above all with a proper interpretation of congressional powers, Barbour embraced strict construction, coveting the sovereign powers of the states, vigilant against national encroachment, and wary of the enlargement of delegated powers. He despised economic and judicial nationalism, and fought them at every juncture of his political career as egregious violations of the Constitution. Barbour’s preoccupation with defeating the American System and promoting states’ rights also reflected another core component of Jacksonian Democracy: an aversion to a moneyed aristocracy, to exclusive privileges and monopolies, and a predilection for majoritarian democracy of common white men. Like Jackson, Barbour detested the “moneyed aristocracy,” consistently opposing exclusive privileges, monopolies, and institutions that enriched the few to the detriment of the many. Throughout his political and judicial career, Barbour shared with Jackson a belief that the will of the majority should prevail, that the welfare of the community outweighed the vested interests of the few, and that the power to regulate the economy and society rested with white men speaking through their state legislatures. This dualistic theme of aristocracy versus democracy, of wealth over the welfare of the community, of the few against the many, not only defined Barbour’s political perspective, but also became the hallmark of the Democratic creed during Jackson’s presidency.38
The expansion of slavery never constituted a central consideration for southerners who sought Barbour as Jackson’s running mate. Only once in Congress, during the Missouri debates, had Barbour publicly addressed the subject of slavery. He opposed restriction of slavery in Missouri because he believed that Congress lacked the constitutional authority to dictate to the sovereign people of a sovereign state the nature of its internal affairs or to set conditions for the admission of Missouri into the Union not required of other states. Barbour never adopted the proslavery extremism of Calhoun, never promoted slavery as a positive good, and never sought its unhindered expansion across the American continent. As such, Barbour, not Calhoun, represented more fully the Democratic creed of Jackson and Van Buren. The suppression of the Barbour movement and the successful incorporation of its supporters during the 1832 presidential election thus led directly to the unification of the Democratic Party and the articulation of its political program and ideology: a war on the American System, a policy of “reform retrenchment and economy” at the national level, and a restoration of republican constitutionalism more in accord with the “Principles of ’98.”

With the 1832 election, the Democratic Party thus solidified into a national political party with a distinct political program and ideology. The Democratic Party became what Van Buren had long envisioned—a national political organization incorporating numerous interests, representing all geographic regions, and suppressing sectional animosities—but possessing an ideology and constitutional outlook more attuned to Barbour’s perspective. The resolution of the vice-presidential question in 1832 represented an important step in the creation of the second American party system. When Jacksonians congealed the various blocs within their ranks by quelling factional strife, settling on a candidate to accompany Old Hickory, and endorsing an ideology hostile to the American System and the moneyed aristocracy that benefited from it, they unwittingly sharpened partisan divisions across the country. The election of 1832, therefore, ensured the emergence of the two party system in the wake of Jackson’s reelection.


2 The 1832 presidential campaign has not received appropriate attention as a transforming event in American political history. In his history of the Jackson presidency, Donald Cole argues that the election “accelerated the rise
of the second American party system" by "strengthening the identity of the major parties." When Democrats nominated a vice-presidential candidate at Baltimore, "they helped unify their party, making it the first truly national American political party." Still, the convention failed to congeal Jackson men, for throughout the 1832 campaign dissatisfaction among southern supporters of the administration continued to disrupt the unity of the party. The rise and fall of the Barbour movement represented a crucial step in solidifying the Democratic Party. See Cole, *The Presidency of Andrew Jackson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); 137, 142, 151.


4 *Richmond Enquirer*, Feb. 28, 1832.


6 Philip P. Barbour to C. W. Gooch, Feb. 28 1832, Manuscripts Including Autographs of Aaron Burr, C. S. Hutter Collection, Correspondence of the Ambler and Barbour Families, UV.

7 The debates of the Virginia Democratic caucus were published in the *Richmond Enquirer*, Mar. 17, 23, 27, 1832.

8 Ibid., Mar. 17, 23, 1832.


10 John Floyd to Thomas Walker Gilmer, Apr. 26, 1832, in *William and Mary Quarterly, 1*st *ser.*, 20 (Jan. 1912), 192-95.

11 Philip P. Barbour to Thomas W. Gilmer, May 13, 1832, Tyler Papers, LC; Thomas E. Burfoot to Philip P. Barbour, May 14, 1832, Barbour Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond (hereafter VHS).

12 Littleton Tazewell to John Tazewell, May 23, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond (hereafter LV); *Niles' Weekly Register*, May 26, 1832; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 29, 1832.

13 Littleton Tazewell to John Tazewell, May 23, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, LV; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 29, 1832.


15 Resolutions and Address of the Charlottesville Jackson and Barbour Convention (Charlottesville, Va.: Cary and Watson, 1832).

16 Thomas W. Gilmer to John N. Tazewell, Sept. 15, 1832, Charles Carter to John N. Tazewell, Oct. 9, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, LV; Thomas W. Gilmer to Philip P. Barbour, Oct. 2, 1832, Ambler and Barbour Papers, UV.

17 *Richmond Enquirer*, May 4, 19, 1832; *Niles' Weekly Register*, June 16, 1832; John Hampton Pleasants to James Barbour, Oct. 7, 1832, James Barbour Papers, NYPL.


21 *U.S. Telegraph*, Sept. 9, 1832; *Niles' Weekly Register*, Oct. 20, 1832.


24 James Iredell to Philip P. Barbour, June 24, 1832, Philip P. Barbour to James Iredell, July 6, 1832, James Iredell Sr. and Jr. Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; Niles’ Weekly Register, Aug. 4, 1832; Raleigh Star, quoted in U.S. Telegraph, Sept. 9, 1832.


26 Niles’ Weekly Register, Aug. 11, 1832.


29 Duff Green to Richard Crallle, Mar. 15, 1832, Duff Green Papers, LC; Duff Green to Richard Crallle, Mar. 28, Apr. 6, May 3, 11, Aug. 3, 1832, in Frederick W. Moore, ed., “Calhoun as Seen by His Political Friends: Letters of Duff Green, Dixon H. Lewis, Richard K. Crallle during the Period from 1831-1848,” Publications of the Southern History Association 7 (July 1903), 272-73, 274-75, 276, 277. Green disliked anyone who appeared little more than a minion of the president or a “whole hoss collar man.”

30 Duff Green to Thomas W. Gilmer, Sept. 24, 1832, Barbour Papers, UV. “Kitchen Cabinet” refers to the informal, close-knit group of advisers Jackson relied on during his presidency.


32 Richmond Enquirer, Oct. 16, 30, 1832.

33 Ibid., Oct. 30, 1832.

34 Ambler, The Life and Diary of John Floyd, 198-99; John M. Paton to Littleton Tazeell, Nov. 9, 1832, Tazeell Family Papers, LV.


37 Daniel Walker Howe maintains that the reelection of Jackson revealed unequivocally that he was “a markedly sectional candidate” because he garnered 88 percent of the popular vote in the South; see Howe, What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of American, 1815-1848 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 385. Still, Van Buren shared the ticket, and Jackson’s 1832 supporters included Barbour and his southern supporters, along with other regional vice presidential candidates. Thus, Old Hickory represented a wide range of geographic regions and interests and was a national candidate. Indeed, Jackson could not always count on southern support after the 1832 election, as Sean Wilentz notes, because his position on banking and nullification “generated a viable southern opposition to his Democracy”; see Wilentz, American Democracy, 435.

38 For similar interpretations of Jacksonian Democracy, see Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Remini, Jackson and the Course of American Freedom. Howe describes the “dual essence” of Jackson’s Bank veto as “the defense of the people against the unfairly privileged and the strict construction of the Constitution,” and argues that this remained “the message of the Democratic Party for a long time to come”; see Howe, What Hath God Wrought, 386.

39 In What Hath God Wrought, Howe stresses Democrats’ embrace of imperialist territorial expansion founded on an assumption of white supremacy.

40 For alternative views of the Democratic Party’s solidification, see Cole, Presidency of Andrew Jackson, 144; and Howe, What Hath God Wrought, 386.
New Deal Public Housing in the Ohio Valley
The Creation of Lincoln Gardens in Evansville, Indiana
Robert G. Barrows

Historian D. Bradford Hunt, in his study of public housing in Chicago, observes that the crisis of the Great Depression and the coming of the New Deal “opened up a political space that made possible the enactment of state-sponsored housing aimed at market failure.” Language in the 1933 legislation that created the Public Works Administration (PWA) “broke open the door to the nation’s first significant public housing experiment.” The PWA’s Housing Division conducted that experiment, which continued until the advent of the United States Housing Authority in 1937, and it marked “the first direct federal intervention into the housing market in the United States during peacetime.” Over the course of its brief and often controversial existence, the Housing Division was the direct builder of fifty-one projects in thirty-six cities.¹
The creation of one of these projects, Lincoln Gardens in Evansville, Indiana, provides a case study of the Housing Division’s operation and the evolving federal-local dynamics of the New Deal era. Although a relatively small undertaking—only eleven of the PWA’s direct-built housing projects had fewer units—Lincoln Gardens nevertheless exemplified many of the bureaucratic practices and community experiences associated with the program. Public housing proponents in Evansville, for example, joined like-minded individuals in other cities in expressing frustration over what they perceived as the overly centralized and dilatory nature of the Housing Division’s management. And like most PWA housing, the Evansville project was conceived, planned, and implemented to serve a racially homogeneous clientele—in this case, African Americans.

But Lincoln Gardens also differed from at least some other PWA housing projects in which slum clearance entailed the removal of both buildings and their poor, usually minority occupants. Techwood Homes in Atlanta, for example, “transformed an all-black neighborhood into a segregated, all-white public housing project.” An examination of race and housing in Miami during the 1930s discovered that the city’s civic elite wanted to “eliminate the downtown black community entirely to make way for further expansion of the business district.” This did not occur in Evansville, where community leaders sought to replace blighted housing in the midst of an African American district with vastly improved yet affordable housing in the same location. The goal had a racial dimension, of course; de facto residential segregation was the reality in the city. But the city made no attempt to use federal housing dollars as a mechanism to displace the African American community from an area where it was well established.

Housing, if not necessarily housing reform, proved an important issue in the early 1930s. Residential construction had peaked in the mid-1920s, several years before the 1929 stock market crash. Thereafter housing starts declined year after year. Construction of residential property dropped 95 percent between 1928 and 1933. Herbert Hoover’s President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership in December 1931 brought together housing experts to respond to the dire situation. The conference and the recommendations emanating from it produced few immediate results, but they did mark the beginning of a change in attitude regarding the role of the government in housing. One recommendation called on the government to begin to aid private efforts to house low-income families, an idea that, at least in the United States, had generally been derided.

The need to upgrade African American dwellings seemed particularly acute. The report prepared by the conference’s Committee on Negro Housing detailed the substandard living conditions endured by a large percentage of the nation’s black citizens. Hoover’s secretary of commerce wrote in the foreword to the report that the realities of housing in African American neighborhoods “emphasize the present shortcomings of our individualistic theory of housing, and the failure
which grows out of expecting each person in our highly complex industrial civilization to provide his own housing as best he may.” Historian Gail Radford observes that this and other similarly “heretical statements” by administration officials “signaled the degree to which confidence in the private market in real estate had deteriorated by 1931.”

In the spring of 1932, as the depression deepened, Hoover and his advisors decided that the federal government needed to take additional action to combat the crisis. The Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932 empowered the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to “make loans to corporations formed wholly for the purpose of providing housing for families of low income, or for the reconstruction of slum areas.” These were designed as low-profit (or “limited dividend”) enterprises. However, requirements for state or municipal regulation of such “corporations” and eventual repayment of the loans proved sufficiently onerous that only a single urban housing project, Knickerbocker Village in New York City, resulted from this legislation. But the expansion of the RFC’s responsibilities in late 1932 and early 1933 established a precedent for federal involvement in slum removal and public housing.

By March 1933, when Franklin Roosevelt’s administration assumed control in Washington, housing starts had stalled at one-tenth of their 1925 levels, unemployment stood at about 25 percent nationally, and foreclosures were increasing. Moreover, the RFC’s housing program had clearly failed. “It is against this background of catastrophe,” writes Radford, “that we can begin to understand how…a program as previously off-limits as federal financing and even outright ownership of low-rent housing could be created.” Title II of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), signed by the president in June 1933, called for a “comprehensive program of public works.” The program became one of the best known of Roosevelt’s so-called “alphabet agencies,” the Public Works Administration (PWA). The legislation granted the new agency power for, among other things, “construction, reconstruction, alteration, or repair under public regulation or control of low-cost housing and slum-clearance projects.” To implement this section of the law Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, who directed the PWA, created a Housing Division that began operation in July.

The Housing Division inherited the RFC’s limited-dividend program and attempted to make it more viable by liberalizing the provisions that had prevented most communities from taking advantage of it. In response to these relaxed rules, applications poured in. As Radford explains, however, “few submissions merited serious consideration.” In the midst of a national economic crisis, “lack of money and inability to put together plausible financial plans were critical barriers to participation.” Of the more than five hundred proposals submitted for limited-dividend housing projects, the division approved only seven. Ickes had, from the start, expressed skepticism about the success of the program.
Having seen his concerns borne out during the first few months of the Housing Division’s existence, he announced in February 1934 that the previous program would cease and that the Housing Division would assume direct responsibility for slum clearance and housing construction projects. It would become, in effect, the housing developer. As Radford summarizes the new arrangement: “The division used local architectural firms and building contractors, but closely supervised all phases of work. It acquired sites in its own name and retained title to land and structures after construction was completed.” Ickes and the Housing Division staff persuaded Congress to lower interest rates on project loans from the 4 percent mandated by the NIRA to 3 percent and to increase the amortization period from thirty-five to sixty years. Many communities, Evansville among them, took note of this new federal initiative.\(^7\)

City officials and social reformers had long voiced concern about conditions in an area known as Baptisttown, the largest African American enclave in Evansville. The district had grown up around a black Baptist church in the decades following the Civil War, when a substantial number of African Americans migrated to the city from the Upper South. Between 1870 and 1890 the number of blacks living in Baptisttown increased by 350 percent, and in the latter year the area accounted for just over half of Evansville’s African American population. Ten years later, blacks comprised almost 13 percent of the city’s residents—a proportion greater than in most midwestern cities—and the most densely populated census district in the city lay in Baptisttown.\(^8\)

The area’s housing stock consisted of small structures, many little more than shacks. Most were rental units. At the turn of the twentieth century, only 9 percent of black household heads in Evansville owned their own home, and in the three census districts in Baptisttown with the largest number of African American

Row of houses in Baptisttown, Evansville, circa 1920s.
COURTESY EVANSVILLE AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM
residents the figure fell to a miniscule 6 percent. Most of those who did own their dwellings belonged to the small black middle class consisting of teachers, barbers, and owners of small businesses who remained in the area because they had few options. Residential segregation increased during the early twentieth century. Evansville historian Darrel Bigham has documented what he describes as “the centripetal tendency of the [African American] population” in these years, a result of both white hostility and the poverty of most black residents. “Custom, the threat of retaliation, and the restrictive covenant [in deeds]…meant that most blacks never considered living anywhere else but where most blacks had always lived.” As a consequence, by 1910 approximately 60 percent of the city’s African American population lived within four blocks of Baptisttown’s center. And when a consolidated black school opened in 1928 on the edge of the neighborhood, it “reinforced the trend toward the concentration of blacks in the Baptisttown region.” As Bigham observes, “the quality of black housing was deplorable.” On several occasions during the early twentieth century, city leaders sought to “eliminate blighted homes located on tiny lots.” These dilapidated structures generally had no connection to city sewers and most still relied on cisterns for their water supply. In 1916, Mayor Benjamin Bosse, local industrialist Richard Rosencranz, and other business leaders embarked on a plan to “redeem Baptisttown.” But success proved elusive, and by the close of the 1920s the city had little progress to report.  

As the new decade began, a proposal surfaced to clear a portion of Baptisttown in order to create a community center and playground that would primarily serve the African American community. Inspections of the proposed area by the city’s building commissioner and a representative of the Health Department in spring 1930 revealed that an overwhelming majority of houses needed “extensive repair” and that the district constituted a “general health menace.” But the proposal stalled, due—at least in part—to the financial stringencies faced by municipalities across the country as the depression deepened. Construction of a playground never began and in November 1933 the Evansville Journal reported that William Best, principal of the all-black Lincoln High School, had approached Mayor Frank Griese “to determine if there is a possibility of cleaning up conditions in Baptisttown,” perhaps with federal funds.  

Precisely what happened next is unclear. But just six weeks after Best and the mayor met, the Evansville Courier reported that a survey of housing conditions in “various parts of the city,”
including Baptisttown, would begin shortly. The paper advised that “the inspection was decided on yesterday afternoon when possibilities of obtaining government funds for improving housing conditions were discussed” at a meeting of city officials, interested citizens, and Earl O. Mills, a planning engineer from St. Louis who did contract work for the city of Evansville. Mayor Griese observed that although no federal monies currently existed for such projects, “the policy of the public works administration may be broadened later...for cleaning up blighted areas.” By conducting a housing survey immediately, the city could position itself “to take advantage of the plan at once” should PWA policies change.\(^{11}\)

The policy of the PWA did in fact change in early 1934 when Ickes abandoned the RFC program he had inherited in favor of having the Housing Division take direct responsibility for slum clearance and low-cost housing projects. Within days of Ickes’s announcement the *Journal* ran a headline proclaiming: “U.S. Building Help is Hope in Baptisttown.” The accompanying story explained that an effort had begun to seek federal assistance in constructing “new modern and sanitary homes” in a district “long considered a health menace.” In order to bolster its application, the City Plan Commission oversaw a survey of the area. The secretary of the commission predicted that they would send a report to Washington in two or three weeks. “We hope to present these facts to the government in the hope of having it finance the work of cleaning up the district and building new houses,” he told the *Journal*’s reporter. According to another local paper, the situation had moved beyond mere hope by late March. “Expect U.S. to Finance Baptisttown Project” announced the *Evansville Press*. The story explained that Mills, the St. Louis planning engineer, had been working with the City Plan Commission and would soon meet with the city council to “explain a plan for Baptisttown rehabilitation which he believes will not cost the city a cent....He has been in touch with officials at Washington and is confident that the money will be granted if proper application is made.”\(^{12}\)

Mills, Henry Dickman (president of the City Plan Commission), and Richard Rosencranz (chairman of the city’s Inter-Racial Commission) spent the next several days explaining the proposal to and securing support from a variety of local organizations. Most groups ultimately supported the plan, but not without expressing some concerns. At one meeting Mills had to “answer to persons who have repeatedly questioned the movement,” some of whom wondered why new housing would not be situated on open land at the edge of the city. Mills expressed surprise at such suggestions since “the Baptisttown project had been centered upon for the past 18 years.” He explained that “the federal government is interested in slum clearance in connection with low-cost housing” and “Baptisttown has the worst slum conditions in Evansville.” This seemingly minor disagreement in Evansville over whether prospective public housing should replace dilapidated structures in the central city or be constructed on vacant land on the outskirts of
town mirrored a national debate. Radford notes that some housing reformers at the time “maintained that undeveloped land was not only much cheaper, it was better because of the absence of already-established street patterns.” They thus believed that building on the urban periphery provided greater opportunities for imaginative design and comprehensive city planning. Ickes “was not persuaded by such arguments” and “described clearing slums as a central purpose” of the PWA’s housing efforts. Mills and others involved with Evansville’s proposal clearly sided with Ickes on this issue and framed their bid accordingly.\(^\text{13}\)

The city forwarded its application to the Housing Division on April 17, 1934, accompanied by two cover letters, one from Dickman and the second from Mayor Griese. The mayor’s letter stressed that “the site selected for the proposed project embraces the worst slum conditions in the City of Evansville” and that the large number of resolutions supporting the project demonstrated that “there is virtually a unanimous public opinion in favor of rehabilitation of this district.” The proposal itself began with the assertion that the “unusual conditions
prevailing in the Baptisttown area…present an opportunity of distinctive merit” since the site suggested for rehabilitation “is one that has had the serious attention of the civic-minded persons for nearly two decades.” The heading on the application, which specified that the proposal involved low-cost “Negro” housing, made clear an otherwise unstated assumption on the part of local leaders: that the project would serve African Americans only. Ickes, a former president of the NAACP chapter in Chicago, sought to reduce racial discrimination in the agencies he headed. The Housing Division, however, generally acquiesced to local mores and mostly constructed projects for either blacks or whites. As Radford observes, “the agency’s decision not to disrupt pre-existing racial patterns of neighborhoods…meant building houses for African Americans in deteriorated sections of cities where they already lived.” Lincoln Gardens reflected this national pattern.14

Little overt activity took place during the next few months as Evansville’s application underwent the Housing Division’s process of internal review. In mid-July, Dickman wrote asking for an update, initiating a steady stream of correspondence that, as it turned out, continued for several years. He received a reply a few days later from Horatio Hackett, director of the division. Hackett advised that the next step involved sending a staff member to “investigate the situation and make a report,” which he would arrange “at the earliest possible moment.” He noted, however, that his division was “under pressure in getting certain authorized projects under way and the funds available are practically all budgeted.” That observation apparently caused enough concern among city officials that they promptly approached their congressional representative for assistance. Congressman John W. Boehne Jr. telegraphed Hackett on July 25. He referred to Hackett’s recent letter to Dickman, expressed hope that Evansville’s application “may not be lost in the shuffle,” and requested “immediate dispatch of one of your staff investigators…for consultation with proper city authorities and [the] plan commission to determine feasibility of this project.” Hackett assured the congressman that “Evansville has not been side-tracked,” but explained that he was endeavoring “to get underway projects which have been long delayed in their commencement,” including one in Indianapolis.15

An inspector from the Housing Division, Edmond Hoben, conducted a site visit a few weeks later. He met with members of the City Plan Commission on August 13, and during this meeting he divulged that out of dozens of applications federal officials had selected the Baptisttown proposal as one of fifteen that merited more detailed consideration. Hoben explained that once investigators had made “reports on all of them the housing division will select the best ones for immediate approval.” He also noted, however, that the division did not have enough money to fund all fifteen projects if it found all of them worthy. A week later Dickman wrote to Hackett thanking him for Hoben’s visit. His letter also included several pages of data that the inspector had requested to supplement the
original application. Hackett replied a few days later to acknowledge receipt of
the supplementary information and expressed hope that “within a short time” the
division would “be able to give you some decision for [or?] constructive sugges-
tions relative to the project.”

While Hackett and Dickman exchanged letters, a report Hoben had pre-
pared shortly after his site visit began working its way up the Housing Division’s
chain of command. He confirmed the deplorable conditions in the Baptiststown
area, noting the “very bad fifty year old shacks with practically no sanitary facili-
ties.” The situation was so bad, in fact, that he believed the division should not
“attempt to replace such housing with buildings designed along the lines of most
of the projects now contemplated by the Housing Division, for such procedure
would place the house produced completely beyond the reach of those who need
it the most.” Even “simple improvements”—fireproof dwellings, screens, running
water in each unit, adequate ventilation—“would be such an improvement over
present conditions that there would be no question as to the justification of the
project.” He predicted that if the division could keep rents below a cost of fifteen
dollars per family per month the project “will meet a great need in Evansville”
that “can never be met by the operation of a private enterprise.”

Correspondence continued to flow back and forth between Evansville and
Washington during October. The city and the Housing Division sparred over
who would pay to pave a newly opened street, whether the project would include
a playground even though a major thoroughfare separated it from the housing,
and what to do about an adjacent rail line. Dickman laid out the city’s case in
two letters at the end of October. Hackett wrote back on November 1 that since
a division representative would “be in your vicinity within the next two weeks,
I will have him stop at Evansville and take up with you the points in ques-
tion in detail.” The anticipated two weeks turned into seven, but the division’s
Oliver Winston visited the city on December 20. Dickman wrote to Hackett on
Christmas Eve to praise the “thorough manner in which he approached the prob-
lems about which we have been corresponding.”

William H. Dress replaced Griese as mayor in January 1935, and in mid-
May A. R. Clas succeeded Hackett as director of the Housing Division. Both
men were familiar with the Evansville proposal, so these changes in leadership
do not appear to have impeded the city’s application. But March brought an
unexpected development. Hackett advised Dickman that because of the Housing
Division’s “sound standards of construction,” it could not set rents low enough
to be “satisfactory for the income group we are trying to rehouse in Evansville.”
Since the city had a “limited group of families of sufficient income to meet our
rents,” federal officials had deemed it “inadvisable to make final disposition of the
Evansville project” for the time being. Proponents should not, however, “abandon all hope.”

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The documentary record does not reveal precisely how city and federal officials resolved this impasse, but the solution likely involved an alteration of the original floor plans. In any event, the project got back on track quickly. During April and May several local architects formed a consortium styled “Lincoln Gardens Associated Architects” to work on the enterprise. The group arranged to compensate Earl Mills, the city planner from St. Louis, for his preliminary work on the proposal. In late May, Mayor Dress confirmed the city’s agreement to various street vacating, paving, and land transfer issues, and the Housing Division included the Evansville project in a formal request for funds filed with the PWA’s Application Division. Then in early June, Clas signed off on a memorandum that defined the boundaries of the site, spelled out several reasons for putting a project at that location, and recommended that officials name the project “Lincoln Gardens.”

Discussion quickly began regarding how to provide alternate housing for Baptisttown residents whose current dwellings would be removed. Dickman wrote Clas several times in late June and early July with information regarding the number of families that the Housing Division would need to relocate, and the possible options for doing so. He documented that local groups such as the YMCA had agreed to assist with the task. Clas responded to these letters by praising the “spirit of cooperation” in the community but cautioned that “at the present time, too much publicity might prove to be a handicap to our operations in your City.” Clas likely referred to the forthcoming delicate tasks of appraising, optioning, and purchasing the properties within the project’s boundaries. Two PWA employees later acknowledged that they often had to conduct these tasks in a “conspiratorial atmosphere” to avoid the inflation of land prices.

The final few months of 1935 witnessed a flurry of activity. The Housing Division required that its projects have a local advisory committee, and Mayor Dress had named such a group in May. The eleven members included several businessmen (including Rosencranz, who became chairman of the committee, and A. W. Hartig, who served as its secretary), the city’s superintendent of schools, a judge, a minister, and the president of Evansville College. Two members represented the African American community: Dr. Raymond King, a dentist, and Mrs. L. A. George, a Lincoln High School teacher who had been involved in anti-tuberculosis and child welfare work. In December, officials in Washington approved the plans submitted by the consortium of local architects, and an Evansville company received the contract to demolish buildings in the Lincoln Gardens area.
Land acquisition had begun in earnest once funding for the project seemed assured, and by late October Clas advised his superiors that with only a few exceptions the Housing Division had secured options to purchase all of the properties in the area. A month later, he reported that for most parcels “good title can be acquired without resorting to court action,” and he recommended that immediate efforts focus on securing title to enough of the land that a “demolition or foundation contract, or both, [could] be let on such portion” by mid-December. At the end of the year the division’s principal land appraiser informed Clas that only six parcels (out of seventy-four) remained to be acquired. The issue of tenant relocation now became more urgent. Several Housing Division employees rotated through the city during the fall to deal with the problem, but as late as December 11 fifty-nine families still required shelter. Officials considered converting vacant factories into temporary housing for some of the displaced, but they eventually found sufficient space in private residences. The process took longer than expected, but by mid-January 1936 Dickman reported that all residential tenants in the project area had been relocated.23
Demolition began that month. Dickman reported the razing of existing structures was well ahead of schedule and he hoped they could soon award a contract for the building foundations. Although “Lincoln Gardens” had become the generally accepted moniker for the project, which stood adjacent to Lincoln Avenue and across the street from Lincoln High School, the advisory committee formally voted in favor of the name in late February and the PWA approved its choice. Clas authorized the start of construction in mid-May, and the city held a groundbreaking ceremony on May 26. During the summer, work proceeded on constructing the foundations and bids for the “superstructure” work on sixteen buildings opened in late September. Dickman told the Evansville Press that he expected a contract to be let and work to begin by about mid-October.24

Seemingly unexpected local developments, kept under wraps for several weeks, shattered these expectations. Eighteen months earlier, Housing Division staffers had expressed concern that it might not be possible to set rents low enough for the local African American population to afford. The issue resurfaced once the low construction bid proved much higher than anticipated. Within days Dickman had a telephone conversation with Robert B. Mitchell at the division, who explained: “There is a problem on that job because of the fact if it should be awarded, a work estimate indicates that the rents are likely to be much too high and that the job might not be rentable if it were built.” He emphasized that this was “preliminary information and very confidential.” He asked Dickman to obtain current data regarding rentals in Evansville, to confer “in a confidential manner” with the chair of the advisory committee, and to travel to Washington for a meeting as soon as possible.25

Dickman journeyed to the capital within the week and met with a dozen Housing Division employees, including the new division director Howard A. Gray, to consider ways to cut costs. Before making any “final decision…as to the disposition of this project” the group tentatively decided to redesign it using frame construction with brick veneer, increase all buildings to two stories (the original plan called for some one-story structures), and eliminate a central heating plant in favor of individual furnaces for each building. These attempts at a quick fix did not persuade Ickes the project could proceed without a thorough reconsideration. In late October, the Evansville papers reported, as the page one headline in the Press screamed: “Lincoln Gardens Housing Project Bids Thrown Out.” The Housing Division would request new bids after officials revised the plans to lower costs. “We have a choice between a few weeks delay in revising construction plans or burdening future tenants with high rentals for 60 years,” Ickes said in the article. So officials went back to the drawing board—literally. On the last day of 1936 the Press reported that the Housing Division had completed revised plans that included increasing the number of family units to 191, putting individual heating systems in each building, and cutting back on
landscaping costs. Still, the project’s future remained problematic as the new year began. Despite the redesign, officials projected average rents to rise to $6.56 per room per month. A survey of African American renters in Evansville indicated that per room charges needed to lie in the five dollar range, and preferably closer to four dollars fifty cents, for a sufficient number of black families to find them affordable.26

The Evansville advisory committee met with Paul Pearson, assistant director of the Housing Division, on January 6, 1937. In a memo he prepared for Gray two days later, Pearson reminded his boss that he had “come to confer with the Committee because you believed it fair that they should have a chance to solve the problem.” After presenting the full committee with a status report, he asked that a subcommittee “go over the analysis sheet with me and make recommendations.” That three-man group, joined by Mayor Dress, spent several hours reviewing every detail of the project and examining the budget line by line. As Pearson observed in his memo, “it seemed hopeless to bring [rents] to $4.50, but they tried it…. [T] is an earnest, intelligent group, and determined to have the housing project, and at rents which Negroes can pay.” But after they “labored long” they had identified potential reductions in operating expenses that would lower per-room rents by only sixty-six cents. The group made more progress when Dress asked Pearson how to omit the budget item for “payments in lieu of taxes”—that is, money paid by the federal government to compensate the city for removing
property from the tax rolls. Pearson replied that it involved the mayor giving written assurance that the city would not request such a payment, and Dress responded: “I’m willing. What do you think, boys?” Everyone on the subcommittee agreed, and this knocked another thirty-three cents off the rent, but they still remained a long way from four dollars fifty cents. A breakthrough came when Dress inquired about the “interest, depreciation, and amortization” budget item, based on an interest rate of 3 percent. He asked what would happen if the interest were reduced to 1 percent. When Pearson replied that it would lower rents approximately one dollar “they all rejoiced, and unanimously decided to request the reduction….This brought their rents down to about $4.50, and they broke up as happy as though the matter were really accomplished.”

The secretary of the advisory committee, A. W. Hartig, wrote Gray immediately to report on the committee’s deliberations. He attached the list of suggested reductions in operating expenses. He also introduced the two major areas of savings the committee had identified, shrewdly making one conditional on the other: “if the Government will agree to reduce the interest on the loan to 1%, the City will eliminate the item of charge in lieu of taxes.” Gray wrote back requesting more detailed estimates, explaining that the division’s staff had expressed concern that some budget items “cannot be reduced without severely handicapping operating services and effecting rapid deterioration of the property.” Interestingly, two days before writing Hartig, Gray had prepared a memo for Ickes outlining “the situation which now confronts us in regard to the Lincoln Gardens Project.” He summarized recent developments such as the redesign (“reducing everything to a minimum”) and the city’s offer to waive charges in lieu of taxes, but explained that projected rents would still remain too high unless the interest rate could be cut. Given the expenses already incurred for land acquisition and foundations, Gray recommended “that we proceed with construction of superstructures with the knowledge that further subsidy [the interest rate reduction] will be required to bring this project within rentable limits.” Ickes approved the changes.

In the aftermath of this exchange between Gray and Ickes, the Housing Division decided to redesign the project once again—and to do so in house. Officials acted, in part, in response to the famous flood of 1937, which inundated the Ohio River Valley, including a portion of Evansville, in late January. The Lincoln Gardens site suffered no damage, but as Gray explained in a subsequent memo, “the architect’s office [Lincoln Gardens Associated Architects] and all local business was suspended for an indefinite period.” Since the Evansville consortium could not undertake a redesign “at the time required by the Housing Division,” the division elected to do so itself “with a minimum of expense and difficulty.”

The redesign, based on the original site plan and utilizing all of the extant foundations, increased the number of dwelling units from 138 to 191—consisting of forty units of two rooms, 121 of three rooms, and thirty of four
rooms—constructed with wood framing and brick veneer. Four of the sixteen buildings would stand two stories, seven would be one story, and five initially planned as one story would now be a combination of one and two stories, thereby increasing the number of units. Each unit would now have its own coal heater, thus eliminating the plumbing or ductwork that a central heating plant would have required. The new plan simplified service drives to reduce paving costs, and increased the yard areas kept up by tenants to cut project maintenance costs for fully landscaped areas. The chairman of the Evansville advisory committee, Richard Rosencranz, unconvinced that these changes would be adequate, wrote Gray twice that spring expressing concerns over whether “the necessities of low rent level have been met.” Gray replied that Housing Division staff believed that when new bids opened on May 4 “the various economies of the redesign will effect sufficient savings in rent as to permit the construction of the entire project, without further delay.” The local newspapers had reported in late March that Ickes had requested new bids on the superstructure work based on the revised specifications, as well as bids on landscaping. A Chicago firm submitted the low bid for the buildings at $483,333, and a Michigan nursery came in at just under twenty-five thousand for the landscaping. Ickes formally awarded the superstructure contract on May 20, pointing out that the new bid was almost $153,000 below the low bid received in October. The Housing Division would determine final rents after the project’s close.30

Construction began in mid-June, with completion anticipated within a year. Ten weeks after construction had begun local papers provided brief updates, reporting that the project was on schedule, with the buildings expected to be
enclosed and under roof by winter. In perhaps the most significant development during the fall of 1937, President Roosevelt signed the United States Housing Act (often called the Wagner-Steagall Act). This legislation created a new federal agency, the United States Housing Authority (USHA), which absorbed the PWA's Housing Division and assumed responsibility for its projects. The Courier reported in early December that all PWA housing projects, including Lincoln Gardens, “will be completed by the federal government and then turned over to local housing authorities.” The story prompted an immediate letter from Hartig, secretary of both the City Plan Commission and the housing advisory committee, to the director of USHA, Nathan Straus. Hartig recounted that he had received many inquiries about the manner in which Lincoln Gardens “will be managed, when such management will start, and by whom….Just what is the program for the future?” One of Straus’s lieutenants replied at the end of the year that since Evansville apparently had no public housing agency “it, therefore, appears that the initial administration will be undertaken directly by the United States Housing Authority.”

In late January 1938, the Courier ran a lengthy article reviewing the history of the project, which it described as a “monument to relentless, indefatigable efforts…through the last decade to clean up the city’s Negro slums.” Also that spring Mayor Dress, with support from Congressman Boehne, opened negotiations with USHA regarding adjacent streets that the city had agreed to pave. The city had made the promise in good faith, but the repairs necessitated by the 1937 flood had exhausted Evansville’s public works funds. Discussion of the issue continued for many months, with USHA eventually agreeing to cover the cost of paving materials (eighteen thousand dollars) and the city agreeing to complete the curb work and sponsor a WPA project to do the actual paving. The city held a cornerstone laying ceremony on April 22, at which point only painting, driveway and sidewalk construction, and landscaping remained. The usual dignitaries, including the mayor and several members of the housing advisory committee, made remarks. Mrs. L. A. George, the Lincoln High School teacher who had served on the committee, described the project as “a requiem to the dead—the old Baptisttown.” Dr. Raymond King, the African American dentist who had also served on the advisory committee—and who would soon become housing manager—placed records relating to the project in a time capsule inside the cornerstone before it was mortared in place. As the Courier summarized the proceedings: “Lincoln Gardens Hailed As Asset To Entire City.”

The newspapers reported in late May that officials had set rents and that the selection of tenants would begin shortly. Base rents per room averaged $4.53, remarkably close to the figure the Housing Division and the local advisory committee had struggled to achieve. Monthly gross rents, including charges for electricity and gas (but not the cost of coal for the heaters) ranged from $12.65 to $20.20 initially, depending
on the size and location of the unit. The government employed several criteria in the selection of residents. An applicant’s “fidelity and character” had to be “well established.” The federal George-Healey Act of 1936 specified that families would be eligible only if they currently lived in substandard housing and their monthly income did not exceed five times the rent (or six times for families with three or more minor dependents). The USHA’s temporary on-site management supervisor, J. P. Prescott, reemphasized that “the purpose of the project is to provide for families of low income who are not able to afford decent housing.” Low income, however, did not mean no income. As Dr. King explained several months later, “public housing is for poor people, yes, but for the poor who show some sign of being able to pay rent regularly.”

Applications began to pour in immediately. An open house on July 10, which featured four model units furnished by local department stores, generated more interest, and by early August officials had received 408 applications, certified 185 as eligible, and 114 families had moved in. By Thanksgiving the apartments were fully leased, with 100 percent occupancy expected in December. Early reviews proved favorable. A writer for the Evansville Argus, a recently inaugurated African American newspaper, described the project as “one beauty to behold.” A new resident told a reporter for the Courier that she thought “the only difference between heaven and my home will be the rent.” With construction completed, landscaping underway, and tenants in residence, King next oversaw the transition to a functioning mini-community. Much of his correspondence with Washington in 1939 dealt with mundane but necessary details regarding the day-to-day operation of the project. Multiple messages back and forth during a six-week period regarding the number and location of public trash baskets suggest that, at least initially, USHA officials exercised a high degree of micromanagement. A final ceremony in July 1940 unveiled a bronze plaque that recognized those who had played an instrumental role in the initiation and completion of Lincoln Gardens.
The following year the city took advantage of state legislation to create the Evansville Housing Authority (EHA). This new local entity took over management of the project from USHA and continued to operate it for the next fifty-six years. By the late 1990s, with the buildings outdated and deteriorating and the vacancy rate about 40 percent, the EHA decided to demolish the Lincoln Gardens complex and replace it with approximately ninety townhouse apartments called Lincoln Estates. City officials decided to spare one of the original Lincoln Gardens buildings the wrecking ball, however, and it subsequently became a museum highlighting the history and heritage of African Americans in Evansville.\(^{35}\)

Lincoln Gardens certainly fits the description of a federal project constructed under the auspices of the New Deal’s Public Works Administration (PWA). But such a portrayal does not reflect the considerable local initiative and input involved in the project’s creation. The idea for a slum clearance and low-income housing project in Evansville originated locally; Washington did not impose it. At the end of 1933, when the PWA’s Housing Division still struggled with the policies it had inherited from the RFC, the city undertook a survey of local housing conditions in order to position itself to receive federal funds should those policies change. When Harold Ickes decided in February 1934 that the Housing Division would assume direct responsibility for slum clearance and housing construction projects, the city was able to submit a formal application quickly. In the months and years that followed, as the proposal underwent numerous alterations and faced repeated delays, regular communication took place between the
Housing Division and local entities—at first the City Plan Commission, and later an advisory committee required by the division. Indeed, a subcommittee of the latter group, joined by the mayor, devised a plan to reduce costs and make the project viable. Although Lincoln Gardens was unquestionably a federal enterprise, the archival record reveals a great degree of local involvement in its origins. The Housing Division stressed in a 1936 bulletin describing its activities that it “required representative and enthusiastic sponsorship in each city where a project was under consideration.” The Lincoln Gardens example supports the claim that sentiment for such projects “did not originate in Washington. It was generated in progressive cities…whose studies [of local conditions] antedated the Housing Division itself.”

However, the Housing Division remained firmly in control. Perhaps, as two PWA employees later wrote, Ickes required local advisory committees so that housing projects would not be “dropped into a void lacking any intimate relation to the community.” However, members of the Evansville committee often felt marginalized. A notoriously hands-on administrator, Ickes “insisted on making the final decision on every project and signed every contract” into which the division entered. And as Gail Radford observes, “consistent with his stance on everything the Public Works Administration built, Ickes insisted on high quality,” even if those standards had the potential to scuttle a low-income housing project because low-income families could not afford to live there.

The creation of Lincoln Gardens proved a lengthy process with many twists and turns. It took about four and a half years from the submission of the city’s application until families moved into most of the units, and at several points it seemed that the project might founder. The criteria used to select residents,
and the “means test” that determined their continuing eligibility to reside in “The Gardens,” caused complaints over the years. But November 1938 was, no doubt, a time of true thanksgiving for many Evansville residents, both government officials and social reformers who had finally “redeemed” at least a portion of Baptiststown, and the Lincoln Gardens tenants whose housing conditions had so dramatically improved because of an imaginative if short-lived New Deal program.

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1 D. Bradford Hunt, Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 22; Gail Radford, Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 85, 93 (Table 4.1), 100-101 (Table 4.2).


7 Radford, Modern Housing for America, 92-93, 96, 99-101. The Housing Division completed projects in four Ohio Valley cities: Cincinnati (Laurel Homes), Evansville (Lincoln Gardens), Lexington (Bluegrass Park/Aspendale), and Louisville (LaSalle Place, College Court).


9 Ibid., 36, 109-11, 111-14, 144.

10 Evansville Journal, May 9, 1930, Nov. 4, 1933; Bigham, We Ask Only a Fair Trial, 219.

11 Evansville Courier, Dec. 19, 1933. Early in his career Mills had associated with Harland Bartholomew, a highly regarded city planner. Bartholomew and his staff prepared a comprehensive master plan for Evansville in the 1920s and provided advice on the drafting of a zoning ordinance. Mills had participated in that project and in the 1930s he continued his professional association with Evansville after establishing his own consulting firm. See Robert G. Barrows, Albion Fellows Bacon: Indiana’s Municipal Housekeeper (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 121-27.


13 Evansville Journal, Mar. 29, 30, 31, 1934. Dickman (1884-1967) operated a local real estate company. In addition to his membership on the City Plan Commission, he served as president of the Evansville Board of Realtors and vice president of the Indiana Board of Realtors; Evansville Courier and Press, Feb. 26, 1967 (obituary). Rosencranz (ca. 1880-1971) served as chairman of the board of Vulcan Plow Works, which his father had founded. At the time of his death a local paper referred to him as a “community leader,” and observed that he was “an early believer in the equality of man, regardless of race, creed or color.” In 1959, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People made him a life member; Evansville Press, Jan. 25, 1971.


Edmon Hoben to Robert B. Mitchell (memo), Sept. 4, 1934, box 270, PHA Files, NA II.

Henry Dickman to Horatio Hackett, Oct. 27, 29, 1934, box 272, Henry Dickman to Horatio Hackett, Aug. 21, 1934, box 269, PHA Files, NA II. The Housing Division confronted the issue of producing high-quality housing for low-income families throughout its short existence; see Radford, Modern Housing for America, 96-98.


Henry Dickman to A. R. Clas, June 26, 28, July 4, 1935, A. R. Clas to Henry Dickman, July 10, 1935, box 270, PHA Files, NA II; Michael W. Straus and Talbot Wegg, Housing Comes of Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), 64.

G. E. Fischer to B. M. Pettit (memo), May 28, 1935, Paul Pearson to Director of Housing (memo), Nov. 23, 1935, Minutes of the Evansville Advisory Committee, Dec. 11, 1935, A. R. Clas to the Administrator [Harold Ickes] (memo), Dec. 3, 1935, box 270, PHA Files, NA II; Evansville Press, Dec. 9, 16, 17, 1935. Hartig, like Rosencranz, was the son of one of the city’s pioneer businessmen, and he became president of the family enterprise, a plow company and foundry, after his father’s death. Like Dickman, he served as a long-time member of the City Plan Commission; Evansville Courier, May 20, 1925. Originally named to the advisory committee, Dickman had stepped down after the Housing Division appointed him as a district manager to oversee the Lincoln Gardens project.

A. R. Clas to the Administrator (memos), Oct. 24, Nov. 19, 1935, J. Alton Lauren to A. R. Clas, Dec. 27, 1935, box 271, Minutes of the Evansville Advisory Committee, Dec. 11, 1935, box 270, Henry Dickman to A. R. Clas, Jan. 16, 1936, box 272, PHA Files, NA II. In early 1935, a federal district court decision in Louisville—confirmed by an appellate court in July—held that the Housing Division could not use the power of eminent domain to obtain the property of recalcitrant owners. Land acquisition in Baptisttown took place after the court decisions, so it appears that the division’s staffers negotiated “willing seller” deals for all the necessary parcels and did not need to resort to condemnation proceedings that the courts might have voided; see Radford, Modern Housing for America, 103; Straus and Wegg, Housing Comes of Age, 85-90. Evansville Press, Dec. 2, 11, 16, 1935. The final tenant to move, a liquor store, relocated later in the spring of 1936.


“ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation with Mr. Henry M. Dickman…October 3, 1936,” box 270, PHA Files, NA II.


Paul Pearson to Director of Housing (memo), Jan. 8, 1937, box 270, PHA Files, NA II.

A. W. Hartig to Howard Gray, Jan. 6, 1937 (with attachment dated Jan. 7), Howard Gray to A. W. Hartig, Jan. 23, 1937, box 273, Howard Gray to the Administrator (memo), Jan. 21, 1937, box 270, PHA Files, NA II.
NEW DEAL PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE OHIO VALLEY

29 Howard Gray to the Administrator (memo), Mar. 29, 1937, Edward Thole to Howard Gray, Apr. 14, 1937, box 273, PHA Files, NA II. Gray's memo also recommended that the government terminate its contract with Lincoln Gardens Associated Architects, with payment made for work already completed. The architects accepted the settlement.


31 Evansville Press, Aug. 29, 1937; Evansville Courier, Aug. 29, Dec. 3, 9, 1937; Radford, Modern Housing for America, 184-91; A. W. Hartig to Nathan Strauss [Straus], Dec. 11, 1937, R. F. Voell to A. W. Hartig, Dec. 31, 1937, box 273, PHA Files, NA II. In an interesting sidelight, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited Evansville in November 1937 to give a lecture. During a tour of the city, which passed by the Lincoln Gardens site, she surprised her hosts by asking to inspect the buildings under construction. According to a contemporary account she asked Mayor Dress and Congressman Boehne “innumerable questions…relative to the type of materials used in the project, the capacity of the buildings, the rents to be charged, the price of fuel in this territory, etc.” Contrary to some subsequent claims, however, Mrs. Roosevelt did not participate in any sort of dedication ceremony for the project; Evansville Courier, Nov. 14, 1937.


33 Evansville Courier, May 27, 28, Nov. 27, 1938. By July the range of rents had expanded slightly, from $10.95 to $23.35; Evansville Press, July 10, 1938. King's comment reflected the reality that “despite the purpose of housing low income families, the laws under which the Housing Division operated required that projects be amortized, which in turn meant that rents had to be paid”; see Straus and Wegg, Housing Comes of Age, 160.

34 J. P. Prescott to Nathan Straus, June 2, 9, Aug. 9, 1938, Raymond King to Nathan Straus, Nov. 23, 1938, box 273, PHA Files, NA II; Evansville Courier, July 10, Aug. 7, Nov. 27, 1938, July 12, 1940; Evansville Argus, July 2, 16, Dec. 3, 1938. Unfortunately, no extant evidence reveals how many of the original tenants of Lincoln Gardens were former Baptisttown residents displaced in order to make the project possible.


37 Straus and Wegg, Housing Comes of Age, 51; Radford, Modern Housing for America, 105, 107.
Collection Essay

Hillbilly Comedy in Cincinnati

The Willie Thall Papers at the Cincinnati Museum Center

For those who watched or listened to Cincinnati’s WLW television or radio station in the late 1940s and 1950s, Willie Thall (1909-1980) became a well-known personality. His musical talent combined with comic wit earned him roles on popular shows, including Ruth Lyons’s Morning Matinee and 50/50 Club as well as the music variety show Midwestern Hayride, but General Store became the program most closely associated with Thall. On this show Thall and Bob Shreve entertained audiences with the mostly ad-libbed antics of two hillbillies. The Cincinnati Museum Center holds a collection of Willie Thall’s Papers along with a suit and briefcase that belonged to him, which his widow, Janice Thall, donated to the museum in 1990. The Willie Thall Papers include two years’ worth of script outlines for the General Store show, as well as other materials Thall used to prepare for various televisions shows, radio shows, and personal appearances.

Somewhat surprisingly, a man best known for his work with country music and hillbilly comedy was the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. Born George William Blumenthal, in Chicago, Thall came from a musical family. His mother was a classical vocalist, and his older brother a professional pianist. Thall studied voice, saxophone, and clarinet, and in the 1930s he performed with the Checkerboard Band on WLS Chicago’s Barn Dance. In 1944, he moved to Cincinnati to work for WLW Radio, where he became both a producer and performer. He played clarinet, bass fiddle, and sang in a group called the Buccaneers on the Boone County Jamboree. In 1945, when this program transitioned to television and was renamed Midwestern Hayride, Thall became its emcee. He continued in that role through 1957, including several summers when NBC broadcast the program nationally.

At the same time, Thall developed the General Store show, which began as a music program with Thall as the disc jockey, inserting comedy bits between songs. In the fall of 1949, Bob Shreve joined the program, and it transformed into the two-man comedy show that continued for many years. Set in a store that
also served as the fictional town of Broken Tooth’s post office, Thall’s character, “Willie,” and Shreve’s “Elmer,” conversed only by phone or through a window to the extensive cast of characters that populated the town, but never appeared on-screen. The script outlines found in the Willie Thall Papers show how they developed a general plot for each episode, and wrote portions of key dialogue, but left the details of their interactions to on-air improvisation. Many of the pre-written portions consisted of fictional newspaper articles typed on sheets of paper taped inside an actual newspaper, so that Willie or Elmer could read them during the program. The collection includes two newspapers used as props on the show whose headlines the duo altered to make them more relevant to the storyline. A contemporary description of the show found among Thall’s papers describes it as “riding the crest of rural America’s humor, which has always been with us and is, in fact, more popular today than ever before. This is small town America with all it’s [sic] charm, often hilarious, always warm and nostalgic, with a message for everyone from 8 to 80.”

In 1957, Thall left his WLW programs and went to work for WKRC television where he had the Bill Thall Show and Country Jamboree. Subsequent television work included humorous “Bargain City Kids” commercials for Rink’s Department Store. In addition to entertainment, Thall had a business association with Rink’s department store, worked in real estate, and ran an insurance agency.
An issue of the Coney Island Tribune, altered by Thall to fit the theme of his show.

CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER

Script for General Store.

CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER
In the 1970s, he became involved with a public broadcasting program, *On Aging*, and had a radio show on WSCH, Aurora, Indiana. The Willie Thall Papers also include much of the script material for this country music program. During the show, Thall presented background on the artists, humorous stories, trivia, and household hints. At the time of Thall’s death, *Enquirer* radio-TV editor Steve Hoffman said of him, “In his day, he was one of Cincinnati’s leading TV figures. He had a personality that became his trademark on camera. He wasn’t a handsome, dashing figure, but he was very well known and well liked.” Bob Braun, who worked with Thall at WLWT, noted, “I thought he and Bob Shreve were two of the best improvisational comedians ever. Their ‘General Store’ show was network quality. They would take any situation and do it. It was hilarious.”

The Willie Thall Papers provide information not only about how early television was produced, but also insight into mid-century attitudes about Appalachian life and country music. The nation-wide audience for shows like WLS Chicago’s *Barn Dance*, and WLW’s *Midwestern Hayride* revealed the popularity of country music. At the same time, however, the caricatures of bumbling hillbillies presented by Willie and Elmer on *General Store* amused audiences. In part, the show was so popular because of the likability of the two characters and the nostalgic environment of the fictional town of Broken Tooth. The Willie Thall Papers provide a useful resource to researchers looking into these issues and related questions.

Angela Shope Stiefbold
University of Cincinnati

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2 *Cincinnati Enquirer* May 4, 6, 1980.
Collection Essay

Civil War Images at The Filson

As a result of advances in photography and printing by the 1860s, the American Civil War was the first conflict with extensive visual documentation. Even with the many photographers and artists in the field covering life in camp, on the march, and the battlefield, huge gaps exist in the visual record of the war. Still, the photographers and artists of the era captured far more of war than had previously been possible. Whether from the relative comfort of their studios or in the field with the troops, photographers captured images of the war’s people and places. Artists, often traveling with the armies, sketched scenes of life in camp, on the march, and in battle. Prints of these works filled the pages of periodicals such as Harper’s Weekly and Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Weekly, serving as an important visual source of the war. Soldiers and sailors engaged in art to pass the time and document their experience. From the routine and whimsical to the bloody horrors of battle, their art remains a significant resource.

The Filson has been collecting and preserving photographs, prints, and artwork since its founding in 1884. In the one hundred thirty years since then, it has amassed a large and important collection of Civil War images. Some images date from The Filson’s founders who served in the conflict; others have been acquired more recently. Altogether, the collection provides a significant pictorial source for documenting soldiers and their families, for understanding the appearance of the countryside and towns in the 1860s, and for visualizing the battles and campaigns of the war. The images that follow represent only a small cross-section of the images in The Filson’s collection that document this tragic and most bloody of conflicts in American history.

James J. Holmberg
Curator of Special Collections

Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner (1823-1914), Confederate States Army. Photograph by Phillips & Krementz, Louisville. Photographers commonly copied the work of others, especially of popular figures such as generals of both armies. Phillips & Krementz likely did so here, because Buckner almost certainly did not visit Louisville in uniform during the war or in the immediate postwar years.

Louisa Hawkins Canby, wife of Major General E. R. S. Canby, taken in New Orleans, most likely while her husband served in the area, 1864-1866. Photograph by Anderson, New Orleans.
Destroyed bridge over the Tennessee River at Bridgeport, Alabama, 1864. Note the pontoon bridge under construction by Union troops. Photograph by Taylor & Seavey, “Photographers for the Army of the Tennessee.”

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Louisville photographer J. L. Elrod took this photo of ten Confederate prisoners of war imprisoned in the city. The length of prisoners’ “visits” to the town varied, most moving on to prisoner of war camps farther north.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Though not as common as photos of individuals, group photos, such as this undated image of officers from Ohio regiments, proved popular.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Corporal Robert Winn, 2nd Kentucky Cavalry, United States Army, sometimes illustrated his letters and envelopes. This drawing of an Episcopal church used by Union forces as a hospital graced a letter to his sister Martha Winn from Cartersville, Georgia, October 26, 1864.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Headquarters of Colonel (later General) Elliott W. Rice (1835-1887) of the Army of the Tennessee, Corinth, Mississippi, c. late 1862.

William Hegan of the 22nd Kentucky Infantry holds the national and regimental colors following the fall of Vicksburg in July 1863.

Sugar Bill, a body servant of General Elliott Rice, United States Army. Sugar Bill was likely a contraband who found work with Rice and his staff. Photograph by Taylor & Seavey.
Mary Zane of Louisville and John B. Castleman of Lexington photographed in Canada in 1865. A number of Kentuckians found refuge in Canada during the war.

Colonel Richard Whitaker, 6th Kentucky Infantry, United States Army. Photograph by J. W. Williams, Shelbyville, Kentucky, undated.

Coleman Pattie photographed by D. F. Brandon while prisoner at Camp Douglas, Illinois, outside Chicago. Pattie, captured during John Hunt Morgan’s 1863 Indiana and Ohio raid, served in the 8th Kentucky Cavalry, Confederate States Army.

Major General Don Carlos Buell, United States Army (1818-1898). Photograph by Webster & Brother, Louisville.
James Brown Clay (1817-1864) was the son of the great statesman Henry Clay. A southern sympathizer, he spent part of the war in Canada where he died.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Depictions of battles in *Harper’s Magazine* and *Frank Leslie’s Weekly* often drew on fact but artists in the field and engravers at the publishers also imagined events for dramatic effect. This depiction of the Battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky, January 1862, likely drew on both.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In the Civil War era, Americans enjoyed engravings of prominent military men and politicians, like this of Kentuckian John J. Crittenden (1787-1863), who served in both the state and federal government and led the failed compromise effort to avert civil war in 1860-61.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Book Reviews

The American National State and the Early West
William H. Bergmann

The nature of white expansion into the trans-Appalachian West during the early republic has long been a fertile field of study. Recent scholars have emphasized race, violence, family and gender relations, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors as determinants of Euro-American expansion. In pointing to broader cultural or social patterns, some scholars have deemphasized the fledgling and flailing early federal government as an agent of active state building in the Northwest Territory, Kentucky, and Tennessee. William H. Bergmann seeks to reorient the story. Rather than stressing “laissez-faire, liberalism, state ineptitude, or complacency” as social and political determinants of expansion, Bergmann emphasizes the role of the federal government in “cultivating partnerships with state governments and local businesses, thereby fostering a commercial economy” (2). According to Bergmann, the fact that most American citizens at the time viewed the early federal government as “invisible” in promoting expansion does not accurately measure the central state’s actual influence in the new nation. Indeed, expansion is better viewed as the result of commercial partnerships that threaded deliberate federal policies into the goals of local merchants, state and territorial officials, and farmers. In most cases, Bergmann finds that federal bureaucracies played an integral role in economic and intercultural developments during western settlement between 1775 and 1815.

Native and Euro-American economies lay at the center of Bergmann’s argument. He uses the concept of intercultural and internecine “property wars” in the 1770s and 1780s, much discussed by recent military historians, as a starting point. White settlers and Indians west of the Appalachians made land and livestock the targets of their expanding conflicts. Fort-based “garrison governments,” sent by the army into Kentucky and Ohio to enforce Indian treaty terms and police settler immigration, quickly came into conflict with anti-Indian local and state militias and eventually Native Americans. Because garrisons and armies needed food and
supplies, militarization led to “martial economies” that provided new markets for farmers and merchants on both sides of the permeable Canadian-American border. This worked against the interests of Shawnees, Miamis, Potawatomis, and other Indian groups, who responded by coalescing in large pan-ethnic communities like the Miami Villages and the Glaize from which they could form centralized confederacies to confront the initially weak federal military threat. But the communities also became vulnerable targets for subsequent federal missions, such as Anthony Wayne’s devastating 1794 foray into the Northwest Territory. Bergmann depicts all of these processes as regional in nature; yet federal bureaucracies remained at the center of most of them, influencing local goals and defining regional conflict and diplomacy.

The influx of the army, the growing importance of roads and other infrastructure, and increasing international cooperation within the region transformed boundaries in the late 1790s. The region proved less a Turnerian “borderland” than an arrangement of “bordered lands,” with a newly drawn national boundary between the Ohio country and Upper Canada, and a cultural boundary emerging from Native American treaties that divided white settlers and Indians. Emerging “webs” of Euro-American commerce crossed the porous national border and followed roads created for the federal post office. Fur-trading “factories,” outposts licensed by the federal government, systematized trading and reduced the importance of cultural brokers and old intercultural trading alliances. All of this helped establish federal authority in a region seemingly dominated by local economic concerns. Administrators and agents representing “factories, an Indian agency, the military, and territorial governments” used “the law, diplomacy, partnerships, and threat of violence” to convince Indians and whites that federal policies would determine the shape of expansion in the trans-Appalachian West (172-73).

Military forts, the new system of factories, improvements in transportation efficiency, and even small-scale industry and mining created matrices of commerce that consolidated local plans and further isolated Indian communities in the 1800s. Native spiritual and social leaders such as Main Poc, Tenskwatawa, and Tecumseh naturally sought as much autonomy as possible within the Indian treaties framed since 1795. When rebuffed, they turned to the familiar tactics of property war to assert their priorities, endangering the complex international and local economic partnerships that dominated the region by the War of 1812. As Tecumseh’s confederacy discovered unhappily, robust federal involvement in the region meant the deployment of harsh measures to protect commercial partnerships and defend federal primacy in defining the course of national expansion.

Well argued and researched, Bergmann’s study brings new perspectives to much-examined episodes. He shows clearly the complexity and multifaceted nature of Native American resistance and survival, which sometimes necessitated partnership with the expanding American state rather than rebellion. Locating the little seen but persistent hands of federal bureaucrats provides a convincing if somewhat disheartening view of a deliberate federally led expansion into Indian Country. Few scholars of early national Indian-white relations still believe that this process was as laissez-faire as Bergmann repeatedly suggests, but his argument remains convincing nonetheless. It could do for the study of early national cultural diplomacy what Thomas R. Hietala’s Manifest Design did for understanding the federal role in promoting nineteenth-century
Writing with the ease and confidence of an experienced historian, Mark Cheathem argues that Andrew Jackson is best understood as a southern gentleman whose identity resonated with millions of Americans (2-4). Eagerly seeking admission into the exclusive world of the southern gentry, Jackson embraced horse racing, land speculation, slave trading, gambling, Indian fighting, and dueling. As an antebellum southern gentleman, Jackson obeyed the strictures of patriarchy, masculinity, honor, loyalty, and kinship networks, utilizing the latter to great effect in his personal, professional, and political life. Cheathem holds that Jackson’s southern identity—replete with internal tensions and demonstrated most visibly in the pursuit of Manifest Destiny—inspired both admiration and consternation among Americans in the years before the Civil War.

Synthesizing a wealth of primary and older and current secondary sources, including numerous manuscript collections at The Filson Historical Society, Cheathem covers virtually every major controversy in Jackson’s times, including nullification, abolition, Indian Removal, the Bank War, the Margaret Eaton scandal, and Texas independence. The author begins with Jackson’s formative years in the Scots-Irish cultural milieu of the South Carolina backcountry. Cheathem argues that Jackson’s identity as a southerner grew out

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**Andrew Jackson, Southerner**
Mark R. Cheathem

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of this region’s links to the Atlantic economy (8). Readers also gain interesting insights into Jackson’s early adoption of classical republican theory and his behavior as a slave dealer, father, and ruthless military leader. A theoretically sophisticated chapter on patriarchy advances the author’s argument effectively while the chapter on the 1828 election proves entertaining.

Still, Cheathem leaves unanswered some questions and issues worth considering. For example, what specifically differentiated a western frontiersman from a southern gentleman and were these two identities mutually exclusive? Jackson’s political base clearly lay in the South, but his candidacy also attracted many northern small farmers, laborers, and artisans. The term “Democratic party” (135, 162) did not become standardized nationwide until 1834, with many newspapers in early 1832 using the term “Jackson Party.” In addition, the chapters on Indian Removal and the Bank War could have been stronger. Cheathem cites Robert Remini and Francis Paul Prucha—both generally sympathetic to Jackson—but he fails to note Mary Hershberger’s excellent article linking women reformers to Indian Removal. To use the words “emigration” and “displaced” (155, 159) interchangeably with “forced removal,” as Cheathem does, results in a more euphemistic discourse that understates the human tragedy of Indian removal. Other historians have viewed removal as genocide, imperialism, and white supremacy whereas Cheathem argues that Jackson saw removal as necessary to end a security threat to white southern society (159).

The House committee that investigated the Bank of the United States on allegations of corruption in early 1832 was not, as the author states, “controlled by Biddle’s backers,” but by the anti-BUS Representative Augustin Clayton of Georgia. And while the author demonstrates clearly that many southerners drifted from Jackson because of his heavy-handed maneuvers in the Bank War, the author misses the point that the BUS proved both popular and valuable in many parts of the South, which helps explain some southern defections from Jackson. Indeed, though it may seem counterintuitive, a few historians have posited that the BUS may have been more popular in the South than New England (167), where competing financial institutions thrived. Congressional votes do not tell the complete story. Many planters, merchants, factors, state bankers, and slave trading firms appreciated the BUS’s unique ability to provide a stable currency, equalize exchange rates between far-flung regions, extend low-interest loans, stimulate trade, and stabilize the prices of land, cotton, and slaves. Moreover, Cheathem’s contention that Jackson’s identification with the South “laid the foundation for the Civil War” (4) remains unconvincing.

The extent to which these issues detract from an otherwise impressive work will, for most readers, be minimal, and a scholar cannot have expertise on every subject, particularly with a larger-than-life figure like Jackson who in his long public career played a role in so many pivotal issues. Certainly, Cheathem has accomplished an impressive feat in condensing such a vast amount of research into a concise, two-hundred-page book; in contrast, most recent biographies of Jackson have proved daunting in length. The author affirms the historical consensus that places slavery and “southern interests” at the heart of nullification without sacrificing nuance. The fact that Jackson could be both brutal to his slaves and beloved by them, while at the same time helping entrench slave interests in the South, speaks to the complexity that Cheathem finds in Jackson’s southern identity.

Stephen Campbell
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Just before his premature death from tuberculosis in a Maryland prison hospital in 1846, activist Charles Torrey admitted to freeing nearly four hundred slaves. Who was Torrey and why, despite the publication of shelves of antislavery histories since the 1960s, did it take until 2013 for someone to write a modern biography of the man? In *The Martyrdom of Abolitionist Charles Torrey*, psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey investigates the life of his distant relation, an often-overlooked abolitionist and slave rescuer, and contends that historians must reexamine Charles Torrey. *Martyrdom* considers Torrey’s battles against prejudice and for abolition. The book ably reveals Torrey’s humanity, and his strengths and weaknesses during his eleven-year activist career. In the first eight chapters the author lays out Torrey’s context and actions; he then explores their implications as well as his contested place in history. The book begins in 1839 with the split within the radical antislavery movement when Torrey embraced political abolition, the anti-Garrisonian faction. Subsequent chapters loop back to Torrey’s Massachusetts childhood, the roots of his religious and antislavery convictions, and then trace Torrey’s central role in the founding of the Liberty Party. He quickly moved from political abolitionism to attacking slavery directly and aiding fugitive slaves.

In the early 1840s, Torrey and Thomas Smallwood, a free African American man, moved back and forth between Washington D.C. and the North, running slaves to freedom quite publicly. Torrey innovated in collaborating with African Americans to create systematic, large-scale slave rescues, with particular emphasis on congressmen’s slaves. Torrey became notorious among slaveholders and the authorities for encouraging slaves to leave and steal assets as they escaped. The authorities issued warrants for the activists’ arrest, but Torrey and his allies nonetheless carried on, even printing the names of the slaves they assisted in newspapers. The Maryland authorities finally caught up with Torrey and arrested him in June 1844. The activist’s lifelong struggle with tuberculosis resumed while he was in jail. He also faced a difficult defense as numerous witnesses testified about his well-documented actions. The court found him guilty and sentenced him to six years in prison. Torrey’s friends unsuccessfully tried...
to obtain a pardon, but his notoriety rendered this impossible and he died in prison at the age of thirty-two. In the wake of his death, Torrey’s legacy as an abolitionist martyr seemed secure, with throngs of abolitionists across the North honoring the man. The author also sees his influence in subsequent activists’ direct action against slavery.

The book makes for an enjoyable read, especially for non-experts, but its contributions and Torrey’s significance remain unclear. First, while lucidly written and interesting, this narrative history lacks a clear statement of its argument. As a result, the book often lacks focus and offers excessive detail about antislavery history without establishing the information’s relevance. For example, the author discusses William Lloyd Garrison, his views, and the mutual dislike between Garrison and Torrey, but this information remains inexplicable until chapter ten when the author argues that this animosity explains Torrey’s descent into relative obscurity. Here Martyrdom offers an intriguing historiographical insight: historians have overlooked Torrey because the Garrisonians wrote many of the earliest histories of the period. Most of Torrey’s allies and admirers died shortly after he did, and many of those who survived, like Gerrit Smith, feared publicizing their illegal activities even after the fact. The author makes a persuasive case about why historians overlooked Torrey’s importance, including his glaring absence from Garrisonian William Still’s 1871 The Underground Railroad. The biography would have benefited from more such original analysis about Torrey and his milieu.

Second, while chapter ten reveals the significance of the author’s arguments, his claims for Torrey’s importance echo those of historian Stanley Harrold. The author credits Harrold’s “initial research on Torrey” (xiii) for having inspired the book, but that underestimates the earlier historian’s contribution. As far back as 1993, Harrold noted the significance of Torrey’s activism, as well as his prominence in “aggressive abolitionism” (see, for example, Harrold, “John Brown’s Forerunners: Slave Rescue Attempts and the Abolitionists, 1841-51,” Radical History Review 55 [Winter 1993], 89-110). While this biography offers careful attention to the details of Torrey’s life, the author leaves unclear how his work enhances public understanding or scholarship. Nevertheless, Fuller Torrey weaves together well-selected primary and secondary sources to highlight a man willing to break the law and even court death for his convictions.

Dana Elizabeth Weiner
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Making Freedom
The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery
R. J. M. Blackett

Few historical subjects stir the popular imagination like the Underground Railroad. This interest has yielded countless interpretive sites, books, websites, and public programs that celebrate the exceptional heroism of the fugitives who successfully escaped slavery and settled in the North. In Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and Politics of Slavery, based upon the annual Brose Lectures given at the George and Ann Richards Civil War Center at Penn State University, R. J. M. Blackett goes beyond the stories about local sites and extraordinary
individuals to explore its operations in the border states after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. In the process, Blackett shows how broadly the UGRR involved communities at points of origin in the South and destinations in the North, reveals the tactics of newly emboldened slaveholders, and establishes the significance of these conflicts to the broader push for emancipation.

Blackett initiates his discussion of the ways that slaves communicated with the outside world by presenting a letter written by a fugitive Henry Banks to his owner. After escaping from Front Royal in the Shenadoah Valley in April 1853, Banks wrote letters to his owner to let him know of his whereabouts first in New York City and then on route to California. Designed to taunt his owner and divert slave catchers from finding his eventual destination in Canada, Banks’s letters were indeed unusual. Yet fugitives commonly used their literary skills to determine routes, forge freedom papers, and communicate to loved ones left behind. Slaves also routinely covered a lot of ground visiting between plantations and neighboring towns, a movement that owners could not contain. As a result, news traveled among slaves with an alacrity that alarmed owners. Gossip thereby helped slaves plot a course for escape that included a keen awareness of international abolitionism and opportunities provided by places with ambiguous jurisdiction such as the high seas.

Blackett explores enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law in southeastern Pennsylvania, a contested terrain that stretched from Harrisburg in the west to Philadelphia in the east and included several well-established free black communities. After September 1850, this region became a hotbed for slave owners and policemen interested in catching slaves. Richard McAllister, appointed as commissioner to adjudicate all cases involving fugitive slaves in the Harrisburg area, considered the free black population a menace and zealously enforced the new law. From his first day on the job, he allowed slaveholders to claim black people as their property without proof, ignored the alleged fugitives’ lawyers, and organized posses to protect them within the state of Pennsylvania. Just as routinely, the black community maintained a presence outside his court, raised money for legal representation, and mobbed the city jail where alleged fugitives awaited their return to the South. The attention brought to McAllister’s sense of justice ultimately led to his political demise in April 1853. A mobilized black community also played a role in thwarting the designs of the numerous kidnappers throughout the region, particularly following the

kidnapping of Elizabeth and Rachel Parker of Nottingham. This community successfully petitioned Maryland courts to secure their freedom.

Blackett brings the reader back to the border South, as he explores the effectiveness of those who helped fugitive slaves: outsiders including northern abolitionists and former slaves, slaves who remained in slavery, and southern free blacks. Blackett opens this chapter by identifying those involved in the unsuccessful escape attempt by Aleck, an enslaved sheet metal worker from Tennessee who tried to ship himself to Cincinnati. Aleck was discovered after his box broke in Seymour, Indiana. The involvement of a free black man, an enslaved man, and an unnamed white man suggested a level of organization that befuddled and frightened slaveholders. Even though the courts and police thwarted most escapes, slaveholders never understood why their slaves left, who abetted them, or their methods of escape. They just knew that slaves escaped at an alarming rate. In this way, the numerous actions supporting fugitives—most undocumented—contributed to the ultimate breakdown of the slave system.

This slender volume packs a powerful punch. R. J. M. Blackett selects compelling stories that convey the deep and extensive networks essential to the operation of the Underground Railroad, its corrosive effect on the slave system, and role in the ultimate demise of slavery. His nuanced portrayal of the Underground Railroad should inform popular interpretations, which generally portray fugitives as exceptional instead of reflections of the vibrant communities that supported them.

Mary Beth Corrigan
Independent Scholar

Knights of the Golden Circle
Secret Empire, Southern Secession, Civil War
David C. Keehn

David C. Keehn's *Knights of the Golden Circle* contributes to historians' understanding of proslavery politics in the American South and the drive toward secession in 1860-1861. By effectively mining southern newspapers and other primary sources, Keehn demonstrates that the Knights of the Golden Circle (or KGC), a secret organization that many historians heretofore have dismissed as the product of overheated imaginations, played a significant role in mobilizing proslavery southerners to action against the perceived threat from Republican election victories.

Keehn describes the career of the founder of the KGC, George W. L. Bickley, a fast-talking Virginia-born self-promoter who passed as a physician, medical educator, novelist, newspaperman, and historian. Conceiving of the organization in the 1850s as an oath-bound secret society intent on expanding the South's slave economy and culture to Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean through filibustering expeditions, Bickley sold thousands of southern men on the idea of military invasions of such benighted countries, recruiting many prominent southern allies along the way. While a secret society, employing oaths and rituals akin to those of other fraternal groups such as the Freemasons and Oddfellows, the KGC had a public presence in southern cities and towns...
as followers gathered to confer, organize, and launch their invasions. Bickley lost control of his creation in the spring of 1860 as state leaders of the organization—fellow believers in spreading the South’s slave society into new territories—elbowed him out of authority. Nonetheless, the founder retained a figurehead role and publicly extolled the motives and plans of the KGC in an effort to drum up support for filibustering.

Keehn shows the successes of these state leaders in assuming control of the organization and using it to advance militant secessionism. Also, throughout his narrative, he effectively follows a thread depicting Maryland-born actor John Wilkes Booth as a KGC member who, driven by his proslavery, pro-secession, pro-Confederate views, eventually conspired to capture but later to murder President Lincoln.

The bulk of Keehn’s study focuses on the KGC’s part in driving a militant pro-secession stance in southern legislatures and other arenas after the election of Lincoln. Leaders rapidly organized membership to support secessionism, forming the nucleus of armed groups that seized U.S. government military facilities and munitions. The KGC proved especially successful in Texas, where the group boasted an extensive and strong membership. Once the war began, it also attempted (unsuccessfully) to bring Kentucky into the rebel fold. When the southern states seceded, the KGC played a significant role in recruiting Confederate government armed forces with which to resist federal efforts to coerce reunion. As members joined the rebel army, Keehn argues, the weakened KGC faded in its influence over secessionist affairs.

While his useful depiction of KGC activism in the South during the secession crisis forms the center of his study, Keehn’s conclusion that the organization had little presence and impact north of the Ohio River is problematic. While noting that founder Bickley advocated recruiting the KGC in free northern states, he follows historian Frank L. Klement’s erroneous argument that the KGC had a negligible presence in the North. Military authorities arrested Bickley in southern Indiana in July 1863, and Keehn adds that his presence in Indiana was “likely related” to the invasion of Confederate guerrilla commander John Hunt Morgan, but
he dismisses reports of the KGC’s existence, confessions of KGC membership, and other evidence of its activities in northern states. He ignores statements made by government spies and secret society members alike that the organization morphed into successor secret societies such as the Order of American Knights and the Sons of Liberty that plotted violence to aid the Confederate cause. Keehn’s study is weakened as well by his frequent resort to words such as “likely,” “presumably,” and “undoubtedly,” which suggest that the author possesses less than rock-solid evidence. Still, secret criminal organizations are elusive animals and typically fail to leave extensive archival paper trails. Keehn should be commended for finding so much evidence about the KGC’s activities, in the process revealing how formidable the organization was in the South.

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**Storytelling, History, and the Postmodern South**
Jason Phillips, ed.

The nine essays within this volume are linked, according to editor Jason Phillips, by their challenges to “master narratives,” what Phillips deems “stories masquerading as knowledge or truth that promote the interests of white patriarchy past and present” (2). With topics spanning two hundred years and ranging from the 1792 attempted poisoning of Virginia Baptist minister James Ireland to an analysis of white trash autobiographies from authors Harry Crews and Dorothy Allison, it seems logical to connect the varied approaches with such a broad term. Phillips provides a carefully crafted introduction, without which one might find the connective theme rather elusive. He begins the introduction with an episode representative of the volume’s goals: during “The Uses of History in Fiction,” a panel discussion at the 1968 Southern Historical Association conference, Ralph Ellison deemed those present (including William Styron, Robert Penn Warren, C. Vann Woodward, and other notable figures in the field) to be “respectable liars.” Fiction writers had, Ellison argued, done far more than historians in terms of undermining...
the lingering myths and master narratives that privileged white perspective in the perception—both scholarly and otherwise—of southern history and culture. Just as this episode encapsulates the interdisciplinary dialogue at least partly responsible for the historiographical shift away from privileging white, patriarchal narratives over other voices in the historical record, so this collection serves as a representative sample of the continued advantages of such interdisciplinary, inter-textual dialogue. According to Phillips, the scholars featured in this collection (six historians and three literary scholars) seek to dispel binaries as they “cross boundaries, question dichotomies, and experiment with the form, not merely the content of scholarship” (3).

The approaches to southern history and literature within this volume vary as widely as their subject matter. Some, like Farrell O’Gorman’s “Rewriting American Borders: The Southern Gothic, Religion, and U.S. Historical Narrative,” employ careful intertextual analysis (in this case, selected novels are examined as a means of demonstrating changing perceptions of the exotic, foreign “other” as it appears in contrast to notions of southern identity in historical and literary narratives) to challenge established literary and historical traditions. Others, like Orville Vernon Burton and Ian Binnington’s “‘And Bid Him Bear a Patriot’s Part’: National and Local Perspectives on Confederate Nationalism,” use a very narrow period of time (in this case, two years) in an individual’s life to understand better the complexities of a particular historical moment.

Phillips suggests this diverse collection be considered in two groups: the first four essays examine what he describes as “the liminal zone between literature and history, the place where master narratives have been constructed and contested for centuries” (5). Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s “Will Percy and Lanterns on the Levee Revisited” provides a fitting introduction to this section (and to the collection as a whole) as it seamlessly connects disciplines in an examination of the complex relationship between individual identity, literary conventions, and the residual pressures of white southern culture. In this regard, the essay—perhaps the epitome of what can be accomplished through interdisciplinary approaches—could just as easily have appeared in the second section. The latter five essays, Phillips writes, address “how southern writers and scholars orient themselves and identify others as southern insiders or outsiders to establish authority and address mastery” (6). Wyatt-Brown’s analysis (which readers familiar with his lengthy work, The House of Percy, will find familiar), though certainly representative of the intersection of literature and history, also probes the often permeable boundary between insider and outsider status in southern society.

Readers seeking overt deconstruction of white master narratives may find themselves initially dismayed: of the nine essays, only one (Jim Downs’s “Her Life, My Past: Rosina Downs and the Proliferation of Racial Categories after the American Civil War”) focuses on a non-white subject, and only one essay, David A. Davis’s “Abjection and White Trash Autobiography,” discusses marginalized classes of white society. These essays certainly question master narratives privileging the white upper classes, but readers new to the field may leave with a skewed view of how such narratives have been historically undermined. What this collection features, then, could be described as an internal dismantling of master narratives—a deconstruction from within. Because the myth of a homogenous white South has been among the most tenacious in southern culture, the white-centered focus of the essays seems appropriate. Phillips suggests the volume contributes to a
recent trend in scholarship, a trend he describes as “a willingness to see and explore southern worlds that exceed simple binaries of race, religion, gender, geography, and class” (7). Readers will find no simple binaries in this collection, and they will find overwhelmingly plausible challenges to some of the South’s most pervasive master narratives.

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Black Freedom, White Resistance, and Red Menace
Civil Rights and Anti-Communism on the Jim Crow South
Yasuhiro Katagiri

In recent years, historians have examined the complex relationship between the Cold War and the American civil rights movement in greater detail. This literature focuses in part on how the United States government coped with the hypocrisy of espousing freedom and democracy abroad while dealing with embarrassing civil rights issues at home, particularly in the South. In some instances, such embarrassment prompted government officials to support civil rights progress for the sake of Cold War advancement. Conversely, anti-Communist politicians often attempted to capitalize on the Cold War political climate by linking civil rights advocacy to Communism. Yasuhiro Katagiri’s Black Freedom, White Resistance, and Red Menace: Civil Rights and Anti-Communism in the Jim Crow South builds on the narrative of southern politicians’ ruthless campaign to link civil rights and Communism by focusing on the role of prominent northern collaborators who assisted southern red-baiting efforts.

Though McCarthyism fell out of favor nationally by the mid-1950s, it continued to thrive in the South, where civil rights activists targeted longstanding Jim Crow laws. Without the national anti-Communist platform so prevalent earlier in the decade, southern states constructed “littleHUACs” to combat burgeoning civil rights activity. Much of Katagiri’s narrative detail is well-known to those familiar with the field; his work distinguishes itself in the emphasis on contributions from J. B. Matthews and Myers Lowman, ardent anti-Communist power brokers who served as “northern messiahs in the white South’s segregationist enterprises” by orchestrating comprehensive red-baiting efforts.
campaigns (92). Lowman was a Cincinnati-based activist and executive secretary of an anti-Communist group known as the Circuit Riders. Matthews, a reformed leftist, built vast anti-Communist networks from his Manhattan penthouse headquarters and famously once implied that “ten-year-old actress Shirley Temple had been duped into unwittingly working for the Communist interests” (42). Together, they worked with southern state governments to orchestrate vicious McCarthy-style investigations in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Katagiri’s work, beautifully written and expertly researched, divides some chapters by state, outlining campaigns in Louisiana, Georgia, Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, and Mississippi. While state officials did not red-bait monolithically across the South, the common thread was a relentless effort to discredit civil rights organizations in the interest of preserving segregation, usually through state-run anti-Communist groups. Such campaigns frequently involved Lowman and Matthews; the latter used his “encyclopedic knowledge of the American Left” when testifying as an expert before multiple statewide anti-Communist committees (164). Louisiana politicians set the tone with anti-NAACP measures and an investigation into Louisiana State University employees, including the former director of the press that published Katagiri’s book. Arkansas officials turned to “strident cries of Communist conspiracy” after appeals to states rights’ rhetoric fell flat in the famed Little Rock desegregation crisis (125). Mississippi, described by the author as “the white South’s most promising citadel of racial segregation and discrimination,” used state-approved organizations to smear progressives and censor textbooks that favored integration (185). Even Georgia, a state with a relatively moderate reputation on civil rights, had high-ranking state officials publishing anti-Communist tracts and supporting the maintenance of traditional southern race relations with widespread political support. In profiling each state, Katagiri blends established historical scholarship with primary sources, including the personal papers of Lowman, Matthews, and other noteworthy anti-Communists to demonstrate the willingness of southern politicians to tap into the patriotic rhetoric of the Cold War era. The materials illuminate the cost exacted from relentless, sustained witchhunts in the South. For example, southern anti-Communists were so intent on depicting Grace Lorch as a Communist sympathizer after she enrolled her child at an African American elementary school and helped members of the Little Rock Nine that they continued to persecute and spy on her even when she and her husband returned to their native Canada.

Eventually, however, Lowman and Matthews’s credibility waned, as did the committees and commissions in the South that had sought their expertise. When Matthews died in 1966, it also “spelled the end of Myers Lowman’s anti-Communist enterprise” (242). Katagiri chronicles the decline of these state agencies, all of which fell victim to “the tide of the South’s civil rights revolution” (252). Ultimately, he concludes, Lowman and Matthews’s misguided, ill-fated anti-Communist crusades “turned a blind eye to the long-standing promise of democracy for every American citizen” (259). Black Freedom, White Resistance, and Red Menace is a valuable addition to the historiography, demonstrating the extent of northern influence on southern red-baiting and thus asserting that although the South stood as the last bastion in America for anti-Communist tactics, some of its most important contributions were not homegrown.

Samuel M. Abramson
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The People’s Princess Comes to the Queen City
Don’t miss the FINAL stop of this world-renowned exhibition

More than fifteen years after her death, Princess Diana’s memory still stirs interest and emotion. The award-winning exhibition Diana: A Celebration, which chronicles the life of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, will be open at Cincinnati Museum Center through August 17. This will be the final showing of the renowned exhibition before the items return to her sons in England to be preserved for future generations.

The exhibition presents the life and humanitarian work of Princess Diana through nine galleries containing one hundred fifty objects ranging from her royal wedding gown and twenty eight of her designer dresses to family heirlooms, personal mementos, paintings, and rare home videos and photos. The items help to showcase the legacy of one of the most remarkable women of her time. Her charm, beauty, and grace touched people worldwide and will do so once again during the exhibition’s visit to Cincinnati.

The final stop of the world-renowned exhibition, Diana: A Celebration, runs through August 17, 2014 at Cincinnati Museum Center. For more information visit cincymuseum.org or call (513) 287-7000.

Daughters of the Queen City inspires a new breed of princess
Materials from Cincinnati Museum Center collections form interactive gallery

Just as Diana, Princess of Wales, continues to inspire people around the globe, Cincinnati Museum Center hopes to inspire people locally with the companion gallery, Daughters of the Queen City. Items from Cincinnati Museum Center’s historic collections illustrate a sampling of philanthropic efforts by Cincinnati women from the 1850s to the 1960s.

The gallery features the wedding gowns of Josephine Lytle Foster, Olivia Procter Benedict, Helen Pogue Fisk, Louise Dieterle Nippert, and Carol Ann Homan Haile, as well as images and information about Virginia Coffey, Anna Sinton Taft, Patricia Corbett, and Maria Longworth Nichols Storer.

Daughters of the Queen City will be open through August 17 at Cincinnati Museum Center. For more information visit cincymuseum.org or call (513) 287-7000.
Exhibit documents a century in the life of the Queen City
*Treasures in Black and White: Historic Photographs of Cincinnati*

A century’s worth of black and white photos from Cincinnati Museum Center’s collections will provide a window into the Queen City between 1860 and 1960. Through still images of Cincinnati’s people, commerce, transportation, infrastructure, and religious, cultural, and educational institutions, *Treasures in Black and White* documents the remarkable story of Cincinnati over a century of change and progress.

*Treasures in Black and White* is an opportunity to revisit the neighborhoods, architecture, and people of Cincinnati from the outbreak of the Civil War to the 1960s. This visual history of a city provides a snapshot of the nation as it grew through five wars, economic depression, and great prosperity. The images will inspire, provide perspective, and evoke insight into former generations of Cincinnatians.

This fascinating and nostalgic exhibit utilizing historical artifacts and video in addition to more than sixty photographs runs through October 12, 2014 at Cincinnati Museum Center. For more information visit cincymuseum.org or call (513) 287-7000.

Online exhibit features history and use of World War I propaganda posters
*World War I Propaganda Posters: Art That Shaped History*

In an age before commercial radio and television, posters served as an important method of communicating with and influencing a mass audience. Entering World War I in 1917 after nations in Europe had been fighting for three years, the United States needed to mobilize men and resources quickly. Just as countries in Europe on both sides of the conflict utilized posters to shape public opinion, the United States took similar steps.

*World War I Propaganda Posters: Art That Shaped History* is an online exhibition featuring fifteen posters pulled from Cincinnati Museum Center collections that demonstrate the variety of approaches used during World War I. Some posters galvanized public opinion by depicting the enemy as brutal, sadistic, and
inhumane while also emphasizing the strength and morality of one's own side. Other posters depict American soldiers in heroic poses and scenes to encourage men to enlist or others to buy liberty bonds. Visit the exhibit online at: cincymuseum.org/exhibits/world-war-I-propaganda-posters.

Be immersed in history this summer
Cincinnati Museum Center hosts Civil War Day and 1940s Weekend

Cincinnati Museum Center holds its third annual Civil War Day on Saturday, June 14, commemorating the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of Cincinnati’s Great Western Sanitary Fair. Recreate the Fair and get an up-close look at Civil War style during the Ladies Living Historical Society fashion show, listen to Raison D’Etre sing Civil War era music before watching a performance of Soldier, Come Home. Join us for lectures led by members of the Cincinnati Civil War Round Table and a viewing of The Siege of Cincinnati, a documentary by local filmmaker Paige E. Malott.

You can also travel back to the 1940s on August 9 and 10 during 1940s Weekend at Cincinnati Museum Center. Listen to big band music and dance along during the fifth annual Cincy Lindy Exchange featuring over one hundred twenty dancers from more than ten states dancing the Lindy. See a collection of classic cars and a series of films from the 1940s as well as educational activities and historical displays, and all within the greatest icon from the 1940s, Cincinnati’s Union Terminal.

For more information on Civil War Day and 1940s Weekend visit cincymuseum.org or call (513) 287-7001.
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