The Rise and Fall of the Tuscaloosa Bards: A Case Study of the Culture Shift in the Nineteenth-Century South

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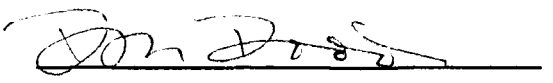

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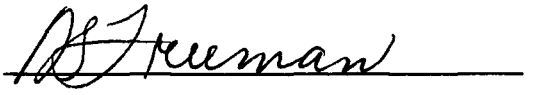

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Introduction

The nineteenth-century South has been analyzed by sociologists, fiction writers, historians, and countless others beyond the boundaries of comparison and perhaps reason. The region has been characterized on the fullest scale of perspectives including extremes about Southerners ranging from ignorant and violent to gentle and hospitable.

Alexander Beaufort Meek in Romantic Passages in Southwestern History, a publication of the mid-nineteenth century, gives one side of the debate regarding the South's character:

> We are everywhere represented to be lawless, violent, irritable, haughty, vain, unsocial, quick of entrance in a quarrel, reckless in life, heedless of the obligations of religion. (156)

While many accounts boasting the virtues of the South exist, one painted by T. S. Stribling in the 1938 novel The Forge magnifies the contrasting perspective in particularly descriptive form:

> The North is concerned mainly with gaining a livelihood; the South is trying to mold something out of life itself. We try to make it beautiful and courteous; we try to live gracefully; we try to talk well . . . Because good conversation requires leisure, politeness, impersonality, uncommerciality and acute observation. (83)

While Stribling's image is tailored to the planter

aristocracy of the Old South, it is typical of the romanticized beliefs many Southerners held near and dear.

The virtues and vices indigenous to the South have been argued by experts encompassing both scholars and "good ole boys." Little disagreement surfaces from either camp, however, regarding the reality of at least two Souths--one before the Civil War and a very different one after the War. General consensus also prevails in the theory that to understand the South one must be familiar not only with the War itself but also with its causes and effects. It is widely believed that reactions to that traumatic period still linger. The transformation of Southern states, Southern cities, and of all sectors of the Southern population is characterized by dramatic shifts in politics, economics, education, philosophy, literature, and in cultural values.

One of the significant stories from the period leading up to the War and immediately following is that of the Tuscaloosa Bards. Theirs is a tale that has not been fully told or studied. The story is one of a group of young men drawn together by a love of literature and an idealized life forged in the classical tradition. But the entire story is much broader. It is a reflection of the antebellum and post-war South in a cultural transition that impacted the lives of everyone. A collective and individual look at the Bards provides insight into the literature, politics, and social attitudes of the South in

general and of Alabama in particular. The Tuscaloosa Bards as both agents and victims of change represent a microcosm of a cultural reality in the South that still haunts the region. The success and failure played out in the Bards' story is a product of the political struggle between the actual and the ideal as well as the philosophical conflict between aestheticism and utilitarianism. The struggle in question has much to do with the "mind of the South"--a particular perception put in clearer focus by the cultural conditions present in the lives and careers of the Tuscaloosa Bards.

Few men in the nineteenth-century South preached and practiced the doctrine of aestheticism, a theory emphasizing beauty and the fine arts as a basic element in life. The Bards were conspicuous among those few, and their work set them apart from a generally rugged agrarian population in Alabama. The unique qualities uniting the young men from Tuscaloosa got caught up in the current of change and caused a shift from success and productivity to political decline and artistic obscurity in the South. The early achievement and ultimate isolation of the Bards provide a case study of what happens when an ideology which has influenced creative endeavor for three decades confronts a changed society in a different cultural environment. For the Bards, being a manifestation of an idealized world in the antebellum South proved an effective formula for leadership and success, yet the same qualities

appeared very out of place and irrelevant to a region devastated by four years of war. Alexander Beaufort Meek, one of the most prominent Bards, sensed the inconsistencies between his ideals and the coming realities of the South as early as 1841 in an essay entitled "Jack-Cadeism and the Fine Arts." Speaking to the voids in literature and aesthetic concerns in the South, Meek offers these poetic lines:

> Like the sounding of a bell in a vast wilderness, we have heard the faint chimes of a scattered few who would awaken us to an elevated devotion. They have been the neglected prophets and apostles of an impractical creed [aestheticism]. (159)

Meeks' words, published in Romantic Passages in Southwestern History, call attention to the minority position shared by his fellow Bards. His perspectives also symbolize their life stories and foreshadow the attitude that would eventually relegate the Bards to a lost breed of men in the South.

Insight can be gained regarding the cultural complexity of the State and the South by examining the Bards' rise and fall in Alabama. Observations highlighting the South's cultural deficiencies are difficult to contest given the historical evidence and supporting scholarship on the subject. A more balanced perspective is achieved, however, if a broader context for analysis is used. A reexamination of romanticized biographies, unchallenged

history, cultural generalities, and regional bias is necessary if the multiple realities of both Alabama and Southern culture are to be accurately explored. In attempting better to understand contrasting cultural philosophies and conditions leading to change in the South, one can learn much from the story of the Tuscaloosa Bards.

Part I

The Tuscaloosa Bards:

Literary and Political Impact on Antebellum Alabama

Chapter One

Overview of the Bards and Alabama's Cultural Environment

The era preceding the Civil War was a robust period of development in Alabama described by frontier judge and humorist Joseph Baldwin as "flush times." In four decades of uninterrupted growth, settlers poured into Alabama and Mississippi from Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, and, to a lesser extent, Virginia. The prospects of new land and opportunity abounded. A society of transplants grew in the Alabama wilderness adapting life styles, politics, forms of recreation, and an agricultural economy into a rich frontier culture. Men who were academically educated, articulate in speech, literate and refined in social manner stood out as conspicuous exceptions to the general population. Benjamin Buford Williams, in the introduction of A Literary History of Alabama: The Nineteenth Century, points out:

> . . . energies of the people were directed toward 'material affairs.' The material affairs that absorbed the energies and interests of the early settlers were the establishing of home sites, the carving of farms out of the forests and the coming to terms with the Indians. (13)

More specifically addressing the unlikelihood that a group of literary men might come together at the same time and place, Arthur P. Hudson in Humor of the Old Deep South

provides a generally shared perspective:

> Everything was against the formation of literary schools, even against the normal transmission of literary influences, especially of the personal variety; everything was for rugged individualism in whatever art there was, as well as in life and thought. (14)

Thus, it was an uninviting environment that came to accommodate the Tuscaloosa Bards, a group of bright, multi-talented avocational writers whom fate brought together in West Alabama in the 1830s.

Tuscaloosa became the state capital of Alabama in 1826. The town, situated at the navigational head of the Black Warrior River and the upper regions of the Tombigbee River, boasted a population of slightly over 2,000 white residents in 1831. That year the first university in the State of Alabama opened its door to the initial class of students. The small town was experiencing a relative boom due to an influx of settlers to the Black Belt, the burgeoning of the state's new capital, and the establishment of the University of Alabama. One of the results of this confluence of diverse individuals was pointed out by Thomas McAdory Owen in his History of Alabama when he proclaimed this site was "the center of intellectual activity and furnished the nucleus of a literary coterie . . ." (888). A unique group of personalities assembled in the form of professors,

students, journalists, attorneys, legislators, and clergymen and comprised what could, in retrospect, be acknowledged as a cultural cornerstone in nineteenth-century Alabama history. The name coined by William Russell Smith to classify this collection of literary men was the Tuscaloosa Bards. Their fame ultimately spread to politics, oratory, and educational enhancement.

Williams calls particular attention to this phenomenon when he states:

> Smith, Clemens, and Meek, thrown together by fate at the outset of their careers, along with their brilliant and gifted young English instructor at the University, Henry Washington Hilliard (1808-1892), were to become dominant forces in both the political and literary arenas of antebellum Alabama. (21)

The cultural development of Alabama was significantly impacted by the Tuscaloosa Bards, and the primary members of this group, which Williams refers to as an "informal literary school" (21), evolved to bridge politics, literature, and oratory in a manner unsurpassed in the nineteenth-century South.

William Russell Smith first introduced the term Tuscaloosa Bards in his Reminiscences of a Long Life as a means of labeling some of the literary notables of the Tuscaloosa town and gown community. While Smith credited

only a few men with his "Bard" designation, literary scholars and historians have since used his term to encompass an expansive group of writers in Tuscaloosa during the 1830s. Williams acknowledges: "Writers of some merit among the students at the university, other than Smith and Meek, were George O. Shortridge (1813-1870) and John Gorman Barr (1823-1858)" (24). Williams suggests that in addition to Hilliard, "The most representative of the group on the University of Alabama faculty was Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard (1809-1889)" (24). Outside of the university community numerous professionals became associated with and contributors to the emerging literary center. Among those generally included in the bard classification are Benjamin F. Porter, Thomas Maxwell, Bachus W. Huntington, Alexander Robinson, and Albert A. Muller. Smith even added the "Sable Bard" to his listing of talented poets in the Tuscaloosa community. He introduced the Black poet, Adam the Rhymer, as "the great literary ornament of New Town [Black section of Tuscaloosa]" (178).

Clearly the most accomplished Bards and those who shaped the group's lasting reputation in historical retrospect were Alexander B. Meek, Frederick A. P. Barnard, Henry W. Hilliard, and William R. Smith. Any lasting literary accomplishment of the other "Bards," were it not for the attention and tribute paid by Smith, would most likely have gone unnoticed. Their impact comes through a

collective body of work reflecting a literary texture of the period and the culture of the old Southwest.

The term Tuscaloosa Bards may have been an after-the-fact fabrication in Smith's reminiscences, but there is evidence that a regular coming together of these men with literary interests did take place. William J. Chute, in Damn Yankee!: The First Career of Frederick A. P. Barnard, draws a picture from Barnard's memoirs: "To escape the loneliness of bachelorhood, and perhaps himself, he [Barnard] spent as many evenings as he could manage following the muses with his literary friends Smith, Meek, and R. H. Eaton" (94). In Smith's Reminiscences the author remembers the first literary society, Erosophic, being organized. Smith claims: "It was founded by Alexander B. Meek, George Shortridge, Burwell Boykin, John D. Bracy, William R. Smith and others" (247). There is considerable evidence that confirms the Erosophic Society remained a group with literary interests and met on a regular basis for many years.

The Bards were an unusual group of men, prolific in literary work at a time and place where writing was a novelty in Alabama frontier life. The favorite genres of the group centered on poetry with a classical orientation and works of regional humor. They were clearly following in the footsteps of English Romanticism. Albert A. Muller, the Episcopal rector in town, wrote "Sunset in Rome" which became a much admired favorite of the Bards. The opening

lines are:

> A day hath pass'd in Rome, and round her spires
> The farewell sun hath lit a thousand fires;
> Vanquished her strength, the blazing god of day
> Sinks from his throne, and hides each quiv'ring ray.
> He smiles no more on earth, yet round his shrine
> Gleam the last beauties of his bright decline,
> While round each crimsoned cloud, in triumph play
> The transient flashes of expiring day. (qtd in Smith 1:163)

Bachus Huntington was recognized as the humorist in the group and received favorable attention for his "Bacon and Greens." A sample stanza from the poem is:

> I have lived long enough to be rarely mistaken,
> And borne my full share of life's changeable scenes,
> But my woes have been solaced by good greens and bacon
> And my joys have been doubled by bacon and greens.
> (qtd in Smith 1:272)

Other examples of work included Hilliard's "The Isles of Greece," Smith's "The Rose of Monteflora," and Barnard's "Pettiboneville, Poetry and Posterity." In addition to poetry and humorous stories, public addresses and orations also appeared in printed form. Williams observes that "among those whose speeches were later put into print were Alva Woods, Benjamin F. Porter, Henry W. Hilliard, A. B. Meek, Bachus Huntington, Caroline Lee Hentz, F. A. P. Barnard, and John Newland Moffett" (24).

Meek's literary monthly, the Southron, published in 1839 proved to be an important vehicle for getting many of the Bards' works presented to a broader audience. In an autobiographical sketch from Meek's personal papers and manuscripts as editor of the publication Meek says, "This magazine, though the ablest of its class ever issued in the South-West, had like all similar enterprises in that section but a brief existence" (4). In his autobiographical profile, Meek also speaks of his personal editing role, telling of "furnishing most of the articles himself, though he was ably assisted by Professor F. A. P. Barnard, Hon. William R. Smith, Hon. H. W. Hilliard and others" (4). The quality of works selected by Meek for print was uneven, but the breakthrough the publication represented for both writers and readers was considerable. The Tuscaloosa experience, relative to the "coterie" of writers, lasted less than a decade but it was a springboard in what Williams calls "Alabama's literary beginnings." Smith's pioneering work, College Musing: or Twigs from Pronassus, done in 1833, is generally credited by literary historians as the first belletristic work written and published in Alabama. The poetry and essays showcased in the Southron helped earn Tuscaloosa the title of "literary capital" to accompany its status as the state's political capital in the 1830s. The dual interests in the two capitals foreshadowed the rise to prominence of the multi-talented Bards that emanated from Tuscaloosa.

In large measure the importance of the Tuscaloosa years for the Bards would be realized more profoundly in the decades that followed. The Tuscaloosa environment, with its focus on politics, scholarship, and creativity, proved to be fertile ground for the germination of lofty ideals and the seeds of public service. Tuscaloosa was a rare cultural oasis in the Southwest, and its significance has not gone unnoticed. Jay B. Hubbell in The South in American Literature 1607-1900 places Tuscaloosa's quality of life in context:

> The best culture of the Southwest was to be found on the larger plantations in the Black Belt and in such cultural centers as Mobile, Tuscaloosa, Nashville, Natchez, and New Orleans. Here at least there was no lack of educated men, of books, and of general intelligence. (621)

The enthusiasm for public office, patriotism, classical idealism, and cultural refinement was heightened for those who had roots in the "Tuscaloosa school" of literature and political thought. Tuscaloosa's evolution as a cultural center and its population's production of a collection of bards are hard to logically explain. The uniqueness of the Tuscaloosa Bards is accentuated by an examination of the social context from which they emerged to positions of political and cultural leadership.

Sutton Scott, in his book The Mobilians: or Tales About the South, a nineteenth-century look at Alabama's

cultural environment and literature, utilizes real and fictional characters to provide commentary about literary conditions in the South. Judge Crofton, Scott's protagonist, states:

> There are not many Alabama books . . . Few people in the South,--hardly one in Alabama--have made literature, or rather the writing of books a business. And they have not done so, because the people of the South have here to fore cared more for eminence in statesmanship than for eminence in general literature--more for speech making than book making; . . . The few Alabama authors whom I have known wrote merely for pasttime--wrote in fact when they had nothing else to do. (108-09)

These words are not atypical of the prevailing notions regarding literature in the nineteenth-century South. Clement Eaton in A History of the Southern Confederacy observes that: "Prior to the war the literary profession, with exception of journalism, had not been highly regarded by the plantation society" (211). Eaton relates the Southern author William Gilmore Simms "repeatedly complaining of the low esteem in which writers were held" (211). As these examples illustrate, the South was not recognized for the value it placed on literature or the quality of the limited work that was produced. With regards to the southwestern frontier and Alabama, the acceptance of serious literature being written was

practically nonexistent. The preoccupation with survival on the rough frontier, the lack of urban centers and public education, and the cultural isolation were but a few of the characteristics that did not advance the cause of literature in Alabama's early development. These factors render the literary accomplishments and interests in Tuscaloosa in the 1830s as both curious and significant. The socio-political conditions that led to the emergence of the Tuscaloosa Bards is unique in the annals of southwestern frontier history.

Numerous members of the Tuscaloosa Bards had distinguished careers over extended years in a turbulent period of Alabama's history. F. A. P. Barnard, after leaving Tuscaloosa, became president of the University of Mississippi and later president of Columbia University in New York. George Shortridge had a notable political career that peaked in his unsuccessful canvass for Governor in 1855 under the Know Nothing or American Party. Although his loss virtually ended his political future, Shortridge was a central figure in Alabama politics in the period between 1840 and 1860. John Gorman Barr, whose life ended abruptly at age 34, was clearly a rising star among the notable men of Alabama. Stanley Hoole makes note in "John Gorman Barr: Forgotten Alabama Humorist" that Barr "was a printer, scholar, editor, lawyer, college professor, soldier, district attorney, orator, politician, author, and ambassador" (84). His death occurred on the voyage to

assume the U.S. consul post in Melborne, Australia. Jeremiah Clemens, a student in Tuscaloosa during the early 1830s, became a major political figure in pre-war years in Alabama. There is no evidence that links Clemens to the literary activity of the Bards while in Tuscaloosa, but later in his life he did write four novels of some consequence: Mustang Gray, Bernard Lile, The Rivals, and Tobias Wilson. While Clemens might be considered on the outside of meeting W. R. Smith's criteria as a member of the Tuscaloosa Bards, he nevertheless is an outstanding example of a man of literary and political talents with Tuscaloosa roots. The passion of convictions he demonstrated in the Alabama Legislature and in Congress gained Clemens a lasting place in the political history of Alabama.

Of all the luminaries sharing Tuscaloosa roots, three of the Bards stand out as renaissance men in antebellum Alabama. The writer, scholar, statesman, orator phenomenon, as linked to the Tuscaloosa Bards, is best reflected in the pre-Civil War careers of Henry W. Hilliard, Alexander B. Meek, and William R. Smith. All three men were present at the opening of the University of Alabama in 1831, Hilliard as a professor and Meek and Smith as students. A profile of these men helps to give shape and texture to the legacy of the Bards. Their lives and works had an impact on literature, politics, oratory, education, journalism, law, and on the molding of Alabama's

character in its early years. While subjective conclusions can be drawn about their artistic talents and the lasting value of their cultural contributions, there is no argument as to the Bards' wide-spread influence in antebellum Alabama.

Arguably, Hilliard, the leader of the Whig Party in antebellum Alabama, was the most prominent of the Bards in terms of political achievement and stature. J. Mills Thorington, in Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860, reveals "Only nine Whigs were elected to Congress [in Alabama] during the entire antebellum period, and only one of these men--Henry W. Hilliard--served more than two terms" (6). Hilliard served three terms in Congress and was appointed to two ambassadorships. As an orator on state and national issues, he was rivaled only by Yancey in Alabama, and clearly Hilliard was among the most highly regarded public speakers in the South expounding on topics ranging from states' rights to the virtues of Methodism to eulogies for great national statesmen of the day. In comparison to Meek and Smith, however, he was a lesser literary figure in terms of both quality and quantity of work.

Of the triumverate Meek made the greatest commitment to advocating culture and was able to compile a large body of literary work while staying busy holding public offices and serving as a keynote speaker statewide. Louis Rubin in The History of Southern Literature notes that: "In Red

Eagle Meek contributed something that few other nineteenth-century Southern poets accomplished--the completion of a reasonably successful long narrative poem" (123). Meek served in many public positions but never really blossomed as a politician.

Smith was the most balanced of the three in terms of achievement in both politics and literature. He displayed signs of genius during his multi-faceted career that saw him serving as mayor, judge, state legislator, and a member of both the United States and Confederate Congresses while continually generating prose and nonfiction work.

Hilliard, Meek, and Smith successfully put their literary talents, oratorical skills, classical scholarship, and statesmanship together in a manner that epitomized the cultured Southern gentleman. Their examples produced a manifestation of the great Southern ideal in the southwestern frontier struggling for respect and a voice in national affairs. The union of the literary arts and politics is embodied in a philosophy Meek presented through "Americanism in Literature" in his Romantic Passages in Southwestern History. Meek contends that: "Democracy is the parent of literature . . . The cause of literature cannot be stopped. It is the cause of civilization, virtue, religion and human progress" (113-114). The oratory and expressed political styles of these men were grounded by classical literature and romanticized rhetoric. Their patriotism was reflected in literature as

well as in public service. All three produced literature that was inspired by the intense political climate of the day. A closer look at the Bards' major figures reveals lifestyles, contributions, and patterns of thinking that are unique to the antebellum Southern culture. Through biographical sketches and analysis of the Bards' work, one can establish a necessary context for the points being emphasized. It should be noted, however, that more comprehensive biographical information should be examined to obtain a full understanding of the lives of Hilliard, Meek, Smith, Barnard, and the other Tuscaloosa Bards.

Chapter Two

Henry Washington Hilliard: Antebellum Years

Henry Washington Hilliard, like many new residents of Alabama, came from the Carolinas. He was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1808. The Hilliards moved to Columbia, South Carolina when Henry was a young boy, and it was there he received a formal education. Hilliard graduated from South Carolina College in 1826 and moved to Athens, Georgia, where he was admitted to the bar in 1829. In December 1831, Henry Hilliard came to the University of Alabama to become that institution's first professor of literature. William R. Smith provides colorful description of Hilliard in these early years:

> As a teacher, Professor Hilliard was ever at his post. He seemed to take infinite delight in this occupation. . . . He often invited pupils, one or more at a time, to his office and would voluntarily enter upon some interesting topic connected with the mind, especially in the line of oratory. He was a charming reader and seemed to seek opportunities to show off this excellence. (215)

It is worth considering that in 1831 Hilliard was only 23 years old, not that much older than his students, but as Smith would recount later, he was "a man to stand before the king" (264). A list of Hilliard's students reads like

a segment of the honor roll of great men in Alabama history. Among these were John A. Elmore, Clement C. Clay, Alexander Meek, Burwell Boykin, George Shortridge, Walter Crenshaw, and William R. Smith. Hilliard, a voice for Romanticism in teaching and literature, was obviously a strong inspiration to his young students.

Hearing a call to the public spotlight, Hilliard resigned his post at the university in 1834. His rise to prominence in political circles was rapid. As a member of the Whig Party he was elected to the state legislature in 1838, appointed in 1842 by President John Tyler to the post of charge d'affaires to Belgium, and in 1845 he was elected to the U. S. House of Representatives where he served three terms. It is generally agreed that Hilliard was not only one of the most prominent members of the Whig Party in Alabama but also one of the most highly respected of that party in the South. Smith confirms, "In Alabama he [Hilliard] was the acknowledged head and front of the Whig Party" (219). It was in this posture that Hilliard became entangled with William Lowndes Yancey, the "fire-eating" Democrat from Montgomery, in a series of famous debates over unionism and states' rights. Smith describes the powerful styles of the two most celebrated orators from Alabama this way:

> In all that was soft and smooth and easy, graceful and persuasive, Mr. Hilliard was unquestionably

> the better; in all that was fierce, stormy, vituperative, denunciatory, impetuous, and scornful Mr. Yancey excelled. Mr. Hilliard had the advantage in the extent of having a more sweeping range of literary accomplishments . . . while Mr. Yancey had a better knowledge of men, was a more perfect master of the passions . . . . (223)

James Golden, in his essay on "The Southern Unionists" in Oratory of the Old South, states: "Houston, Foote, and Hilliard were the most colorful and eloquent Unionists in the Lower South" (264). In addition to Hilliard's political oratory, he was an ordained Methodist minister and was as proficient behind the pulpit as he was on the stump. This affiliation with the church undoubtedly provided him with added credibility and a degree of reverence from his audience.

Hilliard, a novelty from the backwoods of Alabama, established a national reputation for his statesmanship, oratorical skills, and cultural refinement. In 1846 he became a Congressional regent of the newly formed Smithsonian Institution and maintained an ongoing relationship with it throughout his life. Over the years, Hilliard was asked to participate in many eulogies for prominent men. Some of the most notable eulogies were delivered for Charles Carroll, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and Presidents Harrison and Tyler. Hilliard was a favorite

with northern audiences and, before a crowd of 30,000 at the Cooper Institute in New York, Golden summarized his performance as "crisp, oral, vivid and moving" (271). Golden, in describing the Alabamian's style, suggests, "the source of Hilliard's power to arouse the emotions of his listeners was his ability to relate pathetic stories, describe battle scenes, and to employ moving literary and historical allusions" (271). Clearly, Hilliard's literary, political, and oratorical styles were cut from the same mold. From the years at the University of Alabama, his writings, oratorical style, and philosophy evolved, predictably, as the result of his strong liberal arts education and vast knowledge of nineteenth-century English poetry and classical literature. An example of his broad education and romantic tendencies is in his 1865 novel DeVane. "Byron makes nine appearances . . . Coleridge five, Scott four, Wordsworth four, Moore three, Shelley three, Tennyson two, Leigh Hunt one and Mrs. Browning one," according to Rhoda Ellison's count in Early Alabama Publications (142). Hilliard's years of public service seemed to be an exercise in reflecting elevated theories that mirror the great men of Greek history or the famous nineteenth-century English poets who themselves emphasized "long ago and far away places."

Hilliard was a devout Unionist and fought secession as if it were a plague that would ruin his state and region. After the secession of Alabama became a reality, Hilliard

described his feeling to the New York World on January 17, 1861, when he said:

> Now our sun is to go down at noon . . . while the national capitol is yet surrounded by the dome . . . The sky that overreaches us is lurid with ominous fires . . . All was lost on that fatal day.

Hilliard reluctantly rallied behind the cause, offering his services to Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Congress. His first effort on behalf of the Confederacy was, at the request of Davis, a mission to Nashville to urge the Tennessee Legislature to join the secession movement. Evans Johnson, in "Henry W. Hilliard and the Civil War Years," cites then widely circulating newspaper accounts:

> After speaking for more than an hour before a very receptive audience, Hilliard sat down amid thunderous applause . . . On Hilliard's return to Montgomery, President Davis said 'Mr. Hilliard, you have transcended my expectations.' (108)

In 1862 Hilliard was commissioned a colonel in the Confederate Army and through his popularity raised a legion of 3,000 men. He personally served a limited term of active duty but his legion gained fame in engagements under Kirby Smith's division of Bragg's army. Upon resigning from the military at the age of 54, Hilliard resumed his ministerial affiliation with the Methodist church. This decision took him to Augusta, Georgia, and out of the

mainstream of political and military affairs. Hilliard never reestablished the political power, popularity, or prominence he enjoyed in the antebellum years in Alabama. His peak of glory in the limelight had come and gone.

Hilliard brought much needed recognition and credit to the frontier state of Alabama. His opposition and challenge to Yancey on the issue of secession produced some of the most dramatic political confrontations in the South. The oratory of both men undoubtedly influenced the minds of not only Alabamians but political leaders and the general public throughout the country. Due in part to Hilliard's sophistication and national reputation, he helped elevate Alabama's status from a rough backwoods territory to a state that had a legitimate presence in the affairs of the Old South. Hilliard's literary legacy is concentrated primarily in the three books he authored: Politics and Pen Pictures (1887), his memoirs of public service from 1840 to 1880; Addresses and Speeches (1855), a collection of notable speeches on issues of his time; and DeVane. A Story of Plebeians and Patricians (1865), a novel that is semi-autobiographical and what Ellison calls "a defense of Methodism" (185).

Hilliard's writings and literary efforts are more of a reflection of his advanced education, infatuation with English poetry, and mastery of classical history than his creative talent. While his literary endeavors such as "An Evening in Athens" and the novel DeVane: A Story of

Plebeians and Patricians are notable for the times, they do not represent a high point in Hilliard's legacy. The publication in 1855 of his Addresses and Speeches does provide valuable, Whig-oriented perspectives of significant national issues. Clearly Hilliard's talent and impact, accentuated by his eloquent oratory, are missing in the written form of expression. His speeches were a combination of style and substance, with a delivery for the most part more engaging than the text. Politics and Pen Pictures, Hilliard's memoirs, was historically significant because of positions he held, people he knew, and the critical times in which he lived. From the standpoint of nonfiction writing, the narrative contains little colorful description, provides almost no candor by the author, and reflects omissions that are curious. The value of Hilliard's writings must be weighed in context with his other talents and interests. W. R. Smith's point that, "Mr. Hilliard, whose high ambition expected and demanded applause" (217) helps explain Hilliard's emphasis on politics and public speaking over the solitary exercise of writing.

Chapter Three

Alexander Beaufort Meek: Antebellum Years

Alexander Beaufort Meek mirrors Hilliard's classical orientation and diversity of talent, but reflects a contrast in both creative style and interest. While Meek never attained the national stature in the political arena of either Hilliard or Smith, he enjoyed a consensus of popularity within the state that few in his era could surpass. In the mind of Arthur Hudson, Meek was "perhaps the most distinguished of the Tuscaloosa Bards who flourished in the thirties" (167). Meek, relative to spheres of activity and topics for public discourse, was the most persistent of the Bards in promoting literature and the arts in general in Alabama. Meek's popularity constantly thrust him into opportunities for politics even though clearly his first love was literature. From his "Personal Diary" of March 1838, Meek conveys a strong curiosity to know whether he could win in politics. Margaret Figh, in her article "Alexander Beaufort Meek, Pioneer Man of Letters," contends: "Meek put politics second in importance to literature, theoretically, but actually could not resist the lure of having some part in making his state's laws" (132). It is ironic that in Meek's autobiographical sketch of only six pages, left as part of his manuscripts, he stated: "But it was chiefly as a politician that Judge Meek was known to the people of his

state" (4). A study of Meek's political life, however, reveals a lack of assertiveness and confrontational spirit regarding the major questions facing his state and nation. His role in the affairs of the state come across as being philosophical, abstract, and more the mediator, as opposed to an activist or one on the front lines of controversy.

A. B. Meek was born in South Carolina. In 1819 when Meek was five years of age his family moved to Tuscaloosa at the time Alabama was celebrating statehood. While a boy, he attended local schools and began a lifelong friendship with schoolmate William Russell Smith. After a brief period at the University of Georgia, in 1831 Meek registered in the first class at the University of Alabama. Smith, in Reminiscences of a Long Life, relates: "he [Meek] was entered as one of the most advanced in the first class" (315). Meek was at the center of literary activity both at the University and in the community. Smith confirms that Meek "had acquired a considerable village reputation as a poet even before he entered the University" (315).

Upon graduation from the University in 1833, Meek pursued law and received admission to the Alabama bar in 1835. His interest during the time never excluded writing, and from 1835 to 1836 he became the editor of the Flag of the Union, Tuscaloosa's Jacksonian newspaper. Meek's newspaper work was suspended when, in 1836, he volunteered to serve in the Seminole War and saw limited action in

Florida. Upon Meek's return from Florida, Governor Clay appointed him to the post of attorney general. The appointment was due in part to Meek's editorial support during Clay's canvass for governor. The new endeavor was short lived and Meek again turned to his interest in literature. In 1839 Meek began the publication of the Southron. The literary monthly, while lasting only six issues, succeeded in attracting an impressive group of writers, whom Williams lists as "William Gilmore Simms, August Baldwin Longstreet, Richard Henry Wilde, William Russell Smith, F. A. P. Barnard, Henry W. Hilliard, Albert A. Muller, Joseph Holt Ingraham, Caroline Lee Hentz and Henry Tutwiler" (43). The contributing writers, constituting a combination of local talent with authors of regional stature, made the Southron a significant publication in the literary history of Alabama. Meek's five personal entries in the Southron stood as evidence not only of his level of serious literary endeavor but of the diverse character of his work.

In spite of Meek's focus on writing, ongoing ventures into politics occupied much of his time. During his prime years in public service, Meek held positions including justice of the peace, assistant secretary for the U. S. Treasury, federal attorney, state legislator, and Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives. In an analysis of Meek's political loyalties, Figh points out: "He loved the Union intensely, but dearer to him was his natural

affection for the South, whose cause he did not hesitate to espouse" (134). Meek's allegiance to the Union and the South were evident in his orientation to politics and literature. His poems such as "Come to the South," "Bird of the South," and "The Day of Freedom" are testaments to Meek's romanticism and idealistic love for his homeland. These lines from "The Day of Freedom" published in Meek's Songs and Poems of the South illustrate the point:

> Land of the South! - imperial land! -
> Then here's a health to thee, -
> Long as thy mountain barriers stand,
> May'st thou be blest and free! -
> May dark dissension's banner ne'er
> Wave o'er thy fertile loam, -
> But should it come, there's one will die,
> To save his native home. (245)

Meek's Songs and Poems of the South, Romantic Passages in Southwestern History, and Red Eagle, his epic poem about William Weatherford, the famous Creek war chief, all reflect his sentimentality, knowledge of history, and positive attitude about Alabama and the Union.

One highlight of Meek's public service was his contribution to the cause of public education in Alabama. Herman Clarence Nixon, Willis Brewer, Margaret Figh, William Garrett, and other writers of Alabama history call attention to his groundbreaking work in the cause of public education. Garrett, in Reminiscences of Public Men in

Alabama, recognizes Meek's role as Chairman of the Legislative Committee on Education and cites its work to "establish and maintain a system of free public schools" (711). Garrett praises the bill as being "exceedingly able" and proclaims of Meek's work: "This production of Judge Meek, so credible to his intellect and his heart . . . will amply compensate the intelligent reader" (711). On a broader level, Figh credits Meek's impact in the education field: "Always he was writing and speaking of the educational needs of Alabama, thus paving the way for constructive work in the field later" (131). Still further reinforcement of Meek's advocacy of education, Herman Clarence Nixon, in Alexander Beaufort Meek. Poet, Orator, Journalist, Historian, Statesman, professed: "He had spoken and written more on the matters of general culture than any other . . . " (15).

Meek received his share of praise as a statesman and a writer, but as Benjamin Williams reminds us, "During his lifetime in many areas of Alabama, Meek was known almost exclusively as a speaker" (41). A. B. Moore in his History of Alabama concurs and adds: "Some of his contemporaries believed him superior in oratory to both William Lowndes Yancey and Henry W. Hilliard" (493). One important distinction that Williams makes in respect to Meek's oratory is that he "never used his oratorical gifts to debate the great issues of the day with those titans of the hustings" (41). Meek was a unionist, a Southerner, a

gentleman, and a scholar; but, unlike Hilliard and Smith, he avoided becoming a lightning rod for the emotion and controversy sweeping over the state in the decades preceding the Civil War.

Meek's skill as a poet and a writer of history is open to criticism, as Williams, Figh, and Nixon recognized. His political impact was not as dominant as that of many of his contemporaries of lesser talent. Meek's oratory, while refined and eloquent, was not of national consequence in the vein of Hilliard or Yancey. But with these considerations in perspective, Meek's accomplishments like all of the Bards have to be evaluated in the context of his time and environment. As B. F. Riley in Makers and Romance of Alabama History states, "for versatility, brilliancy and general usefulness, few Alabamians have surpassed Judge Alexander B. Meek" (115). Meek died at the age of 51 in Columbus, Mississippi, but not before he had carved out a significant cultural legacy for Alabama's future generations. For example, in his essays "Americanism in Literature" and "Jack-Cadeism on the Fine Arts" which articulated a progressive relationship between politics and literature, he promoted a quality of life in Alabama in a way that no one else approached. It was best that Meek did not have to suffer through the austerity of the creative spirit associated with the post-war period.

Chapter Four

William Russell Smith: Antebellum Years

An examination of the life and genius of William Russell Smith produces the placement of "The Judge," as he was often called, among the most unusual and gifted personalities in Alabama's history. His pioneering efforts and general contributions to the state's literary development are numerous. Benjamin Williams makes an important distinction about Smith:

> Alabama has produced many authors whose writings surpass those of William Russell Smith in literary merit but there is not a writer among them who has as secure a claim as Smith to the title of "Father of Alabama Literature." (28)

Another statement which establishes Smith's political and literary stature is offered by Thomas McAdory Owen in the Library of Southern Literature:

> In versatility of genius, varied and successful achievement, often in the face of apparently insurmountable obstacles, and in a broad and untrammeled grasp of public affairs, William Russell Smith takes easy rank among the first of distinguished Alabamians. (4985)

Of all the Tuscaloosa Bards, Smith reached a balance of attainment that was unequaled. His fields of endeavor included journalism, writing, the law, and politics. In

all areas there is agreement that he left a lasting mark of achievement.

William Russell Smith was born in Kentucky in 1815. After the death of his father, the family moved first to Huntsville and then to Tuscaloosa. In 1823 Smith's mother died, leaving him an orphan to be raised by the Potts family. Several years of unpleasantness ended with Smith in the care of General George W. Crabb. Crabb took Smith under his wing and advanced him the money to further his education. Bolstered by schooling in Tuscaloosa from Dr. Reuben Searcy and Reverend Nathaniel H. Harris, in 1831 at the age of sixteen Smith entered the University of Alabama. His talents quickly became apparent and he was stimulated by the university environment. During the period, Smith published College Musing: or Twigs from Parnassus which Williams concedes is "the first belletristic contribution to Alabama literature" (29). In 1834, prior to graduation, Smith went into law practice with General Crabb. After being admitted to the bar, he set up a law practice in Greensboro, Alabama. The unrest related to the removal of the Creek Indians from Alabama and later the War for Texas's Independence where Smith's brother was killed lured the young lawyer into the military. Smith was in Mobile in 1836 heading west when he learned Texas had won its independence and the fighting was over. He decided to stay in Mobile and while there began the first literary periodical in Alabama, known as the

Bachelor's Button. During his year in Mobile, Smith also wrote the state's first play, Aaron Burr: Emperor of Mexico. Smith returned to Tuscaloosa in 1837 and began editing the Monitor, a local Whig newspaper. Albeit briefly, he also continued Bachelor's Button. At the age of 24, Smith was elected Mayor of Tuscaloosa.

William Russell Smith, still in his twenties, had established himself as both a political and literary force in the state. A summary of Smith's public service is highlighted by a term in the state legislature, three terms in the U. S. House of Representatives, participation as a delegate in the Alabama Secession Convention, a race for governor, and a brief tenure as president of the University of Alabama. During his political career, Smith, like Hilliard, gained a reputation for changing parties. At no time during his diverse political life was his pen totally idle. In fact, Smith used political issues and events as inspiration for much of his writing. Examples of Smith's dual interests and talents are many.

As a freshman Congressman, Smith, clearly in a minority, spoke out strongly in opposition to the United States visit of exiled Hungarian Louis Kossuth. Kossuth had been a celebrated Hungarian patriot and a leader of the Hungarian insurrection of 1848-49. After Kossuth's background as dictator and motives to regain power through U. S. support became apparent, Smith instantly came into the national spotlight for his insight and courage to speak

out in the face of overwhelming popular opinion. Relative to the incident, Williams states: "For his anomalous stand, Smith gained national recognition in the press and was dubbed the Kossuth Killer" (32). As was his common practice, Smith composed a poem shaped by this sequence of events entitled "Kossuth Coppered, or The Banquet at The Capitol of Laputa."

Another example of Smith's tendency toward translating his political experiences into a literary format is reflected in his poem "Hard Cider." This work, fifty-six pages in length, is an account of the Whig supporters of the Harrison-Tyler ticket at the Nashville Convention in 1840. Smith was a relatively young delegate and new to the national political scene. His descriptions in prose convey the enthusiasm and electricity of the occasion. The following lines from "Hard Cider" illustrate Smith's style in 1840:

I heard a gentle maiden say,
I'm tired of taking toll to day
Who ever saw the like before.
See yonder comes a hundred more. (qtd in Powell 583)

The most dramatic instance of Smith's ability and inclination to combine public affairs with literary performance was precipitated by his presence as a delegate to Alabama's secession convention in January 1861. Smith was active in his opposition to secession during the convention and was one of the few who did not ultimately

sign the secession ordinance. An amazing by-product of Smith's participation in the convention was a narrative documentary of the proceedings. Within two months of the convention, The History and Debates of the Convention of the People of Alabama was published. Virtually every scholar of Alabama history recognizes the unparalleled significance of the work. The fact that Smith had the presence of mind at the monumental event to capture the action, packed with emotion, turmoil, and dramatic speeches, is an incredible accomplishment. The time frame within which the work was completed and the overall quality of the narrative is a testament to Smith's rare talents. The following lines illustrate the detail, color, and historical worth of Smith's account of the convention (Smith quoting Robert Jemison):

> The gentleman from Montgomery [Mr. Yancey] has made the remark of myself [Jemison] and my colleague [Mr. Smith] the text, or rather the pretext, or reading for the benefit of ourselves and the minority of this Convention a long and very racy and pointed commentary on the law of Treason. He tells us that the political nomenclature of "'76" will be revived; that parties will be known and distinguished as of yore by the names of Whig and Tory; that in times past the friends of the country were known as Whigs and its enemies as Tories. He tells us further that

> though the Ordinance of Secession may pass by the majority of a single vote, that those who shall not submit to it are guilty of the crime of treason, and must be treated as traitors . . . Will the gentleman go into these sections and hang all who are opposed to Secession? . . . Is this the spirit of Southern chivalry? Are these the first fruits of the Southern Republic? (70-72)

Once the dye was cast, Smith accepted the fate of his home state and transferred his allegiances to the newly formed Confederacy. Smith served in the Confederate Congress for the duration of the war. Following his pattern of reacting to affairs of the state in verse, Smith wrote a satiric poem in 1863 aimed at Lincoln called "The Royal Ape." The work ultimately was not a source of pride for Smith or his family and, according to Brewer's 1896 tribute, a publication for which "he did not wish to invite publicity" (15).

A culmination of Smith's contributions to Alabama is embodied in Reminiscences of a Long Life, published in 1889. Williams credits the work as, "unquestionably the most valuable single contribution that Smith made to Alabama's literature" (37). In the work Smith does not write directly about himself but rather his friends, the early days in Tuscaloosa, and various literary works of the Tuscaloosa Bards. Contrary to memoirs by some of his contemporaries, such as Hilliard, the work is not stiff or

superficial. Reminiscences is full of revealing character profiles, personal observations, and color of the times. In the reflective work Smith chooses to reprint his poem "The Uses of Solitude," first published in 1860 perhaps to provide for posterity a revealing glimpse into the author's personality and philosophy about life. Through the final stanzas Smith also compares the lives of two "fond friends." While the claim has not been historically made without undue speculation, the thoughtful reader can conclude the two characters are Smith and A. B. Meek. His descriptions of both men are significant. Of the first (himself) Smith says:

> The one, dark-browed, to Solitude inclined,
> Stern and repelling all frivolities,
> Much given to quiet brooding with eyes raised,
> Whether in reverence to the Diety
> Or an upreaching merely to the clouds
> For golden thoughts and images that plume
> The wings of Fancy in her early flights,
> He knew not--none could penetrate his mind--
> That realm of inclinations, hopes and fears.
> He took no time to question, but his thoughts
> Ran into adamantive resolutions
> To make himself a center and a star,
> To which the eyes of men in after days,
> Through the long telescope of centuries,
> Should gaze at with increased wonderment. (370)

Of the second friend (Meek) Smith's profile reads:

> The other, open browed, with eyes of fire
> Quick blazing at the touch of cheerfulness;
> Gentle as Summer; wayward as the sky
> That curtains April in her hoyden couch;
> First in the ring of pleasure; in the race
> Of frolic foremost ever; apt of wit;
> Rapid and smooth-tongued, even eloquent;
> Well fashioned and of shape majestical,
> For all the graceful actions that persuade,
> In him assumed such attitudes as prompt
> Earnest responses and enthusiasm.
> This was his fatal gift. Ah! hapless youth,
> To whom applause is born and not achieved--
> He deems mankind his vassals, and demands
> Spontaneous adulation as his due. (370-371)

Smith concludes his tale of the two friends:

> Hence the whole story of his life [Meek] made up
> That worthless eulogy: "He left great signs
> Of Genius"--but he labored not and died.
> The world was busy with his memory,
> As servants are discussing meteors,
> That with excessive light fire their own temples,
> And perish in the self-created flame.
> That other [Smith] whom we saw amid his books -
> Companioned with the demi-gods of old -
> Remote and patient, plodded slow his way,

And seemed to take but little note of time.
Shunning for Learning's sake a life of pleasure, . . .
So that men wondered if he was insane.
Yet his career was upward, to the hill . . .
He patient delved the golden mine of learning. (374)

These lines tell of how Smith approached his work over the years and explains in part his temperament to realize great achievements.

In "Solitude" Smith foreshadows the coming of the Civil War and the conflicts between loyalty, emotions, and logic:

The great men of the earth are disciplined
In Solitude to grapple with the time,
The battle-moment - the emergency -
For life is but a battle, and the odds
Will ever be upon the side of skill. (366)

His words were never again so profound and his literary skills were never more evident than in "The Uses of Solitude."

Shortly after Smith's death in 1896, Willis Brewer, in an article appearing in The Daily Advertiser (Montgomery) entitled "Scholar and Statesman," said, "he had not the fiery eloquence of Yancey or Clemens [sic.], or the influence of Jemison or John T. Morgan, but in scope and prescience as to public polity Smith ranked them all" (15). Brewer went on to add that Smith was still "the single instance in Alabama's history of a man whose ruling

passion was the muses and yet [who] was a successful politician" (15). In writing about political issues and events, Smith undertook and accomplished what no other Alabamian attempted. Smith's body of work was balanced between poetry and nonfiction. He provided a consummate illustration of the politician/author relationship, bridging the two fields with artistry, insight, and with a feel for the moment that transcends time. William Russell Smith, in a sense, created the Tuscaloosa Bards and perhaps displayed best what the group came to represent in history.

Chapter Five

Summary of Literary and Political Impact

It would prove a subjective effort to establish among Hilliard, Meek, and Smith the one who had the greatest impact on Alabama. The important point to be made is that the three contributed in a major way to the cultural evolution of the state and that their efforts were magnified by the work of all of the Bards. Each was an individual educated in the classics and up to the Civil War became skillful in adapting the "renaissance man" image to the requirements for success in the frontier environment of Alabama. Hilliard was a successful lawyer, state and national politician, minister, foreign diplomat, orator, professor, poet, novelist, and author of non-fiction. Meek was widely recognized as a judge, journalist, historian, poet, legislator, and orator. Smith was equally as versatile as Hilliard and Meek, being a noted journalist, poet, playwright, author of court and historical events, judge, mayor, legislator, congressman, orator, and practicing lawyer. There is a distinct irony in the sophisticated and polished image presented by the Bards appealing so consistently to the largely uneducated, "common-folk" of antebellum Alabama. Wilbur Cash in Mind of the South speaks to what seems a cultural paradox of the frontier environment and the Old South relative to the classical genre with a biting analysis: "the great body of

men in the land [South] remained continuously under the influence of the simple man's almost superstitious awe for the classics, as representing an arcanum beyond the reach of the ordinary" (92).

The famous threesome of the antebellum era was elected to positions of leadership at young ages based on the public's "awe" of their intellect, oratorical skills, and literary projects. In a backwoods territory, becoming admired and recognized favorably for cultural refinement was possible only when framed as a sign of gentility, as a member of the planter aristocracy or the landed gentry of the South. The Tuscaloosa Bards came from very different backgrounds and travelled different roads to positions of prominence. While differences were obvious, common traits made these men distinctive and admired. Their abilities to speak, write, and translate the Southern condition in an idealized way set these men at the forefront of antebellum culture. Meek's published oration, "Jack Cadeism and the Fine Arts," presents an example of the Bards' idealized thinking cast over the Southern cultural landscape:

> . . .--how vast would be the benefit of the Fine Arts to the Southwest! We have seen there is much in our situation to be deplored. The vices that mark us, are precisely such as would be removed by imaginative culture. (176)

Meek realized the actual and dreamed of a higher ideal.

If one looks at the Tuscaloosa Bards as a group, the

collective impact is considerable. They brought sophistication and scholarship to a state characterized by a rough agrarian society. They played important roles in shaping a burgeoning state's political character. The Bards gave life and texture to literature in Alabama which still serves as a point of reference for social historians exploring the beginnings of cultural activity in the region. The group did a great deal to advance the cause of education. They brought lofty discourse to burning issues affecting Alabama and the nation. The Bards were all Unionists and, albeit in vain, articulated ideologies that reflected maturity and depth of thought in times when the emotions of men were overpowering rational behavior. Possibly most important, the Bards as a group and as diverse individuals, even though their light was dim at times, served as beacons for the generations that would follow.

Literature and politics never enjoyed a more positive marriage than the one brought about by the Tuscaloosa Bards. If much can and is to be learned from history, public officials and contemporary writers might study a chapter or two in the lives of the special group of men who came together in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in the 1830s. Their stories seem as much like fiction as fact, but proof of their time in Alabama lies behind many doors. The era of these apostles of culture was fleeting but the legacy of the Tuscaloosa Bards comes alive for anyone who scratches the surface of Alabama's early history.

Part II

The Culture Shift Between The Antebellum and Post-War South

Important parameters for considering contributions and post-war frustrations associated with the lives of the Tuscaloosa Bards can be staked out around two diverse philosophies in the nineteenth-century South. On the one hand there was utilitarianism, easily the more prevalent of the two, and on the other was romanticism or aestheticism, a more uncommon way of thinking especially in the New South. Both views existed prior to the Civil War but utilitarianism eventually became an overwhelming threat to individuals and endeavors associated with the arts and humanities. The aesthete, however, could and did find a place in old Dixie as a gallant romantic and a symbol of gentility and a sophisticated society. Willis Brewer, in "Scholar and Statesman," a biographical sketch of William R. Smith appearing in The Daily Advertiser in Montgomery, spoke of these times:

> That was the day [1835] when romanticism in one form or another was at its flood tide in this country. Napoleon and his marshals in war, Scott and Byron in literature, Sheridan and Erskine in the forum, had inflamed men's minds. (15)

Regarding the early days of the Bards, Brewer emphasized the point that "Men are less the children of their fathers,

than they are of their times" (15). After the war utilitarianism became almost a religion of survival and men of beauty and the arts were deemed irrelevant or simply unnecessary.

The Bards were vivid examples of men who placed value on aesthetics. In the prewar years they were admired for being cultured in a society that at least carried an illusion of being civilized and refined. Predictably, after the war their classical charm, scholarly orations, poetry, and prose were out of vogue and at times offensive to a beaten, bitter, poverty-stricken population. The cultural shift that occurred after four years of war was profound. The mood of Southern society shifted from romance and idealism to defeat and despair. The South was initially settled with the spirit of hope, adventure, and opportunity--often the source of song, poetry, and various forms of celebration. After the spirit of hope and opportunity was shattered, joy and celebration seemed out of place. An elaboration on the historical background of the Southwest is useful to put in clearer perspective the culture shift leading to the Bards' post-war decline.

Once the frontier lands of Alabama were opened by Jackson's forced treaties with the defeated Creek nation in 1814, settlers flocked to the state with dreams of a new start. Most of the opportunity seekers were drawn by the lure of cheap, rich land. Concurrent with the securing of land, merchants and traders could do business more freely

throughout the southwestern territory. The successful cultivation of cotton in the Black Belt made some men rich and many more hopeful. Still others came to build reputations in emerging educational institutions, the law, and politics. In virtually every instance, people came to and stayed in the new land by choice. The population at large, with the obvious exception of slaves, shared a degree of hope about building a better future in the four decades prior to the Civil War. A new way of life was being carved out of the wilderness, complete with dreamers and, again using Meek's words, "apostles of an impractical creed" (159).

After the war the land was ravaged. The South's economy was crippled. The best and the brightest of the male population were seriously diminished. The pride and spirit of optimism in the region had vanished. While many did leave Alabama to seek still another new beginning farther west, many more had neither the means nor the motivation to move on. They stayed to rebuild or restructure an economy, a government, educational systems, and communities to meet the different times. The consequences of the post-war era resulted in a culture shift unparalleled in America's history.

Howard Odum, in The Way of the South, describes the shift:

> Earlier the South had frontiers and a growing way of culture, and participation in the national

> scene that was broad and positive. In the Old South there was character, dominance, and vigor. In the New South or reconstruction period there was poverty, disaster, sorrow, and bitterness and an isolation from national affairs that left its leadership limited and negative. (196)

In Origins of the New South 1877-1913, C. Vann Woodward presents an analysis consistent with Odum's regarding antebellum and post-war contrasts in the South. Woodward, as part of his assessment, cites the observations of Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, a Harvard professor of paleontology and geology (1868-1887) and former Union soldier:

> Before the war he [Shaler] had seen evidence that men and women were seeking, through history, literature, the fine arts, and in some measure through science, for a share of the higher life. Four years of civil war . . . made an end of this and set the people on a moral and intellectual plane lower than they occupied when they were warring with the wilderness and the savages. (161)

Walter Lynwood Fleming, in The Sequel of Appomattox, paints another picture of the negative mood and culture shift in the South:

> In the bitter discipline of reconstruction the pleasant side of Southern life came to an end.

> During the war and subsequent reconstruction there was a marked change in Southern temperament toward the severe. (281)

There is no real argument among historians about the economic, physical, social, and cultural devastation brought to the South by the Civil War. The real questions relevant to the story of the Tuscaloosa Bards are more complex ones centering on intellectualism versus practical labor, refinement contrasted with common values, and politics of survival versus preservation of an idealized culture. One strong perspective on these questions was articulated by D. H. Hill in the magazine he edited called The Land We Love. Hill, the ex-Confederate general wrote an editorial entitled "Education" which is used by Paul Gaston in the New South Creed to stress the point about post-war sentiments in the South. Hill states:

> Men needed to learn that the effete, aristocratic educational values of the Old South were the cause and consequence of the economic failures the South had sustained . . . What will a knowledge of the ancient classics of metaphysics and belles-letters do to relieve our poverty. (qtd in Gaston 30)

Henry Grady, generally credited as the father of the term "New South," espoused the same notion a bit more succinctly in his often used phrase "What the South needs now is fewer stump-speakers and more stump pullers."

When one puts Hill or Grady's philosophy in

juxtaposition with the views of the most visible and vocal Bards, the degree of incongruity is obvious. Hilliard, in the semi- autobiographical novel DeVane: A Story of Plebians and Patricians, speaks through the character of Mr. Springfield to reveal his views:

> I certainly hope that everything will be done, that can be to cultivate the taste of our people for the beautiful. We are in great danger of becoming too practical and I confess my horror of the utilitarian philosophy. (173)

Hilliard more directly delivers his opinion about strict utilitarian thinking in a speech to the Alabama State Agricultural Society. To a group oriented to making a living off the land through manual labor, Hilliard in all his eloquence suggests:

> . . . to find no leisure for society or books or the fine arts, or the cultivation of our noblest faculties--surely this is not the condition in life which any but an optimist would pronounce best for our race. (qtd in Shore 71)

Lawrence Shore, in Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite 1832-1885, presents Hilliard's statement to highlight differences in Southern leadership and themes that in Shore's words "elevate the planters' escape from drudgery as the ideal life . . ." (71).

It should be noted that as early as 1841 Meek in his "Jack-Cadeism and the Fine Arts" points to the "horrors of

utilitarianism" in the context of its having a negative impact on literature in the South (162). Nixon highlights the point more broadly in his biography of Meek:

> Meek exemplified a high faith in the value of art and literature. He lamented the mechanical and utilitarian tendencies of the day . . . [professing] 'A people to become refined must have some motivation else than to grow rich' (26).

Frederick A. P. Barnard is also clear in his condemnation of the short-sightedness of utilitarianism in the oration "Art Culture: Its Relation to National Refinement and National Morality." Barnard states:

> I condemn the narrow exclusiveness of that spirit [utilitarianism] which will not tolerate anything that fails to contribute directly to the supply of our animal necessities. (5)

Through the examples of Hill and Grady's attitudes representing a solid public consensus directly opposed to the thinking associated with Hilliard, Meek, and Barnard, it is not hard to understand the alienation experienced by the Tuscaloosa Bards in the post-war South.

Compounding the alienation of the Bards with the reconstructed or New South was the legacy of their outspoken unionist sentiments prior to and during the Civil War. Their pro-union views lingered in the minds of the fire-eater secessionists and post-war conservative democrats. After the war, Hilliard and Smith waffled

unsuccessfully between the radical Republicans and the Democrats to find a political home. As Lynwood Fleming points out, "The Unionist or 'Tory' of the lower and eastern South found himself in 1865 a man without a country" (24). The Bards, representing an esoteric school of thought as classical culture bearers for Alabama, became a distant memory after the war. Under the political and cultural conditions of the New South, all of the qualities that had given them identity and fame became handicaps and liabilities.

In light of the culture shift of the South, the relatively brief period that was the limelight for the Tuscaloosa Bards becomes that much more unique and significant to Alabama's history and the burgeoning years of Southern literature. The Bards' intellectual and aesthetic orientation to life represents an overshadowed but distinct cultural legacy that is in vivid contrast to the more practical and labor-dominated behavior in the South.

Part III

The Bards' Reconstructed Careers:

The Civil War Years and Beyond

Chapter Six

General Impact of the Civil War on The Bards

The individual accomplishments of the Bards in both politics and literature are well documented throughout the pre-Civil War history of Alabama. However, the post-war years relative to the lives and careers of these men have not been given adequate attention. The Civil War had a profound impact on virtually everyone in America, both North and South, but the culture of old "Dixie" was particularly devastated. By 1865 the "flush times" in Alabama had ended and, for most, the productive years had also ended for the Tuscaloosa Bards.

In the South, with but few exceptions, there was little male motivation toward or avocational interest in literature after the fall of the Confederacy, and much talent lay dormant. Odum, as part of his analysis of the Reconstruction era, makes reference to the statement of Gerald W. Johnson: "the most tragic figures in the South are the men who might have been artists had not their obvious duty compelled them to throttle their dreams and turn their hands to material labor" (131). The effect post-war conditions had on the Bards provided the ingredients for a completely different saga from the creative antebellum years. The loss of the Bards politically and artistically to Alabama was significant to a backwardness that would settle over Alabama for decades

to come.

Collectively, the Bards came on the scene in the 1830s like shooting stars, and their light shone brightly in Alabama up to the Civil War. As implied by numerous illustrations, the Bards' impact on literature, politics, education, and oratory, taken as a whole, is unparalleled in Alabama history. After the Civil War, however, their influence and work remained more as afterglow in memories of "days gone by." The reasons for their decline were a combination of circumstances. John Gorman Barr died in 1858. Meek and Clemens both died in 1865. Benjamin Porter was dead by 1868. Hilliard, Barnard, Huntington, Muller, and eventually Smith, left Alabama. Still other members of the Bards, such as George Shortridge and Thomas Maxwell, faded into Alabama's Reconstruction landscape never to realize the potential that seemed so bright in the pre-war decades.

In the post-war South, changes in the "old order" were drastic. Feelings of Southerners were bitter; hatred was deep; humiliation lingered, and opposition to reconstruction policies and politicians was strong. Many Alabama unionists who were philosophically opposed to secession but were sucked into the Confederate effort found the "Conservative" Democrats and the Republican "Radicals" generally suspicious of their allegiance. Those members of the Bards, Smith and Hilliard in particular, who were sympathetic to the preservation of the Union and critical

of fanatic Confederate leadership, experienced a state of political limbo following Appomattox. Hodding Carter, in his 1959 The Angry Scar: The Story of Reconstruction, describes important distinctions between antebellum and post-war attitudes regarding independent and unconventional thinkers in the South:

> Before the war the South had condoned, if reluctantly, her nonconformists. A man could vote the Whig ticket in a Democratic hotbed, he could free his slaves, he could be a Unionist down to the day of Sumpter--and, not infrequently, remain one throughout the struggle--and still not be set apart as an untouchable. But Reconstruction put an end to Southern tolerance of the home-grown dissenter and critic. From the consequent strait-jacketing the South suffered its most grievous and enduring trauma. (187)

After the war, not one of the Bards was elected to a political office. Prior to the war they enjoyed consistent support from an admiring electorate and served with distinction in a wide range of local, state, and federal positions. Smith's appointment by the "Radical"-dominated Board of Regents to the presidency of the University of Alabama in 1871 and Hilliard's appointment by a Republican president to an ambassadorship in Brazil in 1877 are the only public-oriented positions held by Bards after the war. With the exception of William R. Smith and Thomas

Maxwell, verse writing, the hallmark of the Bards, all but ceased. The creative energy and inspiration drawn from a proud, robust Southern culture was gone.

The decades following the Civil War were years of economic, political, and social reorganization in the South. The post-war experiences of the Tuscaloosa Bards provide a microcosmic view of the general cultural conditions and the mood in the South. The post-war South was a place of creative entrenchment. The romantic poetry, verse writing, novel writing, and literature for the sake of art in the antebellum male-dominated society no longer occupied the same place of interest for the once prolific Bards. Arguably, literary pursuits were more than youthful frivolity of the Tuscaloosa writers. Prose writing had been an extension of their patriotism, classical education, philosophy, and genius. The work of the Bards reflected romanticized pictures of reality, a neo-classical genre, and idealism about the South, possible only prior to the Civil War. Their verses were full of enthusiasm, pride, and optimism for the future.

A few lines from Alexander B. Meek's poem "The Day of Freedom" in his Songs and Poems of the South illustrate the antebellum mood and style:

> Land of the South! - Imperial land! -
> How proud thy mountains rise! -
> How sweet thy scenes on every hand!
> How fair thy covering skies!

But not for this, - Oh, not for these
I love thy fields to roam, -
Thou has a dearer spell to me, -
Thou are my native home! (243)

Another look at the tone and spirit of the period is offered by Anne Easby-Smith in William R. Smith: Life and Writings through a stanza from her father's "The Lost Pleiad Found" written on the eve of the Civil War:

The neighboring stars stood mute and wondering when
The erring sister would return again.
Through the ages still they wondered in despair
And now, behold, careering from afar
The long-lost Pleiad! Lo! she takes her place
On Alabama's flag - and lifts her radiant face! (110)

One of the favorite antebellum poems of the Bards was "Sunset at Rome" by Albert A. Muller. In fact, Smith states, "I have no hesitation in expressing it is my opinion that 'Sunset in Rome' is the most elegant and highly-finished poetical production that ever emanated from any of the gifted bards of Tuscaloosa" (161). Smith's view seems exaggerated and the poem's subject almost ridiculous if viewed from the sober context of a defeated South. These lines illustrate the point:

Freedom once more shall shed its fires divine;
And genius, from above its kindly flame,
Reflume its torch to light the Etruscan name,
When Rome again shall rule and bless mankind.

> Her empire Knowledge and her scepter Mind. (qtd in Smith 1:165)

Similar romantic and classic characteristics are observed in Hilliard's "An Evening in Athens" and Barnard's "A Serenade," which was published under his pen name of Charles Augustus Conway. After the Civil War, no work resembling these examples exists.

Of the most prominent Bards, only Hilliard, Barnard, and Smith went on to lead long lives spanning the two and a half decades after the war. During the twenty-five years following the war, there is no sign of verse writing from either Hilliard or Barnard. Both men gave time to nonfiction efforts, but the motivation for creative prose writing fails to surface in their maturing years. Smith's poetry is confined primarily to family-oriented memorials. The old flame of the Bards had dwindled. What should have been years of peak productivity and creativity proved not to be the case for Hilliard or Smith. Only in Barnard's career can it be said that the promise and potential that were so apparent in Tuscaloosa materialized in post-war years. Even in Barnard's case, however, the practical side of science and education totally replaced his artful expressions so alive in his younger years in the South. The major distinguishing element for Barnard's continuing professional maturation on a grand scale is his leaving the South at the early phases of the Civil War. A profile of Henry W. Hilliard, William R. Smith, and Frederick A. P.

Barnard in the last twenty-five years of their lives accentuates the truths and consequences that have been down-played, glossed over, or explored only marginally by both their contemporaries and twentieth century historians. Their lives in the context of a changed Southern culture have been completely neglected.

Chapter Seven

Henry Washington Hilliard: Post-War Profile

Henry W. Hilliard's reversal of fortunes in prominence, productivity, and influence began in 1862 and was a mix of war-time inadequacies and post-war political vacillations. In April of that year, Hilliard was commissioned as colonel in the Confederate Army. In Willis Brewer's Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Records and Public Men 1540-1872, some details relative to his command are given: "Hilliard raised a legion of three thousand men, which were divided into five battalions, one of which was mounted" (671). While Hilliard's skill as a statesman was undisputed, no valid evidence exists that he either excelled at or enjoyed military command. In his Reminiscences, John Massey, a soldier in Hilliard's Legion and later a recognized educator in Alabama, gives a shared opinion about Hilliard as a Confederate Colonel:

> Military genius was not one of the brilliant parts in the make-up of this many-sided man. He appeared to much better advantage in the courtroom, on the hustings, in the halls of Congress or in the courts of kings than he did in the role of a soldier on the tented field. (164-165)

It is revealing that no mention at all is made in Hilliard's memoirs, Politics and Pen Pictures, of his

military service. During Hilliard's preparations for soldiering, his personal affairs and aborted military exploits set a new direction for his life.

In June of 1862, May Bedell Hilliard, the first wife of Alabama's fifty-four-year-old statesman, died in Montgomery. Evans C. Johnson, a primary biographer of Hilliard, in the work "Henry W. Hilliard and the Civil War Years," states: "On August 7, 1862 he [Hilliard] secretly married Eliza Ann Glascock Mays, the widow of Thomas S. Mays a former Montgomery County judge of probate" (109). Johnson also shares the fact that, "Mrs. Mays, a close friend of the first Mrs. Hilliard, had served as Mrs. Hilliard's nurse in her last illness" (109). The stage was set for a serious scandal.

Hilliard returned to the army where, in the late summer, his legion was part of considerable fighting. An account of the legion's combat experience is conveyed by Miss Tococa Cozart in her article "Henry W. Hilliard" published in 1904. Miss Cozart tells the story of Judge Advocate Edward L. MacIntyre of the legion sending a letter to the Hilliard family stating, " . . . Colonel Hilliard and the legion have been in the thickest of the melee: I have found both of the lieutenants of my company at Richmond wounded" (298). The engagement was documented to be near Chickamauga from letters in the Hilliard manuscript file at the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Vague historical references to Hilliard's military

talent, age, and enthusiasm attempt to explain his 1862 resignation from the Confederate Army. The truth about his early departure is likely to be a combination of factors, not the least being the condition of the "secret" new wife in Montgomery.

Hilliard, in the course of his brief military service, applied for and was granted readmission to the ministry. Hilliard had a longstanding affiliation with the Methodist Church as a lay preacher in Alabama. Johnson, who presents the most data from the period, writes, "Hilliard promptly resumed his ministerial duties as pastor of the Methodist Protestant Church on Bibb Street in Montgomery on November 25, 1862" (110). At the resumption of his residence in Montgomery, his marriage to Eliza Ann Glascocok Mays became public. Johnson's narrative fills in the blanks around the rumors that "Hilliard's relations with Mrs. Mays had been improper. Indeed it was generally alleged that the hasty marriage was a result of Mrs. Mays' pregnancy" (110). The mounting stories and related small town gossip were no doubt the cause of Hilliard and his new wife moving to Augusta, Georgia, the family home of Mrs. Mays. Hilliard received a reassignment to the St. John's Methodist Church in Augusta on December 4, 1862.

The scandal failed to be dismissed and Johnson, whose information was aided by interviews with Marie Bankhead Owen, adds, "The Methodist Church accepted the rumors about the circumstances of the marriage . . . declared Hilliard

had obtained readmission to the clergy by 'circumvention' . . . [and a] resolution was forwarded to the presiding elder in Augusta" (110). In October 1863, Hilliard left the pulpit. The years immediately following the tragic episode in Hilliard's career are unclear with the exception that he resumed the practice of law. The impact of the Mays affair has to be considered a negative factor in Hilliard's career from 1863 forward. In his 1865 semi-autobiographical novel DeVane, Hilliard, never short on self esteem, paints a picture of himself through the character of Mr. Springfield, who is described:

> The gentleman . . . is a man of fortune, cultivation, and taste; yet a Methodist, and what it may perhaps surprise you still more to learn, is a lay preacher. Learned, accomplished, and thoroughly acquainted with the world, he is a Christian, and while he is unwilling to assume the responsibilities of a clergyman proper, yet he preaches habitually, and with an earnestness and power rarely equaled. (10)

Considering the period in which DeVane was written, the self-indulging prose and the patronizing of Methodism, the work suggests an effort by Hilliard to rebuild his reputation and elevate his public image. As an artistic endeavor the novel is weak and received little critical acknowledgment.

Through the tone of personal letters to important

contacts, it is obvious that Hilliard's interests were still in political affairs. In correspondence Hilliard changed positions on key Reconstruction issues to suit those he was courting at the time for national political consideration. Twelve years of unsuccessful political posturing finally produced a long-awaited break for Hilliard. In 1876 the aging statesman ran for Congress in the Fourth District out of Columbus, Georgia. He was defeated soundly, but his campaign as an Independent Democrat catered to Republican voters and opened the door for considerations with the newly elected President Hayes. Evans Johnson, in his 1947 thesis study "A Political Life of Henry W. Hilliard," points out: "Since President Rutherford B. Hayes' election coincided with Hilliard's defeat it was natural that Hilliard should be in line for a political appointment under the Republican administration" (172). The Hayes victory had been secured in 1876 only through the solid support of Southern Democrats.

A long-time friend, Richard M. Thompson, the Secretary of Navy under the Hayes administration, "informed Hilliard that the President was amenable to giving him a diplomatic post," according to Johnson (172). Hilliard, because of past experience in Belgium in the 1840s, had hoped for a commission in Germany. In his memoirs, Politics and Pen Pictures, Hilliard explains that an immediate appointment to Brazil was available. In a meeting with Hayes to discuss options, Hilliard recalls the rationale of the

President's thinking: "as a large number of Southern men had gone to Brazil at the close of the war, I might render an important service by accepting the mission to Rio" (358). By October, via London and Paris, the new U. S. Ambassador arrived in Brazil.

During Hilliard's tenure the anti-slavery movement was a major source of controversy in Brazil. Jolo P. Cologeras, author of A History of Brazil, speaks to the ambassador's role in the slavery question: "The abolition of slavery in Brazil did not occur until 1888, but Hilliard's course met with general approval in the United States and abroad" (258). Hilliard's portrayal of his service to the abolitionist cause is more expansive. At a banquet given to honor him by the Anti-Slavery Society of Brazil, Hilliard highlights his contributions and shares with readers: "The Minister of the Argentine Republic met me and said: 'Mr. Hilliard you are the man of the day'" (400). Hilliard's lack of modesty aside, his anti-slavery work in Brazil has been touted by some as the crowning achievement of his public life. Johnson provides some peripheral perspective by suggesting that "his support of the abolition movement was probably not to the best interests of the Southern exiles in Brazil, some of whom were slaveholders in that country" (176). Johnson on balance also notes that Hilliard's role "was not [that] important since the emancipation of slaves in Brazil would have soon followed the general world trend" (176).

In the words of Hilliard: "Upon the accession of General Garfield to the presidency I forwarded my resignation and requested leave of absence to return home" (403). After Hilliard's return from Brazil he established residence in Atlanta and practiced law until his ultimate retirement. Hilliard's memoirs, Politics and Pen Pictures, were written in the retirement years and published in 1891.

An assessment of Hilliard's life and career is complicated by many inconsistencies and unanswered questions about his real philosophy and primary interests in life. Johnson, in his political profile, states, "In trying to be all things to all men, Hilliard made himself liable to attack on charges of opportunism and political perfidy" (179). Johnson punctuates another Hilliard characteristic by these words: "His expressions on Southern post-war problems were at times chaotic and conflicting" (179). Evans Johnson's writings on Hilliard came the closest to an objective picture of the man, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses without undue embellishment.

Another insightful observation about Hilliard's long life came from William Russell Smith. Smith, in his Reminiscences, sums up his feelings:

> But, while his life must not be considered a failure, it was not such a success as he might have achieved, nor commensurate with his magnificent endowments. And here we have the old

> story of divided pursuits, numerous occupations, and frittered energies. (221)

The former pupil concludes his opinion with a belated recommendation directed at his old professor at the University of Alabama:

> Had Mr. Hilliard remained steadfast to the pulpit, where indeed all the stars shone upon him . . . he might have left an enduring fame; . . . as it is, all that we have left from him is a volume or two of essays, sketches, and speeches . . . . (222)

Smith's opinion is mirrored by Hardy Vickers Wooten of Lowndes County writing in his private journal in 1839. Even at such an early date in Hilliard's career, Wooten observes:

> Mr. Hilliard is a smart man, a Preacher, Lawyer, Politician, and deals in Literature. I think that he might be a great man at any one profession, but no man can be eminent in all. If he aims at all he will likely miss all. (21)

Still one additional perspective of Hilliard must take into account his actions and success in relationship to a shifting environment. His personal reputation during the Civil War suffered. He never found the popular political niche he enjoyed in pre-war Alabama, and his desperate efforts to reestablish a position of prominence only accentuated a bruised ego and a weakened local support base. The South in the post-war era was a place with

practical needs, basic approaches to problem solving, and survival-oriented priorities. Hilliard's flamboyant style and antiquated philosophy no longer fit the utilitarian doctrines being emphasized in reconstructing the South.

Chapter Eight

William Russell Smith: Post-War Profile

William Russell Smith, by 1861, was a highly respected politician having held prestigious local, state, and federal offices. He had also produced a body of literature that would prompt literary historians like Benjamin Williams to pronounce him "Father of Alabama Literature" (28). At the eve of the Civil War, Smith had ascended to the peak of his prominence in political and literary circles. He was opposed to the disunion of the South and went to Alabama's secession convention as a cooperationist delegate. Anne Easby-Smith proclaims: "Judge Smith, then in the prime of life, put forth all his energies to prevent the State from seceding" (97). Smith and Robert Jemison were leaders of the anti-secession platform at the convention. His independent position throughout a long public career irreversibly alienated Smith with fiery Southern Democrats and Alabama's political party leadership.

During the two months following Alabama's secession from the Union, Smith devoted himself to work on The History and Debates of the Convention of the People of Alabama. The amazing project documented the speeches, philosophies, emotions and votes of the delegates at the convention. In an 1896 sketch of Smith's life, "Scholar and Statesman," Willis Brewer makes reference to Smith's

work: "I cannot sufficiently admire the forethought which inspired and the diligence which prepared this book amidst all the excitement of the time" (15). Smith completed completed the work in sixty days.

After the removal of the Confederate capital from Montgomery to Richmond, Smith traveled to Virginia to be on hand for the July 20, 1861, opening session of the Confederate Congress. Easby-Smith explains his presence: "Judge Smith was at this time collecting material for a history of the Southern Revolution . . . of this he considered Debates a fitting introduction" (130). The project never progressed to an advanced stage, and Smith's energies became distracted with pressing decisions about his participation in the war.

Subsequent to the initial outbreak of fighting, Smith was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel of the Third Alabama Battalion and raised the necessary troops to form a unit in the Twenty-Sixth Alabama Regiment. Smith, however, never experienced military service due to his election to the Confederate Congress as a representative of the Tuscaloosa District. With respect to Smith's service in the Confederate Congress, Brewer, in his 1896 article, states: "I do not anywhere find that he figured conspicuously in it" (15).

During the early-war period, Easby-Smith recalls that "an event took place which was destined to have a tremendous effect on the life of Judge Smith and his entire

family" (138). Smith's daughter describes in her biographical work the circumstances and particulars of the conversion to Catholicism of her mother, Wilhelmine (138-140). The event is significant because Smith had been an outspoken member of the Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s. The Know-Nothing or American Party was infamous for its opposition to Catholicism and other "non American" groups. Easby-Smith cites a speech made by Smith in 1855 on the floor of the House of Representatives where he vigorously defends criticism against the Know-Nothing Party. On the issue of the Catholic Church, Smith states:

> . . . because the Roman Catholic Church in this country is so intimately connected with foreign influences that it is impossible to separate the two -- they [the Party members] have to take the whole or exclude the whole. (73)

Smith's affiliation with such a discriminating position and the extremism of the Know-Nothings would prove to haunt him politically and personally for the remainder of his life.

Through the course of the war, Smith stayed active with a variety of literary endeavors. As a member of the Confederate Congress, he received dubious recognition for his satire on Abraham Lincoln--The Royal Ape: A Dramatic Poem, published in 1863. Easby-Smith refers to the work only as "a five act play, depicting war-time Washington" (148). The closing dialogue between Mrs. Lincoln and Robert, Lincoln's son, summarizes the 85-page play and

captures its tone and farcical flavor:

> Mrs. L.: We're all dishonored by these antic capers; [disguising to leave Washington, D.C. for fear of a Confederate invasion] The London Times will blow us; all the papers, Except, the Chronicle and Greeley's, Will scarify us first, and then they'll peel us.
>
> Kitty and Kate [Servants] (to Mrs. L.): We fix'd the Prince to aid in his escape.
>
> Robt.: I play'd the girl and dad, he play'd the ape. [Curtain falls.] (85)

Smith's characterization of Lincoln undoubtedly served as a source of embarrassment and political awkwardness in his future relationship with the Republican Party.

Smith returned to Tuscaloosa at the conclusion of the war with thoughts of renewing his political career in Alabama. His first effort was a canvass for the governor's office in 1865. Several biographical sketches of Smith make reference to his receiving a "flattering" vote in a losing campaign to Robert M. Patton. A more accurate picture reflects the fact that he ran third in a three-man race and as A. B. Moore states in his History of Alabama and Her People, "Patton won by a vote almost as large as the combined votes of his opponents" (572). Smith's third place finish in the race with only 9,219 votes is more than a subtle sign that his statewide popularity had waned. Added explanation is provided by Willis Brewer who

remembered Smith "sending out a circular in his own behalf, which appealed to the Union men and assailed the dead Confederacy" (15). Brewer classified Smith's strategy as "an indiscreet act which cost him, and ought to have cost him, many votes" (15). Brewer was Smith's long-time friend with a first hand knowledge of his personal, political, and literary life.

The Judge's next campaign was a short-lived effort in 1866 to be elected to the U. S. House of Representatives from his home district. The canvass ended with a withdrawal when Smith learned the seating procedures for a Reconstruction Congress in Washington. With a family to support and a professional reputation to reestablish, Smith turned his attention to the practice of law and several writing projects. In 1869 he translated the Fifth Book of Illiad. Smith followed this initial work with a more complete Key to the Illiad of Homer. The rather esoteric exercise was intended as a college text. Easby-Smith relates: "It was a source of deep gratification to Judge Smith that Professor Tutwiler approved his work" (179). Tutwiler, the old friend and professor from the Tuscaloosa days, was at the time President of Green Springs College.

Smith produced in 1870 the initial eight volumes of Reports and Decisions of the Supreme Court of Alabama. One begins to detect Smith's struggle between his past world of literature and romanticism and a new world of having to engage in more practical pursuits. When measuring the

level of attention required for The Illiad and Reports of the Supreme Court, the time set aside for practicing law had to be limited. Smith's lingering idealism and attraction to both writing projects and public office was evident in the 1870s. The period is indicative of his motivation away from accumulating wealth and developing a professional career, a characteristic not missed by Brewer in his 1896 tribute "Scholar and Statesman" where he notes the Judge's "indifference to money" and having "never cared much for the commercial chores" (15).

In 1870, "the affairs of the university [of Alabama] were thoroughly ensnarled in Reconstruction politics" (172), states Robert H. McKenzie in "William R. Smith: Forgotten President of the University of Alabama," a 1984 article in The Alabama Review. After first offering the job to an uninterested Nathanial Supton, President of Southern University, the Board of Regents approached Smith. McKenzie cites the Journal of the Board of Regents 1869: "on motion of Mr. Nichols, Judge William R. Smith, of Tuscaloosa was unanimously elected President of the University of Alabama" (174). A degree of skepticism regarding Smith's allegiances and motives, however, surrounded the appointment. Thomas M. Owen, in his profile of Smith in the Library of Southern Literature, provides one description of the affair:

> The Board of Trustees was composed of Radicals, and it was thought that the election of Judge

> Smith would win over to the University the support of the people; but their antagonism to them was reflected on him [Smith], and seeing that he would be unable under the existing state of affairs to build up the University, he retired. (4990)

Additional perspective provided by A. B. Moore shows only ten students enrolled for classes, "four of whom were professors' sons" (640). McKenzie's more comprehensive study of the subject suggests "Smith had indeed sided politically with the Board of Regents before hand [his 1870 appointment]" (181). After Smith's resignation from the University post, McKenzie documents Smith's shift in loyalties: "Ryland Randolph [an earlier Democratic rival opposed to Smith's appointment], welcoming Smith into the Democratic fold in November 1871 implies that Smith had indeed sided politically with the Board of Regents . . . " (181). These facts are relevant in the way they demonstrate Smith's struggle for political acceptance and success in an environment where trying to walk both sides of the political street was impossible. McKenzie concludes his analysis by observing: "terms like 'Radical' and 'Conservative' are too simplistic to explain the complicated political currents that carried over from antebellum politics into Reconstruction" (182). The new set of political rules in force in Alabama were not serving Smith well in Tuscaloosa.

Failing to establish a political niche after the war

led to a lack of voter support for Smith. Brewer reflected on Smith's political difficulties during the period: "In 1878 he did come before the Democratic nominating body, and asked for the place of Attorney General, but was defeated" (15). In 1878 he would again attempt to be elected to Congress after becoming active with the Conservative Democrat Party. Defeat was the result. Obviously frustrated, Smith moved to Washington, D.C., his wife's family home, in the spring of 1879. The nation's capital became Smith's home for the remainder of his life.

The only detailed history of Smith's post-Alabama years is Anne Easby-Smith's biography of her father. Other biographical sketches concentrate on his glory years in Alabama and almost as a postscript mention his later years spent in Washington. While the daughter's book is motivated by an attempt to glorify a beloved father, it does provide some family stories that are not given elsewhere and which give valuable insights to Smith's life.

In Anne Easby-Smith's work the ultimate irony of Smith's life unfolds. Easby-Smith places great emphasis on her father's death-bed conversion to Catholicism. She paints a scene of Father Gillespie at Smith's bedside hearing his confession, administering the Most Holy Sacrament and baptizing the eighty-three year old man as a member of the Catholic Church. The elder Smith is the same man once touted by a Maryland newspaper as a promising presidential candidate under the Know Nothing Party.

Easby-Smith strengthens the drama of the conversion scene with a quotation from "The Judge": "Father I wish to retract every word I have ever spoken against the Catholic Church" (239). Obviously a great burden was lifted from the entire family as a result of the momentous and timely conversion. This final reversal of conviction is symbolic in many ways of Smith's post-war life, career, and philosophy. His shifts in philosophy consistently took place to accommodate circumstances.

Historians and literary scholars agree that William R. Smith's most important work in his later years was Reminiscenses of a Long Life, Historical, Political, Personal, and Literary published in 1889. The work is a valuable historical source for its information about the early settlers of Tuscaloosa and the formative years of the University of Alabama. Smith provides colorful descriptions of numerous significant Alabama personalities such as A. B. Meek, Henry W. Hilliard, Henry Tutwiler, Frederick A. P. Barnard, Robert Jemison, George Shortridge, and Alva Woods. Easby-Smith, in her critique of Reminiscences, gives an outline of its contents: "There are twelve sketches of lawyers, twelve merchants, ten doctors, twelve members of the faculty . . . and seven politicians" (224). Reminiscences is an attempt by Smith to go back to his roots, his romantic youth and a time when men chose to write poetry.

William R. Smith was a favored son in Tuscaloosa

through his later years in life, but he was fondly remembered as a shining star from another time and another world. At his death in 1896, Smith's body was taken by train to Tuscaloosa for burial. Smith had come back to the location of his glory years and the stomping grounds of the Tuscaloosa Bards.

Chapter Nine

Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard: Antebellum and Post-War Contrasts

To the extent the post-Civil War era was generally unkind to the Tuscaloosa Bards, Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard stands out as an exception. His career is a revealing study in contrasting experiences. There is no doubt that the Civil War was a turning point in Barnard's life, but unlike the impact on other Bards, it opened the door for his most productive years. William R. Smith, in his Reminiscences, makes a telling assessment when he claims:

> It is not too much to say that Professor Barnard . . . devoted to science, literature and to educational themes, presents to us a career altogether the most distinguished of any one of the old professors of our University. (235)

A number of Barnard's associates from the Tuscaloosa years such as Meek, Smith, Hilliard, and Clemens arguably equaled or surpassed his intellect and ability. All, however, fell short of his lifetime record of achievement. The most distinguishing factor explaining the contrasting fates after the war was Barnard's departure from the South in the early 1860s. Frederick Barnard's relocation to his native North during the Civil War resulted in opportunities that could never have been matched in the Reconstruction era of

the South.

Barnard, unlike most of the Bards, did not have Southern roots. Born in Massachusetts, he graduated from Yale College in 1829. After teaching jobs in Connecticut and New York, Barnard arrived in Tuscaloosa as the new professor of mathematics at the University of Alabama in 1838. In the Tuscaloosa community as well as on campus, Barnard's blend of intellect, charm, wit, and high-level energy earned him many friends and a reputation as one of the city's outstanding citizens. Though not a politician in the manner of Hilliard, Smith, or Meek, Barnard was an outspoken unionist and a friend of the Whig Party in west Alabama. His oratorical skills were sharpened around political issues while his literary interests were in romantic verse and light-hearted humor. Barnard's reputation for demonstrating multiple talents grew. William J. Chute, author of Damn Yankee!: The First Career of Frederick A. P. Barnard, adds: "The board of trustees of the University soon came to point him out as one of the bright lights of the faculty who shone throughout the state and brought recognition far and wide" (83). It was, however, a flamboyant lifestyle combined with the tone of Barnard's politics that alienated him with the conservative Basil Manly, the University's president. Ongoing friction between the two contributed to Barnard's eventual acceptance of a position at the University of Mississippi in Oxford.

In the young professor's sixteen years in Tuscaloosa, due to a rich social life, close friendships with dynamic personalities such as Smith and Meek, and innovative professional endeavors, much personal growth occurred. Chute reinforces the positive nature of these years and the nurturing Tuscaloosa environment with an observation from Barnard's memoirs: "By his own admission these were the happiest years of his life" (83). Nonetheless, by the 1850s Barnard grew restless and in need of new challenges. In 1854 he left Tuscaloosa for the University of Mississippi as the Chair of Mathematics and Astronomy. After only two years in Oxford, Frederick A. P. Barnard was elected President of the University.

With the coming of the Civil War, Barnard was busy establishing in his mind one of the great universities in the South. The vision seen by Barnard for the University of Mississippi would crumble as part of the "lost cause." Chute points out the scope of the Barnard plans and the magnitude of Mississippi's loss: "Gone was his [Barnard's] promise of building the greatest university on the continent after the German model--anticipating John Hopkins by two decades" (183). What might have been in Mississippi, versus the tragic setback in general of higher education in the deep South, is but one of the sad aftermaths caused by the Civil War.

As the war fervor spread to Mississippi, male students en masse abandoned their studies in response to a call for

soldiers. In Memoirs of Frederick A. P. Barnard, John Fulton reveals the university president's observations of the time. On June 5, 1861, Barnard wrote to Miss Gillis:

> We are indeed inhabitants of a solitude. Our University has ceased to have visible existence. Its halls are completely deserted, and its offices are without occupation. (279)

The condition proved not to be temporary as Barnard had initially hoped and the fifty-one year old educator was left to pursue a new focus for his life.

Barnard refused an offer to serve the Confederate States. As the result of a visit with Jefferson Davis in Richmond, Barnard recalls in his memoirs: " . . . he [Davis] desired to create a bureau for the investigation of the natural resources of the Confederate States . . . and would put me entirely in charge of that work" (280). In the initial months of the war, Barnard traveled the South visiting military institutions, exploring the feasibility of the University of Mississippi's becoming a military school. Failing to find a suitable arena for his energies, the restless educator journeyed north. On May 10, 1862, Barnard found himself in Norfolk, Virginia, as the city was being occupied by federal troops. The circumstances allowed him the opportunity to "cross the line" and reestablish relationships with northern friends and family. The ease with which he was assimilated into the Union's inner circle of influential people was aided by his

brother, General John Gross Barnard, then in charge of defending Washington, D.C.

Barnard, enjoying a considerable reputation in the education and science communities, was invited to the White House to meet with Lincoln. The Union president was curious about Barnard's general perspectives and assessment of conditions in the South (189), according to Chute's account. The positive nature of the meeting became evident when in 1863 Barnard defended Lincoln from an attack by a copperhead university president. Barnard's response was "Letter to the President" which was published and widely circulated. Chute claims, "The letter . . . brought his name to the attention of the leaders of Columbia College, then looking for a president" (188). Frederick A. P. Barnard was hired as president of Columbia in 1864.

The twenty-five year tenure of the one-time "Tuscaloosa Bard" at Columbia was characterized by educational breakthroughs and personal achievement. Under his leadership, Columbia evolved to university status and became one of the foremost institutions of higher learning in the country. In particular, Barnard pioneered the "double system" where students could pursue a bachelor of arts or a bachelor of science degree. He was one of the first and strongest for coeducation at the university level and was violently opposed to the concept of "separate but equal" as it applied to women's education. Barnard developed the "elective system" where juniors and seniors

had a range of specialized subjects to choose from, suited to their particular skills and interests.

Chute points out: "Barnard was a rare example of the scientist as a good writer" (191). His prolific writing tendencies combined with depth of scientific knowledge come together in his role of editor of Johnson's New University Cyclopedia, one of the major encyclopedias of the nineteenth-century. Chute highlights the fact that "Barnard contributed more than eighty articles himself" (192). Referring to Barnard's report for the Paris Universal Exposition, William Garrett in Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama wrote: "It is a very elaborate paper of 650 pages in print, justly placing him in the front rank of men of science, in this or any other country" (708). His versatility and multiple talents resulted in countless productive endeavors throughout his long life.

The same positive traits of social refinement, skill in writing, keen intellect, a sharp wit, and high energy that endeared Barnard to the people of Tuscaloosa in his younger years continued to be a trademark in later life. As a result he was elected president of the American Metrological Society, was an important member of the committee that established the system of international time zones, and was recipient of the French Officer of the Legion of Honor award, secretary of the National Academy of Sciences, a five-term president of the American Association of the Advancement of Science, and a member of the Royal

Society of Liege of Belgium. His list of honorary doctorate degrees, individual awards, and honors is a long one. With all his endeavors, his writing leaves evidence of both intellect and important ground-breaking work.

Frederick A. P. Barnard flourished as a professional man with purpose and vision for almost twenty-five years after the Civil War. The resources of the North gave him the opportunity to see many of his dreams become a reality and experience considerable personal fulfillment. The war was the event that geographically shifted his career and energies. One can only speculate about his future had circumstances led to his remaining in the South. An objective evaluation of his personality, philosophy, and politics suggests a very different outcome had he stayed in Mississippi or Alabama. His commitment to furthering higher-order thinking would have struggled for a foothold in the Reconstruction South. Barnard's life among the Tuscaloosa Bards and his early personal successes turned out to be stepping stones for greater attainment in a supportive environment. In the North, his longstanding loyalty to the Union, his commitment to the advancement of knowledge, his orientation toward intellectual exploration, and his impatience for progress were qualities that led to great achievement. These same qualities placed on the Southern post-war landscape would more than likely have been a formula for frustration. Much like Smith and Hilliard, Barnard would have been out of touch with an

impoverished, tension-filled Southern society.

Foreshadowing the post-war South, the words of Barnard delivered in 1854 to the Alabama chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa become prophetic. The subject of his oration was Art Culture: Its Relation to National Refinement and National Morality. In the talk, Barnard said:

> I maintain that even here on earth, the race is not in hopeless bondage to its physical wants and weaknesses, but has a nobler destiny than to serve tables. I maintain that it is right that man's higher nature should receive its fullest development, and his most refined tastes their free cultivation . . . . (5)

Had Barnard stayed in the South, as did Hilliard and Smith, he would have been overwhelmed by an environment similar to the one he made reference to in his Art Culture oration: "Of those whose utmost efforts fail to accumulate aught beyond the supply of present necessity, whose daily labor serves but to procure their daily bread, how vast the multitude" (3). But Barnard left the South and in doing so broadened his professional status, intellect, and philosophy. Barnard's philosophy, still greatly focused on higher learning and scholarship ten years after he left the South, did shift to a recognition that intellect, refinement, and aesthetic appreciation need not be incompatible with the "dignity of labor." As president of Columbia College in 1872, Barnard, in the address "Modern

Industrial Progress" presented to the American Institute of the City of New York, conceded, "the undeniable truth that before the mind can be cultivated or improved, the body must be provided for" (13). Barnard broadened his views after having observed first hand the backwardness of labor in the South, the unparalleled innovation during the Civil War, and the obvious needs related to rebuilding a nation. In the same address on industrial progress he revealed the expansion of his thinking regarding utilitarianism, stating that, "we have discovered that culture and practical usefulness are not at variance, but that both in their several ways are deserving of respect" (12). Barnard took a common-ground position in the age-old debate.

Barnard's life and logic would have been altered had he been directly subjected to the political, economic, and cultural struggles of the post-war South. As fate would have it, he found a place where his dreams could be realized and, unlike Hilliard and Smith, "indeed all the stars shone upon him."

Conclusion

The talent of all the Tuscaloosa Bards was exceptional for their day. The skills of William R. Smith, Henry W. Hilliard, Frederick A. P. Barnard, and Alexander B. Meek, while different, were most certainly comparable. The potential for all these men was apparent early in their lives. The philosophy, style, and incurable romanticism of both Smith and Hilliard, instead of solidifying a major role in the South's struggle for a new order, set them adrift. The South had become a place where practical and physical skills were much in demand. Barnard's career stands as an exception to the post-war experiences of the other Bards. The second half of his life story is a valuable case study illustrating the contrasting effects of the culture shift in the South.

The Civil War separates two distinct periods in the mythology, legend, and reality of the Tuscaloosa Bards. In the pre-war era, the Bards, with only few exceptions, fit into the classification which Williams describes as "the familiar pattern of lawyer-politician and its variations of lawyer-editor, lawyer-historian, and editor-politician" (27). The high drama, myth, and pride surrounding the Southern tradition proved the inspiration for many avocational writers such as the Bards. After the war the glamour was gone and generally men did not devote the time to writing as a leisurely pursuit. Williams points out:

> the 'Cause' that had consumed the imaginative talents of William Lowndes Yancey, and that drew fledgling writers such as William Russell Smith, Alexander Beaufort Meek, and Henry Washington Hilliard into the political maelstrom of the time no longer dominated the thinking of the gifted writer. (28)

The romantic spirit of the Old South disappeared as did the dream for the ideal society once referred to by Hilliard as "regaining the Garden of Eden." In the post-war period the greatness of Dixie could only be fabricated and portrayed in the minds of a new breed of writer. Meek's enthusiastic patriotism and prose reflected in "Americanism in Literature" would no longer ring out in a burned and gutted South. Classical eloquence in prose and oratory was abandoned by both the artist and his audience in the reconstructed South. Like the empty shells of Greek architecture on the landscape, the Tuscaloosa Bards became icons of an extinct culture.

The rise and fall of the Tuscaloosa Bards is a revealing story of the meteoric changes that took place in Alabama and in the South in but a single generation. The Bards were at center stage for the first act of this drama, but faded from the Southern landscape as the culture was reconstructed for a very different way of life. The Tuscaloosa Bards were but one of the casualties in the traumatic transition. They were men of another world and

time, as foreign to the "New South" as Knights of the Round Table or scholars of Ancient Greece. A suitable close to the Bard's story might benefit by lifting these lines from Muller's Sunset at Rome:

> As thus beneath the ruin'd porch of Fame,
> The thoughtful Muse recalls some honored name,
> What faded images of glory rise
> From out the tombs where buried greatness lies.
> (qtd in Smith 1:163)

Muller's symbolism is appropriate, and his words aptly rekindle the "images of glory" that the Tuscaloosa Bards once made come to life in the backwoods of Alabama for future generations to enjoy and contemplate.

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