The Formation of the Washington Intellectual Community, 1870-1898

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THE FORMATION OF THE WASHINGTON INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY, 1870-1898

by

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A DISSERTATION

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PREFACE

What follows is an attempt to add a new chapter to American cultural history. These pages deal with the post-Civil War emergence in Washington of a self-conscious body of government-scientists and local intellectuals, men whose group identity was established by the network of clubs and societies which they founded and whose self-image was derived from an awareness of shared purposes. This community saw itself as fulfilling two inseparable functions: improving the quality of life at the seat of government by encouraging intellectual pursuits, and using its collective influence to promote national culture, particularly through public science. The interrelationship of these goals rested on the conviction that Washington was destined to become the cultural capital of the nation. Men who were certain they detected the contours of a great center of learning and progress set to work filling in the outlines. Accordingly, the rationalization and development of the city's resources was of transcendent importance, and those who sought to make Washington worthy of its new role acquired the stature of an intellectual elite. By the end of the nineteenth century, with its skeletal structure the Washington Academy of Sciences, this body stood fully
formed. The circumstances of its birth and early growth comprise the story I have tried to tell.

Why it has not been told before is difficult to fathom. A congeries of reminiscences and contemporary impressions indicates that the intellectual community had an important part in transforming Washington into a more modern city. Likewise, the creation of this group was directly related to the expansion of the government's technical bureaus. Because Washington intellectuals were deeply involved in their culture, and since Washington was supposed to epitomize the worst features of post-war life, an examination of their mutual quest to understand and influence their own times offers a means for testing the Gilded Age hypothesis. And, of course, its specialized institutions make the Washington establishment an important topic in the history of science. By studying the inner history of its organizations a greater understanding can be gained regarding the advancement of science, just as the advancement of science sheds light on the broader styles and patterns of late nineteenth century America.

It is a pleasant duty to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many people and institutions who facilitated this study. I owe special thanks to Professor Edward Lurie for introducing me to nineteenth century cultural history, for directing the dissertation from beginning to end, and for
being an ever-inspiring mentor. The members of the History Department of Wayne State University have been more tolerant and considerate than a graduate student has a right to expect. Dr. Nathan Reingold, editor of the Joseph Henry Papers, Mrs. Margaret Blaker, Samuel T. Suratt, William C. Sturtevant, and Wilcomb E. Washburn of the Smithsonian Institution, and Professor Joseph L. Brent of the University of Maryland, and Professor Daniel J. Kevles of the California Institute of Technology were generous with their time and advice. Research, both in Washington and points distant, was made possibly by a year at the Smithsonian as a pre-doctoral intern in the Institution's Department of American Studies. For this I am particularly grateful to Dr. Charles Blitzer and the Office of Education and Training.

My path to the archives of the various scientific organizations was cleared by Betty J. Meggars of the Anthropological Society, Charles O. Handley of the Biological Society, Charles L. Gordon of the Chemical Society, Michael Fleischer of the Geological Society, George Crossett and Leonard J. Grant of the National Geographic Society, Herbert A. Hauptman of the Philosophical Society, Mrs. Richard Humphrey of the Washington Academy of Sciences, and, most of all, by Paul H. Oehser, secretary of the Cosmos Club. I should also like to acknowledge the cooperation of the special collections staffs of the following research insti-
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I am at a loss to thank properly my wife, Jan LeMessurier Flack, for her part in the completion of this dissertation. Not only did she go about her tasks of editing, criticizing, typing, footnote checking, and proof-reading with diligence and good cheer, but somehow she managed to preserve domestic tranquility so that neither of us suffered ill-effects.
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CHAPTER I

"FLABBY, SHAMBLING TIMES"

A crisis of sorts gripped Washington, D.C. during the first week of April, 1965. It had been a late spring, so late, in fact, that on the eve of the National Cherry Blossom Festival the requisite buds were still encased in their dark brown wrappings, and due to this vagary of nature innumerable plans and programs had been thrown out of kilter. Suddenly there came an additional alarm which had to do with a situation at once more serious and more manageable: Washington and the nation were in grave danger because they lacked an intellectual elite—"an aristocracy of brains and character, an aristocracy with a conscience and a sense of history." Further delay in the selection of such an elite would inevitably lead to a deterioration of American culture. Thus the message of Henry Allen Moe, Secretary-General of the Guggenheim Foundation, upon being presented with the 1965 Cosmos Club Award for distinguished service in advancing science, literature and the arts. In brief, warned Moe, there was a pressing need to exploit the wellsprings of genius and to organize men of knowledge in such a way that they could promote the quality of national life. The speaker was careful to rule out aristocracies grounded on anything but intellect, and he took
pains to emphasize that "Without an aristocracy, we should be lost; having it, we surely shall be saved." This optimistic note may have eased some of the disappointment over the absence of pink around the Tidal Basin. Doubtless it caused certain members of the audience to imagine back almost a hundred years, to the time when the Cosmos Club was founded as an embodiment of brains and character—the very kind of elitist institution upon which the guest of honor placed so much stress.

Then, as now, the Club represented an effort to draw together men of scientific, scholarly, and educational interests for purposes of creating a milieu favorable to their work, while at the same time adding to their collective prestige and influence. Membership constituted an acknowledged badge of distinction; hence the entire community held those chosen by the Club in high esteem. Not so high, perhaps, as in Gondour, Mark Twain's fictitious republic where social rank and voting power increased proportionately to one's wealth and education. Here intellectuals had a dominant voice in government, and there were few more exalted citizens than the country's leading astronomer, to whom one and all doffed their hats and bowed deeply in honor of his scholarly attainments. American

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scientists hardly enjoyed this much deference, as was pointed out by Simon Newcomb, himself an eminent astronomer and early member of the Cosmos Club.3 Nonetheless, the latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed an augmentation of the respect and recognition accorded Washington's men of learning, a phenomenon coeval with the birth of associations informing the Capital City's intellectual establishment. Thus institutions like the Cosmos Club had a bearing upon the organization of what could be regarded as an intellectual elite. Furthermore, these institutions had a salutary effect on society in general. Besides enhancing the position of intellectuals, they gave some degree of tone and purpose to what an astute contemporary described as "flabby, shambling times."4

Such expressions have always served to characterize the lack of form in American culture after the Civil War. During this era new wealth, born of an industrial system which was rapidly maturing and expanding, challenged the leadership


4Charles Francis Adams, Jr. to Carl Schurz, March 17, 1873, Schurz Papers, XIX, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress (henceforth LC); for an estimate of its importance in modern times see Waldo G. Leland, "The Cosmos Club and the Nation," November 16, 1943 (in the History File of the Cosmos Club).
of an older established class. Certainly this was to be expected in a land where material accomplishment was highly valued; that prestige should properly serve as the handmaiden of sudden wealth had become something of a tradition. Social prominence seemed the logical reward for those who had gotten ahead in the economic struggle, and in an increasingly fluid social order there had been abundant examples of the rapid ascent from obscurity to distinction. In the 1870's, as before, vertical mobility was celebrated as a positive aspect of national character, something which lay at the very heart of the democratic faith. Was not the arriviste living proof that the doctrine of free opportunity for all really worked?

This question hardly required an answer; yet the swift rise of large numbers of parvenus did not win universal acclaim. Rapid mobility produced social instability, and those whose positions were disturbed reproached the new men for not having paused to cultivate characteristics which distinguished an American aristocrat. Such attributes as appreciation for scholarship, recognition of aesthetic excellence, worthwhile conversation, avoidance of opulent display, and a sense of public service—traits which might be acquired without breeding—seemed in short supply among the nouveaux riches. Perhaps tenets of good manners and good form had not been considered all that seriously by previous generations. Nevertheless, when they were found lacking in the upstarts, these standards were enshrined as absolute virtues.
Thus the elevation of new wealth was not, alone, grounds for alarm, and the sheer swiftness with which this new class asserted itself was not the principal irritant. "The suddenly rich are on a level with any of us nowadays," proclaimed the Brahmin father to his son in The Rise of Silas Lapham.

... there's no doubt but money is to the fore now. It is the romance, the poetry of our age. It's the thing that chiefly strikes the imagination. The Englishmen who come here are more curious about the great new millionaires than about anyone else, and they respect them more. It's all very well. I don't complain of it.5

Charles Francis Adams, Jr., a real-life Brahmin with one foot firmly planted in the world of commerce and finance, sounded this same note: "They may say what they please, but today wealth is the [leverage ground] in America . . . I want wealth as the springboard to influence, consideration, power, and enjoyment." In 1887 he admitted that "I have all I want—and I want a great deal."6 Therefore, not all men of genteel background found nouveau riche values repugnant. What caused consternation was the disregard for social bearing exhibited by the new class. There was slight awareness of the obligations of social leadership, of the responsibility for setting criteria of behavior and discrimination. Indeed the


newly rich were as vulgar as the society from which they issued. Their barrenness was symptomatic of the general low level of American culture, and critics were contemptuous of both.

From the vantage point of the chair of fine arts at Harvard University, Charles Eliot Norton pronounced his verdict on post-bellum America: "This generation is given over to the making and spending of money, and is losing the capacity of thought." He looked about him and concluded that his countrymen lavished every ounce of their mental energies on material pursuits, and, because they could think of nothing else, intellectual life in America was fast dying-out. Norton felt that there had not been much congeniality toward the creative spirit to begin with; like Clarence King, he believed that Americans were simply "an unartistic people, with neither an indigenous nor an adopted art language in which to render grand thoughts. We are ignorant of the meaning and use of style..." Yet his own age topped others in insensibility toward everything but material abundance and petty amusements. He brooded constantly over the moral and intellectual degeneracy which, he insisted, resulted from the high premium placed on affluence.


8[Clarence King], "Style and the Monument," North American Review, CXLI (November, 1885), 443.
Wealth has become the chief modern form of power, and, usurping the dominion of the old ideals over the imagination, it is sought, not only as a means to other ends, but as itself an end. And it has a great advantage over other objects of desire, in its capacity of securing general and immediate recognition, and in its power to inflame the dullest intelligence by its direct appeal to the sensibilities of men.

"The lack of intellectual elevation and of moral discrimination is a source of national weakness," he railed. "The prevalence of vulgarity is a national disgrace." Search as he might it was impossible for him to discern the faintest glimmer of aesthetic or social achievement.

Norton's attitude toward American life had not always been so laden with gloom. Prior to the Civil War he was optimistic about portents of national improvement. "The grandeur of our opportunities is proportional to the immensities of our deficiencies," he wrote in 1857, "so that one may rejoice to be an American even while seeing how far we fall short in many ways of what is accomplished elsewhere." During the struggle he watched the people growing more enlightened and infused with idealism. Like his Cambridge neighbor, the ever sanguine Professor Louis Agassiz, he felt that through the war effort "slumbering citizens had been


aroused and the nation 'manured' to bring forth a glorious harvest.\textsuperscript{11} To make sure that succeeding harvests would be just as rewarding, Norton helped launch the \textit{Nation}, a magazine designed to keep fertile the democratic ideals implanted in the wartime generation. He might not have gone as far as J. W. DeForest's Dr. Ravenel, who was made to assert that "In these days—the days of Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman—faith in the imagination—faith in the supernatural origins of humanity—becomes possible," but certainly Norton felt that the war years would be remembered as an epoch of moral purpose, and that this spirit was bound to regenerate American democracy and culture.\textsuperscript{12}

The later 1860's disabused him of this notion. The experience of sacrifice had failed to usher in a golden age; rather the war gave way to a period of sterility made more tragic by the hopefulness of the bygone era. As the decade wilted down he engaged in an agonizing reappraisal of America's present condition and outlook for the future. Not surprisingly, for this was true of many Brahmins, sometime around 1870 Norton lost faith in American promise. Recurring illness, personal bereavement, the degradation of Grant's second term

\textsuperscript{11}Diary of Mary Henry, January 4, 1865, \textit{II}, Smithsonian Institution Archives (henceforth SI Archives).

in office, and the tearing down of "walls dear to Norton's memory" combined to undermine his optimism. In 1873, two years after his wife's death, Norton lamented that "all life is likely to be solitary in America to one who cannot share that confident spirit of cheerful optimistic fatalism. . . ." He would have agreed with Walt Whitman's observation: "It is as if we were somehow being endowed with a vast and more and more thoroughly appointed body, and then left with little or no soul." 

To men who deeply believed that the nation was destined for some sort of spiritual greatness, post-war America seemed depressingly hollow and superficial. In a society of "small aims, or no aims at all," said Whitman, it was not the poet and the statesman who were admired, but rather the "fashionably dressed speculators and vulgarians." The Gilded Age was worse than a comedy of manners, it was wretched in the extreme. "I came here fifty years ago with high and fond ideals about America," recalled E. L. Godkin, editor of the Nation. "They are now all shattered, and I apparently have to look elsewhere to keep even moderate hopes

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about the human race alive." The same tone of bitterness resounds in an 1878 letter from Dr. Joseph T. Webb, Rutherford Hayes's brother-in-law, replying to an invitation to a veteran's gathering of the 23rd Ohio Volunteers: "You ask if I shall attend the reunion . . . I shall not . . . it was the mistake of my life in joining the Reg't. I sacrificed my business, and all for what?" This line of reasoning was hard to refute.

John Adams had imagined that the latter nineteenth century would be a period of high cultural attainment. By this time America should have so developed that the gentleman-scholar could devote himself to a life of art, to activities of mind and spirit. But such was not the case. Rather than having as its hallmark a natural aristocracy of worth, American society was marked by a plutocratic element whose chief merit was the ability to accumulate wealth—men like Christopher Newman, Henry James's typical nouveau riche, who believed that substantial railroad investments served as a free pass into the best social circles. Such men were both pretentious and extravagant, using palatial mansions, sea-

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17 Quoted in Harry Barnard, Rutherford B. Hayes and His America (Indianapolis, Ind., 1954), p. 215.

shore summer homes, lavish entertainment, and international marriages in ostentatious attempts to cloak their humble origins. Congressman "Sunset" Cox, of New York, summed it up during the campaign of 1872 as "an insane greed for wealth . . . the desire to shine in the calcium glare of the present feverish round of social and political junketing." As the century passed into its final quarter, Godkin judged that the seventies were "filled with more social garishness and bad taste than any other decade in American history." 

Alfred North Whitehead once remarked that when evaluating contemporary culture we should employ "large-scale maps," lest we lose perspective between "the points of excellence in the past as compared with the average failure of the present day." This advice the post-war Jeremiahs might have heeded with profit, since the Gilded Age was hardly the first period to hear cries of anguish about the upsurge of materialism and the degradation of national character. Over two hundred years earlier Massachusetts Bay Puritans had received an eloquent injunction against the pitfalls of "worldliness," and a stern warning not to let prosperity get

19Quoted in David Lindsay, "Sunset" Cox: Irrepressible Democrat (Detroit, 1959), p. 135.


the better of piety. Equally familiar was the complaint that boorish men of new wealth were robbing America of aesthetic appreciation. "I am out of place," Thomas Cole noted ruefully in 1838, "there are few persons of real taste; and no opportunity for the true artist to develop his powers." Abram Hewitt did not have to wait until after the Civil War to issue his statement that "The consumption of iron is the social barometer by which to estimate the relative height of civilization among nations." Nor was dour uncertainty about the disruptive influences stemming from rapid social and economic changes a post-bellum phenomenon. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century Americans fretted over the corrosion of traditional ideals and the need for cultural stability. William R. Taylor has called the 1830's "The Age of Anxiety," admitting that while this condition was not confined solely to the Jacksonian era, here was a time when the sense of vexation happened to be particularly acute. The same point can be made about the seventies.

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and eighties; Emerson's observation that "Every age, like every human body, has its own distemper" is relevant to both periods. Yet the cash nexus may have proved a greater affliction after the Civil War. As Mark Twain said of Jay Gould and his generation: "The people had desired money before his day, but he taught them to fall down and worship it." Coupled with the widespread feeling that the times were out of joint it seemed that post-war culture was becoming hopelessly debased.

In 1873 Francis Amasa Walker, professor of political economy at Yale's Sheffield Scientific School and superintendent of the United States Census, gave vent to his troubled feelings about Gilded Age America. What alerted him to the problem was that between 1860 and 1870 there was a diminution in the geometrically predicted rate of population increase. Throughout the ante-bellum period statisticians affirmed that an unbroken rise in future population was no less inevitable than uninterrupted national progress, and when it came to making a forecast for the sixties James D. B. DeBow, who in 1850 had headed the seventh census, confidently proclaimed that twenty years hence there would be almost forty-three million Americans. As it turned out Mr. DeBow over estimated


by more than four and a quarter million, an astonishing mis-
calculation considering the accuracy of extrapolations for
the earlier decades. Walker interpreted this failure to
realize the projected gain as a sign of national malaise.
According to his diagnosis there was every indication that
the condition would grow worse, and very little reason to
hope that it would get better.

If retardation could have been written off as a
consequence of the Civil War, Walker reasoned, then there
would be little cause for concern. Obviously this was an
unnatural condition not likely to occur soon again; follow-
ing a brief delay the curve of population could be expected
to resume its steady ascent. But after totalling up the
numerical loss due to military casualties, a temporary re-
duction in the birth rate, and the war's effects on immigration
and former slaves, the aggregate was not nearly enough to
account for the disappointingly low population figure for
1870. Thus Walker showed statistically that the war was not
responsible for what had taken place and what seemed to lie
ahead. Instead the decline had to be attributed to a combi-
nation of "social forces and tendencies, not heretofore felt,
or at least not heretofore recognized, in our national life,
[that] are beginning to affect powerfully the reproductive
capabilities of our people." Walker's speculations about the
enervating influences of mass society seemed to be substanti-
ated a few years later by the work of Dr. George Beard, a
New York City neurologist, who, in 1881, published the sensational book *American Nervousness*. Post-war Americans suffered from nervous exhaustion, announced Beard, because the unsettling forces of modern civilization caused a depletion of "nerve force." Although the symptoms identified by the doctor (insomnia, sweating hands and feet, involuntary emissions, dryness of the hair, fear of everything) were less acute than those noted by the professor, they both arrived at the same conclusion. For his part Walker wrote with considerable wit and many of his arguments were made tongue in cheek. Yet he appears to have been gravely earnest about this: "These forces and tendencies have contributed in a very large degree within the last decade to bring down the ratio of increase in the native population."  

What were these factors which Walker considered so deleterious? They were the by-products of mid-nineteenth century industrialization, the moral and social changes that ate away at traditional values underpinning American culture. The price of economic and urban growth was a weakening of the national character, and this was reflected in the census results. Where earlier statisticians had gone wrong, he argued, was in aligning themselves with the prophets of progress by

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considering material advancement conducive to population increase. Rather it was the other way around, that the rate of population declined in proportion to industrialization and urbanization because these processes had side effects which proved debilitating to the spirit. Since Americans showed no inclination to curb their appetites for the fruits of material development, Walker was pessimistic about the future.

... as the whole population tends increasingly to fashion and social observance; as diet, dress, and equipage become more and more artificial; and as the detestable American vice of "boarding," making children truly "encumbrances," and uprooting the ancient and honored institutions of the family, extends from city to city and from village to village,—it is not to be doubted that we shall note a steady decline in the rate of the national increase from decade to decade.2

Though this dire forecast lacked Walker's customary precision, and even after making allowances for the fact that he sometimes went to extremes in pleading the importance of character,30 his expressions of anxiety about post-war culture were highly revealing.


30Mr. Walter Camp, for so many years associated with Yale athletics, confirms the opinion of others that Walker looked on football or baseball as a matter of vital importance because of its effect upon the morale of the youth concerned. He had no patience with the dilettante attitude which regards a game as a means of passing the time, or with the utilitarian point of view which looks upon it simply as a pleasant method of securing exercise." James Phinney Munroe, A Life of Francis Amasa Walker (New York, 1923), pp. 151-152; George M. Fredrickson, The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union (New York, 1965), pp. 223-224.
Walker went beyond sounding the familiar note of spiritual deterioration by locating the causes of this phenomenon in the "eddy and swirl of social and industrial currents through which the nation is now passing." In other words his pessimism was a response to cultural disorder and instability. He called attention to the slashes in the fabric of American life, to the breakdown of traditional patterns of thought and behavior, and to the rupture of whatever cultural unity the country had possessed, because he reckoned that here could be found the explanation for the disintegration of values. National character had waned, then, due to the absence of order following the Civil War. Indeed the disruption of culture was so complete that after the smoke of battle had cleared America seemed to be a different nation.

Henry Adams confessed that when part of his family returned to the United States from England in 1868, having missed observing the war at first hand, they were bewildered by the hasty transformations it had wrought, and could not help feeling alienated from the new style of their native land.

Had they been Tyrian traders of the year B.C. 1000, landing from a galley fresh from Gibraltar, they could hardly have been stranger on the shore of a world, so changed from what it had been ten years before. . . . How much its

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31 Walker, Atlantic Monthly, XXXII, 495.
character had changed or was changing, they could not wholly know, and they could but partly feel.\textsuperscript{32}

The texture of American civilization had been devastated and all was in flux. Nearly twenty years after the war ended Charles Francis Adams, Jr., still talked anxiously about its unsettling effects, and feared that the nation's recovery demanded "quiet more than anything."\textsuperscript{33} To those of the Adams' stamp, men whose watchwords were continuity and community, it appeared that life was dissolving into chaos. Henry's father somberly predicted that anarchy was not far off.\textsuperscript{34}

By 1873 it seemed that his prophecy was on the verge of being fulfilled. Against the background of economic depression which descended over the land that year—while Charles Eliot Norton continued to mourn the passing of idealism and intellectual vitality, which he felt was a prelude to degeneracy; and Francis Amasa Walker resumed the statistical


\textsuperscript{33}Thomas Wentworth Higginson to his sister [Anna Higginson?], August 6, 1883, Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1846-1906, ed. Mary Thacher Higginson (Boston, 1921), 322-323.

\textsuperscript{34}Martin B. Duberman, Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886 (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 337; his son, Charles Francis, Jr., was equally "impatient with 'chance,' 'anarchy,' 'chaos,' words constantly at the end of his pen." Edward C. Kirkland, Business in the Gilded Age: The Conservatives' Balance Sheet (Madison, Wisc., 1952), p. 10; for an analysis of how social flux led to predictions of doom see Frederic Cople Jaher, Doubters and Dissenters: Cataclysmic Thought in America, 1885-1918 (New York, 1964).
analyses which seemed to confirm his worst fears about America's future; and Henry Adams proceeded with the excursions in scientific history which led him to conclude that the world was being drawn inexorably and with increasing rapidity toward annihilation—President Grant began his second term of office, and the Gilded Age carnival rolled merrily along.

Many of the characteristics of Gilded Age America could be discerned in Washington. Indeed, the city was a microcosmic reflection of national culture, with fortunes quickly gained, status changes of different social groups, and the effects of these transformations being as visible as in the nation at large. "Wealth is omnipresent," wrote newspaperman Don Piatt, "and the humanities drive about in gorgeous carriages and live among stunning upholstery." Parvenus competed with established families and there was the same sort of coarse showiness as manifested elsewhere. This could be seen in the contrasting architectural styles of the Capital

35 Although Norton and Walker did not duplicate Adams' attempts to construct a systematic theory of decay, they obviously adhered to an anti-Comtian linear view of history and would have agreed with Adams that the deceleration of human progress resulted from a decrease of the energy that was vital to its continuance. Adams' historical speculations are critically assessed in William H. Jordy, Henry Adams: Scientific Historian (New Haven, Conn., 1952), pp. 121-255.


City. Elaborate ornamentation was mingled with older buildings representing simplicity and restraint. In 1874 newly planted trees symbolized a wealthy class which had not yet established its roots, and dusty, unpaved streets were analogous to this group's unfinished character. "Much that was old," recalled one Washingtonian, "and part of it singularly delightful, had been destroyed. Most of that which was new was not only raw but in need of growth as well as refinement." Newness and imperfection in a physical sense had their counterparts in Washington society.

For instance, there were elements of affluence as well as sham in the nabobs' entertaining. Frank G. Carpenter, correspondent for the Cleveland Leader, and later a member of the Cosmos Club, reported that "the dinners of Washington could not be more expensive if their pepper and salt were grains of gold dust." Yet he also detected a good deal of counterfeit.

It is well known that Washington hostesses hire the china for their large balls and receptions. Almost every china store in this town has stocks of plain white dishes which go out and come back many times during the social season. I asked one of these merchants why the dishes used for this purpose were so plain. "It is not because people like them," he explained, "but because their guests cannot so easily tell that this is the same china they ate from the day before at another house."

38Helen Nicolay, Sixty Years of the Literary Society (Washington, D.C., 1934), p. 4; Whyte, Uncivil War, pp. 13-17, 178-183.

It was rumored that the fine ladies of Washington rented their jewelry.

Some observers denied that Washington had any elegance whatsoever, and upbraided life at the Capital as an existence of "veneered furniture" and "plated spoons" in which "vulgar people who amass fortunes by successful gambling in stocks, pork, or grain can attain a great deal of cheap newspaper notoriety for their social expenditures. . . ."\(^4\) Jane W. Gemmill, writing for the benefit of those who would not be able to visit the Capital and view conditions for themselves, noted that "society, as at present existing in Washington, is very peculiarly made up, and at its best very hollow and unsatisfactory."\(^5\) This criticism was mild compared with an account that stressed the meretricious rather than merely the artificial.

There are more of the demimonde in Washington now than ever before. No law is put into force to stop them. They parade Pennsylvania Avenue in scores every bright afternoon, dressed in their seal skins and silks, either walking or driving in some of the best-looking turnouts in the city. They even enter the galleries of Congress . . . the private galleries reserved for the members' families, where a member of Congress must have furnished the ticket for their admission.\(^6\)


\(^6\)Carp's Washington, p. 110.
Placed in proper perspective Washington's seamy side could be taken as evidence of maturity, since moral delinquency is often a natural part of the process of urbanization. Yet this was not the interpretation it received. Instead, there were exaggerated descriptions of lechery, inferring that the city revelled in sin and was hopelessly debauched.

"Carp" also pointed to behavior that could be defined only as flagrantly bizarre.

A curious feature of the wining and dining of Washington is the craze for giving entertainments of special colors. Not long ago Miss Bacon, the daughter of Representative Bacon of New York, gave a red luncheon at which the shades of the candles and glass globes were red, the bread and baked potatoes were tied with red ribbon, and a cushion of red tulips formed the centerpiece. The souvenirs were Japanese bonbons with dwarf red roses springing from their tops. Even the ice cream was red, in the form of strawberries in little red candy hampers.43

So whether focusing on moral shoddiness or simply aberrant conduct, what passed for society in Washington could be dismissed as nothing more than an unsavory spectacle. "Washington stood outside the social pale," said Henry Adams. "No Bostonian had ever gone there."44 His dismal opinion was confirmed by another contemporary who stated frankly that "the city does not offer many attractions to a stranger, and

43Carp's Washington, p. 89.
few care to remain after seeing the National Property. 45

"Rents are high, food is bad, the dust is disgusting, the mud is deep, and the morals are deplorable," lamented a newspaper editor. 46 He was not alone in judging Washington totally unbearable. Frequently this condition was attributed to the nature of the population. In the spring of 1861 occurred an exodus of southerners who had directed social life at the Capital throughout its history. Filling the vacuum was a hodgepodge of "politicians of every grade, adventurers of either sex, inventors of all sorts of military appliances, and simple citizens, good and bad." 47 Washington, therefore, was without a class which could take the lead as a refining element in regard to tastes and habits. Other cities were more fortunate, and seemed to enjoy loftier amusements which brought about mental improvement and noble pursuits. Washington, on the other hand, was characterized by "a demoralizing haste to be rich, a vulgar, consuming passion for display." 48


46 Albert W. Atwood, Gallaudet College, its First One Hundred Years (Lancaster, Pa., 1964), p. 16.


Members of the government, especially senators, set the tone for social life by living on an expensive scale. Their quarters tended to be sumptuous, and they entertained lavishly with "everything to eat and drink that money could buy." Indeed, during the late sixties, what was reputed to be the most elegant house in Washington was owned by the millionaire senator from New York, Edwin D. Morgan. Abigail Dodge, a cousin of the wife of James G. Blaine who lived with the Blaine's in Washington, expressed the dominant view that:

Ill-gotten and well-gotten wealth have usurped the leadership of society. It is the custom, we are informed, for a society woman to dazzle, not by her beauty or conversation, but by the quality of her dress and the value of her jewels, and that a costume is not remarked upon as being in good taste and becoming, but as having cost so many hundred dollars.

In short, brocade and bank notes were commonly employed to disguise fundamental social deficiencies; appurtenances of elegance passed for the real thing. "When you become

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51 Hamilton, Galaxy, XXI, 762.
conversant with our political society, you will find, with all its charmingness and brightness, that there are no convictions beneath it." It must have been exceptional for one like Madeleine Lee, in Henry Adams' novel Democracy, who "was sober in her tastes" and "made no display," to create the impression of "luxury." Her sister, Miss Sybil Ross, was more typical. She had Paris dresses and "wore them and her ornaments according to all the formulas." But like the society she represented, "Sybil was transparent." Extravagance was most striking in White House social functions. Frequently there were elaborate, crowded receptions, a practice which Henry Adams called "droll aping of monarchical forms." Formal dinners were exceedingly splendid. During the Grant administration they were held regularly on Wednesday evenings and stood as the high points of the fashionable season. An average of thirty-six guests were seated in the state dining room, "suggestive of a baronial hall." Festoons and gilt vases were everywhere. The table was adorned with a long mirror, "a rare work of art" which would have permitted the diners to view themselves eating except for the columns of ferns which formed its border. The Italian steward, Melah, served twenty-nine courses. Six wineglasses were set before

52 Townsend, Washington, p. 684.

each plate and a new wine served with every third course.\textsuperscript{54}

Few events equaled the wedding of the President's eighteen year old daughter in the Executive Mansion. Nellie Grant was a high spirited youth whose gay activities aggravated proper Washingtonians and caused much clucking of tongues. They frowned on an upbringing which failed to "shield her from the allurements of pleasure," and shook their heads in dismay when she "suddenly 'came out' a full-fledged young woman of fashion, spoken of almost exclusively as the driver of a phaeton, and the leader of the all-night German."\textsuperscript{55} Although her engagement to Algernon Sartoris, an English gentleman, was roundly disapproved of, they were married in May, 1874, in what was reputed to be "the most elaborate wedding that ever took place in the White House."\textsuperscript{56} The Marine Band played while guests were escorted into the East Room, where flowers bedecked the windows, walls, mantles, tables, chandeliers, and doorways. "The bride had a trousseau fit for an emperor's daughter, and the gifts showered upon

\textsuperscript{54}Emily Edson Briggs, The Olivia Letters: Being Some History of Washington City for Forty Years as Told by the Letters of a Newspaper Correspondent (New York, 1905), pp. 199-207; "Life at the National Capital," Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science, XII (December, 1873), 658-659.

\textsuperscript{55}Mary Clemmer Ames, Ten Years in Washington: Life and Scenes in the National Capital, as a Woman Sees Them (Hartford, Conn., 1874), p. 245; Maurice Francis Egan, Recollections of a Happy Life (New York, 1924), pp. 62-63.

\textsuperscript{56}Logan, Reminiscences, p. 346.
her represented a fortune."57 After the ceremony there was a breakfast followed by an inspection of presents: a dessert set of eighty-four pieces, a dinner service valued at $4,500, two rings, an emerald and a diamond, worth $1,000 each, a $500 handkerchief, and a $10,000 check from the father of the bride. "All the gifts were arranged by a special agent from Philadelphia, who attractively classified them in accordance with the stores from which they were purchased!"58 A month later the President paid $3,827 in department store and dressmakers' bills, an amount that covered only New York and Philadelphia stores—the doubling of his salary in 1873 came none too soon.

Equally imperative was the establishment of rules of etiquette. Since elegant society entailed appropriate conventions of behavior this became a matter of first importance. Many families which were rapidly achieving notoriety were unaccustomed to observing proper courtesies, and much of Washington society was loud and uncouth. For the sake of order, and to reduce boorishness and confusion, it seemed wise to teach the social climbers accepted modes of conduct.

One who eagerly met this pedagogical challenge was Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, a celebrated Washingtonian whose


father had served twenty years in Congress and whose late husband, Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren, became widely known through his contributions to the U.S. Coast Survey and his seminal work in naval ordnance. Mrs. Dahlgren won fame on her own as an organizer of charitable activities, as an author and dominant force in Washington's Literary Society, and, most of all, as the self-appointed arbiter of taste.

She was remarkably similar to the fictional heroine, Madeleine Lee: both were strong-willed and high-minded; both had lost distinguished husbands while they themselves were still in the prime of life; each engaged in philanthropy but restlessly sought more satisfying outlets for their reformist drives; ultimately, after shedding their widow's weeds, both tried to bring about a refinement of Washington society. 59

Mrs. Lee operated quietly, by turning her parlor into an exclusive salon for witty and clever people. Mrs. Dahlgren, on the other hand, was far more obtrusive. Her crusade took the form of a promulgation of ordinances for proper behavior, Etiquette of Social Life in Washington, which first appeared in 1873, went through many editions, and upset many people.

A hostile clique developed in the Literary Society and

Lucretia Garfield defied Mrs. Dahlgren by refusing to adopt her rigorous format for White House receptions. Nonetheless, she remained a prominent figure in fashionable circles, as her "personal social register" makes clear. Also, the rules which she laid down continued to be obeyed. Finally, there seemed to be general agreement about the urgent need for social guidelines.

As a consequence there appeared a spate of publications designed to serve as manuals of good manners. These books were educative, expounding intricate codes of conduct and preparing the reader for every conceivable situation. Detailed directions fortified him against a myriad of possible faux pas which otherwise might have proved embarrassing in Washington society. When to bow, how to shake hands, the writing of acceptances and regrets, dress, conversation, deportment at table—none of these was overlooked. Primers on etiquette also aimed at a higher objective.


While providing for ordinary day-to-day contacts they sought at the same time to reconcile aristocratic customs with a nonaristocratic social order. This condition reflected what Arthur Schlesinger termed "the leveling-up process of democracy." Without denying the mythology of egalitarianism and classlessness the desire for genteel appearances was writ large. Adams' remark about the "aping of monarchial forms" contained more truth than humor. "Because we are a republic," proclaimed Mrs. Dahlgren, "we are not necessarily to be deprived of those amenities which render life agreeable." At the very least it should be understood that "though democracies may be rude they must not be inhospitable." Furthermore, refined forms and practices were not alien to the American environment. On the contrary, they were as indigenous as the founding fathers, but unfortunately had been dissipated by the waves of democratization earlier in the century. Surely there had been a "rigid observance" of social etiquette in Washington's day, which endured the "radical sentiments" of Jefferson. "But General Jackson, when he became President, first broke down


64Lippincott's Magazine, XII, 657.
the barriers of careful respect. . . ."65 Now they had to be reconstructed.

What seems striking about this hand-wringing over social gaucheries, and brooding over the disappearance of idealism, is that there was such a widespread concern with the lack of form and direction in Gilded Age America. Of significance is the fact that a great many people were aware of the unsettled pattern of post-war life. While the war effort had evoked a spirit of national purpose, it had not resulted in the creation of cultural unity, and those who longed for cohesion were sorely disappointed. Social and economic changes rooted in the ante-bellum era and accelerated by the war itself had left American culture formless. To young George Santayana "society seemed to lack contrast and definition, as if everything were half formed and groping after its essence."66

The most obvious manifestation of this unformed condition was the indefinite status of taste and decorum. If there had ever existed well rooted precedents for the conduct

65Dahlgren, Etiquette, p. 15. The first president actually was invoked as part of the campaign to improve taste and conduct. Appearing within a span of four years were: George Washington's Fifty-Seven Rules of Behavior (1886); Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation (1888); George Washington's Rules of Civility Traced to Their Sources (1890).

of social intercourse they had been buried in the avalanche of changes. Thus the urgency for new norms that would properly fit the post-war nation. Grant's fumbling attempts to establish practices for state functions serve to illustrate this situation. The White House dinner parties and formal receptions reveal more than freakish behavior; they convey a sense of groping uncertainty as to how the President's social and ceremonial duties should be performed in the new era. Similarly, Grant's table setting is significant not as an example of grotesqueness, but because it bespeaks the "un-abashed experimentation" that was so characteristic of the age. 67 Here was one dimension of the larger problem of cultural disorderliness. The drive for social conventions which could act as guides to proper conduct was therefore aimed at ameliorating the general confusion about what constituted acceptable deportment.

Yet the confusion about polite courtesies was only the visible cap of the iceberg, nothing more than the most prominent features of disorder. Commotion over such trifles as which fork to use when merely called attention to the more fundamental disarray of a disintegrated culture. 68


The Washington of the 1870's, however, was not entirely a wasteland; there were also gratifying aspects. Indeed, throughout the last quarter of the century, Capital life was often praised for its quiet dignity. "The society circle in Washington in 1873," recalled one observer, "was small compared with that of today. . . . The old Washingtonians were more an evidence than now and the political element came and went without disturbing in any marked degree the harmony of the social atmosphere. 69 "The circle in Washington was very small . . . and the entertainments many but simple." 70 Another resident wrote that it was "unnecessary for anyone to live beyond his position or to try to dazzle his neighbors by a too lavish parade of wealth." 71 Many people enjoyed an unhurried existence that was rich in its modesty. For those whose tastes were not pretentious social intercourse could be consummately pleasant. In 1928, a former superintendent of the U.S. Coast Survey and president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology reminisced about Washington fifty years before.


70Egan, Recollections, p. 64.

71Wilson, Washington, II, 393.
[It was then] a delightful and hospitable town; there were no rich people; everybody had his daily work in some department of the government and carried his lunch with him—the most aristocratic in cotton napkins, the bourgeoisie in paper napkins. All went home to a half-past five o'clock dinner. For six months of the year the social life of Washington was on the front doorsteps of democratic, but none the less hospitable homes.\textsuperscript{72}

Mrs. William Howard Taft maintained that the pernicious influence of new wealth was not felt until the close of the century.

In 1890 society in Washington still consisted, chiefly, of the "best families" of the old city, the diplomatic corps and the highest among the government officials. A dinner party of twelve was still considered large, and only a few people had weekly evenings at home. There were occasional big receptions, but for nobody was society the mad rush that it is today. We ourselves lived very simply even for those simple days.\textsuperscript{73}

Thus, during the Cleveland era, it could be said by a Smithsonian regent and member of the government, that "there are many pleasant things about the social side of public life in Washington. It is very democratic and yet one cannot go to a large dinner without meeting somebody well worth meeting."\textsuperscript{74} As late as 1900 Washington was compared to "a village,


\textsuperscript{73}Mrs. William Howard Taft, Recollections of Full Years (New York, 1914), p. 27.

where everyone knows everybody else"; where "the general air of its inhabitants is one of dignified ease"; where the citizenry was not "degraded by the greed of commercialism," and "tact and cleverness, brilliancy and beauty, exercise greater influence . . . than they do in most cities."75

Clearly those who extolled Washington, like those who denounced it, tended to see only limited sets of characteristics, and as a result of this astigmatism their descriptions were badly out of focus. Better perception would have revealed a city which was neither all gaudy and flamboyant, nor completely cultivated and genteel, and a social structure with several qualitatively different levels. As Laura Hawkins discovered, in The Gilded Age, three distinct components made up Washington society. There was the old aristocratic group which apotheosized its own cultivation, ancestral roots, and distinguished record of public service. Families in this rigidly exclusive category were referred to as "Antiques." At the opposite pole was the "Aristocracy of the Parvenus" into which anyone might enter—provided, of course, he had money or official position. Origins counted for nothing and immediate assets were all. The "Antiques" somehow managed to ignore the "Parvenus," while the presumptuous "Parvenus" laughed at the "Antiques," even though they

75A. Maurice Low, "Washington: The City of Leisure," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXVI (December, 1900), 768-775.
secretly envied them. In between towered a middle group, "the best aristocracy of the three Washington castes, and the most powerful, by far..." The heads of these families held posts in the legislative and executive branches of government. Educated, competent, and discreet, they "moved serenely in their wide orbit, confident in their own strength and well aware of the potency of their influence." The "Parvenus," as a result of their behavior, were most conspicuous, and as they asserted themselves the older residents became more withdrawn. "They were powerless to resist the tide of excess which so changed the character of their old home, and so protested against the orgies of the new comers by taking no part in them." "

Retirement by established social leaders was an attempt to raise the distinction between authentic quality and the artificial society of the newly rich. Setting themselves apart seemed a means for achieving exclusiveness. Collectively they would comprise a polite social class, the best Washington had to offer. Furthermore, withdrawal seemed a sure way of overcoming the frustrations of cultural disharmony, a kind of counterpoint to crassness. Those dismayed


by the texture of social life could form for themselves a cultivated circle which would serve as a real community of interest. This elite would be the embodiment of sophistication and simple dignity; a closely knit group, fastidious and highly civilized. Not only would its few members be treated to the charm of their own company, but together they could sneer at mediocrity.

For the most part these "cave-dwellers," as they came to be called, were located in the stately brick homes surrounding Lafayette Square. Ironically, this rectangular green opposite the White House had once been a graveyard. By the 1870's it provided the setting for a "series of mansions probably more historic than any other single group in the entire country," and it served as the last stronghold of a permanent residential society whose existence was independent of political changes. 78 Here Twain's "Antiques" spent their evenings, entertaining each other while eschewing showy official receptions; and here developed a society praised as "the most delightful in the world." 79


79 "Washington Gossip," Cincinnati Commercial, November 9, 1876, xeroxed copy in the Rutherford B. Hayes Library.
notable was the salon of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Adams, "an intellectual and high-bred center, a rendezvous for the best ton and the most acceptable people." Although they sought isolation, members of this genteel group had the effect of off-setting some of the flimsiness and fraud of Capital life. Many were important figures in literature, science, and art, and Washington as a whole shared the prestige of their intellectual amusements.

Coincident with this drive for social order, and the creation of a cultivated elite, was Washington's emergence as a hub of scientific enterprise. During the latter part of the nineteenth century it was estimated "that there are more men of distinction in science in Washington than any other city in the country." Numbers seemed to imply significance, as was further revealed in 1883 when Matthew Arnold visited Washington to lecture on "Literature and Science." Although no local intellectual was deemed worthy of sharing the platform with Arnold, considerable pride was derived from the fact that the audience contained two dozen scientists from the Smithsonian Institution alone. One


81 Poore, Perley's Reminiscences, II, 529.

contemporary announced the arrival of a "new era," declaring that "there seems reason to anticipate that in time our capital city of Washington will come to be as well known as a centre of literature and art, as it is now recognized as the centre of statesmanship, law and science."83 Another observer boasted that as soon as its social, political, and intellectual forces were fused into an ordered whole Washington would stand as "the most superb manifestation of civilization."84

Such extravagant expectations reflected the ambitious plans of the scientists, educators, and men of specialized scholarship who had gravitated to Washington during the Civil War decade and, afterward, sought to make the seat of government into the capital of national culture. When Anna E. Dickinson declared her "unlimited belief in its [Washington's] capacity to do anything," she actually was giving voice to the conviction held by local savants that the city's possibilities for advancing culture were infinite, and that once its resources were tapped Washington would become "the intel-

83I. Edward Clarke, "The Conditions of Literature in Washington at the Time of the Founding of This Society," read before the Literary Society of Washington, January 21, 1899, Literary Society Papers, LC.

84Ames, Ten Years, p. 255.
lectual mecca of the civilized world." Certain inter-
connected factors appeared to justify this optimistic view.
With the expansion of government agencies and quasi-govern-
mental institutions, promising young men were attracted to
Washington in greater numbers than ever before. Many worked
for newly created bodies like the United States Geological
Survey, Army Medical Museum, United States Fish Commission,
Department of Agriculture, and the Smithsonian's Bureau of
Ethnology. The Smithsonian itself broadened the scope of
its activities during this period, as did other pre-war
institutions such as the Coast Survey, the Signal Service,
the Light House Board, the Patent Office, and the Naval
Observatory. Thus Washington took on stature as a locus of
scientific training and research, and, rather quickly,
acquired the reputation of being a "unique and colossal
'educational plant.'" Indeed, with its potentially fine
national libraries, art collections, museums, educational
facilities, and a permanent corps of scientific and literary
men there seemed no reason to doubt that Washington could
take the lead in promoting all departments of knowledge and
enhancing American culture. This vision was sustained by

85 Anna E. Dickinson, A Ragged Register (of People,
Places and Opinions) (New York, 1879), p. 183; Tallmadge A.
Lambert, "Observations on the Development of the National
Capital," Records of the Columbia Historical Society, II
(Washington, D.C., 1899), 291.

86 James C. Welling to Daniel C. Gilman, March 29,
1889, Gilman Papers, The Johns Hopkins University Library.
post-war nationalism, according to which the Capital was conceived of as the heart of future advancement. Consequently, Washington and its institutions became vastly important, as illustrated by Francis Lieber's statement to the Librarian of Congress when donating some books.

I have taken a pleasure in inscribing in these volumes "To the National Library." It is not the official name, but I take the liberty. It is the name you have to come to. Library of Congress was good enough in Jeffersonian times; but is not now after the war . . . I give these books on account of the Nationality in your library, and not of its Congressionality.87

Gilded Age Washington looked like the ideal time and place for what Daniel Coit Gilman called "young men bent on progress," and scores of them hastened to take advantage of the situation both for themselves and for the nation.88

Washington after the Civil War presented a portrait full of light and shadows. It was at once a "great and wicked" city mirroring the best and worst of the period.89 In certain respects this culture was singularly inelegant. Epitomized by rough men of new wealth it seemed materialistic, tasteless, and thoroughly devoid of purpose. Custodians of genteel culture and social critics were scornful

87 Francis Lieber to Ainsworth R. Spofford, May 20, 1870, Spofford Papers, LC.


89 Harriett Blaine to Walker Blaine, May 27, 1869, Letters of Mrs. Blaine, I, 10.
of what they regarded as a new American style. They had
looked forward with hope and optimism to the post-bellum era
which, they confidently felt, was destined to be one of high
moral purpose and spiritual greatness. But the war years
had had a greater effect in whetting selfish appetites than
in heightening idealistic fervor, and during the general
pursuit of earthly riches traditional values were rudely
trampled under.

At first glance Washington looked no more inspiring
than the rest of the nation. Its society was of a low
caliber and its luminaries were often coarse and vapid.
Some sensitive Washingtonians sought to ameliorate this
condition by resurrecting forgotten rules of etiquette.
Others, who were pessimistic about possibilities for over-
all improvement, retreated into a social circle of their
own choosing. But Washington also contained a powerful
"middle aristocracy," as Twain labelled it, in which could
be found many of the foremost intellectuals of the late
nineteenth century. These men were deeply, if quietly,
involved in public life, and together they added an important
dimension to late nineteenth century culture, as can be seen
in their first great achievement, the ordering of Washington's
intellectual community.
CHAPTER II

"ELEGANT CIRCLES"

Observers who reported favorably on post-war Washington usually were impressed by the city's ability to spawn scientific and literary societies. Not only did these organizations impose a modicum of order on an otherwise formless culture, they also seemed to bespeak a flourishing interest in matters of the mind and spirit. But then, as now, intellectual pretentions did not guarantee excellence. In the rash of associations that were hastily established during this period there could always be found poor imitations of the authentic.

This unhappy condition was due to the fact that membership in a scientific or literary society had symbolic as well as intrinsic value, and many people were allured more by the former than the latter. Those in the genteel class, attempting to set themselves apart from Gilded Age barbarians, found such groups decidedly useful. Literature as an avocation had traditionally designated a gentleman; it was the universal certificate of breeding and leisure. Science in post-war America brought even higher social dividends. To be deeply interested in science was to be "cultivated," for
devotion to its abstractions showed that one eschewed material concerns. Hence the vogue of literary and scientific societies among the educated who sought to emphasize their distinctiveness.¹

The nouveaux riches considered identification with intellectually oriented groups just as important, if for slightly different reasons. In their case these affiliations offset the lack of family background as they tried to establish social position. Once again, much of the popularity of scientific and literary societies stemmed from the status which they automatically bestowed. Farsighted and practical individuals who organized learned societies after the Civil War knew that the quest for connections could redound to their advantage, and as a result men of means often became the principal benefactors of scientific and literary associations. When Franz Boas solicited advice about starting an ethnological society in New York, for example, he was reminded that "you want patrons as well as talkers, men who like to see their names among intellectual people."² But not all the


²Otis T. Mason to Franz Boas, December 3, 1887, Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society; Joseph Henry had said much the same thing seventeen years before in "Examination of Professor Henry by the English Government Scientific Commission," Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, XVIII (Washington, D.C., 1880), 781-782.
status seekers were drawn into intellectually respectable groups. Many developed circles of their own, and as the years passed and these multiplied, Washington was surfeited.

One who regarded this plethora of organizations as highly amusing was the American born wife of Johan de Hegermann-Lindencrone, Danish Minister to the United States. She was a member of several different circles and even her Negro valet, Robert, belonged to a Browning-Tennyson reading club. Robert used to wear the club decoration in his button-hole when serving formal dinners. Often guests identified it as the French Legion of Honor, and once he was mistaken for the Minister from Haiti. Mme. de Hegermann-Lindencrone's letters from the Capital contain reports of "Sunday evenings" at Mary Isabel Robeson's, wife of Grant's Secretary of the Navy and a member of the musical section of the Washington Literary Society. Oddly the hostess did not allow music because she felt it limited conversation. To the beautiful Lillie de Hegermann-Lindencrone, herself the center of a musical set as well as an acclaimed virtuoso, this policy was preposterous. In 1879 the Minister and his wife and a few intimates, Carl Schurz among them, organized the National Rational International Dining Club. There were by-laws and officers—"who had the job of recognizing and calling attention to the jokes."³ Other groups, however, were more serious

about establishing an intellectual community.

The impulse for enhancing Washington society was exemplified by the salon presided over by Horatio King. King, a former cabinet officer and long time resident had made the cultivation of intellect his major purpose in life. Born and raised on a farm near Paris, Maine, he received little formal instruction beyond what the common schools could provide, and the breadth of his knowledge was almost entirely self-acquired. He did not attend Bowdoin College which during the first third of the nineteenth century stood as the Athens of northern New England. Had he done so he would have known the celebrated company of William Pitt Fessenden, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Franklin Pierce, and Calvin Stowe. Instead he went to work as a printer's devil, and like some of his friends who hailed from the inverted triangle extending between New Hampshire and the Kennebec River—notably Hannibal Hamlin, Anson Morrill, and Elihu Washburne and his brothers Cadwallader and Israel—King made his mark without benefit of higher education. Rather than hindering his progress this void inspired him to map out a course of personal study covering a broad range of subjects.

Before they were twenty he and future Vice-President

Hamlin became owners of their hometown newspaper, the Jeffersonian, and in 1830 King emerged as its editor and sole proprietor. Under his management the paper hewed to a pro-Jacksonian position, a loyalty which brought about his removal to Washington. In 1839 Amos Kendall rewarded him with a clerkship in the Post Office Department, and King began his steady climb to the rank of Postmaster General. Upon retirement he devoted himself to community service, most significantly as secretary of the Washington Monument Society and he was instrumental in bringing the project to completion. Horatio King's rise from farm boy to member of the government reaffirmed the national faith in equality of opportunity and individual advancement. Beyond that it placed him in the front rank of Washington society after the Civil War, and given his commitment to learning, it was natural that he would use this position in an endeavor to elevate cultural standards.⁴

Seeking to fulfill the responsibilities of social leadership, King, late in 1869, began holding what were known as "literary reunions." These assemblies were not conducted under the auspices of any official organization, but rather came about at the pleasure of the host. Attendance was by invitation only and on several occasions visitors who appeared

⁴For a biographical account by his son see Horatio King, Turning On the Light... (Philadelphia, 1895), pp. 7-21.
without one of King's handsomely engraved cards found the portal barred. Mrs. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, widow of the famed ethnologist, was turned away, and King showed no compunction about refusing a friend who requested admission. On this point King was unyielding—regardless of the mortification inflicted. When pressed for justification of the policy he would explain that his house was simply too small to accommodate more than the anticipated number. However, there was also the ulterior purpose of insuring that without exception guests would be persons of influence and standing. King's objective was to provide an atmosphere for "free and pleasant intercourse among the educated and accomplished." Simply put this meant excluding lightweights by making the reunions highly selective. There had been literary groups at the Capital before, but, as Mrs. Schoolcraft painfully discovered, King's was the first to consider the quality of its members a sine qua non.

This is not to say that King welcomed only authors and critics. Had he done so his reunions would have failed for want of participants since Gilded Age Washington was

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5 Unsigned letter to Horatio King, December 15, 1870, and King to Henry A. Brewster, January 12, 1871, King Papers, V, LC.

6 Horatio King to W. W. Belknap, March 22, 1870, ibid.

hardly well stocked with prestigious literary figures. Most writers and scholars of note were either transient lecturers or temporary residents. George William Curtis often spent an evening at King's when he visited Washington, and Moses Coit Tyler, then commencing his landmark study of Colonial American literature, addressed the King group in January, 1871. Lew Wallace frequented reunions during 1873 while working at the Library of Congress preparatory to writing Ben-Hur, but his stay was brief and when it ended King's circle lost one of its few famous authors. In fact, the composition of the reunions was less artistic than governmental, which was to be expected considering what King sought to accomplish. He hoped that his gatherings might gain public attention, set an example others would follow, and thereby create a countervailing force against what he referred to as "the crowded and expensive 'receptions' held at unreasonable hours and which are so unnecessary and unreasonable in almost every respect." It was imperative, therefore, to have celebrities no matter how tenuous their ties with belles lettres.

Within the context of Washington this meant primarily office holders or persons like King who had occupied positions in the government. Literary qualifications were but lightly considered. Thus Millard Fillmore was invited to reunions

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8Horatio King to W. W. Belknap, March 22, 1870, King Papers, V, LC.
although he once had been obliged to refuse an honorary degree from Oxford because, by his own admission, he had done nothing worthwhile in science or literature. Over the years most well known politicians were prevailed upon to attend. President Grant, for example, was promised "a more cordial, if not as warm and brilliant a reception as he received at Fort Donaldson, Vicksburg and Richmond,"⁹ while an overture to President Hayes contained the assurance that "literary exercises would not last more than an hour."¹⁰

Stressing the felicity of his reunions was one way King tried to attract important personalities; another was by making certain that his gatherings stayed apolitical. With the conviction that art and politics do not mix he was scrupulously careful to remain free from partisanship.¹¹ Accordingly King was able to bring under one roof Alexander Stephens, former Vice-President of the Confederacy, and Grand Army of the Republic stalwart Lucius Fairchild, along with such natural opponents as Thomas A. Hendricks and Hannibal Hamlin; Samuel Randall and Schuyler Colfax. Although an ardent Democrat, King abided by the same standard he set

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⁹ Horatio King to Frederick T. Dent, February 18, 1870, ibid.

¹⁰ Horatio King to William K. Rogers, January 11, 1878, Rogers Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Library.

¹¹ For King's abhorrence of partisanship in literature see Horatio King to Ward H. Lamon, December 5, 1887, Lamon Papers, LN 369, Henry E. Huntington Library.
for others. As if to underscore this he composed an affectionate tribute to Justin Morrill, grand old man of the Republican party, on the latter's seventy-fifth birthday:

One year ago, came not a few
Within your open door,
Exulting at the thought that you
Were young at seventy-four.

Again we greet you with delight,
While we ourselves survive,
That you are well and bright to-night,
And young at seventy-five.

Meantime, your old Green Mountain State,
By resolution firm,
Hath wisely voted you, of late,
Another six years' term.

Hence, you are bound as all must see,
To fill the term begun,
And ne'er forget, at least to be
Still young at eighty-one.12

It is not hard to understand why James Buchanan told King that "you were more distinguished as Assistant Postmaster General and as chief of the Department than you will ever become as a poet."13 Using King's verse as a point of reference it also is easy to see why the atmosphere of his reunions more closely resembled extracurricular meetings of

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12King's poem to Justin Morrill, April 14, 1885, King Papers, VIII, LC. During the next few years King became the self-appointed "poet-laureate, in MORRILL sense," and his verse in honor of the senator's eighty-second birthday is reprinted in King, Turning On the Light, pp. 19-30.

13James Buchanan to Horatio King, June 23, 1866, King Papers, IV, LC.
public officials than seminars of literati. Lectures were sometimes witty, but never erudite or complicated. There was neither criticism nor discussion afterward, and they were kept as short as possible. The brevity of programs was what speakers emphasized most when proposing topics for King's approval: "I would like much to offer my lecture on 'Theory and Practice,' or 'The Practical Man'... . It is short—by far the shortest lecture I have," wrote one candidate; another volunteered to read a new poem, "A True History of Jack and Gill [sic]," which could be cut from twenty to ten minutes should that suit King's pleasure.\footnote{\text{Maria A. Stetson to Horatio King, April 3, 1870, and John S. Cunningham to Horatio King, March 21, 1872, \textit{ibid.}, V.}} In addition to choosing their subjects speakers also named their audiences by submitting guest lists which King would ratify. All this made for evenings that were congenial and relaxing if not intellectually incandescent.

Yet everything indicates that this was what King desired. "Social intercourse," he proclaimed, was "the main object of these receptions," and considering what he set out to accomplish, the literary reunions were eminently successful.\footnote{\text{Horatio King to William K. Rogers, January 11, 1878, Rogers Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Library.}} By the mid-seventies they occupied a fixed position in the social and intellectual life of the Capital City. Reflecting what King termed "the cultivated sense of
the community," they were characterized by stateliness, which distinguished them from the distasteful fare of Gilded Age culture. Every opportunity was seized to shun ostenta
tion, as King pointed out in a note to a new guest: "We expect our friends to come in their ordinary calling costume—not at all as to a 'dress party.' We ask them to step up to the 3d story and lay off their hats, bonnet, and over dress, as we receive them without any display in the parlor." By using the gaudy receptions as a foil King's literary reunions became models of dignity and mediums for improving the tone of local society. When he was told in 1871 that his meetings had already come to constitute one of the Capital's most "elegant circles," nothing could have pleased him more.

Elegant the reunions may have been, and certainly they had a desirable effect on taste and conduct, but as a force in the development of America's literary tradition the King group was insignificant. To declare that King succeeded in "concentrating and developing [sic] Literary talent, at the National Metropolis," claimed too much for

16 Horatio King to W. W. Belknap, March 22, 1870, King Papers, V, LC.

17 Horatio King to William K. Rogers, January 11, 1878, Rogers Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Library.

18 M. E. N. Howells to Horatio King, January 12, 1871, King Papers, V, LC.
his reunions, and there simply is no hard evidence to support the assertion that through his efforts Washington became a fount of national influence. Here was no Boston Saturday Club, whose membership roster of Emerson, Hawthorne, Howells, Holmes, Longfellow, Motley, Prescott, Lowell, Whittier, and others approximated a who's who of American letters. With the exception of the reunions' strict simplicity and concise programs, which in a way mirrored the new terseness in fiction—what Edmund Wilson has defined as "the chastening of American prose style"—King's group failed to ripple the stream of literary history.

In the eyes of contemporary Washingtonians, however, the reunions looked like a major achievement, and if some were prone to exaggerate their significance it was because these gatherings brought a refreshing change in the local atmosphere and held such promise for the future. At last it seemed that the cherished hope for an intellectual community at the Capital might be fulfilled; that through learned institutions formed to stabilize Gilded Age culture would be laid a foundation for the national establishment of science and literature which men had talked about all during the

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19Joseph S. Wilson to Horatio King, January 20, 1872, and James A. Ekin to Horatio King, January 16, 1875, ibid., V and VI.

nineteenth century. King's group represented a step toward the realization of that dream. True, there was no organizational structure, no regular membership, no meeting schedule, no publication, and not even an official name, yet these informal reunions showed that Washington was ripe for serious-minded associations. What began as entertainments designed for the benefit of friends in particular and Washington culture in general suggested to others the efficacy of intellectual associations. It may be assumed, for instance, that John Jay Knox, a founder of the Cosmos Club, was influenced to some degree by his wife's musicales which yielded fascinating implications for the organization of Washington culture. Carrie Knox's elegant circle was noted for drawing together congressmen, cabinet members, scientists, Supreme Court justices, and various public administrators, and surely this lesson weighed on the mind of her husband when he decided to help create an elitist institution.\(^{21}\)

Granted, there were irreducible differences between King's circle and Mrs Knox's piano recitals on the one hand, and the Cosmos Club on the other. But while the former groups suffered from a deficiency of talent, successor societies—namely those devoted to science—were increasingly professional in character and function.

The late 1880's witnessed a curtailment and finally

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a ceasing of the literary reunions. Part of the reason was because King found that more and more of his time was being monopolized by the Washington Monument Committee. But this does not entirely explain why they were discontinued. Clearly the reunions had served their purpose since Washington was not the boorish backwater it had been in 1869. More importantly, there were now several other organizations which King had helped inspire and which, in turn, were endeavoring to build upon his success.

Such a group was the Literary Society of Washington which after the mid-1870's accelerated the drive for social order and intellectual advancement. "The Literary" (to use its properly abbreviated title) grew up independent of King's circle and presented some marked contrasts. There were strong hints, however, that the old Postmaster General may have been one of its progenitors—especially since both took such pains to avow their commitment to art. Each sought to infuse Washington with the elegance that official society could never provide, and outwardly they went about gaining their mutual objective in the same way: by holding elite assemblies for the enjoyment and edification of themselves,

22Mrs. William Chapin Huntington has recounted how she was first instructed that "no one—no one who is anyone—calls it anything but 'The Literary,'" "Ladies of The Literary," unpublished paper read before the Literary Society of Washington, January 9, 1965, Literary Society Papers, LC; see also the description of the five hundredth meeting in The Washington Herald, March 28, 1927.
while at the same time hoping that their examples would be widely emulated. The chief difference was internal, and because its organizational framework was better developed, The Literary's influence was more enduring.23

This resulted from the fact that as soon as The Literary was begun its early organizers faded into the background. Numerous quasi-intellectual associations darted across the horizon of late nineteenth century culture; their progress was meteoric and when they vanished it was usually due to the lack of brilliance of their principal members. What helped sustain the Literary Society was the prestige of its leaders, personalities with whom the organization was identified. Had it chosen to rely on those who did the original planning its life span probably would have been as evanescent as many similar groups, for Esmeralda Boyle, Sara Carr Upton, and even Olive Risley Seward were amiable but relatively anonymous.

Of the three Miss Seward was the best known. Hanson Risley, her father, was a lifelong ally of William Henry Seward who had provided him with a minor post in the Treasury. It was the daughter, however, whom Seward found the more interesting member of the family—indeed he was infatuated

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with her. Despite the forty-odd years separating their ages she returned his affections, and gradually they became constant companions. During the late sixties there were carriage rides and picnics along Rock Creek, evenings spent in studying the classics, trips together to upstate New York, a tour of the Orient, and much gossip about the aged widower cavorting with the rather pretty daughter of his associate. Apparently the only way to continue the relationship and safeguard their reputations was adoption. Accordingly, after discussions with Hanson Risley and Seward's children, she took the name of her devoted admirer.  

Even before meeting Seward Olive had shown a mildly intellectual bent. As a girl in New York before the war she experienced the exciting receptions of the sisters Alice and Phoebe Cary, whose house on Twentieth Street was the center of a literary circle. Each Sunday evening, in the Cary's library, gathered a remarkable coterie of men and women noted for their grace, wit, and artistic sensibilities rather than mere social position. Though various shades of political persuasion were represented the atmosphere never grew tense and the conversation was always stimulating. Olive Risley Seward's eager participation in starting a similar

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group in Washington stemmed from glowing remembrances of times past, and the character of the new organization bore the stamp of her youthful impressions. It was in Miss Seward's home that plans for The Literary were first discussed, late in 1873, after which she slipped out of sight so that more illustrious personages could become the objects of attention.26

At this critical juncture John George Nicolay thrust himself forward and through his presence The Literary took on an aura of distinction. Nicolay had achieved prominence while serving with John Hay as President Lincoln's private secretary. Following the assassination he took charge of the American Consulate in Paris, and remained overseas until 1869. Paris, which he adored, proved to be the scene of repeated vexations when Nicolay was charged with incompetence—and worse—by political intriguers who coveted his post. Nor was life in the United States much happier. Ill health plagued him after he returned, the articles he wrote were received with indifference, and he was distraught by what seemed an ominous degeneration of national character. Patriotism and idealism were shrouded in corruption with conditions at the Capital City being bleakest of all. He longed for some way to ameliorate the situation, but what

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was to be done? Bequething to America a detailed portrait of Abraham Lincoln, one that would enshrine the Lincoln tradition by showing him to have been infinitely great, offered possibilities for rekindling moral fervor. Yet a work of this magnitude would be a long term project, leaving unanswered the need for an immediate remedy. Therefore, he was alacritous in accepting the invitation of the Washington Literary Society, a group that bid fair to enhance local culture and which, ultimately, owed as much to Nicolay as he to it.

In 1874 Nicolay was Marshal of the Supreme Court; his influence, however, derived from holding the unofficial position of a resident intellectual. This represented a personal triumph because Nicolay began life inauspiciously. His emergence as a social and intellectual leader was redolent of Horatio King's climb from obscurity. In fact, leaving out a couple of basic differences their careers seem interchangeable. Whereas King was a native Yankee Nicolay immigrated from Germany to the Middle West, and during the political maelstrom of the ante-bellum years King stayed with the Democrats while Nicolay became a Republican. But most other essentials were the same: fending for themselves as apprentice printers and rising to the

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top as young editors; cultivating literary interests and pursuing self-education; entering government bureaucracy at lower levels and becoming presidential confidants; and, finally, writing favorable accounts of the administrations in which they served. Interestingly there was little affection between them—perhaps because they had so much in common—and there was never the remotest possibility of collaboration. Working separately, however, they were instrumental in guiding Washington's intellectual progress. This was especially true in the case of Nicolay, whose Society was more ambitious and therefore required more elaborate organization.28

Putting aside his drafts of the mammoth Abraham Lincoln: A Biography, Nicolay set to work writing a constitution. Samuel Tyler, Professor of Law at Columbian College lent assistance, and by the beginning of the 1875-76 season the document was complete. It provided for a Society of thirty members (this was soon increased to forty) who would meet on alternate Saturday evenings for purposes of "literary and artistic improvement and entertainment." Governing power was delegated to a five member Executive Committee, elected annually, which would appoint all other officers and committees, choose meeting sites, have charge of programs,

28 Helen Nicolay, Lincoln's Secretary: A Biography of John G. Nicolay (New York, 1949), passim; Horatio King to Ward H. Lamon, December 5, 1887, Lamon Papers, LN 369, Henry E. Huntington Library.
and approve nominations for membership. When vacancies occurred new members could be installed only by securing two sponsors within The Literary and after receiving a unanimous vote of the Executive Committee. This screening process implied standards which candidates had to meet, criteria for winnowing excellence from mediocrity. Personal wealth was irrelevant since there was no initiation fee, no dues, and hence, no treasury. So highly valued was the absence of financial requirements that when it became necessary to raise money for some special occasion the Executive Committee asked for voluntary contributions instead of levying general assessments. The important question was whether the candidate could add something of literary or artistic substance. According to the constitution: "All members pledge themselves to contribute at least once in each year, as they may be invited by the Executive Committee, an original essay, poem, or translation." Obligatory participation signaled the uniqueness of the Literary Society and this quality caused its founders to proclaim the opening of a new, exhilarating chapter in Washington's history.

29 Edward M. Gallaudet to Mary B. Claflin, December 12, 1881, Claflin Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Library.

30 I. Edwards Clarke, "The Conditions of Literature in Washington at the Time of the Founding of This Society," unpublished paper read before the Literary Society of Washington, January 21, 1899, Literary Society Papers, LC; copies of the constitution are included in Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, ibid.
In an attempt to create optimum conditions for participation, and to insure that there would be an appropriate balance between writers and artists, the membership was divided into classes. On November 13, 1875, less than two weeks after the adoption of the constitution, it was resolved to have twenty-five literary members, ten painters, and five musicians. These rubrics were not always honored. Over the years there evolved a disproportionate number of the literary element—persons who were nominally writers no matter how infrequently their efforts appeared in print. That many members had means of support other than their pens was evidenced by The Literary's occupational composition which ranged from businessman and clergyman to diplomat, senator, and even President of the United States. The President automatically attained membership as an Honorary Associate, a classification which also applied to the Chief Justice, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Attorney General, and Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. In addition there were Honorary Associates whose high standing in the community made them desirable members. William Wilson Corcoran, Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes, and Alexander Stephens, invested The Literary with riches both tangible and symbolic. This aspect of admissions policy did not adulterate the membership, however, since the total of Honorary Associates was not allowed to exceed one-quarter of the active members. Moreover, those in the special category tended to be more
than social luminaries. Banker Corcoran was also a patron of the arts, and Congressman Stephens, who led his class at the University of Georgia, was publishing treatises on constitutional problems. Thus The Literary was consistent in its demand that members be contributors rather than figureheads.31

The Literary Society went farther than King's reunions toward achieving the happy combination of social repute and intellectual merit. Not only was this a boon in terms of the organization's image, it also meant that The Literary drew from a bounteous reservoir of talent when planning meetings. Accordingly, Joseph Henry was tapped to speak on the philosophy of science; John Wesley Powell about costumes of North American Indians; Edward Minor Gallaudet, president of the college that was soon to bear his name, described how deaf-mutes were educated; General Albert J. Myer, the Army's chief signal officer and a founder of the Weather Bureau, lectured on meteorological observations; and geologist Clarence Edward Dutton was asked to share his knowledge of western mountain ranges. There were authors such as Frances Hodgson Burnett, Thomas Nelson Page, and poet Richard Hovey to lead literary exercises. Members like Nicolay, who had lived abroad, sounded a cosmopolitan note

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in the proceedings. Shortly before becoming Secretary of State, John W. Foster gave his impressions of Mexico where he had spent seven years as Minister. Similarly, George Kennan often took the floor and recounted personal experiences in Russia—including, on at least one occasion, his own renditions of chanted prayers and boat songs. Another time, for a talk on political prisoners, he came clad in the gray uniform, chains, and fetters worn by convicts in eastern Siberia. Kennan's enthusiasm both typified the spirit with which experts in various fields supported The Literary and demonstrated emphatically that these were the individuals who formed its backbone.32

Among the most esteemed members was James Garfield. Garfield started visiting meetings the year after they commenced, while still a congressman, and in 1876 he formally joined the organization. Unfortunately the burden of public duties made his attendance irregular. During the season of 1877-78 he ran afoul of a new article in the constitution which stipulated that three successive unexplained absences would be penalized by expulsion. But the Sage of Mentor redeemed himself when he dutifully appeared at the next meeting and commented upon a paper concerning the habits of the aeronat spider. Thereafter he spoke frequently, becoming

32Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, I and II, passim, LC.
such a valuable member that he was twice elected president. In fact, Garfield held The Literary's highest office during his abbreviated term in the White House. Lucretia Garfield remained an Honorary Associate for thirty-six years following her husband's assassination, and the President's former secretary, Joseph Stanley-Brown, was subsequently accepted as a member. Soon after Garfield died, and on the fiftieth anniversary of his birth, commemorative exercises were held at the residence of Dr. Gallaudet. Eulogies and tributes were read including a poem by Mrs. Burnett. There were fond recollections of Garfield's contributions to the Literary Society, and a display of photographs and portraits by fellow members. This was the first meeting of its kind, a lasting memorial to one of the brightest lights in The Literary's early history.\textsuperscript{33}

As a rule gatherings of The Literary were not this grand. The season extended from December through May with meetings held wherever facilities were available. Usually this meant assembling in members' homes, though sometimes space was provided at a site such as the Smithsonian or the Willard Hotel. Invariably the Executive Committee would allot two and a half hours for an evening's activities, and almost

\textsuperscript{33}Diary of James A. Garfield, December 11, 1875, Garfield Papers, IV, Box 2, LC; A Tribute of Respect from the Literary Society of Washington to its Late President James Abram Garfield (Washington, D.C., 1882), passim.
without fail the meetings continued well beyond the time for adjournment. It was common for the secretary to close the Minutes with: "At a late hour the Society adjourned," or, "The hour of midnight brought the time for parting." A meeting at Garrick Mallery's once lasted so long that streetcar riders found themselves stranded because the lines had stopped running for the night. Invited guests were permitted except at the first meeting in December, the annual business session and election of officers. Indeed the opportunity to make the "acquaintance of a distinguished artist, savan [sic], actor or actress or musician who may be for a few days in town" rated high among The Literary's attributes. As well as gracing meetings with their presence famous visitors were encouraged to participate, and comments from the likes of George W. Cable, Samuel Clemens, and Monoure Conway made memorable evenings. But in the main regular members were responsible for The Literary's programs.

The schedule devised by the Executive Committee called for two papers each meeting. These, plus the critiques that followed, constituted the exercises in which

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34 Diary of Edward M. Gallaudet, March 12, 1881, Gallaudet Papers, LC.


36 Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, I and II, passim, LC.
literary members made their required contributions. As might be expected there was an enormous variety of topics and forms of presentation, and a qualitative unevenness in the papers themselves. Some of the better essays, poems, short stories, and descriptive sketches were later printed by the Literary Society. For the most part these still hold the reader's attention. On the other hand one begins to squirm just thinking about enduring "The Stony Brook and What It Said," by Peter Baumgras, or Annie Story's recitation of "When You and I Were Young Lad." The only stipulation about lectures was that they not exceed twenty minutes in length; save this restriction speakers enjoyed absolute freedom. The monthly discussions, however, were more regimented.37

Every third meeting was given over to the general discussion of some subject which the Executive Committee announced in advance. No one was exempt from participation; artistic and musical members as well as those in the literary category were expected to have in hand prepared expositions on the topic. Five minutes were allowed for each speaker, their names being called by the president from an alphabetical membership list.38 While the general discussions

37 Both MSS and published lectures are contained in boxes labeled "Various Publications," and "Some Papers Presented at Meetings," Literary Society of Washington Papers, LC.

38 Minutes of the Executive Committee, December 11, 1876, ibid.
were more structured than the regular literary exercises the
former showed an equal variety of subject matter. "What
Desirable Social Elements are Endangered by the Rapid
Advance of Civilization?"; "Who Were the Chief Promoters of
American Independence?"; "The Character and Public Life of
Jefferson"; "What Shall We Do With Our Leisure?"; and "The
Influence of Fiction in Reform" were but a few of the
problems discussed. The only topics excluded were those
touching upon politics and religion.39

"In our literary symposia," emphasized an old member,
"controversy has no place."40 Whatever else might be said
about the desires of the founders they hardly included pro-
viding a forum for vigorous debate. "Our aim and purpose
is to assimilate contraries," proclaimed Madeleine Vinton
Dahlgren, The Literary's leading matriarch. "This Society
claims to be neutral ground rather than a battlefield—for
while a free expression of opinions is intended our dis-
cussions are expected to elicit truth."41 Her's was the
dominant voice in policy matters throughout the first phase—

39Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, I
and II, passim, ibid.

40Ainsworth R. Spofford, unpublished comments on the
twenty-fifth anniversary of the Literary Society of Washin-
ton, January 21, 1899, box labeled "Documents Relating to
the History of the Society," ibid.

41Madeleine V. Dahlgren, "Statement of the Purposes
of the Literary Society of Washington" (1888), ibid., Box 5.
so much so, in fact, that this period came to be known as The Protectorate. Although she never became president (no woman ever did), Mrs. Dahlgren held a place on the powerful Executive Committee, and taking advantage of this position she was able to usurp the role of permanent hostess. One founder even referred to it as the "Dahlgren Literary Society."\(^4\) Officially banning controversy reflected the will of herself, and because she deemed the quest for truth and spirited debate incompatible she sought to gird The Literary against disruptive polemics.

Yet Mrs. Dahlgren's wishes were not always obeyed, and it would be a mistake to interpret the founders' professions of consensus to mean that meetings were subdued. On the contrary, a survey of the Minutes reveals that programs were punctuated by intense intellectual probing, challenging of entrenched orthodoxies, and discourse that was respectful but sometimes vehement. Certainly greater attention was paid to sensitive question than Mrs. Dahlgren's statement implies. In the spring of 1881 members listened attentively while H. Pelham Curtis translated The Struggle or the Plea Guilty, a realistic German poem which, noted

\(^4\) Christopher C. Cox, "To the Members of the 'Dahlgren Literary Society,'" ibid.; for Mrs. Dahlgren's influence in The Literary's affairs see Madeleine V. Dahlgren to Spencer F. Baird, December 3, 1878, Spencer F. Baird Personal Papers, SI Archives; Florence P. Spofford to Nevin M. Fenneman, January 29, 1923, box labeled "Documents Relating to the History of the Society," and Huntington, "Ladies of The Literary," p. 2, Literary Society Papers, LC.
Secretary Theodore Dwight, "produced a deep impression. It was another reminder of the momentous social questions which are pressing for a solution at home and abroad." Earlier the discussion topic had been industrial employment, showing that The Literary was not averse to taking up provocative subjects. Nor were individual members evasive in handling delicate issues. George Kennan made no secret of his opposition to Czar Alexander III and repressions in Russia. After one lecture Samuel Clemens commented on the cruelty and tyranny described by Kennan, "and the apparent impossibility of effecting a change for the better in any way but by revolution." Talk of revolution, industrial violence, and domestic discord did not square with the soothing meetings idealized by Mrs. Dahlgren. 43

In addition there was more healthy disputation than The Literary's spokesmen chose to admit. When Clarence Dutton argued that there should be no limitations placed on the accumulation of wealth, because large fortunes were rewards for social usefulness, Henry Ulke retorted that economic inequality was the origin of much suffering. This prompted others to join in the dispute. 44 At another meeting a heated debate ensued over the question of what caused poverty. I. Edwards Clarke offered an explanation which

43Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, March 26, 1881, and January 15, 1881, and March 24, 1888, ibid., I.

44Ibid., May 13, 1882.
anticipated later denunciations of malefactors of great wealth, while Dr. Gallaudet maintained it was due to shiftlessness and a lack of thrift. Several concurred, calling attention to the Irish as a case in point. Socialists and anarchists were roundly condemned except by Ulke who once again epitomized the spirit of intellectual dissent. Quarrels over the relative merits of authors were also lively. During a session devoted to Browning, Augustus Heaton charged that his "Jacobin style was a defiance of the classic elegance and form of the highest masters of poetry." Then, pressing his attack, he likened Browning's poems to "a mob entering a city pillaging attics and cellars on the way." This disparagement was too much for Ainsworth Spofford, who sprang to the defense by proclaiming him the "greatest dramatic poet since Shakespeare." It would seem, therefore, that on many evenings the musical portion of the program came as a welcome respite after the good-natured—if tumultuous—exchanges of ideas.

Why was there so little candor about an aspect of the organization which in the afterglow of history appears as one of its most commendable features? The answer lies in the high premium accorded the image of elegance. Following in the footsteps of Horatio King the founders strove for

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45Ibid., February 22, 1890, II.

46Ibid., January 25, 1890.
dignity while at the same time maintaining their guard against anything that threatened to detract from the stately impression they had already made. Ideally meetings of The Literary were to be such that when one entered he could feel himself passing from the hurly-burly world of politics and commerce into an atmosphere of graceful tranquility. Not surprisingly, then, since their objective was the opposite of Gilded Age ostentation, the founders played down whatever might be construed as bad taste or coarse behavior. This concern for refinement could be seen in The Literary's practice of disregarding formal titles and military rank, a custom rigidly observed. Here was a patent reaction to those who inundated Washington during and after the Civil War spangled with symbols of importance. Literary Society members regarded such display as attempts to veil inferiority. Hence they stripped-off all artificial distinctions to better expose their true excellence. In much the same spirit it was decreed that suppers provided by meeting hosts were to be only light repasts. Although not readily admitted by the organization this rule was also broken from time to time, a further transgression against the ideal of absolute simplicity.47

It is ironic that while modesty and reticence received heavy stress members were outspoken when describing

47Ibid., December 11, 1880, I.
the role of their organization in post-bellum American culture. "It should aim at nothing less than to be the center of the artistic and literary life of the Capital"; this was its "inspiring motive."

If Washington was the intellectual hub of the nation, then certainly the Literary Society must stand at the intellectual center of Washington. "We desire to become a thought nucleus," announced Mrs. Dahlgren boldly.

This Capital is filled with representative men elected to mold the destinies of this great nation, as also with men chosen to represent other nations near us. It becomes then a center for forensic eloquence and of statecraft and diplomacy—shall it not as well become a focus of intellectual force in every domain, and thus exert a corresponding power over the national will in the various departments of human knowledge? But such influence, to be felt, must be aggregated. With this view our Society seeks a solidarity of interest for the scientist, the scholar, the writer, and the artist.

This declaration of intent deserves more than passing notice. Its central assumption seems to be that "intellectual force" is no less important in the affairs of men than "statecraft." Thus, in America, mind must be made "a corresponding power" of politics. Indeed there exists a natural connection between the two which should be understood and cultivated. Bountiful returns await the nation if only thought and government can be harmonized. But how might this

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48 Olive Risley Seward's statement of the purpose of the Literary Society, ibid., Box 5.

49 Madeleine V. Dahlgren, "Statement of the Purposes of the Literary Society," ibid.
be brought to pass? How make intellect the equal partner of institutionalized political authority? To the founders of The Literary the solution was to be found in establishing an association of intellectuals; by creating an institution of broad culture that could take its place in an America which, at every turn, was becoming more rationalized—or more "aggregated" as Mrs. Dahlgren would have described it. She, of course, was not alone in perceiving that before intellectuals could influence national life it was first necessary to adopt the national mode of organization, to utilize the tactic of institutional development in order to achieve power. Others recognized this imperative and, with growing force, they too sought "a solidarity of interest for the scientist, the scholar, the writer, and the artist."

The Washington Literary Society set itself a formidable task, this much is abundantly clear. Not so clear is the dimension of its success. Even spokesmen shied away from making definitive judgments lest their evaluations be premature. Dr. Gallaudet, in reviewing its history, was vague about The Literary's role in post-war culture and found it impossible to specify what its importance had been. Nonetheless, he was certain that in an indescribable way Washington was a better place because of its existence—if for no other reason than because it kept the process of
establishing intellectual organizations moving steadily along.\textsuperscript{50} As its first quarter century drew to a close Ainsworth Spofford stated as unequivocally as he dared: "We count not ourselves as having attained great or noteworthy results, but we are on the road."\textsuperscript{51}

Others, more impatient with tentative accomplishments, showed less satisfaction and less optimism. Instead of being buoyed by the worthwhile contributions of members they were dismayed by the mixed quality of programs; rather than having confidence that The Literary would eventually emerge as the embodiment of recognized achievement they tended to ask whether it was degenerating into another version of hothouse culture. In short, there were grave doubts that, given its present direction, the Literary Society could become an elitist association of intellectual merit. Garrick Mallery, for one, urged the elimination of science, poetry, and music from the programs. The former might better be left to Washington's scientific societies, while the poetry and music produced by The Literary were hopelessly second rate. Verses like "Reading to Grandmamma," and tunes such as "Sally in Our Alley" and "Charlie

\textsuperscript{50} "Dr. Gallaudet's Remarks," undated, box labeled "Some Papers Presented at Meetings," \textit{ibid}.

"is My Darlin" failed to convey the desired impression of creativity. More than once Garfield criticized the banality of lectures and discussions, betraying disappointment in The Literary's lack of progress. As early as 1877 Mme. de Hegermann-Lindencrone inferred that it was in eclipse. With sarcastic humor she caricatured the Literary Society as the "enchanted circle of the Brain Club," and recounted the discussion of a paper on "The Metamorphosis of Negative Matter." At a subsequent meeting Mrs. Dahlgren requested her to sing "Tender and True," a melancholy ballad relating the death of a young soldier who had gone into battle with a momento from his love, a ribbon of blue, pinned over his heart. The composer, Jennie Lincoln, happened to be present, and capped the performance—in a proper Victorian manner—by fainting dead away. Like Mrs. Lincoln, the Literary Society appeared to be on the wane.

It was true that The Literary was fast falling out of date so far as its own taste in letters was concerned. At a time when realism and naturalism were vying to become the dominant genre members still inclined toward prose that

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52 Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, February 24, 1888, ibid., I.

53 Diary of James A. Garfield, January 10, 1880 and April 3, 1880, Garfield Papers, IX, Box 5, LC.

54 de Hegermann-Lindencrone, Sunny Side, p. 16; Egan, Recollections, p. 64.
oozed sentimentality. To end the 1889 season there was a general discussion of Realism in Fiction, which turned into a castigation of Zola and an affirmation of the enobling duties of the writer.\textsuperscript{55} Despite the call by leading craftsmen for depictions of life with straightforward frankness, the innocents of The Literary remained entranced by romantic homelies. "A Sentimental Journey," "What is the Deepest Grief?" and "Where Duty Calls," a melodramatic tale about a girl in the country who despaired of ever performing a heroic deed until she suddenly had the opportunity to save two children from a flaming farmhouse were typical products of literary exercises.\textsuperscript{56} As one of the founders observed, his Society was partial to "stories of pathetic mould that leave the eyelids wet."\textsuperscript{57} The influence of feminine custodians of culture—the very types who launched The Literary—obviously pervaded its activities throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover, it is apparent that during an epochal period of change in literary conventions the Washington group was becoming passé.

Yet even in its slightly enfeebled and somewhat retrograde state The Literary could claim certain successes.

\textsuperscript{55}Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, May 4, 1889, I, Literary Society Papers, LC.

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}, January 15, 1889.

\textsuperscript{57}Christopher C. Cox, "To the Members of the 'Dahlgren Literary Society,'" \textit{ibid.}, Box 5.
First of all it provided an outlet for Washingtonians more interested in written expression than science. By 1874 the ground was already being prepared for a harvest of local scientific associations. Contrariwise, no literary organization worthy of the name graced Washington except King's, and members of the Literary Society questioned whether his reunions did justice to the cause of whetting appetites for polite letters. Was not the key to generating interest offering opportunities for actual writing and criticism? A circle of luminaries was important, they agreed, but so was a coterie in which all persons were active contributors. Both groups selected members with great care, but while King considered social rank at the expense of everything else (it might be argued that his programs were merely excuses for holding reunions), The Literary's founders thought in terms of encouraging regular participation. Furthermore, in light of the reunions' indefinite character, what guaranteed that they would not enter the grave with their sponsor? Thus the Literary Society answered a two-fold need: it offered greater permanence than King's group and gave more chance to those who seriously wanted to try their hands at composition.

Aiming at excellence and falling short of the mark was another common characteristic. Both were more celebrated for social elegance than artistic accomplishment; for enabling Washingtonians to assume the mantle of
cultivation rather than denoting real intellectual ferment. The Literary, however, was definitely a cut above King's circle. Its membership rolls contained a catalogue of Washington's scientific community, men who were building national scientific institutions while at the same time establishing local societies for the promotion of their disciplines. The Literary cooperated with these organizations that were primarily scientific and, in this way, contributed to the general strengthening of intellectual associations, to the consolidation of individuals sharing like interests and talents. Finally there remained its broader cultural influence, which though amorphous was no less deeply felt. Refreshingly different from the frivolity of dancing parties and reception crushes the Literary Society brightened the local atmosphere. Here, then, was the culmination of Mrs. Dahlgren's crusade to have The Literary cast a "radiance over the conventional inanity of social life in Washington." In this respect it did have an "influence which was healthful in the highest degree," but which was as hard to delineate as an invigorating breath of fresh air.

58 Madeleine V. Dahlgren to Carl Schurz, December [1878?], Schurz Papers, XLVII, General Correspondence, LC.

59 "Dr. Gallaudet's Remarks," undated, box labeled "Some Papers Presented at Meetings," Literary Society Papers, LC.
"FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE"

"The art of destroying life," observed Joseph Henry during the grim winter of 1862-63, "as well as that of preserving it, calls for the application of scientific principles, and the institution of scientific experiments on a scale of magnitude which would never be attempted in time of peace."1 Thus Henry suggested that a positive result of the Civil War would be its influence in advancing American science. Yet this wish went unfulfilled, and the statement must be read as an exaggeration of science's role in the Union war effort. Henry, himself, admitted as much in 1870 in response to questions from members of the English Government Scientific Commission. The Commission had been appointed to study means for improving scientific education and research, and while vacationing in London Henry agreed to testify on how science was supported in the United States. There was little he could tell his British peers—aside from calling attention to ways the Smithsonian went about increasing and diffusing knowledge among men—since at that

time national science happened to be relatively stagnant. Annual appropriations by the states and Congress totaled a paltry half-million dollars, divided between the United States Coast Survey, the Naval Observatory, several lighthouses, and various western reconnaissance groups. No sums were spent for scientific scholarships or original investigations. Scientific societies—including the National Academy—received nothing from the government and, consequently, had little voice in matters of public policy. Like the man who believed that the steam engine did more for science than science for the steam engine, Americans continued to appreciate only the utilitarian implications of pure research. In a word, the immediate impact of the Civil War on science had been negligible.2

This was due to the fact that the War of the Rebellion was not notably scientific. Since neither side claimed a military technology sufficiently advanced to threaten the other, the war lacked the kind of new weaponry demanding research in exact science. Most innovations came from the hands of amateur inventors rather than from the trained minds of chemists and physicists, and there was never much consideration given to mobilizing professional scientists in order to take advantage of their expertise. Practical individuals

blessed with mechanical intuition were what the country needed, it was felt, not true savants. The latter were in short supply anyway, a fact helping to explain why they were generally ignored by the government. Furthermore, physical science had not yet reached the stage at which it could be exploited for purposes of mass annihilation; industrial research was not adequately developed to yield instruments of destruction; and, of course, universities were still decades away from being sucked into the war machine. Therefore, the country was without the necessary ingredients for waging a scientific war. Between 1861 and 1865 the National Academy of Sciences and the Permanent Commission instituted to advise the Navy Department on scientific matters accomplished distressingly little. Even the National Academy's attempt to ascertain the age of whiskey used in military hospitals proved a failure. Such shortcomings and disappointments have led to the conclusion that, "During the Civil War, the nearest thing to a research and development agency was the President himself."³

Though the war failed to hasten scientific break-throughs the middle period of American history was anything

but dormant in terms of organization and professionalization. As early as 1840 a lively interest was shown in every branch of science, and this enthusiasm led to and resulted from scientific institutions which multiplied at a breathtaking pace. Between 1842 and 1848, the Navy's Depot of Charts and Instruments was transformed into the Naval Observatory; under the direction of Franklin's shrewd and capable great grandson, Alexander Dallas Bache, the Coast Survey was revitalized; the Smithsonian Institution was established as a national center for science; Benjamin Silliman enlarged his American Journal of Science and Arts, the principal organ for scientific publication in the United States; new observatories, museums, and laboratories were erected at Cincinnati, Williams College, Yale, and Harvard; Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School opened its doors; the American Association for the Advancement of Science was born; vigorous societies and academies of science flourished in many southern cities; and all the while various public and private agencies covered the earth with research parties which turned-up vast quantities of specimens and data, published numerous reports, and also helped educate the scientists themselves. Simultaneously these men were being more amply rewarded with money and status. Despite the federal government's hesitancy about encouraging learning, the middle 1840's constituted a watershed in the development of science in America. As I. B. Cohen has pointed
out, "American science was apparently reaching its majority." Therefore, the Civil War could not have brought maturation for that had already occurred. Just as other departments of national culture experienced ante-bellum "take-off" periods, so with American science, and the impetus sustained scientific enterprise until the Gilded Age. Then, in the 1870's, came another epoch of ferment and acceleration as Congress moved to implement the constitutional provision to "promote the progress of science and useful arts."

Some years later Clarence Edward Dutton recalled the seventies as a time when "all of those great bureaus for scientific investigation under governmental auspices and support, which are such conspicuous features of our system, were then in existence and in full career. . . ." Major Dutton knew whereof he spoke. His own analyses of rock formations and vivid, panoramic descriptions of the high plateaus of Utah and Grand Canyon country were made possible by more than fifteen years service with the Powell Survey, the Public Lands Commission, the United States Geological Survey, and the Irrigation Survey. Dutton's experience is illustrative of scientific activity under the aegis of the

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government. It is doubly interesting because he was drawn into public service mainly through his affiliation with one of the scientific community's notable organizations, the Philosophical Society of Washington. Members of the Philosophical Society helped nurture his geological speculations, and the contacts which it afforded enabled him to pursue a long career in government agencies.⁶

While not officially founded until 1871, the Philosophical Society's roots reached back into pre-Civil War America. To a significant degree this illustrated the linkage connecting post and ante-bellum scientific institutions. Also, the existence of Joseph Henry leading the way as a principal organizer of both groups underscored the continuity between the Philosophical Society and its earlier variant. That Henry should have been conspicuously in the forefront in 1871 was at once understandable and appropriate. Understandable because he had just returned from his interview with the English Commission, during which the inadequacy of America's scientific establishment had been forcefully brought home. Organizing the Philosophical Society was therefore a calculated response to this challenging realization. In another way Henry's presence seemed fitting as he was already the center of Washington's most learned circle,

a group which styled itself the Scientific Club.

The designation "club" should not be taken too literally, however, since this body was never as tightly organized as the term implies. Indeed it lacked even the most rudimentary element of a club: a roster of regular members. There was a good deal of vagueness about the name, with some calling it "The Saturday Club" and Spencer Baird referring to it simply as "The Washington Scientifics."

This ill-defined coterie took its existence from the custom of Henry and his friends of passing Saturday evenings in each others' company. Commencing early in the 1850's, these pleasant gatherings were held "for the discussion of scientific subjects and for general scientific conversation," aims which, in practice, proved broad enough to encompass disparate specialties. Hugh McCulloch learned this upon coming to Washington as comptroller of the currency. Shortly after arriving he received an invitation from the Scientific Club, which he refused, apologizing that he was poorly versed in science. No matter, insisted Henry, "finance is a subject in which the country is just now deeply interested, and the Club wants a member who knows something about it." McCulloch


soon became a steady visitor, along with others whose *metiers*
lay outside of pure science. Several had positions in the
Patent Office, including Titian Peale, explorer, artist,
mechanic, photographer, and naturalist—a fascinating product
of one of the country's most singular families. Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, George Schaeffer,
librarian of the Interior Department, and Major General
Andrew Atkinson Humphreys, chief of the army Corps of
Engineers augmented a nucleus of mathematicians, geodesists,
astronomers, and physicists. These men would assemble at
one of their number's residence, hear a paper, then close
the evening with supper. Since Henry was an ever-willing
host meetings frequently took place at the Smithsonian, and
these occasions left particularly vivid impressions in the
minds of participants—not only because the professor used
his scientific knowledge to concoct a punch with a base of
pure alcohol. Intellectual offerings were equally imagina
tive, and well-deserved was the accolade that these meetings
were "the highest possible example of social life at the
Nation's Capital."  

9"Dr. Gallaudet's Remarks," undated, box labeled
"Some Papers Presented at Meetings," Literary Society Papers,
LC; something of the character of meetings is rendered in
George C. Schaeffer to Alexander D. Bache, Saturday, 1861, RH
2243, and Joseph Henry to Bache, December 11, 1861, Box 29,
Henry to Bache, February 1, 1862, RH 1503, Box 30, Hugh
McCulloch to Henry, February 17, 1870, RH 3492, Box 41,
William J. Rhea's Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library.
The fatal flaw of the Scientific Club was a lack of institutional structure. Unlike most elegant circles all its members were "gentlemen of superior culture," and it justifiably took precedence over groups like Horatio King's.\textsuperscript{10} In no sense was it a haven for mere aficionados of the arts and sciences, but instead an elitist body of specialists and professionals. A revealing aspect of its history was the absence of any talk about merging with the Washington Scientific Association, a collection of buffs which had little in common with the Scientific Club aside from its name.\textsuperscript{11} Saturday get togethers were looked forward to with such expectation that men would venture out on the most bitter and blustery January night rather than forfeit the warm fellowship of the Scientific Club. But for all that, Henry's group was not well-organized, a problem which became acute with the enlargement of Washington's scientific corps during the late 1860's. By 1871 attendance at meetings was running as high as fifty; clearly the Scientific Club had outgrown its casual character and the time was ripe for a more comprehensive organization. Before the first quarter of the new year had run its course it would be formalized

\textsuperscript{10}McCulloch, Men and Measures, p. 259; Joseph Henry to Horatio King, December 20, 1870, King Papers, V, LC.

into the Philosophical Society of Washington.  

Responding to the plea of forty-three Washingtonians interested in scientific pursuits, Joseph Henry called a meeting for the purpose of creating a society which would satisfy the needs of local savants. Benjamin Peirce, Asaph Hall, Stephen Vincent Benet, General Sherman, Salmon P. Chase, Peale, Meigs, Schaeffer, Humphreys, and Newcomb totaled a small percentage of those who affirmed their commitment to the ideal of an organization "having for its object the free exchange of views and studies on scientific subjects, and the promotion of scientific inquiry among its members." On Monday, March 13, in the Smithsonian Regent's Room, they adopted a constitution and elected officers. Henry, himself, was chosen the first president of the Society, and its constitution and by-laws were formally ratified on April first. Almost overnight professional ties between the Capital City's men of specialized knowledge had been strengthened. More definite form had been given to the constellation of resident intellectuals. And now, across the seat of government, fell the shadow cast by "a society for the advancement of Science." 


13 Joseph Henry, "Anniversary Address of the President of the Philosophical Society of Washington," November 18, 1871, Bulletin of the Philosophical Society of Washington, I
Considering the Society's focus of attention would it not have been appropriate to retain the title Scientific Club? Here was "an association of a strictly scientific character"; why, then, give up a name which seemed perfectly suitable? The answer lay in the founders' belief that all "those branches of knowledge that relate to the positive facts and laws of the physical and moral universe" touch the essence of science, and because these men were concerned with truth and wisdom in the fullest sense, they chose to describe themselves as "Philosophical." Moreover, they had not united for relaxation or amusement, but to stimulate their mutual quest for empirical understanding. To an extent the founders parted company with Henry's circle, and, in the process, "Club" was replaced by "Society." Societies had always generated much of the energy for scientific progress, a tradition which the first president deemed well-worth perpetuating. This could be accomplished, he advised, through the corporate sharing of new discoveries, by improving the image of American science, and as a result of influencing popular thought.

(March, 1871-June, 1874), viii; the initiatory letter to Henry, February 7, 1871, is in the undated box labeled "Material of Historical Interest," Philosophical Society of Washington Archives (henceforth PSW Archives), United States Naval Research Laboratory, and published in ibid., 19-20; Journal of Joseph Henry, March 6, 1871, SI Archives.

However wide the diffusion of general knowledge, public opinion in regard to scientific questions must eventually be determined by the authority of societies, journals, and individuals, of established scientific reputation. It is therefore of the first importance that the operations of this Society be conducted with great care, and that nothing be given to the world under its sanction which is not based upon thorough investigation or established scientific principles.\(^{15}\)

The Philosophical Society regarded itself as more than a clique of hometown scientists. According to Henry it aspired to help chart the course of national development, an immense challenge to say the least. In view of this it undoubtedly was well to have embarked on its mission clad in the robes of a society of philosophers rather than something more modest.

Naturally, much depended on the caliber of the membership. At the very outset it was made clear that those who might fail to pass muster need not apply. \(^{16}\) "While but comparatively few qualifications are necessary for admittance," Henry explained, "no person is elected who is not supposed to have at least a high appreciation of science; has some familiarity with its principles, and is capable of doing something in the way of promoting the objects of the Association." The latter might entail just making a "good audience"—assuming, of course, that the candidate met the

\(^{15}\text{Ibid., viii.}\)

\(^{16}\text{Joseph Henry, "Annual Address of the President," November 24, 1877, \textit{ibid.}, II (October 10, 1874-November 2, 1878), 162.}\)
criterion of "general culture"—but on no account would the Society accept "pseudo-scientists." Taking only relatively trained minds vouchsafed the Society’s position vis-a-vis the elegant circles. These aggregations were well-intentioned and worthwhile, in so far as they encouraged self-improvement, but the National Capital was both deserving and capable of better. Washington already claimed proportionately more men engaged in scientifically oriented pursuits than any other city, and with the predicted growth of government science this number was bound to multiply. Before long the Society would revolve around original investigators collectively comparing and testing aspects of their research. So by attracting the superior talent of national institutions the Philosophical Society would simultaneously nourish the spirit of inquiry in Washington and "have reflex influence upon every part of the United States." 18

The standards set for meetings were still more rigorous than those pertaining to membership. Since the Society assumed responsibility for scrutinizing claims to advances in knowledge its proceedings were conducted with utmost seriousness. In this vein evening dress was de rigueur for participants,

17 Minutes of the General Committee, March 2, 1889, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.

18 Henry, Bulletin, II, 162; Asaph Hall, "Annual Address of the President," December 5, 1885, ibid., VIII (1885), xlvi.
thereby imparting an aura of formal dignity. Twice a month between twenty and thirty members convened to hear and comment upon prepared papers. These contributions were almost invariably of a high order, and remarks from the audience that hinted of pedestrianism were coldly received. "Free critical discussion," as Henry understood it, was meant to be constructive, calling attention to neglected facts, clarifying hypotheses, and refining tentative conclusions. Informed criticism was therefore an indispensable part of the Society's operations. Although in the beginning most lectures dealt with pure science, the scope of the Society's interest included "Dreams in Their Relation to Psychology," a talk on the Brooklyn Bridge, William H. Dall's "On the Relative Value of Alaska to the United States," "An Attempt at a Theory of Odor," a travelogue of the Middle East by General Sherman, G. E. Dutton's treatment of the silver question, J. H. Saville, "On the New Japanese Coinage," Spencer Baird's "The Artificial Propagation of the Cod," and eulogies of famous members, one of the first being occasioned by the death of A. D. Bache in 1871. An unforgettable evening was when Professor Bell gave the first public demonstration of his telephone. Significantly, these papers appeared in mass circulation periodicals as well as lesser known scholarly journals. Cultivated readers of Scribner's or Harper's New Monthly Magazine, and those who poured over Annals of the Harvard College Observatory
and the Annual Report of the U.S. Fish Commission, were equally apt to be treated to a Philosophical Society paper. In either case they were bound to be impressed by the competence of the author and the self-evident earnestness of his organization.  

Yet conviviality also had a place in the Society's existence, as illustrated by the tradition of "adjourned meetings." Regular meetings were held fortnightly in the old Ford's Theatre. After Lincoln's assassination the building had been turned into an annex of the Surgeon General's office to house the Army Medical Museum and Library, and Dr. John Shaw Billings in charge. By happy coincidence Billings, and Surgeon General J. K. Barnes, happened to be founders of the Philosophical Society. Through their official capacities they arranged for the Society's first home. Between 1871 and 1887, when the Cosmos Club auditorium became available, the narrow stairs of Ford's Theatre were ascended countless times as members made their way to the dingy, "rather gloomy" room which Dr. Billings found nonetheless "appropriate to the objects and purposes of the company gathered therein."  

Maybe this somber ambience contributed to the main order of business, but it also seems to have prepared members for


20 John S. Billings, ibid., XII (1892-1894), 549.
their retirement immediately afterward to a tavern around the corner for beer, pretzels, and oysters. Thus, Philosophical Society evenings always concluded by moving from the gray of theory into the green of life. The policy of postponing refreshments may have reflected apprehension over the tarnished image of the Megatherium Club, an organization of Washington naturalists in the late 1850's which was rumored to harbor dissipates. Of greater import was the way adjourned meetings carried on the Henry tradition of trying to blend sociability with intellectual pursuits. 21

A novelty without precedent in the Scientific Club was a publication of Minutes. The Bulletin of the Philosophical Society of Washington, printed by the Smithsonian, first appeared in 1874. Somewhat sporadically, during the next seventeen years, ten more volumes containing resumes of as few as one and as many as four years of meetings were made available. Each volume included a list of officers and members, the constitution and rules. But out of economic necessity scientific journals, government documents, and the Smithsonian Institution's Miscellaneous Collections (the secretary of the Smithsonian occupied a permanent place on the publications committee) had to be relied on for the

distribution of complete papers.\footnote{Marcus Baker to Spencer F. Baird, December 28, 1887, Letters Received from Washington Societies, SI Archives.} Before 1888 just titles and abstracts of communications were presented, with only the president's annual address given in full. Consequently, the early Bulletin revealed but a bare outline of the Society's substance.

Nonetheless, this represented a breakthrough both for the Society and in terms of the promotion of Washington science. Virtually any record of proceedings served to differentiate between truly dynamic organizations and elegant circles, and "Without at least such a publication," warned Henry, "the society cannot have a recognized existence."\footnote{Henry, Bulletin, I, x.} The Bulletin met this publish-or-perish demand by partially filling the needs of individual members for an outlet, while at the same time giving an impression of organizational vitality. Henry had always maintained that one of the most effective means for advancing science was by regularly disseminating notices of accretions to knowledge. Such a task was beyond the range of the Scientific Club, but the more elaborate machinery of the Philosophical Society made this possible. As president, Henry deplored the delay in getting out the first volume, and the Bulletin never satisfied his hopes for a comprehensive series of transactions. Not until
ten years after his death was the publication policy revised to permit the printing of entire articles. Yet a delinquent journal of limited scope was preferable to nothing at all. By 1879, when it began a regular yearly schedule, the Bulletin was received by major libraries and research institutions throughout North America and Europe; exchanges had been established with over a dozen royal societies and imperial academies; and to an increasing extent the Philosophical Society of Washington was emerging as a leading spokesman for national science.

It was Joseph Henry's custom to begin meetings by reading from a volume of Royal Society Transactions, thereby establishing a favorable mood and from which might be inferred comparability with the older British institution. As a matter of fact this had some justification: both groups were founded, in the main, by mathematicians, astronomers, and physical scientists; with respect to origins, the mid-seventeenth century circle at London and the Scientific Club in ante-bellum Washington were loosely knit; though they accepted members from outside the ranks of professional science, and despite their avoidance of rigid specialization, the two societies stressed enlightened discussion; and gradually both grew more formal, national, and influential. During the nineteenth century elitist club and society building took place against backgrounds that were unmistakably similar.

24 Billings, ibid., XII, 550.
The English experience was colored by the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Rapid social and economic changes reverberating throughout the class system, and the general condition of cultural disorder combined to produce "the great age of the London club."25 Also, as was the case in America later on, a protracted military effort brought about a concentration in the National Capital of scientists and talented civil servants. These new men of common interests sought opportunities for association like those already enjoyed by aristocrats and politicians. Hence the formation of intellectual organizations. Though they surfaced in the wake of heightened nationalism these groups were not notably nationalistic. On the contrary, they often served as meeting places for foreign scientists and men of letters. As President Asaph Hall reminded the Philosophical Society: "Let us welcome all earnest men, remembering that the principles of science are universal, and are not confined to any language or country."26 Finally, there were striking

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26 Asaph Hall, Bulletin, VIII, xlvi; Herbert Spencer to Samuel P. Langley, February 28, 1885, Langley Papers, University of Michigan Library; Allan Nevins, Henry White: Thirty Years of American Diplomacy (New York, 1930), p. 104; "We have not allowed any learned association coming here for a meeting, or any man of eminence in the learned world to visit the city, without, if the case was known to our members, tendering our hospitalities. We thus aim to show to the world at large what Washington is trying to be and to do." Simon Newcomb, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Cosmos Club, p. 34.
parallels of composition and character. The London Athenæum, for instance, was established for eminences in the arts and sciences, a genuine intellectual elite. Certainly the Philosophical Society of Washington approximated this status as it came to include more and more men of national distinction.

Undergirding this rise to prominence was a hierarchical structure designed to take utmost advantage of the prestige of individual members. The Philosophical Society had been created as an elite organization, and those in charge studiously made certain that it would be identified with the cream of official Washington. "It is not a public establishment," wrote Henry, "and is composed of members and such persons as are especially invited." Moreover, its leaders and its most famous personages were one and the same, guaranteeing that brilliant exhibits would constantly be on display. Henry, who also was president of the National Academy, held the Society's highest office every year until his death, when it devolved to the second ranking member, Simon Newcomb. Likewise, Baird, General Humphreys, Meigs, Julius Hilgard, J. J. Woodward, Abbe, Asaph Hall, Charles Schott, Thomas L. Casey, Gill, and J. H. C. Coffin—all in

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28Joseph Henry to S. Mann, April 6, 1876, SI Archives.
the National Academy—were so repetitiously returned to office that their names became synonymous with the Society itself. The tactic of building a reputation around illustrious figures had been profitably employed by other groups, and no points for originality can be awarded to the Society on this score. However, in contrast to the majority of exquisite circles its ornaments not only dazzled, they also governed. As stipulated in the constitution and standing rules, the executive officers and nine-man general committee transacted all business independent of the rest of the membership. Meeting separately, prior to the regular sessions, they passed judgment on communications, considered amendments to the by-laws, set financial policies, and even decided upon membership nominations. "For the government of men whose object is the advance of truth, but few rules are necessary," assured the president upon introducing his Society to the public. Elitist rule brought operational efficiency and the "devotion of almost every evening exclusively to its legitimate purposes." This brand of authoritarianism followed from Henry's belief that federal office holders should have longer terms, and that the President might serve for life. With regard to his own Society it enabled the star performers to choose supporting casts that

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30 Diary of Mary Henry, January 3, 1865, II, SI Archives.
were consonant with the character and purposes of their organization. 31

Certain members took exception to these elitist configurations. In May 1883, scarcely two months after his admission, Albert Williams privately deplored it as "the Washington Mutual Admiration Society" and described the lectures as "slush." 32 Since Williams occupied one of the fashionable residences on Lafayette Square and was employed by the United States Geological Survey, this low opinion of a group patently well-tailored to his own position seemed to defy reason. Some elucidation was shed by the confidential report of a colleague, Samuel Franklin Emmons, after addressing the Society.

I wish I was a little better up in Chemistry and Physics myself, but don't seem to have time to do any studying on so abstract a line as that. . . . The paper of which you heard . . . I wrote out at Gilbert's request for the Washington Philosophical Society. He told me they were a lot of old fogies to whom anything of that kind would be a novelty. I therefore took very little pains about it, and merely read the paper and sent in a hurried abstract. . . . 33

By this jaundiced confession Emmons lifted the veil from the state of professional jealousy which aggravated relationships

31 See, Minutes of the General Committee, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.

32 Albert Williams, Jr. to George F. Becker, May 4, 1883, Becker Papers, Box 15, LC.

33 Samuel F. Emmons to George F. Becker, May 30, 1883, ibid.
between Washington's men of science. As geologists, Williams, Emmons, and Gilbert resented the denigration of their specialties by physical scientists and the minority status of natural science within the Philosophical Society. Had not their former president, Simon Newcomb, spoken disparagingly of them in his *North American Review* articles a few short years before? What meaning was there in the Society's establishment of a Mathematical Section during the previous month if not to signal the absolute hegemony of exact science? Actually there was no such juggernaut of physicists, astronomers, and mathematicians (at times the Mathematical Section would not meet for months on end). Natural scientists lectured often, and in 1883, while the three geologists were sharing their dissatisfaction, the president was John Wesley Powell. Thus the "old fogies" sniped at by Emmons and Gilbert were merely symbols; Williams' "slush" had less to do with Society papers than work performed in other branches; their implicit contempt for the elitist control of the Society was really directed at the status accorded abstract science, "that profound respect

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which pertains to comparative ignorance. . . . "

Yet the murmurs of pique by disgruntled members cannot be dismissed lightly for they point to a muted weakness of the Washington Philosophical Society. The Society's paramount objective was the advancement of science, but at the same time it sought to operate informally as a social club. These ends were mutually incompatible; professional prejudice and distrust were too strong among government-scientists to permit a comprehensive organization of genuine fellowship and good will. Either it could, in a serious fashion, promote national science and forget about sociability, or it might disregard substantive matters and thereby increase the chances for developing a pleasant milieu. This dilemma was not of the Society's making, but inadvertently the Society institutionalized it. Encompassing disparate groups of scientists assured the exacerbation of existing rivalries, and thrashing-out issues over which men had already taken sides lengthened the odds in favor of a factionalized association. No wonder the merriment of adjourned meetings was sometimes brittle. Henry had anticipated this, and from the beginning he pleaded for toleration and self-control. But the problem was more deep-seated than the inability of members to master personal foibles. The Society was the world of American science in microcosm—all its petty antagonisms included. Here was the

35 Billings, Bulletin, IX (1886), xxxvii.
supreme irony: the Society had indeed become an authoritative voice of national science, but in so doing its secondary function was attenuated.

The heart of the matter was that Henry's organization sought to promote science in general, hardly noticing the flow of specialization which periodically threatened to engulf it. This became increasingly frustrating and there was much chafing under the commitment to generalization long after it had had its day. The standing rules seemed to suggest a remedy by sanctioning sub-organizations to represent particular branches of science. Accordingly, on March 29, 1883, a separate section was formed for the reading of papers in applied mathematics. But this exhausted the Society's willingness to embrace specialization. Two years later President Hall, who was also the mathematical chairman, voiced his acceptance of tradition: "Our society has been established on a broad basis . . . the purpose of a paper should be to present the principle points clearly, and the author may generally trust to the intelligence of his audience to fill in the details." Resignedly echoing his predecessor, John Shaw Billings disapproved of the "polarization" of science and even registered his opposition to

36 "Organization of the Mathematical Section, 1883," PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.

37 Hall, Bulletin, VIII, xlvi.
the distinctions drawn between different branches, though "there seems to be no way of preventing it." The issue was ignored until G. K. Gilbert observed that the Society was not "adapted to the presentation of highly specialized researches . . . it has discountenanced those papers which from their nature can interest only the devotees of a single science, and it, therefore, has not fully met the needs of the scientific community."39

Regardless of the implications, this dilemma could not obscure the Society's significance for American cultural history. On the contrary it magnified it, for the Society's steadfast encouragement of the generalizing mind testified to the shallowness of the emerging technical expert, the "trained man with special abilities in one field" whose narrow margin of comprehension left him incapable of understanding "where, in society, his own skills became mixed with all other knowledge."40 On another level the Society's founding illustrated the developmental pattern of scientific institutions. After the potent eighteen forties and fifties, and following the subsequent "period of disorganization," an

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38 Billings, *ibid.*, IX, xxxvii.


intellectual elite dedicated to advancing science had taken shape at the national capital. Here was an achievement of the first water, but beyond that the Philosophical Society fulfilled a dream which was almost as old as the republic. In early autumn, 1800, Vice-President Jefferson received a letter from Paris written by Joel Barlow. Barlow's brief message was turgid with enthusiasm over the promotion of national culture in France and how it might be duplicated at home. Apropos of the French experience, he wrote, there should be established an institution "called the Polysophic Society or some such comprehensive name," to direct science and learning in the United States, "its members to be chosen for their eminence." Located at "the seat of government in America" its influence would be "national," and its effect upon the "amelioration of society" nothing short of momentous. Little came of Barlow's proposal and over the years his ideal grew dim. It never faded completely, however, due to the vision of men like Henry. And of course it was Henry who redeemed the concept three-quarters of a century later. In the wake of his European trip, with the urgency for learned institutions very much in mind, he saw to it


42Joel Barlow to Thomas Jefferson, September 15, 1800, Jefferson Papers, CVII, LC.
that the nation finally was provided with a society in Washington for the advancement of science.

So forceful was Henry's leadership that the Society, like the Smithsonian, seemed almost an extension of the Professor's mind and spirit. Both institutions manifested his awareness of national potentialities, and under his tutelage each helped to enrich American culture. "The Smithsonian," wrote James Dwight Dana, "is a central finding establishment for the Museums of the country, and whatever helps them helps the science of the whole land." 43 A foreign visitor called it the "one institution in America which promises to exercise a considerable influence on the development of science and of scientific life." 44 Over the years—especially during the latter part of his lifetime—Henry bolstered the Smithsonian through his extensive support of several additional organizations. None, however, matched the Philosophical Society in his conceptions of national progress. On the occasion of his last presidential address the founding father reiterated that it should, above all else, "keep alive an active spirit of scientific advancement." 45 By this time, however, his injunction had less

43 James D. Dana to Othniel C. Marsh [February, 1867], Marsh Letterbooks, Peabody Museum Library, Yale University.


45 Henry, Bulletin, II, 162.
relevance to the future than to an accomplished fact, for the success of his Society was now irrefutable.

After he was gone Henry's great rule of conduct remained intact. There was no deviating from the first principle of the Society, not even for the sake of creating an atmosphere of greater accommodation. Nor did the Society become much more attuned to specialization. The original order of priorities was maintained, keeping it a Society for the study and promotion of all new contributions to scientific knowledge. As such, members could take pride in the excellent run of diversified lectures and their own "broadening of mental boundaries." Volumes of the Bulletin were enlarged by five and six times so that they could carry up to fifteen articles and more illustrations. In 1888 the Bulletin ceased to be printed at the Smithsonian's expense, showing that the Society had graduated to self-sufficiency. This also indicated that the Society was on a firm financial footing, having supplemented its income from the $5.00 a member annual dues with the interest on United States, Columbia Railway, and Cosmos Club bonds. At the end of the century it was decided that because "science and exact knowledge may be cultivated, not only by the reading and discussion of papers

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46 Dall, ibid., XII, 562.

47 Samuel P. Langley to Marcus Baker, November 5, 1888, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.
explaining the researches carried out by individuals . . .
but also by direct agencies tending to promote science where
it most needs active work," there was a demand for a committee
to apprise members of available grants in aid.  

Membership had increased to around two hundred
members, many from outside Washington, with both promising
younger men and the Nestors of American science. Unfortunately, the success of the Society in engendering their mutual
affections was indifferent at best, and to a degree it had
incorporated peevishness rather than diminish it. But this
was always a subordinate purpose anyway; better to realize
the primary goal than the one of lesser importance. Even if
these ends had not been contradictory they certainly were
too much for a single organization. Besides, a new group
had already accepted the challenge of fostering a sense of
community among Washington's men of science. The imperfection
of the Philosophical Society had, in an almost uncanny way,
spawned a different sort of institution to attempt what
Henry's failed to achieve. As though foreordained by some
compensatory process the year 1878, when Joseph Henry was
laid to rest, also marked the birth of the Cosmos Club.

48 Minutes of the General Committee, November 26,
1898, ibid.
CHAPTER IV

"BY A SOCIAL TIE"

It was common for those in the Philosophical Society also to be members of the Cosmos Club. Thirty-six of the Club's sixty founders came from the Society and its first officers were all Society members. Indirectly the Society could claim partial credit for the Club's existence, and from the very beginning it provided the core of the Club's membership. Once the strength of this formative influence is taken into account it becomes understandable why the manifesto of Washington's Cosmos Club has a familiar ring: "the advancement of its members in science, literature, and art [and] their mutual improvement by social intercourse."\(^1\) Here was another organization dedicated to individual cultivation and the enhancement of local culture. Yet, from its earliest moments, no one ever confused the Cosmos Club with the city's elegant circles. Instead of being an association in which almost any interested party might be considered eligible for membership, the Cosmos was a highly selective body limited to those who were actually contributing to knowledge. As the representative

\(^1\)Articles of Incorporation of the Cosmos Club of Washington City, By-Laws, Rules and Regulations of the Cosmos Club (Washington, D.C., 1879), p. 3.

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of a Washington economics association acknowledged to Lester Frank Ward, one of the sixty founders, "the 'Cosmos Club' is really a Club, & unlike our Assn. which some call a Club."² It was therefore sui generis, and because of its uniqueness the Cosmos immediately became the headquarters of Washington's intellectual elite.

Clubs were not unknown in the Capital City, nor did the Cosmos represent the first attempt to establish a club primarily for men of science. Joseph Henry's circle took the appellation "Scientific Club" as early as 1854 and went by that name for nearly twenty years. In 1871, however, its transformation into the Philosophical Society terminated its club status, leaving only the Potomac-Side Naturalists Club to meet the needs of local scientists. Created in 1858 for the purpose of drawing together students of fauna and flora in the immediate vicinity, this group was just slightly less venerable than the Scientific Club and had an impressive roll of members. By the mid-1870's it had grown steadily, established a special botanical section, found a permanent meeting place, and acquired patrons who made possible the publication of a monthly which in three years time expanded from twelve to twenty-two pages. This journal, Field and Forest, was designed not only as a medium for inspiring a popular appreciation for natural history, but also to insure

that "the Club shall no longer hide its light under a bushel."

By its own estimation the Naturalists had come a long way. Moreover, Club spokesmen were confident that its usefulness was bound to increase, and they invoked a fitting metaphor to point out that in science "some of the most sturdy oaks have sprung from acorns like this one."³

But in certain respects the Potomac-Side Naturalists showed weaknesses which cast doubt upon its ability to stand as an enduring institution. For instance, the curtailment of meetings during the Civil War was a subtle indication that it lacked the viability of Henry's aggregation, which continued in full swing throughout the conflict. More serious was its refusal to develop a permanent structure. As late as 1875 the Club's founders still were praised for adopting the "simplest plan of operation," and it was a matter of considerable pride that the Potomac-Side Naturalists carried on "without machinery to get out of order—without even an officer excepting the Secretary. . . ."⁴ This brand of anti-institutionalism was pre-war, dating back to a time when all along a broad front more or less authoritarian structures


⁴Coues, Field and Forest, I, 1.
were assailed as inhibitors of individual expression. The war, however, had the effect of blunting this impulse, and in its aftermath many intellectuals tended to accept and participate in the institutionalization of national culture. Organization building became the order of the day, and the imaginative men who refashioned the Scientific Club were not the only ones to be persuaded of its efficacy. Yet even in the face of this development the Naturalists remained implacable. Before long the "Potomac-Side" portion of their title took on a meaning that was ironically appropriate, for clearly they were not in the institutional mainstream, and as they continued to abjure the flow of post-war culture their group became something of an anachronism. To its most loyal members the Club lost none of its appeal, but it simply was not equal to the task of assuming a major role in the creation of Washington's intellectual establishment.

Another predecessor of the Cosmos was the Metropolitan Club which drew many members from scientific and educational institutions. Joseph Henry, Theodore Nicholas Gill, and Spencer Baird represented the Smithsonian; James C. Welling academia; Benjamin Peirce, Julius Hilgard, Richard Cutts and Carlisle Patterson the Coast and Geodetic Survey; Albert J. Myer and Adolphus W. Greely the Army Signal Service; Joseph K. Barnes the Surgeon General's office; John G. Parke and Andrew A. Humphreys the Corps of Army Engineers; Charles H. Davis the Naval Observatory; Charles S. Boggs the Lighthouse
Board; James Alden the Bureau of Navigation; and J. H. C. Coffin the *Nautical Almanac*. Many, of course, were in the National Academy and the Philosophical Society, and they gave the Metropolitan an aura of intellectual distinctiveness. But, as with the Potomac-Side Naturalists, inherent weaknesses prevented this club from contributing much to the development of an intellectual community. Originally established in October, 1863, the Metropolitan dissolved after only four years, started up again in 1872, and underwent a third reorganization in 1882; its sporadic history seems to have offered the Cosmos Club founders a model of what to avoid. In contrast to the Naturalists the Metropolitan did have a written constitution and by-laws, the usual elected officers, and an executive committee to carry on its business. These practices would be adopted by the Cosmos Club. Moreover, like the Cosmos, it sought to provide a social outlet for men new to the Capital who had accepted positions in expanding bureaus and departments. "To promote social and literary intercourse and enjoyment among its members" was the purpose set forth in its first constitution.  

Yet the Metropolitan Club was so steeped in sociability that it never enjoyed the kind of group spirit which

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became such an important feature of the Cosmos Club. In 1873, at the time of its rebirth when enthusiasm should have been high, the annual meeting pulled only ten members. Creating and maintaining interest in the Club posed a perpetual problem and from time to time the officers resorted to desperate measures in hopes of building vitality. During the mid-seventies foreign diplomats stationed in Washington automatically received membership invitations, but there was only one acceptance, that by the Turkish Minister Aristarchi Bey.6

This absence of esprit de corps may have stemmed from the fact that the Metropolitan really was not very private, as illustrated by the openness of Club functions. Attendance at the Metropolitan's soirees was based mainly on social repute, making its dinners, lectures, and art exhibits inclusive rather than exclusive. Moreover, there was no common bond of professional identity among the members. Joseph Henry, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and New York Congressman James Brooks, who was later censured for his implication in the Credit Mobilier scandal, shared few interests. Virtually everyone associated with official Washington was gathered into the Metropolitan—from Abraham Lincoln to Nellie Grant's glamorous husband, Algernon Sartoris. Not only was the Club large (the limit was set

at 500), but it also was expensive. When Senator James McMillan of Michigan joined, in 1889, the cost was $150—six times the fee charged by the Cosmos Club.7

Another difference between the Cosmos Club and the Metropolitan was the latter's lack of discrimination in selecting members. The ease with which one might join the Metropolitan was revealed in an anecdote told by Clifford Richardson, who had come to Washington in 1878 as a scientific staff assistant in the Department of Agriculture.

As I was passing the Club on the 8th of July 1881 Captain George Dewey, who was sitting at an open window on H Street, hailed me and said, "Come in and have a cocktail!" I accepted the offer. In the course of conversation my host said, "Why don't you join the Club?" I replied that I had thought myself too young to do so. However, my name was put up. . . .

The next day I met Colonel Archibald Hopkins, the Secretary of the Club, in the street. He stopped me and spoke of my nomination, adding that the Board of Governors would not meet until the following November but said that I might as well consider myself as elected and use the Club immediately. I did so without hesitation.8

The Cosmos Club was far less loosely composed.

The beginnings of the Cosmos Club can be traced to the fall of 1878 when a small group of government-scientists, unhappy with previous attempts to create the proper social atmosphere for intellectual activity, decided to establish

7F. W. Poor to James McMillan, April 20, 1889, McMillan Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

8Quoted in Charlick, Metropolitan, p. 67.
a club in Washington for their own use. At the initiation of Major C. E. Dutton, Garrick Mallery, and John Wesley Powell, preliminary soundings were taken among geologists to ascertain the feelings of likely founders. The results were heartening and, after a more exhaustive canvass of the U.S. Naval Observatory and the Smithsonian, it was decided to forge ahead with the project. On November 16 an informal group assembled at Powell's house where it was resolved to organize a social club composed of "men devoted to or interested in science, professionally or otherwise." Temporary officers were named and a subsequent meeting called for Monday the twenty-fifth of November, at which time a constitution was adopted marking the Club's official inception. When Spencer Baird returned home that night, and before turning in, he noted that the weather had been exceptionally fair and mild, something which augured well for the future of the Club.\footnote{J. W. Powell and Edward S. Holden to William Henry Holmes, November 18, 1878, Holmes, "Random Records of a Lifetime . . ." National Collection of Fine Arts Library, SI; this form invitation to participate in founding the Club is reprinted in William A. DeCandido (comp.), "Documentary History of the Cosmos Club," The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the Cosmos Club of Washington (Washington, D.C., 1904), p. 66.}

Considerable latitude was rendered to qualifications for admission, and though at the outset it was referred to

as the "Scientific Club of Washington," there were, among the founders, a number of men who were not scientists. Marcellus Bailey was a patent attorney, and Henry Adams an author; John Jay Knox a banker, and Charles Valentine Riley an agriculturalist; Edward M. Gallaudet, James C. Welling, and Daniel Coit Gilman presided over centers of higher education. Gilman, recently installed at The Johns Hopkins University, offered a precept by showing how the social union of his faculty gave rise to an intellectually stimulating environment. Original members were also surgeons and physicians such as Joseph M. Toner, Newton L. Bates, Robert Fletcher, George Peck, and John Shaw Billings. While Theodore Frelinghuysen Dwight was a librarian, several founders were career officers in the army and navy, usually scientists in uniform. One of the notable features of the

11Powell and Holden to Holmes, November 18, 1878, Holmes, "Random Records," National Collection of Fine Arts Library, SI.

Cosmos Club was its disposition to transcend professional boundaries in choosing members. "Nearly all the well-known artists, architects, and men of letters at the capital belong to it," reported Harper's Weekly, "and every stranger who has made his mark in one of the liberal professions finds its doors wide open to him when he visits the city." However, membership was not meant to be honorific; rather it was instrumental. Association with the Club acted subtly to advance in their chosen specialties men of unmistakable promise, individuals who, like Washington's intellectual community, were rapidly moving ahead.

The foregoing indicates that the fathers of the Cosmos Club did not define excellence narrowly. On the contrary, their plan revealed an admirable harmony of discrimination and diversity. Restrictive in the sense that members were carefully selected, the criteria for selection permitted a wide range of interests. Dr. Langley affirmed this on the occasion of the Club's silver anniversary:

One of the best preparations for a proper mind in which to meet ... changes of scientific doctrine lies, then, in the catholic spirit in which we may look out on all life, not on the scientific life alone, and this spirit is fostered in a club which opens its doors wide to all thought, and whose motto might be "nothing human is foreign to me."  


The intellectual range of the founders and the Club's general character were no less broad than knowledge itself, and, like the cosmos from whence its name was derived, the Club represented an orderly whole in which there was a place for everything.

Seemingly the founders drew inspiration from Henry Adams, one of their number,¹⁵ and sought to achieve that "unity through multiplicity" which so fascinated Adams. His personal and scholarly quests for order were, in a way, realized by the creators of the Cosmos Club. It contained multitudes, yet all were fused into a coherent whole by the synthesizing factor of professional worthiness. In 1882 the Washington Evening Star complained that whereas clubs for the "average American citizen" were becoming plentiful throughout the land, there was scant evidence that the trend had reached the Capital.¹⁶ Apparently the Cosmos Club, which had been in operation for four years, did not fall into this

¹⁵Although Adams was elected to the first committee on admissions he was not noticeably active in the Club after its founding. Perhaps, in this matter, he obeyed his own maxim that "silence, next to good-temper, was the mark of sense." Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography (Boston, 1918, Sentry edn., Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 501; on Adams being torn between "passive perception" and "reaction" see J. C. Levenson, "Henry Adams and the Art of Politics," Southern Review, n.s., IV (January, 1968), 50-58.

¹⁶Washington Evening Star, July 1, 1882.
category—and properly so, for the Cosmos was more attuned to
merit than the democratic mean. An early report stated frankly
that "no club recruited from our own class of men had previous-
ly existed in the city," and, as its members have always
enjoyed pointing out: there are many clubs in the cosmos,
but only one Cosmos.17

Compounding this singularity was the Club's aim to
"make a place where it will be possible for the members of
the Club to meet socially at any time under pleasant surround-
ings."18 Intimacy and charm were to be its hallmarks, and,
said the by-laws, the "mutual improvement" of the membership
was to be gained through "social intercourse." Hence it was
not extraordinary for outsiders to describe it as a "company
of distinguished workers in various fields of public usefulness
who gather for social relaxation within the hospitable
walls of the Cosmos. . . ." Unlike the Literary, the Philo-
sophical, and the new professional societies, members did not
join together for the purpose of reading weighty disquisitions
to one another. Casualness was its very essence so that other
than the annual elections each January, and monthly business
meetings, there were no functions in which members were
obliged to take part.

17 Thomas M. Spaulding, The Cosmos Club on Lafayette
Square (Washington, D.C., 1949), p. 5; Cosmos Club Bulletin,
1 (March, 1948), 2.

18 Powell and Holden to Holmes, November 18, 1878,
Holmes, "Random Records," National Collection of Fine Arts
Library, SI.
Its members do not assemble to ... air their scholarly attainments, but for recreation purely; and the use they make of their time when off duty is well attested to by the merry click of the billiard balls, the gathering around the chess tables, the animated chatter of the smoking-rooms, and the drafts made nightly upon the mass of popular magazines and weeklies with which the tables are strewn. 19

This tone of gracious informality yields an insight into why its founders considered a new and different type of organization so necessary.

The social motif of the Cosmos Club was intended to kindle a spirit of community among Washington's intellectuals, especially men involved in government-science. By filling the void left by the Philosophical Society it was felt that the Club would help prevent the kind of fear and suspicion which tended to crop up among those engaged in research, and, conversely, create a mood of mutual appreciation and good will. Grove Karl Gilbert, one of the disgruntled geologists in the Society, put it succinctly when he said that the Cosmos Club endeavored to "bind the scientific men of Washington by a social tie and thus promote that solidarity which is important to their proper work and influence." 20 A corollary to this was an inevitable improvement of communications within


20 Address delivered by Grove Karl Gilbert, The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Cosmos Club, p. 40.
the scientific corps, and association with the Club soon became an effective way to keep abreast of professional news. "I haven't given you much gossip, have I," wrote Samuel F. Emmons to a fellow geologist, whereupon he referred his correspondent to another man who was bound to be a better source of enlightenment, "for he goes regularly to the Cosmos, and plays cards with the Major [Powell], Gilbert & Co."\(^{21}\)

The Club seemed to be an immediate success. As early as 1880 it had expanded its facilities and begun holding weekly "Club Nights" which occasioned particularly good turn outs. Some members still found Washington uncongenial, like Clarence King, who considered it "a place of such transient residence that permanent friendships, which are, after all, the mitigating circumstance of life, seem out of the question."\(^{22}\) But King's sentiments were untypical. During the summer of 1883 the Smithsonian's Tarleton Bean and G. Brown Goode journeyed to England for the International Fisheries Exhibition. One of the most striking features of London's intellectual atmosphere was the intense jealousy among scientific men—"quite in contrast with the ordinary condition

\(^{21}\)Samuel F. Emmons to George F. Becker, April 26, 1883, Becker Papers, Box 15, LC.

\(^{22}\)Clarence King to Daniel C. Gilman, February 27, 1885, Gilman Papers, The Johns Hopkins University Library; Grove K. Gilbert to William H. Holmes, February 12, 1880, Holmes, "Random Records," National Collection of Fine Arts Library, SI.
of things at home," they reported. That Bean and Goode were active in the Cosmos Club should come as no surprise.

Less predictable was the relationship that suddenly developed between the Club and the Philosophical Society. As a social organization whose members were chosen with even greater care the Cosmos did not duplicate the Society; at the same time its existence could be considered a veiled threat to the older group. There were enough similarities between the two to suggest that the Club's development might progress at the expense of the Society. Some feared that a flourishing Club would emasculate the Society by absorbing its important members. With this condition as the backdrop a sequence of events ensued which had all the fast-moving excitement of a carefully staged melodrama. The action opened when it became known that the Philosophical Society would shortly be recast along club lines, thereby guaranteeing its self-preservation and mounting a challenge to the Cosmos Club's reason for being. December 12, 1878, was when this was to be effected, at a meeting scheduled for eight o'clock at the Army Medical Museum. Quickly Powell and a few others moved to foil the Society's plan. It was decided to hold an emergency meeting on the same date, also at the Army Medical Museum, but to have it begin promptly at seven-thirty, half an hour before the Society was set to convene. The single

23 Tarleton H. Bean to William J. Rhees, August 10, 1883, Rhees Collection, RH 2714, Box 51, Henry E. Huntington Library.
item of business was a resolution enabling anyone in the Philosophical Society to join the Cosmos Club before January 1, 1879. This was rushed through without delay, allowing plenty of time for Welling, who was in both groups, to step across the hall and present a general invitation to the Society's assembled membership. The movement to transform the Philosophical Society into a club immediately collapsed, and by this gambit the Cosmos made several worthwhile additions to its number. 24

The episode was not completely ended, however, and its residual effects constituted a lingering intrusion on the serenity of the Club's early days. Ironically, the organization which had been formed to mitigate rivalry and to still rancor was enveloped by it from the start. Some responsibility for this must be laid to the strategem used against the Philosophical Society, but even more to blame was the part seemingly played by the Cosmos in the wholesale reordering of government geographical and geological work.

Between 1867 and 1874 four separate surveys were commissioned essentially to investigate whether any use could be made of this last, unsettled part of the country, and to study rock strata in the far west. Dr. Ferdinand V. Hayden's United States Geological Survey of the Territories was first into the field, followed shortly by the United

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States Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, led by Clarence King, the United States Geological Survey West of the One Hundredth Meridian, Lieutenant George Montague Wheeler in charge, and Powell's United States Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region. From what Indians called the summit of the world, near Yellowstone, to the alkali flats of Nevada's Great Basin, and from the drifting sands of Death Valley to the turbulent waters of the lower Colorado these enterprises traversed America's most majestic sections, leaving behind them a long list of noteworthy achievements. They provided reliable maps of what had hitherto been terra incognita; they opened the way for miners, ranchers, lumbermen, and railroad builders; through their descriptive writings, photographs, paintings, and sketches they popularized an image of the west which was at once credible and enthralling; as a result of their collections of Indian artifacts, myths, and vocabularies they gave momentum to the study of American ethnology; and with respect to geology, botany, and paleontology, their efforts were so fruitful as to influence permanently the earth sciences. Withstanding formidable hardships and dangers these expeditions carried out their tasks with enthusiasm and competence, completing many technical projects and setting guidelines for even more. "Eighteen hundred and sixty-seven," wrote Clarence King, "marks, in the history of national geological work, a turning point, when the science ceased to be dragged in the
dust of rapid exploration and took a commanding position in
the professional work of the country.\textsuperscript{25} It is with good
reason that they have come to be called "the Great Surveys."\textsuperscript{26}

By the late 1870's, however, their greatness was
threatening to put them out of business. Less and less of
the west was unknown, and now that good railroad track beds
had been found and rich silver deposits identified, the over-
lapping and duplication of the surveys became nettlesome to
Congress. It was Congress which held the power of life and
death over the surveys since they were provided for not by
statutes, but through annual appropriations. In 1874, after
broaching the subject of combining them, the House Committee
on Public Lands had concluded that this might just as well
be postponed; but four years later, when the Appropriations
Committee of the House announced that further funds would be
withheld until organizational inefficiencies were overcome.

\textsuperscript{25}First Annual Report of the U.S. Geological Survey,
in Edward Salisbury Dana et al., A Century of Science in
America, With Special Reference to the American Journal of
Science, 1818-1918 (New Haven, Conn., 1918), pp. 201-202; for
his own part King "had incorporated the West into the realm
of academic science," William H. Goetzmann, Exploration and
Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the

\textsuperscript{26}Richard A. Bartlett, Great Surveys of the American
West (Norman, Okla., 1962), pp. 373-376; Thomas G. Manning,
(Lexington, Ky., 1967), pp. 1-32; George P. Merrill, The
First One Hundred Years of American Geology (New Haven,
Conn., 1924, New York, 1964), pp. 500-552; Howard D. Kramer,
"The Scientist in the West, 1870-1880," Pacific Historical
Review, XII (September, 1943), 239-251.
there could be no doubt that the time for decision had arrived. Unless the surveys were consolidated scientific investigation in the west would cease altogether. Expressions of concern had already been heard from the ranks of science, most notably Josiah Dwight Whitney's extended article in the North American Review calling attention to the fact that several surveys were performing virtually the same functions in more or less the same territories, and Congress could not be expected to abide this condition indefinitely.27

Thus the congressional warning of 1878 found a significant body of scientists favorably disposed toward the reorganization of western research. When the National Academy of Sciences was instructed to report on how geological and geographical surveys could be streamlined, a select committee composed of Alexander Agassiz, James Dwight Dana, acting President O. C. Marsh, J. S. Newberry, Simon Newcomb, William Barton Rogers, and William P. Trowbridge took up the problem without delay. Requests for information were sent to those in charge of existing surveys so that their ideas could be considered in preparing the final report. As it turned out,

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Powell's reply was used verbatim, which meant that though he had not yet been named to the National Academy he was formulating its official policy on the subject of consolidation. At its special New York meeting, November 6, 1878, the committee's (or Powell's) recommendations were adopted with only one dissenting vote: mensuration work should be combined under the Coast and Geodetic Survey, with all investigations of natural resources in the public domain and classification of public lands becoming the responsibility of a new bureau in the Interior Department, the United States Geological Survey. If acted upon by Congress this would eliminate the Great Surveys.

Ultimately consolidation was achieved, but not without a struggle and only after the National Academy's original plan had been watered down. History has remembered the acrimonious debates of the Forty-Fifth Congress, a congress so freighted with discord that it came to regret the day of its birth. The sessions were punctuated with controversies over the size, support, and internal uses of the army; whether soldiers should be stationed at polling places; the remonitization of silver and its relationship to gold; resumption of specie

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payments; alleged frauds and voting irregularities in the presidential election of 1876; and the restriction of Chinese immigration. The recasting of government geological and geographical work did nothing to ease this Sturm and Drang. When advocates of the National Academy's proposals declared that consolidation would represent a substantial savings of money, opponents retorted that this was false economy, since discontinuing Lieutenant Wheeler's Survey would deprive the army of a vital intelligence source for waging Indian campaigns, "and unless this information is obtained by the War Department disastrous results are liable to follow at any time." 29 The point about reducing bureaucratic waste was challenged by those who maintained that the Coast Survey, which was to have jurisdiction over surveys of mensuration, was overstaffed, uneconomical, and "the most irresponsible and extravagant scientific body that Congress has ever provided for." Denying that unification was truly progressive, the anti-consolidation forces argued that such a change in the system of parcelling out unsettled territory would raise "unnumbered hindrances to the prompt obtaining of title to homes by the hardy pioneers of our country." 30 Conservationist claims were dismissed brusquely: "Pay these scientific


30 Ibid., 218.
men to hunt bugs, pay them to get up fancy colored maps, and yet charge the settler with the expense of defining the boundaries of his little homestead." Clearly the opposition was too strong for the National Academy's plan to be passed intact. However, the section calling for a new geological survey under the Interior Department did carry, as a rider to the Sundry Civil Appropriation Act, which was signed by President Hayes on March 3, 1879.

Before the ink was dry there were murmurs of complaint about the role played in these proceedings by a coterie of local intellectuals led by Powell. "The scheme has had its origin here in Washington," groused Montana Congressman Martin Maginnis, "in the lobbies of the House—scientific lobbyists perhaps—certainly scientific in the manner in which they have conducted their approaches on this body."

Maginnis, who disdained "the conceit of new-fledged collegiates and of governmental scientists," had little use for the Capital City's savants. Yet, in a backhanded fashion, he was crediting them with proficiently managing their cause and, by way of innuendo, the highest tribute went to Powell.32

31Ibid., Part 7, 1211; the motives of congressmen opposing the Powell plan are thoughtfully analyzed in Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire, pp. 587-588; Manning, Government in Science, pp. 46-54.

Powell's singular contribution came in the form of two government reports printed in 1878, *Lands of the Arid Region of the United States*, and *Methods of Surveying the Public Domain*. These *tours de force* not only demonstrated the value of his own survey, they also presented a convincing argument in favor of revising federal land policies so that Washington could plan for both the development and the conservation of western territories. *Lands of the Arid Region*, published over the signature of Secretary of the Interior Schurz, was distributed by the all-important House Committee on Appropriations, and of course, *Methods of Surveying the Public Domain* was actually the National Academy's report recommending unification. These documents enabled influential friends of science in both parties—especially Democrats John D. C. Atkins, Chairman of Appropriations in the House, his fellow committee member Abram S. Hewitt, and Congressman James A. Garfield, leader of the Republican minority—to build a persuasive case for the creation of a United States Geological Survey. Also, Clarence King, Powell's candidate for the directorship of the Survey, was put in charge of the new enterprise, while at the same time Congress went along with two of the Major's favorite designs.

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33 In the judgment of the historian of the arid region Powell's analyses and recommendations "were the most intelligent and comprehensive that had been made, and they have not been surpassed since," Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York, 1931, Universal Library edn., n.d.), p. 422.
for promoting science: requiring that all collections made by federal surveys be deposited in the National Museum, and instituting a Bureau of Ethnology as part of the Smithsonian. By the end of the congressional session Powell had carried all before him. "There can be no doubt that this whole thing came about with various other changes of a revolutionary character, through the instrumentality of the Major," wrote ethnologist Frank Hamilton Cushing. Then, reviewing the contrasting prospects of Powell and Hayden,

it is my belief that the former will be directly and largely benefitted—the latter injured and Wheeler—already dead from starvation—consigned to the inexhaustible tour of military service, as a lieutenant in the United States Army.34

The founding of the Cosmos Club seemed to constitute a suspiciously vital link in this chain of events. William Healey Dall, an early member, noted "some perturbed individuals who had seen in the formation of such a club a scheme to control governmental scientific activities."35 This charge had a certain validity, to the extent that the Club's organizers included many who envisioned the need for the centralized direction of national science, and that in subsequent periods—especially during the world wars—the Club

34 Frank H. Cushing to [?] Turner, May 15, 1879, Cushing Papers, Southwest Museum Library.

35 Dall, Baird, p. 397; milder hints that the Cosmos Club must have had something to do with the creation of the Survey appear in William Culp Darrah, Powell of the Colorado (Princeton, N.J., 1951), pp. 247-248 and Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire, p. 591.
indirectly affected public policy. Yet all this came in the fullness of time; during its early years the Club's influence was more imaginary than real. Presumably Dall's "perturbed individuals" were Powell's enemies, men who resented his accomplishments, envied his political ingenuity, and who were quick to construe his every action as part of a larger campaign of aggrandizement which would end with the Major and a small detachment of chosen lieutenants "running" American science. As the gray eminence of government geology he was a man who deserved to be eyed warily lest his power expand into other departments. Accordingly the Cosmos Club appeared to be a vehicle for advancing Powell's position in the scientific establishment.

The trouble with this conjecture was that it overlooked the timing of certain important factors: first, Powell had already garnered the esteem of leading men of science through his report for the National Academy, and second, like King, he enjoyed a widespread popular following. Through their exploits both had gained such notoriety that mere mention of the names Powell and King immediately conjured up images familiar to the public. The one-armed explorer took on fascination in 1869 when he and his party were believed to have disappeared in a whirlpool while attempting to navigate the tempestuous Green River. Soon afterward "The King of Diamonds" created a sensation by exposing a cache of fraudulent gems that had convinced none other than Charles Tiffany.
Men who narrowly escaped being bilked thanked God and Clarence King in the same breath, thereby showing how close the latter had come to immortality. On the professional front the reputations of King and Powell were enhanced by the publication of such monographs as Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada and Powell's Exploration of the Colorado River. These two had also been assiduously courting official Washington for years before the Club was conceived. Thus the Cosmos Club was not even on the scene when the foundation for the Survey was being laid. To the perceptive observer, watching simultaneously the organization of the Club and the establishment of the Survey, there simply was less there than met the eye.

Furthermore, in this instance Powell's success


37In later years a colleague wrote of King: "It was his personal charm and captivating speech that won for him an immediate and enduring success. Senators, representatives and government officials of every grade became at once his admiring friends. Fessenden, of Maine, after an evening's companionship with King at Sam Hooper's genial dinner-table, was himself almost persuaded to be a scientist, and professed his conversion in saying, 'If I were not United States Senator I would be United States Geologist.'" Hague, King Memoirs, p. 382.
resulted not from deft machinations but because his plan for reorganizing federally sponsored geology offered several patent advantages. On the level of expediency it provided a timely alternative to the surveys of Wheeler and Hayden, both of which suffered from critical limitations and continued only by the grace of bureaucratic inertia. For all practical purposes the kind of topographical reconnaissance undertaken by Wheeler had perished in the Civil War, along with other projects of soldier-scientists that earlier had contributed mightily to the winning of the west.\(^{38}\) Indeed, one of the few excuses for resurrecting the military survey in 1871 was that map-making had always been a legitimate army function. During its history the United States Geographical Survey West of the One Hundredth Meridian made some contributions to paleontology, botany, ornithology, and zoology, thanks to civilian employees like Fielding Bradford Meek, as well as Cosmos Club founders G. K. Gilbert, Henry

\(^{38}\)Military reconnaissance traditionally gave short shrift to exploitation and conservation, both of which loomed larger than ever before in post-1865 conceptions of the trans-Mississippi west. As the historian of this subject has written: "Nearly to a man every Topographical Officer from Stephen H. Long onward had described the plains west of the 100th meridian as being of little value to a civilization largely agrarian in its basic economic activity. To them the plains country formed a barrier to progress." William H. Goetzmann, Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863 (New Haven, Conn., 1959), pp. 415-416; "perhaps the climax of the War Department's geological effort came in 1859. . . ." Manning, Government in Science, p. 2.
W. Henshaw, and Henry C. Yarrow. Yet, the inherent rigidity of the army way proved inhibiting and, by 1878, all save the Corps of Engineers agreed that abolishing Wheeler's Survey would be a good thing.39

A significant body of opinion also favored disbanding the survey headed by Ferdinand V. Hayden, but for different reasons. Unlike Wheeler's, the Hayden enterprise was primarily geological and as such it was more relevant to the needs of national science. Being part of the Interior Department it enjoyed a civilian status rendering it estimable in the eyes of the scientific establishment. Its professional staff, including Cyrus Thomas, William Henry Holmes, Henry Gannett, Frederick Endlich, Edward Drinker Cope, one of the leading vertebrate paleontologists in the country, and "the Nestor of American paleobotanists," Leo Lesquereux, was superior to Wheeler's. Beginning in 1867 and for the next eleven years it uncovered great portions of natural history. The photographs of William Henry Jackson and the

39Bartlett, Great Surveys, pp. 333-372; the House Appropriations Committee's refusal to fund further surveys "was really a vote of no confidence in Wheeler's work, and it marked the beginning of the end of large-scale army exploration in the West," Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire, p. 485; General A. A. Humphreys, Chief of Engineers, submitted his resignation to the National Academy and the Philosophical Society when he saw that the special committee appointed to study western surveys was composed of geologists and therefore stacked against topography, A. A. Humphreys to Theodore N. Gill, and Humphreys to Simon Newcomb, December 31, 1878, FSW Archives, Naval Research Laboratory.
landscape paintings of Thomas Moran kept it consistently in the public eye, it was valued by western agriculturalists, railroad promoters, and miners, and the entrepreneurial skill of its director made it increasingly popular with Congress. Indeed, the mercurial Hayden "became the most powerful and most celebrated public scientist of the seventies." His survey had only one weakness: administration. But, by 1878, this had become an insuperable problem.

Though slight of frame Ferdinand Hayden was blessed with unbounded energy which enabled him to scurry up and down mountains and across deserts like a man possessed. "There was a vehemence and a sort of wildness in his nature," remembered J. Peter Lesley. He was passionately devoted to the virgin west, adored what he termed its "beautiful decorations," and seemed determined to make known as much of it as was possible before death overtook him. With his ever-present specimen bag and geologist's pick, ferreting in winter and summer both, whether accompanied by assistants or alone, Hayden became a familiar sight—as well as a curiosity—to the natives. The Sioux had a name for him: "Man-Who-Picks-Up-Stones-Running." This nervous intensity was reflected in the work of the survey. Spatially speaking it accomplished

40Bartlett, Great Surveys, pp. 3-120; Manning, Government in Science, p. 15; Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire, pp. 495-529; for an incisive critique of Hayden's Survey see Jules Marcou to Hayden, January 27, 1874, in Merrill, First One Hundred Years, pp. 721-722.
much, but more often than not this meant sacrificing detailed analysis; self-descriptions of its manifold activities filled tomes, but all too frequently these accounts contained inaccuracies that made Hayden look like either a charlatan or an incompetent. "He worked with a telescope instead of with a microscope. He worked so rapidly and published so quickly that shoddiness became the hallmark of his reports."41 Since deliberate, methodical investigation was beyond his ken it became clear that Hayden's Survey had—in a very literal sense—run its course.

In addition to the shortcomings of definition and administration plaguing both surveys an internecine rivalry had grown up between them. Once Hayden and Wheeler sensed the imminence of extinction they confronted each other like implacable foes. So great was their enmity that malicious personal attacks became commonplace. Wheeler charged that his opponent lacked sufficient skill even to "revise the work done by his own topographers," whereupon Hayden vowed that "if he stirs a finger, or attempts to interfere with me or my survey in any way, I will utterly crush him—as I have

enough congressional influence to do so, and will bring it to bear.** Such venomous give and take underscores a general condition of the pursuit of natural science in late nineteenth century America: unrelenting antipathies were almost the rule rather than the exception.

It was precisely this problem which Powell sought to alleviate, and in so doing he approached it from several different directions. Abolishing competing surveys would cast out one apple of discord. Similarly, requiring that all newly discovered artifacts, fossils, and specimens be deposited in national institutions (the United States Museum and the Bureau of Ethnology) was aimed at curbing competition between individual specialists, such as Cope and Marsh. Their titanic struggles over the classification and description of extinct animals, pitting against each other two giants of paleontology, were exacerbated by repeated contests over fossil troves in the west. "They were," in Nathan Reingold's phrase, "Robber Barons trying to corner the old-bones market." Reducing this speculative fever was therefore


bound to diminish hostilities and yield happier relations among the big plungers. Finally, an organization designed as a mollifying force promised to engender mutual trust and good will. In this way the Hayden-Wheeler fight dramatized the urgent need for the Cosmos Club and, by the same token, the Club's founding was bound up with the United States Geological Survey.

But it did not automatically follow that the Cosmos Club was indispensable to the creation of the Survey or the appointment of its personnel. On the contrary, the Club did its utmost to remain aloof from consolidation quarrels by following the lead of a seasoned scientific institution, the Coast Survey, and adopting a position of discreet non-involvement. Thus the decision that Hayden and Wheeler had become expendable was reached by scientists outside the Club's orbit. Powell's report was silent on the question of who should head the new bureau; consequently it could not be deemed unfriendly toward either antagonist. True, the report was slanted against military surveys, but this prejudice was widely held and certainly Powell's bias did not cause the downfall of Wheeler. Nor did the Club act to save Hayden, despite personal appeals to Spencer Baird in the former's hour of need.44 Clearly, then, the Cosmos Club exercised no

44 Julius E. Hilgard to Othniel C. Marsh, November 28, 1878, Marsh Letterbooks, Peabody Museum Library, Yale University; Ferdinand V. Hayden to Spencer F. Baird, September 18 and 20, 1878, Baird Personal Papers, SI Archives.
appreciable leverage in consigning Hayden and Wheeler to premature retirement.

Moreover, the man who ultimately received the directorship, Clarence King, was named not as a result of his affiliation with the Cosmos Club, but because, as O. C. Marsh said, he commanded "the respect and hearty support of the best scientific men in the country." King, rather than the Club, assumed the main burden of soliciting letters from these men backing his candidacy. "I am here in the thick of the fight," he wrote, after taking up a position in Washington from which to marshal support for his nomination. Already President Hayes had begun receiving notes favorable to King, including the glowing sentiments of William Dean Howells and the letter from Mrs. Howells to "Dear Cousin Lucy," proclaiming King "the most accomplished man of his age in

45 O. C. Marsh to Rutherford B. Hayes, January 14, 1879, Hayes Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Library.

46 Clarence King to Daniel C. Gilman, January 15, 1879, Gilman Papers, The Johns Hopkins University Library; King was an old hand at using his irresistible charm to win choice government positions. In 1867, at the age of twenty-four, he induced Congress and the War Department to approve the 40th Parallel Survey and, through personal efforts, secured the directorship for himself. In bidding him adieu Secretary of War Stanton said: "Now, Mr. King, the sooner you get out of Washington the better—you are entirely too young to be seen about town with this appointment in your pocket—there are four major-generals who want your place." Quoted in Wilkins, King, p. 96. Small wonder that even Henry Adams stood in awe of King.
the country."^  Now messages equally saturated with praise engulfed the White House. During the first three months of 1879 Hayes heard from state geologists, the presidents and faculties of major scientific schools, members of the National Academy, as well as geologists formerly employed by the defunct surveys, notably Grove Karl Gilbert (Wheeler's), Clarence Edward Dutton (Powell's) and, of course, Powell himself. The only significant name missing belonged to James Dwight Dana, King's old mentor at Yale and the venerable editor of Silliman's Journal, who felt constrained to limit himself to a course of benevolent neutrality. 48 Given this embarrassment of riches the voice of the Cosmos Club was hardly necessary to secure King's appointment.

Even though talk of the Club's omnipotence in government-science may have been premature, the membership was not indifferent to politics. Nor should it be assumed that in great ways and small the government did not have a bearing on its early development. The practice of admitting female guests to the Club rooms began with the celebration of President Garfield's inauguration, showing that the Club

47 William Dean Howells to Rutherford B. Hayes, and Elinor Howells to Lucy Webb Hayes, January 4, 1879, Hayes Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Library, her father's letter is reprinted in Mildred Howells (ed.), Life in Letters of William Dean Howells (Garden City, N.Y., 1928), 1, 261-262.

48 James Dwight Dana to Clarence King, January 7, 1879, Hayes Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Library; the battle of the testimonials is described in Manning, Government in Science, pp. 56-58.
was susceptible to political infection. This meant forsaking a hallowed tradition, for it had long been felt that relaxing the prohibitions against women would be an open invitation to decadence. "We may, in the spirit of scientific investigation," avowed Billings, "secure good seats to inspect the latest patterns of skirt-dancing and high-kicking in the places where these are something of a specialty, but we don't want them at home." Yet the political contagions of Washington caused a lowering of resistance. Moreover it was believed that the Club should eventually reciprocate by exerting influence in government. Simon Newcomb left no doubt "that the bringing into closer touch of the academic and the political sides of Washington should be one of our great objects."

Another objective, and one most seriously pursued, was safeguarding the Club's exclusiveness. After the general invitation to the Philosophical Society, membership in the Cosmos Club was limited by the by-laws to two hundred. When vacancies occurred the secretary and treasurer notified the committee on admissions which, in turn, would receive


51 Newcomb, *The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Cosmos Club*, p. 34.
proposals for new members. The candidates' names were then posted on a central bulletin board for fifteen days during which recommendations were invited and the qualifications carefully gone over. The committee numbered ten, and only two negative ballots were necessary for rejection. Candidates who survived this test were finally passed upon by the Club, and those getting a two-thirds majority were accepted, while those who were voted down could not be renominated for twelve months. None of the other groups had membership policies that were comparably strict, but like the rest, the Cosmos Club's exclusiveness did not pertain to material status. "We have never aimed at social distinction," said Newcomb. "We invite no one to our midst because he is prominent in the eye of the public." 52

It is noteworthy that the Cosmos Club was able to remain inexpensive without impeding its steady progress. A twenty dollar admission fee and annual dues set at a modest twenty dollars for residents and ten dollars for non-residents were the only membership costs. Understandably the operating budget was always small, and before the Club was two weeks old it became necessary to request immediate payment of individual charges in order to meet expenses. Later on the officers were obliged to solicit voluntary subscriptions to finance special events. Even so, the unwritten rule of

52 Ibid., p. 34.
keeping assessments to a minimum was held inviolate. In 1881—the year William H. Howgate, one of its founders, was charged with embezzling over $100,000 from the Signal Service Disbursement Office—the board of management proudly noted that the Cosmos Club was far more reasonable than similar organizations in England and America. At the same time it was becoming securely established and plans were being laid for the move to a much grander clubhouse.

For five years the Club rented cramped but temporary quarters, the Corcoran Building at Fifteenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, before finding a permanent site on the other side of the Treasury Department. Number 23 Lafayette Square stood among the most famous landmarks in what was indisputably the most illustrious residential section in the city. Moreover, 1883, when the Club took up its new residence, was the heyday of what had customarily been known as the "President's Park." The official name was bestowed in 1878, the same year Lafayette Square acquired its longest resident, Henry Adams. During the next forty years Adams lived a block west of the Club, opposite the Executive

Mansion in the double house Henry H. Richardson had designed specially for the Adamses and the John Hays. At once this Romanesque masterpiece became a celebrated salon presided over by the "Five of Hearts" (its occupants plus the irrepressible Clarence King), further enriching the neighborhood's legendary quality in this, its golden age. The dwelling places adjacent to Adams, and flanking the Square, were inhabited as they always had been, by cabinet members, congressmen, naval and military heroes, and distinguished private citizens. Except for a row of stately elms the remaining side, to the south, was bare. This gave Club members an almost unimpaired view of the nation's political headquarters and, for that matter, allowed the President to look back at one of America's foremost intellectual centers.  

Soon the Cosmos Club on Lafayette Square turned into the common meeting site for Washington's professional societies. In 1886 the Tayloe property immediately next door was purchased and converted into an assembly hall not only for the Club but other societies as well. By renting to these groups the Cosmos showed that while there were fundamental differences between societies for the dissemination

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of learning and a social club, mutual assistance was desirable. The income from its tenants enabled the Club to expand its facilities without raising dues, and through the Club's standing invitations the societies were spared the expense of separate quarters. From the time of the Club's inception it was intended that local societies which were "purely literary, artistic, or scientific and in no way concerned with the regulation of business or commercial affairs" be permitted use of the assembly hall. The major prerequisites (besides demanding that guests use a separate entrance) was that the society in question have at least forty-five members from the Cosmos Club roster, and that no fewer than twenty of these men regularly attend its meetings. This was hardly an impediment since dual membership was usual, most of the superior government scientists deriving their social sustenance from the Cosmos Club.

If Joseph Henry's spirit hovered over the Philosophical Society the Cosmos Club was personified by Powell, and its role as catalytic agent in molding the community of government scientists bespoke his image of the Club's importance. After Henry's death, when it became apparent that the Philosophical Society would not alter his legacy by capitulating to specialization, a number of particularized

groups came into being. These organizations were at once causes and effects of the broadening influences of science in the federal government, and their nascent development paralleled the early histories of related public agencies. "The moment we examine closely our own national administration," observed a contributor to the Popular Science Monthly, "we find an amazing development in certain lines of scientific industry. Nearly every executive department either has scientific experts regularly connected with it, or employs such experts occasionally for the conduct of important investigations." This trend received its most dramatic thrust from the Geological Survey, but there were many other bureaus and agencies abundantly staffed by scientists. Between Engraving and Printing, which periodically offered employment, and the Coast and Geodetic Survey, probably the most scientific in character, were the Ordnance Corps, Weather Service, Lighthouse Board, Department of Agriculture, Fish Commission, the Patent Office, Weights and Measures, military medical corps, and the Naval Observatory. The emerging professional societies heightened the effectiveness of these men as practitioners of their separate specialties, while at the Cosmos Club they found a social atmosphere that deepened appreciation of all disciplines. The Cosmos Club was therefore crucial to averting fragmentation within the

scientific corps. Indeed, as the epitomy of synthesis, it was primarily responsible for keeping a balance between specialization and community. This function was consistent with Powell's whole career which was less distinguished for abstract thought or original research than for achieving harmony and order. His forte was rationalization, causing some colleagues to complain that he "wants to corral everybody." Yet few would gainsay his flair for organization, or deny that in carrying out his expansive schemes he went from strength to strength—regardless of whether he was codifying Indian languages, consolidating systems of map coloration, unifying western surveys, or drawing together the members of scientific societies.

The "experiment" which Powell hoped would "at least get a fair trial" had brought forth gratifying results. As a social body it subtly allied conglomerate specialists; its effect in improving interpersonal relations was such that one could find "much in the atmosphere of Washington . . . to inspire and encourage useful activities"; and by unifying the Capital City's men of science it helped increase their potency. Of course these developments did not

57 Albert Williams, Jr. to George F. Becker, December 3, 1883, Becker Papers, LC.

58 Powell and Holden to Holmes, November 18, 1878, Holmes, "Random Records," National Collection of Fine Arts Library, SI.

59 Thomas C. Mendenhall, Autobiographical Notes, V, 151-152, Mendenhall Papers, American Institute of Physics.
take place in a vacuum, but were interwoven with the larger pattern of late nineteenth century professional and institutional growth. Particularly relevant to the Cosmos Club was the consolidation of the surveys. This triumph infused government scientists with a self-awareness of their own importance in official Washington, and it also fostered a group consciousness congruent with the theme of the Cosmos Club.60 Thus the creation of the Club and the establishment of the United States Geological Survey had a reciprocal bearing on one another. The third piece of this mosaic which took shape in 1878-79 was the Anthropological Society of Washington, a different kind of "experiment," but again one which quickly produced happy consequences.

CHAPTER V

"THE MINUTE SEED"

A cultivated Washingtonian, reading the Evening Star of February 7, 1879, would have been both pleased and curious to learn that his city was about to become the home of a new scientific body, the Anthropological Society of Washington. Its object of attention was defined as "American archeology"; its purpose would be to "promote, study, and diffuse knowledge about the subject." An organizational meeting had been called for the following Monday in the Regents' Room of the Smithsonian Institution, and all those willing to join such an association were invited to attend. This announcement ended with the names of three valuable contributors to the formation of Washington's intellectual community: Colonel Garrick Mallery, Professor Otis T. Mason, and Dr. Joseph Meredith Toner.¹

Mallery would always look back upon 1879 as a significant point in his life. That was when he helped found the Anthropological Society, and it was then that he mustered out of the regular army and accepted a position in Powell's

recently created Bureau of Ethnology. The Colonel had not sought retirement, rather it came as the result of wounds suffered in the Civil War which eventually rendered him unfit for service. In fact, it is reasonable to suppose that had his discharge not been forced he would have remained a career officer, for he thrived in the military. When Fort Sumter fell Mallery was a fast rising Philadelphia attorney. He had graduated from Yale and then taken his law degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Barely thirty at the war's outbreak, he was already prosperous and generally well thought of, and his future seemed glorious. These considerations deterred him not a whit; he literally dashed to the colors and volunteered as a private. In June 1861 he was made a captain of infantry in the 71st Pennsylvania, and over the course of the next four years rose to brevet-colonel. There followed duty with the Signal Service and the Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region before he finally succumbed to lingering disabilities.\(^2\)

The army's loss soon proved to be a gain for science. Even before officially launching another career Mallery had begun studying Indian culture and publishing his findings.

Accordingly, when he joined the Bureau, his novitiate was behind him and he was prepared to turn his attention to problems of fundamental importance. Mallery wanted to know how Indians acquired and transmitted ideas. The answer seemed to lie in a thorough understanding of sign language and pictography. He therefore undertook the "collection and collation" of all symbols, gestures, and facial expressions that were language representations. Aided by an assortment of cavalry officers, missionaries, doctors, land officials, and Indian agents scattered over the western parts of the United States and Canada who furnished descriptive lists of "sign talk," he produced several comprehensive monographs that were published by the Smithsonian Institution. These reports rank with the notable accomplishments of the Bureau's early period.

Mallery's work conveys an affinity for North American natives showing why he felt at home among the canyons and prairies of the west. Even so, in certain quarters his motives were suspect, and it was held that, as an ethnologist, he was exploiting the Indian in order to protect his own job. Some of his contemporaries who were engaged in "civilizing" the red man contended that ethnologists had no real sympathy for Indians, and that they wanted to keep them

3Garrick Mallery to Richard H. Pratt, October 29, 1879, Correspondence of the Bureau of Ethnology, Office of Anthropology Archives, SI.
segregated on reservations and hold back Indian advancement so they could be studied in their aboriginal state. Captain Pratt, who founded the Carlisle Indian School in the same year that the Bureau of Ethnology was established, insisted that the education of Indians could proceed only after they has been "isolated from their savagery." However, obstacles were constantly being strewn in the path of acculturation by ethnologists and their ilk at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Pratt saw in the "Bureau oligarchy" an insidious scheme to "keep the Indians from the opportunities and environment of civilized life," because Indian citizenship would render the bureaus obsolete.

It is true that a frequently heard justification for the Bureau of Ethnology was that it existed to gather data about cultures that were rapidly disappearing, thus leaving precious little time in which to carry out meaningful ethnological research. Yet many of those who made this argument were also outspoken champions of justice for the Indian. When John Wesley Powell, on behalf of the National Academy of Sciences, appealed for government support for ethnology, he used the opportunity to call for a more enlightened approach to the "Indian problem.""The blunders we have made

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4Richard H. Pratt to Frank H. Cushing, December 27, 1881, Cushing Papers, Southwest Museum Library.

5Richard Henry Pratt, Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades With the American Indian, 1867-1904, ed. Robert M. Utley (New Haven, Conn., 1964), 293.
and the wrongs we have inflicted upon the Indians," he charged, "have been cruel and inexcusable, except on the ground of our ignorance." Powell's humanitarian views—and lack of scientific neutrality—were shared by Mallery. He wrote compassionately about Indians, and desired the immediate assimilation of a "race entrusted to our national honor, which may readily and with no long delay, become a valuable element in our motley community."^7

Mallery's Bureau reports exhibit the creative brilliance of an active mind, thereby helping to explain why he was so highly esteemed by Washington's intellectual community. The Colonel was also a man of personal charm. He possessed a keen sense of humor and was an entertaining raconteur, qualities that made him welcome in the most cultivated Lafayette Square salons. Recent acquaintances sometimes mistook his cynicism for surliness, yet Mallery had many close friends, and those who wrote about him were struck by the fact that he never lost his military bearing. Perhaps it was his stern countenance, or his erect carriage; at any rate he was an imposing individual who gave an impression of rugged manliness. With his strong chin, full

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7Garrick Mallery, "The Former and Present Number of Our Indians," Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, XXVI (1878), 366.
moustache, and pince-nez he had a look of determination not unlike Theodore Roosevelt's. Doubtless both men would have found this comparison flattering.8

The year 1879 had special meaning for Otis Tufton Mason. That date was inscribed on his Ph.D. degree from Columbian University in Washington, where he was director of the Columbian Preparatory School. At the time he also worked as a collaborator in ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution. In fact, the Smithsonian appears with such frequency in the life of Mason that it is impossible to disconnect his achievements from the former's late nineteenth century burgeoning activity.

Ever since boyhood Mason had found the Smithsonian irresistible. His earliest recollections of the place ran back to a day in the fifties when, seeking diversion from his father's farm in nearby Virginia, he had strolled to Washington for a look around. As soon as he entered the city he felt drawn toward the Smithsonian. Nearing the Mall he saw a large gathering of men and women in front of the reddish-brown sandstone building. Curiosity impelled him to join them and, before he knew it, he was swept upstairs with the rest of the crowd where Joseph Henry was giving a lecture. Over the years, as Mason pondered this experience, he came to regard it as an event of epochal proportions—

8John G. Bourke to Frank H. Cushing, December 5, 1894, Cushing Papers, Southwest Museum Library.
and with good reason. For once inside the Smithsonian he
never really left.9

This institution also had a formative influence upon
his scholarly life. It was none other than Professor Henry
who convinced him that biblical archeology, to which Mason
had initially been attracted, was less important than study-
ing North American Indian tribes. Thus the Smithsonian
set the course of Mason's career, and it was through the
Smithsonian that Mason rose to eminence as the first real
museum ethnologist in the United States. Being a profession-
al placed him in very select company; hence his expertise
was constantly in demand. In 1875, when the U.S. National
Museum was bulging with ethnological specimens, Mason was
prevailed upon to catalog and arrange the collection. He
also edited anthropological papers for the Institution. In
1884, after he had already made a provisional classification
of the collections, Mason was appointed curator of the
Department of Ethnology. By this chain of events the Smith-
sonian acquired another outstanding anthropologist and, in the
process, added to its stature as a great locus of Indian
study.10

9 Otis T. Mason to William J. Rhees, January 11, 1904,
Rhees Collection, RH 3566, Box 55, Henry E. Huntington Library.

10 Otis T. Mason, The Popular Science Monthly, LXXIV
(January, 1909), 98; Journal of Joseph Henry, January 10,
1875, SI Archives; Report of the United States National
Mason's position at the National Museum demanded all the ingenuity and skill he could muster. In the beginning he was curator of a one man department, which meant that he maintained single handedly the ever increasing collections made by the Bureau of Ethnology. Not only did he have charge of an enormous number of material objects, but he had to assemble them in a manner that would both enrich the Museum's public displays and make the collections usable for ethnologists doing research. In short, he had to keep an eye on the Museum's role in professional investigation without losing sight of its responsibility to public entertainment and enlightenment.  

So masterfully did this gentle man with the neatly trimmed beard perform his tasks that he was recognized as a leader in museum science. This was the period when the "National Cabinet of Curiosities" was being transformed into a comprehensive, instructive museum, and Mason's assistance was vital to this endeavor. Mason was also one of the most versatile anthropologists of his day. Although he defined the science broadly, and considered every aspect of man's

natural history grist for the anthropologist's mill, his writing never suffered because of it. He published widely in the field of aboriginal material culture, and according to a colleague, "had the rare gift of presenting the scientific data in such a style and manner that his works can be read with profit and pleasure by men and women of intelligence in all vocations."13

Here was a truly indomitable man whose vitality and capacity for sustained exertion bordered on the phenomenal. Mason's admirers liked to recount how, when he was past sixty, he suffered a stroke that paralyzed his right hand. Undaunted by this affliction he promptly taught himself to write left handed and, in a matter of weeks, was able to resume his normal schedule of constant work. This glimpse into Mason's character makes plausible his promotion to the head Curatorship of Anthropology at an age when most men are preparing for retirement. Advancing years had little effect on his activities, and for over a quarter century Otis T. Mason was a bulwark of the Smithsonian Institution, just as he was of the Anthropological Society of Washington.


Unlike Mallory and Mason, Joseph Meredith Toner had no direct connection with ethnology, but this did not mean that his name was foreign to Washington's intellectuals. Of the three principal founders of the Society Dr. Toner undoubtedly was the best known. His forte was encouraging medical research, and for many years he had figured prominently in the advancement of American medicine. There was an element of irony in this because, even though he was a respected physician, his own work was not notably singular. "Perhaps the leading characteristic of his pursuit of scientific subjects," admitted a friend, "was assiduity rather than originality." 14 Such men are always needed; after the Civil War Toner was invaluable to the development of Washington's scientific community. So firm was his commitment to establishing institutions and inducements for research that he allowed his practice to dwindle away to a handful of personal acquaintances, thus permitting himself to lavish all his attention on the promotion of scientific and literary activities.

His most famous effort along these lines was the Toner Lecture series which he endowed and the Smithsonian administered. Beginning in 1873 the Toner Lectures were given annually in Washington, as original contributions to

medical knowledge. Subsequently the papers were published in the **Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections**. Toner also gave a medal to the school where he earned an M.D., the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. This was awarded each year to the student whose experiments and investigations showed the greatest originality. Another Toner Medal was one he presented to Georgetown University, which went to the graduate who was most proficient in science.

Toner's ample presence could always be found in the vanguard of programs aimed at improving public health and medical libraries, especially the Surgeon General's Library and the library of the American Medical Association. His interest in public health stemmed from having served in the Pittsburgh cholera epidemic of 1854 and the following year in Norfolk's yellow fever epidemic. After those experiences preventive medicine became his specialty and he wrote numerous articles on contagious diseases. His concern about hygiene and municipal sanitation as major problems of modern industrial centers was remarkably prescient. For example, he was an early proponent of summer fresh air camps for children of the urban poor. Toner's obsession with libraries was perfectly natural considering that he was one of the country's greatest bibliophiles.

The Librarian of Congress recalled that Toner "was for forty years a familiar figure in nearly all the bookstores, book auctions, and junk shops of this and of some other
cities, and though reputed a close buyer, he expended largely in amassing medical, historical, and biographical literature. The result was a huge personal library of both printed and manuscript material. When he began the collection his major interest was medicine, and he acquired books, pamphlets, and periodicals dealing with the medical profession. This led to a more specialized interest in American doctors, which in turn, led to American biography up to the Revolution. The final stage in building his library, and the one which consumed his later years, was gathering everything he could get hold of that had been written by and about George Washington. Thus he put together a treasury of Washingtoniana which still has value. Regardless of whether his shelves contained a copy of the Gospel of Wealth he was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of philanthropy. In 1878 he offered his library to the doctors of Chicago upon the condition that they provide a fireproof structure in which to house it. Similar propositions had already been made to the medical professions in Pittsburgh and St. Louis. But in each case raising the money proved an impossible task, so in 1882 he gave the entire collection—by this time numbering twenty-seven thousand volumes—to the Library of Congress.16

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15 Ibid., p. 640.

16 Thomas Neville Bonner, Medicine in Chicago, 1850-1950: A Chapter in the Social and Scientific Development of
The Doctor's tendency to be stout did not derive from indolence. In addition to book collecting he wrote continuously on a broad range of subjects (a lifelong bachelor, his first book was *Maternal Instinct*). It is hard to find a Washington hospital or an orphanage during this period that Toner did not either found or assist in some way, usually as the physician or a member of the board of directors. His affiliations with local and national associations were many, and he was elected president of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia (1870), the American Medical Association (1873), and the American Public Health Association (1874). These honors were fitting rewards for one who was extraordinarily generous with both his time and his talents.

These three men were already participating in local intellectual organizations at the time they called for the establishment of an anthropological society. Mallery was active in both the Literary and Philosophical Societies, while Mason was a Philosophical Society member and Toner a bellwether in the Literary Society. Only a few months before the three had helped found the Cosmos Club. Now they were seeking to expand the network of societies to include the growing number of Washingtonians who were anxious to

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*Bio (Madison, Wisc., 1957), pp. 82-83; Thomas Antisell, Biographical Sketch of Joseph M. Toner, M.D., of Washington (Lancaster, Pa., 1878), p. 16.*
delve into the absorbing problems concerning primitive life on their continent.

Word of this venture proved sufficiently exciting to attract twenty-five men to the meeting scheduled for February 10, 1879. Dr. Toner was summoned to the chair as temporary president, and under his approving eye the organization was formally established. There was considerable discussion concerning the breadth of interests to be pursued. Should the Society embrace all that was relevant to the origins, nature, and history of man in America, or would it be better to limit itself to American antiquities? The founders boldly chose the first alternative, thereby deciding not to confine their activities to archeology as had been originally suggested. With this matter resolved, and after a committee of four had been named to draft a constitution, the Anthropological Society of Washington adjourned until February seventeenth.17

It would be misleading to assume that the Anthropological Society was created solely by practicing anthropologists, or that it was conceived as a bona fide professional group. Several founders, namely Frank Hamilton Cushing, Willis DeHass, P. W. Norris, Mallery, and Mason were actually engaged in certain aspects of ethnological research. However,

17Minutes of the first preliminary meeting, February 10, 1879, Archives of the Anthropological Society of Washington (henceforth ASW Archives), Office of Anthropology, SI.
a large majority had no professional link with that scientific discipline which they proposed, in their own words, to "promote, study, and diffuse knowledge about." The Anthropological Society of Washington stood somewhat apart from the professionalization of science in late nineteenth century America. Rather than being a tight-knit circle of trained specialists it was "an organization of quite broad character with a large amateur element."

Yet the Society's "broad character" and "large amateur element" constituted what the founders felt was its greatest strength. The fact of the matter was that there were few professionals anyway—certainly not enough to sustain an anthropological organization and standards for joining in the study of American aboriginal culture were so lax that Cushing railed: "every boor who has correctly or incorrectly described an arrowhead or a simple mound, is at once considered an archaeologist and styles himself, 'Professor.'" So by opening the Society to amateurs the founders showed themselves to be realists. But many went beyond this and urged inclusiveness as a positive virtue. Even Mason, an accomplished


19Frank H. Cushing to Otis T. Mason, September 30, 1876, Cushing Papers, Southwest Museum Library.
student of ethnological material, celebrated the lack of professional distinction. Its absence encouraged heterogeneity, which was good not because this condition conformed to egalitarian ideals, but because it meant that the Society was making its presence felt throughout different levels of the government and the community.

"Who may be an anthropologist?" Mason asked rhetorically. "Every man, woman, and child that has sense and patience to observe, and that can honestly record the thing observed." At early meetings soldiers sat next to scientists, educators beside bureaucrats, and this inevitable dispersion of information about the Society had a salutary effect on its nascent development. Mason ascribed this initial success to getting the "doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers, clergy, Rabbis, everybody interested. That is the way I greased the wheels of our now flourishing Anthropological Society." In addition, the Society's favor among men from divergent backgrounds and occupations furthered the vogue of anthropology, a vastly popular branch of science in the late 1870's.

So much for the Society's inclusiveness, but what

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about its prospects for contributing to anthropology when few of its members had proven competence in the field? Once again an apparent liability, upon closer inspection, turned into an asset, and there is nothing to indicate that the founders suffered any qualms about proceeding with their venture because the Society was composed mainly of amateurs. This was the "preacademic period" when most American anthropologists were self-taught. Until the mid-1890's they drifted into the discipline from many different points of origin; the only prerequisite, as Mason pointed out, was a curiosity about the physical and mental life of mankind—hardly a rigid restriction. Furthermore, amateurs had shown that they could make significant additions to the storehouse of anthropological knowledge. Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark, for example, were scantily prepared to comprehend the wonders of ethnography in the trans-Mississippi wilderness. Yet they knew enough to collect much valuable data, proved themselves first rate field researchers, and particularly Lewis, who undertook the expedition equipped with detailed lists of questions to ask.

Indians, applied anthropology "in its most modern sense."

This story of interested laymen doing pioneer work in linguistics, ethnology, archeology, and physical anthropology had been repeated time after time.

During the period when the Anthropological Society of Washington was being founded Lewis Henry Morgan was the doyen of American anthropologists. His accomplishments were legion: he had established the Anthropology Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; published the universally acclaimed *Ancient Society*; attained membership in the National Academy of Sciences; inspired numerous younger men; and produced a "record of facts previously unknown to science." Morgan also embodied the tradition of the amateur in anthropology. He was neither specially trained nor a full-time worker in the discipline.

"The circumstances which led to his interest in ethnology," wrote an old colleague, "are worthy of record and serve to illustrate the character and tastes of the man." They also serve to reveal something of the haphazard

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progress of anthropological science in the ante-bellum period. As a young lawyer Morgan was one of the main founders of the Order of the Gordian Knot, a fraternal body based on Greek myths with chapters that met in the abandoned Masonic lodges of a dozen towns across rural western New York.

In 1843, at the annual summer conclave held in Aurora, Morgan persuaded the five hundred members that it would be appropriate to replace classical forms with Iroquois customs. Accordingly the association became the Grand Order of the Iroquois and the Aurora Lodge turned into the Cayuga Tribe, with Morgan as its chief. His first duty was to acquire information about Iroquois ceremonies and ritual. Soon he became interested in institutions, the structure of tribal organizations, and broader patterns of Indian culture. It was fitting that this happened to be the take-off period in the development of American anthropology, for suddenly Morgan's perfunctory attempt to find out something about Indian lore had blossomed into a full fledged study of ethnology.26

The tale of Morgan's accidental entry into anthropology is well known, less familiar is the fact that his monumental studies were sandwiched between legal practice, business enterprises, and his dabbling in politics. Even

his early investigations among the Senecas were intertwined with lobbying in their behalf in Washington and Albany to forestall their removal west of the Mississippi. But even though Morgan was unable to devote all his time to science, "like a colossus he strode in every field of anthropology, influencing his generation with his burning enthusiasm and agreeable disposition." Presumably his influence prevailed over the founders of the Anthropological Society, for they launched their organization with the same combination of fervor and congeniality.

The recommendations of the constitutional committee, adopted with slight amendments at the second meeting, both confirmed what had already taken place and provided an instrument of government for future operations. The constitution stated that the main business of the Anthropological Society of Washington was to "encourage the study of the Natural History of Man, especially with reference to America," and that the members "shall be persons who are interested in Anthropology." Thus the founders' preference for a relatively non-restrictive organization as to who could belong and what they would do was written into the official document. However, controlling power within the Society was not factionated, it was thoroughly centralized. There would be a Council


28Panchanan Mitra, A History of American Anthropology (Calcutta, India, 1933), p. 120.
of fifteen members, later known as the Board of Managers, in which was vested absolute authority over all the Society's affairs. Elected annually by the whole membership, it was to consist of the president, vice-presidents who also were ex officio chairmen of the Society's four sections (Somaticology, Sociology, Philology, and Philosophy and Psychology), corresponding and recording secretaries, the treasurer, the curator, and six other members designated as councilors. This directory passed on nominations for membership in the Society, handled its finances, received communications, had responsibility for programs and publications, and was empowered to call special meetings. In short, the members of the Council "transacted all business of the Society, save their own elections." 29

Actually it made little difference how members of the Council were chosen because the same men tended to be perennial office holders. The offices that they held might change from year to year, but their elections to the Council seems to have been pro forma. Throughout the Society's early history, when the attrition rate was low anyway, what few Council replacements were needed were drawn almost invariably from the slate of incumbents. Between 1880, when the terms of the first officers expired, and 1885 there were ninety Council positions that had to be filled, yet only twenty-three men

29 Minutes of the second preliminary meeting, February 17, 1879, ASW Archives, SI.
filled them. A further breakdown of this figure reveals that seventeen of these went onto the Council at the councillor level. In other words, roughly 75 per cent of the changes took place at the bottom of the power structure, which made for remarkable continuity in the higher offices. Powell was elected president every year but one, when Mallery became president and Powell served as a vice-president. Walter J. Hoffman, Colonel Franklin A. Seely, and Lester Frank Ward were on the Council year after year; Mallery, the author of the constitution and by-laws, Mason, and Powell were never out of office. Thus the founders held sway and provided the stability that was more highly prized than dispersion of authority.30

The settled character of the Society's governing body acted as a counterweight against its lack of a permanent home. Without chambers of its own, or a fixed location for meetings, the Society was obliged to wander about the city accepting temporary quarters wherever they might be made available. Unfortunately the early Minutes fail to record where meetings were held, but the retrospections of an old member and former president leave the impression of as nomadic an existence as that of some of the peoples they were studying. Society gatherings fluctuated from the

Regents' Room of the Smithsonian, to the National Medical College, to the Library of the Army Medical Museum, and eventually to the lecture hall of Columbian University. In April 1887, as so many societies of this kind ultimately did, it lighted at the Cosmos Club. There it remained, except for unusually large sessions which had to be transferred to places where more visitors could be accommodated. The Builders' Exchange Hall often was used for annual meetings where attendance might run as high as two hundred and fifty.31

An average of between fifty and sixty persons were on hand for regular meetings of the Society which occurred twice a month, on alternate Tuesday evenings, October through June. The main orders of business were the lectures and discussions that followed. Indeed these were the only items on the agenda that involved the Society as a whole. Minutes of preceding meetings were read and approved, donations were acknowledged, and new members were received all in a most perfunctory manner. The role of the general membership in operating the Society was clearly a passive one. Administrative matters were deliberated and decided upon by the Board of Managers which always convened separately one hour before regular meetings. By the time the rest of the Society gathered everything had been taken care of save the lectures

31Lamb, American Anthropologist, n.s., VIII, 568-569; Frank Baker, Annual Report of the Secretary for 1891, January 19, 1892, ASW Archives, SI.
for that evening—and these had to be approved by the Board of Managers prior to their presentation.\textsuperscript{32}

The meticulous planning of programs and the seriousness with which lectures were regarded testifies to the importance of formal papers in the life of the Anthropological Society. These were its meat and drink; nothing was allowed to inhibit the speaker or distract the audience from partaking of the Society's intellectual offerings. At least two papers were given in an evening, so by disposing of routine affairs in a Board of Managers' meeting held in advance more time was provided for lectures and discussions. Similarly, it was not only expedient to run the Society this way, but by vesting absolute authority in the Board of Managers all but a handful of members were spared the often mind-numbing tasks of administration. The result was that both the quality of lectures and the interest they commanded remained high. Anything less would have constituted a severe disappointment. Because the Society existed for the two-fold objective of disseminating knowledge and encouraging further study, and since this aim could best be accomplished through oral presentations which might subsequently be published, it was vital that the Society have superior lectures. If its bi-weekly programs were failures then the Anthropological Society would fail in its purpose—it was as simple as that.

\textsuperscript{32}Minutes of the Board of Management, \textit{ibid}. 
Formal papers answered a definite need of the organization and in an immediate way they also provided intellectual stimulation for individual members. Less directly they served to promote the new science of man. Through communications to the Society persons doing research were given a chance to test certain concepts and theories related to their work. During the Society's discussion sessions these notions would be criticized and debated by other students of the particular subject. Finally, after further reflection and more systematic development, original lectures were prepared for publication. In this manner many noteworthy monographs of the 1880's dealing with archeology, ethnology, sociology, and psychology were put into finished form. Edward M. Gallaudet, founder and president of the National Deaf-Mute College, read his "How Shall the Deaf be Educated?" before it appeared in the International Review (December, 1881). Members of the Anthropological Society were the first to hear Cyrus Thomas's ideas about mound builders; likewise the study of Indian superstitions by Henry C. Yarrow was presented to the Society prior to publication in the American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal (January, 1882). Lester Frank Ward frequently spoke at meetings with several of his papers constituting chapters of Dynamic Sociology.

Speakers were almost always active members, although on occasion a special lecturer such as Franz Boas, Alfred R. Wallace, Mrs. Zelia Nuttall from Berlin, or
Thus Washington's Anthropological Society enjoyed the good fortune of being treated to an outstanding run of lectures. Also, it was blessed with a large number of men who were always eager to describe the fruits of their labors. Because lecturing afforded a means of gaining individual recognition, and since serials such as Contributions to North American Ethnology, the Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, and the Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution were willing to accept articles by members, it is no wonder that the Committee on Communications often received far more papers than it could possibly fit into a year of meetings. In 1893 W J McGee confessed that the Society was "almost embarrassed by the wealth of material for the present season, and will probably have to provide several special meetings. . . ."\(^3\)

A more difficult problem was finding the best way of disseminating information about the pursuit of this increasing-ly popular science. Once again the Anthropological Society was brought face to face with the dilemma that was inherent in its organization, namely how at the same time to serve a small group of incipient professionals and a larger body of interested amateurs. In the case of the Society this issue had been resolved by structuring the association so that

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E. B. Tylor, the English anthropologist who was an honorary member of the Society, would read an address.

\(^3\)W J McGee to Horace E. Warner, January 7, 1893, Correspondence, ASW Archives, SI.
anyone might belong while authority rested with a controlling elite. The matter of diffusing knowledge, however, could not be dealt with so easily. Scientific periodicals had notoriously small circulations, a fact which militated against starting a journal of anthropology. The founders knew that an ill-starred venture could turn into an albatross leading the Society to destruction. Good sense cautioned not to be hasty about trying the stormy seas of scholarly publication. On the other hand, if the Society had no official voice its diffusion of knowledge would be hopelessly insular, and its effect upon anthropology outside of Washington practically nil. Individual members might publish their lectures, but these did not carry the imprimatur of the Anthropological Society. Prudence prevailed, and during the early years of its existence few heard from the Society as such, except those who attended its meetings.\textsuperscript{35}

Considering this reluctance to become weighted down with the operation of a costly journal, it is understandable that the Society's initial publication was something less than ambitious. In 1882 appeared Volume I of \textit{Transactions of the Anthropological Society of Washington}, a one hundred and forty-two page synopsis of the first three years of meetings. Included were a brief historical sketch, its constitution, names of members and officers for 1882, Powell's

presidential address of that year, and an index. Obviously this did not leave much space for communications, which were merely listed or, at best, abstracted. The Transactions was made possible by the support of the Smithsonian Institution, which also published its contents, plus abstracts of papers read between March, 1879 and January, 1881 in the Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections for 1883. The same format—and the same means of assistance—were repeated for two more volumes, enabling publication to continue through 1885. However, this was hardly satisfactory for announcing the activities of the Society and heralding the new truths discovered by its members.

Far more suitable was the American Anthropologist which produced its first number in January, 1888. Thereafter the journal was published on a regular quarterly schedule, a distinct improvement over the biennial appearances of the Transactions. As Secretary Franklin Austin Seely pointed out, this meant that the members were receiving about eight times the quantity of matter as before.\(^{36}\) In terms of quality the contrast was profound.

Ostensibly the American Anthropologist formed a continuation of the Transactions, but a glance at their respective contents reveals a world of difference. In the

\(^{36}\) Franklin A. Seely, Letter to the members of the Anthropological Society of Washington, November 8, 1888, Reports of the Curator, ASW Archives, SI.
Transactions resumes of papers were usually limited to a few paragraphs, followed by transcripts of the discussions. The American Anthropologist contained full length articles of six to eight thousand words. These were often printed versions of lectures delivered at meetings, and to this extent the new publication was just as much an organ of the Anthropological Society as the Transactions had been. Also, the editorial board consisted of Society members and the Society's seal dominated the cover of every issue, leaving no doubt about who sponsored the American Anthropologist. But at the same time its orientation seemed less provincial.

Whereas the Transactions provided nothing more than truncated summaries of Washington meetings, the second publishing venture gave an impression of national scope. It seemed to be what its title promised: an American journal of anthropology in the broadest sense. Beginning with Volume II, in 1889, its self-advertisement below the table of contents emphasized that "THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST . . . includes, but is not confined to, the Transactions of the Anthropological Society of Washington. . . ." It was as good as its word. There were notices of anthropology meetings throughout the United States and Europe, announcements of professional import such as the awarding of Ph.D.'s in anthropology and the introduction of anthropology courses at American universities, book reviews, quarterly bibliographies, and miscellaneous items of interest to professionals.
and laymen both within and outside of Washington. In substance, then, the *American Anthropologist* bore little resemblance to its predecessor.

Another difference had to do with economics. The Smithsonian Institution had underwritten the *Transactions*, but responsibility for the *American Anthropologist* was entirely in the hands of the Society—a burden which proved heavier than had been originally bargained for. At the outset it was felt that the new journal could be financed solely by subscriptions, selling for three dollars, allowing those who paid the annual membership fee to receive the *American Anthropologist* for no additional charge. This was wishful thinking. Early subscribers were few, and it immediately became clear that if a second volume was ever to see the light of day it would be necessary to raise the cost for members. Accordingly dues went up to five dollars a year. 37 This enabled the *American Anthropologist* to carry on and, under the circumstances, was justifiable as a temporary measure. But what began as a makeshift arrangement came to be accepted as the *modus operandi*, and instead of forthrightly addressing itself to the problem of insufficient subscriptions the Society continued to operate at a loss by printing journals that it did not sell. In this respect the members supplied *evidence for John Dewey's assertion that*

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37 Ibid.
we do not solve difficult questions, we get over them. 38

Except that before the problem of paying for the American
Anthropologist could be gotten over matters suddenly took
a turn for the worse making it imperative that some means
for enlarging subscriptions be devised.

The middle 1890's were marked by panic and depression
throughout the United States, and while the national economy
stumbled the Society fell on hard times. The American
Anthropologist had been such a financial drain that the
Society now found itself faced with insolvency. A further
increase of membership dues was out of the question; this
left only the alternative of boosting subscriptions. Late
in 1895, as President Cleveland desperately sought to
rescue the government from bankruptcy, the Board of Managers
hit upon a plan that would stave off economic disaster.

During its brief existence the Anthropological
Society of Washington had accumulated a large stockpile of
unsold publications. There is no record of members becoming
upset about this. Instead they duplicated the sardonic
resignation of a fellow naturalist who had suffered similarly
at the hands of public indifference: "I now have a library
of nearly nine hundred volumes," noted Henry David Thoreau

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38 John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on
Philosophy," American Thought: Civil War to World War I, ed.
Perry Miller (New York, 1954, Knopf edn., New York,
1962), 224.
in 1851, "over seven hundred of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor?" During the lean years of the nineties cold comfort could be taken from such luxuries—especially since the Society had over two thousand dollars worth of back numbers gathering dust. It was decided to sort these into eight volume sets and offer them to likely institutions at the regular price of three dollars per volume. In this way schools and libraries purchasing new subscriptions could receive complete series of American Anthropologists, and the Society would turn an otherwise useless collection of old issues into a source of badly needed revenue.

Beginning in autumn 1895 almost four hundred letters were mailed to potential subscribers throughout the country, inviting them to purchase "one of the few remaining complete sets" of the American Anthropologist. The initial response was gratifying. Within a few weeks eight sets were disposed of bringing the Society almost two hundred dollars. By the end of 1896 five more had been sold and the situation seemed no longer critical. Coincident with this sales campaign were alterations made in the price and publication schedule. Starting with Volume IX annual subscriptions were


40 Frederick W. Hodge, Report of the Curator for 1895, January 21, 1896, Reports of the Curator, ASW Archives, SI.
reduced to two dollars and the number of issues increased to twelve. Thus the American Anthropologist was converted from a quarterly into a monthly magazine, a change designed to give it wider popular appeal. 41

The drive to add buyers resulted in a period of fleeting success. Immediately subscriptions shot up by 25 per cent, but at the lower price this was not enough to place the Society on a firm footing. Indeed operating the monthly turned out to be more expensive than the quarterly. Within a matter of months the treasury showed a credit of only $7.28, and future prospects were so grim that consideration was given to selling the Society's library. A better course of action was to look outside the Society for financial aid. 42

Fortunately the American Association for the Advancement of Science had been adequately impressed with the journal to assume a large share of responsibility for keeping it alive. On June 14, 1898, at the Cosmos Club, representatives of the Association met with the Society's officers and agreed to assist with the management of the Anthropologist as well as help pay the bills. Before this backing was secured,

41 Frederick W. Hodge to the Librarian, Keokuk [Iowa] Library Association, January 16, 1896, Correspondence, ibid.; Frederick W. Hodge, Report . . . 1895, ibid.; Minutes of the Board of Managers, December 15, 1896, ibid.

42 Frederick W. Hodge, Report . . . 1895, ibid.; Cyrus Adler to W J McGee, November 20, 1897, and Perry B. Pierce to W J McGee, November 30, 1897, McGee Papers, General Correspondence, Box 1, LC.
however, the Board of Managers outlined certain changes that promised to make the journal more useful and more attractive. First of all the January, 1899 number would begin a new series of quarterly issues. Obviously the magazine format had been a mistake and everyone was anxious to return to the status of a scholarly journal. It was even suggested that the publication be called the *Journal of Anthropology*, but this was discarded in favor of the traditional title. Also, both the size and the price of volumes would be doubled, to eight hundred pages and four dollars respectively. Of greatest importance was the fact that the sponsoring agency was now the Anthropology Section of the Association. The *American Anthropologist* would continue to speak for the Washington organization—that was made emphatically clear—but as the organ for and not of the Society. New York rather than Washington served as the seat of publication, with overseas editions published in London and Leipzig. For the first time the editorial board included men who were not Society members, and no more was the Society's name and crest emblazoned on the journal's cover. Thus, in every perceptible way, the guiding hand of the Society had been removed from the *American Anthropologist*.

At the same time, however, the new series signaled a brilliant success for the Anthropological Society of

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43 Minutes of the Board of Managers, March 15, 1898 and November 1, 1898, Minutes, ASW Archives, SI.
Washington. Its original purpose was to promote anthropology and diffuse knowledge about the subject; now there existed a means to achieve that objective, and to the Society went the credit for its creation. Without the Society there would have been no journal. Therefore the members could be indulged a little self-congratulation over the new *American Anthropologist*. It was far and away the pre-eminent vehicle of anthropological information in the western hemisphere, and also had a regular distribution in England and Europe. Its articles covered all branches of anthropology and its influence transcended local and even national boundaries. Its editors were leading lights in the science of man as well as having important institutional ties: Daniel G. Brinton, the University of Pennsylvania; Franz Boas of the American Museum of Natural History; George A. Dorsey, the Field Columbian Museum; Frederick Ward Putnam, President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Curator of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University; plus Hodge, Holmes, and Powell from the Smithsonian and Bureau of Ethnology. An immediate result of the new series, then, was the strengthening of a network of interconnections between Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Cambridge, and Washington, the country's vital centers of anthropological research. In summary it was what the Washington group had desired all along, an achievement which reflected the Society's maturity as an institution
dedicated to the promotion of anthropology.

By any reckoning the Anthropological Society of Washington was no longer a fledgling organization. Just as early trepidation in the matter of publishing a journal bespoke weakness, so founding the American Anthropologist was an indication of strength. As early as 1888 all doubts had been erased as to whether the Society would survive. With its permanent home at the Cosmos Club, and after its incorporation in 1887 for a term of one thousand years, the Society exuded robust self-confidence.

In less than a decade what began as an experiment involving fewer than thirty Washingtonians had surpassed the greatest expectations of its founders. Frank Hamilton Cushing was pleasantly surprised, in 1879, when the Society showed sufficient progress to warrant another year's activity. Its growth continued, however, and at the time of incorporation there were two hundred and sixty-five members. Paralleling this steady rise in membership was an expansion of the Society's orbit so that it became increasingly national and even international in scope. Science magazine carried reports of its proceedings, thereby bringing the Society to the attention of men outside Washington and helping to attract members the world over. In 1888 there were one hundred fifteen members from places other than Washington including

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44 Frank H. Cushing to [?] Turner, May 15, 1879, Cushing Papers, Southwest Museum Library.
McGee's ardor was well founded, for through its deeds the Society had proclaimed its importance to the advancement of anthropology.

Most obvious were its unstinting efforts to drum up popular enthusiasm for this branch of science. Neither energy nor expense were spared in carrying out this aim, and no opportunity was neglected for swelling the ranks of anthropology's devotees. Thus, in 1885, when feminism manifested itself in anthropological circles, little time was lost helping to organize the Women's Anthropological Society of America. One of the most illustrious members of the new group was Miss Alice Cunningham Fletcher, an assistant to Putnam at the Peabody, a collaborator of the Bureau of Ethnology, and an editor of the American Anthropologist; one of its most inimitable was Tilly Stevenson, whose overbearing

45 W J McGee to Francis A. March, October 31, 1892, Correspondence, ASW Archives, SI.
personality would have qualified her to sit for Thomas Beer's portrait of the Gilded Age "Titaness."
Yet the Anthropological Society was not goaded into offering assistance. It did so of its own volition, on the grounds that another organization was bound to increase popular interest in the discipline. Drawing women into anthropology was the distaff group's primary objective, so by abetting the ladies in achieving their aspirations the Society was serving its own purpose of generating support for anthropological research.

The Women's Anthropological Society of America coveted independence and hence was not in the habit of acknowledging its debt to the Anthropological Society of Washington. Yet there were enough similarities between them to indicate that the former was patterned on the older organization. In purpose they were identical and in polity almost so. Like the Anthropological Society the Women's Society was divided

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46 Mrs. Stevenson was the terror of the Bureau of Ethnology: "She is described as a strong-willed and dominating individual; she commanded others to do her bidding. What she wanted she took—even a chair someone else might be using." Neil M. Judd, The Bureau of American Ethnology: A Partial History (Norman, Okla., 1967), p. 57; for an excellent account of her, Alice Fletcher, and the Women's Anthropological Society see Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Women in Early Anthropology," Pioneers of American Anthropology: The Uses of Biography, ed. June Helm (Seattle, Wash., 1966), 31-81.

into specialized sections (archeology, child-life, ethnology, folklore, psychology, and sociology); meetings were held biweekly, November through April, and consisted of lectures and discussions; records of proceedings were published annually; membership requirements were negligible; and governing power was centralized in a Board of Directors. The Women's Anthropological Society of America also followed the Society's example of forging ahead with its operation even though few of its members were trained professionals, and of being cautious about starting publications during its early life. Therefore, although the ladies resolved to remain autonomous until "the time when science shall regard only the work, not the worker," it was crystal clear from whence they derived inspiration. 48

In waging their campaign for feminine rights in science the women received other forms of assistance from the Society. In 1889 the creation of a library was helped by Major Powell, who offered them shelf space which he had reserved for their use at the Bureau of Ethnology. On several occasions in the nineties the Anthropological Society arranged for the Societies to meet jointly. Usually this was for the purpose of hearing a visiting lecturer,

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and when the guest happened to be a female, the Women's Anthropological Society of America had the honor of being the host organization. Cooperation of this sort was facilitated by the fact that certain leaders in both Societies were husband and wife, notably the Weston Flints, the Masons, and the McGees. Thus the Anthropological Society of Washington had something of a vested interest in the Women's Anthropological Society of America. By contributing to its success the Society was simultaneously aiding the cause of anthropology in general.49

The Society also promoted the study of man through public lectures held at the National Museum. Inaugurated in March, 1882, the Saturday Lectures were intended to introduce audiences of non-specialists to recent discoveries and advances. Otis T. Mason's "What is Anthropology?" might be taken as an archetypical attempt to give the intelligent layman a better understanding of this particular branch of science. Mason also exemplified the quality of lecturers, who invariably were men of recognized competence. William Henry Holmes, Mallery, McGee, Powell, and other familiar figures perennially donated their services, thereby reaffirming their commitments to the popularization of scientific knowledge. It was through their efforts that the

49 W J McGee to Susan A. Mendenhall, November 24, 1893, W J McGee to Weston Flint, March 8, 1894, and W J McGee to Washington Matthews, March 23, 1895, Correspondence, ASW Archives, SI.
Saturday Lectures came to be a permanent fixture of Washington's intellectual life. Except for a temporary lapse in the early 1890's every year saw a series of at least twelve lectures which were structured into three or four weekly courses, each having a definite theme. By this approach residents of the Federal City were able to experience a little of the excitement that colored late nineteenth century science in America.50

All through the 1880's the Society persistently sought to arouse interest in scientific pursuits, but nothing matched its bid for popular attention in 1893. At the annual meeting that year an amendment to the by-laws was passed which permitted the Board of Managers to "offer prizes for notable original contributions to anthropology." This was the work of W J McGee whose ambitious schemes for himself and the Society sometimes raised the hackles of fellow Board members.51 In 1892 he had tried to change the by-laws so that income from life memberships would be earmarked for monetary prizes. The gathering clouds of depression, plus the Society's shaky economic status, made this seem unwise, and McGee's proposal was not accepted by the Board. But shortly thereafter the Society voted unanimously in favor

50 Saturday Lectures . . . 1882; Annual Schedules of Lectures are contained in Ibid.

51 Otis T. Mason to Frederick W. Hodge, January 11, 1893, Correspondence and Papers, 1891-1897, Ibid.
of bestowing awards provided the funds came from another source. Now McGee had all the leeway he needed, for his powers of solicitation were great. In no time he secured a benefactor from the ranks of the Society, Dr. Robert H. Lamborn, of New York, and at the end of March came the announcement that the Anthropological Society of Washington was offering awards of one hundred twenty-five dollars and seventy-five dollars for the two "clearest statements of the elements that go to make up the most useful citizen regardless of occupation." Other than a maximum limit of two thousand words and a stipulation that essays bear pseudonyms, there were no rules for contestants to follow. The citizenship essay competition was underway.52

From many parts of the United States, as well as from Denmark, England, Spain, Syria, and Java compositions poured in to McGee who was Chairman of the Prize Committee. On March 1, 1894, after forty-two manuscripts had been received, the competition was closed and the business of evaluation commenced. First a preliminary screening of all papers was performed by McGee's committee which included Cushing, Flint, and Mason. Papers entirely devoid of merit were eliminated, while the twenty-five or thirty that survived were given provisional grades. Then the essays went to a panel of final judges consisting of Daniel Brinton,

52Minutes of the Anthropological Society of Washington, December 20, 1892 and January 17, 1893, ibid.
the anthropologist, Melville W. Fuller, Chief Justice of the United States, Daniel Coit Gilman, Vice-President Adlai E. Stevenson, and Dr. Lamborn. These Commissioners of Award had been painstakingly selected by McGee who operated on the premise that admirable, well established Americans were best able to judge qualities of ideal citizenship.  

Their verdict considered strength of individual character and loyalty to republican institutions to be the requisite virtues. This was predictable considering the patriotic impulse which American culture produced in the 1890's as an antidote to radicalism.  

Totally unexpected, however, was the awarding of second prize to the Chairman of the Prize Committee, his essay being deemed superior to all others except that written by his father-in-law, Simon Newcomb. McGee confessed privately that he had submitted the paper hoping that this would prompt other members of the Society to enter manuscripts. Ironically, his attempt to generate enthusiasm turned into a source of embarrassment and regret when the awards were announced.  

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53 W J McGee to Daniel G. Brinton, March 5, 1894, and W J McGee to Robert H. Lamborn, March 26, 1894, Correspondence, ibid.

54 "None are anarchistic," reported McGee with an air of relief after he had examined the essays. W J McGee to Robert H. Lamborn, May 8, 1894, ibid.

the winning essays appeared in the October, 1894 *American Anthropologist*, came expressions of dissatisfaction from unsuccessful authors. Both the administration of the contest and the standards of judgment were taken to task, as in a letter from Parkman, Ohio which concluded: "Now if your Society together with Mr. Newcomb and the commission of eminent men will come to this town [and] attend the public school you may learn that which you ought to have learned before by studying some reading lessons in Appleton's Fifth Reader. . . ."56

Actually the essay competition could not have been more in keeping with the aims and character of the Anthropological Society of Washington. "The elements that go to make up the most useful citizen" was a subject as broad as Mason's definition of anthropology, and conformed to the *American Anthropologist*’s principle of encouraging articles "not burdened with technicalities."57 Notices of the competition had been printed in learned journals as well as newspapers with general readerships. Thus the Society was true to its policy of serving at once specialists and laymen. Yet while the essay contest was open to all—just as the invitation to participate in the Society was freely extended—

56 W. J. Bestor to W J McGee, January 21, 1895, McGee Papers, General Correspondence, Box 1, LC.

57 Minutes of the Board of Managers, March 15, 1898, ASW Archives, SI.
it was subtly dominated by a handful of professionals. In other words, the subsurface condition of elitist direction which prevailed in the Society was perpetuated in the competition. Finally, the citizenship essay contest was designed to provide national publicity and to encourage the study of anthropology in its widest sense.

These factors were very much on the mind of W J McGee, who never permitted his thoughts to wander far from considerations of the prestige and promotion of Washington's intellectual community. His fertile brain conceived of a galaxy of learned bodies at the Capital, aiding the advancement of science and culture while developing concurrently with the disciplines they sustained. This mental image encapsulated the early history of the Anthropological Society of Washington. It was especially important as a seminal influence in the creation of intellectual organizations during the late nineteenth century. It was, in fact, what his wife had hoped her Society might become: "the minute seed from which a great forest will spring."58

58Anita Newcomb McGee, Historical Sketch, p. 22.
CHAPTER VI

"WITHIN ONE ORGANIZATION"

The next two decades witnessed the creation of a series of homologous organizations which evolved into the Washington Academy of Sciences. First came the Biological Society in 1880, followed four years later by the Chemical and Entomological Societies, then the National Geographic in 1888, and, in 1893, the Geological Society of Washington. This process rounded-out the formative phase of the Capital's intellectual community. By the end of the century there were separate components for half a dozen different specialties, all fused in a local academy. Many new societies shared the same founders and officers, and frequently these men were also fellow members of the Cosmos Club. Thus the proliferation of independent bodies was accompanied by the strengthening of personal and institutional ties. Furthermore, the groups which emerged in the eighties and nineties tended to hold mutual objectives and display similar characteristics. Each stood for the increase and diffusion of knowledge, a common aim which invariably led them to promote both professional research and popular interest. Strikingly, but not surprisingly—
for they were rooted in the same soil as the Anthropological Society—they appeared to be branches of a single tree.

These societies began as outlets for men interested in particular branches of science. Usually founders were employed by federal agencies and the establishment of societies reflected the maturity of their specialties in the government. The Geological was formed in the office of the United States Geological Survey director, Charles Walcott; Charles Riley of the Department of Agriculture, issues the call for the Biological's first meeting; and the Chemical was born at the Army Medical Museum. New organizations did not result from influences that were entirely positive, however. To an extent their appearances were caused by the reluctance of the Philosophical Society to encourage special sections. When prospects for a Geological body were under discussion George Brown Goode argued in favor of remaining within the older association, but to no avail. As the Biologists and Anthropologists had already discovered, separation was the best way to achieve the desired combination of professional and amateur participation.¹

In order to serve both experts and devotees membership in the societies was made easily attainable. For the most part only a majority vote was needed for admission and there were no special requirements for candidates. Indeed, constitutions were written so as to attract laymen. The Entomological, for example, welcomed those "in any way interested" in the study of entomology. On the other hand instruments of government guaranteed tight control by the executive councils. Invariably something resembling the skeletal structure of the Anthropological Society was adopted, and without exception this made for sturdy organization. While elections were held annually certain men tended to be perennial office holders—and often in more than one group. The expediency of this practice is clear, though it is hard to imagine how some individuals were able to attend all the board meetings required of them. Another feature borrowed from the Anthropological was the division of members into specialized sections. The Biological Society made this one of its first items of business so that the presentation and discussion of technical papers could begin at once. Consequently the attention of professionals was aroused, and once they visited the Society they were

\[\text{2Proceedings of the Entomological Society of Washington, I (1884), 5.}\]

\[\text{3Minutes of the Council, February 11, 1881, Archives of the Biological Society of Washington (henceforth BSW Archives), I, SI.}\]
further impressed by the modest initiation and membership fees. Most organizations collected dues of only one or two dollars a year, the notable exception being the National Geographic Society which charged five dollars. Yet the National Geographic showed the greatest rise in membership, from 167 in 1888 to almost 2500 by the end of the century.4

Doubtless this was due to the quality of its journal, for while almost all societies had publications none was comparable to the National Geographic Magazine. Only the Geological Society failed to get out some sort of proceedings or bulletin of transactions prior to 1898. At the outset, as had been true of the American Anthropologist, these contained just resumes and abstracts summarizing meetings, and despite the inevitable problems encountered in maintaining serials, they improved with age. It also became customary for journals to be distributed to libraries and research institutions on exchange bases. Thus, nineteen years after it first appeared, Lester Ward could legitimately state that the Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington was as suitable a medium for original descriptions as any natural science journal in the country.5 Nevertheless, it hardly


5Lester F. Ward to Othniel C. Marsh, May 4, 1898, Marsh Letterbooks, Peabody Museum Library, Yale University.
surpassed the **Magazine** in either form or content. The familiar **National Geographic** of today is fundamentally different from the late nineteenth century version. Instead of pictorial glimpses the original presented scholarly papers, and rather than being a general periodical it served as a means of communication between geographers. "Its aim is to convey new information," wrote W J McGee in 1896, "and at the same time to reflect current opinion on geological matters." By printing full length articles, the proceedings of the Society, correspondence and book reviews, and through the excellent maps which were always a hallmark, the **Magazine** enjoyed immediate success. Much of its popularity could be credited to the brilliance of its editorial board. In the mid-nineties, for instance, the **Magazine** began reporting the arctic adventures of Lieutenant Robert E. Peary, a member of the Society. Other timely contributions dealt with the natural resources and geographical importance of the Caribbean Islands and the Philippines. The **National Geographic Magazine** was exceptional. Yet the publication with the reddish-brown cover (symbolically matching the color of the Smithsonian buildings) seemed to stand for the vitality of Washington's intellectual establishment.

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In addition to their publications the societies used regular meetings for the transmission of scientific knowledge. With all groups having the same October through May schedule it was necessary to arrange dates so as to avoid conflicts for the many men belonging to more than one group. Also, the organizations shared common meeting sites: the Smithsonian before 1887, the Cosmos Club afterward, and the Builders' Exchange Hall which was used for annual meetings. January was when annual meetings customarily took place and on these occasions officers were elected and presidential addresses delivered. During the other months members and their guests heard and criticized technical papers. The Geological Society divided its time between "Informal Communications" and "Regular Programs," thereby providing for both extemporaneous remarks and lectures prepared in advance. Among all societies an average of roughly 30 to 40 per cent of the members came to meetings, with professionals comprising the core of every regular attendance. These were the men who gave and received the most from monthly sessions. As McGee said of the Geographers, "each contributes . . . to the common stock of knowledge . . . and their researches are stimulated by the encouragement and associations found in the Society." 

7Ibid., 257.
Promoting different branches of science also required whetting the public's appetite, and this the societies made one of their collective tasks. "I possess only the same general interest in the subject of geography that should be felt by every educated man," proclaimed Gardiner Greene Hubbard. But what if the other men were neither as well educated nor as instinctively curious? How could they become stimulated? The *National Geographic Magazine* might engage the attention of laymen, but for the most part other journals would be read only by workers in the particular fields. Lester Ward was reminded of this when he was told that "such writings as yours are the leaven, a very little of which ultimately affects the whole mass, but for my present purposes I cannot wait for the bread to 'rise.'" Fortunately there was a technique that offered immediate results: programs geared specifically to non-professional audiences. During the eighties and nineties most groups attempted popular lectures and demonstrations. The Anthropological and Biological Societies offered introductory courses at the Smithsonian; the *National Geographic* gave several lectures illustrated by maps, lantern slides, and stereoptic views; and the Chemical held a public

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exhibition of "liquid air" at Columbian University. Thus the new societies tended to utilize the same methods for kindling popular appreciation just as they had for advancing their own specialities.

Besides generating enthusiasm these parallel efforts and common undertakings, accelerated a movement to unify all the societies. Two years after leaving the presidency of the Cosmos Club, Charles Walcott noted a heightened awareness that "a central, well-organized and representative body can be of great assistance to individuals and groups of workers in different ways, particularly in helping to arouse public interest in scientific investigations and in directing it to the best ends." Though it started gradually, by the end of the century Washington's intellectual community experienced a concerted drive to "bring within one organization the leading persons representing scientific activities at the National Capital."  

During the early eighties there began to be hints that Washington's scientific organizations were inching toward some sort of federated status. Each year marked a perceptible step closer to union, but progress was painfully

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10 Annual Report of the Secretary, January 12, 1899, Archives of the Chemical Society of Washington (henceforth CSW Archives).

11 Charles D. Walcott to Edward W. Morley, January 9, 1900, Morley Papers, Box 3, LC.
slow. In the spring of 1882 the Philosophical Society suggested that it send representatives to confer with delegates from the Anthropological and Biological Societies to discuss consolidation of the three into a "central academy of sciences, with sections devoted to the several departments of science." Two lengthy meetings resulted in a prospectus of an organization to be known as the Washington Academy of Sciences. While the affiliates retained their separate identities, the Academy would be responsible for a common publication of transactions, arranging sessions of the united societies, the election of its own officers and honorary fellows, collecting membership fees, and conducting courses of popular lectures. Popular lectures were repugnant to the Philosophical Society, however, and the organization which initiated the conference wound-up vetoing its recommendations. Yet this did not mean that the Philosophical was averse to institutional cooperation, and the next year it invited members of the other societies to attend its annual meeting, thus establishing a precedent of joining together to hear each other's presidential addresses. Also, in 1884, the Philosophical participated

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12 Minutes of the Council, April 14, 1882, BSW Archives, I, SI.

in a joint reception for the Society of Eastern Naturalists during that group's Christmas convention in Washington. Such professional connections contributed to the advancement of science and were perfectly consistent with the Philosophical's character and purpose. But staging simplified programs for the uninitiated fell outside this category, and, in 1886, when the Biological and Anthropological Societies asked the Philosophical if it would assist "in the management and control of the Saturday Lectures," the latter respectfully declined.14 Though relations between the societies were cordial and joint functions more common, a full-scale alliance remained out of the question.

Grove Karl Gilbert attributed this to "the conservatism of the governing body of . . . [the Philosophical] Society."15 Since he was a member of that governing body throughout the 1880's his statement bears the seal of authenticity. Taken at face value, however, it implies an obdurate refusal to participate in any mutual venture; this, of course, would be untrue. On the contrary, the Philosophical led the way in strengthening ties between the societies. Repeated objections to the Saturday Lectures did not indicate

14 Minutes of the Council, January 9 and February 20, 1886, BSW Archives, I, SI; Minutes of the General Committee, January 16, 30, and February 13, 1886, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.

15 Cross and Gilbert, Report of a Committee, p. 3.
a hostility toward union; rather they illuminated the irreducible differences between an elitist conception of promoting science and the view shared by the Anthropological and Biological Societies that the same end could be achieved through the encouragement of amateurs. By 1887 these distinctions were starting to blur. That was when the Cosmos Club became a headquarters for all the societies, and the gemütlichkeit it afforded helped make the Philosophical's leaders more amenable to change. In February the other members of the scientific establishment were heartened to learn that "the Philosophical Society would probably be willing to cooperate in the Saturday Lectures during the present season. . . ."¹⁶ When this occurred it opened the way for permanent federation. Once again, the group which Gilbert labelled conservative was in the vanguard.

In fact, the impulse for cementing an alliance originated in the Philosophical Society. At the General Committee meeting of January 7, 1888, Marcus Baker offered a resolution proposing that each society designate three representatives, to confer as a body, "respecting the formation of a permanent organization to deal with questions

¹⁶Minutes of the Council, February 19, 1887, BSW Archives, II, SI; Minutes of the General Committee, February 21, 1887, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.
of common interest to all these scientific societies."\(^17\)

Drawing attention to the rapid increase of specialized groups, Baker emphasized that during the six years that his Society had been in existence the number of its siblings had multiplied to four. His concern was not so much with future growth—though certainly this must have been on his mind—but rather with giving the five societies a sense of mutual destiny. Others shared his sentiments and the resolution passed by a vote of eleven to eight. President Garrick Mallery appointed Robert Fletcher, W. H. Dall (subsequently replaced by Powell), and Baker to serve as spokesmen for the Philosophical Society.\(^18\)

Similar actions were taken by the executive councils of the Anthropological, Biological, Chemical, and Geographic Societies, and at eight o'clock on February 19, 1888, beneath the roof of the Cosmos Club, their delegations assembled for the first time. Eleven men attended this organizational meeting of what was at once christened the "Joint Committee." Fletcher and Baker were elected chairman and secretary, all affirmed support for the Philosophical Society's resolution, and it was agreed to convene again as

\(^{17}\)Minutes of the General Committee, January 7, 1888, \textit{ibid}.

\(^{18}\)March 31, 1888, \textit{ibid}.
soon as possible. February twenty-fifth signified a day of fulfillment for those who doggedly had pursued the elusive goal of union; finally it seemed within their grasp. Through an "organic act" the delegates created a permanent Joint Commission of the Scientific Societies of Washington. This was to consist of three commissioners from each organization who would perform a two-fold function. As stated in the original resolution the Joint Commission should give advice on "questions of common interest." But now it was invested with the additional authority to "execute instructions on general subjects...." Such instructions were not to be binding and member societies could disregard the Joint Commission's will. At the same time, however, this ambiguous clause suggested that the fathers of the Joint Commission did not conceive of it as being peripheral to the scientific establishment. Without trying to predict how its influence should later be applied, they equipped it for any eventuality. During the next six weeks the organic act was ratified by the five component societies and the Joint Committee adjourned sine die, its preparatory labors having come to an end.

19Minutes of the First Meeting of a Joint Committee, February 19, 1888, Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission, Washington Academy of Sciences (henceforth WAS).

Almost immediately the Joint Commission swung into operation. In 1889 it offered to invite the American Association for the Advancement of Science, on behalf of the local societies, to hold its fortieth annual meeting in Washington two years hence. When the AAAS accepted the Joint Commission suddenly took on stature as the host organization. Undismayed by responsibilities of managing a national convention its committees set to work raising money, arranging transportation and hotel reservations, planning receptions and excursions, and making sure that the whole affair received the publicity it deserved. An eight-man executive committee, "with full power to act for the Commission," was created as a coordinating unit which also dealt with Frederick Ward Putnam, permanent secretary of the AAAS. The meeting lasted from August 17 to September 2, 1891, during which time the visitors heard scheduled papers and attended business sessions at the Arlington Hotel and Columbian University, exchanged information with foreign scientists (this marked the first time the International Congress of Geologists came to the United States), inspected the public buildings and historic landmarks, and were entertained at a party given by the Washington Board of Trade. Not only did everything go off without a hitch, but the treasury reported a surplus of over $1,100. Upon the recommendation of Henry Gannett and Gardiner Greene Hubbard these unexpended funds were to be used for the
support of the member societies. For a while the Joint Commission was able to dispense largesse commensurate with its new found importance. 21

After this initial burst of activity, however, the Joint Commission settled into a role that was largely symbolic. It seldom advised or instructed, as the organic act provided for, and it was hardly the decisive force in government-science that some of its creators expected it would become. When the societies began meeting at the Cosmos Club, in 1887, the Joint Commission donated a common specimen cabinet to the assembly hall, but it could not follow through on a proposal to establish a joint library for the use of its affiliates. 22 Expansion was undertaken with extreme caution and there was no concerted drive to consolidate all specialized groups. The Microscopical Society was barred entirely, and the Entomological Society, founded in 1884, was not granted a seat on the Joint Commission until December, 1892. On the other hand, no time was wasted in publishing a Directory of Scientific Societies of Washington. Appearing biennially, from 1889

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21 Minutes of the Joint Commission of Scientific Societies, January 17, February 5 and 14, March 6, and October 9, 1891, Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission, WAS; Science, XVIII (August 7, 1891), 71-72.

22 Minutes of the Joint Commission of Scientific Societies, November 26, 1894, ibid.
to 1895, this contained single lists of the names and addresses of all society members. This obviated the need for separate brochures and, because many men belonged to two or more groups, solved the problem of duplication. The Directory also constituted a sign of nominal integration and the Joint Commission's meetings, held every month or two, kept open channels of communication between the various organizations. Beyond this it could boast of few concrete accomplishments.

Yet the Joint Commission had a certain value accrued from intangible assets. Its mere being assured the affiliated members of the maturity of Washington's professional elite. As with other self-conscious groups that were emerging and asserting themselves at this time an overarching association seemed prima facie evidence of coming of age. Regardless of their operational effects, late nineteenth century structures conveyed the impression of robustness; their true authority might be limited, or their jurisdiction circumscribed, or their capital watered, or their literal resources exaggerated—nonetheless, their institutional forms suggested power, especially to those who identified with them. Central aggregations perforce meant quantity, and quantity was taken to represent growth and development. Thus commissioners were predisposed to equate the proliferation of specialized bodies with the general association's progress: "Only twenty-two years
have passed, and Washington has become the most important scientific center in the Americas—twenty-two years, and instead of one society we have six. . . ." 23 (Presumably a doubling of this figure would bring world-wide supremacy.) So the net worth of the Joint Commission was the confidence and self-esteem it inspired, not through its actions but simply by its existence.

Similarly the Joint Commission helped improve the quality of local culture and bestowed status and prestige on its members. Neither was easily verified, though many scientists intuitively felt that these influences issued from its presence. Sensing vaguely that the Joint Commission had a positive affect on themselves and their community they resorted to forms of expression that seemed curiously unscientific. Garrick Mallery, in a bit of topical verse, plumbed the depth of its contribution and concluded that before the Civil War "every congressman thought he could boss over a fellow who was merely a philosopher," while afterward "a Joint Commission of societies saved science and restored the lost proprieties." In addition, men of rarefied taste, to whom Gilded Age culture was generally unappetizing, could derive sustenance from the organization:

What though our formal dinner may be horrid,
The soup be frigid and the salad torrid,
Though then your palate gets not full fruition,
You have some pabulum in your Commission;
We're fit to eat,—if doubting, only try it—
Our body's in a double sense your Diet!24

In the main Mallery was correct, and certainly his metaphor evoked the ethos of the Joint Commission. After savoring this morsel, however, one suspects that before the "pabulum" could become a satisfactory "Diet" it would have to be seasoned liberally.

Some of the Joint Commission's leaders must have been left with the same impression for in 1895 they undertook to make it more effective. At its first meeting of the year President Gardiner Hubbard called for an open discussion of the organization's condition. Nearly all the commissioners voiced opinions about how it might be improved and there seemed to be a consensus in favor of "combining the scientific societies more closely along lines of common interest." Distributing joint notices of sessions and collaborating on a monthly publication were motions which received wide support. Before going ahead with any plan, however, it was decided to accept Otis Mason's proposal that the presidents of the societies comprise a committee "on the State of the Union." The committee's report, submitted January twenty-fifth, began

with the premise that further cooperation depended on "enlarging the power of the Joint Commission." This meant providing it with enough administrative machinery to become a governing body, giving it the same sort of institutional framework as the professional groups of which it was composed, in short, making it more than a figurehead. Accordingly, the next six weeks witnessed the adoption of a constitution and a set of by-laws.²⁵

These documents increased the size of the Joint Commission and broadened the margins of its activity. Instead of having just three delegates from each of the societies (excepting the Entomological and Geological which had fewer seats due to their small memberships) it would henceforth be made up of all their officers and board members. Consequently the organization which previously numbered eighteen now had a grand total of ninety-three participants. Since this was too unwieldy to conduct business the constitution provided for an eleven man executive committee. Here lay responsibility for all policies and administrative details, and though its decisions were subject to review at the Joint Commission's annual meetings, its rule was virtually absolute. The committeemen were the president and

²⁵Minutes of the Joint Commission of Scientific Societies, January 2 and 25, 1895, Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission, WAS.
secretary of the Joint Commission, as well as those holding the newly created offices of vice-president and treasurer, and one member at large from each component society. Their terms were for twelve months without prohibition against re-election. Obviously the Joint Commission's government weighed more heavily than before, the result of its operations having become more ample. In place of its almost non-existent advisory functions the revamped body was empowered to organize joint meetings, continue the Directory on an annual basis, distribute composite meeting notices for the several groups, hold lectures, and "to act in the interest of the component societies at the instance of any of them." These last provisions were implemented when the Joint Commission, at the request of the Geological Society, sponsored Sir Archibald Geikie's address during the famed British scientist's visit to Washington in 1896.²⁶ The Joint Commission also might cause itself to meet specially upon request of the president or any ten commissioners. If the contours of this design seemed familiar it was because most of them were the work of Major Powell, whose bold strokes were easily recognized.²⁷

²⁶Minutes of the Council, May 13, 1896, GSW Archives, USGS.

²⁷The constitution and by-laws first appeared in Directory of Scientific Societies of Washington ..., V (1896), 10-12; for Powell's role in drafting the by-laws see, Minutes of the Executive Committee, February 27 and March 12, 1895, Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission, WAS.
Indubitably the reorganization of 1895 made the Joint Commission more comprehensive, but not everyone considered this an unqualified good. Broader powers for the central body, said its opponents, might result in actions which would be counterproductive for the separate societies. Responding to this apprehension, seven of the eighteen officers of the Philosophical Society voted to maintain the status quo.28 For one thing they felt that the existing machinery was good enough; that the psychological effects it produced were satisfactory and that the so-called "common interests" of the several societies were insufficient to warrant a major overhaul. Secondly, they reiterated the Society's fear of jeopardizing its elitist character by becoming more occupied with popularization. There were also expressions of alarm about what a more energetic association might do. Without implying that the Joint Commission would fall into the hands of reckless men, they placed enough credence in Lord Acton's famous dictum to be somewhat chary. One of their concerns had to do with the likelihood of unforeseen expenses, a concern which proved well-founded in 1897 when the Joint Commission almost went broke.29 However, it was not the

28 Minutes of the General Committee, February 16, 1895, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.

29 Cross and Gilbert, Report of a Committee, pp. 7-8; Minutes of the Executive Committee, December 14, 1897, Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission, WAS.
Philosophical Society, a large and solidly established group, which registered the first complaints against fiscal policies, but rather the Chemical Society whose weaknesses left it vulnerable to any added strain.

Under its constitution, Joint Commission expenditures were to be borne by the component groups in proportion to their membership. With only 116 members in 1896 the Chemical Society was the second smallest organization, and the amount it paid into the common treasury correspondingly low. But viewed from the standpoint of its own resources this represented over 35 per cent of its income. Moreover, the Chemical Society was not getting much for its money. Since its annual meetings were sparsely attended there was no need of holding them under the auspices of the Joint Commission, and the master schedules of meetings which the Joint Commission issued were deemed to be of limited value. Therefore, its Executive Committee submitted a series of resolutions to the several societies proposing that the Joint Commission's power to prepare and distribute programs be reduced. Each organization should send out whatever notices it chose to publicize rather than having them all compiled in blanket announcements. Also, instead of every member of every society automatically receiving notices, those who were interested in attending another's meetings must ask for invitations and include return
postage with their requests. The axe being ground had an economic appearance, particularly because the Chemical Society of Washington received financial aid from the American Chemical Society which also was trying to hold down expenses. Yet the root of the problem lay deeper than that, for men with individual grievances were also having second thoughts about the way they had been yoked together.

Due to the fact that in activities it surpassed the original version, the new Joint Commission stood condemned for having attempted too much; at the same time it was criticized for not doing enough for Washington's men of scientific distinction. Ironically the first Joint Commission—those honored by their societies to serve as representatives—had been more notable for the prestige it conferred than the policies it enacted. After 1895, however, it consisted of the officers of the societies, meaning that commissioners were determined in the same perfunctory way that men were elected in their components. While this process ran smoothly it was devoid of grandeur. When Arnold Hague observed that the Joint Commission represented societies instead of scientists he touched the nub of the issue: to the city's most brilliant minds it was utterly boring. The very designation of

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30 Charles E. Munroe and W. P. Cutter to J. H. McCormick, December 19, 1896, Minutes of the Board of Managers, January 12, 1897, ASW Archives, SI; Minutes of the Council, December 23, 1896, GSW Archives, USGS.
"commission" connoted organizational dullness, with its ranks having a caste of administrative rather than technical accomplishment. For the most part commissioners were business managers and, "As it is frequently the case that the men who are most prominent in scientific work are for one reason or another reluctant to give time to the affairs of societies," many of the best government-scientists were left outside. Not that they really wanted to get in, since association with the Joint Commission carried little professional significance. This inability to satisfy legitimate desires for recognition prompted efforts to make the central body less powerful and more honorific.  

During the first third of 1897 the Geological Society conducted an inquiry into the background and current operations of the federation, and in conclusion expressed "its disapproval of the present organization of the Joint Commission as being neither well adapted for performing the business of the societies nor representing them in scientific matters." But how devise a union which could balance between general effectiveness and acceptability to

31Arnold Hague and C. W. Hayes to J. H. McCormick, September 15, 1897, Minutes of the Board of Managers, November 2, 1897, ASW Archives, SI.

32Minutes of the Council, May 26, 1897, GSW Archives, USGS; the tedious course of the investigation may be followed in the Minutes of January 27, February 24, and March 24, 1897, ibid.
all components; which might conduct business and bestow honor; which would possess the advantages of both form and substance? This the Geological Society did not presume to know. Instead, on September fifteenth, it suggested in a circular letter that each society appoint three men to another conference committee to seek the best possible solution. For the third time in nine years there would be an attempted merger of Washington's men of science. At its second meeting in December the conferees unanimously resolved that some form of "federal head, competent to initiate action," was desirable, but that the "autonomy of the several scientific societies should be maintained." It was imperative that the central organization have a scientific character and be representative in scientific as well as in business matters. To this end the committee recommended that the Joint Commission "assume independent scientific functions, have power to add to its members," and that it be given a more imposing title. The move to make the Joint Commission less objectionable thus culminated with a call for an entirely new institution, a Washington Academy of Sciences.

Nothing could have been more gratifying to those who bent every effort to advance science and culture at

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33Whitman Cross, Report to the Chairmen of the Several Committees [comprising the Joint Commission's Committee of Conference], December 13, 1897, Scrapbook, WAS.
the national Capital. Having launched half a dozen organizations for the promotion of different specialties they now looked forward to completing the fusion of these bodies into a more vital union. Small wonder that discussions about the proposed Academy engaged the soaring imaginations of its principal founders. Powell talked of an association which would combine exclusiveness and financial stability by imposing a minimum fee on the members of component societies, and having a select group for whom the dues would be higher. Gilbert envisioned the Academy becoming the agency of popularization—giving lectures and attracting patrons—so that the societies could grapple with the frontiers of knowledge in their particular disciplines. McGee saw it as an instrument of harmony, respecting the specialized jurisdictions of the societies while working for the accomplishment of mutual objectives; specifically this meant the further development of Washington's intellectual community.  

Powell, Gilbert, and McGee were among the fifteen men appointed by the Joint Commission to draft a constitution. Others included C. Hart Merriam, an officer in the Biological and National Geographic; L. O. Howard representing the Biological and Entomological Societies; Arnold Hague from the Geological; H. N. Stokes the Chemical;

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34 Minutes of the Joint Commission of Scientific Societies, January 11, 1898, Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission, WAS.
John Robie Eastman, F. W. Clarke, Bernard Green, and Marcus Baker the Philosophical; and Frank Baker, George M. Sternberg, and Lester Frank Ward from the Anthropological. Ward and Sternberg were also vice-presidents in the Philosophical Society whose numerical superiority totalled almost half the committee. In order to expedite its mission two subcommittees were assigned responsibility for drafting working documents. Eastman, Merriam, and Clarke set to work outlining functions of the Academy, and Green, Frank Baker, and Powell criteria for its membership. The urgency of these matters was attested to by the prompt consideration they received. On January 15, 1898, just four days after being formed, the subcommittees filed their reports.

Concentrating on the twin objectives of elitist control and broad representation Powell's group prescribed a formula for achieving both. This entailed four membership categories: regular members, fellows, honorary members, and patrons. The first classification was open to anyone in a component who paid dues to the Washington Academy, thereby integrating the affiliated societies and guaranteeing the central body economic support. Moreover it served as a mechanism for gradual expansion and gave each member a personal stake in the Academy's future. But

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35Minutes of the Committee on Constitution, January 11, 1898, ibid.
direct participation was restricted to those in the second category, the fellows, who "shall have power to add to their members and in their hands shall rest the government of the Academy." Referred to as the "nucleus," this group would initially be elected by the components balloting "for the fifty persons whom they consider best qualified." The report did not define "best qualified," an omission making it possible to vote for either top-flight scientists or administrators. By splitting the difference between the Philosophical and the specialized societies Powell's draft became acceptable to all parties. Also, once it was formed the nucleus would fill its own vacancies. Thus the way was cleared for the same sort of centralization of power and continuity of personnel that had given stability to the components. In addition, the fellows chose honorary members, "persons distinguished in science, literature or art," and presumably it was through their policies that patrons would be acquired. Except for changes of detail—enlarging the nucleus to seventy-five and having electors vote for one hundred men, the twenty-five lowest vote-getters being eliminated; dropping "literature or art" from the qualifications for honorary membership; and reducing the classes of members to three—the report won a favorable reception.36

36 January 15 and 17, 1898, ibid.; Minutes of the Joint Commission of the Scientific Societies, January 19 and 25, 1898, ibid.
The adoption of an organizational blueprint spurred further action, and within the next sixty days the Washington Academy was created and the Joint Commission permanently dissolved. On January nineteenth C. Hart Merriam, speaking for the constitutional committee, proposed that steps be taken to incorporate the new body under the laws of the District of Columbia. While this was being accomplished the seventy-five members of the nucleus were elected, their names to be kept secret until the first meeting was announced. One of the Joint Commission's last acts was accepting as an affiliate the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, thus permitting the eighty year old association to become a founder of the Academy even though it had not participated in informing the intellectual community. Finally an incorporation draft and a set of by-laws were submitted to the eight components.37 These ratification meetings were witness to more quibbling over minor points in the instruments of government (once again the Chemical Society had reservations about the levying of assessments), but all agreed that such a government was both desirable and necessary. Some members of the Anthropological Society would have preferred a local version of the AAAS, a single organization with the membership divided into separate sections, but this did not cause

37January 19, 31, and February 2, 1898, ibid.
them to oppose the plan under consideration. The Chemical Society pushed Dr. Harvey Wiley's resolution that the governing board be made up of the affiliates' executive committees. Though this was rejected out of hand by the Joint Commission the Chemical Society continued to back the unionists. Illustrative of the consensus favoring the Academy was the ratification vote taken in the Philosophical Society. Whereas in 1888 almost half of its General Committee opposed establishing the Joint Commission, and in 1895 over one-third was against strengthening it, now only a single negative ballot was cast.38 Thus, when the members-elect held their initial meeting, on February sixteenth, they did so with near unanimous support from the scientific establishment. John Robie Eastman, G. K. Gilbert, and Bernard R. Green were chosen president, secretary, and treasurer, to be joined subsequently by eight vice-presidents, each representing his own component. On March twenty-second the Joint Commission passed out of existence and these men became the official leaders of the intellectual community, in the name of the Washington Academy of Sciences.39

38Minutes of the Board of Managers, February 15, 1898, ASW Archives, SI; Minutes of the Executive Committee, January 22, 1898, CSW Archives; Minutes of the General Committee, February 5, 1898, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.

39Minutes of the Joint Commission of Scientific Societies, March 22, 1898, Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission, WAS.
That the by-laws and act of incorporation would be accepted was almost a foregone conclusion, since the membership subcommittee borrowed principles of internal structure from the specialized societies; much less certain was the fate in store for the draft of functions which harkened back to a plan that had already been rejected. The second subcommittee's report seemed a replica of the abortive 1882 plan of union, and though there was only one member of the constitutional committee (Powell) who had a hand in composing the original version, the current proposals resoundingly echoed those of sixteen years before. Proclaiming "the promotion of science" as the Academy's purpose, the subcommittee on functions said that this could be effected by courses of lectures, holding joint sessions, publishing and distributing a joint directory and joint notices of meetings, abetting research and investigation in any way, securing a permanent building, and by cooperating "with existing scientific and other societies in matters of common concern."\textsuperscript{40} Considering that this concept had once died aborning what hope was there for survival now? In the first place the Philosophical Society no longer discountenanced popular programs. After having thrown its weight behind the Saturday Lectures in 1887 the Society had gone along with

\textsuperscript{40}Minutes of the Committee on Constitution, January 15, 1898, \textit{ibid.}
efforts for greater cooperation. Unlike the other organizations its General Committee did not unanimously endorse the reorganization of 1895, but neither did it threaten to boycott the Joint Commission's expanded activities. Secondly, the prospect of a Washington Academy held out enticing advantages to all concerned. Not only would it serve as a kind of interlocking directorship for the various organizations but it also promised to take over the task of popularization, allowing the societies to make their meetings more technical and to devote their attention to more challenging topics. In collaboration with these groups it would help advance national science, and its own activities would carry forward the improvement of local culture.

Lectures for laymen had traditionally been the shortest route to inspiring a general appreciation for science—especially during periods of rapid social and economic change when "cultivation" was in vogue. From the vantage point of the Gilded Age, therefore, Washington's savants could fully comprehend the appeal of earlier popularizers. Before the Civil War Benjamin Silliman was among the most skillful if not the first practitioner of the art of presenting science to the public. His technique involved painstaking rehearsals of lectures so that at the podium he would not be bound to his notes, making certain beforehand that experiments and illustrative
demonstrations were sure to work, and then elucidating his subject with dignity and animation. As his fame spread the crowds increased, both in size and zeal, so that it became customary for people to arrive hours ahead of time in order to get good seats. For over twenty years, from Buffalo to Mobile and between Nantucket and Pittsburgh, the Yale professor deciphered the mysteries of geology and chemistry for large gatherings. Silliman considered these performances his highest service to science; they also netted him a handsome income, raised funds for educational establish-ments such as the Lowell Institute, and, in the words of a disciple, "attracted to his lectures the refined and cultivated." What Silliman did for physical science was matched by Louis Agassiz in biology. Drovess of men and women listened approvingly as he described the complex magnificence of creation, with both Agassiz and his audiences feeling ennobled by the experience. The lesson was not lost on his friend Joseph Henry who was seeking ways of advancing and diffusing knowledge through the Smithsonian Institution. Henry could not hope to duplicate Agassiz's "charming

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Continental accent,\(^\text{42}\) but it was possible to copy his method for whetting the public's appetite. Thus, in the 1850's "the best feature of Washington was the courses of lectures given at the Smithsonian, not limited to science, which enabled us to hear eminent educators from various parts of the country."\(^\text{43}\) In 1882 the Smithsonian again became the scene of popular lectures, only this time they were sponsored by Washington's new scientific societies.

The history of the Saturday Lectures provides a gauge for measuring the intellectual community's development in the eighties and nineties. At first there were sharp differences over whether Washington societies were cut out for this sort of activity. In contrast to the Anthropological and Biological Societies, the Philosophical maintained that responsibility for lectures resided with the Smithsonian Institution.\(^\text{44}\) Once this argument had been irrefutable, but the rise of new societies deflected its thrust since they were so strongly committed to popularization. Also, popularizers were


\(^{43}\)\textit{Autobiography Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway} (Boston, 1904), I, 210-211.

\(^{44}\)Minutes of the General Committee, February 13, 1886, PSW Archives, United States Naval Research Laboratory.
sustained by the Smithsonian's assistant secretary who proclaimed it "the duty of every scientific scholar, however minute his specialty," to help kindle enthusiasm. Indeed scientists had a solemn obligation to further the broadest possible education of non-professionals. But here, as in other matters, the Joint Commission was only moderately successful, and not for several years did the Saturday Lectures acquire a definite place in the intellectual life of the city. When they did, however, it signalled the revitalization and public significance of local bodies. In 1897 Cleveland Abbe wished some programs could be delivered "in the Senate Chamber, to Congress—it would be an admirable improvement on the ordinary methods of lobbying." Though the proposal itself may have been only half-serious, Abbe was correct in implying that distillation and transmission of general knowledge reflected the potency of Washington's scientific establishment.

Usually lectures were considered from the standpoint of public enlightenment rather than in terms of how they strengthened the institutions which sponsored them. On the occasion of the first Saturday meeting, held March


46Cleveland Abbe to Thomas C. Mendenhall, April 24, 1897, Mendenhall Papers, Box 6, American Institute of Physics.
11, 1882, Powell announced that the ensuing series was designed to offer "birds-eye views to inquiring students," and that audiences could anticipate learning "the simpler lessons taught by the works of nature." In 1893, following a three year lapse, the annual courses were renewed on the grounds that they served to introduce laymen to science. Later the Washington Academy's Committee on Functions not only assumed responsibility for arranging lectures, it also strove to expand them by sending special notices to public school teachers. Programs would thus become "more serviceable" justifying honorariums for speakers. Because of their public character and educational purpose W J McGee likened the Saturday Lectures to a "university extension," to the kind of institution "which has attracted so much interest in other portions of the country within the last five years." Looked at in this way the significance of the courses offered by Washington's Academy transcended their own time and place, and took on a far deeper historical meaning.


49 W J McGee to the editor of the Washington News, April 27, 1894, Correspondence, ASW Archives, SI.
McGee's allusion was to the many proposals for founding a national university at the seat of government. This idea, from George Washington onward, had impressive proponents, but it never was compelling enough to be translated into reality. By the late nineteenth century, however, its time seemed to have come, and there was a reigning confidence among Washington intellectuals that it could be resisted no longer. In large measure this stemmed from their own exuberance. Those concerned with transforming the political Capital into a center for cultural advancement showed little hesitancy about enlisting in the crusade. Horatio King was on a committee which exhorted Congress to incorporate an institution under the government, Joseph Henry became involved with the National University Committee of scientists and educators, and, in 1884, The Literary's president used his inaugural to stress the "taste and culture manifested in the society of Washington and the suitability of that city as a site for a great National University."\(^{50}\)

Meanwhile there was a movement afoot to upgrade Columbian University, an effort further demonstrating the enthusiasm for making Washington an educational base. Without

\(^{50}\)Minutes of the Literary Society of Washington, December 27, 1884, Literary Society Papers, I, LC; P. J. Keene to Horatio King, December 24, 1870, King Papers, V, LC; Joseph Henry to J. W. Hoyt, July 30, 1874, SI Archives.
endowments, but having the support of such local talent as Lester Frank Ward, who held the chair of botany, James Welling launched the Corcoran Scientific School. This was a noble venture though no substitute for a genuine national university. Therefore, in 1891, when the American Association for the Advancement of Science met in Washington, Ward added his voice to the chorus demanding a center of higher learning. His design was laid out so that the end result would be "exclusively the product of the federal government," thus relying upon Congress for its enactment.51 Others, mindful of official lethargy and undaunted by the pitfalls of an independent course, asked if it was "not advisable to think of organizing the instruction . . . under the Joint Commission of the Scientific Societies of Washington?"52

In reply a fair question might have been: what grounds were there for believing that the Joint Commission could make a success of such a project? It was understandable that men immersed in national science should seek to hasten the day when Washington would house a university operating in conjunction with technical


52Edward S. Holden to Daniel C. Gilman, November 9 and 23, 1897, Gilman Papers, The Johns Hopkins University Library.
agencies of the government. Furthermore, it was natural for those committed to the diffusion of knowledge as well as its creation to work unspARINGLY for the marriage of specialized research and general education. But even after making these allowances was it not presumptuous to tie such a grand objective to a local organization? It would have been, except for the intellectual establishment's tempering of optimism with a keen awareness of its own resources. The enduring hope was that Congress would recognize the wisdom of their vision, but failing this government-scientists were prepared to utilize the existing machinery for disseminating learning. "We could reorganize the old Saturday Lectures on a higher plane in the lecture room of the National Museum," suggested Otis Mason, thereby improving the quality of instruction already being offered. Operating on such a scale the Joint Commission—and even more so the Washington Academy after 1898—could meet an interim need until the national university was established. Its educational contribution was therefore regarded not as an ultimate solution, but rather as a beginning.

To the historian, however, this signifies a kind of finality. By its vigor and self-assurance the

53 Otis T. Mason to the Members of the Anthropological Society of Washington, February 9, 1893, McGee Papers, Box 8, LC.
Washington Academy announced that the intellectual community's formative period was ended. The process that began with a series of groping attempts to impose order on Gilded Age society, and which quickly meshed with the movement to promote government-science, had culminated in an institution dedicated to improving national culture. On one level it could be celebrated as the ultimate expression of cultivation and elegance, with these attributes being shared by the Capital City. In another sense it was appreciated as the fruition of Washington's scientific establishment. The stature of its membership towered above those of the genteel circles, and as an agency for the advancement of science it surpassed even Henry's Philosophical Society. The Washington Academy of Sciences accommodated both amateurs and professionals; its components represented specialization and they diffused technical knowledge, while the Academy itself, through public lectures, served the cause of popularization; its structural form enabled it to bestow prestige on members and also function as an administrative body. In short, the Academy gave conclusive evidence of a flourishing intellectual community at the seat of government.

The formation of this community was only one of countless accomplishments of the post-Civil War period; but because its leaders figured in so many of these
creative influences it occupied a special place in late nineteenth century culture. The Henrys, the Powells, the McGees, the Bairds, the Newcombs, the Wards, and scores like them were responsible for a host of bureaus, research institutions, and government enterprises which left lasting imprints on American life. In going about their work these men revealed previously neglected sources of national strength, and by opening new areas of inquiry they enlarged the possibilities for future progress. Perhaps their most momentous achievement came when they thrust themselves into public service, for this gave the scientists and scholars representation in the realm of practical affairs. Here was an intellectual elite which sought not detachment, but influence, and to a significant degree its quest was fulfilled.

Reviewing the development of this community reminds one again of Henry Allen Moe's Cosmos Club address in 1965. His words come back like a whispered refrain: national culture can best be advanced by intellectual organizations. Those who had created Washington's establishment three-quarters of a century earlier would have appreciated his message, just as he was inspired by their example. Physically these bewhiskered, high-collared gentlemen belonged to another age, but their spirit was timeless. Accordingly,
"an aristocracy of brains and character, an aristocracy with a conscience and a sense of history" serves both as an epitaph and as a tribute to their enduring vision.
APPENDIX

MEMBERSHIP OF THE WASHINGTON INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY,
1871-1899*

*The data used in compiling this roster was taken from lists of founders and officers of the several components, the Cosmos Club, and the Washington Academy of Sciences, as contained in bulletins, unpublished minutes, and the Directory of Scientific Societies (1889-1899). The symbols in the following list for the various societies are: A—Anthropological; B—Biological; C—Chemical; CC—Cosmos Club; E—Entomological; G—Geological; L—Literary; N—National Geographic; P—Philosophical; and W—Washington Academy of Sciences.
## WASHINGTON INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY, 1871-1899

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ESSAY ON SOURCES
ESSAY ON SOURCES

The purpose of the essay that follows is to draw attention to the major source material used in this study. As regards manuscript and archival collections the bibliography is complete. In the interest of brevity, however, only the most relevant published works have been listed and evaluated. Also, there has been an attempt not to duplicate footnote citations except where additional comments would be helpful to the reader.

Archival and Manuscript Sources

The most important collections of unpublished materials pertaining to the Washington intellectual community are in the archives of the several clubs and societies. Except in the cases of the Entomological and the National Geographic Societies, membership lists, minutes, reports, and correspondence files have been maintained and are open for inspection, though they are sometimes difficult for the researcher to locate. Hopefully these scattered collections will soon be transferred to the Archives of the Smithsonian Institution, thereby insuring their preservation and making them more accessible to scholars.
The Anthropological Society's archives are housed in the Division of Cultural Anthropology of the Smithsonian Institution. There are nineteen file boxes plus assorted packages and envelopes containing Minutes of the Board of Managers (1895-1905); Minutes of the Regular Meetings (1879-1896); Reports of the Curator, which include some letters; and six volumes of correspondence covering the years between 1880 and 1900. The volume labelled "1892-95" has many W J McGee letters and is particularly informative. There is also a History File, but this is disappointingly thin. Supplementary to the Society's collection of documents are two other bodies of material in the Smithsonian: the Bureau of Ethnology Letterbooks (2 volumes), and the Bureau of American Ethnology Archives in the Office of Anthropology. The correspondence files of the BAE are laced with communications from men prominent in the Anthropological Society.

The Division of Mammals of the Smithsonian contains the archives of the Biological Society of Washington. Of utmost significance are the three volumes of council meeting minutes for the years between 1880 and 1906. The BSW records also include a copy of the original constitution and Minutes of the Regular Meetings (1894-1907).

In lieu of an official depository the archives of the Chemical Society are in the secretary's personal custody.
Regrettably there are no extant executive committee minutes prior to 1898. There is, however, a volume of Annual Reports of Secretaries (1887-1913).

The richest source of unpublished information about the Cosmos Club is its History File, replete with typescript addresses to the members, newspaper clippings, reminiscences, and the Recollections of Samuel Escue Tillman, a founder who worked with the Wheeler reconnaissances of the 1870's.

The United States Geological Survey Library contains archival material of the Geological Society. This includes single volumes of Council Minutes (1893-1900); the Minutes of Meetings (1893-1904); and two treasurers' Record Books (1893-1913 and 1896-1911).

Among the many important collections in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress is the Literary Society's Papers. Especially rewarding for the period before 1900 are Boxes 4 and 5, and those labelled "Various Publications," "Documents Relating to the History of the Society," and "Some Papers Presented at Meetings." In addition there are two volumes of minutes, two volumes of the proceedings of the executive committee, and a volume of correspondence prior to 1925.

At the time they were consulted the early records of the Philosophical Society were in the Division of Mathematics and Information Sciences, United States Naval Research.
Laboratory, Washington, D.C. They have since been moved to
the Smithsonian Archives. Originally they were arranged
into four boxes of minutes and three boxes of correspondence,
the former containing three red-leather volumes of General
Committee Minutes (1883-1911). Under the correspondence
category is an undated box labelled "Material of Historical
Interest," which has membership nominations and acceptances
between 1871 and 1875. Handwritten drafts of Joseph Henry's
communications to the Philosophical Society are in a folder
marked "Addresses and Reports" in the Henryana File of the
Smithsonian Institution Archives.

The Joint Commission of Scientific Societies and
the Washington Academy of Sciences archives are located in
the office of the Academy, which, in turn, is in the Carnegie
Institution Building in Washington. Of primary interest are
the Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Commission of
Scientific Societies of Washington (2 volumes). There is
also a scrapbook of Miscellaneous Printed Matter (1898-1922),
and a folder labelled "Formation and Early History of the
Academy," containing notices of meetings, nominations for
membership, and reports of various committees.

Much data concerning Washington's intellectual
community can be gleaned from the papers of government-
scientists, local savants, persons of cultivation, and men
associated with elegant circles and learned societies; the
most fertile fields for this research are the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

The following collections in the Library of Congress are of particular relevance: the George F. Becker Papers, especially the two boxes of General Correspondence containing letters from Samuel F. Emmons. The Diaries of Edward M. Gallaudet yield insights into the day-to-day activities of the Washington establishment. Similarly, the Diaries of James and Lucretia Garfield in the Garfield Papers (Boxes 2-5), which also shed light on the Literary Society. The letters in Vols. V-VII (1870-1883) of the Horatio King Papers provide the best history of King's literary reunions. The W. J. McGee Papers are indispensable to any study of scientific organizations during this period; its 31 containers house incoming and outgoing correspondence, scrapbooks, miscellaneous material, and articles and notes, with scarcely a dull item in the entire collection. The papers of McGee's father-in-law, Simon Newcomb, contain revealing comments about the Cosmos Club. Included in the Joseph M. Toner Papers are 14 boxes of letters, 1864-1896.

The Archives of the Smithsonian Institution comprise a vital source of information regarding American culture in the nineteenth century. Its vast holdings of the letters of Secretaries Joseph Henry, Spencer F. Baird, and Samuel P.
Langley are organized according to official correspondence and private papers. Those in the first category relate to the diversified activities of the Institution, its administration and history. The private papers include carefully indexed autobiographical data, personal letters, and daily journals. Here may be found the diary kept by Henry's daughter, Mary, chronicling many key developments in national science. The official correspondence of the Institution also contains a volume of requests from Washington clubs and societies for use of the lecture hall (1882-1890), and two folders with material pertaining to the national university movement (1870-1900).

Separate from the Archives, but under the Smithsonian's jurisdiction, is the National Collection of Fine Arts Library, which has William Henry Holmes', "Random Records of a Lifetime, 1846-1931: Cullings, Largely Personal, from the Scrap Heap of Three Score Years and Ten, Devoted to Science, Literature and Art." Originally consisting of twenty volumes, the "personal" volumes (XVII-XX) have disappeared. What remains is a fascinating array of diary entries, field notes, typescript essays, letters, water colors, photographs, and other memorabilia collected by a man whose fifty years of public service kept him too busy to write his autobiography.

Other collections of primary source material bearing upon the Washington intellectual community are: the Franz
Boas and the LeConte Family Papers at the American Philosophical Society; the Brown University Library's holding of Lester Frank Ward Papers; Thomas Corwin Mendenhall's autobiographical notes, diary, and correspondence at the American Institute of Physics, New York City; the extensive William J. Rhees Collection, as well as the letters of Clarence King and Horatio King, in the Henry E. Huntington Library; the Daniel C. Gilman Papers, the Ira Remsen Papers, and Henry A. Rowland's correspondence with Mendenhall, in The Johns Hopkins University Library; intermittent Gilman letters in the papers of James B. Angell, Thomas McIntyre Cooley, and Andrew C. McLaughlin, the Michigan Historical Collections; the Knox Circular Letter, Vols. V and VI, containing comments by John Jay Knox on Washington in the seventies and eighties, at the New York Historical Society; the small collection of Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren Papers at the New York Public Library; the correspondence of Mary Claflin, Stanley Matthews, William King Rogers, Rutherford B. Hayes, and xeroxed copies of "Washington Gossip," the Cincinnati Commercial (October 23, 1876-October 7, 1877), in the Rutherford B. Hayes Library, Fremont, Ohio; the Frank Hamilton Cushing and the Frederick W. Hodge Papers, in the Southwest Museum Library, Los Angeles; William Henry Holmes' correspondence in the Joseph B. Steere Papers, and 200 letters to Samuel P. Langley, in the University of
Michigan Library; and the twenty-odd volumes of Othniel C. Marsh Letterbooks at the Peabody Museum Library, Yale University.

Published Diaries, Letters, Memoirs, and Autobiographies


From the following reminiscences and self-portraits one can learn much about late nineteenth century life in Washington and the nation: Charles Francis Adams, 1835-1915: An Autobiography (Boston, 1916); David S. Barry, Forty Years in Washington (Boston, 1924); John Bigelow, Retrospections of an Active Life (5 vols.; New York, 1909-1913), Volumes IV and V being most relevant; W. H. Crook, Memories of the White House: The Home Life of Our Presidents from Lincoln to Roosevelt (Boston, 1911); Julia B. Foraker, I Would Live it Again: Memories of a Vivid Life (New York, 1932); Daniel Coit Gilman, The Launching of a University, and Other Papers: A Sheaf of Rememberances (New York, 1906); L. A. Gobright,
Recollection of Men and Things at Washington During the Third of a Century (Philadelphia, 1869); George F. Hoar, Autobiography of Seventy Years (2 vols.; New York, 1903); Henry Holt, Garrulities of an Octogenarian Editor: With Other Essays Somewhat Biographical and Autobiographical (Boston, 1923); E. D. Keyes, Fifty Years' Observation of Men and Events, Civil and Military (New York, 1884); Mrs. John A. Logan (ed.), Thirty Years in Washington, Or Life and Scenes in Our National Capital (Hartford, Conn., 1901); Ward McAllister, Society As I Have Found It (New York, 1890); Mrs. Roger A. Pryor, Reminiscences of Peace and War (New York, 1904); Raphael Pumpelly, My Reminiscences (2 vols.; New York, 1918); and, The Autobiography of Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, With a Supplementary Memoir by His Wife (Boston, 1909).

Many of Henry Adams' trenchant North American Review articles of the late sixties and early seventies have been collected in, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. and Henry Adams, Chapters of Erie (Boston, 1871, Cornell paperback edn., Ithaca, N.Y., 1966) and, George Hochfield (ed.), The Great Secession Winter of 1860-61, and Other Essays by Henry Adams (New York, 1958); other important contemporary writings are, Elizabeth N. Chapin, American Court Gossip (Marshalltown, Ia., 1887); F. W. Clarke, "Science in Politics," Popular Science Monthly, XXVI (March, 1885), 577-586; John W. Draper, "Science in America," Proceedings of the American Chemical Society, I

Magazines, Newspapers, and Serial Publications

The journals of the various societies are valuable supplements to the previously described archives and manuscripts. Indeed, these publications might almost be considered primary sources because of the information they yield concerning the internal development of Washington's intellectual community. First, the *Transactions of the Anthropological*
Society of Washington, I-III (1879-1885), which became the
American Anthropologist in 1888; its counterparts are the
Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington, I-XIII
(1880-1900); the Bulletin of the Chemical Society of Washington,
I-IX (1884-1895); the Proceedings of the Entomological Society
of Washington, I-IV (1884-1901); Field and Forest, I-III
(1875-1878), the bulletin of the Potomac-Side Naturalists
Club; the National Geographic Magazine, I-XI (1888-1900);
the Bulletin of the Philosophical Society of Washington, I-XII
(1871-1899); and, the Proceedings of the Washington Academy
of Sciences, I (1899-1900). The publications of the Anthropo-
gical and Philosophical Societies, initially printed by
the Smithsonian Institution, also appear in volumes of the
Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections.

Other specialized and general interest periodicals
carried items pertaining to science and culture at the Capital
City. For the emergence of the scientific community see: the
American Journal of Science and Arts (after 1880, the American
Journal of Science); the Popular Science Monthly; the Proceed-
ings of the American Association for the Advancement of
Science; Science, which maintained a weekly news column about
Washington organizations; and, the Annual Report of the
Secretary to the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Insti-
tution. From time to time cultivated magazines printed articles
about Washington intellectual life. The Atlantic Monthly;
Harper's New Monthly Magazine; Harper's Weekly; Lippincott's Monthly Magazine; the Nation; the North American Review; and Scribner's are relevant in this regard. Also, interesting bits of information can be gathered from John Clagett Proctor's sketches of Washington clubs in the 1880's, which originally appeared in the Washington Sunday Star and are now in a compiled form at the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.

Historical Studies of Scientific Organizations

The secondary literature on Washington scientific societies during this period is virtually non-existent. Watson H. Monroe, *Scientific Institutions of Washington* (Washington, D.C., 1933), treats the community as a whole but makes no attempt to analyze the dynamics of the subject. The few articles dealing with components of the Washington Academy have been cited where appropriate in the footnotes. Among the most useful studies are: Daniel S. Lamb, "The Story of the Anthropological Society of Washington," *American Anthropologist*, n.s., VIII (July-September, 1906), 564-579; George W. Stocking, Jr., "Franz Boas and the Founding of the American Anthropological Association," *American Anthropologist* LXII (February, 1960), 1-17, which is excellent on the amateurish, non-professional viewpoint of McGee; C. A. Browne, "Dr. Thomas Antisell and His Associates in the Founding of the Chemical Society of Washington," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, XXVIII (May 15, 1938), 213-246; and,


Secondary Sources

Pre-Civil War science in America is discussed in, George H. Daniels, American Science in the Age of Jackson (New York, 1968), which places the seminal period of institutional development in the years 1815-1845; the emergence of professionalism is touched upon by A. Hunter Dupree and Robert V. Bruce, in, David T. Gilchrist and W. David Lewis (eds.), Economic Change in the Civil War Decade (Greenville, Del., 1965), 117-136; pioneer attempts at publicly sponsored research are discussed by, Walter B. Henderson, "Nineteenth-Century State Geological Surveys: Early Government Support
of Science," *Isis*, LII (September, 1961), 357-371; for the
growth of scientific institutions in the south see, Thomas
Cary Johnson, Jr., *Scientific Interests in the Old South*
(New York, 1936); Edward Lurie, "Nineteenth Century American
Science: Insights From Four Manuscripts," *Rockefeller Institute
*Yankee Science in the Making* (Boston, 1948), offers a glimpse
of science in the mid-forties; Charles S. Sydnor, "State
Geological Surveys in the Old South," *American Studies in
Honor of William Kenneth Boyd*, David Kelly Jackson, ed.
(Durham, N.C., 1940), 86-109.

The differing attitudes of intellectuals toward
institutions before and after the Civil War are analyzed in,
George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern In-
tellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965);
Edward Lurie, "Science in American Thought," *Journal of
World History*, VII (1965), 638-665; John L. Thomas, "Romantic
Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly*, XVII
(Winter, 1965), 656-681; and, John William Ward, "The Politics

The following books and essays present general back-
ground information: I. Bernard Cohen, *Science and American
Society in the First Century of the Republic* (Columbus, Ohio,
1961), and, I. B. Cohen, "Some Reflections on the State of
Science in America During the Nineteenth Century," *Proceed-
ings of the National Academy of Sciences*, XLV (May, 1959),

Most of the material dealing specifically with individual members of the Washington intellectual community has already been cited. Unfortunately there are few full-scale biographies and, for the most part, it is necessary to rely on entries in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, eds., Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (11 vols.; New York, 1957-1964); the *Biographical Memoirs* of the National Academy of Sciences (Washington, D.C., 1877- ); obituaries in the publications of the various societies. Other biographical accounts are: J. C. Levenson, *The Mind and Art of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1957); Irving Katz, "Confidant at the Capital: William W. Corcoran's Role in Nineteenth-Century American Politics," *Historian*, XXIX (August, 1967), 546-564; Maxine Tull Boatner, *Voice of the Deaf: A Biography of Edward Miner Gallaudet* (Washington, D.C., 1959); S. N. D. North, *Henry Gannett, President of the National Geographic Society, 1910-1914* (Washington, D.C., 1915); Robert Granville Caldwell,

In addition to those previously noted, the following dissertations deal with relevant aspects of late nineteenth century culture: Burton J. Bledstein, "Cultivation and Custom: The Idea of Liberal Culture in Post-Civil War America" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Princeton University, 1967); Joseph Lancaster Brent, III, "A Study of the Life of Charles Sanders Peirce" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1960); Bert J. Loewenberg, "The Impact of the
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Name: James Kirkpatrick Flack, Jr.

Birth: February 11, 1937; Brooklyn, New York.


Recognitions: Colonial Dames of America Scholarship Award, 1965.
