LITERARY CULTURE IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY GREENVILLE

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In contrast to the cultural history of Charleston before 1860, which is fairly well-known, only a few facts about up-country South Carolina have been considered worthy of inclusion in general histories. These facts concern John Caldwell Calhoun and Andrew Jackson and the "famous" Academy of Moses Waddell, where Calhoun and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, among others, went to school. Greenville comes into the main stream of literary culture only obliquely through Charleston figures like William Gilmore Simms and Joel R. Poinsett and through the writings of John William DeForest, who spent two years here as agent for the Freedmen's Bureau.[1] Charleston was 127 years old when Greenville was incorporated in 1797. Already Charleston had an established culture dominated by the planter aristocracy. The Charleston Library Society had burned down once but still had acquired a holding of 1,200 volumes by the time Greenville established its first library society in 1826.[2]

In 1825 Greenville had a population of about 500. Its principal activities were farming, law, tourism, and trade with drovers.[3] Because of its many low-country tourists, Greenville was partly a social and intellectual extension of Charleston. But as was typical of the Southern backwoods, Greenville's smaller farms, fewer slaves, less wealth, more diversified farming, its provincial mountaineer independence, and its indignation toward the coast for discriminatory use of tax moneys had bred in these backwoods people a more actual democratic life than Charleston had and possibly a great deal more respect for the national union. Thus in one sense Greenville culture was in opposition to that of the low-country.[4]

By the 1820's, this society began to acquire the rudiments of literary culture. Evidence appears first in the establishment of schools in 1819, a newspaper in 1826, and bookstores in 1827 and 1828.[5] E.R. Stokes opened a third bookshop in 1837 and frequently announced his titles in *The Greenville Mountaineer.*[6] Books of history and biography, such as Gibbons' *Rome,* Gillie's *History of Greece,* Hinton's *United States,* and Plutarch's *Lives,* head the list. Standard English authors constantly appear, especially the poetical works of Shakespeare, Pope, and Goldsmith; the Romantic poets, Campbell, Scott, Moore, Burns, and Byron; and the English novelists, Fielding, Austen,

Scott, and Dickens. *Poets of America* is listed in 1840. Quite a few obscure novels appear, but Irving, Cooper, and Simms are the only noted Americans listed. Books on religion and textbooks in oratory, the classics, agriculture, geography, and bookkeeping round out most of the lists.

Much current periodical literature, including *DeBow's Review, Southern Review, Harper's Magazine,* and *The New York Mirror,* was accessible through the local newspaper offices. James B.D. DeBow, a native Charlestonian, had visited Joel R. Poinsett in Greenville to get his advice on founding the *Review* in New Orleans.[7]

As to libraries, Benjamin Franklin Perry, a distinguished local citizen, says that, "In 1823 I do not think there was a citizen in the village who had more than 15 or 20 volumes of books in his house."[8] A few years later, at least one lawyer, Baylis Earle, had about 500 volumes, about half in law and half on miscellaneous subjects. Other lawyers — Waddy Thompson in particular, who succeeded Poinsett as minister to Mexico — must have had a fairly good collection of law books. Poinsett, a regular summer visitor from Charleston in the 1820's and 1830's, had a sizable library and B.F. Perry himself "was an eager buyer and reader of books" and is said to have had a collection of 1700 volumes in 1849.[9]

In 1826 the Ladies Library Society was founded; three years later it had twenty members and 400 volumes. O.H. Wells, editor of the *Greenville Mountaineer,* urged patronage and encouraged wide reading as necessary to a free people. By December 1838, and probably earlier, a men's group had organized a "Greenville Literary Society" and a reading room.[10]

Creative effort began in Greenville about 1824 with the organization of an informal debating club and a formal oratorical group called the Franklin Polemic Society.[11] Both groups encouraged reading and discussion. After the demise of these groups, a Lyceum, organized about 1840, stressed informal debates and invited outside speakers. Discussion topics between 1840 and 1850 included the moral influence of fiction, women's education, the compatibility of married life and literary pursuits, censorship, liberty of the press, the abolition of military schools in South Carolina, the wisdom of the executions of the mutineers aboard the *SOMERS,* advantages of an international copyright law, and the moral value of theatrical amusements. Lectures on topics in literature, religion, history, philosophy, and politics were standard but irregular occurrences.[12] In May 1838,

the town turned out to hear a lecture at fifty cents a head, the proceeds of which went as charity to the Charleston victims of a devastating fire. Charles W. D'Oyley, local citizen and classical scholar, spoke appropriately on the fires that burned Troy and Moscow.[13]

These lectures and clubs for debate reflect vigorous intellectual life for a small backwoods town but not one of outstanding achievements. Meanwhile literary activity had begun. About 1824 John H. Hewitt of New York, a poet, song-writer, and amateur actor, came to Greenville to study law and started a short-lived literary magazine called *Ladies Literary Portfolio.* Hewitt and Perry and others contributed poems, stories, essays, and reviews. Hewitt's poem "The Rival Harps," published in three parts, received praise from a local reviewer who compared its style to that of Thomas Moore. The reviewer regretted that the *Portfolio* had to close after only a few numbers: "It was a little work that pleased our community, more from its light nature than from its solidity."[14] In 1826, Young and Timme founded the *Greenville Republican,* a weekly newspaper, but Hewitt was one of the leading contributors. He composed the "Jubilee Song," which was sung at Cowpens at the Jubilee Celebration of American Independence on July 4, 1826, and which was reprinted in the first number of the *Republican;* and he was the author of several other poems and possibly stories. After helping to get literature started in Greenville, Hewitt left town sometime in the spring of 1827 and moved to Baltimore where, among other activities, including musical composition, he became involved in a literary controversy with Edgar Allan Poe.[15]

After a year and a half, the *Republican* was superseded by the *Mountaineer,* founded by O.H. Wells in 1829. Both the *Republican* and the *Mountaineer* served as journals of opinion and as outlets for local essayists, short story writers, and poets. All the early editors stressed the "literary" quality of the paper by including extracts and poems from various popular journals, and each showed an eagerness to print essays on subjects like states rights, anti-feminism, medicine, the evils of slave trading, literature, law, and agriculture.

During the secession controversy of the 1850's, two new weekly newspapers were founded, and literature in this village of about 1500 people took a more serious turn. Editorials and correspondence in B.F. Perry's *Southern Patriot,* founded in 1851, adopted a polemic tone. Poetry consistently furthered the Union cause and satirized the secessionists. "Peter Pleasant's" *The Beasts — The Birds — The Bats,* for instance, describes the "simpering smile and lowly brow" of the

reformed secessionists and urges people not to trust these "treacherous men" again. And discarding names like "puppies, pigs, and rats,/Let's know them henceforth as — The bats."[16]

In 1854 William P. Price founded the *Southern Enterprise* as an "acceptable family newspaper" to appeal to the ladies and the "mechanics." His editorial policy was sentimental in its stress on home and motherhood, on all that is "chaste and elegant," in urging women's rights but in denouncing tight corsets, and in avoiding all "revolutionary and destructive principles." Price put in a ladies' column, encouraged female poets to contribute, and tried in all ways to "blend the useful with the beautiful and the good." In upholding Southern rights, the *Enterprise* became a foe of Perry's *Southern Patriot*, regarded slavery as "right and proper," and gradually moved from Unionism to Secessionism.[17]

Three of the lady poets of the *Enterprise* were Laura Gwin, a minister's wife; "Ola Sta," a young girl; and "C. de Flori," whose "pen name" when turned around probably stands for Floride Calhoun; for B.F. Perry describes her, on the publication of some of her verses, as a "descendant of South Carolina's great statesman, John C. Calhoun."[18] Mrs. Gwin's work, with its preoccupation with morbid and sentimental themes about the death of young girls, shows the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, but her emphasis is far more moralistic than Poe would have approved of. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gwin is probably the most polished of nineteenth century Greenville poets.

One person, above all others, Benjamin Franklin Perry, stands out as the leading spirit of Greenville antebellum culture and the fulfillment of its potentialities. Perry had one of the best libraries and was one of the most avid readers in the community. He was also the most prolific and substantial writer. He contributed stories and sketches to Hewitt's *Ladies Literary Portfolio* and to other magazines in the state. He contributed essays on political and moral subjects to the *Republican* and *Mountaineer*.[19] A year after Wells founded the *Mountaineer* in 1829, Perry took over as editor and vigorously opposed nullification. In 1834, while a state senator, he wrote a series of sketches of revolutionary incidents in the Greenville and Spartanburg area.

In February 1851 Perry and C.J. Elford formed the *Southern Patriot*, a weekly newspaper dedicated to "Agriculture, Arts, Commerce, Literature, Manufactures, Science, and Politics," but especially advocating unionism over states rights and nullification. Perry wrote longer editorials than he had written twenty years earlier in the *Moun-*

taineer and in them carefully developed his thoughts on Political issues. He reviewed books, wrote sketches of state politicians, and described the founding of various mills in the community. Among his book reviews is an enthusiastic endorsement of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and an equally strong repudiation of Calhoun's theory of concurrent majority as "impractical," "utterly fallacious," and as leading to anarchy.[20]

His letters to his wife, his diary or journal, his editorials and speeches, and his sketches of public men have much literary merit and show a sensitive and noble person with a keen mind. His *Reminiscences of Public Men* (1883) reveal clearly his political ideas. He was a liberal in advocating legal, penal, and educational reforms and internal improvements; he was a rationalist in appealing to common sense, moderation, and sanity in public affairs; he was Unionist in opposing nullification and secession as "madness and folly." Thus the book shows partiality to Unionists like James L. Pettigru, Joel R. Poinsett, Daniel E. Huger, Thomas S. Grimke, and William J. Grayson.

Yet Perry was a Southerner in standing by the South even when he knew the South was wrong and in his refusal to cooperate with the Radicals during Reconstruction. He told Governor John H. Means just after South Carolina seceded in 1860 — in what is perhaps the most famous remark ever made by a Greenvillian — that for thirty years he had been "trying to keep the state from committing so dreadful and suicidal a folly; but all my life-long efforts had proved unavailing, and they were now all going to the devil and I would go with them."

Of Perry's miscellaneous papers and speeches, the most notable are a speech in Greenville in 1865 and one in 1882 at Reidsville Female Academy. The Greenville speech was occasioned by a meeting of Greenvillians to draw up resolutions to present to President Andrew Johnson asking for honorable return of the State into the Union; in it Perry strongly indicts Southern politicians for their false leadership. He charges that secession was totally unjustifiable, a position which he had held all his life; and he berates Greenvillians for their wild extravagance in voting for secession, an act of "madness and folly": "Abandon at once," he says, "all notions of Secession, Nullification and Disunion, determined to live, and to teach your children to live, as true American citizens." The speech at Reidsville urges Southerners to educate the masses, develop industry, and practice habits of hard work to overcome the harsh effects of Reconstruction.

The moving of Furman University to Greenville in the 1850's brought new minds to town and augmented the native trend toward a more serious atmosphere with stress on ethics, scholarship, and literary productivity. Perry welcomed the arrival of Furman University in an editorial on January 27, 1853, for its bringing to Greenville students and men of learning and piety from other states and for its introducing a "liberalizing" influence into the area. The college and town enjoyed a close relation. The Adelphian Society of Furman students invited outside speakers, and Perry and Richard Furman III, a grandson of the "godfather" of Furman University, member of the board of trustees, and pastor for a while of the Baptist Church, seem to have attended several times. Once Perry heard Furman read a poem, "The Pleasures of Piety," and make an address, and Perry published in the *Patriot* at least one of Furman's poems, "Lines Written at the Base of Table Rock."[21]

The arrival of three new faculty members of the newly organized Furman Theological Seminary in 1859 — John A. Broadus, Basil Manly, Jr., and William Williams — to join President James P. Boyce, brought still more learning, trained intelligence, and productive writing ability to Greenville.[22] Besides their youth, energy, zeal, and cosmopolitan refinements, these men brought a large fund of literary experience into the community and assisted Perry and other local men of culture in setting the intellectual tone and dominating the literary life of Greenville for eighteen years. Boyce and Manly had both edited religious journals and had contributed articles themselves. Manly had collaborated with his father in compiling a hymnbook in 1850. Broadus already had published several articles and had shown an urge to write.

Besides sermons, tracts, and editorial work, the so-called "Big Four" of the Seminary produced or began much substantial scholarship in Greenville, including Boyce's *A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine* (1872) and Broadus' famous *A Harmony of the Gospels.* After launching the press of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, which they helped organize in Greenville in 1863 — and which today in Nashville still bears portions of their names as the Broadman Press — Broadus and Manly hoped to found an independent adult religious "Review," but their plans fell through for lack of funds. Boyce, Manly, and Williams were also interested in verse. Boyce translated French poems, Williams composed hymns, and Manly wrote the commencement hymn for the seminary, "Soldiers of Christ, in Truth Arrayed," in addition to doing other poems and humorous verse.

The interest of these men in literature and ideas and in making Greenville a lively intellectual forum is especially apparent in their participation in "The Greenville Literary Club," which they helped start in 1867. The only available records of this club, heretofore known only through casual references, are *The Southern Enterprise,* which was edited during the years of the club by George F. Townes, a club member who regularly announced and reported on the meetings, and a small book containing four years of the club "minutes," from 1871 to 1874, as kept by D. Townsend Smith, who was secretary during these years.[1]

Under the leadership of Broadus, one of the most productive of Greenville citizens, next to Perry, the club was founded early in 1867 and held monthly meetings in the homes of members. Each month a member read a paper and led in a discussion. The first meeting was held on March 21, 1867, in the home of John B. Patrick, teacher in the Furman Preparatory School and later principal of Greenville High School; E.T. Buist, pastor of the Presbyterian Church, read a paper on "The Press." On April 11 the second meeting was held at the home of William Thomas, pastor of the Baptist Church; and G.F. Townes read a paper on "Suffrage." A week later Townes printed an editorial praising the club for its "easy, familiar, conversational way" and for its attracting to its midst some of the most "able minds in the District."

In June the club also inaugurated a program of seven weekly "Summer Lectures" at the Court House, and tickets went on sale at Elford's Bookstore. The lecturers for this first summer were A.M. Shipp, president of Wofford College, who spoke on "The Philosophy of History"; E.T. Buist, who spoke on "Education"; Broadus, on "The Poetry of Mrs. Browning"; Joseph LeCompte of the University of South Carolina faculty, on the "Flora of the Coal Period"; William Hans Campbell, lawyer and judge, on "Macbeth." James Clement Furman, president of Furman University, and J.H. Carlisle appeared on this series, but their lecture topics are not recorded. The scientific lecture by Joseph LeCompte was so well received that by "popular request" he remained a second night and lectured to a large crowd on "Petroleum." Broadus' lecture on Mrs. Browning's poetry was also well attended; Townes thought that it was a "scholarly coverage" of the topic.

Next to scientific subjects, topics on politics, social studies, and ethics appealed to the group, such as "Suffrage," "Social Intercourse," "Divorce," "National Banks," "Requisites of Success," "Human Perfectibility," and "Inequalities of Life." Education, lan-

guage, and oratory were also discussed. Broadus gave a speech on "Language: Its Origin" in March 1868, and one on "The Art of Oratory" in September 1870; C.H. Toy, new member of the seminary, spoke on "The English Language in Reference to Schools and Colleges" in April 1869, and in February 1871 he spoke on "The Bible in the Public Schools"; W.D. Thomas spoke on "Teaching and Teachers" in July 1868; and D.T. Smith read an essay on January 23, 1872, on "Some Considerations Which Render the Study of Classics a Desideratum." Historical subjects came up for discussion several times. W.K. Easley, lawyer in partnership with G.G. Wells, spoke in November 1868 on "Arabic Civilization"; Ellison Capers, later to become Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina, spoke on "Maximilian" in July 1867. The Christian religion was not usually treated directly but was more often discussed in relation to other topics, such as in G.F. Townes' "The Influence of Religion on Civil Government," which produced considerable disagreement; in Toy's "The Koran" and Boyce's "Mormonism," the latter of which Boyce worked up into a lecture for the 1869 series; and in Judson's lecture on the geological implications of the antiquity of man, mentioned earlier.

Besides Judson, the summer lectures for 1868 included J.L. Reynolds of the University of South Carolina; J.P. Thomas, editor of the *Columbia Phoenix*, who spoke on "The Past and Future of South Carolina"; and N.R. Middleton of Charleston, who spoke on "Social Intercourse." In 1869 the lecturers were Boyce, Toy, J.L. Burrows of Richmond, Professor Rivers of the University of South Carolina, and Hicks of Charleston. Toy spoke on "The Koran," Boyce on "Mormonism," and Hicks on a "Plea for the Bible"; other topics are not recorded.

In December 1868 the club set annual dues at $15.00 and made plans for opening a reading room, at the dedication of which in February 1869, at the Court House, J.P. Boyce read a paper on "Perfect Womanhood as Seen in Ideal Portraitures of Eve."

The last meeting took place on December 23, 1874, at Whitsett's house, and the discussion topic was "Josh Billings' Reputation Fifty Years From Now." The demise of the club was perhaps due to changes in interest and leadership. One of its leaders, Manly, had left Greenville in 1870 to become president of Georgetown University. Broadus had spent a good part of 1870 and 1871 in Palestine. And other members, like Boyce, Capers, Easley, and Wells, were equally busy in civic, business, religious, and cultural activities. The town was too small to sustain a club of this sort for very long.[14]

Looking back on the days when this literary club was at the height of its influence, John William DeForest, local agent for the Freedman's Bureau, called this little Southern city the "Athens" of the up-country and the envy of neighboring towns. It had two colleges and a seminary, it had an active literary club, and it had a well-stocked reading room, to which, he says, he "was made welcome and allowed to draw as a member."[25] B.F. Perry was unusually proud of his town in these days. Even though he was apparently not a member of the literary club, he contributed frequent letters to the newspapers, made speeches, wrote sketches, collected his private papers, and often reminisced. In September 1871 he wrote in the *Enterprise* that Greenville is "quite a literary city, with its university, Theological Seminary, Female College, Academies, Schools, and learned professors. There are Literary Clubs, Public Libraries, and almost every one has a fine private library. Some of these private libraries contain three or four thousand volumes of well selected standard works. . . ."

FOOTNOTES

[1]See Robert E. Spiller, et al., ed., *Literary History of the United States*, 3 vols (1948), I, 882, and Jay B. Hubbell, *The South in American Literature; 1670-1900* (1954), pp. 264-267, 268, 413.

[2]Hubbel, pp. 74, 183; *The Greenville Mountaineer*, April 25, 1829.

[3]Lillian A. Kibler, *Benjamin F. Perry: South Carolina Unionist* (1946), pp. 39-44.

[4]See the *Southern Patriot*, Aug. 1, 1851.

[5]S.S. Crittenden, *The Greenville Century Book*, p. 29; *Greenville Republican*, March 24, 1827, February 23, 1828.

[6]*Mountaineer*, September 29, 1837; March 2, 1838; September 27, 1838; January 4, 1839; July 19, 1839; December 11, 1840.

[7]S. Fred Rippy, *Joel R. Poinsett: Versatile American* (1935), pp. 179, 214n; *Southern Patriot*, June 27, 1851.

[8]*Southern Enterprise*, August 30, 1871.

[9]Kibler, pp. 44, 203; Rippy, p. 221; Henry T. Thompson, *Waddy Thompson, Jr.* (1929), pp. 32-33. An unverified report estimates that Thompson's library contained 3,500 volumes. His biographer gives no figures but says that the library was housed in a separate building from Thompson's home, built in 1852, on Paris Mountain; "His library was one of the wonders of the day and attracted men like Bancroft, the great historian, who frequently visited Paris Mountain to consult it. In the library was a portrait gallery, which contained oil paintings of many distinguished Americans and a museum of curios which Thompson had collected . . . in Mexico."

[10]*Mountaineer*, April 25, 1829; December 28, 1838.

[11]Kibler, pp. 46-47.

[12]*Mountaineer*, June 24, 1842; July 8, 1842; October 21, 1842; October 28, 1842; December 9, 1842; December 16, 1842; February 10, 1843; March 1, 1844; February 7, 1845; July 6, 1849; June 10, 1837.

[11]*Ibid.*, May 11, 1838.

[12]*Enterprise and Mountaineer,* August 30, 1871; July 28, 1875; Kibler, pp. 49, 78-79; *Republican,* January 6, 1827.

[13]John H. Hewitt, *Shadows on the Wall* (1877), pp. 41, 43.

[14]*Southern Patriot,* August 30, 1852.

[15]*Southern Enterprise,* May 19, 1854; June 15, 1854; December 1, 1854; March 30, 1855; January 10, 1867; January 1, 1857.

[16]*Southern Enterprise,* June 9, 1869.

[17]Kibler, pp. 49, 54-55, 78.

[18]*Southern Patriot,* June 2, 1851; November 20, 1851; December 11, 1851.

[19]*Ibid.*, June 20, 1851; July 1851.

[20]This paragraph is condensed from *The Arts in Greenville,* pp. 108-111.

[21]This valuable book of "The Literary Club of Greenville, South Carolina, 1871-1874," including the revised "Constitution" of 1873 and the "Roll of Members," is in the possession of Smith's daughter, Mrs. George A. Adams, 38 Mount Vista Avenue, Greenville.

[22]In the notes of Smith's "Minutes," probably dating back to 1871 or 1872, appears a "List of those willing to make essays or read selectiions"; Capers, J.F. Reynolds, D.D.J. Smith, D.T. Smith, Sam Mauldin, Rev. J.C. Hiden, W.M. Wheeler (photographer), Rev. J.F. Webster, Wells, & Rev. W.J. Dargan.

[23]*A Union Officer in Reconstruction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 47.