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Between 1825 and 1850 the young, poor, sparsely populated state of Ohio undertook a monumental civil engineering project that, proportional to its resources, dwarfs any comparable modern undertaking, such as the interstate highways or even the space shuttle. It constructed, largely by means of hand tools and manual labor, through swamps, forests, and rough terrain, a thousand-mile, statewide network of canals requiring hundreds of locks and dozens of reservoirs and aqueducts. As a more or less direct result of the canals, the state’s population tripled, its income increased tenfold, and Ohio became one of the richest states in the union. Yet most of the canals were in full operation for less than sixty years. By 1850, railroads had come to Ohio and the canals were allowed to deteriorate. A few continued to operate into the twentieth century, but now all that remains are scattered ruins, preserved by a few citizens with a sense of history who value these relics of an era of astonishing enterprise.

On February 4, 1825, the 22-year-old state prepared to enter the canal age, with the passage by its legislature of an “Act to provide for the internal improvement of the State of Ohio by navigable canals.” At that time Ohio’s entire population was well under one million; its annual revenue amounted to less than $200,000; thousands of square miles were still virtual wilderness, dotted by meager subsistence farms accessible only over rough, sometimes impassable trails.

The immediate stimulus for Ohio’s Canal Act was the success of the most famous American canal, the Erie, begun in 1817 and carried to completion over many obstacles, both natural and political, with the vigorous support of New York’s governor DeWitt Clinton. When completed in 1825, “Clinton’s Ditch” extended 363 miles from the Hudson River at Albany to Buffalo on Lake Erie, providing cheaper and easier transportation for the settlers of the western territories and the goods they needed and produced. The canal,

For most of the material in this article, and for much of the text as well, The Gamut is indebted to Mrs. Edith McNally, who edits both the Newsletter of the Canal Society of Ohio, and Towpaths, its historical quarterly journal. The photographs are provided courtesy of Miss Cloea Thomas.
which followed the valley of the Mohawk River, circumvented the great barrier to westward expansion, the Appalachian mountain chain, crossed only by the roughest of roads. A canal system across Ohio would in turn link Lake Erie with the Ohio River, and hence with the Mississippi.

Canals had been constructed for navigation as well as for drainage in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, in early China, and later in Holland, Germany, Italy, and France. By 1760 there was an inland navigation system in England and Wales of more than 1,300 miles, used primarily to transport coal. By 1820 the system had grown to almost 3,700 miles.

Transportation by canals, therefore, was not unknown to the leaders of the United States. Thomas Jefferson while ambassador to France had visited the Canal du Midi, in operation since 1681. During his years as a surveyor and participant in military expeditions, George Washington had seen much of the vast and fertile, but often impenetrable, lands of his new country. He was aware of the potential for water transportation routes and actually proposed "to connect the Atlantic Seaboard with the Mississippi Valley by way of either the Patowmack or Kanawha with the James River."

In the nineteenth century, canal boats capable of holding up to 85 tons of cargo were towed by horses or mules in tandem at an average speed of three miles per hour. Though this may seem unimpressive to modern readers, it was a vast improvement over the wagons or pack animals which were the only alternatives for transporting farm products and other goods over areas not traversed by navigable rivers. It might be noted that the importance of whiskey as a "cash crop" in early America was due in part to the relative ease of transporting it, compared with transporting the grain required to make it.

But canals posed engineering problems and were expensive to build and maintain. They had to be filled with water from nearby rivers, streams, or reservoirs. The water supply was conducted to the canals through man-made channels called feeders, which were also sometimes navigable. At the higher elevations, or summits, where streams are normally small or intermittent, it was necessary to construct reservoirs to collect and store water. Canal boats could not go up and down hills, except by slow passage through locks, each of which raised the canal level by a height of six to twelve feet. Sometimes a canal required the excavation of a deep cut through a hill or the construction of an aqueduct over an existing stream.

Benjamin Franklin in 1772 observed, "Rivers are ungovernable things, especially in hilly countries. Canals are quiet and very manageable." In later years, canal boatmen would at times differ with him. Ice jams, floods, and washouts from time to time destroyed boats and drowned animals and boatmen. A number of ballads that originated on the Erie Canal described such dangers — though sometimes with a touch of exaggeration. In "The Raging Canal," for example, the boatmen satirized themselves by describing the perils of their profession in terms more appropriate for sailors on ocean-going vessels:

Come listen to my story,
Ye landsmen, one and all,
And I'll sing to you the dangers
Of that raging Canal;
For I... grave,
For I've been at the mercies
Of the winds and the waves.'

And in the well-known ballad "The Erie Was Arisin'," the greatest catastrophe envisioned is the depletion of the boat's gin supply.

Interest in Canals Begins in Ohio

Ohio's leaders were well aware of the need for a transportation system to bring trade from the East and hard cash for the surplus crops of grain, flour, meat, and whiskey. Before canals and railroads, these products were sent to market by flatboat on the rivers flowing southward into the Ohio River. This uncertain, one-way route then continued to the Mississippi and down to New Orleans.

In 1807 it was proposed to clean and deepen the Cuyahoga and Tuscarawas rivers so that goods could be taken by boats up the Cuyahoga to the portage. There they would be transferred to wagons and taken to boats on the Tuscarawas and thence to the Muskingum and Ohio rivers. The legislature approved the scheme but granted no funds. The Cuyahoga and Muskingum Navigation Lottery was organized with prominent Clevelanders as commissioners to supply $12,000 for the project, but ticket sales were far from brisk; the lottery was called off and the money returned.
The northern terminus of the Ohio Canal, c. 1865: Superior Street Viaduct, Cleveland. At left is the five-story Canal Hotel; at right, a canal boat behind a lake steamer.

Other transportation projects, both federal and state, continued to be proposed, but it was not until 1822 that the Ohio legislature established a Canal Commission and authorized surveys of potential canal routes. Among the Commission members was early Cleveland settler Alfred Kelley, an avid proponent of canals and an energetic public figure, who opened the first law office and the first bank in Cleveland.

The Commission’s report of January 10, 1825, proposed the construction of two canals. The first, later called the Ohio or Ohio and Erie Canal, would follow the Scioto valley north to just south of Columbus, then turn east to the Muskingum and its tributaries and the Tuscarawas, and then north to Lake Erie along either the Cuyahoga or the Black River. The second canal, later known as the Miami, would extend initially from Cincinnati north to Dayton. Both of these routes were provided with an adequate water supply. Earlier, the Commission recommended abandonment of a Scioto-Sandusky route because of inadequate water.

The recommendation that the Miami canal be eventually extended to Lake Erie won political support from the northwestern as well as the populous southwestern part of the state. The Ohio Canal, originating in south central Ohio, with its irregular course north and east, provided for the opening of the widest possible area through which an adequate water supply was available. Estimates of the cost of construction of the Ohio Canal were from $2.8 to $4 million, and for the 66-mile Miami canal, $673,000. On February 4 the legislature authorized the two canals and provided for partial funding through land taxes. The legislature also named a seven-member board of Canal Commissioners and three Canal Fund Commissioners. When Ohio canal system bonds were offered for sale in New York, Eastern investors, mindful of the success of the Erie Canal, were eager to bid. In April, 1825, bankers Rathbone and Lord bid highest on the first bond issue of $400,000, and funds became available for the first year of construction.

Construction Begins

At the May 5, 1825, meeting of the Canal Commissioners, Alfred Kelley and Micajah Williams were designated Acting Commissioners to supervise the actual construction, and the decision was made that the northern section of the Ohio Canal would pass through the Cuyahoga Valley with Cleveland the terminus on Lake Erie. The Canal Act of 1825 gave the Commission the power of eminent domain to acquire land and stone and timber for construction. In case of objections to seizure or price, a board of appraisers would arrange for a compromise.

The first contracts for construction were awarded in June of 1825 for the following sites: 36 miles of canal between Cleveland and Akron, 11 miles at the Licking Summit south of Newark, and a part of the Miami Canal north from the Cincinnati city limits to Middletown. The canal line was divided into numbered sections, each of which could include a level portion, one or more locks, an aqueduct, a culvert, or a bridge. Contractors bid for as many sections as they wished to construct. Experienced contractors and workers came from the Erie Canal, which was nearing completion, and the 1825 bids for the most part were for less than the engineers estimated. This situation did not continue in later years as the Pennsylvania canals competed for contractors and laborers. Farmers whose lands were along the canals also bid and worked on the construction.
As the canal engineers and surveyors had already discovered, the canal line was more often than not through the marshy land along the rivers and the untouched dense forests. The tools for construction were primarily pick and shovel, with the use of animals, often oxen, for dragging trees, stumps, rocks, scrapers, and carts filled with dirt. Wages for laborers began in 1825 at $5 a month with board and daily rations of whiskey. The Acting Commissioners each received $3 a day. Temporary shanties for canal workers provided poor living conditions where epidemics of the fever and ague (malaria), smallpox, and cholera spread rapidly, causing many deaths.

The minimum canal dimensions closely followed those of the Erie Canal: 40 feet wide at the water line, 26 feet wide at the bottom, 4 feet in depth, with the towpath 10 feet wide and 2 to 5 feet above the water line on the river side of the canal. The opposite or berm bank, if required, was 5 feet wide. These dimensions were increased depending upon the lay of the land and the availability of water—the critical requirement of canal construction. These dimensions permitted the towing of a boat of up to 85 tons with a minimum of damage to the canal banks from the disturbance of the water. The canal was wide enough to permit boats to pass. The locks, however, could be used by only one boat at a time.

The locks were constructed of stone on the Ohio Canal, with a pair of wooden gates at either end. They were 90 feet long within the chamber and 15 feet wide. A boat might take from 10 to 15 minutes to pass through a lock. In certain northern sections of the Miami and Erie Canal, locks were constructed of wood initially because stone was unavailable.

On May 30, 1825, Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York arrived in Cleveland by steamboat on Lake Erie from Buffalo. He had been invited by the canal commissioners to participate in the ground-breaking ceremonies for the Ohio Canal on July 4 at the Licking Summit. He was accompanied, according to the Cleveland Herald, by "General Solomon Van Rensselaer, Mr. Conklin and Messrs. Rathbone & Lord (the gentlemen with whom our canal loan was negotiated) and several other citizens of N.Y." Clinton was met with the proper salutes by well-wishers and officials and spent the night at the Mansion House, leaving early the following morning with Alfred Kelley and others from Cleveland for the journey to the Licking Summit, near Newark.

Clinton was welcomed throughout Ohio as he crossed the state for the ground breaking for the Miami Canal July 21, 1825, at Middletown, where he again wielded the ceremonial shovel with Governor Jeremiah Morrow, and again addressed the assembly with glowing tributes to Ohio’s foresight.
progress, and increasing prosperity. Clinton spent the entire month of July in Ohio.

The Ohio Canal

At the close of ground-breaking ceremonies at the Licking Summit and at Middle­town, construction continued at those points, and also in the Cuyahoga Valley, as noted in The Herald, June 10, 1825:

The acting commissioners and engineers are indefatigably engaged in preparing the canal line for contract. From the number of experienced contractors on the ground, it is presumed the 15 miles of canal line, and 300 feet of lockage, which have been advertised, will be let on terms very favorable. It is expected the whole line from the Portage summit to the lake will be put under contract before the first of August.

The section of the Ohio Canal from Cleveland to the Portage Summit at Akron, 38 miles south of Cleveland and 395 feet above the level of Lake Erie, constituted a major engineering and construction effort. Ultimately, 44 locks were required to overcome the difference in elevation. Three aqueducts were required, one to take the canal across Mill Creek, another for Tinkers Creek, and the largest at Peninsula, where the canal crossed from the east to the west bank of the Cuyahoga River. Stone abutments were constructed on either side of the creek or river and one or more stone piers in the stream supported a wooden, water-carrying trough with a towpath at one side. Stone or wood culverts were built to conduct smaller streams beneath the canal. Four feeders furnished the water for this section, which required dams in the Cuyahoga and Little Cuyahoga rivers.

A staircase of 16 locks in 2 1/2 miles was required to raise the canal from the level of the Little Cuyahoga to the summit at Lock 1; this was the greatest concentration of locks on any of Ohio's canals. The Herald of Friday, October 14, 1825, noted one very favorable result of the coming of the Ohio Canal:

The village recently laid out by Messrs. Perkins and Williams, on the Portage Summit, has received the name of Akron. The ground selected for the location of this village is situated on the banks of the Canal, and is highly pleasant and delightful.

The excavation of the Ohio Canal, at the Portage Summit, was commenced in July last, when the greater portion of the land, now occupied as the location of Akron, was covered with standing trees. A considerable distance of the canal at that place is now completed. The village already contains 3 or 4 stores, a great number of groceries, mechanical shops of different kinds, and a number of dwelling houses.

Just as Summit County is named for its location at the top of a watershed, so the name of Akron is topographical, deriving from the Greek word meaning "high place." The growth of the new town was favored by the
German picnic on what is identified as a “powder boat,” on the Ohio Canal between 17-Mile Lock and Superior Street, Cleveland.

fact that boats required some six hours to pass through the locks, giving passengers time to spend money in town.

Construction of the canal was delayed by inclement weather and, in the summer of 1827, by malaria, ever present in the wet conditions of the canal line. Laborers were also drawn away by higher wages paid on the Pennsylvania canals at that time. Financing became more difficult as both Pennsylvania and New York were offering their canal bonds for sale. The canal fund commissioners obtained short-term loans from Ohio banks until difficulties with Eastern financiers had eased, when a total of $1 million in Ohio bonds were sold. In order to sell additional bonds in 1827, however, it was deemed necessary that some part of the Ohio Canal be navigable. The opening of the section between Lake Erie and Akron would provide the initial access to the interior of the state in the north, and the concentration of effort was made there.

The official opening of this section began as the canal boat State of Ohio, constructed in Akron, departed from there on July 3, 1827. The boatload of dignitaries including Governor Allen Trimble, the canal and canal fund commissioners, and many officials and dignitaries, were met in Boston in the Cuyahoga Valley by a second boat, the Allen Trimble. A third boat, the Pioneer, with Cleveland dignitaries aboard, met the other boats on July 4 about six miles up the canal and escorted them to Cleveland. Festivities, complete with flags, decorations, two processions, cannon salutes, bands, dinners with many speeches and toasts, and a ball, commemorated the day.

Less than a week later, The Herald listed the following under the heading, “Ohio Canal Navigation, Port of Cleveland”:

**Arrived**
- Canal Boat, Allen Trimble, Warner (captain), from Boston, cargo, flour and passengers.
- Canal Boat, Enterprise, Wadsworth, from Old Por­tage, cargo flour and oil.
- Canal Boat, Pioneer, Jones, from Akron, cargo, flour, whiskey and passengers.

**Cleared**
- Canal Boat, Enterprise, Wadsworth, for Old Por­tage.
- Canal Boat, Sun, Munson, for Akron, cargo, mer­chandize.
- Canal Boat, Allen Trimble, Warner, for Boston, cargo, iron and corn.
- Canal Boat, Pioneer, Jones, for Akron, cargo, mer­chandize.
- Canal Boat, Allen Trimble, Warner, for Boston, cargo, lumber.
- Canal Boat, Enterprise, Wadsworth, for Old Por­tage, cargo, merchandize.
Canal boats were used as stores. Here is a floating print shop at Bolivar. In the background is an aqueduct carrying the canal over the Tuscarawas River.

With the opening of the Ohio Canal between Cleveland and Akron, investors in New York and Philadelphia took $1.2 million in Ohio bonds to aid the increase in wages and construction expenses, some of which had been caused by washouts of the already or partially completed canal sections. In 1828 the sale of bonds was for the same amount, and the federal government granted 500,000 acres of land along the projected extension of the Miami Canal. The Ohio legislature added to the canal system that year with a one-mile canal from the Miami Canal to the town of Hamilton, and a three-mile canal from the Ohio Canal to the Muskingum River, thus beginning a series of additions to the system which would enlarge it and also increase its cost.

Construction Progress of the Ohio Canal

By mid-summer of 1828, the Ohio Canal was open south of Akron to Massillon. Locks 43 and 44 at the terminus of the Ohio Canal at the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland were not completed until 1829 because of high water in Lake Erie which delayed construction. These locks were larger than the standard size and could even accommodate the lake vessels of the day, which were then able to discharge and take on cargo from the warehouses along the canal basin there.

By way of the Licking Summit, the Ohio Canal passed from the Tuscarawas River valley to that of the Scioto. The three-mile long cut through the ridge between the valleys required five years to complete. This “deep cut” was 34 feet deep near the middle, and almost a million cubic yards of dirt were removed during its construction. This was the most difficult and time-consuming project of the entire Ohio Canal and delayed the opening of the canal south of the Summit.
CANALS OF OHIO, 1827-1913
Numerals indicate canal remains still visible.

The Licking Reservoir (now Buckeye Lake) was constructed to supply part of the water for the canal in that area. Stone from a large Indian mound nearby was taken by wagon on the National Road to Hebron and then by canal boat on a completed part of the canal, to be used to line the banks of the reservoir. 17

The canal was completed down to Newark by July of 1830, but the following year floods did much damage there and in the Scioto Valley, again delaying the passage of through traffic from Cleveland to Chillicothe until October of 1831. In 1832 floods damaged much of the already constructed canal south of Chillicothe and a cholera epidemic in the Scioto Valley in July caused further delay.

The Ohio Canal was opened for traffic to Portsmouth in October of 1832. The actual junction with the Ohio River there was an uncertainty because of periodic flooding of both the Scioto and the Ohio rivers. The total differences in elevation on the 308.14-mile-long Ohio Canal required 146 lift locks. Seven guard locks (locks that permitted canal boats to enter rivers or reservoirs) were also constructed, as well as 14 aqueducts, 203 culverts, 6 dams for water supply, and 8 dams to create slackwater pools (a method of crossing rivers or streams where aqueducts were not constructed). The total cost was $4 million.

The Miami and Erie Canal

The Miami and Erie Canal was a composite of three separately authorized canals: the Miami, authorized in February of 1825, the Miami Extension Canal, authorized in 1831, and the Wabash and Erie, authorized by resolution in February of 1833.

At Middletown, where ground had been broken in 1825 for the Miami Canal, water was let into the canal on July 1, 1827, and by July 4 was deep enough to float the canal packet Samuel Forrer. 18 It was not until early December, however, that the canal was navigable between the canal basin north of Cincinnati to Middletown, and the boats Washington and Clinton executed their official voyages carrying bands, politicians, some of the canal commissioners, engineers, contractors, and townspeople. 19 A more auspicious celebration occurred on March 17, 1828, as the same boats and four others arrived at the basin in Cincinnati, where they were greeted by the salute of an artillery company, a bust of DeWitt Clinton, flags, and cheers. The Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette of March 20, 1828, also reported:

As an indication of a new direction of the business of the city, the Draymen, to the number of 30 or 40, with their horses and drays, on one of which was hoisted a flag, came marching up Main Street in single file to the landing of the boats. The sight was pleasing and contributed much to the interest of the occasion.
As completed in 1828, the Miami Canal from the city limits of Cincinnati to Dayton was 65 miles long, constructed at a cost of $900,000. The ten locks through the city of Cincinnati to the Ohio River were constructed between 1831 and 1834, the delay in completion caused by lack of stone, severe weather conditions, and cholera outbreaks.

Although the extension of the Miami Canal from Dayton to Lake Erie had been provided for by the Internal Improvements Act of 1825, no date had been set for completion. It was not until 1830, when developers from the Sandusky area proposed that the state build a railroad from Dayton to Sandusky rather than extend the Miami Canal, that pressure for its construction increased. The Miami Extension Canal, completed to two miles north of Piqua, was officially opened to navigation with a three-day celebration in Piqua July 4, 5, 6, 1837. General William Henry Harrison and his son were aboard the canal packet Clarion for the festivities and arrived in Troy July 4. After dinner, speeches, and toasts in Troy, they were escorted overland to Piqua for the July 5 celebration there and departed the following day aboard the Clarion on its return trip, accompanied by the canal boat Emigrant of Piqua.

Receipts from tolls rose as traffic increased on the Ohio and the Miami canals. By 1833 there was a surplus of net earnings (above the amount of interest due bondholders). In 1836 the legislature approved four more canal projects, including the extension of the Miami Canal north from Piqua to join the proposed Wabash and Erie Canal from Lake Erie along the Maumee River to the Indiana line and the Wabash River.

North of Piqua the Miami Canal Extension crossed its only summit, the 23-mile Loramie. The “deep cut” of the canal, south of Spencerville, took the canal through the east-west ridge from the St. Marys River watershed to the Auglaize. This cut, 52 feet deep and 6,600 feet long, took almost four years to complete; it was opened in November, 1843.

The first contracts for the Ohio section of the Wabash and Erie Canal were let in 1837, but failures of contractors and depressed economic conditions slowed and often stopped construction. Some sections were completed by 1842, and on July 4, 1843, the entire Wabash and Erie in Ohio, extending to Fort Wayne in Indiana, was opened with the proper ceremonies and celebrations. Water for this line of canal came from dams in the Maumee River and the 2,500 acre Six Mile Creek Reservoir near the Ohio-Indiana border. The remaining 33 miles of the Miami Extension, joining the Wabash and Erie section, was completed in 1845.

The canal from Cincinnati to Toledo, which the legislature on March 14, 1849, des-
ignated as the Miami and Erie Canal, was 249 miles long and had 103 lift locks, 3 guard locks, and 15 aqueducts. The approximate cost was $6.7 million.

Branches and Side Cuts

In addition to the two main north-south canals, numerous branch canals, side cuts, and navigable feeders created an extensive network. Those in the west included the Sidney Feeder, navigable from the Miami and Erie to Port Jefferson in Shelby County; the Warren County Canal, from Middletown to Lebanon, privately organized but eventually financed and completed by the state; and the Cincinnati and Whitewater, connecting with the Whitewater Canal in Indiana.

The Ohio Canal, later the Ohio and Erie, also had a number of side cuts and feeders, one to Zoar, another at Trenton (now Tuscawas). The Walhonding Canal from the basin of the Ohio at Roscoe extended north to a short distance inside Knox County. Through the Dresden side cut shipments on the Ohio Canal could reach the Muskingum River for trans-shipment aboard river steamers there and on to the Ohio River at Marietta. The Ohio City Canal, a short ship channel, was dug in 1837 on the west side of the Cuyahoga River in Ohio City (later a part of Cleveland). 26

The Hocking Canal, completed in 1843 by the state, led from the Ohio Canal at Carroll to Athens and was used to transport coal, salt, flour, and wheat from that region. 27 The Granville feeder supplied additional water to the Ohio Canal north of the Licking Summit and was navigable to Granville in Licking County. The Columbus feeder gave the capital city direct access to the canal at Lockbourne. 26

In 1834 the privately financed 73-mile-long Sandy and Beaver Canal was begun. Completed in 1848, it joined the Ohio Canal at Bolivar and passed through Stark County, a small part of Carroll County, and through Columbiana County to the Ohio River near Glasgow, Pennsylvania. 27 The Sandy and Beaver and the Pennsylvania and Ohio (which was privately organized but constructed with some state funds) were Ohio's links with the canal system of Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania and Ohio, also known as the Mahoning or Cross Cut Canal, constructed between 1835 and 1841, joined the Ohio Canal at Akron and passed through Summit, Portage, Trumbull, and Mahoning counties to Pennsylvania's Beaver and Erie Canal. The Milan Canal was constructed between 1833 and 1839 to take grain-carrying lake ships the eight miles from Lake Erie to Milan, where grain was brought from a wide area for shipment to Eastern markets. 28

Economic Growth Stimulated by Canals

As sections of the canals were constructed, land values soared and cash flowed in from the sale of state bonds. Investors be-
gan to see the benefits of the canals’ water power for industry as well as for transportation. Canal-front land that had sold for $15 an acre now brought $200, historian Walter Havighurst notes, and “in Cincinnati a building lot on the canal basin was sold in 1829 for $18,000. It had been bought for $400 in 1821, and the previous owner had got it a few years earlier for a horse bridle.”

Even before the Ohio Canal was completed, the Sciento Gazette of Chillicothe reported, in November, 1830, that the canal “has reduced the price of salt [paid by consumers in the area] from 87 to 50 cents a bushel, and reduced carriage on every article imported from abroad in a corresponding ratio. It has advanced the price of flour [received by producers in the area] from $3 to $4 per barrel, and wheat from 40 to 65 cents per bushel. It has raised the price of real estate and opened a ready market for it, and has increased the business and hustle of the town fifty per cent.”

The population of Ohio increased from 580,000 in 1820 to almost two million in 1850, near the peak of canal use. At this time the state had slightly less than 1,000 miles of canals, including navigable feeders. Portsmouth was a receiver of a large amount of bulk pork and bacon as well as pork in barrels. At Marietta, salt was the other principal arrival via the Muskingum in addition to wheat and flour. Leaving these ports by canal was “merchandize,” a catch-all term for all types of finished goods such as textiles, shoes, and machinery, and also for tea and coffee. Cleveland was the only “canal port” from which salt (from New York state) was shipped inland by canal.

Shipments of coal to Cleveland had come first from the Tuscarawas valley and later from the Mahoning valley on the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal to the Ohio Canal, then north to Cleveland. These shipments supplied the Lake Erie steamboats which refueled at Cleveland, and also the growing iron industry. Dairy products and wool came via the Pennsylvania and Ohio to Cleveland, and were also sent south on the Ohio Canal and down the Ohio River.

**Canal Travel and Canal Boats**

Travel by passenger packet, while an improvement over travel by stage coach, varied widely in comforts and discomforts. President John Quincy Adams described in his diary in November of 1843 the canal packet *Rob Roy* in which he traveled on the Ohio Canal from Cleveland part of the distance on his way across Ohio to Cincinnati:

> Akron, 2nd. . . . It is divided into six compartments, the first in the bow, with two settee beds, for the ladies, separated by a curtain from a parlor bed-chamber, with an iron stove in the center, and side settees, on which four of us slept, feet to feet; then a bulging stable for four horses, two and two by turns, and a narrow passage, with a side settee for one passenger to sleep on, leading to the third compartment, a dining hall and dormitory for thirty persons; and, lastly a kitchen and cooking apparatus, with sleeping room for cook, steward and crew, and necessary conveniences. So much humanity crowded into such a compass was a trial such as I had never before experienced, and my heart sunk within me when squeezing into this pillow, I reflected that I am to pass three nights and four days on it. . . .
3rd, ... The most uncomfortable part of our navigation is caused by the careless and unskilful steering of the boat into and through the locks, which seem to be numberless, upwards of two hundred of them on the canal. The boat scarcely escapes a heavy thump on entering every one of them. She strikes and grazes against their sides, and staggers along like a stumbling nag.

Horses or mules towed the canal boats harnessed single-file in teams of two, sometimes three animals. In the early years of the canals, boats were operated by canal boat lines, and stables were set up every ten or fifteen miles along the canals, where teams were changed. Animals were frequently replaced because of ill-use, causing unforeseen expenditures by the operators of the canal boat lines. Later, boats would carry a team of animals aboard, while a second team plodded the towpath.

The first canal boats were constructed with one large, enclosed area, divided into compartments for passenger accommodations as described by John Quincy Adams, or into sections for freight. Often whole families lived aboard and the children helped operate the boat. Many long-distance freight boats traveled all day and much of the night, as did passenger packets. Later boats had three cabins, the cabin amidships serving as a stable for the resting team of tow animals. The open space between the cabins was used for bulk cargo such as coal, wood, and stone. A third type of boat had fore and aft cabins only and was used for carrying freight short distances.

All boats on the canals were required to be registered with the collectors of tolls at designated ports. Most boats were operated by their owners. Their sometimes colorful names and home ports were painted on the sterns: Forest City of Cleveland, Neptune of Minerva, Northern Lights of Akron, Romeo of Dover, 10 E C of Chillicothe, Shadow Catcher of Portsmouth, Western Star of Athens.

As the canals were completed, the problems of maintenance began. Floods causing washouts of the canal banks often left boats stranded as the water receded. Locks, aqueducts, and dams could be damaged in many ways. Where problems developed, canal boats passing in either direction would be lined up for miles until repairs were made by the state maintenance boats and crews.

Locks were numbered from the summits of the canals, in both directions. Those who lived on and along the canals, however, bestowed names on many of the locks, basins, and sections of the canals, and often the names were subject to change over the years. Lock 37 in the Cuyahoga Valley is still known locally as “14-Mile Lock,” since it was 14 miles from the canal terminus in Cleveland. It was also called “Alexander’s Lock” for the owner of the mill at that lock and later as “Wilson’s” for the present owners of the mill. Wild Turkey Lock is No. 25 on the Ohio Canal south of...
the Portage Summit. Locks 41, 42, and 43 south of the Licking Summit were known as "Tomlinson’s Three Locks."

End of the Era

By 1850 canal shipping began to decline as the number of railroads with their more reliable service increased. Tolls on canal shipments were lowered to compete, but the year-round and all-weather service of the railroads could not be matched by lowered tolls, which in turn decreased canal income and funds for maintenance and repayment of interest. State taxes repaid the loans since canal revenues could not. The railroads in Ohio, although privately organized and for the most part privately financed, were encouraged by state-granted privileges often aggressively pursued by the railroad interests. The state-owned canals were thereby dealt a double blow: not only by the new, superior technology but by the state’s encouragement of their rivals. The canals, having achieved the aims of the state’s policy of opening the state to outside markets and increasing the population, by 1852 were deemed no longer worthy of support.

In time many miles of canals were sold or abandoned to railroads and to cities which had prospered by reason of the canal. Railroad interests acquired the bed of the Ohio Canal in Cleveland. Main Street in Akron was the route of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal near its junction with the Ohio, and much of the Anthony Wayne Parkway (U.S. 24) is on the bed of the Miami and Erie near Toledo, as is Central Parkway in Dayton. Railroad lines used many sections of the Pennsylvania and Ohio.

In 1848, the year of completion of the last canal in Ohio (the Sandy and Beaver), the state’s first railroad line was also completed—ironically, along a route earlier rejected by the canal planners, between Dayton and Sandusky. By the end of the year, 307 miles of railroad were in operation; by 1852, 1,080 miles, and by 1860, 3,034 miles.

The Wabash and Erie, Milan, Cincinnati and Whitewater, and Warren County canals were among the first to be closed or abandoned. The Pennsylvania and Ohio, Sandy and Beaver, and Hocking closed between 1877 and 1894. Lack of maintenance during a ten-year lease granted by the legislature in 1867 to private operators did nothing to halt the decline of the state-owned canals. Between 1905 and 1909, however, major repairs and reconstruction of locks, dams, canal beds, culverts, and aqueducts were carried out by the state on the Ohio and Miami and Erie canals, though there was little traffic at that time. The locks and dams on the Muskingum were improved after 1886, when ceded to the
federal government, to permit use by larger steamboats from the Ohio River. The Muskingum Improvement was returned to the state of Ohio in 1958, and the locks are now operated by the state for pleasure boating.

**Canal Remains Today**

The devastating spring flood of 1913, which caused much damage throughout the state, was the final blow to the canal system. Only sections leasing canal water for industrial use were repaired. Today, on the Ohio and Erie south of Cleveland, U.S. Steel leases canal water for operations at the former American Steel and Wire facility in Cuyahoga Heights. Part of this eleven-mile section, from Rockside Road south, is within the boundaries of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area. A part of the dry canal bed in Summit County is also within park boundaries.

On the Portage Summit in Akron, a twelve-mile section of the canal is filled with water for industrial use. South of downtown Akron, a new housing development in Opportunity Park incorporates the canal into its landscaping.

On the water-filled canal at Canal Fulton in Stark County the authentic replica canal boat *St. Helena II* is towed serenely to Lock 4, which has recently been made operational in order to demonstrate to passengers the actual locking procedure. Near Roscoe Village, a restored canal-era town in Coshocton County, the replica canal boat *Monticello II* travels a restored section of the Ohio Canal. The “Triple Locks” of the Walhonding Canal are well-preserved canal site near Roscoe.

The Portage Lakes near Akron and Buckeye Lake were constructed as reservoirs for the Ohio Canal. There are canal lock remnants at Lockville and Lockbourne, a five-mile section of water-filled canal near Circleville, and “three locks” beside the road of that name south of Chillicothe. When water in the Scioto and Ohio rivers is low, the last lock on the Ohio Canal is visible.

On the Miami and Erie south of Toledo, the Metropark system has preserved a number of locks at Side Cut Metropark. A lock can be seen at Independence Park in Defiance County, a section of water-filled canal in the Delphos area, and the “deep cut” of the Miami and Erie in a park near Spencerville. The reservoirs of the Miami and Erie, Grand Lake St. Marys, Lewistown (now Indian Lake), and Loramie (now Lake Loramie) are all state parks.

In the Piqua area the canal boat *Gen'l Harrison* is operated by The Ohio Historical Society on a section of the Miami and Erie, and not far north is the site of Locks 1 through 5 at Lockington. There is a twin-arch culvert at Troy, Excello Lock Park in Middletown and a reconstructed lock at Carillon Park in Dayton.

Very little can be found of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal. On the Sandy and Beaver, there is a lock and dam at Magnolia and a canal-era mill. Guilford Lake, now a state part, was a canal reservoir, and there are other locks on the way to Beaver Creek State Park, which has a restored canal-era mill and a lock.

These are some of the more accessible canal sites. The Canal Society of Ohio, a non-profit organization operated by volunteer staff, twice each year has sponsored tours for members and other interested persons to some of the less well known sections of Ohio’s canals. The Society preserves canal information, photographs, maps, drawings, publications, and manuscripts in its archives at Bierce Library of the University of Akron, and it also holds the opportunity to copy such materials for the archives. The Society publishes a historical quarterly, *Towpaths*, and a newsletter of current canal and Society information.

The canal sites provide an appealing glimpse into an era that was in many ways simpler, perhaps cruder than ours, yet one whose energy and optimism inspire admiration. These relics of earlier days teach us something of how we have gotten where we are; like all history, they give us a perspective on our own lives.
NOTES

'Much of the factual material for this article, unless otherwise specifically attributed, has been derived from John Kilbourne, *Public Documents Concerning the Ohio Canals* (Columbus, 1828), and Harry N. Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861* (Athens, Ohio: The Ohio University Press, 1969). These sources are gratefully acknowledged.


"Ohio’s first senator, Thomas Worthington, supported the 1808 Gallatin Report of projected roads and canals calling for a system of internal improvements in the United States. No federal funds were appropriated, and the states postponed the projects with the beginning of the War of 1812. (Richard C. Waugh, Jr., "Canal Development in Early America, Part I," *The Best from American Canals*, pp. 3-4).

"Ethan Allen Brown, who succeeded Thomas Worthington as governor of Ohio in 1818, understood the need for a canal between Lake Erie and the Ohio River and worked diligently for it with his friends, pressing for bills to accomplish the needed studies and surveys.

"A bill passed on January 31, 1822, established a seven-member Canal Commission and provided for the hiring of an engineer to conduct surveys. Those named to the Commission were all active in Ohio politics: Cleveland’s Alfred Kelley; Ethan Allen Brown, recently elected to the U.S. Senate; former governor Thomas Worthington from Chillicothe; Ebenezer Buckingham from the Zanesville area; Benjamin Tappan of Steubenville; Isaac Minor of Madison County in west central Ohio; and Jeremiah Morrow of Warren County.

The engineer, James Geddes, who had worked on the Erie Canal, examined some 900 miles of Ohio country in eight months, gauging streams and rivers for water supply, calculating how many locks would be required for the elevations and how many feeders to supply water, dams, artificial cuts, and aqueducts, and figuring the costs as well as mapping the routes and summits. Acting on Geddes’s reports and the first report of the Canal Commissioners, on January 27, 1823, the legislature agreed to further surveys; Micajah T. Williams of Cincinnati was appointed to the Commission to succeed Jeremiah Morrow, recently elected governor (Act of Jan. 21, 1823). Since Ohio lacked experienced engineers, the Committee sent its own members Kelley and Williams to the Erie Canal to observe first-hand the construction methods and costs (Second Annual Report of Board of Canal Commissioners, Jan. 21, 1824).


"The Canal Commissioners were Thomas Worthington, Benjamin Tappan, Nathaniel Beasley, Isaac Minor, Alfred Kelley, Micajah Williams, and a new member, John Johnston of Piqua; the Canal Fund Commissioners were Ethan Allen Brown, Ebenezer Buckingham, and Allen Trimble.

"Kilbourne, p. 174; Scheiber, pp. 29-30, 37-39. The principal on the canal debt was to be paid from a sinking fund accumulated from a special state canal tax on land and by allocation of other revenues. Interest was expected to be paid from canal tolls and sale of water power created by the canal locks.


"The Herald, Cleveland, June 17 and July 1, 1825.

"The Herald, Cleveland, July 6, 1827.

*Western Star and Lebanon Gazette*, July 7, 1827.

*Cincinnati Chronicle*, Dec. 1, 8, 1827.


*Cincinnati Whig*, July 12, 1837; *Piqua Courier and Enquirer*, July 8, 1837.

For this the state again borrowed money and also received funds from the sale of federal lands. Other projects approved by the legislature in 1836 included the improvement of the Muskingum River for use by steamboats by means of a series of dams and locks constructed in the river; construction of the Walhonding Canal from the Ohio Canal at Coshocton upstream along the Walhonding River; and construction of the Hocking Valley (or Hocking) Canal from the Ohio Canal at Carroll to Athens along the Hocking River. Three smaller transportation expenditures approved that year were the continuation of the Warren County Canal, the Milan Canal, and the Mad River and Lake Erie Railroad.

*The Miami Extension Canal*, *Towpaths*, Sesquicentennial Issue, 9, No. 2 (1975), 22. The Miami Canal followed the Mill Creek valley north of Cincinnati and then the Great Miami River valley. The Extension canal continued in the Great Miami River valley. Water was supplied for both sections from the Mad and Great Miami rivers by dams and feeders. In the area of the Loramie Summit three reservoirs were constructed: Lewistown (Indian Lake), Loramie, and Mercer County (Grand Lake St. Marys), with necessary feeders to the canal. Grand Lake St. Marys eventually covered 17,000 acres, and small steamers traveled on it to Celina on its northwestern bank. With the discovery of oil and gas in the lake in the 1890s, a number of derricks sprouted above the water line. (Frank W. Trevorrow, "The Water Supply of Ohio's Canals," *Ohio's Canals*, [Privately printed, 1973], p. 122).

While the Ohio canals were of uniform dimensions for the most part, the Miami and Erie was increased in depth to 5 feet, 50 feet wide at the water line, and 36 feet at the bottom for the Miami Extension; lock size was unchanged. The Canal from the junction with the Wabash and Erie to Lake Erie was 6 feet deep, 60 feet at the water line, and 46 at the bottom.

*Kennedy, pp. 289-90.*

*Board of Public Works, 7th Annual Report, 1844.*

*Canal Commissioners, 11th Annual Report, 1833.*


*Havighurst, pp. 82, 86.*

*Quoted by Waggoner, p. 216.

*Havighurst, p. 86.*

Almost every occupation and region has its own music which expresses people's circumstances and concerns, both to themselves and to outsiders. Generally such music lives apart from feeble survival in libraries and archives only as long as these people exist. Canalers have long since all but vanished from Ohio, but some of their music is preserved through the efforts of Captain Pearl R. Nye, the "last of the Canal Boat Captains." Like the Ohio canals he loved, Captain Nye was a conduit through which much of the popular culture of the late nineteenth century passed, and the songs he learned from others and wrote himself represent many of the regions and traditions through which the canal passed.

Pearl R. Nye was born on a canal boat, the "Reform," docked at the Upper Paine Street Bridge in Chillicothe on February 5, 1872, the fifteenth of the eighteen children of Captain and Mrs. William Nye; and he remained on the canal until it closed in 1913. Captain William Nye provided for all nine of his sons, and at one time there were nine canal boats captained by Nyes on the Ohio and Erie. Captain Pearl R. Nye never seems to have found any occupation that suited him after the canals closed, but he hoped to make a place for himself as the representative, historian, and musical spokesman of the canalers. He built his house, Camp Charming, a log cabin in the shape of a canal boat, on the top of an abandoned lock near Roscoe, and from here he wrote the Ohio Historical Society. Ohio State University, the Library of Congress, and, probably, anyone else he could think of who might be interested in his songs and recollections of the canal.

John and Alan Lomax, hearing of Captain Nye through the Ohio Historical Society, recorded him in 1937 during one of their collecting trips for the Library of Congress; and he was recorded again in 1938 by Ivan Walton and in 1945 by Miss Edith Keller and Miss Cloea Thomas. Miss Keller, Music Supervisor of Elementary and Secondary Education in Ohio, and Miss Thomas, a faculty member of the Ohio State University School of Music, wanted music illustrating Ohio history for use in schools, and several curriculum guides containing songs gathered from Captain Nye were developed by Miss Thomas and Miss Keller. Miss Thomas also edited a book of his songs, Scenes and Songs of the Ohio-Erie Canal, and a few of his songs have found their way into print or recordings over the years.

Alan Lomax also arranged for Captain Nye to sing in Washington, D.C., at the National Folk Festival in 1938 and 1942. This began a relatively brief but impressive singing career for the Captain: he sang in Madison Square Garden, in Constitution Hall in Philadelphia, and in Cleveland at the National Folk Festival in 1946. Ill health eventually forced him to leave Camp Charming and move to a nursing home in Akron, and he died on January 4, 1950, in Hawthornden State Hospital. He never did find anyone to transcribe and edit all his songs and recollections.

Song transcriptions by Cloea Thomas; photographs courtesy of Cloea Thomas.
nor did he ever write the history of the Ohio and Erie Canal or the dictionary of canaller's slang that he planned. Nevertheless, he left a marvelous legacy of material in the form of letters, song manuscripts, photographs, and recordings, and from this legacy we can learn a great deal about the Ohio canals and about life in Ohio during the late nineteenth century.

Captain Nye's repertoire of songs included ballads he learned from his parents (such as versions of The Cruel Ship's Carpenter, The Baffled Knight, William Reilly, The Farmer's Cursed Wife, and many others); topical ballads of American History (such as the War of 1812 broadsides Perry's Victory and The Death of Bird and the Civil War ballad The Cumberland's Crew); white and black gospel songs and hymns; songs from minstrel shows; white and black dance tunes; and popular songs from the late nineteenth century. He not only knew a huge number of popular and traditional songs and ballads, but he also wrote poetry and songs and adapted old songs by localizing them to the canal or changing key words to suit his purposes.

This remarkable range of material is in a sense a reflection of the social position and function of the canals and the canallers. Not only did the canals link the North and South in Ohio, but canal boats often served as floating dance halls and stages for performances at various stops along their way. This not only meant that canallers in Ohio traveled between the two musical cultures, North and South, but that canallers given to performance had different audiences to please. And Captain Nye not only performed for different audiences, he learned from different traditional performers along the canal. He and his mother would learn songs together, particularly gospel songs and hymns. Hearing of a camp meeting or revival, either black or white, or coming across a song that they liked, each would learn alternate verses as the song was sung, thus capturing a whole song without having to hear it more than once—a clever and effective scheme in the days before recording.

But canallers not only performed for and learned from others, they sang for themselves, and, particularly in Captain Nye's case, they sang so that others would know who and what they were. The following songs are representative of Captain Nye's canal songs. They do not indicate the extremely broad variety of material just mentioned, but they do give a reasonable reflection of how he felt about the canals, and how he wanted others to remember them.

Captain Nye, “taken on the top of the Congressional Library in Washington, with a lumberjack from Wisconsin, 1938.”
We're Going to Pump Out Lake Erie

This song revolves around a difficult problem of canal engineering: keeping the canal filled with water at its higher points during times of drought. Buckeye Lake at Licking Summit was dug and Portage Lakes enlarged to supply the Ohio and Erie Canal. But even with such reservoirs and feeder canals from lakes and rivers, the levels sometimes got too low to float a canal boat.

The change of meter from 6/8 to 2/4 is characteristic of many old ballads and hymns, and Captain Nye uses it very effectively here. In a note to this song Captain Nye says it was “Written in winter of 1887 when makin’ locks, fitting locks.” This would mean he wrote it when he was fifteen.

1. The season is dry — old timer
   Yes, and water won’t run up hill,
   So let us do our best, and forget the rest, —
   O, and keep our levels filled.

   **Chorus:**
   Yes, we’re going to pump out Lake Erie,
   We’re going to begin next June,
   And when we get done, you may tell by the sun,
   There’ll be whiskers on the moon.

   For the canal needs water to keep things afloat;
   And I never will put wheels on my canal boat;
   For I love the old towpath and all things that float,
   So you cannot make a wagon of my grand old boat!

2. The Portage Lakes often fail us,
   And often our Summit’s low,
   O, it is then for rain we would have to wait, —
   For loaded we cannot go.

   **Chorus:**
   We will watch our gates and paddles,
   Yes, the tumbles and wasteways too;
   They will help us along with their merry song,
   And will see that we get through.

3. The season is dry — old timer
   Yes, and water won’t run up hill,
   So let us do our best, and forget the rest, —
   O, and keep our levels filled.

   **Chorus:**
   Yes, we’re going to pump out Lake Erie,
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   For the canal needs water to keep things afloat;
   And I never will put wheels on my canal boat;
   For I love the old towpath and all things that float,
   So you cannot make a wagon of my grand old boat!
Take a Trip on the Canal If You Want to Have Fun

Captain Nye claimed he wrote this song:

I wrote it — over 50 years ago and it became popular on the Ohio and Erie Canal, The Miami and Ohio, and the Erie Canal (of New York State), and the Great Lakes — for my brothers — in summer used to work on the above for a change and heard it there. Seemed the 1st and 18th verses and the chorus was most popular."

Most traditional folk songs are anonymous, and it is unusual to know who wrote them. This song has indeed been widely collected, and, if Captain Nye did write it, rather than adapting an already existing tune and lyrics, we can add his name to that short list of people whom we can identify as having added songs to the Anglo-American tradition.

1. Whenever you eat them how strangely you feel.
   Her stews are the limit, O yes, all her chow,
   We put it away, but I won't tell you how.

2. Clear the line, hit the deadeye, open town-path gate,
   She's so fond of biscuits, she makes them like rocks,
   But the work in the cabins she really did hate.
   And woe unto you if you fall in the locks,
   We all got disgusted, the captain would snort,
   They'd do for a cannon, with them we'd kill snakes.
   Her pies are like leather, you need teeth of steel

3. The water pail often you know would get dry,
   In the food you could taste it, the captain would "rare"
   She sure had an answer for all that was said
   And if you would cross her, she'd try to raise the dead.
   O, wonders were many, you'd laugh, cry or run.
   Take a trip on the Canal if you want to have fun.

4. Down stream at the locks, she would throw off the line,
   Boat the bowsman and snub, spring a paddle divine,
   Clear the line, hit the deadeye, open town-path gate.
   But the work in the cabins she really did hate.
   We all got disgusted, the captain would snort,
   Her ways were so winning, whatever may come.
   Take a trip on the canal if you want to have fun.

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   We all got disgusted, the captain would snort,
   Her ways were so winning, whatever may come.
   Take a trip on the canal if you want to have fun.
5.
We all have our trouble, but this rule we keep
In: "Move about easy, the cook is asleep."
We lock down or up with the greatest of care —
And know what is coming if she gets a scare.
A great dryland sailor and smokes like a stove,
The pipe drips so freely — and so does her nose.
The "dayboats" — she wakes, "packets" — "Put on more
They're glad to escape, whether up or down stream.

6.
The locktenders hide when we pull in the locks,
Collectors are out, or will play with their clocks,
Troupes use their bands but it all seems in vain,
The passengers smile, but they don't say a word,
Take a trip on the Canal if you want to have fun.

7.
She knew just what deadeyes to put the line on,
Could fit locks, and drive, sing the steersman a song.
When we pass a boat or lay up for the night,
She would sit on the deck box, the carrel in the hatch
Anything but the cook-room, she was hard to match;
And I have been round, met the poor and the rich.
Twas a life gay and easy whatever may come,
And you'll know that their life is an ocean of fun!

8.
She would go some, she would go some,
When we passed a lock, she would go some,
We had mascots, a source of delight,
We were up, rough and ready, would meet anything,
No place like the Canal
If you want to have fun!

9.
When we pass a boat or lay up for the night,
She would go some, she would go some,
We had mascots, a source of delight,
We were up, rough and ready, would meet anything,
No place like the Canal
If you want to have fun!

10.
We had a few mascots, a source of delight,
At the locks, where our chickens with others would fight
The pigs, they would squeal, rabbits up quick and get,
The pigeons would coo, show their colors and grit.
All along we were Welcome, as showers in spring.
And at night we had music would play, yodel, sing,
My mind travels back to the Ditch when 'twas young:
No place in the world had such an Ocean of Fun!

11.
Our mules, they were peppy, you should see them prance
The Hard-Water Step, they would gracefully dance,
They knew, did their stuff, "O, I say they were trained,
The voice of the driver, to them — a refrain
Our leader was wise, for he knew many things.
He kept up the line, while the cook, she would sing.
So all worked together whatever may come,
Take a trip on the Canal if you want to have fun!

24.

RICHARD H. SWAIN
Down the River

The Ohio and Erie Canal joined the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, and canal boats were forced to make their way among lake schooners and steamers. Mules and horses could not be used to pull the canal boats in the Cuyahoga, and tug boats had to be used. This must have been nerve-wracking for the canallers, whose boats were much lower to the water and smaller than the lake boats. Collisions were not infrequent, and boats might sink or break the tow and run aground or drift helplessly out into Lake Erie. Captain Nye also mentions this problem in verse 72 of "The Old Canal."

1. I towed into Cleveland about twelve o'clock
And the first man I met was the Collector on the dock,
He looked at me, then at my team—Oh boy, he made me shiver.
Then said, "My bully driver, you must go down the river."
Says he, "The tug will take you, so come now, cut out the sass,
I'll keep your mules here safely, boy, oft turn them out to grass."

The river gets my nerve, and there, there I cannot sleep,
The schooners, barges, tugs are careless and on us they creep;
Then squeeze and crush us, then we sink, our all is lost, that river—
We love our boat, you know we do, and that is why I shiver.
A tug will run wide open, then those waves,—what can we do?
And often boats they ruin, sink, oh! the story is not new!
"Fish House", "Whiskey Island", "Slips", yes—and that old river bed,
They make me have the "jimmies" and sometimes wish I were dead.

2. There's "Grasselies Chemical", yes and "Acid Works"—
"The Pump"—other places that do not make me shirk,
"The Dog Pond", "Paper Mills" are near, but how I dread that river—
There's nothing safe,—you know it and that is why I shiver.
You know whatever happens there, you will be recompensed,—
But oh! our stuff is precious, yes, can't be bought with dollars—cents,
He said, "Your load is needed, boy, and everything is right,
The craft will all respect you when they see your lights at night."

Rhodes" and "Biddler's Slip" has lumber waiting now for you,
So don't be scared, you've never died, be brave, why should you shiver?
I know all you've said is true, quite lively is the river.
My fears were soon disposed of, I was willing then to go
Anywhere he sent us,—where'er our mules or tug can tow—
I learned to love the rivers, for we oft their course would wend.
We worked in perfect harmony and soon were best of friends.
The Old Skipper

This song shows another side of Captain’s Nye’s repertoire: fiddle tunes. This song contains verses which are variation on the words which are often added by fiddlers to the dance music they play. For example verses 9 and 10 are variations of the well-known

*Jack of Diamonds, Jack of Diamonds I know you of old
You’ve robbed my poor pockets of silver and gold*

and

*I’ve gambled in England, I’ve gambled in Spain
I’m going to Georgia to play my last game.*

Verses like these are “floating verses” similar to those which comprise many blues lyrics, and turn up again and again in different songs. In this case they floated up the canal to Captain Nye, and he rewrote them in his characteristic didactic and moralizing style.

The tune is also a variant of a tune used for the ballad “The Waggoner’s Lad.” Captain Nye calls the tune “The Whiskey Waltz.” He comments that this song “seems to be a favorite at the ‘Folk Festival’ for I have sung it at Washington, Madison Square Gardens, and Philadelphia. Five times in all.”

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1. I’m an old canal boat skipper, with black snake in hand
So fare you well, Darling, my mules will not stand.
The line’s on the dead-eye, for Portsmouth I’m bound, and I love the old towpath, best place I have found.

2. I’ve been on the Lakes and the rivers, O boy,
But my dear Silver Ribbon is the place I enjoy,
’Tis a life oh so matchless, each day new things born,
And I love to boat wheat and the big yellow corn.

3. There’s tanbark and hooppoles, wet goods, merchandise,
Clay, coal, brick and lumber, cordwood, stone and ice.
Yes, all that was needed we boated, dear pal; Best times of our lives we had on the Canal.

4. I will not be a rover for I love my “boat”.
I am happy, contented; yet work, dream and float.
My mules are not hungry, they’re lively and gay
The “plank is pulled in,” we are off on our way.

5. On the deck, or the Towpath, I whistle and sing
To the soft roaring rivers or rippling of springs.
My rapture is boundless; a taste from on high,
And dear mother nature, — with kind dancing eyes.

6. Canal girls are novel, O alert and so gay
Graceful and modest, what games they play
In a world of their own they are happy, so free,
And whatever comes, “It’s a canal girl for me.”

7. I’m living in clover on this old canal,
The girls are so pretty; I love just one gal;
I shot her a bird, with a wing of true blue,
We drift, float along, as real lovers should do.

8. We never get weary of this matchless life,
Our hearts are as feathers, and blessings so rife,
With needs, want supplied we are always at home,
And those that don’t like it can leave us alone.

9. Yes, all kinds of people, I meet now and then,
But I am no Angel, yet would be a man;
For Spades, Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, — I know them of old,
They robbed my poor pockets of silver and gold.

10. I’ve played for a nickel, I’ve played for a dime —
I’ve won all the money and mixed it with mine.
I’ve gambled in Cleveland, in Portsmouth the same,
But gambling don’t pay for you lose it again.

11. I don’t want your whisky, you’re no friend of mine;
’Twould kill my poor body and poison my mind.
I’d wake in the morning, yes stagger and reel,
Have hiccoughs a plenty, how bad I would feel.
My toes may be plenty, or maybe they’re few
I’m harmless and peaceful — and hope you are too.
But don’t interfere with my home, business, play;
And if you don’t like me, keep out of my way.

Some are born on the farm, the plantation, the ranch,
In poverty’s vale but please give them a change.
The heart is a garden that needs special care;
And crops rich and golden may often grow there.

I left go down “Hocking” where miners live high
And where’er you turn you can hear babies cry.
They live close to nature, they’re happy so kind
And all bid us welcome, they’re friends we do find.

I’m ragged, (I’m ragged, I’m ragged I know) but happy
and free don’t you know?
But it’s nobody’s business how ragged I go;
I eat when I’m hungry and drink when I’m dry
If nobody kills me, “I’ll live till I die.”

Log cabins were many along on each side.
The fiddle and banjo you’d hear as we glide;
They’d sing; oft we’d join them along on our run;
They’d answer in laughter for all it was fun.

The city, town, country gals sure make us laugh;
They smile, wink and flirt with us on the Towpath;
They’re always on guard, will not let us alone—
And fall for a Canaler like a dog for a bone!

When I get married I’ll make life a song,
And if I must travel, “Wife” goes along,
I know I shall need her to keep on the track,
For oft I am “itchy” — then she’ll scratch my back.

Now look here, my darling, there are others you know,
Who smile at us boatmen wherever we go,
Yes, in every port there are beautiful gals,
Who welcome us “skippers” from the gay old canal.

My bed is not feathers, soft cotton, no, no;
But I love my old fiddle, mouth organ, banjo,
I live my own life, ‘tis the best I can do,
And if you don’t love me, I’ll never harm you.

She said, “Now here, skipper, my heart you have won,
We’ll settle it all and with you I will run.
There will be no questions, my love it is true,
And the same you have told me, I’m shipping with you.”

We embraced, how I kissed her! It seemed all was vain,
This was my last effort for parting was pain;
I said, “Well goodbye, dear”, she cried, “Wait for me,”
I can ne’er love another; you’re mine, mine shall be.”

I kicked up my heels, and I cried out “Ha, ha!”
I’m a proud jolly boatman with many in-laws.
“You’re an old up-north skipper, you’re clever and wild,”
This pretty young maiden said, cute, with a smile.

“I never will leave you, I’ll never complain,”
She said, kissed my hands, yes, again and again;
“I’ll go where you go, and with you I will dwell,
And whatever comes, to you we shall be well.”

The fun has just started, now we will go home,
And put things in order, have some of our own,
I like a gay time, but I love just one Gal,
She’s the pride of my heart and the gay Old Canal.
The Old Canal

Captain Nye called this his "masterpiece." It describes, among other things, the entire trip up the Ohio and Erie Canal from Portsmouth on the Ohio River to Cleveland. The sentimental and didactic verses are characteristic of a great deal of late nineteenth century popular poetry and of most of the songs Captain Nye wrote. Although excerpts have appeared in *Scenes and Songs of the Ohio-Erie Canal* and *Towpaths*, the journal of the Canal Society of Ohio, this is the largest selection that has appeared in print. The tune is a variation of "The Little Log Cabin in the Lane," or "The Little Sod Shanty on My Claim," both popular songs of the mid-nineteenth century. The punctuation (including the excessive quotation marks) and spelling are Captain Nye's; the bracketed comments are mine — R.S.

There's a little "Silver Ribbon" runs across the Buckeye State,
'Tis the dearest place of all this earth to me,
For upon its placid surface, I was born some years ago
And its beauty, grandeur always do I see.
Cleveland is the northern end and Portsmouth is the south,
While its side cuts they are many, many, Pal.
And where'er we went we took along our "Home, Sweet Home" you know,
In those balmy days upon "The Old Canal."

Chorus

There's naught in all creation that to this can compare.
Good times, rounds of pleasure, were our lot, DEAR PAL.
No other people e'er were known to have such times as we—
In those balmy days upon "The Old Canal."

2.

There everybody had good times, a "Picnic" all the while—
And the scenery was entrancing all the day;
For 'twas ever new, inspiring, unexcelled, you ne'er forgot—
There was no monotony along the way.
The rivers they would smile and flirt—and such antics, O, they cut!
While the "tumbles," "dams," "locks," they would laugh and roar.
Everybody was "Eureka," not a care dare show his face—
In those dear old "balmy days" of yore.

1.

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And the scenery was entrancing all the day;
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There was no monotony along the way.
The rivers they would smile and flirt—and such antics, O, they cut!
While the "tumbles," "dams," "locks," they would laugh and roar.
Everybody was "Eureka," not a care dare show his face—
In those dear old "balmy days" of yore.
At night, when "running," we would gather on the "deck" for fun —
Stories, songs and music always in demand.
For we were "night hawks," more or less; 'twas in the game you know,
We were "lords" of all we saw or could command.
'Twas "Hello Cap!" on every side and smiles all down the line,
For the "canalers" brought their wealth and fame, dear Pal!
And there are all the "Old Timers" I know would fain return
To those "Balmy Days" upon the "Old Canal."

Portsmouth was a junction with the Ohio River craft,
Up and down its silvery waters oft we'd go,
But our "levels" were most beautiful, there I was so content,

Famous "bridges," "basins," "pots," — I loved them so.
"Union Mills," "Dry Run," "Ghost Orchard," "Powder Mills," "Brush Creek"
Lucasville, Bear Creek and Piketon — by the way,
Sunfish, Jasper, Cutler's, Sam Strutt, McGowen's Burkheimer's;
Dewey's, Jasper Basin, — great when in their day.

"Smilie Cutler's," "Trinkler's Bridge" and "Pee-Pee Locks" were fine,
Waverly and Aqueduct come fresh to mind —
The Lock and Dillard's Crooked Creek, Emet's Tavern Dry Dock Mills,
Stabler's Store, — and all were busy, you would find!
On every side was work and fun, so happy there were we!
Oh, no tongue can tell the half of it, Dear Pal;
For "good times" there were everywhere and Nature seemed to smile,
In those "Balmy Days" upon "The Old Canal."

On this "branch" 'twas fun! — eleven miles in length, I know —
[Columbus Side Cut Branch 11 miles in length]
And was busy as could be in those "old days."
O, countless loads of wheat and corn we "loaded" from her shores,
'Ah those "old rail corn cribs," naught for them but praise.
The farmers they would load us with wheelbarrows from the cribs,
"Trapdoors" in the bridges, where they hauled it, Pal,
Oh! how the "darkies" they would sing while "coming up the run":
There was fun for all upon "The Old Canal."

At Lockbourse, up "Big Bellie Creek" we'd often go for corn,
'Twas a sight, her "Virgin Timber" on each side:
But my! what snakes, their equal I had never seen at large, —
Our revolvers, shot-guns near, what e'er betide.
The scenery, fishing, hunting too, was fine in there "Old Days;"
How the darkies "wheeling corn" would sing, Dear Pal,
For Canal Boats seemed to brighten things wherever they would go,
'Twas a life beyond compare — "That Old Canal!"

The beautiful Cuyahoga greeted us at "Twenty-One",
She was full of fun, threw kisses many times,
The she is the "most crooked" of earths bright and silvery veins,
She's a great companion, makes you feel so fine.
Oh, how she sings and tumbles down the valley that a sight,
And at Cleveland, in Lake Erie takes a plunge.
But till she leaves she comes so near, and kisses us Goodbye.
The Atlantic — takes her everlasting lunge.

When in port or "at the mines" or if we chanced to "bunch"
It was music, song, and dancing, gay old times.
While some go fishing, hunting, swimming, or the games engage,
It was grand, no matter if it "rain or shine;"
The birds would sing so gaily, while the frogs would "croak at night;"
Katydids and crickets do their part, Dear Pal,
All would join the pleasure makers, "serenade" till break of day.
O, 'twas great to be upon "The Old Canal!"
30

43. When we would “draw the levels” for “repairs” or “raise a boat”,
Then the turtles, frogs, and fish I got, O boy:
With my “frog pole,” “Slingshot”, hooks and lines were busy all the day.
In the mud and water, “barefoot”, “what a joy;
With those leatherbacks and snappers, green and pinkeyes we had fun.
Shovel heads, red horse and ladycats, Dear Pal,
And catching eel with helgar-mit and spoonfish in our nets.
It was great to be upon “The Old Canal”.

44. We had a dog — and O what fun I had in many lines —
“Cottontails”, “Coon”, “Squirrel”, “Woodchuck”, and “Mrs. Skunk”.
But often her “perfume” would make you think that you were “gassed”.
And that she had left, forgot to take her “trunk”.
The old “Tow-Path” was wonderful, so pretty, pretty too;
For on “each side” — flowers smiling bright, O, Pal;
I never saw or found a place that filled me with such joy
As those “golden days” upon the “Old Canal”.

45. On the Towpath I had fun, grasshoppers playing tag.
Honey, Bumblebees, and Yellow Jackets, too.
And when a hornet's nest I'd see, Oh, how the “stones would fly”.
Then the mules would “kick and dance” — the “sky was blue.”
The turtles, frogs and snakes would “dive” and come up with a “smile”
They'd “wink at me”, the snakes “stick out their tongues”.
The skating bugs and spiders, Oh what capers they would cut
Twas amusing just to watch their “skip and run”.

46. The frogs were so amusing — OI'd lay awake for hours,
Listen to their “croaking”, “kidding”, mile by mile.
From bank to bank, such valleys, — often would laugh out loud,
For I knew their “language” and of course would smile.
“Come across, I dare you”, — then “Knee Deep” would say, “Can't swim”.
Oft “Old Soak” would thunder lustily — “More Rum”!
The screech owl, coon, would snicker — Messrs. Mink and Weasel, smile
In the distance, “Dear Old Grandpa” said “I'll come!”

Nye family boats at Lockbourne, above Chillicothe. Father Nye stands at left with Warren, the 17th child; mother sits on tool chest with number 18.
47. At nite the "banks" were full of guests, whose eyes and ears were keen.

Mr. Frog would more or less himself "betray."

The Muskrat with his "eyes of jet" was sure a jolly chap.

He would "board our boat," then how he'd dive and play.

When we would "lay-up" for the nite,

The mussels, "crawfish," "roasting-ears" — on them he loved to feast.

While the "lightning bugs" and "bats" were "busy," Pa.

The "nile life" and its "denizens" — I never shall forget!

How I'd love to live it o'er, "The Old Canal!"

48. The "brownhair snakes" and ants would "get me," — how I dreaded them,

For they'd "wind around my toes" in "muddy time."

The "ants" would get beneath my clothes — and My! how they'd bear down!

I would "disrobe" and into others climb.

The "tadpoles," "possums," "waterdogs" (hell benders), yes, snail and dragon flies

"Lizards," "toads," "the birds," "trees," "flowers," I knew well.

Oh everything there worked for good, most happy was my lot.

How I missed my "Dear Old Friend," no one can tell.

49. The shots of those "Old Days" — sure fill and thrill me like a "flood!"

I was just a child of nature, simple, kind.

For everything along the way, just seemed to smile and speak.

Nite and day the "serenade" was great — sublime!

I learned how "all the creatures" lived, "their habits, voices and song."

Many I could "imitate," — yes, Dear Old Pal!

They knew I was their friend — and oft they would eat from my hand,

In those "Dear Old Days" upon "The Old Canal."

50. The locks were oft our swimming holes, we'd empty, fill at will

In the upper, lower jaws, all kinds of fun.

Turning the flip-flops, diving from the foot-bridge, balance beams,

Smubbing the posts and gates, the coupling-stones would run.

We'd spring the paddles, make it rough, "twas something like a storm.

None ventured but good swimmers, Dear Old Pal.

Oh days of heaven, here on earth, I never will forget.

Take the world, but give to me "The Old Canal."

51. We were a happy family, there were many boys and girls [18 — 11 boys, 7 girls]

But dear father, mother had a "watchful eye."

We ran and played all o'er the boat, but accidents would come,

Then "our clothes" would be out on the line to dry.

We had our "courses," work and play, so everyone had fun,

"Twas quite systematic, loving service," Pa.

And all the comforts of those days, — we had aboard our boat;

You may have world, — give me "The Old Canal."

52. I never knew how many times I tumbled "overboard."

But dear father or someone would "pull" me out —

And then the rest would laugh, and tell me I should "learn to swim."

That would make me "sore," — then you should hear them shout.

Of course we learned that art quite young, then "swim and dive like rats" —

From the "gawwales," "bowstern," "bowwhales," "quarterdecks,"

The "bridge plank," "maindecks," "taffrail," "buckinwhale," yes, everywhere,

For we'd "swim while running" "fun" without a "check."

54. "The Mills" were always thrilling, — for I loved to hear their "hum," —

As I watched the grain in buckets speed along, —

Where it was "bolted" — into flour, also other "feed;"

The "machinery" seemed to "sing a funny song."

Well, just the same, I loved it — and everyone was gay —

That's a "Secret of a Happy Life," — Dear Pal,

We all can't have or love the same, so this is my choice, —

I'm contented, happy on "The Old Canal!"
We used to “dress the mules up,” then we’d race them “up and down,” —  
But quite often they would “stumble,” then ‘twas “splash”! —  
Yet, all was fun and laughter, for that seemed to be the aim, —  
Same as “tub racing,” — when someone would make a “Dash”! —  
We’d stretch a line across the Canal-and — “tight rope” if we could,  
But I never saw one reach “the other side;” —  
For when he’d get about the “middle,” someone would touch the line,  
Then he’d have to “Take to water” — what betide!

The winter scenes and sports were fine, Oh how we’d skate for miles,  
Up and down the levels, basins with delight.  
“The Flying Dutchman” oft we’d use, ‘Twas fun for all you know,  
It was great, we’d play it almost day and night.  
“Who has got the Button?”, “Hockey,” “Tag,” yes and “Fox and Geese,”  
“Drop the Handkerchief” “Blind Man,” — what times, Dear Pal;  
If I would, I could not tell you half the fun we had,  
‘Twas a glorious world, our own; “The Old Canal.”

Oft in fall, we’d run quite late, sometimes all winter too,  
But we’d use our “beads” and old icebreakers then,  
Yet when the “ice was too heavy” we’d wait then for a “thaw,”  
With my gun, dog, traps the time I’d gayly spend,  
Oh, who can picture things like this, without the “old time urge,”  
For the soul of man aspires to many things.  
We’d get “froze in” so many times, but soon we would “break out”  
And be on our way gayly we would sing.

Our “roosters” oft would make us fun — when we’d go through the locks,  
For we kept them “tame” and “trained” — the whole year round.  
And they would do themselves great if the others wanted to fight, —  
My “Old Grover,” — he would “crow” — and stand his “ground!”  
But Captain Asa Gillett had a “game” he called “Old Ben,”  
So we let them “go” — it was some “scrap,” — Old Pal —  
For “Grover” killed “old Ben,” — but he soon followed the next day, —  
We were not so slow — Upon “The Old Canal!”

What sights there were in Portsmouth, — Canal and River all agog!  
Those “old steamers” — towing canalboats everywhere;  
Men were yelling, “whistles tooting” — I would look on and smile,  
For it was amusing — and how some would “swear!” —  
That “Old Ohio River” is a “Puzzle” — let me say, —  
For the people seem to have a “tongue” their own, —  
Some “sing-song” their language, yes, others “squeal” and “drag it out”  
While others “grunt” and use an “undertone.”

We “Old Thru Trippers” always noted this, — along the line, —  
For the “skirper,” “merchant,” “farmer” — none were the same, —  
“Dockwallopers” and Hillbillies, — they too had “their tongue,”  
So we Canalers had to watch and know our game.  
But oft we used these things for sport — and O, boy! it was fun,  
We knew just where and how to do it — Pal.  
So we were just “linguists,” — “mimics,” — always of a certain type —  
In those “Balmy Days” upon “The Old Canal!”

Cleveland was another place — you bet she was alive —  
In that River, O! most crooked of the world, —  
The “tugs” would “grab our boat” — and take us ever “up and down.”  
“Round those bends” we seemed to “tumble” or be “hurled.” —  
Sometimes we’d “hold our breath” in fear — and think it was “the last” —  
“Collision Bend” so certain, — Deal Old Pal!  
Those Tugmen knew their business, tho quite oft it gave us chills,  
In those “Balmy Days” upon “The Old Canal!”
73.
Those Great Lakes Sailors, River Men were jolly in their way,—
But our Canal beat everything I’ve heard or known;
For we were always home—and happy, mixing work and fun,—
In a world most blest, contented, all our own!
I’ve never seen another place that I would “choose” to live,—
The Canal was “Heaven Below”, — My Dear Old Pal!
And I have been around a bit—and know a thing or two,—
But no place is equal to “The Old Canal!”

74.
Oh yes, The Ohio and Erie Canal can well be proud,
For her past is glorious! Matchless! Oh so grand!
I know her well from A to Z — describe her every mile
And was “Zealous” — always for her I would stand!
In Childhood, Youth, Maturity, I always loved her dear,
But now my heart is often saddened, Pal.
Oh, how I wish that all might know and love her as I do
And would “take a trip upon the Old Canal!”

75.
And now where’er I hear someone reproach or speak unkind —
Of this Grand Old Sire, I know they’re not informed,
For behold! the towns and cities that are standing on His shores,
Were it not for Him, they never would be “born’d.”
“He has outlived his usefulness,” O this I’ve heard some say,
They have forgotten! The Old Man betrayed,
I know there’s much that He could do, and gladden many hearts,
If He only had a half a chance today!

76.
Those famous days — were pleasant and in fancy I reflect,
See, — her boats and packets — Two thousand and more [over 2,200 registered at one time],
Her “shipyards,” “drydocks,” “warehouses” and many other things,
That were needed — all were standing on her shores.
I know my love for her is true, God grant it ne’er shall change!
For most pleasant is her memory, Oh Pal!
When I “check in” — Oh may I rest in peace forevermore,
On the shore of my dear friend, “The Old Canal!”

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Notes

1. Comments of Captain Nye recorded by John and Alan Lomax, June 7, 1937. Ohio State University cassette tape #3 side B.

2. Conversations with Miss Cloea Thomas, March 18 and May 25, 1983. “The Ohio and Erie” is the later and more common name for the Ohio Canal from Cleveland to Portsmouth.


4. Ohio Department of Education, The Musical Heritage of Ohio (Columbus, Ohio: no date). This booklet says that it is taken mainly from chapter three of Ohio Elementary Music Guide, 1948, a publication which I have not seen.


7. Note to song “The Old Skipper” from the collection of Miss Cloea Thomas.

8. Schroeder, p. 18.

9. Unfortunately this material is scattered: some in the Library of Congress; some in the Ohio Historical Society Library, The Canal Society of Ohio Archives at the University of Akron; and private collections.


15. I have found two versions of this: one with 45 verses, dated May 4, 1932, in the Ohio Historical Society Library (OHS 60/1/3); and one with 76 verses in the collection given me by Miss Thomas, dating, I believe, from the 1940s. There are some differences other than length between the two, but nothing of great significance. The version here is the one from Miss Thomas.

16. OHS 60/1/3.

17. OHS 60/1/3. The grammar and punctuation (particularly the quotation marks and underlining) are characteristics of Captain Nye’s writing.

18. Thompson, p. 246; Lomax and Lomax, p. 465; Wyld, p. 97.

19. There are two versions of this song in Captain Nye’s papers in the Ohio Historical Society (OHS 60/1/3). One, in a manuscript dated May 4, 1932, has a chorus four lines longer than the other. The short-chorus version (although in a manuscript probably dating from the 1940s) is, I believe, the earlier version. It is the short-chorus version that has been collected from other traditional singers.
Barton R. Friedman

Re-assassinating Lincoln

Was He Racist or Emancipator?

When the 6th U.S. Colored Infantry, survivors of Forrest’s massacre of Yankee prisoners at Fort Pillow, gathered to plan a memorial to Abraham Lincoln, they could hardly have imagined that some of their descendants would one day dismiss Lincoln as just another white racist, dressed up by the likes of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg in Great Emancipator’s clothing. Nor could the crowd of well-wishers, mostly white, who gathered to hear Lincoln’s Second Inaugural have imagined that some of their descendants would dismiss him as no more than a shrewder Richard Nixon. That these views have been, and continue to be, asserted not only in popular and scholarly writing but in high school and college classes, challenges us, amid the dust raised by the partisans of myth and counter-myth, to seek the man who—so we used to think—embodied all that was best about America.

1. John Brown’s Body

March 4, 1865, Inauguration Day, arrived bleak and wet. Along the lines outside Petersburg, soldiers of both armies answered the dawn stand-to, sighting down their musket barrels and steeling themselves for another day of misery. In the Carolinas long blue columns, Sherman’s, struggled through the mud. At 11 a.m., though the rain had stopped, the sky remained so dark in Washington that the morning star could still be seen (so legend has it), keeping lonely watch over the Capitol. But as Lincoln stepped forward to take the oath, the sun broke through.

He spoke of retribution and repentance:

If we suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woes due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said: “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

Behind the stern voice of the Old Testament prophet can be heard—whether, deep within, Lincoln knew it or not—the voice of John Brown on his way to the gallows: “I...”
am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with blood.”

Indeed, the spirit of John Brown moved through the land. Sherman’s troops sang as they slogged northward, “John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave, / His truth goes marching on.” Little more than a month after Lincoln’s solemn words to his countrymen, Horatio G. Wright’s VI Corps, the toughest fighters in the Army of the Potomac, were virtually to shout “John Brown’s Body” as they forded the last river between them and a showdown with Lee’s remnants at a place called Appomattox Station. On April 14, even as Lincoln was reluctantly consenting to attend the “last appearance of Miss Laura Keene in her celebrated comedy of Our American Cousin” that night at Ford’s Theatre, a regimental band was marching through the streets of Charleston, South Carolina, playing “John Brown’s Body,” heralding the ceremony which would see Major General Robert Anderson re-raise over Fort Sumter the tattered flag he had carefully preserved to be his shroud.

So it was no accident that Lincoln in his Second Inaugural had, however unconsciously, evoked a specter condemned in life by most of his countrymen for a madman and murderer. As Bruce Catton observes of slavery, it set its supporters a most vexing problem: “It ennobled its opponents.” Six years and a million casualties (North and South) after John Brown was hanged, the country had, in a phrase W.B. Yeats applies to a later revolution, changed utterly.

2. “A Usable Lincoln”

How ironic, then, that the hard-war President, who did more than anyone else to effect this change, would a century after his death be excoriated as at worst a bigot, at best a political trimmer who went where the wind blew. None of the current attempts at character assassination would have surprised Lincoln, who was in his own day called ape and gorilla, and whose fine eye for whimsy would have twinkled at the quintessential American myth that John Wilkes Booth’s bullet and generations of admirers have made of him. But they surprise those of us who grew up with the myth and — however we may have been jaded by recent occupants of Lincoln’s office — still believe in the greatness of the man it portrays.

In this cartoon from Harper’s Weekly, October 11, 1862, Frank Bel­lew depicts Jefferson Davis in the tree of slavery about to be chopped down by Lincoln.
“Getting right with Lincoln,” as one important revisionist historian describes efforts to reconcile the myth and the man, is an issue of more than antiquarian or partisan interest. We can perhaps start to understand why by looking at the origin of this campaign to show that the Great Emancipator had clay feet. It first rears itself in academic circles in an essay by the influential neo-Marxist historian, Howard Zinn, “Abolitionists, Freedom-Riders, and the Tactics of Agitation” (1965). Zinn had the misfortune to be inducing Lincoln in a university press hardback, destined for the most part to be read only by professional colleagues. But he was followed by two prosecution witnesses who cracked the mass media: Lerone Bennett, Jr. and Herbert Mitgang, posing the (for them) strictly rhetorical question, “Was Abraham Lincoln a White Supremacist?” or, in Mitgang’s more with-it phrase, “Was Lincoln Just a Honkie?” (the one published in Ebony, the other in the New York Times Magazine, both in February, 1968).

To this question, Malcolm X, for one, responds with a resounding “yes”: “He [Lincoln] probably did more to trick Negroes than any other man in history.” While students no longer run around campuses clutching Malcolm’s Autobiography, many who did in the sixties, and who were taught—properly, by the historian’s lights—to suspect the myth of the pristine Lincoln, were also taught to embrace the counter-myth of a Nixonian Lincoln; which they, having become teachers in their turn, now with malign innocence pass on to their students. Lincoln, that is, had the bad luck, during the almost second civil war which sprang out of Vietnam and Black militancy, to stand at a point where academics and politics intersected. As Zinn puts it, with an eye to his own politics, “At issue are a number of claims advanced by liberal-minded people who profess purposes similar to the radical reformers but urge more moderate methods. To argue a case too heatedly, they point out, provokes the opponent to retaliation. To urge measures too extreme alienates possible allies. To ask for too much too soon results in getting nothing. To use vituperative language arouses emotions to a pitch which precludes rational consideration. To be dogmatic and inflexible prevents adjustment to rapidly changing situations. To set up a clash of extremes precipitates sharp conflict and violence” (pp. 417-18).

Zinn wants to read the struggle of the Abolitionists, to push Lincoln into a war first to free the slaves and only second to save the Union, as an allegory, prefiguring the struggle for civil rights in which, circa 1965, he finds himself personally engaged. “Abolitionists, Freedom-Riders, and the Tactics of Agitation” is a polemic masquerading as scholarship. And if not Zinn, then many of his colleagues in the Movement viewed teaching the same way. In his pioneer study of the 1960s, The Making of a Counter Culture (1969), Theodore Roszak drops his own pretense to scholarly distance long enough to admit as much: “the young have one of the very few social levers dissent has to work with. This is that ‘significant soil’ in which the Great Refusal [the concept is Herbert Marcuse’s] has begun to take root.”

Roszak comes dangerously close to advocating the same kind of cynical manipulation that sharp-eared radicals claimed to detect the Establishment practicing in almost every lecture hall. It is but a short step from his characterization of the young as “significant soil” to Julian Bond’s plea (1970) overtly to politicize the classroom: “Until the university develops ... a curriculum and a discipline that stifles war and poverty and racism ... the university will be in doubt.”

The consequences for historical accuracy of such a pedagogical objective, however well intended, are manifest in Zinn’s treatment of Lincoln. To press his case against Lincoln, Zinn enlists one of the extraordinary men of the nineteenth century, the freed slave Frederick Douglass, speaking at the dedication of the 6th U.S. Colored Infantry’s memorial to the Great Emancipator on Good Friday, April 14, 1876:

To protect, defend, and perpetuate slavery in the United States where it existed Abraham Lincoln was not less ready than any other President to draw the sword of the nation. He was ready to execute all the supposed constitutional guarantees of the United States Constitution in favor of the slave system anywhere inside the slave states. He was willing to recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master, and to suppress a slave rising for liberty, though his guilty master was already in arms against the Government. The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow citizens, a pre-eminence in his worship at once full and supreme. First, midst, and last, you and yours were the objects of his deepest affection.
and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best his stepchildren, children by adoption, children by force of circumstance and necessity.

But Zinn ignores Douglass’s words to an audience at Cooper Union on January 13, 1864—“Perhaps you would like to know how I, a Negro, was received at the White House by the President of the United States. Why, precisely as one gentleman would be received by another”—or his words to Lincoln himself at the reception following the Second Inaugural: “Mr. Lincoln, that was a sacred effort.” Zinn ignores Douglass in the 1880s recalling, “In all my interviews with Mr. Lincoln I was impressed with his entire freedom from prejudice against the colored race.” And Zinn ignores the praise with which Douglass qualifies his criticism of Lincoln in the dedicatory speech of Good Friday, 1876: “though the Union was more to him than our freedom or our future, under his wise and beneficent guidance, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.”

About Lincoln, Douglass is a more perceptive historian than Zinn, whose concern in “Abolitionists, Freedom-Riders, and the Tactics of Agitation” is less with history than with ideology — with piecing together, by careful selection and structuring of his data, what George M. Fredrickson calls “a usable Lincoln.” And Douglass is a much more perceptive historian than Lerone Bennett, whose interest is also in piecing together a usable rather than in seeking the real, Lincoln.

Bennett recognizes that, to condemn Lincoln as a White Supremacist, he must, for an audience brainwashed (he presumes) by generations of racist mythmakers, discount the Emancipation Proclamation — which he does, with a logical dexterity that, in 1968, should have drawn envious attention from Pentagon analysts seeing light at the end of the Vietnam tunnel:

The Proclamation argues so powerfully against itself that some scholars have suggested that Lincoln was trying to do the opposite of what he said he was doing. In other words the Proclamation was a political stratagem by which Lincoln hoped to outflank the Radicals, buy time and forestall a definitive act of emancipation. This is not the place to review the political stratagem in detail. Suffice it to say that on the basis of the evidence one can make a powerful case for the view that Lincoln never intended to free the slaves, certainly not immediately.

I do not say the Emancipation Proclamation is the second Declaration of Independence one might have wished it to be, or that some (who surely never read it) have claimed it to be. Pulled out of context, the Proclamation seems disappointing exactly as the eminent American historian, Richard Hofstadter, suggests when he attributes to it “all the moral grandeur of a bill of lading.” It proclaims emancipation as a matter not of inalienable right but of military need; it declares slaves free in states where rebellion had cancelled Federal authority and denies them freedom in states loyal to the Union. By statement and by act, moreover, Lincoln made clear that, into the second year of the war, he still preferred to end slavery through a program of gradual, compensated emancipation, entailing the departure of the “freedmen” to a land of their own.

But this policy — which appears very different after Civil Rights and Black militancy than it did to a man born in 1809 in Kentucky (within one year and a hundred miles of Jefferson Davis), raised in southern Illinois, and responsible to prosecute the bloodiest war in American history — should not have blinded Bennett to the fact that “not immediately” is not “never.” And despite his claim that some other place would be more appropriate for treating Lincoln’s subterfuge in detail than the place in which he accuses Lincoln, I cannot suppress my curiosity about those unnamed scholars who discover behind the Emancipation Proclamation a Machiavel conning the radicals with a document shaped to do the opposite of what it purported to be doing. Indeed Zinn and T. Harry Williams (who agree on little else) agree that, far from manipulating the radicals, Lincoln was manipulated by them. Of the Emancipation Proclamation Zinn insists that “only the compelling force of the abolitionist intransigents made it come as soon as it did” (p. 433), a judgment that essentially sums up Williams’s findings.
Lincoln's contemporary critics saw the Emancipation Proclamation as motivated by military rather than moral concerns. Pro-Southern cartoonist John Tenniel (illustrator of *Alice in Wonderland*) in the *London Punch* for August 9, 1862, shows Lincoln dressed as Uncle Sam, offering a freed slave a musket and cartridge box. In Tenniel's caption Lincoln says, "Why I du declare, it's my dear old friend Sambo. Lend us a hand, old hoss, du."
Emancipation Proclamation

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people thereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States, and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. Johns, St. Charles, St. James[,] Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New-Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South-Carolina, North-Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth-City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk & Portsmouth[)]; and which excepted parts are, for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-seventh.

By the President:

WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
in *Lincoln and the Radicals* (1941), a book generally acknowledged to be among the seminal studies of the Civil War:

Abraham Lincoln caught the significance of events in those hot July days [of 1862] when the spirit of radicalism burgeoned in the nation and the Jacobins in Congress wrested from him the control of the Republican Party. He knew at last that the radicals represented an implacable force which he could not ignore and to which perhaps he must yield. On July 10, while driving to the funeral of Stanton’s infant son, he confided to Seward and Welles, who were in the carriage with him, that he had decided to issue a proclamation of freedom.

### 3. Fighting a Hard War

Looking back on his treatment of Lincoln from a distance of twenty-four years, Williams conceded his underestimation of the President’s political skill and “devotion to pragmatic reform.” Lincoln himself, in signing the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, announced that “I never in my life felt more certain that I was doing right than I do by signing this paper.” His conviction suggests more than a clever ploy for outmaneuvering either the radicals in Washington or the reactionaries in Richmond. And comments he made about the Proclamation before as well as after its issuance stress his awareness of the revolutionary change he was making in the moral life of the country. On November 21, 1862, he told a delegation of Kentuckians that he “would rather die than take back a word of the Proclamation of Freedom.” In February, 1865, he remarked to Francis B. Carpenter, “As affairs have turned, it is the central act of my administration, and the greatest event of the nineteenth century.”

The greatest event of the nineteenth century was not—despite Bennett, who considers the question too trivial to argue—undertaken without political and military risk. In the summer of 1862, while Lincoln was privately meditating emancipation, Archbishop John Hughes of New York declared, “We Catholics, and a vast majority of our brave troops in the field, have not the slightest idea of carrying on a war that costs so much blood and treasure just to gratify a clique of Abolitionists in the North.” Some Congressional races in the West during the 1862 campaign were fought out between candidates labeled “charcoal” and “snowflake.” The Republicans took a beating at the polls in 1862; and through the militarily grim summer of 1864, their prospects seemed scarcely better. So pessimistic was Lincoln at the outlook both for his re-election and the war that he asked Frederick Douglass to help plan ways of increasing the flow of runaway slaves into the Union lines, to insure that, should the government be forced into negotiations, they at least would be free. Though nothing came of the scheme, Douglass was moved to observe that Lincoln “showed a deeper moral conviction against slavery than I had ever seen before in anything spoken or written by him... evidence conclusive that the proclamation, so far as he was concerned, was not effected merely as a [military] necessity.”

The President, his party, and, it may be, the Union were saved by the wire Sherman sent Halleck on September 3: “Atlanta is ours, and fairly won.” Sherman’s triumph at Atlanta—qualified by his failure to bag Joseph E. Johnston’s (later John Bell Hood’s) army, which he and Grant had agreed should be his prime objective—was in a sense as much Lincoln’s triumph as Sherman’s own or Grant’s. For it was, with Vicksburg, the richest yield thus far of a strategy Lincoln had (unsuccessfully until Grant) been urging on his generals almost since Sumter. Early in the war the President had written to Don Carlos Buell that “we have greater numbers, and the enemy has the greater facility of concentrating forces upon points of collision... we must fail, unless we can find some way of making our advantage an overmatch of his;... this can be done by menacing him with superior forces at different points, at the same time; so that we can safely attack one, or both, if he makes no change; and if he weakens one to strengthen the other, forbear to attack the strengthened one, but seize, and hold the weakened one, gaining so much.”

Lincoln was proposing a variation on General Winfield Scott’s so-called Anaconda Plan, which had disappeared from the minds of Union commanders with the disappearance of the old general himself, driven into retirement by the scorn of McClellan. That the Anaconda Plan was calculated to exploit Jefferson Davis’s greatest weakness, by forcing him to divide his strength between the contending claims of political expediency and military necessity, is attested to by the Confederacy’s greatest modern historian, Douglas Southall Freeman:

All military men of experience accepted without argument the doctrine that the Confederate armies
should be concentrated, but the administration consented to dispersion because the people of each State demanded protection from the invader. Seapower made it possible for the Union leaders to take advantage of the Confederacy’s mistaken policy. By threatening at all times to land troops at any point between Albemarle Sound and Savannah, the Federals could immobilize a great part of the Confederate army. 12

Lincoln perceived from the outset that, to make such a threat credible, to extend it west along the imaginary frontier secession had drawn between North and South, he had, despite their slaves and their Southern sympathizers, to hold the Border States—especially (once Virginia had gone) Maryland and Kentucky, both of which were represented by stars on the Confederate flag. Without Maryland and the crucial railroad line running through Baltimore, Washington would be effectively cut off from the rest of the nation; with Kentucky, Lincoln knew, he could keep Missouri in the Union, regain Tennessee, and launch his forces down the Mississippi, breaking the South in half. As an observer with some Lincolonian wit put it, "Lincoln would like to have God on his side, but he must have Kentucky." Or as Lincoln himself explained to Senator Orville H. Browning of Illinois, "I think to lose Kentucky is nearly to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this capital."

Those who judge Lincoln’s policy on emancipation to be self-serving and cynical, or who want to argue—as Bennett does, with a sharp ear for what “appeasement” has come to mean since 1939—that Lincoln “appeased the slaveholding Border States,” might consider how separation would have served Black freedom. 13 Frederick Douglass had considered it. He repudiated William Lloyd Garrison in 1851 because Garrison’s support for dissolving the Union appeared to him a betrayal of Abolitionism itself. 14

Debunkers of the Great Emancipator might also consider how close, even with Maryland and Kentucky, the North came to losing the game. The preponderance of attention paid by press and politicians to Northern Virginia ("On to Richmond!")—where the deadly combination of Lee’s tactical brilliance and the incompetence of a series of Union commanders produced defeat after defeat, and an ever lengthening butcher’s bill, eroded public morale. Historians have noted the parallels between the Civil War and World War I, none more striking than the fact that, fought in several theaters, both conflicts have nonetheless come to be associated with one theater: the Western Front from 1914 to 1918, and Northern Virginia from 1861 to 1865. Lincoln saw farther; so did Grant and Sherman. And so (with the curious exception of Lee) did their chief adversaries. Albert Sidney Johnston, Davis’s first choice to command the armies of the Confederacy, said that to lose the Mississippi Valley would be to lose the war in the West. Davis himself called Vicksburg the nail holding the two halves of the Confederacy together. P.G.T. Beauregard warned that to lose Island 10 and New Madrid, the keys to Vicksburg, would mean losing not only Vicksburg, the Mississippi Valley, and the war in the West, but the war altogether. Informed by Joseph Johnston that Vicksburg could not be held against Grant, Davis’s Secretary of War, James A. Seddon, replied that the fall of the city known throughout the Confederacy as the Gibraltar of the West would mean the fall of the Confederacy itself. And Lee’s solidest corps commander, James Longstreet, recalling how news of Vicksburg reached him during the weary retreat from another battle—fought even as Vicksburg was surrendering, this one at a little Pennsylvania town named Gettysburg—confessed that "I felt … our last hope was gone, and … it was now only a question of time with us."

That Longstreet was right, as Lincoln had been right, was to be confirmed strategically a year later. Ordered east to reinforce the defenders of Atlanta, Richard Taylor found that his corps could not cross the Mississippi against the Yankee gunboats patrolling its length from Cairo to New Orleans. Taylor himself managed the crossing alone only at night in a canoe.

The victory at Atlanta, which Union control of the Mississippi helped to bring about, and which in turn assured Lincoln’s victory at the polls, led thereby to that other “great moral victory,” as Lincoln himself labeled it, for which the radical Abolitionists had chiefly been fighting. One month after his re-election Lincoln sent to Congress a Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. It car-
"Uncle Abe's Valentine Sent to Columbia [America]" — the abolition of slavery by the Thirteenth Amendment. Cartoon by William Newman in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, February 25, 1865.
Constitution of the United States

AMENDMENT XIII

SECTION I

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

SECTION II

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

ried (with some muscling by the Administration) on January 31, 1865.

The degree of change Lincoln had to work in American political thinking on slavery to secure passage of the Thirteenth Amendment may be measured by the fact that there was an earlier Thirteenth Amendment, passed by two-thirds of both Houses six weeks before Sumter, but obliterated (happily) when Edmund Ruffin yanked the lan­yard which started the first shell hurtling toward then Major Robert Anderson’s beleaguered flag. Had that Thirteenth Amendment become part of the Constitution, Congress would have been forever forbidden “to abolish or interfere within any State with the domestic institutions thereof including that of persons held to labor or service by the laws of said State.” The Amendment would, that is, have solidified the protections the Founding Fathers had in 1787 built around slavery to gain the support of the Southern states for the draft Constitution.

Those protections had vexed Lincoln throughout his Presidency. For as wrong as Lerone Bennett is about almost every aspect of Lincoln’s character, he is right about one thing: Lincoln was basically a conservative, what we might call a strict constructionist, who could find no wedge in the Constitution to break the chains of slavery except the war powers. In early July, 1864, one of the Congressional fire-eaters from his own party, Zachariah Chandler, came to the White House to urge Presidential support of the harsh Wade-Davis formula for Reconstruction.

“If [the bill] is vetoed,” Chandler argued, “it will damage us fearfully in the Northwest. The important point is the one prohibiting slavery in the reconstructed states.”

“That,” Lincoln replied, “is the point on which I doubt the authority of Congress to act.”

“It is no more, than you have done yourself.”

Whereupon Lincoln explained: “I conceive that I may, in an emergency, do things on military grounds which cannot be done constitutionally by Congress.”

It is reported that Chandler left Lincoln’s presence chagrined. But Lincoln must not have felt much better. He knew that appeal to the war powers was at best a temporary expedient; that, as nothing (he used to tell his friends) touched the tired spot deep within him, so nothing done in response to the exigencies of the moment could root out the underlying problem.

The Thirteenth Amendment thus struck the chains not only from Blacks but from the President, from the Constitution itself. Lincoln had been, even before Lee’s surrender at Appomatox, looking beyond the war: moving, however cautiously, toward opening educational opportunities to the “freedmen,” giving them the right to vote, integrating them into the political and social life of the country. Had John Wilkes Booth’s bullet not shattered both the President’s brain and his plans for a Reconstruction conducted “With malice toward none; with charity for all,” race relations in the United States might have evolved very differently.
NOTES


7The story of Frederick Douglass’s relationship with Lincoln, the statements he made about Lincoln, can be gleaned wholly or in part from a variety of sources: most notably from Douglass’s autobiography, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, available in a Collier paperback (New York, 1962); but also from two books by Benjamin Quarles (who was contributing to our knowledge of Black history long before the subject became trendy), Frederick Douglass (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1948), and Lincoln and the Negro (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); and more recently from LaWanda Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1981).


9Lerone Bennett, Jr., “Was Lincoln a White Supremacist?” Ebony, XXI (February 1968), 40.


11This little-known incident is noted in LaWanda Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, p. 16. The remark by Archbishop Hughes is quoted from volume 1 of Shelby Foote’s monumental three volume history, The Civil War (New York: Random House, 1958-74), p. 538, as is the comment regarding the impact of emancipation as an issue in the 1862 election. Foote’s work is a “must read” for any serious student of the war.


14Douglass’s quarrel with the Garrisonians is examined in Leon F. Litwack, “The Negro Abolitionist,” The Anti-Slavery Vanguard, pp. 146-47.

Linguistic nationalism is a frequent cause of conflict in the modern world, yet it is an inevitable — even a desirable — stage in the political development of every people.

In 1974, on the first day of a visit to Calcutta, my birthplace, I was startled to see a fistfight among students in front of a coffee house. This coffee house was a favorite gathering place for all sorts of pugnacious intellectuals, and on this particular occasion the combatants happened to be promoters of Hindi, the government-sponsored national language of India, and supporters of Bengali, the regional language. Only a day earlier I had had lunch in a sidewalk café in Geneva, Switzerland, where French and German syllables had mingled casually around me amid the cool sounds of ice cubes in glass tumblers. The jet-age transition from linguistic harmony in Switzerland to acrimony on the streets of Calcutta brought home to me the drama of modern linguistic nationalism.

The variations range all the way from linguistically untroubled small countries like Switzerland and intermittently troubled small countries like Belgium to seemingly untroubled large countries like Russia and deeply troubled large countries like India. Are there any patterns? Are there any explanations for the linguistic tranquility that prevails in some places for centuries and for the linguistic riots that break out in places where people actually die for the sake of a language?

Is there a direction in which the world as a whole is headed linguistically? In order to answer such questions, we must first explore the basic nature of linguistic nationalism. The subtler aspects of this nationalism are easy to miss unless one looks at specific examples in a comparative framework. Let us start with a brief analysis of a contrast between two small countries: Ireland and Israel.

Professor John Macnamara grew up in Ireland in the 1930s, when “teaching through Irish reached its peak.”1 Out of 5,000 national schools, 704 taught all subjects in Irish in 1939,2 and linguistic nationalism had been one of the main features of Irish life since the turn of the century. Yet consider the implications of the story Professor Macnamara tells:

When I was about eight years old I went into a shop to buy sweets with my sister who was three years older than I. The lady behind the counter, to my great surprise, asked us why we were not talking Irish. We just hung our heads, as children do. But outside I asked my sister what the lady meant. She explained to me that we were learning Irish at school so that we would talk it all the time. And I asked her quite honestly: “Is Irish for talking?”

At present “less than 3 percent of the school-going population speaks Irish as a home language.”3 It is not that the people of Ireland...
The contrast with Israel is quite revealing. Here is another small country with a strong sense of nationalism that succeeded in reviving an earlier language, Hebrew. Jews were expelled from Palestine in the second century A.D., and for the next seventeen hundred years no nation used Hebrew for everyday purposes. Yet in the nineteenth century people with intense faith, like Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, undertook to revive Hebrew as a spoken language. Actually Ben-Yehuda and his followers revived and re-created Hebrew. “Of the 100,000 Hebrew words now in use, only about 12,000 date back to the Old Testament.” Ben-Yehuda had to invent words like buba (doll), glida (ice cream), and mimkhata (handkerchief). This re-creation was helped by a literary revival that had started in the eighteenth century, and the new “vernacular” was based on a number of literary dialects, a compromise between several traditional pronunciations, and on the linguistic habits of various immigrant communities, chiefly of East European origin.

In short, both Irish and Jewish people started working with patriotic fervor in the 1880s on the task of reviving what they felt ought to be their national language. In Ireland, however, English was already entrenched too deeply to be displaced. Even though Ireland had an old, established culture, the British had overwhelmed the Irish people so completely in the seventeenth century that by 1850 the large majority in Ireland had to replace Irish with English. When Israel was established in 1948, the followers of Ben-Yehuda did not have to cope with an entrenched language like English. The overwhelming majority of the people in this new country had not become dependent on English or Arabic or any other language that could serve as a permanent barrier to Hebrew.

It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened in Ireland if the foreign language adopted there had been a less important language than English. Retaining this hypothetical language would obviously have been less advantageous. Would the revival of Irish in that case have been as successful as the revival of Hebrew? There is probably no definitive answer to this question because there are complex economic and religious factors to be considered in addition to the linguistic ones. Nonetheless, it is helpful to raise the question because it involves a significant theoretical issue related to linguistic nationalism.

The importance of English, which proved to be so crucial in Ireland, is due not to intrinsic qualities in the language but rather to socio-political forces. For reasons that will be explored later, many advocates of linguistic nationalism talk about the superiority of the specific mother tongue they want to promote. Though one recognizes the emotional basis for such advocacy, at the same time anyone who wishes to be analytic must also recognize that linguistically all languages are equally important.

Many people mistakenly believe that some languages, especially those of advanced industrial countries, must somehow be superior to languages used in technologically less advanced cultures. Often when people talk about language what they are really dealing with is culture. The availability in French of many terms for cooking does not mean that French is superior to languages with fewer culinary terms. It simply means that French culture pays more attention to cooking than many other cultures.

Similarly, it is not linguistic weakness that has prevented some nations from producing literature that can be ranked next to works in Greek, Sanskrit, Latin, English, French, or Japanese. It may be tempting to think that something inherent in the languages of Homer, Kalidasa, Virgil, Shakespeare, Racine, or Lady Murasaki made it possible for these geniuses to create the marvels for which they are famous, but one must ponder the fact that they were all products of societies that had already been extraordinarily successful in nonliterary areas such as commerce, industry, or colonial expansion. The English language, for example, has been in existence since the fifth century; yet even as late as the twelfth century very few truly great literary works (worthy of being placed next to Beowulf or Troilus and Criseyde or Hamlet) had appeared in English. If the inherent qualities of English were the crucial factor, why did more great works not appear in the first seven hundred years of the language?
Until quite recent times even English writers themselves did not really believe that their language was worthy of comparison with a language like Latin. Yet after England's (and America's) practical success on the world scene, English writers created some of the greatest literature the world has ever known. Surely the language did not suddenly acquire special creative power after having been in existence for about a thousand years. For a variety of reasons, great literature inevitably appears in any language whose speakers are successful on the world scene for a reasonable length of time. Obviously this essay is not the place to explore these reasons. Here we simply need to note that the existence of great literature in a given language does not mean that the language itself is superior to any other.

In examining grammatical systems underlying languages, scholars find that (contrary to what the general public might expect) the languages of so-called primitive cultures are grammatically just as complex as the languages of so-called advanced cultures. English verbs generally have five forms (such as do, does, did, done, doing), while Bengali verbs have fifty-three forms, and Eskimo verbs many hundreds. The culture of the people who spoke Old English may seem backward to many English-speaking people of today. Yet the grammar of Old English is patently more complex in many areas than the grammar of Modern English. Where Modern English has only the, Old English had about a dozen forms that could be used as definite articles. The specific form to be used depended on whether the article appeared before a singular or plural form of a masculine, feminine, or neuter noun. Similar mechanics governed the form of the Old English adjective as well. Languages of other “backward” cultures also show astonishingly complex grammatical systems. How societies that have yet to invent the wheel are able to develop so complex a thing as language is indeed one of the great mysteries of mankind.

Though all languages are equal in a purely linguistic sense, there are five non-linguistic factors that, in the opinion of many linguists, do cause certain languages to be more important than others in a practical sense. First, the total number of people speaking a language is obviously significant. A language spoken by hundreds of millions of people must of necessity be more important than one spoken by a few hundred. Here are the top twelve languages of the world (as listed in The World Almanac of 1983) in terms of the number of speakers:

1. Mandarin Chinese 726,000,000
2. English 397,000,000
3. Russian 274,000,000
4. Spanish 258,000,000
5. Hindi 254,000,000
6. Arabic 155,000,000
7. Portuguese 151,000,000
8. Bengali 151,000,000
9. German 119,000,000
10. Japanese 119,000,000
11. French 107,000,000
12. Italian 62,000,000

Some of these figures will, of course, vary significantly if differences among certain languages are viewed as dialectal variations.

A second factor, closely related to the first, is the range of distribution over the globe of the speakers of a language. The wider the range, the greater the importance of the language. Chinese is spoken by more people, but the speakers of English represent many countries spread out over the world. So English has an advantage over Chinese in terms of global distribution.

Third, the economic and political power of the speakers of a language is probably the single most important factor. Throughout history there have been correlations between power and linguistic predominance. It is no coincidence that the dominant language in today's world, English, is spoken by people who collectively wield the greatest economic and political power. In addition to the almost 400 million people who know English as their mother tongue, there are some 400 million people around the world who know English as a second language. Clearly, this second group learned English for practical rather than sentimental reasons. No other language has so many foreign speakers.

All dominant languages have at some point been spoken by powerful people; otherwise they would not have become influential. It was not the flexibility of Latin syntax or the inflectional subtlety of Sanskrit that made Latin or Sanskrit dominant in certain eras. The power represented by Roman or Hindu emperors was the real factor. The religions followed by powerful people also helped to
make their languages important, but the basic reason for linguistic dominance has always been economic and political power.

Fourth, the total amount of productive land available to a linguistic group for future expansion endows a language with potential importance. Languages like English, Russian, and Spanish are likely to grow in importance because their speakers control so much land.

Fifth, the quantity and quality of literature available in a given language always constitute an important factor. Numerically, French is behind ten other languages, but the brilliance of French literature and the dominance of French, over centuries, as the language of diplomacy and culture clearly suggest a higher overall rank for French than the eleventh position.

All five factors should, of course, be considered jointly in judging the overall importance of a language. Linguistic nationalism is closely related to language planning and to the educational requirements imposed upon students. In establishing linguistic requirements, governmental and educational authorities should consider carefully the five factors listed above and the individual needs of students. At present, language requirements in most places tend to be guided by sentimental tradition or traditional sentiment.

Such sentiment lies naturally at the very heart of linguistic nationalism, devotion to the language of a nation. Nationalism in general involves the commonly held by a large group of people, commonality based on factors such as language, religion, and ethnocultural identity, or rather on combinations of such factors.
Inevitably, nationalism stresses the “authenticity . . . of the values . . . that typify the community of reference.” In modern nationalism this sense of authenticity has relied heavily on identification with a “language which is experientially unique and, therefore, functional . . . in safeguarding the sentimental and behavioral links between the speech community of today and its (real or imaginary) counterparts . . . in antiquity.” This link between nationalism and language is fairly obvious. What is not so obvious, however, to the general public is the link between modern nationalism and industrialization.

A constantly recurring theme in analyses of modern nationalisms is to point to industrialization . . . as its most basic cause. This view is justified on the grounds of the undeniable disruptive impact of industrial and other economic transformations of prior affilitative and integrative bonds . . . Nationalism . . . appears as a natural cure for a natural ailment: the restoration of more meaningful and appropriate ethnocultural loyalties subsequent to the disruption of older ones that are no longer functional, in the light of widespread economic change.

This link between modern nationalism and industrialization is crucial to understanding the difficulty many nations have in accommodating the nationalism of other nations. The nations that achieved industrialization long ago may know history on the intellectual level, but they do not necessarily remember the emotional aspects of the disintegration and reintegration inherent in industrialization. In many cases it is virtually impossible for such developed nations to sympathize with the growing pains of emerging nationalism in other countries, especially when the emerging forces appear to be fanatical or when they seem to threaten the self-interest of the developed nations. On the other hand, the insecurity of developing nations may cause them to behave irrationally with each other or with developed nations.

What is particularly surprising is that the basic ingredient of linguistic nationalism, devotion to one’s own linguistic identity, can manifest itself in nonrational behavior even on the part of professional linguists, the very people one might expect to be the most rational or objective in dealing with linguistic matters. Here are two illustrations, one involving a developing country and the other a highly developed one.

The Turkish Linguistic Society (Türk Dil Kurumu or TDK) was formed in 1932 with the personal support of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. One of its main tasks was to create words from Turkish roots that would replace foreign words. For centuries the official language of the Ottoman empire had been Osmanli, a mixture of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Early in the twentieth century the spoken Turkish of Istanbul began to replace Osmanli, and in 1929 the government abolished Arabic writing and replaced it with the Roman script. In 1934, the TDK published the first collection of Turkish words to replace Ottoman words. This list of 30,000 words caused considerable confusion, and the following year the TDK prepared another glossary. This new glossary contained many Arabic and Persian words. In support of this retention of foreign words, the linguists advanced the “Sun Language Theory.” According to this theory, Turkish was the earliest language of the world. Consequently all words were Turkish to start with, and foreign words in Turkish had been borrowed in the first place from Turkish by other languages. Hence it was not essential get rid of widely used foreign words in Turkish.

The second example involves the official attitude of language planners in France toward words derived from American English. A distinguished linguist, Henry Kahane, describes the situation in the following way: After World War I, the United States, replacing French hegemony, becomes a menace to French pride. Out of the feeling of military-political inferiority grows an intellectual superiority complex, resulting in a cultural-ethical hostility toward the United States. The language becomes the symbol against which the hostility is most strongly in evidence. Americanisms symbolize colonialism: they are America’s fifth column; they express submission; they reveal a preference for dollars over francs. The defense of the génie français is realized through a defense of the French language, and linguistic nationalism takes on a warlike character. Duhamel said in 1968: “Our first duty is to watch over the purity of our language. Importing vocabulary is a sign of weakness.” The enemy is franglais. Americanisms are danger/invasion/cancer. Borrowing is treason. Foreignisms are compared to useless immigrants. Etcembre, the foremost fighter against franglais, has written an expose with the slanted title, From French Prose to Atlantic Sabir. Atlantic sabir means Atlantic pidgin; in other words, he interprets American English as the base language of a new lingua franca which replaces French.
Let me phrase the battle of the French intelligentsia against Americanisms succinctly, as a set of conservative political and cultural attitudes. The anti-attitude symbolizes a belief in tradition and norm, in elitism, in the intellectual's skepticism toward technology; it symbolizes an anti-democratic reaction against women, the young, and mass culture; it symbolizes anti-Americanism and a rejection of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The attitude against Americanisms, in short, reflects the struggle against the cultural and social revolution which marks the decline of the traditional French civilization.

If linguists and critics can (knowingly or unknowingly) be chauvinistic in the very areas in which they claim to be the most objective and rational, then should we be surprised when people whose current glory is not visible to anyone else suddenly happen to discover that their language is of divine origin? Such excessive nationalism probably deserves to be derided, but the derision should be balanced with serious consideration of deeper issues. As Joshua Fishman observes, this inclination to deride ethnocultural nationalism has, for a long time, been continued in the West for over a century, with little scholarly and even less general recognition that such derision itself reflects a stage in the evolution of ethnocultural... integration. While others were just beginning to dig into and reconstruct their ethnic pasts, Western intellectuals were already beginning to extol nonethnic and supraethnic rationality.

The five factors that determine the overall socio-political importance of language can be calmly considered only by people who have come to terms with their own linguistic identity. Those who have not done so may have to go through a stage in which they proclaim their mother tongue to be the supreme language in the world.

The entire problem, of course, becomes painfully compounded when there are several competing mother tongues in the same area. Perhaps in no other country is the problem as critical as it is in India. Unlike countries which have to deal with only two or three languages, India has over a dozen major languages, not to mention some eight hundred dialects.

The Constitution of India in its Eighth Schedule recognizes 15 languages, which are as follows: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. Hindi has been given the status of India's official language, along with English.

Four of these languages (Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu) are members of the Dravidian language family, while the remaining eleven belong to the Indo-European family. In other words, these languages differ from each other as much as English, French, Russian, and Hungarian. Since linguistic issues get mixed up with other potentially explosive issues like religion, it is important to note that 85 percent of the population of 750 million is Hindu, 10 percent Moslem, and the remaining 5 percent Christian, Jain, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian. The land area is 1.2 million square miles, exactly a third of the size of the U.S.A.

Hindi, the official language, is the mother tongue of 180 million people in the North. (The World Almanac's figure of 254
million includes many people who might officially classify themselves as speakers of Urdu.) Spoken Hindi and Urdu have roughly the same grammar, and the spoken form of the marketplace is often called Hindustani. For literary or official purposes, however, Hindi differs from Urdu. Literary Hindi favors words from Sanskrit, the classical language of Hindus; literary Urdu favors words from Persian and Arabic, languages favored by Moslem writers. This linguistic phenomenon is known as diglossia. It involves the use of relatively uniform dialects for literary, religious, or other formal contexts alongside less uniform spoken dialects that vary considerably from one region to another. In this particular case, the perception of diglossia is intensified by the use of the Devanagari script by Hindi writers and of the Persian script by Urdu writers. The two scripts are totally different in appearance and, in addition, Urdu writing goes from right to left, while Hindi goes from left to right.

Proponents of Hindi are quite zealous about promoting their language in non-Hindi-speaking states. But there is considerable resistance, especially when the speakers of other languages feel they have to compete for jobs that have unfair requirements involving knowledge of Hindi. In fact, most of the linguistic nationalism in India that appears so excessive and irrational on the surface has as its underlying cause economic anxiety on the part of someone or other. In extreme situations the anxiety can cause riots, but most of the time linguistic differences do stay on a

Most Americans are familiar with Canadian bilingualism, exemplified in these signs.

In January, 1983, the Governor of Tamil Nadu, a southern state, complained that despite assurances given by the late Jawaharlal Nehru and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Railway Administration was insisting that its employees pass Hindi examinations to qualify for annual raises. The state government, he said, would like to urge the Center to take the necessary steps and adhere to the earlier assurances.

On the same day in the neighboring state of Karnataka there were uproarious scenes in the State Assembly, leading to a fifteen-minute adjournment. It was the opening day of the Assembly and the trouble started simply because one of the members took his oath in Tamil, the language of Tamil Nadu.

Some of this linguistic rivalry among the states is alleviated by the special role of English. Only 2 percent of the population know English reasonably well, but these are the most powerful people, the people who run the country. English is the language of business, science, and administration. It is a "link language" for the country as a whole, and since it is a foreign language for everyone it creates a strange kind of linguistic equality, at least among the privileged people who can afford English education. In the lower grades of the majority of schools the medium of instruction is the local language, but in higher education English is generally essential. In fact, anyone who tries to appeal to a national audience and campaign for the abolition of English has no choice but to make the appeal in English.

This complicated linguistic situation is, of course, the result of the long historical process that created today's India, in which so many diverse people jostle each other in such limited space. The contrast with other large countries like America is really dramatic. In America it became possible for people from advanced European countries to make a new start on rich, unexploited land without the burden of obsolete European traditions. The native people were either eliminated or neutralized, and no native language was ever in a position to compete with English.

In India, on the other hand, there was a long cavalcade of settlers or invaders — the Aryans, Sakas, Parthians, Parsis, Huns, Mongols, Turks, Moguls, and finally the British — and they all contributed in some way or
other to the crazy quilt that is modern India's linguistic legacy. With the descendants of so many different groups competing for scarce resources, is it any wonder that from time to time religious and linguistic differences should cause human patience to wear as thin as the exhausted topsoil of the weary land?

Other Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines also have problems similar to India's. In each case there is an official language that the government sponsors in order to promote national identity and unity, but in no case does this official language meet all the needs felt by the country as a whole or by minority groups lacking competence in the official language. Linguistic acrimony and confusion are virtually inevitable in all such situations.

The problem is not limited to developing countries like India and Indonesia. Even in technologically advanced countries that are not burdened by problems comparable to India's, the wellspring of linguistic nationalism or chauvinism can run surprisingly deep. Canada has only two languages to cope with; yet linguistic resentment there led to a 1980 referendum over whether or not Québec should become a French-speaking sovereign state. The proposal was defeated because many speakers of French realized that voting for separation from English-speaking Canada was tantamount to committing economic suicide. In the midst of the linguistic furor that preceded the referendum, Sun Life of Canada decided on April 25, 1978, to move its headquarters from Montreal to Toronto. An overwhelming 84 percent of the company's policyholders had voted for the move. A move of this sort by a business establishment as large as Sun Life never fails to make the handwriting on the wall visible, even to blind fanatics.

Even though on the surface the raging issue in such cases is language, the deeper currents are more socioeconomic than linguistic. There is nothing in the structure of French or English that caused the problem in Canada. The same sociolinguistic problem can arise in relation to any two languages. In Canada the French-speaking people are the less privileged group. In Belgium, on the other hand, it is the speakers of French who are the dominant group. The entire country of Belgium has fewer inhabitants than the single city of Calcutta; yet tensions between speakers of French and speakers of Flemish have caused serious trouble in Belgium. The Flemings (speakers of Flemish) feel that they have been discriminated against both socially and economically and, as might be expected, linguistic resentment rises to the surface every so often.

In Switzerland the French-speaking Swiss do not resent the large majority of German-speaking Swiss people because they do not feel culturally or economically deprived. Economic opportunities abound for all citizens, and the geographical proximity of France enables the French-speaking Swiss to avoid a sense of cultural isolation or inferiority. In Canada the French-speaking people are too far away from France to sustain close cultural links with the main center of the French language, and in addition they feel overwhelmed by the economic power of English-speaking Canadians and Americans.

In short, for every country like Switzerland (with its commendable record of linguistic harmony among speakers of four languages) or Finland (which has a good record of cooperation among speakers of Finnish, Swedish, and Russian), there are many examples like Belgium, Canada, and India. The explanation is that regardless of the level of development in a given country, if there happens to be a group which feels that a linguistically dominant group is preventing it from achieving its full potential, its rightful place in society, then linguistic hostility is inevitable.

So the similarity between developed and developing countries in relation to such linguistic tension is that in each case the group that feels its language is not being accorded its due importance is also the group that feels it is economically disadvantaged. The difference is that in a developed country linguistic nationalism does not destroy the basic pattern of society. In a country like Sri Lanka, on the other hand, de-emphasizing English has hurt scientific work, while conflict between speakers of Tamil and Sinhalese has been serious enough to cause many deaths and to evoke the specter of partition. Clearly, today's world involves a new paradox: alongside a growing tendency toward internationalism there is a strong pull toward narrow provincialism or nationalism, especially in relation to language. Finding the proper balance between internationalism and linguistic nationalism should be a major goal of modern
education in developed as well as developing countries.

This balance involves moving away from narrow tribalism and recognizing the differences between the roles that should be played by regional languages like Bengali or Japanese and by an international language like English. The former are essential for emotional and cultural reasons; the latter is indispensable for the future of mankind as a whole. Along with recognition of the need for bilingual education (for limited periods only) in many places, there must also be recognition of the impossibility of sustaining modern civilization without an international language.

This international language must, of course, be a natural language. No artificial language (such as Esperanto) is ever likely to provide a realistic shortcut to linguistic integration either locally or globally. Expecting an artificial language to replace national languages is not a sign of intelligence, either natural or artificial. In fact, such an expectation may be a sign of artificial stupidity. The practical course to follow is to let each human being develop his or her mother tongue and to provide the opportunity (wherever the means are available) of learning a second language that can serve as a link with the rest of the world.

The dogma about teaching a child first in its "mother tongue" may appear unchallengeable if one is in a fairly simple bilingual situation such as exists in Wales, but is far less meaningful in those multilingual situations with which we are mainly concerned.

Secondly, the claim that "he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium" is not necessarily true. . . None of the students in Malaya with whom I have discussed the point has admitted experiencing any psychological disturbance on beginning school at an early age in English; many have said, however, that some of their problems in speaking English correctly could have been surmounted more easily if their teachers had had sufficient linguistic training to be able to pinpoint the difficulty for them.

Proper linguistic training is indeed going to be crucial, especially in countries that do not currently have an international language and therefore need to promote at least two languages: the local language and a language like English.

Until the general public appreciates the basic linguistic equality of all languages, it may not even be possible for people to learn how to combine loyalty to their mother tongue with proper consideration of the linguistic needs of society at large. It is not enough to tell Spanish-speaking people demanding bilingual education in the U.S.A. or French-speaking people trying to "purify" French or Tamil-speaking people harboring fears of "Hindi imperialism" that they must identify with larger sociopolitical structures. They have to be motivated to arrive at this conclusion on their own through a process of long-range education. To be effective, this education has to include at least two lessons that the entire world must learn.

First, intense linguistic nationalism is unavoidable in a newly formed state. In fact, such nationalism may even be necessary.

Through nationalism masses of people attain and maintain a new and a constantly renewed sense of identity and purpose. . . . Without the mother tongue, which too is viewed as reborn. . . . neither songs nor poems, nor slogans, nor proverbs, nor speeches, nor epics, nor books, nor schools, nor nationality, nor nation would have come into being.

People often refer to America as a young country, but in reality America is one of the oldest countries in the world. The cultures in many other countries may date back thousands of years, but as states most of these countries are very young. The psychological age of a country needs to be measured in terms of continuity in governmental structures and regular activities like shopping and paying taxes and going to school. There are very few countries in which the patterns of such activities have enjoyed two centuries of continuity. The average person everywhere is far more aware of this kind of continuity than of the history that creates (or destroys) the continuity. So in terms of "continuity age" as distinguished from "historical age," America is old and established and therefore does not need linguistic nationalism. Or rather, it is probably more accurate to say that America is so well-established that it does not have to be conscious of its linguistic nationalism. To become a citizen of the United States one must show knowledge of English. (Exceptions are made only for people who are over fifty and have already lived more than twenty years in the U.S.A.) Surely this requirement shows linguistic nationalism, presumably of the desirable type.

Second, the stress on authenticity that is characteristic of new nationalism generally leads to language planning. Inevitably, the
language planners in new states (as well as in some old, established states like France) become overly concerned about the purity of the mother tongue and try to eliminate foreign words. Sometimes this excessive zeal produces all kinds of clumsy new words. In India, for example, newspapers “periodically carry articles that are highly critical of the new Hindi. At one point even Nehru exclaimed in Parliament that the Hindi broadcasts of his own speeches were incomprehensible to him. “22 He was complaining, of course, about the excessive patriotism of official promoters of Hindi who (like their counterparts in France) wanted to get rid of English words, even those which had been thoroughly integrated into everyday speech patterns. I remember, for example, that at one point the Hindi planners wanted to replace “railway station” (which was in common use in Indian languages) with bdrop shlokat gamanagaman sihan, which, in Sanskritized Hindi, literally means “steam vehicle going-coming place.” There was much amusement in coffee houses and at parties, and I cannot recall anyone ever using the new Hindi term in a railway station. In his autobiography Nehru wrote:

I would personally like to encourage Hindustani to adapt and assimilate many words from English. . . . We lack modern terms, and it is better to have well-known words than to evolve new and difficult words from Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic. Purists object to the use of foreign words, but I think they make a great mistake.23

Those who doubt the validity of Nehru’s remark and fear that language can be harmed by incorporation of foreign words should ponder the fact that over the centuries English has lost 85 percent of the original words of Old English.24 Absorption of thousands and thousands of foreign words into English has not hindered English-speaking people in creating Hamlet or inventing penicillin or landing on the moon.

Historical trends since Nehru’s death in 1964 have proved that he was wholly correct in his stress on reasonable internationalism. In its May 19, 1983, issue, The New York Times accurately reported in an article on India that after three decades of often bitter squabbling over what the national language of this country of many languages should be, it appears that English is winning.

Hindi and English are both established as official national languages for governmental use. Originally Hindi was to stand alone. And opposition over the years from states where Hindi is not spoken, particularly in the south, has enabled English to hold its own in central Government use. . . .

Indian English has adopted many local words, as is the case in many other countries where the use of English has expanded.

Conversely, in a kind of cross-fertilization that may be producing a sort of “Hindish,” Hindi has incorporated many English words. Some authorities place the proportion of English in Hindi as high as 30 percent.

This New York Times report highlights a significant aspect of linguistic nationalism in third-world countries brought about by the end of colonialism. When a controlling foreign power leaves a multilingual area, there generally ensues a period of intense rivalry among the local languages. India typifies the linguistic conflicts that have been generated among local groups in many countries following the collapse of colonial rule.

This aspect of linguistic nationalism may be seen only in former colonial areas, but in the final analysis these linguistic struggles involve basic human needs arising from deep-rooted feelings concerning psychic identity. Our self-images rely so heavily on the language(s) we know that it does not take much to trigger linguistic anxiety. In relatively uncomplicated situations as well as in complex ones, we can be plunged into abject helplessness when our linguistic props are taken away from us. Imagine a tourist who knows only Albanian trying to get around without an interpreter in a place like Cleveland, Ohio. Or imagine a group of Americans being ordered suddenly, by someone with power over them, to communicate only in Russian.

To return now to the questions raised at the beginning of this essay concerning patterns in modern linguistic nationalism, we can recapitulate the following general points that I have tried, explicitly or implicitly, to establish: (1) Overt linguistic nationalism (or even fanaticism) is inevitable when a group develops feelings of inferiority or a sense of being exploited by an outside group. (2) A linguistically dominant group dealing with a struggling group should show special sensitivity in enabling the latter to achieve a position of dignity in the family of man. (3) All languages are equal linguistically but not sociopolitically; the overall importance of a
language is determined by practical matters such as the number of speakers, economic and political power, and the amount of land available for future expansion. (4) In today's world, English is the closest thing we have to a world language, and every country stands to gain by promoting English alongside a local language. (5) The ultimate issues in linguistic nationalism involve deep-rooted feelings concerning human identity that we do not understand fully; we must, therefore, continue to explore these issues with scholarly caution and sensitivity.

The only alternative to understanding these five generalizations is one that has an ancient name: Babel. Given all the variables in today's world, it is obviously impossible to predict the details involved in linguistic nationalism of the future, but recognition of these five generalizations will at least enable us to improvise in a rational manner as we enter the twenty-first century.

NOTES

2Macnamara, pp. 71-72.
3Macnamara, p. 73.
4Macnamara, p. 65.
5Time, November 22, 1982, p. 84.
6Ibid.
11Fishman, pp. 43-44.
12Fishman, pp. 11-13.
15Fishman, p. 25.
17India Abroad, February 4, 1983, p. 15.
19This information was given to me by Mr. Robert L. Viall, Group Representative, Sun Life of Canada, Cleveland Group Office.
21Fishman, p. 55.
22Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta, p. 163.
23Fishman, p. 72.
Susan Hinton

Forest Photographs

Susan Hinton grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, received a B. A. from Sangamon State University in Illinois, and studied art at St. Louis University and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and photography at Illinois State University. She now lives in Columbus, Ohio, where her photographs have appeared in many exhibitions.

Of her subject matter and craft she writes: "I grew up in the city, but learned to love the countryside from numerous camping trips my family took when I was a child. Still, the countryside was always a mysterious place, full of things that I had no familiar knowledge of. I felt that the uninterrupted growth and decay was somehow sacred and that I was a trespasser who should walk cautiously, perhaps even on tiptoe, through the surface stillness of the forest. At its most intense, I felt as though the beauty were a mirage — no — as though I were the mirage and would slowly fade away . . . .

"I want my outdoors photographs to be unabashedly visual. I would like to produce work which will continue to capture interest after our language and our words have changed beyond recognition. . . . I hope to do this by making work that will invite people to look and keep looking. I work with an extended gray range, texture, selective focusing, and painstaking composition. Though I work with the world as it is (very rarely do I move anything around in front of the camera), I am not interested in "truth." Instead I am fascinated by the way in which directed vision can select slices of the "real world" to produce some eerie and "unreal" effects. I like to play with perspective, light and light sources, depth vs. flatness, and reflections of one scene or part of a scene onto another scene. Ultimately I hope to produce little visual worlds, or mazes, that a viewer can get into and stay willingly lost in."
faerie ring
memory encountered
The Anatomy of Best-Seller Lists

The lists grow and decay like living organisms, feeding on the publishing industry, the public, and themselves.


The best-seller lists — those neat sets of statistics appearing toward the end of each New York Times Book Review and, less elaborately, in other newspapers and magazines like Time and Publishers Weekly — who reads them and why? Occasional students of popular culture have given them a passing glance, commenting, usually invidiously, as to why this or that work has or has not graced the lists with its presence. Others have taken a longer view: from Alice Hackett's periodically revised 80 Years of Best Sellers, for example, we can learn that the most popular author of all time, after God, is Erle Stanley Gardner, whose dozens of novels have sold over 132 million copies, far outstripping his nearest, less prolific competitors (Mickey Spillane at 42 million, and Ian Fleming at 37 million). 1

No one that I know, however, has viewed the lists as phenomena in themselves. As I brooded over them, week after week, a few years ago, I began to perceive a pattern in the shifting ranks of titles. A particular best seller is born into a list at a particular time, grows, lives on the list, matures, fades, and dies, like any mortal creature. Public attitudes toward the lists also seemed cyclic; there have been flurries of criticism around 1921, 1938, 1949, 1962, and 1971. 2 Do the lists themselves, I wondered, have their own life cycle?

To answer that question, I began in 1974 an attempt to record the lists' changes and, I hoped, to plot their courses. My formal observations began on September 1, 1974, with the first appearance on the Fiction list in the New York Times Book Review of James A. Michener's novel Centennial (Random House). I decided to start with the entrance of one new book on the lists and follow them until all ten books on the Fiction list and all ten on the Nonfiction list had entered since the starting point: this would be the first half of a cycle — the period of "growth." Then I would continue to follow the lists until all of those 20 books had finally left it: this was the second, "decaying" half of the cycle. It can be seen that in my system of cycles, this second half-cycle overlaps with the beginning of a new cycle, as a new generation of titles begins to replace the older one.

The "growth" half of the Centennial cycle turned out to be seven months: on March 30, 1975, the Fiction list contained for the first time no book that had not entered it since the first of the preceding September. In those seven months, 16 works of fiction and 19 works of nonfiction had entered the closed world of the best-seller lists, and most also left them again by mid-July, though Centennial had by then dropped only to third place. It did not leave the list permanently until October 19. The fact that more nonfiction works than...
fiction appeared during the Centennial cycle and that every work of fiction survived for at least two weeks, whereas several appeared only once on the Nonfiction list, suggested that the Nonfiction list has a slightly more rapid metabolism. The titles' departures from the lists were sometimes only temporary: Marabel Morgan's ode to womanhood, *The Total Woman* (G.K. Hall), for example, turned up in tenth place on the Nonfiction list on November 3, 1975, reappeared on April 27, 1976, and then appeared about every other week for several months.


This first attempt at formal observation of the lists was informative, but frustrating. It convinced me that my initial perception had had some validity, and it gave me some hints as to the structure of the organic pattern of the lists. My notion that the lists could be analyzed in terms of overlapping cycles seemed promising. Yet I had to leave that first attempt incomplete. Before I had come to a satisfactory conclusion, the *New York Times Book Review* changed its format, listing the top fifteen instead of the top ten and supplementing its hardback Fiction and Nonfiction lists with two new paperback lists: Mass Market (those uniform-format paperbacks found on drugstore and supermarket racks), and Trade (the more expensive paperbacks found in irregular formats, sold mostly in bookstores). Moreover, I was still looking more at individual best sellers, rather than at the lists themselves. Some systematic methodology was necessary if I was to do more than make observational notes.

Available studies provided little help. Much has been written, of course, about some particular best sellers, though there seems little correlation between total sales of a book and the amount written about it; critics more often choose to write about books they like, rather than ones the public likes. Anthony Burgess, for example, noted in 1971, "Generally the books that make the most money are those which lack both style and subtlety and present a grossly oversimplified picture of life. Such books are poor art, and life is too short to bother with any art that is not the best of its kind."

Critics who look more generally at best sellers often compile lists themselves (the best sellers of the 1970s, or of all time), but
their attention remains either on individual books, on types of books, or on changes in public taste. John Sutherland, in the most insightful book on best sellers to date, devotes his second chapter to an excellent synthetic overview of the whole phenomenon, including lists ("The Best-Seller Machine and Its Diverse Products," pages 31-37), but spends most of his 259 pages on individual books, types of books, and differences between British and American taste. Robert Escarpit anatomizes the sales patterns of best sellers, distinguishing between "fast-sellers" (books that rise quickly to the top of a list and then fade away), "steady-sellers" (books that may never reach the top of a list but stay at lower levels for a long time), and the true "best-sellers" (books that rise quickly to the top of a list and fade very slowly, often with recurrent peaks of sales).

The most useful hint for a methodology was that the lists consisted of changing populations, and therefore, like human societies, could be analyzed only statistically; one had to begin by measuring the movement-patterns of the individual books populating the lists. In my own pilot study of the Centennial cycle I had, like many journalistic writers, used "number of weeks on list" as a measure; but, as Escarpit had made clear, a book's life-cycle pattern must consider not only time on list but also position on list. His own measuring-stick was "total sales," which does merge both position (weekly sales) and time (sum of sales) into a single figure. "Total sales," however, is only indirectly related to the lists themselves; a book often goes on selling well, and therefore accumulating total sales figures, long after it has left the lists, and it is difficult to obtain total sales figures of all books.

The measuring device I needed had to use only data provided by the lists themselves, and had to take into account not only the time a book stayed on a list, but also its sequence of positions on that list. After some experimentation I arrived at a scale on which a book "earned" 25 points each week it appeared in first place on a list, 24 points for second place, and so on, down to 11 points for 15th place; a book which dropped off a list only to return later earned five points for each intervening week. When each book left a list for good, I calculated a three-value rating. For example, William Styron's Sophie's Choice (Random House) earned a total rating of 47.935 (19.9) in the Fiction list; on the list for 47 weeks, earning a total of 935 points, and an average of 19.9 points per week, reflecting a mean position over its course of sixth place on the list.

December 20, 1981: Seven of the fifteen top Trade Paperback best sellers are about cats, and will remain so until January 7, 1982.

I have been using this system to follow the New York Times Book Review hardbound best-seller lists (Fiction, Nonfiction) since November 12, 1978, and its paperback lists (Mass Market, Trade) since January 21, 1979. The data collected has been analyzed through December 5, 1982—a four-year period in which the Fiction and Nonfiction lists completed three overlapping life-cycles and were winding down their fourth, the Mass Market list was approaching the mid-point of its sixth cycle, and the Trade list (for reasons to be discussed later) had not yet completed even one cycle. In those four years, 583 books entered and left the four lists, many of them in that time having moved from a hardbound to a paperback list.

Statistically, the three lists for which I have analyzed data for three full cycles show some interesting patterns, as Figure 1 demonstrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
<th>Mass Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Total weeks in cycle: Average</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(high, low)</td>
<td>(100/60)</td>
<td>(102/75)</td>
<td>(105/64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Average number of weeks on list per book</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Average points earned per book</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Average number of books in cycle</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The length of a cycle is highly variable, but on all three lists the average cycle takes a little more than a year and a half to run its course. The two hardbound categories seem here to show very similar cyclic patterns: though the length of the Nonfiction cycle is somewhat longer, the typical book spends a little over four months on a list and earns about 309 position points, reflecting a mean rank on the list of about ninth place. The Mass Market list, however, seems to run a different course, a
much quicker one; its component books stay on the list only some two and a half months, and earn only a little over half as many position points (about 180). The mean rank of Mass Market books (between ninth and tenth places), however, is similar to that of those on hardbound lists. The rank-distribution of books on these three lists is thus not a neat bell-shaped curve; more books appear in the lower half of the list (below eighth place), and hence more briefly, than appear above eighth place.

The Trade paperback list is very different from the other three in at least one respect: thus far in my period of observation, no cycle has yet completed itself. Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* (Simon and Schuster/Fireside) had been on the list for some time when I began recording data in 1978, the last survivor of the preceding cycle. When it finally left the list for five weeks on October 25, 1981, I recorded the beginning of a new cycle, but to my distress it reappeared on February 7, 1982, and again on March 7 for seven straight weeks, twice in May, three times in August, twice in September, and three times again in October before leaving, apparently for good, on October 24, 1982. Though it has not appeared since, one still finds it displayed prominently in some bookstores, and I do not trust it not to reappear in the Trade list at any time.

If it proves true that the average length of a Trade paperback cycle is more than four years, then one would expect that list to exceed the other three lists elsewhere in the categories I have used for rating. It is indeed a Trade paperback, Mary Ellen Pinkham's *Best of Helpful Hints* (Warner/Lansky), which holds the record among the 583 books analyzed for "longest time on any one list" (108 weeks) and "most points earned on one list" (2,366). Overall, however, the 110 trade paperbacks that have entered and left the list in four years do not show such startling differences from
books on other lists: the typical Trade paperback best seller stayed on the list 20 weeks (only a bit longer than the hardbound average), and earned 291 points (a little less).

Some of the differences between the four lists become more pronounced in an analysis of the upper end of the scale in each one, the twelve highest-ranked books (the upper 17 percent of the 583 books), as can be seen in Figure 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, <em>Ashes in the Wind</em></td>
<td>Avon</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>$4.95</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fiction: romance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Betty Edwards, <em>Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain</em></td>
<td>J.B. Tarcher</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$8.95</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nonfiction: art/psychology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Simon Bond, <em>101 Uses for a Dead Cat</em></td>
<td>Clarkson N. Potter</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>$2.95</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nonfiction: cartoon/humor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Barbara Taylor, <em>A Woman of Substance</em></td>
<td>Avon</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$2.95</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fiction: romance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Peter Straub, <em>Ghost Story, Pocket</em></td>
<td>Pocket</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$2.95</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fiction: terror</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sidney Sheldon, <em>Bloodline</em></td>
<td>Warner</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>$2.95</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fiction: general</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Judith Krantz, <em>Scruples</em></td>
<td>Warner</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>$2.75</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fiction: general</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This ranked list alone is suggestive. The top ten, with one exception (no. 2), intermingle works from the Trade paperback and hardbound Nonfiction lists, while the hardbound Fiction (nos. 11-15) and all but one (no. 2) of the Mass Market paperbacks form another cluster. Figure 3, however, reveals further information.
Beyond the clustering just noted of the Nonfiction with the Trade books, and of the Fiction with the Mass Market books, the most obvious distinction lies in the fact that most of the books on the Trade list appear only on it: of the 110 books on the Trade list in four years, only 12 appeared earlier on one of the hardbound lists, whereas over half of the Mass Market paperbacks came from a hardbound list. Roger Tory Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds* (Houghton Mifflin) was published almost simultaneously in hardbound and paper: the Trade paperback ($9.95) went on that list on November 2, 1980 (where it stayed 83 weeks to earn 778 points, seventh from the top of that list), and three weeks later it appeared...
on the Nonfiction list. Only recently have Trade paperbacks begun to be republished in mass-market format, and only four in my four-year period have made the transition from the Trade to the Mass Market paperback best-seller list. In addition to Kathleen Woodiwiss's *Ashes in the Wind* (mentioned above, no. 6), they include Robert A. Heinlein's *The Number of the Beast* (Fawcett/Columbine), Jerry Hopkins's and Daniel Sugerman's *No One Gets Out of Here Alive* (Warner), and Erica Jong's *Fanny* (New American Library — the only one of the 583 studied here to appear on three lists). In none of these four cases has the mass-market reprint done at all as well as the Trade version, and so this experiment may not continue for long.

Unlike the other three lists, the Trade list contains a high proportion of non-books (joke-books, parodies, cartoon books, etc. — represented in the top 20 by nos. 4 and 9); on November 21, 1982, ten of the 15 were non-books — three parodistic guides to behavior, and seven cartoon books. Thus its relationship to the Nonfiction list is not as close as it first appears.

The books in the hardbound Nonfiction list are generally much more serious than the Trade paperbacks, though even the Nonfiction list has its trivial side. The Nonfiction leaders show considerable influence from the mass media: Sagan, Simmons, and Herriott (nos. 3, 5, and 8) all have ties to television programs; and Tarnower's book (no. 2) would not, as I mentioned elsewhere, have stayed so long on the lists without the publicity engendered by his murder and the subsequent trial. As the presence of Tarnower's book suggests, the Nonfiction list shares with the Trade paperbacks an emphasis on self-help books, especially those on diet, exercise, and food. It is no coincidence that two of the top five Nonfiction books have to do with food; so do Nathan Fritikin's *The Pritikin Program* (Grosset and Dunlap), sixth on the Nonfiction list, and Craig Claiborne's *Gourmet Diet* (Times Books), twelfth. There has not, I believe, been a single week in the four years studied here when at least one cookbook, diet, or exercise book was not on the Nonfiction or Trade best-seller lists.

There are also differences in content between the hardbound Fiction and the Mass Market paperback lists. To be sure, four of the top six Mass Market books are works of fiction, all four of them had previously appeared on the Fiction list, and five of the six works of fiction in our top 15 (nos. 6 and 11-14) later became Mass Market best-sellers. But the kind of novels that lead the Fiction lists are very different from those in the same position on the Mass Market list. Four of the top five on the Fiction list are historical novels, whereas novels of romance and terror rank high among the Mass Market paperbacks. It is more than chance that the novels at the top of the Trade paperback and hardbound Fiction lists showed at best mediocre performance on the Mass Market list, and the Mass Market leaders did no better on the Fiction list. There is a clear difference in taste between those who buy hardbound and paperback fiction.

It is revealing to note the disparity between the performances of a single book on different lists. Of the 583 books in our sample here, 138 appeared both on the Mass Market lists and on one of the two hardback lists. By my system the average rating of these 138 books on their hardbound lists was 21 weeks and 388 points earned, well above the average for all hardbound books surveyed, while their average rating on the Mass Market list was 12 weeks and 194 points, only a touch above the average for all books on that list. In other words, the average book appearing on both a hardbound list and the Mass Market list stays on the hardbound list nearly twice as long and earns exactly twice as many points there as it does on the Mass Market list. Of the five books for which the disparity was greatest in favor of the hardbound version, all appeared originally on the Nonfiction list. Readers of Mass Market books obviously prefer fiction; Tarnower's book seems now even more of an anomaly. In general, hardbound nonfiction works republished for mass-market distribution have little chance of making the Mass Market best-seller list; four of these five were above-average Nonfiction best-sellers, but all of them barely made it onto the Mass Market list.

It is not surprising, then, that all of the five books for which the disparity was greatest in favor of the Mass Market list appeared originally on the hardbound Fiction list. These five top novels ran a below-average course on the Fiction list but appealed strongly to the mass-market public. Not only does the mass-market audience prefer fiction to nonfiction, but it prefers detective and suspense novels and romances to fiction of the more serious
sort. Wilfrid Sheed wrote, commenting on the ubiquity of books by writers like Michener, Leon Uris, and Morris West on the 1960 best-seller list:

The Best Seller List has always had these aspects of a venerable club, which grants a few lifetime memberships for the Right Sort. Only death could have kept John O'Hara . . . out of that year's meeting. Alan Drury . . . must have blotted his copybook in some way; He was just our sort. Meanwhile literary fellows like John Updike . . ., Robert Penn Warren . . . and John Hersey . . . frisk eternally at the foot of the stairs. The Club is proud and perhaps relieved to have them, but they can't get in without a book. The life members just have to mention their names. 36

Perhaps the elitism of an Anthony Burgess, already quoted, has some point after all. Sheed concludes:

So, as ever, you had to go root out the best books for yourself, without much help from this lazy, self-indulgent, congenitally timid guide. In fact, I am half-persuaded that, perhaps then and certainly now, if you simply bought five first novels, any five, you would have a better time of it than with five random best sellers. And if it didn't quite work out like that, at least you would have sent some young writer to summer camp, instead of becoming an item in a fat cat's tax shelter. And literature in its quiet way would thank you for it. (Page 17).

Speaking of fat cats . . .

November 21, 1982: Jim Davis alone has seven cat books on the Trade paperback list, and they will stay there for five weeks.

What has been said so far hardly begins to exhaust the data I have collected in nearly nine years of studying the best-seller lists, though it may well have exhausted the reader's patience. But before I close, let me turn to the phenomenon of cat books. It is clear that we have had, not simply a cat book phenomenon, but a specifically "Garfield" phenomenon as well. 37 Jim Davis may well be the only author in history to have seven books simultaneously on a single best-seller list, as he did on the Trade list from November 21 until December 19, 1982. Those seven books had, all together, garnered by December 5 a total of 341 weeks on that list; the first one alone, Garfield at Large, had been there 138 weeks. Mr. Davis may be on the way to passing Mickey Spillane's record as the best-selling author of this half-century.

The cat-book craze is scarcely imagi

able without the existence of best-seller lists, and that defines it as a specifically American phenomenon, for we are a list-making culture. 38 In Europe or elsewhere in the world, any sudden popularity of books about cats would scarcely be noticed. 39 Here in the United States, the best-seller lists not only provide instant notice, but also create "positive feedback"—a phrase used to describe the annoying phenomenon that occurs when you hold a microphone too close to the amplifier to which it is connected: output of the system feeds back into it and, further amplified, breeds a vicious cycle that results, in the case of the microphone, in an intolerable scream.

So also the best-seller lists. A cycle develops some apparent emphasis, such as cats. The "output" of the lists—publicity—stimulates everyone to exploit the fad before it dies, and each new book augments it until some undefined saturation point is reached, and the bookstores are left with cat books galore by writers who responded too late: not best sellers but nonsellers, destined for the remainder tables.

If that scenario is as accurate as I believe it to be, then the best-seller lists are not simply a journalistic device to record what is happening within our book-reading culture, but—like many attempts to measure phenomena 39—they are an intrusive force affecting directly and profoundly the phenomenon they set out to record. Each list is a pseudo-living system that, feeding on the publishing industry and public taste, continues indefinitely to renew itself. For how long? Consider one final cat-book reference:

August 21, 1983: There is only one cat book remaining, in ninth place, on the Trade List. Its title is Garfield Eats His Heart Out.

Garfield eats his heart out

STUFFED AGAIN

His Sixth Book from W. W. NORTHE
NOTES

1 Alice Payne Hackett and James H. Burke, 80 Years of Best Sellers (New York: Bowker, 1977).


3 One of the more delightful studies is Geoffrey Bocca’s recent Best Seller (New York: Wyndham Books, 1981), which discusses fifteen books, from F.W. Farrar’s Eric, or Little by Little (1858), by way of Tarzan and Beau Geste, to R.C. Sherriff’s The Hopkins Manuscript (1939). His subtitle is indicative of the usual attitude toward best-sellers: A Nostalgic Celebration of the Less-Than-Great Books You Have Always Been Afraid to Admit You Loved.


6 Hackett and Burke.


8 Cited in note 5.


10 The best example I have recorded is Betty Edwards, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain (J. P. Tarcher), which entered the Trade paperback list on March 23, 1980, left it for four weeks, reappeared on April 27 to stay for 57 weeks, dropping out for two weeks (January 4 and 11, 1981) and one-week intervals (February 8 and May 17, 1981), but then reappearing periodically (August 2, September 6, and October 18, 1981; February 2, March 14 and 21, and April 11, 1982), before leaving the list permanently.

11 My best example is The Complete Scarsdale Medical Diet (Ransome and Wade), by Herman Tarnower and Samm S. Baker, which entered the Nonfiction list on February 4, 1979, was in first place between April 1 and November 11, 1979 (dropping to second on July 22 and October 28). It left the Nonfiction list on January 13, 1980, the same day it entered the Trade paperback list (Bantam), where it rose to first place for four weeks (April 6, 13, and 21, and May 18, 1981) and remained on the list through Tarnower’s murder and the trial of his mistress-killer with only two lapses (January 18 and July 26, 1981) before leaving the list permanently on August 2, 1981.

12 In that pilot study I had independently, unaware of Escarpit’s work, made graphs of each book’s pattern of occurrence on the lists, and had begun to recognize the differences in pattern that led to his distinctions. My own graphs, however, suggest that, whereas the “fast-seller” is a category fairly distinct from the other two, it is difficult to draw a clear boundary between “best-sellers” and “steady-sellers.”

13 Also, as noted earlier, many books that are “best-sellers” in terms of total sales over time, like the Bible and some reference books, never appear on the lists at all.

14 Publishers Weekly regularly provides annual sales figures for many books, but by no means for all that appear on the best-seller lists; it occasionally provides total sales-to-date figures for a still more limited quantity of books. My own efforts to obtain figures directly from publishers met with varying success; some provided detailed data willingly, others refused on the grounds that it constituted “confidential information which belongs to each writer in question” (letter from Walter Meade, President, Avon Books, October 21, 1982).

15 My rationale for this scale was that, when a “steady-seller” book drops off the list for a week or several and then returns, it would in fact still be on a longer list during the interval. I therefore postulated an hypothetical list of the 25 best-sellers, and assumed that any book off the list of 15 best sellers for a short period would, on the average, be in 20th place. This system proved reliable in all but a very few cases. The clearest of these few anomalies is Peter Straub’s Ghost Story (Coward; McCann and Geoghan), which began a somewhat below-average course on the Fiction list on April 29, 1979 (19 weeks, 276 points), and a year later (April 13, 1980) a slightly above-average course on the Mass Market paperback list (Pocket Books: 13 weeks,
January 4 until September 13, 1981, it returned (obviously popular for Christmas gift-giving) from December
weeks; it’s earlier reappearance on May 30, 1982, after a 42-week interval, is what gave it the 83-week tenure
by Mr. Williams, hence its popularity. Its long tenure on the list includes a lapse: on the Fiction list from
and its high position on the list, and now it
appears to be an illustrated fantasy for children, a sort of book that is seldom, if ever, a best seller. However,
7, 27-29, for a discussion on this transition; some follow-up comments appear in his “Sales Up of Hardcover
Tarnower’s book, the figures in the Mass Market column become (reading down) 37,
Edwards’s book (see note 11).

251 points). However, when the movie came out, the paperback reappeared on the list on January 17, 1982,
and stayed there for eight weeks. Applying my usual rating system produces a quite unrealistic 99 weeks and
770 points for its paperback life on the list.

2 My “weeks on list” figure differs from that given in the Fiction and Nonfiction lists in the New York
Times Book Review; it covers the weeks between first appearance and final appearance, including intervening
weeks not on the list; their figure includes only weeks a book was actually on the list.

The Fiction and Nonfiction lists provide not only a book’s position for the current week but also its
position the preceding week and its total number of weeks on the list, so that one can easily locate any book’s
first appearance on those lists. The Mass Market and Trade paperback lists, however, provide only current-
week position; so I had to follow these lists for ten weeks before beginning to keep statistical records, to assure
that I could clearly identify first appearances. I used the lists in the New York Times Book Review rather than
(e.g.) those in Time or Publishers Weekly because they provide the most sophisticated distinctions and the most
information.

One book had in fact moved through three lists: Erica Jong’s Fanny, which entered the Fiction list on
(in all three formats published by New American Library), earning a somewhat below-average rating as a
hardbound book (12 weeks, 211 points), and significantly below-average ratings in paperback (Trade 7
weeks, 113 points; Mass Market 3 weeks, 44 points). The triple-format publication is a phenomenon that will
be discussed later.

Alex Comfort’s The Joy of Sex (Simon and Schuster) first appeared in 1972. It may well, by now, be the
book that has spent the longest time on a best-seller list.

Remember that cycles overlap; cycle 1 has reached only its half point when cycle 2 begins; cycle 1 ends
and cycle 3 begins at the half-life point of cycle 2, and so on. For the Fiction, Nonfiction, and Mass Market
lists, I found that it was sufficient to allow three weeks to pass after the last book in one cycle had left the list
before assuming that the books of the next cycle had completely replaced those of the earlier one, and
therefore beginning to record new appearances as part of a third cycle. In this case, the astonishing resistance
to death of the Joy of Sex cycle led me to wait five weeks: but that proved insufficient.

Its parallel in Trade cycle 1, still in progress after more than four years, is Richard Bolles’s What Color Is
Your Parachute? (Ten Speed Press), which has been on the Trade list almost uninterruptedly since February 4,
1979.

The differences between the Mass Market list and the others show still more clearly if one eliminates
the anomalous case of Tarnower’s Scarsdale Diet book (see note 12), whose 82 weeks and 1497 points earned
are about double the average for the next five top books on that list (see nos. 16-20 in Figure 3). Without
Tarnower’s book, the figures in the Mass Market column become (reading down) 37, 99/21, and 602 (843/452).

For the Mass Market list, the top six: since Tarnower’s book, no. 2 on my list, appeared in the top five
on both the Nonfiction and the Mass Market lists and since its course on the latter list was somewhat
anomalous, I included the next five on that list.

2 See note 23.

2 See note 11.

Kit Williams’s Masquerade is an anomaly on the Fiction list. Technically, it is hardbound fiction, but it
appears to be an illustrated fantasy for children, a sort of book that is seldom, if ever, a best seller. However,
the text and illustrations encrypted a message that could (and did) lead to a perfectly real “treasure” hidden
by Mr. Williams, hence its popularity. Its long tenure on the list includes a lapse: on the Fiction list from
January 4 until September 13, 1981, it returned (obviously popular for Christmas gift-giving) from December

Peter Straub’s Ghost Story is another anomaly; see note 16. Without the points earned during its 18-
month absence from the Mass Market list, it would not be among the top 20.

The Field Guide reappeared on the Trade list in 15th place on May 22, 1983, after an interval of 46
weeks; its earlier reappearance on May 30, 1982, after a 42-week interval, is what gave it the 83-week tenure
and its high position on the list, and now it will doubtless go still higher. It is a true “slow-seller,” like Betty
Edwards’s book (see note 11).

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26 See note 11.

27 Kit Williams’s Masquerade is an anomaly on the Fiction list. Technically, it is hardbound fiction, but it
appears to be an illustrated fantasy for children, a sort of book that is seldom, if ever, a best seller. However,
the text and illustrations encrypted a message that could (and did) lead to a perfectly real “treasure” hidden
by Mr. Williams, hence its popularity. Its long tenure on the list includes a lapse: on the Fiction list from
January 4 until September 13, 1981, it returned (obviously popular for Christmas gift-giving) from December

28 Peter Straub’s Ghost Story is another anomaly; see note 16. Without the points earned during its 18-
month absence from the Mass Market list, it would not be among the top 20.

29 The Field Guide reappeared on the Trade list in 15th place on May 22, 1983, after an interval of 46
weeks; its earlier reappearance on May 30, 1982, after a 42-week interval, is what gave it the 83-week tenure
and its high position on the list, and now it will doubtless go still higher. It is a true “slow-seller,” like Betty
Edwards’s book (see note 11).

7, 27-29, for a discussion on this transition; some follow-up comments appear in his “Sales Up of Hardcover
33See note 19.

34On this phenomenon see Melvin Maddocks, "Best-Seller List Is Getting To Be a Joke," Cleveland Plain Dealer, January 1, 1982, section B, p. 3.

35See note 23.

36The following five titles are those for which the hardbound edition (H) earned the greatest number of points, by my system, over the mass-market edition of the same book. The number of weeks on the list and the point earnings are noted in parentheses.

37The following five titles are those for which the mass-market edition earned the greatest number of points, by my system over the hardbound edition of the same book. The number of weeks on the list and the point earnings are noted in parentheses.


This is in itself material for another essay. The roots of the cat-book phenomenon may go back to B. Kliban's cartoon-book Cats (Workman, 1975), a trade paperback which became something of a cult favorite in the late 1970s.


On the general phenomenon of "scientific measurement" in humanistic areas, see Bruce A. Beatie, "Measurement and the Study of Literature," Computers and the Humanities, 13 (1979), 185-194.
Martin Kessler

Mystery-Man of Music: The Orchestra Conductor

The mystery — as opposed to the so-called “mystique” — of conducting has fascinated and intrigued me since my mid-teens when I first had an opportunity to observe the conductor’s work at close quarters through numerous rehearsals and recording sessions. But paradoxically, the more familiar I became with the technicalities of the conducting as a craft . . . the less I felt I understood the essence of this most elusive of arts.

— Helena Matheoupolous, from the introduction to her book Maestro (Harper & Row, 1982).

The glamour-boy of the classical music world — that is how many view the professional conductor. No figure is more visible, more important — or, in my opinion, more misunderstood. Often overpraised for qualities of a performance that are really not under his control, and just as often maligned for equally inappropriate reasons, the conductor remains a mystery to audiences and orchestra members alike. It is my hope to dispel some of these mysteries by answering the cocktail-party question most frequently asked of a conductor: “What exactly is it that you do?”

To begin with, the full-time conductor (or “Maestro” as he is often styled) is a relative newcomer to music. It was less than two centuries ago that the first conductor stood in front of a performing ensemble and led its members in a piece of music by means of silent gestures. Not until the era of Wagner’s music dramas and the massive symphonies of Brahms, Bruckner, and Mahler did conductors emerge whose principal activity was conducting. Until then there were composer-conductors, such as Weber, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, and Spohr, or pianist-conductors, such as Liszt, von Bülow, and Halle. And it was not until our century that the species known as the Music Director, combining administrative and public-relations duties with artistic ones, was engendered. Conducting did not become a legitimate course of study in musical conservatories until 1945, and useful textbooks on the subject are still scarce.

Martin Kessler, a native of Cleveland, began conducting as a high school student; he was the youngest participant in the conducting program at the Meadowbrook School of Music, where he studied with Robert Shaw, James Levine, and Clayton Krehbiel. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Harvard University, diplomas in conducting from the Salzburg Mozarteum (Austria) and the Trinity College of Music (London), and a master’s degree in music composition from Cleveland State University. As a composer he has received several commissions. His conducting experience includes orchestras at Harvard, Trinity College of Music, and Cleveland State University; the Trinity Chamber Orchestra of Cleveland, formerly the Opus 1 Chamber Orchestra (specializing in contemporary music); the Cleveland Opera Theater; and, since 1979, the Suburban Symphony of Cleveland. Also well known in the Cleveland area as a teacher, he is Head of the Music Department at University School upper campus.
The conductor himself often contributes to the mystification that surrounds him. Far from being troubled by the misunderstanding, many conductors seem to revel in mystery as protection against criticism. Serious musicians, however, prefer to have their work, in which they take pride and pleasure, better understood.

Perhaps the most important source of misunderstanding is the nature of the conductor's work itself. The answer to the cocktail party question is a multiple one. Conductors don't do just one thing; they have many duties, some of them appearing quite unrelated, and no two conductors are equally talented in all of them. The modern conductor is not only a person who stands in front of an orchestra and leads it with his baton; he is also a teacher-critic, historian-editor, interpretive artist, inspirational leader, administrator, and media front-man for the orchestra. The best way of describing what the conductor does is to provide a job-by-job description of this highly peripatetic profession, with illustrations from my own experience.

The Conductor as Orchestra Leader

Consider the conductor in his most characteristic environment — in a tailcoat with white tie standing in front of an orchestra with his back to the audience. The first official gesture he makes is to bring his hands up to what is called the "ready" position. This alerts the players to the fact that the piece is about to begin: violinists bring their instruments up to their chins, oboists and bassoonists wet their reeds, and brass players tinker with their bent tubes and pipes. The next gesture is the "preparatory beat." This is the beat which precedes the first played beat. The Star-Spangled Banner, for example, begins on the third beat of a 3/4 measure, so the preparatory beat would be the second one. The conductor's way of beating time is of great importance to the players. His gestures represent a picture in the air of the beats in each measure of music. This is done with the right hand, whether or not the conductor uses a baton, and employs an internationally accepted language of patterns easily understood by every orchestral player wherever classical music is played. In this lexicon of gesture, the 3/4 pattern is very much like a right triangle whereas the 4/4 pattern closely resembles a Catholic sign of the cross.

This may seem to be a remarkably simple process hardly consistent with the subtlety generally attributed to the conductor's art. It is indeed simple in its schematic form—in fact it is taught to children to give them the notion of beats in a measure. Yet no other aspect of the conductor's physical performance is as subject to stylistic variations reflecting each conductor's individual personality and manner.

It is understandable that no two conductors will look alike beating the same pattern, since these simple movements convey an inordinate amount of expressiveness. The degree of sharpness of the pattern, achieved by the rebound of the wrist, tells the players how they are to articulate a given passage—whether it is to be smooth and connected or separated and rhythmic. The size of the pattern informs the players how loud they are to play and which beats are of major rhythmic importance. Finally, it is the beat pattern that controls all of the changes of speed that influence the shaping of a performance. Just as no two moments of human experience are the same, so no two moments in a piece of music, even repeated sections, are identical in length, loudness, or any other characteristic. Through his baton technique a conductor represents musical time as a constantly unfolding phenomenon, both for the orchestra and for the audience.

Whereas the right hand beats the time, the conductor's left hand gives cues and comments on the message of the right. For example, when the conductor puts his left palm down, he wishes the orchestra to play softly; conversely, the rising upturned palm means "play louder." By pointing to a player or a section of players, the conductor instructs them when to enter. Because only the conductor

1In my use of the masculine pronoun to refer to conductors, I am in part following literary convention but also reflecting the fact that— for reasons unrelated to the nature of conducting or to women's abilities—most, but by no means all, conductors have been men. There are notable exceptions such as Sarah Caldwell and Nadia Boulanger. And I am sure that we will see a time when female conductors will be no rarer than female hornists, bassoonists, and bassists are today.
The author demonstrates basic conducting movements. **Top:** the "ready" position. **Middle:** "play softly." **Bottom:** "play louder."
has the entire score before him (either on the stand or in his head) and players have only their individual parts, there could be doubt about the exact moment when an entry should take place. In addition to telling the player when to come in, the conductor's cue can indicate the style and manner of the entrance. In a way, the conductor is telling the player why the composer wanted him to enter at that particular moment.

The left hand was once known as the "expressive" hand because of a series of emotive gestures that were a common part of a conductor's physical language. A quivering left wrist called for more vibrato, touching the heart requested a sweeter, more expressive sound, and the clenched fist, a forceful aggressive sound. This kind of gesture seems to have been abandoned by modern conductors and has been replaced by less overt signals which are more fully integrated with the rest of the technique.

But do experienced musicians really need such direction in a performance? On a notorious occasion the president of a South American country, who was a fine amateur musician, was given the honor of conducting the National Anthem at an official Washington function. All went well except that the U.S. Marine Band played the Star-Spangled Banner, which is in 3/4 time, while the visiting President conducted his own country's anthem, which was in 2/4! One might reasonably ask why, if the conductor is so important, the performance did not fall apart. The conductor's importance is relative to the orchestra's familiarity with the repertoire and the skill, experience and musicianship of the players. Certainly, the Marine Band could play the National Anthem under any circumstances, with or without a conductor. And the Cleveland Orchestra could give a perfectly satisfactory performance of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* without a conductor, but *Till Eulenspiegel*, a piece which the players know almost as well, but which is rhythmically more complicated, might well fall apart without a conductor.

In my own career, I can recall two outwardly similar conducting assignments: *The Mikado* with Cleveland Opera Theatre in 1981 and Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* in Cain Park in 1982. In actuality the two occasions could not have been more different in their demands on my conducting technique. In the former case, the charming, straightforward music of Arthur Sullivan presented absolutely no problems for either cast or orchestra: each night my biggest decision was how fast to take the patter songs, how long to hold a fermata, and whether there was sufficient applause to warrant an encore. *Sweeney Todd* was quite another matter. This psychologically and technically complex melodrama was written to be performed only by the most skilled Broadway performers. (It was in fact planned to open at the New York City Opera.) Our production was mounted with a cast and orchestra exhibiting a wide range of skill and experience, from seasoned professionals to talented high school students. Each night it seemed to me as if the success of the performance depended to a great extent on my ability to concentrate intensely for three hours.

So when you see a conductor at work, think of him as performing three functions: first, he is the rhythmic glue that keeps the players together; second, he is the sole repository of the entire score; and finally, he is the unifier of the interpretation. Although this may seem a burdensome assignment, it is possible to think of it as merely the last step in a series. The conductor's job is almost finished by the time the performance is ready to begin. It is in the study of the music and in the rehearsal of the orchestra that the real work of the conductor takes place.

**The Conductor as Teacher and Critic**

The conductor's work may seem mysterious to the public because it does not see him except in performance. The rehearsal hall is not open to the public, but that is where the conductor spends most of his time. Rehearsal is also the most important activity for producing the final result. Exceptions should be noted in the case of well-known works like the Dvorak *New World Symphony*, which any of the great orchestras of the world could play without rehearsal. There are also opera houses in Germany and Italy where operas in the standard repertoire are performed without rehearsal. Nonetheless, rehearsals are the groundwork of any performance and the main occupation of a working conductor.

The number of rehearsals devoted to any piece will vary greatly, depending on the caliber of the orchestra and on the difficulty of the work. The conductor's rehearsal strategy will vary accordingly. A first-ranked international orchestra, such as the Cleveland Or-
Martin Kessler conducts at a rehearsal of the Suburban Symphony.

orchestra, may need no rehearsals, or as many as three for a difficult piece; a second-rank American major orchestra (e.g., the Milwaukee Symphony) needs on the average two to four rehearsals; a metropolitan amateur-professional group (e.g., Cleveland's Suburban Symphony), five to seven. Clearly, the amount of teaching increases dramatically as skill and experience decline. My duties with the Suburban Symphony, an orchestra of which I am the Music Director, will provide a good illustration.

At the beginning of a rehearsal the orchestra must be tuned, a process in which the oboist plays an “A” three times so that the players in each of the orchestral families — strings, brass, and woodwinds — can adjust the pitch of their instruments. This task is normally performed by the concertmaster, who is both the leader of the first violin section and the second leader of the orchestra. If the concertmaster is not present, the conductor may supervise the tuning, but will take an active part only when individual players are having trouble adjusting their pitch.

I like to begin the rehearsal with a work or a movement from a symphony that is fully scored (i.e., one that has parts for all the instruments), so that everyone can be playing from the beginning of the rehearsal. I try to avoid a piece that requires great subtlety of interpretation, as the frequent pauses for explanation can be disruptive.

Assuming that most of the players have either never played the piece before or haven't played it recently, I try to begin with a run-through, stopping only if things fall apart. This process gives the players an auditory picture of the piece as a whole, an essential step, since the next stage involves the fragmentation of the work and rehearsal of each part separately. This first run-through

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The Suburban Symphony, founded in 1954, is one of the region’s outstanding avocational orchestras. It holds weekly evening rehearsals (currently in Beachwood High School) and gives an average of five concerts a year. Most of its members are drawn from Cleveland’s eastern suburbs and play for the love of it, though many have considerable musical training. Their ages range from fourteen to seventy. The conductor, concert-master, and several other key players are paid professionals; in addition, distinguished soloists often join the orchestra for individual concerts.
The conductor discusses a point in the score with Suburban Symphony bassist Martin Hersch.

also gives the players and conductor a sense of where the most difficult parts are. A third reason is to confirm that there are no serious mistakes in the printed parts. Unfortunately, printed music frequently contains inaccuracies, from simple typographical errors to discrepancies between the parts and the conductor’s score and even to the omission of whole sections of the work.

If the run-through has been relatively uneventful, I then return to the beginning of the piece, which we rehearse with great care. There is a theoretical and a practical reason for this procedure. The theoretical reason is that I believe a piece of music evolves from its opening, a view supported by the old saying that an artist has only one free gesture—the first. The practical reason is that there is never enough time to rehearse an entire piece in detail. Rehearsing a single passage in detail makes it possible to set a standard for what is expected from the orchestra the rest of the way.

After the opening has been perfected, I generally change my attitude from that of a teacher to that of a critic. That is, from this point on, I stop when something is not right, either in interpretation or performance. Here the conductor’s rehearsal technique comes into play. He must have the “ear” to hear a mistake; he must have the knowledge of the score and the orchestral experience to discover the source of the mistake in the dense wall of sound created by an orchestra; and finally he must know how to correct it. The latter requires mainly common sense and judgment. If a difficult string part is ragged, repetition at different speeds is a good rehearsal technique; if a cello melody is out of tune, stopping and tuning the offending notes is effective. But one must also know when not to stop for a mistake. A pure flub will be corrected by the player himself; to stop and point it out is unnecessary, infuriating to the player, and a waste of precious time.

When the performance is near, the best rehearsal is a run-through without stops. After all the fragmentation involved in normal rehearsal procedure, it is important to reestablish the piece as an artistic totality. And, for a group like the Suburban Symphony, run-throughs are important because avocational orchestra players don’t have the stamina of professional musicians.

Ultimately, there are as many different rehearsal styles as there are conductors, from the pedant at one extreme to the lax “everything will turn out all right in the performance” type on the other. The main need is to keep the players working at the music and to engage their individual musicality in the preparation of the performance. Good rehearsal technique involves everything from management of time to a feel for the psychology of the group. But the very foundation of good rehearsal technique is a thorough knowledge of the score and an affinity for the stylistic, esthetic, and emotional intentions of the composer.

The Conductor as Historian and Editor

How a conductor actually learns a piece of music is perhaps of more interest to other conductors than to the general reader. Suffice it to say that, through piano reductions, silent study, and, yes, listening to records, somehow we manage to learn our scores. But learning the notes, rhythms, harmonies, and forms is just the beginning of score study.

I start with this fact: nine-tenths of the music a conductor will conduct in a typical season is at least fifty years old. The bulk of the repertoire comes from the two centuries between 1700 and 1900, a period which takes us from the Concerti Grossi of Vivaldi to the massive symphonies of Mahler. This set of limits immediately places the contemporary con-
ductor in the role of historian of style and of performance practice.

Musicologists have been very helpful to conductors in this regard, particularly in the performance of music of the Baroque and earlier eras. But for music between Haydn through Richard Strauss, a conductor’s access to historical information is much more haphazard.

The average concert-goer may ask, “Isn’t everything right there in the score?” The answer is resoundingly, “No!” For one thing, composers and publishers have always taken certain practices of the composer’s own era as a given and, therefore, unnecessary to include in the score. During the Baroque era, for example, there were no articulation marks indicating staccato (sharply separated notes), only slurs indicating legato (notes connected to each other). We have deduced from this that the general style of Baroque playing was highly articulated, and that sharply separated notes were the norm. The only marks a Baroque composer would feel obliged to add, therefore, would be those that altered this kind of articulation. A second example taken from the other end of the period is a curious pair of written instructions that one frequently finds in the scores of Gustav Mahler. The phrases are nicht schleppen and nicht eilen, which mean respectively, “don’t slow down” and “don’t speed up.” It is very unusual to find instructions which warn against altering the rhythmic status quo, but Mahler, who was a celebrated conductor in his own right, was well aware of the contemporary tendency to alter the tempo at certain highly charged moments. By warning against this performance practice at certain places, he is, essentially, confirming the speeding up and slowing down at similar places that are unmarked.

A second way in which the printed score is inadequate has to do with certain stylistic traditions (particularly national customs) which exist only as aural history, passed on from performance to performance and from teacher to student. I am reminded of a conducting teacher of mine at the Salzburg Mozarteum who was telling us about a diminuendo (gradual reduction of volume) in a Beethoven symphony which never appears in the score. When challenged about it, my teacher responded with characteristic Viennese dryness, “Well, I got the idea from Bruno Walter, who got it from Hans Richter, who got it from von Bülow, who got it from von Weber, who got it from Beethoven.”

The last and perhaps worst problem of the printed page deals with the editions themselves. Except with music of the last fifty years, an orchestra almost never uses an original edition. This means that there are at least four intermediaries between the interpretive artist (the conductor) and the creative artist (the composer): the publisher, the editor, the copyist, and the typesetter.

Of these four, the publishers and the editors are the worst culprits. Publishers often show a profound awareness of financial considerations and a profound lack of interest in artistic considerations. Probably the most scandalous example of such an attitude is the suppression of the original score of the Beethoven Fifth Symphony, which contains over one hundred measures of music not in any published edition. It seems that Beethoven made a cut in the initial performance because of the excessive length of the program, and the publishers erroneously failed to print this material. To this day, orchestras continue to play Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony without this cut section because the publishers felt it would be too costly to redo the plates! For the same reason publishers continue to print scores and parts containing copyists’ and typesetters’ errors without even an enclosed errata sheet.

The case of the editors is somewhat more complex. There are numerous devoted editors whose scholarship and musicality have added greatly to the quality of musical performances; for every good one, however, there is a bad editor who suffers from the twin failings of ignorance and arrogance. The most obvious example of this is to be found in the Breitkopf and Härtel editions of music of the eighteenth century. These editions contain a wholesale romanticization of the music of Bach, Handel, Haydn, and Mozart, including added slurs, altered dynamics, and actual tampering with notes, rests, accidentals, and orchestral details. It is part of the education of a conductor to know which publishers and editors are reputable and for what repertoire.

The conductor himself is, of course, the final editor of the music. Nine-tenths of the interpretive decisions a conductor makes are actually editorial decisions — notations of articulation, dynamics, and tempo which are added to the players’ parts before and during
There was a time when it was relatively common for the conductor to make changes in the orchestration. Many of these conductor-generated changes make excellent sense and have remained standard in performance. A celebrated example is the second statement of the second theme in the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. This figure is a horn call, and is scored for two French horns in unison the first time it is heard. But the second statement, in the recapitulation, which occurs in a different key, is mysteriously scored for two bassoons. Conductors long ago realized that Beethoven chose this orchestration because of the physical limitations of his contemporary horns; before the advent of the piston horn (c. 1830), this second statement was in a key impossible for horns. No such limitations exist for the modern horn and so, in the name of musical sense and symmetry, this change is now regularly made in performances of our own era.

But apart from discovering errata and correcting stylistically inappropriate editorial markings, why should the conductor feel authorized to alter or add to anything in the printed score? The stock answer, which is indisputably correct, is that the printed page of music is really nothing more than a bare blueprint of the performance. Musical notation cannot help being highly inexact. During every millisecond of a performance, players make subjective interpretive decisions—how soft is mezzo-piano, how fast is più mosso, how separate is marcato. It is the job of the conductor to interrelate these myriad decisions into one cohesive whole based on his own vision of the piece.

The Conductor as Interpretive Artist

A conductor makes interpretive decisions on three levels. First, there is the general level which we might equate with the conductor's vision of the piece. Second, there is the particular level which has been previously alluded to—actual decisions about how fast, how loud, how connected, and what version to use. Finally, there is the subliminal level—the unconscious, intuitive way in which a conductor inevitably interjects his personality into the interpretation of the piece.

Of these three levels I find the first to be the least important. Occasionally, in a moment of epiphanal revelation, the meaning of a piece of music crystallizes in the mind of the conductor. One must be suspicious of these insights because most great music is too complex to yield to a central unifying vision. Even the composer himself is seldom to be trusted when he gives an explication of his work. As I think back on my own conceptualization of certain pieces in the repertoire—the slow movement of the Beethoven Seventh Symphony as a Dance of Death, for example, I am aware that the organic nature of music is incapable of being contained within such a capsule analysis. Nonetheless, a conductor does need to have a flexible vision of the meaning of the parts of a piece, and he must be able to make the parts fit together into a naturally unfolding whole.

The particular or technical level of interpretation should serve to make the meaning clear. These decisions break down into two varieties: the way the printed indications in the score are translated into sound, and the unwritten details a conductor adds on his own. For a brief illustration of both of these matters, let us consider an excerpt from the first movement of the Franck D Minor Symphony, reproduced on the next page.

Here we are looking at twelve measures of music—eight measures of transition, and the first four measures of a new theme. Transitions, by the way, are generally the most crucial interpretive moments in a piece of music, as they frequently involve changes of speed, dynamic, and mood. The composer in this case has provided the conductor and players with a wealth of interpretive instructions. He wants the flute and oboes to be "expressive" through the eight measures of transition. As these instruments play the main melody, "expressive" in this case must mean played "so-loisti­cally," with somewhat exaggerated phrasing and slightly louder dynamics. As the other wind instruments have exactly the same dynamic indications, including the crescendo-decrescendos, it is important that the two sets of instruments which are marked "expressive" stand out.

The entire passage is in two-bar phrases; the composer shows us this with slur-marks. But, exactly how to execute these two-bar phrases is left up to the conductor. Should the wind players actually breathe after two measures? Or does the up-and-down contour of the melody mark the phrase clearly enough without a breath? I conduct this passage with no breath between the second
and third bars, but with a slight stretching of the tempo to give the clarinet's F# some room, and to anticipate the pianissimo repeat. I then have the woodwinds breathe at the same time as the horns before the fifth bar.

Measures five through eight show how vague musical indications are even in a carefully — one might almost say fussily — marked passage. We have, for example, no dynamic indication for measure five. Do we stay at the pianissimo level or revert to the previous slightly louder piano? I prefer the latter because I think the pianissimo was only a coloristic variation for the exactly repeated third and fourth measures. We next see "molto crescendo," which might be translated as "play a lot louder." The question then is, does the music become as loud as possible or does it become louder within a piano (soft) dynamic? Again, my vote is for piano; if Franck had wanted the dynamics to go into the forte (loud) range, he would have marked it "f" somewhere in the passage. Furthermore, we must still balance the flutes and oboes, which have the melody, against four horns, which do not. Finally, three questions remain unanswered: where is the peak of the crescendo? Where does the diminuendo actually start? And how
slow does the "poco rallentando" get? My answers are: the high-F in the seventh measure is the peak of the crescendo since it is the highest note in the passage; the diminuendo begins a note earlier than marked; the rallentando should slow down enough to accommodate the quarter-note activity in the eighth measure.

I have included the first four measures of the new theme to show how the conductor acts as interpreter with purely additive details. Unless told to do otherwise, string players will normally begin a passage which starts on the first beat of a measure with a down-bow (i.e., arm moving away from instrument), and normally the entire string section of the orchestra would start on the same bow motion. My preference, however, is to ask the first violins to begin up-bow and to change to down-bow on the second measure. An up-bow in string technique is characterized by a quiet, unaccented beginning and a natural crescendo, whereas a down-bow is forceful at the beginning and has a natural diminuendo. The marking "dolce," the rising line, and the emphatically repeated high-D on the downbeat of the second bar suggest to me that this "backwards bowing" makes the best musical sense.

As to that most elusive aspect of a conductor's art, his own personality, it is enough to say that in a social interchange as highly charged as the performance of a great piece of music, the unarticulated power of the conductor's personality inevitably has a profound effect on the orchestra. To paraphrase Herbert von Karajan, "Ultimately, it is only the worth of the conductor as a human being that is important." Of our own generation of major conductors, Carlo Maria Giulini comes immediately to mind. Though a man of great spiritual impact, he has nonetheless a very unorthodox and occasionally awkward physical technique. By his own admission, he is not a facile musician; it takes him a long time to learn a piece to his satisfaction and thus his repertoire is correspondingly limited. Furthermore, in rehearsal he is a minimalist in matters of technical correction and fine tuning. With any but the foremost orchestras, this technique would probably result in musical disaster. Yet the compelling sincerity of Giulini's vision and his love for the process of music-making put him in a class by himself, universally admired and respected.

A conductor is many other things besides the personae that I have tried to describe here. Besides his musical functions as leader, teacher, historian, editor, and interpreter, he also has nonmusical functions as administrator, group psychologist, fund raiser, media personality, and even sometimes labor negotiator. But as important and time-consuming as these activities are, it is the music itself which sustains and motivates this unusual breed of hard-working, often misunderstood professionals. Behind every stern glance and magisterial gesture, there is a child sneaking off to the family phonograph to thrill again to the hundredth playing of his favorite piece.
Michael J. McTighe

The Limits of Voluntary Charity

Even in nineteenth-century Cleveland, during a supposed Golden Age of Voluntarism, government was a major dispenser of aid for the needy.

President Ronald Reagan's call for a new spirit of voluntarism to help the truly needy assumes that there was a golden era when private groups, not the government, shouldered the burden of aid. Reagan opened the 1982 United Way campaign with the claim that "By working together through voluntary organizations like United Way, we keep alive the historical values that served us so well in the past." According to Reagan, in the 1981 campaign, "we proved again, as a Nation, that the old community spirit of neighbor helping neighbor still works if we all pitch in."

Reagan's ideal of a golden era of voluntarism has proven popular as a rallying cry against the size and intrusiveness of the federal government, but it falls short as history. Voluntary societies have rarely been the only or even the primary dispensers of charity. From colonial days to the present, local governments have played a large part in aiding the needy. Voluntary charity reflects the attitudes and prejudices of those who give the aid; at times it has been openhearted and expansive, but at other times narrow, provincial, and flawed with the same intrusiveness that Reagan imputes to the government.

Cleveland in the first half of the nineteenth century provides a good example of the strengths and weaknesses of voluntary charity. Charitable societies of all styles flourished during these years here as in the rest of the country. Temperance, anti-slavery, anti-gambling, female moral reform, and poor relief societies made the ante-bellum years the heyday of voluntary reform.

Voluntarism at its best marked the work of the Soldiers' Aid Society of Northern Ohio. Organized in April of 1861, only five days after the first call for troops in the Civil War, Cleveland's was the first such society in the country. Two days after the Society was organized it received word from a nearby army camp that 1,000 men would soon be arriving, and they all needed blankets. The women of the Soldiers' Aid Society went to work. At 3:00 in the afternoon they set off in their carriages; by nightfall 729 blankets were delivered to the camp. By the next evening every soldier was furnished a blanket. In the four years that the Society's workers gathered provisions and visited hospitals, they raised $2 million in hospital supplies, $1 million in provisions, and $130,000 in cash. Thus, presented with a dramatic and clear-cut need, the Soldiers' Aid Society acted quickly, effectively, and asked nothing in return. Givers and recipients were united by patriotism and a shared purpose.

The same atmosphere marked other voluntary efforts. Holidays such as Thanksgiving, or sudden calamities such as fire, injury, disease, or death brought forth a sympathetic response. Ethnic groups and fra-

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ternal societies established mutual aid organizations designed to help their members. These mutual aid groups took pride in keeping their own from the public dole. Cleveland's Mayor William B. Castle, speaking to the St. Andrew's Society in 1856, saw it as a sign of the efficiency with which this organization relieved the unfortunate and distressed of Scottish descent that among the thousands who had received city poor funds, only one was a Scotchman. The Mona's Relief Society, for settlers from the Isle of Man, similarly congratulated itself that only one Manxman had been a resident of the poor house and insisted that he too would have been aided, but he had revealed his birthplace only on his deathbed.

The city's churches also assumed some of the functions of mutual aid societies. Virtually all of the churches made provisions to deal with their own members who were poor. Part of the quarterly collection of most churches was earmarked for this purpose. Special collections or disbursements met occasional needs, such as when the First Presbyterian Church gave Polly Wright five dollars in 1837 because she was about to move and needed money. From time to time a church would make provision to help a needy "Christian traveler" on his way.

Voluntary charitable efforts had the capacity to be caring, flexible, and innovative. When the problem of poverty increased in the new city, Cleveland women formed the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society in 1843. According to its constitution, the Society was organized "For the retarding of intemperance, to which is added, systematic labor for the inevitable result of the vice, namely, poverty of every description." For the six years of its existence, the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society was the major voluntary society providing poor relief in Cleveland. The prime mover of the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society, and its only president, was Rebecca Rouse, later the president of the Soldiers' Aid Society. Rouse often made daily visits to comfort and aid sufferers. Finding one family with six children, who had sold everything they had, she brought firewood, provisions, a bed, and a bedstead, and managed to get the husband employment. The Society reported that "they were soon able to take care of themselves." Rouse furnished other families with medicine and nurses. During an outbreak of cholera, the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society sent clothes to the hospital for victims whose own clothes had to be burned.

When "heart-rending stories of neglect and want" in the Perrysville, Kentucky, hospital for Northern soldiers began to filter back to Cleveland, the Soldiers' Aid Society gave evidence of another virtue of voluntarism—the ability to act quickly and decisively. The final straw came one day at the Society offices when "an aged mother appeared, crushing in her trembling hand the letter that told a heart-breaking tale of her youngest and best-loved boy dying in one of those ill-conditioned hospitals, unfriended and uncared for." Three hours later the president and secretary of the Society were on their way to Perrysville, taking as their only luggage "a trunk stowed with oysters, soup stock, and stimulants." At Louisville there were strict rules against women passing through the lines, but after a personal interview with the post commandant they were allowed to proceed. "At Perrysville the dying boy was at once sought out, his last hours soothed, and his sorrowing mother in some degree comforted by knowing that her son had not died unfriended."

A young girl who came from the country to live with her brother with the intention of getting sewing came down with a "raging fever." The brother and his wife moved away, leaving her behind. Rebecca Rouse arranged for a widow, whom the Society had previ-
Cleveland, during the so-called Golden Age of Voluntarism, looking east from the corner of Bank (presently West Sixth) and St. Clair streets. The scene depicts a woman walking eastward along St. Clair and a young girl about to cross her path. In the background, a horse and carriage is turning in front of the First Episcopal Church toward the Old Court House (far right), now the site of the Terminal Tower Building. Drawn by Thomas Whelpley, 1834.

Thusly helped, to take the young girl in. Rouse visited her every day for several weeks until she recovered and returned to the country.*

Innovation, flexibility, and a personal touch were the marks of voluntary reform at its best, and were due largely to the work of a small group of dedicated individuals willing to lend their own efforts to care for the needy. Some of the limitations of voluntarism derived from these same characteristics. Voluntary societies were too small. They relied heavily on a few volunteers, and they could not sustain their work when volunteers left or problems spread. As the city grew, voluntary societies found themselves increasingly unable to meet growing demands, and they called for the local government to assume more of the burden.

The Martha Washington and Dorcas Society, Cleveland’s first concerted voluntary effort to provide aid to the general population, collapsed after six years. It suffered from two failings. First, it was largely the project of one woman, Rebecca Rouse. When she turned her attention to creating an Orphan Asylum, the Society lost its principal sustaining force. Second, the problem of poverty began to dwarf its capacities. The Daily True Democrat attributed the collapse of the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society to “the increase in pauperism and the added burden of aiding paupers without assistance from the local government.” The secretary of the Society pointed in the same direction when she asked, “Can we not have some permanent form of relief?”

The voluntary poor relief societies which followed in the wake of the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society were less personal and more concerned with targeting their aid. Terms handy in distinguishing some poor from others, such as “deserving” poor and “worthy” poor, became part of the standard vocabulary of relief. Even though they consciously dispensed their aid only to those they deemed deserving, the voluntary poor relief societies of the 1850s kept up a constant lament about their inability to bear the burden alone. The Martha Washington and Dorcas Society’s successor, the Relief Association, organized in 1850 by concerned citizens with men as officers, complained that their resources did not match the need for aid. In 1852 the Association considered whether poor relief would “continue to be done by this and other voluntary Associations, or by a well arranged Municipal plan.” Later that month the Association concluded that the responsibility for poor relief should be borne by the city, so that the “expense and burden of it fall upon all alike, in proportion to their property and means, like any other city expenditure, instead of being drawn from such as, while they are ever ready, should never in justice be required to do more than their due share of what is a common and public duty.”

Euclid Street Presbyterian Church’s
City Mission, founded in 1859, likewise failed to gather enough voluntary contributions even though it had developed a systematic program of visits and inquiries to ensure that only the truly needy were aided. The Mission’s agent pointed to the unwillingness of the church’s members to provide enough money to sustain the effort. Several members of the church who were the most able to help had evidenced little enthusiasm or liberality, he noted. He was inclined to believe “that there is too great a lack of zeal in this church to make any organized plan really efficient.”

The children’s institutions founded by the city’s voluntary societies made recourse to similar pleas of inadequacy and requests for help from the local government. In 1855 the Orphan Asylum requested and received a contribution of $150 a year from the city in recognition of the care the Orphan Asylum provided for children who otherwise might have had to receive relief from the city. The city also agreed to pay $150 for the support of a teacher. The Asylum’s reports called on the local government to do more, since private donations were not sufficient to sustain the project. The Annual Report published in March of 1861 argued that the city’s charitable residents were burdened with having to give to too many benevolent “enterprises”:

an institution like an Orphan Asylum, which is an integral part of every Christian city, dare not rely, for its maintenance on alms asked monthly, or yearly, of many whose sympathies are exhausted by minor enterprises.

The Ragged School, founded in 1853 by women connected with the First Methodist Church to provide education and training for abandoned and ill-disciplined children, eventually required even more government support than the Orphan Asylum. In the mid 1850s the city’s leaders confronted the problem of vagrant, neglected, and disruptive children. A committee of the Common Council,
as the City Council was then known, recommended city involvement. In 1857 the city adopted the Ragged School, and renamed it the Industrial School. The school became a hybrid in terms of public and voluntary initiative. The Council assumed control of the school and provided money from the city treasury to support it. At the same time, the city allowed a private group, the Children’s Aid Society, to supervise the school, and private fund-raising efforts continued. 14

This public involvement in the Orphan Asylum and the Ragged School was only one aspect of a general pattern of local government participation in charity work. Even in the early nineteenth century, the high tide of voluntarism, the local government’s charitable activity was prominent enough to undercut any claim that the early years of the city constituted an Age of Voluntarism. Public authorities always played a substantial role in poor relief. Sometimes responsibility for the poor was assumed by the city, and sometimes by the township, a governmental unit larger than the city but smaller than the county. Before the incorporation of the city in 1836, public poor relief centered on the township poor house. The city took over the poor house in 1836, placing it under the jurisdiction of the Board of Health. After two years of argument about whether the city had the power to levy a tax to support the poor house, it was returned to the township. In 1849 the city received the power to tax land in support of a poor house and in May, 1849, the Common Council authorized a Poor House and Hospital. Known as the City Infirmary, the main building was completed in 1855 at a cost of $20,000. It had three departments: a hospital, a unit for the insane, and a unit for the indigent and aged poor. 15

The local government spent considerable sums of money on poor relief in the 1850s, as indicated by the amount spent on the City Infirmary. In 1854, for example, the city spent more than $25,000 on aid. This far surpassed the expenditures of the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society, which in 1849 expended $525.90 and distributed provisions worth perhaps $5,000 more. 16

The notion that there was a Golden Era of Voluntarism loses much credibility in the light of the substantial relief activities actually conducted by local government; this notion also gives a distorted impression of the disinterested benevolence of voluntary charities. The voluntary societies were dominated by well-to-do Protestants whose beneficence combined sympathy, fear, and condescension. Neighbor helped neighbor, but if a Protestant neighbor was willing to help a Catholic neighbor it was usually on condition that the Catholic reassess his or her faith.

Protestants used charity as a vehicle for evangelism. Rebecca Rouse read the Scriptures and tracts to the sufferers she visited for the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society. In the City Mission operated by the Euclid Street Presbyterian Church, aid was dispensed with conditions attached: “No continued and permanent relief shall be granted to any family from the Relief Fund that is not or will not become connected with some Protestant Church or Sabbath School or congregation.” 17 The Plain Dealer complained that proselytizing was replacing aid. Efforts to improve morals, educate minds, supply Bibles, and save souls were good in their place, the paper agreed, but, “It is hard to acquire knowledge on an empty stomach, or to read the Lord’s Prayer without ‘daily bread,’ or to get religion without pork and potatoes.” Grace would go well as a dessert, said the paper, but it was a poor substitute for the necessities of life. 18

Protestantism permeated the voluntary societies which reached out to the general population. The officers of the Martha Washington and Dorcas Society, the Orphan Asylum, the Ragged School, and other societies were members of Protestant churches. The societies were organized in Protestant churches, met in the churches, and they received donations from them. The Ragged School, for example, was organized by Rev. Dillon Prosser and other Methodists, primarily from First Methodist Church. The church’s Ladies’ Home Missionary Society supervised the school and raised money to support it with concerts, entertainments, fairs, and suppers.

The rhetoric of voluntarism also derived from Protestantism. For the city’s Protestants, benevolence was one of the corollaries of conversion. Looking after God’s creatures advanced the glory of God. James A. Thome, minister of Ohio City’s First Presbyterian Church, saw “the true idea of Christianity as a union of piety and philanthropy.” Thomas Starkey, minister of Trinity Episcopal Church, in calling for a well-arranged and sys-
tematic plan of charity, saw such a project as both "a ministry of mercy to men's bodies" and as "a ministry of reconciliation to men's souls." The Orphan Asylum considered itself "a Christian home," its idea of a Christian, of course, being a Protestant. 19

Along with the Protestantism of these voluntary efforts came anti-Catholicism. The Martha Washington and Dorcas Society reported in 1848 that 59 of the 82 families helped were Catholic. The support for Catholics was somewhat grudging: "We would not complain of the preponderance of Catholics, if the church to which they belong, manifested a disposition to aid us in proportion to others," said the Society in its report for 1848. 20

Catholics and other observers complained that often aid did not reach Catholics, and that when it did, strings were attached. A letter to the Plain Dealer in 1852 complained that under the Relief Association and its agent, Benjamin Rouse, "the funds for the poor are taking a selfish, sectarian, close communion direction." The letter added that "The Deacon (Benjamin Rouse was a deacon of First Baptist Church) seems to act much like the Priest and Levite who found the man half dead between Jerusalem and Jericho, he passes him by on the other side." 21

The death in 1856 of a young child, Barbara Forman, testified to the religious tensions that pervaded voluntary reform. She was a pupil at St. Mary's Catholic Church school. Her gravestone tells the Protestant side of the story: "Little Barbara died from a whipping, a cruel punishment inflicted by a bigoted teacher for her attendance upon the Ragged School." Contemporary Protestant accounts reported that the child had been placed across a chair and then beaten with a thick cane.22

The altruism of the voluntary societies was also compromised by the social interests of the volunteers and their supporters. The voluntary societies were the creation of the relatively well-to-do. The societies depended on large subscriptions and donations from the business community and the wealthy. The male officers of the Orphan Asylum and the Industrial School, like officers in other voluntary societies, were city leaders — government officeholders and officers in a wide range of business, political, educational, and moral reform organizations.

The dispensers of aid had a major stake in the community, and, not surprisingly, their charity reinforced prevailing economic and social arrangements. Voluntary aid thus served an ideological function. Aid and institutions were organized to inculcate the piety, discipline, and work habits appropriate to the expanding city of which the givers were so prominent a part. The Protestant Orphan Asylum and the Ragged School, for example, intended to combine discipline, piety, and development of skills. As the Ragged School's Superintendent Robert Waterton described it in 1857, the "scholars" "learn to labor while they are taught in the elementary branches of an English education, and thus acquire habits of industry and self-reliance which are better than even food or raiment." Children were trained for "usefulness." Boys were taught to make brushes and "pick oakum," and girls were tutored in sewing. 23

As an indication of the extent to which social interests compromised altruism, the causes not supported by the voluntary charities are just as significant as those they did support. In early Cleveland the Female Protective Union, a labor organization of sewing women, tested the limits of charity. The Union was organized in 1850 by sewing women disgruntled at long hours, low wages, and pay which came not in cash but in credits which merchants refused to honor at face value. The innovation of the Female Protective Union was to refuse to accept the dependent status of the usual recipient of aid. The Union appealed to philanthropic citizens for help in establishing a cooperative store where they could market their goods for themselves: "We ask not for charity, but for a loan of sufficient capital to commence an establishment, where we shall receive from our labor a more adequate reward." 24

Cleveland's voluntary societies failed to support the Female Protective Union. They were used to thinking in terms of dispensing food, wood, and clothes, not capital. The cooperative store, which would bypass the city's merchants, would have rearranged the economic order the volunteers were familiar with. Voluntary societies were not used to their recipients setting the agenda or receiving power along with provisions.

The voluntarism that sprang to life so quickly to provide blankets for Civil War soldiers was the same voluntarism that was unable to support poor relief in the early 1850s and
that refused to support the Female Protective Union. Voluntarism responds best to cases that are dramatic, simple, and temporary, such as today's newspaper and television accounts of distressed individuals and families, which bring an outpouring of sympathy and aid. Yet in a society with millions in need, only a few can receive that kind of attention. When needs are less definable and more permanent, and when ties between dispensers and recipients are weakened by divisions of race, class, ethnicity, age, and self-interest, it is difficult to establish the feeling of neighborliness, the sense of obligation, and the shared cultural values which fuel voluntarism.

Even in the early nineteenth century, government could command the resources that private groups could not. Government has additional advantages as a dispenser of aid. It is politically accountable to a wider range of groups than the voluntary society, and so can be more inclusive and less intolerant of religious, racial, and ethnic differences. In addition, it is able to transcend the role of band-aid dispenser by changing the conditions that give rise to need.

That the voluntary societies even in a small city of the early 1800s such as Cleveland complained of their inability to meet the burden of poor relief or to care for abandoned children should lend a note of caution to attempts to inflate the role of voluntary charity. The complaints of Catholics about Protestant evangelization are a further reminder that voluntarism inevitably reflects the particular social vision of its sponsors.

This is not to suggest that voluntarism has no role in charity. Voluntary aid at its best deals with human beings, not statistics. It can respond rapidly in emergency situations. It is less subject to political pressures than government programs. Finally, in developing innovative approaches, voluntary projects can serve as models for larger-scale efforts by governments.

Whatever balance is struck between the various levels of government and the private sector in aiding the needy, policy decisions should not be based on a perceived Golden Era of Voluntarism or on a naive faith in the inherent superiority of the voluntary way. Whole-hearted faith in voluntarism ignores the instability and often insufficient resources that gave rise to government intervention in the first place. Nor should there be any illusion about the benign nature of private charity. It is just as capable as government aid of being impersonal and intrusive and of serving the interests of the givers rather than the recipients. The voluntary spirit of neighbor helping neighbor that President Reagan evoked in his 1982 United Way address proved insufficient in the 1840s and 1850s. It is unlikely to provide an adequate answer for the 1980s.

**NOTES**


3. PD, Dec. 2, 1856, p. 3; Dec. 24, 1856, p. 3.

4. First Presbyterian Church, Record, 1837-1849, First Presbyterian Church, Cleveland, July 19, 1837, tells the story of Polly Wright.

5. The "Martha Washington" of the Society's name suggested it would be the counterpart of the Washingtonian temperance societies then being formed in the East; the "Dorcas" was for the Biblical woman who aided the sick and was "full of good works and charity." Dorcas, from the Greek, or Tabitha in the Aramaic, was a disciple at Joppa who was brought back to life by Peter (Acts 9:36-43). She was known for making coats and garments, so female charitable and sewing societies took the name "Dorcas." The activities of the Society are described in Cleveland Centennial Commission, *History of the Charities of Cleveland, 1796-1896* (Cleveland: Centennial Commission, 1896), p. 15. The Plain Dealer reprinted reports of the Society which described cases of aid: Nov. 9, 1847, p. 3; Nov. 25, 1848, p. 3; Nov. 17, 1849, p. 3.

6. PD, Nov. 17, 1849, p. 3.

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Cleveland *Leader*, Jan. 12, 1855, p. 3 in *WPA, Annals*, 1855, p. 24; *Leader*, Jan. 16, 1855, p. 3 in *WPA, Annals*, 1855, p. 25; *PD*, Feb. 1, 1855, p. 3; *PD*, Apr. 4, 1851, p. 2; *PD*, Feb. 18, 1859, p. 3; and *Leader*, Dec. 7, 1854, p. 3 in *WPA, Annals*, 1854, p. 466.

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Cleveland Centennial Commission, *History of the Charities of Cleveland*, p. 9; Samuel P. Orth, *A History of Cleveland, Ohio* (Chicago and Cleveland: S. J. Clarke, 1910), I, 403; Clara Anne Kaiser, "Organized Social Work in Cleveland, Its History and Setting" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1936), pp. 90-91, 403; Charters of the Village of Cleveland, and the City of Cleveland, With Their Several Amendments: To Which Are Added the Laws and Ordinances of the City of Cleveland (Cleveland: Sanford and Co., 1842), "Act of Incorporation," Mar., 1836, Sec. 13, p. 33; Cleveland, Ohio, Charters of the Village of Cleveland, and the City of Cleveland, With Their Several Amendments, To Which Are Added the Laws and Ordinances of the City of Cleveland (Cleveland: Harris, Fairbanks and Co., 1851), p. 47; *PD*, Mar. 22, 1849, p. 2.

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For the City Infirmary, see Kaiser, "Organized Social Work in Cleveland," pp. 91, 403; Charters of the Village of Cleveland, p. 47; *PD*, Mar. 9, 1855, p. 2. The Martha Washington and Dorcas Society expenditures are in the *Daily True Democrat*, Nov. 17, 1849, p. 3 in *WPA, Annals*, 1849, p. 416. The Society distributed 2,632 lbs. flour, 254 lbs. beef and pork, 415 lbs. fish, 250 lbs. sugar, 325 lbs. candles, 227 lbs. rice, 165 lbs. coffee, 19 lbs. tea, 23 bushels meal, 767 garments, 99 pairs of shoes and stockings, and 59 loads of wood. The Society commented that they distributed more that year than previously because of cholera. For other years, see *PD*, Nov. 9, 1847, p. 3; and Nov. 25, 1848, p. 3.

Luce, "Report." 

*PD*, Jan. 20, 1855, p. 2.


*PD*, Nov. 25, 1848, p. 3.

*PD*, Jan. 16, 1852, p. 3.


Cleveland Industrial School, *Annual Report of the Superintendent, 1858* (Cleveland: Fairbanks, Benedict and Co., 1859), p. 7. "Picking oakum" involved collecting loose hemp or fibers from fabrics. The resulting product was then treated with tar and used as a caulking for ships.

*PD*, Oct. 30, 1851, p. 3; *PD*, Jan. 25, 1851, p. 3; *PD*, Jan. 29, 1851, p. 3; *Daily True Democrat*, Sept. 4, 1850, p. 2 in *WPA, Annals*, 1850, p. 113.
Collister Hutchison lived in Cleveland most of her life. She was a schoolteacher for 46 years, a professional handwriting analyst, and for a time a fashion model. She was a devoted daughter and is remembered as a brilliant conversationalist and a woman of great personal beauty. But above all, she thought of herself as a poet.

Her collection of poems *Toward Daybreak*, published by Harper in 1950 and ranked as one of the year’s best books, has a laudatory preface by the French poet and novelist Jules Romains, and illustrations specially drawn for it by Marc Chagall. Her poems were published by the editors of the country’s leading magazines — Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*, Edward Weeks of the *Atlantic*, Hiram Haydn of *The American Scholar*. In 1933 America’s foremost anthologist of poetry, Louis Untermeyer, praised her as “a real lyricist with great promise.”

But she never achieved the success she felt was her due as a poet, such as was enjoyed by T.S. Eliot and Marianne Moore. Success seemed to come to poets like Hart Crane, who left Cleveland. She worked over her poems carefully, and her output seemed small because she selected only those of her poems she truly cared to have published. “I have waited two years for the right adjective,” she once said. After *Toward Daybreak* she published no new poems, though she kept working on a long dramatic poem, “From Worship to Wonder,” finally completed in 1973, four years before her death.

Hazel Collister Hutchison (she shortened her pen name hoping to avoid being referred to as “poetess” — or, worse, “lady poet”) was born in 1893 in Newburgh, an old part of Cleveland, the older of two children of Ella Collister and Archibald Cameron Hutchison. Her grandparents came to this country from Scotland and the Isle of Man, and her family heritage meant a great deal to her. She often spoke of “paying one’s birth duties,” by which she meant fulfilling one’s obligations to one’s family. When she was a child, her father was blinded by a careless boy with a BB gun. As soon as she could read she began reading aloud to her father from his favorite books — the Bible, the classics, sermons, and Scottish poetry. Much of what she read to him she, as a little girl, did not understand. But she learned to love the cadences and rhythms and the singing sounds of the words; she was learning to be a poet.
After her mother died, in 1926, her father became, until she was fifty, her chief responsibility. In 1943, she was able, out of her savings from more than twenty years of teaching, to make a down payment on a house that was dear to her heart the rest of her life. Below the mantelpiece in her living room were painted these words of Sappho, the Greek poet: "Lamentation may not be in a poet's house; such things befit us not." Now torn down, the house was on Grandview Avenue in Cleveland Heights, not far from Murray Hill School, in Little Italy, where she taught for almost twenty years, until her retirement in 1960. Many children loved and respected her as the Miss Hutchison who not only taught them what they were supposed to learn in class but also read stories and poems to them, told them ancient myths and legends, encouraged them to write poems, and coached some of them in a baseball team called the "Hutchison Hornets."

She kept on her desk in the schoolroom a figure of Pegasus, which had a symbolism for her that she shared with her pupils. Pegasus, the winged horse often used as an emblem for poetry, is able to soar in the air but also has four feet to support it on the earth. She was always eager to be independent, to support herself, and to be able to help others. In addition to her teaching and her earlier work as a model, she worked for a time at the Federal Reserve Bank in Cleveland. As a graphologist she studied documents for forgeries and served as a consultant for corporations who used handwriting as one of the means of assessing the personalities of prospective employees. She also analyzed handwriting on Sidney Andorn's television program on old Channel 9.

Miss Hutchison prepared herself to teach French as well as English, but she was never assigned to teach French in the public schools of Cleveland. After two years at Cleveland Normal School and two years at Western Reserve University, she received a bachelor's degree. Many years later, in the forties, she earned a master's degree in English at Western Reserve. At the same time, because she wanted to know more about science, she took a course or two at Case Institute of Technology. One in astronomy particularly fascinated her; she traveled to California just to see the great telescope on Mt. Palomar. And she was amused at one professor at Case who always turned to her, the only woman in his class, when he came, in lecturing, to something beautiful, like the structure of crystals.

In 1921-22 she spent a year studying in Paris, and kept on writing poems. Four of them were accepted at this time by the editor of Poetry, Harriet Monroe. To be published in Poetry was then the greatest accolade for any American poet. One of these was "Reims—1920," reprinted on the facing page.

Her classes at the Sorbonne, such as art history and recent French history, were valuable to her, but she valued even more the courses at L'Ecole du Vieux-Colombier in prosody and versification with Jules Romains and Georges Chennevière. Romains, who had already begun writing his series of novels Men of Good Will, took a special interest in her poetry. Her friendship with him and later also with his wife continued until his death in 1972. Many letters, in French, passed between them over the years. And when it came time for the poems of Collister Hutchison to be published by Harper and Brothers, he offered to write a preface for the volume. Toward Daybreak appeared in 1950.

In his preface, Romains distinguishes two "species" of modern poets: those who pour out their feelings spontaneously without plan or revision, and those who "consider poetry as the product of a very rare and slow distillation" which is refined with "deliberate, conscious, and meticulous" effort. This second method "consists in making a most stringent choice among myriad states of consciousness (including verbal phantoms)." Collister Hutchison, he says, belongs to the second species of poet; and he concludes, "If the reader of Toward Daybreak will go to the trouble of considering all this for a little while before taking up the book, I believe that he will find himself richly rewarded. And he will wish to spend some time, a great deal of time in the company of these poems which in their apparently so spontaneous structure have succeeded in introducing such discriminating and subtle refinements of thought."

REIMS — 1920

I had forgotten birch trees.
Birch trees, I think, are the cool, thin sound
Earth likes to make when it is weary
Of shouting mountains, screaming waterfalls,
And chanting hot, tremulous plains.

I had forgotten slim, white trees,
Beating a silvery rhythm
Upon the gray insistence
Of autumn twilight.

I should have stayed away
From this motionless forest of stone.
Here is the same caught silver
And above, in the dark somewhere,
A bird too — screaming.

Chagall, whom Collister Hutchison had met in New York, made four drawings especially for her book. He was attracted to the religious imagery and motifs that are integral to her poetry, particularly in "Goat for Azazel," one of the poems he chose to illustrate. Louis Untermeyer interpreted this poem as "an expression of the world we know — our own difficult world torn between order and chaos, faith and fear, the good dream and the doubtful deed." Azazel, it should perhaps be explained, seems to have been the Hebrew name for an evil spirit or demon of the wilderness. The goat is a scapegoat, sent into the desert with the sins of the people on its head. In later ritual the goat for Azazel is led into the wilderness and thrown from the top of a cliff, with a scarlet cord tied to its horns.
Illustration by Marc Chagall for "Goat for Azazel" in Toward Daybreak.
GOAT FOR AZAZEL

And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for Jehovah, and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat upon which the lot fell for Jehovah, and offer him for a sin-offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell for Azazel, shall be set alive before Jehovah, to make atonement for him, to send him away for Azazel into the wilderness.

LEVITICUS XVI, 9, 10, 11

Now it is your turn, yours by incessantly recurring lot,
To lie on an altar under the sky, apparently
Or perhaps only more apparently dead, while I perish slowly.
No near heaven with the load that I bear on my head!
But you, too, other offering, brother victim, you also
Have had your wildernesses between dust and dust.
Waters, I believe, waters undoubtedly would define
Life as a constant beating on inconstant shores.
And stones, surely stones, bear the signature
Of ancient violence and mute submission.
Ah, fellow substance,
There is no desert lonelier than the wastes within an atom,
No cliff more perilously tall
Than the one down which stars make perpetual firefall.
And the cord,
The scarlet knotted in my horns for blood to brighten,
Bewildering bond of tangled faith and fear —
Oh earth,
Have I not seen, have I not trembled,
Watching you ponderously turn toward hazardous day and lonely night,
Trembled to see upon your branchy forehead burn
The old familiar sign, the red, oblique communication
Vibrating to an ordered violence, remote and unmalusious
Vicar of yet another agonist back of the precipice out of sight?
Illustration by Marc Chagall in *Toward Daybreak*.
In 1973, forty years after their first publication, she reprinted the booklet that had inspired Louis Untermeyer's praise, *Seven Christmas Poems*. All but a few of the 1,000 copies were sold.

All of her poems that Collister Hutchison wanted to have published are included in the volume *Toward Daybreak*—except for one, a long poem she called "From Worship to Wonder." She began writing it in 1944 and finished it in 1973, four years before she died. She referred to it as "three facets of a play" (like a play in three acts, although there is very little action in it). She dreamed of having it staged, with music and dance composed and choreographed especially for it. At one point she discussed with Martha Graham, who was quite interested, the sort of dance that might accompany the play. When the first facet of the play was finished, Edward Weeks, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, wanted to publish part of it, but she declined his offer because she wanted to have the whole play published or, preferably, staged. About thirty years ago the first facet (or section) was staged, but without music or dance. She and William McCollom read it aloud from the stage of the old auditorium in the Cleveland Museum of Art. It seems fitting that she, a poet who was a teacher, and he, an actor who was a professor, should give her poem its only public hearing.

"From Worship to Wonder" grows out of "The Pomegranate Seeds," a story from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* that she used to read to her schoolchildren. In the story the goddess Ceres while wandering the earth in search of her daughter Proserpina, abducted by Pluto, comes to the palace of the king of Eleusis. The queen Metanira welcomes Ceres and begs her to restore to health her ailing baby boy, Demophoon. Metanira puts her baby completely in the care of the goddess, who makes him well and healthy. But Metanira one night, out of natural curiosity, hides in the bedchamber where Ceres is tending the child. When she sees Ceres place the baby on a bed of live coals and then rake ashes over it, she shrieks and snatches her baby from the bed of embers. Demophoon is unharmed, but Ceres tells his mother he would have had superhuman strength and intelligence and would have lived forever, if he had continued in her care. And Ceres leaves, to resume her search for Proserpina.

In a letter about her poem, in 1944, Collister Hutchison wrote:

One of the troubles of the world is that we had Ceres to mother us once and don't have her any more. We have all slept in the mystery of great burning myth and been nursed by a goddess who has gone away.

And in a letter in 1958, she wrote:

A word to those who might question the use of secondary sources and a child's story in writing the poem. Perhaps it is the only way I can thank the thousands of boys and girls who have been my best teachers. Long before the words reached paper the poem was growing as hushed, thoughtful little listeners followed Ceres on her heart-breaking journey. The wondering beauty of faces that long since have grown to manhood and womanhood will always be demanding my best.

The following passage from the second facet of "From Worship to Wonder" was sent by the poet as a Christmas gift in 1971, and it was read at her memorial service in 1977. Metanira is speaking.
CLARK C. LIVENSPARGER

RELENTLESSLY IMMORTAL

Trees though,
Trees will always be trying to tell you
It is nothing at all like what you seem to fear,
No final event to crawl toward on your knees
With rite and ritual,
To ease with arrangements of words and wired flowers,
Wreaths of words, leaves glossy and smooth as words.

It is a bird gone,
The snap of a twig
Failing a nest of songs
That never will be sung,
Of wings that will never fly.

Not Death!
It is the little deaths
Stalking unnoticed along leafy ways,
Crawling under bark,
Rotting the branch’s marrow.
It is the little deaths that hollow the tall heart.

Obedient a while to old compulsions,
Still thrusting unblossoming boughs into Pluto’s kingdom,
The tree below the tree will hold
Until one with the quieted shrew, its hungers done,
One with beetle gold and blue
Gone a glimmering spark into waiting mold,
It, too, goes down into the dark
Where all go, one by one,
To fold and unfold, no more alone,
In the living and dying, timelessness and time
Primordial, relentlessly immortal,
And One.

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