

MUSCOGIANA



Carson McCullers
1917-1967

FALL 2017

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MUSCOGIANA
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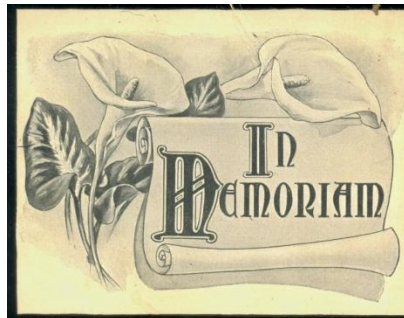
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From the Editor

If it seems like we have celebrated anniversaries in the pages of *Muscogiana* a bit more than usual lately, it is because we have. In recent editions we commemorated the anniversaries of the Civil War and World War I, as well as the founding of the Muscogee County Genealogical Society (MCGS). In this edition we recognize yet another significant event in local history, the life of noted author and famous native daughter Carson McCullers. The internationally-acclaimed writer drew heavily on life in the town in which she grew up in her fiction, and hence has spread a little bit of Columbus' history around the world. We therefore devote several pages of this issue of the journal to McCullers and her legacy.

The first of two articles focusing on her life and the Columbus she knew is a three-part piece featuring contributions by Nick Norwood, Director of Columbus State University's (CSU) Carson McCullers Center for Writing and Music; Rebecca Bush, Curator of History at the Columbus Museum; Dr. Gary Sprayberry, Professor of History at Columbus State University; and Dr. Joe Miller, Associate Professor of English at CSU. Norwood reflects on Carson's controversial legacy in her hometown, casting her rocky relationship with Columbus in a broad new light. Bush, Sprayberry, and Miller discuss innovative interpretive projects involving CSU students and interns that have advanced our understanding of her life. The second McCullers-focused article is another fascinating contribution by our friend Daniel Bellware. Here he takes a look at the life and tragic death of McCullers' father, a man she rarely mentioned and who is somewhat forgotten locally.

We round out our articles with two pieces on other individuals from different eras, the lives of whom each provide us intriguing glimpses of Columbus' past in their own way. I offer an article based on the diary of a relatively unknown resident of antebellum Columbus, a young Irishman by the name of Laurence Eugene O'Keeffe. Next, Jack Pease Schley provides an overview history of the remarkable legacy of the Schley family in Columbus and its longtime involvement in the community's medical care. Our regular features on the CSU Archives and our book reviews conclude the issue.

Lastly, I regret that we have to note the passing of two longtime friends of the MCGS, Robert Galer and Lea Dowd. Galer was a decorated World War II and Korean War veteran with a deep interest in genealogy and historic preservation. He was especially active with the Sons of the American Revolution, helping them identify and mark several Revolutionary War veterans' graves in Georgia and working diligently to preserve Revolutionary War battle sites. Dowd was a woman of many interests and talents who volunteered her services for many years as part of *Muscogiana*'s editorial board. But she also pursued harness racing, hunting, cooking, and playing the guitar, in addition to learning sign language and teaching swimming to the deaf. Both Galer and Dowd were active and knowledgeable members of the genealogical community. They will be missed.

Mike Bunn, Editor

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Remembering Carson McCullers: Reflections and New Avenues of Investigation



Publicity still of Carson McCullers, ca. 1957, Collection of the Columbus Museum, G.2016.36.2.
Gift of Jonathan Frederick Walz, Ph.D., in honor of Rebecca Bush, Curator of History.

Carson McCullers is, arguably, the most famous person to hail from Columbus. An internationally famous author whose books have been published in many languages and remain in print some five decades after her death, her name is familiar to readers across the globe. Although her hometown's collective memory of her is not on the whole as profound or as warm as one might suppose due to a variety of factors, those willing to look will find that McCullers' shadow nonetheless looms large in Columbus' past. It was her experiences with the people, the culture, and the place, after all, which she drew upon in her writing. She transformed local and unique stories into global and universal commentaries on the human condition in a way that continues to resonate for millions. But what do we really know about either McCullers or her Columbus? Finding out what made the rather quiet and reserved author tick can be an elusive pursuit, and the city she knew in her youth is nearly a century distant from us today; save for a few iconic landmarks it seems like a foreign land to most. That research into McCullers' years in Columbus can reveal much about both her and the community that shaped her seems obvious.

It is therefore refreshing to see that local educational and cultural heritage institutions continue to find new ways to combine the celebration of McCullers' life and investigation of Columbus history. During the recent observance of the centennial of her birth, multiple special projects utilizing new resources and fresh approaches showcased her life and times. In this article we present summaries of two of the most robust, preceded by an enlightening statement on the context in which the author's legacy endures in her hometown. Taken together, they show her continuing relevance to local history, and that much yet remains to be learned about the legendary writer and the city that shaped her.

Mike Bunn

Part One

Carson and Columbus: It's Complicated

By Nick Norwood



Carson McCullers at her typewriter, courtesy of the *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*.

I have spent a long time thinking about Carson McCullers' relationship with her hometown of Columbus, Georgia. One thing I have recognized is that the animosity between McCullers and her hometown is not unique in literary history, especially in the American South. William Faulkner's relationship with his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, for instance, is a good example of a case in which an author whose work draws heavily on the history, culture, and people of his home place was resented by many people there for the way he depicted them. Also like the case of Carson McCullers is the fact that Faulkner was considered *outré* by his hometown even before he became famous. "Count No Count" his fellow Oxfordians called him, an assessment of what they considered his general worthlessness combined with a reference to the foppish attire he adopted after returning home from his military service during the First World War.¹

Columbus has had a long grievance with Carson McCullers. Of course, it did not help that after becoming famous and moving to New York she said, in print, that her reason for returning to the South "periodically" was to "renew her sense of horror." It also seems to be the case that when she returned, Carson was not always a gracious guest. There are plenty of stories to support the claim—of her refusal to see certain people she didn't want to see, of her aloofness in the company of others, of cutting remarks she made about people, and so on. Likewise, the people of Columbus often did not behave kindly to her. For instance, after the publication of her second novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*—which is set on an unnamed army post in the South and features a high-ranking officer who is a latent homosexual, his libidinous and alcoholic wife, and a soldier who is a peeping tom—she received death threats from the Ku Klux Klan. As McCullers explains in her unfinished autobiography, *Illumination and Night Glare*, a member of the Klan telephoned her parents' house, where she was visiting at the time, and said, "We are the Klan and we don't like nigger lovers or fairies. Tonight will be your night." McCullers' family took the threat seriously enough that they notified the police and for several nights Carson's father, Lamar Smith, sat on the front porch with a shotgun across his lap. Later, in the 1950s, after McCullers had published several more highly successful novels and her own adaptation of *The Member of The Wedding* was produced on Broadway to great acclaim, the administration of the newly constructed W.C. Bradley Library asked McCullers if she would consider donating her papers. She said she thought it would be a splendid idea but wanted to confirm that the library would be open to all citizens regardless of race. When it was explained to her that, no, "colored citizens" would not be allowed in the main library but that they had their own public library across town and could request that the materials be sent over, McCullers refused their request. Then she wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper condemning the library for its non-progressive policies on civil rights. These are just a few of the

¹ This essay was adapted from a presentation given in the "Lunch and Learn" series at the Columbus Museum on February 7, 2017, as part of the celebration of the centennial of Carson McCullers's birth.

highlights in the long history of mutual animosity between Carson McCullers and her hometown of Columbus, Georgia.

But my sense is that, among the people of Columbus who hold—or in the past, held—negative attitudes about Carson McCullers, those attitudes are mostly in response to her books, which they read on the whole as an *airing* of grievances. I understand how people could get such an idea. After all, McCullers' books—especially her first novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, expose many of the ills of southern society during the 1930s, poverty and racism being chief among them. One of the reasons McCullers has earned a reputation as an important American and world writer is that she was an early champion of the rights of previously marginalized people. Issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability figure prominently in her works, and, again, because those works are most often set in communities unmistakably resembling Columbus, Georgia, they have often ruffled the town's culturally conservative feathers. Like Faulkner, McCullers was considered "weird" by many in her hometown long before she became famous. She was not accepted into the mainstream of Columbus society, and her reaction to that was complete indifference—which made matters even worse in many people's eyes. Thus, when her books were published, many of those same people in Columbus who were put off by her bohemianism viewed her fiction as a thinly veiled attempt to get back at the people who had ostracized her. This is an idea I would like to refute.

In my role as director of the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians I am responsible for conducting guided tours of the Smith-McCullers House, Carson's childhood home at 1519 Stark Avenue here in Columbus, and in that capacity I give tours to people from all over the country and all over the world. Oftentimes, they make a special trip to Columbus just to enter what they consider a sacred space, the house that nurtured a writer who has become very important to them and with whom they feel a strong intellectual or spiritual connection. I have given the tour to groups from Australia, China, Japan, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Sweden, various Latin American countries, and elsewhere. I have had people break down crying, overwhelmed by emotion, just because they are standing in Carson McCullers's childhood bedroom. Also in my role as director of the center, I receive daily letters, emails, and telephone calls from around the globe—from readers, publishers, other writers, artists, singers, composers, agents, translators, etc...—all having to do in some way or another with a deep and abiding interest in Carson McCullers's life and work. I have been made aware that McCullers is considered one of the great writers in literary history by noted authors and critics from countries as disparate as Ireland, France, Japan, and Mexico.



McCullers's Columbus home, courtesy of the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians.

So if McCullers' works are really just an airing of grievances with her hometown of Columbus, Georgia, why are so many people with no dog in that fight so interested in her? The answer, I think, is that there is a lot more to McCullers' work than many people in Columbus are giving her credit for. They have underestimated her writing's thematic depth and mistaken the use of her hometown material as part of a personal vendetta when in fact it was a way for her to develop universal themes about all people. I believe McCullers is a major world writer, and my evidence to support such an assessment is that she was able to offer in her work insights about the human condition that cannot be found anywhere else. The poet Robert Frost once said that poems should be about griefs, not grievances. What I take him to mean is that poems should eschew the petty and the personal and focus instead on the existential problems of being human. His famous poem, "The Road Not Taken", is a perfect example of how he practiced what he preached, conveying as it does the universal grief of having to choose between two seemingly desirable options because we "cannot travel both / and be one traveler" and thus are left with a lingering sense of loss and regret over the road we could not take.

Likewise, Carson McCullers' major works focus on universal human griefs. Like a lot of major writers, McCullers had one central theme she returned to in most—if not all—of her works, and that theme is loneliness. She came at it from a number of different angles, but one of the primary ways was through examining the lives of characters on the fringes of society—the disabled, for instance, like John Singer, the hearing-impaired central figure of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Being somewhat reductive, I believe we can identify variations on a primary theme in each of McCullers's four major novels:

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter: All humans face a sort of existential loneliness and also feel that there is no one out there to whom they can fully communicate that loneliness, no one who can completely understand them.

The Member of the Wedding: In their attempt to overcome loneliness humans try to find the group of people to whom they belong, to find, as McCullers has her character Frankie so memorably put it, “the we of me.”

The Ballad of the Sad Café: Love—which is unpredictable and can fall upon the most unlikely of beloveds—tends to be one-sided, and the lover is left feeling lonely and alienated because her love is not returned to an equal degree by the beloved.

Reflections in a Golden Eye: Society makes it difficult for people to be who they really are and tries to impose on them who they should be, leaving them feeling lonely and alienated.

We see these themes developed through the lives of McCullers’ main characters, with whom lovers of her work often relate on some deep level. The number of people in public life who have expressed their connection to a McCullers character serves to support my point. For instance, *The New York Times* currently runs a column in which they ask famous people known to be avid readers a series of questions about their reading. One of the questions is, “who is the character from fiction with whom you most identify?” David Benioff, a novelist and one of the creators of the immensely popular television series *Game of Thrones*, names Frankie from McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding*. In fact, Benioff says he and his wife both connected so strongly with Frankie they named their daughter after her. Well known feminist author Gloria Steinem names John Singer as the character with whom she most identifies. Likewise, readers from around the world often find in McCullers’ characters a soul they feel is simpatico with their own, and this is why they show up on the doorstep of her childhood home.

Popular music artists Nancy Griffith and Suzanne Vega identify with Carson McCullers herself. Griffith has dedicated one of her albums to McCullers. Vega, famous for mega-hit singles like “Tom’s Diner” and “Luka,” twenty years ago embarked on a project to bring McCullers’s life and work to the stage in a one-woman show in which the singer impersonates her literary idol. This past year, Vega released an album of songs from the show, *Lover, Beloved: An Evening of Songs with Carson McCullers*. Like Suzanne Vega, actress Karen Allen—famous for her roles in *Animal House*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Starman*, *Scrooged*, *The Sandlot*, and other Hollywood movies—first read McCullers in her twenties and became a lifelong fan, so much so that when she came to direct her first film she chose to adapt her favorite Carson McCullers story, “A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.”, the premiere of which was the highlight of the Carson McCullers 100th birthday celebration at the RiverCenter in February. Also part of that celebration was a lecture at the Columbus Library by *New Yorker* theatre and culture critic Hilton Als, who has published several laudatory articles on McCullers. After his well-received talk at the library, I gave him a guided tour of the Smith-McCullers House, to which he responded like any other McCullers devotee—with reverence and delight. Six weeks later Als was named the 2017 winner of the Pulitzer Prize

in Criticism. The previous summer, I had given the house tour to one of Als' fellow writers at *The New Yorker*, the novelist Sarah Schulman. Her piece on McCullers, published in the magazine in October 2016, makes an argument for why this famous novelist from Columbus, Georgia, should become a model for writers working now. Schulman quotes from the review of McCullers' first book by seminal African American writer Richard Wright in which Wright praises "the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race." It is that "humanity," Schulman argues, that ability to "stand with others who officially did not exist," that makes McCullers a writer other writers should be learning from right now.



Carl Van Vechten, *Carson McCullers*, 1959, Collection of the Columbus Museum, G.2016.36.3, Gift of Jonathan Frederick Walz, Ph.D., in honor of his tenth grade English teacher, L. Joan Rypkema.

Columbus, Georgia, is where Carson McCullers grew up. It provided the examples she drew on to develop her books' universal themes. I hope that all of Columbus would come to recognize that fact and take pride in it. To make a place real in fiction the writer has to include both the good and the bad that is in it. And perhaps the best way to pay homage to something is to render it with as much objectivity as possible. That is difficult for some people to accept, especially people who have a deep pride and fondness for a place. With regard to Columbus, it should come as some consolation that Carson has made so many people from around the world want to come here. Gertrude Stein famously said about her hometown of Oakland, California, "There's no there there," meaning it did not have a distinct culture or sense of place. For readers of McCullers' fiction, the same cannot be said for Columbus. To them there is a there there.

I feel I can speak with some authority on that subject because I am one of them: a nonnative who first came to know Columbus, Georgia, through the work of Carson McCullers. I first read her in my twenties as a graduate student at the University of North Texas. I chose her name from a list of authors given as potential subjects for a term paper in a course on the twentieth century American novel. I did not even know if the writer was male or female. I was intrigued by the name. I read *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* first and became an immediate fan. I then read all the major works and the biography written by Virginia Spencer Carr while she was on faculty at what was then Columbus College in the mid-1970s. I remember staring at the photo of the Stark Avenue home in Carr's book, trying to imagine the life Carson McCullers led there that allowed her to become such an original and insightful writer. The first time I came to Columbus I was interviewing for my job as a professor of creative writing at Columbus State. While giving me a tour of the city, Dan Ross, my now longtime colleague in the English Department, took me by the Smith-McCullers House and just pulled up in front of it mid-conversation without having told me where we were going. Imagine the sensation I felt at that moment.

Now imagine my shock when, after having lived here a while, I discovered how much some people in Columbus dislike Carson McCullers, or dismiss her, or just do not even know she exists. Some time ago I was giving a talk on contemporary Christian poetry at a local church and while making polite conversation with my hostess—a woman of retirement age and a native of this area—she asked how I first came to know about Columbus, Georgia. When I told her I came to know about Columbus through the works of Carson McCullers, it was as if I had spoken the name of the devil. Her face darkened instantly. She sputtered out a string of exclamations, the gist of which was "I hope you realize everything Carson McCullers wrote about Columbus is a lie!" Sometime later, upon mentioning to another local woman that I was on my way to attend an event at the McCullers Center, she remarked, "You know she didn't really write those books. Somebody else wrote them for her. Everybody knows that." I had to confess that I did not. Over the years I have met other natives of Columbus who told me they only read McCullers much later in life because, as young people, they were commanded specifically *not* to read the filthy writings of that "bad person" Carson McCullers. And I have met still other Columbusites who, like

me, did not discover Carson McCullers until they were in college in places far away from here, and never knew she existed until after they left and found out there was a famous writer from their hometown. Apparently, to their parents and high school English teachers, Carson McCullers was a name that should not be spoken.

McCullers was born Lula Carson Smith on February 19, 1917, at the Smith family home in the 400 block of 13th Street (the house, long ago demolished, was located at what is now the base of the viaduct over the railroad yards, very near the site of the building currently occupied by AT&T). Her double name—Lula Carson—is an example of one of the ways in which she was a true child of the South. The story goes that while visiting cousins in Ohio as a teenager someone recommended she drop the “Lula” as being *too* southern and old-fashioned. Thus, the name next to her senior portrait in the Columbus High School yearbook identifies her as “Carson Smith.” By that time, her family had moved to the home on Stark Avenue, in suburban Columbus. She attended Wynnton School, took piano lessons from Mary Tucker, the wife of a colonel at Fort Benning, through Mary Tucker met soldiers interested in the arts—including her lifelong friend Edwin Peacock—and through Edwin Peacock met her future husband, Reeves McCullers, another soldier stationed here in Columbus.

Talking to people who knew someone who knew Carson (likely someone who is now also deceased), you will often hear the same words come up as their way of describing her: “weird,” “odd,” “in her own world.” She had a distinct fashion sense involving disreputable-looking worn-out sneakers, skirts whose hemlines were way too low for the times, and worse, men’s shirts, suit jackets, and even trousers. She smoked cigarettes on the street when it was considered unladylike to do so. She read serious authors—Tolstoy, Eugene O’Neill, Hemingway, Faulkner—and was more interested in the society of books than the society of Columbus. For these reasons and more, Carson did not endear herself to most citizens of her hometown, who shunned and mocked her. To Carson’s credit, she didn’t seem to let it bother her. Maybe this was because her mother, Marguerite, had convinced her she was a genius destined for fame. Her father, Lamar Smith, a jeweler and watch repairman with a shop in downtown Columbus, seems to have been supportive and content to let his wife remain the primary influence in the life of his oldest child (Carson had two younger siblings, a sister, Margarita, and a brother, Lamar, Jr.).

Carson left home after graduating from Columbus High in 1933 and moved to New York City, ostensibly to pursue a musical career by studying at Julliard. Apparently, she secretly planned to study writing instead. Meanwhile, back at Stark Avenue, her mother held a weekly salon in the front room, where she and Edwin Peacock and other soldiers interested in the arts would sit and chat about books and listen to classical music records. During a visit home Carson was introduced to one of those soldiers, James Reeves McCullers. The two fell in love and were married at the house in 1937. (One of the highlights of a Smith-McCullers House tour is a screening of the twenty-nine-second wedding-day video shot on a home movie camera by Carson’s best Columbus friend Helen Harvey.) The newlyweds resettled in North Carolina, where Reeves went to work at various jobs in insurance and credit services and Carson

stayed home to write. It was there in Fayetteville and Charlotte that she completed her first novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, which was published in 1940 and brought her instant, lifelong fame at the age of 23.

She is still the most famous artist to come out of Columbus, Georgia. And, in fact, that is saying something. Because Columbus, it turns out, has been the birthplace of a wide and remarkable array of world-class artists including Ma Rainey, "Mother of the Blues," screenplay writer and director Nunnally Johnson, writer Augusta Evans Wilson, singers Tom Darby and Jimmie Tarlton, musical savant Blind Tom Wiggins, and African American Expressionist painter Alma Thomas. Columbus should be proud of its artistic heritage. It should celebrate that heritage with the kind of resources it currently pours into its immensely worthwhile and successful urban revitalization program. Maybe one day we will even have a statue of her. I can think of nothing more appropriate than a life-sized depiction of Carson McCullers strolling Broadway in her mannish clothes and tomboy haircut, smoking a cigarette and soaking up everything she can about humanity.

Part Two
**Collaborative Curation and the
Dr. Mary E. Mercer/Carson McCullers Collection**

By Rebecca Bush

It is rare for cultural heritage institutions to have an occasion to present new information on a celebrated local figure whose life has been studied for decades by numerous accomplished scholars. The recent addition of Dr. Mary Mercer's papers to the Columbus State University (CSU) Archives therefore presented an ideal opportunity for the Columbus Museum to explore previously unreleased material related to renowned author Carson McCullers. Mercer and McCullers shared a devoted relationship during the last nine years of the author's life, and Mercer's subsequent fierce guarding of McCullers' literary legacy produced a meticulously organized treasure trove of documents for patient researchers. Rather than undertake a traditional curatorial approach to mining this rich collection in view of staging an exhibition, though, I chose to attempt to expand the relevance of the project by engaging undergraduate interns from CSU in archival research. By combining rich original material with the fresh perspective of bright students, I believed the Mercer Collection project could become a unique learning experience for the Museum, the students, and the larger community as a whole.



Photo of Mary Mercer and Carson McCullers from Mercer's scrapbook, ca. 1963,
Courtesy of the Columbus State University Archives.

I have been fortunate during my time at the Museum to work with some truly outstanding interns from several universities, with almost all of them pursuing bachelor's degrees at the time. Primary-source research in undergraduate history classes is often limited to one capstone research seminar and possible "special topics" electives that draw from local history organizations in universities' surrounding communities. Even in the classroom, students' experiences are affected by each professor's expectations for primary-source work, as well as by the ready availability of relevant sources for a project meant to be initiated and finished in less than sixteen weeks. Consequently, conducting original research for a museum exhibition is often undergraduate interns' first meaningful exposure to primary-source research, especially using archival documents and original artifacts in original or "hard copy" form as opposed to a digitized format online. I consider this to be a vital tool for any humanities student, especially those who express interest in continuing their education at the graduate level. From a purely practical standpoint, research assistance from qualified interns is also a boon for curators and other cultural-resource professionals who might be juggling multiple projects on disparate topics at any given time. Finally, the inherent collaborative nature of this process inevitably leads to fresh approaches and new ways of thinking that benefit staff members and the institution as a whole.

Research Goals and Methodology

An open call for McCullers exhibition interns in August 2016 yielded two applicants from CSU: Valerie Parker, a junior majoring in art history; and Robin Price, another art history major who had just graduated. Both had completed internships at the Museum earlier that year, and their familiarity with the institution and some of our exhibition processes would prove to be essential for this fast-moving project. At our first meeting, I explained my plan to draw the bulk of the exhibition from the Mercer Collection, and I quickly ascertained that neither woman had conducted research in an archival library before, though they were willing to learn. For the first two weeks, I asked them to read a couple of McCullers' novels to gain awareness of her writing style and some of the Columbus-inspired people and places that figure prominently in her work, and also asked them to peruse the finding aid for the Mercer Collection. We then visited the CSU Archives to meet with archivists David Owings and Jesse Chariton, who provided an orientation to the facility and an in-depth overview of the Mercer Collection. After a few exploratory sessions, Parker, Price, and I chose a thematic focus of "Carson's People," one of the series that Mercer had created in her own thorough organization of her McCullers-related papers. Inspired by a well-known phrase from *The Member of the Wedding*, we decided to look at how McCullers searched for her own "we of me" through familial, platonic, and romantic relationships.

Faced with a tight deadline for a January 2017 exhibition opening, my co-curators and I identified several boxes we were each responsible for combing through to match our own research interests, mostly separated by individuals and geographic locations. With guidance from archival assistants Tom Converse and Martha Ragan, as well as Owings and Chariton, we searched for items that contributed to

our understanding of McCullers' relationships. As is often true in exhibition research, our quest was two-fold: in addition to looking for documents that could *illuminate* McCullers' story, we were also on the hunt for visually engaging material that could *illustrate* our exhibition narrative. Keenly aware that much of this material was unpublished, we kept meticulous notes, tracking the folder and box numbers of each letter or magazine article to allow for an accurate research trail. Weekly meetings helped us assess our progress, and using the finding aid I was able to assign each of us additional folders to address gaps in our research. In November, we compiled all of our notes into one Google Doc, an online tool that allows multiple users to seamlessly work on the same document. After much consideration and discussion, we chose to organize the exhibition chronologically, a decision that also allowed for loose geographical distinctions. The first section would focus on McCullers' early years in Columbus through the publication of her debut novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*; the second followed her move to New York City with her husband Reeves, their induction into the city's cultural milieu, and the troubled trajectory of their relationship; and the third focused on the last years of her life, spent happily near Mercer in Nyack, New York. We also made our final group visit to the Archives to select the documents, photographs, and three-dimensional objects that would fill the Museum's exhibition cases. Letters from Reeves, the Dictaphone machine and transcripts from Mercer and McCullers' year of therapy sessions, favorite clothing items, and photographs from all stages of McCullers' life filled our list, supplemented with material from CSU's McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians and the Museum's own collection.



Right to left: Carson Smith, sister Rita, and neighbor Mildred Miller on Stark Avenue, 1929, Courtesy of Mr. Alan F. Rothschild, Jr.

Carson McCullers and playwright Edward Albee on Fire Island, 1962, Courtesy of the Columbus State University Archives.



Final Products and Reflection



Installation view, *The We of Me: The Chosen Families of Carson McCullers*, January 31 – May 21, 2017, The Columbus Museum.

Turning our attention to co-authoring a complementary gallery guide allowed each of us to highlight the areas in our research that we found most essential or overlooked. To fully tell the story of McCullers' early years, Valerie Parker turned to the author's own words in her unfinished autobiography, *Illumination and Night Glare*, as well as correspondence from the Margaret S. Sullivan Papers, compiled during research for an early McCullers biography by a Duke University doctoral student in the 1960s. In addition to shedding light on McCullers' adolescent interactions with piano teacher Mary Tucker using both women's own words, she filled in key biographical information about McCullers' father and the family's early residences with addresses that are now forgotten with the preservation of the house on Stark Avenue, which Carson did not live in until she was nine years old. Robin Price chose to focus on the author's Nyack years, finding numerous photos of her Victorian home's interior and exterior. (One house picture selected for the exhibition included a detailed list of paint colors for each room on its reverse.) She also examined the critical reception to McCullers' final novel, *Clock Without Hands*, as well as efforts to adapt other works for the stage and screen in the late 1960s. Despite her declining health, public interviews and private correspondence reveal that McCullers was actively involved in these plans. For my own section, I focused on McCullers' correspondence with Annemarie Schwarzenbach, a Swiss photographer/journalist who sparked a years-long obsession for McCullers. Interweaving snippets from her letters with portions of the transcripts from her sessions with Mercer revealed a complicated relationship that clearly resonated with the author more than fifteen years later. Combining direct

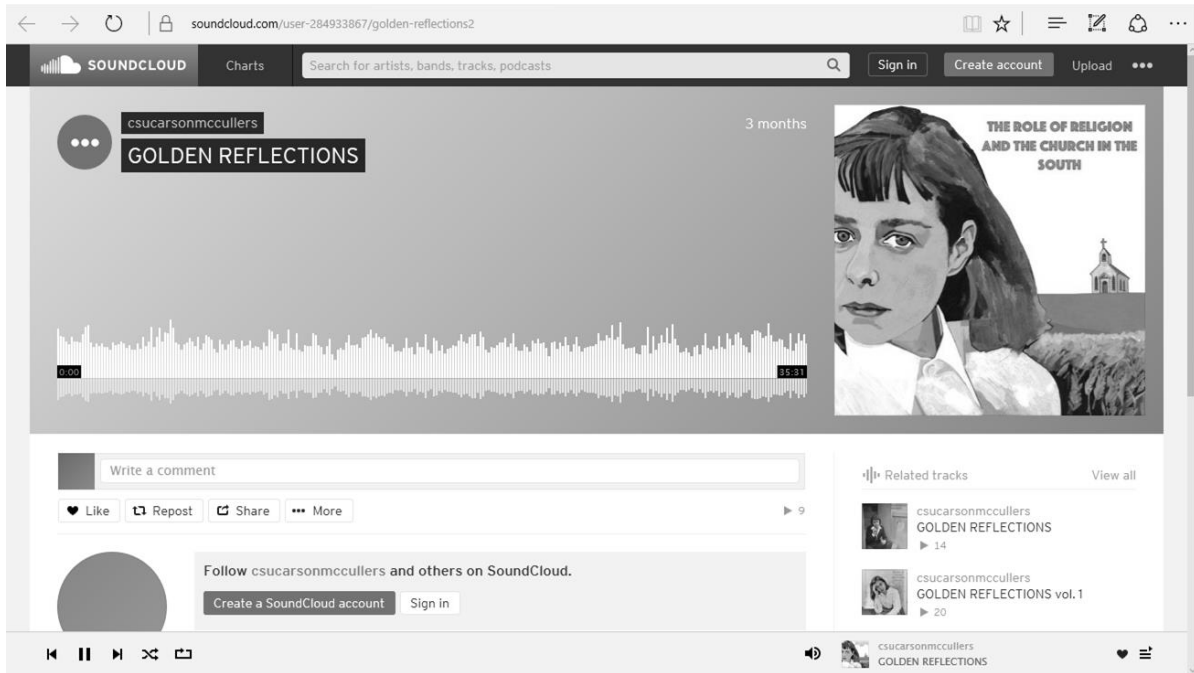
quotations with a contact sheet of photographs of Schwarzenbach that show her clear influence on McCullers' personal style, I sought to address the influence of this relationship on McCullers' life, as well as the tragic parallel of Schwarzenbach's morphine addiction and Reeves McCullers' alcoholism.

The We of Me: The Chosen Families of Carson McCullers opened at the Columbus Museum on January 31, 2017 and ran through May 21. Partially funded by a grant from Georgia Humanities, the exhibition attracted several group tours from high schools, CSU history and English classes, and the Leadership Columbus civic training program. In casual conversation and in words written in the exhibition comment book, visitors expressed a sense of deeper connection with McCullers herself, including comments such as "You have brought Carson back to life for us to enjoy," "Feel like I know her better," and "Thank you for sharing the intimacy of her with all of us." These reactions confirm what my interns and I had already discovered: primary-source documents, coupled with authentic objects and images, powerfully communicate the grand arcs and nitty-gritty details of a person's life in a way that few traditional biographies can. The project's secondary goals were also successful, as both Parker and Price noted in their final evaluations that they found their archival research experience to be useful; that it helped them better understand the importance of archives; and that they felt their aptitude for finding and synthesizing relevant information increased through the project. As for myself, this proved to be one of the most enjoyable and productive student-assisted exhibitions I have worked on. A fascinating archival collection proved to be an excellent starting point, and I look forward to working with future interns on other projects utilizing the CSU Archives.

Part Three

Exploring the Life and Legacy of Carson McCullers in the Digital Age

By Gary Sprayberry and Joe Miller



Screenshot from the "Golden Reflections" podcast; <https://csucomparts.wixsite.com/carsonmccullers100/podcast>.

In the spring of 2017, Columbus State University professors Gary Sprayberry (Department of History and Geography) and Joe Miller (Department of English) offered courses that explored the life and legacy of writer Carson McCullers, using her work as a lens through which to examine the history and literary heritage of Columbus, Georgia. The courses coincided with the citywide commemoration of the 100th anniversary of McCullers' birth. Students in both classes were required to attend a certain number of events related to McCullers' 100th birthday celebration, to read and analyze a number of her works, to conduct research in the CSU Archives, and to work together in teams to complete multi-media projects on certain aspects of McCullers' life and work. The professors asked the students to work on projects that would help to promote the citywide commemoration of her birth, to inspire a new generation of readers, and, frankly, to rehabilitate her image in the community. Throughout her career, McCullers wrote openly and pointedly about such topics as race, class conflict, and sexual identity, ranking and offending many of the residents of Columbus. Through careful readings of her books, research in the CSU Archives, primary source analysis, group discussions, and visits to key sites in the city, students identified the various sources of McCullers' troubled relationship with her hometown. Sprayberry and Miller received an

Interdisciplinary Initiative Grant from CSU's Faculty Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning to carry out the project.

Professor Sprayberry offered an honors section of United States History since 1865. The class examined the rich history of Columbus, Georgia, and the city's role in the social, economic, and political development of the United States since the end of the Civil War. Students were required to analyze primary sources related to McCullers and the history of Columbus; take short field trips to places such as the Columbus Museum, McCullers' childhood home, and the CSU Archives; hear classroom presentations by local experts on the history of Columbus; post their research on Instagram; and produce a multi-media team-based learning project at the end of the semester. The students were tasked with uncovering the many ways that McCullers' work was inspired and informed by her experiences in Columbus.

Professor Miller offered a class called Comparative Arts. The course provided not only a deep examination of the author's novels and selected short stories, essays, and poems, but a rare opportunity to explore her personal life and her relation to the city where she grew up. Students conducted deep, primary-source research in the CSU Archives' various McCullers-related collections, including the Dr. Mary E. Mercer/Carson McCullers Collection, which includes transcripts from the author's therapy sessions. Writing assignments challenged students to connect with a wide variety of audiences in a range of writing situations, including academic, literary criticism, arts writing for a popular audience, and social media. Miller's students worked together with students in Sprayberry's course on a social media project conducted during the city's celebration of the author's 100th birthday, and they produced a multi-media team-based learning project exploring intersections between McCullers's writing and Columbus history.



In the end, the students produced some very innovative and engaging projects. For their mid-term Instagram assignment, students from both classes were asked to take several photographs during their field trips to the Columbus Museum and McCullers' childhood home and during their own excursions around Columbus. The photographs had to relate in some way to McCullers's novels *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *Member of the Wedding*. Afterwards, the students had to write a caption for each of the photographs, explaining the significance of each image and how it related to the literary heritage and history of Columbus. They marked each caption with the hashtag #carsonmccullers and #mccullers100, so as to engage members of the public who are interested in the author's work. Each student was responsible for five images. Both of the professors found the assignment to be one of the most interesting they had ever devised, as it drew students out of the classroom to find and document ways in which literature and history are relevant to contemporary life in the Deep South and how literary works and local history are intertwined.

The students' final assignments achieved a similar outcome, though in a more in-depth and innovative manner. As with the Instagram assignment, students partnered with members of the other classes, but here they had much more free reign in terms of content matter and choice of media. The projects had to focus on aspects of McCullers' life and Columbus history, had to be completed in multimedia formats, and had to utilize some primary research from the CSU archives. At semester's end, they presented websites, documentary films, podcasts, and a scattered array of geocache treasures. All of these projects were well-designed and thoughtfully implemented, especially the "Golden Reflections" podcast produced by students Hannah Eubanks, Jasmine Douglas, Abby Kruger, Robert Humber, Joanne Youngblood, and Mory Fode Traore. Their three-part series sought to "encourage critical thinking and positive communication about the current societal issues troubling our community through the discussion of Carson McCullers' life and literary works." Another group produced a documentary called "The Influence of Racism on Carson McCullers and Her Literary Works." A final group worked on a project called "Carson McCullers Geocache," in which the students took quotes from *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and information from primary source documents and placed them in various spots around Columbus for geocache enthusiasts to discover as they enjoy their pastime. It is the hope of Professors Sprayberry and Miller that such projects will inspire others to investigate the life and legacy of Carson McCullers in Columbus, Georgia, and will serve to introduce her work to a whole new generation of readers.

If you are interested in examining some of the student projects, visit the websites below:

"[The Influence of Racism on Carson McCullers and Her Literary Works](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1LFLj6QqoA&feature=youtube)"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1LFLj6QqoA&feature=youtube>

"A conversation on race and socioeconomics in Columbus, GA in the past and present and how Carson McCullers fits into that conversation"

<https://soundcloud.com/lyndsey-gardner-student/itds1145-podcast>

"Golden Reflections Podcast"

<https://csucomparts.wixsite.com/carsonmccullers100/podcast>



Irving Penn, *Carson McCullers*, New York, 1950, Collection of the Columbus Museum, G.2016.43, Museum purchase made possible by the Art Acquisition and Restoration Fund.

A Member of the Family

By Daniel A. Bellware



Lamar, Marguerite, and Carson Smith at their home on Stark Avenue in Columbus.
Photo from *Illuminations and Night Glare: The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers*, by Carlos Dews.

Much has been written about author and Columbus native Carson McCullers. She was a literary genius from a little-known Southern town who made it big in New York City. She was also a tomboy who was struck by infirmities in her youth which eventually took her life at age fifty. Her marriages to Reeves McCullers were stormy and full of drama and culminated in his suicide in Paris. Her relationship with her mother proved long and loving. Marguerite doted on Carson throughout her childhood and moved to New York to be close to her daughter after she left Columbus. Less well-known, however, is Carson's father, Lamar Smith. He is usually referred to simply as a watchmaker or jewelry store owner of French Huguenot extraction, with little else mentioned about him or his role in her life. He is a bit of a mystery, in part due to Carson's own reticence in speaking about the man. One prominent biography of McCullers sums up the influence of her father in a single sentence:

"Carson never spoke much about her father beyond saying that he was very nice, indicating the importance in her life of certain gifts that were apparently his idea (a piano and a typewriter) and recounting her childhood fascination with his jewelry shop, its clocks and watches, their inner working, and the curious sense of time she sometimes felt in that place."²

²Josyane Savigneau, *Carson McCullers, A Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 16.

The fact that her father's gifts represent the two ways Carson would have to free herself from the sleepy town of her birth highlights his importance to her and the person she would become. Similarities can be seen between Lamar and some of the characters in her books. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, the character of Mr. Kelly, the father of tomboy Mick Kelly, is described as a man who feels useless to his family and runs a small watch-repair business with hardly any customers.³ In *The Member of the Wedding*, Mr. Addams, tomboy Frankie Addams' father, is said to be quiet, serious, and spends most of the novel out of the picture, working in his jewelry shop.⁴



William Hooker Smith and family, ca. 1900. Lamar is in the back row on the far right (see arrow).
Courtesy of Ralph L. Sherman, grandson of Lamar's sister, Myra Smith Richards.

Lamar's real story is lost to all but the most curious. A reader must wade through six hundred pages of Virginia Spencer Carr's biography of Carson McCullers to get a good glimpse of him. However, Carr's highly detailed tome gets some of the facts wrong as it often depends more on recollection rather than research for information on the Smith family. Lamar Smith was born in June of 1889 in Union Springs, Alabama, the seventh of ten children of William Hooker Smith and Mary Louise Gachet. His father, William, was an Alabama native according every census from 1860 to 1900 and not from

³ Character list for *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*; Sparknotes, <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/lonelyhunter/characters.html>, retrieved May 21, 2017.

⁴ Character list for *The Member of the Wedding*, Sparknotes, <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/memberwedding/characters.html>, retrieved May 21, 2017.

Connecticut as reported by Carr.⁵ According to the 1880 and 1900 censuses, William worked as carriage maker and machinist, but he may have also farmed to help support his family. That became more difficult when he lost his right arm in a cotton gin accident around 1887. The family moved to Tuskegee, Alabama, where Lamar's father died in 1905. Shortly thereafter, Lamar's oldest brother, Henry, relocated to Detroit, Michigan. Like their father, the boys were all mechanically inclined. Henry found success in the marine business on the Detroit River and developed a racing propeller that was used for many years.⁶ He was followed to Detroit by most of his siblings and his mother. His sisters Lavinia, Corinne, and Myra became teachers in the Detroit area. His brothers William, James, and Hogan became machinists and mechanics in Detroit, working in the marine business, as well. Only sisters Louise and Minnie stayed in the South with their youngest brother.



Lamar Smith, ca. 1906, from *The Lonely Hunter*, by Virginia Spencer Carr.

Lamar came to Columbus about same time as Henry moved to Michigan. He lived with his cousin Rochelle Martiniere and tried his hand at repairing bicycles, sewing machines, and clocks.⁷ He claimed he could fix anything with moving parts and found success working for jeweler Carl Schomburg as a watch repairman. He spent ten years honing his skills and learning the trade before setting out on his own. In the meantime, Lamar met and married a coworker at Schomburg's named Marguerite Waters. The wedding took place in February 1916. She was on her way home from an extended visit to Miami when Lamar surprised her in Jacksonville. They were wed at the home of Eddie Bates and his wife, friends formerly of Columbus.⁸ They settled into a house owned by relatives at 423 Thirteenth Street. Lula Carson Smith arrived almost exactly one year later in February 1917. Carson's siblings, Lamar, Jr. and Marguerite or "Rita," appeared in 1919 and 1922, respectively.

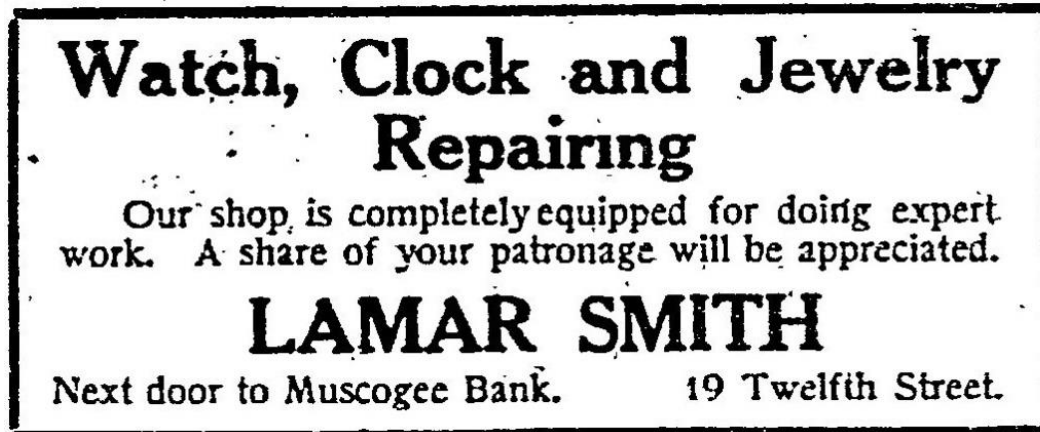
⁵ Virginia Spencer Carr, *The Lonely Hunter* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), 8. William's parents, Henry H. Smith and Mary Clark, were from Vermont and Connecticut. This may likely be the source of confusion to those who relayed the story to Carr later.

⁶ "Obituaries," *Detroit Free Press*, May 19, 1954, 29.

⁷ Carr, *The Lonely Hunter*, 9.

⁸ "Miss Marguerite Waters Weds Mr. Lamar Smith in Jacksonville, Florida," *Columbus Enquirer*, February 15, 1916, 5.

Around the time of Carson's first birthday, in 1918, Lamar opened his own shop at 19 Twelfth Street, in the Murrah Building, less than half a mile from his home. A year later, he moved to 1131 Broad, (now Broadway) in the lobby of the Grand Theater. He spent ten years there before moving to 1201 Broadway for another ten year stint. In December of 1940 he made his final move, back to the Murrah building and his original address, 19 Twelfth Street, just in time for Christmas.



Advertisement from the *Columbus Enquirer*, April 5, 1918.

Lamar was a devoted husband, father, and son-in-law. In her autobiography, Carson recalls an anecdote about her grandmother, "Mommy," which provides a glimpse of him at home with family. In the story, Mommy befuddles the ladies of the Women's Christian Temperance Union when she tells them how her son-in-law prepares a toddy for her every afternoon. Lamar then appears and offers to make the cocktail for any of the ladies who would like to join them.⁹ The story is really about how the family feels about alcohol but it is one of McCullers' few stories that include her father. An indication of the family's reliance on Lamar is evidenced by the arrangements made when he was out of town. In 1918, Lamar's brother Hogan died in Detroit and he went to the funeral. In his absence, the entire family, mother-in-law, wife and child, went to stay with his sister-in-law, in Wynnton, rather than remain home.¹⁰

Lamar set an example for Carson in his treatment of the African-Americans in their life. During the Great Depression, the family could not afford to keep their young maid, Lucille. She was given a good reference and let go. When her new employer accused Lucille of trying to poison them, Lamar testified on her behalf.¹¹ She was convicted despite of Lamar's testimony and sent to the state penitentiary. Lamar sent her money for the prison canteen during her incarceration. They also visited "Sis Laura," Mommy's

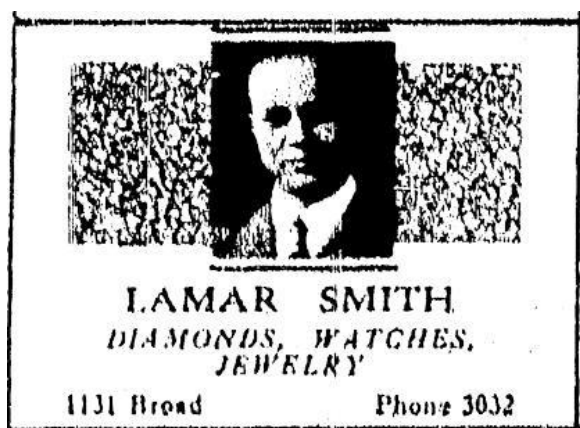
⁹ Carlos L. Dews, *Illumination and Night Glare, The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 7.

¹⁰ "Society," *Columbus Ledger*, March 17, 1918, 5.

¹¹ Dews, *Illumination*, 56.

old African-American cook. Marguerite thought Sis Laura treated her badly as a child and did not enjoy the visits. Lamar, however, brought money and fruit for the appreciative old woman.¹²

While not members of the moneyed class in Columbus, Marguerite counted many of the wives of the wealthy businessmen in the community among her friends.¹³ She belonged to the Garden Club and the Parent-Teacher Association. Her name appeared many times either with her husband, the children, or alone in the society columns. She had high hopes for her first born. Indeed, from the womb she allegedly could tell that Carson was special.¹⁴ Marguerite had plans to groom Carson as a musical prodigy, and Lamar's gift of a piano served to help facilitate the idea. Lamar appears good-natured and supportive of Marguerite's promotion of their daughter. Her fourth birthday was a George Washington-themed extravaganza detailed in the local newspaper.¹⁵ Children in attendance took turns at pinning a hatchet into Washington's hand; the boy's prize was a large hatchet and the girl's prize was a box of cherry candy. While it is unknown how many actually attended, forty-eight children were invited. The surnames of the children read like "Who's Who" of Columbus society: Helen Johnson, Martha Schomburg, Martha Johnson, Kersten Schomburg, Helen Harvey, Maud Dixon, Helen Fleming, Caroline Calloway, Helen Swift, Frances Lummus, Dorothy Wells, Mary Peacock, Mildred Wells, Elizabeth Spencer, Dorothy Illges, Elizabeth Spence, Virginia Woodruff, Gracie Thornton, Olive Kelly, Caroline Oliver, Leslie Mullin, Edward Everett, Virginia Brawner, Helen Renfroe, Martha Carter, Sara Ruth Allmond, Harriet Murray, Lena Honour, Margaret Cooper, Sarah Ryan, Baby Holland, Mozelle Worsley, Ruth Krone, George Burrus III, Edgar Chancellor, Jr., Charles Berry, Dewit Duskin, Robert Carter, James A. Lewis III, Walter Byrd, Jr., Jim Otto, Louis Lynch, Robert Parrish, Jr., Edward Lentz, Jr., Ben Wardlaw, Jr., Schley Gordy, Jr., Porter Golden, and Paul McKenny, Jr.



Advertisement from the *Columbus Ledger*, Centennial Issue, April 21, 1928.

Lamar was quieter than his wife but still socially active and generous. Various organizations in town recognized him for his contributions. It seems that almost no charity escaped his largess. He became the first to give to the Kiwanis Club's "crusade against Christmastime want" in 1920.¹⁶ He became a booster for the Elks in 1922.¹⁷ When the Ledger Fund collected money to provide ice to the

¹² Dews, *Illumination*, 57.

¹³ Carr, *The Lonely Hunter*, 17.

¹⁴ Dews, *Illumination*, xix.

¹⁵ "Little Miss Lula Carson Smith Celebrates Fourth Birthday," *Columbus Ledger*, February 20, 1921, 14.

¹⁶ "Kiwanians Planning to Spread Cheer; Lamar Smith Gives First," *Columbus Enquirer*, December 10, 1920, 3.

¹⁷ "Overflow of Elks Boosters," *Columbus Enquirer*, May 7, 1922, 8.

poor and sick, Lamar donated.¹⁸ The Lions Club acknowledged his contribution, among others, for an event they held at Fort Benning in 1936.¹⁹ He was also active with the jewelers in the state as evidenced by his participation the Georgia Retail Jewelers Association convention held at the Ralston Hotel in July 1922. The main topic centered on stopping the Western Clock Company from selling clocks to retailers other than jewelers. Lamar was in charge of the "question box" used to poll the delegates on questions of vital interest to the group.²⁰ Though they were competitors in the marketplace, Lamar appears to have remained on good terms with his old employer, and likely mentor, Carl Schomburg. When Schomburg died in 1937, Lamar served as one of his pallbearers.²¹

Lamar's health became questionable in early 1943. Carson returned from New York for a visit that summer. According to Carson, her father was drinking heavily and thought he had cancer but refused to see a doctor. He continued doing repair work in his shop but was letting his business slip. He collapsed in September of 1943 and finally got medical attention. There was no cancer but the drinking had taken its toll. His heart was also in bad shape. He continued working, though. While his first love was definitely his family, Lamar's shop had always run a close second. Unless at home, he could usually be found there. In fact, he died alone at the shop on the night of August 1, 1944. A policeman named Bob Askew discovered his body while making his evening rounds. The medical examiner determined he had been dead for about an hour and a half.²² Officer Askew may have been more attentive than usual since the shop had been vandalized several times in recent years.²³

At the funeral, the family was surprised by the outpouring of sympathy from the community. People that the family had never seen before came to pay their respects. In Carr's biography of Carson, she claimed that he had no enemies, except perhaps, himself.²⁴ It was his son-in-law Reeves McCullers who probably summed up Lamar Smith the best. He wrote to Carson later that month and said of Lamar "He was a kind and gentle person. No man loved his family as he did."²⁵

¹⁸ "Ledger Fund Brings Relief," *Columbus Ledger*, June 18, 1922, 1.

¹⁹ "An Acknowledgement," *Columbus Enquirer*, October 2, 1936, 14.

²⁰ "Jewelers Meet In Convention At The Ralston," *Columbus Enquirer*, July 11, 1922, 1.

²¹ "Funeral Services for C. Schomburg To Be Held Today," *Columbus Enquirer*, October 25, 1937, 10.

²² "Lamar Smith Dies Suddenly," *Columbus Enquirer*, August 2, 1944, 1.

²³ "Brick Tossers Break Glasses, Window at Lamar Smith's and Door at Fruit Stand Smashed," *Columbus Enquirer*, December 23, 1940, 10 and "Smashes Window Robs Smith Store," *Columbus Enquirer*, July 19, 1943, 2.

²⁴ Carr, *The Lonely Hunter*, 249.

²⁵ Savigneau, *Carson McCullers*, 119.



The Murrah Building where Lamar's shop was located, on the corner of 12th Street and Broadway. Number 19 is in the middle of the 12th Street side, on the left. Photograph by the author.

Lamar's story may be even more tragic than it appears. In the 2003 revised edition of her biography of Carson McCullers, Carr claims that Lamar actually died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, instead of the heart attack that was reported to the public. She claims that family and friends were sworn to secrecy and that the coroner and policeman were in on the cover up.²⁶ A coroner's jury headed by Dr. O.C. Brannen did determine that Lamar met his end as a result of a heart attack.²⁷ Of course, a conspiracy such as this would require several participants. At a minimum, Officer Askew, Dr. Brannen, Coroner H.M. Woodall and the undertaker, D.A. Striffler, would have to have been in on it. Is there reason to believe they may have been willing to undertake such an endeavor?

It is true that Lamar was probably on friendly terms with the beat cop, given the history of vandalism at his store, and the Smiths and the Brannens had been acquainted for years through the Garden Club.²⁸ The Brannens were also neighbors, living about a block away on Stark Avenue, and Dr. Brannen had recently moved into the Murrah Building.²⁹ Conspiracy theorists might point out that the undertaker might have been complicit since the family paid for his service. But what motive would the coroner have in such a scheme? At nearly eighty-five years of age, Woodall had already announced his

²⁶ Virginia Carr, *The Lonely Hunter*, (Athens: University of Georgia, 2003), xvi – xv.

²⁷ "Funeral Service for Lamar Smith Will Be Friday," *Columbus Enquirer*, August 3, 1944, 2.

²⁸ "Marguerite Club Has Interesting Meeting Tuesday," *Columbus Enquirer*, September 15, 1932, 10.

²⁹ "Removal," professional advertisement, *Columbus Enquirer*, February 7, 1943, 27.

retirement earlier that year.³⁰ Lamar Smith's would be one of the last death certificates he would sign before his own death in early October. Determining whether or not Woodall did anything unusual is impossible at present, however. By law, the cause of death will not become public for a period of years, so, it remains obscured in copies currently available.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION	
23. Date of Death	August 1, 1944 Time 6:00 P.M.
24. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased who died on the above date. I last saw	
H. Alive on	19
Duration	
O.C.G.A. Chapter 31-10-26 and DHR Regulation 290-1-3-.3 prohibits the release of confidential medical information to except the next of kin and other authorized persons.	
25. If death was due to external violence please answer the following questions :	
(a) Accident, Suicide, Homicide (Specify)	(b) Date of Occurrence
(c) Place of Accident (city) (County) (State)	
(d) Where : Home, Farm, Industry, Public Place	While at Work
(e) Means of Injury	
26. Physician's Signature	Date Signed 8/9/44
Physician's P. O. Address	

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION	
20. Date of death	1 month 20 day year 1940
21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from 19 to 19	
I last saw h. alive on	19
death occurred on the date stated above at	9:30 P.M. Duration
Immediate cause of death	<i>This is to certify that H. D. Kemp came to his death from a gunshot wound self-inflicted due to ill health.</i>
due to:	H.M. Woodall
due to:	Coroner Muscogee County Ga.
Other morbid conditions (including any pregnancy within 3 months of death)	PHYSICIAN
Major findings of operations	Underline the one cause above to which death should be charged statistically.
-of autopsy	
22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following :	
a. Accident, suicide, or homicide (specify)	b. Date of occurrence
c. Where did injury occur?	city or town county state
d. Did injury occur in or about home, on farm, in industrial place, in public place?	e. While at work?
i. Means of injury	Specify type of place
23. Signature of physician	
Address	Date signed

Medical certification portion of death certificates for Lamar Smith in 1944 (left) and H. D. Kemp in 1940 (right). The author's own, admittedly unscientific, survey of Columbus death certificates from 1940 (available on familysearch.org), reveals a pattern in death certificates of suicide victims which is consistent with Lamar's. The medical certification portion of the death certificates in the four suicides found in Muscogee County in 1940 shows that they all remained unsigned at the bottom by Coroner H.M. Woodall. Death certificates for nonviolent deaths generally include a cause of death at the top and a doctor's signature at the bottom. In cases of violent deaths, they generally include a cause of death at the top as well as a description of the violence and signature at the bottom. Although a space is provided to note a suicide, it was not used in any of the four cases sampled from 1940. Aside from the obscured cause of death, Lamar's 1944 death certificate matches the four suicide death certificates with no signature at the bottom. Completing the certification in this way would allow a false report to the newspaper to go undetected for seventy-five years without actually falsifying the death certificate.

³⁰ "Coroner Woodall Expresses Thanks to Local Public," *Columbus Enquirer*, April 6, 1944, 7.

Lamar's death alone in the shop is sad enough. That he might have been so despondent that he took his own life is even more heartrending to contemplate. While Lamar's suicide is only conjecture at this time, it might help explain Marguerite's reaction. She was hospitalized following his death and refused to set foot in their home after her release.³¹ She quickly put as much distance between herself and Columbus as she could. Both the house on Stark Avenue and the jewelry store were sold in short order and she moved to New York to be near her daughters. It might also explain why Carson spoke so little about him.



Lamar Smith's grave in Riverdale Cemetery. Photograph by the author.

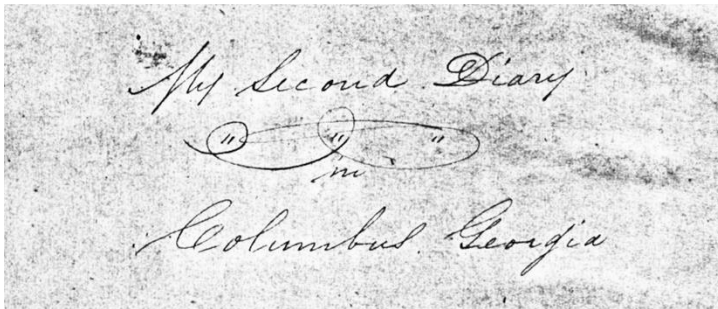
When Marguerite moved to New York, Lamar was left behind in Riverdale Cemetery, in a lonely corner of the Johnson-Smith lot. His closest relative in the cemetery was his mother-in-law in a nearby grave. His Martiniere cousins are buried in Linwood. His mother and seven of his siblings are buried in Michigan. Marguerite, Carson, and Rita are all buried together in Nyack, New York and Lamar, Jr., is buried in Taylor County, Florida. The forlorn watchmaker of French-Huguenot extraction, father of a famous Southern author and model for several characters in her critically acclaimed masterpieces rests quietly by himself. While the works of Carson McCullers are known for exploring themes of loneliness and isolation, her father's death and burial certainly epitomize them.

³¹ Savigneau, *Carson McCullers, A Life*, 119.

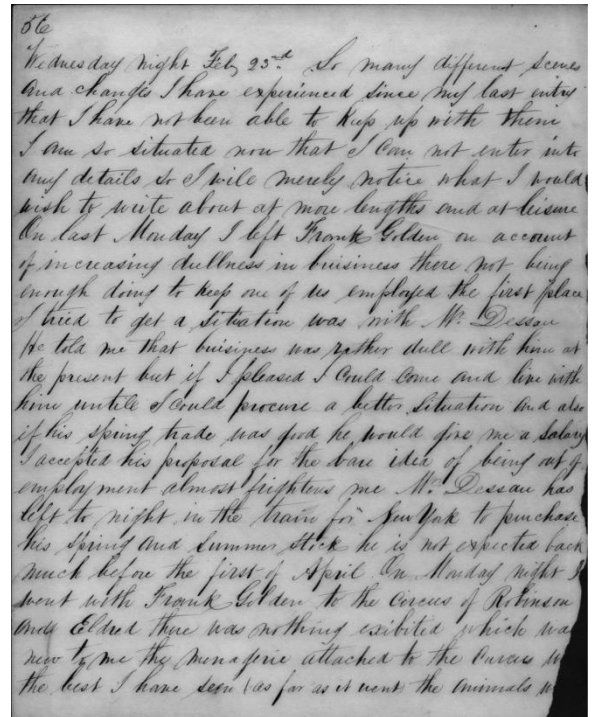
The 1853 Diary of Laurence Eugene O’Keeffe: A Snapshot of Life in Antebellum Columbus

By Mike Bunn

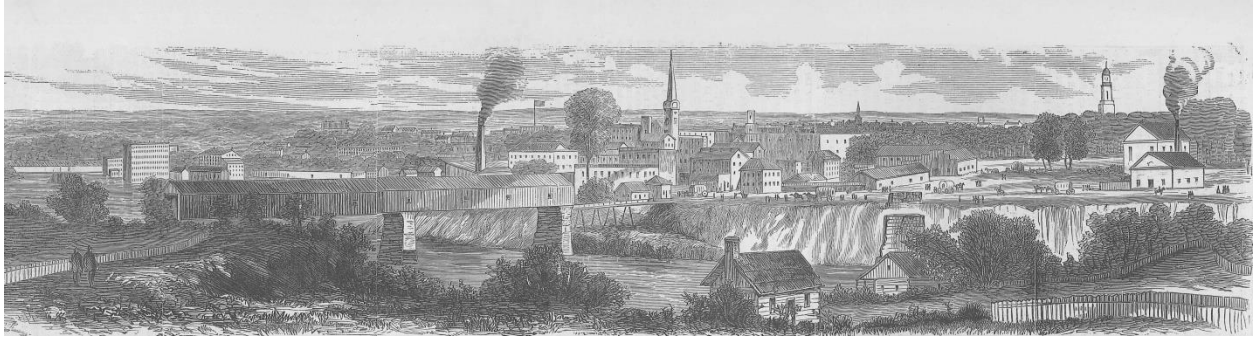
Deep within the stacks of the Columbus State University Archives, nestled among folders full of personal correspondence of former city residents, official records of businesses and institutions, and antiquarian books by the score, lies a nondescript journal containing the personal thoughts and observations of a young Irish immigrant living in antebellum Columbus named Laurence Eugene O’Keeffe. In a simple notebook purchased in 1853 for thirty cents, this astute and discerning resident recorded one of the more intriguing accounts of life in the pre-Civil War city we have available, in the form of a diary. He carefully observed the manners and habits of his neighbors, noticed and recorded details about the city’s appearance and physical environment, and wrestled with the pervasive influence of slavery on its society. While not a fluid narrative or designed in any way to serve as a documentary, the diary is nonetheless a fascinating time capsule which transports readers back to Columbus of the 1850s.³²



The front page of the notebook in which O’Keeffe kept his journal (top) and a page from the diary (right).
Courtesy of Columbus State University Archives.



³² Laurence O’Keeffe Collection, MC 218, Folder Three, “The Second Diary”.



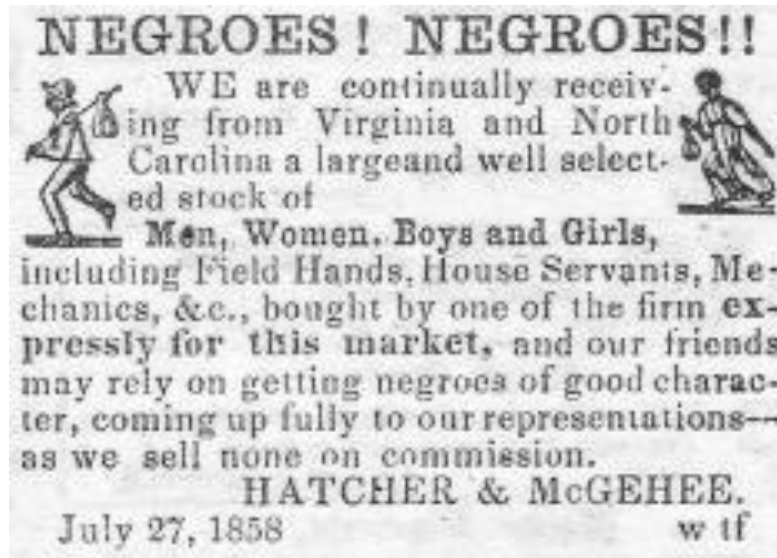
Though produced shortly after the Civil War, this view of Columbus as seen from Alabama provides a glimpse of what Columbus looked like during the time O’Keeffe kept his diary. Courtesy of the Columbus Museum.

One of the most fundamental ways O’Keeffe’s diary helps us understand Columbus during his day are through his descriptions of its appearance. While he never attempts to describe in detail any architectural features, his attention to the relatively commonplace sights and sounds which few other observers deemed worthy to comment upon are revealing. He noted, for example, the fact that many of the homes which lined Columbus’ quaint streets featured well-kept “nice garden plots” and there appeared to be a proliferation of exotic plants growing in tubs along the sidewalks. In fact, taken aback by the attention to horticulture in the city, he ventured to guess that no “city without regard to size or situation in this whole country can excel Columbus in tastes for the culture of flowers and the beautifully rustic way in which the houses are kept.” While admittedly not in a position to state such a claim definitively, O’Keeffe had traveled a good deal more than many of his Columbus contemporaries, and viewed the attempts to beautify the city as exceptional. He also commented on how sidewalks were swept ritually every morning by merchants and residents, leaving readers with the distinct impression that the citizens of antebellum Columbus took pride in the city’s ordered appearance.³³

O’Keeffe’s descriptions of the activity along those streets is especially informative, and paints a picture of a bustling but low-key downtown scene reminiscent more of an Old World European village than the vehicle-filled streets of the city’s core today. He noted vegetable vendors ringing bells on their carts as they approached, offering for sale fresh cucumbers, lettuce, radishes, green peas, and other edibles. He also commented on the “large quantity of fish (including catfish, trout, and shad) that are hawked about the street every morning and evening.” Lest we be too charmed by this idyllic tableau, however, we are reminded of the cultural and economic backdrop to O’Keeffe’s Columbus when he notes that many of these carts and stands were tended by poor boys or slaves. In fact, O’Keeffe recorded having seen several slaves selling corn and other produce they raised on the side in small patches for

³³ Born in Ireland in 1835, O’Keeffe moved with his family to the United States as a teen in 1850 and by 1853 had found his way to Columbus. During the Civil War he served in the 17th Regiment of Georgia Volunteers, seeing action in Virginia before being captured and imprisoned at Johnson’s Island in Ohio. After the war, O’Keeffe returned to Columbus. He eventually operated a steamboat line before moving to Atlanta where he ran a chemical and fertilizer industry. He married Sarah C. Cox in 1880. He died in 1907 and is buried in Westview Cemetery in Atlanta.

sale, presumably keeping some or all of the profits for themselves. He jotted down on one occasion how he knew of some bondsmen who earned in excess of \$100 per year through their own entrepreneurship in such a manner.³⁴



Advertisement for Columbus slave dealer which appeared in local papers during the 1850s. Courtesy of Columbus State University Archives.

O’Keeffe’s observations regarding the ubiquitous presence of slaves in antebellum Columbus are jarring for the way they lay bare the cold exploitation inherent in the system and the routine nature with which it permeated life in the city. Out of perhaps as much morbid curiosity as humanitarian concern, he found himself intrigued with learning about the living conditions of slaves and devoted several lines of his diary to recording their daily circumstances. He recorded that it seemed to be commonplace for planters to provide their bondsmen with a somewhat standard yearly supply of clothing consisting of two hats (one for summer and one for winter), four shirts, two coats, two pair of pants, two pair of shoes, and a blanket. He even took the time to calculate to the penny—\$8.50—the amount an average yearly outfit for a bondsmen might cost his owner. O’Keeffe could not help but find as profound the casual intermingling of purchases by planters of mundane supplies such as “bacon, ploughs, hoes and other farming implements” with “homemade cotton cloths to clothe their negroes.” He was, in short, deeply troubled at the raw reality of slave-keeping and clearly struggled to understand how the practice of forced servitude could be squared with civilized society.³⁵

While O’Keeffe does not elaborate with specificity on what the cold statistics he compiles in his diary might mean to him personally, he does allude to the link between the insatiable demand for economic gain and the human misery which underlay slavery as a rather distasteful symbiosis. Illustrative

³⁴ O’Keeffe Diary, pp. 134, 166.

³⁵ O’Keeffe Diary, p. 165.

of this opinion is the fact that slid in between notes on his normal routines in the city are reflections on gentlemen he overheard deep in conversation about “their idol”—cotton—and disdainful scrutiny of the stinginess of masters who seemingly only with reluctance provided their slaves with the most basic of needs. In one instance, he complained in private of how he knew of some owners who would shamelessly allow their slaves to be “almost naked” before purchasing them new garments. One can almost hear the sarcasm in his voice when he similarly derided how some owners, representing the other extreme in stewardship of human property, “cannot bear to see a tattered shirt” on a slave. O’Keeffe clearly believed this to be misplaced pride which had more to do with notions of owners’ status associated with the slave’s appearance than any genuine concern for their comfort and well-being. In a similar vein, O’Keeffe makes mention of crude talk about slave discipline overheard on the streets of Columbus, such as the braggadocio of some arising from their efficiency in hunting down runaways. “Best nigger dog that ever made a track on top side of the ground,” he heard one man crassly assert on a downtown sidewalk as a sort of presumed penultimate canine praise. The Columbus society O’Keeffe’s diary brings to life is not necessarily one in which the modern reader feels at ease.³⁶

But O’Keeffe introduces readers of his diary to other, less morally vexing aspects of a surprisingly diverse antebellum society. Columbus of the 1850s had a heavy European influence among its citizenry, and as much as half the population was born outside the state. Much like himself, many of the foreign-born residents of the city were first-generation immigrants who had fled dire economic circumstances in their native countries for the opportunities America presented. On the streets and in the halls of commerce of the riverside community could be heard Irish, Scottish, and German accents, as well as some others of eastern European origin. O’Keeffe need look no further than his own place of employment in the dry goods store of M.H. Dessau to find immigrants, in fact, as one of his coworkers happened to be a native of Poland who had been raised in Germany before finding his way to the banks of the Chattahoochee. Perhaps as might be suspected, O’Keeffe became particularly attuned to noticing those who, like him, hailed from the Emerald Isle. He made a special entry in his diary after enjoying a two-hour conversation with a lady he met in town who had been born in Ireland but raised in Canada, commenting on the uniqueness of her French-Irish accent and the difficulty with which he deciphered some of her phrases. In the pages of the diary are also references to the numerous Irish workers he noticed laboring on various infrastructure projects in and around the growing city whose sweat and muscle opened and maintained streets, laid gas lines, and made possible a variety of other labor-intensive endeavors.³⁷

O’Keeffe evidences a bit of a fixation with comparing life in Georgia with what he had known in Ireland. Not infrequently he found the conditions and people in the latter superior to the former in several respects. With no little private conceit, he wrote how he observed in America that although

³⁶ O’Keeffe Diary, pp. 166, 210, 238.

³⁷ O’Keeffe Diary, pp. 116, 119, 174-175. O’Keeffe worked as a clerk in the store.

"Ireland's poverty is greatly spoken of by a good number of persons," he observed on the streets of Columbus "old people from the country who would be considered objects of charity in Ireland." Perhaps feeling a rising indignity at that possibility he might be perceived some sort of object of charity himself because of his place of birth, he took pains to write about the several people in Columbus he saw in various levels of economic distress, dressed in coarse and threadworn homespun, barely getting by. He was taken aback, though, upon witnessing one abjectly poor man traversing the streets of town in a "rickety cart drawn or rather tugged by one of the poorest mules I ever saw...the creature was a picture of poverty and hunger." "There are many such people living in the woods of Alabama and Georgia," he noted with condescension, "raising a little corn, cotton, chicken, and eggs." If they had any children they "bring them up like themselves in the woods knowing nothing beyond guiding a plow and raising corn and cotton..."³⁸

At times O'Keeffe seems to almost revel in the backwardness of some of the residents of his adopted home. Scorn and sarcasm figuratively dripping off the page, he confided his thoughts about the exceptionally ragged appearance of a man he noticed passing by one day aboard a ramshackle wagon pulled by a worn-down mule. His hair and beard were white "except where the tobacco juice running from the corners of his mouth left a brown dirty looking streak." Almost comically, he noted how the wool hat he wore "flopped with the motion of his beast's ears" and his homespun pants were too short by a full six inches. As if his depiction were not unflattering enough, he went on to write that his "old lady" walked beside the wagon he rode smoking a cane pipe with a foot-long stem. The description reads as almost a caricature, but it preserves a description of a reality all too true in antebellum Columbus. While the community was as sophisticated and industrious as any in the region, indeed likely more so than most in several ways, there was also abundant illiteracy, substantial rates of poverty, and no little indolence. Still, that O'Keeffe chose to comment with such detail on the manners and habits of certain people who seemed to represent the proverbial "bottom rung" of antebellum society may be less a measure of their ubiquity than their exception. If there is one thing his descriptions of the people he encountered makes clear, it is that antebellum Columbus was a truly diverse place where rich and poor, black and white, domestic and foreign-born mingled.³⁹

It unfortunately proved to also be a place of great violence. O'Keeffe found the bloodshed regularly occurring on the streets of Columbus—fights, duels, and other disturbances—shocking. "On Sunday morning about three or four o'clock one of those frequent shooting cases came off in a bar room in the upper part of town," he noted on one occasion, observing that "it ended more tragically than is usual, in this case one of the parties got killed instantly his name is Newberry and leaves a large and poor family." O'Keeffe believed violence to be both more prolific and less policed than he expected to find in a civilized society, even though both may have been about average for a Southern city of Columbus' size at

³⁸ O'Keeffe Diary, pp. 135, 136, 138, 139.

³⁹ O'Keeffe Diary, p. 137.

the time. With astonishment he noted, for example, at one point that “there are 3 or 4 murderers at large in this city at present” and seemingly only weak efforts undertaken to apprehend them. O’Keeffe could never quite grasp how the code of honor embedded in the culture of the region in which he lived tacitly sanctioned violence as a legitimate solution for grievances large and small. He despaired how “the laws and more especially the public feeling is much worse against a thief or pickpocket than it is against a murderer who kills his opponent in a fight.”⁴⁰

It seems to the modern reader patently incongruent, but the slaveholding, violence-prone society in which Columbus existed manifested a prominent religious scene that was part of the mainstream of Columbus society. Perhaps unsurprisingly, O’Keeffe’s depiction of the spiritual life of Columbus citizens is not entirely flattering, however. A devout Old World Catholic thrown into the midst of a rowdy American Protestant society, O’Keeffe looked askance at the worship practices of some of his neighbors. For starters, he viewed it as a sad commentary on their spiritual devotion that he seemed to hear little talk of religion in Columbus unless, according to him, immediately preceding a camp meeting—a frontier-era tradition that featured all-day campground preaching in ad-hoc facilities in a raucous, often carnival-like atmosphere. Already an old tradition which harkened to an earlier era at the time of O’Keeffe’s days in Columbus, these meetings played a critical role in the promulgation of Protestant faiths throughout the antebellum South. If O’Keeffe could not make sense of this democratic ecclesiology, he had special difficulty comprehending the ease with which Columbusites appeared to switch denominational loyalty. Baptists might attend Methodist churches or vice versa, going and coming as they pleased and switching religious affiliation on what seemed to him a rather promiscuous whim.⁴¹

Yet O’Keeffe ultimately found himself rather well-adapted to the seemingly borderless spiritual milieu in which he circulated, as he eventually visited multiple denominations. He found local religious institutions in his adopted home town ultimately to not be up to his standards in several regards. After attending an Easter service at St. Philip and James Catholic Church, for instance, he caustically noted that among the large crowd, “the (music) playing was anything but well and the singing no better.” On another occasion after he attended Trinity Episcopal Church with friends, he remarked afterward that “I like their music much better than the nasal chanting of the discordant Baptists or Methodists,” but since the bishop read from a book on the French Revolution and the writings of Robespierre, he “did not learn anything new from him nor take a single fresh idea from discourse.” O’Keeffe could be condescending and disapproving of Catholic and Protestant alike. He became offended when parishioners at the Catholic church scolded him that keeping non-Catholic friends might lead him to “forsake my religion altogether”—advice he found both intolerant and impractical. In actuality, though, O’Keeffe could be every bit as prejudicial as those he railed against in his private journal. When members of the Catholic congregation asked him to sing in the church choir, he hesitated on somewhat self-righteous grounds. Among the

⁴⁰ O’Keeffe Diary, p. 105, 204, 205.

⁴¹ O’Keeffe Diary, 210, 211, 212.

congregation was a single mother whose estranged husband still lived in town and, inconceivably to O’Keeffe, managed to still be regarded as a gentleman. O’Keeffe did admit, inadvertently perhaps, that his rationale may have been more of a justification than a moral stance, as he wrote how “the straightforward truth (is) I have no particular fancy for any of them.”⁴²



Trinity Episcopal Church, ca. 1850.
Courtesy of Columbus State University Archives.

While they may not carry quite the gravity of O’Keeffe’s commentary on the topics of the economy, slavery, or religion, his entries documenting the leisure activities in which Columbusites indulged during somnolent mornings and languid afternoons along the Chattahoochee are perhaps even more fascinating. The ubiquity of the casual use of tobacco in antebellum society in particular drew his notice, as he commented on the multitude of ways in which local “Georgia Crackers” enjoyed the leaf. Many, if not most, men apparently smoked tobacco on the streets of town, and not a few chewed. But many women and girls did, too. Some even walked around town with a bottle of snuff and brush which they dipped into the bottle and then sucked in the manner of a lollipop—a practice O’Keeffe found repellent. He found the near-universal fondness for the hobby of whittling especially curious. “This practice of whittling is a source of enjoyment to the people; from the school boy with his blunt sevenpence knife to the dandy with his of the ivory or mother of pearl haft and blades of all shapes and sizes.” “The old politician cannot argue or hold up a controversy without a piece of pine in his hand... The warmer he will get on his subject the more furious he will cut the wood.” With a figurative upturned nose, he noted that in his estimation the habit was “disliked by the best classes, and by others whose other pursuits occupy their time.” In other words, O’Keeffe seemed to say, only the idle poor or the

⁴² O’Keeffe Diary, p. 102, 146, 168, 171, 172.

indolent wealthy “who have never had anything to do in their lives...and have negroes and plantations left them by their parents and have a white man employed to carry on the business for them” had the time to waste in such pursuits. Readers will therefore not be surprised, but may possibly be amused, at his tone of resignation in his entry for May 12, 1853. Summer seemed to have finally arrived in town, he noted, and thus “large gashes are being made in the good boxes that stand outside the dry good and other stores, and names and characters are being cut every day upon post and pillar by the crowd of lazy.”⁴³

Other diversions, personal and public, also became the subject of O’Keeffe’s diary entries and likewise provide fascinating additional insight into social life in antebellum Columbus. He wrote, for instance, of how he spent hours with his dear friend, Frank Golden, engaged in conversation about travel, music, fine arts, literature, and other topics of mutual interest. On occasion, the two would read stories from periodicals such as the *Georgia Citizen*, play card games, or shoot billiards. But O’Keeffe had many more acquaintances than Golden and enjoyed a fairly active social life, the details of which are illustrative of the entertainment opportunities available to his contemporaries. He attended dances, serenaded “lady friends” late at night, and celebrated his birthday (May 15th) among friends with strawberries, cigars, and “cooling drinks.” He commented on several parties he attended at which music—via accordions, violins, pianos, and flutes, to name a few instruments—was provided, and recorded eating supper as a guest of a distinguished local family at which “various kinds of fancy breads, jellies, sardines, pickled salmon, pound cake...ice cream, wine and cigars” graced the table. O’Keeffe enjoyed more private outings than these group gatherings, as well. His diary contains a lengthy entry on a day spent with a girl named Mary whom he must have known well despite the fact that the entry is the only one that mentions her. The two talked, flirted, and playfully snacked on almonds and raisins after church one spring Sunday afternoon. “We had great fun tempting one another with the largest ones. And when sure of getting them we would snatch them away and eat them ourselves. We held some between our teeth also while either of us bit the part off outside (by the way a rather *raisinable* way of kissing).” O’Keeffe’s diary thus records work, play, and even a little romance on the banks of the Chattahoochee.⁴⁴

The diary also provides information on entertainment available to the public in the form of concerts and various other types of performances. Obviously interested in music, O’Keeffe took note when singers such as the acclaimed soprano Emma Bostwick made an appearance in town at Temperance Hall. He seemed pleased with the show, but came away disappointed with the size of the audience, remarking in the margins of his diary how “I wish it were as full as it could be, for I always like to see talent of every kind well supported.” He tried his best to live up to his own expectation in this regard, as he took the time to attend a student concert arranged by a music instructor named Mr.

⁴³ O’Keeffe Diary, p. 140, 141, 207, 208, 209.

⁴⁴ O’Keeffe Diary, p. 115, 133, 155, 156, 163, 164, 169, 219. The *Georgia Citizen* was published weekly in Macon from 1850 to 1860.

Kennemer and gladly paid the admission price of fifty cents. He seemed to think more of the students than their teacher, though, remarking that "Mr. Kennemer himself sung two songs but took from rather than added to the entertainment." O'Keeffe also recorded attending a variety of other types of events which add color to our understanding of the entertainment options available in 1850s Columbus, such as a special, wide-ranging, program showcasing the cultural life and natural environment of Ireland. The show, held at Temperance Hall, featured music, singing, comedy, and the display of a large panorama painting, but O'Keeffe could only express his misgivings of what he perceived to be an inauthentic depiction of his hometown of Limerick.⁴⁵



Concert singer Emma Gillingham Bostwick was one of the most popular and famous performers in the antebellum United States. This rare image of her is believed to have been taken in the early 1850s, around the time of her visit to Columbus. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

⁴⁵ O'Keeffe Diary, p. 107, 142, 175, 182. Temperance Hall was a centerpiece of public life in antebellum Columbus. The largest building in the city in the early 1850s, the three-story structure became the scene of many of the city's largest public gatherings. The building stood on First Avenue between 12th and 13th Streets.



Limerick Ireland, in the 1830s, by Alphone Dousseu, courtesy of the National Library of Wales.

No public gathering recorded by O’Keeffe in his diary outranked in terms of size or interest the celebration associated with the completion of the railroad which connected the city by rail with the Atlantic. On May 20, 1853, Columbus staged a gala event to mark the opening of the Muscogee Railroad, which ran between the Chattahoochee and the port of Savannah, and the arrival of the first train to carry passengers along the route. Nearly 200 visitors from Savannah traveled aboard the train, which advanced at what seemed an astonishing speed in a single day from Georgia’s coast to its western border—a feat many locals could scarcely believe possible, despite the fact that rail travel was certainly not a new innovation at the time. The feat marked a watershed event in the city’s trade and travel development and its import immediately became apparent to all. “The completion of the railroad...has set a goodly number of our citizens almost crazy with joy,” O’Keeffe noted in his diary. Caught up in the moment, he observed with a touch hyperbole tinged with the language of the civic boosterism with which he no doubt suddenly found himself surrounded how “before this week has elapsed the traveler who views the sun rise from the Atlantic...may see him shed his setting low upon the bosom of the picturesque and beautiful Chattahoochee.” O’Keeffe recorded the city-wide celebration connected with the rail line’s opening in great detail, noting it featured a grand reception of the initial travelers with a band, a large public dinner, and a

soiree and ball the night of the train's arrival. As this banner event concludes, so does O'Keeffe's diary for 1853.⁴⁶

It is an inescapable truth that any observer of society brings with him or her certain biases and preconceptions based on past experiences that impact the way they perceive the reality around them. Owing to the fact that Laurence Eugene O'Keeffe's were so different from many of his contemporaries in these regards, his diary is a particularly intriguing account of aspects of life in antebellum Columbus. Many may have found the events and experiences he commented on unworthy of mention, while others would have explained them in an entirely different way. Still others, busily consumed in their daily routines, may not have taken notice of the uniqueness of the city and culture around them. O'Keeffe's diary contains the musings of a person attuned to recognizing the small things that distinguish a people, a place, and a time, even if only hazily aware of the type of record he was creating in the moment. The diary is thus a compelling treasure-trove of observations on early Columbus, and reading his words helps give shape to a long-vanished world. It is therefore fitting that we leave O'Keeffe exactly where we first found him—deep in observation within the pages of his diary. As he attempted to settle in for the evening on a Tuesday night in Columbus over a century and a half ago, he paused to listen anxiously to the world outside of his door. "Everything is so still," he wrote, "that my pen as it grates upon the paper may be said to make a noise...occasionally I can catch the sound of a violin and hear the barking of dogs in the distance."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ O'Keeffe Diary, p. 221, 226-231.

⁴⁷ O'Keeffe Diary, p. 106.

The Drs. Schley An Original Medical Family of Columbus

By Jack Pease Schley

It has always been, since the 1830s and up until recently, that those citizens of Columbus and the surrounding area in need of medical attention could call on a Dr. Schley. Five generations of this family, all descended from the first Schley to come to America in 1744, dedicated their lives and talents to a career in medicine.

At the time of their arrival, Columbus was the newest, and ripest with potential, frontier town in the state of Georgia. There were fortunes to be made here in all that the land and river had to offer, but it was also a very hostile environment. The town was not built up to any great extent, but for a few city blocks of wooden dwellings that sheltered those that lived here. Just across the river in Alabama lay the Creek Nation of Indians. Many of the Native Americans were friendly and traded in Columbus with the townsfolk and merchants here; however, there were also many who resented the presence of the white man on their ancestral lands. At the onset of the Second Creek War in 1836, those natives raided the town and surrounding farms, wreaking havoc on the settlers. In response to continuous calls for military support in Columbus, the governor of Georgia, William Schley, sent his brother Philip Thomas to the frontier town to form a militia unit of volunteers to help protect the town from further attack. When Philip arrived here he had with him his wife, Frances Vivian Brooking, and their seven children: three sons and four daughters with a fourth son to be born in Columbus. They lived in a brick house on the corner of First Avenue and Eleventh Street, the current site of the First Presbyterian Church.

After the Second Creek War the Creek Indians were removed altogether from the South and transplanted to the Oklahoma Territory. Philip Sr. returned to a career of law after the war and remained in Columbus along with his family. His nephew, Dr. William K. Schley, son of Governor Schley, lived and practiced in Columbus for all of his life. His house once stood where the Columbus Museum is now situated. Dr. W.K. also served on the Board of Health in Columbus from 1838 to 1842. Of Philip Thomas' four sons, two became doctors. Philip Jr., lived in a few different cities but he did practice in Columbus for a short while.⁴⁸ He also practiced in Charleston, Atlanta, and eventually New York.

⁴⁸ Georgia Tax Digest for Muscogee County, 1885, lists a Dr. P.T. Schley.



Edward Brooking Schley.
(All images courtesy of the author).

Edward Brooking Schley remained in Columbus and became a homeopathic physician, trained according to an alternative medical theory positing the idea that a sick people can be healed by the same substance which causes the symptoms of a disease. He first studied under his brother-in-law, Dr. Henry Cleckley. Then in the winter of 1859-1860 he attended lectures at the Homeopathic Medical College in Philadelphia. The following winter he studied at the Homeopathic Medical School in New York City, and graduated on February 28, 1861.⁴⁹ In April of the same year he and his younger brother Philip enlisted in the Confederate Army as members of Company A of the Second Georgia Infantry Battalion. Edward served as Assistant Surgeon to the whole battalion for three of the four years of the war.⁵⁰

After the South's surrender in 1865, Edward made his way home after a brief stint in Texas and married Melissa Sparks of Talbot County in 1866. She died in 1883 and he remarried to Miss Nannie Pitts of Waverly Hall, but he never had any children. Edward, or Uncle Ed as the family knew him, took up what was known as a carriage practice. Locals often saw him in a two-horse buggy wearing yellow gloves, attending to a variety of treatments. His patient's house became his office, where he delivered bedside care. This required a great acquaintance with both social and geographical knowledge of the area in addition to the theory and applied skill of a physician. Edward garnered all of this knowledge and became well respected by the community for it. He served two terms as City Physician to Columbus in the late 1860s and early 1870s.⁵¹ In his travels he would often stop to visit with his brother's family in Chattahoochee County. Thomas B. Schley was a farmer on the family plantation along Upatoi creek south of town. His children were very fond of their Uncle Ed and two of Thomas's son followed Edward in their career choice.

Francis "Frank" Vivian and William Kirkley, sons of Thomas and Eliza Greene Schley, grew up in Chattahoochee County and also became homeopathic practitioners of medicine. Dr. Will K. Schley was known as a Chattahoochee County physician all of his life. Frank V. rode along with his Uncle Ed in the early years, and was introduced to the community in Columbus as the next Dr. Schley while he learned

⁴⁹ *Biographical Souvenir of the States of Georgia and Florida* (Chicago: F. A. Battey & Company. 1889), 728.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; Letter from Dr. Philip T. Schley, Jr to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Eliza Greene Schley, November 5, 1868, in the possession of the Schley family.

the skills of diagnosis and treatment. One of his prescriptions for general ailments was a dose of sulfur, diluted in water, and drunk by the patient. He left instructions with the family to give attentive, loving support to the infirm. This often proved to be the true medicine for minor afflictions. Frank married Martha Hightower of Lumpkin, Georgia, in 1882. Together they had five children in Chattahoochee County, all of them girls. In the late 1880s, Frank enrolled in the Atlanta Medical College, which later became affiliated with Emory University, and graduated in 1891. With his new credentials, he returned home and determined that the family should move into Columbus. In so doing, his daughters could find suitable husbands. The Schley's relocated from the country to Florida Street in Rose Hill, now 6th Avenue, where a sixth daughter and, at last, a son—the seventh and final child—were born.



Francis Vivian Schley.



William Kirkley Schley.

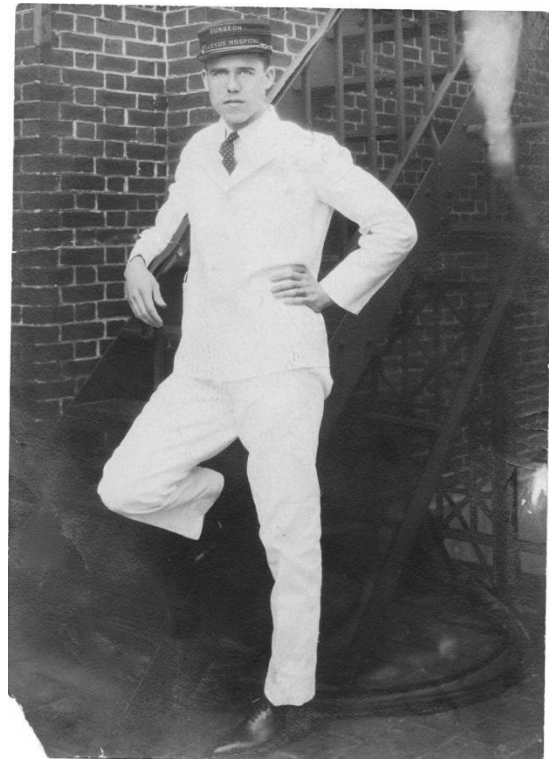
Around 1898, Frank, again following in his Uncle Ed's footsteps, assumed the role of City Physician to Columbus. He also served on the Board of Health for the City of Columbus, as City Physician, in 1900.⁵² His office for this position was located in the old courthouse. He made about 300 house calls a month to patients both black and white, rich and poor, in town. He also oversaw the burial of the city

⁵² Etta Blanchard Worsley. *Columbus on the Chattahoochee* (Columbus: Columbus Office Supply Company. 1951), 398.

“paupers.”⁵³ He too developed a reputation for competence and attentiveness, and was generally respected. He also traveled by wagon to see many of his patients outside of town. He rode out into many late nights to attend to the birthing of a baby and would stay by the bedside of the sick for hours when he felt he needed to, whether for the patient or family’s sake. A friend described him in life as a “childishly happy” man in his character who enjoyed adding to the joy of others.

One story from Dr. Frank V. Schley’s time as City Physician was retold by one of his patients at a much-advanced age. While a young boy, he was taken to Dr. Schley’s office in the old courthouse about a boil growing on his arm. Dr. Schley told the boy he would have to cut open the growth, to which the child cried out in objection. Dr. Schley told him, “If you’ll let me make my cuts, I’ll give you a pigeon,” pointing out the window to a pigeon coop he kept in the outside yard. The boy stared at the birds, and deciding that he really wanted to have a pigeon, agreed to the deal. After the procedure, Dr. Schley handed the boy a bird. When the boy walked out, his mother began to protest to Dr. Schley about the inconvenience that bird would have on the family. Frank just smiled and said, “Not to worry, as soon as he lets go, the bird will fly right back to me.” Sure enough, the boy held onto the bird for about two hours. When he released it, the homing pigeon flew right back to its coop at the courthouse.⁵⁴

Dr. Frank V. Schley also had a private practice while serving as City Physician, a position he held for almost a decade up until a short while before his death in 1909 of meningitis. He named his only son Francis Brooking, carrying on the name of his father and great-grandmother. Frank B. attended the University of Georgia and then the Atlanta Medical College at Emory like his father. After his graduation in 1924, he fulfilled his residency at Bellevue Hospital in New York. He entered medicine as it began to divide from general to specific practitioners and focused his studies on the care of infants and children. Frank fell in love with a young nurse from Illinois working at Bellevue named Susie Smith. They were married in New York in a small ceremony in 1926. Frank had been in contact with a cousin while in New York, the son of his great uncle, Dr. Philip T. Schley, Jr. Named for his father, Philip Schley, of Rockville Center, New York, insisted that Frank practice locally, but the family at home was calling for Frank and Susie



Dr. Francis Brooking Schley in 1925 while at Bellevue Hospital in New York.

⁵³ City Physician Monthly Reports. Original papers of Dr. F. V. Schley, in the possession of the author.

⁵⁴ Oral history from Dr. Philip T. Schley, Jr. of Columbus, Georgia. April 10, 2017.

to live in Columbus. Frank had also been in contact with Dr. Mercer Blanchard of Columbus. Dr. Blanchard was the only "baby doctor" in town and convinced Frank that he could make a living, as well as a significant impact, if he chose to practice in his hometown. The problem at the time was that Frank did not have enough money to make the move, so his cousin Philip loaded the young couple up and moved them down to Columbus himself.



Upon settling back in Columbus, Frank ran his practice out of the Swift-Kyle Building on the corner of Broadway and 13th Street, where Dr. Blanchard's office was located. Later, he moved the practice into an old home at 303 11th Street. He was known as a "baby doctor" and helped developed that field into pediatrics, which became a formally recognized discipline in 1934. Frank became one of the first such specialty physicians in the Chattahoochee Valley, along with Dr. Mercer Blanchard. He diagnosed and treated diseases such as smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid, and yellow fever, and lived to see these diseases nearly wiped out by vaccines. He joined the Muscogee County Medical Society as a charter member. The group consisted of many doctors of varying specialties that collaborated to provide the best possible medical care for their community. He served as Chief of Staff at the City Hospital, now the

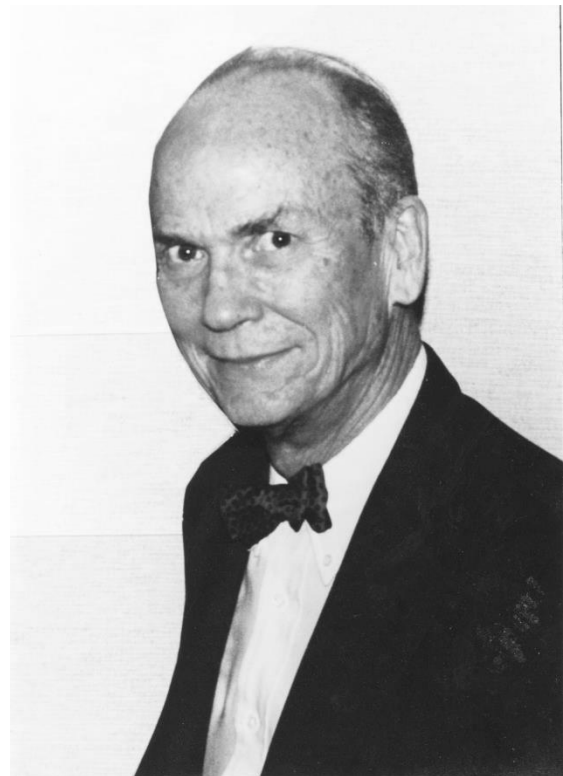
Medical Center, from 1946-1947, in addition to running his private practice. In his own office he was known for treating both black and white children; a taboo in the white community of Columbus in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. He also treated the children of the mob families that unofficially ruled Phenix City, Alabama in those days, although he refused to accept payment for his services to these children because he, quietly, did not approve of how the parents made their money. Frank accepted it as his duty, however, to see and treat any child no matter their social or racial background. He and Susie would sometimes find a frozen turkey on the backdoor step of their Peacock Avenue home during the holidays, left there by an anonymous donor. He and Susie had four children: three sons and one daughter, all of whom became involved in medicine.

Their three sons; Frank Jr., Philip T., and William Shain, all attended Emory University as undergraduates and medical students. All three also gave their medical skill in service to their country. Frank was stationed in Germany, following the completion of his training after his residency in Cincinnati, Ohio. He went there with his wife, Dr. Mary Wheatland; both were trained as pediatricians. Philip served as a flight surgeon in the Air Force and was stationed in England, where he met his wife, Margot

Sommerville, and Shain served during the conflict in Vietnam. In 1957, after attending to two morning house calls, Dr. Frank B. Schley, Sr. returned home to Peacock Avenue and told Susie he was feeling ill. By the end of the day he was dead. The news was sent to Frank Jr. and Mary in Germany. Frank flew to Washington, D.C. and connected with a doctor stationed at the Pentagon. He presented his case for needing to be discharged from the Army a few months early, due to the death of his father. With no one to run the office in Columbus the town would have been seriously lacking in pediatric care, and the family practice would also lose much of its loyal business. The doctor in Washington had met Dr. Frank, Sr. at a medical conference just a few months before. Impressed with him then, and shocked to hear of his death, the doctor helped Frank, Jr., receive an early discharge. Frank returned home to Columbus and took over the family pediatric practice at 303 11th street while he waited for Mary and their son Frank III to arrive from Germany six weeks later.

Dr. Frank B. Schley, Jr., carried on and built upon the legacy of his father, grandfather, and great-great uncle and was known to be a competent, charismatic, and respected physician. In his office, his nurses and workers were kind, efficient, and well loved by the children. Frank, himself, was admired by both parent and child. The children he treated trusted him owing to his soft-spoken honesty—he informed them when to expect pain and that it was permissible to cry. When his treatment would not hurt, he told the children that he forbade crying. The parents appreciated Frank because he was attentive and clear when informing them about their child’s health. His wife Mary practiced at the Pediatric Office of the Columbus Clinic, a division of the Columbus Medical Center, which she eventually directed. She was known for the respect she paid to everyone in the practice of healthcare

and the seriousness with which she practiced, while also being approachable. Philip T. returned home to Columbus with his wife Margot and opened a urology clinic, where he was known as a practitioner of modern medicine in a traditional, classical manner. Brother Shain returned from service in the Vietnam War and ran an Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) practice in New York, in addition to directing the ENT department at Cornell University. Their sister, Susan, married Dr. Anthony Gristina, an orthopedic surgeon who held many patents on orthopedic implants. They lived in North Carolina. Dr. Gristina, “Tony,” lectured at orthopedic



Dr. Frank B. Schley, Jr.

conferences in Europe, Asia, and across the United States about his research, which focused on the cause and prevention of infection from bacteria on the surface of implants.

Frank, Mary, and Philip practiced for decades, over a century with all three careers combined. They retired in Columbus with the respect and gratitude of the town and their patients as well as their employees and coworkers. They did not, however, disappear from the public eye. When Mary retired, her role was filled by three people. In the years since, she has been dedicating her mind and talents to the administration of many Columbus organizations such as Columbus Regional, the Columbus Symphony, Brookstone School, and Columbus State University, just to name a few. Philip has lent his time and talents to the Boy Scouts of America in Columbus; he and his brothers all achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. Philip also served as president of the Muscogee County School Board and oversaw its relocation to the new building on Macon Road. Frank passed away too quickly after his retirement, his health compromised from an infection of the brain. Shain and Susan have both retired and returned to Columbus and are involved in many similar, community organizations. Of the sixth generation of Schleys in Columbus, one fifth generation doctor was produced; Philip and Margot's second son Robert, known to his family as Beau. He practiced for many years at St. Francis Hospital in Columbus as an anesthesiologist.

For over one hundred and seventy years, Columbus has called on a Dr. Schley to lend his or her service to the community and has been grateful for it. These physicians' careers are marked by scholarship, strong and amiable character, and devotion to family and community. Their mark on this town is visible by those babies, now grown up and of no relation to the family, who carry the doctors' names, and by those who saw and knew the doctors so frequently that they are able to pick out their progeny from a crowd due to their distinctive "Schleyness."

Focus On Columbus State University Archives



As many of you may know, *Muscogiana* is published through a partnership between the Muscogee Genealogical Society and the Columbus State University Archives. In addition to housing archival copies of the journal, the university prints and distributes them. We tremendously value the great relationship we have with the Society; you have been some of our strongest supporters. I am anxious to build upon this and am therefore happy to announce to all of you that the CSU Archives is relaunching its friends group, the Azilia Society. The Azilia Society is named after the Margravate of Azilia, which was Sir Robert Montgomery's original plan for the colony of Georgia proposed in 1717. It supports the CSU Archives in its mission to document and preserve the history and culture of Columbus and the broader Chattahoochee Valley area.



The "Carolina" or "Azilia" Map by Herman Moll, 1720.

Individuals who join will receive invitations to special events, workshops, lectures, and other activities; will receive CSU Libraries check-out privileges; and will receive a subscription to *Muscogiana*, if not already a subscriber. Those interested can join at the following levels:

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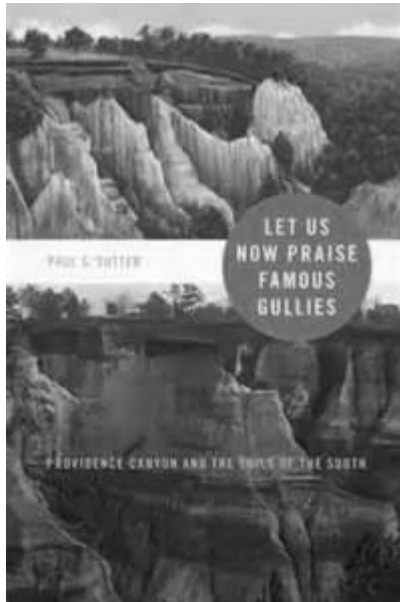
Please consider becoming a member of the Azilia Society. Your contributions help us provide quality programming, purchase collections that we would not normally be able to acquire, and allows us to send items out for professional conservation when needed. All of these things ensure that we are documenting and preserving the area's past and making it available for future generations. If you are interested, simply send me an email at owings_david@columbusstate.edu or give me a call at 706-507-8674.

Thank you for all you have already done! We are looking forward to accomplishing more with your help in the future!

David M. Owings
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Columbus State University Archives
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Book Reviews

Paul S Sutter. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Gullies: Providence Canyon and the Soils of the*



Located in west central Georgia, Providence Canyon offers a seemingly simple window into some of the primary challenges of Southern environmental history. What is the relationship between humans and the environment in the South? How does that relationship change over time? And, what are the causes and meanings of extreme regional environmental degradation? Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, author Paul S. Sutter reflects on this most extreme example of soil erosion that became a 1,109-acre state park with sixteen multicolored and rambling canyons, some 150 feet deep, with small, sandy streams at its base. Drawing together the erosive force of Southern raindrops, poor farming practices, soils, geology, slavery, land tenure, scientific interpretations, boosterism, and the impact of nineteenth century settlers, he offers a complex and remarkable history of the gullification of Providence Canyon.

Readers first arrive at Providence Canyon State Park as the author did, to explore the visual drama of this remarkable, multicolored, gully-eroded landscape. By studying the deep cuts into the coastal plain, Sutter troubles long held assumptions about why the canyon is there and what it represents, including the view that the canyon is an ironic result of poor southern agricultural practices. He examines this state park on three scales: local, regional, and national. Sutter reflects on the local context of the canyon in Stewart County's extensively eroded landscapes. He also places the canyon into a larger context of Southern piedmont cotton and tobacco farming, and a national scale of severely eroded American landscapes.

The narrative shifts to the 1930s in part two. In a remarkable confluence of events, Sutter highlights how Providence Canyon became the poster child for a variety of social, economic, political, and environmental ailments associated with the Great Depression. As Americans began to travel with the aid of cheaper automobiles, these tourists discovered American landscapes. Local community boosters sought to draw their landscapes, through image and narratives, to the attention of these visitors. At the same time, both state and national actors in the form of the Conservation Service and the Geological Survey agencies were also shaping the meanings of this place. Drawing together a rich variety of sources, Sutter reflects on the relationship between soil erosion and labor practices in the antebellum and post-Civil War periods.

In the final section, the author raises important questions about the roles of slaves, slave owners, small scale farmers, and tenant farmers in the management of this regional environment. It is a complex picture, and one that the author signals as an area for fruitful work in the future. In this last section, Sutter steps into the realm of environmental possibilism, one important step away from environmental determinism. In doing so he lays out the curious and remarkable confluence of erosion, soil type and rainfall erosivity in the production of this fantastic landscape.

If there is something missing from Sutter's history, it may be a reflection on the massive rise in cotton productivity in the fifty years prior to the Civil War, as Stewart County underwent steady population growth. Did newly developed varieties of upland cotton impact Stewart County's landscape? The newly developed highland cotton varieties were greatly desired by global manufacturers, more so than its earlier sea island cultivars. With the rise of upland cotton, we also see rapid increases in the number of enslaved cotton workers at the intersection of piedmont and coastal Georgia.

This critique notwithstanding, this author weaves a complex environmental history. Sutter's *Providence Canyon* embraces the site's creation myth of raindrops dripping off a barn, and places it into a broader local, regional, and national context. The deeply incised, riotously colorful, and dramatic gullies are made sense of using an interdisciplinary mashup of geological and soil sciences, geography, and agricultural, cultural, and environmental histories of the South.

Dr. Amanda Rees

Professor of Geography and Coordinator: Columbus Community Geography Center
Columbus State University

Christopher Haveman. *Rivers of Sand: Creek Indian Emigration, Relocation, and Ethnic Cleansing in the American South*. 438 pp. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

Chris Haveman's *Rivers of Sand: Creek Indian Emigration, Relocation, and Ethnic Cleansing in the American South* provides a comprehensive look at the Creek Nation after the Battle of Tohopeka (Horseshoe Bend), the loss of their traditional homeland, and relocation of the Creeks to the Indian Territory. This book won the Alabama Historical Association's 2017 James F. Sulzby Book Award, which "recognizes excellence in a book published in the previous two years that has made the most significant contribution to greater knowledge and appreciation of Alabama history."



The defeat of the Creeks at Tohopeka and the conclusion of the Creek War was not the end of troubles, but the beginning of a period of great tribulation for the Creek peoples. They lost a vast portion of their homeland with the settlement from the war. The pressure of white settlers, ranchers, and hunters continually nipping away at the borderlands ensured there would be no relief from the conflict. Internal anxieties continued as disagreements played out between those who wanted to stand firm and hold the lands that remained, and those who realized it was inevitable that they would soon lose what remained of their dear homeland. Large chunks of land were signed away under various treaties in the hope of stabilization of the borderlands. Instead this resulted in many displaced people, who piled into an ever-shrinking territory.

The Federal Government encouraged relocation to the West and many Creeks gave it a go, voluntarily. The move was a massively disruptive and costly undertaking for the individual, the family, and the town. These emigrants moved from facing one set of hostile neighbors to another, with loss of property, health, and life. They moved from a well-watered and familiar climate to a much more arid and less productive landscape.

The Creeks were left with no good choices. They faced hostile and often violent white neighbors, unsympathetic and many times untruthful state and federal governments. Their own neighbors and leaders could also be hostile to their decisions in the debate over whether or not to move west or to stay put and try to hang on. Many of those who tried to hold out to the very end were drawn into a conflict with the encroaching white populations and were finally hunted down, rounded up, and, if they weren't killed, were taken west in chains. Haveman's book takes the reader through details and individual stories of this unhappy saga; the twenty-two years following the Creek War; into a new beginning of the Creek Nation in the West; and the story of how the people learned how to live there and hold on to much of their historic culture.

T.R. Henderson
Friends of Horseshoe Bend National Military Park

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