THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

FOUND AMONG THE PAPERS OF THE EARLY REPUBLIC

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2019

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All photos are mine unless otherwise noted.

Acknowledgments

Lauren Berlant made every conversation, and every moment of research and writing, a thrill. Bill Brown helped me to hear what I was trying to say. Eric Slauter made me want to be a book historian and a cultural historian. They were wonderful guides and advisors, and they are my models for the kind of teacher and scholar I hope to become. Maud Ellman, Heather Keenleyside, Richard Jean So, Chris Taylor, and Ken Warren inspired me to think in new ways while I was writing this dissertation, and before then, too. My amazing graduate cohort changed me as a reader, and more fundamentally as a person. Special thanks to Hannah Christensen, Kevin Kimura, and Katie Krywokulski for many years of friendship, and to Hadji Bakara, Oscar Chavez, Alex Jacobs, Jose-Luis Moctezuma, Andrew Peart, and Megan Tusler for talking to me about my work and sharing their own research with me. I was lucky to spend a year in Philadelphia learning from my fellow fellows at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Thanks, especially, to my cohort of English, Art History, and Material Text scholars there – Daniel Couch, Elizabeth Eager, Lauren Kimball, Don James McLaughlin, and Laura Soderberg – and to Dan Richter for everything. I am extraordinarily grateful to everyone I met during my time as a fellow at the Franke Institute for the Humanities. Jim Chandler, Margot Browning, Rebecca Crisafulli, Tom Kelly, Branden Kosch, Daniela Licandro, Adhira Mangalagiri, Jim Conant, Daniel Desormeaux, Ghenwa Hayek, Bob Kendrick, Wei-Cheng Lin, Sarah Nooter, Michael Rossi, and Yuri Tsivian: thank you for a year of the best, most generative discussions that I have ever been a part of.

Jim Green and Connie King introduced me to the collections at the Library Company and the joys of looking at things like book bindings. So many other librarians offered me the same support and generosity at the Newberry Library, the American Antiquarian Society, the Beinecke

Library, the New York Public Library, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Haverford College Library, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, and the Library of Congress. I could not have written a word of this dissertation without their guidance. Thank you to my students in “Letters to America,” whose ideas always surprised and dazzled me. I was so fortunate to spend a year teaching at the Lab School while I finished my dissertation. Thank you to Mark Krewatch, Carrie Koenen, and everyone else in the English Department at Lab for an extraordinary year of good company and encouragement. And I cannot thank my students at Lab enough for the eight months of or so that I spent with them. Their warmth and energy and kindness helped me to finish this project.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, to Leslie, and to Bum, whose love and support mean more to me than I can say.

Abstract

In my dissertation, I study the fate of loose manuscripts in an age we more often associate with print. Starting in the early nineteenth century, families began to give the wills and letters that they'd always stored in dresser drawers to new libraries and historical societies. Historians consulted these papers and other old documents and started to think of manuscripts as primary sources for their work. Authors and politicians wondered who might someday read their drafts and private notes. Studies of early American print and manuscript cultures tend to focus on the production, publication, and circulation of texts. But men and women in the early United States also lived with, and held onto, manuscripts – written by themselves, by their loved ones, and by people who were strangers to them. A list dashed off in an instant was a manuscript; a list kept for decades, bundled together with other lists and messages, was also part of someone's *papers*. I argue that this new name points to something larger: manuscripts became public texts through their preservation. Michael Warner made "publication" a crucial term for understanding the political and cultural impact of print in his exploration of the eighteenth-century American public sphere. The papers of famous politicians and writers were sometimes published, in bits and pieces, during the first half of the nineteenth century. But these papers, like the papers of far less prominent men and women, were already public, in ways that didn't begin or end with publication.

My four chapters and coda move across the domains of history, literature, politics, and law, traveling from attics and studies to the halls of Congress, before winding up in local courtrooms. In my first chapter, I offer a group portrait of four American antiquaries: Christopher Columbus Baldwin, William Lincoln, Thomas Wallcut, and Thomas Jefferson. These men collected old manuscripts with a zeal that was sometimes confusing to other people.

Baldwin planned to write a history of every family that had lived in the town of Sutton, Massachusetts. He and Lincoln looked through all the court ledgers in the garret of the Massachusetts Court House. Wallcut searched for deeds and treaties that gave English and French colonists ownership of the Wampanoag and Penobscot Indians' land. And Jefferson spent thirty years amassing lists of words from fifty Indian languages. These four men shared an archival consciousness that wasn't just a variety of historical consciousness. It involved transferring notes from one page to another, finding a place to label a letter, and feeling a document slip through one's fingers.

Obsessive antiquaries have a place in the nineteenth-century literary imagination. The protagonists of Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) mistake a signature carved recently onto a stone for an ancient inscription; Diedrich Knickerbocker, the supposed author of Washington Irving's *A History of New York* (1809), leaves all his papers behind him in his hotel room. In my second chapter, I propose that some of the found manuscripts that turn up in antebellum novels and tales are connected to another phenomenon: the emergence of an audience for authors' papers. When Irving died, in 1859, his nephew opened a drawer in his desk that had always been locked and found a package labeled "Private Mems." Irving wasn't the only American author with a reason to worry about the fate of his papers. After Edgar Allan Poe died, ten years earlier, his aunt sold his papers to his literary rival, who proved to be a disastrously bad executor. And, in the early 1870s, Caroline Dall borrowed the letters of Elizabeth Whitman, whose story had inspired Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), from the woman who had inherited them. She then refused, for decades, to give them back. During this era, authors were never sure of which manuscripts they should tear up or hide under a floorboard. The readers who loved and hated their work were sometimes stuck with the same question.

Until the twentieth century, government documents were not subject to clear standards of classification. But during and after the American Revolution, manuscripts passed between officials were often marked "Confidential" or "Secret." In my third chapter, I examine some of the earliest versions of what we now call classified and declassified documents, to show that classification and declassification are always political acts, often inspired by other agendas. In the winter of 1812, after a few covert meetings on rainy nights, James Madison, who was then the President, purchased a dozen letters from a former British spy named John Henry. These letters were three years old, and they were mostly filled with gossip from Boston and Vermont coffeehouses. But when Madison shared them, first with Congress, and then with the public, he used their existence to justify the War of 1812.

The first clause of the Fourth Amendment, written in 1789, protected papers, along with persons, houses, and effects, from unwarranted searches. These were papers that people kept in their homes: the notes that Baldwin took for his history of Sutton; the letters that Dall wouldn't return. Around the same time, though, a new set of local laws emerged requiring some people to carry papers with them everywhere they went. In my fourth chapter, I provide a history of freedom papers – the documents that former slaves and free black men and women in North and South could be asked to show at any moment. That history leads to my larger claim in this chapter: that these papers made freedom unfinished, and something that could be lost. In some states, people had to prove their freedom in court again and again, constantly re-registering their legal status in places that they'd lived all their lives. If a man dropped his papers by the side of a road, or had his papers taken from him, the only thing that could replace them was more documentation. Black men and women devised all kinds of strategies for guarding their freedom papers. At the end of the eighteenth century, Phillis Wheatley sent a copy of hers from

Massachusetts to London. Half a century later, a man named Joseph Trammell fashioned a tin wallet for his papers so that he would know right away if they had fallen from his pocket.

As I wrote this dissertation, I kept finding nineteenth-century books that looked like nothing more than a bundle of papers. In my coda, I write about two of those books: William Still's *The Underground Rail Road* and Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days*. These works, I suggest, belong to a common genre that has never really been pinpointed or named – a genre that I've come to think of as the document book. Document books reproduce the form and sprawl and haphazardness of a bunch of loose manuscripts. But these works also reach out an audience of readers that a drawer full of papers might never find.

Introduction: Not Rubbish

Here are three manuscripts – a petition, a letter, and a draft – written by people who never met in nineteenth-century America. Priscilla Freeman submitted the petition in 1864 to the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives, two bodies she had petitioned before and would petition again. In this petition, she explained that she "was one of the Indian people, of the Deep Bottom tribe, now nearly extinct, and blotted out."[1] She asked the legislature to grant her two dollars a week to help her care for her mother, Jemima Easton. For the past few years, the government had allotted Freeman a dollar a week. But her mother's health was failing, and Freeman had already taken on more work washing and ironing her neighbors' clothes. "I would not now ask this increase," she insisted, "if necessity did not drive me to it" (*PF* 1). Four years later, in New York, a woman named Hetty sent the letter to her friend, Patrick Henry Reason. "My Dear Reason," she began, "I resved your letter of New Year and you do not now how much pleasure I have in hearing how well you ar."[2] Hetty and Reason had been talking about reading and writing in their messages to each other. He had wondered how well she could read his letters, and she told him that she could "read them like a booke" (*H* 1). "Well sometimes," she teased him, "you say that I am getting to write a good letter" (*H* 1). In 1876, almost a decade after Hetty stayed up late answering all of Reason's questions, Walt Whitman jotted down some ideas about a yellow poplar tree he had seen at Timber Creek, near Camden, New Jersey. His

[1] Priscilla Freeman, "Petition of Priscilla Freeman to the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives," 11 February 1864, page 1 [electronic edition], Massachusetts Archives, Resolves 1864, c.29. Accessed through the *Native Northeast Portal*, New Haven: Yale Divinity School. http://nativenortheastportal.com/digital-heritage/petition-priscilla-freeman-massachusetts-senate-and-house-representatives-1. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *PF*.

[2] Hetty to Patrick Reason, January 5, 1868, box 8, REA-SYM, folder 1: Patrick Reason, 180B, Miscellaneous American Letters and Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. I have preserved Hetty's spelling. Her letter is hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *H*.

draft stretched to the edges of two small pieces of paper, which he kept picking up over the next year. As he tried to relate the "untellable qualities" of the yellow poplar, "almost heroic" became "certainly heroic."[3] At some point, he scrapped his first title, "About a Tree, and Trees," replacing it, in blue pencil, with the essay's first words: "The Lesson of a Tree" (*LT* 1).

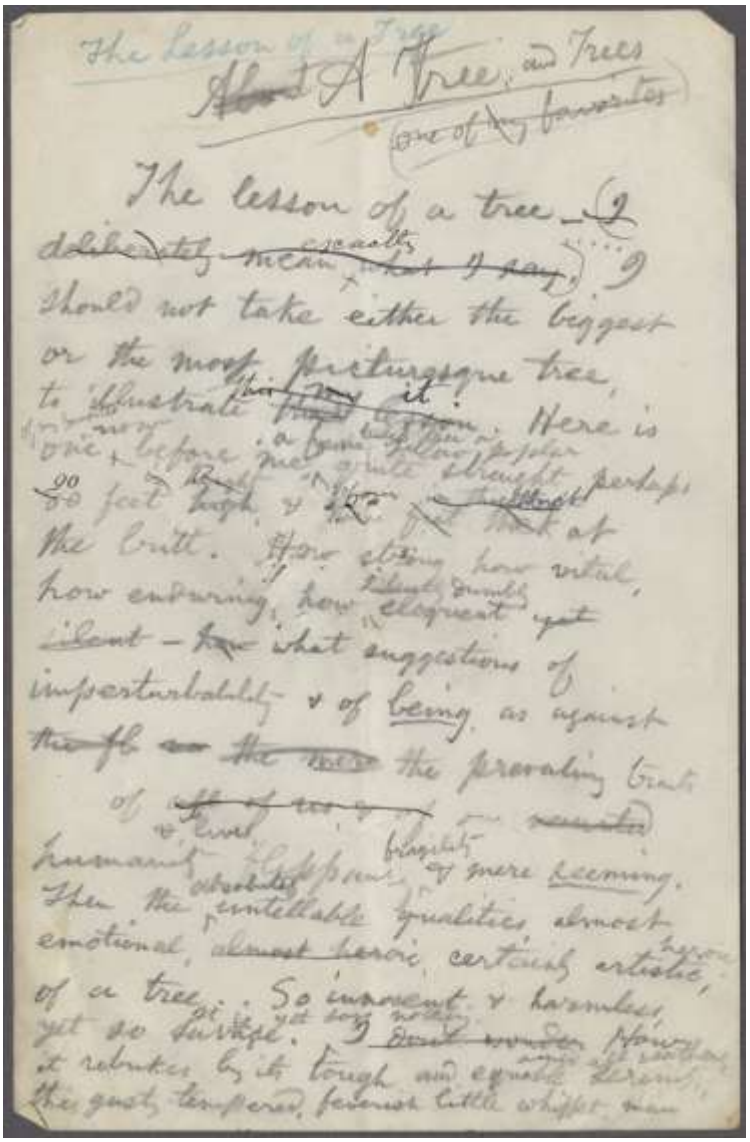

Figure 1: First page of "The Lesson of a Tree," University of California, Berkeley

[3] Walt Whitman, "The Lesson of a Tree," 1876-77, box 1, folder 50, Walt Whitman Literary Manuscripts in the Walt Whitman Collection, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Accessed through *The Walt Whitman Archive*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska-Lincoln. https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/finding_aids/UC_Berkeley.html. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *LT*.

These three manuscripts share a history, one that has everything to do with what happened to them after they written. When Freeman delivered her petition to the legislature in February 1864, one clerk signed it and referred her case to the Committee on Claims; the next day, a second clerk added his name to the document and filed it among the Committee's records. By 1864, those records already contained a small archive of manuscripts written by members of Freeman's family. Her mother had petitioned the House and Senate three times concerning the fate of the land that, as she wrote in 1855, had been "held by her fathers for hundreds of years."[4] After 1864, this archive of a mother and daughter's writings kept growing, though it was scattered among the heaps of other documents saved by clerks at the courthouse. Reason probably held onto all of Hetty's letters for as long as he could, but her New Year's message to him was the one that never left his hands. He was in the habit of saving the documents and scraps of paper that mattered most to him, from his parents' marriage certificate to some of the business cards that he had designed as an engraver. Reason's parents and grandparents had emigrated to the U.S. from Guadeloupe and Haiti at the turn of the nineteenth century. During the last decade of that century, and the last years of his life, he wrote a brief narrative about his parents' and grandparents' lives, to give to his children and grandchildren – along with those business cards and Hetty's letter.[5] Whitman's draft about the yellow poplar sat amid a pile other notes about meadow larks and cedar-apples, which he sometimes tied together with string. In 1882, he included most of those notes in his book *Specimen Days*. Still, Whitman's drafts remained alive to him, as works in progress, after he published them. As he revised "The Lesson of a Tree," he kept moving the words "one of my favorites" around the page (*LT* 1). Freeman's petition was

[4] Jemima Easton, "Petition of Jemima Easton to the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives, 10 March 1854, page 1 [electronic edition], Massachusetts Archives, Resolves 1855, c. 69. Accessed through the *Native Northeast Portal*. http://nativenortheastportal.com/digital-heritage/petition-jemima-easton-massachusetts-senate-and-house-representatives

[5] Patrick Henry Reason, family history, box 8, REA-SYM, folder 1.

filed away, Hetty's letter was treasured, and Whitman's draft was remade again and again. Through being saved (on a courthouse's shelves, among an artist's prized possessions, or bundled up with string), all these manuscripts became papers. That transformation makes them part of a larger history: a history of bureaucracies, archives, and families, caches of documents and single sheets of paper, and the fate of loose manuscripts in the early U.S.

That history is the subject of my dissertation. The original inspiration for my project came to me as I looked, in person and online, at nineteenth-century manuscripts like Freeman's petition, Hetty's letter, and Whitman's draft. I wondered who had cared to save these documents, and how they had ended up in research libraries and archives within collections of papers. I was struck, too, by that familiar word, "papers." It named a catch-all category whose boundaries and origins weren't obvious to me. The petition, the letter, and the draft were all papers, but only the draft was included among its author's papers. Freeman's petition was part of a state government's papers, and Hetty's letter survived among the papers of a beloved friend. Soon, I started to ask these questions not just about one or two collections of papers, but about all the loose pieces of paper that people tucked into coat pockets, set aside in trunks, and folded under the covers of Bibles in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. I saw how these small, individual acts were tangled up with larger changes at the end of the eighteenth century and the turn of the nineteenth. During those years, "papers" appeared in the Fourth Amendment as a protected category of property, and new libraries and historical societies opened their doors. In the early U.S., having papers meant many things. One person's papers could be a travel pass stored in that coat pocket; someone's else papers could be a vast store of manuscripts documenting every episode in a life. The history of having, losing, and holding onto papers in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century U.S. includes love letters, confidential documents, private

memoirs, dinner invitations, and family genealogies. It encompasses, too, an equally broad swath of people: famous authors and politicians; people rummaging through state archives; men and women writing or getting a letter for the first time.

A basic premise of my project is that handwritten texts took on changed significance in an age in which printed works grew more and more prevalent.[6] Manuscripts were transformed by printing long before the eighteenth century. As Peter Stallybrass explains, in an essay that has become foundational to my thinking, the invention of printing gave rise to the idea of a manuscript – and to the word "manuscript" as well, which emerged sometime around 1600. Printing also offered people more places to write by hand: they could record the weather in the blank pages of an almanac or sign their name at the bottom of a printed form.[7] When men and women in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America held onto writings of their own, of their relatives and ancestors, or of authors they never knew, what they were doing wasn't exactly new. Authors, families, and state officials gathered manuscripts into sets of papers prior to the mid-eighteenth century, in colonial British America and other regions of the world. But, from the 1770s through the 1870s – the century I consider in this dissertation – individuals and families across a wider range of class positions and social statuses came to have more reasons to save handwritten texts and more places to deposit the collections of papers that they formed. It is not

[6] The second volume of the wonderful series *A History of the Book in America* deals with a period (1790 to 1840) almost identical to the one I investigate here. The contributors to that volume repeatedly emphasize the spread of print culture in the U.S. over these decades – through the rise of national book trades, the proliferation of periodicals, and the emergence of new communities of readers and writers. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelly, eds., *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790—1840, A History of the Book in America*, Vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[7] Peter Stallybrass, "Printing and the Manuscript Revolution," in Barbie Zelizer, ed., *Explorations in Communication and History* (London: Routledge, 2008). For a related, excellent discussions of printed blanks, see Matthew Brown, "Blanks: Data, Method, and the British American Print Shop," *American Literary History* (Spring 2017): 228-247.

so surprising that Whitman, one of the most celebrated authors of his era, thought to keep his drafts, together with his laundry lists and pretty much everything else that he wrote. But far less prominent Americans preserved their writings, too, even when it was unclear who would read them in the future.

We have inherited the papers of famous and ordinary writers from the early Republic. One of the claims that underlies my project is that we have also inherited from the people who saved these papers a belief that they matter: a belief that the meaning and value of manuscripts outlasts their initial reading or their reproduction in print. Freeman's petition might capture the attention today of a historian, a literary scholar, and a curious reader who found it by chance for three separate reasons. Similarly, the people who held onto handwritten texts of their own, of their loved ones, or of strangers in the early U.S. were not motivated by one common impulse, but rather by a large spectrum of cares. If we understand more fully the attachments, forces, and accidents that made it possible for some manuscripts to survive within sets of papers, then we can better comprehend why we wish in the first place to read, examine, and touch a letter not written to us or a list of someone's possessions.[8]

Before I turn to some of the people whose lives and papers I discuss in the chapters that follow, I'd like to describe briefly the world in which they wrote, read, and preserved manuscripts. In an age of print, handwritten documents neither disappeared nor became irrelevant. They played a central role in the composition of the new nation's laws and a smaller but still important part in the content of those laws. They acted, too, as sources for a number of major print publications in the early decades of the nineteenth century. But the rapid expansion

[8] My formulation of this point is inspired by an observation made by Carolyn Steedman, whose work has also had a great influence on my method in this dissertation. Steedman emphasizes the sense in which, "If you are a historian, you nearly always read something that was not intended for your eyes." Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 150.

of print culture also brought the use, worth, and private or public status of manuscripts into question. The first clause of the Fourth Amendment, written in 1789, addressed these matters explicitly in its protection of "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures."[9] "Papers" were not mentioned in this list casually. One of the chief precedents for the amendment was a 1763 British case concerning the government's confiscation of the personal papers, ledgers, and will of John Wilkes, the author of an opposition periodical.

Around the same time that legislators considered whether and when authorities could lawfully seize a person's papers, scholars prepared print editions of manuscripts written centuries ago. The three notebooks that contained John Winthrop's *Journal* passed between multiple hands in the early Republic. For years, the third volume was buried among the books of Thomas Prince in a tower in Boston's Old South Church. In 1825, the second volume was lost in a fire at the office of James Savage, who was busy transcribing the notebooks and who published the first complete print edition of the *Journal* later that year.[10] Similar efforts to bring seventeenth-century manuscripts into print were ongoing in England during the same period. In 1813, an antiquary and a manuscript collector found the diary of John Evelyn inside a cabinet in the billiard room of his descendants' house in Wotton; they published selections from it to much

[9] William J. Cuddihy, *The Fourth Amendment: Origins and Original Meaning, 602-1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), lix. Cuddihy offers an exhaustive history of the legal background of the amendment, including the circumstances and significance of *Wilkes v. Wood*. Akhil Reed Amar provides another helpful, more succinct history of the amendment; like Cuddihy, he stresses the importance of *Wilkes* to the amendment's conception and language. Amar, *The Bill of Rights: Creation and Reconstruction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 64-80.

[10] Noah Webster published an edition of the first two manuscript volumes, transcribed by John Porter (the secretary of Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut) in 1790. I've followed the model of Richard S. Dunn in calling Winthrop's work *The Journal of John Winthrop* and not *A History of New England*, another title by which it is often known. Dunn, "John Winthrop Writes His Journal," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 41, no. 2 (1984), 185-212.

acclaim in 1818.[11] Another now-famous diary kept by Evelyn's friend Samuel Pepys remained unpublished until 1825, when John Smith, a student at Cambridge, deciphered Pepys's shorthand.[12] In varying fashions, these are all stories about how print offered new possibilities for handwritten texts. They are also stories about the new uncertainties introduced by print, concerning the potential differences (in publicity, readership, and completeness) between a printed work and a manuscript or set of papers.

As the examples of Wilkes's case and Evelyn's and Pepys's diaries suggest, cultures of print altered the destiny of handwritten texts not just in the United States but everywhere that they emerged. In the early U.S., though, more so than in England and somewhat otherwise than in France, the issue of whether and how manuscripts should be valued and saved was entwined with the challenges of founding a nation and memorializing a pre-national past.[13] The material history of the federal Constitution shows us how these sorts of concerns could intersect. When the Constitutional Convention ended in Philadelphia in 1787, its Committee of Style had one copy of the final text written by hand on parchment for the delegates to sign and five hundred additional copies printed. The printed copies, which differed slightly in punctuation and capitalization from the original manuscript, were reproduced and distributed to the members of the state ratifying conventions and to interested readers.[14] For decades, the parchment remained

[11] John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, E.S. de Beer, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), Vol. 1, 51-56.
[12] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), Vol. 1, lxxv-lxxxv.
[13] France provides an especially complex and illuminating comparative case. Ben Kafka argues that the French Revolution brought about a revolution in paperwork, which made the records of the state transparent to France's citizens for the first time. Some of the papers and parchments which had been stored away from public view for centuries under the Old Regime were intentionally set on fire during the Revolution. Others, like the documents found by the crowds who stormed the Bastille, "were made available in a makeshift public archive, consultable from noon to two until the end of August 1789." Kafka's wonderful book suggests that many questions about the public role and consumption of manuscripts were as alive in France following its Revolution as they were in the U.S. after the American Revolution. Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 38.

[14] Akhil Reed Amar, "Our Forgotten Constitution," *The Yale Law Journal* 97, no. 2 (1987), 281-298.

something of an afterthought, stored in the disorganized files of Congress in New York. It was unearthed from those files in 1819 by John Quincy Adams, who, as Secretary of State, was given the task of gathering together for publication the official *Journal* and other papers kept by the Convention's secretary, William Jackson. Adams slowly pieced together a record of the Convention's proceedings from the papers saved by Jackson, who had also destroyed "'all the loose scraps of paper'" that struck him as worthless.[15] The manuscript version of the Constitution surfaced amid this process. The State Department published an edition of the document in 1820, and it was later displayed next to the Declaration of Independence at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia.[16] We tend to think of the parchment copy of the Constitution in the same way that the organizers of the Centennial Exhibition did: as an object invested with symbolic meaning. But the people who had access to the manuscript soon after it was produced did not understand it in these terms. It took time for them to recognize why its worth might be in excess of its verbal content.

This is partly a study of manuscripts written for a broad audience, like the parchment copy of the Constitution, and of the papers of people who led highly visible lives in the early Republic, like Washington Irving, Thomas Jefferson, and William Maclay. To an equal degree, though, it is also a study of people who attracted little public notice and who wrote and saved papers that, at first glance, appear private – people like Hetty and Reason, who thought of each other during the first days of 1868. On its own, Hetty's letter was not a public piece of writing. But when Reason saved that letter with his business cards and his son's drawing of a bird, it obtained a new form of publicity – one that had nothing to do with publication (fig. 2)

[15] Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), Vol. 1, xi. See also Amar, "Our Forgotten Constitution."
[16] Amar, "Our Forgotten Constitution," 284-285.

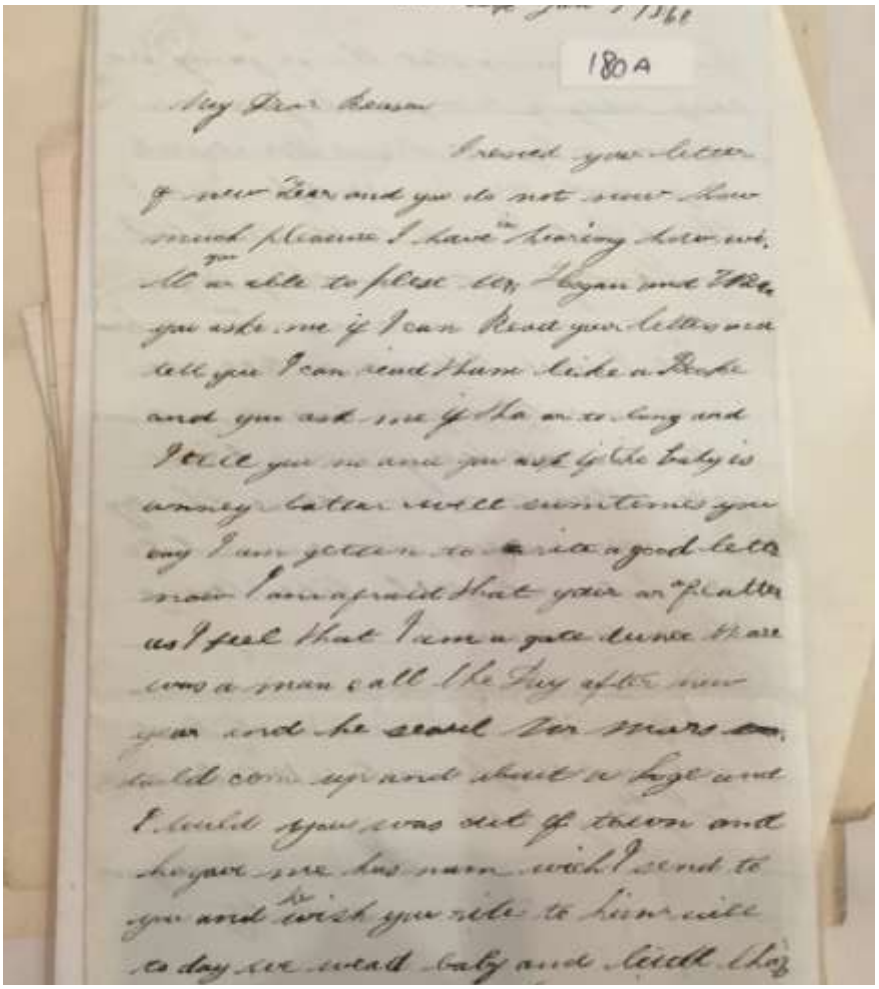

Figure 2: Hetty's letter to Reason, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

My dissertation is most directly in conversation with pioneering studies of manuscripts in colonial British America and the antebellum U.S. David S. Shields argues persuasively that, especially during the first half of the eighteenth century, belletristic writings were often published in manuscript form rather than in print.[17] Many poets saw the members of the coffeehouses they frequented and clubs to which they belonged as their primary audience. They could reach that audience by distributing handwritten copies of their work. Whereas Shields is concerned with the manuscript publication of literary texts in the eighteenth century, Karen J.

[17] David S. Shields, "British-American Belles-Lettres." *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., Vol. 1, 1590-1820 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 307-344.

Sanchez-Eppler is principally interested in the production of manuscript books not meant for publication in the nineteenth. In her forthcoming study, she surveys picture books made by children, friendship albums, and unpublished novels in order to understand how these texts participated in a public sphere separate from the one defined by printed works.[18] For both these scholars, a handwritten work can assume a public status, but chiefly to readers known by its author: a poet's fellow club member or the recipient of a friendship album.[19] The manuscripts I explore in this dissertation often share this quality. A marriage proposal, for example, has a select audience intimately familiar to its author. But a proposal saved by its author or addressee, gathered among a body of writings, and sold or donated to a library ultimately becomes public in a distinct sense.

A manuscript cannot form or address a reading public in the same way that a printed text can. A journal entry composed by hand in Philadelphia around 1787 might be read, over subsequent years and centuries, by a host of people in multiple settings. A journal printed in Philadelphia the same year, in contrast, could reach many readers in many places at once, in a matter of days, weeks, or months. Through reflecting upon what it means for a manuscript to become a public text when it is included within a collection of papers, I also engage scholars whose work concentrates on the print public spheres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Michael Warner shows how printed works constituted a new public in eighteenth-century

[18] Karen J. Sanchez-Eppler, *The Unpublished Republic: Manuscript Cultures of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States*. Sanchez-Eppler provides a detailed account of this fascinating work-in-progress on the Amherst College website: https://www.amherst.edu/people/facstaff/kjsanchezepp.

[19] Another excellent study of the shifting status of manuscript in the age of print is Tamara Plakins Thornton's *Handwriting in America*. Thornton stresses that, particularly during the period I explore in my dissertation, some authors turned to script as a more transparent alternative to what they saw as the opacity of print. Her insights build upon Shields's account of belletristic writings and in some ways anticipate Sanchez-Eppler's approach to nineteenth-century texts like friendship albums. Thornton, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

America – one that was abstract and separate from relationships between real persons.[20] Of a dialogue between two anonymous men printed in a 1727 Maryland pamphlet, he argues that "The meaning of public utterance, for both men, is established by the very fact that their exchange can be read and participated in by any number of unknown and *in principle unknowable* others."[21] Warner is especially deft at describing shifts in how people perceived print. He tries to pinpoint when printed works came to be characterized by their "negative relation to the hand," and when "publication" came to designate the circulation of specifically printed works.[22] I want to uncover a few parallel shifts in perception: the moment when an antiquary could start to picture a larger audience for the documents he was taking out of families' attics, or when an ordinary woman could begin to envision future readers of the letters she saved.

Faced with the 1727 Maryland pamphlet, or a journal printed in Philadelphia in 1787, Trish Loughran would say that most copies of these texts likely remained close to the sites of their production.[23] She contends that printed works were imagined to bridge local cultures in the post-Revolutionary era before they could actually circulate in significant numbers between far-flung regions of the U.S, on newly constructed roads and railroad tracks. My contribution to this discussion about the kinds of publics that a printed text might address proposes that manuscripts reveal other meanings and iterations of publicity in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America. The public status of an old love letter saved by its recipient and donated years later to a

[20] Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).
[21] Ibid., 40. The pamphlet's title identifies the two men, but not by name: *A Letter from a Freeholder, to a Member of the Lower House of Assembly*.
[22] Ibid., 7.
[23] Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

library would not depend upon the medium of print or the building of roads and railroad tracks along which a text might travel.

The more time I spent with collections of papers, the more I thought about the act of holding onto a manuscript. Families often stored their papers in linen chests and dresser drawers, while collectors and antiquaries searched for larger spaces to house the manuscripts they had found. Thomas Wallcut, who I write about in my first chapter, rented out a warehouse on the fourth story of an oil store. Sometimes, though, papers circulated with the people who possessed them. In my final chapter, I examine the freedom papers that free and formerly enslaved people of color had to carry everywhere they went. When Joseph Trammell received his freedom papers, he made a tin wallet for them and put it in his pocket. Until emancipation, that wallet never left his pocket. Having papers meant having both a tactile and affective relationship to those documents. In recent decades, scholars of nineteenth-century American literature have expanded our understanding of reading and writing, to include more practices and more readers and writers. In *Forgotten Readers* (2002), Elizabeth McHenry focuses not on black readers' literacy, but instead on their nearness to books and their desire to join literary circles.[24] In *Dickinson's Misery* (2005), Virginia Jackson shows that we must start with Dickinson's writing materials – her fascicles, chocolate wrappers, and split-open envelopes – before we can say anything definite about what she was writing.[25] In *Word by Word* (2013), Christopher Hager

[24] Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

[25] This is a much too brief acknowledgement of the influence that all the scholarship on Dickinson's fascicles and envelopes has had on me as I worked on this project. See, for starters, Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sharon Cameron, *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985); Alexandra Socarides, *Dickinson Unbound: Paper, Process, Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Jen Bervin and Marta Werner, *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope-Poems* (New York: Granary Books, 2012).

stresses how momentous it was for enslaved people to set words down in ink on blank paper.[26] I'd like us to add the act of holding onto a piece of paper to these other practices – to see it as a practice that was just as suffused with meaning during this era.

My four chapters move across the domains of history, literature, politics, and law, traveling from attics and studies to the halls of Congress, before winding up in courthouses and on country roads. In my first chapter, I offer a group portrait of four American antiquaries: Christopher Columbus Baldwin, William Lincoln, Thomas Wallcut, and Thomas Jefferson. These men collected old manuscripts with a zeal that was sometimes confusing to other people. Baldwin planned to write a history of every family that had lived in the town of Sutton, Massachusetts. He and Lincoln looked through all the court ledgers in the garret of the Massachusetts Court House, where, half a century later, Priscilla Freeman would petition the legislature. Wallcut searched for deeds and treaties that gave English and French colonists ownership of the Wampanoag and Penobscot Indians' land. And Jefferson spent thirty years amassing lists of words from fifty Indian languages. These four men shared an archival consciousness that was separate from any variety of historical consciousness. It involved transferring notes from one page to another, finding a place to label a letter, and feeling a document slip through one's fingers.

Obsessive antiquaries have a place in the nineteenth-century literary imagination. The protagonists of Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) mistake a signature carved recently onto a stone for an ancient inscription; Diedrich Knickerbocker, the supposed author of Washington Irving's *A History of New York* (1809), leaves all his papers behind him in his hotel room. In my second chapter, I suggest that some of the found manuscripts that turn up in

[26] Christopher Hager, *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013). On letter-writing in particular, see as well David Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom: Improvising Life in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

antebellum novels and tales are connected to another phenomenon: the emergence of an audience for authors' papers. When Irving died, in 1859, his nephew opened a drawer in his desk that had always been locked and found a package labeled "Private Mems." Irving wasn't the only American author with a reason to worry about the fate of his papers. After Edgar Allan Poe died, ten years earlier, his aunt sold his papers to his literary rival, who proved to be a disastrously bad executor. And, in the early 1870s, Caroline Dall borrowed the letters of Elizabeth Whitman, whose story had inspired Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), from the woman who had inherited them. She then refused, for decades, to give them back. During this era, authors were never sure of which manuscripts they should tear up or hide under a floorboard. The readers who loved and hated their work were sometimes stuck with the same question.

Many of the manuscripts that I explore in my first two chapters were uprooted from one context and assigned a new form of importance. An old will or a private memoir could matter, first, to the people who loved its author; it could then become valuable to a fan or collector, or to someone who saw it as an artifact of local history. Some of the manuscripts that appear in my third chapter began as mundane letters. Yet, by chance or by political will, they all became significant to the nation and hidden from public view for that reason. Until the twentieth century, government documents were not subject to clear standards of classification. But during and after the American Revolution, manuscripts passed between official s were often marked "Confidential" or "Secret." In this chapter, I examine some of the earliest versions of what we now call classified and declassified documents. These manuscripts reveal that classification and declassification are always political acts, often inspired by other agendas. For Thomas Paine and William Maclay, whose legislative careers were unhappy and short, secrecy had a distorting effect on the government. They foresaw how the release of previously confidential information

could have a similar impact. In the winter of 1812, after a few covert meetings on rainy nights, James Madison, who was then the President, purchased a dozen letters from a former British spy named John Henry. These letters were three years old, and they were mostly filled with gossip. But Madison used their existence to justify the War of 1812. Some state papers, including many Indian treaties, became confidential as soon as they were written. In the 1830s, the Pequot minister and activist William Apess searched through deeds and treaties that had never been made public. Like Thomas Wallcut a few decades earlier, Apess hoped that old papers could reverse the dispossession of Native land.

My fourth chapter departs, in some respects, from the three that precede it. Free black men and women were accountable, before the law, for having papers certifying their liberty. It was arduous to obtain these papers, and it was perilous to lose them. In some states, people had to prove their freedom in court again and again, constantly re-registering their legal status in places they had lived all their lives. If a man dropped his papers by the side of a road, or had his papers taken from him, the only thing that could replace them was more documentation, as we find in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*. In this chapter, I argue that these papers made freedom unfinished, and something that could be lost. Freedom papers were legal documents, issued by states, filled out by clerks, and signed by former owners. But for the people who were required to possess them, these documents also became family papers. By the turn of the twentieth century, some people were using these manuscripts to trace their family trees. Before emancipation, too, black men and women devised all kinds of strategies for guarding their freedom papers. At the end of the eighteenth century, Phillis Wheatley sent a copy of hers from Massachusetts to London, so that proof of her liberty would span the Atlantic. Wheatley was

putting into practice the archival consciousness that inspired the antiquaries in my first chapter. Her recourse to archiving, though, was motivated by the threat of unfreedom.

As I wrote this dissertation, I kept finding printed books that resembled the manuscript collections I was studying, both in form and content. The book that William Apess published after sifting through old records, *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts* (1835), looked like a collection of papers unearthed at a library. So did Caroline Dall's *The Romance of the Association* (1875) – a book about finding Elizabeth Whitman's letters. In a coda to my dissertation, I argue that these works, and others like them, might all be document books – a print genre that grew out of the proliferation of papers in nineteenth-century America. In my coda, I examine two more works that seem, to me, to belong to this genre: William Still's *The Underground Rail Road* (1872) and Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days* (1882). Still wanted his work to serve as a directory for people who were searching for their relatives after emancipation. And Whitman wondered if his compilation of notebook entries, jottings, and observations about yellow poplar trees would prove to be "the most wayward, spontaneous, fragmentary book every published" – an outcome that didn't especially worry him.[27]

Whitman's belief in the value of his wayward notes reflected larger changes in the century before he published *Specimen Days*. There is one more story that has helped me to grasp how torn-out pages and loose scraps of paper gained a new form of value, and a measure of publicity, in the early U.S. Between 1829 and 1833, John Quincy Adams kept a diary that he called "Rubbish." One of the first entries in Rubbish describes the contents of some chests and trunks that he found during a visit, in the summer of 1829, to his family's old house in Quincy, Massachusetts. Six months prior, Adams had lost the Presidency to Andrew Jackson; two and a

[27] Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, in *Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 690.

half years before that, his father, John Adams, had died. There were eight blue chests at the house in Quincy. A few of them were packed with books or clothes, but mostly they were filled with papers: "1. Books and papers of John Adams 2. Papers of John Adams 3. Papers of John Adams and State 4. Papers of John Adams 5. Books of J.Q. Adams 6. Books and papers of J.Q. Adams 7. Clothing of J.Q. Adams 8. Blank paper of J.Q. Adams."[28] Adams tended to use Rubbish as a space for lists like these two. If he wanted to write at greater length about the events of a day, he would turn to a different diary set aside for extended entries. And, if he wished to summarize more succinctly the day that had just passed, he would add an entry in one of his line-a-day diaries. From the age of twelve to the time of his death, in 1848, when he was eighty years old, he kept fifty-one diary volumes, often alternating between several of them over the course of a single day or week. The manuscripts that Adams spent part of a summer day in 1829 noting the location of some books and loose manuscripts. He spent a lifetime filling diary volumes that were not necessarily meant for publication but were meant to be preserved.[29]

[28] John Quincy Adams, "27. [June 1829]." Diary 47, "Rubbish I," diary and miscellaneous entries, 11 June 1829 - 31 October 1833, page 33 [electronic edition]. *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection.* Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2004. http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries

[29] Much of the diary's content – especially the more mundane material found in volumes like Rubbish – has never appeared in print. Adams's son, Charles Francis Adams, published selections from the diary in *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-1877). Full transcriptions of the diary volumes Adams kept between 1779 and 1788 were published in 1981, in David Grayson Allen, Robert J. Taylor, Marc Friedlander, and Celeste Walker, eds., *Diary of John Quincy Adams*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

Chapter 1: The Antiquaries' Archives

1. Jefferson's Pocket

Thomas Jefferson's *Autobiography* ends with a story about a missing manuscript. Passing through Philadelphia on his way from Virginia to New York in March 1790, Jefferson stopped to visit Benjamin Franklin, whom he found bedridden. Franklin was in the process of compiling the autobiographical fragments he had written over the past two decades, with the expectation that they would be published after his death by his grandson, William Temple Franklin. When Jefferson asked him about these fragments, Franklin gave him one to read – "about a quire of folio paper, written in a large and running hand" taken from his bedside table.

[1] Franklin urged Jefferson to hold onto this manuscript: "Not certain of his meaning, I again looked into it, folded it for my pocket, and said again, I would certainly return it. 'No,' said he, 'keep it.' I put it into my pocket, and shortly after took leave of him" (*A*, 100). One month later, Franklin died. During the spring or summer of the same year, Jefferson delivered the manuscript to Temple Franklin in New York. As soon as he had let go of the document, though, he wished to regain it, fearing that "Dr. Franklin had meant it as a confidential deposit in my hands, and that I had done wrong in parting from it" (*A*, 100). The manuscript contained an account written by Franklin in March 1775, on his return from London to Philadelphia aboard the Pennsylvania Packet, of his failed negotiations with representatives of the British cabinet. Franklin presented the British participants in the negotiations in an unflattering light, as unmoved by the possibility of war. In 1790, and even more so in the years that followed, Jefferson worried that Temple Franklin – who hoped to secure a diplomatic office in Europe – would suppress the

[1] Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography*, in *Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 99. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *A*.

account. After Temple Franklin published the *Memoirs of the life and writings of Benjamin Franklin* in London in 1818, Jefferson heard rumors that the diplomatic narrative had not been included in the volume. Still unsure of the manuscript's fate in 1821, when he wrote the last sentences of his own *Autobiography*, Jefferson wondered where it might be found: "If this is not among the papers published, we ask what has become of it?" (*A*, 101).

What did it mean to lose a manuscript in the early United States? The story Jefferson tells is partly about the suspicions he came to harbor against Temple Franklin. But its central subjects are something else: the ease with which he lost possession of Franklin's narrative, and the impossibility of replacing it once it was gone. The manuscript that Jefferson took from Franklin's bedside table and gave to Temple Franklin in 1790 was not actually missing in 1821. Contrary to the rumors Jefferson had heard, the text of this document appeared in Temple Franklin's 1818 edition of his grandfather's *Memoirs*.[2] It is hard to understand why Jefferson, who cared so deeply about the fate of this document and had long awaited the publication of Franklin's autobiographical writings, never obtained a copy of the *Memoirs* for himself. While the closing passage of the *Autobiography* does not explain this choice, it does reveal how acutely Jefferson felt both the loss of the manuscript and his error in handling it. The detail with which he recalls folding and unfolding the quire of paper helps him to capture the shock he experienced upon giving it away and realizing that he might never see it, or the text it contained, again. For Jefferson, losing Franklin's manuscript meant having no way to recover the knowledge that was once stored in his pocket.

The subjects of this chapter all sought to prevent the loss of manuscripts. The handwritten texts that they searched for or held onto were in most instances not written by authors as

[2] For an exhaustive account of the reasons why Jefferson may have believed that Franklin's manuscript was absent from Franklin's *Memoirs*, see Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian Boyd, Vol. 18 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 87-97.

celebrated as Franklin. But the method by which William Lincoln preserved a dinner invitation or Thomas Wallcut a letter from his aunt was fundamentally similar to the way in which Franklin planned to save his diplomatic narrative. Franklin's narrative was destined for two sets of papers – the collection of original documents held by Temple Franklin, and the print edition based on that collection. Unlike Franklin and his grandson, most of the people who sorted manuscripts of their own or of their relatives into sets of papers at the turn of the nineteenth century had little reason to think that these documents would ever be published. But a printed volume of papers and a collection of unpublished manuscripts (perhaps wrapped in twine and cached in a chest) served analogous, although not identical, purposes. Each helped to contain quires and scraps of paper that might otherwise be misplaced or forgotten.

The practical challenges and aims of assembling a collection of papers were never far from people's minds as they decided which manuscripts to save and how to save them. A merchant whose desk was divided into shelves and drawers could organize his personal and business papers more easily than someone who worked on a flat table; a family that moved from town to town might struggle to hold onto stray notes and lists more than one that remained in the same house for generations.[3] Faced with all the letters, bills, and memoranda they might keep and uncertain of where to begin in valuing some more than others, the people whose papers I explore in this chapter arrived at a common solution. They saved everything.

Among their contemporaries, the four central subjects of this chapter – Thomas Jefferson, William Lincoln, Thomas Wallcut, and Christopher Columbus Baldwin – were at once typical and anomalous in their dealings with manuscripts. Both the pivotal moments and mundane

[3] Some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century desks, including desks made for merchants, were designed to accommodate the storage of papers. Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 28.

events in these men's lives tended to be recorded in handwritten documents. In this sense, they were no different from most of their peers. But these men were also unusually committed to recovering and retaining verbal texts. They preserved manuscripts that they had produced and received as well as documents unrelated to themselves, their families and friends, or their work. Whenever he could spare a day or week in 1831, Baldwin, a lawyer by training and the American Antiquarian Society's first librarian, would visit a county or state courthouse in New England. He spent his time at each courthouse transcribing the contents of all the seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century record books held there. As the name of his employer suggests, Baldwin was an antiquary; so were Lincoln, Wallcut, and Jefferson. American and European antiquaries of this period saw great value in all sorts of ancient objects. They believed that an old vase or basket could bring them into contact with long-forgotten lives and ways of living.[4] Baldwin, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Wallcut were antiquaries of a specific kind. The remnants of the past that interested them the most were handwritten texts, along with some rare books, pamphlets, and newspapers. The four subjects of this chapter looked for manuscripts in places where they had already been hoarded in bulk: in the archives of the state, but also in the attics of their neighbors. They stored the texts that they recovered in these locations, together with the other documents that they wished to preserve, in more than one place as well: in trunks that they kept at their own homes, warehouses that they rented, and libraries and historical societies that they helped to found.

[4] For an account of how people in mid-nineteenth century Rhode Island learned about the colonial past through studying a seventeenth-century Algonkian basket, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 42-74. For a comparative English case, see Thora Brylowe's history of the Portland Vase, a Roman artifact that became a favorite of eighteenth-century tourists and was frequently reproduced during the Romantic period. Brylowe, "Antiquity by Design: Re-Mediating the Portland Vase," "Romantic Antiquarianism," ed. Heringman and Lake, *Romantic Circles* (June 2014): http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/antiquarianism/praxis.antiquarianism.2014.heringman_lake.html

Through studying the papers of these antiquaries, we can begin to answer some questions that extend beyond their individual collecting efforts. When, how, and why did people in the early U.S. begin to create archives of their own? And why did some people need archives of various kinds in the decades that followed the American Revolution?[5] When I write about archives in this chapter, I think of them as places where records and documents are stored, with the expectation that these texts might read in the future. [6] Some of the archives that existed in the early Republic were administered by the state. These were county and state courthouses and record offices. [7] The subjects of this chapter went to these archives, and sometimes worked in them, too. Baldwin and Lincoln searched for manuscripts in the garret of the Massachusetts State House, where Wallcut held a job as a clerk for forty years. But, during this time, many manuscripts, sets of papers, and copies of documents were in states of transition, as they moved between repositories of different sorts. Minutes from a seventeenth-century New York treaty session, which perhaps had been housed in a local courthouse or a family's cabinet for many years, ended up on Jefferson's desk in Virginia at the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1814,

[5] My use of the word "need" in this question is inspired by one aspect of Jacques Derrida's remarkable study of archives, *Archive Fever*. The condition named in the title of his book is a state of desire as much as it is a state of sickness. For Derrida, "We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives." He goes on to explain that "to be *en mal d'archive* … is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips always." Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 91.

[6] For a succinct, thoughtful discussion of the many uses served by the word "archive" and the concept of the archive in the field of literary history today, see Rodrigo Lazo, "The Invention of America Again: On the Impossibility of an Archive," *American Literary History* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 751-771, esp. 753-54. For an equally insightful analysis of how the proliferation of references to archives of all sorts in literary scholarship reflects the profound influence of historicism on the field, see Carrie Hyde and Joseph Rezek, "Introduction: The Aesthetics of Archival Evidence," *J19* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 155-162. For a librarian's very useful perspective on shifting understandings of the archive across disciplines, see Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (January 2004): 9-25.

[7] In the preface to *Dust*, her eloquent inquiry into what social and cultural historians hope to uncover at archives, Carolyn Steedman writes that her book deals with the archives "instituted by state (or quasi-state) organisations since the late eighteenth century, in England and France." She notes that these archives "were inaugurated simultaneously with a right of public access to their holdings." In this chapter, I write about some archives that closely resemble the kind that Steedman describes in *Dust*. As I move outward to consider less traditional forms of archives, I consider whether these other archives might still have been formed with some thought of their future use by a broader public. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), ix.

Jefferson donated this manuscript to the American Antiquarian Society, in Worcester, Massachusetts.[8] At the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth, it was often not clear where certain documents belonged or might be found.

As much as I am concerned in this chapter with the multiple forms that an archive could take in the early U.S., I am equally interested in the multiple versions of antiquarianism that were practiced during this era. Baldwin, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Wallcut were all early members of the AAS, which was established in 1812 by the retired printer and publisher Isaiah Thomas. Thomas and the other leaders of the AAS envisioned it as an American version of older British and European societies of antiquaries. At an 1813 celebration of the library's first anniversary, the speaker, William Jenks, proposed that it should acquire collections related to four fields of inquiry. These collections would deal with the writings and histories of Native Americans, the excavated remains of North America's earliest inhabitants, the initial stages of European colonization of the continent, and the "civil antiquities" left by more recent English and French colonists.[9] In many ways, the Society followed Jenks's plan during its first decades. And the four men I write about in this chapter added to the library's holdings in these areas. But the categories described by Jenks do not capture the range of manuscripts that these men sought out and kept. Baldwin transcribed the epitaphs that he read in cemeteries across New England and the ledgers that he discovered at the Worcester County Courthouse. After Baldwin died in an accident in 1835, Lincoln, his best friend, had all of his loose papers bound, so that the manuscripts he had obtained and held onto during his life would be preserved in their entirety. Wallcut searched for the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century charters, deeds, and treaties that gave English and

[8] The bound manuscript that Jefferson gave to the AAS in 1814 was later discovered to be the first volume of the records of the Albany Commissioners for Indian Affairs. Philip F. Gura, *The American Antiquarian Society, 1812-2012: A Bicentennial History* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 2012), 26.
[9] Ibid., 28-29.

French colonists ownership of the Wampanoag and Penobscot Indians' land. Jefferson spent thirty years amassing lists of words from fifty Indian languages. He saved these lexicons alongside letters that he had received and copies of his own notes to friends and acquaintances. These men were not practicing a single, fully elaborated form of antiquarianism. Looking at the handwritten texts they saved, and the ways in which they saved them, it can be difficult to know where their work as antiquaries ended and their lives as brothers, sons, and neighbors began. For this reason, I discuss the more obviously personal as well as historical documents that my subjects held onto and treat both sorts of texts as relevant to their antiquarianism. History was nothing if not personal to these men, and daily life offered up constant material to be archived and preserved.

Over the next four sections of this chapter, I examine my subjects' relationships to four forms of history: local history, personal history, colonial history, and national history. The manuscripts that these antiquaries gathered together and preserved amounted to both less and more than a chronicle of the history of a town, a person's life, the colonization of North America, or one politician's part in the forming of the nation. Jefferson was so upset by the disappearance of Franklin's diplomatic narrative because he saw that text as one piece of the nation's history. But he was also unsettled by the impermanence of a document that he saw as permanently important, and by the loss of a manuscript that his friend had trusted him to protect. Like Jefferson, the other subjects of this chapter were confronted by the material qualities of the documents they wished to collect and save. The texts that mattered to them were sometimes inscribed on gravestones, written on small scraps of paper, or missing from the record offices where they should have been housed. These antiquaries had to think as much or more about the process of collecting and storing these manuscripts as they did about their actual content.

Although these men were constrained by the material features of the texts they held onto, they were also free to care about these texts in any fashion that they chose. They could notice the beauty of one signature in a ledger, make dinner invitations the focus of a collection, or imagine a connection between their personal experiences and the experiences recorded in a deed or a lexicon.[10] In place of one standard measure of value, these manuscripts mattered to the men who saved them for idiosyncratic, open-ended reasons. But in their own fashions, these antiquaries were all acting out the archival consciousness that I described in my introduction. That archival consciousness was defined by touching, holding, labeling, and saving manuscripts.

2. One Labor

Christopher Columbus Baldwin saw artifacts of local history all around him. In the last week of May 1831, he traveled from Sutton, Massachusetts, where he lived at the time, to Windsor, Vermont, to argue a case before the state Circuit Court. He found much to do when he was not in court, making visits to local clergymen, doctors, and judges in towns across southern Vermont and New Hampshire. He had one other occupation during this trip, and it attracted some attention. As he passed through Charlestown, New Hampshire early one morning, Baldwin heard a surprising story from Mr. Sumner, a man whom he had never met before. When Sumner was in the nearby town of Claremont the previous day, he had been approached by three men who wondered if he recognized a stranger "who was so busy in examining the grave-stones in

[10] Ann Laura Stoler's superlative study of nineteenth-century Dutch colonial archives, *Along the Archival Grain*, is one of the inspirations for my method in this chapter. Much like Stoler, I am consistently concerned in this chapter not only with archival content but also with archival form – which, for her, encompasses "prose style, repetitive refrain, the arts of persuasion, affective strains that shape 'rational' response, categories of confidentiality and classification, and not least, genres of documentation." In contrast to Stoler, I am primarily interested in this chapter in archives that had little or nothing to do with governance, together with archives that were not part of the state but contained official documents (or transcriptions of them). One reason for this difference in focus could have to do with the distinct periods and places that we are examining. Courthouses and record offices may not have held quite the same prominence or power in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century U.S. that colonial archives held in the late nineteenth-century Netherlands Indies. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.

the grave-yard."[11] These men had watched the stranger as he walked slowly for hours around the cemetery next to St. Mary's Church and were now convinced that he planned to disinter a dead body and leave with it. Sumner joined the three men in observing the stranger from a distance and tried to assure them, without much success, that he looked harmless. The men had learned that the stranger wished to see Father Barber, the priest of St. Mary's, but "they believed such a story to be all a fudge and made up only to blind them" (*P*, 88).

The stranger standing in the Claremont graveyard was Baldwin. As he moved methodically through the cemetery, he was actually consumed with the task of copying down each gravestone inscription that he read. This was not the only graveyard that Baldwin toured during his week in southern Vermont and New Hampshire. His diary entries from that trip suggest that he went to a cemetery as soon as he arrived in a town he had never been to before, so that he could transcribe every epitaph found there: "I copy one-half of the epitaphs in Keene burying-ground, being those on the south side"; "Copy epitaphs in the Windsor grave-yard and all those in the yard in the north part of Cornish, N.H., near Blow-me-down-River" (*P*, 86; 88). For Baldwin, there was nothing unusual about transcribing the epitaphs inscribed on gravestones. It was just a part of how he spent his days: "Walk into the Street and copy one hundred & fifty epitaphs there before noon" (*P*, 88). This was true when he was closer to home as much as it was when he was away from Massachusetts. Returning by foot from Worcester to Sutton one summer day in 1831, he stopped in the town of Grafton, where he copied down 190 inscriptions.[12]

What was Baldwin doing? People who watched him transcribe epitaphs were often baffled by what they saw, even when they – unlike the distressed men in Claremont – knew him

[11] Christopher Columbus Baldwin, *A Place in My Chronicle: A New Edition of the Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 1829-1835*, ed. Jack Larkin and Caroline Sloat (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 2010), 88. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *P*.
[12] Ibid., 92.

and had some sense of his endeavor.[13] Aboard the train to Windsor, Baldwin ran into Maryanne Washburn, an acquaintance from Worcester. In a letter to her husband, Washburn recalled how much she had enjoyed sitting next to Baldwin for much of the ride, before reflecting upon the strangeness of his "'love of copying the epitaphs of others, whether or not he ever knew or heard of the people! It struck me so oddly at Keene to see him go directly to the grave-yard, with a piece of paper and set to work'" (*P*, 87.). Washburn didn't have the chance to read the transcriptions that Baldwin made on the piece of paper he brought with him into the graveyard in Keene, New Hampshire, or the further copies that he made based on these original notes. These transcriptions begin to explain what Baldwin was trying to accomplish whenever he rushed into a cemetery and stayed there for hours. Writing in a clear hand, he copied down in pencil every inscription that he came across as he walked through a burying-ground. These fair copies were the first stage of a longer process of preservation. When Baldwin returned from a visit to a cemetery, he would make a second transcription in ink of the epitaphs he had seen, crossing out each pencil copy as he went.[14]

[13] Baldwin's actions might have appeared less out of the ordinary in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, where, as Joshua Scodel explains, "more and more literate people of diverse backgrounds composed and read epitaphs." At the same time, it seems that some of the people who watched Baldwin were confused not just by his devotion to epitaphs, but also by the form that his devotion took. Joshua Scodel, *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 313.
[14] Octavo vols. 12-14, Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers, 1816-1835, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

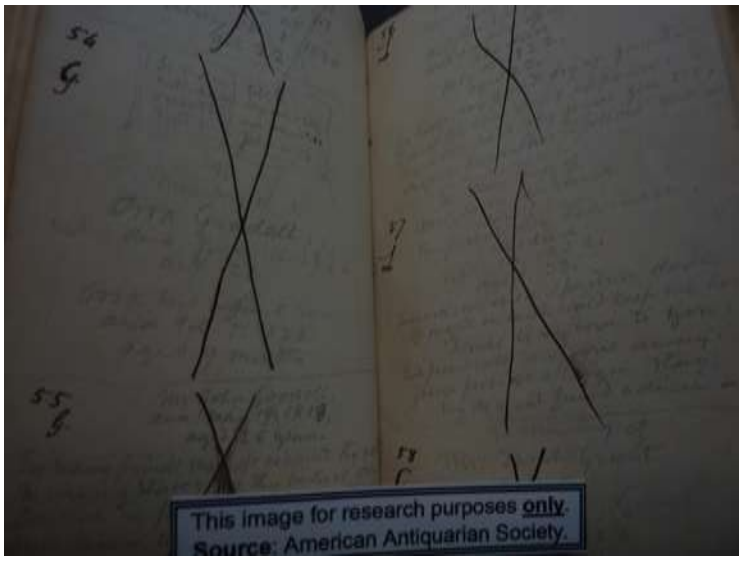

Figure 3: A page from a hand-bound volume of Baldwin's original copies of gravestone inscriptions. Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers.

Each feature of an epitaph mattered to him. One inscription, on the grave of a man named Joseph Willard, began with the words, "So passeth away the glory of the world."[15] In his copy of the inscription, Baldwin reproduced the arch that these words formed over Willard's name.

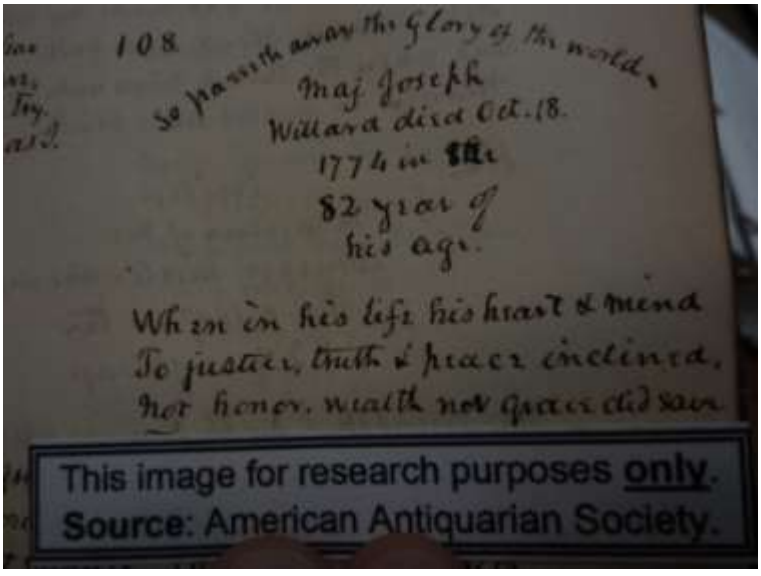

Figure 4: Baldwin always reproduced the visual elements of epitaphs in his transcriptions. Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers.

[15] Octavo vol. 13, Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers.

Each gravestone inscription, too, needed to be captured, regardless of whose life it commemorated. In a Woodstock, Vermont burying-ground, Baldwin carefully transcribed the epitaph of James and Marcia Hutchinson: "James died Jan'y 14, 1812 aged 12 weeks; Marcia died Jan'y 1. 1813 aged 12 hours."[16]

There is a concise way to describe what Baldwin was doing as he copied down epitaph after epitaph in graveyard after graveyard: he was being an antiquary. He paid attention to old things unnoticed by others, was boundlessly interested in the knowledge he gained from these things, and took steps to preserve everything that he discovered. These practices and habits of mind characterized late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarianism.[17] In an 1874 essay entitled "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," Friedrich Nietzsche offers a beautiful summary of the antiquary's relationship to historical artifacts: "The trivial, circumscribed, decaying and obsolete acquire their own dignity and inviolability through the fact that the preserving and revering soul of the antiquarian man has emigrated into them and there made its home."[18] When Baldwin set out into a burying-ground with notepaper in hand, he was participating in a centuries-long, transatlantic tradition of making his home among the shards of the past.

He was also acting in the context of more immediate changes in his life and his community. William Lincoln, Baldwin's closest friend, was for many years a member of the

[16] Ibid.

[17] In their introduction to a recent, wonderful special issue of the journal *Romantic Circles* dedicated to "Romantic Antiquarianism," Noah Heringman and Crystal B. Lake consider why the popularity of antiquarianism increased so greatly during the Romantic period: "It is in large part the popularity of antiquarianism that distinguishes the Romantic from the Enlightenment project of making sense of history's lost and found objects." Heringman and Lake, "Introduction," in "Romantic Antiquarianism."

[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," from *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73. Jennifer Fleissner explores the three modes of historical relation identified by Nietzsche – monumental, critical, and antiquarian – at the start of a rich and provocative essay on frustrations with historicism in contemporary literary criticism. Fleissner, "Historicism Blues," *American Literary History* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 699-717.

American Antiquarian Society. Soon after Lincoln and Baldwin started to publish the *Worcester Magazine and Historical Journal* together in 1825, Baldwin began to collect old books, manuscripts, and objects. He replaced the nineteenth-century furniture in his law office with chairs and desks from an earlier era and installed a clock that had been made by Worcester's first clockmaker.[19] In the final months of 1831, Baldwin gave up his law practice for good so that he could become the librarian and cabinet keeper for the AAS. He was the first person to occupy this role for any length of time, and he transformed the institution during the four years that he held it. He significantly expanded its holdings in books, manuscripts, and artifacts and made its collections more accessible to researchers than they had been before.[20]

Baldwin's efforts to collect and save gravestone inscriptions from across New England were connected to a project that sounds smaller in scope. He planned to write a history of Sutton, where he spent much of the later part of his life. For Baldwin, though, this project demanded endless research. Describing his ambitions in his diary in the spring of 1831, he confessed that "I have begun one labor which I fear I shall not live long enough to accomplish: it is to procure a history of each family that has lived in town, and the births and deaths of each, and where they have all gone to" (*P*, 86). Baldwin was right. At the time of his death, in 1835, he had not come close to finishing the history he wanted to produce of Sutton. But he was able to amass an extraordinary amount of information about each family that had resided in that town and where the members of all those families had gone.

One reason that he managed to learn so much was that he didn't have to go about this project alone. It is tempting to think of an antiquary like Baldwin as someone who was not caught up in the major developments of the era in which he lived, or as someone who tried to

[19] Larkin, "Introduction," from *A Place in My Chronicle*, xxix.
[20] Gura, *The American Antiquarian Society, 1812-2012*, 45-77.

distance himself from such developments. Recent scholarship by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Karen Halttunen, and Noah Heringman on antiquarianism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America and Britain tells us otherwise. These scholars have shown that the practices of antiquaries reflected, and sometimes helped to bring about, much larger cultural changes – changes in how people viewed the objects around them, the land on which they walked, and the acquisition of new forms of knowledge.[21] This body of scholarship says less about how an antiquary who wished to collect verbal texts in the early nineteenth century might have interacted with members of his community, as well as with these artifacts themselves. In order to compile the history of Sutton that he had in mind, Baldwin needed to read and transcribe manuscripts of all sorts. He looked for registers of births and marriages, lists of churches' congregants, court records – even epitaphs, in which he might recognize a familiar name. He found most of these manuscripts in two places: the state archives of Massachusetts and the homes of his neighbors and acquaintances.

As Baldwin researched the births, deaths, and journeys of Sutton's past and current inhabitants, he moved between the organized records held in county and state courthouses and the scattered papers that individuals had inherited or obtained by other means. Much of Baldwin's material came from the Worcester County Courthouse and the Massachusetts State House. He and Lincoln spent an entire week in Boston "copying old papers relating to Worcester and Sutton which we found in the garret of the State House" (*P*, 75). In addition to borrowing and transcribing the records that he encountered in these official archives, though, he obtained

[21] Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*; Karen Halttunen, "'That great natural curiosity:' The Old Man of the Mountain as *Lusus Naturae*," *Common-Place* 4, no. 2 (January 2004) and "Transnationalism and American Studies in Place," *The Japanese Journal of American Studies*, no. 18 (2007): 5-19; Noah Heringman, *Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Heringman and Lake, "Introduction," from "Romantic Antiquarianism." Ulrich rarely writes explicitly about antiquarianism in *The Age of Homespun*, but she still provides much insight into how ordinary old things became the objects of special interest and study in the nineteenth-century U.S.

nearly as many documents from people he had grown up around. His diary entries from 1831 suggest that he could expect to meet someone with a cache of papers of one type or another whenever he left his house: "[I] pass by the west side of Crooked Pond in my way home: and Mr. Stephen Stockwell gives me a large bundle of old papers relating to his ancestors" (*P*, 86). Some of the manuscripts that Baldwin received from residents of Sutton and other towns in southeastern Massachusetts were drawn from the personal papers of families: "I visited most of the old families and they obligingly gave me all their old letters, deeds, wills and the like, and I have now filled a large chest with them" (*P*, 90). In other cases, his sources were people who had come to possess much smaller, less systematic versions of the collection of papers he hoped to form: "Ensign John Woodbury presents me a box of old papers, which contains above one hundred old deeds, most of which belonged to the Dwight family of Dedham, the oldest of which is dated in 1646" (*P*, 75). The sets of papers that these different people saved were not all the same, nor were they all analogous to one another. Stockwell and the members of the old families whose homes Baldwin visited probably did not seek out the letters their ancestors wrote and the wills they signed. It is more likely that these manuscripts were passed down over generations; they might have been stored undisturbed in the same drawer for many years. Woodbury may have actively searched for some of the deeds that he later loaned to Baldwin – out of historical curiosity, or with an interest in the land that they concerned. Whatever his motivation was, he ultimately gathered together manuscripts of one sort tied to the history of one family.

Baldwin's one labor was "to procure a history of each family that has lived in town." This labor had no bounds. In a certain sense, though, the boundlessness of Baldwin's endeavor made his work easy. There were always more texts for him to transcribe, in a graveyard near Blow-me-down River or a home near Crooked Pond. Because he did not necessarily value

original documents more than copies of them, he could also store the texts that he meant to preserve in more than one place – on notepaper he carried with him, or in one of the volumes that he bound by hand. Reading page after page of transcribed records and epitaphs in his papers, it seems possible to view these copies as notes for the history of Sutton he meant to write. But it is also hard to tell how Baldwin planned to condense the sheer volume of material he had amassed into a written account of the town's history. Although we can only speculate about the exact end to which he conducted his research, we can say something about what he produced. Baldwin formed a repository for every document connected to the history of the town and its people. We might think of that mass of papers as the unofficial archive of Sutton.

3. In the Docket

The local history of Sutton was also a part of Baldwin's personal history. He lived in that town himself and knew many of the descendants of the people who were named in the papers he transcribed. At times, too, the documents that he copied moved him. Silence Buckley gave her daughter a gold necklace, a brass kettle, and two pictures in her 1756 will. After copying Buckley's will, Baldwin observed that "The pictures mentioned above are now in the possession of Jonathan Leland esq. of Sutton whose wife is the great grand daughter of the testatrix."[22] Some of Baldwin's interlinear comments are like this one. They provide his particular knowledge about a person or a thing mentioned in a manuscript. In other cases, though, his observations have to do with people who were strangers to him. In one of the hand-bound volumes that he used to transcribe the town and court records of Sutton, Baldwin copied a land deed signed in 1700 by Elizabeth Jackson. Below his transcription of the deed, he noted that

[22] Octavo vol. 11, Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers.

"The widow writes her name beautifully."[23] Baldwin believed that documents could be beautiful. He was especially sensitive to the appearance of people's handwriting.[24] In his opinion, Benjamin Swan, the clerk of Windsor County, Vermont, made "a more beautiful record than any man I have ever seen" (*P*, 83). Signatures and descriptions of court proceedings became sources of wonder in Baldwin's hands.

What distinguished a document like Jackson's deed or Swan's record from another type of artifact in the early Republic? Tamara Plakins Thornton has argued that, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, a man or woman's handwriting was often thought to reveal much about him or her. Whereas print seemed impersonal and obscure, script could be personal and transparent.[25] Pausing to note the beauty of Jackson's signature allowed Baldwin to describe what he could not reproduce in his transcription: the appearance of her hand. Manuscripts were not the only kind of handmade object that people collected during this era. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich tells the remarkable story of a seventeenth-century Algonkian basket that was given to the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1842. The basket's donor, Eleanor Field, included a label explaining how its maker had woven it from the inner bark of a tree and the shreds of a wool blanket.[26] In many ways, a seventeenth-century deed might have resembled a seventeenth-century basket to a nineteenth-century antiquary. Still, at least for the subjects of this chapter, manuscripts differed in one important sense from baskets and other objects made by hand. Manuscripts were things that my subjects searched for and recovered, but they were also things

[23] Octavo vol. 11, Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers. Jackson's deed actually involves land in Newtown, Massachusetts (now Newton). Baldwin's wish to learn where every resident of Sutton had gone eventually led him to copy entire record books from other towns across eastern Massachusetts.
[24] William Lincoln noticed that Baldwin made a conscious effort to change his handwriting in the late 1820s, "giving it a strongly marked angularity so that it would echo the 'black letter type' characteristic of the earliest years of printing." Larkin, "Introduction," xxx.
[25] In her terrific study of changes in the form and meaning of handwriting in colonial America and the U.S., Thornton writes that handwriting "was perceived as a transparent medium of the self" in the eighteenth century. Thornton, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 33.
[26] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 42-43.

that these men and the other people in their lives produced all the time. Baldwin, like his friend William Lincoln and his fellow antiquary Thomas Wallcut, saved every letter that he received and every draft of a letter that he composed at the same time that he collected and transcribed thousands of historical documents. Even as they stayed in touch with old friends, learned of the joys and disappointments of their relatives, and looked for work, these antiquaries never really left the archive.

Lincoln was a bachelor with a busy social life. He spent many days conducting research for his own planned history of Worcester and many evenings in the company of his neighbors in that town. In 1834, he decided to preserve a record of his social schedule over the previous few years by binding together the many dinner and party invitations he had received.[27]

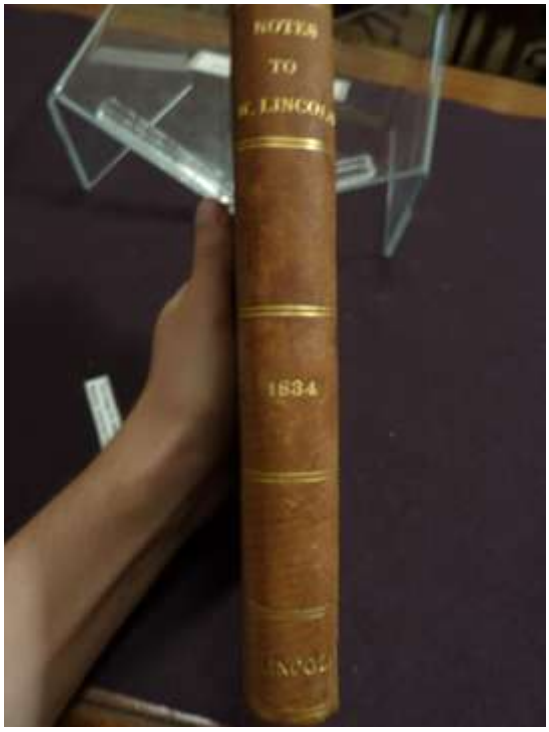

Figure 5: William Lincoln's volume of invitations. Lincoln Family Papers.

[27] Octavo vol. 52, Lincoln Family Papers, 1667-1937, American Antiquarian Society.

The volume that Lincoln made for his invitations gave order and permanence to notes that were highly occasional. Sometimes, his friends asked him to attend gatherings that would take place later that same day: "Mrs. Sarah S. Bancroft anticipates the pleasure of the company of a few married ladies this evening, and will be happy to see Mr. Lincoln if he will join the social party."[28] Lincoln saved and bound together nearly one hundred invitations like this one without adding any of his own remembrances of the parties he went to during this period of his life. Each note may have been mattered to Lincoln, or not mattered to him, for a separate reason: perhaps snow was falling as he walked home from Bancroft's party, or maybe he didn't go to her house that night. We can speculate that, contained within this volume, what mattered most about each invitation was the fact that it was there, helping to make the collection as comprehensive as it could be.

It took some effort for Lincoln to bind together all his old invitations. But the methods of keeping and preserving records that he encountered in the state archives of Massachusetts also became a part of his daily practices. On the back of every letter that he received, he wrote a brief summary of its contents or, at the very least, noted when it had come into his hands: "Recd. Nath' Dwight's Letter Providence Jan'y 1823."[29] A short label of this kind, added to a letter by its sender or recipient, is called a docket. It shares its name with other, more official summaries: a docket could hold a list of legal judgments or the important features of a warrant.[30] Baldwin, like his friend, docketed almost every letter that was sent to him. His dockets were more idiosyncratic than Lincoln's were. He labeled one note, from an acquaintance whose letters

[28] Sarah S. Bancroft to William Lincoln, ibid.
[29] Nathaniel Dwight to William Lincoln, January 1823, MS Box 5, folder 1, Lincoln Family Papers.
[30] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "docket, *n. 1*," accessed January 7, 2015. http://www.oed.com.

sometimes upset him, as "friendly."[31] On another letter sent to him by the same man, Francis Borland, he added multiple summaries over time – crossing out his first label, "Borland," and replacing it with a longer explanation: "Francis Borland, Somerset 16 Jan 1822. Borland was my chum in college –."[32]

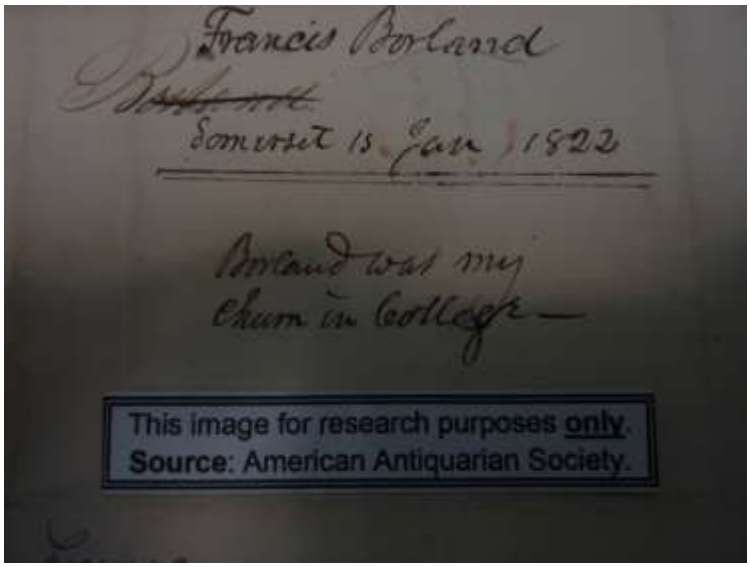

Figure 6: An updated docket, from a letter sent to Baldwin. Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers.

Baldwin used the docket as a space to track changes in his correspondents' lives. In May 1825, he received a lively note from his friend David Cutler, sent from Prince Frederick County, Maryland – which Cutler described as the "Land of Bacon and Kale." The second label that Baldwin affixed to this letter was a sorrowful postscript to the first: "Cutler died a few months after date of this letter at Prince Frederick County."[33]

Who were the potential readers of these dockets? The notes that Baldwin, in particular, made on the backs of letters seem to address someone other than himself – a reader who might not know that Borland was his chum in college. The American Antiquarian Society played a

[31] Francis Borland to Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 3 May 1824, MS Box 1, folder 1, Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers.
[32] Francis Borland to Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 15 January 1822, ibid.
[33] David Cutler to Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 8 May 1825, ibid.

major role in Baldwin's life as well as Lincoln's. It is possible that, as these two men helped the library to acquire the papers of many New England families and watched readers consult these collections, they may have wondered if their own papers would someday be stored there, too.[34] In addition to making such speculations, we can also look more closely at the form of these dockets. The labels that Baldwin and Lincoln attached to the letters they received have something in common with the records that they discovered in the Massachusetts State House. A clerk's entries in a ledger tell unknown future readers about the people named within them. Baldwin's dockets similarly convey the nature of his relationship to Borland and the time and place of Cutler's death to an audience unknown to him. Like a clerk's ledger, a docket accounts for everything. But, much more so than a ledger stored at a courthouse, these dockets speak transparently about the frustration, tenderness, and loss that their authors experienced.[35]

The antiquaries' papers reveal fragments of other people's lives. In the late 1780s, Wallcut's aunt, Dorcas Woodhull, sent her daughter to Boston to stay with him. When she arrived in Boston, Wallcut's cousin, who was also named Dorcas, gave him a short letter from her mother: "Very Dear Thomas, I take this opportunity by Dorcas to write you a few lines by way of a pollegy."[36] Wallcut may not have expected that his cousin would move to Boston so soon. His aunt's apology was for the suddenness of this arrangement: "I hope you will not think that I slight your advice in letting her come she has had a great desire to come for some time but not so good an opportunity as now."[37] Woodhull seems to have written this letter minutes before

[34] During the late 1820s, Lincoln briefly held the office of librarian and cabinet keeper at the AAS that Baldwin would later assume. Gura, *The American Antiquarian Society, 1812-2012*, 36.
[35] Clerk's ledgers can be expressive, too. Ann Laura Stoler writes that "Against the sober formulaics of officialese, these archives register the febrile movements of persons off balance – of thoughts and feelings in and out of place." Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 2.
[36] Dorcas Woodhull to Thomas Wallcut, undated, Box 2, folder 1, Thomas Wallcut Papers, 1640-1833, American Antiquarian Society. This letter from the elder Dorcas Woodhull is undated. Based on the dates of subsequent letters she sent to Wallcut, it seems likely that she wrote this first note at the end of the 1780s.
[37] Ibid.

she parted with her daughter. It ends in a rush, with statements that are at once sad, uncertain, and hopeful: "I hope you will have an agreeable interview with one another but I am just called upon to take my leave of her so must conclude with love to you, Dorcas Woodhull."[38] On July 2, 1791, Woodhull sent a second, happier note to her nephew from New Haven, Connecticut, thanking him for both his many letters and his kindness to her son Billy: "I can look back with pleasure on letters and presents both to me and my children and must say that you have been more like a father to Billy than a cosen."[39] This note to Wallcut was one of three letters that Woodhull included on the same sheet of paper. She wrote a brief message to her sisters, who lived in Boston, and another to her daughter, who had remained there. This single sheet of paper contains a partial history of Wallcut's family, written in the form of Woodhull's notes to her different relatives in Boston. At the same time, that piece of paper reflects the economies that shaped how Woodhull wrote to her relatives. Using a single sheet for three letters would have helped her to save money on both postage and paper. This choice could have affected the content and length of her notes as well. She filled the entire sheet that she mailed to Boston and might have had even more to say to her sisters, her daughter, or her nephew.

Wallcut held onto these letters from his aunt. Today, they are preserved among his papers at the American Antiquarian Society. Those papers tell us as much about the writings of Wallcut's relatives and acquaintances as they do about the kind of writer that he himself was. For Woodhull, sending a letter to her nephew or her sisters in Boston or receiving one from them in the mail may have been a major event. Both of the letters that she sent to Wallcut feature small spelling errors and lack regular punctuation; they are written in a wide, sloping hand. In her second note, Woodhull describes the pleasure she took in rereading her nephew's earlier letters.

[38] Ibid.
[39] Dorcas Woodhull to Thomas Wallcut, 2 July 1791, ibid.

She saved his correspondence, just as he saved hers. But the papers that Woodhull amassed during her lifetime never became part of a library or historical society's collection. Her only connection to a library was through her nephew. And while Wallcut expected that the AAS would house his papers someday, Woodhull had no similar assurance. The record that survives of her separation from her daughter lies between a list of historical pamphlets Wallcut wished to purchase and a note from his mother.

Many people's words, as well as others' words about them, were preserved in the papers of Wallcut, Lincoln, and Baldwin. The same thing could be said of the state archives that these men so often visited. As Baldwin copied the deed that Elizabeth Jackson signed a century before he was born, he was moved by the appearance of her handwriting. He may have been affected, too, by the simple experience of holding and transcribing a document that Jackson had held and added her name to so long ago. We frequently think about the confusion and wonder that we feel during our own trips to archives in terms close to these. Baldwin and Lincoln wrote dockets on the backs of the letters they received; I read those dockets many years later and felt less distant from their authors, at least for an instant.[40] Baldwin's response to Jackson's deed could also have involved an additional, somewhat different sense of recognition. There was much about her world that he did not, and could not, know. But we might guess that he would have recognized the way in which a moment in her life had been recorded and saved at the Worcester County Courthouse. Episodes from his own life were stored at that courthouse, too, and at other state

[40] Arlette Farge reflects upon why "the doodles and scribbles in the margins of case summaries" can seem so meaningful to us now: "It is as if some material traces had returned from this departed world, traces of moments that were the most private and least expressed." One difference between her reading of these scribbles and my reading of Baldwin's and Lincoln's dockets is that I tend to think of those dockets as public, rather than private, expressions. Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 11.

repositories – in a register of births, a will he had witnessed and signed, a note made by a clerk in a ledger's margin.

With the volumes of invitations that they compiled, the dockets that they wrote, and the letters that they kept, Lincoln, Baldwin, and Wallcut formed more personal archives for both their own lives and those of people they loved or met in passing. The papers of these men rarely offer us complete stories about their personal histories. Any knowledge of whether Lincoln went to a certain party, or enjoyed it if he did go, is missing from his bound volume of invitations. Any sense of what it was like for Wallcut to greet his cousin in Boston is absent from the letters that his aunt sent to him. Even though the papers that these men preserved fall short of providing us with narratives about their lives, they are also in excess of any such account. Some aspects of how Lincoln perceived himself and the people around him might be expressed more fully by the volume that he had bound than they could be by any memoir that he wrote. The archival consciousness of these antiquaries took in more than just the old documents that they collected. It extended to themselves.

4. History's Mess

The epitaphs and records that Baldwin copied down were right in front of him; the letters that he and Lincoln and Wallcut held onto were in their hands or on their desks. Some of the texts that these antiquaries hoped to preserve were harder to locate. What happened when a document couldn't be found? On May 5, 1802, Wallcut received a note from a Nantucket whaling merchant named Christopher Starbuck, answering several questions that Wallcut had asked him about the island's colonial history.[41] A few of the oldest manuscripts that Wallcut had inquired about were missing from Nantucket's local archives: "In regard to the deed or charter

[41] Starbuck was a member of a prominent Nantucket family. He appears in Lisa Norling's study of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century whaling communities of Nantucket and New Bedford. Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women & the Whalefishery, 1720-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

from Lord Sterling to M Mayhew in 1641, if I remember right it was a charter from James Forrest agent to Lord Sterling."[42] Starbuck recalled having once seen another document from the same era, "a patent from Sir Ferdinando Gorges to the first settlers of the island," but he was not sure of its current whereabouts.[43] He mentioned that Wallcut might look for Forrest's 1641 charter on the nearby island of Martha's Vineyard. Starbuck's letter shows how easily a manuscript could be misplaced, even a manuscript which could help to explain a pivotal incident in a place's past. Forrest's charter might have been filed elsewhere, but it also might never resurface.

Wallcut had a special interest in recovering and saving texts like Forrest's charter and Gorges's patent. He saw these documents of land ownership as part of a history of violence done to the indigenous peoples of North America. Among his papers, Wallcut kept two drafts of a long letter that he wrote in 1791 to Benjamin Edes, one of the printers of the *Boston Gazette*.[44] He thanked Edes for publishing historical accounts of New Jersey and New Hampshire in recent issues of the newspaper. These histories confirmed what Wallcut already believed: "By that & other authentic & respectable testimonies of our own historians, it is made clear, beyond all cavil or doubt, that white men were the first aggressors, & set the example of hostility & treachery to the aboriginal natives of this country."[45] For Wallcut, who was himself white, a charter written and signed by English colonists on Nantucket in 1641 still mattered in the nineteenth century. The Wampanoag Indians who lived on the island lost their land through that document and other similar deeds. Wallcut wanted to know how this had occurred and whether the Wampanoags'

[42] Christopher Starbuck to Thomas Wallcut, 5 May 1802, Box 2, folder 2, Thomas Wallcut Papers.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Edes's fellow printer of the *Gazette* was John Gill. See Eric Slauter, "Reading and Radicalization: Print, Politics, and the American Revolution," *Early American Studies* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 5-40 for a discussion of the political influence of the works (including John Locke's *Second Treatise*) that Edes and Gill printed.
[45] Thomas Wallcut to Benjamin Edes, undated draft, Box 2, folder 1, Thomas Wallcut Papers. There are two drafts of Wallcut's letter in this folder (which contains Wallcut's personal correspondence). They vary from each other slightly in content and length.

loss could be redressed or reversed: "The history of the Natives, their dispossession, or our purchase of their country, whether honestly acquired or not, from its discovery down to the present day, has & will continue to form an important part of our civil, political, & moral history."[46] Wallcut encouraged Edes to add a new section to the *Gazette*, dedicated to essays, anecdotes, and historical extracts about the past circumstances and present states of Native Americans.

Edes took Wallcut up on this proposal, although perhaps not with the result that Wallcut had envisioned. Wallcut's letter appeared on the first page of the October 17, 1791 issue of the *Gazette*.[47] He signed it as "Abram Madoc," using the name of the Welsh prince who, according to legend, had sailed to North America in the twelfth century.[48] One month after Edes published Wallcut's note, he created a recurring column in the *Gazette* called the "Indian Department." Most of the texts that Edes printed under this heading had been written recently, rather than long ago. They were often dispatches from ongoing wars between colonists and Indians. Readers of the December 5, 1791 issue of the newspaper would have come across two letters composed earlier that fall by white officers stationed in Shawnee and Miami territory (in what is now Ohio and Kentucky). The first letter reports the arrival of new regiments and militias along the Great Miami River. The second note describes the burial of a white man or woman who died as a captive. The funeral was overseen by a Native woman and a white official. The woman noticed that her deceased friend's feet were bare: "The white person who superintended the whole business, informed her that there were no good moccasins in the store, but that by way of

[46] Ibid.
[47] Abram Madoc to Messieurs Edes, "Is it thus you 'civilize the rude, unpolished world…,'" *The Boston Gazette and The Country Journal*, October 17, 1791, 1-2. Based on the drafts of this letter that I found among Wallcut's papers, I believe that he was its author. (Both drafts are addressed to "Mr. Edes.") It is also possible, though, that he transcribed the note multiple times from the *Gazette*.
[48] For an overview of the legend of Prince Madoc, which captivated some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonists, see Derrick Spradlin, "GOD ne'er Brings to pass Such Things for Nought": Empire and Prince Madoc of Wales in Eighteenth-Century America," *Early American Literature* 44, no. 1 (2009): 39-70.

amends, they had put a sufficiency of leather in the knapsack for two pair."[49] She accepted his answer, "saying that her friend was well acquainted with making them."[50] Wallcut seems to have hoped that Edes, by collecting and printing older as well as newer texts, could reveal to his readers the origins of these wars. The somber funeral of a captive taken during a struggle over land at the end of the eighteenth century was, in Wallcut's view, the legacy of much earlier acts of hostility and deceit. But Edes never published a seventeenth-century land deed, or a legal petition submitted by Native people, in the "Indian Department." The work of tracking down these documents and finding a place to store them was left to Wallcut.

Wallcut moved through the world of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Boston not only as an antiquary and a political thinker, but also as someone who went to school, formed close friendships, and held the same job for decades. These experiences shaped his sense of both the injustices of his era and the ways in which he might respond to them. In 1770, when Wallcut was twelve, his mother, Elizabeth, sent him from Boston, where he was born, to Hanover, New Hampshire, so that he could attend Moor's Charity School.[51] The Congregational minister Eleazar Wheelock had founded this school thirty years before, with the aim of training Indian and English students to become missionaries. During his time in Hanover, Wallcut studied the language of the Abenaki people, on whose land Wheelock had built both Moor's Charity School and another school that he established in 1769: Dartmouth College.[52] Wallcut was briefly enrolled at Dartmouth but did not graduate from that institution. He lived for nearly one year in 1774 and 1775 with the Abenakis at St. Francis (in what is today Odanak, Québec), where his

[49] "Extract of a Letter dated Washington, in Kentucky, September 3, 1791," *The Boston Gazette and The Country Journal*, December 5, 1791, 1.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Colin G. Calloway, *The Indian History of an American Institution: Native Americans and Dartmouth* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 34. Calloway uses an alternative spelling of Wallcut's family name: "Walcutt."
[52] Until 1769, Moor's Charity School was located in Lebanon, Connecticut. With the help of funds raised by one of his first students, the Mohegan minister and orator Samson Occom, Wheelock moved the school to Hanover in 1769 while also founding Dartmouth – the last of the colonial colleges. Ibid.

classmates, including his Narragansett friend Daniel Simon, wrote to him with words of support and stories about life at Dartmouth. After Wallcut left St. Francis, he never worked as a missionary again.[53] For the rest of his life, he had two careers. He devoted as much time and money as he could to locating manuscripts like Forrest's charter and assembling a library of rare printed works from colonial America. But he needed to earn a living, too. For almost forty years, Wallcut was employed as a clerk at the Massachusetts State House.

In contrast to an antiquary like Baldwin, whose curiosity about the former residents of Sutton was unequivocal and unceasing, Wallcut did not always collect records from the colonial era out of a reverence for that time. He seems to have searched for charters, deeds, and treaty minutes because they belonged to a history that he lamented. In his essay on the different possible uses of history for life, Nietzsche emphasizes the antiquary's veneration of everything that came before him: "The history of his city becomes for him the history of himself; he reads its walls, its towered gates, its rules and regulations, its holidays, like an illuminated diary of his youth and in all this again he finds himself."[54] Wallcut had plenty of reasons to see aspects of his own life in the manuscripts and books that he preserved. He amassed a large collection of documents related to the history of the Penobscot Indians, whose language was very similar to the one spoken by the Abenakis and whose land, like the land of the Abenakis, became the property of English and French colonists during the second half of the eighteenth century.[55] In addition, so many of the texts that Wallcut saved had been written decades or centuries before by clerks like himself.

[53] Ibid., 34-35.
[54] Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," 73.
[55] Wallcut's collection of manuscripts associated with the history of the Penobscots can be found in Box 3, folder 2, Thomas Wallcut Papers.

Wallcut had cause to imagine that the artifacts he found were as much a part of the present as they were of the past. Nietzsche's antiquary is heartened by this realization: "Here we lived, he says to himself, for here we are living; and here we shall live, for we are tough and not to be ruined overnight."[56] Wallcut was troubled by the same thought. At the start of his 1791 letter to Edes, he includes an epigraph taken from Joseph Addison's *Cato, a Tragedy*. He introduces this passage from Addison's play with four words that transform the epigraph into an accusation: "Is it thus you 'civilize the rude unpolished world, To lay it under the restraint of laws; To make man mild and sociable to man."[57] Wallcut attempted to recover lost and forgotten writings from colonial America so that he could show his contemporaries how their ancestors had acted. At the same time, he wanted these contemporaries, and future generations of Americans, to understand what it would mean to go on acting in the same way.

Wallcut spent many years forming a vast archive of printed and manuscript works. Then he gave that archive away. On a warm August day in 1834, Baldwin traveled to Boston at the invitation of Wallcut's nephew Robert. Wallcut, who was one of the original members of both the American Antiquarian Society and the Massachusetts Historical Society, was growing old. He wished to donate most of the books, pamphlets, newspapers, and manuscripts that he had amassed over the course of his life to the AAS and other public libraries. Robert Wallcut brought Baldwin to his uncle's warehouse, on the fourth story of an oil store in India Wharf, and encouraged him to take anything that was of interest to him. Baldwin could not believe what he discovered there: "Great numbers of the productions of our early authors turned up at every turn. I could hardly persuade myself that it was not all a dream" (*P*, 211). One of the texts that

[56] Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," 73.
[57] Madoc to Edes, "Is it thus you 'civilize the rude, unpolished world…,'" 1. For an analysis of both the general appeal of Addison's play during the revolutionary era and the more particular resonance of these lines of dialogue (spoken by Juba, Cato's prospective son-in-law) to an eighteenth-century American audience, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 216-18.

Baldwin came across was a volume of Cotton Mather's diary. Wallcut had stored the works that he had collected in every container that he could find: "They were put in ancient trunks, bureaus, and chests, baskets, tea chests and old drawers" (*P*, 210). Baldwin accepted much of what he unearthed in the warehouse on behalf of the AAS. The texts and trunks that were shipped back to Worcester weighed nearly 4,500 pounds in total.[58] For Baldwin, Wallcut was an enigma. The younger man could not comprehend why his fellow antiquary would let go of his valuable collection of writings for free. Baldwin tired quickly of working in the warehouse. He wondered how Wallcut had managed to endure the same conditions day after day: "as I was under a slated roof and the thermometer at ninety-three, I had a pretty hot time of it. Nothing but a love of such work could inspire any man to labor in such a place" (*(P*, 211). At certain moments, Wallcut may have loved his work as an antiquary. But he also seems to have searched for some texts and made them available to a larger audience of readers because their content haunted him.

5. Losses and Absences

This chapter began with a story about the apparent loss of a manuscript. We can imagine that, for Baldwin, losing a transcription of an epitaph or a will would have meant losing a piece of his archive of Sutton. For Lincoln, Wallcut, and Baldwin, losing a letter from a relative or a friend would have meant losing a record of both a part of their lives and a part of another person's life. And, for Wallcut, losing an original historical document would have meant losing some evidence of how an Indian nation's homeland became colonial property. Thomas Jefferson's letters and memoirs contain several stories like the one that concludes his *Autobiography*, about papers that were misplaced, almost destroyed, or lost for good. On September 21, 1809, Jefferson wrote to the botanist and natural historian Benjamin Smith Barton, to tell him about the fate of some documents that mattered greatly to them both. When

[58] Baldwin, *A Place in My Chronicle*, 213.

Jefferson's presidency ended, in the spring of 1809, he packed up many of his books, papers, and other belongings and shipped them to Monticello. As one of these shipments traveled along the James River, someone stole an especially heavy trunk from it. The person who took the trunk seems to have been misled by its weight: "the thief being disappointed on opening it, threw into the river all it's contents of which he thought he could make no use."[59] There were no precious metals in this trunk. The thief who opened it found instead lists of words that Jefferson had compiled, over the past thirty years, from fifty Indian languages. Jefferson had compared these lists to one another and to the lexicons of other languages spoken around the world. He had kept track of which words appeared in every language that he studied, with the hope that he would discover a common global vocabulary.[60] These lists floated away on the river: "some leaves floated ashore & were found in the mud; but these were very few, & so defaced by the mud & water that no general use can ever be made of them."[61]

For Jefferson, collecting the vocabularies of different Indian nations was one way of grappling with his own uncertainty about the place of Indian peoples in the U.S. His research, which combined antiquarianism, philology, and ethnology, grew out of his curiosity about North America's colonial and pre-colonial past. The relationship of this research to the lives and political standing of Native Americans in the early Republic was not always clear. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which was first published in 1787, Jefferson bemoaned the fact that were so few records of Indian languages: "It is to be lamented then, very much to be lamented, that we have suffered so many of the Indian tribes already to extinguish, without our having previously collected and deposited in the records of literature, the general rudiments at least of the

[59] Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Smith Barton, 21 September 1809, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney, Vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 556.
[60] For an excellent account of Jefferson's project of compiling and comparing the vocabularies of Native peoples, see Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 77-80.
[61] Jefferson to Barton, 21 September 1809, 556.

languages they spoke."[62] As Jay Fliegelman observes, this sentence refers to the suffering of people who wish to learn more about Indians, rather than to the suffering of actual Indian peoples.[63] By gathering together vocabularies of Native languages and visiting Native burial mounds, antiquaries like Jefferson and Barton – who drew upon Jefferson's philological work for his *New Views of the Origin of the Tribes and Nations of America* (1797) – included the indigenous peoples of North America within their vision of American history.[64] But, as Gordon M. Sayre and Jonathan Elmer have persuasively argued, these antiquaries also tended to confine Indians to America's past. In *Notes*, Jefferson writes off multiple nations in a phrase: "so many of the Indian tribes already to extinguish."[65]

Sayre, Elmer, and Daniel J. Boorstin have given us a clear sense of both the kind of knowledge that Jefferson and Barton hoped to gain through assembling lists of Indian words and the concerns and human lives that were mostly absent from their work.[66] These scholars have focused less on the fragility of the materials that Jefferson and his friends used to store the knowledge they accumulated. One of the few manuscripts that washed up on the shores of the James River, and that was not too damaged by water and mud to be read, was a vocabulary for the Pawnee language. This vocabulary had been sent to Jefferson by Meriwether Lewis. Jefferson sent it to Barton (who was preparing an expanded edition of *New Views*), along with a fragment of another lexicon that Lewis had collected: "no indication remains on it of what

[62] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *Writings*, 227.
[63] Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 231n9.
[64] For a detailed history of early American antiquaries' great interest in Indian burial mounds, or earthworks, see Gordon M. Sayre, "The Mound Builders and the Imagination of American Antiquity in Jefferson, Bartram, and Chateaubriand," *Early American Literature* 33, no. 3 (1998): 225-249.
[65] Sayre suggests that, by transferring the speech of Native Americans into lists of words to be deposited at libraries, Jefferson reduces their "living culture to dead object of knowledge." Ibid., 245. And Elmer, in his rich reading of *Notes*, emphasizes that it displays "a deep-seated cultural logic according to which U.S. acknowledgment and maintenance of the sovereign status of Indian peoples cannot be disentangled from a drive to forget, abject, and abandon those same peoples." Jonathan Elmer, *On Lingering and Being Last: Race and Sovereignty in the New World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 146.
[66] See Sayre, "The Mound Builders," Elmer, ibid., and Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*.

language it is. it is a specimen of the condition of the little which was recovered."[67] Although these lists of words were intended to reveal enduring features of a language that was once spoken by people around the world, they were recorded on leaves of paper that could fall into a river.

In separate contexts, all of the antiquaries whom I have discussed in this chapter had to confront the ephemeral nature of the manuscripts they wished to preserve. Jefferson, to a much greater extent than Baldwin, Lincoln, and Wallcut, had the chance to publish some of his writings during his lifetime; many of his other papers would appear in print after his death. But Jefferson also knew that a document could slip away in an instant. And he may have guessed that most of the letters that he sent and received and notes that he made to himself would for many years continue to exist only in manuscript form – if they continued to exist at all.[68] In an effort to make the letters that he wrote slightly more permanent than they otherwise would have been, Jefferson composed thousands of them using a copying device called a polygraph. The polygraph featured two pens, connected to each other by a joint. As Jefferson wrote with the first pen, the second duplicated each mark that he made.[69] He mailed one copy of every letter that he composed with the polygraph to his correspondent and kept the other, identical document among his own papers. Baldwin transcribed James and Marcia Hutchinson's epitaph and Elizabeth Jackson's deed so that the content of these texts would be saved in multiple places. Jefferson, who once said that he could not live without his polygraph, seems to have relied upon that device

[67] Jefferson to Barton, 21 September 1809, 556.

[68] While partial editions of Jefferson's papers were published during the nineteenth century, the earliest comprehensive collections of his manuscript writings did not appear until the middle decades of the twentieth century. In 1944, the Library of Congress produced a microfilm edition of Jefferson's papers. In 1950, Princeton University Press published the first volume of what has become the definitive scholarly edition of Jefferson's papers. As of 2015, this series has still not been completed. Thomas Jefferson, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Helen Duprey Bullock (Washington: Library of Congress, 1944-45), microfilm, 101 reels; Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian Boyd and Lyman H. Butterfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-).

[69] For a detailed history of the polygraph, see Silvio A. Bedini, *Thomas Jefferson and His Copying Machines* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984). The device was created at the turn of the nineteenth century by the Philadelphia inventor John Isaac Hawkins and was marketed in the U.S. by Charles Willson Peale. It was based on the pantograph, a seventeenth-century drafting tool used to adjust the scale of drawings.

for a similar reason.[70] But the texts that these two men reproduced were also quite different in nature. The polygraph allowed Jefferson to retain as much of his own writing as he could. Letters that he had composed were sorted alongside notes sent to him by friends and documents that he had collected. Jefferson, like Baldwin, Lincoln, and Wallcut, gathered together some part of himself by holding onto manuscripts that he had produced and manuscripts that other people had written. For Jefferson, though, more so than for the other three men, it was crucial to preserve not only the thoughts that he had expressed to himself in his memoir or memorandum books, but also those thoughts that he had communicated to others.

Near the start of this chapter, I suggested that Baldwin, Lincoln, Wallcut, and Jefferson have something simple but important in common. These men did everything they could to save the manuscripts that they sought out and the other texts that ended up in their hands. I would like to end this chapter with another kind of story, one that might represent an exception to my initial claim. When Jefferson traveled north from Virginia to New York in March 1790, stopping along the way in Philadelphia to see Franklin, he was accompanied by Robert and James Hemings. These brothers were members of the enslaved Hemings family, which had come to Monticello in 1774. Robert and James's sister Sally had seven children with Jefferson between 1790 and 1808: two daughters, three sons, and two other children who died at birth.[71] During the last decade of the eighteenth century, Robert and James Hemings became free men; Jefferson signed Robert's deed of manumission in 1774 and James's in 1776. In the first years after Robert Hemings left Monticello and joined his wife, Dolly, and their children in Richmond, he sent five letters to

[70] Jefferson to Charles Willson Peale, 15 January 1809, *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, ed. Lillian B. Miller, Vol. 2, pt. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983-), 1168-69.
[71] For full portraits of Robert, James, and Sally Hemings, as well as of their siblings, parents, and children, see Annette Gordon-Reed's magnificent biography of the Hemingses, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: Norton, 2008); for a discussion of Robert and James Hemings's time in Philadelphia and New York with Jefferson in the spring of 1790, see especially 437-54.

Jefferson at Monticello, where his mother, siblings, and nieces and nephews still lived and continued to be enslaved. Jefferson recorded the exact dates on which he received Hemings's notes, as well as the date on which he wrote back to Hemings, in his Summary Journal of Letters – a register that he used to keep track of his correspondence from 1783 until the final days of his life, in 1826.[72] We can imagine that Hemings probably asked after his family in these letters, and we can guess that he might have mentioned his sister Sally in at least some of them. But we can't know for sure. Like many documents that may have included some reference to Sally Hemings's relationship with Jefferson, Robert Hemings's five letters are nowhere to found.[73]

This chapter has focused on the consciousness at work in a text such as Jefferson's Summary Journal. There are other ways, though, of handling manuscripts, ways that go beyond recording the arrival of letters in a register or compiling invitations in a bound volume. While it is easy to lose a piece of paper by accident, it is just as easy to tear one up or toss one into a fire. Jefferson left his papers to one of his grandsons, Thomas Jefferson Randolph. Fawn Brodie and Annette Gordon-Reed have both speculated that Randolph and other members of Jefferson's white family may have destroyed letters that alluded to Sally Hemings's life at Monticello or to her relationship with her master.[74] Robert Hemings's five letters could have been among the documents that Randolph suppressed. They could also have been texts that Jefferson himself thought twice about keeping and removed from his papers before his death. It is possible, too, that these letters were misplaced during Jefferson's travels and could still resurface. When

[72] For a discussion of the five letters that Robert Hemings wrote to Jefferson, their disappearance, and their possible content, together with a more general treatment of Robert and James Hemings's literacy, see Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 401-404. For the exact dates between 1794 and 1796 when Robert Hemings wrote to Jefferson and Jefferson received Hemings's letters, see Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. John Catanzariti, vol. 28 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 223.
[73] For Gordon-Reed's comments on the repeated absence in Jefferson's papers of letters that might have mentioned Sally Hemings, see *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 243-44; 402; 423-24.
[74] Fawn Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York: Norton, 1974), 234; Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 243-44.

Jefferson recorded his receipt of Hemings's five letters in his Summary Journal, he was not really forming a narrative about his own life or a narrative about Robert and Sally Hemings's lives. Historical narratives may depend as much upon the loss and destruction of documents as they do upon their accretion. As a manuscript is torn into shreds or hidden under a floorboard, one story begins to be told and another becomes harder to recover. Both stories could be about people who passed through one another's lives. They could also both be stories about a nation.

Chapter 2: Authors' Papers and the Flotsam of Antebellum Literature

1. You Want to Know

What happens to our secrets when we write them down? In the weeks after Washington Irving died, his nephew, Pierre Munro Irving, started to clear out Sunnyside, the author's house on the Hudson River. There was one drawer in Irving's desk that Pierre had never looked inside before; his uncle had always kept it locked. Now, when Pierre opened the drawer, he found a package that Irving had labeled "Private Mems."[1] He made a note of his discovery on the other side of the wrapper: "Found by me Dec. 13 1859 – P.M.I."[2] The package held eight small pages, covered from front to back with writing. To Pierre, these pages seemed to form part of a long letter written by his uncle decades ago. The first and last pages of the letter were missing, and the ink had faded in places, but the words were not hard to read. The manuscript began mid-sentence: "feelings since I entered upon the world, which like severe wounds and maims in the body, leave forever after a morbid sensitiveness, and a quick susceptibility to any new injury."[3] Irving wrote frankly here about experiences that he had never mentioned to his nephew. He explained how the loss of his friend Matilda Hoffman, who died when he was twenty-six, made him afraid to be alone: "I had often to get up in the night & seek the bedroom of my brother, as if

[1] Private memoranda, manuscript fragment of autobiography, undated, Box 8, Washington Irving Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. A few years after Irving's death, Pierre Munro Irving published a biography of his uncle and extracted brief passages from this manuscript there. He wrote that he discovered the manuscript "in a repository of which he [Irving] always had the key." Pierre M. Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1862), 183. Stanley T. Williams included a full transcription of this manuscript in an appendix to his invaluable biography of Irving. "Appendix II: Manuscript Fragment," from Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935): 255-262. In his study of the relationship between Washington Irving and his nephew, Wayne R. Kime suggests that the "repository" where Pierre found this manuscript was Irving's desk; I have followed his suggestion. Kime, *Pierre M. Irving and Washington Irving: A Collaboration in Life and Letters* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), 257.

[2] This is one small feature of the manuscript that Williams did not print. Private memoranda, manuscript fragment of autobiography, undated, Box 8, Washington Irving Collection. Irving died on November 28, 1859.

[3] "Appendix II: Manuscript Fragment," from Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, 255. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *MF*.

the having a human being by me would relieve me from the frightful gloom of my own thoughts" (*MF*, 257-58). After his brothers' business went bankrupt a few years later, he was overcome with emotion once more: "Good heavens what I suffered for months and months and months. I lost all appetite I scarcely slept – I went to bed every night as to a grave" (*MF*, 259).

Pierre was unsure of what had prompted his uncle to write about his life so openly and sadly until he came to the final page that had been left in the drawer. On that page, Irving addressed the original reader he had imagined for the letter – someone whose questions had caused him to look back on past heartbreak and grief: "You wonder why I am not married. I have shewn you why I was not long since" (*MF*, 261).[4] There was more that Irving needed to tell this reader about how painful he found it to live with loss: "You want to know some of the fancies that distress me; I will mention one as a specimen of many others" (*MF*, 261-62). On a recent evening, he had fallen asleep in the hours before a ball and dreamed of his older brother William, who had died eighteen months before. In his dream, Irving walked and talked with William. Later that night, he went to the ball but quickly realized that he couldn't stay: "I tried to dance but could not; my heart sank at the very sound of the music and I had to give up the attempt & go home" (*MF*, 262). This story still left something unspoken that Irving meant to reveal. He began to deal with what he hadn't said so far: "Do you want some of the real causes. While at Dresden I had repeated" (*MF*, 262). Years ago, someone else may have turned to the next page and read about these causes, but now, Pierre could only guess what they were. The rest of the letter was gone.

It wasn't just the words on the missing page that remained a mystery to Pierre. Although his uncle's manuscript came to him with the force of a secret, there was much about it that he did

[4] Michael Warner has written what is, to my mind, the definitive essay on both Irving's bachelorhood and the significance of bachelorhood in his work. That essay has helped to shaped the questions that I ask here about Irving's published writings and papers. Warner, "Irving's Posterity," *ELH* 67 (2000): 773-799.

not understand. He wasn't even certain of what he was reading. Irving seemed to have written about his life for one person, who had asked him why he had never married and wondered what it was that was always on his mind. But the note he had left on the package's wrapper described these writings as his private memoirs, or memoranda, and not a letter. Even if Pierre was right, and these eight pages had once been part of a letter, it was still hard to tell if anyone had read them before. The disappearance of the manuscript's first and last pages only made matters worse. While their absence seemed full of meaning, it could have come about by chance. What came before and after the contents of the package, though, was more than a few other pages of writing. In the manuscript's most dramatic moments, there seemed to be echoes of conversations that Pierre would never hear. When he reached the bottom of the last page, he didn't know how the broken sentence ended, and he had no sense of whether some remembered voice or look had made his uncle want to take back what he had said and start again.

As Pierre unlocked Irving's desk drawer and saw a package labeled "Private Mems.," he may have felt as though he had stepped into the world of one of his uncle's books. So many of Irving's histories and tales begin this way, with the discovery of a manuscript. In *A History of New York, from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty,* a landlord comes across a bundle of paper in the room of his former tenant, an old man of Irving's invention named Diedrich Knickerbocker. Two of Irving's most famous tales, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," come from Knickerbocker's papers, too, and open with notes saying just that: "The following Tale was found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker"; "Found among the Papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker."[5] At the start of his *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada,* Irving's fictive "editor" describes how he assembled the book from

[5] Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, in *History, Tales and Sketches,* James W. Tuttleton, ed. (New York: Library of America, 1983), 767; 1058.

the manuscript fragments of another fictitious historian, Fray Antonio Agapida, "one of the many indefatigable authors of Spain who have filled the libraries of convents and cathedrals with their tomes, without ever dreaming of bringing their labors to the press."[6] These are all narratives that needed to be found before anyone could read them, or at least that's what we're told.

Of course, Irving was far from the first author to claim that his own works were drawn from the discovered manuscripts of some other writer. This device is so commonplace in early modern romances and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prose narratives that it is tempting to read past it now whenever we encounter it. But as my whole dissertation tries to show, a bundle of paper left on the floor of an empty room was not the same thing in 1809 that it would have been a century, or even fifty years, before. In the nineteenth century, there were new possible futures for papers like the fictive ones found in Knickerbocker's hotel room. Irving's fiction is suffused with both the antiquarian imagination and the archival consciousness that I looked at in my first chapter. But his fiction, like much antebellum American fiction, also responds to that imagination and that consciousness, asking what gets seen and read when every manuscript is saved. In this chapter, I sift through the many handwritten documents scattered through the work of Irving and his contemporaries, from the manuscript found in a bottle in one of Edgar Allan Poe's tales to the posthumous papers of the Pickwick Club, which form the substance of Charles Dickens's first novel. These invented scraps of parchment and unsent letters are the textual flotsam of nineteenth-century literature: mostly unremarkable, half-noticed, and ever present. What do we learn when we gather all that flotsam in one place?

The stories that early nineteenth-century works tell us about manuscripts tend to be stories about writings separated from their original authors – whether by loss, or by death, or by

[6] Fray Antonio Agapida (Washington Irving, pseud.), *Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, 1829), ix.

absent-mindedness. It's possible to read these frame narratives as meditations on the conditions of publication in the first decades of the nineteenth century. My own account of Knickerbocker's papers and Poe's manuscript found in a bottle doesn't end with print publication. In some ways, though, it begins there. Meredith McGill has taught us that the literary marketplace of the 1830s and '40s was nothing if not decentralized.[7] A tale published anonymously in a Boston gift book might then be reprinted under its author's real name in both a Philadelphia literary weekly and a western Massachusetts temperance newspaper.[8] The Supreme Court's landmark 1834 decision on copyright, *Wheaton v. Peters*, affirmed the legality of unauthorized reprinting. The Court suggested that an author's private ownership of his or her work was mostly forfeited once that work appeared in print. McGill writes with great power about the ways that authors like Dickens, Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne tried to address "their profoundly unknowable and unstable audiences," and the found manuscripts that so often surface in the sketches and novels of these writers and those of their peers absolutely evoke these circumstances.[9]

Yet these recovered bundles and journals are evidence, too, of another form of historical change. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that a writer's letter or story draft was likely be found somewhere, because it was really only then that literary authors began to save their own papers with posterity in mind. As Roger Chartier has noted, European authors rarely preserved manuscript copies of their work before the middle of the eighteenth century.[10] Around then, quite suddenly, some writers became careful archivists. Jean Jacques Rousseau assembled what he called a "dossier" of drafts, copies, and proofs of *Julie*. Johann Wolfgang van Goethe wrote to a

[7] Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).
[8] This is the publishing history of one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's early tales, "The Wives of the Dead." After first being published anonymously in 1832 in *The Token*, the story was reprinted widely under Hawthorne's name over the next fifteen years. Ibid., 225.
[9] Ibid., 17.
[10] Roger Chartier, *The Author's Hand and the Printer's Mind*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 73-86.

friend in 1832, near the end of his life, that "'My manuscripts, my letters, and my collections deserve the greatest attention.'"[11] Chartier suggests that the eighteenth-century legal and cultural debates surrounding literary property and copyright led writers like Rousseau and Goethe to hold onto their manuscripts. A handwritten draft was the closest thing these authors had to proof of their labor. Chartier's argument is compelling, though it is harder to say whether a writer might have saved notes for a tale and a letter from an old friend for the same reason. Over the rest of this chapter, though, rather than trying to explain why authors in nineteenth-century America preserved their writings, I want to show what happened when they did.

Before the nineteenth century, an author's manuscript could be a thing of outsize value, a document treasured for it what it said, or its creased surface, or a memory of the day when it was written. Yet such a manuscript would matter only to the few people who might see it, and those people would know the author. In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, thanks in part to the robust culture of reprinting that McGill brings to light, American writers like Irving and James Fennimore Cooper and British writers like Walter Scott and Dickens became celebrities in the U.S. At least some of these authors' readers cared to learn more about how they wrote and how they lived. Until the nineteenth century, a package hidden inside an author's desk hardly stood a chance of becoming a public text even if someone discovered it there. Now, though, it might appear in a volume of that author's writings, or in a collection of papers sold at auction.

In his nephew's hands, there was something out of place about Irving's "Private Mems." The manuscript only became more at odds with its surroundings when it was excerpted in Pierre's 1862 book about his uncle, then filed away in the storage shelves of a library at Yale,

[11] Ibid., 82.

then printed in full in the appendix to Stanley Williams's 1935 biography of Irving.[12] That sense of anachronism had much to do with the way that these biographers and institutions made public a document deemed private by its author. Still, as this manuscript was transferred into print and into an archive, its value was also changing. The value that these pages had had for Irving, a value that Pierre could only guess at, was replaced by new measures of worth. A package full of secrets half explained or uttered became a source of knowledge for scholars and a commodity.

Stacks and stacks of authors' papers from the nineteenth century share this history with Irving's "Private Mems." In their passage from the floor of a writer's room or the pocket of a loved one to print or to a library's shelves, these documents became something other than what they had been to their original authors and readers. The fictive manuscript volumes and loose pages that are so often discovered and read in antebellum novels and tales are records of this passage and efforts to imagine its consequences – not just for the papers of celebrated authors, but for the writings left behind by anyone at all.

In the next section, I offer a few snapshots of the found manuscript trope in works of historical fiction. The parchments plucked from obscurity in early modern romances, the scraps of paper saved from destruction in eighteenth-century fictions and antiquarian works, and the bundle of paper found in Diedrich Knickerbocker's hotel room look a lot like one another. Pushing past that resemblance, we see that these invented documents all register ideas about history and authorship specific to their different eras. For eighteenth-century authors, the authenticity of a putative manuscript source always mattered somehow. But Irving, in *A History of New York*, places his supposed author – the larger-than-life but elusive Knickerbocker – in the foreground. Irving underscores all that we cannot know about the authors of the documents that

[12] Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1862), 223; Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935): 255-262.

we find. The third section considers some of these same questions about authorship, but from another perspective. There, I look at three scenes from Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) and three stories by Poe. These works cast authorship as an experience of losing one's manuscripts. For Dickens and Poe, there was something very literal about this notion. The posthumous fate of Poe's own papers, which I consider at the end of this section, suggests how plausible this understanding of authorship was for him and his peers. In a coda to the chapter, I turn to Caroline Dall's *The Romance of the Association* (1875), a book that narrates Dall's search for the writings of Elizabeth Whitman. Many of the developments that I track over the course of the first three sections coalesce in Dall's idiosyncratic and affecting work. Dall seemed to perceive the value of Whitman's manuscripts in all sorts of heightened ways. She was left unsure of what public form, if any, they should take.

2. Looking for Diedrich Knickerbocker

Before we can get to the beginning of the world in *A History of New York*, we first must read a landlord's complaint about unpaid rent. The book opens with an "Account of the Author" written by Seth Handaside, the owner of the Independent Columbian Hotel on New York's Mulberry Street. Sometime in the fall of 1808, Handaside recalls, an older man rented a room in his hotel. The man's clothes and habits made him stand out on Mulberry Street. He wore "a rusty black coat, a pair of olive velvet breeches, and a small cocked hat," and moved into his new room with just two saddle bags as luggage.[13] That room was soon a mess, its floor covered with papers and books that the man "would never let any body touch" (*H*, 373). Handaside and his wife watched as their lodger became "an oracle among the neighbours": people would gather

[13] Washington Irving, *A History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, in *History, Tales and Sketches*, ed. James W. Tuttleton (New York: Library of America, 1983). This is the 1809 edition of *A History of New York*. Except where noted, I refer to that edition in this essay. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *H*.

around him in front of the hotel to hear his thoughts about the polls and ward meetings that he was always returning from (*H*, 374). Later, they learned that the man was related to the Knickerbockers of Scaghtikoke, New York, and that one of his cousins was a congressman. The only real issue that the landlord and his wife had with their lodger was that he didn't pay his rent. When she tried once to broach the subject with him, he became offended and said that the contents of his saddle bags were worth as much as the entire building.

About a year after this man arrived at the hotel, he headed out one morning "with a bundle in his hand" and never came back (*H*, 375). Handaside spent two months looking for his missing lodger. He wrote to the man's relatives in Scaghtikoke to ask if they knew where he might be and learned that the man had stopped speaking to them a few years ago, after a falling-out with his cousin, the congressman. Handaside placed advertisements, too, in several New York newspapers, describing his lodger's appearance and requesting any word about him. These ads went unanswered. Finally, the landlord went with his wife to the man's room, hoping that something he had left there might make up for the rent they had lost. The floor was still covered with books and scraps of paper, and the saddle bags held nothing that seemed remarkable at first – "only a few articles of worn out clothes, and a large bundle of blotted paper" (*H*, 376). But when one of the lodger's friends from the neighborhood, a librarian, stopped by to see that bundle of paper, he knew instantly that "it was the treasure which the old gentleman had spoken about it; as it proved to be a most excellent and faithful HISTORY OF NEW YORK" (*H*, 376).

Here, in these opening pages of the *History*, Irving borrows a narrative convention from both the novel and romance. The trope of the discovered manuscript is so familiar, and so long-lived, that it was already being parodied in the sixteenth century. Irving inherited this trope from many writers before him; he also helped to reimagine it, though in ways that aren't always easy

to pin down. When Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo published a sequel to the popular chivalric romance *Amadís of Gaul* in 1510, he explained that this new volume "came to light in a stone tomb discovered underground below a hermitage near Constantinople and was brought to this part of Spain by a Hungarian merchant, being inscribed on parchment so old that only with great difficulty were those who knew the language able to read it."[14] Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605; 1615) famously stops early on, in the midst of a dramatic battle, when Cervantes' original manuscript source comes to an end. A chance encounter at a market in Toledo allows Cervantes to resume his history of the knight's life. At the market, he meets a boy who has come "to sell some notebooks and old papers to a silk merchant."[15] The notebooks are written in Arabic, and Cervantes, wondering what they say, asks another man at the market to translate them into Castilian. One volume bears this title: "*History of Don Quixote of La Mancha. Written by Cide Hamete Benengeli, an Arab Historian*."[16] Cervantes rushes to buy all the notebooks and papers from the boy before the silk merchant can outbid him; they hold the rest of his hero's story. The parchment unearthed from a tomb in *Amadís* and the notebooks purchased at a market in *Don Quixote* aren't ordinary documents (although the manuscripts in Cervantes' book seem, at first, to be just that). Their recovery depends, in each case, on both a stroke of luck and a translator's skill. Both of these works wear the trope of the found manuscript lightly. Once Rodríguez de Montalvo and Cervantes have explained the origins of their material, they can return without fuss to their narratives.

[14] Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, *Amadis of Gaul*, Books 1 and 2, trans. Edward B. Place and Herbert C. Behn (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 20, quoted in Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 56.
[15] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Ecco, 2003), 67.
[16] Ibid. For a compelling account of how these parodic scenes in *Amadís of Gaul* and *Don Quixote* are implicit affirmations of a claim to historicity (and not critiques of such a claim), see McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*, 56-57.

In the eighteenth century, torn sheets and carefully preserved parchments started to appear everywhere: at the beginning of many novels, and in the introductions to works of antiquarian research. On average, the documents that turn up in eighteenth-century fictions and local histories are far more mundane than the volume buried under a hermitage in *Amadís*. The narrative of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) is drawn from a bunch of paper fragments that were being used as wadding for a gun.[17] The ballads collected in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) come from a manuscript – a real one, in this case – that Percy found "lying dirty on the floor under a Bureau in the Parlour of his friend Humphrey Pitt of Shiffnal in Shopshire, being used by the maids to light the fire."[18] Yet even though these manuscripts are integrated into daily life, they are also thornier than their early-modern antecedents. Katie Trumpener has argued that all the references to made-up or actual documents in late eighteenth-century British literary culture were inflected by the controversy surrounding James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems. Macpherson claimed that the poems he published in 1760 – poems that were, in fact, his own compositions – were his translations of third-century Gaelic works, which had been passed down through oral performance and memory over the last fifteen centuries. But he also maintained that he had discovered a manuscript copy of the poems. His ultimate failure to produce that document heightened the suspicions of some of his readers, including Samuel Johnson.[19]

Trumpener shows how, at one moment in one literary culture, the convention of the found manuscript came to be freighted with a very particular meaning. And that meaning had

[17] [Henry Mackeznie], *The Man of Feeling* (London: W. Strahan, 1773), vii-viii.
[18] Thomas Percy, *Bishop Percy's Folio Ms. Ballads and Romances*, ed. John W. Hales and Frederick Furnivall (London: N. Trubner, 1868), vol. 1, xii, quoted in Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 111.
[19] Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 67-127.

everything to do with authenticity. After *Ossian*, the signs that gave credence to a character or a text had changed. When novelists like Ann Radcliffe and William Godwin claimed a manuscript provenance for their historical fictions, they made sure to acknowledge and entertain the skepticism of their audience. Radcliffe's *Gaston de Blondeville* (written in 1802 and published in 1826) is bookended by drawn-out conversations about the dating of multiple print and manuscript sources. Godwin's *Imogen* (1784) begins with the discovery of an ancient Welsh parchment that, to its editor, seems uncannily like much more recent works of literature. All the quibbles and doubts introduced by Radcliffe and Godwin make readers less skeptical, not more, in the end: "the result of such qualifications, which force readers to consider the provenance of what they are reading, is that they are then more ready, once the main story begins, to suspend their disbelief; by raising the problems of authenticity, probability, and believability from the outset, these novelists are also able to contain them."[20] The uncertainties that take center stage in these frame narratives are nowhere in sight once the main sections of these novels begin.

The preface to *A History of New York* doesn't deliver up an ancient manuscript, and it doesn't introduce the writings of a completely unknown author. Instead, it offers a brief profile of a man who has gone missing. Where Radcliffe and Godwin cast doubt upon the authenticity of their supposed sources, the questions introduced by Irving are of a different order: they concern not the manuscript found at the Independent Columbian Hotel but its author. One of Irving's twists on the discovered manuscript trope is to keep Knickerbocker alive. While it's true that the historian is a mysterious figure, and that no one knows where to find him, he remains in the picture. At the end of the preface, Handaside writes that if Knickerbocker "ever returns (though I much fear some unhappy accident has befallen him) I stand ready to account with him, like a true and honest man" (*H*, 376). Irving's other twist is to use this invented frame story for a

[20] Ibid., 109. For Trumpener's complete account of *Gaston de Blondeville* and *Imogen*, see 103-109.

book that is, most straightforwardly, a history, and not a romance or a historical fiction. Together, these two variations on an old literary convention have an odd effect. They turn the usual mix of fact and fiction evoked by a found document on its head.

Some readers heard about Knickerbocker and started to wonder about his fate even before the *History* was published in December of 1809. The ads that Handaside mentions in his "Account" did appear in the *New York Evening Post*, in October and November of that same year. Irving asked two of his friends, Henry Brevoort and James Kirke Paulding, to submit these notices to the newspaper under the name of the landlord, who was just as fictitious as the Independent Columbian Hotel.[21] The first ad described Knickerbocker's black coat and cocked hat and indicated that he was, perhaps, "not entirely in his right mind."[22] Irving and his friends went to great lengths to make readers of the *Evening Post* imagine that they might pass Knickerbocker in the street. Soon after the first notice was printed, either Brevoort or Paulding sent a letter to the editor of that newspaper, signed by "A Traveler." This traveler reported that a man fitting Knickerbocker's description had been "seen by the passengers of the Albany stage, early in the morning, about four or five weeks since, resting himself by the side of the road, a little above King's Bridge."[23] The man was holding a bundle tied up in a handkerchief, just like the one that Knickerbocker was carrying the last time Handaside saw him.

To be sure, the essential spirit of these ads and Handaside's "Account of the Author" is a playful one. But they share, too, a kind of slow-burning sadness, fueled by the sense that Knickerbocker may be gone for good. In the 1812 edition of the *History*, Irving added a new

[21] For a fuller discussion of these advertisements, see the most recent biography of Irving, Andrew Burstein, *The Original Knickerbocker: The Life of Washington Irving* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 70-73.
[22] "*From the Evening Post of October 26, 1809*. DISTRESSING," in Washington Irving, *A History of New York*, ed. Michael L. Black and Nancy B. Black, *The Complete Works of Washington Irving* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), 6.
[23] "*From the same, November 6, 1809. To the Editor of the Evening Post*," ibid., 6. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *HCW*.

section to Handaside's "Account of the Author," explaining where the old man had gone when the landlord was searching for him. The traveler who claimed to have seen Knickerbocker on the road to Albany was right: the historian had visited some Dutch villages along the Hudson River before heading to Albany. Somewhere along the way, he heard that his book had been published and wrote to Handaside, expressing "much concern at its premature appearance" (*HCW*, 12). But the success of the *History* still pleased him, and it gave him a chance to reunite with his family. From Albany, he continued on to their home, in Scaghtikoke, "where, it is but justice to say, he was received with open arms, and treated with wonderful loving-kindness. He was much looked up to by the family, being the first historian of the name" (*HCW,* 13). He eventually grew restless and returned to New York, where children would cry "'there goes Diedrich!'" when they spotted him in the street. (*HCW,* 13) Sometime before 1812, he caught a fever and became seriously ill. After dictating his parting words to his relatives, he died in the arms of his friend, the librarian.

Read in relation to the rest of the *History*, the most moving aspect of this added section might be its description of Knickerbocker's reunion with his family. This passage reminds us that the historian was not on speaking terms with his relatives when he composed the book. Yet in the *History*, he writes about his family with curiosity and affection. At the outset of one early chapter in the book, Knickerbocker discusses an episode from the life of his great-grandfather: "My great grandfather, by the mother's side, Hermanus Van Clattercop, when employed to build the large stone church at Rotterdam, which stands about three hundred yards to your left, after you turn off from the Boomkeys" (*H,* 447). He is so enthralled by the story of how his great-grandfather built this church that he has trouble finishing his sentences. And ultimately, these constant interruptions are part of the point of this episode. Hermanus Van Clattercop constructed the church very slowly. First, he bought some new pipes and smoked them for three months.

Then he left Rotterdam to visit Amsterdam and Delft for a while. After that, he walked in a circle for three more months around the spot where the church would someday stand. Knickerbocker explains that he has written his book in the same spirit that his great-grandfather built this church. He asks his readers to be patient if they were expecting to hear about Henry Hudson a little sooner.[24]

Amid the humor of this story, there is also a feeling of love, both for the details of this piece of family lore and for the man at its center. Separated from the other people who might remember how Van Clattercop built his church, and unsure of who might recall any of this a generation from now, Knickerbocker carves out a space in the *History* to record what he knows about his great-grandfather. In addition to being so many other things, *A History of New York* is Knickerbocker's statement of love for his family, and his attempt to keep some of that family's stories alive for a few more years. Still, there remains a nagging sense that something about Knickerbocker isn't to be found in these pages, at least not by us. He flickers into view – in the book; by the side of a road; embracing his relatives in Scaghtikoke – before he disappears again.

In the frame of the *History*, the discovery of a document leads to a search for its author. We might wonder, quite speculatively, if Irving's experiences researching the book caused him to envision this chain of events. At a few moments in the *History*, Knickerbocker acknowledges one of his sources, a manuscript written by someone named De Vries. His references to this manuscript are relegated to his footnotes: "'De Vries mentions a place where they over-haul their ships, which he calls *Smits Vleye*, there is still to this day a place in New York called by that

[24] It's in passages like this one, which deal comically with the challenge of starting to tell a story or write a book, that the influence of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* on *A History of New York* is felt most deeply: "It is so long since the reader of this rhapsodical work has been parted from the midwife, that is high time to mention her again to him, merely to put him in mind, that there is such a body still in the world, and whom, upon the best judgment I can form upon my own plan at present, — I am going to introduce to him for good and all." Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, ed. Howard Anderson (New York: Norton, 1980), 25.

name, where a market is built called the Fly market.' – Old MS" (*H*, 473). A reader might guess that De Vries's manuscript is about as real as Knickerbocker's cocked hat, or the Independent Columbian Hotel. But this was a document that Irving consulted. In October of 1809, Irving sent a letter to Brevoort from Philadelphia explaining why his book was still not finished: "I have been delayed in putting my work to press by some minute & curious facts which I found in a Mss in the Philad Library & which has obliged me to make alterations in the first vol. but tomorrow I begin – by God."[25]

In their introduction to a 1927 edition of the *History*, Stanley Williams and Tremaine McDowell speculated that the manuscript Irving found in Philadelphia could have been a copy of David Pietersz de Vries's *Korte Historiael ende Journaels*.[26] De Vries was a businessman who, during the middle decades of the seventeenth century, sailed several times from the Dutch town of Hoorn to New Netherland and the West Indies. He published his travel journal in 1655.[27] As far as we know, only one copy of de Vries's work existed in the U.S. at the turn of the nineteenth century: a transcription made some decades before by the Swiss-born artist and collector Pierre Eugène Du Simitière. Du Simitière spent twelve years collecting books, rocks, and plants in Holland before emigrating to America in 1769. In 1782, he opened the American Museum inside his home in Philadelphia; it was the city's first public museum. When he died two years later, his

[25] Washington Irving to Henry Brevoort, October 23, 1809, *Letters*, ed. Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert L. Kleinfeld and Jenifer S. Banks, vol. 1 (1802-1823), from *The Complete Works of Washington Irving* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 274.
[26] Williams and McDowell, "Introduction," in Irving, *Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York*, xxvi-xxvii.
[27] For several brief but insightful discussions of De Vries's life and *Korte Historiael ende Journaels*, see Donna Merwick, *The Shame and the Sorrow: Dutch-Amerindian Encounters in New Netherland* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 17, 111-13, and esp. 197-98.

collections were auctioned off, and the Library Company of Philadelphia purchased most of his manuscripts.[28] Among those documents was his copy of *Korte Historiael ende Journaels*.

That manuscript remains at the Library Company today.[29] It holds a few surprises. Du Simitière's transcription is written in ink, in a beautiful hand, and entirely in Dutch. The earliest pages of the manuscript are pristine, but soon, someone else's notes, made in pencil, start to surface in the margins. Lines of emphasis fill the right side of several pages, and, here and there, a year has been scrawled on the left. The first year marked down by this reader, "1636," shows up next to the words "Smits vleye" – the place-name that Knickerbocker says he discovered in De Vries's manuscript. Attributing these marginal notes to one author amounts to guesswork; there is hardly any writing to go by. But "1636" is written in a hand that could be Irving's. One of the most memorable characters in the *History* is Anthony Van Corlaer (misspelled by Irving as "Corlear"), who plays his trumpet at the fort of New Amsterdam during battles. With his large nose and "huge whiskers," and his dramatic confrontation with a Swedish drummer, Van Corlaer could come straight from the realm of legend (*H*, 526; 657). Yet Knickerbocker's first mention of him is followed by a footnote, explaining that proof of the trumpeter's existence can be found in De Vries's work (*H*, 526). Sure enough, "Corlaer de Trumpeter" does appear in the manuscript stored at the Library Company, his name highlighted by the same reader who penciled in a year next to "Smits vleye."

If these notes were added in pencil by Irving, then this manuscript is an artifact of how history was written in 1809. What might it tell us? For one thing, the scarcity of sources was not the only challenge that Irving encountered as he researched his book. Sometimes, it may not

[28] The best guide to Du Simitière's life and collecting practices, as well as to the history of the American Museum, is an exhibition catalog produced by the Library Company. Library Company of Philadelphia, *Pierre Eugène Du Simitière: His American Museum 200 Years After* (Philadelphia: Library Company, 1985).
[29] Extracts from David Pietersz De Vries' *Voyages*, 1655, Box 1, folders 3-5, Pierre Eugène Du Simitière Collection, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pa.

have been an issue for him at all. It is somewhat remarkable that Irving could hurry down to Philadelphia to see a manuscript copy of a seventeenth-century Dutch travel journal. But as the history of Du Simitière's transcription suggests, the availability of documents like this one was a relatively recent phenomenon. Twenty-five years earlier, Irving would have been out of luck. Now, he could scan this journal's lines for the words "Smits vleye" and "Corlaer de Trumpeter." As far as I can gather, though, Irving still knew next to nothing about who De Vries was. And the identity of the man who transcribed De Vries's work with such extraordinary care might have been invisible to him as well. Sitting at the Library Company in 1809, Irving could retrieve a manuscript like Du Simitière's copy of *Korte Historiael ende Journaels*. Yet the authors of such documents were probably out of his reach.

3. Writing Alone

Walking through the village of Cobham on a warm summer afternoon, Samuel Pickwick and Tracy Tupman see a "small broken stone" at the door of a cottage. [30] Pickwick pauses, falls to his knees before the stone, and begins to wipe the dirt and dust off it in a frenzy. Soon, he can make out a few letters inscribed on its surface: "'I can discern,' continued Mr Pickwick, rubbing away with all his might, and gazing intently through his spectacles: 'I can discern a cross, and a B, and then a T. This is important,' continued Mr Pickwick, starting up. 'This is some very old inscription, existing perhaps long before the ancient alms-houses in this place. It must not be lost'" (*P*, 147). Pickwick is an antiquary with a boundless curiosity. As he holds this stone in his hands, he believes he has made a major discovery, and he and Tupman convince the owner of the cottage to sell the stone to them for ten shillings. (The man appears baffled by the thought of selling the stone to anyone – "'Ah! But who'd buy it?'" – but Pickwick and Tupman suspect him

[30] Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, ed. Mark Wormald (London: Penguin, 1999), 147. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *P*.

of trying to drive up the price) (*P*, 147). After washing the stone and scraping away more dirt, they can read the entire inscription:

+
B I L S T
U M
P S H I
S. M.
A R K[31]

No one knows quite what to do with these letters, but that uncertainty only seems to confirm their importance. An artist's copy of the inscription is presented to the Royal Antiquarian Society. Pickwick publishes a pamphlet with twenty-seven different readings of the letters. Several men disinherit their sons for doubting that the inscription is truly ancient.

One member of the Pickwick Club, Blotton, returns to Cobham to learn more about the stone. There, he talks to the man who sold it to Pickwick and Tupman. And right away, that man explains that while the stone may be very old, the letters are not. They're just his signature: "'Bill Stumps, his mark'" (*P*, 157). Because Stumps rarely had reason to write and used the sounds of words to guide him when he did, he forgot the last "L" in his first name. In part, this episode is a parody of the *Ossian* controversy; Dickens writes that "the Pickwick controversy" was all anyone could talk about for a time (*P*, 158). Here, though, in place of a hoax, there is a man who carved his name onto a stone one day when he was bored.

The strange journey of Bill Stumps's stone is part of a larger arc in *The Pickwick Papers*. One of Dickens's recurring themes in *Pickwick* is that a piece of writing can end up anywhere and be read in all sort of ways once it leaves its author's hands. The characters in the novel are constantly turning over stones and finding manuscripts in inkstand drawers. Someone always seems to be taking out his notebook to write down what he just heard, whether it was a poem or a

[31] Ibid., 148.

description of a horse's personality. For a novel whose serial publication in 1836 and 1837 was a landmark event in the history of transatlantic print culture, *Pickwick* is remarkably full of handwritten texts. The book's full title, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, announces its source. The many chapters of the novel are drawn, supposedly, from the manuscript Transactions of the Pickwick Club. In the first chapter, four of the club's members form a Corresponding Society, and the following chapters document what these men see as they wander around England. Early on, Dickens's narrator keeps reminding us that his role is only that of an editor, and that everything we are reading comes from the records kept by the four protagonists: "The Pickwick papers are our New River Head; and we may be compared to the New River Company" (*P*, 58). As *Pickwick* goes on, this conceit begins to fade from view. Still, at almost every turn, the narrative is propelled by the discovery of other documents. The ubiquity of handwritten texts in *Pickwick* conjures, at one level, the way that readers in England and elsewhere encountered the novel itself – in small printed numbers that were wildly popular. Yet all the handwritten documents in the novel are more than metonyms. Dickens is thinking, too, about why certain manuscripts both old and new are chosen for preservation.

Our desires warp not just how we read texts but also how we classify them. Wanting so much for the inscription on the stone to be ancient, Pickwick and Tupman can't read the letters for what they say. And they can't ask Stumps the question that would change the nature of their discovery. Another variation on this problem appears later in the novel. Pickwick's landlady, Mrs. Bardell, begins to think that he wants to marry her. When he tells her that this was never his intention, she sues him for breach of promise. At the trial, her lawyer produces as evidence a small scrap of paper, which contains a brief message Pickwick once sent to Mrs. Bardell: "'Dear Mrs B. – Chops and Tomata sauce.'" (*P*, 454). The lawyer claims that this note is a love letter.

Its language, he argues, is "a mere cover for hidden fire – a mere substitute for some endearing word or promise" (*P*, 455). In court, "chops" and "tomata sauce" become plausible expressions of love, just as, in antiquarian circles, Bill Stumps's mark became the subject of many learned debates. On one hand, these are ordinary documents that have ended up in the wrong place. But on the other, the stone and the letter didn't cross into these new contexts by accident. To Pickwick and Tupman, the stone looked extraordinary: "'It must not be lost.'" And Mrs. Bardell saw her lodger's note in much the same way.[32]

The papers of the Pickwick Club are posthumous because, at the novel's end, Pickwick decides to dissolve the association. This is a time of joy for Pickwick and his friends; we last see Pickwick "in one of those moments of unmixed happiness" (*P*, 752). But, at an earlier stage in the novel, Dickens introduces a rather different case of posthumousness. Before Pickwick leaves for Cobham, an old clergyman stops him and gives him a document composed by someone he never knew: "'I found it on the death of a friend of mine – a medical man, engaged in our County Lunatic Asylum – among a variety of papers, which I had the option of destroying or preserving, as I thought proper'" (*P*, 144-5). The manuscript that the clergyman shares with Pickwick was written by one of the doctor's patients. On the day that Pickwick discovers the stone, the excitement of that afternoon keeps him awake at night, and he takes this manuscript out of his coat pocket: "It was a strange hand-writing, and the paper was much soiled and blotted. The title gave him a sudden start, too" (*P*, 149).

The title of this document is "A Madman's Manuscript," and we read it with Pickwick. It tells the unremittingly bleak Gothic tale of a man slowly losing his mind. Near the end of the

[32] For a terrific reading of both Pickwick's "Chops and Tomata sauce" note and a valentine written by his servant, Sam Weller, see J. Hillis Miller, "Sam Weller's Valentine," in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93-122.

account, the man describes the last thing he remembers before waking up at the asylum: "'I was borne upon the arms of demons who swept along upon the wind, and bore down bank and hedge before them, and spun me round and round with a rustle and a speed that made my head swim, until at last they threw me from them with a violent shock'" (*P*, 155). On the last page of the manuscript, someone (perhaps the clergyman's doctor friend) has added a few comments about this man's diagnosis. The author suffered first from the conviction that madness ran in his family, and that belief "produced a settled gloom, which in time developed a morbid insanity, and finally terminated in raving madness" (*P*, 156). The "Madman's Manuscript" sits uneasily within the pages of *Pickwick*. The tale interrupts the comic saga of Bill Stumps's stone with a headlong rush of words and a different intensity of feeling. Amanda Claybaugh has argued persuasively that Dickens used this tale and the other eight stand-alone stories sprinkled through *Pickwick* to learn how to write a social novel on the job.[33] It is striking, though, that the manuscript is dropped from the narrative as soon as Pickwick has finished reading it. His light flickers out, and he falls asleep.[34] Something about the anguish of the madman's confessions, and the elaborate sequence of steps that carried those confessions to Pickwick in his room in Cobham, exceeds the novel's bounds.

"A Madman's Manuscript" seems to me to be a clue to understanding the profusion of handwritten texts in so much fiction of the mid-nineteenth century. Stumps's stone and Pickwick's message are texts remade by the people who read them. In both those episodes,

[33] "Gothic in mode, the early tales take up topics (crime, poverty, madness, disease) that herald Dickens's growing commitment to verisimilitude. And in doing so, they reveal that the picaresque main plot, with all its freedom and joy, depends on the denial of troubling social facts." Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 65.

[34] In his essay on *Pickwick*, W.H. Auden discusses the role of the interpolated tales and notices how swiftly Dickens's protagonist moves on from them. Auden suggests that these tales all have, for Pickwick, the status of literature, and "To Pickwick … literature and life are separate universes; evil and suffering do not exist in the world he perceives with his senses, only in the world of entertaining fiction." Auden, "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), 418.

though, we see the other side of the story; we learn what Stumps and Pickwick meant to say. But the author of the "Madman's Manuscript" remains a mystery to us, and so do this author's reasons for producing such a tormented record of his life. In the novel, no one who comes across this document discards it or forgets about it. The author of the note on its final page values it as a case history, the clergyman selects it for preservation, and Pickwick stays up reading it in the middle of the night. This fictitious manuscript is characteristic of a time when many real letters and journals began to be saved and read by people with no connection to their authors. As I emphasized in the first section of this chapter, the papers of literary authors met this fate in the nineteenth century far more often than they had before. Yet manuscripts of all kinds were swept up in the tide of preservation. And these papers could end up in a hospital's files or a church's archives as easily as in a library's collection.

Although "A Madman's Manuscript" is, in many senses, a conventional Gothic tale, it also might remind us of the work of one American author: Poe. When the early numbers of *The Pickwick Papers* were published by Carey, Lea and Blanchard in the U.S., in the fall of 1836, Poe reviewed them for the *Southern Literary Messenger*. After praising Dickens's "general powers as a prose writer," he decided to reprint the final paragraphs of "A Madman's Manuscript" instead of saying much further. [35] He set the scene for the excerpt: "The writer is supposed to be an hereditary madman, and to have labored under the disease for many years, but to have been conscious of his condition, and thus, by a strong effort of the will, to have preserved his secret from the eye of even his most intimate friends."[36] As his summary of the tale suggests, it's very likely that Poe was attracted to it for its treatment of madness. But as often as Poe

[35] Edgar Allan Poe, review of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, November 1836, in *Essays and Reviews*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 207.
[36] Ibid.

returned to that theme in his own work, he was preoccupied, too, with the paths by which manuscript writings were transmitted and made public.

This concern is even mentioned in the title of one of Poe's earliest stories, "MS. Found in a Bottle." That tale first appeared in the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* in June of 1833, when it won the paper's fiction contest. The story's narrator survives a shipwreck and takes refuge on another ship that seems, at first, to be abandoned. As it turns out, there are passengers on this second ship, but they are unable to see the narrator. Soon, he starts to wonder if these other men are ghosts. Fearing that his life will end on the ship, the narrator starts to keep a journal: "It is true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavor. At the last moment I will enclose the MS. in a bottle, and cast it within the sea."[37] This was a favorite device of Poe's. In "The Balloon Hoax," two adventurers drop a message in a bottle into the Atlantic as they cross over it in a balloon. And at the beginning of "Mellonta Tauta" – a tale that was first published in *Godey's Lady Book* in 1849 – Poe explained that the work was his friend's translation "of an odd-looking MS which I found, about a year ago, tightly corked up in a jug floating in the *Mare Tenebrarum*."[38] When the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" describes his plan to cast his journal out to sea in the last seconds of his life, we are drawn closer to his experience of growing horror. At the tale's conclusion, the crew steers the ship into a whirlpool instead of turning away from it: "we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool – and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering – oh God! and – going down!"[39] The story ends here, but we imagine the narrator sealing these pages quickly in a bottle and watching them float away.

[37] Edgar Allan Poe, "MS. Found in a Bottle," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. II: *Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), 142.
[38] Poe, "Mellonta Tauta," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. III, ed. Mabbott, 1291.
[39] Poe, "MS. Found in a Bottle," 146.

If you place your writings in a bottle, you want them to find a reader. And though you may have one reader in mind, you have to hope, first, that your words will reach anyone at all. In this sense, the scenario at the heart of Poe's tale sounds a lot like submitting a work for publication. Unlike the confessions unearthed from the doctor's papers in *Pickwick* or the bundle left on the floor in *A History of New York*, the journal in "MS. Found in a Bottle" is circulated by its author. But at the same time, the publication and circulation of this manuscript can only happen once the narrator has died, or, at least, disappeared into the whirlpool. In the *History*, the discovery of a manuscript is part of a search for a missing person. In Poe's story, a bottle that washed ashore somewhere holds the writings of someone who is already gone.

Authors and papers get lost and found all the time in Poe's fiction. Often, though, writers seem to vanish in this shuffle, sometimes just before their manuscripts appear. "MS. Found in a Bottle" was a test run of sorts for *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), Poe's only novel and another account of a troubled voyage. Pym, though, survives his voyage. As he tells us in the preface to the book, Pym decided to write a full narrative of his Antarctic expedition ten years after his return to America, at the encouragement of his friend, Edgar Allan Poe.[40] But the narrative concludes in the most unresolved of ways. When Pym and another sailor, Dirk Peters, attempt to flee the island of Tsalal with a captive, a man named Nu-Nu, their boat is engulfed in whiteness. In the last sentence of the narrative, they encounter a figure with skin "the perfect whiteness of the snow."[41] A note at the end of the novel explains that Pym died, in an unnamed

[40] The narrative frame for the novel is even more elaborate than this. In the preface, Pym explains that when he declined at first to produce a record of his experiences, Poe – whom Pym met in Richmond – wrote his own description of his friend's voyage and published it in the *Southern Literary Messenger* (where two early versions of the novel did, in fact, appear in 1837). For an excellent account of the importance and slipperiness of textual reliability in *Pym*, see Lisa Gitelman, "Arthur Gordon Pym and the Novel Narrative of Edgar Allan Poe," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47, no. 3 (1992): 349-361.

[41] Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, in *Poetry and Tales*, ed. Patrick F. Quinn (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1179. Toni Morrison's enormously influential reading of this scene presents it as an exemplary moment in American literature – one of many episodes in which the presence of a black person (here, Nu-Nu) is

accident, while he was revising the final part of the narrative. The final chapters of the work were lost with Pym in this accident. Where this afterword tells of losses heaped upon losses, the introduction to one of Poe's less well-known stories, *The Journal of Julius Rodman* (1840), heralds a discovery. As Rodman crossed the Rocky Mountains, he kept a journal. That volume was later mislaid in transit when another explorer asked to see it. After Rodman died, though, his family found the same diary "in a secret drawer of a bureau which had belonged to Mr. Julius R."[42] Rodman's death was, it seems, a precondition for the circulation of his writings. In this respect, he resembles the author casting his words out into the ocean in Poe's earlier tale. Still, there is no proof here that Rodman ever wanted his journal to reach a broader audience

Such moments from Poe's fiction begin to form a picture of authorship in the 1830s and '40s, and the scenes from *Pickwick* fill in that picture further. Together, these episodes lend ballast to one of the most nuanced recent accounts of authorship in antebellum America, Leon Jackson's *The Business of Letters*.[43] They also help us add new layers to Jackson's insights. Following the lead of William Charvat, several generations of literary historians thought of authorship in individual terms. These scholars tried to track when certain writers began to make a living from their work.[44] Jackson's study, though, presents authorship as an intensely social practice. He looks not at one economic measure – professionalism – but at all the economies that writers participated in, from bartering and gift exchange to patronage and emulation. There's one more turn in Jackson's argument. He suggests that over time, during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the life and work of an author became less embedded in social relationships

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mediated by "images of blinding whiteness." Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 33.

[42] Poe, "The Journal of Julius Rodman," in *Poetry and Tales*, ed. Quinn, 1189.

[43] Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[44] See William Charvat, *Literary Publishing in America: 1790-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959) and *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968).

and economies: "Modes of literary production became less personal and more mediated. The business of letters became less intimate and more fleeting."[45]

The manuscripts that appear in *Pickwick* and in Poe's tales are disembedded, too, though not in quite the same sense that Jackson has in mind. Some of these documents, like Pickwick's note to Mrs. Bardell, were written as part of an exchange, while others, like Rodman's journal, were probably not meant for another reader's eyes. But all these texts have drifted away from their authors. Looking for signs of a transition from embedded to disembedded authorial economies, Jackson points to moments when writers and publishers described literary works only in commercial terms. He finds a poet, in the 1820s, calling each of his poems a "'five dollar inspiration,'" and an editor, in the 1830s, asking an author to write him "'about twenty-five dollars' worth of Literature.'"[46] Although prices aren't attached to Stumps's stone or the madman's manuscript by their readers, other forms of value are, from antiquarian to medical knowledge.

Here is one more version of this story, related, this time, to some of Poe's own manuscripts. During the last weeks of his life, in the fall of 1849, Poe left Richmond by steamboat, heading towards New York. He made it to Baltimore, where he then disappeared for a few days before being spotted at the back of a tavern, feverish, drunk, and wearing what seemed to be another man's clothes. Some of the men at the tavern carried him to a nearby hospital. He died there less than a week later, at the age of forty.[47] Amid her grief over Poe's death, his aunt, Maria Clemm, made the somewhat odd choice to sell his papers to his literary rival, Rufus Griswold – a man who claimed, in his obituary of Poe, that the late writer had had "*few or no*

[45] Jackson, *The Business of Letters*, 48.
[46] Ibid., 49. The poet mentioned above is Nathaniel P. Willis, whose sister was Fanny Fern; the editor and author are Louis Godey and Robert Montgomery Bird.
[47] For a vivid chronicle of the last weeks of Poe's life, see Peter Ackroyd, *Poe: A Life Cut Short* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2008), esp. 1-5.

friends."[48] Poe spent much of his adult life hungry and desperate for money, and his aunt was just scraping by, too, when he died.[49] She needed whatever she could gain from the sale of her nephew's papers. Griswold, though, turned out to be a disastrously bad executor. When he published a three-volume edition of Poe's writings in 1850, he made significant changes to the author's letters and even invented a few from whole cloth. In one of those forged letters, Poe asks Griswold, "Can you not send me $5?".[50]

Griswold did less to distort Poe's fiction and poetry, but he and his family were still imperfect guardians of Poe's literary manuscripts. Among Poe's papers was a fragment of a tale, unsigned and untitled, and written, in a neat hand, on four long, narrow leaves. The unfinished tale took the form of a lighthouse-keeper's journal: "*Jan 1 – 1796*. This day – my first on the light-house – I make this entry in my Diary."[51] But for his dog, Neptune, the narrator is alone in the lighthouse. His solitude gives him comfort while also terrifying him: "Besides, I wish to be *alone*…… It is strange that I never observed, until this moment, how dreary a sound that word has – 'alone'!"[52] Thomas Ollive Mabbott, the twentieth-century editor of Poe's writings, has speculated that Poe was still working on this story at the time of his death. The careful, clear handwriting is typical of the author's final years, and so is the tale's unornamented style.[53] For more than a century after Poe's death, however, hardly anyone saw these four pages together. In 1896, Griswold's son sold the first of the story's four pages. By 1924, that first page was back on the market, as part of the sale of Stephen H. Wakeman's collection of nineteenth-century literary

[48] Ibid., 190.
[49] On Poe's poverty and its relationship to his literary production, see Jill Lepore, "The Humbug," *The New Yorker*, April 27, 2009. See Ackroyd, esp. 190-191, for a discussion of Maria Clemm's financial circumstances after Poe's death.
[50] The editors of the twentieth-century edition of Poe's letters deemed this note, supposedly sent by Poe to Griswold on June 11, 1843, a forgery. John Ward Ostrom, "Letters: Notes to Letters 1-173," *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. II: *1846-1849*, ed. Ostrom (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), 491.
[51] Poe, "The Light-House," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. III, ed. Mabbott, 1390.
[52] Ibid., 1390-1391.
[53] Ibid., 1389.

manuscripts. The auction catalogue described this single leaf as "a Poe manuscript of a most unusual character," and started the bidding for it at $210.[54] It wasn't until the 1970s that Mabbott recovered this page from the New York Public Library and the next three leaves from the Houghton Library, at Harvard. He pieced them together to form a tale that he published as "The Light-House." In "MS. Found in a Bottle," Poe imagines a document alone in the world. Though the narrative frame of a message in a bottle was a literary device for Poe, it was also a portent for him and for other authors of his era. The pages of "The Light-House" were not lost, and they were valued by the people who possessed them – though not, exactly, as literature. Still, for many years, no one could quite see these pages for what they were.

Coda: Separation and Reunion

When Pierre Irving opened his uncle's desk drawer in 1859, he came across two things: the manuscript that I described at the beginning of this chapter and a separate case, which held a miniature portrait and a lock of hair. This braid had belonged to Washington Irving's friend Matilda Hoffman; a label slipped inside the case and written in Irving's hand explained just that. Pierre longed to know why his uncle had never married. When Irving's manuscript failed to give him a clear answer, he chose to find one instead in the miniature and the lock of hair. In *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving* (1862), Pierre suggested that his uncle never fully moved past the devastation of Matilda's death. She was "the destined sharer of his lot in life."[55] He printed only the passages from Irving's "Private Mems." that had to do with her.

Pierre's biography of his uncle bears a resemblance to a book written ten years after it, a book that reads like a fever dream of manuscript recovery: Caroline Dall's *The Romance of the*

[54] *The Stephen H. Wakeman Collection of Books of Nineteenth Century American Writers*, American Art Association, New York, April 29, 1924, no. 964.
[55] Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. 1, 182. See 183 for Pierre's description of the case's contents: "With these private memoranda was found a miniature of great beauty, enclosed in a case, and in it a braid of fair hair, and a slip of paper, on which was written in his own handwriting, 'Matilda Hoffman.'"

Association (1875). Dall was a Boston writer, reformer, and lecturer who helped to found the American Social Science Association in 1867.[56] While that group is the "Association" named in her book's title, it plays second fiddle in the text to another of her passions. The central narrative of *The Romance* involves Dall's efforts to learn about the end of Elizabeth Whitman's life. Whitman was a poet in Revolutionary-era Connecticut who died in a tavern outside Boston, in 1788, after delivering a stillborn child. Her life quickly became the basis for two novels, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797). At the turn of the nineteenth century and for many years after that, readers often knew that Whitman was the inspiration for Foster's heroine, Eliza Wharton. Some of these readers traveled to visit Whitman's grave, in Danvers, Massachusetts – the town where she died.[57]

The Romance of the Association is a surpassingly strange book. It is at once a history of both Whitman's family and Dall's, a life-and-letters biography of Whitman and her circle of friends, and a work of speculative fiction. Dall's journey in the book begins in Middleton, Massachusetts, where she goes to see if any records survive of her grandmother's childhood. By the time that Dall arrives in Middleton, her own mother has died, too. As she places her hand on an old register in the town hall, she starts to cry: "I stood there dreaming, my cheeks wet and a soft mist over all the distance, when the harsh voice of the old clerk jarred upon my ear. 'They burnt up the records, -- some of the folks at the Hall. Perhaps you'll find 'em at Danvers.'"[58] When Dall read *The Coquette* as a child, her grandmother told her that Whitman, in crucial

[56] For general background on Dall's life and her political efforts, see Howard M. Wach, "A Boston Vindication: Margaret Fuller and Caroline Dall Read Mary Wollstonecraft," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 7 (2005), 3-35. For a useful overview of Dall's own journals, see Helen R. Deese, "Alcott's Conversations on the Transcendentalists: The Record of Caroline Dall," *American Literature* 60, no. 1 (1988): 17-25.
[57] Bryan Waterman, "Coquetry and Correspondence in Revolutionary-Era Connecticut: Reading Elizabeth Whitman's Letters," *Early American Literature* 46, no. 3 (2011): 541-563 and Waterman, "The Letters of Elizabeth Whitman to Joel and Ruth Barlow, 1779-1783," *Early American Literature* 46, no. 3 (2011): 565-600.
[58] Mrs. Dall [Caroline Dall], *The Romance of the Association; or, One Last Glimpse of Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton* (Cambridge: John Wilson, 1875), 36. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *RA*.

contrast to Eliza Wharton, was married when she died. Now, as Dall travels through the towns where her grandmother grew up, she becomes obsessed with finding proof of this claim. One woman whom she meets in Danvers is the daughter of a past owner of the Bell Tavern: "'Not while Eliza Wharton was in it?' I cried breathlessly" (*RA*, 37).[59] Dall refers to Whitman as "Eliza Wharton" throughout the book – partly to conceal Whitman's identity, but also, it seems, because she can't or won't tear the person and the character apart.

The climax of the narrative comes on an off day during the Association's 1873 annual meeting in Portland, Maine. Having heard that a woman who lives outside of town has a valuable collection of papers, Dall stops by her house. When she realizes that she cannot read all the manuscripts in one night, she asks their owner to loan them to her. Back in Boston, she starts to sift through these documents and notices that one pile is "labelled 'Bessie Wharton's Letters,' in the handwriting of Joel Barlow" (*RA*, 41). Barlow and his wife, Ruth, were close friends of Whitman's in Connecticut. For Dall, seeing these names on this label is an ecstatic experience: "I wonder if there be among all my readers one young girl, interested to lift a cloud from some dead name, who can understand the thrill with which I took these papers into my hands?" (*RA*, 41). The rest of the book is devoted mostly to these letters, which Whitman exchanged with the Barlows several years before her death. The first and second sections of *The Romance* are called "Separation" and "Reunion." Although these titles seem to allude to the Civil War and its aftermath, topics treated obliquely by Dall, they evoke perhaps more directly her great desire to hold some artifact of Whitman's life in her hands. It's in "Reunion" that Dall comes across

[59] At one point in his lovely reading of Dall's book, Christopher Castiglia observes that the people Dall's narrator meets along her travels through New England "have all, in various ways, resisted conventional social arrangements." These men and women are brought together by Dall to form what is essentially a new community of friends for Elizabeth Whitman. Castiglia, *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 58.

"'Bessie Wharton's Letters'" and wonders if, somewhere, there is a young girl who also wants "to lift a cloud from some dead name."

Recently, Bryan Waterman tracked down the original manuscript versions of these letters: the papers that Dall supposedly found in a pile. He discovered that Dall made significant changes to Whitman's notes before she printed them. She cut sentences that hinted at Whitman's flirtatiousness and, in one case, added whole paragraphs that are absent from the manuscripts. [60] As Dall acknowledges in *The Romance*, she borrowed these documents from their owner, Ruth Bomford Paine, whose aunt was Ruth Barlow. For about a decade, Paine asked Dall repeatedly to return the papers to her, but Dall kept thinking of new ways to delay giving them up. There is a chance, Waterman suggests, that she kept a few of the letters for herself when she finally sent the others back.

In *The Romance,* Dall confesses that she was heartbroken when she came to the last letter in the pile. These pages had already changed her life by the time she finished reading them, but she wanted to change how people remembered Whitman's life, too. And the letters had all been written long before Whitman might have been married: "When I had done reading, I laid my head down upon my hands, and wondered seriously whether I should ever discover the secret of this unuttered life" (*RA*, 42). Picture Dall in Boston, sometime in the early 1880s. Each time she hears from Paine, she stalls, hoping, maybe, that she won't write again. The letters that she borrowed from Paine brought her up short, so much so that she wrote a book about them. But like Pierre Irving reading his uncle's manuscript or Samuel Pickwick squinting at the stone, she keeps wishing that these letters would reveal more to her. So instead of letting go of them, she waits

[60] Waterman, "The Letters of Elizabeth Whitman," 565-566.

Chapter 3: Three Secrets and a Lie

In the spring of 1779, the Continental Congress stopped answering Thomas Paine's letters. On March 19, he asked for copies of all the "proceedings respecting me from January 2d to January 16th," but he never heard back from anyone.[1] On March 30, he wrote again: "Were I asking a favor I should address my language accordingly, but my application being a *matter of right*, I cannot discredit the latter by giving it the disguise of the former."[2] March turned to April, and Paine grew more impatient. He knew the men who must have been reading his notes; they met near where he lived, in Philadelphia. He began to wonder if his messages, or Congress's messages, had somehow gone missing in transit. But his friend Benjamin Thomson, the Secretary of Congress, told him otherwise: "On inquiring yesterday of Mr Thomson, your Secretary, I find that no answer is given to any of my letters."[3] Paine sent what seems to have been his final note on June 17. By this time, Congress had started to publish its weekly journals, and that led to a strange experience for Paine: he read about the fate of his unanswered letters. At the end of May, he learned, they had all been referred to a committee for further review. He was fed up: "I find it impossible in me to put up any longer with such treatment."[4]

Paine's troubles all began with a revelation. Until the first week of 1779, he wasn't sending letters to Congress, because he was working there, as Secretary of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. In the middle of that winter, though, he came to suspect that Silas Deane, an American agent in France, was trying to profit from the ongoing war. Over the past year, the French government had secretly aided the United States by sending supplies. Now Deane was

[1] Thomas Paine, "To the Honorable Congress of the United States," March 30, 1779, from *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner, vol. 2 (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), 1170.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Paine, "To the Continental Congress," April 23, 1779, ibid., 1175.
[4] Paine, "To the Honorable Congress of the United States," June 17, 1779, ibid., 1177.

asking Congress for the money that he claimed it owed to France. Yet Paine was sure that these supplies had been meant as a gift. In December 1778 and January 1779, he wrote a series of fiery essays for the *Pennsylvania Packet* attacking Deane's actions. There was "a premeditated baseness lurking somewhere" in the American government, and he was desperate to root it out.[5] Paine addressed some of his essays to Deane, but his most important readers were "the People of America," and he kept nothing hidden from them.[6] In his essays, he revealed secret information that had been entrusted to him as a congressional official. On January 6, Paine was forced to resign from his office. Two days later, in the first of his many unanswered letters to Congress, he confessed that he couldn't see what he had done wrong: "I have betrayed no trust because I have constantly employed that trust to the public good. I have revealed no secrets because I have told nothing that was, or I conceive ought to be a secret."[7] Almost three years to the date before this, *Common Sense* had been published. But now, Paine couldn't sway most of his readers, at least the ones who might change his circumstances. He would never work for the American government again.

Strictly speaking, classified information is a twentieth-century invention. Yet ever since the Revolution, Presidents, Senators, and clerks have marked documents as "secret," "protected," or, most often of all, "confidential." In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these officials worried about where these papers would be safe, and at least a few people without government jobs wanted desperately to know what they said. Some people, too, both inside and outside the government, took it upon themselves to share these documents with the public. Paine's initial defense of his actions sounds like a statement we might hear today, and that's partly because it has a hitch. The things that a government keeps secret aren't always the same as the things that

[5] Paine, "To the Public," *Pennsylvania Packet*, December 29, 1778, ibid., 109.
[6] Paine, "To the People of America," *Pennsylvania Packet*, January 23, 1779, ibid., 141.
[7] Paine, "To the Congress of the United States," January 8, 1779, ibid., 1160.

ought to be secret. And any two people might disagree about what belongs in the second category. The uncertainties inherent to classified documents, and the costs that come with both protecting and releasing information, have been with us for a long time. In this chapter, I return to some of the earliest moments when American politicians and ordinary people weighed these dilemmas. My reasons for doing so, and my questions about the past, have been shaped, in part, by the events of the last few years. If secrets are the government's drumbeat, then, lately, that drumbeat has been getting louder. There have been major leaks of military and intelligence materials and drawn-out, consequential debates about a private e-mail server. Now, during Donald Trump's Presidency, secret memos and dossiers seem to be everywhere at once, in rumors and in BuzzFeed articles.[8]

In a superb recent essay, Beverly Gage tries to explain how things got to this point. The current administration, she writes, "has helped show how confusing and how politicized classification can be."[9] Gage emphasizes, though, that politicians, journalists, academics, and government employees have been worrying about the ambiguities and excesses of the modern classification system since it was established by Harry Truman in 1951. When Daniel Patrick Moynihan chaired a senatorial Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy, in 1997, he and the other members of his committee were alarmed by what they found. "It is time for a new way of thinking about secrecy," Moynihan declared in the first sentence of the commission's official report.[10] As he saw it, classification was a form of regulation, and the American government had opted for overregulation at every turn. This problem was baked into

[8] Ken Bensinger, Miriam Elder, and Mark Schoofs, "These Reports Allege Trump Has Deep Ties to Russia," *BuzzFeed News*, January 10, 2017: https://www.buzzfeed.com/kenbensinger/these-reports-allege-trump-has-deep-ties-to-russia

[9] Beverly Gage, "The Strange Politics of 'Classified' Information," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 22, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/magazine/the-strange-politics-of-classified-information.html

[10] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy*, 105th Cong., 1st sess., 1997. Y 1.1/3:105-2, xxi.

the classification system from the beginning, and it often resulted in baffling choices. Drawing upon the research of Sam Lebovic, Gage describes how, in the 1950s, the Labor Department "refused to say how much peanut butter the Army had purchased, for fear that enemy number-crunchers might figure out the size of the armed forces" – a number that was readily available elsewhere.[11] This tendency to protect all sorts of information added up over the years. In 1997, Moynihan's commission estimated that 1.5 billion records were currently secret; some of them were a quarter of a century old. Moynihan proposed that government agencies should attend to the "life cycle of secrets": a document that needs to be protected for a month shouldn't remain classified for a decade.[12] And he implored officials to deliberate more, in the first place, before labeling anything "Top Secret," "Secret," or "Confidential." While he hoped that his findings might inspire a sea change, the habit of secrecy wasn't going anywhere. In 2014, Gage reports, the government classified 77.5 million individual documents.

Some of the consequences of this phenomenon are all too familiar, but others are unknowable. Peter Galison has argued that we may not fully grasp the magnitude of the knowledge withheld or redacted by the American government since World War II. There's a "classified universe" and an unclassified one.[13] The first universe, Galison suggests, is probably far larger than the second, though we can only hazard vague guesses about its size. Galison stresses that secrecy, on this scale, doesn't happen casually; it requires lots of money and just as much labor. Original Classifiers – the government employees responsible for identifying which documents to protect – are often fumbling in the dark, too. Because these men and women can't talk about their work with colleagues from other departments or agencies, Galison writes, "each

[11] Gage, "The Strange Politics of 'Classified' Information."
[12] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the Commission*, xxiv.
[13] Peter Galison, "Removing Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 229-243; quot. 229. For Galison, the era of modern classification begins not in 1951, with Truman's executive order, but in 1946, with the Atomic Energy Act – "the founding document of modern secrecy." Ibid., 234.

isolated branch forms its own routines of hiding."[14] In Gage's essay, she asks Matthew Connelly, the author of a forthcoming history of classified information, whether anything has changed during Trump's Presidency. "'What's new,'" Connelly answers, "'is the volume and the sensitivity of what's being leaked and the fact that that at least some of these leaks seem intended to show Trump is unfit to be president.'"[15] All these leaked memos and caches of documents are reminders of how much is still hidden. Reading them is like touching the surface of something vast.[16]

Over the rest of this chapter, I look back at a time when the number of confidential documents could have been counted, or at least estimated. And I see two features of protected information starting to emerge during this era, features that had already hardened into problems by the nineteenth century. To begin with, the content of a secret document can sometimes matter less than the fact of its confidentiality. Confidential papers have the power to distract their readers from what's happening just outside these texts. Politicians often do their work on the edge of secrets, by accusing someone of having disclosed sensitive information or making previously confidential material public. In the first and third sections of this chapter, I write about politicians like Deane and James Madison, who seized upon this chance, along with two other men, Paine and a onetime British spy named John Henry, who got lost in the drama of secrecy. At the same time, secrecy's inertia is hard to reverse. It's easier to hide information without much deliberation than it is to make careful choices about what should and shouldn't be concealed. The consequences of this condition were plain to see for the men at the center of my

[14] Ibid., 238.
[15] Gage, "The Strange Politics of 'Classified' Information."
[16] For a great recent study of the leak as a genre, see Michael Dango, "Leaks: A Genre," *Post45* (November 17, 2017). Dango specifically explores "the development of conventions and norms around what a leak is and how to read it — and the conditions that have made it possible for a public to know what a leak is about and how they ought to feel about it before even reading a word of the documents it covers" – two questions that I could take up more directly in this chapter.

second and fourth sections: the Pennsylvania Senator William Maclay and the Pequot writer and minister William Apess.

The First Secret

When John Folger testified before some members of Congress at the start of 1778, none of his questioners knew much about him. So he told them everything, about why he had found himself in Paris the summer before and how his life had been thrown into chaos by five sealed envelopes and a lot of blank paper.[17] In the summer of 1775, Folger left his home in Nantucket and began a rambling journey. He made his way to England, where he joined a whaling voyage bound for Brazil; he ended up instead in the Falkland Islands before returning to Europe and heading toward Paris. When he got there, he looked up his distant relative, Benjamin Franklin. Folger now wanted to go back to America, and he needed a boat to take him there. After a few false starts, Franklin found him one: a sloop named *Benjamin*.

As the captain of the *Benjamin*, Folger also joined a covert mission. His task was to transport five packets from a port in Le Havre to Congress. At a boarding house in Le Havre, he received the envelopes from a messenger and locked them in a trunk, never thinking to open one packet labeled "Dispatches." On the *Benjamin*, he stashed the envelopes in a canvas bag and filled it with iron weights, so that the papers would sink if something happened to him and the boat. Here and there, he confided to members of his crew about the packets, and, earlier, he'd told one of the other lodgers at the boarding house, Captain Hynson, about them. But what was the harm of mentioning his mission to a few people if Folger watched the envelopes all day and slept beside them at night? The *Benjamin* came ashore in Wilmington, North Carolina, and, from there, Folger traveled by coach toward New Bern, to meet the Governor, Richard Caswell. As

[17] Folger's testimony before Congress – the source of all the details mentioned in the next two paragraphs – comes from *The Silas Deane Papers…1774-1790*, in *Collections of the New York Historical Society*, v. 20 (New York: New York Historical Society, 1887), 315-22.

the two men began to unseal the five packets, they discovered that the one marked "Dispatches" held nothing but blank paper. That didn't seem right to Caswell, and it made no sense to Folger, who had been sure that these dispatches were confidential and urgent. With a premonition of worse news to come, Folger completed his mission. He left New Bern for York, Pennsylvania, to deliver the messages – or whatever they were – to Congress. Soon after he arrived there, he was asked to explain who he was and to recount everything that he'd done, because no one in York was waiting for blank paper. Folger had been tricked; the dispatches had been stolen.

Paine tells Folger's story in one of his essays about the actions of Silas Deane. For a year, no one who knew about the theft said or wrote much about it in public. All that time, Paine saw how the fate of Folger's missing dispatches was linked to his own predicament. Then he pulled the curtain back. Still, that decision didn't come easily to him. Along with his supporters and critics, Paine was making up the rules for guarding and disclosing government secrets as he went. Before we get to the secrets that he made public – about Deane, Folger, and France – we might step back first to look at all the pressures behind his choice.

It seemed possible to Paine in 1778 that the fortunes of a revolution could turn on a few pieces of paper. There were plenty of reasons for him to believe that. As the war unfolded, secret plans and messages, written by both patriots and loyalists, traveled over land and across an ocean in people's pockets and shoes. Some of these manuscripts were stolen from trunks or intercepted in the woods. When Paine decided to tell the readers of the *Pennsylvania Packet* what he had learned from the confidential papers of Congress, he did so in the thick of these other revelations. In the fall of 1777, Jacob Duché, who had once been the chaplain to the Continental Congress, sent George Washington a letter urging him to abandon the war. Because Duché had just been imprisoned in Philadelphia by the British army, he asked a member of his congregation,

Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson, to act as his messenger. Fergusson, a poet and an ardent supporter of the Revolution, might have agreed to this scheme knowing it would backfire. If that was her hunch, she wasn't wrong. Even though Duché wanted the letter to stay between him and its only reader, Washington sent it right away to Congress.[18] And Congress released the note, in turn, to a New York newspaper, the *Royal Gazette*. Later, and more famously, John André was crossing through the woods near Tarrytown, New York, in the summer of 1780, when he was stopped by three patriots. The men wondered if André was hiding something valuable. Inside his boots, they found a bunch of letters from Benedict Arnold, concerning Arnold's secret negotiations with the British.[19]

The public exchange between Paine and Deane was so much of its moment that it began with a heated debate about missing papers. On December 5, 1778, a few months after he returned to America from France, Deane wrote to the American people about his time abroad as a diplomat. This open letter appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, and it celebrated, in equal parts, France's support of the Revolution and Deane's role in securing that aid. In one quick aside, Deane mentioned that his papers from his commission in Paris were still there; for fear of losing them, he hadn't brought them with him to Philadelphia: "And having placed my papers and yours, in safety, I left Paris the 30th [of March], to embark for my native country."[20] To Paine, this sentence was pretty much a confession of guilt. When he first responded to Deane in the *Packet*, on December 15, he burrowed into this detail, asking his readers to imagine what Deane might be hiding: "Would anybody have supposed that a gentleman in the character of a

[18] Carl Van Doren, *Secret History of the American Revolution: An Account of the Conspiracies of Benedict Arnold and Numerous Others…* (New York: Viking, 1941), 42. Van Doren's book is rich with stories like this one, about spies, secrets, and the covert traffic of manuscripts during the Revolution.
[19] Ibid., esp. 339-334.
[20] Paine, "To Silas Deane, Esq.," *Pennsylvania Packet*, December 15, 1778, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 99. All of Paine's writings from the *Pennsylvania Packet* are hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *CW*.

commercial agent, and afterwards in that of a public minister, would return home after seeing himself both recalled and superseded, and not bring with him his papers and vouchers?" (*CW* 100). Without his papers, Deane couldn't account for his use of public funds in Paris, and he couldn't answer all of Congress's questions: "I presume Congress are anxious to hear him, and to have his accounts arranged and settled; and if this should be the case, why did Mr. Deane leave his papers in France?" (*CW* 103). Sitting somewhere in Paris, those papers nagged at Paine. His comments about their absence seemed to stand in for other accusations that he left unsaid: "Surely Mr. Deane must have left his discretion with his papers, or he would see the imprudence of his present conduct" (*CW* 105). He couldn't let it go.

Paine was dancing around something bigger in this first essay, hoping that his readers would catch his drift. On the last day of 1778, he tried to make himself clearer. In another open letter, he spelled out his case against Deane "in language as plain as the alphabet" (*CW* 111). Here, for the first time, Paine included confidential details about the work Deane had and hadn't done in France. He explained, too, how Folger had come to deliver blank paper to Congress. This was the essay that led to Paine's resignation. It was also his first meditation on the question that had been troubling him for a while, and that he would keep writing about for the next six months, in half a dozen more articles in the *Packet* and letter after letter to Congress. That question was: how much should a government keep secret from its people? And Paine's answer, ultimately, was: not much. "Had Mr. Deane confined himself to his proper line of conduct," Paine wrote, "he would never have been interrupted by me, or exposed himself to suspicious criticism. But departing from this, he has thrown himself on the ocean of the public" (*CW* 112). What felt limitless to Paine at this moment in the eighteenth century wasn't the amount of knowledge hidden from the public but that public itself.

When Congressional officials opened the packet labeled "Dispatches" in York, they were expecting to find reports from France about that country's alliance with America – a partnership that was still a secret then. The original messages had been taken, and replaced with blank paper, by Captain Hynson, who was working as a British spy. Because so many of Paine's accusations against Deane had to do with the timing and form of France's aid to America, this whole mess was crucial to his case. He retold the entire sequence of events in his open letter, explaining that Britain changed its diplomatic strategy after Hynson delivered the stolen messages.

Paine was sure that Deane would lose his reputation and career once he had been cast out onto the ocean of the public. Yet it was Paine, not Deane, who ultimately lost more because of their conflict. Paine was entirely right about the former agent's plans to profit from the war, but the clearest proof of Deane's guilt wouldn't surface for another century. After Paine published his first essay on the subject, a man visited his house to warn him about unnamed other people who "had threatened most extraordinary violence against him … for taking the matter up" (*CW* 108). For a few days, Paine stopped leaving his home. Months later, he found himself wishing that someone would write back to him. In one of the best and most sustained discussions of Paine's articles about Deane, Edward Larkin suggests that Paine's mistake was to criticize Deane so personally.[21] Still, as Larkin goes on to argue, secrecy helped make their debate personal and acrimonious. Perhaps because of what they prohibit people from saying, confidential documents tend to reroute conversations and conflicts in just this way. Almost inevitably, they make things personal. Beyond that, there's a theater, of sorts, to hiding documents and plucking them from obscurity. Paine was caught up in this theater for years. And at least one member of the First Federal Congress might have felt stuck there for eternity.

[21] Edward Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 67-71.

The Second Secret

On days when he was feeling betrayed by his colleagues in the Senate, William Maclay would sometimes write the letters "L. L." in his diary. He used these letters to punctuate his frustrations, and to stop himself from staying up any later: "I may write L. L. to the end of the line."[22] Though he never explained the source of this abbreviation, "L. L." probably stood for "Lancaster Lesson" – another phrase that crops up in his diary. That lesson came at the 1788 convention for choosing Pennsylvania's new representatives to Congress. Maclay had left the meeting bitter and furious after his friend Tench Coxe was blocked from a nomination. While Maclay himself was elected to the Senate at that convention, much of his time in Congress just brought back bad memories of Lancaster.

May 13, 1790 was another "L. L." day. Its "singular Occurrances," as Maclay remembered them in his diary, show one elaborate way that government documents could be suppressed in the early years of Congress (*WM* 265). Early that morning, Maclay went to see the register of the Treasury Department, Joseph Nourse, about some of the government's debts from the war. The Treasury's offices were a stone's throw down Wall Street from Federal Hall, where Congress met during its first years.[23] Maclay's request wasn't too unusual: he wanted to consult the receipts for a series of payments made five years earlier. Nourse promised to send him those documents that same day, but it didn't take long for him to break his promise Within an hour, Maclay learned that he couldn't look at the receipts, because they were locked away among the papers of the former treasurer, Michael Hillegas. Maclay's diary is never short on detail or

[22] William Maclay, *The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes on Senate Debates*, vol. 9 in *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America: 4 March 1789-3 March 1791*, ed. Kenneth E. Bowling and Helen E. Veit (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 303. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *WM*.

[23] On the location and halls of the Treasury during this period, and on Hamilton's reasons for withholding these receipts from Maclay (and anyone else who might have asked for them), see Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), esp. 291-92.

drama; he recalls, for instance, where he and Nourse stood on the stairs when they first talked. As soon as Nourse informed him that the receipts were locked up, he was sure that something was amiss. In his diary, he narrates what followed with obsessive, aggrieved attention to any slights or untruths.

Back at the Treasury, Maclay asked around for someone with access to Hillegas's papers and heard that he should speak to the new Secretary of Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. Their conversation did not go well. After Hamilton "refused me in pretty stiff terms" and said that he couldn't "open any Gentlemen's Papers," Maclay insisted that the treasurer's papers "belong to the public & to no private Gentleman Whatever" (*WM* 266). As the day went on, Maclay would get closer and closer to the receipts without ever seeing them or touching them. When he returned to the Treasury's offices for a third time, Hamilton reluctantly led him down the hall to another room. At first, Hamilton claimed that the papers were somewhere inside that room, but then, after a hushed conference with a clerk, he told Maclay that they were elsewhere in the building, in a desk "locked & bound round with tape" (*WM* 267). And the key to the lock, Hamilton went on to say, was not in New York, but in Philadelphia, with Hillegas. Guessing, correctly, that Maclay might not believe him, Hamilton showed him the taped-up desk. Maclay stormed out of the building and returned to Federal Hall, ready to tell his saga to anyone who would listen to it: "I went to see Mr. Meredith but he was out. fell in with Mr. Fitzsimmons, he talked familiarly with me. L. L." (*WM* 267).

Maclay was a grumpy observer of the proceedings of the Senate and other branches of the government. But his prickliness didn't come out of nowhere. He believed that his colleagues were in the habit of hiding things, both from one another and from their constituents. All around him, he saw politicians abandoning the principles of republicanism in favor of political efficacy

or popularity on the national stage. Perhaps without knowing it, he was troubled by many of the same impulses and actions that had bothered Paine so much a decade before. In her marvelous history of the languages and codes of early national politics, Joanne Freeman considers Maclay's disappointing encounter with Hamilton in the backrooms of the Treasury.[24] She highlights one moment, near the end of their exchange, when Hamilton turned their whole conversation into an attack on his reputation. According to Maclay, "Hamilton affected to believe that I meant some censure on his Conduct" (*WM* 267). This charge, Freeman argues, left Maclay with little recourse. Hamilton "declared himself personally insulted, an ambiguous threat of an affair of honor that left Maclay unable to do anything other than sputter in disbelief and leave."[25] Over a few hours, Maclay's wish to see some receipts that belonged to the government had become an affront to the current and past Secretaries of Treasury. Some of the things that kept him from getting to those documents – a key in Philadelphia, a roll of tape – were resoundingly material. Yet other obstacles, like Hamilton's real or pretended outrage, were just as plainly personal.

Secrecy was in the atmosphere of the early national government. For a time, it was also part of the government's conventions. Between 1789 and 1795, the first six years of its history, the Senate always met behind closed doors. Maclay, characteristically, could never abide this policy, and some of his peers felt the same way. During the first months of 1791, Virginia's General Assembly and Pennsylvania's House of Representatives both called upon the Senate to open its hearings to the public. Maclay lent his support to these resolutions. "I thought I would be wanting in the duty I owed the public if I sat silent," he explained in his diary (*WM* 389). When other Senators worried about who might sit in on their debates, Maclay countered that this risk was necessary and just: "That let who would fill the Chairs of the Senate. I hoped discretion

[24] Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
[25] Ibid., 29.

would mark their deportment. That they would rise to impart Knowledge & li[s]ten to obtain information" (*WM* 389). Maclay wasn't opposed in every case to closed sessions; in his list of proposed rules for the Senate, he wrote about the importance of observing "Inviolable Secrecy" whenever the doors had to be shut (*WM* 404). He hoped, though, that those occasions might become the exception, and not the norm.

Before 1795, the daily sessions of the Senate weren't entirely confidential. Samuel Allyne Otis, the Secretary of the Senate (and the brother of the historian Mercy Otis Warren), kept the Senate Executive Journal. And each month, that Journal was printed in full for anyone to read. As Kenneth R. Bowling and Helen E. Veit, the editors of the invaluable *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress,* insist, Otis was an excellent, conscientious archivist. He was far less haphazard in his methods than the House's Secretary, John Beckley, who sometimes destroyed outdated or duplicate records on a whim.[26] Despite all this, Maclay was often unhappy with the Senate Journal. His diary is filled with laments about both Otis's work and other Senators' efforts to meddle with the official record. Almost right away, he viewed the Journal as an object of suspicion. On the second day that the Senate met, he complained that "Otis our secretary makes a most miserable hand of it, the grossest Mistakes made on our minutes and it cost Us an hour or Two to rectify them" (*WM* 5). What vexed him more, though, were the liberties that his colleagues took with Otis's Journal. Some of his objections were about questions of language, rather than outright falsehoods. One week into his legislative career, he demanded, successfully, that the phrase "*His Most gracious Speech*" be struck from the official minutes – a phrase added, after the fact, by John Adams to describe George Washington's inaugural address. To Maclay, this bit of commentary sounded like the language of a monarchy:

[26] Bowling and Veit, eds., *The Diary of William Maclay,* 5n5.

"'the Minds of Men are still heated, everything related to that Species of Government is odious to the People'" (*WM* 16).

Maclay was convinced, moreover, that discussions and motions could disappear from the Journal. One summer day in 1789, during a period when the permanent location for the nation's capital was being debated, he presented a petition submitted by the town of Lancaster – the place of his fateful lesson. As Otis read aloud from the minutes for that day, Maclay noticed that no mention had been made of the petition. He asked Otis why it had been overlooked and pressed him to include it. Robert Morris, Maclay's fellow Senator from Pennsylvania and frequent nemesis, was out of the room when Maclay shared the Lancaster petition. But when he returned, Maclay watched as Otis took him aside: "When he came in Otis the Secretary came to him and whispered something to him. God forgive me if I heard wrong or apprehended Wrong, but I thought he said *Maclay has got that put on the minutes*" (*WM* 134). On some level, Maclay knew that he might be imagining things. "[A]ll this is perhaps the effect of over Observation," he reflected that night, "I however care not." (*WM* 135). There would be other times, Maclay thought, when he would fail to catch a mistake or a deliberate change.

This was one of the most important reasons that he kept a diary during his tenure as a senator. As he and his peers debated where they should build the new capital or whether they should open the doors of Federal Hall, he scribbled down notes on loose scraps of paper. Every night, he reworked his jottings into a narrative of the day's events, recorded in a folio blank book. Over twenty-four months, his term in the Senate, he filled about four hundred pages in two books and part of a third, missing only twelve days. Maclay conceived of his diary – a name that he preferred to "journal" – as a fundamentally public piece of writing. He imagined that the federal government should be something like an open book. And because Otis's Journal didn't

always live up to that principle, he hoped that his diary could take its place, or at least supplement it.

On his trips to Philadelphia, he carried his diary in his saddlebag, eager to share its entries with his constituents. Still, the modern editors of his diary suspect that few people took him up on this offer. As Freeman, a wonderfully keen reader of the diary, contends, Maclay was sure that his painstaking chronicle of the Senate would bolster his reputation in Pennsylvania: "His diary was central to this campaign of self-promotion, displaying his steadfast republicanism in the face of constant opposition from a powerful majority."[27] But he kept hearing rumors that he had become unpopular in Pennsylvania. None of his friends could really explain why, except that "'every Body says *the People don't like You* the People Wont hear of Your Reelection."[28] Back in New York, in the spring of 1790, he sent pocket books inscribed with messages to his daughters Elizabeth and Eleanor and wondered why he wasn't with them. "Wretched Man that I am," he wrote one night, "who do not break loose from this disagreeable place, and Stay live & die with my family" (*WM* 248). Near the end of his time in Congress, Maclay stopped writing "L. L." in his diary as often as he once had. By that point, his whole tenure might have started to feel like one long Lancaster Lesson. In 1791, he wasn't reelected to the Senate. His political career was over; he returned happily to his family in Pennsylvania. Over the next decade, though, before his death in 1803, he kept looking back at his diary. In the margins of its pages, he would sometimes add more remarks about the former colleagues who had disappointed him.[29]

Whereas Paine thought that he had uncovered a grand scheme, Maclay agonized over much more prosaic secrets: a few financial records from the war; a petition briefly elided from the minutes. In themselves, these evasions and omissions wouldn't ruin the government. Even at

[27] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 32.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Bowling and Veit, eds., *The Diary of William Maclay*, xvi.

his lowest moments, Maclay appears to have realized this. But the precedents established by these episodes – for how freely and strategically government officials might suppress information – were another story to him. Once secrecy is adopted as standard practice in one context, or one branch of the government, it's probably there to stay. Gage, Moynihan, and Galison all point to versions of this phenomenon in twentieth- and twenty-first century America. Maclay saw its beginnings in the last years of the eighteenth century.

Once a document is hidden from the public, too, its exposure is never guaranteed. On January 18, 1803, Thomas Jefferson sent a message to Congress – a message whose confidentiality probably would have worried Maclay. Jefferson, now the President, was intent on seizing vast stretches of land that belonged to Native American nations. In his secret letter to the House and Senate, he requested $2,500 to pay for Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's expedition up and back down the Missouri River and to the Pacific Ocean. "While other civilized nations have encountered great expence to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, by undertaking voyages of discovery," Jefferson wrote, "our nation seems to owe it to the same object, as well as to it's own interests, to explore this, the only easy line of communication across the continent."[30] At Jefferson's instruction, the clerks who circulated this message endorsed it with the word "Confidential." The Senate and House each closed their doors to debate it before agreeing to Jefferson's terms, and the secretaries for both branches made no mention of the letter in their journals.

In his message, Jefferson promised an expansion of U.S. trade and land into Louisiana, which France would still claim as its territory for another few months. This was why the letter

[30] Thomas Jefferson, "To the Senate and the House of Representatives – Confidential," from *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg, vol. 39 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 352.

was shrouded in secrecy, at least initially.[31] The long reach of this message was felt first by the Mandan and Hidatsa men and women who encountered Lewis and Clark west of St. Louis, in the summer and fall of 1804. But while the consequences of the message, and the expedition that it launched, slowly became apparent to people on the east and northwest coasts and everywhere in between, the letter itself remained secret for decades. More than twenty years after Jefferson submitted this message to the House and Senate, a new Congress revisited the matter of its confidentiality. Before we turn to the questions that officials wrestled with and ignored in 1825, though, I want to highlight another episode from the intervening years. Maclay believed that a government's principles and actions could warp under the weight of too many secrets. The disclosure of once-hidden papers sometimes had the same effect.

The Third Secret

John Henry had been a farmer, a wine dealer, and a newspaper editor, but on Christmas Eve in 1811, he was out of work and broke.[32] He stepped off a ship in Boston that day with a bunch of old letters stashed in his luggage. For the past year, Henry had been living in London, where he sometimes told people that he was studying law. Mostly, though, he was looking for a government job, and he thought those old letters could help him find one. Months went by and nothing happened. At one point, he heard a rumor that he might become a sheriff in Montreal, but it turned out that the last sheriff's nephew had been promised that office already. In September 1811, tired of London, Henry bought a ticket for a ship bound for Quebec. Just as he was about to set off, he got sick and missed his ship's departure. The next ship to Montreal

[31] Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Encounters at the Heart of the World: A History of the Mandan People* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2014), 204.

[32] For what is by far the most extensive account of Henry's life and time as a spy, see E.A. Cruikshank, *The Political Adventures of John Henry: The Record of an International Imbroglio* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936). Cruikshank's book – an idiosyncratic hybrid of biography and documentary edition – is my primary source of information about Henry's travels and many careers. For a far more condensed but illuminating discussion of Henry, Crillon, and the Madison administration, see James Madison, *The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series*, ed. J.C.A. Stagg, vol. 4 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 117n1.

wouldn't leave until 1812, and Henry was ready to be anywhere else. He boarded the *New Galen* and traveled to Boston instead. During his voyage, he struck up a friendship with a French passenger, Count Edward de Crillon. Crillon told Henry about his famous family, his feud with Napoleon, and his recent banishment from France.[33] And Henry, wanting to confide something in turn to his new friend, showed Crillon some of the letters that he'd been carrying around for years. Crillon insisted that these documents were worth a fortune. Soon after Christmas Eve, when the two men arrived in Boston, they began to look for a buyer. Henry moved to Washington and took a room in a Georgetown boarding house. Crillon's optimism may have seemed far-fetched to him; not long ago, the contents of these letters hadn't made him more important than a sheriff's nephew. Yet Crillon was right – or, at least, he was persuasive. In the first week of February 1812, he and Henry sold the letters to the American government for $50,000.

After Henry left the newspaper business in Philadelphia and gave up farming in Vermont, he worked as a British spy, in the winter and spring of 1809. The letters that James Madison and James Monroe purchased from him all came from that time, and from the year before, when Henry was auditioning for the role of secret agent. There was one thread running through most of Henry's otherwise unrelated careers. When he immigrated to Philadelphia, sometime in the mid-1790s, from Dublin, where he'd grown up, he fell in right away with the Federalist community there. The newspaper that he edited was a Federalist newspaper, and its contributors and readers often bought wine from him, too.[34] Years later, living now in Montreal, he pitched himself to the

[33] A few of the things that Crillon told Henry were true, but most of them weren't. Crillon was a con man whose real name was Paul-Émile Soubrillon. He was running away from Napoleon's secret police when Henry met him on the *New Galen*. Stagg, ed., *The Papers of James Madison*, 117n1.

[34] In Philadelphia, Henry also married the daughter of Jacob Duché – the former minister to the Continental Congress. Henry and his wife had two daughters together. By the time that he became a secret agent, though, his wife had died. After he sold his papers to the American government in 1812, he fled to Paris with his daughters. Cruikshank, *The Political Adventures*, 1.

British colonial government as a secret agent, using his friendships with Federalists as a credential. Early in 1808, he told Herman Ryland, the civil secretary of Canada, that many Federalists were waiting for the chance to secede: "we have powerful friends in the United & particularly in the N. England States, if we will only encourage and support them."[35]

Henry spent the next few months visiting one coffeehouse after another in Vermont and Massachusetts, searching for people who were unhappy with the American government. "The bold talk publicly of an organized resistance," he wrote to Ryland from Windsor, Vermont (*PA* 19). And "the timid," caught up "in a contest in which they have everything to lose and nothing to hope for," wished for help from the British government, too (*PA* 19). His letters were long on gossip and conjecture and short on concrete details. Yet he offered his readers in Canada something that they wanted: a vision, and a promise, of the U.S.'s precarity. Curious to hear more, James Henry Craig, Canada's governor-general, hired Henry as a spy. Now, Henry's methods of communication were far more covert: he addressed all his messages to a third party and considered encoding them using a cipher provided by Craig. But the content of his messages didn't change much. He was still an on-the-ground correspondent in New England. Judging from what he wrote, he spent most of his days reading local newspapers and listening to second- or third-hand rumors of political dissent. No one adopted a new allegiance at his behest; no signs of an actual secession materialized. "I have not yet had sufficient time to ascertain the lengths to which the federal party will go," he confessed to Craig at one point, "nor the means they possess to maintain themselves against the General Government in the event of a War with Great Britain" (*PA* 49). In the spring of 1809, Henry's career in espionage came to a quiet end. Ryland sent Henry copies of the letters that he'd written as a spy, with the hope that they would "eventually contribute to your permanent advantage" (*PA* 59).

[35] Cruikshank, *The Political Adventures*, 9. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *PA*.

Sometime in 1809, Henry's letters had been forgotten by the government that had commissioned them. What made them so valuable, three years after that, to a different government? When Madison, the President, and Monroe, the Secretary of State, were introduced to Henry and Crillon in January 1812, they were trying to start a war with the British empire. There was no support for this idea among the Federalists in Congress, and it was polarizing among Republicans, too. France, like Britain, had recently interfered with American commerce, and it wasn't clear to some Republicans that Madison had chosen the right enemy.[36] Henry's letters, though, documented a British effort to split the U.S. in two. On top of that, they seemed to cast Federalists as willing partners in this plan. Over a few weeks, Madison and Monroe negotiated with Crillon and Henry about the price of the letters. They met on rainy nights, when no one would spot two unfamiliar men coming and going. Convinced that Henry's papers would lend ballast to the case for war, the President and the Secretary of State finally bought them for an extravagant sum – the entire secret service budget for the year. A month later, on March 9, Madison released the documents to Congress, in numbered sets. The following day, the letters became more public still when they appeared (by Madison's design) in print, in the pages of the *National Intelligencer*.[37]

This was declassification by another name, or, more exactly, by no name at all. And this version of declassification may have altered the political landscape in 1812. Even though the substance of Henry's letters was sometimes humdrum, the documents themselves were charged with drama and portentousness. Madison recognized how powerful the rhetoric of secrets kept and exposed could be. He appears to have understood, too, that this rhetoric could have a life of its own, separate from the content of those secrets. In his own message to Congress introducing

[36] Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 127-29.
[37] James Madison, "To Congress, March 9, 1812," from *The Papers of James Madison*, 236n1; 236-37.

the documents, he described Henry's work in escalating terms. Henry, he explained, was a secret agent employed "in fomenting disaffection to the constituted authorities of the nation; and in intrigues with the disaffected, for the purpose of bringing about resistance to the laws, and eventually, in concert with a British force, of destroying the Union."[38] Many historians of the War of 1812 view the sale and subsequent publication of Henry's letters as oddities of the era, not turning points.[39] But Alan Taylor sees these events as transformative. The Federalists in Congress were mortified, at first, by the existence of the letters; one witness reported that they were "'in the greatest agony and distress.'"[40] After they'd read the letters, though, these same men were furious that a packet of old gossip had cost the government its yearly budget. Republicans, meanwhile, found new cause for war with Britain in these pages. "Henry's documents revived the stalled push for war," Taylor writes, "but ensured that the war would bitterly divide the nation."[41] Madison had reassembled the theater of secrecy and its opposites, where Paine's debate with Deane had been staged thirty years before.

One of the documents that Madison bought from Henry was his cipher. Henry himself had trouble making sense of this cipher; for that reason, he never wrote his letters in code.[42] It was an elaborate contraption – a long, thin strip of paper, filled with several grids of numbers and words.[43] To Madison, nothing else in the packet would have looked nearly as mysterious as this. Still, there was also something elucidating about this strange slip of paper. The words

[38] Ibid., 235.
[39] For one instance of this view, see a standard history of the conflict: Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten History*, Bicentennial Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012). Hickey writes that "The Henry affair proved to be a tempest in a teapot. The letters were hardly worth $50,000 and scarcely a cause for war." Ibid., 36.
[40] Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 130.
[41] Ibid., 131. For a likeminded recent study of this era, one that focuses on the roles of romance and passion in justifying the war, see Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
[42] Cruikshank, *The Political Adventures*, 43.
[43] The papers that Madison and Monroe purchased from Henry, including this cipher, now belong to the Library of Congress, in a collection with a wonderful name: John Henry Papers, Spy, 1802-1812, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., microfilm, Reel 1.

arranged in its grids seemed to tell the story of Britain's plans more forthrightly than any of Henry's messages did: "treachery"; "troops"; "enemy"; "Union."[44] It's not clear how the members of Congress came to inspect this cipher, or whether most of them saw it at all. Perhaps it was passed around the chambers or whispered about rather than seen. But no matter how much Congress knew about this slip of paper, it was heady with revelation. And that feeling was a good part of what Madison purchased for $50,000.

The Lie

On December 27, 1825, the House of Representatives closed its doors and began a secret debate. Those doors had been propped open for more than a decade, since the end of the War of 1812. The secrecy and paranoia that Maclay had bemoaned in the First Federal Congress had given way, thirty-odd years later, to the veneer, at least, of far more transparency. But on this day, the legacy of earlier Congressional practices – and of one document, especially – prompted Edward Everett and his colleagues to shut the doors of the Capitol. It all started that morning when the President, John Quincy Adams, sent some old papers in his office over to the House and Senate. One of those documents was Jefferson's 1803 message to Congress about Lewis and Clark's westward expedition. While Adams was assembling the papers, he realized that there might be a problem: the note from Jefferson had never lost its confidential status. Adams could have changed this label on his own. As he recalled in his diary, though, he wondered what Congress would make of the letter: "I sent it now to the House, leaving it to them to determine whether it may be still expedient to keep it secret."[45] Adams didn't go to the Capitol, but that night, his friend Everett, a Representative from Massachusetts, told him what he'd missed.

[44] Ibid.
[45] John Quincy Adams, "27 [December 1825]," Diary 37, 11 November 1825-24 June 1828, p. 46 [electronic edition]. *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2004. http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *JQA*.

When word of a secret message traveled through the assembly, "some surprise was excited," and everyone expected that it had to with an upcoming conference in Panama, which had been organized by Simón Bolívar (*JQA* 46). Once Jefferson's letter had been read aloud, no one seemed to agree about whether it should remain confidential. "The Virginians were alarmed with a fear of it being published," Everett reported to Adams, yet others couldn't understand why it had ever been a secret document. David Trimble, from Kentucky, offered one theory: "Trimble said, because it exhibited Jefferson's Views in regard to the civilization of the Indians." (*JQA* 46). In the winter of 1825, Jefferson was still alive. (He would die six months later.) Some of the men debating this question knew him and worried about how he would be remembered. These congressmen may have been concerned about exposing the exchange that Jefferson had imagined between Indian nations and the federal government: an unequal trade of "what they can spare & we want, for what we can spare and they want."[46] More likely, though, they wanted Jefferson's use of confidentiality to stay suppressed. Other congressmen were less affected by this bulletin from twenty years ago. They were ready to talk about that conference in Panama – the next item on the docket. As a compromise, John Forsyth, a Representative from Georgia, suggested that nothing be done: "Forsyth could not perceive that it was at all important whether it should be made public or not, but as it had been originally a secret message, he thought it might as well be still considered as confidential" (*JQA* 46). Forsyth's motion passed. The moment when anyone could read Jefferson's words was deferred, once more, until some unknown time.

Although Adams knew that this secret session was out of the ordinary, he wrote about it calmly in his diary, like just another piece of business. While the House was meeting behind closed doors, he had been trying to save the engagement of Annie Stockton, whose grandfather had signed the Declaration of Independence, and John Renshaw Thomson. The President had

[46] Jefferson, "To the Senate and the House of Representatives – Confidential," 351.

given support and counsel to a friend of Stockton's father about Thomson – a man who had fallen deeply in debt. In his diary, Adams had almost as much to say about the fate of Thomson and Stockton's marriage as he did about Jefferson's secret message. During his Presidency, especially, Adams often fretted about who might someday read his diary or his other private writings. "I can never be sure of writing a line, that will not some day be published by fiend or foe," he lamented in one entry from 1827, "Nor can I write a sentence susceptible of an odious misconstruction, but it will be seized upon and bandied about like a watchword for hatred and derision — This condition of things gives Style the Cramp"[47] Perhaps Adams was writing around his real feelings about Jefferson's letter. If he wasn't, then his equanimity about the message's future might be even more telling.

In his exploration of the classified universe, Peter Galison explains that, today, some documents never pass through the hands of an Original Classifier: "Nuclear weapons knowledge is born secret."[48] He underlines the epistemological weirdness of this policy. If you or I happen to realize something new about thermonuclear fission and jot down that discovery on a piece of paper, we're immediately barred from reading or possessing what we have just written. We lack the proper clearance for our own thought. There are no exact analogues in the nineteenth century for this kind of instant secrecy. But around the same time that Congress returned to Jefferson's letter, other confidential papers were beginning to pile up. Like Jefferson's 1803 message, moreover, many of these protected documents had something to do with Indian land. Between 1824 and 1825, the U.S. government made treaties with the Quapaw, Choctaw, Kansas, Shawnee, and Osage tribes. At least at first, the government hid all these treaties from public

[47] John Quincy Adams, "18 [March 1827]," *Diaries*, ed. David Waldstreicher, vol. 2: 1821-1848 (New York: Library of America, 2017), 149.
[48] Galison, "Removing Knowledge," 232.

view.[49] In the past, secret journals and messages had almost always been handwritten texts. This was still true of Jefferson's letter, which Adams found in a stack of papers in his office. Yet these treaties were "ordered to be printed, in confidence, for use of the Members of the Senate."[50] The concealment of these treaties seems to have been more reflexive than considered. During the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, certain subjects qualified a document for secrecy right off the bat.

For as long as a treaty belonged to the world of confidential documents, no one could read it in its final form. A sentence might have been added moving a border to the west; a paragraph delaying the transfer of land might be gone. As Lisa Brooks describes in her terrific and moving study of Native space in the northeast, these sorts of revisions and omissions had been happening for centuries.[51] In 1727, after learning that his statements had been amended in the printed Treaty of Casco Bay, the Penobscot leader Loron wrote a line-by-line rebuttal of that document. In 1744, the Six Nations argued within the text of another treaty that "'We are being impoverished by pen and ink work.'"[52] And in 1756, at the first of two councils for the Easton Treaties, the Delaware leader Teedyuscung declared that "'This very Ground that is under me (striking it with his Foot) was my Land and Inheritance, and is taken from me, by Fraud.'"[53] When Teedyuscung began to speak, the colonial secretary for Pennsylvania, Conrad Weiser, put down his pen and refused to enter his words into the official records for the council. Although

[49] [Treaty Between the U.S., and the Quapaw Indians], Treaty and Nomination Reports and Documents, January 27, 1825, *ProQuest Congressional*: https://congressional-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/congressional/docview/t51.d48.sed-18-2-7?accountid=14657; [Treaty with the Choctaw Indians], Treaty and Nomination Reports and Documents, January 28, 1825, *ProQuest Congressional*: https://congressional-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/congressional/docview/t51.d48.sed-18-2-8?accountid=14657; [Treaties with the Osage, Kansas, and Shawnee Indians], Treaty and Nomination Reports and Documents, December 14, 1825, *ProQuest Congressional*: https://congressional-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/congressional/docview/t51.d48.sed-19-1-1?accountid=14657.
[50] [Treaty with the Choctaw Indians], January 28, 1825, 1.
[51] Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), esp. 229-41.
[52] Ibid., 234.
[53] Ibid., 232.

writing could easily lead to dispossession, Brooks writes, it could "reverse that destructive course," too.[54] For Brooks, one of the Native authors and activists who understood this best was William Apess.[55]

Apess was an inveterate historian of treaties and legislation. Almost as soon as he arrived in the Cape Cod town of Mashpee, in the spring of 1833, he began what would become his most ambitious documentary project. For the past hundred and forty years, the Mashpee Indians had lived, against their wishes, as wards of the Massachusetts government.[56] By the 1830s, they were governed by three overseers, who controlled property rights and kept certain people from moving into town – including some black men and women with Mashpee husbands and wives. Twenty years before, a Congregationalist minister, Phineas Fish, had been sent to Mashpee by Harvard College. Though his congregation was tiny, he had no plans to leave; he had been given land and a house that he claimed as his own. Apess, too, came to Mashpee as a minister. Since his ordination in the Methodist church, in 1829, he'd spent most of his days traveling through Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts, preaching to Native and black audiences. Usually, he made these journeys alone, while his wife Mary and their two children stayed in Connecticut. As he ventured north toward Barnstable County in 1833, he heard reports of the Mashpees' mistreatment. "I resolved to visit the people of Marshpee and judge for myself," he later explained, at the start of his remarkable 1835 book about the Mashpees' political struggle,

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[54] Ibid., 236.

[55] There is a rich body of scholarship on writing's relationship to both dispossession and efforts to reclaim land and culture in seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Native American history. For literary-historical accounts that, in addition to Brooks's work, have influenced my ideas in this section of the chapter, Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), and Alanna Hickey, "'Let Paler Nations Vaunt Themselves': John Rollin Ridge's 'Official Verse' and Racial Citizenship in Gold Rush California," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 27, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 66-100.

[56] Many of these details about the Mashpees' history emerge in *Indian Nullification*, but the best summary of them can be found in Barry O'Connell, "Introduction," in William Apess, *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot*, ed. O'Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), xxiv-xxxviii.

Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe (*IN* 169).[57]

What he found, when he got there, was a community weary of its minister, Harvard, and, most of all, the Massachusetts government. During his early days on Cape Cod, Apess recalled, "Mr. Fish cautioned me not to say anything about oppression" to the Mashpees (*IN* 172). But that was all they wanted to talk to him about. At the first Mashpee meeting that Apess went to, the opening speaker, an older man named Ebenezer Attaquin, stood up and began to weep. He and the other men and women gathered at the meetinghouse had been trying for years to appeal to the state, but they "*had never been able to obtain a hearing*" (*IN* 173). For Apess, who'd spent the unhappiest part of his childhood on a Pequot reservation, the frustrations of the Mashpees were only too familiar. He urged them to make their grievances heard once more, this time with his help. After Attaquin responded by saying that "'If we get this man to stand by us, we must stand by him,'" the Mashpees took Apess and his family into their tribe (*IN* 173). A hundred people signed a statement to this effect, and Apess reproduced it in *Indian Nullification*: "Be it known, that we, the Marshpees, now assembled in the presence of God, do hereby agree to adopt the Rev. William Apes, of the Pequot tribe, as one of ours" (*IN* 174). During the meeting, Attaquin, Apess, and a man named Israel Amos also drafted petitions to Harvard and Massachusetts. "We will have our own meeting house" they told the President of Harvard, "and place in the pulpit whom we please to preach to us" (*IN* 177). From now on, "we, as a tribe, will rule ourselves," they announced to the governor, "and have the right to do so; for all men are born free and equal,

[57] William Apess, *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained*, in *On Our Own Ground*, 169. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *IN*. Apess almost always used the word "Marshpee." I have followed the editor of his collected writings, Barry O'Connell, in adopting the variant spelling "Mashpee," which is more common today.

says the Constitution of the country" (*IN* 175). The same hundred men and women added their names to these petitions.

As he wrote *Indian Nullification,* Apess seems to have followed one rule: whenever he mentioned a document, he included it in the book. The book that he created is dedicated to showing anything that would otherwise be hard to find in print, from the names of Mashpee men and women to their complaints against Harvard and Massachusetts. Apess wasn't searching, exactly, for a secret treaty. But he joined the Mashpees' effort and wrote *Indian Nullification* with an awareness of such protected documents. And he was rummaging around for something similar: the legal records that provided a basis for Massachusetts's involvement with the community and Fish's presence in town. In folio 139 from the twenty-fifth book of records for Barnstable County, Apess found what he was looking for. Fish's claim to property in Mashpee depended upon a deed, from 1783, that Apess unearthed from this volume of records. Yet as Apess noticed when he read the deed, the purpose of this document was to give the Mashpees "clear title" to four hundred acres of land for their parsonage (*IN* 261). Decades later, though, in 1809, the Massachusetts General Court had returned to this deed and appended new language to it, without consulting the Mashpees. The four hundred acres were now set aside "for the use and benefit of a Congregational gospel minister" (*IN* 261). In combination with the leadership of Attaquin and Amos, Apess's lapidary approach to the documentary record worked. Beginning in March 1834, the Mashpee Indians were granted the same rights of self-governance as all other Massachusetts citizens.[58]

[58] O'Connell, "Introduction," *On Our Own Ground*, xxxvii.

Early in the 2010s, a group of historians, computer scientists, and statisticians launched the Declassification Engine.[59] Still a work-in-progress today, the Declassification Engine is designed to read and process the many, many pages of declassified material released under the Obama Administration. Almost every one of these declassified pages is filled with redactions. Words and sentences have been buried under bars drawn with black markers, covered up with opaque tape, or cut out with razor knives. The Declassification Engine uses natural language processing to find patterns in these texts, to guess at the words that might be concealed by the black bars. When Apess pored over the record books at the Barnstable County Courthouse almost two hundred years ago, he wasn't dealing with declassified documents. But some of these deeds and other records were subject to a more limited version of redaction. A deed might not make sense until Apess located a much later piece of legislation, in another folio somewhere else in the courthouse. The minute changes and substitutions that added up to a whole new set of laws, and four hundred acres of land, weren't hidden under black bars. But they weren't far from being that obscure, either. After searching through many volumes and peering at old dates, addendums, and missing signatures, Apess held some pages out into the light.

[59] William Brennan, "The Declassification Engine: Reading Between the Black Bars," *The New Yorker* (October 16, 2013): https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-declassification-engine-reading-between-the-black-bars. One of the directors of the Declassification Engine is Matthew Connelly, the author of a forthcoming history of classified information.

Chapter 4: About to Be Free: Paperwork and Emancipation

Benjamin and Jonas ad been walking for miles and miles when they came to a crossroads in a place called Duck Creek. As the sun was rising that same morning, in the spring of 1794, they had left the house of Philena and Edward Lay, in Sussex County, Delaware, and headed out for the town of Dover.[1] For the past few weeks, Benjamin and Jonas had been sawing wood for the Lays, a Quaker couple. Now, that job had ended, and they were both looking for more work. Benjamin had been born into slavery, in Pasquotank County, North Carolina, but, not so long ago, his onetime owner had manumitted him. Jonas, like his friend, had once been enslaved. Wherever they went, in North Carolina or Delaware, both men made sure to bring their manumission papers with them – the sheets of paper that declared them free. This morning, like every other morning, Benjamin had folded his papers into his pocket just before he and Jonas started off on their journey. Late that night, though, at the crossroads in Duck Creek, Benjamin opened his pocket to check on something and saw that his papers were gone. He and Jonas had been on the road for at least twelve hours. They weren't far at all from Dover. Still, without a second thought, they began to retrace their steps.

The piece of paper could be anywhere, covered up by some dirt or caught in a bramble by the side of the road, and so their search was hopeless almost from the start. Benjamin walked all the way back to the home of the Lays, who had read his manumission when he first came to work for them. Hearing his story now, they wrote out a statement on his behalf on a new sheet of paper, explaining that he was a free man who had lost his proof of that status. "Be it known," they wrote, "to all whom it may concern that Benjamin the bearer hereof came to our house the

[1] The details of this episode come from the record books of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Manumission Book B: 1788-1795 (AmS .051), p. 50, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *B*.

twenty-ninth of the first month last in company with a negro man named Jonas having with them each man a good and sufficient manumission from their masters." (*B*). Benjamin's original papers had been filled with names: that of his former owner, Benjamin White, and those of the men who had acted as White's witnesses, Joseph Henly and Zachariah Nixon. The Lays included all these names in the new document. Meanwhile, Jonas was waiting for Benjamin along their route at the house of Jonathan Hunn – a man they had met through the Lays. When Benjamin rejoined his friend there, he asked Hunn to add his own testimony to this second piece of paper, and Hunn agreed. He recounted every stage of Benjamin and Jonas's journey, up until the moment that Benjamin came back to his house: "and further I do certify that his companion Jonas tarried at my house until said Benjamin went down in Sussex to said Philena & Edward Lay's and obtained the foregoing certificate" (*B*). Once Hunn had finished writing, Benjamin and Jonas set out again for Dover.

This chapter looks closely at one kind of bureaucratic document, the kind that Benjamin mislaid somewhere along the way to Dover: freedom papers. In the decades between the start of the American Revolution and the end of the Civil War, nearly all former slaves and free black men and women in the North and the South were required to carry a piece of paper with them describing their legal status. The local laws that dictated what these forms should say, who could sign them, and where they could be issued were labyrinthine and mutable, and varied enormously from place to place. Freedom papers were a constant part of the everyday lives and encounters of the people who were forced to possess them.[2] As Benjamin rushed back to Sussex County that spring night, he must have wondered if, along with that sheet of paper, he'd lost his

[2] One of the best sources of information about these laws remains Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1976). For a wonderful look at one family's movements across the Caribbean and the Atlantic Ocean and the records of their freedom that they obtained along the way, see Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

freedom – the thing he'd just found. He knew that the missing manuscript represented him in a way that he couldn't represent himself.

This was how freedom papers worked. In his history of identification papers in medieval and early modern Europe, Valentin Groebner makes a distinction between two sorts of documents. Wanted posters and circulating personal descriptions offer information about people who are somewhere else, often on the run from the law. But passports and letters of introduction describe people who are present, standing right there as someone else reviews their papers.[3] Freedom papers belong to this second category, but they also exceed it. In the first of this chapter's three sections, I follow the steps taken by both newly manumitted people, like Phebe Henry, and African Americans who had born free, like Polly Cowen, to register and prove their liberty – only to have to register and prove it again and again. White privilege was built into the regular performance demanded by these documents: any white person could ask to see someone's papers, and only a white person could deem those papers sufficient. Although the pieces of paper that black men and women took away from town halls and courthouses marked a joyous event, their content and their sheer existence could have the opposite effect, too. These papers could make their bearers feel estranged, even in communities to which they'd always belonged. For the men and women required to carry them, freedom papers offered an incomplete and eminently losable version of liberty. Because they were so light, these documents could slip away in an instant; for that reason, too, they weighed heavily in their bearers' hands and pockets.

Near the beginning of *Lose Your Mother*, a brilliant and often heartrending chronicle of her travels along the Atlantic slave route, Saidiya Hartman writes that "The most universal

[3] Valentin Groebner, *Who Are You?: Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Mark Kyburz and John Peck (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 154.

definition of the slave is a stranger."[4] Her book is partly a meditation on how, as the descendant of slaves, she inherited a "sense of being a stranger in the world," too.[5] Hartman thinks of a stranger as someone who is alone in every way, torn from her family and community, living in exile from her home. For Polly Cowen, obtaining a certificate of freedom every three years did not isolate her profoundly in the Virginia county where she had lived in all her life. But, at the same time, if she'd forgotten one year to stop by her local courthouse, her family could have been separated or forced to leave the state.[6]

When freedom papers emerged as a genre near the end of the eighteenth century, it happened both all at once and in fits and starts. These documents inherited some of their features from two other genres that had been around for much longer: the travel passes carried by enslaved people from place to place, and the bills of sale that propelled the slave trade forward. All these genres had at least two mediums in common.[7] The first was paper, and the second was slavery – for freedom papers only made sense in the context of that institution. Yet freedom papers had a third medium as well, one that wasn't quite as important for bills of sale and didn't matter at all for travel passes. That last medium was bureaucracy. Our experience of paperwork, Ben Kafka has argued, is usually an experience of mistakes. For Kafka, we shouldn't rush to conflate that carelessness with uncaring. The errors that are built into paperwork, he writes, result from the challenges of manual labor and written communication – "Nibs still break. Ink

[4] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 9.
[5] Ibid., 17.
[6] There are parallels between the ideas I explore in my first section, about the essentially estranging nature of freedom papers, and later stages of immigration law in the U.S. The legal historian Kunal M. Parker has argued that we ought to see the legal construction of freedmen at the turn of the nineteenth century as part of the longer arc of U.S. immigration history. Parker, *Making Foreigners: Immigration and Citizenship Law in America, 1600-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Parker, "Making Blacks Foreigners: The Legal Construction of Former Slaves in Post-Revolutionary Massachusetts," *Utah Law Review* 75 (2001): 75-124.
[7] In pairing genre and medium as I do here, I have the interrelated significance of these two concepts to Stanley Cavell in my ear. See, for instance, Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

still smudges. Handwriting still cramps. Signifiers still slip" – and not from the fact that, as Hannah Arendt writes, bureaucracy is "'The rule by Nobody.'"[8] As soon as freedom papers started to appear, they were understood as transparent, self-evident documents. But they were formed, too, by all the idiosyncrasies, lapses, and whims that come with the generation of paperwork. Law and social custom asked these documents to be the three things that their production and material form prevented them from being: readily available, error-proof, and unlosable. Black men and women lived with an awareness of this essential contradiction. They found ways to dodge or survive the performance of having and displaying papers – whether that meant taking a risk and living without papers or guarding those documents as tightly as they could.

In the second and third sections of the chapter, we leave the chambers of local courthouses behind for the larger world in which African Americans walked around town, went to work, and resettled in new states with their freedom papers close at hand. One of the literary-historical models for my chapter, and especially its second part, is Edlie L. Wong's *Neither Fugitive nor Free* – a study of freedom suits and what Wong calls, in her subtitle, "the legal culture of travel."[9] Wong sees the freedom suit as a genre of antislavery literature. And, by classifying it in that way, she puts it into productive dialogue with the fugitive slave narrative. At the center of my chapter's second section is a reading of Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*. Perhaps because freedom papers – obtained, lost, and found again – played such a crucial part in Northup's life, some of the clear generic distinctions between those documents and the slave narrative start to collapse in his book, especially near its end. The authenticating documents

[8] Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 12; 14. The notion of a "bureaucratic medium" was, originally, that of Karl Marx; Marx never fully explained what he meant by it, but Kafka examines all its implications in his superlative book.
[9] Edlie L. Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

that so often accompany slave narratives wind up looking a lot like freedom papers here. Finally, in the third part of the chapter, I survey a few of the practical solutions that Phillis Wheatley, Joseph Trammell, and other men and women devised for preserving their papers. This section deals with daily methods of archiving, or, more simply, of holding onto a piece of paper. Some of these papers were reimagined and remade as they were passed down through families.

1. Registering

Isabella spent most of 1826 and 1827 waiting for a change that had been a long time coming. While she waited, she spun wool and worked in the field outside her master's house, in Ulster County, New York. But every day, she looked ahead to a future she thought was imminent, when her life would be nothing like this. In 1799, when she was two years old, the state of New York passed a law of gradual emancipation. Anyone who had been born a slave before that year would be freed by July 4, 1827.[10] At first, Isabella's owner, John Dumont, promised her that she wouldn't have to wait until then to become a free woman: "Isabella's Master told her if she would do well, and be faithful, he would give her 'free papers,' one year before she was legally free by statute."[11] After she injured her hand early in 1826, though, he backed out of this agreement. Then, the next year, he began to evade the terms of the law: "on the arrival of July 4, 1827, the time specified for her receiving her 'free papers,' she claimed the fulfillment of her master's promise; but he refused granting it, on account (as he alleged) of the loss he had sustained by her hand."[12] By the time that Isabella described this period of her life to Olive Gilbert, a white abolitionist, in the late 1840s, she'd adopted a new name: Sojourner Truth.

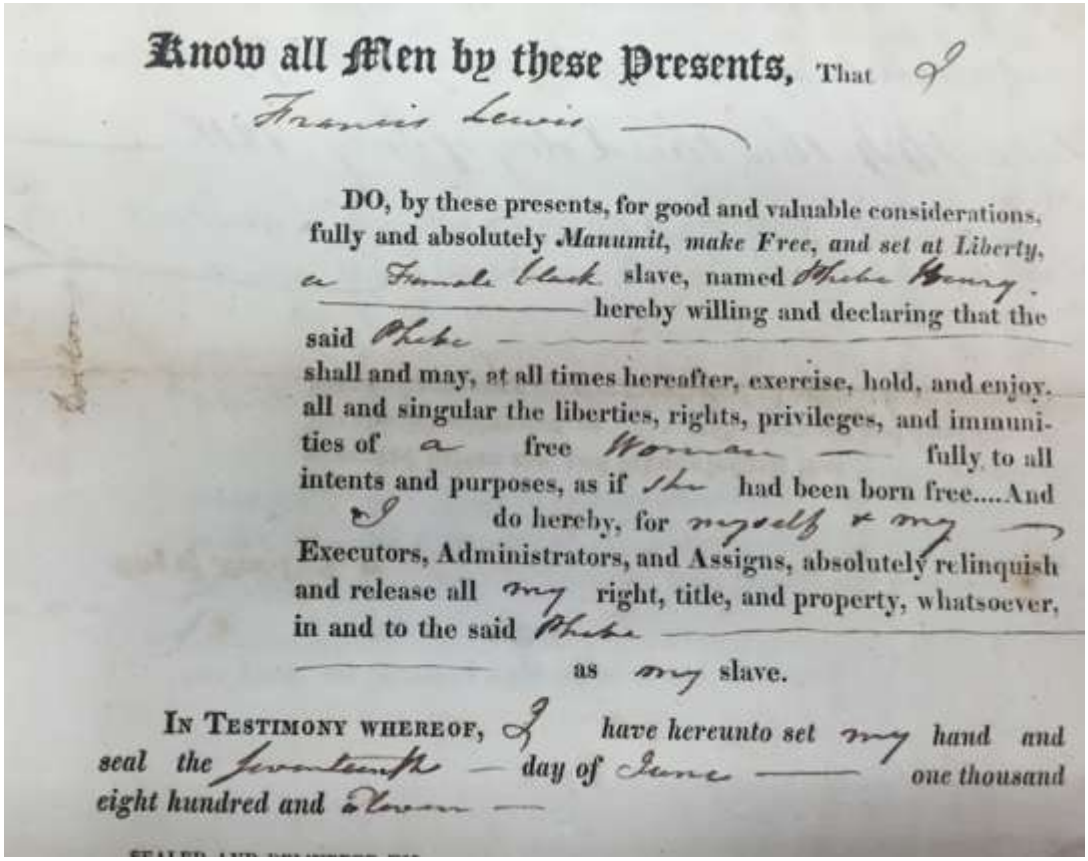
[10] For an extensive history of New York's gradual emancipation law and its legacy after 1827, see Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[11] Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, A Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828*, in *Slave Narratives*, ed. William L. Andrews and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Library of America, 2000), 595.
[12] Ibid.

When Dumont failed to give Truth her free papers once again, she took a chance and walked off his farm one morning, in the fall of 1827. She held her infant daughter, Sophia, in one arm and all the possessions that she could carry in the other. Standing at the top of a hill, she looked up at the sun and "thought it never was so light before."[13]

Paperwork is all about waiting. Even if Dumont had agreed to give Truth a record of her freedom, she still might have been stuck at his farm for weeks or months. For in New York, like in many other Northern and Southern states, freed men and women had to obtain their manumission papers from bureaucracies that were often rickety and hard to navigate. And so legal freedom, for Truth and for many other people at the brink of emancipation, was constantly deferred until one more page had been written. That deferral could stretch over weeks, months, or years; sometimes, as Truth recognized, it could go on forever. On June 17, 1811, Phebe Henry went with Francis Lewis to a New York City courthouse, where she watched as Lewis filled out a form: "Know all Men by these Presents, that I Francis Lewis do, by these presents, for good and valuable considerations, fully and absolutely Manumit, make Free, and set at Liberty, a female black slave, named Phebe Henry."[14] At the top of the form, Henry was still identified as a slave, but soon, that status fell away: "said Phebe shall and may, at all times hereafter, exercise, hold, and enjoy, all and singular the liberties, rights, privileges, and immunities of a free woman fully, to all intents and purposes, as if she had been born free."[15] Now, according to the words on this page, Henry was a free woman. Later that same day, perhaps in another chamber of the courthouse, she received a certificate, signed by the mayor of New York City, declaring that she

[13] Ibid., 597.
[14] Phebe Henry's manumission papers, "Manumissions and documents certifying free status, 1801-1847, undated," box 2, folder 8, Black History Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[15] Ibid.

was "about to be manumitted."[16] The record of Henry's freedom remained unfinished on June 17. The next day, a man named Jacob Morton stopped by the courthouse to witness her manumission after the fact; a clerk added Morton's deposition at the bottom of the original document. Even after this, Henry's new legal status wasn't entered in the city's record books until August of that year. Two months passed when the only evidence of her freedom was the certificate handed to her at the courthouse. There was something unfixed about that certificate, too. For all the marks of institutional authority that it bore, it also placed Henry's manumission in the future: she wasn't quite free but about to be so. Henry needed this certificate to prove her liberty, but the document – like all freedom papers – did not, and could not, make her free by itself.



Know all Men by these Presents, That I
Francis Lewis

DO, by these presents, for good and valuable considerations, fully and absolutely *Manumit, make Free, and set at Liberty,* a Female black slave, named Phebe Henry. hereby willing and declaring that the said Phebe shall and may, at all times hereafter, exercise, hold, and enjoy, all and singular the liberties, rights, privileges, and immunities of a free Woman fully to all intents and purposes, as if she had been born free....And I do hereby, for myself & my Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, absolutely relinquish and release all my right, title, and property, whatsoever, in and to the said Phebe as my slave.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal the seventeenth day of June one thousand eight hundred and eleven

Fig. 7: Phebe Henry's manumission papers, Black History Collection, Library of Congress

[16] Ibid.

Between the printed lines of freedom papers, clerks and judges made changes and additions both small and not-so-small. It was left up to these officials to fill in, as they saw fit, a more precise account of how a person came to be free – by copying down, for instance, the statement of a witness who arrived a day late. A few months before Phebe Henry walked through the halls of New York's Court of Common Pleas, James Jackson went there with a friend. Jackson's life had been very different from Henry's: fifty-six years ago, he'd been born free. And though he already had a piece of paper explaining this, he wanted to make sure that his liberty was registered in the city. He appeared with his friend and witness, Henry Pier, before an alderman and judge named Peter Mesier, and Mesier certified that "on this day James Jackson residing in the said city, a mulatto man exhibited proof before me, reduced to writing, of the freedom of him the said James."[17] Few of these words were the judge's. He noted that Jackson was "mulatto," and, down the page, that his hair was "short short black." Near the end of the form, though, Mesier encountered a problem. He had already recorded the time and place of Jackson's birth, and now the wording of the document seemed to assume that his freedom had come later: "and that he _____ free in or before _____."[18] So Mesier crossed out "in or before" and made the sentence simpler: "and that he was born free." This was a minor revision, but one that only Mesier could have made. It would have been illegal for Jackson to amend his own freedom papers. Though these pieces of paper could not make their bearers free, they did have other performative powers. They could misstate their bearers' identities, rewriting something fundamental about their lives.

[17] James Jackson's certificate of freedom, "Manumissions and documents certifying free status, 1801-1847, undated," box 2, folder 8, Black History Collection.
[18] Ibid.

In his narrative of his life, Olaudah Equiano gives a minute-by-minute account of the day in 1766 when he went to get his manumission papers. Equiano remembers this day in ecstatic terms. But his story is littered with moments when things could have gone wrong. On the island of Montserrat, Equiano prepared to purchase his freedom from Robert King. Though they'd agreed upon a price, King hesitated, at first, to accept the money that Equiano had saved. Finally, though, he asked Equiano to go to the island's Register Office. Equiano recalls, that as he ran there, he could "scarcely believe I was awake": "My feet scarcely touched the ground, for they were winged with joy."[19] Along the way, he told everyone that he met where he was going, and why. At the Register's Office, the clerk offered to record his manumission for half the usual cost. Once the clerk had finished writing the document, Equiano rushed back to find King, so that he could sign it. The bureaucracy that Equiano encountered in Montserrat sounds surprisingly frictionless. Still, it's not so hard to imagine another version of this episode – a day when King changed his mind once again, or when a different clerk doubled the charge for registering a manumission. Throughout this passage in the narrative, Equiano is always running: "I flew to the Register Office" (*IN*, 152). And while that state is an expression of his joy, it reflects his desperation, too. At any instant, his chance at freedom might be postponed or even lost for good.

Looking back on this day twenty years afterwards, as he composed his narrative in 1789, Equiano's spirits seem to have been lifted again by the memory of how it felt to be newly free. But then, he revisits the actual document that he took from the Register's Office. Its language disturbs him: "As the form of my manumission has something peculiar in it, and expresses the absolute power and dominion one man claims over his fellow, I shall beg leave to present it before my readers at full length" (*IN*, 153). The pieces of paper that freedmen carried around

[19] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*, in *Slave Narratives*, ed. Andrews and Gates, 152. Cited parenthetically hereafter in the text as *IN*.

with them had to mention their enslavement along with their manumission. Any morning or evening, out in the street, someone could ask to see Equiano's certificate of freedom, or Henry's, or Benjamin's. Once a conversation took that turn, these men and women would be overshadowed by the contents of their papers – documents that labeled them both as "free" and as "slaves," and, always, too, as "black," "Negro," or "mulatto."

In a remarkable essay, Thomas C. Holt examines how the marking of race occurs in everyday encounters. It's on this level, Holt contends, "that racist ideas and practices are naturalized, made self-evident, and thus seemingly beyond audible challenge."[20] Holt is trying to understand how the reproduction of race and racism keeps happening long after the abolition of slavery, and so most of his examples are drawn from later moments in American history than the ones I'm exploring here. But freedom papers already had some of the same effects that he pinpoints. Any account that Phebe Henry might have wanted to give of herself to a stranger would have been interrupted, and made hard to hear, by the far more self-evident document in her pocket.

For African Americans who were born free, too, the constant need to prove that fact threatened to make their lives within a community seem secondary to their lives on paper. In the summer of 1851, Polly Cowen went with her family to the courthouse in Albemarle County, Virginia.[21] She'd made the same trip at least a dozen times before. In 1793, the state of Virginia had passed a law requiring all free black men and women to register at their local courthouses and town halls, and to renew that registration every three years. While that law was an artifact of the first years after the American Revolution, when some slaveholders in the South chose to

[20] Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (1995): 1-20; quot. 7.
[21] Cowen, Polly (F, 43): Free Negro Register, 1851, Albemarle County (Va.) Free Negro and Slave Records, 1799-1870 ca. [electronic edition], *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*, Richmond, Va.: The Library of Virginia: http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/

emancipate their slaves, another statute enacted in Virginia in 1806 limited both the liberties and the presence of free black men and women there. That second law required former slaves who were manumitted after May 1, 1806 to move out of the state within a year of gaining their freedom. During the first half of the nineteenth century, hundreds of freedmen petitioned the Virginia legislature to stay in the place that they called home. Though some of these petitions were granted, the law still tore many families apart.[22]

These two laws were the reason why Polly Cowen had been going all her life to the county courthouse. On that summer day in 1851, she was forty-three years old. She appeared before Ira Garrett, a Justice of the Peace, and provided him with "satisfactory evidence of her having been born free." Garrett, following the terms of the 1793 law, described her features for both the court's records and the certificate she would leave with that day: she was five feet two and had, he observed, "a scar on the left side of the neck and one on the middle joint of the forefinger of the left hand."[23] Cowen had traveled to the courthouse with her husband, Benjamin; their two daughters, Sarah and Mary; and their two sons, William and Benjamin. Every one of them went through the same steps that she had. The family probably returned to the courthouse in 1854, and we know that Cowen and her husband, at least, were back there again in 1857. On November 3 of that year, she stood once more before Ira Garrett – a man whose face she now knew, and who might have remembered her, too, or recognized her from around town. This time, Garrett noted that she had been "born free of parents who were free before 1 May 1806."[24] In the years between the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, in 1850, and the start of the Civil War, in

[22] For an excellent history of both these laws as well as a fascinating discussion of the ways that both freedmen and slaves circumvented them, see Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 92-95 and 146-148. For further background on similar laws in other Southern states, see, as well, Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
[23] Cowen, Polly (F, 43): Free Negro Register, 1851.
[24] "Certificates of freedom, 1803-1936," Carter Godwin Woodson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., microfilm reel 9.

1861, free black Americans were more legally vulnerable than they'd ever been. Before going to court in 1857, Cowen may have dug up her parents' freedom papers, in case her own were challenged.

There hadn't been a time, during the first fifty years of Cowen's life, when her freedom could go undocumented; she could never have been sure that her own description of herself would be accepted. Knowing how much they'd have to do to register their liberty (and how often they would need to return to court to keep that registration up-to-date), some freed people took a chance and lived for years without authentic papers. The registration laws in Virginia and other Southern states tended to be hard to enforce, because they depended upon a level of surveillance that didn't exist in most places. And besides, forged freedom papers were usually not in short supply. Toward the end of the 1850s, a few black men and women in Petersburg, Virginia figured out that the night watchmen who checked their papers were illiterate. Over time, as Ira Berlin describes in *Slaves without Masters*, the town's black residents started to use all kinds of documents as passes, including some old bills of sale salvaged from a nearby plantation.[25] For these freedmen, the similarity that Equiano seems to have noticed between freedom papers and bills of sale offered an opening. But the effects of a statute enforced incompetently or at random could still be felt, day after day. As Berlin writes, free African Americans created liberties denied to them by the law. Yet these liberties weren't the same as security: "A gathering of friends to celebrate a wedding, to plan an outing, or simply to discuss old times might be broken up by the police, the participants arrested and dragged to the whipping post."[26] The constant possibility of such violence was the result of far more than just registration laws. Still, those laws left freed people on ever fragile ground.

[25] Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 331.
[26] Ibid., 331-332.

Of course, there can't be just one account of what was taking place when black men and women registered their freedom. The experience, even, of seeing one's name written out on a piece of paper would seldom have been identical for two people. When Israel Gillette went to the Albemarle County courthouse in 1843 to get his freedom papers, he had already been living as a free man for two years. Or, at least, he had found the nearest thing there was for him to freedom in Virginia. Forty-some years ago, Gillette had been born just a few miles from this courthouse, on Thomas Jefferson's plantation, Monticello. His mother and father, Jane and Edward Gillette, had been enslaved by Jefferson for their entire lives, and Israel had grown up at Monticello, too; Jane had worked on the farm, and Edward had driven a wagon. Jefferson died in 1826. In his will, he freed two of the sons that he'd had with Sally Hemings, Eston and Madison, along with three of their relatives. But the rest of Jefferson's one hundred and thirty slaves, including Israel Gillette, were auctioned off to new owners.[27] For another decade, Gillette remained a bondsman, until his second owner, Thomas Walker Gilmer, was elected to Congress in 1841. That year, in his wife's name, he bought himself from Gilmer for $500.

Now, in 1843, Gillette and his wife, Elizabeth, who had never been enslaved, were leaving Virginia. They walked into the courthouse in Charlottesville together. As he remembered thirty years later, in an interview with Ohio's *Pike County Republican*, "When there, the clerk, Mr. Garrett, asked me what surname I would take. I hesitated, and he suggested that it should be Jefferson, because I was born at Monticello and had been a good and faithful servant to Thomas Jefferson."[28] The name Gillette was probably missing from the documents that Israel had brought with him to court that day. It appears to have been absent from Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book – the volume that he used to keep track of the births, deaths, and work of all the people enslaved

[27] Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: Norton, 2008), 655.
[28] "Israel Jefferson, interviewed, 1873, Ohio," in *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 484.

on his land.[29] It's not clear whether Israel could have adopted his parents' last name if he had wanted to. The clerk, who perhaps was Ira Garrett – the man who recorded Polly Cowen's certificates of freedom – continued to make the case for "Jefferson": "Besides, he said, it would give me more dignity to be called after so eminent a man. So I consented to adopt the surname Jefferson, and have been known by it ever since."[30] We can only speculate, in the most tentative of ways, about how Israel felt to gain this new name, and new identity, in the same instant that his freedom was certified. When he was enslaved at Monticello, one of his jobs, for fourteen years, was to clean Jefferson's office. He spent many days standing a few feet from that Farm Book, in which Jefferson decided how much food and clothing would be given to him and his siblings.[31] Suddenly, years later, in the Charlottesville courthouse, a man was writing his name, and his former owner's name, and the word "free" on the same sheet of paper. Israel, who would use the last name Jefferson for the rest of his life, stood between all that was emancipatory about this moment and all that would tie him still to his past enslavement.

2. Traveling

There could be liberty without freedom papers, as Berlin's example shows us, but there could never be safety. The freedom that some black men and women found without obtaining papers was never portable. On the road, nothing could take the place of freedom papers. After Henry Bibb escaped from Kentucky on Christmas Day in 1837, he kept going back to look for his family. Twice, he managed to find his wife, Malinda, and their daughter, Frances, who were

[29] I haven't yet found a mention of the Gillette family name in the facsimile edition of the Farm Book. This seems to have been Jefferson's usual practice; the only surname that shows up in his lists of his slaves' names is "Hemings." Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book, with Commentary and Relevant Extracts from Other Writings*, ed. Edwin Morris Betts (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press and the American Philosophical Society, 1976).
[30] "Israel Jefferson, interviewed, 1873, Ohio," 484.
[31] At the beginning of *The Hemingses of Monticello*, Annette Gordon-Reed writes powerfully about how it felt to read the Farm Book in manuscript form for the first time: "He determined who got fish, and how many; who got cloth, and how much … it was wrenching to hold the original and to know that Jefferson's actual hand had dipped into the inkwell and touched these pages to create what was to me a record of human oppression. It took my breath away." Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 15-16.

both still enslaved. They made plans to reunite on the other side of the Ohio River, in Cincinnati, and to travel north from there to Canada. But rumors of Bibb's presence in town always seemed to draw too much attention to Malinda; she and Frances could never get away. In 1845, he tried once more to reach his wife and daughter, approaching Kentucky, this time, from the west and passing through another slave state, Missouri. When he rode into Jefferson City on horseback, he didn't know what to do next: "it was there I must cross the river or take a steamboat down; it was there I expected to be interrogated and required to prove whether I was actually a free man or a slave."[32] And Bibb, who remained a fugitive slave, had no answer to this question and no documents to explain it away: "If I was free, I should have to show my free papers; and if I was a slave I should be required to tell who my master was."[33]

This axiom was always hard to escape for free people of color in the antebellum period, but never more so than when they were traveling from one place to another. At least a few African Americans born free in the North during this era saw no pressing need to register their liberty if they weren't going anywhere. For a while, this was how Solomon Northup felt. Northup was born in 1808, in Essex County, New York, not very far from Canada; his father, Mintus Northup, was a former slave who gradually amassed enough property to vote. Solomon Northup knew nothing but freedom for three decades. The opening chapter of *Twelve Years a Slave*, the memoir that he wrote with David Wilson, a white attorney, in 1853, is filled with the details of an ordinary life. As Northup tells it, that ordinariness sounds a lot like bliss. He married Anne Hampton on Christmas Day in 1829, and "Immediately upon our marriage we commenced house-keeping, in the old yellow building then standing at the southern extremity of

[32] Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*, in *Slave Narratives*, ed. Andrews and Gates, 537.
[33] Ibid.

Fort Edward village."[34] On a spring day in 1841, Northup was walking through the middle of town in Saratoga Springs, New York, where he and his family now lived, when he met two strangers and struck up a conversation with them. Northup was a skilled violinist who often performed at local taverns: "Throughout the surrounding villages my fiddle was notorious" (*TY*, 24). The strangers were putting on a traveling circus show, and they invited him to be their one-man orchestra on a tour that would end in Washington, D.C. During their stop in New York City, the men encouraged Northup to obtain free papers before they left for Washington, where slavery hadn't been abolished. This thought wouldn't have crossed Northup's mind. Even after he visited the Custom House and proceeded through a less complicated version of the steps that Phebe Henry had taken thirty years before, he still wasn't convinced that the documents mattered much: "I placed the papers in my pocket, and started with my two friends to our hotel. I thought at the time, I must confess, that the papers were scarcely worth the cost of obtaining them" (*TY*, 32).

Just the opposite was true. In Washington, Northup awoke in a place he'd soon realize was a slave pen, with his arms and legs in chains, and his money and freedom papers gone. Treated as a runaway slave from Georgia, he was taken by a slave trader to Louisiana. His twelve years there form the devastating center of his memoir. Still, one of the many heartbreaking things about the early chapters of *Twelve Years a Slave* is Northup's introduction to a world in which papers make all the difference. Inside the slave pen, he talks to a woman named Eliza, who came to Washington "under pretence that the time had come when her free papers were to be executed" (*TY*, 53). Instead, "The paper that was executed was a bill of sale. The hope of years was blasted in a moment" (*TY*, 53). Another man that he meets, Robert, had

[34] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave, and Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, ed. Sue Eakin (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2007), 22. Cited parenthetically hereafter in the text as *TY*.

been born free in Cincinnati. Looking for work, Robert had been hired by two men there, and they had all crossed into Virginia together: "Without free papers, he had been seized at Fredericksburgh, placed in confinement, and beaten until he had learned, as I had, the necessity and the policy of silence" (*TY*, 61). A few weeks before he met Eliza and Robert, Northup saw his freedom as something that he only needed to announce. Now, nothing that he, or Eliza, or Robert could say about themselves would be enough.

The only thing that could begin to replace freedom papers when they were lost, destroyed, or challenged was more documentation. *Twelve Years a Slave* ends with a flurry of legal documents. These letters and depositions reveal how Henry Northup, a relative of Mintus Northup's former master, helped Solomon regain his freedom. As Robert B. Stepto argues in his foundational reading of *Twelve Years a Slave* and other antebellum slave narratives, these documents serve the crucial purpose of authenticating Northup's story for readers of the book.[35] What's also remarkable about these texts is that they are all freedom papers by proxy. On November 19, 1852, at a courthouse in Sandy Hill, New York, Anne Northup swore that her husband was "a free citizen of the State of New-York, and is now wrongfully held in slavery, in or near Marksville, in the parish of Avoyelles, in the State of Louisiana." (*TY*, 326). With her that day was Josiah Hand, who had known Solomon for much of his life; he swore that "Mintus and his wife, the mother of said Solomon Northup, were reported to be free citizens of New-York, and deponent believes they were so free" (*TY*, 327-28). Next up was Timothy Eddy, who had married Solomon and Anne in 1828. He swore now that "said Solomon was a free citizen of the State of New-York" (*TY*, 329). The depositions don't stop here. Four more men gave statements under oath that day on Northup's behalf. In the language and the form of the document that

[35] Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 3-31.

disappeared from his pocket twelve years before, Northup's loved ones, old neighbors, and passing acquaintances tried to restore part of what had been taken from him.

3. Holding On

Sometime in September or October of 1773, Phillis Wheatley became a freedwoman. She was about twenty years old. Just a few weeks before she was manumitted by John Wheatley, in Massachusetts, her first book of poems had been published in London. That same summer, she had traveled to England with her owner's son, Nathaniel, to promote the book and meet her patron, the Countess of Huntingdon. And, twelve years before that voyage, she had been kidnapped in West Africa (maybe Gambia, or Senegal), sold into slavery, and taken to America on a ship whose name would become her own.[36] On October 18, 1773, she sent a letter from Boston, where she was still living with John and Susanna Wheatley, to one of her many acquaintances in New England, a merchant named David Wooster. The letter begins with her "short Sketch of my voyage and return from London."[37] The six-week trip was so eventful for Wheatley, and so unlike her life in America, that she can only list some of the places she went: "Saw Westminster Abbey, British Museum Coxe's Museum, Saddler's wells, Greenwich Hospital, Park, and Chapel, the royal Observatory at Greenwich, &c. &c. too many things and Places to trouble you with in a Letter" ("DW," 146.)

Partway through this letter, Wheatley turns to what happened when she and Nathaniel came back to Massachusetts. It's here that she writes, for the only time in any of her surviving manuscripts, about how she came to be free. In England, she had met Granville Sharp, who gave

[36] The definitive modern biography of Wheatley is Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011). My interest in the short span of time that separated the publication of her first and only book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, and her manumission is inspired by a beautiful short essay by Rafia Zafar that opens with this point. Zafar, "Shakespeare's Darker Sister," *A New Literary History of America*, ed. Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 93-98.

[37] Phillis Wheatley to David Worcester [Wooster], October 18, 1773, *Complete Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta, 146. Cited parenthetically hereafter in the text as "DW."

her a tour of the Tower of London. The year before, Sharp had brought the case of James Somerset before England's highest common law court. Somerset was an enslaved man who had fled from his owner only to be recaptured in London. The judge in the case, Lord Mansfield, ruled that enslaved people who, like Somerset, came to England from the colonies could not be forced to leave as slaves. By law, then, Wheatley had the choice to stay in London and to emancipate herself there. She decided to return to Massachusetts. But, in her letter to Wooster, she hints that she left England on the condition that she'd soon be manumitted: "Since my return to America my Master, has at the desire of my friends in England given me my freedom." ("DW," 147).

Wheatley hadn't stopped thinking, though, about the other life she could have led – and might still lead – on the other side of the Atlantic. When she received her manumission papers back in Boston, she tells Wooster, she sent a copy of them to London, to an official named Israel Mauduit. Mauduit, the colonial agent for Massachusetts, was another person she had met during her time in England that summer. At the time of Wheatley's manumission, there were signs that slavery wouldn't be around much longer in Massachusetts: in 1766, an enslaved woman named Jenny Slew had successfully sued for her freedom. But another decade would pass before the institution was deemed unconstitutional there.[38] And Wheatley was just starting to learn what her life would be like as a free black woman in Boston. As she transcribed her manumission papers (an "Instrument" designed to "secure whatsoever Should be given me as my Own") and sent them to Mauduit, she may not have had one plan in mind ("DW," 147). Instead, she seems to have been preparing herself for all kinds of contingencies. The original document might slip out of her coat. The laws of Massachusetts might grow more restrictive for freed people. There

[38] On the slow and incomplete abolition of slavery in Massachusetts during the last decades of the eighteenth century, see Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, esp. 139-141 and Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

might be another chance for her to return to England. If, on some level, Wheatley's manumission papers redefined her life, then she came up with a way to store that account of herself in two parts of the world.

At the end of the eighteenth century, there weren't many former slaves who could send a transcription of their freedom papers to a foreign official they knew. But freed men and women found other methods to guard these documents. Sometimes, they settled upon a version of Wheatley's strategy: they made copies of their papers. If they hadn't learned to write or couldn't afford to buy the extra paper, they turned to friends, neighbors, and abolitionists for help. Beginning in 1790, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society's Committee of Guardians traveled around Philadelphia and its surrounding counties, transcribing the manumissions and indentures of free black men and women.[39] Eventually, these copies filled the pages of seven large bound volumes.[40] At some point after the spring of 1794, one of the Committee's secretaries – perhaps Thomas Harrison, a Quaker tailor – encountered Benjamin. Word for word, this secretary reproduced the statements that Philena and Edward Lay and Jonathan Hunn had given him. Harrison and the other members of the Committee of Guardians were often copying the words of the clerks and justices of the peace that we saw up close in the first section of this chapter. Yet in the hands of the abolitionists, these same words took on a new insistence. Turning the pages of the seven volumes, labeled "Books of Manumission," you get the sense that their compilers were trying to write slavery out of existence, one statement of freedom at a time.

For free black men and women, there was always the problem of how to live with their papers and carry them around day after day. This was a practical problem, but it was also a philosophical one. On the front page of the first issue of *The North Star,* the earliest newspaper

[39] For a detailed portrait of the PAS and its activities, see Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
[40] Manumission books A-G, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

that he published, Frederick Douglass printed his free papers. He prefaced them, though, with a few remarks about how to read them: "We give to our readers the evidence of our right to be free in this democratic and Christian country – not so much however to establish our right to ourself as to expose the cold-blooded Methodist man-stealer who claimed as his property and the hypocritical nation that has sanctioned his infamous claim. We shall send him a copy of this paper."[41] To Douglass, this manuscript offered support for the abolitionist cause, because it captured something essential about how slavery worked. For that reason, too, it was a painful artifact for him. He held onto it, but he also disavowed it.

But these documents could also lose some associations and pick up new ones as time went by. After emancipation, Polly Cowen may have placed her certificates of freedom at the bottom of a drawer. For almost sixty years, they had been a constant presence in her life. Now, they didn't need to be. When freedom papers appear, today, among the African American family papers preserved at research libraries, they are often the oldest items in a collection. In 1842, John Frederick Cook became a free man and obtained a piece of paper declaring that from Samuel King, a justice of the peace in Washington, D.C.[42] Two years later, when his daughter, Mary Victoria, was manumitted, he returned to King's courthouse. In addition, almost certainly, to getting separate papers for her, he asked King to record the details of his daughter's manumission on the same sheet of paper that he always kept with him. In 1845, Cook's son, George Frederick, was freed, too, and he made the same request once more of King. Because there wasn't much room left, King had to copy out George Frederick's manumission in a smaller hand; his signature touched the edge of the page. Out of his own freedom papers, Cook improvised a storage place for those of his children. In doing so, he created a family history in

[41] "Free Papers," *The North Star* 1 (December 3, 1847), Rochester, N.Y., p. 1.
[42] Box 20-1, Cook Family Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Libraries, Washington, D.C.

miniature. Many years later, one of his descendants would transcribe the contents of this manuscript again – this time, in the branches of a family tree.[43]

When the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened this past September in Washington, D.C., one of the objects exhibited on its bottom floor was a small tin box.[44] Joseph Trammell made this box, a kind of wallet, in Leesburg, Virginia, in 1852 – the year that he became a free man. He folded up his freedom papers in the box and brought them with him everywhere he went. A loose sheet of paper weighs next to nothing; this was one of the sources of Benjamin's trouble. Trammell's wallet, though, was heavy. He would have noticed right away if it was gone. A hundred and fifty years after Trammell received his freedom papers and fashioned this tin for them, they were passed down to his great-great-great-granddaughter, Elaine Thompson. At first, she thought to herself, "'What am I going to do with this?'"[45] Trammell had gone to the Loudon County courthouse when he was twenty-one to register his freedom. The clerk who recorded his features noticed a small scar on his forehead and a longer one on his wrist. This piece of paper might sometimes have made Trammell feel estranged in the place he had lived all his life. Yet, over time, he and his descendants had slowly turned this document into something else: a legacy. As Thompson kept rereading the description of her great-great-great-grandfather, she might have thought, for a moment, that she saw his face. But the weight of the wallet might still not feel like freedom.

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[43] Box 20-1, ibid.

[44] "Freedom papers and handmade tin carrying box belonging to Joseph Trammell," 1852, object no. 2014.25, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2014.25. Vinson Cunningham mentions the location of Trammell's tin wallet in the museum in a thoughtful essay about the institution: Cunningham, "Making a Home for Black History," *The New Yorker*, August 29, 2016.

[45] Marcia Davis, "The Artifacts and Stories that Brought the African American Museum to Life," *The Washington Post*, September 15, 2016.

Coda: The Document Book

There is no collection of Apess Family Papers. The original deeds and certificates that William Apess transcribed are probably still in Massachusetts, filed away at a courthouse or sitting on the shelves of some historical society. In the homes of the descendants of Daniel Amos, Lucy Orchard, and Ebenezer Attaquin, there might be copies of the petitions that these men and women wrote, signed, and submitted to the state. But all the transcriptions that Apess made of records and acts haven't turned up anywhere. At least for now, there are no drafts of his five books and no letters sent to his family while he was on the road. There is nothing written by his wife Elizabeth or their children, either. "All we know reliably" about Apess, Barry O'Connell observed in 1992, "is how he shaped his life in writing."[1] Our knowledge about him seems to end even sooner than that, with the words that he published.[2] Around the same time that Apess was combing through old deeds and circulating appeals, officials at Harvard were saving their own records related to the Mashpee people. Today, in the Harvard University Archives, you can find two boxes filled with lists of the Mashpee congregants at Phineas Fish's church and letters asking whether Fish should be fired.[3] Apess amassed a similar collection of papers in the early 1830s, one that told parts of the same story from a much different perspective. Still, *Indian Nullification* can offer only a secondhand sense of that collection. There are no boxes to open, no manuscripts to touch.

[1] Barry O'Connell, "Introduction," in William Apess, *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot*, ed. O'Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), xxxix. Cited hereafter parenthetically in the text as *IN*.

[2] For a wonderful reexamination of what we do and don't know, and an excellent complement to O'Connell's pathbreaking research, see Margaret Bruchac, "Hill Town Touchstone: Reconsidering William Apess and Colrain, Massachusetts," *Early American Studies* (Fall 2016): 712-748.

[3] Harvard University Corporation. Papers relating to the Marshpee Indians, 1811-1841: 1 vol. and 2 boxes, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, MA.

And yet Apess's book looks and feels a lot like a bundle of papers. One after another, documents propel the book's drama ahead. Ebenezer Attaquin and Israel Amos send their first petition to Harvard. Benjamin Hallett, the lawyer hired by the Mashpee people, presents his brief before the Massachusetts General Court. Ezra Attaquin, Isaac Combs, and Israel Amos submit evidence to the Massachusetts Legislature of their community's past losses and past appeals that went unheard.[4] Apess guides his readers through these manuscripts, always stopping to point out why they matter: "The following are the petitions presented to the legislature, which will give some light on the history of Mashpee" (*IN* 250). In her ingenious reading of *Indian Nullification*, Lisa Brooks argues that the book's cascade of texts and voices resembles "the literary form of the treaty" – a genre that Apess knew well.[5] Like the orchestrator of a treaty council, Apess draws his audience into the deliberations. The readers of his book, Brooks writes, can "consider the evidence and contribute their own response."[6] Brooks is right: *Indian Nullification* hums with the voices of a courtroom. But it belongs to the archive, too. Apess knew what it was like to sift through papers day after day, and his work bears the imprint of that experience. Sometimes, when I am reading his book, I imagine that I am sitting next to him at a library table, looking on as he says, "See this. Now, see this."

As I wrote this dissertation, I kept running into books that had the same effect on me. There was Caroline Dall's *The Romance of the Association* (1875), with its tender and more than a little obsessive reading and emendation of Elizabeth Whitman's letters. There was Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), with its final rush of depositions insisting upon Northup's freedom. There was Thomas Wait's *Secret Journals of the Acts and Proceedings of*

[4] Apess, *Indian Nullification*, in *On Our Own Ground*, 176-190.
[5] Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 238.
[6] Ibid., 238.

Congress (1820-21), and Peter Force's *American Archives* (1833-53), too, with their rambling surveys of all the government's doings. Far from the shelves of any archive or the linen chests in any family's home, these printed works made me feel as if I were rummaging through someone else's papers. In many ways, these books don't seem to have much in common. Yet, like *Indian Nullification,* they are all the product of hours and days spent sitting with manuscripts, searching for them, or holding on to them. They capture something elusive about what it was like to be alive in nineteenth-century America.

One or two of these books fall squarely into familiar genres, but the rest are still waiting for a name to tell us what they are. *Twelve Years a Slave* is a canonical slave narrative, and *The Romance of the Association* and *Indian Nullification* sit at the outer edges of other genres. Dall's work is a version of literary history filled with longing; Apess's is a political appeal made up of many people's words. Still, there is a reason that most scholars of these two books never mention those genres, relying instead on adjectives like "odd" and "bizarre."[7] Next to each other, Dall's book and Apess's start to look less singular. Alongside *American Archives*, *Secret Journals*, and the last pages of *Twelve Years a Slave,* they seem even more like variations on the same genre.

I have come to think of all these works as document books. A document book can make an unwieldy collection of papers portable. It can change what someone will discover among a stranger's writings, or it can piece together a documentary record that would otherwise be ignored. Trunks, wallets, and libraries are all repositories for manuscripts. A document book can be a repository, too. Between the covers of a document book, you might encounter the papers of a famous author. You might also find manuscripts that no nineteenth-century library wanted.

[7] O'Connell characterizes *Indian Nullification* as an "odd book," while Christopher Castiglia refers to *The Romance of the Association* as "bizarre": O'Connell, in Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, 165; Castiglia, *Interior States*, 56.

Over the course of my dissertation, there have been other volumes that resembled these books in every way but one: they were written by hand. After Christopher Columbus Baldwin's death, in 1835, his friend William Lincoln bound together the loose notes that Baldwin had made during long walks through cemeteries and days spent sitting in town halls. Around the same time, Lincoln took almost a hundred dinner and party invitations that he'd saved over the years and collected them inside one bound volume. Forty years earlier, Thomas Harrison and the other secretaries of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society slowly filled the pages of seven blank books with the manumissions and indentures of free and soon-to-be-free black men and women. Retracing words and binding loose sheets of paper together, these archivists tried to keep writings that they valued safe. They wanted to give these manuscripts a kind of publicity and a measure of permanence, so that someone else might read them a decade or a half-century later. When people folded up their parents' letters and put them in a drawer, their reasons were not so different.

Document books carried forward these hopes. But they also made papers public in a way that no handwritten copy and no dresser drawer could. Here are two more document books that seem to me to reflect upon this change while looking back, too, on a whole era. The second book, which I'll return to, is Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days* (1882). The first is William Still's *The Underground Rail Road* (1872).

Initially, when Still began to aid runaway slaves in Philadelphia, he didn't plan to write about his work. He had joined the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society as a mail clerk and janitor in 1847, when he was twenty-six years old. Soon, he became one of the leaders of its Vigilance Committee, which sheltered fugitives, represented them in court, and helped them find safe harbor elsewhere. Another member of the Committee, Robert Purvis, had been chronicling its

efforts for years. But after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, Purvis destroyed all those records.[8] Although enslaved men and women kept fleeing to Philadelphia, their names and journeys went undocumented for about two years. Then, in the last days of 1852, Still opened a blank journal and started writing: "Arrived Hannah Jane Thompson; Left Sussex last Jan'y – first stopped with Jacob Parson – went from his house to his Cousin's."[9] Over the next five years, he recorded everything that he learned about the six hundred and forty-nine fugitives who came to the Society's office, on Fifth Street, or to his own house, on South Street. He kept track of people's names, places they'd been before, and, sometimes, the names of the loved ones they were missing and hoped to see again. Before and during the Civil War, Still hid his journal, along with letters from runaways and other agents that he had kept, inside a caretaker's house in a cemetery. When the war ended, he retrieved his notes and made them the core of his book – one of the first and best accounts of the Underground Railroad.[10]

Something changed for Still between 1847 and 1852, and that event stayed with him; twenty years later, it gave his book its form and purpose. A chance encounter, in the summer of 1850, prompted him to write about the men and women passing through his city. Still's mother and his siblings had been fugitives, too. Before he was born, in Burlington County, New Jersey, his parents, Levin and Sidney Steel, and their four children had been enslaved on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.[11] After Levin purchased his own freedom and moved to New Jersey, Sidney tried twice to join him there. The first time that she ran away from her owner, she brought her two sons and two daughters with her. A few months after they were all caught, she fled again.

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[8] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 387.
[9] William Still, *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c….* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872), 4. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *UR*.
[10] James Oliver Horton, "A Crusade for Freedom: William Still and the Real Underground Railroad," in *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 178; 184-187.
[11] For details about Still's early life, see Horton's excellent "A Crusade for Freedom," 175-194.

This time, only she and her daughters, Mary and Kitturah, escaped. In New Jersey, she took the name Charity, and her husband and children – including, now, William – all adopted the last name Still. For forty years, she heard nothing about her other sons, Levin and Peter.

In August 1850, a man named Peter Freedman walked into the Antislavery Society's office and asked Still for help. He was looking for his family, and he had traveled north from Alabama to Philadelphia to find them. Still asked Freedman what he remembered about his parents, whom he hadn't seen since he was six years old. When Freedman mentioned that their names were Levin and Sidney, Still knew that he was talking to his brother Peter. He noticed his mother's features now in Peter's face. "I took Peter and seated myself by his side," Still recalled in a letter to a friend. "I told him that I could tell him all about his kinsfolks."[12] Charity Still and Peter Freedman, who had always thought of each other by different names, were reunited the next day.[13]

This reunion made Still believe that he could end other separations. With all its logs of comings and goings, *The Underground Rail Road* was meant as a directory for people who had lost their families in slavery.[14] During his years as a conductor, Still spoke almost every day with men and women who were searching for their spouses, siblings, and children, or wondering when those relatives might gain their freedom. *The Underground Rail Road* works as a general history of its namesake. But, as Still explains in his preface, the first readers that he had in mind were people who, after emancipation, were "living without the slightest knowledge of each other's whereabouts" (*UR* 4).

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[12] William Still to James Miller McKim," 8 August 1850, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858, ed. C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 55.

[13] For a beautiful and analytically rich account of Still's reunion with his brother, see the opening chapter of Edlie Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[14] For a moving account of other ways that people searched for loved ones after emancipation, see Heather A. Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

Somewhere within the narratives collected in his book, he hoped that these readers would maybe find their loved ones: "by the use that might be made privately, if not publicly, of just such facts as would naturally be embraced in their brief narratives, re-unions might take place" (*UR* 4). *The Underground Rail Road* begins with private grief and joy. The opening narrative is Peter's; the first two illustrations are of Peter and Charity. Even as the book opens out, over nearly eight hundred pages, to a broader view of the 1850s, it continues to unfold from person to person. Daniel Hughes, the subject of one short chapter, ran away from his owner in Dorchester County, Maryland, trying, he told Still, to "'go where colored men are free'" (*UR* 73). "He left brothers and sisters, and uncles and aunts behind," Still notes (*UR* 73). Susan Brooks boarded a ship in Norfolk, Virginia with a man's ironed shirt draped over her arm. Mistaken, as she'd hoped, for someone delivering clothes to a passenger, she escaped first to Philadelphia, where she met Still, and then to Canada, where she planned to join her son. "She left one sister," Still writes, "named Mary Ann Tharagood, who was wanting to come away very much" (*UR* 212). Gathered together, these short narratives make up a panorama of flight and peril, and of freedom and loss. Taken one at a time, though, Still's chapters do seem written for more specific, private uses. They are packed with details that would matter most to a few readers: to Daniel Hughes's brothers, say, or Susan Brooks's sister.

To bring people back to their families by a stroke of luck, *The Underground Rail Road* had to be a printed book. That way, one reader in Virginia could find her brother's name on page 100, and another reader in Nova Scotia could spot his aunt's name on page 600. As a printed archive of notes and letters related to slavery and freedom, *The Underground Rail Road* was both the legacy of earlier document books and a departure from those works. When Still marked down Hannah Jane Thompson's arrival in Philadelphia in 1852, he was picking up where Thomas

Harrison had left off fifty years before. Both men approached record-keeping with a great deal of hope. They were writing, though, about different forms of freedom during different political moments. The words that Harrison copied into his Committee's record books all proclaimed people's freedom under the law. These manuscript books were open, right away, to anyone in Philadelphia who wished to read them. Still, by contrast, chronicled the freedom of fugitives in secret, unsure if anyone would ever get to read his notes.

In the 1850s, while Still was keeping a journal that no one could see, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853). Some years earlier, Angelina and Sarah Grimké and Theodore Weld had written *American Slavery As It Is* (1839), a book that Stowe slept with under her pillow. Like *The Underground Rail Road*, these antebellum works depended on the accumulation of personal narratives and documentary evidence for their effect. The Grimkés and Weld, along with Stowe, reprinted ads for runaway slaves next to testimonies from former slaveholders and abolitionists.[15] Still may well have been influenced by these books and their authors. But his materials were not quite the same as theirs, and his ambitions were new, too. By recording names and stories in his journal, and by writing a book based on those notes, Still created papers for people who often had none.

Specimen Days, like *The Underground Rail Road*, is a book about reunions. Writing in the shadow of big, unresolved questions – about national reunion, and about the form that citizenship would assume for black men and women – Whitman and Still attended to what else might be found after the war. Some passages of *Specimen Days* deal directly with the matter of how the U.S. might be mended after its dissolution. Almost all these passages appear in the book's most famous section, in which Whitman narrates his visits to hospitals during the Civil

[15] For a great discussion of these abolitionist works that has shaped how I understand Still's book, too, see Ellen Gruber Garvey, "facts and FACTS": Abolitionists' Database Innovations," in *"Raw Data" is an Oxymoron*, ed. Lisa Gitelman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 89-102.

War. Much of *Specimen Days*, though, follows Whitman's daily encounters years after the war with bees, raspberries, waterfalls, and cedar-plums. He dedicates the second half of his book to a menagerie of weeds, turtles, and "tulip trees (and all other trees)."[16] In January 1873, Whitman suffered a major stroke. Later that year, he left Washington, D.C. and moved into his brother George's house in Camden, New Jersey. When he wrote a few years afterwards about the wildflowers and birds that he had gotten to know around Camden, he was describing his reunion with the physical world.[17]

His papers were a part of that world, and like mulleins and glow-worms, they were wonderful to him. In a book filled with marvelous ordinary things, Whitman's notebooks, memoranda, and loose sheets of paper are the first to appear. He begins *Specimen Days* by explaining its design, which came to him as he was sitting in the woods on a perfect summer day in 1882. Back at his house, he had "a huddle of diary-jottings, war-memoranda of 1862-'65, Nature-notes of 1871-'81, with Western and Canadian observations afterwards, all bundled up and tied by a big string" (*SD* 689). In the woods, he decided to "go home, untie the bundle, reel out diary-scraps and memoranda," and print all those pages just as they were (*SD* 689).

He knew that some things would be lost in that transition. Holding his notebooks from the war again, "each composed of a sheet or two of paper, folded small to carry in the pocket, and fasten'd with a pin," he read words that he had scribbled down "while watching, or waiting, or tending somebody" (*SD* 689). Revisiting his notes from Camden, he remembered stopping here and there along the banks of Timber Creek to write about what he was seeing. The notebooks from the war, Whitman confesses, are "full of associations never to be possibly said

[16] Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, in *Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 831. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *SD*.
[17] There is recent, vital scholarship on Whitman and disability, some of which appears in a special issue of *Common-place*: "Whitman and Disability," ed. Don James McLaughlin and Clare Mullaney, *Common-place* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2019).

or sung" (*SD* 689). That problem could extend to his other jottings, too. Few readers of his papers, in manuscript or print, had any sense of the memories embedded in each pin and crease and pencil mark. No reader of *Specimen Days* could run a finger along one of those creases. But throughout the book, and most of all in the chapters written in Camden, Whitman seems to be searching for the closest thing to that knowledge and that kind of experience.

Specimen Days is unified not by subject matter or chronology, but by the constant presence of Whitman – as a walker, a sitter, a writer, and an archivist. In one typical short chapter, "Sundown Perfume – Quail-Notes – The Hermit-Thrush," he goes to Timber Creek before sunset and starts to write, in the light of "different greens, shadows, half-shadows" (*SD* 787). As he listens to a quail's song, a few young hogs "come sniffing near me, and then scamper away" (*SD* 787). He jots down something about them, and about the quail and his partial view of water, with "the quiver of leaf-shadows over the paper as I write" (*SD* 787). As readers, we keep seeing, and sensing, Whitman here. There is his body, resting under an oak with the pigs, and his hand, writing about half-shadows. And, implicitly, there are his hands, saving this piece of paper. At times like this, *Specimen Days* strikes me as a meditation on how, and why, people read and valued handwritten texts in nineteenth-century America. For many readers, it began to seem possible that a loose scrap of paper could make an absent person appear. This promise wasn't new, but, in the nineteenth century, it was available to more people, and needed by more people, too. In describing a walk cut short by the cold, or the shadow passing across a page, Whitman fills this section of his book with a chorus of associations. Addressing an audience of strangers, he makes himself appear.

About a year before *Specimen Days* was published, Whitman went searching among handwritten texts of a different kind for people who were gone. In one of the book's first

chapters, he remembers his visit, in the summer of 1881, to his family's two burial hills on Long Island. At the cemetery for his father's side of the family, he encounters more than fifty graves which are "plainly traceable, and as many more decay'd out of all form" (*SD* 692). At his mother's family's burial hill, near Cold Spring, he climbs to the top under "a slightly drizzling rain" and sees the names of "My grandfather Cornelius and my grandmother Amy (Naomi) and numerous relatives nearer or remoter" (*SD* 693). When Christopher Columbus Baldwin took circuitous walks home, sometimes in the rain, so that he could copy down every gravestone inscription in central Massachusetts, no one watching him understood what he was doing. Fifty years later, though, Whitman might have. "There is always," he writes, "the deepest eloquence of sermon or poem in any of these ancient graveyards of which Long Island has so many; so what must this one have been to me?" (*SD* 693).

Some men and women in nineteenth-century America were unsure if a stranger might someday read the papers that they were saving, and some hoped for that outcome. Others, though, longed for someone to read the documents that they had held onto for years. This was Still's wish, and it was Whitman's, too. Print promised to reach someone – anyone – in a way that a storage box could not. Sifting through manuscript collections as I researched this dissertation, I have sometimes wondered how often readers were seeing one document or another. Had this piece of paper found the audience that someone had imagined for it a hundred and fifty years ago? I wasn't searching for Hetty's letter, or Patrick Henry Reason's papers, when I happened upon them both at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Reason's papers are held within one slim manila folder in the bulky "REA-SYM" box of a much larger collection, called Miscellaneous American Letters and Papers. The New York Public Library has digitized much of its print and manuscript holdings, but, so far, Reason's papers

haven’t been a part of that effort. Without some luck, without the Schomburg’s conscientious archivists, and, most of all, without the care that Reason and his descendants had paid to Hetty’s note, I would never have been able to read her message the way that she read his letter to her: like a book.

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