

Perspectives  
in  
HISTORY

---

---

*ALPHA BETA PHI*  
*CHAPTER*  
*PHI ALPHA THETA*

---

---



JOURNAL OF THE ALPHA BETA PHI  
CHAPTER OF PHI ALPHA THETA

**Perspectives  
in  
HISTORY**

EDITOR

Bonnie Wheeler May

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Allison Schmidt

Jennifer L. Schmidt

Jason S. Taylor

ADVISOR

James A. Ramage

---

**Perspectives in History** is an annual scholarly publication of the Department of History and Geography. Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the NKU Board of Regents, the faculty of the university, or the student editors of the journal. Manuscripts are welcome from students and faculty.

**Send all articles, essays and book reviews to:**

Northern Kentucky University  
History/Geography Department  
Highland Heights, KY 41099  
copyright 1998



# CONTENTS

---

## Perspectives in History

Vol. XIII, 1997-1998

### DEDICATION to H. Lew Wallace

5 *Frank Steely*

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

7 *Jennifer L. Schmidt*

### FOREWORD

9 *Bonnie Wheeler May*

### ARTICLES

- 11 Mary Boykin Chesnut: Confederate Critic of Slavery  
*Michael C. C. Adams*
- 25 Myths and Realities of the Underground Railroad in Kentucky  
*Jason S. Taylor*
- 33 "To Free The Minds of Our People:" Charles Sherrod  
and the Civil Rights Movement  
*Angela L. Brown*
- 39 Kentucky Coal Miners' Health and Safety  
*Gina Brock*
- 47 The Sears Discrimination Case: A Study of Grass-roots Activism  
*Cornelia F. Sexauer*
- 57 Mark Rothko: Expanding Boundaries in the 1960s  
*William J. Landon*
- 65 Russian Icons and the Orthodox Church  
*Walter L. Schneider*

### REVIEW

- 71 *The Autobiography of John P. Parker: Former Slave  
and Conductor on the Underground Railroad*, by  
Stuart S. Sprague, ed.  
review by Shalom Renay Bentley and Michael Washington

### 73 OFFICERS

### 75 MEMBERS



*Volume XIII of Perspectives in History is  
dedicated to the memory of  
Dr. H. Lew Wallace (1932 - 1996).*

## DEDICATION

---

When first appointed President of Northern Kentucky University I knew immediately that I would invite Dr. Harold Lew Wallace to chair the department of history. I had earlier invited him to join the department I chaired at Murray State University and I already knew that he was the teacher *par excellence*.

At Northern Lew was responsible for recruiting a history and geography faculty that can boast of having several winners of the Outstanding Professor Award and two Regents Professors. From the beginning the department reflected as much diversity of views as one could expect in any discipline in the arts. Lew Wallace successfully reconciled our varied teaching philosophies and political biases. I never heard anyone even whisper that she or he had been treated unfairly.

Dr. Wallace was an outstanding writer, teacher and administrator. His education in literature as well as history and his sense of good prose enabled him to produce articles for publications from *Reader's Digest* to scholarly journals in history. He fathered the issue of *The Filson Club History Quarterly* in which four Northern faculty members paid tribute to four great Kentucky historians.

In 1956 the President of the American Historical Association, Dexter Perkins, author of twenty-three scholarly books on diplomatic history, entitled his address "Let Us Gladly Teach." Harold Lew Wallace personified that joy in teaching, and his greatest professional contributions were his classroom lectures and discussions which won for him enormous popularity with students of every background and talent. Almost daily, his former students speak admiringly of him to me and to others. His evaluations by students, from the beginning of his quarter century tenure at Northern Kentucky University, were constant reflections of the statement by a student that I remember from his first semester here: "Don't tamper with perfection."

As I consider the variety of individuals who offered remembrances at Lew's Memorial Service in Greaves Hall, I am convinced that we lost a true "Renaissance Man"—a breed increasingly rare in this late twentieth century.

Frank Steely





# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

---

As President of Alpha Beta Phi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta it is my honor to welcome you to our wonderful journal and tell you something about what we have done this year. *Perspectives in History* is always of the highest quality thanks to the contributions of students and professors who worked hard on the papers submitted. The work of our editor, Bonnie May, is of the highest quality and Dr. Ramage always puts in long hours on our publication.

This year we have had a great time. We have taken field trips to the Cincinnati Historical Society Museum, Great Serpent Mound near Hillsboro, Ohio, Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, and the Frontier in American Culture exhibit at the Cincinnati Public Library. We have had wide participation in our field trips. We invited students and faculty to a Christmas party and special thanks is extended to Rick and Jenny Trump for hosting it in their home. We had an end-of-the-year picnic at the home of Bonnie May for faculty, staff and students of the department.

It has been a very successful year for our bake sales. These are a relatively new venture for our Chapter and in the short time that we have been holding them they have taken off. For Halloween and Valentine's Day we had two tables piled high with a variety of snacks and goodies and sales set new records. With our own bakery owner making the finest baked goods, hot cider and delicious chocolates, our customers, including professors, could not help but stop and buy from us.

Also we had a wonderful used book sale this year. Thanks to everyone who came out to select "non-sellers" and help trade them to a local used book shop for books that did sell. We gave several boxes of books to Good Will. Thanks to Dr. David Payne for his large donation of books this year and to Dr. Michael Adams for donating photographs, video tapes, and many books and for involving the Chapter in the Military History Lecture Series. Support from the faculty and administration makes this one of the best Chapters in the nation.

And speaking of Best Chapters, Alpha Beta Phi Chapter has again won the Best Chapter Award for the 1996-1997 academic year. This is the fifth award in six years for our Chapter. We are all very proud and thankful to Dr. Ramage for his leadership in taking us to this level of achievement.

I would like to extend a special and personal thank you to Dr. Ramage. He has been a great help to me and an inspiration to all members. I'm sure I speak for everyone when I say that he is the best advisor our group could have and he is why Phi Alpha Theta is special.

Congratulations to next year's officers and thank you to all my fellow 1997-1998 officers; you did a great job this year. The enthusiasm of the student members and officers made this year a success. You demonstrated your dedication during Spring Break with a record participation in the Regional Conference at the University of Louisville: ten members attending and four presenting papers.

In closing I would like to express my pride at having been allowed the honor of leading Phi Alpha Theta. I thank you for the trust and support you have given me throughout the year. I look forward to seeing us grow stronger through the years. Readers, I hope you enjoy the fine scholarly works in this volume of the journal.

Jennifer L. Schmidt  
President

# FOREWORD

---

I have considered it an honor and a privilege to serve as 1997-98 Editor of *Perspectives in History*. As both a History and Secondary Education - Social Studies major, this experience has renewed my personal commitment to the importance of fostering “intellectual curiosity” in my students.

As Editor, I have had the opportunity to participate in a very special learning experience. Dr. James A. Ramage, Regents Professor of History and Faculty Advisor to the chapter, inspires his members and authors to strive for excellence. Journal contributors’ willingness to meet these high standards of scholarship makes the Editor’s job an easy one.

It is also fitting that this edition of the Journal be dedicated to Dr. H. Lew Wallace. I had the truly exciting and joyful experience of sharing his class as a student. He convinced me that all excellent teachers of history must first be great storytellers. His approach to history made me a better teacher. I must also pay a special tribute to past Chair and Regents Professor Dr. Michael C. C. Adams, who graciously allowed me to discover my love of history and inspired me to value good writing.

In conclusion, we students of Northern Kentucky University and members of Alpha Beta Phi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta are indeed fortunate to have the support of our Chair, Dr. Robert C. Vitz, our faculty who inspire students to write fine papers and our administrative staff—Jan Rachford and Bertie Sandy—who help in countless ways throughout the year. We recognize the encouragement and generous support of student scholarship of Dr. Rogers Redding, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the University community. Without the commitment of the University administration this Journal would not be possible. We thank Kathy Stewart and University Relations and Kathy Dawn and Printing Services for their professional work and Joseph Ruh, University photographer, for his assistance with the tribute to the memory of Dr. Wallace.

Bonnie Wheeler May  
Editor



# Mary Boykin Chesnut: Confederate Critic of Slavery

by  
Michael C. C. Adams

Mary Boykin Chesnut (née Miller) was born the eldest child of a white slaveholding family of South Carolina, on March 31, 1823. She lived through arguably the most traumatic period in her state's history, witnessing secession and Civil War, the death of the Confederacy and of slavery, the destruction wrought by General William Tecumseh Sherman and the years of economic struggle that followed, then the "Redemption" of the state by the forces of white supremacy. All this she documented in her writing which ended in 1884, only two years before her death by heart failure on November 22, 1886.<sup>1</sup>

Mary's father, Stephen Decatur Miller, was of modest birth but managed to graduate from South Carolina College in 1808, after which he studied and practiced law. Entering politics, he rose to be state governor, senator, and U.S. Congressman. His wife, Mary Boykin, was from a wealthy family with a powerful clan network, so that the Millers were finally by work and marriage at the top of the social scale. Daughter Mary consolidated her prestigious origins by marrying, on April 23, 1840, James Chesnut, Jr., son of one of the wealthiest planters in South Carolina, James Chesnut, owner of five hundred slaves. Mary initially lived with her husband's family at their stately home, Mulberry, and here her growing distaste for slavery was confirmed.<sup>2</sup>

James Jr. advanced quickly in South Carolina politics, serving in various offices including state senator. In 1858 he was elected to the U.S. Senate, where he was a staunch defender of state's rights. Resigning his Senate seat after the election as President of Abraham Lincoln, James helped draft South Carolina's Ordinance of Secession and was one of those sent to demand the surrender of Fort Sumter during its bombardment. After the forming of the Confederate States, James undertook important political and military assignments for the government. Because of her position, Mary was thus at the peak of society in several capital cities, including Columbia, Washington, Montgomery and Richmond. She loved the life of a social belle, making up for modest good looks with a generous nature and incisive conversation. Thomas Cooper De Leon, a Confederate social light, called her "sympathetic, helpful, intent." Her intimates included President and Mrs. Jefferson Davis, the Robert E. Lees, General and Mrs. Wade Hampton, the Clays of Alabama, the Wigfalls of Texas, and the star-crossed General John Bell Hood.<sup>3</sup>

---

Dr. Michael C. C. Adams, Regents Professor of History, is a charter member of Alpha Beta Phi Chapter. He served two four-year terms as Chair of the History and Geography Department and is the author of several books including *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

It is intriguing that a woman at the pinnacle of Southern social power was also one of Dixie's sharpest critics. She has been described as an abolitionist and a feminist. Opposing her husband's 1860 Senate resignation, Mary also doubted the wisdom of the secession war and saw early that the Confederacy would fail through U.S. power and its own divided counsels. Though she claimed in 1883 that "I was - I am - and I always will be - heart and soul a good Confederate," she feared God's wrath on the South for the sin of slavery. Her Confederate sympathies sprang not from defense of slavery but resentment of Northern bullying. She understood the war in a Marxian or Beardian sense as a power struggle between competing economic systems and she despised Northern hypocrisy in condemning the cotton grower while making a large profit from the manufacture of Southern cotton into consumer goods: "we get all the opprobrium and they all the money," she said succinctly.<sup>4</sup>

Mary's forthright views cost her emotionally. Too able for the constrained role of a nineteenth-century wife, her ideas led to rows with family and acquaintances. Unlike Mary Todd Lincoln, another gifted woman of pronounced opinions, she was not actually incarcerated in a mental institution to quiet her, but she became subject to nervous attacks which drove her to the seclusion of her bedroom and the soothing relief provided by opium, a habit she tried but failed to break.<sup>5</sup>

This independence of mind came partly from individual character. Mary Boykin was precocious. When only eight she wrote, "I will read my Father's speech [on the tariff] when it is published." At thirteen, visiting the Miller lands in Mississippi, she concluded that white treatment of the Choctaw tribes was wrong and made a linkage between this ethnic bullying and slavery. Mary had a rebellious streak. Disliking her imperious father-in-law, she enjoyed fast carriage driving through Camden in defiance of his instructions. Mary's childlessness too may have molded her critical approach by reinforcing the intellectual's sense of being somehow an outsider in her society. To be a childless wife in Victorian society was to be branded as inadequate, even abnormal.<sup>6</sup>

Political differences amongst South Carolina's elite families may also have helped Mary develop a multifaceted approach to issues. In the Nullification Crisis of 1832, for example, the Millers were pro nullification, the Chesnuts against. But perhaps most important, Mary was widely read and well educated for her era and gender. She attended female academies in Camden and Charleston. At Madame Talvande's French School in Charleston, she learned to see blacks as people, particularly as a mulatto girl was educated there as a regular pupil.<sup>7</sup>

Mary was a writer. As early as 1838 she began to jot down her thoughts and she left us with a considerable corpus of literature. This is of uneven quality and value. From 1861, Mary worked intermittently on two novels, both lacklustre. The first, called "Two Years in My Life," gives some insight into the author's early life and schooling. The second, "The Captain and the Colonel," begun in 1863, is a dense and conventional romantic novel, mainly interesting for its portraits of black characters. Some of Mary's letters are extant, but her most important artifact is a

diary kept from 1861 to 1865, then reworked and greatly expanded in 1875 and late 1881 through 1884. This later version, more artful and deliberately crafted than the original, was treated for many years as a contemporary Civil War diary. Edmund Wilson, the great essayist, considered it one of the best pieces from the war era, complementing the author on her prescience in forecasting the outcome of events, an ability not surprising when we understand that Mary edited her work with the benefit of hindsight. The revelation, in 1981, that an earlier manuscript diary existed, threw the value of the whole later memoir into question. The prominent literary historian Kenneth S. Lynn called it “The Masterpiece That Became a Hoax.” Lynn accused Mary Boykin of deliberately doctoring her diary after the war to put slavery in a better light and he essentially dismissed her as a thinker and social critic. Mary’s literary reputation was defended by Yale historian C. Vann Woodward, her biographer Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, and novelist William Styron.<sup>8</sup>

After a careful reading of both diary versions, I believe Lynn’s view unreasonable. Mary did make changes over time but they follow no clearly revisionist scheme and at times the later version gives a more clear sense of her thinking on an issue than the hastily scribbled down entries of the original text. Lynn uses a graphic incident to support his charge of revisionism. He describes James coming upon a pregnant slave who has been beaten up by her mistress. This incident he says is in the original text but was expurgated later. In fact, the reverse appears to be the case. Several other bleak pictures of slavery appear for the first time in the final draft. I conclude that, used judiciously, both texts illuminate the author’s views.<sup>9</sup>

So what did this prominent aristocrat think of the “peculiar institution”? The human complexity of slavery perplexed and even confused Mary at times. She could be ambivalent about the merits of slavery and of black character. She valued the genteel way that slavery made possible. She was color conscious and shared the conventional white belief in innate African inferiority and simplicity of character. She accepted the stereotype that only Africans could stand to work in the Southern summer climate. At the same time she loved and understood many blacks, like Dick, her father’s butler, a sage master servant and family friend, and she was moved to tears by the powerful emotion of black religious services. She taught her house servants to read in violation of South Carolina’s black code and she went into an egg and butter business with her maid Molly on an equal shares basis. Often her prejudice was as much that of class as of caste, encompassing the poor and uneducated of both races whom she defined as peasants, much as an English noble landlord might speak of his tenants. She was also an abolitionist. She read Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) several times with acceptance. She noted slaves she knew with Tom’s fine character. She said that nothing Stowe and the abrasive abolitionist senator Charles Sumner said about slavery was untrue. In 1850 she told her husband plainly that she was heterodox on slavery, stating “I am not the hearty lover of slavery this latitude requires.”<sup>10</sup>

Mary enjoyed the benefits of having attentive slaves to do her every bidding, saying “Your own servants think for you, they know your ways and your wants; they

save you all responsibility, even in matters of your own ease and well doing.” But she also saw that slavery was an inefficient labor system, a view James agreed with. At best, slavery was “a mutual aid society” in which the planter’s financial interest often suffered. By law and custom, South Carolina planters took care of all their slave dependents, including infants, the sick and aged. As both critics and defenders of slavery noted, the Northern free capitalist had no such obligation, denying worker benefits and firing employees at will to maximize profits. There is a large irony in the fact that conditions of free industrial workers were often so bad that their physical circumstances compared unfavorably with those of the better treated slaves. Mary instanced her grandmother as a model of the slaveowner who worked hard for her people, dispensing medicine and making workers’ clothing each day. Some slaveowners wanted an end to this concept of an all-embracing plantation community. She quoted her cousin Edward’s joy at the abolition of slavery so that he “can hire only those he really wants,” and thus streamline his workforce.<sup>11</sup>

There was a disingenuous element in Mary’s argument of noblesse oblige, as she herself could see at times. Generous as a slaveholder might be, his worker’s labor was given free of charge (although the Chesnuts paid their slaves for some work) and was extorted by the threat of force. Also, as Mary’s husband pointed out, the robotic gang system of slave labor required keeping the field hand as “dark and unenlightened as his skin.” James calculated that if his father’s 6,000 acre estate were broken into 800 independent farms, it would bring both enlightenment and prosperity.<sup>12</sup>

Although at times defending the benevolence of the patriarchal system, Mary saw the damaging effects of slavery on the victim’s character. Slaves must wear masks and deceive their masters, as a character says in “The Captain and the Colonel”: “that was a part of their peculiar position. Cunning was self-defense.” Thus, they were forced to steal supplies from the big house to provide for their needs but had to pretend to themselves that such theft was not a crime. Arbitrary violence against slaves could drive them to murder. In September 1861, Mary’s cousin Betsey Witherspoon was smothered to death by her houseservants. The crime puzzled everyone until it came out that the slaves had borrowed Betsey’s silver and linen for a party and had been promised a whipping for the following day. At times Mary understood that the context produced the crime; at other times she saw it as the product of savage and primitive African natures. Either way, it suggested the hollow base of the slave system and the implicit role of violence in race relations. As the war went on, this vein of mutual misunderstanding and potential violence grew.<sup>13</sup>

Mary Boykin was not tentative or ambivalent in charting the disastrous effects of slavery on weak or flawed white character. It struck a chord when her physician pointed out that white women on isolated plantations, catered to hand and foot, had nothing to occupy or challenge them, and so “took to patent medicine & *hypocondria*.” Worse, arbitrary power might produce imperiousness in the power holder. On one occasion, Mary could not sleep in an inn for upset over the landlady’s unreasonable



abuse of a serving girl. "Men & women are punished when their masters & mistresses are brutes & not when they do wrong" she wrote at another time. The system encompassed sadism. Mary wrote with disgust of a man who rolled his slaves down a hill in barrels studded with nails. Northerners in the South were often the worst because they were not used to the exercise of plantation power and drove their slaves with entrepreneurial ruthlessness. This view she shared with Stowe who made Simon Legree a New Englander. Slavery made whites inevitably into hypocrites. Mary noted in 1880 that her Grandfather Boykin had never let his children keep anything they found or default on a loan because it stole from others; yet he stole the slaves' lives from them, while "regarding them as little as the chairs & tables."<sup>14</sup>

The hypocrisy Mary hated most and the worm at the core of slavery was the sexual exploitation and immorality encouraged by the powerlessness of women. Adultery with slave women, taken voluntarily or by rape, she believed to be a widespread and frequent occurrence. She denounced this on a number of occasions but the key passage, a famous one, is in the original dairy, entered on March 17, 1861. Here she asserted that "we live surrounded by prostitutes," slave women living under the same roofs with legal wives. "God forgive us, but ours is a *monstrous* system & wrong & iniquity." She went on, "the Mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children." Everybody knew this but carefully ignored it; wives could say nothing because it would be deemed indelicate.<sup>15</sup>

The great Southern journalist Wilbur J. Cash, in his monumental *The Mind of the South* (1941), argued that the sense of shame and guilt created by this suppressed knowledge of sin and evil had molded the Southern psyche. He was challenged by Southern historian Clement Eaton who, in *The Mind of the Old South* (1964), accused Mary Boykin of "great exaggeration." He saw a general American sense of sin and attributed it not to slavery but to Calvinism. He also commented to me that sexual transgression in the Old South was no worse than prostitution in London, Paris or Boston.<sup>16</sup>

Prostitution there certainly was. At one time it was estimated that there were 109 brothels between Ohio and Pennsylvania Avenues in Washington D. C. The rate of venereal disease among white Union soldiers was 82 cases per 1,000 men. The population of mid Victorian London was 2,362,000 and medical men reliably estimated that 80,000 prostitutes, many of them adolescents, catered to their carnal needs. Across the English Channel in France, the Emperor Napoleon III courted his mistress openly and the demimonde flaunted its wares on the boulevards each evening. Many prostitutes were forced by circumstance just like slave women. Victorian art suggests that the male imagination encompassed both exaltation and violation of women. The forcing of slave women and the joys of the harem are salient themes.<sup>17</sup>

Yet perhaps Mary Boykin was correct in sensing a greater horror in the slave situation. The point is in her comment that Stowe erred in making Legree a bachelor.

This reminds us that married men kept their legitimate and illegitimate children together in one house, but the latter were usually chattel, unrecognized and defined as property. They and their mothers could be sold at will. This must surely be an ultimate step in dehumanization. In December 1861 Mary Boykin recorded a *Journal* advertisement of “a slave so *white* as to be mistaken for a citizen” except for the slave brand on his forehead above the hat band. Clearly, the slave had a white father. James forced the editor, Tom Warren, to withdraw the copy. For Mary, the injustice cried out. One suspects her husband was merely embarrassed by the public attention drawn to the case.<sup>18</sup>

Mary drew an obvious parallel between African slavery and the plight of white women under the marriage laws and conventions. When abolition came in 1865, Mary asserted that white women now needed a Joanna Brown to help them out of bondage. She commented that a woman had to beg her husband’s permission to spend her own money as though it were his gift to her. Women must defer to men’s opinions even when the latter were wrong. Thus, if a woman criticized her husband’s drunkenness, she was being “unwifelike” and in “female rebellion.” Mary fumed at her exclusion from public service, especially in the crisis of war, saying “South Carolina as a rule does not think it necessary for women to have any existence outside of their pantries and nurseries.” And although she loved James dearly, referring to him as “my all & I should go mad without him,” she resented his lectures on her views and behavior, his aloofness, and discreet liaisons with other white women.<sup>19</sup>

Today we romanticize past family life and picture only harmony in the “good old days.” Many marriages were awful and blighted the victims’ lives. Mary Boykin recorded female friends carefully studying the divorce laws - “One especially seemed to have so great a knowledge of its various provisions in every state, her husband seemed to dislike the suspicion such knowledge cast upon her.” There was also the battered wife who hoped her soldier husband would be killed in the fighting at Pensacola. And the husband who, preparing to throw himself off a bridge, told to his wife to hold the baby. “No, take the baby with you,” she replied. “I want none of your breed left!”<sup>20</sup>

Mary’s resentment of her inferior legal status as a woman nurtured her distaste for slavery. In March 1861 she saw a female slave auctioned who “looked as coy & pleased at the bidder,” who was leering at her. In this sexual submission she saw the degradation of all women. “The Bible authorizes marriage & slavery - poor women! poor slaves!” This sort of comment led early feminist scholars of the 1970s to propose that ladies of the Old South recognized a common sisterhood, a human equality of sorts, with female slaves. That would overstate the bond of empathy. At times, as above, Mary perceived a mutual humanity. But her primary concern was for the white wife as victim of a male sexual double standard. Sometimes, she even saw the black woman as co-conspirator with the white adulterer rather than as a common victim. Of one seemingly promiscuous mulatto woman with a white lover and a black son she wrote, “I wonder if there are more impure women, Negroes &

all, North or South?" Yet it remains true that Mary's resentment of her inferior legal status as a woman fed her hatred of slavery and vice versa.<sup>21</sup>

Historians have difficulty dealing with the role of sexual relations in cultural development. Sexual mores are by nature private and thus hard to document. Yet this aspect of the slave system, its sexual exploitation of women, that Mary Boykin Chesnut insisted on charting, must have had profound human ramifications. Was not the stability of slave family relations damaged by the white man's power to rape at will and the black people's impotence to prevent him? And wasn't the barbarous record of lynchings, usually accompanied by savage torture and castration, largely a reflection of the white man's fear that black males might want to take revenge on his women?

After the end of the Civil War the Chesnuts' financial status was precarious, with slavery gone, Confederate investments worthless, the land neglected. At one time in 1865 the only cash flow came from Mary and Molly's egg and butter business. Yet in other senses these were good years. Mary Boykin took an equal role with James in managing the plantation and they drew together. They read and wrote. These were Mary Boykin's most productive literary years.<sup>22</sup>

She was happy to see the end of slavery. Relations with the Chesnuts' house servants had degenerated during the war years, mistrust and mutual fear clouding past affection. Freed of slavery's incubus, black and white at the big house had some freedom to negotiate relationships, even to end them. Finally, Mary was able to express some of that genuinely disinterested noblesse that she espoused. For example, she took in black children left behind in the wake of the departing Union armies. To some degree, the plantation became a true mutual aid society with people helping people. Mary recorded her relief that the head gardener and his assistant had agreed to stay on at Mulberry, at least until James Sr. died, meaning that there would be fresh fruits and vegetables available.<sup>23</sup>

Mary's best literary portraits of African Americans were drawn in the postwar years. She appreciated that freedom meant complex choices for black as well as white; it provided a setting for a common humanity. She sketched her nurse, a plump old lady of seventy, who when repeatedly offered a cushy berth on the plantation, insisted that "I must first speak to my children and see what their plans are." Such momentous decisions were not to be rushed. She caught the canny folk wisdom of the experienced field hand who explained his decision to stay on the land by likening himself to a Jay Bird. It was the same for him as for the bird: "he die if don't hop about and pick up wurrum." His worm was in farming: "I must pick up fer me - I mean fer to stay & pick up my wurrum with you." Mary appreciated the political insight of the old coach driver who saw that freedom without economic or political empowerment was hollow: "they have taken off the bridle," he said, "but left the halter."<sup>24</sup>

I don't want to romanticize my subject. Mary continued to see blacks largely as a sturdy peasantry, usually but not always deserving of her patronage. She supported the "Redeemer" movement led by ex-Confederate-General Wade Hampton, whose

intent was to keep power in the hands of the white master class, by violence if necessary, cowing the poor of both races. There was a final irony amongst many ironies in the anomalous position of this scion of the planter class who was both beneficiary and victim of the status quo: when James Jr. died, she lost much of their property through entailment to the next male kin.<sup>25</sup>

In the final analysis, what are we to make of Mary Boykin Chesnut? She was a proud exponent of a gentry system who also attacked its inefficiency, cruelty, hypocrisy, and exploitation. She believed in African-American inferiority but taught her house servants to write in violation of South Carolina's black code, paid her slaves wages, and went into business with her maid. She was a feminist who took opium to bear her husband's displeasure. Simply put, faced by complex dilemmas, some of which had no ready solution, she was ambivalent, sometimes hesitant, even at times paradoxical. She was what William R. Taylor, in his fine study of antebellum fiction, *Cavalier and Yankee* (1963), called a Southern Hamlet. Like Stowe's St. Clare, she understood the evils around her but was not able to completely think her way out of the predicament. It was at times too large, too insoluble. As Taylor put it, the people of the Old South had a wolf by the tail, and would be bitten, whether they held on or let go.

For Kenneth Lynn, who despises the American genteel tradition, such a characterization is too sympathetic. He denies Mary Boykin's abolitionism and feminism. I think his criticism reflects a tendency, too great in our society, to disparage ideas and writings as forms of social action. In a "can do," "just do it" culture, the thinker as activist is discounted. Mary undertook no overt political program, she started no suffrage movement, manipulated no votes, and therefore had no effect. An easy dismissal, yet I wonder how many of us do better in combatting the palpable injustices of our age, particularly those from which we benefit materially. Mary Boykin Chesnut at her best rose above the class and regional conventions of her time, and in so doing left us a powerful body of literature critiquing the "peculiar institution."

Consider that South Carolina was arguably the state least tolerant of dissent on the slavery issue, the most reactionary of the Southern tier. See what this meant by hearing testimony as to the state of opinion in the freer atmosphere of New York society. George Templeton Strong, a prominent lawyer in New York city, wrote in December 1862, at the height of the slaveholders' rebellion, that loyal New Yorkers of his class still opposed the enlistment of black soldiers because of a dominant belief "that slaveholding rights possess peculiar sanctity and inviolability, that everybody who doubts their justice is an Abolitionist, and that an Abolitionist is a social pariah, a reprobate and caitiff, a leper whom all decent people are bound to avoid and denounce."<sup>26</sup>

Now hear another voice, saying that slavery "fetters your progress, it is the enemy of improvement; the deadly foe of education; it promotes vice; it shelters crime; it is a curse of the earth that supports it and yet you cling to it as if it were the sheet anchor of all your hopes." Those are the words of Frederick Douglass, a slave

who gained freedom and rose to be a statesman. Every one of those ideas was also held and voiced by Mary Boykin Chesnut, a woman born into the trammels of slavery who protested its evils and lived to see its demise. Might this serve as her epitaph?<sup>27</sup>

### **Mary Boykin Chesnut's Literary Legacy: a Brief Essay**

Between February 1861 and July 1865 Chesnut kept a manuscript diary. The period August 1862 to October 1863 is now lost. The surviving manuscript is about 100,000 words. In 1875 and from late 1881 through 1884 Mary rewrote and expanded the original entries to around 400,000 words. Also in 1861, Mary began a manuscript novel, "Two Years in My Life." This was revised in 1877 to 1878 but never published. In 1863 Mary began a second novel, "The Captain and the Colonel," redrafted in 1868, unfinished and shelved in 1875. In 1886, two years after she finished writing on her diary/memoir, Chesnut died.

In 1905, Isabella D. Martin, a schoolmistress and friend of Chesnut, coedited with Myrta Lockett Avary, an experienced editor of Confederate memoirs, a published version of the 1881-1884 memoir. But it was called *A Diary from Dixie* (New York, D. Appleton and Company) and no indication was given that it was not an untouched diary from the war period. The manuscript was heavily cut to about 130,000 words and all unfavorable references to slavery were expunged. Thomas Cooper De Leon, the literary executor of the Confederacy, brought further national attention to Chesnut through a favorable portrait of her in his 1909 *Belles Beaux and Brains of the 60's* (reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974).

In 1949, the writer Ben Ames Williams, who had used the 1881-1884 manuscript as background material for a novel he was writing, produced a new edition of *A Diary from Dixie* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Compnay). This improved the 1905 edition by doubling the text but Williams again failed to inform the public that this was not an untouched 1861-1865 diary. He also changed Chesnut's text and added his own interpolations without editorial acknowledgement.

In 1962, the distinguished essayist Edmund Wilson, in *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York, Oxford University Press), gave *A Diary from Dixie* a high accolade as one of the best diaries of the war era. He did not know that he was reading a revised piece which had suffered editorial tampering. Bell Irvin Wiley, a leading historian of the Civil War and the South, in 1975 wrote favorably of Chesnut's work in *Confederate Women* (Westport, CN, Greenwood Press).

In 1977, Allie Patricia Wall collected all of Chesnut's known extant letters in "The Letters of Mary Boykin Chesnut," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina). Sadly, only one copy is available for circulation. In 1978, Elisabeth Showalte Muhlenfeld studied the manuscript writings of Chesnut in "Mary Boykin Chesnut: The Writer and Her Work," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University

of South Carolina, 2 vols.). The work contains the only transcript of Chesnut's novels but, again, only one copy is available to the public.

Elisabeth Muhlenfeld followed up, in 1981, with *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press). In this thorough work, Muhlenfeld pointed out that *A Diary from Dixie* was based on the 1881-1884 manuscript and that an earlier original 1861-1865 diary exists in manuscript. Also in this year, the prominent Southern historian, C. Vann Woodward, published the complete text of the 1881-1884 memoir as *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven, Yale University Press). He also noted that this is not the original diary and that both earlier versions (*A Diary from Dixie*) were doctored and incomplete.

Two years later, in 1983, the Johns Hopkins literary historian, Kenneth S. Lynn, outraged by these revelations, accused Chesnut of having written "The Masterpiece That Became a Hoax." He cast doubt on Chesnut's reliability and value as a witness. See *The Air-Line to Seattle: Studies in Literary and Historical Writing about America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press). The following year, 1984, Woodward and Muhlenfeld replied with *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries* (New York, Oxford University Press). Finally, a century to the year after Chesnut stopped writing, the full text of her original 1861-1865 diary, her most important contribution to the literature of the period, became available to the public.

## Endnotes

1. The best study of Mary Chesnut's life is Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge, 1981).
2. Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport, Connecticut, 1975), 7ff; Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 128.
3. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 60, 65, 67; Wiley, *Women*, 11. Thomas Cooper De Leon, *Belles Beaux and Brains of the 60's* (New York, 1974; 1st pub. 1909), 217.
4. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 96 on James' resignation. The 1883 comment is in Allie Patricia Wall, ed., "The Letters of Mary Boykin Chesnut," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis: University of South Carolina, 1977), 82, letter to Varina Howell Davis, June 18, 1883. C. Vann Woodward and Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries* (New York, 1984), 82 on the sin of slavery. C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven, 1981), 84 on Northern profits.
5. On Mrs. Lincoln's sufferings see Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters* (New York, 1972), xviii-xix. For examples of Chesnut's opium taking, Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 40-44, 91, 191.
6. Wall, "Letters," 1, letter of March 3, 1832, to father. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 30 on the Indians, and 63 on fast driving. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 40-41 and 44-45 for childlessness.
7. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 4, on nullification. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 110 and Elisabeth Showalter Muhlenfeld, "Mary Boykin Chesnut: The Writer and Her Work," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: University of South Carolina, 1978), vol. 2: 806 on education.
8. See bibliographical essay, this article, for a discussion of Chesnut's literary history. Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York, 1966), 277, 280. Kenneth S. Lynn, *The Air-Line to Seattle: Studies in Literary and Historical Writing about America* (Chicago, 1983), 50, 56-57. Also Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 34, 97, 141-42, 191 on Chesnut's manuscripts.
9. Woodward, *Civil War*, 646-47. This editor places the passage in the 1861-1865 diary also but this does not appear to be the case.

10. Muhlenfeld, "Writer," vol. 2: 812-13 and Woodward, *Civil War*, 488 on creature comforts. Also, 263 on teaching slaves to write and 53 and 209 on paying slaves; 243 on color prejudice. Also Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 51 and 115. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 209 on Molly and 77 on blacks and climate. On Dick, Muhlenfeld, "Writer," vol. 2:815 and Wall, "Letters," 5, letter of May 28, 1850, to James Chesnut Jr., Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 177 and Woodward, *Civil War*, 213-14 on response to black Church services. Woodward, *Civil War*, 307 on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 45-46 on noble slave characters. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 42 on Sumner. Wall, "Letters," 6 letter to JC, Jr., May 28, 1850, on heterodoxy. Woodward, *Civil War*, 394 on relationship to English class system.
11. Woodward, *Civil War*, 488 on ease. Wiley, *Women*, 24-25 on inefficiency. Muhlenfeld, "Writer," vol. 1:396 for slavery as a mutual aid society and vol. 2: 803-12 on her grandmother. Edward's comment is in Woodward, *Civil War*, 809.
12. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 171.
13. Muhlenfeld, "Writer," vol. 1: 324-25, 326-27 on cunning and theft. For the Witherspoon affair, Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 162, 164, 174-75 and 181; also 190 and 199 on mutual fear. Woodward, *Civil War*, 60 on Dick's aloofness as an example, and 226 on Chesnut's mother not trusting her slaves and wishing to sell them.
14. Muhlenfeld, "Writer," vol. 2: 812-813 on hypochondria and 822 on the innkeeper. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 42 on punishment. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 164 on spiked barrels and 109 on slaveholder hypocrisy. Woodward, *Civil War*, 307 on Northerners in Dixie.
15. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 42.
16. Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1964), 176, 235-36. Support for Chesnut is provided by the memoir of Harriet Jacobs, a slave girl forced to take a white lover. See Linda Brent, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), repr. in Robert Marcus and David Bumer, eds., *America Firsthand* (New York, 1995), 3d. ed., vol. 1: 224-34.
17. Thomas P. Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn't Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 1994), 69, 104. Ronald Pearsall, *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality* (Harmondsworth, 1983), 313. Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (New York, 1980), 356 ff. John



- Bierman, *Napoleon III and His Carnival Empire* (New York, 1988), 260-61. On Victorian art, Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (New York, 1986), 108-118 and Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience*, vol. 1: *Education of the Senses* (New York, 1984), 395-98.
18. Woodward, *Civil War*, 168-69 on Legree and also prostitution under one roof. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 215 on the slave ad.
  19. Muhlenfeld, "Writer," vol. 1: 414 on Joanna Brown. Woodward, *Civil War*, 284-85 on gifts and 375 for women always being wrong. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 113 and Wiley, *Women*, 31 re. public office and the pantry. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 56 and Wall, "Letters," 58 on affection for James Jr. Also 32 on aloofness. Woodward, *Civil War*, 605-606 and Lynn, *Air-Line*, 58-59 on liaisons.
  20. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 18 and 31.
  21. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 21 and 207. Also Woodward, *Civil War*, 15.
  22. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 128 and 138.
  23. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 241-42 on babies; Woodward, *Civil War*, 805 on the gardeners; Muhlenfeld, "Writer," vol. 1: 398, 408 on freedom from slavery.
  24. Woodward and Muhlenfeld, *Diaries*, 254, 258, 261.
  25. Muhlenfeld, *Biography*, 167-68, 212.
  26. George Templeton Strong, *Diary of the Civil War 1860-1865*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York, 1962), 283.
  27. Quoted in Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World* (New York, 1996), 366.



# Myths and Realities of the Underground Railroad in Kentucky

by  
Jason S. Taylor

The story of the Underground Railroad has captivated the minds of post-Civil War society into modern times. This process of escape was directly linked to a mysterious network that systematically guided slaves to freedom. Through the years, the popular interest has been so great that the Underground Railroad has acquired mythical characteristics and romantic stories have circulated of tunnels, trapdoors, secret rooms, and other adventurous and heroic aspects. In understanding the process of the Underground Railroad, it is helpful to understand its origins, why slaves ran away and methods they used to escape to freedom in Canada. Many Kentuckians, strategically located in a border state, played a vital role in helping slaves get to free territory, but it is important to separate myth from reality.

The term "Underground Railroad" has a variety of mythical sources for its origin. Places such as Washington, D.C. and Columbia, Pennsylvania have claimed that the term was first used in their cities. The well-known abolitionist, Levi Coffin, stated that he first heard the words spoken in Cincinnati. He may have, but according to historian Larry Gara, the leading authority on the subject, the name may have been first applied in Ripley, Ohio, a few miles down the river and across from Maysville, Kentucky. Gara wrote: "the most frequently repeated story traces the term to an incident of 1831 when a fugitive slave from Kentucky eluded his pursuers along the Ohio River near Ripley. The slave swam to the Ohio shore and disappeared. The slave hunters gave up, saying the fugitive 'must have gone off on an Underground road.'"<sup>1</sup>

Many people have taken the term, "Underground Railroad" literally and imagined some type of mythical system of tunnels or subways or they have assumed that at some point the slaves must have gone beneath the ground, but this was simply myth. It was actually a systematic network "composed of a loosely organized group of people who offered food and shelter, or a place of concealment, to fugitives who had set out on the long road to the North and Freedom."<sup>2</sup> Harboring a fugitive slave or concealing him or helping him in any way was a violation of federal law. The Fugitive Slave Act in the Compromise of 1850 authorized the appointment of special commissioners to grant certificates for the return of fugitives and any person obstructing the process or aiding a fugitive could be fined up to \$1,000 and imprisoned for up to six months.<sup>3</sup> The road in Kentucky was very dangerous, and

---

Jason S. Taylor, Senior History Major and Treasurer of Alpha Beta Phi Chapter for two years, 1996-1997 and 1997-1998, and Assistant Editor, *Perspectives in History*, 1997-1998, presented this paper at the Regional Phi Alpha Theta conference at the University of Louisville, March 21, 1998.

fleeing slaves did their best to keep their flight muted from slave hunters. In Boone County, slave patrols searched the areas near the river for fugitives. These patrolmen were paid one dollar for a ten-hour shift, and if they caught a fugitive within the county of residence of his/her owner, they received a bounty of twenty-five dollars and beyond the county, fifty dollars per “catch.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the great dreads of slaves was that their present kind master would die and they would be sold and separated from their families. The sale of slaves at the public market could be a traumatic experience, especially for women. This experience became reality for a young slave girl named Eliza in Lexington, Kentucky in 1843. Eliza was put on the auction platform for sale and the auctioneer was not receiving the bids he thought acceptable, so “he suddenly reached over to Eliza, ripped open her dress and displayed to the throng . . . ’superb neck and breast.’” The auctioneer then began the bidding once more; “still frustrated in his effort to get a fair price for such a fine piece of goods . . . he lifted the girl’s skirts as high as they would go, laying bare ‘her beautiful, symmetrical body, from her feet to her waist, and with his brutal, sacrilegious hand smote her white flesh,’ once more calling for a bid.” The girl was finally sold for \$1485.00 to abolitionist Calvin Fairbanks, who purchased and freed her with money contributed by fellow abolitionists Levi Coffin, Salmon P. Chase, and Nicholas Longworth.<sup>5</sup>

The reality of Eliza’s traumatic experience illustrates how helpless and degrading it could be living as someone else’s property, and such treatment caused many slaves to run away in pursuit of freedom. Many fugitives underwent extreme hardship, enduring cold and wet conditions, and hiding in places along the way that were not fit for beasts. For instance, a slave girl

ran away from her home in Boone County after having learned that she was to be sold to the deep South. She hid in a large straw pile near her master’s barn. [With help from friends,] Previous arrangements had been made for air and a winding passage with a concealed entrance by which her fellow-servants could feed her. She remained here for six-weeks while her master and a large posse of men searched the countryside for her. . . . When the hunt was over, she stole out of her hiding place and made her way safely to the Ohio River. She crossed the river in a skiff and reached the house of a family of abolitionist in Cincinnati.<sup>6</sup>

Many others fought the physical and mental torment of the route to freedom through Kentucky. Andrew Jackson was born in western Kentucky not far from Bowling Green as a slave on January 25, 1814 and his experience on the Underground Railroad through Kentucky provides a prime portrait of the experience in fact. Jackson’s mother had been manumitted by her master, but his relatives “refused to give the woman and her children freedom on the ground of the alleged insanity of her master at the time of his giving her the deed.” After Jackson had been passed through several masters, he ended up in the hands of Perry Claypoole, a

tobacco cultivator. Claypoole insisted that Jackson have children with a female slave or he would be sold south. Jackson, after hearing his masters demands, came to the conclusion:

‘This information’ I did not like, - more especially, as I had often been promised my freedom in a few years if I would work faithfully; and I resolved, whenever an opportunity should offer, and I could see my way clear to attempt a shorter and more certain route to freedom than to await the fulfillment of a Slaveholder’s promise; for in relation to emancipation their promises are always forgotten before they get cold.<sup>7</sup>

Jackson began planning for his escape once he had gained directions from a man who had been North. This gentleman explained the route through Kentucky, and on a Saturday in August, 1847, Jackson began his escape with an act of trickery; he created evidence to mislead his master into assuming that he had been killed: “I started off in the direction of a piece of woods, and there tore up those I desired least, and threw them down, besmeared with blood which I obtained to give them the appearance of having been torn from me by a wild beast, in order that I might prevent any one from pursuing me until I could escape beyond their reach.”<sup>8</sup> Whether or not this bought Jackson time, he was successfully on the trail to freedom.

He used another trick that allowed him to stroll along the road in broad daylight: “I had frequently seen gentlemen traveling, with a servant either preceding or following them on foot. So I waited until I saw a carriage pass, and got into the road, and followed it, and whenever I met anyone I would appear to be all anxiety and inquire ‘how far ahead master’s carriage was.’”<sup>9</sup> Once Jackson got within reach of the Ohio River he crossed on a ferry into Illinois, a free state.

Another slave, Henry Bibb, traveled the Underground Railroad from Shelby County, Kentucky through Cincinnati. Bibb was born in 1815 and sought his freedom once he was old enough to realize the immorality in the institution of slavery. Bibb is said to have “learned the art of running away to perfection. [He said] I made a regular business of it, and never gave it up until I had broken the bands of slavery.”<sup>10</sup> Bibb confirmed that the first time he ran away was in 1835 due to the cruel punishments received from his master: “She was every day flogging me, boxing, pulling my ears, and scolding.”<sup>11</sup> He continued his repeated episodes of fleeing to the woods for a period of time, as rebellion, for another two years.

In the fall of 1837 he decided to make a permanent escape to freedom. He prepared with “the accumulation of a little money, perhaps not exceeding two dollars and fifty cents, and a suit which I had never been seen or known to wear before; this last was to avoid detection.”<sup>12</sup> Like Jackson, Bibb used trickery to disguise himself, most-likely from published fugitive advertisements describing his appearance.

Bibb then obtained permission from his master to hire himself out for employment. Once he began his quest to find work, he found a steamship that traveled through Cincinnati. Accordingly, “The boat landed about 9 o’clock in the morning

in Cincinnati, and I waited and until after most of the passengers had gone off of the boat I then walked gracefully up street as if I was not running away, until I had got pretty well up Broad-way.”<sup>13</sup>

Although many slaves made it to freedom, others were not so fortunate. *The Loder Diary*, written by a Boone County resident, provides several examples of unsuccessful escapes:

“*FM Bess took up a negro man at the Lothery Ferry and brot him over here-said negro belonged in Henry Co, Ky. \$400 reward for taken said negro up & out of state [June 27, 1857].*”<sup>14</sup>

“County Court to day - *Washington Watts* presiding - *Jos Homes, West Abbot, Ri Terrill* & several other men took tow men away - *Negros at Aurora, In* & brot them over to *Pete*<sup>15</sup> & then on out to *Burl*<sup>16</sup> - one of the negroes belongs to *Arnold near Verona* & the other boy to a man by the name of *Conner* [May 7, 1860].”<sup>17</sup>

“*Brown* & four other men come to *Pete* last night with five black men & one black woman that they had cought at *Dillsboro, Ind.* The *Negroes* ran away from *Warsaw, Ky.* and taken back to *Warsaw* [December 22, 1862].”<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the journey of freedom for Bibb and Jackson, neither man mentioned being kept in secret rooms, or tunnels for protection against slave hunters. This does not mean that tunnels, trapdoors, secret rooms, and or attics were never used for harboring fugitive slaves; they were sometimes used, especially by free black, Quaker and white abolitionist conductors on the Underground Railroad. Maryland slave Harriet Tubman “spent a week hidden in a potato hole in a cabin which belonged to a family of free Negroes. She had [also] been hidden in the attic of the home of a Quaker.”<sup>19</sup> However, the reality of these deceptive hidden storage rooms have given rise to tales and unfounded assumptions where verifiable evidence is lacking. Gara wrote in *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*: “When underground or hidden storage places, tunnels, and even air shafts are found in older houses, there are always individuals who quickly conclude that these places were built and used for hiding fugitive slaves.”<sup>20</sup>

A prominent popular myth in northern Kentucky is that tunnels leading from houses in Newport and Covington to the Licking River bank were constructed to conceal runaways escaping to boats. The most well known is the General James Taylor home in Newport. Taylor was a native of Virginia, who came to Kentucky in 1793. He was one of the founders of Newport and served as a general in the War of 1812. In 1957 the Kentucky Historical Society erected a highway marker at the house and included the words: “Underground Railroad Station.” Today the highway marker program requires strong documentation and review by scholars for approval of new markers. But the file in support of the Taylor marker contains no contemporary documentation, only secondary sources reporting local tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Taylor received the land from his father, James Taylor, an officer in the American Revolution. For his service in the war, the elder Taylor received a military land warrant and filed a claim on the mouth of the Licking River that included Newport. He deeded the land to his son, General Taylor, who erected a log cabin named "Bellevue" and in 1793, "in company of his three black servants opened up a farm and began permanent improvements." Later he erected a larger house, which was torched by a slave and burned in 1842. General Taylor died on November 7, 1848, bequeathing the lot to his son, Colonel James Taylor, who in 1851 constructed the house that stands today."<sup>22</sup>

General Taylor also willed his slaves to his children: "I give and confirm to my son Hubbard my negro man Dick...I give & confirm to my son James Taylor and his heirs forever all such negroes as I have already given & delivered to him...Daniel, Humphrey, Sally and Clasey whom I give to my said daughter Ann, as her absolute property."<sup>23</sup> Considering that Colonel Taylor was the son of a slave owner and a slave owner himself it seems very unlikely that he would have participated as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. He owned the property until his death in 1883 and willed it to his son John Barney Taylor.

The home of John White Stevenson, Governor of Kentucky, 1867-1871, at Fourth and Garrard Streets in Covington also had a tunnel and it too has been designated in the popular mind as a station on the Underground Railroad. In reality it was a service tunnel used by servants to move food and goods into the house from boats arriving from Cincinnati. It also served as an underground storage area for the household. It seems unlikely that Stevenson would have aided fugitive slaves given the fact that he was a slaveowner himself. The Gano-Southgate House, 105 East Second Street, had a tunnel, and it was constructed by a slave owner.<sup>24</sup>

Larry Gara in his article, "The Underground Legend and Reality," explains these tunnels as part of the era:

Builders' guides in the mid-nineteenth century warned of the dangers of 'vitiating air' resulting from humans repeatedly breathing the same air while indoors. Elaborate and highly effective means of ventilation and heating were devised to bring cool, fresh air from below and circulate it through the building...Doubtless many other subterranean features in [Kentucky] homes now identified with the Underground Railroad can better be attribute to the Victorian preference for proper ventilation.<sup>25</sup>

The home of William and Elizabeth Glore on Big Bone-Union Road in Boone County has the reputation of having been an Underground Railroad station. A trapdoor in a closet was supposedly used to conceal fugitives in their escape to free territory. The house still stands, and when I heard about the trapdoor I requested a tour of the house. The family living there graciously welcomed me and showed me the trapdoor. As I stood there in that venerable home constructed several generations before I was born, I came to understand why so many myths have originated around

the Underground Railroad—I wanted very much to believe that runaway slaves hid in this very closet behind this door, listening as slave catchers searched the house, and then moving on the next morning toward freedom. But was it truly? Was the house in reality a station on the Underground Railroad?

In 1853 when William Glore obtained the property, tax records indicate that he owned two lots, one composed of 60 acres valued at 600 dollars, and the other 115 acres valued at 1150 dollars. At the time he owned no slaves and state tax records indicate that he owned none through 1856. But in 1857 there was a dramatic change in William Glore's taxes that challenges the myth that he was a conductor on the Underground Railroad:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Slaves over 16</i>	<i>Total slaves</i>	<i>Value</i>
William Glore	1	2	1,000

According to a slave census taken on June 21, 1860 in Boone County, Glore still owned two slaves, a black male forty years old and a black female, aged fifteen.<sup>26</sup>

The mysteries that encompass the Underground Railroad have attracted story tellers and inspired imaginations for over a century. But the fact of the matter is that fantasy creates legends and people succumb to the temptation to repeat tales and fail to examine the facts and separate myth from reality. Students of history look for the facts and search for contemporary documentary evidence before making conclusions about this very popular subject.



## Endnotes

1. Larry Gara, "The Underground Railroad: Legend and Reality," *Timeline* (August-September, 1988), 23.
2. Ann Petry, *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (New York, 1955), 89.
3. Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (New York, 1972), 24.
4. Merrill S. Caldwell, "A Brief History of Slavery in Boone County, Kentucky," Boone County Historical Society, June 21, 1957.
5. Randolph P. Runyon, *Delia Webster and the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1996), 6.
6. Caldwell, "Brief History."
7. Andrew Jackson, *Narrative and Writings of Andrew Jackson of Kentucky* (Syracuse, New York, 1847), chapter 1. This source has no page numbers.
8. *Ibid.*, chapter 2.
9. *Ibid.*, chapter 5.
10. Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (New York, 1849), 15.
11. *Ibid.*, 16.
12. *Ibid.*, 46.
13. *Ibid.*, 47-50.
14. William Conrad, ed., *The Loder Diary* (Boone County, 1985), 8.
15. Refers to Petersburg.
16. Refers to Burlington.
17. Conrad, *Loder Diary*, 54.

18. Ibid., 97.
19. Petry, *Tubman*, 92.
20. Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, 1961), 11.
21. John E. Kleber, ed., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington, 1992), 869; interview with James A. Ramage, February 19, 1998.
22. C. B. Truesdell to Charles Hinds, June 8, 1956, James Taylor Biographical File, Kenton County Public Library, Covington, Kentucky.
23. James Taylor, Last Will and Testament, James Taylor papers, Newport Branch, Campbell County Libraries.
24. *Kentucky Enquirer*, August 21, 1983.
25. Gara, "Underground Railroad," 25.
26. Computer deed search, Glore-Sanders House/Barns, Big Bone-Union Road, by historian, Boone County Courthouse; Kentucky State Tax Records, Boone County, 1853-1857; U. S. Census, 1860, slave schedules, Boone County.

# **“To Free The Minds of Our People:” Charles Sherrod and the Civil Rights Movement**

by  
**Angela L. Brown**

Our movement, it was a black and white movement,  
to free the minds of our people, not just black, whites  
got something out of it too, freedom...a lot has  
changed but there was so much to be changed  
it didn't look like a lot.” — Charles Sherrod<sup>1</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s inspired many great leaders. Some went on to lead movements remembered as milestones in the fight for civil rights, individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr., Julian Bond, John Lewis, Ella Baker, and Charles Sherrod. But how does a person become a civil rights leader? What sort of background and personality makes a person an inspiration to others? During the course of my research I reflected on these questions, and when I had the honor of interviewing Charles Sherrod on the telephone I felt that I was beginning to find the answers.

Although he is not as famous as many other civil rights leaders, Charles Sherrod played an important role in the fight for equality for black Americans. His accomplishments include sit-ins at the white churches in Petersburg, Virginia in 1954 and the voter registration drive in Albany, Georgia, with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee ( SNCC). Each job that Sherrod took on became the center of all his focus; no task was too large or too small for the cause of equality.

He was born in Petersburg, Virginia in 1937, with only his mother to care for him. She was both a father and mother to him while he attended elementary and high school. He recalled a story his grandmother told him about hiding from white slave owners. She hid underneath the skirt of her mother when some white men from a nearby plantation were looking for her to beat her. Sherrod remarked that his first encounter with racism occurred when he was two years old. He had gotten on a bus with his mother and had taken a seat at the front of the bus. He pulled himself up to the window and was looking out. “The next thing I felt was my arm swung around in the air going to the back of the bus. My mother had observed me climbing up there with the white folk on the front of the bus, and I had climbed up right there between two white folk and was looking out the window so she grabbed me. I always remembered that as my first.”<sup>2</sup>

His next meeting with racism took place when he got a job in the Five and Ten Cent store. He went down to the stock room and a white girl followed him. She

---

Angela L. Brown is a U.S. Army Reservist and a Senior History and Political Science Major at Northern Kentucky University.

wanted “in no uncertain terms to play. The sex game. And she touched me. And all I could see was rope around my neck, and I left the place in a hurry. I went home and never went back to that job.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1954, the year of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, Sherrod was a senior in high school. He believed that the ruling applied not only to schools but churches as well. Therefore he and a school friend, Billy Lee, gathered a group of high school students and staged sit-ins at white churches in Petersburg. Sherrod recalled: “Before I knew anything about what I was doing, we didn’t call it a sit-in or anything, we called it going to these churches, making these churches do right.” In response, some church leaders called the police; others seated them in front pews as spectacles.<sup>4</sup>

Sherrod grew up being afraid of white people. He was afraid to sit down next to them. Besides his mother, the one person who had a major influence on his life was Wyatt T. Walker, a minister in Petersburg who later became Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). As Sherrod’s spiritual father, Wyatt arranged for his admission to Virginia Union University with a partial scholarship and assisted him in acquiring a job to earn money for school, food, and housing. He worked breakfast, lunch, and dinner in a cafeteria and had a housing arrangement with the dietitian of the cafeteria to live upstairs.

He arrived on campus with misconceptions of white people: “I always thought that white folk was the smartest people on the face of the earth. And when I sat down and listened to some of the questions that they were asking, I had read about that years ago, and knew about that.”<sup>5</sup> He believed that his teachers in high school made the difference. Black high schools received the old discarded books from the white high schools and no equipment. There was no science equipment, football equipment, gymnasium, new books, or televisions for the classrooms. But the teachers built relationships with the students, rewarding them for having dreams and giving pats on the back, hugs and encouragement to continue their education.

Sherrod graduated and entered the ministerial graduate school at Virginia Union University. Then one day he read about a call for students to gather at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina to form an organization. He and other students from all over the United States attended. “With \$800 of SCLC money, the prestige of Martin Luther King, the organizing wisdom of Ella Baker, and the enthusiasm of the rare young people who were leading the new student movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was born.”<sup>6</sup> The goals that SNCC fought for were identical to those of other civil rights groups, but their methods were of the “nonelitist, noncondescending sort.”<sup>7</sup> SNCC’s statement of purpose was to “affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action . . . Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. . . . Love is the central motif of nonviolence. Love is the force by which God binds man to Himself and man

to man. . . . By appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities.”<sup>8</sup>

The first major project for Sherrod and SNCC was in Rockhill, South Carolina. In February 1961, ten students were arrested. It was decided that four SNCC volunteers would go to Rockhill and get arrested and refuse bail. Ruby Doris Smith, Diane Nash, Charles Jones, and Sherrod went to Rockhill and were arrested when trying to obtain service at a lunch counter. They refused bail and spent thirty days in jail. While in prison, the men were sent to work on a chain gang. “SNCC’s executive secretary, Ed King, issued a statement calling upon all those who shared their convictions to join them at the lunch counters and in jail. Only by this type of action can we show that the non-violent movement against segregation is not a local issue for just the individual community, but rather a united movement of all those who believe in equality.”<sup>9</sup> “Jail-no bail would spread. In Atlanta, in February, 1961, eighty students from the Negro colleges went to jail and refused to come out.”<sup>10</sup> This project was a major move for SNCC and established their reputation as students who were going to fight and not give up.

The best known project that Sherrod participated in was the voter registration project in Albany, Georgia. In October 1961, Sherrod and Cordell Reagon, a fellow member of SNCC, arrived in Albany to set up the voter registration office. One reason Albany was chosen for this campaign, was because of its history as the “old trading center for the slave population country of southwest Georgia.”<sup>11</sup>

The voter registration campaign was extremely important for SNCC and African Americans. It helped unite the younger and older generations by giving them a common goal. Sherrod was already known for his ability to “stir a crowd to song like no one else,”<sup>12</sup> and to move people to act against racial inequality. Sherrod knew when he came to Albany that getting people involved and registered was going to be a difficult task: “When we first came to Albany, the people were afraid, really afraid. Sometimes we’d walk down the streets and the little kids would call us Freedom Riders and the people walking in the same direction would go across the street from us, because they were afraid; they didn’t want to be connected with us in any way. Many of the ministers were afraid to let us use their churches, afraid that their churches would be bombed, that their homes would be stoned. There was fear in the air, and if we were to progress we knew that we must cut through that fear.”<sup>13</sup>

Sherrod and Reagon recruited students from Albany State College for the voter registration drive and the students also assisted in testing the ruling of the Interstate Commerce Commission barring segregation in bus terminals. In December 1961, Sherrod and several other demonstrators were arrested and taken to Terrell County jail by Sheriff Z. T. “Zeke” Mathews who announced: “There’ll be no damn singin’ and no damn prayin’ in my jail. I don’t want to hear nothin’ about freedom!”<sup>14</sup> Sherrod retorted: “We may be in jail, but we’re still human beings and still Christians!”<sup>15</sup> At that point Mathews and another officer struck Sherrod in the face to shut him up. Eventually he was placed in a cell by himself.

On these and other projects one of the main problems that SNCC faced were the police. Southern law officers did not like their towns being the target of desegregation. In Albany the major obstacles in SNCC's fight were Mathews and Police Chief Laurie Pritchett. When asked about his opinion of Zeke Mathews, Sherrod replied "Zeke Mathews? Well, Zeke was a model southern sheriff, with all the power and glitter and fear—a fear producer. That went along with his office. He was feared by both black and white. He would just soon, I think he would just soon kill a white man as a black man that got in his way. Most of the sheriffs were like that. He was a mean guy, he's mean. He didn't expect anybody to do, he didn't expect to take back steps to anybody, or any compromise. Everything was suppose to go his way. It was his way or the highway."<sup>16</sup>

Sherrod dismissed the notion that Pritchett was less violent than Mathews. "There was one girl who was pulled by her hair. There was a man, Sammy Wells, was pulled up the Freedom Alley by his gonads, there was a lady who was kicked in her rear end while she was pregnant and she lost the child. There was many things that happened in Albany, Georgia that happened under the auspices of Laurie Pritchett. That I could count as dangers, violence. In fact, he showed me, well you might not say that's violence, but it was mental violence. He took my letters, intercepted my letters, and showed me a whole stack of letters that I never saw. Yeah, so they had their way to do whatever they wanted to do. But to say there wasn't violence, that is the biggest lie in the world. Many people were hit and hurt. After they arrested us, we would go limp, so they would hurt us. Cause they became tired, cause they had a hundred people that they had to move one at a time so they would get mad with us and hurt us."<sup>17</sup>

There were several nights that remain fresh in Sherrod's mind. But more important was that death was an everyday possibility. "One time they were looking for me, I guess it was the Ku Klux Klan, they was Rotarians, they were there, in town for a Rotarian meeting, it was a state meeting of Rotarians, and they came to the place where we stayed. There was sixteen of us that stayed in one house on Highlands in Albany, Georgia. My wife was there and a little boy about twelve or fourteen years old, were there and my wife was in the bedroom asleep. They came in and started a fire and they were looking for me and I wasn't there. They started a fire in the office and almost burned the house down. They called the fire people in time to stop the house from being burned down. My wife was pregnant with my first child when that happened."<sup>18</sup>

Another unforgettable moment was at one of the church meetings. "One night I just knew I was dead when we were up in a church and sixteen sheriffs walked in the church with Billy clubs. I thought I was dead that night. I was getting ready to come down and let one of the local people take over, that was our philosophy anyway, to let the local people share the power, but I couldn't come down that night when they walked in that night I knew it was my ball game. So I acted if I was just starting the meeting again, I started off again with prayer and singing, and everything. I was getting myself together. What was I going to do? It came to me

that there were two outside people there, and sitting in the church. White and with the newspaper. So I introduced Claude Simmons and whoever the other guy was, I can't think of his name, he was from the [Atlanta] *Constitution*. The other guy was reporting for the Associated Press, AP, so I introduced them. I asked them to stand up. All we got out of it that night was some slashed tires and some shots fired in the air. The reason I knew I was gone was because they had brought the guns into the church. They had shotguns and everything and them long flashlights.”<sup>19</sup>

There was once even a meeting with Malcolm X to discuss ways about working together in the movement. Sherrod, Martin Luther King Jr., and others went to New York to discuss working together and made plans for additional meetings but nothing came of it. Malcolm X was murdered before their two groups could come together in the movement.

Sherrod's greatest disappointment came with the collapse of his economic development organization in 1985. His dream for New Communities Inc., a settlement on 6,000 acres in Georgia was to push the civil rights movement in a new direction, but a drought cut production and the federal government canceled the land contract. “An economic aspect in society that we control. Like the Italians control, and like the Chinese control, and like the Jews control. Just about every ethnic group in the country who have been successful, or who are becoming successful, they are working together and we have yet to do that. And I feel, I felt then, and I still feel, that the food delivery process is our strength and if we are able ever to come together and work together on agricultural things, then we will be successful. And be able to influence our general society in a greater way. Put a lot of people through school. A lot of kids who would never think of using their minds to invent this and that and to be an influence in international politics. Sending food in the third world in exchange or bartering for different kinds of finances. We are capable of doing that and we have not done it. That's what I had hoped to have done with that 6,000 acres. But I couldn't do it.”<sup>20</sup>

But with failure there is success. Sherrod now has another organization, the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education Inc. This organization was started in 1968 to raise money to continue the struggle. They have a housing development on sixteen acres of land and have been influencing children for about ten years, trying to keep them off drugs. Sometimes he gets kids out of the juvenile delinquency channel for criminals and pulls them into the project in an attempt to save them.

To Sherrod, SNCC never fell apart. For him the fight just took another direction. He, like other students, believed that he could integrate everything, create a revolution in society and be back in school within three years. The fight for equality took a lot longer than expected but he has never given up. For him, each day is a new day to fight for what he believes in and to help save the children of Albany from a life of crime and drugs. Charles Sherrod is a hero of the civil rights movement, a courageous, dynamic and generous person who cares deeply about the well-being of others, and stands firmly for justice and equality.

## Endnotes

1. Telephone interview with Charles Sherrod, conducted by Angela L. Brown, April 5, 1997.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston, 1965), 33.
7. Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville, 1988), 35.
8. Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, 1981), 23-4.
9. Ibid., 32.
10. Zinn, *Abolitionists*, 39.
11. Ibid., 124.
12. Ibid., 123.
13. Ibid., 125.
14. Ibid., 131.
15. Ibid.
16. Sherrod interview.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.



# Kentucky Coal Miners' Health and Safety

by  
Gina Brock

To many Kentuckians who do not live near a coal mine, the bituminous coal industry is usually represented as a particular wedge of Kentucky's economic pie chart. Yet there exists a very personal side to an industry that relies on human labor working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions. Mine workers have long suffered from severe occupational diseases and injuries recorded throughout the history of Kentucky coal mining. Legislation and technological advances have had some effect on working conditions but the problems of miners are still there, painful and deadly. Even with the advances in miner protection, bituminous coal extraction is still a dangerous and unhealthy occupation with a long history of human tragedy and suffering.

The history of coal mining in Kentucky is a story of wealthy men in a fast-growing industry. During the 1880s, the Kentucky Geological Survey was initiated to locate mineral resources in the state, with an emphasis on coal. In 1890 this information attracted the interest of English capitalist Alexander Alen Arthur. His ore and coal mining investments, along with the railroads constructed to transport iron ore and coal, created the town of Middlesboro. Coal production increased to about two million tons in 1910 in the area. Other entrepreneurs and companies followed suit in other parts of the state. By the 1900s, massive coal extraction was in the hands of a few. John Caldwell Calhoun Mayo, for example, upon his death in 1914 owned 500,000 acres and had a worth of twenty million dollars.<sup>1</sup>

The vast amounts of volatile, low-sulfur, low ash coal found in Kentucky fed the rapidly growing industrial plants and railroads. Isolated mountain areas boomed quickly. In 1911, Letcher and Perry counties produced only 198,316 tons and 1,400 tons respectively. But by 1915, Perry produced over one-half million tons and Letcher produced over two million tons of coal.<sup>2</sup> The United Bureau of Mines stated: "The average output for (Kentucky coal) was more that thirteen times as great as the average for the decade of 1890 - 1900, while the growth of the bituminous output as a whole during this same time was less than two fold."<sup>3</sup>

During this era, Kentucky's coal mining industry was growing tremendously, but conditions for the miners were both dangerous and low-paying. The conditions in which a coal miner and his family had to live and work have long been an integral part of folklore. This folklore and music were ways for people in harsh conditions to face their lives. The plight of the coal miner's daughter and the power of the company store are favorite motifs in mountain ballads. Many of the communities that housed the mine workers were completely built, owned, and operated by the

---

Gina Brock is a student in the Northern Kentucky University Honors Program and she is a Junior Biology major.

companies that also owned the mines. The mine had complete knowledge of the wages earned and products and services purchased. Withholding a check for two weeks when a new employee started allowed the company to stay ahead in the credit game. This was an easy method of controlling the workers, keeping them in a continual state of indenture.

In 1922-1923, 65 percent of Kentucky's coal miners lived in one-industry, isolated community towns.<sup>4</sup> According to the Coal Commission, a subcommittee of the Bureau of Mines, a study of 713 company-owned communities demonstrated that the housing was very poor with two-thirds of the houses consisting of thin, single-walled shacks mounted on post foundations. "Thirty eight percent of the houses were plaster; only two percent had bath tubs or showers; and three percent had inside flush toilets; less than fourteen percent had running water."<sup>5</sup> When these communities were rated on a scale of 1 to 100, only six in Kentucky scored above 75, while twenty-three had a score less than 50. While similar conditions could be found among mountain farmers, the company houses were not owned by the miners and their families; they were provided by the company for their employees to rent.

Besides housing and company stores, other necessary services were provided by the company. Doctors and hospital services were tightly controlled. Fees for their services were often directly deducted from checks. The credit system applied to almost all of the services provided. With such controls on the wages earned and fees paid, very few miners could stay far enough ahead to take good care of themselves and their families. In April, 1932 Kentucky coal miner Arthur Jenkins received a check for \$7.50 for mining twenty-nine tons of coal in the first half of the month. His debits to the company included \$5.00 to the company store, \$.75 for coal, \$1.00 for the doctor, \$.25 for smithing and \$.50 for hospitalization, with a total of \$7.50 — his bills to the company exactly equaled his paycheck.<sup>6</sup>

Diseases were an occupational hazard for many different reasons with the defining ailment being pulmonary disorders. Coal dust, in combination with other irritants, was the most common culprit of these diseases after long exposure. Before the advent of electric lights, lamp black and soot also contributed to the dust content of the air. Black lung, bronchitis, emphysema, and other disorders were significant health problems for miners. Black lung disease is the most famous because of the unusual symptoms of degeneration that accompany the end stages of the disease. Black lung is described as: "Occupational lung disease, one of the 10 leading causes of work-related health problems in the United States, results from inhaled organic and inorganic dusts, irritant gases, and toxic fumes, which adversely affect both the upper and lower respiratory tracts. Ten percent of the active coal miners and twenty percent of the retired miners had coal worker pneumoconiosis."<sup>7</sup>

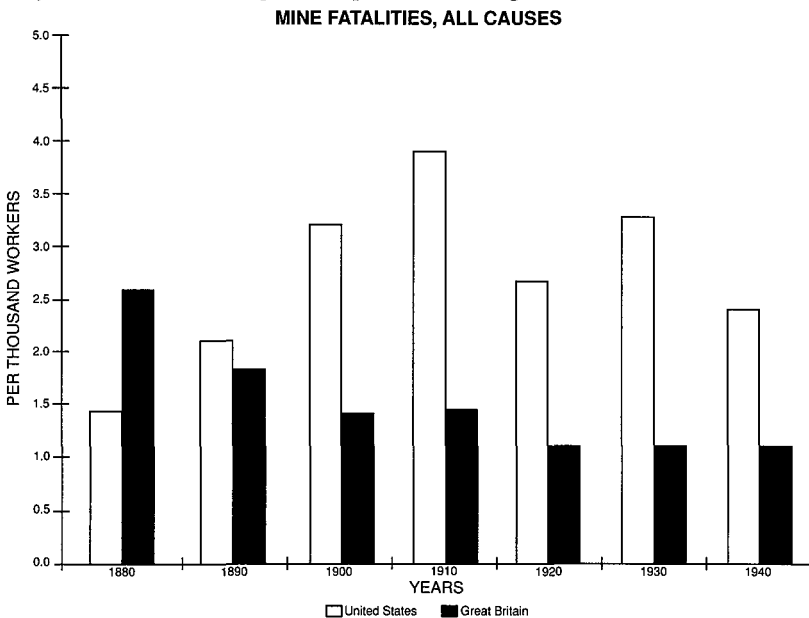
Black lung and other pulmonary disorders are the result of the atmosphere in the mines. While coal dust alone is not considered harmful, when it combines with irritating gases and fumes, the lungs react by producing excess mucus or "coal macules."<sup>8</sup> The end stage of black lung disease is the culmination of the damage that is done to the lungs. Black sputum and mucus is coughed up in large quantities. The

reason for the black color is not the expulsion of the black dust. Instead, it is the disintegrated black-stained tissue that is being expelled. Large cavities of degenerated lung tissue, filled with black liquid, are found in autopsies after the patient has suffocated from having so little functional lung tissue. There is no treatment for coal workers pneumoconiosis or CVP. The only possibility for most is preventative measures, such as increased dust control and inhalation protection.<sup>9</sup>

Another less common type of injury was known as “beat hand, beat elbow, and beat knee.” This “non-infective tenosynovitis” was caused by the odd working positions miners endured. In an article in the *Journal of Industrial Hygiene* Edward Collis described this condition as “a chronic thickening of the subcutaneous tissue overlaying prominent bones and the chronic enlargement of the local bursae.”<sup>10</sup> Miners lay on their sides while working narrow faces of coal and this caused a rubbing of the tissue surrounding the elbows and knees as they braced their bodies. “Beat hand” developed from the improper use of a pickax against the hard coal or stone. The extreme vibrations caused damage to the tissues of the hand.

Sickness or injury could mean the end of solvency for a miner and family. This problem was intensified in company communities where strict leases required miners to leave company-owned housing very quickly once laid off. While some companies allowed the sick and injured or widows and children to continue to live in company housing, this was an informal arrangement only. No written provisions were guaranteed to those who became sick or injured.

In addition to the high risk of illness, miners worked in dangerous conditions that often resulted in maiming or death. A chart by Mark Aldrich indicates the high fatality rates of U.S. mining as compared to mining in Great Britain.<sup>11</sup>



One difficulty in preventing dangerous situations in mines is that each is as varied as the geology that contains it. One of the most common reasons for accidents is simply human error. These mistakes can include such varied actions as walking into a cordoned off area meant to collapse upon itself or casually lighting a match or striking a spark on stone and setting off an explosion that expands throughout the mine. Roof falls were identified as the number one killer in 1915. The protection of "roof bolting" was not discovered until 1940.<sup>12</sup> Even the safer areas of sedimentary rock in coal fields are not always solid enough to allow tunnels to riddle through it. Roof falls may cause immediate damage or create secondary situations in which miners are trapped in other parts of the mine.

"Bumps" were strange phenomena which resulted in cave-ins. These were subterranean occurrences—uncontrollable and unpredictable—resulting in an "immediate bursting of the coal or the strata immediately in contact with it."<sup>13</sup> These natural phenomena resulted in explosions or roof falls. In turn, roof falls sometimes caused gas leaks. The spread of carbon monoxide and methane in the tunnels of the mine threatened even non-trapped miners working on the faces. The men themselves devised a group system of protection against these dangerous gases. If someone felt dizzy or faint, he immediately told everyone and lay on the floor. This was to be done immediately without thought about whether it was real or imagined. Without mechanical detection, the miners' bodies were the test subjects for gas detection. The popular myth of the use of canaries in Kentucky mines is not supported by the research available. Later, mechanical testers and equipment allowed evacuations to occur when low levels of toxic gases were detected.

Explosions were the major fear faced by miners. Methane gas is not only toxic but highly flammable. If a spark was struck or a torch lit carelessly, explosion was likely. A backshot, a charge fired not into the coal but back out the hole, was also a danger. An explosion in one part of the mine could lead to a chain reaction around the tunnels as gas and coal dust ignited. One of the major ways of dealing with the danger of mines involved the code of commitment to rescue efforts in explosions. A trapped miner knew from "the miner's code, that his fellow workers would toil ceaselessly until all the men (or bodies) were recovered. From his own experience, . . . he was familiar with the rescue procedures and could visualize rescue activities in progress."<sup>14</sup>

The miners code was unwritten law. All families knew that if someone was trapped or killed, the person or body would always be recovered. Rescue efforts were always heroic since you never knew when it would be you who was trapped. Explosions in the mines brought large groups running to the main entrance. There miners formed search and rescue teams for exploring the collapsed shaft. Families often waited outside to find their loved ones or support the rescue effort. Exact knowledge of who was still left below was critical. Mine foremen gave out numbered tags to each miner as he picked up his head lamp to allow for a quick count on the surface. Miners stayed at their own work sites and did not move without informing the boss where they were going.

When the family discovered that a loved one had been killed, they proceeded to carry out prepared plans to keep the family going. A trapped miner “was sure that his family could maintain itself during his absence. . . . The family could count upon support from kin, friends and neighbors . . . and community institutional arrangements upon the event of his death.”<sup>15</sup> The rules that governed miner behavior in these critical situations differed very little from mine to mine. Most of the rules were instituted by the miners themselves as protection measures they could control and count on. These rules often acted as methods to repress the constant fear. No comment about fear or anxiety about accidents could be expressed. Males became bound to these rules through mechanisms of family and community socialization.<sup>16</sup>

The federal government first took an active role in miner’s health and safety after two serious explosions in other states. The Technological Branch had the responsibility to find new ways to prevent accidents and officials concentrated time and money on such hazards as roof falls and explosions. They did not investigate problems of “hauling, hoisting, drilling, and cutting machinery, conveyors, and electricity.”<sup>17</sup> Debate had raged for years on the question of whether coal dust by itself was explosive. Many contended that methane had to be present in the form of “fire damp,” a mixture of methane and air. But federal officials pointed out that no methane was detected in a French explosion in 1906 that killed 1,230 mine workers; the explosion was attributed to the coal dust itself. With this evidence officials convinced the mining industry that coal dust was explosive. After a rash of mining accidents in 1907 the Bureau of Mines was created. The Bureau helped implement better explosion controls. However, not all mining companies accepted the new regulations, and miners still died from preventable explosions.

During 1911-1913, the Bureau suffered major cutbacks from Congress and gave less attention to coal mines and expanded its scope to include Western metal mines. In 1941 the Coal Mines Inspection and Investigation Act helped reduce fatalities in coal mines by allowing direct inspection of safety measures. Enforcement was lax until similar accidents occurred in Bartley, West Virginia, and Neff, Ohio.<sup>18</sup> Then inspections were stepped up resulting in a 23 percent decrease in accidents over the next ten years.

In 1952, the Coal Mine Safety Act provided for the closing of coal mines when unsafe conditions were found. However, only an eight percent decline in fatalities resulted. A major reason was the exclusion of mines with less than fifteen employees from the act’s provisions. In addition, the United Mine Workers were focusing their efforts on wage increases and job security rather than safety. After a 1969 explosion in Farmington, West Virginia which killed seventy-eight miners, safety legislation continued to be strengthened. By the 1980s, a decline in fatalities and injuries of 54 percent demonstrated the importance of this legislation.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the psychological aspects of working in underground mines complicated the diagnosis and treatment of pulmonary disorders. A study of thirty coal miners revealed that over one-half were suffering emotional distress that affected their ability to breathe or relax out of a panic attack.<sup>20</sup> Apparently they were suffering

from anxieties pushed into the background of their thoughts since they started in the mines as teenagers. Concentrating on working efficiently, they refused to reconcile with the danger in their lives. Over the years they had seen friends injured and killed, participated in rescue operations and narrowly escaped death themselves. In 1972 Lew Wallace, Professor of History and Chair of the History and Geography Department of Northern Kentucky University, published a *Reader's Digest* article on the disaster in Farmington, West Virginia. In the article, "Inferno in Farmington No. 9," Dr. Wallace wrote: "For every miner, on every shift, carries someplace in his mind an awareness of the bloody history of his occupation—a chronicle of death, injury and disease, the casualty records so high they can only be guessed." After a lifetime of danger many experienced "shortness of breath, choking sensations, and spasms of coughing, sometimes accompanied by chest pains, fatigue and weakness."<sup>21</sup>

Danger, disease and extreme working conditions continue in the daily lives of coal miners. In what other career field does an individual go to work comforted by the bottom-line knowledge that at least if he is killed in this dark tunnel on this shift his co-workers will remove his body and his family and friends will gather at the mine entrance to see him brought forth? In how many fields does a worker face the risk of being unable to breathe in retirement and yet unable to pass the test to qualify for assistance? The conditions these workers function under are truly terrible. Yet they face these dangers with a courageous stoicism in order to support their families who they leave behind on the surface. They work for the ones they love.

## Endnotes

1. Judge Watson, *Eastern Kentucky, Economic and Cultural, 1900-1962* (Lakeland, Florida, 1993), 27.
2. *Ibid.*, 31.
3. *Ibid.*, 45.
4. Homer L. Morris, *The Plight of the Bituminous Coal Miner* (Philadelphia, 1934), 86.
5. *Ibid.*, 87.
6. *Ibid.*, 163.
7. Allan H. Goroll, et al, *Primary Care Medicine* (Philadelphia, 1995), 223.
8. Robert Berkow, ed., *The Merck Manual* (Rathway, New Jersey, 1992), 704.
9. *Ibid.*, 705.
10. Edward Collis, "The Coal Miner: His Health, Diseases, and General Welfare," *Journal of Industrial Hygiene* (1925), 7: 2.
11. Mark Aldrich, "Preventing 'the Needless Peril of the Coal Mine': The Bureau of Mines and the Campaign Against Coal Mine Explosions, 1910-1940," *Technology and Culture* (1995), 36: 483-519.
12. William Graebner, *Coal-mining Safety in the Progressive Period: The Political Economy of Reform* (Lexington, 1976), 43.
13. Rex A. Lucas, *Men in Crisis: A Study of a Mine Disaster* (New York, 1969), 17.
14. *Ibid.*, 41.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 20.
17. Graebner, *Safety*, 43.

18. Curtis E. Harvey, *Coal in Appalachia: An Economic Analysis* (Lexington, 1986), 117.
19. *Ibid.*, 119.
20. W. D. Ross, et al, "Emotional Aspects of Respiratory Disorders Among Coal Miners," *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1954) 156: 484-7.
21. *Ibid.*, 486; Lew Wallace, "Inferno in Farmington No. 9," *Reader's Digest* (September, 1972): 71.



# The Sears Discrimination Case: A Study of Grass-roots Activism

by  
Cornelia F. Sexauer

Social movements of the 1960s and 1970s made a tremendous impact on society. Grass-roots activism proved an effective means for change, and the most successful programs were those that stayed within the establishment. A revolution from within demonstrated that society itself was the real locus of power, not its leaders, and this fortified belief in the American system. Women used knowledge acquired in the civil rights and student movements to forge a campaign for equality. In 1966 they created The National Organization for Women, a civil rights organization with the primary purpose of ending prejudice and discrimination against women. NOW activists lobbied, researched, boycotted, demonstrated, and litigated to promote concern for their issues.

NOW has been regarded by many critics as primarily an upper class, educated, white women's coalition with little regard for working class, under educated, minorities.<sup>1</sup> Yet, by the early 1970s this group was specifically concerned about activating under-represented women, and moving to uncover explicit discrimination against them. More than the solicitation for new membership, the association broadened its perspectives to include issues pertinent to women from all racial, ethnic and economic segments.<sup>2</sup> While NOW fostered a top-down management strategy, Flora Davis, Gloria Steinem, William Chafe, and others have noted that the strength of the 1970s women's movement came from individuals within the movement as opposed to charismatic leaders.<sup>3</sup>

NOW pledged a firm commitment to uncover sexual discrimination and to set in motion a collective action to "systematically and consistently reach out to underrepresented sisters."<sup>4</sup> NOW's active struggle in its endeavors with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to force Sears, Roebuck and Company into compliance with affirmative action policies strongly supports this philosophy.

The strategies and techniques used by NOW point out the importance of the grass-roots movement in pursuing fairness in the job market. Without diligent and conscientious efforts at the local level this case may have never reached the court room, and consequently never have made an impact on attempts to bring equality to women. Furthermore, this struggle for ending sexual discrimination at the retail

---

Cornelia F. Sexauer, adjunct faculty member in the History and Geography Department, is a Ph.D candidate and teaching assistant at the University of Cincinnati. As a member of Psi Psi Chapter of the University of Missouri, St. Louis, she presented this paper at the Phi Alpha Theta Regional conference in St. Louis, April 9, 1994 and won the first place award.

level demonstrates NOW's commitment to broadening its base to include women of lower income.

Title Seven of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in hiring, promotion, assignment, and all other terms and conditions of employment, including compensation of every kind. Enforcement of this act fell to EEOC.<sup>5</sup>

Manipulation of civil rights legislation, specifically anti-women policies and practices, by Sears made it a prime target. In 1974 Sears, the fifth largest corporation in the United States, employed almost 400,000 people nationwide, twice as many people as its closest competitor. Women made up over half of its total work force. As a major corporation Sears functioned as a trend setter in guidelines for the retail business. The campaign would draw a large audience and have profound effects. A successful campaign could have a visible impact on median wages.<sup>6</sup>

In its 1973 Annual Report on national employment statistics Sears showed an increase over 1969 in the percentage of women filling the managerial and professional spots, but the vast majority of female positions were not concentrated at these levels. In 1969, 86.4 percent of female employees held office, clerical, or sales positions. In 1973, 83 percent of the women continued to hold these jobs. In 1969, 4.3 percent of the women were employed as officials and managers. In 1973, only 6.2 percent of the women had acquired this position. This constitutes an increase of only 1.9 percent in four years.<sup>7</sup>

Sears had only four women managers in their 840 stores. Nearly one-half of the full-time workers at Sears were women, but they made up only 9 percent of the higher paid salaried positions that included benefits of sick pay, vacations, bonuses, etc. The sales force at Sears employed only 20.6 percent of women working on selling the big-ticket items that included: tires, car repairs, sports equipment, refrigerators, washing machines, stoves, sewing machines, televisions, furniture, and kitchen remodeling. Consequently, the majority of the women earned a 1 percent commission while the greater part of the men secured a 6-7 percent commission on higher priced items.<sup>8</sup>

Part-time workers earning minimum wage, no commission, and virtually no benefits comprised the bulk of the sales force. Sears actively initiated a policy of employing primarily part-time sales workers. With the sales force constituting almost 60 percent of the positions within the company, this netted a huge savings to the corporation.<sup>9</sup>

As a federal contractor, Sears came under government laws and executive orders. Sears lobbied both the EEOC and Congress on the equal employment law, specifically the issue of disclosure. In December 1973, the company filed a suit in U.S. District Court against the Department of Labor, the General Services Administration, and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance to bar public disclosure of the Sears affirmative action formula or equal employment information. Sears maintained that release of salary information would jeopardize their competitive stance.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, at the 1974 National Conference in Houston, NOW voted to embark on

a national and local effort to force Sears to comply with equal opportunity legislation. In May 1974, the Chicago chapter of NOW filed thirteen class action charges with Donald Muse, Regional Director of the EEOC, on behalf of women employees at corporate headquarters and the Chicago downtown retail store. The allegations involved complaints of “sex discrimination in hiring, promotions, job classifications, transfers, equal pay, health benefits, and leaves.”<sup>11</sup>

NOW sparked the concern of Sears employees about their lack of opportunities for transfers, promotions, training, and acquiring positions that paid higher wages and provided benefits.<sup>12</sup> Sears’s initial contact with job applicants consisted literally of handing female applicants forms for “female” jobs and handing male applicants forms for “male” jobs.<sup>13</sup> In addition Sears turned many retail full-time jobs into part-time positions. Consequently, these employees reported discrimination in a broad classification of jobs. They believed the reasons for their lack of opportunities rested primarily on sex, race, and age.<sup>14</sup>

Anne Ladky, President of the Chicago NOW Chapter, and Mary Jean Collins-Robson, past-President of the Chicago Chapter, former Midwest Regional Director for NOW, and a national NOW board member, spearheaded the Sears Action Subcommittee of NOW’s Compliance Task Force. To begin with they organized nearly fifty NOW chapters nationwide for help in researching, assembling, and organizing data that would lead to complaints filed with local EEOC offices against local and regional Sears outlets.<sup>15</sup> Collins-Robson stated: “Sears won’t disclose its own equal employment data, so NOW is going to do its own research.”<sup>16</sup>

Encouraged by successful settlements of recent EEOC cases against AT&T, the steel industry, and the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, NOW advocates formulated a method of attack. The coordinators began by garnering the support of the local chapters. In a letter to NOW chapter presidents, Ladky and Collins-Robson stated the important issues in the campaign. Their plan of action included: “conducting investigations of employment patterns in retail outlets, pay, promotions, benefits, and working conditions in all Sears installations, and credit and consumer practices.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, NOW publications updated the status of the program and offered the newest and latest methods of attack. This publicity helped promote NOW’s gains, allowed focus on small victories, and provided incentives to forge ahead.

Chapters from around the country responded with news about their successes and activities. Under a consent decree, the Sears store in Owensboro, Kentucky agreed to pay nearly \$50,000 in back pay to specified female employees for equal pay violations.<sup>18</sup> The Atlanta NOW reported filing charges with the EEOC, contacting Sears employees in the Southern Territorial Headquarters, and excellent publicity in advertising their campaign locally.<sup>19</sup> A New Jersey chapter sent a copy of their press release entitled “NOW Says Sears Shortchanges Women” that explained the Sears case.<sup>20</sup> The Twin Cities NOW held a rally at the Sears’ Lake Street store, urged folks to bring their children and other noisemakers to show their support, sent copies of anti-Sears songs they sang at the rally, and forwarded a copy of questions they

used to interrogate Sears management.<sup>21</sup> The St. Louis chapter provided a copy of a letter sent to William McCory of the Northwest Plaza store which included a list of fifteen questions concerning Sears discrimination policies that they wished the manager to address. In addition, they requested specific statistics concerning employment practices.<sup>22</sup>

Sears had the necessary resources to battle the charges brought by NOW. Moreover, Sears, with a majority of the company being non-union, had a long history of dismissing its employees for organizing activities. Further clout rested on Sears's reputation as a good employer.<sup>23</sup> Even more crucial factors affected the ultimate settlement of the case were the backlog of cases before the EEOC, its lack of adequate staff, ineffective coordination between EEOC and NOW, and political maneuvering.<sup>24</sup>

By October 1974, the Sears Action Committee had doubled their participants with over one hundred chapters actively involved. The Committee found additional support from other activist groups including the National Black Caucus, Senior Skills Foundation, Asian League of Equality, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, National Consumers League, and others. These affiliations became an important tool for promoting the message about the problems with Sears and strengthened national support.<sup>25</sup>

NOW set December 14th as a nationwide boycott and leaflet distribution day with the battle cry "Sears Christmas Special on Sex Discrimination — Women Won't Buy It!" Their plan stressed the importance of organizing, handing out leaflets, and picketing. NOW leaders emphasized that local spokespersons should explain "why NOW is here today": to promote a national crusade to end sex discrimination at Sears, to apprise Sears employees and customers, and to enhance the local Sears campaign by involving as many members as possible.<sup>26</sup>

Clippings, photos, letters, leaflets and other reports sent to the Sears Action Subcommittee proved the success of the December 14th crusade. Over fifty chapters, including Milwaukee, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, Oakland, and Norfolk participated in the pre-Christmas actions. Demonstrators pestered Sears with a straightforward message: "Sears is selling women short." Each chapter reported favorable response from shoppers and participants.<sup>27</sup>

On February 27, 1975, five NOW representatives, including Collins-Robson and Ladky, met with Chairman Arthur M. Wood, President A. Dean Swift, and nine other Sears top managers. The company supplied some basic employee information and literature, but not the affirmative action plan showing goals, targets, and timetables for ending discrimination against women. Without this information NOW questioned the legitimacy of Sears's right to be a federal contractor. Chairman Arthur M. Wood expressed his displeasure in NOW's practices of informing Sears customers about their accusations. His apparent displeasure at NOW's actions gave confirmation that NOW succeeded in shaking the confidence of top management.<sup>28</sup>

The next line of attack was aimed at the Sears Annual stockholders' Meeting scheduled for May 19, 1975. NOW implored as many members as possible to attend the Chicago meeting, and focused on two main problems: job discrimination and concealment of the affirmative action information.<sup>29</sup> NOW drafted an open letter to present to the Board of Directors soliciting their support to change company policy in regard to disclosure and discrimination. NOW intended the letter to capture the attention of the meeting, compel support from the Directors, and show NOW's concern.<sup>30</sup> In addition, NOW distributed a letter to the shareholders, held a press briefing, and organized a rally outside the meeting.<sup>31</sup>

The strategies used by NOW proved to be successful, if only on a limited basis. It appeared that the pressure tactics worked. In the first year, NOW reported a number of achievements. Besides annual merit raises, Sears implemented a cost-of-living increase. They equalized the pay scale for record clerks, and typists, improved their vacation policy, and made profit sharing available to part-time employees. Sears named a woman to head one of the fifty buying departments, and appointed the first female store manager of the Southern Territory (Cleveland, Tennessee).<sup>32</sup>

However, Sears continued the policy of transforming its retail sales force to part-time, and held fast in its refusal to disclose its employment practices. Chapters continued their extensive research into local store policies with regard to layoffs, promotions, job placement, and overall opportunities for women.<sup>33</sup>

The EEOC filed its class action suit against Sears in 1979, yet it took six years before the trial took place. This hearing, the last of the major anti-discrimination actions brought by the pre-Reagan EEOC, lasted ten months, and Federal Judge John A. Nordberg found in favor of Sears.<sup>34</sup>

The prime evidence used by EEOC was statistical evidence. The commission defended this position by pointing out "that testimony from a few individuals who believed they were victims of discrimination could do little to substantiate the charge of hiring discrimination because of the vast numbers of job applications Sears received and because in most cases an applicant who is not hired has no way of knowing the reason why." Ruth Milkman in her article "Women's History and the Sears Case" proposes the assumption that perhaps "The absence of testimony . . . reflected the EEOC's limited resources, which were enormously taxed by the Sears case as it was. . . . \$2.5 million . . . while Sears spent an estimated \$20 million."<sup>35</sup>

The debate of the case changed from equality-versus-difference to the general idea of sexual difference in the context of employment. EEOC challenged Sears's hiring practices, and Sears refused to accept the fault, arguing that the differences between the sexes explained the gender imbalances in its labor force. Crucial to this stance of defense would be witnesses, but EEOC chose to use only its statistical approach.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the judge decided in Sears' favor, and in 1988 a federal appeals court upheld the decision.<sup>37</sup>

While the twelve-year struggle to end discrimination at Sears was not wholly successful, gains were made. The failure to attain a guilty verdict can in no way be

blamed on the lack of personal commitment, dedication, or organization of the NOW movement. NOW's local and national chapters worked diligently with EEOC in securing the necessary statistical defense: but in the end it simply was not enough.

Nevertheless, as Anne Ladky explained in an interview with me, on December 3, 1993 "victories were achieved and significant changes occurred. NOW demonstrated a sincere concern to the issues affecting low income and minority women. The campaign helped to raise consciousness."<sup>38</sup> The local participants mobilized and helped keep women's issues in the forefront. Women organized, reached out to others, challenged the system, instilled hope, and gained a sense of belonging to a group that provided experience, power, self respect, dignity and confidence. The defeat enlightened feminists to strive to end the image of the cultural acceptance which showed all women being content with the domestic role.

Judicial action has placed the *EEOC vs. Sears* case in the law books. If future generations battle job discrimination they can study the records to determine how to better prepare for battle. In addition, evidence is available to show the importance of mobilizing the common people in an effort for change. Though mass social reform is still needed to improve the unequal wage scale, health care, and child care areas in particular, in the years that have followed this court decision, changes have been forthcoming to end sexist child rearing and sex stereotyping. Society has come to realize that not all women want to raise children, bear children, marry, or have heterosexual relationships. Many women strive for the opportunity to choose the role of the breadwinner rather than breadmaker.

The women of the '90s owe much to their predecessors. Compared with the pre-'70s, women constitute a larger percentage of bartenders, bus drivers, police officers, lawyers, doctors, and real estate sales positions.<sup>39</sup> But take a stroll through the big-ticket item departments of Sears today, and you will see that little has changed in the area of affirmative action since Sears won its case. Why should they change when they are not held accountable?

The grass-roots movement proved to be a vital force within the women's movement. While top-down organizations such as NOW need strong leadership to succeed, a critical aspect to successful implementation of their programs rests in the strength, commitment, and dedication of the masses. Clearly, mobilization at the grass-roots level fuels the work of a national campaign to alleviate discrimination.

## Endnotes

1. bell hooks, "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," in *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (Boston, 1984), 1-15; William Chafe, *The American Woman* (New York, 1972), 237; Nancy Woloch, "New Women: From the 1920s to the Present," in Howard H. Quint, Dean Albertson, and Milton Canton, eds., *Main Problems in American History* (Belmont, California, 1987), 421.
2. "Outreach Committee - Affirmative Action Plan," NOW position paper, National Organization for Women Records, 1971-79, Western Historical Manuscript Collection (hereafter NOW-WHMC), folder 5.
3. William Chafe, *Women and Equality* (New York, 1977), 126-7. See also Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain* (New York, 1991) and Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (New York, 1983).
4. Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (New York, 1975), 91-2.
5. Caroline Bird, *What Women Want* (New York, 1979), 117.
6. "Why Sears?" in report from Sears Sub-committee, November, 1974, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
7. Ibid.
8. "Sears Action Bulletin," no date or number, Section C, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
9. Ibid.
10. "Sears Action Bulletin," no date or number, Section F, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
11. "Tower Tattler," May 21, 1974, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
12. "Why Sears?" NOW-WHMC, folder 99; "Sears Action Bulletin," August, 1974, no. 3, NOW-WHMC, folder 99; *The Spokeswoman*, August 15, 1974, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
13. Christine A. Littleton, "Equality and Feminist Legal Theory," in Kathryn K. Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds., *Women and Power in American History: A reading Vol. II from 1879* (Englewood, New Jersey, 1991), 278.

14. "Why Sears?" NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
15. Telephone interview with Anne Ladky, December 3, 1993.
16. "Sears Action Bulletin," July, 1974, no. 1: 1, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
17. "What is NOW?" NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
18. "Compliance newsletter no. 6 (December, 1974): 3, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
19. Ibid.
20. "Now Says Sears Shortchanges Women," leaflet, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
21. "Rally Around Sears," July 21, leaflet; "The old Sears, Roebuck ain't what it's s'posed to be" and "Take me out to the SEARS store," words to songs; List of 12 questions to ask Twin Cities Sears Management, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
22. Judy Townsend to William McCory, October 13, 1975; list of 15 questions to Sears management, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
23. "Sears Action Bulletin," July, 1974, no. 1: 1, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
24. Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York, 1984), 513.
25. Collins-Robson and Ladky to NOW chapter presidents, November 9, 1974, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
26. "Sears Action Bulletin," December, 1974, no. 6, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
27. Ibid., February, 1975, no. 7.
28. Ibid., April, 1975, no. 8. Vice President of Personnel Charles Bacon defended the Sears position stating that company managers "worked *hard enough* toward job rights for their women employees." He believed that NOW did not know the facts. Ibid.
29. Ibid., May, 1975, no. 9.



30. Ibid. See attachments A1 and A2, open letter to Board of Directors of Sears, May, 1975, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
31. "Sears Action Bulletin," May, 1975, no. 9, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
32. Ibid.
33. Yvonne Jozwih to Board of Directors, Metro St. Louis NOW, August 4, 1975, NOW-WHMC, folder 99.
34. *New York Times*, June 6, 1986, January 16, 1988; *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1986; *The Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 1986; *The Nation*, September 7, 1985.
35. Ruth Milkman, "Women's History and the Sears Case," *Feminist Studies* (Summer, 1986): 380-2.
36. *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, March 27, 1986.
37. *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1986.
38. Telephone interview with Anne Ladky, December 3, 1993. Ladky stated that while ERA was the prime thrust of NOW during the 1970s the Sears case was a major issue nationwide.
39. Davis, *Mountain*, 492.



# **Mark Rothko: Expanding Boundaries in the 1960s**

by

**William J. Landon**

Art in the 1960s, and art, in general, has always captivated me because as well as being an historian I am an artist. Mark Rothko (1903-1970) stands out as a quintessential figure in the modern art world. His paintings are unique in American art history because he pulled the eyes of the art world to the United States for the first time. The power that his works exude is beyond comparison, for when one stands in front of a Rothko it is impossible not to be overwhelmed with emotion simply because his paintings are completely raw and primal in nature. The large color fields which cover the canvas float in space and time, pulling the viewer into Rothko's world.<sup>1</sup>

My goal in the beginning of my research on this paper was to prove that something was truly special about the climate of the 1960s that allowed artists like Rothko to shine. When I began I was sure that this topic would be quite easy and have a predictable outcome, but I found the contrary to be true. For example, I had no idea just how many steps Rothko went through in his artistic evolution before he reached his now immortal style. However, I discovered a little chapel near Houston, Texas, which pulled all of my research together. It was during the 1960s that Rothko reached his full maturity, melding together beliefs from all religions into one crowning masterpiece, The Rothko Chapel. It was from the bleak walls lined with paintings in the chapel studded with sculptures that I found the conclusion to my research. The 1960s were a special time when the climate was ripe and ready for artistic explosions because never before in history had society been so open and embracing to change. Thus, my initial research proposal proved correct; but it took me a great deal of time to understand what I had found.

The conclusion to which I came, and the topic which I chose, were influenced by the fact that I am an artist. I spent several years under the guiding hand of Michael Skop at Studio 70 in Ft. Thomas, Kentucky. His teachings influenced me as an artist and an individual a great deal. Studying at Studio 70 I was first introduced to Mark Rothko's art. I have been interested in his work ever since and this research has given me an opportunity to further expand my knowledge of an incredible man.

The major resources that I utilized for my research were several books on the life of Mark Rothko which contained many color prints of his original works. I also used scholarly collections of the writings of modern artists and the aesthetic principles they practiced in their work. Finally I used notes from lectures on Rothko that I wrote while attending Studio 70.

---

William J. Landon, a member of Alpha Beta Phi Chapter and Senior History Major, presented this paper at the Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference at the University of Louisville, March 21, 1998.

I believe that it is essential to look back at the foundations of Mark Rothko's career as an artist to understand how he developed his painting style. He was born Mark Rothkowitz in Davinsk, Russia on September 25, 1903. His family moved to the United States and settled in Portland, Oregon when he was quite young. As a young boy he exhibited great interest in poetry and music, but as he grew older his love of art came to the forefront. As a young man, Rothko studied with well known American painter, Max Weber, a former pupil of Henri Matisse. Under Matisse, Weber was imbued with the fundamentals of Fauvism, which is, in a nutshell, based on visibly expressing an object's inner essence in an outward manner. Thus, one can paint a chair that looks nothing like what we would call a chair, yet it completely retains its "chairness" because the artist has consciously decided it would be that way. Weber passed on his knowledge to Rothko, who then utilized the information to further his own painting style. These early works are not well known because Rothko eventually grew to despise them, feeling that they were not worthy to be viewed by the public. However, the paintings were extremely important in the development of his career, for one cannot reach maturity without years of trial and hard work. His style continued to evolve and mutate as he became fixed on creating imaginary, amorphous, protozoan life forms that, in his mind, once covered the earth. He parted ways with the Fauvists and ran to the open arms of the Surrealists.

Rothko respected the great masters of the Surrealist movement, especially Joan Miro and Salvador Dali. They invited viewers to let go of their preconceptions about art and life and tempted them with visions of the irrational. Objects and beings which existed on another plane or in a different realm were the subjects of their paintings. At this point in Rothko's career many people would say that he had become a painter of the abstract, but if someone had called him an abstract painter he would have gotten quite upset. He once said: "Abstract art never interested me; I always painted realistically. My present paintings are realistic."<sup>2</sup> Rothko never viewed his work as abstract because he regarded his subjects as living organisms, beings which he had created. This is in sharp contrast to the purely abstract painters such as Mondrian, who used geometric shapes to compose his paintings. Rothko did not see how geometry could possess life, but his beings could be granted life because they were organic in nature; hence, Rothko's abhorrence for the title of abstractionist.

As well as the aesthetic climate in Rothko's early days, we must also look at the cultural climate in which he was working. His career began in the 1920s, a time of rapid change and growth in the United States, but also a period when Americans still saw Europe as the cultural center of the world. Picasso, Mondrian, Matisse and others were leading the art world into a new century at a lightning speed. Never before in history had the face of the art world changed so drastically in such a brief time. American artists flocked to Europe to study with the new masters. The United States was the new economic world power but it lacked faith in its fledgling culture. Then, with little warning, the Great Depression struck, and economic hardship meant that artists were out of jobs because patrons could no longer afford to buy their work. American artists, being creative individuals, had to use ingenuity to find a

way out of abject poverty. Rothko signed on to the WPA, the Works Projects Administration, and was employed in the Easel Division which helped create art works for the public. He stayed with the WPA from 1936 to 1937, and in the late 1930s rejected the Fauvists and accepted the Surrealist movement. The dark paintings of this period were influenced a great deal by the rise of totalitarianism and coming of World War II. Rothko was bruised very deeply by the atrocities committed against the Jewish people of Europe. His work of this period mirrors some of the anguish he felt. By the middle of the 1940s he was beginning to move away from the Surrealist movement. He was basically becoming bored with it. Rothko, along with others in the New York School, including Adolph Gottlieb and Barnett Newman, were on the verge of blowing the art world open.

The late 1940s witnessed a complete change in the art of Mark Rothko. After the war he was ready to break away and begin a movement of his own. Marc Glimcher, editor of the book, *The Art of Mark Rothko: Into an Unknown World*, called the paintings of this period "The Multiforms." The reason that Glimcher chose to call this series of paintings by such an odd name is that they were all rather large canvases covered with different color shapes in no apparent order.

The Multiforms are amazing paintings. However, I do not think the name is appropriate because Rothko did not care about the forms or the color relationships between them. His goal was complete control of the viewers's emotions when they stood in front of his paintings. He wanted to create works that were powerful and could not be broken down into separate parts. He wanted the viewer to *experience* his paintings not look at them and say, "Oh, how nice." His feelings can best be described by a statement that he made later in his career when he was complimented on the beauty of his color relationships:

I'm not interested in relationships of color or form or anything else...I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions-tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on - and the fact that lots of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I *communicate* these basic human emotions... The people who weep before my paintings are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them, and if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationships, then you miss the point.<sup>3</sup>

I believe this statement is one of the cornerstones of Rothko's work. To Rothko the sum of the parts, like color and form, was less important than the sum of whole, i.e., the entire emotional experience one has when standing in front of a Rothko.

Rothko's evolution from surrealism to his Multiform period can be linked to his simple boredom with surrealism and his ever-present distaste for the academic art prevalent in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. Furthermore, Rothko never accepted most of the ideas that academic artists held concerning aesthetic principles. He did not view painting as something that should be done for relaxation. For Rothko, painting was an extremely ascetic profession that required the complete

and religious dedication of the artist to his work. However, Rothko did not reject all art. He believed, like the masters of old, that it was his duty to study and work as hard as he could to develop himself as a human being and an artist. It is therefore an easy assumption to make that Rothko was a link which bound that old world to the rapidly changing world of the 1950s. Another interesting point is that Rothko reached his mature years as a painter during the 1950s when the United States was a truly conservative place in which to live. His paintings were something completely new that went against the grain of prevalent American art. Consequently, some viewed his work as an attack on the predominant culture. This assumption, I believe, was faulty. Rothko was not criticizing culture; he simply wanted to create paintings that pushed people into looking at themselves. He was also pushing the bounds of the art world and experimenting with new ideas and new ideas were what the 1960s were all about.

In the 1960s society experienced sweeping changes, and the evolution of Rothko's art was a mirror that reflected, sometimes in a personally distorted way, those changes. The "Multiforms," like the surrealist paintings, faded away and opened the door to the next step in his artistic evolution. Rothko considered the works of this time period to be deeply psychological in nature, representing a semi-Freudian unconscious. He said, "If previous abstractions paralleled the scientific and objective pre-occupations (referring to Mondrian and Picasso) of our time, ours are finding a pictorial equivalent for man's new knowledge and consciousness of his more inner self."<sup>4</sup> Rothko's emphasis on man's inner being goes hand in hand with many of attitudes that were prevalent in the 1960s. For example, many people were trying to overcome a societal system that infringed on them as individuals. This overwhelming pressure forced them to rely on themselves for emancipation. Rothko's work mirrored this individualistic sentiment, for he was embarking on a journey that would eventually lead to his final emancipation, suicide, which is traceable in the evolution of his art and the emotion exuded from them. His suicide, in 1970, is once again a mirror of the turmoil in society.

By the early 1960s, the United States was falling into a period of intense social unrest. The United States Government had dragged the country into the Vietnam War and the student population at many of the country's larger educational institutions revolted against what they considered a purely unjust war. The country was also in the midst of the civil rights movement with large-scale rioting in urban centers. The student movement was populated by many so called people of the counter culture. These men and women sought peace and understanding through basically pacifistic means. They introduced on a wide scale many of the eastern religions based on peaceful living and pensive meditation. These religions proclaimed that we are all tied to our surroundings, which means that we cannot act on anything around us without affecting our being. Thus, one can conclude that it is in our own best interest to be at peace with ourselves and our environment. However, people from all religious backgrounds were involved heavily in the 1960s, whether Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu. The beliefs of each were very important but the goal

of peace was the central mission to all. I believe that understanding the religious and social background of the 1960s is essential to understanding the works of Rothko, leading up to the completion of Rothko Chapel.

The paintings which Rothko completed during the 1960s are works that have withstood the test of time. They are paintings that consist of large planes of color that are placed on the canvas in no particular "order." Yet, the order represented is universal and all encompassing in its nature. I use the term universal, meaning that the colors are placed there with a precision which, once again, demands that the viewer experience the painting as a whole, i.e., the sense that one has become tied to the painting in an experience which consists of pure emotion, and not as an experience that only involves color. The colors themselves are not mere colors but human shapes. One would look at the paintings briefly and say that the color fields are not human, but after careful study one would begin to realize that the colors appear to breathe and possess their own lives. When one considers the philosophy behind Rothko's work, the ability to accept his work as human becomes much easier. As human beings we all know that our entire ability to perceive our environment is encapsulated in our body, specifically in our minds. Therefore, to some, it is a logical, philosophical, aesthetic conclusion to see our surroundings as human as well; for since they are perceived internally, is it not logical to say that our surroundings are human? Is it not logical to say that when we view a chair, it is human because we are perceiving it internally, so it therefore has breath and a beating heart as well as life. Rothko viewed his colored shapes as living organisms with wills of their own.

They are unique elements in a unique situation. They are organisms with volition and a passion for self-assertion. They move with internal freedom, and without need to conform with or to violate what is probable in the familiar world. They have no direct association with any particular visible experience, but in them one recognizes the principle and passion of organisms. The presentation of this drama in the familiar world was never possible, unless everyday acts belong to a ritual accepted as referring to a transcendent realm.<sup>5</sup>

I believe this view is completely in line with the cultural climate of the 1960s. Although Rothko's works were completely new to the art world, the ideas that went into them had the same aesthetic quality that all great artists throughout history have possessed. Rothko's art took the United States and the world by surprise, much as the radical movements of the student and religious movements did during the same time period.

Rothko had always dreamed of creating a space where he could control the entire experience of the viewer: "After I had been at work for some time, I realized that I was much influenced subconsciously by Michelangelo's walls in the staircase room of the Medicean Library in Florence. He achieved just the kind of feeling I'm after--he makes the viewers feel that they are trapped in a room where all the doors

and windows are bricked up.”<sup>6</sup> His dreams came true when he, along with Barnett Newman and Philip Johnson, was commissioned to complete a chapel in Houston, Texas. The massive endeavor was first commissioned by John and Dominique de Menil, a wealthy French couple. The de Menils were very close friends with a Dominican monk; Father Marie-Alain Courturier, who was responsible for the completion of several major European chapels, one of which was designed by Henri Matisse. Needless to say, he was very responsive to the idea of building a chapel which was designed by contemporary artists, especially when one considers the religious devotion that Rothko put into every painting he completed. Father Courturier, as a religious activist did not want The Chapel to solely represent Christian ideas but wanted it to symbolize religious toleration. Rothko jumped on the task and did not look back.

The paintings are all very dark, mostly brown and purple. They encircle the viewer completely, for when one walks into the main entrance he or she has entered into the world of Mark Rothko, where the only seating provided is from a few sparse wooden benches; the rest of the interior is wide open space lined with Rothko’s large paintings. James E. B. Breslin, Rothko’s premiere biographer, described his reaction:

During my visits to the chapel, I periodically felt a strong urge to walk over to one of the wooden benches, stretch out, and fall asleep. One day, a young woman came in, sat for about an hour on a bench looking at the east wall triptych, then she swung her feet up onto the bench, lay back, and took a nap. Maybe she was tired. Maybe I was tired. But I think that, after time, these paintings begin to feel oppressive. Close-up, they are not engaging, though they are imposing; lacking the thin layers of translucent color, the feathery of vigorous brushwork, the spontaneous, delicate edges of Rothko’s earlier works, the chapel murals lack their intimacy, warmth and humanity. This environment isn’t something you command, because it is something *he* commands, and he is aloof and demanding, withdrawn and grandiose, dominating and despairing.<sup>7</sup>

I believe that the paintings which Rothko completed for The Chapel were created to be imposing because as Rothko said, he wanted to create a space where he was in control.

When the Chapel was consecrated on February 27, 1971, the ceremony was conducted by Eastern Orthodox Priests, Rabbis and Muslims.<sup>8</sup> It immediately became a meeting place for religious and political leaders of the world. The Dalai Lama visited to speak at a religious gathering, and there have been conferences on human rights and meetings for various causes. I believe the openness of the gatherings held at the Rothko Chapel is a direct result of the effect the 1960s had on the art of Mark Rothko. However, several months before the chapel was dedicated Rothko took his own life. For years he had been obsessed with his own mortality and



this is quite easy to see when one simply looks at the progression of his paintings. He had become tired of people and wanted to end the constant emotional pain that he was suffering. The liberating atmosphere of the 1960s was gone and so was Mark Rothko.

In conclusion I wish to report on how Rothko has affected me personally. As I progressed with my research I found that he had deeply influenced me as an artist. I recently received a large commission for a “religious” painting. I was given free will to express myself. My painting became something religious to me, although it is completely non-representational in nature. It was my total dedication to the piece, and the experience of painting it that made it religious. When I approached my canvas, I was approaching my altar. This is the direct influence of Mark Rothko, on me as a painter. This personal experience that I attained through my studies of Rothko made the topic much more important to me as an historian and an artist.

## Endnotes

1. My deepest thanks go to my wife who put up with my constant battle between worry and procrastination. Without her help I would never have completed the paper. I thank Jonathan Ellis for reading and proofreading and my parents and family for the use of their computer.
2. Anna Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven, 1989), 25.
3. Susan J. Barnes, *The Rothko Chapel: An Act of Faith* (Austin, 1989), 22.
4. Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1993), 37.
5. Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley, 1968), 549.
6. Marc Glimcher, *The Art of Mark Rothko: Into an Unknown World* (New York, 1991), 65.
7. James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago, 1993), 481.
8. Yuif Ibish and Ileana Marculescu, *Contemplation and Action in World Religions: A Rothko Chapel Book* (Seattle, 1977), 7.

# Russian Icons and the Orthodox Church

by

Walter L. Schneider

My interest in Orthodox Christianity in Russia began when I volunteered to serve on a missions team to Russia with the Southern Baptist Convention. For two weeks I lived in Moscow, from May 26 to June 11, 1996, and with my fellow team members constructed a Baptist church and performed other missionary duties. I was impressed with the Russian Orthodox cathedrals and the emphasis on icons and I determined to study the history of religion in Russia.

Before the introduction of Orthodox Christianity, the dominant religion in Russia was a mixture of paganism that varied from tribe to tribe. These religions involved worship of ancestors, nature, rivers and household spirits. Then, beginning in the early tenth century, Christian missionaries arrived from Greece. These missionaries began exerting both political and military influence on the Rus government. The first Christian church appeared in 945 A.D. in the Kiev region, the center of Rus political power. The first royal baptism was performed in 946 A.D. when Princess Olga was baptized in Constantinople. Realizing that a unified religion would help unify the country, Vladimir the First of Rus (who reigned 978 A.D. to 1015 A.D.) sent emissaries to explore the major religions of the day. After examining Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam, Vladimir declared Orthodoxy the “official” religion. Although he saw positives in each religion, he was persuaded by the reverence placed upon religious art by the Orthodox Church.

Vladimir sent representatives to Constantinople, the center of the Greek Orthodox Church or Eastern Orthodox Church. Constantinople had become the “Second Rome” when Roman Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople in 330 A.D. The period that followed the movement of the capital was very stressful for the Orthodox Church. Rome insisted on Latin as the one ecclesiastical language, whereas leaders in Constantinople strove to include and promote native languages as a means of spreading Christianity. In 1054 many other factors, including political and cultural differences, created a schism that split the Eastern Church from the Roman Catholic Church—each church leader excommunicated the other.<sup>1</sup>

During this period Vladimir sought to begin consolidating control of the various city-states within Rus borders. And to do this he used several political, military and religious methods. First, he rid the territory of the Varangian (Rus-Scandinavian) mercenaries that helped him seize control through the assassination of his half-

---

Walter L. Schneider, Vice-President of Alpha Beta Phi Chapter, 1997-1998, presented this paper at the Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference at Morehead State University, March 29, 1997. As a History major he graduated from Northern Kentucky University in 1997.

brother Yaropolk in 978 A.D. Vladimir viewed these people as a future threat to his growing power in Rus. So he sent “non-useful” Varangian to serve in the army of Constantinople, far enough away to not pose a threat. The more useful persons he sent to occupy outlying provinces and ordered a tight reign on them.<sup>2</sup>

The period is also marked by Vladimir’s open use of warfare to consolidate his control and to further it by conquering numerous other tribes both within and outside Kievan borders. These included tribes north and east of the Kiev region as well as Cherven’ and Peremyshl’ to the west in 981 A.D. Control of these two cities enabled him to secure trade with Cracow and Prague and to provide vital salt imports to the Kiev region. Salt was the only preservative and was considered worth its weight in gold.

In order to hold these gains, Vladimir established a series of defensive works to protect his territory from the many vengeful rulers that bordered his lands to the east.<sup>3</sup> But political and military gains were not the only means of consolidation of power in Rus; he also used religion—he sent emissaries to explore the various religions of the times and find one that would “unify” the masses. After visiting the Hagia Sophia, the holiest place in Constantinople, Vladimir’s emissaries reported back saying: “We went to the Greeks, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty and we are at a loss to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men.”<sup>4</sup>

Vladimir learned what the Orthodox Church had already learned. In order to convey the “new” message of Christianity, “images” would have to be used. These “images” took many forms but by far the most popular was the use of icons. Icons were used to illustrate the Christian faith and convey the message of Jesus Christ to a lower class population that was functionally illiterate.

The production of icons began to flourish in the newly emerging Russia. Centers of icon painting were Novogorod, Pskov and Moscow. It was not until the fifteenth century that Russian icon painting reached its height. This occurred parallel with the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. Moscow soon became known as the “Third Rome.” Many in the Christian world believed that the “Christian torch” had passed once more. Since both Rome and Constantinople had failed in their divine mission to become the center of Orthodoxy, the burden lay on Moscow’s shoulders. The Russian ruler titled himself “Czar,” Russian for “Caesar,” and the Czars claimed to trace their lineage back to Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. Russia, as the “Third Rome,” assimilated into its culture much of the spirituality and ethos of Byzantium.

By far the most significant problem that the Orthodox Church in Byzantium and Russia had to address was: How could the Orthodox message be spread to a vastly illiterate culture? The answer was to use “tools” that would teach both the masses and the creators of these tools the message of Christ. For the “tools,” or icons as they were known, were physical pictures representing an invisible but real God. John of Damascus, a Byzantine missionary who lived from 675 A.D. to 749 A.D., wrote

during a stay in Constantinople that “Icons are open books to remind us of God. . . . If a pagan asks you to show him your faith, take him into a church and show him your icons.”<sup>5</sup> Although religious paintings existed in western churches, Pope Gregory considered them sacrilegious idols that had replaced the Holy Scriptures in Orthodox Churches. This was far from the case, however. Instead of replacing the Scriptures, icons were used to supplement them. Many worried that the veneration of icons was a violation of the commandment against idol worship in the Old Testament. The Orthodox Church, therefore, maintained a strict distinction between the worship of God and the reverence paid to the icons themselves. Icons were meant to be viewed as doorways or meeting places between man and God.<sup>6</sup>

Both Theodore of Studios and St. John of Damascus spoke in defense of icons. Theodore wrote: “Christ is depicted in images, and the invisible is seen. . . . The veneration of the image is the veneration of Christ. The material of the image is not venerated at all, but only Christ who has his likeness in it.” St. John wrote: “I do not adore matter, but I adore the Creator of matter, who became matter for me, inhabiting matter and accomplishing my salvation through matter.”<sup>7</sup>

Not everyone could create a religious icon as “defined” by the Orthodox Church. In order for a painting to be considered an icon, the painter needed to be a master of both the materials and his own spirituality. The icons did not necessarily have to be “Mona Lisa” quality, or what the western world considers masterpieces. They did have to show that the artist understood the complexity of combining spirituality and physical matter to create a “doorway to heaven.”<sup>8</sup> Exactly how these icons were made is a mystery that is gradually being unraveled, though some of the techniques may never be fully understood.

The earliest technique was called *wax encaustic*. In this method pigments derived from various sources were mixed and placed on the drawing or sketch of the icon and molten wax was applied to “seal” the icon and hold the pigments together.<sup>9</sup> This technique was used from the late fifth to the ninth century, when a new technique developed called *egg tempera*. In this method colors were held in place by a mixture of egg yolk and water. When dried, they gave a smooth and translucent finish unlike the wax encaustic method which became yellowed or clouded as the years passed. Another name for this technique was “*gesso*,” in reference to the use of finely-ground chalk or alabaster that was mixed into the wash and then polished to the smoothest possible surface.<sup>10</sup>

An icon had three basic elements.<sup>11</sup> First was the wood base which was carefully scrutinized for any imperfections which were “shored up” by the use of line strips or additional pieces of wood attached to the back. This prevented the wood from warping or cracking during transport or over years of use. Next the “*gesso*” was applied to achieve a smooth surface. It gave the artist the best agent with which to work. This was done over an extended period of time and many layers were used. It was not uncommon to apply up to twenty layers. Even then, the surface only measured about one millimeter in thickness. This was usually but not always followed with a layer of gold leaf that was set on a layer of pigment and not on the

gesso. Then the layers of pigment were added and varied in number depending on the shade that the artist wanted to represent. A vast majority of the colors were taken from nature such as burnt bones for black. Lead was used for white, and other colors were created by painters at great expense.

Finally the entire painting would be covered in a glaze several times to protect it from the environment. The following illustration shows a cross section of an icon from *Doors of Perception* by John Bagglely.



Along with the strict order in which the icons were painted, an equally regimented order was enforced regarding the worshiping and displaying of icons. Russian Orthodoxy believed that God revealed himself through the beauty of art and therefore Orthodox churches were covered in religious icons, some of which the congregation could approach but others they could not. The icons that could not be physically approached were placed on the Iconostasis which served as a divider between heaven and earth.<sup>12</sup> The screen was arranged in a particular order, from top to bottom as follows:<sup>13</sup>

1. Christ, in the center. The Archangel below him and the Apostles in a row below that.
2. Christ again in the center, with the Virgin Mary to his right and John the Baptist to his left.
3. The Saints of the Bible as well as local saints, and scenes from the Bible.

This placement was taken quite seriously and every effort was made to insure that no icons were placed incorrectly as that would constitute heresy. The Iconostasis, as a separation between heaven and earth, consisted of three doors with the central door being the “Royal Gate.” It was considered royal because it symbolized the King of Glory bringing the Holy Eucharist through this door to “feed” his followers.<sup>14</sup> Also Deacon’s doors were located on the left and right side of the “Royal Gate.” These enabled deacons, altar boys and other clergy to enter and exit from the altar.

Along with the Iconostasis, every church had its own patron saint. An icon of the saint was placed on a cloth-covered lectern in the center of the church surrounded by candles.<sup>15</sup> Other icons of saints were similarly placed along the walls of the churches. The candles used to give light to the icons were of a special variety. They were made of beeswax and olive oil since these materials were known in the Bible as the purest substances found in nature and would therefore give off the purest light

for sacred objects.<sup>16</sup> People also honored the icons with incense. This was believed symbolic of the grace of the Holy Spirit which is given freely to everyone. The incense burner, the Kadilio, represented Christ as the Divine Ember.<sup>17</sup>

Now when I reflect on my trip to Russia the one image that still brings me joy is remembering when I stood in the Cathedral of the Assumption inside the Kremlin where Ivan the Terrible attended worship services. It is one thing to read a description of a historical site, but to actually be there and experience the feelings evoked provides unique insights. Standing in that beautiful cathedral and reflecting on the history of Moscow, the religious history of Russia and the development of icons, I had the most unique worship experience of my life, one that I will never forget.

Jaroslav Pelikan, a modern apologist for icon use in the Orthodox religion, wrote in his book *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons*: “There are some people who find fault with us because we bow down before and worship images. . . . Certain events that actually took place and that were seen by human beings have been written down for the remembrance and instruction of those of us who were not alive at that time, in order that, though we did not see them, we may still obtain the benefit of them . . . by hearing and believing them. But since not everyone is literate, nor does everyone have time for reading, our ancestors gave their permission to portray these same events in the form of images, as acts of heroic excellence.”<sup>18</sup> Before I went to Moscow I believed, like many in western society, that icons were sacrilegious and bordered on idol worship. But having experienced them first-hand and studied them more intently, I found that I was wrong. The Orthodox believers do not worship icons themselves but worship what icons represent—the visible representation of the invisible God.

## Endnotes

1. Michael Venzie, *Treasures of the Czars* (Internet source: <http://www.times.St.pete.fl.us/Treasures/TC.5.4.7.html>, 1996), 1.
2. John Fennell, *The History of the Russian Church to 1448* (London, 1995), 9-11.
3. *Ibid.*, 10.
4. Ronald Goetz, "Making the Invisible Visible: A Protestant Encounter with Icons," *Christian Century*, November 10, 1993, 1120-2.
5. Venzie, *Treasures*, 1.
6. John Baggley, *Doors of Perception: Icons and Their Spiritual Significances* (Crestwood, New York, 1987), 25.
7. *Ibid.*, 24-5.
8. *Ibid.*, 99-101.
9. *Ibid.*, 101.
10. *Ibid.*, 102.
11. *Ibid.*, 102-3.
12. Denise Denton, *The Use of Icons in the Russian Orthodox Church* (Internet Source: <http://www.valley.net/~transnat/russel.html>), 1-2.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Vera Espinola, *Treasures of the Czars education guide* (Internet Source: same address as note 1).
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Washington, D.C., 1990), 1.



**Stuart S. Sprague, ed.**  
***The Autobiography of John P. Parker:***  
***Former Slave and Conductor***  
***on the Underground Railroad***  
**(New York, 1996).**

by  
**Shalohm Renay Bentley and Michael Washington**

The accomplishments of African Americans have broken through the elements of white history little by little. African American people old and young have been astounded to learn about the varied accomplishments of their ancestors. However, during slavery Africans and African Americans were not acknowledged for their contribution to America. And still today proper recognition has never been given to the brave enslaved and free African Americans involved in the Underground Railroad.

Most of today's history textbooks mention the experience of the escaping slaves, but give major white figures credit for assisting their flight to freedom. Individuals such as John Rankin, Jesse Lockhart and Quaker leaders such as Levi Coffin, author of the book *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin* (2d ed., 1880), are recognized for aiding the escape of fugitive slaves. William Still, an African American who was secretary of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, published *The Underground Rail Road* in 1872 and his focus was on the fugitives themselves rather than the abolitionists assisting them. But as historian Larry Gara pointed out in *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (1961), the popular legend ignores Still and stresses the romantic adventures of white abolitionist conductors. Actually, Gara wrote, most runaways made their own way through the South to the borders of the northern states and once on free soil were usually aided by free blacks.

This book supports Gara's thesis that the majority of workers on the Underground Railroad were African Americans. *His Promised Land* is the autobiography of John Parker, one of the most prominent and hardworking conductors of the Underground Railroad. Born a slave in Virginia, at the age of eight Parker was sold to a planter in Alabama. "Though the work was hard, I was a willing worker," he wrote, "for I was already casting about to find some way to escape" (p. 45). He escaped several times and was always captured, but regardless his master recognized that he was able and apprenticed him to an iron molder. As a successful iron

---

Shalohm Renay Bentley graduated from Northern Kentucky University in December, 1997 with a major in English. Michael Washington, Professor of History and a member of Alpha Beta Phi Chapter, is Director of the Afro-American Studies Program at Northern Kentucky University.

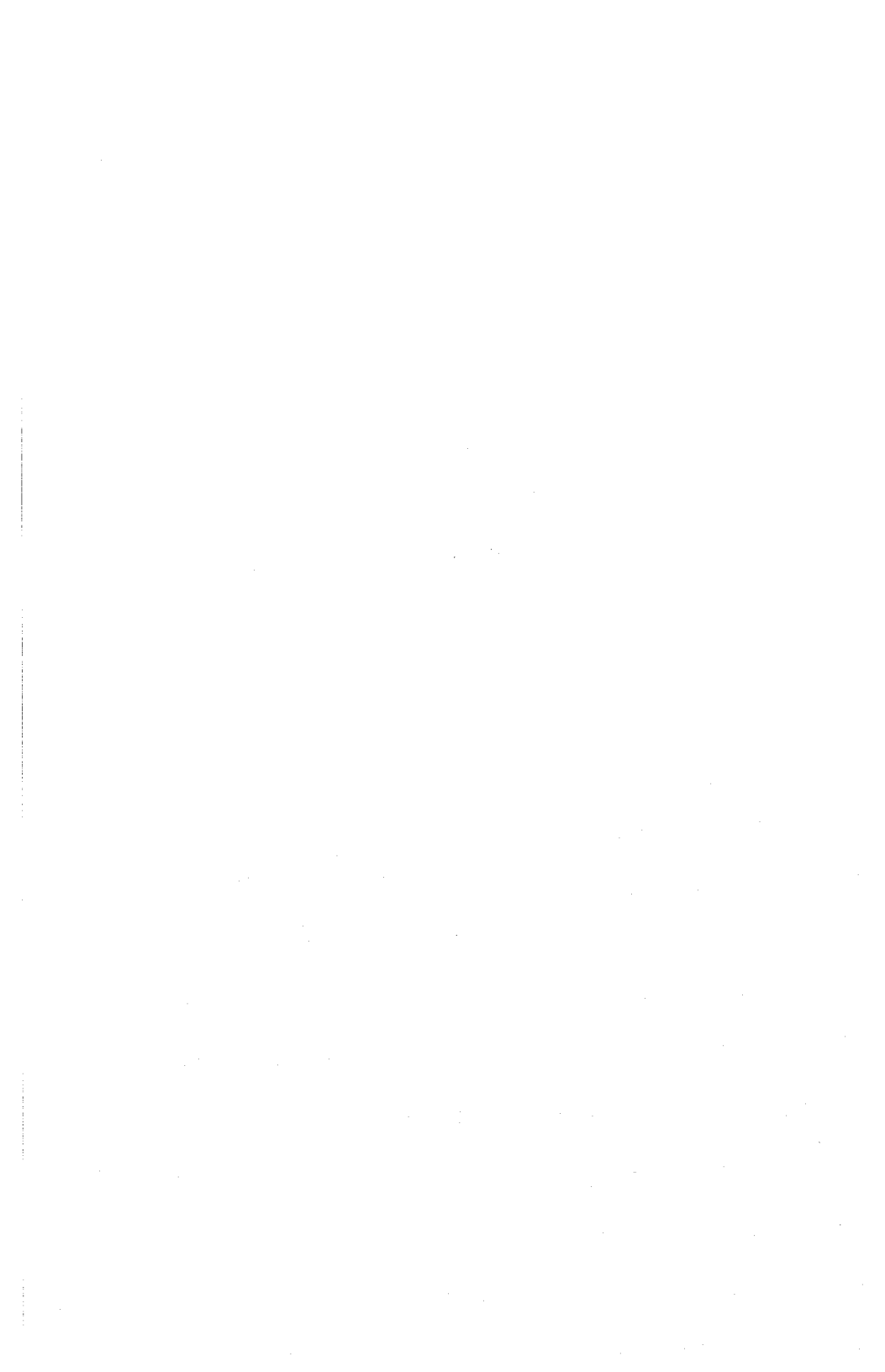
molder he earned enough money to purchase his freedom in 1845 at the age of eighteen. He moved to Cincinnati and then Ripley, Ohio and for twenty years assisted 440 fugitives escape to Canada. His obsession with freedom and undying commitment to escape and assist others is the theme of the book.

Editor Stuart Sprague, professor emeritus of Morehead State University, wrote a brief biographical sketch of Parker's life (1827-1900) and gave the historical background in the preface. This is followed by an essay by Frank M. Gregg, a journalist who knew Parker and encouraged him to write the manuscript. The manuscript itself is in the Duke University Library. Sprague provides helpful notes and an epilogue that describes Parker's success in business after the Civil War during the period subsequent to the years described in the manuscript.

The book holds the reader's attention and reveals many interesting details such as Parker's statement that he rarely learned the names of the people that he helped to escape. Through the mystery and intrigue Parker's hatred of slavery and his inner strength show through. He was a courageous person, voluntarily risking fine and imprisonment to aid others in achieving something that he had purchased for himself, the basic tenet of the American dream—freedom.

*Officers  
of  
Alpha Beta Phi  
Chapter  
1997-1998*

Jennifer L. Schmidt .....	President
Walter L. Schneider .....	Vice-President
Christopher M. Scherff .....	Secretary
Jason S. Taylor .....	Treasurer
Allison Schmidt .....	Historian
James A. Ramage .....	Faculty Advisor



## *Charter Student Members*

Joy M. Baker  
Ann C. Cahill  
John P. DeMarcus Jr.  
Scott K. Fowler  
Bennie W. Good  
Matthew W. Hornsby  
Kenneth E. Hughes  
Shonda S. Kinman  
Douglas K. Meyer, Jr.  
Grace M. Murimi  
Dick Wolfe

Christopher P. Burns  
David R. Caudill, Jr.  
Daniel M. Driscoll  
Mark K. Gilvin  
Joseph S. Guilyard  
Todd P. Huff  
Jeffrey Junto  
Andrew O. Lutes  
S. Wayne Moreland  
Elaine M. Richardson  
Rudiger F. Wolfe

## *Members Initiated April 15, 1986*

David P. Anstead  
Richard T. Dedman  
James R. Eilers  
Michael P. Holliday  
Betty R. Letscher  
Darlene S. Miller  
Linda M. Ruh

Joseph T. Shields  
Harold A. Stephens  
Shelley L. Stephenson  
Deborah S. Trego  
Edwin L. Vardiman  
Shawn T. Young

## *Members Initiated April 14, 1987*

Kristen H. Breen  
Laura A. Butcher  
Lynn David  
Cheryl L. Grinninger  
Linda Kay Hon  
Judith F. Hutchison

John Prescott Kappas  
Martha Pelfrey  
Julie Ann Prewitt  
Edna L. Stracener  
Verna L. Vardiman

***Members Initiated***  
***April 12, 1988***

Susan M. Burgess  
Lori Ann Dinser  
Stacey L. Graus  
Timothy Craig Grayson  
Jeffrey Hampton  
Derick Rogers Harper  
Christopher Gary Holmes  
Virginia Johnson

Sarah Suzanne Kiser  
Joyce Borne Kramer  
William H. Lowe  
Michael K. G. Moore  
Jennifer A. Raiche  
Debra Beckett Weigold  
Nancy Lynn Willoughby

***Members Initiated***  
***April 11, 1989***

Roger Craig Adams  
James Lee Breth  
Edward R. Fahlbush  
Linda Holbrook  
Christopher Iannelli

Tracy Ice  
Elizabeth W. Johnson  
Wylie D. Jones  
Mary Elaine Ray  
Rebecca Rose Schroer  
Jeffery A. Smith

***Members Initiated***  
***April 10, 1990***

Fred Quintin Beagle  
Kyle Wayne Bennett  
Susan Claypool  
Daniel Paul Decker  
Gregory S. Duncan  
Mark A. Good  
Richard Timothy Herrmann  
Rebecca Leslie Knight  
Mary Alice Mairose

Bryan P. McGovern  
Ernestine Moore  
Christina Lee Poston  
Preston A. Reed, Jr.  
Christine Rose Schroth  
Scott Andrew Schuh  
Michael Scott Smith  
Eric Lee Sowers  
Dorinda Sue Tackett

***Members Initiated***  
***April 9, 1991***

Patrick Thomas Berry  
Nicholas Brake  
Shelly Renee Helmer  
Toni Hickey  
Tina Holliday  
Charles F. Hollis, III  
Rick Jones  
Michael Shawn Kemper

Todd Michael Novak  
Greg Perkins  
Larry Prine  
Janine Marie Ramsey  
Brian Scott Rogers  
Sandra Seidman  
Stacy E. Wallace  
Steven David Wilson

***Members Initiated***  
***April 7, 1992***

Tonya M. Ahlfeld  
Lisa Lyn Blank  
Douglas E. Bunch  
Ty Busch  
Brian Forrest Clayton  
Thomas M. Connelly  
Marvin J. Cox  
Kristi M. Eubanks  
Lori J. Fair  
Aric W. Fiscus  
Christopher Bentley Haley

Laurie Anne Haley  
Sean P. Hennessy  
Brett Matthew Kappas  
David R. Lamb  
Mary Emily Melching  
Kenneth Edward Prost  
Ty Robbins  
Gregory J. Scheper  
Julie Shore  
David Stahl

***Members Initiated***  
***April 16, 1993***

Mark E. Brown  
Randy P. Caperton  
James L. Gronefeld  
Marian B. Henderson

James L. Kimble  
Daniel T. Murphy  
Heather E. Wallace  
Kathryn M. H. Wilson

***Members Initiated***  
***April 12, 1994***

Fred Lee Alread  
Julie B. Berry  
Craig Thomas Bohman  
Michael A. Flannery  
Aimee Marie Fuller  
Kelly Lynn Auton-Fowee  
Joyce A. Hartig  
Hilari M. Gentry  
Louis W. Brian Houillion  
J. Chad Howard  
Jill K. Kemme

Brian A. Lee  
Alden T. Meyers  
Leslie C. Nomeland  
Thomas Arthur Roose, Jr.  
David Austin Rosselott  
Shannon J. Roll  
Paula Somori-Arnold  
Kimberly Michaela Vance  
Brady Russell Webster  
Michael D. Welsh  
Robert W. Wilcox

***Members Initiated***  
***April 11, 1995***

Donald C. Adkisson  
Monica L. Faust  
Sean A. Fields  
Randal S. Fuson  
Jason E. Hall  
Michael Hersey  
Sherry W. Kingston

Christina M. MacFarlane  
Andrew J. Michalack  
Rachel A. Routt  
Steven M. Watkins  
Brian Winstel  
Bradley E. Winterod  
Roberta A. Zeter

***Members Initiated***  
***April 9, 1996***

Sarah E. Adams  
Brandon E. Biddle  
Dale N. Duncan, Jr.  
Gary W. Graff  
Robert L. Haubner II  
William M. Hipple  
Deborah L. Jones  
Francois Le Roy  
Bonnie W. May

Scott A. Merriman  
Laureen K. Norris  
Cliff J. Ravenscraft  
Allison Schmidt  
Diane Talbert  
Jason S. Taylor  
Elisaveta Todorova  
Lisa A. Young



***Members Initiated***  
***April 8, 1997***

Megan R. Adams  
Dawn R. Brennan  
Patrick A. Carpenter  
Brad A. Dansberry  
Terry L. Fernbach  
Mary A. Glass  
Roy S. Gross  
Walter C. Heringer  
Kraig S. Hoover  
William J. Landon

Carrie D. Mayer  
John D. Nichols  
Andrea M. Reckers  
Christopher M. Scherff  
Jennifer L. Schmidt  
Walter L. Schneider  
Joshua L. Searcy  
Gabrielle H. Snyder  
Andrew G. Wilson

***Members Initiated***  
***April 9, 1998***

Erik J. Arwood  
Clara M. Gerner  
Stephanie Hagerty  
Andre L. Maitre  
Thomas J. May  
Patricia A. Morwood

Jodi L. Otto  
Rick L. Trump  
Andrew K. Von Bargaen  
Karen L. Watkins  
Aaron M. Weaver

***Faculty***

Michael C. C. Adams  
Lawrence R. Borne  
John P. DeMarcus  
J. Merle Nickell  
W. Michael Ryan  
Louis R. Thomas  
H. Lew Wallace  
Michael H. Washington  
Robert W. Wilcox

Leon E. Boothe  
James C. Claypool  
Tripta Desai  
James A. Ramage  
W. Frank Steely  
Robert C. Vitz  
Richard E. Ward  
Jeffrey C. Williams





