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Searching for Stephen Crane: The Schoberlin Collection

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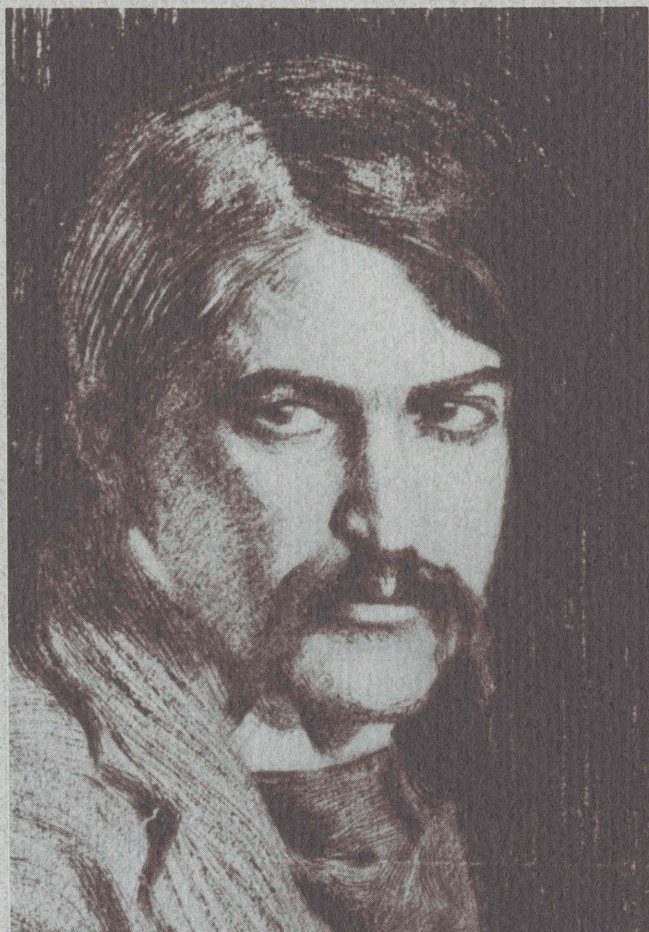
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fin. I'd Rather Have —
Last Christmas they gave me a sweater,
And a nice warm suit of wool,
But I'd rather be cold and have a dog,
To watch when I come from school.

Father gave me a bicycle,
But that isn't much of a treat,
Unless you have a dog at your heels
Racing away down the street

They bought me a camping outfit,
But a bonfire by a log
Is all the outfit I would ask,
If I only had a dog.

They seem to think a little dog
Is a killer of all earth's joys;
But oh, that "pesky little dog"
Means hours of joy to the boys.

Stephen Crane's earliest surviving manuscript, ca. 1879–80, written when he was about eight years old (from the Melvin H. Schoberlin Collection).

Ah, Tommie: when you
get back to Dixie, remember
how often you used to
be fired out of #117 and
how you always came
directly in again
Your sincere friend
Stephen Crane

CC + H.P.C.
March 10, 1890

Autograph album inscription to Armistead ("Tommie") Borland, 1890
(from the Melvin H. Schoberlin Collection).

Searching for Stephen Crane: The Schoberlin Collection

BY JAMES B. COLVERT

In mid-March of 1896 Stephen Crane, already famous at twenty-four as the author of a novel of the Civil War, *The Red Badge of Courage*, sent his editor, Ripley Hitchcock, a note apologizing for missing a business appointment. "Of course", Crane wrote, "eccentric people are admirably picturesque at a distance but I suppose after your recent close-range experiences with me, you have the usual sense of annoyance. After all, I cannot help vanishing and disappearing and dissolving. It is my foremost trait."¹

It was a trait his mother, a noted Methodist reformer who always wanted him to be dependable, orderly, and attentive to his Christian duties, often complained about. "Stevie", she wrote when he was thirteen or fourteen, a cub reporter roaming the New Jersey beaches around Asbury Park gleaning resort gossip for his brother Townley's newspaper column, "is like the wind in Scripture. He bloweth whither he listeth."² He has seemed so to his biographers. "I go through the world unexplained, I suppose", he once wrote, and no one who has struggled with the recalcitrant facts of his life would deny the truth of the observation.³

The most gifted writer of his generation, he was precocious, unlucky (fated, as the romantic-minded have said), and very nearly helpless in the management of his affairs. Dead at twenty-eight from tuberculosis aggravated by physical exhaustion brought on by his strenuous and reckless life as a war correspondent, he moved frenet-

1. Crane to Ripley Hitchcock, [15 March?] 1896. R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes, eds., *Stephen Crane: Letters* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1960), 118-19.

2. Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters* (New York: Knopf, 1923), 48.

3. Crane to Nellie Crouse, 31 December [1895]. Stallman and Gilkes, *Letters*, 86.

ically from one high adventure to another, leaving little or nothing as a record of his passing. "Crane's carelessness was astonishing", his first biographer, Thomas Beer, wrote in 1923. "Belonging to the vainest of professions, he took no trouble to annotate himself for history."⁴ What he failed to annotate were his excursions in the Bohemian rooming houses and art studios in New York in the early nineties, when he was writing *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, *The Black Riders*, *George's Mother*, and *The Red Badge of Courage*; his journey through the West and Mexico in 1895, which gave him "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel"; his adventures with shipwreck and war in Florida and Greece in 1896–97, from which he got "The Open Boat" and "Death and the Child"; his literary and personal relations with Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Harold Frederic, H. G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford (then Ford Madox Hueffer) in England in 1897 and 1899; and his adventures as a war reporter for the *New York Journal* and the *New York World* in Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, and Puerto Rico in 1898. Handsome, intense, indifferent to the conventions of art and life, he was the prototypical romantic adventurer-artist, an early devotee of the cult of experience, a compulsive seeker after danger, crisis, and high sensation.

Searching out the facts of this hectic life, his biographers have been confronted at nearly every turn by tangled chronologies, undated, misdated, and missing letters, contradictory testimony by people who knew him (or thought they knew him), and legions of unverifiable rumors and fanciful legends. The life of no writer except Poe, perhaps, has seemed so intriguing, and none so frustrating. Within three years of his death, Willis Clarke, a young journalist who visited him in England at Brede Place, the fantastic late-medieval manor which Crane shared in the last year and a half of his life with his common-law wife, Cora, began collecting letters and information for a biography, but abandoned the project when he became lost in a bewildering maze of conflicting and undocumented statements. Henry McBride, an artist who knew Crane in his Bohemian days in New York, wrote Beer: "I spent ten years planning a study of Crane and ended by deciding there was no such animal, although I knew him for eleven years".⁵ Commenting on the dearth of facts about his sub-

4. Beer, *Stephen Crane*, 247.

5. John Berryman, *Stephen Crane*, rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1962), xvi.

ject, Beer acknowledged that his book was a “most imperfect study” and “probably filled with errors”.⁶ Twenty years later Crane’s next biographer, John Berryman, entered the same complaint. “No one will ever be able to work casually at Crane and be certain of anything. So many people have been wrong about him so often. . . . Book after book on the man has been announced, labored at, and laid by in despair.”⁷

Crane scholars have retrieved much information in the thirty-five years since Berryman wrote this, and recent developments in Crane studies will soon give us more. Robert Stallman, Thomas Gullason, Fredson Bowers, J. C. Levenson, Edwin Cady, Joseph Katz, Jean Cazemajou, and others have filled in many of the gaps in Crane’s story. Letters discovered since the publication of Stallman’s comprehensive biography in 1968 and the appearance of the last volume of Bowers’s Virginia Edition of Crane’s works in 1976 will join available Crane documentation when the Columbia University Press brings out Stanley Wertheim’s and Paul Sorrentino’s new edition of Crane’s correspondence next year. Their edition will add about 400 letters to the 370 in the edition that Stallman and Gilkes published in 1960. But at the moment, the most important new source of information about Crane is the newly uncovered Schoberlin Collection which Syracuse University acquired in 1984. This important collection was assembled by Commander Melvin H. Schoberlin, U.S.N. (1912–1977) in the 1940s, and though Crane scholars have long known of its existence—many were in frequent touch with Schoberlin before his death in 1977—no one knew its full extent or exact contents until 1984, when Paul Sorrentino, a young Crane scholar at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, persuaded Commander Schoberlin’s widow, Laura, to bring it out of storage in Honolulu and make it available to Syracuse University as an addition to its already substantial Crane holdings.

Put together more than forty years after Crane’s death, when he was but a dim memory to the handful of people who had actually known him and when his letters and manuscripts were still almost as widely scattered as they had been in Beer’s day, Schoberlin’s impressive collection gives eloquent testimony of his uncommon energy, determination, and ingenuity. It holds sixty-two letters by Stephen

6. Beer, *Stephen Crane*, 243, 246.

7. Berryman, *Stephen Crane*, xvi–xvii.

Crane, fourteen of them unknown to the authors of his published biographies, and thirty-nine by Cora, many of these loosely dictated by Stephen in 1899–1900, when she was acting as his business and literary manager. It includes a diary by Crane's sensitive, reflective, and sadly isolated sister Agnes, invaluable for what it reveals about the cramped Methodist world of Stephen's early childhood.⁸ It includes also Schoberlin's voluminous research notes, his correspondence with almost all the Crane collectors and researchers of his time, his set of Crane first editions,⁹ some with inscriptions not previously known to other scholars, Crane manuscripts, two autograph books, many clippings, and a number of previously unknown newspaper articles about Crane. Though the collection will not radically alter Crane scholarship, as Wertheim and Sorrentino have noted, it nevertheless contains many hitherto unknown biographic and literary details which show a more human, more convincing Stephen Crane than anyone has so far been able to realize.

It is not surprising that the young Melvin Schoberlin was drawn to the study of Stephen Crane. In his early twenties, he too was a literary-minded, adventurous young man. He had been the feature editor of the school paper at the North Denver High School, from which he graduated in 1930, and had postponed college to take a job as a feature writer for the *Denver Post*. He left the *Post* in 1932 to become a sort of free-lance journalist-artist. During the next two years he wrote a series of historical sketches about early Western theatres, which was published in 1941 under the title *From Candles to Footlights: A Biography of the Pike's Peak Theatre, 1859–1876*. Also, he instructed in dramatics and stage design at the Denver Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, became a sound technician for a broadcasting station, an actor in a traveling variety company, and the stage manager for the University Civic Theatre. In 1934 he stowed away on a British molasses tanker and worked his way around the world as a mess-room steward, with extended stopovers in Japan, Java, China, Africa, and England. Back home in 1935, he entered Colorado State College of Education in the fall, paying his way by

8. Among the numerous photographs in the collection is the only known picture of Agnes, whose resemblance to Stephen was striking. Like her brother, she died at age twenty-eight.

9. The collection is complete except for the 1893 *Maggie* and the English edition of *The Black Riders*. Copies of both works were, however, already at Syracuse.



Melvin H. Schoberlin as a young naval officer
(Courtesy of Mrs. Melvin H. Schoberlin).

writing feature articles for several Western newspapers. Also, he contributed a number of poems to several little magazines of the time (published as a book collection, *Roads and Other Lines*, in 1939) and won two prizes in college poetry contests.

It was in 1936, during his second year at Colorado State, that he discovered and became interested in Stephen Crane. The story of the Schoberlin Crane Collection probably begins about that time. Such a young man as this, as we can easily imagine, would have been captivated by Beer's portrait of Crane. Deeply colored by the biographer's idolatry and vivid impressionism, Beer's Crane could have struck young Schoberlin as a realization of his own enthusiasms and inclinations. In any case, his interest was aroused.¹⁰ He wrote Max Herzberg, president of the Stephen Crane Association, that he was doing research on Crane and asked his advice about getting information.¹¹ The idea of writing a book of his own about Crane, as he said later, was already "rattling around in [his] head".¹²

But that was five years before he began his preparations in earnest. In the fall of 1941 he was principal of the high school at Follett, Texas. From his office there, working from B. J. R. Stolper's pioneering thirty-page bibliography that Herzberg had referred him to in 1936, he poured out a flood of inquiries to librarians, collectors, and rare book dealers. His aim, he explained, was to write "an exhaustive and critical biography of Stephen Crane", to which end he was determined to "exhaust every possible source of information concerning the life and literary influence of Crane and his wife Cora Taylor", a "tall order", he admitted, but one he intended to fill by "contacting every individual who might have known this writer—if only slightly".¹³ Though somewhat at a loss about how to proceed in these first months of his labors, he was earnest, energetic, and sometimes ingenious, as his invention of an odd research device shows. He compiled from

10. It is possible that Schoberlin had read Crane earlier. Schoberlin wrote a Fred J. Perrine on 23 July 1948 that he had planned to write a book on Crane "sixteen years ago". Unless otherwise noted, all cited letters are in the Schoberlin Collection.

11. Max J. Herzberg to Schoberlin, 1 October 1936.

12. Schoberlin wrote Jim Sandoe, librarian at the University of Colorado on 6 March 1948 that the idea of a Crane biography "was rattling around inside my head while I was in Boulder, but I had more immediate fish to fry at that time".

13. Schoberlin to G. W. Allen, 4 October 1941.

Who's Who in America a list of names of people whose occupations and activities suggested that their paths might at some time or other have crossed Crane's—editors, newspaper correspondents, alumni of his schools and colleges, veterans of the Spanish-American war—and sent them laboriously typed form letters appealing for their help. But the results of these efforts during the few months before Pearl Harbor were disappointing. However, he did find the manuscript of one of Crane's Mexican stories, "Five White Mice", and an 1892 Crane letter in the Huntington Library, but most of the letters in the Schoberlin correspondence file for September and October 1941 are from people whose names he culled from *Who's Who*. Not one had ever met Stephen Crane; most had never heard of him. Some wrote brief notes of apology and encouragement, some expressed surprise that they had not known Crane ("I was a student at Claverack College—but I haven't the faintest memory of Stephen Crane"), and one—also at Claverack, though some years after Crane's time—took the occasion to write a fond and charming description of the old Dutch village and the College¹⁴ where Crane, as he once said, spent the happiest years of his life. This letter was the closest thing to a usable Crane item that Schoberlin got out of his experiment.

There is a gap in the correspondence file between October 1941 and May 1946, roughly corresponding to the years Schoberlin served as a submarine officer in the Navy during the war; but he may have continued to collect during these years, for he seems to have had on hand in 1946 more material than he could have possibly acquired in September and October of 1941. A few months after he left the Navy in the spring of 1946, he wrote Herbert F. West¹⁵ that the "amount of material I have collected (and that primary source material) is staggering", and he wrote Max Herzberg that he had in his possession 200 unpublished Crane letters, mostly in transcript or photocopy, but some originals.

He was at Johns Hopkins University in the fall, enrolled in the Ph.D. program and bursting with ambitious plans. His idea, as he explained to West, was to submit his book on Crane to Johns Hopkins as his doctoral dissertation and then rework it for commercial

14. Josephine Lee Chrysler to Schoberlin, 27 October 1941.

15. West was an English professor at Dartmouth College and was instrumental in building the Crane collection there.

publication.¹⁶ He told Herzberg that he was now “starting” research on the definitive biography, to be called “Flagon of Despair”, and that he expected to finish it in three years.¹⁷ Furthermore, he had outlined five other books to be got out of his research.¹⁸ His ambition soared to new heights in November when Alfred A. Knopf (who had published Beer’s biography) offered him a “gilt edged” contract for the publication of his book, stipulating November 1949 as the due date. From this time on, the definitive biography was Schoberlin’s first priority. When the academic year ended in the spring of 1947, he resigned his teaching fellowship at Hopkins and set up operations in Phoenix, where he had established residence after the war. From there he cast a wide net of correspondence—inquiring, bargaining, demanding, cajoling, and even threatening—that ultimately caught up most of the country’s major libraries, records offices, rare book and manuscript dealers, private collectors, at least a dozen people who had known Crane personally, and another dozen who had been associated with him or whose parents or relatives had known him. Finely webbed to catch even the smallest detail, the net covered Mexico (where Crane had gone for the Bacheller Syndicate in 1895), England, France, Greece, and Germany.

Diplomatic and patient when diplomacy and patience served his purpose, Schoberlin had established good relations with almost everyone who had Crane materials or knowledge about him: the old painter, Corwin Knapp Linson, in whose studio Crane had started *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1894 and who had written an indispensable unpublished memoir of him;¹⁹ Edith Crane, Stephen’s niece, who had valuable letters and memories of Stephen when he was living at her house in Hartwood and writing *The Third Violet*; Odell Hathaway, one of Crane’s intimates at Claverack who also had valu-

16. Schoberlin to Herbert F. West, 28 September 1946.

17. The phrase is from Crane’s last love letter to Nellie Crouse, who dismissed him in February 1896. Playing the role of the grieving and rejected lover, he ended his letter of 1 March with the sentences, “The future is blue with obligations—new trials—conflicts. It was a rare old wine the gods brewed for mortals. Flagons of despair—”. Later, he worked the phrases into a poem: “Oh, a rare old wine ye brewed for me / Flagons of despair”. See Stallman and Gilkes, *Letters*, 120.

18. Schoberlin to Max Herzberg, 29 September 1946.

19. Edited with an introduction by Edwin H. Cady and published by the Syracuse University Press in 1958 as *My Stephen Crane*.

able letters, including one dated 1888, the earliest known; Dr. Fred-eric Lawrence, who had been his classmate at Syracuse and his room-mate at the “Pendennis Club”, a rooming house on the border of the tenement district in New York where Crane wrote much of *Maggie*; Armistead Borland, Crane’s friend at Claverack and owner of Crane letters and two interesting autograph albums; Alice Beer, sis-ter of Thomas Beer, who had two folders of materials her brother had collected for his biography; Stephen’s Asbury Park friends Her-bert and Richard Warren Senger, brothers of the gifted Louis (de-ceased), who had tried to model himself as a writer on Stephen; the daughters of Nellie Crouse, the young woman to whom Crane wrote seven remarkable love letters,²⁰ though he saw her only once or twice for an hour or so at tea; Mrs. Frederick B. Smillie, the former Lily Brandon Munroe, the young married beauty Crane fell in love with in Asbury Park in 1892 and once begged to elope with him; Nelson Greene, another painter who knew Crane at the Art Students’ League; and many others with more or less tenuous connections to Stephen and his world.

He visited many of these people—perhaps all of them—in the spring of 1948 on a two-month, 5000-mile research tour, which he planned for months as the climax of his research efforts. Between April and June he was in Nebraska, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York City, Port Jervis, Syracuse, and other places to examine documents and conduct personal interviews. Back in Phoenix in mid-June, he de-clared his tour an unqualified success. “I am quite travelled out”, he wrote Dr. George Mitchell of London (with whom he once traded a bottle of Scotch for an inscribed copy of Crane’s *Pictures of War*) and reported that he had conducted “more than sixty interviews”.²¹ He wrote several people in mid-June that his tour was successful “beyond my most sanguine expectation”. He wrote Rabbi Abraham Kellner, whom he had visited in New Jersey to discuss Crane’s relationship with Harold Frederic, that he was “now about to tear into the writ-ing of the biography”.²²

20. Edited with notes and introductions by Edwin H. Cady and Lester G. Wells and published by the Syracuse University Press in 1954 as *Stephen Crane’s Love Letters to Nellie Crouse*.

21. Schoberlin to Dr. George Mitchell, 13 June 1948.

22. Schoberlin to Rabbi Abraham Kellner, 15 June 1948.

He continued for years, of course, to add to the collection, but June 1948, in his mind, marked the beginning of a new phase of his work. The deadline for his manuscript was only a year and a half away, and we detect in his letters after mid-June a certain anxiety about the task facing him, his sense that he is about to engage a formidable enemy in grim and dubious battle. A letter to Leon Edel, the Henry James scholar, written a few weeks before he started his tour, touches upon this. Schoberlin, for all his successes, felt deep down that he did not have—and would not be able to get—the materials he needed for the kind of biography he wanted to write. They did not exist, or he had not found them, or for some reason they were not available to him. There were still great gaps in the Crane story, despite all his efforts. Too much of what he had found was peripheral, anecdotal, fragmentary. “Your chances of writing a well-balanced biography”, he wrote Edel, “are infinitely better than my own, for my own materials often dictate an unbalanced exaggeration of incidents (physical & mental) beyond what I conceive to be their true relative importance in Crane’s life”.²³ No one has stated the problem of Crane biography more accurately. This inherent difficulty defeated Schoberlin in his attempt to write the definitive biography, as indeed it has defeated others. Nevertheless, his relentless efforts as a collector, some of which are described in the following pages as representative of his skill and determination, have added many valuable documents to our resources for the study of the elusive Stephen Crane.

THOMAS BEER

Thomas Beer, novelist, popular cultural historian, and biographer, was a writer of imagination and intelligence. His witty, urbane ironic chapters on Crane (“Beer’s sparkling pages”, Berryman called them) did much to rescue his subject from the obscurity that fell upon him in the first two decades of the century. For nearly thirty years, Beer was the chief source of information about Crane’s life, despite the distrust he inspired in many of his readers. Some of his reviewers had hinted that his version of Crane might be something less than accurate. By Schoberlin’s time scholars had come to suspect that many

23. Schoberlin to Leon Edel, 15 March 1948.

of the incidents and episodes had indeed been concocted by Beer's fertile imagination. He had quoted more than thirty letters—purportedly by Crane—which no one had ever seen, several of them key documents in the Crane story. Were these letters hidden away somewhere, waiting to be discovered? Had Beer destroyed them, as Stallman speculated? Or had he simply manufactured them? Until the matter was settled, the proper uses of Beer's work would be hopelessly problematical, and Schoberlin was anxious to settle the question once and for all.

He knew that Beer's papers had come into the hands of his sister Alice when her brother died in 1940, and early in 1948 he addressed a letter to her through Knopf, Beer's publisher, asking permission to call on her at her New York apartment and to examine them. Alice replied that the materials, which she had put in storage in 1942, were easily accessible, and invited Schoberlin to see them. "If you will give me very ample warning of your arrival I will plan to go over the papers ahead of time and have them in order for you."²⁴

If Schoberlin had lingering hopes that he might find thirty-odd lost Crane letters and other documents supporting questionable incidents in Beer, Alice's next letter would have cautioned him against such expectations:

I have been going over two folders of papers, removed from my trunks in storage, which I believe to be all the data on Crane which was preserved after the publication of my brother's book. This material consists mostly of letters to my brother, in answer to inquiries by him, or in answer to his published appeal in one of the papers (the Times I think) for material on Crane.

I question whether you will find anything new in this little collection, but I should think you would find it all pretty interesting reading.²⁵

A week later Alice wrote again to advise him that John Berryman, whose search for Crane materials for his own biography Schoberlin had first heard vaguely about in the fall of 1947 and whom Schob-

24. Alice Beer to Schoberlin, 12 March 1948.

25. Alice Beer to Schoberlin, 20 April 1948.

erlin now regarded as a serious competitor, had called to inquire about Beer's papers, but that she and Knopf had agreed that Schoberlin should have the first look at them since he had asked first. Schoberlin was doubtless gratified by this recognition of his priority, but he could hardly have been happy about Alice's further cautions:

What I fear is that both you and Mr. Berryman are going to find very little in the correspondence I have which is not already known to you from my brother's book or from your own research. First of all it is evident that not all the correspondence has been preserved. I am sorry this is so, but it would appear to be the case. In the second place my brother did not make elaborate notes, did not erect an outline construction. His memory was so extraordinary that full notes were not necessary. And in the third place I don't think he kept them, when he did make them. However, many of the letters written to my brother by friends of Crane, and by members of his family, are interesting reading.²⁶

What Schoberlin found was very close to proof of what he had come to suspect. There were ten letters by Crane (six of them copies); five letters by members of the Crane family; and nine letters by Stephen's friends and acquaintances, all but one in the two latter groups written to Beer in the early twenties. There was also a four-page biographical note on Crane by his brother Edmund, and a long, anonymous two-paragraph manuscript describing Stephen's and the writer's encounter with a boy prostitute in a New York café in the early nineties. But none of the Crane letters were those quoted in the biography. There were no love notes from Stephen to Helen Trent; no note to Mrs. Armstrong announcing the beginning of *The Red Badge of Courage*; no outraged letter to "An Unknown Recipient" about verandah gossips at Orange County resort hotels (which was supposed to anticipate a central theme of Crane's superb 1897 story of village malice, "The Monster"); there was no humorous, kindly letter to the runaway youth Edward Grover, whom Crane supposedly found destitute and frightened in San Antonio and to whom he lent the last of his money for train fare home to St. Louis. In

26. Alice Beer to Schoberlin, 26 April 1948.

short, none of the key letters that had appeared in Beer's book as dramatic evidence of Crane's character and conduct were in Alice Beer's two folders.

Alice perhaps sensed Schoberlin's suspicions that her brother may have invented some of his materials, for she called on Edith Crane, whom Schoberlin had also visited, to look for missing Crane letters in her files. She reported to Schoberlin that they had found none and suggested, perhaps in oblique defense against Schoberlin's skepticism, that Edith, like the Beers, had misplaced papers while moving about over the years. "She has not found any of my brother's letters. I fear that, as in the Beer family[,] upheavals and moving about of material, have resulted in the loss of various valuable papers." A few days later Schoberlin wrote her that he would not be using a great deal of the material in her brother's book.²⁷ To Herbert West, he exclaimed: "Beer! Well, we've got to give thanks for what he did, but, after looking through the notes and correspondence upon which Beer based his book, I have discovered that he often suppressed facts . . . and, worst of all, he was not above editing and rewriting some of Crane's own statements."²⁸

If Schoberlin had been able to finish and publish "Flagon of Despair", his rejection of Beer's spurious information would have no doubt helped turn Crane scholarship in a new direction. No published biography is as free of Beer's influence as Schoberlin's unfinished manuscript. "I have discarded much of Beer", he wrote in his notes for the preface, "as incorrect—at times unconsciously—his sources were wrong. . . . He attempted to soften his portrait of Crane and was not beyond rewriting Crane in several instances to his own designed end."²⁹

27. Alice Beer to Schoberlin, 10 August 1948; Schoberlin to Alice Beer, 16 August 1948.

28. Schoberlin to Herbert F. West, 19 July 1948. Schoberlin never accused Beer of actually fabricating the letters, probably because he was not quite certain that they had not, as Alice wanted to believe, been lost. But his blunt statement to Alice that he would use little of Beer's book suggests that he had little faith in this possibility.

29. John Berryman also suspected, as his cautious phrasing reveals, that much in this pioneer biography is spurious. "Most of the bulk of letters upon which he relied . . . have disappeared, or are not to be found among his papers. . . . For a number of letters and incidents, therefore, he is my only authority. I never differ with him unless, for any reason, he appears to be wrong." Berryman, *Stephen Crane*, xvi.

COMPETITORS

The poet John Berryman, gathering materials for a critical biography of Crane for Sloane's American Men of Letters Series, first crossed Schoberlin's path (only days behind him) at Alice Beer's apartment, though they did not actually meet. Quiet, inconspicuous, and skillful, he sometimes seemed to Schoberlin to be everywhere at once. Berryman knew about his rival from Alice Beer, Edith Crane, the collectors Ames W. Williams and H. B. Collamore,³⁰ and others in the research community. Oddly, he made no move to get in touch with Schoberlin, who was naturally intrigued. "I would like to know from him just what he intends", Schoberlin wrote Alice Beer in July; "however, I feel that he should break the ice if it is to be broken".³¹

Two months later Ames W. Williams wrote that Berryman had called on him and "dropped a bomb" by announcing that he had acquired the elusive Lily Brandon Munroe letters and was using substantial excerpts from them in his book.³² Schoberlin was astounded by this news; he had diligently pursued, without success, these letters of 1893-94 to Lily Brandon Munroe (now Mrs. Frederick B. Smillie and over eighty years old). Schoberlin was particularly covetous of them and aware of their great value for the light they shed on Crane's aspirations as a writer in the days of *Maggie*, when he was first attracting the notice of leading literary men like William Dean Howells and Hamlin Garland. According to one story, Stephen had given Lily the manuscript of *Maggie*, which her husband destroyed in a jealous rage. Schoberlin had located someone, not named, who knew her but who refused to give him her address.

The apparently easy success of the ghostly Berryman unnerved him, and Williams's comment that "Berryman must have a lot of information" likely did little to ease his mind: "I have no reason to be irked, but I am getting that way", Schoberlin wrote Williams.

30. Ames W. Williams, a Washington attorney and later a federal judge, was a veteran Crane collector and bibliographer. His collection, acquired in 1950 by Syracuse University, became, along with George Arents's gifts, the foundation for the original Syracuse collection, which Schoberlin's now complements. H. B. Collamore, president of the National Fire Insurance Company of Hartford, also owned a substantial collection which eventually became a part of the large Crane holdings in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library at the University of Virginia.

31. Schoberlin to Alice Beer, 7 July 1948.

32. Ames W. Williams to Schoberlin, 6 September 1948.

In any case, I am going on at my own speed in spite of hell or a flood. I have enough confidence in what I am doing (and in me) to think I can best the field—eventually. . . . Berryman’s Brandon bomb leaves me unamused. How in the hell—? Did he intimate that he was going to have more than a couple of chapters of biography? . . . Oh, he has been busy. The Beer papers were ignored by those interested in Crane until I came along. He came along with the same idea a month later.³³

Schoberlin also wrote Alice Beer about Berryman’s approach to Corwin Knapp Linson when Schoberlin was visiting the old painter a few months earlier during his research tour:

While I was with Mr. Linson, I was shown a letter from Mr. Berryman. Linson said “What should I do about it.” I replied in this vein: “I can’t tell you what to do. Mr. Barryman [sic] is a competitor of mine, and the decision is entirely up to you.” I am just egoistical enough to believe that I could have ‘scotched’ Mr. Barryman’s [sic] chances, but that I would not have done for the world—even though others have not always been equally kind to me. It took me eighteen months and six letters to win Mr. Linson’s confidence. Naturally, I’d be slightly chagrined if Mr. Barryman [sic] succeeded in two.³⁴

When Schoberlin wrote this he was only a year and a half from his deadline of November 1949.

Another competitor, an investigator of quite a different stripe, was worrisome in another way, because he was creating anger and distrust that was seriously interfering with Schoberlin’s research. Schoberlin first heard about him from Collamore, whose fine collection—“probably the best collection in the country”, Schoberlin once wrote³⁵—

33. Schoberlin to Ames W. Williams, 8 September 1948.

34. Schoberlin to Alice Beer, 7 July 1948.

35. Schoberlin described the collection in a letter to Lester G. Wells, 21 May 1950. Wells, Curator of Special Collections at the Syracuse University Library, had just acquired all of Ames W. Williams’s Crane collection and had queried Schoberlin about other materials. “We have a millionaire benefactor who *might* be induced to purchase for us. . . . In our mind is the nebulous idea of becoming a kind of

included about a dozen manuscripts and several inscribed books that Schoberlin, writing in the fall of 1946, sought permission to examine and copy.³⁶ Collamore ignored his request, and Schoberlin, supposing that he had not taken his statement of interest and purpose seriously, wrote again several months later: "I am not, as you might have thought, merely curious or a journalistic hack writer interested in your collection for purely personal reasons".³⁷ Collamore answered with an explanation for his delayed response. "My reason for not being cooperative previously was that I had given what material I possessed to Rees Frescoln and felt I should not pass it on to others. However, he does not seem to be making any use of it and, therefore, I believe I'm privileged to let someone who is seriously interested make use of anything he may find worthwhile."³⁸

In time Frescoln outraged the whole community of Crane collectors and scholars by borrowing materials and ignoring all pleas from their owners to return them. Amazingly active, he had preceded Schoberlin by months or years to almost every source, alienating one after another and creating exasperating suspicions and delays. Schoberlin told Alice Beer that Frescoln's refusal to return documents he borrowed from Corwin Linson in 1940 had convinced the old man that he should have nothing further to do with seekers after Crane lore. This resolve accounts for the eighteen months it took Schoberlin to win Linson's confidence.³⁹ Edith Crane told Alice Beer how she also had been victimized by Frescoln, and Alice wrote Schoberlin that this man's antics were just "really too awful", that she had consulted a lawyer, and that she had advised Edith, on the lawyer's recommendation, to bring legal action against the culprit. "My reason for meddling in the matter", she added, showing again her anxiety over the "missing" Beer papers, "is not altogether on behalf of

Crane bibliographical center. We know about the Dartmouth Collection. We now have six ALS of Crane, the MS of 'Ol Bennet' and work sheets for the story of 'The Desertion'." Lester G. Wells to Schoberlin, 3 May 1950.

36. Schoberlin to H. B. Collamore, 28 September 1946. At Johns Hopkins at this time, more deeply involved with Crane than ever, Schoberlin had begun to realize fully, it seems, how difficult his project was going to be. "The proposition of Crane research sometimes staggers me—one has to dig so very hard for so little."

37. Schoberlin to H. B. Collamore, 24 August 1947.

38. H. B. Collamore to Schoberlin, 27 August 1947.

39. Schoberlin to Alice Beer, 7 July 1948.

the interests of scholarship. I am hoping that some of my brother's letters will turn up there"—that is, in Frescoln's ill-gotten hoard.⁴⁰

Schoberlin was certain that this rival had done serious harm to Crane research. "Frescoln's little escapades have given all the would-be and serious Crane biographers such a bad name that through my own action I am trying to recoup at least a measure of what we have lost. It was not until I talked to Miss Crane that the full measure of his activities became apparent to me. . . . I can only think of this individual in terms of four-letter Anglo-Saxon words."⁴¹

ROSENBACH

Under the spur of Berryman's successes and Knopf's November 1949 deadline, Schoberlin began to drive hard at his more recalcitrant sources. In his first letter to the rare book dealer A. S. W. Rosenbach he had apparently suggested that he might edit the manuscript of *The Red Badge of Courage* for publication, and Rosenbach invited him to discuss the plan.⁴² But nothing came of this. Schoberlin was apparently less interested in the manuscript than in Rosenbach's collection of the Crane-Hawkins correspondence, particularly valuable for the twenty-five letters written between August 1895 and February 1896, when Crane was living at his brother Edmund's house in Hartwood, New York, and writing *The Third Violet* and the war stories of *The Little Regiment*. But Rosenbach had priced the letters at \$1250, more than Schoberlin could afford. The dealer had allowed him to read the letters and make brief notes, but had also severely restricted their use in his book on the theory that lengthy quotations from them might lower their market value. Schoberlin stewed over the situation for several months and then launched an all-out campaign. He wrote in the summer of 1948 to request—not more leeway in the length of quotations—but *copies* of the letters, arguing that this biography, which he once said was going to be "one of the wheels" of the approaching Crane bandwagon, would raise,

40. Alice Beer to Schoberlin, 10 August 1948.

41. Schoberlin to Alice Beer, 16 August 1948. Schoberlin did not mention it to Alice Beer, but he wrote Ames Williams that he had looked up Frescoln on his tour. "We sparred, and got nowhere." Frescoln was apparently "tied up with Doubleday", but "Oh, he was vague". Schoberlin to Ames W. Williams, 15 June 1948.

42. A. S. W. Rosenbach to Schoberlin, 29 October 1946.

not lower, the value of the letters by increasing public interest in them.⁴³

Rosenbach took a different view of the matter. He delayed and evaded while Schoberlin grew irritable and at last in October wrote asking for a “blunt answer” immediately. “Naturally, the matter is important to me, or I should not have persisted in spite of delays and cool abruptness.”⁴⁴ The dealer’s manager, Percy Lawler, replied that Dr. Rosenbach was ill in the University of Pennsylvania hospital and could not be consulted about his demands. “We have had another unfortunate experience in the matter of a sale being killed because we had given photostats”, he wrote. “When you were here you made some notes of some of the contents of the letters. Would this not be sufficient for your purpose?”⁴⁵ Convinced that Lawler was determined to deny him access to the letters, Schoberlin now brought the matter to a head. He had consulted the Crane Estate, he wrote, and had received full and exclusive clearance for unrestricted use of Hawkins’s correspondence. This authority, he reminded Lawler, was binding. “For, as you undoubtedly are aware, *only* Stephen’s Estate can give or withhold permission to reprint his letters.” If necessary he could have a letter sent “to prove the official nature of the book I am doing. It is a collaboration of everyone who has Stephen Crane’s best interests at heart—and the group includes every dealer (with the single exception, at present, of your company) who has Crane letters and manuscripts.” As to the notes: “You were very careful as to the notes I took; I enclose them to show you just what they were. For my purpose they are not sufficient—not at all.” He wanted, he said, the use of four letters, “a number that would certainly not place a sale in jeopardy”. As summarized by Schoberlin, these four letters were:

1. Crane’s denouncement of the persecution of prostitutes: “Burn them, etc.”
2. The bicycle incident
3. “A kind note” Crane sent with the manuscript of *The Red Badge of Courage*
4. Nov 15 1895 letter on the Philistine dinner.

43. Schoberlin to A. S. W. Rosenbach, 1 July 1948.

44. Schoberlin to A. S. W. Rosenbach, 4 October 1948.

45. Percy Lawler to Schoberlin, 7 October 1948.

“I do not think my request extravagant—in as much as your company will share in the profits of a Stephen Crane revival, a revival toward which I have now asked that you contribute—not for my sake or yours, but for Stephen Crane’s—a share.” But what Lawler probably found especially persuasive was Schoberlin’s concluding request for a “blunt reply”, one he could take to Knopf and the Crane Estate.⁴⁶ In any case, Lawler agreed. “I have your letter of October 17th. At last I have received from you a concrete proposition which I am pleased to be able to comply with. I am therefore enclosing herewith transcripts of the portion of the letters which you request.”⁴⁷

Schoberlin had little reason to feel victorious over Rosenbach’s concession. Crane’s letters to Hawkins, one of the very few men Stephen ever completely trusted, as he once told his friend, are among the most charming, expressive, and revealing of any he ever wrote. His ambivalent feelings of elation, anxiety, and confusion when fame suddenly burst upon him in the winter of 1895–96, his witty self-derision and concealed boasting over Elbert Hubbard’s self-serving testimonial dinner, and his sharp sense of village life in rural New York—all eloquently expressed in these letters—are of major importance to Crane biography. Schoberlin knew this, of course, and we may detect a certain mood of resignation in his next letter to Lawler. “I expect that I shall use most of the materials which you have sent, but only time will provide a precise answer.”⁴⁸ He did, of course, use them; but the Hartwood months, revealed in the other twenty-odd letters as one of the happiest in Crane’s life, are a colorless blur in Schoberlin’s manuscript biography.

46. Schoberlin to Percy Lawler, 17 October 1948. The one-paragraph fragment about prostitutes, which Crane wrote in the fall of 1896 in connection with the infamous Dora Clark affair, is not a part of the Crane-Hawkins correspondence. Crane testified in police court that Charles Becker, a New York City policeman, had falsely arrested Dora Clark for soliciting and attacked the police sharply in an article in the *New York Journal* for their high-handed treatment of women. In his manuscript biography Schoberlin says it is a note scribbled on newsprint to Hawkins “after the trial that early morning”, but it is more likely a first draft of Crane’s *Journal* article. In any case, it is curious that Schoberlin would choose this interesting but relatively unimportant document over some of the other more informative Crane-Hawkins letters.

47. Percy Lawler to Schoberlin, 21 October 1948.

48. Schoberlin to Percy Lawler, 31 October 1948.



Commander Melvin H. Schoberlin.

An incident which is a kind of epilogue to these dealings with Rosenbach occurred in 1950. Mervin Lowe, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, wrote Schoberlin asking the whereabouts of the manuscript of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Schoberlin agreed to tell him on the condition that Lowe not use his name. "It took me a very long time to find out where it was, and it cost me eighteen months of constant effort to get to see it." Rosenbach, he wrote, is "very cagey", and Schoberlin warned Lowe that the dealer would not likely allow him to see it.⁴⁹ But Lowe found it unnecessary to test Rosenbach's cooperation. He informed Schoberlin that the dealer had sold the manuscript. He would not reveal the name of the buyer, but a librarian at the University of Pennsylvania discovered that it was Clifton Waller Barrett, who eventually gave it, with

49. Schoberlin to Mervin Lowe, 7 February 1950. In this letter Schoberlin expressed an interesting critical view of the novel which anticipates by twenty years a major issue in the criticism of *The Red Badge of Courage*: "In my opinion, the book . . . fails of being integrated in point of view. Crane's irony is sustained until the last part of the book, when it goes all to pieces, trails off into sentimental drivel. I have no explanation for this ending, unless it was simply a compromise with a hoped for success."

a large collection of Crane documents, to the University of Virginia Library.⁵⁰

CORA

In Beer's book Cora appears as the shadowiest of figures, disposed of in little more than a dozen passing references. Beer says nothing whatever about the two months Crane and his correspondent friends Ralph D. Paine and Ernest McCready spent in the winter of 1896–97 lounging in her elegant Jacksonville brothel while Crane was waiting for a chance to slip illegally into Cuba to report the rebellion for the Bacheller Syndicate. In Beer's account, she entered Crane's life in Greece in the spring of 1897, a "fair, affable woman, older than himself . . . who had fallen in love with him at Jacksonville and had come after him to Greece".⁵¹ Beer suggests that they were married in England in late August 1897 and thereafter largely ignores her, except to refer occasionally to her sociability as a hostess at Ravensbrook and Brede Place. Beer, of course, knew about this colorful, shrewd, devoted, and irresponsible woman's life in Jacksonville; her "past" was a matter of gossip among Americans in England within months of their arrival; and by the early twenties, when Beer was doing research for his biography, Cora's story was a matter of common knowledge, probably known even to the Crane family. But Beer suppressed it to spare the Cranes embarrassment, and nothing more than hints appeared in print until 1934, when Stephen's niece, Helen Crane, ironically one of those whose sensibilities Beer had tried to guard, told the story of Cora and the Hotel de Dream in an article in the *American Mercury*. Beer then published in the same magazine, without mentioning Helen's article, a number of letters by people who had known Cora testifying to her kind, loyal, and generous nature. Included in these letters is one from Ralph Paine, who did not mention the Hotel de Dream.⁵²

Schoberlin knew these sources, of course, and also, we may sup-

50. Mervin Lowe to Schoberlin, 26 April 1950.

51. Beer, *Stephen Crane*, 158.

52. Helen Crane, "My Uncle, Stephen Crane", *American Mercury* 31 (January 1934): 24–29; Beer, "Mrs. Stephen Crane", *American Mercury* 31 (March 1934): 289–95.

pose, McCready's 1934 letter to B. J. R. Stolper, in which he described Cora and the Hotel de Dream when he, Crane, Paine, and Captain Murphy were there shortly before or after Murphy's ship *Commodore* went down off the coast of Florida.⁵³ But there were many unanswered questions about her origins and career in these years before her papers became available. It was variously understood that she had been a politician's mistress and had arrived at Jacksonville aboard a yacht. Schoberlin found bits and pieces of her history in Lockwood Barr's *The Howorth Family*: she was the daughter of John Howorth, a Boston painter and restorer of paintings; two of her uncles were distinguished naval officers; her mother was the daughter of Charles Holder, a wealthy piano maker; and Cora herself had married in England. Barr, to whom Schoberlin wrote, could say nothing about her career after that.⁵⁴

Nothing in the record demonstrates more dramatically the difficulty of Crane research in the forties than Schoberlin's struggles to find the facts about Cora. Until her papers became available at Columbia University in 1952, there was simply no reliable source of information. His correspondence suggests a certain anxiety about this that sometimes drove him to extreme measures. His inquiries about the Hotel de Dream revealed that the widow of a certain Ernest C. Budd, who had been an habitu  of the hotel and Cora's close friend, was still living in Jacksonville. Schoberlin wrote her for information about Cora and her house, apologizing for intruding in "a delicate matter", but declaring it necessary. He assured Mrs. Budd that he already had "many facts about Cora's relation with Budd", and though it was not his intention "to expand out of proportion the rather lurid details of Cora Taylor's life", he would, of course, "as a conscientious biographer . . . find it necessary to give names, dates and places".⁵⁵ Apparently, the widow never saw the letter. It was forwarded to a second Jacksonville address and then returned to Schoberlin unclaimed.

Turning through the record of his search for Cora, the reader is startled to find that he is being addressed directly by Schoberlin. An official of the Bureau of Records of the New York City Health De-

53. Stallman and Gilkes, *Letters*, 339-40.

54. Schoberlin to Lockwood Barr, 3 January 1948.

55. Schoberlin to Mrs. Ernest C. Budd, 3 November 1947.

partment had apparently advised him that certain information he had requested about Cora's marriage to Hammond McNeil in New York in 1905 could be made available only to Cora's relatives or direct descendants. Schoberlin sent the official the following note, dated 24 October 1946 at Long Beach, California:

To Whom it May Concern:

Permission is hereby granted my grandson, Melvin Schoberlin, to obtain a copy of the records of my marriage to Hammond P. McNeil in New York City on April 4, 1905.

(Mrs.) Cora McNeil Wistler

Below this Schoberlin wrote:

For those who may see this file later: This is a ruse which I used to get information not otherwise obtained. Need I iterate that I am not Cora Taylor's grandson—and the signature of the above and of the original letter is of [sic] forgery. Melvin H. Schoberlin.⁵⁶

Schoberlin's account of Cora in "Flagon of Despair", written without the benefit of her papers, understandably contains errors: she was not shipwrecked in the Black Sea on her way to Greece, as we now know; and George M. Powell, who gave out considerable misinformation about her, was not her lawyer, as he claimed in order to give credence to his stories.⁵⁷ In Schoberlin's version, Cora is a more spirited, more aggressive personality than she is in Beer, Berryman, or Stallman, where she is described as devoted, passive, and yielding to the adored Stephen. According to Schoberlin, going to Greece with Crane was her idea; the plan was not prearranged. Crane did not get her on the *Journal* staff; she herself talked the editor, S. S. Chamberlain, into hiring her. Crane was sometimes enraged with her, and once in Greece, broke with her and "fled to the hills" with his servant, Adoni. Heinemann, Crane's English publisher, did not like Cora because he thought her "vain and extravagant". Schober-

56. Letter To Whom It May Concern, 24 October 1946.

57. Lillian B. Gilkes, *Cora Crane: A Biography of Mrs. Stephen Crane* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1960), 372–78.

lin finds her less generous than do Berryman and Stallman. She was “aggressive and willful”, he wrote, a born outlaw, despite her descent from Boston respectability and her genteel education. She is not the “fair, affable” Cora we find in Beer—or in Berryman, whose version is based on Beer’s. Whether further study in the collection will reveal the sources of Schoberlin’s Cora is not yet clear.

THE BOHNENBERGER-HILL COLLECTION

What scholars knew more or less vaguely about Cora’s role in Crane’s life in England was that she had in effect managed his literary, business, and social affairs, had scrupulously saved his papers, and had returned to Jacksonville in 1901 with a vast collection which included manuscripts, letters from his literary agents, letters from Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Harold Frederic, Edward Garnett, H. G. Wells, and other literary figures. Crane scholars also knew that these documents had fallen into the hands of Henry W. Walters, an employee of the Jacksonville Gas Company who had known Cora personally, that Walters’s friend Carl Bohnenberger, a librarian at the Jacksonville Free Public Library, had catalogued the papers and, of course, that Bohnenberger and Norman Hill had edited and published Conrad letters from the collection in 1929.

When Schoberlin took up his research again after the war, he made finding the Bohnenberger papers a matter of the highest priority. In August 1946, he journeyed to Jacksonville, found Henry Walters, and wasted time and money pursuing false leads Walters gave him. “A Mr. Walters led me off on a wild-goose-chase which was far from humorous”, he wrote one correspondent, still angry a year later. To another he wrote that Walters had “deliberately falsified facts”.⁵⁸ Walters had been uncooperative from the first. He was slow to respond to Schoberlin’s persistent inquiries in the fall of 1946; but in November, explaining that his reply had been delayed because he had been injured “pretty badly” in a strike at the Gas Company, he told Schoberlin that the collection had been sold through the Chase Bank in New York to an unknown purchaser.⁵⁹ Schoberlin wrote the

58. Schoberlin to Richard P. Daniel, 20 July 1947; Schoberlin to Frank H. Elmore, 20 July 1947.

59. Henry Walters to Schoberlin, 9 November 1946.

Chase Bank on the same day that he got Walters's letter, and a few days later learned that the Bohnenberger-Hill papers (as they were usually called), despite buyers and sellers and promises and sure leads, had again evaporated. "Your inquiry of November 11th", an officer of the bank wrote Schoberlin, ". . . was thoroughly investigated and we regret that we are unable to locate in our files any information on the subject".⁶⁰ Whether the Chase Bank was simply protecting the identity of a buyer who wanted to remain anonymous, as seems likely, or whether Walters, for whatever reasons, was trying to throw Schoberlin off the track is not clear. Worried that he might never find the collection, Schoberlin thought the worst. It seemed to him merely senseless malice, and he recorded that he imagined with delight a "special purgatory for Mr. Walters".⁶¹

The Florida collection occupied him nearly full-time in the early months of 1947, and in mid-April he wrote Lars Åhnebrink, a young Swedish scholar who was also trying to track down Cora's collection, that at least part of it had been broken up and sold and that he had traced two items to Chicago. "I think I have been able to locate the rest of the collection, but finding out will take a great deal of tact and circumspection, so definite information will have to wait until this summer when I have a chance to do some traveling. I did see part of the collection several years ago but I was not permitted to copy any of it."⁶²

In July 1947, Schoberlin thought for a time that his luck was about to turn. Frank H. Elmore, a Jacksonville attorney who had known Bohnenberger (Bohnenberger died in an automobile accident in 1935), wrote that the papers were probably in Jacksonville and that George Powell, an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Florida who had been Cora's attorney at one time, probably knew where they could be found.⁶³ Powell apparently responded with information about Cora and her English husband, Donald Stewart, since Schoberlin cites him as a source in "Flagon", but he had nothing to say about the location of her papers. Schoberlin encountered another dead end

60. Chase National Bank to Schoberlin, 21 November 1946.

61. Schoberlin to Elizabeth Fretwell, 23 December 1947.

62. Schoberlin to Lars Åhnebrink, 11 April 1947. This is the only indication in Schoberlin's research correspondence that he ever saw any of the collection.

63. Frank H. Elmore to Schoberlin, 17 July 1947.

when he tried to get in touch with Norman Hill, who had co-edited the Conrad letters with Bohnenberger in 1929. But there were two Norman Hills in Jacksonville, and his letter reached the wrong one. This puzzled gentleman's frosty response adds a faint touch of ironic mockery to the whole discouraging matter of hunting collections: "I do not own and never have owned a collection of any kind. Further, I have never heard of the persons mentioned in your letter."⁶⁴

Ironically, the most helpful information had come from Walters himself several months before, though indirectly through a Virginia Davis of Jacksonville, not further identified in the correspondence. "Mr. Walters of the Gas Co. says he sold all of his material [to] Bohnenberger, but thought his wife still had some—Mrs. Edward T. Fretwell, West Point, Ga. will reach her—it's a very small town."⁶⁵ Mrs. Fretwell was Carl Bohnenberger's widow and something of a bibliophile herself; she did know a bit about the collection, and gave Schoberlin certain information about its tangled history. Someone who had known Cora gave Walters the documents in 1927 or 1928. Joseph Marron of the Jacksonville Free Public Library told his assistant, Carl Bohnenberger, about it, and Walters and Bohnenberger brought in their mutual friend, Norman Hill, to help them catalogue it. Mrs. Fretwell had Bohnenberger's complete list of the items in the collection, a copy of which his friend Alfred J. Hanna filed with the Florida Historical Society. In 1929 Hill and Bohnenberger published from the collection several poems and the Conrad letters in *The Bookman*. Shortly before he died in 1935, Bohnenberger told his wife that the material was in a safety deposit vault in Jacksonville in either Hill's or Walters's name, or perhaps in both. Mrs. Fretwell recalled that they refused Hanna's request to examine it when he was working with James Branch Cabell on *The St. Johns: A Paradise of Diversities*, which contains a very unflattering chapter on Cora. "Both Mr. Hill and Mr. Walters appear[ed] to be very cagey about it", she wrote. Bohnenberger made no claim on the collection, thinking that it belonged wholly to Walters and that Walters had complete rights to it.⁶⁶

64. Norman Hill to Schoberlin, 20 August 1947.

65. Virginia Davis to Schoberlin, 27 December 1946.

66. Lillian Gilkes's account of the origins of the collection differs from Mrs. Fretwell's in several details: "Mystery surrounds the earlier history of the Crane papers. . . . The generally accepted theory is that Bohnenberger and Henry W. Walters,

This was more than Schoberlin had ever known about it, but he was actually no closer to locating it than he had ever been, for Mrs. Fretwell had no information about where it could be found.⁶⁷ In November she sent Schoberlin a valuable document—though painful perhaps as a reminder of how much his failure was costing him—a nine-page summary of the items in the rich Bohnenberger-Hill collection.⁶⁸ Writing Leon Edel about the listed Henry James letters to Crane and Cora, Schoberlin noted that they were in “one of the most important Crane collection[s] in existence. . . . I have been raising Heaven and earth in an attempt to locate this material.” He has a new lead, he said, but by now he expected all leads to “collapse in a wild goose chase”.⁶⁹ By 1950, his unfinished biography laid by and his passion for the pursuit already cooling, he seemed to refer to the quest as a closed incident of the past. “I tried every means I could think of to locate this collection—and failed. It simply disappeared.”⁷⁰ When it came to light at last in 1952 as the Columbia University Crane Collection, Schoberlin was again on active duty in the Navy and his book on Crane had been indefinitely delayed. Nothing in the record reveals his feelings when he heard the news.

an employee of the Jacksonville Gas Company who became acquainted with Cora in the course of his reading the gas meters at the Court [the brothel Cora established when she returned to Jacksonville], purchased the collection which had been stored in a trunk for the sum of five hundred dollars. Circumstances point to the conclusion that sometime previously, perhaps during the four days between Cora Taylor's death and the filing of her will for probate, the trunk may have been stolen from the Court by someone aware of the future value of its contents, as the papers were not found among her personal effects.” *Cora Crane*, 378. Gilkes does not mention Elizabeth Fretwell.

67. Elizabeth Fretwell to Schoberlin, 21 August 1947.

68. Elizabeth Fretwell to Schoberlin, 13 November 1947. Mrs. Fretwell refused Schoberlin's offer to pay for her help. “Of course that is absurd. If you are doing a scholarly work on Crane that should be sufficient payment for any one interested in American literature.” In the interest of the latter, as she may have thought, she sent Schoberlin the manuscript of her former husband's novel about Crane, “Colour of the Sky”, which Carl Bohnenberger had submitted to Maxwell Perkins in person about 1934. Perkins returned it, suggesting Appleton's as a possible publisher. Schoberlin returned it a few weeks after receiving it with a conspicuously non-committal comment.

69. Schoberlin to Leon Edel, 15 March 1948.

70. Schoberlin to George M. Adams, 19 April 1950.

"FLAGON OF DESPAIR"

Schoberlin began writing in June 1948, shortly after he completed his marathon research tour. Two months later he wrote Alice Beer that his work was going well but slowly. "I want to do the very best job that I can, for a great deal depends on its success."⁷¹ The maximum length specified in his contract with Knopf was 135,000 words, but he was planning a longer book, apparently even before he began writing it. He wrote Claude Jones, who had been a student at Syracuse University and had written about Crane's college experience, that "Flagon" would be 150,000 to 200,000 words. But the scope Schoberlin adopted in the first chapters would make it even longer than this. By mid-November he had written 37,000 words, more than a fourth of the contract length, and had only brought Crane up to 1888, the year he entered Claverack College; a month later it stood at 52,000 words—"half finished", he said, though Crane at this point in the story was just entering Lafayette College in the fall of 1890.⁷² In mid-June, a year after he began, Schoberlin had written 100,000 words, which he counted as two-thirds of the total, and had decided to trim his lengthy discussions of naturalism, impressionism, and symbolism to make more room for biography.⁷³

These numbers are indicators of a fatal problem—insurmountable, given Schoberlin's inalterable plan to write the definitive biography. He was aware, as he explained to Edel, of the peculiar problem of imbalance in Crane materials, but curiously he seemed determined to ignore it. His real passion was collecting; the writing was in a sense anticlimactic. As the months passed and the pages accumulated, he seemed oblivious to the warning implicit in his own lucid statement of the fundamental problem in Crane biography and appeared determined to use every bit of information he had so painstakingly gathered and classified. Readers to whom he sent chapters for comment—Post Wheeler, the journalist and diplomat, who had known Crane at Asbury Park; Clarence Goodwin, who had been Crane's fraternity brother at Syracuse; and several others—almost in-

71. Schoberlin to Alice Beer, 16 August 1948.

72. Schoberlin to Max Herzberg, 17 November 1948; Schoberlin to Mrs. Harri-man, 12 December 1948.

73. Schoberlin to Max Herzberg, 12 June 1948.

variably complained about the density of detail. A Dr. E. A. Cross, returning chapters, congratulated him on his research but complained about its turgidity. Schoberlin responded:

I imagine that most of the people in the world would find the extent of my research on Crane beyond all understanding. Besides at least 2 million words of notes, there are 4 cardfile indexes of a) all Crane's work b) all written about him c) every name ever associated with Crane d) day-by-day date index, hundreds of photostats, 112 original letters (700 copies of other letters), a full library of 1st editions—between 7 & 8 thousand letters written and received.⁷⁴

To Wheeler he wrote, "If Stevie were around, he'd probably say I was nuts a good deal of the time, but I think he'd be amazed by what I've dug up out of his past".⁷⁵

By the end of January 1950 he had sent thirteen of the planned fifteen chapters to Knopf, but predictably, he was having troubles. His original editor, Wilson Follett, who had brought out a twelve-volume edition of Crane's work in the mid-twenties, had been reassigned and another had been put in charge of "Flagon"—one, Schoberlin wrote, who "knows nothing about Crane, who (I feel) cares less, and whose own work has been limited to very popular works on music and musical biographies. So the original plan of my biography had to be thrown overboard to coincide more nearly with his idiosyncrasies." In the end he thought he would probably have to give up his contract with Knopf and take "Flagon" elsewhere. "Knopf is not to blame, however; it's just a fickle fate [that] landed me in the lap of an editor with whom I share a mutual dislike."⁷⁶ To George M. Adams he wrote that "Flagon" would not be out in the spring of 1950 and perhaps not even in the fall. By May he had virtually put it aside. "Right now some work for the Navy is delaying my work on the book, and if another war comes along—and I don't see any way to avoid a conflict with Russia (probably in 1953)—goodness only knows when I'll get everything into shape. I'm having

74. Schoberlin to Dr. E. A. Cross, [n.d.].

75. Schoberlin to Post Wheeler, 26 June 1949.

76. Schoberlin to Odell Hathaway, 31 January 1950.

to telescope the first few chapters—they got out of hand, about seventy thousand words to get Crane through college, which the powers that be thought entirely too much. The powers are always right.”⁷⁷ As he predicted, he was recalled to active duty in the Navy and “Flagon” was laid aside altogether, though he never dropped the idea of finishing it. In 1952 he wrote that the wars had only delayed, not cancelled his work on Crane, “though I cannot see the end of the delay”.⁷⁸

His unpublished book has not been lost to Crane studies, of course. In it he proposes, as it were, some radical revisions in chronology which must be taken into account. He claims, for example, that Crane returned to Hartwood after the *Commodore* disaster and wrote “The Open Boat” at his brother Edmund’s house before returning to Jacksonville; and that he did not return to New York from Havana in 1898 until 24 December, a fact which rearranges several New York events in the story. His book will stimulate new tests and new investigations of received ideas about such exasperating puzzles in Crane’s life. But the collection is just now fully open and it is still too early to say in what ways and to what extent its numerous documents will support his new conclusions and interpretations. In any case, the acquisition of his fine collection is an important event. In 1950 he wrote Lester G. Wells, Curator of Special Collections at Syracuse, a curiously prophetic letter about the future of his papers. “Eventually I shall part with most of my Crane letters and if I do, you’ll have first chance at them. Then at some distant date—perhaps twenty years hence, or possibly when I die—I shall give some institution my files on Crane. I now have the Library of Congress in mind, but you are not out of the running. . . . That is all in the future.”⁷⁹ Students of the elusive Stephen Crane will remain grateful to Syracuse University for seizing that future when it finally arrived. For, as Schoberlin said of his papers, “They contain so much information that no one will ever be able to get again”.

77. Schoberlin to George M. Adams, 19 April 1950.

78. Schoberlin to R. W. Stallman, 17 February 1952.

79. Schoberlin to Lester G. Wells, 21 May 1950.