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## Library Notes: Selected Acquisitions [v. 13, no. 1/2]

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## Selected Acquisitions

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### *Alexander Wilson Visits Kentucky*

The libraries have recently acquired a section of a nineteenth-century Philadelphia periodical called *The Port Folio* that contains two letters by the ornithologist Alexander Wilson. Wilson was born in Paisley, Scotland in 1766. He came to America after an edition of his satires was burned at the town crossroads, and is remembered for his seven-volume *American Ornithology*, published from 1808 to 1813, the year of his death.

In his letters to *The Port Folio*, Wilson describes his adventures during a western tour of 1810 that included a glimpse of early Kentucky. He speaks of traveling from Pittsburgh down the Ohio River, traveling alone in an open skiff. "I considered this mode," he writes, "with all its inconveniences, as the most favorable to my researches, and the most suitable to my funds." He speaks of larger vessels called arks, or "Kentucky boats." "I boarded many of these arks, and felt much interested at the sight of so many human beings migrating like birds of passage to the luxuriant regions of the south and west."

Wilson describes his landing at Limestone, or Maysville, and nearby Washington, where he found "prodigious quantities of petrified shells." On 15 March, Wilson toured through Big Bone Lick, "that great antediluvian rendezvous of the American elephants," where he took specimens of "ducks and peroquets." "I have strong hopes," he writes, "that a more complete skeleton of that animal called the mammoth, than has yet been found will be procured."

At Louisville, "about the size of Frankfort," Wilson sold his skiff and set out on foot for Lexington. "The soil, by appearance, is of the richest sort, immense fields of Indian corn, high excellent fences, few grain fields, many log houses. . . ." He found the forests "swarming with pigs, pigeons, squirrels, and woodpeckers."

Wilson continues his account of Kentucky in a second letter, from Nashville, on 28 April. Lexington he calls the "little metropolis of the western country." He describes the courthouse, the town branch with several mills, the market, and factories for spinning cotton and wool and for making sailcloth, bagging, and rope. "A taste for neat and even elegant buildings is fast gaining ground; and Lexington, at present, can boast of men who do honour to science, and of females whose beauty and amiable appearance would grace the first circles of society."

From Lexington Wilson traveled on to Tennessee by way of Nicholasville, "about twenty houses, with three stores and four taverns," to Danville, "about 80 houses," with sheep and a woolen factory, and on through "a small village called Bowling Green." In western Kentucky he toured caves and found also "many new subjects for my Ornithology."

Wilson's account of a journey through Kentucky is one of the many recorded by such scholars as Dr. Thomas D. Clark and J. Winston Coleman. His observations form a valuable primary document in understanding the early conditions and development of the Commonwealth.

### *The Joe Nickell Collection of Writing Instruments*

Dr. Joe Nickell, formerly of the University English Department, has made a gift to the Division of Special Collections of his extraordinary collection of objects related to writing as well as of a choice collection of documents illustrating their use. These formed the basis for his book *Pen, Ink, & Evidence: A Study of Writing and Writing Materials for the Penman, Collector, and Document Detective*, published in 1990 by the University Press of Kentucky.

A teacher and the author of several research studies, Dr. Nickell has worked also as a professional detective. It was from this perspective, as a collector of evidence, that he assembled a wide-ranging and representative gathering of pens and writing instruments of every description, from feather quills to glass pens to steel points, in a great variety of forms and designs. Accompanying them are pen stands, penknives, inkwells, blotters, seals, racks, paper weights, letter openers, stamp boxes, mechanical pencils, pencil boxes, and other paraphernalia. There is also a valuable collection of writing manuals that unfold the techniques of various styles of penmanship. The collection forms a superb

museum of the history of writing materials and will prove a valuable resource both for study and for exhibition.

### *Papers of a Kentucky Writer—Joe Creason*

The papers of Joe Creason, one of Kentucky's best-remembered journalists, have come to the University of Kentucky Libraries. Joe Creason prepared a regular column, "Joe Creason's Kentucky," for the Louisville *Courier-Journal* and wrote also for *The Courier-Journal Sunday Magazine*. In 1972 Creason assembled an anthology of his newspaper writings as *Joe Creason's Kentucky*, introduced by Jesse Stuart. A year after his death in 1974, the *Courier-Journal* published *Crossroads and Coffee Trees: A Legacy of Joe Creason*, with a preliminary essay by Bill Creason. In 1991, a third volume of his writings appeared, entitled *The Best of Joe Creason: A Collection of Short Stories and Kentucky Folklore*. In addition to his writing, Creason was a popular speaker, and he also hosted a regular radio broadcast.

Joe Creason was a native of Benton, Kentucky, and graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1940, when he was named the most popular man on campus. (In 1969-1970 he was national president of the Alumni Association.) As a student, he was a correspondent for his hometown papers and also a contributor to the Paducah *Sun-Democrat*. In 1981 the Joe Creason Lecture Series was established to honor his memory with an annual presentation by a prominent member of the press. The Creason lectureship was created by the Bingham Enterprises Foundation of Kentucky, university alumni, and friends of the late writer.

The Creason papers include correspondence, articles, photographs, and other materials that will make possible a thoughtful appraisal of one of the Commonwealth's most effective and most popular journalists.

### *Papers of the McDonald Family of Scotland, Virginia, and Kentucky*

Mrs. Harriett Holladay of Lexington has made a gift to the libraries of a significant bloc of papers of the McDonald family, documenting their activities from 1817 to 1907. These represent papers kept by Major Edward H. McDonald and his son, Edward L. McDonald. The family was of Scottish origin, beginning in this country with the emigrant Angus McDonald (1727-1778). This

Angus McDonald lived at Glengarry, a farm near Winchester, Virginia. With the exception of occasional visits to the West, the family remained in Virginia until moving to Louisville to establish Rugby School after the Civil War. E. H. McDonald was an attorney in Louisville, and his son E. L. McDonald took his law degree at the University of Virginia in 1889. E. L. McDonald married the English-born Florence Pinninger; they moved from Louisville to Lexington in 1920 with their three children. Accompanying the McDonald family papers is a photograph showing members of the family who are among the correspondents. Also of importance for research on the Civil War era is a transcript of the memoirs of Maj. E. H. McDonald, based on his service in the 11th Virginia Cavalry. He was one of the founders of the Southern Historical Association. The McDonald family papers form a valuable group of materials for the study of a prominent Kentucky family over a period of several generations.

—James D. Birchfield

*An Ode to the Liberator of Mexico: The First Example of Post-Colonial Mexican Poetry*

In 1993, the Lou Emma Wilson Mexicana Collection of the University of Kentucky Libraries acquired a rare pamphlet confidently described by its former owner as the first piece of literature written in independent Mexico.<sup>1</sup> It is a fulsome occasional ode recited at a banquet in honor of the "Liberator of New Spain," Agustín de Iturbide.

Iturbide, born in 1783 in the town now called Morelia, was the son of minor Spanish aristocrats and hence a creole (from Spanish *criollo*), a Hispanic American of European ancestry. Creoles were second-class members of Colonial society, which reserved its best posts in government, the army and the church for continental Spaniards. In Mexico and other colonies it was often the excluded and resentful creoles who led the move toward independence from the mother country. Iturbide, however, was a staunch royalist. He first established himself as a skillful military leader by successfully defending the Colonial government when the great Mexican revolutionaries Hidalgo and Morelos began their ill-fated rebellion 16 September 1810.

To understand the allusions in the Wilson Mexicana Collection's ode, it is necessary to know something of the events that led up to Mexico's successful declaration of independence, eleven years after the first attempt to sever ties with the Spanish monarchy. Early in 1821, Iturbide, the erstwhile pillar of the old regime, announced his withdrawal of support from the Spanish government, because parliament (the *Cortes*) was in the throes of a liberalization that appeared, in the eyes of Colonial conservatives like Iturbide, to be guided by anti-clerical Free Masons and godless followers of the French *enciclopedistes*. Iturbide proposed the creation of an independent monarchy in Mexico, with the king of Spain, Fernando VII, or one of his Bourbon relatives, as ruler. This scheme, which is known in Mexican history as the Plan of Iguala (a small town near Taxco where Iturbide had his headquarters), offered three guarantees ("Religion, Independence, Union") that attracted the squabbling factions in the upper layers of Colonial society. The Plan supported the Catholic clergy and its traditional privileges; it made Mexico independent of the erratic Spanish parliament; and it promoted the unity of all Mexicans, European and creole, and allayed the fears of loyalists by promising no reprisals and by offering assistance to those who wished to move to another colony. This ingenious document, which in hindsight seems so flawed, made Iturbide the hero of the hour, brought former rebels and other disaffected groups into his camp, and made him the most powerful man in Mexico. When Spain's newly appointed captain general, an Irishman named John O'Donohugh, (Juan O'Donojú to the Mexicans), sailed into port at Veracruz in the autumn of 1821, Iturbide was in control of the country. After a brief consultation, Iturbide and the wily O'Donojú signed an agreement that avoided battle between the huge Mexican army and the handful of undermanned garrisons still loyal to Spain. At the head of his Army of the Three Guarantees, Iturbide entered Mexico City in triumph on his thirty-eighth birthday, September 27, 1821. After reviewing fifteen thousand troops, receiving the keys to the city, and hearing a *Te Deum* sung in the cathedral, the Hero of Independence was the guest of honor at a banquet offered by the city council in the former viceregal palace that still forms one side of the *Plaza Mayor* in Mexico City. It was on this occasion that the Wilson Collection's ode was recited by a member of the city council.

Twenty-two months after this glorious day, Iturbide—once called the Father of his Country, the tutelary genius of the new

Mexican Empire, the Christian hero—was dead. He had served for eight months as president of an interim council of regency and for ten months as elected emperor, after the Spanish Bourbons declined to recognize Mexico's independence or to accept its offered throne. But the turmoil of the Emperor Agustín I's brief reign was such that it has permanently tarnished his reputation as the champion of independence. In 1823 the emperor abdicated under pressure from his enemies and went into exile in Italy and England, during which time the Mexican congress declared him a traitor to the nation. Unaware of this proscription, he returned to Mexico on July 17, 1824, and two days later died before a firing squad. In 1833 the government officially enrolled him among the founders of the nation and in 1838 transferred his bones to the cathedral of Mexico. But when other patriots were reburied in a splendid pantheon on Reforma Avenue in 1935, Iturbide was not deemed worthy to rest beside the likes of Hidalgo and Morelos. The man who achieved independence for his country lies in his marble urn, alone, in the vast church built on the ruins of an Aztec pyramid.

Depending upon the period and the historian, Iturbide emerges from his biographies as a ridiculous poseur, aping Napoleon and deserving his disgrace, or as a clever leader and a sincere lover of his country, defeated by the complicated play of forces over which he had no control. Whichever of these two personalities may be the real Iturbide, no one challenges the assertion that in the last months of 1821, he was the most admired man in Mexico. The Wilson Mexicana ode is the first example of what one Mexican scholar has called the volcanic eruption of poetry in praise of the Liberator that inaugurated the literature of independent Mexico.

TRANSLATION:

Ode Recited at the Banquet that the Most Excellent City [Council] Gave for His Excellency the First Chief of the Imperial Army, on the Day of His Entrance into this Capital.

Eleven times<sup>2</sup> has sluggish Saturn run  
His immense circuit since dismal sighing wrung  
My homeland's noble breast and burning tears  
Furrowed her cheek.

Other champions<sup>3</sup>, struggling in vain, then raised  
Their angry shout and tried to cut  
The ancient links that, forming chains, entwined,  
Oppressed my homeland's neck, her feet, her hands

It was not Heaven's will, O valorous men,  
You sacrificial victims of a grateful nation;  
But by losing your life, you won illustrious names  
That the coming generations will never speak without  
Sweet sorrow.

To you alone, unconquered hero, pampered son  
Of Mars invincible and of Minerva,  
To you alone does Fate reserve so great  
An undertaking: the links will fall to pieces  
When your strong arms have scarcely touched them.

Lift your dusky brow, O august lady<sup>4</sup>,  
And dry your handsome eyes; let your hair  
Float freely in the wind, and if you can,  
Ponder your good fortune, for Iturbide  
Has made you a sovereign power.

Welcome, welcome happy day, for which  
Three centuries<sup>5</sup> have vainly longed! Stay!  
Do not pass! Delay the shady night,  
And may your pleasant hours find sleep on couches  
Of unfading roses!

O Freedom, gift of holy heaven! Now  
You hold in your arms the American-born, who rests  
With pride upon your lap, no longer afraid.  
Upon his brow and temples you bestow a kiss  
And with it, what good fortune, how many benefits!

But ah, beforehand, the frightful burst of cannon  
Ominously deafens the valley; Mars<sup>6</sup> unleashes  
A thousand furies, and brandishing his monstrous  
Lance with his right hand, he walks beside  
The American hero.



A numberless number of warriors marches behind  
The immortal leader; the glitter of sharp weapons  
Foreshadows deaths; yet still the hero-loving  
Olympian deities incite to battle.

Will our brothers by the thousands descend  
To gloomy Orcus? Are we to buy our freedom  
And our homes so dearly? Sadness, begone! O'Donohugh  
Assures the peace.

O super-human mortal<sup>7</sup> and glory of Spain:  
The grateful American people will praise your name  
While sun gives warmth; you are one of us as long  
As you have breath. Bid adieu forever  
To the turbulent seas.

Oh fortunate a thousand times, America!  
Speak blessings on the author<sup>8</sup> of your fate.  
Cast fear aside, rest<sup>9</sup> without cares. If Iturbide  
The Unconquered is on your side, every enemy will be  
Contemptible.

The nations of the ancient continent,  
Awakening from the slumber of oblivion,  
Observe a tall Colossus rise majestically  
Here, in this New World, and in amazement  
watch the great deed.

Let us then, Mexicans, repeat Hosannah  
A hundred times, hosannah again a hundred  
More, and let us say, "Long may Religion,  
Union, and Independence live, as gifts  
Of heavenly mercy."

Mexico 1821. Printed at the Imperial Press of don Alejandro Valdés.

—*Joseph R. Jones*

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The honor of being the first literary piece published in independent Mexico should probably go to an allegory published in a Mexico City newspaper, *El diario independiente*, on 27 September 1821. The Wilson Mexicana poem may well be the first ode composed to celebrate independence and the "Liberator," but it is not possible to know exactly when it appeared in print.

<sup>2</sup>1810—1821

<sup>3</sup>Hidalgo, Morelos

<sup>4</sup>Mexico

<sup>5</sup>1521—1821

<sup>6</sup>Mavorte, printed erroneously as Moverte

<sup>7</sup>O'Donohugh

<sup>8</sup>O'Donohugh, Iturbide

<sup>9</sup>roposa for reposa