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Producing a Past: Cyrus McCormick's Reaper from Heritage to History

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PRODUCING A PAST:

CYRUS MCCORMICK'S REAPER FROM HERITAGE TO HISTORY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

JOINT PROGRAM IN AMERICAN HISTORY / PUBLIC HISTORY

BY

DANIEL PETER OTT

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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This dissertation is the result of four years of work as a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago, but is the scholarly culmination of my love of history which began more than a decade before I moved to Chicago. At no point was I ever alone on this journey, always inspired and supported by a large cast of teachers, professors, colleagues, co-workers, friends and family. I am indebted to them all for making this dissertation possible, and for supporting my personal and scholarly growth.

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encourage me to take a break in order to preserve my sanity and how to get me outside of myself to enjoy doing anything other than reading, writing or grading. I could not have done it without her love and support, and this dissertation is dedicated to her.

To Cassie

When the historian of the future comes to speak of the great Americans...who have succeeded the best in lightening the burdens of mankind, by the side of Franklin, and Fulton and Joseph Henry and Morse, they will not forget to mention Cyrus H. McCormick. Where the golden wheat rustles in the breeze, the panting toilers under the hot sun will hail him as their benefactor.

—S.C.P. Miller, *In Memoriam: Cyrus Hall McCormick*

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ABSTRACT

“Producing a Past” explores how the false “fact” of Cyrus McCormick’s 1831 invention of the reaper came to be incorporated into the American historical cannon. From 1884 to 1932, the McCormick Harvester family and their various affiliated businesses created a useable past about their departed patriarch, Cyrus McCormick, and his role in producing civilization through advertising and the emerging historical profession. The McCormick narrative of the past which was peddled in advertising and supported in scholarship justified the family’s elite position in American society and its monopolistic control of the harvester industry in the face of political and popular antagonism.

As a parallel story to the McCormick’s hegemonic use of history, this dissertation also focuses on the professionalizing historical discipline during the Progressive Era. These early historians were anxious to demonstrate their concrete value in the corporate economy as “objective” guardians of the past. While ethics might have prevented them from being historians for hire, their own positions as middle-class workers pre-disposed them to be receptive to both the McCormick’s financial influence and their historical messages.

INTRODUCTION

The reaper- a horse-drawn machine that greatly increased the amount of wheat a farmer could harvest, was invented by Cyrus McCormick in 1831.

Eric Foner¹

The automatic reaper, the invention of Cyrus H. McCormick, took the place of sickle, cradle and hand labor.... The reaper enabled a crew of six or seven men to harvest in a day as much wheat as fifteen men could harvest using the older methods.

Alan Brinkley²

Inventions revolutionized not only manufacturing, but the age-old methods of farming. Cyrus McCormick, twenty-two-year-old son of a Virginia blacksmith-farmer, made his first reaper in 1831, a two-wheeled, horse-drawn chariot that harvested grain.

Daniel Walker Howe³

This ubiquitous “fact” originated from Cyrus McCormick’s heirs. According to them, their patriarch was a mechanical genius, who invented the reaper in 1831 at the ripe-age of twenty-two. He had inherited his ingenuity from his father, Robert McCormick, who had conceived and built many labor-saving farm tools in their Virginia plantation’s workshop. Beginning in 1816, Robert had attempted to build a horse-drawn implement to cut grain, but had failed. Puzzling over his father’s grain contraption for many years, in

¹Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History* volume 1, brief third edition (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2012): 261.

² Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 5th edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008):274-275.

³ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 535.

1831 young Cyrus was struck by divine inspiration while on a journey through the mountains. Riding to a nearby foundry, his horse stopped for a drink in the middle of a considerable stream. “Just then, as he looked up, his eye fell on a fertile tract of land brightened by sunshine, and the blended thought of the vast future of the country in agriculture, and the possibilities of his invention for reaping grain, struck him.” In that beautiful and dramatic moment, he conceived the horizontal reciprocating blade as the key to the machine’s success. He went home and began fashioning his vision into wood and iron. Six weeks later, he successfully unveiled his machine in front of a small audience of interested onlookers in a neighbor’s field of oats near Steele’s Tavern. And the rest, as they say, “is history.” He began selling the machine, continued to improve it, earned numerous accolades at World’s Fairs, moved to Chicago in 1848 to erect a reaper manufactory amidst the prairies of the West and by the time of his death in 1884 had built a vast industrial empire while revolutionizing American agriculture.⁴

This origin story is a synthesis of a “memoir” honoring “the great inventor” written shortly after his death by his eldest son, Cyrus Hall McCormick II. While the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company had begun advertising their founder’s 1831 invention in 1878, this “memoir” introducing a memorial volume on his father’s life is the first full publication of the McCormick invention story. Fancying himself an amateur historian, Cyrus McCormick II included heroic details of his father’s life, his unimpeachable Christian character, and his monumental impact on the progress of the world. While he had great ease locating sources about his father’s success as a business

⁴ Cyrus McCormick II, “Memoir,” *In Memoriam – Cyrus Hall McCormick* (Cambridge: H.O. Houghton & Company, 1885): 1 – 23, box 396, Anita McCormick Blaine Papers, Mss 1E, McCormick-International Harvester Company Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin [Hereafter MIHCC].

man once he moved to Chicago, where the family and his Company preserved relevant historical documents and artifacts, the story of the invention itself is a product of oral tradition. Only twenty-five years old at the time of his father's death, these details about the moment of invention are most likely Cyrus II's recounting of the story that his father had told he and his siblings as children.⁵

For this wealthy industrial family, their patriarch's invention was an important part of their identities. The story of his genius and revolutionary impact on agriculture was a righteous explanation of their elite status. Their massive reaper works, authority over armies of employees, mansions, luxury goods and high standing as members of Chicago's Gilded Age "society," all stemmed from his 1831 invention. These were the privileges and rewards for their father's monumental contributions to agricultural and American civilization. As McCormick's widow, Nettie Fowler, reiterated to their daughter, their company was "an honor to your father, as one of the best known Institutions in the country" and their wealth was an "ornament" of his success. On another occasion, Cyrus McCormick II explained that their fortunes and reputation were not ill-gotten, but earned through their paterfamilias's "tenacity, energy and consistency of purpose" over years of "toil," inventing the machine and building the business which allowed farmers to flourish. In essence, the story was their family's "heritage," which righteously explained where they came from and justified all of the social, economic and material realities of who they were.⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Nettie Fowler McCormick to Anita McCormick Blaine, July 30, 1897, box 7, Nettie Fowler McCormick Papers, Mss 1b; Cyrus McCormick II to John Carlisle, January 6, 1897, reel 8, Cyrus McCormick II Papers,

Regardless of the family's private heritage, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the fact of Cyrus McCormick's invention was far from consensus knowledge. Rather, ideas about invention, progress, civilization and capitalism were debated in a period of fierce industrial competition within the harvesting machine industry. Crucially, these business rivals attempted to use history-based advertising to cultivate desire for their wares amongst rural farmers who did not passively accept the "natural" logic of capitalism or mechanization. Competing claims about the origins of the reaper were prevalent in advertising literature, sales scripts, public relations materials and corporate branding projects. In the harvester industry, the emphasis on invention was initiated by Cyrus McCormick's Chicago-based McCormick Harvesting Machine Company and used as evidence of the superiority of its products. Competitors countered that many different inventors, mechanics and tinkerers played a significant role in the gradual development of the reaper over many decades. Most often, they pointed to the fact that Obed Hussey had patented a reaper in 1833, a year-before McCormick patented his own in 1834. Ubiquitously advertised, written about in the press, and studied by contemporary pre-professional historians, the American public was generally aware of the controversy surrounding the reaper's origins.⁷ Moreover, Cyrus McCormick's own

Mss 3c, MIHCC. David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁷ A.T. Andreas, *History of Chicago: From Its Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1884-1886) recognized the important innovations of competing harvesting firms in Chicago such as McCormick and Deering within his encyclopedic volumes, suggesting a broader understanding of the reaper's evolution. Robert Ardley, *American Agricultural Implements: A Review of Invention and Development in the Agricultural Implement Industry of the United States* (Chicago: 1894) is the most important of these histories because it was commissioned by the National Association of Agricultural Implement Manufacturer as a consensus history of technological progress in response to the rising agrarian dissent from the Farmer's Alliances and similar organizations. McCormick Harvester notably did not participate in the Association, but their contributions to the larger project of harvester innovation was recognized in Ardley's work alongside many others. Percy Bidwell and John Falconer, *History of*

siblings, nieces and nephews contested his supposed invention and resented his company's advertising. Alternatively they argued that his father, Robert McCormick, was responsible for imagining and building the revolutionary farm implement, entrusting the machine to Cyrus to manage for the entire family's financial benefit.⁸

The conflicting claims for Robert McCormick, Cyrus McCormick and Obed Hussey as the inventor of the reaper all have their merits and solid supporting evidence. Obed Hussey's reaper was operational and was patented before McCormick's. The story advancing Robert McCormick as the inventor after decades of experimentation is more believable than the twenty-two year-old Cyrus inventing the reaper in 1831 after a flash of insight and six weeks of applied ingenuity. The Cyrus McCormick story is supported by an ocean of advertising literature, court room testimony and oral history, all of which came into existence at least a decade and a half after his supposed invention. With this in mind, the point of this dissertation, is not to rehash "who invented the reaper," as had been done seemingly ad infinitum in advertising campaigns, the press and history books beginning in 1884 and continuing well into the twentieth century. Rather the purpose is to uncover why invention mattered so much in American culture during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. To do so asks why Cyrus McCormick became recognized as the inventor of the reaper within the canon of American history while Obed Hussey has been relegated to a secondary status if he is mentioned at all and Robert McCormick has become historically invisible. The answer to this question about a seemingly innocuous

Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860 (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1925) also recognized this broader history.

⁸ Robert Hall McCormick II, *Memorial of Robert McCormick* (Chicago: 1885); and Norbert Lyons, *The McCormick Reaper Legend* (New York: Exposition Press, 1955).

bit of trivia reveals insights about how history functioned as both a valued cultural resource and a malleable, producible, material during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.⁹

This dissertation argues that the predominance of Cyrus McCormick's invention in history textbooks is the best example of a larger corporate trend of co-opting the past and the progressive-era historical profession in order to sanctify the modern corporate order. Over the course of five decades, from 1878 to 1936, McCormick's heirs and their companies spent millions of dollars on an evolving variety of means to secure their patriarch's past. The cultural importance of history during the period is a salient thread of this dissertation's central argument. In an era obsessed with progress and civilization, accomplishments of the past were seen as the crucial building blocks of modernity. Monumental historic contributions teleologically explained the present social, political, and economic order. Within this cultural context, a close association with the milestones of progress were celebrated marks of masculine leadership in the superior Anglo-American civilization. For this reason, the invention of the reaper was more than just a "fact," but rather was pin-pointed by the McCormick family as the righteous seed of their wealth and a justification of their authority in the harvester industry.

⁹ William Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Seedtime* (New York: Century Co., 1930) is the authoritative account sanctioning Cyrus McCormick as the inventor of the reaper. John F. Steward and Arthur Pound, *The Reaper: A History of the Efforts of Those Who Justly May Be Said to Have Made Bread Cheap* (New York: Greenberg, 1931) is a history asserting the primacy of Obed Hussey's reaper written by a former inventor for William Deering Company. Lyons, *The McCormick Reaper Legend*, covers the arguments for Robert McCormick. Leo Rogin, *The Introduction of Farm Machinery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931) and Leo Rogin, "The Introduction of Farm Machinery: A Reply," *Journal of Political Economy* vol. 40, no. 5 (October, 1932): 695-696, argues, using the same material as Hutchinson, that the evidence is "inconclusive" for between Cyrus McCormick and Obed Hussey, which in turn makes any evidence about Robert McCormick as the inventor, similarly suspicious.

“Producing a Past” is, then, a story of an elite family and its company actively writing and promoting a past which sanctioned its status and wealth. Over time, the story of McCormick’s invention was adapted as valuable cultural ammunition to meet a variety of emerging challenges. Initially, the story was promoted as the brand of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company during the late 1870s, when many competitors were offering similar or better machines. At that time, McCormick’s invention was used to claim the Company’s paternal dominion over the entire industry as a well as the primary evidence of the superiority of its goods. The narrative of invention and progress proved eminently malleable and, during the populist revolt of the 1890, the story was altered to emphasize McCormick’s personal origins as a farmer and to suggest his Company’s long-term commitment to the welfare of farmers. After the Company merged with competitors to form International Harvester, the story was spun again to meet the challenges of anti-trust litigation during opening decades of the twentieth century. In this context, McCormick was credited with initiating the agricultural revolution, which had led to “cheap bread” for the masses and allowed all of civilization to progress into the modern age. Crucially, International Harvester used the story to recast itself as a benefactor of the nation, rather than a parasitic industrial octopus leaching away wealth from the general public.

Along the way, the family and its company encountered resistance to its past-turned-brand and historical sanctification. The greater the emphasis family members placed on Cyrus McCormick’s 1831 invention of the reaper, the more dissent they provoked from competitors and their own relatives. It became that much more important to safeguard McCormick’s legacy as the inventor of the reaper to protect the company’s

cultural legitimacy and, on a different level, the family's personal identity. Alternative histories of the reaper's origins could damage the general public's perception of the Company and potentially impact the family's personal fortunes. During the period beginning in 1897, dissenting historical-narratives in advertising successfully diminished the McCormick brand and undermined its industrial dominance. Industrial dissent only ceased when the Company successfully merged with its mud-slinging competitors to form International Harvester in 1902. After that point, the story was almost continuously challenged by the McCormicks' relatives, who argued that the honor of inventing the reaper belonged to Robert McCormick. Crucially, that story was their heritage and part of their collective identity. They felt Cyrus McCormick's heirs were besmirching Robert and stealing their glory. On some level, that familial conflict never ended. By the 1930s, however, International Harvester and the McCormick family had drowned-out dissenting voices in a crushing sea of historical scholarship, public relations, and advertising, which successfully shaped public perception of the family's past.

As the McCormicks, their company and the general public were confronted with conflicting histories of the reaper, the family utilized increasingly sophisticated means to promote its interpretation of the past and silence dissent. It began with historical-based advertising in the 1870s, but moved onto public relations education in the 1910s and by the 1920s implemented a plan to covertly influence the budding historical profession. A variety of historical laborers were crucial to helping the McCormicks secure dominion over the past during this fifty-year period, including salesmen, inventors, advertisers, lawyers, clerks, librarians and a host of trained academics. While only trained academics seem like "historians," these other professionals dabbled in historical research, analysis,

production and public education in an effort to demonstrate that they could help the McCormicks attain their objective in exchange for monetary rewards.

While trained academics were a part of the family's historical project as early as 1900, they were in direct competition with advertisers, public relations specialists and lawyers for historical authority and remuneration until 1930. During this period, academic historians held a tenuous and vulnerable position as laborers within an unestablished profession. In a competitive labor market, they were anxious to demonstrate the concrete value of their training and historical imaginations in order to claim greater monetary and cultural compensation. With their middle-class aspirations on the line, historians employed by the McCormicks were willing to promote and fortify the family's narrative of the past despite historical dissent. Their choices to do so were not as unethical as they might seem, but were reinforced by the ubiquity of the McCormicks' sustained historical-advertising and public relations which had indelibly marked public memory of the reaper. Historical-propaganda on the company and the family's behalf not only made the American public receptive to academic sanctification of McCormick's past, but also shaped academics' historical knowledge of the invention before they engaged the subject.

In pursuit of financial security and authority over the past, academic historians preserved and created a wide variety of lasting historical materials which solidified the heritage of McCormick's invention as history. First and foremost, Herbert Kellar a university trained historian employed by the family from 1915 to 1955, collected a world-class archive on the history of agriculture, frontier America, and the farm implement industry within the family's McCormick Agricultural Library. Including materials on a

wide-variety of topics, Kellar broadly promoted scholarly use of the Library within numerous historical organizations to further spread the family's historical influence. Using this collection, in 1928 William T. Hutchinson was commissioned to write the two-volume authoritative biography of Cyrus H. McCormick which proved McCormick invented the reaper in 1831 and quashed dissenting narratives. Beyond fulfilling this direct purpose, however, the archive also became the foundation for a variety of other historical studies which prominently placed McCormick, his family, his company, and its successors in history books – ensuring that his contributions would never be forgotten.¹⁰

“Producing a Past” speaks to several overlapping historiographies within the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The history of capitalism and corporations, the “new rural history” of the progressive movement and agribusiness as well as the history of the historical profession are the key literatures that underpin this study. This dissertation argues that these historiographies are connected in previously unappreciated ways, specifically stating that the nascent historical profession actively participated in supporting the new and embattled corporate order through crafting a useable past that sanctioned its activities in exchange for sponsorship of scholarly aims.

Since the 1960s, the history of capitalism and business successfully demonstrated how large-scale businesses were actively built by business-people, office workers,

¹⁰ William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick*, 2 volumes (New York: The Century Company, 1930, 1935) is the “authoritative account of McCormick’s life and the reaper. Now at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison and retitled the McCormick-International Harvester Company Collection, many scholars have utilized the McCormick Agricultural Library for work in a variety of historiographies. William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Alfred Chandler, *Visible Hand* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977); Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); and Sterling Evans, *Bound In Twine* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007), is a short sample of some of the more recent prominent studies that have utilized the collection, but the list includes scores more.

managers and stock-holders while attempting to assuage wider American anxiety about corporate scale.¹¹ Historians of capitalism and corporations ably outline business efforts to fit their institutions within the mainstream culture of America. These historians suggest that the making of the corporate order was a complex cultural public relations project operating both internally to convince employees and externally through advertising, philanthropy and political manipulation to convince the general public. Olivier Zunz' *Making America Corporate* and Roland Marchand's *Creating the Corporate Soul* are particularly relevant to this study. Zunz demonstrates that the institutions and bureaucracies of the corporate order were built by middle-class, "white collar" employees seeking to demonstrate the value of their expertise to their employers in exchange for economic rewards and security. Marchand brings public relations and advertising into the historiography of corporations and capitalism. His work argues that corporations were only successful because they utilized image making to convince employees and the

¹¹ Historians of business began following the "institutional" history laid out by historians like Robert Wiebe, *Search for Order* which studied how business and new professionals both created and reacted to the new scale of American business which transformed the workings of the American economy. Prior to this shift, business historians narrowly focused on entrepreneurial biographies and the evolution of singular businesses without reference to the larger American political, economic or social contexts. From 1909 to 1935, the McCormicks had four biographies written that would fit this model, including ones by his grandson, Cyrus Hall McCormick III, Herbert Casson, Reuben Gold Thwaites and William T. Hutchinson. Their larger influence was not on business history however, but rather agricultural history, which will be discussed later. Alfred Chandler's work on the evolution of "managerial capitalism, *Visible Hand and Strategy and Structure* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962) stand as the major works of historical re-imagination of business history. This field has expanded to include the structural and cultural implications of international business, such as Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982) as well as the politics of the corporate managed economy, such as Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Within this historiography, historians have studied both McCormick and International Harvester to consider how they structured their businesses, labor and marketing relationships both domestically and abroad, including Robert Ozanne, *Century of Labor-Management Relations*, Fred Carstensen, *American Enterprise in Foreign Markets: Studies of Singer and International Harvester in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) and more recently Sterling Evans, *Bound in Twine* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007) and Gordon Winder, *American Reaper* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), among many other works.

general public that their businesses were compatible with American values and operated as moral institutions in American society.¹²

“Producing a Past” builds on this work to demonstrate historians’ involvement in this public relations process as another subsection of Zunz’ “collar-line” middle-class workforce. As corporations sought cultural legitimacy, historians offered a professional service to meet corporate needs while securing financial support and legitimacy for their own scholarly endeavors. Academic historians became engaged in the project of creating an authoritative pre-corporate American history that offered a teleological justification of the rising corporate order in line with American values. Simultaneously they created professionalized standards of conduct and methodology based on training and the doctorate, marginalizing non-academic and amateur historians as antiquarians. Wealthy industrial elites and corporations financially supported academic authority over history in exchange for services received. Post World War II historians of the historical profession have not explored this connection among corporations, wealthy benefactors, professional history, and public institutions.

Prior to the 1950s, historians wrote about the overlapping connections among historians, corporations, and wealthy benefactors, reflecting a “progressive” and

¹² Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) textures Zunz’s interpretation to demonstrate that corporations were only capable of recruiting this workforce because of a gendered businesses language that placed corporations within traditional American family values. In the wake of the financial meltdown of 2008, Julia Ott, *When Wall Street Met Main Street: The Quest for an Investor’s Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) builds on Marchand to suggest that the 1920s emergence of popular stock-holding was a corporate strategy to assuage hostility towards corporate wealth and undermine government regulatory. These efforts utilized the language of “investor’s democracy” manipulating the discourses of producer citizenship and property.

professional sensibility that found such influences normal. These historians endorsed the modern corporate order as the “natural” result of progress.¹³ After the 1950s, this scholarship on the historical profession fragmented as the “progressive” notion gave way and historians no longer saw themselves as cut from the same cloth as other middle-class corporate workers or pursuing the same goals. The consolidation of professional authority in history, the increases in public funding for universities and a changing perception of “progress” made corporate and elite influence unnecessary and suspect.¹⁴

Studies of the historical profession such as John Higham’s *History* and Clifford Lord’s *Keepers of the Past* parsed the historical profession apart to preserve the objective sanctity of professionalism. Higham focuses on professional historians as they consolidated authority in historical publishing and within associations and universities, while Lord focuses on who would later be called “public historians.” While the works outline parallel professional developments, there is little overlap to suggest a direct connection. Higham does not discuss the influence of elite wealth on scholarship, while

¹³ Earl Ross, “A Generation of Prairie Historiography,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 33 (December, 1946): 391-410 and August Krey, “History in the Machine Age,” *Minnesota History* 14 (March, 1933): 3-29 both serve as strong examples of contemporary understandings of the historical profession in the 1930s and 1940s. Both considered the activities of academic historians, alongside those of amateur historians as well as public and private institutions. Underlying their perspectives was full knowledge that wealthy benefactors such as Andrew Carnegie and the McCormick family financed historical work. This was not considered unethical in light of the Progressive Era and the “new history” that progressive historians wanted to advance, because they assumed that such connections and narratives reflected the “true” progressive history of the country. The overlap amongst academics, universities, historical societies and libraries was particularly noted amongst the “Prairie historians” of the Mississippi Valley and Herbert Kellar was frequently cited as one of the foremost agents in this movement. Laurence Coleman, *Company Museums* (Washington D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1943), reflects a belief in the importance of corporate records as materials for historical research and underlines Progressive historian’s positive association with corporations as agents of American modernity.

¹⁴ John Higham, Leonard Krieger and Felix Gilbert, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965) suggests that the shift towards historical relativism away from “progressive” scholarship was couched in the gruesome experience of the Second World War, hinting that maybe the progress of humanity was not actually happening.

Lord considers this influence on institution building, but not institutional direction. Later historians like Peter Novick continued this separation, outlining changes in historiographical trends in light of the cultural turn's emphasis on middle-class values, demonstrating how historians sought, defined and refuted "objectivity." Novick suggests that historians accommodated mainstream American values and authorities to augment their reputations and financial opportunities, but his analysis of this point is brief. Taking this analysis a step farther in his study of *Midwestern Historians*, Kerwin Klein demonstrates how the "new history" and the "frontier thesis" empowered the professional activities of Midwestern historians. In this intellectual history, Klein continues to keep scholarship separate from wealth, while highlighting the importance of Midwestern culture on Midwestern historical scholarship.¹⁵

With the emergence of Public History in the 1970s, some scholars began to reconnect academic and public history institutional work in an effort to highlight the earlier civic ethic of the historical profession. Rebecca Conard, for example, hones in on the early-twentieth century and the career of Benjamin Shambaugh considering the influence of Midwestern historians on the professionalization effort as well as the connections between academic and public history institutions. Conard argues that Midwestern historians in universities and public historical societies became empowered by the "frontier thesis" that made the Midwest the center of American history, democracy, and historical inquiry. This development led not only to a dramatic growth of

¹⁵ John Higham, *History*; Clifford Lord, *Keepers of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965). Peter Novick, *The Noble Dream: the "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 61-85. Kerwin Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

interest in prairie history but also “progressive” historical societies committed to public education and “applying history” in government decision making. Ian Tyrell’s *Historians in Public* restores the public role of historians more broadly, refuting idea that has circulated since the 1970s, that historians have been apathetic towards the general public. On both counts, Tyrell and Conard expand the scope of professional historical activity to demonstrate the importance of earlier public history pioneers. In reclaiming this past, however, they ignore the influence of wealth on these earlier efforts or historians’ public engagement as a means to demonstrate their profession’s value.¹⁶

“Producing a Past” will recover the more encompassing public vision of historical work held by the prairie historians, while bringing it together with the scholarship on the culture of professionalization and the history of capitalism. Within patron-relationships, prairie historians exercised a measure of agency to pursue their own goals. Early historical professionals that touted the “new history” and Midwestern history accommodated corporate needs, like those of McCormick Harvester, because they both emphasized the importance of the Midwestern experience to American civilization and national history. The history that the McCormicks wanted scholars to write seemed to be ubiquitously supported by the material realities of agrarian life which Midwestern historians were most interested in chronicling. The similarities between these perspectives washed over any ambivalent feelings historians might have harbored about the ethics of hired scholarship. Moreover, historians were receptive to messages about the

¹⁶ Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002). Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

importance of progress and technology to modern life, because they had embraced careers within the new world of professionalization that ran parallel to the corporate order.¹⁷

Beyond the history of capitalism and historians, this dissertation also speaks to the historiography of the rural progressive era. This work fits within the “new rural history” of the Progressive Era that emerged in the 1970s, which came after decades of progressive and economic historical work championed market and technological determinism. These earlier works assume that historically farmers embraced technological advancement and market farming as the natural logic of a “modern” mindset.¹⁸ Later “new rural historians” like David Danbom, Mary Neth, and Ronald Klein all demonstrate that rural farmers did not passively accept the “natural” logic of capitalism or the rising agribusiness as an authority in rural life. They argue that the “agricultural complex” of agri-businesses, universities and the state, working in cooperation, contrived to alter rural production and consumption through the cultural

¹⁷ Jon Lauck, *The Lost Region”: Towards a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), coins the term “prairie historians,” for progressive era historians of the Midwest and considers how their world view impacted their scholarship.

¹⁸ Culturally, the agricultural historical work prior to the “new rural history,” endorsed a worldview that was very accommodating to agribusinesses, including International Harvester, holding that economic and technological potential held the keys to rural decision making and success. This was just the sort of historical perspective that Herbert Kellar was paid to promote. Most importantly, he advanced a popular theory of agricultural history, which held that farmer’s suffered from a sort of generational amnesia, which caused both farm protest and economic hardship. He suggested that these problems could be solved through better public education and awareness of agricultural history. Works like Fred Shannon, *Farmer’s Last Frontier* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1945), Paul Gates, *The Farmer’s Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960) and most importantly Paul A. David, “The Mechanization of the Reaping in Antebellum America,” in Henry Rosovsky, ed., *Industrialization in America in Two Systems* (New York: 1966): 3-39, all highlight the importance of increased farm scale and technology for farmer success. David is representative of an entire school of economic history that focused on the cliometrics of grain production in the 1960s, as pointed out by James Baughman, “New Directions in American Economic and Business History,” in George Billias and Gerald Grob, eds., *American History”: Retrospect and Prospect* (New York: Free Press, 1971): 286.

gospel of progress during the first four decades of the twentieth century. The majority of agrarians resisted these efforts as they espoused a producer ethic of independence against market-place coercion. They only capitulated during the New Deal when the Federal government significantly altered agricultural policy in favor of mono-crop, mechanized farming. “Producing a Past” argues that historians were also active allies in the “agricultural complex” war on dirt farmers through proselytizing a very particular vision of American history as technological progress.¹⁹

The historical efforts of the McCormick family and their evolving corporate empire shed light on these overlapping histories in a unique manner that unites these three historiographies. McCormick Harvester was at the center of increasing the scale of American business and its participation in industrial consolidation creating International Harvester occurred at the height of the turn-of-the-century merger movement. The McCormicks were embattled on all sides, from their competitors, their customers, and the federal government. They repeatedly referenced their long history as evidence of their just moral standing in American industry and made this past the cornerstone of their

¹⁹ Within these works, International Harvester agents are referenced as a source of progressive discourse and pressure upon rural agrarians. David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialized of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press) argues that the rural progressive movement was pushed upon rural farmers beginning in the early 1900s by a combination of agribusiness, universities and the federal authorities. These groups, operating through Morrell Land-grant University extension services, the Country Life movement, regional sales agents and Department of Agriculture county agents, attempted to modernize rural production habits to create cheaper foodstuffs for urban consumers. Danbom suggests that these efforts only succeed in the years after World War I, because of patriotic production. Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundation of Agribusiness in the Midwest 1900-1940* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995) argues that these rural habits only changed in the 1920s and 1930s, because the progressive movement’s discursive reframing of gender norms around access to the tools of modernity. Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000) labels these progressive forces the “agricultural complex” and suggests that New Deal agricultural policy, influenced by agribusiness, successfully marginalized non-market farming techniques through scarcity management and technological subsidization.

brand. As their version of history was contested, they invested in the emerging historical profession to bolster their brand against producer populism, broader anti-monopoly sentiments and anti-trust prosecution. When Midwestern historians rose to prominence during the high-water years of the frontier thesis, the McCormicks seized on the opportunity to inject their heritage of mechanical innovation into the frontier narrative of democratic civilization. For their part, Midwestern historians obligingly received support in their quest to free American history from the East coast. All of these connections suggest historians' involvement in the creation of corporate cultural authority that have been previously overlooked. They also reveal the degree to which today's canon of American history, available archival resources, and the historical profession are unwitting instruments of elite authority.

This dissertation utilizes three methodological prisms of investigation. First, it analyzes the gendered and racial discourse of civilization which is ubiquitously available in the source material to understand why history was so important to the McCormicks, the reaper industry, and the value historians attached to their industrial labor. Secondly, it will analyze how history functioned as a means of spreading cultural authority both in conventional advertising catalogs and history books. Finally, it will trace the reactions of harvester magnates and employees as well as historians and advertisers as they responded to the history-in-advertising and advertising-in-history that they created and spread. At the center of this last prism is a cultural history of historical labor as historians made sense of their work and their world, while striving for a greater measure of security within the evolving corporate order.

Gender and racial discourse analysis provides the ideal tool for investigating the advertising and histories of the corporate order created in the years between 1880 and 1930. Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization* masterfully demonstrates that ideas about "civilization" functioned as a discourse of power around the turn of the last-century, which operated through entwined notions of gender and race that signified morality and progress within Anglo-American hegemony. Daniel Bender's *American Abyss*, takes this analysis a step further and suggests that the discourse of civilization offered a world view of "industrial evolution," that explicitly ordered all people on a spectrum of Darwinian evolution and history. This spectrum could be "naturally" understood and communicated through modes of living, production and consumption. For Bender, then, material associations of labor, environment and bodies were all indices of the civilized order, which placed industrialization as the height of human progress opposite caveman savagery. The language and materials of civilization were demonstrations of cultural order which were used by wealthy elites to shore-up their cultural authority, sanction new forms of business, discipline workers and sell goods. This same language could also become a tool of resistance, as laborers, farmers and others used "civilization" to reinforce alternative forms of economic, political and social organization.²⁰

This dissertation applies this approach to the records of the McCormick family and its businesses. The language of manly civilization was pervasive in McCormick representations of Cyrus McCormick. The family believed and promulgated that his 1831

²⁰ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Daniel Bender, *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2009).

invention made him a hero of progress and civilization, justifying its later authority in the harvester industry. The family widely projected this worldview as the cornerstone of its company's brand from the 1870s into the 1930s. In their advertising, World's Fair exhibitions, public relations materials and their correspondence. The discourse of civilization offers a lens for understanding the McCormicks' investment in the historical profession to authoritatively defend their past as their brand.

Additionally, the history of advertising offers two methodological avenues of analysis that are utilized in this dissertation. Historians such as Roland Marchand, William Leach and Jackson Lears have demonstrated how the material culture of advertising and physical space were arranged to guide consumer decision and garnish consumer desire for mass-goods. They suggest that advertisements presented a "distorted mirror" of reality, which prioritized the values of the creators through images and arrangement that cultivated consumer desire. Beyond material culture analysis, however, Roland Marchand and Jackson Lears both analyze the labor and culture of ad-men and artists to capture their perspectives as middle-class workers ambivalently creating the tools of mass-culture. Likewise, studying the creators of advertising allowed historians to locate a controlled audience of cultural images and literature. Advertisers' and artists' engagement with their own work reflected mixed emotions about the messages they were sending and their role in the corporate order against a middle-class consumer desire and salary dependency.²¹

²¹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Emulating the work of Lears and Marchand, an investigation of historians as laborers and culture brokers will be a part of this project. Similar to advertisers, “distorted mirror” of American society, historians created a “distorted snapshot” of the past, to fit contemporary needs. The demands of the McCormick family and its company upon the nascent historical profession reveal how the family perceived heritage as the cornerstone of their company’s brand and a consistent bulwark against criticism. Alternatively, professional standards among historians were the fluctuating variable that the McCormicks continuously worked to harness. This relationship between the McCormicks and historians operated dialectically. The Company’s need for definitive historical authority against competing claims was a driving force in its financial support of historical professionalization, which simultaneously made historians more resistant to the tampering of monied interests. Similar to the work of advertising historians, “Producing a Past” will analyze historians’ need for financial security, which was sometimes at odds with their quest for professional “objectivity.” A key difference stands between advertisers and historians with regards to readership however. While it is difficult to prove what other advertisements ad-men encountered beyond their own or how that shaped popular perception, professional historians made a concerted effort to reference and footnote every piece of evidence that informed or legitimated their work. With this in mind, tracking the genealogy of historians’ concepts, ideas and specific turns-of-phrase is uniquely possible, allowing “Producing a Past” to clearly document the success of the McCormick’s efforts to influence professional historians and thus national memory.

While the McCormicks eventually endorsed trained historians as authorities over the past by 1930, academic historians throughout the period of study were always

working in tandem with other historical laborers. The family and its corporation utilized a variety of agents and mediums to sanction its version of the past. These efforts began with newspapers and journalists, advertising and world's fairs judges, but evolved to include lawyers, librarians, lobbyists and mercenary historical biographers. The escalation of historical effort was brought about by direct contests for the past. Interestingly, the narrowing of the historical profession to an academic essence paralleled the narrowing of the reaper industry into the single harvester trust. Previously, there existed broader avenues for both buying a reaper and being a historian, which have subsequently been obscured by the historical profession and the corporate order as the logic of progress.

At best, writing history has always been an educated approximation of the past. Archival resources are far too uneven, mentalities of historic actors are too multifaceted and writing is too linear to perfectly capture the complex and infinite entirety of past experience. Historians, faced with such a daunting task, make crucial decisions about what to study based on personal beliefs, contemporary needs and available material. The corpus of the profession's choices and labor impart "legitimate" knowledge about the past for public consumption. Importantly, the groundwork for the historical canon of important events, dates, and people was laid by historians in the early twentieth century, who strove to make studies "objective," but did not consider the subjectivity of their own positions within modern society. Scholarship is never isolated in an ivory tower but, like all cultural productions, is influenced by the society around it. Informed by anxieties about financial security, professional status, and a progressive-era world view, early historians generally were supported by societal elite to write histories that reinforced the

status-quo. It is important for current historians to understand this professional legacy in order to reckon with the historical canon they have inherited and avoid unwittingly repeating the hegemonic heritage of a previous generation.

CHAPTER ONE:

EVERY SALESMAN, A HISTORIAN

The morning of July 25, 1877, Samuel Peterson and George Brewster stood beside a ripe field of golden winter wheat outside of New Ulm, Minnesota. They looked on while their expert machine-man, Mr. Johnson, tuned-up a McCormick Automatic Wire-Binder and Harvester. All three were employees of the Chicago reaper manufacturer, C.H. & L.J. McCormick. Johnson had been “starting” McCormick binders all summer, beginning in Texas and following the ripening of grain northwards. He had already started seven machines for Brewster’s general agency in Minnesota so far that year. Nearby, a crowd of local farmers was forming. They were curious to witness the mechanized cutting and binding machine that they had heard so much about. For his part, Peterson anxiously awaited the success of the machine he spoke so much about, but never actually saw work.¹

Peterson and most of the farmers had watched or heard about other manufacturer’s automatic-binders operating in fields outside of Brown County during previous harvests. Walter A. Wood Harvesting Machine Company had introduced wire-binders into the Minnesota Valley three years before and binders were being sold by numerous other firms throughout the state and the upper Midwest. In the meantime, C.H

¹ George H. Brewster to C.H. & L.J. McCormick, July 23 and July 25, 1877, reel 176, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company: Incoming Correspondence and Reports, 1849-1902, Mss 2x, McCormick-International Harvester Company Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI [Hereafter MIHCC].

& L.J. McCormick struggled to close the glaring technology gap while skirting patent infringement. These firms could not sink roots in Brown County. Brown County seemed perfect for mechanized harvesters and small grain agriculture because of its rich soil, temperate climate and abundance of water. The county's location along the Minnesota River and the arrival of the Winona & St. Peter Railroad in 1872 also allowed cheap access to the national grain market. Moreover, most of these farmers were in good financial standing and owned their farmsteads. These factors and the appearance of automatic-binders nearby were not enough to convince Brown County farmers to become masters of machines.²

Peterson had been successful in drumming up interest amongst these farmers where others had failed, because he spoke German and Norwegian. Most of the county was inhabited by first and second generation immigrants from Northern Europe and Scandinavia. These people had risked migration for the rewards of the prairie's fertility in hopes of supporting their families and ethnic communities for generations to come. Unlike their Yankee counter-parts, they did not necessarily perceive of the land as a strictly profit-oriented venture. These were people that Peterson knew and shared much in common with as a first generation immigrant himself – having made the voyage from Norway at the age of three and grown up among these transplanted communities.³

² Brewster to McCormick, June 23, 1877, reel 210, Mss 2x, MIHCC. "Railroad Construction in Minnesota," *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 21, 1872. William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest, 1856-1884* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company Incorporated, 1935): 536-572.

³ S.D. Peterson to McCormick, March 27, 1977, reel 209, Mss 2x, MIHCC. Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, NARA microfilm publication T9, reel 616, New Ulm, Brown County, Minnesota, sheet 14D, accessed at Ancestry.com, October 23, 2013. Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) argues a fundamental cultural difference between communal Catholic and Lutheran immigrant from northern

The crowd that July morning in 1877 was composed of Germans who Peterson had canvassed repeatedly over the preceding months. Making numerous house calls every day with a grip full of sales literature, he read through McCormick catalogs and *Farmers Advance* newspapers with them in German. He told these farmers about Cyrus McCormick's invention of the reaper in 1831, the establishment of the mammoth reaper works in Chicago in 1848 and the perfect evolution of harvesting machinery over time which resulted in that day's modern automatic-binder. Peterson recounted McCormick's "world beating" victories at international expositions, fairs and countless field trials over the course of the preceding generation as proof of his employer's competitive and lasting quality. He traveled the roads of Brown County with a harvester affixed to his wagon, explaining the intricacies of the machine and its economic value as farmers were invited to see and to touch. Connecting the machine in front of them with national history, Peterson explained how McCormick's progress was directly involved with the creation of American civilization, allowing American farmers to enjoy better lives as masters of machines, rather than mere toilers in the soil.⁴

Peterson was not particularly unique in his story-telling, only in his lingual ability. McCormick agents across the country utilized the same practices and stories, integrating their machines, employer, and customers into the active historical imaginations of nineteenth-century Americans. Peterson may have mixed in more references to family well-being which appealed to German communalism, rather than Yankee adventuresome

Europe and American Yankee Protestants. These differences accounted for crucial divergences in all manner of social organization from politics to market orientation.

⁴ Peterson to McCormick, March 27, 1977, reel 209, Mss 2x, MIHCC.

independence. His sales talk, however, was aimed at orienting farmers within a national story about America's past and its future, inviting them to embrace a Yankee sense of American identity. The Brown County Germans could join in the American march of progress through buying a McCormick harvester or face the certainty of being left behind.

Harvester salesmen needed to animate their product with cultural meaning in order to solicit sales. The machine's bizarre mechanical aesthetic did not offer an uninitiated bystander any hints of inherent value or economic potential. The sales talk played a crucial role in exciting a change in farmers' environmental imaginations and cultural identities not only by offering mechanization, but also by expounding upon what ownership of that machine would mean for themselves as Americans. They created demand for their goods through popularizing self-serving, celebratory memories of the past as national history, preaching to the masses as both salesmen and amateur historians.

Peterson drew a crowd of farmers to the field that morning because he was able to connect the importance of harvesting machinery to their personal identities' as Americans in words they could understand. His bilingual ability and salesmanship were in fact his only good qualities as a salesmen. His boss, George Brewster found him to be utterly incompetent in matters of book keeping, asset management, final settlement, logistics and order preparation. Brewster needed to constantly double-check Peterson's work to prevent damage to both the company's reputation and finances. Peterson routinely complained to Brewster about his commission rate and even pled to the C.H & L.J. McCormick central office in Chicago about Brewster's shoddy work as a general agent - requesting his dismissal: a request they denied and forwarded to Brewster. Despite all

this, Peterson successfully “bulldozed” a higher commission rate than any other sub-agent in Minnesota and Brewster actively preserved Peterson’s job with the company, despite his employee’s insubordination. Peterson had “taken ahold” of the Germans and the Scandinavians in Brown County and Brewster knew that McCormick could not stand up to Peterson there if he became employed by “the opposition.”⁵

After conferring with Johnson and confirming that both he and the machine were ready, Peterson approached his customer in the crowd. Exchanging pleasantries, Peterson again confirmed their agreement – if the machine worked after a fair trial in the field, they would settle for two hundred and ninety-seven dollars cash, plus freight.

Grandstanding a bit more to the modest crowd about the merits of the machine and its value to civilization, Peterson instructed Johnson to start the binder. As Johnson urged his team of horses to “come-up,” the harvester creaked to life: the sickle blade vibrating, the reel pushing wheat to the blade, the apron and elevator collecting the cut and the wire-binder snapping the wheat into perfect sheaves. Peterson breathed a sigh of relief and then invited the crowd to follow along and witness the reaper’s progress, while he and Brewster began shocking the sheaves. They marched alongside the machine all morning and into the afternoon, cutting and binding an acre an hour. Eventually the new owner tried his hand at driving the machine and, fully satisfied, settled with Peterson for cash.

⁵ Brewster to McCormick, February 9, 1877, reel 209; May 21 and July 9, 1877, reel 210; Peterson to McCormick, March 27, 1877, reel 209, Mss 2x; McCormick to Brewster, February 15, 1877, reel 173, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, Letterpress Copy Books, 1856-1902, Mss 1x, MIHCC. Peterson received the McCormick maximum of 10% commission on cash sales, 5% commission on “time” sales. He also received 2% for past-due notes, a commission which was reserved for General Agents.

Brewster reported back to Chicago that the morning's trial was going to be good for fifty binder sales in cash with those Germans the following year.⁶

The Mass-Alchemy of Progress

When Samuel Peterson and other harvester salesmen invoked history to “take ahold” of customers and sell machines, they tapped into an American discourse of progress and civilization. This cultural discourse revolved around the belief that through material progress, American civilization would continue to be perfected until ultimately bringing about the evangelical millennium. As historians Gail Bederman and Daniel Bender have argued, progress and civilization functioned as materially and environmentally self-evident measures of race, class and gender. Those who possessed the latest tools of mechanical invention were the most progressive and civilized. They were therefore destined to be the authorities over all who were more primitive. While this tended to privilege and justify wealthy, white men's authority over women, non-whites and the working-classes, the discourse allowed a space for anyone to contest what was and was not progress, denigrating the claims of others to “civilization” or making their own.⁷

⁶ Brewster to McCormick, July 14, 21 and 25, 1877, reel 210, 2x, provide a description of how Brewster went about starting binders in new territory and Peterson's success in Brown County. McCormick to Brewster, February 20, 1877, reel 173, Mss 1x, indicates that each binder was to be sold for \$140 with a 10% discount for cash, while George A. Freideireich to McCormick, April 30, 1877, reel 209, 2x, shows that each harvester was sold for \$190 with a 10% cash discount. Freights varied from location to location, but Brewster could receive a carload of sixteen harvesters at Mankato from Chicago at a rate of ninety-six dollars a car or about six dollars a harvester, McCormick to Brewster, July 3, 1877, reel 176, 1x; MIHCC.

⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) lays how progress and civilization operated as a cultural discourse that accounted for race, gender and class. Daniel Bender, *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) explains how this discourse was reflected in American's environmental and material perspectives – such that savagery or civilization was deemed obvious to the contemporary eye.

This discourse had deep roots in the enlightenment, but took on localized American traits in the generation after American Independence. As Joyce Appleby has noted, the revolution created a new political entity through the creation of a democratic constitution, but left Americans with no sense of what the ideals of the revolution meant to the conduct of their lives or society. White American men were free from monarchical structures which had controlled their politics, society and economy, but had no models for how to organize such a new society. In the breach, Americans engaged in “self-making” to define the meaning of their revolutionary past to their present in terms of their evangelical religion – a lone cultural institutions which survived the revolution and provided a compass for upward moral direction. In the end, they privileged individual success within the enlightened capitalist economy, which afforded them the freedom to make their own fortunes free from the constraints of political tyranny and the patriarchy of their families of origin. Young men were able to capitalize on the new found geographic, social, and cultural mobility of their new nation and its economy. In this context, economic competition was regarded as a divine mechanism in the new economy, because it was God’s tool for rewarding the pious and punishing the wicked. The rationale seemed irrefutable and self-evident.⁸

This sense of revolutionary meaning was not shared throughout the nation. Rather it was limited to old stock northerners who embraced the downfall of the Crown’s mercantilist policies and seized upon the new economic opportunities of capitalism. They spread this vision of the past, present and future utilizing print culture, creating an

⁸ Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: the First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000):1-25.

imagined community of national sentiment. Southerners stood apart from northerners in this regard because not only was print not as widely distributed among them, but also the revolution was disruptive to a critical feature of their social organization: plantation slavery.⁹

In the northern imagination, the benevolence of capitalism was demonstrated through the technological inventions of their times. As historian Daniel Walker Howe has argued, innovations such as the steamboat, railroad, telegraph, steam printing-press, steel plow, and sewing machine, among many others, were all heralded as significant leaps forward that better facilitated commerce and enabled Americans to take advantage of the opportunities that their nation had to offer. These creations were believed to be possible only because American democracy and God allowed the entrepreneurial and inventive spirit of individuals to flourish. In the words of a northern evangelical, “the vanguard of all progress is a long line of mechanics; the Anvil Chorus the song to which the world has made its grandest march.” Historian Richard Bushman has further argued that in the new “class-less” society of entrepreneurial and inventive freedom, consumer goods became the new mark of respectability, available to anyone that could pay. Nineteenth-century Americans pointed to the new abundance of consumer society as part of the material and environmental changes brought about by technology and commerce as evidence of the divine progress of their civilization. Tethered to an evangelical sense of the millennium, technological progress was one of the keys to perfecting humanity. In this regard, God

⁹ Ibid, 239-266.

divined competition amongst inventors as the strop that sharpened the blade of progress, guaranteeing that only the best survived.¹⁰

Beyond technology, consumerism, and capitalism, territorial expansion across the continent was also a part of the progressive cultural equation. Westward expansion was an important feature of American identity as the nation's Manifest Destiny. Americans believed that they transformed the savagery of the wilderness into the garden of civilization when they brought the land and its resources under the plow.¹¹

The essence of progress and civilization encompassed a set of cultural values that were embodied physically as points of easy comparison. Capital accumulation, technological innovation, competition, and territorial expansion, amongst several others such as gender differentiation, leisure time, ownership of consumer-goods and cleanliness, were all "merits" of civilization that Americans could point to as indications of their progress when compared to others. Making such comparisons did not require a professional specialist, because true progress was apparent to the average American and obviously superior to what had preceded it. Americans from all walks of life and for all manner of purposes were eager to make these comparisons to assuage their personal anxieties and prove that their revolution and their lives had been successful. I label this system of comparison the "alchemy of progress."

¹⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 287-289. "Machinery as a Gospel Worker," *Christian Examiner*, November 18, 1869. Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

¹¹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 700-708.

History was the methodological center of this comparative pseudo-science and the larger cultural discourse. American faith in progress revolved around a belief that civilization was continually improving. History provided the best means for assessing the progressive change over time through referencing the past as compared to the present. Like progress, the meaning and value of history was deemed to be self-evident. In the popular and commercial press anecdotal reference to history were ubiquitous and anyone could use “history” to support a claim to progress. As intertwined concepts, progress and history provided mutually reinforcing lessons to Americans about the future; lessons which must be heeded in order to stay in lock-step with civilization to avoid the savagery of marginalization. Such lessons merely required someone to interpret the meaning of historic anecdotes for their own purposes.

As a viable cultural tool, the alchemy of progress was widely utilized not just by citizens and politicians, but by salesmen. Salesmen used progress to peddle their wares to customers, comparing their modern stock with those tools of antiquity possessed by the potential customer. They also justified the existence of their profession in terms of history and civilization. Sales guilds explicitly connected the labor of traveling salesmen with the spread of knowledge in terms of civilization and history. In 1869, the Society of Commercial Travelers published a twenty-two page booklet, *The System of Commercial Traveling* which utilized a sense of historical progress to defend their labor. The authors stated that salesmen “are fully recognized as one of the exponents of modern civilization” and that “civilization flowed from commerce,” beginning with the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, and the Syrians, and continuing on in contemporary England, France, and Germany. Indeed, “commerce” was the “civilizing conqueror,” and its history “is but the

record of the gradual advancement of mankind from a condition of probation and barbarism to that of national well-being and civilization.” Restrictions, they argued, were “disgraceful to civilization” and deprived Americans of the benefits of the “always-progressing amelioration of mechanical skill and modern science.” At heart, the pamphlet argued that salesmen were public educators providing “indispensable knowledge” and producing “uniformity of rate, freshness of supply, novelty of invention and fabric and novelty of price.” For salesmen, selling goods was the same as spreading civilization and as such, was accompanied by a sweeping history which undergirded their work and their wares in the world.¹²

Wandering canvassers who sold subscription atlases and county histories provide a good example of historically-minded sales rhetoric and the alchemy of progress at work. Bates Harrington’s 1879, *How ‘Tis Done* is a hybrid exposé and “how to” manual on the art of peddling such products through appealing to “public vanity,” a “vision of wealth,” and personal “fear.” These men offered locally focused books which allowed customers to put their homes on the map, place their lives within national history, compare themselves favorably with their neighbors, and ensure that they were remembered in the future. Concentrating their efforts in the Midwest, these agents invited farmers to “see one’s name in print,” and in so doing touched upon an “overpowering bit of egotism... [a character trait] as broad and far-reaching as the boundaries of civilization.” While the rhetoric was seemingly high-minded, these books merely featured

¹² The Society of Commercial Travelers, *The System of Commercial Traveling in Europe and the United States: Its History, Customs and Laws* (Riverside Press, 1869): 1-22.

localized pictures, maps and biographies literally within the same binding as unchanging regional and national narratives.¹³

The canvasser's sales pitch demonstrates the alchemy of progress in practice. To every potential customer, they noted the need for good "white men" who were "intelligent and public-spirited" to subscribe to make the project viable. They frequently mentioned the threat of "the foreign elements" (the "Irish" and "Bohemians") throughout the county who would not support the endeavor and "thereby deprive the county of the greatest blessing that has ever been proposed in that region." These commercial travelers assured potential customers that subscribing to such a work was necessary for "men of education or knowledge... to keep up with the progress of the times." Canvassers further stated that owning a work with such valuable information would place the subscriber on "equal footing with the early pioneer, who has made the settlement, progress and development of the county his life study." As canvassers told it, the publication meant prestige for the county and individual possession meant a boost in local stature akin to blazing the first trail into the wilderness. The sales talk boiled down to loaded cultural comparisons between the customer and his "pioneer" neighbors; "whites" and the "foreign elements"; and ignorance compared to "knowledge."¹⁴

¹³ Bates Harrington, *How 'Tis Done*, 2nd Edition (Syracuse, NY: W.I. Pattison, Publisher, 1890):10, 20. Harrington's focus is on the swindles involving maps, atlases and histories, but also includes brief excerpts on a wider variety of anxiety and desire based swindles including lightning rod peddling and patent-right machinery. Walter T. Ristow, "Alfred T. Andreas and His Minnesota Atlas" *Minnesota History*, Vol. 40 (Fall, 1966): 120-129 and Michael P. Conzen, editor, *Chicago Mapmakers* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1984) offer good introductions to the subscription map, atlas and history industry during the second-half of the nineteenth century.

¹⁴ Harrington, *How 'Tis Done*, 28-29, 151, 153.

Further playing on anxiety they had created through the alchemy of progress, canvassers pushed customers to pay additional money to have their personal biographies, as well as pictures of themselves or their homes, included in the books. Salesmen casually recalled that settlers of the East had failed to record their histories and had been forgotten. These men with the “gift of gab” related to farmers the importance of their new geography and noted that the story of the West must be preserved. In the West, settlers had embraced the “general scheme of advancement” and “improvement,” with specific reference to the increased scale of farming, modern technology and education. They did not deserve to be forgotten, because their lives were too important to the greatness of the nation. The drummer appealed to the farmer’s desire to be on par or even superior to their neighbors, encouraging them to present their ideals and dreams rather than the realities of their lives. They explained that the book would ensure that premium subscribers would be remembered “for years to come,” and that the histories and atlases would be “cherished” by their children as well as “handed down through future generations.” Functioning as self-appointed historians, canvassers sold these products through orienting customers within a historical narrative of the past and present, further implying its critical value to the course of their future – as people remembered or forgotten. The alchemy of progress was their principal tool as it was for salesmen across the economy and throughout the nation.¹⁵

Nineteenth-century America was a nation obsessed with the progressive meaning of its larger history. The nation lacked professional authorities on the topic, because of its self-evident nature. In the void, everyone could be a historian. The histories and

¹⁵ Harrington, *How 'Tis Done*, 16-18, 33, 148, 168.

narratives that gained the most traction in American society were those that were most closely aligned with the alchemy of progress and, more importantly, were championed by national organizations. Samuel Peterson and the rest of McCormick's canvassing sales force were not alone in their sales motivated invocation of history. Salesmen, entrepreneurs, advertisers and canvassers from all manner and size of businesses utilized the alchemy of progress to make history pervasive in the public mind as their primary tool for generating desire or anxiety within potential customers. These salesmen created a national market for their goods in some measure through popularizing narratives of the past and teaching Americans to see themselves within that selective scheme of national history.¹⁶

Sowing History and Demand in the Harvester Industry

During the second-half of the nineteenth century, the harvester industry grew exponentially from producing and selling several hundred machines in the mid-1840s to hundreds of thousands of machines by the 1890s. As early as the 1850s companies developed sales networks which gradually came to include thousands of canvassers across the country to generate demand for their new and expensive machinery. These sales agents and their parent companies, made history and the alchemy of progress a central part of their marketing strategy, actively inserting themselves, their machines and

¹⁶ Laird, *Advertising Progress* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 100-151 discusses tactics for associating business with progress, but does not discuss the important of history too this effort. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994):196-234 discusses the use of "civilization" as a key advertising concept for "animating" objects, but does not infer how it shaped American's historical imaginations. Timothy Spears, *100 Years on the Road: the Traveling Salesman in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) and David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: the Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) both highlight the role of traveling salesmen and earlier itinerant peddlers during the nineteenth century in creating a national market for consumer goods – neither discusses the use of historical narrative in creating that market.

their customers into the history of civilization. By and large rival products evolved together at about the same pace during this era. New-models and improvements were quickly duplicated throughout the industry, limiting technological advantages as well as making marketing and advertising very important to economic success. Cyrus Hall McCormick's various firms and partners did not necessarily create this marketing strategy, but his longevity in the field and his businesses' extant records provide the best evidence of the strategy's execution.

During the mid-1870s, C.H. & L.J McCormick published sales literature in the form of circulars, bulletins, a house quarterly newspaper – *The Farmers' Advance* – as well as annual catalogs. These were the all-important tools which filled the salesman's grip. This printed matter detailed the core of McCormick's claim to supremacy by laying out a narrative which tallied the firm's abundant progressive merits for potential customers. The annual catalogs were the longest and most thorough material and provide the nucleus of the company's marketing narrative thus offering a vantage point to observe the company's changing use of history as an asset. The main text of the McCormick sales catalogs was formatted the same way from year to year. Every catalog included four basic elements: an annual letter from management to the customer, a list of noteworthy awards and premiums, and descriptions of the machinery, detailing the newest advancements and testimonials from satisfied customers. As printing technology became cheaper, the catalogs gradually became longer and included more color-lithograph illustrations, but their essence remained the same.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest*, 491-492 notes that the *Farmers Advance* began to be published in 1871, three years after the Champion firms of Ohio commenced printing a trade paper. Unfortunately, few of copies of this quarterly have survived.

The first annual catalog was published in 1859 and incorporated all four elements. The catalog evolved from single-page bulletins, phrased as letters from the manufacturer that incorporated tidbits of these same features in tiny font along with an order form at the bottom of the page. The first catalog included only one print illustration of a reaper on its cover and sixteen pages of print. Ghost-written for Cyrus H. McCormick by his brother and business partner, William, the heart of the 1859 catalog was an eight-page “letter” detailing the virtues of the machine. This letter was a mixed-variety of claims to the progress of civilization and a detailed comparison of the McCormick Company and machine to the competition.¹⁸

The firm’s first attempt at a long-form sales pamphlet was a response to other manufacturers’ catalogs, which William wrote, were “whole books” of “humbuggery and misrepresentations.” The McCormick catalog was set on providing the “facts” and protecting farmers from being “misled” by the “gross fabrications” of others. William McCormick effectively compared his company to other firms utilizing the alchemy of progress as the standard of measure, finding McCormick “superior” in every instance. While somewhat clumsy, the 1859 McCormick catalog set out a format which was subsequently followed for the rest of the century.¹⁹

The greatest portion of McCormick’s letter to the farmers in the 1859 catalog focused on clarifying McCormick’s record in international trials. The catalog listed

¹⁸ C.H. McCormick per W.S. McCormick, “McCormick’s Patent Reaping and Mowing Machine!” January, 1853, bulletin; C.H. McCormick by Wm. S. McCormick, “McCormick’s Reaping and Mowing Machines,” 1859, annual catalog, transcription, box 1, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, Advertising materials and catalogs, 1847-1902, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

¹⁹ C.H. McCormick by Wm. S. McCormick, “McCormick’s Reaping and Mowing Machines,” 1859, annual catalog, transcription, 8-9, Box 1, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

McCormick's achievements at World's Fairs and other prominent international competitions, beginning with the "Great Council Medal," at the London Crystal Palace in 1851 and continuing on to list prizes from the Great French Exhibition in 1855 at Paris; the 1856 French Universal Exhibition; the Royal Agriculture Society of England in 1857; and, finally, "A Gold Medal and Diploma" awarded by the U.S. National Agricultural Society in 1857. The list was a correction of their opposition's catalogs. These competitors, unworthy of "public confidence," besmirched McCormick's record and "excite prejudice against my machine," while claiming false victories for themselves in all of these prestigious settings. In a choppy style, William then included two-pages of fully cited newspaper quotations and testimonials from prominent citizens, politicians and military officials supporting McCormick's claims to the "truth" as asserted by his list of awards. In total this evidence was intended to convey that McCormick's reaper was "widely known throughout the civilized world," "a triumph of inventive genius," and "indispensable" to farmers.²⁰

Correcting history was important to C.H. McCormick & Bros. because international trials and World's Fairs were the highest venue of competition in the civilized world. These competitions, judged by international dignitaries, provided prolonged and closely monitored demonstrations in all manner of field conditions. Winners carried the torch of progress onward while losers "died out." Spreading false results undermined the divine sanctification and "public confidence" which the "true"

²⁰ Ibid, 8-15.

winner had justly earned. Company management regarded their machine's historic record of success in these events as the firm's highest endorsement.²¹

Beyond the trials, William McCormick laid out more "facts" of "intrinsic merit" regarding reapers more generally. Through prattling prose, the author labored through a comparison of the reaper to the railroad and the threshing machine, emphasizing the technological progress which had replaced "the flail," "the cradle" and "the stage" to benefit "the wages of harvest hands." McCormick coupled material progress with geographic progress, emphasizing that older tools "had been almost wholly abandoned in the Western States." While such sweeping statements were inaccurate, McCormick's objective was to inspire farmers' comparative sense of progress in material and geographic terms, hoping to generate anxiety and sales from farmers that feared being materially left behind.²²

William's catalog also outlined a history of the firm's manufacturing. The company's association with the "very origin of the Reaper" in 1831 was mentioned, but more important was its business in the West and the establishment of their "extensive and superior" factory in Chicago in 1848. The factory had increased its production of reapers year by year from 1848 to 1858. Great emphasis was placed on the sheer volume of raw materials "purchased in cash" for 1859 including weights and volumes of wrought iron, pig iron, cast steel, white & lead colors, lumber, chain, sheet zinc, tin & copper, oil & turpentine, lumber, coal and nails. Such materials would allow the factory to employ

²¹ Ibid, 10.

²² Ibid. 1-2. Emphasis in text.

three-hundred men to build five-thousand machines later that year and was presented as “positive evidence of its [McCormick] superiority.”²³

The ad copy also indicated that the increased sales of machines which mirrored the increased production of the reaper works was proof of the farming public’s approval. Customer demand was “constantly increasing,” because it recognized the “benefit of my more than 20 years experience” and ignored the “desperate efforts of rival manufacturers.” Such demand required the machine to be “shipped in all directions,” because farmers recognized “the perfect simplicity, great strength and durability” which allowed them to use the machine “with as little risk as the plow.” Encouraging customers to trust in their own mechanical competence, William reassured them that McCormick machines could be operated with “no attention at all” from agents.²⁴

The catalog also included eight pages of testimonials and two pages of mechanical descriptions of the actual machines. The testimonials came from farmers across the country and supported the claim that the machine was simple, durable, and superior to competitors, while successfully functioning in a variety of conditions. Aimed at generating desire the testimonials suggested that machine farmers were more progressive because they made more money and had larger farms. For its part, the mechanical description detailed the improvements in the machines’ design in fairly bland terms.²⁵

²³ Ibid. 2-4. Emphasis in text.

²⁴ Ibid. 4-5. Emphasis in text.

²⁵ Ibid, 5-8, 15-25.

Within the alchemy of progress, the scale of manufacturing, longevity of operation and success in competition were easy points of comparison to score against competitors. Bigger was always better and factories were monuments to progress and civilization. Victory in international trials was further proof of superiority. History and longevity however, were the ultimate indication of progress, because a firm's survival and growth over time indicated that it had flourished in the continual competition of the marketplace – where the customer was the judge. On the same scale, farmers that embraced the most progressive machines were also rewarded with material success.

Catalogs throughout the harvester industry during the 1860s and 1870s embraced similar thematic features in the same basic format, but became more concise over time. The bland mechanical descriptions became more narrative, touching on public popularity and trial victories, rather than trivial details like the circumference of the drive wheel and the shape of the sickle blade. The section on international competition was reduced to a confident list of awards and locations, rather than a thoroughly documented discussion of historical arguments. Descriptions of the factory became more intensive including the dimensions of each workshop facility, proximity to rail lines and inventories of manufacturing machinery as well as materials. As the technology became cheaper, “bird’s eye” lithograph illustrations of factory works became fixtures in every catalog. Testimonials remained a mainstay and there was increasing emphasis placed upon the geographic extent of sales, especially internationally. Marketing strategies across the

harvester industry evolved dialectically and catalogs throughout the business were reminiscent of one another in terms of general content.²⁶

McCormick literature became more selective in its invocation of history as well as more forceful in its assertions about the meaning of the past. For instance, the 1861 catalog read: “The McCormick is the oldest Machine in existence, having any claim to *merit*, being the *first* practical development of power as applied to harvesting. Year by year, from infancy to the present manhood’s prime it has grown in favor, till there is scarce a spot beneath the sun where its triumphs are not known.” William dropped the details of the industry debates and explicitly stated what their record meant. Oddly, despite claiming to have the “oldest Machine” the literature did not assert 1831 as the moment of invention. With the Civil War looming, the company instead emphasized its more recent “FOURTEEN YEARS in the city of Chicago,” rather than its roots in the Old Dominion. Cyrus McCormick had incurred popular wrath as a known southern-sympathizing peace-Democrat. While he did not apologize for his views, his company’s sale literature underlined the manufactory’s connection to the progress of farmers in the North-West, rather than the South. This relationship would only be further stressed in the wake of the 1871 Chicago fire. McCormick advertising bulletins noted that the city and its works rose “from the ashes,” because of the “teeming millions produced by the

²⁶ C.H. McCormick & Bros., “McCormick’s Reaper and Mower,” 1861, annual catalog, 1; “McCormick’s Prize Harvesters,” 1868, annual catalog, 1, Mss 5x; D.M. Osborne & Co., “1878 – The Twenty Second Annual Pamphlet,” 1878, annual catalog, International Harvester Company, Competitors’ Advertising Literature, 1832-1950, Mss 10z, MIHCC

farmers of the vast Northwest,” to which the firm had contributed through the “invention, as well as the manufacture of the Reaper.”²⁷

Significantly, the 1859 catalog was addressed to both farmers *and* salesmen. The catalog was intended to educate both groups about the merits of the company and the machines as well as the supposedly libelous claims of their competitors. Likely most farmers did not bother reading the long self-righteous *exparté* or the historical evidence, however such information was useful ammunition in the hands of reaper agents as they sought to persuade customers and traded insults with their opponents. The annual catalog was the company’s most important means for distributing information about itself and its products to its own employees, who in turn shared the material with customers by word of mouth.²⁸

The annual catalogs reached the customer through direct interaction with traveling salesmen. Canvassers, like Samuel Peterson in New Ulm, were employed seasonally on commission from the spring through the harvest and frequently changed employers from year to year. The best canvassers in the harvester trade were particularly well versed on the merits of all makes of machines, because rival companies vied for their labor. Every winter, these salesmen wanted to see what tools the manufacturer would provide them and “call[ed] loudly for Reading matter.” They made their choice of employer based on

²⁷ C.H. McCormick & Bros., “McCormick’s Reaper and Mower,” 1861, and “McCormick’s Prize Harvesters,” 1868, Mss 5x; C.H. McCormick & Bro. to Agents and Farmers of the Country, “McCormicks’ New Reaper Works.” January 10, 1873, box 15, Cyrus Hall McCormick I, Correspondence and Subject File, 1788-1939, Mss 2A, MIHCC. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest*, 3-63, 202-273, 308-359, – includes extensive information about Cyrus McCormick’s stances on political as well as Presbyterian sectionalism, including his vain efforts before and during the Civil War to defuse the conflict.

²⁸ C.H. McCormick by Wm. S. McCormick, “McCormick’s Reaping and Mowing Machines,” 1859, 1, Box 1, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

their commission rates, but also the quality of printed material available and the established reputation of the manufacturer. A better reputation and higher quality advertising material enabled salesmen to generate more sales and maintain higher prices. In direct competition for sales with rival firms, canvassers would rely upon the manufacturer's published materials for important points of progressive comparison: including a firm's scale of manufacturing, its record in international trials and its larger history of production.²⁹

In common, canvassers from across the industry utilized similar methods to make their case and excite customer interest. As William J. Hanna, a sales manager at McCormick's Chicago office explained to a recruit, being a sub-agent meant "active out door work, travelling and canvassing from houses to house," rather than simply "staying in town and advertising!" Circular letters from Chicago to McCormick salesmen across the country regularly encouraged sub-agents to visit farmers "again and again" as the "only way to make numerous sales." The office managers believed that the "strong assertions" of "superiority" made by agents and advertising would be sustained by their machine and that the extensive canvassing effort would "show its results at harvest."³⁰

Salesmen drove house to house on horse drawn wagons with bags full of sales literature, lugging a sample reaper in the wagon bed. From their grip they delivered "into farmers hands," a wealth of printed matter. Making numerous trips, they always

²⁹ M.T. Grattan to McCormick, January 30 and February 7, 1877; S.D. Peterson to McCormick, March 27, 1877, E.M. Brooks to McCormick, January 10, 1877, reel 209, E.M. Brooks to McCormick, May 8, 1877, reel 210, Mss 2x; McCormick & Bro. to H.H. Johnson, November 11, 1868, reel 109, Mss 1x, MIHCC.

³⁰ W.J. Hanna to H.B. Mack, December 8, 1868, reel 109, Mss 1x; C.H. McCormick & Bro's., "Private Circular to Agents," March, 1867, Box 1, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

presented the farmer with something new- whether it was the annual catalog, *The Farmers' Advance* or a shorter localized bulletin detailing the victory of the McCormick machine over another manufacturer's inferior contraption in a field trial. The Chicago office spared no effort in ensuring that their canvassers had ample material to share. *The Farmer's Advance* was published four times during the growing season. They also distributed national newspaper articles reporting their victories in major fairs and competitions every summer. The firm was printing and distributing 800,000 catalogs annually by the 1880s and exponentially more copies of the *Advance* and other ephemera. Furthermore, they encouraged their agents to carry the advertising material of their competitors allowing them to make side-by-side comparisons between the McCormick machines and their rivals. All of this material assisted the sub-agent in the important task of "getting before... [the farmer] the merits" of the McCormick machine.³¹

Sitting down in farmhouse parlors, McCormick's reaper men talked customers through their literature. In these settings, the canvasser was a storyteller alone. He could not demonstrate the operation of his machine until harvest. He could only invite farmers to see and touch a sample machine and he could make promises, encouraging them to imagine what owning such a machine might mean for their lives. The agent might begin by asking about the farmer's family as well as how much land a farmer owned, how much was improved for planting and what crops and livestock he raised as well as the

³¹E.M. Brooks to McCormick, March 3, 1877, reel 209, Mss 2x; John Edgar, "To the Agents for the McCormick Machines," June 23, 1869, Box 1, Mss 5x; C.H. & L.J. McCormick, "Two Gold Medals at Vienna Award the McCormick!" September 20, 1873, ad copy, Box 50; W.J. Hanna to C.H. McCormick I, September 13, 1879, Box 52, Mss 2A, MIHCC. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest*, 491-492. Gordon M. Winder, *the American Reaper: Harvesting Networks and Technology, 1830-1910* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2012), 120-121.

sort of tools he used. Such information provided important details for the yarn the agent was about to unfurl, but was also valuable reconnaissance for assessing a farmer's creditworthiness. From there the agent would describe the great "prospects" for the coming year's wheat harvest. Every year the agent usually exclaimed, "We have seldom seen a season open better than the present." The winter had been favorable for a good growing season and grain was fetching a high price in Chicago.³²

The agent then pointed out that the farmer had the opportunity to take advantage of the ideal circumstances. The farmer simply had to expand his acreage of wheat on the land that he already owned. Of course, the agent then emphasized how much time and labor it would take to cut that wheat using a cradle scythe and binding the sheaths by hand. A man could only cut and bind an acre a day without the assistance of a machine. He was further limited by the short ten day window when wheat was ripe for harvest. Furthermore, bad weather could further limit the period of harvest by making the grain wet and tangled, and thus more difficult to cradle.³³

After setting up the obvious solution, the agent then suggested that purchasing a reaper at harvest would enable the farmer to seize the golden opportunity. Using a reaper, one man could cut an acre an hour in any circumstance. He would need to be followed by at least three family members to bind the grain, but in the process he could increase his acreage from maybe ten acres of the wheat to more than fifty. Fifty acres of wheat was

³² C.H. McCormick & Bro's., "Private Circular to Agents," March, 1867; John Edgar, "To the Agents for the McCormick Machine," June 23, 1869, Box 1, Mss 5x, MIHCC. Edgar's letter makes clear that sub agents should not extend credit to homesteaders, renters, those badly in debt, those who lives on property that was not titled, those on railroad or school land and those that were unknown in the district.

³³ C.H. McCormick by Wm. S. McCormick, "McCormick's Reaping and Mowing Machines," 1859, 5, box 1, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

the magic number to make the reaper pay. Not only would fifty acres allow the farmer to buy the reaper “on time” (over two harvests, without a down payment), but also to make more money and afford the finer things in life. The agent might then refer to prominent neighbors who already purchased a reaper or perhaps he would page through the catalog’s testimonials to highlight others who had invested in a reaper and enjoyed the fruits of civilization. On all counts, the salesmen emphasized what the reaper had “done, to lighten toil, to dignify farming, and to raise the farmer out of the dirt, into the purer better air of culture and refinement.” One agent reminisced that such information was a “great education for the farmer, who would be back in the old rut if he did not know machines.” They emphasized that the cradle the farmer still used was the way of the past and that the machine at their fingertips, was the way of progress, civilization and the future. The customer could become a member of the “better class of farmers.”³⁴

The salesman proceeded to explain why the McCormick reaper was superior to all others. The agent tallied the merits of their machines according to the alchemy of progress, expanding on the points in the catalog. In particular, the canvassers relished telling the story of the company’s victory at the London Crystal Palace in 1851. At this first international exhibition, the great nations of civilization displayed their magnificent objects of “luxury and ornament” as well of those of industry. The peddler explained that upon the opening of the exhibition, the United States’ department within the palace was

³⁴ Every catalog in the second half of the nineteenth century included testimonials, which stated the quality of the machines as tools as well as their economic value. C.H. McCormick by Wm. S. McCormick, “McCormick’s Reaping and Mowing Machines,” 1859, 5, 15-25, box 1; C.W. Shanto “A Wonderful Success: Great Northwestern Exposition,” September, 1879, Pamphlet, box 2, Mss 5x; S.S. Pease to McCormick, May 4, 1877, reel 210, Mss 2x; C.N. Frazier, “Reminiscences of C.N. Frazier, September 6, 1930” in Herbert Kellar, editor, “Harvester Reminiscences,” 1930, 3, box 1, Reaper Centennial Celebration Records, 1923-1936, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

seen as the “poorest and least interesting” exhibition, lacking in objects of culture and sparsely occupied with tools rather than fine arts. It was derisively called the “Prairie Ground,” surely a slap to the face of any Midwesterner! The McCormick reaper was likewise “the butt of British... waggers,” described as a “cross between an Astley’s chariot, a flying machine and a treadmill.” The storyteller joyfully explained that these sentiments changed as soon as the British saw the glory of the reaper working in the field. At an official trial, McCormick’s machine successfully cut wet and tangled grain in horrendous conditions, while defeating a longtime American rival, Obed Hussey as well as a European manufacturer. At a follow-up trial, thousands thronged to see the machine in action and ultimately McCormick was awarded the Grand Council Medal. His victory restored honor to the United States and was “recognized as the most valuable contribution” at the Crystal Palace. By the end of the exhibition all had witnessed “American genius and skill, which convinced them in this age of progress and invention,” that they may yet “learn” from the young Republic.³⁵

In telling this story, reapermen tapped into their customer’s sense of patriotism as well as history. The McCormick triumph at the Crystal Palace demonstrated the promise of American democracy as well as the nation’s role in expanding the boundaries of civilization. The company’s victories at later competitions was further evidence of its continued relationship with progress. Canvassers liked to point out that Obed Hussey had fallen behind in 1851 and no longer manufactured reapers. Likewise, they suggested that

³⁵ W.C. Rivers, “The Great Exhibition – The American Department,” *New York Daily Times*, October 3, 1851. Horace Greeley, “The Crystal Palace and Its Lessons,” *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art and Fashion*, (May, 1852): 473. William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Seed Time, 1809-1856* (New York: The Century Co., 1930): 385-394

more recent losers would also soon be out of business and forgotten. McCormick salesmen had already explained why mechanized reaping was important to each farmer's individual progress. Through regaling customers with these stories and the merits of their machines, canvassers convinced farmers that their product was both superior to and more prestigious than any other.

Once harvest came, the agent ensured that his non-committal prospects witnessed the "starting" of a sold machine. Upon seeing that the machine functioned as well as promised, the customer paid for the machine and the spectators followed suit, placing orders for their own machines on the spot. The demonstration confirmed that the machine worked, but the sales talk and storytelling persuaded the farmer to see the machine in action and cultivated the farmers' desire to own one.³⁶

In particularly competitive sales territories reapermen from opposing companies issued trial challenges. In these situations, the challenge was usually for a particular farmer's business and the farmer was free to buy "the machine *which he prefers*." The trial was usually well-publicized in the neighborhood and whole communities turned out to watch the competition. Such events were so common that agricultural periodicals like *the Prairie Farmer* printed score cards for evaluating each competitor according to standardized criteria. Salesmen made a big noise about these events, emphatically fighting amongst themselves, exchanging insults and playing to the gallery of spectators. Generally such commotion was mere posturing and showmanship, as opposing agents usually had little real animosity between them. Agents acknowledged that the real work

³⁶ "Edgar, "To the Agents for the McCormick Machines," June 23, 1869, box 1, Mss 5x, E.M. Brooks to McCormick, July 11 and 12, 1877, reel 210, Mss 2x, MIHCC.

of a trial was “well done before they commenced” during the canvas. What farmers saw at the trial tended to confirm what they already thought and had heard about at length. These trials were historical reenactments of the international competitions. They were also opportunities for local farmers to witness and partake in the progressive glory of head-to-head competition first-hand.³⁷

After a trial, opposing firms wasted no time in printing and distributing the non-definitive results as overwhelming victories. “Who won” made “no difference,” as varying newspapers, bulletins and circulars claimed the day for every competitor. Most firms were actively engaged in “puffery,” paying for newspapers to publish biased and imagined trial accounts as if they were typical newspaper articles. D.M. Osborne & Co., informed its agents that such tactics were “the most profitable way to advertise” as the “science of advertising” allowed “false statements and misrepresentations” to be spread “just as easily as real truth.” C.H. & L.J. McCormick was also engaged in such subterfuge from top to bottom. Salesmen as well as management in Chicago bought favorable press regardless of the actual results or the magnitude of the event. Beyond newspapers, they also printed these stories in their own bulletins and the *Farmers’ Advance* with headlines like “Sweeps the Field!” “A Bad Day for Chokers!” and “A Grand Fizzle!” Salesmen distributed all of this printed matter to customers, recounting the falsified stories as legitimate news and as history in the making.³⁸

³⁷ Scales for Reapers and Mowers, *The Prairie Farmer*, August, 1855. C.N. Frazier, “Reminiscences of C.N. Frazier, September 6, 1930” in Herbert Kellar, editor, “Harvester Reminiscences,” 1930, 3, box 1, Mss 1Q; Edgar, “To the Agents for the McCormick Machines,” June 23, 1869, box 1, Mss 5x, MIHCC, emphasis in text.

³⁸ “Great Reaper Trial! A Grand Fizzle!” circular, N.D. (c. 1874-79); “The Rattle of the Reapers: The McCormick on the War Path!” June 1, 1882, circular, box 2, Mss 5x; “Grand Exhibition of Self-Binding Harvesters at Decatur, IL” N.D., (c. 1882); Lake Ransom, “All Agents Should Read this Carefully,” June

Successfully selling harvesters meant that a salesman was able to tap into a customer's environmental and historical imagination as well as his pocketbook. Owning a machine required a farmer to reorganize farmland. In most cases farm families had to increase their overall improved acreage and raise more grain to pay for the machine. They made this choice to incur debt and risk, because salesmen were able to orient them within a specific historical rendering that equated mechanization with the progress of civilization as well future personal wealth. Harvester salesmen were colloquial historians, interpreting the past for the masses of rural Americans and explaining what their machines meant to that past as well as the future trajectory of both individual owners and civilization.

Reaper salesmen and the industry at large succeeded in making their machine a touchstone of progress in the public imagination. *Scientific American*, among many others, regularly referenced the reaper alongside the telegraph, the railroad, the power loom and the sewing machine as one of the "exponents of civilization," that "bring us nearer to that social millennium." The nationally-known journalist-turned-politician, Horace Greeley frequently shared his belief that the reaper had enabled the progress of urban manufacturing and the social uplift of the mechanic and laborer. The agricultural writer and rural taste-maker Solon Robinson whose great mission was to "elevate the standing of the cultivators of the soil," believed that wheat was the great crop of civilization and "*must be cut by machines.*" An 1851 *Chicago Daily Democrat* article

13, 1878, box 31, Mss 10z; W.J. Hanna to C.H. McCormick, September 13, 1879, box 52; W.J. Hanna to C.H. McCormick I, August 29, 1881, box 53, Mss 2A; C.M Fullerton, "Reminiscences of C.M. Fullerton, September 5, 1930" in Herbert Kellar, editor, "Harvester Reminiscences," 1930, 3, box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

summarized the value of the machine, stating that the reaper “conquers nature to the benign end of civilization,” progressively transforming the continent as it pressed westward.³⁹

Evangelical preachers too made ubiquitous references in their sermons to the reaping-machine. They noted God’s divine intention for both the land and man’s invention of the reaper. The “All-wise Power” created the “Arable land” of the Midwest, which “prophesied grain-crops and these predicted reaping-machines.” The reaper functioned as a “gospel worker... written over with the promise of a new Eden to be won out of the earth.” One sermon held that the reaper, and indeed all progressive machinery, was “one of the world’s great democratic forces,” acting as a “mighty level placed under the lowest classes of society to raise them up.” The reaper not only “doubled the crop of the country, but doubled its manhood.” Beyond ringing endorsements of the country’s divine progress, ministers also utilized the reaping-machine metaphorically in their jeremiads. The 1859 Reverend J.A. James encouraged greater energy in proselytizing, stating that “God’s harvest must be gathered with his own implement... No reaping machine of modern invention can be supplied to us: the sickle of the gospel of Christ is still in our hands.” These statements were tied to the already popular “spiritual harvest”

³⁹ Three Great American Inventions,” *Valley Farmer*, August, 1860: “Invention, the Ally of Civilization,” *Scientific American*, February 13, 1864. “Horace Greeley’s Lecture to the Mechanics,” *The Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), August 19, 1859. Solon Robinson, “A Proposition, to Facilitate Agricultural Improvement, *Albany Cultivator* in Herbert Kellar, Editor, *Solon Robinson: Pioneer and Agriculturalist*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1936): 87. Solon Robinson, *Facts for Farmers* in Kellar, *Solon Robinson*, vol. 2 (New York: A.J. Johnson, 1866): 668, 682, emphasis in text. *Chicago Daily Democrat*, December 23, 1851, as quoted in Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Seedtime*, 271.

metaphors within evangelical rhetoric, but indicate the salience of the reaper's progress in American culture.⁴⁰

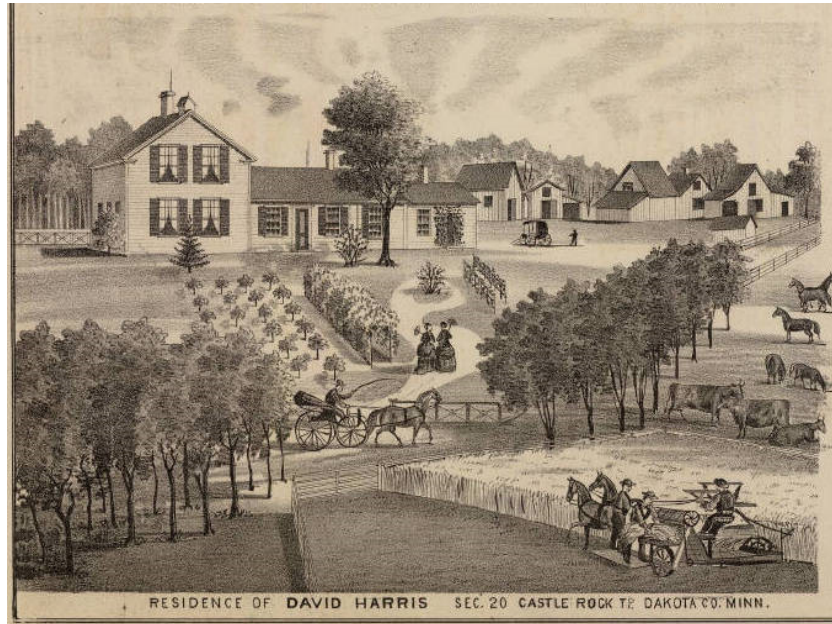


Figure 1: Residence of David Harris. Harris paid to have this idealized drawing of his homestead included in Andreas' Atlas of Minnesota (1874). He may not have even owned a reaper, but he certainly wanted other people to think he did.

Beyond politicians, preachers and newspapermen, there is some indication that customers bought the history as well as the machine. In many instances, county histories funded by local subscribers listed the first time such machines were used in their territory alongside the “first death,” the “first birth” and the “first marriage.” County atlas patrons also paid to include depictions of harvesters in their idealized illustrations of their farmsteads. These people wanted to be associated with the reaping-machine, because it

⁴⁰ Rev. H.W. Bellows, “The Moral Significance of the Crystal Palace,” *the North American Review*, July, 1854, 14, 24. “Machinery as a Gospel Worker,” *Christian Examiner*, November 18, 1869, 2, 10, 13-14. Rev. J.A. James “Preaching,” in W.K. Pendleton, A.W. Campbell, R. Milligan and R. Richardson, eds. *The Millennial Harbinger Devoted to Primitive Christianity*, volume 2, number 1 (January, 1859): 292.

was a powerful material symbol of progress and a reflection upon their own status as progressive farmers.⁴¹

“Established 1831”

From the late 1850s until the late 1870s, the marketing strategies in the harvester industry remained relatively static – relying upon house calls, trials and narratives based upon the alchemy of progress. Throughout this time, however, the “industrial art” of reaping, was constantly changing through the efforts of tinkerers, mechanics and inventors at firms across the country. As could be anticipated, these innovations promoted greater efficiency of labor and value. Inventors lightened the draft, widened the sickle, combined the mower and the reaper into a single machine, mechanized raking, created an elevator and apron to collect the cut grain, attached a binding platform for laborers and eventually invented apparatuses to bind the grain with wire and later twine. Specific articulations of these mechanisms were patented and then licensed to other manufacturers that operated in non-competing regions. Competing patents could be secured to produce the same final outcome of a technology, such as binding grain with wire, but the process needed to be novel enough to avoid prosecutable patent infringement. Once a new outcome was patented, knock-offs emerged usually within a year. Machines incorporated many overlapping patented mechanisms within a single “modern” model, encouraging manufacturers to create “patent pools” with strategic allies to share technologies. Sharing

⁴¹ Edward D. Neill, *History of Houston County* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Company, 1882): 490. A.T. Andreas, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* (Chicago, A.T. Andreas Publishers, 1874): 61.

patents with a distant manufacturer was an easy way to gain a competitive edge in a regionally competitive market like the Midwest.⁴²

Beginning in 1875, C.H. & L.J. McCormick faced a problem: the firm was on the outside of a “wire-binder” patent pool, looking in. William Deering, D.M Osborne & Co. and Walter A. Wood Mowing & Reaping Machine Company, as well as several smaller firms, manufactured and sold the “Locke” or “Gordon” patented wire-binders beginning in 1875. Denied a license to either, McCormick did not patent and sell a comparable product until 1877 and in that year, their manufacture of binders was very limited. The wire-binder was a complex mechanism attached to the side of a grain harvester, which tied grain into uniform sheaths. As a D.M. Osborne & Co. catalog advertised, the self-binder “saves the wages and board of from five to eight men.... Doing better work than can be done by and hand and with none of the waste.” These “self-evident” merits were great sales fodder. While the machine was expensive, it was easily sold as a tool that would allow the farmer to profit from larger crops free from the hassle of itinerant laborers. Without an analogous product for two full seasons, McCormick’s market share was slipping, however their rhetoric of “superiority” continued unchanged.⁴³

In 1879, twine-binders were introduced by Deering and Wood, and again McCormick was on the outside. Advocating the obvious superiority of twine over wire,

⁴² Winder, *American Reaper*, 37-64 is a fantastic geographic analysis of “patent pools” in the harvester industry.

⁴³ D.M Osborne & Co. “Harvesting Machinery,” 1879, Annual Catalog, 10, box 31, Mss 10z; Fullerton, “Reminiscences of C.M. Fullerton, September 5, 1930” in Kellar, ed., “Harvester Reminiscences,” 1930, 3, box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvester*, 536-572 describes the complexity of patent law, license relationships and negotiations in great detail, however, excludes the reality of product comparison in real time.

was a bit more nuanced than advertising the advantages of automatic over hand binding. To make the case, salesmen resorted to fear-mongering. They labored to demonstrate that wire was counter-productive to the entire project of harvesting grain, either for personal or market consumption. Wire, they claimed, could not be successfully sorted out in the threshing process. The results were negative on three-counts. The wire would damage the expensive threshing machine. Milling companies would not buy grain with wire in it. Finally, livestock would be killed by eating wire that was mixed in with their grain or left in the pastures. Such statements were debatable, but as ubiquitous voices in rural America, these salesmen traveling door to door and publishing newspaper “puffery” on the topic both locally and nationally, planted potent seeds of doubt. These sentiments were difficult to correct in the public imagination, because of the lack of established and trusted public authorities on the topic.⁴⁴

In response to these negative allegations and patent deficiencies C.H. & L.J. McCormick developed an evolving branding strategy to claim authority over the harvester industry in the public mind and negate their competitors’ touted mechanical advantage. Beginning in in 1879, the company asserted a paternalistic authority over the entire industry based on its long historic record and invention of “the first successful reaper ever made.” The catalog that year historicized the company’s significance:

It is a well known fact, that ever since 1831, the name of McCormick has been inseparably linked with the recorded progress of the invention and manufacture of grain and grass-cutting machinery; and in all the years... the machinery bearing that name has been found to be in advance of anything in the field; for, in the

⁴⁴ C.H. & L.J. McCormick, “C.H. & L.J. McCormick: Harvesting Machinery,” 1879, Annual Catalog, box 2, Mss 5x; Walter A. Wood M. & R.M Co., “Harvesting Machines Manufactured Exclusively by Walter A. Wood,” 1882, annual catalog, 7, box 42; Wm. Deering & Co., “Deering Twine Binders, Reapers and Mowers,” 1884, annual catalog, box 14, Mss 10z, MIHCC. “Another Self Binder,” *The American Farmer*, August 1879, 8. “Wire in Wheat,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 26, 1879, 7.

ceaseless round of invention and improvement, year by year we have kept pace with the demands of a progressive age, so that the article of our manufacture have never yet been 'weighed and found wanting.'

The narrative went on to marginalize the rest of the industry, explaining that "whoever builds a mower, reaper or harvester, copies... the McCormick of nearly fifty years ago."

The ad-copy brushed off the company's technological deficiencies, instead proclaiming that "History but repeats itself," as the McCormick continually demonstrated "overwhelming proof" that it is "*foremost in the field*" through international trials and sales to farmers.⁴⁵

The ad-copy further utilized the firm's historic record to claim a recognized benevolent relationship with farmers, as a trusted advisor. The invention "lightens their labors" and "curtails their expenses." Most incredibly, McCormick's invention bestowed civilization upon the farmer because it, "relieves their wives and daughters of the odious slavery of harvest time." C.H. & L.J. McCormick were responsible for *all* of the economic and cultural benefits that owning any manufacture of harvesting machinery conferred. The 1879 catalog followed the usual conventions of the progress-centric marketing strategy, with the crucial twist of claiming absolute credit for the entire history of the industry. Beginning in 1879 and continuing until the formation of International Harvester in 1902, every McCormick catalog cover began with the simple declarative statement, "Established 1831."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ C.H. & L.J. McCormick, "C.H. & L.J. McCormick: Harvesting Machinery," 1879, Annual Catalog, box 2, Mss 5x, MIHCC, emphasis in text.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The shift to McCormick's "Established 1831," can be attributed to the founder's oldest son, Cyrus McCormick II. Having graduated from Princeton in 1878, he immediately joined his father and uncle's family business and became the assistant to the president and involved in writing the company's advertising. To that point, writing advertising copy had been done on an ad-hoc basis amongst the firm's executive board. McCormick II was fascinated by his father's role in the development of America. He was a young man captivated by "the contrast between the old and the new," and pushed for greater recognition of his father's accomplishments in an industry which had recently become dominated by the automatic-binder, an invention of others. He fashioned his father's historic impact into a brand which was utilized in all advertising matter from the annual catalog to the *Farmers Advance*. Eventually he made his father's portrait the symbolic brand of the company, posted in all advertising material and hung on a sign at every McCormick sales agency across the country.⁴⁷

McCormick salesmen were encouraged to seize on the new branding strategy by smearing their competitors as irresponsible swindlers rather than progressive innovators. They told customers that competitors' twine-binders were fundamentally "untried" "experiments at best." The strong "talk" of Wood and Deering agents was an effort to "effect premature sales," of a machine that had not "gone through at least one harvest in all kinds and conditions of grain." The "opposition" sold their untested implements at the expense of the financial "safety" of the farmer. Farmers who were "foolish" enough to

⁴⁷ E.K. Butler to Cyrus Hall McCormick I, August 20, 1880; Butler to Cyrus Hall McCormick II, August 12, 1881; W.J. Hanna to McCormick II, August 19, 1881, box 53, Mss 2A, MIHCC. Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 100-151, details the evolution of advertising labor and suggests that professional advertisers did not emerge until the turn of the century. Indeed McCormick did not hire its first advertising specialist until the summer of 1900. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest*, 556.

buy the machine would be met by “endless annoyance” and lose both “time and money.” Moreover, they would be required to buy twine which was both “expensive and scarce.” McCormick’s canvassers further argued, that twine binders were only sold by “manufacturers who have a poor wire binder or perhaps none at all.” Affecting a position as a trustworthy advisor, salesmen noted that McCormick was responsibly “perfecting,” a twine-binder in harvests from Texas to Manitoba and assured farmers that “we will have a successful Twine Binder as soon as anyone can do it safely.”⁴⁸

Such talk was mostly bluster and a skillful hedge against a sea change in public opinion towards a machine which McCormick did not sell. While other manufacturers claimed that twine-binders were the most advanced and progressive machines on the market, as had been the advertising practice for decades— McCormick utilized its self-proclaimed authority to suggest that the new machine was not a part of the “march of progress.” In reality, throughout this time the company was busily experimenting with twine-binders and met little success. Desperate to close the technology gap, the Chicago office instructed its agents “to keep your eyes wide open,” and “examine closely... the working of every twine binder.” The agents were then to report back just “exactly how they are constructed” in an “unprejudiced way.” In 1881, they were finally able to release a twine-binder to the public, that was “as good or better” than any twine-binder on the

⁴⁸ McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, circular to agents, February 6, March 16, March 20, March 22 and March 29, 1880, reel 472, Mss 1x, MIHCC, emphasis in text.

market. Maintaining their previous position, they continued to claim that their wire-binder remained superior to any twine-binder including their own.⁴⁹

Competitors responded to McCormick's new branding campaign, fully aware of the damage that it was doing to their reputations. D.M. Osborne & Co. simply refuted McCormick's chirping stating that its "Self-Binding Harvester is not an experiment," and asked that customers trust their innovations, because of "our record of the past." William Deering & Co. went significantly further, waging-war against McCormick's entire claim to authority and defending its own record of progress. Without mentioning McCormick by name, the Deering 1881 catalog stated that the "howl of disapproval" about twine-binders came from "'old and established manufacturers,' - old and established in non-progressive notions and methods – who were alarmed by this bold step in invention." They attempted to marginalize the McCormick fear-mongering and claims to authority by implying that such statements were simply the sentiments of traditionalists and ungracious losers. The copy further mocked McCormick for its "modesty and truthfulness... trumpeting themselves... as the chief benefactors of the world."⁵⁰

Undeterred by competitors, McCormick II continued to develop the company's historical brand narrative, pivoting around the year 1831. The 1886 catalog began with a nine-page "short history of wheat and wheat reapers." The objective of the narrative was to demonstrate that "very little progress was made in its [wheat] culture during all the

⁴⁹ McCormick Harvesting Machine Co, circular to agents, May 31, October 8, December 18 1880, reel 471, Mss 10z; McCormick Harvesting Machine Co., "McCormick Harvesting Machine Co's Illustrated Annual Catalogue" 1881, Fair Edition Catalog, box 2, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

⁵⁰ D.M. Osborne & Co., "Twenty-Fourth Annual Greeting," 1880, annual catalog, box 31; William Deering, "The Leader Reapers, Deering Mowers & Droppers and Deering Self-Binding Harvesters," 1881, annual catalog, box 14, Mss 10z, MIHCC.

ages past,” until 1831 when McCormick “constructed the first reaper that ever successfully harvested grain.” The history included illustrations of ancient sickles found during archaeological digs – stressing that such “methods were employed before the time of the Pharaohs,” and were “quite like the sickle our fathers used.” The copy also compared ancient means to those utilized in the less civilized world, like India where the farmer, “sits upon his heels, cuts a handful of straw... and then waddles on without rising, cutting in this way about one-twelfth of an acre a day.” Narrowly interpreting the past through the alchemy of progress, it emphasized that McCormick’s invention was of “incalculable value to the human race.” The Company also printed trade cards covered with the same imagery as the catalog, teleologically summarizing the history of wheat harvest pictorially (Figures 2 and 3). Through such imagery and comparisons, the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company made clear that the civilized farmer road a reaper to profits, while those that did not, may as well be “waddling” like “Indians.”⁵¹

⁵¹ McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, “McCormick Machines Illustrated – 1886,” Box 2, Mss 5x, MIHCC. McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, “The improvements of fifty-five years,” Advertising Card, 1886, WHi-36208 and WHi-36369, Wisconsin Historical Images, online at <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org.flagship.luc.edu/whi/>.



Figure 2: Exterior of the 1886 MHC Trade Card. The bottom reads “The Pioneer Reaper Manufacturers of the World. Originators and Leaders in All Valuable Improvements of the Art.”

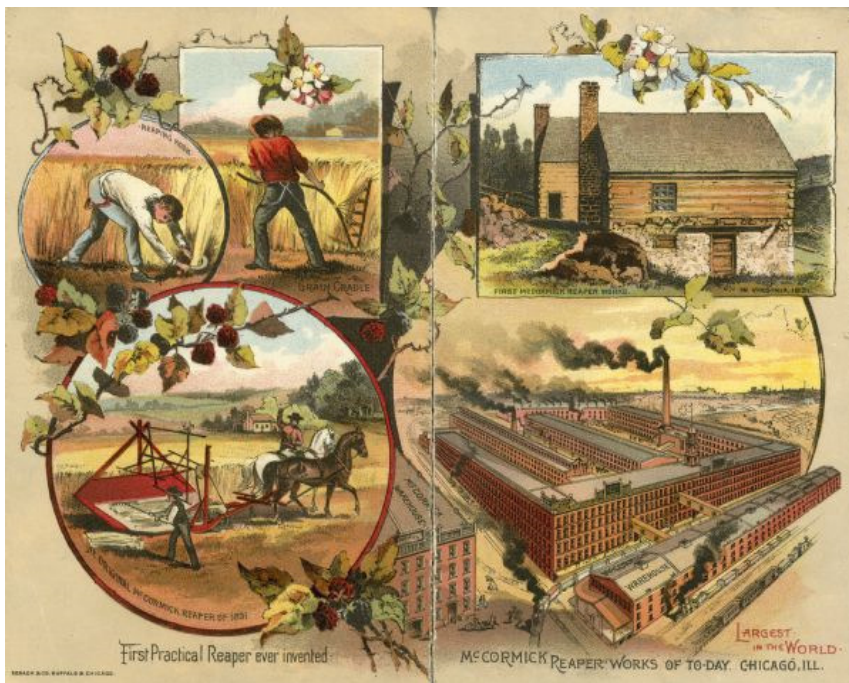


Figure 3: Interior of the 1886 MHC Trade Card. Utilizing the imagery from the catalog as visual points of reference for impromptu sales pitches.

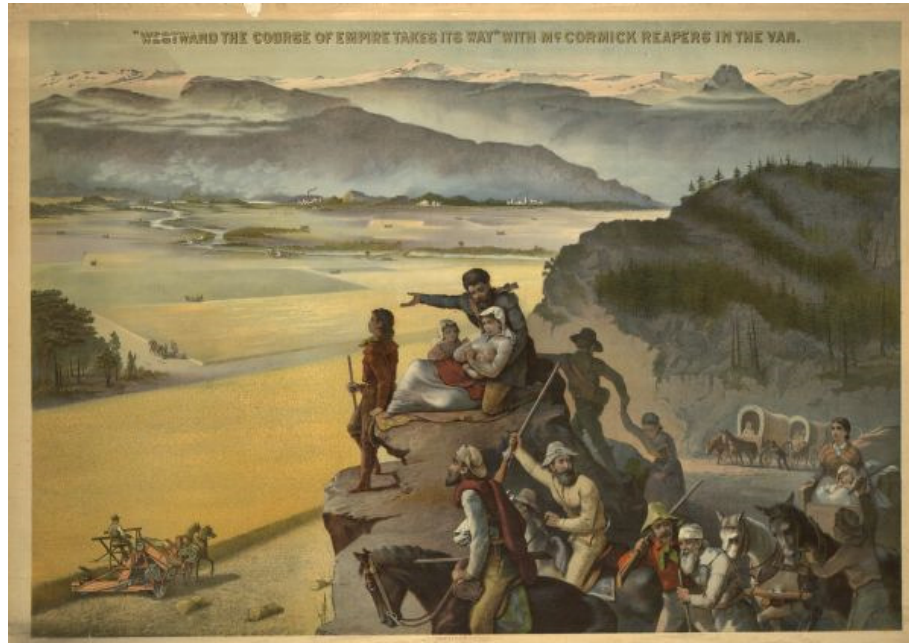


Figure 4: “Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way” With McCormick in the Van.

Beyond meta-narratives of civilization, McCormick II steered company advertising toward bolder claims and imagery regarding the nation’s past. In particular, he emphasized the company’s role in settling the west and “Manifest Destiny,” throughout the company’s advertising material. While the connection was made in company catalogs, the best examples are color-lithograph posters. The company distributed thousands of color-posters to customers beginning in the 1880s, which often became objects of art within their homes. The pioneer’s Conestoga wagon became a ubiquitous symbol in these posters, even ahistorically showing up in an illustration of the first reaper trial in 1831. More blatant than this however, the Company printed a poster entitled “‘Westward the course of empire makes its way’ with McCormick in the van” (Figure 4), which was a blatant copy of Emanuel Lutzen’s popular painting from 1861, “Westward the Course of Empire.” The McCormick poster depicts settlers caravanning in darkness to the top of a ridge, overlooking a bright field of grain, where a farmer is

already harvesting with a McCormick self-binder. The reaper was a mechanized Daniel Boone.⁵²



Figure 5: Battle of Gettysburg. Disregarding any semblance of historical accuracy, the McCormick Reaper in the center is an 1884 self-binder.

McCormick II also began to revise his father's infamous Civil War record and participated in re-imagining the larger meaning of the war in general. Advertising and bulletins began to stress the company's northern allegiance, utilizing pro-union imagery. For instance, an 1883 bulletin referred to their customers as "the Grand McCormick Army" while another from 1882 bulletin stressed that the McCormick was "On the War Path!... All Along the Southern Line." Certainly, such military metaphors played in the

⁵² McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, "Westward the course of empire..." Advertising Poster 1886, WHI-2496; "Testing the First Reaping Machines, Advertising Poster, 1883, WHI-2497, Wisconsin Historical Images, online at. <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org.flagship.luc.edu/whi/>.

masculine culture of the Gilded Age, but also resonated with their key demographic- free-holding farmers in the upper Midwest. The Company also created a series of Civil War related posters, the most popular of these was a two-poster set of an epic landscape illustration of the Battle of Gettysburg (Figure 5), depicting the Union and Confederate forces clashing around an abandoned self-binding harvester standing in the middle of a field of wheat. The poster was titled, “Harvest Interrupted,” underscoring the disruption of America’s God divined legacy of agricultural abundance rather than Union victory or Confederate defeat.⁵³

Until the consolidation of the harvester industry in 1902, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company continued to make grander claims to patriarchal ownership of the industry’s past with implications for the present. While competitors initially responded to McCormick with corrective statements in their catalogs and, through their agents, they soon adopted the idea of branding themselves in similar fashions. William Deering & Co., touted itself as the inventor of the first harvester in 1857, claiming it to be the real break-through in the progress of harvesting technology. In a similar manner Walter A. Wood Mowing and Harvesting Machine Co. advertised itself as “the Pioneer” of self-binders adopting the motto “Progress is our Watchword.” D.M. Osborne & Co., went in a different direction attempting to reframe itself as the farmer’s ally and educator – filling its catalogs with incredibly complex illustrations of binding mechanisms and operational instructions. In comparison to McCormick’s bold historical narrative, pressing the

⁵³ McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, “The Rattle of the Reapers,” 1882; “The Ball Just Opened!,” 1883; H.R. Gould to Agents, June 14, 1884, Box 2, Mss 5x, MIHCC. McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, “Harvest Interrupted: The Battle of Gettysburg,” Advertising Poster 1886, WHi-3563, Wisconsin Historical Images, online at. <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org.flagship.luc.edu/whi/>.

monumental change from hand-cutting with sickles which had been used for thousands of years to mechanized reaping in 1831, opponents' narratives seemed trivial.⁵⁴

Throughout the nineteenth century history was an important feature of the American cultural imagination. The meaning of the past to the present and future was self-evident to anyone looking to teach or learn a lesson as well as anyone looking for a justification of an action. In such a context, the only authority over history was the supposed "objectivity" of the past. With such a fluid standard of proof in a historically-primed nation companies, like those in the harvester-industry, were able to utilize self-serving narratives of the past to sell their products. Sending out thousands of salesmen and printing millions of advertisements, companies tapped into this sense of the past using the alchemy of progress to offer comparative analysis of products, farmers and society as a whole within the milieu of civilization. In the process, they created a national-market for their goods and also popularized fictions as national history. Many of these advertised histories were later uncritically adopted by the emerging historical profession during the progressive era as the obvious bricks for building the house of American history.

⁵⁴ Walter A. Wood M. & H.M. Co. "Harvesting Machines," 1882, Annual Catalog, box 42; D.M. Osborne & Co., "Twenty-Fourth Annual Greeting," 1880, annual catalog, box 31; Wm. Deering & Co., "Deering Twine Binders, Reapers and Mowers," 1884, annual catalog, box 14, Mss 10z, MIHCC.

CHAPTER TWO:

“WITH SUCH BENEFITS TO MANKIND”:

PRODUCING INVENTION FOR PRODUCER POPULISTS

Beginning in the late 1880s the McCormick Company changed its marketing rhetoric in response to the growing economic and political activism of American farmers. The business stressed to insurgent rural producers that Cyrus McCormick as a farmer had *produced* technology through toil and ingenuity that allowed other farmers to prosper in his wake, equating the wealth-producing power of labor with the wealth-producing power of invention. The Company rolled the “labor theory of value,” which undergirded producerist criticism into their “Established 1831” brand and narratives about its founder to create what I have termed a technological surplus value ideology. Instead of being a capitalist, parasitic leach on producers in the fields, the firm’s ideology pronounced that McCormick Senior’s labor and invention made the Company’s relationship with farmers harmonious. The agency asserted that its laborsaving technology increased the individual prosperity of farmers in ways that were previously unattainable. The McCormick Harvesting Machine Company spread this ideology and its advertising to justify the McCormick family’s elite position in the Gilded Age social order and the firm’s leading role within the harvester industry.

The manufacturer’s exhibit at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago offered the clearest perspective of how this advertising narrative and ideology operated as

well as revealed the weakness of a brand based on history: their claim to priority in the marketplace could be threatened by alternative narratives of the past. The McCormick Harvesting Machine Company's exhibit prominently displayed the historical features of their advertising, stirring discontent amongst rivals and prompting protests to the Exposition's officials on grounds of historical inaccuracy. At the same venue where Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his famous "Frontier Thesis" to the American Historical Association, harvester industry millionaires relied upon lawyers, patent officers, and inventors to protect their versions of the past.

The organizers, exhibitors, and sponsors of the 1893 World's Fair ordered the entirety of humanity through the lens of civilization and the layout of Jackson Park. They projected their conceptions of social, racial, and gender hierarchy to visitors through architecture, display, performance, and landscape. The Court of Honor was the core of the White City, a reverent monument to white civilization's claimed accomplishments in art, science, and technology. Outside the White City, on the Midway Plaisance, other "savage" cultures were presented as subjects of amusement rather than knowledge. Through this structured spectacle, racial and gender differences were presented as natural products of evolution. Evolution occurred through the drama of history, "scientifically" justifying social hierarchies and differences in the present. The 1893 exposition reinforced the existing social, economic, racial, and gender order of the United States while supporting the further expansion of Anglo-American dominance around the world.¹

¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 31-41.

Within the buildings of the White City, businesses erected exhibits, staking claims in the great project of civilization. In the Agriculture Building adjacent to the Court of Honor, the displays of American manufacturers were arranged around a massive globe at the center. Fair planners suggested that the American agricultural technology of civilization had spread beyond the nation and literally surrounded the world. Inside this massive, high-ceilinged building the energy of “civilization” bustled as more than five hundred farm implement businesses offered educational and attractive exhibits, while employees handed out trade cards, brochures, and catalogs to visitors. These solicitors competed with their industry peers for audience attention, hoping to excite interest and future sales.²

As a leading business in the host city and a veteran of every World’s Fair since the London Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851, the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company spared no expense in presenting its machines and story to the masses of World’s Fair visitors. Company president, Cyrus McCormick II, took the lead in conceptualizing the exhibit assisted by his senior patent officer and inventor, Rodney B. Swift, an authority on the mechanical development of the McCormick reaper. The display cases were created by local furniture makers under instruction from a Marshall Field and Company consultant, who further advised McCormick II on the exhibit layout and the use of text, flags, and banners. The exhibit and its visitors were attended to by knowledgeable salesmen, assisted by Ms. Keefer, a “good girl” from Indiana—mechanically minded,

² E. F. Baker to McCormick Harvesting Machine Company (Hereafter McCormick HMC), May 12, 1893, reel 267, McCormick HMC, Incoming Correspondence and Reports, 1849-1902, Mss 2x, MIHCC; Mona Domosh, “A ‘Civilized’ Commerce: Gender, ‘Race,’ and Empire at the 1893 Chicago Exposition,” *Cultural Geographies* 9 (Apr. 2002): 181-201.

young, buxom, and single. As a bonus, she also spoke German, allowing the Company to pitch their wares to some of the more “civilized” tourists from abroad.³

While most farm implement businesses offered “sales floor” exhibits that presented machines and tools, the McCormick Company advanced a coherent narrative of its contributions to civilization. The McCormick exhibition was a genuine spectacle, a “constant magnet for a large and admiring audience.” Visitors followed a carpeted pathway that wove through McCormick machines and display cases on a tour of reaper history. The tour began with a replica of McCormick Senior’s original 1831 reaper and included company machines that had won top honors at the 1851 and 1867 World’s Fairs, as well as its first twine binder that took gold in 1878. The tour culminated with its line of 1893 models. Along the way, the audience passed a display case of the awards won by the McCormick company and its founder in international competitions, banners announcing these feats, along with flags from four continents. An oil portrait of the late McCormick Senior was prominently featured adjacent to a glass display case that held the McCormick’s superior quality twine--a mundane but contentious commodity in 1893.⁴

As fairgoers passed through the McCormick gallery, placards narrated the importance of McCormick machines to history and the success of modern agriculture. The replica of the 1831 reaper was labeled “the first practical reaper, invented and built

³ R. B. Swift to Culver and Tracey, June 1, 1893, reel 336, McCormick HMC, Letterpress Books, 1856-1902 Mss 1x.; Daily to J. B. Heywood, June 16, 1893, reel 336, Mss 1x; McCormick II to W. Pretyman, June 27, 1893, reel 337, Mss 1x, MIHCC.

⁴ James B. Campbell, *World’s Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art and Literature*, 3 vols. (Chicago: World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893): 156-57, transcription, box 2, McCormick HMC, Expositions and Exhibitions Records, 1851-1900, Mss 6x, MIHCC.

by Cyrus H. McCormick.” A label on McCormick’s portrait reflected a similar sentiment. Along the way, Keefer and other McCormick exhibitors regaled visitors with the tale of McCormick’s invention. In their story, Cyrus’s father attempted to create a machine to cut grain throughout his lifetime, but had failed after decades of toil. A twenty-two-year-old Cyrus resumed his father’s work with inventive rigor in the spring of 1831. Later that summer, after a mere six weeks of tinkering, his machine cut standing grain in front of a small crowd of locals in a field near Steele’s Tavern, Virginia. As the Company spokesmen told it, from that point forward American agriculture was on the path of progress. Decorative shields affixed to structural pillars in the exhibit connected this early date with the Company’s continued success: “First in 1831, First in 1893.” A large banner above the exhibit reduced competitors’ products to McCormick’s mechanical progeny, “All Harvesters of To-Day Are Based Upon the Features C. H. McCormick Invented and Built in 1831.” The Company ensured that all visitors knew McCormick possessed the “prestige of priority” in the harvester trade and that all of the competitors surrounding them in the exhibit hall were docile followers and uninspired imitators.⁵

These messages of industrial primacy were nuanced and accentuated by the crown jewel of the McCormick showcase--a massive mechanized diorama (Figure 6). The diorama was set within a large case against a bird’s-eye illustration of the McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago with transparent glass signs that offered interpretation. In the distant background, at the top of the illustration, vessels crisscrossed Lake Michigan. Set along the base of the cabinet opening to the left, trains moved in-and-out of the works’

⁵ R. B. Swift to Culver and Tracey, June 1, 1893, reel 336, Mss 1x Campbell, *World’s Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, 156-57, MIHCC.

busy warehouses and train yard. A label read: “These Works produce more Harvesting machines annually than any others in the world.” In the front right, a farmer rode a tiny modern binder that clicked across a field of wheat, “the sun never sets on the McCormick machines at work.” Adjacent to this garden of wheat was a small model building simply stating, “In this blacksmith shop, near Steele’s Tavern, Virginia, Cyrus H. McCormick made the first successful reaper in 1831.”⁶

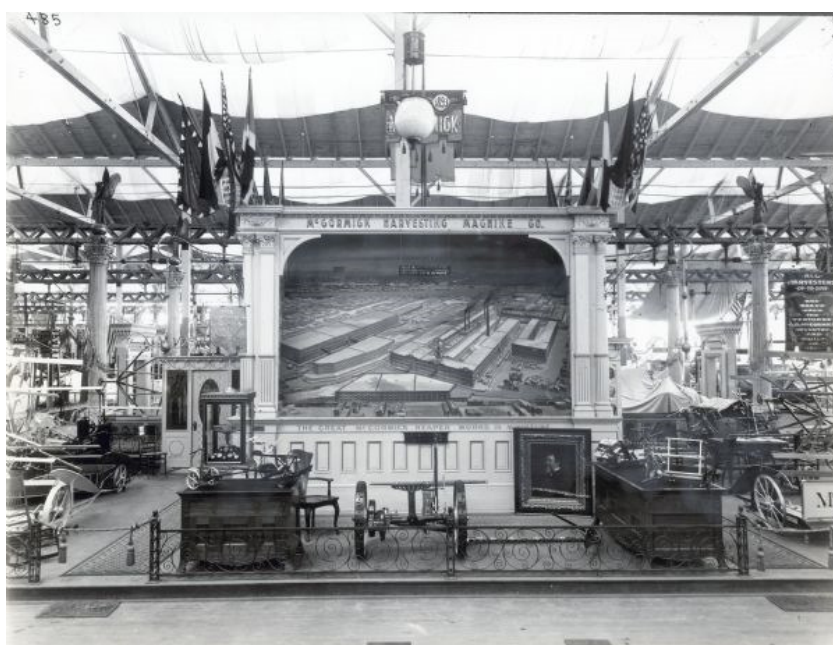


Figure 6: The MHMC Exhibit at the 1893 Columbian Exposition.

The ahistorical and spatially inaccurate McCormick display offered visitors a wealth of meaning, framing the Company’s relationships with customers and employees in historical terms. The exhibit expressed a worldview in which McCormick, the Company’s farmer-customers, and its laborer-employees were all interconnected producers contributing to civilization. The McCormick Works, filled with “busy artisans”

⁶ Campbell, *World’s Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, 156-57, box 2, Mss 6x, MIHCC; Wisconsin Historical Society, McCormick HMC, “McCormick Display at Columbian Exposition,” WHI-60572, viewed online at: <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/feature/mccormick/>.

(according to McCormick exhibitors), produced more harvesters daily than any other manufactory. This industrial marvel in Chicago was connected to the entire world by railroad and ship, allowing McCormick to spread the tools of civilization. On the receiving end, farmers everywhere were able to purchase harvesters, enabling them to produce greater quantities of grain for the world marketplace and create otherwise unattainable wealth. Most importantly, the diorama suggested that both the development of the factory and the modern farmer were only possible because McCormick “made” the first reaper in 1831. The positioning of the blacksmith shop along the field also suggested that McCormick was a farmer at heart, not an industrialist. Fairgoing farmers and factory laborers could see that they were allocated representative space as agents of civilization within the White City. As agents of civilization, however, they were not equal. McCormick was their superior and benefactor because his invention allowed others to prosper.⁷

An exposition souvenir book summed up the meaning of technological surplus value and its presentation within the exhibit for visitors: “The measure of Cyrus Hall McCormick’s contribution to the welfare of men and nations cannot be estimated.” The text further announced that McCormick’s invention “distributed an annual income to the whole country of over fifty-five millions of dollars, which must increase through all time.” The Company underlined its ideological perspective that the wealth and surplus value generated by modern agricultural technology radiated from McCormick’s inventive genius. As the organizers of the World’s Columbian Exposition ordered society as a whole, so too did the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company depict the moral social

⁷ Campbell, *World’s Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, 156-57, box 2, Mss 6x, MIHCC.

hierarchy of its business relationships. The elaborate display established the firm as the moral authority within the harvester industry as well as the patriarchal figure over its farmer-customers and laborer-employees. On all counts, McCormick's historic invention of the reaper in 1831 was the linchpin to his successors' mastery over others.⁸

The Company's ideology and historic narrative were not only available to those that attended the fair, but were distributed to homes across the country within the pages of the McCormick annual catalog. No stranger to teleological anachronisms, its catalog depicted Cyrus McCormick on the front cover of the 1893 issue as the "historical egg" that hatched civilized farming, differentiating the gardens of nineteenth-century America from the savage continent Columbus "discovered" in 1492 (Figure 7). The advertising narrative supplied more intricate points of the ideology, emphasizing McCormick's origins as a farmer and his contributions to civilization. "In aiming to promote the honorable cause of those with whom he toiled in the field . . . Cyrus McCormick builded [sic] better than he knew. A benefactor to the farmer he became a benefactor to the world." The following page boasted that farmers "of every land" recognized McCormick's invention "as an essential factor in his race for individual supremacy." The copy further highlighted the Company's acknowledged leadership in "the field his genius illumined." The 1893 catalog and company salesmen brought the McCormick messages of paternal authority and benevolence directly into parlors across America.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Established 1831--Sixty-second Annual Catalogue – McCormick Machines, 1893," Box 3, McCormick HMC, Annual Catalog, Advertising Materials and Catalogs, Mss 5x, MIHCC. Wisconsin Historical Society, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, "The McCormick Annual Catalog," 1893, WHI-29409. Viewed online at <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/feature/mccormick/>.

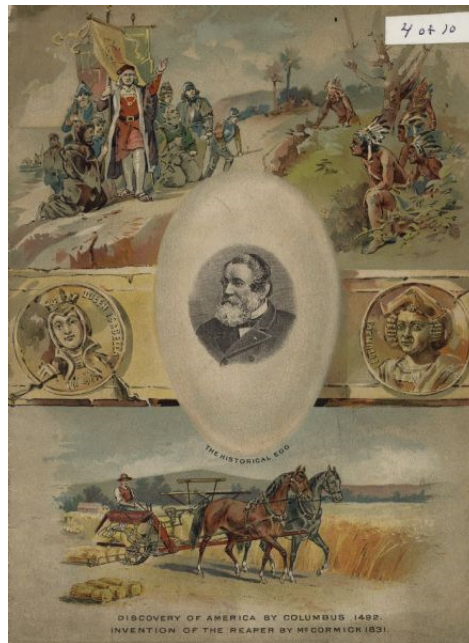


Figure 7: 1893 MHMC Catalog Cover.

Competing firms were galled by the McCormick Company's reductionist and what they saw as insulting interpretation of history. Ultimately, they had no recourse against these advertised fabrications. Companies such as Deering; Aultman, Miller & Co.; and Walter A. Wood held that the reaper had evolved through dozens of minor adaptations by a large number of inventors, which all materially contributed to making the machine practical for farmer use. Their grievances were on sound legal and historical footing. Obed Hussey had a patent on a reaper that was practically identical to McCormick's in 1833, while Cyrus McCormick did not apply for a patent on his own machine until 1834. His dissenters also pointed to Patrick Bell's 1829 reaper from England, indicating McCormick's 1831 reaper did not have historic priority on innovation either. These rivals made their nuanced interpretation of the past readily available to the public in trade journals and histories of the harvester industry. They could

not, however, persuasively compete with McCormick's simplistic and epic past, which was ubiquitously repeated in all the company's advertising copy.¹⁰

Since the 1880s, harvester firms had been locked in tight competition and advertising was increasingly important to success. With the arrival of twine-binders in the late 1870s, the major harvester firms were selling very similar products in a mature technology line in which innovation no longer substantially altered the operation of the machine. During the same period, well-capitalized manufacturers, such as Deering, McCormick, and Wood, became capable of selling their products on a national scale because of mass production. Intensification led to greater competition throughout the United States as more firms began to compete for traditionally "safe" single company sales territories. Such competition as well as a groundswell of populist disapproval for big business, led to "price slashing," and profit margins began to shrink. In such a context, advertising material and branding became particularly important to gaining an edge. While most of these companies advertised their special relationship with progress and farmers, the grand McCormick narrative of the past trumped their claims.¹¹

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition offered competitors a rare opportunity to censure the McCormick narrative and overthrow its grandiose conceptions of the industrial order. During the fair an "Inventors' Congress," an international body of inventors and patent specialists, met to discuss the creation of international patent laws as well as comparing and contrasting the merits of the many innovations presented in

¹⁰ Robert Ardrey, *American Agricultural Implements: A Review of Invention and Development in the Agricultural Implement Industry of the United States* (1894; repr., New York: Arno, 1972).

¹¹ Gordon M. Winder, *The American Reaper: Harvesting Networks and Technology, 1830-1910* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2012), 105-44.

Chicago. This group also volunteered its services to act as a judiciary in cases of inventive dispute. Collectively, three rival companies seized the opportunity to rebut the lies of “the McCormick Thief,” petitioning the Congress. Inventors and patent officers took the lead in tearing down McCormick’s public heritage. Lewis Miller, an owner-inventor, at Aultman, Miller & Co. led the charge by publishing and distributing a pamphlet entitled, “The First Reaper: BE IT KNOWN and DISTINCTLY UNDERSTOOD THAT McCORMICK DID NOT MAKE the FIRST REAPING MACHINE.” Russell Parsons of Wood and John F. Steward of Deering both senior patent officers and inventors, published evidence in *Farm Implement News*. When Cyrus McCormick II was informed of the historical coup, he had his own officer, R.B. Swift, compile a defense, but their efforts fell short. Within weeks the Inventor’s Congress forced the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company to take down all of its placards claiming inventive priority. Without the labels, it is doubtful that the intrinsic historical importance of the McCormick machines was apparent to the visitors as they walked through the exhibit. They likely only saw old machinery.¹²

The Inventor’s Congress reprimanded the Company, but could not force the firm to roll back its claims to the past outside of the White City. While both sides published and distributed historical treatises in trade newspapers, the specifics of the Inventor’s Congress judgment were handled discretely, unknown to the wider public. Many of the harvester companies from Illinois were involved in financing and planning the

¹² Clark Lane to Aultman, Miller & Co., Feb. 10, 1897, box 1, John F. Steward Papers, Mss BJ; Clark Lane, “The First Reaper: BE IT KNOWN and DISTINCTLY UNDERSTOOD THAT McCORMICK DID NOT MAKE the FIRST REAPING MACHINE.” Oct. 9, 1893, box 1, Mss BJ; Russell Parsons to Steward, Dec. 30, 1896, box 1, Mss BJ; McCormick II to Nettie F. McCormick, May 8, 1893, reel 3, Cyrus Hall McCormick II, Letterpress Books, 1891-1928, Mss 3c, MIHCC. “Congress of Inventors,” December 11, 1892, *Chicago Tribune*.

Columbian Exposition and probably had no interest in embarrassing the city or the industry on the international stage.

After the Columbian Exposition, Deering began to more fervently dispute the McCormick claims to the past through its own sales force and advertising. Beginning in 1894, that company's literature printed John Steward's chronology of the reaper's origins, including portraits and descriptions of seven inventors who contributed to the creation of the modern harvester. The catalog stated that, "the history of their inventions is one of persevering struggle against difficulties.... and of systematic efforts on the part of others... to rob them of their well-earned laurels." Taking issue with the McCormick narrative of the past, the Deering catalog stated that its account was a matter of "truth versus fiction." Practical inventions were not conceived in whole form as the result of a divine moment of inspiration, but were the result of generations of inventors building on one another's previous accomplishments.¹³

Re-Inventing Producerism for Populists

Compounding the troubles of industry competition, the McCormick Company and others also faced the emergence of radical populist producerism in the 1880s and 1890s, which threatened their profits and their elite social position. Producerists maintained that wealth was only produced through the labor of workers, rather than through financial manipulation or owning capital. These producerist expressions originated from different positions in the economic order--workers as employees and farmers as business owners--but were unified by a common experience. Their articulation of producerism rejected the "harmony of interests" ideology that had been preached by capitalists since mid-century

¹³ William Deering & Co., "Why Bonanza Farming Pays," 1894, Annual Catalog.

(and which was visibly evident in the McCormick World's Fair diorama). The populists did not believe that capital and labor operated in a mutually beneficial relationship. Rather, the producer ideology of these groups--undergirded by the labor theory of value, that labor created wealth--combined with an anti-monopolist perspective that framed big businesses and millionaires as parasites, unjustly leaching away wealth from producers. These ideas and groups, along with others, politically solidified in the 1890s within the ranks of the People's Party creating no small discomfort for big business owners.¹⁴

In identifying the producerist undercurrents of radical nineteenth-century resistance to capitalist hegemony, historians have rarely acknowledged the inherent contradictions some producer-goods industries negotiated in responding to the distinct anti-monopolism of their workers and their agrarian customers. Two massive literatures of labor and Populism have discussed the republican rhetorical tradition of producerism in appealing to people from broad experiences and also producerism's lack of lasting, class-consciousness-building grit amongst adherents. However, both veins of scholarship largely ignore how farmers and factory workers from materially different positions in the economic order embraced producerism. They required separate rebuttals from industries that built producer goods. Only labor historians have shown how capitalists formulated a response to producerism through re-appropriation of the language and symbols of producerist freedom. They have demonstrated that as laborers claimed the right to the

¹⁴ The "harmony of interests" ideology is described by Anthony Wallace as a Christian industrialist response to radical producerism, justifying the economic order. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 350. Robert McMath and Matthew Hild outline the producer unity amongst Populist farmers and laborers. Robert C. McMath Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 50-82; Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, & Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

wealth created by their toil, so too did employers claim their right to manage their business toward higher productivity and profits through mechanization and efficiency schemes, undermining worker autonomy.¹⁵

Industrialists, like McCormick, could not use the same language of republican liberty and progress that they used with their employees to reject agrarian producerism. While they could tell their employees that they had the right to find a new place to work if they did not appreciate their wages or laborsaving machinery, they could not antagonize their customers with the rhetoric of republican liberty. Telling irate agrarian customers that they could buy another make of machine if they did not like company practices was clearly ill-advised. Instead, they created new ideological formulations and paternal justifications to assuage the producers' populist threats and morally reinforce their position atop the Gilded Age hierarchy.

The McCormicks recognized that both their employees and their customers criticized their industrial power through producerist anti-monopolism. They attempted to leverage the difference between their employees and farmer-customers into increased authority over the two. For example, in 1886 the McCormick Company installed new molding machinery in order to crush the highly specialized Iron Molders Union, which had been a thorn in its side since the Civil War. During the spring, the Company hired less skilled factory hands to perform the task, prompting the molders union to strike. Cyrus McCormick II claimed the freedom to select his own workers in the same way that

¹⁵ Wallace, *Rockdale*, 243-46, 293-95, 394-97; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, The State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

workers had the liberty to choose employers. He dismissed the union and its objections as un-American and backward. In a February meeting with representatives from the union, he reported: “They had no cause of grievance against the molding machines, as that was solely our business, and that whatever suited us suited them. They said they were too intelligent to object to the use of machinery for any purpose any more than they would object to farmers using the harvesting machines which we manufacture.” It seems unlikely that the molders union arrived at McCormick II’s office with no “grievance” against the machines. After all, the Company purchased the machinery to regain control of the shop floor, drive down wages, and employ unskilled labor in pursuit of higher profits. This report suggests that when the union representatives arrived, McCormick II reframed union objections. He compared his own purchase of modern machinery with that of farmers buying the machines that the Company and laborers produced. He demonstrated that the very source of the molders’ employment was tied to manufacturing the sort of laborsaving machinery they were protesting. Intellectually outmaneuvering his employees, McCormick II used the symbols of modernity and producerism against the molders to make their critique untenable.¹⁶

At the same time, McCormick Company management was aware that its customers perceived union-busting as monopolistic abuse. In a circular distributed by its sales agents, the Company sought to align its anti-union actions with those of farmers dealing with unruly seasonal harvest labor. McCormick agents reminded their farmer-

¹⁶ Robert Ozanne, *A Century of Labor-Management Relations at McCormick and International Harvester* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 3-28; McCormick II to Day, Mar. 10, 1886, box 11, C.H. McCormick II Home Files, Mss 8c, MCC; McCormick II, “About the Committee,” Feb. 1886, box 11, Mss 8c, MIHCC.

customers that they too had “difficulty of dealing with the help at harvest time, before the self-binder freed them from such trouble.” Salesmen further asserted that “we are sure . . . that no independent farmer would . . . submit to be dictated to in regard to who should hire or discharge.” Such posturing reflects their cognizance of the shared anti-monopolism of farmers and laborers. Alternatively, McCormick management and sales agents argued that farmers had more in common with the Company as business owners than with the agitating union men. They especially underlined the point that their machinery had “freed” farmers from such problems.¹⁷

By the 1890s, the Company had successfully marginalized its employees on the shop floor. The manufacturer’s investment in machinery and unskilled labor to break worker control of production had gained wider cultural salience in-line with the anti-union sentiment which followed the 1887 Haymarket Bombing. The McCormick family did not face any serious threats from workers within their factory during the following decade, but was continually conscious of the potential for the working class to violently challenge their elite authority. Though factory management had successfully neutralized the labor threat within its own walls, they still harbored anxiety about the working classes at large, especially during turbulent times, such as the Pullman Strike of 1894. While the firm’s power marginalized employees, it had less leverage to silence farmer-customer critiques of its wealth.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Will Control Their Own Business,” 1886, box 3, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

¹⁸ Ozanne, *Century*, 3-28. During the 1894 Pullman Strike, McCormick Junior wrote about his worries that “our men” might be “drawn into crowds and mobs.” McCormick II to N. F. McCormick, July 9, 11, 1894; McCormick II to Butler, July 13, 1894, reel 4, Mss 3c, MIHCC.

The McCormick Company and family had concerns about populist farmers for decades. Radical rural populism threatened their position in the economic order and the Company was aware that it needed to work vigilantly to undermine agrarian producerism and strengthen its bonds with customers. As early as 1873 Grangers had specifically protested McCormick's use of "middle-men" sales agents who artificially inflated the price of machines without adding value. Many Grangers published books and pamphlets that singled out McCormick for inflated machinery prices that were 50 to 100 percent higher than the cost of production. Grangers sought to secure lower prices through buying directly from the Company. Later in the 1890s local Farmers' Alliances would use similar tactics.¹⁹

Pricing was not the only front upon which the Company was maligned by agrarian discontent. The populist farmers also attempted to organize manufacturing to supply cheaper machines and tools. In this pursuit they attempted to overturn federal patent laws to allow populist manufactories to build the newest harvesting equipment without investment in research and development. In the early 1890s the National Farmers' Alliance joined with the National Cordage Company to secure cheaper twine and financial backing for a national wholesale warehouse, the National Union Company, in exchange for guaranteed patronage. This strategy undercut McCormick's international maneuvering to secure cheaper twine by contracting directly with the Yucatan plantations

¹⁹ Arthur H. Hirsch, "Efforts of the Grange in the Middle West to Control the Price of Farm Machinery, 1870-1880," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 15 (Mar. 1929): 473-96. The Company's response to the Grangers, as well as the Farmers' Alliance cooperative price initiatives, was to quote slightly reduced prices for bulk purchases that did not include shipping. They then had their regional agents target the leaders of local alliances offering a still lower price for that individual. In that way they systematically broke resistance by "drawing them away from the Alliances one by one." R. B. Swift to J. S. Wogan, May 20, 1890; Butler to M. D. Coffeen, Apr. 25, 1891, reel 297, Mss 1x, MIHCC.

that produced the best fiber (sisal and henequen) for binder twine, as well as its twine distribution through its branch house sales network. In 1891 Minnesota populists went so far as placing twine manufacture in the Stillwater State Penitentiary, ensuring that farmers in that state could pay a lower price for twine than was offered by any business in the harvester or twine industry. The populist farmers experimented with many strategies to overturn their dependence upon big businesses, effectively challenging the economic authority and profits of established manufacturers.²⁰

With the rising tide of anti-monopolism amongst farmers, the Company even had trouble forcing customers to pay past-due notes on machinery purchased on credit. By the late 1880s, McCormick had initiated a policy restraining legal action on overdue notes and began to exercise more conservative lending practices. As one agent explained the difficulty of collecting through the courts, “justice, equity law and everything else is on our side. The only thing that would be against is that in this day of Grangerism, you can’t always bet on a jury, law has very little to do with some of their decisions.” Illustrating this sentiment, in 1884 the Company took Ignatius Donnelly, later the “father of the People’s Party,” to court in Minnesota for six hundred dollars plus interest on two wire binders he had purchased in 1878. Donnelly had not paid because the machines did not work as well as advertised. The jury decided in Donnelly’s favor, ruling that the Company pay him twenty-five dollars as well as court fees. Donnelly warned the

²⁰ Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 247; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 126-33; Fred Carstensen and Diane Roazen, “Foreign Markets, Domestic Initiative, and the Emergence of a Monocrop Economy: The Yucatecan Experience, 1825-1903,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72 (Nov. 1992): 555-92; Sterling Evans, *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 121-26.

Company of its folly in advance, stating that juries “realize that machines are sold for three times their cost, and that patent laws are breeding great and injurious monopolies.” Populists were successfully carrying out their vision in some localities, threatening to turn the nature of the economic and political system upside down.²¹

Company officials like McCormick II, Swift, and general manager of operations, Earl K. Butler, discussed agrarian populists in broad disdainful terms as backward farmers who did not understand the principles of qualitative value or order. They rarely perceived nuanced differences amongst agrarian populist groups like the Farmers’ Alliances, the Agricultural Wheel, or the Patrons of Husbandry. Rather, they grouped them all as “granger organizations” that “demoralized” prices and the harvester industry more generally. “Populists,” they thought, made no distinctions for quality and were “ready to be gulled” by lower prices. Meanwhile, “intelligent people” were ready to pay more for the “best” machines. Factory officials resentfully labeled anyone who questioned the Company’s authority as “populists”--especially local tax commissioners. To the McCormick Company, populism did not represent specific people or organizations, but existed as a groundswell abstraction of the lower classes, menacing the Gilded Age social order.²²

The producerist undercurrents of labor and farmer discontent converged as the People’s Party in 1892, representing the national political embodiment of producer-

²¹ Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly* 288; Ignatius Donnelly et al., “Cyrus H. McCormick and Leander J. McCormick, Partners as C. H. & L. J. McCormick, Appellants, vs. Ignatius Donnelly, Respondent . . .” (Hastings, Minn.: H. M. Hall, 1884), 65. George Brewster to C.H. & L.J. McCormick, July 4, 1877, reel 210, Mss 2x, MIHCC, emphasis in text.

²² Butler to W. H. Town, May 31, 1890; Butler to N. B. Fulmer, June 28, 1890, reel 297, Mss 1x; Butler to Chas. F. Adams, June 16, 1893, reel 327, Mss 1x, MIHCC.

populist challenges. The 1892 Omaha Platform pronounced a program of action to “restrain the extortions of aggregated capital” that plundered the “fruits of the toil of millions.” As a proclamation of producerist unity, the Populists declared, “‘if any will not work, neither shall he eat.’ The interests of rural and civic labor are the same; their enemies are identical.” The platform called for the permanent union of labor forces of the United States, nationalization of natural monopolies (such as railroads and telegraphs), redistribution of railroad land grants, and illegalizing private police (such as the Pinkerton Detective Agency), amongst others. However, the party’s ultimate support of free silver was perhaps the most frightening plank of the platform to the wealthy.²³

While many of Populist’s planks targeted specific groups and offered governmental protection of producer interests, the issue of loose money, such as greenbacks, and to a lesser extent silver coinage, was particularly alarming to Gilded Age capitalists. “Gold bugs” believed the gold standard was central to a stable economy and also their authoritative role within society. Loose money allowed greater social mobility and also the repayment of debt with less valuable currency--a shift that would erode elite economic authority and that they feared might topple the entire economic system. The McCormicks perceived that the People’s Party unified their producer populist laborers and customers against them and that such an event, coupled with bimetallism, could lead to their ruin.²⁴

²³ “Omaha Platform, July, 1892,” Appendix F, in Johns D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 439-44.

²⁴ Michael O’Malley, *Face Value: The Entwined Histories of Money & Race in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 124-61.

To make matters worse for themselves, the industry's "big six" firms, including McCormick, Deering and Wood, briefly created a "Harvester Trust" in 1890 in order to collectively raise prices, garnering still greater popular antagonism. Devoted to the idea of making the business more profitable, the American Harvester Company was formed in November of 1890. Nationwide, newspapers were filled with stories about the formation of the Company, including its monumental scale, justifications for its existence and critiques of its monopolistic abuses. Its creation invited immediate legal and political challenges from farmers and populists throughout the United States. Finding these threats credible, owners of the trust disbanded in mid-January of 1891, only a month and a half after it had been founded.²⁵

Companies involved in the Harvester Trust tried to spin its dismantling as public benevolence, while their competitors seized on the debacle for their own advertising. In 1891, Plano Manufacturing Company made hay of their exclusion from the Harvester Trust, moralizing on the evils of the trust while illuminating its own sanctity for staying aloof of the parasitic evil. Its catalog that year began with a four-page "word to our customers about the late American Harvester Company," detailing their competitors' "gigantic and mercenary 'Harvester Trust'" aimed at fleecing farmers. Plano educated customers about the "nefarious organization" as an "unlawful tribute upon farmers" through reprinting a long scathing article about the trust published in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*. Juxtaposing itself against the trust, Plano was "engaged in no unlawful

²⁵ Walter A. Wood to C.H. McCormick II, December 5, 1889; H.J. Shields to William Deering & Co, December 23, 1890; C.H. McCormick II to Adriaance Play & Co., January 10, 1891, telegraph; McCormick HMC to Agents, January 8, 1891, box 1, American Harvester Company Records, Correspondence, 1889-1890, 1899, Mss W, MIHCC. "To Fight the Harvester Trust: Farmers of North Dakota Will Take Matter Into Court," *New York Times*, January 7, 1891.

combination” and “been concerned with nothing excepting its legitimate business.”

Presumably such muck-raking excited greater animosity amongst populist farmers and benefited Plano at the expense of conspiring rivals.²⁶

In response to the challenges of agrarian producerism, the later People’s Party and rival smear campaigns, McCormick copy-editors reoriented the firm’s “Established 1831” brand, incorporating the technological surplus value ideology. The Company’s heritage and founder’s invention was positive evidence that its interests were compatible with the interests of farmers. Others also attempted to assuage producer criticism by highlighting the productive power of technology and ingenuity as well. In 1894, *Labour and the Popular Welfare* by William Mallock asserted that both labor and “ability”-- shorthand for technological ingenuity and efficient management--created wealth. Mallock argued that radical producerists advocated stealing the fruits of “ability,” in the same way that slaveholders stole labor from men. The book was well received by Chicago elite, and the *Chicago Tribune* wondered, “Have the socialistic labor agitators given a thought to this?” In 1894 leaders of the National Association of Farm Implement Manufacturers couched their argument against producerist criticisms in similar terms of technological surplus value, stating that “labor of brain and hand” created wealth. McCormick copy men utilized these ideas in tandem with the Company’s heritage to present a coherent narrative of the past and the present to its customers, mollifying populist antagonism while continuing to claim patriarchal authority over the industry during the reaper wars.²⁷

²⁶ The Plano Manufacturing Company, “Plano Manufacturing Co.,” 1891, Annual Catalog, box 33, International Harvester Company, Competitors’ Advertising Literature, 1832-1950, Mss 10z, MIHCC.

²⁷ W. H. Mallock, *Labour and the Popular Welfare* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895); “Labor and Ability,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1894, 28; National Association of Agricultural Implement

The Company's annual catalogs demonstrate the firm's use of history and the technological surplus value ideology. In the decade after Cyrus McCormick's death in 1884, the "Established 1831" advertising developed a more aggressive edge. The narrative implied that McCormick was the "Father of Reapers," and all competitors were merely child-like followers. The 1885 catalog pronounced, "we glory in the undisputed fact that the McCormick is the original of all grain and grass cutting machines . . . admitted to be 'the type and pattern after which all others are modeled,'" the Company's longevity in the industry was evidence of "the inexorable law of the survival of the fittest," which crowned the McCormick machine "unapproachable and alone." The Company further implied that competitors did not contribute to the progress of the modern harvester industry but merely "anxiously follow" its lead. The 1892 catalog made this charge directly, labeling industry peers as, "followers . . . who can copy, can rob and pattern," but could not match the ingenuity or quality of the house of McCormick. The Company's "priority of invention" was equated to its "superiority of construction."²⁸

The firm also utilized the past to place its machine among the great inventions of civilization and progress. The 1887 catalog compared McCormick's reaper to such important inventions as the railroad, steamboat, and telegraph that had "set the world in a blaze of excitement and upon a career of marvelous prosperity." Ad writers went further the next year, declaring the advent of the reaper to be *the* event that prompted modern ingenuity and progress. Claiming authority over modernity, the Company boldly stated

Manufacturers, *Farm Implement News Daily: Official Report of the Annual Convention* . . . (Chicago: National Association of Agricultural Implement Manufacturers, 1894), 113.

²⁸ "Established 1831--Fifty-Fourth Annual Catalogue: McCormick Machines--1885"; "Established 1831--Fifty-Sixth Annual Catalogue: McCormick Machines--1887"; "Bindlochine," 1892, box 3, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

itself not just the leader of the harvester industry, but of progress in general, “from no other institution in any land has the spirit of progress . . . received such an impetus as ours.” Tapping into Gilded Age and Progressive Era infatuation with progress, civilization and technology, the Company included their founder amongst the pantheon of great inventors that brought about modernity.²⁹

The McCormicks also applied their brand to command higher prices from farmers during the competitive reaper war thanks to their supposed higher moral value. The literature and sales agents referred to these traits when explaining why a McCormick machine cost more than a Wood harvester or a Deering binder. Customers would “cheerfully” pay more, because of McCormick’s “historical record” and the “intrinsic merits” of their machines. Tellingly, McCormick sales management in Chicago acknowledged that “the very fact that our goods are sold for more money than our competitors’ . . . increases their popularity with the farming community.” The “McCormick prestige” of history coupled with the comparatively higher price translated into the perception of McCormick machines as being a higher qualitative value, allowing the Company to “get the bulk of the best farmers” and capture a sizeable market share.³⁰

Beyond justifying McCormick supremacy in the harvester industry and more expensive machinery, the sales narratives also asserted that the technological surplus value of their founder’s invention allowed farmers to prosper. These messages to farmers about their own relationship with the Company mark the change in the advertising appeal

²⁹ “Annual Catalogue: McCormick Machines- 1887”; “Established 1831- Fifty-Seventh Annual Catalogue: McCormick Machines- 1888,” box 3, Mss 5x MIHCC.

³⁰ Butler to S. B. Town, May 2, 1890, reel 297, Mss 1x, MCC. “Annual Catalogue: McCormick Machines- 1887” box 3, Mss 5x; A. Mayer to S. B. Town, June 10, 1893, reel 337, Mss 1x, MCC; Butler to S. W. Park, Apr. 1, 1889; May 13, 1890, reel 297, Mss 1x, MIHCC.

of the “Established 1831” brand, which originally only signified McCormick’s superiority to its industrial competitors. In contrast, the 1885 catalog emphasized the relationship between farmers and the Company, reminding customers that McCormick’s invention “released the farmer from the drudgery of life, [and] almost miraculously increased production.” The Company’s ingenuity conferred substantial benefits upon customers as it reminded farmers, “as heretofore we shall make your interests our interests.”³¹

The cover art of the 1890 catalog summarized the concept of technological surplus value. On the front cover (Figure 8) a farmer stands next to a fashionably attired woman wearing a stylish hat and holding a parasol beneath a hilltop tree. He is gesturing to a harvester-binder cutting a field of grain in the background. An inset picture in the top right corner of the illustration, labeled “1830,” shows a man raking grain by hand in front of uncut fields and a bonneted woman binding grain by hand. The image implied that the modern farmer and his wife were no longer toilers as their predecessors had been in 1830. Rather he was an owner of producer-good capital – operated by wage-laborers – which accumulated such wealth that allowed him and his wife to enjoy a life of leisurely consumption.³²

³¹ “Established 1831 – Fifty fourth annual catalogue: McCormick Machines – 1885,”; “McCormick Harvesting Machine Company – 1893”, Annual Catalog, Mss 5x Box 3, MIHCC.

³² “Established 1831 – Fifty Ninth Year - the McCormick Annual Catalogue– 1890,” Mss 5x, Box 3. Wisconsin Historical Society, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, “The McCormick Annual Catalog,” 1890, WHi-86968. Viewed online at <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/feature/mccormick/>, MIHCC.

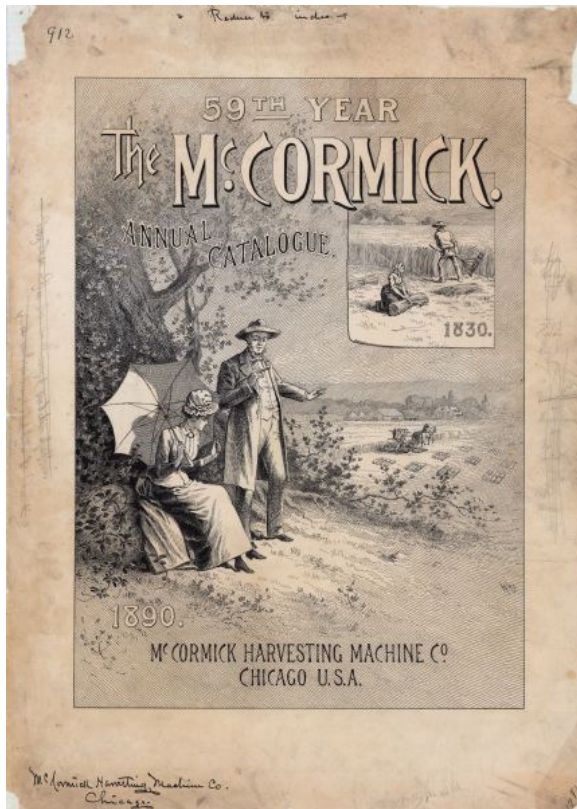


Figure 8: 1890 MHMC Catalog Cover.



Figure 9: 1890 MHMC Catalog Back Cover.

The back cover drew out the concept further by incorporating mechanized farmers into middle-class consumption and the project of civilization (Figure 9). Set in a parlor, a well-groomed, bow-tied man sits in an arm chair with a foot up on an ottoman, pointing a pencil at North America on a globe. A boy leans across the man's lap to get a good look at the globe and a girl looks up from her book on the plush carpeted floor. There is a large mirror on the wall, revealing Asia on the literally darker side of the globe as well as a miniature marble bust atop a bookcase. A painting of a mower cutting through a field hangs adjacent to the mirror. Text across the globe reads: "my children on this globe you see the harvest fields of the earth where the McCormick is ever king." The illustration is labeled, "Teaching Objective Lessons."³³

The 1890 cover art combined with the narratives in the catalog pages convey the core of the technological surplus value within the brand. The founder's invention signaled a monumental jump forward in the progress of civilization and the circumstances of farmers everywhere. The McCormick Company continued in its founder's footsteps as a cutting-edge leader in agricultural progress, blazing trails where others merely followed. Investing in a more expensive McCormick machine not only guaranteed that the purchaser had the highest quality machine on the market, but also promised that the farmer would rise in status and material wealth. No longer would the farmer be a toiler, but rather he would transform into a capitalist, owning producer goods and hiring laborers both of which produced the wealth necessary to enjoy the consumer goods and leisure of the Victorian middle class. McCormick machines were branded as a

³³ "Established 1831 – Fifty Ninth Year - the McCormick Annual Catalogue– 1890," Mss 5x, Box 3. Wisconsin Historical Society, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, "The McCormick Annual Catalog," 1890, WHi-4413. Viewed online at <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/feature/mccormick/>.

status symbol, an idea intrinsically connected to the Company's "prestige of priority." Butler bragged that the 1890 catalog was "the best advertising matter that was ever put out." He recognized that selling harvesters was about convincing would-be customers to dream of the material benefits that owning such an expensive machine would confer upon them. As farming men and women gazed through the pages of the catalog, they saw "better" machinery as a pathway to having "better" lives.³⁴

With the rising tide of radical agrarian producerism in the later 1880s and into the 1890s, the McCormick company sought to harness its supposed authority over farmers to defuse their hostility. In 1889 the firm sent out literature to its agents advising them on how to deal with "the Farmers Grange Movement"--its blanket term for all farmers' organizations that sought communal solutions to social and economic problems. The pamphlet outlined why the McCormick Company was not a monopoly and could not bear to reduce the price of its machinery because of the rigorous competition in the harvester business. Its tone was patronizing, as it warned "against the *politicians* who are. . . . Political demagogues who care little for the farmers' Granges or the farmers' interests." The Company attempted to separate its customers from the radical elements. Furthermore, this circular seemed to encourage reform efforts: "wherever extortion or monopoly or combination rings exist, we hope the farmers will strike hard blows to eradicate them." Indicating the smarminess of their public relations rhetoric, the next year they attempted to create a "Harvester Trust" along with five other manufacturers.³⁵

³⁴ Butler to S. W. Park, May 13, 1890, reel 297, Mss 1x, MIHCC.

³⁵ McCormick HMC, "The Farmers Grange Movement," 1889, box 3, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

Reflecting populist rhetoric of modernization and economic liberty, McCormick advertising further stressed that farmers' shrewd management was necessary to reap the rewards of the land. An 1893 advertisement began: "The Pleasures of Toil are unknown to many thousands in the world's grand army of toilers. It's because so few of them labor with their heads as well as with their hands. Thinking pays; ideas are so much capital." The advertisement stated the literal wealth production of thought, suggesting a similarity between the productive methods of farmers and the harvester firm. Manual labor alone was not the best way to obtain "the pleasures of toil"; clearly producer goods were necessary to the production of wealth as well.³⁶

Alongside the campaign of marketing literature, McCormick officials consistently solicited newspaper editors to publish glowing articles that reflected their history and its just rewards. These pieces more openly justified the Company's elite position in society and the merits of technological surplus value. A mechanical journal explained, "that immense wealth came to the inventor for the benefits conferred." Some more explicitly placed Cyrus McCormick amongst the cannon of great inventors. An article in *Greater Chicago* claimed, "[McCormick's] fame in the agricultural field was gained solely through the fact that not unlike Thomas A. Edison, his was a mastermind in mechanics. . . . [He] was one of the world's greatest benefactors to mankind." The text went on to state that his reaper was "the greatest labor saving device of the century." The

³⁶ The firm annually sent out prefabricated advertisement copy to their agents to post in local newspapers. In 1893 it sent out four sets of copy for agents to rotate in weekly readers. "McCormick Advertisements," Apr. 20, 1893, box 3, Mss 5x, MIHCC.

reading public, and farmers in particular, received the message of Cyrus McCormick's inventive prowess from many sources.³⁷

The apex of the Company's efforts to generate consumer empathy with the brand and restore their authority over their customers was the 1894 catalog. Looking radically different from previous catalogs, the cover read, "The Farmer--Our Country's Defender--The Builder of our National Prosperity and the Guaranty of Our Future Greatness" (Figure 10). Betraying anxiety about the agrarian political movement, it displayed two illustrations. The first was of a courtroom bordered by an American flag, captioned "The Balance of Power." The second was of a farmer riding a McCormick and titled, "The hand that drives the Binder is the hand that should rule the world." The cover set the tone for the catalog, shifting away from the Company's usual celebration of the reaper in years past toward a rejoicing paean to the farmer. Company management knew that their customers were the same populists that threatened to topple the economic order. In response, they tried accommodating the insurgents.³⁸

³⁷ "The Man for the Time," *Easter's Implement World*, Feb. 28, 1893, box 134, Cyrus H. McCormick II, Subject Files, Mss 2c, MCC; "Farming in America," *Greater Chicago*, Aug. 4, 1898, box 134, Mss 2c, MHCC.

³⁸ "Sixty-third Annual Catalogue – McCormick Machines, 1894," box 3, Mss 5x, MIHCC. Wisconsin Historical Society, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, "The McCormick Annual Catalog," 1894, WHi-4415. Viewed online at <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/feature/mccormick/>.

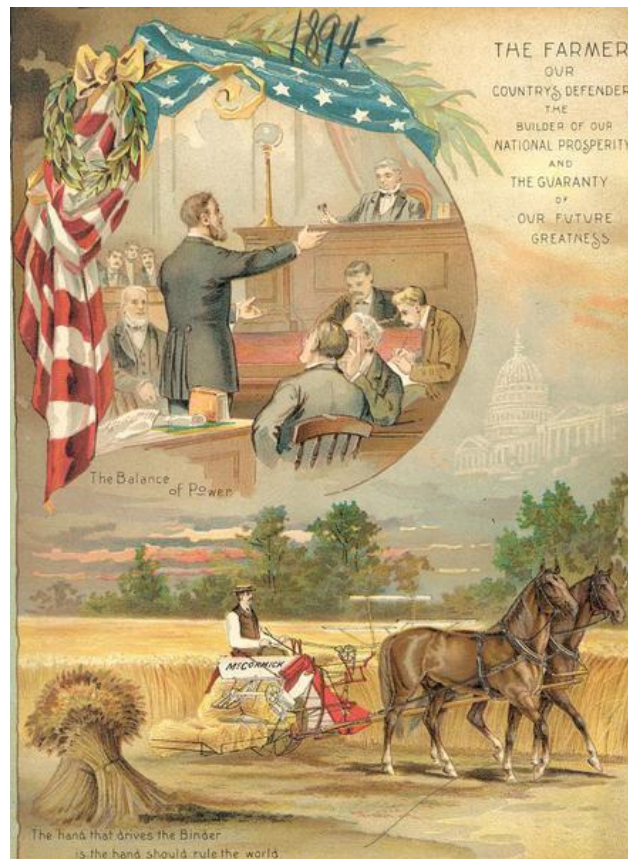


Figure 10: 1894 MHMC Catalog Cover.

Within the catalog's pages, the narrative labored to establish the parallels between the farmer and the manufacturer. The connection was drawn from their supposedly similar relationship to technology and producerism. "The practical farmer of today is a theoretical mechanic." A few pages later, "no workman can perform as much labor and do his work as well as the American mechanic." Following the narrative's rationale, the farmer was not a toiler, but neither was he a capitalist as the catalogs had inferred in 1890. Rather, the farmer was a modern mechanic running finely tuned machinery, which made him more productive. The Company implied that it played a special role in

allowing the farmer to reach this evolved state because of its relationship with mechanical ingenuity.³⁹

For the first time, the sales magazine included historical biographies of prominent farmers. The new feature introduced a rhetorical question: “What does not the world owe to the farm?” The biographies presented important business and political figures with agrarian roots, including George Washington, Henry Clay, Leland Stanford, and Phillip Armour. Predictably, the catalog also lionized McCormick. His biography demonstrated, “how a farmer boy worked his way up to be one of the greatest and richest manufacturers of the country.” The entire performance of the narrative suggested Cyrus McCormick was a farmer hero. In all, the house of McCormick then was not leaching wealth away from producers whom populists targeted, but rather an ally in the pursuit of individual success. The biographies as a whole, and McCormick’s in particular, implied that farmers could rely on political and industrial elites to act in their best interests.⁴⁰

The McCormick Harvesting Machine Company’s publications leading up to 1894 were public messages to potential customers aligning the two parties’ interests and justifying a position of dominance. The change in promotional literature from the original “Established 1831,” advertising in 1879, indicated the Company’s accommodation of the prominent grassroots challenges it faced. These messages were no longer only about superiority to competitors, but also about harmonious relationships with customers. By 1896, however, the radical populist sentiments, which the McCormicks sought to alleviate, were sweeping the nation in anticipation of the upcoming presidential election.

³⁹ Ibid, 5, 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 37.

Over-Stating Historic Authority

By early July the populist movement seemed to be influencing the Democratic Party at the National Convention in Chicago and was making Cyrus McCormick II anxious. The populist uprising was reorienting the party his family had supported since the 1850s, away from his economic interests. His business dealings with farmers and laborers had made him familiar with the threats that populism posed, but as these radical ideas seeped into mainstream politics he worried that it signaled more drastic changes to the existing economic order. While stumping for bimetallism, Ohio bonanza farmer and Democratic leader John Bookwalter compounded McCormick II's fears by proclaiming that mechanized harvesters did not share the wealth in the ways that the industry implied, but only increased productivity in exchange for increased debt. When Democrats adopted the People's Party plank on bimetallism, McCormick II sought to translate the authority created by his technological surplus value and brand into real political capital against the radical movement.⁴¹

McCormick II publically took a stand against the radical movement, urging the Democratic Party to abandon the free-silver platform. His gold bug appeal seemed to be economic suicide because it went directly against the core of his agrarian customer base. An incredulous newspaper telegraphed McCormick to confirm the quote: "believing that the news would create a strong prejudice against product of your company." McCormick confirmed the report and presented himself as a trusted advisor to the farmers: "the present silver sentiment is a delusion, put forward for political purposes and for individual personal gain by a few at the expense of the masses." He confirmed his

⁴¹ John W. Bookwalter, *If Not Silver, What?* (Springfield, Ohio: John W. Bookwalter, 1896), 21-24.

commitment to the Democratic Party, but qualified it by saying he could not support free silver, “which I firmly believe to be disastrous to the highest interests of the Nation.” As in earlier public statements against the Grangers, McCormick II attempted to separate his customers from the agitators that led them astray. This exchange garnered national attention, but did not stop the Democrats from nominating William Jennings Bryan for president after his famous “Cross of Gold” speech. Following his failed appeal to curb the Democratic adoption of free silver, the harvester magnate abandoned his family’s political legacy as staunch Democrats and endorsed Republican William McKinley for president.⁴²

McCormick II continued his campaign against Bryan and free silver through his sales network. In mid-August Butler surveyed all 7,500 McCormick agents asking them to provide information on the political leanings of their regions. Butler warned, “We have never before been so at a loss to lay out our plans and work for the next season as we are at this time. If we felt sure the election would go for sound money and reasonable protection, we should push ahead with our manufacturing.” He implied that if free silver won, the Company would cease manufacturing machines because of resulting monetary instability. The memorandum was widely published by conservative papers as evidence of the economic apocalypse that would reward free-silver monetization. Undoubtedly the message was an attempt by McCormick II to claim a leadership position amongst his clientele and employees. The Company made clear that if Bryan won, the house of McCormick would have to curtail its production of reapers. Sales agents reminded

⁴² *Lincoln Freie Presse* to McCormick II, July 4, 1896; McCormick II to *Lincoln Freie Presse*, July 8, 1896, box 11, Mss 8c, MIHCC; “M’Cormick Denounces Popocracy: He Looks Upon Free Silver as a National Calamity,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 2, 1896, 3.

customers that if the Company had to cut back, the farmers would no longer have access to the technology that allowed them to prosper.⁴³

McKinley utilized McCormick II's message and endorsement in his stump speeches, predicting that free silver would destabilize the economic order of the nation. "This uncertainty makes every business-man pause, makes every business enterprise halt; and while they pause and halt the home of every workingman is filled with despair." McKinley interpreted the message as McCormick II planned, implying that anything that negatively impacted capital would dynamically harm farmers and laborers.⁴⁴

McCormick II's public stance against free silver was a calculated gambit. In taking the stand, he relied heavily on his company's prestige as a respected source of authority in the agrarian mind. He hoped the brand would be resilient enough to prevent a consumer backlash and sought other mediums to reinforce the Company's public image as the great agrarian liberator and forerunner of progress. The United States Department of the Treasury provided him with just such an opportunity.

In March 1896 the treasury department began to print a new "education" series of silver certificates. The new bills artistically represented the progressive themes of the 1890s. In allegorical classical style, the images depicted "Electricity Presenting Light to the World" and "History Instructing Youth," amongst others. For the first time, federal currency was pressed with images of non-political leaders, including the inventors Morse and Fulton on the two-dollar note. The treasury department planned to issue five-dollar

⁴³ Butler to sales agents, Aug. 17, 1896, box 11, Mss 8c, MCC; "What Bryan's Election Would Mean," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 2, 1896, 6.

⁴⁴ "Factory Men Hear Him: M'Kinley Speaks to Clubs from Springfield, O.," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct. 2, 1896, 3.

and ten-dollar notes later that year. After bimetal exchange had been prohibited in 1893, silver certificates plummeted in value because they were perceived as intrinsically inferior to gold-backed currency. Secretary of the Treasury John G. Carlisle--a gold bug himself--recognized the legitimacy of silverite demands for an increased money supply and attempted to shore up the cultural and moral value associated with silver without “freeing” it, to encourage its circulation. The printing of inventors and machines on the “education” series was to remind people that silver was associated with the superiority of American civilization, even if the certificates could not be exchanged for gold. Despite these efforts, gold-bug capitalists and bankers atop the economic order would not accept silver-backed currency as a means to repay debts, so Carlisle’s gesture was fruitless.⁴⁵

Regardless of this, the McCormicks learned of the new silver certificates and sought to have their patriarch’s likeness printed on the new currency as a pillar of progress. McCormick II wrote to their agent in Washington D.C., Louis Dent, to: “Ascertain who is it that decides [on the designs]... and from them could you not inquire whether the development of the agricultural resources of the country are not equal in importance to the development of the steamship or the telegraph.... The name of the

⁴⁵ “New Silver Certificates: Beautiful Designs of the Bill Shortly to be Issued, How This Change Has Taken Place,” *New York Times*, Mar. 1, 1896, 25; the “education” series one, two and five dollar bills were briefly in circulation. Pictures and discussion of the “education” series artwork are in Gene Hessler, *US Essay, Proof, and Specimen Notes* (Portage, Ohio: BNR, 1979), 98-133. The treasury department’s decision to print new silver certificates in 1896 seems odd, considering bimetal currency exchange had been prohibited since 1893. Prior to that, the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchasing Act allowed silver specie to be exchanged for gold at a ratio of sixteen to one. Many people thought that such a rate of exchange favored the inherent value of gold and so attempted to secure gold for silver certificates, resulting in a serious drain on the Treasury gold reserves--partially accounting for the Panic of 1893. The decision to prohibit bimetal exchange soon thereafter reduced the credible money supply because only the federal government was forced to accept silver as currency on par with gold-backed money. The intrinsically “lesser” silver certificates became a currency for those considered to be “lesser” people. With so little credible money in circulation, prices deflated, and farmers, among others, began to crusade for the legally enforced free-silver exchange to secure better prices for their crops and repay their debts with cheaper currency. O’Malley, *Face Value*, 124-61.

inventor of the Reaper might find a place with those of the pioneers upon other lines.” If the family could have their father definitively presented as the inventor of the reaper on the silver certificate, the government would effectively brand their version of history onto the currency that was most associated with agrarian interests. The meaning would seem to be that wealth accrued by farmers using McCormick’s technology was literally printed as “McCormick” money--a profound statement of elite hegemony. McCormick II began his lobby of the treasury office three days before his sales agents began pressuring farmers to abandon free silver. He considered his ability to make a political stand against populists without injury dynamically linked to the intellectual debt he perceived farmers owed his father’s company. He hoped that placing his father’s image on currency would remind them of that relationship.⁴⁶

Louis Dent was the family’s first historical laborer who did work resembling that of the modern historian. Smarting from the debacle at the 1893 World’s Fair, the McCormick family had employed Louis Dent to compile evidence in Washington D.C. at the Congressional Library and Patent Office that would verify their history. Dent was college educated and had worked as a stenographer, a journalist and a free-lance researcher beginning around 1890. He came into contact with the McCormick’s because he had provided research assistance to James G. Blaine’s (Anita McCormick Blaine’s father-in-law) for his account of his experience in Congress.⁴⁷

Dent’s lobbying efforts proved successful. The treasury department released the new design in late December 1896. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* ran the headline “New

⁴⁶ McCormick II to Louis Dent, Aug. 14, 1896, reel 7, Mss 3c, MIHCC.

⁴⁷ McCormick II to George E. Adams, March 8, 1894, reel 4, Mss 3c, MIHCC.

\$10 Silver Certificates--Will Bear Vignettes of C. H. McCormick and Eli Whitney.”

McKinley had already won the presidential election by that point, and undoubtedly the chorus of dire predictions by gold-bug capitalists played some role in defeating Bryan, even if the exact degree is immeasurable.⁴⁸

Competitors throughout the harvester industry had long contested the McCormick origin story as an oversimplification of the past and a direct slight to their own credibility. They too had been faced with discontented agrarian customers and endeavored to temper their criticism. As a whole, the harvester industry advertised an amicable relationship between farmers and industrialists that aided in their pursuit of wealth. These attempts at fostering a harmonious partnership with farmers were constantly undercut by McCormick’s “bombastic advertising” which derided them as “followers” that “rob” McCormick of its intellectual property and peddled “second-rate” machines which were “trash.”⁴⁹

Steward, an inventor and patent officer for Deering Harvester, was the most outspoken crusader against the McCormick narrative. He sarcastically summed up the success of the McCormick advertising campaign as a result of its longevity:

Popular belief that Cyrus H. McCormick invented the reaper and thus laid the foundation for Harvesting Machinery is as deeply rooted as the child’s faith in Santa Claus. . . . It is a half-century since Cyrus H. McCormick began advertising and claiming he was the inventor of the reaper. It has been dinned into the ears of the press, into the ears of editors, has found its way into Encyclopedias and has loaded the shelves of our libraries with false biographies.

⁴⁸ “New \$10 Silver Certifications: Will Bear Vignettes of C. H. McCormick and Eli Whitney,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec. 25, 1896, 8.

⁴⁹ J.F. Steward to Walter A. Wood Mowing & Reaping Machine Co., January 13, 1897, box 1, Mss BJ; “Established 1831-- Sixty-first Annual Catalogue – McCormick Machines, 1892,” p. 5, box 3, Mss 5x; “Annual Catalog: McCormick Machines—1892”, p.4 , Box 3, Mss 5x, MIHCC. McCormick Harvesting Machines Company, “Which Side are You On?” 1888, Advertising Card, WHi-86304, Wisconsin Historical Images, Wisconsin Historical Society, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/>.

Steward further lamented the inability to counter fictitious advertising. “While business houses cannot be seriously censured for this kind of advertising it is censurable to mold advertising talk into history.” Regarded as the utmost authority on the reaper’s true mechanical evolution, he saw it as his duty to correct the “historical injustices to real inventors.”⁵⁰

As previously detailed, rival harvester manufacturers corrected the history at the 1893 World’s Fair through presentation of historical evidence to the Inventors’ Congress. News of the victory, however, did not reach their agrarian customer base. In 1897, when the rivals contested the placement of Cyrus McCormick’s likeness on the silver certificate, they were more successful in publicly revealing the McCormicks’ fictionalization of history. Upon becoming aware of the McCormick scheme at the Department of the Treasury, competing manufacturers organized a cooperative refutation. The arguments and the results were covered extensively in farm trade journals as well as many national newspapers. The public would finally bear witness to the contest for the past.

The Illinois-based harvester manufacturers of Deering Harvester Company, Plano Manufacturing Company, and Warder, Bushnell & Glessner responded to the initial report from the Department of the Treasury, collectively sending a letter to Treasury Secretary Carlisle. Their letter offered a history of the reaper’s development and they pleaded to be seen in a hearing on the topic. They were prepared to present “overwhelming proof that the popular belief that McCormick was the inventor of the

⁵⁰ J. F. Steward to Ginn & Co., Jan. 15, 1898, box 1, Mss BJ; Harvester Co. to John Russell Parsons, Dec. 31, 1896, , box 1, Mss BJ, MIHCC.

reaper is a fallacy.” The rivals believed that placing McCormick on federal money – whose likeness was also the official symbol of his family’s company - would serve as a government endorsement of the “falsehood . . . which injustice would result in corresponding financial injury to all competing manufacturers.” After sending their letters, the companies recruited other firms to join their cause – successfully gaining the support of at least Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine in Hoosick Falls, New York. The companies began immediate preparations to send Steward and another lawyer, Henry S. Robbins, to Washington, to argue their case to Secretary Carlisle. Wood Harvester also recruited the U.S. Senators from New York, David Hill and Edward Murphy to assist Robbins and Steward.⁵¹

The legal brief that Robbins and Steward presented to Carlisle laid out the injustice of promoting the McCormick brand over others as well as the historical inaccuracy of such a decision. Robbins described the stalemate of the reaper war and the importance of advertising to the industry, telling Carlisle that, “The actual merit of those manufactured by the different makers are so nearly equal that the selection of the purchaser is generally decided by some outside consideration.” He further argued, “The [government] indorsement [sic] . . . of C. H. McCormick will attract universal attention . . . and will ensure to them great profits which they would not otherwise enjoy.” He disclosed what those throughout the industry had known for years- the McCormicks

⁵¹ Charles Deering et al. to John G. Carlisle, Dec. 29, 1896, box 1, Mss BJ, MCC., Parson to Steward, December 30, 1896, Parsons to Edward Murphy, December 30, 1896; Parsons to David Hill, January 2, 1897, Box 1, Mss BJ, MIHCC.

had fabricated history. The rest of the industry salivated at the opportunity to refute that past publicly in front of an official arbiter.⁵²

McCormick II responded by writing a letter to Carlisle that ostensibly restated years of branding and advertising. He argued that his father deserved recognition, because his efforts “resulted in such benefits to mankind,” allowing farmers and other manufacturers to substantially contribute to the progress of civilization. McCormick presented the central tenets of technological surplus value and underlined his father’s efforts as a producer. “My father toiled as few men have toiled and with remarkable perseverance. . . . You will understand the pride I naturally feel in his invention and especially in the tenacity, energy and consistency of purpose that animated him during his early years of hardship and toil.” He further listed his father amongst other great inventors and the meaning of this invention to civilization: “At the beginning of the century agriculture was almost the sole occupation but with the tremendous energy of American invention progress in lines of manufacture has led our people into the workshop and the cities.... The reaper... has enabled the production of crops that have more than kept pace with the growth of the centers of population, and though the young man of the farm has gone to the city still the labor saving farm tools have kept up production.” Concluding his letter, he justified federal endorsement of his company’s brand, because it was “impossible to dissociate my father’s name from the invention which he made and the business which he founded.”⁵³

⁵²Steward and Wood, “Advertisements on United States Bank Notes,” box 1, Mss BJ, MIHCC.

⁵³McCormick II to John Carlisle, Jan. 6, 1897, reel 8, Mss 3c, MIHCC.

McCormick also sent Swift to Washington to assist Dent in arguing the facts of their case to Secretary Carlisle, but their efforts came up short. Undoubtedly Carlisle was surprised by the uproar caused by his decision to place McCormick on the silver certificate. He, like many others, had recognized the Company's advertised past as truth and so accepted Dent's early lobbying as a clear choice for inclusion on the silver certificates. Once the other harvester manufacturers contested this decision, he decided it was easier to leave well enough alone rather than "bother" with such things. He instructed his chief of engraving to substitute other vignettes for Whitney and McCormick before any of the bills went into circulation. National and local newspapers reported Carlisle's decision, creating widespread doubt regarding the McCormick narrative.⁵⁴

The rival harvester companies wasted no time in generating press to spread the news of Treasury's rejection of the McCormick fabrications of the past. They sent out essays and articles across the country, and their sales agents reminded customers of the decision. One article, written by the Deering Company and printed in *Farm Machinery*, began by crediting Hussey with the invention of the reaper. After revealing the "true" history of the reaper, it then concluded: "it seems very strange that his [McCormick's] successors should claim that he ever invented any detail that lasted, or in fact, any that was ever used by any manufactory." Deering implied that the McCormicks knew the true

⁵⁴ Steward to Deering, Jan. 11, 1897, box 1, Mss BJ; J. G. Carlisle to C. M. Johnson, Jan. 14, 1897, box 1, Mss BJ MIHCC; "Gossips in a Flutter: Wife of Secretary Francis Breaks a Precedent," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 8, 1897, 8.

history of the machine all along and played the role of the despised confidence man, willfully lying to the public in order to boost sales.⁵⁵

The McCormicks were aware that the events at the Department of the Treasury threatened to undermine their credibility in the public mind and waged a counter-smear campaign. Immediately, Butler telegraphed *Farm Machinery* ordering them to issue a retraction of the article or be sued for libel. This worked to silence one paper, but on the whole irreparable damage had been done to their reputation by the entire incident at the nation's capital. The Company used their in-house paper *The Farmers Advance* and networks of sales agents to reassure their customer base that the allegations were untrue. The paper proposed that the McCormick Company's status as the leading producer of reapers was evidence that McCormick invented the machine: "Had Hussey really demonstrated to the world that he was the inventor of the successful reaping machine, and had McCormick been forced as Hussey was, to recognize his failure and retire from the field.... Hussey would be, to-day, the leading manufacturer of harvesting machines and McCormick would be comparatively unknown." Hussey could not have been the inventor, because he did not have the rewards that would befit invention. While this seems like a desperate argument, it reflected the power of the alchemy of progress in American culture, using success in the present as direct evidence of Cyrus H. McCormick's marvelous invention in the past.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Farm Machinery*, Jan. 13, 1897, box 1, Mss BJ, MIHCC.

⁵⁶ E. K. Reifsnider to Deering Harvester Co., Jan. 18, 1897, box 1, Mss BJ; "Pounding the Same Old Straw," *Farmers Advance*, May 1897, Box 134, Mss 2c, MIHCC.

Shortly after Carlisle changed his mind, both sides published documentation of their arguments for public consumption and advertising material. The inventors, Steward, Miller, and Parsons assembled *Overlooked Pages of Reaper History*, a republication of three pamphlets from the 1850s, which demonstrated that Hussey invented the reaper before McCormick, through detailing the mechanical operation of each. Steward wanted to have the title, “placed in every library in the world and perhaps translated into foreign languages.” Swift at McCormick countered with “Who Invented the Reaper,” in an April 1897 *Implement Age*, an incredibly long and detailed mechanical description of the difference between Hussey’s and McCormick’s Reapers. Swift’s argument (and perhaps even the entire text of the article) was based on historical research that had been compiled by Louis Dent. Dent had found an 1850 advertisement in which Cyrus Senior directly compared his machine with Hussey’s on both its mechanical and historical merits for the purposes of patent extension. Dent presented this document and others along with his own analysis to the family in a bound volume. Dent’s volume, which Swift reprinted as his own for the Company’s purposes, can be considered the family’s first in-depth historical study.⁵⁷

The editor of *Implement Age* reviewed the arguments provided by McCormick and the opposition later that month and found neither to be conclusive or compelling. He felt that others “who have time and patience to wade through the tediously long *ex parte* pleas of both” would agree. Despite this finding, Steward and Swift and several other

⁵⁷ John Steward et al., eds., *Overlooked Pages of Reaper History* (Chicago: J. R. Parsons, L. Miller, J. F. Steward, 1897); Steward to Deering, Jan. 13, 1897, box 1, Mss BJ, MCC; R. B. Swift, “Who Invented the Reaper,” *Implement Age*, Apr. 15, 1897, Press Clippings, Box 134, Mss 2c. Louis Dent to Frances Smith, April 18, 1905, box 215, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

inventors -paid clandestinely by both factions- carried on a running argument in the journal for two more years. The printed exchange degenerated from a discussion of the mechanical evolution of the machine to personal attacks on one another's character. "I have stated that John F. Steward, who in this controversy has been attempting to make a record to suit his own sinister motives," wrote Swift, "has been guilty of mutilating and misrepresenting well established historical facts." Steward ultimately threatened to sue Swift for libel, forcing *Implement Age* to stop publishing the heated exchange.⁵⁸

The 1897 silver certificate victory emboldened William Deering & Co. to make greater hay out of history as a way to cut into the McCormick brand. Deering had made its own 1850s connection with the evolution of the binder a part of its advertising as early as 1886, practicing the McCormick's historical advertising strategy for its own ends. The company's success in contesting the McCormick past at both the 1893 World's Fair and then more publically during the silver-certificate controversy of 1897 led Deering management to advertise a counter-history of the reaper which although it that had no connection directly to their own company, was a single-minded assault on McCormick's brand and history.⁵⁹

Deering's historical aggression is best demonstrated by its activities at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Mirroring the McCormicks efforts at the 1893 World's Fair, Deering staged a historical coup and secured an exclusive right from French officials to create a "retrospective exhibit" of harvesting technology for the fair-going public. Covering

⁵⁸ "Review of Recent Additions to Reaper History," *Implement Age*, Apr. 29, 1897, box 134, Mss 2c; R.B. Swift, "To the Editor," unpublished, November 2, 1898 and "Correspondence from W.P. Nolan [editor, *Implement Age*] to J.F. Steward, November 21, 1898, Box 64,, Mss AC, MIHCC.

⁵⁹ Deering Harvest Co., "Forty Harvest Seasons – 1858-1898," Advertising Ephemera, folder 740, box 95, International Harvest Company Corporate Archives Central File, 1819-1998, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

15,000 square feet, the Deerings included ninety-five reproductions of historical harvesting machine models, electrified to demonstrate mechanical operation, thirty large water-color paintings of historic reapers in various landscapes and portraits of eighteen-inventors. Digging as deep as the Roman Empire, the exhibit included a model of the “semimechanical means of harvesting resorted to by the Gauls, as told by Pliny,” and flattering the French by referring to it as the first civilized attempt at mechanized reaping. Deering set out to muddy the waters, telling a more complicated narrative of technological evolution, which the McCormick’s resented as an attack upon their business and family.⁶⁰

Ultimately, the prolonged historical advertising battle tarnished the reputation of the McCormick Harvest Machine Company as the most prestigious manufacturer of reapers. The McCormick Works produced an estimated 150,000 machines annually by the 1890s--about 88,000 fewer machines than the Deering Company--an acceptable difference when their brand was a status symbol and their machines commanded higher prices. Once their competitors had dispelled the “prestige of priority,” however, the McCormick market share dwindled in the face of comparable and cheaper harvesters supplied by competitors. In private conversation, the Deerings offered to cease their counter-history advertising, if the McCormicks would eliminate their claims to the past. The McCormicks, however, could not sacrifice the “historical feature of the harvesting

⁶⁰ *Retrospective Report on the International Universal Exposition at Paris*, 456-465, Box 2, Mss 6x. Stanley McCormick to Charles Richards, July 23, 1900, box 2; S.E. Morss to Harold McCormick, March 25, 1901, box 3, Stanley McCormick Papers, Mss 1G, MIHCC.

machine business,” because it would be “against the interests of the Company,” as the cornerstone of their brand.⁶¹

Faced with a declining market share, the McCormicks were forced to mark down their prices and began pursuing opportunities to eliminate the Deering’s through a merger or an acquisition beginning in 1897. Advertising played a key consideration in this decision making process. As the family matriarch, Nettie Fowler McCormick, put it, the Deering’s successful “cultural warfare” upon her deceased husband’s prestige and the Company’s brand demanded that they either “buy” or “kill” their competitor’s company. Feeling that the Deering’s “enormous” price was too high, despicably implying that they were “the equal of our business in its prestige in the country,” she resolved that the McCormick Company must bury the Deering Company through price slashing. She was certain that her family would emerge victorious if they sold at prices “as low or lower than anyone,” because McCormick machines were better and “have the greater [public] respect due to... longer standing.” Following her advice, the McCormick Company engaged in price warfare for the next five years, determined to eliminate their competitors and the negative advertising campaigns which had tarnished their company’s brand.⁶²

Failing to destroy their rival through competition or restore their company’s previous market advantage and historical prestige, in 1901 the McCormicks renewed negotiations to merge with the Deering Company. The fierce competition had proven too ruinous to their fortunes to continue onward. With the help of George Perkins from the

⁶¹ Harold McCormick to Stanley McCormick, August 15, 1900, box 2, Mss 1G, MIHCC. Winder, *American Reaper*, 18-19.

⁶² Nettie Fowler McCormick to C.H. McCormick II, September 16, 1897, October 4, 1897; Nettie Fowler McCormick to Anita McCormick Blaine, July 30, 1897; Nettie Fowler McCormick to Earl Butler, September 22, 1897, box 7, Nettie Fowler McCormick Papers, Mss 1B, MIHCC.

House of Morgan, the Deering and McCormick companies combined with the three other largest harvester manufacturers to create the International Harvester Company in 1902.

Importantly, the McCormicks duped their new partners with the help of their in-law, John D. Rockefeller, who secretly bought large portions of the “public stock.” By 1903 the two families owned half of the total stock in the new corporation. After the ten-year period of Morgan-guided leadership mandated by the merger agreement, the McCormicks gained complete control of the corporation and the very industry they believed their father had created. Almost immediately, they resurrected their historical narrative as part of their public relations and legal defense to refute a federal anti-trust case brought against them in 1912.⁶³

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company was embattled on three fronts by its employees, its industry peers, and its customers. While the firm and its competitors recited economic theories of American capitalist liberty to their unionizing employees, none dared antagonize their customers with the same language. In dealing with radical agrarian clients who sought drastic economic reforms the McCormick Company was not unified with other harvesting companies, but in direct competition. In response, the McCormicks articulated a technological surplus value ideology that offered a useable past for public consumption, creating a brand based on McCormick Senior’s invention of the reaper and aligning their supposed inventive energy with producer populists’ labor. The McCormicks’

⁶³ McCormick Jr., “Memorandum on the Creation of International Harvester,” Aug. 13, 1902, box 30, Mss 2c; John D. Rockefeller Jr. to Harold McCormick, June 23, 1902, box 605; Edith Rockefeller McCormick to Anita McCormick Blaine, July 1903, box 453, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

technological surplus value ideology helped the Company maintain primacy in the harvester market during the reaper wars and through the rise of the populist movement. Their brand, however, made protection of their history the same as protection of their profits; a critical chink in their armor of “prestige” that was ultimately exposed and led to the demise of the Company’s market dominance.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Kramer attributes the 1897 shift from McCormick to Deering industrial authority to sales superiority in the harvester industry to vertical integration, which the McCormick’s could not keep pace with financially and a sudden improvement in their marketing strategy. Against the light of the massive amount of investment capital available to the McCormicks from their close relationship with the Rockefellers, this explanation seems unlikely. Thus the shift in marketing success by Deering thanks to their public relations victory over the McCormicks warrants greater emphasis in the decision to seek a merger. Helen Kramer, “Harvesters and High Finance,” *Business History Review* 38 (1964): 288-289.

CHAPTER THREE:

“THE REAPER IS TO THE NORTH...”:

HISTORICAL LABORERS AND THE MANIPULATION OF THE PAST

Secretary of War Stanton said: ‘The reaper is to the North what slavery is to the South. By taking the place of regiments of young men in western harvest fields, it released them to do battle for the Union at the front and at the same time kept up the supply of bread for the nation and the nation’s armies. Thus, without McCormick’s invention I feel the North could not win and the Union would have been dismembered.’¹

This quote came from a public relations history produced in 1931 by International Harvester as part of the centennial celebration of Cyrus McCormick’s invention of the reaper. This history of McCormick’s reaper was distributed to teachers, newspaper editors and others. Stanton’s quote dominates the brief section devoted to the American Civil War. It is meant to suggest that one of the iconic figures of the Civil War recognized McCormick as a patriotic contributor to the Union cause and without him Union victory and the emancipation of millions of slaves would have been in doubt. However, this noble, patriotic image of Cyrus McCormick is a myth.

The problem with Stanton’s quote is that it has been taken out of context and grossly misrepresents not only McCormick’s feelings about the Civil War, but also his factory’s production of reapers to support that righteous cause. Of course, Stanton’s quote and its misinterpretation do not only appear in International Harvester’s history

¹ International Harvester, “McCormick Reaper Centennial Source Material (1831-1931),” 1931: 7, accessed November 21, 2010, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/ihc/search.asp>.

publications, but it pervades the historiography of Cyrus McCormick during the Civil War. It has also been used in hundreds of books, articles and historic documents about the Civil War and nineteenth-century America.

The ubiquity of Stanton's misleading quote is the result of a concerted effort by Cyrus McCormick's family to shape and protect Cyrus' legacy as the inventor of the reaper. The McCormicks had faced frequent threats to this legacy from competing reaper firms. These battles for the past were carried out in newspapers, advertisements, field trials and World's Fairs. Salesmen from across the industry carried the controversy into farmers' homes throughout the country as they compared their machines and their histories with those of the opposition. In the years following their patriarch's death, the McCormicks discovered that holding fast and repeatedly broadcasting their private memory of the past was not enough to certify their story as truth in the public imagination. Unwavering and outspoken about their historical beliefs, they gradually turned to historical professionals to discover, analyze and publish evidence that would vindicate their claims. Sensitive to shifts in public perceptions of the past, the McCormicks also sought cultural institutions that would protect their father's legacy for all time. They ultimately set their sights on the New York University, *Hall of Fame of Great Americans*, seeking their father's inclusion in that "temple of honor" for thirty-five years following its opening in 1900.

The family's sustained efforts focusing on the *Hall of Fame* provoked vehement resistance from their own relatives. Crucially, Cyrus McCormick's siblings, nephews and nieces believed that his father, Robert McCormick, had invented the reaper and entrusted it to Cyrus to manage for the family's financial well-being. The relatives had long been

offended by the Company's advertising of the supposed "great inventor," who they knew had no mechanical instinct what-so-ever. In fact, when Cyrus McCormick II began utilizing his father's heritage as the brand of the Company in the late 1870s, the bold claim tore apart the ownership of C.H. and L.J. McCormick, resulting in the creation of McCormick Harvesting Machine Company. Leander and his son, Robert McCormick II, demanded a buy-out for their share of the company, because they would not be a party to detracting from Robert McCormick's legacy and their own heritage. The buy-out was completed after Cyrus' death, for two and a half million dollars in 1889. As part of the deal, they informally agreed to let the Company's advertising stand. This understanding was upset when the Cyrus McCormick's heirs began campaigning for the *Hall of Fame*. In response, the cousins began to make their own larger claims to promote Robert McCormick's legacy.²

Faced with fierce industrial challenges to their Company's advertising, in 1900, the heirs of Cyrus McCormick family created the "McCormick Biographical Association," which eventually spear-headed their *Hall of Fame* efforts as well. This organization was founded at a time academic historians had not yet closed-ranks as the sole professionals of historical merit. The McCormick Biographical Association's experience employing and consulting with a variety of historical laborers willing to do research, organize libraries, offer analysis, and write narratives inside-and-out of academia indicates the breadth of the historical professional spectrum at the turn of the twentieth century. Employing historical laborers from across the spectrum, the

² Norbert Lyons *The McCormick Reaper Legend* (New York: Exposition Press, 1955). William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvester* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935): 627-42.

McCormicks hired lawyers, advertisers, free-lance researchers, librarians, clerical workers, and academics. Like many other new professionals in the emerging corporate order, these historical laborers strove to secure stable employment and middle-class salaries through energetic institutional organizing and relentless pursuit of their employer's objectives. Approaching their work from very different vocational backgrounds and with diverse professional identities, these historians adopted widely divergent conceptions of "objective" historical conduct in hopes of proving the value of their expertise. Their historical contributions were of varying quality, credibility and style but became equalized and dynamically interwoven under the obscuring aegis of the McCormick family's elite status and historical enterprise.³

The full spectrum of the historical laborers during the early twentieth century is largely ignored in the historiography of the historical profession. The most relevant work on the topic, Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream* details the struggle of academically trained historians to gain professional historical authority and their quest for "objective" study of the past. Under the auspices of James Franklin Jameson and the American Historical Association, academics were able to wrest control of university historian positions from "literary," "gentlemen amateurs" by 1900 through creating peer-reviewed

³ Like any other professional group during the progressive era, academically trained historians need to be considered within their social and cultural context as trained laborers competing for jobs. This proposition becomes that much more dynamic when considering their pursuit of careers outside of the university within the emerging corporate order. The study of historical professionals can benefit by borrowing from the labor oriented histories of capitalism and advertising. Jackson Lear, *Fables of Abundance* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) details the struggle of advertising professionals and artists to demonstrate the concrete value of their expertise in a cultural climate that dismissed their labor as unnecessary and later in a corporate climate that undermined their identities as artists. Olivier Zunz, *Making American Corporate* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990) points out that new professionals were anxious to stake their claim in the corporate order through proving their utility and initiating bureaucracy building to make the institution, and their jobs, viable for the long-term.

journals, standardized “scientific” training for students and certified credentials in the form of the doctorate to control access to jobs. While Novick acknowledges that beyond the university, “nothing approaching a thoroughgoing monopoly [over historical labor] by certified professionals was ever achieved,” he fails to recognize that non-certified laborers had a substantial impact upon academics’ historical project.⁴

The McCormicks were able to reshape their father’s Civil War legacy because of the un-even application of professional standards within this broad historical labor pool during this era. Historical laborers across the professional spectrum, including moon-lighting and unemployed academics, were overly-eager and willing to provide historical evidence and narratives that placed Cyrus McCormick on “the right side of history,” in exchange for monetary rewards. Seeking middle-class earnings and professional stability, the family’s historical staff and associated consultants actively conducted research, challenged dissenting historical opinions, produced historical works, influenced the scholarship of others, and created a world-class agricultural library. In this context, “objectivity” was murky and Stanton’s quote became powerful ammunition for the McCormick Biographical Association as the primary proof of Cyrus’ contributions to one of the United States’ most formative moments.

Cyrus’s Civil War

Only after peeling back the layers of fictitious history can a clear picture emerge of Cyrus McCormick’s real relationship to the Civil War. He was not the patriotic supporter of the Union cause that Edwin Stanton’s quote implies, rather he was a Peace Democrat. Also

⁴ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 48-50.

mistaken is how prolific his reaper works was during the Civil War. From 1861 to 1865 reaper production at C.H. McCormick & Bros. can be characterized as turbulent at best.

Cyrus McCormick was deeply distraught by the outbreak of war within the United States and actively sought to end the conflict in peaceful reunification through both legitimate and clandestine means. As a native Virginian and a businessman of Chicago, he was uncomfortably torn between the two belligerents. Until the outbreak of war, he continued to remind Southern farmers that despite the company's location in the North, "our heart still yield's allegiance to the 'Old Dominion' and we claim a place as the representatives of your interests." McCormick's actions from 1860 to 1865 reflect the truth of that statement. He believed that the Union should be preserved and that the North should make the utmost concessions to the South. Determined to promote this perspective, McCormick purchased two newspapers in Chicago to make one strong Democratic paper. He also attempted to reconcile Stephen Douglas and Southern Democrats, became chair of the Democratic Cook County Central Committee and unsuccessfully ran for a seat in Congress in 1864. Staunchly supporting conservative religious beliefs on the question of slavery, he provided monetary support to prop-up Old School Presbyterianism when sectionalism was tearing the denomination apart. More damning than his party politics, were his extra political affairs. Before his journey to Europe in 1862, Cyrus procured a note of introduction from Horace Greeley to William L. Dayton, the US Ambassador to France. The note suggested that McCormick wanted to convince Napoleon III to intervene in the conflict as a peacemaker. Late in the war, he also hatched a desperate plan for Northern Democrats to negotiate a peace with the Southern Democrats in Richmond. McCormick went as far as petitioning President

Lincoln to condone this plan. More blatant un-patriotic activities are implied by his conscious destruction of letters, which he wrote to Confederate officials operating in Canada.⁵

Once the war broke, Cyrus fled to Europe to cultivate a market for the reaper abroad, avoiding the war and leaving his brothers William and Leander to run the business. William summed up the family's opinion of the war nicely in a scathing letter to his brother, accusing Cyrus of, "flee[ing] away from this land of blood & death – where we are trodden by abolitionism in the *North* without liberty of speech & with utter ruin in the south [sic]." His neglect of the reaper works and the American market during the Civil War is perhaps the leading cause of the factory's flagging production.⁶

During the war, C.H. McCormick & Bros. lost its dominating control of the reaper market as their production faltered. Manufacturing became inconsistent as a result of several factors working in concert: an antiquated mode of production, labor shortages, strikes, monetary inflation, and Cyrus' distracted initiatives to create a more complicated reaper that took twice the time to produce. The McCormick reaper production statistics bear this story out. In 1861, the McCormick works produced 5,491 reapers. In the next two years, reaper production declined to as low as 4,312 in 1863, before shooting up to

⁵ Hutchinson devoted the second chapter of his second volume to exclusively discussing Cyrus McCormick's political activities leading up to and during the war. Footnote 50 on pages 56-57 discusses the intentional destruction of a letter from Cyrus to J.E. Thompson, a former Buchanan cabinet member and confederate associate in Canada. William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest, 1856-1884* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company Incorporated, 1935): 37-63, 82. Letter from H. Greeley to W.L. Dayton, July 14, 1862, box 16, Cyrus Hall McCormick Papers, Mss 1A, McCormick-International Harvester Company Collection, Madison, Wisconsin [Hereafter MIHCC].

⁶ As quoted in David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984): 166.

6,090 in 1864 and dipping to a ten-year low of 2,503 in 1865. When compared to the 250,000 reapers produced nationwide by over 200 firms, the McCormick works only produced ten-percent of the reapers built from 1861 to 1865. For comparison, during the 1850s McCormick annually produced over half of the reaper's nationwide.⁷

In this light, it is clear that McCormick was far from the patriotic, prolific contributor to the Union cause that is implied by those who use the Stanton quote. Torn by the outbreak of war, McCormick promoted peaceful reconciliation through newspapers, political participation, and clandestine activities. Moreover, his company's reaper production was inconsistent; the war marks the period when *C.H. McCormick & Bros.* lost their dominant position in the industry. This compels investigation as to why Stanton would make such an erroneous conclusion that, "without McCormick's invention... the North could not win and the Union would have been dismembered." Obviously, the Union did win, but this was no thanks to McCormick, who was seeking peaceful reunification with the South throughout the war.

⁷ Hounshell details the antiquated mode of production at the reaper works, which had difficulty producing more complicated implements. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production*, 153-188. Ozanne discusses the labor unrest at the McCormick works during the Civil War, including more than six strikes at the works, which are conspicuously absent from most of the company's histories. Robert Ozanne, *A Century of Labor-Management Relations at McCormick and International Harvester* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967): 5. Lerner's articles covers the McCormick's response to monetary inflation during the war, a problem that got so out of hand that at one point William McCormick proposed suspending production of reapers all together. Eugene M. Lerner, "Investment Uncertainty During the Civil War – A note on the McCormick Brothers," *Journal of Economic History* Vol. 16, No. 1 (March, 1956): 34-40. Alan L. Olmstead; Paul W. Rhode, "Beyond the Threshold: An Analysis of the Characteristics and Behavior of Early Reaper Adopters," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (March, 1995): 27-28, touches upon the increased number of firms producing reapers during the Civil War. Paul W. Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1965): 233-234, looks into the contributions of agriculture to the Civil War and puts the production of reapers at 250,000 for the five-year period of the war.

Edwin Stanton's "The Reaper is the North..."

Prior to his family's historical activities in the late nineteenth century, Cyrus McCormick was busy defending his machine against patent challenges in federal courts. In the 1850s, he was famously engaged in fierce competition with other inventors and firms in international competitions and courtrooms. His earliest and most tenacious opponents were Obed Hussey and John Manny. Hussey had patented his reaper in 1833, one year before Cyrus received a patent on his own reaper. In order to maintain market control these parties engaged in frequent legal battles to contest one another's patents and patent extensions. One of these many legal battles came in 1861, when Cyrus applied for extensions of his 1847 and 1849 patents. Obed Hussey's family contested the extension and the case went to trial in front of a US Patent Commissioner.⁸

This is the context for "the reaper is to the North..." Edwin Stanton was acting as one of McCormick's attorneys in the 1861 patent extension case. He argued that McCormick's *potential* contributions to the Union merited the extension of his reaper patent. The war was in its infancy in June of 1861 when he was alleged to have made his famous statement. Stanton was thought to be one of the best patent lawyers in the country and would not become Lincoln's Secretary of War until January of 1862. Stanton's failure to gain a patent extension for his client allowed the reaper to be

⁸ Joseph Gies, "The Great Reaper War," *American Heritage of Invention and Technology*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1989): 20-28. Hutchinson's first volume covers the legal and competitive aspects of the reaper wars extensively in six chapters. William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Seedtime, 1809-1856, Vol.1* (New York: The Century Co., 1930).

produced by many other manufacturers during the war, contributing to McCormick's faltering production.⁹

While this was the context for Stanton's quote, there is no direct primary evidence that the statement was ever made. The farthest back in history that any citation goes is Byron Levene's footnote from "Two Emancipators," that references a 1905 biography of Edwin Stanton written by Frank A. Flower. Flower's contextualized version of the quote is noticeably different from how later historians would use it to demonstrate McCormick's support of the union cause. Flower quotes Stanton as saying:

The reaper is as important to the North as slavery to the South. It takes the place of the regiments of young men who have left the harvest fields to do battle for the Union, and thus enables the farmers to keep up the supply of bread for the nation and its armies. McCormick's invention will aid materially to prevent the Union from dismemberment, and to grant his prayer herein is the smallest compensation the Government can make.

What is clear from this version of the quote is that Stanton was referencing the probable value of the reaper to the Union effort and in the last sentence is explicitly making the plea for a patent extension. International Harvester's version of the quote, which leads this chapter, has been manipulated to make it seem as though Stanton was reflecting on McCormick's contributions after Appomattox.¹⁰

⁹ It is also worth mentioning that Lincoln and Stanton met in 1855 when they both worked as lawyers for John Manny in defense of a patent infringement accusation brought by McCormick. Stanton's skillful litigation in this case is what is said to have convinced Lincoln to appoint him Secretary of War and more immediately convinced McCormick to make him his lawyer. This story frequently shows up in McCormick's histories. Byron H. Levene, "Lincoln and McCormick: Two Emancipators," *the Wisconsin Magazine of History* Vol. 42, No. 2 (Winter 1958-1959): 98-99 and was also the basis for a sketch of a 2013 *Drunk History* sketch on Comedy Central.

¹⁰ Byron Levene, "Lincoln and McCormick," 101, footnote 27. Frank Abial Flower, *Edwin McMasters Stanton: the autocrat of rebellion, emancipation, and reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Wilson, 1905): 114.

The inconsistent use of Stanton's quote may be attributed to a complete lack of primary documentation. Flower does not cite the quote, but rather begins his discussion of it with the statement "During the argument on these extension cases, which is still remembered in Washington, Stanton formulated his famous tribute to McCormick."¹¹ This statement indicates that the entire quote may have been derived from word-of-mouth recitation, rather than primary documentation.

The conclusion that the quote lacks primary provenance is further substantiated by looking into the Patent Office Records of the extension case, which does not have the quote on record. The documentation does set the tone for Stanton to make his bold statement. An "Argument for the Applicant," submitted in Stanton's name on June 20, 1861 to the Commissioner of Patents states:

that while the country is in the midst of Civil War, and some departments of the government are contending against treason and rebellion, others are calmly pursuing the paths of peace, and wise judgment and judicious policy securing to authors and inventors due reward for whatever their genius may contribute for the happiness and prosperity of mankind.

This excerpt might have created the framework for "the reaper is to the North..." by referencing the reaper's contributions to mankind. However, it is far from saying that McCormick would save the Union.¹²

The excerpt from the "Argument for Application" also strongly suggests that if Stanton made his statement about the reaper in oral arguments, it was only to soften McCormick's well-deserved reputation as a southern sympathizer. He wanted to paint

¹¹ Flower, *Edwin McMasters Stanton*, 114.

¹² Edwin Stanton, et al, "Argument for the Applicant," in Patent Office Records, *McCormick Extension Case – Patent of 1847* (Washington, 1861): 260, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company Legal and Patent Records, 1830-1896, Mcc Mss 4x, Volume 36.

McCormick as the man “pursuing paths of peace,” reframing the image of his client for the patent commissioner. The northern public and the patent commissioner were likely aware of Cyrus’ outspoken belief that the North should have made further concessions to the South to prevent secession. A letter to the editor in the *Chicago Tribune* indicated McCormick’s dubious reputation among Northerners. “Who would think that at the very moment Mr. McCormick’s press is preaching treason, Mr. McCormick is urging his petition at Washington.... He would bleed the North... and he would stab the Government.” The author, “One of the People,” further urged that McCormick’s patent not be extended and that his invention be renamed the “*disunion reaper*.” While this account maybe an excessively colorful description of McCormick typical of the partisan press, it highlights the public awareness of McCormick’s unpopular stance on the crisis. Historians’ later use of Stanton’s quote becomes ironic as the statement meant to convince a patent commissioner to ignore all of Cyrus’ unpatriotic activities, became the singular motto that historians used as proof of his Union support.¹³

Later historians took liberties with Stanton’s quote, often neglecting the context, mislabeling him the Secretary of War , in many cases, manipulating the quote for their own purposes. While the last of these charges may be a result of multiple and differing recollections of Stanton’s quote and a lack of primary documentation, the first two are certainly an indication of poor and potentially unethical scholarship. The undoubted power of the quote makes it too good to pass by, especially if it reaffirms a sought conclusion.

¹³ “The Reaper Man and Seceasion,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 28, 1861, 2.

With some perspective on McCormick's Civil War experience and having established the context for Edwin Stanton's, the focus of this chapter will turn to how both of these became twisted together and rewritten. The genesis of Stanton's dubious quote reveals how the McCormick family's understanding of history and historical work had evolved. Reflecting their increasingly nuanced appreciation of the historian's craft, the McCormicks dealt with a wide range of historians from across the professional spectrum in order to rebuild the credibility of their father's legacy in the public imagination. Their efforts focused on bringing new evidence to light as well as finding credible groups and institutions to protect their patriarch's monumental past. The McCormicks' interactions with historians at this time demonstrates the fluidity of history and "objectivity" at the turn of the century as well as betraying the anxieties of an emerging group of middle-class laborers.

"Facts," "Perversions of Truth," and Historical Laborers

Coming out of the Silver Certificate controversy of 1897, the best historical evidence of McCormick's priority of invention that the family could muster was found by Louis Dent. Dent had provided an argument and supporting evidence about the mechanical differences between McCormick's and Hussey's machines in 1850. Dent's analysis and material was printed ad nauseum entitled "Who Invented the Reaper?" in newspapers and in pamphlet form under the company patent officer's name. He received no public credit for his historical labor. The family refrained from referencing Dent's work when discussing their history with elite peers or officials, because it was overly technical and dull. Instead, they continued their previous practice of distributing Cyrus McCormick's II historically fictitious 1885 eulogy of their father as well as referencing the findings of

judges at prior World's Fairs as they had advertised for decades. While these materials were more palatable to the average person, they were found wanting when compared with the patent records presented by the Deerings and other industrial opponents.¹⁴

The Deerings seized the initiative in the harvester industry's on-going history tug-of-war at the Paris Exposition in 1900. With great prescience, the Deering Company successfully lobbied the officials of the Parisian exposition in March 1898 through "subtle and forceful methods," to grant them the exclusive right to present a retrospective exhibit on harvesting machinery at the World's Fair two years later. Predictably, their exhibit marginalized the McCormick narrative and emphasized the large number of inventors and machines that had contributed to the progress of harvesting technology. The McCormicks vociferously contended that "the attitude of making the [Deering] exhibit has been rather one of advertising than making an impartial historical exhibit." The McCormicks attempted to repeal the Deerings' exclusive right to build such an exhibit and, failing that, they sought to curb the Deerings' historical impact at Paris through all manner of historical protest and counter-presentation.¹⁵

On the ropes for the third time in seven years, the McCormick family re-imagined their ongoing history-as-advertising branding strategy. They sought to fortify their own history with historical research, while demanding that the "perversion of the truth." presented by their opponents be held to the same standard. Even though the mud-slinging

¹⁴ Louis Dent to Frances Smith, April 18, 1905, box 215, Mss 1E; Stanley McCormick to Charles Richard Dodge, July 23, 1900; Stanley McCormick to Bonet Maury, January 31, 1900, box 2, Mss 1G, MIHCC.

¹⁵ Harold F. McCormick to S.E. Morss, March 23, 1901, box 2; Stanley McCormick, "Interview at Commissioner Peck's Office," October 24, 1899, box 1; Stanley McCormick Papers, Mss 1G; Cyrus McCormick II to Salem Pattison, August 8, 1900, box 121, Mss 2c, MIHCC.

between their companies was intense, the conversation among the families was cordial. James Deering offered to halt their historical warfare, if the McCormicks agreed to the same. Rather than fold up their brand and identity, the McCormicks hedged towards mutually restraining overly broad historical claims to those that could be rigorously supported by evidence. As Harold McCormick admitted to his brother Stanley, “[in the past] we have made defences [sic] which... stretched the literal interpretation of the records.” Moving forward, Harold suggested “both should agree to adhere absolutely to facts to facts alone.” He felt, as did his siblings and mother, that they were on the right side of history and that sufficient evidence could be unearthed which would support their narrative as fact.¹⁶

The family chartered the McCormick Biographical Association during that summer, to find the evidence that would redeem both their company’s brand and fortify their private sense of identity. The membership of the association was made up of the Cyrus McCormick’s widow, Nettie, and four children, Cyrus Junior, Anita Blaine, Harold and Stanley. In the words of the charter, the Association was created “in order to provide for continuing the work (already begun) of compiling and preserving in convenient form, and of publishing (in such ways and so far as may seem desirable) the life history of Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr.; in order, also to provide for the erection of a monument to his

¹⁶ Harold McCormick to Stanley, August 15, 1900. Stanley McCormick, “Copies of Correspondence to and From Mr. James Deering,” July 27, 1900, demonstrates through 10 pages of transcribed letters the McCormick plan of abrasively questioning the evidentiary base for the Deering exhibit. It is most striking that only a fraction of their protests regard their father’s machine specifically. Box 2, Mss 1G, MIHCC.

memory.” They agreed to provide \$25,000 toward a monument and a renewable fund of \$5,000 to pay historical laborers.¹⁷

With a keen sense of purpose and an incorporated entity to pursue it, the family experimented with employees across the professional historical spectrum, searching for laborers who might secure their past. At a relatively early date in the historical profession’s tenure, the McCormicks’ experiences with this group of professionals reveals historians’ struggle for middle-class security, as well as indicating the fluidity of both the guild and objectivity. In a culture where the past was deemed self-evident to everyone, historical laborers faced an uphill battle to prove that their expertise amounted to a professional service which warranted white-collar wages.

In 1900, the association employed at least seven historical laborers. They paid one full-time trained historian, Salem Pattison and a freelance researcher, Louis Dent to do historical research and analysis. They were assisted by at least two of the family’s secretaries to assist in organizing the collection into a library and their company’s senior patent lawyer, Robert Parkinson, who advised on the finer mechanical points of the reaper’s evolution. The association also subsidized two retired inventors from defunct firms, Henry F. Mann and J.D. Easter, to write personal histories which undermined the Deering historical narrative. The association’s historical laborers were directed from above by the family in a fairly disorganized manner, frequently answering to Anita, Cyrus II, Harold and Stanley as well the company’s patent officer, Rodney Swift. Their short term objective was to provide specific historical ammunition to Stanley

¹⁷ “McCormick Biographical Association,” charter 1900, box 453, Mss 1E; Cyrus McCormick II to Anita Blaine, June 28, 1900, box 121, Mss 2c, MIHCC.

McCormick, who oversaw the company's campaign for the past in Paris. They were also tasked with challenging the "perversions of truth," presented at other museums or in books. In this regard, they were just as likely to censure history that was presented by their competitors or familial rivals on the Leander-side of the family as they were to chastise an unassuming museum administrator. For example in 1907, they waged a campaign to revise an exhibit on the reaper at the Kensington Museum in London - an unlikely product of cognizant historical manipulation.¹⁸

Salem Pattison, the association's first academically trained historian, was given a \$2000, one-year contract in January of 1900. Pattison received his master's degree in history from Cornell University in 1891 but had put his history degree to work as the president of Hastings College in Nebraska beginning in 1896. The McCormick family had been benefactors of the college as early as 1883, continuing their philanthropic support of Presbyterian education as their father had since the sectional crisis of the 1850s. This connection brought Pattison to the McCormicks together when the educator left the college in search of a better position.¹⁹

¹⁸ Cyrus McCormick II to Frances Smith, September 26, 1907, box 4, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, Exposition and Exhibitions Records, Mss 6x. On the other hand in 1909, they paid \$500 to the James T. White Publishing Company to "correct" an article in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, which credited Robert McCormick with the invention of the reaper. MBA Meeting Minutes, June 4, 1909, Box 3, Mss AA. A similar instance is mentioned in Norbert Lyons, *McCormick Reaper Legend* (New York: Exposition Press, 1955): 200, claiming that the MBA spent \$4,000 to correct an entry in the *Encyclopedia of American Manufacturers*. Salem G. Pattison to Anita Blaine McCormick, February 5, 1901; Salem Pattison "Report to the Members of the McCormick Biographical Association," April 16, 1903; box 363, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

¹⁹ For comparison to another emerging profession, Harold McCormick hired the company's first advertising professional that same year at \$2500 for half-time labor. Harold McCormick to Clifford Wild, October 10, 1900, box 121, Mss 2c11 Salem Pattison to Cyrus McCormick II, December 28, 1900 box 363, Mss 1E, Salem Pattison to Harold McCormick, October 1, 1898, box 2, Harold McCormick Papers, Mss 1F, MIHCC. "Cornell Alumni Notes," *Cornell Alumni News*, January 27, 1901, Cornell University Library, e-commons @ Cornell, Online at: <http://dspace.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/3158> accessed January 13, 2014.

Pattison diligently fulfilled the family's initial demands of him, providing ample historical evidence for the on-going historical showdown in Paris. Pattison located, organized, and sent a large amount of historical evidence to the exposition, including historic advertisements, newspaper clippings, patent records, court testimonies, manuscripts and mechanical diagrams. An express shipping manifest five-pages long from June of 1900 serves as a bibliography of just some of the materials he put together. Over the summer, the family also had him "fact-check" the claims of the Deering exhibit as well as vetting their opposition's supposed evidence. His first major task was writing a history of the "McCormick Patent Extension Case of 1848." The patent extension case was the major judicial showdown between Obed Hussey and Cyrus McCormick during their life-times and offered a wealth of testimony from the patriarch regarding his 1831 invention.²⁰

Like most emerging corporate professionals during the progressive era, Salem Pattison was intent on building his value through building his institution. He created a bureaucratic structure within the association, assuming a supervisory capacity as the point of communication with the family interests as well as directing the actions of the association's two secretaries and Louis Dent. Pattison pursued a collections policy for the association beyond the McCormick's single-minded interest in settling the contested history of the reaper. Pattison outlined a scope of research that would "be a complete

²⁰ Salem Pattison, "Report of Salem G. Pattison to Mrs. Emmons Blaine, Secretary Biographical Association," October 26, 1900, box 363, Anita McCormick Blaine Papers, Mss 1E; Salem Pattison to Stanley McCormick, June 15, 1900; Cyrus McCormick II to Stanley McCormick, May 10, 1900, box 2, Mss 1G; Cyrus McCormick II to Salem Pattison, July 5, 1900, box 121, Mss 2c, MIHCC. Salem G. Pattison, *The McCormick Extension Case of 1848: and other matter related to the invention of 1831* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly, 1900).

revelation of the deeper meaning of your father's life." The archive, which was created in Nettie McCormick's basement, would include Cyrus McCormick's "ideas on religion, politics, business and social affairs" through locating and preserving evidence from his own life as well as those of his contemporaries. Such a collection, he advised the McCormicks, would be "worth infinitely more than any other." With such grand plans, he lobbied for more clerical laborers and research assistants within the historical enterprise. Exhibiting professional congeniality, Pattison networked with other historical laborers in hopes of locating additional resources to support the enterprise and his ambitions. Through this process, other aspiring historians reached out to Pattison and offered their services to the McCormick Biographical Association.²¹

Pattison strove to demonstrate his utility to the McCormicks' interests. He drew attention to his initiative and professional acumen through frequent detailed reports, hoping to establish himself as an asset worthy of a higher salary. Cognizant that his colleagues' interests were parallel to his own, Pattison sang their praises in his correspondence with the McCormicks and requested that they receive higher pay as well. He appreciated the unique professional opportunity that the McCormick's historical agenda presented and sought to shape it into something more.²²

In this pursuit, Pattison brought his historical imagination to the McCormick's service. Leveraging their desires for his own benefit, Pattison offered historical

²¹ Salem Pattison, "Report of Salem G. Pattison to Mrs. Emmons Blaine, Secretary Biographical Association," October 26, 1900; Salem Pattison to Anita McCormick Blaine, October 21, 1901, box 363, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

²² Salem Pattison to Anita McCormick Blaine, September 26, 1902; Salem Pattison, "Report of Salem G. Pattison to Mrs. Emmons Blaine, Secretary Biographical Association," October 26, 1900; Salem Pattison "Report of Salem G. Pattison to Mrs. Emmons Blaine, Secretary Biographical Association, April 16, 1903, box 363, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

awareness and perspective beyond the family's own grandiose conception of their father's past. Demonstrating his understanding of public knowledge production, Pattison recommended that focusing on "school histories will... lay the basis for general and popular recognition of his invention by the masses more than anything." Beyond means of knowledge distribution, he also tantalized the family with a broader interpretation of their patriarch's legacy. Pattison asserted that "the invention of the reaper by him has been the most potent influence in banishing the fear of famine from all lands." Within this glorious reimagining of the past, Pattison revised McCormick's Civil War record from a Confederate sympathizer to a Union hero. While he was not the one responsible for fabricating Stanton's quote he was the first to argue that McCormick's reaper "enable[d] the country to spare a great army for putting down the Rebellion."²³

Pattison's decision to rewrite McCormick's Civil War record with questionable conclusions must be understood in light of his quest for a middle-class living. Pattison built up the association and spun McCormick's legacy and Civil War record to make himself invaluable to the family's historical interests. Pattison, like many other professionals and historians during this era, was less concerned with dilemmas of "objectivity" and utilizing his vocational training as a historian, but more interested in securing the higher wages befitting an educated professional worker. To illustrate this point, Pattison did work as a historian for the McCormicks and eventually as a professor, but also spent substantial time as an administrator at universities and insurance

²³ Salem Pattison, "Report of Salem G. Pattison to Mrs. Emmons Blaine, Secretary Biographical Association," October 26, 1900, box 363, Mss 1E; Salem Pattison to David Schaff, August 18, 1900, Salem Pattison to Cyrus McCormick II, May 11, 1902; Salem Pattison to Cyrus McCormick II, October 19, 1905, box 1, McCormick Biographical Association Papers, Mss AA, MIHCC.

companies. His bottom line was gaining professional status, but not necessarily within his trained vocation as a historian.²⁴

In September 1900, he attempted to leverage the value he had created for himself into a higher salary. He frankly admitted to the McCormicks that his historical labor alone was not personally rewarding: “I find the constant every day work on the old correspondence very hard trying work.” He then informed them that he required no less than \$4000 annually to stay on with the Association and that if they did not accede to his request, he would leave their employ for a higher paying job at an Insurance company in Indiana. Despite all that he had done for the family’s historical enterprise, they balked at doubling his salary, believing that “he is setting too high a value upon his work.” Pattison followed through with his threat, leaving for Indiana at the end of October. He committed to finish out his one-year contract with the McCormicks from his home office after work.²⁵

Taking the long view of the negotiation, upon leaving and intermittently in the closing months of 1900, Pattison stressed to the family the importance of replacing him

²⁴ Beyond his work as a historian, Pattison spent substantial time as a university administrator at Carthage College, Hastings College and Taylor University before joining the McCormick Biographical Association in 1900. However, after his time with the McCormicks, he worked for insurance companies from 1903 to 1908, before again becoming a university administrator at Westminster College and ultimately a professor of history at Coe College by 1914. “Personal” *Indiana School Journal* Vol. 37 (1892): 455. Salem Pattison to C.H. McCormick II, April 16, 1915, box 363, Mss 1E, MIHCC. Justin Price, “2010 Reconnaissance Survey of the Pillar of Fire Structures and Historical Context,” cultural resource study, Metropolitan State College of Denver, 2010, accessed 2/13/2014, online at: <http://www.ci.westminster.co.us/Portals/0/Repository/Documents/ExploreWestminster/Pillar%20of%20Fire%20Survey%20Report%20%28add%20appendices%29.pdf>. “Cornell Alumni Notes,” *Cornell Alumni News*, January 23, 1907, Cornell University Library, e-commons @ Cornell, Online at: <http://dspace.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/3158> accessed February 13, 2014.

²⁵ Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine, October 8, 1900; Salem Pattison to Cyrus McCormick II, September 7, 1900, box 121, Mss 2c; Salem Pattison to Anita McCormick Blaine, October 26, 1900 and December 3, 1900, box 363, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

with a professional historian who could be trusted to continue building their collection. Referring to himself in thinly guised language, Pattison stated that the work demanded “a man of historical instinct and thorough training as well as the strictest moral integrity.” He implied that only he could be trusted with the confidential organization and indexing of their father’s sensitive personal manuscripts. Reminding them that he was not beyond their reach, Pattison stated he “had a strong desire to continue the work but my own financial needs and the prospect of an enlarged income... decided me to make the change.” As the year and his contract neared conclusion, he made a final calculated move. Pattison informed the family that he did not find his position in Indiana “congenial,” and offered to come back to the association. Playing on the McCormick’s anxieties, he shrewdly reminded them that if they did not take him back at an increased salary, he “thought of making application for a position with Deerings, who... had two openings that they wanted me to consider.” The McCormicks hired back him at \$4000 annually and seem to have had no ill-will about the proceedings.²⁶

The results of Pattison’s negotiating tactics provide insight into historians’ search for the trappings of recognized professional status. When compared with other professionals in that era or afterwards, his approach seems typical. He had a specific expertise and demonstrated the value of that expertise through serving and building his employer’s institution. Pattison and the McCormicks disagreed about what his services were worth, so he decided to see what the free labor market would yield. In a labor market with uniquely high demand for experts on reaper history, Pattison achieved his

²⁶ Salem Pattison to Anita Blaine McCormick, September 27, 1900; Salem Pattison, “Report of Salem G. Pattison to Mrs. Emmons Blaine, Secretary Biographical Association,” October 26, 1900; Salem G. Pattison to Cyrus McCormick II, December 28, 1900, box 363, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

goal by threatening to serve the Company's chief opposition. After the amalgamation of McCormick and Deering with the creation of International Harvester in 1902, however, he was no longer be able to maintain his higher wage, because the competition for his labor became restrained.

The episode also reveals that the McCormicks were aware of the fragility of the past. The McCormicks believed that historic evidence and "facts" were the key to redeeming their father's legacy, but also knew that historical labor could swing the pendulum of history away from their favor. While historians in academia pursued that "noble dream" of objective study, trained historians outside of the ivory tower's confines could not afford such a luxury. They were determined to demonstrate the concrete value of their services to their employers, hoping to secure a middle-class life style. Pattison's willingness to play fast and loose with the past seems fitting when considering that within the McCormick Company the trained historian had to compete against lawyers, advertisers, journalists and others for historical authority.

When the family formed their biographical association, they had a short-term need to refute the Deerings' counter-history at the Paris Exposition. Before long, however, that need dissipated as the competitors merged to become International Harvester and agreed to drop their historical dispute. Without Pattison's efforts, it is unlikely that the McCormick's would have continued their Biographical Association or employing their historical laborers. He successfully offered a grander interpretation of their father's past, implemented a bold collections policy to secure new materials, and created a bureaucratic labor system to execute that policy and organize a library. He argued that once such a collection was built, it would be the solid foundation for an

authoritative life history of Cyrus McCormick. Perhaps most importantly, in August of 1900, Pattison located an outlet for the McCormick's yearnings to see a monument erected to their father which might insure that he receive the public recognition he deserved for generations to come. He proposed that the McCormicks set their sights upon the recently created *Hall of Fame of Great Americans* at New York University as the best institution to preserve their patriarch's legacy. Pattison was able to prolong the family's interest in employing historical laborers by fashioning their abstract goals for a collection, a biography and a monument into a concrete plan of action. Pattison ultimately left the McCormicks' employ on his own terms in 1903. He had "completed the work" that he had laid out for Association in 1900 and traded-up for a better paying job at insurance company in Indiana.²⁷

"The Reaper is to the North..." and the *Hall of Fame*

New York University's *Hall of Fame of Great Americans* was conceived in 1900 after NYU received a large endowment from Jay Gould's heiress daughter, Helen Gould. Similar to the McCormicks Helen Gould was intent on rescuing her deceased father's reputation. Searching for philanthropic support and eager to prove the usefulness of his institution to wealthy benefactors, NYU's Chancellor Henry MacCracken imagined building a Hall of Fame to secure Helen Gould's support for a new university library. He promised that creating a monument which recognized businessmen alongside inventors, politicians, and artists would provide a fitting memorial venue to restore her father's

²⁷ Cyrus McCormick II to Salem Pattison, August 17, 1900, box 121, mss 2c; David Schaff to Salem Pattison, August 1, 1900, box 4, mss AA; Salem Pattison to Anita McCormick Blaine, April 16, 1903, box 363, mss 1E, MIHCC.

legacy in the public mind. The heiress donated \$1,150,000 to erect the library and the adjacent *Hall of Fame of Great Americans*.²⁸

The concept of the *Hall of Fame* was to have a jury elect fifty “Great Americans” in 1900. Five inductees were then to be added every five years until the year 2000 bringing the total of “Great Americans” to 150. Each honored person would have a statue, bust, or portrait presented in the Hall. This plan was delayed when jurists only made twenty-nine selections on the first vote. Mass elections were then held again in 1905 and 1910 to fulfill the number of “Great Americans” they sought. The one-hundred jurists were societal elite and academics from across the country, including President Theodore Roosevelt. The *Hall of Fame* was a classical colonnade structure built in University Heights on the original campus of NYU in New York City. It was opened Memorial Day of 1901, and held elections until it went defunct in 1976.²⁹

Beginning in 1900, with the urging of Salem Pattison, the McCormick Biographical Association commenced a campaign to have Cyrus McCormick inducted into the new *Hall of Fame*. If successful, it would legitimize their patriarch’s legacy as the inventor of the reaper and vanquish their industrial rivals’ and antagonistic cousins’ claims to the past. With Pattison’s guidance, the family shifted its focus from producing works that argued the genesis of the reaper to histories that lionized the life of Cyrus McCormick and his contributions to American history. Over the next ten years, the

²⁸ Paula D. Watson, “Carnegie Ladies, Lady Carnegies: Women and the Building of Libraries” *Libraries & Culture*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (Winter, 1996): 168-169.

²⁹ “Gift for a Hall of Fame – New York University to Commemorate Great Americans,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1900, 12. “The Hall of Fame,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1905, 8. “Memorial Day Exercises,” *New York Times*, May 30 1901, 12. The *Hall of Fame* still stands to this day on what is now the campus of Bronx Community College and is open to the public for tours. “Hall of Fame of Great Americans,” Bronx Community College, accessed 12/1/10, <http://www.bcc.cuny.edu/halloffame/>.

family made many attempts to influence the *Hall of Fame* electors. Their lobbying efforts came to a climax in a public relations blitz that was part of their 1909 centennial celebration of McCormick's birth. As part of this effort, the McCormick Biographical Association commissioned two authors to write biographies of the family patriarch and distributed thousands of copies of these histories. They also wrote countless newspaper articles featuring excerpts from the books. Included in these histories was Pattison's revision of the Civil War. This monumental effort in knowledge production is the origin of the misinterpretation of Stanton's tribute to McCormick and the reason for its ubiquity throughout the historiography of the Civil War and the nineteenth century.

Upon learning of the *Hall of Fame* in 1900, the McCormick Biographical Association began gathering information about the election process and the jurists in order to formulate a strategy to get Cyrus Sr. elected. Their efforts began in August of that year and the election was held in October, so it was too late to launch a grand campaign while the family was still entrenched in Paris. Pattison did most of the initial reconnaissance. The first jurist Pattison contacted was Dr. David Schaff of the Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati.³⁰

The cornerstone of the argument Pattison presented to Schaff was McCormick's contributions to the Civil War. On August 18, 1900 Pattison wrote to Schaff, "I fully believe that his invention made possible the freedom of 4,000,000 of slaves in the [18] '60s." Pattison's letter revealed the new angle the family was taking. Pattison went on to comment that this contribution had been overlooked, but presciently predicted, "that later

³⁰ Letter from D.S. Schaff to S.G. Pattison, August 6, 1900, in Frances Smith, compiled documents on the Hall of Fame, May 11, 1910, 2, box 4, Mss AA, MIHCC.

historians will put a great emphasis upon this fact.” This was the seed of their later endeavors.³¹

No other correspondences appear in the McCormick Biographical Association files at the McCormick-International Harvester Collection in Madison, Wisconsin in reference to the 1900 *Hall of Fame* elections. However, given Pattison’s enthusiasm for demonstrating his usefulness, it is likely that he contacted other jurists from the list that was given to him by Schaff. When the votes were cast in mid-October, Cyrus McCormick Sr. received twenty-six votes.³²

The campaign for the 1905 election began in 1904 with letters from Harold McCormick to Dr. W.H.P Faunce, another *Hall of Fame* voter. In these letters Faunce recommended that the family find a credible biographer to write a book plainly stating the case for Cyrus Sr. as a “Great American.” He also revealed a point of delicacy in the matter. The biography would need to be presented to the jurists in an unassuming manner that would not appear as a shameless plea. Harold began the correspondence with an inquiry about how others had lobbied for an election and mentioned, “we contemplate collaborating a statement of some kind to present in a dignified manner to the judges. Who should make this and how the treatise should be handled, we are uncertain of.” Faunce encouraged Harold to have such a biography written, but cautioned that “anything like an attempt to pledge the committee to vote one way or the other... would only harm.” Harold responded that they would begin an effort to find “somebody who, we

³¹ Letter from S.G. Pattison to D.S. Schaff, August 18, 1900, in Frances Smith, compiled documents on the Hall of Fame, May 11, 1910, 3-3.5, box 4, Mss AA, MIHCC.

³² “Names for Hall of Fame,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1900, in Frances Smith, compiled documents on the Hall of Fame, May 11, 1910, 14, box 4, Mss AA, MIHCC.

could feel would, be qualified to write an interesting statement of the facts in an attractive manner.”³³

The McCormick Biographical Association consulted with other *Hall of Fame* jurors sympathetic to their cause in search of an author and tried to craft a strategy for natural distribution that would not offend the judges. Woodrow Wilson, then president of Princeton and a native Virginian, met with Cyrus II on the matter and also prompted him to have a biographical sketch written and proposed “not [to] confine the sending of this booklet to the judges of the Hall of Fame, but would send it also to scientists, and editorial writers, issuing perhaps fifteen hundred of them. In this way it would be evidenced that it was not aimed at any one set of men, but was information of a proper character for any who wished to have it.” This strategy of mass distribution to make the presentation of the material to the judges seem coincidental became an integral part of the family’s strategy for the next several decades.³⁴

The McCormick Biographical Association had come into contact with several potential biographers between 1900 and 1905 from across the spectrum of historical laborers. Some had learned about their historical ambitions from McCormick Biographical Association or company employees while rubbing shoulders with them in libraries or elsewhere. Others were directly solicited by the family. This talent pool of potential biographers included an advertiser, a journalist, two lawyers of varying pedigree

³³ Harold McCormick to W.H.P. Faunce, undated [but in response to a letter from August 30, 1904]; September 15, 1904 | W.H.P. Faunce to Harold McCormick, September 7, 1904 in Frances Smith, compiled documents on the Hall of Fame, May 11, 1910, 6, box 4, Mss AA, MIHCC.
Letter from H. McCormick to W.H.P. Faunce, September 15, 1904, box 4, Mss AA, MIHCC.

³⁴ C.H. McCormick, Memorandum, December 5, 1904, in *ibid*, 8-9.

(one of whom might be considered an early historical consultant), a museum administrator, and several academics. This wide range of laborers offered their services at different prices depending upon how established their profession was within the corporate order. On the high-end, the McCormicks paid the company patent lawyer, Robert Parkinson, to write a history of the McCormick reaper in legalistic detail, keeping him on a \$7,500 retainer. On the low end, journalists offered to do work for as little as \$100 a month. Moonlighting academics only bid \$500 for the entire project, most likely because of their own anxiety about paid work as members of a secluded portion of the historical professional spectrum that built its identity on objective distance.³⁵

The first historical laborer to solicit his services as a biographer was the farm implement journalist Robert L. Ardrey in 1901. Ardrey had already written a history of the farm implement business in 1894 for the National Association of Agricultural Implement and Vehicle Manufacturers. Financed by McCormick's competitors his book attributed the invention of the reaper to a wider cohort of inventors in the 1820s and 30s, including both Hussey and McCormick. As part of his project and reflecting the flexibility of his scholarly mores, he offered to revise his previous book which "did Mr. McCormick an injustice."³⁶

Ardrey outlined a biography of Cyrus McCormick that ostensibly restated decades of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company's "Established 1831" advertising narrative. Reflecting the family's technological surplus value ideology, he stated that

³⁵ Robert Parkinson invoice to C.H. McCormick, November 30, 1911, box 355, Mss 2C, MIHCC.

³⁶ Robert Ardrey, *American Agricultural Implements: A Review of Invention and Development in the Agricultural Implement Industry of the United States* (1894; repr, New York: Arno, 1972). R.L. Ardrey to Harold McCormick, April 1, 1901, box 323, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

“McCormick’s inventors has contributed to the progress of the world” and before his grand mechanical innovation, “the farmer... was a stranger to wealth.” He proposed to “dress up all these bare facts, and bring them out in a brilliant style of writing, with enough color to make them readable.” He offered to do the work if advanced \$100 a month for his historical labor, plus expenses. Ardrey promised that if he was given six months to work on the book, the finished product “would be a standard authority throughout the world on American inventions in this industry.” Playing to the family’s desires, he vowed that such a book would be a valuable reference for experts, agricultural colleges and experiment stations and would be purchased by “every library in the country.” The McCormicks were not interested in Ardrey as the authoritative biographer of their father; however, they took the opportunity to root out dissenting narratives, paying him to rewrite his previous book.³⁷

Another historical laborer, an opportunistic lawyer turned government clerk and author, named Frank Flower, provided the family with a much more enticing proposal in 1903. Flower was particularly attuned to the McCormick’s specific interests and needs. He had come into contact with Salem Pattison, during one of Pattison’s research trips to Washington D.C. and had mined the McCormick’s historian for much information about his employer’s agenda. In his proposal he promised to write a well-researched 400-page biography, but also to “unearth” any reaper made by McCormick or any other in 1839 and 1840 (the year McCormick first offered his machines for sale in Virginia). Finally, he promised the family that he could secure “the McCormick portrait on our currency,” for

³⁷ R.L. Ardrey to Harold McCormick, April 1, 1901, box 323, mss 1E; “Material Taken East by Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick in Re: Hall of Fame,” March 7, 1905, box 1, mss AA, MIHCC.

little expense, except wining and dining the right “public men.” He assured them that he could do all of this for \$3000. He noted that such a monetary “grub stake,” was necessary. No other author would undertake the project without funding, because there is “no public taste for industrial literature.” Aware of the importance of history to the McCormicks’ identity he told them that, “members of the family... who desire to see him (and themselves with him) given his proper place and honor in history,” must finance the work themselves.³⁸

Flower framed himself less as a historian and more as an able operator with connections. He stressed the importance of his geographic location in Washington D.C., as the “location to accomplish all three of the things mentioned.” He further emphasized himself as the man for the job: “I know the public men and records; I know the Patent Office; I know the Libraries in which all printed documents rest, and I am familiar with the people and sections in which the search must be made for the old reapers.” Demonstrating the resources at his disposal, Flower detailed his involvement with a cohort of free-lance researchers at the Library of Congress, who might be called historical consultants. Working on a for-hire basis, he and apparently about fifty other “learned men,” provided research services upon “historical, statistical, industrial and biographical subjects.” The historical laborers worked together, “turning over to all others any fact he finds of value to them.”³⁹

Providing the family with a savory morsel of evidence as an example of his services, Flower ended his proposition with a reference to Edwin McMasters Stanton’s

³⁸ Frank Abial Flower to Salem Pattison, May 27, 1900, box 453, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

³⁹ Ibid.

high regard for McCormick's contributions to union victory. Flower had doctored Stanton's "Reaper is to the North..." to improve his own appeal to a potential proprietor. He later placed the quote in his biography of Stanton, the first location where it appeared in print. Importantly, the fabrication and its publication provided the family with the needed "facts" to support Pattison's revision of Cyrus McCormick's Civil War record. The McCormicks did not hire Flowers to write the biography, but did pay him to do research.⁴⁰

For their *Hall of Fame* campaign the McCormicks were intent on hiring a biographer "whose name would carry conviction and a weight of dignity," to persuade the *Hall of Fame's* gentlemen jurists. Reflecting both confidence in the work that had been done by Salem Pattison and simultaneously a disregard for academic historian's expertise, Stanley McCormick wrote his family in 1905: "No one... can bring any very new lights upon the subject. His [the historian's] name at the foot of the paper is the greatest benefit he can furnish! Therefore I think the character of the paper can be formulated while or before we finally engage the man." The family apparently followed the policy set forth by Stanley and sought a historian who could turn around an article length biography in a mere six weeks. By 1905, Salem Pattison was no longer a fulltime employee, because he had completed his grand vision for the collection and moved onto a different job. He remained available to the McCormick's for side-work that they deemed

⁴⁰ Flower, *Edwin McMasters Stanton*, 79; Frank Abial Flower to Salem Pattison, May 27, 1900, box 453; Salem G. Pattison to Anita Blaine McCormick, February 5, 1901; Salem Pattison "Report to the Members of the McCormick Biographical Association," April 16, 1903, 2, box 363, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

required a historian's mind. In his absence, the family had their association's long-time secretary, Frances Smith, put together the materials for the publication.⁴¹

Cyrus II and Harold spearheaded the shotgun search for a historian, utilizing their personal connections and status as societal elites to locate candidates. Reflecting their grand ambition, they contacted the famous British author and poet, Robert Bridges. After Bridges rejected them, they solicited the services of two of the most prominent historians in the country John Bach Masters and James Franklin Jameson. Jameson was the foremost leader of the academic professionalization movement, while Masters was the last great and untrained "gentleman amateur." Each supported the McCormick's project but declined the commission because as *Hall of Fame* jurors, they felt it was a conflict of interest. Following a suggestion from the Dean of the University of Chicago, Harry Judson, the family then set out to convince Frederick Jackson Turner, the great historian of the American West, to be their biographer.⁴²

Cyrus II visited Turner in Madison on March 18, 1905. Initially, he convinced Turner to take the commission through providing ample financial, personnel and manuscript resource support for the project. The family believed Turner was the ideal candidate for job and would "fulfill it with good taste and... enthusiasm," because he "is making a life study of the development of the western part of this county, particularly with regards to agricultural development." They had long advertised their company's

⁴¹ Stanley McCormick to Members of the Biographical Association, March 3, 1905, box 398, mss 1E, MIHCC.

⁴² Cyrus McCormick II to Nettie Fowler McCormick, February 18, 1905; Cyrus McCormick II to the Members of the Biographical Association, March 16, 1905 box 398, Mss 1E; C.H. McCormick to Stanley McCormick, March 18, 1905, box 1, Mss AA, MIHCC.

geographic location in Chicago and its close association with the economic and agricultural success of Midwest. Surely they believed that solidifying the relationship between the reaper and the nation's breadbasket through historical inquiry and publication would be profitable to their historical quest and larger reputation. Two days later, however Turner reneged on his contract. In a letter Turner stated that after going through the family's historic material, he believed "to your father belongs the credit of the invention of the reaper as a practical machine, which revolutionized the economic history of the Middle West and consequently the Nation." Unfortunately, Turner went on to explain that such a study "should only be undertaken with leisure and entirely apart from any consideration but a desire to know the truth." When he agreed to the contract, he did not "realize the fact... that the conditions necessarily involved in writing the paper would give room for criticism of my motives." He could not undertake the commission, because it posed a dilemma of objectivity.⁴³

Turner was the only historian to ever raise the question of professional ethics to the family directly. His position can be attributed to several possibilities, not least of which was his prominent position in the academic historical guild and his own relative job security. Alternatively, his moral dilemma may also have been a cover for his seeming inability to write research papers on a deadline. Either way, he freely proposed to pass the project along to Reuben Gold Thwaites, the director of the State Historical

⁴³ Cyrus McCormick II, Memorandum, March 18, 1905, box 1, mss AA; Frederick Jackson Turner to Cyrus McCormick II, March 20, 1905, box 398, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

Society of Wisconsin, who he doubted would have the same quandaries of conscience.

Turner's "urging" was instrumental in convincing Thwaites to take the job.⁴⁴

Despite only having a master degree from Yale, Thwaites was considered a peer of doctored academic professionals. He had devoted his career to building the state historical society into a premier historical research institution and published 168 edited manuscript volumes as well as fifteen works of original research. He also had strong connections with Turner, the University of Wisconsin history faculty and other "Prairie Historians" who labored to demonstrate the Midwest's importance to the historic development of the nation. With a solid academic reputation, a clear interest in Midwestern history, and a "strong sentiment" of the reaper's "great importance," the McCormick's were "satisfied that he [Thwaites] could do the work well."⁴⁵

After one meeting on March 27, 1905 Thwaites agreed to write an article-length biography of Cyrus McCormick. The family paid him \$500, providing him with a large volume of their historical propaganda, including Parkinson's article on the patent history of the reaper, the articles written by Swift and Dent in 1897, Ardrey's revised history of the farm implement industry, and Cyrus II's 1885 eulogy to his father "Memorial to Cyrus McCormick," among several others. They also delivered a selection of the Biographical Association's indexed manuscript materials that had been pulled together by

⁴⁴ Cyrus McCormick II to the Members of the Biographical Association, March 27, 1905, box 398, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

⁴⁵ C.H. McCormick II, Memorandum to the Members of the Biographical Association, March 27, 1905, box 1, mss AA, MIHCC. C.H. McCormick II to Frederick Jackson Turner, March 22, 1905, box 2, Reuben Gold Thwaites Papers, Wis Mss VJ, the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, WI [hereafter WHS]. Frederick Jackson Turner, *Reuben Gould Thwaites: Memorial Address* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1914). Jon K. Lauck, "The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History," *The Annals of Iowa*, Vol. 71 (Spring, 2012): 137-173.

their historical laborers in the opening years of the decade. Robert Parkinson, Salem Pattison (on a short-term leave from his job in Indiana), a stenographer and a research assistant also journeyed to Madison to help Thwaites with the project.⁴⁶

As an academically credible historian, Thwaites did not question the McCormicks' motives. He was satisfied that everything was accurate, because of the sheer volume of evidence the family provided, the expert quality of the assistance he received, and the strong recommendation from Turner to take on the project. Surely, the gravitas of the McCormicks as an economically elite family furnishing him with a commission also contributed to solidifying his resolve and abating suspicion. In a mere three weeks, Thwaites completed a twenty-three page article, an ideal length for *Hall of Fame* jurists to digest. The finished product was substantively ghost written by the Biographical Association and the family found it to be a "dignified and valuable contribution to the literature on the subject."⁴⁷

Seemingly, Thwaites' only research contribution was discovering a history of the reaper written by a graduate student at the University of Iowa, Margaret Schaffner. In a sexist-tone typical of the male dominated historical profession during the Progressive Era, Thwaites reported to the McCormicks' that Schaffner was a "rambling... rather eccentric person" and that her scholarship was influenced by the "misinformation received by [John F.] Stewart," recognizing the more contentious history of the reaper.

⁴⁶ Cyrus McCormick II to the Members of the Biographical Association, March 27, 1900, box 398, Mss 1E; "Material taken East by Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick in Re: Hall of Fame," March 7, 1900, box 1, Mss AA, MIHCC.

⁴⁷ Cyrus McCormick II to Reuben Thwaites, April 14, 1905, box 2; Salem Pattison to Reuben Thwaites, April 22, 1905, Wis Mss VJ, WHS.

Perhaps protecting his own credibility on the topic and certainly promoting the McCormicks' interests Thwaites then committed an unnecessarily cruel act of scholarly assassination. He utilized his strong connections in the historical profession to discredit Schaffner's work and make sure that it was not published by the Carnegie Institute. Pattison agreed with Thwaites that, "it would be a great mistake for her article to go to press" and stated on behalf of the McCormicks that, "it is kind of you to take up the matter."⁴⁸

It is in Thwaites' manuscript that Stanton's quote first became inserted into the historiography of Cyrus McCormick's life. Undoubtedly the McCormick Biographical Association had placed Frank Flower's fabrication of the quote in Thwaites' hands. In his version, Stanton's quote read:

'The reaper is to the North,' he said, 'what slavery is to the South. By taking the places of regiments of young men in the Western harvest fields, it releases them to do battle for the Union at the front, and at the same time keeps up the bread supply for the nation and the nation's armies. Thus without McCormick's invention I fear the North could not win and the Union would be dismembered.'

In his article, there is no citation for Stanton's quote. Thwaites' version lacked what little information was available to contextualize the quote. He did not go as far as calling Stanton the Secretary of War, but he certainly did not reference Stanton's involvement in representing McCormick during the 1861 patent extension case.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Salem Pattison to Reuben Thwaites, May 11, 1905; Reuben Thwaites to Salem Pattison, April 25, 1905, box 2, Wis Mss VJ, WHS.

⁴⁹ Reuben Gold Thwaites, "Cyrus Hall McCormick and the reaper" in State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Proceedings of the annual meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* (Madison: The Society, 1909): 255.

Thwaites' biographical article *Cyrus Hall McCormick and the Reaper* would not be published for almost four years. While Thwaites was writing the biographical sketch, most of the family was discussing how best to distribute the biography to the jurors. They met with several of their lawyers, including Robert Parkinson, Cyrus Bentley and John Wilson but other historical laborers were excluded from the discussion. Their lawyers suggested not distributing Thwaites' essay, "in view of the fact that no natural occasion can now be found for a treatise of this kind, or sending it out." Parkinson feared that distributing the biography the wrong way would, "involve more peril than promise of success." After much debate, the family agreed that it was probably better to wait "rather than to subject ourselves to serious criticism for doing the thing itself the wrong way." They were searching for a natural occasion to distribute the article and did not want to spoil their chances for their patriarch's election. They filed away Thwaites' work for future use.⁵⁰

The *Hall of Fame* vote came and went in 1905 without Cyrus Sr.'s election. While the McCormick Biographical Association had been busy scheming, they had chosen not to act. Their "natural occasion" would arrive in 1909 as an opportunity to celebrate the centennial anniversary of Cyrus McCormick's birth. The family would turn to an advertising professional, Herbert Casson, to write a more attractive full-length biography and orchestrate a grand public relations campaign in hopes of persuading the *Hall of Fame* judges.

⁵⁰ Letter from C.H. McCormick to N.F. McCormick, April 13, 1905, Box 1, Mss AA; Robert Parkinson to Cyrus McCormick II, April 11, 1905, box 398, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

Herbert Casson had come into contact with the family, through his dealings with the International Harvester Company as a public relations adviser. He had been paid by the company in 1907 to prepare a glorified history of the harvester industry and the new corporation. His work, *Romance of the Reaper*, was widely distributed to newspapers and by IHC sales agents in hopes to promote the “good trust” image that was conceived by the company’s chairman, George Perkins. Perkins hoped that portraying the company as the “good trust” would convince the Bureau of Corporations to encourage the Justice Department not to pursue anti-trust proceedings. Perkins had cultivated a similar image for the U.S. Steel Corporation and in that campaign had paid Casson to write a similar history of the steel industry, *The Romance of Steel*. In both endeavors, Casson worked to establish that the great millionaires of American industry were not parasites, but rather were boot-strapping entrepreneurs whose enterprise was a boon to the nation. Casson had clearly come across the work of the McCormick Biographical Association, as he included Stanton’s quote in his publication for the International Harvester Company. Crucially important and reflecting the contention amongst the corporation’s ownership by both the Deerings and the McCormicks, he credited the invention of the reaper to a wider cohort of inventors rather than solely to Cyrus McCormick.⁵¹

In June 1908, the family renewed their campaign for the *Hall of Fame* and Smith contacted Herbert Casson about orchestrating a public relations campaign for the family.

⁵¹ International Harvester Company, “Memorandum of Material to be Sent to Commissioner Smith,” April 10, 1907, box 37, Mss 2c, MIHCC. Robert Ozanne, *A Century of Labor-Management Relations at McCormick and International Harvester* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967): 71-72. Herbert Casson, “The Romance of the Reaper,” *Everybody’s Magazine*, vol. 17, no. 6 (December, 1907): 755-566). Herbert Casson, *The Romance of the Reaper* (Doubleday, Page & Company, 1908): 45. Herbert Casson, *The Romance of Steel* (New York: Barnes, 1907).

Following-up on Smith's recommendation, Cyrus II hired Casson to undertake the project after a brief meeting. Casson became the historical laborer most prized and highly rewarded by the McCormicks, earning around \$5000, because he packaged history within a public relations campaign to fulfill their ambitions. His professional expertise managing several similar projects for their company and others, had given him the requisite credibility to oversee their affairs publically. For comparison, the family would not give an academically trained historian this sort of power over their affairs until 1929.⁵²

The family seized on their patriarch's centennial birthday as an "appropriate occasion," to write articles for magazines, publish a full biography and submit letters to the editors of numerous newspapers. Harold stated their intentions clearly in a letter to Frances Smith: "It seems to me this year is a great opportunity for us to have these articles spread all over the country in such a way that they will come to the eyes and ears of the men who are going to vote in the next Hall of Fame.... Such a program would call to their attention in a legitimate way... the merit of the invention and the inventor." Herbert Casson engineered a scheme that would fulfill both their need for a biography and their interest in producing a mass of newspaper articles that would reach the *Hall of Fame* voters. He would write a series of six articles that would be widely circulated to newspapers and then published as a book. Cyrus II liked the plan, writing in a memorandum to the other members of the Biographical Association, "this work should be begun at once." Casson's 184-page biography was completed and ready for

⁵² Frances Smith to Members of the Biographical Association, June 4, 1908; Cyrus McCormick II, Memorandum, January 25, 1909, box 2, Mss AA, MIHCC.

publication by late 1908. The Association also had Thwaites publish his article in the *Proceedings* of the Wisconsin State Historical Society in late 1908.⁵³

The centennial birthday of Cyrus McCormick in 1909 saw an epic public relations scheme carried out by the McCormick Biographical Association in an effort to shift the public mind and specifically the thoughts of the *Hall of Fame* election committee towards the family's prerogative. Under Casson's tutelage, they printed and distributed 1500 copies of Thwaites' article to historians, libraries, universities, newspapers, and notably forty-two of the *Hall of Fame* judges whom they felt were most likely to read the document in a positive light. They also purchased and distributed a staggering 10,000 copies of Casson's biography *Cyrus Hall McCormick: His Life and Works*. Frances Smith proposed a strategy for distribution of 9,000 copies. It is unclear where the last 1,000 went. Six thousand copies were to be sent to "Public Libraries, Institutional Libraries and Educators," 1,000 for "Representative men in the Association of Commerce," which was a Chicago based business association, 1,000 copies for the press, 300 copies for family and friends and an additional 200 for stock on hand. She also proposed that 500 be sent to professors of history and economics, because "these are the men who write the histories of our country." They believed putting the biography in the hands of historians was an investment for the future. Their investment came to fruition as Cyrus McCormick was included in many history books afterwards. The McCormick

⁵³ Harold McCormick to F. Smith, February 26, 1909; C.H. McCormick II, memorandum, January 23, 1909, box 3; F. Smith, Memorandum, December 3, 1908; F. Smith to the Members of the Biographical Association, June 4, 1908, box 2, Mss AA, MIHCC.

Biographical Association also sent out an additional 1,000 copies of Casson's *Romance of the Reaper* to the press.⁵⁴

This blitz saturated the literary world with the family's version of history and specifically Stanton's quote. Judging from the response in the press, the McCormick Biographical Association's effort appears to have reached far more than simply the individual recipients of their books. The Association furnished many newspapers with articles featuring Stanton's quote as well. The McCormick's version of history was featured in popular national publications such as *Harper's Weekly*, *the Wall Street Journal* and *the Saturday Evening Post*, among many other national magazines and newspapers.⁵⁵

The centennial campaign went beyond literature, including celebratory events and addresses at the Chicago Association of Commerce and several universities. The centennial was mostly observed by institutions that had been endowed by the McCormick family. For instance, the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, and Washington and Lee University in Virginia (which the family endowed with \$75,000 in the spring of 1909) held celebrations. McCormick was also commemorated as the inaugural inductee into the *Farmer's Hall of Fame* at the University of Illinois in Champaign.

⁵⁴ N.F. McCormick to F.G. Brown, A.C. McClurg Publishers, May 26, 1908; F. Smith to C.H. McCormick II, April 30, 1909, in Frances Smith, compiled documents on the Hall of Fame, May 11, 1910, box 4, Mss AA, MIHCC.

⁵⁵ In addition to its own article commemorating Cyrus Hall McCormick, *International Harvester's* magazine published twelve excerpts from prominent newspapers and magazine that were also about McCormick. "Echoes from the Press," *The Harvester World*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1909), 2-4.

Coincidentally, the *Farmer's Hall of Fame* came into existence that same October and held their inaugural induction ceremony honoring Cyrus in December.⁵⁶

Ironically and perhaps comically, their relatives successfully sabotaged the McCormick Biographical Association's bid to have Cyrus inducted into the *Hall of Fame* in 1910. While McCormick Biographical Association was well aware of their relative's alternative version of the past, they had remained silent on the topic since on historical debate since the 1889 buy-out. Gouged by the heir's arrogant public relations campaign, the cousins Robert Hall McCormick II and James Shields nominated Robert Hall McCormick as the inventor of the reaper. They also independently published their own history, *Robert McCormick, Inventor*, which they directly distributed to all of the electors. After the elections were held in October, a gloating Robert Hall McCormick II revealed the disruptive plot to his totally surprised and unaware cousin, Cyrus II. After describing his nomination of their mutual grandfather and the publication of his book, Robert Hall remarked that he would "take great pleasure in sending you one," as he prepared to distribute the work more widely. In the *Hall of Fame* polling, Cyrus McCormick garnered only sixteen votes, while Robert McCormick received seven. In spite of all of their lobbying, plotting and professional resources the McCormick Biographical Association's plans had been spoiled by their own kin. For the next twenty-five years, Cyrus McCormick's heirs continued to campaign for the *Hall of Fame*, and

⁵⁶ Nolan R. Best, "Cyrus Hall McCormick," *The Harvester World*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1909): 1-2. The secretary of the Illinois State Board of Agriculture J.K. Dickirson discusses the ceremonial plans at Champaign for the *Farmer's Hall of Fame* and also invited C.H. McCormick to contribute an essay to a volume that the State Board was preparing composed on the value of the reaper. This is a great example of other groups producing the MBAs version of history unsolicited. JK Dickirson to MBA, 1909, box 3, Mss AA. F. Smith, Memorandum, December 3, 1908, box 2, Mss AA, MIHCC.

were endlessly worried about their cousins' nefarious tampering and power to derail their historical objectives.⁵⁷

“The Reaper is to the North...” beyond 1910.

The McCormick Biographical Association had indelibly marked the historical record in 1909. After the failed *Hall of Fame* election bid, the family feud among cousins rose to the surface and Cyrus' family would redouble its efforts, continuing to finance historical laborers for the next forty years in order to quell their own family's rebellion. The unaware scholarly bystanders of this conflict were won over by the McCormick Biographical Association's ubiquitous propaganda and often repeated its version of the past. Through them, the McCormick family's heritage of invention and other associated fabrications would spread to monographs, textbooks and finally into public memory.

Moving forward, the McCormick Biographical Association continued to produce its versions of history, including Stanton's quote. Within these works, the family's historians continued to consciously craft misleading interpretations of Cyrus' Civil War era activities. Cyrus Hall McCormick III's *Century of the Reaper* is a good example of just such a work, which featured Stanton's quote and a blatantly misleading narrative of the Civil War. Furthermore, this perspective and Stanton's quote would be present in many of the corporate histories of International Harvester, which they helped create. Along with the 1931 public relations history referenced at the beginning of this article,

⁵⁷ R.H. McCormick, J.H. Shields, *Robert McCormick, Inventor* (Chicago, 1910). R.H. McCormick II to C.H McCormick II, October 18, 1910, Mcc Mss AA, Box 4. “Poe gets a place in Hall of Fame,” *New York Times*, October 22, 1910, 1.

the quote would to be used in “History and Development of International Harvester”(1976).⁵⁸

The family also sought to influence the history produced by others. Prior to 1930, their historians sent out copies of Casson’s two books and Thwaites’ article to anyone who inquired about the history of McCormick. In 1931, they would again engage an academic historian, William T. Hutchinson to write a two volume authoritative biography of their father. The Association’s laborers also actively prepared entries for encyclopedias and sought out museums to present their version of history, including the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago and the Smithsonian American History Museum.⁵⁹

As a result of the McCormick family’s historical laborers, Stanton’s quote and their heritage would become ubiquitous in the historiography of Cyrus McCormick, the Civil War and the nineteenth century. Within two years of the Biographical Association’s public relations blitz in 1909, the quote would be used in its first Civil War history book. All context for the quote was lost and it was attributed to “the Secretary of War.” Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. used the quote in his *Political and Social History of the United States*, as would many others on the topic of broader American history. Stanton’s quote became

⁵⁸ In, Herbert Kellar to H.L. Boyle, March 21, 1941, Special Reports File: Civil War, Influence of the Reaper upon; compiled 1924, March 1943, box 2, McCormick Collections Special Reports File, Mss AD, MIHCC, Kellar explains to an interested International Harvester employee why the McCormick company did so poorly during the civil war- a history which is never acknowledged in the works he produced for the family or International Harvester. Cyrus McCormick, *The Century of the Reaper* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1931): 63. Herbert Kellar to C.H. McCormick II, Anita McCormick Blaine, and Harold McCormick, February 3, 1932, “General Report of the MHA for the Period January 1, 1931 to January 30, 1932,” 11, box 35, Herbert Kellar Papers, Mss AC, MIHCC. International Harvester, “History and Development of International Harvester, 1976, 6, Accessed December 3, 2010, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/ihc/search.asp>.

⁵⁹ Herbert. Kellar to C.H McCormick II, April 12, 1930, box 9, Mss AC, MIHCC.

substantially shorter, generally only including the last portion, “without McCormick’s invention, I feel the North could not win and that the Union would be dismembered.”⁶⁰

The works that the McCormick Biographical Association produced would seep into mainstream historiography and contaminate the histories of the Civil War and nineteenth century America. Stanton’s quote is evidence of this. The fabrication has been repeated often, perpetually confirming the image of Cyrus McCormick as a patriotic and important supporter of the Union cause. The quote would end up being used by just about any historian that wanted to make a claim that their topic contributed to Union victory, if they could connect their interests to the reaper or McCormick. Chicago historians would use the quote as evidence of their city’s contribution to the war efforts. Historians of agriculture and the Midwest would do the same. Strangely, the quote is even used by Virginia historians as evidence of the greatness of the state’s people.⁶¹

Crucially important to the McCormick’s historical enterprise were the laborers that the family paid to fulfill their ambitions. The full spectrum of historical laborers who interacted with the McCormicks indicates the range of professionals that attempted to claim the past as their area of expertise. The spectrum included those who were academically trained, alongside lawyers, advertisers, journalists and free-lance

⁶⁰ Frederic Paxson, *The Civil War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911): 59. Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Political and Social History of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925): 185.

⁶¹ Stephen Longstreet, *Chicago: 1860-1919* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1973): 39. Lloyd Lewis, *Chicago: the History of its Reputation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929): 93. William Horace Clark, *Farms and Farmers: the story of American Agriculture*, (New York: L.C. Page and Company, 1945): 190. Robert McLaughlin, *The Heartland* (New York: Time, Inc., 1967): 89. Walter Ebeling, *The Fruited Plain: the Story of American Agriculture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979): 167. M.M. Theobald, “Lion of the Hour,” *Virginia Living Magazine*, vol. 7, no 4 (June 3, 2009): 41. Philip Bruce, *et al.*, *History of Virginia*, vol. 2, (New York: American Historical Society, 1924): 532.

consultants. These historians may seem to be professional worlds apart, but most of them mutually agreed to interpret the past flexibly in order to prove their value in the corporate order and secure financial remuneration. While Frederick Jackson Turner seems nothing like Frank Flower, Flower's mercenary research was published under the by-line of Turner's credible-colleague Reuben Gold Thwaites. The academically trained Salem Pattison bears a striking resemblance to the advertising professional, Herbert Casson. Both succeeded in getting paid, because they offered a concrete plan of action to meet their employer's historical needs. Moreover, the research services and legalistic briefs of the trained lawyers Louis Dent and Robert Parkinson seem very similar to the labor of the academically trained historian. Academic historians would not secure their positional authority within the McCormick's historical enterprise until 1929. In the meantime, the McCormicks would continue to hold lawyers and advertisers above their own academic historians as the historical professionals of merit.

CHAPTER FOUR:

“EVERY TALL BUILDING IS A MONUMENT TO BREAD”

In mid-August 1913, residents of Glenwood Iowa and surrounding Mill County flocked to the chautauqua tent on the east edge of town for a week of lectures, debates, musical performances and motion pictures. Every summer since 1904, Midland Chautauqua Circuit had made a stop in Glenwood, erecting a massive canvas tent and arranging a program of interesting, uplifting and educational talent for each day and evening of its stay. Praised by Theodore Roosevelt as “the most American thing in America,” circuit chautauqua companies toured the Midwest, engaging rural Americans in the cultural, social, civic, and spiritual debates of the Progressive Era. Mill County residents eagerly anticipated and treasured the annual chautauqua as the event of the season. They saved and cherished programs from each annual gathering and discussed what they had seen and heard in the tent year round. Boosters promoted it for months preceding the arrival of the circuit, hanging banners, decorating storefronts, and widely publicizing the occasion in local papers. Adults readily paid \$2 for a season ticket in advance to see the whole bill of enlightening presentations and an additional \$1 for each of their children to enjoy the festivities as well. Once the chautauqua opened, local entrepreneurs sold food onsite to feed the more than 2,000 people that packed into the tent each day. Merchants closed for the week, farmers left their fields, and out-of-towners stayed with local friends and

family or camped in the canvas village adjacent to the big top, so that they would not miss a moment of the presentations.¹

Spanning from Saturday August ninth through the sixteenth, Midland Chautauqua Circuit offered an educational and morally-enriching variety show of over thirty acts on the platform. Glenwood's 1913 bill included fourteen choral and instrumental concerts, seven motion picture shows, an impersonator, a debate on military armament and foreign tensions in Europe, and seven lectures. Orating to intent audiences, the lectures generally focused on Christian morality, ranging topics from advice for youth in the workplace, to the importance of strong parenting for the future of the nation, and a sermon on the perils of socialism for the independent Christian.²

Among the lectures, two addresses focused on the nation's economic order, a popular topic of discussion. Americans, and farmers in particular, were anxious about and hostile towards big businesses at a time when economic power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations. Many saw the corporate merger movement of 1895-1904 as further proof that the farmer's independence and the nation's sacred democracy were in jeopardy. Chautauqua performers commonly spoke to these issues and invigorated populist anti-trust sentiments. L.F. Lybarger filled this role on the second night of the Glenwood chautauqua, lambasting railroads and robber barons

¹ "Chautauqua Proves a Great Success," *The Glenwood Opinion*, August 22, 1907; "Chautauqua is in full blast," *The Glenwood Opinion*, August 10, 1911; "Glenwood Chautauq'a Begins Saturday," *The Glenwood Opinion*, August 4, 1913. Charlotte Canning, *The Most American Thing in America: Circuit Chautauqua as performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005): 71-97.

² "Glenwood Chautauq'a Begins Saturday," *The Glenwood Opinion*, August 4, 1913; "Glenwood Chautauqua," *The Glenwood Opinion*, August 14, 1913; "The Chautauqua Closed Last Saturday Evening," *The Glenwood Opinion*, August 18, 1913.

for “gobbling up the country” and the wealth of the common man. At the conclusion of his lecture, “Land, Labor and Wealth,” Lybarger repeated a common Progressive Era call to arms, praying that the government intervene to rescue the nation, lest the country’s children be condemned to a life of poverty at the hands of trusts. In juxtaposition to Lybarger’s tirade, Frank Stockdale offered a harmonious rendering of the nation’s interests, entitled “The Dawn of Plenty.”³

As the closing lecture of the week, Frank Stockdale took center stage and for an hour regaled the audience with a history of the world “as a record of man’s struggle for bread.” Assisted by illustrations, motion pictures and dramatic lighting effects, Stockdale argued that prior to the nineteenth century, ninety-seven percent of humanity struggled to merely provide bread to feed itself because it lacked the appropriate tools to harvest grain efficiently. For over fifty centuries, farmers were enslaved by tyrants who stole the fruits of their labor and progress stood still. Stockdale explained that this deprived condition only ceased when Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper in 1831. He illustrated that the reaper and its successive improvements freed Americans to leave the farm and pursue the progress which made the nation great, while other “lesser races” were still enslaved by the tools of the ancients. Stockdale preached that in the reaper’s wake, cities sprang up, Americans pushed westward, railroads followed across the continent, industry boomed, commerce matured, universities opened, and technological ingenuity was unleashed, creating a modern civilization of abundance. He opined that modern industrialization, urbanization, and corporatization were not at odds with agrarians. Rather, the farmer’s

³ “Glenwood Chautauqua,” *the Glenwood Opinion*, August 14, 1913. Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmer’s, Worker’s and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 1-9.

“common sense” and embrace of “up-to-date methods” allowed him to profit as a partner and crucial contributor to the new economic order. His grain enabled civilization and progress to flourish.⁴

The audience sat in rapt silence throughout Stockdale’s performance and was wowed by his accompanying multi-media imagery. The editor of the *Glenwood Opinion* believed that Stockdale’s show alone was worth the price of the season’s admission. He raved that “the Dawn of Plenty” was “meritorious for its instruction and education,” placing the week’s preceding lecturers “far in the shade.” Billed as the “Mirthful Orator,” Stockdale was a polished and engaging public speaker. He had taken the “Dawn of Plenty” to lyceum halls the previous winter. During the summer of 1913 Stockdale executed it at scores of chautauqua across the Midwest, including three other times that same week for audiences in Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska. Unpublicized and unbeknownst to all of these onlookers and indeed the editor of the *Glenwood Opinion*, Frank Stockdale worked for the International Harvester Company. The rural masses filling the chautauqua benches had paid to witness a public relations spectacle prepared by the despised “harvester trust.”⁵

As a growing monopolistic power in America’s farm implement industry, International Harvester Company was beset during the Progressive Era by anti-trust antagonism and real legal threats since its creation in 1902. The trust’s illegal competitive

⁴ “The Chautauqua Closed Last Saturday Evening,” *the Glenwood Opinion*, August 18, 1913. “The Dawn of Plenty,” (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1913): 5, 17, 32, folder 4200, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

⁵ “The Chautauqua Closed Last Saturday Evening,” *the Glenwood Opinion*, August 18, 1913. “The Dawn of Plenty Grows,” *The Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 8 (August, 1913):4.

practices, deplorable treatment of workers, and outright bribery of public officials made it the target of rural animosity, labor strikes, muckrakers, middle-class concern, political stumping, and eventually, government inquiry and regulation. Rising from this swirling cacophony of protest, in 1912 the United States Department of Justice brought suit against the harvester trust to dissolve the corporation.

As anti-trust pressure against the company mounted and the real threat of destruction emerged, the company developed an evolving and increasingly sophisticated public relations campaign to convince Americans that it was a “good trust.” This initiative began in 1907 with new corporate welfare programs for its workers and a 1909 overhaul of advertising material and branding efforts. By 1912, it included an Agricultural Extension Department to demonstrate the corporation’s goodwill towards farmers and a public education campaign under the auspices of the Service Bureau. At the height of anti-trust antagonism, the Service Bureau saturated the nation with a wealth of veiled propaganda in the form of educational lectures and materials for school children. These “indirect advertisements” utilized creative re-imaginings of the past and present to prove that the corporation was a cooperative ally of the common man happily aiding in his pursuit of progress and prosperity. To further legitimize these public relations narratives, the company’s ownership also set out to influence the academic historians of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association to ensure that their corporate myths would stay in the public mind for generations to come.⁶

⁶ Building on Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), this chapter is investigating the means through which corporate imagery was spread and sustained. The use of imagery recalling history, a service ethic, welfare capitalism, patriotism and the corporation as community member were all common corporate public relations strategies in the early twentieth century as

The Harvester Trust and Its Discontents

International Harvester was founded in 1902 to eliminate competition in the harvesting industry and increase profits. One of many such mergers during the era, the International quickly earned a reputation as another hated “trust” designed to rob the common man. In an industry previously defined by consumer power and rigorous competition, the corporation unified the five largest harvester manufacturers, McCormick, Deering, Milwaukee, Osborne, and Champion and immediately gained the power of price making over its customers. The corporation soon faced animosity from a variety of sources, including agrarians, laborers, muckraking journalists, and politicians. These forces culminated to instigate government inquiry, regulation, and, eventually, an anti-trust suit against the harvester trust in 1912.

Farmers made up the largest group aggrieved by the trust. At its creation International Harvester produced eighty-five percent of harvesting machines in the country and immediately doubled the real price a farmer paid for the machine. Through manufacturer-exclusive contracts with retailers, the firm expanded its monopoly on harvester-machines to build monopolies on other farm implements, like seeders, spreaders, wagons and harrows. Seemingly overnight, farmers went from being able to skillfully play competitors off of one another and purchasing a harvester for \$60 to having no negotiation leverage and paying more than \$125 for the same machine. They

Marchand identifies. What is unique about this study is that International Harvester seized upon established and founding education institutions, like the lyceum, chautauqua, the emerging public school and the historical profession as a means to covertly spread those images.

saw the “monster octopus” ensnaring other implement lines as well and railed against the firm as their “greatest enemy.”⁷

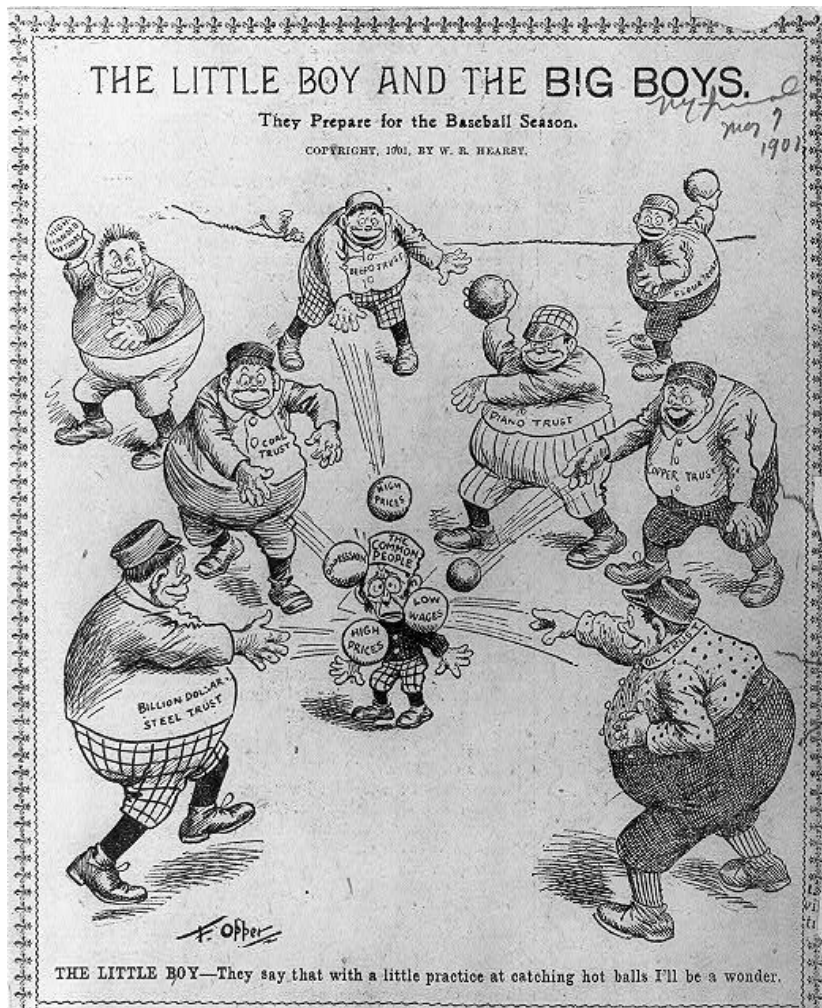


Figure 11: “The Little Boy and the Big Boys.” Cartoons depicting trusts’ oppression of the common people with high prices, low wages, and high handed methods were ubiquitous around the turn of the 20th century.⁸

⁷ Robert Ozanne, *A Century of Labor-Management Relations at McCormick and International Harvester* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967): 71-72. “Judson’s Address to State Grange,” *the Glenwood Opinion*, January 1, 1905. “The Farmer’s Greatest Enemy,” *Southern Mercury*, November 24, 1904; “The Harvester merger,” *Southern Mercury*, October 22, 1903. Defense Brief, *Missouri v. International Harvester Company of America*, Supreme Court of Missouri, 5-6, box 7, International Harvester Company Legal and Patent Records, 1902-1947, M2001-144, MIHCC.

⁸ “The Little Boy and the Big Boys,” W.R. Hearst, 1901, Lib. of Congress, accessed March 23, 2014, available online at: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005685051/>.

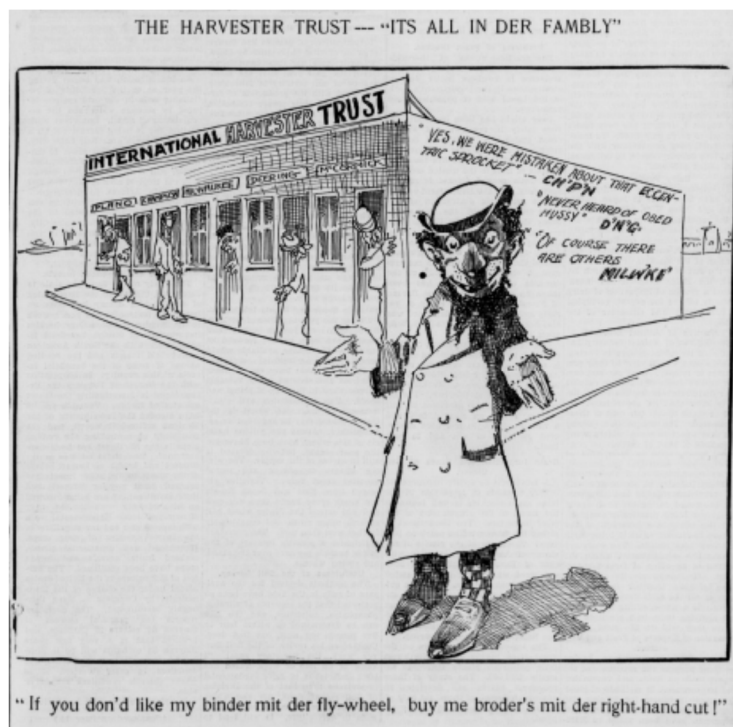


Figure 12: “The Harvester Trust.” Farmers loathed the harvester trust's monopoly and also commented on the hypocrisy of the merger given the inflammatory advertising and brand differentiation that defined the industry during the previous decade.⁹

The trust posed a grave threat not only to the farmer's pocketbook, but also to his identity and way of life. Into the 20th century, many agrarians believed that they were Jefferson's yeoman farmers – morally protecting American democracy through mastering the land, paternally providing for their families, contributing to their communities and remaining independently unencumbered by outside interests or obligations. This “agrarian fundamentalism” provided the basis for a masculine pre-industrial American ideal. Corporations like International Harvester undermined this gender ideal, because they contributed to making the farmer powerlessly reliant on outside market forces and

⁹ “The Harvester Trust,” *The Ranch* [Seattle, WA], December 15, 1902, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress, accessed March 23, 2014, online: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn98047754/1902-12-15/ed-1/seq-1/>.

distant arbitrary decisions which could not be negotiated or challenged. Increasingly in debt and dependent on commodity prices that were never high enough, the farmer had to take on more debt to buy more machinery and land or quit the farm. Moreover, his paternal authority was diminished as he was less able to provide for his family and his children either had to work elsewhere to support the family or left the farm in pursuit of urban opportunities. As neighbors encountered these forces and choices simultaneously, farmers were anxious that their former way of life would disappear along with their children and neighbors. The harvester trust was the most recent and egregious example of corporate order's threat to the farmer's livelihood and masculinity. Resentful and outraged, they looked to politicians to regulate the morass and restore the democratic order.¹⁰

The corporation's reputation in the city was not much better. Early after its creation, International Harvester was the target of Chicago muckrakers at *Collier's* and *The Day Book*, among many others, who exposed the company's exploitation of its workers and administrative chicanery, to middle-class urban readers. These journalists revealed the real impact of the trust's low wages, the dangerous working conditions in factories, its disregard for employee welfare, and its scandalous relationship with the city's tax board, igniting the ire of urban progressives. In conjunction, the corporation also faced five waves of labor strikes from 1903 to 1919. Workers struck for better

¹⁰ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1967) discusses the major social transitions and migrations of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era that accompanied the corporatization and modernization of the economy. Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), describes the impact of these transitions on the farm family through both social and gender analysis.

wages, conditions and shorter hours, attracting still more negative publicity and the interests of “trust-busting” reform politicians.¹¹

The harvester trust’s undesirable image in both the country and the city, as well as its real monopolistic control of the industry invited state and federal government intervention on behalf of the American people. The corporation had faced intense political and legal scrutiny in a number of western states including Arkansas, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas. Most of these states passed anti-trust laws and imposed fines on the corporation in the few years following its creation. In the most extreme cases, International Harvester was ousted from doing business within Missouri in 1910 and Kentucky in 1911. At the behest of western senators, the Bureau of Corporations initiated an investigation of the trust in 1907. In 1912, President William Howard Taft instructed the Department of Justice to commence its anti-trust prosecution of International Harvester, after Roosevelt had previously stayed the suit pending the on-going bureau investigation. Lasting from 1912 to 1918, the federal suit against International Harvester pursued enforcement of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 and the dissolution of the trust.¹²

¹¹ Ozanne, *A Century of Labor-Management Relations*, 71-161. “Making Cripples and Dodging Taxes *Collier’s Weekly*, April 18, 1908. “Where Harvester \$2-a-Day Families Live,” *The Day Book*, April 17, 1914, 28.

¹² Cyrus McCormick II to George Perkins, June 19, 1905, box 1, Stanley R. McCormick Papers – Additions 1890-1909, M2002-052; Cyrus McCormick II, Memorandum of Conference Held at the Manhattan Hotel, February 15, 1907; Cyrus McCormick II, Memorandum, April 1, 1907; C.S. Funk to Cyrus McCormick II, March 27, 1907; box 37, Cyrus Hall McCormick - Subject Files, Mss 2c; “The International Harvester Case: A Compilation,” Volume 29, p. 31, International Harvester Company Legal and Patent Records, 1902-1947, Mss 3z, MIHCC. “Harvester Company Meets all Charges: Files Brief in Answer to Missouri Ouster Suit Begun There in 1907,” *Harvester World*, V. 1, No. 9 (June, 1910): 1. “Kentucky,” *Harvester World*, V. 2, No. 14 (November, 1911): 16. “Playing Politics with Business,”

Facing myriad challenges to its reputation and existence from 1907 to 1918, management desperately struggled to improve the corporation's public image through public relations efforts that reframed the combination as a "good trust." The company created welfare programs, profit sharing and industrial relations committees in hopes of assuaging labor animosity and currying favor with reformers and politicians. In the countryside, image making advertisements and educational programs were the core of the company's public relations strategy for placating hostility and promoting sales. Attracting attention from historians, the 1912 creation of the Agricultural Extension Department brought scientific best-practices education to farmers across the nation to assist them in their pursuit of prosperity. Largely unnoticed, however, the company also created a Service Bureau in 1910 which offered educational materials to the rural masses which culturally sanctioned the corporation's position in American society. The Service Bureau was engaged in historical production teaching farmers and their children that business and the common farmer were partners, mutually benefitting while advancing civilization.¹³

reprinted editorial in, *The Harvester World* V. 3, No. 5 (May, 1912): 2-4. "Workings of Harvester Trust," February 7, 1907, *Bismarck Daily Tribune*. United States v. International Harvester Company and others, "Petition in Equity," (US District Court, St. Paul, 1912): 2, 8-9, 40-43. Cyrus H. McCormick, "President Cyrus H. McCormick's Letter to the Harvester Family," *Harvester World* Vol. 9, No. 10 (October, 1918): 2-3. Harvester lost the suit in the St. Paul District Court in 1914. After the case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and argued twice, it was settled out of court with a compromise that forced harvester to sell of its smaller assets but allowed it to keep the McCormick and Deering lines together.

¹³ Ozanne, *A Century of Labor-Management Relations* and Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul* discuss International Harvester's welfare programs as public relations enterprises. Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: the Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003)¹³ David Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979) reflect on the cultural dispute between farmers and corporations as well as the environmental impact of agronomic education. Sterling Evans, *Bound In Twine* (College Station: Texas A & M University, 2007) does consider how the company created materials which culturally sanctioned their twine monopoly in the mid-1910s, but does not reflect on the company's larger cultural education project.

“Prosperity,” the “Obligations of Citizenship,” and the Service Bureau

In 1909, International Harvester renovated its advertising to recast the trust as a cooperative ally of the farmer. Under the direction of M.R.D. Owings, the Advertising Department dramatically overhauled its promotional materials and expanded its offerings. The department began to publish a monthly magazine, *The Harvester World*, to inform its workforce and its customers. It also undertook to distribute an annual almanac to three and a half million farmers, serving them as a “constant reference,” that was “free of miscellaneous advertising, but incidentally advertising our line and the Company.” They also improved the company’s catalogs, so that they were no longer “big, cheaply printed, small type affairs... in which the biggest thing is the price.” Rather the catalogs became “books of information,” educating both agents and the farmer about the best methods and modern tools for attaining prosperity on the farm.¹⁴

This advertising overhaul was accompanied by a re-branding initiative to make the company synonymous with prosperity. In its inaugural October 1909 issue of *The Harvester World*, the department unveiled a new company logo as well as a mascot. The mascot they imagined was a “genial little Farm-Sprite” named “Prospsy” (short for “Prosperity). Indicating the advertising department’s awareness of public anti-trust sentiment, Prospsy’s first printed words were “Business is or should be and will be cooperation – not robbery.” Committed to the concepts of “prosperity” and “cooperation”

¹⁴ M.R.D. Owings to R.C. Haskins, November 21, 1912, box 151; International Harvester Advertising Department, *Instruction and Suggestions*, 40, box 325, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

as a more desirable public image, all of the company's advertising materials became educational in nature and included Prospery's likeness.¹⁵

The message of the new brand is best conveyed in Prospery's feature pamphlet, *Glimpses of Thrift Land*. In this illustrated booklet, Prospery demonstrates to the backwards "Farmer Brown" that "the ideal farmer on an ideal farm... saves time and expense and preserves himself to enjoy in his old age his rapidly growing wealth by using the peerless I.H.C. farm machines and implements." The story opens with an exasperated Farmer Brown cutting hay by hand. Prospery appears and introduces himself to the flabbergasted farmer Farmer Brown, as a "Son of the Soil," and a "Genius of Farm Thrift," before taking him on a journey to "thrift land." In the course of their adventures together Prospery shows Farmer Brown the entire line of International Harvester machines, clearly identified with the new trademark and educates him about how to ensure the success of his crops. Reflecting the company's desired public image, Prospery also stressed that that the company existed to further advance the farmers' wealth through education and modern tools. Functioning as an allegory for the company's new brand, Prospery pointed "the unprogressive farmer to 'Thriftland'" and fittingly, prosperity.¹⁶

¹⁵ M.R.D. Owings, "Current Advertising"; "Prospery at the Bat," *the Harvester World* Vol. 1, No. 1 (October, 1909). International Harvester Company, "Prospery," Poster, 1909, WHi-4625, available online at Wisconsin Digital Archive, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/advancedSearch.asp>, accessed 2/27/2014.

¹⁶ "A Delightful Allegory on the Uses of Farm Machines," *the Herald of Gospel Liberty*, September 30, 1909, 28. "A Delightful Allegory on the Uses of Farm Machines," *Better Fruit* Vol. 4, No. 4 (October, 1909): 42.



Figure 13: "Prosperity." The IHC Mascot was made out of corn, wheat and alfalfa. His shield was the corporation's new trademark monogram.

As a curious invention of the advertising department, Prosperity's image (figure 13) and thrifty wisdom recommended a new agrarian masculinity. Prosperity was a freakish amalgamation of "primitivism," International Harvester iconography and common farm commodities. With a headdress of alfalfa, a corn-cob body, a spear of wheat, a golden IHC trademark shield, and Roman sandals, he resembled a generic primitive warrior that might be found in the pages of *National Geographic*. Unlike these racial stereotypes,

however, he was white, proffered sagacious wisdom about modern farming and peddled expensive machinery. Prosperity was a vision of primitive white masculinity that suggested the compatibility of the prosperous independent farmer and the emerging corporate order. This gendered message and indeed Prosperity, were ubiquitous in International Harvester's sales and service materials as a cultural trump of agrarian fears regarding corporate enslavement.¹⁷

The Service Bureau was another facet of the Prosperity-advertising revolution and rebranding effort in 1910. The advertising department hired knowledgeable, educated employees who specialized in key areas of interest like mechanics and horticulture to make catalogs more educational. The department included useful and practical farming content alongside sales text designed to demonstrate the company's thoughtful engagement with the farmer's interests. In tandem, the Service Bureau was formed to garner greater public trust by carrying out this educational mission outside of sales and advertising purposes. Department manager Owings noted that the new bureau allowed the company: "to place with the schools, agricultural colleges, institutes, on cars, boats, boards of trade, commercial organizations, and through our own organization, literature that is highly appreciated and accepted as educational without the tincture of advertising, but which indirectly advertises the Company in advance educational work." In the manager's mind, the bureau offered double value by reframing the public image of the

¹⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

company and subtly cultivating demand for International Harvester products through its educational initiatives.¹⁸

Reflecting the self-serving interests of the company's supposed benevolent enterprise, the Service Bureau and advertising department were practically one entity. They were so "closely allied... that it would be difficult to tell where one begins and the others leaves off." Frequently content and artwork which were developed for one of the branches was freely utilized by the other. They remained necessarily intertwined, because in "back of service ever stands the shadow of advertising," so much so that the two branches occupied the same office space. Owings and his staff were careful to conceal this relationship from the public.¹⁹

Cyrus McCormick II overtly stated the public relations objectives of the Service Bureau when he expanded it to include a new Extension Department in 1912. In a circular denying the veracity of the federal anti-trust case and promoting the new department, McCormick argued that his corporation was compatible with traditional American values and communities. Addressing popular anxieties, he was certain that International Harvester could demonstrate that it was "inspired by the same high ideals which so often characterize the management of a private business." He noted that the company served the farmer's interests through developing, building, and selling modern machinery. Beyond this most basic business function, he also underlined that the corporation benevolently educated the masses through its Service Bureau. The Bureau

¹⁸ M.R.D. Owings to R.C. Haskins, June 19, 1913, box 33, Mss 6z, MIHCC. "A New Department," *The Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 1 (January, 1913): 16.

¹⁹ M.R.D. Owings to R.C. Haskins, November 21, 1912; box 151; Mss 6z, MIHCC. "A New Department," *The Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 1 (January, 1913): 16.

was “giving a definite and valuable service to the country at large.” It was committed to “spreading the doctrine of more intelligent farming” and carried “directly to the farm house the discoveries and results of the work” in agricultural science. To further meet the “great need” for public education, McCormick announced that he had hired Perry G. Holden, the famous agronomist from Iowa State University, to enlarge the bureau’s work by creating an Extension Department for company. He also suggested that these benevolent expenditures on the farmer education were only possible because of the business’s massive scale.²⁰

Many International Harvester publications emphasized the upstanding character of the corporation by pointing to its Service Bureau. In contrast to rural fears of the corporate infringement, these publications and messages consistently stressed that the corporation was a positive social force. An Extension Department publication stated that “The International Harvester Company, as a citizen of the nation, feels the responsibility of its obligations to the people.” Such, “obligations of citizenship,” were met through the bureau’s mission “to simplify and to modernize scientific agriculture and to carry the most efficient methods to the homes of the people.” Another suggested that the corporation was on the frontlines of a war on famine and want. Aware that Americans would not naively accept such public relations message on faith alone, most publications explained that the corporation’s success was reliant on the farmer’s prosperity. Educating the farmer ensured his own progress and the company’s profits.²¹

²⁰ Cyrus McCormick II, “The International Harvester Company and the Farmer From 1902 Until 1912,” December 29, 1912, box 748, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

²¹ E.L. Barker, “Holden Leaves Iowa,” *The Harvester World* Vol. 3, no. 12 (December 1912): 24-25. International Harvester Company, “Campaign Budgets: Agricultural Extension Department,” 1914, box 74;

Propaganda as Historical Education

The Service Bureau created an expanding cache of educational resources for the farmer, which emphasized the company's fresh brand and mechanized progress. While Perry Holden and the Extension Department conducted agronomic education campaigns and published booklets that informed the farmer's progressive methods, another branch was entirely dedicated to the farmer's cultural indoctrination. These efforts were tailored to "molding public opinion and putting the right thoughts into the minds" of the masses. These men engaged in historical labor creating booklets, "dramalogues," motion pictures, and lantern-slide lectures which justified the corporation's existence through celebratory narratives of the past. Their teleological tales wove together the interests of the farmer, the corporation and the nation in a single tale of progressive and prosperity. They emphasized that prior to the creation of International Harvester's philanthropic departments, the corporation and its predecessors provided service indirectly to the farmer and society. Resurrecting McCormick Harvesting Machine Company's former historical brand, their case-in-point was that McCormick's "invention of the reaper... founded agricultural greatness and the Company." From 1831 forward the farmer, the nation and the company progressed and prospered together.²²

Cyrus McCormick II, "The International Harvester Company and the Farmer From 1902 Until 1912," December 29, 1912, box 748, Mss 6z; Cyrus McCormick II, "The Coming Problem of Agricultural Development," reprinted from *Farm Machinery*, December 31, 1912, box 3, International Harvester Company Sample Books, 1913-1957, Mss 5z, MIHCC.

²² E.L. Barker, "Holden Leaves Iowa," *The Harvester World* Vol. 3, No. 12 (December, 1912): 24-25. E.L. Barker, "Batting it up to Our Own Family," *The Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 10 (October, 1913): 12.

Indicating the less-than-scholarly tenor of this pursuit, the historical branch of the Service Bureau was managed by a veteran of the theater and entertainment industry, Edwin Lincoln Barker. Born in 1868, Barker had made his career as a humorist, monologist, playwright and impersonator in Chicago during the 1890s. In the first decade of the 1900s, he co-owned the Bush Temple Theater and booked variety-show performers and orators. Building on this background in the emerging field of educational show business, Barker became very involved in the professionalization of lyceum and chautauqua. In 1904, he opened and operated the Midwest's premier trade journal for traveling circuit professionals, *The Lyceumite*. His Chicago office was the hub of the new industry. Bustling with activity, managers and performers hustled in and out. They sought jobs, publicized their circuits, asked for information about good chautauqua towns, practiced their performances, and wrung their hands over railroad maps trying to figure out the logistics of their traveling educational extravaganzas. As an orator himself, a manager and the man at the center of the professional network, Barker knew everything about, and everyone in, the Midwestern lyceum and circuit chautauqua industry.²³

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, circuit chautauqua were a celebrated institution in rural America. The commercialized progeny of the stationary

²³ *The Lyceumite & Talent* Vol. 5, No. 7 (June, 1907): 20. "Guy Standing and Theodore Roberts, 'The Right of Way': Plays & Players, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 5, 1908. "Funny Men in a League," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 4, 1903. "Christmas for the Deaf and Dumb," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 25, 1895. "Masonic Roof Temple Garden," Classified Ad, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 30, 1894, 8. Edwin Lincoln Barker, "Dirty Hands: A Clean Comedy in Three Acts," script, (New York: 1932); "Middletown: A Play in Three Acts," script (1934). F.W.H. to P.G. Holden, "IHC Service Bureau Employees," January 31, 1914, box 151, Mss 6z, MIHCC. Helga Sandburg, *A Great and Glorious Romance* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978): 90-92, and John Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua* (Jefferson, NC: Macfaland & Company, 1997):43-44, describe the Great midwestern poet and author Carl Sandburg's experience working for Barker as the advertising manager at the *Lyceumite*.

chautauqua assemblies and akin to lyceum lectures, the traveling circuits brought a full week of morally, intellectually and culturally uplifting presentations to rural communities across the nation. Hungry for inspiration, leisure and affirmation, chautauqua audiences witnessed a variety of educational and cultural presentations, including elocution, orations, special programming for children and musical groups. Addressing rural anxieties about citizenship, race, gender, urbanization, corporatization, foreign affairs, politics, government, and Christian morality, performances in the big tent connected the countryside with the larger world. Progressive Era politicians and reformers like William Jennings Bryan, Robert Lafollette, Ida Tarbell, and Eugene Debs frequented the same circuit stages as minstrel shows, gospel choirs, string quartets, exotic foreign acts, and comedians. Millions of rural Americans attended these educational variety shows, because the performers on the platform and the audience in the seats briefly actualized an ideal vision of rural modernity. In juxtaposition to their anxieties, that cherished vision reassured audiences that their farms, their communities and their values were righteous, pervasive and vital to the strength of the nation.²⁴

International Harvester hired Edwin Barker to lead its Service Bureau and present public relations materials to rural audiences. Considered an “exceptionally fine writer,” Barker’s brought chautauqua-style didactics and themes to the company’s publications and later to its public presentations. Creating a set of cultural education tools from scratch, Barker blended rural-centric tropes with the corporation’s gendered branding messages. Within Barker’s literary creations, the power and prosperity of civilization

²⁴ Canning, *The Lost American Thing in America*, 2, 21, 76, 82. Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua*, 43-44. Andrew Rieser, *The Chautauqua Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003):269-274.

flowed from the farmer's mastery of machines and scientific agricultural knowledge, rather than his principled independence. In his renderings, the virtuous modern farmer was assisted by misunderstood businesses to acquire wealth and feed the world. While Barker acknowledged social and economic discontent, he assured that the concerns of the modern age were natural growing pains of progress and negligible in comparison to the woes of the ancients. Time would iron out such wrinkles as it always had and soon all society would be on the path to prosperity. To underline these points Barker relied on teleological anecdotes and histories that revolved around McCormick's 1831 invention of the reaper as the key moment when progress commenced and the farmer was liberated from primitive drudgery. History had been almost entirely absent from the company's promotional materials from 1902-1910, but Barker quickly made it the corporation's principal cultural asset.

Over his five years in the Service Bureau, Barker's influence and responsibility gradually advanced. He began by assisting the advertising department in livening up copy, collaborating on scientific farming booklets as Service Bureau publications, and contributing articles to *Harvester World*. He also fabricated unassuming school histories that instilled a logic of progress into children and offered lectures in limited numbers. After the anti-trust suit was filed in 1912, the Service Bureau was greatly enlarged and Barker was given a staff that included an artist, a film editor, three lecturers, three motion picture operators, and several assistants. With more resources at his command and greater

imperative, Barker imagined a grand chautauqua circuit campaign to influence public opinion through hundreds of multi-media assisted oratory spectacles.²⁵

Barker's first work laying out the corporation's public relations history was *The Story of Bread*. Written in 1911, the twenty-nine page booklet recounts the transformative influence of the reaper on the world. The story dramatically emphasizes the machine's conclusive impact on the age-old struggle for bread and the farmer's importance to modernity. Inviting the reader to fathom the era before the current "Age of Plenty," Barker opens the story: "for fifty centuries the world stood still, waiting to be fed," a condition which continued until "no farther back than your great-grandfather and mine." Ninety-seven percent of these ancestors of humanity fought to avoid starvation "for there was no bread to be had, for there was no flour, for there was no wheat, for there were no large fields planted, for there were no quick ways of gathering the harvest." After sixteen pages expounding on the centuries of humankind's deprivation and the comparative abundance in the modern age, Cyrus McCormick's 1831 invention of the reaper appears as the great turning point in human history. The reaper's efficiency "released two-thirds of the population" to pursue vocations beyond the farm, because it ended starvation by making bread cheap and abundant.²⁶

From the invention of the reaper onward, *The Story of Bread* argues humanity was on the path of progress. In a wonderfully overstated passage on the impact of the

²⁵ F.W.H. to P.G. Holden, "IHC Service Bureau Employes," January 31, 1914; "Report of Service Bureau Meeting," November 25, 1912, box 151; M.R.D. Owings to R.C. Haskins, June 19, 1913, box 33; Mss 6z, MIHCC. "The Harvester Company at the Chautauqua," *The Lyceumite and Talent* (July, 1911): 34.

²⁶ Edwin Lincoln Barker, *The Story of Bread* (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1911): 1,4, 17.

inventor, Barker explains: “The wheels of industry were set in motion, modern business was born, and commerce reached its arms around the world. American civilization pushed westward at the rate of thirty miles a year, and older nations awoke to greatness[.] Railroads came, cities were builded, and inventions multiplied. Every tall building is a monument to cheap bread.” The invention and the agrarians who adopted it were responsible for populating the wilderness of the west, the expansion of railroads, the formation of factories, the rising of skyscrapers, the commerce of cities, the founding of universities and agriculture schools, the creation of jobs and many other trappings of modernity. In this conception, agrarian independence was not at odds with the modern order, as was often feared. Rather, Barker cast mechanized farmers as the crucial heroes of civilization. Through pursuit of their own prosperity and adoption of modern implements, they were responsible for feeding the world and allowing progress to flourish.²⁷

Predictably, Cyrus McCormick was lionized as a great inventor-businessman to be revered as the farmer’s paternal benefactor and role model. He was peer to all of the great inventors, intellectuals and businessmen, including Galileo, Charles Darwin, Thomas Edison, Robert Fulton, James J. Hill, and John D. Rockefeller. With ingenuity and forthright moral character, he had kept “plugging away” until he had invented a working reaper and successfully marketed it to the masses, insuring that “no longer is the farmer a drudge.” He had “the wonderful foresight (or was it inspiration?)” to build his business in Chicago amidst the wild prairies “the center of where wheat fields were to

²⁷ Ibid, 17.

be” in the future. His reaper, single-handedly ended slavery during the Civil War and, which, in words that alluded to Declaration of Independence, “removed the hobble from man’s right to the pursuit of happiness.” The reaper was the great machine of democracy and farmer liberation. Its inventor was in-turn the harbinger of progress.²⁸

Reflecting the corporation’s more immediate political, legal and social woes, *The Story of Bread* historically reframed corporate capitalism and class conflict. Barker stressed that the current complaints of modern capitalism paled in comparison to the class stratification and hard-ships before the reaper. For centuries, “great wealth sat in the high places,” in the hands of the few “round and fat.” Meanwhile the toiling millions “furrowed his brow, bent his back, and crumbled away before his time, all in an effort to scratch from the earth a few grains of wheat with which to keep the spark of life flickering in his starved and shivering body.” Beyond starvation, even in the more recent pre-reaper history, people labored “in the hot harvest field for sixteen hours a day at a wage of three cents an hour.” Comparatively, Barker noted that modern workers on the farm, in the office, and in the factory labored a fraction of that time for much higher wages.²⁹

Within this framework, the story inferred that International Harvester was a persecuted martyr ahead of its time. Historically, past leaders were “assassinated,” intellectuals were “beheaded” or “burned” and “as proof of how civilization has advanced, today we merely sick onto them penny humorists and muck-rakers.” Suffering continuous bad press and legal challenges, in the future the nation would think better of

²⁸ Ibid, 16-17, 23, 25, 29.

²⁹ Ibid, 1, 21-22.

International Harvester in light of how it “has benefitted the world.” Barker reminded readers that “business men of every description” were not the enemies of the farmer, but rather were sincerely concerned “with the welfare of the farm” as cooperative allies.³⁰

The booklet ably demonstrated the “purpose and idea of the I H C.” As a concise statement of the corporation’s contributions to humanity and the narrative behind its “Prosperity” brand, *the Story of Bread* was adopted as a reference material for executive speeches throughout the anti-trust proceedings of the 1910s. It showed the company’s commitment to “eliminate the centuries of drudgery on the farm,” its “great part... in the world’s advancement,” and the resulting “tremendous progress of the American farmer,” signified by the farmers “confidence in our willingness to treat them as co-partners.” Any speech and publication by the company or its owners on the topic of the anti-trust suit ostensibly re-stated ideas from the *Story of Bread*. In a 1912 speech typical of this type and reprinted in *Harvester World*, Harold McCormick summarized *the Story of Bread* before concluding that this history demonstrated International Harvester’s focus on “the general welfare and progress of... the farm.”³¹

Barker also wrote other histories that followed the same teleological arch patterned in *The Story of Bread*. *The Creeds of Great Businessmen* told the stories of thriving businessmen who were enabled by farmers and McCormick’s invention to serve the common good. *The Story of Twine* follows the historical development and production of the innocuous material which uplifted Mexican workers, employed factory workers

³⁰ Ibid, 21-22, 28.

³¹ Harold McCormick, June 19, 1912, speech; Advertising Department to Harold McCormick, 1912, box 28, Harold McCormick Papers, Mss 1F, MIHCC

and allowed American farmers to be still more productive. Amongst several others, these publications indicated that the corporate order and the American farmer marched shoulder-to-shoulder improving the nation and the world.³²

The Service Bureau distributed millions of copies of booklet annually. The sales force gave them to farmers, commercial clubs and newspaper editors, amongst many others. For his part, Barker particularly focused on getting the books in the hands of school children, agricultural universities and into libraries. In February 1912, the Bureau sent copies of the *Story of Bread* to every state education superintendent. They also reported that several states had provided the Bureau with a complete list of county superintendents to solicit and had prepared lesson plans “for the use of their teachers in presenting, ‘the Story of Bread’ to pupils.” Along these same lines, the Bureau prepared “the Development of Agriculture” lantern-slide lecture for teachers to deliver in tandem with the reading materials. The Bureau also sponsored spelling bee competitions for schools that used a Bureau provided vocabulary list in 1912 and created a cash-prize essay competition for students to answer the prompt “What Cheap Bread has Done for the World” in 1913. The company trumpeted the bureau’s success, proclaiming that thousands of schools and colleges were using the booklets “as supplemental reading to the delight,” of students.³³

³² Edwin Lincoln Barker, *the Creeds of Great Business Men* (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1913); *The Story of Twine* (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1912).

³³ IHC Service Bureau, “The Dawn of Plenty: A Dramalogue with Motion Pictures, Colored Views, Pictorial Effect,” Souvenir Program (Chicago: Crown Press, 1913): 2, box 150, Mss 6z, MIHCC. Grace Marian Smith, “Service Bureau Work in Public Schools,” *The Harvester World* Vol. 3, No. 4 (April, 1912): 10-11. “School Work in Iowa,” *The Harvester World* Vol. 3, No. 9 (September, 1912): 6. “Booklet Circulation,” *The Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 8 (August, 1913): 4.

Through creating materials for classrooms, the Service Bureau was contributing to the rural educational reform movement. A contentious undertaking instigated by urban progressives and politicians to the chagrin of rural residents, school reform focused on consolidating schools into expensive modern facilities, professionalizing teachers, creating higher educational standards and providing better content for pupils. As part of the “Country Life Movement” to civilize rural society and modernize its industry, the reorganization of schools was met with hostility from agrarians because of its expense and its cultural warfare upon rural traditions. As obvious supporters of such an undertaking in the name of their own profits, the Service Bureau’s contributions were readily accepted by school administrators and teachers to help fill the content void in an era when educational funding was still minimal. The Bureau’s literary combinations of civilized progress and mechanized farming matched the cultural values that the reformers sought to instill. Moreover, the bureau’s decision to focus on children would ensure that in the future, “the International is regarded as a broad, liberal, human-betterment organization” and allowed them to indirectly advertise the benefits of the corporation to parents through their children. These educational efforts supposedly illustrated the corporation’s commitment to public service, while advancing its self-serving image as a historic promoter of progress and prosperity.³⁴

With the commencement of the federal anti-trust suit in 1912, International Harvester increased the Service Bureau’s budget to one million dollars so that public relations efforts could be expanded. While part of this money went to create Extension

³⁴ What the Bureau is Doing,” *The Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 7 (July, 1913): 12-13. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979): 51-58. Hal Barron, *Mixed Harvest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 43-77.

Department, the rest was available to Barker. Utilizing his background in oratory and circuit management, Barker used this financial influx to produce a high quality lecture campaign presented in chautauqua tents and lyceum halls by three teams of Service Bureau employees. Barker placed his lectures on summer chautauqua circuits and utilized the corporation's sales organization to locate suitable winter venues. The lectures were booked at schools, agricultural colleges, churches Y.M.C.A.s, chautauqua, commercial clubs, farmers' institutes, teachers' institutes, theaters and a variety of other locations across the agricultural sections of the Midwest and the far West. Exercising audience awareness, the orators only revealed their corporate connections to those that were more likely to be amicable towards the company as "progressive minded" citizens, like business associations and agricultural colleges.³⁵

The new lectures were dramatic enactments of the Bureau's booklets. Initially Barker adapted the *Story of Bread* into a script called "the Dawn of Plenty" in 1911, but which was only offered in limited quantities as traditional platform orations. By 1914, he added "The Dawn of Commerce," a discussion of the modern economy, and the "Dawn of Power," a history of mechanization, to the Bureau's offerings. Billed as an "industrialogue" series, the "three Dawns" were multi-media sensations that included colored lantern-slide illustrations, motion pictures and theatrical lighting to dramatically enhance the traditional chautauqua-style performance. Engaged as companion events the

³⁵ International Harvester Advertising Department, *Instructions and Suggestions*, 50. "The Harvester Company at the Chautauquas," *Lyceumite and Talent* Vol. 5, No. 2 (July, 1911): 34.

industrialogues demonstrated “why big business is necessary,” to the “great industrial and commercial age in which we live.”³⁶

As a series, the “Three Dawns,” were histories of civilization, saturated with racialized and gendered cultural messages that reflected the corporation’s public relations ambitions and projected “modern” ideals onto the audience. The series was intended to convince farmers of their mutually beneficial relationship with corporations and modernity. To accomplish this goal, these narratives transformed the established ideal of the independent and self-sustaining farmer, into the Advertising Department’s vision of the prosperous and mechanized master of the land that “Prosperity” suggested. The shift in masculine archetypes necessarily altered the farmer’s supposed relationship with manufacturers and indeed the rest of the progressive order. Barker’s metamorphosis of agrarian masculinity rested on interpreting the farmer’s tools and property, “as the signposts of civilization.”³⁷

With such an emphasis, “the Dawn of Plenty,” “The Dawn of Power” and “The Dawn of Commerce,” ascribed cultural value, respectively, to farm tools, industrial machines and consumer goods. The Dawns of Power and Plenty recounted teleological chronologies of invention as material marches from ancient times to modern civilization. As the concluding lecture, the Dawn of Commerce expounded on the cooperation

³⁶ International Harvester Advertising Department, *Instructions and Suggestions*, 50. Edwin Barker, “Getting into Swing,” *Harvester World* Vol. 5, No. 11 (November, 1914): 15. “The Harvester Trust Will Teach Farmers How to Make More Money for It,” November 16, 1912, *The Day Book*, 7. “How About Your Town,” *Harvester World* Vol. 5, No. 5 (May, 1914): 5.

³⁷ “The Dawn of Plenty,” (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1913): 44; “The Dawn of Power,” (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1913); “The Dawn of Commerce,” (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1913), folder 4200, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

between the farmer and the manufacturer which had resulted in the proliferation of trade and the accumulation of material wealth. Within this framework, the lecturer still paid homage to the independent American farmer who “conquered nature,” provided for his family and enabled progress, but it was evident that his masculine authority was built on shifting ground.³⁸

The lectures’ hammer of anxiety struck on the audience’s consciousness in the form of comparisons between white civilized tools and the primitive tools of foreign races. Assisted by the new technology of film, the lecturers assessed images of white farmers on tractors, riding binders, driving combines or shipping large crop commodities on trains against clips of brown farmers crouching to cut wheat by hand, sending small surpluses by boat and grinding flour with stones. The narrators explained that the American farmer had been assisted by technological ingenuity to become prosperous while the “foreigner”; the Indian, the Korean, the Chinese and the Egyptian; was kept in “ignorance and poverty,” because they continued to use the tools of the ancients. They offered further mocking asides about the brown farmer’s lowly huts, their lack of shoes and their “dinky methods of agriculture.” Providing overarching meaning, the orator noted that in the tools, “we see the difference between a nation that goes backward and a nation that goes forward.”³⁹

Importantly, the lectures demonstrated that the difference between the civilized and the primitive was not exclusively racial, but was yoked to masculinity. A farmer was manly if he had the most modern tools available, and he was primitive if he fell short of

³⁸ “The Dawn of Power,” 1, folder 4200, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

³⁹ “The Dawn of Plenty,” 11, 14, 44-48; “The Dawn of Power,” 2, 5, 40, folder 4200, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

that standard. Sowing seeds of anxiety, these racial comparisons implied that materiality was crucial to “white” status. Directly conveying these messages, the orators related the civilized American farmer with his rundown neighbor. The civilized farmer had well-maintained buildings, ubiquitous machinery, diversified crops, a herd of livestock and a mansion filled with “modern improvements and conveniences.” Meanwhile his rundown neighbor had slipshod fences, fields covered in filth, a barn that was going to ruin and a hole in the roof of his house. This farmer was un-progressive and un-mechanized. Like the “foreigner,” his surroundings signified his mockable “poverty.” The lectures had replaced the old image of the independent and self-sufficient farmer with a new prosperous and progressive man who not only provided for his family, but could supply them with the consumer trappings of middle-class life. He had freed his wife from the drudgery of home manufacture and could take his leisure. They had connected the masculinity of middle-class consumption which had been created by advertisers in the consumer-goods industry and offered modern machinery as the farmer’s pathway to that ideal.⁴⁰

With such a cultural imperative placed on modern farm implements and consumer goods, the lectures re-oriented the ideal farmer’s relationship with the industrial order. While all of Barker’s work was oriented towards rescuing International Harvester’s public image during the federal anti-trust suit, none was more direct and overstated than the “Dawn of Commerce.” “The Dawn of Commerce” stressed the interconnected and mutually beneficial relationships amongst agriculture, commerce, labor and capital as

⁴⁰ “The Dawn of Plenty,” 39-41, “The Dawn of Power,” 27-29, “The Dawn of Commerce,” folder 4200, Mss 6z, MIHCC. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance* (New York: Basic Books, 1994): 196-234.

they walked “shoulder to shoulder,” in pursuit of prosperity. While prosperity sprang from the farms, mines and forests of the land, engines of commerce transformed those resources and increased their value through manufacturing and distribution which moved the supply to new points of demand. In this iteration, all parties generated wealth through their labor as “producers,” converting raw materials into valuable commodities and goods. Through numerous historic and imaginary anecdotes charting the flow of consumer dollars, the orator demonstrated how the fortunes of all rose and fell together.⁴¹

In particular, the “Dawn of Commerce” was concerned with demonstrating that corporations were a vital and legitimate part of the system. Corporations were simply larger businesses which promoted commercial efficiency and prosperity through organizing, “raw materials, mechanical skill, advertising, salesmanship... for the profit of all, including the farmer who feeds us.” “Big organizations” like International Harvester, U.S. Steel and the United Shoe Machinery Company, amongst others, were necessary “to blaze trails into the markets of the world,” spreading the “light of civilization” into the “darkest corners of the earth” and securing greater prosperity at home. The lecture also defended corporations as democratically owned entities and argued that the high paid executive was necessary to assure that the company “maintains a sure pay roll” which made Americans “the best paid worker[s] in the world.”⁴²

Within this celebratory framework, critics of business and corporations were cast as enemies of the entire economic system. “Agitators” maligned Wall Street and big

⁴¹ “The Dawn of Commerce,” (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America): 6, folder 4200, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

⁴² Ibid, 21, 28, 30, 43-43.

business for their own benefit at the expense of prosperity. The orator couched the audience “not to let the agitator sour you with discontent,” but to remind them that “You and business are partners!” Along the same lines, the lecturer emphasized that “a strike is a small war,” created by labors’ disregarded of capital’s benevolent act of feeding and clothing them. As an enemy of commerce, “Strikes waste time and money” and “both sides lose.” The dramalogue also went out of its way to address those that have “the artistic temperament,” and complain about commercialization. Rebutting such arm-chair critics, the orator reminded that “if the world were less commercial, the artistic would be less artistic. Commerce discovered us – commerce civilized us—commerce improved us—and commerce supports us.” The narratives most important point, however, was that “every time an American Company is dissolved or held up to scorn... it makes it harder to get foreign trade,” to the injury of American farmers and workers. Despite this antagonism, “Alone, unaided and often obstructed, the trusts have built up our commerce” to the benefit of all and “are still fighting that we may have a better world in which to live and work.” In much the same way as their other press releases and publications, the “Dawn of Plenty,” suggested the International Harvester was no less than a modern martyr.⁴³

In promoting these “industrialogues,” to potential hosts and sponsors, the Service Bureau stressed that they were “free from advertising,” and billed them as “big, vital, educational, entertaining lecture[s].” While the lectures were void of International Harvester’s brand or specific farm implements, they clearly “promote[d] sales by indirect

⁴³ Ibid, 7, 29, 31-32, 39, 49.

publicity.” The gendered messages of the lectures cultivated desire for products through generating cultural anxieties about material wealth. They also restored the corporation’s reputation. The advertising department, Service Bureau and the *Harvester World* constantly urged regional sales agents to book performances and provided sample marketing strategies and materials to support these efforts. Agents were sent a wealth of promotional goods that were void of company branding, including post-cards, posters, press copy, four-page circulars and small flyers to “keep the lecture constantly before them [the potential audience].” They also recommended booking the most prominent local venues, selling tickets in advance, issuing coupons in the newspaper and making announcement in the days before the event in schools. Reflecting the thought process behind their other school outreach efforts, the advertising department noted that if school children “can be sent home two or three times a week talking about the lecture, it is sure to have its influence,” upon their parents. In common, the content of these materials implied that only the backwards and unmanly who were not “interested in progress and prosperity,” would miss the event.⁴⁴

The Service Bureau industrialogues were a sensational success. Barnstorming about the country, the Service Bureau lecture teams presented daily in chautauqua tents and lyceum halls from 1912 to 1915. According to the Service Bureau, they reached hundreds of thousands of people. Charging admission rates ranging from ten to twenty-five cents for adults and a discounted rate for school pupils, *Harvester World* regularly

⁴⁴ “The Dawn of Plenty,” *The Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 6 (June, 1913): 17. Advertising Department, “Suggestions for Advertising and Creating Interest in ‘The Dawn of Plenty,’” 1913; Advertising Department, “Professor P.G. Holden Says-,” promotional postcard, box 4, Mss 5z; International Harvester Advertising Department, *Instruction and Suggestions*, 50, box 325, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

reported that single lectures grossed proceeds in the range to one hundred dollars for audiences in the hundreds and occasionally much more when audiences reached the thousands. Most of these audiences were totally unaware of the corporation's involvement with the lectures, because they were booked and advertised through institutional third parties, like chautauqua circuits or local commercial clubs.⁴⁵

Aside from these traditional rural institutional venues, the industrialogues were also carried to land-grant universities and became part of university extension efforts. As early as 1912, Barker built a close relationship with the agricultural professors at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, so that the lectures were regularly presented to students. The University of Illinois also invited Service Bureau orators to headline at their annual farmers' institute on campus and included the bureau in their other outreach efforts. In 1913, Barker solidified a partnership with the University of Wisconsin's Extension Department. The Department offered the lectures on campus in Madison and undertook to book and promote them throughout the state. *Harvester World* noted that universities in other states were doing the same.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ "The Dawn of Plenty," *Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 6 (June, 1913): 16. "Summer Lecture Tour," *Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 7 (July, 1914): 12. "The Dawn of Plenty Grows," *Harvester World* Vol. 5 No. 8 (August, 1914): 4. "Do You Know," *Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 10 (October, 1913): 12. "Chronicles of the Dawn of Plenty," *Harvester World* Vol. 6, No. 1 (January, 1915): 21. "Something New: A Course of Lectures," *Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 4 (April, 1914): 5. "How About Your Town?" *Harvester World* Vol. 5, No. 5 (May, 1914). "IHC Plans for an Alfalfa Campaign," *Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 4 (April, 1913): 4-5. E.L. Barker, "Meeting the Crows in Utah and Idaho," *Harvester World*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (May, 1913): 6-7.

⁴⁶ "The Dawn of Plenty," *Harvester World* Vol. 4, No. 12 (December, 1913): 5. "Frank Stockdale Talks to Ags in Morrow Hall," *The Daily Illini*, November 9, 1912, 1. "Institute and Short Course," *Sycamore True Republican*, January 31, 1914, 1. F.W.H. to P.G. Holden, "IHC Service Bureau Employees," January 31, 1914, box 151, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

Widely accepted as educational, Barker's massive propaganda campaign did generate some criticism both inside of the corporation and in some corners of the wider world. Outside of the business, some muckrakers recognized the Service Bureau and the Extension Department as no more than self-interested campaigns to "teach the farmer how to make more money for it" and buoy its falling profits. Inside the company, such critiques struck a chord with at least the former educator, Perry Holden, who was quickly disenchanted with the close relationship between the Service Bureau and the Advertising Department. Sincerely believing in the corporation's philanthropic duty and rhetoric, he was disgusted with Barker's underhanded labor. Igniting corporate conflict, he wholly separated the scientific educational efforts from the Service Bureau and the advertising department to his own Extension Department in 1913. At that point, the Bureau solely existed as International Harvester's engine of cultural propaganda.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the Bureau's ubiquitously produced romantic histories of corporate contributions to civilization spurred a least one dissenting historical narrative. In 1912, the descendants of Obed Hussey again called into question the veracity of corporation's claims that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper. The volume they published was a direct challenge to *the Story of Bread*, entitled, *Obed Hussey, Who of All Inventors, Made Bread Cheap*. This publication was not widely distributed and thus could not compete with the din of the Service's Bureau's efforts for public attention. It did, however, prompt anxiety within the McCormick family, who both owned the company and treasured their

⁴⁷ "The Harvester Trust will teach the famer how to make more money for it," November 16, 1912, *the Day Book*. Cyrus H. McCormick II to Herbert Casson, January 26, 1914, box 36, Mss 2c; M.R.D. Owings to R.C Haskings, June 19, 1913, box 33; Advertising Department Cartoon sketch, "Boo Hoo Don't want to Stay Here," box 151, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

patriarch's past as sacred. They began to search for means to muzzle historical discord in tandem with their company's powerful propaganda campaigns.⁴⁸

Corporate Historical Hegemony and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association

International Harvester did not employ any academic or trained historians to participate in the Service Bureau's historical production. Nor did any academics advise the corporation's legal team, which rigorously argued that understanding the corporation's origins "required a knowledge of the history." From the perspective of the corporation and the McCormick family, lawyers, entertainers, and advertisers could carry out historical production and labor on behalf of their interests as ably as anyone. Their messages about the past were easily conveyed to the general public through the sheer volume of materials that the corporation produced without need of trained historians.⁴⁹

While International Harvester produced oceans of historical propaganda, the family continued to be concerned about the potential damage of dissenting historical narratives to the public image of both their company and themselves. They had discovered in the past that bulk distribution alone was not enough to verify historical legitimacy in the face of conflicting narratives. In the 1890s, their historical brand had been scuttled by John F. Steward and the Deering Company through dissenting historical advertising. In 1910, members of their estranged family foiled their plans to have their patriarch honored in the *Hall of Fame of Great Americans*. The appearance of yet another oppositional history in 1912 presented by the descendants of Obed Hussey gave them

⁴⁸ Follett Lamberton Greeno, editor, *Obed Hussey, who, of all Inventors, Made Bread Cheap* (Rochester: The Rochester Herald Publishing Co., 1912).

⁴⁹ "The International Harvester Case: A Compilation," Volume 29, p. 31, International Harvester Company Legal and Patent Records, 1902-1947, Mss 3z, MIHCC.

pause. They worried that this counter-history or a renewed campaign by their cousins might injure their company in the midst of the federal anti-trust trial or prove detrimental to their *Hall of Fame* initiatives.

While they had resolved their conflict with Deering and Steward through the merger in 1902, they had yet to figure out how to silence the past presented by private citizens. In the early 1910s, the family began to turn to emerging historical professionals, whose supposed “disinterested” and “scientific” training made the findings of their historical labor irrefutable. They hoped that securing wide-spread professorial certification would legitimize their heritage as fact beyond reproach. After a bit of trial and error, by 1914, the family settled on The Mississippi Valley Historical Association as the best instrument for fulfilling its objectives and protecting the corporation’s heritage.

The McCormicks took a circuitous route to this plan of action. After 1910, when their cousins, Robert Hall McCormick II and James Shields, had spoiled their *Hall of Fame* bid, the McCormicks met with their cousins to dissuade them of their “false” understanding of the past. Despite that Harold, Cyrus II, and Anita already gave their cousins an “allowance” that supported a lavish lifestyle, their relatives refused to abandon their claims and maintained they were entitled to a sizeable portion of the reaper fortune. The cousins held that the heirs of Cyrus McCormick could expect vociferous protest to their *Hall of Fame* ambitions, until they recognized the “honor of a distinguished ancestor,” Robert Hall McCormick I, as the principal inventor of the reaper. Rejecting a historical concession which would damage their corporation’s public image and their familial sense of identity, the McCormick Biographical Association devised a bizarre plan that combined legalistic procedure, historical evidence, and academic historians to

end their inter-family conflict. They proposed to have both sides present their case and evidence to a “historical tribunal” of three of the “foremost American historical scholars.” The tribunal’s decision would settle the dispute once and for all.⁵⁰

The “tribunal” concept was hatched by Cyrus Bentley, the family’s long-time lawyer hired in early 1911 to manage the McCormick Biographical Association. Paid a handsome \$10,000 annually, Bentley’s salary reflected the high professional standing of lawyers at this time and his legal background informed his approach to the family’s specific historical dispute. Within the “tribunal” concept, Bentley prepared a legalistic-style brief which argued both sides of the question. Prior to Bentley’s intervention, the family had focused only on demonstrating that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper. Bentley believed it was equally important “to show the essential falsity of the Testimony for Robert [McCormick],” through demonstrating that these “untruths” originated in the “hatred,” “unscrupulous and malignant” motivations, and “degraded moral standards,” of the opposing relatives. Bentley’s severe. To support this undertaking and reflecting his legalistic mentality, Bentley set out to survey public memory of the first reaper trial in the valley of Virginia. Eighty years removed from 1831, his goal was collect legal-style depositions of residents who had heard about the invention from the now-deceased older

⁵⁰ Robert Hall McCormick to Harold McCormick, December 21, 1910; Cyrus McCormick II, “Memorandum of conference between Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus Adams and Cyrus McCormick II,” April 18, 1911, box 399, Anita McCormick Blaine Papers, Mss 1E; Cyrus Bentley to Harold McCormick, July 15, 1911; Cyrus Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, April 24, 1911, box 20, McCormick Historical Association, Mss AB; Cyrus Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, June 4, 1915, box 55, Anita McCormick Blaine Papers, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

generation. Focusing on Virginian's oral traditions about the reaper's invention, Bentley totally neglected searching for extant historic documents.⁵¹

Within his purview as the manager of the McCormick Biographical Association, Bentley was also responsible for vetting materials created by the Service Bureau. In this capacity, Bentley made sure that Barker was not overreaching what historical evidence could support and "avoid[ing] actions which might precipitate further controversy," with their relatives. While Bentley did exercise editorial authority over the Service Bureau, he did not prevent the sprouting of new challenges from unexpected sources. In 1914, when the family became aware of the contests to their heritage presented in *Obed Hussey, Who, of All Inventors, Made Bread Cheap*, it was apparent that they needed to develop a new strategy to censor historical dissent.⁵²

Bentley's efforts ultimately amounted to very little. While the family favored his aggressive approach to the situation in theory and appreciated his "historical tribunal" scheme, they found the "violent language" of his finished work "too defensive" and undignified. Along these lines, Cyrus II needed to rewrite everything that Bentley produced for readers outside of the immediate family. Moreover, their cousins refused to participate in the "historical tribunal" charade and so Bentley's history brief had no clear purpose. The family kept him on the payroll to manage their historical endeavors and he

⁵¹ Francis Steuert to Louis Dent, January 5, 1911; Cyrus Bentley to Anita Emmons Blaine, October 10, 1911, receipt, box 20, Mss AB. Cyrus Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, Nettie McCormick, Anita McCormick Blaine and Harold McCormick, March 31, 1911; Cyrus Bentley, Interview Questions, August 13, 1912, box 4, McCormick Biographical Association, Mss AA; Cyrus Bentley to John Latane, December 17, 1914, box 20, Mss AB; Cyrus Bentley to Anita McCormick Blaine, August 1, 1912, box 54; F.A. Steuert to T.B. Gorton, November 16, 1914, box 400, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

⁵² Cyrus Bentley, "Memorandum on the Story of Bread," June 20, 1911, box 20, Mss AB.

worked to revise his history brief as a book for the next fifteen years, in case the family needed it as a tool of last resort. The family appreciated that Bentley clearly identified with its perspective and was keenly engaged in its historical problems, but found that the family probably needed a more impartial representative to more tactfully pursue its interests.⁵³

By coincidence, the McCormicks arrived at a new historical strategy through nurturing a relationship with the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. As a collector of historical materials and artifacts outside of his family's private historical association, Cyrus McCormick frequented rare manuscript auctions. At an auction in the fall of 1913, he outbid historian Clarence W. Alvord, representing the University of Illinois: Urbana-Champaign, for an eighteen-century record book of the Illinois-Wabash Land Company. Afterwards, Alvord approached McCormick about making the manuscript available to historians, because of its incredible historical value. Impressed with Alvord's expert knowledge of frontier Illinois, McCormick agreed to make fifty photogravures of the manuscript for leading universities and invited him to write an introduction for the volume.⁵⁴

As a trained historian, specializing in Midwestern history and working at a major Midwestern university, Clarence Alvord was a leading member of the fledgling Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA). Founded in 1907, the Association was meant to promote greater interest and collaboration in the history of the American

⁵³ Cyrus Bentley to Anita Blaine McCormick, July 3, 1915, box 55, Mss 1E; Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine, August 4, 1915, box 400, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

⁵⁴ "Introduction to Book is written by Prof. Alvord," *Daily Illini*, March 23, 1915. F.A. Steuert to M.H. Jaynes, January 25, 1914, box 150, Cyrus Hall McCormick II - Subject Files, Mss 1C, MIHCC.

heartland. Seeking to fulfill the implied vision of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, they believed greater emphasis should be placed on the Mississippi Valley as the core of the nation's power. This emphasis attracted many other Midwestern organizations and scholars to their ranks, as the association blossomed from regional seeds of resentment towards the established American Historical Association's [AHA] east coast bias.⁵⁵

In early 1912, Alvord initiated a movement within the MVHA to create its own journal, *the Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. As an instrument that would legitimize the professional endeavors of Midwestern historians, the journal would be "devoted to western history... be of creditable character and edited by the men that are doing scientific work in the field." A feasibility study revealed that most members supported Alvord's endeavor and thought that the AHA neglected Midwestern history and historians. While there was an immediate windfall of interested historical contributors to the *Review*, the project required financial support. Before publication could commence, they needed to secure three-year guarantor subscriptions amounting to \$1500 annually to underwrite the *Review* against its losses until it could be self-sustaining through the membership. While they dreamed of "some person of means and leisure," to support the *Review*, Clarence Paine, the MVHA's secretary, and Alvord "work[ed] like the devil," broadly soliciting potential benefactors, but could not muster the requisite funds.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ James L. Sellers, "Before We Were Members – the MVHA," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (June, 1953): 8. Ian Tyrell, "Public at the Creation: Place, Memory and Historical Practice in the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1907-1950," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (June 2007): 23.

⁵⁶ Clarence Alvord to Clarence Paine, March 15, 1912; November 8, 1913, box 21; Clarence Paine, "the Meetings of the MVHA," December 30, 1912, 4-10; Clarence Paine, "Report of the Secretary-Treasurer of

With the withering *Review* in mind, in early February 1914, Alvord met with Cyrus McCormick II to discuss the publication of the Illinois-Wabash Land Company manuscript. He also hoped to “interest him in the project” of underwriting the *Review*. After brief conversation, McCormick supported the objectives of the enterprise and was “perfectly willing to give the money.” He contributed \$200 as a donation for the association to allocate freely, rather than as part of the guarantee fund. While Alvord had been struggling to secure funds from other penny-pinching “cranks,” McCormick’s liberal patronage was a welcome relief for which the MVHA held him in high regard. Privately, Alvord and Paine praised McCormick’s generosity, “That is the way that kind of fellows do business. [sic].”⁵⁷

McCormick seized on the opportunity in hopes of making the professional historians of the Midwest an asset to his family and corporation’s interests. Thinking through the problems that history battles posed to his corporation’s public relations strategy and his family’s own historical ambitions, McCormick recognized Alvord and the *Review* as potential allies. Before sending his first check to the *Review*, McCormick disclosed to Alvord the “intimate” details of his family’s historical disputes. He also

the MVHA,” May 8, 1913, 1, box 1, Organization of American Historians (OAH) Records, 1906-2003, Mss 27, in the Special Collections of the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN [hereafter OAH].

⁵⁷ Clarence Alvord to Clarence Paine, January 27, 1914, February 25, 1914; June 24, 1914; Clarence Paine to Clarence Alvord, June 29, 1914, box 21; Clarence Paine to Notre Dame, February 26, 1914, box 79, Mss 27, OAH. Cyrus McCormick, “University of Illinois Donation Files, 1914-1931,” No. 9:116, box 26, Cyrus Hall McCormick II – Donation Papers, Mss 5c, MIHCC, is mostly composed of papers regarding the MVHA and *Review*. The misleading label on the file indicates that McCormick always perceived his contribution to the *Review* (which was financially managed from Lincoln, Nebraska by Clarence Paine) as a relationship with Clarence Alvord, who worked at the University of Illinois. To this point, he probably stopped contributing in 1931, because Alvord had passed away in 1928, just after McCormick had committed to a three year guarantor renewal. “Front Matter,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 1, No. 1 (June, 1914) to Vol. 17, No. 4 (March, 1931).

revealed the efforts of his family's historical association and intention to publish a historical biography of their father. The unwritten implication was that McCormick was trusting Alvord and the *Review* to participate in protecting his father's reputation as the inventor of the reaper. Alvord readily accepted these "minor conditions." Working to stay in McCormick's good graces, Alvord secured the benefactor's annual contributions to the *Review* for 17 years and also lobbied to be chosen as the family's biographer.⁵⁸

Alvord's agreement to serve McCormick's interests should be considered in light of his professional and cultural context. Until the disenchanting experience of World War II, most academics considered themselves to be professional intellectuals within the new corporate order, rather than discontents of modernization. They were generally uncritical of established bases of power and wealth. Historians during the Progressive Era generally perceived their task as charting the material progress of civilization; a process in which corporations, industry, and the wealthy were heroic participants. Moreover, Alvord did not perceive his commitment as unethical, because McCormick's request was to help defend an idea which was an accepted part of public memory. No different from any other American, Alvord in particular and historians in general, were unconscious consumers of advertised historical narratives that had been widely promoted by companies, like the one's McCormick owned, for decades. Alvord likely already believed that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper in 1831, because the nation had been saturated with advertisements carrying that idea since the 1870s. In his mind, McCormick was

⁵⁸ Clarence Alvord to Clarence Paine, May 20, 1914, box 21, Mss 27, OAH. Clarence Paine, "Report of the Secretary-Treasurer," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, Vol. 7, (1913-1914): 35-36. Cyrus Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, March 31, 1920; List of potential biographers, n.d, Box 2, Cyrus McCormick II, Historical Interest Documents, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

most likely asking him to defend “facts” from malicious elements; an idea which was entirely congruent with his identity as a historian during the Progressive Era.⁵⁹

Cyrus McCormick II was eager to fund the *Review*, not only because it provided a professional asset to overturn historical opposition, but also because it was directly concerned with increasing the historical profile of the Midwest. McCormick, his family and his company had been working towards a parallel objective with specific regard to their patriarch for decades. After their February meeting, Alvord presented McCormick with a promotional circular for the *Review*, which summarized the *Review*'s historical focus. The circular illustrated the overlapping interests of the journal and McCormick's own intentions. The *Review* was created to promote: “Recognition of the part played by the Mississippi Valley in the development of the United State... In its pages will appear discussion of all phases of the westward march of American civilization from the time the first Spaniards visited the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico to the present time when a new civilization has resulted.” Within such a scholarly movement, McCormick recognized there was space for his father's inventive genius and dramatic impact on the region. Indeed the *Review*'s purported fixation on the “westward march of civilization,” was reminiscent of his company's advertising since the 1880s as well as its more recent public relations campaigns. While McCormick had been excited about the academic movement in frontier studies since meeting Frederick Jackson Turner in 1905, Alvord and the MVHA offered him an opportunity to broadly support this specific branch of the

⁵⁹ “Dawn of Plenty- Motion Pictures,” *The Daily Illini*, January 24, 1914; “Dawn of Plenty: Moving Picture,” *The Daily Illini*, January 14, 1914; “Last Day Mid-Winter Fair,” *The Daily Illini*, February 14, 1914; “Frank Stockdale Talks to Ags in Morrow Hall,” *The Daily Illini*, November 9, 1912; “Large Number Enroll in Short Course,” *The Daily Illini*, January 21, 1914; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 61-85.

historical profession. If western and frontier history rose to prominence, it would buoy his own claims to the past.⁶⁰

McCormick's support immediately provided a boon to Alvord's fundraising efforts with Chicagoland's elite, politicians, and cultural institutions. Following McCormick's lead, the *Review* gained financial backing from Julius Rosenwald of Sears-Roebuck, Joy Morton of Morton Salt, Henry J. Patten (the Chicago "Grain King" of trading), future vice-president Charles Dawes, and future Illinois governor Frank O. Lowden. They supported the *Review* because, like McCormick, they too were interested in raising the profile of the region. Since the nineteenth century, Chicago's rich had financed cultural institutions and endeavors. Philanthropically creating and supporting institutions like the Civic Opera, the Art Institute, the Field Museum and the 1893 World's Fair, they aspired to create a cultural reputation for the city which both softened and mirrored its recognized industrial importance. Supporting the *Review* and historians intent on demonstrating the importance of the Midwest, was simply another way to lend gravitas to their own success as Midwestern moguls.⁶¹

Reflecting the new-found trust that the McCormicks had in the historical profession, the family also tapped the MVHA in 1915, to assist them in finding a trained

⁶⁰ Clarence Alvord to Cyrus McCormick II, February 23, 1914; Mississippi Valley Historical Association, "The Mississippi Valley Historical Review," circular, 1914, box 150, Mss 1c, MIHCC.

⁶¹ Correspondence, boxes 21-24, Mss 27, OAH, demonstrate that support for the *Review* from Julius Rosenwald, Joy Morton, H.J. Patten, Calvin Dawes, Frank Lowden, the University of Chicago and Northwestern University were all secured after McCormick committed to the effort. While they do not specifically mention McCormick, this connection can be inferred from their inclusion in the same social circles, most specifically the membership of the social elite in the Commercial Club of Chicago. "Front Matter," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 1, No. 1 (June, 1914) to Vol. 17, No. 4 (March, 1931). Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Culture & the City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1976).

historian to work for their recently renamed McCormick Historical Association. Bringing his candidate needs to Alvord, Cyrus McCormick II was directed to send his inquiry to a variety of established MVHA historians working with graduate students who might be interested in the job. Cyrus McCormick sent one such request to Dana C. Munro at the University of Wisconsin. Munro conferred with Guy Stanton Ford at the University of Minnesota and both agreed that Herbert Anthony Kellar was a strong fit for the position. Kellar had been one of Munro's advisees at Madison and in 1915 was an adjunct colleague of Ford's in Minneapolis. Following these recommendations, Kellar was hired by the McCormick to catalog and round out their archival collection. Importantly he was also to function as a "representative" for the family's interests within professional historical organizations. Arriving in August 1915, Kellar remained with the family for the next forty years and expanded the scope of their work and influence on academic history through his prolific participation in their professional associations.⁶²

Conclusion

The federal anti-trust case against International Harvester carried on until 1918, when the Department of Justice settled with the corporation. The Department agreed to allow the Company to keep its Deering and McCormick holdings, but were required to sell off all of its other corporate acquisitions in order to re-establish competition in the harvester industry. While Barker's branch of the Service Bureau disbanded in 1915, the company

⁶² Cyrus Bentley, "Interview between W.N.C. Carlton and Cyrus Bentley," May 27, 1915, box 55, Mss 1E; D.C. Munro to H. Kellar, June 26, 1915, box 23, Herbert Kellar Papers, Mss AC, MIHCC. Herbert Kellar, "The Minnesota State Archives: Their Character, Condition and Historical Value," *Minnesota History Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (May 1915): 37-53. Kellar had received his undergraduate degree from the University of Chicago and done graduate work at the University of Wisconsin: Madison. He had been a student of Dana Munro, who had been a close colleague of R.G. Thwaites, and who had let Kellar know about the opening with the McCormick family.

continued to use historical propaganda and advertising to sanctify its company during the trying period of popular and legal antagonism. Barker left International Harvester to start his own lecture and film company, but continued to perform the industrialogues using the large network of contacts he had created across the country and offered his services to help other companies develop similar campaigns. International Harvester regional sales agencies continued to book Barker for local lectures. The corporation also distributed the public relations materials he had created well into the 1920s and more direct historical advertising remained a staple of their marketing efforts in perpetuity.⁶³

Barker's production of public relations histories from 1910 to 1915 and beyond were accepted by the general public as legitimate and educational. The wide distribution of the booklets, the Advertising Department's canned press blitzes, and the utilization of new motion picture technology generated public interest in, and acceptance of, these narratives. The success of the enterprise can be attributed to both utilizing agrarian-centric tropes and inserting the industrialogues into the era's popular public education institutions of the chautauqua circuit and lyceum hall. Indeed, the industrialogues were so convincing and popular in these venues that other circuit performers began to present them outside of the corporation's control, including at least one who presented "The Dawn of Plenty" as an endorsement of socialism. The venture was further legitimized under the auspices of formal educational institutions, which adopted the materials for use in both public schools and in universities. Within a year of *the Story of Bread's*

⁶³ "Industrialogues Discontinued," *Harvester World* Vol. 6, No 2 (February, 1915): 2. F.W.H. to P.G. Holden, "IHC Service Bureau Employes," January 31, 1914, box 151, Mss 6z, MIHCC.

publication, Cyrus H. McCormick and his reaper became common place in American History textbooks, where previously they were rarely mentioned.⁶⁴

After the close of the anti-trust case, the corporation continued to use the invention of the reaper for its advertising campaigns, but scaled back its historical-educational propaganda. Meanwhile, the McCormick's historical initiatives came to rest on academic historians. The family had successfully broadcast and utilized its heritage to sanctify the corporation during the anti-trust moment, but they needed trained historical professionals to legitimize that heritage as history. For the next two decades, the family promoted the field of academic historical inquiry as a vehicle to advance its patriarch's reputation and fortify the corporate brand. The McCormicks also secured allies and an employee to allow them to monitor and influence the historical profession from within. Overtime, their investment would pay dividends and their father's legacy would become ubiquitous in the canon of American history.

⁶⁴ "Everett Busy," *The Northwestern Worker* [Everett, WA], June 1, 1916. Andrew McLaughlin, *A History of the United States for the Schools* (New York: D. Appleton Co, 1911): 320. David Muzzey, *An American History* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1911): 289.

CHAPTER FIVE:

“HISTORICAL ACCURACY” KELLAR, 1915-1932

The last week of April 1932 Herbert Kellar journeyed from his office at the McCormick Agricultural Library in Chicago to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. to discuss that museum’s exhibition of reaper models. Since April 1930 the Smithsonian had displayed several replicas of a reaper with labels that attributed the invention to Robert Hall McCormick. His employers were alerted to the deplorable situation almost immediately by a clipping service, which also reported the donation of the models by the Leander J. McCormick family. In light of the upcoming Hall of Fame election and the Harvester Company’s yearlong Reaper Centennial festivities planned for 1931, the heirs of Cyrus McCormick thought better of renewing the family controversy and drawing public attention.¹

Unaware of the McCormick’s decision, International Harvester’s advertising department attempted to donate a replica of Cyrus McCormick 1831 reaper to the Smithsonian in 1931. With Kellar’s assistance, the Company created several hundred historically-accurate replicas to distribute to Harvester sales agencies across the nation as promotional pieces for the reaper centennial celebration. Taking further initiative, the

¹ Herbert Kellar to Harold McCormick, March 27, 1931, 1, box 2, Reaper Centennial Celebration Records, 1923 – 1936, Mss 1Q; Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 1, box 11, McCormick Historical Association Records, 1892 – 1963, Mss AB, McCormick – International Harvester Company Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. [Hereafter MIHCC].

advertising department overstepped its bounds and began distributing the models to museums. Upon learning of these plans, Cyrus McCormick II and his brother Harold intervened. They halted the company's donation to the Smithsonian before the proceedings had gone too far or stirred up any unwanted trouble. Given that the company had already cultivated a relationship with the national institution, however, the brothers further instructed the advertising manager to send a formal protest of the Robert McCormick display to the Smithsonian Institute in January 1932.²

Later that spring, Kellar was sent by the family to handle the situation. Since 1915, Kellar had labored to create a sophisticated network of professional contacts within historical associations and institutions to protect and promote Cyrus McCormick's legacy as the inventor of the reaper. Kellar was an enthusiastic participant in a period in which the historical profession eagerly expanded its cultural authority beyond the halls of academia to reach a wider public audience and broader job opportunities. He was a member and sometime officer of associations like the Agricultural Historical Society (AHS) and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA) which branched out to professionalize museums and archives. Kellar and his fellow historians also strove to demonstrate the value of historical knowledge to government policy, corporations and the general public. In this pursuit, professional ambitions were much broader than simply writing scholarly monographs and textbooks as historians hoped to reach the widest possible audience through mass-cultural projects like film, radio, advertising and popular magazines. Kellar's professional activities exemplify this movement and offer a roadmap

² Kellar to Harold McCormick, March 27, 1931; Cyrus McCormick II to Harold McCormick, April 10, 1931; Judson Stone to Cyrus McCormick II, May 7, 1931 box 2, Mss 1Q; Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 3, box 11, Mss AB, MIHCC.

to the early twentieth century growth of the historical profession. Kellar offered both assistance and leadership within emerging academic forums and professional networks, simultaneously advancing the interests of his profession and cohesively presenting the public with a very specific history that sanctified the corporate order with a veneer of objective historical “truth.”

The Smithsonian incident represents an excellent example of Kellar’s professional efforts, which utilized the creative new applications of historical expertise he created and cultivated, including not only his extensive archive of manuscripts but also his personal relationships within the profession. When he journeyed to the Smithsonian in 1932, he elected to first discuss the Robert McCormick models with his long-time friend, Frederick Lewton, who was also the curator of agricultural artifacts at the museum, before taking any definitive actions. Kellar had known Lewton for at least twelve years. Both were active members of the Agricultural History Society since its founding in 1919. They rarely missed the annual meetings, and served in the organization’s governance and committee structures. Most notably, both were seated on the AHS National Agricultural Museum committee, which aspired to fulfill the committee’s title. In 1921, this committee successfully lobbied the Smithsonian National Museum to create a Division of Agriculture History that would collect farming artifacts for an eventual national museum of agriculture. As a curator at the Smithsonian in 1921, Lewton was appointed by his managers to lead the small agricultural division. By 1932, he had collected around 1000 objects for the collection, including the models in question.³

³ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 3, box 11; Fredererick Lewton to Kellar, April 27, 1932, box 10, Mss AB; “The Fifth Annual Meeting of the Agricultural History Society, June 2, 1923” Minutes, 7, box 86, Herbert Anthony Kellar Papers, 1817 –

When Kellar arrived, Lewton provided him with a wealth of information regarding the reaper display's association with the Leander McCormick-Goodhart family (the grandson of Leander J. McCormick). The situation was delicate because the politically-connected and wealthy family financially supported the Smithsonian's astronomy programs. They donated the models and the label text directly to the head of the Smithsonian, Dr. Charles Abbott, in 1930, which he readily accepted on account of the family's philanthropic assistance. As soon as he learned about the display, Lewton protested the "suspicious exhibit," but was ignored. Lewton went on to explain that the McCormick-Goodharts frequently brought friends to visit the display, including a journalist, Norbert Lyons, who they hired to write a history which would "show the spurious character of the claims for Cyrus." Lyons apparently complained to Lewton that Kellar "had taken every scrap of evidence available to Chicago" and that little was left for him to find in Virginia.⁴

Kellar found all of this information very instructive. He was well aware of the McCormick cousins' historical tampering throughout the tenure of his employment with the McCormick Historical Association. Their "distasteful" acts had intensified more recently in response to the company's centennial celebration. The cousins had created similar delicate and embarrassing situations at the museum of the Chicago Historical Society as well as the University of Virginia. Additionally, Kellar had actually met and ejected Lyons from his library not a week before his meeting with Lewton on April 22.

1969, Mss AC, MIHCC. "Notes and Comments," *Agricultural History* Vol. 2, No. 2 (April, 1928): 103-104.

⁴ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 2-6, box 11, Mss AB, MIHCC

Lyons lacked reputable credentials and was suspiciously interested in the reaper controversy. At the time, Kellar did not know who Lyons worked for, but now Lewton had closed that circle for him. Kellar was also delighted to know that his thorough manuscript canvas in Virginia had thwarted the cousins' historical counter-strategy.⁵

Lewton further explained that the formal complaint by the Harvester Company in early 1932 gave him the opportunity to again present his case against the exhibit. He showed Abbott the relevant patent documentation and demonstrated that the exhibit was erroneous because it attributed the invention to Robert, rather than Cyrus, as the patents indicated. Abbott then partially acceded to Lewton's request and they removed the offending labels, but left up the models. Unprompted by Kellar, Lewton planned to make a further case to Abbott that the models should be removed as well. On April 28, he wrote Kellar to provide him with additional documentation and to his surprise, Kellar arrived at his door the next day with a suitcase of manuscripts.⁶

Over the next several days, the two historians poured over the documents and presented their argument to Abbott. Abbott had recently faced similar "first invention" controversies regarding the airplane, and the museum was involved in an ongoing lawsuit over inaccurate labels on a radial engine exhibit. In Abbott's own words, he lamented that he had again "gotten the Smithsonian into a pickle," with regard to the reaper. On the one hand, Abbot was worried that offending the politically-connected and

⁵ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 6; May 4, 1932; Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine and Harold McCormick, May 14, 1932, box 11, Mss AB; Harold McCormick to Cyrus McCormick II and Anita McCormick Blaine, February 19, 1931. Box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

⁶ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 3-4, box 11; Lewton to Kellar, April 27, 1932, box 10, Mss AB, MIHCC.

philanthropically-minded McCormick-Goodharts “might result in great harm to the Institution.” On the other, he was afraid that leaving the exhibit in tact would result in a lawsuit against the museum by the McCormick Historical Association. Faced with the evidence, Lewton’s support, and these dire alternatives, Abbot gave in to Kellar’s request. He agreed to remove the Robert McCormick models and adopted a policy of strictly displaying inventions with official patent documentation. He also approved Kellar and Lewton’s plan to display models of Cyrus McCormick’s patent inventions from 1834, but not the unpatented 1831 version.⁷

As a trained historian, Lewton acted to protect the history of the reaper which Herbert Kellar had labored to establish in historical circles for the previous seventeen years. In handling the situation at the Smithsonian, Kellar commented to his employers that Lewton’s “heart was full of the subject,” and that he had done everything in his power to rectify the injustice to Cyrus McCormick. With Kellar’s support, Lewton continued the campaign until 1934 when the Smithsonian finally placed a label on the Cyrus’s 1834 machine that emphasized its origins in 1831 as the first functional reaper. The episode was just another example of Kellar’s invaluable service to the McCormick Historical Association and the high esteem he had earned for the family’s legacy in the historical profession. Herbert Kellar had become the family’s man inside the profession

⁷ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 8-13; May 17, 1932, box 11, MIHCC.

and his influence helped push other historians to give priority to the claims of Cyrus McCormick.⁸

When Cyrus II and his siblings hired their archivist in 1915, they could not have imagined that he would become such an influential asset to their historical crusade. He was initially charged with only organizing historical manuscripts for a future biography of Cyrus McCormick and acting as a historical watch-dog for the family. Over the next two decades, however, Kellar labored to expand his responsibilities within the organization, while competing for historical authority with his supervisor and the family's lawyer, Cyrus Bentley. Crucially, he needed to demonstrate that historical expertise was more than simply "proving" the facts of the past as the lawyer intended, but that it could be applied along broader lines for greater ends.

Early in his career, Kellar demonstrated his value to the family through actively participating in the historical profession. He skillfully fed the family's desire for scholarly sanctification of their heritage, and in so doing impacted public memory. Kellar reveled in building the family's historical library and promoted its reputation in scholarly circles. Simultaneously, he actively participated in historical organizations, striving to increase the profession's impact on the general public. By the 1930s his professional activities had gained academic acceptance of his employer's prized heritage and the Harvester Company's brand as historical fact.

While Kellar's endeavors within the profession were effective over time, the benefits of his labor were too slow in coming for Cyrus Bentley. Spending the

⁸ Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine and Harold McCormick, May 14, 1932; Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II, and Harold McCormick, May 2, 1932, 5, box 11; Kellar, "Report on trip to the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., May 13 – 29, 1934," box 15, Mss AB, MIHCC.

McCormicks' time and money, Bentley was concerned that the family's investment in Kellar's activities would never pay off. Moreover, he worried that giving Kellar more authority within the family's affairs would diminish his own usefulness to their historical projects. As the family's long-time trusted advisor, Bentley preserved his own authority at Kellar's expense. Throughout the late-1910s and 1920s he curtailed Kellar's ambitious plans, denigrated his contributions and erected barriers to Kellar's hopes of exerting professional control over the McCormick Historical Association.

Ultimately, Kellar was able to work around Bentley's sandbagging to secure professional autonomy when he made the collection and his training an asset to International Harvester, the family's corporation. His welcome involvement with the company's advertising department in preparing materials for the 1931 centennial celebration of the invention of the reaper, clearly improved the historical content of the company's publicity and reached the general public. Harvester Company officials sang his praises directly to Cyrus II and Harold McCormick. This third-party professional validation for Kellar's historical assistance undermined Bentley's efforts to minimize his employee's contributions. Kellar was freed from Bentley's draconian grip having earned external commendation from an influential source which the McCormick family trusted. Almost immediately, Kellar gained the family's confidence to make historical decisions to serve their best interests and received increased wages.

Unlike the family's previous historian Salem Pattison, who was more committed to middle-class wages rather than scholarly work, Herbert Kellar was personally invested in the historical profession. Seeking to expand the influence of his profession, Kellar was part of a professional cadre of Midwestern "prairie historians." This group intended to

raise the profile of Midwestern history while making the discipline a useful resource for government decision making and American life. As progressive-minded intellectuals, these historians wanted to use their historical training to inform and resolve the issue of the modern age. Unlike his colleagues employed in academia or at state historical societies, Kellar was unique in that he participated as a historian for an elite family. While he was involved in many of the movement's public initiatives however, he had great difficulty establishing that these projects were beneficial to his employers. Through trial and error, he discovered that he could continue to advance his career as a historian and serve the family's interests by bringing historical expertise to bear on their company. As a "prairie historian," his key contribution was as a pioneer of the corporate archive. Predating the founding of the "first" such archive at Firestone in the late 1930's, Kellar demonstrated the value of historical expertise to the corporate order in his work for International Harvester a decade earlier.⁹

The McCormick Agricultural Library

Prior to Kellar's arrival in August of 1915, the McCormick Historical Association was managed by Cyrus Bentley. Bentley had been the family's primary legal counselor since the turn of century, when he had been heavily involved in negotiating the International

⁹ While not officially a part of International Harvester, Kellar's collection and knowledge were utilized as a company resource. He offered the same services as later corporate archives to inform advertising, public relations, policy, and legal decisions. Indeed, Kellar and his McCormick Agricultural Library provided both inspiration and a model for the "first" American corporate archive in 1937, at Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. Phillip F. Mooney, "The Practice of History in Corporate America: Business Archives in the United States," in Arnita Jones and Phillip Cantelon, editors, *Corporate Archives and History: Making the Past Work* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993): 9-20. William D. Overman to Kellar, December 1, 1937, box 135, Mss AC, MIHCC. Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002): 7-35, 151. Ian Tyrell, "Public at the Creation: Place, Memory, and Historical Practice in the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *Journal of American History* 94 (June, 2007): 19-46. Jon Lauck, *the Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013): 13-52.

Harvester merger with the Deerings. In the years that followed, he had offered financial counsel for the family's estate, advised during the anti-trust proceedings, managed Stanley McCormick's long-term psychological medical care, offered his opinion on the *Hall of Fame* campaigns and acted as the family's general counsel on a variety of other issues. Considered more than an employee, Cyrus McCormick II even followed Bentley's advice to purchase a summer home in Michigan's Upper Peninsula that White Deer Lake, just south of his own place at the Huron Mountain Club. Throughout his tenure with the family, he also courted the widowed Anita McCormick Blaine. At least holding partial romantic feelings for Bentley, Blaine rejected his overtures on account of Victorian decorum rather than actual distaste.¹⁰

Intimately familiar with the family and their historical problems, when Bentley was hired to lead the McCormick Biographical Association in 1911, he took the appointment as a crucial opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to the family. Engaged to manage the family's historical conflict with their cousins, their *Hall of Fame* initiatives and their plans for an authoritative biography, Bentley took an overly combative and legalistic approach that reflected his close personal association with the family's interests. By 1915, Cyrus II and Harold began to doubt if Bentley was capable of being an effective public advocate for the "true history" of the reaper because of his absolutist and antagonistic approach. While they leaned towards more subtle tactics, Bentley seemed incapable of putting aside his legal instinct and personal mission to win

¹⁰ Gilbert Harrison, *A Timeless Affair: the Life of Anita McCormick Blaine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

unconditional victory for their father's legacy through direct historical battle with their cousins.

When the McCormick Historical Association began its search for a librarian in 1915, these differing perspectives created division amongst the close-knit group of family members and the trusted counselor about the function of that employee. Spear-heading their efforts, Bentley initiated the hunt for an assistant who would support his professional labor. Anticipating a short-term hire of a year or less, he wanted someone to catalog the collection in order to streamline his own legalistic writing on the reaper controversy and to fact-check the accuracy of his finished work. Unsatisfied with Bentley's work, but unwilling to part with their lawyer and friend, Cyrus McCormick II hoped to steer the Association into the hands of trained historians. After his interactions with Clarence Alvord the previous year, he was convinced that an historical expert might broaden their horizons and act as a representative to preserve the history of the reaper within the historical profession. Following this inclination, he suggested that Bentley tap into the network of professional historians which the family had cultivated. Through these channels, the family hired Herbert Anthony Kellar.¹¹

Bentley and Kellar's differing professional identities and training created a conflict of authority within the Historical Association between the lawyer and the historian which lasted for the next fifteen years. To Bentley's mind, the scope of their project was limited to unequivocally proving that Cyrus invented the reaper, regardless of

¹¹ Cyrus Bentley, "Interview between W.N.C. Carlton, Librarian of the Newberry Library and Cyrus Bentley," May 27, 1915; Cyrus Bentley to Anita McCormick Blaine, August 10, 1915, box 55, Anita McCormick Blaine Papers, Mss 1E; Cyrus McCormick II to Dana C. Munro, June 24, 1915, box 5, Cyrus McCormick II, Historical Interest Documents, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

its larger impact or context. Intent on this legalistic approach, the older Bentley was unwilling to yield his role as the champion of Cyrus McCormick's legacy and refused to recognize Kellar's historical talents beyond the legal program he had laid out. For his part, Kellar strove to use his academic background and the tools of his professional training to establish his own value to the family. He also embraced the positivist notion that public knowledge of historical scholarship could resolve contemporary problems. Consistently obstructed by Bentley, Kellar resiliently formulated new historical strategies to broaden the family's mission by locating the larger impact of the reaper's invention on American civilization and cultivating new avenues for sharing that history for the benefit of the larger society. He hoped such efforts would bolster his professional authority within the McCormick Historical Association. After numerous attempts over many years, he ultimately achieved professional victory in 1929 when he successfully earned recognition for his abilities from International Harvester.

Prior to his employment with the McCormicks, Kellar had spent his young career intermittently teaching courses and conducting archival surveys after completing his graduate course work. A son of the Midwest, Kellar was born in 1887 in Nebraska but was raised in Illinois. He earned a history degree at the University of Chicago in 1909, before attending four years of graduate school between the University of Wisconsin and Stanford University. Never completing his dissertation, Kellar cobbled together a career as an adjunct teaching medieval history courses at the University of Texas and the University of Minnesota. To that point, his most notable historical accomplishment was completing an inventory in 1915 of the Minnesota Historical Society's collection. When he was taken on by the McCormicks, he was twenty-eight years old. In Chicago, he

secured an income of \$2000 annually, on par with the \$900 a semester he received for teaching, but substantially more stable. He was determined to improve his lot with the elite family through impressing them beyond their expectations with the power of his expertise.¹²

Kellar was initially confined to Bentley's narrow intentions for his position and the Association. Kellar surveyed the extant McCormick collection, which at that point included about 1600 original publications, 10,000 manuscripts and ten boxes of facsimiles and transcribed materials from the Library of Congress. These materials documented Cyrus McCormick's invention of the reaper and the associated familial strife. The collection had been compiled since 1900 by Salem Pattison, Louis Dent and Cyrus Bentley for the family's various biographical, *Hall of Fame* and advertising efforts. Housed in a room within the mansion of Cyrus H. McCormick's widow, these resources were only utilized for the family's historical efforts. Following Bentley's suggestion, Kellar outlined and commenced a plan for cataloging the collection to highlight content relevant in the Robert-Cyrus McCormick invention controversy. While he recognized that the material could provide insight on a variety of other historic topic, the lawyer was only interested in the material which could be utilized for his legalistic treatise of the reaper's origins.¹³

¹² "Historical News and Comments," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42 (December, 1955): 598-599. George Vincent to Kellar, November 17, 1914, box 1, Mss AC; Cyrus Bentley to Anita McCormick Blaine, *August* 2, 1915, box 55, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

¹³ Kellar to Bentley, September 8, 1915, box 23; Herbert Kellar, "The McCormick Records and State, Local, and Regional History," unpublished manuscript, n.d., box 19, Mss AC, MIHCC.

In Bentley's imagination, Kellar's cataloging was a final step before moving forward with a biography. Betraying his rigid and managerially-litigation approach to the historical enterprise, Bentley's 1915 "outline of work," demonstrated that he believed the association had almost exhausted all relevant avenues of investigation. The only evidence left to collect were competing depositions from both sides of the McCormick family. He then intended to present these materials and the rest of his historical brief on the disagreement to the Leander McCormicks, in hopes of forcing them to back down. Failing that, Bentley planned for the Association to proceed with publishing a commissioned history of the reaper which would overwhelm the cousins and the general public with an unimpeachable product of scholarly verve proving that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper. According to Bentley's estimation, the entire agenda would be accomplished within a single year.¹⁴

Unlike Bentley, Kellar envisioned a much broader public-oriented agenda. Interacting with the materials and the family sparked his historical imagination in ways Bentley could never perceive. He believed that the collection could be expanded and the historical influence of the family could be augmented through a variety of means. The library could easily add agricultural periodicals and early newspapers that discussed the advent of the reaper and placed its adoption into the context of the expansion of the American Republic. Historic correspondence and manuscripts authored by Virginians outside the immediate family could probably be found, shedding light on the origins of the reaper. Following such a course and disinterested in the Bentley's litigation-oriented approach, Kellar believed that the family's historical dispute could be resolved if the

¹⁴ Cyrus Bentley, "Outline of work for the Historical Association," 1915, box 1, Mss AB, MIHCC.

collection was enlarged and opened to outside historians. Supporting wider historical scholarship could provide an important resource to the family. Demonstrating a commitment to congenial intellectual exchange, other historians could help the McCormick Historical Association locate distant source materials, monitor scholarship and provide new insight on the history of the reaper. Promoting broader scholarly use of the collection would garner good will and further raise the Association's profile within the profession. Perhaps most importantly, wider study of the reaper would support the invention's importance to the progress of American civilization.¹⁵

Finally, in March of 1916, after biding his time, Kellar eventually worked around Bentley's managerial control and personally was able to share his vision for the organization with Cyrus McCormick II. By coincidence or contrivance, Kellar was invited from his work in the library of Nettie McCormick's mansion, to enjoy a cup of tea with her and her son, Cyrus II, in the parlor. During his eight months of employment for the Association, it was probably only the second time that Kellar directly spoke with Cyrus II. After some prodding from the McCormicks, Kellar shared his larger ambitions for their organization. Referencing his recent trip to Washington D.C., for the American Historical Association annual meeting in December, he expounded on the many leads that other historians had shared with him about repositories and collections that might prove useful for the family. Along with these threads of opportunity to expand their collections, he noted that conservation work was needed on some of the existing

¹⁵ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, January 17, 1916, box 34, Mss AC, MIHCC.

documents and that better library shelves, cases and boxes were necessary to preserve the material.¹⁶

Uninspired by Bentley's approach and long-intrigued by the promise of the historical profession, Cyrus McCormick II seized on his employee's suggestions to make his family's collection more substantial, formal and scholarly. Going beyond Kellar's scope of work, Cyrus II also proposed hiring two research assistants, a personal stenographer and renovating his mother's carriage house behind the mansion into a modern library with a fireproof vault, better housing for documents, and a museum. With a descriptive memorandum from Kellar, he outlined a ten point plan with sixteen collection "leads to follow" for the next meeting of the McCormick Historical Association. Of course, at the next meeting of the family, Kellar and Cyrus II's plan was approved. They also agreed to pay for Kellar to attend historical conferences in the future and subscribed to the *American Historical Review*. Kellar successfully brought his historical training to bear on the organization, securing his job beyond the lone year Bentley had predicted.¹⁷

The enlarged program stood in stark contrast to Bentley's miniscule "outline of work" for 1915. Undoubtedly Kellar's insubordination rankled Bentley's nerves and bruised his ego. Petulently Bentley briefly resigned from the McCormick Historical Association for the remainder of 1916 and Kellar reported directly to Anita McCormick

¹⁶ Herbert Kellar, memorandum, March 9, 1916, box 5, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

¹⁷ Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine, March 10, 1916; Cyrus McCormick II, "Leads to Follow Up for Docket"; "Memos," March 8, 1916, box 5, Mss 9c; Cyrus McCormick II to Harold McCormick, May 26, 1914, box 400, Mss 1E; Herbert Kellar to Richard Bentley, January 8, 1956, box 31, Mss AB, MIHCC.

Blaine. The following year, Blaine became too busy to supervise the Association and the family brought back Bentley as the manager. Back in control, Bentley carried out the McCormick's wishes, but from that point until his death in 1930, he tightly micro-managed Kellar and limited the historian's access to the family. He continually demanded more results, frequently contested Kellar's proposals and rarely shared those ideas with the McCormicks. He also required detailed weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly reports on all of the activities within the library. While Kellar was able to easily influence the family in 1916 through direct contact with Cyrus II, gaining support for his later designs would be an uphill battle.¹⁸

Despite Bentley's later restrictive efforts, gaining family adherence to his program in 1916 gave Kellar wide latitude to operate for many years. The transformation of the carriage house into the McCormick Agricultural Library was not complete until 1919, at which time the staff was also enlarged. In the meantime Kellar, commenced his work along the broad lines approved by the McCormicks. He began searching Chicago area libraries for materials and transcribing relevant items for the collection. He sent correspondence across the nation to other librarians and historians requesting information and relevant documents. He also used his trips to meetings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the American Historical Association to hunt for more sources in host cities and to raise the profile of agricultural history, and by extension the McCormick Agricultural Library, within the profession.

¹⁸ Cyrus Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, "Special Report on Kellar," November 23, 1923, box 2, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

In reports on his activities and these meetings, he explained that his goal was to make the collection “notable” and “create for the Association a [historical] standing of its own.” The key was to not only compile a complete record on the origins of Cyrus McCormick’s reaper, but “to increase it to cover the material on agricultural or industrial history of the west.” If his “ideal” was attained and promoted, Kellar had no doubt the collection would attract historians from across the country. He emphasized that the library would provide a solid foundation for a biography of Cyrus McCormick, which remained the focus of the enterprise.¹⁹

A Representative in the Historical Profession

After 1916, Herbert Kellar became a fixture in the historical profession as a supportive archivist, knowledgeable interlocutor, and well-endowed patron rather than an active writer of history. He was ubiquitous at major historical conferences for the rest of his life and was energetically involved in organizational functions. Within this context, he assumed dual roles as both an employee and a fellow intellectual amongst his peers. The McCormicks financially supported his participation in the guild so that he could advance their interests as a professional amongst professionals. At the same time, Kellar exercised personal agency, lobbying the McCormicks for additional support for the scholarly enterprises of he and his colleagues.

Issuing detailed summaries of his activities at annual conferences, Kellar was determined to show that his attendance at these functions was an asset to the McCormick Historical Association. In his earliest reports on the meetings of the MVHA and AHA, he

¹⁹ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, report, June 14, 1916; report, September 23, 1913, box 34, Mss AC, MIHCC.

listed dozen of historians who expressed interest in the family's historical endeavor and further documented the manuscript leads they provided. A typical report, on the 1916 MVHA meeting in Nashville, Kellar named the twenty-three historians whom he had conversed with about his work. He also provided eight pages of painstaking details on known manuscript collections ranging over ten states that could be potential resources for the McCormicks' efforts. This ongoing professional reconnaissance was the basis for Kellar's later manuscript hunts and library searches. Indeed, his reliable presence at meetings and his enthusiastic promotion of the family's library and their patriarch's reputation make it unlikely that any professionally-engaged historian was unaware of the McCormick's historical agenda.²⁰

Kellar also used conferences as an opportunity to monitor scholarship that directly concerned the history of the reaper and Cyrus H. McCormick. Indicating that the family and their company's previous effort already had a significant impact, he drew the family's attention to historians that already recognized the historic importance of their patriarch. As an early example, after the 1917 AHA meeting in Philadelphia, Kellar praised Louis Schmidt's paper "A study of the influence of Wheat and Cotton on Anglo-American Relations during the Civil War," for giving "due credit... to agricultural machinery, with the emphasis upon the reaper." In 1919, Kellar sent copies of Schmidt's foundational "The Economic History of American Agriculture as a Field for Study," to all of the members of the McCormick family, because it prominently discussed McCormick's contributions to Union victory. Later, he would draw attention to the

²⁰ Kellar to Bentley, January 19, 1918, box 1; Kellar to Bentley, June 16, 1919, Mss AB; Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, January 17, 1916; May 4, 1916, box 34; Kellar to Bentley, November 30, 1916, box 23, Mss AC, MIHCC.

scholar's that he had directly influenced, whose work advanced the family cherished heritage.²¹

In instances when Kellar discovered scholars that did not do justice to McCormick's reputation, he openly criticized the work and recorded his attempts to rectify the situation. In a particularly noteworthy episode, Kellar intervened with a Carnegie Foundation supported history of northern agriculture by Percy Bidwell and John Falconer almost a decade before it was published. In 1916, he visited Madison to discuss the work with the director of the project, agricultural economist, Henry C. Taylor. Allowed to see a draft, Kellar was "surprised at the inadequacy and superficiality of the chapter on agricultural implements," which, amongst many faults, did not mention McCormick. Leveling harsh criticism on the various omissions, he proceeded to suggest a wide array of source material might improve the work. Taylor was receptive to Kellar's feedback and agreed to include McCormick in the chapter.²²

The archivist's affiliation with an elite family quickly garnered the attention of his colleagues. In particular, the leadership of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, with whom he was already acquainted, ushered him into their inner circle. The cohort of Clarence Alvord, Solon Buck, Milo Quaife, Harlow Lindley, Otto Schmidt and Benjamin Shambaugh was very supportive of Kellar's work. They offered him suggestions, eagerly engaged him in conversation about the family's ambitions and encouraged him to present papers and publish articles about the McCormick Historical Association. With such

²¹ Kellar to Bentley, January 19, 1918, box 1, Mss AB; Kellar to Bentley, April 9, 1919, box 34, Mss AC, MIHCC. Louis Schmidt, "The Economic History of American Agriculture as a Field of Study," *The Historical Outlook* 10 (January, 1919): 9.

²² Kellar to Bentley, June 15, 1918, box 34, Mss AC, MIHCC.

enthusiastic support, Kellar rose to professional prominence rapidly. In 1919, he was the chair of the program committee for the annual conference in St. Louis. By 1923, he was appointed the chair of the Committee on Historical Cooperation, charged with creating a centralized system for sharing information about historical archives. He was also welcomed as a member of editorial board for the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*.²³

Reflecting self-interest, this group and others utilized Kellar as an access point to his elite employers. As a congenial colleague with his own aspirations for the profession, Kellar generally sent their requests up the chain to Cyrus Bentley, but it is unclear if they ever reached the family. In 1917, Buck encouraged Kellar to create fellowships for graduate student researchers. The following year, a group of state historical society directors hoped to gain McCormick financing for a researcher in Washington D.C. to collect relevant documents for the group on the upper Midwest. For several years, William E. Dodd at the University of Chicago lobbied the McCormicks to buy a massive collection of manuscripts from Virginia so that he could make use of them closer to home. James Franklin Jameson successfully secured funds from Cyrus McCormick II for the AHA. The MVHA regularly solicited Cyrus McCormick II to double his annual contribution to the publication. Clarence Alvord was particularly close with Kellar and was keen on becoming Cyrus McCormick's commissioned biographer. From 1916

²³ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, September 25, 1918, box 34, Mss AC; Kellar to Bentley, December 10, 1918, box 1; Kellar to Bentley, June 16, 1919, box 2, Mss AB; Kellar to Bentley, November 17, 1923, box 4, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

through 1925, he frequently dropped hints in his reports about Alvord's interest in the project and ability as a man of "historical imagination."²⁴

Kellar's prominent position, networking, and promotional efforts almost immediately led to other historians using the library for their own research. William T. Trimble, an early champion of agricultural history as a field of study, was the first professional historian to use the family's collection in late December 1916. Despite Kellar's glowing recommendation of Trimble character's and scholarship, the McCormicks were leary of inviting an outsider into Nettie McCormick's mansion to see their jealously guarded collection. Trimble was only granted access after being interviewed by Cyrus McCormick II on Christmas morning in his mother's home and with Kellar's close supervision. A parade of historians over the next thirty five years, including Ulrich B. Phillips, Avery Craven, Bessie Louise Pierce, Leo Rogin, and Paul Gates, among many others, were allowed entry with much less fanfare or scrutiny. Until the collection moved to Madison in 1951, Kellar was the gatekeeper and scholars could only use it at his discretion. Once the new library building was completed in 1919, Kellar promoted its growing archive in the pages of historical journals and in conference presentations. Undoubtedly, his collection building efforts increased academic interest in the library.²⁵

²⁴ Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, September 25, 1918; Kellar to Bentley, April 23, 1917; May 2, 1917, box 34; Kellar to Bentley, March 22, 1918, box 23; Herbert Kellar "Notes on Trip," April 24 - May 2, 1929, box 109, Mss AC; Kellar to Bentley, December 10, 1918, box 1; Clarence Alvord to Kellar, April 19, 1922, box 30, Mss AB; Clara Paine to Cyrus McCormick II, April 7, 1920; October 25, 1920; Kellar to C.S. Stilwell, April 25, 1922, box 26, Cyrus McCormick II, Donation papers, 1880-1937, Mss 5c, MIHCC.

²⁵ Kellar to Bentley, December 23, 1916, box 23; Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, August 21, 1916; Kellar to Bentley, May 2, 1917, box 34, Mss AC. "News and Comments," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 8 (December, 1921): 297-298.

Kellar was able to open the archive for scholarly use by successfully arguing that developing a larger historiographical context was paramount to the McCormick's historical ambitions. Reflecting professional awareness, Kellar pointed out that the collection itself was "raw material," which would prove impossible for a single biographer to master. Moreover, in a scholarly vacuum any potential biography would garner little intellectual notice. If however, other historians wrote monographs on topics which touched on McCormick and the reaper using the collection, a later biographer's efforts would be more intellectually relevant. Encouraging scholarly use would "hasten the time when the writing of the Mr. Cyrus H. McCormick could be seriously undertaken."²⁶

The emerging school of agricultural history was perhaps the most important field in which to advance Cyrus McCormick's legacy. In 1917, Kellar explained that the Great War was generating historical interest in the production of food and the influence of agriculture on the development of the country. He emphasized that "the importance of such a situation in its relation to Mr. C.H. McCormick is manifest." Following his own interests and acting on the family's behalf, Kellar inserted himself into the professional movement and soon became a leader within it, alongside William Trimble and Rodney True. He worked to guide the infant field by coordinating scholarly activities "to consciously control the lines of development, in accordance with the high standards of scholarship" and the McCormick's interests.²⁷

²⁶ Kellar to Bentley, May 2, 1917; July 26, 1917, box 34, Mss AC, MIHCC.

²⁷ Kellar to Bentley, June 16, 1919, box 2.; Kellar to Bentley, January 18, 1918, box 1, Mss AB, MIHCC.

Throughout the 1920s, Kellar was primarily affiliated with the Agricultural History Society. The Society was founded in 1919 under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture and with support from the AHA. Kellar joined the organization several months after its founding and was an integral “moving spirit.” Aware that they needed to not only advance their scholarship but share it with the wider American public, his first formal proposal to the AHS in 1919 was to create a national museum of agriculture “to portray the development of harvesting machinery.” A formal committee to accomplish this task was created in 1921, led by Frederick Lewton who began collecting materials for the museum at the Smithsonian Institute. Kellar became vice president of the AHS from 1921 to 1922 and president from 1922 to 1924. As president, he imparted his vision as a profession builder, creating the first AHS committees for membership, publications, programs, agricultural surveys, archives and fields of research. He was then the secretary-treasurer from 1924 to 1927. Kellar was also the guiding force behind the establishment of *Agricultural History* in 1927 and served on its board of editors for the rest of his life.²⁸

In 1930, Kellar explained to Cyrus McCormick II that all of his professional activities within the MVHA, the AHA, and the AHS were designed to “control... information published about Mr. C.H. McCormick.” His network of contacts in the profession kept him apprised of on-going projects relevant to Cyrus McCromick. Furthermore, the reputation of the library alone attracted intellectuals and other writers to

²⁸ Wayne Rasmussen, “the Growth of Agricultural History,” in William Hesselstine and Donald McNeil, editors *In Support of Clio: Essay in Memory of Herbert A. Kellar* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958): 159-161. Arthur G. Peterson, “The Agricultural History Society’s First Quarter Century,” *Agricultural History* 19 (October, 1945):

his doorstep. In contact with these authors, he could steer them in the right direction and “caution” them about using the nefarious materials printed by the Leander J. McCormick family and others. Moreover, his standing in the field solicited many invitations for lectures and gave him power to affect appointments of professionals at other historical institutions. The director of the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Waldemar Kaempffert, allowed Kellar to handpick its curator of agriculture. Selecting a friend, Russell Anderson from the University of Illinois, Kellar ensured that the museum would present a favorable exhibit on Cyrus McCormick and the reaper. In short, he explained that his reputation in the profession was paying dividends on the McCormicks’ historical investment.²⁹

Although Kellar certainly curated and promoted the family’s collection to shape the scholarly reputation of Cyrus McCormick, it is unfair to solely characterize him as a historical mercenary. Kellar and indeed most of his colleagues probably already believed that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper in 1831, because of the family and their company’s previous public relations, advertising and historical endeavors. Indeed, the narratives of progress that International Harvester had distributed during the early 1910s which trumpeted Cyrus McCormick’s contributions to civilization, probably sat particularly well with the “prairie historians” of the Midwest. Having migrated from life on the farm to pursue high-minded work in urban academia, many of these historians probably felt that the International Harvester’s Service Bureau tales of the mutually

²⁹ Kellar to Cyrus McCormick II, April 12, 1930, box 9, Mss AB; Kellar to Waldemar Kempffert, March 13, 1929, box 134, Mss AC, MIHCC. Arthur Hirsch, “Efforts of the Grange in the Middle West to Control the Price of Farm Machinery, 1870 – 1880, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 15 (March, 1929): 473-496.

reinforcing urban and rural progress reflected their own experience. Moreover, they viewed themselves as agents within that movement. They perceived their profession as a potentially powerful progressive force in the larger nation.³⁰

Reflecting their progressive mindset and professional ambition, agricultural historians, in particular, had faith that their work could be instrumental in resolving rural social and economic problems. Built on a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the AHA, the Agricultural History Society focused on using historical research and methodology to inform government agricultural policy. They believed that their historical expertise could provide “the light of experience” to inform decisions about volatile commodity markets, tariffs, crops, pests, soil conditions and other issues. In this context and well aware of the McCormicks ability to further their agenda, they welcomed Kellar as a valuable contributor and resource. It is telling that in 1923, during the first annual meeting that he presided over as AHS president, his colleagues suggested that he ask the McCormicks for a \$100,000 endowment to fortify their organization.³¹

Within the AHS, Kellar was vehement about the value of history to the larger nation and the profession’s obligations to share their expertise with the general public. He frequently urged his academic colleagues to be less esoteric in their research and more cognizant of their duty to people outside of their profession. Similarly, he pressed the agricultural scientists within the AHS and USDA to be open-minded to academic ideas and more courageous in actively lobbying policy reform, rather than passively providing

³⁰ Lauck, *The Lost Region*, 29-30. Edwin Barker, *The Story of Bread*. See discussion of Edwin Lincoln Barker, *The Story of Bread* (Chicago: International Harvester Company of America, 1911) in Chapter 4.

³¹ Tyrell, *Historians in Public*, 165 – 168. Nils A. Olsen to Kellar, May 25, 1921, box 84; Minutes, “The Fifth Annual Meeting of the Agricultural History Society,” June 2, 1923, box 86, Mss AC,MIHCC.

solicited information to politicians. On all fronts, he stressed the need to develop tools to share historical knowledge with the general public through schools, manuscript collecting, local historical societies and agricultural extension offices.³²

At the heart of his historical efforts, Kellar held a dynamic theory of agricultural history. He believed agricultural social, economic and political problems in the present and throughout time stemmed from a sort of generational amnesia that was inherent in the orality of passing farming traditions. Simply stated, farmers taught their sons in light of their own experience, but failed to impart wisdom that they had learned from their own fathers, resulting in “curious recurrence of mistakes every other generation.” In his estimation then, contemporary agricultural problems were fundamentally historical in nature, because they were rooted in flawed systems of vernacular education about the past. This theory of agricultural history accounted for farmer’s fluctuating relationship with progressive methods and beliefs.³³

Importantly, Kellar’s theory presented a manifest opportunity for agricultural historians to demonstrate the concrete value of their expertise. The profession could resolve present rural problems through better public education about the rural past. Kellar’s intellectual configuration and mission for the profession was completely compatible with the McCormicks’ own desires to increase sales of their modern farm

³² Herbert Kellar, “Agricultural Surveys,” delivered at the 1923 AHS annual meeting; Kellar to O.C. Stine, October 27, 1927, box 84; “Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Agricultural History Society,” October 18, 1927; “Notes on Meeting of Agricultural History,” December 29, 1927, box 86; Herbert Kellar, “The McCormick Records and their Relation to Local, State and Regional Development,” n.d., box 19, Mss AC, MIHCC.

³³ August Krey, “History in the Machine Age,” *Minnesota History* 14 (March 1933): 11-12, notes that Kellar’s work and theory of history was one of the best examples of the historians making their craft a “practical” social tool.

equipment amongst sometimes resistant agrarians. If farmers had a better knowledge of the past, they would be more willing to embrace the materiality of progress. In these instances, Kellar's sincere beliefs about the value of his work and his profession are apparent, even though it also reflects his culturally "modern" view of rural life.³⁴

Not simply the McCormicks' "hired gun," Kellar attempted to garner greater financial support from the McCormick family to advance this practical historical agenda and the interests of agricultural history. Making frequent requests of varying size, Kellar typically obscured his own desires behind the McCormick's yearning to "settle the question of the invention of the reaper." For example, in 1922, Kellar laid out a particularly ambitious twenty-year strategic plan, proposing to triple the family's historical expenditures in order to financially and intellectually fortify agricultural history. Kellar explained that such expenditures were necessary to build a context for their father's biography. If this was done, Kellar noted:

The McCormick family can expect a return of their good about equal to what they are willing to do for the public good. If they are broad minded enough to encourage the study of agricultural history... they will not only be performing a great service for American History but will at the same time materially aid in the acceptance of the truth with regard to the reaper.

Undoubtedly pandering to the McCormicks' interests, he also couched his proposal in terms of its value for the "public good," served by agricultural historians. His proposal included salaries for three full-time historians as well as a support staff of stenographers, librarians and secretaries to handle the administration of the library.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Herbert Kellar, "Suggestions for the Organization of the McCormick Agricultural Library, 1922-1944," April 1, 1922; "Estimates of Annual Cost of Suggestions for the Organization of the McCormick Agricultural Library, 1922-1944," April 21, 1922, box 5, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

This proposal and many others were stymied by Cyrus Bentley. In response to Kellar's fourteen page proposal in 1922, he told the archivists that his plan was untenable and would "prove surprising" to family on account of the expense. As an efficiency-minded and spiteful middle-manager, Bentley only supplied the family with a single page synopsis of the plan, which emphasized the bottom line budget and omitted Kellar's arguments about its value to the family's larger enterprise and the general public. This episode in particular, led Kellar to increasingly resist and complain about Bentley's management. In direct confrontation, Kellar bluntly told Bentley that he could not appreciate the historical prerogative, "in the light of your legal training." He openly resented that Bentley isolated the family from the benefits of his historical expertise and frustrated his ability to use his training to serve their interests. With his program for professionalization consistently dashed, Kellar increasingly turned to manuscript collecting as a more direct avenue to demonstrate his value to the family. Simultaneously, this activity allowed Kellar to continue pushing forward the interests of his profession.³⁶

The "Boll Weevil" of Manuscript Collecting

On a damp and cold spring afternoon in 1926, Herbert Kellar, Ulrich B. Phillips – the era's most important historian of the South- and Rion McKissick rattled along the dirt roads of Augusta County, Virginia in a Model T Ford. When the day began, they originally intended to find George Armentrout, an aging local who had mentioned to Kellar in 1919 that he had a collection of old papers. Chasing this lead they discovered that Mr. Armentrout had recently passed away. As a stroke good of fortune, however,

³⁶ Kellar to Bentley, April 3, 1922; January 5, 1925; Cyrus Bentley, "Memorandum, re: Organization of the Historical Library, May 19, 1922, box 5; Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, November 23, 1923, box 2, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

they found his sister who agreed to take them to his abandoned house where she believed there were several bags of papers in the attic.³⁷

After a cold and bumpy ride in the open cab Ford, they pulled up to a creek. To their dismay, Mrs. Armentrout announced that they would have to leave the car and cross a treacherous swinging bridge to reach the house. McKissick, a University of South Carolina Professor, “rashly” charged ahead and promptly fell off the rickety bridge into the deepest part of the creek. After fishing out their water-logged friend, the group continued on to the boarded up house. Mrs. Armentrout struck a fire to warm them and then went to the attic in search of the papers. She returned with a huge cotton picking sack of old documents. Sampling the manuscripts, the first one that Kellar pulled out was dated 1795. Recognizing the potential value, Kellar asked if there were any more and Mrs. Armentrout told them that there were four other bags just like it. Experienced in the art of manuscript speculating, Kellar then coolly offered her five dollars a bag, sight unseen. She agreed. With great difficulty, they then hauled the precious cargo back across the hazardous bridge and tied them to the roof and the running boards of the Model T. “Looking like a moving hay stack,” the party drove back to Mrs. Armentrouts farm.³⁸

Eventually reaching the train station, they had to send the sacks by freight to their base of operations in Lexington. Tasked with assessing their uncommon package, the station agent refused to take them, because bags of letters were not listed in his book of fares. After some haggling and threatening to bring the musty sacks into the passenger car, the agent agreed to send them as “corn shucks.” Later that night and for the next

³⁷ Kellar to Bentley, May 17, 1926, box 35, Mss AC, MIHCC.

³⁸ Lucille M. Kane, “Manuscript Collecting,” in Hesselton and McNeil, eds., *In Support of Clio*, 41-43.

several days, the troop of historians poured over the contents of the bags in a hotel room at the Dutch Inn in Lexington. As they sorted through the collection they gradually discovered that the Armentrout haul of 12,000 items was a bonanza for all three: Phillips found items on slavery, McKissick had papers on South Carolina and Kellar had his own pile of agricultural documents and several letters by C.H. McCormick. The last document in the bags however, was easily the most impressive. Reaching to the bottom of the final sack, Kellar pulled out a land survey receipt for a plot “in the Dark and Bloody Ground,” signed by Daniel Boone.³⁹

In historical circles, the tale quickly became known as the “corn shucks” story. It was just one of a veritable library of yarns that Kellar spun at conferences and cocktail parties about his adventures on the hunt. Beginning in 1919 and with increasing frequency after 1922, Kellar journeyed to the valley of Virginia for weeks and sometimes months at a time in search of manuscripts regarding Cyrus McCormick and early nineteenth-century agriculture. A legendary collector, Kellar was famous for his ability to “charm documents out of the attics of patrician mansions and humble farm houses,” and arrive just before, “the match was struck to bonfires of family papers.” He then preserved them in the McCormick Agricultural Library or sold them to other historical repositories. Nicknamed the “boll weevil,” Kellar thoroughly surveyed and plundered old papers out of the western Virginia, leaving “slim pickings” in his wake.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Margaret C. Norton, “Herbert Anthony Kellar, 1887 – 1955,” *American Archivist* 19 (April, 1956): 151-153. Ulrich Phillips to Kellar, May 12, 1956, box 137, Mss AC, MIHCC.

Kellar's collecting activities in Virginia and elsewhere were liberally supported by the McCormick Historical Association. Kellar argued that securing evanescent and documentary materials that were privately held, relevant to their project and at risk of destruction should be a top priority. Finding these sources would "complete" their collection on Cyrus McCormick's life and prove paramount to ensuring the scholarly quality of the future biography. Lending additional urgency to the situation, Kellar discovered that the Leander McCormick-Goodharts were actively working to prevent the McCormick Historical Association from acquiring such papers from their mutual friends in Virginia. Finding himself engaged in a historical arms race, Kellar pressed the family to "act quickly." Alarmed by their cousins' impropriety and accepting Kellar's rationale, the McCormick's agreed to finance his annual manuscript hunts, providing him with letters of introduction to their various contacts in the region, and buying all of the trunks, bags and boxes of old papers that he believed were worthwhile.⁴¹

While collecting manuscripts to fill the McCormick Agricultural Library, Kellar was also advancing the interests of his fellow historian and promoting his own historical agenda. Most obviously, he was preserving a larger mass of materials for historians to study. In this regard, he was not only searching for materials relevant to McCormick, but in the mold of his fellow "New Historians," he took a broader view to enable future scholars to write more instructive and complete histories. He compiled a collection that touched on the social, agricultural and economic realities of McCormick's contemporaries in Virginia, rather than only empirical details of the invention. Moreover,

⁴¹ Kellar to Bentley, June 6, 1926, box 25; Kellar to Bentley, March 19, 1921; Kellar to Steuert, March 22, 1921, box 45; Kellar, "Agricultural Surveys," 1923 speech at the AHS annual meeting, box 86, Mss AC, MIHCC.

in his search he came across many papers that were irrelevant to the McCormick Historical Association. In these situations, he either alerted other repositories to private collections or bought and sold them himself. He also invited universities to create special collections and advised them in organization of their new archives.⁴²

Well informed on collections throughout the Midwest, South, and East, Kellar soon became a promoter of centralized surveying and cataloging efforts to help his fellow scholars locate sought after materials. Along these lines, he also viewed the activity of manuscript collecting as a vital avenue for garnering greater public interest in history. Importantly, barnstorming the country-side for old documents excited local historical interest. He believed that it invited Americans to participate in preserving their own family papers and founding local historical societies, while attracting popular engagement with historical scholarship. Indicative of his vision and ambitions for the profession, he noted that this interest would trickle upward from the local to the national level, generating additional demand for scholarship and support for the historical guild as a whole.⁴³

Not simply a magic trick like “pulling a rabbit out of a hat,” Kellar’s success in collecting was largely the product of networking and diligent note taking. He kept meticulous track of the people with whom Cyrus McCormick associated, which he discovered while processing and indexing the library’s collections. Tracing these historic

⁴² Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 92-97. Kellar to Alderman, February 14, 1928, box 133, Mss AC, MIHCC.

⁴³ Herbert Kellar, “Agricultural Surveys,” delivered at the 1923 AHS annual meeting, box 86; Herbert Kellar, “Report of the Committee on Co-Operation in Historical Work,” June 10, 1924, MVHA, box 107, Mss AC, MIHCC.

actors, he attempted to contact their descendants to see if they had extant papers. Kellar also made use of his professional colleagues who were familiar with Virginia and might know of privately held collections. He also used his peers to locate relevant materials in other libraries and archives. His most productive tactic, however, was to modestly discuss his historical projects with total strangers while he was on the trail. Kellar's reports on his trips to Virginia are littered with serendipitous encounters in hotels, on trains and at random farm houses with interested locals who freely shared their own papers or directed him to their friends.⁴⁴

Through these means, Kellar eventually created an informal partnership with a local surgeon and stamp-collector in Lynchburg, Virginia: Dr. Don Preston Peters. Continuously on the hunt for his own artifacts and locally situated, Peters forwarded his on-the-ground discoveries to Kellar in Chicago. Using this information, Kellar began remote negotiations with distant Virginians and, in many instances, bought papers by proxy through Peters, which he then held or forwarded. Becoming fast friends, Kellar and sometimes Ulrich Phillips (a collector in his own right) stayed with Peters' family on their trips to Virginia. The group then spent weeks roving the countryside together in search of manuscript treasure. In exchange, the historians gave Peters stamps from the collections they procured and used their network of historical colleagues to help locate stamps further afield.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Kellar to Bentley, May 17, 1926; June 5, 1926, box 25; Kellar to Mr. House, March 29, 1919; box 45, Mss AC, MIHCC. Lucille M. Kane, "Manuscript Collecting," in Hesselton and McNeil, eds., *In Support of Clio*, 41-43.

⁴⁵ Don Peters to Kellar, November 11, 1926; February 23, 1927; September 22, 1927; November 13, 1930; May 7, 1931; Kellar to Peters, November 14, 1926, box 45, Mss AC, MIHCC.

Through active collecting efforts, Kellar gradually built the McCormick Agricultural Library into a substantial archive. In correspondence with the McCormick Historical Association, he reassured the family that their library “is as complete a collection about any one man as can be found in America.” In so doing, Kellar advanced the family’s collection from tens of thousands of items related to their patriarch, to a million and a half items that created a historic context for Cyrus McCormick’s life and demonstrated his influence on the nation. The McCormicks came to own the largest archive of materials related to western Virginia in the country and substantial resources on the wheat producing states of the interior. Kellar’s broader collections policy and promotional efforts made it into a magnet for historians doing research on the South, the Midwest and agriculture. At the end of his life, it was recognized by his peers as “the best collection of colonial and nineteenth-century agricultural materials in the country.”⁴⁶

For a relatively brief period, from mid-1926 to 1930, Bentley disrupted Kellar’s archival agenda and restrained the McCormick Historical Association’s support of his efforts. In a somewhat humorous episode in 1926, Kellar seemed to invite financial sanctions and limits on his professional freedom by intentionally aggravating Bentley. That spring, Kellar informed Bentley that he was taking a two-week personal vacation to go manuscript collecting with Ulrich B. Phillips and would secure incidental McCormick materials that he found along the way. In a rare moment of good will, Bentley suggested that the McCormick’s pay for his time and expenses, encouraging Kellar to “finish up your unfinished work in Virginia for the Association.” Kellar took advantage of

⁴⁶ David Van Tassel and James Tinsley, “Historical Organizations as Aids to History,” in Hesselstine and McNeil, eds., *In Support of Clio*, 140. Margaret Norton, “Herbert Anthony Kellar,” *American Archivist*, 151. Kellar to Bentley, June 6, 1926, box 25, Mss AC, MIHCC.

Bentley's generosity, staying in Virginia for three months from mid-April to early July and accumulating over \$750 in expenses.⁴⁷

With no set deadline, Bentley began urging Kellar to return after several weeks and was increasingly infuriated by Kellar's insubordinate flouting of his authority. Issuing bi-weekly reports to Bentley while requesting additional funds, Bentley's responses must have made it apparent to Kellar that he was getting underneath the lawyer's skin. In late May, Bentley wrote "How far do you think we should make an effort to collect letters or other papers...? Have you any limit... in your mind?" Kellar's windy and strategic response about the value of such activities to their larger project, seems to have been a passive-aggressive, "...no." After Kellar's return to Chicago, he presented Bentley with a detailed report of his activities and suggested a large number of more expensive collections for the family to purchase. Responding unequivocally Bentley wrote, "I will only say that we will buy no more collections."⁴⁸

In Bentley's estimation the entire trip was a waste of time and Kellar's entire historical approach was unnecessarily "extravagant." Kellar had spent a lot of time and money to locate collections and materials, which were of "negligible importance" to the biography or settling the reaper controversy. Moreover, finding the materials was just the beginning of the expense. Kellar would then need to pour over "this haystack of correspondence" to find the "needle of reference to the machine," which might result in

⁴⁷ Kellar to Bentley, April 10, 1926; April 17, 1926, box 25, Mss AC; Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, October 14, 1926, box 59, Mss 1E, MIHCC.

⁴⁸ Kellar to Bentley, July 13, 1926, box 6, Mss AB; Kellar to Bentley, June 6, 1926, box 25, Mss AC; Bentley to Kellar, July 16, 1926, box 59, Mss 1E. Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, quarterly report, July, 1926, box 59, Mss 1E, MIHCC, included a summary of the correspondence between Kellar and himself as well as his reflections on Kellar's work.

hardly a sentence or paragraph in the larger biography. Stating both his frustration with Kellar's ever expanding agenda and a historical truth, "probably more time has been spent to collect material in this case than in the case of any single biography which has ever been published." Moreover, Kellar's enterprise had become a distraction from his primary task of outlining and organizing material for that biography. Bentley reported back to the McCormick's that it had become necessary to exert greater "control" over Kellar's work, rather than "allow[ing] him to follow his own bent." Without the family's consent, Bentley unilaterally defunded Kellar's collection accumulation and refused to finance future trips. Only discovering this decision in 1930, Cyrus McCormick II was incensed by Bentley's actions and re-instituted their previous policy of actively building the library's collection.⁴⁹

Despite being temporarily cut-off from the family's coffers, Kellar continued his efforts to advance the interests of the profession, moonlighting in manuscript speculation and dealing. Beginning in 1925 and accounting for his extended journey to Virginia in 1926, Kellar partnered with Ulrich Phillips and Don Peters to discover, purchase and sell old manuscripts. After 1926 and into the 1930s, Kellar took up these adventures on his personal vacations and managed their partnership remotely from Chicago through telegrams and mail. Correspondence among Phillips, Peters and Kellar are filled with details of their exploits ranging from manuscript leads to haggling with owners, discovering the fruits of their speculation and eventually selling their hauls to other repositories. Working around Bentley's embargo, he raided the library's discretionary

⁴⁹ Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, July, 1926; October 15, 1926, box 59, Mss 1E; Kellar to Cyrus McCormick II, April 12, 1930; Cyrus McCormick II to Kellar, April 17, 1930; Kellar to Bentley, April 14, 1930; Cyrus McCormick II to Bentley, April 15, 1930, box 9, Mss AB, MIHCC.

petty cash funds, so he could continue to secure McCormick documents to the library. Bentley eventually became wise to this ruse and closed the loop-hole, only renewing the fund on a monthly, rather than on an “as needed” basis. Kellar also processed his own collections, purchased as a speculation. While on the McCormick Library clock, he prepared inventories for potential buyers and carried out his moonlight business correspondence. Camouflaged in his ubiquitous indexing, cataloging, and processing of old documents owned by the library, Bentley was unable to detect Kellar’s deception.⁵⁰

The trio almost exclusively sold their wares to research universities and libraries, rather than private collectors. Drumming up interest in their holdings, they solicited librarians, historians, and administrators at institutions like the University of Michigan, the University of Illinois, the Business Historical Society, the American Antiquarian Society, Duke, Washington & Lee University, the University of Virginia, and the USDA. While they had success selling their collections fairly broadly in small lots, their best success was selling “Massie Papers” to the University of Texas in 1927 for \$1600. They purchased this collection in Virginia during their 1926 spree for \$275. Not solely an entrepreneurial enterprise, they conscientiously sold their collections to research institutions in order to advance historical scholarship and their particular interests in southern history. On several occasions, Kellar actively encouraged the University of Virginia and Washington & Lee University to establish special collections and offered assistance to help them organize their new archives. He argued that such efforts were

⁵⁰ Kellar to Cyrus McCormick II, April 12, 1930, box 9, Mss AB; Kellar to Bentley, July 12, 1927, box 35; Kellar to Phillips, August 27, 1926, box 137, Mss AC, MIHCC. Boxes 137 and 25 in the Hebert Kellar Papers (Mss AC) are respectively focused on Ulrich B. Phillips correspondence (mostly regarding manuscript collecting and dealing) and Kellar’s hunts in Virginia.

important to promote a higher quality of southern history and to prevent other libraries and private collectors, like himself, from stealing away Virginia's historic manuscripts to the North.⁵¹

By the mid-1920s, Kellar's library and active reconnaissance as well as his manuscript dealing made him the guru of archives and collections in the historical profession. He was famous for his willingness to share information about archives he had visited and help connect historians with collections. Moreover, his applied experience collecting and organizing the McCormick collection made him an expert on archival management and he was sought by other institutions interested in undertaking similar efforts. Recognizing his unique and valuable skill set, the MVHA made him the Chair of its Historical Co-Operation Committee in 1923 (later renamed the Historical Manuscripts Committee). Much later, in 1939 the AHA followed suit and appointed him to lead their Committee on Historical Source Materials.⁵²

The Life of Cyrus H. McCormick

Herbert Kellar was certainly most interested in archive and profession building, but the majority of his time was spent in the McCormick Agricultural Library preparing materials for the biography of Cyrus H. McCormick. Initially, Kellar had been responsible for a wider spectrum of library activities including: facilitating use of the

⁵¹ Kellar to Ulrich Phillips, January 27, 1928; Phillips to Kellar, May 26 1926; February 28, 1927, box 137; Kellar to Dr. Alderman, February 14, 1926, box 133; Kellar to Clarence Brigham (AAS), October 16, 1926; Claribel Barnett (USDA) to Kellar, October 27, 1926; box 25; Kellar to W.F. Boyd (Duke), October 16, 1926; Kellar to Franklin Riley (Washington & Lee), January 31, 1927; Kellar to P.L. Winsor (Illinois), May 27, 1927; Kellar to the Business Historical Society, August 24, 1927; Harry Clemmons (Virginia) to Kellar, November 22, 1928, box 45, Mss AC, MIHCC

⁵² Clara Paine to Kellar, October 24, 1923, box 107; Robert Binkley to Conyers Read, January 16, 1939, box 101, Mss AC, MIHCC. Norton, "Herbert Anthony Kellar," 151-153.

materials by outside scholars, responding to family research inquiries, genealogical studies, occasional International Harvester requests, and collections cataloging as well as historical writing for external publications. Gradually, this list of responsibilities was delegated to an ever-growing staff, so that Kellar could focus on preparing materials for the biography.⁵³

As the family's foremost priority since 1900, the authoritative biography, in their minds, was the key to protecting their father's past and securing his enshrinement in *The Hall of Fame of Great Americans* at New York University. Bentley's job with the McCormicks was to lay plans and execute the family's campaign for the *Hall of Fame* every five years. Using his legal expertise, he also developed strategies for handling the inter-family historical conflict with the various members of the Leander McCormick clan. Within these realms, he offered oceans of contingency plans that balanced the need for the family to both influence the public opinion and the *Hall of Fame* electors while simultaneously making their propaganda appear dignified. A future scholarly biography was seen as the chief means to accomplish this delicate balance and achieve their goal. Failing to have Cyrus McCormick elected in 1915 and 1920, they did not even attempt a campaign in 1925, because they did not yet have the biography in hands as their desired tool of influence. Bentley seems to have mostly offered non-actionable legal advice, but

⁵³ Herbert Kellar, "A Proposed Staff and Organization for the Work of the Historical Association," August 25, 1924, Box 5, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

intent on showing his own value to the family, he spent most of his time managing the preparation of the biography, and by association - Herbert Kellar.⁵⁴

Bentley and the McCormick Historical Association's strategy for completing the biography was multi-faceted. As already demonstrated, they believed that building a complete collection of materials on their patriarch's life was crucial to the enterprise and agreed with Kellar on at least a philosophical level that encouraging scholarly use of that collection would be beneficial to them. Furthermore, they had Kellar prepare a historically-informed, incredibly-detailed outline for the future authoritative biography. He also created an extensive note index of the evidence in their possession that supported the outline. This meticulous task of note-taking and cross-referencing accounted for the majority of Kellar's labor during the 1920s. At the same time, Bentley prepared a legalistic rendering of materials and Kellar's outline as they related to the controversial invention of the reaper. With all of these carefully manicured materials prepared, they could simply hand them over to a commissioned historian to write the biography they envisioned. The historian only provided his name and writing style, rather than his historical imagination.⁵⁵

Given the importance of the historian's reputation and prose to the project, their search for a biographer was intensive. Their quest began in 1919. Illustrative of their

⁵⁴ Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine and Harold McCormick, June 19, 1925; Bentley to Kellar, April 29, 1925; Kellar to Bentley, June 13, 1925; Cyrus McCormick III to Cyrus McCormick II, February 25, 1930; February 25, 1930; box 1, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

⁵⁵ A ubiquitous feature of Kellar's reports to Bentley beginning in 1922 was his progress on the outline and the number of note cards he had completed. Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, March 31, 1920; November 23, 1923; box 2; Kellar to Bentley, December 21, 1923, box 4; Kellar to Bentley, November 26, 1924; December 11, 1925; April 27 1927, box 5, Mss 9c; Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, Harold McCormick, Anita McCormick Blaine, July 30, 1925; Cyrus Bentley, "The Invention of the McCormick Reaper," Page Proofs, R.R. Donnelly & Sons, 1930, box 21, Mss AB, MIHCC.

unconventional approach, they began their quest by flipping through a booklet about the “New Historians” in Columbia University’s *Chronicles of America Series*. They jotted notes in the margins and circled scholars that seemed the most desirable, as if buying furniture in a Sears-Roebuck catalog. They then consulted with James Franklin Jameson, Clarence Alvord and Dana Munro, to get their thoughts on these candidates. Writing numerous “Pros and Cons” memorandums, they assessed and compared historians including: Frederick Jackson Turner, John Bach McMasters, Ellis Oberholzer, Carl Becker, Clarence Alvord, Frederic Paxson, and Arthur Cole as well as many others. Their assessments were not engaged with scholarship, but were chiefly interested in superficial questions of character. McMasters was undesirable because “he is... crotchety;” in the wake of anti-German sentiment sparked by World War I Oberholzer’s “name would be an insuperable obstacle,” and Turner was an “interminable procrastinator.” Cyrus McCormick II noted from his personal experience that Alvord had “excellent qualifications,” but after correspondence with Jameson, the notes on Alvord were cryptically changed to “not... up to our standards.” This research eventually led to a succession of interviews during the early 1920s with Arthur Cole, Frederic Paxson and William E. Dodd, but all were found wanting.⁵⁶

To his chagrin, Kellar was kept outside of the candidate search. In 1922, he attempted to assume authority over the process. At the MVHA meeting that year, he

⁵⁶ Cyrus McCormick II to Cyrus Bentley, October 17, 1919; Dana Munro to Cyrus McCormick II, September 2, 1919; James Franklin James to Cyrus McCormick II, January 17, 1921; Cyrus McCormick II, Memorandum on Meeting with Frederic Paxson, June 6, 1921, box 401, Mss 1E; Cyrus McCormick II to Bentley, January 30, 1923; Yale University Press, “The New Historians: A Booklet About the Authors of the *Chronicles of America Series*,” “Meeting of the McCormick Historical Association with Arthur Cole,” December 31, 1921; “Analysis of Suggested Historians to Date,” May 11, 1920; Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, March 31, 1920, box 2, Mss 9c; Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine, June 30, 1927, box 28, Mss 2c, MIHCC.

discussed the biographical project with several historians, outlining the family's ambitions for the project. After generating some interest, he wrote a report on his work to Cyrus Bentley, recommending Clarence Alvord, Carl Becker, Milo Quaife, and himself as qualified candidates for the job. In response, Bentley sharply reprimanded him for holding conversations with possible biographers without the McCormick's consent and demanded "that you do not speak to anybody else." Indignantly, Kellar noted the irony of being excluded from Bentley's search, "in view of [my] familiarity with Mr C H McCormick's life, knowledge of the historical field of America, and acquaintance with members of the profession." He further urged Bentley that it was in the "best interests" of the family to consult with him about their search. Bentley disagreed with his upstart employee and Kellar continued to be isolated from the process.⁵⁷

After becoming intensively involved in the search from 1919 to 1922, the McCormick Historical Association delegated the job to Bentley. In this capacity, Bentley did almost nothing, because he hoped that he would become the biographer by default. In 1927, Cyrus McCormick II discovered that Bentley had neglected the search. He confronted Bentley about his disregard for the family's important priority, wondering aloud why the family paid him anything at all. Bentley's job was only preserved because Anita and Harold quickly chided Cyrus II for his malicious treatment of their longtime counselor and shamed their brother into keeping Bentley on the payroll. Despite Bentley's continued employment, McCormick and his brother took control of the biographer search and, in short order, commissioned William T. Hutchinson to write the

⁵⁷ Bentley to Kellar, May 18, 1922; April 25, 1922; Bentley, "Memorandum, re: Mr Kellar's Search for a Biographer," May 18, 1922; Kellar to Bentley, April 24, 1922; May 4, 1922, box 2, Mss 9c.

biography. Hutchinson came on the recommendation of William E. Dodd of the University of Chicago. The latter was a southern born Democrat, whose writings on Southern history and Woodrow Wilson, the first Southerner elected President after the Civil War, all made him compatible with the McCormick family's political outlook. Hutchinson had just received his doctorate from the University of Chicago that May, and Dodd was looking out for one of his graduate students. Ironically, this culminating decision after decades of preparation was made for sake of expedience, regardless of the fact that Hutchinson had no reputation to speak of and McCormick found Dodd's biography of his friend Woodrow Wilson to be lackluster. They selected Hutchinson because he was available and they needed the job done in time for the next *Hall of Fame* vote.⁵⁸

William E. Dodd took the opportunity to lobby the family for financial support with some success. Initially, he asked the McCormick's for a \$200,000 endowment for the University of Chicago History Department. After that ploy was rejected, he informed the family that the department chair, Andrew McLaughlin, was going to retire, leaving him with a larger work load and less time to assist Hutchinson. Dodd suggested that the family sweeten McLaughlin's salary by \$1,500 to keep him on the job, which the family obligingly did. Following that escapade, Dodd went to their coffers again, explaining that he would leave the University of Chicago for a better paying job at Cornell, unless the

⁵⁸ Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, March 22, 1927; Cyrus McCormick II to Bentley, March 25, 1927; Anita McCormick Blaine to Cyrus McCormick II, March 22, 1927; Harold McCormick to Cyrus McCormick II, March 28, 1927; Dodd to Cyrus McCormick II, April 8, 1927, box 7, Mss AB; Memorandum of conference attended by William Dodd, Harold McCormick and Cyrus Bentley, May 21, 1927; Cyrus McCormick II to Mr. Stilwell, May 22, 1927; Harold McCormick to Cyrus McCormick II, May 23, 1927; Cyrus McCormick II to Anita McCormick Blaine, June 30, 1927, box 28, Mss 2C, MIHCC.

family subsidized his salary for the next five years. In a sort of odd turn of events, the family actually wrote a check for \$25,000 and presented it to Dodd. Embarrassed by the outward corruptive appearance of this transaction and indicating the changing professional ethos, Dodd gave the check back and explained that he would arrange it as a gift to the history department. Dodd never followed-up on this plan and the check sat in the McCormick Estate office for many years. The entire series of episodes between McCormick and Dodd suggests the degree to which the historian was able to leverage his position and the family's anxieties to secure greater financial support. It also indicates the lengths that the family would go to secure the biography.⁵⁹

Hutchinson began research for the project in June of 1927. In collaboration between the family and the historians, he decided to divide the project into two chronological volumes divided at 1858. The family agreed not to interfere with Hutchinson's writing, but retained the right to leave the finished manuscript unpublished if they found the work to be unfavorable. The McCormicks were confident, however, that Dodd would ensure that Hutchinson's work met their standard and did justice to their father's legacy. The McCormick Historical Association paid him a wage of \$3500 annually to work on the biography. Hutchinson was given free access to the McCormick Agricultural Library and the Kellar's outlines and notes. He was also thoroughly versed

⁵⁹ Cyrus McCormick II, "Memorandum," February 16, 1927; Harold McCormick to Stilwell, June 9, 1927, box 7; Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, October 1, 1929, box 8, Mss AB; Dodd to Cyrus McCormick II, July 19, 1928; December 24, 1928; May 10, 1932; Cyrus McCormick II to Dodd, September 5, 1928, May 26, 1932; Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, Anita McCormick Blaine and Harold McCormick. January 11, 1929; box 20, Cyrus McCormick II, Donation Papers, Mss 5c, MIHCC.

by Cyrus Bentley on the reaper controversy and the forcible argument against the “Robert legend.”⁶⁰

When the first volume was complete and published in late 1930, the family was satisfied that Hutchinson had unequivocally proven that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper in 1831. Unfortunately, however, it was released too late for the 1930 *Hall of Fame* election. Hutchinson’s “beautifully written,” *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Seedtime* presented a full and contextualized history of the reaper magnate from his humble origins on a Virginia plantation to the dawn of the Civil War. The family distributed this first volume and its 1935 companion *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest*, to historians, libraries and notable dignitaries across the country as the primary proof that their patriarch had invented the reaper. The carefully curated two-volume biography was the product of over thirty years of collection building by the family and still stands today as the authoritative account on the origins of the reaper, its supposed inventor, and the nineteenth-century harvester industry.⁶¹

On the issue of the reaper controversy, Hutchinson included a full chapter detailing the inter-family conflict that systematically countered the points of the “Robert legend,” as a wholesale fabrication. This crucial point rested on Leander and William’s testimony in mid-nineteenth-century patent trials. In these instances, both brothers testified that Cyrus had invented the reaper in 1831. Uncritical of these sources,

⁶⁰ “Historical Association – Receipts and Disbursements,” January 9, 1928; Cyrus McCormick II to Dodd, December 28, 1927; box 7; Dodd to Bentley, January 15, 1930; January 28, 1930; Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, January 16, 1930; box 20, Mss AB, MIHCC.

⁶¹ William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Seedtime, 1809- 1856* (New York: The Century Company, 1930); William T. Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Harvest, 1856 - 1884* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935).

Hutchinson ignored that Cyrus' brothers made these statements to protect their mutual company's market supremacy and intellectual property. As Cyrus' siblings and co-owners of the business, their testimony was totally in-line with their story that Robert invented the reaper and entrusted it to Cyrus to manage for the family's interests. The patent court was an inappropriate venue to clarify their family understanding. Moreover in the antebellum era, the familial business arrangement needed no clarification, because Cyrus was financially taking care of all of his immediate relatives. If they had testified that Cyrus did not invent the reaper, as they believed, it would have upset a functional arrangement and jeopardized their entire clan's economic well-being. With the patent testimony as "proof" that Cyrus' brothers were lying about Robert inventing the reaper, Hutchinson utilized a wealth of archived correspondence to show that the cousins' antagonistically advanced this "myth" to extort wealth from the heirs.⁶²

To the Kellar's dismay, in 1928 Hutchinson chose not to use his outline or his notes for any of his work. Hutchinson insisted on handling the original materials himself and coming to his own conclusions. His refusal cast aside years of Kellar's work carefully preparing notes to support his detailed outline for the monumental project. Kellar seemed to serve no function for the McCormick Historical Association. Noticing the lull in the archivist's work by the end of 1928, Bentley recommended they let Kellar go, stating to the family that the archivist's "usefulness is drawing to a close." Cognizant of his vulnerable position, Kellar saved his job by making his expert services more available to International Harvester Company. He became the historical advisor for the

⁶² Hutchinson, *Cyrus Hall McCormick: Seedtime*, CHAPTER 5.

company's 1931 centennial celebration of the reaper, which the advertising department had begun planning in 1927.⁶³

Corporate Historian

Oddly, International Harvester's preparations for the hundredth anniversary of the invention of the reaper began independently of the McCormick family in 1927. In April of that year, a copy writer in the Advertising Department, Sanford B. White, boldly suggested to the company's vice president, Cyrus McCormick III, that the company create a film about Cyrus McCormick's reaper and carry-out a nationwide celebration of the invention for the centennial. White's idea fit well within the company's entrenched nostalgic advertising campaigns, however, he was most likely encouraged by the new emphasis placed on history in the advertising profession. Historic advertising was in professional vogue during the mid-1920s. A 1926 *Printers' Ink* article, "History as a Factor In Good-Will Advertising," seems to have been a reference item within the department. He further noted that the Baltimore & Ohio Railroads' own centennial celebration in 1927 which included exhibits, pageants, speeches, souvenirs, advertising and huge public picnics, could provide the company with ideas about how best to honor the occasion. Predictably, McCormick III, the Company, the Advertising Department, and the rest of the family quickly endorsed the scheme.⁶⁴

⁶³ Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, December 4, 1928; box 7; Bentley to Dodd, January 13, 1930, box 20, Mss AB, MIHCC.

⁶⁴ S.B. White to Cyrus McCormick III, April 9, 1927, box 1, International Harvester – Centennial Celebration additions, M2002-049, Don Gridley, "History as a Factor in Good-Will Advertising," *Printers' Ink Monthly* (January, 1926): 44-45, 133-134; James True, "Advertising the Fair of the Iron Horse," *Printer's Ink*, November 3, 1927; James Murray to Cyrus McCormick II, November 17, 1926; Cyrus McCormick II to Edward Hungerford, November 20, 1928; Hungerford to Cyrus McCormick II, November 22, 1922, box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

The Advertising Department laid out an ambitious itinerary for the centennial festivities by the spring of 1928. The yearlong fête would include the film, a permanent McCormick reaper monument, celebrations at regional offices around the world, radio broadcasts, and striking advertising features in all of the nation's newspapers. They would also hand out free centennial medallions, stamps, calendars, books, and special editions of *Harvester World* to people across the country. Reminiscent of Barker's *Story of Bread*, these activities would lead the public "to regard the centenary of the birth of the new agriculture – of the farmer's emancipation from the slavery of hand labor, and of the world's emancipation from the perils of famine." Presenting this campaign to the Company's executive committee, E.S. Simpson explained that the campaign would be expensive, but would "produce a great volume of publicity of a kind unpurchasable at any price and unobtainable in any other way." He stressed that "No other... Company... has such a historical background... universally recognized as the source of the industry and of a world-wide economic revolution."⁶⁵

To fulfill its monumental aspirations, the advertising department turned to Hebert Kellar to give their activities the weight of historical authenticity. Prior to 1927, the Company had intermittently used the McCormick Agricultural Library as a resource for their legal and advertising needs. Holding all of McCormick Harvesting Machine Company's pre-1902 legal, patent, advertising and sales records, the library served an obvious, if under-utilized, corporate function as its informal archives. With additional weight placed on historical advertising, however, the collection and its historian-archivist became increasingly valuable to the Company. For his part, Kellar jumped at the

⁶⁵ E.S. Simpson to George Ranney, "McCormick Reaper Centennial," April 6, 1928, box 7, Mss AB.

opportunity to provide a concrete service to the McCormick's enterprise at a moment when his job was hanging in the balance. In his capacity as the company's historical advisor amongst advertising professionals, Kellar was finally respected as a historical authority and given a high level of autonomy.⁶⁶

Kellar's point of entry into the advertising work was the Company's film production, "The Romance of the Reaper," named after Herbert Casson's 1908 history of the corporation. The idea was to film historically re-enactment the evolution of harvesting machinery with a particular emphasis on Cyrus McCormick's invention and trial of the reaper in 1831. The company planned on shooting the film at Walnut Grove, Virginia, the property where McCormick allegedly invented the reaper and which the family still owned. As a historical advisor, Kellar began by giving R.E. Kenny, the Harvester man in charge of film research, information about the actual geographical location where the reaper was invented and the condition of the relevant historic buildings. Providing detailed, fruitful and interesting information, the director of the Advertising Department, F.W. Heiskell instructed his staff to make greater use of Kellar.⁶⁷

The historian was soon involved in every facet of the production. Already thoroughly acquainted with the story of the reaper's inception and patent documentation, Kellar did more research to become thoroughly versed on the specific conditions of the landscape and the geography. He also became an expert in the relevant craft methods and

⁶⁶ Kellar to Bentley, December 21, 1923, box 4; Alice Kroeschell to Bentley, March 5, 1925, box 5, Mss 9c; Kellar to R.E. Kenny, February 23, 1927; H.P. Doolittle to Kellar, December 30, 1927, box 7, Mss AB MIHCC.

⁶⁷ Kellar to R.E. Kenny, May 9, 1927; Kenny to Kellar, May 13, 1927, box 7, Mss AB.

material cultures of the nineteenth century to make the film historically accurate.

Bringing all of this knowledge to bear, he revised the script, chose the fields to plant in 1928, picked the sightlines for the cameras, revised the script with the family, helped company mechanics to recreate historic machines, and selected the props and costumes. No detail was left unnoticed as he considered everything from top hats to narrative syntax.⁶⁸

During this process, Cyrus Bentley peevishly attempted to wrest control of Historical Association's participation in the company's movie. He successfully convinced the family that he should be their primary liaison with the Company on matters of the film and the centennial celebration. Kellar's authoritative role in the project was only preserved by the company's preference for his energy and historical expertise over the lawyer's contemplative and balkish pace. At the behest of the advertising department, the company president, Alexander Legge, lobbied the family to reconsider. Legge tactfully notified the family that the company did not wish to "impose" on Bentley's time, but favored Kellar as a better fit for their needs. Harold McCormick agreed. In his estimation, Kellar had taken the initiative and was "already on the ground with representatives of the Harvester Company." Not to take anything away from Bentley, Harold stated that in his experience, "Kellar is the most effective continuous contact man in detail work." Cyrus McCormick II heartily consented, stating, "There was nothing

⁶⁸ S.B. White, Memorandum, August 24, 1928, Bentley to Cyrus McCormick II, September 29, 1928; box 7; R.E. Kenny to Kellar, February 20, 1928; Kellar to Bentley, February 12, 1929; MAY 11, 1929; June 7, 1929; Anita McCormick, Memorandum, June 7, 1929; Hebert Kellar, "Comment on the IHC Scenario – Romance of the Reaper," June 4, 1929, box 8, Mss AB; Kellar to C.S. Stilwell, September 18, 1928; Kellar to Cyrus McCormick II, "List of Points – Fillm", June 12, 1929, box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

Kellar could do more important than helping,” the Company. Kellar became the official historical advisor for not only the film, but all of the Company’s centennial planning.⁶⁹

With International Harvester’s endorsement, Kellar was able to coopt Bentley’s authority within the Historical Association. As their principal advisor to the Company, he gained increased access to the family to report on the Company’s plans, record their input on the proceedings, and share his personal insights. Bentley’s influence waned as it became apparent that his participation was superfluous next to Kellar’s. Moreover, his assistance was equally unnecessary for Hutchinson’s biography of Cyrus McCormick. The family kept Bentley in his managerial role with their Historical Association until his death in the summer of 1930. It was apparent by 1929, however, that the McCormick’s only maintained his counsel as an act of personal courtesy rather than because of his actual value to their historical efforts.

Between June 1 and July 20, 1929 International Harvester mechanics and advertising men, a Fox-Case Corporation film crew, hundreds of cast members and Herbert Kellar descended on Walnut Grove in Virginia. When they reached the site for filming, Kellar was everywhere, fastidiously paying attention to all of the physical details of the film and tweaking the script on site to achieve the best affect. He took care of costuming the entire cast in proper attire and made sure that all of the men were clean shaven - the fashion of the day. Taking tools in his hands he led the physical reconditioning of Walnut Grove blacksmith shop into a period piece. With assistance

⁶⁹ Cyrus McCormick II, Memorandum on Centenary, December 20, 1928; Alex Legge to Harold McCormick June 12, 1929; Harold McCormick to Cyrus McCormick II, June 17, 1929; S.B. White to Harold McCormick, May 13, 1929; Cyrus McCormick II to Harold McCormick, June 12, 1929 box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

from company mechanics, he removed gutters, telephone poles, light fixtures and electric wires, covered cement with clay, put in a foot scraper on the front step, placed benches, created curtains and a made variety of other alterations. He also oversaw the construction of a replica carriage and learned how to teamster oxen. After that, he tweaked the old and replica machines to work in the fields – rediscovering how to make them cut productively. In all of these activities, he closely explained his historical process to A.C. Seyfarth and S.B. White of the advertising department, earning the nickname “Historical Accuracy” Kellar by the time the filming wrapped in mid-July.⁷⁰

When Fox-Case finished editing “Romance of the Reaper,” in 1930, it was a twenty-six minute synthesis of the Cyrus McCormick family’s story of the invention and decades of company advertising. The overarching plot was a march of progress from pre-1831 grain-cutting technology to the pinnacle of modern grain harvesting machinery, the combine. Heavily informed by the Edwin Barker’s Service Bureau narratives of the early 1910s, Cyrus McCormick’s invention of 1831 was no-less than the watershed end of toil and famine, harkening a new age of progress.⁷¹

Importantly, however, the film emphasized and depicted the moment of invention. The “Romance” showed young McCormick’s toil inventing the reaper in 1831, faithfully following the family’s longtime tradition of the events and indirectly countering the naysaying of the Leander McCormick family. The film acknowledged that Cyrus’s

⁷⁰ Kellar to Bentley, August 1, 1929, box 8, Mss AB; Kellar to U.B. Phillips, July 24, 1929, box 137, Mss AC; S.B. White to Kellar, June 12, 1931, box 3, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

⁷¹ Anita Blaine McCormick to Cyrus McCormick II, June 14, 1930, box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC. International Harvester Company, “The Romance of the Reaper,” film, 1930, Wisconsin Digital Collection, viewed May 7, 2014, available online at: <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15932coll3/id/0/rec/1>

father, Robert Hall, had attempted to invent the machine, but could not “unlock the riddle of the reaper,” and abandoned the project. While on-lookers scoffed and his younger brother, Leander played childish games, Cyrus McCormick struggled to create the ingenious reaper with only the assistance of his trusty “helper” and “servant,” the enslaved Joe Anderson. Eventually, Cyrus took the finished reaper to Steele’s Tavern for a test-run in front of a crowd of curious friends and locals (including pioneers in a Conestoga wagon headed west). The reaper miraculously worked and the crowd was amazed, following the machine through the field as it cut grain. Cyrus McCormick had set progress in motion.⁷²

While the details of the story were the same as they had been in the 1880s, the visual medium of film imparted more powerful and definite weight to the story through imagery. The fundamental point of contention by the Leander family, that Cyrus had little mechanical instinct was refuted by scenes of Cyrus working away in the blacksmith shop hammering and cutting pieces that he fit together to form the machine. Moreover, this narrative was underscored by Kellar’s choice of costumes. Cyrus looked every bit the stereotypical manly Jacksonian-era craftsman, with a craft apron, rolled up sleeves and dirty hands. Alternatively, his brothers, father and neighbors were all dressed as gentlemen in vests and tailcoats with cravats, white gloves, and top hats looking too effeminate and incompetent for the arduous work of invention. Among these images, one particular detail stands out: Cyrus McCormick building the side-to-side sickle blade in the blacksmith shop. Importantly, the sickle blade in 1831 was actually forged by Selah

⁷² International Harvester Company, “The Romance of the Reaper,” film, 1930, Wisconsin Digital Collection, viewed May 7, 2014, available online at: <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15932coll3/id/0/rec/1>

Holbrook, a local smithy, because McCormick lacked the ability to build such an intricate piece of iron work. The film was another layer of historical construction. Through the medium of the film the family and the company made the image Cyrus McCormick as the inventor more complete than even they had previously claimed.⁷³

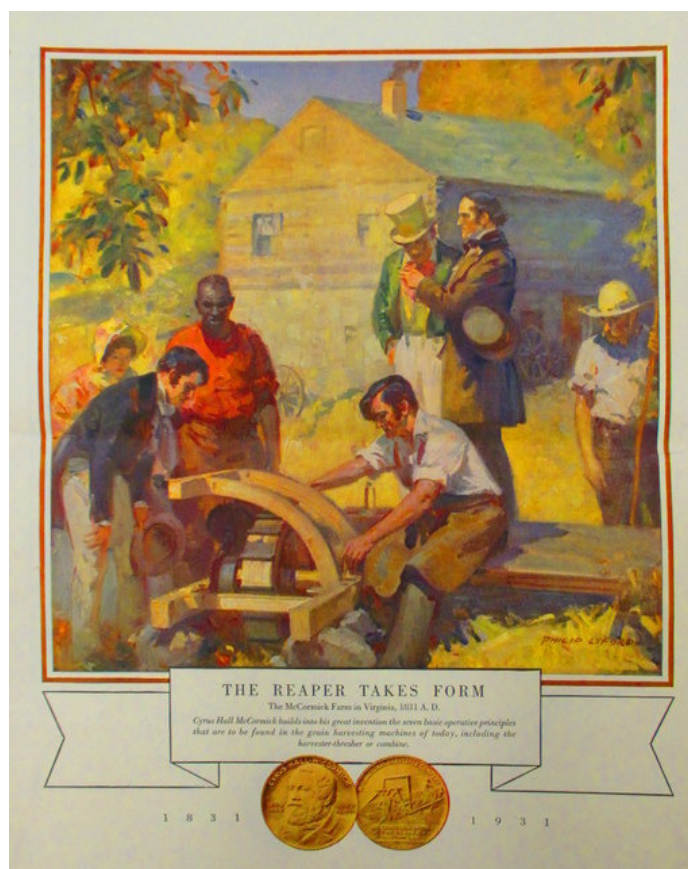


Figure 14: “The Reaper Takes Form.” IHC Centennial Advertising borrowed heavily from imagery in the film. This poster depicts a scene from the movie in which Cyrus is toiling away in front of on-lookers.⁷⁴

Taking many artistic liberties, the movie allowed the company and the family to present a seamless narrative of the past on the silver screen for public consumption. The movie flattened out decades of historical controversy and fabricated new details to make

⁷³ Ibid. C.D. Harnsberger to Kellar, October 6, 1919, box 3, Mss 9c, MIHCC.

⁷⁴ International Harvester, “The Reaper Takes Form,” poster, 1931, box 3, Mss 2Q, MIHCC.

the story of Cyrus McCormick's heroic invention more complete. Herbert Kellar played the important role of making prop, process and costume decisions that made that narrative more historically believable and compelling. The family was thrilled with the company's finished product and Kellar's participation in shaping it.⁷⁵

Returning from filming in late July of 1929, Kellar immediately became involved with International Harvester's larger plans for the celebration on all levels. He supplied images from the archive and historical content for the company's advertising, which ubiquitously included information about Cyrus McCormick's legacy. In this pursuit, he even researched and delivered specific historical information for every agency to make use of for their local advertising, including the specific details of who bought and sold the first reapers in their territory. Along these lines, he wrote a three volume "source book" on the company's history, which was distributed to school teachers and the general public by company salesmen. He also aided Cyrus McCormick III in writing a history of the company, *The Century of the Reaper*. Presenting the company with the 1831 reaper's original design, he assisted in fabricating 400 replicas to install at all of the company's dealerships and factories, authoring the accompanying interpretive copy. For the company's celebratory banquets and public events, he helped the advertising department write a generic speech on the history of the reaper and its impact on civilization. Choosing imagery and phraseology, Kellar participated in designing a commemorative

⁷⁵ Anita McCormick Blaine to Cyrus McCormick II, June 14, 1930, box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

medallion that the company distributed by the millions. By 1931, there was not a single aspect of the centennial that was not covered in Kellar's fingerprints.⁷⁶

Predictably, the Leander McCormick's began their counter-campaign for the past in 1930. International Harvester was concerned about this potential interference and actually pled with the Cyrus McCormick family not to wage a *Hall of Fame* effort in 1930. Recognizing that the Leander faction usually responded to the Cyrus group's *Hall of Fame* drives, Company officials feared that another election cycle might do irreparable damage to their brand. Heeding the company's advice, the family only ensured that their father was on the ballot and because Hutchinson's book was not yet ready, took no further promotional steps. Despite their caution, beginning in early 1931 the Leanders carried out their own celebrations, distributed medallions honoring Robert McCormick, placed reaper models in museums and influenced articles in *Commerce* and *Fortune* magazines which cast doubt on the their cousins and the company's claims to the past.⁷⁷

When these actions came to light in February of 1931, Kellar claimed the mantle of authority and laid out the Company's strategic response. He recommended that they simply ignore the cousins and ratchet up the scale of their own celebration, casting a wider net with more advertising, more books, more movie showings, more radio and

⁷⁶ International Harvester Centennial Committee and Sub-Committee Meeting, July 28, 1930, Minutes, box 1; H.C. Pemberton to IHC, June 30, 1931, box 3; A.C. Seyfarth to Kellar, October 1, 1930, box 4, Mss 1Q; Cyrus McCormick II to Bentley, May 14, 1930, box 1, Mss 2Q; Herbert Kellar to Cyrus McCormick II, Anita McCormick Blaine and Harold McCormick, Report on 1931, February 3, 1932, box 35, Mss AC; Kellar to Cyrus McCormick II, October 28, 1930, box 9, Mss AB; "McCormick Reaper Centennial Source Book," (Chicago: 1931), Box 643, IHC Corporate Archives Central File, Mss 6z, MIHCC. Cyrus McCormick, *Century of the Reaper* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931).

⁷⁷ Cyrus McCormick III to Cyrus McCormick II, February 25, 1930; February 26, 1930; Box 38, Mss AB; Herbert Kellar, "Family Centennial Committee Report," box 1, Mss 2Q, MIHCC.

more press, with the addition of pageants and programs for stage productions in theaters.

He noted that such a plan:

Would have the effect of firmly establishing in the mind of the American people the true fact of the invention of the reaper, in a way they would never forget... It would create a tradition for the future about Cyrus McCormick and the invention of the reaper that would become as truly part of American History as our heritage of Washington and Lincoln. Furthermore any protests or counter-celebrations of the Leander group would be overthrown in the mass of information for Cyrus and eventually drowned out.

Offering a clear break from Bentley's plans of officially refuting the cousins, Kellar knew that regardless of their ability to prove that Cyrus McComick invented the reaper, they could never silence the opposition. Rather, they could diminish those protests in the public mind through sheer volume. He confidently reassured the company and the family that distributing such a wealth of historically sound materials would ensure that "historians, scholars and the intelligent publics," would "vouch for their authenticity," in the long run. With decades of experience as a professional historian, Kellar knew that shaping public memory was a matter of repetition, not legalistic debate. In effect, he embraced the de-facto position that the Company had held for decades in widely distributing its branded advertising.⁷⁸

The Company adopted Kellar's strategy. With the exception of adding more radio broadcasts and developing theater productions, they agreed that washing out the Leander McCormicks in a tide of publicity was the best course of action. The advent of familial dissent and Kellar's response, also prompted the McCormick family to initiate its own celebratory preparations apart from International Harvester's. Suspecting that the Leander

⁷⁸ Kellar to Judson Stone, February 16, 1931, box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

McCormicks were waging their campaign in the valley of Virginia, they plotted their own response in the seat of battle. Following the company's lead, the family appointed Kellar, to organize two massive public celebrations at Washington & Lee University in Lexington and Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg.⁷⁹

The centennial celebration of 1931 was a yearlong stream of events and publications on a grand scale which were aimed at a variety of audiences. International Harvester held banquets and movie screenings for its employees across the nation in the office, in the field, and in the factory. For the general public, a series of articles were printed in the *Saturday Evening Post* as well as other national and local periodicals. Customers received these messages even more forcefully, through all of the Company's sales literature and commercial exhibits. In rural areas, every International Harvester dealership in the nation arranged for public screenings of "Romance of the Reaper" and sponsored special events for children and adults alike. Virginians were particularly targeted. The family's two "McCormick Day" celebrations in late summer, included pageants, picnics, movie screenings, speeches and ceremonies, parts of which were broadcast over the radio to the nation. At Washington & Lee University, the family also unveiled a statue of the late Cyrus McCormick. Across the country, every person that attended these events was given a bronze medallion to commemorate the occasion.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Herbert Kellar, "Family Centennial Committee Report," box 1, Mss 2Q.; "Conference," Minutes, February 17, 1931; box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

⁸⁰ Herbert Kellar, "Family Centennial Committee Report," box 1, Mss 2Q; IHC to Cyrus McCormick II, February 11, 1931; "Meeting of the Centennial Committee and Sub-Committee," Minutes, July 28, 1930 box 1; Harold McCormick to Anita McCormick Blaine, March 31, 1931, box 2; Hans Emch to Cyrus McCormick III, July 27, 1931, box 3; Mss 1Q; Herbert Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Harold McCormick and Cyrus McCormick II, "Report on 1931," February 3, 1932, box 35, Mss AB; American Society of Agricultural Engineers, "Pageant Portraying the Evolution and Development of Grain Harvesting Machinery," Program, July 24, 1931, box 1, M2002-049; MIHCC. Mss 4Q is composed of 4

Attention was also particularly directed to educational and agricultural institutions as the sites for perpetuating their history in the future. The Company distributed roughly 30,000 copies of Cyrus McCormick III's *Century of the Reaper*, 2,500 copies of Hutchinson's *Cyrus Hall McCormick* and untold thousands of its "Centennial Source Book," most of which went to libraries, universities and grade schools. Along this avenue, the company created a 4-H scholarship fund to aid students in learning about modern agricultural practices and presented an endowment to Washington & Lee University in Blacksburg. It also presented a donation to the the American Society of Agricultural Engineers and assisted them in creating a pageant and program about Cyrus McCormick for their annual meeting. They further arranged a special screening of the "Romance of the Reaper" for employees of the USDA in Washington. Not losing sight of the importance of museums as repositories of official memory, replicas of the 1831 reaper were also presented to the Museum of Science and Industry, the Franklin Institute, and the Minnesota Historical Society, among many other institutions.⁸¹

By the end of 1931, millions of Americans had been exposed to the company and the families' monumental celebration of their shared heritage. In total, they spent about \$1,250,000 (about \$23,000,000 today), excluding the standard advertising budget, to broadcast this message to the nation. Continuing decades of advertising traditions, all of

boxes of centennial reports submitted to the company by dealerships about their local celebrations, including the information about the number of people that attended and saw the movie, how many medallions were distributed, local advertising efforts and other miscellaneous details about promotion endeavors.

⁸¹ Herbert Kellar, "Family Centennial Committee Report;" Advertising Department "Free Distribution of Book, 'the Century of Progress,' March 12, 1931, box 1, Mss 2Q; IHC to Cyrus McCormick II, February 11, 1931; "Meeting of the Centennial Committee and Sub-Committee," Minutes, July 28, 1930 box 1, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

these promotional endeavors and events stressed the vital importance of Cyrus McCormick's ingenuity to the progress of modern civilization. From the McCormick's perspective, they hoped that these efforts would solidify their patriarch's legacy in the public imagination and in the pages of history. Meanwhile, International Harvester executives and the advertising department utilized the anniversary to bring more attention to their longtime brand, ascribing greater cultural gravity to their company's role in American life. Recognizing the opportunity to serve both of these interests, Herbert Kellar inserted himself into the proceedings and made himself a central figure in all of these activities. He tightly grasped the occasion to make his historical expertise invaluable to these elite ambitions.⁸²

The McCormicks' Historical "Agent"

Prior to becoming involved with the company's centennial plans and advertising department, Kellar had great difficulty demonstrating the concrete value of his historical expertise. While he had been able to advance his salary by expanding the library and influencing the historical profession, by 1924 he had reached a ceiling. Pursuing his own interest in building the historical profession, Kellar was unsuccessful in demonstrating how these activities benefitted his employers, despite his belief that they would ultimately yield the family definite results. Cyrus Bentley thwarted his numerous attempts to encourage the McCormicks to tether their association more closely to the historical enterprise, often noting that Kellar's various schemes were a "waste [of] time." Locked in at an annual salary of \$5,000 a year by 1924, Bentley refused Kellar's requests

⁸² "Meeting of the Centennial Committee and Sub-Committee," Minutes, July 28, 1930, box 1; Herbert Kellar, McCormick Family Centennial Committee Estimate of Expenses, June 17, 1931, box 3, Mss 1Q, MIHCC.

for a raise because he believed Kellar was being paid was too much for his “unsatisfactory” results, as it was. Indeed, by the time he was marginalized from the McCormick Historical Association’s biographical efforts in 1928, Bentley urged the family to let their historian go, because he was no longer useful for their purposes.⁸³

Kellar was only able to rescue his job and advance his career by using his expertise to assist the company’s advertising campaigns for the 1931 centennial. In this capacity he could effectively apply his training and historical knowledge to concrete products, like the film. Moreover, as he made his services and his archive more available to the company, employees increasingly took advantage of the historical resources for their corporate purposes. Kellar’s contributions were praised by Harvester Company executives and advertisers alike. As a result, Kellar’s status within the McCormick Historical Association rose, because he was professionally validated by sources which the family knew were credible, and he was given more authority. Kellar improved his own stock by demonstrating the value of his historical expertise to the economic interests of the family’s corporation, rather than in the more nebulous scholarly field. While the corporation did not have its own archive until 1971, beginning in the mid-1920s, it utilized the McCormick Agricultural Library’s private collection of its historic records to inform contemporary policy, advertising and legal decisions.

Following the centennial celebrations in 1932, Kellar’s efforts in the scholarly community also began to bear tangible fruit for the McCormicks. As he took care of the various situations that their cousins had created at the Smithsonian and other museums, it

⁸³ Bentley to Cyrus McCormick, May 1, 1926, box 55, Mss 1E; Herbert Kellar, Individual Income Tax Return, 1925, box 9, Mss AC, MIHCC.

became apparent to the family that his historical colleagues, like Frederick Lewton, were actively looking out for the McCormick family's interests. They were not only providing Kellar with valuable information about the activities of their ne'er-do-well relatives, but taking personal actions to protect Cyrus McCormick's legacy. Moreover, as Kellar acted on these leads and his own suspicions, he further demonstrated that he could be trusted to look out for the family's interests.

Earning the family's trust and respect, in July of 1932, the McCormick Historical Association appointed Herbert Kellar to be its official "agent." As the family defined it, Kellar would be responsible for arranging all of their meeting, setting the agendas, keeping them apprised of pressing information and executing all of their decisions. He was also given a raise to \$6000, effectively immediately. As they settled into this new arrangement, however, it quickly became apparent that the McCormicks were deferential to Kellar's judgment and allowed him to pursue whichever avenues he thought best.⁸⁴

In 1935, the McCormick Historical Association renewed its campaign for the *Hall of Fame* one final time. Reflecting decades of experience as well as Kellar's more expansive understanding of history, they did not rely solely on the "objectivity" of the past to win over *Hall of Fame* electors. While Kellar was still instrumental in creating historical materials, they also hired advertising guru Bruce Barton to orchestrate their campaign. Barton conducted market research on the balloted jurists to assess their stance on the reaper's invention. Armed with this information, they custom tailored their promotional efforts to each individual voter. Yet in October 1935, the results of the

⁸⁴ Cyrus McCormick II, Anita McComick Blaine and Harold McCormick to Herbert Kellar, July 6, 1932; "Excerpts of Meeting Minutes, relating to the Historical Association," September 1, 1932, box 11, Mss AC, MIHCC.

election came back and the family had failed to secure a majority by a narrow margins. Of the 120 electors, 55 voted for Cyrus McCormick – just six jurists shy of gaining enshrinement in the *Hall of Fame*. The McCormick Historical Association vowed to continue their efforts and made plans to hire Barton to work on the project for the next five years. Their plot was never carried out, however. Cyrus McCormick II died in 1936 at the age of seventy-seven and his surviving siblings, Anita and Harold, chose not to pursue the *Hall of Fame*. Instead they believed that their continued support of the historical profession and Kellar's promotional efforts would be enough for their father to be elected on his own merits.⁸⁵

In 1949 Anita McCormick Blaine sold the property where the McCormick Agricultural Library stood and appointed Herbert Kellar to locate a new home for its massive collection. Their foremost concern in searching for a new home was guaranteeing that the collection would be adequately preserved and continue to be used by historians in the future. After an intensive survey and negotiation with upwards of thirty interested universities and historical societies over three years, Kellar chose the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison as the new repository for the McCormick archive in 1951. The historical society was chosen because of its location and close association with the University of Wisconsin. The University's strong history and agriculture departments ensured that the McCormick collection would continue to be used by noteworthy historians and agronomists in the future. Moreover, as an addition to

⁸⁵ Cyrus Hall McCormick was still not elected to the *Hall of Fame* when elections ceased and it went defunct in 1976. Bruce Barton to F.A. Steuert, June 18, 1935; August 13, 1935; Box 39; Minutes, Conference of F.A. Steuert, Herbert Kellar and Bruce Barton, May 14, 1936; Herbert Kellar, "Report Concerning Interview with Bruce Barton, May 14, 1936; Bruce Barton to F.A. Steuert, June 4, 1936, box 40, McCormick Historical Association Records, Mss AB, MIHCC.

a collection which was already recognized as “the center of the best material on the history of the West,” it would become a part of a preeminent archival destination for scholars of the Midwest. Anita Blaine continued to pay Kellar’s salary and his expenses until her death in 1954, but even after that time her estate covered his costs.⁸⁶

Having earned professional autonomy as the McCormick Historical Association’s “agent” in 1932, Hebert Kellar continued on the family’s payroll until his death in 1955 with both intellectual freedom and generous financial support. Predictably, he chose to become more involved in historical organizations and profession building. He believed that historical knowledge and expertise were valuable resources for corporations, farmers, and the general public, but that the profession needed to do a better job demonstrating that value. Reflecting his experience of struggling for historical authority within the McCormick Historical Association, he was determined to drive the discipline towards a higher degree of public engagement which might better justify their professional standing. Supporting this effort, he continually urged his colleagues to provide better historical training for historians assuming jobs outside of academia and took a leading role in the creation of both the Society of American Archivists and the American Association for State and Local History. He felt that these new institutions could address these important topic areas that had been neglected by the American Historical Association and the larger profession. He was also a strong proponent of more historical

⁸⁶ Herbert Kellar, “Report on Suvery of Institutions with respect to the possible acquisition of the collections of the McCormick Historical Association December 1, 1950; Lucille Kellar to Stella Roderick, February 15, 1952, box 43, Herbert Kellar Papers, Mss AC, MIHCC.

training within the USDA to bring better historical information to American farmers during the Great Depression and was a welcome participant on USDA advisory panels.⁸⁷

Merging his public impulse and his employers' direct interests, Kellar was also a pioneer of the living agricultural museum. In the mid-1930's, he used his vast archival resources and the family's wealth to restore the McCormick's Virginia plantation at Walnut-Grove to its 1831 condition. Rebuilding and renovating the farmhouse, barn, corncrib, springhouse, slave quarters, workshop and gristmill, he believed that the restored historic site was the perfect way to communicate the significance of Cyrus McCormick's life and invention to twentieth-century Americans.⁸⁸

Kellar continued to function as the profession's foremost authority on manuscript collecting and archival coordination. He knew that sharing historic documents was crucial to the profession's ability to provide historical insight for the benefit of larger society. He was the head of both the AHA and the MVHA committees responsible for centralizing information about archival holdings during the 1920s and 1930s. Carrying this work a step-further, he became the director of the Historical Records Survey from 1940-1942, coordinating the nation-wide archival inventory project after federal funding

⁸⁷ David Van Tassel and James Tinsley, "Historical Organizations as Aids to History,"; G. Phillip Bauer, "Public Archives in the United States,"; Wayne Rasmussen, "The Growth of Agricultural History," in David Hesseltine and McNeil, eds, *In Support of Clio: Essays in Memory of Herbert Kellar* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958). Herbert Kellar, "Memorandum upon the Status of Historical Activities in the United States in Recent Years," January 1939, box 19, Herbert Anthony Kellar Papers, Mss AC, MIHCC, was read at the 1939 AHA meeting is a sort of "call to arms" for the profession to devote more attention to training historians for jobs outside of academic settings, which focused on public education.

⁸⁸ Herbert Kellar, "Living Agricultural Museums," April 13, 1944, presentation at the National Agricultural Jefferson Bicentenary Committee, box 86, Mss AC; boxes 34-48, McCormick Historical Association Papers, Mss AC, are the extensive documentation of the Walnut Grove Restoration during the late 1930s, MIHCC. Edward Alexander, "Historical Restoration," in Hesseltine and McNeil, eds, *In Support of Clio*, 195 – 214.

had been cut from its parent agency, the Works Progress Administration. Around that same time, Kellar also became a champion of new microphotography technology, which would allow archives to share materials with historians at great distance and were less burdensome to create than edited volumes.⁸⁹

Kellar was recognized for his work not in crafting historical narrative, but in supporting the scholarship of others and boosting the profile of the discipline as a whole. Within the profession, especially amongst the historians of the Midwest, he was praised as a visionary. Ubiquitously involved in the historical profession throughout his career, in organizations like the AHA, AHS, AASLH, AAS, the Southern Historical Association, the American Council of Learned Societies, and many others, the high mark of his professional achievement was being elected president of the MVHA in 1946. He was further honored post-humously in 1958, when the Wisconsin Historical Society published *In Support of Clio*. An edited volume that included essays by nine of his peers, *In Support of Clio* touched on the importance of endeavors that supported historical scholarship, for which Kellar was best known, including manuscript collection, professional associations, archives and historic restorations, amongst several others. Perhaps most fittingly, the volume included an essay on the importance of wealthy foundations, like that of the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Rosenwald Fund, and the McCormick Historical Association, in financing the work of academics. Kellar's colleagues recognized that the McCormick family was responsible for underwriting his

⁸⁹ David Smiley, "The W.P.A. Historical Records Survey," in Hesselstine and McNeil, eds, *In Support of Clio*, 3-28.

energetic participation in the profession and were cognizant that other wealthy philanthropists provided similar support.⁹⁰

Coincidentally the same year that Kellar died, Norbert Lyons published *the McCormick Reaper Legend*. With a Preface by Robert McCormick III, the book gave the glory for inventing the reaper to Robert McCormick and called out the McCormick Historical Association, and Herbert Kellar specifically, for consciously fabricating history to fit their economic and corporate interests. He even revealed that the family's previous historical laborers, Louis Dent and Salem Pattison, did not believe that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper, but only participated in the project in exchange for pay. Reflecting the influence of Cyrus McCormick's heirs and Hebert Kellar on the historical profession, however, the book was barely noticed. Receiving only one academic critique, in the pages of *Business History Review*, the reviewer dismissed Lyons book, because "the work may not be considered objective, scientific or impartial." It was too little, too late. One book was not enough to overturn decades of McCormick family historical activities. The heir's and their company's heritage, that Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper in 1831, continued to proliferate unabated in American history textbooks.⁹¹

Conclusion

Herbert Kellar began an address to the American Library Association in June 1938, "The mere fact of the physical existence of a manuscript collection is mute

⁹⁰ Richard Younger, "Foundations and the Study of History," in Hesseltine and McNeil, eds, *In Support of Clio*, 107 – 126.

⁹¹ Norbert Lyons, *The McCormick Reaper Legend* (New York: Exposition Press, 1955). Frank Tuttle, "Review: The McCormick Reaper Legend by Norbert Lyons," *The Business History Review* Volume 30 (December, 1956): 497-499. Herbert Kellar to Anita McCormick Blaine, Cyrus McCormick II and Harold McCormick, September 21, 1932, box 9, Mss AB, MIHCC.

evidence of the activities... of an individual or a group.... Behind the development of practically every important group of manuscript collections, there is a story.” While he was referring to the story of how a collection is processed and organized, there is also a story behind why a collection is put together. The existence of any archive of preserved documents is always “mute evidence,” of cultural, economic, political or social motivations and desires of those who created it.⁹²

This dissertation told one such story, describing how and why the McCormick collection came into being. While the family failed to have their patriarch’s legacy as the inventor of the reaper protected in the *Hall of Fame of Great Americans*, the significant collection they assembled to promote that effort became a longer-lasting and more effective institution for accomplishing that goal. It functioned as the primary support of the family’s authoritative biography of their father and the reaper, but also verified decades of previous historical-advertising and public relations materials. These promotional, archival, and historical efforts are what has solidified the family’s heritage of their patriarch’s invention in the canon of American history as fact. Operating as a sort of historical-capital, the collection continues to churn out cultural-dividends, attracting historians in perpetuity to study its contents, in effect ensuring that Cyrus McCormick, his Company and his family continues to be historically relevant for generations after his heirs deceased.

While the exact motivations behind the creation of other archives are different from the McCormicks’, those assembled during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

⁹² Herbert Kellar, “The Organization and Preservation of Manuscript Collections in the McCormick Historical Association Library,” address to the American Library Association, June 15, 1938, box 19, Mss AC, MIHCC.

share a similar cultural and social context. Importantly, they were created during a time when history was highly prized and contested as a cultural asset that explained the progressive evolution of modern civilization and justified the contemporary social, economic, gender, racial and political order. Moreover, they were built by trained historians who were fighting to demonstrate their “scientific” authority over the past. As “Producing a Past” describes, these professionals were only able to lay claim to that authority and gain entry into middle-class jobs through aligning their scholarship with those in economic power. As such, the collections that they preserved and the histories that they wrote functioned as cultural sanctifications of the order that they served.

Most contemporary historians are aware of how previous institutional intentions shaped the archives they utilize for their own scholarship. They have been afforded this opportunity by a relatively secure and established professional protection within universities, which has marginalized the influence of wealth over their intellectual labor. The overarching business of successful scholarship seems to be in bringing neglected pasts to light to suggest new ideas about historic realities, while overthrowing the “distorted snapshots” of earlier historiography. They face an uphill battle, however, as they continue to use well-endowed archives which their predecessors and their patrons had left behind. These archives were built to preserve documents which supported an earlier hegemonic order as the “natural” outcome of progress. The success of profession to escape these distorted narratives, thus rests on its ability to read these archives against the grain.

“Producing a Past” sheds light on the messy business of history-making which yields seemingly self-evident and simple truths, suggesting that the entire canon of a

previous generation was fabricated through similar, if less well-documented, processes. Studying the successful efforts of one family to historically justify their corporation's existence, this dissertation demonstrates that during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, corporations and wealthy elite had the means, the cultural impulse and the willing historical workforce to successfully engage in shaping history to sanction the "modern," corporate order.

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