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History, INC-Hubert Howe Bancroft's History Company and the Problem of Selling the Past

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HISTORY, INC—HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT'S HISTORY
COMPANY AND THE PROBLEM OF SELLING THE PAST

by

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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For Julie, Dillon, and Cameron

ABSTRACT

This is the intertwined economic and cultural histories of private support for the arts and humanities before and contemporaneous to the rise of the German-style research university in the United States. In many ways, this recovers the nineteenth-century precursor to the more recent crowdsourcing and crowdfunding movement. It investigates how the California bookseller Hubert Howe Bancroft's for-profit historical enterprise used subscription publishing to raise the necessary capital and to elicit cultural support for its end-to-end production of what its contributors hoped would be the definitive history of Pacific North America, from Alaska to Panama and inland to the Rocky Mountains, from antiquity to their present. The company adapted its existing subscription publishing infrastructure to canvass western North America, crowdsourcing the production of the core manuscript collection of what became the University of California, Berkeley's eponymous Bancroft Library. A team of employees worked collaboratively to index the growing library and to write the thirty-nine volumes of *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*. Book agents sold advance subscriptions to the full series to elite and common people in western North America, the eastern United States, and Europe.

I argue that while its industrial means of intellectual production damaged the reputation of Bancroft's enterprise and its histories among popular and scholarly critics in the twentieth century, the company built a diverse and expansive public support for its enterprise by proudly advertising those methods. Before the modern research university offered a steady funding source for scholarly knowledge, people worried more about

whether an important work could be completed than about how it would be completed. By appealing to enduring public sympathies for subscriptions, broadly construed, as a reliable way to support and to associate with learned societies and important intellectual and cultural works, Bancroft & Company summoned a diverse, transnational public to its cause.

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INTRODUCTION

STAKING A CLAIM

Midst the unfoldings of my fate, I found myself in the year of 1856 in the newly Americanized and gold-burnished country of California, in the city of San Francisco, which stands on a narrow peninsula, about midway between either extreme of the mighty stretch of western earth's end seaboard, beside a bay unequalled by any along the whole seven thousand miles of shore line, and unsurpassed as a harbor by any in the world. Out of this circumstance, as from an omnipotent accident, sprang the Literary Industries of which this volume is a record.

—Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Literary Industries*

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.

—Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”

In June of 1852, a twenty-year-old man carrying all of his possessions in a bundle on a stick walked beside his father under a scorching sun, cursing California. Having arrived on the Pacific Coast in March of that year, the young Hubert Howe Bancroft had joined his father in a quartz-mining venture. His father, Azariah Ashley Bancroft, had already been in California for some time. He hoped that a final effort with the Plymouth Company would secure his financial success before he returned to Ohio. But by June, the operation had consumed what wealth the father had accrued previously. Within weeks,

the old man would return to Ohio no richer for his time in California.¹ As the father and son struggled to put thirty miles between themselves and the “valley of hateful memories” where so much had been lost, the young man took stock of his condition.² After just three months in California, he found himself destitute and miserable, feet blistered, limbs aching, and on the verge of dehydration. He breathed the air, “hot and suffocating, like a sirocco, mingled with clouds of dust from the parched plain.” He cried out, “if this be California, I hope God will give me little of it.”³ Of that infamous California, the younger Bancroft got just enough.

In the notorious cycle of boom and bust that came to define the quest for riches in the Golden State, Bancroft experienced just enough hardship to start his story where any good pioneer narrative must begin: at rock bottom.⁴ Bancroft recounted this story within his own contribution to the burgeoning genre of pioneer reminiscences, his memoir *Literary Industries*. That volume was the thirty-ninth and final volume of his series of *Pacific States Histories*, which examined North America’s Pacific Coast from Alaska to Panama and inland to Colorado and Texas. The tale of industry and wealth that

¹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, vol. 39, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), 61; John Walton Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946), 35.

² Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 130–31.

³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 130–31.

⁴ David M. Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Manhattan, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 3–4, see especially chapters 3 and 4. Historian David M. Wrobel has demonstrated that while early booster literature attempted to downplay the difficulties and dangers of frontier life, the later genre of pioneer reminiscences emphasized—even exaggerated—those earlier struggles as a part of an anxious and self-aggrandizing story about making manly men as new frontier regions disappeared in the growing United States. Bancroft’s memoir and the many reminiscences he collected certainly operated within that genre.

transformed that twenty-year-old disappointed quartz miner into a Gilded Age tycoon in the Pacific Coast's most important city invoked that familiar narrative formula to great success. Bancroft deftly reframed his accomplishments in the book trade into a heroic pioneer tale, as if he had pushed cattle rather than paper. It recounted his labors bringing the printed word to the Pacific before returning the favor and putting into print a grand history of the Pacific for the edification of readers confined to live more mundane lives in older, less auspicious corners of the world.⁵

Bancroft found life's bottom in the usual place and in the typical California way, by digging for wealth in the ground. Well before the fate of the Plymouth Company had become evident late in the spring of 1852, the hard labor already disagreed with the younger Bancroft. Unlike his father, he labored for the company primarily to pass the time. He intended to mine a much richer vein: the book-hungry readers of California. He awaited the arrival of a stock of books consigned to him by his brother-in-law and former employer George Derby, a bookseller in Buffalo, New York. He hoped to take those books to Sacramento, San Francisco being already overrun by similar claims. There, he would attempt to draw mineral wealth out of the mountains by way of miners' pockets.⁶

The young Bancroft took something out of the Sierra that summer that he would eventually regard as more valuable than the bullion that eluded him. His experience laboring in vain inspired a life rule. He "firmly resolved that thenceforth, whatever

⁵ The historian and biographer of Bancroft, John Walton Caughey, claimed that Bancroft had so much in common with the pioneers whose exploits his histories recounted that Bancroft, "in a sense," was continually "writing variations on his own biography." It might be just as fair to reverse the direction of influence Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*, 466.

⁶ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 123. For an introduction to the storied tradition of "mining the miners," see James J. Rawls, "A Golden State: An Introduction," *California History* 77, no. 4 (1998): 7.

speculation I might at any time engage in, it should be not with my own labor. I might stake money, but if I worked with my hands I would have pay for such labor.”⁷ When he set out to research and to write a comprehensive history of North America’s Pacific Coast from antiquity to his present, he risked a great deal of money. He put business and his reputation on the line, speculating that he could make Pacific history simultaneously profitable and respectable. He kept his promise to himself, though, and he never risked his own labor. Instead, he built a vertically integrated historical enterprise within his expanding book and stationery business, employing long-term collaborators and short-term jobbers to produce history in his name. Bancroft read and wrote prolifically, at least on the subjects that interested him and with which he often had personal experience. The grueling tedium that goes into turning exhaustive archival research into good history, however, he left largely to his team of paid field researchers, librarians, note-takers, and ghostwriters.

Through his company, Bancroft built a private, end-to-end historical profession capable of doing in-house the work that would soon become the purview of university history departments, research libraries, and scholarly presses. He and a close circle of employees built and managed an intellectual network of paid and unpaid contributors who collaborated on the research, writing, and publication of the company’s grand thirty-nine volume history of North America’s Pacific Coast. In total, thousands of volunteers and donors, hundreds of jobbers, and a handful of senior employees worked unequally within Bancroft’s company and its wider network to write *The Works of Hubert Howe*

⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 130.

Bancroft.⁸ As the series' title implied, when his speculation yielded cultural and economic capital, Bancroft alone profited. By leveraging his company's economies of scale, he mass-produced history, both in the sense of the histories' collaborative production and their vast target audience. In the process, he risked a great deal. He tied his reputation as an author to the unproven talents of a rotating stable of ghostwriters. He gambled a great deal of his wealth, too, with the exorbitant prepublication costs making even the prospect of breaking even unlikely. But he did not have to put his own labor on the line. He found no shortage of talented writers struggling to make a life by the pen who willingly performed what they regarded as important intellectual work for hourly wages.⁹

The very existence of Bancroft's company and its wider network presents a historical problem. At first glance, it stands alone in history, with no obvious corollaries either before or after its operation. How did Bancroft convince so many people to entrust their memories, personal papers, and historical legacies to a company they could not control that intended to repackage those stories for sale in the marketplace? For that matter, what made Bancroft decide to build a ground operation spanning half a continent

⁸ Bancroft's company changed its name several times. It began as "H. H. Bancroft & Company," became "A. L. Bancroft & Company," and eventually split into the separate "History Company." For readability, I alternate between several generic titles for the company: "Bancroft's company," "Bancroft & Company," or simply "the company." When referring to a specific manifestation, I use the title under which it operated in that specific historical moment. I use "Bancroft's enterprise" to refer to the larger project on which volunteers and employees collaborated through, but also adjacent to, the company's actual corporate structure. Similarly, the title given to the histories changed over time, too. Again, for sake of readability, this dissertation varies between several shorthand descriptors, including: "Bancroft's Works," "the Works," "Bancroft's histories," and "the *Pacific States Histories*." When referring to specific incarnations, it uses the chronologically correct title.

⁹ On the tenability of professional authorship and the other authorial economies by which many made a living with the pen in the nineteenth century, see William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800–1870: The Papers of William Charvat* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1968); and Ronald Weber, *Hired Pens: Professional Writers in America's Golden Age of Print* (Ohio University Press, 1997).

in order to crowdsource historical knowledge one individual at a time? He certainly had cheaper, easier, and less risky avenues to satisfy his authorial ambitions, to find fame, or to capitalize on a growing, global interest in books about the Pacific. Furthermore, writing history collaboratively denied everyone—even Bancroft—the power to tell exactly the story she or he wanted to tell. The formation of an innovative business model that failed to serve any individual interests demands explanation. Indeed, this dissertation undercuts the distinctiveness of Bancroft’s enterprise, showing how it differed more in degree than in type from other operations within the underdeveloped knowledge industry of the nineteenth century. The actual marketplace in which people bought and sold ideas, I argue, had conditioned a wide variety of people with wildly divergent levels of social, cultural, and economic power to see their interests as aligned and Bancroft’s enterprise as worthy of their support. In spite of—perhaps even because of—their many differences, they hoped to inflect Bancroft’s definitive history of North America’s Pacific Coast and its conquest with some version of their stories. In *Literary Industries*, Bancroft aptly described the tenuous coalition that produced the company and its histories as an “omnipotent accident.”¹⁰

Knowledge, Markets, and Publics

The accident had help. Several converging cultural, economic, and intellectual trends in the nineteenth century had conditioned the choices and expectations of that diverse public to say yes when Bancroft & Company’s agents came knocking. Those agents sought different kinds of support and participation in distinct but overlapping canvasses.

¹⁰ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 8.

Traveling researchers requested historical materials and personal reminiscences. Book agents solicited subscriptions to the full thirty-nine-volume series while it was still in production. Bancroft and his publishing partners solicited from leading lights in science and literature even as they placed ready-made promotional pieces in newspapers and periodicals, knowing well that their free content would eventually fill space in almost any publication that received it.

Some of the people and institutions whose support the company solicited said no, but a surprising—and surprisingly diverse—number said yes. Asked to trust a private publishing company with their deeply personal historical legacies, thousands of people from across the social spectrum donated personal papers or dictated their life stories for the company's use. They did so because they lacked better options, but also because they expected less and hoped for more in the market than their successors in the twentieth century would. Talented writers with better formal educations and more experience writing history—or writing anything, for that matter—than their boss nevertheless agreed to write histories under Bancroft's name. They did so because, while the corporate authorship was not unusual, the significance of the work to which they would contribute was important. Thousands of subscribers around the world, including many of the aforementioned donors and writers, became monetary patrons of the enterprise. They responded to Bancroft's call for their small patronage, supporting an important intellectual endeavor by preordering full sets of the expensive thirty-nine volume series. The leading lights of Victorian science and literature championed Bancroft's enterprise, often based on only a few sample chapters from the initial five-volume *Native Races*. Rather than scoff at Bancroft & Company's industrial means of intellectual production, they touted the company's methods and its corporate historian publically in print and

privately within their social circles. As volumes began coming out quarterly in the 1880s, literary tastemakers and local editors alike recommended the histories to readers in erudite and popular publications. At every phase of production, Bancroft & Company summoned a public eager to join in its work.

Much of the nineteenth-century public sphere actually operated in and depended on overlapping private industries. In what follows, I refer to “the public” and “publics” not as self-evident, but as groups of people who had associated—however fragily—based on their perceived shared investment in or opposition to something.¹¹ Invoking the twentieth-century political philosopher John Dewey, the contemporary political scientist Corey Robin argued in his 2015 keynote address to the Society for U.S. Intellectual History that publics “never simply exist; they are always created. Created out of groups of people who are made and mangled by the actions of other people.”¹² Though Dewey actively distinguished “the public” from the state, his analysis never departed very far from the realm of political actions. Robin, however, argues cogently that public intellectuals summon and disband publics through the act of writing.¹³ As a history of the book and of

¹¹ Here I borrow from the political philosopher John Dewey’s study of publics as they are formed and eclipsed. Dewey, it happens, was among the first generation of American-trained academics, having earned one of the first research PhDs from Johns Hopkins University. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1954), 30–32, 35, 136–39.

¹² Corey Robin, “Publics That Don’t Exist and the Intellectuals Who Write for Them” (keynote address, Society for U.S. Intellectual History, Washington, DC, October 15, 2015). Robin published a version of that keynote on the web as well. Corey Robin, “How Intellectuals Create a Public,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 29, 2016, <http://chronicle.com/article/How-Intellectuals-Create-a/234984>.

¹³ Though the formation of a particular public might result in political organization, “made effective by means of representatives who . . . care for its especial interests by methods intended to regulate the conjoint actions of individuals and groups,” Dewey necessarily distinguished between “a political state” and the public that might or might not form “something which may be government.” Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 35; Robin, “How Intellectuals Create a Public.”

capitalism, this dissertation extends Robin's argument about how authors summon publics through writing by examining the ubiquitous but too-often-forgotten publishers who stand between authors and their publics. In the first half of the nineteenth century, publishers emerged specifically to stand in that gap, working tirelessly to create books for publics and publics for books.¹⁴

The story that follows traces the ways in which shifting cultural expectations, market forces, and intellectual values conditioned the individual choices made by potential donors, employees, subscribers, and supporters made in response to their individual and hyperlocal needs and options. In the 1870s and 1880s, those decisions compounded to build broad public support for Bancroft's enterprise. Around 1890 and into the twentieth century, that support crumbled as those same people responded to the rapid remaking of the knowledge market, ultimately deciding to divest from the company. That cascade both responded and contributed to the fracturing of the massive reading public that had grown unwieldy. The rise and fall of public support for Bancroft's enterprise reveals how it came to crack under its own weight, leaving behind several smaller publics that perceived little common ground. Those several publics did, however, manage to unite around a common outrage at Bancroft's industrial methods.¹⁵

¹⁴ For two relatively recent attempts to investigate the importance of individual publishers and their larger social network to the production of knowledge and literature, see Alistair McCleery, "The Return of the Publisher to Book History: The Case of Allen Lane," *Book History* 5, no. 1 (2002): 161–85; and John B. Hench, "The Publishers Who Lunch: The Social Networking of American Book Publishers," *Book History* 18, no. 1 (2015): 273–301.

¹⁵ I might easily have used "audience" rather than public. In literary studies, "audience" has allowed critics to frame their studies so as to include those who heard text read aloud in addition to "readers" or reading publics in the strictest sense. In studies of public oration and other kinds of media studies that focus less strictly on printed media, of course, using audience makes even more sense. I have chosen to refer to "publics" and, when appropriate, "reading publics" because I mean to conflate those various engagements with media with the civic act of joining or supporting an institution in addition to the acts related to consuming media implied by both "audience" and

Across half the world, Bancroft & Company elicited that intellectual, financial, and cultural support not in spite of its industrial means of production, but because of them. The public did not see the collaborative production of primary sources, the ghostwriting of the volumes, or their aggressive subscription sales push as necessary evils. To the contrary, I argue, longstanding economic and cultural assumptions conditioned by a knowledge industry fully embedded within market capitalism had provided a framework for interpreting the machinations of a profit-driven publishing company positively. The economies of scale with which Bancroft promised to produce knowledge beneficial to the nation and to the world only multiplied rather than threatened the perceived intellectual value of his enterprise. Within a few decades, however, those methods became unconscionable.¹⁶

“reading public.” Though I eschew strict divisions, my usage of these terms assumes that Bancroft’s books had readers, but they also had larger audiences that included those who potentially ordered them based on an agent’s description but never read them. Similarly, Bancroft’s enterprise had an audience in those who entertained explanations of the company but who perhaps never saw a set of the finished histories. I use “public” to refer to those groups in conjunction with others who recognized themselves as having allied interests with the company in part because “public” insists on treating those people as self-organized, however problematically. Stephen Railton, *Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11; Robert McParland, *Mark Twain’s Audience: A Critical Analysis of Reader Responses to the Writings of Mark Twain* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 19, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=lang_en&id=EuapBAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&ots=dW3-HIW85_&sig=ZoMVg3nVngSG3LzO2DAulilH3rI; Rosa A. Eberly, *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*, History of Communication (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 18–19, 39; Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 50–51. For a special forum examining Warner’s public and counterpublics, see Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (November 1, 2002): 410–12; David Wittenberg, “Going Out in Public: Visibility and Anonymity in Michael Warner’s ‘Publics and Counterpublics,’” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (November 1, 2002): 426–33; Ronald Walter Greene, “Rhetorical Pedagogy as a Postal System: Circulating Subjects Through Michael Warner’s ‘Publics and Counterpublics,’” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (November 1, 2002): 434–43; Melissa Deem, “Stranger Sociability, Public Hope, and the Limits of Political Transformation,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (November 1, 2002): 444–54.

¹⁶ I use knowledge industry here to refer to a phenomenon related to but distinct from “knowledge economy,” which tends to refer to the trade in and reliance on technical knowledge for industrial growth. My usage flips that, examining the business models that underwrote knowledge

That such a successful collective intellectual endeavor built its expansive and diverse public in a publishing house made sense. Nowhere is the paradoxical relationship between individual choices and the collective, impersonal whims of the market more germane than in a discussion of the nineteenth-century mass book market. As the market grew, so, too, did publishers' potential to target a proliferating number of submarkets defined by diverging tastes, interests, and brow lines.¹⁷ But reading publics do not break and reform quickly; the structures that formed their previous alignments actively resist realignments.¹⁸ So the mass market continued to unite a single, increasingly unwieldy reading public made up of people who had not yet come to see themselves or their interests as more closely connected to smaller, more tightly-knit associations. For the

production rather than the economic production driven by knowledge. The two necessarily overlap, but I have coined this phrase in an attempt to distinguish this business history of ideas before academic professionalization from the more standard meanings of knowledge economy. Margaret C. Jacob, *The First Knowledge Economy: Human Capital and the European Economy, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014). The historian of science Paul Lucier's work reveals the difficulty of fully distinguishing knowledge in economic development from the economics of knowledge production, particularly in the nineteenth century. Paul Lucier, *Scientists & Swindlers: Consulting on Coal and Oil in America, 1820–1890*, Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Paul Lucier, "The Professional and the Scientist in Nineteenth-Century America," *Isis* 100, no. 4 (2009): 699–732. On the history of risk in the American marketplace, lexicon, and imagination, see Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ On the inchoate taxonomy of brows in the nineteenth century, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middle/Brow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

¹⁸ Here, Dewey's argument related to the formation of new publics within the political sphere offers a helpful explanation of the protracted and uncertain transition of the book market. He argues that once outside forces—innovations in industry or technology, for instance—"radically change the quantity, character and place of impact of their indirect consequences," the resulting "political forms, once established, persist of their own momentum. The new public which is generated remains long inchoate, unorganized, because it cannot use inherited political agencies. The latter, if elaborate and well institutionalized, obstruct the organization of the new public. They prevent that development of new forms of the state which might grow up rapidly were social life more fluid, less precipitated into set political and legal molds." Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*,

moment, that market contained everyone, to almost everyone's dismay.

Bancroft targeted all of them; from every corner of that burgeoning market, they responded positively. They did so, I demonstrate, in large part due to the company's much-lauded industrial means of production. Critics in the twentieth century have struggled to see that vast and diverse public support as anything other than the work of a skilled conman of the Gilded Age. They encountered Bancroft's enterprise with expectations derived from the fragmented reading publics of that later era. The fragmentation of knowledge by both discipline and erudition came to look natural rather than historical because the same academic professionalization of knowledge that produced distinct reading publics simultaneously produced academe. Even in our current knowledge industry, surprisingly little has changed. Authors write for imagined audiences. The machinations of university presses and trade publishers position books before those readers. Publics respond accordingly, whether in airport bookstores or in faculty offices while creating graduate syllabi. The successful crossover book that finds both scholarly and popular success remains an elusive but generally desirable ideal for many academic authors.¹⁹ In the late nineteenth century, history remained a distinct literary form within the larger genre of literature, meaning that the skilled publishers at Bancroft & Company could summon a public capable of making modern academics jealous. It succeeded;

30–31.

¹⁹ On the desirability and elusiveness of the successful crossover book, see the historian and public intellectual Patricia Limerick's preface to the twentieth anniversary edition of her manifesto on new western history. Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, Reprint edition (W. W. Norton & Company, 2011). Peter Charles Hoffer demonstrates how the divergent standards and expectations for writing and citation in popular and scholarly history make crossover books both difficult and potentially dangerous for professional historians because trade presses care more about making books that sell than about making fully original books. Peter Charles Hoffer, *Past Imperfect: Facts, Fictions, and Fraud in the Writing of American History*, First Edition (New York City: PublicAffairs, 2004), 8, 204–6.

incredulous academic historians spent much of the twentieth century decrying the unnatural conjuring.

A Culture of Subscription

The company published its *Works* by subscription, but it also sold its enterprise and underlying methods in a market given to supporting everything from civic organizations to intellectual endeavors by subscription, broadly defined. The act of subscribing had a long, storied history by the time the Bancroft & Company started its work. It had grown up with the Enlightenment, both structuring public support for and allowing access to knowledge creation and curation production enterprises.²⁰ Bancroft & Company used the business models meant to push large volumes of books in the Gilded Age, but it did that by appealing to a cultural affinity for subscriptions that had endured from earlier in the century. Subscription publishers including Bancroft & company exhausted that public goodwill by century's end; the whole industry became a victim of its prodigious success.²¹

In conversation with a few very old works and some rather recent or forthcoming scholarship on subscriptions and salesmanship, this dissertation advances an argumentative narrative of that cultural and economic history. It traces the continuities and transformations in the cultural meanings of subscriptions, broadly construed, over the

²⁰ Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

²¹ Basie Gitlin argued cogently for this rapid change in fates for book agency in his Yale undergraduate thesis. Basie Bales Gitlin, "Great Readers of Men: Subscription Book Agents, the Selling of Culture, and the Culture of Selling in America, 1865–1935" (Undergraduate Thesis, Yale College, 2010).

long nineteenth century. Subscribing performed many functions, only one of which was to acquire personal access to a publication, service, or organization. Since the colonial era, subscribing had offered a way for individuals to advance their vision of American society or their literary tastes in the open market, financially and culturally supporting a particular idea, cultural work, or institution. Subscribing could change the subscriber, too. Subscribing offered aspirational Americans an opportunity to associate themselves with wealthy patrons or with elite intellectual circles, for instance. That impulse toward voluntarism and civic duty rooted in early America waxed rather than waned with the market revolution. As corporations proliferated in number and size, so, too, did the possibility—the necessity!—of using them to support one’s values and tastes for the good of the Republic. In sum, the scarcity of options for serving the public good in the colonial era created a culture of subscribing, but the explosion of private enterprises requesting subscriptions to support their worthy causes made it big business from the early national period into the antebellum era.²²

²² Sarah L. C. Clapp, “The Beginnings of Subscription Publication in the Seventeenth Century,” *Modern Philology* 29, no. 2 (1931): 199–224; Marjorie Stafford, “Subscription Publishing in the United States” (MLS Thesis, University of Illinois, 1943); Donald Farren, “Publishing by Subscription: Insights into the Eighteenth-Century American Book Trade (With a Special Focus on Connecticut)” (Unpublished paper from “Printing and Society in Early America,” American Antiquarian Society, October 24, 1980); Donald Farren, “Subscription: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century American Book Trade” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1982); Michael Hackenberg, “Hawking Subscription Books in 1870: A Salesman’s Prospectus from Western Pennsylvania,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 78, no. 2 (1984): 137–153; Amy M. Thomas, “There Is Nothing So Effective as a Personal Canvass’: Revaluing Nineteenth-Century American Subscription Books,” *Book History* 1, no. 1 (1998): 140–55; Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Michael Hackenberg, “The Subscription Publishing Network in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Getting the Books Out: Papers from the Chicago Conference on the Book in 19th-Century America* (Washington, DC: Center for the Book, Library of Congress, 1987), 45–75; William S. Powell, “Patrons of the Press: Subscription Book Purchasers in North Carolina, 1733–1850,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 39 (1962): 423–99; Michael Winship, “Charles Scribner’s Sons as Subscription Publishers: The Canvass for Stanley’s *In Darkest Africa* in the Pacific Coast Agency,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 71, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 121–49; Eric Gardner, “Remembered (Black) Readers: Subscribers to the Christian Recorder, 1864–1865,” *American Literary History* 23 (2011): 229–

I show that subscriptions were central rather than incidental to the success of Bancroft's enterprise. As one of the largest subscription publishers on the Pacific Coast, Bancroft & Company mobilized a prodigious extractive and distributive network for its research and publication campaigns, respectively, by adapting the methods and infrastructure of its existing door-to-door book canvassing operation. It created a distributed research campaign that quickly came to overlap with an aggressive, transnational subscription sales push.

Bancroft's company relied on the business model that expanded and transformed subscription publishing between the Civil War and the end of the century, but it capitalized on enduring public sympathies for subscriptions first forged in the late colonial period. During that earlier era, a rather different form of subscription publishing had underwritten expensive, significant works. Cash-strapped and credit-poor, early American printers often turned to subscription publishing in search of a collective subvention for important, cost-prohibitive works.²³ Whether they proposed a handsome but affordable

59; Marine-Street, "'Agents Wanted': Sales, Gender, and the Making of Consumer Markets in America, 1830–1930" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2016); Amy L. Sopcak-Joseph, "Fashioning American Women: Godey's Lady's Book, Female Consumers, and Periodical Publishing in the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, Forthcoming).

²³ On the importance of subscription publishing as a means of crowdfunding works of perceived public and moral good, see Powell, "Patrons of the Press: Subscription Book Purchasers in North Carolina, 1733–1850"; Farren, "Publishing by Subscription: Insights into the Eighteenth-Century American Book Trade (With a Special Focus on Connecticut)," 30–33; Farren, "Subscription: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century American Book Trade," 4, 65; Amy M. Thomas, "Who Makes the Text? The Production and Use of Literature in Antebellum America" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1992), especially Chapter 4 on colportage; Gardner, "Remembered (Black) Readers". American subscription publishing had its roots in Great Britain. Focused on nineteenth-century Britain, Staci Stone challenges the narrative that posited patronage had declined in England before the nineteenth century, demonstrating how one poet benefitted simultaneously from ongoing individual patronage and from subscription publishing. Staci Lynn Stone, "Literary Patronage and Subscription Publication in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Launching of Felicia Hemans" (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2000); and Laura Suzanne York, "Redeeming the Truth: Robert Morden and the Marketing of Authority in Early World Atlases" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), chap. 3, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/2j66c4qh>.

family bible to middling folks or a lavish illustrated work to affluent people, the printers typically targeted a relatively small customer base and then printed and bound the edition to meet precisely those orders.²⁴ In addition to patronizing important printed works, Americans had used subscriptions to support civic institutions like libraries and to associate with learned and civic-minded voluntary associations.²⁵ In short, since the eighteenth century, Americans had become increasingly conditioned to participate in public life as subscribers and joiners.²⁶

By midcentury, other businesses had capitalized on that enduring public goodwill toward subscriptions to create much larger, more lucrative publishing endeavors. By around 1840, publishers began to use subscriptions not to subvent the cost of small publications, but to build much larger audiences for sprawling print brands. Whether cynical or sincere, the high-minded rhetoric of the earlier era continued to frame the more aggressive marketing campaigns that followed. It worked. Potential subscribers stood

²⁴ F. E. Compton, *Subscription Books: Fourth of the R. R. Bowker Memorial Lectures* (New York: New York Public Library, 1939), throughout, but especially pp. 46–47. The publishing history of Audubon's *The Birds of America* offers another important intermediary example, though it largely proves the rules asserted here. Audubon targeted editions at small groups of subscribers who had pre-ordered. Ron Tyler, "The Royal Octavo Edition," in *Audubon's Great National Work: The Royal Octavo Edition of Birds of America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 47–72, 153–62, 175–80.

²⁵ Some even proposed an extralegal postal service supported and operated by subscribers. Joseph M. Adelman, "A Constitutional Conveyance of Intelligence, Public and Private': The Post Office, the Business of Printing, and the American Revolution," *Enterprise & Society* 11, no. 4 (December 2010): 709–52.

²⁶ For the history of subscriptions beyond publishing as support for and as a means of associating with civic institutions in early America, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Biography of a Nation of Joiners," *The American Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (1944): 1–25; Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts*, Harvard Historical Studies (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public After the Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Jessica Choppin Roney, *Governed by a Spirit of Opposition: The Origins of American Political Practice in Colonial Philadelphia*, Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

prepared to believe not only that they could subscribe to the greater good, but that their subscription actually furthered that good for others, too. Periodicals like *Godey's Lady's Book*, for instance, built their distinctive brands initially by promising subscribers curation of the best literature from England before they began printing original works by American authors.²⁷ Similarly, the proprietors of the African Methodist Episcopal Church's *Christian Recorder* pitched subscriptions as finite and necessary support for a movement to which others gave their lives; their public responded accordingly. The *Christian Recorder* celebrated the "thick trust" that defined the relationship between it, its agents, and its public.²⁸ Motivated by anxieties about the proliferation of the wrong kind of literature, the American Tract Society dispatched colporteurs intent on spreading their religious literature far and wide.²⁹ The Society imbued its work to expand its distribution as a matter of the Great Commission. A subscription to a periodical like *Godey's* or the *Christian Recorder* or to literature distributed by the ATS guaranteed the subscriber personal access, but subscribing also promised to inflect an emerging American national literature with voices sympathetic to their identities and values.

By the early national period, newspapers also began to seek an expanded audience rather than a sustaining subscriber base. They had previously underwritten the production of the news for local communities by drumming up subscriptions like one might take up a

²⁷ The historian Amy Sopcak-Joseph develops this argument in the first chapter of her prepublication dissertation on *Godey's Lady's Book*, building on the work of Meredith McGill, who demonstrated how the lack of protections for international authors in nineteenth-century America made reprinting desirable foreign authors without paying royalties a lucrative business model. Sopcak-Joseph, "Fashioning American Women"; Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

²⁸ Gardner, "Remembered (Black) Readers," 237.

²⁹ Thomas, "Who Makes the Text?," 142–43.

collection for any local project. However, by the early nineteenth century, papers had come to serve political parties. A greater audience for the paper meant a greater potential base for its party, which that party's members saw as a service to the public good.³⁰ In all of these cases, the publisher could claim—and subscribers seem to have believed them—that expanded distribution served the greater good, not just the publisher's bottom line. In the antebellum era, it became possible to subscribe to a distinct vision of America not just to consume it personally, but to support those engaged in writing it into being.³¹

By the Gilded Age, subscription publishing had become increasingly aggressive. Canvassing agents allowed publishers to saturate markets with particular works. Aggressive canvassing could either expand the reach of an existing project or make an otherwise impossible one feasible. So long as the project was important, the segment of the public sympathetic to it—large or small—regarded even the most aggressive canvasses as performing important cultural, intellectual, or political services to the nation. Bancroft & Company did more than sell their works by subscription, though. By using the methods designed to saturate markets in the Gilded Age and by framing their various requests in language that recalled public participation in the making of knowledge from the Enlightenment to the early national period, the company's agents sought the sort of voluntary association that intertwined financial, cultural, and intellectual support. No

³⁰ Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All: America's Coming-of-Age with the Press* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 47–48.

³¹ For further reading on the intersection between nationalism and print culture in this era of transformation, and particularly related to the desirability and difficulty of creating an American national literature, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Grantland S. Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); McGill, *Culture of Reprinting*; and Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers*.

wonder the public responded favorably to the agents Bancroft & Company sent out to gather materials for its private library and the Pacific States Histories. To summon its desired public, the company needed only to convince potential patrons that the completion of a grand history of Pacific North America from antiquity to the present constituted a worthy intellectual enterprise. Several cultural and intellectual currents had conspired with globalizing capitalism to ensure that the company's desired public would respond positively.

The Marketplace of Ideas

The emergence of subscriptions to all manner of goods and services intertwined with another dramatic increase that occurred between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the explosion and democratization of knowledge.³² We know a great deal about many of the industries that operated within the nineteenth-century marketplace of ideas, but we know surprisingly little about that market as a whole, whether on its own terms or within the context of the rest of the market revolution.³³ That failure derives from our own disciplinary subfields, according to the historian of knowledge Richard D. Brown. "Our perspective has often been fragmented," he asserts, "because our analyses have been arranged according to the issues and chronologies suitable to each topic," which has obscured the relationships between interconnected phenomena like "printing and journalism, politics and voluntary associations, or education and recreation." As a result,

³² Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³³ Jacob, *The First Knowledge Economy*, 5.

“the nature of their collective impact and significance eludes us.”³⁴ This dissertation builds upon as well as responds to Brown’s argument, attempting to show through one example how much we stand to gain in a systematic analysis of how knowledge and market capitalism grew up together in the nineteenth century as well as how the resulting academic knowledge industry has functioned to obscure its own origins.³⁵

There are many important intersections between knowledge and capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century that remain unexplored. I advance a simple but provocative claim about just one of them: knowledge has long been a subscription business. The types and accessibility of knowledge subscriptions have certainly changed over time; the predilection toward putting one’s name and money toward producing, disseminating, and accessing a particular sort of knowledge in the market, however, continues in an unbroken history. In America, it stretches from the Library Company of Philadelphia to JSTOR, from early subscription books to Kickstarter novels, and from voluntary organizations to scholarly professional associations. As in the past, people do not subscribe just for personal *access*. They also subscribe to *support* those things, for themselves and for others. It can also allow a way for aspiring subscribers to associate with learned societies and likeminded people. Sometimes subscribers even pay extra for sustaining memberships, whether to the Metropolitan Museum of Art or The Society for

³⁴ Brown, *Knowledge Is Power*, 5.

³⁵ Certainly the production and consumption of knowledge in the long nineteenth century extended well beyond the book market. As an exercise in what the eminent historian of the book Leslie Howsam called “thinking through the history of the book,” this dissertation uses the history of books to explore larger historical patterns and events. Leslie Howsam, “Thinking Through the History of the Book” (keynote address, “The Generation and Regeneration of Books / Générations et régénérations du livre,” 23rd Annual Conference of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, Montréal, Canada, July 7, 2015).

the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, for instance.³⁶

Knowledge had long been sold and supported by subscription, but much of it was also the product of voluntary association in formal or informal intellectual networks. Those networks relied on a pervasive public-mindedness that made many professionals and amateurs willing to trust their labors and materials to networks they could not control. From the dawn of the modern era through the nineteenth century and across North America and Europe, amateur and professional scientists had corresponded, shared data, formed societies, and collaborated with governmental or industrial partners to produce scientific knowledge with local granularity and global aspirations.³⁷ Often these networks enjoyed the support and served the interests of empires, producing knowledge meant to render far-off places legible to imperial administrators.³⁸ Participants on the periphery had often engaged in networks that served the interests of empire because it

³⁶ “Become a Member,” *The Met Store*, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://store.metmuseum.org/become-a-member/icat/membership>; and “Membership Categories and Rates | SHARP,” accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.sharpweb.org/main/membership-categories-and-rates>. Subscriptions remain especially important to funding the arts. See, for instance: Danny Newman, *Subscribe Now!: Building Arts Audiences Through Dynamic Subscription Promotion* (New York City: Theatre Communications Groups, 1977).

³⁷ For instance, see Elizabeth Yale, *Sociable Knowledge: Natural History and the Nation in Early Modern Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680–1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Leslie Howsam, “An Experiment with Science for the Nineteenth-Century Book Trade: The International Scientific Series,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33, no. 02 (2000): 187–207; Regina Horta Duarte, “Between the National and the Universal: Natural History Networks in Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Isis* 104, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 777–87; Ian Hesketh, “A Good Darwinian? Winwood Reade and the Making of a Late Victorian Evolutionary Epic,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 51 (June 2015): 44–52; and Howsam, “An Experiment with Science.”

³⁸ Paul Carter, *Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1988); D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

offered them an opportunity to construct their identities and to find their place in the larger world.³⁹ In other words, many found it important to contribute to the imperial production of knowledge from the periphery *because of* rather than *in spite of* the epistemic inequalities that privileged the imperial gaze. In some cases, participants in these networks troubled our ostensibly defensible boundaries between “professional” and “amateur;” in other cases, practitioners worked as invisible assistants in the labs of a famous scientist whose purported genius eventually obscured all the other minds and hands in the room.⁴⁰ Sometimes these networks sought patronage from governments, from private corporations, or from the print market, though many viewed the popularization of science and the act of writing it for money quite degrading.⁴¹

Beginning with the Republic of Letters, an increasingly—and, for some, worryingly—diverse group of people had participated in the collaborative production of knowledge, whether as an avocation or within the bounds of their professions.⁴² When

³⁹ Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Neil Safier, “Global Knowledge on the Move: Itineraries, Amerindian Narratives, and Deep Histories of Science,” *Isis* 101, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 133–45.

⁴⁰ On the anachronism of the amateur-professional dichotomy, see Elizabeth Keeney, *The Botanizers: Amateur Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). For the original work that began to repopulate historical laboratories while launching many of these studies of scientific networks, see Steven Shapin, “The Invisible Technician,” *American Scientist* 77, no. 6 (November 1, 1989): 554–63.

⁴¹ Respectively, see Hugh Richard Slotten, *Patronage, Practice, and the Culture of American Science: Alexander Dallas Bache and the U.S. Coast Survey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lucier, *Scientists & Swindlers*; Mark Rose, “The Author as Proprietor: Donaldson v. Becket and the Genealogy of Modern Authorship,” *Representations*, no. 23 (July 1, 1988): 54; and Mario Biagioli and Peter Louis Galison, *Scientific Authorship: Credit and Intellectual Property in Science* (New York City: Routledge, 2003), 20.

⁴² Nina Baym, *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: Published for the

Bancroft's company sought granular historical contributions from unremarkable citizens around western North America, when it offered research or writing engagements in its library in exchange for an hourly wage in lieu of authorial credit, or when it sought support for a massive, collaboratively-produced history of the Pacific from the leading lights of Victorian literature or science, it hardly had to explain the pitch. Its operation differed more in degree than in type from many analogous endeavors, past or present.⁴³

When the company began its work around 1870, no university in America yet offered a PhD in history as a research degree.⁴⁴ By the time it completed its final volume in 1890, American intellectual life had rapidly recentered around the modern research university, either newly-formed or reformed according to the German model of higher education.⁴⁵ Before the research university effectively monopolized intellectual production

Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴³ Like the naturalists Yale examines, the people of the Pacific joined a network that allowed them to produce the object of their study—in this case, the Pacific—and to produce themselves as neighbors within it. "The naturalists' Britain," Yale asserts 'reflected the medium in which it was constructed. This is evident in Childrey's assertion that readers of his *Britannia Baconica* gained knowledge that made them neighbors to one another, though they might live at opposite ends of the island. It can be seen also in the naturalists' interest (even obsession) with the mechanics of travel and communication, especially the prominent places they accorded in their books to roads and waterways, the physical pathways that knit the country together. It is also visible in the divisions and inequalities that cut through these books, the social and intellectual hierarchies that they created between England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales." As will become clear, Bancroft & Company's insistence that its Pacific histories could not be divided because Pacific history was itself indivisible invited potential subscribers to invest at great price in the notion that Alaska, Mexico, California, and Utah were all equally their region even if they lived in Colorado or Montana. Yale, *Sociable Knowledge*, 8.

⁴⁴ Robert B. Townsend, *History's Babel: Scholarship, Professionalization, and the Historical Enterprise in the United States, 1880–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 20–21.

⁴⁵ For critical analyses of this historical transformation in history commonly identified as academic professionalization as well as the consequences of that narrative for those outside of academe, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Bonnie

across most of North America and Europe, Bancroft used his company's profits and infrastructure to build a broad coalition of historically-minded contributors in order to construct a full, working alternative to the modern historical profession. Using the economies of scale afforded by its bookselling and publishing departments, Bancroft & Company vertically integrated historical production, outpacing the disorganized complex of history departments, academic libraries, and university presses then forming to do similar work.

Knowledge has long been a subscription industry; in many important ways, academic professionalization did little to change that. What is the modern research university if not the ultimate subscription to curated knowledge? If modern academics rankle at that framing, this dissertation closes by demonstrating the source of that discomfort: the university era made it possible to maintain a distaste for mixing the high-minded work of knowledge and learning with the base concerns over money and capitalism. As public funding for the humanities and education has receded in recent years, it has been harder to pretend that high wall of separation still exists between capitalism and knowledge, a fact that has launched a thousand erudite lamentations.

The Idea of the Marketplace

Due to cheaper print technologies and higher literacy rates, an increasingly diverse reading public had exploded in the first half of the nineteenth century. Those readers

G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880–1945*, *Gender in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Ian R. Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Townsend, *History's Babel*.

centered in, but were hardly limited to, the nascent middling classes.⁴⁶ That expansion brought more books to more people, conditioning an increasingly large and aspirational public to value books and reading as attainable markers of cultural, intellectual, and economic status. To elites, downward expansion of the reading public proved indistinguishable from a gathering of the masses to profane knowledge.⁴⁷ Anxieties abounded.⁴⁸ The market gave new and old classes of readers more choices in how to consume, display, and cultivate their tastes and status. It also subjected them to the machinations of a new class of capitalists: publishers.

Beginning in the early national period, publishers had emerged to fill the gap between content creators and customers. Rather than merely printing materials in small runs for people who already wanted them, publishers increasingly worked to summon audiences that did not yet exist for particular printed works.⁴⁹ This new class of professionals created and normalized a new problem for literature: overproduction. It quickly became impossible for any reader to expect to keep abreast of literature in its

⁴⁶ Scott E. Casper et al., eds., *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880, A History of the Book in America 3* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 4–5, 33–36.

⁴⁷ Another century would pass before the cultural critic Raymond Williams would famously assert, “there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses.” Raymond Williams, “Culture Is Ordinary,” in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (Verso, 1989), 11.

⁴⁸ The literary critic Terence Whalen argues that Edgar Allen Poe and other aspiring authors in antebellum America increasingly recognized three readers for their work: their ideal reader, their feared readers, and the Capital Reader. For Whalen, the Capital Reader is the archetypal, disembodied arbiter of literary salability who stood between *littérateurs* and publication judging works not on their merit, but on some inscrutable calculus of profitability. Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 9–11.

⁴⁹ Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

totality. She or he would have to make choices.⁵⁰ The powerful influence of capital over the production of art based exclusively on profitability rather than aesthetic qualities concerned many. One could find a bit of solace within the overwhelming literary market by subscribing to known brands, which promised to curate the best materials for a proliferating palate of literary tastes. Editors and publishers had brands that were, in many cases, better known than their authors' reputations.⁵¹

The mass book market had neither a shortage of critics nor of participants; those groups were hardly mutually exclusive. Coteries of authors formed to build brands collaboratively even as they condemned the market for its cool indifference toward literary value.⁵² In other words, the insinuation of capital into the increasingly romanticized and ostensibly sacrosanct space between authors and readers had conditioned both parties to believe that rather than opting out of the market, they should become strategic consumers, using subscriptions and associations with other likeminded participants to navigate and to shape that crowded, disorienting space.⁵³ Revealingly,

⁵⁰ Within this "crisis of surplus," as Whalen identifies it, the *littérateur* Lucian Minor implored readers to remain courageously ignorant of "useless subjects," particularly rejecting "fashionable" literature and science. Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, 12.

⁵¹ Sopcak-Joseph, "Fashioning American Women"; Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, 74; Rice, *Transformation of Authorship*; Martin T. Buinicki, *Negotiating Copyright: Authorship and the Discourse of Literary Property Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York City: Routledge, 2005); Meredith L. McGill, "Copyright and Intellectual Property: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 16, no. 1 (2013): 407.

⁵² Dowling asserts, "coteries thus became both marketing vehicles and clearing houses for market critiques, often exposing the limitations of individualism and corrosive symptoms of the surging entrepreneurial economy while also championing the admirable qualities of the business world, which even a skeptic like Thoreau found irresistibly 'alert, adventurous, unwearied.'" David Oakey Dowling, *The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth-Century America*, *Nineteenth-Century Major Lives and Letters* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2–3.

⁵³ For a brief but helpful introduction to Romantic authorship and the emerging ideal of the literary genius, see Christine Haynes, "Reassessing 'Genius' in Studies of Authorship: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 8, no. 1 (2005): 287–320.

those who complained about capital's unchecked ability to prevent the wide dissemination of a potentially important but not immediately saleable literary work implicitly accepted large scale distribution as the only obvious desirable end for authorial labors.⁵⁴

The growth of the reading public in both size and complexity tracked with the growth of the market economy in which it was embedded. Just as readers' tastes had diverged without the public recognizably dividing, social classes had striated without discrete identities yet having solidified.⁵⁵ The capitalist market economy had impressed itself on more and more Americans in the antebellum era, becoming an increasingly inscrutable and ubiquitous fact of daily life. Corporations had become indispensable, but the memory lingered of an era in which their legitimacy had depended on them serving the public good, for which they received fervent public support.⁵⁶ Bancroft's company operated within the market economy of the Gilded Age, far removed from that earlier, more precarious time for corporations, but it sold itself successfully according to that classic standard.

The increasing uncertainty with which people engaged in a market they could neither trust nor avoid extended even to the money in their pockets. They found themselves accepting dubious bills of credit from unauthorized banks that operated with

⁵⁴ The handful of authors like Emily Dickinson who did not seek mass audiences for their works offer an exception that proves the rule that most writers assumed broad publication was the logical end to the act of writing. Railton, *Authorship and Audience*, 4, 8–9.

⁵⁵ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum, eds., *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, Palgrave Studies in Cultural and Intellectual History (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁵⁶ Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners*, 5; Schlesinger, "Biography of a Nation of Joiners."

essentially no oversight.⁵⁷ In a market in which counterfeit and devalued bills abounded, historian Stephen Mihm argues, “distinctions between counterfeit money and real money had yet to coalesce. Whether a note was counterfeit or not, or whether the bank that issued it could ultimately make good on its promise to pay, mattered little at the moment money changed hands.”⁵⁸ Whether or not a note had value depended only on whether or not the other person accepted its value. Ironically, then, the epistemic crises that accompanied the rise of the market economy had conditioned a broad range of people to accept a certain amount of risk in a market in which they could not avoid trading with companies and monies of unknown legitimacy. Though burgeoning capitalism in the first half of the nineteenth century had given most Americans scant reasons to trust the market, the enormous incentives it offered for those who engaged it anyway had conspired with the lack of any real alternatives to condition the American public to accepting uncertainty and the “confidence game” as not just inevitable, but potentially lucrative.⁵⁹

A cognate cultural transaction took place decades later when researchers showed up asking people to support Bancroft’s histories by giving their materials to his library or

⁵⁷ Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters*, 10.

⁵⁹ Mihm explains this irony by positing, “perhaps, in a nation poor in gold and silver but rich in promise, counterfeit notes and their close cousins helped meet the growing desire for credit and capital. Indeed, all the invidious comparisons between bankers and counterfeiters hinted at a deeper truth. This was a country whose inhabitants desperately needed and wanted money to make their dreams a reality, and where the banks fell short, counterfeiters proved more than willing to pick up the slack. Many people in the business of banking viewed counterfeiting as a small price to pay for a system of money creation governed not by the edicts of a central bank or the fiscal arm of the state, but by insatiable private demand for credit in the form of bank notes.” Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters*, 15. On the history of risk as an economic concept, see Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*.

by preordering the series. Individuals, in that moment, weighed their judgment of the company's pitch through its agent against their alternatives. Whether or not Bancroft would put their materials to good use, or whether he could finish the full series as he promised mattered less than whether a significant number of individuals risked believing that he might. For lack of better options, thousands did exactly that. The more investments the company accumulated, the more legitimacy its requests gained. Like the freewheeling capitalism out of which it emerged, The preacademic knowledge industry was a confidence game. Whether or not the company turned out to be a house of counterfeiters and con artists, they seemed plausibly capable of delivering the value they promised. The company explicitly addressed those fears by consistently pointing to its economies of scale, to its stable of unnamed researchers and writers, and to Bancroft's business acumen. Plausible proved good enough to elicit the cultural, intellectual, and financial support of thousands of benefactors and subscribers across North America and Europe.⁶⁰

Intellectual Currents

Before the modern university assumed the center of American intellectual life and established legitimate scholarly production as antithetical to writing for profit, people worried a lot less about whether a work might have been corrupted by its author's economic interests and a lot more about whether an important book could be finished at all. Within that precarious marketplace of ideas, the machinations of a seasoned publisher

⁶⁰ Mihm uses bank notes to symbolize "the dramatic economic transformation taking place. Entrepreneurs borrowed money in the form of bank notes; factory owners paid wages in bank notes; farmers who took their crops to market accepted payment in bank notes. They were markers of the market revolution; they were capitalism incarnate." Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters*, 15.

intent on making an important scholarly contribution by relying on the economies of scale at his disposal guaranteed not only that he could finish his monumental work, but also that the company could do so on a grander scale than any single historian could have hoped to approach. That scope proved important. The intellectual currents that made a grand history of the Pacific so desirable to such a broad public also made it cost-prohibitive.

Readers in the Victorian Era increasingly expected to read their way through the world; they expected to see it in both hyperlocal and cosmic perspectives. Written to satisfy those expectations, a definitive history of the Pacific Coast of North America would have to intertwine thousands of small lives and local oddities with larger regional transformations and the rise and fall of global empires in the region. Such a work would take a historian several more lifetimes to complete than historians tend to have at their disposal. Bancroft & Company had a solution that combined a long and noble history of collaborative knowledge production with the innovative adaptation of cutting-edge publishing practices.⁶¹ Invoking time-honored traditions like patronage and voluntarism, the company needed only for the public to judge its project worthy of support by subscription. The public subscribed.

When he went in search of his literary niche, Bancroft chose the Pacific Coast of North America. It made sense. He was partisan to his adopted home. He also had good reason to believe he would not face significant competition writing about that region. Bancroft must have assumed he could easily expect to become the *de facto* expert on

⁶¹ Valuing the refinement and expansion of branded knowledge over original work by individual authors had a very long history, one told best by the eminent book historian Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know*.

Pacific History. But the seasoned publisher wanted to sell history profitably, and that required summoning an attainable reading public of significant size to support the scope of the work. Taking European and American expansion into the vast Pacific as his historical study expanded the scope by necessity, but the growing European and American fascination with the vast, distant Pacific Rim almost ensured he would find eager readers for the larger project.

Many people in western North America chose to buy the sets, but a history of the Pacific had the advantage of eliciting the interests of potential subscribers from every corner of the transatlantic print trade. Even before the promise of mineral wealth around the Pacific basin had exercised a gravitational pull on the people of Europe—their bodies and their imaginations—the extension of colonial competition into that region had pulled explorers from the West so far west that they found themselves in the east. “Armchair explorers” who could not or would not board a ship could and did read their way through that world, which was paradoxically shrinking as its boundaries expanded.⁶² While no one had yet attempted to write a comprehensive history of Pacific America, hundreds of works had been published in or about California and the broader Pacific before 1870.⁶³ Among

⁶² For a recent exploration of Victorian armchair explorers’ adventures in reading, see the special issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture* “The Nineteenth-Century Pacific Rim,” edited by Tamara S. Wagner. Tamara S. Wagner, “Introduction: The Nineteenth-Century Pacific Rim: Victorian Transoceanic Studies Beyond the Postcolonial Matrix,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 02 (June 2015): 223. Historians and literary critics have done much to examine and to deconstruct the colonial gaze of this literature. See for instance: Jill Barnum, Wyn Kelley, and Christopher Sten, eds., *“Whole Oceans Away”: Melville and the Pacific* (Ashland, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007); Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific: Travel, Empire, and the Author’s Profession* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009); Lawrence Phillips, *The South Pacific Narratives of Robert Louis Stevenson and Jack London: Race, Class, Imperialism* (London: Continuum, 2012); Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, eds., *The South Seas: A Reception History from Daniel Defoe to Dorothy Lamour* (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2015).

⁶³ Robert Ernest Cowan, *A Bibliography of the History of California and the Pacific West, 1510–1906* (Columbus, OH: Long’s College Book Co, 1952).

them were titles like Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) and Mark Twain's *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* (1867).⁶⁴ The region had inspired illustrated books that were as expensive as they were limited in their production, including *Maximilian, Prince of Wied's Travels in the Interior of North America, during the years 1832–1834* (1839) and John W. Audubon's *Illustrated Notes of an Expedition Through Mexico and California in 1849–1850* (1852).⁶⁵ While expensive illustrated works pertaining to the Pacific had made handsome profits in small runs sold to affluent subscribers in Europe, Bancroft & Company targeted a more expansive audience on both sides of the Atlantic. The audience responded to Bancroft & Company and to other producers of knowledge about the Pacific based on an interest in that vast ocean world not only as the distant ends of the earth, but also as an increasingly close site of economic exchange.⁶⁶ If the Pacific World is currently having a moment, it is hardly the first time.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea* (New York City: Harper & Brothers, 1840); Mark Twain, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches* (New York City: C. H. Webb & Company, 1867).

⁶⁵ Prince Maximilian of Wied and Karl Bodmer, *Maximilian, Prince of Wied's Travels in the Interior of North America, during the Years 1832–1834*, First English Edition (London: Ackermann & Company, 1843); John W. Audubon, *Illustrated Notes of an Expedition Through Mexico and California in 1849–50* (New York City: Published by the author, 1852), a copy is held by the American Antiquarian Society under the call number H560 A916 1852 PF. <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=32069>.

⁶⁶ Walter Mulrea Fisher, *The Californians* (London: Macmillan, 1876); Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Silverado Squatters* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884); Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884); Josiah Royce, *California: A Study of American Character: From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1886). The most significant literary criticism on the Pacific in Victorian Literature focuses on Stevenson: Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific*; Phillips, *South Pacific Narratives*.

⁶⁷ Bancroft and Company took a more limited view of the Pacific than modern scholars of the Pacific World do, though one struggles to call the history of half a continent from antiquity to the present "limited." Still, their story of the Pacific silenced many people and whole cultures who also made and experienced history around and within the Pacific Rim. By departing from the more common obsession with nationalistic history in their own moment and choosing to organize their massive shared history of countless small locales and individual lives around North America's

As the first chapter demonstrates, the region was also brimming with people eager to hand over the raw materials of history for free. Over the previous half century, competition between the Spanish, Russian, and British empires as well as the new American nations had conspired with multiple mineral rushes to remake the Pacific world and western North America multiple times over. Those overlapping and incomplete conquests had left behind a population of people sure that they had witnessed history but lacking any good way to tell it. Importantly, the fragmented and messy history of the region meant that while everyone had a story to tell, few people had exactly the same one. Rather than dissuading participation, those disagreements made it all the more important

Pacific Coast, though, Bancroft & Company made an early, albeit incomplete, contribution to a history that their academic successors silenced until recently. The inclusiveness of their vision might underwhelm in comparison to the contemporary vision of the Pacific World now emerging in historical scholarship, but it significantly expanded on and deviated from the available identities and organizing categories usually available to historians and readers of history in the late nineteenth century. To exclude the company's efforts from the historiography of the Pacific World as we are currently writing it would only serve to extend that historical silence to a historiographic silencing, too. To flag the company's more limited vision of the Pacific, I tend either to use "Pacific North America" or "North America's Pacific Coast" in reference to the geographic region the company hoped to examine. I exclusively use "Pacific World" to refer to that region as contemporary academics have recently begun to theorize it. I further differentiate between the region identified as the Pacific world and the academic concept of the "Pacific World." While the company's limited scope implicitly assumed and reified the sense that Alaska and Panama shared a history in a way that Samoa and Japan did not, the company capitalized on a more general fascination with the larger Pacific world. Victorian readers in the metropole would pay dearly to read their way through the exoticized distant reaches of the other side of the world; a coalition of residents occupying a significant subset of that periphery chose to take advantage of Bancroft's enterprise in order to write back. Even in their attempt to write an expansive history of that more limited region, the company produced significant silences. It presented North America's Pacific Coast as depopulated of native peoples, largely excluding them from the ranks of its intellectual network and limiting historical presence to the initial five volume miniseries, as if Native history were exclusively a static past that quickly ended with Euro-American settlement in the region. Matt K. Matsuda, "The Pacific," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 1, 2006): 758–80; David Igler, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Kindle Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012); Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific*; Wagner, "Introduction"; Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

to inflect the first and greatest history of the Pacific with their version of events.⁶⁸

With a transnational audience eager for information about the Pacific and with no competing enterprise capable of converting the abundant raw materials into a commodity targeted at that market, Bancroft's seemingly audacious scheme begins to seem more obvious, if not less ambitious. The local view of the available raw materials was at odds with the global perspective desired in a knowledge commodity. Writing history global in its scope but local in its details promised to reconcile that problem, but it also appealed to two intellectual currents then pulling the emerging genre of history in opposite directions. Along with cognates like biography and personal reminiscences, history afforded readers highly-desired access to the private thoughts and inner lives of others, famous or unknown, noble or ignoble.⁶⁹ Beyond the entertainment or edification offered by reading

⁶⁸ In a field-defining work focused on the Pacific World, historian David Igler argues that the Pacific "was not a single ocean world. Rather, it represented a vast waterscape where imperial and personal contests played out in isolated bays and coastlines, where indigenous communities sought to control the terms of exchange, and where maritime traders plied the waters for profitable commodities. Igler, *The Great Ocean*, 4. Historian Matt K. Matsuda identifies the Pacific World as "a multilocal space." Certainly Bancroft's histories do not cover the whole of the Pacific World, to whatever degree such a singular world exists. The field has taken shape around the concept of reorienting history toward the ocean and waterways rather than viewing the sea as a division between historical places. To that extent, Bancroft's Pacific States Histories mark an early attempt to write a shared history of an admittedly multilocal space because they share an orientation toward the same waterway and the world on its other side, even when that other side meant rounding a horn, too. Matsuda, "The Pacific," 758–59. For two recent, award-sharing books on the ways in which certain threads tied those myriad locales together, see Edward Dallam Melillo, *Strangers on Familiar Soil: Rediscovering the Chile-California Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); and Joshua L. Reid, *The Sea Is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs, an Indigenous Borderlands People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁶⁹ Biography, the book historian Scott Casper argues, made people crazy. Before documentaries, true crime TV, or reality game shows gave people an opportunity to learn from or gawk at the inner lives of others, biographies offered unprecedented public access into private worlds. Two early types of biographies both expected the genre to inculcate good values, differing only in whether they told nationalistic celebrations of America through its iconic leaders or recounted the extraordinary lives of self-made men or pious women beyond the political pantheon. Like other genres—including history—then growing with and emerging from general literature, the larger it became the more biography fragmented, targeting particular types of biography at particular segments of the population. Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and*

sordid or exemplary lives, respectively, an obsession with small lives as important components of larger transformations constituted an emerging historical consciousness grounded locally.⁷⁰ With three wars for the racial make-up of America in its recent memory and the centennial celebration quickly approaching, the country became obsessed with its history down to the local level.⁷¹ At the same time, international audiences clamored for evolutionary epics, history writ cosmic. Just as history was

Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2, 4–5. Another historian of the book, Ann Fabian, has examined the proliferation of first person narratives in nineteenth-century America. While biographies offered access to the lives of important figures perceived as worthy of some degree of veneration, the market for these narratives traded in the sordid lives of society's more wretched characters. Whether sold through the traditional market or peddled door-to-door by the destitute author, the market for uglier stories found an audience among their social betters. But the cultural expectations that allowed such a narrator to present an authoritative story about her or his own lived experiences required her or him to assume a subservient pose, at least rhetorically, but possibly also physically in the doorway of a potential buyer's home. Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3–5, 7.

⁷⁰ Carol Kammen points to President Ulysses Grant's call for local histories in the Centennial era as a boon to the genre and discipline. Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 7. In an edited volume, Kammen has reproduced several texts on local history produced during the nineteenth century. Carol Kammen and American Association for State and Local History, eds., *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996). Historians of science in print culture James Secord and Ian Hesketh have each examined the publishing histories of natural histories that purported to tell natural histories on a cosmic scale. James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Ian Hesketh, "The Story of Big History," *History of the Present* 4, no. 2 (2014): 179–80; Ian Hesketh, "Behold the (Anonymous) Man: J. R. Seeley and the Publishing of *Ecce Homo*," *Victorian Review* 38, no. 1 (2012): 93–112; Hesketh, "A Good Darwinian?"

⁷¹ In his cogent revisionist article, western historian Elliot West reframes the Civil War as one among three wars to determine the racial make-up of the country, placing it between the Mexican-American War and the Indian Wars. Elliott West, "Reconstructing Race," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (April 1, 2003): 6–26. On the memory of conflict and race in the nineteenth century, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); and Boyd Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

expanding downward to encompass local details and upward to account for the history of the universe, a scientific worldview increasingly demanded that history of either scale tell true stories rather than merely good and instructive ones.⁷² With those paradoxical standards demanding great depth and breadth of both narrative and evidence, only Bancroft & Company's much-touted economies of scale could possibly write a definitive history of western North America from Alaska to Panama and inland to the Rocky Mountains from antiquity to the present. True, it was barely plausible. Still, even that scant promise would have beat competing offers by a significant margin, had there been any.

The intellectual and cultural currents that had made history desirable to readers had also made people want to write themselves into it. The emerging subgenres, however, denied most people the opportunity to frame their lives within histories of greater significance. First-person narratives sold very well by purporting to tell true stories, but they were not history. Whatever value those stories had rested in their ostensibly true reconstruction of lives horrible beyond fabrication; authors performed a certain wretchedness as a condition of their sale.⁷³ An emerging genre of pioneer reminiscences, by contrast, told heroic stories that were also not properly a part of history. Bancroft took advantage of that peculiarly western genre, offering those who gave reminiscences to its library an opportunity to become part of history, too.⁷⁴

⁷² Secord, *Victorian Sensation*; Leslie Howsam, "Academic Discipline or Literary Genre? The Establishment of Boundaries in Historical Writing," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, January 1, 2004, 525–45; Leslie Howsam, *Past into Print: The Publishing of History in Britain, 1850–1950* (London: British Library, 2009); Ian Hesketh, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain: Making the Past Speak* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011); Hesketh, "A Good Darwinian?"

⁷³ Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth*.

⁷⁴ William E. Wagner, "Composing Pioneers: Westering Men, Personal Writing, and the

The market and its diverging subgenres had conditioned western Americans who believed they had witnessed—or even made—history in the preceding decades. It also encouraged them to think about the global significance of those local events, but it still largely denied them the opportunity to write their own local specificity into the larger story. What opportunity they did have necessitated a subservient and ignoble narrator. So when agents from Bancroft & Company came canvassing for stories and materials to donate to the company's library and histories, it promised a lot. Contributors could inflect a history meant to tell a global story with local specificity with their own perspectives. Even if they could not fully control their representation within that larger story, they could hardly do worse than the construction of the wretched narrator they could otherwise assume. Over a half century before professional historians began recording oral histories, Bancroft's door-to-door agents did something remarkably similar for the company's proprietary library. They capitalized on the growing desire among common people to write their lives into larger histories and the enduring lack of options for satisfying that proclivity.⁷⁵

Historiography

Bancroft's for-profit historical enterprise briefly coexisted with the nascent academic profession. In many ways, the two enterprises emerged from and served similar expectations and epistemologies. They differed primarily according to the publics they

Making of Frontier Opportunity in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011).

⁷⁵ Willa Krug Baum, a pioneer of oral history in her own right, asserted this continuity between Bancroft & Company and Berkeley's Bancroft library. Willa Krug Baum, "Oral History: A Revived Tradition at the Bancroft Library," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, no. 58 (1967): 57–64.

imagined for their scholarship, which was both a cause and consequence of academic scholars' distaste for writing for profit. Throughout the twentieth century, those who examined Bancroft's enterprise necessarily did it from within the academically-structured knowledge industry, even if they wrote from outside academe. While the significance of Bancroft's *Works* and library have consistently impressed later scholars, the methods that produced both have departed so significantly from accepted academic practices that the legitimacy of that legacy remained constantly in jeopardy.

Bancroft & Company's successive critics spent much of the twentieth century attempting to save the company and its *Works* from the very methods that had once made the enterprise seem so promising to so many people. Most of those scholars viewed Bancroft sympathetically. They hoped to find a way to portray him as a legitimate historian in spite of his clear violations of the implicit code of scholars. Bancroft's would-be redeemers struggled to defend the apparent plagiarist, who seemed to have passed off as his own works written by a stable of ghostwriters. Some attempted to redeem the *Works* in spite of their veiled authorship by reassuring incredulous readers that Bancroft's ghostwriters actually possessed talents and educations greater than their boss. Such explanations failed to redeem the company in large part because they failed to distinguish the knowledge industry in which Bancroft & Company had operated from the one in which they wrote and passed judgement.⁷⁶ Even though the company had never tried to

⁷⁶ Most of these studies suggested that Bancroft ought to be forgiven for failing to honor the convention of transparently representing one's authorship that historians had come to hold as sacrosanct precisely because he was not a historian. The representation of Bancroft as an industrialist whose business acumen outpaced his scholarly ethics is present even in several of the very creative titles: Rockwell D. Hunt, "Hubert Howe Bancroft: His Work and His Method," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* 8, no. 3 (January 1, 1911): 158–73; John Walton Coughy, "Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of Western America," *The American Historical Review* 50, no. 3 (April 1, 1945): 461–70; John Russell McCarthy, "Wholesale Historian: Hubert Howe Bancroft," *American Heritage* 1, no. 3 (1950): 17–19; John H. Krenkel, "Bancroft's Assembly Line

hide its corporate authorship, later critics anachronistically extended the natural relationship between author and text backward. They assumed that uncredited collaborative authorship necessarily constituted an intentional violation of the ostensibly natural relationship between authors and their texts.⁷⁷

Similarly, scholars consistently felt the need to redeem the company's distasteful use of subscription publishing, which had come to appear as the ultimate violation of historians' necessary distance from economic ambitions. Confronted by the obvious value of the *Works* and the strength of their scholarship, though, several historians argued that the industrialist and his employees had done important work even if they had failed to honor that scholarly convention. The knowledge industry in which Bancroft did his work had been so thoroughly erased that even historians eager to redeem his methods as congenial to his time primarily settled on the dismissive claim that he was a publisher rather than a scholar. So framed, several of them suggested that Bancroft's ostensibly

Histories," *American History Illustrated* 1, no. 2 (1967): 44–9; Harry Clark, *A Venture in History: The Production, Publication, and Sale of the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

⁷⁷ The multiple authorship of the volumes had never exactly constituted a secret. The pace and scope of production clearly outpaced the efforts of a single man. In the 1893 Annual Report of the AHA, James Schouler praised Bancroft highly while observing that his memoir "recounts fully the methods he employed, with a corps of literary writers under his personal direction, in ransacking the contents of that huge library which he afterward sold, to furnish forth his own compendious treatises upon the archaeology, history, and ethnology of our Pacific Coast, hitherto but little illustrated by its latest race of conquerors." James Schouler, "Historical Industries," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 59, <https://archive.org/details/1893annualreportooameruoft>. The academically trained historian and personal friend of Frances Fuller Victor, the woman who wrote the Oregon volumes among others, William A. Morris wrote the first scholarly essay on the authorship of the histories in 1903. Even there, he acknowledged that the public had come to infer Bancroft's authorship beginning in the twentieth century. Morris noted that Bancroft never actually claimed sole authorship of the series and, for that matter, for any one man to assert authorship of the Bancroft series of histories would be preposterous." William Alfred Morris, "The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications: A History of a History," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 4, no. 4 (December 1, 1903): 2.

unique innovation of putting the industrial means of production at his disposal to work writing history deserved a bit of admiration from scholars, even if they still rejected those methods as antithetical to real scholarly work.

Consequently, Bancroft's place in western historiography has remained largely unchanged for a century despite occasional books or essays focused on his life or works. Together, those historians who have studied him have continually pointed to a central paradox: western historians have long pillaged Bancroft's books for historical information and continue to rely on Berkeley's eponymous Bancroft Library, but they have continually refused to acknowledge him as a participant in western history and historiography.⁷⁸

Before undergraduates pretended not to use Wikipedia, western historians referenced Bancroft's *Works* before citing something more respectable. None who work in western history can escape the legacy of Bancroft's enterprise; his histories offer the most dependable and accessible reference volumes for establishing ancillary information about almost every region in western North America before the twentieth century and the library that bears his name continues to underpin some portion of most research projects on western topics.⁷⁹

As a result, the origin story of western history has long opened in Chicago, 1893, with Frederick Jackson Turner reading his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Even new western historians accepted that point of origin when they

⁷⁸ Charles S. Peterson makes this case the most clearly in his essay examining Bancroft's place in the field of western history. Charles S. Peterson, "Hubert Howe Bancroft: First Western Regionalist," in *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians*, ed. Richard W. Etulain (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 43–44.

⁷⁹ The Pacific historian Earl Pomeroy argued cogently that western American studies had replicated the themes and proportions established by Bancroft's histories and library, for better and for worse. Earl Pomeroy, "Old Lamps for New: The Cultural Lag in Pacific Coast Historiography," *Arizona and the West* 2, no. 2 (1960): 107–126.

attempted to displace Turner's frontier, arguing instead for a new western history. The "new west" looked conspicuously like a very old west: it was regional rather than focused on a moving process, it focused on violence and incomplete conquests in the contest over that diverse, transnational space. No new western historian seems to have noticed the resemblance between that new west and Bancroft & Company's much older Pacific West, which had predated Turner by a decade even as it surpassed both the audience and the page count of that essay hundreds of times over. Bancroft wrote hulking tomes for the mass market while Turner infamously never published a book to follow up on his brief essay.⁸⁰ The new academic knowledge industry, however, privileged Turner over Bancroft. Within that industry, Turner produced a generation of graduate students devoted to advancing his central idea while Bancroft's ghost of a public haunted his reputation, raising questions about the purity of his motives and the ethics of his methods. Put simply, if one hopes for enduring significance in the new academic knowledge industry, one would do better to churn out graduate students rather than books. In the early twentieth century, a juggernaut history factory operated under Turner's management first at the University of Wisconsin and then at Harvard University; a new, distinctly academic public subscribed.

This dissertation recovers the lost knowledge industry in which Bancroft & Company operated, telling a roughly chronological narrative of the assembly and dissolution of Bancroft's coalition and its broad public support. Chapter I traces the lives lived by people with complex racial and ethnic identities as they negotiated local continuities even as the world changed around them. It explains how so many diverse

⁸⁰ Peterson, "Hubert Howe Bancroft: First Western Regionalist," 43.

people across western North America came to believe they possessed important historical materials—if only in their fading memories—that could counter the willful amnesia of the so-called pioneers who seemed convinced they had built the region from nothing. In order to cure that amnesia, however, their historical materials required preservation. The next chapter turns to the slow, contingent process of coalition building by which Bancroft's company built its broader intellectual network. It begins by examining how Bancroft and his chief collaborators first recruited themselves to the cause of Pacific history, and then how their operation created a cascade of likeminded choices. Chapter III returns to the company's informants, examining the oral memoirs that company agents recorded as a part of the research canvass in California. If the first chapter explained how people came to have a story they believed needed telling, this chapter examines the shared narrative arc of those otherwise conflicting stories. Chapters IV and V examine the publication campaign and the broad public response to the *Works*. Together, they juxtapose the operations and public appeals the company made based on its initial financial security with the more desperate times that followed the devastating destruction of Bancroft's business and building by fire in 1886.

Like so many other critics of Bancroft, this dissertation intertwines the problems of multiple authorship and subscription publishing. Collaborative authorship occupies much of chapters I, II, and III while chapters IV and V focus on the subscription drive. In part, this focus results from the fact that those collaborative methods made up the core of public participation in Bancroft's private knowledge enterprise. But corporate authorship, research-for-hire, and aggressive publishing all became antithetical to modern academic professionalism, and so those practices have always demanded the most explanation. It is no accident that the collaborative methods that made Bancroft's enterprise so successful

in the private marketplace of ideas that preceded academic professionalization also became the most indefensible violations of professional ethics according to the standard that emerged thereafter. Unlike previous works on Bancroft's company, however, the present dissertation does not attempt to redeem the company from those blights. In conversation with the growing scholarship on the history of authorship and authorial economies as well as a forthcoming body of work on subscriptions, it recovers the marketplace of ideas in which people saw those things positively rather than negatively. The epilogue, then, traces the rapid erasure of that knowledge industry in the twentieth century as a study in scholarly memory and forgetting.

This is the story of how an unlettered capitalist and his publishing company used the most aggressive marketing techniques of the Gilded Age to build an intellectual network out of public sentiments for patronage and voluntarism that harkened back to the eighteenth century, perhaps even to the Enlightenment. The pitch was simple: together, they could give the world the definitive history of the Pacific. Acting alone, none of them could accomplish even a part of that. Bancroft's company marks the end of a long arc in the history of knowledge. It began with the curation of collaboratively-produced knowledge brands in the early modern era, grew up in the correspondence networks of the Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters, and used increasingly aggressive subscription models to adapt to market capitalism. Even if Bancroft's company operated according to the norms of the Gilded Age, it relied on an intellectual network that had more in common with the networks of Sir Walter Raleigh or Benjamin Franklin than with the academic departments that emerged contemporaneously with it.⁸¹

⁸¹ Nicholas Popper, *Walter Raleigh's "History of the World" and the Historical Culture of the Late Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

CHAPTER I

UNSETTLED PASTS, OCCUPIED FUTURES

The world was larger then than now, and the mind of man was smaller . . . no one ever left New York by any route and arrived at San Francisco the same person.

—Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Retrospection, Political and Personal*

What an awakening was here along these hitherto slumbering shores; steam, gold, and Anglo-American occupation, all in a breath! And let it be borne in mind that neither of these events grew out of the other; each was independent, though all simultaneous—as if this fair land, ripening for untold ages in the womb of time, had with the throes of progress now been born to the sphere, and made ready for the use of civilized man.

—Hubert Howe Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*

In the muddy spring of 1852, the young Hubert Howe Bancroft did not yet know that his labors with the quartz-mining Plymouth company in the Sierra Nevada mountains would prove a tremendous waste of effort. That lack of prescience alone drove him in the backbreaking labor he so despised. Even the “glorious mornings, ushered in by myriads of sweet songsters welcoming the warm sunlight which came tremblingly through the soft misty air” could not ameliorate his suffering.⁸² He beat his mules in anger. His malice derived from every aspect of his job, from the sharp rocks that abused his still-delicate hands, from the heavy firewood that resisted his efforts to collect and stack it, and from

⁸² Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 128.

the terrible cooking with which he afflicted himself at day's end.⁸³ He considered his suffering heroic—surely Lord Byron's heroes could have commiserated with him, if only their solitude were not fundamental to their plight as well.⁸⁴

It was from such a place that Bancroft found himself briefly transported back to the days of his youth. His mnemonic journey began with the discovery of something foreign to life in the Sierra: a pair of white gloves, the sort a young man might wear dancing. They transported the now-seasoned young man over the Pacific Ocean, across Panama, through Cuba, and back to his last night in Buffalo, New York. In youthful rebellion to his Puritan upbringing, he had celebrated his liberation from his brother-in-law and employer George Derby's watchful eye a few hours early, dancing all night on the eve of his departure. He found himself wearing the very same clothes for very different purposes on the other side of the continent. The gloves, above all else, struck him as humorously out of place. With the "relic of past revelries" offering a valiant, futile defense of his delicate hands, Bancroft "gathered up the reins, mounted the load, and [beat his] mules into a round trot, rode up to the mill laughing bitterly at the absurdity of the thing."⁸⁵ From his vantage point high in the Sierra, the more seasoned Bancroft could just make out the frivolous boy in Buffalo wearing the pristine versions of the very same set of clothes—gloves and all—that barely protected him from the brutality of California. In Bancroft's telling, the younger boy would hardly have recognized his older self, his soul now "in harmony with nothing except the coyotes which all night howled discordantly

⁸³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 127–28.

⁸⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 128–29.

⁸⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 129.

behind the hills.”⁸⁶ No more than three months had elapsed.

One should not dismiss lightly Bancroft’s grandiose account of that watershed in his life. He might have technically arrived in the same nation from which he had departed, but California was more like “an overseas possession” than a contiguous state, “distant two ocean voyages and an isthmian transit through the territory of a foreign nation.”⁸⁷ For the young man who had found working in his brother-in-law’s bookstore a bit harsh, working in the mountains of California came as quite a shock. Bancroft learned a great deal about himself in those early weeks in California. While “some woods send forth fragrance under the tool of the carver,” he later wrote, “such was not my nature. I never took kindly to misfortune; prosperity fits me like a glove.”⁸⁸ His early labors in California offered him insights into his character, into the kind of life he wanted to lead.

Those ill-fated months spent laboring in vain with the Plymouth company provided him with something he sorely needed by 1890: a pioneer story filled with familiar themes like speculation, failure, and resilience. As he later constructed the character Hubert Howe Bancroft, author of the foregoing *Works*, that story allowed the closely-related Bancroft to transform his character from an entitled young man, fresh from his youthful revelry and seasoned only by a relatively comfortable oceanic journey to California, into a rugged pioneer tempered by the blazing sun, and calloused by the unrewarded labors of gold country. That story gave Bancroft a way to soil the “white kid gloves” of his youth before recounting how he became the book collector—perhaps with a

⁸⁶ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 129.

⁸⁷ Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*, 19.

⁸⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 128.

new set of white gloves—and made his fortune hawking paper in the city. By 1890, an increasingly urban American population had created a thriving market for stories of an earlier, manlier frontier life. Bancroft & Company had capitalized on that market for nostalgia, but they had done so in part by relying on a historical consciousness among longtime residents of the Pacific who were eager to undercut the romantic reminiscences of those later arrivals and, worse, their children.⁸⁹

The several incomplete conquests of western America over the course of the preceding century had created ideal market conditions for the commodification of historical narratives by the time Bancroft began his enterprise around 1870. Many of its oldest inhabitants found themselves living as foreigners in their homelands, history-rich and future-poor; the region's newest residents had moved to a foreign world newly within the borders of their own nation, a condition that put them in the market to buy a history

⁸⁹ Bancroft and many of those who contributed to his enterprise represented the most prolific contributors to the genre of pioneer reminiscences that blew up in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. That explosion provided Bancroft & Company with countless reminiscences for its library as well as many subscribers to its histories. It likely inspired the later pivot toward mug books, too. Wagner, "Composing Pioneers," chap. 5. Growing up with the Country: Pioneer Narratives and Historical Memory."; Clyde A. Milner, "The Shared Memory of Montana Pioneers," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 37 (1987): 2–13; Clyde A. Milner, "The View from Wisdom: Region and Identity in the Minds of Four Westerners," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. William J. Cronon, Jay Gitlin, and George Miles (New York City: W. W. Norton, 1992); Wallace Earle Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992). That same anxiety over the sense that the frontier experience was disappearing from American life inspired Frederick Jackson Turner to write his essay, which has proved important and problematic to western regionalists and frontier historians ever since. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 197–227. For the context of Turner's essay, see William Cronon, "Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner," *Western Historical Quarterly* 18 (1987): 157–76. Historian Glen Gendzel has explored the intersection between ethnicity, generation, and memory in California in this era: Glen Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres: Competing Mythologies in Northern and Southern California, 1850–1930," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (April 2001): 55–79.

worthy of the grand future that they imagined.⁹⁰ Already a savvy businessman, the young Bancroft set about the task of acquiring history from the region's oldest residents at a bargain and reselling it to the region's rootless immigrants at a considerable markup. The company's headquarters in San Francisco only served as a node in a network that quickly expanded across western North America, stretching from Alaska to the central valley of Mexico and inland all the way to Denver. People across that vast region had something in common: they thought of themselves as the pioneers who had developed their particular corner of that continent from nothing, only to see it increasingly become unrecognizable as later arrivals further transformed it, claiming also to have invented it. The rapid transformation had laid down striated memories like a flood does sediment, and each layer agreed only that their generation had the real story. Long before the company's agents knocked on their doors beginning in the 1870s, the rapid transformation of Pacific North America had created a population of people eager to preserve their historical knowledge and documents but lacking reliable means to do so.

Becoming Pioneers

Bancroft's story required a bit of creative rewriting to sell as a pioneer narrative; John Breen's did not. In 1877, at the urging of the History Company's agents, Breen recounted his family's overland journey to California. Breen shared a sense of nostalgia with many of the Anglo American contributors to Bancroft's Library who had come to California in the few years on either side of 1850. They shared the sense that lives like

⁹⁰ The tension between grand hopes for the future of the region and the romanticization of its rougher past extended far beyond the History Company. Bancroft did not invent that phenomenon; he merely cashed in on it. Wrobel, *Promised Lands*.

theirs could never be lived again. The Breen family's harrowing overland journey was unlikely to be repeated after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Certainly no one—Breen included—would have wanted to repeat the tragedy of the Donner party, with whom the Breen family had infamously spent the winter of 1846–1847 snowbound in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The closing of the historical chapter that had made such tragedies possible seemed to beg for veterans of that more primitive era to commit their stories to paper for the sake of posterity. Bancroft, too, had a story he believed would never be duplicated. He recounted in *California Inter Pocula* (1888) his own oceanic journey and the isthmian transit as representative of that popular route. With the Panama Canal then under construction, Bancroft believed his voyage to California marked the end of an age. The world had no Californias left to give, he argued, no “gold-besprinkled unoccupied temperate zone” left to entice Argonauts across Earth's seas.⁹¹ Both men believed that he had undergone a tribulation the last of its kind in human history. That sense of a global transformation that had recently and permanently remade the world produced an acute nostalgia that not only impelled many people to tell their stories to company researchers, it also guaranteed agents on the other end of the company could summon a vast public for those stories in the future.

In the spring of 1846, the fourteen-year-old son of Irish immigrants embarked with his family on a quintessential American journey: the overland trek to the Pacific Coast.⁹²

⁹¹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, vol. 35, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1888), 123.

⁹² John Mack Faragher wrote the standard work on the overland trail. John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, Second Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 7; David Rich Lewis, “Argonauts and the Overland Trail Experience: Method and Theory,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1985): 285–305. In her dissertation, the historian Sarah Keyes has argued that the overland journey quickly came to occupy a special place in the memory of westward expansion such that overlanders alone could truly claim to be pioneers while those who

The Breen family left its home in Iowa with three wagons and seven yoke of oxen, destined for California by way of Independence, Missouri.⁹³ The young John Breen could not have known then that he would have an enduring legacy in the American historical imagination, both as a historical figure and as a narrator. A prototypical pioneer, the young man was short on education, a deficiency the overland trail would remedy by providing him with life experience beyond his years. That practical education would eventually impel him to become one of the first people to write in the then nonexistent genre of western American history.⁹⁴

Little rhetorical flourish was required in order to carry his audience with him on the emotional spring day in 1847 when the family finally neared Sutter's Fort in present day Sacramento. Even three decades had not dulled in his mind the "appearance of the country about Johnson's ranch," beautiful grassland with "many flowers mingled through it," and the weather, "warm and clear which gave a sensation to the new emigrant that I can not describe."⁹⁵ The warmth of that meadow could never erase the memory of the cold of the previous winter, during which the young John Breen, his parents Patrick and Peggy, and his younger siblings, had struggled to survive at what is now called Donner Lake, fewer than a hundred miles from Sutter's Fort. Those hundred miles—seemingly trivial

voyaged to the Pacific Coast by sea could not. Sarah Keyes, "Beyond the Plains: Migration to the Pacific and the Reconfiguration of America, 1820s-1900s" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2012).

⁹³ John Breen, "Pioneer Memoirs by John Breen: Who Came to California Overland in 1846 as a Member of the Donner Party" 1877, 4-5, BANC MSS C-D 51, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11235511~S1>; Dale Lowell Morgan, *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 307.

⁹⁴ Breen, "Pioneer Memoirs by John Breen," 2.

⁹⁵ Breen, "Pioneer Memoirs by John Breen," 48.

after the couple thousand the party had already traversed—made the difference between a comfortable winter with plentiful food and the nightmare that claimed the lives of half the party and that infamously caused some to resort to cannibalism.

Within a generation, the ordeal that they and the rest of the Donner party endured would become the stuff of legend in the American West in large part because it was wildly atypical. The Donner party's story threw into sharp relief the imagined topography of savagery and civilization on the Pacific Coast. It confirmed what many people already thought they knew about the middle of the continent and the foolish attempt to cross it.⁹⁶ Rather than walking from one contiguous state to another, those who crossed to California or Oregon by the overland route made a "headlong dash for safety" on the more developed, temperate Pacific Coast.⁹⁷ The Donner Party's ordeal made clear the tenuousness of life on the western edge of the continent. Only a couple of hundred miles separated the thriving society on the bay from the picturesque lake in the mountains, on the shores of which "cultivated, wealthy people . . . did not wholly forbear to eat of each other."⁹⁸ Initial printed reports suggested that the "all-absorbing thought of individual self-preservation" had won the day, driving party members mad to the point that when food did arrive, "some of them cast it aside and seemed to prefer the putrid human flesh that still remained."⁹⁹ With such sordid stories of his family's experience in circulation,

⁹⁶ Historian Ethan Rarick recounts the debate between the boosters who claimed the overland journey would quickly become quite safe and the skeptics like Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, who "insisted that trying to take a family west amounted to 'palpable homicide.'" Ethan Rarick, *Desperate Passage: The Donner Party's Perilous Journey West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10–11.

⁹⁷ Rarick, *Desperate Passage*, 2.

⁹⁸ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 109.

⁹⁹ Elbert P. Jones, "[Untitled]," *California Star*, April 10, 1847; quoted in Bancroft, *California*

Breen had good reason to accept Bancroft & Company's invitation to recount his version of that story thirty years later.

In February 1852, the nineteen-year-old Hubert Howe Bancroft began his journey to California the normal way: by sea. Between 1848 and 1870, the majority of immigrants to California came to California by sea, entering San Francisco Bay through what would become known as the Golden Gate.¹⁰⁰ Living in Buffalo, New York, Bancroft already lived significantly closer to California than the Breen family had in Iowa. Bancroft's journey by the Panamanian route took just over one month while the overland route took five to six months.¹⁰¹ For the discriminating traveler with the requisite financial means, the choice journey to California began in New York rather than Missouri and crossed Panama rather than the Sierra.¹⁰² The distance across the continent might have been shorter than traveling around the horn or even than crossing the isthmus, but "the overland route was by certain measures the longest, for it required travelers to cross not just distance but ignorance."¹⁰³

Some thirty years after the fact, Bancroft, too, would recount for future

Inter Pocula, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Doris Marion Wright, "The Making of Cosmopolitan California: An Analysis of Immigration, 1848-1870," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (December 1, 1940): 323-24.

¹⁰¹ Bancroft left New York February 24, 1852 and arrived in San Francisco April 1, 1852. Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 124, 222; Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, xi; Keyes, "Beyond the Plains," 1.

¹⁰² Historian H. W. Brands argues that while the initial cost of the overland journey could exceed the cost of passage on a steamer, arriving in California with wagons and livestock could help poorer travelers to recoup some of the cost. H. W. Brands, *The Age of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the New American Dream* (New York City: Random House, 2008), 72, 123.

¹⁰³ Brands, *The Age of Gold*, 122.

generations the story of his journey to California, a harrowing trip in its own right—at least by his telling. He invited his readers to lean over the rail, to feel the ocean spray, and to witness the watery sublime, the “briny, boisterous idyll, where courage bore along slippery passage-ways, and love lounged upon canopied decks, and sentiment in thin muslin cooed in close cabins, and vice and virtue went hand in hand as friends.”¹⁰⁴ Having brought his readers close, he showed them a much uglier sight on the decks of the steamships, an environment infected with “social gangrene, . . . moroseness and chronic distemper” and “on which life is not so dull as it is disgusting; not so much monotony as morbidity.”¹⁰⁵ Sickness packed the decks: seasickness, lovesickness, homesickness, and the peculiar sickness that derives from spending day after day trapped on a ship with the aforementioned invalids.¹⁰⁶ The people, rather than nature, threatened the wellbeing of those bound for California by sea. The danger was moral rather than physical, at least as long as one distinguished between the *feeling* of imminent death experienced by the seasick and the less dire reality.

The Donner Pass of the nautical odyssey was certainly the Isthmus of Panama. On the western edge of that narrow strip of land, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, gathered several thousand Argonauts bound for California, a panic setting in among them as they awaited transport to San Francisco “by any conveyance whatever.”¹⁰⁷ In the meantime, they passed the days with great “imprudence,” “the excessive use of intoxicating liquors,” and the consumption of “tropical fruits to which they were unaccustomed” while the wet

¹⁰⁴ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 149.

¹⁰⁶ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 139–43, 149–50.

climate incubated tropical diseases among them.¹⁰⁸ While nature had halted the advance of the Donner Party in the Sierra, the bottleneck in Panama resulted from a more human scheme. No company offered an end-to-end service to California by way of the isthmus, and so a human pileup occurred in Panama as unscrupulous steamship companies on the Atlantic side crammed passengers into packed steamers, paying little mind to how they might secure the other half of their passage to California. That left many people stranded in Panama, playing a game of chance not unlike their snowbound counterparts in the Sierra. They tried their luck in the lottery for tickets, waiting to see whether a steamer or a fever would deliver them from Panama first.¹⁰⁹

Unlike many Argonauts who expected their time in California to be brief, Bancroft quickly became partisan to the Pacific. As he told it, everything about the voyage to California—about life itself—got better the closer one came to that young state’s shores. He recalled stepping onto the deck of the Pacific Mail steamer as his first time setting foot in California proper. After enduring the filthy, packed steamers on the Atlantic side, the “well-scrubbed deck” on the Pacific side offered a telling juxtaposition: “such is California, such the superiority of the new over the old. As the Atlantic steamer is to the Pacific steamer, . . . so is your cold, dull, eastern coast to our warm, bright, western coast.”¹¹⁰ Like

¹⁰⁷ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 156.

¹⁰⁸ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 156.

¹⁰⁹ In his in-depth analysis of the global history of the isthmian transit at the local level in Panama, Aims McGuinness asserts “no through tickets across Panama could be purchased. Instead, passengers negotiated transport with local people at every stage of the journey, beginning with their transport from their ship to the port of Chagres Aims McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 33–34; Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 157.

¹¹⁰ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 192.

Breen, Bancroft could recall thirty years later the sights and sounds of his arrival in California. As they sailed through the Golden Gate, Bancroft saw for the first time through a “subtle violet haze” the splendor of the city on the bay. It was “a land of promise; mountain, vale, and bay glimmering in a flood of saffron sunlight, zoned and studded with bright emerald hills—gold and green, significant of the royal metal in its veins; and the elements of the rich harvest hidden in its breast.”¹¹¹ On the wharf a crowd stood, waving handkerchiefs, welcoming the Argonauts to El Dorado.¹¹²

Bancroft made his home on the Pacific, but his business essentially operated in the furthest reaches of the Atlantic. Almost as quickly as Argonauts began to arrive in California for the Gold Rush, so, too, did printed materials from the eastern states. Bancroft and others helped to create San Francisco as the Pacific node of the Atlantic print trade. Due to his overlapping family ties and business dealings that connected him to the eastern United States, Bancroft moved himself and the goods he sold between San Francisco and New York as though a continent did not separate the two cities. In the decade and a half that followed his arrival in 1852, Bancroft made that voyage at least eleven times. Many others made that journey two or three times as often. “Life on the steamer was but California life,” Bancroft claimed.¹¹³ For the Breen family, California existed on the other side of the Great American Desert and reaching it meant setting out on a harrowing journey across the continent they would not be keen to repeat. But for people like Bancroft who could afford it, rapidly improving transportation technology

¹¹¹ Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 224.

¹¹² Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula*, 224.

¹¹³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 120.

placed California just across the ocean from New York or Paris.¹¹⁴ No wonder Bancroft's histories imagined western North America as the Pacific Coast and its hinterland, which sprawled from California in the opposite direction of Turner's moving frontier.

Earlier Pioneers

Whether Bancroft or Breen thought of themselves as actual pioneers of an otherwise empty land, the company's collecting efforts assumed they were not. Agents mined the memories of an earlier generation brought to California in waves of settlement and resettlement that had continually tried and failed to claim California for various nations and empires. On August 3, 1834, two men who would give their dictations to the company in 1877 set out for California with the Híjar-Padrés party. The Mexican government sent the party to Alta California (Upper California) in hopes of reasserting political control there after having largely abandoned the region during the war for Mexican independence.¹¹⁵ Like almost everyone else who came to California before the completion of the transcontinental railroad, those colonists crossed the Pacific Ocean, sailing on the naval corvette *Morelos* and the brigantine *Natalia*. In fact, in the late eighteenth century, the then Spanish inspector general José de Galvéz had ordered the creation of the naval post at San Blas with the express purpose of supplying colonies in Alta California by sea, as overland supply lines remained impractical even decades after the Dominguez-Escalante expedition of 1776–1777 had attempted to establish an overland

¹¹⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 120, 155.

¹¹⁵ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York City: Modern Library, 2005), 47–48. For a more extensive account, see Cecil Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement in Mexican California: The Híjar-Padrés Colony and Its Origins, 1769–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

route between New Spain and Alta California.¹¹⁶

While Alta California had long been claimed as a possession of Spain, neither the Spanish nor the Mexican central governments had ever managed to exert much control over the remote region on the Pacific. The Híjar-Padrés party formed when its two leaders, José María Híjar and José María Padrés, decided to capitalize on the decision by the Mexican government to secularize the missions of California. In a scheme that anticipated the settlement of much of what became the western United States, Híjar and Padrés convinced their government to give some of the land to colonies promising to settle California with industrious, loyal citizens of Mexico.¹¹⁷ Among the names of those loyal colonists—one hundred and five men, fifty-five women, and seventy-nine children under the age of fourteen—appeared Antonio Franco Coronel, fifteen years old, carpenter, and Florencio Serrano, twenty-five years old.¹¹⁸ The two would spend their lives at opposite ends of California, but the long reach of the Bancroft & Company's research canvass reunited their lives in the library and then on the pages of the *Works* decades later. In April 1877, Thomas Savage recorded a dictation from Serrano in Monterey and, later that year, from Coronel in Los Angeles.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Richard J. Orsi, eds., *Contested Eden: California before the Gold Rush* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 113–14.

¹¹⁷ Starr, *California*, 47–48.

¹¹⁸ C. Alan Hutchinson, "An Official List of the Members of the Híjar-Padrés Colony for Mexican California, 1834," *Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (August 1, 1973): 414–15.

¹¹⁹ Florencio Serrano, "Apuntes Para La Historia De Alta California" 1877, BANC MSS C-D 77, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219564~S1>; Florencio Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano: Alta California Remembered, 1834–1850*, ed. and trans. William Wilkinson (Petaluma, CA: Booksurge, 2009); Antonio Franco Coronel, "Cosas De California: Vecino De La Ciudad De Los Angeles..." 1877, BANC MSS C-D 61, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b10852117~S1>; Antonio Franco Coronel, *Tales of Mexican*

Securing loyal Mexican citizens for the purpose of recolonizing the old Spanish possession of Alta California in the name of the independent Mexican state meant recruiting colonists from the heart of the new nation: Mexico City. The government promised them fifty centavos for adults and twenty-five for children under eighteen years of age as well as the livestock and land grants that they would require in order to make new lives in the distant northern reaches of the nation.¹²⁰ The party consisted of a broad group of *farmers* and food processors, clothiers and cobblers, barbers and other medical professionals as well as a handful of miscellaneous artisans: a few smiths, a couple of distillers, a printer, a bookbinder, a miniature painter, and a maker of fireworks. A number of those professionals and artisans would also work as teachers, as the Mexican government was anxious to provide education in Alta California, no doubt with the objective of inculcating patriotism in the distant colony, far from the heart of the fledgling nation.¹²¹

So enticed, the band set out from Mexico City in April 1834, bound for the coast in tarp-covered carts or fancy coaches, all according to the wealth and status of the respective colonists, escorted by a civilian militia and a cavalry detachment.¹²² The show of

California: Cosas de California, ed. and trans. Doyce B. Nunis (Santa Barbara, CA: Bellerophon Books, 1994).

¹²⁰ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 37.

¹²¹ Hutchinson, "An Official List of the Members of the Híjar-Padrés Colony for Mexican California, 1834," 408–9. According to Coronel, more than a few political exiles joined the party—not necessarily willingly—who were "decent people of good social position who for purely political reasons had run afoul of the government and were punished as severely as though they were criminals. Certainly the inclusion of political exiles undercut the goal of populating Alta California with loyal citizens, but it also demonstrates the degree to which Alta California was a distant possession rather than a contiguous state of Mexico. Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 12–13.

¹²² Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 37; Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 13.

force proved necessary, defending the party from a mob in Mexico City that attempted to prevent its departure. According to Coronel, common Mexicans believed, “in their ignorance,” that California was “impossibly remote” and overrun “by barbarous Indians called *Mecos*” and that anyone “fool enough to go there was sure to suffer great trials and fall victim to savages.”¹²³ The only armed escort the colonists required on their journey to Alta California, however, was in the heart of Mexico City, a place where the fear of *la frontera* created hysteria more dangerous than the place itself.¹²⁴

As they would later in the century in the United States, fear mongers had their booster counterparts in Mexico, too. The Vice President of Mexico soothingly promised the colonists “a virgin country, gilded by the hand of Providence with abundant elements of riches” with a small population, all of them “innocent people without any more industry than the raising of livestock and a small and imperfect agricultural development.”¹²⁵ The bastions of Mexican civilization would teach the people of the north by example, introducing arts and industry among them. He also promised that others would quickly join them, perhaps even reuniting them with those they were leaving behind, as wave after wave of colonization would wash up on the Pacific Coast of California from Mexico.¹²⁶

Like the Anglo American pioneers of later migrations, however, the party soon discovered that human elements—not natural ones—often posed the most significant challenges. Left to its own devices, the party moved at a pace of fifteen to twenty miles per day. The party lost a month, waylaid in Guadalajara. Few in the party knew why they had

¹²³ Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 13.

¹²⁴ Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 13.

¹²⁵ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 55.

been delayed, but when the party reached Tepíc, Serrano and others discovered that the treasurer of the state of Jalisco had refused to dispense the funds promised to the party.¹²⁷ Arrival in Tepíc might have explained the previous financial crisis, but it did not ameliorate it. Short on cash, many party members found themselves living on credit for another month, which forced many to desert the party and to return home “by whatever means possible.”¹²⁸ In the end, the party only moved forward because Híjar, a wealthy Jalisco native, mortgaged his “beautiful hacienda, ‘San Felipe,’ for some thousands of pesos to bail out the colonists.”¹²⁹ Human elements had halted the party and Híjar’s humanitarian and patriotic sacrifice had got it moving again, allowing for the final push to San Blas and the Pacific Ocean, which separated them from their new homes—unbuilt, but also unmortgaged—in Alta California.

As have so many other pioneers, the Híjar-Padrés party found the emptiness and disarray of the country had been rather exaggerated. In addition to the region’s indigenous peoples, Spain had previously dispatched colonists to the region with some frequency over the previous half century in a futile attempt to gain colonial control over the promising, remote region. Spain had created a chain of missions and military posts along the coast between California’s two great harbors—San Francisco and San Diego—beginning in 1769, and the Spanish colonists had become Californios and had established a thriving social and cultural order over which the Spanish and Mexican governments had little control.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 53–55.

¹²⁷ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 37.

¹²⁸ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 39.

¹²⁹ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 39.

¹³⁰ Gutiérrez and Orsi, *Contested Eden*, 113.

The early Spanish attempt to establish permanent settlements in Alta California had intended to dissuade interlopers from Great Britain and Russia. Soon, the United States would join the list of potential usurpers. No one knew yet that the latest threat would prove final, cleaving the northern half of Mexico's territory from the metropole by midcentury. In 1834, Anglo American colonists and Tejanos were just beginning to threaten Mexico's other northernmost possession: Texas.¹³¹

The Mexican government had dispatched the party with the promise that its members would assert national control among the simple people of Alta California. But the relative isolation of Alta California from the rest of New Spain and then Mexico had helped to make the Californios increasingly self-sufficient.¹³² Rather than take over, the party found itself disbanded by local leaders. The fate of the party had been decided when the ships put in at San Diego for a respite, during the course of which certain members of the party detained a special courier carrying dispatches they believed contrary to the colony's interests in order to prevent him from reaching the governor of Alta California, the widely loved General Manuel Figueroa.¹³³ As punishment, Figueroa stripped Híjar and Padrés of all but the most local authority over the affairs of their colony, assigning them a settlement in Sonoma. Rather than reasserting Mexican control over Alta California, the

¹³¹ Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 3. For more on the local stirrings in Texas, see Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821–1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹³² Steven W. Hackel, "Land, Labor, and Production: The Colonial Economy of Spanish and Mexican California," in *Contested Eden: California before the Gold Rush*, ed. Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Richard J. Orsi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹³³ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 53–55; Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 14.

party found themselves abandoned by the Mexican central government and its new president, Santa Ana.¹³⁴ Two decades before Bancroft and Breen arrived in an effectively foreign corner of their own country, Serrano and Coronel had done the same. The already thriving society between the Pacific and the Sierra absorbed both pairs of would-be pioneers.

Among all the contributors who thought they had witnessed the founding of California, not even the company's oldest contributor could support such a claim. When Savage interviewed Eulalia Pérez for the company in 1877, he reached back as far in living memory as anyone could in that year. Pérez was at least one hundred years old.¹³⁵ Even though her arrival in San Diego in 1802 meant that she predated the Híjar-Padrés party by over thirty years, Pérez had not bravely traveled into the unknown either. She came to Alta California from Baja (Lower) California with her husband, the soldier Miguel Antonio Guillén.¹³⁶ Upon their arrival, the presidio of San Diego had only the military commander's house and the soldier's barracks. It had no church. A missionary did come from the

¹³⁴ Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 14; At this point, Serrano received dispensation from Figueroa to break from the colony based on his argument that during the unlawful detention of the courier, the leaders of the party had abandoned their obligations to him and had implicitly released him from his contract. Figueroa concurred with his argument, eventually helping him to secure work as a clerk at the former mission of San Antonio. Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 45-47.

¹³⁵ Marie E. Northrop, *Spanish-Mexican Families of Early California, 1769-1850*, vol. 2 (Burbank: Southern California Genealogical Society, 1984, 1984), 116-18; cited in, Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Testimonios: Early California Through the Eyes of Women, 1815-1848* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2006), 95, 434n2; Eulalia Perez, "Una Vieja y Sus Recuerdos Dictados ... a La Edad Avanzada De 139 Años: San Gabriel, Calif" 1877, BANC MSS C-D 139, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11218472~S1>. Pérez's dictation has also been published in translation in: Carlos N. Híjar, Eulalia Pérez, and Agustín Escobar, *Three Memoirs of Mexican California*, trans. Vivian C. Fisher (Berkeley: Friends of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, 1988).

¹³⁶ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 95.

mission to say Mass “in a shelter made from some old walls covered with branches.”¹³⁷

About a year after Pérez arrived in 1802, a man named Sánchez built the first house there.

Even though it was quite small, “everybody would go and see it as if it were a palace.”¹³⁸

Most of the company’s narrators participated because they wanted to tell stories about how they had transformed the Pacific in their own lifetimes. Pérez, by contrast, offered a staid story of slow progress. Savage certainly interviewed her because of her famously advanced years. Pérez had witnessed the dramatic transformation of southern California in the seventy-five years that she lived between 1802 and her death on June 11, 1877, six months to the day after she dictated her *testimonio* to Savage.¹³⁹ Pérez must have appeared to the company as the living embodiment of old California’s history, a romantic past rich in history and short on future. But if Savage or others expected a romanticized story of a static, noble past or one bewildered by the rapidly changing world, they got neither from Pérez. Instead, the old woman took the opportunity to recount a longer, slower story of historical change through her important service to Mission San Gabriel as keeper of the keys beginning in 1821.¹⁴⁰ Like many others who contributed to Bancroft & Company’s research canvass, Pérez had accumulated a lifetime of historical information through her service to a small, vibrant community.

If Pérez captured the continuities of slow historical change at the local level, her son-in-law Michael Claringbud White (sometimes hispanicized as Miguel Blanco) demonstrated the fluidity of the early Pacific World. In 1801, on the other side of the world

¹³⁷ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 101.

¹³⁸ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 101.

¹³⁹ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 97.

in Kent, England, James White, Jr. and Elizabeth (MacTed) White had a son and named him Michael. Thirteen years later, the young man found himself working as the apprentice to William Mott, master of the London-based whaling ship *Perseverance*.¹⁴¹ White worked in the whaling industry for two years and nine months. One day in 1817, when over twelve thousand nautical miles from his home port in London, White took shore leave in San José del Cabo, a port at the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula. He rented a horse to go for a ride in the country, but his life changed in an instant. The horse fell, catching his leg beneath it.¹⁴² The *Perseverance* had no patience. Its captain determined that it could not wait for White's leg to mend, so it left the adolescent on the opposite side of the world.

For years, White sailed the Pacific Ocean with its many flags, occupying a globalized world a century and a half too soon. In the course of his circuitous route to California, the accidental immigrant to Mexico reclaimed the Baltimore clipper *Lancaster* from two dozen French and Spanish pirates with just three mates and a deck hook, receiving a wound at the hand of "a big Frenchman with a cutlass."¹⁴³ In a lackluster showing of appreciation for his daring, the American consul offered White a five dollar reward. White refused, telling him "to stick it up his fundament."¹⁴⁴ White found his way

¹⁴⁰ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 96–97, 103–4.

¹⁴¹ Michael Claringbud White, "California All the Way Back to 1828: Pomona, Calif" 1877, BANC MSS C-D 173, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11218308-S1>; Michael Claringbud White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, ed. Glen Dawson (Los Angeles: Glen Dawson, 1956), 17.

¹⁴² White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 17.

¹⁴³ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 19–20.

¹⁴⁴ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 20.

out of port and to the Sandwich Islands, now known as Hawaii. The English consul there offered him work as captain of a vessel that would sail between the islands and San Francisco, in hopes of bringing horses back from the mainland.¹⁴⁵

The seemingly rootless White established a life in Alta California beginning in August 1828. For the second time, a ship left him in port. This time it did so at his command. He dispatched his ship without him, choosing to remain in Santa Barbara.¹⁴⁶ In 1831, he married Pérez's daughter María del Rosario Guillén at Mission San Gabriel.¹⁴⁷ Though he would continue to sail the Pacific, White put down an anchor in Alta California. He claimed Mexican citizenship, adopted a Hispanicized name, and married a Californiana.¹⁴⁸ He would eventually live under and accept other flags during the turbulent years that followed, but the Englishman claimed as his home Alta California under Mexican rule. He moved fluidly between the cultures and nations that intersected on the Pacific Ocean, a waterscape with which he was intimately familiar. He fought privateers even as he treated his own nationality and citizenship as fluid and contextual rather than static or natural. He was a storied man of the Pacific; but as California would turn away from the Pacific Ocean, so, too, would it turn away from him. By 1877, the English-born, Mexican citizen of Alta California found himself living in the increasingly American state of California, witness to a growing cultural memory that romanticized Alta California's history and established the Gold Rush as the beginning of California's history proper.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 25–26.

¹⁴⁶ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 28.

¹⁴⁷ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 32.

¹⁴⁸ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 35, xv.

¹⁴⁹ Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres."

When Savage offered him the opportunity to tell history as he had witnessed it, White had every reason to say yes.

Provincializing the Pacific

Every wave of humanity that washed up on the coast of California to at least the middle of the nineteenth century encountered a country similar in at least one respect: it was an independent island nation oriented back toward the Pacific Basin and it resisted all attempts to turn its eyes anywhere else. To see the world from California meant to put one's back to the Sierra and to look out across the Pacific Ocean. At midcentury, several nations had secured footholds in California, but none had succeeded in reorienting it back toward itself. Spain had managed to expand from New Spain to the northwestern Pacific Coast, but rather than bringing that region into the empire, it succeeded only in seeding the coast with Spanish germs like Pérez who would become Californios rather than Spaniards, or even Mexicans.¹⁵⁰ Mexico had no better luck asserting its claim over the region through the Híjar-Padrés party after securing its independence. John C. Frémont and his fellow rebels might have successfully raised the Bear Flag, and the end of the Mexican-American War might have replaced the star and bear with the stars and stripes, but those changes occurred primarily on paper and flagpoles and made little difference to the orientation of California.¹⁵¹

Even the Gold Rush succeeded primarily in drawing the gaze of the continental

¹⁵⁰ For an account of precisely how those peoples became Californios, see Louise Pablos, "Becoming Californio: Jokes, Broad-sides, and a Slap in the Face," in *Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation, 1769–1850*, ed. Steven W. Hackel (Berkeley: University of California Press and the Huntington Library, 2010), 131–55.

¹⁵¹ Kenneth N. Owens, ed., *Riches for All: The California Gold Rush and the World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 16–17.

United States to the Pacific. For a short but significant period, California exercised a gravitational pull all its own. It drew throngs of international immigrants to the Golden Gate in pursuit of El Dorado.¹⁵² That pull was felt as far away as France, where magazines transported readers to California in cartoons that poked fun at francophone Argonauts and advertisements for clothes specially engineered for the natural elements of California. The new restaurant *La Californie* promised to bring the gold fields to Paris, offering “the finest meal in town at a reasonable price,” an attempt to “reproduce the legend of the bounty of California in which everyone would receive much for little or no cost.”¹⁵³ The worldwide phenomenon of the Gold Rush pulled the world briefly toward a notoriously unconquerable coastline as far as possible from almost everything that had previously mattered.¹⁵⁴

The Gold Rush was the apogee of California as an independent region. The very forces that drew the world to the Pacific thereafter drew the thirty-first state toward the eastern United States. As of 1850, California had a foreign-born population well over double the national average. The concentration of Anglo Americans from the eastern

¹⁵² Brands, *The Age of Gold*, 47–48. See also: Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000); Kevin Starr and Richard J. Orsi, eds., *Rooted in Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Owens, *Riches for All*.

¹⁵³ Rohrbough notes that the bounty promised by California went beyond marketing, having a real impact “on the French people in a postrevolutionary period of national reconstruction” such that “Karl Marx wrote in 1849 ‘the dreams of gold had replaced the dreams of socialism among the proletariat of Paris.’” Malcolm J. Rohrbough, “We Will Make Our Fortunes—No Doubt of It: The Worldwide Rush to California,” in Owens, *Riches for All*, 66.

¹⁵⁴ Historian J. S. Holliday asserts, “The world’s maritime economy was disrupted when trading companies removed their ships from established trade routes to collect fatter profits by carrying goldseekers and speculative cargoes to that sudden magnet, San Francisco.” J. S. Holliday, *Rush for Riches: Gold Fever and the Making of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press and the Oakland Museum of California, 1999), 97.

United States had rapidly begun to dilute the international character of California as the population exploded between 1848 and 1860.¹⁵⁵ The diversity of California's population has never abated. In 1850, 22,358 foreign-born persons resided in California along with 68,610 natural-born Americans. By 1870, both numbers had climbed to 208,831 foreigners and 350,416 Americans.¹⁵⁶ So while the Pacific Coast retained its significant international population long after the gold fever had broken, the foreign-born Californians were too diverse to challenge the increasingly dominant Anglo American culture. At the same time, a calculated and sustained effort attempted to eradicate California's native peoples while legal cases worked to deprive even the oldest and wealthiest Californios of their claim to their homeland.¹⁵⁷

Like everyone else who had ever made a play to take possession of California and the rest of the Pacific Coast, the people who came there during the Gold Rush and after from the eastern United States hoped to transform it. They hoped to transplant cultural and religious seeds from the east into its fertile soil.¹⁵⁸ For the first time, it worked. The

¹⁵⁵ Karen Clay and Randall Jones, "Migrating to Riches? Evidence from the California Gold Rush," *The Journal of Economic History* 68, no. 04 (2008): 1004. Karen Clay and Randall Jones offer a rich statistical analysis of immigration to California, the factors that contributed to the demographic distribution of that migration, and the relative financial gains that rewarded immigrants—miners or otherwise—across demographic categories.

¹⁵⁶ Wright, "The Making of Cosmopolitan California," 339–41.

¹⁵⁷ Historian Benjamin Madley has recently recounted the genocidal campaign against American Indians in California. Madley, *An American Genocide*. For the standard work on the fate of the Californios, see Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846–1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). As historian Louise Pubols has demonstrated, however, some Californio families like the de la Guerra family in Santa Barbara did manage to negotiate the transition to American rule. Louise Pubols, *The Father of All: The de La Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California*, 1st ed. (Huntington Library Press, 2010).

¹⁵⁸ Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *Religion and Society in Frontier California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 37.

very cultural independence that had pulled people from around the world—and especially from the eastern United States—to the shores of California cultivated the seeds of an invasive culture that would adapt and proliferate in its temperate climate and fertile soil, gradually reorienting the region to the east.¹⁵⁹ The mass influx of outsiders, and the eventual outpacing of all others by Anglo Americans, accomplished what no other foreign power had succeeded in doing in a century of trying: it provincialized California. Slowly, the United States transformed the region from a culturally independent island on the Pacific that consistently absorbed outsiders into a province of the eastern metropole.

As the American national history was beginning to take shape, it threatened to erase the distinct regional history in which so many westerners had a deep investment. North America's Pacific Coast would eventually be interpolated as nothing but the western endpoint of a nationalist history. At best, it would constitute a regional variant of the whole.¹⁶⁰ At worst—and in reality—the history of Pacific North America would be provincialized, becoming subject to the themes, chronology, and major questions of the United States' national history.¹⁶¹ Whether or not the residents of the Pacific America

¹⁵⁹ Laurie Maffly-Kipp develops the seed and soil imagery in her masterful study of the attempt to transplant religion to California. While religion would remain nearly invisible to the History Company, it was among the most important—and still understudied—components of the Americanizing of the Pacific Coast. Maffly-Kipp, *Religion and Society in Frontier California*.

¹⁶⁰ Josiah Royce's history of California, originally published in 1886, did precisely this, using California as a case study to critique the American character. Josiah Royce and Ronald Wells, *California: A Study of American Character: From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002).

¹⁶¹ Historian and theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty points to the irony that postcolonial theorists intent on decentering Europe and on asserting the importance of the margins in history have to do so given the categories, tools, and periodization of European history. This project uses that term similarly, although it does not follow Chakrabarty in suggesting a way forward, offering instead an extended analysis of how, why, and to what effect the Pacific Coast of North America became provincialized and how that intersected with the writing and rewriting of its history. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton:

anticipated Turner's reorientation of American expansion as a steady movement from east to west, the increasingly historically-minded westerners had a shared investment in seeing the full, messy struggle to remake the foreign Pacific as an American coast told on its own terms. As Chapter III demonstrates, even American-born immigrants to the region prior to American expansion had a vested interest in preserving that story of conflict and multiethnic cooperation.

Thousands of diverse residents of Pacific North America responded to Bancroft & Company's research canvass because they shared a common vantage point on their regional history, scaling from their local communities as a part of the larger Pacific up to the place of that vast waterscape in the world. They agreed on very little else, but that did not hinder the company's call for participation. Disagreement over who the heroes and villains were in a story everyone assumed was of global significance only made individuals more inclined to assert their perspective. As the Pacific Coast of North America from San Diego to Seattle became increasingly American and as the nation filled in the middle of the continent, even Anglo Americans who had struggled to carve out lives on a foreign coast had reason to worry that their participation in a hemispheric history at the local level would be erased by an American national history that had little room for a hemispheric story. They did not have to value multiculturalism as an inherent good to want a history that accurately captured how they had negotiated to make lives, to provide governance, or to build businesses in a diverse, liminal space. The increasing Americanization of the Pacific Coast in both its population and geography by national expansion threatened the historical legacies of even Anglo Americans because it

Princeton University Press, 2000).

threatened to erase the difficulty and contingency that had defined their participation in a global transformation.

By the late nineteenth century, generations of diverse peoples who had all moved to western North America when it was far more contested found themselves living at the western edge of an increasingly American continent. They had come to believe that in their local lives they had witnessed or even made world history. Those who found themselves living in a foreign land without having moved had an obvious motivation to tell a counter history to the triumphalist nationalist history threatening to interpolate their regional history.¹⁶² But those Anglo Americans who found themselves living back in their homeland without moving after having immigrated to a foreign coast also had good reason to assert the contingency of their efforts in that region as well as its significance to world history. Both groups shared a common view of their region oriented from the Pacific, a perspective that still aroused interests among transatlantic readers. Even if the nationalist history would eventually succeed in provincializing the Pacific, the American conquest of a foreign coast on the other side of the world that had created the United States as a continental nation could certainly find readers. That created ideal market conditions for Bancroft to collect the raw materials for his *Pacific States Histories* for free before selling them to readers within and well beyond that vast region.

¹⁶² This story has been told especially well in relationship to Bancroft's Spanish speaking informants. Genaro M. Padilla, *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The California Testimonios*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

CHAPTER II

BUILDING THE FIFTH FLOOR

I did not stop to consider, I did not care, whether the book was of any value or not; it was easier and cheaper to buy it than to spend time in examining its value. Besides, in making such a collection it is impossible to determine at a glance what is of value and what is not. The most worthless trash may prove some fact wherein the best book is deficient, and this makes the trash valuable.

—Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Literary Industries*

As to the motive which prompts this effort, some call it love of fame, but it is, in truth, love of the work. But if it were for fame? It must be good and conscientious work to bring fame.

—Frances Fuller Victor, in *The Californian and Overland Monthly*, 1882

Late in the year 1855, a crowd of young men disembarked their Atlantic steamer in New York. They smelled oysters in place of bacon and beans, a sure sign that they had returned to civilization. Even the sting of the wintry Atlantic air was a welcome sensation to those ready to put California behind them. Family and friends awaiting the Argonauts looked out across a sea of identical young men, all “brown and bearded, and rough and red-shirted.”¹⁶³ Among them, one “pale, thin, timid boy” stuck out.¹⁶⁴ His failure to honor the convention of returning in the “rough appearance of a bear” garnered more than a few

¹⁶³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 142–43.

¹⁶⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 142–43.

disapproving glances.¹⁶⁵ Like many of his more appropriately-dressed shipmates, Bancroft had failed to find fortune in California; unlike the others, he was only visiting New York. He had found his home on the Pacific Coast and intended to return with haste.

Both the young Bancroft's appearance and his insistence on returning *home* to San Francisco inverted the proper order of things. The gold fields of California were supposed to allow for a temporary rebellion, not provide a new home. Young men could try to make a quick fortune there before reinvesting whatever they brought home with them into a proper, civilized career back east. The riches acquired in California could take the form of either gold or wisdom, but should support a renewed devotion to steady labor in place of youthful dreams of striking it rich. A good shave and a white shirt was all it should take to signal that their class rebellion had been left behind on the Pacific Coast.¹⁶⁶

Showing up clean-shaven and white-shirted threatened the hierarchy that ordered the coasts. Bancroft arrived in New York hoping to secure a quick infusion of capital that he could reinvest in steady enterprise in California. He came at the behest of his older sister, Cecilia, who had become his creditor since the premature death of her husband, George Derby.¹⁶⁷ His visit to the east lasted only as long as it took to thaw his accounts and the ground in New York. By April, he had departed for California once again. Anticipating what would become an enduring component of California's mythic place in the American

¹⁶⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 142–43.

¹⁶⁶ Historian Brian Roberts traces the northeastern middle class forty-niners to California and back, revealing the ways in which they used the voyage to escape the trappings of middle class life in the east if only for a moment. Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). See also David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Johnson, *Roaring Camp*.

¹⁶⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 132–34; Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*, 36–39.

imagination, the young entrepreneur yearned to leave the Atlantic—where “beginnings were pretty well over”—and return to the Pacific Coast, where “all was new, all was to be done.”¹⁶⁸ The young man had determined he would make his fortune on the Pacific Coast; he had not yet determined to make that fortune off of Pacific history.

Bancroft returned to San Francisco with a bit more than determination and strong bootstraps, though. What he had gained in New York made the difference between his first and second attempts to strike it rich in California. After Derby’s death, investments had been made to support Cecilia. Whether she doubted the prospects of her portfolio, had such faith in the future of her younger brother, or some combination of both, Cecilia reinvested her money in Hubert’s enterprise. The pair struck an uneasy arrangement. She became dependent on the success of her unproven little brother; he set off to California to risk money neither of them could afford to lose.¹⁶⁹

Hubert and Cecilia’s partnership was born of necessity in spite of the shared risks. This partnership placed Cecilia at the head of a long line of supporters for Bancroft’s business enterprises. It would be another fifteen years before Bancroft & Company began the long process of coalition building for its historical enterprise. Principle participants like Bancroft, Oak, and Victor had not yet recruited even themselves to the cause of Pacific history. The story of Bancroft’s historical enterprise must begin with the young man’s earlier venture not because the company’s story is his personally, but because the intellectual network began forming within the growing company before it was clear

¹⁶⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 144. This view of California was hardly unique to Bancroft. For a historical analysis of the origins of the California dream, see Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1973).

¹⁶⁹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 145.

exactly what either of those would become. Beginning with his successful bid for his sister Cecilia's financial support, an enduring pattern emerged: the individual decisions to support Bancroft, his company, or his historical enterprise were inextricably bound up in personal connections between people, impersonal market forces, and competing intellectual commitments.

This chapter traces the slow process of coalition building in which the company engaged in the 1870s and early 1880s. It intertwines the expansion of Bancroft's business with the story of several key acquisitions for its nascent historical enterprise. In its collection of people for its network, of books for its library, and of new ventures for its diversifying business, Bancroft & Company tended to collect in the largest units available. Examining several representative negotiations within its decade-long research canvass, I argue the company's agents recruited participation and solicited donations by emphasizing the company's economies of scale and its wealthy proprietor's unwavering intention to find fame and fortune. Though the reasons differed according to the circumstances unique to each encounter, this chapter demonstrates how effective that appeal proved. Building on the previous chapter's explanation of how so many people had become deeply invested in telling their version of Pacific history, the present chapter argues that Bancroft found such success because potential collaborators did not need to be sold on the importance of the project, they needed only to be convinced Bancroft's enterprise could accomplish it.

When each additional person or institution agreed to collaborate, that decision bolstered the company's appeal to others, though they did not do so equally. First, for those who worried about their lack of control over the narratives, the company's insistence that it had the means and the drive to complete its histories with or without

their participation meant that potential collaborators needed only to decide between inflecting those histories with some version of their story, or letting them be written without their participation. As the coalition grew, it diluted each contributor's power to control the narrative, but it did the same to those who might skew history against them, too. Second, if a potential contributor worried whether or not Bancroft & Company would turn out to be a fraud, each subsequent investment made the company's insistence that it meant to succeed in writing the definitive history of Pacific North America increasingly plausible. In other words, people joined Bancroft's coalition following the same patterns that encouraged participation in the rest of the inscrutable market, with all its potential risks and rewards.¹⁷⁰

Bancroft and his chief assistants built the company and its intellectual network on thousands of precarious alliances by addressing those concerns with a common refrain indigenous to its knowledge industry but out of place in our own. They highlighted its industrial means of production and Bancroft's insatiable desire to find wealth and fame. The negotiation often began with the shared realization that the company needed its collaborators and they needed it. If Bancroft was to "accomplish in one year what would require ten years by ordinary methods," gathering "all the evidence, when by ordinary methods a lifetime of toil would yield only a part," then he needed an army of researchers and writers.¹⁷¹ The company needed to secure some cooperation or collections more than others, and the degree to which it needed any particular person or institution to support it

¹⁷⁰ Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters*.

¹⁷¹ Bancroft opens his chapter explaining (and defending) his method of historical research as superior to ordinary methods by dividing between research and writing, claiming that research assistants divided their labors up to the moment of composition. He implied that he personally took the evidence that they had amassed and arranged, made judgments on it, and then composed

often dictated how much control that contributor could wield. Support for the company often followed existing lines of trust within local communities, families, or intellectual networks. As it grew, Bancroft's enterprise became the *de facto* historical enterprise of western North America.¹⁷²

Collections and Coalitions

Bancroft began building his network close to home. The nepotism that made Cecilia risk so much on her younger brother would continue as a rule in the company for years, with Albert and Hubert employing more than a few of their nephews.¹⁷³ It was only fair, as they were mostly sons of their older brother Curtis, who had employed Hubert in Rich Bar during that first summer while he had awaited the arrival of the books from his brother-in-law, which he hoped would give him his start.¹⁷⁴ When Cecilia sent Hubert off to California this time, she had a vested interest in seeing him succeed. She provided him with something just as valuable as her money: a letter of introduction to her late husband's associate John C. Barnes, a partner in the New York City stationery house Ames,

his historical narratives personally. Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 593.

¹⁷² This should not obscure the importance of local historical and pioneers' societies, but the hemispheric vision and operations of Bancroft's enterprise distinguished it both in type and scale from those locally-minded institutions. Amanda Laugesen, *The Making of Public Historical Culture in the American West, 1880–1910: The Role of Historical Societies* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

¹⁷³ Soon after, the center of gravity in the Bancroft family would shift westward toward the Pacific Coast. In 1860, President Lincoln appointed Azariah Ashley Bancroft, Hubert's father, Indian Agent for the Washington Territory at Fort Simcoe, and at the end of those four years the elder Bancroft settled again in California, this time with his wife Lucy Damaris Howe Bancroft. Their daughter and Hubert's younger sister Mary also settled in Portland, Oregon with her husband T. B. Trevett around the same time. Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 40, 154.

¹⁷⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 131.

Herrick, Barnes, and Roads.¹⁷⁵

As was the custom of the day, nearly everywhere the young Bancroft went letters of introduction earned him audiences he could not have gained on his own name, at least not yet.¹⁷⁶ Beginning in August 1874, Bancroft would take a trunk filled with samples from *Native Races* on what he later called a literary pilgrimage, following a trail of introductions through the intellectual elite of the east coast in search of “the countenance and sympathy of scholars in my enterprise.”¹⁷⁷ In the spring of 1856, though, it took all of the nepotism the as-yet-unknown Bancroft could muster to get into a New York City stationery firm.

Thanks to his sister and her connections, Bancroft and his partner George Kenny began pulling at newly reinforced bootstraps in California. The success they made would become the stuff of western American lore, a literary tradition to which their businesses would eventually contribute. The pair began working in their new storefront. “Storefront” was aspirational. In reality, it had no front while it was undergoing renovations that winter. Each night, before settling into a cot stowed beneath the counter, Bancroft closed the store by stacking empty boxes in the breach. It was under such auspicious circumstances that the first books were sold in San Francisco under the then unknown

¹⁷⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 146.

¹⁷⁶ Literary critic Barbara Rotundo offered an insightful analysis of the formality of letters in the Victorian Era, noting the possible meanings that one could imply simply by addressing a letter in a particular way. Barbara Rotundo, “Forms of Address: Reading Between the Lines,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (October 1979): 349–58. For a discussion of the importance of letters of introduction in scientific circles, see Anne Laurine Larsen, “Not Since Noah: The English Scientific Zoologists and the Craft of Collecting, 1800–1840” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1993), 307–12; and Jim Endersby, *Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 64, 104, 344n9.

¹⁷⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 326.

name “H. H. Bancroft and Company.”¹⁷⁸

Over the next dozen years, the business grew exclusively as a book and stationery store. The growing business and its steady income provided Bancroft with the means and the impetus to travel, the latter resulting from his frustration with steady industry. He had found the work of building a dependable business “exceedingly dull,” and so almost as quickly as he was financially able to do so, he entrusted the monotonous work of building wealth by selling books and stationery to his younger brother Albert Little Bancroft.¹⁷⁹ He, in turn, used the revenue stream that the dull work of his company generated to experiment in a more exciting endeavor, even if he did not yet know precisely where it would take him. While vacationing in Europe with his young family during 1866 and 1867, the bookseller discovered for the first time his interest in buying books, rare or otherwise.

As a collector, Bancroft had two peculiar habits: He liked to collect whole collections rather than individual works. He also liked to denounce the act of collecting as an activity unto itself. To reconcile himself to his own habit, then, Bancroft insisted that he was building a library for some a grand purpose rather than a personal collection for his own vanity. When he began collecting people for his enterprise, he did the same. When the company wanted to expand into making books and other paper goods on site “easily and economically,” Bancroft purchased “several small establishments,” people and all.¹⁸⁰ That same practice would endure throughout Bancroft & Company’s coalition building. Bancroft built the intellectual network at the center of his enterprise by adapting

¹⁷⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 146–57.

¹⁷⁹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 148.

¹⁸⁰ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 162.

and expanding the company's extensive network in the book trade, which allowed the bookseller to act definitively in the Atlantic print trade from its furthest outpost.

That prodigious network allowed him to acquire the priceless collection of rare books and manuscripts assembled by the Mexican collector José María Andrade when it went up for sale half a world away. Andrade had arranged for the sale and nationalization of the collection through Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico, but upon the latter's death at the hands of revolutionaries in June 1867, he had feared his hopes of liquidating his library without dissolving it had died, too. Andrade moved his collection to Europe in hopes of finding another single buyer capable of putting the collection to use "for the consummation of a grand purpose."¹⁸¹ Bancroft had the financial means and human connections to make the purchase; he lacked the grand purpose. He was working on that.

Acquiring Andrade's collection would prove a watershed in the construction of Bancroft's now famous library. Not only did it establish a core collection in that library, it also pushed him to decide for what grand purpose he was amassing it. The purchase also dictated that whatever purpose he chose, Mexican history and literature would play a prominent role. But he thought very little about that when he received notice of the sale. "Shutting my eyes to the consequences," he later recalled, "I telegraphed my agent in London five thousand dollars' earnest money, with instructions to attend the sale and purchase at his discretion."¹⁸² The collection that had crossed Mexico by mule and the Atlantic by steamer made its way back across the Atlantic and the Pacific to California. His

¹⁸¹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 187–88.

¹⁸² Bancroft acknowledged that both his and Andrade's hoarding of Mexico's literary heritage constituted a kind of cultural theft—"never since the burning of the Aztec manuscripts by the bigot Zumárraga had there fallen on the country such a loss," he later wrote—even as he insisted that he had done it in the interest of preserving the world's intellectual and cultural

trust in his standing purchasing agent was well placed. Joseph Whitaker was the founder and proprietor of the premier organ of the book trade: *The Bookseller*. Bancroft had authorized Whitaker to buy at his discretion, promising to pay whatever price Whitaker negotiated, sight unseen.¹⁸³

Bancroft became increasingly interested in making his collection into the world's best library for researching historical matters concerning western North America. In what was quickly becoming his pattern, Bancroft decided to accomplish that by being in multiple places at the same time. Paying a wage to trusted and capable employees who would complete rote tasks to which he assigned them allowed him to do what the laws of the universe would otherwise have denied. Through Whitaker, Bancroft engaged Joseph Walden who, for the pay of two guineas per week, scoured the libraries of the British Museum and of the Royal Geographical Society, recording the "title of every book, manuscript, pamphlet, and magazine article, touching this territory, with brief notes or memoranda on the subject-matter."¹⁸⁴ Through Whitaker, Bancroft managed to comb two world-class repositories two oceans distant by paying a modest wage to a man he probably never met. The idea stuck.

Bancroft had a single method for acquiring both books for his library and people for his company: "to buy everything I could obtain, with the view of winnowing . . . at my

heritage at Mexico's expense. Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 189–90.

¹⁸³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 189. Whitaker began publishing *The Bookseller* in 1858 and it remains in print to the present. H. R. Tedder, "Whitaker, Joseph (1820–1895)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison, Online Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29224>; Adolf Growoll, *Three Centuries of English Booktrade Bibliography: An Essay on the Beginnings of Booktrade Bibliography Since the Introduction of Printing and in England Since 1595* (New York City: Dibdin Club, 1903), 89, 99–100.

¹⁸⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 181.

leisure.” Disappointing books proved easier to shelve and to forget than dissatisfactory people, though.¹⁸⁵ That habit of picking up people and books indiscriminately meant that every rare find came at the expense of sorting through piles of less satisfying specimens. In all, some six hundred people passed through the various manifestations of Bancroft’s company in its three decades of operation. The number of workers seldom fell below twelve at any one time. At its high-water mark, it had reached fifty, with thirty working on “regular details” and the remaining twenty, presumably, filling in as needed. Most employees worked under contract to perform a particular task and then went along their way. When one showed particular acumen and discipline, she or he found steady employment moving from task to task, completing what others failed to accomplish.¹⁸⁶

Print in the Pacific and the Pacific in Print

Even if Bancroft claimed to be committed to using his collection, his library was not yet a literary workshop before 1870. In December 1869, Hubert’s wife Emily Ketchum Bancroft died. Her passing catalyzed the reaction already in progress in Bancroft’s enterprise. One can never say what might have happened had Hubert not lost his beloved Emily, but he said quite clearly what happened when he did lose her: he poured himself into writing. “Occupation,” he wrote in his memoir, “is the antidote to grief; give me work or I die.” Making and selling books provided work, but he found it “of the exasperating and not of the soothing kind,” and he soon found that writing alone assuaged the sorrow of his soul.¹⁸⁷ Writing books provided a kind of catharsis that selling them did not.

¹⁸⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 180.

¹⁸⁶ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 245.

¹⁸⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 160–61.

His grief pushed him to do something seemingly irrational and potentially disastrous. He began to write books that did not yet have a market. Worse still, he began to write in the only way that he knew how to do anything: by relying on economies of scale. He risked not only wasting his time, but the vast financial and human resources of his company. Rather than conceiving of a single book and writing it in peaceful solitude, “whatever was most congenial” to Bancroft’s mind turned out to be overseeing the mass production of historical knowledge on an unprecedented scale. “I always had a taste, more pleasant than profitable, for publishing books,” Bancroft later recalled, “for conceiving a work and having it wrought out under my direction.”¹⁸⁸

In 1870, the Pacific Coast did not yet have as vibrant a book culture as the one flourishing among the middling classes to the east. Bancroft lamented the inability of the Pacific market “to absorb an edition of any work, except a law-book, or a book intended as a working tool for a class.” The utilitarian view of books had long frustrated the publisher in its hopes of selling books meant for leisure rather than for work.¹⁸⁹ His grief might have impeded his judgment, but it did not prevent him from keeping an old promise that he had made to himself after his labors with the Plymouth Company had come to naught: When he speculated on the creation of a general reading market, it was not with his own labor.¹⁹⁰

A. L. Bancroft & Company successfully created a culture of reading, or at least of

¹⁸⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 173–74.

¹⁸⁹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 173–74; Rubin, *The Making of Middle/Brow Culture*, 18; Casper et al., *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, 4. Bancroft was joined in this attempt to create a market for the “best kind” of literature by the Unitarian minister in San Francisco Thomas Starr King. J. D. Groves, “‘Ticknor-and-Fields-ism of All Kinds’: Thomas Starr King, Literary Promotion, and Canon Formation,” *New England Quarterly*, 1995, 212.

¹⁹⁰ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 130.

owning books. It began rather humbly with William H. Knight's work on the annual *Bancroft's Hand-Book Almanac of the Pacific States*. The company organized the relevant historical books from Bancroft's collection into a usable reference library for Knight's use, a first step toward transforming the collection into a library.¹⁹¹ The almanacs also slipped small historical essays into the sort of working books that actually sold in the existing market. Subsidized by advertisements, the handbooks offered a way to lower the upfront costs associated with writing a market into being. The collector who claimed to loathe collecting used the *Hand-Book* project as an excuse to "gradually and almost imperceptibly" expand his library from California to include Oregon as well. From Oregon, it was "but a step to British Columbia and Alaska," and his holdings on California obliged him to expand to "Mexico and Spain."¹⁹² His tendencies toward comprehensiveness quickly took over. What had started with Bancroft buying occasional "old, rare, and valuable books" as he encountered them quickly grew until he found himself touring Europe, spending some three months in London going "faithfully through every catalogue and every stock of books likely to contain anything on the Pacific Coast."¹⁹³ If the handbooks had excused Bancroft's collecting habits initially, his activities quickly outgrew their cover. As the collection grew, so, too, would the grand purpose have to grow.

A Collector of Collections

Book by book, excuse by excuse, Bancroft recruited himself and his company to the project of Pacific history. It had a certain appeal to the company for several reasons.

¹⁹¹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 173.

¹⁹² Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 180–81.

¹⁹³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 180–81.

History was a rapidly-growing subgenre of general literature by 1870.¹⁹⁴ The strengths of the library lent itself to the research and writing of a singular history; writing a history of the Pacific out of that prodigious library of published materials and manuscripts lent itself to Bancroft's tendency toward industrial-scale production. It also had the advantage of appealing to Bancroft's partisanship toward his adopted coast.

The same market forces that made history lucrative made its raw materials cheap. People with historical knowledge or documents that they judged worthy of preservation vastly outnumbered the institutions willing or capable of collecting and managing them, especially on the Pacific Coast. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the remapping of the North American West that had deprived Mexico of half of its territory had left behind a generation of aging people convinced they had historical knowledge worth preserving in a rapidly changing country that did not feel similarly. It had done the same thing at an institutional level. During the hasty transition to US control of the vast region, many local record houses from the Spanish and Mexican eras had been abandoned or worse. By the 1870s, communities proved surprisingly agreeable when the company asked to absorb those public records into its private library. Given the choice between donating priceless documents to a for-profit company and seeing them lost forever, many individuals, communities, and institutions chose to risk cooperating with Bancroft's enterprise.

Through its canvassing agents, the nascent history department of A. L. Bancroft & Company recounted an ambitious vision for preserving and using those records even as they pointed to the economies of scale that made the realization of that enterprise at least plausible. If the company hoped to bolster both the strength of its manuscript collection

¹⁹⁴ Gregory M. Pfitzer, *Popular History and the Literary Marketplace, 1840–1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Howsam, *Past into Print*.

related to California while establishing the legitimacy of its enterprise, it needed to secure the donation of the most famous and infamously inaccessible private collection of materials from Alta California. Rumors had long circulated that the prominent California General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo held a vast archive of personal papers and official documents from his many years of service in the military and civil power structures of Alta California. Vallejo had spent years working on his own history of Alta California. His many years high in the ranks of the military and civilian power structures of the territory made both Vallejo and his papers an indispensable source for any respectable history of California. All previous attempts by Bancroft and other aspiring historians of California to secure Vallejo's cooperation, however, had always received the same polite, dismissive replies.

On October 21, 1873, a boisterous and eccentric Italian, Henry Cerruti, made his first of many successful pitches for the company when he convinced Bancroft to give him a job in spite of his failure to impress his new boss, "either in his person or in his history," as "one specially adapted to literary labors."¹⁹⁵ "There was something winning about the fellow," Bancroft would later recall, "though I scarcely could tell what it was."¹⁹⁶ When he managed to sell himself to Bancroft against his new boss' better judgment, Cerruti proved that he belonged in the company regardless of his dubious literary merit. The company had greater need of silver-tongued salesmen than of skilled wielders of the pen at that point; the latter might write profitable books, but only if the former could sell them. Before they could market their histories as the definitive history of the Pacific, the

¹⁹⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 366.

¹⁹⁶ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 366.

company needed to secure Vallejo's cooperation.

Bancroft was building an army of researchers. He had soldiers, but he needed a general. Cerruti filled that role with panache, even claiming the title as an honorific. He could transform even the most miniscule of qualifications into a storied career, as he did with his ostensible military and diplomatic career from which he drew his self-appointed rank. As he spoke, layers of qualifications settled like shifting sediment, eventually hardening into a bedrock of near believability. "Though he had been but consul-general, even though he had been but consul," Bancroft recalled, peeling back the layers of lies and half-truths in *Literary Industries*, "even though he had slept but a fortnight in a consulate," few disputed his self-aggrandizing. His winning personality made people want to believe the very lies and exaggerations they had seen constructed before their very eyes only moments earlier.¹⁹⁷ In the campaign to solicit historical materials by any means necessary, an eloquent liar came to be of far more value than the legions of fastidious and felicitous researches and writers who could turn the materials that Cerruti acquired into pages of text.

The most surprising of friendships began when Bancroft dispatched his most accomplished liar to *Lachryma Montis*, the home of Alta California's most respected surviving citizen. Bancroft dispatched his best general to Sonoma to accomplish what letters had failed to do. "General Vallejo was wary; General Cerruti was wily."¹⁹⁸ The stage was set.¹⁹⁹ Cerruti succeeded, but only because he set out with a rather different goal. He

¹⁹⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 370.

¹⁹⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 383.

¹⁹⁹ For a much more complete study of Vallejo's participation with the company, see Padilla, *My History, Not Yours*.

set out to “captivate” Vallejo. He knew that if he accomplished that, then access to everything the old general had in his possession would follow.²⁰⁰ Cerruti capitalized on every gesture of hospitality Vallejo showed. At their first meeting, he meandered about the room. While ostensibly lost in conversation, Cerruti quietly examined the stacks of books littering the room. From them he judged his host to be “a person of literary taste” who was “anxious for some person endowed with literary talents to engage in the arduous task of giving to the world a true history of California.”²⁰¹

Rather than the result of apathy regarding California’s history, Cerruti judged Vallejo’s reticence to give his materials to aspiring historians as a result of his deep investment in seeing California’s history not only written, but written well. Once Cerruti determined that Vallejo wanted a worthy historian to take his materials off of his hands, he had only to show his would-be benefactor that the company was precisely the enterprise for which he had been waiting.²⁰² He frankly declared that he “had neither the intelligence nor the means” necessary for that task, but he pushed Bancroft according to the most important criteria in the current knowledge economy: Bancroft was desperate for fame. “Bancroft was a person fully able to compete with Prescott and Macaulay,” Cerruti claimed, but he also had “large means at his disposal, [and] was willing to invest the

²⁰⁰ Henry Cerruti, *Ramblings in California: The Adventures of Henry Cerruti*, ed. Margaret Mollins and Virginia Emily Thickens (Berkeley: Friends of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, 1954), 23.

²⁰¹ Cerruti, *Ramblings in California*, 19.

²⁰² A fire in 1867 had claimed the five-volume historical manuscript on which Vallejo had long been at work along with many priceless documents, a misfortune that had stunted his own attempt to become the historian he desired and a looming threat that likely made him even more anxious—as Bancroft would later be—to rid himself of a priceless and flammable collection before it went up in smoke. Alan Rosenus, *General M. G. Vallejo and the Advent of the Americans: A Biography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 229.

greater part of his fortune for the purpose of acquiring literary fame.”²⁰³ The battle would not be won so easily, though.

The standoff endured because both generals wanted the same thing. Vallejo must have known that Bancroft’s enterprise could hardly proceed without him; he also must have realized how difficult it would be to find a better suitor than Bancroft’s company for his manuscripts. Cerruti waited. His days at *Lachryma Montis* turned to weeks. Meanwhile, he enjoyed the food and drink, cultivated “a favorable impression in the mind of Mrs. Vallejo, made love to the young women, and flattered the general to his heart’s content.”²⁰⁴ Such was the hard work of making history. Assured of his own position of power, eventually Cerruti called Vallejo’s bluff. If, as Vallejo had sworn, “he had nothing” to give and if he refused even “to dictate his recollections,” then “that was the end of it; he must return to San Francisco and so report.”²⁰⁵ As Bancroft would later recall, “the old general could be as cunning and crafty as the younger one.”²⁰⁶ Even as he had insisted that he had nothing to give, Vallejo had consistently peppered their conversations with tantalizing hints meant to suggest “to his watchful attendant the vast fund of information at his command.”²⁰⁷ The charade continued, both men aware of their role in it. As each threat by the one or the other to abandon the project altogether came to naught, each

²⁰³ Cerruti, *Ramblings in California*, 19; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 386. Bancroft cut off his quotation of this passage rather abruptly following the mention of his name, omitting Cerruti’s comparison of himself to the famous historians William H. Prescott and Thomas Babington Macaulay as well as the insinuation that Bancroft was willing to spend his then modest fortune buying fame similar to those aforementioned gentleman historians.

²⁰⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 388.

²⁰⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 389.

²⁰⁶ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 389.

²⁰⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 389.

became increasingly aware of his counterpart's deep investment in seeing the transaction take place.

In June 1874, Cerruti set the stage for the final act. It would take place on the fifth floor of the company's building in San Francisco. Cerruti had managed by that time to get General Vallejo to agree to have his materials copied at the library. Under the auspices of inspecting that process, Vallejo spent two hours touring the library. The copyists, "with one accord, signified their respect by rising and bowing low," as the general moved from room to room.²⁰⁸ He met the employees who had the literary talents that Cerruti admittedly lacked and it quickly showed that "General Vallejo was impressed and pleased."²⁰⁹ Cerruti saw the opening for which he had been waiting. "Now is your time, general. If you are ever going to give those papers—and what better can you do with them?—this is the proper moment." Vallejo must have seen his opportunity to do what he had long intended to do, too. "He deserves them!" the general declared, "tell him they are his."²¹⁰

That moment changed a great deal at Bancroft's company. It added ten thousand manuscripts to the library, including letters and documents that filled thirty-six bound volumes.²¹¹ Most of the copyists who had only moments earlier looked forward to a year's worth of work in copying Vallejo's loaned documents quickly found the door to the fifth floor closed behind them. More importantly, by finally becoming the beneficiary of

²⁰⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 394.

²⁰⁹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 394.

²¹⁰ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 394–95.

²¹¹ Doris Marion Wright, ed., *A Guide to the Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo Documentos Para La Historia De California, 1780–1875* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953).

Vallejo's famous and sought-after personal archive, the company gained a new level of legitimacy. Perhaps most important to Bancroft, securing the donation rather than the purchase of such a storied collection set the precedent that the company did not pay for materials, even the most valuable ones.²¹² To Bancroft's good fortune, the University of California never established such a miserly rule.

The standoff at *Lachryma Montis* revealed in an early phase of the enterprise a pattern that would repeat throughout the research and publication phases. Cerruti and Vallejo's struggle to negotiate an exchange they both wanted echoed throughout the company's research campaign. Like Vallejo, other potential contributors feared giving their materials to the unproven publisher, but they also lacked better options. Emphasizing not only his vision, but also Bancroft's financial and intellectual ambitions actually helped to make that case in a market where the company abandoning its project and trashing its sources proved a greater concern than what it might write based on their materials.

Bancroft's celebration of Cerruti's contributions also revealed two important facts about the company's head and public face, both the man Hubert Howe Bancroft and the persona that he created and sold as the author of the *Works*. He portrayed Cerruti as his opposite even though the pair had a surprising amount in common. Bancroft celebrated Cerruti as a genius with a gift for sales and human relations, but no particular literary prowess. Focusing on Cerruti rather than one of the gifted ghostwriters allowed Bancroft to celebrate the company's collaborative efforts without diluting his own claim to literary

²¹² Henry Lebbeus Oak, "*Literary Industries*" in *a New Light. A Statement on the Authorship of Bancroft's Native Races and History of the Pacific States, with Comments on Those Works and the System by Which They Were Written* (San Francisco: Bacon Printing Company, 1893), 15.

genius. It also offered Bancroft a loveable rogue in whom he could celebrate the less scrupulous forms of genius that underpinned Bancroft's success and the success of his enterprise, which proved necessary since his curated authorial persona had to remain aloof from the very market in which Bancroft the man had excelled. Ironically, the person most unlike Bancroft's constructed persona offered the memoirist a surrogate through which he could celebrate the very penchant for creative deception that had led him to construct the biggest and most benign of all the company's lies: that he was Hubert Howe Bancroft, the literary genius behind the *Works*. Like the people who chose to believe even Cerruti's most ridiculous lies, Bancroft's readers were temporarily complicit in their own deception.

Cerruti never got the chance to follow up on his victory at *Lachryma Montis*. He worked for the company for just three short years between 1873 and 1876 before tragically taking his own life. He had acquired debts he could not pay by speculating on mining. He staged an elaborate suicide in historic Sonoma, making sure to announce his intentions for six months prior to the act and to bid his friends and coworkers farewell before departing to his final resting place. Predictably, no one believed him. When the hotel staff in Sonoma awoke to hear him in the throes of death, they sent for Vallejo and his wife Francisca Benicia Carrillo. Attended by the closest thing California had to surviving nobility, Cerruti meticulously staged his noble death. Carrillo attempted to administer an antidote to stop the strychnine from slowly claiming her friend's last breaths, but he refused to take it. So it happened that on October 9, 1876, in California's most historic setting, the most important surviving leader of Alta California and his high-born wife attended the theatrical suicide of an accomplished conman, failing tragically to save their

unlikely friend from himself.²¹³

Bancroft & Company's efforts to collect or to copy the personal and institutional records in and beyond California continued under a scrupulous researcher named Thomas Savage, a man more like Cerruti's projected self-image than like Cerruti himself. Born in Cuba to American parents in 1823, Savage had worked in—not just slept in—the US consulate in Cuba during the American Civil War. By 1877, he had found his way into the employ of Bancroft's company in California, where his mastery of the Spanish language and the customs of Latin America made him an invaluable resource. Beginning in the spring of 1877, he toured California completing the work that Cerruti had begun after the latter had become fully committed to securing Vallejo's materials.

During those two years, Savage secured donations of documents from local repositories lacking the means to care for their collections while simultaneously taking oral memoirs from the aging population of Alta California. He began in the US Surveyor General's office, which he found in chaos.²¹⁴ The tumultuous transition from Spanish to Mexican to American rule in California had left it—like so many public records houses—in dangerous disrepair. Two decades earlier in 1857, Edwin Stanton had come to California to oversee the litigation of the Mexican land grant disputes. He had bound documents from the Spanish and Mexican periods haphazardly. His primary interest in their

²¹³ Certainly Cerruti knew that “during the 1870s and 1880s, hardly a public event took place to which Vallejo was not invited—either as an honored guest or speaker” and so he made sure to stage his death close enough to ensure his friend's attendance. Rosenus, *General M. G. Vallejo and the Advent of the Americans*, 231; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 443–45.

²¹⁴ Thomas Savage, “Report of Labors in Archives and Procuring Material for History of California: And Related Material” 1879, BANC MSS C-E 191, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11228197~S1>; Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 342; Paul Wallace Gates, *Land and Law in California: Essays on Land Policies* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991), 34.

preservation was as evidence for the disputation of land grants, not as useful historical sources. At the close of his time there, he had returned to the east to serve as Secretary of War during the Civil War. Savage's arrival in 1877 marked the first time anyone in the American era had attempted to preserve the historical documents for posterity.

Religious repositories presented a different challenge. Bancroft vociferously denied that he ever colluded with any sect in order to tell a more positive version of its history. As in the case of individuals, the degree to which the company required an institution's participation determined the power that organization and its leaders held in the construction of historical narrative. Like every individual decision to cooperate, soliciting the participation of religious organizations began with a negotiation between representatives of the company and of the church in which the choice between having some control over a story that would be told regardless or none at all quickly made itself.

Archbishop Joseph S. Alemany of San Francisco enthusiastically welcomed Savage, though he subtly insisted on his right to review any material on religious matters that resulted, "lest unintentionally something might be stated inaccurately, which no doubt you would rectify." Bancroft had Savage copy the sources anyway, later proclaiming his own intellectual freedom: "it is needless to say that neither to the archbishop, nor to any person, living or dead, did I ever grant permission to revise or change my writings."²¹⁵ The posturing on each side obscured whatever part Alemany might have played in shaping the representation of his church in the history of California. Whatever hidden agreement they struck, it set a pattern that underpinned the company's growing coalition: Each party decided that collaborating offered the best chance of meeting their various goals in spite

²¹⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 472–73.

of the fear of what could happen if the other party gained the upper hand in the exchange.

Institutional Partners

If Bancroft's library continued his personal habit of collecting whole collections, the history department continued his larger company's habit of expanding its operations by buying competing firms. Rather than starting the two-volume history of Oregon from nothing, Bancroft convinced the historian Frances Fuller Victor to join the company. *Oregon I & II* had been in the works longer than the *Works*. Though they eventually appeared in that series as the twenty-ninth and thirtieth volumes, Victor had started them as her own independent history of Oregon in 1865.²¹⁶ Victor was the only woman among Bancroft's writing corps and she alone had a literary career both before and after her work with the company. Those two facts combined to make Victor the most studied of Bancroft's literary assistants among historians in the twentieth century.²¹⁷ The key distinctives that have made her both a fascinating and telling example of misappropriated authorship, however, have also proved misleading precisely because her case was so

²¹⁶ Hazel Emery Mills, "The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (1961): 309–36.

²¹⁷ An impressive selection of scholarly and popular historians and biographers have examined the so-called "mother of Oregon history" in everything from newspaper articles to full-length books. William A. Morris, "Historian of the Northwest. A Woman Who Loved Oregon: Frances Fuller Victor," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 3, no. 4 (1902): 429–34; Jim Martin, *A Bit of a Blue: The Life and Work of Frances Fuller Victor* (Salem, OR: Deep Well Pub. Co., 1992); Hazel E. Mills et al., *Frances Fuller Victor: The Witness to America's Westerings* (Portland: Peregrine Productions for the Oregon Historical Society Press, 2002); Richard W. Etulain, "A Brief History of Oregon Historians," *The Oregonian*, September 4, 2011; Sheri Bartlett Browne, "What Shall Be Done with Her? Frances Fuller Victor Analyzes 'The Woman Question' in Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (2012): 286–311. Additionally, Browne has announced her plans to follow this article with a book-length intellectual biography of Victor. Bancroft did attempt to employ other women and his less-than-enlightened view of women as writers, in which Victor appeared as the exception that proved the rule, suggests why no other women—save his second wife Matilda and his daughter Kate—stayed with the company for long, whether by their choice or his.

unusual.

Frances Aurette Fuller was born May 23, 1826 in Rome, New York. By the time she ventured to the Pacific with her second husband, a sailor in the Navy named Henry Clay Victor, she had already built a substantial personal network and reputation among influential east coast *littérateurs*. Edgar Allen Poe identified her among the “most imaginative” female poets of the day in agreement with Rufus W. Griswold’s inclusion of Frances and her younger sister Metta Fuller in *The Female Poets of America* (1860).²¹⁸ A writer in many genres, Victor did not add history to that list until she encountered it in the making—as she interpreted it—in Oregon in 1865. She moved there reluctantly, having lived in San Francisco and written for the *Golden Era* under the penname Florence Fane since 1863.²¹⁹ In San Francisco she had expanded her circle further, adding Bret Harte and Charles Henry Webb to its number. Her “Florence” maintained a friendly battle of the wits with Webb’s “Inigo” in the *Golden Era*, though many readers mistook the exchange for Webb battling himself under a female penname. “For as usual,” Victor maligned, “they decided that no woman could be as ‘smart’ as a man who was an acknowledged wit.”²²⁰ It was not the last time that her writing would be mistakenly attributed to a man thanks, in

²¹⁸ Rufus W. Griswold, *The Female Poets of America* (Philadelphia: Moss, Brother & co., 1860), 368; Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe: Criticism*, ed. Charles Francis Richardson, vol. 7 (New York City: Lamb Publishing Co., 1902), 325, 327–28; as cited in: Martin, *A Bit of a Blue*.

²¹⁹ Frances Fuller Victor, “Romance, Reminiscence, Facts, Fiction, Fads, Fancies and Pioneer Narrative. Mrs. F. F. Victor.,” *Daily Oregon Statesman*, June 16, 1895, sec. Romance, Reminiscence, Facts, Fiction, Fads, Fancies and Pioneer Narrative; Mills, “The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian,” 311; Martin, *A Bit of a Blue*, 67.

²²⁰ Victor, “Romance, Reminiscence, Facts, Fiction, Fads, Fancies and Pioneer Narrative. Mrs. F. F. Victor.”

part, to the strength of its composition.²²¹

Bancroft liked buying whole operations, which is what he did in 1878 when he successfully offered Victor “an engagement in [his] library.”²²² In April of that year, Bancroft had turned his “historic explorations northward,” sailing for Vancouver Island on the steamer *City of Panamá* with the intention of making his southbound return trip overland.²²³ He intended to “examine public archives and private papers,” extracting from them what proved useful, but also “to become historically inspired with the spirit of settlement throughout the great north-west.”²²⁴ He engaged assistants to those ends in British Columbia and found willing collaborators in Olympia, including the Washington territorial governor Elisha Peyre Ferry, his wife Sarah Ferry, née Kellogg, and the historian and librarian Elwood Evans.²²⁵

No one writes history alone; Bancroft knew it and so did Victor. Almost immediately upon arriving in Oregon, she began to assemble her own intellectual network, finding valuable allies in Judge Matthew P. Deady and Harvey W. Scott. The pair connected her to the Portland Library Association, which they had helped to found before her arrival in 1864.²²⁶ Bancroft had already intended to contact her based on his existing

²²¹ For more on Victor’s time writing as Florence Fane, see Chapter 2: “Florence Fane in San Francisco” in Mills et al., *Frances Fuller Victor*.

²²² Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 543; Mills, “The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian,” 324.

²²³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 530.

²²⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 531.

²²⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 542. For more on Evans, “the pioneer historian of the state of Washington,” see John MacEachern, “Elwood Evans, Lawyer-Historian,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (January 1961): 15–23.

²²⁶ Victor, “Romance, Reminiscence, Facts, Fiction, Fads, Fancies and Pioneer Narrative.

respect for her written work. She was away on the coast when he visited Portland and so he failed to meet his most promising contact in Oregon. He must have realized quickly that in pursuit of his objectives in that territory, he was following a trail already well beaten by Victor. Upon his return, he wrote her a letter offering her an engagement—with her existing network of collaborators and her collection of sources intact—as a researcher and writer in the company.²²⁷

In the biggest boon to the *Works* since General Cerruti wore down General Vallejo in the protracted battle at *Lachryma Montis*, Victor agreed. Though her later attempts to receive authorial credit for her work under Bancroft's name contributed to scandal over authorship in the twentieth century, she had no misconceptions about the nature of her labors when she originally agreed to work for the company. In a letter to Deady in 1878, she wrote, "of course this is Mr. Bancroft's history: but I am getting every thing in shape as he never could—not being so familiar with the ground and if we agree about it when I am ready to begin, I shall probably *write* it. In any case it is my conscientious desire to do my work faithfully."²²⁸ Two years later she wrote to her fellow historian Elwood Evans, who had contributed to the company and its history of Washington but who had not elected to go to work for it directly. Her account of the working conditions at the company probably did not inspire Evans to regret that decision. "Last year I wrote or worked fifty-one weeks every day except Sundays from 8 o'clock in the morning until 6 in the evening," she noted,

Mrs. F. F. Victor."; Mills, "The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian," 314; Mills et al., *Frances Fuller Victor*, 122–23.

²²⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 543. Notably, Bancroft and Victor got access to each other's collections while each retained possession of their own materials, as Mills notes. Mills, "The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian," 324.

²²⁸ Frances Fuller Victor to Matthew P. Deady, December 8, 1878, Oregon Historical Society; quoted in Mills, "The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian," 326–27.

all in exchange for \$23.10 per week, or “less than a copyist in City Hall would be paid.”²²⁹ In that moment, she believed she had found a workable—if overworking—compromise between her own literary reputation and her need to support herself. Publishing under her own name gave her a chance to maintain her own literary reputation while her work at the company paid her a steady wage in exchange for doing what she believed to be important work.²³⁰

In an eight page spread in *The Californian* extolling the wonders of the company’s library and forthcoming historical series in 1882, Victor repeated without controversy the same story told elsewhere about Bancroft’s authorship: Bancroft “withdrew himself from the cares of business as much as possible (though never able to do so entirely), and set himself to write the ‘History of the Pacific,’ from Darien to Alaska.”²³¹ As she further explored the company’s writing system—everywhere an object of fascination and a source of pride for the company—she made a telling shift in her sentence subjects. In place of “Bancroft,” she wrote that “the writer is enabled to compare at once all his authorities on that subject” thanks to the indexing and note-taking efforts of “a large corps of readers” who had previously “gone over the whole collection,” saving “the author considerable labor in that part of the work, the plan being one to which all those doing similar work

²²⁹ Victor to Evans, December 9, 1879, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University; quoted in Mills, “The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian”; Mills et al., *Frances Fuller Victor*; Clark, *A Venture in History*, 33; Frances Fuller Victor to Matthew P. Deady, December 24, 1878, Oregon Historical Society; quoted in Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America*, 26.

²³⁰ Mills et al., *Frances Fuller Victor*, 281.

²³¹ Frances Fuller Victor, “The Bancroft Historical Library,” *The Californian*, December 1882, 494.

conform, under his direction.”²³² Though after the collapse of the History Company’s coalition she would attempt to assert her authorship, for the moment she did not object to the arrangement and chose to write “as if I were doing it for my own glory” in order to “put into Mr. B’s hands and under his name all the results of my long preparation for this particular work.” She found it then safe to assert “that no historical writing was ever done under better conditions.”²³³

Sometimes other historical enterprises could not be bought; that did not mean that aligned interests could not be served. The company had recognized quickly the advantages—even the necessity—of working with existing, historically interested institutions in all of the locales into which they ventured. In most cases, the company merely hoped to secure access to the institutional records, as Savage had done in the records of the Archdiocese of San Francisco or the Survey General’s Office. Everything changed when the company turned its eye toward Utah, a significant population center at the furthest inland edge of its Pacific region. Alemany had let Savage research in church records. Individuals like Vallejo could be convinced to donate their materials. Victor could be wooed with the promise of steady pay and access to the company’s priceless library. In Utah, the company needed a relationship to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that had similarities to all of those previous partnerships.

It needed something more, though. The hierarchical religious organization held significant sacred, cultural, and political power in the territory populated heavily by

²³² Victor, “The Bancroft Historical Library,” 494.

²³³ Victor to Evans, December 9, 1879; quoted in Mills, “The Emergence of Frances Fuller Victor—Historian,” 328.

Mormons.²³⁴ In order to write the history of Utah, Bancroft & Company would need the church's cooperation, beginning with the Office of the First Presidency, through the Church Historian and Recorder, and down to the rank-and-file. Bancroft intended to write a comprehensive history of Utah in which the LDS church would necessarily figure prominently. It would be neither anti-Mormon propaganda nor blatant hagiography. When it promised to tell a neutral and critical history of Utah and its Saints, the company promised to do what the historically-minded church had proved incapable of doing on its own, despite its significant institutional apparatus for recording and writing its own history.²³⁵

Utah history barely existed in print in 1880. There were histories of the Latter-day Saints that singled them out as a peculiar people, for good or ill, rather than writing their history into the wider west. The polarized literature came from and spoke to religious zealots on both sides.²³⁶ The company promised to put a comprehensive, integrated history of both Utah and the Mormon church on the bookshelves of its many subscribers,

²³⁴ I follow the convention among historians and religionists studying the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by using the many monikers both for the church and its members interchangeably, including the originally derogatory term "Mormon." See W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2015), 273n1.

²³⁵ For two recent works studying the legal and cultural history of Anti-Mormonism as a nationwide phenomenon, see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America*, Studies in Legal History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*.

²³⁶ In his 1954 article introducing the Utah Historical Society's then forthcoming "Guide to the Manuscripts in the Bancroft Library Relating to the History of Utah," historian George Ellsworth offered a comprehensive review of the state of the field of Utah history when Bancroft decided to write his history. George Ellsworth, "Hubert Howe Bancroft and the History of Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (April 1954): 99–100. Bancroft feared the polarization of the reading public's sentiments regarding Mormons. In spite of the company's desire to write an even-handed historical account, Bancroft recalled in his memoir having feared that "strict impartiality would bring upon me the condemnation of both Mormons and gentiles." Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 632.

nestling Utah and its Saints—appropriately—between *The History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming* on the one side and two volumes of *The History of the Northwest Coast* on the other. It could not have been lost on anyone in Salt Lake City that Bancroft would not be stopped from writing his history of Utah. If they chose not to cooperate, others far less sympathetic to their story likely would.²³⁷

Each institutions' interests were already pulling them together; Bancroft could not, however, have known with confidence that church leaders would recognize that fact, too. The negotiations began through the mail, passing through what must have struck Bancroft as the most logical of all channels: Dwyer's Bookstore. The proprietor James Dwyer advertised his business as "The Oldest, Most Reliable and Leading Book and Stationery House in Utah."²³⁸ Whatever their professional relationship had been previously, Bancroft must have felt some comfort in reaching out first to another bookseller and self-styled intellectual. Dwyer's bookstore and home marked the "unofficial headquarters for the 'intellectuals' of Salt Lake Valley."²³⁹

With Dwyer as an intermediary, Bancroft's initial inquiry received a response of which he recorded only an echo in *Literary Industries*. "It had been intimated," Bancroft

²³⁷ Ellsworth assessed the church's position similarly in 1954, asserting, "Bancroft and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints each stood to gain or lose much by this enterprise. Bancroft wanted a truthful history and he wanted to sell it to Mormons and non-Mormons alike. He must have access to Mormon and Gentile records, assistance from Mormons and Gentiles alike. The church needed and desired the best possible representation to the world at a critical time in its history. It stood to gain much by having the currently regarded great and distinguished historian present the facts of her history to the world." Ellsworth, "Hubert Howe Bancroft and the History of Utah," 104.

²³⁸ Sydney W. Darke, *Salt Lake City, Illustrated* (Salt Lake City: S. W. Darke & Co., 1887), 63, <https://archive.org/details/saltlakecityilluoodark>; Chris Rigby, "Ada Dwyer: Bright Lights and Lilacs," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (January 1975): 41–51.

²³⁹ Rigby, "Ada Dwyer: Bright Lights and Lilacs," 43.

claimed, that the Church Historian and Recorder Orson Pratt would “furnish a complete history of Utah” if Bancroft would print it “without mutilation.”²⁴⁰ On January 12, 1880, Bancroft replied in an epistle surpassing 2,000 words. He promised only that “the extract” of any materials furnished “would be added to the extracts of all other material within my reach; for from such admixtures, through the alembic of infinite labor and pains, my work is distilled.”²⁴¹ Adding weight both to his insistence that no single voice ever dominated one of the company’s histories and to the strength of his request for materials, Bancroft listed a lengthy selection of the twelve hundred manuscripts “varying in size from a few pages to five folio volumes” that others—including Vallejo and Deady—had already given to the company, all with the knowledge that donations bought no right of review. He closed his letter by inviting the leadership of the church to join that long list of donors in recognizing what he regarded as a simple truth: “fair-minded me, who desire to see placed before the world a true history of Utah, cannot more directly or thoroughly accomplish the purpose, in this generation at least, than by placing within my reach the material necessary for the building of such a work.”²⁴²

The missive closed ominously, plainly stating what so many individuals and institutions must have thought before conceding to cooperate: “better a thousandfold that our faults be told by a friend than by an enemy.”²⁴³ Bancroft’s hefty epistle elicited a swift

²⁴⁰ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 632.

²⁴¹ Hubert Howe Bancroft to James Dwyer, January 12, 1880; reproduced in full in Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 632–36.

²⁴² Bancroft to Dwyer, January 12, 1880; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 636. Bancroft listed the materials given to the company by fifty-one named individuals or repositories before he felt comfortable that he had made his point and that an “etc.” could stand in for further specific mentions.

²⁴³ Bancroft to Dwyer, January 12, 1880; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 636.

response. Dwyer responded first. By the end of February, Bancroft found himself communicating directly with the President of the Church, John Taylor.²⁴⁴ Taylor, along with Pratt, acknowledged Bancroft's "position and ability to accomplish this much-desired work." They promised to compile and send to the company the materials that Bancroft would require. He encouraged Bancroft "to proceed with the work, in view of the great good we anticipate will be accomplished in placing before the world those facts, of which the majority are more or less ignorant," assuring him that Taylor himself would be "in direct communication . . . on this subject."²⁴⁵ Initially, the church intended to send Pratt to the History Company, but by July the historian had to apologize that the "very feeble state of [his] health" would prevent him from traveling to visit Bancroft's historical workshop in San Francisco while delegating further responsibility in the matter to Judge Franklin D. Richards, with Apostle Richards being quickly dispatched by the pair as their representative to the company.²⁴⁶

Throughout the year 1880 and into the middle years of that decade, Mormon families and communities gathered and compiled materials for Bancroft. In that first year alone, the efforts of Richards yielded at least sixty manuscripts for the library.²⁴⁷ Mrs.

²⁴⁴ Bancroft to Dwyer, January 12, 1880; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 636.

²⁴⁵ John Taylor to Hubert Howe Bancroft, February 26, 1880, BANC MSS P-F 77, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, printed in Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 637.

²⁴⁶ Orson Pratt to Hubert Howe Bancroft, July 1, 1880, BANC MSS P-F 77, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, reprinted in Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 638. Pratt died the following October and was succeeded as historian by Wilford Woodruff, who occupied that position until becoming President of the Church in 1889, after which Richards—who had been Woodruff's assistant—assumed the calling as Church Historian and Recorder. Ellsworth, "Hubert Howe Bancroft and the History of Utah," 113–14.

²⁴⁷ Ellsworth, "Hubert Howe Bancroft and the History of Utah," 111–12; "Utah Miscellany" 1880, BANC MSS P-F 12, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11227627~S1>; "Utah Sketches" 1880, BANC MSS P-F 10, Bancroft

Richards helped to procure the written recollections of prominent Mormon women, too, including Wilford Woodruff's wife Phebe, Margaret Smoot, Nancy N. Tracy, Mary J. Tanner, Martha H. Brown, Mary Jane Hyde, and Mrs. Hanna T. King.²⁴⁸ The partnership between the company and the church as facilitated through Richards proved both happy and productive and by 1884 it had made the near completion of Bancroft's Utah volume possible.

Hubert, his second wife Matilda, and their youngest son Philip spent the latter half of 1884 residing at the Continental Hotel in Salt Lake City. As he told it in *Literary Industries*, the salubrious air of the high desert had brought the Bancrofts to Utah in hopes that it would remedy the sickly boy's cough.²⁴⁹ From Salt Lake City's Continental Hotel, the family could enjoy the air, a chef with the "reputation of being unexcelled in his art west of the Missouri," and easy access to the church's central operations a few blocks away.²⁵⁰ After four years of cooperation, the level of trust and commitment between Bancroft and the LDS leadership had greatly increased even in a time when Mormons found themselves embattled against the federal prosecution of their plural marriages.

Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11217904~S1>; F. D. Richards, "F. D. Richards Letters and Notes on Utah History" 1883-1885, BANC MSS P-F 66, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11216711~S1>; F. T. Gilbert, "Early History of Carson Valley" April 17, 1881, BANC MSS P-F 16, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11217901~S1>; Joseph Stanford, "Brief Historical Sketch of the Settlements in Weber County: Ogden, Utah" 1880, BANC MSS P-F 8, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11217905~S1>; Joseph Stanford, "Historical Sketch of Ogden City: Ogden, Utah" 1880, BANC MSS P-F 7, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11217906~S1>.

²⁴⁸ Ellsworth, "Hubert Howe Bancroft and the History of Utah," 111.

²⁴⁹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 759.

²⁵⁰ Darke, *Salt Lake City, Illustrated*, 6; D. A. Sanborn, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps" (Salt Lake City: D. A. Sanborn, 1889), Western Americana Division, Special Collection, J. Willard

In September of that year, Bancroft managed to sit down with Taylor, Woodruff, Richards, and George Q. Cannon in order to review the Utah manuscript.²⁵¹ Woodruff recorded the episode in his journal; Bancroft neglected to mention it in *Literary Industries*. According to Woodruff, since Bancroft “was giving both sides of the question for and against” the church, he offered its leaders “the privilege of correcting any mistakes on our side.”²⁵² Fearful of his and the *Works*’ reputation, Bancroft always downplayed anything that made it appear that powers outside of the company had influenced their ostensibly objective accounts. In the messier day-to-day operations of making history, however, far from public scrutiny, the company faced the same concerns that all historians face, particularly when treating historical events recent enough to have surviving witnesses and participants. Bancroft struggled to balance the company’s delicate relationship to informants and potential readers—Mormon or anti-Mormon—on all sides of the issues that it narrated.²⁵³

Marriott Library, University of Utah, section 29.

²⁵¹ This meeting could hardly have occurred later than the fall of 1884. As the federal indictments of polygamist men ballooned beginning in 1885, most of these men—and countless others—went into hiding. Gordon, *The Mormon Question*, throughout, but especially Chapter 5.

²⁵² Wilford Woodruff, “Wilford Woodruff Journals and Papers” 1828–1898, September 2, 1884., MS 1352, LDS Church History Library; quoted in Ellsworth, “Hubert Howe Bancroft and the History of Utah,” 114.

²⁵³ James T. Cobb to Hubert Howe Bancroft, September 1, 1884, BANC MSS P-F 18, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; James T. Cobb to Hubert Howe Bancroft, September 7, 1884, BANC MSS P-F 18, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; James T. Cobb to Hubert Howe Bancroft, September 22, 1884, BANC MSS P-F 18, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Joseph Smith to James T. Cobb, September 2, 1884, BANC MSS P-F 86, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Bancroft had exchanged materials and letters with the former Mormon T. B. H. Stenhouse, who had authored a less-than-favorable history. “Letters to H. H. Bancroft & Company, 1861–1884” 1861–1884, folios 1–2, BANC MSS P-F 72, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11232806~S1>; Thomas B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons, from the First Vision of Joseph Smith to the Last Courtship of Brigham Young* (New York City: D. Appleton & Company, 1873); Francis Fuller Victor’s sister Metta Victoria Fuller Victor had written

Meanwhile, Matilda Bancroft spent her days meeting with elite Latter-day Saint women, recording dictations meant to capture the women's perspective on polygamy. Amid the anti-polygamist fervor of the 1880s, many Americans outside of Utah, particularly Protestant women, found themselves wondering at the possibility that Mormon women supported—rather than endured—plural marriages. When women in Utah failed to vote themselves out of polygamy and instead enjoyed what their gentile counterparts could only regard as the “liberty of self-degradation,” female reformers found themselves in the strange position of successfully advocating for the disenfranchisement of women in Utah.²⁵⁴ While other women across the country looked toward Utah with horror the Bancrofts did their best to record accurately and without judgment the Mormon's perspective on their own past and present.

Neither the company nor the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could accomplish their goals independently; both benefitted from carefully curating the public details about the nature and degree of their collaboration. The History Company could not have written the history of Utah without the help of the LDS church, its leadership

her own exposé of polygamy in Utah in the mid-1850s. Though there is no indication that she contributed to the History of Utah, the prominence of her sister as a writer in the company must have given LDS church leaders pause. That the close relationship between a staff writer and a published anti-Mormon author seems not to have influenced the arrangement between the company and the church further demonstrates the degree to which both entities understood the importance of maintaining their fragile alliance. Metta Victoria Fuller Victor, *Mormon Wives; a Narrative of Facts Stranger Than Fiction*. (New York City: H. W. Derby & Co., 1856).

²⁵⁴ Kate Fields chafed at female support for polygamy, calling it a “shameless spectacle afforded by the Mormon female lobby . . . a rock that needs blowing up with the dynamite of law.” Kate Fields, “Kate and the Mormons. Miss Fields' Arraignment of the Apostolic Women of Utah,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 6, 1886. For the definitive studies of polygamy and antipolygamy with keen attention paid to gender, religion, and law, see Sarah Barringer Gordon, “‘The Liberty of Self-Degradation’: Polygamy, Woman Suffrage, and Consent in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (December 1996): 815–47; Gordon, *The Mormon Question*; and Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*.

and laity. It also could not risk it appearing to readers as if the company had published under Bancroft's name a history prepared by the church historian. Though it was understandably nervous about letting company researchers into its midst given the anti-Mormon fervor of the day, the LDS church stood to gain far more in that polarized climate from an independent review that was not entirely positive than it could have gained from an apologetic history written and distributed internally.

The gentile author of *Sinners and Saints* (1883) Phil Robinson lamented, "there is not, to my knowledge, a single Gentile work before the public that is not utterly unreliable from its distortion of facts. Yet it is from these books—for there are no others—that the American public has acquired nearly all its ideas about the people of Utah," a dearth of good press for which he blamed Mormons, calling them "foolishly negligent of the power of the press."²⁵⁵ Robinson accurately depicted the polarization of the literature in 1883. He failed to see the Saints' more sophisticated strategy, in which the church quietly assisted the publication of a critical history of Utah that was sympathetic to their story.

The company continued to grow, picking up new collaborators based on referrals from existing participants. With every acquisition of new personal papers or of a new oral memoir, the network gained both a new champion and additional legitimacy. Each investment signaled to others that this for-profit historical enterprise meant to succeed and that it had the resources to do so. Throughout the nineteenth century, the diverse population of the North American West had watched nations and empires come and go. They had witnessed the inward expansion from the Pacific met by the westward expansion across the continent. They had even seen the transcontinental railroad shrink the space

²⁵⁵ Phil Robinson, *Sinners and Saints: A Tour Across the States, and Round Them; with Three Months Among the Mormons* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 245.

between the Atlantic and the Pacific. They had become human archives and they feared that their collections would decay with them. Bancroft's enterprise offered them their only real alternative to letting history as they had seen it die with them. To middle class westerners hoping to live by the pen, the company offered a steady paycheck in exchange for work they valued and enjoyed, even if the *Works* would never be their own.

For a brief moment, Bancroft leveraged his massive means of production into a near monopoly over the collection, production, and distribution of historical knowledge about the burgeoning Pacific World. The company brought together—if only fleetingly—individuals and groups whose historical interests and epistemologies would eventually diverge into public, popular, and scholarly history. For a moment that only looks brief in hindsight from a century hence, those diverse interests in the past all converged in a network extending outward from the fifth floor of the aptly named History Building, 721 Market Street, San Francisco, California.

Over and over again, people allowed themselves and their priceless and deeply personal papers and memories to be acquired by the History Company for the pursuit of its great purpose. The tension was obvious. The company offered the resources to complete a more significant task than any one person could complete on her or his own; each additional investment in the company made it more enticing for others. At the same time, their reticence resulted from their keen awareness that the company's great purpose could not be controlled. It could at any time diverge from their goals and interpretations. Remarkably, over two decades, thousands of individuals made one-time decisions to invest in the company with their priceless and ephemeral materials. Hundreds of others decided over and over again to keep working without public credit because it offered them

the chance to do something greater with whatever they brought to the company than they could have done with the same independently.

CHAPTER III

TELLING STORIES

It will be readily understood that among the large mass of documents, there was a considerable portion of no value whatever, but which could not be ignored or set aside till after being read, or at least glanced over—Of the useful portion the substance had to be carefully extracted, and written down concisely tho' clearly—But if the document or any part of it was important enough to be copied, it was taken down verbatim et literatim. What was of no practical use was left out.

—Thomas Savage, “Report of Labors”

There were found some old men and women that would speak fluently on events they professed to have witnessed or obtained from good sources. To one uninformed on the country's history their talk appears sound enough and even interesting. But to one who has gathered his information from the best authorities, and read nearly all the official documents issued since the foundation of the first settlement, and even back of that, the effect is quite different. The latter finds that such chroniclers are not only unable to furnish dates in most cases, but that their descriptions of events are jumbled.

—Thomas Savage, “Report of Labors”

It took two company researchers multiple visits between April 20 and May 16, 1877 to record an oral memoir at the former Alta California Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado's house in Monterey. Alvarado did not live there, however. Instead Thomas Savage and Vicente P. Gómez interviewed Mauricio Gonzalez, the “very talkative, illiterate, good-natured” Californio.²⁵⁶ Savage complained that he rambled and mixed up his narratives in

²⁵⁶ Mauricio González, “Memorias ... De La Historia [de] California: Monterey, Calif” 1877, 1–2, BANC MSS C-D 91 Trans., Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley,

a frustrating way, but the researchers persevered. They “knew of the importance of obtaining his detailed account of the campaign of General Micheltorena against the revolted Californians in 1845,” because González had spent “the whole of it near the General's person.”²⁵⁷ Over those multiple visits to an otherwise unknown, aging Californio who just happened to live in an auspicious house, the researchers recorded a dictation that ran over 10,000 words. In that narrative, González had related a single detail about the battle that Savage regarded as important and that he had “not seen given by any one else.”²⁵⁸ Savage counted it as a success. He approached potential contributors like González in much the same way he approached the mess he found in the Surveyor General's office. Both that office and González's mind were dusty, disordered repositories of historical information that a skilled researcher could mine for facts. That meant that he largely devalued everything González said; it also meant that he recorded their conversation with surprising accuracy. One never knew what might prove important, after all, and that included González in Savage's mind.

The company had desperately needed both Vallejo's documents and his public support, and so Bancroft & Oak had dispatched Cerruti to *Lachryma Montis* for as long as it took. Around the same time, though, the company dispatched other researchers for extended research trips during which they would visit local repositories while securing materials from otherwise unknown people at their discretion. As the previous chapter briefly demonstrated, Savage took over that task from Cerruti. He was as well suited to it

<http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219828-S1>.

²⁵⁷ González, “Memorias ... De La Historia [de] California,” 1.

²⁵⁸ González, “Memorias ... De La Historia [de] California,” 1.

as Cerruti was to his mission in Sonoma. Savage built upon a practice pioneered by Cerruti: he recorded oral memoirs.²⁵⁹ Savage's visits to chaotic local repositories overlapped with his extraction of memories from California's elderly population. He made no distinction between the two tasks or their respective archives.

In the Archive of the Mind

He set out on a salvage mission in the spring of 1877 and he judged both the repositories and recollections of Alta California equally disordered. The following December he recorded the aforementioned dictations from Michael White and his mother-in-law Eulalia Pérez. Savage made little of the differences between them, mentioning White's emigration to California from England only as a matter of fact and Pérez's long tenure there as a matter of local curiosity. In Savage's estimation, the national origins of a narrator had little to do with the kinds of facts that person might possess. He concerned himself only minimally with the diversity of the voices he recorded.²⁶⁰ For the purposes of the company's research canvass, potential subjects had only to be willing and capable of recounting accurate details of Alta California's history from first-hand experience. That meant that those not born in Alta California had to have immigrated

²⁵⁹ The two men's approach to this innovative research method differed drastically. Cerruti took notes, but wrote the narrative later in his own voice. Though Savage clearly omitted his own interjections, he appears to have come much closer to recording the actual narratives as his subjects recounted them. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, xxviii-xxix.

²⁶⁰ In a bibliographic essay detailing the collection of the California dictations, a company writer distinguished narrowly between the quality of historical information given by Anglo American "foreigners," asserting, "the testimony of foreigners, taken all in all, I regard as of less value than that of the native Californians; for although the latter may be the superior of the former in native mendacity, foreigners have in many cases taken but little interest in the subject." Hubert Howe Bancroft, *California Pastoral, 1769-1848*, vol. 34, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1888), 792.

there by at least the early 1840s. Under those circumstances, Savage assumed that the national origins of his subjects would not influence the objective facts that they recounted.

Later scholars' historical imaginations have shaped their expectations in approaching these sources as much as Savage's did when he and his assistants mediated their creation. As scholars have come to recognize the role that identity plays in the construction of historical memory, they have turned to Bancroft's Spanish-language testimonies—sometimes identified as *testimonios*—in order to reconstruct the Californio counter-memory to the Anglo American founding myths of California that emerged after the Gold Rush.²⁶¹ These scholars have rightly argued that the Californios' memories challenged Anglo American attempts to forget California's Spanish and Mexican heritage.²⁶² As this chapter will demonstrate, the acculturated Anglo Americans and Europeans who had immigrated to Alta California before the Bear Flag Revolt joined their native Spanish-speaking counterparts in telling similar stories of hard-won historical continuity. In his interviews with Alta Californians who had lived in the region during the Mexican era, Savage recorded a multiethnic primary memory (one comprised of first-hand experiences) that challenged the Anglo-dominated secondary memory (a kind of cultural memory in which people recount events through which they themselves had not lived).²⁶³

²⁶¹ Padilla, *My History, Not Yours*; Sánchez, *Telling Identities*; Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres."

²⁶² For more on the attempts to forget—even to erase—California's Spanish and Mexican past, see Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres"; David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

²⁶³ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University

This chapter builds on both of the previous chapters. It examines how the research methods explored in Chapter II extended beyond famous contributors like Vallejo or institutions like the LDS church to include a multiethnic group of women and men of widely varying levels of power and wealth by 1877. If the first chapter demonstrated how Anglo Americans, Europeans, Mexicans, and Californios all shared a vested interest in opposing the provincialization of Pacific history, this chapter examines the shared narrative arc those acculturated Alta Californians recounted to Savage in 1877 and 1878. It argues that they overwhelmingly told stories that insisted on continuity between Mexican-era California and the US state. That consensus is surprising given the cultural amnesia later Anglo American arrivals exhibited as well as the material discontinuity endured by so many Californios.²⁶⁴ Narrators who had been on opposing sides of the same local upheavals all insisted that their efforts had preserved local autonomy while also preserving both the maximum number of its people and the essence of its culture as California passed from one distant colonial power to the next. While they necessarily disagreed over whose side—or even which revolutionary movement—had saved California, they all told stories with a common plot.

During the 1830s and 1840s, California saw a series of localized political upheavals that, in aggregate, worked to limit the authority of the Mexican central government to control its northernmost colony. Only a few of the narrators recalled the 1830s, and none of these were Anglo Americans, though two of them were European immigrants to Alta California. The events of the 1840s, by contrast, appear in the dictations of several Anglo

Press, 1998), 20–21.

²⁶⁴ Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*; Gendzel, “Pioneers and Padres.”

Americans who had arrived in California near the end of the 1830s. The accounts of the earlier decade provide a control group for the more diverse accounts of the 1840s.

This chapter begins by examining the six accounts of the 1830s recorded by Savage and the various ways in which they recounted the revolutions of the 1830s while uniformly presenting that decade as the apogee of Alta California's history. Second, it examines how a much more diverse sample of narrators recounted the 1840s and the enormous historical transformations that decade brought. Individual narrators of both decades often disagreed with the accounts given by others, with a particular division evident between northern and southern Californians, but even those divisions crossed ethnic lines. Most significantly, the narrators all chose to highlight the historical continuity between Alta California and the American state rather than to present the decade as a historical rupture. That narrative convention contradicted the nascent memory of rupture that began to take shape among Anglo Americans who had come to California after the Bear Flag rebellion with the expectation that the region would adapt to them rather than the other way around. When they told their stories in 1877 and 1878, the Alta Californians' stories of cultural continuity stood in opposition to the then dominant narrative of rupture, but also to the material reality of the Californios' lives.

The 1830s

California experienced a series of violent contestations of power throughout the 1830s as the new nation of Mexico attempted to assert its control over the region, which had experienced little outside control over the previous fifty years.²⁶⁵ Californian attempts

²⁶⁵ Pubols, "Becoming Californio: Jokes, Broad-sides, and a Slap in the Face"; Historian Leonard Pitt expounded upon California's isolation, describing it as "a sort of Siberian work camp"

to preserve the region's autonomy manifested in the form of a series of localized political upheavals throughout the early part of the decade, culminating in the successful revolution of 1836 in which Juan Bautista Alvarado wrested the governorship of Alta California from his rivals.²⁶⁶ When the narrators recalled those scattered and disconnected political upheavals, they necessarily took a great deal of license in order to make sense of an otherwise tumultuous decade.

In spite of the challenges, each of the six narrators constructed an internally consistent narrative out of the events he or she remembered from the 1830s in order to tell a story that explained how the people of California had risen in defense of their country and, in the process, had become Californians. The narrators did not agree with one another on what it meant to be Californian and, in some cases, they claimed that identity for the opposing sides on which they had fought during that period. Gender, nationality, and geographic location all influenced which movement they identified with the popular will of "the people" of California during that period. For all their disagreements, these dictations posited an emerging Californian identity within Alta California in the 1830s. Even when two narrators identified the popular will of the people with opposing sides of the same conflict, both narratives shared the assumption that during that period Californios gained a political consciousness. Taken together, they constitute a cultural memory that emphasized the people of Alta California in the 1830s as responsible for

that absorbed from Mexico "hosts of petty thieves and political prisoners—18 in 1825, 200 in 1829, 130 in 1830, and so on." Pitt argues that the policy of banishing such undesirables to California created "an ambivalence toward Mexico and things Mexican." Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 6–7.

²⁶⁶ According to Pitt, many of the factions within California resulted from the organizational efforts of the political prisoners who had been sent to the region. Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 6.

initiating a movement against tyranny.

The complicated, ever-shifting web of alliances that contributed to that pattern of political and social upheaval made it possible for a narrator to begin her or his story with almost any event, or with almost any governor or revolutionary, in order to construct a narrative leading to Juan Bautista Alvarado's 1836 installation as governor, a position he held until 1842.²⁶⁷ They chose from events and characters local to their own experiences, tying them to larger movements and outcomes in order to *make* them important. The death of the widely respected General José Figueroa, governor of California from 1833 to 1835,²⁶⁸ led to a succession crisis that caused the revolts of 1836.²⁶⁹ Upon Figueroa's death, José Castro served briefly as governor before he relinquished control to Nicolás Gutiérrez, the military commander. Gutiérrez held the office from January 2 to May 3, 1836, after which he transferred control to Mariano Chico. Under political pressure, Chico fled the

²⁶⁷ Of course, such freedom existed only at the theoretical level. In practice, Savage always played some role in directing the narrators to particular events of interest to him. However, Beebe and Senkewicz have noted that the narrators also held the power to redirect their narrative, as they argue that Angustias de la Guerra did when "she broke the flow of Savage's questioning to insert an event in which she had been a significant agent." Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 199.

²⁶⁸ In his 1851 history of Alta California, Antonio María Osio described Figueroa as one who desired "to be respected rather than feared." He asserted, the people of California "found in him the fine qualities they had hoped for and a good friend who was always ready to help in any manner which did not conflict with his decorum and duty." Based upon those characteristics, Osio claimed that Figueroa "obtained everything simply by stating that those were his desires and that everyone should work together for the good of the country." Osio could find only one fault with Figueroa, a defect "which he could not remove, even by the power of his good intentions." Figueroa was an Indian, which Osio argued made Figueroa sympathetic to their plight and gave the Native Americans a sense of empowerment that made them, in Osio's eyes, more unruly. Antonio María Osio, *History of Alta California: A Memoir of Mexican California* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 125, 133–34.

²⁶⁹ Among the other valuable appendices included within their volume, Beebe and Senkewicz put together a chronological list of the "Governors of Alta California and Important Events during Their Governorships." Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 427–28.

state on July 31, 1836, leaving Gutiérrez in charge again.²⁷⁰ In November 1836, José Castro, Ángel Ramírez, and Juan Bautista Alvarado began an open rebellion against Gutiérrez in Monterey. Castro and Alvarado succeeded in wresting control of Alta California from Gutiérrez in Monterey and from Don Carlos Carrillo, who had controlled southern California. The Mexican central government had appointed Carrillo to the office of governor, based upon the recommendation of his brother José Antonio Carrillo, the representative of Alta California to the Mexican congress, in order to appease the Californios' desire for a Californian to govern California.²⁷¹

In their aforementioned accounts of the Híjar-Padrés party's expedition, the narrators Florencio Serrano and Antonio Coronel both explored the relationship between the emerging popular Californian identity and the leadership of two opposing movements that attempted to harness that popular energy. Neither narrator seems to have imagined his Californian identity as inherently incompatible with loyalty to another nation. Neither man was a Californian nationalist even if, like other Californians, they both expected home rule of Alta California by one of its own. Serrano and Coronel recalled how different movements of Californians attempted to achieve that goal in conflicting ways.

Serrano was born in Mexico in 1810 to *criollo* (Spaniards born in Mexico) parents and came to California in 1834 with the Híjar-Padrés colony.²⁷² Serrano recounted the 1836 revolt as the joint effort of Anglo Americans, Californios, "and some Mexicans," in which those diverse, common people attempted to secure Alta Californian independence under

²⁷⁰ George Tays, "The Surrender of Monterey by Governor Nicolas Gutierrez November 5, 1836: An Account from Unpublished Correspondence," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (December 1936): 338.

²⁷¹ Osio, *History of Alta California*, 304 n16.

the leadership of Ángel Ramírez, Juan Bautista Alvarado, and José Castro.²⁷³ He argued that almost immediately after their first victory, the Californians “publically proclaimed the ‘free, independent, and sovereign state of California.’”²⁷⁴ He interpreted the rhetorical shift toward California nationalism at the popular level as an indication that the common people had moved beyond “that which was believed at the beginning” of the revolution.²⁷⁵ He never explained to whose beliefs he referred, but his assertion clearly indicated that whatever role its leaders had played in the outbreak of revolt, the will of the people had become a self-sustaining nationalist cause. In fact, Serrano argued that the “advanced views of the Californios caused Licenciado Peña, the principal promoter of the revolution, Don Ángel Ramírez,” and others “to separate themselves from the ranks of Castro” in order to form a counter-revolution.²⁷⁶

Serrano argued that on all sides, common Californians and their leaders attempted to appropriate the emerging Californian identity for their cause. Naturally, conflicts arose over those competing claims to Californian identity. Twice he recounted the “despicable act against the national colors” perpetrated by Castro in 1836. In the process of replacing the Mexican flag with the first of two newly made Californian flags, Castro had placed the Mexican flag on the ground and “stamped on it with scorn.”²⁷⁷ While Serrano vehemently disapproved of Castro’s desecration of the Mexican flag, he never questioned the decision

²⁷² Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 1.

²⁷³ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 65.

²⁷⁴ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 67.

²⁷⁵ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 67.

²⁷⁶ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 67.

²⁷⁷ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 57.

to create and to fly a Californian flag.²⁷⁸ Throughout, he presented the movement as a struggle between two groups of Californians who disagreed about whether or not loyalty to Alta California demanded the renunciation of all loyalties to Mexico.

Coronel offered an opposite interpretation of the popular will, arguing that a few opportunists, including Ángel Ramírez, had attempted to coopt Californians' identity but that a popular movement had arisen in support of maintaining ties to Mexico.²⁷⁹ Rather than a revolution of the people, Coronel remembered an orchestrated manipulation of the populace by a few elites who sought additional power in the region. In his dictation, he told how he and others fought because they rejected the Monterey revolutionaries' binary opposition between being Californian and remaining loyal to Mexico.²⁸⁰ While he always represented that revolution as an illegitimate power play by a small number of people, Coronel argued that it had capitalized on an emerging popular

²⁷⁸ Teodoro González, who had come to California from Mexico as a prisoner, offered a brief statement of his memory of the revolution and counter-revolution in which he corroborated much of what Serrano recalled. González identified the counter-revolutionaries as Mexicans and recalled how he had demanded their release from military custody after they had been captured by revolutionary forces. He emphasized that the revolutionaries "turned them over without any opposition, thus respecting civil authority. I proceeded in this way in the discharge of my duty, and most especially with a view to preventing the mishaps which might have befallen the prisoners because of the ill-feeling of the Californians against them, but fortunately this was soon appeased." González, like Serrano, recognized the vehemence of Californian nationalists in Monterey even as he represented himself as a sort of intermediary whose loyalty remained with the maintenance of law and order. Teodoro González, "Las Revoluciones En California, 1829-40" 1877, 8-9, BANC MSS C-D 93 Trans., Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219830~S1>.

²⁷⁹ According to Coronel, Ramírez persuaded Castro and Alvarado, who "were young men then, and would not have aimed so high if it hadn't been for Ramírez's advice and maneuvers," to join his cause by promising them more power. Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 17; Coronel, "Cosas De California."

²⁸⁰ Coronel and the others in his family lost their property in a title dispute with the US Land Commission, but he amassed a fair amount of wealth mining with which he was able to purchase and maintain a successful orchard and vineyard in Los Angeles. Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 3.

Californian identity and the accompanying conviction that California ought to be ruled by its own people. Coronel agreed with the assessment of José Antonio Carrillo, Carrillo's brother and the Californian representative to the Mexican Congress, in 1838, that "the Californians were loyal" to the central government of Mexico "only if they had a native son as governor" and that "the Mexican government [would be] well-served" if they remembered that fact.²⁸¹ Though he had lamented Carrillo's surrender, he found no fault in the eventual rule of Alvarado after the latter renounced his intentions of breaking with Mexico. In that act, Coronel represented Alvarado as finally capitulating to the popular will of the people, which opposed casting off Mexican authority.

Coronel did not portray himself or his movement as more Mexican than Californian. Rather, he explained that he and his companions had defended Carrillo because they had accepted the legitimacy of the governor's rule, finding him both legitimately appointed and a "native son" of California who had been "immediately recognized by the town council of Los Angeles and all of California south of Santa Barbara," all of whom identified themselves as Californians as fervently as their northern counterparts. Coronel represented his and other southern Californians' willingness to fight against the northern revolution as a natural part of their identity as Californians rather than at odds with it.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 19.

²⁸² Though he lamented Carrillo's surrender, Coronel remembered giving the same unquestioning allegiance to Alvarado after the Mexican government officially appointed him Governor of California, after which "there was no longer any excuse for this or any other part of the territory to deny Alvarado's authority." José del Carmen Lugo, *Vida De Un Ranchero, a History of San Bernardino Valley*, ed. Helen Pruitt Beattie, vol. 8, Quarterly (San Bernardino County Museum Association) (Bloomington, CA, 1961), 5; José del Carmen Lugo, "Vida De Un Ranchero: Los Angeles" 1877, BANC MSS C-D 118, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219850~S1>.

María Inocenta Pico and María de las Angustias de la Guerra, both women of prominent families in California, focused their narratives on specific, local events that caused popular sentiment to turn against Chico and Gutiérrez in defense of a local, prominent Californian man who had been wronged by Chico. Like Serrano and Coronel, Pico and de la Guerra did not understand the Californian identity as antithetical to Mexican identity. Rather, they argued that Chico's arbitrary actions against local Californians dramatized for the common people the need for home rule.

In interviewing Pico, Savage hoped that she would relate the dictation from the perspective of her late husband, the military man Miguel Avila.²⁸³ Instead, she offered a narrative driven by ordinary women and men who rose up to defend her husband from an unjust arrest ordered by Governor Gutiérrez. Pico portrayed Alvarado and Castro as champions of the local community, which had responded violently to a series of highly personal affronts by the governor against the people of the pueblo. Savage approached Pico with the assumption that he could only gain second-hand information from her concerning the outbreak of revolution in which her husband had played an important and active role; instead, she dictated to him a narrative in which her late husband remained in a mostly passive role as she and other members of the pueblo transformed California while attempting to deliver him from his wrongful imprisonment.

For Pico, the events leading to the November 1836 revolution had begun earlier that year when Gutiérrez wrongfully arrested Avila for having chastised the wives of

²⁸³ Born in Santa Barbara in 1810, she married the soldier Miguel Avila in Monterey in 1826. When Savage interviewed her in 1878 her husband had been dead for four years. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 297–300.

prominent men for bathing in a well.²⁸⁴ Pico recalled how she went before Gutiérrez in order to secure her husband's release accompanied by her four-year-old son, presenting herself as a wife and mother appealing for her husband's release. She recalled that Gutiérrez had responded heartlessly, asking if she "preferred to have them shoot my husband five times or have him exiled to Guadalajara for many years."²⁸⁵ She responded coolly that "if he thought it was fair, then he should shoot my husband five times," adding that "there would be justice on earth as surely as there was justice in Heaven" for she was "determined that he would not see one bit of cowardice" in her.²⁸⁶ Far from placing her faith in divine justice in the next life, though, Pico demanded earthly justice in a not-so-veiled threat.²⁸⁷

As Pico told it, the revolt against Gutiérrez in Monterey began when the pueblo, outraged by the mistreatment of her husband, rose up against him under Castro's leadership. The leaders of Monterey had met immediately after her husband's arrest in order to secure his release, "by force if necessary. The revolt against Gutiérrez was triggered a few days after the arrest, which was one of the main reasons for the revolt."²⁸⁸ She explained that her appeal to Gutiérrez and her refusal to show any fear before him had dramatized his injustices against the people, spurring them to action. Even after he

²⁸⁴ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 304–8; María Inocenta Pico, "Cosas De California" 1878, BANC MSS C-D 74 Transl., Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219569~S1>.

²⁸⁵ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 305.

²⁸⁶ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 305.

²⁸⁷ For an extended study of women's experiences in California, see Virginia M. Bouvier, *Women and the Conquest of California, 1542–1840: Codes of Silence* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001).

²⁸⁸ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 305.

released Avila, Pico explained, Castro and Alvarado had decided to lead troops against Gutiérrez anyway. She recounted how she had supplied them with all of the provisions she had: food, drink, gunpowder, and tack. Pico celebrated the victory as her own: “I had contributed greatly with my resources, my influence, and even with my own hard work. Many times my hands were the ones that put the bridles on the horses, and many of those bridles were made with pieces of my clothesline.”²⁸⁹ Pico represented the 1836 revolt against Gutiérrez not as a movement forced upon the people by elite, power-hungry politicians, but as an organic movement that arose from the people and in which she and other women played active and decisive roles. As she recalled it, the revolt that freed the Californians from a government that treated them “more despotically than what we had ever experienced during the absolute rule of the Spanish governors” resulted from the undaunted resolve of a wronged mother and wife, wielding her gunpowder and clothesline.²⁹⁰

Angustias de la Guerra,²⁹¹ whom Savage interviewed because of her reputation “as a lady of intelligence who, from her connections and position, was enabled to inform herself upon governmental affairs,” portrayed the people of Santa Barbara as trusting of Chico and

²⁸⁹ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 307.

²⁹⁰ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 308.

²⁹¹ Savage referred to de la Guerra as Mrs. Ord, using her ex-husband James Ord’s last name. Her dictation appears at the Bancroft under the name Angustias Ord. She, however, began her dictation “I, María de las Angustias de la Guerra.” I have elected to use the name by which she self-identified at the time of her interview. Beebe and Senkewicz highlight de la Guerra’s diverse personal history. The daughter of José de la Guerra, a prominent Spaniard in California, and María Antonia Carrillo, a Californiana, she was first married to a Mexican and second to an American. Thus, “Angustias de la Guerra encountered many worlds. Her testimonio revealed that she saw the light and darkness in all of them.” Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 201; Angustias Ord, “Ocurrencias En California: Relatadas a Thomas Savage En Santa Barbara” 1878, BANC MSS C-D 134, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11218710~S1>.

Gutiérrez to a fault, arguing that while the signs of their bad character were apparent to many, the final popular opposition to their arbitrary rule built upon a series of unlikely events.²⁹² Like Pico, de la Guerra focused on the common people, especially women, and their interactions with the leaders of the revolution.²⁹³ De la Guerra's dictation reads as a series of anecdotes that coalesce in the "right moment" to show how the people of Santa Barbara reluctantly rose against the leaders to whom they had desperately wanted to submit.

Her account began with a prophetic Indian named Cristóbal Manojó at Mission Santa Barbara and the cryptic promise to reveal how "this issue gave rise to serious incidents which I will relate at the right moment."²⁹⁴ With that statement, one of the clearest acknowledgments by any of the narrators that they intentionally crafted their narratives in order to make a particular point, de la Guerra set about demonstrating how the people's anger had slowly and steadily built against Chico. As de la Guerra told the story, the sixty-year-old neophyte Manojó had avoided Chico and, when Father Jimeno asked why, Manojó had replied "Oh, Father, it doesn't sit well with me to be around a bad man. This fellow is crafty. Don't you see it, boy? He wears glasses. I saw him when he

²⁹² De la Guerra was born in 1815 to a prominent Californian family in San Diego. While she had moved with her family to Monterey in 1829, they returned to southern California before revolution erupted in Monterey in 1836. More than most of Savage's subjects, de la Guerra had significant connections in both northern and southern California. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 193, 196, 245; Pubols, *The Father of All*.

²⁹³ Beebe and Senkewicz argue that throughout her long narrative she "seems to have bristled when Savage focused his questions on the deeds of various men. She insisted that she and other women had been active participants in the history of their land. At various points in her narrative, she broke the flow of Savage's questioning to insert an event in which she had been a significant agent." Thus, her tendencies to emphasize her and other women's roles in the events leading up to the revolt in 1836 is consistent with the rest of her dictation. Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 199.

²⁹⁴ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 243.

arrived and I looked at his eyes. They were peering out from under the glasses. I'm afraid of him."²⁹⁵ De la Guerra recalled that Jimeno had rebuked Manojó for his disrespect, insisting that Chico was a good man with an honorable position who deserved respect. In spite of his rebuke, de la Guerra claimed that Manojó refused to concede, telling the Father to wait to see.²⁹⁶ Beginning with Manojó and his obstinacy allowed de la Guerra to show how Chico's despotism had always been present, but how the Californians had chosen to deny it for as long as possible.²⁹⁷

De la Guerra used Manojó to portray a sort of simple wisdom from a bygone era that foreshadowed the coming abuses of the Californians at the hands of Chico.²⁹⁸ She represented Manojó as simultaneously bold and meek, assertive on the matter of his revelation concerning Chico and yet "afraid" of the man such that he hid from him.²⁹⁹ So

²⁹⁵ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 241.

²⁹⁶ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 241.

²⁹⁷ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 243. The elderly Rafael González, who was born in Santa Barbara in 1797, offered only sparse glimpses of this period, relying consistently upon what he recalled having heard at that time rather than his personal experiences. As such, he did not attempt to interpret how those events shaped California. His recollections, though, did coincide with those of de la Guerra. He confirmed her account, for example: "the Political Chief, Mariano Chico, had tried to make Father Narciso Duran take ship for Monterey, but the people of Santa Barbara opposed it, and for that reason it was not carried out. The men and women went right down to the beach and showed such a decided determination that those who were escorting the father had to return him to the mission. Father Duran was dearly loved by the people of Santa Barbara because he was very good, virtuous, and noble." Rafael González, "Experiencias De Un Soldado De California: Santa Barbara, Calif" 1878, BANC MSS C-D 92 Trans., Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219829~S1>.

²⁹⁸ De la Guerra represented Manojó's insistence as foolish persistence. From an insider's perspective, Manojó's actions align with Lisbeth Haas's description of the ways in which Native Americans negotiated their identities, refusing to abandon their indigenous cultures, through "behaviors of acceptance and accommodation [that] easily intertwined with overt and subtle forms of resistance." Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 29.

²⁹⁹ Haas's gloss of the violence suffered by indigenous peoples in California from the conquest forward suggests that Manojó had good reason to fear not only Chico, but also Jimeno,

constructed, Manojó provided de la Guerra the opportunity to demonstrate that even a fool could have seen the signs of Chico's poor character. Yet the Californians, like the priest who brushed off his warnings, remained temporarily blinded by their hope that he would be a "good man," deserving of the respect due his office.

Having prophesied the horrors of Chico's rule, de la Guerra immediately explained how Californians came to learn the truth of Manojó's warning, recalling how they came to see "who won," Manojó or Jimeno.³⁰⁰ After a visit to the mission, Chico complained to the beloved Father Prefect Durán that the missionaries had welcomed him "as if he were an Indian and [accused them] of sticking him in the scullery."³⁰¹ She elaborated in the pages that followed that Chico had insisted that the Fathers be punished and, eventually, that Durán be punished for taking their side in the matter. She meticulously built her narrative to "the right moment," recalling in detail how the frustration of the people had mounted steadily until it eventually broke into open rebellion.

De la Guerra explained that the rebellion against Chico began when the women of Santa Barbara forcibly prevented the wrongful deportation of Father Durán. The *disputación*, an elected assembly that met at Monterey and that advised the governor,³⁰² decided to use Chico's abuse of the Father in order to "goad" the people of Santa Barbara, "who had never rebelled against the government before . . . into rebelling against

when he spoke against the general. The missionaries engaged in a "systematic effort . . . to disrupt the passage of indigenous forms of knowledge, authority, and power from elders to their children, and to more easily inculcate Christian norms," and Manojó's insistence on his ability to see in Chico something beyond what Jimeno could see could certainly have conflicted with those efforts. Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769–1936*, 26–29.

³⁰⁰ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 241.

³⁰¹ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 242–43.

³⁰² Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 446.

Chico.”³⁰³ The whole pueblo quickly became involved in preventing Durán’s deportation. While the “fathers, husbands, and brothers” of the women hid nearby, de la Guerra recounted how the women forcibly prevented Durán’s deportation when he arrived at the beach, with some even resorting to the threat of violence. Rebellion, prefigured in de la Guerra’s dictation by the prophecy of an Indian neophyte and spurred on by the *disputación*, ultimately burst forth when the women of Santa Barbara defended their beloved Father Durán against deportation.³⁰⁴

Michael Claringbud White and Agustín Janssens both possessed complicated ethnic heritages that shaped their narratives. Both of these men came to California from Europe (Janssens from Belgium and White from England), adopted Spanish names, and married Californianas.³⁰⁵ White and Janssens provided Savage with the only narratives of this period by narrators who were neither Mexican nor Spanish.³⁰⁶ Janssens and White

³⁰³ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 243.

³⁰⁴ Again, Amador provided approximately the same explanation for the outbreak of the revolt against Chico in Santa Barbara, but he did so with only scant details. He claimed “he had misunderstandings with the Monterey town council, with the Deputation, and also with private individuals . . . it is said that Chico was as quixotic as a Spaniard and was almost as crazy.” Gregorio Mora-Torres, *Californio Voices: The Oral Memoirs of Jose Maria Amador and Lorenzo Asisara* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2005), 167; José María Amador, “Memorias Sobre La Historia De California: Natural Del País Que Nació El Año De 1781 Yvive Hoy Cerca Del Pueblito De Whiskey Hill. Lo Escribió, Dictado Por El Autor, Thomas Savage Para La Bancroft Library” 1877, BANC MSS C-D 28, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b10849506~S1>.

³⁰⁵ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 241–42.

³⁰⁶ The mountain man and self-styled adventurer George Nidever, who came to Southern California overland in 1833, made sporadic mention of Castro, Alvarado, and their political dealings, but only insofar as his brief interactions with them informed his hunting stories. George Nidever and William Henry Ellison, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever, 1802–1883* (Santa Barbara: Mcnally & Loftin, 1984), 45–49. The Anglo American Job Francis Dye briefly recounted the events of the 1830s, noting that he “kept myself, as ever, aloof from the political disturbances of the country. I know that several foreigners, Americans, English, Irish & other nationalities, aided Alvarado to secure him in his position as Gov., and that he & others attempted at first the foolish prospect of making Cal. a free & independent State, [met] with strong opposition in the South, where people

provided two of the most ambivalent accounts of the period of any of the narrators. However, their ambivalence resulted from their entrenchment within Alta California society rather than from being outsiders. Both men recognized the need for home rule, but both opposed violence between factions specifically because they had strong connections to people on all sides.

Throughout the brief portion of his dictation devoted to the 1836 revolt, White rejected the revolutionaries' attempts to conflate support of their cause with being Californian. White's first experiences with Castro and Alvarado's revolt came in 1836 in Los Angeles, when Judge José Sepúlveda called upon him to bring "every man capable of bearing arms residing in my jurisdiction" to meet him in Los Angeles. Accompanied by four men, White met Sepúlveda, Castro, Alvarado, and White's brother-in-law Alferez Isidoro Guillen in February 1837. Sepúlveda had asked him to meet with them in order to convince White to take troops to San Diego on behalf of the revolt. White rejected the request, claiming to be "a citizen of Mexico, but not a citizen of revolutions."³⁰⁷

Sepúlveda continued trying to recruit him until White finally explained why he could never join the revolt: He had too many ties to people on the other side to support even the possibility of violence. Notwithstanding Sepúlveda's assurance that he hoped to avoid violence, White told him that he could not go because his wife's cousin Macedonio Gonzalez, who had named White his son's godfather, lived among those in the south

were nearer to Mex. & likely to be the first victims if the Mex. Govt. decided to send a strong force and punish their audacity in ignoring its supremacy & authority." Thus, even as one who intentionally remained "aloof" from Californian politics, Dye recognized that southern Californians did not oppose independence because they were more loyal to Mexico, but because they were more vulnerable to Mexican attacks. Job Francis Dye, "Recollections of California Since 1832: Corralitos, Calif" 1877, 69, BANC MSS C-D 69, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219581~S1>.

³⁰⁷ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 34–35.

against whom Sepúlveda intended to march. Throughout his narrative, White challenged the simplicity of Sepúlveda's conflation of his movement with being Californian. He identified his friend Gonzalez not as a Mexican, but as one of the *abajanos*, "those from down below."³⁰⁸ White recalled how the revolutionaries' conflation of their revolt with being Californian threatened many others who had equal claim to the title "Californian."

Like White, Agustín Janssens presented the 1836 revolt in his testimonio as a movement that created false distinctions between Californians, threatening not only the unity of the region but also the lives of its people. Janssens focused his narrative to an even greater degree than White on his close ties to Californians on both sides of the conflict, beginning by noting that at the outbreak of the 1836 revolt he had shared a house in Monterey with Ángel Ramírez and Juan Bautista Alvarado. Janssen framed his entire narrative with the assertion that—contrary to María Inocenta Pico's memory—a few ambitious men had orchestrated the movement based upon existing plans rather than as the result of any perceived injustices, arguing that "all the charges they presented against [Gutiérrez] did not amount to more than pretexts to bring about the plan of independence for California which had been conceived for a long time."³⁰⁹ Beyond that, he seemed neither to know nor to care what roles people like Pico thought they had played in its beginning.

Janssens presented the whole affair as an empty string of mob violence, void of any

³⁰⁸ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 36.

³⁰⁹ As a preface to his assertion that Castro, Alvarado, and Ramírez had no legitimate charges, Janssens plainly stated, "I don't remember, or perhaps did not know, the motives that they could have had." Agustín Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens, 1834–1856*, ed. William Henry Ellison, trans. Francis Price (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1953), 50–51, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/calbk.172>; Agustín Janssens, "Documentos Para La Historia De California" 1878, BANC MSS C-B 83, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11235725~S1>.

idealistic underpinnings, a situation he blamed on its leaders. He recalled how he had struggled to get those who found themselves on the wrong side of the revolutionary mob to safety in southern California. He constructed the average Californian revolutionaries as drunk, prone to violence, and largely directionless, because their leaders based the impetus for the revolt on such shaky grounds. As Janssens told it, while the “cause of independence was growing noisier,” it also grew less articulate.³¹⁰ By the time Janssens helped the Coronel family flee to Santa Barbara in November 1836, he noted that Señora Coronel had claimed, “the rebels had changed face, and the cry was now ‘Kill the Mexicans.’”³¹¹ When asked by one of those rebels where he was from, Janssens, “seeing his evil intention, . . . answered that I was French.”³¹² Janssens consistently portrayed himself and those in his party as political refugees threatened with incessant violence by a revolution that lacked the principles necessary to define an actual enemy. In opposition to that violence, however, he and other Californians risked their lives by dissenting from the revolution because it appealed only to the sort of shallow patriotism and easy binaries that motivate drunken mobs rather than proper citizens.

The narrators in the 1870s contributed to a shared cultural memory of 1830s California as a region in transition from colonial rule by outsiders to home rule by one of its own. For all of their disagreements about which movements had possessed authentic popular support, they all implicitly defined the Californian identity broadly, choosing only to explore it negatively through recounting how small minorities had attempted to usurp

³¹⁰ Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens*, 1834–1856, 53.

³¹¹ Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens*, 1834–1856, 55.

³¹² Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens*, 1834–1856, 57.

it only to be thwarted by popular action. The Mexican immigrants of the Híjar-Padrés party, the Californianas, and the acculturated Europeans examined here took the fractured movements of a divided region in a tumultuous decade and collectively presented the California populace's ability to strike down pockets of dissent through popular, if disorganized, action as the heartbeat of a diverse and resilient culture. That insistence on making order from chaos and on positing Alta California as a culture that spanned political struggles would define the much more diverse and numerically greater narratives of the 1840s, which similarly struggled to find order and continuity in a decade of upheaval, transition, and conflicting loyalties.

The 1840s

If the memory of California's origins were to diverge ethnically on any particular event, one might expect it to do so concerning the series of local events in the 1840s that alienated California from Mexico and that led to its annexation by the United States. Later generations of Anglo Americans, including Bancroft in his published histories of California, would remember that watershed decade as the creation of California and—if they even thought much about what came before—as the gulf separating the thirty-first state from its Spanish and Mexican past.³¹³ The Alta Californians—even the Anglo American narrators who had only arrived there beginning in the late 1830s—unanimously proclaimed that they had participated in the preservation of Alta California, variously defined by its people, its cultural forms, or its social structures, during the tumultuous

³¹³ Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres," 58–59'.

1840s.³¹⁴ The narrators uniformly recounted a historical progression that resulted from intentional actions by Californians who recognized the need to preserve the people and culture of their home under any flag. Certainly the stories that the narrators told differed from one another, but their differences—even their disagreements—did not align along clearly racial or ethnic lines.

Rough patterns emerge from the stories that Savage and his assistants collected. One group of testimonies emphasized the actions of elite Californians and Mexicans, particularly General Micheltorena, as central to the transformation of California during the 1840s. Second, some narrators celebrated the self-sacrificial actions of average Californians in defense of their homes and families in direct opposition to the greed and excess of its leaders, portraying the martyrs as the real heroes of the decade. A third set of narrators described how they themselves had acted as intermediaries in order to transition California through the 1840s as peacefully as possible, regardless of which national power came to possess it. Finally, a fourth category of dictations posited specific villains whose actions had threatened the future of California, recounting how the people of California had persevered successfully to preserve the country.

Several narrators focused on the ways in which political leaders cooperated—occasionally in secret—in order to safeguard the future of California. Their narratives share an emphasis on the selflessness of those leaders, recalling how many of them chose to preserve the social fabric of California rather than attempt to maintain their power once

³¹⁴ In his classic social history of the Californios, historian Leonard Pitt wrote of the decimation of the northern ranchos by the 1870s. Pitt notes that residents of California made up their own minds about who or what was to blame for the massive displacement of the Californios. That study relied only on the Spanish dictations examined here, though the variety of explanations increases rather than decreases when they are considered together. Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 103.

the will of the people had moved against them. Highlighting that altruism allowed these narrators to portray Alta California's political leaders not as those who had lost control of the country, but rather as those who sacrificed themselves for it.

Serrano and Janssens fixated on the close relationship between the military governor General Manuel Micheltorena (1842–1845) and José Castro, who led the revolt that deposed Micheltorena in 1845. Serrano recalled the rebellion as an orchestrated drama in which Micheltorena and Castro colluded in order to allow the former to transfer the country peacefully into the hands of the latter after the hearts of the people had turned against the old general.³¹⁵ Serrano claimed that, years later, Castro had shown him a note from Micheltorena that read, “a revolution has begun. More disgracefully, at the head of it are found young hotheads. I don't want there to be persecutions and personal vengeance. Put yourself at the head of it to regulate it and we will understand one another. Manuel Micheltorena.”³¹⁶

Janssens argued cogently that when the two leaders did meet in battle, Micheltorena had resigned from the fight *because* he knew that he could win it. California “needed population, civilization, and progress” and, for the few bachelor soldiers the Mexican force might lose, those Californians who would be killed “would leave families, and he could never blot out this memory. He said that he would use every means and exhaust every resource to prevent the shedding of blood.”³¹⁷ Faced with the unyielding

³¹⁵ Serrano told how he had chastised Castro after the general had bragged about expelling Micheltorena. Serrano argued, “The Californios haven't expelled Micheltorena like you say. What, according to my understanding, has happened is that if the General didn't promote the revolution, at least he knew how to take advantage of it as it was convenient for him to leave California very quickly.” Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 119.

³¹⁶ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 123.

³¹⁷ Janssens, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustín Janssens, 1834–1856*, 124.

determination of the Californians to rule themselves, Janssens recalled how Micheltorena had taken the only remaining avenue available to him: surrender. In their respective narratives, both Serrano and Janssens emphasized Micheltorena's interest not in the preservation of California as a possession of Mexico, but rather in the preservation of its people.³¹⁸

The California-born José María Amador, the Mexican-born Antonio Coronel, and the Anglo American William Wiggins all blamed the Californians' pathological desire for home rule for the eventual annexation of California by the United States.³¹⁹ They all recalled Micheltorena as a tragic character, noting how he had attempted to save California from its own bickering citizens, only to find them finally unified against him on account of his universally maligned troops.³²⁰ In these dictations, Micheltorena appears as the selfless

³¹⁸ Agustín Escobar recalled how Castro had similarly chosen surrender to avoid the loss of Californian lives in his campaign against Frémont. Escobar claimed that Castro had refused to engage Frémont based on his assertion "that there was no necessity to spill blood. He did not want to be responsible for spilling California blood." Unlike Janssens, however, Escobar disapproved of Castro's preference for preserving Californians rather than for preserving Mexican California. He recalled, "all were anxious to fight and became disgusted with Señor Castro for having stopped them. Among our men there was an excellent rifle company who would have won the combat." In spite of his disapproval of Castro's inaction, Escobar's recollection of Castro essentially matched Janssens' portrayal of Micheltorena. In both cases, the narrators remembered how military leaders chose not to fight a battle that each man would have won, preferring instead to save the lives of Californians for its future, even if that meant surrendering control of the country. Híjar, Pérez, and Escobar, *Three Memoirs of Mexican California*, 110; Agustín Escobar, "La Campaña De '46 Contra Los Americanos En California: Monterey, Calif" 1877, BANC MSS C-D 72, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219568~S1>.

³¹⁹ José María Amador was born in the presidio of San Francisco in 1781. Mora-Torres, *Californio Voices*, 31; Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 3.

³²⁰ Though her dictation said little about the revolution itself, Juana Machado offered perhaps the most succinct recollection of Micheltorena's troops. She stated, "Micheltorena brought with him a large retinue of officers and an infantry Battalón Permanente Fijo de Californias. It was made up of thieves and criminals taken from the prisons in Mexico as well as prisoners from Chapala." Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 140; Juana de Dios Machado Alipás Ridington, "Los Tiempos Pasados De La Alta California: San Diego, Calif" 1878, BANC MSS C-D 119, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11219851~S1>; Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 6.

victim of the Californians' penchant for deposing Mexican governors, a condition exacerbated by the failure of the Mexican government to properly equip him for his task. Coronel lamented the general's plight: "the government failed to support him, he had no confidence in his troops, the Californians considered him their enemy," concluding that "an American invasion was inevitable."³²¹ Wiggins argued that the Mexican government "pretended to have control, and sent military officers to rule the country, . . . and indeed the whole native population... would not endure their stay but a short time."³²² Coronel recalled the bitter irony of that tendency in the context of Micheltorena's departure, after which "at last we see California again governed by her native sons," though it would be for the last time.³²³

None of the three expressed many regrets over the transition to US control. Serrano argued that "thoughtful persons" in California had begun to realize that the United States offered the only possible future for Californians, "at this distance of time, I have become convinced that if the United States had not occupied the country in such an opportune time this place would have ceased to exist as a civilized society."³²⁴ For narratives devoted to demonstrating the pathological inability of the Californians to submit to leadership from Mexico, Frémont at least brought the political stability that Castro and Alvarado never had.

While many of the narrators identified Micheltorena as the hero of 1846, others

³²¹ Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 29–30.

³²² William L. Wiggins, "William L. Wiggins Reminiscences" 1877, 175, BANC MSS C-D 175, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11218310~S1>.

³²³ Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, 30–31.

³²⁴ Serrano, *Testimonios De Florencio Serrano*, 127.

assigned equally heroic roles to a variety of average Californians for their sacrifices in defense of family and home. In those cases, their heroism almost always involved the defense of family and community, highlighting the social survival of Californian communities in the face of political turmoil. In this way, a small number of Californians recalled how heroic efforts at the local level had preserved their society regardless of who controlled California.

Inocente García, who was born in Los Angeles in 1791, recalled how he had come to fight Micheltorena against his will. He had done so in order to secure the release of his son-in-law, José Mariano Bonilla, who had been arrested by Castro's forces.³²⁵ The true heroes, as he told it, were those, like him, who had avoided the violence insofar as was possible, participating only in defense of home and family. García recounted Frémont's victory over the Californios similarly, focusing primarily on how he had worked to avoid it, lamenting only those details that directly affected his estate. He recalled with little fanfare how the "Californios made a vain attempt to stop" the American advance, "and were soon convinced of the futility of their efforts, and they fell back."³²⁶

Juan Bernal, brother-in-law to José María Amador, largely ignored Frémont and his rebellion, choosing instead to recount the senseless murder of three heroic Californios at the hands of American troops. He recalled how a man named José de los Reyes Berreyesa and his two nephews, surnamed Haro, encountered members of the Bear Party. Berreyesa had been killed, and in response both of his nephews in succession demanded that the

³²⁵ Inocente García, *Hechos Historicos de California, as Told to Thomas Savage, 1878*, ed. Antonio Isaac Bonilla, trans. Thomas Workman Temple (Santa Barbara, CA: Flair Studio Printing, 1974), 43; Inocente García, "Hechos Historicos De California: San Luis Obispo" 1878, BANC MSS C-D 84, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11231743~S1>.

troops also kill them to allay their grief. Bernal included no idealistic cause, nor did he narrate any actual fighting. Rather, he identified the Californios' commitment to their family members as the source of their heroism and the cause for which they chose to die. Nationalistic causes and the violence that perpetuated them emerge as senseless and ineffectual in his telling.

Three Anglo American men and one Californiana recalled how they had used their relationships to the most powerful men in California society in order to smooth the transition between the changing regimes.³²⁷ These narrators used their own lives to express in microcosm the cultural divide that they remembered between Alta California and California under the United States. In recalling how they helped to bridge that divide, they also used their lives to illustrate the ways in which Californians intentionally preserved continuity between the old and the new.

María Inocenta Pico's brief treatment of the 1840s focused on how her husband, the soldier Miguel Avila, had acted as an intermediary in the transformation of California. He had chosen not to fight against the Americans and had, afterward, "regarded himself as a citizen of that republic. He tried (as far as his influence could extend) to get his

³²⁶ Garcia, *Hechos Historicos de California, as Told to Thomas Savage*, 1878, 49.

³²⁷ Additionally, George Nidever presented himself as an intermediary figure. Characteristically, he emphasized only his use of his intermediary status for his own gain rather than to facilitate peace in California. He remembered California, before and after its annexation by the United States, as a land occupied by roving bands of international war parties. He recalled Frémont's party as one among the others, albeit the one to which he was loyal and that delivered him from what he recalled as perpetual harassment at the hands of the Californios for his associations with Frémont. He appreciated Frémont insofar as he benefitted from the actions of his party, though he equally appreciated the "three or four Californian women at my house besides my wife" who "at all times knew of my movements but . . . never offered to betray me, but on the contrary kept me informed of what was going on among their countrymen." He remembered California in turmoil and elaborated on the ways in which he established and manipulated relationships with Anglo Americans like Frémont, Californios, and even Englishmen. Nidever and Ellison, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever*, 1802–1883, 66.

California countrymen to take advantage of the benefits the new regime offered for progress.”³²⁸ She remembered that both she and Avila had employed their influence to quell the constant, popular rejection of authority in hopes that stronger government might provide opportunity for advancement.

Benjamin Davis Wilson, originally from Tennessee, portrayed himself as the broker of a bloodless peace. He recalled how Governor Pío Pico had enlisted him to carry to Commodore Stockton a message, telling him of Pico’s “intention to abandon the country, and that I hope he will not ill treat my people.”³²⁹ Here Wilson recalled, as so many had concerning Micheltorena, that Pico showed more interest in preserving the safety of the people of California than he did in preserving his power over them. He also claimed that José Antonio Carrillo had enlisted him to carry a similar message to Stockton, promising “no more blood will be shed on either side during . . . the war in Mexico, where the fate of this country must be decided upon.”³³⁰ According to Wilson, Carrillo implored Stockton that, “in the name of humanity,” he should not “march forces thro’ the country, as this would cause the spilling of blood and engender bad feeling [between] two people who in all probability will have to live together.”³³¹ Thus, Wilson recalled his part in negotiating peace regardless of the war’s outcome.

William A. Streeter, a dentist born in New York in 1811, came to California for the sake of his health in 1843 after spending the previous year in Peru. His recollection of the

³²⁸ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 304.

³²⁹ Benjamin Davis Wilson, “Observations on Early Days in California and New Mexico: Lake Vineyard” 1877, 61, BANC MSS C-D 177, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11218637~S1>.

³³⁰ Wilson, “Observations on Early Days in California and New Mexico,” 85–86.

³³¹ Wilson, “Observations on Early Days in California and New Mexico,” 85–86.

alliance between the Californios and the Americans against Micheltorena essentially agreed with Wilson's narrative, but Streeter attempted to reconcile his memory of that cooperative effort to save California with the conflicting recognition that, by the 1870s, the Californios had largely lost California.³³² Streeter placed significant blame upon the Californios' refusal to acquiesce to American culture in the ways that the Anglo Californians had under Mexican rule, arguing that the average Californian of 1878 was an "American citizen in name only" who refused to "assimilate with the Americans."³³³ Streeter recalled the decline of the Californios' cultural and economic status in the American period as a failure on their part to assimilate rather than faulting Anglo American settlers of the Mexican Era for having abandoned their compatriots after 1846. María Inocenta Pico, Wilson, and Streeter all argued that they had preserved California by changing with it, but they each recalled how so few of Alta California citizens had been able to do the same.

Finally, a few narrators recalled specific villains in order to demonstrate how the majority of Californians had worked to preserve the country against a minority that had

³³² Streeter asserted, "it was not his (Castro's) intention to drive all the foreigners from the country as had been currently reported, but that the revolution was against Micheltorena because he refused to send his cholos, or hijos, as he called them, back to Mexico" and "that it was owing to this report that most all of the foreigners had joined Micheltorena, by advice of Sutter." William A. Streeter, "Recollections of Historical Events in California, 1843-1878 (Continued)," ed. William Henry Ellison, *California Historical Society Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (June 1939): 158. William Wiggins also essentially agreed with this narrative from his experiences on Micheltorena's side. He recalled, "During the action the foreigners serving in both contending armies came to an understanding among ourselves to withdraw from the contest and let the Mexicans & Californians fight it out. The foreigners on our side withdrew and, without our knowledge, those on the other side stuck to Castro, and the result was that Gen. Micheltorena was taken prisoner and afterwards left the country with his troops & officers that he had brought from Mexico." Wiggins, "William L. Wiggins Reminiscences," 10.

³³³ William A. Streeter, "Recollections of Historical Events in California, 1843-1878 (Concluded)," ed. William Henry Ellison, *California Historical Society Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1939): 274.

threatened to destroy it. In this way, a Californiana, a Californio, an Englishman, and an Anglo American all recalled similarly how the democratic actions of the people of California had preserved it against the selfish and destructive actions of specific military leaders. In opposition to so many memories of the 1840s that blamed popular revolt for having severed California from Mexico, these narrators praised the democratic impulse in that decade for having preserved the culture and the people of Alta California.

Francis Pliny Fisk Temple, a native of Massachusetts who had come to Monterey in 1841 at the age of nineteen, narrated the deposing of Micheltorena as a democratic action taken justly by an elected body—the assembly—against a man who had, “as the Californians say, . . . broke faith with them.”³³⁴ Similarly, José del Carmen Lugo recalled how the Assembly, recognizing that Micheltorena was determined “to punish those who had risen against him,” identified Micheltorena as “a person prejudicial to the country, ignoring his authority, and authorizing the older head, Pío Pico, to take the reins of government into his hands.”³³⁵ Both of these narrators recalled how California’s democracy had saved it from the whims of its military ruler and his depraved troops.

White and de la Guerra both blamed the American Captain Archibald Gillespie, in whose hands Frémont had left Los Angeles after capturing it in August of 1846, for having squandered what might have been a peaceful occupation of the city for the duration of the Mexican-American War.³³⁶ Both recalled how southern Californians would have preferred

³³⁴ Francis Pliny F. Temple, “Recollections of Francis Temple, a Resident of Los Angeles and a Pioneer of 1841: Events from 1841–1847” 1877, 4, BANC MSS C-D 162, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11218648-S1>.

³³⁵ Lugo, *Vida De Un Ranchero, a History of San Bernardino Valley*, 8:8.

³³⁶ In his edited publication of White’s dictation, the southern California bookman Glen Dawson outlined the chronology of the Flores revolution as follows: “August 13, 1846, Fremont and Stockton took Los Angeles without opposition; early September, Captain Gillespie and some 50

peace under US rule to open rebellion if not for Gillespie's abuses. White argued that had a "sensible officer been left in command," one who had recognized the need to treat the Californios as integral parts of the existing California society rather than as a conquered people, then "the Californians would have continued to acquiesce to the occupation of their country by the Americans."³³⁷ Each argued that through popular revolt the southern Californians had achieved their desired end: peace for all Californians without concern for which flag flew.

Mauricio González provided one of the narratives most critical of the material conditions produced by the military transition to American occupation. González, according to Savage, owned and lived in Alvarado's old house, and yet Savage made note that he "has to work, earning a scanty support for himself and family with an express waggon, having lost all his other property. It is well known that one time of his life he was in much better circumstances."³³⁸ The disparity between his wealth in Alta California and his relative poverty by 1877 illuminates his narrative, in which he argued that the economic takeover of California, rather than the military campaigns, had transformed it into an American state and the Californios into a conquered and dispossessed people.

González's memory of the true nature of the war for California emphasized that

men were left to hold Los Angeles; September 23 there was outbreak by the Californians in Los Angeles; September 26 was the Battle of Chino, described by White, with the American force surrendering to the Californians; September 30 was an exchange of prisoners and Gillespie forced to withdraw to San Pedro; October 9, the attempt to retake Los Angeles fails at the Battle of Domínguez; December 6 Kearny and his men fight the Californians at Battle of San Pasqual; January 8 and 9, Americans approaching from San Diego fight battles of San Gabriel and La Mesa, the last battles on California soil; January 13, 1847, Fremont and Andres Pico sign treaty of Cahuenga." White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 52–53.

³³⁷ White, *California All the Way Back to 1828*, 1956, 56.

³³⁸ González, "Memorias ... De La Historia [de] California," 1–2.

the military campaigns did more to rob the Californios of their livelihoods than of their lives. González asserted plainly, “the real war on both sides was against the horses and cattle.”³³⁹ Because the Californios who had lost property—horses, cattle, and land—had little proof of what they had lost, any attempts to reimburse them had no relationship to their actual lost property. Without such a relationship, González argued that there had existed no guarantee of continuity for the Californios between their past and their present. Living in Alvarado’s historic house and yet deprived of his own former wealth, González’s memory certainly reflected his own life’s trajectory over the intervening three decades.³⁴⁰

The proliferation of voices in Savage’s oral history project from the 1830s into the 1840s did not alter the underlying assumption that popular action had always united the majority of Californians against the narrower minority of usurpers and opportunists, successfully preserving the people and culture of California across both tumultuous decades and all the way up to the 1870s. As a generation, they found continuity across the lives they lived under multiple flags that belied their ostensible ethnic divisions. Because that continuity rested in the preservation of people, identities, and sentiments toward California rather than on flags or regimes, it dropped from visibility when later generations of Anglo Americans looked back on that era. When Anglo Americans who had

³³⁹ He never claimed that United States government had failed to compensate Californians for their lost property maliciously. Instead, he remembered how “the American government paid even for many that were not taken by the forces, but many that were taken remained unpaid for,” thus identifying the source of the problem as bureaucratic clumsiness. González, “Memorias ... De La Historia [de] California,” 32.

³⁴⁰ For information concerning the impact of the Land Law of 1851, which created the Board of Land Commissioners to investigate Mexican titles that had been guaranteed under the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, see Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Linda Heidenreich, “*This Land Was Mexican Once*”: *Histories of Resistance from Northern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); and Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*.

decided to come to California after the Bear Flag revolt with the expectation that they would create an American California—including Savage and Bancroft—recounted the history of the state, they failed to see the ties that bound the Mexican past to the American present. The Spanish and English voices that Savage recorded, regardless of their accents, spoke of continuity because their own lives spanned that historical period. They recalled together how they had made Alta California in the 1830s as a place distinct from Mexico and how they had preserved that distinctiveness over the 1840s and into the 1870s.

CHAPTER IV

BUILDING A PUBLIC

“This money he never expects will come back, and he does not care whether it does or not. He sets out to make good reliable books, and at any cost will do his work well, or not at all.”

—[Strictly Private.] How to place Hubert Bancroft, his library, and his works, before every intelligent man on the Pacific Coast.

“...I sent the money. I was resolved that nothing within my power to remove should stand in the way of a first and complete success. Again and again have I plunged recklessly forward in my undertakings regardless of consequences...”

—Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Literary Industries*

On Saturday July 19, 1884, a traveling book salesman named E. B. Palmer visited a farm near Eagleville, California. The small community occupied a stretch of high desert along California’s Oregon and Nevada borders. In the Surprise Valley, where the Great Basin intrudes into the Golden State, sat a handsome two-story farmhouse belonging to Henry and Jessie Stiner and their five children, all between the ages of two and ten years old.³⁴¹ When Palmer informed the Stiners that he had come to talk about an exciting new

³⁴¹ “Henry Stiner Residence” (Eagleville, CA, September 1899), Northeastern California Historical Photograph Collection, Meriam Library. California State University, Chico, <http://archives.csuchico.edu/cdm/ref/collection/coll11/id/20084>; “United States Census, 1910,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MVLD-73R> : 29 October 2015), Henry Stiner, Dewey, Modoc, California, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) ED 41, sheet 13A, NARA microfilm publication T624 (Washington, DC: National Archives and

series of books, they likely had a sense of what to expect. They had probably entertained book agents before; they probably did again. They might even have bought other subscription books in their own parlor. During the 1880s, a diverse set of straight-to-consumer sales practices loosely identified as subscription publishing had transformed private homes into an important sales floor for books, especially in remote areas where folks like the Stiners were likely unable to frequent urban bookstores.³⁴²

On that Saturday in July 1884, the Stiner family chose to join thousands of others by committing precious resources in support of Bancroft's enterprise and its goal of presenting to the world a comprehensive history of their Pacific Coast. Others had given collections of personal papers and life stories that defied valuation—at least for the moment—but the Stiners' investment had a fixed cost: \$214.50, to be paid in installments over the next six years.³⁴³ Like Michael White, Angustias de la Guerra, or General Vallejo, the company solicited that investment by sending an agent to the Stiners' home. Like Thomas Savage or Henry Cerruti before him, Palmer worked to convince his hosts that Bancroft's company and its historical enterprise warranted and required their contribution, however insignificant it might seem. As Cerruti had proved critical to the

Records Administration); FHL microfilm 1,374,100., (n.d.); "HENRY STINER DIES SUDDENLY," *Surprise Valley Record*, March 19, 1921; "Henry Stiner Papers Relating to the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft" 1884–1885, BANC MSS 2006/147, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11157401~S1>.

³⁴² See "The Heyday of Subscription Publishing" in Casper et al., *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, 219–23.

³⁴³ "Henry Stiner Papers Relating to the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft". Eventually, Stiner joined those others by becoming a donor to the library as well as a subscriber to the histories, dictating his personal history to a company researcher in the late 1880s as a part of one of its later research campaigns. Henry Stiner, "Dictation from Henry Stiner: Modoc County" ca. 1887–1889, Miscellaneous California Dictations, BANC MSS C-D 810:423, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11004829~S1>.

research phase, the labors of Palmer and his fellow book agents did as much to advance the company and its histories as the writing corps even if they never wrote—or even read—a single word.

As a successful book agent, Palmer must have seen the potential in the family from the moment of his arrival. The subtle art of canvassing still maintained most of its trade secrets in the 1880s, canonized knowledge and strategies to overcome almost any objection.³⁴⁴ A family like the Stiners would likely have had plenty to overcome; they also

³⁴⁴ Clark, *A Venture in History*, 50n1. A selection of the private instruction manuals produced by subscription publishers in order to prepare their agents have survived, including the general manual of A. L. Bancroft & Company as well as its special instructions for marketing its histories. Zeigler, McCurdy & Co, *Instructions on Canvassing* (Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy & Company, 1868), <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=374444>; *Agents' Companion: (Confidential) ... by a Careful Daily Study of These All Important Practical Instructions, Your Work Becomes Easy and Your Success Sure* (Philadelphia: Jones Brothers & Company, 1866), <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=196779>; A. L. Bancroft & Company, *The Book Agent: A Manual of Confidential Instructions, Unfolding in Detail, and in a Thoroughly Practical Manner, the Best Methods of Conducting the Business of Canvassing in Accordance with High and Honorable Business Principles, Leading to the Highest Degree of Success and Pecuniary Profit* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 18--), <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b10362794~S1>; A. L. Bancroft & Company, *[Strictly Private] How to Place Hubert Bancroft, His Library, and His Works, before Every Intelligent Man on the Pacific Coast* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1874), Special Collections at the Claremont Colleges holds a copy of this pamphlet under the call number 970 B221z. <https://ccl.on.worldcat.org/oclc/35706373>; E. Hannaford, *Success in Canvassing: A Manual of Practical Hints and Instructions, Specially Adapted to the Use of Book Canvassers of the Better Class* (New York City: Printed for the agents of Nelson & Phillips subscription book department, (H. W. Knight, superintendent) 805 Broadway, New York, 1875), <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=531316>; *Agent's Companion: A Manual of Confidential Instructions* (Publisher not identified, 1876), a copy held by the American Antiquarian Society under the call number Backlog 19P 4765. <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=531320>; Roger E. Stoddard and Marcus A. McCorison, eds., *Our Canvassers' Confidential Guide: We Trust That Our Agents Will Keep These Instructions Strictly Private* (Chicago: L. W. Yaggy, 1881), <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=428833>. Eventually, the secrets began to leak out as the people who had made their livings selling books by subscription decided to turn a profit selling books about that process, too. Bates Harrington, *How 'tis Done: A Thorough Ventilation of the Numerous Schemes Conducted by Wandering Canvassers, Together with the Various Advertising Dodges for the Swindling of the Public* (Chicago: Fidelity Publishing Company, 1879), <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=73818>; Annie Nelles, *Annie Nelles; or, The Life of a Book Agent: An Autobiography* (Cincinnati: Miami Printing and Publishing Company, 1868), <https://archive.org/details/annienellesorlioodumogoog>; Henrietta Brown, *A Blind Lady's Experience in Four Years' Canvassing* (Publisher not identified, 1882), a copy is available at the American Antiquarian Society, Backlog 19C 2780. <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=525261>.

offered multiple opportunities for a clever agent to exert a bit of leverage. An agent could prod a father toward placing an order by reminding him of his responsibility to provide for the education of his children. If the agent had already persuaded his wife, then she or he had a valuable ally.³⁴⁵ Whether Palmer dealt with Henry, Jessie, or both remains unclear.³⁴⁶

We will never know how much leverage Palmer had to exert in order to make his sale that Saturday; we do know that the subscription department at A. L. Bancroft & Company had, uncharacteristically, begged him not to use any.³⁴⁷ If he followed his training, Palmer might have ended with a speech in which he attempted to dissuade the Stiners from placing an order, as if he really had trekked across the Sierra simply to tell them about an important new series of books. “One word more, and I am done,” he might have assured the Stiner family after a lengthy description of Bancroft, his library, and

For an analysis of the ways in which those secrets leaked and the damage done to the reputation of subscription books upon the public realization that they had been read and manipulated by book agents, see Gitlin, “Great Readers of Men.”

³⁴⁵ The rare extant manuals with which subscription publishers prepared agents all echo one another, emphasizing the leverage that a wife and children offer to move an otherwise impassive man. Zeigler, McCurdy & Co, *Instructions on Canvassing*, 7–8; Hannaford, *Success in Canvassing*, 11; Stoddard and McCorison, *Our Canvassers’ Confidential Guide*, 15–17.

³⁴⁶ Henry appears as the subscriber on the contracts and receipts, but the delivery instructions for the initial twelve volumes and the walnut bookcase that would hold them all point to “Mrs. Henry Stiner.” “Henry Stiner Papers Relating to the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft”. The strategy seems to have worked elsewhere, too. John M. Sloan of Oregon had the family’s set dedicated to “My Wife Margaret J. Sloan and our children Harriet E., Charley E., Ernest R. and Arthur W. by J. M. Sloan.” Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, 39 vols., Subscription Set of J. M. Sloan, in the Possession of Ken Sanders Rare Books, Salt Lake City, Utah. Observed January 30, 2014. (San Francisco: The History Company, 1876–1890); “United States Census, 1900,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MSDX-KH4 : 22 January 2015>), Margaret J. Sloan in household of John M. Sloan, South Eugene Precincts 1 and 2 Eugene City, Lane, Oregon, United States; citing sheet 11A, family 243, NARA microfilm publication T623 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration); FHL microfilm 1,241,348., (n.d.).

³⁴⁷ A. L. Bancroft & Company, [*Strictly Private*], 4.

literary endeavors.³⁴⁸

Naturally enough you may think that in all this I speak as an interested person, that I want to secure your name as a subscriber. It is true I am interested, I am proud to say, deeply interested in Hubert Bancroft and in his work. I believe in it, otherwise I would not be here talking to you, and I want your name, and the name of every good, intelligent man in this country, and I believe you will give it to me. But I do not want it until you are as thoroughly satisfied of the truth of what I say as I am. I have taken some of your time, and some of my time, and some pains to place Mr Bancroft and his work properly before you, and I believe, whether you subscribe or not, that such time has not been lost to either one of us. It is worth something to you to know what I have told you. It is worth something to me to have this author and his work known to one more good man on this coast. If you subscribe there will be a further advantage to you and to me, which I shall not at all object to, but as I said, in any event I want you to know about this book that I have told you of.³⁴⁹

It might have been worth something to Palmer simply to inform the Stiner family about Bancroft's *Works*, but only a subscription would get him paid in anything he could spend. Luckily for Palmer, the Stiner family decided it was worth something to them to own the *Works* in addition to knowing about them. Even if Palmer respected his employer's pleas against using the more aggressive strategies of his profession, he certainly had to make a bit of his own luck. Through a combination of incentives, Palmer offered the Stiner family a deal sure to overcome their objections. In the process, he made his trek to their home in the Surprise Valley profitable for himself, but costly for A. L. Bancroft & Company.

Palmer acted exactly as instructed. Every incentive he had offered came on an official form from his kit, though he still edited them at will. Its protestations to the contrary aside, the company could not have expected to find book agents so impressed by the quality and significance of its *Works* that they would willingly traverse western North America merely to spread the good news about Bancroft, his library, and literary endeavors. That the company still worked so hard to convince its proxies to frame each

³⁴⁸ A. L. Bancroft & Company, [*Strictly Private*], 13.

³⁴⁹ A. L. Bancroft & Company, [*Strictly Private*], 13.

first impression as altruistically motivated in spite of the ludicrousness of such a claim promises to reveal a larger truth: The company consistently took a loss on its history to underwrite in reality the kind of disregard for profits that it asked its agents to feign.

As this chapter demonstrates, between 1876 and 1886, Bancroft & Company slashed profit margins in order to expand its public beyond its economic limits. Bancroft, Oak, Victor, and Savage had already invested much of their lives in producing the histories and it really was “worth something” to them to “have this author and his work known to one more good man on this coast.”³⁵⁰ As a result, Victor and others accepted embarrassingly low wages for skilled labor because seeing the work done and done successfully was worth something to them. At the same time, A. L. Bancroft & Company operated on the steady revenue stream provided by the rest of its diversified business.

Palmer and his fellow agents had no such attachment to the histories; they worked on commission. The company made their job more difficult than it had to be by asking them to sell an exorbitantly expensive product. At \$4.50 bound in cloth, a single volume of the histories actually slightly undercut the going rate of around \$5 for a hefty, handsomely bound subscription book. With twelve volumes already completed in the summer of 1884, the Stiner family would owe sixty-six dollars up front and would expect to pay \$5.50 for a new volume every three months thereafter until the bookcase was filled, roughly by 1890.³⁵¹ Many subscription books sold for much more than that, sometimes costing over a hundred dollars for a single volume. Targeted subscription publishing made small productions of beautiful, expensive, illustrated volumes profitable, or at least feasible. At

³⁵⁰ Stoddard and McCorison, *Our Canvassers' Confidential Guide*, 13.

³⁵¹ “Henry Stiner Papers Relating to the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft.”

the other end of the spectrum, much more expansive canvasses transformed inexpensive but desirable books by known authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe or books focused on popular subjects like the Civil War into lucrative endeavors. The company could have adopted either model. It might have made individual volumes affordable for a wide swath of the public by selling them individually, following the usual practice of selling hyperlocal histories or maps within the geographic areas to which they pertained. Alternatively, it could have sold the entire set profitably as a luxury item by targeting only a small number of elite customers. The company envisioned an audience that encompassed both of those groups simultaneously. It compromised its profits rather than its public.³⁵²

Bancroft and his close circle of collaborators carefully curated the many public faces by which their histories would be known publicly. The partner publishing firms and individual book agents with whom they contracted would serve as their proxies, making thousands of first impressions on their behalf across the world. In the process, they would either multiply the company's allies or its enemies. The company made simultaneous use of the two channels through which most consumers purchased books in the late nineteenth century. In the urban centers of the Atlantic World, it struck deals with

³⁵² Because publishing by subscription incurred higher costs than selling through traditional retail stores, the books had to be either beautiful but relatively expensive or cheap and cheaply made. As distinct from peddlers who simultaneously hawked any of several cheap books that they carried with them, subscription agents took orders for one book per canvass, and then filled those orders after the fact. Average prices for books pushed by subscription are difficult to estimate because their prices rarely appeared in print, but also because they varied wildly depending on the volume. Expensive art volumes could cost one hundred or more dollars, with the price of full sets multiplying from there. For more modest works like *The Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Men of Our Times*, standard cloth bindings could range from \$3.50 to \$7 per volume. James Reynolds, "Strive If You Would Win; or, Struggles and Triumphs of an Agent," *Canvassing Agents' Manual*, April 1872; Stafford, "Subscription Publishing in the United States"; Gerald Carson, "Get The Prospect Seated ... And Keep Talking," *American Heritage* 9, no. 5 (August 1958); Hackenberg, "The Subscription Publishing Network in Nineteenth-Century America."

established publishing houses who would lend their good names to the *Works* of an otherwise unknown historian. Between the Pacific Coast and the Rocky Mountains, the company became its own subscription publisher, sending canvassers door-to-door across half a continent. Through those two, usually antithetical, publishing schemes, Bancroft and his collaborators summoned a public across four languages, two oceans, and every level of erudition. If the company hoped to make back on publication what it had paid out in its earlier phases of production, it could hardly have designed a worse strategy. Expanding its desired public almost guaranteed a net loss.

The company continued in the early years of its publication campaign what it had begun in the research and writing phase, which remained ongoing in the 1870s and early 1880s. The same obsession with comprehensiveness at the expense of profitability that had ballooned its production expenditures to an estimated \$1,500 to \$2,000 per month continued in the publication phase.³⁵³ The company had collected and filed the historical information contained in elite institutions like the Royal Geographic Society alongside the personal reminiscences of otherwise unknown figures like Mauricio González. So, too, did its publication strategy refuse to honor the divergence between erudite and popular readers or between affluent and nonelite buyers. It paid dearly to put its *Works* before the likes of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer as well as Henry and Jessie Stiner. The same lack of concern with profitability that made Bancroft shut “his eyes to the consequences” in order to purchase the Andrade collection, therefore, continued even in the publication phase, during which he might reasonably have tried to recoup the exorbitant costs he had

³⁵³ A. L. Bancroft & Company, *[Strictly Private]*, 11.

incurred with his eyes closed.³⁵⁴

The bookmen and women who had spent their careers making and selling books together under the name Bancroft & Company probably saw no contradiction between bolstering the reputation of an important book and trying to maximize its sales. That was, after all, publishing.³⁵⁵ Reputation and revenue always intertwined; whenever the company felt it had to choose between the two, however, it privileged the former. In some instances, that meant aggressively pursuing sales in order to promote their popularity at the expense of their profitability. The company could afford to lose a little off the top thanks to the steady income produced by A. L. Bancroft & Company's diversified business selling business cards, school furniture, law books, stationery, diaries, pianos, sheet music, and art materials while providing services that included bookbinding, lithography, engraving, book and job printing, and ink manufacturing.³⁵⁶

Bancroft and his chief collaborators were not altruistic. They all had their reasons for participating in the company, motives the previous chapters have already explored. The unique vertical integration of the historical enterprise simply allowed for a more diverse accounting of compensation than more traditional author-publisher relationships. In the usual communication circuit between authors, publishers, and readers, there are multiple intervening parties with an interest in seeing their cut of the profits maximized.³⁵⁷ But Bancroft's enterprise had vertically integrated the entire circuit, save the

³⁵⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 190.

³⁵⁵ John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2005), 1.

³⁵⁶ Henry G. Langley, *The Pacific Coast Business Directory for 1876–1878* (San Francisco: Henry G. Langley Publishers, 1875), 10, 292, 299, 320, 324, 339, 348, 358, 365, 367, 370, 373.

³⁵⁷ For the original and enduring delineation of the communication circuit uniting authors

readers. The efficiency made possible by an end-to-end production line saved some costs. The company could cut even more because its professional integration and shared investment allowed some of the people in that network either to play multiple roles while taking pay for only one of them, or to take lower wages in exchange for the intellectual and cultural satisfaction that came with the success of the *Works*.³⁵⁸ As the subscription department explained it in their manual for canvassers, its writers worked for less and Bancroft took a loss in exchange for “the satisfaction of doing well a useful work.” If a work proved a “truly reliable, and in every respect first-class book,” it continued, “his work is a success, though not a copy be sold; if he makes worthless books, and sells thousands, he feels that he makes a miserable failure.”³⁵⁹

But writing books does not make one famous; only selling them can do that. Unsold books could not transform Bancroft from a successful bookseller into a man of letters, nor could they elicit the scholarly accolades that Oak and Victor hoped would augment the modest wages they had already received in full. Everyone involved in the

to readers through publishers, printers, and booksellers, see Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” *Daedalus: Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 111, no. 3 (1982): 67; Robert Darnton, “‘What Is the History of Books?’ Revisited,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 03 (November 2007); and Leslie Howsam, “What Is the Historiography of Books? Recent Studies in Authorship, Publishing, and Reading in Modern Britain and North America,” *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 04 (December 2008): 1089.

³⁵⁸ A few recent books have examined the ways in which the nascent mass book market required a new relationship between authors, publishers, and buyers of books, but also how its inchoateness throughout much of the nineteenth century allowed for far more negotiation in forms of payment than had previously been acknowledged in studies of authorship and its professionalization, especially those following William Charvat. Ronald J. Zboray, *Literary Dollars and Social Sense: A People’s History of the Mass Market Book* (New York City: Routledge, 2005); Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); David Dowling, *Capital Letters: Authorship in the Antebellum Literary Market* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009); Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America*.

³⁵⁹ A. L. Bancroft & Company, [*Strictly Private*], 11.

company stood to gain from seeing the histories publicized as widely as possible, but almost no one within the company stood to gain financially from their sales. Palmer did, of course, as did his fellow book agents on the ground in other regions. The regional publishers of record like Longmans and Appleton did, too.

Reading publics do not merely exist. They are summoned; they are disbanded. Authors write with particular publics in mind and publishers target particular markets when they choose, edit, and promote what those authors have written.³⁶⁰ Ultimately, publics are comprised of individual readers who choose to respond to a work in one of the several ways one can respond: by reading it, annotating it, decrying or celebrating it in public venues, or even just gifting it to a friend one has judged to be likeminded. Generally, a successful summons obscures its own machinations, appearing as though the work and its audience fit naturally together. A. L. Bancroft & Company became the victim of its own success. It constructed an audience for its histories that was intellectually, culturally, and nationally diverse. The same inchoate movement that produced the academic knowledge industry began to produce cracks in that expansive public. In time, those cracks grew into chasms, and the knowledge industry that emerged with the modern research university naturalized them. As a result, critics living within mere decades of the completion of Bancroft's histories could only interpret the company's success in summoning its broad audience as an unnatural conjuring.³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ For the historian of political ideas Corey Robin, authors create publics by summoning them through the act of writing. For book historians, publics are no less summoned or dismissed, but there are certainly more actors intermediating between authors and their readers. Robin, "Publics That Don't Exist and the Intellectuals Who Write for Them"; Robin, "How Intellectuals Create a Public"; McCleery, "Return of the Publisher."

³⁶¹ Many of these critics actually hoped to save Bancroft from himself, attempting to redeem his legacy in the public eye. But their sense that such a prolific and successful historian needed such assistance says a great deal. By the twentieth century, the academic profession of

Atlantic Names, Atlantic Audiences

On Saturday August 15, 1874, good fortune struck Bancroft while he awaited a train in New Haven. Ostensibly in Connecticut to place his daughter Kate in school, Bancroft's luggage suggested that the self-identified "literary pilgrim" had had other plans since before leaving San Francisco.³⁶² He had found it convenient to travel halfway around the world and all over New England accompanied by a trunk containing "one hundred author's copies" of *Native Races I*. The trunk also contained printed sheets of all the pages from the remaining volumes that had been set in type before his departure. Those sheets encompassed "the whole of volume I., one hundred and fifty pages of volume II., four hundred pages of volume III., and one hundred pages of volume IV."³⁶³ The area between New York, Boston, and New Haven happened to have a confluence of good schools and a high concentration of scholars, publishing elites, and literary tastemakers.³⁶⁴ While in that auspicious location, he hoped to find a publisher for his forthcoming histories as well as to elicit "the countenance and sympathy of scholars in [his] enterprise."³⁶⁵ Luck favors the prepared, and Bancroft's handy trunk ensured he was prepared for whomever he met.

At the station in New Haven, he happened to meet the Yale-educated scholar

history had so successfully identified the scholarly persona of the historian with the economic security and professional status of the professor that a historian who successfully satisfied both popular and erudite readers just a generation or two earlier demanded explanation. Morris, "The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications"; Hunt, "Hubert Howe Bancroft: His Work and His Method"; Krenkel, "Bancroft's Assembly Line Histories"; McCarthy, "Wholesale Historian: Hubert Howe Bancroft"; Carson, "Get The Prospect Seated ... And Keep Talking."

³⁶² Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 326.

³⁶³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 326.

³⁶⁴ Clark, *A Venture in History*, 39.

³⁶⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 326.

Daniel Coit Gilman. An important man of letters, Gilman had the diverse interests and expertise typical of academics before the professionalization of academe. One wonders how many trains Bancroft let pass in order to facilitate his good fortune. That Bancroft met Gilman out of all the scholars in New Haven offers a particularly curious coincidence between the several streams then converging and diverging as the American and European knowledge economies were in flux. When they met on that platform in New Haven in August 1874, Gilman was still the President of the University of California. He had held that position since 1872, though he would resign in March of the following year.³⁶⁶ It was not the first time they had met, nor was it the first time Bancroft had sought his support. Gilman had already pushed Bancroft's enterprise in erudite circles before, writing an advanced review of *Native Races*. He had even attempted several times to bring Bancroft's library to the campus of the University of California under construction in Berkeley.³⁶⁷

Gilman left California to take the top job as the founding president of the new Johns Hopkins University.³⁶⁸ The polymathic man of letters according to the old academic order helped to establish the first German-style research university in the United States.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ Gilman had tried unsuccessfully to resign earlier in 1874. Fabian Franklin, *The Life of Daniel Coit Gilman* (New York City: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1910), 118, 159–61, 172–75, <https://archive.org/details/lifedanielcoitgo1frangoog>; Verne A. Stadtman, ed., *The University of California, 1868–1968* (Berkeley: University of California printing Department, 1967), 1–2, 12, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb4v19n9zb>.

³⁶⁷ Of Gilman, Bancroft wrote "I had often met him since his assuming the presidency of the university of California; he had been a guest at my house, had frequently visited the library, spending considerable time there, and had always expressed much interest in my work. It was a favorite project of his in some way to transfer my library to the lands of the university, evidently with the idea that once there it would never be removed." Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 320; Fabian Franklin, *The Life of Daniel Coit Gilman*, 127.

³⁶⁸ Stadtman, *The University of California, 1868–1968*, 1–2, 12.

³⁶⁹ Alain Touraine, *The Academic System in American Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 31–33.

With its professional scholars specially-trained in increasingly specific disciplines, The Johns Hopkins University and the reorganization of American higher education that followed it produced a rapid transformation in higher learning and scholarship that has endured over the century and a half since.³⁷⁰ Under Gilman's leadership, the young, German-educated American historian Herbert Baxter Adams led the charge to professionalize history as an academic discipline, an important factor in the fragmentation of knowledge that would later transform the broad public summoned by the *Works* into an inexplicable conjuring of an unnatural audience.³⁷¹ But when their paths crossed on the platform a few thousand miles from their respective homes in August 1874, the ways in which their tracks would eventually diverge remained in the distance.³⁷² Gilman aided Bancroft in building the erudite pole of his public, introducing his fellow Californian as a qualified, ambitious man of letters to the protean scholars at the center of American learning.³⁷³

Even with all the luck—natural or manufactured—that Bancroft had enjoyed

³⁷⁰ Touraine, *The Academic System in American Society*, 31–33.

³⁷¹ Raymond J. Cunningham, "The German Historical World of Herbert Baxter Adams: 1874–1876," *The Journal of American History* 68, no. 2 (September 1, 1981): 261–75. For a critical analysis of the distance between the reality and the rhetoric of professionalization, see Novick, *That Noble Dream*; and Townsend, *History's Babel*.

³⁷² For more on the boundary work academic historians did in order to defend their scholarly conversations from the perceived rabble of common readers, see Howsam, "Academic Discipline or Literary Genre?"; Howsam, *Past into Print*; Ian Hesketh, "Writing History in Macaulay's Shadow: J. R. Seeley, E. A. Freeman, and the Audience for Scientific History in Late Victorian Britain," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 22, no. 2 (2011): 30; and Ian Hesketh, "Diagnosing Froude's Disease: Boundary Work and the Discipline of History in Late-Victorian Britain," *History and Theory* 47, no. 3 (October 1, 2008): 373–95. For increasingly-critical studies of the professionalization of history by Adams and the first generation of academically trained historians, see Cunningham, "The German Historical World of Herbert Baxter Adams"; Novick, *That Noble Dream*; and Townsend, *History's Babel*, 13–14.

³⁷³ Gilman's first introductions included William H. Brewer and Porter C. Bliss of Yale and Asa Gray of Harvard. Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 328.

during his eastern sojourn, one man and a hefty trunk have natural limits as a publication strategy. So on the same trip, Bancroft and his trusty box of finished and unfinished books availed themselves of the local printing and publishing community. Though the company could have maximized its profits by completing the project entirely in-house, its leadership knew that finding favor among the best sort of readers on both sides of the Atlantic would prove easier if *Native Races* came out under a recognized firm in each country. Bancroft feared that releasing an expensive historical series from an unknown bookseller-turned-author who was also his own printer and publisher would already seem like vanity publishing, a bias that would only be multiplied by its origins on the ostensibly backward Pacific Coast. “This man is getting above his business,” Bancroft feared critics would say. “Because he can sell books he seems to infer a divine mission to write them.”³⁷⁴ For Bancroft and his writing corps, all of whom had bet their authorial reputations on the success of the *Works*, partnering with established printers and publishers in the eastern United States and Europe offered them their best chance at a generous audience in those regions. In turn, they cut into the histories’ already thin margins.

They maintained nearly full control over the histories, however, by treating their eastern and European partners as jobbers. A. L. Bancroft & Company set the type and electrotyped the plates at its facilities in San Francisco. It then shipped the plates to H. O. Houghton & Company’s Riverside Press outside of Boston. Riverside printed from the supplied plates, bound the American volumes, and delivered them to the prodigious publisher D. Appleton & Company in New York City. Having taken delivery at one half retail, Appleton stood to double its investment in exchange only for its publishing

³⁷⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 310–11, 319; Clark, *A Venture in History*, 43.

services.³⁷⁵ The disadvantage to Bancroft and the advantage to a prospective publisher-of-record like Appleton was clear: Bancroft & Company assumed most of the risk while Appleton made most of the profit.

Even with such generous terms, not every publisher jumped at the opportunity to put its imprint on the work of an unknown collective of writers over which it held no editorial control. Bancroft had originally intended to enlist Harper & Brothers. Since he had no connections in that firm, however, he presented himself unannounced and asked for “the partner who attended to the publishing part of the business.”³⁷⁶ After John Abner Harper deferred to the absentee John Wesley Harper, Bancroft found his case shuffled off to a disinterested, “cold cynical cuss” named Connant, “or some such name.”³⁷⁷ Though he did not malign his experience with Harper as mistreatment, Bancroft felt “sickened” by his welcome there and eventually turned to Appleton, where he had an existing connection. His late brother-in-law George Derby’s brother James C. Derby headed the subscription department at Appleton. Bancroft had known James for at least twenty years at that point; the personal connection made all the difference between his experiences at Harpers and at Appleton. Though he lamented, “very little work was put upon it, for the subscription department was crowded with books in which the house had deeper pecuniary interest than in mine,” he claimed ultimately that Appleton’s effort and success ultimately satisfied him.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 326, 336.

³⁷⁶ Hubert Howe Bancroft, “Personal Observations During a Tour Through the Line of Missions of Upper California” [187–], 187, BANC MSS C-E 113, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11228232~S1>.

³⁷⁷ Bancroft, “Personal Observations....,” 188.

³⁷⁸ By 1890, Bancroft claimed to have been initially reticent to sell the histories by

Like its counterpart A. L. Bancroft & Company in California, Appleton had the means to push books by either subscription or through the edifices of the book trade, and it chose between the two by region to maximize sales without competing with itself. In Hawaii, for instance, it allowed the subscription firm already selling its sixteen volume *American Cyclopædia* to offer the similarly priced five volume set of *Native Races* as well. On the east coast, however, it offered the *Cyclopædia* exclusively by subscription but referred potential purchasers of *Native Races* either to visit their local bookstore or to send an order with advanced payment to have it shipped anywhere in the United States.³⁷⁹

Ironically, in order to avoid the appearance of vanity publishing, Bancroft and his primary collaborators quietly engaged in the act proper. The company could have leveraged its economies of scale and end-to-end shop in order to produce its histories quite profitably. Instead, it significantly cut its margins in order to subvent the publication of its *Works* by a more established press, effectively buying its way into a prestigious publisher's catalog. Appleton stood to gain significantly from its five-year contract on the initial miniseries. It also risked almost nothing, save for its name. By the time it paid Riverside \$0.90 and \$1.35 for the finished volumes in cloth and sheepskin, respectively, Bancroft could expect to earn just \$1.35 and \$1.40 on each while Appleton could expect each sale of \$4.50 or \$5.50 per volume to double its investment.³⁸⁰

subscription under Appleton. Perhaps he feared the model would either not reach or would prove off-putting to his intended Atlantic audience, men of letters, or perhaps his recollection nearly two decades after the fact reflected the general decline in public opinion for subscription publishing. Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 119, 347; Bancroft, "Personal Observations...", 200; Clark, *A Venture in History*, 40.

³⁷⁹ "Advertisement," *The New York Herald*, December 12, 1874; "Advertisement," *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, July 21, 1877; "The Red Man," *The New York Herald*, January 4, 1875.

³⁸⁰ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 336, 346; Bancroft, "Personal Observations...", 193; Clark, *A Venture in History*, 42, 71.

Even though the genre and study of history were becoming increasingly nationalistic in the late nineteenth century, Bancroft's team had never imagined its Pacific States Histories as bound by the borders of the United States.³⁸¹ The multinational coalition of informants, researchers, and writers constantly recalled the fluidity and the recency of the border that had settled to divide the vast, polyglot coast of North America. The Bancroft Library itself, whether on Valencia Street or eventually in Berkeley, has continued to pull against the impetus toward American exceptionalism for generations, even in the heyday of nationalist histories.³⁸² Even if the company had been so motivated, nothing about the recent history of the Pacific Coast in the 1870s lent itself to writing the now-familiar fiction of a nationalist history.

The disregard for national borders that ran through its histories continued in the company's anticipated reading public. It aimed for the other side of the Atlantic as well, even as it debated the viability of the *Works* in Mexico. It had good reason to believe that a comprehensive, scientific history of the Pacific might suffice in uniting the disparate readers of the Atlantic World into a reading public that could be separated from its money, whatever the currency. The nineteenth century had witnessed the rapid expansion of the world. Even before the promise of mineral wealth around the Pacific basin had

³⁸¹ Iggers and Wang argue, "the emergence of history as a discipline went hand in hand with the rise of nationalism. On the one hand professionalization was to guarantee the objectivity of historical studies; on the other hand it consciously assisted in constructing national identities. Thus while giving lip service to the objectivity, impartiality, and honesty of the historian, it in fact too often utilized scholarship to legitimize nationalistic aspirations." Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers, *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 4-5.

³⁸² Historian Al Hurtado, for instance, suggests how the Bancroft's collection pulled the historian and faculty director Hubert Eugene Bolton away from the nationalism of his advisor Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier and toward a transnational history of the borderlands. Albert L. Hurtado, *Herbert Eugene Bolton: Historian of the American Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 110.

exercised a gravitational pull on the people of Europe—their bodies and their imaginations—the extension of colonial competition into that region had pulled explorers from the so-called West so far to the west that they found themselves in the ostensible East. “Armchair explorers” who could not or would not board a ship could and did read their way through that world, which was paradoxically shrinking as its boundaries expanded.³⁸³

To reach those readers, Bancroft contracted publishers in Europe on terms similar to those given Appleton. Longmans in London, Maisonneuve et Cie in Paris, and F. A. Brockhaus in Leipzig would publish the same English editions as Appleton, which Bancroft would supply printed but unbound.³⁸⁴ Longmans accepted “on their usual terms: namely, ten per cent. commissions on trade sale price.”³⁸⁵ Longmans took the project enthusiastically, but that did not stop it from taking advantage of both Bancroft’s wealth and his eagerness to see the work brought to market. Not only did he provide the books to them already printed, he also fronted five hundred dollars for costs associated with publication. If the book failed to find its audience in Britain, Bancroft would lose the money personally; if Longmans managed to put a set in every parlor in Victorian London, Longmans stood to make a handsome profit. In Paris and Leipzig, too, Bancroft provided his respective publishers with books printed from its plates at Riverside Press.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Wagner, “Introduction,” 223. Historians and literary critics have done much to examine and to deconstruct the colonial gaze of this literature. See for instance: Barnum, Kelley, and Sten, *Whole Oceans Away*; Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific*; Phillips, *South Pacific Narratives*; Brawley and Dixon, *The South Seas*.

³⁸⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 345–46; Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*, 147, 280–81; Clark, *A Venture in History*, 42, 50, 70–71.

³⁸⁵ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 354.

³⁸⁶ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 360.

While A. L. Bancroft & Company did not see revenue and reputation as mutually exclusive, the company's obvious investment in promoting the latter at any cost certainly undercut its ability to negotiate aggressively with the partners it needed. The affluent bookman had "resolved that nothing within [his] power to remove should stand in the way of a first and complete success."³⁸⁷ His publishing partners took full advantage. Bancroft consoled himself that even if he had borne all the risks for his European publishers, he likely saved money over what it would have cost him to travel to London, Paris, and Leipzig personally in order to attend to the arrangements.³⁸⁸ The European firms worked the histories beyond Bancroft's satisfaction, though, especially Brockhaus in Germany. They coordinated the European releases to coincide with publication in New York and placed lengthy, positive reviews in the leading journals in their respective languages.³⁸⁹

Pacific Patronage

Between the Pacific Coast and the Rocky Mountains, A. L. Bancroft & Company found itself doing familiar work in a strange way. As it had many times before, the company's prodigious subscription department had won the contract to be the exclusive Pacific Coast agent for an important work published by a major eastern firm.³⁹⁰ In this

³⁸⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 354.

³⁸⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 355.

³⁸⁹ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 347, 360–61.

³⁹⁰ A sample of the contracts that one manifestation of Bancroft's company or another published prior to 1877 can be found in Marcus A. McCorison's catalogue of the records of the American Antiquarian Society and the Zinman collection at the University of Pennsylvania. In total, the company held the exclusive contract for subscription sales on the Pacific Coast for twenty-one books prior to 1877. By comparison, only five total records survived from the company's two closest

case, the contract happened to be for its own *Works*, and there were thirty-nine of them. If the company was going to make money on its histories, it would have to come from the subscription campaign in western America, where it would not share profits with anyone but its canvassing agents. Instead of maximizing its profits, however, the company's sales strategies consistently undercut its total sales and profits. As it had in more distant markets, the company spent more money than it could hope to recoup in order to place its *Works* before the public it wanted and in the way that it wanted.

Palmer did his part. If alternative economies subsidized the labors of his higher-ups in the company, Palmer worked for more conventional pay. In pursuit of the commissions he would make on subscriptions, he passed through over fifty towns covering a 25,000 square mile area. His canvass took him from the counties north of Sacramento all the way to southern Oregon and across the Sierra to the Nevada border. If he hoped to keep ahead of the cost of shoe leather, he had to be meticulous in his canvass. The terrain and population density of that expanse already threatened to weight the ratio of miles to dollars quite unfavorably; leaving a town without exhausting its population would only have exacerbated that struggle.³⁹¹

If he followed the instructions given by his employer, Palmer would have appealed to the Stiner family for their support of an important intellectual cause rather than asking

competitors in San Francisco, A. Roman & Company and Francis Dewing & Company. Marcus A. McCorison, "Publishers' Sample and Canvassing Books Issued Prior to the Year 1877 in the Collections of the American Antiquarian Society and Michael Zinman" (Bibliographical Society of America, 2003), <http://bibsocamer.org/wp-content/uploads/Publishers-Samples.pdf>.

³⁹¹ Many, though possibly not all, of Palmer's subscription lists survived with those produced by his counterparts in the company records. Palmer appears to have been an effective book agent, but unexceptional enough to offer a window into the typical work of the company. "Hubert Howe Bancroft: Records of the Library and Publishing Companies" 1864-1910, Ctn. 25, folder 43., BANC MSS B-C 7, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11225611~S1>.

them to buy some very nice books. His training warned against giving “too much the air of business; rather let it appear in this and in everything connected with the canvass, that it is your chief object to make people acquainted with, and enlist their sympathies in favor of, this great literary work that is being done in their country.” If “properly done,” the company promised, “subscriptions and money [would] easily come as a matter of course.”³⁹² That promise likely did not dissuade the tireless book agent from pushing the sale, but the company’s entreaty to Palmer and his counterparts to frame their conversations as invitations to invest in an important intellectual endeavor revealed how the company thought about itself, its works, and their potential subscribers.

The company used an innovative business model to do something quite old fashioned; as it had done with historical research and writing, the company crowdsourced patronage, too.³⁹³ Through Palmer, Bancroft & Company invited the Stiner family to buy their way into its intellectual network, supporting the final stage of its good and important work. The support of the Stiner family and thousands of others promised to underwrite Bancroft’s important work, they were told. Subscribing would ensure that they and their children could eventually read it in their own homes, but first it would ensure the company could complete its *Works* in the interest of the public good. In every area it could hope to control, the company’s sales materials framed its histories as a service to

³⁹² A. L. Bancroft & Company, *[Strictly Private]*, 2.

³⁹³ For more on early subscription publishing—especially its oldest American manifestation in the colonial and early national eras—see Powell, “Patrons of the Press: Subscription Book Purchasers in North Carolina, 1733–1850”. For other transitions in the history of American patronage, broadly conceived, see Sloten, *Patronage, Practice, and the Culture of American Science*; Francesca Sawaya, *The Difficult Art of Giving: Patronage, Philanthropy, and the American Literary Market*, Haney Foundation Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); and John Ott, *Manufacturing the Modern Patron in Victorian California: Cultural Philanthropy, Industrial Capital, and Social Authority* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

humanity and a subscription to them as an opportunity to participate in the classic institution of patronage.³⁹⁴

For the book agents, the stakes were unusually high. They had to sell thirty-nine books all at once, or none at all. Potential subscribers likely expected to be able to order only those volumes of immediate interest to their geographic area. Capitalizing on the burgeoning interest in local history, publishers had created hyperlocal histories and maps that they pushed by subscription almost exclusively within the geographic boundaries of the works themselves.³⁹⁵ The *Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* assumed westerners held an inherent interest in their regional history, it just demanded that they expand their imagined region to the whole of the Pacific coast from Alaska to Panama and inland to Denver and Mexico City.

The company insisted that the Pacific States Histories were indivisible because the history of the Pacific was, too. “All the volumes of the series are of equal importance,” a note preserved by the Stiners had informed them and other subscribers. “All belong together,” it continued, “as constant reference has been made from one volume to

³⁹⁴ When Bancroft and company offered potential subscribers an opportunity to buy their way into an intellectual network as partial patrons, they offered yet another way that the culture of consumption in the Victorian Era allowed Americans to shop and buy their way into desirable roles at the top of the global economic and cultural order. For the definitive work on the subject, see Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

³⁹⁵ Stafford, “Subscription Publishing in the United States,” 91–92. The Oakland-based Thompson & West publishers operated contemporaneously, for instance, selling histories and maps of cities and counties within the respective territories as well as works of national interest, like their map depicting the eastern theatre of the American Civil War. “Local Brieflets,” *Livermore Herald*, March 28, 1877; “History of Sacramento,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, May 7, 1880; “War Map,” *Marin Journal*, June 21, 1877; A. L. Bancroft & Company had even produced some of these focused vanity histories before. Frederick Hall, *The History of San Jose and Surroundings, with Biographical Sketches of Early Settlers. Illustrated with a Map and Engravings on Stone* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1871). Of course, the History Company infamously produced its own vanity histories, or mug books, in the 1890s. Carson, “Get The Prospect Seated ... And Keep Talking”;

another, and from one set of volumes to another. This was found necessary to avoid repetition, and a further increase in the number of volumes. Together the 39 volumes form a complete whole, and the volumes and sets are properly arranged and numbered in their natural and chronological order.”³⁹⁶ Though bundling probably sold more copies of *The History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana, 1845–1889* by ensuring that many California subscribers had to buy it, too, a company driven exclusively by profitability might never have attempted to write exhaustive histories of such a sparsely populated place. The company’s insistence on the indivisibility of Pacific history eventually proved costly to both it and its customers.

Framing subscriptions as a form of patronage advanced the company’s desired image, but it obscured an important point: The company did not need the Stiners’ support. The long, expensive project of producing the *Works* had operated for years without their pittance. Oak, Fuller, Bancroft, and others needed mindshare more than market share, and subscription publishing offered them a form of personal promotion far beyond the windows, catalogs, and newspaper notices that apprised regular, urban book buyers of an interesting volume, newly available. But even if they valued the histories as highly as the sales manual suggested they should, Palmer and his fellow canvassers did not work for the prestige of the company or its *Works*. They had bills to pay and they had chosen a lucrative, taxing profession that promised to pay them as long as they put names on lines. In an attempt to conjure the expansive intellectually, culturally, and economically diverse public it wanted, the company had to avoid pricing its *Works* out of

Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 15.

³⁹⁶ “Henry Stiner Papers Relating to the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft.”

reach of its public while still offering compensation sufficient to motivate its agents properly.

Like most books sold by subscription in the nineteenth century, the *Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* made large, beautiful books accessible to people looking to display their cultural sophistication and erudition in their parlors in handsomely bound tomes. They came with luxury bound in, embossed with high culture, and they demanded a premium for it. Starting at \$4.50 in cloth, the base prices for the works already had a dollar per book premium over the entry level price for the kinds of books meant for display more than for reading. That gap threatened to become exorbitant for most middling customers as the thirty-nine volumes multiplied that price to a minimum of \$175.50. Making Palmer's job harder, new customers who might have been able to commit to a quarterly installment of four or five dollars for each new volume first had to pay up front for all the volumes already completed at the time of their order. Any upgrades could drive the bill even higher as the per-volume base price rose. The Sloan family in Eugene, Oregon ordered their set bound in full calf, which cost ten dollars per volume. They then requested further personalized embellishments, which almost certainly pushed the total well beyond the \$390 list price. The Eugene blacksmith ordered a custom dedication page printed on an otherwise blank leaf in the preliminary pages as well as a third label reading "J. M. Sloan" below the double lettering-pieces on the spine.³⁹⁷

Purchasing a full set of *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* probably required many families to rearrange their finances and their furniture. Where does one put thirty-nine eight hundred page volumes? In a custom walnut bookcase, of course. Both the

³⁹⁷ Kent Tschanz, "37. Complete Set of Bancroft's Works," *Ken Sanders' Rare Books Catalogue* 30 (2007); Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*.

Sloans and the Stiners received the beautiful, glass-paneled furniture piece that would display and protect their expensive new investment. The Stiners, at least, received theirs free of charge, thanks to a special offer made by Palmer. The family needed only to pick it up from the freight office in Reno. Even still, doing so required making a significant journey from Eagleville. To make matters worse, they would have an expensive, bulky, and fragile piece of furniture to worry about on their return.³⁹⁸

If sticker shock nearly derailed Palmer's pitch, he had the power to assuage the financial panic incited by that hefty total price. He offered the Stiners a three-year extension on the \$66 owed for first twelve volumes. They arrived via the post in August, just over a month after the family first encountered Bancroft & Company through Palmer. In January of the following year, the family received its thirteenth volume, which happened to be Volume 28 due to the asynchronous completion of the *Works*. They also received their first bill. Six months after placing their order, and with thirteen leather-bound tomes sitting behind the glass doors of their new walnut bookcase, they owed just \$5.50.

When he satisfactorily resolved the family's potential objections, Palmer did not bend any rules. He used forms from his canvassing outfit that the company had prepared and distributed to its agents in order to help them overcome potential obstacles to subscribing. By deferring the hefty initial payment, the company effectively reduced the initial buy-in cost of joining its network as a subscriber to zero. Presumably, Palmer collected his full commission with neither delay nor discount. He likely made fifty to sixty

³⁹⁸ "Henry Stiner Papers Relating to the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft."

percent of the total sale.³⁹⁹ Palmer had an incentive to offer those discretionary discounts and deferred payment plans generously. When he made it affordable for the Stiner family not only to subscribe, but also to upgrade to leather, he likely increased his own cut of their order by \$20 or more. By the time he submitted his orders from Modoc County, Palmer had made twenty-seven sales there in addition to the Stiner family's order. For as long as the company could afford to defer its profits, it had found a highly effective method for building its expansive public one household at a time. In thousands of parlors across western North America, A. L. Bancroft & Company paid book agents to sell its expensive series of histories only to carry the contracts on those orders interest free.

Once they signed their names, the whole operation moved rather quickly for the Stiners. Their name appeared near the middle of Palmer's list for Modoc County, suggesting that the book agent did not leave the Surprise Valley for some time. By late July, the subscription department in San Francisco had that list, though, because on July 28 the company entered the Stiner order, number 3971. Just nine days later, a clerk at the company named R. Pattinson composed a letter on behalf of Albert Bancroft. The letter accompanied the first twelve volumes in the mail, thanking them for their order and reviewing the terms of their contract. He explained what they would owe, when and how to pay it, and how their bookcase would arrive in Reno. He closed by asking that the family acknowledge receipt of both parcels.⁴⁰⁰

For Palmer, the sale had completed when he sent in his list and left Modoc

³⁹⁹ "Subscription Publishing," *American Bookseller's Guide*, EBSCO AAS Historical Periodicals Collection, 1 (1869); Stafford, "Subscription Publishing in the United States," 44.

⁴⁰⁰ Albert Little Bancroft to Henry Stiner, August 6, 1884, BANC MSS 2006/147 V.1, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b11157401~S1>.

County. The Stiners and the Bancroft company, though, had initiated a long-term relationship that would endure for the remainder of the decade. Even if very little money had initially changed hands between the Stiners and the company, both had bought something at a high cost. It was worth taking a moment to review the details of the order. Even if they had deferred it for the moment, Henry and Jessie Stiner would eventually have to pay a significant, ongoing price for their order. For its part, the company had just sent the better part of a hundred dollars in merchandise to Eagleville on a no-interest loan while paying Palmer the better part of another hundred dollars for the Stiner order alone.

For the moment, that investment had bought the company little more than the goodwill of at least twenty-eight households in Modoc County, California. Supporting that quest for positive mindshare, the paperwork related to their purchase contained a one page “Hint to the Readers of Mr. Bancroft’s Works” explaining their essential interconnectedness as well as an engraving of their titular author, Hubert Howe Bancroft. After the devastating 1886 fire, the company would send the Stiners and other subscribers an illustrated, one-page flyer meant to assure them of the company’s endurance while also explaining its reorganization as the separate History Company and Bancroft Company. As the decade wore on and the various manifestations of the company sent the Stiners new materials, someone decided to place the ephemera into the bookshelf. Over a century later, that bookshelf and the only known extant copy of the company’s subscription paperwork made its way back to the Bancroft Library, where it sits in the office of the faculty director. The exceptional record of the almost decade-long relationship between the company in San Francisco and a family of farmers in Eagleville, California offers the only glimpse inside a single, unexceptional interaction in the subscription publishing economy that was as ephemeral as it was ubiquitous in nineteenth-century America.

With over a decade of experience as one of the leading subscription publishers on the Pacific Coast, A. L. Bancroft & Company knew how to match a work to its optimal audience. Instead of doing that, however, the company used its knowledge of the mass book market and its steady revenues from its other businesses in order to promote its *Works* beyond their natural limits. But the actual person who would apprise someone in Eagleville, Dallas, Mexico City, or Leipzig of Bancroft, his library and his *Works*, would almost certainly be someone whose only investment in those volumes was financial. With its established empire, the company had the experience to strike a strategic balance between the public reputation of the *Works* and their profits even as it had the financial means to write off losses incurred by that strategy.

When it set out to pitch its own *Works*, A. L. Bancroft & Company had already dominated subscription publishing on the Pacific Coast for a decade. Its unique relationship to its own histories and the challenge of publishing such a large, expensive series required a strategic appropriation and adaptation of practices from two different subscription models. In the cash-strapped and credit-poor economy of early America, subscriptions—paid at least partially in advance—had often functioned to offset the cost of printing an important but cost-prohibitive work. This old version of crowdfunding stood in the place of the dying patronage of old, and much of its success derived from middling people's aspirational desire to act as little patrons of the press in order to join their social betters in visible support of an important work. The promise of having one's name printed below George Washington's in the list at the back of *Brown's Self-interpreting Bible* certainly induced more than a few subscriptions, for instance.⁴⁰¹ Later in

⁴⁰¹ John Brown, ed., "List of the Names of the Subscribers to the American Edition of Brown's Family Bible," in *The Self-Interpreting Bible: Containing the Sacred Text of the Old and New*

the nineteenth century, better established printers and publishers had the cash and credit to take projects much closer to completion before seeking public support. Equipped with sample books, canvassers sold more copies than retail stores might have even as they allowed publishers to finish the volumes on demand. Not only could they delay the most expensive phase of production until they knew they already had a customer, it gave them an opportunity to offer upgradable bindings without the risk of over- or under-producing any of them.

Bancroft & Company sold the Stiners and the Sloans the opportunity to think of themselves as great patrons of the press; in every way that mattered, California's robber baron of History was his own patron.⁴⁰² In the subscription push of the *Works* in western North America, A. L. Bancroft and Company drew on both models. Though they did not need the financial support of prepaid subscriptions in order to complete the histories, they sold the idea of patronage in order to evoke public sympathy and to frame their endeavor as a public good being undertaken by a private corporation. At the same time, they employed the methods that had proven so effective at driving sales in the later period in order to create a larger public for their histories, particularly among westerners whose remoteness prevented them from frequenting bookstores regularly and, therefore, made them even more likely to see the value in purchasing an instant library of their own. By cuttings its profit margins severely and by carrying no interest contracts, the combined

Testaments (New York City: Printed by Robert Hodge and Samuel Campbell for T. Allen, 1792).

⁴⁰² Bancroft fit within, probably aspirationally, the Gilded Age story of artistic production and industrial capital that centered on California's "big four" in the same era. See Ott, *Manufacturing the Modern Patron in Victorian California*.

model made patronage of an important work accessible even to westerners of modest means.

CHAPTER V

DIVIDING THE WORKS

It would seem in such a case that not to accept the work as a whole, or to refuse to give cheerful support to the enterprise as it is, would be nothing less than failure to acknowledge a palpable obligation. A subscription to Bancroft's works by any gentleman whose interests come within the scope of his pen, is in reality only the partial payment of a debt our people owe him.

—The History Company, Bancroft's Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold
Except as a Complete Unbroken Series

Already you have achieved almost a miracle, for you have conquered the jealousy and envy of your own neighbors. To secure the suffrages of the world at large is far easier than to obtain simple justices from those who have lived beside us; and your success in this is a fair measure of the standing your work is destined to occupy.

—George Frederic Parsons, Literary Editor, *New York Tribune*, letter to
Hubert Howe Bancroft, 23 May 1886

One evening late in the year 1892, two teenaged boys employed by the History Company waited awkwardly for Nathan Jonas Stone to leave his desk. They intended to carry out a nefarious deed against their supervisor. For weeks, the former vice president of the company had arrived at work to find his desk tampered with, often removed during the previous night to some inconvenient place in the building. He had found it placed just close enough to a wall that he could still use it, but only without the benefit of a chair. Other times, the chair had gone missing entirely. Once he claimed there was a sawhorse placed upon it. Someone had once dumped ink over the papers he had left out overnight.

In another instance, someone had removed the desk to the darkest corner possible.⁴⁰³

Some determined miscreant would stop at nothing to make Stone's life miserable and his job nearly impossible to complete. Stone knew the identities of the culprits, and yet he quietly endured his torment.

On this particular evening, the boys planned to remove the desk's casters in order to make it nearly impossible for him to relocate it the following morning. But it was half past five, and Stone had not yet left for the evening. Daniel Crawford, one of the conspirators, did something quite out of place in such hijinks: He approached Stone, nervously informing his superior of their ill intentions. Stone allowed the pair to proceed. Crawford had felt too guilty to sabotage Stone's desk without at least warning him first. The pair flipped the desk over, but they never succeeded in removing the rear casters. Those proved to be "fixed in deeper than the others; they were screwed in and the others were staved in." Crawford quietly hid his failure.⁴⁰⁴

The seemingly childish antics that had befallen Stone and his desk since the previous summer revealed a surprisingly serious problem for Bancroft's enterprise after the completion of the *Works* two years previous. Though perpetrated by adolescents, the acts of maleficence originated from the top. Encouraged by George H. Morrison, Stone's replacement as vice president, Bancroft had directed Crawford and other low level employees to torment Stone at work and to impede his ability to perform his job more generally. A. L. Bancroft & Company, which had previously subsidized not only its

⁴⁰³ "N. J. Stone, Plaintiff and Respondent, vs. H. H. Bancroft, Defendant and Appellant ... E. J. McCutchen, Attorney for Appellant; Reddy, Campbell & Metson, Attorneys for Respondent" 1895, 87-90, E13.B23 S7, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://www.archive.org/details/njstoneplanoostonrich>.

⁴⁰⁴ "Stone v. Bancroft, Compilation," 87-88, 90.

publishing partners but also its customers, was gone. The more streamlined History Company had replaced its behemoth predecessor after a devastating fire in 1886, and the new company never enjoyed the same economic advantages as its predecessor. By 1892, the company needed to boost flagging subscriptions more than ever. It had even created a more lucrative sequel in *The Chronicles of the Builders of the Commonwealth*, a series of vanity biographies that would cost far less to produce and that it would sell for much more.⁴⁰⁵ The company that had lost money based on its liberal interpretation of who should make and read history was gone and its successor had launched a new series of vanity biographies that allowed rich people to buy as much historical significance as they could afford. As financial pressure and intellectual frustration mounted, personal feuds pushed the long-time collaborators beyond the pale. At a moment when the company needed subscriptions more than ever, it spent months paying one set of employees to prevent the handsomely-paid sales manager Stone from doing his job in hopes that he would quit. He did not. Anger boiled over into the courts, and the company's reputation suffered as much as its bottom line.

Morrison and Bancroft had come to regard Stone as a weight around the company's neck, blaming him for disappointing sales of the histories even as they lamented the lavish \$350 per month salary that his contract promised him. A product of flusher times for the company, Stone's contract had promised him that salary for ten years with no clause for firing him. In the more difficult financial situation in which the

⁴⁰⁵ Mug books had a well-established reputation among both publishers and potential biographical subjects. See Clark's lengthy treatment of this scheme as a sequel to the histories in Clark, *A Venture in History*, Chapter IX, especially 121n1. Casper embeds an analytical examination of Bancroft's turn toward mug books in his masterful history of biography as a genre and American obsession in the nineteenth century. Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 300–303.

company found itself in the early 1890s, Stone's exorbitant salary remained a fixed cost that exceeded their budget. The accomplished sales manager had, to Bancroft and Morrison's judgment, fallen short of the heroic sales the company needed. In order to balance their books, they needed to make Stone quit. To Bancroft and Morrison's dismay, Stone's resilience rivaled Herman Melville's immovable Bartleby. The increasingly nasty methods employed by the pair and their agents of mischief departed from the paternalist concern exhibited by Melville's narrator. Stone sat—or stood, depending on the current availability of his chair—quietly living up to his name. Though prevented from doing his actual work, Stone fulfilled his contract by remaining “willing and ready” to “[perform] the services required of him.”⁴⁰⁶ The lawsuit that ensued rose to California's Supreme Court. The lengthy record it left reveals the syndrome that slowly killed the company from the inside even as attempts to rejuvenate it destroyed its reputation with an already cracking public.⁴⁰⁷

Bancroft and company had built their intellectual network by eliciting myriad individual investments. Each had bolstered its case to the next potential contributor. In the same way, its demise had no single cause. Each divestment made other allies more likely to judge that the company no longer offered them their best chance to achieve her or his particular goals. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the company curated public goodwill for its endeavor at great expense by selling the sense of patronage well below the actual cost of its enterprise. The diversified businesses operated under A. L. Bancroft &

⁴⁰⁶ “Stone v. Bancroft, Compilation,” 220.

⁴⁰⁷ In addition to the decisions reported by the Supreme Court of California, a more substantive but atypical compilation of decisions related to this case is held at the Bancroft Library. A digitized version of that file is hosted by the Internet Archive. Stone v. Bancroft, 112 Cal. 652 (Supreme Court of California 1896); Stone v. Bancroft, 139 Cal. 78 (Supreme Court of California

Company had subsidized the remaining costs even as the core employees of the company worked beyond the scope of their pay in order to support *their* works within Bancroft's *Works*. The struggle between Bancroft, Morrison, and Stone demonstrates that by 1892, that arrangement had almost entirely reversed. Worse, while the company had intentionally obscured the ways in which it had subsidized its histories and their expansive public, the ugly grudge match and the apparent greed that animated it played out quite publicly.⁴⁰⁸

In his relationship to the histories, Stone had more in common with Palmer than he did with Oak or Victor. Like the canvassers who worked under him, Stone had drawn generous compensation for his work on the aggressive marketing campaign. He had overseen sales of the histories for the History Company since it formed in August 1886 in the wake of the devastating fire earlier that year. Making matters worse, he had failed to deliver the heroic sales numbers the leaner new company then required for survival even as his guaranteed salary and its lack of performance requirements insulated him from the financial crisis endured by the rest of the company. Eventually, Stone fulfilled only the most basic requirement of his contract: He showed up to work, “ready and willing at all times” to do the work that his superiors refused to let him do.⁴⁰⁹ The company's newfound obsession with sales, the collective dissatisfaction with Stone's seemingly respectable numbers, and Stone's willingness to sit idly while collecting a salary that was crushing the company all demonstrate how dramatically the internal culture of the History Company

1903).

⁴⁰⁸ “Bancroft's Books: What Ex-Manager Stone Says of Them. A Vigorous Answer to the Historian's Suit. Revelations as to How the Books Were Written—Damages Wanted,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 9, 1892.

differed from the spirit that had motivated the History Department at A. L. Bancroft & Company. The transformation within the company was catalyzed by fire. The earlier knowledge industry of the nineteenth century was already changing in ways the company likely could not have endured, but heat sped the process along.

The Public Response

The company broke when its public cracked beneath it. Before the fire, hairline fractures manifested, but they appeared as exceptions that seemed isolated enough to prove the viability of Bancroft's expansive audience. The fire eventually made its previous strategies unsustainable, and the rising heat and pressure added extra stress to a public that the company had built on previously unseen fault lines. In the early years of publication, between roughly 1874 and the early 1880s, the reviews of *Native Races* in a wide range of journals revealed the degree to which Bancroft and company had successfully summoned their desired public. That public had responded, recognizing themselves and the ostensibly likeminded readers of their various organs as the *Works*' proper public. The vast majority of reviews in erudite journals, popular magazines, and newspapers offered uniformly positive assessments of the initial volumes. The reviews' striking uniformity, more than their overall positivity, reveals the successful construction of its reading public. Like a person lost in amiable conversation, absentmindedly mirroring her or his interlocutor's gestures and expressions, the early reviewers of Bancroft's *Works* constantly invoked the company's own talking points. As the early volumes came out in the late 1870s and early 1880s, reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic

⁴⁰⁹ "Stone v. Bancroft, Compilation," 36.

became canvassers in print.

In the doorways and sitting rooms of western America, agents like Palmer had spent the 1880s spouting talking points provided by the prospectus concealed within their jacket or by a sales manual, kept *strictly private*, of course. The same leitmotif played quietly in the background of published and ostensibly independent reviews, too. Bancroft had personally canvassed some of those reviewers. By working through Gilman and his circle, he had reached other prominent reviewers like the eminent historian of the day, Francis Parkman.⁴¹⁰ Most reviewers had not met Bancroft. They had never endured his pitch, at least not in person. But they appear to have read the extensive account of the company's endeavors that appeared in the introduction to *Native Races*. In any case, the reviews uniformly repeated the story the company told about itself almost constantly.⁴¹¹

The company had made that story readily available. In addition to sending out

⁴¹⁰ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 337–38. Parkman reviewed the initial volumes quite favorably: Francis Parkman, “Review of *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*. Vol. I by Hubert Howe Bancroft,” *The North American Review* 120, no. 246 (January 1, 1875): 34–47; Francis Parkman, “Critical Notices: H. H. Bancroft’s *Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, Vols. II. and III,” *The North American Review* 121, no. 249 (October 1875): 442–50. In spite of his favorable early reviews, Bancroft’s pushy manner as a businessman wore on Parkman, as is clear in his letters to Lewis H. Morgan and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Parkman’s tone toward both suggests he regarded them as proper scholars even as he denounced Bancroft as “a curious cross between a student and a driving man of business,—half licked, of course. He has a gang of writers at work for him, like so many clerks.” Francis Parkman to Lewis H. Morgan, April 2, 1877; Francis Parkman to Oliver Wendell Holmes, May 28, 1882, 97–98, 151–52. The letters can be found, along with contextual notes, in: Francis Parkman, *Letters of Francis Parkman*, ed. Wilbur R. Jacobs, vol. 2 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

⁴¹¹ Throughout the analysis that follows, I have in mind the “second story” that the historian of the book Anthony Grafton posits and explores in his masterful, eponymous history of the footnote. Though the company’s sales materials and placed reviews go well beyond the citations that Grafton identifies as the site of the second story, the function of reassuring skeptical readers while warding off potential detractors remained the same, merely finding expanded forms of expression here. The company’s many repeated tellings of Bancroft, his library, and literary endeavors certainly operated within the same genre as Grafton’s second story even if they expanded beyond the notes themselves. Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

agents like Palmer on foot, it had placed articles celebrating Bancroft, his literary endeavors, and his library in as many newspapers and periodicals as it could. This duplicated at home what Longmans, Maisonneuve et Cie, and Brockhaus had done in their respective countries and languages. The company had told and retold its story incessantly, and it always highlighted the same selling points. It emphasized the breadth of Bancroft's library and the rarity of its sources. It always highlighted the teams of researchers and note takers who made such a library workable, a division of labor that promised to exceed the capabilities of any individual historian in both scope and depth of analysis. In other words, it publicly lauded the very economies of scale that would eventually prove scandalous as guarantors of a history beyond the capabilities of any single historian in a lifetime.

Across the wide range of publications, reviewers agreed. When they did, they answered the company's summons, becoming its public not just by reviewing its histories positively, but by accepting and repeating the company's scripted story as their own. As they repeated the story of "Hubert Bancroft, his library, and his works" to every intelligent person in their readership, the editors and reviewers of a wide range of erudite and popular organs identified themselves and their subscribers as a part of the public for Bancroft's *Pacific States Histories*.⁴¹²

The marketing push had several recurring refrains. Canvassers and outside reviewers alike reminded potential readers that Bancroft's experience as a bookseller ought to assure all observers that he was not in this for profit. "In fact," the canvasser was instructed to say in subtle acknowledgement of Bancroft's silent self-patronage, "he

⁴¹² A. L. Bancroft & Company, *[Strictly Private]*.

spends from one to two thousand dollars a month now all the time which he never expects to get back. He works harder to get rid of his money than any man I ever heard of.”⁴¹³

Likewise, the magnitude of the research and the collaborative system through which it had been accomplished found regular mention. Reviews uniformly lauded the footnotes as proof of the volumes’ intellectual rigor.⁴¹⁴ In the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly*, *North American Review*, and *Scribner’s Monthly*, the public’s diverse intermediaries responded to the summons from the Pacific.

A common refrain echoed throughout the early critical response to *Native Races*: The scale of the archival research that underpinned them dwarfed similar works. Reviewing *Native Races I* in *North American Review*, the leading literary journal of the day, Parkman proclaimed the volumes “an encyclopædia of knowledge not only unequalled, but unapproached. A literary enterprise more deserving of a generous sympathy and support has never been undertaken on this side of the Atlantic.”⁴¹⁵ An English academic and one of the progenitors of cultural anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor hoped that other likeminded scholars might follow in Bancroft’s example for love of their own regions. He had in mind places where “ethnological materials are unmanageable because no student can get them before him as a whole. Especially we want a Bancroft for India, a

⁴¹³ A. L. Bancroft & Company, *[Strictly Private]*, 4.

⁴¹⁴ The reviewers largely echoed the company’s own mastery of the genre of the footnote, the “second story,” as historian Anthony Grafton has called it, that celebrated the exhaustive research underpinning the volume in order to build readers’ trust while warning would-be detractors of the reading list they would have to complete in order to mount a successful critique. Grafton, *The Footnote*.

⁴¹⁵ Parkman, “Review of The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America. Vol. I by Hubert Howe Bancroft,” 47.

Bancroft for Asiatic Russia.”⁴¹⁶ Throughout the early reviews, the industrial means of production failed to perturb most reviewers. They were willing to accept their use because of what they had accomplished. Or, as Parkman reasoned, “if this method has its objections, it is certain that no one man could accomplish the proposed task by any other.”⁴¹⁷

The footnotes of *Native Races* could stretch nearly as far as the Pacific Coast itself. Few reviewers failed to mention the behemoths, and they did so with almost uniform delight. Footnotes do more than provide evidence and point interested readers to further materials. According to the historian Anthony Grafton, they offer a second story within the text. The second story simultaneously reassures generous readers that the historian is to be trusted while warding off detractors by showing both the depth of research behind every claim.⁴¹⁸ Even the self-described “popular” periodical *Scribner’s Monthly* praised the huge notes in *Native Races*, making its case with just one, “if that can be called foot-note which goes up to the head,” anyway.⁴¹⁹ *Scribner’s* celebrated the prodigious notes as valuable even to its readers—“the people”—lauding the exemplary citation for having identified “with precision seventy-one authors, in six different languages.”⁴²⁰ Parkman offered more qualified praise. “For a single remark respecting the court life of

⁴¹⁶ Edward B. Tylor, “The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America,” *The Living Age*, September 16, 1876, 768.

⁴¹⁷ Parkman, “Review of The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America. Vol. I by Hubert Howe Bancroft,” 37.

⁴¹⁸ Grafton, *The Footnote*.

⁴¹⁹ “Culture and Progress: The Native Races of the Pacific Coast,” *Scribner’s Monthly, an Illustrated Magazine for the People*, July 1875, 387.

⁴²⁰ “Culture and Progress: The Native Races of the Pacific Coast,” 387.

Montezuma,” he wrote, “[Bancroft] cites no less than thirty-seven authorities. Of course he would not have us understand that all these are of the same weight. In this comprehensive survey nothing seems omitted.”⁴²¹ The mountaineer and eminent geologist Clarence King argued, “perhaps a true literary workman is known as well by his foot-notes as by the page.” If so, then the “frankness” with which Bancroft cited “arguments or opinions contrary to his own conclusion” offered the mark of finest scholarly craftsmanship to King’s scrutiny.⁴²² The authors of *Native Races* had mastered that second story; their reviewers repeated it.

The irony of such a contribution to Victorian literature and science coming to the Atlantic from the rough shores of the Pacific rarely escaped mention—anxious or otherwise. “Eastern scholars may well look to their laurels when such careful work comes to us from the Pacific coast,” Parkman warned.⁴²³ King noted the significant accomplishment of so “monumental a literary labor” having “been accomplished in a new country, far from all scholastic atmosphere, remote from the daily association with fellow-investigators, by the perseverance of one courageous student.”⁴²⁴ Reviewers tended to accept San Francisco as a nonthreatening, mildly surprising extension of the American literary and scholarly scene. According to *Scribner’s*, “that California was to be counted upon to yield wit and poetry was known by all.” But such an intellectual labor in

⁴²¹ Parkman, “Critical Notices: H. H. Bancroft’s *Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, Vols. II. and III,” 445.

⁴²² Clarence King, “Bancroft’s *Native Races of the Pacific States*,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1875, 173.

⁴²³ Parkman, “Critical Notices: H. H. Bancroft’s *Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, Vols. II. and III,” 450.

⁴²⁴ King, “Bancroft’s *Native Races of the Pacific States*,” 173.

nonfiction “seemed to belong rather to a society a little maturer, to a region of public libraries and universities. Even the older States had as yet yielded it but sparingly.” *Scribner’s* argued that if Bancroft had “presented himself wearing a specimen of the *sequoia gigantea* for a button-hole bouquet,” during his tour of the east, “it would hardly have seemed more surprising” to the scholars with whom he visited than the samples he showed instead.⁴²⁵ “No scholar in the Atlantic States can hear such an announcement,” it proclaimed, “without an increased sense of national self-respect, and of personal stimulus to effort.”⁴²⁶ In a moment in which Americans remained anxious about the lackluster status of the American contribution to the Atlantic literary exchange, neither *Scribner’s* nor any other American organ gave regional rivalry a foothold.⁴²⁷

Native Races directly engaged in the debate over the origins of indigenous Americans in a scientific conversation that had not yet splintered into distinct conversations within discrete academic disciplines. King celebrated *Native Races* as an important contribution to the development of a truly scientific history. The development of native peoples in the Americas offered, he believed, a control against which sweeping theses about human development and social evolution based on European, Asian, and African case studies could be tested. The *Edinburgh Review* identified the same advantage,

⁴²⁵ “Culture and Progress: The Native Races of the Pacific Coast,” 386.

⁴²⁶ “Culture and Progress: The Native Races of the Pacific Coast,” 388. The many worried about the development of a truly American national literature in the nineteenth century. The absence of protective copyright for international authors made reprinting foreign works cheaper and more lucrative than domestic works, which bound up the struggle for an American literary identity in some of the most contentious political issues of the century. See Rice, *Transformation of Authorship*; McGill, *Culture of Reprinting*; Buinicki, *Negotiating Copyright*; and Jennifer Phegley, “Literary Piracy, Nationalism, and Women Readers in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, 1850–1855,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 14, no. 1 (2004): 63–90.

⁴²⁷ Parkman, “Review of The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America. Vol. I by Hubert Howe Bancroft,” 34.

specifically identifying Thomas Buckle and his divisive theories as a candidate for testing and, one might infer, refutation.⁴²⁸ Beyond providing material *for* scientific history, King praised the volumes *as* exemplary works of the same. “Scholarly in method, sagacious in the balancing of oft-conflicting authorities, conscientious in keeping the data of science pure and unvitiated by the special pleading of theorists, he has achieved a conspicuous success,” King declared.⁴²⁹ The desire for scientific knowledge about the world—and especially about the Pacific—cut across the otherwise diverse reading public, which both explains and is confirmed by the uniformity with which otherwise distant corners of the market responded to the company’s call. When reviewers mirrored the second story told in *Native Races*, implicitly repeating the sales pitch that had won their support for Bancroft’s enterprise, they responded to the company’s summoning. Recognizing themselves as its target audience, they became its public.

Cracks

This representative sample of reviews of *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America* demonstrates the degree to which Bancroft & Company’s summons found its mark around the world. The response also foreshadowed the collapse of both the company and its public by revealing hairline fractures within the latter. In the 1870s, cracks that did not yet have names began to appear. They will look familiar to modern readers. The as-yet unnamed fissures that appeared in Bancroft & Company’s otherwise cohesive and expansive public eventually grew into familiar chasms: the divide between

⁴²⁸ “‘The Native Races of North America.’ By Hubert Howe Bancroft. 5 Vols.,” *The Edinburgh Review*, October 1876, 284. Ian Hesketh has investigated the controversy over the science of history with a particular focus on Buckle: Hesketh, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain*.

⁴²⁹ King, “Bancroft’s Native Races of the Pacific States,” 163, 173.

scholarly and popular readers, or between discrete intellectual disciplines, for instance. They have come to look natural. That makes their emergence here as indescribable disagreements all the more telling for the history of knowledge.

The tensile strength of Bancroft & Company's public survived its first test. While most reviews lauded *Native Races*, one prominent scholar denounced the volumes as wildly inaccurate in *North American Review*. The disagreement resulted from methodological and theoretical disagreement about how to reconstruct the past faithfully. Bancroft and his opposition, the protean anthropologist and a fellow autodidact Lewis H. Morgan, had a great deal in common. Both stood at the forefront of nascent disciplines even though, in the moment of their disagreement, they saw their inquiry and methods as synonymous. Comparing their heated exchange to the esoteric squabbles between the academic specialists who would follow them, however, obscures more than it might reveal. Today, two experts in a narrowly-defined subspecialty might disagree vehemently over interpretation or methodology within the pages of a journal dedicated to a small readership of likeminded specialists. Rather than playing out at a conference on a narrow topic or in the pages of a specialist journal, however, this fight began quite publicly in *North American Review* and continued in a standalone essay published by A. L. Bancroft & Company for its diverse audience.

A lawyer and influential anthropological thinker, Morgan attacked *Native Races II* for fundamentally misunderstanding indigenous social structures. Based on observations of the Iroquois peoples of the Great Lakes region, Lewis had constructed a general theory explaining the social structures of all native peoples in the Americas. It happened to run contrary to *Native Races'* reconstruction of the Aztecs in the Central Valley of Mexico. Imposing theoretical unity over historical complexity, Morgan reasoned that whenever

Bancroft's manuscripts disagreed with his theory, the Spanish sources must have erred. Spanish observers, Lewis reasoned, could be trusted only in relation to Spanish customs. "In whatever relates to Indian society and government, their social relations and plan of life, [Spanish observers] are wholly worthless," he explained without a hint of irony, "because they learned nothing and knew nothing of either. We are at full liberty to reject them in these respects, and commence anew; using any facts they may contain which harmonize with what is known of Indian society."⁴³⁰ In a later era, the disciplinary divide and the expectation of disagreement in whether to privilege theoretical patterns or historical complexity would likely have avoided the whole dust-up. An anthropologist and a historian might never have read one another's works. Even if they had, they might have shrugged off their disagreement as the result of immutable disciplinary assumptions. In 1876, however, two self-styled intellectuals at the vanguard of the inchoate disciplines of history and anthropology debated the most basic questions about theory, method, evidence, and interpretation in the pages of the leading general interest literary journal of the day.

Lewis targeted the erudite readers of *North American Review*. Bancroft responded by leveraging his own power of the press, publishing his pamphlet *The Early American Chroniclers* (1883). That pamphlet explained the company's historical epistemology. It also

⁴³⁰ Lewis H. Morgan, "Review of Native Races of the Pacific States. Vol. II by Hubert Howe Bancroft," *The North American Review* 122, no. 251 (April 1, 1876): 272. In a sense, Morgan was right about Spanish observers, but for the wrong reason. Since the 1990s, Latin Americanists focused on Meso-Americans in the period following Spanish contact have cogently argued for the importance of relying on indigenous language sources rather than exclusively using Spanish sources. From that vantage point, Morgan's diagnosis might have been at least partially valid, but his prescription moved so far and so proudly in the wrong direction as to be laughable. Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964); James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

protected the value of the company's priceless library, which Lewis' argument would have rendered worthless. The author or authors of *The Early American Chroniclers* emphasized the erudite tradition of careful Spanish observers.⁴³¹ The slim volume returned to one of the company's most successful arguments: the company's library boasted more information than any one person could comprehend in a lifetime. That included Lewis. That fact alone, the small volume argued, ought to give the company's collaborative investigation of Mesoamerican history more weight than Morgan's individual fieldwork, which was hundreds of years and thousands of miles distant.⁴³² For the moment, both authors assumed they addressed the same public; the failure to accept the same fundamentals about how to approach the past and its peoples revealed a crack in that public. That crack did not yet have a name; soon, the disciplinary divide would become so well-known and prodigiously documented that the formerly unified public that both Morgan and Bancroft's company had presumed to address would no longer have a name, its very existence rendered suspect.

The spat between Morgan and Bancroft over *Native Races* proved the tensile strength of Bancroft's broad public; it also foreshadowed the fragmentation that would quickly follow. Increasingly distinct fields of inquiry like history or anthropology continually refined the esoteric theories, methods, and epistemologies that underpinned them. Not surprisingly, that process pushed both beyond the overstretched genre of general literature. Younger scholars across the western world had already begun the work of exporting from Germany an organizational structure for academic professions that

⁴³¹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Early American Chroniclers* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1883).

⁴³² Bancroft, *The Early American Chroniclers*, 43.

could establish authoritative and universal epistemologies—universal within the narrow contexts of their disciplines, at least—for future inquiries. In both Britain and the United States, early scholarly historians concerned themselves with defining their enterprise as a profession in opposition to the incumbent historians—men and women whom they judged to be amateurs—who had romanticized the past.⁴³³ The new model relied on special training and esoteric knowledge to interpret sources as close to historical events as possible, in order to reconstruct the past faithfully.⁴³⁴

Another hairline fracture manifested in the 1880s. It, too, happened to undercut a key talking point in the company's second story, inviting questions into exactly how Hubert Howe Bancroft went about producing in less than two decades a series that would have taken several historians their entire lifetimes by ordinary means. The company never explicitly hid the ghostwriters who cranked out its texts ten hours per day, six days per week. It could hardly have hidden them from anyone inclined to investigate, and the famous *littérateur* Ambrose Bierce was so inclined. As editor of San Francisco's literary periodical *The Wasp*, he worked tirelessly to expose the thinly-veiled ghostwriting operation that drove Bancroft and his company's literary endeavors. He succeeded in exposing the workshop, but he failed to convince anyone else to care.

With a new 800-page volume coming out quarterly for a decade, few could have believed Bancroft had written the whole of each. Still, the company hardly volunteered additional information, either. The prospectus to the *Works* asserted, "the methods by which the historian utilizes the services of his corps of assistants are too complicated to be

⁴³³ On the importance of gender in this boundary work, see Smith, *The Gender of History*; and Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America*.

⁴³⁴ Howsam, *Past into Print*, 6–9.

fully explained . . . without this division of labor in preliminary research,” it continued, Bancroft “could not obviously look forward to anything but failure. With it, and with the aid of several competent collaborators, though the work advances slowly, he confidently expects success.”⁴³⁵ In the context of soliciting contributions or selling subscriptions in the first decade of its operations, the company primarily had to convince the public that the company could meet its obligations. Who exactly did the work for the *Works* proved a later concern, at least to everyone but Bierce.

While the working conditions faced by other professional authors in nineteenth-century America did not differ significantly from those faced by members of the company’s writing corps, the literary community had come to idealize authorship in ways that could not accommodate the literary workshop of which Bancroft and company were so proud. The sort of author recognizable to most modern readers—a lone genius, artistically motivated, and divorced from the market—only emerged in the late eighteenth century, and then mostly in the imagination. By the nineteenth a Romantic archetype had crystalized, one captured best in Thomas Carlyle’s 1840 lecture “The Hero as a Man of Letters.” Originality, sincerity, and genius inhered in that hero; in spite of low birth, personal tragedy, or poverty, the heroic man of letters would stop at nothing to bring the fruit of his mind—and his alone—to a public that likely would not appreciate it.⁴³⁶ Though everyone recognized that even the brightest of literary lights sometimes wrote for pay, the experience of doing so when necessary confirmed for many that there was a difference

⁴³⁵ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Prospectus of the Literary Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1882), 26.

⁴³⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840); Haynes, “Reassessing ‘Genius’ in Studies of Authorship,” 287.

between what one wrote for a paycheck and what one wrote for sake of literature. Writing for the mass market might sustain the author's body, but it could kill the authorial soul.⁴³⁷

San Francisco's high priest in the cult of Romantic authorship, Bierce had a significant mouthpiece with which to expose Bancroft's workshop. He edited the first color illustrated periodical in America: *The Wasp*. The beautiful and relentless organ derived its name from its stinging satire. In its assault on the local "literary impostor" Hubert Howe Bancroft, it lived up to the moniker. *The Wasp* only became angrier the longer it was swished away.⁴³⁸

In 1882, Bierce reviewed the first volume of the full series that followed *Native Races*. He had two complaints. First, he objected that Bancroft had not "let his book take its chances of praise, instead of having it heralded by 'favorable notices' of interminable length, paid for by the line and published in newspapers whose literary judgment is evolved by the friction of coins in their proprietors' pockets." Second, he objected to the histories byline, arguing that Bancroft was "not in any sense their author." Bierce chastised Bancroft for pitching his *Works* as high literature while employing all of the marketing strategies meant to appeal to the masses, for whom serious *littérateurs* were supposed to have distaste enough to endure poverty rather than lower oneself. The idealized Romantic

⁴³⁷ On the working conditions of authorship—such that one could make a profession of it in nineteenth-century America—see Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America*; Michael Newbury, *Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*; and Michael S. Kearns, *Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret: Melville, Dickinson, and Private Publication* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010). As the literary critic Loren Glass has demonstrated, the potential to create a literary brand came only later, coinciding at its earliest with the apogee of the History Company's work. Loren Daniel Glass, *Authors Inc: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880–1980* (New York City: New York University Press, 2004).

⁴³⁸ "The History of the Pacific States," *The Wasp*, December 26, 1885; Charles H. Phelps, "Our Roasted Historian," *The Wasp*, February 17, 1883; "Very Literary Notes," *The Wasp*, August 4, 1883; Ambrose Bierce, "Prattle," *The Wasp*, August 9, 1884.

author cared neither about building a public nor about the money readers might pay for books. Neither objection necessarily damned the literary merits of the histories, Bierce acknowledged, which might well stand on their own merits. Bancroft need only cease his machinations and let judgment take place unmolested.⁴³⁹

Bancroft and company would do no such thing. By 1884, Bierce's initial generosity had soured. In his November 22, 1884 installment of "Prattle," Bierce took aim at Bancroft's shameless marketing strategies again, this time in response to a pamphlet titled *The Bancroft Library as Materials for Pacific States History*.⁴⁴⁰ Bierce complained again that Bancroft continued to pass himself off as the author of his *Works*. The pamphlet in question, he noted, celebrated the library's holdings in Spanish and Latin, neither of which he believed Bancroft could either read or write. But could the literary impostor read or write at all, even in English? "By the terms of his contract with his lettered employés," Bierce noted, "he is not required to write," rendering the answer as unknowable as it was unimportant.⁴⁴¹ As further evidence that Bancroft was a capitalist merely posing as a *littérateur*, Bierce prognosticated about Bancroft's ultimate goal. The pamphlet confirmed "what this paper has repeatedly asserted—that it is this cunning tradesman's hope to sell his library to the State University as soon as his crew of hack-writers shall have 'finished making history' at ten dollars a week without board."⁴⁴² History proved Bierce right.

The ideal Romantic author took an effective vow of poverty rather than lowering

⁴³⁹ Ambrose Bierce, "Prattle," *The Wasp*, November 11, 1882.

⁴⁴⁰ A. L. Bancroft & Company, "The Bancroft Library as Material for Pacific States History" (San Francisco, [188-]), E13.B23 B28, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b10611616~S1>.

⁴⁴¹ Ambrose Bierce, "Prattle," *The Wasp*, November 22, 1884.

⁴⁴² Bierce, "Prattle," November 22, 1884, 22.

herself or himself to writing drivel for trinkets. However, Bierce and his coterie of authors—the Bohemians—knew well that most writers did no such thing. Many excused writing for the mass market as a means to support their more literary endeavors. In other cases, performing aloofness toward the market made terrific marketing.⁴⁴³ Even Bierce wrote much of *The Wasp* in unsigned columns, week after week! Hence, while the writers who wrote under their boss's name were complicit in the misappropriation of their authorship, Bierce seems not to have held it against them. He knew as well as most how difficult it was to make a living by the pen. He likely knew at least Frances Fuller Victor, who operated within the same intellectual network as him and shared a mutual friend in Bret Harte.⁴⁴⁴

In its attacks on the many-handed monster of Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Wasp* aimed exclusively for the head. Sometimes others got in the way, of course. In the October 20, 1883 edition, the relentless paper reported the suicide of John S. Griffing, “a young man well known and highly esteemed in this city.” Griffing was the “brother-in-law of Mr. Hubert H. Bancroft, though doubtless other causes contributed to the sad result.”⁴⁴⁵ Even such a cringe-inducing barb left Bancroft's writing staff untouched. His writers were guilty only of choosing to take a writing job not unlike others. Bancroft alone violated the sacrosanct boundary between literary endeavors and profitable print when he passed his writers' work off as his own. That doubled the misrepresentation: works produced and

⁴⁴³ Sheila Post-Lauria, *Correspondent Colorings: Melville in the Marketplace* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Kenneth Dauber, *The Idea of Authorship in America: Democratic Poetics from Franklin to Melville* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*; Kearns, *Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret*.

⁴⁴⁴ Mills et al., *Frances Fuller Victor*, 20–21.

⁴⁴⁵ “[Notice of the Death of John S. Griffing],” *The Wasp*, October 20, 1883.

sold by such means could neither be his, nor properly literary.

The History Company endured Bierce's sting at *The Wasp* longer than *The Wasp* endured Bierce. By the middle of 1885, John P. Jackson—no friend to Bierce—took over the publication and likely demoted Bierce from his uncredited role as its editor.⁴⁴⁶ It was under new management that *The Wasp* reprinted a quite favorable review of Bancroft's whole enterprise from the December 5 edition of *Harper's Weekly* in which *Harper's* had either printed or borrowed directly from Bancroft's ubiquitous and uniform promotional materials. The review cited the usual impressive list of endorsements that the company had collected regarding *Native Races*, which the company continued to pass around liberally as though they applied to the entire remaining series.⁴⁴⁷ The lights listed included Wendell Phillips, Charles Darwin, Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and William Dean Howells among many others.⁴⁴⁸ On the following page appeared a single paragraph explaining the reprint. "The small-minded local critics who have heretofore written grudgingly of our home historian, Hubert Howe Bancroft," it opened, "must have a flesh-creeping feeling of personal diminutiveness as they witness the honor with which he and his are received elsewhere." When one finds "such suns of literature . . . united in admiration of our own Bancroft's magnificent

⁴⁴⁶ S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz, *Ambrose Bierce: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Sources*, vol. 29, *Bibliographies and Indexes in American Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 5–6.

⁴⁴⁷ A. L. Bancroft & Company, *A Brief Account of the Literary Undertakings of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (London: Trübner & Company, 1883), <https://books.google.com/books?id=BYsIAAAQAAJ>.

⁴⁴⁸ "The History of the Pacific States," *Harpers Weekly*, December 5, 1885. According to Bancroft's memoir, he met and solicited positive feedback from almost every member of this list during his tour of the eastern United States in 1874. See his account of that trip in his chapter "A Literary Pilgrim" in Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 326–64.

publication it is fitting that the scratching moles of the pen should hie them to their burrowings.”⁴⁴⁹ It must have especially frustrated the deposed Bierce to see his esteemed literary journal stoop to the level of effectively reprinting the company’s prewritten press.⁴⁵⁰

For the moment, Bancroft and Company’s broad public proved durable enough to prevent Bierce from wedging open the crack that ran within it. As in its survival of the methodological controversy initiated by Morgan, the victory would be fleeting. So quickly and so completely would the emerging vision of the historian appropriate the Romantic ideal of authorship that even academic historians sympathetic to Bancroft and his work in the twentieth century would struggle to explain the company’s system of collaborative authorship.⁴⁵¹ Within decades, the relationship between a single author and a text would be naturalized to the point that any explanation of the more complex relationship between researchers, writers, authors, and texts in Bancroft’s company would prove damning even when intended to save the company from itself.⁴⁵² At the same time, the much larger public that Bancroft and company had summoned and that failed to care in spite of Bierce’s many protestations would be largely forgotten.

⁴⁴⁹ “Untitled,” *The Wasp*, December 26, 1885, 10.

⁴⁵⁰ “The History of the Pacific States,” December 5, 1885; “The History of the Pacific States,” December 26, 1885, 9–10.

⁴⁵¹ For an introduction to the emerging inquiry into the scholarly persona in the humanities, see Herman Paul, “What Is a Scholarly Persona? Ten Theses on Virtues, Skills, and Desires,” *History and Theory* 53, no. 3 (October 1, 2014): 348–71.

⁴⁵² Morris, “Historian of the Northwest. A Woman Who Loved Oregon: Frances Fuller Victor”; Morris, “The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications”; Hunt, “Hubert Howe Bancroft: His Work and His Method”; McCarthy, “Wholesale Historian: Hubert Howe Bancroft”; Krenkel, “Bancroft’s Assembly Line Histories.”

Forged in the Flames

A quarter of a million people watched an inferno consume the real patron of Bancroft's histories, A. L. Bancroft & Company. San Francisco had brought the Pacific Coast of North America out of the imagination and into the global market and its homegrown History Company had spanned the world in order to tell that story. One could hardly have imagined a plot twist in its story more fitting to its San Francisco roots than fire, the mutual enemy of books and industry in the city by the bay. Fire broke out in the basement of the History Building on Market Street April 30, 1886. It happened at 3:55 PM, the peak of foot traffic along that street. The blaze reduced the History Building to rubble, claimed at least four lives, and destroyed property worth an estimated one million dollars.⁴⁵³ It began in the basement, then occupied by L & E Emanuel, furniture dealers. From there it spread quickly to the rest of the building through the elevator shaft. Though the city mobilized its entire brigade, the "twelve engines, five hoses, and three truck companies" would prove insufficient to do anything but save the surrounding structures like the nearby Grand Opera House.⁴⁵⁴ Two companies from Oakland took a defensive position from which they hoped to cover the rest of the cities on either side of the bay.

The tragedy began when Philip Wenzel, a delivery clerk for L & E Emanuel,

⁴⁵³ "Ravenous Flames," *Daily Alta California*, May 1, 1886; "Report of the Board of Fire Commissioners," in *San Francisco Municipal Reports Fiscal Year 1885-86, Ending June 30, 1886* (San Francisco: W. M. Hinton and Company, 1886), 287-88, <https://archive.org/details/sanfranciscocomuni85sanfrich>. The San Francisco Fire Department Museum currently maintains a page that has aggregated and ordered the several newspaper accounts that appeared across the city in the days that followed the blaze: "Notable Fires: 1886 A. L. Bancroft & Co.," *San Francisco Fire Department Museum*, accessed March 9, 2016, http://guardiansofthecity.org/sffd/fires/notable_fires/1886_a_l_bancroft_co.html.

⁴⁵⁴ David Scannell, "Report of the Chief Engineer of the San Francisco Fire Department," in *San Francisco Municipal Reports Fiscal Year 1885-86, Ending June 30, 1886* (San Francisco: W. M. Hinton and Company, 1886), 293.

dropped his candle. As he unpacked goods in the basement, Wenzel had covered the floor with excelsior, the highly-flammable wood shavings used to pack furniture in transit. After a panicked moment spent trying desperately to stamp out his devastating mistake, Wenzel escaped out the rear door while the flames escaped up the nearby elevator shaft.⁴⁵⁵ His coworkers Patrick Beatty and James Brannan were not so lucky.⁴⁵⁶ Though early estimates in the *Daily Alta California* suggested many firefighters had been lost in the blaze, the department fared better than believed once the smoke had cleared. Patrick Curran, the foreman of Engine Company No. 4 broke his leg. John Fleming of Truck No. 2—who had survived a fall from a rooftop in Chinatown earlier that year with only a sprained ankle—was less fortunate. Fleming fell from a ladder during the Bancroft fire and was found dead in his bed the following day, officially having died due to “over exertion.” As May passed and cleanup continued, a foreboding odor emanating from the ruins began to make the family of sixteen-year-old Willie Daily fear the worst, not having seen him since the day of the fire. On May 20, his father identified the charred remains.⁴⁵⁷

Compared to such human tragedies, Bancroft & Company appeared to the public to have fared surprisingly well. People especially focused on the survival of Bancroft’s priceless library, a cultural treasure that had been removed to a special fireproof building on an isolated lot on Valencia Street in 1881. The fire might easily have destroyed Bancroft’s historical enterprise had it taken his library; instead, it created the History

⁴⁵⁵ “Telegraphic: Details of the Bancroft Fire,” *Los Angeles Herald*, May 2, 1886.

⁴⁵⁶ Scannell, “Report of the Chief Engineer of the San Francisco Fire Department,” 294, 296; “Ashen Aftermath,” *Daily Alta California*, May 2, 1886, 1; Special to the Herald by the Associated Press, “Telegraphic: Loss of Life and Property in San Francisco,” *Los Angeles Herald*, May 1, 1886.

⁴⁵⁷ “Another Missing Boy,” *Daily Alta California*, May 7, 1886; “A Few Charred Bones,” *Daily Alta California*, May 16, 1886; “Willie Daily’s Remains,” *Daily Alta California*, May 20, 1886.

Company out of the ashes of A. L. Bancroft & Company. As the name of the former company implied, Hubert's younger brother Albert Little Bancroft had increasingly managed the sprawling business as his older brother concerned himself with collecting and writing books more than stocking and selling them.⁴⁵⁸

A rift developed between the two brothers after the fire and, while much speculation has followed about precisely what caused it, it seems fair to count the relationship between Albert and Hubert as a casualty of the fire, too. Like the firefighter John Fleming who survived the fire only to be found dead in his bed the next day, the brothers' relationship walked briefly among the living even after its expiration had become inevitable. They even briefly went into business together, replacing A. L. Bancroft & Company while allowing its former History department to grow into the standalone History Company.⁴⁵⁹ Like Fleming's delayed demise, the belated breaking between the Bancroft brothers after the fire is difficult to dismiss as unrelated.⁴⁶⁰ Remarkably, Bancroft

⁴⁵⁸ Bertha Knight Power, *William Henry Knight, California Pioneer* (New York City: Privately Printed by Alfred Knight, 1932), 64.

⁴⁵⁹ The Bancroft Whitney Company incorporated May 24, 1886 in order to revive the legal department, naming as its directors Albert and Hubert Bancroft, Fred and Nathan Stone, along with J. Has Brouck, Sumner Whitney, and F. G. Sanborn. The creation of new, individual companies had the added benefit of disassociating themselves from the debts owed by A. L. Bancroft & Company during the scramble to become solvent again. "Bancroft Whitney Company," *Daily Alta California*, May 25, 1886; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 788. The splintering proved permanent, with each brother eventually overseeing a more specialized company in line with his respective affinities and in competition with the other's firm. Clark, *A Venture in History*, 113.

⁴⁶⁰ In her biography of her father, Bertha Knight Power cited this as the reason for the brothers' split, too. While Clark qualified Power's assertion by noting that Knight had left the company in 1879 and therefore could not have been a witness to the falling out directly, he acknowledged that Bancroft's cursed "management" likely referred to his younger brother Albert. Wagner theorized that Bancroft had become jealous of his younger brother's more capable management of the company and especially of the accolades he had received in the 1881 article published in *The Paper World*. Certainly Hubert's jealousy over Albert's successes or Albert's likely annoyance at working thanklessly to support Hubert's expensive literary ambitions could not have helped the brothers' relationship, the sudden and dramatic nature of the break must have required a catalyst even if it ignited long-smoldering frustrations. In later interviews, children of both men

omitted his younger brother and business partner entirely from *Literary Industries*. That volume does not even contain the name “A. L. Bancroft & Company,” a testament to how far their relationship had deteriorated by the end of the 1880s when Bancroft completed the memoir.⁴⁶¹

The library survived, but A. L. Bancroft & Company did not. As a result, Bancroft’s enterprise lost the diversified revenue stream that had long supported it. Bancroft blamed “management”—probably a reference to his estranged brother Albert—for the confluence of bad luck and poor planning that made the fire so devastating. When the fire ignited, the building sat “crammed full to overflowing” with merchandise because “management” had stocked up, taking advantage of low freights.⁴⁶² The same unnamed person had let an important insurance policy lapse, “so that when the match was applied in the basement of the furniture store adjoining, and a two-hours’ blaze left only a heap of ashes, the old business should be killed as dead as possible.”⁴⁶³

Bancroft did not share the public’s relief at the survival of his library. “I felt with Shylock,” he recalled in a Shakespearean allusion, “as well take my history as take from me

acknowledged the falling out and speculated as to the cause, though the difference between what Philip Bancroft and Alberta Reid heard from their fathers even privately suggests that the two men might not even have agreed as to what had happened between them. Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 777; Power, *William Henry Knight, California Pioneer*, 64; Clark, *A Venture in History*, 112–113, 113n23, 113n25; Henry R. Wagner and Albert Little Bancroft, “Albert Little Bancroft: His Diaries, Account Books, Card String of Events, and Other Papers,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 1950): 97–128; “A Cosmopolitan Publishing House; History of the Establishment of A. L. Bancroft and Co., San Francisco, Cal.,” *The Paper World* 12 (March 1881).

⁴⁶¹ Since he commenced work on his memoir in 1874, Hubert almost certainly had to return to edit Albert out of portions of the volume that he had written long before the fire. Bancroft, “Personal Observations...,” 204.

⁴⁶² Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 777.

⁴⁶³ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 777.

the means of completing my history.”⁴⁶⁴ In *the Merchant of Venice*, the antagonist Shylock won the right to take the pound of flesh owed to him by his rival and debtor Antonio, but quickly discovered to his dismay that the terms of his victory also made collecting it impossible. The contract afforded him exactly one pound—no more, no less—and not a drop of blood. Having previously protested that he would only be satisfied by precisely what was owed him, he could accept no alternative payment than that which he had been awarded but could not collect.⁴⁶⁵ Though a bit melodramatic, Bancroft’s retrospective empathy for the Bard’s villain accurately captured his conundrum. Without the larger business of A. L. Bancroft & Company, he could neither afford to finish his histories as he wanted to complete them, nor could he afford to abandon them. His allusion implicitly acknowledged a hidden truth about the enterprise: The library was not “the means of completing [the] history,” the revenue from A. L. Bancroft & Company was.⁴⁶⁶ But because he and his company had invisibly subsidized the publication of the histories in order to avoid charges of vanity publishing and to elicit the enduring sympathies tied to subscriptions, no one in the company could acknowledge how devastating the fire actually had been. So they quietly endured the public outpouring of relief at the survival of the library.⁴⁶⁷

Even as they quietly hid the financial woes in public, the company found a private confidant to turn to for support: its bankers. The financiers reached out first, actually. Bancroft recalled that shortly after the fire, he received notice that, if he “wanted money to

⁴⁶⁴ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 777.

⁴⁶⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 94–96.

⁴⁶⁶ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 777.

rebuild,” then he could “come around and get the money.”⁴⁶⁸ Bancroft & Company’s capital—financial and cultural—was all bound up in the histories. Slightly over seven thousand outstanding subscriptions counted heavily in the new History Company’s declaration of its capital, accounting for an estimated \$240,000 to \$250,000 of the company’s initial \$500,000 in stock. The initial stockholders were Hubert Bancroft, his wife Matilda, and his daughter Kate, as well as Nathan Stone and his wife Olive.⁴⁶⁹ Thanks to the financing, the new History Company could complete the *Works* that A. L. Bancroft & Company had started. Two things had changed, though. First, the histories became the new company’s primary product. Second, the bank had a lien against the future of the histories. As a result of those two changes, the histories had to turn a profit on their own for the first time.

Dividing the Indivisible Pacific

The History Company needed to sell its only real product in order to survive, but in the months immediately following the catastrophic inferno the company appeared only mildly concerned about its chances at becoming profitable. On August 20, 1886, the company offered Stone his ten-year contract as manager of the sales campaign. He had worked for A. L. Bancroft & Company since summer 1882, and during those flusher years his salary had crept from \$200 to \$400 per month. In July 1886, his salary should have increased again to \$450 and it would have jumped to \$500 the following summer. Those

⁴⁶⁷ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 777.

⁴⁶⁸ Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, 781.

⁴⁶⁹ “The History Company—A New Printing House,” *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, August 2, 1886; “The History Company,” *Daily Alta California*, September 22, 1886; Clark, *A Venture in History*, 114.

additional raises never materialized. In fact, he took a cut in pay in the immediate aftermath of the fire, drawing only the \$350 in May 1886. Compared to the generous annual raises he had enjoyed since 1882, a contract that fixed his reduced salary for the next decade reveals the higher level of anxiety about operating costs. Still, when it inked a contract with Stone for \$42,000 and significant stock in exchange for a decade of his services with no way to terminate him, the company revealed its confidence in the profitability of the histories and in Stone's sales acumen.⁴⁷⁰

Whether because they could not bear to or simply thought they did not need to, in the immediate aftermath of the fire, the leadership of the History Company changed very little about their overall publication strategy. Not only did the company refuse to break the set, it issued a rather verbose pamphlet explaining why they could not and would not do so. Titled "*Bancroft's Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold Except as a Complete Unbroken Series*," it repeated the familiar explanation: To divide the Pacific States Histories into individual volumes or smaller series would violate the interconnectedness of the region's history. The books might sell individually, but they would cease to be history in any sense with which the company was then comfortable.⁴⁷¹

Beyond the intellectual reasons, the pamphlet asserted three interrelated reasons why customers were duty bound to buy a full set. In the process, they rendered as text the

⁴⁷⁰ "Stone v. Bancroft, Compilation," 20–21.

⁴⁷¹ Though undated, the pamphlet identifies the History Company as both its publisher and as the publisher of the histories, meaning that the new History Company created this sometime after its formation in 1886 in order to push anew its historical series as a complete, unbroken series. The History Company, *Bancroft's Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold Except as a Complete Unbroken Series* (San Francisco: The History Company, [188–]). At least one copy of the pamphlet has survived at the San Francisco Public Library. Paul Bancroft, "Scrapbooks, 3 Volumes" 1880–1915, San Francisco and California Scrapbooks Collection, San Francisco Public Library. San Francisco History Center.

subtext of patronage that had underpinned the early publication campaign. First, the histories stood as a monument not only "to the literary genius of the United States," but especially "to this section of the country." "Hence, we of all people in the world," it continued, "should be depended upon to appreciate the requirements of Mr. Bancroft's plan in writing and the policy of his publishers in publishing." It concluded the first appeal by asking: "if we do not enter into the spirit of his undertaking, to whom may we look for that generous and substantial endorsement which it requires?"⁴⁷²

Second, the company asserted, "the value of a book depends upon the number of those who read and study it." The unmatched scope of Bancroft's *Works* granted greater prestige to each of its constituent parts than any could garner on their own, much the same way that recognizing a constellation transforms unassuming stars into something more. In a biblical allusion that transformed Bancroft's *Works* into a historical gospel, the pamphlet argued for the inherent good in placing the "priceless annals of each of these several communities . . . before the citizens of each and every other one to which it is historically related," rather than leaving each state's history "hid away under its own bushel."⁴⁷³ Inclusion within the historical constellation, therefore, better preserved and promoted the important histories of places like Utah not only on its own terms, but as a peculiar part of a larger whole.⁴⁷⁴

Finally, those who had already invested their lives and money developing the

⁴⁷² The History Company, *Bancroft's Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold Except as a Complete Unbroken Series*, 3-4.

⁴⁷³ The History Company, *Bancroft's Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold Except as a Complete Unbroken Series*, 4.

⁴⁷⁴ The History Company, *Bancroft's Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold Except as a Complete Unbroken Series*, 4.

Pacific Coast stood to gain materially by supporting the histories, which would do much to promote further investment in the coast. Of course, that positive impact would only multiply with the degree to which “his writings” were “acknowledged and accepted as authority.”⁴⁷⁵ Every subscription bolstered that claim. In an argument that made the plea for patronage more explicit even as it acknowledged that Bancroft had previously been his own patron, the pamphlet cited the company’s “unceasing labor of mind and body” as well as Bancroft’s “sacrifice of personal estate unhesitatingly made.” Could any “broadguage [sic], enterprising, intelligent, and public-spirited men of the West . . . being abundantly able to afford the expense, refuse to co-operate with the historian to the extent of one subscription to his complete work? It would seem in such a case that not to accept the work as a whole, or to refuse to give cheerful support to the enterprise as it is, would be nothing less than failure to acknowledge a palpable obligation. A subscription to Bancroft’s works by any gentleman whose interests come within the scope of his pen,” the pamphlet concluded, “is in reality only the partial repayment of a debt our people owe him.”⁴⁷⁶ The company had spent the years prior to 1886 selling the *idea* of patronage by evoking an older subscription model even as it quietly subsidized the histories internally. After the fire, it attempted to graft a plea for retroactive patronage onto the more lucrative subscription model of the late nineteenth century. It found just enough success to be its undoing.

Mounting financial woes did eventually break the series. Combined with the sort

⁴⁷⁵ The History Company, *Bancroft’s Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold Except as a Complete Unbroken Series*, 4.

⁴⁷⁶ The History Company, *Bancroft’s Works: Why They Cannot Be Sold Except as a Complete Unbroken Series*, 4.

of interpersonal strife that one might expect to build up among people over a decade spent deeply invested in the same project, sharing a small workspace and a collective mind, the company broke, too. Sometime between the summers of 1887 and 1892, the History Company sent out confidential notices stating that it intended to break the set.⁴⁷⁷ The extant letters ostensibly responded to the opinions of the company's "patrons" and "the wishes of the people" in offering a single volume *History of British Columbia* for sale "throughout the British-America provinces, a three volume *History of Central America*, and a standalone *History of Alaska*."⁴⁷⁸

Though promotional materials continued to emphasize the significance of the prodigious set and their desirability as a unified whole, by around 1890 sales materials increasingly focused on pitching individual volumes or miniseries to particular audiences. The announcement that *Literary Industries* would be sold on its own, for instance, reduced the *Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* to a heading over a list of discrete series—*The History of Oregon* (2 volumes) or *Popular Tribunals* (2 volumes)—by the same author.⁴⁷⁹ A flyer targeted at Mormons in Utah reminded them that Bancroft's was "the only completed *History of Utah* which has the endorsement of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," being also the only authoritative, single-

⁴⁷⁷ Four of these confidential letters survived in a scrapbook compiled by Hubert Bancroft's son Paul Bancroft. Though the datelines remain blank, the letterhead places the History Company at its rebuilt Market Street location, the aptly-named History Building, which opened late in the summer of 1887. Bancroft and Morrison promptly removed Stone from the letterhead upon deposing him in May 1892, placing the composition of the letters between those years. The standalone publication of *Literary Industries* in 1891 already listed individual volumes and discrete state and regional series available. Bancroft, "Scrapbooks, 3 Volumes." Similar scrapbooks tied to Griffing and Phillip Bancroft reside at the Bancroft Library, and at least Griffing's contains the same letters. "History Company Records," Volume 11.

⁴⁷⁸ Bancroft, "Scrapbooks, 3 Volumes."

⁴⁷⁹ "History Company Records," Volume 34.

volume history of the territory. The flyer added that, “on account of the fame of the author and the reasonable price at which the work has been placed on the market,” it was “selling heavily outside of Utah as well.” Like the ostensible material impact of the full set on the Pacific Coast, “every copy sold to those outside of the territory has a direct bearing on the welfare of Utah,” the flyer asserted boldly, concluding that it deserved Utahns’ “liberal patronage.”⁴⁸⁰ Even as Bancroft and company came to terms with the division of their *Pacific States Histories*, they maintained the same logic and language of patronage that assumed the histories and their success to be a public good for the region, even if it had become increasingly fragmented.

The intellectual network that produced Bancroft’s library and histories came apart like it had gone together. No single decision to support the company had guaranteed its success, even if some had helped disproportionately. Similarly, neither did any individual choice to divest from the company nor any external force—no matter how catastrophic—singlehandedly doom the company. As crises threatened the project, dissension arose between highly-interested parties who did not agree on how to save the collective enterprise in which they had all invested so much of themselves. As more things went wrong, the infighting only increased.

Catalyzed by the heat of the flames, the company’s business model subtly transmuted from an older system of subscription patronage into the blatantly capitalist subscription publishing economy of the Gilded Age just when the public was definitively turning against that publishing model. At nearly the same moment, the new cohort of academics began to associate the modest economic security of the professoriate as a

⁴⁸⁰ “History Company Records,” Volume 12.

guarantor of objective scholarship because the modest, steady living isolated academics from the whims of the fickle public.⁴⁸¹ The market forces within the knowledge industry had shifted. With that transformation, the kinds of isolated criticism advanced by outliers like Bierce and Morgan exploded into widely held public sentiments that soon seemed positively natural.

In a company still populated by a high proportion of relatives from a handful of families, complicated lines of loyalty and filial frustration created even more fault lines. Along with the unhappy split between Hubert and his younger brother Albert, a few of Bancroft's nephews took the fire as an opportunity to strike out on their own. Not only did the History Company form without several key employees of A. L. Bancroft & Company, it also had the most experienced and tenacious young competitors it had faced in years in San Francisco.⁴⁸² When Morrison and Bancroft turned against Stone, they lost another family. His brother Fred Stone had headed the law department and eventually went to work for the competing Bancroft-Whitney Company. Stone's niece Nyna Hambly worked at the company as a stenographer and typewriter. She married another employee, H. B. Hambly, and both of them offered damning testimony against Bancroft on Stone's behalf.⁴⁸³ Stone eventually prevailed in his case. Not only did the History Company lose the work he might have performed pushing the histories in the early 1890s, it ended up having to pay him \$4,900 in lost wages, plus seven percent interest per annum, adding an

⁴⁸¹ On the former, see Gitlin, "Great Readers of Men"; For more on the latter, see Novick, *That Noble Dream*.

⁴⁸² Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*, 311–12.

⁴⁸³ "Stone v. Bancroft, Compilation," 85–87, 92–97.

additional \$378.⁴⁸⁴

Before the fire, Bancroft and his closest collaborators had committed themselves to ensuring that nothing would prevent the completion of their histories. Afterward, they adapted in order to ensure the same. They succeeded. Not only did they complete the series, they kept the library safe from fire and water until Bancroft found a permanent preservation solution. Considering their financial straits, that success was nothing short of miraculous. Fate smiled upon some of them much kindlier than others, a disparity of outcomes that was quickly exacerbated by the difficult depression of the 1890s. At least in part, the wealth gap that came to sharply divide the proprietor from his assistants and customers after the close of the campaign violated the nascent expectations for scholars. Going to court against former employees and customers alike in order to deprive the former of wages or to extort unpaid subscriptions from the latter proved particularly distasteful. After a decade of buying the positive reputation he and his *Works* needed in order to survive in the changing genre of history, Bancroft lost his financial security at the very moment he began to consider retirement. By the romantic expectations regarding authorship that had mostly solidified by the 1890s, Bancroft had gained the world and lost his soul in search of a secure retirement.

⁴⁸⁴ “Stone v. Bancroft, Compilation,” 16.

EPILOGUE

BREAKING COMPANY

He did not lie for gain; indeed, should so unpalatable a thing as truth ever force his lips you might suspect something of personal benefit at the bottom of it. In his economy of deceit he would not waste a good falsehood upon himself. Reversing Byron's statement, the truth with him was a lie in masquerade.

—Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Literary Industries*

I was reluctant to take any step that might seem to throw discredit on a work in which I had toiled so long, with an interest much deeper, I believe, than is generally shown by a hireling. Strongest of all was the doubt that might be entertained by the class of men whose approval I most desired, as to my right to reveal the truth respecting an enterprise in which I had worked for a salary, with knowledge that my services would not be fully acknowledged . . . but with all the facts in evidence the literary public—or that infinitesimal part of it that may read these pages—will decide whether I am right or wrong; and I must abide by the decision.

—Henry Lebbeus Oak, “Literary Industries” in a New Light

For a moment between 1901 and 1902, two lives, two historical professions, and two knowledge industries occupied the same boardinghouse in Portland, Oregon. One was the recent Stanford alumnus and native Oregonian William Alfred Morris, then a high school history and Latin teacher. He had graduated from Stanford University in 1901 and would enter Harvard University in Autumn 1904 in pursuit of a PhD in history. After taking his degree and a brief stint as instructor of European history at the University of Washington, Morris went on to a long and distinguished career as a professor of history at the

University of California.⁴⁸⁵ Morris was among the founding generation of academic historians. Thanks to their shared accommodations, Morris could count among his teachers a prolific historian of the old order: Frances Fuller Victor.⁴⁸⁶ She inculcated in him an appreciation for the discipline of history even as she explained to him how she and so many others had made history in Bancroft's company.

When Victor died in 1902, she had never received full public recognition for her most important authorial work. Morris hoped to fix that. In an essay in the *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* titled "The Origin and Authorship of Bancroft's Pacific States Publications," Morris detailed the collaborative research and writing process that had produced Bancroft's *Works*. While it had been relatively well known in the 1880s and 1890s that Bancroft had employed a team of researchers and writers in order to complete the prodigious series, that fact had been largely forgotten after 1900. The lingering memory of the intellectual network and industrial means of production that had made the company so successful had come to work against the reputation of the company and its histories by the turn of the century. "A little knowledge on this point," Morris lamented in that article, "has proved a dangerous thing for the reputation of the histories."⁴⁸⁷

Less than two decades after Bancroft & Company had touted its economies of scale and the industrial methods they enabled to great success, Morris attempted to explain the same system and its once obvious advantages to a very different public, or set of publics.

⁴⁸⁵ "Summer Session: June 23 to August 2, 1913," *University of California Bulletin*, Third Series, 6, no. 9 (1913): 26; University of California (System) Academic Senate, "1946, University of California: In Memoriam" 1946, pt. William Alfred Morris, History: Berkeley, UC History Digital Archives, UC Berkeley, University Archives, <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/hb300004ss/>.

⁴⁸⁶ Mills et al., *Frances Fuller Victor*, 390.

⁴⁸⁷ Morris, "The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications," 293.

Academic professionalization had made individual training and credentials the primary guarantor of a professional historian's objectivity, thereby making simple and transparent identification of authorship the chief criterion of a new historical epistemology.⁴⁸⁸

Conditioned to expect a simple relationship between a professional historian and a scholarly work of history, a "little knowledge" about the corporate authorship of Bancroft's *Works* had done their reputation no favors. A lot more knowledge helped even less.

Morris' attempt to save the collective reputations of his friend Victor and the company's other corporate authors established a sort of miniature genre that would endure for over a century. The foregoing dissertation might be called its most recent contribution. Writing in the tradition Morris established, academic historians have periodically attempted to translate the company's methods into terms amenable to those conditioned by the new academic knowledge industry to expect individual geniuses to write history.⁴⁸⁹ Two things stand out in that body of literature. First, its contributors have tended to treat the industrial means of production that the company had once proudly proclaimed to great effect as a new discovery of a long-hidden secret. Second, the company's latter-day champions have struggled mightily—and usually in vain—to redeem those methods. Even the most sympathetic of explanations have failed to render Bancroft's methods or its public legible in our present knowledge industry.

No one remembers the moment of forgetting; it is an act that always effaces itself.

⁴⁸⁸ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 47–48.

⁴⁸⁹ The principal works in this genre are: Morris, "The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications"; Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*; Clark, *A Venture in History*; David D. Smits, "Hubert Howe Bancroft and American Social Science, 1874–1918" (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1973); Peterson, "Hubert Howe Bancroft: First Western Regionalist." Arguably, this dissertation and my larger research project constitute the most recent installment in this enduring body of literature.

So, too, is the onset of the collective amnesia concerning Bancroft & Company's methods lost to history. The academic professionalization of knowledge that accompanied the modern research university constituted one aspect of a larger bureaucratization that began to remake American public life around the turn of the twentieth century. The new organizational structure and its growing professional class closely linked individual training, education, credentials, and occupations to the legitimacy of cultural, political, and intellectual authority. That movement subtly restructured expectations regarding public-minded institutions. The resulting academic profession has claimed almost exclusive purview over telling that story, recounting a rehearsed professionalization narrative more akin to a creation myth than to a history of the transformation of one knowledge industry out of another. As a result, Bancroft & Company, its methods and the market in which it sold them to such great success, has become an enigma, apparently devoid of historical context.⁴⁹⁰ The forgoing study has attempted to fix that by presenting Bancroft's History Company as a highly successful operation created within the knowledge enterprise of the forgotten industry that made and disseminated knowledge before the research university.

The shift in public opinion allows for the partial reconstruction of the act of forgetting that separates our present knowledge industry from its forgotten predecessor.

⁴⁹⁰ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York City: Hill and Wang, 1966); L. Galambos, "The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History," *The Business History Review* 44, no. 3 (1970): 279-290; Robert D. Cuff, "American Historians and the 'Organizational Factor,'" *Canadian Review of American Studies* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1973): 19-31; Louis Galambos, "Technology, Political Economy, and Professionalization: Central Themes of the Organizational Synthesis," *The Business History Review* 57, no. 4 (1983): 471-93; L. Galambos, "Recasting the Organizational Synthesis: Structure and Process in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries," *The Business History Review* 79, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 1-38. For the specific influence of Progressive Era professionalization in the academic historical profession, see Novick, *That Noble Dream*; and Townsend, *History's Babel*.

In the case of Bancroft's *Works*, the public's amnesia seems largely to have proceeded by people hearing what they expected to hear regarding a premier intellectual producer of the Pacific Coast. "Nowhere," Morris reminded his readers, had Bancroft made "an unequivocal claim to the authorship of the works which have been published under his name." But by 1900, Morris asserted, "in the minds of the great number, Hubert Howe Bancroft is the historian of the Pacific states for just the same reason that George Bancroft is the historian of the United States."⁴⁹¹ Having accepted Bancroft as the only historian of their coast, the public had implicitly reimagined the intellectual industrialist according to the emerging scholarly persona of the professional historian. Bancroft had hardly tried to correct the error; he even encouraged it in *Literary Industries*. Even in that volume, though, he did less to assert his own authorship than to imply it, letting his public fill in the blanks according to their nascent expectations. The collective outrage felt upon discovering Bancroft had never been that kind of scholar reveals more about the rapid and definitive restructuring of expectations than it does about Bancroft or his company. In that new knowledge industry, the company's crowdsourcing, its assembly line approach to research and writing, and its subscription publication all rapidly changed from positive characteristics into scandalous deviations from the norms of professional historians. What had once guaranteed to so many potential investors and subscribers that Bancroft's enterprise was worthy of whatever they had to give had no place in the new industry, dominated by lone geniuses who pointed to their hard-won expertise and the comfortable salaries that together ensured not only that they could recover historical truth, but that they had no reason to do so with anything less than disinterested objectivity.

⁴⁹¹ Morris, "The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications," 292.

Throughout the twentieth century, critics and advocates of Bancroft's *Works* obsessed over his authorship. Writing in forums that ranged from newspapers to academic journals, their assessments gravitated toward two poles. In either case, they assumed that texts, authors, and literary value were inseparable. Some represented Bancroft's actions as the blatant misappropriation of intellectual property and authorial reputation rightfully belonging to the *real* authors, who were always imagined according to the Romantic archetype: individual geniuses working independently only to be robbed of their authorial labors by the mean capitalist Bancroft. To others, the *Works* amounted to nothing more than the endless rambling of whatever hack writer had agreed to take hold of the pen for the lowest wage that week. Both interpretations shared an underlying conception of authorship that linked texts to authors in a natural way, but that also treated authorial reputation as necessary criteria for making literary and epistemological judgments about any text. Any explanation of authorship more complicated than the simple preposition "by" almost guaranteed more problems; the lengthy explanations Morris or Oak offered to explain the authorship of Bancroft's *Works* proved truly damning.⁴⁹²

By 1893, the History Company's nearly-forgotten writing corps appeared to be in revolt. That year Oak published "*Literary Industries*" in *a New Light*, a rebuttal to Bancroft's *Literary Industries* while Victor displayed the four volumes she had written in their entirety as her own at the San Francisco winter fair.⁴⁹³ Both Oak and Victor retitled their respective eleven and four volumes as *The Works of Henry L. Oak* or *The Works of Frances Fuller Victor*. When they did, they also told a lie that differed more in degree than

⁴⁹² Oak, "*Literary Industries*" in *a New Light*.

⁴⁹³ Clark, *A Venture in History*, 148; Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*, 266.

in type from the one told by their boss in *Literary Industries*. Victor, at least, knew that. “It seems not only just, but necessary to affix my name to at least four volumes of the History of the Pacific States,” her display explained, “although that does not cover all the work done on the history by myself. The four volumes referred to comprise the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, and Nevada. My name is therefore placed on the backs of these volumes without displacing that of Mr. Bancroft.”⁴⁹⁴ Missing, of course, were the names of the many lesser research and writing assistants who had helped Oak and Victor to write their volumes. Though their antics seemed to confirm for later historians the notion that the company’s real authors were possessive of *their* works, neither Oak nor Victor had ever had the luxury of holding such rigid, moralistic notions about authorship. Both of them had knowingly done their life’s work under someone else’s name in order to make a steady living by the pen.

When they attempted to extricate their works from Bancroft’s *Works* after the fact, Victor and Oak each made a calculated decision that they had more to lose by continued association with the company than they did from whatever scandal might ensue from their public break with Bancroft. Oak wrote the seeming tell-all that exposed the corporate authorship of the *Works*. But Oak did less to assert his own authorship than to try to distance the histories from Bancroft’s declining reputation. The Dartmouth man must have seen the world changing sooner and more clearly than his boss. He feared Bancroft’s self-aggrandizement would turn already skeptical scholars—“that class of men whose approval I most desired”—into outright enemies.⁴⁹⁵ Further, “Mr. Bancroft,” Oak

⁴⁹⁴ Morris, “The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications,” 345.

⁴⁹⁵ Oak, “*Literary Industries*” in *a New Light*, 6–7.

claimed, “was regarded as a selfish and cold-blooded man. He apparently made few friends and many bitter enemies,” many of whom had come to denounce him publicly.⁴⁹⁶

Bancroft and Oak pursued contradictory schemes to the same end: Both attempted to adapt the collaboratively-written works to the new era by constructing a genius author for them. Bancroft and Oak both assumed that by the 1890s, such a superlative historical series required a genius author to support its reputation. For his part, Bancroft invented a largely fictional character in *Literary Industries*. Bancroft’s genius embodied the Romantic ideal of the author. He was a lone scholar who eschewed wealth, writing for art at a personal financial loss. Generously, Bancroft lent the literary genius his own name and face. Oak, on the other hand, hoped to win the respect of his two diverging audiences by selling a more subtle and humble genius, one constructed out of the collective intellect of the company’s talented researchers and writers collaborating in harmony. Both strategies derived directly from the respective personalities and salesmanship of their proponents.

They also shared a sense that readers had come to expect something in their authors that the company had not prepared to deliver in the previous decades, at least not without a bit of creative salesmanship.⁴⁹⁷ Both Bancroft and Oak’s geniuses essentially repackaged aspects of the older subscription model that had once elicited such fervent public support for the new market. Bancroft’s fictive version of Hubert Howe Bancroft recalled the longstanding narrative of his altruistic patronage of his own histories at great personal loss. Oak, on the other hand, revisited the intellectual possibilities opened up by collaborative research and writing, a collective genius that had been only occasionally

⁴⁹⁶ Oak, “*Literary Industries*” in *a New Light*, 11.

⁴⁹⁷ Christine Haynes, “Reassessing ‘Genius’ in Studies of Authorship: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 8, no. 1 (2005): 287–320.

marred by lesser writers. If Bancroft's genius truly towered over his assistants and their lesser skills, Oak reasoned, then Bancroft could only benefit by the full and public division of authorial credit.⁴⁹⁸

Tempers flared, but not over stolen authorship. Oak and Victor complained of the misuse of their written work, of Bancroft's squandering of the public trust they and the rest of his coalition had meticulously built. They had received clerk's wages in exchange for writing history with felicity and fidelity ten hours per day, six days per week for years. They had done that in order to see their intellectual and literary labors included in a historical series beyond comparison. Bancroft's demotion of them to mere "assistants" in *Literary Industries* was certainly an insult, but the injury came in his attempt to capitalize on their collective reputation in order to spin off a series of lucrative mug books that would enrich only him at the risk of his reputation, which was not his alone to risk.⁴⁹⁹

Bancroft's money grubbing could hardly have come at a worse time. By 1893, subscriptions were declining in public reputation. By then, "not even the Bible, or any other of the best works ever written," Oak believed, "could be thus sold without arousing a storm of popular dissatisfaction; but of such works the authors are not, as a rule, also the publishers, and they may therefore, for the most part escape from the storm. Mr. Bancroft succeeded in his chief purpose, as, perhaps, few other men could have done—but at a sad

⁴⁹⁸ Oak, "Literary Industries" in *a New Light*, 6.

⁴⁹⁹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Chronicles of the Builders of the Commonwealth: Historical Character Study*, 7 Volumes (San Francisco: The History Company, 1891–1892); Clark, *A Venture in History*, chap. IX "A Sequel to the Works." On the history of vanity biographies in general and in which Bancroft's mug books play a prominent role, see Oscar Lewis, "Mug Books: A Dissertation Concerning the Origins of a Certain Familiar Division of Americana," *Colophon: A Book Collector's Quarterly* 17 (1934): 119–26; and Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 300–301.

cost to his contemporary reputation.”⁵⁰⁰ According to this veteran of subscription publishing, perceived abuse of that aggressive marketing tool had extinguished the public memory—seemingly even Oak’s recollection—of the previous culture of subscribing and its positive associations with patronage. Both subscription publishing and the *Works* had fallen victim to their own prodigious successes.

Bancroft’s attempts to multiply that financial success only exacerbated the condition. By aggressively selling vanity biographies in its *Chronicles of the Builders* sequel series, Bancroft & Company contributed to the growing public exhaustion regarding subscriptions, but selling vanity biographies obviously also threatened the fragile public perception of the related histories and the research canvass that had produced them. Many people retroactively judged the older histories according to the later scheme. According to Morris, many had come to believe “that those who prepared narrations for Mr. Bancroft were writing history for him to publish, and that persons not connected with the Bancroft library were authors of parts of the work.”⁵⁰¹ As a result, the plea for patronage and the liberal interpretation of who could tell history that had once bolstered the company’s image came to look like blatant greed at best, and like the cynical sale of historical legacies to the highest bidder at worst.

With the subscribers and writers who had invested so much into the histories in apparent public revolt against Bancroft & Company even at the risk of devaluing their investments, public support for the company by scholars quietly evaporated. The decline in public support came as the result of another sense of Bancroft’s protracted abuse of

⁵⁰⁰ Oak, “*Literary Industries*” in *a New Light*, 13; Gitlin, “Great Readers of Men.”

⁵⁰¹ Morris, “The Origin and Authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States Publications,” 293.

supporters' goodwill. As early as 1882, the venerable historian of the amateur age Francis Parkman had corresponded with Oliver Wendell Holmes concerning Bancroft's aggressive pursuit of public adulation. In response to a letter from Holmes, Parkman wrote, "H. H. Bancroft and his books have great merits and great defects. In the case of the man, these defects are self-laudation and a pushing disposition. I reviewed some of his early vols. but have no time to do more. I don't know why he should expect you to find a trumpeter for him, and in your place, I should decline."⁵⁰² Throughout the rest of the 1880s, the company had only further pushed the limits of the public goodwill.

At the same time, the emergence of academic scholars began to restructure expectations concerning intellectuals across North America and Europe. Professionalization increasingly established a certain indifference—perhaps even antagonism—to common readers, the mass market, and the financial gain they promised as a central component of the scholarly persona.⁵⁰³ As a result, the new academic knowledge industry not only made support for humanistic knowledge production outside market capitalism possible, it made engagement with that market increasingly distasteful. The erasure of the marketplace of ideas had longstanding consequences. It has obscured the intersection between culture, capitalism, and ideas that structured the exchange between Bancroft & Company and its many supporters.

That collective amnesia has legitimized and delegitimized certain knowledges. It has privileged academic discourses over popular ones. Nowhere is that more evident than in the place of Bancroft's *Works* in western history and historiography. By 1890, Bancroft &

⁵⁰² Parkman to Holmes, May 28, 1882; Parkman, *Letters of Francis Parkman*, 2:151.

⁵⁰³ Hesketh, "Diagnosing Froude's Disease"; Pfitzer, *Popular History and the Literary Marketplace*, 9–10.

Company had sold thousands of full sets of its *Works* to subscribers all over North America and Europe. It had built a nearly priceless library, a fact that made it exceptionally hard for its proprietor to sell. Bancroft had cemented his place in western history as its primary source base. The strength of his library and its accessibility in condensed form through the ubiquitous reprints of the *Works* meant that western historians in the twentieth century continued to echo the narrative structure of Bancroft's histories. The western historian Earl Pomeroy lamented in 1960 that Bancroft's Pacific States Histories had established the central themes of western history, their proportions within that genre, and the dates of study, for both good and ill.⁵⁰⁴ Pomeroy suggested that western historians could address the "cultural lag in Pacific historiography" by following Bancroft's example in spirit, though. Rather than accept the 1880s as the closing date for western history because Bancroft's *Works* and manuscript collection ended there, for instance, Pomeroy called for historians of his day to follow Bancroft's example in recording and writing western history up to the very recent past.

Pomeroy's essay reads like a prescient manifesto for the new western history written at least two decades too early; he differed from that later movement, however, by noting Bancroft's legacy even as he largely dismissed Turner from western history.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ "The shape of our regional and state history thus corresponds less to that of the profession as a whole," Pomeroy argued, "than to the proportions of the histories that Hubert Howe Bancroft published in the 1880's." Pomeroy claimed that Bancroft shaped Pacific historiography both by publishing its "raw material" and by establishing "the greatest of the libraries of Far Western History. He had made the Bancroft Library so strong, so nearly adequate in pioneer Pacific Coast history, that no university librarians could bring their holdings on the post-pioneer years to equal strength." Rather than follow Bancroft's lead in bringing their studies within decades of their present, later historians reproduced his end date in the 1880s. Pomeroy, "Old Lamps for New," 110–12.

⁵⁰⁵ In Pomeroy's later monograph, Turner's name appears only on one page and in two footnotes while Bancroft receives considerably more attention. Earl Spencer Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada* (Reno: University of

Patricia Nelson Limerick, by contrast, wrote her manifesto of new western history *The Legacy of Conquest*, in direct opposition to Turner's frontier thesis. Bancroft's earlier regional history of western North America remains fully absent from both editions of her book. Rather than a criticism of Limerick's admirable work, I mean only to suggest how completely Bancroft's enterprise has been erased from western historiography. Even Limerick, a committed public intellectual intent on separating western history from Turner's deeply problematic frontier thesis failed to see the connections between new western history and the popular, regional history of the transnational Pacific Coast that Bancroft & Company had made with and for an expansive public.⁵⁰⁶

In short, Bancroft's legacy and his ghost of a public remain invisible to western historiography, a spectre that haunts our field. Western historians have used Bancroft & Company's histories and library in their research, but they have disregarded the *Works* as a legitimate contributor to—or even progenitor of—western historiography. Even Pomeroy plainly asserted: “copying from Bancroft is not plagiarism; it is doing research from published notes and calendared sources. To ignore him is folly; to attempt alone to do again the research of his staff of assistants is impossible.”⁵⁰⁷ The means of his

Nevada Press, 1965), 175n4, 391, 392n4.

⁵⁰⁶ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*. I consider myself a historian of the new west and the present dissertation a contribution to that field. I am deeply sympathetic to its diagnosis of the problems of western history and to its prescription for the future. So while I use this example primarily to suggest the intellectual and historiographic consequences that have long endured as a result of our failure to understand knowledge production before academe on its own terms, this particular example has specific import to me. I am also a self-identified historian of the Pacific World. I believe that recognizing the longer and more complicated intellectual history of competing regionalisms offers an opportunity to reframe each of those fields as reinvigorations of a field of study that began with massive popular support from across western North America and beyond.

⁵⁰⁷ Pomeroy, “Old Lamps for New,” 111.

company's production permanently disqualified Bancroft's *Works* as western histories even for those hoping to establish a new field of western regional history remarkably similar to Bancroft & Company in its vision of the regional west and its orientation toward the public.⁵⁰⁸

Bancroft's examination of the contest over the transnational Pacific region, its convergence of diverse peoples, the tension between local diversity and overarching patterns, and its emphasis of violent conquest certainly shares a great deal in common with the outlook of the new western history.⁵⁰⁹ Bancroft's histories were hardly enlightened, prescient manifestations of the new western history a century too early. Still, they offer a highly popular antecedent to new western history that might inform the more recent revisionists' critique of the ostensible "old" frontier history. At the very least, the failure of the collective historical imagination to look to Bancroft's early, popular, regional history as a way to get past the stalemate in western history demonstrates the ways in

⁵⁰⁸ A successful and committed public intellectual, Limerick has consistently attempted to address the new western history toward a broader public, publisher her brief explanation of the movement in a popular magazine of western history, for instance. Patricia Nelson Limerick, "What on Earth Is the New Western History?," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 40, no. 3 (July 1, 1990): 61–64. Rather than ignoring Bancroft's enterprise for its popular origins and audience, then, perhaps new western historians merely missed their less obvious antecedent in their haste to assert a "new" line of inquiry. On the peculiar haste with which historians since the 1960s have ignored their own intellectual history in pursuit of ostensibly "new" histories, see Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past, 1880–1980* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰⁹ Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); David M. Wrobel, "Introduction: 'What on Earth Has Happened to the New Western History?,'" *Historian* 66, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 437–41.

which assumptions about scholars and their publics have structured the conversations we can and cannot have.⁵¹⁰

⁵¹⁰ While I have pillaged Corey Robin's 2015 S-USIH Keynote address for a working theory of how the act of writing can summon or disband publics, the substance of his address goes well beyond my usage and begins to address this point in the twentieth century. Robin examines how public intellectuals have come to accept the publics they believe they have been given rather than summoning publics that do not yet exist. Robin, "How Intellectuals Create a Public". This is meant only to be suggestive. The historian Kerwin Klein has done this work in much greater detail, intertwining the philosophy of history, intellectual history, and historiography, and the contest over western American history. Notably, his book mentions Bancroft only in passing as well. Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

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