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## Herbert Baxter Adams and the Study of Local History

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ON ARRIVING AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY when it opened in the fall of 1876, Herbert Baxter Adams's first task was to find something to do. A dapper young man of boundless ambition, his Heidelberg Ph.D. fresh in hand, Adams had the title of Fellow, a new position in America calling chiefly for the pursuit of research. In recruiting Johns Hopkins's original faculty, President Daniel Coit Gilman had failed to locate a professor of history or of social science. Instruction in history was placed in the charge of a part-time associate, Austin Scott, who commuted from Washington where he was the assistant to the great George Bancroft. Bringing over to Baltimore some books and manuscripts from Bancroft's library, Scott put his students to work on the genesis of the famous Ordinance of 1787. Adams was already formulating for himself a large agenda rooted in his graduate studies in Germany, but he could not resist an opportunity to be useful and to make a place for himself at Hopkins.<sup>1</sup> Plunging into Scott's documents, he focused unerringly on a problem of special interest to Marylanders. The result was a paper entitled "Maryland's Influence in Founding a National Commonwealth," which Adams read to the Maryland Historical Society in 1877 and later described, with characteristic satisfaction, as "the first original work done in the historical department of the Johns Hopkins University."<sup>2</sup>

Adams had discovered that Maryland's delegates to the Continental Congress framed the first formal proposal empowering Congress to define the western boundaries of the several states. According to the Maryland plan, Congress should erect new independent states in the transmontane region, where the charters of some of the original states created vast, conflicting claims. Adams's paper traced what he called "the sturdy opposition of [Maryland] to the grasping claims of Virginia and the larger States" until, in 1781, Maryland's demands were satisfied sufficiently to permit ratification of the Articles of Confederation. Thus, the young

<sup>1</sup> John Martin Vincent, "Herbert B. Adams," in Howard W. Odum, ed., *American Masters of Social Science* (New York, 1927), 105-07. This remains the best biographical sketch, but also see Hugh Hawkins, *Pioneer: A History of the Johns Hopkins University, 1874-1889* (Ithaca, 1960), 79-90, 171-73, 227.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, "The Germanic Origin of New England Towns," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* [hereafter, *JHUSHPS*], 1st ser., no. 2 (1882): 38 n.

historian proclaimed with italicized emphasis, "*Maryland laid the keystone of the Confederation and . . . of the American Union.*"<sup>3</sup>

He then drove home this rousing declaration with a lesson from the political science he had learned at Heidelberg. In the creation of a national government, Adams said, the community of material interests that arises from possession of a national domain is more fundamental than written constitutions. "No state without a people," the young historian intoned, "no state without land: these are the fundamental principles of political science and were recognized as early as the days of Aristotle."<sup>4</sup> Without the common interest that a national domain engendered, the feeble Confederation could not have become a national state. In short, Maryland's land policy established the material basis for an enduring nation. The substantial Baltimoreans who comprised Adams's audience must have smiled and nodded.

Adams's assiduous cultivation of the local history buffs who were already entrenched in Baltimore when he came to town has been forgotten. Adams is remembered only among professional historians, for whom he figures chiefly as the preeminent founder of their guild. When he arrived at Johns Hopkins, the teaching of history as a separate and distinct subject in American colleges and universities was just beginning. The writing of history was in the hands of local antiquarians, journalists, and a few gifted gentlemen like Bancroft and Francis Parkman. Adams took the lead in changing all that. Replacing Scott, he developed a famous seminar in which graduate students were taught a style of scholarship and acquired a corporate identity that separated them decisively from the amateurs who had long dominated historiography in America. Under Adams's inspiration, professional historians seized command of the field.<sup>5</sup>

Such is the conventional wisdom. Although not incorrect, it does not fit well with the tableau I have just sketched. If Adams intended to set out on a new course, why did he first choose to address the principal body of amateur historians in the vicinity and in terms obviously designed to reach their hearts as well as their heads? Why, furthermore, did he indulge in the kind of local boosterism—backed by facile analogies and far-fetched inferences—that was the stock in trade of all historical societies at that time? Why did this fugleman of scientific history start out with a calculated appeal to local pride?

These questions are difficult to answer so long as we insist on forcing Adams into the Procrustean mold of "the professional historian"—a type that did not exist when he defined his own role. So far as I know, Adams never described himself as a

<sup>3</sup> Adams, "Maryland's Influence upon Land Cessions to the United States," *JHUSHPS*, 3rd ser., no. 1 (1885): 29, 40. This is a reprint, with a more modest title, of the paper that first appeared in 1877 as a separate publication of the Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–51.

<sup>5</sup> My own account of the formation of the historical profession qualified the conventional disjunction between professional and amateur. But the reasons for the surprising overlap between the two categories in the late nineteenth century were left somewhat uncertain, as Laurence Veysey pointed out. The present essay examines the history Adams himself wrote, and the seminar he conducted. For a more specific explanation of his mediating role, see John Higham *et al.*, *History: Humanistic Scholarship in America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 8–16; and Veysey, "The Plural Organized Worlds of the Humanities," in Alexandra Olsson and John Voss, eds., *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860–1920* (Baltimore, 1979), 99.

professional historian, nor did he urge on others any spirit of professional autonomy. Instead of identifying Adams as the founder of a profession that succeeded, we might better conceive of him as the standard bearer of a cultural enterprise that failed. Much of Adams's energy went to forging a broad alliance between the teachers of history, whom he was training, and the much larger number of local historians, whose support he eagerly solicited and whose status as pillars of the community he yearned to share.

Both intellectual and personal inclinations qualified Adams to play a mediating role. Unlike the strictly academic historians who came after him, Adams never wanted to specialize, compartmentalize, or criticize. His teaching and lecturing ranged by his own choice across the history of ancient, modern, and Oriental civilizations.<sup>6</sup> His writing and editing aimed to put different things together. His personal style was conciliatory. A zeal to link and consolidate—combining the old with the new, the citizen with the teacher, and local history with the broadest currents of national and international life—explains the history that Adams himself wrote and the organizational initiatives he espoused.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF ADAMS'S DESIGN is essential to a comprehension of his failure. Not enough attention has been paid to the fact that Adams's own publications were quickly superseded and that the institutions he launched either declined or moved out of his control. The story of how all of this happened can throw some light on the split between amateur and professional historians that Adams tried, but failed, to prevent. To discover what went wrong with his organizational strategies, it will be useful to begin with his work as a scholar.

Adams did not follow up his early foray into the history of the public lands, although he encouraged some of his students to do so and thus deserves more credit for Frederick Jackson Turner's discoveries than he has customarily received.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Adams, as already suggested, conceived another program of research during his first months at Hopkins, if not before, and his first decade in Baltimore was devoted principally to the execution of that program. Its focus was the comparative study of local institutions in early America with the object of demonstrating deep underlying continuities in the character of the American people.

As Adams said later, his interest in the history of local self-government was awakened in one of his Heidelberg seminars by a historiographical controversy over the origins of early medieval towns. Some scholars claimed that the Italian

<sup>6</sup> W. Stull Holt, ed., *Historical Scholarship in the United States, 1876-1901: As Revealed in the Correspondence of Herbert B. Adams* (JHUSHPS, 56th ser., 1938), 146. On successive weeks Adams presented to his seminar papers on "Oriental Institutions of Learning"—which dealt with Egypt, the Jews, and India—and on "Confucius and Chinese Education." Records of the Historical Seminary, October 17-24, 1890, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md., Herbert Baxter Adams Papers [hereafter, Adams Papers], box 59. That Adams's catholic intellectual interests were not uncommon among the early professors of history has been amply demonstrated by Deborah Haines. See her "Scientific History as a Teaching Method," *Journal of American History*, 63 (1976-77): 892-912.

<sup>7</sup> Adams's enthusiasm for research in the "vast questions lying back of the disposal and settlement of our Public Lands" is evident in "Maryland's Influence upon Land Cessions," 5-6.

communes sprang from late Roman villas. Others, the Teutonists, argued that the liberties of the medieval town were derived from the ancient customs of Teutonic villages as described by Tacitus. According to this theory, the Germanic villagers regulated their own affairs through local assemblies. These communal, self-governing institutions antedated the feudal system and, here and there, survived its oppressive weight. Modern democracy, therefore, originated in the forests of Germany. Adams joined the Teutonists.<sup>8</sup>

Adams found the theory compelling not only because of the formidable scholarly authority of his German professors but also because of its adoption by leading English historians of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. John Kemble's influential book on Anglo-Saxon colonization in England depicted the Saxons as bringing with them from Germany the self-governing village community. Bishop Stubbs elaborated on the survival of local liberties beneath the feudal pyramid imposed by the Norman Conquest—liberties imbedded in such institutions as courts of the shire and the hundred. John Russell Green in 1874 spread these ideas before a very large American public. The opening pages of his *Short History of the English People*, the historical best seller of the Gilded Age, invested the Teutonist thesis with an unforgettable piety. "It is with a reverence such as is stirred by the sight of the head-waters of some mighty river that one looks back to these tiny moots, where the men of the village met to order the village life and the village industry, as their descendants, the men of a later England, meet in Parliament at Westminster, to frame laws and do justice for the great empire which has sprung from this little body of farmer-commonwealths."<sup>9</sup>

Both the English and the German Teutonists were engaged in defining their own national characters in terms of age-old customs organically rooted in local institutions and only gradually nationalized. The English historians gave this basically romantic theory a strongly libertarian inflection, which explains much of its appeal to upper-class Americans in the Gilded Age. Transposed to the United States, the Teutonist thesis said that American democracy was not a product of revolution, nor was it truly formulated in abstract doctrines concerning the rights of man. Instead, it was the distinctive ethnic heritage of a people who had learned self-government by running their own affairs and defending local liberties against centralized power.

Adams's contribution was simply to move the area of scholarly inquiry from the beginning of the Middle Ages to the beginning of American history. What Kemble and his successors had found in the early Saxon settlements in England, Adams set out to find in the early English settlements in North America. He went about the task with zeal and enthusiasm. His object was not to test a theory but to extend it, so, of course, he found what he was looking for.

Himself a New Englander of obscure but ancient lineage, Adams concentrated his own research on the towns of eastern Massachusetts. Teaching during the spring term at Smith College for several years enabled him to spend many months

<sup>8</sup> Raymond J. Cunningham, "The German Historical World of Herbert Baxter Adams, 1874–1876," *Journal of American History*, 68 (1981–82): 269–70.

<sup>9</sup> Green, as quoted in J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), 125.

in local archives. Adams felt confident, he told a friend in 1880, that his study of Plymouth "will be for town history what Huxley's work on the crawfish is for biology, i.e., typical of many things besides those described."<sup>10</sup> Adams never produced a major study of an individual town, nor did he write a solid book on any subject. But in 1882–83 he was able to publish in the first volume of the *Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Science* four essays on the survival and revival of early English institutions in the towns of New England. These essays, which he had already read before various local historical societies, were entitled "The Germanic Origin of New England Towns," "Saxon Tithing-Men in America," "Norman Constables in America," and "Village Communities of Cape Anne and Salem." All argued that ancient customs, long submerged in modern England, had reappeared on this side of the Atlantic in such practices as communal landholding, town meetings, the appointment of selectmen, and the building of stockades.

Today these essays by Adams seem as shallow as they are pretentious. He was not a first-class historical scholar, partly because he cared only about continuity and took no interest whatever in change and partly because he ignored any construction of evidence other than what his theory dictated. He never admitted, for example, that early colonial settlers had a more immediate reason for putting up palisades than the mysterious compulsion of their Saxon ancestry. Yet Adams's work was important, because it laid out an agenda for research that was intended to engage both the graduate students he trained and the local amateur historians with whom he constantly hobnobbed.

To the students Adams offered an introduction to historical research that would begin on their own home ground. On taking full charge of the Johns Hopkins Seminary in Historical and Political Science in the fall of 1881, Adams required that each graduate student undertake an original investigation into the institutional history of his or her own locality. These studies, Adams advised, should be broadly conceived to show how local phenomena provide a foundation for national and international life, but "the first step in History is to know thoroughly the district where we live."<sup>11</sup> Since Hopkins attracted students from all over the country, Adams was able to include in the first volume of the *Johns Hopkins Studies* papers on local government in Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, on parish institutions in Maryland, on old Maryland manors, and on the evolution of Connecticut from separate townships. Fortunately, Adams did not insist that his students specifically address the Teutonic thesis, but the spirit of their research was wholly consistent with it.

To the many local historical societies that proliferated in the post-Civil War decades, Adams proposed an agenda based squarely on what they were already doing.<sup>12</sup> The societies were dedicated to civic improvement under the leadership of

<sup>10</sup> Adams, as quoted in David D. Van Tassel, "From Learned Society to Professional Organization: The American Historical Association, 1884–1900," *AHR*, 89 (1984): 947.

<sup>11</sup> Adams, "Co-operation in University Work," *JHUSHPS*, 1st ser., no. 2 (1882): 48. Adams included a detailed account of the early years of the Hopkins seminar in *The Study of History in American Colleges and Universities* (United States Bureau of Education, Circular No. 2, 1887), 171–79.

<sup>12</sup> David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607–1884* (Chicago, 1960), 185–89. On the rise and character of the societies, also see George H.

a cultural elite and to the celebration of deeds and values the local communities cherished. Adams told the societies, in effect, that stories of individual achievement were necessarily episodic. To appreciate fully the continuity of past and present, local historians should study the origins of local institutions. The vast majority of available local histories, he declared in an early public address, ignore the most important question they should address: the genesis of the town as an institution.<sup>13</sup> To underline the significance of institutional origins, Adams brought one of England's foremost Teutonists, E. A. Freeman, to Baltimore in 1881 to lecture at the Peabody Institute. Freeman provided Adams with a prestigious endorsement of the notion that local institutions transmit the seeds of national character. The English migration to America in the seventeenth century, Freeman argued, revived local institutions that Anglo-Saxons had relied on in their migration to England in the fifth and sixth centuries. Consequently, an English heritage still remained in America "the kernel round which everything grows and to which everything else assimilates itself."<sup>14</sup>

While offering the conceptual stimulus of a wide-ranging, emotionally appealing theory, the Adams agenda also promised local historical societies a new infusion of energy. Keenly aware of the practical benefits to be gained through "associations of men and money" (as he confessed to Gilman),<sup>15</sup> Adams urged his students to be active in local organizations.

Local studies should always be connected in some way with the life of the community and should always be used to quicken that life to higher consciousness. A student, a teacher, who prepares a paper on local history or some social question, should read it before the Village Lyceum or some literary club or an association of teachers. If encouraged to believe his work of any general interest or permanent value, he should print it in the local paper or in a local magazine. . . . It is highly desirable that every paper which appears in connection with the Johns Hopkins University Studies should bear the stamp of corporate recognition by some worthy local organization. Such approval, and especially such preliminary publication, will introduce an unknown student to science with credentials from a local constituency.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, while Adams's historiographical program envisaged an eventual rewriting of national history in terms of local history, his organizational leadership pointed in exactly the same direction: to wit, a working partnership between the best of the local historians and the nationally oriented academics.

To understand the strength of this commitment, it is helpful to appreciate the common class standing that facilitated the partnership. Although most university professors, like Adams himself, came from relatively modest social backgrounds, they were routinely received into the social elite in the communities where they

Callcott, *History in the United States, 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore, 1970), 35-45; Joseph W. Cox, "The Origins of the Maryland Historical Society: A Case Study in Cultural Philanthropy," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 74 (1979): 103-16; and Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana, Ill., 1982).

<sup>13</sup> William E. Foster to Herbert Baxter Adams, August 29, 1881, Adams Papers, box 33.

<sup>14</sup> Edward A. Freeman, "An Introduction to American Institutional History," *JHUSHPS*, 1st ser., no. 1 (1882): 31.

<sup>15</sup> Holt, *Historical Scholarship in the United States*, 5. This entire letter describes Adams's relations with local and state historical societies in illuminating detail.

<sup>16</sup> Adams, "Co-operation in University Work," 51.

taught. Professors shared with the urban patrician class a common style of dignified dress, a common standard of gentlemanly behavior, a common Anglophile outlook, a common acceptance of an elaborate social hierarchy, and a common zeal to elevate and civilize a rough-hewn, overly materialistic people.<sup>17</sup> In mid-nineteenth-century America historical societies were foci of this kind of cultural leadership.

HAPPY TO BE A PART of so congenial a social milieu and supremely gifted in tact and diplomacy, Adams labored tirelessly to promote cooperation between the local cultural establishment and the emerging professoriat. His next initiative, after demonstrating his talents to the Maryland Historical Society, came as secretary of a historical and political science association that President Gilman launched in 1877.<sup>18</sup> This was intended as a forum for scholarly discourse open to a cultivated public. Taking advantage of the proximity of Washington, Adams frequently invited distinguished outsiders to address the association on matters of general cultural import. On replacing Scott as director of the seminar in history and political science, he continued the same practice. The association and the seminar coalesced. Thus, the famous Johns Hopkins seminar, in which aspiring college teachers were trained to search for new truth, also functioned as a place where nonacademic pundits could present their own investigations or simply talk about contemporary public issues.

Simultaneously Adams worked closely with the Maryland Historical Society and the Peabody Institute to quicken the study of Maryland history. As early as 1878 Adams was talking with "certain Baltimore gentlemen" about ways and means of persuading the state to publish some of its colonial records.<sup>19</sup> The Maryland Historical Society took up the issue. When Freeman came to lecture at Peabody, Adams extracted from him an open letter extolling the value of the unpublished archives in Annapolis and urging the Maryland legislature to underwrite their systematic publication. A letter-writing campaign in the Baltimore newspapers followed. In 1882 the state authorized just what Adams wanted: the transfer of the mass of colonial and Revolutionary archives from Annapolis to Baltimore and a subvention to the Maryland Historical Society for publication of these early records.<sup>20</sup> Largely through Adams's initiative and political skill, the historical society took a major step in the advancement of historical research, and the academic community at Hopkins gained immediate access to a magnificent corpus of sources for Maryland history.

Adams's best-known accomplishment as an entrepreneur of scholarship was the creation just one hundred years ago of the American Historical Association. This is often supposed to have been from the outset a determinedly professional body,

<sup>17</sup> Higham *et al.*, *History: Humanistic Scholarship in America*, 8–11. For perhaps the best statement of this common value system, see James Russell Lowell, "Harvard Anniversary Address," 1886, in *The Writings of James Russell Lowell*, 6 (Cambridge, Mass., 1890): 137–80.

<sup>18</sup> Records of the Historical and Political Science Association, Adams Papers, box 58. Also see Hawkins, *Pioneer*, 113–15.

<sup>19</sup> Records of the Historical and Political Science Association, March 29, 1878, Adams Papers, box 58.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, "Mr. Freeman's Visit to Baltimore," *JHUSHPS*, 1st ser., no. 1 (1882): 9–10.

aloof from the amateurs engaged in local, antiquarian work. But nothing was further from Adams's intentions. He ran the organization almost single-handedly for about a decade, and throughout that time he strove unremittingly to include and recognize the gentleman-historians and to serve and guide the local historical societies.<sup>21</sup>

The initial proposal for a national organization to promote systematic training and study in history came not from the Hopkins professor but from his namesake Charles Kendall Adams, the new president of Cornell University. It was H. B. Adams, however, who made the suggestion a reality. Because he sent out the call for an organizational meeting, he decided who the founders should be and served from the outset as secretary. Significantly, the first meeting consisted mostly of nonacademic historians, though the inner circle—a committee of five who drew up the constitution—was predominantly professional. The implicit theory of the association was that the professors would lead and yet welcome and honor outstanding amateur historians and seek to coordinate efforts of the many local historical societies.

It was not easy for Adams to balance the claims of professors and amateurs. After the annual meeting of 1888 a young professor complained, "There were more nobs than usual in attendance. . . . I am a little inclined to think the thing is getting into the hands of elderly swells who dabble in history, whereas at first it was run by young teachers, which I think made it more interesting."<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Edward Eggleston, an outstanding amateur historian, complained a year later that the American Historical Association "seems to be run in the interest of college professors only and to give those of us who are not of that clan the cold shoulder."<sup>23</sup> Still, there was a balance of sorts until 1895, when a group of university professors rebelled against Adams's leadership and turned the association in a more exclusively professional direction. They did so in two ways: first, by shifting the annual meeting from Washington, D.C., where amateur historians predominated, to various university campuses; second, by creating a new scholarly journal—the *American Historical Review*—that was placed under strictly professional editorship and removed from Adams's influence.

What occasioned this rebellion and the subsequent separation between the worlds of the amateur and the professional historian? It is hard not to believe that the separation was in large measure unavoidable. The young teachers of history—trained by Adams and others at the leading universities to search for undiscovered truth—could not identify themselves wholeheartedly with a local civic culture, as the physicians and lawyers of an earlier era had done. The academic historians were caught up in a new, disciplinary professionalism that invaded all fields of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> The new pattern transferred intellectual authority to clusters of

<sup>21</sup> Here I have followed, especially, Van Tassel's detailed account in "From Learned Society to Professional Organization."

<sup>22</sup> Jameson to John Jameson, January 5, 1889, printed in Elizabeth Donnan and Leo F. Stock, eds., *An Historian's World: Selections from the Correspondence of John Franklin Jameson* (Philadelphia, 1956), 46–47.

<sup>23</sup> Eggleston, as quoted in David D. Van Tassel, "The American Historical Association and the South, 1884–1913," *Journal of Southern History*, 23 (1957): 468.

<sup>24</sup> For Thomas Bender's interpretation of this transition, see "The Cultures of Intellectual Life: The City and



specialists, who fiercely insisted on autonomy in setting standards and validating results without regard for particular interests or local needs. Moreover, the professional communities did their best work by testing and elaborating recondite theories. Thus, the interpretations produced by professional historians assigned causal importance to processes more or less remote from the immediate experience that amateur scholars still found self-explanatory. The mix of local dignitaries and academic specialists that Adams tried to maintain was bound to break down.

Yet it was perhaps not inevitable that the separation between amateur and professional became, in the study of history, a yawning chasm. History is the least arcane of all sciences. It is preeminently the discipline in which dialogue between amateur and professional might have remained open and fruitful without compromising the distinctive purposes of either group. That was certainly Adams's intent, and he was adroit in pursuing it. Why did he fail?

One possible explanation may be the weakening of local ties and identities throughout much of American middle-class life in the first half of the twentieth century. The local community constituted the common ground on which academic and amateur scholars met. A shared affection for it was essential to their partnership. But the attachment of the young professional historian to a particular locality suffered as his reputation and advancement came to depend on a willingness to move to another university in another part of the country. The mobile professor necessarily invested his energies in the accumulation of an intellectual capital as portable as his family and personal possessions. Local history was literally left behind.

Similar pressures probably deprived local historical societies of nonacademic talent as well. Like the new disciplinary professions, the older gentlemanly vocations were drawn into national networks that reduced the importance of strictly local relationships. In the nineteenth century men at the top of the occupational structure in American cities were less likely than lower-status workers to move elsewhere. Their local interests were extensive, their ties with one another dense and varied. In the twentieth century the affluent strata of urban society have often become the most transient, and many of those who remain settled in one locality withdraw from active participation in local institutions as their careers and horizons move outward to wider but also more specialized connections.<sup>25</sup> It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that local history has actively engaged a smaller proportion of the talent and cultural leadership in many cities than it did in an earlier era.

Thus, I believe that the high level of geographical mobility and the accompanying development of translocal segmentation, which have characterized American

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the Professions," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), 181-95. For a later amplification, see Bender's "The Erosion of Public Culture: Cities, Discourses, and Disciplines," in Thomas L. Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 84-106.

<sup>25</sup> Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 228-30; and Donald A. Clelland and William H. Form, "Economic Dominants and Community Power: A Comparative Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology*, 69 (1963-64): 511-21. The persistence of a stable leadership in the midst of flux in the nineteenth century is explored in Richard S. Alcorn, "Leadership and Stability in Mid-Nineteenth Century America: A Case Study of an Illinois Town," *Journal of American History*, 61 (1974-75): 685-702.

middle-class life through most of the twentieth century, have been underlying reasons for a decline in the study of local history. But sociological interpretations never fully excuse us from looking at the imponderables of leadership in human affairs. The inducements of mobility within a national academic system hardly explain the suddenness with which Adams's plans for the promotion of local history collapsed. Adams was manifestly unable to resist effectively the abandonment of his program by his best students. His program failed, quite simply, from a lack of intellectual substance.

THE FIRST IMPLICIT CHALLENGES to the kind of local history Adams laid out as a model in 1881–82 came within two or three years from two of his most remarkable students. Woodrow Wilson arrived in Baltimore in the fall of 1883, the goal of his graduate training already firmly in mind. He wanted to continue the studies in comparative politics that he had begun as an undergraduate at Princeton, under the influence of Walter Bagehot, and had pursued independently for several years. His object was to assess the working of representative government in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere, with particular attention to the shortcomings of the American model. Dismayed to learn that all students were expected to dig “in the dusty records of old settlements and colonial cities” for the purpose of “rehabilitating in authentic form the stories . . . of the first colonists,” Wilson pleaded with Adams to be allowed to follow his own bent. Adams not only assented but told the startled and elated young man that the project he proposed was just what Adams wanted to see done.<sup>26</sup> Before the academic year ended Wilson read to Adams's seminar two stunning chapters from his forthcoming book, *Congressional Government* (1885). Wilson's approach to comparative problems diverged significantly ✓ from that of Adams, partly because Wilson focused on national rather than local government but even more because Wilson concentrated on differences between the United States and Britain rather than on similarities and continuities. Nevertheless, after Wilson's first seminar report Adams grandly commented that Wilson's studies of the national government were a valuable addition, “as this subject has long been intended to be a part of the work on institutions undertaken in this department.”<sup>27</sup>

Wilson's success may have encouraged another seminar member, John Franklin ✓ Jameson, to strike out on his own. Three years younger than Wilson, Jameson was less self-assured; he was also more dependent on Adams. Having submitted just the kind of dissertation Adams desired—a study of an early Long Island town—he had received his Ph.D. in 1882 and was then kept on temporarily as an associate while waiting for a suitable position to open up elsewhere. In the style of the German universities on which Hopkins was modeled, he was Adams's assistant. Jameson fumed in private at the frequent tedium of the Adams seminar and the lack of

<sup>26</sup> Wilson to Ellen Louise Axson, October 16, 1883, in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 2 (Princeton, 1967): 479–80. Also see Henry W. Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 57–64, 75–80, 95–113.

<sup>27</sup> Records of the Historical Seminary, May 8, 1884, Adams Papers, box 58.

sharp criticism; he grumbled when students obediently traced institutions "back nearly to when our ancestors chattered in the tree-tops."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, he thought it expedient at first to accept an assignment from Adams to investigate parallels between the village communities of the Teutonic race and those of the ancient Greeks.<sup>29</sup> After Wilson's dramatic assertion of independence, Jameson staked out a new area of historical research that would free him from discipleship and implicitly challenge Adams's Teutonism. In January 1885 the young associate read to Adams's seminar a series of papers arguing that a longstanding preoccupation with the colonial period, with local history, and with the more colorful episodes of national history had left the history of the states as the most neglected level of American history. State politics, Jameson contended, had given national politics their shape and direction, and local records should be used to illuminate these broader developments.<sup>30</sup>

Once again Adams imperturbably embraced the incipient rebellion. Addressing the seminar after Jameson delivered his second paper, Adams urged its members to take up the line of research his subaltern was recommending, since it would be an excellent means of demonstrating connections between Europe and America.<sup>31</sup> That was one of the last things Jameson had in mind. He was shifting attention away from remote European antecedents to the immediate origins of the new governments created during the American Revolution.<sup>32</sup> Adams's benevolent and irenic comment served, however, to bridge the gap between his own agenda and Jameson's, one rooted in the Old World, the other in the New.

Henceforth, it must have been clear that Adams would not actively defend the Teutonist thesis against rival approaches; instead, he would confer his approval on whatever new initiatives his students might take. After 1887 the number of contributions to American local history in the *Johns Hopkins Studies* markedly declined.<sup>33</sup>

The finest scholar of early American history who emerged from Adams's seminar was Charles McLean Andrews. No scoffer like Jameson, Andrews was fascinated by the Teutonist thesis but highly skeptical of the evidence for it. His doctoral dissertation examined minutely the founding of three Connecticut towns,

<sup>28</sup> Jameson to John Jameson, February 13, 1882, printed in Donnan and Stock, *An Historian's World*, 21. Also see *ibid.*, 22, 25 n., 26, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Freeman, "Introduction," *JHUSHPS*, 1st ser., no. 1 (1882): 14 n.; and Donnan and Stock, *An Historian's World*, 25 n.

<sup>30</sup> Jameson, "An Introduction to the Study of the Constitutional and Political History of the States," *JHUSHPS*, 4th ser., no. 5 (1886): 5-29.

<sup>31</sup> Records of the Historical Seminary, January 23, 1885, Adams Papers, box 58.

<sup>32</sup> Jameson's "Introduction" was not without influence in altering the tenor of the Adams seminar at Hopkins. Four years later Jameson was able to publish a volume of essays by Hopkins students, *Essays in the Constitutional History of the United States in the Formative Period, 1775-1789* (Boston, 1889). About the same time a similar paper by Albion Small, "Relations of the Continental Congress to the Colonies," happened to be presented to the seminar on an evening when Woodrow Wilson, then a visiting lecturer, attended. Wilson took the occasion to praise Small and to "deprecate . . . the study of our institutions from the European standpoint." Adams was absent that evening. One wonders if Wilson would have been less outspoken in his presence. Records of the Historical Seminary, March 8, 1889, Adams Papers, box 59. On the planning of Jameson's book, see Donnan and Stock, *An Historian's World*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Monographs dealing with particular localities were the predominant type only in the first four volumes of the *Johns Hopkins Studies* (1883-86). State and national studies predominated through the late 1880s and 1890s. Local history, feebly represented in the 1890s, thereafter disappeared.

concluding that they were not (as Teutonists supposed) the institutional "seeds" from which the commonwealth of Connecticut had sprouted.<sup>54</sup> Andrews then immediately moved back to the "village community" of the Anglo-Saxons, plunging fearlessly into a thicket of Anglo-Saxon and Latin sources. A modulated but decisive paper that he presented to Adams's seminar in 1890, a year after he had begun teaching at Bryn Mawr, showed that the very existence of self-governing communities of independent freemen, standing at the dawn of English and German history, was undemonstrable, improbable, and intellectually out of date.<sup>55</sup>

Andrews did not write as a lonely iconoclast. He drew on, and identified himself with, the best current scholarship in England, where opponents of the Teutonist thesis were rapidly gaining ground. Moreover, Andrews aimed his critique not at Adams but at the older generation of English historians, especially Freeman; he avoided all mention of the grandiloquent Teutonist essays his mentor had published just seven years before. Adams returned the kindness by urging his former student to expand the paper into a book and offering to publish it. Andrews eagerly complied. When *The Old English Manor* appeared as an extra volume in the *Johns Hopkins Studies* in 1892, Andrews wrote dutifully to his former professor, "I trust that you are satisfied with the work. . . . I feel sure it cannot be accused of being hastily put together or being based on second hand authorities."<sup>56</sup>

Andrews's expert demolition shattered whatever intellectual authority the Teutonist thesis still possessed. By doing so he deprived local history of its special significance as the source and seat of American freedom. Adams had mortgaged the study of local history to a flimsy, outmoded theory—a theory, moreover, that Adams had neither the stomach to defend nor the wit to revise. Is it any wonder that the search for significant themes in American history turned almost exclusively to the state, the national, and—among colonial historians—the imperial levels?

FOR ADAMS THE QUEST FOR GRAND THEMES in history was over. In the late 1880s and after, his own writing shifted principally to current problems in education and social reform. For the U.S. Bureau of Education he produced a number of studies of higher education in various states. In other publications he called attention to

<sup>54</sup> Andrews, "The River Towns of Connecticut: A Study of Wethersfield, Hartford, and Windsor," *JHUSHPS*, 7th ser., nos. 7–9 (1889): 8–9. Here Andrews's very limited and specific qualification of Teutonist thought was aimed at Alexander Johnston's essay, "The Genesis of a New England State," in the first volume of the *Johns Hopkins Studies*. For evidence of Andrews's filial attachment to Adams, see A. S. Eisenstadt, *Charles McLean Andrews: A Study in American Historical Writing* (New York, 1956), 9–10.

<sup>55</sup> Records of the Historical Seminary, December 5, 1890, Adams Papers, box 59. Andrews presented the same or a closely related paper to the American Historical Association later the same month and incorporated it into the introduction to *The Old English Manor: A Study in English Economic History* (Baltimore, 1892). See "The Theory of the Village Community," *Papers of the American Historical Association*, 5 (1891): 47–60. The Teutonist thesis was out of date, according to Andrews, because it rested on a romantic, idealized image of primitive man. This "liberal optimism," Andrews pointed out, had declined since 1870 as the world learned that humanity is "pervaded with brute instincts" and that "primitive man, whether he were Saxon, Teuton or Aryan, was very much lower down in the scale of human development than the older view was willing to place him." *Old English Manor*, 4. For an intriguing though complex interpretation of the difference between Adams and Andrews, see Dorothy Ross, "Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," *AHR*, 89 (1984): 927–28.

<sup>56</sup> Andrews to Adams, October 23, 1891, May 19, 1892, Adams Papers, box 53. The Teutonist theme in English historiography is treated in J. W. Burrow, "The Village Community' and the Uses of History in Late

many English initiatives in philanthropy and social betterment, encouraging his students especially to admire the historian *engagé* Arnold Toynbee, who founded the settlement movement by inducing Oxford graduates to bring "learning and civilization" to "a savage district" in East London.<sup>37</sup> One senses that Adams's increasing writing and public lecturing in behalf of genteel reform provided a new outlet for his enduring identification with a responsible civic elite when the promise of local history faded. Presciently he understood that the civic involvement his students and younger colleagues were giving up as scholars could be regained in some measure through reform.

By the end of the nineteenth century very few of the younger professional historians were taking an interest in local history or in the state and local societies that fostered it.<sup>38</sup> The societies for the most part were content to go their own way. Wisconsin was a notable exception. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin under Reuben Gold Thwaites developed a close, fruitful relation with the University of Wisconsin while also serving all of the historical interests of the people at large. Wisconsin's example gradually encouraged similar forms of cooperation between amateur and professional in other Midwestern states.<sup>39</sup> In the East, however, relations between the two groups may be judged from the content of a paper Jameson gave at the AHA meeting in 1897. He scolded the state and local societies for making much slighter contributions to knowledge than similar bodies in France and Germany, for having improved their publications only marginally in the past forty years, for ignoring everything that had happened since the American Revolution, and for "gross misuse" of their library funds to feed a ravenous interest in genealogy.<sup>40</sup>

It is unlikely that many local historians were on hand to hear Jameson's attack. The new policies inaugurated in 1895 had produced a dramatic increase in the number of academic members of the AHA and in the range of its academic services. The organization now belonged visibly and overwhelmingly to the professors. Adams acquiesced with his usual good nature in his loss of control over the association.<sup>41</sup> In 1900 he quietly resigned as secretary. Leadership in the historical guild passed into the hands of Jameson, who was the very incarnation of professionalism. To Jameson, for example, the "scientific society" was the true bastion of scholarship because it was "composed of specialists alone and working in unhampered devotion to intellectual ends," whereas the American university was

Nineteenth Century England," in Neil McKendrick, ed., *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in Honour of J. H. Plumb* (London, 1974), 255-84.

<sup>37</sup> Adams, "Notes on the Literature of Charities," in Charity Organization Society of Baltimore, *Report of a Conference on Charities* (Baltimore, 1887), appendix, and pp. 19-23. In 1889 the *Johns Hopkins Studies*, seventeenth series, led off with three inspirational articles about Arnold Toynbee, the settlement movement, and its recent introduction to the United States.

<sup>38</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, "The Functions of State and Local Historical Societies with Respect to Research and Publication," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1897* (Washington, 1898), 56.

<sup>39</sup> H. Hale Bellot, *American History and American Historians* (Norman, Okla., 1952), 26-35.

<sup>40</sup> *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1897*, 54-59.

<sup>41</sup> While Jameson was excoriating the local historical societies and their members, Adams was waving an olive branch. "Peace and harmony now reign throughout the American Historical Association," Adams wrote in his report of the annual meeting. "All recognize the wisdom of meeting in the West as well as in the East, with perhaps a triennial round-up in Washington." *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1897*, 9.

"a body of specialists ruled over by a body of 'prominent citizens.'"<sup>42</sup> As editor of the *American Historical Review* for more than a quarter of a century, Jameson vigilantly guarded its pages against the antiquarianism he thought almost inseparable from local history.<sup>43</sup>

Could a different approach to local history at the outset have mitigated this rupture? The question admits of no conclusive response, but it prompts a second question that suggests a feasible alternative. What kind of local history could have engaged amateur historians effectively and some professionals as well? The answer must surely be a narrative history of individuals and human endeavors rather than an impersonal history of institutions. A feeling for a specific theater of action and for the events it dramatizes has been the attraction and strength of amateur history from the time of Homer to the present. In promoting an institutional history that rested on arcane knowledge, a remote past, and fanciful theories, Herbert Baxter Adams offered to amateur historians a scheme of cooperation into which they could not fit.

Perhaps another kind of theory, more tangibly imbedded in the circumstances of American life, could have drawn the active support of amateur scholars. Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis may have accounted in part for the better rapport between academic and nonacademic historians in the Midwest. By focusing on the impact of the local environment, Turner confined causation to a sphere that local historians could comprehend. Teutonism offered them no comparable challenge. It moved the locus of causation out of a familiar habitat, back into an alien and uncertain past where no level-headed empiric wanted to follow. Some of the best of the local historians regarded Adams's Teutonism as symptomatic of the impractical theorizing to which academic scholars were prone. On returning from an early meeting of the American Historical Association, Mellen Chamberlain reported to the Massachusetts Historical Society that the "New Historical School" (which he identified with Freeman and Adams) consisted of "young men mainly of scholastic training, unacquainted with affairs and without opportunities for observing how the elementary facts which make history are colored and even transformed in legislative assemblies, by judicial decisions, and in the tumultuous proceedings of the crowd."<sup>44</sup> Chamberlain and the other speakers who responded to his paper agreed that the New England town meeting was not a primordial form but a modern, indigenous invention.

So the amateur and professional historians went their separate ways until, in recent years, many of the latter have begun to turn back to the local community. They have done so because the historical profession no longer tempts them away. Opportunities for moving onward and upward, from one locality to another, have sadly contracted. The intellectual appeal of national history has correspondingly waned. Once more the manageable scale and the immediate presence of a concrete

<sup>42</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, "The American Historical Association, 1884-1909," *AHR*, 15 (1909-10): 2.

<sup>43</sup> See Morey Rothberg, "To Set a Standard of Workmanship and Compel Men to Conform to It: John Franklin Jameson as Editor of the *American Historical Review*," *AHR*, 89 (1984): 957-75.

<sup>44</sup> *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd ser., 5 (1890): 265. For similar comments by Abner C. Goodell, Jr., see *ibid.*, 323-24; by Charles Francis Adams, Jr., see *ibid.*, 7 (1892): 207. I am indebted to Raymond Cunningham for bringing to my attention this extended discussion of the origins of the town meeting.

community is both intellectually attractive and emotionally engaging to many young historians. The "new" social history has revived the old promise of institutional history: the promise that community studies can illuminate the general contours of the past.

Revived, but not yet redeemed. Professional historians still bring to community studies a panoply of theories, and the theories still leave the general contours of the past uncertain. Amateur historians probably find the new concepts no more useful than were the doctrines of the Teutonist thesis. The state and local historical societies are now infiltrated by professional scholars who often manage their publication programs, but communication between amateur and professional remains difficult and tenuous. Compelling narrative history is still in short supply. It receives little encouragement either from the seminars of professionals or from the historical societies. Nevertheless, the wheel has come full circle. It is time once more to wrestle with problems that Herbert Baxter Adams failed to solve.

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