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## THE SEMI-COLON CLUB OF CINCINNATI

by **LOUIS L. TUCKER** Director of the Cincinnati Historical Society  
[Later: New York, ... then, Massachusetts Societies]

Among the holdings of the Cincinnati Historical Society<sup>1</sup> is a **box of manuscripts** containing 126 documents and a single volume of a short-lived magazine, titled *The Semi-Colon*.<sup>2</sup>

These two source materials represent the sole remains of the Semi-Colon Club, a literary society that flourished in Cincinnati during the **1830's** and **1840's**.<sup>3</sup> The activities of this club constitute a significant chapter in the **intellectual history of Cincinnati and the American West**.

In the three decades prior to the Civil War, Cincinnati was a Gulliver among western cities. It was not only a chief economic bastion but a cultural center, a regional capital of arts and science. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, **Lexington, Kentucky**, had been the focus of intellectual life in the West,<sup>4</sup> but by **1830 Cincinnati had wrested the crown of leadership from its Kentucky rival**. The upper Mississippi Valley and Ohio River Valley now lit their economic and cultural flame from a Cincinnati candle--literally, too, what with the enormous candle production in Cincinnati! It was for good reason that Cincinnati acquired the title "**Queen City of the West**." Cincinnati's importance as a manufacturing and commercial emporium has been detailed in a number of works, but surprisingly slight attention has been devoted to its cultural and intellectual activities and attainments.<sup>5</sup>

One plausible answer for this dearth of attention may be found in the image of Cincinnati projected in Mrs. Frances Trollope's celebrated *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). While Madam Trollope did find a few Cincinnatians who measured up to her high standards of literary refinement and social breeding, she indicted the city as an area populated by **boorish frontiersmen** who were disciples of Mammon and were **more intent on improving their bank accounts than their minds**. As she looked about, Mrs. Trollope found Cincinnatians actively employed in "search of that honey of Hybla, vulgarly called **money**."<sup>6</sup> (It could be added that she also joined in the search, but the honey of Hybla eluded her.) Madam Trollope's conception of Cincinnati has hung over American historiography with the persistence of a London fog.

In viewing Cincinnati, scholars have been unable to penetrate beyond its economic and commercial affairs. Like Madam Trollope, they **regard the city as blatantly commercial, noted for pork packing, candle production, and the roughest waterfront district in the Ohio River Valley**.

**In a study now in preparation**, I hope to survey the variegated cultural and intellectual life of Cincinnati in that period of its history (**1830-60**) when visitors equally as refined as Madam Trollope, but less given to hyperbole and less inclined to personal bitterness, described it in more glowing terms.<sup>7</sup> Even a letter to a Cleveland newspaper gratuitously conceded in 1837 that Cincinnati was rapidly becoming the "**Athens of the West!**"<sup>8</sup> This essay focuses on the **Semi-Colon Club**, which was one of the more important agencies in the veritable kaleidoscope of literary, cultural, and educational organizations which abounded in the city in the 1830-60 period.

The **Semi-Colon Club** owed its existence to the tremendous economic boom Cincinnati experienced during the "**Steamboat Age**." Manufacturing and commercial expansion, which was conjunctive with the revolution in transportation, produced the necessary conditions for a formal intellectual life. Almost overnight, a raw, primitive frontier village grew into a bustling, regional center. Even during its village phase, Cincinnati was blessed with a number of **men of substance who were as deeply committed to education and the life of the mind as they were to material success**. **Martin Baum**, the noted entrepreneur-patron of the arts, typifies the

enlightened business leadership of Cincinnati's early settlers. Baum and others of like cast laid the groundwork for a cultural explosion during the 1830-60 period. By 1830, with the influx of many educated easterners (mostly from New England), Cincinnati could boast of a high percentage of men and women of impressive mental qualities, people who represented a tradition of culture, education, and refinement. These were the people who organized the myriad agencies of intellectual life which came to characterize the Queen City during this phase of its history.<sup>9</sup> One of these agencies was the **Semi-Colon Club**.

Who first inspired formation of the club is not known for certain. Not even its members could agree on the founders. According to **John Foote**, whose **brother Samuel was a leading light of the club**, the founding agents were a group of transplanted New Englanders led by the **Rev. E. B. Hall**, his wife **[Louisa Jane Hall?]**, Judge **Timothy Walker**, and **Nathan Guilford**, all of whom were key figures among the local intelligentsia.<sup>10</sup> **Edwin Cranch**, an active member of the club, wrote in later years that **Benjamin Drake [1795-1841]**, a newspaper editor, was a moving force in the club's founding.<sup>11</sup>

**[Benjamin authored *Life of Tecumseh* [1768-1813] and of His Brother the Prophet** Wiki:  
In September 1809, **William Henry Harrison**, governor of the newly formed **Indiana Territory**, negotiated the **Treaty of Fort Wayne** in which a delegation of Indians ceded 3 million **acres** (12,000 **km<sup>2</sup>**) of Native American lands to the United States. The treaty negotiations were questionable as they were unauthorized by the President and thus the United States government, and involved what some historians compared to bribery, offering large subsidies to the tribes and their chiefs, and the liberal distribution of liquor before the negotiations.<sup>[25]</sup>  
As Tecumseh was not ready to confront the United States directly, his primary adversaries were initially the Indian leaders who had signed the treaty. An impressive orator, Tecumseh began to travel widely, urging warriors to abandon accommodationist chiefs and to join him in resistance of the treaty.<sup>[27]</sup> Tecumseh insisted that the Fort Wayne treaty was illegal; he asked Harrison to nullify it, and warned that Americans should not attempt to settle on the lands sold in the treaty. He is quoted as saying, "No tribe has the right to sell [land], even to each other, much less to strangers.... Sell a country!? Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Didn't the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?" And, "....the only way to stop this evil [loss of land] is for the red man to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was first, and should be now, for it was never divided."<sup>[28]</sup>

**Benjamin's brother Daniel [1785-1852], an intellectual colossus** who was known to his contemporaries as the "**Franklin of the West**," may have had a hand in organizing the society.<sup>12</sup> Although a medical doctor by profession, Daniel became involved in virtually every cultural and scientific development (and institution) in Cincinnati during his long residence there. At an earlier day (**1815-16**), while in Philadelphia attending medical lectures at the University of Pennsylvania, Drake had been a frequent visitor to the **literary soirees** sponsored by the scientist **Caspar Wistar, Jr.**; these were held during the winter months and called "Wistar parties." To these informal affairs came the prominent intellectuals of the city, including a number associated with the American Philosophical Society. In design and purpose, the Semi-Colon Club meetings were somewhat akin to Wistar's.

**Drake also began a Buckeye Club (1833-39)**, which was a carbon copy of Wistar's parties. These met at Drake's own home and were attended by many Semi-Colon Club members. Drake's **Buckeye Club** did not meet as regularly as the **Semi-Colon** group, nor did it have as well developed a format or as many guests; it was mainly a small conversational gathering of intellectuals. **Drake made a conscious effort to reproduce the cultural life of Philadelphia in Cincinnati** when he took up permanent residence in the Queen City. He made it his life's mission to force a western flowering and make Cincinnati the cultural capital of the West. Whether or not Drake founded the Semi-Colon Club, he did take an active part in its proceedings.

The **origin of the club's "whimsical" title** is also a matter of speculation. Again, not even the members shared a common belief. Two explanations were frequently bandied about. One school of thought accepted Benjamin Drake's explanation that the semi-colon was a "*point* or punctum . . . a little in advance of the period" and thereby was symbolical of progress.<sup>13</sup> Another popularly held notion was that Columbus was called "Colon" in Spanish, and he who discovered a new pleasure was considered to be at least half as great as he who discovered a new continent--ergo "Semi-Colon."<sup>14</sup> Whatever the source, the club did have a name, but it purposely refrained from having a constitution, by-laws, or officers.<sup>15</sup>

The group convened **only during the winter months**, although at least one enthusiastic member urged that the sessions be extended through the summer. In a paper prepared for the club, the writer asked: "Cannot we have **Summer Semicolons on the hills, beneath the shadow of our beautiful trees, by our lovely Ohio?** Cannot we laugh and sentiment[ta]lize--and get in love with each other,--in the country? Cannot we have some

regular Semicolon Pickwicks, (Picnics I mean) ?"<sup>16</sup> The members were not prepared to traipse off into the hills with their "baskets of provisions--together with literary food." They were assuredly aware that the summer air was as **humid** in the neighboring hills as it was in the city proper and was hardly conducive to brisk, intellectual activity. Then, too, the summer months brought forth the dreaded **cholera** epidemics, which made congregating in groups inadvisable.<sup>17</sup>

The general pattern was to meet fortnightly at the **homes** of either **Samuel Foote, William Greene, or William Stetson**; on occasion, meetings were held in the comfortable town houses of other members. **Foote's** stately and spacious mansion on Third Street, in the fashionable residential area adjoining the business center, was the most popular meeting place. Featuring a striking classic facade, the home was a center of liberal hospitality and cultural activity until the **panic of 1837**. At that time, Foote took a severe financial ducking and was left with a sizeable number of notes bearing his signature on which his **friends had defaulted**.<sup>18</sup> He lost his beautiful home, and the Semi-Colon Club lost a first-rate assembly site.<sup>19</sup> Dominated by transplanted New Englanders, the club's membership contained the greatest concentration of intellect in the trans-Allegheny country. Heterogeneous in interest, this group was drawn together by basic common assumptions and shared views and values. Few American cities, east or west, could have boasted of a "brain trust" of higher intellectual quality.

**John Foote**, a New Englander by background and a man of broad cultural experience, wrote that the club "constituted a literary galaxy which could scarcely have been equalled at that time in any city of our country."<sup>20</sup> The roster reads like a *Who's Who* of the West of that day. [Daniel Drake](#), [Lyman Beecher](#), [Harriet Beecher \(Stowe\)](#), [Catharine Beecher](#), Calvin Stowe, James H. Perkins, [James Freeman Clarke](#), [Timothy Flint](#), [James Hall](#), [Ormsby M. Mitchel](#) (built Cincy Observatory), [Edward Deering Mansfield](#), [Elizabeth Blackwell](#), [Caroline Hentz](#) -- these were some of the more prominent luminaries who participated. As **Forrest Wilson**, the perceptive **biographer of Harriet Beecher Stowe**, has noted, "a dozen or more of the 'Semi-Colons' left their names permanently in the American collections of biography."<sup>21</sup>

As noted above, women were permitted to participate in the club's affairs. This reflects the more liberal attitude prevailing in the West. The gatherings were frequently attended by visitors to Cincinnati who were of "congenial minds and talents." Charles Fenno Hoffman, the popular New York author, was often a visitor.<sup>22</sup> There is strong internal evidence to suggest that **Charles Dickens** dropped in on the club when he passed through the Queen City in early April, 1842. There seems to be no question but that Dickens' stay in Cincinnati was spent in the company of those who attended Semi-Colon meetings. Dickens wrote in his *American Notes* that the "society with which I mingled was intelligent, courteous, and agreeable."<sup>23</sup> Some of the extant papers allude to Dickens as a visitor to the soiree.<sup>24</sup>

While the club functioned without constitution, by-laws, or permanent officers, it did adhere to a prescribed pattern. Meetings were kept brief, and terminated at an early hour in the evening. They were also characterized by a lack of extravagance in dress and provender. Expensive culinary luxuries were rigidly forbidden. Coffee, tea, light dinner wines, sandwiches, sponge cake--this was the traditional menu and only slight deviation occurred from home to home. It was a principle of the club to discountenance ostentation in any form. The prime desideratum was **rational amusement**. Referring possibly to the moderate use of alcoholic beverages at the meetings, John Foote wrote that the "health of the members was not endangered, (nor the reputation of their neighbors)."<sup>25</sup> The meetings often terminated with a Virginia reel, a cotillion, or a musical presentation by a member.

The central exercise, and *raison d'etre* of the meetings, was the reading of a literary work, either a prose or verse selection; a general discussion followed the reading. The format of the meeting was as follows: All those invited were requested to prepare a literary offering. The principle of moderation was to be observed in the length of essays (many of the extant papers are four pages), but authors could unleash all restraint in developing their subject matter--and they frequently did. **Authors were to remain anonymous**. The offerings were brought to the meeting and

surreptitiously given to the hostess of the evening; some were presented days in advance of the meeting. The hostess deposited them with William Greene, an ex-Rhode Islander of distinguished lineage who served as the official reader. Greene's stately manner and stentorian voice made him an ideal choice for the job. A lawyer by profession, Greene was particularly fond of constitutional law, and this topic became such a staple of his normal conversation that he became known as "Constitutional Billy."<sup>26</sup> With the group seated about him (women were permitted to knit) Greene thumbed through the selections and read those appearing to be intrinsically interesting and having literary distinction.

Every effort was made by the founders of the club to assure the anonymity of authors. Hostesses were pledged to secrecy, and members were urged not to attempt to "run down" authors and make them "confess."<sup>27</sup> The reason for secrecy in authorship extended beyond the consideration of sparing a shy soul from embarrassment. Cranch wrote that anonymity gave "additional freedom to maturer writers, while it emboldened beginners to a spontaneity of thought and style, which certainly added to the literary budget of the night."<sup>28</sup>

But alas, human nature could hardly be contained by rules. The evidence suggests that one of the favorite games played by members was that of "Author, author, who is the author?" For some, author's vanity was too powerful a force to suppress, and they divulged their literary secret to close friends. Once identity had broken through the dam of personal secrecy, it swept through the club as rapidly as the Ohio River swept through the valley during the spring floods. One member made sharp comment on the practice of revealing authorship in a paper prepared for the club; it took the form of a letter, which was a popular stylistic format. Directed to "Elizabeth," it recounted a Semi-Colon meeting at which the author's paper was read: "At last--at last! he [Mr. Greene] did take mine up to read--Oh! I thought I should smother! My head swam, my heart beat--my eyes filled--everybody too was looking directly at me--how did they know it was my piece. Who could have told! It was a profound secret to every soul but you and myself and Mary Smith and Katy Fennell, and Caroline Durer, and how it could have got out was certainly to me a mystery!" The author went on to write that, as the reading came to an end, "I was sitting on the small sofa near the front window under the shipwreck piece.... Mr. A. whom you used to like so much sat next to me--he leaned forward as if to say something--I tremblingly turned half around--'That's remarkably'-- Heavens! I thought I should faint! 'That's remarkably stupid!' said he. 'Do you know whose it is?'"<sup>29</sup> In the case of Edwin Cranch, there was little need for guesswork, for he boldly adorned his selections with pencil sketches, to the apparent delight of the members.<sup>30</sup>

The gifted **Harriet** Beecher Stowe attempted many ingenious devices to conceal her authorship. In her case it would seem that personal shyness, the vicarious thrill she derived from deluding the members, and a penchant for stylistic experimentation were motives of co-equal value. One of her letter-essays was couched in the style of Boswell's Dr. Samuel Johnson. Wrote Harriet to trusted friend Georgiana May of Hartford: "I have been stiling about in his [Johnson's] style so long that it is a relief to me to come down to the jog of common English." Harriet's first contribution to the club was done in the "outrageous style of parentheses and foggification" (as she phrased it) of Bishop Joseph Butler, the English theologian.<sup>31</sup>

Another of Harriet's contributions indicates the extent to which some authors went to conceal their identity, as well as to confuse the ever-guessing members, Harriet became disturbed because, in her judgment, too many of the papers dealt with such hackneyed themes as matrimony, old maids, and bachelors. To counter this trend and establish higher literary standards, she first prepared a set of legislative enactments purporting to organize a club which forbade discussion of such topics. She then decided to show the way by writing a set of "serious and rational" letters. In composing the first letter, she set it up as coming from a close friend. Designed to lay the groundwork for subsequent letters dealing with various serious themes, it introduced a man and wife (the Howards), who were portrayed as a pious and literary-minded couple living in a rural setting. After completing the letter, Harriet carefully smoked it until it acquired a yellowed appearance, slightly tore it at various places, and sealed it and cracked the seal. Then she placed it in an envelope, addressed it in a

"scrawny, scrawly gentleman's hand," and directed it to **Mrs. Samuel Foote. Samuel Foote, who was Harriet's uncle**, "pronounced *ex cathedra*, that it must have been a real letter." Apparently forgetting for the moment that members were not to attempt to identify authors, official reader "Billy" Greene guessed that it was the work of James Hall's wife. As the time for meeting approached, Harriet was tied into knots of uncertainty and anticipation. Her **cousin Elizabeth Foote**, the only one to be told of the plan (even Harriet could not observe the rule of secrecy), was certain the letter was overly sentimental in tone and would be severely criticized by fellow Semi-Colons. Wrote Harriet: "I am unused to being criticised, and don't know how I shall bear it."<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, the sources dry up at this point, and it is not possible to tell what kind of an impact Harriet's letter made on the membership, or if she continued the series.

Before evaluating the literary remains of the club, it would be proper to examine the motivation which inspired its founding. While no member explicitly committed the thought to paper, there is sufficient internal evidence suggesting that the club was designed to fill social and intellectual cravings. Despite its meteoric rise as an urban center, Cincinnati was still the frontier. Its cultural and intellectual institutions lacked the urbane sophistication of those of Philadelphia and Boston. Practically all of the Semi-Colon members were either emigrants from the East, or had been exposed to literary clubs while traveling through, or residing in, this area for a time (Daniel Drake, for example). To these people, life without intellectual stimulation was unthinkable. The Semi-Colon Club provided them with nourishing intellectual fare. Besides, it was, in a word, great fun.

A secondary function is expressed in one of the club's papers, which listed its objectives and intents. The paper was ostensibly inspired by a lack of decorum manifested by contemporary congressmen. It affirmed that "fist-fighting in the Halls of Congress, and meetings by its members at Bladensburgh, to commit murder" were "not essential to the public welfare," and that members of congress were "not necessarily required to be bullies and brawlers in order to be qualified for the duties of their stations." The writer went on to assert that "**semi-colonism** acts upon the *public* welfare, by increasing the amount of the *private* and domestic virtues, by extending the influences of kindly feelings, and the intercourse of friendship, and of the knowledge that public prosperity is better promoted by the exercise of private virtues than by acts grounded on maxims of political expediency."<sup>33</sup>

Now what of the character and quality of the extant literary works? A conspicuous feature is their wide range of subject matter. The evidence at hand does not square with Harriet Beecher Stowe's charge that a few standard themes were worked over constantly-but it must be acknowledged that what remains is a minuscule portion of the whole. A random glance through the essays reveals such diverse items as: the advantages of traveling by steamboat; a method for analyzing character; a "dissertation on names"; a satiric blast at the city council; numerous examples of mawkish and doggerel verse; "unforgettable character" essays; jokes and other humor pieces. Reflecting on her residency in Cincinnati and attendance at Semi-Colon meetings, **Anna Blackwell** stated that "conversation [and papers, by implication] ranged from immortality to cranberry sauce, from Adam and Eve to 'old' Dr. [Lyman] Beecher."<sup>34</sup> With no restriction placed on subject matter, authors gave full vent to their imagination and their selections reflect an enormously wide range of subject matter.

As for the literary quality of the extant works, the most charitable judgment an historian could render is "average." Perhaps a different value judgment would be in order if the collection consisted entirely of the essays and verse offerings of such authors as Harriet Beecher Stowe, James Hall, or Daniel Drake, et al. But such is not the case. What remains is a representative assortment, and since they are not signed, authorship can only be determined on the basis of internal evidence (except in the case of Cranch's illustrated essays). If some of the offerings represent second-rate literature, most, if not all, exhibit a sensitive appreciation of such elements as diction, spelling, and syntax. It would appear that Semi-Colon members to a man (or woman) knew the rudiments of literary expression.

As for subject matter, a high percentage of what survives are frivolous humor items. There are very few philosophical or deeply serious works. It need be noted that brevity was insisted upon, and philosophical treatises do not lend themselves to brief treatment. Moreover, the character of the

meetings was such that light, fanciful offerings were called for. Perhaps this may represent the secret of the club's longevity.

The humor pieces also may help to explain the immense popularity of the meetings. Looking back, one member fondly regarded them as the "apotheosis of wit, humor and fun."<sup>35</sup> Anna Blackwell wrote: "What flights up, down, and round about! and what hearty merriment over our witticisms and our neighbors blunders!"<sup>36</sup> James H. Perkins reported to a friend in 1834 that the papers were better than in past years and "we have had singing too and dancing."<sup>37</sup> "There never was a meeting," wrote Cranch, "that was not fully attended, delightful, and brilliant."<sup>38</sup> The coming of winter meant conviviality and gay times for the Semi-Colons. One member rhapsodically expressed it this way in a piece prepared for the club:

The other morning a bright ray pierced the gloom that like a sable mantle has enwrapped us all this winter. -- a joyous note -- the gay carol of a bird was heard in the morn silence, -- a light hearted whisper -- amid the monotonous mutterings of dull weeks and hard times -- a whisper heard in other days -- but so long ago that its tones were almost forgotten.

It went forth -- the whisper -- gathering consistency in its course, -- and as it fell upon willing ears, there came up smiles that spoke of the remembrances of many past pleasures -- of happy moments recalled -- of rosy hours chased with flying feet -- of rapid nights -- that slid -- we know not how -- into morning, -- of the merry infectious laugh -- of music, light and flowers, -- of bright eyes and dancing hearts, -- of -- of, delicate sponge cake -- and coffee unsurpassable!

The whisper was semi colon! -- Such a rattling of steel pens! -- Such a crackling of goose quills! -- Such a rustling of paper -- both letter and curl!<sup>39</sup>

There is only one piece of negative evidence suggesting that some regarded the meetings as a grand bore. The literary historian William H. Venable once interviewed an old-timer who had attended the parties as a young man. The elderly gentleman recalled: "We went to different houses of the folks, and certain manuscript articles were read, which were supposed to be interesting and instructive. I suppose they were, as there is no evidence to the contrary. Personally, however, I remember thinking that most of them were stupid. Most of us were glad when the readings were over, for then we did something else, the principal of which was dancing."<sup>40</sup> Obviously, this member was not of a literary bent.

If their literary quality leaves much to be desired, of what value are such materials to the historian? It is my contention that they are of enormous value. They represent a window for observing the literary values and thought structure of an impressive intellectual elite, a group which was prototypal of American intellectuals of that period. It is possible, for example, to gain an insight into the type of humor which had appeal to them. Consider these conundrums taken from a selection of the papers:

"Why are affectionate friends like a string of sausages?"

"Because they are *attached to each other*."

"Why is an exaggeration *not* a viper?"

"Because he is an adder."

"What instrument of martial music would answer best to boil eggs in?"

"A *kettle-drum*."

"To whom should one apply for a remedy?"

"To the Cincinnati *re-leaf* society."

"What is the difference between Christopher Smith and a bottle of rum?"

"One is an undertaker and the other an overtaker."

"What gigantic name should we apply to liars?"

"Go-liah."

"What state is spoken of oftener than any other these hard times?"

"Ohio--Oh, heigho!"

"When boys are given to bad habits, why are they like lamps?"

"They are wicked."<sup>41</sup>

These documents also provide the historian with a wealth of information on prevailing customs and general living patterns. While mostly fictional-

ized, the pieces are based on actual, contemporary experience. One of the papers, for example, provides a detailed description of life on a canal boat. Such travel, one learns, was not akin to the romanticized notion now in vogue. From the moment the workmen flung the baggage aboard (it came on like a "hailstorm") to the day of embarkation, the journey was a trying experience. The cramped living quarters, the interrelationship of a group of strangers of varying age and diverse background in these crowded cabins, the problems attendant upon traveling with children--all of these factors are carefully delineated.<sup>42</sup> The document represents a valuable piece of Americana.

Other documents reveal an attitude of mind held by many western immigrants--homesickness! In prose and poetry, there are wistful, nostalgic remembrances of the ordered life of the past--familiar scenes, loved ones, and the like. A poem, "The Emigrant," contains these telling stanzas:

Where can lonely sorrow  
A ray of comfort find?  
Gleams there in tomorrow  
One hope to cheer the mind?  
Pride and folly only  
Enticed me far from home,  
Friendless, sad, and lonely [*sic*]  
Through distant lands to roam.

Father now I know not,  
Nor mother's face I see;  
Eyes of love now glow not  
With tears of joy for me.  
Sisters have I none here,  
Nor brothers good and kind;  
No, I am alone here,  
The sport of every wind.<sup>43</sup>

A New Englander continues the emigrant's lament in a poem titled "New England's snow":

Those many, merry Sleigh-bells!  
Oh! dear to me their chimes,  
For they carry thought and memory back  
To boyhood's happiest times.  
And long the cherished and beloved,  
The thoughts, where 'er I go,  
Of youthful home, and early friends,  
And dear *New England snow*.<sup>44</sup>

Another New Englander, the sensitive Unitarian James H. Perkins spoke for many of his fellow emigrants:

Why do I love that rocky land,  
And that inclement sky?  
I know alone, I love it--  
And ask not, care not *why*.  
As round my friends my feelings twine,  
So round my native shore;  
God placed the instinct in my heart,  
And I seek to know no more.

My father's bones, New England,  
Sleep in thy hallow'd ground;  
My living kin, New England,  
In thy shady paths are found--  
And though my body dwelleth here,  
And my weary feet here roam,  
My spirit and my hopes are still  
In thee, my own true home.<sup>45</sup>

If the poetry is bland, from an aesthetic standpoint, it nonetheless has value, for it reveals the inner face of an America on the move. Nineteenth-century America was filled with countless thousands who were building a new civilization in the West. Psychologically and emotionally they were alienated from a settled way of life, and they were homesick. In their poetic utterances they expressed their innermost cravings for a return to

the familiar. The process of alienation in the immigration of Europeans, which Oscar Handlin so brilliantly describes in *The Uprooted*, was repeated on the American mainland as the hordes swept westward, pushing blindly on to the Pacific, much like lemmings in their celebrated act of self-destruction. The historian cannot in good conscience consign these poetic expressions to the literary garbage dump.

In a broader context, the Semi-Colon Club made a distinct contribution to the cultural development of the West. It was through the doings of such agencies that the rough edge of frontier life was blunted, and the cultural values of the more settled East were impregnated. Semi-Colonism also helped in the development of a western literary tradition by affording potential authors an opportunity to write and, equally important, to receive constructive criticism. A number of the essays and poems delivered before the club subsequently found their way into local newspapers and magazines, as well as national journals. Publication assuredly stimulated authors to continue their writing, and the net result was the development of a cadre of western literati, who later made conspicuous contributions to the history of American letters.

It could be argued that the Semi-Colon Club was singularly responsible for **developing Harriet Beecher Stowe** as an author. The club provided her with a forum for literary expression, her first such forum. Cranch remembered Harriet as "a bright and happy girl, running over with genius and sympathy--and it was there [in the Semi-Colon Club] she first fledged her wings as a writer."<sup>46</sup> As Forrest Wilson has indicated, the club's policy of not divulging authors held great appeal for the shy Harriet.<sup>47</sup> Without fear of suffering embarrassment, she plunged into literary work--and into a career as an author. One of her early pieces was a character sketch of her father's foster-father, Lot Benton; she titled it "Uncle Lot." Impressed by the essay, James Hall, who was then publishing the *Western Monthly Review*, "ran down" the author and persuaded her to enter it in an essay contest being sponsored by his magazine. Harriet's essay won top prize (a fifty-dollar award) and Hall published it as "A New England Sketch" (April 1834). It was **Harriet's first appearance in print**. According to Forrest Wilson, this essay can be ranked with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the picture she painted of her native New England. Harriet's shrewd, humorous, and pious "Uncle Lot" became in time the stereotyped conception of the New Englander.<sup>48</sup> Harriet subsequently published other Semi-Colon essays in a variety of national journals, including the popular *Lady's Book*.<sup>49</sup> If the Semi-Colon Club accomplished no other achievement than to "bring out" Lyman Beecher's mousey little daughter as an author, it can be credited with having made a major contribution to American literary history. Harriet's recognition of her debt to the club is indicated by the fact that she dedicated her very first book, *The Mayflower* (1849), to it.

It was the belief of some members that the club had a salutary effect on the manners and morals of the "higher classes of society" in Cincinnati. John Foote saw a strong correlation between the club and the low incidence of serious crime among the city's social elite. He noted that the members of his social order rarely, if ever, committed murders, participated in duels, or broke "the heads of gentlemen while [they were] sitting quietly at their desks."<sup>50</sup> We have it on the authority of Edward Mansfield that, in the decade preceding the formation of the club, prominent merchants and other "gentlemen" of Cincinnati exhibited a strong predilection for gambling, particularly card playing. Indeed, gambling was apparently a normal part of the daily routine of all elements in the city! A crackdown by the marshal and his officers, who were seized by "a sudden spasm of virtue," once led to the arrest of nearly one hundred of the city's "first" citizens. The general public (as well as those apprehended) was astounded --by the action of the marshal, not by the quality of the catch! Included in the roundup were the sheriff and prosecuting attorney! The incident provoked this jibe from a satiric poet, "Horace":

Our citizens had long,  
Unfearing fortune's evils,  
With cards, and wine and song,  
Enjoyed their midnight revels.  
They grew more free and bold,  
Nor thought to be molested;  
At length a tale was told,  
And every man arrested.<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not Semi-Colonism had a curbing effect on the "gentlemen's" passion for gambling or on more serious wayward practices cannot be determined with certainty, but it is known that the more prominent members of the club were more noted for civic virtue than for dissolute personal behavior.

The **panic of 1837** marked the beginning of the end for the club. It limped along for a period and then expired "as naturally as it arose, from changes in the social conditions of its members, its daily Patrons and the community at large."<sup>52</sup>

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## FootNotes

<http://publications.ohiohistory.org/ohj/browse/displaypages.php?display%5B%5D=0073&display%5B%5D=57&display%5B%5D=58>

1. On December 2, 1963, the name of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio was changed to: The Cincinnati Historical Society.
2. The manuscripts were donated to the society by Davis L. James, Jr., in 1934. *The Semi-Colon* magazine (Nos. I-III, 1845) contains brief essays, which presumably were presented at the meetings. In further support of this contention, the society's copy has the names of Edwin Cranch, Mrs. Charles Stetson, Samuel Foote, and Tracy Howe inscribed in it; all were prominent in the club. About thirteen *Semi-Colon* essays and poems are printed in Appendix IV of John P. Foote, *Memoirs of the Life of Samuel E. Foote* (Cincinnati, 1860), 244-287.
3. The precise dates of origin and death of the club are difficult to determine. Contemporary sources are at variance. One source states that the club functioned from about 1829 to 1846. Another writes that it terminated during the "Panic of 1837." The fact that *The Semi-Colon* magazine was published in 1845 suggests that the club was still functioning in the mid-1840's.
4. See Bernard Mayo, "Lexington: Frontier Metropolis," in Eric F. Goldman, ed., *Historiography and Urbanization* (Baltimore, 1941), 21-42; Niels H. Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky, 1780-1828* (New York, 1939), 160-242.
5. There are only two main works which treat cultural and intellectual developments in Cincinnati at any length: William H. Venable, *Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley: Historical and Biographical Sketches* (Cincinnati, 1891), and Ralph L. Rusk, *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier* (New York, 1926). In both books the coverage is spotty, not concentrated. For the early period, see James M. Miller, *The Genesis of Western Culture: The Upper Ohio Valley, 1800-1825* (Columbus, Ohio, 1938).
6. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, ed. by Donald Smalley (New York, 1949); see pages 52-180 in particular.
7. See, for example: Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel* (London, 1838), II, 56; Frederick Marryat, *Diary in America, with Remarks on Its Institutions* (Paris, 1839), 167-171; John Quincy Adams to William Greene, May 1844, Greene Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society; David Shaffer to Hiram Powers, April 16, 1860, Hiram Powers Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society.
8. *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, August 25, 1837, quoted in *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September 1, 1837.
9. The full range of Cincinnati's cultural and intellectual life can be determined by the many types of agencies cited in Charles Cist, *Cincinnati in 1841* (Cincinnati, 1841), 109-141. This work is also excellent for tracing the economic growth of Cincinnati.
10. Foote, *Memoirs of Samuel E. Foote*, 176-180.
11. Undated Cranch manuscript in the Library of Congress. Cranch presents a brief history of the club.
12. On Daniel Drake, see Emmet F. Horine, *Daniel Drake (1785-1852), Pioneer Physician of the Midwest* (Philadelphia, 1961), and Edward D. Mansfield, *Memoirs of the Life and Services of Daniel Drake* (Cincinnati, 1855). Whose name was accorded an 85' alley to nowhere off the street named for his 9-yr younger student Dr. Robert Boal.
13. Cranch manuscript.
14. This explanation is found in a number of contemporary documents.
15. Cranch manuscript.
16. *Semi-Colon Club Manuscripts*, No. 23. A striking pencil sketch on the document points to Cranch as its author.
17. The 1830's, in particular, produced some devastating cholera epidemics.
18. Foote, *Memoirs of Samuel E. Foote*, 183-184. Foote later built up another fortune in the insurance business. In the 1840's he moved his family back to New Haven, Connecticut.
19. Forrest Wilson writes that the club dissolved with the loss of the Foote home as a meeting place. He offers no source. *Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Reecher Stowe* (Philadelphia, 1941), 197.
20. Foote, *Memoirs of Samuel E. Foote*, 179-180.
21. Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline*, 123.
22. Venable, *Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley*, 420.
23. *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (London and New York, 1893), 143.

Timothy Walker, one of the members, sponsored a party for Dickens and his wife. Walker Diary, April 5, 1842. Cincinnati Historical Society.

24. See No. 25, for example. The impact of Dickens' visit to Cincinnati is reflected by allusions to Dickensian characters in a number of the papers.
25. Foote, *Memoirs of Samuel E. Foote*, 180.
26. Greene's activities as a cultural leader of Cincinnati can be traced in the large collection of William Greene Papers owned by the Cincinnati Historical Society.
27. Cranch manuscript.
28. *Ibid.*
29. No. 10.
30. See Nos. 23 and 25.
31. Charles Edward Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe Compiled from Her Letters and Journals* (Boston and New York, 1891), 69.
32. *Ibid.*, 71.
33. Quoted in Foote, *Memoirs of Samuel E. Foote*, 181-182.
34. Anna Blackwell to William Greene, August 18, 1844. Greene Papers.
35. Clara Longworth DeChambrun, *The Making of Nicholas Longworth: Annals of an American Family* (New York, 1933), 94-97.
36. Anna Blackwell to William Greene, August 18, 1844. Greene Papers.
37. Edith Perkins Cunningham, *Owls Nest* (Boston, 1907), 125.
38. Cranch manuscript.
39. No. 10.
40. *Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley*, 420.
41. Nos. 15, 26, and 89.
42. No. 6.
43. No. 12.
44. No. 84.
45. Quoted in Foote, *Memoirs of Samuel E. Foote*, 249-250.
46. Cranch manuscript.
47. Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline*, 124-127.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Ephraim Peabody to William Greene, June 15, 1839. Greene Papers.
50. Foote, *Memoirs of Samuel E. Foote*, 182.
51. E. D. Mansfield, *Personal Memories, Social, Political, and Literary, with Sketches of Many Noted People, 1803-1843* (Cincinnati, 1879), 190-191.
52. Cranch manuscript.

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<http://www.worldcat.org/search?q=au%3Ajohn+p+foote&fq=yr%3A1800..1900+%3E&qt=advanced&dblist=638>

[http://www.worldcat.org/title/act-of-incorporation-of-the-cincinnati-academy-of-fine-arts-with-an-address-to-the-members-of-the-institution-by-john-f-foote-president-of-the-board-of-trustees/oclc/40463466&referer=brief\\_results](http://www.worldcat.org/title/act-of-incorporation-of-the-cincinnati-academy-of-fine-arts-with-an-address-to-the-members-of-the-institution-by-john-f-foote-president-of-the-board-of-trustees/oclc/40463466&referer=brief_results)

This indicates Harriet's Uncles were Cincinnati Leaders prior to her move here, probably instrumental in her move.

<http://catalog.wrhs.org/collections/search?&identifier=ocm40463466>

Author	Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts.
Title	The act of incorporation of the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts : with an address to the members of the institution by <b>John F. Foote</b> , President of the board of trustees / published by order of the board.
Published	Cincinnati : Printed by G.T. Williamson, 1828.
Description	12 p. ; 21 cm.
General Note	Copy in Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections bound in red library cloth.
Subjects	Ohio imprints -- 1828.
Other Authors	<b>Foote, John P.</b> (John Parsons), 1783-1865. Williamson, George T.
Call Number/Copies	WRHS Research Library: Pam. C335 mq171726: Pamphlets, closed stacks [status: NON-CIRCULATING]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_S.\\_Duncanson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_S._Duncanson)

Robert Duncanson's *Uncle Tom and Little Eva*, painted in 1853 is housed at the [Detroit Institute of Arts](#). The painting depicts a scene from Chapter 22 of [Harriet Beecher Stowe's](#) novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The characters are set in an idyllic landscape of tropical plants and [Lake Pontchartrain](#) in [Louisiana](#). Reverend James Francis Conover commissioned *Uncle Tom and Little Eva* in 1853 after a viewing of Duncanson's work at the Fireman's Hall exhibit in the same year. This work is his only one containing explicit African-American subject matter, and it reveals his personal response to [slavery](#). The theme of salvation from the novel depicted here can be read as both salvation for Eva and the salvation for all slaves. By painting this work, Duncanson announced his stance on slavery and "his hope for a religious basis for resolving the slavery question."<sup>181</sup>(p. 47)<sup>[18]</sup>

below is unexplained content appended on the same page, following above

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## CALEB ATWATER AS HISTORIAN

1. The printers were Glezen and Shepard of **Cincinnati**. An abbreviated title, *History of Ohio*, appears on the spine of the book.
2. S. F. Haven, "Report of the Council," American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings*, Old Series, IV (1866-68), 22.
3. Clement L. Martzloff, "Caleb Atwater," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, XIV (1905), 247-271. The article stresses Atwater's contributions to Ohio education.
4. Henry C. Shetrone, "Caleb Atwater: Versatile Pioneer--A Re-Appraisal," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, LIV (1945), 87. The strongest impression to be gleaned from this article, but probably not the one intended, is that Atwater was out of place in the West.
5. Francis P. Weisenburger, "Caleb Atwater: Pioneer Politician and Historian," *Ohio Historical Quarterly*, LXVIII (1959), 18-37. This is primarily a review of Atwater's political activities.
6. In *Archaeologica Americana: Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, I (1820), 105-267.
7. American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings*, Old Series, IV (1866-68), 26-27.
8. January 27, February 2, 10, and 17.
9. Weisenburger says that the "first significant summary" of Ohio's past was Salmon P. Chase's forty-eight page introduction to his *Statutes of Ohio*, which was published in three volumes from 1833 to 1835 at Cincinnati. "Caleb Atwater," 18.
10. *The General Character, Present and Future Prospects of the People of Ohio* (Columbus, 1827), an address, and *Remarks Made on a Tour to Prairie du Chien, Thence to Washington City, in 1829* (Columbus, 1831). Atwater's two other principal publications are an *Essay on Education* (Cincinnati, 1841), and *Mysteries of Washington City During Several Months of the Session of the 28th Congress* (Washington, 1844).
11. Shetrone, "Caleb Atwater," 82.
12. The date usually given is 1815. However, Atwater, in his *History of Ohio* (p. 26), see url below

reports that in December 1814 he had been on a tour of wet prairies in west central Ohio. Having gone to New York City to teach after graduating from **Williams College** in 1804, Atwater in time completed studies for the ministry and the law, and practiced both before moving to Ohio at age thirty-six or thirty-seven. He was born Christmas Day, 1778, in North Adams, Massachusetts. Twice married, Atwater raised a large

<https://books.google.com/books?id=uGhMAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA9&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=true>

The Semi-Colon Club was an informal organization of talented writers in Cincinnati, Ohio during the mid-19th century. Harriet Beecher Stowe was a member of the club while living in the city from 1832 until 1850. Stowe's experiences in Cincinnati and her time in the club were major factors in her work Uncle Tom's Cabin. Harriet Beecher Stowe's uncles lived in Cincinnati and called on the family at their home often. One day, Harriet Beecher's uncle Samuel Foote, who was a brother of Harriet Beecher's Charles Dickens stopped by the Semi-Colon Club on his visit to America in 1842. Many celebrated literary figures belonged, including the Lyman Beecher family. Nobody really knows when the Semi-Colon Club was formed, but the general view is that it was around 1829. Cincinnati was a far-away western destination in those days, and many went west for excitement and adventure. He took the position of President of Lane Seminary and preacher at the Second Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati. He did not fare too well, losing a battle with pro abolition students which decimated Lane. Harriet taught in Cincinnati and the house that Lyman and his second wife Harriet lived in is now called the Harriet Beecher Stowe House and is open to visitors.