

HONOR, GENDER, VIOLENCE, AND
THE LIFE OF ROBERT POTTER

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Southwest Texas State University
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of ARTS

By

Oakley Neils Durfee Barber, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas
May, 2000

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the people most responsible for this project reaching completion. First, my mate, partner, and chief benefactor Tera Stone. She hung in there over the long haul and paid the bills while I struggled to find some self-discipline. For that and more I am humble and grateful. Second, my advisor Dr. Victoria Bynum who provided me with this topic, she spent too much of her own time helping me sort out ideas and she read and re-read the manuscript without the slightest sign of pain or discomfort. Without her personal and scholarly dedication to this project, I would have long since floundered in confusion. Lastly, and no less as importantly, I would like to thank Claud and Jimi Harr, managers of the Indian Springs Ranch, for allowing me to spend weeks on end hold-up in the hunting cabin putting it all together. They welcomed me into their home, they fed me, and they provided the quiet simplicity I needed. Without that I might still be wondering what to do next instead of just sitting down and saying it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter	
I. From Boyhood to "Unspeakable Crimes" in North Carolina.....	23
II. Gone To Texas Revolution and Fame.....	44
III. Marriage and Death In the New Republic.....	63
Conclusion.....	83
APENDICES.....	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	96



Introduction

Why did Robert Potter castrate two men who had been praying with his wife at a revival meeting? Thirty-one years old, married only two years, and at the peak of his political career, Robert Potter publicly accused two of his wife's cousins of adultery with her. The alleged adulterers were Louis Taylor, a preacher, and his nephew, Louis Wiley, a boy of seventeen. Many members of the community believed the charges false. Nonetheless, Potter tied both men and castrated them. Some in his community were outraged, Potter, however, argued that the punishment fit the crime. Many men agreed with him and rioted outside the jail to gain his release. Why was the community divided over Potter's actions? How could so many men support this kind of violence while others condemned him as a dangerous criminal?¹

Eleven years after the castrations, Potter was murdered in Texas after trying to arrest the leader of a vigilante group. Potter led a group of men to the farm of William Pickney Rose, a man who had once been his friend, and attempted to arrest him for murdering a sheriff and two other men. Rose eluded Potter and his men then gathered a group of his supporters and besieged Potter's house just before dawn

¹State vs. Robert Potter, Minutes of the Superior Court, August 29, 1831 Granville County, NCDAH.

the next day. Potter ran from the house and was shot while trying to escape. Potter was not a sheriff, yet he felt it was his duty to arrest Rose. Why did Robert Potter get involved in such a deadly power struggle with Rose, a man who could have been subdued by the law.

Beginning in Granville County, North Carolina, in 1800 and ending on the Texas frontier in the 1840s, this study addresses the themes of Southern honor, gender, and violence. Many men of Potter's period would have claimed that honor motivated all his actions. Personal honor was one of the primary cultural forces in the antebellum South, and the central theme of this essay is to better understand Southern honor and how it influenced individual lives. To do this I first review the historiography of gender and Southern honor. Second, I study individual behavior within the gender norms of the Old South. Finally, this essay compares how cultural differences on the frontier altered gender conventions and affected decisions concerning personal honor.²

Robert Potter's life and those people associated with it demonstrate the socially-constructed nature of gender and how differing gender dictates shaped individual honor. Potter constantly struggled and literally fought to establish, preserve, extend, and reclaim his honorable standing in the communities in which he lived. In North Carolina that struggle took him from his beginnings as a common farm boy and led him to elite society. There, hubris and

²The most thorough discussion of Southern honor in its many forms is found in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) , Passim.

unreasoned violence brought social ostracization. In the less developed society of frontier Texas, he combined his penchant for backwoods violence with his intelligence and gift for oratory. In Texas, he exploited, dominated, bullied, and attacked others to recover his honor, an odyssey that ultimately cost him his life. Potter's first wife, Isabella Taylor, never seemed to recover from the disgrace of Potter's actions, and she died the year after Potter left for Texas. In contrast, his second wife, Harriet Page, rebuilt her life and retained her honor in frontier Texas after Potter's death.

Robert Potter, Isabella Taylor, and Harriet Page lived within a culture in which dishonor for men and women was worse than death. Female honor, once lost, was virtually irrecoverable. A dishonored woman was considered ruined. Her fall from honorable society meant rejection and banishment. While some of these women built lives on the fringes of society, they were seldom allowed to reenter the mainstream. Unsettled conditions on the frontier, however, allowed some women to recover from minor deviations from the honor code.³

In the Old South, but especially on the frontier, the notion of male honor was inexorably linked to masculine norms of behavior. Without his good standing in the community, a male was not a true man. A dishonored male was merely one more entity to be dominated by men of honor. Male honor could sometimes be reclaimed through decisive acts of violence such as the castrations perpetrated by Potter.

³Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 226-231.

However, by the 1820s, leaders of the Old South strove to limit the level and nature of acceptable violence. Yet, as many historians of the Old South have demonstrated, frontier notions of honor not only condoned, but required men to engage in acts of extreme violence to maintain their honor.⁴

Most historical studies of Southern honor have primarily addressed the male culture of the Old South. Only in the last ten years have historians begun to look at the inter-relatedness of honor, gender, and power. In 1941, Wilber Cash wrote *The Mind of the South*, one of the earliest and most durable discussions of Southern male culture. Cash explored Southern culture in general and violence, honor, and male culture in depth. While Cash did not specifically discuss gender, he took an important first step by treating male culture apart from other elements of the Southern society. Southern masculinity, in Cash's view, was fiercely independent, proud, willful, and violent to a fault. He attributed the violence to a range of factors, but placed special emphasis on the difficulty of wresting a life from the wilderness and maintaining it on the uncivilized frontier. The men who survived and prospered on the frontier readily used violence to "win" the frontier, and these men, according to Cash, became the old land-owning elites who ruled society.⁵ Necessitated by frontier living and perpetuated by notions of power based on white male dominance of all other members

⁴ On frontier honor, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 368-369.

⁵ Wilber F. Cash, *The Mind of The South*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1941) , 3-15.

of society, violence permeated male culture. Power and honor were conflated with aggression and material prosperity. Elite men who presided over plantations connected individualism to their unlimited power over property. Regardless whether they were slave owners or small farmers owning no slaves, total dominance and control by all white men over nearly every aspect of plantation life fostered a white man's peerage in which all males shared. It was this power and superiority, set loose by the demands of frontier living that Cash placed at the core of male violence. What Cash described as intense individualism, an aversion to authority, and willful petulance, subsequent studies have exposed as essential components of a system of honor unique to the American South.⁶

Cash was an early pioneer in the study of male culture, and his efforts, however simplistic and apologetic of antebellum Southern society, opened the door for later studies. For several decades historians did not study questions of male gender, focusing instead on more traditional historical topics. In the 1980s, however, historians began to reexamine the antebellum Southern male and his relationship to society. Their studies focused on honor as the salient element of masculinity. Several historians followed Cash's hints about the significance of honor, but it was Bertram Wyatt-Brown who explored it most thoroughly. In *Southern Honor*, Wyatt-Brown investigated the roots and types of honor, and analyzed how it influenced Southern society. He identified violence and masculinity as key components of

⁶Ibid. , 42-43.

honor. In Southern society, he claimed, cultural reality was shaped by rules of honor, both for men and women.⁷

Wyatt-Brown defined the core of Southern honor as primal honor, which had three basic elements: 1) conviction of self-worth; 2) the ability to claim this conviction in public; and 3) the assessment or reflection of this claim by the public. To a large degree, reputation determined honor. It provided a standard by which individuals could organize society and make a place for themselves in it. The public assessed how well men and women adhered to the standards of honor and judged them accordingly. Public evaluation allowed the individual to know himself and place himself in society. Society acted as a mirror, and men shaped themselves based what society reflected. Or as Wyatt-Brown said it, "He reflects society as society reflects him." Community assessment or reputation as a determining factor in assigning honor is, according to Wyatt-Brown, rooted in early European, clan-based societies from which much of Southern society evolved. Primal honor refers to this ancestral organization of honor as it developed in the American South.⁸

Honor and slavery were inexorably linked in Wyatt-Brown's, assessment. Yet, honor was not a direct product of the slave system. Rather, slavery was compatible with primal honor and existed parallel with it; the two existed in a "mutually sustaining relationship" to the

⁷Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, passim.

⁸Ibid. , 14.

extent that they "became in the public mind of the South practically indistinguishable."⁹ Primal honor existed outside geography, time, and organization of labor. Honor was not a strictly Southern phenomenon, but economic development in the North fostered changes during the nineteenth century that did not take place in the South for another one hundred years. Primal honor in the North existed in opposition to changing notions of honor predicated on gentility and inner virtue. By the nineteenth century, Northern honor stemmed from what Wyatt-Brown called "the unity of inner virtue with the natural order of reason, the innate desire of man for the good, and the happy congruence of inner virtue with outward public appearance."¹⁰ While this form of honor came to dominate the North, the isolated, rural South held on to notions of primal honor even as Northern sensibilities of honor made inroads into Southern society. The contradictions between new and old forms of honor produced a cultural duality in Southern men that allowed them to hold slaves, fight, drink to excess, and yet consider themselves men of honor. Southern honor, dominated by primal honor, was influenced by and defined in conflict with Northern gentility, while it was abetted by the Southern institution of slavery.¹¹

⁹Ibid. , 16.

¹⁰Ibid. , 21.

¹¹Ibid. , 23.

Built on an aggressive archaic system of honor, Southern honor fostered ferocity, bravery, revenge, and clan protectiveness. Motivated by adherence to archaic, primal honor, antebellum Southern men fought over the slightest perceived insult. Wyatt-Brown's understanding of honor became the foundation of later works on Southern honor and violence. Historians built on his fundamental argument that honor was pervasive in Southern society, forming the foundation of manhood and the Southern world view.

Focusing on the relationship between Southern honor and slavery, Edward Ayres argued that honor and violence were dependent on the slave system.¹² Ayers claimed that honor-based societies only thrive in specific kinds of cultures: economically undiversified, localized, and explicitly hierarchical, those with one dominant standard of worth and with relatively few paths to respectability and prosperity. With slaves totally dishonored and white society distinctly honorific, Southern society was a rigidly structured hierarchy. Whether slave holders or not, all whites were of the master class. Wealth and independence dominated the path to respectability, a path only for white men. Non-slaveholding, yeoman farmers vigorously defended their personal honor and independence. In this way they shared a vision of nearly equal standing in the master class. Without slavery to perpetuate the particular constructs of Southern society, Ayers claimed that Southern honor would have been supplanted, as it was in

¹²Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) , 26.

the North, by economic change predicated on "depersonalized, market-oriented, contractual relationships."¹³

Ayers's argument appears tangential to gendered readings of Southern history; yet, without this kind of analysis, notions of honor remain fixed by "natural" laws depicting differences between the sexes. Honor can only be understood as a fixed quality of male culture handed down from archaic antecedents. However, if the social organization of slavery shaped notions of Southern honor, and honor is understood as the basis of manhood, then manhood and masculinity can be studied as a social construct. A gendered reading of antebellum history can expose the intricacies of masculinity as conceived and organized by society. Ayers did not provide a gender analysis of honor but he exposed the socially constructed basis of seemingly fixed cultural norms. In antebellum Southern culture, especially masculine culture, personal honor was a basic organizing principle, providing, among other things, the primary means for gauging individual self worth. In this milieu, words, especially insults, had the power to incite physical violence: "it was considered as brutal and uncivilized to call a man a liar as it was to bruise or cut his body." Words were more than mere insults, they were an attack. The slightest verbal misstep required a violent response to protect personal honor. The wronged individual had to cleanse himself of the taint of dishonor with bloody

¹³Ibid. , 13. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) , 92-130.

violence. Through violence, the Southern man defended and preserved his masculinity.¹⁴

Elliott Gorn acknowledges the influence of slavery on Southern honor, but focuses instead on the relationship between honor and violence. The excessive violence of the antebellum backwoodsmen, writes Gorn, stemmed from the constant need to defend their individual status. Men expressed their masculinity through outward appearances, and they affirmed their public persona of honor and masculinity by fighting, gambling and competition. Rough and tumble fighting, gouging out eyes, biting ears and noses, stabbing, and other disfiguring forms of violence, were the poor man's access to honor. Elites sought honor through dueling and other more "civilized" forms of combat, but backwoodsmen rejected what they considered the effete battles of their upper-class brothers. Non-elite men sought to define their place in society as free and honorable men, separate from both the debased state of slaves, and the dispassionate, genteel elites. Backwoodsmen inverted the gentlemen's behavior code that advocated reserved, detached, restraint as exemplified in dueling and instead fought with passionate, intense, ferocity.¹⁵

A passionate and bloody honor code also separated lower class, white men from slaves. Combatants shouted oaths and proclaimed their strength and prowess. Gorn writes that men metaphorically

¹⁴Elliott Gorn, "Gouge, Bite, Pull Hair, and Scratch" : The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Back Country." *American Historical Review*, vol. 90, (February, 1985) , 18-32.

¹⁵*Ibid.* , 200.

"shouted their equality at each other." Quick-tempered ferocity made the white backwoodsman everything the slave was not. Slaves were compelled to quietly and to passively accept blows under threat of death, but plain folk could and did become violent at the slightest affront. Like the gentleman's readiness to duel, the gouging match allowed common white men to participate in the culture of honor. The readiness to use, what we consider, extreme violence reaffirmed common white male claims to honor and resolved their uncertain place in the society between slaves and elites. Physical strength, courage, and the willingness to risk life and limb to defend public reputation became a primary expression of the Southern-backwoods culture.¹⁶

Gorn locates the boundaries of backwoods male culture within the overriding society of honor. Like Wyatt-Brown, he does not discuss the socially constructed basis of masculinity. However, his work establishes a basis for such an interpretation. Common white males maintained their own system for establishing and preserving manhood, acting it out whenever a threat loomed. Elliott Gorn and Bertram Wyatt-Brown did not fully develop the connections between masculinity, violence, and honor though others have attempted to do so. They treated honor as a social phenomenon to be studied, but masculinity was simply a given; it was not viewed as a socially constructed cultural aberration. For most male historians, manhood

¹⁶Ibid. , 200-203.

just is and therefore is not open to historical interpretation. In a male-centered world, now as then, masculinity is not understood as socially constructed; it is the natural or divinely ordained principle around which society is organized.

In his investigation of Southern culture, Kenneth Greenburg attempts to reconstruct and interpret the now "dead" language of "honorable gentlemen." Greenburg pays homage to Wyatt-Brown's groundbreaking work, then takes the discussion of honor in unexplored directions, developing the connections between appearances, respect, honor, and masculinity.¹⁷

Greenberg argues that honor was profoundly connected with the appearance of respect. Respect conferred honor, and honor reinforced masculinity. In the world of Southern manhood, accusing a man of lying meant that his appearance differed from his true nature. Calling someone a liar was equivalent to "unmasking" him: to expose and shame him by pointing out that he was not what he appeared to be. Shaming a man by exposing his "real" self beneath the mask impugned his masculinity because white males considered slaves and women duplicitous. Once unmasked, his duplicity exposed, whether true or not, he could no longer claim the appearance of honor. In a world where only men possessed honor, traits associated with femininity or servility were considered the antithesis of masculinity.

¹⁷Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave rebellions, The Pro-Slavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*, (Princeton: University Press, 1996) , Passim.

That a man actually lied was not as important as the accusation. Someone had to "give you the lie." Once *given*, the gauntlet was laid down, and one's manhood was at stake.¹⁸

The relationship between master and slave was also intimately connected to this system of honor. Slaves did not have the power to prevent being "unmasked." Masters could strip a slave of his manhood at any time. Bondsmen lacked access to the rituals used by their white counterparts to protect or regain masculinity. White masters could resort to violence in protection of their manhood, but slave men had no such recourse since they were denied entry into the white male system of honor. However, Greenberg claims that the language of honor may have provided room for some degree of black cultural autonomy. Whites believed that the black mask, or face, lied: because slave "masks" were inscrutable to their masters, slaves were incapable of truth. In a society that believed surface appearances mirrored the inner person, masters rarely inquired into the secrets hidden behind a black face. Because the slave face connoted no inner value to white observers, such a face had no honor and was therefore not a threat to white masculinity. White men were comforted by this assumption because it cemented their perception of white superiority.¹⁹

Greenberg's analysis of the gendered nature of sport and its relationship to death provides another example of how Southern men

¹⁸Ibid. , 9-32.

¹⁹Ibid. , 47-48.

constructed their manhood to reflect the language of honor. The hunt was the sport of choice for middle and upper class men. Men equated the hunt with honor by anthropomorphizing and ascribing noble traits to their prey. Hunting was not simply killing for sport it was doing battle with an honorable adversary. Mastery of death included not only dispensing it in the hunt, but also the ability to confront one's own death fearlessly.²⁰

Control was the hallmark of white men's superiority, and their relationship to death was no different. As Greenberg wrote, "men of honor controlled the passage into death." Death was not to be passively accepted but challenged to the end. Submission to death was unmanly—death with honor was the motto. If a man could not die the ultimate honorable death found on the battlefield, he sought to give the appearance of control over the passage into death. Retaining pride and control in death enforced the appearance of masculinity. In an effort to maintain pride and the appearance of control, eulogies of the period were couched as battles with death itself.²¹

Contrary to dominant Christian tenets, Southern men considered suicide an honorable death. Most men did not choose suicide, but did attempt to project a veneer of mastery over death. Masculinity was not earned by simply killing or accepting death passively, it had to take the form of honorable battle. To affirm their masculinity men's

²⁰Ibid. , 110-128.

²¹Ibid.

behavior in death had to contrast with how they imagined slaves and women behaved. As individuals without honor, slaves and women were thought to face death with resignation and submission. Moreover, they preferred life over liberty; only honorable men preferred death over enslavement.²² These ideas reinforced white male dominance of society. Ascribing dishonorable behavior in death to women and slaves defined their own code of honor, and further secured their manhood. Male attitudes about death and masculinity were social constructions dressed up in the guise of supposedly immutable, *natural laws* of sexual and racial difference. Greenberg's conclusions show the value of a gendered interpretation of Southern honor. His work exposes some of the social constructions behind antebellum masculinity. There is no question that white men held all formal power over Southern society, but how they garnered, maintained, and extended that power is the deeper question that studies like Greenberg's reveal.

Until Greenberg's pioneering work, traditional studies of male honor failed to explore the cultural forces behind the construction of gender. While Greenberg's perspective is a powerful tool for understanding male honor, the next step is to investigate male *and* female gender in relationship to honor and power. New perspectives on gender that gave rise to Greenberg's study have also inspired others to analyze both masculine and feminine norms of behavior.

In the last two decades the history of gender has moved from a marginal position in historical studies to a central category of analysis.

²²*Ibid.* , 110-128.

This transformation occurred when historians began to interpret gender as a socially constructed separation of the sexes based on biological and supposed psychological differences. Historians began using gender as an analytical tool with explanatory power for history in general. Beginning in the 1960s, historians of women produced studies that sought to explain the roles of women as historical actors and agents. This effort was largely successful and studies that demonstrated women's historical significance proliferated. The earliest works by feminist historians investigated the roots and mechanisms of female oppression as they related to patriarchy. By feminist estimations these efforts were successful in their attempt to prove a causal relationship between notions of patriarchy and female oppression.

Despite its successes, feminist and women's history remained marginal in most historical texts and monographs until the mid-1980s. The early efforts of feminist historians failed to sufficiently disrupt or transform the dominant disciplinary framework of historical study. The academy first acknowledged and validated these efforts then designated them a "special" field of historical inquiry. Historians accepted that women had a history but considered it a separate field, consigning the history of women to feminist historians. Many of them defined women's history as studies of the family and sexuality, and therefore separate from what was considered by the white-male dominated academy as "history" that is, political, economic, or military history.

By the mid-1980's, women's historians had begun to question the separation of women's history from the mainstream. In a seminal work presented to the American Historical Association in December of 1985, Joan Scott called for a re-thinking of feminist history to address this problem. In "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Scott argued that the term gender, as it related to women's history, must refer not just to the study of women's history but to the study of "the social organization of the relationship between the sexes."²³ Scott's theory of gender included the notion that "gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated." In Western culture sexual difference is and has been a primary way of expressing differentiation of power—men have traditionally held it, while women have not. Hierarchical relationships are expressions of power and have been legitimized by references to the supposed "natural" differences between men and women. These socially constructed notions of power, gender, and the binary opposition between the sexes have become culturally embedded and self justifying.²⁴

Individuals' political claims to power often appear to originate outside the mutable, human world, and therefore are seen as part of the "natural" or divine order. Significations of gender become dissociated from the claim to power when they are bound up in the

²³Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) , 28.

²⁴*Ibid.* , 46-47.

supposedly unchangeable patterns of the natural or divine world. Scott pointed out that the claim to power is not based on a divine order, nor does it naturally reside in the male gender. Rather, male dominance and female powerlessness are socially constructed significations of gender. According to Scott's theory, understanding how socially constructed notions of gender are generated and maintained provides a way to analyze how power is articulated. Gender and power can be mutually descriptive. Studying them in relation to one and other can expose the socially constructed nature of both fields of historical study.²⁵

Scott's theory of gender is particularly useful for analyzing the topics of power, honor, masculinity, and violence in the antebellum South. Historians initially sought only to define the roots of violence and honor, while traditional and popular notions of gender viewed only women as having gender, much like only dark-skinned people were viewed as having race. Since men have traditionally dominated western society, the perception is that men simply *are* and women are "other." Within this assumption, gender merely defines women's otherness just as race often defines the otherness of blacks.

The history of activities traditionally associated with men (warfare and politics for example) simply *is* history, and therefore thought to be without gender bias. Historians have not seen male gender perspectives in traditional histories because gender is a *special* field of inquiry outside the dominant male perspective. Mainstream history is

²⁵Ibid. , 48-50

based on what one writer has called "the view from nowhere"; that is "the understanding of one self and one's perspective on things as locationless." Male historians have failed to recognize their own gender bias—their own *location*—which has, therefore, remained largely unexplored.²⁶

Until recently, the dominant historical thinking supported the idea that only non-traditional topics, like race, women, and family, have a point of view, or a "bias." This has certainly been the pattern for antebellum Southern history, where traditional historians also analyzed the Southern past from a supposedly genderless, male perspective. Recent studies have moved beyond this cultural perspective and illuminated the *location* of antebellum Southern men and women within their society.

Feminist interpretations of gender have proved especially effective for deconstructing Southern society. Joan Scott's theory and methodology provide excellent tools for rethinking Southern manhood. She points out that war is an aspect of the male world seemingly unrelated to the constructed nature of gender. Warfare is the province of men in the modern world and therefore not analyzed on the basis of its gendered aspects. Yet, using a gendered reading of how and why war is conducted illuminates much about its social and political significance. Historians have examined The Civil War from

²⁶Susan Bordo, in "Feminism, Post modernism, and Gender Skepticism." *Feminism/Post modernism*, Edited by Linda J. Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990) , 137. Lee Ann Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis In Gender:: Augusta, Georgia 1860-1890* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995) , 3.

every conceivable perspective for over a century. However, no historian had studied the impact of socially constructed gender norms on the course of war. In 1995, Lee Ann Whites exposed the intimate connections between war and masculinity as it was constructed in the antebellum South.²⁷

In Whites's view, manhood was clearly at stake in the war. Black men stood ready to prove their manhood as soldiers and masters of death. This put the foundation of white men's masculinity in jeopardy. Black soldiers had the opportunity to prove they were men of honor by participating in honorable activities previously available only to white men. If black men could participate in one of the fundamental activities used to establish white male superiority then the entire structure of white masculinity was on uncertain ground. "If black men could acquire manhood through military service, then white men could lose it, or at least their racialized understanding of it."²⁸

Manhood was not all that was at stake: the war threatened to break down the quid pro quo between Southern men and women. In that arrangement men were to protect and women to obey and submit. Yet, as the war dragged on, it became increasingly apparent that men could not fulfill their role without the active support of their women at home. When Southern women had to fill male roles at home gender

²⁷Whites, *The Civil War as A Crisis in Gender*, 4.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 3.

constructs were thrown into disarray. Here was a real *crisis in gender*.

Whites makes significant progress in deconstructing "the view from nowhere." Through a gendered analysis of Southern culture before and after the war, she shows that white men in the North and South were not independent, autonomous "free men" but were defined through those they subordinated. Those subordinates took the reins of society while the men were away fighting, and soon the leaders became dependent on the led to preserve the culture that maintained and defined their own masculinity. When seen from this perspective, the Civil War did produce a crisis in gender. With the traditional gender roles turned up side down, men had lost their masculine sphere. That was indeed a crisis, for it exposed that white males did indeed have a gendered and racial *view from somewhere*.²⁹

Antebellum Southern males relied on a socially constructed understanding of manhood. This was their cultural positioning system: the *somewhere* from which they constructed their reality. Whites sums up the importance of male gender studies by calling for a vigorous commitment to it: "Until we recognize that whites have race and that men have gender and that both have a social history, then gender studies will remain incomplete."³⁰

²⁹Ibid. , 7.

³⁰Ibid. , 9.

Whites's work is an important contribution to Southern historiography. Her argument is directly descended from Joan Scott's call for a rethinking of feminist history. It also builds on the work of Bertram Wyatt-Brown and other pioneers in gender history. On careful examination, feminism and manhood studies are not as far apart as might be thought. Without the shift in feminist history encouraged by Scott and others, investigations of the socially constructed nature of masculinity would not have been possible.

Using the tools of gender analysis enables us to better understand the lives of Southern men. And examining Robert Potter's life in detail exposes how antebellum gender prescriptions affected the lives of Southern men in general. Like many men of his time, Potter's life was driven by his desire to express and preserve masculinity within the gender dictates of his society. When we recognize that men and women have gendered histories, we can build a picture of the past that reflects the political relationships between men, women, society, and the strategies they developed to order their world.

I

FROM BOYHOOD TO "UNSPEAKABLE CRIMES" IN NORTH CAROLINA

Robert Potter's life is a study of the struggle of men and women to conform to antebellum rules of gender, masculinity, and honor. Personal honor was a central theme of antebellum Southern life, and public perception and recognition of honorific conduct for women and men conferred and protected personal honor. Women were expected to maintain a reputation of chastity and sexual purity; men, on the other hand, were expected to constantly prove their virility, strength, self-possession, and ferocity. Men maintained and enhanced their standing in the community by aggressively and violently defending threats to their honor. A man unwilling or unable to defend his reputation with violent action was less of a man in the public's assessment. Thus, honor was inexorably linked to certain rituals of masculinity within Old South Society.³¹

When Potter attacked the two men he had accused of committing adultery with his wife, he was attempting to defend his honor and threats to his masculinity. To accomplish this he reacted with swift, unreasoned violence, castrating Louis Taylor and Louis Wiley. In his

³¹Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, passim.

understanding of the situation, the act of castration preserved his honor and his manhood. Castration suited his ends well: it was both violent and bloody yet stopped short of murder. Indeed, this particular kind of maiming appealed to Potter's sense of justice and honor, and he assumed that the public would also approve. In short, he believed that he had enhanced his masculinity by exacting such severe and precise retribution.³²

Many people in Potter's community, and many in the state, condoned the attacks, yet his incarceration indicates that others did not. One contemporary writer claimed that Potter attempted to keep the "operations" a secret, indicating that he knew that more genteel members of the society might condemn his actions. Some contemporary accounts claim that Potter told his victims that he would not tell anyone of the castrations if they did not reveal that he had committed them. Chroniclers of Potter's behavior indicate that his actions placed him within a shifting class-based understanding of male honor. Common folk expected a man to respond with bloody violence when his honor had been impugned, but elites were beginning to reject such violence as barbarous and uncivilized.³³

³²A first hand account of the event does not exist, however, this rare crime was the inspiration for several historical articles and many quasi-historical stories and biographies. These accounts, taken together, constitute a historically palpable kind of folklore. These accounts were consulted as folklore representing the general run of events.

³³Robert Winston gives a reasonably accurate account of the general events surrounding the situation in, Robert Watson Winston, "Robert Potter: Tar Heel and Texas Dare Devil," *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 29, (1930) , 140-159.

This kind of violence remained acceptable much longer in the South than in the North. Dueling or maiming did not fall out of broad favor in the South until the 1850s or 60s; however, Potter's case indicates that they began to decline much sooner. In 1831 when Potter castrated Taylor and Wiley, maiming a foe in a fight or killing him in a duel was still considered socially acceptable. Yet Potter's case so shocked elite society that the North Carolina legislature made castration a capitol crime. Clearly, the visceral barbarity of castration horrified aristocratic society and caused it to discourage such bloody violence. Elites preferred settling disputes by dueling. Because it was more ritualized and less bloody, dueling was viewed as noble combat and therefore brought honor to the duelists. In contrast, bloody maiming began to be seen as senseless and dishonorable mayhem perpetrated by the lower classes.³⁴

There were important reasons why the Southern ruling class began to reject the kind of violence Potter perpetrated, while common men still embraced it as a viable means of maintaining honor. By the 1820s, elite men had begun to equate honor and status less with physical prowess and more with wealth, piety, and political power. In contrast, common men, who lacked wealth and political power, continued to gain status and honor through the traditional means available to them, physical strength and violence. Potter's early life experiences in non-elite society may have influenced his actions. Although he had become an elite male, he resorted to common

³⁴For the significance of dueling see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 350-351. For changing notions of honor see Ibid. , 88-114. For common men's methods of defending honor see, Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992) , 170-176.

violence when his honor and his masculinity were in question.

Because his violent and bloody actions contrasted sharply with his elite status, Robert Potter provides a rich example of changing cultural notions of manhood, honor and gender in the Old South.³⁵

Potter's early life is not well documented, and the extant primary sources offer little to expand our knowledge of his roots. His birthplace, the neighborhood of Brassfields, was located sixteen miles from the town of Oxford in Granville county North Carolina. Potter's exact birth date is uncertain, but he appears to have been born in 1800. His father was a farmer who apparently owned no slaves. There were few slave owners in this area, and Potter's family, while not wealthy, was not extremely poor. That the Potters owned no slaves may indicate, that they, like many of their neighbors, disapproved of slavery.³⁶

Potter left the family farm and joined the United States Navy in 1815 where he received the beginnings of his formal education from the ship's chaplain.³⁷ The war of 1812 ended the year before Potter enlisted, and military service did not offer him the kind of opportunity and experiences he needed to establish himself as a high ranking male among other men in the South. The Navy did, however, provide an ideal environment for a young man like Potter to learn the connection between violence and manhood. The adolescent Potter learned how

³⁵Scott Culclasure, " 'I have Killed a Damned Dog' : Murder by a Poor White in the Antebellum South." *The North Carolina Historical Review* Vol. 70 No. 1 (January, 1993) , 14-40. Elliott Gorn "Gouge, Bite, Pull Hair, and Scratch" , 18-32.

³⁶Joseph Blount Cheshire, *Nonnulla : Memories, Stories, Traditions, More or Less True* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1930) 65-87. Winston, *Robert Potter*, 140-141.

³⁷Robert Potter's naval records reproduced by Louis Wiltz Kemp, found in the Louis Wiltz Kemp Collection, box #2R231, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin.

men exhibited manhood from sailors who were known for venting pent-up energy with wild behavior that featured fighting. Potter was not promoted during his navy service and he lacked the sort of distinguished military career that would have elevated his position in the hierarchy of male society.³⁸

After six years of service Potter left the navy and returned to North Carolina, where he settled in Halifax, seventy-five miles from his home town of Oxford. There he began studying law. At that time legal training resembled an apprenticeship in which young men studied under established practitioners. Potter settled at a plantation known as "The Groves," home of the late Willie Jones. Jones had been instrumental in forming the North Carolina state constitution in 1788, was an ardent republican, and was a refined and powerful aristocrat. The Groves evidently provided training for young lawyers. It had an extensive library and was a Mecca for elite members of society. Here Potter was exposed to the ruling class of Southern society that he sought to enter. He was on the cusp of manhood, twenty-one years of age, well read in the necessary classics, and learning aristocratic ways.³⁹

Potter studied law for several months. One of his early cases gained statewide recognition when he appealed to the North Carolina Supreme Court on behalf of a client who had been denied a jury trial. Potter argued that being tried without the benefit of a jury was unconscionable. The high court denied his appeal, but his brief was

³⁸On the significance of male hierarchy see, Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 69-70.

³⁹Earnest G. Fischer, *Robert Potter: Founder of the Texas Navy* (New York: The Pelican Publishing Co. , 1976) , 11.

entered into the North Carolina legal Reports and published as a broadside. Using the fame generated by this recognition, Potter soon made the transition from law to politics.⁴⁰

Biographers differ over the details of Potter's early political career, but they agree that a disorderly series of events led to his election to the North Carolina House of Commons in 1824. Matters of policy were not at issue. The real contest, as it was reported, seems to have been based on personalities and societal rank. Potter, young, inexperienced, and zealous, challenged Jesse Bynum, the elder, conservative, incumbent. For the next three years, violence reigned during the elections while Potter found his bearings in the world of rural politics⁴¹

Besides their opposing ideologies, the enmity between the two men was said to have arisen when Bynum refused to introduce Potter to a young belle at a local gathering. If this were the root of their feud, it indicated that Potter chafed under the controlling force of the elder generation, adding fuel to his impatience for higher rank in the male hierarchy. In the election of 1824 the well-established Bynum won out over the younger, inexperienced candidate. Potter claimed that he was defeated by a fraudulent count, and challenged Bynum to a duel following the election. Bynum refused, claiming that Potter was unworthy. He dismissed the challenge and reminded Potter of his

⁴⁰In his argument to the justices of the high court he warned that, "The habit of discarding the jury, is a hoary error, sanctioned by time and hallowed by precedent, but your Honors must not be swayed by a thousand idle bug-bears started to terrify the mind and mislead it in its investigation." Watson Winston, *Robert Potter*, 141-143.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 143-144.

place: "I will not sport away my life with any tussey boy or understrapper."⁴²

The next year both men ran again. There was a riot on election day, and one man was said to have been killed. The election was canceled, and the borough went unrepresented in 1825. Potter continued to denounce Bynum as a poltroon and a coward. Bynum issued a paper defending his position entitled: "An Exposition of Potter's Misrepresentations." In it he stated, among other things, that "Potter was a demon of discord." The battle for supremacy ended in Potter's favor in the election of 1826 when Bynum did not run for reelection, and Potter defeated the hand picked candidate from the "Bynum Party."⁴³

Regardless of the exact events surrounding the election, the two men were engaged in a struggle for masculine supremacy. Potter used the approved tools of the established generation to defeat the dominant male who had attempted to keep him in his place. The rules governing this kind of battle were complex and precise. A seemingly insignificant gesture could ignite violence. Bynum is said to have once rested his hand on Potter's shoulder at a social gathering, leaving Potter deeply insulted. He was amazed that Bynum could be "guilty of such rudeness and vulgarity." The next day Potter went looking for satisfaction, and the two opposing factions battled at a local tavern. Potter was stabbed with a sword cane, and Bynum's skull was fractured.⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid. , 145.

⁴³Winston, *Robert Potter*, 145.

⁴⁴Ibid.

As the aggressor in this and other conflicts, Potter won not only a seat in the House of Commons, he won position and rank. The young, vigorous male had brought down and supplanted, at least temporarily, the ranking elder. A sharp tongue, a quick temper, and rapid, careless use of potentially mortal violence propelled Potter into the highest ranks of Southern manhood. At the young age of twenty six he was no longer an “understrapper.”

In keeping with his new stature as a man of state and honor, Potter introduced a bill to the North Carolina House of Commons proposing the formation of what he termed a “Political College.” He conceived it with the overall intention of improving North Carolina society. The program was to educate those boys whose fathers could not afford to provide them with higher education. The outline of the bill was both chivalrous and farsighted. Had it passed it would have marked him as a truly progressive leader. The college was to be funded by the state and would have admitted those qualified young men whose families were worth less than a one thousand dollars. The state would have assumed their entire support and education for six years.⁴⁵

During their first three years of college young men were to learn the standard college disciplines and the science of agriculture. The remaining three years were to be spent living and teaching in various parts of the state under the supervision of qualified faculty. Potter argued tirelessly for the bill on the floor of the house, admonishing his peers to consider that “a hundred men educated in the manner

⁴⁵Cheshire, *Nonnulla*, 68-69.

proposed, would be worth more to the state than a hundred thousand, with a mere smattering of education.”⁴⁶

In his speech on behalf of his education bill, Potter also attacked some of his political enemies including Bynum. He hurled insults at various powerful men in the state house, especially those who appeared to have had connections back in Halifax. The bill was laid on the table and never came to a vote. Incessant battling had defeated him once again. Potter’s vituperative speech deepened and perhaps broadened the enmity of powerful men. He was still young and perhaps trying to prove he deserved his new rank, but in the process he overstepped the bounds of acceptable political behavior. Honor required that he constantly prove himself; however behavioral rules were in flux as society re-negotiated its definition of honorable behavior. It seemed that Potter repeatedly misjudged and overstepped those limits because he was unable to escape his backcountry roots and govern himself according to genteel standards.⁴⁷

Potter returned home to Halifax from the capital in Raleigh in the spring of 1827, but several months later some unknown event caused him to leave in a rage. Some of his contemporaries speculated that he so angered Halifax society with his political college speech that they somehow forced him to exit hastily the highly charged political environment. Before departing Halifax, Potter leveled one more attack at his enemies. Apparently with an eye toward revenge, he wrote a

⁴⁶Charles L. Coon, *Public Education in North Carolina, A Documentary History 1790-1840*, 2 vol. (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1915), 1:300.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 308-329.

mock heroic poem marked by bitter invective, slanderous allusions, and biting sarcasm. Addressing many individuals by name, Potter directed it primarily at his political rivals and other members of elite society. This episode closed one chapter of his political career, and marked the beginning of another.⁴⁸

Potter returned to Granville County and settled in his hometown of Oxford, where he again sought public office. In Oxford he began agitating for closure of the state banks in his campaign for state representative from Granville. Since the majority of Granville's residents were yeoman farmers his stumping fell on sympathetic ears. The farmers were angry with the banks, which had over-speculated in the cotton market, because they were then charging farmers twelve percent interest on crop loans and demanding payment in specie. Farms were falling into foreclosure and being sold for taxes. Potter supported the farmers in their claim that the banks had first flooded the area with paper money and loaned generously to them. Once the currency had depreciated, however, banks began calling in the loans in an attempt to gain ownership of the land. Potter called for closure of the banks, capping of judge's salaries, and limiting lawyer's fees to ten dollars. These campaign initiatives won him the vote of common farmers and they overwhelmingly elected him to represent Granville in the state house.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Robert Potter, *The Head of Medusa*, unpublished poem, reproduced from the Texas State library, box 2-22/597, Austin, Texas; The poem runs thirty five typed legal sized pages as transcribed from the original; Appendix one contains the first page of this poem and shows Potter's literary ability and biting wit.

⁴⁹Cheshire, *Nonnulla*, 71. Fischer, *Robert Potter*, 19.

Potter argued in support of his bill for nine consecutive days on the floor of the house, in the process establishing himself as a champion of the farmer and small freeholder. The battle was fierce and the vote evenly split, but the bill failed on a tie-breaking vote by the house speaker. Potter nonetheless gained some fame from this episode. Three months after his election to the North Carolina state house, he was elected to the United States Congress. The state legislature adjourned in February 1829, and Potter took his seat in Washington the following December. He served in the Twenty-First Congress of 1831 where he argued in favor of revoking the charter of the United States bank on the grounds that it was unwise and injurious to common people to make and distribute paper money.⁵⁰

Potter's distrust of the banking system was characteristic of many Southern men of this period. Southerners in general, farmers and cotton growers in particular, felt that Northern controlled banking concerns were antithetical to Southern prosperity. Potter grew up in years of rapid westward expansion. Between 1810 and 1820 the population of the Mississippi-Alabama territory increased by nearly 200,000. When he entered the navy in 1815, the South began an unprecedented period of economic growth that lasted until 1819. Spurred on by the sale of public lands, generous loans, and increased European demand for cotton, farmers and planters bought slaves and western land on credit, expanding cotton production into the rich soils of the Mississippi territory. A wave of extreme nationalism swept the country in the wake of the U.S. victory in the war of 1812, fueling expansion and economic growth. Banks proliferated between 1815

⁵⁰U.S. Congress, *Congressional Debates*, May 10, 1830.

and 1819 to meet demands for capital to finance expansion. To meet the growing demand for capital, banks lent freely without regard to keeping safe reserves of specie to support their loans. In 1819 the boom cycle ended abruptly when cotton production exceeded European demand and cotton prices plummeted. New director of the Bank of the United States, Landon Cheves, exacerbated the situation in 1819 when he implemented retrenchment policies, calling in notes from satellite banks and foreclosing on mortgages. This pressured local banks to begin calling in their notes extended to small farmers. When depression engulfed the South and west, Southerners blamed the United States bank headquartered in Philadelphia for their hardship.⁵¹

When Potter was elected to the North Carolina House of Commons in 1826, the South was still reeling from the depression, Andrew Jackson had lost a controversial presidential election to John Quincy Adams, and sectionalism was taking root. Potter's rise in politics coincided with the rise of Jacksonian Democracy in America. Jackson won the presidential election the same year that Potter was elected to the United States Congress, and Potter supported Jacksonian ideals throughout his brief congressional career. Like other Jacksonian advocates of the common man, Potter supported wresting control from privileged elites and returning it to the plain folk. And when Jackson began fighting the national bank's powerful new director, Nicholas Biddle, Potter supported his efforts.⁵²

⁵¹John Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region*, 2 vol. , (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995) , 1:170-173. Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Bank War: A Study in Presidential Power*, (New York: Norton, 1967) , 49-66.

⁵²Arthur Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1945) , passim.

Potter swam with the Southern political tide during his national political career, and in that sense he was true son of the South. As a strong Jacksonian, Potter believed in the Southern rural agricultural way of life, and he used his newly won status to preserve it. The only thing still missing in his "successful" persona was a good wife and a family.

Potter married Isabella A. Taylor in August 1828. He was maturing as a statesman, and his record was unmarked by the kind of behavior he had exhibited while serving in the North Carolina legislature. After serving out his first term in U.S. Congress, he prepared to be seated for the Twenty Second Congress on December 5, 1831. Potter's political career and his personal life were going smoothly. Powerful, well respected, and well married, his fortunes were clearly on the rise when he made a watershed decision that exposed his overwhelming and violent irrationality.⁵³

Potter returned home to Oxford from Washington in the summer of 1831. The details of events are not reliably recorded, but sometime in August of that year, Potter accused his wife of committing adultery with two members of her extended family. Soon afterward, perhaps that same day, he hunted down the suspected men and surgically castrated them. There are differing versions of the story, and no first hand account, but all agree on the major points of the attack. Robert Winston states that Potter returned home to find his wife in a prayer meeting with a group of church members from the Oxford community. The group included the Reverend Louis Taylor (his wife's cousin) and Taylor's 17 year old nephew, Louis Wiley. Potter accused the two men

⁵³Fischer, *Robert Potter*, 22.

of debauching his young wife, and later hunted them down individually, then tied and castrated them. He then returned the men to their homes and put them to bed. Arrested the next day, Potter was denied bail because, it was said, the men might yet die from their wounds. Neither man did die, but Potter was nonetheless held until his trial. Acting as his own attorney, he defended the castrations as justified on grounds that his victims had violated the sanctity of the marriage bed. As the trial proceeded he also claimed that rich and powerful men were persecuting him because he had attempted to "relieve the people of their oppression." Potter was convicted of maiming the men by a judge and jury and sentenced to two years in jail and a one thousand dollar fine.⁵⁴

Although Potter's actions were considered heinous by many members of society, his reasoning reflected the masculine language of honor. Some people claimed that Potter had actually fallen in love with a beautiful heiress while serving as a congressman in Washington, and was looking for an excuse to end his marriage. Whether he wanted out of his marriage or whether he actually believed his wife was guilty of adultery, accusing her of infidelity was the most socially acceptable way to end his marriage and preserve his honor.⁵⁵

For men, adultery was commonplace, though not openly approved. An adulterous woman, by contrast, was considered ruined. Where male adultery reaffirmed masculine virility, female adultery destroyed a woman's purity and chastity, the basis of her claim to honor. Isabella Potter sued Robert Potter for divorce in 1833 in an attempt to recover

⁵⁴Winston, *Robert Potter*, 152.

⁵⁵Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 62-68.

her honor, which had been severely damaged by the incident. She was eventually granted a divorce in 1835, and immediately afterward she petitioned to have her name changed to her mother's maiden name of Pellum in a further attempt to distance herself from the disgraceful incident.⁵⁶

The accusation of female adultery not only destroyed the reputation of women like Isabella, it also threatened Southern manhood by questioning a man's ability to satisfy and control his wife, and by making it difficult to determine the paternity of his heirs. Men's mastery over women, children, slaves, business, and politics was the cornerstone of their social dominance. A man who could not control his wife's sexual behavior was not her master, and accordingly, was less qualified to assert masculine prerogatives in society. An adulterous woman threatened the foundation and structure of antebellum society. That is why Southern men and women alike defended white male notions of honor and superiority.⁵⁷

When Robert Potter accused his wife of committing adultery, he attempted to dishonor her in a culturally acceptable manner that would preserve his own honor. Simply charging her with adultery, however, might have won him a divorce, but was not enough to maintain his honorable status in the community. Men were expected to control their property by whatever appropriate means available. If they could not, it reflected negatively on their masculinity. The legal structure placed full responsibility for controlling subordinates on

⁵⁶Isabella A. Potter vs. Robert Potter, Divorce Records, Granville County, 1833, NCDAH.

⁵⁷Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 226-254.

men. If a wife were unfaithful, if a slave misbehaved, or if his cow got into the neighbor's corn, Southern men were expected to take decisive action to set the situation right. If Potter hoped to disgrace his wife, end his marriage, and remain a respected member of the community, he had to act in a way that would prove he was not to be cuckolded.⁵⁸

Potter understood this code. Castrating the two men was his attempt to comply with it and demonstrate his masculinity to the community. Severing the organs most closely associated with manhood exacted the level of revenge Potter needed to reassert his own virility and preserve his honor. Had Potter killed the men, he would have faced murder charges, something unacceptable for a man of honor. Castration, on the other hand, struck directly at the source of the threat without being a capital crime.⁵⁹ Bloody violence was condoned in situations of this nature. And, except in rare cases, murder was not. Whether the crime was premeditated or committed in a fit of passion, Potter understood his actions to be socially acceptable. If he did not understand this in the heat of the moment, those values were ingrained in his conception of honor. Castration was beyond the normal level of violence sanctioned by elite Southern culture, but it was consistent with the violence perpetrated by non-

⁵⁸On divorce see Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 74-75. ; See also, Victoria Bynum, "Reshaping the Bonds of Womanhood: Divorce in Reconstruction North Carolina." In *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, edited by, Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 321-333. On manhood and honorable action see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 25-62.

⁵⁹In August 1831, castration was only a misdemeanor punishable by a fine and imprisonment. That same year the legislature made it a capital felony. In 1868, the penalty was reduced to imprisonment for not less than five years, nor more than sixty years.

elite men in battles over honor and masculinity. Despite the trappings of his new-found elite status, Potter's common background influenced his conduct in battles concerning masculinity. By taking this sort of violent and decisive action, Potter secured the approbation of common men and preserved his manhood within the culture of Southern plain folk.⁶⁰

Soon after being jailed, Potter wrote an appeal to his constituents, the local farmers and country people. In it, he attempted to justify his actions by using the language of honor. He invoked cultural symbols of manhood to excuse his crime, and although he was convicted and jailed, the non-elite population of Granville County continued to support him. For six days following his arrest, crowds gathered outside the jail and rioted for his release. Officials were so concerned that his popularity would present problems that they moved him from the jail in his hometown of Oxford to a jail in the nearby town of Hillsborough. Potter crafted his appeal to impress the common people. He believed that with their support he could launch his political career anew. The appeal was printed and broadcast throughout the county, spreading his popularity.⁶¹

Almost immediately after serving out his two year sentence, Potter was elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives by his ardent supporters. He had judged them correctly. They shared his understanding of masculinity, rejected elite values, and claimed him as

⁶⁰Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch" 18-32. Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor*, 199-225.

⁶¹Robert Potter, *Mr. Potter's Appeal to the Citizens of Nash, Franklin, Warren, and Granville*, Samuel Asbury Papers, Folder on Robert Potter, box #2A139, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin. Potter's popular support and transfer see Cheshire, *Nonnulla*, 75-78. The appeal is reproduced in appendix two. It is an excellent example of Potter's forceful argumentative style.

one of their own. The community of non-elite men understood Potter's act for what it meant in their society: attacks on white male prerogatives required bloody, violent retribution if one were to be respected by his peers. In his appeal, Potter presented many justifications for his actions. To this end, he invoked culturally accepted norms of gender behavior and manhood. He claimed that "the public" was "too weak" to understand the "full measure of Justice" which he had dispensed. He had dispensed this justice, albeit excessive, because his society expected some form of retribution and, the "pride of manhood demanded it."⁶²

Potter reasoned that the castrated men had done irreparable physical and emotional damage to him. Taylor and Wiley, he wrote, had "stabbed me most vitally" and "hurt me beyond all cure." In the language of manhood such "physical damage" to one's honor required a swift and violent response. Potter was "forced" to take an eye for an eye. Manhood and honor were deeply connected to physical prowess and the ability to control others with fear of physical violence. The two men had intruded on his physical realm and damaged his ability to control his world. They had, "abused" him and done him violence, but more importantly, their alleged actions threatened his claim to honor and therefore his masculinity. In effect, the men had emasculated him. Thus he argued that their behavior merited "even such an affliction" as castration.⁶³

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Robert Potter, *Mr. Potter's Appeal*, 2. On the connection between masculinity and violence see, Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery*, 3-24.

Beyond the "physical" harm of the alleged adultery, Potter was most concerned with his public image. He suggested that he might have been able to bear the "physical damage" done him, but the damage to his public image made him "resolved to act." One of his primary grievances was that the two men had "cheated" him, presumably out of his public persona of masculinity. Honor could only be claimed if the community acknowledged it; Taylor and Wiley had threatened his masculinity and therefore robbed him of his public claim to honor. He was once again no longer the master of his world. He stood alongside children, slaves, and women and beneath men of honor. Potter's violent actions thus enabled him to reclaim his master status among honor bearing men of Southern society.⁶⁴

Potter's fellow representatives in the North Carolina state house were appalled that a man capable of such common violence should be allowed to serve alongside them. Demonstrating their indignation, members of the legislature decreed castration a crime punishable by death without benefit of clergy.⁶⁵ The legislature sought a legal means to prevent Potter from taking his seat on the grounds that he had been elected before he had served out his jail sentence. However, as the situation unfolded, legislators discovered that he had, in fact, served out his sentence and was duly elected by the people of Granville with their full knowledge of his crime. Perhaps impressed by his violent

⁶⁴Robert Potter, *Mr. Potter's Appeal*, 1. On violence and honor see, Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 25-30.

⁶⁵Robert Watson Winston writes that "benefit of clergy" meant that an individual who was literate would not suffer death for certain offenses. Therefore, the clause "without benefit of clergy" in the law would have prevented educated men like Potter from saving themselves from the gallows. Interestingly, Winston claims that the 51st Psalm was called the "neck verse" because prisoners would memorize and recite it as if reading it in an attempt to prove literacy and save themselves from hanging, Winston, *Robert Potter*, 152.

retribution and stirring rhetoric, it appeared that the voters elected him *because* of his crime.⁶⁶

Potter took his seat in November of 1834, but by December of that year his fellow lawmakers had discovered sufficient grounds for expulsion. They charged him with precipitating a fight over a game of cards and pulling a gun on one of his colleagues. The house then formed a committee to investigate the charge and quickly initiated a resolution to expel him. Some members wondered openly where it would end if the house were to investigate the private affairs of all their members. These lawmakers understood that if Potter were expelled because of his private actions that their own male prerogatives might be in jeopardy. In spite of their logical protests, on January 2, 1835, by a vote of sixty-two to forty-two, the house voted to expel Potter.⁶⁷

Potter had redeemed himself before his constituents, but the ruling class of men were unwilling to accept him. Violent retribution could restore a man's honor only if it was appropriate to the class that it was intended to impress; unfortunately for Potter, he orbited in two different worlds. By reacting with extreme violence he won the confidence of farmers and backwoodsmen, yet alienated the ruling class. The support of common men would do him no good if elites rejected him. Potter's swift and bloody revenge had restored his masculinity and honor in the eyes of common men, but it ended his political career in North Carolina.

⁶⁶Cheshire, *Nonnulla*, 80.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 81.

With his reputation at its nadir in North Carolina, Potter was politically bankrupt and on the run. The elite rejected and rebuked him, and members of his ex-wife's family swore to kill him for besmirching their family name. In a masterful bit of understatement, one of his friends suggested that he "seek out some new and peaceful situation."⁶⁸ Like many men of his generation who hoped to erase their past and make a new start, Potter migrated westward. Although he had been a forceful speaker and a dynamic political figure in North Carolina, he was a relative newcomer among the ruling elite. Senior males attempted to limit the progress of younger men to consolidate and protect their own power and wealth. For many ambitious and unestablished men of the Old South, moving west offered an opportunity to escape the entrenched, planter-dominated hierarchy of the Southeast. Potter had destroyed his opportunity to advance in the small, tightly woven web of the North Carolina upper class. Hoping to reinvent himself as a man of honor, and searching for an opportunity to rejoin the elite, Potter fled westward to Texas.

⁶⁸Ibid. , 82.

II

GONE TO TEXAS: REVOLUTION AND FAME

In the 1830s, the border area of Louisiana and the Mexican State of Coahuila y Texas attracted a wide range of individuals. Criminals, debtors, and social misfits located there to avoid U.S. laws and yet remain close to the relative safety of the United States. Alongside these dubious characters, land speculators and other opportunists who understood the great economic potential of Texas settled in eastern Texas where they operated among the growing Anglo-American farming population. While many of the men who relocated to the Texas border region were fleeing justice or debt in the U.S., others hoped to purchase land and make a fresh start on the frontier.

At 35, Potter was a relatively young man when he fled North Carolina for Texas. The details of his trip west are undocumented, but he landed first in New Orleans, where he lingered for a short time before moving over the border to the old Spanish settlement of Nacogdoches in July of 1835. That summer, Texas was in the early stages of revolt against the Mexican government; and by October Potter had enlisted in the "Nacogdoches Independent Volunteers," led by Thomas J. Rusk. Rusk's company was ostensibly organized to

defend Texas settlers' rights as guaranteed under the Mexican Constitution of 1824. Potter stayed in Rusk's company only a short time, leaving after one month, and drawing no pay for his brief service. Given Potter's aggressive personality, his lust for action, and his desire to improve his economic position, he likely left Rusk's command seeking more prestigious and more profitable avenues to serve himself and the emerging republic.⁶⁹

Searching for the best opportunity to enhance his position in Texas, Rusk's company offered Potter few advantages. For one, he was serving under Captain Rusk while he himself held the courtesy title of Colonel. Each of these titles were somewhat arbitrary based in part on the holder's social rank and alternately on their ability to command respect from his men. While a captain primarily commanded men in the field, Colonel was less a military title and more a mark of individual standing. Perhaps serving as a subaltern to Captain Rusk chaffed Potter's sense of personal honor. Regardless of his reasons for leaving Rusk's volunteers, Potter quickly sought a new position. On December 1, 1835, Potter addressed a letter to the Provisional Government of Texas requesting a commission and letters of marque. Potter cited his naval experience and told the government that he could "render more effectual service at sea than elsewhere."⁷⁰

⁶⁹Louis Wiltz Kemp, *The Signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence*, (Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1944) , 173-180. Fischer, *Robert Potter*, 32-33.

⁷⁰Robert Potter to the Governing Council of Texas, 1 December 1835, box # 401-1195, Texas State Library, Austin.

Texas as yet had no "navy" or armed vessels at its disposal. Hoping to use privateer vessels to help its cause, the government granted the letters, essentially a license to pirate, to Potter and several others. Still, neither Potter nor Texas had an armed vessel. Had a ship been available, cruising the Texas coast waylaying Mexican cargo ships would have provided Potter with a share in the captured spoils as well as public and private acclaim for his contribution to Texas independence. This was an ideal opportunity for a newcomer like Potter to establish himself, and success would have thrust him into a social rank befitting his self perception. Privateering on behalf of the rebellious frontier, it would have earned him high praise and honor among the men of uppermost standing. Texas did not acquire ships soon enough, however, for Potter to capitalize on that opportunity and he never took advantage of his license to cruise the gulf as a privateer.

In November 1835, as Potter moved from Rusk's company and an uncertain future, the planning and skirmishing that led to Texas's war for independence intensified. After the opening incident in October, when a group of settlers fired on Mexican troops after refusing to return a cannon loaned to them by the Mexican government to protect themselves from Indian depredations, the Texians⁷¹ began their revolt by capturing the presidio at Goliad. Bolstered by this minor victory, they surrounded and eventually attacked San Antonio de Bexar. Now in full-scale revolt, Texians called for a meeting of delegates from Texas communities. The Consultation of 1835 met at San Filipe de

⁷¹The term Texian is generally applied to a citizen of the Anglo-American section of the province of Coahuila and Texas or of the Republic of Texas. "After annexation Texan Replaced Texian." *The Handbook of Texas*,. "Texian." (Austin: The Texas State Historical Commission, 1996) , *Handbook of Texas Online*.

Austin on November 3-14. The delegates ostensibly met to clarify the settlers relationship with the Mexican Government. However, they were soon planning for independence. The delegates set up a provisional government and elected Henry Smith governor. They established a general council to act as a legislative body, and they sent Stephen F. Austin and others to seek recognition and assistance from the United States. Sam Houston was elected commander-in-chief of the army. And among other war-like actions, the delegates formed a committee on naval affairs. It was at this meeting that the letters of marque, like the one eventually issued to Potter, were recommended to help Texas deal with the Mexican navy in the gulf. Potter would have been a natural choice as a delegate to the consultation, but he did not attend.⁷²

Potter was one of relatively few men in Texas at the time with an education and political experience. His resignation from the army was not official until November 21, yet when delegates met in early November, he was no longer with Rusk's company. Potter was unaccounted for until he wrote the letter requesting a commission with the Texas "Navy." His absence at the consultation might have been due to his recent arrival in Texas. He was, as yet, undistinguished and not well known. He may also have simply been out of communication with those planning the meeting. Potter's early

⁷²On the government see, William C. Binkley, ed. , 6 vol. , *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution 1835-1836*, (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936) , 1:39-41. See also Paul Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: A Social and Political History 1835-1836*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992) , 38-39. On the incident surrounding the cannon see, Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) , 6-8.

military career in Texas had done little to increase his wealth or public standing.⁷³

Texas was moving ever more quickly toward all-out war for independence and needed experienced statesmen to guide the fledgling republic. Potter needed a position in Texas that suited his talents and that would secure him elite standing. Pursuing this goal, he returned to his personal bailiwick: rough and tumble rural politics. Established in November 1835, by December the provisional government was wracked by dissension and confusion. Hoping to steady the situation, the general council called for an election of delegates to meet in March 1836 to set up an Ad Interim Government and frame a new constitution. The district of Nacogdoches, a well-established area in the sparsely populated state, was allowed to send four delegates to the meeting. Potter sought one of those four seats as a point of entry into the upper levels of government in the emerging republic.⁷⁴

Among the two opposing factions in Nacogdoches, the war party supported immediate declaration of independence, while the other called for conciliation and adherence to the Mexican Constitution of 1824. Potter was uncommitted, but an incident involving a group of volunteers that had just arrived from Newport, Kentucky, helped him decide. The election judge did not want the Kentucky soldiers to vote, but without their votes, the local Mexican population might outvote the war hawks and elect a representative sympathetic to Mexico.

⁷³On Potter's movements see Fischer, *Robert Potter*, 30-32.

⁷⁴On formation of the various Texas governments see, Binkley, *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution*, 1:3-5.

Thus the war hawks favored allowing the Kentucky Riflemen to vote. Furthermore, the commander of the riflemen was enraged that he and his men had come so far to help Texas and were being prevented from exercising their rights as Americans. The Kentuckians lined up and threatened to fire on the building where the election was being held if they were not allowed to vote. In an effort to avoid bloodshed it was decided that the citizens should decide if the soldiers should be permitted to vote. Local citizens, the majority of whom were Mexican and Anglo supporters of the constitution of 1824 voted not to allow the soldiers to vote. Again the Kentuckians threatened violence. Potter sensed his opportunity and abandoned his neutral stance on the issue. It became clear that if the soldiers were not allowed to vote there would be trouble, and Potter argued in their favor. With the support of the Kentucky Riflemen, Potter stood fifth in the field of seventeen candidates after the first day of balloting. The following day, after the rural votes were counted, Potter had won the fourth of four seats by just two votes. William Fairfax Gray, who came to Texas scouting for business opportunities said Potter was "courting favor with all his art and succeeding to a wonderful degree. He can only float on troubled waters." Potter's oratorical prowess, his aggressive style, and his political savvy won him a hold on power, a hold he exploited when he reached the convention on March 1, 1836.⁷⁵

Potter defeated some prominent Texians on his way to winning a seat at the Constitutional Convention, including Sam Houston, who finished sixteenth out of seventeen candidates. Houston, however,

⁷⁵William Fairfax Gray, *From Virginia to Texas 1835-1837*, edited by Paul Lack (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1997) , 79-82 and 89-90. On the election returns see Kemp, *Signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence*, 178-179.

whose name was placed on both the Nacogdoches and Refugio district ballots, won in the Refugio election. Houston and Potter crossed paths in the Nacogdoches election and this may have been the source of a contentious relationship between them. Potter was the only representative of Nacogdoches present when the delegates met on March 1, at Washington-on-the-Brazos. Houston was there representing Refugio and the two men were compelled to work together during the meeting.⁷⁶

Both experienced statesmen, Potter and Houston were appointed to a committee to draft rules of order. Houston had been governor of Tennessee, and Potter drew from his senatorial experience. The two also served on the committee to draft a constitution. Potter was the more educated and eloquent statesman while Houston employed a down-to-earth style.⁷⁷

Potter worked diligently at the convention, advising the body on parliamentary procedure, calling for election of officers, and sponsoring a bill to authorize a force of rangers to help defend the frontier. In a long line of actions showing his disdain for Houston, Potter opposed a resolution to reelect Houston as commander-in-chief of the army. The convention elected Houston over Potter's opposition, increasing the enmity between them. The conflict came to a head when the convention received a letter from the Alamo. The delegates received a dispatch from William B. Travis regarding his desperate situation at the Alamo, and Potter, ever the zealot, moved that "the

⁷⁶Proceedings of the General Convention, Washington (on the Brazos), March 1-17, 1836, (Houston, 1838), Texas State Library, Austin. On Potter's defeat of Houston see Kemp, *Signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence*, 178-179.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

convention do immediately adjourn, arm and march to the relief of the Alamo." Several delegates opposed such action, but Houston went further calling the resolution madness, folly and treason. Events proved him right. As the dispatch was read to the delegates on Sunday March 6, Travis and his men were already dead at the Alamo.⁷⁸

The convention was about to begin its third week on March 13, 1836 when the delegates learned of the Alamo defeat. Sam Houston had departed a week earlier to organize his soldiers, and the convention was beginning the work of setting up a new government. After an all-night session on March 16, the Ad-Interim Government formally replaced the provisional government. The delegates elected David Burnet president, and filled important cabinet posts. Thomas Rusk was elected secretary of war over Potter, but Potter won the post of secretary of the navy. By this time the Texians had commandeered some private vessels for the navy's use and were attempting to bolster their tiny fleet with financial help from private banking concerns in New Orleans.⁷⁹

Potter had little time to dedicate to his little navy. The convention adjourned the next day and the new government was in full flight from the advancing Mexican army. They fled from Washington-on-the-Brazos to Groce's plantation ten miles South near the present town of Hempstead. While the government rested near Hempstead, James Fannin and his soldiers began a retreat from Goliad, where they were

⁷⁸Gray, *From Virginia to Texas*, 117. On Potter's motion to aid the troops at the Alamo see *Proceedings of the General Convention*. On the overlapping sequence of events see, *The Handbook of Texas*, v 1, "Alamo" (Austin: Texas State Historical Commission, 1996), 82

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

overtaken by superior forces of the Mexican army and forced to surrender. A week after surrender the Mexican general Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna ordered the prisoners executed. Victorious at Goliad, the Mexicans marched eastward while Houston's forces retreated before them, leaving settlers defenseless. This seemingly aimless retreat, combined with the Alamo and Goliad losses, alarmed the populace into flight. Rumors circulated that the approaching Mexicans were bent on slaughtering soldiers and civilians alike. Mexican ships attempting to supply Santa Anna were sighted off the coast, and Houston's army continued retreating eastward toward the Sabine River, leaving more settlers exposed to the enemy. All this triggered hysteria among the populace, which began fleeing, by land and sea, for the U.S. border. Known as the Runaway Scrape, this all-out flight, consisting of settlers, soldiers, and government officials caused refugee camps to build up in towns along the route to the coast.⁸⁰

Sometime near the end of Houston's retreat, Potter attempted to spy on the general, an act that cemented the hatred between them. Potter, perhaps hoping to obtain information regarding Houston's seemingly inexplicable refusal to turn and face the enemy, planted a spy in his camp. Although there is no evidence that President Burnet knew of Potter's actions, he trusted Potter and regarded him as a man of action and integrity. The president and many others feared losing the war because of Houston's reluctance to fight, and it is possible that Potter acted officially when he sent James H. Perry to spy on Houston.

⁸⁰Gray, *From Virginia to Texas*, 108-136. On the general sequence of events and Fannin's defeat see Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 97-99.

During or just after the constitutional convention in March, the government made Perry commander of the port town of Velasco. Sometime in late March or early April he showed up at Houston's camp with papers indicating that he was a West Point graduate. Apparently, Houston approved of Perry and made him a voluntary aide-de-camp. Perry wrote a letter dated April 9, 1835 that left no doubt he was Potter's spy.⁸¹

Perry delivered a damning report on Houston's command to Potter. The men, he said, were "entirely without discipline," and not likely to "become better disciplined than an ordinary mob." He blamed this on the officers. There were, Perry claimed, many among the officer corps who had an eye on obtaining political office after the war and had "more regard to their own interest than to the welfare of Texas." He reported that Houston was in especially bad condition: "either for want of his customary excitement (for he has entirely discontinued the use of ardent spirits) or as some say from the effect of opium," the general was "in a condition between sleeping and waking which amounts to a constant state of insanity."⁸²

Houston sought complete secrecy about his plans even from his own government. To that end, he strictly insisted on reading and approving all correspondence that left his camp. As the express rider prepared to leave camp, Houston went through his bags and discovered the letter. He sent for Perry and had the letter read aloud

⁸¹Louis Wiltz Kemp, *The Signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence* (Houston: The Anson Jones Press,) 1944, 262-265. James H. Perry, to Robert Potter, 9 April 1836, box # 2-22/151, Texas State Library, Austin. The letter began: "Agreeable to your request, I embrace the earliest opportunity of giving you the information you desire with respect to the army." Binkley, *Official Correspondence of the Texas Revolution*, xxi.

⁸²James H Perry to Robert Potter, 9 April 1836.

before him. Writing years later, Houston claimed that Perry "acknowledged himself [Potter's] spy and pimp upon the general and they were a most worthy pair."⁸³ After the war, Houston worked assiduously to clear his name. The scandal was damaging to his honor and as a leader he had to expurgate it from his past. Potter, on the other hand, stood to gain public stature if he could expose Houston as a coward and save the Texas cause. Looking toward high office and enhanced honor, Potter may have undertaken to spy on Houston without Burnet's knowledge or consent. In the relatively undeveloped society of the frontier, men like Potter fought for power by whatever means were at their disposal, and Potter was not above this kind of activity when honor and reputation were at stake.

Potter's conflict with Houston represented yet another battle over honor and status with an elder, better established foe. Both men were strong willed and confident of their abilities, and struggled for power in the newly formed government. Potter perhaps resented Houston's appointment as commander-in-chief. Houston, on the other hand, disdained the education and oratorical skills that helped Potter defeat him in the Nacogdoches election. Potter had once again elevated his status by defying the honor code of the Old Southeast that restricted younger less established men to subordinate roles. Perhaps because of Potter's continued threat to his supremacy, Houston hated Potter ever after.

As the Runaway Scrape intensified, Houston neared the end of his retreat and the decisive battle at San Jacinto. The Texas ad-interim

⁸³ Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, eds. *The Writings of Sam Houston 1813-1863*. 8 vols. , (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1942) , Sam Houston to David G. Burnet, 1859, 7:330.

government prepared to flee Harrisburg, first for the port town of Velasco, then off shore to Galveston Island. President Burnet sent Potter ahead to help fortify Velasco because it was the only escape route for the government and civilian refugees should the Mexicans defeat Houston's forces. At Velasco, Potter met with Mr. Hall, the port commandant, and it was decided that the civilian refugees should be evacuated to the safety of Galveston Island.⁸⁴

In a small community near Velasco, a delirious local drunk saw a fire in a canebrake and heard the cane popping and cracking as it burned. He ran through town screaming that the Mexicans were coming, burning and murdering along the way. The people fled in panic, and joined the Runaway Scrape. Mrs. Harriet Page and her two small children were among those that joined the retreat. The drunk's alarm proved false. Instead, the settlers discovered that several slaves, finding their masters had left to fight and their mistresses fleeing the Mexicans, had set fire to some houses, which in turn ignited the cane. As some members of the community prepared to return to their homes and deal with the slaves, Potter and Hall rode up and informed them that all civilians were being evacuated to Galveston.⁸⁵

Mrs. Page had just arrived in Texas from New Orleans with her husband a few months earlier. Solomon Page had brought his family to Texas in hopes of getting free land and improving their situation, but he soon deserted them on the prairie to join Houston's army. After some months of living with her children in a small cabin, twenty miles

⁸⁴Gray, *From Virginia to Texas*, 124-127.

⁸⁵Harriet A. Ames, "The History of Harriet A. Ames During the Early Days of Texas" typed unpublished manuscript, 13, Kemp Collection, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin.

from her nearest neighbor, Harriet and her family were rescued and brought to the community near Velasco.⁸⁶

Just before the drunken man sent everyone fleeing into the Runaway Scrape, Harriet Page dressed in her finery to visit a neighbor. She had owned and operated a small dry goods store in New Orleans, and her outfit, very opulent for the wilds of the frontier, was from the stock she had brought to Texas. Heavy rains had soaked the area for several days and left standing water on the road to the coast. While her son rode on the back of a wagon, she followed behind carrying her daughter. When Potter came upon the group Harriet stood holding her children, with her black silk dress, white crepe shawl, and feathered velvet hat covered with mud. Feeling uncomfortable because people were staring at her odd attire, Harriet looked young, “very pretty,” and distressed. Since she had no one to help her travel to Galveston, Potter spoke briefly with Col. Hall, and then, in a “gentle and courtly manner” offered Harriet a seat behind him on his horse and assured her that his servant would carry her children. The meeting began a new chapter in Harriet Page’s life and, for a short but critical time, carried Potter away from the uproar of Texas politics.⁸⁷

Potter and Page rode together to Velasco where they boarded the steamer Cayuga for Galveston. The island had become the temporary home of the ad-interim government and thousands of refugees fleeing Santa Anna’s advancing army. The island was severely overcrowded, so Potter found Page and some other women accommodations on-board ship. While quartered aboard Potter’s flagship *Flash*, Page’s

⁸⁶Ibid. , 11-12.

⁸⁷Ibid. , 14-16.

daughter became ill with fever and died suddenly. She buried the child on Galveston Island and resolved to leave Texas and her neglectful husband. Solomon Page visited his wife on the *Flash* and begged her to return and stay with him, but she was determined to leave and “go away from him and Texas forever.” According to Harriet, her husband was a habitual gambler whose neglect and “indifference to his children” convinced her that she must leave him and “neither look to him for help nor consider him in my plans for making a living.”⁸⁸

Earlier, while the couple lived in New Orleans, Solomon Page's gambling and drinking worried Harriet, but he had promised to get a job and straighten up if she agreed to come to Texas. Hoping for a better life, she agreed to emmigrate and closed her dry goods store in New Orleans. The day after their arrival in Texas, he gambled away their furniture and other personal belongings while she was away visiting her father and brother who already lived near by. Her brother tried to convince her to leave Solomon, and her father offered to give her land and cattle. However, Harriet's father, Francis Moore, had remarried and started a second family. His new wife protested his giving away assets that could benefit their own children. Angered by this affront, Harriet rejected any help from her father and brother and returned to her husband who promised to stop gambling and go to work.⁸⁹

Shortly after Solomon and Harriet reconciled, he took work tending stock for a local rancher and moved the family to a small log

⁸⁸Ibid. , 16-17.

⁸⁹Ibid. , 4-8.

cabin on Austin Bayou near present day Houston and twenty miles from the nearest neighbors. A short while later he left to look into another job. He promised to return in three days, but he did not return for six. Harriet had only a quart jar of blackeyed peas for provisions, which ran out on the third day. For the remainder of the time she fed the children wild parsley. She had given her husband ten dollars to buy provisions, but when he returned, he brought none. When asked what he had done with the money he said he had spent it on clothes to go to war.⁹⁰

Solomon became caught up in the excitement of revolution claiming that "everyone was volunteering to go" and that he did not want "to be called coward." When Harriet asked how she and the children were going to survive he offered no help, and simply stated that "you will have to do the best you can." Disgusted with her husband's continued neglect, Harriet responded with absolute and final rejection: "If you go off and leave us to starve, I cried, I hope that the first bullet that is fired will pierce your heart, and just leave you time enough to think of the wife and children that you left to die of starvation in this wilderness."⁹¹ Solomon left; and nine days later Harriet and her children were visited by Mr. Merrick, the farmer who owned the cabin where she was living. He told her he had dreamt she was in trouble and rode the twenty miles to the cabin to check on her. While there, he shot and prepared game for her and the children, left them some supplies, and returned to his farm. She asked Merrick before he left if there was any way of being rescued and returning to

⁹⁰Ibid. , 7-8.

⁹¹Ibid. , 8.

civilization. He told her he did not see any way because, “everyone has gone to war.”⁹²

Salvation finally came because Harriet had done a good deed shortly after her arrival in Texas. On their first day in Texas, along their way inland from the coast, the Pages spent the night with a Mrs. Abit who, when asked what they owed for the night's stay, refused payment. Harriet had brought some sewing supplies from her New Orleans store and offered some to Mrs. Abit as a gift. She gladly accepted the items, commenting on how difficult such things were to come by on the frontier. The two parted with “very friendly feelings for each other.” When Mrs. Abit heard that Harriet's husband had abandoned his family to go to war she became worried. Very ill, Mrs. Abit sent for a minister to pray with her. She made him promise to go find Harriet and make sure she was all right because she could not “rest easy” until he found them and saw that she was safe.⁹³

On her deathbed, Mrs. Abit admonished the minister, “Don't forget what you promised me.” Not having any idea where to look, the minister set out in the general direction that the Pages had headed when they left Mrs. Abit's home. On the day he passed nearby Harriet's cabin, she had set fire to some dried broomcorn near the house, hoping that the fire might “amuse and perhaps cheer” the children. The minister followed the smoke to the cabin and told Harriet why he had come. He left her with provisions and promised that he would send a wagon to take her and the children to a settlement near Velasco. There Harriet lived with her brother's wife

⁹²Ibid. , 9-10.

⁹³Ibid. , 10.

until the local drunk's false alarm sent her fleeing among the other settlers into the Runaway Scrape and eventually into the cabin of Potter's ship anchored in Galveston bay.⁹⁴

Solomon Page's behavior revealed how distorted notions of personal honor had become in the chaotic environment of revolutionary Texas. He defied conventions of manhood when he abandoned his wife and children. The fear of being marked as a coward by his peers and the need to fit into male society overrode the dictates of genteel and chivalrous notions of honor. On the frontier, rough and violent men dominated society, and men of action, not gentility, garnered more honor. Chivalry had limits when it came to projecting a masculine image. On the frontier at least, it was more important to be seen as brave than as protective of women.

Harriet too faced a difficult social dilemma. As a woman with two children who had rejected her husband, she would have been condemned by Southeastern society. Yet, in the less settled environment of the Southwest, she could reject her husband and maintain an honorable public reputation. Although she rejected her first husband she maintained enough female honor to attract another husband and to prosper socially. One mitigating factor was the shortage of women on the frontier, but this does not entirely account for Harriet's social survival. She prospered socially, in part, because she was a strong woman willing to take a stand, yet who also readily conformed to a wide range of social conventions. She played a dual role, being strong enough to reject a husband who would not support his family, and attractive enough to find a brighter prospect. Frontier

⁹⁴*Ibid.* , 11-12.

society accepted Harriet's decisions because they were necessitated by the need to survive.⁹⁵

Texas was indeed the frontier, but it was not so unsettled that Potter could easily advance without a wife. He had political and personal ambitions that Harriet and her children could help him fulfill. When Harriet Page came into his path he must have been taken by her beauty, but she also represented a partner who could enable him to achieve the social respectability necessary to fulfill his ambitions. Male honor was, among other things, predicated on womanizing, but a single man, unless he were young and unaccomplished, had a somewhat diminished social standing. One needed a wife to provide the requisite stage and supporting cast to make the performance of masculinity convincing. A womanizing single man of forty was simply a rounder, a cad, and a threat to other men's honor because of his potential to prey on their wives.⁹⁶

Cultural forces also influenced Robert Potter's decisions in regard to women in general as well as Harriet in particular. Potter's willingness to take Page under his wing seemed, on the surface, the strong chivalrous male rescuing the helpless female. Yet Potter was not simply a disinterested gentleman. He needed a wife to claim the larger land grant given to heads of families who settled in Texas before the revolution. To that end, he wasted no time in convincing Page to marry him. In fact, he had already stated on official Texas government documents that he had a family in order to claim his four thousand-

⁹⁵Sandra Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982) 6-7.

⁹⁶Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 199-224.

acre headright. However, his marital status was unclear at the time since he had abandoned his wife in North Carolina. Within a year after his departure, she obtained a divorce, then died the following year. In reality, Potter was a divorced bachelor. Obtaining a ready-made family by marrying Page might have spared him the embarrassment of dredging up his past to prove the legitimacy of his claim. Marrying Harriet Page also fulfilled his social need for a wife. Then, as now, politically prominent men were expected to have wives. Honorific status depended in part on being a husband. In his quest for improved status, it was natural for Potter to take a wife. Aside from providing the emotional comforts of marriage, a good wife connoted a man's success. Potter was not completely cynical in his interest in Harriet Page, but she was made to order for his immediate needs.⁹⁷

The only impediment to Potter's plan was that Harriet was still married to Solomon Page. Potter knew that she had repudiated her husband and resolved to go back to Nashville to live with her family, and he knew that she was still legally married. First, he needed to change Page's mind about returning to Tennessee; after that he could overcome the obstacle of her marriage.⁹⁸

⁹⁷For land grants and married men see William Gouge, *The Fiscal History of Texas, Embracing an Account of its Revenues, Debts and Currency from The Commencement of the Revolution in 1834 to 1851-1852*, (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, Reprint of 1852 edition, 1968), 22-27. On the importance of wives to men's respectability, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 199-202.

⁹⁸Ames, *History of Harriet Ames*, 16.

III

MARRIAGE AND DEATH IN THE NEW REPUBLIC

The day before Santa Anna's defeat at San Jacinto, on April 20, 1836, President Burnet appointed Potter commander of the port of Galveston. The next day following the battle, Potter shuttled back and forth to the coast before moving Harriet and her children onto the brig *Pocket*, a freshly captured prize from a U.S. firm attempting to ship supplies to the Mexican army. Potter told Harriet that he had agreed to escort Martha Moore, Harriet's half sister from her father's second marriage, back to Kentucky and that he would take charge of both of them. Some time around May 8, Potter sailed for New Orleans with the women on board. He was ostensibly on naval business in the city. He ordered ship repairs and purchased some new officers' uniforms. The repairs ordered by Potter for the brig *Liberty* amounted to more than the government could pay and it was auctioned to cover charges. There is no record that Potter tried to save the ship from the auction block, but if he was somewhat inattentive to official

business it may have been because he was deciding how he was going to convince Harriet to stay with him in Texas.⁹⁹

Harriet Page and Martha Moore were staying with friends in New Orleans when Potter announced that he had booked passage on a Mississippi steamer for the three of them. Page awoke the next morning feeling sure she was finally on her way home. She wrote in her memior that "New Orleans lay behind us like a gray streak on the distant shore and we were steaming up the river on our way to Kentucky." Waking on another morning she found that they were steaming up a different river, a "deep, clear stream, now green, now red in hue...." The boat had turned up the Red River. When questioned about the change in course, Potter told the women that yellow fever had broken out in New Orleans and he thought it best to hurry them out of the city without alarming them. They were, he informed them, on their way to Texas. Page informed him that when they landed in Alexandria, Louisiana, she would arrange overland transportation to Kentucky. Potter countered that he would himself find someone to take them and pay for the trip. This satisfied her anxiety, convincing her that "all had happened for the best."¹⁰⁰

Once in Alexandria, Potter again prevented the women from departing for Kentucky. He told them that departing from Alexandria for Kentucky was too dangerous and they should travel up river to

⁹⁹On Potter's assignment to Galveston see, Binkley, *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution*, 1:641. For Potter's activities after San Jacinto, see Fischer, *Robert Potter*, 126-128.

¹⁰⁰Ames, *History of Harriet Ames*, 17-18.

Shreveport where he knew someone who would escort them overland. Potter's land claim lay just over the Sabine from Shreveport in Texas, and he was coaxing them closer to it with each change in plans. At Shreveport, Potter hired wagons to take them all to the Sabine. Once there, Potter told the women that the group he had planned to send them with liked the surrounding country so well they had decided to stay. Page later wrote that it did not occur to her that he was "weaving a net around me it would be impossible to break, that all the disappointments of our trip had been planned by him."¹⁰¹

Page claimed that Potter had often asked her to marry him, but that while she respected him and was "under a great many obligations to him," she was still legally married to Solomon Page and was therefore "obliged to refuse him." Repeatedly foiled in his plan, Potter tried another strategy. He appeared at her door one day saying he had some important questions for her. He asked if she and her husband had been married by a priest. She said they had not, and he then replied that theirs was not a legal marriage in Texas because, "in Texas a marriage not solemnized by a priest is not valid." Pressing his point further, he told her that according to the laws of Texas she was "just as free to marry again as any one else." After considering the matter for some time, Harriet wrote that the more she thought about it "the better way it seemed out of my difficulties."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid. , 19.

The hardship of living alone on the prairie helped convince Page that even though Potter had kidnapped her and lied to her about his intentions, staying with him was her most practical means of survival. She had been able to reject her husband and strike out alone, but she would need to marry again to maintain honorable standing. The Old South society back in her hometown of Nashville would have rejected a single woman with children who had not been widowed but had rejected her husband. She had a better, though not good, chance of social acceptance as a single woman on the frontier, yet the frontier was a difficult and dangerous place for anyone. Survival depended on individual ferocity or the group protection of a community, and married couples were the basic social building blocks of community. Remarrying was necessary for a woman in Page's position. Men dominated and controlled society, and she needed one to help maintain her honorable standing. Marrying Robert Potter seemed more attractive once she considered how life would be back in Nashville. Practical considerations must also have played a significant role. He was politically powerful and wealthy by frontier standards. Young, energetic, physically attractive, and possessing significant potential for social and economic prosperity, he was a good marital prospect for a single mother of two, and he was eager to marry her. While practical considerations were surely not his only attraction for Page, she never mentioned loving him as one of her reasons for finally agreeing to the marriage. Potter represented a way out for Page, a way to put one painful chapter of life behind her and an opportunity to begin another that held more promise.

When Robert Potter left New Orleans with Harriet Page on the brig *Pocket* in May of 1836, he was still secretary of the Texas Navy. He had mismanaged naval business in New Orleans when he ordered repairs the republic could not afford. At that point he disappeared up the river without leaving word of his plans. There is no evidence that he officially resigned from his duties. But in October 1836, president Burnet wrote to congress stating that they should not consider his incumbency an obstacle to the inauguration of newly elected executive officers. This letter would have included appointed offices like that of naval secretary as well. Burnet's letter spared Potter the responsibility of tendering an official resignation. The ad-interim government dissolved and transferred authority to the new national government under incoming president Sam Houston on October 22, 1836. Houston rode into the presidency on a wave of popular support, heralded as a war hero and savior of Texas. No amount of criticism from his political enemies could have quelled his popularity, and any intentions Potter entertained of continuing to hold high office were scotched by Houston's immense popularity.¹⁰³

On the heels of Houston's victory, Potter took a four year extended break from Texas politics, concentrating his energies on his home life. He arranged a mostly private wedding ceremony without benefit of clergy or judge. The couple lived for one year, or as Page said, one "season," in a cabin near the Sabine River. Potter's headright of land was on the west-end of Caddo Lake which spans the Texas-Louisiana border north of Nacogdoches. While the new Mrs. Potter maintained

¹⁰³Binkley, *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution*, 2:1091-1093.

their crops on the Sabine, Potter traveled to his land and oversaw the construction of their new home on Caddo Lake.¹⁰⁴

Alone in the countryside, Harriet confronted what would, in later years, become a common but largely unfounded fear: violent and dangerous runaway slaves. She dreamt that a "Negro" man cut off her hands. And when a white male neighbor came by the next day to sharpen his ax, she begged him not to leave her alone. Still shaken by the dream, she was surprised by a "large Negro" man approaching her door. She thought him to be a wandering, runaway slave. As he came nearer, she aggressively reprimanded him for daring to approach a gentleman's house without removing his hat. When the neighbor came up to the house the slave said he was lost and was looking for something to eat and directions to the road. They fed him and showed him the road. She wrote that latter she learned he was shot while trying to attack a horseman on the road near the house. Written in the 1870s, fifty years after the event and near the end of reconstruction, her story showed the merging of memory with the increasing hysteria over the alleged "barbarity" of the black race.¹⁰⁵

Not long after the slave scare, Harriet encountered a group of Caddo Indians that had come to ask Potter's help to recover some stolen horses. The once powerful and mostly peaceful Caddos had been largely dispossessed of their land by Texas settlers. As a result, they began leading a more predatory existence, roaming the area stealing animals and food from isolated farms. Potter was on good

¹⁰⁴Ames, "History of Harriet Ames," 19-20.

¹⁰⁵Ibid. , 20-21. Harriet Page may well have exaggerated this story for a New Southern reading public which had become obsessed with stories of "Black Beast Rapists" by 1890.

terms with the group near his home, but he had instilled the fear of Indians in Harriet. While Harriet and Martha Moore were waiting at Shreveport for overland transportation to Kentucky, Potter had kept them a bay by telling them that many hostile Indians made the overland journey too dangerous. Consequently, Harriet reacted with hostility when an old chief with some young boys came asking if Potter would help them get their horses back. She stood in her doorway near a small cannon mounted on a table. The chief asked what it was for, trying to appear capable of her own defense, she said it was to "kill anyone who pesters me." At that, the chief laughed, but to Harriet it was not simply a laugh. It was an "ugly and guttural" laugh. While she was talking to the old chief, the boys got into her melon patch. She told the chief that they could not be friends if he let the boys steal her melons and he laughed again, this time a "sinister sound," then called the boys out of the melons and left.¹⁰⁶

Harriet shared the almost universal hatred of whites for Indians that frontier life encouraged. Her hatred and fear of Indians and blacks was common among white men and women, yet her aggressive and hostile actions when face to face with them was less common, and she may have exaggerated her boldness. When confronted with her fears she reacted outwardly with fearlessness and ferocity. Gender norms conditioned women to hide from danger: aggression and courage were prescribed male responses to danger. Harriet defied this dictate, displaying an aggressive and independent spirit that

¹⁰⁶Ibid. , 22-24. Here again Harriet may be writing back in time about these experiences and exaggerating her rhetoric. Whether she did this consciously or was simply influenced by popular ideas denigrating Indians and African Americans is difficult to tell. On stereotypes that fueled women's fear of Indians see Myres, *Westering Women*, 38-40.

complemented frontier life. Even for women, isolation on the frontier encouraged ferocity and courage, traits that would have been almost impossible for a woman to express and still retain her honor in the highly structured culture of the urban South.¹⁰⁷

Potter finished the house on Caddo Lake soon after Harriet's episode with the local chief, and the couple moved to what became known as Potter's Point. At that time there were few settlers in the immediate area and Harriet noted her isolation. She remembered that she did not see another white woman during her first year at their new home. She had a black female servant, but no white women for social company. Harriet was "alone" at this time. Potter was away on business in Shreveport with all the field hands. She later mentioned her slave woman, demonstrating that she was not actually alone, but that she identified with the enslaved woman as a worker, not as another woman who could help ameliorate her isolation. Consistent with white women's attitudes toward black women in the Old South, racial differences were often more powerful than gender affinities.¹⁰⁸

Harriet's feelings of isolation must have been exacerbated by Potter's absence during the birth of their first child. Harriet mentioned his absence dispassionately as though giving birth without the presence of one's husband was nothing unusual, merely the reality of a woman's life roles. A patriarchal society viewed women's reproductive and domestic duties as tangential to the exigencies of

¹⁰⁷For the basis of Harriet's fear and characterization of Indians see , Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) , 54-55.

¹⁰⁸White women rarely understood black women as companions; rather they held profoundly racist view over long periods of time, see Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South*, (New York: Oxford University Press , 1996) , 200-205. Ames, "History of Harriet Ames", 24.

men's business. Some husbands did remain nearby during childbirth, however, but commonly even something so important as a child's birth did not supersede a business transaction.¹⁰⁹

Although Harriet had no white female companionship and her husband was often away, she learned to enjoy her surroundings. Nature, she said, "had spared no pains to make complete the beauty of this spot, and I felt that at last I must be happy."¹¹⁰ However happy she felt she must be, her writing indicated that she was lonely and afraid in this unfamiliar wilderness. Harriet's "happiness," inspired by the natural beauty of her new home, helped her to cope with her fears. Focusing her attention on nature instead of on her isolation allowed her to accept a circumstance over which she had no control. As Potter's wife she understood that, according to social norms, she had to live where he chose. Forced to accept her isolation, she found something in it she could take pleasure in. She may have expressed discontent or she may have truly loved the area's natural wonders, but either way she knew she had to stay with him or risk dishonor. Hers was likely an unconscious decision: she had to be happy with her lot, because, as a married woman in the Old South, she had little power to direct her own life.¹¹¹

Harriet readily accepted the cultural limitations placed upon her by marriage. Yet, when called on to participate in situations that called for "male traits," like many frontier women, she deviated from

¹⁰⁹Sally Mc Millen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 109.
Ames, "History of Harriet A Ames," 185.

¹¹⁰Ames, "History of Harriet Ames," 26.

¹¹¹Mc Curry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 92-130.

the behavior expected of women. When faced with threatening situations, Harriet acted with courage and cunning. After living at Potter's Point for only a few months, Harriet had another encounter with local Indians while Potter was away on business. While working indoors one rainy morning, someone drove all the horses off. Each horse wore a bell around its neck and she heard them heading in the direction of the Indian village. That evening, the local chief came to their house. She did not accuse him outright, which might have provoked trouble; instead she told him that some of the Indian boys had driven off her horses and she expected him to have them bring the horses back. Without making an overt threat, she reached over and took a double-barreled shotgun off the rack and cradled it in her arm. She then told him that Potter would be very angry if the horses were not back by the time he returned. She then gave him some flour and salt to take to his "squaw" and told him to go. He did not leave but asked to spend the night rather than make the long journey back in the dark. She flatly said no he could not stay, he must go and make the boys return her horses. She told him "I know they will mind you and I do not think you would let your boys take my horses." The next morning she heard the horses come running down the trail from the Indian village.¹¹²

As a woman living alone on the frontier, Harriet's response to the chief showed she had adapted gender dictates to suit her situation. She confronted the chief without blaming him. She then brandished a weapon to let him know there would be consequences if the horses were not returned and that she was not to be cowed or taken

¹¹² Ibid. , 30.

advantage of. She then gave him a gift to show friendship and trust. And finally, she appealed to his honor by suggesting that he was a powerful chief with firm control over junior males in the tribe. This combination of responses was more direct and skillful than what even frontier society expected of a woman, yet neither could it be called a characteristic male response. Had she reacted with fear the chief might have taken advantage of her weakness. And had she offered a suddenly violent response, as a male might have, she could have been killed or at least have escalated the severity of the situation.

Because Harriet reacted with what were considered both male and female responses, the situation was resolved successfully, without bloodshed or bad feelings. Within a few years of living in a male dominated society on the frontier, Harriet had learned to adapt gender proscriptions to her needs. The realities of frontier life had not changed her understanding of gender appropriate behavior, but they had taught her to reject rigid categories of behavior when it came to survival.

The Potters lived and farmed at Potter's Point for several years before Robert Potter reentered Texas politics. Although Robert was a prosperous farmer and stockman, settled life lacked the excitement that Potter thrived on. Even in this remote area, his oratorical skills marked him as a leader. He once came to the aid of a neighbor he thought falsely accused of murder, giving a powerful speech in an attempt to save the man from lynching. The speech failed to prevent the hanging, but the people around Clarksville heard and saw that Potter would be a powerful voice for their interests in the Texas legislature. He was elected as the senator from Red River County to

the Fifth Texas Congress that convened November 2, 1840. He served on the committees of military and naval affairs and was chairman of the committee on public lands.¹¹³

Potter worked diligently to protect his constituents' land claims in the area around Clarksville. Land fraud and rampant speculation had reached severe proportions by 1840, and the old settlers in Potter's district, (those who arrived before 1836) and in other east Texas counties, were in danger of having their claims superseded by corrupt officials conducting illegal transactions. Potter sponsored legislation that would protect the old settlers' claims and prevent large portions of Texas's public lands from purchase by nefarious land speculators working in concert with government insiders. Reasonably successful in his effort, he wrote Harriet a self-congratulatory letter on January 18, 1841 as the Fifth congress neared its close. He let her know that he would be staying on in Austin to shepherd some bills through congress before it adjourned. On February 4, both houses passed one of Potter's bills validating marriages performed by persons other than clergy. This bill applied directly to his own marriage, and Harriet mentioned it in her memoir.¹¹⁴

Reelected to the Sixth Texas Congress in November 1841, Potter returned to Austin and took his seat on November 9. Potter's nemesis, Houston had defeated David G. Burnet, Lamar's hand picked candidate, for the presidency in the same election, and Lamar's

¹¹³On Potter's reentry into Texas Politics, see Ames, "History of Harriet Ames," 31. Potter's committee service in the fifth congress see Republic of Texas, Congress, Senate, *Journal*, Fifth Congress, First Session, Texas State Library, Austin.

¹¹⁴Robert Potter to Harriet "Potter", 18 January 1841, entered as evidence in Edward Mc Ginnis and Samuel K. Lewis vs. Charles and Harriet A. Ames, trial transcript, Texas Supreme Court, Texas State Library, Austin. Potter's marriage bill is in the Senate *Journal*, 5th Congress, first session, November 27, 1841, 65.

supporters decided a ball in the outgoing president's honor. Potter had long been a supporter of Lamar and was called on to speak at the ball. The papers reported that Potter gave an eloquent speech and was the most popular man in the capital. During the Sixth Congress, Potter continued to work on land issues, although with Houston in the presidency, he had less success in moving his bills through congress.¹¹⁵

In the Sixth Congress Potter also served on a committee to hear impeachment charges against Judge John M. Hansford. Hansford had been secretary of state early in the Lamar administration and Potter's associate. He also presided over Potter's district. Sitting on a committee to impeach a political ally must have been an unpleasant job for Potter, and it may have contributed to his murder. Hansford had been accused of repeatedly holding court while drunk on many occasions. On Potter's motion, the committee decided to drop charges and let Hansford resign. One of the trials the judge had been accused of presiding over while drunk was that of Charles Jackson. Jackson had been accused of murdering a man in the early stages of a local feud brewing in Potter's district. Jackson led a group of vigilantes who called themselves "Regulators." Another group organized to "moderate" the Regulators. From that point matters escalated until vigilante justice ruled the region. The conflict eventually escalated into what became known as the Regulator-Moderator War, or alternately, The Shelby County War. The battles associated with the Regulator-Moderator conflict became so fearsome

¹¹⁵Potter's speech was printed in The Austin Daily Bulletin (Austin) , 24 December 1841.

that in his early history of Texas Henderson Yokum wrote, "the law became only a passive looker-on."¹¹⁶

Too drunk to preside at Jackson's trial and facing a courtroom full of Jackson's armed supporters, Judge Hansford left the county and wrote a letter asking the sheriff to adjourn court. Jackson was acquitted and himself murdered a few days later. Jackson's supporters and accusers alike thought Hansford's failure to maintain order was yet another example of the need to take matters into their own hands. On another occasion, Judge Hansford denied bail to William P. Rose leader of the men who eventually murdered Potter. Many in the area including Rose had enmity for Hansford, and Potter's motion to let him resign may have set them against Potter.¹¹⁷

While all this conflict brewed in his home district, Potter returned to one of his early interests and sponsored a bill to create a university in Harrison County. The bill passed seven to five and, remarkably, President Houston signed it. Potter remained active throughout the Sixth Congress, registering a minor legislative victory on the last night of the session. Congress adjourned February 5, 1842, and Potter made arrangements to return home. Before leaving Austin, he took steps to put some things in order. On February 11, he made out a will. Several days later he dissolved his law partnership with Isaac Van Zandt and retrieved a presidential proclamation issued by Lamar before his term expired that offered a \$500 reward for the capture of William P. Rose.

¹¹⁶Henderson Yoakum, *History of Texas from Its First Settlement in 1685 to Its Annexation to the United States in 1846*, vol. 2 , (Austin: The Steck Company, reprint, 1935) , 439.

¹¹⁷Proceedings of the trial were reported in Republic of Texas, Congress, Senate, *Journal*, Sixth Congress, First Session, 1841-1842. Potter's deposition and others in Republic of Texas , Congress, House, *Journal*, vol. 2 , 6th Congress, First session, 1841-1842, 212-217.

Rose had been accused of murdering two men and a sheriff from Potter's district late in 1841. On his ride home he stopped for several days in Nacogdoches to visit friends, and arrived back at Potter's Point in early March.¹¹⁸

Soon after returning home Potter went to arrest Rose, who was apparently still terrorizing the area. In addition to the three murders, Rose reportedly headed a gang of "Regulators" who were organized for the expressed intention of ridding the area of thieves but in the process were killing innocent men. Intending to restore the rule of law in his district, Potter and a group of well-armed men rode to Rose's farm. Rose learned that the men were approaching and had a slave hide him in a pile of leaves. After failing to arrest Rose, Potter's group disbanded. Potter returned home determined to continue his search for Rose the next day.¹¹⁹

Before dawn the next morning, Rose and some of his followers approached Potter's home while he slept. The men surrounded the house and called for Potter to come out. Harriet urged him to fight, but Potter argued that Rose and his men would simply set fire to the house and burn them out. Ignoring his wife's pleas to fight, he ran from the house toward the lake 200 yards away with Rose's men in pursuit. Under a small cliff at the edge of the lake, Potter dropped his shotgun at the water's edge and dove into the lake. One of Rose's men gave chase and picked up Potter's gun. There he waited for Potter to

¹¹⁸Will of Robert Potter, Folder on Robert Potter, Box # 2A139, Asbury Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin. The dissolution of Potter's law partnership was reported in The Weekly Texian, 16 February 1842. For his arrival back at Potter's Point, see Ames, "History of Harriet Ames" , 35.

¹¹⁹Ames, "History of Harriet Ames", 35-40.

come up for air and shot him in the head. Potter's lifelong struggle for masculine power ended with his own murder.¹²⁰

In this last battle, Potter attempted to defeat an exceedingly violent man determined to dominate him. Potter's battle with Sam Houston for supremacy had been primarily intellectual and political. It represented the more refined version of Southern honor. While Houston had been less educated and more down-to-earth than Potter, he was nonetheless associated with upper class, old Southern society. Rose, however, was neither educated nor refined, and he was in no way a diplomat. In Rose, Potter had taken on an adversary whom he could not overwhelm with oratory.

Potter and Rose had once been friends and neighbors, but they fell out over seemingly minor issues related to which man would "rule" the area as the dominant male. There are many accounts of the struggle between the two men, each offering a slightly different slant on the "facts" depending on the author's sympathies. Viewed collectively, as a kind of folkloric representation, these accounts represent the struggle as a battle over territory and male dominance. In particular, Potter and Rose competed for overlapping spheres of power. Potter was well established in the community and viewed himself as an officially sanctioned authority. Rose had a significant popular following although he lacked formal authority.

Perhaps because he was so revered by others, Rose considered himself an appropriate dispenser of law and order. By taking matters into his own hands, he sought not only law and order, but also to extend his own power over the community. Law and order meant his

¹²⁰Ibid.

law and his orders. In the gendered language of honor, Potter understood Rose's actions as a threat to his own carefully assembled claim to masculine power and reputation. To the extent that Rose succeeded in appropriating power, Potter's reputation would suffer. He would appear weak and ineffectual to the community—less of a man than Rose. Potter then found Rose to be both a public nuisance and a private threat.

In his conflict with Rose, Potter found the protection of his honor a more elusive and dangerous quest on the frontier. On the frontier, affronts to one's manhood almost always put men in mortal danger. Any man might become dangerously violent at a moment's notice, and there were few enforceable limits on violent retribution. Men like Potter understood the heightened chances for violence on the frontier—it was part of what attracted them. Although Potter was prepared for what he encountered on the frontier, it nonetheless overwhelmed him and ultimately it destroyed him.

Although the frontier culture had overwhelmed Robert Potter, Harriet Page-Potter-Ames not only survived, but adapted to life in Texas. After Potter's murder she feared for her own life. She had been the only eyewitness to the slaying, and she was convinced Rose would try to kill her to protect himself. She intended to bring Rose and his men to trial for killing Potter but could not let word of her intentions leak out. She decided to play out a ruse to cover herself. She let it be known around the community that she was so shaken by the affair that she was going to travel across the lake and stay with a woman friend until she felt better. Instead she went to file charges against the men. They were arrested but released when it was

discovered that the warrant was issued in a county without jurisdiction in the case. Harriet then traveled to the county seat of Clarksville to obtain another warrant. The men were again arrested and this time they were held over for trial. Rose hired several good lawyers and the trial was delayed several times. When the case finally came to trial it was ultimately dismissed.¹²¹

Rose's defense lawyers used Robert Potter's will in an attempt to defame Harriet's character by showing that she was not his legal wife. Potter did not list Harriet as his wife in the will nor did he leave her the bulk of his estate. After discovering this, Harriet decided that in order to prosper she would have to put Robert Potter behind her. Potter had left the house on Potter's Point and much of the surrounding land to Sophia Ann Mayfield, wife of Texas Secretary of State James Mayfield. Potter also left several sections to Mary W. Chalmers, wife of John G. Chalmers, secretary of the Texas treasury. Both of these men had been allied with Potter and were considered friends. Potter listed Harriet as Mrs. Harriet A. Page, not Mrs. Robert Potter, and left her several sections of undeveloped land and two mares of her choice. Harriet first learned of the will at the trial, after believing that Potter had died intestate. Considering this betrayal and all the difficulty of pressing for another trial, she decided to let Rose's dismissal stand.¹²²

Why Potter left most of his estate to these women remains a mystery, but it is clear that once Harriet was no longer useful to him his attentions wandered and he stopped considering her his wife. In

¹²¹Ibid. , 46-49.

¹²²Ibid. , 48. Potter's will is reproduced in Appendix 3.

turn, when Harriet discovered that Potter's will had disgraced her she stopped trying to avenge his death and concentrated on recovering her own personal honor by remarrying Charles Ames a few months after the trial.¹²³

Harriet and Charles Ames stayed on at Potter's Point, and in 1843 they filed a petition to break Potter's will and redistribute the estate. The petition was granted and they assumed ownership of the land. The Mayfields never contested the redistribution of Potter's estate. But, in 1852, Mr. and Mrs. Mayfield died within months of one another. The executor of their will sold a title to the property to Samuel Lewis and Edward Mc Ginnis. He was able to do this because Potter had not only willed his property to Mrs. Mayfield on February 11, 1842, but he had conveyed the property to her by deed three days earlier on February 8. Potter had perhaps anticipated trouble with his will and wanted to ensure that Mrs. Mayfield would take ownership of the land. It was this title that was sold to Lewis and McGinnis, and in 1857 they filed suit, trespass to try title, against Charles and Harriet Ames. The suit was not tried until 1872; the judge awarded one section to the plaintiffs, but ruled in favor of the Ames's on two other sections which included the land on Potter's Point. However, in 1875 the Texas Supreme Court reversed the lower court. It ruled that

¹²³In her deposition Isabella Patrick (listed as a neighbor of the Potter's) quoted Potter to the effect that Harriet was not his wife: "He stated that he had made his will and had left a portion of his property to Mrs. Mayfield. I asked him if Mrs. M. was any relation and he said no that she was only a friend. I remarked that if I was Mrs. P. I would not like for to will his property away in this manner. Potter remarked ' I would like for you to show me Mrs. P.' He said to me ' I suppose the woman you have reference to is Mrs. Page.' " Deposition of Isabella Patrick in Mc Ginnis and Lewis vs. Ames , trial transcript, Texas State Library, Austin.

Harriet's marriage to Potter was not legal in Texas and awarded all the land to Lewis and Mc Ginnis.¹²⁴

Harriet Potter wanted to retain ownership of the land she felt was rightfully hers. It was a point of pride for her. She had helped improve the land and considered it her own, "I knew that it was mine and [would] never give it up."¹²⁵ Harriet's personal honor demanded that she publicly show her contempt for Potter's will. By contesting the will she attempted to make it clear to her neighbors that, regardless of what the courts ruled, she was not simply Robert Potter's concubine but his wife. This was the key point in retaining her honor. Had she not contested the will, the public would have perceived her as a dishonorable woman and rejected her. But when she fought to defend her marriage and claim her inheritance she declared to all that she was an honorable woman. This public display allowed her to regain enough standing in the community to live on at Potter's Point for many years with her new husband, raise two children by him and hold her head up until the supreme court ruling forcibly took the property from her.

Robert Potter and Harriet Page had "married" each other because both sought public status that depended on being part of a couple. In that sense, they needed one another. Honor, both public and personal, bound them to one another. Yet, Potter ultimately rejected their relationship once it had served his purpose. And Harriet Page in turn repudiated the relationship when it became a liability to her prosperity.

¹²⁴Ginnis and Lewis vs. Ames.

¹²⁵Ames, "History of Harriet Ames", 50.

CONCLUSION

Robert Potter, his first wife, Isabella Taylor, and his second wife Harriet Page all manipulated the dictates of Southern honor within the restraints placed upon them by society. Robert Potter paid a high single price for his struggle to conform. While he enjoyed far more freedom and power than did the women, he constantly had to prove his masculinity and demonstrate his worth by placing himself in mortal danger. Ultimately this cost him his life. As women, Harriet and Isabella were both compelled to engage in on-going emotional repression and personal sacrifice. The requirements of female honor and the conventions of gender in the Old South extracted from them a daily toll of individual sublimation and ceaseless subordination to outside authority.

Geographic differences skewed the requirements for achieving and adhering to gender dictates. On the frontier, Potter had more opportunity for political advancement and honor. Ferocity, violence and power went far in establishing and protecting honor on the frontier. By contrast, wealth, piety, and family prominence were slowly becoming the dominant avenues to honorific status in the Old South. Living in the genteel Southeast, Isabella Taylor's honor was destroyed by Potter's behavior. There were few avenues for

recovering honor once a woman was accused of adultery in the Old South. Isabella first obtained a divorce to eliminate the taint associated with Robert Potter. In a further attempt to separate herself with the castration incident and to remove the onus from herself and her children, she changed her last name to her mother's maiden name of Pellum. This disassociated her from Potter and from the castrated men who shared her own maiden name. She then moved away from the area where the crime took place. These were her only readily available options. In her culture she was a ruined woman with limited means for recovering her honor.¹²⁶

In contrast to Isabella's situation, Harriet Page's life on the frontier offered her much more freedom to rebuild and maintain her honor. Demands were greater, yet those same demands also opened the door for more power and freedom. While Harriet had less formal power than the men around her, she gained power because the frontier required her to perform tasks and roles normally reserved for men. Like many frontier women, she operated the family farm while her husband was away, fulfilling the gender roles of both sexes. Moreover, she was able to contest her husband's will in court without serious social censure. She was also able to reject his legacy and remarry, and to stay in her home and raise the children from her third marriage in the same community.

¹²⁶Isabella A. Potter vs. Robert Potter, Divorce Records, Granville County. ; On female honor see, Cathrine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*, (New York: Pantheon, 1982) , 108-109.

Like many men, albeit to a lesser degree, Harriet was able to reinvent herself on the frontier and continue her life as an honorable woman.¹²⁷

How one acquired, protected, and recovered Southern honor was in part dictated by socially proscribed gender norms. When those proscriptions changed so did the avenues to honor. The lives of Robert Potter, Harriet Page and Isabella Taylor were each affected by how their culture defined gender and ultimately conferred honor.

¹²⁷ Cashin, *A Family Venture*, 78-99. ; Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 179-200.

Appendix I

The Head of Medusa

A Mock Heroic Poem

Founded on fact and—in which "the word is suited to the phrase,
and the phrase to the action."

By
Rienzi

"In hoc est hoar, cum quiz et jokesez, Et smokem toastem, roastem,
folksez,

Fee, Faw, fum.

Psalmazar."

"With Baked, and Broiled, and Stewed, and Toasted and Fried, and
Broiled, and Smoked, and Roasted, We Treat the Town."

Salmagundi.

Then where's the wrong to gibbet high the name of fools and knaves,
already dead to shame."

Halifax , North Carolina, 14th, 1827.

Dedication

To the sad Village,

Once distinguished for "wit and wisdom, gaiety and grace," but
notorious now as the haunt of swindlers, liars and assassins, this Poem,

descriptive of their manner, practices sentiments and principles, is dedicated, with all imaginable contempt, by

Rienzi.

The Author's Apology.

Whenever this effusion shall fall into the hands of a gentleman and scholar, in justice to the author, and extenuation of the roughness and indecorum of his manner, he must recollect it was addressed to a community where, with few exceptions, there was neither refinement nor learning, and where, consequently they would as little have felt the force of polite satire, as they would have understood the allusions of literature; nor is the author, in the adoption of this method, with out the sanction of great names; besides that of Pope, and other illustrious masters of the art, who deemed a blunt severity, under some circumstances, a sine qua non to the efficacy of a satire, he is sustained by the example of Juvenal, approved by Sir Richard Steel. Adverting to the writings of Horace and Juvenal, and arguing the circumstances which went to form the different styles, each pre-eminences in its way, of these celebrated ancients, Sir Richard says: "The ordinary subjects for satire are such as excite the greatest indignation in the best tempers - the men of the greatest character in this kind were Horace and Juvenal; in the perusal of these writers it may not be unnecessary to consider that they lived in very different times. Horace was intimate with a Prince of the greatest goodness and humanity imaginable, and his court was formed after his example; therefore, the faults that Poet falls upon, were little inconsistencies in behavior, false pretenses to politeness, or impertinent

affectations of what men were not fit for. Vices of a coarser sort could not come under his consideration, or enter the palace of Augustus. Juvenal on the other hand, lived under Domitian, in whose reign everything that was great and noble was banished the habitations of men in power. Therefore, he attacks vice as it passes by in triumph, not as it breaks into conversation—In days of Augustus, to have talked like Juvenal, had been madness, or in those of Domitian like Horace. Morality and virtue are every where recommended in Horace became a man in polite court; from the beauty, a the propriety, the convenience of pursuing them. Vice and corruption are attacked by Juvenal in a style which denotes he fears he shall not be heard, without he calls to them in their own proper language, with a barefaced mention of the villainies and obscenities of his contemporaries." Now the author conceives the case of Juvenal to be an authority , express and ample, in support of the villainies he portrays. If, as Sir Richard concluded, it had been madness to talk like Horace in the days of Domition, it were no less so to practice his politeness and forbearance here—Indeed the author has little thought of teaching the leaden sensibilities of his contemporaries even in his coarse way; believing any attempt to operate on them by the force of wit, or any other method than manual applications, as idle as "chopping blocks with a razor."

The fragment reproduced here is only a portion of the introduction which goes on for ten more legal sized pages. The poem itself fills thirteen pages with ten additional pages of annotation.

Appendix II

Mr. Potter's Appeal

To the Citizens of Nash, Franklin, Warren, and Granville.

As a man-as a member of society, I own to the world an explanation of my situation- but to you, My constituents, this explanation is particularly due. The connexion between us—the confidence you have reposed in—the honors I have received at your hands—make it most especially my duty to come before you with my justification.

Notwithstanding the force of these considerations-notwithstanding I had been the subject to a Judicial investigation, and rumor, with a thousand exaggerations, was bearing the tale of my misfortune to every corner of the world, I yet felt an invincible repugnance to placing my name in the newspapers in connexion with it. But, however painful and excruciating the task, the publication of the report of my late trial, together with a note from one of the persons interested, leaves me no longer any Option in this respect. Violent excitements are at all times unfavorable to fair exercises of judgment, and when the storm of the

passions is completely up, it is quite sufficient to silence the voice of reason altogether. Of this I have had a strong exemplification in my present case—the public nerve was too weak to bear the full measure of justice which I dealt out to those who had injured me—the severity of the punishment forestalled all inquiry as to its justice, and predisposed the unthinking part of the community to believe, at all events, that they had suffered improperly—they did not wait for evidence—they did not pause to learn the grounds on which I acted—it does not seem to have occurred to them, as possible, that there was a crime which those men could commit against me, to merit even such an infliction as that which they received--yet such a crime they had committed—they had indeed stabbed me most vitally—they had indeed hurt me beyond all cure—they had polluted the very sanctuary of my soul, and involved my life in hopeless darkness and desolation. Could I be required to bear this, and permit the villains that had done it to walk the world in peace; to laugh at me, and enjoy the idea that they had not only abused me, but cheated me? Yet did I man myself to bear even this. I strove with all the energy of my nature to hide from the world the foul disgrace which had been brought into my house. There were powerful reasons why I should do so--I was unwilling to throw away the prospects of an honorable ambition, and to compromise my position in the world; a position to which I had marched through difficulties and perils, both moral and physical, such as it has rarely fallen to the lot of men to encounter. I was unwilling to give up my connexion with my constituents, to whom I stood bound by all the ties of affection, of duty, and gratitude. I was unwilling to leave the land of my birth—the earth from which I sprung, and with which I had hoped to mingle again, when the frail spirit which, animates me had passed away

forever. These are the considerations which, for a time, enabled me to sustain in secret the wrongs which I had suffered; and if to those at a distance there should seem to be a tone of exaggeration in this, I have only to say to them, they would not think so, if they know the history of my connexion with this community. But I found the weight which had been put upon me, was more than I could bear. I could no longer conjure down the spirit of insulted honor with the offerings of ambition. My feelings admonished me, that while I held the most exalted station in the community, I was in fact the most degraded man in it. I felt that I could no longer maintain my place among men, unless I wiped off the disgrace which had been put upon me, with the blood of those who had fixed it there--my peace of mind, the spirit and pride of manhood demanded it; and in this spirit, and with those feelings, I resolved to act. In selecting the mode of punishment, I was still influenced by the desire to avoid publishing this to the world; and but for the subsequent fears of one of the individuals, the purpose would have succeeded, as both of them, at the time, expressed a wish to keep the transaction undiscovered. I address this remark more particularly to those who may think I acted with cruelty and malice, that they may see the real motives and views which governed me. Feuds I have had, arising from a sanguine and excitable temper, but those who know me, know me to be incapable of cruelty or malice. In enumerating the causes which have contributed to mislead public opinion in this matter, I must not omit to state, that while a part of the excitement occasioned by it has grown out of the honest feelings of nature, yet a great deal of it has sprung from sources of a very sinister and selfish character. In the first place all the would be great men of the community have seized upon it as a favorable

opportunity to destroy my political interest, and thus make way for themselves. They have always looked with repining and envy upon the confidence and favor bestowed upon me by the people, and embrace this occasion to bring in to operation these feelings of opposition to me which, however strongly cherished, they never until now had the courage openly to avow—they are of course the active and talkative individuals in the community, and , in their sly and cautious way, will make the most persevering efforts to keep alive the excitement against me....

This is an excerpt from Potter's appeal showing his notions about manhood and honor.

Appendix III

Will of Robert Potter

February 11, 1842

In the name of God. Amen.

I, Robert Potter of the County of Paschal and Republic of Texas do hereby make and ordain this my last will and testament—

1st. I desire that my debt shall be paid by a sale of a sufficient amount of my personal property.

2nd. As testimony of my deep sense of the personal worth of Mrs. Sophia Ann Mayfield, my gratitude for her friendship and the happiness I have derived from her converse, I give and bequeath to her all that part of my Estate on Ferry Lake known and described upon the map of the survey made by authority of the United States, in Range 17 west, Township 20, as sections twelve, thirteen, and twenty four, the latter being a fractional section fronting on said lake, and being the place of my residence.

3rd. As testimony of my deep sense of the personal worth of Mrs. Mary W. Chalmers, my gratitude for her friendship and the happiness I have derived from her converse, I give and bequeth to her all that part of my Estate on Ferry Lake known and described on the map aforesaid as sections Seven, Eighteen and Nineteen the latter being a fractional section fronting on said lake, adjoining to and lying east of the Section on which is situated my residence.

4th. I give and bequeath to Mrs. Harriet A. Page all that part of my headright, being part of my estate aforesaid lying north of Section Twelve before mentioned and west of Section Six as mentioned, except one thousand acres to be set apart by Mrs. Page and reserved for her brother John D. Moore. I also give and bequeath to her two mares to be chosen by herself, my stock of cattle, and three negroes, to wit, George, Hannah and Matilda, and also my household and kitchen furniture and farming utensils.

5th. As a testimony of my esteem for my long cherished and valued friend John W. Crunk, I give and bequeath to him my negro girl Mary.

6th. As a testimony of my esteem for my friend Col. James B. Mayfield, I give and bequeath to him my favorite horse Shakespeare.

7th As a testimony of my esteem and friendship for my friend Dr. John G. Chalmers, I give and bequeath to him all my Estate, Real and

Personal, that may remain after and satisfying the several bequests and objects hereinbefore expressd.

8th. I appoint my friend Col. Robert M. Smith my Executor, In testimony of which I hereto subscribe my name and seal this the eleventh day of February, A.D. , One Thousand Eight Hunderd and Forty-Two.

Robert Potter (seal)

Witness:

M.C. Hamilton

T. Henderson

N. B. Yancy

The will was probated Jan. 10, 1843 at a special term of the Probate court, before W.B. Stout, Chief Justice, and ex-officio judge of Probate of Red River County at Clarksville. J.C. Heart was County Clerk. It was recorded in Marion County, Jan. 10, 1879.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Manuscripts

Ames, Harriet A. "History of Harriet A. Ames During the Early Days of Texas." The Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin Texas.

Asbury, Samuel. Papers, Folder on Robert Potter, Box # 2A139, Center For American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin Texas.

Kemp, Louis Wiltz. Collection, Box # 2R231, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin

Potter, Robert. "The Head of Medusa, A Mock Heroic Poem." Box # 2-22/597, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

Books

Binkley, William C. ed. , *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution 1835-1836.* , 6 vol. New York: D. Appleton- Century. 1936.

Gammel, H.P.N. ed. , *The Laws of Texas 1822-1897.* Austin: Gammel Book Co. 1898.

Gouge, William. *The Fiscal History of Texas, Embracing an Account of its Revenues, Debts and Currency from the Commencement of the Revolution in 1834 to 1851-1852.* New York: Augustus M. Kelley, Reprint of 1852 edition, 1968.

Gray, William Fairfax. *From Virginia to Texas 1835-1837.* ed. , Paul Lack. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1997.

Houston, Smuel. *Writings of Sam Houston 1813-1863.* Edited by Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker. 8 vols. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1938-1943.

Court Records

Minutes of the Supreme Court, Granville Co. , North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Divorce Records, Granville Co. , N. C. . North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Republic of Texas, Supreme Court, *Edward Mc Guinnes and Samuel K. Lewis vs. Charles and Harriet Ames, trespass to try title*. transcript of proceedings, Texas State Library, Austin.

Public Documents

Republic of Texas. Fifth Congress, First Session, Senate, *Journals*. 1841. Texas State Library.

_____. Sixth Congress, First Session, Senate, *Journals*. 1841-1842. Texas State Library.

_____. Sixth Congress, First Session, House, *Journals*. 1841- 1842. Texas State Library.

_____. General Convention, *Proceedings*. March 1-17, 1836. Texas State Library.

U.S. *Congressional Debates*. January 7, May 10, 1830.

Newspapers

The Austin Daily Bulletin, Austin, Texas.

The New Orleans Bee, New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Telegraph and Texas Register, Republic of Texas.

The Weekly Texian, Republic of Texas.

Secondary Materials

Books

Ayers, Edward L. . *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Binkley, William. *The Texas Revolution*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952.

- Bordo, Susan. "Feminism, Post Modernism, and Gender Skepticism." In *Feminism/Post Modernism*, Ed. Linda Nicholson, pp. 133-156. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- _____. "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault." In *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of being and Knowing*. Eds. Allison M. Jagger and Susan R. Bordo, pp. 13-35. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.
- Boles, John B. . *The South Through Time" A History of an American Region*. 2 vol. , Englewood Cliffs (New Jersey): Prentice Hall, 1995.
- Bynum, Victoria E. "Reshaping the Bonds of Womanhood: Divorce in Reconstruction North Carolina." In *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*. Eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, pp. 320-333.
- _____. *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Cash, Wilber F. . *The Mind of the South*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1941.
- Cashin, Joan E. . *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Cheshire, Joseph Blount. *Nonnulla: Memories, Stories, Traditions, More or Less Authentic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930.
- Clinton, Cathrine. *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. New York: Pantheon, 1982.
- Coon, Charles L. . *Public Education in North Carolina, A Documentary History*. 2 vol. Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1915.
- Fischer, Ernest G. . *Robert Potter: Founder of the Texas Navy*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Co. , 1976.
- Fronsman, Bill Cecil. *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina*. Lexington (Kentucky): The University of Kentucky Press. 1992.

- Greenberg, Kenneth S. . *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Pro-Slavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Handbook of Texas. 6 vols. Texas State Historical Commission, 1996.
- Hardin, Stephen L. . *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy. *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840 1880*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1979.
- Kemp, Louis Wiltz. *The Signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence*. Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1944.
- Lack, Paul D. *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: A Political and Social History 1835-1836*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992.
- Mc Curry, Stephanie. *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Mc Millen, Sally. *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.
- Myres, Sandra. *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982
- Nisbett, Richard E. and Dov Cohen. *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*. Boulder (Colorado): Westview Press, 1996.
- Remini, Robert. *Andrew and the Bank War: A Study in Presidential Power*. New York: Norton, 1967.
- Shearer, Ernest C., *Robert Potter: Remarkable North Carolinian and Texan*. Houston : University of Houston Press, 1951.
- Schlesinger, Arthur. *The Age of Jackson*. Boston: Little Brown, 1945.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and The Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Stevenson, Brenda E. . *Life in Black And White: Family and Community in the Slave South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Whites, Lee Ann. *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia 1860-1890*. Athens (Georgia): The University of Georgia Press, 1995.

Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*. New York : Oxford University Press, 1982.

Articles

Culclasure, Scott P.. " 'I have Killed a Damned Dog': Murder by a Poor White in the Antebellum South." *The North Carolina Historical Review* V. LXX No. 1 (Jan. 1993) : 14-40.

Gorn, Elliott. "Gouge and Bite, pull and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry." *American Historical Review* V.90, no. 1 (February 1985) : 18-32.

Winston, Robert Watson. "Robert Potter: Tar Heel and Texan Daredevil." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 29 (1930) : 140-43.

Vita

Oakley Barber was born in Portland, Oregon, to Jack and Bonnie Barber on March 19, 1957. He attended public school there before moving to Colorado in 1980 to pursue a career in professional ski racing and coaching. In 1987, he enrolled in the Denver Community College. He later transferred to The Colorado College in Colorado Springs where he earned a B.A. and received the Clyde Augustus Dunneway Award for distinction in history. After leaving The Colorado College in 1992, he moved to Austin, Texas, where he served for two years as an Americorps volunteer before enrolling in the graduate history, and teacher certification programs at Southwest Texas State University.