

May 18, 2004

To: Associated Colleges of the South
From: Joe Essid, University of Richmond
Subject: 2003 ACS Technology Fellowship - Spirit of the Southern Frontier

Overview

Last year, the ACS provided funding for me and a student assistant to conduct a survey of never-republished journalistic pieces about the "Old Southwest," the region on either side of the Mississippi River from 1830-1860. We were looking, to quote briefly from my original proposal, for "hundreds of now-forgotten stories, as well as humorous tellings of "news"—real, embellished, or wholly imagined. . . . Much of this writing, with its duels, horse-swaps, and shotgun weddings, remains obscure despite its literary role as an antecedent to the some of the South's best known literature."

I'm pleased to say that we not only found more than we anticipated, but we have made strong progress in getting these materials online for others to use.

Current Status of Project

Student-Assistant Erin Bartels secured a university undergraduate research grant to pay her way as she assisted me last summer. We worked daily at the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia collecting materials or in our own offices here typing, proofreading, and coding the materials we found. Our work carried us a few times the Library of Virginia's archives, where we found a few materials to round out our collection and diversify our materials. Much of what we found at the Alderman came from William T. Porter's *New York Spirit of the Times*, an important publication that promoted this sub-genre of journalism and literature.

Currently about 75 pieces of writing, and a few images, are online for the "Spirit of the Southern Frontier" site <<http://writing2.richmond.edu/spirit/>>, most of them from the archives at the University of Virginia's Alderman Library, a handful from the Library of Virginia. This summer Ms. Bartels and I will complete the proofreading and coding of another 100 pieces for the site, and we may travel to the Library of Congress to fill in a few gaps in chronology and subject-area. We will develop a list of all materials by title and year published. We already have a Google search engine in place.

As an appendix to this report I include our "topics list" from the site, used with permission of the University of Georgia Press, as well as an authors' list of all pieces included on the site (note that many other pieces are not listed as they are anonymously authored).

Continuing Work, Promotion, Pedagogy

We have yet to place secondary materials or multimedia about the cultural context for these primary materials online. This summer Ms. Bartels and I will add two articles written by advanced students in English, and during the next year I hope to do some filming at the Museum of Frontier History in Stanton, Virginia and along at the annual Batteaux festival on the James River.

Promoting the project to colleagues is now possible that we have sufficient content online that has been through a two-stage proofreading process. I plan to write a short article to accompany a republication of "A Story About Banvard," to alert colleges in humanities that the archive is now "open for business." I will also be submitting a short description of the project to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. I'd also be pleased to work up a short piece (perhaps to include one of our originals from the archive) for *Palladian*.

On our campus I plan to develop a 200-level course that will use the materials heavily to establish the basis for further study in Southern literature.

Pedagogy

The pedagogy of this project is straightforward: we compliment *Humor of the Old Southwest*, the one in-print anthology of this literature, with work by lesser-known writers or with never-republished pieces by major figures. All texts are laid out with the simplest-possible HTML code and are printer-friendly pages. Our idea would be for faculty to assign readings that students could print and annotate for later reference in class.

Given that all the pieces are relatively short, and all are in the public domain, this archive provides the sort of access to fascinating primary materials not easily found elsewhere. ACS readers may wish to consider two of the stronger pieces we have found. They are both exemplary among what we located and also prophetic of what awaits others in 150-year-old newspapers sitting in archives today:

"A Story About Banvard"

<<http://writing2.richmond.edu/spirit/archive/banvard.html>>

"Old Singletire: The Man That was not Annexed"

<<http://writing2.richmond.edu/spirit/archive/oldsingletire.html>>

Appendix: Topics List from "Spirit" Site:

- [1] The Hunt
- [2] Fights, mock fights, reluctant fighters, and animal fights
- [3] Courtship, rejected suitors, weddings, and honeymoons
- [4] Frolics and dances
- [5] Games, horse races, and other contests
- [6] Militia drills (and other military sketches)
- [7] Elections and electioneering
- [8] The legislature, the courtroom, and lawyers
- [9] Sermons, camp meetings, preachers, and religious experiences
- [10] The visitor in a humble home, rude accommodations for travelers
- [11] The native country boy in the city
- [12] The riverboat, life on the river
- [13] Adventures of a rogue
- [14] Pranks and tricks of a practical joker, hoaxes
- [15] Gambling
- [16] Trades and swindles
- [17] Cures, sickness and bodily discomfort, medical treatments
- [18] Drunks and drinking
- [19] Dandies, foreigners, Yankees, and city slickers
- [20] Odd characters and local eccentrics
- [21] Modesty, immodesty, and false modesty
- [22] Actors, the theater, and theatrics

We have placed sketches of military life under topic 6. We have also added a few categories for pieces that do not quite fall under any of Cohen and Dillingham's subjects:

- [23] Tales of survival
- [24] Women on the Frontier
- [25] Coming of Civilization