Greetings from the Simms Society Executive Council. Since our last newsletter, the Society and Simms scholarship have experienced a number of exciting developments that we’re pleased to report.

Our greatest effort has been planning our biennial conference, slated for fall 2010 at the University of South Carolina (see below). We are fortunate in being able to work with the University and the South Caroliniana Library, home of the greatest Simms collection in the world, to host this next meeting. Enthusiasm is high and we anticipate a number of exciting events to be held in conjunction with our panels.

Our special issue of *The Simms Review* appeared in November, and we were delighted at the production values that enabled us to mimic the appearance of journals with far larger circulations. Our thanks to Society Life Member John G. Simms for making the issue possible.

Society President Matthew Brennan’s edited issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* was also published in 2009 (see p.3). Another important milestone in Simms studies, it features a number of Simms Society members and provides a thoughtful examination of several important and evolving themes in Simms studies.

This will be the last communication Society members will receive before the conference. Please mark your calendars and send in your paper proposals!

As always, we welcome your news, comments, and all information pertaining to Simms.

**Simms Conference 2010 Planned for USC**

Simms Society members and scholars from around the world are already marking their calendars for the next Simms conference, slated for September 23-25 at the University of South Carolina.

With the support of the South Caroliniana Library and the Watson-Brown Foundation (see p.10), the Society will welcome scholars from a wide range of disciplines to discuss all aspects of Simms’s life and works. Called “William Gilmore Simms and the Crucible of Southern Culture,” the conference will also provide scholars with the opportunity to focus attention on Simms’s postwar work, an especially fruitful area that scholars have only recently begun to explore.

“We’re delighted to host the Simms Society,” Dean Tom McNally of University Libraries commented, “and we’re especially excited at the plans to publish that work in a major university press volume.”

Thanks to the Watson-Brown Foundation, money has been allocated to support the publication of a two-volume set that will make available for the first time two of Simms’s postwar works, *The Brothers of the Coast* (see p.4) and *Sir Will O’Wisp*, along with essays addressing Simms’s postwar writings.

“This conference and publication will be a landmark in Simms studies,” enthused Allen Stokes, Director of the Caroliniana and Life Member of the Society. “It is an honor and a pleasure to continue the Library’s long tradition of supporting Simms studies with this conference.”
Simms Society Membership News

This past year marked a transition for the Society in several ways. Some changes were visible, such as our revamping of the newsletter and especially David Newton’s thorough overhaul of the Society’s website. It now features copies of the newsletters and the most recent Review, with plans to make more articles and features from back issues available as well. The 2009 special double issue of the Review was another important step, with production values normally associated only with much more expensive journals. The Executive Council was especially pleased at how smoothly the double-blind peer-review process went, which means that contributors can list their articles as peer-reviewed, an important part of the tenure process.

We conducted our first formal membership vote, on a technical but important change in the bylaws, allowing for unexpected vacancies in office to be filled expeditiously (see p.12). That vote was unanimous, with a fine return rate from the membership. Our thanks to all who submitted ballots.

We also had a strong response to our multi-letter, nine-month campaign to locate old members whose addresses had changed. We continue to work to locate a few more, and urge all members who move to let us know their new addresses promptly.

In our November mailing we asked members to send us news, and we had a number of comments. Founding Review editor Jim Kibler’s new novel, The Education of Chauncey Doolittle, is available from Peli-can Publishers at <www.pelicanpub.com>. Dr. Kibler writes, “Simmsians will recognize echoes there from the writings of Simms.” We applaud Dr. Kibler for his latest literary effort. An expanded edition of his Selected Poems of William Gilmore Simms will be published April 15, marking the twentieth anniversary of this landmark work. Colin Pearce published a review of James H. Read’s Majority Rule Versus Consensus: The Political Thought of John C. Calhoun in Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries (Nov. 2009), available at <www.cro2.org>.

Society President Matt Brennan’s poem, “Nights Our House Comes to Life,” was featured on Garrison Keillor’s The Writers Almanac on 12 December 2009 (http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2009/12/12). It is reproduced on the next page. Society members may recognize several Southern themes that also pay homage to Simms. We congratulate Matt on this national recognition.

Several members wrote in to comment admiringly about the new Review. “It looks first-rate,” wrote one. “Well done! Very professional-looking.” One prospective member joined after seeing it, commenting in an email that “the last Review looked terrific, very sharp and substantive.” One of our first Life Members wrote, “I am so pleased with the new format of the Review. Each article will be savored. High marks to Dr. Kibler and all who brought the Society to where it is today. Sincere thanks to all who are working so diligently to advance the good work to an even higher plane.”

Life Member Allen Stokes and an anonymous member purchased additional copies of the Review to send to prospective members, and we thank them for their recruiting efforts, as we do all of our members who help spread the word about Simms and the Society.

One member suggested that we “eliminate the life membership category. I joined as a Life Member years ago ... Since I want to continue my support, I have become a regular member,” and included a generous donation as well. The Executive Council appreciates the sentiment and will look into the matter, but the enduring significance of amendments to the Constitution mean that for now, we will be grateful for all additional support and continue to view our Life Members as the patrons whose substantial membership level connotes.

We would like to recognize the following Society members for their generous additional contributions this year:

Anonymous
Kate Simms Counts
Roger Klohr
Stephen E. Meats
Carl Mixon
David Moltke-Hansen
Ronald Carroll Plunkett
Steven Heard Simms
Allen Stokes
James L. West
Alexandra Furman Whitley

We also welcomed several new Life Members in 2009, listed on the inside back cover of the Review; two members who elected to become Life Members since the Review went to press are Francis C. Gregory, Jr. and Joseph C. Wingard. We thank them both for their loyalty and support. Another member whose name was not included in the Review, and who is not only an esteemed Life Member but also a Simms descendent, is Mrs. Connie Hartman Gawrych. We apologize for the oversight and look forward to remedying it in the next issue.

Thank you to all of the members who contributed news—your efforts make the Society the convivial and collegial group that it is.
Nights Our House Comes to Life

Matthew Brennan

Some nights in midwinter when the creek clogs
With ice and the spines of fir trees stiffen
Under a blank, frozen sky,
On these nights our house comes to life.
It happens when you’re half asleep:
A sudden crack, a fractured dream, you bolting
Upright—but all you can hear is the clock
Your great-grandfather found in 1860
And smuggled here from Dublin for his future bride,
A being as unknown to him then as she is now
To you, a being as distant as the strangers
Who built this house, and died in this room
Some cold, still night, like tonight,
When all that was heard were the rhythmic clicks
Of a pendulum, and something, barely audible,
Moving on the dark landing of the attic stairs.


Special Simms Issue of Studies in the Literary Imagination

The special Simms issue of Studies in the Literary Imagination, a national journal published by Georgia State University, Atlanta, rolled off the presses just before Christmas. Titled “The World in William Gilmore Simms,” the 180-page interdisciplinary volume presents eight new essays on Simms from a variety of perspectives. They all in different ways reinforce Simms’s devotion to his region but also place him in national and international orbits.

Society Council member-at-large Kevin Collins argues that Simms’s novels set west of the Carolinas anticipate the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner. Drawing on more than four decades of work on Simms the poet, Jim Kibler, also a Council member-at-large, pursues new ground by placing Simms in the tradition of Celtic poetry. Society Secretary-Treasurer Nicholas Meriwether reexamines Simms’s Sack and Destruction of Columbia, S.C. and concludes that Simms used this book to reinvigorate his literary career and to aid national healing after the traumatic war. John Miller discusses Simms’s sonnets on the Mexican War in the context of the nineteenth-century marketplace.

Former Society President David Moltke-Hansen traces Simms’s development as a fiction writer who began by emulating Walter Scott and his nationalist romances and who ended by comparing to Mark Twain whose Huck Finn Moltke-Hansen cleverly calls a cousin to Sharp Snaffles.

Similarly exploring Simms’s short fiction, David Newton delves deeply in the story “Grayling,” masterfully demonstrating the high level of Simms’s narrative skill. Colin Pearce broadens the scope of the issue by investigating Simms’s metaphysical thought on the idea of the State, which Pearce ingeniously links to such philosophers as Hannah Arendt, Immanuel Kant, and Francois Guizot. And last Laura Perkins alertly finds multicultural relevance in some of Simms’s sympathetic fictional portrayals of African Americans.

Of course I am biased, but I believe all eight essays are excellent as well as fascinating. I am indebted to the contributors, who have much to teach those of us devoted to the study and appreciation of William Gilmore Simms.

The Simms issue of Studies in the Literary Imagination (Volume 42, issue 1, spring 2009) is available for ten dollars, with checks made out to Georgia State U. and mailed to: Georgia State U., SLI, Dept. of English, PO Box 3970, Atlanta, GA 30302-3970. For more, see: <www.sli.gsu.edu>.

--Matt Brennan
The Brothers of the Coast: A Chapter from Simms’s Unpublished Pirate Romance

One of Simms’s unfinished projects was The Brothers of the Coast, which he subtitled “A Pirate Story.” Though he indicated plans for such a work before the Civil War, Simms only began writing it in the summer of 1865. He completed ten chapters, all that survive, before abandoning it for paid commissions. Now part of the Charles Carroll Simms Collection of the Papers of William Gilmore Simms in the South Carolina Library, the transcription was made possible by a gift of Simms Society Life Member John G. Simms, Jr. Plans are underway to produce a definitive edition of this work, to be published by the University of South Carolina Press. The version here represents a compromise of formal textual principles in favor of producing a readable, complete text; scholars should consult the original at the Caroliniana until the definitive text is published.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Could we command the wings of any one of these great white sea birds which we behold, continually hovering around us, and rise to the adequate elevation, we should behold a picture of these Bahama islands such as would fill the heart with content, the most feverish and impatient heart; and enliven and unkindle, to activity and delight, the most languid and unimpressible fancy.

Assuming for a moment, the possession of this wing, and having attained this elevation, we behold spread before us a thousand miles of islet and island, and grey key and bald rock, each in the embrace of its own billows, as with a belt of blue; and rejoicing in such fruits and flowers, as might well compensate the most heroic enterprise and excite the most languid spirit. Far as the eye can stretch, following the flight of flocks of great sea birds, all bound as it were to some chosen and well known realm of their own, these little coral gems of land and rock, rise suddenly out of the deep to intercept the horizon, already on the strain, and to rest the wings already wearied from its flight. Some of them are simply gray specks upon the surface of the sea, to be submerged by inrolling waters, when the ocean swells with storm and dilates in fury; others are long lines of habitable realm; covered with shrub and fruit trees, filling the air with fragrance, which the winds shall waft in blessing to less favored regions.

From above you gain glimpses, on one hand, of the lovely shores of the Cuban; on the other of the long and narrow capes of the Floridian; and, if your elevation be sufficiently great, and your eye sufficiently keen, like that of pelican or osprey, the horn of Yucatan, or Cape Cotoche, projects beneath your gaze, a sad realm of mystery and shadow, whose wondrous ruins enshrine a secret of probably five thousand years!

Verily, a spacious and beautiful empire; an archipelago second to none, of lovely retreat and loving solitude; a vast empire of the sun; upon which, pouring down his most fruitful beams, he grafts his flowers upon the bassement of rocks, and from their clefts, draws out the slender tree which brings the fruits of the tropics to perfection in the progress of the briefest season.

Follow these thousand avenues of sea, through these myriad barriers of rocky islet, and you penetrate, from realm to realm, finding in each some compensation for your toil, and rewards in the survey alone, by all the charms of a full-bosomed beauty, reposing in the embraces of a voluptuous sun. Mark now the progress of this grand procession of white birds, great winged creatures that swim and soar, and dive and run, alternately, as they wind their way through narrow channels, among scores of these rocky islets, or dunes of sand and sea shell, on and on, steadily pursuing a fixed route, as if to a select and long inhabited empire of their own. They conduct you finally to a region, to which we propose to direct our own step, one of equal obscurity and notoriety, as well in past as in present times. You pass with them, into the channels which lead immediately to a little realm, an island of small size, but large in comparison with hundreds in the same region; which the red men held to be one of his paradisal domains, but which the white man soon converted into a seat of sin and suffering. Yet he, too, became tired of the rest it gave him, and the peace it promised, called it his “Providence”; and there, without a law, he planted his habitations; and there, without the banner of a nation, he reveled in all the insolences of a prince!

Perusing your objects of vision, from your ideal height, you suddenly behold a great white form, looking very like a sea bird also, with immense white wings outspread, rounding one of the thousand islands which present a front, at once wooling and defensive, to the billows of the gulph; a long slip of land or rock, utterly obscure, yet singularly powerful in recalling a grand history. That islet is Guanahani, San Salvador, or Cat island, the first spot of the new world which held out a feeble light, at midnight, to the straining eyes of Christopher Columbus, making his way blindly, but with heart of faith, through the uncertain channels of the unknown deep. Even now, that which seems to your remote vision a great bird, is a war ship of Europe, filled with European men; and she presses forward, making her way to one of the several passages which conduct to “New Providence.” And as you gaze, you behold another, and
yet another, of these great vessels, though from opposite courses, and far apart from each other, all tending in the same direction.

And, were you on board one of these vessels, you would behold, even as you are about to enter one or other of the channels which are to conduct you to your post, another of these goody looking ships; and she would appear, framed to your eyes, as by the framing of a picture, through a vast opening in the solid rock. Such is the picturesque medium through which you look forth upon the ocean, through the arched passage of Abaco, and behold, possibly, in the approaching vessel, an enemy whose rival cannon you run, and prepare yourself to encounter with the broadsides of your own.

Briefly, your eye, surveying the vast amphitheatre which groups together, in one grand frame work, the Bahamas, and the Great Antilles, takes in a wondrous panoramic procession of white sails (as of white birds) all pressing forward, though from opposite points of the compass, in the one direction of “New Providence.” That island, at the period of which we write, was the great harboring place for all European birds of prey. It was this grand receptacle for the pirates and discontents of the Old World; the bold, audacious, reckless adventurers, who grew finally to be so strong as to write themselves into a powerful fraternity, calling themselves “The Brothers of the Coast.” They are trooping forever in their ships, to and fro; giving themselves but little rest, and denying rest to others. They come and go, perpetually, rounding the Capes of Florida, from the British colonies along the Atlantic. From the golden realm of the Spanish main they make their way; from a thousand regions which, like many of these keys and islets, seem designed only for the harborage of birds of prey; sharks, and eagles, and cormorants; vultures of all degrees and sizes, from the little hawk that preys upon the sparrow, to the mighty condor of the Andes, which carries off on great pinions, the fattest ewe of all the flocks!

They are then, at the period through which you take your survey of the scene, speeding or hovering in scores along the deep; seeking each some spoil or victim; frequently singly, and with a desperate hardihood, that goes forth even in a cockleshell, or cutter; slight of build, and conveying its ten men only; to the great ship of thirty guns; and, anon, uniting their beaks and talons in a savage foray on some common prey. Thus uniting their powers, they have on occasion come forth, with a grand armament, sometimes of no less than fifty war vessels in a line.

These, under names of different nations, are the lineal successors of the Vikings, the Sea-Dragons of the Northmen; having all their keen appetite for plunder; their reckless hardihood; their audacious courage; their unscrupulous avarice; their utter scorn of human sensibilities and suffering.

And though the skies thicken, so that we may no longer trace their progress along the deep, and the winds rise and threaten the ocean with their lash, these scattered prowlers whom we have watched will all soon congregate together safely in the harbor of Nassau. Well do they know these avenues of sea. They have mapped each one in blood! They knew them as well three hundred years ago as we do now. Nor were these spoliators then held to be the criminals which we should pronounce them now. Great kings gave them, in many cases, their credentials to persecute and plunder! Under the Great Seal of State, they were commissioned to open the arteries of rival nations. The blood of princes and nobles has not unfrequently filled the veins of their chiefains, and the honors of knighthood were not unfrequently accorded to some of their most savage leaders, as a reward for deeds of as much infamy as valor. It was the season when “deeds of derring-do” were deemed sufficiently to atone for the atrocities of the outlaw; when it was proclaimed, “There is no peace beyond the line,” and when one powerful European nation, like some great Leviathan, had outraged the rest of Europe by its power of excesses, that, as by common instruct, they all seemed to single her out as a common enemy; and, like a sword fish armed against the whale, lost no opportunity to pierce her sides with their sharp weapons, making up, by their celerity and audacity, for their lack of bulk and armament!

Nassau was then but a scattered hamlet. Its dwellings dotted hills remote from each other; were scattered over the long strip of line fronting the harbor entrance, without plan or uniformity. There were no streets. The buildings were generally small, rarely exceeding a single story, and built, in the Spanish fashion mostly, of the composition tapia, or the soft stone common to the region. Here and there, might be seen a dwell of two stories, standing upon some loftier spot, and looking more like a huge barracks, or fortress rather, than a merely human habitation. And, verily, these habitations had need to be fortifications, each well manned, with a garrison of its own, watchful against all surprise. There was no law in the island. There was no local government. The population lived mostly in the violation of law. They profited from the spoils of violence. The strong arm was the best security for life and property, and, indeed, the spot was not often employed for the preservation and keeping of those spoils which were yet brought hither for distribution. The birds of prey might gather here for a season, nay, for many seasons, but they simply rested here for a night as will those great sea birds whom we behold, to take their flight, seeking other prey, by the dawn of another morning.

Yet, there were some small scattered groups in this wild abiding place, families disposed to rest, who had sought the region as one of refuge, and did not share the objects of those who used it for the purposes of crime. Men of broken fortunes and attained blood, from Europe, were here exiled, to maintain a monotonous existence, glad to find repose from the stifles of European society or politics and escape from danger which they had incurred in the civil wars of their several countries. Here and there, and now and then, would the whisper go through the settlement, of this or that banished noble, the son of a Lord or Earl, or Duke, and, possible, his Lordship himself, only so happy, if let alone when identified, housing himself, perhaps, from sight, whenever a King’s cruiser came into these waters, in the interior of the island. Some of these refugees had brought wealth with them—did not, at all events, seem needy; and their dwellings were generally the most select, and the most secluded, guarded by equal reserve and vigilance. Society—if the irregular intercourse known among the residents, might deserve the name—was something of a medley; there were a few groups of English and French, some Irish, and occasionally a family of Portuguese or Spanish. But these, in large degree, were not wholly independent of those adventurers who sought, in these waters, to carve out their fortunes with the sword. The dashing English Buccaneer, the French Corsair, the Spanish or Portuguese Pirate, the Dutch Filibuster, were in the ascendant; and though willing to forbear, toward those residents who were disposed to show them a friendly countenance, were yet apt upon occasion, to show their teeth, and assert their powers of mischief, at
seasons, if only for the continued practice of authority. There were taverns and pot houses in the place, in one of which we propose to open the details of this history. Let us proceed to enter that which stands most conspicuous before us; a great, broad dwelling of soft stone, just fronting the harbor, and not more than two hundred yards from one of its landing places. It is called “The King’s Image,” and upon a sign, a circular plate of brass or tin, rudely painted to resemble a large piece of golden coinage, or one side of which, something vaguely like a crowned head is barely perceptible, while on the other some few traces exist which can be made one of the pillars, representative of the Kingdom of Spain, but nearly obliterated by exposure to the weather. The idea was probably borrowed from the ordinary Spanish milled Dollar—a piece of eight—a coin not altogether extinct; the value of which, in these times of [unclear] in pictured papers, is by no means under par. The “King’s Image,” consists of a long lumbering range of houses of a single story, but consisting of narrow apartments that seem rather to have been thrown, than built together; addition upon addition having been made, according to the growth of the place, and the increasing demand for shelter. Its Landlord was supposed to be an Englishman—he had been a pirate doubtless—certainly a sailor, and had lost a leg in the service; a loss which had the effect of converting a bold boarder, into a shrewd and money making landlord. But we must reserve our introduction to him and his hostel, for another chapter.

Simms, Memory, and Oral Lore: The Guilds/Oliphant Interviews

Nicholas Meriwether

Although Simms enthusiasts and scholars are fortunate to have a remarkable body of books, manuscripts, ephemera and memorabilia to consult, what we lack is something tantalizing that lies at the heart of so much of that work: his voice. Despite numerous, colorful, and occasionally humorous depictions of that voice—from his children and fellow writers, who were mesmerized by his stories, to citizens and fellow legislators, who praised his spell-binding orations, to even a neighbor, who was scandalized by his earthy imitations of rough frontiersmen—what we don’t have is the sound of that voice.

It is a sad omission for an author who spent so much time thinking about orality, whose use of oral sources was so sophisticated and prescient, and whose efforts to capture speech in his writings spanned nearly five decades. Scholars have found Simms’s treatment of oral sources to be compelling and intriguing, for a number of reasons, even if that falls outside the bounds of oral history as it is defined and practiced today. It is worth noting, however, that Simms’s attitude toward and use of oral sources largely comports with modern scholarly standards; and in all the work he did compiling his Sack and Destruction of Columbia, S.C. he may well have acted as an oral historian, sitting in his chair and transcribing the accounts of the anguished and dispossessed Columbians whom he sought out as narrators. That, however, is conjecture, if based on careful examination of the few manuscripts in the South Caro-
linana Library, and though it certainly fits with what we know of his celerity as a writer and his ear for the spoken word.

But until a box of cassette tapes of interviews conducted with Simms’s granddaughter, Mary C. Simms Oliphant, turned up in the Caroliniana’s collections, I didn’t think I would be able to truly merge my appreciation of Simms with my professional responsibilities here. Those responsibilities include conservation of the Library’s recordings, and this is intended to be an outline of the work being done to conserve those tapes, as well as a broad indication of what that work will mean to other scholars.

When John C. Guilds, Jr., began his studies of Simms in the late 1950s, he sought out the insights of Simms’s granddaughter, Mary C. Simms Oliphant, an accomplished writer and historian in her own right. A formidable Simms scholar herself—she co-edited the monumental Letters project, in addition to numerous revisions of her grandfather’s History of South Carolina—she also lectured on her grandfather to dozens of classes and groups, and had read more of her grandfather’s work than any other scholar until Guilds. So it was with mounting disbelief and delight that I began work on this cache of tapes. Hearing Simms’s granddaughter reminisce about her grandfather—recounting family stories and legends, and participating in them, describing how a tale had taken on its own life, noting where it departed from fact and where it might resonate with history—I realized that in fact, we do have an oral history of Simms: not directly, but as close as we’ll probably come. Moreover, the stories Oliphant tells on those tapes add another dimension to the Simms collections at the Caroliniana, just as her interactions with those stories will provide fascinating fodder for historians interested in tracing the changing contours of historical discourse in South Carolina’s cultural landscape over the decades.

The interview sessions span fourteen cassettes, about twenty hours recorded over the course of a year, from June 1978 through May 1979. Guilds took fairly extensive notes on three tapes, though those do not always correlate to the contents; none were fully transcribed, and some, not at all. A quick review of Guilds’ biography reveals that he used the tapes often, and well, thus making the work of conservation all the more important: in keeping with American Historical Association standards, scholars conducting interviews need to make those available for consultation and corroboration, and Guilds has now made that possible with his generous donation. We have now transferred all of the tapes to digital format, and have begun the process of signal restoration and transcript preparation. The final transcripts will be vetted and approved by Guilds and by Oliphant’s daughter, Mary Simms Furman, both of whom have given their permission for us to begin work.

Once those transcripts are approved, scholars will have access to a wealth of data on Simms, his children, and his grandchildren, along with a remarkable swath of South Carolina history, culture, and folkways, all preserved with the power and immediacy that oral history can provide. Based on the work already completed—and from the quotations from, and citations of, these interviews in Guilds’ biography—we have an idea of what treasures lie in store for us, and how they will enrich our knowledge of Simms.

Mary C. Simms Oliphant was born in 1891, more than twenty years after her grandfather’s death, so she tends to frame her responses in terms of family history; at their broadest, the tapes are an oral history of family history. Oliphant made sure that Guilds heard the family lore, and in those stories, you can hear her recall the exact phrases and recount the stories in the same cadences that she had heard. One example of this demonstrates several qualities of Simms that often escaped attention:

Now this was said to be the only unpleasant relationship with his father-in-law.... Nash Roach’s daughter was a considerable heiress when Simms married her.... What else she had I don’t know, but she was considered an heiress, and she did have the Summerville house, the estate in England, a fine house in Charleston, and the two plantations consisting of 7,000 acres. Well, Simms was determined to get that appointment to any foreign country—France, England, Switzerland, anywhere he could get, Italy—and he considered himself something of a linguist, you know; he said that at ten years old he was translating in four different languages. So he felt with his interest in national and international affairs—which is certainly shown in his work—he should...get an appointment. Well, Nash Roach opposed him bitterly. Nash Roach was something of an autocratic sire, and the remark he made to Simms—which Simms never forgot—and Simms dropped all efforts afterwards—he said, “Mr. Simms, hasn’t my daughter enough?”

Like Simms, Mrs. Oliphant also appreciated humor, and she especially enjoys telling Dr. Guilds the story of the family slave Jupiter, who accompanied Mrs. Oliphant’s father when he went to war:

Simms the author sent them off. ...and his instructions were, “Jupiter, bring them back whole,” and see that they were...kept alive. And, the night before Manassas, Jupiter got the three boys together—you remember that remarkable remark: “Now boys, you’ve got to be brave, but you ain’t got to be too brave.”

Even there, though, Mrs. Oliphant is the scholar: when Dr. Guilds asked, “Now where is that recorded?” She responded, “Me, I think.” At several points in the sessions, they both bemoan the lack of documentation for certain stories; part of the value of the tapes is the degree to which they trace the development of family stories and legends, and how they departed from fact. “We don’t want to over-claim,” she says at one point, “we want to be very sure of our ground....”

Mrs. Oliphant had covered that ground meticulously by the time Dr. Guilds sat down with her in Greenville, which makes her testimony far from hagiographic. When Dr. Guilds says, “We have to be careful that we don’t make it appear that Simms got along famously with everyone,” Mrs. Oliphant replies, quickly; “No, he didn’t. He quarreled with his best friends.” Although she makes plain her admiration for her grandfather, she doesn’t canonize him, nor does she hesitate to debunk treasured family stories, even when she appreciates them as stories; early in the tapes, she addresses the family story that Simms had a difficult childhood: “I think it makes such a good story that I hate to spoil it, because a little boy starting without help and achieving national notice makes a wonderful story. But on the other hand, look what was done for him.”

When Mrs. Oliphant recalls her father’s stories, the tapes reveal even more. One of the best exchanges occurs when she is describing a visit to Woodlands with her father:

[Simms] had this tremendous appreciation of his own children. I can hear them right now, “Father said so-and-so, Father says.” One day I was riding with my father down from Continued next page
Barnwell to Woodlands, and Father would address him. He would forget the generations, and he would say, “Your [grand]father riding along this road would say, ‘wildflowers had no scent or purpose, that they were not ever designed to make the weary traveler late, so they had no fragrance.”’...I grew up with that one. I remember so well riding that 25 miles with Father, talking about his father all the way. The children were really infatuated.... I remember; Lord, I can see those children myself.

The connections between the generations are so clear, and you can hear them in the tone of her voice. But she is also a scholar, and how she used that understanding of those connections is interesting; shortly after that exchange, she directly addresses Trent’s dismissive biography, explaining that Simms’s children “were the ones, of course, responsible for Mr. Trent...because all they could say was, nobody ever did enough, no matter who wrote about him...his children, his relatives, and his friends, including [Paul Hamilton] Hayne himself, thought that Simms deserved more by his people.”

Some family lore Oliphant never corroborated, and she conveys that to Dr. Guilds as just stories; what’s most interesting about some of these are their origins in Simms’s own research. In one exchange, Guilds probes her recollection that Simms had written some little poem that I up the heights in Greece. Every way I went ...I followed Simms and Byron from the tradition of Hardy. It was always the spoken word...that was one reason of the fascination really, of Simms’s romances; it was a story told, not a story written. It’s the oral quality that Mr. Davidson had noted that I had not seen anybody else [discuss] ... That you have a feeling when Simms wrote he was just saying the words as hard as he could go, and somebody was taking them down....

The relationship between autobiographical and orality comes up often in the interviews, and Mrs. Oliphant credits Donald Davidson as the first to identify the importance of the latter in her grandfather’s work:

[Donald Davidson] would speak of Simms in the tradition of Hardy. It was always the spoken word...that was one reason of the fascination really, of Simms’s romances; it was a story told, not a story written. It’s the oral quality that Mr. Davidson had noted that I had not seen anybody else [discuss] ... That you have a feeling when Simms wrote he was just saying the words as hard as he could go, and somebody was taking them down....

Mrs. Oliphant, however, adds another dimension to the story, remarking that her grandfather was “such an eternal talker, and I think that maybe his writings may have developed from the dinner table when he expatriated on every subject under the sun....”

Scholars who have had to contend with critical issues such as intertextuality may find some parts of the tapes especially intriguing, from a theoretical standpoint, since there is a kind of inter-orality at work when Oliphant is providing an oral history of family stories of orality and oral history in Simms’s own work. But at a simpler level, it is clear that these connections are also a part of the cultural landscape that shaped both Simms and his granddaughter. Both devoted much of their work to finding, recording and preserving their state’s history and heritage, reifying it in print. Hearing Oliphant describe her own work cannot fail to impress a listener with how she has emulated his example. But that example goes deeper: at one point, she says to Guilds:

This little old reader that I wrote with Mary Simms long ago is Woodlands completely. Sometime, if you ever have time, it gives you a picture of the life of Woodlands you get nowhere else because day by day we put into there the things that we’d grown up with...nowhere else do we have Woodlands so presented in the eyes of the family as we see in that little book...all the things the children said, all the things that Grandmother told them they ought to remember....

Just as her grandfather incorporated his own life into his work, so too did his granddaughter. Simms would have been pleased.

Musicologists have often bemoaned the fact that without a recording, we can never know how Bach improvised at the keyboard. Simms died shortly before we had the capability to record sound, but in one of these interviews, Mrs. Oliphant mourns the fact that no one recorded the next generation; there is a haunting tone to her voice when she quietly remarks, “you wish it would have been possible to take a tape recorder among Simms’ children....” We may lack a recording of Simms’s voice, but with these tapes, it isn’t difficult to hear his voice echoing across the generations. Thanks to Jack Guilds and Mary Simms Oliphant, at least we have the sound of one of Simms’s grandchildren, whose dedication to preserving his memory and achievements made her an eloquent, powerful, and moving narrator.

Society Secretary-Treasurer Nicholas Meriwether gave an earlier version of this talk at the conference “Cultural Hearth: William Gilmore Simms and His State,” at the University of South Carolina, April 6-8, 2006. All quotations are from the Guilds/Oliphant oral history collection at the South Caroliniana Library. Used with permission.
visions of order in william gilmore simms: southern conservatism and the other american romance by mashahiro nakamura (university of south carolina press, 2009; 222 pages).

reviewed by kevin collins

mashahiro nakamura’s work is among the highlights of the dramatic revival of simms scholarship that began nearly two decades ago with the release of john c. guild’s biography, simms: a literary life, continued with the founding of the simms society, and is on-going today with the proliferation of new editions of the author’s works and critical analyses of them produced by scholarly and commercial publishers.

the author is a professor of american literature at aichi university of education in aichi, japan, and he has both taught simms in japanese classrooms and produced japanese-language translations of simms’s the yemassee and selected shorter fiction by the author. dr. nakamura’s professional biography alone makes his scholarly opinion essential on the question that has vexed simms scholars and simms’s readers since at least the 1840s: of simms’s philosophical identities as an american and a southerner, which is coincidental to the other? (simms himself, very clearly, made both claims.) knowledgeable on his subject, yet unburdened by irrational innate loyalties either to the united states or to any of the nation’s regions, nakamura is in a position to work from an unbiased perspective on this question that perhaps no american scholar can access.

to a degree, however, nakamura is presented with the conundrum that faces all excellent scholars: the value of his objectivity is lessened a bit by the very thoroughness of his research. in the end, he refines and complicates this essential question concerning the identity of simms—and he makes the need for an answer to it perhaps even more pressing—but he does not answer it definitively. it is at least possible that nobody ever will.

nakamura’s title, as well as the thesis he clearly states in his introduction, indicates that he sees his subject as a southerner who is also an “american,” but merely by the accident of birth (or the accident of the constitution). as he lays out his argument, however, he supports it with an astounding number of references to scholars who bring their own biases—supporting and opposing nakamura’s thesis—to their studies. largely because of this choice, the book loses some of its unique and essential quality: the point of view of a scholar unencumbered by partisan positions on the regional disagreements that have enlivened american history.

the book’s six chapters treat, in turn, 1.) the regional differences in the romance as a form, 2.) simms’s distinctly southern world view, 3.) the subjects of these first two chapters as they are illustrated in a single simms work (martin faber), 4.) the revolutionary romances, 5.) the border romances, and 6.) simms’s treatments in fiction of american indians. in all of these chapters, nakamura demonstrates the differences between simms’s work and the works of writers from other regions in terms of style and philosophy, echoing perhaps the most frequently cited of simms’s own words, from the dedicatory essay that opens the wigwam and the cabin: his claim that his work is local, sectional in nature. to the extent that nakamura falls short of complete success in his demonstration, it is in the degree to which he excludes the context in which simms identified his work as sectional illustration: “...to be national in literature one must needs be sectional...and he who shall depict one section faithfully, has made his proper and sufficient contribution to the great work of national illustration.” simms, in his own words, agreed whole-heartedly with nakamura’s thesis, but he also saw his task as using his distinctly southern mind to depict his distinct southern region specifically in order to do his part to depict the united states of america. simms wrote this passage in 1845, and it is almost certainly true both that he felt less strongly about it fifteen years later and that he felt more strongly about it fifteen years earlier. the problem for scholars and aficionados of william gilmore simms is that they must consider their subject over a very long and very diverse career.

nakamura’s prose style is not only accessible to scholarly readers, but it is elegant, especially given the fact that he is not writing in his native language. if lay readers have more difficulty accessing the arguments, the fault lies not with the author’s command of english, but—again—with the layers of references to published scholarly works. to cite the example of just one brief paragraph (36-37), nakamura begins in his own voice but quickly cites a brief quotation from frederick jackson turner, on the subject of american regionalism, in order to introduce a response to it, three other brief quotations—these from howard w. odum—as well as a much longer citation of odum’s work. by the end of this brief paragraph, the point with which the author began it—his own point—is retrievable, but only with the sort of work that scholars love and that many lay readers dread. and while there are many notable exceptions (especially in chapter six), this sort of layered intertextuality is probably more the rule than the exception throughout the book.

except for simms’s works themselves, there are only a dozen or so published works that every dedicated simms reader must have on his or her shelf, and not one of them is perfect. mashahiro nakamura’s visions of order in william gilmore simms: southern conservatism and the other american romance is certainly one essential source for insight into simms’s life and works.

kevin collins serves as member-at-large on the simms society executive council. an expanded version of this review will appear in the next simms review.
Simms Initiatives Launched at the University of South Carolina

In the spring of 2008, Society Secretary-Treasurer Nicholas Meriwether received a telephone call from Carol Benfield, Director of Development for the University Libraries at the University of South Carolina. “Tell me what area of the Caroliniana you can imagine would most benefit from development,” she asked. Without hesitation, Meriwether replied: “Simms.” Though far from unappreciated and under-utilized, the Simms materials at the Caroliniana still contained vast amounts of unexplored material that Meriwether knew could benefit scholars in a wide variety of disciplines.

Over the next three months, Meriwether and Benfield met several times, along with Library Director Allen Stokes and Grants Assistant Matthew Costello, to explain why the Caroliniana Library’s extensive holdings of Simms materials were a major resource that could be more fully explored and made accessible. As Stokes summarized, “Simply put, there is no other Library in the country with holdings as extensive as ours documenting all aspects of a major nineteenth-century American author and literary figure.”

Meriwether and Stokes mapped out a multi-pronged approach that would involve major units from the Thomas Cooper Library and from the Caroliniana. The centerpiece of the effort would be an online bibliography component, building on the model of several other high-profile endeavors. “One of the most intriguing and productive applications of Web 2.0 technology is its collaborative potential,” explained Meriwether. With an author like Simms, whose productivity was so fecund and whose work appeared in such a staggering array of forms, editions, and translations, the idea of a single scholar or team ever physically visiting the repositories necessary to establish a definitive bibliography is simply not economically feasible. “That kind of undertaking would also be essentially a lifetime effort,” commented Stokes. The Caroliniana only just acquired an extraordinarily rare British edition of Simms’s Count Julian (see Simms Society News no. 1, p.3), formerly unknown to scholars. “If this edition only just came to light,” Stokes added, “then how many more such examples may exist?”

Stokes has good reason for his supposition. For years, two Russian members of the Simms Society have been pointing out that Simms had Russian admirers, and that indeed, editions of Simms’s novels appeared in Russia during the author’s life, though the dire economic difficulties academics in that country continue to face have thwarted efforts to provide confirmation. With a sophisticated web-based interface coupled with a database-backed bibliography engine, however, scholars and Simms collectors from around the world will be able to submit information, upload scans of title pages and copyright information, and help define the extent of Simms’s mammoth corpus. Compiling the work online will also make the work accessible long before a definitive print edition can be produced, a real boon to Simms studies given the lengthy timeline of the project.

That timeline is dictated not only by the enormous amount of material to be described, but also by the abundance of anonymous and pseudonymous publications Simms penned during his life. Longtime Simms Review editor James Kibler has identified many of these, publishing a volume documenting hundreds of pseudonyms and steadily adding to his list over the years, but the extent of those is a reminder of what treasures may still have escaped critical notice. Fortunately, materials at the Caroliniana—especially the voluminous scrapbooks in the Charles Carroll Simms collection—offer clues to, and often confirmation of, Simms’s authorship of many of the publications whose attribution would otherwise be impossible to verify.

Other components of the Simms Initiatives include a major digitization effort, which will begin by creating a comprehensive online edition of all of Simms’s published works, complete with verified texts. This will make possible textual analyses that have been possible only to scholars with access to original copies; for titles like Monody, on the Death of Gen. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, where only one intact copy is known to survive, digital facsimiles are vital. Once published versions have been digitized, manuscript materials from the Caroliniana will form the next series to be digitized, transcribed, and made available online.

A vital component of the Simms Initiatives includes support for the upcoming Simms conference to be held at the University of South Carolina in September 2010. With several papers already accepted and a number of panels formed, plans are well underway for what promises to be a milestone in Simms scholarship. One theme of the conference is Simms’s postwar writings, still the most misunderstood and neglected period in his life and work. An excerpt of one of his unfinished novels from that time, The Brothers of the Coast, appears in this issue (see p.4). The publication of that work, along with one other unpublished late effort, is being planned, in conjunction with a volume devoted to revised conference presentations that will focus on that part of his corpus. It is an exciting time in Simms studies, and these efforts should help fuel that enthusiasm and interest.

“...Scholars, bibliographers and Simms enthusiasts from around the world will be able to...help define the impressive extent of Simms’s mammoth corpus.”
William Gilmore Simms Curatorship Created at Caroliniana

With the enthusiastic support of Dean of University Libraries Tom McNally, the position of William Gilmore Simms Curator has now been created at the South Caroliniana Library, home of the country's greatest collection of Simms materials. As the coordinator of the Simms Initiatives, the Simms Curator represents a major aspect of the Libraries' commitment to the Simms Initiatives (see p. 10).

“We’re excited to launch this new frontier in Simms studies,” enthused Allen Stokes, Director of the Caroliniana. “We have been fortunate to have so many fine scholars work on Simms here, and this position will allow us to make our Simms materials even more accessible.”

Creating the Curator position was part of the challenge to secure the major grant that is funding the Simms Initiatives (see below). Part of the Curator’s duties will be to facilitate the efforts by the Society to foster and support Simms studies. With the Society’s records housed at the Caroliniana, deposited there by Jim Kibler in 2009, the Library is now the unofficial home of the Society, a secure repository that already serves as the base for so much of Simms studies. “It makes sense for the Caroliniana to be the archive for both Simms’s work and the work on Simms,” commented Henry Fulmer, Curator of Manuscripts at the Caroliniana. The papers of prominent Simms scholars such as Mary Simms Oliphant and James B. Meriwether are already at the Library.

Nicholas Meriwether, Oral Historian at the Caroliniana and architect of the Simms Initiatives, was originally offered the post after completing the application process but had to decline. “My heart will always lie with the Caroliniana,” he explained, “and I will continue to work on Simms, but after five years of work building the oral history collections at USC and nearly two years helping Matthew Brennan and the other members of the Executive Council to revamp the Simms Society, it was time to seek other challenges.”

It was a hard decision, but after intensive lobbying by officials at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Meriwether agreed to take a position as archivist and curator at the McHenry Library there. “Santa Cruz offered a level of challenge and opportunity that I could not afford to pass up,” Meriwether noted. “It was the most difficult decision of my career, only made possible by my confidence in Allen Stokes and the staffs of University Libraries, who will be continuing my efforts with Simms and oral history.” The Executive Council thanks Nick for his efforts and wishes him well in his new endeavors.

Watson-Brown Foundation Supports Simms Initiatives

When the idea for a series of related efforts to showcase the University of South Carolina’s collections devoted to William Gilmore Simms began to be seriously discussed, the major hurdle was funding. Even three years ago, the economic conditions looked grim, a situation that has only grown bleaker. “But in every time of difficulty there are always opportunities,” remarked Carol Benfield, Director of Development for University Libraries, recollecting how she began to identify possible funding sources for the Libraries’ plans for Simms.

One private institution that quickly emerged as a possible donor was the Watson-Brown Foundation. Based in Thomson, Georgia, the Foundation has played an active philanthropic role at USC for many years, funding activities and efforts by the Institute for Southern Studies, the College of Journalism and Mass Communication, and others.

Although the Foundation is active at all levels of education, it has a particular interest in scholarship devoted to topics in Southern history and literature, funding ambitious projects such as the collected works of noted historian Elizabeth Fox Genovese, a multi-volume effort being published by the University of South Carolina Press.

“The Watson-Brown Foundation’s efforts at USC and throughout the region, as well as their uncompromising commitment to funding high-profile, cutting-edge scholarly projects, made them a natural choice as a partner for our Simms Initiatives,” enthused Dean of Libraries Tom McNally. After an initial meeting with Foundation President Tad Brown, McNally was confident that the Simms Initiatives were a set of projects that would appeal strongly to the Foundation’s board.

After more research and meetings, the Watson-Brown Foundation voted to fund the Simms Initiatives for a four-year period, renewable for another four years. In addition to making possible the creation of the complex database-backed website that will host the bibliography and digital edition, the grant also provides for a number of additional roles, including manuscripts processing for important Simms-related materials. “We are elated and honored by this vote of confidence,” Allen Stokes commented. “With this grant, Simms studies will reach an entirely new level.”
First Simms Society By-Laws Change Approved by the Membership

At the Simms Society Executive Council meeting last June, one issue raised was the lack of a mechanism for vacancies to be filled between Society meetings. After discussion, the Council agreed on proposed wording for an amendment and voted to poll the membership.

In November, members received a ballot, capitalizing on the concerted effort that had resulted in the first complete overhaul of the Society’s mailing list. While a few members’ new mailing addresses remained (and still remain) unknown, the preceding year-long effort—involving database work, extensive web searches, and repeated letters to all possible addresses—had narrowed that number down to fewer than ten. (Society members who move before, much less between meetings of the Society, and it’s good to know that we can use that mechanism when emergencies arise.)

Results were posted at the Society’s website shortly after the ballots were tabulated, and the amendment added to the bylaws posted there as well. The section of the bylaws amended appears at right, with the full text of the added language of the amendment below:

**Simms Society Bylaws, Section 6, before amendment:**

The President-Elect, Secretary-Treasurer, and at-large members are nominated by the Executive Council (with nominations also being accepted from the floor) and are elected to two-year terms by majority vote of the members present at the business meeting.

**Simms Society Bylaws, Section 6, after amendment:**

If vacancies occur due to resignations or any other circumstances, replacements for the remainder of the two-year terms will be appointed by the President, with the advice of the officers, the at-large members, and the ex officio members.