



Simms Society News

Greetings

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Greetings and welcome to the *Simms Society News*, an informal newsletter that the Society has launched in order to keep our members informed of news and events of interest to Simms scholars, fans, and descendants. For many years, Dr. Jim Kibler has done a wonderful job of including as much of this kind of news as possible in his well-edited *Simms Review*, but the *Review's* primary focus is scholarly, and we hope this newsletter will serve as a way of conveying other information that is still of interest to the Society. We encourage members to send us letters, news, and items pertaining to Simms.

The Society and its members have been keeping busy with a variety of Simms efforts,

from the summer work of the Simms Visiting Professors at the South Caroliniana Library (*see p.2*) to the most recent conference, held in Athens, GA, (*see p.2*) to the pioneering special issue of the respected scholarly periodical *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, edited by newly elected Society president Matt Brennan (*see p.3*).

Newly discovered Simms manuscripts and even rare published materials continue to come to light, one of which is detailed inside (*see p.3*). We appreciate the efforts of Society members Mary Simms Furman and her cousin John Simms for their efforts to make rarities like this available to scholars through their generous donations to the South



The beautifully restored T. R. R. Cobb House in Athens, GA, site of the Simms Society's 2008 conference.

Caroliniana Library. Our new officers, elected at the most recent business meeting, are already hard at work planning the next conference, to be held in 2010 at the University of South Carolina. We'll keep you posted as plans develop.

Please let us know if you have news to share or if your address has changed. We'd love to hear from you.

2010 Conference:

- The Executive Council has agreed to hold the next Simms Society conference in the fall of 2010.
- The meeting will be held at the University of South Carolina, host to the largest Simms collection in the country.
- As plans develop, we'll keep you informed .

From the President

It was a pleasure and an honor to be elected President of the Simms Society at our recent conference, held in the beautifully restored T.R.R. Cobb House in Athens, GA. After a wonderful conference with so many fine presentations, it was a surprise and a delight to be given the responsibility of shepherding the Society for the

next two years, along with my capable fellow officers, Sean Busick, President-Elect, and Nicholas Meriwether, Secretary-Treasurer. Building on the momentum created by so many years of good work by our past officers, we have already begun a number of initiatives designed to help upgrade the Society's finances and pub-

lications, including this newsletter and a special issue of the *Simms Review* (*see p.4*). The Society wouldn't exist without the enthusiasm of its members, and I thank you for your continued support as we enter our sixteenth year. Please stay in touch and let us hear from you if you have any thoughts or concerns.

Matthew Brennan

2008 Conference Report



Matt Brennan, incoming President of the Simms Society, and Jim Kibler, conference organizer and editor of the Simms Review, after the election held at the conference.

The Simms Society held its tenth meeting in Athens, GA, September 11-13, an event that all attendees agreed set a new standard in hospitality, entertainment, and scholarship. Held in the recently restored T. R. R. Cobb House, the conference attracted students, scholars, and fans from as far away as Germany and Japan.

With a focus on Simms as a poet, the conference program had twelve papers and presentations covering nearly every aspect of Simms's career, from his earliest poem, *Monody on the Death of General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney*, to some of his last, the Grandfather Gander poems. In addition to many

senior scholars, presenters included two new graduate student members who offered interesting comparative contexts for assessing Simms. "We are particularly pleased at the efforts that these younger Simms scholars have made," conference organizer Jim Kibler remarked. "While we are delighted with the increasingly learned forays into Simms's work by senior members of the Society, a vital part of our mission is to encourage student interest in Simms."

Other conference highlights included an exhibit of rare Simms works, an evening concert by noted Celtic harpist Deborah Brinson, and a recep-

tion in honor of Society member Masahiro Nakamura, celebrating his forthcoming book on Simms, *Visions of Order*.

The conference was co-sponsored by the Watson-Brown Foundation, who not only provided the accommodations but also hosted the Society for the banquet and bar. Between sessions, attendees admired the restored rooms and exhibits on display at the Cobb House, ably explained by House staffers Sam Thomas and Shanon Hayes, who were invaluable throughout the conference. "This meeting was unequalled," enthused Brennan, "thanks to Jim Kibler's tireless efforts."

Simms Summer Scholars News

This summer, the South Carolina hosted two members of the Simms Society as part of its Simms Visiting Professor program: Dr. David W. Newton, a professor at the University of West Georgia, and John W. Miller, who is completing his dissertation at the College of William and Mary. Newton pursued several projects but focused primarily on an unpublished manuscript titled *Sir Will O' Wish*, a 188-page novel fragment that Simms worked on after the Civil War. Newton's two other projects included completing research on Simms and Edgar Allan Poe for an essay slated for publication in *Studies in the Literary*

Imagination (see above), and work on an unpublished collection of Simms's poetry, known as the Grandfather Gander poems. He presented a paper on his research at the biannual meeting of the William Gilmore Simms Society, held at the T. R. R. Cobb House in Athens, Georgia, in September (see above).

Miller's primary focus at the Caroliniana was editing and annotating a selection of Simms's criticism. "Simms was one of antebellum America's prominent public intellectuals," Miller commented, and his research found that the Caroliniana's collections offered new insights into Simms's centrality to his times. "Simms's

criticism is an indicator of the intellectual and cultural development of the mid-nineteenth century United States," Miller explained, "and it shows how he was participating in and shaping these national discussions."

Both scholars had high praise for their time at the Caroliniana. Miller wrote that, "I can think of no other library that has such a concentration of a single author's manuscripts, published works, and complete runs of antebellum periodicals." Newton concurred. "I was continually amazed at how much the staff knew about the collection and where to locate difficult to find sources." Both plan to return and continue their work.

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New Simms Scholarship

Society president Matthew Brennan, Professor of English at Indiana State University, has recently completed editing an issue devoted to Simms of the respected academic journal *Studies in the Literary Imagination*. Scheduled for publication in the spring of 2009, it is entitled “The World in William Gilmore Simms,” and features articles by a number of Simms Society members, including Kevin Collins, Jim Kibler, David Newton, Colin Pearce, and others.

Brennan’s focus is wide-ranging, as befits his subject, offering new perspectives on Simms’s poetry, fiction and non-fiction, with nearly every

period of Simms’s life represented. Fundamentally, however, his effort continues the slow process of restoring Simms’s reputation and place in the canon, a process that began in the 1950s with the publication of the *Letters*, and has been gathering momentum ever since.

“When you think of the literary status that Simms enjoyed in his own lifetime and his centrality to American literature of that era,” Brennan notes, “it is amazing to contemplate his subsequent scholarly neglect.” While efforts such as the University of Arkansas Press editions and a steady stream of articles con-

tinue to build momentum for Simms studies, Brennan’s issue should make a significant impact as an issue of a major scholarly periodical entirely devoted to Simms. “I was surprised at how readily my proposal was accepted,” Brennan laughed. “But that may be why Simms is finally coming into his own: scholars are hungry for new writers to read, new territory to map—and Simms is a veritable universe waiting for discovery.” With this issue, literary scholars unfamiliar with Simms will have a manifesto documenting his significance—and those accustomed to dismissing him will find ample reason to reassess that view.

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A British Simms Edition

As an American author, Simms was concerned with establishing both the legitimacy of a distinct American literature as well as the profession of letters in the U.S. One theme in his letters and writings is the lack of copyright protection for American authors—and the efforts to which he went to secure copies of his own works that had been pirated by enter-

prising English publishers. So when a British edition of his historical romance *Count Julian* turned up, Allen Stokes, Director of the South Caroliniana Library, bought it immediately.

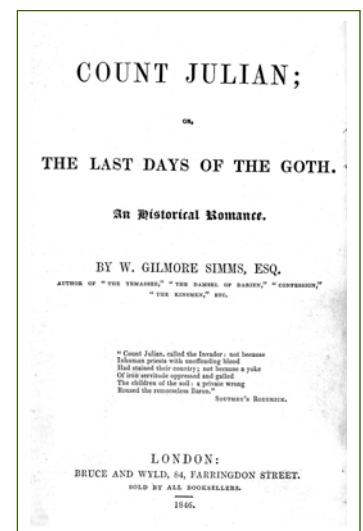
“The Caroliniana has almost every known edition of Simms’s books,” Stokes explained, “but this is one that I don’t think scholars even knew existed.” For Simms scholars, the book is interesting because it bears a “Publisher’s Note” praising Simms as a “distinguished American novelist” and singling out his skill in rendering characters and especially the “spirit and splendour of [the book’s] glowing spectacles of warlike strife!”

Even more intriguing is that it claims to be the result of an “arrangement with this celebrated author, by which (simultaneously with its publication in the United States) we are enabled exclusively to present our readers with an entirely original work . . .” Such an agreement in 1846 was uncommon, offering scholars another insight into the efforts Simms made to secure a market for his work.

After undergoing restoration at Etherington Conservation, it will join the Library’s Simms holdings as part of the Simms-Oliphant-Furman Collection where it will be available for researchers to consult.



The newly-acquired British edition of Count Julian., before undergoing conservation.



The title page of this very rare 1846 British edition of Count Julian.

Simms Society News

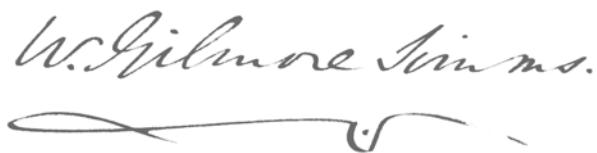
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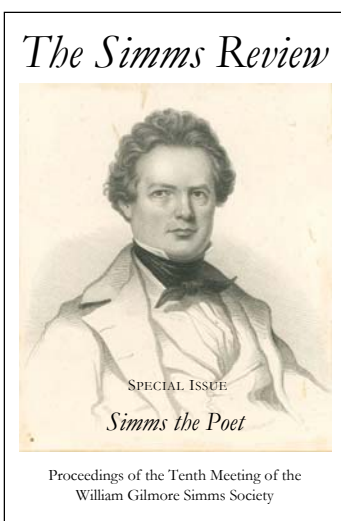
Visit the Society on the web:

<http://www.westga.edu/~simms/>

*Devoted to advancing the study of William Gilmore Simms
and restoring his role in the mainstream of American letters.*



Special Issue of the Simms Review



*A draft cover for the special edition of
the Simms Review, slated for pub-
lication in mid-2009.*

At the recent conference in Athens, a number of attendees marveled at the strength of the presentations, almost all of them devoted to illuminating aspects of Simms's poetry. "I don't think we've ever had such a range of papers approaching one single aspect of Simms," commented conference organizer Jim Kibler.

As the foremost scholar of Simms's poetry, Kibler was especially pleased at the enthusiasm that greeted the conference's theme. "Simms's poetry is still comparatively neglected," Kibler pointed out, "although he himself considered it his forte." In discus-

sions between sessions and over meals, a number of participants commented on how well the papers seemed to fit together.

"There are so many aspects to Simms's poetic oeuvre," David Newton mused after the Saturday session concluded. "For all of the papers to cohere so well is testament to the inspiration that Simms continues to arouse in scholars more than a century after his death."

Kibler, longtime *Simms Review* editor, and newly elected Society Secretary-Treasurer Nicholas Meriwether agreed, and in conversations later that

day, plans for a special edition of the *Simms Review* took shape.

With the generous support of Society member and Simms descendent John Simms, the special issue will be able to adhere to high-quality production values normally associated with scholarly periodicals reaching a far wider audience. "It seems fitting that such a fine conference would be documented by such well-produced proceedings," Simms remarked. "I'm just delighted that I could help." With publication slated for mid-2009, the work is already well underway. Members will be informed when the volume is available.