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Found among the Papers

Fictions of Textual Discovery in Early America

Abstract: Though modeled on the insistent factuality that had defined prefatory material in fiction a century earlier (what scholars have called the pseudofactual mode), the narrative frame of the found manuscript utilized in early American novels like Unca Eliza Winkfield's The Female American (1767) and Susanna Rowson's Reuben and Rachel (1798) had long been recognized as a "fiction" in itself. Linking this trope to current debates over the "archive" and the "hermeneutics of suspicion" this essay argues that the endurance of the "found manuscript" convention can be traced to the interpretive methodologies of early American antiquarianism and the growing effort to find "among the papers" of the dead and the living a materially stable canon of American letters. Pointing to emerging archives both literally and figuratively, writers of historical fiction such as Washington Irving, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and John Neal were engaged with an ongoing recovery and reprinting of colonial documents that was coincident with the rise of American historical and antiquarian societies. In dramatizing antiquarian excavation and serendipitous "finds" while also conspicuously citing new histories based on such finds, historical fictions of the early nineteenth century registered the tension between perceiving old "papers" as a body of enduring source material and as a haphazard hoard of mutable ephemera that demanded imaginative reconstruction. Reading historical fictions as an outgrowth of antiquarian research also invites us to reevaluate the legacy of the pseudofactual, and its relationship with emergent discourses of fictionality, by questioning long-standing historicist approaches to early American fiction.

KEYWORDS: fiction, collecting, manuscript, antiquarianism, historicism

In the first half of Royall Tyler's picaresque novel *The Algerine Captive* (1797), protagonist Updike Underhill relates a dream that his mother had while pregnant with him. In the dream, their house is "beset by Indians" and little Updike is brutalized, his head used as a soccer ball (22).

For Underhill, this dream is a premonition of his own captivity in North Africa, described in the novel's second half. To support his theory, he relates a story of Massachusetts Bay governor William Phipps, who dreamt he would "one day ride in his coach, and live in a grand house near Boston common" (23). The incredulous reader, he notes, can refer to "Doctor Mather's *Magnalia*" for the detailed account (23). Underhill here references a fantastical premonition nestled in a real, old book, offering a coalescence of fiction and nonfiction, past and future projection. He clearly wants us to believe Phipps's prediction, even as he also sets up an earnest observation about past epistemes. "It was the error of the times of monkish ignorance, to believe every thing," as Mather had done with the witch trials, he adds, but "it may possibly be the error of the present day, to credit nothing" (23). Underhill then proceeds to relate his own complicated relationship to fiction's truth claims, recalling how he jammed a skewer through the eye of the demon Apollyon "to help Christian beat him" in a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and killed the family's fatted calf in an attempt to "raise a swarm of bees" in the tradition of Virgil (25, 29).

Underhill appears to have believed "every thing" on this evidence, spearing the immobile page in an embodied act of reading, feeling, and faith. Yet conversely, taking a stab at an illustration is an act equally evocative of a suspicious mode of reading, a practice of "crediting nothing" to the text's surface and attempting to dig beneath it. Similarly, while Underhill cites Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) to legitimize his mother's dream, Mather's reputation as an irrelevant sophist by the end of the eighteenth century undermines the citation's value—the reference may well be ironic. Underhill's (mis)reading, in short, resonates with two critical reading practices currently under scrutiny in our discipline, one that "credits nothing" in its hermeneutics of suspicion and the other that "believes everything" in its historicist bent toward archival evidence. Both methods tend to treat texts like clues or like mysteries in and of themselves; accordingly, the literary scholar's expertise is rooted in their ability to reveal the text's truth and set it free. Through discourse analysis or deep archival contextualization, we claim to "know more than the text" because we have marshalled the evidence or performed the appropriate diagnosis (Sizemore 12). This is perhaps what Elizabeth Fenton and Valerie Rohy mean when they argue that literary historicism is "at its core an imaginative methodology," dependent on speculation about "what might have

been" (83). This is perhaps even what Charles Brockden Brown meant in his 1800 essay "The Difference between History and Romance" when he argued: "The same man is frequently both historian and romancer in the compass of the same work" (252). Interpretive work is romancer's work; we are always just taking a stab at the page.

Early Americanists often find themselves and their evidence "among the papers" of physical and digital archives; they rummage and they dig, often traversing through the "truly mundane" in search of the telling detail (Parrish 265). But the work of digging has also come to signify a critical posture of suspicion, digging through or under the deceptive surface of a text to reveal its truths.¹ This second meaning has variously been called "suspicious" or "symptomatic," reading against which "distant" or perhaps "aesthetic" reading frameworks are set. The interpretative methods of archivally informed historicism and suspicious reading often deploy the same language, though. In her 2013 essay "Digging Down and Standing Back," Rita Felski asks: "What are the spatial metaphors that shape and sustain a hermeneutics of suspicion?" (7). The first cluster are digging metaphors; the critic "excavates a rocky and resistant terrain in order to retrieve, after arduous effort" the text's meanings (7). The other technique is "standing back" and attending to the surface through defamiliarizing the text. In both critical postures—digging and standing back—the critic takes a "mistrustful, wary, and vigilant stance" toward the text (20). Reading becomes archaeological and diagnostic to the detriment of other interpretative or affective modes of engagement. At the same time, increased archival access can lead to accumulation for its own sake and a misguided faith in empirical methods of interpretation. Similarly, in his critique of historicism, Brian Connolly warns that digging through physical and digital archives can lead to an uncritical sense of contextualizing documents as the site of "the real" (172).² These literary critical methods, from crediting nothing to believing everything, deploy an investigative grammar to think through the ideological work that a text performed in its complex sociohistorical moment of origin. But what, and when, is such a "moment" after all?

Fixing texts to a spot on a historical timeline tends to obscure the circumstances of "contingence or coincidence" that make up the life of a text, as Michelle Sizemore, Jeffrey Insko, and others have recently argued (Sizemore 12). Rethinking historicist hermeneutics is of a piece with a (re)turn

to aesthetics, whereby the interpretive language of “passion,” “stimulation,” “sympathy,” “enthusiasm” is set against the language of a text’s ideological “work” (Larkin and Cahill 243–44). In both the temporal and aesthetic turns, there lies a desire to embrace chance and feeling as viable ways of (re)experiencing the books we encounter. I use the terms *experience* and *encounter* here deliberately, because they capture what early American fiction writers frequently dramatized in their own work through what will be the subject of this essay: old books, letters, documents, and artifacts, the process of their discovery and incorporation, and their role as sources of authority and affective engagement in fiction. Recognized more generally in literary history as the trope of the “found manuscript,” these themes are not unique to the American novel but were uniquely adapted to the American scene of collecting, recording, preserving, and recirculating the material past during the long eighteenth century, a time when developing American literature meant using “American materials.”

From its origins in chivalric romances through to experiments with the device in the early nineteenth-century novel, the trope of the found document or manuscript has typically cloaked fictional stories in a guise of historical truth and functioned as a metafictional device for tracing a story’s origins. Whether by accident, inheritance, or gift, the manuscript lands in the hands of the author, who then assumes an editorial role that shifts the site of his or her authority to the manuscript itself.³ If the story proves poorly constructed, dull, badly written, bawdy, or derivative, the author can hide behind the role of “editor” and the blame can be assigned to the manuscript’s author. Seen through the lens of writers’ efforts to keep their work within the “confines of the credible,” an effort Catherine Gallagher posits as central to modern fictionality, authors’ reiteration of the found manuscript trope suggests their confidence in the evidentiary power of material documents, even if the circumstances of their discovery are fantastic (“Fictionality” 337). By the late eighteenth century, though, the knowing Anglo-American reader could increasingly recognize even the most quotidian of discovered manuscripts as a probable ruse. As a reviewer of the English author Sophia Lee’s 1783 historical romance *The Recess*, which is partly set in Jamaica, scoffed: “She talks indeed of an obsolete manuscript and of the wonderful coincidence of history; but these are subterfuges which no longer surprise or deceive us” (“Novels” 233). If such a manuscript is no longer “easily supposed to exist” and no one now believes

“the story which is built upon it,” then why did the trope persist in early American fiction (“Novels” 233)?

Consider what finding old papers might entail: contact with another, often dead, person; invasions of privacy; the shame of neglect; seizure of editorial control; surprise or shock; rebirth and recirculation. People’s papers, after all, are not just collected or stored, but felt; their “confirmatory physique” incorporates a tangible reassurance that something happened, that someone was there (Matthew P. Brown 647). Thus, stories of textual dis- and re-covery emphasize not just the material value of documents as such, but their affective work on the person who encounters them. As a fictional device, the found manuscript trope embraces both the fantastic (chance, serendipity, accident, magic) and the real, mundane, and common experience of settling estates, sending letters, and filing paperwork. Beyond establishing narrative credibility, the trope of the found manuscript performed affective, aesthetic, and aesthesic work. By dramatizing the documentary dynamics of lost and found, the trope highlights material texts’ precarity and the *incredible* circumstances of their discovery and their survival. The trope’s appearance in both fictive and nonfictive discourses—from tales and novels to historical chronicles, personal letters, periodical excerpts, and devotional works—highlights the reciprocity of these discourses in the early Republic, rather than signaling their distinctions. This trope sets the stage both for critical skepticism of a text’s truth claims *and* for attachment to a material thing that (perhaps surprisingly) survived to be held. Though, as I will show, this trope was not bound by time or genre, novelists in particular turned to the found manuscript’s potential for exploring what Sarah Tindal Kareem calls the “thematic commingling of the realistic and the strange” (2). More than a “phantom pretext” predicated on believability or ironic engagement, stories of documentary circulation and found papers enact plots that foster sympathy across temporal boundaries, they put us in touch with the past (quite literally, through the motif of the book held in one’s hand) and in range of the present and the future (Johnson 181).

The fiction and nonfiction works I consider in this essay treat the found manuscript as a vibrant aesthetic object that circulates through time and through many owners, and the experience of the finding itself forms part of these stories’ plots. But, as Daniel Punday observes, “novels are especially good at emphasizing the life of documents and the circulation of

stories within a community,” whether these documents are real or imagined (45). Tracing the evolution of this trope in American historical fictions in particular, then, I will explore how novelists used para- and intertextual methods to incorporate real archival material from the colonial period into their narratives, while also scrutinizing such material’s limitations in capturing historical truths. Reflecting authors’ engagement—both parodic and earnest—with a burgeoning culture of American antiquarianism, early American fictions’ subtitles shifted from “tales of truth” to “tales of old times.”⁴ In this way, the trope influentially exercised what Michael McKeon suggests is its “appeal to the past that is based upon the normative values of antiquity, linear continuity, and successions” (56). In the context of early American fiction, however, the discourse of “antiquity” was necessarily complicated by the tension between Indigenous history (cloaked in rhetorical mystery within both fiction and nonfiction of the time) and the “youth” of the nation state. Is America a new place with no history, or an old place with an ancient past, eighteenth-century writers repeatedly asked. The dynamics of historical teleology and succession were, for them, increasingly vexed by the burgeoning American discourse of self-making. Young America’s temporal positioning was always *both* past and future oriented. Early American fictionalists repeatedly centered the role that discovered papers played in knowledge-making about the past and its projection into the future. But at the same time, they probed the limitations of “crediting everything” one finds among the papers and “believing nothing” that cannot be materially proven.

DOCUMENTARY FICTIONS AND ANTIQUARIAN BONDS

The found manuscript destabilizes textual authority by its very appearance on the scene. Often positioning narrators as the “guileless beneficiaries of a happy accident,” the device of the found manuscript paradoxically “underscores the text’s mutability,” rather than establishing its credibility (Blackwell 239).⁵ In her work on Sir Walter Scott’s debt to Miguel de Cervantes, Patricia Gaston observes that the found manuscript device highlights a text’s precarity, the sobering recognition that “what is found has been lost and can easily be lost again” (51). Thus, the found document’s truth status is ironic because of its dubious origins and because of its marginality as a text long since absent from public consideration. Because this

trope is often advanced in a work's paratextual material—a preface, an advertisement, a notice to the reader—its function can also be metafictional and metadiscursive.⁶ Before the reader enters the fictional universe of the novel, she is asked to scrutinize the process by which this very book came into her hands. But because the found manuscript trope operates in both fictive and nonfictive discourses, it may also be useful to think of “degrees of fictionality rather than the distinction of fiction” when we consider its function (Nielsen et al. 67).⁷ Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605–15) is instructive here. Famous for satirizing the trope of the found manuscript via the claim that the Moorish author Sidi Hamid Benengeli's work is the basis for its own text, Cervantes's novel also leaned heavily on genuine, recently uncovered histories of Muslim converts to Christianity in Spain in making this assertion. As Carroll Johnson reminds us, despite all of the “phantom manuscripts” that animated chivalric romances of the Renaissance, this same period “witnessed the discovery of such fundamental and absolutely real texts as Aristotle's *Poetics* and Heliodorus's *Aethiopic History*” (181). Accordingly, she concludes, “in many instances the story about the found manuscript is true” (181). The trope persists in part because it captures a real occurrence, but because that real occurrence is itself fantastic, it neatly resonates with fiction's production of wonder in the reader.

Wonder manifests explicitly in the dialectical theme of chance and stewardship inscribed in antiquarian discourse. In the 1792 preface to his *Historical Collections*, an anthology of rare colonial reprints, Ebenezer Hazard reveals that while he sought some materials in the archives of state houses and libraries, many papers included in the anthology “have been picked up just as they happened to fall in [my] Way” (iv). Thus, antiquarian discourse and the formal elements of fiction share in common an engagement with both the coincidental and the contingent. This claim may be surprising given the degree to which “the difference between history and romance,” as Charles Brockden Brown phrased it in 1800, was conventionally defined as the difference between the “actual” and the “probable” (251). But, in keeping with Brown's sentiments on the subject, placing fiction alongside antiquarian discourse reveals that the “actual” is only “very imperfectly known” and that history's sphere is “extremely narrow” (Brown 251, 253).⁸ In narrating their strange or chance encounters with found papers, such as those which Hazard indicates above, fiction writers and antiquarians shared a sense of the impossibility of accessing the actual, even when

encountering concrete historical evidence. The pendulum swing between access to the material past and facing its lacunae is a hallmark of the found manuscript trope in *both* fiction and antiquarian discourse.

Such discoveries are indebted not simply to chance, however, but also to a genealogy of previous collectors. In early American bibliography and historical study, the foremost image for another key thematic commingling—preservation and loss—was the “New England Library,” the designation for the combined libraries of the Reverend Thomas Prince and the holdings of the Old South Church and Reverend Joseph Sewall.⁹ Prince’s library held one of the most important and complete collections of colonial American manuscripts and print and became vital source material for the innumerable historians who consulted it; and as the basis of colonial historiography, Prince’s library also formed the archive for those historical fictions dealing with this period emerged in the early nineteenth century. It is not an exaggeration to say that without Thomas Prince’s collection and its transmission across generations of antiquarians, we might not have the American historical novel. Considered the “Father of American Bibliography,” Prince was an avid book collector from 1703, when he entered Harvard to study divinity, until his death in 1758, at which point only two other collections were considered even vaguely comparable to his own: the Mather family’s (bequeathed to the American Antiquarian Society by Hannah Mather Crocker) and Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s, which was pillaged in a Stamp Act uprising and contained some of Prince’s old books. When Prince died, though, his library initially languished, “without care and subject to many vicissitudes,” according to cataloguers in 1870 (*Prince Library* ix). In the run-up to the Revolution it was trampled on by horses when British troops used the Old South Church as a riding school, and items were burned as kindling in Boston’s cold winters.¹⁰ Despite having been constructed “from a public View,” the library sat unkempt and unread (ix).¹¹ In 1774, when Massachusetts minister and antiquarian Jeremy Belknap, for whom Prince had been a mentor, visited the Old South Church’s steeple chamber, he found the collection “lying in a most shamefully chaotic state” (“Belknap Papers” 49). Yet despite all this destructive neglect, Prince’s library remained the axis around which New England’s antiquarian work revolved. His library, stuffed “on shelves and in boxes and barrels,” was the ultimate found manuscript, the neglected treasure of New England that would animate its many stories (Wisner 23).

Beyond its value as an archive, Prince's library was a touchstone in imagining the communion between people that books can peculiarly facilitate. In an 1860 article for the *North American Review* titled "The Life and Labors of Thomas Prince," the writer envisions the bond that Prince shared with his mentor, Cotton Mather. Asking, "Why may we not fancy" the details of one of the most "difficult and almost unrecorded parts of our early history?" the *Review* muses on the "pleasing . . . picture" presented by imagining Prince and Mather sitting side by side in a room "crammed with the histories of [William] Hubbard, [Cotton] Mather, [Joseph] Dudley, [Edward] Johnson, [Daniel] Neal, and a host of others," over a table teeming with "precious manuscripts" ("Life" 366). In this scene, what is to be found among the papers in the nineteenth century is an affective, spiritual experience of the past unbound by time and place. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's use of the term *aesthesis* is useful here, as a means to consider how "shared sensation and meaning making" exceeds a document's historical value as an archival object (367). Manuscript papers cultivate communion between the dead and the living. When handled, books "conjure up the hand of the long-dead author" or connect the reader to the "traces of another," as Charles Lamb put it, offering the evidence of a "thousand thumbs" (qtd. in Silverman 79).¹² In fictions that deploy the found manuscript trope, the reader is not only holding a book others have held, but also experiencing the presence of the author and the traces of the book's material journey from manuscript to print. Indeed, as Washington Irving wryly dramatized in his 1819 essay "The Mutability of Literature," a book's handling is part of its purpose in the world. When Irving's narrator Geoffrey Crayon encounters a long-shelved book in the Westminster Abbey library, he remarks that it was fortunate to have been stored safely away, but the book (which can speak) tartly replies, "I was intended to circulate from hand to hand" (*Legend* 102). Part of the joke here is the little tome's insistence on his outsized importance, as—"ruffling his leaves and looking big"—he claims to be equal to "other great contemporary works" (102). But for all its humor, the link that Irving draws between a book being shelved and being lost, dead, or useless captures the common antiquarian sentiment around finding and recirculating old books and manuscripts that depicts it as an act of reanimation and communion. These texts become meaningful *in hand* and they come alive *hand to hand*. The often-used phrase "found among the papers," then, refers not only to the experience of finding a narrative

to animate a novel, as in the found manuscript trope, but to finding *oneself* among the papers, occupying a place in the midst of papers belonging to another and becoming a claimant in a system of inheritance.

DEAD MEN'S PAPERS

Finding the papers of another is, then, a relational phenomenon, and it explains why antiquarianism and genealogy went hand in hand in the early Republic. When Jeremy Belknap was working on his *American Biographies* (1794–98) and building the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) repository, he relied on the goodwill and participation of deceased persons' families to deliver the goods. Belknap reported to the MHS in 1795, for example, that he had gone through the late Governor Jonathan Trumbull's books and papers and found letters by William Samuel Johnson, LLD, the former president of King's College (now Columbia University). When Belknap wrote to Johnson asking to publish his correspondence with Governor Trumbull, however, Johnson "declined . . . with some feeling," arguing that "he felt that their publication would be an unwarrantable use of a private correspondence, and might do him great injustice" (*Proceedings* 85). In another case, such disappointments notwithstanding, Belknap could not quite contain his enthusiasm when he wrote to Ebenezer Hazard of his last trip to Lebanon to collect the Trumbull manuscripts: "We expect some from Governour Hancock's; and when our old patriot S.A.'s [Samuel Adams] head is laid, we hope to get more. There is nothing like having a *good repository*, and keeping a *good look-out*, not waiting at home for things to fall into the lap, but prowling about like a wolf for the prey" ("Correspondence" 356–57). Licking their chops at the deathbeds of old patriots is not a particularly flattering quality of antiquarians, but it makes clear that the stereotype of the lone, sober researcher is unreflective of the acquisitive and relentless nature of their labor. Years later, in an 1831 diary entry, American Antiquarian Society librarian Christopher Columbus Baldwin wrote of a trip he had taken to the "Old Mather House" in Boston to "see if there might not be found some of his papers in the Garret" (*Place* 147). The woman who opened the door said that the floorboards of her second story were "completely filled with old paper which nobody could read," but that she would not let him peruse them. Baldwin's disgust, tinged with classism, is palpable in his diary (*Place* 147). "Why will people

destroy such valuable papers?" he scrawled angrily, wondering how many treasures were "perishing daily" in the former homes of deceased luminaries—a double death of bodies and books (*Place* 152, 147). Such losses were made all the more galling by how capaciously Baldwin defined "valuable papers." As he put it to a friend in 1834: "We cannot determine what is valuable and what is not. There is scarcely anything that issues from the press that will not be wanted by somebody" (*Diary* xi). The fictional trope of the found manuscript, then, invites readers to be that "somebody," the recipient of a long-since-sent letter or a haphazard box of inherited papers that may seem to have only marginal value to others.

Fiction writers, indeed, frequently deployed the theme of inherited papers as both a pretext and a plot point through which to explore themes of ownership, posterity, and knowledge-making. In *The Female American*, a 1767 Robinsonade pseudonymously attributed to Eliza Unca Winkfield, for instance, the original London edition's "Advertisement" consists of a note from "the editor" about the story's origin (33). Since "curiosity demands" an answer to the question of where the narrative originated, the editor claims to have "found it among the papers of my late father" and to have deemed it edifying and entertaining enough to be published (33). Because the story is grounded in these papers, moreover, the editor imagines it will "descend to late posterity," while stories "founded only in fiction, will have been long forgotten" (33).¹³ Since the book is narrated by its protagonist, Unca Eliza Winkfield, the "Advertisement" effectively creates an entirely separate fictional frame whereby an unrelated editor found this manuscript after his or her father's (or friend's) death whose own ties to Winkfield remain obscure. In this respect, the manuscript is more clearly an antiquarian curiosity, found by the grieving editor who imagines it will be "wanted by somebody," that somebody being the eighteenth-century reader addressed in the "Advertisement" and the reader of the future.

The survival of the novel's marooned heroine, appropriately enough, also depends upon a manuscript, which she finds lying on a table, abandoned by a hermit she briefly meets before his death, thereby marking another link between found manuscripts and posterity. Winkfield comes to know the hermit through his manuscript first, a manuscript that anticipates its own discovery by declaring that: "If this book should ever fall into the hands of any person, it is to inform him that I lived on this uninhabited island forty years. . . . How you may subsist, you may learn from

the history of life" (58). The hermit's manuscript, in other words, becomes a settler guide for Winkfield as well as relating a picaresque tale of folly and self-improvement that chimes with her own experiences. Dedicating "a few hours every day to the history of his life," Winkfield imaginatively bonds with the absent hermit (72). But when she accidentally comes across the sickly man later on in the novel, having presumed he is dead she asks him if "you [are] really living, or do I converse with a spirit?" (75). And likewise, responding to Winkfield's designation of him as "Holy father" by calling her "daughter," the hermit is baffled by her familiarity with him, inquiring: "How comes it that you speak to me in a manner as if you knew me?" (75–76). The found manuscript trope in *The Female American* thus serves to underscore the dynamics of fictionality, the way it destabilizes the dividing line between the real and the fantastic, empirical knowledge and seemingly impossible knowledge. Through the manuscript, Winkfield gains access to the hermit's knowledge of the island and ultimately inherits his property. The found manuscript trope functions here as it does in other novels of the period, as an instrument of succession (even if the heir is not apparent). The hermit wrote the manuscript not with a specific audience in mind, but in the hope that it would, to borrow from the novel's "Advertisement," "descend to late posterity," that it will be wanted by somebody he could not envisage. When the hermit's living body finally does give out, in the following chapter, Winkfield is still left with access to his body of work, his corpus. This intimacy with the past holder of papers suggests that sympathetic identification—a hallmark of the eighteenth-century Anglophone novel—is triggered through the novel's paratextual apparatuses, not just through characters arcs in the story.

Even as fiction writers staged affective encounters between protagonists, readers, and papers, real-life families were sometimes reluctant to share their decedents' papers (and the "skeletons" therein) with antiquarians. Some chose to destroy their loved ones' letters before they fell into the wrong hands. As Alea Henle relates of one example, John Lardner of Philadelphia destroyed his father's letterbook in 1816, fearing that it reflected too much of the "bitterness" of its times and that publication would "disturb his family's peace" ("Preserving" 103). The public, on the other hand, loved these materials because they fed a voyeuristic need to peak in on the casual, intimate writings of others. This desire even spawned an entire genre of "post-humous works." In 1762, for example, a writer for the London-based *Criti-*

cal Review making note of a new publication of *The Works of Dr. Jonathan Swift* bemoaned the fact that “every scrap found among the papers of such a writer is published, without consideration, whether it be fit for inspection, or whether it increases or diminishes his reputation” (“Swift’s” 177). Posthumous works were so popular, in fact, that an Irish writer, Richard Griffith, created a fabricated collection of pieces attributed to Laurence Sterne, *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius* (1770). A commentator for *The Monthly Review* saw through the ruse immediately, though, calling the essays “manifestly spurious, a fraudulent imposition upon the Public, and a flagrant injustice to the memory of the dead” (“Posthumous” 360).¹⁴ This reviewer’s disgust is not just rooted in the deception practiced by Griffith, but in the presumption anthologizers show in disturbing Sterne’s corpse. The fraudulent editor of *Posthumous Works* quite explicitly claims to be presenting the public with “the remains of an author” in the form of sheets bequeathed to him by Sterne “on his death-bed,” which could be either “kept among my miscellaneous papers, for my own amusement, or published to the world, or thrown into the fire” (Griffith v, vii). The grotesque picture of metaphorical cremation here makes vivid the link between a person’s body and his or her textual remains. This type of fraud is an affront to the public trust in the printed word precisely because of this link, precisely because the genre of the posthumous work implies some authenticating measure on behalf of the named author’s estate. Unlike novelistic uses of the found manuscript trope, those in fake posthumous works are treated as a violation of decorum because fictionality is not recognized as a function of this genre, but anathema to it.

In a media climate predicated “not on the authorial but on the editorial function and the careful arrangement of fragments and data,” dead men’s papers nonetheless made for compelling fodder in the pastiche of late eighteenth-century literary culture (Gardner 74). Paper fragments from the dead, even the common citizen, frequently ran in early American periodicals, serving a variety of didactic, literary, historical, and religious ends. In 1805, for instance, the *Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review* (1804–11) ran an “Original Letter of Rev. Samuel Mather.” The donor is anonymous, but waxes eloquent about the significance of this missive to him personally, comparing it to a “rich gem” or a valuable cameo coin (406). The letter was “found among the papers of a clergyman, who died in this town a few years ago,” he claims, but treasures like this are not meant

to be hoarded; it was now time to move America's great artifacts from the "curious shelf or table-drawer" in order to "exhibit them in the Anthology" (407). There are many other examples from American magazines of individual donors finding "among the papers of a young man lately deceased" some item of antiquarian curiosity, advice, or warning from beyond the grave ("Youths" 8). In the 1823 prospectus to their monthly historical journal, antiquarians John Farmer and Jacob B. Moore explained that their entire publishing project would be directed to "those valuable historical and other documents which have been rescued from or yet remain in dust and obscurity amid the rubbish of private families" (5). The image of the found manuscript circulated, then, not just as a fictional trope but frequently also as an antiquarian campaign tool that bonded the reader with the private lives of the deceased and raised the specter of a vast, untapped archive now lying in "dust and obscurity" but ready to be rescued.

When Washington Irving crafted the most famous example of a fictional documentary find, *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809), his satirical work engaged many of the same devices found in antiquarian discourse: the found manuscript, paratextual commentary, dramas of loss and recovery, rifling among dead people's papers, printing snippets of rare material, quibbling over historical minutiae. Sensitive to what Jeffrey Insko calls the "fictive quality of historical causation," Irving's *History* is also sensitive to the fictive quality of document discovery itself, that is, the emplotment of fictional narratives onto the experience of finding source material ("Diedrich" 617). Irving's satirical book deliberately draws attention to the layers of media and mediation that make up recorded history, the many hands through which papers must pass. We might be tempted to read Irving's use of the found document trope as a clear signal of his history's fictionality. But in the context of antiquarian preservation and the posthumous publication of private papers, the trope's inherent fictionality is cunningly called into question. Finding and printing valuable manuscripts was not only within the realm of possibility in the early Republic; it was also a legitimate method of preservation and archive-building.

Following in the spirit of those found fragments printed in American periodicals, Irving planted curious notices in the *New York Evening Post* between October 26 and November 28, 1809, about a cache of papers found at the Independent Columbian Hotel on Mulberry Street. The "small elderly

gentleman" who had left them behind went "by the name of *Knickerbocker*" (*History* 15). The supposed landlord of the Independent Columbian Hotel, Seth Handaside was eager to do just what his name suggested, find a way to "dispose of [this] book" in order to cover the "bill for boarding and lodging" Knickerbocker had left behind (*History* 16). So when the two-volume history was finally printed in late November 1809, it came with a lengthy "Account of the Author" attributed to Handaside, as well as Knickerbocker's own preface to the public. Irving's experiment with peri- and epitextual devices thus draws attention to the "overlapping mediations of textual production" common in early fiction (Ratner 737).¹⁵ Knickerbocker's hoard of "scraps of paper and old mouldy books" realistically captured the labors of antiquarian work ongoing at the time that Irving invented his enigmatic figure (*History* 18). In his own note to the public, Knickerbocker claims that he consulted "many legends, letters and other documents" taken from "researches among the family chests and lumber garrets of our respectable Dutch citizens" as well as the tales and traditions carried through time by many "excellent old ladies" (30). When he did not have access to papers he fought the impulse to "introduce a thousand pleasing fictions," he emphatically adds, thereby drawing a line between history and fiction that the book so comically blurs (32). And to what end does Knickerbocker perform this arduous work? "Immortality," he tells Handaside's wife (16). And he is right, of course, even if Mrs. Handaside's response to this is to speculate that "the poor old gentleman's head was a little cracked" (18). The Posthumous Papers of Diedrich Knickerbocker would animate many of Irving's later fictions, and Knickerbocker himself would become synonymous with New York City.

What makes this example so compelling, though, is not just Irving's sendup of Dutch American historiography or the more general discipline of history-writing and its tendencies toward filiopietism, revisionism, and anachronism. Irving's fictions of discovery gave way to real archival discoveries, he claims in the "Author's Apology" that appeared, from 1848, in subsequent editions of the *History*. Irving admitted that while his work was "besotted with his own fancies" (the exact reverse of Knickerbocker's claim), "it is only since this work appeared that the forgotten archives of the province have been rummaged, and the facts and personages of the olden time rescued from the dust of oblivion and elevated into whatever importance they may virtually possess" (13). Irving congratulates himself

for spurring real antiquarian interest in local history for the first time in his region, a more worthy reaction to authorial deception some early American commentators would no doubt say than readers of *Charlotte Temple* seeking out the deceased woman's grave in New York, convinced she was real. But Irving is too quick to claim credit for rescuing the forgotten archives from oblivion. Established in 1809, the year of *History's* publication, the New-York Historical Society's publishing organ, *Collections of the New-York Historical Society*, was already active in recovering and reprinting rare materials related to Dutch and Indigenous history. In the first volume of *Collections*, for instance, the society reprinted sections of Henry Hudson's journal, cobbled together from a variety of seventeenth-century sources. The idea, as with many historical society publications, was to print and preserve such materials for the future reader, taking them out of the garret and into the light. In this way, they could achieve the "immortality" that the fictional Knickerbocker sought and that Irving certainly imagined for himself. The notion that Irving's parodic *History* would spur real historical inquiry thus implicitly acknowledges his fiction's indebtedness to antiquarian work and to the genre of posthumous papers, both of which raised complex questions about documents' proprietary status.

Irving's forerunner in the field of satirical fictionality, Royall Tyler, dramatized a similarly complex relationship between private, found papers and public, official histories in *The Algerine Captive*. Though Tyler's most famous deployment of the found manuscript trope is in his mock epic *The Anarchiad* (1786–87), it is *The Algerine Captive's* defense of narrator Updike Underhill's ancestry that more clearly tests the boundaries of early American historiography. For all of the ways that this novel winks to the reader about its own manufactured status, many took it as a true account. Captain John Underhill, after all, was a real person with a history of colonial misdeeds. Indeed, Cathy Davidson argues that part of Tyler's point is to unsettle the novel's novelistic status. "Where is truth in the story of Captain Underhill? Where is truth in the story of Updike?," she—and the novel—asks (295). Updike gestures toward Jeremy Belknap's *History of New Hampshire* (1784–92) in the opening chapter of *Algerine Captive* to ground his story in Belknap's research, but then he almost immediately charges Belknap with error in his representation of Captain Underhill's alleged adultery. Updike takes umbrage at Belknap speaking "evil even of the dead" and directs the reader to errors on "page forty three of his first

volume,” which he hopes will be fixed in the next edition (14). Here, then, is a fictional narrator engaging with a real historian on the finer points of the narrator’s invented family history. But are Belknap’s sources any more authentic? As a counter-history to Belknap’s narrative, Updike offers up a found document, a manuscript letter “pasted on the back of an old Indian deed,” which he transcribes for the reader (16). The letter, alleged to be from John Underhill to Baptist minister Hanserd Knollys, is a hilarious spoof of colonial writing, down to the antiquated orthography. References to his ancestor lusting after a woman whose hands are exposed by fingerless gloves—“Satan’s port holes of firy temptations”—illustrate the point that Underhill stresses in his critique of Belknap; what was once a cardinal sin is laughable by modern standards (17). In the very next chapter, Updike then relates his ignorance over the inheritance of his ancestor’s land, despite speculators urging him to sell it. Titles and boundaries, they told him, were “mere trifles” (21). Updike’s conversation here gestures back to the “old Indian deed,” which functions as a “mere trifle” inasmuch it is simply a vehicle for the exonerating manuscript letter, not an enduring claim to the land nor evidence of John Underhill’s dealings with the Lenape people. It certainly makes no mention of Underhill’s slaughter of members of the Wappinger Confederacy at Pound Ridge (New York) in 1644. This double-sided document also makes for a compelling commentary on historical truth, for Updike literally transcribes only one side of the story. Tyler accordingly blurs the lines between real and imaginary documentary evidence, drawing at once on Belknap’s *History*, constructed from “among the papers” of countless New Hampshire families, and on Updike’s pseudo-archive, found among the papers of the fictional protagonist. Updike even expresses “great reluctance” at publishing the letters he finds, which potentially expose his ancestor to ridicule, thus highlighting the discretionary role of the author/editor in keeping them concealed, and limiting what can be known (18).

Tyler’s contemporary, Susanna Rowson, takes up a similar set of concerns in her historical epic *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), wherein found family papers are a source of previously undisclosed identity. As with *The Algerine Captive*, the trope of the found manuscript is linked with genealogy, the papers being part of an inheritance at once burdensome and liberating. Her novel centers women as protagonists and as the keepers of history because they are keepers of their husband’s, father’s, and son’s papers.

If found papers function as an inheritance, then centering a woman's relationship to family papers grants her property, authority, and control that she was denied in other legal arenas. In the novel's preface, Rowson makes no claims to the absolute historical veracity of her narrative, but she does hope that it will spur young people to read history and "more especially the history of their native country" (38).¹⁶ Rowson herself enacts a sweeping version of that national history by beginning *Reuben and Rachel* with the family of Christopher Columbus, a point of origin already set in place by William Robertson's 1777 *History of America* and echoed in works like Ebenezer Hazard's *Historical Collections* (1792).¹⁷ In his own preface, Robertson offers a lengthy series of credits, listing his sources primarily as other historians in his transatlantic network. He takes such pains to acknowledge his sources because, he insists, it is material "evidence" that separates the "amusing tale" from the "authentic history" (xv).¹⁸ The categorical separation of amusing/authentic and tale/history is troubled in Rowson's novel, however, because it is precisely the ostensible family papers that are most authentic. The heroine of the first fourteen chapters of the novel is Columbia, great-granddaughter of Christopher Columbus and granddaughter of a union between Columbus's son Fernando and a Peruvian princess named Orrabella. In an effort to learn more about her lineage and the source of her mother's persistent melancholy, Columbia asks her mother, Isabelle, if she might peruse the family archive. Columbia, we are told, had often "observed her mother weeping over papers which she took from a private drawer in an escritoire which stood in her bed-chamber, and which in no other part was locked, except that which she most wished to explore" (49). A metaphor for Isabelle's "locked" heart, the box of letters also functions as corroborating evidence in the history of Spanish colonialism, a history over which, even the indefatigable Robertson had to admit, there had been "thrown a veil" by the government's tight controls of state archives (ix). What counts as evidence in the rehearsal of history is here scrutinized by setting individual recollection and documents on a similar plain of reliability. Instructing their Peruvian servant and Isabelle's childhood companion, Cora, to guide Columbia through the family's tragic history, Isabelle tells Cora: "What your memory cannot furnish toward the recital, the papers you will find in that drawer will assist" (51). Cora's memory is seemingly sharp and her oratorical style is compelling, but when Cora is overcome with emotion, her narration is inevitably disrupted. Columbia

thus turns to the letters as an equally authentic supplementary record, and Rowson turns to the epistolary form to include these letters in the narrative.¹⁹ In Columbia's view the letters "must contain facts necessary for me to know, or they would not be thus carefully preserved," and eighteenth-century novels similarly leaned heavily on the veridical properties of the epistolary form (52). But more importantly for this plot turn, letters are a distinctive media for bridging a broad temporal divide; their perdurance means they are read by unintended and unimagined readers in the future.²⁰ In the case of Columbus's letters, his personal correspondence is figured as a legacy bequeathed to the as-yet-unknown Columbia (the character and the United States) and these letters contain revelations that throw light on *her* experience in the present. Now printed in the pages of the novel, the family papers become the public's inheritance. In this way, the novel dramatizes the real journey of papers from private hands to collecting institutions in the early Republic, a journey of preservation and access that later flourished in the antebellum arena of historical reprinting and in the paratexts of historical romances.

PAPER TRAILS

In an 1825 letter to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, John F. Watson suggested that they invite veterans of the Revolutionary War to narrate their stories to the society's members. In doing so, Watson reiterated the oft-repeated fear that such accounts would be lost to oblivion on their deaths. He then recommended soliciting information from the "pioneers still alive in some of the interior settlement" who could provide, he added, details like those found in "Cooper's *Pioneer*" (Carson 112). Watson, in other words, sought a truth as truthful as he perceived fiction could be. He wanted the realism of James Fenimore Cooper's 1823 novel to be incorporated into the "real" historical record. This curious formulation crucially acknowledges the role that historical novels were playing in the construction of history and vice versa by the second decade of the nineteenth century. By this point, the convention of the found manuscript reflects both the formalization of antiquarian labor through the establishment of historical societies and attendant changes in the literary marketplace, now flooded not just with historical romances but with new editions of previously lost, out-of-print, or rare colonial imprints. Novelists accordingly

used these documents as paratextual materials to make extratextual gestures, encouraging their readers to read further beyond or further into the fictional universe of the romance.²¹ At the same time, these historical fictions lay bare the sometimes-antagonistic relationship between colonial testimony and the nineteenth-century mechanisms of collection, recovery, and recuperation. In addition to pointing directly to real source material, writers of historical fiction also attached truth claims to what was *missing* from the archive, decoupling historical truths from material paper trails and progressive historiography.²²

In her preface to *Hope Leslie* (1827), Catharine Maria Sedgwick explores the parameters of genre, truth-telling, and the archive. Like Rowson before her, Sedgwick makes clear what the reader *won't* find in the pages of her romance. The novel is not, “in any degree an historical narrative, or a relation of real events,” she claims, even if “real characters and real events are, however, alluded to” (3). Sedgwick’s preface does point in the direction of real sources, though. The accounts left behind by “our ancestors” are “clear, copious, and authentic,” Sedgwick observes, so she has taken on the role of a researcher of sorts, through “patient investigation of all the materials that could be obtained” (3). In this way, Sedgwick differs from the pseudo-editor of the previous generation because she is not claiming her novel itself as a found document, but rather her plot’s indebtedness to the materials she consulted. Her editorial labor is to carefully read the newly accessible documents—available through the processes of historical reprinting—and then fashion them into a pleasing narrative. Is this the work of fiction or of history? In her preface, Sedgwick observes the marginal difference between the two. At the same time, she does note a distinction, anticipating criticism from the “antiquarian reader” over her variations in chronology and liberties in characterization (3). Her defense is that she hopes readers will be “stimulated to investigate the early history of their native land” themselves—a gesture beyond the novel that explicitly encourages further reading outside of it (4). Let *Hope Leslie* be the spark that lights a fire of historical interest!

Importantly, Sedgwick’s preface also stresses what is not present in the archive. She repeats the common nineteenth-century line that all accounts of Indigenous history have been erased or never existed in the first place, bemoaning the fact that Native Americans have been mischaracterized in Anglo-American literature as “surly dogs” (3). “Their own historians or

poets, if they had such, would as naturally, and with more justice, have extolled their high-souled courage and patriotism,” she acknowledges (4). It is the phrase “if they had such” here that betrays the historiographical biases undergirding her fiction, however nominally recuperative of Indigenous history. Depending on the accounts “our ancestors” left behind them means privileging the inheritance of Anglo-American papers to form the basis of both history *and* fiction. Catherine Gallagher has suggested that the mid-eighteenth century saw the rise of the “nobody” novel, fictions that featured characters with no direct referents in the real world (*Nobody's* 341). In this way, the “novel could be judged generally true even though all of its particulars are merely imaginary” (“Fictionality” 342). Similarly, Sedgwick confines the representation of the Pequod heroine Magawisca “not to the actual, but the possible,” assigning Indigenous history the status of paperless, fictional invention (4). In fact, Sedgwick uses a slippage between the actual and the possible commonly associated with the romance genre to explain a gap in the archive, thereby equating the absence of written records with fictional forms. Sedgwick’s insistence on the inaccessibility of Indigenous histories relegates Magawisca to the imaginary. She left no papers behind and she is nobody; indeed, she is no body, given how the “vanishing American” trope operated during this period. As Jillian Sayre has recently argued, insisting on the always already absent Indigenous history “reinforces the connection between the material documents of memory and the possibility of a narratable subject” (721). But Magawisca is not even mournable in the way that a tragic heroine like Susanna Rowson’s Charlotte Temple, whose grave is foregrounded as a site to visit and “weep over” in the final episode of that novel, is imagined to be (*Temple* 130). For as Sayre puts it, in the case of the *Pequod* “there are no bodies to recover, no grave sites over which to shed tears” (721). If the found manuscript establishes a material link to the body, then the absence of such a manuscript, figured as never existing to begin with and thus unrecoverable, yields an Indigenous history of no body, no trace, and nothing to posthumously recover in the white literary imaginary. Yet, in an effort to romanticize this loss, nineteenth-century writers imagined the paperless history of Indigenous people, their enforced fictionality, as somehow more authentic than if they’d bequeathed copious libraries to the present. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s words in his 1841 essay “History” captures the sentiment in particularly egregious terms: “The idiot, the Indian, the child and unschooled farmer’s

boy stand nearer to the light by which nature is to be read, than the dissector or the antiquary" (172–73). In idealizing the Indigenous person's transcendence of formal history, Emerson classes her with the disabled, the infantile, and illiterate; that is, outside of legible narration and outside of referentiality, much as Sedgwick does in her preface.

In *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* (1829), a novel clearly indebted to *Hope Leslie*, James Fenimore Cooper appears to address this "no body" problem in his authorial preface by crediting the narrative to a "Rev. J.R.C." who "furnished the materials of the following tale" (iii). Cooper hints that "J.R.C." is a man of Indo-European ancestry, the descendant of Narragansett chief Conanchet and the English Ruth Heathcote, who feature in the narrative. Rather than suggesting a dearth of family histories, Indigenous identity proliferates possible narratives here, with Cooper declaring that there are "hundreds of other families" whose stories could be similarly told, supplying the "materials of many moving tales" (iii). Indeed, Cooper claims that J.R.C.'s story is the most national of all stories. "You are truly an American," he asserts of the reverend in his preface, while those of European descent "must appear little more than denizens quite recently admitted to the privilege of a residence" (iv). Cooper's invention of J.R.C.'s "materials" thus functions differently from Sedgwick's prefatory remarks in a number of ways: first, by establishing credibility for a tale not generally supported by official history (a "secret" history of miscegenation); and second, by thematizing the unearthing of narratives that are not marginal to American history at all, but central to it. If they are unknown, it is only because they have yet to be narrated for the public; they exist, but remain the stuff of private family archives.²³ Also haunting Cooper's text, though, is Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, from which he cribbed his plot. One critic who spotted the theft observed in the *Southern Review*: "Perhaps the gentleman who is said in the dedication to have furnished the materials for the *Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish*, had before supplied the same for *Hope Leslie*—but the former has so much of the air of a copy, that we think in fairness the author of the latter should have been honoured by the dedication" ("The *Wept*" 219). Stressing the unbelievability of the found manuscript trope, this reviewer ironizes Cooper's truth claims by pointing out his plagiarism: *Wept* was founded on a manuscript, all right, just not J.R.C.'s.

The relationship between writers and their source material is likewise at the center of Lydia Maria Child's preface to *Hobomok: A Tale of Early*

Times (1824), which begins with a curious revision of the found manuscript trope. Child's preface removes herself from authorship twice: first, in speaking under the identity of "Frederic," a male friend of the "true" author of *Hobomok* (who is unnamed), and second in this author's claim that his story is based on an "old, worn-out manuscript" inherited from one of his predecessors (6). We learn in the preface that Frederic procured some "old, historical pamphlets" for the "true" author and following a few weeks of drafting, the latter returned with his novel, having leant heavily on the manuscript material (4). Further complicating this frame, though, is the "true" author's claim in the book's first chapter that some of the book's details were "unfolded in an old, worn-out manuscript, which accidentally came in my way. It was written by one of my ancestors who fled with the persecuted nonconformists from the Isle of Wight, and about the middle of June, 1629, arrived at Naumkeak on the eastern shore of Massachusetts" (6-7). The "old, worn-out manuscripts" on which Child might have *actually* relied were a legacy of the Thomas Prince library, described above. Carolyn Karcher claims that Child would have been "brought up on John Winthrop's *Journal*, William Hubbard's *General History of New England*, and Nathaniel Morton's *New England's Memorial*" (22). But using the Indigenous name Naumkeak in reference to Salem not only speaks to the manuscript's authenticity; it also chimes with Child's commitment to representing Indigenous voices, peoples, and place-names in the novel. These manuscripts were not necessarily worn out from neglect, but from a lifetime of changing hands as part of the author's inheritance in a way akin to those in *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish*.²⁴

Pausing for a moment over the three sources that Karcher identifies we can observe more closely the confluence of historical fiction with the operations of antiquarian recovery. For, despite being considered among the "three most considerable historical accounts of the first settlement of New England" by early national historical thinkers, these books were nearly impossible to come by until the early nineteenth century (Hubbard vi). John Winthrop's journal was only fully transcribed, edited, and reprinted in 1825 under the auspices of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Its second volume was found among the Prince papers.²⁵ William Hubbard's *A General History of New England* wasn't printed until 1815, also by the MHS. Even then the editors, Abiel Holmes and Joseph McKean, were forced to acknowledge that the manuscript is "mutilated" and "scarcely

legible" in some early portions and that they had "supplied words, or portions of words, conjecturally," which were marked out in italics, and where they "were at a loss" they had filled the gaps with asterisks (Hubbard vi).²⁶ Accordingly, the first page of their reproduction is riddled with a constellation of stars, indicating the page where the manuscript had been most handled and thus most deteriorated. The Hubbard manuscript had been donated to the MHS by Rev. Dr. John Eliot and, as Holmes and McKean noted, was "believed to have been rescued by [Eliot's] excellent father from the fury of the mob in the depredations on the house, furniture and library of Governour Hutchinson" in 1765 (Hubbard iii). This sensational rescue was novel-worthy enough for Child to include the event in her 1825 historical romance *The Rebels*. Recounting the famous ransacking of Hutchinson's home, the narrator there mournfully observes, "he had been more than thirty years collecting, with all the devotedness of antiquarian zeal"; nevertheless, the "books were stripped of their covers, manuscripts torn to pieces, the royal portraits rent from top to bottom" (47–48). Representing book destruction as a source of both individual and communal pain, Child's depiction acknowledges both the perdurance of books through inheritance and their vulnerability to loss. Similarly, in the 1826 reprinting of Nathaniel Morton's 1669 *New England's Memorial* (another of Child's sources) the editor Allen Danforth's paratextual notice "To the Publick" talks not just about the book's rarity in terms of historical value, but also about how its status as "beyond the reach" of the public has caused great public "uneasiness" (ii). Just as Morton had inherited his uncle, William Bradford's, manuscripts so should every child of Plymouth, Massachusetts, "treasure up its contents" as their birthright (ii).

Old, worn-out manuscripts can yield old, worn-out tropes and sanitized children's stories. But as Child's reinterpretation of the characters of Hobomok and Mary Conant demonstrates, they can also foreground the counternarratives that were *always* present, but simply "beyond the reach" of received history. John Neal's *Rachel Dyer* (1828) is an instructive example of how some radical counternarratives of colonial history, suppressed in their own time, found a new airing in historical fiction of the early nineteenth century. Neal uses inter- and paratextual techniques to recover previously marginalized accounts and challenge the truth claims of history (and, with it, the discipline of historiography) in a particularly radical way. Neal is keen to debunk the *en vogue* mode of progressive his-

tory, observing: "I do not believe that we know much more of the matter than our great progenitors did; or that we are much wiser than a multitude who have been for ages, and are now, renowned for their wisdom" (28). The great rush to condemn the Puritans to backwardness or even to offer a tepid apology for their naïve piety is, for Neal, hubristic. Neal's novel knits together factual and pseudofactual accounts of the witchcraft trials and the persecution of the Quakers, but also reproduces counternarratives from the seventeenth century that had only recently resurfaced in the print market. In other words, Neal engages with historical discourse in multiple ways: repeating mainstream historical accounts, reimagining those accounts in the fictional universe of the novel, and reprinting colonial-era accounts word for word. As Jeffery Insko suggests, this intertextual and discursive mashup is precisely the point. Neal's famous "incoherencies" — which Insko also detects in his Revolutionary novel *Seventy-Six* (1823) — reflect Neal's view of history as itself incoherent and of historical narrative as "inimical to vivacity," tending toward a cohesive but ultimately dead record of the past (64).²⁷ In the appendix to *Rachel Dyer*, Neal still reproduces "Historical Facts" so that the reader cannot take his novel as "sheer fabrication" (265). But the facts he includes are in keeping with his self-reflexive project. He incorporates, for example, accounts of Dyer's trials taken from Robert Calef's 1700 *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, which had been reprinted in 1823, a book that had originally been published to contest Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693). Neal, in short, chose to rely on the antiestablishment historical narrative pertaining to the witch trials. Indeed, Increase Mather had ordered Calef's "wicked book" to be burnt in the Harvard College yard, according to John Eliot's 1809 *Biographical Dictionary* (95). Found among the ashes, we might say, was an account that centered the testimony of the condemned in what Neal called "the very language of history," an account that conveyed the victim's perspective, which was also the point of *Rachel Dyer* as an experiment in historical fiction (265). Neal's use of verbatim textual reproduction in the novel's back matter calls attention to the biases of history writing, a discipline that preserves some stories and obliterates the rest. In the body of the novel, too, Neal cites "another American writer who was an eye witness of the facts," Thomas Brattle (44). Brattle died in 1713 and somehow his papers ended up in the hands of his grand-nephew, who passed them along to the Massachusetts Historical Society, which printed a

scorching letter Brattle wrote in 1692 critiquing the witchcraft trials in their *Collections* of 1798.²⁸ Like Calef's *Wonders*, Brattle's letter not only articulates an alternative view of the trials from the seventeenth century, but also represents, for the nineteenth-century reader, a history of dissent already present in the archive but neglected by official histories. Leaning on new editions of old, marginalized works, Neal scrutinizes the role of historical preservation and material proof in meaning making. "Are we to believe only so far as we may touch and see for ourselves?" he asks in his preface. "Wither should we go for proof?" (30–31). Probing fiction's capacity to test the boundaries of historical veracity, Neal asks a question that would remain at the forefront of American writers' minds, even as the generic boundaries between historical fiction and nonfiction solidified in the following decades.

Into the 1830s and through the antebellum period, it became commonplace for authors to include a prefatory remark on the historical reliability of their fictions, but not a claim to the work's status as a found manuscript. In his advertisement to *Yemassee* (1835), for instance, William Gilmore Simms calls the work an "American romance," in part because "the material could have been furnished by no other country" than the United States (vii). Though he does not name the works he consulted, Simms claims that his "authorities are numerous" and that the "leading events are strictly true" (vii). Precisely because he anticipates some readers' skepticism—the events being too "extravag[ant] . . . even beyond the usual license of fiction"—he leans on the unnamed authorities he consulted to bolster the veracity of the plot (vii). This move to claim that American history was so remarkable that it was *unbelievable* proved useful for public antiquarians, too, who were looking to interest a new generation of citizens in historical preservation. Simms's prefatory remarks reflect the explosion in historical writing and formal collecting practices between 1830 and 1860. While the 1830s and '40s saw the establishment of twelve new historical societies in the US, between 1840 and 1860, forty new historical societies were founded.²⁹ This formalization of collecting, cataloguing, and reprinting old books buoyed the historical profession and, as I think Simms's preface suggests, created a veneer of historical objectivity on which fiction writers continued to draw. New versions of the trope of the found manuscript continued to feature in the flourishing tradition of historical romance. Nathaniel Hawthorne built an entire novel around an imaginary manuscript found in an attic—

The Scarlet Letter (1850)—and another novel around a hidden land deed—*The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). The trope's flexible deployment and sustaining presence in American fiction suggests a formal link between fiction and document discovery, not least for the affective and transtemporal relationships that found documents produce in both the novel and the reader. But by the mid-nineteenth century the delicate negotiation between the actual and the possible that marked out early American fictionality was becoming less convoluted and less self-conscious.

During the early national period, being “among the papers” was sensuous and relational and experiences of discovery were thrilling and unsettling. The prefatory conceit of found papers or even a plot point revolving around found papers situates reading itself as an act of discovery, but perhaps not, as I have already suggested, exactly in the symptomatic vein of contemporary literary criticism. Rethinking literary historicism via the early historical romance and its “discrepant temporalities,” Michelle Sizemore explains that this genre invites “anticipatory-reading” (167). This posture situates the reader as the future generation imagined by past writers and actors, the generation that will find and experience the text. I would argue that this is also an antiquarian posture, one that paradoxically digs into the past in order to serve the as-yet-unknown needs of the future. The found manuscript is, after all, both an *object* and an *experience*. As critics grappling with Neal's question “Wither should we go for proof?,” we might try to strike a balance between the full faith of Hawthorne's customs officer in the evidentiary promise of documents, and Irving's Seth Handaside, who is suspicious of a text's surface. We might continue to scrutinize and to deeply historicize the terms of our methodological debates, finding themes of suspicious and surface reading in the old fictions of the early Republic. Digging—for meaning, for symptoms, for evidence, for the past—does not have to impede wonder, deter discovery nor fix the text to a singular temporal moment. “Don't you know that Antiquaries seek for things that are not so well understood?” Christopher Columbus Baldwin wrote to a college friend in 1833. “Mystery is our life. . . . If I could see you in the Antiquarian Hall only one day, I could make you in love with my pursuits” (Letter to Emerson, n.p.). Like the operations of early American fictionality, Baldwin's bibliographic digging through the “dust and ashes, scinders and the like” is not really about evidence or historical veracity, but about mystery and love, the dramas of discovery, the pleasures of coincidence,

and the yearning for a “one day” encounter with a text and with its keepers (Letter to Farmer, n.p.).

NOTES

1. In their essay “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best notably contend that suspicious and symptomatic approaches to reading have relegated textual surfaces to the “superficial and deceptive,” assuming that a text’s truths are not “immediately apprehensible” (4). Their efforts to reaffirm surface reading takes many forms, from methods in book history to narratology to reader response. In this essay, I am interested in how both suspicious and surface reading are thematized in early American fiction and how the trope of the found manuscript, in particular, binds these methods together rather than setting them at odds.
2. Conversely, literary critics’ failure to consult a broad range of materials can also lead to what Nicholas Paige calls “magical reading,” whereby a critic takes one representative text as a sign of a broader cultural phenomenon (505). Paige’s own data-rich study of fictionality in the long eighteenth century rejects what he calls the positioning of individual novels as “ciphers” (506). Here, accumulation of examples from the archive leads to analytical precision, not just excess.
3. See Johnson; and Duncan.
4. I have in mind the contrast between the subtitle of Susanna Rowson’s 1791 *Charlotte Temple*, “A Tale of Truth” (1), and that of her 1798 *Reuben and Rachel*, “Tales of Old Times” (37).
5. As Timothy Baker observes, the found manuscript animates a story that “not only exists outside codified history, but actively resists it,” since it is often figured as a never-before-seen supplement or even corrective to received historical wisdom (89). See also Evans’s “Missing Books.”
6. Thomas Koenigs argues that one of the hallmarks of early American fiction is the degree to which writers used “texts and paratexts” to make “metafictional arguments for the value of fictionality within republican culture” (301). In historical fiction, these paratexts also lay bare the reciprocal relationship between antiquarian discourse and the fictional device of discovery.
7. Even in what Barbara Foley terms the “pseudofactual” strand of the “documentary novel,” the line between fictional discourse and nonfictional discourse is unclear (107). Further, as Natalie Davis’s *Fiction in the Archives* long ago established, so-called nonfictional discourses like the confession often bear distinctly “fictional” features at the level of narrative (3).
8. Here, I echo Jesse Molesworth’s skepticism of the claim that the realist novel emerged out of a “hunger for actuality,” and a belief in fiction’s ability to enlighten (2).
9. For a detailed account of these collections see Amory 146–61.

10. See *The Prince Library* x.
11. For more on Prince's community-oriented collecting and meticulous record-keeping see Amory 147.
12. For a fuller discussion of the erotics of this sensory connection with other collectors and book owners, see Mills. Walt Whitman would make this connection more explicitly in a poem from *Leaves of Grass*, "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand," written in 1860, the same year as the *North American Review*'s article on Prince. In Whitman, the book is characteristically connected to his body, and only through this connection does it yield meaning; without this aesthetic experience the book simply lies as "in libraries . . . as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead" (271).
13. Interestingly, as reproduced in Michelle Burnham's footnote to this advertisement in the Broadview edition, in the eighteenth-century Newburyport and Vergennes editions of *The Female American*, the papers became those of "a deceased friend" (Winkfield 33).
14. Strikingly, Royall Tyler, who presumably knew of Griffith's imposition, drew on the *Posthumous Works* in *The Algerine Captive* as a source for the anecdote Updike Underhill relates of a "young lady" who reads the first volume of Plutarch's *Lives* "supposing it to be a Novel" but, on learning it is actually "founded on FACT," throws away the other volumes "with disgust" (7). See *Algerine* 229.
15. Ratner uses Gérard Genette's definition of *peritexts* and *epitexts* whereby a peritext is the "spatial category" that designates materials embedded in the same volume as the text and epitexts exist first outside of the main text, as in the case of Irving's newspaper advertisements (734).
16. Women's stewardship of family papers or the family chest is why we have the Mather Library at the American Antiquarian Society, for example, or many of the letters of William Penn and James Logan. See Henle, "A Widow's"; and Premo.
17. For discussions of late eighteenth-century writers' interest in an "American" Columbus, see Bushman and the essays in Materassi and Santos. Rowson was certainly aware of Robertson's history, referencing it in a textbook for schoolgirls she wrote in 1805, *An Abridgement of Universal Geography, Together with Sketches of History*. See Rust 224.
18. In *An Abridgement*, Rowson defines history rigidly in a sample question-and-answer recitation: "What is the most ancient, and yet the most authentic history? The bible, and is termed sacred history. Profane history gives an account of the rise and fall of various nations, states, and empires, their different religions, languages, customs, manners, and forms of government" (285).
19. This is a telling decision since, as Eve Tavor Bannet points out, Rowson was constructing her historical romance in the midst of two major generic shifts: "Historical writing was still hovering on the cusp between 'antiquarianism' and the great conjectural neoclassical master-narratives, and the novel was moving from its predominantly epistolary to its predominantly narrative form" (35).

20. For a discussion of American historical societies' collecting and preservation practices regarding letters, see Henle, "The Means and the End."
21. Ding usefully argues that genre dictated practices of fictionality in the Romantic era. Reading realist fiction led to the rise of *rereading* a book as a normative practice because absorption was driven by the complex interior life and social situations of the characters, not by gothic mystery, she suggests. In the case of the historical romance, I would add, there was an invitation to read *beyond* the narrative, which encouraged audiences to engage expansively with the array of factual texts informing the events and action of the novel, including old, rare, or previously missing documents.
22. Critics like Lloyd Pratt have recently invited a reconsideration of the form and goals of the historical romance, especially in relationship to its experiments with time. While I agree with Pratt that "this literature allows its readers to imagine and inhabit impossible relationships that cross naturalized chronological boundaries," I further argue, here, that these novels' self-conscious relationship to source material and their thematizing of textual discoveries are a primary way they foster transtemporality (70). If, as Pratt argues, historical romancers found that linear, progressive time was "only one of [time's] aspects—and not necessarily the most important one," then reading this body of fiction as the literal result of chance encounters with old papers *and* as the vehicle for themes of serendipity introduces the disruptive concept of the unforeseen into the presumed certitude of progressive time (64).
23. For this reason it is important that we do not relegate the phenomena of believing the fictional ruse to the distant past. Cooper's mysterious "J.R.C.," for instance, was a point of antiquarian interest long after its publication. Thus, as late as 1922, a subscriber to the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* wrote in to the "Notes and Queries" section enquiring who "the Rev. J.R.C." was (368).
24. Child may have framed her novel in this way to mirror the tale of collaboration that prefaced James Wallis Eastburn and Robert Sands's narrative poem *Yamoyden: A Tale of the Wars of King Philip, in Six Cantos* (1820), which had already inspired *Hobomok*. In the preface to *Yamoyden*, Sands (who passes himself off as "the Editor") describes collaborating with Eastburn on a rough draft of the poem until the sudden decline and death of his colleague (v). "He left among his papers a great quantity of poetry, of which his part of 'Yamoyden' forms but a small proportion," the "Advertisement" reads (vi). Sands claims to have corrected the manuscript, while taking care not to "destroy his deceased friend's poetical identity" (vi). Vaux argues that Child uses the preface to "clothe her ambition in a form acceptable to her readers and to authenticate her novel's representation of cultural transition in New England" (128).
25. See DiCuirci 52–83.
26. For a discussion on the role of absent or missing papers in literary critical work, see Fenton and Rohy.

27. For further discussion of Neal's generic experimentation with and metacommentary on historical romance, see Pethers.
28. See Burr 168.
29. See Van Tassel 100.

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