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HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT

Historian of the West



One of the more famous historians to come from Granville is Hubert Howe Bancroft. Born in Granville in 1832, Bancroft went from student at Doane Academy to bookselling to history writing. Ann Natalie Hansen has written this delightful biographical account of Hubert Howe Bancroft. The editors of *The Historical Times* are pleased to publish for the first time Miss Hansen's original work on the life and times of this famous Granville native.

HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT

Historian of the West

A transplanted and transformed Yankee who rose from farm boy to bookseller to author and publisher, Hubert Howe Bancroft holds a place in American historiography which is often disputed. The question invariably arises --- was he really an historian at all, or merely a shrewd Yankee trader? It seems most fair to say that he was a little of each.

Massachusetts Roots

Bancroft's father, Azariah Ashley Bancroft, was born in Granville, Massachusetts. He and his parents emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1809, and to Granville, Ohio in 1814, there joining their old neighbors from the Berkshires who had founded the village in 1805. Lucy D. Howe, at sixteen, also moved westward across the Alleghenies from Vermont with her family who settled in the new Granville on a farm adjoining that of the Bancrofts. In time Azariah Ashley Bancroft and Lucy Howe were married and became the parents of Hubert Howe Bancroft who was born May 5, 1832 in Granville, Ohio.

There was nothing spectacular about the Bancroft family. Of Anglo-Saxon stock, John Bancroft had arrived in Massachusetts from England aboard the *James* in 1632. Like so many other

of these Puritan families, the Bancrofts moved westward into the Connecticut Valley taking part in local government, the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. This spirit of restlessness continued in the family. Azariah Ashley Bancroft, in 1845, moved his family to New Madrid, Missouri. The fertile bottom lands yielded good crops for which there were only poor markets, so after three years the trek was made back to Granville. In a few years, though, the West beckoned again and Azariah Ashley was off to the gold fields of California where he stayed for two years. After another stint in Ohio, he set out again for the West where he served as Indian agent at Fort Simcoe, Washington during the Civil War. He finally settled down in San Francisco.

An Ohio Boyhood

Hubert Howe Bancroft's boyhood in Ohio was exactly what one would expect of such a time and place. He hated milking the cow and raking hay in the hot sun, and he hated going to school. The town abounded in New England piety and thrift and love of education; laziness was the root of all evil. As a consequence, Bancroft was reared in the strict Puritan tradition with large doses of church-going on the Sabbath and all sorts of admonitions for living a Godly life. The impression this made apparently was not very deep; in his adult life the church-going

habit lasted for only about ten years, due largely to the influence of his first wife, Emily Ketchum to whom he was married in 1859.

As for education, he seems to have gotten over his early dislike for school, aspiring to graduate from college, be elected to Congress, and perhaps the Presidency. With this ideal in mind, he began his studies at Doane Academy in Granville, where he stayed for a year. Realizing the need for money, he accepted the offer of his brother-in-law, a bookseller in Buffalo, New York, as a clerk in his store. His decision ended the first distinct phase of his life. The principle of industry which had been deeply ingrained in him as a child, he kept throughout his long life. This and the knack for quickly turning a dollar were the survivals of his Puritan heritage.

A Bookseller's Life

After two attempts at bookselling in Buffalo, the second more successful than the first, and a brief interlude of selling books by subscription in the country around Mansfield, Ohio, Bancroft set out in 1851 for California by ship from New York going overland across the Isthmus of Panama. From humble beginnings, Bancroft profited in business and continued to expand until the house of H. H. Bancroft and Company of San Francisco, booksellers and publishers, was unique in the West

and one of the largest of its kind in the world. Its owner admitted, "...no one was more interested and absorbed in money-making while engaged in it than

Bancroft's book collecting was a natural outgrowth of the business, and in turn, his writings were the outgrowth of the library he so diligently formed. He had already published a handbook of the Pacific Coast. One day in 1859 he conceived the idea of shelving together the fifty to seventy-five titles he had in stock on the subject for the convenience of the handbook's editor, William H. Knight. Sometime later he happened to notice some early California pamphlets in another San Francisco bookstore, and he promptly bought them. This was the beginning of his search which was to extend all over the Western United States, New York and Philadelphia, Mexico, Alaska, and various parts of Europe. The result was a collection of 60,000 volumes. Bancroft himself poked through the bookstores of London and Paris finding great quantities of books dealing with his subject, and then went on to Spain where he was disappointed in the result. He did not realize that Spain's wealth of material was in manuscript form in the archives of the government and Church, especially in the Casa Longa at Seville. He was not alone in his ignorance. Few others of his day were aware of it either.

All this only whetted his appetite for the search. He had enlarged his field of interest from just California to Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Lower California and Pacific States, and a history of the Pacific States in popular one-volume form. After much mental warfare he concluded to write a complete and detailed history of the western half of North America.

Installing a Librarian for the Collection

In the spring of 1870, Henry Lebbeus Oak was installed as librarian of Bancroft's collection. A native of Garland, Maine, he had attended Bowdoin College and was graduated from Dartmouth College during the Civil War. He was of invaluable assistance throughout the duration of the project, beginning with the cataloguing of the collection and the removal of the books to the fifth floor of the new building on Market Street which was destined to become a "literary workshop."

The Writing of History

When the decision was finally made to write the history, Bancroft sought a way to abstract the necessary information from his library. He first tried reading through the books and copying paragraphs which had been marked for the purpose. After doing this with a dozen or so volumes, he calculated that it would take him, by

working eight hours a day, four hundred years to do this superficial job. He hired assistants to aid him in this work, but then when he set to writing from these notes he found that he needed the book to understand the connection.

The Literary Mill

From this unsatisfactory beginning came the idea of an index to the whole library. When finished, it was completely analytical of the subject matter of every scrap of material he had, whether it be books, periodicals, newspapers, or manuscripts. Even the most seemingly insignificant subject was included, such as the texture of an Eskimo's hair. All together, more than twenty men worked on the project, some over a long period of time, and the cost mounted to \$35,000 which Bancroft regarded as well invested.

The writing moved forward with the assistants working from eight to twelve and from one to six with smoking freely allowed while they worked. By this time Oak was ably assisted by William Nemos, whose surname was assumed to cover his identity as a member of a distinguished Polish family. He perfected the note-taking system, especially for beginners on the job so that they would become familiar with "the respective merits of authors, their bent of thought, and the age in which they lived, and the

fullness and trustworthiness of their works." The complicated system of note-taking and filing in paper bags is detailed in Bancroft's book, *Literary Industries*, published in 1891.

Bancroft allowed his note-takers to put anything they pleased into their own words, but he insisted that when the exact words of the author were used they must be plainly indicated. The notes pointed out contradictory statements of different authors and the evidence for each interpretation. This enabled Bancroft to draw his own conclusions when he studied and wrote from these notes. Minor sections of the history were written by the more able and experienced assistants and incorporated by Bancroft into his own writing after some condensation and change.

After a minor fire in the building, Bancroft hired about twenty copyists to transcribe everything he had written. Writing by hand, it took them three or four months to complete the task. A second copy was made in a copy press, and deposited in a different place from the original to guard against fire destroying the fruits of all their labors.

The Publication of Books

First to be published was *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, in five octavo volumes, covering every phase of culture of all the Native American tribes that inhabited the seaboard and the interior from Alaska to Panama. Over the period of fifteen years thirty-four more volumes appeared. Those dealing with the history of the Pacific Coast were published under the general title, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, thus avoiding any direct claim to authorship by not using a by-line as such. These were published by his own company, and after 1886 by a subsidiary company formed for the purpose and called The History Company. The preparation of the manuscript for the history began in 1871 and ended in 1889, but Bancroft continued writing until he was eighty-four, publishing five more books.

Hubert Howe Bancroft never made a secret of his literary mill; he recognized that his "greatest safeguard was publicity." Each worker knew what each other worker was doing, and visitors, strangers to the place, were not asked what they wanted. One of the staff was always on hand to show visitors through the firm and the library and explain rare or curious books to them as well as the nature of the work being carried on. The doors were never locked during working hours. To

Bancroft it was only sensible to apply business methods to the writing of history. His division of labor had been highly successful in the operation of his far-flung book empire, and he merely adapted the same basic technique to his literary endeavors.

He did not rely entirely on the information his copyists extracted from the books and manuscripts in his library. When certain facts were lacking Bancroft set out to find them himself. He traveled many miles interviewing the priests of the California missions and members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Mexico and those in civil authority. For instance, he once with a native stenographer took down the life and career of Porfirio Diaz as he told it to him. When Bancroft was unable to go himself, he sent others who were well qualified. Such was the case when he discovered that he lacked Russian material for his history of Alaska. Ivan Petrof was dispatched twice to Alaska and then to Washington where he spent two years. The result was all the information contained in state papers as well as dictation from Russian officials and from officials of Hudson's Bay Company. No stone was left unturned.

An Entrepreneurial Spirit

With the instinct of the businessman, Bancroft set about acquiring a long list of favorable

comments on his work. With the first volume of *Native Races* in print, he went East in August 1874 to solicit reviews and comments. His success was a bit phenomenal. Bancroft called on Francis Parkman, Charles Francis Adams, James Russell Lowell, Wendell Phillips, John Greenleaf Whittier, and George Bancroft. His efforts were repaid with an honorary Master of Arts degree from Yale University, a review by Clarence King in the *Atlantic* and several splendid reviews by Francis Parkman in the *North American Review* as the various volumes appeared. The work was also published in England, France and Germany and was favorably reviewed in all the leading literary media of the day. He admits, however, that not all was unadulterated praise.

Some were clever in circumventing the heart of the matter in penning their praise. Oliver Wendell Holmes in a letter to Bancroft commented only on that which was obvious to anyone who was familiar with the methods employed by Bancroft for producing his work. He said nothing about the literary merits of the contents or of their historical worth.

Considering the method utilized for his *Works*, it is not surprising that the style is not entirely uniform; it is more surprising that it is not less uniform than it is. It was ever Bancroft's concern to narrate every related scrap

of information in the most condensed form possible; he did not pretend to be a philosopher of history. At times, however, sandwiched between his almost breathless detailing of facts are pithy phrases which, in a few words, give a penetrating analysis of the subject at hand. He had a passion for accuracy, objectivity, documentation and good indexing. The thousands of footnotes contained in the Works cite not only source material but pertinent information, especially an amazing array of biographical details which would have broken the continuity of the narrative had they been included in the text.

Death in San Francisco

When Hubert Howe Bancroft died in San Francisco on March 2, 1918 at the age of nearly eighty-six, he left a monument of forty-one volumes of history and essays plus a magnificent collection of 60,000 volumes of rare books and manuscripts which he had given to the University of California at Berkeley. His work was criticized during his lifetime and since because of his methodology and because he did not give sufficient credit to those who did a large part of the writing. This can be attributed to his business acumen. First and foremost he was a businessman -- everything about his life was geared to making money, and in this he was enormously successful. This facet of his personality, however,

should not be allowed to detract from the intrinsic merit of his work. His books certainly are not literary masterpieces, but they are mines of information and they have the advantage of having been written at a time when untapped source materials were available. Within another generation many of the early books and manuscripts that Bancroft collected and used might have been lost forever.

The product of an early Ohio farm, a country school and a village academy: in the light of this background, Hubert Howe Bancroft's contributions to American historiography are little short of amazing, if not especially profound.

PostScript

In the past few years there has been wide press coverage of the Columbus-America Discovery Group financing the endeavor to salvage the gold from the sunken *S. S. Central America*. The ship went down off the Carolina coast in a furious hurricane in September 1857 carrying 425 passengers and crew to their deaths. The side-wheel steamship was laden with gold being transported from the San Francisco Mint as well as the gold of the successful prospectors who were on board. Bancroft, writing in 1912 in *Retrospection*, referred to the *Central America* as "an old condemned steamer whose name had been several times changed."

One of those who went to a watery grave was Alvin Ellis of Waterford, Ohio. His wife, Lynthia, and their three children were saved from the wreck. Many years later Lynthia became the second wife of Henry L. Bancroft, Granville banker, who was an uncle of Hubert Howe Bancroft. Henry died in 1890, nine days before his 90th birthday and lies in Maple Grove. Lynthia, who had been described as a delicate woman, died in 1912 at age 92. She is buried in Red Lodge, Montana where her son, Alvin Ellis, Jr., owned a ranch.

Ann Natalie Hansen
The Granville Historical Society

Hubert Howe Bancroft Writing on the Slavery Issue and the Great Granville Riot

The following passages are from Bancroft's chapter, "Some Ohio Yankees," found in his book, Retrospection: Personal and Political, published in 1912.

I do not pretend to any remembrance of it, but I may state the facts as history, that when I was four years old, while yet Abraham Lincoln was playing seven-up with slaveholders in his back office, and William Lloyd Garrison was being mobbed by the good people of Boston, since then evolutionizing themselves into a state of sympathy and sentiment regarding the poor people of color, there came to our town certain zealous men to hold an anti-slavery convention, the first in central Ohio. The use of the church in which town meetings were held, being refused for the purpose, my father offered his barn, a nice new one, and as yet unfilled with hay, which was gladly accepted. All went well until the meetings were over. Then as the chief speakers on their horses were slowly wending their way out of town, a one-horse wagon filled with bad men and bad eggs was seen following them. Notwithstanding the vile odors which filled the air, and the slimy substance dripping from men and horses, not the faintest shade of annoyance was seen on the faces of the strangers; not the



The Bancroft House on North Street

seen on the faces of the strangers; not the slightest increase of pace was discernible.

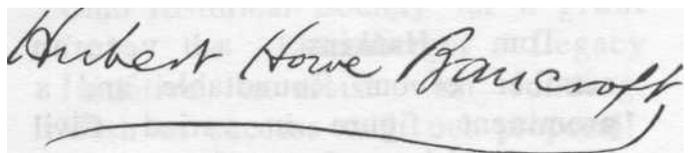
They went their way, these early Ohio martyrs, none the less true though tamer perhaps than the fiery Wendell Phillips, who shouted to his Boston audience that tried to stop his speaking: "Howl on! Howl on! You contumacious curs; I speak to forty millions of freemen"--pointing to the reporters. He might almost make it a round hundred millions today.

And that from Boston's solid men in Faneuil hall assembled; too much like the solid men of San Francisco of today, our most worshipful apostles of high crime; they, Boston's apostles of high crime, loath to offend the white men of the south, later eager to place over them these same black men to grind them into the dust.

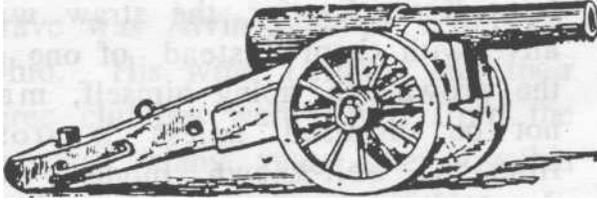
Some six years after this black baptism of the barn, a small boy might have been seen, had it not been midnight and rather dark, driving a big two-horse wagon filled with straw on the way to Fredonia, distance six miles toward Canada. It was his first all-night out of bed, and the bumps of the wagon as the old plow horses followed the road sadly interfered with the snatches of sleep taken at his peril on the slippery seat. Why the enthusiasts should send forth this babe as director-general of a wagon of human estrays fresh

from Kentucky--for the straw was alive with them--instead of one of the grown-ups going himself, may not be surmised unless it arose from the well-known modesty of the Yankee in matters of charity and good deeds; or should the slave hunters catch on such an errand a little fellow like that, all they could do would be to send him home and to bed.

It will be remembered that at the time of the discontinuance of the slave-trade in 1807 Negro slaves numbered nearly one-fifth of the population of the United States, and were fast increasing, to the peril of the Republic. The Anti-slavery society was formed in 1833, under the auspices of Arthur Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell Phillips. Public sentiment, carrying with it the churches, was against the movement. "It hurts business," said the thrifty New Englander, the Quaker silent by assenting," thus to stir up the enmity of our customers in the south," forgetting that the American revolution hurt business, likewise the war of 1812. It was the same cry which we hear to-day in the streets of our cities over the prosecution of rich criminals.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hubert Howe Bancroft". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background. Below the signature is a long, horizontal, wavy line that serves as a decorative flourish.

Hubert Howe Bancroft, Retrospection: Political and Personal [New York: The Bancroft Company, 1912], pp. 84-85.



The Civil War Roundtable

Clarke Wilhelm announces an exciting schedule of presentations for Spring Session of the Civil War Roundtable sponsored by the Society. All meetings will once again take place in the Old Academy Building at 7:30 on the third Tuesday of each month. The Spring schedule runs from January through May.

Tuesday, January 20, 1998:

Lee's Retreat from Gettysburg:

Patrick Gordon, A CPA from Columbus and a Civil War enthusiast from the age of ten when he learned that he was a great, great, great grand nephew of Phil Sheridan, will speak on a critical and often overlooked aspect of Gettysburg.

Tuesday, February 17, 1998: -

The Ghosts of Gettysburg:

Tom Hankins, a veteran member of our Roundtable and a prominent figure in varied Civil War activities who spoke to us a few years back on surgery in the Civil War, will essay a quite

different topic in looking at the ghostly side of Gettysburg.

Tuesday, March 17, 1998:

Major General Charles Griffin: Granville's Forgotten Hero:

Kevin Bennett, recent head of our Roundtable, will speak on the results of his research and writing about the career of a Granvillian who was an important military figure in the Union Army but whose accomplishments have been ignored by the historians.

Tuesday, April 21, 1998: -

Grant at Cold Harbor:

Member Nancy Winkler, who examined Grant's career and especially his final years at a Roundtable session in 1996, will lead a discussion on Grant's performance at Cold Harbor. This is to be a group discussion, so it is important that everyone read up on the battle that many consider a Grant disaster.

Tuesday, May 19, 1998: -

Aerostats Blue, Aerostats Gray:

Member Ted Collen, retired aerospace engineer who analyzed the ironclad war for us last Spring, will look at the Union and Confederate balloon service in the Civil War.



What's New with the Granville Historical Society

At the Society's annual banquet in October, President Dick Daly gave the following report concerning the variety of activities undertaken by the Board of Management and society members over the last year. The list is impressive and indicates the number of activities sponsored by your society.

--Museum displays are being reorganized. The museum front room is being arranged and various items brought out of storage and displayed to emphasize the pioneer history of Granville. Future displays will focus on interesting individuals and later periods of our history. Display cards and labels are being made that provide a description for each artifact. We encourage our members to join in the research and fun this winter that will provide an exciting "new look" when we reopen our Museum next April.

--An updated and systematic

inventory of historical items is scheduled for completion before reopening the museum next spring.

--The Archives room in the Museum was reorganized this year in order to accommodate more shelving and records.

--An outreach program for young people in our community was initiated and includes a seminar for high school students on the working of the Historical Society; research and writing opportunities for selected high school students will be sponsored that may be included in our Historical Times. In addition, we are working on a program that includes artifacts that may be taken to the elementary school to teach about life in early Granville. Would you like to help with this?

--We have increased our membership by ten percent this year; we will focus some attention on developing a similar increase in volunteers for our society as well as membership in 1998.

--The Society is working on an application for an Historical Marker for the Old Academy Building. We are applying to the Ohio Historical Society for a grant from the Longaberger Legacy Initiative to assist with funding. Wish us success with our proposal!

--The Old Colony Burial Ground Project continues to make

--The Accessions Committee continues to accept historical artifacts and documents. We have recently acquired for our archives a number of documents that meet the requirements of accession; we will actively seek additions for our bicentennial celebration including artifacts and documents from early 20th Century.

--The Board of Management met in "Brainstorming Sessions" to discuss our role in the 2005 Bicentennial Celebration for our village. It is not too soon to begin developing a plan for this significant historical event. We welcome your ideas and suggestions.

The Old Colony Burial Ground Project

The multi-year restoration project undertaken by the society at the Old Colony Burial Ground continues on a successful path. Following a successful season of work, two large obelisks were set in place with the generous assistance of the Felumlee Monument Company who donated their time and equipment.

The company also provided invaluable assistance with the Jesse Munson replacement stone which the Munson family dedicated last summer.

Housecleaning at the Museum

Under the watchful eye of Museum Committee Chair, Cynthia Cort, the attic above the museum has been cleared of much of the material stored there. Several items were recovered which had been placed there many years ago. A collection of old books was also discovered.

Cynthia and her committee members are actively involved in arranging new displays of our historical materials in the museum. Society members and their guests will want to stop by in April, when the museum again opens for the season, in order to see first hand the new exhibits.

**Board of Managers
Of
Granville Historical Society**

<u>President</u>	Richard Daly
<u>Vice President</u>	Thomas Martin
<u>Secretary</u>	John Senn
<u>Treasurer</u>	David Neel

Term Ends 20(X):
Clarke Wilhelm
George Wales
Cynthia Cort

Term Ends 1999:
Florence Hoffman
Anthony Lisska
Richard Shiels

Term Ends 1998:
Robert Watson
John Kessler
Maggie Brooks