

Huntsville Historical Review

Volume 1 | Number 2

Article 6

4-1-1971

Back Matter

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Recommended Citation

Watson, Elbert L. (1971) "Back Matter," *Huntsville Historical Review*. Vol. 1: No. 2, Article 6.
Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review/vol1/iss2/6>

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE

By ELBERT L. WATSON

Some concern has been expressed in recent years about professional historians who have given faulty interpretations of the South. Though we tend to agree, we also feel that much of the responsibility may rest at our own door steps because Southerners have been so inept themselves in providing sound state and local histories. Regardless of his scholarly objectivity, the professional historian will approach his study with certain built-in prejudices which usually affect his interpretation of the material he uses. Possibly his prejudices would be modified if more primary sources were available to him.

In most communities descendants of pioneer families possess old family letters, diaries, and pictures which give interesting and often significant insights into political and social conditions during earlier periods of history. Local historians should make sure that citizens understand the importance of placing this material in libraries and archives where it will be permanently preserved. If the owner will not release the original documents to such an institution, then perhaps he will permit their reproduction through microfilm or some other copy-

ing process. The availability of such materials should partially relieve the professional historian of the frustration of not being able to obtain primary sources for his research.

The local historian can further assist in the proper interpretation of his region by encouraging research and writing at the local level. The nonprofessional is fortunate at this point because he is usually close to the heart of his community. While searching through old records, he will often find that names and events will arrest his attention because of his personal involvement in his project. Though he is dealing with history in a somewhat different framework, the local historian's study may lead the professional historian into records which may have otherwise escaped his attention. There is always the possibility, of course, that nuggets of historical fact may crop up in the local historian's research which will reward him beyond the mere pleasure he derives from his hobby.

Through the Review the Huntsville Historical Society is fulfilling its responsibility to preserve and propagate Huntsville's and Madison County's history. Already we envision the possibility of publishing some rare manuscripts which have never appeared in print anywhere. Also, our citizens now have an outlet through which their historical papers can be published without undue delay. We expect the Review to etch a fine mark for itself among journals with similar objectives.