

Part III of V

Good Fellows: The Walpole Society

by Jeanne Schinto

Photos courtesy the Walpole Society

"I am absolutely in favor of Tom Streeter for the Walpole Society and think that he would be an outstanding candidate. I did mention his name about two years ago and one of the old timers replied that he was only a book collector. Of course he is far more than that."

— Clarence S. Brigham to Lawrence C. Wroth, September 22, 1944.¹

As readers have learned in the two previous articles in this series,² the Walpole Society is an ultra-exclusive club dedicated to Americana that was founded over a century ago and continues today. Many of the biggest names in collecting, curating, and studying American furniture, decorative arts, fine arts, antiquarian architecture, and artifacts have been or are now members. The biggest *men's* names, anyway. The membership is and always has been exclusively male.

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Little by little, however, from the moment of its birth, just like any other living thing, the club has undergone change. And those changes continue even as the Walpoleans persist in clinging to many of the most old-fashioned of their dearly loved traditions.

The required dress for their formal dinners, for example, is black tie. It leads to misunderstandings among ordinary citizens who encounter them on their weekend travels to private and public collections of distinction. For example, in the spring of 2012, while boarding the bus that would take them from their hotel in Worcester, Massachusetts, to their evening soiree under the dome in the reading room of the American Antiquarian Society, they were asked by a couple of young women in town for a rock concert, "Are you Masons?" "Are you Shriners?"³ Another time, in another place, they were assumed to be members of the band. They have also been mistaken for a group headed for a convention of *maître d's*.⁴



Japanned high chest of drawers, Boston, 1730-40; Massachusetts side chair, Boston, 1730-60, walnut, reproduction needlework seat; and pair of covered vases, Delft, the Netherlands, 1700-25, tin-glazed earthenware. All were bequests of Walpolean Charles Hitchcock Tyler to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 1932. Schinto photo.

They don't care. In fact, they still don the decorative accessory that they adopted in 1931 to be worn just under the tie on these formal occasions. It is called a gorget. Made of silver, it is a convex crescent that is fastened around the neck with two lengths of red ribbon. Reminiscent of a baby's bib, it has been compared by one club member to the silver tags used to label decanters. In the medieval period, a gorget was armor designed to protect a soldier's throat from sword thrusts and other attacks to that tender area. About 1650, this use became obsolete, but English and European officers still wore gorgets ornamentally or as a badge of distinction. In the Americas, a few were made as gifts for Indian chiefs. There was an article containing a bit of this information about that phenomenon in the December 1924 issue of the magazine *Antiques*—no doubt read by Walpoleans.⁵

A circa 1931 memorandum to the group, written by Luke Vincent Lockwood, John Hill Morgan, and Hollis French, contains the same material.⁶ A subsequent article about gorgets, written by Jamestown (Virginia) curator J. Paul Hudson, appeared in *Antiques* in July 1961.⁷ It includes information about the silver one worn by George Washington in a portrait painted by Charles Willson Peale at Mount Vernon in 1772. The then colonel in the Virginia militia was pictured wearing it as part of his full-dress uniform. By 1830 gorgets were "all but forgotten," according to Hudson—forgotten except by the Walpoleans, that is, several of whom were experts in Colonial silver.

Some early society members didn't like the idea of the gorget, since, just like any group of individuals no matter how like-minded, they had their differences of opinion. "I do regard these things as flummery," Henry Wood Erving wrote in 1932 to fellow member George Francis Dow.⁸ "Anyone would naturally suppose it a design for a dress shield."⁹

Erving, a Hartford banker, complained about the gorget in subsequent letters to Dow, going so far as to say that wearing it was at odds with the very nature of the society. "It isn't what we are organized for," he told Dow, an antiquarian and historical house preservationist.¹⁰ "Ours isn't even essentially a social organization but much less [one] for silverware dress shields, and red vests"—the vests being another accessory idea floated, then dropped.¹¹

"These things are for secret societies primarily," Erving went on. "I never joined but one of the latter in my life and that was over fifty years ago, and for the purpose of the insurance it carried. The one meeting that I attended, accompanied by the initiation, filled me full. I never went near it again but paid my dues conscientiously for about three years and then in a dignified manner withdrew."¹²

Whether or not aware of it, Erving was resisting more than the gorget. The fact is, the nature of the society was no longer what it had been when he'd been invited to become a charter member. At end of the 19th century, when Erving began to collect, there was plenty of fine, fresh Americana to buy. By the 1940s, many of the choicest objects were behind the walls of institutions, much of it having been put there by Walpoleans. Just a few examples among many: Charter member Charles Hitchcock Tyler, who died in 1931, bequeathed scores of items to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the city where he lived and worked as a lawyer. If you visit the Art of the Americas wing, you'll see a couple of Tyler gifts immediately upon entering the 18th-century exhibitions. They are a Boston side chair with a needlework seat and a japanned high chest displayed in a pleasing tableau right by John Singleton Copley's famous portrait of Paul Revere and the patriot's Liberty Bowl. Another charter member, Boston engineer Hollis French, gave his 232-piece American silver collection to the Cleveland Museum of Art some time before his death in 1940. And George Dudley Seymour, elected in 1918, donated many pieces of early furniture to the Connecticut Historical Society.

A catalog of the Seymour items was published in the 1950s. Seymour's notes about provenance are part of each description. They include his account of a time in the 1880s when he had to finagle a piece from a distant relative. She was the elderly eldest daughter of

his great-great uncle who "frowned on any references to old furniture on the Lord's Day," which it happened to be. Nonetheless, her son—Seymour's cousin—managed to smuggle Seymour into the woodshed so he could have a look at an oak blanket chest being used to store harnesses.¹³ "At length and at last," Seymour recounted with joy, "I reduced it to possession."¹⁴ He was too late to secure the family's cupboard, however, since it had earlier been "ejected from the house" and "carried out into the back yard," where it "was espied by those all-seeing 'Cromwell Thieves' [a reference to dealers named Pryor of Cromwell, Connecticut], who stole it and carried it off to Hartford and sold it...I am lucky to have secured the drawerless 'Connecticut' chest, before it was discarded."¹⁵

With high-caliber supplies running low, comparable private collectors dwindled along with them. Hunters like rarity and challenge, to be sure, but they've got to have at least the promise of a "kill" now and then. Psychologically

and economically, most collectors will probably agree, that's just how it works. If the Walpole Society were to survive, it would have to attract at least a few of another type of Americana lover, and Henry Watson Kent knew where to find them.

One of the Walpole Society's three cofounders and always a forward-thinker, Kent told his fellow members at their annual meeting in Boston in May 1941 that they should expect to elect more "students" to join them, by which he meant those who studied rather than owned fine pieces. Those would be professional art historians, curators, and others in charge of institutional



Tyler's Massachusetts side chair. Schinto photo.

collections.¹⁶ And that is exactly what started to happen. When five private collectors—Erving, French, Mantle Fielding, Samuel Woodhouse Jr., and R.T. Haines Halsey—all died within the first three years of that decade, only one private collector, William Hutchinson Putnam, was among the five men elected as their replacements in the 30-member society. The others were Clarence S. Brigham of the American Antiquarian Society, John Marshall Phillips of the Yale University Art Gallery, Edwin Hipkiss of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Macgill James of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

When Kent himself died on Sunday morning, August 28, 1948, while dressing in his room at the Nichewaung Inn in Petersham, Massachusetts, where he spent his summers, his spot in the society was filled the following year by Bertram K. Little, a professional, who was director of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA, now Historic New England). Bert Little was also a private collector of early lighting devices, but according to his nomination papers, that was not what got him a spot in the Walpole Society. It was the SPNEA credential. "Last winter he was appointed to what amounts to the position held by the late William Sumner Appleton [SPNEA's founder], who was an Honorary Member," Russell Hawes Kettell wrote on Little's behalf. "It would seem especially fitting to consider his election as one of us."¹⁷

That Bert Little was married to a major pioneer collector of folk art, Nina Fletcher Little, with whom he collaborated, wasn't mentioned. The Walpoleans

of the 1940s and 1950s didn't clearly understand or acknowledge the importance of folk art, and it would be a long while before another folk art expert was admitted into their ranks.¹⁸ (As late as October 1960, while on a weekend visit to Cooperstown, New York, the Walpole Society listened to a very basic talk read by Nina, a trustee of the New York State Historical Association, on "primitive painting" in America.) Instead, during that period and a little beyond it, many of those who became Walpoleans collected rare books.

Chauncey Cushing Nash, a Boston stockbroker who was elected to the society in 1929, wasn't happy about it. "The Society is getting to be mostly all book men, and we ought to stop it if we can," he wrote in 1954 to Morgan Bulkeley Brainard, a Hartford insurance man and collector of 18th-century tavern signs who was elected in 1927.¹⁹

Nash was only slightly exaggerating. By 1955, a total of 14 out of 30 Walpoleans were also members of the Grolier Club, the preeminent organization of bibliophiles in the United States.²⁰ Certainly a book collector may also collect tables and chairs, but many of those with dual memberships didn't know the difference between Thomas Chippendale and Thomas Seymour. Nor did they need to know in order to be important Americanists. While first-class collections of furniture were growing more difficult to assemble, comparable libraries of American books were still being created, and those of the newer generation of Walpoleans were among the ones creating them.

Book collector and bibliographer Thomas Winthrop Streeter of Morristown, New Jersey, was elected to the society in 1945. He had been proposed by rare book librarian Lawrence Counselman Wroth of Providence, Rhode Island, elected a decade earlier. Anticipating a trip with the Walpoleans to Philadelphia in October 1950, Streeter wrote to Wroth, "I am looking forward to the two dinners but I must say that I don't get much pleasure out of traipsing around and looking at houses. I am afraid I am not a real Walpolean [sic]."²¹

To his credit, Streeter did make an effort to appreciate objects other than those made of paper. As he told Wroth, "The girl my son Frank is going to marry early in February has inherited quite a lot of old furniture from her grandmother and, so that they could study it together, she got for him for Christmas Albert Sack's *Fine Points of Furniture, Early American*, which I have been studying so that I won't be quite so ignorant at our next Walpole meeting."²² To which Wroth replied, "I must look up the book on old furniture you spoke of. I always feel stupid at our Walpole meetings when the brethren are displaying their genuine knowledge of styles and periods."²³

Three years later, in 1953, as Streeter was preparing to host the Walpole Society in his home territory, he wrote to Wroth, "I am doing quite a lot of fussing now on having the fall meeting of the Walpole [sic] here in New Jersey."²⁴ The plan was to have dinner and the business meeting at the Princeton Inn Friday night, then on Saturday go to see Ledlie I. Laughlin, the foremost collector of pewter in the United States at the time and author of a famous textbook, *Pewter in America*. For Saturday lunch they would motor to Streeter's house in Morristown and have a look at his collection. One hopes that the tables-and-chairs guys appreciated it. Streeter was one of the greatest bookmen that America has produced.

Streeter assembled the largest private Texana collection ever compiled and spent decades writing the authoritative three-part five-volume *Bibliography of Texas, 1795-1845*. He also put together a seminal collection on American railroading. And there was a third one, on general Americana, ranging from books about discovery and exploration to first books printed in each of the American states. This last collection, some 5000 items, was sold in a landmark series of seven auctions at Parke-Bernet in New York City from 1966 through 1969. The railroad

collection was divided among the American Antiquarian Society, Dartmouth College (Streeter's alma mater, class of 1904), and other institutions. The Texana was bought by Yale University in 1957.

As for Wroth, for more than two decades he was librarian of the John Carter Brown Library, perhaps the finest and most complete library of the Americas extant, comprising 50,000 rare books (printed before circa 1825) and maps relating to the European discovery, exploration, settlement, and development of the Western Hemisphere. Its collection of volumes printed in or relating to Spanish and Portuguese America is considered among the finest in the world. In some areas, the collections are unmatched and include works found nowhere else.

Two Walpoleans were responsible for deepening the John Carter Brown Library's great trove of Hispanic Americana. Beside Wroth, the other was his predecessor at the library, George Parker Winship. (Two other Walpoleans were related to John Carter Brown [1797-1874] the person, not the library—his grandson John Nicholas Brown and his great-grandson J. Carter Brown.) As Henry R. Wagner wrote in *Essays Honoring Lawrence Wroth*, when Wroth arrived he found that few accessions had been made to the list since the purchases of Winship, who had left the library in Providence, Rhode Island, eight years earlier, headed for Harvard's then new Harry Elkins Widener Library. Wroth, a scholar who wrote extensively and eloquently about the history of American Colonial printing, added not only Mexican imprints but some "remarkable" books published in Europe after 1500 that relate either wholly or in part to Spanish America. During Wroth's tenure, the Brown library acquired a total of 5500 books, maps, engravings, and manuscripts of American interest, printed, drawn, or written before 1801.²⁵

Another outstanding Walpolean bookman of the period was William Alexander Jackson, who was elected to the club in 1944. Considered one of the most successful rare-book librarians of the post-World War II period, Jackson was the founding librarian of the Arthur A. Houghton Jr. Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts at Harvard University.

(The library's namesake was a Walpolean, too, elected in 1951, but he rarely participated; in 1968 he became an honorary member only, a status usually reserved for members who no longer attend meetings because of illness or infirmity.)

Wilmarth Sheldon "Lefty" Lewis, who became a Walpolean along with Houghton in 1951, had no more interest in decorative arts than any of his fellow bookmen did. As he once wrote in an account of a Walpole Society visit to a lengthy list of historical houses in Virginia, "I drift from room to room with an expression that I hope is reverential and that conceals the fact that I am really looking for a place to sit down."²⁶

Instead of collecting highboys and lowboys, Lewis had made it his life's work to collect Horace Walpole's enormous correspondence. He published it in a monumental series. He also reproduced at



Thomas W. Streeter, while on the club's visit to Ephrata Cloisters, Pennsylvania, May 2, 1959.



This 3 3/4" x 4 3/4" x 1/4" cast silver gorget is engraved in the center "WALPOLE / SOCIETY / MCMIX" in Roman letters around the society's logo, an oil lamp on two books, and has red rayon ribbon for fastening around the neck. Once owned by John Munro Woolsey, it is inscribed with his name and the date of his election, December 15, 1916. Made by Crichton & Co., Ltd., New York, it is part of the Walpole Society archives in the Winterthur Library. More usually, a gorget is passed on to a new member—e.g., John Nicholas Brown's gorget was worn by his son J. Carter Brown; it is currently worn by Jared Ingersoll Edwards. (Letter of thanks to Angela Brown Fischer from Edwards, November 21, 2003.) Another example is that the one originally issued to Chauncey Cushing Nash went from Richard Harding Randall Jr. to Ward Alan Minge to its current wearer, Franklin Wood Kelly, elected 2008. (Records, Walpole Society (U.S.), Call No.: Col. 386, Winterthur Library.) Schinto photo.

his home in Farmington, Connecticut, the libraries that Walpole had assembled at his villa near London, called Strawberry Hill. The catalog, which he worked on for 31 years, was published by Yale University Press. The Lewis Walpole Library is now part of Yale, the alma mater of Lewis (class of 1918), whose British collecting focus made him an anomaly among the mostly Americanist Walpoleans he joined.²⁷ But since he was the world's expert on the society's namesake, it must have seemed only right to the clubmen that they include him.

Some years after his election, perhaps for fun, Lewis devised an argument to support the legitimacy of his membership in the society.²⁸ As reported in the *Note Book*, he did this by "recounting recent archeological adventures at his home [in Farmington]...., which have resulted in the unearthing of a considerable quantity of Indian arrowheads and implements, as well as numerous Revolutionary War buttons and other relics of that period."²⁹ The items were said to have been left behind by Count de Rochambeau and his French troops when they were encamped on the site in 1781.

As membership turnover continued through the 1950s because of more deaths, including that of Luke Vincent Lockwood, the last of the club's three cofounders, yet more bookmen came on board. Elected in 1958, Clifton Waller Barrett was a shipping magnate who told his friends that for his business career, "I chose shipping; for my real life work I chose book collecting."³⁰ The creator of the Barrett Library of American Literature at the University of Virginia collected all fiction, poetry, drama, and essays published by an American author in book form from the American Revolution through 1875. For the period 1875 to 1950, he amassed the first and important editions of every major American writer and hundreds of minor ones. To the books he added correspondence and manuscripts including the earliest surviving manuscripts of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and the original manuscripts of Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

In 1962, Frederick Baldwin Adams Jr., director of the



The Walpole Society celebrated its 40th anniversary at the Heublein Hotel, Hartford, on January 21, 1950. Its first dinner meeting had been held there on the same date in 1910. Seated (left to right): Clarence S. Brigham, Edwin J. Hipkiss, J. Gilman D'Arcy Paul, Bertram K. Little, Herbert A. Claiborne, William H. Putnam, John Marshall Phillips, J. Hall Pleasants, William Davis Miller, Harry Harkness Flagler, Morgan B. Brainard, Chauncey Cushing Nash, Henry F. du Pont. Standing (left to right): Carleton Rubira Richmond, Newton C. Brainard, Walter Morrison Jeffords, Theodore Sizer, Thomas W. Streeter, Augustus Peabody Loring, William A. Jackson, Russell H. Kettell, William M. Van Winkle, Lawrence C. Wroth. Missing: Joseph Downs, Thomas Tileston Waterman.

Pierpont Morgan Library in Manhattan, was admitted to the club. Like Bert Little, he was both a professional and private collector—in fact, a renegade collector in the tradition of Walpolean collector-pioneers. Born in 1910, the year the Walpole Society was founded, Adams went to work for his father's Air Reduction Company after Harvard. During the Great Depression, this cousin of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was assigned to examine New Deal legislation to learn how it might affect business. As a result, he started collecting books and periodicals of radical and left-wing movements in the United States.³¹

Radical Literature in America, a 1938 Grolier Club exhibition, was one of the results. Thomas Paine's *Agrarian Justice* was among the highlights, along with Victoria C. Woodhull's *A New Constitution for the United States of the World*, editions of *Das Kapital*, Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and Vol. 1, No. 1 of Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*. A catalog and talk Adams gave at the club were published afterwards. He acknowledged there that the books were in "sometimes terrible condition" and without a single dust jacket. Readers were reminded that "until recently radical literature has gone largely into the hands of poor people and the books have been cheaply printed." In addition, "most of them were read to pieces, or thrown away in disgust,

and served life terms," in Garrett's words. "Berkeley was wise enough to realize that more 'heavyweights' from out of town would never solve the problem. So patiently biding his time, he brought several local men of stature onto the board," including two fellow Walpoleans, Waller Barrett and Frederick Doveton Nichols, who was an architect and architecture professor at the University of Virginia. (When Nichols died in 1995, the *New York Times* obituary began, "Frederick D. Nichols, who rescued Thomas Jefferson from Stanford White...")³⁴ Eventually Berkeley managed to get the board to conduct a nationwide search for a new president of the foundation. Historian Daniel Porter Jordan was chosen unanimously in 1985. He was elected a Walpolean five years later.

In sum, while it is true that the bookmen were something of a cadre within the Walpole Society, they added a rich, new dimension to the group that may well have faded away without them. "Billy Miller a few years ago thought we ought not to elect any more members, and gradually let the Society go out of existence," Nash wrote in 1948 to Brainard, paraphrasing William Davis Miller, a Walpolean from 1932 until his death in 1959.³⁵ Obviously that didn't happen. But as Theodore "Tubby" Sizer, an art history professor at Yale and a Monuments Man during World War II, told his fellow Walpoleans at a meeting in 1950, "As fields become exhausted it is wise to move on."³⁶

Barrett, Berkeley, and Nichols were Virginians either by birth or adoption; Jordan is a Mississippian. In 1956, yet another southerner, E. Milby Burton of Charleston, who is author of the groundbreaking book *Charleston Furniture, 1700-1825*, joined the society. The elections of southerners

reflect another change that the club underwent in the mid-20th century, based on members' acknowledgement that the club needed geographical diversity. Partly, it was because they depended on a network of contacts for their weekend trips, and until then that network did not extend much beyond the eastern seaboard and Mid-Atlantic States. (Of the 21 original members, eight were New Yorkers, five came from Massachusetts, five from Connecticut, and one each from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. In 1950, there were five from New York, nine from Massachusetts, six from Connecticut, two each from Rhode Island, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., and one each from New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.) Simply put, the men were getting bored with the same old places, and with improvements in transportation and more gasoline available after World War II, traveling farther for a weekend became possible.

Partly, too, the society's step in the southerly direction occurred as a result of the newfound acknowledgement that its vision of Americana needed expanding in order to reflect the true sense of the term. When Joseph Downs died in 1954, the Walpole Society's memorial contained the dubious comment that he had grown up in New England "where, earlier than in most parts of the country, there was an awareness of our heritage."³⁷

It was a difficult assignment to jettison such attitudes. On a 1954 visit to Monticello, William Hutchinson Putnam, an Israel Putnam descendant whose collection of American silver was built around family heirlooms, was among the unimpressed. He admired Jefferson as a statesman; however, as he wrote in the *Note Book*, "coming from Connecticut, and realizing that my ancestors looked with



In September 1946 at Time Stone Farm in Marlborough, Massachusetts, the Walpoleans enjoyed an 18th-century period dinner cooked and served on pewter by their host, Edna Greenwood, who brought out old hats for the men to wear. The house had no electricity; the lights are blazing candles. From left to right: Edwin J. Hipkiss, William Sumner Appleton, Morgan Bulkeley Brainard, William H. Putnam, Henry F. du Pont, Stephen H.P. Pell, William D. Miller, J. Hall Pleasants, George Parker Winship, and William A. Jackson.



William A. Jackson (on left) and Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis at Medway Plantation, Mount Holly, South Carolina, April 7, 1956.

or destroyed in fear of reprisals." A neglected field, to be sure, it held great value, he argued. "For here, in these books you see around you, lie the germs of movements that may some day bring about either the destruction or the rebirth of our present civilization."³²

After Adams moved to Paris in 1969, he became president of the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie, considered the most prestigious organization of bibliophiles in the world. No longer attending Walpole Society meetings, he became an honorary member in 1973. His private collection was sold at Sotheby's in London on November 6 and 7, 2001.

Francis Lewis Berkeley Jr. was elected in 1955 and certainly qualifies as a bookman. As archivist of the University of Virginia, he is credited with having done more than perhaps anyone in the 20th century to collect and preserve unpublished manuscripts documenting Virginia's early history. But the Walpoleans seem to remember him best for what he did for Monticello.

Soon after Thomas Jefferson died in 1826, the former president's household furnishings were sold, and in 1829 the last of his family left Monticello. The property was sold by Jefferson's only surviving child, along with 550 acres of land, for \$7000 in 1831. Uriah Levy bought the neglected property three years later. He renovated and cared for the house until his death in 1858. A little over 20 years later, after a long dispute over his will, his 27-year old nephew, Jefferson Levy, took possession of the property. He, too, restored it, opening it to the public. He also enlarged the estate to about 2000 acres. In total, members of the Levy family owned Monticello for 89 years, far longer than Jefferson kin, finally selling it in 1923 to the newly formed Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, along with 650 acres, for \$500,000. The foundation then undertook its own restoration of the house, grounds, and working plantation landscape—a decades' long process with many missteps along the way.

Berkeley was elected to the foundation's board in 1964, "when it was a small group, dominated by local businessmen whose tendency towards cronyism easily neutered the influence of the few out-of-town scholars on the board," as Wendell Douglas Garrett wrote in a memorial to Berkeley published in the Walpole Society's *Note Book*.³³ "These men essentially did what they wished

suspicion on all his actions, I would be hypocritical if I did not approach all that Jefferson did with prejudice."³⁸

Nonetheless, within the year of Milby Burton's election the men took a trip to Charleston and environs and were impressed by the grandeur of Medway Plantation, Middleton Plantation, and a third plantation, Drayton Hall, among other places. They had been traveling together to Maryland and Virginia since the mid-1920s, but this was the group's southernmost adventure—46 years after the club's founding. The following year, they got even more geographically ambitious and traveled to Lexington, Kentucky. Member Russell H. Kettell of Concord, Massachusetts, joked in the *Note Book* that he felt almost as if he had used a passport to get there.

One of their Kentucky hosts was Cassius M. Clay, a former general counsel of the B & O Railroad who owned a plantation. Clay was also a former Yale classmate of Lefty Lewis and a "delightful gentleman of the blood of [early 19th-century American political leader] Henry Clay," in the words of the *Note Book* scribe, J. Gilman D'Arcy Paul of Baltimore. The men also visited a horse-breeding farm, where "[t]he head stable-man, a rangy, wild-looking fellow strongly suggestive of Gary Cooper, intimated that he was ready, if time permitted, to induct us into the inner mysteries, as a mare was about to be bred to one of these famous stud horses." That would have been a Walpolean first too. "A chilly reception, however, was given Gary Cooper's well-meant invitation by the few Walpoleans who heard it," D'Arcy Paul reported, adding, "It would have been amusing to put the matter to a vote."³⁹

One southerner joined earlier than all the rest. Alexander Wilbourne Weddell of Richmond was elected in 1932 although he spent most of the 1930s abroad, as ambassador to Argentina. In the 1940s, after his retirement from the foreign service, he and his wife, Virginia, returned to their estate, called Virginia House. Built in 1925-29, the house combined the architecture of a 12th-century priory that the couple had bought in England in the 1920s with that of two 16th-century English manor houses and a loggia acquired in Spain. Weddell had not come from money, but his wife, Virginia, had been left a fortune in 1921 by her first husband, James Harrison Steedman, whose family was in the ammunition business in St. Louis, Missouri.



From left to right: Francis L. Berkeley Jr., Henry F. du Pont, and J. Gilman D'Arcy Paul in Charleston, South Carolina, April 6, 1956.

Virginia House was completed in 1928 and filled with a sizable collection of 18th-century paintings, sculpture, textiles, furniture, and decorative arts from Mexico, collected while Weddell was U.S. consul general to Mexico City in the mid-1920s. Spanish colonial art was not the usual thing for 20th-century foreigners to be collecting—works by Diego Rivera and his contemporaries were the far more popular choice—so



Carleton Rubira Richmond on the weekend of April 6 and 7, 1956. Yet another bookman, Richmond joined the Walpole Society in 1939. The 16th president of the American Antiquarian Society, Richmond of Milton, Massachusetts, collected books, both European and American, about flowers and herbals, printed principally in the 18th century or earlier.

once again a Walpolean was a renegade collector.

Or was he? Michael J. Schreffler of Virginia Commonwealth University has noted that Alexander Weddell documented the construction and contents of Virginia House, following the example of “his 18th-century British idol, Horace Walpole.”⁴⁰ However, as Schreffler, an art historian, discovered by reading the couple’s correspondence, it was Virginia Weddell who took the much more active role in the collecting, frequently instructing her husband “on the purchase and shipping of her Mexican acquisitions” back home to Richmond.⁴¹ In his words, “it was Virginia Weddell who masterminded its assemblage.”⁴²

When the Walpole Society was founded in 1910, men’s clubs were men’s clubs, and women’s clubs were women’s clubs. But being unwilling to admit women did not mean the Walpoleans missed having the company of many women collectors who, arguably, were better collectors than many of them. Throughout their history, they often visited women’s collections.

A sampling: Isabella Stewart Gardner hosted them within the first year of their founding during the weekend of December 9-11, 1910. In 1918 they went to see Theodate Pope Riddle, creator of Hill-Stead in Farmington, Connecticut. In 1929 they were the lunch guests of Mrs. John Insley Blair of Tuxedo Park, New York. Years earlier, Natalie Knowlton Blair had begun, like the earliest Walpoleans, to collect furniture and decorative arts that became a comprehensive survey of high-style forms made in New England and the Mid-Atlantic States from the 17th through the early 19th centuries. In the attic of her mansion, Blairhame, she created a series of what she called “museum rooms,” much like the period rooms in the American wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In January 2006, as Christie’s was preparing to sell 100 lots of her estate consigned by her grandson John Overton, Morrison H. Heckscher, the Met’s curator (and a Walpolean since 1980), told the *New York Times*, “Mrs. Blair was the earliest woman collector of Americana of the first rank.”⁴³

In 1940, while the Walpoleans were on Long Island, New York, Anna and Bertha Parsons allowed them to tour Bowne House, believed to be the oldest residence on the island, erected by the Misses Parsons’ ancestor John Bowne circa 1661. (In 1947 the house, located in Flushing, became a museum.) They went

next to see Mrs. Harry Horton Benckard and her distinguished 18th-century collections, particularly furniture by Duncan Phyfe, in Oyster Bay. Like Mrs. Blair, she also created period rooms, including a parlor whose background came from the parlor of the Smith-Nichols house in Newburyport, Massachusetts. After her death in 1945, the room was presented as a gift by a group of her friends to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Of perhaps more lasting significance, as friend and advisor to Harry du Pont, Bertha Benckard was “indispensable to the evolution of Winterthur,” according to du Pont’s daughter Ruth Lord.⁴⁴

In 1946 the Walpoleans made a visit to Time Stone Farm in Marlborough, Massachusetts, home of Edna Greenwood, who cooked them an 18th-century period dinner they didn’t soon forget. Considered one of the first important collectors of Americana right along with the Walpoleans, Greenwood, a cousin of Bert Little, has one more claim to fame. The dedication in Nina Fletcher Little’s autobiography, *Little by Little*, credits her with inspiring Nina’s and Bert’s “lifelong interest in collecting New England country arts.”⁴⁵ Through Greenwood’s example and with her guidance, Nina recounted in the book, the couple discovered how to shop at “little known local shops and small family auctions...and so began our collecting of New England country furniture and related decorative arts.”⁴⁶

Sometimes too, the members were married to collectors just as accomplished as or more accomplished than themselves, as I’ve noted in the cases of Alex Weddell and Bert Little. In the first few decades of the Walpole Society, however, those “assets” didn’t seem to matter much. A wife’s charm seemed to carry more weight. In the membership proposals written on behalf of Weddell and Little, their wives were not even mentioned. More typical of spouse-related remarks was what John Marshall Phillips wrote in his letter of nomination for Vincent D. Andrus in 1952: “He would be very gemütlich with the brotherhood and has a charming wife who descends from the Moultons of Newburyport.”⁴⁷ Henry F. du Pont, writing to nominate Charles F. Montgomery in 1955, said that Montgomery was a Harvard graduate, an authority on pewter and lighting fixtures, a potentially “charming and delightful companion” —and had “a very pleasant wife, who is interested in the same things he is.”⁴⁸

Charm plus breeding was a particularly good combination in a helpmeet in those days. As Joseph Downs, first curator of Winterthur, remarked on behalf of Reginald Minturn Lewis, elected in the same year as Andrus, “Mrs. Lewis shares his enthusiasm for Americana, having inherited from her family excellent pieces of Philadelphia origin.”⁴⁹ It occurred in earlier days too. As George Dudley Seymour wrote to another member regarding Morgan Bulkeley Brainard’s proposed membership, “His wife, Elizabeth Chetwood, is said to have surpassed, in point of blood, any person, male or female, who came to New England in our Colonial Period.”⁵⁰

We’ll never know how many would-be Walpoleans were blackballed because of an unacceptable wife. Details such as those don’t show up in the society’s records, housed at the Winterthur Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware.

However, I did learn from reading correspondence that when Henry Needham Flynt was under membership consideration, Bert Little wrote to Chauncey Nash, “I am afraid many of us would find that his wife is not as interesting a person as he, and that she requires, as it were, considerable attention.”⁵¹ With Helen Flynt as part of the package, the founder of Historic Deerfield was, nonetheless, admitted to the club in 1950.

Along with the wearing of black tie and gorgets, the Walpoleans carry on another tradition at their formal dinners—that of show-and-tell. (It is also known as “gewgaw time,” as in “After dinner it was gewgaw time, with Little producing a handsome silver creamer by Zachariah Brigden of Boston and Vietor retrieving



Chauncey Cushing Nash at Winterthur on May 3, 1959. Nash was the Walpole Society’s assistant secretary 1937-39, then its secretary 1939-62.

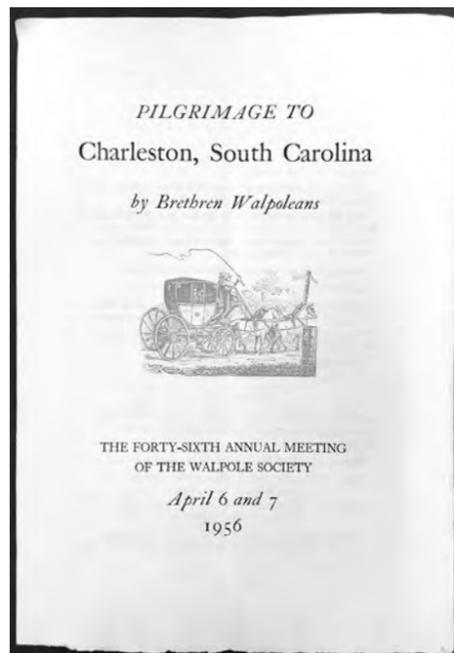
a rudder bolt off the ill-fated H.M.S. *Bounty* from his key chain.”⁵²) The item is usually something that can fit into a pocket. It is meant to inspire “mutual consultation, congratulations, and commiseration” around the table, even a bit of “mutual envy” as the men see what “quietly—very quietly” has been “gathered while the others slumbered.”⁵³

In 1960, on their 50th anniversary, the show-and-tell took place at the New Haven home of Alexander Orr Vietor, curator of maps at Yale from 1943 to 1978. Usually they celebrated their anniversaries in Hartford, where their first meeting had taken place. But in 1955, while the club was there celebrating its 45th, Streeter was robbed at his hotel. Awakened by a man in his room, he gave chase. What he lost specifically wasn’t much—a money clip containing \$150 and a \$20 gold coin. But the Walpoleans had to admit that Hartford was not what it once had been, and they did not return there for their golden anniversary.

Walter Morrison Jeffords brought out a rococo snuffbox by Joseph Richardson Sr. of Philadelphia—a gift to Mary Coats of that city from Robert Dinwiddie, one of the last royal governors of Virginia. Vincent Andrus produced

a silver watch made by Thomas Harland in nearby Norwich. Then Vietor, elected in 1958, produced a chalice from his wife’s grandfather, who had celebrated his golden wedding anniversary with it. Designed and executed in 1900 by Louis Tiffany, the vessel was in the shape of a tree with foliage studded with pearls. Dazzling: so much so that some members remarked that the society henceforth “should pay more attention to those modern handicrafts which survived the crushing blows of the machine age than we are accustomed to do.”⁵⁴

The machine age? That would be the 20th century. Horrors. The men hadn’t even delved much into the 19th century yet. Moving into those aesthetic spheres would be a very big change for the brethren, but they would certainly give it a try.



Program for trip to South Carolina by the “Brethren Walpoleans” on the weekend of April 6 and 7, 1956.

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Endnotes to Part III

1. Clarence S. Brigham papers, American Antiquarian Society (AAS).
2. See *M.A.D.*, November 2015, pp. 29-32-A and December 2015, pp. 31-35-C.
3. The Walpole Society *Note Book*, 2012, p. 29.
4. Alfred C. Harrison Jr., *The Walpole Society: The Second Fifty Years* (The Walpole Society, 2012), p. 47.
5. Harrold [sic] E. Gillingham, "Early American Indian Medals," *Antiques*, December 1924, pp. 312-15.
6. George Francis Dow papers, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, MH 82, Box 9, Folder 7, pp. 8-9 of partial typed mss., undated, circa 1931.
7. J. Paul Hudson, "Charles Willson Peale's Silver Gorget," *Antiques*, July 1961, pp. 50-51.
8. George F. Dow papers, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, MH 82, Box 7, Folder 14, Henry Wood Erving to George F. Dow, January 29, 1932.
9. *Ibid.*, February 9, 1932.
10. *Ibid.*, February 15, 1932.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *George Dudley Seymour's Furniture Collection in the Connecticut Historical Society* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1958), p. 20.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1941, p. 37.
17. Records, Walpole Society (U.S.), Call No.: Col. 386, Winterthur Library, "Nomination for Membership: Bertram Kimball Little," October 16, 1948.
18. That said, two of the society's own, Edwin AtLee Barber and Albert H. Pitkin, had been on the folk art scene even earlier than Nina Fletcher Little. According to Elizabeth Stillinger's *A Kind of Archeology: Collecting American Folk Art, 1876-1976*, Pitkin was the first person in the United States to use the word *folk* in print in a decorative arts context, when his *Early American Folk Pottery* was posthumously published in 1918. As for Barber, Stillinger wrote, he was "conducting a one-man campaign to inspire respect for American ceramics." But these members both had died by 1918.
19. Chauncey Cushing Nash to Morgan B. Brainard, May 12, 1954. Records, Walpole Society (U.S.), Call No.: Col. 386, Winterthur Library. Unless otherwise noted, all other quotes from correspondence are from this source. For more information about Brainard's collection, see *Morgan B. Brainard's Tavern Signs* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1958): "Until he showed this interest, no one knew of a market for tavern signs," p. 3. Nash was concerned in this period about more than the bookmen. On March 12, 1954, he wrote to Brainard, "I realize that you and I are the only ones to keep alive the old traditions and treasures of the Society. I hope we can do it for a long time yet." Alas, Brainard died in 1957; Nash died in 1968.
20. William S. Reese, "Walpole Society-Grolier Club Connections," *The Walpole Society Note Book* 2009/2010, p. 80.
21. Thomas W. Streeter to Lawrence C. Wroth, October 7, 1950. Thomas Winthrop Streeter papers, American Antiquarian Society. Correspondence between Streeter and Lawrence C. Wroth is archived at the AAS. Each was an AAS member, as were and are dozens of other Walpoleans.
22. Thomas W. Streeter to Lawrence C. Wroth, December 26, 1950. AAS.
23. Lawrence C. Wroth to Thomas W. Streeter, December 29, 1950. AAS.
24. Thomas W. Streeter to Lawrence C. Wroth, June 23, 1953. AAS.
25. *Essays Honoring Lawrence Wroth* (Portland, Maine: The Anthoensen Press), pp. 426-429.
26. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1972, p. 21.
27. The book group became so strong that, in addition to Lewis, other people who had little or nothing to do with Americana were elected. These include William A. Jackson and Arthur A. Houghton Jr., both of whom were put forth by George Parker Winship.
28. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1961, p. 36.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517784.pdf), p. 28.
31. Aside from "Radical Literature," however, Adams had no American interests. He was nominated by Lawrence C. Wroth and seconded by William A. Jackson. See Records, Walpole Society (U.S.), Call No.: Col. 386, Winterthur Library, "Nomination for Membership: Frederick B. Adams Jr.," February 7, 1961.
32. Frederick D. Adams, *Radical Literature in America* (Stamford, Connecticut: Overbrook Press, 1939), pp. 34-35.
33. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 2003/2004, p. 10.
34. "Frederick D. Nichols, 83, a Preservationist, Dies," *New York Times*, April 13, 1995.
35. Chauncey Cushing Nash to Morgan B. Brainard, September 27, 1948.
36. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1950, p. 24.
37. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1954, p. 36.
38. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1954, pp. 17-18.
39. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1957, p. 21.
40. Michael J. Schreffler, "New Spanish Art in the Weddell Collection," published in *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, No. 81, 2002, p. 10.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Wendy Moonan, "A Trove of Americana from a Well-Stocked Attic Goes on the Block," *New York Times*, January 6, 2006.
44. Ruth Lord, *Henry F. du Point and Winterthur: A Daughter's Portrait* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 151.
45. Nina Fletcher Little, *Little by Little: Six Decades of Collecting American Decorative Arts* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), p. vi.
46. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
47. Records, Walpole Society (U.S.), Call No.: Col. 386, Winterthur Library, "Nomination for Membership: Vincent Dyckman Andrus," September 9, 1952.
48. *Ibid.*, "Nomination for Membership: Charles Franklin Montgomery," October 19, 1950.
49. Records, Walpole Society, op. cit., "Nomination for Membership: Reginald Minturn Lewis," January 4, 1952. The wife referred to was Alice Cramp Vaux, who married Lewis in 1937 at age 26. He was 42. There had been two previous wives. One of them, Charlotte Potter Lewis, sued Lewis for divorce in 1930, citing mental cruelty, charging Lewis with constant faultfinding and alleging that he provided her with no amusement, and that when he did accompany her anywhere he did so in "a most disagreeable manner."
50. George D. Seymour to Philip L. Spalding, March 21, 1925.
51. Bertram K. Little to Chauncey Cushing Nash, October 30, 1950.
52. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1978, p. 22.
53. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1934, p. 61.
54. The Walpole Society *Note Book* 1960, pp. 12-13.



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