

**“the young officer  
who rode  
beside me”**

**an examination of  
nineteenth-century naming conventions**

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In a world where men and women, presidents and petty thieves are referred to in print by their last names alone, it is not surprising that modern scholars have become oblivious to the careful discrimination with which nineteenth century authors employed names. When Robert F. Sayre wrote of Thoreau that “His famous reticence also seems to have extended to a feeling that it was inappropriate to put his friends’ names in print,”<sup>1</sup> he put his finger on one element of the almost forgotten literary code governing gentlemanly authors. However, he does not recognize the conventional character of Thoreau’s practice and therefore ascribes the reticence to Thoreau individually without examining Thoreau’s relationship to people like John Field whom Thoreau both names and describes unfavorably.

Names printed in nineteenth-century autobiography and travel literature convey a surprising amount of information by their adherence or lack of adherence to a code of social and literary decorum, knowledge of which can prove a valuable tool to scholars and particularly editors of such works. Four examples from nineteenth-century works edited in the last half of the twentieth century will serve to illustrate the kinds of editorial or critical inferences which would surely have been modified had the editors considered the nineteenth-century conventions governing names in print.

When Milo Milton Quaife edited Margaret I. Carrington’s *Absaraka* (1868) for republication in 1950, he characterized much of the

book as an emigrants' guide, designed to direct travelers over the path to Laramie and up the Bozeman trail.<sup>2</sup> He failed to take into consideration the fact that Mrs. Carrington, wife of the commander at Fort Phil Kearney, traveled with a small party of army people about whom she could print only the most perfunctory comments. More personal material was available to her because she had obeyed General Sherman's admonition to keep a diary which she drew upon when she recorded the deaths of men killed outside Fort Phil Kearney. Margaret Carrington's choice of material, like Elizabeth Custer's some years later, was constrained by her inability to name, or describe in detail, the people with whom she traveled. At a time when the army code "limited an officer's personal affairs to the concern of his own regiment alone; it was bad manners for the officers of other regiments even to ask questions," no officer's wife could publish intimate accounts of army society.<sup>3</sup>

Because in some instances conventional references to names carried information almost by code, Edgar I. Stewart was technically correct in his foreword to George Armstrong Custer's *My Life on the Plains* (1874) when he said that Custer never mentioned the suicide of Colonel Wickliffe Cooper.<sup>4</sup> Since Custer had been accused of precipitating Cooper's suicide, Stewart made the omission seem self-serving. Actually, in his single mention of Cooper, Custer indicated by the form of name he employed that Cooper had died. The only regular army officers to whom he referred by military title and full name were those like Colonel Cooper, Major Joel Elliot, and Captain Louis McLane Hamilton who were dead. Cooper left a young wife and army friends who would have been affronted had the suicide been published to the world. Custer thus neatly managed to signal Cooper's death and at the same time preserve the proprieties.

Two more serious instances of editorial failure to recognize the significance of the forms of name reference do an injustice to Timothy Dwight. In the original edition of *Travels in New England and New York* (1822), Dwight referred to his traveling companions only by an initial letter and a dash.<sup>5</sup> In the 1969 edition of the *Travels*, the names that Dwight omitted have been supplied, without footnotes in the text, thus making the punctilious Dwight appear either ignorant of polite usage or callous to the feelings of men whose identities he had scrupulously protected.<sup>6</sup> Either interpretation misrepresents Dwight.

The final example is also drawn from Dwight's *Travels*. The editor, in attempting to define Dwight's attitude toward blacks, cites Dwight's statement that a colored minister was then serving a congregation in Rutland, Vermont. The editor seizes upon the reference to explain, "He thus referred to a respected Edwardsian preacher, Lemuel Haynes. The Connecticut-born son of a negro and a white woman, Haynes grew up as an indentured servant, studied with the Rev. Daniel Ferrand, and married a white school teacher in 1783. Dwight's

omission of this interesting biography suggests his evasiveness about the negro's assimilation into the New England community."<sup>7</sup>

The omission of Haynes's name and biography, however, suggests only that Dwight treated the black minister with the same courtesy he would have accorded a white judge. In the paragraph immediately preceding his reference to a "colored minister" he had written of Judge Williams, "This gentleman being since dead, it will not be improper for me to remark, that he raised himself by the dint of his own well-directed efforts, to a useful station, and a very respectable character in society."<sup>8</sup> If even so restrained a printed appraisal of a man's life could be justified only after his death, Haynes's "interesting biography" could hardly have been published while he lived.

Instances of such minor misinterpretations could be multiplied many times by anyone reading widely in nineteenth-century travel literature and autobiography. Many of them could be avoided if the new generation of editors and critics became aware of the conventions to which nineteenth-century authors subscribed.

An examination of the naming practices of nineteenth-century travel writers and memoirists may also contribute to an understanding of social values and class structure as these authors perceived them.

If in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries men were daily reminded of their position in a class structure derived from England, by the nineteenth century the reminders had become less effective.<sup>9</sup> James Fenimore Cooper wrote *Home as Found* (1838) in a vain effort to delineate clear class distinctions in a society yeasty with parvenues asserting the equality of all men. The three part class model of earlier centuries proves inadequate to describe class alignments, even in Great Britain, during the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> In America, the three part model may have proved more hindrance than help in efforts to define the American gentleman. Edwin Cady described the nineteenth century American gentleman as possessed of family, wealth, integrity, courtesy, cultivation and dedication to some good social cause.<sup>11</sup> Insistence upon all these qualities made the true gentleman so rare a phenomenon that Lincoln had to be relegated to the subclass "natural gentleman."<sup>12</sup> Cooper might have accepted these criteria, but small town judges, substantial farmers, military officers, teachers and authors apparently would not. Such people thought of themselves and their friends as gentlemen and ladies. In consequence the names, the forms of names and the avoidance of names by nineteenth century authors provide the closest approximation we are likely to have to the method of James West's *Plainville U.S.A.* in which members of the community described the social structure of the community as they perceived it.<sup>13</sup> Examination of the naming conventions and their application by writers of nineteenth-century travel books and memoirs suggests that, like Plainville, nineteenth-century society was not classless, but it also suggests that apart from the seaboard cities it was more

egalitarian than Cady's description of the gentleman in nineteenth-century America would indicate.

It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate the existence of a nineteenth-century literary code governing the use of names, to explore its roots, and to reconstruct its salient features while simultaneously suggesting the critical insights which familiarity with the code may offer historians, editors and literary critics.

The study is based primarily upon a close examination of twenty works by sixteen American and English authors writing about life in the United States and Canada.<sup>14</sup> These works, all designed by their authors for publication, were selected to provide a diverse sample of travel literature and autobiographical works spanning the nineteenth century. The authors include both men and women and represent a wide range of backgrounds, education and social position. Civil War memoirs, which might be considered a special subcategory of autobiographical writing, have been deliberately omitted because they pose special problems too complex for an introductory study. For example, it is almost impossible to establish that an author consciously avoided naming the subject of an anecdote when he was surrounded by a multitude of men whose names he did not know. It is even more difficult to establish that the author knew at the time he wrote whether men who had been his fellow soldiers were living or dead. Nevertheless, examination of such works as Thomas Wentworth Higginson's *Army Life in a Black Regiment* and Henry Kyd Douglas' *I Rode with Stonewall* suggests that Civil War memoirs generally observed the same conventions in the use of names as the travel literature. Cumulatively the authors of these 20 works provide evidence both in their practice and by their comments that the omission of names, and the forms in which names were written, were the result of conscious decisions.

Dwight, Parkman, and Irving all substituted an initial and a dash for the names of men with whom they journeyed for weeks. Mrs. Trollope wrote of "Mr. T" or "my husband." George Frederick Ruxton employed false names for all his chief characters and even many minor ones. At one point he wrote his publishers "The Chases (and I wish I had not given the proper name) did start for the Platte alone."<sup>15</sup> The editor, sympathizing with Ruxton's scruples, immediately changed the name to Brand.

Henry David Thoreau and Isabella Bird both testify to their inability to write facts they know. In *Walden* Thoreau described the woodcutter Alex Therien and commented that "he had so suitable and poetic a name that I am sorry I cannot print it here."<sup>16</sup> Isabella Bird after employing dashes, anagrams for two family names, and at least one name her modern editor suspects of being false,<sup>17</sup> twice withheld information of family life "from a fear of violating the rights of privacy."<sup>18</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, who quoted and named T. R. Griscom as an authority on farm economy under slavery, was careful

to explain that he had "called upon him to ask if he would object to my giving his name with it. He was so good as to permit me to do so."<sup>19</sup>

All such examples of practice and comment demonstrate that nineteenth-century authors were conscious of writing within a shared and binding tradition the basis of which is hinted at when Miss Bird invokes the "right of privacy." Some people, however, obviously had a greater right of privacy than others, since most of these authors employed real names mingled with the dashes, the false names, and the circumlocutions such as "my companion" or "the young officer who rode beside me."

The question of who could be named under what circumstances is closely related to the question of what forms the names could take. That in turn appears to have been governed by the sex and social status of the subject as well as the author's consciousness of his own status in society. Thus etiquette books of the period provide a good many clues to the code governing what could be said about whom.

Strictures against gossip appear in almost all early etiquette books, together with the admonition that concern for the sensibilities of others is the chief mark of good breeding. Mrs. H. O. Ward warned her readers that even people who listened avidly to gossip about others "never fail to remember whether the retailer has violated other rules of good-breeding than the one which discountenances tattling."<sup>20</sup> John A. Ruth put the matter more succinctly, "Scandal is the least excusable of all conversational vulgarities."<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Ward also reminded her reader of the hazards inherent even in stories in which no one is named:

"'Write if you must,' said a gentleman, several years since to the author, 'but for heaven's sake leave out your illustrations.'

'An author cannot write without illustrations' was the answer. 'Even our Lord had to use parables when he wished to instruct.'

'Yes, and if you wish to be crucified, I know of no better way to attain your end. You are ignorant of human nature if you do not know that for every illustration there will be scores of persons who will think they are individually meant, and each will be your enemy.'<sup>22</sup>

Thus to avoid all appearance of gossiping, and perhaps also to avert the danger of having an acquaintance think she recognized herself, when Mrs. Custer (to illustrate the social confusion of the post-Civil War army) told an amusing story about Irish washerwomen elevated to officers' wives, she disclaimed all knowledge of the originals. "If I knew of any one to whom this incident occurred, I should not venture to make use of it as an example of the embarrassing situation in the new order of things in the reorganized army. The story is true; but the names if I ever knew them, have long since faded out of memory."<sup>23</sup>

Etiquette books, however, did more than circumscribe the stories an author might relate. They also provided a guide to the forms in which names might be employed. The rule, in general, required that

people be referred to in print in terms no less formal than those by which an author would address them in person. Mrs. Ward makes the point emphatically when she writes that “everywhere children are taught . . . that it is vulgarity to pick the teeth with ones fingers” or “to speak of absent persons by their first names when you would not so address them if they were present.”<sup>24</sup> Overfamiliarity in print, as in speech, branded a man a boor.

Parkman, on the other hand, attacked the opposite failing when he derided Tete Rouge’s lack of social discrimination. “In his former capacity of steamboat clerk, he had learned to prefix the honorary *Mister* to everybody’s name, whether of high or low degree; so Jim Gurney was Mr. Gurney, Henry was Mr. Henry, and even Deslauriers, for the first time in his life, heard himself addressed as Mr. Deslauriers.”<sup>25</sup>

A twentieth-century reader marvels that nineteenth-century authors threaded the maze of proprieties with such consistent steps that, guided by the hints and explanations they occasionally provided, it seems possible to reconstruct their conventions by their practice.

What follows is an attempt to summarize the nineteenth-century conventions of name reference in books designed for contemporary publication. Five categories (several of them, with subcategories) have been established: women, men, the dead, humorous figures, and Indians. The practices of the sixteen authors upon whose work this paper is based have been examined in regard to each. The discussion of each category begins with the common practice of authors dealing with characters appropriate to that section and proceeds to deviations from the pattern.

## women

A gentleman’s hypersensitivity to printing a lady’s name can be illustrated by a paragraph from Henry Kyd Douglas’s *I Rode with Stonewall*. “At dinner time one day, Colonel Wright told a story of the Army of the Potomac, in repeating which I am not conscious of any indelicacy in mentioning the name of a lady. It was told in the presence of General McClellan. There was a report in the Army of the Potomac . . . that General McClellan and General A. P. Hill were both in love with the beautiful Miss Nellie Marcy . . . but that in the end she married McClellan.”<sup>26</sup>

Such nineteenth-century reluctance to name a lady in print was predicated upon the assumption that publicity, and particularly personal publicity, was always abhorrent to a well-bred woman, both as an invasion of privacy and because it might expose her name to the gossip of barrooms and barber shops, bringing on her the attention of men and women who were not her social equals. Elizabeth Custer, who suppressed her initial dislike of seeing her name in print sufficiently to write in her husband’s defense, had experienced the conven-

tional response. Her marriage to General Custer catapulted her into the news and provided her first experience of "the misery of being paragrahped."<sup>27</sup>

In deference to the sensitivity of ladies and to protect their names, no living lady was ever identified by two names or without the title, Miss or Mrs., which she would have been accorded in direct address. Even when an author wrote of his own wife he followed the form which he would have used in speaking of her to anyone outside her immediate social circle, and referred to her only as "Mrs. Blank" or "my wife." This latter is the term Emily Post characterized as "the name of safety," meaning that it was universally appropriate because no one hearing it could impose upon the lady or her friends by giving the impression that they knew her better than was in fact the case.<sup>28</sup>

Usually the title "Mrs." was perceived as sufficiently formal for a lady's protection, but in the nineteenth century accuracy sometimes required further titles. At least once Mrs. Carrington employed "Mrs. Doctor Horton"<sup>29</sup> and Randolph Keim was positively Germanic in his use of honorifics when he identified three ladies at one post as "estimable ladies, wives of officers, Mrs. Major Kimball, Mrs. Dr. Buchanan, and Mrs. Captain Ovenshine" even though they were never mentioned again.<sup>30</sup> The double titles resulted from the fact that in the old army lieutenants were addressed as "mister." When Jennie Barnitz wrote home that "Mrs. Gen. Custer, Mrs. Gen. Gibbs, Miss Darraugh, Mrs. Wallingford & myself are all the ladies here," she was making the proper distinctions in the rank of husbands, and therefore of wives.<sup>31</sup>

Once a lady had been identified only the most impersonal statements could follow. Mrs. Custer could indicate that she and Mrs. Miles had accompanied their husbands on a buffalo hunt.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Carrington could mention that Mrs. Wands sometimes rode with others before the walls of the fort,<sup>33</sup> and Isabella Bird might indulge in such generalized and laudatory comments as "Mrs. Daly [a governor's wife] is an invalid but her kindness makes her deservedly popular."<sup>34</sup> When she waxed more personal as in, "I took leave of Miss Kenjins who is good, clever and agreeable enough to redeem the young-ladyhood of the island,"<sup>35</sup> the reader is not surprised to learn that the Kenjins, who had been named freely, were the Jenkins concealed beneath an anagram.<sup>36</sup>

The nineteenth-century reverence for ladies colored references to other women as well. Men who conducted schools were usually identified by Timothy Dwight by their full names and titles. Thus in Litchfield he records a "flourishing academy raised by the efforts of James Morris, Esq."<sup>37</sup> and a law school "begun by the Hon. Tapping Reeve,"<sup>38</sup> but the female academy is "under the superintendence of Miss Pierce."<sup>39</sup>

Lodging houses, taverns and stage stops, usually kept by men, were known by their owners' names; for example, Hudson's, Bemis's, Putnam's.<sup>40</sup> But when Frederick Law Olmsted took lodging at a "piny-woods stage house" run by a woman, it was called "Mrs. Barclay's."<sup>41</sup>

Maids when they appeared in the travel literature were referred to by their first names only, as the writers would have addressed them in person. Usually they were kept off stage. Mrs. Custer, however, made her colored maids Eliza and Mary important characters in her books. Contrary to general usage something of Eliza's history and much of her wit and courage were chronicled in *Tenting on the Plains* and *Following the Guidon*. Mrs. Custer and Eliza, whose married name is never revealed, remained friends as long as they both lived and Eliza's consent to the role she played in the memoirs is clearly suggested by the fact that she visited Mrs. Custer in New York in order to contribute her memories of the years on the plains to *Following the Guidon* and *Tenting on the Plains*.<sup>42</sup>

Only one woman in the twenty volumes is identified by both a given and a surname and she was named by Mrs. Trollope whose social discriminations were acute. Mrs. Trollope had concealed the identity of an intellectual milliner behind an initial and a dash.<sup>43</sup> She referred to her English friend and fellow author only as "Miss Mitford,"<sup>44</sup> and even Frances Wright, lecturer, author, and advocate of free love, whom many of her contemporaries considered unwomanly and immoral, was always referred to as "Miss Wright," although her more retiring sister became "Mrs. W-----."<sup>45</sup> But no circumstance of birth or education preserved the anonymity of the maid who served Mrs. Trollope's household by day and another clientele by night. Nancy Fletcher was named without so much as a prefatory "Miss."<sup>46</sup>

Nancy Fletcher's abandonment of virtue and her consequent public naming by Mrs. Trollope are suggestive in any examination of G. A. Custer's treatment of two young women captured by Indians and subsequently rescued by a force under his command. One was the wife, the other a daughter, of Kansas small farmers. Their captivity so stirred the frontier that the Governor of Kansas led a volunteer unit to rescue the girls. Custer referred to them properly as Mrs. Morgan and Miss White, and in view of the publicity which their capture had set off he was probably justified in doing so.<sup>47</sup> Yet when Mrs. Custer referred to the same events she never named the women. Could the fact that they had been repeatedly ravished and when he met them were loaded with the tawdry trinkets of squaws have influenced him to provide names where none would have been necessary? The question is more complex than that of why he did not mention the suicide of Wickliffe Cooper, and more unanswerable, but the fact remains that he named women under circumstances in which they almost certainly would have preferred to be nameless.

## men

The privacy of men perceived as gentlemen was almost as scrupulously regarded as that of ladies, and therefore an author traveling with others of his own station or above is careful never to name them.



Thoreau dedicated his book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River* to his brother, but his brother is never named in the book. Dwight never names his traveling companions; Irving refers to "Mr. L--," "the commissioner," and "the count;" and Mrs. Trollope never names her family nor their artist companion. Parkman names the party with which he joined forces for the trip to Laramie only as Capt. C--, his brother, and Mr. R--. Not only were these men older than he but as he makes clear he found them unsatisfactory companions. On the other hand he names his cousin, Quincy Adams Shaw, on the opening page of his book and then refers to him at intervals as Shaw. Since both men were young and Shaw had clearly given his assent to being named, the exception is interesting but hardly significant except for the fact that Parkman even in this instance employed the last name when, from the evidence of the *Journals*, he ordinarily addressed his cousin as Quincy.<sup>48</sup> Given names, however, were reserved for use among family and intimates or for children and servants. In the 1860's the public use of first names "was in such bad form that even young women and men who had known each other all their lives and habitually called each other by their first names spoke to each other as 'Miss' or 'Mister' when with strangers."<sup>49</sup>

Despite the circumspection with which a gentleman's name was concealed, many more men than women could be identified by nineteenth-century authors, because more men than women served in public occupations. Thoreau stated the rule tongue-in-cheek when he visited the governor of the Indian community at Old Town. "Personalities are allowable in speaking of public men. Therefore I will give the particulars of our visit."<sup>50</sup> He then presumes upon the very minor office to describe the room and the fact that the "Governor" received them from his bed. However, the rule was generally valid even though Thoreau stretched liberty to license. Men who assumed public occupations could be named in conjunction with their public employments.

Army officers and men could be named freely in performance of army duties. This fact results in a great difference between the books of General and Mrs. Custer. He wrote about army movements and campaigns and therefore could name his subordinates, detail their military movements, their losses, and their promotions; for such things were a matter of military record. He was meticulous in the use of titles, conforming always to Mrs. Ward's admonition that one should speak of an absent person in the same terms with which one would address him if present. Mrs. Custer, whose recollections were personal rather than military, had occasion to name very few officers although when she did she was as careful of titles as her husband. Percival G. Lowe, Washington Irving and Francis Parkman were similarly conventional in the use of military titles. Mrs. Carrington, however, frequently employed a militarily correct title which was more formal than that used in address when she referred to men as "Brevet-Captain" or "Brevet-Colonel" followed by their names. The emphasis

on brevet rank served her argument that hunger for brevets led Fetterman and his men to their deaths in violation of her husband's orders. Keim, a journalist observing General Sheridan's winter campaign of 1867-68, was somewhat more cavalier about army usage. He identified an officer by rank when he first mentioned him but sometimes failed to use the title for subsequent references, particularly in the case of officers of the lower ranks.

Politicians and holders of public office might be named provided their occupation was referred to in some way. Not only were such men supported by the public purse but they had voluntarily assumed a public role. Mrs. Trollope, therefore, could describe Andrew Jackson's visit to Cincinnati and Peter Cartwright describe General Jackson's visit to a church where Cartwright was preaching.<sup>51</sup> Similarly General Custer could name S. J. Crawford, Governor of Kansas, as he led a volunteer army against the Indians.<sup>52</sup> When, however, Cartwright recounted a dinner table conversation at Jackson's home and commented on Jackson's attitude toward religion the reader realizes that Jackson had been dead for almost twenty years before the account was written.<sup>53</sup> Similarly when Mrs. Custer told the story of a Governor of Colorado who, in a domestic emergency, summoned his skill as a trail cook to prepare a meal for his guests, the man was never named. Cooking dinner or rising to any other domestic crisis was no part of a Governor's official function.<sup>54</sup>

Tradesmen, hotel keepers, and all men who sold goods or services could be named in connection with their businesses. Thus Parkman and Lowe can identify horse dealers, Mrs. Carrington can name contractors who supply the army and Mrs. Trollope and Miss Bird, like Dwight and Olmsted, can identify innkeepers, usually by last name alone.

Proprietors of academies and colleges, and college presidents, were likewise viewed as men who had sought the public eye and performed a public function in connection with which they could be named. Dwight visited and named many such men, always being careful to include honorific titles and being equally careful to avoid all but perfunctory references to their personal lives or characters.

Ministers were also public figures, particularly in those denominations which claimed any public support for the collection of church taxes or tithes. Isabella Bird visited and named Episcopal ministers, including a Bishop, in Canada. Dwight, himself a minister, visited brother ministers on most of his journeys, and Peter Cartwright became an author for the avowed purpose of recording the history of the Methodist Church on the middlewestern frontier. What is said of ministers is highly conventional in most cases. They are "gracious," "learned," "devoted" and their families are "well regulated," "hospitable" or "kind." Cartwright usually noted the achievements of ministers who had died before his book was written, and apparently viewing his army of the Lord as analogous to the military army, names ministers

and the churches to which they were assigned by the annual conferences. He is sometimes outspoken on the subject of his disagreement with other ministers, particularly in the matter of slavery, but he never impugns the motives or personal integrity of his opponents. Both his use of names and the moderation of his tone may also reflect his assumption that the men he mentions are dead, for as he said, "I have outlived all my early bishops; I have outlived every presiding elder I ever had when on circuits; and I have outlived hundreds and thousands of my contemporary ministers and members, as well as juniors."<sup>55</sup>

Actors, authors, singers and other public performers might be identified by their professional names. It is to this group that Thoreau's "personalities are allowable in speaking of public men" chiefly applies, because, particularly in the case of actors, discussion of appearance, bearing and expression were permissible. Discussion of literature, writers and stage performances was a common ingredient of polite conversation and in the romantic period, which tended to read the author into his works, the discussions were sometimes more personal than analytical. Ideally, however, comments were focused on the art rather than the man, never descending to the level of gossip. The personal lives, particularly of authors, were generally guarded by the same scruples as the lives of other gentlemen. Mrs. Trollope presumed upon a handful of poems in the local papers, as Thoreau had presumed upon an Indian governorship, when she named Madison Franklin Harris, a local shoemaker, and commented that "the last and the lyre divided his time, I fear too equally, for he looked pale and poor."<sup>56</sup>

Thoreau, on the other hand, concealed his literary friends Channing, Alcott and Emerson under the pseudonyms of "the poet," "the philosopher" and "the seer" when he mentioned them in *Walden*. Despite their public names their relationship to him was that of friends and private citizens.

### men of the lower orders

Like maids, male servants other than valets, butlers and sometimes coachmen were addressed by their first names by their employers, as were hired men on northern farms. In the south all male servants and farm laborers (usually slaves until after emancipation) were called by their given names.

The conventions of name reference are least clear for men who are neither gentlemen nor public figures. If such a man attained importance in the community despite his lack of breeding and education, he was frequently designated by a paramilitary title such as Colonel or Captain, although his rank might derive from brief militia service or in some instances none at all.

Generally a man addressed, or referred to, by last name alone was not a gentleman by nineteenth-century standards. The distinction is illustrated in Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth's novel *Ishmael* (1864). When Ishmael, who is a gentleman's son although raised by an unlettered maternal aunt and educated by his own efforts, meets his aunt's husband after several years of separation, the older man wishes to address him as "Sir" and feels that the young man should not claim an artificial kinship. "So Ish-Sir, I mean, I won't take no offense, nor likewise feel hurt, if you leaves off calling me uncle and calls me plain 'Gray' like Judge Merlin does."<sup>57</sup>

Elizabeth Bacon was quite aware of the social gulf separating Mr. Gray from plain Gray. Therefore her diary recorded at least a shred of comfort after she read the letter from an Uncle attempting to dissuade her from marriage to George Armstrong Custer. "He was considerate enough to call him Mr. C and in the other letter it was only C."<sup>58</sup>

Parkman employed the last name alone for Shaw, Bisonette, Deslaurier and sometimes for Chatillon and Gurney, but in the latter cases he frequently used both the given and surname, i.e., Henry Chatillon, without the title Mr. Judging from the examples of direct address included in *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman apparently spoke to Chatillon as "Henry"—the address for a servant or an intimate. Since Parkman employed only last names for the other hired frontiersmen it would seem that the frequent use of Henry Chatillon was an attempt to avoid either overfamiliarity in print or the appearance of condescension implicit in "Deslaurier," for example.

Chatillon, as a hired guide, could be identified but there appeared to be no justification for the identification of Jim Gurney who traveled with Parkman's group as a private citizen. In the *Journals*, however, Jim is first referred to as "Ben" and then "called Jim Gurney in the book and Jim hereafter in the Journal."<sup>59</sup> This suggests that the probable deserter from his ship sails under false colors in *The Oregon Trail* so there was no reason for avoiding his name.

If employing a double name was an attempt by Parkman to dignify Chatillon, Thoreau employed a double name to a quite different end. Thoreau names John Field, private citizen of Concord, as unequivocally as Mrs. Trollope named Nancy Fletcher. Moreover, what he says of Field, his house, his wife and his "poor starveling brat" is overpersonal and generally derogatory. It is no wonder that he concludes "Poor John Field! I trust he does not read this, unless he will be improved by it. . . ."<sup>60</sup> For Thoreau the double name served to designate a figure beyond redemption.

## the dead

The dead might be named but what was said of them was governed by the circumstances of their deaths, the closeness of survivors, and the folk wisdom that prohibited speaking ill of the dead.

Generally the appearance of two names and the appropriate title of someone who would not ordinarily be named that fully serves as a signal that the person has died.<sup>61</sup> Often the reference is clarified in a succeeding paragraph or by reference to the "Late Mr." So and So. In some instances there is no mention of the death, but the fact can be taken almost for granted. Thus Percival G. Lowe in *Five Years a Dragoon* wrote an account of the years 1849 to 1854 in a book published in 1906. He names men freely for as he says "most of them are now dead."<sup>62</sup>

Sometimes an uncharacteristically personal paragraph about a friend or acquaintance also signals his death. Thus when Elizabeth Custer, who employs names very sparingly, writes an entire paragraph about the kindness and the punctilious social code of General Gibbs, even adding that he was known among the officers' wives at one post as "General Etiquette" the reader is prepared to learn that General Gibbs had died before the book was written — as indeed he had.<sup>63</sup>

But although one could be more personal in writing of the dead than of the living, a man's death, even a death many years previous, did not free a gentlemanly author from the obligation to guard his words. As Lowe explained after describing the hanging of three men for murder, "I have refrained from mentioning the names of men of whom I had to speak in uncomplimentary terms, for the reason that most men have family relations and friends, and to mention them in a way to leave a stain on their character might be unjust and is altogether unnecessary."<sup>64</sup>

The recently dead, of course, were to be treated even more circumpectly than those long dead. Not only were the surviving family and friends likely to be more numerous, but their grief was fresher, and more susceptible of being reawakened by intimate stories of loved ones they had lost.

## humorous figures

Elizabeth Custer sometimes made herself the object of her own humor. That, after all, was her prerogative. No other figure who is presented in a ridiculous light is ever identified by Mrs. Custer or any other of the authors except Miss Bird. Washington Irving enlivened many pages with 'Tonish's vainglorious chatter but never identified him by more than a single name. Parkman concealed the identity of their inept soldier companion, whom he ridiculed quite mercilessly, under the nickname Tete Rouge. Mrs. Trollope twice refrained from naming figures who by virtue of their professions might have been identified. One of these was the flamboyant lady who dabbled in politics and had published a "sat-here" (satire) which she pressed upon her acquaintance.<sup>65</sup> Her name might have been given, as Miss Mitford's was, on the basis of her authorship. But Mrs. Trollope, although she

may have heightened the lady's manner, never revealed her name. The second identity she concealed was that of the Cincinnati inn-keeper notorious for his peremptory treatment of guests. In that instance she not only did not name him, but seems to have given a fictitious name to his establishment, which she called the Washington Hotel.<sup>66</sup> Since she had spent two years in Cincinnati she almost certainly knew that there was no Washington Hotel in the town. The change of name seems to have been designed to confuse the hotel keeper's identity.

Peter Cartwright, who recorded events much farther in his past than those of which Irving, Parkman or Mrs. Trollope wrote, relates his religious triumphs over bullies and snobbish women with gusto. However, he never reveals the identities of any of the people whom he defeated and brought to Christ against their wills.

An almost overdicate sense of propriety forbade General Custer to reveal the names of two young officers surprised by Indians while they were bathing in the river a mile or two from camp. Stark naked they galloped through the picket line ahead of the pursuing braves; whereupon potential tragedy turned instantly to comedy.<sup>67</sup> Years later, after his death in the Custer massacre, Elizabeth Custer identified one of the young men as her brother-in-law, Tom Custer.<sup>68</sup> She did not name the other.

General Custer sailed closer to the wind, however, in his treatment of the famous scout California Joe. He not only described the scout's hard drinking but included a rather personal description of Joe's return from a visit to Leavenworth, newly shaven and in store clothes.<sup>69</sup> Yet technically Custer had not identified California Joe, whose real name was Moses Milner.

Against the general background of concealment Isabella Bird's occasional candor made her a formidable figure, even when she adhered to the letter of the rules. For instance, in her discussion of the Hon. George Coles, prime minister of Canada, she observes, "He is a self-made and self educated man, and by his own energy, industry and perseverance, has raised himself to the position he now holds; and if his manners have not the finish of polite society, and if he does sometimes say 'me and the governor' his energy is not less to be admired."<sup>70</sup> Mr. Coles was indisputably a public figure. His educational background was probably public knowledge. But Mrs. Bishop's exposure of his grammatical frailties in a sentence which simultaneously emphasized his public position was as adroit as it was unkind.

## indians

None of the previous rules of courtesy applies to Indians. Thoreau, Irving, General and Mrs. Custer, Keim and Lowe all name Indians whenever it is convenient. Thoreau names Molly Molasses after simply seeing her on the street<sup>71</sup> and although he properly refers to Joe Polis's

wife as "Mrs. P." he says she was "not introduced to us," which is revelatory.<sup>72</sup> Polis owned a two story house and was reputed to be worth \$6,000. He had been their hired guide, but that service was ended. Mrs. Polis had never served them; yet the sense of caste was so strong that Thoreau could expect that she would be presented to two strange men rather than they to her.

Thoreau seems to have realized that he had exceeded the bounds of decorum in the account of his journey on the Allegash and East Branch, for when Lowell asked him for that essay Thoreau "demurred on the grounds that his guide Joe Polis, 'whose words and deeds I report very faithfully' might read it and take offense."<sup>73</sup>

Many of the Indians whom Custer, Keim and Lowe call by name were the Indian equivalent of American army officers, politicians or diplomats and could therefore be named in their military or diplomatic capacities. Some of the references, however, go beyond the proprieties and employ such adjectives as "villainous looking." The Custers go further still; Custer tells the story of Mo-na-se-ta, who was married against her will, crippled her elderly husband with a shot from her pistol and returned to her father's house.<sup>74</sup> Mrs. Custer, who is particularly punctilious about naming white men and women and even her colored maid, describes Et-nah-wah-ruchta attending her husband at his bath in the river—an unconscionable invasion of privacy had the young woman not been an Indian.<sup>75</sup>

Washington Irving, on the other hand, wrote of his white guide, Pierre Beatte, with the freedom generally reserved for Indians, because he believed Beatte to be a half-breed. Beatte, like Chatillon, could be identified, but that fact did not justify such observations as "He had altogether more of the red than the white man in his composition; and as I had been taught to look upon all half-breds with distrust, as an uncertain and faithless race, I would gladly have dispensed with the services of Pierre Beatte."<sup>76</sup> Beatte, however, was probably of pure French blood although he had lived among the Indians. Because of their preconceptions Irving and his companions saw Indian blood where there was none and wrote of Beatte as though he were in truth Indian.<sup>77</sup>

In conclusion this study of a previously unexplored aspect of nineteenth-century travel books and memoirs appears to demonstrate that authors once subscribed to rules of decorum defining who could be named in print and in what manner. The rules seem to be based upon the assumption that all men have a basic right of privacy unless they have relinquished the right by placing their names before the public as tradesmen or public servants, or by conduct so debased that an author feels no compulsion to treat them with courtesy. The rule is surprisingly egalitarian since it has only a tangential relationship to such marks of the nineteenth-century gentleman as birth and wealth and emphasizes moral character. While inherited wealth would preclude the need to work at occupations which brought one's name before the public,

the rule of privacy accords more nearly with the American tradition of the natural gentleman than with that of the polite gentleman. It seems to work in opposition to Cady's insistence that the gentleman should perform "some good social function" since most such functions would bring him into public view.

The nineteenth-century adulation of women guarded their names even more closely than those of men. Women were treated like ladies. Only her flagrant immorality could justify printing a woman's full name or failing to provide her appropriate title.

Respect for the dead or their relatives often resulted in their being named more formally than courtesy would have required had they been alive, and usually restricted authors to favorable comments, particularly in the cases of those who had died recently. The acts, opinions and even eccentricities of those who had been dead for many years could be reported more freely provided the account was not derogatory.

No one portrayed in a humorous light could be named. Apparently people of the nineteenth century took themselves seriously, at least in print, and the foibles the twentieth century considers humanizing were attributed only to anonymous characters.

Indians, like the morally reprehensible, were consigned to the bottom of the scale. Perhaps Nancy Fletcher, John Field and Indians were all, consciously or unconsciously, relegated to Plainville's category of "people who live like animals" because they violated either nineteenth century sanitary conventions or the Christian moral code.

No other ethnic group seems to have been treated as cavalierly as Indians, which is not to say that nineteenth-century writers were without prejudice. But authors writing for publication did not use individual names carelessly. If what they said was unflattering either to the individual or his race or nationality, they resorted to generalities or to such phrases as "the Irish soldiers," "our driver" or "the sullen farmer we met at dinner."

As a consequence of the conventions governing naming, nineteenth-century authors of travel books and memoirs tended to emphasize impersonal subjects and to employ a variety of subterfuges to conceal the identities of people they could not name. When they name a person in apparent violation of the conventions, closer investigation often reveals that the person is dead or that the name is fictitious. When an author violates the privacy of others he reveals his own ignorance of polite usage or, more frequently, his contempt for those whom he judges to be his social or moral inferiors.

## notes

1. Robert F. Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians* (Princeton, 1977), 173.
2. Milo Milton Quaife, ed., *Absaraka*, by Margaret I. Carrington (Chicago, 1950), xliii.
3. Oliver Knight, *Life and Manners in the Frontier Army* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1978), 75.



4. Edgar I. Stewart, ed., *My Life on the Plains*, by George Armstrong Custer (Norman, Oklahoma, 1962), xii.
5. Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, 4 vols. (New Haven, 1821-22).
6. Barbara Miller Solomon, ed., *Travels in New England and New York* by Timothy Dwight (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969) I, lii.
7. Solomon, ed., *Travels* by Timothy Dwight, I, xxxix.
8. Dwight, *Travels*, II, 421.
9. Gary B. Nash, *Class and Society in Early America*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970), 6.
10. R. S. Neal, *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Boston, 1972), 15.
11. Edwin Harrison Cady, *The Gentleman in America* (Syracuse, New York, 1949), 19.
12. Cady, *The Gentleman in America*, 20.
13. James West (psued. Carl Withers), *Plainville U.S.A.* (New York, 1945).
14. In addition to *Absaraka* and Dwight's *Travels* these are as follows: Isabella Lucy Bird (Bishop), *The Englishwoman in America* (1856), ed. Andrew Hill Clark (Madison, 1966); Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography* of Peter Cartwright, (1856), (Nashville, Tennessee, 1956); Elizabeth Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, (1885), (Norman, Oklahoma, 1961); *Tenting on the Plains*, (1895), (Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1973); *Following the Guidon* (New York, 1890); George Armstrong Custer, *My Life on the Plains* (1874), (Norman, Oklahoma, 1962); Henry Kyd Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1940); Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1870), (Boston, 1962); Washington Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies*, (1835), ed. John Francis McDermott (Norman, Oklahoma, 1956); De B. Randolph Keim, *Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders*, (1870), (Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1973); Percival G. Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon* (1906), (Norman, Oklahoma, 1965); Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 2 vols. (New York, 1904); Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, (1849) ed. E. N. Feltsgog (Madison, Wisconsin, 1969); George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West* (1849) ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman, Oklahoma, 1951); Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854) ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, New Jersey, 1971); *The Main Woods* (1864) ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton, New Jersey, 1972); *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Boston, 1893); Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) ed. Donald Smalley (New York, 1949).
15. Ruxton, 231.
16. Thoreau, *Walden*, 144.
17. Bird, note 432-433.
18. Bird, 115, 355.
19. Olmsted, I, 228.
20. Mrs. H. O. Ward, *Sensible Etiquette of the Best Society*, 16th ed. (Philadelphia, 1878), 147.
21. John A. Ruth, *Decorum* (Chicago, 1877), 59.
22. Mrs. H. O. Ward, 112.
23. Elizabeth Custer, *Tenting on the Plains*, 262.
24. Mrs. H. O. Ward, 52.
25. Parkman, 389.
26. Douglas, 177, 178. His hesitation to write Mrs. McClellan's name reflects John A. Ruth's dictum, "Let no man speak a word against a woman at anytime, or mention a woman's name in any company in which it should not be spoken." 228.
27. Elizabeth Custer, *Tenting on the Plains*, 209.
28. Emily Post, *Etiquette* (New York, 1960), 26.
29. Carrington, 99.
30. Keim, 23.
31. Jennie Barnitz, *Life in Custer's Cavalry*, ed. Robert J. Utley (New Haven, 1977), 54.
32. Elizabeth Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 195.
33. Carrington, 169.
34. Bird, 44.
35. Bird, 65.
36. Clark, ed., *The Englishwoman in America*, 48.
37. Dwight, II, 369.
38. Dwight, II, 373.
39. Dwight, II, 371.
40. Inns named by Dwight in his *Travels*, III, 204; IV, 52; III, 213.
41. Olmsted, I, 364.
42. Elizabeth Custer, *Tenting on the Plains*, 26, 105, 161; *Following the Guidon*, 129.
43. Trollope, 9.
44. Trollope, 127, 339.
45. Trollope, 29.
46. Trollope, 56.
47. G. A. Custer, 273.
48. Francis Parkman, *Journals*, ed. Mason Wade (New York, 1947).

49. Emily Post, 24. John H. Young made the same point in *Our Deportment* (Detroit, 1880) where he wrote "never address a mere acquaintance by his or her Christian name. It is a presumption. . . ." 271.
50. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 147.
51. Cartwright, 133, 134.
52. G. A. Custer, 278.
53. Cartwright, 134.
54. Elizabeth Custer, *Tenting on the Plains*, 336.
55. Cartwright, 340.
56. Trollope, 93.
57. E. D. E. N. Southworth, *Ishmael* (New York, n.d.), 461.
58. Lawrence A. Frost, *General Custer's Libbie* (Seattle, 1976), 78.
59. Mason Wade, *Parkman's Journals*, note, II, 637.
60. Thoreau, *Walden*, 240, 205.
61. Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories* (New York, 1929). Theodor Fischer says of his friend that "I noticed that in my thoughts I was . . . speaking of him by his full name, and reverently, as one speaks of the dead." 90.
62. Lowe, 77.
63. Elizabeth Custer, *Tenting on the Plains*, 277.
64. Lowe, 117.
65. Trollope, 190, 191.
66. Trollope, note 37.
67. G. A. Custer, 186, 187.
68. Elizabeth Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 19.
69. G. A. Custer, 379.
70. Bird, 46.
71. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 157.
72. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 297.
73. Joseph Moldenhauer, ed., *The Maine Woods*, by H. D. Thoreau, note, 360.
74. G. A. Custer, 282, 283.
75. Elizabeth Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, 196.
76. Irving, 24, 25.
77. McDermott, ed., *A Tour on the Prairies*, by Washington Irving, note, 24.