

The Organizational Meeting of the Society

The first meeting of the Frank Norris Society, Inc., occurred at the MLA Convention in Chicago on 29 December 1985. Dr. Joseph McElrath, representing the Board of Directors, explained that the Society had been registered as a non-profit corporation in Florida and that recognition as a tax-exempt educational organization had been requested from the IRS. He then provided the simple definition of the Society: its purpose is the dissemination of information on Frank Norris, his works, and his era. The principal means of achieving this goal are an annual meeting at the MLA Convention (along with other possible meetings) and the Society's newsletter, *Frank Norris Studies*. Membership dues were set at ten dollars per year which entitles one to participate in the Society's activities and to receive the newsletter which will appear at least twice per year. (Checks should be made payable to The Frank Norris Society, Inc., and addressed to its business offices at the Department of English, Florida State University, Tallahassee FL 32306.)

An executive committee was then created: Dr. James D. Hart (The Bancroft Library) now serves as President; Dr. Barbara Hochman (Tel Aviv Univ.) was elected Vice-President; and Dr. Richard Allan Davison (Univ. of Delaware) — whose startling "Moran of the *Lady Letty Lives*" buttons were to be seen everywhere at the Convention — became Secretary.

The primary function of the Executive Committee is to arrange the program for the annual meeting; queries regarding the 1986 meeting should be directed to Dr. Davison.

The next item on the agenda was a presentation by Dr. Jesse Crisler, who is editing Norris' correspondence. Discussion followed, as did an informal gathering at which preliminary plans were made for the 1986 program.

Presented below is the paper delivered by Dr. Crisler. While its length will prove atypical for *FNS*, its substance will not. *FNS* will feature brief articles, notes, queries, and a running bibliography of writings on Norris; it also solicits unpublished primary materials as well as previously unnoted commentary by Norris' contemporaries. Contributions should be directed to the editors, Dr. Robert C. Leitz, III (English, Louisiana St. Univ., Shreveport LA 71115) and Dr. Jesse S. Crisler (Commun. and Lang. Arts, Brigham Young Univ. — Hawaii Campus, Laie HI 96762).

Editing the Letters of Frank Norris

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As originally conceived by James D. Hart, a new edition of Frank Norris's correspondence was to have involved a simple expansion of the pioneering *Letters of Frank Norris* edited by Franklin D. Walker in 1956. To the texts provided by Walker, thirty subsequently recovered letters first published in a series of ten articles in the Book Club of California's *Quarterly Newsletter* were to have been added. A previously unnoted letter to Grant Richards was also to have been included in the volume. In one convenient place, then, ninety-nine letters would be available to the scholar, at long last. Since Hart wanted to

preserve as much of Walker's and subsequent editors' original scholarship as was possible, he decided to re-present most of their work and to provide an introduction which would acknowledge both their editorial decisions and their methods of presenting and glossing the letters. At the same time, though, he planned to point out the variances in editorial methods and styles as well as to inform the reader of additional data concerning all original documents. That was the initial conception in 1983; it appeared both practical and efficient. And, had it been possible, the product would have been a boon to Norris Scholarship. Since that time, however, much has changed.

In early 1984, Hart graciously asked me to join him in his task, a labor I was delighted to pursue with him. Though we began working independently, we jointly realized in short order that the original conception of a simple reprinting and expansion must necessarily be radically altered. In the first place, new letters began to surface almost immediately. We, of course, welcomed this phenomenon for it insured that our work would be even more complete; but our initial vision had not encompassed such an enlargement of the volume in mid-execution.

Second, we soon encountered problems in editorial consistency since the presentational formats employed by our predecessors proved rather diverse. While some post-1956 editors — Robert C. Leitz, Joseph Katz, and Walker himself — followed the latter's original tactic of confining commentary to introductions for several letters at a time, Donald Pizer's large supplement to *Letters* relegated his commentary almost entirely to footnotes, while Ursula Scheulen, Robert Morace, and James B. Stronks combined the two procedures. To be true to each article in its original form was one solution, but not the most satisfactory, since the eclectic result might have been both stylistically and critically unbalanced. A second alternative, to throw out all previous notes and commentary, seemed not only wasteful but foolhardy. A final possibility was to decide which method of prior presentation was best and make all the letters conform to it. We ultimately adopted this last option as the most expedient, though also the most difficult, for our purposes, thereby salvaging as much scholarship as possible from the work of earlier editors.

A third problem we soon discovered was that the texts of most letters, as previously published, contained errors — usually involving mere accidentals, true, but sometimes substantives. For example, in a letter to Grant Richards, as edited by Walker, Norris thanks his English publisher for "Mr. Honnings opinion of *MacTeague*" and mentions further his delight that the novel is "well received by such good critics as the Pell Mell." The identity of "Mr. Honning," presumably a reviewer, has eluded researchers for three decades, and that has also effectively kept his review from being located. But an examination of the holograph reveals that Norris actually wrote "Mr. Hornung"; Ernest William Hornung (1866-1921), the celebrated creator of the gentleman crook Raffles, and brother-in-law of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, actually reviewed *McTeague* in *The Pall Mall Gazette* on 1 November 1899, just a week after Richards issued

the London edition of the novel, and only a month before Norris wrote his letter expressing his gratitude for a copy of the review which Richards had enclosed. Or course, not all textual cruces which we found were as dramatic or as fruitful as this, but each nonetheless deserved correction in print.

Further research also taught us that righting them might not be as easy as we had believed, for the source of several of Norris's letters is not a holograph safely deposited in a major university or private collection but a publication by a recipient of a Norris letter who had quoted it in a memoir of his association with Norris. For these, we recognized that we had to use the published texts, but we also grasped the need to be aware of variants between different published versions of the same material. A case in point pertains to Norris's loyal friend, Isaac F. Marcosson. His well-known recollections of Norris in *Adventures in Interviewing* (1959) presented in variant forms the same Norris letters he included in an earlier, much shorter piece, "Some Literary Friendships," written for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1919. As our work proceeded, then, our textual problems were becoming much more complicated than we once thought they would be.

In the end we concluded that, instead of Hart's "brief overall preface" and basically reprinted texts, the new edition would be precisely that — with selective but finally quite thorough re-editing, expanded notes, corrected commentary, and additional data, all presented in such a manner that the Frank Norris who materialized from his correspondence would accurately represent the real Frank Norris, rather than a nostalgic gloss of him as he was visualized in the 1950's. Such was the state of our new conception of the edition when Hart found that he would have to withdraw from the project, and I found that I would be the principal carrying through on the plans we had made as co-editors.

This new edition of Norris's letters will contain not the ninety-nine which Hart had first envisioned but one hundred twenty-two, as well as over forty inscriptions, more than thirty of which have never been previously printed. It also will seek to solve the problems disclosed in the first stages of research, both presentational and textual. Finally, its intent is to demonstrate that while editing and re-editing the letters of Frank Norris pose a variety of unique dilemmas, the information which emerges concerning his standard chronology and his personality as both author and man not only repays the would-be editor's efforts but also rewards the critic and the biographer.

Determining precisely what constitutes a Norris letter is the initial enigma facing the editor of Norris's correspondence. Norris's letters are not the careful creations of George Eliot, the exquisite productions of Keats, the emotional exchanges of Patmore and Hopkins; neither do they contain the grotesque maunderings of Dreiser nor the egotistical hyperbole of Chesterfield. Regardless of one's response to the letters of these writers, one realizes that they are indeed letters. In the case of Norris, however, several kinds of documents can be regarded as letters, even though they might not be so categorized for other authors. Consider a group of petitions which Norris addressed to various governing bodies of the University of California, for example. Because they shed light on a major phase of Norris's life, because they are signed by him, and because they may be treated more satisfactorily as letters than as anything else, they have tacitly become accepted as additions to Norris's correspondence over the years. The new edition accepts the tradition and adds a new petition to the five previously published.

The second class of Norris documents which may best be examined as letters consists of three contributions he made as an undergraduate "Fiji" to his fraternity's national voice, *Phi Gamma Delta Quarterly*. Published in the issues of April and October, 1893, and April, 1894, they relate in florid detail the

past successes, current coups, and future hopes for the Delta Xi chapter. Since Norris presumably either wrote these reports in the form of letters to the journal, or forwarded them with accompanying notes, now lost, and since they contain references to events which impinge on his subsequent life and to people to whom and about whom he later writes, adding them now to his other letters seem logical. They relate to his college career in a manner similar to the petitions, and they furnish examples of his written work in years from which very little, either published or in epistolary form, has survived.

Agreements with his publishers comprise a third category of material that is closely enough connected to Norris's letters to be counted along with them. Besides seven extant contracts between Norris and his publishers, Norris concluded three other agreements concerning not only the publication of his works but also the conditions of his employment. While the contracts, despite Norris's signature on them, are definitely not letters, these three agreements may be viewed thus for several reasons. Norris not only signed two of them but also verified his acceptance of their terms by adding a comment; thus, though they are brief, they contain a greeting, a body, and a signature, in the manner of any other letter. Unlike these two, the third has no greeting, but its conventional signature and date readily place it with Norris's letters as well.

Last, five fragments, evidently parts of letters, seem worthy of consideration as examples of Norris's correspondence. This new edition will include them, not just because they represent informal efforts by a writer whose signature continues to be rare, but also because each distinctively contributes to Norris Studies. One early fragment, for example, appears in facsimile, as part of Ernest Peixotto's memoir of Norris entitled "Romanticist Under the Skin," in the *Saturday Review of Literature* of 15 May 1933. However, all editors have ignored this fragment, even when they have reminded us that Norris, in Walker's words, "occasionally illustrates his letters with sketches in the margin"; aside from this fragment to Peixotto, the only other letter containing a "sketch" of any kind is a well-known one to Marcosson which ends with a line drawing of a revolver as part of its signature. Thus, this new edition resurrects this fragment. Indeed, the presentation of all five fragments helps achieve as comprehensive a record as possible of Norris's correspondence. Even though in themselves they are incomplete, in conjunction with other letters they flesh out the biographical picture of Norris available to us. Like the publishing agreements, the *Phi Gamma Delta* contributions, and the student petitions, these fragments make their most consequential impact on the study of Norris and his work if treated as letters, rather than as ephemera which happen to be by Norris.

Some Norris items, on the other hand, clearly should not be regarded as letters. The formal contracts between Norris and his publishers fall into this category. Two other items, part of Walker's work, have been excluded from this new edition. Norris's reader's report on "Aida of the Coal Mines" is dismissible as an example of regular office procedure. Walker also included what he terms "the long news letter written . . . during the Spanish-American War," or "News Gathering at Key West"; yet the earlier appearance of this piece as "On the Cuban Blockade" in 1914, in the *New York Evening Post*, effectively removes it from consideration as a letter.

Deciding to omit these items is not difficult, for none looks like nor was any intended to be a letter. But, what to do with the inscriptions which Norris wrote in presentation copies of his works is another matter entirely. Are they, or are they not, letters? Walker thought so, at least for some: his edition contained four of them because they "reveal some detail concerning the writing of a Norris novel." Nearly fifteen years later, Katz accepted Walker's judgment, adding one more

inscription in his *A Frank Norris Collection* (1970) to the established canon of Norris letters. Curiously, however, only a year earlier Katz had rejected inscriptions when tallying published letters in "Frank Norris Replies," in which he presented a recently discovered letter. Though deciding which way to turn on this issue is difficult, an editor can make a solid case for including all known inscriptions in a volume of Norris's letters for several reasons. First, they were autograph communications designed to perform an epistolary function. In the second place, the inscriptions have additional value as they cast Norris in the new light of grateful debtor. He apparently felt a need to discharge his obligations, whether literary or otherwise, and considered his books good return for services rendered or friendship extended. That the inscriptions show the rather wide extent of Norris's personal acquaintance with *literati* and other contemporary figures provides a third justification for their inclusion. Fourth, since Walker published five inscriptions — the famous one to L.E. Gates, Norris's Harvard English professor, included — should not all others in the interest of consistency and completeness be presented? Many new inscriptions, finally, contain exactly the kind of information which apparently governed Walker's decision to publish those he did: they extend our knowledge of the writing of his novels; certainly these also merit publication. Despite these weighty arguments, however, with the exception of the long expression of gratitude to Gates, inscriptions are not letters *per se*. They properly "belong" with Norris's correspondence, of course, but their rightful place is in an addendum of the new edition where they may be consulted as helpful adjuncts to the letters themselves.

Besides judging what to retain and discard in an edition of Norris's letters, a third problem, by far more difficult as noted earlier, is selecting a copy-text for the letters which will be included. Manuscript forms, of course, have primary authority; and, fortunately, for ninety of 122 Norris letters a manuscript has survived. Either the original or a photocopy of each of these is now in the magnificent Frank Norris Collection developed by Hart at the Bancroft Library. In addition, the Bancroft possesses copies of eleven other holograph letters the originals of which have now been lost. Despite the rather peripatetic past of some of these holographs, then, a great many are available and present no editing difficulties beyond Norris's irregular punctuation, capricious capitalization, and unique spelling.

Far more challenging are the remaining twenty-one letters which derive either from published sources, from typed copies transcribed from originals which no longer exist, or from both. The first division, letters only available in published sources, comprises thirteen. The absence of originals for these allows the editor no choice: perforce he must employ the printed texts. When different printed texts of the same letters exist, as with those offered by Marcossou, the editor must select the most authoritative, which, in Marcossou's case, seem to be those in *Adventures in Interviewing*.

As for those letters deriving from transcriptions, again the editor's decision is fairly obvious: the existence of neither a holograph nor a printed version mandates the use of the only text available. Single letters to Norris's college friend, Eleanor Davenport, and to his journalistic colleague, James F. J. Archibald, and two business notes to his co-worker Arthur Goodrich on the staff of *World's Work* constitute this second group of non-holograph letters. Walker acquired a copy of each of these while writing *Frank Norris: A Biography* (1932), transcribed them for use in the book, and returned the originals to their respective owners who subsequently lost them.

Finally, three letters have been both published and transcribed by Walker as well as by Peixotto who used them as the focus of his article written during the revival of interest in Norris in the early Thirties. Peixotto, however, omitted certain passages

which Walker preserved. Although Peixotto undoubtedly authorized these omissions in his paean to Norris encouraging the continuance of a long overdue rekindling of interest in a departed but talented writer, the cuts eliminated significant biographical data; Norris's familiar impetuosity appears more clearly in the transcriptions than in Peixotto's article which considerably diminished it. Using the transcriptions as copy-text, therefore, results in a return to sources closer to their originals as well as in a recovery of primary data.

A final puzzle more prevalent in Norris's letters than in those of many other writers involves ordering them properly. Since Norris either fails to date many letters or supplies only abbreviated headings such as "Saturday" or "Friday, A.M.," charting the probable sequence of his letters sometimes rests on informed guesswork at best — guesswork which may lead to conclusions often at variance with long accepted biographical commonplaces about Norris's life. For instance, Walker states in his biography, and subsequent critics have agreed, that Norris spent two months researching *The Pit* in Chicago during the early spring of 1901, that he and Jeannette then journeyed to San Francisco for a vacation, also of two months, and that they ultimately completed their vacation on the shores of Greenwood Lake in New Jersey where they spent an idyllic final three months. But Norris's extant letters divulge that he could not have left New York before 15 February, when he writes a letter to *Youth's Companion* directing that future correspondence be sent to his publisher, and that almost certainly he had returned permanently to New York by 19 July, when he requests aid from former colleague Ida Tarbell in locating a map of Africa. If this is the case, the Norrises' time away from New York, whether spent in research or on vacation, was shorter than has been previously realized. Once this had been discovered, placing the scantily dated letters from this period in proper order becomes a more manageable process.

But after deciding what are and are not letters, after establishing copy-texts for those selected, after determining their correct sequence, the largest and potentially most interesting issue for both editor and reader remains: what do the letters tell us about Norris? Only intensive reading of and research about them will provide adequate answers to this questions, but a few suggestions may be in order here. In the first place, the letters challenge standard biographical assertions about Norris, such as length of his leave from New York in 1901, or the accepted pronouncement that he did not either enjoy writing *The Pit* or consider it worthwhile as a novel, or the theory that he never cared about financial matters until during his approaching fatherhood.

Norris's correspondence also naturally leads to a new view of his personality, as manifested in the letters. Instead of merely a well-delineated portrait of Norris as energetic but undisciplined writer, given to whimsical exchanges with old friends, they also reveal cameos of other Norrises — the social charmer who capitalizes on acquaintances shamelessly in order to advance his career; the compliant employee, content to abide by the restrictions of a job and the decisions of superiors even when he disagrees with those decisions as in the case of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*; the workaday professional, constantly writing to editors of major journals, such as Mark A. Howe of *Youth's Companion* to peddle a Cuban article, Richard Watson Gilder of *Century* to sell "A Lost Story," and Edward Livermore Burlingame of *Scribner's* in a vain attempt to place "Dieing Fires," as well as to reviewers and others who could promote his work; the wise advisor, a writer whose success allows him to impart counsel to suppliants; the protean artist, able to adjust his written comments about his past to the demands of his audience, whether the boyish Marcossou or the established Howells, the exuberant Lummis or the untrustworthy Richards; the successful belletrist in a position so well entrenched that he can afford to request an

author as popularly secure as Edwin Markham to intercept yet another proposed article on the theme of Norris's "origin-history-and-development"; and the affectionate family man whose love for his wife and child are incontrovertible.

Finally, the existence of one hundred twenty-two letters and forty-one inscriptions ought to prophesy a more positive future for Norris scholarship. If a little less than two years' search uncovered twenty-three new letters and thirty new inscriptions, surely others still await discovery. Where, for example, are the letters supposedly written to Norris's "lost love" Viola Rodgers, or those to his family, or others to the Davenports, or James G. Huneker who told Mencken he had received many, or letters to Frederic Taber Cooper and Thomas Beer both of whom had been recipients according to Charles Norris, or the "several" notes which Goodrich received, as recorded by Walker? What of letters to other fraternity brothers besides Wright? Contact with still living children of Seymour Waterhouse has yielded a mine of Norris material, including a new letter, several photographs, a drawing by Norris, and a few inscriptions. Would a similar situation obtain for descendants of Edward Selfridge, Albert Houston, or George Gibbs? The papers of S.S. McClure, Dreiser, various Chicago writers, Doubleday, and Grant Richards also need thorough examination for letters as well as other material, not to mention collections in major libraries. Work in the Bancroft itself, a library sedulously and frequently combed by Norris scholars, unearthed an early letter to a San Francisco acquaintance, three publishing agreements, a new petition, a fragment, two notes to Jeannette, and many inscriptions. Do other libraries hold like treasure?

As these leads are followed and new material is found, our understanding of Norris, his life, and his work, will probably continue to change; it will certainly increase. That is the objective of new edition of his letters. This edition, though far more complete than earlier work, hardly represents an end, therefore. Instead, it will perhaps promote even more attention for a still neglected writer.

Frank Norris and *The Wave*: 1894

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André Poncet's 1976 dissertation, "Frank Norris (1870-1902)" (Université de Paris IV) radically departed from the pattern established by other bibliographies through the mid-1970s. He attributed hundreds of new *Wave* pieces to Norris; Walker, Gaer, Lohf and Sheehy, Pizer, Katz, and Morace — none of whom might be accused of timidity — suddenly appeared rather conservative in contrast to the ambitious and daring Poncet. Whether right or wrong in each of his attributions, Poncet thoughtfully challenged many established notions about Norris, the kind of person he was and the kind and quantity of work he did for *The Wave*; he called into question a good many matters which once seemed explained to everyone's satisfaction. He also made it necessary to widen the scope of inquiry *vis à vis* how much of *The Wave* requires close scrutiny in the search for writings by Norris; for he pushed back the date at which Norris became an active contributor. Poncet has him regularly producing copy beginning in July, 1895, rather than in April, 1896. His Norris, thus, does not enjoy the hiatus between the Harvard experience and the reportorial jaunt to Africa that Norris Biography has long allowed him.

To produce a complete edition of Norris' *Wave* writings now requires that one start surveying the earlier issues on the assumption that Poncet may be correct. Perhaps Norris did begin earlier. Thus a reel of the 1894 *Wave* went onto the microfilm reader; and, column by column, I examined each

issue. Now ready to move into 1895 (and prepared to view the pre-1894 issues later), I can offer the reassurance that no paragraphs on social doings, no short story, and no essay, interview or book review was by Frank Norris. Not even one paragraph was a candidate for attribution.

Along the way, two pieces about Norris did appear, both of which will be of interest to Norris biographers. The writer signing himself "The Witness" offered them in the "Splashes" feature. The first appeared on page 4 of the 31 March issue, following a description of a reception given at Berkeley's Stiles Hall. It reads:

The second entertainment was the "Low Jinks" given by the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity at its clubhouse, near Stiles' Hall. Frank Norris was the leader of the jinks, and had prepared a distinctly amusing programme, somewhat on the order of that in vogue at the "De Young Mardi Gras entertainment." Among the amusements furnished was a musical parody of "Romeo and Juliet," which proved especially good. Character skits and banjo specialities formed a rather laughable feature. The programmes were very long yellow affairs, somewhat on the order of circus bills, printed in staring black letters. There were many there who intended going to the [Stiles Hall] reception afterwards, but who were so much interested that they remained, while those who first attended the reception voted the jinks infinitely more amusing. After the programme came dancing and refreshments. Rosy-hued dawn was appearing in the heavens ere the merry crowd dispersed.

The second, on page 3 of the 19 May issue, is more important, given what appears the still-unfolding story of Norris-as-actor. On 16 May, two days before Myron Wolf, Jessica Peixotto, E.A. Selfridge, Frank M. Todd, Harry M. Wright, and Benjamin Weed received their degrees while classmate Norris did not, the show still went on with him in it:

The funniest part of the Skull and Keys performance was the fact that the boys made their own costumes with marvelous results in lace and dazzling effects in embroidery. Really, the whole thing was well done. [W.S.] Gilbert's bright farce comedy, "Engaged," cleverly interpreted to the last minor character, and the actors enthusiastically encouraged by a brilliant and friendly audience. Frank Norris was a tremendous success and blushing responded to innumerable recalls, which were offered also to Douglas Waterman, who was immensely clever as "Belinda," and gotten up in a most lovely manner. Decidedly a society house — Oakland and San Francisco both, in best gowns, white ties, and the most amiable of moods. Everyone, I think, knew his neighbor, and a little ripple of sympathy ran from tier to tier, giving an inspiring and electric quality to the vociferous applause, which scarcely permitted the boys to make a hit before bursting out afresh. The Crookers, Dimonds, Kittles and Addison Mizner were on one side of the nave, the Prathers, Clements, Scotts, Mastens, Garber and Millers grouped at the other — and the flowers went showering down on the stage from every box and chair. Supper afterward at half a dozen houses, on both sides of the Bay, and the Skull and Keys, "wreathed with flowers and garlanded with smiles" was appropriately feted and sent away to dream of histrionic triumphs of the future.

While it was known that Norris was in this play because of a surviving program at the Bancroft, how well he performed is a new datum. Thus we have another installment to the story of Norris the Thespian told by Don Graham in "Frank Norris, Actor," Book Club of California's *Quarterly News-Letter*, 41 (1976), 38-40.

A Publication of the Frank Norris Society, Inc.
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