

ABSTRACT

Harry S. Warren. COLONEL FREDERICK AUGUSTUS OLDS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM OF HISTORY (Under the direction of Dr. John Tilley), Department of History, April, 1988.

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into the life of Colonel Frederick Augustus Olds and the early development of the North Carolina Museum of History. It is also to show the state of museums during the first quarter of the twentieth century and the evolution of the museum idea in North Carolina.

In order to understand the man, an overview of the politics, social history and economics of the times is necessary. Olds is also put into perspective by comparing his museum work to that in the other museums of the time. Each of the four chapters covers a well defined period in his life and tells how he was influenced by the local, state and national events that were occurring around him. This story is based on correspondence, newspaper articles, government documents, interviews and numerous published works.

Thus, Chapter One focuses on Olds's early years and the direction of southern thinking following the Civil War. The following chapter discusses the growing southern pride, some of the men responsible for the development of that pride, and

how Olds was affected by them. The final two chapters look at the first three decades of the North Carolina Museum of History, then known as the Hall of History, and how Olds developed the collection while becoming one of the best known men in the state. That story is set against the background of the fast-changing technology and museum practices of the twentieth century.

Anecdotes about Olds's involvement with the newspaper business; his love for people, especially children; his family; and his emergence as one of the best known and most colorful North Carolinians of his time reveal his personality and philosophy.

COLONEL FREDERICK AUGUSTUS OLDS AND
THE FOUNDING OF THE NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM OF HISTORY

A Thesis

Presented To

the Faculty of the Department of History
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in History

by

Harry S. Warren

April 1988

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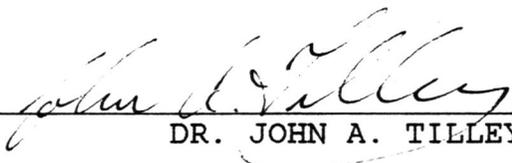
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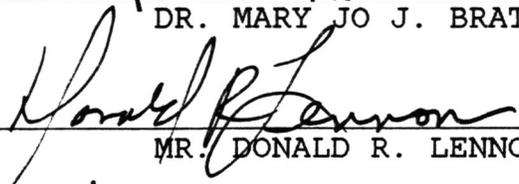
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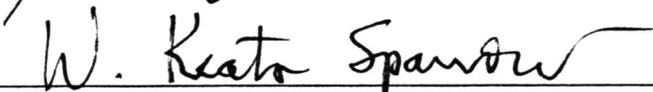
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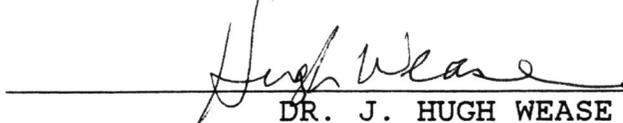
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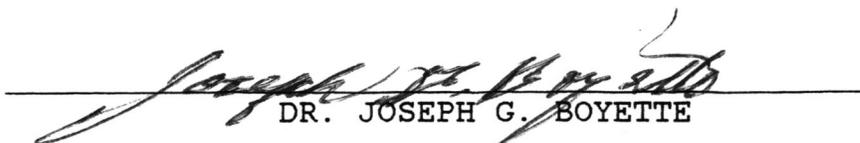
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INTRODUCTION

Ten years before his death, a newspaper article in The News and Observer proclaimed that Frederick Augustus Olds "has been an active man." An examination of the facts supporting that 1925 headline quickly shows how accurate that summation was.

At age twenty he enlisted as a private in the State Guard. This satisfied the fever for the military he had acquired as a child who, because of his youth, was unable to participate in the Civil War. His military career helped to expand his horizons and develop his confidence. It also provided one of his most unforgettable lessons about the importance of preserving historical artifacts.

Olds entered professional life as a newspaper correspondent at the age of twenty-four. This path led him to a position as the first city editor of The News and Observer in 1880. Through his career as a newspaperman he promoted the need for preserving and the reasons for appreciating the artifacts of North Carolina's history to the point where it became his passion.

His newspaper and museum careers took him to every county in North Carolina and introduced him to thousands of people. He wrote hundreds of newspaper articles about

people, places, and events in North Carolina's past, and guided at least two hundred thousand people through the streets of Raleigh, showing them points of interest and curiosity around every corner. He was also active in organizing groups of young boys and girls whom he escorted to the state's mountains and beaches every year. Frederick Olds became a much beloved man in Raleigh, indeed throughout the state, for his efforts and was formally recognized for his contributions to the City of Raleigh in 1925 when he was voted "Citizen of the Year" by the people of the capital city.

His greatest satisfaction, however, came earlier, in 1902, when the Hall of History was established. Today the Hall of History survives as the North Carolina Museum of History and serves as a monument to its founder. A state historical marker outside the museum gives Frederick Olds full credit for founding the institution -- but it hardly tells the whole story. It does not mention the thirty thousand artifacts he collected during his life. There is not enough room on the marker to mention the evolution of the museum idea in North Carolina, nor can it make reference to the fact that Fred Olds had begun collecting artifacts a full twenty years before the Hall of History was established. The historical marker cannot begin to explain the personality of this foresighted gentleman or his famous enthusiasm for the preservation of history.

Fred Olds, who in his later years was affectionately known as "Colonel Olds" because of his military activities, is not as well regarded by modern scholars and historians as he was by his contemporaries. This lack of appreciation is understandable. Colonel Olds, though not the originator of the cliché, "Never let a fact get in the way of a good story," could have been its creator; that was his style. His creative approach toward history has led many modern professional historians to categorize the colonel as either an eccentric collector or one whose work cannot be trusted. In the strict sense of scholarly work these charges cannot be denied, and Colonel Olds, despite all his good intentions, must stand guilty of the charge because his collecting methods did not conform to modern standards.

However, it can be said in Colonel Olds's defense that he never claimed to be a scholar. He was simply a lover of history -- North Carolina history in particular, but in a general way just history, the study and preservation of the past.

Although Colonel Olds did not take the time to document and footnote the history he propagated, he did leave behind an extensive "paper trail," which documented his life from 1853 to 1935. His own publications number in the hundreds, and scores of official reports, newspaper articles and letters reveal his own personal history. Primary resource material is abundant, the most helpful being corre-

spondences from the Fred A. Olds Papers, the North Carolina Historical Commission Biennial Reports: numbers one through seventeen, U.S. Census Reports, records of the State Guard, the North Carolina Historical Commission Collection, and Raleigh city directories. Newspapers played a large part in the research for this thesis and are represented by editions from across North Carolina. The News and Observer, however, follows Olds throughout much of his life and offers more key information than any other newspaper. Relatively little of this thesis is based on secondary sources. The most helpful of these were books such as Museum Masters by Edward Alexander and Material Culture Studies in America by Thomas J. Schlereth. Magazines and journals used include The State, The North Carolina Historical Review, Carolina Comments and The North Carolina Booklet. These sources yielded ideas about where further research should be conducted as well as some valuable information.

This paper intends neither to glorify Colonel Frederick Augustus Olds nor to make him out to be the scholar he never was. The purpose of this thesis is simply to give a documented account of his life. A school has been named for him, trees have been planted in tribute to his efforts, and exhibit halls have been named in his memory. Yet no substantial study has examined his career, his accomplishments, or his contributions to North Carolina history and the North Carolina Museum of History in particular. While he may

be unappreciated by some and laughed at by others, his achievements cannot be denied. He did in fact establish the Museum of History, he did begin collecting artifacts on a massive scale, he did start museum education and he did promote the concept of history's value (with greater fanfare than anybody in North Carolina had ever done before). To this extent the staff of the North Carolina Museum of History can thank Colonel Olds for his untiring efforts to establish a history museum, and all lovers of North Carolina history can be grateful for his devotion and work.

This paper will approach the topic in the manner of an historical overview, with an emphasis on the last thirty-five years of Olds's life. Four chapters will take the reader through his eighty-two years in North Carolina.

Chapter One of this paper is brief, and covers Olds's life from his birth, in 1853, through his marriage in 1878. Chapter Two deals with two subjects simultaneously: the development of the museum idea in North Carolina and Fred Olds's growing love for and fascination with history. His newspaper career played an important role in both developments. That will be examined, as will his involvement in the State Guard.

Chapter Three introduces the major milestone of Colonel Olds's career, the opening of the Hall of History. It also reviews the growth of the artifact collection, the educational activities of Colonel Olds, and the development

of the Hall's role in interpreting and preserving state history in the years from 1902 until 1914. Personal tragedy also struck Colonel Olds during this time with the death of his wife and his two sons. How these events affected his life is also discussed in Chapter Three.

The final chapter examines the last quarter of Olds's life from 1914 until his death in 1935. It includes the opening of the new Hall of History, the continued growth of collections, exhibits, education, and visitations at the Hall, Olds's travels and personal appearances, his selection as "Citizen of the Year," his reputation as historian and eccentric, his declining health and eventual death, and the enduring legacy he left behind.

CHAPTER I

UNCERTAIN BEGINNINGS

Frederick Augustus Olds loved to tell a good story. He delighted in taking mundane facts and transforming them into a romantic tale to titillate his audience. He developed this style into a trademark over the course of his career and, although his weaving of fact and fiction makes for a colorful character to document, it also creates a sizeable problem in determining what is true.

Take, for example, the year of his birth. Three dates, 1853, 1854 and 1857 were recorded as being the correct date. All dates are supported by primary resource material.¹

The place of Olds's birth cannot be pinpointed with any greater accuracy than the year he was born. Once more a variety of places including North Carolina, New York, and Connecticut are substantiated by primary source materials.² Olds himself used all these dates and places interchangeably during his life, and one sometimes feels that he never spoke of the same birthplace twice. Once, in one of his more inspired moments, he claimed to be "a man without a country," having been born on board a ship off the coast of Connecticut.³

Despite all the misleading statements Olds made during his lifetime, October 12, 1853 and North Carolina are best supported by primary sources as the date and place of his birth. Olds's father provided that date and place of birth for his youngest son in the 1870 U.S. Census, and Olds himself provided the same date in the 1880 Census.⁴ This example shows that an objective examination of the life of Frederick Augustus Olds requires a constant cross referencing of all primary and secondary sources.

Fred Olds's family of four consisted of his father, mother and half-brother and himself. His father, Lewis P. Olds, was successively a farmer and a lawyer with a reputation of being a political opportunist. His mother, Pauline Evans Olds, was his father's second wife. They were married in 1846, six years after her sister Amanda, Lewis P. Olds's first wife, had died.⁵ Fred Olds had one older half-brother, Glaucus E. Olds, who served in the Confederate Army.⁶ Lewis P. Olds's opportunistic nature deserves closer scrutiny because of the psychological effect it may have had on his younger son throughout his adult life.

Lewis P. Olds was a successful farmer in 1860. His total net worth was close to twenty thousand dollars and he owned eleven slaves.⁷ The Civil War must have devastated his estate: ten years later his net worth was listed as zero.⁸ It was during this ten-year period that Lewis Olds changed careers from farmer to lawyer. He held office in the Repub-

lican Reconstruction administration of William W. Holden, serving as state railroad director and as attorney general.⁹ Governor Holden, who was the only North Carolina governor to be impeached, was notorious for his nepotism. Lewis P. Olds may have had this in mind when he took Laura Holden, the governor's daughter, as his third wife in 1869.¹⁰

Lewis Olds served his governor well, raising money to assist with the defense against impeachment. Still, the governor had his suspicions about his son-in-law and attorney general. He considered Lewis Olds "a strange person" and in his letters to Laura indicated his concern for the stability of her domestic situation.¹¹

Lewis Olds's life after his term as attorney general seems to have justified Governor Holden's apprehension. Although he served one term as state senator from Wake County between 1870-1872, he was always in want of a job and money.¹² Lewis and his wife Laura remained unsettled, living in Florida, Nicaragua and St. Helena, apparently never regaining the prominence and wealth they had once enjoyed.¹³

It cannot be determined how the impressionable Frederick A. Olds was influenced by his wandering father. It is a curious fact, however, that Olds - never mentioned his father or family except in passing in any of his papers that were researched for this thesis.

It can be said conclusively that Lewis P. Olds does not turn up in any available documents of Fred A. Olds's life

after the 1870 U.S. Census. At that time Fred was still considered a member of his father's household, although second-hand accounts have him living in the care of a relative in Cary, North Carolina. These same accounts also suggest that Olds received the equivalent of a high school education while living in Cary and that he eventually attended the Virginia Military Institute.¹⁴ His enrollment at VMI appears to be a complete fabrication. No record of Fred A. Olds's attendance there, at any time, can be found in the Institute's files. No doubt Olds did receive some formal education during his youth but it must have been of a limited quantity. The 1870 U.S. Census reports Olds as not having attended school within the past year, so his formal education may have ended when he was fifteen or even younger.¹⁵

During the 1860s Olds was fascinated by the war and the veterans who returned to the region. He was also stimulated by historic events taking place around him. One of his favorite stories in later years was about the time he walked to Raleigh to see and hear President Andrew Johnson, who was making a short tour through his native state.¹⁶ President Johnson visited Raleigh in 1867, and was greeted with many "demonstrations of esteem" by the crowds that gathered to see him.¹⁷ At the time Fred Olds was fourteen years old.

Olds's late teen years and his early twenties are poorly documented. Some accounts suggest he moved to Raleigh in 1872 to pursue a career in the insurance business. Several writers mention this episode in his life but it has not been substantiated.¹⁸

The few known facts that can be pieced together about his life during this period present a scanty picture. The 1870 U.S. Census has Olds living with his father and family in Raleigh at Mrs. Pullen's Boarding House. Presumably his father left Raleigh, to travel, shortly after his term as state senator from Wake County ended in 1872, but Fred Olds continued to call Mrs. Pullen's Boarding House "home" at least until 1875.¹⁹

Maybe he did try his hand at selling insurance, or working at an insurance office in Raleigh. The Raleigh city directory lists him as a clerk in 1875. Olds did not seek a fast fortune. He decided to take a different path to success, one that would lead to a secure future.

While still living at Mrs. Pullen's Boarding House and working as a clerk, Olds joined the State Guard, the equivalent of today's National Guard. On August 28, 1874, before he was twenty-one, he joined the State Guard ranks as a private. He rose to the rank of corporal within three months, and remained at that rank for almost two years until he was promoted to sergeant in June, 1876. One year later he was made first lieutenant in charge of ordnance. He was also

acquiring a reputation among his superiors as a man who could be trusted and depended upon.²⁰

Once an officer, Olds rose quickly in rank. Less than two years after he had been made lieutenant he was called Colonel Olds for the first time when, on October 16, 1879 he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. He was still the ordnance officer, but his duties and responsibilities were expanded to include the entire state.²¹

As state ordnance officer Olds had a prophetic brush with North Carolina history in 1880. While tending to his housekeeping duties at the state arsenal, located on the capitol grounds in Raleigh, he was confronted with a large number of boxes containing papers, books, and other clutter that constituted a fire hazard. Olds immediately saw the danger and requested permission from Governor Thomas J. Jarvis to remove the "debris" from the arsenal. Fortunately for North Carolina history and future historians, the governor did not simply give the go-ahead but sent his secretary of state, William L. Saunders, over to the state arsenal for a first-hand inspection of the building and its contents.²²

Saunders was shocked by what he saw. The papers Olds had described as "debris" turned into one of the most significant finds of research material in North Carolina's history. There, in the damp and the dark, were the papers of colonial governors, the provincial congress, and an assort-

ment of primary source documents vitally important to the history of North Carolina. Saunders immediately recognized the value of this body of papers and pressed the governor to take action to save what was left. Jarvis responded to the call. The next day he met with Saunders and instructed him to create a resolution authorizing the trustees of the State Library to collect and publish the colonial records.²³

As ordnance officer Olds became aware of valuable historical materials waiting to be found, preserved, and used, like those stuffed in the arsenal. He also became familiar with a popular part of the material culture of the times, the military. Through his military career he became acquainted with an assortment of military hardware - guns, uniforms, and all the accoutrements associated with them. His familiarity with military items and his ability to identify their rare qualities or commonplace accessibility aided him in his future career as collector of artifacts for the Hall of History.

As ordnance officer for all of North Carolina Olds was, at a very early age, already moving in high political and social circles. Through these experiences he was able to become familiar with people in prominent positions and develop an easy disposition toward working and talking with almost anyone he met. The State Guard also provided Olds with an opportunity to travel throughout North Carolina and

occasionally to other states, which he did extensively throughout his career.

One such trip he made, as a member of the State Guard, was to attend the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.²⁴ The Centennial Exposition, with its massive buildings and enormous exhibits, was the kind of event that could motivate a person to collect artifacts, study, and admire historical treasures. The Government Building alone, under the direction of the relatively new Smithsonian Institution, covered nearly an acre of land. In it was displayed a variety of national and patriotic icons including George Washington's field gear, tents, blankets, mess kits and even his dressing mirror; the coat Andrew Jackson wore at the Battle of New Orleans; and a model of a machine designed by Abraham Lincoln to lift steamboats over river sandbars. The huge mural of the Battle of Gettysburg surrounded by national mementos certainly stirred Olds, who was not yet twenty-four years old, and provided examples of display techniques he was to employ later in the Hall of History.²⁵

His duties in the State Guard and the infrequent travels were not enough to keep Olds busy. Noted in his later years as a tireless, indefatigable person, he must have had boundless energy in his youth. Olds used this extra energy to pursue a career in the newspaper business.

"My connection with Raleigh newspaper work began on the first day of November, 1877," Olds recalled in 1904.²⁶ This may well be accurate. Newspapers researched do not produce an association of his name with a masthead until June, 1878, in a wedding announcement.²⁷ The announcement states Olds is the local editor of the Raleigh Daily News, so one may safely assume he had been in the newspaper business at least some months before that date. Apparently his enthusiastic approach and limitless energy compensated for his lack of training and experience in newspaper work.

Samuel Ashe, editor and owner of The News and Observer, hired Olds in 1880. He recalled later that Olds

had some little experience, but his natural aptitude for the business was apparent and he rapidly developed into a fine newspaper man. He was a hard worker, diligent, industrious, unflagging, and a keen searcher for the news.²⁸

His employers recognized his talent, particularly when he served as city editor for Hale's Weekly,²⁹ another Raleigh newspaper, while still city editor for the Raleigh Daily News.

The Raleigh Daily News merged with the Raleigh Observer on September 12, 1880, to form the well-known daily newspaper, The News and Observer, run by Samuel Ashe.³⁰ Olds must have seen the merger coming; he had jumped newspapers in January of that year to become city editor for the Raleigh

Observer.³¹ A few days earlier he had also resigned his post as city editor for Hale's Weekly. But one of the last articles he wrote before leaving Hale's Weekly concerned a museum: the Agricultural Museum, then in its third year of operation in Raleigh.³²

This museum was primarily dedicated to showcasing the agricultural products of North Carolina. Olds found the museum "one of the most interesting places in the city," but still wrote a critical analysis of it.³³ This analysis reveals Olds's thoughts on what made a good exhibit, what kind of organizational scheme should be used to present North Carolina in a museum and, to some extent, what he thought made a good museum.

In the museum part of the building Olds found "three aisles and on each side of these are shelves, five rows in all, divided into compartments specially for each county in the state. In these are displayed distinctive products, as much as possible." Olds reported to his readers that the "articles shown are those sent by residents of the various counties" and represented all of North Carolina from "the mountains to the coast." The museum, in a space thirty-five feet by sixty feet, was packed with foodstuffs and agricultural products. Great arrangements of cereals and grains crowned large exhibit cases, which contained an Eden of corn, sugar cane, and rice, as well as tobacco, all grown in the state. This forest of foodstuffs all stood in the

shadow of one eight-foot-tall tobacco plant from Granville County. Olds saw no problem with cramming into an exhibit space all the material the space could hold, and in fact only found fault with the counties that were poorly represented.³⁴

"There are some [counties] whose displays are not credible, their compartments being empty or nearly so," complained Olds. He listed thirty-two counties whose exhibits he thought poorly represented the agriculture of those particular regions. He felt there was no excuse for this poor representation and recommended to the people of those counties that they "see that they are represented worthily." He suggested that people from the ill-represented counties send their products and produce to the museum in care of Colonel L.L. Polk, the head of the museum. Olds assured his readers that the material would be "at once arranged in the proper place."³⁵

Many of Olds's observations about the museum became part of the philosophy that came to govern his own museum work. The crowded conditions, the insatiable appetite for more artifacts, and the light scolding he administered to people who did not supply the needed materials were all practices he employed during his own career in museums and as a collector. Even his final note, that the museum was the "best advertisement" the state could have, has a familiar ring to it.

Olds admired the way Polk had created the exhibits in the museum "without a model," but Olds himself would, to some degree, use the Agricultural Museum as his model. He wanted each county to be well represented in the Agricultural Museum and he later demanded the same thing at the Hall of History, seeking to make the museum as "complete" as possible.³⁶

Olds's personal and professional life started to take root as his ideas about how to operate a museum and display materials were developed. The work at the newspapers around Raleigh and his activity with the State Guard made for a busy life, and provided room to grow as he became an established figure around the capital city. The only essentials missing from his life were companionship and a family, both of which he found in Mrs. Kate A. Primrose, a "petite brunette beauty" from Tennessee.³⁷

The marriage was a social event for the city of Raleigh in the summer of 1878. Both the daily newspapers reported the event. Kate Primrose was considered one of the most "popular ladies in the state,"³⁸ and it was said that she and the young city editor, Olds, made one "handsome young couple." After a tour of the North, including a traditional trip to Niagara Falls, Fred and Kate settled back into life around Raleigh, becoming one of the most visible couples around the city. Kate had been married before, and had two daughters who provided Olds with the family and stability he needed to pursue his work.³⁹

Olds now had a happy home life to complement his blossoming love for North Carolina history. All he needed was a spark, an inspiration, to propel him into his life's work. He found that spark in his new employer, Samuel Ashe, at the Raleigh Observer.

When Olds jumped newspapers, from the Raleigh Daily News and Hale's Weekly to the Raleigh Observer, in January, 1880, he did not realize he was placing himself in the company of a man who would influence and help direct his career as a museum man. Upon assuming the position as city editor for the Raleigh Observer Olds also took the responsibility as the "local historian" for the newspaper, as reported by the Farmer and Mechanic.⁴⁰ Olds found himself typecast for the position. He also found the new owner of the Raleigh Observer, Samuel Ashe, a man of his own kind, energetic, driven, and enthusiastic in his beliefs, who would serve as his living example and mentor. "Captain Ashe was always a brilliant writer having a large acquaintance with public men and the world in general," wrote Olds in later years.⁴¹

The relationship between Olds and Ashe was to bear much fruit for North Carolina history. During the next six years the dynamics between these two men spawned a movement that culminated with the establishment of the first official history museum in the state.

CHAPTER II

MAN ABOUT TOWN

Samuel Ashe was impressed. He had just visited the capital of Massachusetts as a member of North Carolina's delegation to the 1883 Boston Exposition, and the things he saw there inspired him to write, "The Old South Church...rebuilt...stands as it did when . disguised Bostonians...plotted their treason."¹

The Old South Church was not the only Boston structure he sagaciously eyed. In "Impressions of Boston," an editorial he wrote for The News and Observer after his return from that city in the fall of 1883, Ashe commented on government buildings where "patriots...thundered out against oppression." He made a direct reference to Faneuil Hall, which "stands as a silent witness to the days that tried mens souls."² The staunch Southern editor of the The News and Observer was moved by the preservation and restoration of historic structures he saw in the city of Boston and these conservation efforts caught him a bit by surprise.

He had gone to Boston as a good will ambassador to promote the virtues of his native state, its products, and its people. Cases of wine, bales of cotton, bushels of rice and peanuts, 120 varieties of cut timber, and even sacks of

guano were sent to New England with the North Carolina delegation to impress the people there and to create an exhibit to "excite wonder among all those who examine it."³ Instead it was Ashe who was excited about what he saw in Boston. His excitement infected Fred Olds, city editor of his newspaper, who had by that time been employed by Ashe for almost four years.

Samuel Ashe was an opinionated man. He began his journalistic career publishing a political newspaper called The Blasting Powder, which supported the conservative Democratic Party and railed against the radical Republicans. He continued his solid support of the Democratic Party after he purchased the Raleigh Observer and later when he merged it with the Raleigh Daily News to form The News and Observer.⁴ He seldom let any of his opinions go unheard. When he returned from Boston he expounded his well-formed opinion of what he had experienced in an editorial entitled "State Exposition," which suggested that North Carolinians should emulate the fine exhibit by the Bostonians with similar endeavors of their own to promote the state.⁵ Ten days later Ashe wrote "Impressions of Boston," a direct plea to his fellow citizens to save North Carolina's historical treasures. Ashe felt that collections of "mementos" were indicative of the "Boston spirit" and these items were "honorable to Bostonians of this generation."⁶

Olds, thirty-one years old at the time of these editorials, was strongly influenced by his editor's enthusiasm. Olds had for some time been working closely with businessmen, politicians and fellow journalists interested in preserving the state's history, and their concern sparked Olds's natural inclination to study and to collect material which documented the state's heritage. He was soon taking up the call to establish accommodations to exhibit and promote the glories and traditions of the Old North State.

On October 26, 1883, Olds wrote "Some Old Relics," an article spurred by an old key. A Mr. Kruester presented The News and Observer with "a ponderous key, covered with rust and bearing the air, most antique." Mr. Kruester claimed the key was to a lock in the old capitol building, which had burned half a century before. The old capitol had contained little of value, commented Olds, except for Canova's statue of George Washington. The statue had been destroyed except for its base, curule chair, and some sculptured pieces of the pedestal. These few remnants had been saved, and were stored in the Agricultural Museum and in the state arsenal.⁷

The "ponderous key" opened the door to more than the old capitol building. Stimulated by this find, Olds suggested that since some of the remains of the Canova statue were already located in the Agricultural Museum, the museum should be opened to more historical material and thereby "make the museum even more interesting by gathering there

other curiosities." Olds saw "little trouble" in accomplishing this and sought to gather examples of Civil War uniforms, military weapons, and other articles for exhibit in the museum. The "most practical way" to collect these objects, Olds thought, was to request people to send them directly to him or arrange for him to see the objects. Olds even went so far as to offer the offices of The News and Observer as a collection depot for historic items, stating "we would be glad to hear from parties having any curiosities, or to receive the curiosities themselves." This article is the first hard evidence that Olds was making a concerted effort to collect artifacts from North Carolinians for museum use. It was followed in succeeding years by personal calls Olds made to people throughout the state requesting the donation or loan of their precious possessions. These artifacts, he said, would be used to remind people of what the state had accomplished, and should be displayed so "people from all over parts of the state and other states will see them."⁸

A month after Olds wrote the "Old Relics" article Raleigh was visited by a group of Bostonians, no doubt at an invitation made during the Boston Exposition. There was great anticipation in Raleigh of the upcoming visit, especially in the offices of The News and Observer. Stirring articles filled the pages before the group's arrival, claiming this would to be the start of a new era for the

South. Plans were made to impress the New England visitors with a picture of a progressive and strong southern economy -- one influenced by an enlightened way of thinking.⁹

Fred Olds was a member of the Raleigh welcoming party that greeted the Bostonians. The visitors were given a "hearty reception," which included a tour of the city. Olds assisted in conducting the tour, the first such account of his providing a personal tour of the capital city, a practice for which he became famous in later years. One of the first places to which he took the New Englanders was the Agricultural Museum, where they could see the state's many agricultural products and the few items of historical material, like the remains of the Canova statue of Washington, that were kept in the museum.¹⁰ The Bostonians' visit in November, 1883, was just a month after Samuel Ashe had written his "Impressions of Boston" article, and the people of Raleigh, including Olds, had numerous questions for their visitors. Inquiries into Boston history and how it was being preserved, naturally, headed the list. Soon after the Boston delegation returned to the North another series of newspaper articles appeared in The News and Observer which addressed the need for more historical exhibits in Raleigh.

"One reason North Carolina is so little known abroad is because she is so little appreciated at home," wrote William Lacy, an editorial writer, in January, 1884. He mentioned the Agricultural Museum in his article as a good

place to see products of the state, but he suggested it would serve North Carolina well to provide a space that would allow citizens to "see the beginnings -- the foundations of our present and prospective greatness." Lacy was particularly disturbed by the lack of knowledge North Carolinians had about their home state: even the origins of the place names were unknown to most residents. He pointed to the historical interest in Massachusetts, centered around Plymouth Colony, and in Virginia, where Jamestown was highly celebrated. But, argued Lacy, seldom did one ever hear a word about Roanoke or the Lost Colony, which pre-dated them both.¹¹

North Carolina was lagging far behind other states in preserving her heritage. Lacy was particularly impressed with Virginia's efforts to preserve the past; he pointed to the work of Dr. R. A. Brock, secretary of the Virginia Historical Society, who was editing historical papers and stimulating interest for that organization,¹² which had been founded in 1831.¹³ North Carolina's sister state, South Carolina, could also boast an early awareness of the need for historical preservation by claiming the oldest museum in the country at Charleston. That museum opened its doors in 1773.¹⁴

The North, too, could claim an interest in saving and promoting history. New York alone had three historical societies form during the Civil War: the Long Island Society, the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, and the

Dewitt Society.¹⁵ The Smithsonian Institution was beginning to amass a sizeable collection by the 1870s and, furthered by boxcars of materials from the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, it was becoming the most respected and imitated museum in the country.¹⁶ Ashe noted during his trip to Boston that other northern states were also involved in preservation efforts.

Lacy was certain North Carolina could and should demonstrate a historical awareness like the other states. He called for an organized effort to "cultivate...a juster appreciation of the historic value of the State -- its past glory and grand achievements."¹⁷ He recognized, from the Boston Exposition, how pride in one's state was increased by expounding its historical virtues. Vivid memories of Reconstruction and the Civil War were finally on the wane; life was returning to normal after almost a quarter century of turmoil, and the time for a revival of interest in history was at hand.

Editor Ashe echoed Lacy's sentiments in that same January 13, 1884, edition. He started his "State Pride" article "cheerfully" providing newspaper space for Lacy's article which promoted the need for more historical exhibits. He ended the article by seconding the notion that North Carolina "has much to be proud of in her history." Why had there been so much neglect of North Carolina history he asked. Ashe pointed to sectionalism within the borders of

the state as the main problem, with interests of the east being pitted against interests of the west and vice versa. This internal feuding, combined with the poor economic conditions of the countryside and lack of large North Carolina cities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, made a proper cultivation of the state's past extremely difficult. Ashe, like Lacy, felt the situation in North Carolina was changing and that the time to encourage appreciation of the state's past was now upon them.¹⁸

Ashe enumerated the people and places in North Carolina which deserved recognition. He proclaimed in his article that North Carolina had sent men to "fight in the French War up about Pittsburg, Pa., in 1754; our citizens were the first to penetrate the Alleghanies; we were behind the bold action in the days of 1765." He also named numerous nineteenth century events that were noteworthy to the state's citizens; these included the completion of Wilmington and Weldon Railroad -- longest in the world at that time -- and the battles of the state during the Civil War. He ended his argument with a plea to consider the state's history, preserve the past, and remember "men whose names should be remembered and whose deeds should not be forgotten."¹⁹

Lacy and Ashe were doing their best to provoke people's historical curiosity and interest. They had started an historical fire and the time seemed ripe to stoke it. Lacy fired off another stirring article within the week, this

one peppered with a few sarcastic jabs at the reader. "Some Reflections II" recounted trips he had made to Richmond, Virginia, and Newark, New Jersey, during the preceding year and the sights he witnessed during the trip. He found statues of Virginia's favorite sons, Jefferson, Marshall, and other early republic and revolutionary heroes, scattered around Richmond, and portraits of Virginia's governors in the state library. "Do you wonder those Virginians are proud?" Lacy asked his readers.²⁰

In New Jersey Lacy reported seeing a statue of General Philip Kearney, a Civil War general from North Carolina who had fought on the Union side during the war. Lacy sarcastically said he was, in his own way, glad the good and brave general had fought for the North because if he had been a North Carolina general "he would sleep unhonored." Lacy acidly conjectured that if Kearney's name had been remembered in his home state it would probably adorn a railroad station.²¹

Noting that the lack of attention given to the state's history was intolerable, Lacy wondered if preserving and perpetuating history was a "vain dream." He longed for the day when portraits of all the North Carolina governors and chief justices would hang in the state capitol. Lacy realized there was much work to be done and it could not be accomplished in the "spurt of a season." Rather it had to be motivated by a "love of country" that incorporated "a wise

plan and persistent effort." He appealed to southern emotions -- "they gave their blood for us...oh have they died in vain for us" -- and contended that historical preservation was "one way to educate the children."²² These pleas touched the hearts of many southerners who read them.

Fred Olds was certainly one southerner who closely read and followed Lacy's suggestions. Olds realized he had the two necessary ingredients that Lacy thought were needed to accomplish the task: a "love of country" and a personal disposition capable of "persistent effort." Olds, furthermore, incorporated into his vision of a museum, Lacy's dream of collecting pictures of all the North Carolina governors and using artifacts to educate children.²³

Interest in North Carolina's history was starting to gain momentum, but the excitement was only temporary. Later that year the matter apparently was completely forgotten by the columnists of The News and Observer. Their attention was diverted to other pressing matters, such as the upcoming state exposition scheduled for the fall of 1884. Any action to collect and preserve historical items would have to be done by individuals committed to such a goal.²⁴

Olds, motivated by the Lacy and Ashe articles, decided to start collecting historical material related to North Carolina. He had been thinking about establishing a collection since 1883, when he wrote the column about the

"ponderous key" to the old state capitol building, and he may have begun collecting at that early date. Olds later claimed 1885 to be the year he "engaged" in collecting artifacts.²⁵ But he also stated in a short autobiographical sketch that "the work of collecting historical material began in 1887,"²⁶ a date reprinted in subsequent newspaper accounts about his career.²⁷

Olds found his employment at The News and Observer to have its advantages and disadvantages for artifact collecting. As city editor for the newspaper he came into contact with war veterans, politicians (who were often war veterans), businessmen, and the general public, all of whom were potential donors. Working in his official capacity, Olds could arouse people's interest about history, gain their good favor, offer the newspaper's office as a collection depot, and promote the idea of collecting and preserving "old relics."²⁸ Fortunately he was among friends who supported and encouraged the work of creating a collection.

Unfortunately, the time required to do his job left Olds little opportunity to collect outside his office. The demands of publishing a daily newspaper created a lot of pressure, and Olds admitted in later years that it took "some hustling" to get the newspaper out each day on schedule. He had a variety of duties, including writing the city news, covering activities of the state government, compiling news

from around the state received via the telegraph service, and answering correspondence. He was also responsible for some of the "detail work" for editor and newspaper owner Ashe, and working through the night was a regular requirement of the job.²⁹

As Olds's collection and thirst for collecting grew, he found more time was needed. Doing a thorough job of collecting historical material did not fit well into the schedule of a daily newspaper. Proper collecting required a schedule that was easier to control.

Fred Olds's name appeared as city editor of The News and Observer for the last time on November 6, 1886.³⁰ Three years after suggesting that a collection of "old relics" be established to preserve the state's history, two years after the articles by Lacy and Ashe, and one year after he claimed that he had started collecting privately, Olds was free to begin collecting artifacts in earnest.

Olds retained his ties with The News and Observer as a free-lance correspondent for that newspaper and several other newspapers throughout the state. He also ran a news bureau out of Raleigh. He contributed to the Charlotte Observer and the Wilmington Messenger, among other publications, for the next forty years. During that time he wrote hundreds of articles and established himself as one of the leading journalists in North Carolina.³¹

Travel, business, and history were the three general categories addressed by Olds's newspaper articles. He developed a reputation for fair and competent writing and his editors depended on his consistent, regular contributions to their newspapers. Sometimes Olds's extracurricular activities would force him to miss his deadlines. On one occasion he failed to send his regular column, "Pithy Locals," to the Wilmington Messenger because he was attending celebrations in New York for the centennial of the Constitution.³² The editor complained for several days that Olds was not sending in his articles but told his readers that he (the editor) had been assured by Olds that the column would be filed. He finally gave up. His explanation read, "We suppose that our readers must forgo the pleasure of a Raleigh letter until our correspondent returns from New York."³³

Despite such lapses Olds became one of North Carolina's most respected newspaper correspondents during the next twenty years.³⁴ He covered newspaper stories in and out of North Carolina and sometimes witnessed history being made or contributed to the making of it. One account identified him as a passenger on land developer Henry Flagler's first railroad train traveling to the new Florida vacation land,³⁵ while another account gives Olds credit for sending the first Western Union telegraph message from a train in North Carolina.³⁶ He also wrote closer to Raleigh, sometimes about

historical topics, to a grateful readership. "Please accept sincere thanks for having published that summary of the brilliant achievements of my old brigade," James H. Lane wrote to Olds in 1893.³⁷

The new schedule he followed as a freelance correspondent was much more agreeable to Olds. It was a rewarding job that allowed him the freedom to pick and choose his topics, travel around the country, and control his schedule to fit his own personal preferences and professional interest. One such interest led to his involvement with the State Guard, an organization that took up an increasing amount of his time.

When Olds resigned from The News and Observer he had been in the State Guard for twelve years. He had been promoted to full colonel in 1885, about a year before he left his job as city editor for The News and Observer. He also served as quartermaster general in charge of all ordnance for the state, a job that included its own work and travel demands.³⁸

Sometimes the demands were completely unexpected. For instance, following the east coast's most devastating earthquake at Charleston, South Carolina, on August 31, 1886, Olds sent tents to the disaster victims. "Thanks for tents which are vastly needed," read a telegram from Charleston's mayor to Quartermaster General Olds. A handwritten note on

the telegram's corner indicated these were the first tents to be sent to the earthquake victims.³⁹

Other responsibilities as ordnance officer were more mundane. He kept the State Guard's men supplied with weapons, tools and various military supplies and arranged their housing. These military chores could often be time consuming, and kept him moving at a fast pace.

When Wilmington citizens proposed that the state of North Carolina establish a permanent site for summer encampments, Olds was sent to investigate the possibility. Olds, accompanied by the governor on a whirlwind tour of the proposed land offered by the Wilmingtonians, arrived at Wilmington at 8:30 a.m. on June 20, 1889, and, after a quick breakfast, the party proceeded to Wrightsville Beach by rail to inspect four tracts of land. They decided on a tract called Summer Rest, a bluff on the mainland consisting of a hundred acres, overlooking a salt marsh. The governor, Olds, and the rest of the inspection party could not return directly to Raleigh; first they had to partake of some southeastern North Carolina hospitality. Before they caught the 7:30 p.m. train from Wilmington back to Raleigh a huge oyster roast was held on the estate of Wilmington tycoon Pembroke Jones.⁴⁰

After the site had been selected Olds had to supervise the construction of facilities for the State Guard. There was not enough time to construct all the buildings

needed for a permanent post, so Olds returned to Wilmington to insure that sufficient housing was available to accommodate the State Guard. As it turned out the new site could not be cleared of the trees in time to complete the work. He then decided to use the grounds of a former campsite, Camp Latimer, which was ready and available; but even on cleared grounds much work had to be done. A bath house for a hundred men, a kitchen, and sufficient outhouses had to be built within several weeks.⁴¹ There was some concern locally whether it could be done until Olds arrived on the scene and put the people's concerns to rest. The Wilmington Morning Star reported on July 10 that "Colonel Olds is a remarkably fine pedestrian. His onerous duties keep him constantly on the go, but the task he has performed within the past few days stands as a monument to his indefatigable zeal."⁴² The "onerous duties" were completed in time for the State Guard's summer encampment, and Olds stayed with the bivouac until the end to insure all moveable materials (tents, tent poles, and the like) were properly removed.⁴³

This type of involvement with the State Guard would have been impossible had Olds remained a city editor. His new schedule, however, allowed him time to attend to his military duties, which included reviewing state regulations, writing general orders, and overseeing State Guard activities throughout the state.⁴⁴ In fact, the State Guard job

required more time than Olds had to give, even with his new journalistic independence. Olds had become an invaluable asset to a smooth running State Guard -- too much so for Olds, who needed more time to call his own. Consequently, he resigned from the State Guard in 1891. Governor Thomas Holt accepted the resignation with "deep regret to the entire guard, I might say the entire state," and then went on to praise Olds, commending him for his efficiency and conduct plus "the readiness you have always shown to obey all orders."⁴⁵

By joining the State Guard Olds satisfied a craving to join the military which he carried with him most of his life. The military was his first love. He had been too young to participate in the Civil War, but he was fascinated by his half-brother Glaucis's participation in it and the exciting tales of the veterans with whom he had become acquainted. He could not completely let it go, and eventually his urge to serve manifested itself again in 1897 when he re-enlisted. Olds served through the short Spanish-American War and for two years afterward, resigning for a second and final time in 1900 with the rank of brigadier general.⁴⁶

Olds, by the 1890s, was a well-known person around Raleigh. He was the friend of business people and the general public knew him through his newspaper work. He was at ease with many politicians throughout the state because of his service as ordnance officer for the State Guard. His

prominence made Olds a logical choice to represent Raleigh and the state at expositions held around the world. Governor Elias Carr named him a delegate to the Exposition of Industries and Fine Arts held at Mexico City;⁴⁷ he was appointed commissioner for North Carolina in the Interstate and West Indian Exposition at Charleston, South Carolina;⁴⁸ and he traveled to Havana, Cuba, to report on the aftermath of the Spanish-American War.⁴⁹ Olds was also appointed as assistant marshal for the Raleigh Centennial Celebration held in 1892, a post he no doubt held with great pride.⁵⁰

The 1880s and the 1890s were some of the happiest years in the life of Fred A. Olds. He was well-known and well-respected, had the ability to control his own work schedule, and kept company with the state's governors. These factors all served to boost his self esteem and place him in a favored social position which was enhanced even further by his role as a family man.

Fred and Kate Olds, married in 1878, were now the parents of two sons, Frederick Charles and Robert Douglas Olds.⁵¹ The family lived in downtown Raleigh, at 11 Salisbury Street, where it had resided since 1883.⁵² The Olds family was a visible part of the local community, Fred with his newspaper and State Guard work, and his wife Kate with her involvement in numerous local charities. She was, in fact, to become as well-known as her husband during the 1890s through her benevolent work and her association with a

relatively new historical organization, the United Daughters of the Confederacy.⁵³

Career successes and personal happiness set the stage for Olds to develop fully his interest in collecting artifacts and studying history. Olds had been accumulating historical material since 1885 and by the 1890s had been given a "small room" in the Agricultural Museum, a room that he quickly "filled with collections from various counties."⁵⁴ His collecting work did not go unnoticed. In 1888 Governor Scales wrote to Olds informing him of a letter he (Scales) had received "asking for some relics to be sent to another state, I told the writer you were way ahead of him and you wanted all the relics he had or could get for North Carolina." The governor also gave Olds encouragement to continue to collect by sending him a letter from a "glorious Confederate." The governor hoped this letter would further stimulate Olds to "collect relics...from the old state of North Carolina which I know is dear to you."⁵⁵

Olds was beginning to amass a private collection and develop a reputation as a collector. As the owner of original research material he was often contacted by people who requested his assistance in locating information about their ancestors.⁵⁶

Olds was collecting by means of private solicitation, private donations, and help from his friends, including Governor Scales. Olds would even make occasional purchases

of historical material, such as the Trueblood family will, which he "bought in a junk shop."⁵⁷

Olds's collecting efforts were met with approval and encouragement from community leaders. His efforts even had unofficial approval from the state, which chose to overlook the fact that Olds was using a state-owned building, the Agricultural Museum, to house his private collection.

By the 1890s, it was logical for people in the South to begin thinking about preserving their heritage. The region was finally recovering from economic devastation and bitter Civil War memories. The 1860s and 1870s had been devoid of any groups attempting to preserve and stimulate interest in the state's history. By the 1880s people were at least talking about the preservation of history, but it wasn't until the 1890s that the first historical organizations in the state were recognized.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy (U.D.C.) was formed in 1894.⁵⁸ This group of women, while romantic in character and reveling in the glories of the South, served as a support group with a common interest in preserving the past. They made some efforts to collect relics and in at least one city, Wilmington, they established a local museum.⁵⁹ More importantly they established a network of people throughout the state who were interested in stimulating discussion and learning more about history.

Women connected with the U.D.C. were often interested in other aspects of history and the role North Carolinians played in it. The Society of Colonial Dames formed a state chapter in 1894⁶⁰ and a few years later in 1898 the women of Mecklenburg County formed the North Carolina branch of the Daughters of the American Revolution.⁶¹ All these groups encouraged the preservation and proliferation of North Carolina history and Fred Olds could depend on them to support and understand his interest in collecting artifacts.

The State Literary and Historical Association, formed in 1900, embraced the goals of all these historical organizations. The association stated three objectives: to promote the reading habit among the people of North Carolina, to stimulate production of literature in the state, and to collect and preserve historical material. Its members hoped to carry out these objectives in a number of ways, including establishing public libraries, forming literary clubs and "the foundation of an historical museum." The founding members were confident that "much good can be accomplished" by a few people who "earnestly endeavor to promote these purposes."⁶²

Olds joined the State Literary and Historical Association within six months after it was organized.⁶³ His private collection and reputation as an historian were well known, as his selection as the Association's chairman of the Committee on Historical Museums would indicate. The duties

of the Historical Museums Committee read like Olds's wish book. They included the promise to "place in a museum or place of safe-keeping and exhibition, all valuable historical relics and original documents which may be donated or collected, and to endeavor to discover them wherever they may be found."⁶⁴ The Historical Museums Committee also had the responsibility for artifacts collected by the Association. Those items were stored in the State Museum (the old Agricultural Museum) with the approval of the State Museum officers. The selection of Olds as the chairman of the association's Committee on Historical Museums helped ensure that the "proper officers" of the State Museum would approve of storing the artifacts in the museum.

Herbert Hutchinson Brimley, director of the State Museum, felt that Olds was the man to head the museum committee. Brimley described Olds as "the one man in North Carolina capable of throwing into this kind of work the proper physical and mental enthusiasm to make it a thorough success."⁶⁵ Brimley was North Carolina's most professional museum person in the nineteenth century. His emphatic remark about Olds was praise from a man who by 1900 had worked in state government, Raleigh, and museums for over twenty years.⁶⁶

H. H. Brimley immigrated with his family to Raleigh from England in 1880. Soon after his arrival he gained a reputation as a skilled taxidermist, and he was occasionally

employed by the state. Brimley's primary task was to prepare exhibits of North Carolina wildlife for various expositions. Soon after he constructed a large exhibit on waterfowl for the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Brimley was appointed curator for the State Museum, where he served in that capacity and as director until 1937.⁶⁷ The State Museum, which began in 1878 in a small room over a Raleigh hardware store, made significant advances under his leadership.

Brimley doubled the museum's size, and arrested a sizeable deterioration problem from which the museum's collection was suffering. He also made the museum such an interesting and noteworthy place that the annual attendance increased from four thousand in 1893 to sixty thousand by 1900.⁶⁸ The museum was staffed by a curator (Brimley) at \$1200 annual salary, an usher at \$480 and a janitor and assistant janitor at \$600 and \$208, respectively.⁶⁹ By the time the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association formed and selected Olds as chairman of its museum committee, Brimley was a significant force in the local academic and professional community. He was also well acquainted with Olds's endeavors at collecting artifacts.

Olds and Brimley had been acquainted for some years before 1900, but exactly how long these two museum pioneers knew each other and how long Olds had historical relics in the State Museum is subject to debate. A matter of controversy between the Literary and Historical Association and the

State Museum centered on the question of who was responsible for founding North Carolina's first history museum.

Professor William Louis Poteat, at a meeting of the Literary and Historical Association, claimed credit for establishing the museum, citing the association's endorsement of such an institution from the organization's inception. Brimley, who heard of Poteat's claim for the Association, fired off a powerful letter of rebuttal to Poteat and, to assure public coverage, sent a copy The News and Observer.⁷⁰

Brimley argued that North Carolina's history had been represented in the State Museum as early as 1893 by two objects, a musket from the Sharpsburg battlefield and the smokestack of the CSS Albemarle. The historical artifact collection, he said, did not expand until soldiers returning from the Spanish-American War in 1898 donated their war trophies to the State Museum. An exhibit case was built to house these artifacts, "this nest egg caused other things to be brought in even more rapidly," and in a "very short time" three additional exhibit cases of historical material were added. Brimley also asserted that the first "official" recognition of the Agricultural Museum's historical collection was included in a report he submitted to the Department of Agriculture in 1900. He chastised Poteat and the Association by saying "now this Association is nothing, if not a stickler for facts, its very existence being dependent upon the collection of facts and the dissemination

of truth." Brimley then went on to "enlighten" Poteat as to what he construed as the truth.⁷¹

It is difficult to say whether the Literary and Historical Association or the State Museum was the first to give the history museum official sanction. Brimley's assertion is suspect since the report he refers to in his letter to Poteat only mentions the possibility of establishing a "new department...of North Carolina history"⁷² in the State Museum. The matter is further complicated by the fact that the State Museum had already housed historical materials for some time, whether with official sanction or not, as established by Olds's claim that he had space in the State Museum as early as 1887.

Olds felt the entire issue was academic. He did not really care who claimed credit for first "officially" recognizing the history collection and suggesting a museum. He simply collected artifacts, publicized the need for space to arrange exhibits, and spoke of the virtues of saving and studying North Carolina history. He submitted his first report on the formation of a state history museum to the Literary and Historical Association on January 17, 1901. In the report Olds wrote that three hundred objects were now in his possession and secured for the "Hall of History." Significantly this is the first time the institution is mentioned by name. Among the first objects in the collection was a 1692 will of Jonathan Falkland of Albemarle, the Great

Seal of North Carolina, a large painting of Tryon Palace, a piano made in Raleigh about 1800, and a million-dollar Confederate States Treasury Warrant.⁷³

It is important to note that events were moving toward the ultimate end of establishing a real museum, or "Hall of History." Interest was running so high that groups were competing with each other to claim credit for it.

Raleigh was a bustling capital city of almost fourteen thousand people at the turn of the twentieth century. The fourth largest city in North Carolina, it was starting a growth spurt which would increase its population a full 50% by 1910.⁷⁴ The city had good macadamized roads, it was financially sound, and it considered itself the education and newspaper center of the state.⁷⁵ The idea of an historical museum to educate people and their children, and to enhance pride in the city and state, was a logical step to take for the citizens of Raleigh, who considered themselves in the vanguard of a progressive Southern city. An article in The News and Observer in 1900 read,

No people in the Union possess stronger state pride than North Carolinians, but no people have done less to perpetuate the glories of their state, to systematize its intellectual culture, and to give it a recognized position in the literature and history of the world.⁷⁶

The observation echoed the early 1880s editorials by Ashe and Lacy complaining that people were doing nothing to preserve the state's heritage. Unlike the earlier Lacy and Ashe editorials, this newspaper article did not question whether or not North Carolinians possessed "state pride," but instead pronounced the strength of it. The article also did not hedge on providing a solution to the problem of giving North Carolina proper recognition for its contributions to history and culture. The News and Observer newspaper article in 1900 stated,

Here [in Raleigh] should be established a great historical museum, a collection of things illustrating the life of the State from the earliest period-Colonial, Revolutionary, Antebellum, Civil War, Civil, Political, Religious, Industrial, Military, Educational. So complete should be the collections in this library and museum that any writer anywhere on the globe seeking to investigate any question concerning North Carolina could find what he wanted.

The Historical and Literary Association, the article proclaimed, would start this massive work of collecting "things" but the work, once started, "would never end."⁷⁷

North Carolina was entering a new era at the twentieth century's dawn. The 1800s saw the state successively burdened by apathy during its "Rip Van Winkle" period, consumed by the struggle of the Civil War, and trou-

bled by the strife caused by Reconstruction. Now, in 1900, new industrial and transportation technology, population shifts from the country to the city, and most importantly, a bright and progressive attitude about the state's potential were all manifesting themselves in social and political circles. Nowhere better was this new attitude demonstrated than in the arena of public education. Charles B. Aycock, North Carolina's "education governor," was elected in 1900 and soon after his election he initiated drastic improvements in the education system. Aycock said the key to North Carolina's heart and strength was "universal education."⁷⁸ He proved his commitment to education by opening one new schoolhouse almost every day of his administration.⁷⁹

Olds was well aware of changes occurring throughout the state and in Raleigh in particular. He had seen the idea of a North Carolina history museum grow from vague suggestions made in the 1880s to organized groups formally endorsing the museum concept. A history museum found strong support in the press, where it had always been a popular idea, and now a museum would fit well into the governor's scheme to enhance education in North Carolina. Olds could feel the time was near when official action and state money would come to the aid of his own collection. He reported to the Literary and Historical Association on October 22, 1901, "that space for the historical collection would probably be made in the State Museum."⁸⁰

In December 1902, the dream of a North Carolina Museum of History came true. Olds called it the Hall of History, and it occupied its own space in the Agricultural Museum. The collection Olds had started nearly twenty years before had finally found a permanent home. Who would manage this storehouse of North Carolina history? No evidence suggests that anyone but Fred A. Olds was considered for the job.⁸¹

CHAPTER III

A "NOBLE ROOM"

The opening of the Hall of History was a milestone in the preservation of North Carolina history. Housed in the State Museum and administered by the Department of Agriculture, the Hall, formerly called the Agriculture Museum, was the first officially recognized North Carolina museum of history. On display in its own exhibit space in a tax-supported institution was the artifact collection that had been assiduously gathered by Olds during the 1880s and 1890s.¹

Olds was excited about the educational and promotional prospects of the museum. "For fully twenty years the writer Olds has hoped for such a hall, a place to show what the State has done; to make an exhibit alike pleasing and instructive, which would be susceptible of the development only limited by space," he wrote soon after the Hall opened. The exact date of the opening is questionable. Olds claimed both December 1 and December 15 as the day "work began" in the Hall.²

The Hall was definitely open to the public by December 28, 1902 when Olds proclaimed that "all who have seen it are gratified and pleased." The citizens of Raleigh had a good reason to be pleased with the Hall of History. It was a

first-class turn-of-the century museum, described by Olds as a "noble room." The Hall, one hundred feet long and forty feet wide, had a forty-foot-high ceiling made of polished pine and was filled with twenty exhibit cases made from North Carolina oak, cherry and walnut. These cases were of the most modern design and construction. A triple locking device kept the artifacts safe. Olds claimed the cases were also moth and dust-proof. "There is perfect safety for all articles no matter what material they may be," he confidently reported.³

Olds proudly stated that even though the twenty exhibit cases were full, he had enough materials to "fill a few more."⁴ While this exhibit philosophy, to display the collection's total content, is out of step with modern exhibit and curatorial work, it was the accepted method of display in 1900. Olds's methods, considered sound during this "age of collecting," were the same used by George Brown Goode, curator of the Smithsonian's United States National Museum.⁵

Museum visitors, whether at the Smithsonian or the Hall of History, viewed collections of artifacts arranged either topically or chronologically. Little interpretation was provided by the exhibit labels. Exhibits were simply study collections designed to please an audience through quantity alone.

Olds, influenced by the numerous expositions he had visited, followed the established exhibit philosophy of the time. He arranged objects into categories, or distinct his-

torical periods. Two of the most dominant collections contained Civil War relics and Indian artifacts. Other collections included a smattering of materials from Roanoke's ill-fated settlement, the Colonial and Revolutionary periods, and the Spanish-American War.⁶

The Indian life display cases contained some of the best, and most gruesome, artifacts in the Hall. Olds had gathered Indian axes representing several periods of the tool's technological development. Arrowheads, spearheads and other projectile points, pottery (including an eighteen-inch clay jar - "one of the most perfect in existence"), beads, skinning implements, eating utensils and pipes were all exhibited. "The skeleton of an Indian found in Wilkes County" and numerous skulls were also included in the Indian section.⁷

Civil War artifacts were the most diverse, bizarre and eclectic items on exhibit. Uniforms, weapons, battle flags, a Confederate prayer book and Bible, correspondence, "two minie balls taken from General Toom's body," Confederate money, shoes and candles brought into the South by blockade runners, and an assortment of other items related to the war were part of the display. Highlighting this collection were two complete uniforms, including accouterments of Confederate generals James Johnson Pettigrew and Bryan Grimes. These two uniforms, Olds observed, drew "marked attention" from visitors.⁸

Between the Indian and Civil War exhibit cases Olds placed a potpourri of commonplace and spectacular historical artifacts. One-hundred-year-old plows, "the most primitive of all cotton gins," an 1802 piano, the uniform of a Chinese soldier captured by a North Carolinian during the Boxer Rebellion, spinning wheels, guns (representing every American war), two cannon captured from the Spanish in the Phillipines, a 1760 pewter drinking cup, a butter mould and a lamp ("handmade, of iron, and very crude") were to be found in the Hall. Olds had also assembled an assortment of documents, including one signed by colonial governor Arthur Dobbs, the 1692 will of Albemarle resident John Trueblood, papers of Governor Richard Caswell, and a letter from General Robert E. Lee praising the "gallantry" of a North Carolina regiment.⁹

Virtually all the materials Olds had collected in twenty years were on exhibit. When it opened the Hall of History was already too small to provide proper exhibit and visitor space. Crowded conditions soon began to prevail, but this neither deterred Olds from collecting nor convinced him to change his display methods. "Now that the Hall of History is opened it will grow rapidly, so far as the collections are concerned," Olds told the citizens of Raleigh. He assured them that the collecting of artifacts would be "pushed." Public solicitation had always been a part of his collecting strategy, so when he "pushed" for original "arms and armor of the time of Sir Walter Raleigh" he did not hesitate to call

for some "publicly spirited" citizen to make the purchase for the Hall.¹⁰

As Olds approached his fiftieth birthday he could be satisfied that he had been successful at all his ventures. He was a respected man about town with two sons and an admirable wife, the Hall of History was finally established, and his urge for collecting was as strong as ever. One would have to deduce that Fred Olds was a happy man.

Then tragedy struck him two swift blows. First his wife died. Her death was soon followed by that of his youngest son, Douglas.

At the time of her death Kate Olds, known affectionately as "Cousin Kate," was as well known in Raleigh and North Carolina as her husband. She was an organizer of Associated Charities in Raleigh; a state officer in The King's Daughters; a member of the Raleigh Nurses Guild; president of St. Luke's Home for Old Ladies; and when she died, president of the state division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Mrs. Olds was also known and appreciated for her work with the poor and with criminals.¹¹

Mrs. Olds's death on September 8, 1904 was not totally unexpected. Earlier that year, in April, she had been involved in what the Wilmington Messenger called a "runaway accident." For five months she had teetered between recovery and relapse, but, using crutches, she continued to work with various organizations.¹² Yet her strength slowly eroded,

leaving her vulnerable to other illnesses. Even as her health declined, she remained visible around Raleigh. In fact she and her husband were seen strolling on the streets two or three weeks before she died.¹³ "I was greatly shocked to learn of the change for the worse," wrote Maggie C.D. Burgwyn to Olds the day before his wife died.¹⁴

The News and Observer reported she had finally succumbed to "acute inflammation of the stomach,"¹⁵ although one correspondent felt malaria had dealt the final blow.¹⁶ News of her death unleashed an avalanche of sympathy cards, telegrams, and letters to Olds from every corner of North Carolina, many demonstrating the Victorian flare for the romantic. "O Fred, Fred! there is nothing I can do to comfort you, for I too, am comfortless," wrote one such mourner.¹⁷

Another friend observed that Cousin Kate was "more like a mother to me,"¹⁸ while a relative wrote that Mrs. Olds was "one of the few kinfolks I cared for."¹⁹ One obituary from outside the state added that "her personal beauty was eclipsed by the beauty of her character."²⁰

Olds's deep affection for his wife was well known and her death was a severe personal setback for him. Friends noted how he "was always so kind and considerate to Miss Kate,"²¹ and that he spoke to his wife with "tenderness."²² He never remarried, and his papers give no indication that he ever considered the notion of remarriage. At age fifty, still

full of vigor and life, he must have been one of the city's most eligible bachelors.

During his wife's illness Olds had few opportunities to work at the Hall of History, and his travel was limited to the immediate vicinity of Wake County. Throughout this time he kept friends and family informed of her deteriorating condition. The Associated Charities organization complimented Olds on the work he was doing and added, "we are sure that - Mrs. Olds [sic] work is being done by you." After her death he was free once again to carry on with his endeavors at the Hall.²³

Olds thereafter resumed collecting artifacts and arousing interest in North Carolina history. In 1905 he was formally recognized for his efforts. Governor Charles B. Aycock wrote Olds thanking him for "gathering, preserving and exhibiting the valuable historical data now in the State Museum."²⁴ The Commissioner of Agriculture, Samuel L. Patterson, in whose department responsibility for the Hall of History rested, echoed the governor's praise, adding, "the Hall of History, established through the indefatigable industry and unselfish perseverance of Col. Fred A. Olds, is going to quicken a new interest in our dormant State history."²⁵

Not long after Olds received this special recognition his youngest son, Douglas, died at the age of eighteen.

Though sudden, his death came as no surprise. All his life he had been frail.²⁶

A short time before his death he had moved to Waco, Texas, to live with his brother.²⁷ The dry Texas air was less aggravating to Douglas's tubercular condition, but his health continued to deteriorate. Douglas returned to North Carolina and sought care at Southern Pines, where his father tended to his needs for two months. Little could be done for Douglas other than to make him comfortable.²⁸ Douglas Olds was the apple of his father's eye. He had helped his father collect for the Hall of History and made his father proud of him by being a young man of outstanding character. He died on March 28, 1906.²⁹

One of Douglas's girlfriends wrote Olds shortly afterwards noting "We never saw him lose his temper - or do anything or say anything - out of place - but he was always a true gentleman."³⁰ Olds brought his favorite son's body back to Raleigh and buried him beside his mother in Oakwood Cemetery. According to one account the burial scene and number of mourners were "most impressive," despite a stormy day full of heavy rains.³¹

The death of his wife and son left Fred Olds more and more to his own company. Olds's sister-in-law wrote, "How sorry I feel for your father! Douglas was still as a little child to be fettered and coddled, and now he has no one to

fill the place. When the girls [Olds's two step daughters] go back to their respective homes he will be doubly alone."³²

Olds immediately fell back to his work at the Hall of History. He continued to collect for the Hall and to promote it as a center of historical interest. At the end of 1906 he said the Hall "has taken its place very firmly as a feature of historical development -- one of those outward and visible signs which indicate a great movement." He also promised North Carolinians "greater things to come" from himself and the Hall.³³

Collecting remained the foremost item on Olds's historical agenda, as it had since the 1880s. He must have devoted the majority of his time to it for the collection grew from a mere three hundred objects in 1900³⁴ to over four thousand by 1906.³⁵ The next four years saw the collection grow at an average of over one thousand objects per year, as Olds opened the Hall to any donation or loan he could acquire.³⁶

Modern curators would consider some of the things he collected to have little historical value. Olds claimed to have stones used for ballast by the settlers of the Roanoke colony and pieces of charcoal dug up from that same site. This may have been true but he seldom offered any documentation for objects coming into the Hall. Naturally, this led one to question his claims. Blackbeard's pistol, a wine bottle "[from] which no doubt that roystering devil had

drank deeply," and a button supposedly from the pirate's coat were among the bounty Olds acquired during a trip to Bath.³⁷ Other opulent and curious objects found in the Hall included a coach which may or may not have been used by Lafayette when he visited North Carolina, a tea caddy from the Edenton Tea Party, an "Indian god of stone" found at a burial ground, and even a whiskey still "captured in Scotland by Robert Burns, the poet."³⁸

While some objects in the Hall of History were of dubious provenance and historical value, others were of genuine importance. Records of North Carolina Quaker settlements, documents relating to the Spanish invasion of coastal North Carolina in the 1740s, and peace treaties with native Indians were some of the primary resource materials Olds had gathered. He had assembled an impressive collection of photographs, paintings, drawings, and other visual reproductions showing North Carolina from colonial times to the present. Pictures in the Hall included photographs of wild ponies along the Outer Banks, Cherokee Indians, and various historic sites throughout the state as they looked at the turn of the century. He had portraits of Queen Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh, and twenty-six pictures by John White and photographs of engravings by Theodore DeBry. The collection also contained drawings of colonial Wilmington, Bath, and Edenton, plus seven illustrations of the "War of the Regulators." The pace Olds set for acquiring items was too

swift for him to catalogue the artifacts he collected for the Hall.³⁹

"I think there is a very urgent need of the proper catalogue ... of objects which are on view in the Hall of History," Olds wrote to the North Carolina Historical Commission. He further offered to prepare such a catalogue for the mere sum of twenty-five dollars, reminding the commission that "professionals would charge many times that much." He indicated that his lack of professional training would be compensated for by his "pride in the collection." His concern was so strong that he felt anything he could do to enhance the Hall "ought to be done, in the best, and at the same time cheapest way possible." Olds eventually did compile a collections catalogue which is still used today.⁴⁰

Olds had developed a three-step approach to object acquisition: (1) learn of an object, (2) pinpoint the object's location, and (3) make a personal appeal to the owner. He had no rigid rule that an item had to be an outright gift, but would accept artifacts as either gifts or loans. He used the Hall of History to encourage people to donate artifacts while pointing out the "enormous loss of significant historical artifacts, due to the burning of courthouses, public buildings, and, most of all, private homes." Olds considered the Hall as merely a "stepping-stone to higher things," and he sought to ensure that another hall

would be built "generous as to space, and built on the most modern lines as regards the elimination of risk by fire."⁴¹

Olds's final objective was nothing less than to collect everything. He promised that, if given a hall that was "far more noble" than the present one, he could "secure almost everything in North Carolina." Only a lack of cooperation would prevent him from accomplishing his task. He complained that there were a few stubborn people who kept their historical treasures "under a bushel" instead of sharing them with the citizens of the state who "pour through ... by so many thousands every year." Olds was willing to traverse back and forth along North Carolina's rural dirt roads and rely on nothing more than horsepower for local transportation. He made an odd sight, with his wry, five-foot seven-inch frame and large handlebar mustache, sitting atop a wagon with his latest acquisitions lying in the wagonbed.⁴²

Olds continued to complement his collecting efforts with newspaper articles he wrote to stimulate public interest in preserving the state's history. His journalistic efforts remained his major source of income, as they had been since the 1880s.

By 1905 Olds no longer covered the news for North Carolina newspapers. He had by then become more of a syndicated columnist, who provided long essays and feature stories on a variety of topics. "A Christmas in Ye Old Bath Town," written in 1906, was a typical example of his work. A

small drawing of a dapper and distinguished Olds appeared in the upper left-hand corner of the page just above a long and wordy commentary. His article filled five columns two inches wide and ten inches long and read like a romantic Victorian tale. "A darksome sort of day, with wisps of gray clouds hurrying from the northeast," Olds wrote as he set the scene for one historical drama about the Tuscarora, "the Apaches of the olden days," and their Christmas Eve attack on the fledgling colony at Bath, North Carolina. Olds described how half the town spent Christmas Eve on board ships in dock while the other half stood guard, but still the next day "Christmas burst in all its glory upon the world." Finally, after what seemed to be a half-hearted attack by the Indians, "English pluck and readiness" saved the day for the colonists. While this sort of commentary was based on little documentation, it did serve to arouse curiosity about the state's history.⁴³

He wrote countless columns about North Carolina's history and his travels throughout North Carolina. Each of these stories stirred the imagination of his readers, whether it was about David Stone's gravesite or a contemporary account of a place he had just visited.⁴⁴ "Wilmington is a charming town ... and though in the corner of the state can't be kept off the map," Olds wrote after speaking to four thousand school children in the port city. His article went on to comment about Wilmington's school system, and describe the region, the port and factors in the local economy.⁴⁵ The

opinions and comments of this widely-respected journalist were good reading for many people across the state. Governor Aycock, just before leaving office, wrote Olds a thank-you letter calling him the "Dean of the College of Reporters" and expressing particular thanks for Olds's restraint when quoting Aycock.⁴⁶

"The well-known newspaper correspondent" was published in Charlotte, Wilmington, Asheville, and Raleigh, North Carolina and in Norfolk, Virginia⁴⁷ to readerships that appreciated his "gifted pen" and "exact information and brilliant writing."⁴⁸ Through his own "bureau of correspondence" Olds continued to contribute to not only regional newspapers but also to national publications, including Harper's Weekly.⁴⁹ The Raleigh City Directory listed his occupation in 1906 as a "traveling salesman" and, though no evidence has been uncovered to prove he pursued this occupation in the literal sense, he was in fact a salesman for the state and its history.⁵⁰

The Raleigh Chamber of Commerce recognized this fact when it selected Olds as its secretary in 1907.⁵¹ In this position, which he held until 1912,⁵² Olds represented the Chamber at the Southern Commercial Congress at Washington, D.C., in 1908 and the Second International Congress of Road Builders in Brussels, Belgium, in 1910. His travels also included trips to Mexico, Germany, and Switzerland, where he promoted the city of Raleigh and the state of North Carolina

to anyone within earshot.⁵³ When back in Raleigh he was busy writing articles about his favorite topics and expounding on the virtues of the capital city. "Everything is hopeful so far as the future is concerned," proclaimed Olds in 1910.⁵⁴ The city was in a "high position in the industrial, commercial and social world" he wrote in a special Chamber souvenir publication entitled Raleigh Illustrated.⁵⁵

Olds was also a Master Freemason, and this added to his personal prestige. This fraternal association allowed him the opportunity to make important contributions to special projects supported by the Masons.⁵⁶

One such project involved the promotion of the Oxford Orphan Asylum, a Masonic institution which was created by the Free and Accepted Masons in 1872. It was the first of its kind in North Carolina. Its stated purpose was to be a "temporary home and training school for the homeless boys and girls of the state." The asylum was not "restricted to the children of Masons alone" but it would not take any orphans under six years old. Here a destitute child was provided "moral and religious instruction" as well as the opportunity to develop skills in woodworking, printing and a wide variety of domestic duties.⁵⁷

Olds gladly gave his talents and time to support the asylum. He was one of the most regular contributors to The Orphan's Friend and Masonic Journal, writing scores of articles on a wide variety of subjects. So numerous and

appreciated were his historical accounts it was suggested to him that he have them bound and published in a book.⁵⁸ "Each issue of the Orphan's Friend is worth the price of a year's subscription," wrote one of his literary admirers.⁵⁹

He was a much beloved man at the asylum. After his frequent visits to the institution the children would often say they had "the best time that they had ever had."⁶⁰ Olds endeared himself to both the asylum's children and administrators. At one point he was selected, without his knowledge, to serve on the asylum's board of directors. The superintendent, William B. Hicks, knew Olds would accept the position because of all the "kind and helpful things you [Olds] have written relative to the Oxford Orphan Asylum." He added that he knew Olds was "in hearty sympathy with the effort to care for and train properly the orphan child."⁶¹ Olds's relationship with the asylum continued for over thirty years, and over time its staff and residents adopted him as one of their own. In 1931 the superintendent, Creasy K. Proctor, wrote to Olds reminding him that there was "a room waiting for you at the superintendent's cottage ... and that the best wife I have ever had is anxious to fix just the things you would like to eat."⁶²

One might think the benevolent efforts Olds engaged in with the asylum would have satisfied his desire to help the destitute children. But his association with the asylum, no matter how intimate, was still long distance, and it could not

provide the daily personal companionship with young people he needed to satisfy his paternal instincts.

The "Sunshiners" were a manifestation of his need to help people and work with children. Olds had started the group in 1903 to "cheer the sad hearts of two little children whose mother had just died." He originally called these girls, and the children who soon followed, the "Southsiders," indicating the side of town where they held their meetings. The idea caught on with Raleigh's children and soon small bands of children, under the guidance of Olds, were visiting the homes of the sick and poor -- taking with them gifts provided by the Associated Charities organization. Following one particularly successful Thanksgiving Day celebration, Olds changed their name to the "Sunshiners" because they carried with them such abundant joy.⁶³

Olds identified with this group of children and became more involved with them over time. The group consisted of both boys and girls and met once a week, on Friday, to hear Olds tell stories and to feast on lemonade and cookies. He considered himself a "grown-up Sunshiner" who had the opportunity to instruct these young people to be well-rounded citizens. Each summer he would take a group of girls and boys on a ten-day trip to Beaufort, North Carolina. Some of the hardier boys would accompany Olds on a trip through the mountains, often walking twenty miles a day for a week. All accounts of these journeys told by former "Sunshiners" glow

with a love for Olds and a precise memory of the man. "I believe our beloved Colonel Olds did a lot of character molding without even being aware of it," recounted Banks Arendell sixty years after he had been one of Olds's boys.⁶⁴

"I am happiest when I can add to the wonderful collection of the North Carolina historical relics ... and when I am with one of the many groups of school children," Olds said when asked if he had a hobby or recreation.⁶⁵

The "Sunshiners" were probably too young to realize the void they filled in Olds's life. After the deaths of his wife and son a sympathetic sister-in-law observed that the "terrific strain" he had been suffering under was "as hard a trial of heart and nerves as I ever knew anyone to undergo." She advised him to "brace" himself against these emotional losses and to "not give up" for his wife would have desired him to "keep your cheerfulness and helpfulness." These children helped Olds "brace" himself and brought to him as much "sunshine" as they had to others.⁶⁶

The Sunshiners were always a welcome diversion for Olds, but the creation of the North Carolina Historical Commission by the North Carolina General Assembly on March 9, 1903 provided the challenge and support he needed to maintain his enthusiasm for collecting artifacts. The commission was empowered to spend \$500 on publications annually. The commission was to consist of five persons, who would serve without salary and without compensation for incurred

expenses.⁶⁷ The commission met for the first time at Warsaw, North Carolina, November 20, 1903 and elected R.D.W. Conner as its secretary, but it had no legal control over the Hall.⁶⁸

The selection of Conner as secretary was the wisest decision the commission made during its first four years. Conner, only twenty-five years old at the time and destined for greatness as the first national archivist of the United States, zealously took on the challenge of building a strong foundation for the commission.⁶⁹ He surmised the current situation was hopeless. The commission had no money, except for five hundred dollars for copying and transcribing documents, no expense account for staff members, and a membership that was scattered from Asheville to Wilmington to Edenton. It was hardly an easy task for these men to perform, particularly if they were not to receive travel expense money. Conner spent the first few years making plans to get out of his cramped office in the capitol and to put the commission on a sounder financial base.⁷⁰

When the commission was formed in 1903 Olds immediately saw it as a support organization for his activities at the Hall. Three days before the commission held its first meeting at Warsaw Olds had put in a request for fifty dollars, one-tenth of the commission's annual budget, to reproduce photographs.⁷¹ The commission granted his request, as it did similar requests during its formative years, asking few questions and keeping loose records of transactions. It

acquired and donated to the Hall over fifty photographs and paintings during its first four years, and allowed Olds to keep track of objects as he saw fit. The commission's passive attitude toward the Hall's operation worked well for it and Olds between 1903 and 1907.⁷² This relationship culminated with Olds's being placed in charge of the historical display at the Jamestown Ter-Centennial sponsored by the commission.

North Carolina's exhibit at Jamestown represented an enormous effort to delineate the state's history. Presented between April 26 and December 1, 1907, the display drew artifacts from several organizations including the Wachovia Historical Society, the State Library, the governor's office and, of course, the Hall of History. Hundreds of items were loaned -- so many, in fact, that not all of them would fit in the space allotted to the state at the Ter-Centennial. Consequently, the state's display did not have artifacts beyond the War of 1812, thus excluding "much of our most valuable history." The exhibit had been assembled on a two-thousand-dollar budget of which almost a fifth (391 dollars) was spent on packing and shipping. Olds supervised handling and transportation of the objects and was responsible for all items loaned by the Historical Commission or the Hall of History. The exhibit appeared very much like a section of the Hall, with hundreds of objects crammed into a space and arranged in chronological order.⁷³

According to an official account, the exhibit was pleasing to both its promoters and patrons. North Carolina demonstrated its "historical awakening" with the quality of its exhibit and the cooperation between the various historical organizations in the state. Olds, who attended the Jamestown Ter-Centennial as a proxy for Samuel Ashe, was thanked for ensuring the exhibit arrived safely and for attending to other "essential details." His efforts, along with those of the other historical societies, were rewarded by the number of people who "sought the North Carolina exhibit more than any other in the History Building." North Carolina, along with New York, also won a silver medal for having one of the Ter-Centennial's best displays. The combined work of the Historical Commission, the Hall of History, and the various historical organizations showed exemplary coordination and cooperation between groups which traditionally competed for the same available resources and public support.⁷⁴

Four years after the commission was formed Conner approached the General Assembly to request broader responsibilities and more money. He asked for, and got, additional office space, an appropriation to pay for the expenses incurred by the members of the commission, and a secretary to carry out the day-to-day business. At that time he also initiated a program to collect all county records which were not in use. These records were to be preserved at the commission's office in Raleigh. To carry out his

proposals Conner later asked for, and again received, an annual budget of five thousand dollars for the commission to maintain its operation. This budget also allowed for an annual salary for himself and his secretary.⁷⁵

Olds now started looking to Conner and the commission for direction and leadership. Olds wrote to Conner asking about a series of paintings the organization had commissioned James Busbee to do depicting Roanoke Island.

What is their status? [Olds wrote.]

Is it the plan of the commission to purchase these pictures or do they already belong to it and if so, is it the commission's desire that they shall be placed in the Hall of History?

Olds ended his questioning by informing Conner that he had dropped by the commission's office to discuss the matter face to face "but unluckily found you out; hence this letter."⁷⁶

There was a stylistic difference between the erudite Conner and the self-made Olds. By the age of twenty-one Conner had received his Ph.D. in history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Conner was still under thirty, half of Olds's age; there was a personal and professional generation separating them. Conner enjoyed statistics, reports, and establishing provenance as opposed to the informal methods Olds employed in his work.⁷⁷

For instance, since September 1909 Olds had promised Conner a catalogue for the collection but four years later he

had not yet produced one. He listed the objects he had collected each year in a letter to Conner, and Conner needed to occasionally prod Olds for these reports.

Will you please write me as soon as possible, [requested Conner,] and "submit a report of the activities of the Hall of History ... giving the total number of relics ... mentioning by name the most important ... an estimate of the number of visitors ... and other items of interest."⁷⁸

Olds responded to this particular request by telling Conner there was only one object, a photograph of King Edward VII, worth reporting to the commission. In lieu of an object count he simply stated that collecting "had not been pressed" and cited the reason as a lack of space in the Hall. He also told Conner "it is difficult to make an estimate of that number [the number of visitors] as there is no way to record it."⁷⁹

Conner thanked Olds for his meager offerings and suggested that a box be placed at the Hall of History's entrance to collect "visitor cards." He further suggested these cards be placed in "some order" and assured Olds that this information would be of "considerable interest and value."⁸⁰ There is no evidence that Olds ever followed Conner's suggestions about visitors' cards. And that year (1912) he (Olds) did not file a report to the commission.⁸¹

Olds enjoyed his independence but he had an ego that needed some special attention. He, of course, worked alone and

worked for nothing, as he always had, sometimes even paying his own expenses. Conner, on the other hand, was paid \$166.66 monthly and had a staff of five people including an archivist, a secretary, an editor, and a stenographer.⁸² Although Olds felt "the commission and myself ought to cooperate very fully and heartily" he desired to keep his Hall pre-eminent.⁸³

But Conner and the North Carolina Historical Commission could only suggest ideas; they did not make policy for the Hall of History. Technically it was still under the Department of Agriculture's administrative umbrella and housed in one of its buildings. Olds, however, looked to the commission -- the organization to which he and the Hall were most closely akin -- for moral and financial support. Consequently, the Hall operated without a firm administrative leadership other than the day-to-day direction provided by Olds.

Both Conner and Olds had the best interests of North Carolina history in their minds. Olds had been clamoring for a new hall since 1906, soliciting the General Assembly to "erect an absolutely fireproof building and provide ample room." The commission and Conner, in turn, explained to the governor that "the work of the commission could ... be greatly extended, its collections increased largely, its usefulness expanded tenfold if it had ample and accessible quarters in a safe building." The commission and Olds saw the advantage of

having a fireproof building they could use to entice people to donate their personal materials and manuscripts.⁸⁴

North Carolina history was fortunate to have two determined men faithful to its preservation. If that had not been the case the growth of either the archival repository or the artifact collection would have been stifled. Fortunately, the General Assembly saw the need for both collections to be healthy, and supported them by appropriating money for a new building. The more spacious quarters would house both the archives collected by the commission and the artifacts collected by Olds.

Promise of a new space for the collections further increased communications and cooperation between Olds and Conner. For example, when Olds provided Conner with a tip on where the manuscript collection of Judge William M. Shipp was located he asked that any envelopes from the collection be saved for him.⁸⁵ Conner replied the next day, thanking Olds for the lead and soliciting advice on what he was to do with "the Spanish suit and plume of General Pettigrew."⁸⁶

When they moved to the new State Administration Building, at the intersection of Fayetteville and Morgan streets, Olds and Conner were still in close contact. Olds provided Conner with a detailed report on how many exhibit cases were in the Hall. The report also described the contents of each case. He recommended that Conner should come to the Hall to inspect the cases with the contractor who was

scheduled to build more cases for the new facility. Olds was extremely anxious to ensure that each case be dust-proof, and wanted Conner to see what a case that was not dust-proof looked like.⁸⁷

Olds spent most of 1913 preparing to make the move into the new building. The old quarters in the State Museum had become such a fire hazard and offered so little space that Olds stopped collecting. He used his time preparing exhibit cases for the new building and storing objects he had on hand in "places of safety" around Raleigh.⁸⁸ His work went on uninterrupted until he received a startling telegram in December, 1913, just three months before the new Hall of History opened. His older and only surviving son, Frederick C. Olds, had died in faraway Abilene, Texas.⁸⁹

Frederick, unlike his younger brother Douglas, had not suffered from poor health. He was a successful cotton merchant in Waco, Texas, having resided there for at least nine years. He was married and had his own family. Though he lived in Texas he was still very devoted to his father. In one letter he assured the elder Olds, "you know whatever I have I will be more than glad to let you have." His death was not expected as he had taken precautions to detect any occurrence of Douglas's tuberculosis in his own body by having his "sputter" examined. Apparently he was in good general health until pneumonia took his life.⁹⁰

Frederick's untimely death at the age of thirty-four left Olds truly alone. In eleven years his Raleigh family, -- Kate, Douglas, and now Frederick -- had all gone, leaving Olds with no one to call upon during a time of need. Frederick, although living in distant Texas, had frequently written to his father and once gave him a thousand dollars. In one letter he wrote, "whatever money I have been able to help you with, was certainly a pleasure."⁹¹

Olds had just turned sixty at the time of Frederick's death. Though suffering from emotional stress, he was in good physical condition. Soon after Frederick was buried in Texas, Olds returned to his work at the Hall of History. The new building housing both the Hall and the commission was due to open in February and he had to make final preparations for the transfer of materials. He was excited about the upcoming move and turned all his attention to it.

"The task of telling a story about a collection so great and with so wide a scope as the one here presents no little difficulty," remarked Olds.⁹² The next twenty years would see him try to tell the story of the collection. He would also become a paid member of the Historical Commission and come to be regarded by the citizens of Raleigh as the most beloved man in the city.

CHAPTER IV

"RALEIGH'S MOST VALUABLE CITIZEN"

Olds was extremely satisfied with the new quarters for the museum. "Modern, convenient, safe" were the words he used to describe the new Hall of History after it was "thrown open to the public March 14th, 1914."¹ He felt nothing in the South could compare to it and proclaimed, "The new quarters are the finest of our state buildings."²

Conner also had good reason to be satisfied with the Hall's move. The North Carolina Historical Commission, which had been housed in cramped quarters in the state capitol, also relocated its offices into the spacious new building. This close proximity allowed Conner to keep a watchful eye on Olds's activity and the collections in the Hall. When the Hall of History and the North Carolina Historical Commission were finally consolidated under one roof, the General Assembly put the Hall under the commission's legal jurisdiction and administration. This officially made Conner and the commission Olds's bosses, and the artifacts Olds had collected suddenly became the "Commission's collection of relics."³

It seems Olds and the commission were content with each other and their respective roles. "I have settled down

in my new quarters ... next to my beloved Hall of History," Olds happily wrote in the spring of 1914.⁴

His new contentment was justified. The building had been specifically designed to provide proper exhibit and collections space. This new building was much more appropriate than the makeshift quarters that had housed the Hall in the State Museum, and it represented the state's firm commitment to provide and support a place "for properly caring for the State's archives and historical collections."⁵

A spacious exhibit room was located at each end of the building. Olds dubbed these two rooms the eastern and the western halls of history. The commission's offices included two rooms for Conner and his stenographer, two rooms for repairing manuscripts, a storage room, and a shipping room. The door to Fred Olds's office was emblazoned with his new title, "Collector for the Hall of History."⁶

Olds wasted little time putting the new facility to use. Within three months he was regularly scheduling lectures for both school groups and private parties. In June 1914 a large number of veterans attending the North Carolina Veterans' reunion visited the Hall. When the state division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy held its annual meeting in Raleigh, Olds organized a reception for the ladies at the Hall. Olds provided the music and refreshments and the Daughters of the Confederacy provided the compliments. Olds

wrote, "the collections were given careful study and received much praise."⁷

One visitor from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, commented that he thought the collection in the Hall was better than any he had seen in any similar institution.⁸ Governor Glenn expressed the same sentiments when he credited Olds with making the Hall "one of the very best in the Union."⁹ Olds himself never hesitated to call the Hall one of the best collections in the South. That enthusiasm was also part of his strategy to make the Hall bigger and better than it already was.

Olds was quick to use the new Hall to attract prospective donors by pointing out the advantages of having their objects in "a fireproof Hall of History in which everything is given the most thorough care."¹⁰ He reported to the commission that various patriotic organizations were using the Hall as a storehouse for their collections. The new Hall grew by more than 612 "exhibits" within the eight months following its opening.¹¹

Olds was ready to go anywhere or strike any deal to acquire an object. He was willing to accept a tray and candle snuffer belonging to Flora McDonald, the heroine of the Revolutionary War battle at Moore's Creek, with the understanding that the owners would have the right to reclaim them anytime they wished. Most of the items he acquired on an indefinite loan basis were never reclaimed by their owners.¹²

Olds was allowed to collect artifacts his way with little restraint because his methods were still considered typical in those days. The commission let Olds go unchecked because he produced results. Olds had established a network of friends throughout North Carolina who would "keep a lookout" for materials he desired for the Hall. Through his efforts many people in North Carolina became familiar with the commission's purpose, the Hall of History, and the value of preserving the state's past.¹³

During his first eight months under the commission's direction Olds made "journeys into various parts of the state." He brought into the Hall Indian relics from Nags Head, Spanish silver from Murphey, and statues of John C. Calhoun and George Washington from the state capitol. Olds wrote to the governors and adjutant generals of every state in the North that had participated in the Civil War, asking them to return any captured North Carolina battle flags. His requests were rewarded: eight flags were returned to North Carolina. He also pressured Tar Heel natives to relinquish Confederate flags held in certain families. Three flags were immediately recovered for the Hall and later Olds located seven more.¹⁴

The establishment of the Jule Carr Research Fund in 1914 gave Olds greater freedom to collect artifacts. General Julian S. Carr created the endowment in his own name "to meet the expenses of the collector for the Hall of History in

producing his work."¹⁵ Olds immediately started using the money to increase his travels throughout the state. Between 1914 and 1924 he visited every one of North Carolina's one hundred counties no fewer than three times, netting thousands of valuable relics for the Hall.¹⁶

Indeed, his reports to the commission list an array of almost every conceivable artifact, from the earrings of colonial governor William Tryon's sister-in-law to the port of Edenton's original record books.¹⁷ He scoured Revolutionary War battlefields such as Moore's Creek, King's Mountain and Guilford Courthouse, finding many new additions for the Hall. He also collected Civil War relics. These relics included many swords, uniforms, and arms.¹⁸ His collection of Confederate battle flags continued to grow until it was said to be the largest such assemblage in existence.¹⁹

His approach was particularly ambitious when it came to collecting photographs or paintings of people, places and events. Olds attempted to find likenesses of all the governors of North Carolina, from the earliest colonial times to the present. He secured images of forty-eight out of seventy-one. He also acquired photographs and daguerreotypes that documented a broad section of the Confederate army. These images included one of Henry Lawson Wyatt, reputed to be the first Confederate soldier killed in battle, and an oil portrait of Colonel Harry K. Burgwyn, who was "killed at the head of his regiment in the battle of Gettysburg."²⁰

Olds's reputation grew in proportion with the collection, making it easier for him to collect for the museum. Because of his statewide stature he was extended invitations to "pick up some relics" from many organizations and individuals.²¹ Cooperation was another benefit of his increased prominence. Once, while looking for a photograph of Colonel Van Metts of Wilmington, he wrote his friend John Blair, superintendent of Wilmington's public schools. Blair quickly replied to Olds that if such a photograph were to be found in Wilmington he would have it within twenty-four hours.²²

The generosity of the Jule Carr Research Fund greatly enhanced all of Olds's collecting efforts. When the fund was started in 1914 there were just over twelve thousand objects in the collection.²³ When Olds left his post as collector for the Hall, conservative estimates put the total number of objects at closer to thirty thousand.²⁴ Olds summed up his attitude about traveling around the state to collect when he said "there are years of work ahead to ransack North Carolina for those things to which the State alone can give proper care."²⁵

World War I brought Olds other opportunities to collect artifacts. The commission recognized at the war's beginning a need to obtain records and relics from the "war to end war." A special commission was set up to collect war records for the state, with the term "war records" given "the

widest possible interpretation." R.B. House, who later became secretary of the commission, directed the committee's work. During the course of the war and for a short time afterward he collected "thousands of documents and a great numbers of photographs." War-related artifacts were collected by the boxcar, and included all North Carolina regimental flags, two cannon and an anti-aircraft gun from a German warship, a German machine gun, uniforms, medals, and a "testament struck by German shrapnel which saved the life of private Curtis Benton." Olds still knew how to infuse a human touch into an object.²⁶

The documentation and organization of artifacts brought into the Hall by the war was anticipated and handled well by Olds and the commission.

Unfortunately, other opportunities provided by the war did not have such harmonious results. Consider, for example, the confusion caused when the collection of the New Hanover County Museum, sent to the Hall of History for safe keeping, was reclaimed after the war.

The problem started as a result of the war. The New Hanover County Museum, founded in 1898 and thus four years older than the Hall, had been housed in an armory of the local militia, the Wilmington Light Infantry. Founded by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the museum occupied one room on the second floor of the armory. Its collection consisted almost entirely of Civil War-related artifacts and it was open

to the public on selected days of the week.²⁷ When World War I started the men in the militia needed all the available space in the armory and insisted that the U.D.C. find other accommodations for its displays.²⁸

The U.D.C. immediately looked to Raleigh and the Hall for help. Arrangements were made to ship the relics to Raleigh, where Olds would store them or display them, whichever he saw fit to do. The president of the local U.D.C. chapter sent Olds a catalogue of the objects and a request: "As soon as practicable send me a receipt for the said relics, as a loan or deposit to the State Museum."²⁹ Olds paid the \$18.50 to have the items shipped to Raleigh, but was not impressed by what he received.³⁰ He reported that some of the 340 objects were in "poor condition." He also noted that the exhibit cases were not "air-tight and moth-proof as those in the Hall of History." He selected the artifacts he wanted, such as the Confederate telegraph used at Fort Fisher, placed them on exhibit in the Hall, and stored the remainder of the collection in another part of the Hall.³¹

The end of the war did not see the immediate return of the objects to New Hanover County. In 1930 the New Hanover County Historical Commission, under the guidance of Reverend Andrew J. Howell, made an attempt to bring the artifacts home. Olds offered no resistance to the idea and freely allowed the stored artifacts, which had never been unpacked, to be taken

back to Wilmington. The artifacts on exhibit proved more difficult to recover, however, because Olds had become accustomed to calling them his own. Even with catalogues and receipts Howell and the commission had a difficult time persuading Olds to relinquish all the items the New Hanover County Historical Commission felt belonged to it. The controversy was never completely resolved and continues, to some extent, to this day.³²

His haphazard way of collecting was bound to produce such results occasionally. The North Carolina Historical Commission continued to let Olds operate in this fashion and did little to discourage him. For Olds it was "pleasant to report" information to the secretary of the commission. Conner looked forward to these reports, as they contained not only lists of artifacts Olds had found but also field reports on the condition and location of manuscripts, documents, and county records. In some cases Olds would personally bring in records so Conner could study them and apply preservation efforts.³³ The commission was so impressed with Olds's work that in 1918, after collecting for thirty years and operating the Hall for half that time, Olds was awarded an annual salary of six hundred dollars. Conner signed the order of the Executive Committee paying Olds the money for "valuable work for the Hall of History and for the Commission generally."³⁴

Olds always served as a good will ambassador for the commission on his jaunts around the state, and every collect-

ing trip included a number of speaking engagements. When he was back in Raleigh he kept busy writing scores of articles and escorting thousands of people around the state capital. The commission had its vociferous cheerleader in Olds, and in return it supported the Hall of History and Olds's use of the artifact collection.

Olds's prolific writing continued to serve his and the commission's cause to propagate interest in North Carolina history. His hundreds of articles appeared in publications ranging from the state's best newspapers to Prison News.³⁵ The Manufacturer's Record, a Raleigh newspaper, considered him "one of the best informed men in the State in regard to everything which pertains to history."³⁶ Often his articles were based on relics in the Hall of History or written records he had recently acquired. He wrote about the history of North Carolina's counties in Every Woman's Magazine and the events surrounding the Edenton Tea Party for the DAR Magazine.³⁷ Wherever his articles appeared they were always appreciated and James Sprunt once complimented him for his "wonderful gift of expression" and for being such a "charming storyteller."³⁸ It was suggested more than once that he should collect all his articles and put them in book form, but this was never done. Still some people took it upon themselves to save his writings; one person commented, "I have clipped more things from your pen than from the pen of any other single man in North Carolina."³⁹

His articles did not always go unchallenged. On one occasion A.B. Andrews wrote cautiously that he did not like to "take issue with you on any matter," but felt compelled to point to a mistake Olds had made concerning the origin of "the Jewel of Joseph Dickson."⁴⁰ Olds was not bothered by people who questioned his facts, and he was not inclined to change his writing style for their benefit. Only the onset of age and sickness affected his output. He was still supplying the Charlotte Observer with a series of historical articles when he was past seventy-five years old.⁴¹

Olds had been a traveling man all his life, and as he got older only seemed to accelerate his pace. Once he was quoted as saying he knew "every hog-path and by-path in every one of the state's 100 counties."⁴² This was an apt description of North Carolina's transportation system for the first two decades of the twentieth century. When making arrangements for a trip to Burnsville, North Carolina, in 1917 Olds's host wrote to tell him that he (the host) did not yet have an automobile but had access to a "good horse and buggy" which he would use to escort Olds around town.⁴³ On another occasion the superintendent of the Mitchell County Public Schools welcomed Olds to visit but warned him the roads were so poor that he (the superintendent) was "compelled to do all my traveling by horseback."⁴⁴

Olds's traveling schedule was filled with invitations. He sometimes had to decline tours offered by anxious North

Carolínians wanting him to explore and promote their sections' history. When he could not accept an invitation to speak, alternate dates were offered to ensure his eventual arrival. "In case you cannot come on either of the above dates please advise me when you can come," wrote R.E. Wicker to Olds from the Sand Hills Farm Life School at Pinehurst.⁴⁵

Olds was a good public speaker who honed his talents by making hundreds of addresses to a great variety of groups. He spoke to Sunday School classes at the Buffalo Baptist Church near Greensboro and to the North Carolina Livestock Exposition and Conference in Raleigh.⁴⁶ He was also a popular speaker at the unveiling of new historical markers and statues. On those occasions he would treat his audience to stories about the events or persons being recognized. He often complemented his presentations with artifacts he brought from the Hall of History. When attending the dedication of a bronze tablet for Richard Caswell in Kinston, Olds brought with him three Revolutionary War battle flags thought to be the only ones in existence.⁴⁷ He spoke to over three thousand people at Moore's Creek Battleground in Pender County, and told the story of that battle, which came to be known as the "Concord and Lexington of the South," to a "delighted" audience. These were sometimes lively affairs; at the Moore's Creek ceremony, for instance, a "number of white men" were arrested for bootlegging.⁴⁸ The students at the Cherokee Indian School liked Olds so much that after a two-year absence

they complained to him it was "about time for you to give account of yourself." The school also honored him by making him an honorary "Shon-co-a-vie" or story teller of their tribe.⁴⁹

"Am right down after you now, and want you to come over," wrote the chairman of the program committee for the Carolina Club at Greenville to prod Olds into a visit. This request was typical of the ones he received over the years. He was allowed to choose any subject he liked as his topic. Though his talk was brief their invitation would ask him to "stay as long thereafter as you find the time for." They wanted to take Olds to "points of historical note" around Pitt County including the relatively new East Carolina Teacher Training School.⁵⁰ Greenville proved to be one of Olds's favorite spots in eastern North Carolina. One of his visits there saw Olds bring an entire school band with him from Raleigh. That trip to the Training School was "one of the most interesting visits yet paid" to it.⁵¹

People felt Olds was a source of endless knowledge and expertise. He received questions pertaining to genealogy and geography, and general inquiries into history -- some of a rather bizarre nature. He was once asked to find the skull of Colonel Ephraim Williams, founder of Williams College, whose headless body had been exhumed. Other requests for information were more mundane. Mrs. H.A. Nanney, for example, wanted to know about the Scotch Highlanders in North Carolina

and the life of Flora McDonald.⁵² Olds tried to respond to all questions asked him, and over the years his willingness to supply information became well known. "Our good State is more than fortunate in having in you -- the great historian you are -- living and talking history ... I only wish it were possible for you to conduct an extension course in history in every school in the state," wrote Frank S. Blue to Olds in 1929.⁵³

While Olds could not provide an "extension course" to all the state's schools, he diligently worked to excite students entering the Hall. Many school groups visiting Raleigh were the lucky recipients of not only his tour of the Hall but also Olds's famous guided tours of the capital city. He worked with school groups ranging from the elementary to the college level, and was always on call to assist any institution with its educational endeavors. Once he sent a box of books to Louisburg College, prompting the president to reply that the act was "just another evidence of your great interest in the education of the youth of North Carolina."⁵⁴

Young people were impressed and inspired by their contact with him. "The Henderson boys and girls are very enthusiastic over their trip with you yesterday, some say it is the finest day they had ever spent," Mary Dosier told Olds after a visit to Raleigh.⁵⁵ Mary Hayman, a teacher from Orange County, praised Olds for "arousing interest in North Carolina history" commenting he could not have done a "bigger, better day's work."⁵⁶

He certainly did have a way with children, and was fondly remembered by many who visited him at the Hall. Mrs. Mary Arnold recalled sixty-two years after her class visited Raleigh that Olds "made everybody feel like somebody." She went on to say that "he had the kids so trained they would do anything for him."⁵⁷ He received hundreds of notes from appreciative teachers, superintendents, and assorted other educators thanking him for helping their school or entertaining their class. He was constantly available to help promote innovations in education with his writings, as he did in 1923 when he wrote about the "moving picture projectors" to be used in schools across the state.⁵⁸ Younger children simply adored him and he was sometimes the object of their affections. For instance a third grade class from Hillsboro once wrote a poem in his honor:

The people of our old North State
From one side to another
Cherish the name of Colonel Olds,
And love him like a brother.⁵⁹

School classes poured into the Hall throughout his career. The last fifteen years of his career saw Olds guide an average of a hundred classes per year through the Hall, with one two-year period accounting for visits by 337 classes.⁶⁰

Olds, with his one-man show at the Hall, was kept constantly busy. But he was never too busy to take time for visitors coming to Raleigh.

He became well-known throughout North Carolina as the man to see for a tour of the state capital. People would contact him well in advance of their arrival to request one of his famous tours. "I am taking the liberty to ask if you will show us the places of interest," wrote principal F.E. Howard of Pikeville.⁶¹ When time allowed it, Olds was more than happy to oblige. His tours included almost every landmark and government institution in Raleigh; one could expect to see the North Carolina Supreme Court, the state capitol, the state penitentiary and Dix Hill. When he felt particularly inspired he might go into the governor's office or the State Supreme Court and persuade the governor or the presiding judge to say a few words to the tour group.⁶²

He was a natural-born actor and all of Raleigh was his stage. He took genuine pleasure showing people around the city and receiving their praise for doing such a charming job. H.H. Brimley, still curator of the State Museum, said, "Fred Olds has given more pleasure to more people in North Carolina than any ten men."⁶³ Another noted, "You went out of your way to make those strangers from Burlington feel at ease in the museum."⁶⁴ A conservative estimate places the number of people to visit the Hall at two hundred thousand charmed individuals.⁶⁵

It was little wonder that people began to look to Olds, with his statewide reputation and considerable influence, for help in all sorts of matters. Madame Helena Paderewska contacted Olds to ask him to lecture on behalf of Polish needs during the First World War. She had heard from parties in North Carolina that he was a "brilliant and very popular lecturer and would be willing to do something for us."⁶⁶ On another occasion Charles N. Hunter solicited Olds's assistance in organizing a Negro State Fair. Even distant family members attempted to take advantage of his warm-hearted nature and would sometimes ask him for money. He would comply in whatever way he could help. He gladly made speeches on behalf of Poland and responded with a hundred dollars for a faraway cousin.⁶⁷

An agreeable nature was one of the assets Olds used to make friends and influence people. The persons with whom he came in contact recognized Olds's lust for life. His old boss Samuel Ashe observed in 1921 that Olds was normal in the fact that he had only one life to live, but abnormal in that he enjoyed his existence "more than any king or queen in any country."⁶⁸ Biron Butler said he had no trouble adjusting to the thought of becoming an octogenarian if his years could be the same as Olds's.⁶⁹

James Sprunt, cotton merchant and local historian in Wilmington, had been one of Olds's closest friends for twenty years. He wrote Olds more often than anyone else, and his

letters were filled with hosannas pertaining to Olds's character. He told Olds that every time they were together he felt he had "direct intercourse with the fountain of youth." Sprunt was sometimes perplexed by Olds's constantly optimistic nature, and once inquired, "do you believe absolutely every minute in the overwhelming power of right to conquer each nook and cranny of our civilization?" Sprunt, one of the wealthiest men in North Carolina, assured Olds that if he ever wanted to run for governor "I am confident you will have a walk-over."⁷⁰

It appeared Olds would live perpetually and prosper. By age sixty-five he had become a Raleigh landmark in himself and, to some extent, he was probably taken for granted by the citizens of Raleigh. Those same citizens were abruptly reminded of his mortality when he suffered a stroke in 1925.⁷¹

The stroke caught his friends completely by surprise. A review of his activity over the past several years gave no indication of a man with failing health. Between 1922 and 1924, Olds visited every county in the state, showed 177 classes -- from schools outside Raleigh -- the Hall of History, and personally visited 392 schools around the state. During this same period he also collected several hundred artifacts, including a first edition of Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World.⁷²

Fortunately, the stroke, which occurred on January 20, 1925, was not debilitating. It was described by local

newspapers as a "facial paralysis" and the prognosis for a complete recovery was good.⁷³ It nonetheless served to awaken the community to the fact that its friend Olds, now past seventy years in age, would not live forever. The North Carolina General Assembly responded to Olds's illness within the week, and quickly passed a joint resolution of appreciation. The resolution stated, "it has come to the attention of the members of the General Assembly that Colonel Olds is ill in a local hospital." The resolution went on to commend Olds for his "zealous" efforts to "preserve the history of the state of North Carolina" at all times during his life. The legislators wished Olds a "speedy recovery" and instructed that a copy of the resolution be taken to Olds at the Mary Elizabeth Hospital where he was recuperating.⁷⁴

The resolution no doubt cheered Olds, as did the get-well wishes he received from admirers and friends. Bolstered by this outpouring of public and private sentiment, he soon started to recover. The Charlotte Observer noted on February 15 that Olds was recovering quickly, while a friend wrote to say he was happy to learn "that you are recovering so rapidly."⁷⁵ Olds's strong constitution did not let him down, and he was out of the hospital and back at work within six weeks of the stroke.⁷⁶

The life-threatening illness made citizens in Raleigh take stock of their beloved Olds. The General Assembly had acted properly by passing the resolution of appreciation

before Olds passed away, but it was a resolution rushed by fear that he would die before being properly thanked. Now that he was recovered and again a visible part of Raleigh's daily life, people did not forget Olds was human and that they eventually would lose his effervescent company.

An opportunity to honor Olds properly presented itself in November, 1925, when the Raleigh American Legion decided it would be a good idea to create a "Hall of Fame" to recognize the outstanding achievements of Raleigh's citizens. The Legion set out to find the most altruistic person in the community who could meet four qualifications. The nominees had

to encourage and promote increased public spiritedness and unselfishness in the lives of the citizens of Raleigh, to increase the sum total of services rendered by the citizens of Raleigh in behalf of their fellow man and community, to encourage the citizens of Raleigh to make their community a better place to live, and to recognize publicly and in a fitting manner the deeds and services that are of the greatest value to the life of Raleigh.

Six men were nominated for membership in the Hall of Fame. The recipient was chosen by a selection committee comprising members of the American Legion, the Lions Club, the Kiwanis Club, the Civitan Club, the Woman's Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Business and Professional Women's Club, the Merchants' Association, and the Rotary Club.⁷⁷

There seems little reason to believe any nominee was seriously considered except Olds, who was unanimously selected. "Colonel Olds Chosen as Most Valuable Citizen," boomed the headlines of The News and Observer. The newspaper reported, "Colonel Olds more nearly than any other fulfilled the requirements" established by the American Legion and the selection committee. Olds modestly accepted the award, saying he had "in my poor fashion through the years tried to consecrate myself more fully and completely to the things which make for peace and welfare of mankind."⁷⁸

The accolade was celebrated by "every citizen of Raleigh" and congratulations were sent to Olds from across the state. "Honor to Colonel Olds is long overdue," read one newspaper editorial,⁷⁹ while an old friend, Leonard Tufts, commended Olds and recalled the early days when he had little support for his work. Tufts wrote to Olds,

I can remember when the great majority of North Carolinians were worrying as to whether they were going to be able to buy sour belly, corn meal and molasses ... and to be told that North Carolina was a great state was at least uninteresting to them. It was hard to swim against the current in those days but you did it untiringly and consistently.⁸⁰

The Raleigh citizens had given Olds a proper and appropriate tribute. But this only served to fuel the fire

with which he had warmed their hearts and to drive him on in his service to the community he loved. Olds was not ready to call it quits.

His work habits changed little after his stroke. He traveled less, and never again did he report to the commission that he had explored all one hundred counties of North Carolina, but he was by no means immobilized. Olds continued to comb the state looking for artifacts, and as always kept a full schedule of speaking engagements on his calendar. People still wanted to listen to this "spirited and eloquent speaker" tell his stories about North Carolina history.⁸¹ The year following his stroke he rearranged the two rooms in the Hall of History. The work, he reported to the commission, had to be carried on "day and night."⁸²

Some of the research Olds conducted manifested itself as a book he published entitled An Abstract of North Carolina Wills from 1760 to 1800. The work, while not the best of its kind, is still his most enduring publication, and has been useful enough to be reprinted three times, most recently in 1965.⁸³

The school groups continued to pour into the city. The classes still received the standard Olds tour of the Hall and, if time and energy allowed, his special "streets of Raleigh" tour. "All the prisoners, insane people, blind, and people on the street knew Colonel Olds," reported James W. Snipes after following Olds on one of his famous tours in 1927.⁸⁴

Olds was justly proud of his tours' fame and his reputation as Raleigh's unofficial reception committee. He knew he provided a little extra color to the local scene, and would sometimes end his tours by saying "there are hundreds of people living in Raleigh for years that do not know and have not seen what you all have seen today."⁸⁵

It was difficult for him when, in March 1930, after another brief illness, he had to stop giving tours. The tours, however, had become so much a part of the local scene that they could not just be dropped. Consequently, the local Boy Scouts were asked to carry on the tour duties under Olds's direction. They were called the "F.A.O. Scout Guides" and were identified by arm bands sporting those initials. Only the oldest and those who had "won distinction along other lines in scouting" would be selected to conduct tours.⁸⁶ But Olds could not let the scouts have entirely free reign, and within two months after his March illness he was again personally helping them carry on the tours. By the end of the year he was once again entertaining "one or two truck loads" of children at a time.⁸⁷

Despite his declining health, Olds refused to admit he could not carry on his duties at the Hall. "If I have any hobby or recreation, it is my work," he was quoted as saying in his eightieth year.⁸⁸ He might have added that if he had any family at all, it was the citizens of Raleigh, and that his extended family was the people of North Carolina.

He had nowhere to go; no family to take care of him. He lived at the local Y.M.C.A., and other than an annual vacation to the warm climate of Florida, he seldom left his work.⁸⁹

State newspapers treated the aging Olds with continued respect and glorification. The press corps celebrated his birthdays as special occasions and he was included in the Raleigh Times list of "prominent Raleigh folks."⁹⁰ "Dapper Colonel is Eighty Today," "Colonel Fred A. Olds an Institution," and "Guardian of History" are samples of the headlines he inspired in his later years. This praise, however, did not tell anything about his deteriorating physical condition and state of mind.⁹¹

Olds had spent over half his life in the nineteenth century and that was where his mind, in 1930, was solidly entrenched. "There is no question but that we are on the decline," he gloomily predicted, and he strongly felt that by the 1930s people were "living too fast." He thought the people who had lived during his prime were a superior generation. He complained that "our people in this state haven't half the grit they had in 1865." Violence, spurred on by prohibition and bad economic times, frightened him and he declared the young white criminal was "the greatest evil facing us today." As for new mechanical technology, he said "I loathe it. Machinery is not very near to God."⁹²

Then, after scornfully describing modern society, he would do a complete about face. "Youth -- that is the world's

hope. Yes, the youth of any age has been its hope." But then he declined an invitation to talk about the youth of 1932. He was acting in a confused manner, and some of his statements contradicted themselves and signaled the magnitude of his deepening melancholia. Olds thought that tourists, those throngs with whom he had worked for decades, were responsible for lowering the standard of living. The same people he had encouraged to visit Raleigh and the Hall of History were now viewed as threats to tradition because, by their travel, they homogenized society to the point of destroying individuality.⁹³

Despite becoming more and more irrational, Olds continued with his work at the Hall of History. "Give up this job ... I should say not. I shall continue as long as I am able," he was quoted as saying in October, 1933. Yet he knew his end was drawing near.⁹⁴ He made one last flurry of visits around the state during 1931 and 1932, attending high school Memorial Day exercises in Laurinburg, the dedication of a monument to Robert Howe in Elizabethtown, and the unveiling of the Fort Fisher Memorial.⁹⁵ When he filed his last report to the commission in 1932, he was satisfied that the collection of artifacts "has been nearly completed."⁹⁶ He spent most of 1933 in Raleigh, attending the state fair (still using his old press pass), and even speaking before a private club in October of that year.⁹⁷

The winter of 1933-1934 proved to be too much of a physical strain for Olds's health. He slowly declined and, although he did not have a stroke or sudden illness as he had in earlier years, he was admitted to Rex Hospital for treatment. The Historical Commission stated in its report that Olds "was compelled by increasing age and declining health" to enter the hospital.⁹⁸ His condition was listed as "infirmities due to his age," and there was little hope of a complete recovery.⁹⁹ He did slightly rebound at the hospital and was able to take short walks around the grounds. An attendant was assigned to help him walk and to be immediately available when Olds needed attention. School children sent him flowers every day lifting his spirits and, for a moment, rekindling a spark of charm.¹⁰⁰

Yet it was apparent that he would never be able to resume his responsibilities. The commission continued to keep him on its payroll until his sick leave was exhausted and then retired him from his job on July 31, 1934. His replacement was Joseph Carlyle Sitterson, a well-educated, young professional historian who was just beginning his career. Sitterson's first tasks were to compile a catalogue of the collection and to discover exactly what Olds had collected in nearly half a century.¹⁰¹

The News and Observer was skeptical about the changing of the guard. "Mr. Sitterson's "scientific catalogue" may be a work of erudition, a storehouse of wonders, but if he does

not attempt to take up the Colonel's activities as shepard, philosopher, historian, and friend to the school children of the state, he will not even attempt to succeed him," fired the editor of the newspaper. His editorial went on to say it was probably sheer folly for anyone to attempt to do the things for which Olds had become so well-known around Raleigh. The editor's comment included an opinion that for any man to try it would "be bold indeed."¹⁰²

It is possible that Olds's condition had deteriorated beyond cognition by the time of Sitterson's appointment. Olds was eventually moved from Rex Hospital, to Dix Hill, where he would spend his last days. The state government paid for all of his medical expenses while Olds hung onto life, sometimes "vainly trying to rouse into remembrance the agile memory that gave him a most comprehending grasp of history." He finally died in his sleep on July 2, 1935.¹⁰³

His obituary was carried in newspapers across the state. It recalled his service to the state, the founding of the Hall of History, the thousands of objects he collected, and the friends he made for the Hall.¹⁰⁴

The day of his funeral was a day of mourning for the citizens of Raleigh. The offices of the commission were closed and the employees of that organization attended en masse. Members of the Y.M.C.A. attended as well as a smattering of friends. But he had outlived his family and

many of his best friends, including his good friend and correspondent James Sprunt. School children, the largest segment of society he embraced during his life, were advised against attending the services because of an epidemic of infantile paralysis that was sweeping Wake County at the time of his death.¹⁰⁵

The Historical Commission reported that it and "the entire state lament the loss of Colonel Olds." They had good reason to regret his passing. The commission had lost one of the most dedicated people its organization had ever had. He may have had his shortcomings as an historian, but he did keep the Hall alive and in the public eye up to the time of his retirement. His replacement, Carlyle Sitterson, served as collector for less than a year; he was followed by three others in that position between 1935 and 1938.¹⁰⁶ Mrs. Mattie Erma Edwards Parker served as collector after 1938. She reported that the Hall was virtually ignored by the commission. The commission, she said, used the collector's position to do work associated with different projects, such as the establishment of a highway marker program.¹⁰⁷

Olds's friends never forgot him. They had honored him during his lifetime with awards, named an elementary school after him in 1930, and named one of the exhibition halls in the Hall of History the Fred A. Olds Historical Museum. (It eventually became the Fred A. Olds Memorial.)

Fittingly, the only exhibits displayed in the memorial room were about transportation, something with which Olds had plenty of experience during his life. A holly tree was planted in his remembrance on the capitol grounds at a Christmas service six months after he died. Many of the children who had missed his funeral attended the event and sang "Silent Night."¹⁰⁸

The inscription on his tombstone reads "Fred A. Olds, Journalist, Founder of the State Hall of History." The inscription could have mentioned many more of his significant contributions to the state. The North Carolina Museum of History now stands as a monument to his success, while the continued preservation and interpretation of history in North Carolina remain as his legacy.¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

Few people identify their niches as precisely and explore them as thoroughly as Fred A. Olds did his.

He was an accomplished collector who saved many historical artifacts which otherwise would have been lost or destroyed. The collection he amassed was well-rounded and represented North Carolina history from prehistoric Indians to the twentieth century. He did make exaggerated claims about some of the objects he collected but many items he acquired are considered irreplaceable parts of the North Carolina Museum of History's collection. The uniforms, portraits, battleflags, housewares, weapons, documents, and photographs he collected over fifty years numbered in the thousands. This collection was a monument to perseverance and a strong foundation for the North Carolina Museum of History's present collection.

Modern day museum professionals have called Olds's preservation and exhibit methods primitive. But his methods and philosophy were no less primitive than those of his contemporaries. He traveled widely, not only across North Carolina but throughout the country and the world, and he was witness to some great expositions which influenced his exhibit style. Professional training in exhibit design, re-

search, conservation, registration, education, and administration was replaced with on the job experience and a seemingly boundless enthusiasm to do the work.

Olds was an historian in the popular sense of the word. He wrote hundreds of columns about North Carolina history during his career as a journalist. The articles were editorial in content and served the purpose of creating interest in history among the general public. They also recorded his travels around North Carolina and provided a glimpse of what the state was like during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Today it is difficult to imagine North Carolina without any history museums. Historic sites dot the state from the mountains to the coast, and almost every community of size has a local history museum. It would be erroneous to claim Olds started these various organizations but his efforts to stimulate interest in history had far-reaching influence.

People appreciated Fred A. Olds and there is no evidence to prove he ever had any enemies. Hundreds of letters and telegrams have been examined during the research for this thesis and never was there a harsh word to be found about Olds in a single one of them. Instead, they consistently praised him for the work he was doing at the Hall, the newspaper articles he wrote, the speeches he delivered or the assistance he had given someone.

Fred Olds loved people and enjoyed helping them, especially children. Adults in their seventies and eighties today still remember their trips to Raleigh as youngsters, and meeting Colonel Olds. His love for children was reflected in the work he did for the Oxford Orphanage and the Sunshiner groups he formed around Raleigh.

Many tributes have been paid to Frederick Augustus Olds. A school has been named after him, trees have been planted in remembrance of his efforts, and exhibit halls have been named in his honor. Employees at the North Carolina Museum of History and the citizens of Raleigh now remember Olds fondly, and he is also recognized on a historical marker at the door of the museum.

In the final analysis, however, the biggest tribute to Fred Olds is the history museum itself. He was a key player in the creation of the museum and its establishment as one of the best known organizations in North Carolina. The collection he began over one hundred years ago continues to grow and plans are now underway to once again expand the museum. There is little question that Fred Olds deserves a place in the forefront of those individuals who were most instrumental in laying the groundwork for historic interpretation and preservation activities today in North Carolina.

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CHAPTER IV

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³Fifth Biennial Report, p. 6.

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⁵Fifth Biennial Report, p. 6.

⁶Fifth Biennial Report, pp. 6-15.

⁷Fifth Biennial Report, p. 16.

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¹⁸ Ninth Biennial Report, p. 36.

¹⁹ Nina Holland Covington and the Journalism Class of the Raleigh High School, Guide Book of Raleigh, North Carolina, Historical and Descriptive, (Raleigh, N.C.: Capital Printing Co., 1924), p. 27.

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²³ Fifth Biennial Report, p. 23.

²⁴ "Colonel Fred A. Olds Dies Here at Age 81," The News and Observer, July 3, 1935; hereinafter cited as The News and Observer, July 3, 1935.

²⁵ Sixth Biennial Report, p. 20.

²⁶ Seventh Biennial Report, pp. 20-21, North Carolina Historical Commission, Eighth Biennial Report, (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1921), pp. 31-32; hereinafter cited as Eighth Biennial Report.

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²⁹ Mrs. N.G. Whitehead to Fred A. Olds, August 19, 1918, Fred A. Olds Papers, North Carolina State Archives.

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³¹ Seventh Biennial Report, p. 22.

³²See Rev. Andrew J. Howell, "New Hanover County Museum," unpublished report, 1935. Lower Cape Fear Historical Society Collection. Interview with Janet K. Seapker, Director, New Hanover County Museum of the Lower Cape Fear, Wilmington, North Carolina, January 20, 1988.

³³Twelfth Biennial Report, p. 28.

³⁴R.D.W. Conner to Fred A. Olds, 1918, Archives and History Director's Office, general correspondence, Hall of History, North Carolina State Archives.

³⁵J.P. Breedlove to Fred A. Olds, July 26, 1930, Fred A. Olds Papers, North Carolina State Archives.

³⁶"Hunt Out and Destroy Pro-Germanism," Manufacture's Record, May 30, 1918.

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³⁸See James Sprunt to Fred A. Olds, July 3, 1917, Fred A. Olds Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Eliza Lang Laughinghouse to Fred A. Olds, Fred A. Olds Collection, North Carolina State Archives.

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⁴²"80 Years Old---Still Hard at Work," The State, July 15, 1933, p. 16.

⁴³W.O. Griffith to Fred A. Olds, August 26, 1917, Fred A. Olds Papers, North Carolina State Archives.

⁴⁴D.W. Greene to Fred A. Olds, August 28, 1917, Fred A. Olds Papers, North Carolina State Archives.

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