



THE COVER DESIGN

The existence and number of private antebellum southern libraries remains a matter of contention among American social historians—particularly historians of reading and education. Apologists maintain that the flower of colonial intellectualism lay south of the Mason-Dixon divide rather than in New England, among the Divines and the later Transcendentalists, while critics point to the lack of statistics and documentation—other than oral history and local legend—as detrimental to such inflated claims. Few contest, however, the legacy of Nickajack Library and its imprimatur, Nickajack Press, which, along with its famous owner, Frances Guerard Stanback Eaton (1836–1934), refute the notion of a benighted South, lack of a broad range of reading matter in the southern states, and hegemonic distinctions based upon social class, legal franchise, or denominational predilection. Moreover, the Nickajack legacy contradicts the currently popular feminist theory of the nineteenth-

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century private library as a heteronormative social space devoid of varied reading matter and feminine influence.

Frances Guerard Stanback was the second of three daughters born to Anne Eliza (Gallagher) and Austin Nolan Stanback, Anglo-German-Irish immigrants who originally settled in Baltimore. In April 1843, Frances' father, Austin Stanback, built Nickajack Hall as a plantation in Cobb County, Georgia, with slave labor and the proceeds of lucrative speculation in the Caribbean ink trade. He and Mrs. Stanback, deeply devout converts to Presbyterianism, freed their slaves secretly and covertly paid and privately educated (a capital offense at the time) those who chose to stay with them to operate the household, run the sawmill, and mine Stanback's holdings in rich marble deposits in the northern part of the state. Frances was educated at the LaGrange Female Seminary, later LaGrange College, where she became proficient in Latin, Greek, and modern languages. On April 1, 1854, she married a handsome and persuasive lawyer by the name of DeWitt Eaton—a defender of “lost causes”—who assumed many cases of indigent Cherokee, African American, and Anglo-American clients, thus ridding the county, for a short while, of the sort of vigilante justice for which it later became notorious. Through Eaton, Frances was related to the Brumbys, Glovers, DuPrees, Doziers, Gobers, Mannings, and many other prominent Cobb County families. When Frances' mother went blind with glaucoma on Christmas Day of 1855, Frances' sisters (Mamie and Martha “Pooh-Pooh” Stanback) joined Frances and DeWitt at Nickajack Hall to assist in the running of the house, its affiliated commercial interests, and the raising of their three children (Terpsichorine¹ [1856–1935], Atticus Amory [1857–1912], and Persephronia [1859–1948]). This arrangement prevailed until DeWitt Eaton's sudden and controversial death in a carriage accident on April 1, 1860—by which time the land holdings of Nickajack proper had been reduced to two-and-a-half acres (in direct proportion to the increase of Cobb County relatives). Frances, however, promptly invited several bachelor uncles and spinster aunts to live at Nickajack Hall thereafter, and a changing cast of relatives—cousins, great-aunts, and uncles—could be seen whiling away the afternoon in the long row of twelve Brumby rockers that lined the front porch well into the twentieth century.

The Nickajack Library, located on the first floor of the transitional Federal-style fourteen-room mansion, contained some three thousand volumes—a huge library by contemporary standards—at least two thousand of which were stored in a finished basement annex under the front porch, accessible by a hidden staircase. The holdings, although only sparsely detailed in relevant correspondence and tax records of the period, included a large representation from the classics: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1794); Alexander Pope's translation of *The Iliad of Homer* (London: Printed by W. Bowyer for B. Lintott between the Temple Gates, 1720); Horace Walpole's *Catalogue of Pictures and Drawings in the Holbein-Chamber at Strawberry-Hill* (Strawberry-Hill:

1. A Works Progress Administration transcriber apparently erred in the April 1, 1938, typescript of graveyard records at Ezekiel Memorial Library, where her name is rendered as “Terpsichlorine.”

Strawberry-Hill Press, 1760); as well as early romantic fiction (Scott, Poe, and Bulwer-Lytton), poetry (Thomas Moore, Coleridge, and Shelly) and sprinklings of texts in the areas of contemporary medical practice, agriculture, domestic economy, phrenology, and animal husbandry. Nor were periodicals ignored: *Southern Literary Messenger* (Richmond, Va.: T. H. White, 1834–64); *Cornhill Magazine* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1860–); *Gentleman's Magazine* (London: R. Newton, 1731–); and a complete set of *Begonia: A Gift Annual* (Eatonton, Ga.: Oconee Press, 1848–59), in which poet laureate Sidney Lanier first published his poetry under the pseudonym of "Sidonius," were among its glories. During their productive but short married life together, Frances insisted that her husband's law texts be kept at the office, to better separate work from the business of living.

At Nickajack Library, local families could sit for a day, enjoy the pleasures of the bookshelf and a cheroot, while imbibing in "Beethoven's fifth" (an elaborately equipped eighteenth-century coromandel cabinet outfitted as a bar), and debate *à haut voix*, if they so desired. Those who wanted to borrow a book merely mentioned it to Frances or her lifelong retainer and confidante Patience Zenobia Love Divine Popham (known to the family as "Ureah"), as Frances believed that the keeping of records detracted from the enjoyment of reading and discussion of what was read. "Don't tell me about organization," she is reported to have said, "I am the organization!"

On April 1, 1855, Frances Guerard Stanback Eaton began operating a small press in the basement—Nickajack Press—from which poured her own voluminous pamphlets on the history of continental porcelains (*Garlands and Grottoes: Poetical Gems from the Ancients* [1856] and *Soft-Paste Thoughts: The Dirt Origins of Royal Crown Derby Porcelain* [1857]); her husband's treatise on the political complexities of Georgia state government (*The Shirts Off Our Backs: Rate Differentials in Railway Transportation of Raw Goods from the Southern States and Finished Goods from the North* [1858]); and numerous commonplace books (such as *Ureah's Receipts: A Christmas Memento of Nickajack Hall* [Patience Z. L. D. Popham and Frances S. Eaton, 1859]), which she presented to friends at Christmas before the war. Unfortunately, despite concerted efforts by noted historians, none of these publications has yet surfaced or been found.

During her tireless hours operating the press, Frances became a quick study at the type case and credited the vigorous exercise of pulling the Columbian press for her amazing body tone, since she never developed dowager's hump, turkey neck, or widow's crepe. Her domestic standards also never lapsed during the conflict between the North and the South. According to one story (source unknown), she would write "Shame" in any dust she found on the Adams demilune parlor consoles as a reproach to lackadaisical house helpers.

During the war, while aided by her two sisters and three small children, Frances insisted on entertaining Confederate troops in the Nickajack Library. Pooh-Pooh, even more contemptuous of convention than her sister, could supposedly play the pianoforte with her toes, whence she abandoned the wearing of hoops long before fashion dictated it. Mamie, the eldest sister, self-effacingly clung to the smokehouse and the kitchen (where she helped Ureah with her chores) and became in the

process a purveyor of sublime cookery, noted throughout the state, particularly for her soy marinades.

In keeping with Frances' liberal hospitality, press, and library policies, she never forbade her children any reading matter, however advanced or shocking the content, as she privately thought that parents more often than their children suffered any ill effects from radical ideas. As the motto for her library, she reportedly applied Rabelais' educational encomium: "Fais Ce Que Voudras" (Do What Thou Wilt). One famous vignette has Frances presiding over a Lucullan Thanksgiving dinner of scrawny fowl, grits, elder blossom fritters, and wine for the Confederate cavalry: when James, the porter, tripped over the stoop to the dining room, sending the precious carcass hurtling along the floor to the opposite wall, she famously replied, "James, pick up that bird and throw it away and bring in the other one." James, who knew his mistress well, merely wiped off the bird and made a suitably elaborate second entrance.

Though Nickajack Hall was sacked after the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Frances talked a Union soldier into letting her have a mule and wagon to escape to Macon with her sisters and children. When she returned to Nickajack Hall after the fall of Savannah, the mansion was still standing, but all of the books had either been burned in a bonfire on the once beautifully landscaped front lawn or stolen as booty. Regrettably, the press had been disassembled and the metal parts carted away to be melted down for munitions, along with Frances' distinct Baskerville-type fonts. Only the printer's device, which Frances used as a colophon on all their publications, escaped the conflagration due to Ureah's timely loss of a blown-glass spice pestle the week before their unplanned but expeditious exodus from Nickajack Hall. Thereafter, throughout her children's adolescent and teenage years, Frances' only reminder of the once famous Nickajack Press was the printer's device—which continued to serve in the kitchen, its handle as a pestle and its plate as an impress on butter molds and fine chocolates.

As grown adults, Terpsichorine, Atticus, and Persephronia profited from their rich heritage and Frances' example. Terpsichorine established herself as a patroness of the arts in Reconstruction Atlanta; as the new Mrs. Hiram Astin, she entertained Amelita Galli-Curci, Enrico Caruso, and Olive Flemsted in her Decatur home when the Metropolitan Opera began its Southern tours. Atticus studied in Germany, became an intimate friend of Phillip Prince zu Eulenburg-Hertfeld, and translated several illustrated treatises on physical culture before hanging himself mysteriously in the third floor ballroom of Nickajack Hall, sans progeny. Persephronia married a German art student, Max Mickelson, while she was studying philosophy in Leipzig.

In April 1875, a former Union soldier in Boston placed a widespread Atlanta newspaper announcement, looking for descendants of the family that had first owned Nickajack Hall. Frances contacted him, and he returned to her volume one of a second edition of Ann Radcliffe's *Udolpho* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1794) that he had taken from the library the night that Nickajack was raided.

Unsurprisingly, Frances never replaced the library that had been destroyed—"I've *done* that," she wrote to her cousin, librarian Anne Wallace of Atlanta, "and neither will I remarry, because on both counts, I've had the best" (p. 2 of lost

letter dated April 1, 1896). Frances was refreshingly free of the rancor of so many southerners who resented change in the postwar era. When her childhood friend, Latrice Grasty, married a reputed carpetbagger and built a Victorian monstrosity visible from miles around, Eaton merely quipped, "It's amazing what a little money and manure can do," thus upbraiding the squalid intellectual and spiritual state of the rest of the county. She was frequently to be seen in jodhpurs, repairing the shingles on her roof, tending her asparagus patch, or harvesting her blushed peonies. It is said that she secured and saved a piece of the rope that hung Leo Frank, as a perpetual admonition to bigotry. A nondenominationalist all of her life, in reaction to her Mother's convenient lapse from Catholicism into Presbyterianism, she took great satisfaction and joy from the fact that her granddaughter Peggy married into the prominent Atlanta Jewish family of Elsas.

In her later years, Frances became more eccentric, refusing, for example, any mention of herself or her family in Sadie Temple Gober's unsurpassed *The First Hundred Years: A Short History of Cobb County, in Georgia* (Atlanta: Walter W. Brown Publishing Company, 1935). Shortly before her death in 1934, Frances donated the Nickajack Press' versatile printer's device and Nickajack Library's sole surviving volume to the fledgling Young Men's Library Association (later Ezekiel Memorial Library). Print historians now speculate that the device's design represents the work of Sue Nonnie Toggle, reputed to be a distant relative of adventuress Lola Montez, and later, an intimate member of the reading circle formed by Persephronia and the Reverend Buttolph at the First Presbyterian Church. The device pictures Frances, in a characteristic pose, in circa 1860 dress and coiffure.

After Persephronia sold Nickajack Hall in the early 1940s, it served at various times as a sanatorium for indigent ladies, a stockbroker's office, a furniture factory used to employ out-of-work employees of Bell Aircraft, and a beauty salon/athletic spa. After decades of neglect and architectural bastardization, the hall was finally returned to its original glorious state by new owners from Manhasset, who now use the historic mansion as a second residence when not renting it to the film industry. Despite some false and contradictory claims over Nickajack Hall's exact location, a reliable source (whose name has been withheld for confidentiality purposes) confirms that Nickajack Hall is located a discreet distance from the old town square of the "Gem City," Marietta,² and the old strip of stores on the Old Atlanta Road that used to mark Smyrna, the "Jonquil City."

Suda Mae Savon Hamby, *Lady Charleen Library,*
Southern Family History Project, Lizard Lick, North Carolina

2. Approximately thirteen miles southwest of the "big chicken" (a Kentucky Fried Chicken landmark originally built by Atlantic Steel) on Highway 41 North.