

FEATURE: PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PRESIDENT OF THE HISTORIANS: THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

Theodore Roosevelt was a Renaissance man. Although he is best remembered today for his political career, which included a successful seven and half years stay in the White House, he made contributions in a number of different fields, including history. He did ground breaking work in the discipline and was rewarded with one of the profession's highest honors. Roosevelt believed a soundly functioning democracy required a well-informed and educated citizenry. An understanding of history was a primary element in such a background. The nation also needed a distinctive literary cannon, and history, in his view, was part of literature. As the president of the American Historical Association, he wanted to further this trend, but he realized he had to appeal to the assembled academics as a scholar rather than as a politician. The events surrounding this speech bring into question previous conclusions reached about the influence and actions of Roosevelt in the years after he left the White House. The issues that the AHA President raised back in 1912 about the functions of historians in society remain relevant to the profession and all interested in education.

During his lifetime, Theodore Roosevelt had an impact on American society that extended beyond politics. He was a Renaissance man. Although he is best remembered today for his political career, which included a successful seven and half years stay in the White House, he made contributions in a number of different fields, including education. Success as a politician, however, has obscured these accomplishments. Commonly known by his initials, TR earned contemporary notice as an outdoor travel writer, botanist, explorer, publisher, journalist, and historian. His impact in any one of these fields was shallow, because his interests were so broad and diverse. History, however, was the exception. He did ground breaking work in the discipline and was rewarded with one of the profession's highest honors. While he deserves a full-fledged intellectual study, this article will concentrate solely on a small period in Roosevelt's career as an historian — his tenure as president of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1912. He believed a soundly functioning democracy required a well-informed and educated citizenry. An understanding of history was a primary element in such a background. The nation also needed a distinctive literary cannon, and history, in his view,

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was part of literature. Long before becoming president of the AHA, Roosevelt saw the profession breaking down into small sub-fields, and individual scholars interested in producing narrowly focused monographs examining minutia, and in the process, abandoning their civic duty to the rest of society. The AHA President wanted to reverse this trend, but he realized he had to appeal to the assembled academics as a scholar rather than as a politician. Roosevelt did just that. In two speeches that had much long-term, if somewhat limited impact, he appealed to the professional interests of the gathered historians, calling on them to write great works of literature as well as scholarship, using rhetoric that cast learned writers in heroic and immortal roles in an endeavor that amounted to a national crusade.

This analysis seeks to examine Roosevelt's tenure as president of the American Historical Association for several reasons. First, the events surrounding this speech bring into question previous conclusions reached about the influence and actions of Roosevelt in the years after he left the White House. More importantly, the issues that the AHA President raised back in 1912 about the functions of historians in society remain relevant to the profession and all interested in education. Finally, no previous scholars have explored this matter at any length. Edmund Morris's multi-volume account has not yet progressed to this point. In their one-volume biographies, Henry F. Pringle makes no mention of this episode, while Nathan Miller refers to it only in passing. In a short description of the event, H.W. Brands sees this address as part of Roosevelt's romantic view of life, which it was, but ends his analysis with this observation. William Harbaugh quotes the address, but makes no assessment of the speech or its reception. Joseph L. Gardner is extremely brief about this speech in his study of Roosevelt's post-presidential life. Lawrence J. Oliver's study of Roosevelt's influence on American literature devotes some attention to historical works, but the main focus of this account is on works of fiction. Aloysius A. Norton has offered the most in depth examination of this speech as part of a literary analysis of Roosevelt's career as a writer. Norton points out that Roosevelt produced over fifty books in the separate fields of history, outdoor travel, and journalism, but often uses the comments of others as a substitute for his own analysis, noting only that the presidential address "represents the finest achievement of Roosevelt's efforts as a historian."¹

What set this study apart from previous accounts is the use of lesser examined collections, such as the files of the American Historical Association. Operating with the idea that access to the primary material would advance Roosevelt's historical reputation, friends and family quickly compiled and published his letters, editorial columns, essays, and other writings. In later years, the creation of a microfilm copy of the Theodore Roosevelt papers boosted his historical reputation even more. While those interested in studying the man and his times have profited greatly from these efforts, these publications created contours that have unintentionally channeled investigation in certain directions. The use of these sources, but also others, such as the previously mentioned AHA records, contemporary publications, and the writings of other leading historians make this examination possible.

¹ Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1931); H.W. Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic*. (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 731-733; Nathan Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Life*. (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 198; William Harbaugh, *The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt*. Revised Edition. (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 428-430; Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. (New York: Ballantine, 1979); Joseph L. Gardner, *Departing Glory: Theodore Roosevelt as Ex-President*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 285; William Harbaugh, *The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Lawrence J. Oliver, *Brander Matthews, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Politics of American Literature, 1880-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

I. BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS

The story of Roosevelt's selection actually begins in 1910, and is best understood against the backdrop of professionalization. During the Nineteenth Century, German institutions of higher education had an enormous impact on their counterparts in the United States. American students traveled to Germany to earn advanced degrees. No institution in the western hemisphere offered graduate education of any real merit. The United Kingdom might have been a more natural destination for Americans for linguistic reasons alone, but British schools focused on producing gentlemen rather than scholars. In Germany the Americans found a society in which professors had enormous social prestige and economic earning power. The kings and emperors of the German-speaking states of Central Europe even ennobled some of their more highly respected academic leaders. In the field of history one of the most distinguished scholars was Leopold von Ranke. He worked to show the past "wie es eigentlich gewesen." Most translators have rendered this phrase into English to mean "as it really was." Like many other German scholars, Ranke was reacting against the radicalism of the Enlightenment. In the context of German culture, this phrase has some ambiguity and is best understood to mean that the historian refused to make moral judgments about events in the past, but were hardly neutral in their presentations about these episodes. These developments happened, regardless of one's personal feelings about them, and to study them is hardly an effort to make a value judgment or an endorsement in their favor. Most Americans studying in Germany were unaware of these subtle nuances in thought and they often ignored what they failed to understand. Combining their indirect understanding of Ranke — he retired before most American students arrived in Europe — with the methods of empirical science, which enjoyed high regard in the United States, these scholars tried to establish history as a professional occupation.²

This effort is hardly surprising, coming as it did during the Progressive Era with its emphasis on professional expertise. Prior to this time, historians in the United States were writers first and foremost. More times than not, they had no affiliation with an academic institution, and usually had no advanced degree. As a result, they wrote broad studies for the public at large and tended to emphasize great men in their accounts. In contrast, individuals attempting to professionalize the field believed that graduate education and an advanced degree were necessary credentials for work in the field. Professionals also had to have an academic affiliation like their German mentors. Adopting the professional ethos of science, German-trained historians believed scholars could make important contributions to a collective enterprise with narrowly focused studies that were mainly of interest to others in their field. The academic monograph became the most important element in professional advancement and the most important element in assessing its utility was its analysis of the facts rather than the quality of its prose. During the 1900s in both institutional and disciplinary identification history was a social science. Since history was one of the oldest academic disciplines, it also played an influential role in advancing the idea that universities

² Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-29. The writings of Prussian military philosopher, strategist, and historian Carl von Clausewitz produced a similar cultural mistranslation in the English-speaking world. For a study that presents this extremely complicated subject in an extremely easy to follow manner, see: Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America 1815-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

should have a research mission rather than one designed to develop the morality and character of students even if its practitioners tended to subordinate the discipline to those like sociology and political science. This system also limited productive and constructive debate since university administrators always worried about offending wealthy donors. Most professionals made their living from their salaries as professors rather than their writings. Ironically, the status and the income of historians were generally higher before professionalization. Such a system allowed mediocre talents to survive. It is hardly surprising that J. Franklin Jameson, the editor of *The American Historical Review* during this period, called much of the scholarship of the 1890s "second-class work."³

As part of this trend, the AHA was in the final stages of a transformation that was turning this learned society into a professional academic organization. In the first two decades of the organization's existence, few historians had advanced degrees and many members of the organization were antiquarians, genealogists, or simple history buffs. In an effort to build up the prestige of the new organization, its membership selected a number of influential persons to serve as president, who often times had never worked as a historian, had no academic affiliation, or had even attended college. These presidents were politicians, naval officers, college presidents, and businessmen. Only one of the first nineteen presidents (one man served twice) was a Ph.D., but from 1905 to 1919 half of the presidents had a doctoral degree. The current practice of awarding the office to a senior scholar associated with a history department at a major research university came into existence after the end of World War I.⁴

A. TR as an Historian

When the Association met at Indianapolis in 1910 to select its new slate of officers, Roosevelt seemed to offer the best of two different worlds. He had a solid body of scholarship to his name, and his writings reflected some of the intellectual trends of the professional historians. In the past, he had engaged in the various activities of a scholar. Roosevelt attended scholarly conferences, presented papers, and wrote book reviews for academic journals, including *The American Historical Review*. His scholarship always had a timely nature, offered moral advice on contemporary issues be they political or social, and advanced an interpretive thesis that H.W. Brands describes as "heroically nationalist."⁵ Some of his

³ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 48, 50, 52-55, 59, 63-68; Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 211-213; Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 171-172; John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 9-10, 112-113.

⁴ Emil Pocock, "Presidents of the American Historical Association: A Statistical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4. (October 1984), 1016-1018; David D. Van Tassel, "From Learned Society to Professional Organization: The American Historical Association, 1884-1900," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4. (October 1984), 929-956.

⁵ J. Franklin Jameson, "Early Days of the American Historical Association, 1884-1895," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1. (October 1934), 6; J. Franklin Jameson, "The American Historical Review, 1895-1920," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. (October 1920), 11; Theodore Roosevelt, "Review of *The Speaker of the House of Representatives* by M. P. Follett," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1. (October 1896), 176-178; Theodore Roosevelt, "Review of *Chronicles of Border Warfare* by Alexander Scott Withers," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1. (October 1895), 170-171; Brands, *T.R.*, 232-233. Probably the best known academic historian to advance this thesis—albeit of a different flavor—was Samuel Flagg Bemis of Yale University. Bemis won the Pulitzer Prize for his biography of John Quincy Adams and was

books were second rate, but others were quite good. His biography of Thomas Hart Benton was the standard account of the Missouri senator for two decades, and, according to Edmund Morris, Roosevelt's first book, a study of naval warfare during the war of 1812, remains the authoritative account on the topic.⁶

The future AHA president had the biggest impact in the profession with *The Winning of the West*, his multi-volume study on westward expansion. This work was a path breaking effort; one of the first in the discipline to establish western history as an area of legitimate scholarly inquiry. Unlike many of the gentleman historians that wrote earlier in the century, Roosevelt was more than willing to include the experiences of the average or common man in his accounts. The first volume-published in 1889, received a number of positive reviews, including one in *Dial* from Frederick Jackson Turner, the future author of the frontier thesis. In fact, several scholars of Turner's work argue that *The Winning of the West* provided him with the inspiration for this interpretation. The review that caught Roosevelt's attention, however, was the one that appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*. The anonymous author of this piece noted that the author's "style is natural, simple, and picturesque." The reviewer also noted that Roosevelt's contention that western history was a new area worthy of examination offered a counter balance to New England centric studies that dominated American historical scholarship at the time. This writer then disputed a few interpretations, commented on several factual errors, pointed out some archive collections that should have been explored, and suggested several topics that worthy of further inquiry. Roosevelt responded with a polite letter to the still anonymous individual, "I must frankly acknowledge the justice of some your criticisms," he wrote. "Yours is the first criticism of my book from which I learnt anything." The reviewer was William Frederick Poole, the then current president of the AHA, and a correspondence developed between the two about westward expansion and movement into the Northwest Territory. Roosevelt argued it was a national effort, while Poole believed conquest of the region was entirely the effort of Virginians.⁷

In addition to his solid credentials as a scholar, the other factor that contributed to Roosevelt's selection was his celebrity status as a popular former President of the United States. While in the White House, he championed cultural and learned activities. As President, he supported the efforts of the AHA to create a national historical commission, which would fund the publication of historical government records and publish guides to documentary collections. "We cannot," the secretary of the Association would later write him, "forget that along with all the other notable things for which you stood, the cause of historical learning and historical writing has an important place." As a result, the officers of

president of the AHA in 1961. Gaddis Smith, "The Two Worlds of Samuel Flagg Bemis," *Diplomatic History* 9 (Fall 1985), 295-302.

⁶ For accounts of Roosevelt's strengths and weaknesses as a historian see Brands, *T.R.*, 119-120, 143, 211-214, 232-234, 262-264, and Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 154-156, 331-335, 378-381, 410-411, 705-707.

⁷ Roosevelt to Anonymus, October 27, 1889 and Roosevelt to Poole, November 8, 1889 in George B. Utley, "Theodore Roosevelt's *The Winning of the West*: Some Unpublished Letters," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 30, No. 4. (March 1944), 495-499, 502; Ray Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 83-84; Wilbur Jacobs, *The Historical World of Frederick Jackson Turner*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 4; Brands, *T.R.*, 232-234, 262-264, and Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 410-411, 705-707; Higham, *History*, 155-156.

the Association elected, and offered to him the position of first vice-president with the hope and expectation that he would become the president the following year.⁸

No one appears to have talked with Roosevelt before hand or explained the honorific nature of the position, and his response, as a result, was less than enthusiastic. "Permit me, through you, to thank the officers of the American Historical Association," he wrote Jameson. "I sincerely appreciate their kindness, and have much pleasure in accepting. Of course you understand that my acceptance of this office does not in any way [involve] work or financial responsibility in connection with the association, as I already have as much on my hands as I can well manage."⁹

Key figures in the operation of the Association quickly contacted Roosevelt and explained the nature of the job. Jameson typed a letter that was sent to Roosevelt's office at *Outlook* magazine, where he worked as a contributing editor. "It is quite true that your acceptance of the office entails no work or responsibility in connection with the Association." He went on to explain the promotion associated with the job, and that his only duty in 1912 would be to give the presidential address at the annual meeting. This effort backfired. After reading Jameson's note Roosevelt wanted nothing to do with the Association. In a reply, he explained his feelings: "You really cannot imagine the endless pressure upon me for speeches of every kind. I have come positively to dread making any address, and I have to make addresses continually. They are a perfect burden to me." He also wanted to avoid a commitment so far in advance of the date. "I would not be willing to scamp the duties, and yet I do not see how I can undertake duties additional to those I have already undertaken. I do not want to be churlish, and I do not want to seem to show lack of sensibility of the great honor conferred upon me, but it does seem to me that it would be wiser to take someone else in my place." William Sloane, the president of the Association in 1911, apparently contacted him later in the day, and convinced him to accept. In another letter to Jameson with the same date, Roosevelt changed his position. "All right, I will accept the Vice-Presidency and ultimately the Presidency as you desire."¹⁰

II. TR AS PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Despite his initial reluctance in accepting the position, the presidency of the AHA would help him advance some of the intellectual and cultural ideas that he had advocated before and during his residence in the White House. Since the United States of America is an artificial construct, questions about national identity have been a reoccurring issue throughout

⁸ Arthur Link, "The American Historical Association, 1884-1984: Retrospect and Prospect," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1, Supplement to Volume 90. (February 1985), 10, fn. 24; Jameson to Roosevelt, January 14, 1911, and Haskins to Roosevelt, October 26, 1912, Folder Q-R, Box 16, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter referred to as LC).

⁹ Roosevelt to Jameson, January 12, 1911, Folder Q-R, Box 16, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, LC.

¹⁰ Gardner, *Departing Glory*, 108; Jameson to Roosevelt, January 14, 1911, and Roosevelt to Jameson, January 19, 1911, Folder Q-R, Box 16, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, LC; Roosevelt to Jameson, January 19, 1911 in Elting Morison, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. VII, *The Days of Armageddon*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 212.

American history. Put another way, what makes an American an American? Unlike the Danes, Japanese, or Swedes — to name just a few examples — Americans have no institutions like a national church, racial homogeneity, unifying culture, long and shared history, or a monarchy to bind their nation together. These concerns were particularly acute in the Progressive Era as the nation received an influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. The white Anglo-Saxon Protestants already in the country thought these new residents had little in common with “native-born” Americans. Roosevelt believed that art and culture were important elements in national identity. He thought that a distinctive body of American literature that stressed themes and symbols that helped to perpetuate the virtuous republic that he saw at the core of the nation’s identity could serve as a unifying force. The factors that made America a virtuous republic included its democratic ideals, the absence of class distinctions, and a rugged individualism that was tempered with an inclination to sacrifice for the greater good. History, as far as Roosevelt was concerned, was part of that literary canon that the United States needed, and he could use his position in the AHA to try and convince professional historians that society needed them to write for audience larger than just their colleagues.¹¹

His desire for a more democratically oriented history was one of the reasons he was so hostile towards the AHA and the strong elitism that existed among the professional historians. He actually thought very little of the group. “We have a preposterous little organization called I think the American Historical Association, which, when I was just out of Harvard and very ignorant, I joined,” he told the British historian Sir George Trevelyan in a moment of candid overstatement back in 1904. “After a while it dawned on me that all of the conscientious, industrious, painstaking little pedants, who would have been useful people in a rather small way if they had understood their limitations, had become because of their conceit distinctly noxious. Unfortunately with us it is these small men who do most of the historic teaching in the colleges.”¹²

The professionals in the Association wanted Roosevelt to serve as president because of his public stature and he had credentials that were respectable enough. These individuals were more than willing to overlook some of his views about history that ran counter to the one’s they had, but there was a downside to his status. Roosevelt was absent from all AHA functions in 1911, and some within the organization resented his non-involvement. Sloane once again contacted Roosevelt, and returned with assurances from Roosevelt.¹³

Despite this promise, Roosevelt had little to do with the Association in the year that followed. He never attended any of the executive council meetings of the Association, which were normally chaired by the president. His absences were hardly unexpected; Roosevelt was running for President of the United States in 1912. His duties as president of the American Historical Association paled in comparison to this undertaking.¹⁴

¹¹ Stephen L. Levine, “Race, Culture, and Art: Theodore Roosevelt and the Nationalist Aesthetic,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Department of History, Kent State University, 2001), 111-115, 117.

¹² Roosevelt to Trevelyan, January 25, 1904 in Elting E. Morison, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. III, *The Square Deal*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 707-708.

¹³ Haskins to Rhodes, November 3, 1911; Rhodes to Haskins, November 4, 1911; Haskins to Rhodes, November 8, 1911, Folder Q-R, Box 16; Haskins to Sloane, November 8, 1911, Folder S, Box 14, Secretary’s File, American Historical Association Papers, LC.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Executive Council of the American Historical Association, December 1, 1911; Minutes of the Executive Council of the American Historical Association, November 30, 1912; Minutes of the Executive

It would be easy and misleading to dismiss Roosevelt as a token, ceremonial appointment, because the original basis for his selection had little to do with his administrative abilities. The AHA leadership wanted his presence and name, and get it they did. Roosevelt performed all the public duties associated with the position.¹⁵

Delivering the presidential address at the annual AHA conference was Roosevelt's main contribution to the Association, and he had diffident feelings about his obligation to attend the meeting. In a letter to his sister-in-law, written after the new year, he explained that his main interest that winter was the understandable desire of a father to spend time with his two youngest sons: "The Christmas holidays have gone off admirably. Unfortunately I had to go for three days to Boston, as president of the American Historical Association. I loathed doing it, and of course especially because it made me miss so much of Archie and Quentin's time home." He would give the address, but he informed Haskins that he would not stay for the entire conference. He started writing the speech only after the end of the 1912 campaign. "I have been as busy as possible writing this address and doing my other *Outlook* work, together with the endless fussing in the effort to keep the Progressive Party going along," he told his son Kermit.¹⁶ The AHA was fortunate he had not won the election; the demands on his time would have been even greater were he returning to the White House.

He was also unsure if his audience would like the message he would give. "I am to deliver a beastly lecture — 'History as Literature' — because I am President of the American Historical Association," he wrote his old friend and fellow politician/historian Henry Cabot Lodge. "None of its members, by the way, believe that history is literature. I have spent much care on the lecture, and as far as I now know it won't even be printed anywhere. Even the *Outlook* finds it too tough a morsel to swallow!"¹⁷

Although best known as a political figure, Lodge had professional expertise in the subject of history, and offered words of encouragement to his friend. Before entering politics, he earned the first Ph.D. in history that Harvard University granted. He also rejected the narrowly focused monographs that were coming to dominate historical scholarship. "I cannot imagine a better subject than the one you have chosen and I cannot conceive why you should call it a 'tough morsel' and say that even the *Outlook* would not print it. If anything in the world needs to be said it is some words of truth about history as literature. The only history the world will ever read is the history that is literature, and the excellent gentlemen who heap up vast masses of facts render valuable service to history and the historian, but they are not read."¹⁸

Council of the American Historical Association, December 27, 1912; Minutes of the Executive Council of the American Historical Association, December 27, 1912, Folder Council Minutes 1911-1912, Box 244, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, LC.

¹⁵ Ibid; Leland to Roosevelt, April 24, 1912, Reel 138; Leland to Roosevelt, June 14, 1912, Reel 146, Papers of Theodore Roosevelt, LC; Bowen to Haskins, October 12, 1912, Folder Council Dinner 1912, Box 244, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, LC.

¹⁶ Roosevelt to Carow, January 4, 1913, and Theodore Roosevelt to Kermit Roosevelt, December 3, 1912, in Morison, *Letters*, Vol. VII, 688, 660; Roosevelt to Haskins, November 1, 1912, Folder Council Dinner 1912, Box 244, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, LC.

¹⁷ Roosevelt to Lodge, December 26, 1912, in Henry Cabot Lodge and Charles F. Redmond, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918*. Vol. 2, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 427.

¹⁸ Lodge to Roosevelt, December 28, 1912, Ibid, 428.

Roosevelt's participation in the annual conference was the focus of much attention. "It is a great pleasure to us all as well as an honor to the Association, to have you as our president and to look forward to seeing you at the annual meeting," Haskins wrote to him. Another historian, the compiler of the Association's annual report, noted, "From the point of view of the general public, the chief characteristic of the association's twenty-eighth annual meeting lay in the presence of Col. Roosevelt and in the power and charm of the address which he delivered as president."¹⁹ A reporter covering the event for *The Boston Daily Globe* noted that the former President would speak "with all the authority of one who is at the same time a maker of history, a litterateur, and an historian."²⁰ An editorial in the *Boston Evening Transcript* noted that Roosevelt was more than a politician. He had written a number of well-respected works of history. "Fortunately we can all be interested in what he will say. It may leave us a new topic for debate, possibly for dissension, but it is not likely to be platitudinous. Whatever else Mr. Roosevelt is, he is not that."²¹

The presence of Roosevelt helped boost attendance at the conference. The number of registered participants was 450, which was more than double that of the previous year. In fact, the convention in Boston was the second largest gathering in the Association's history up to that point in time. Only the meeting that marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization had drawn a better crowd. These figures should hardly be surprising; the annual meeting of the AHA during this era was more of a social gathering than a professional conference. The author of the Association's annual report attributed this increase to Roosevelt: "The attractive force of his political and literary fame accounts in great measure for the large attendance." Every registered member received two tickets to the presidential address, which was held in Symphony Hall, the largest auditorium in Boston at the time with a seating capacity of 2,500. When Roosevelt arrived to give his speech the hall was at maximum capacity, which was all the more impressive since the crowd came despite a winter snow storm.²²

Roosevelt's fame was in some ways a liability in his effort to get his message across. The AHA presidential address was his first public appearance since the end of the U.S. presidential campaign. If his intended audience — the historians — thought he was attempting to use an intellectual event for political purposes, they might easily ignore his message. A reporter for the *Boston Daily Globe* noted that there was a strong contingent of Progressives in the hall. When he walked on to the stage with the rest of the platform party, a shout went out and there was good deal of applause. A group of his admirers stood up and began cheering, demonstrating their political allegiance. Roosevelt wanted no partisan demonstrations. He smiled, shook his head, and waved them back into their seats. All throughout the conference. Roosevelt avoided any mention of party politics and maintained a

¹⁹ "The Meeting of the American Historical Association at Boston." *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912*. (Washington, 1914), 27; Haskins to Roosevelt, October 12, 1912, Folder Q-R, Box 16, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, LC.

²⁰ *The Boston Daily Globe*, December, 27, 1912, morning edition, 10; evening edition, 2; the *Washington Evening Star* published a story about Roosevelt speaking at the conference prior to the event, but ran no story about the actual event itself. *Washington Evening Star*, December 27, 28, 1912.

²¹ *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 27, 1912, 10.

²² *Ibid*; "The Meeting of the American Historical Association at Buffalo and Ithaca." *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 17, No. 3. (April 1912), 453; *The Boston Daily Globe*, December, 28, 1912, morning edition, 1; Haskins to Roosevelt, October 26, 1912, Folder Council Dinner 1912. Box 244, Secretary's File, American Historical Association Papers, LC; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 58.

deferential attitude towards the gathered academics on all intellectual and educational matters. According to observers, this behavior impressed many.²³

In an effort to set the right intellectual tone and further minimize any partisan sentiment, A. Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard University, introduced the main speaker. "It is not often that a historical society is enriched by the presence of a man who has not only made written history, but also made history," he said after receiving some applause of his own. "Most men who make history have the life of a statesman and then spen[d] their declining years in writing their recollections with greater or less accuracy. The speaker of the evening started writing history long before he began to make history. He first wrote *The Naval History of the War of 1812* before he had ever been in a war [or] thought of being Assistant Secretary of the Navy. He then wrote a book on *The Winning of the West* before his eloquence had won the west. I cannot introduce him to you for you know him too well — I can only make way for Theodore Roosevelt." Loud applause followed.²⁴

A. The Presidential Address

Roosevelt stood before the audience and gave his address, titled "History as Literature," in which the language was as important as the message. His speech was an exposition on the role and nature of history in society, and the importance of style in historical writing. As such, his rhetoric not only had to communicate his argument, but had to have literary merit of its own. His remarks lasted almost two hours, and according to a *Boston Daily Globe* reporter, he held the audience the entire time with a "clear[,] musical voice which seemed to grow in power and tone as he proceeded." Throughout his talk he used language in which he tried to inspire and cast historians in the role of immortal artists of as much significance as the great figures in history that they studied. With this rhetoric he suggested that scholars who employed such tools would go far in their profession and have a huge audience. He repeatedly used the phrase "great historian" and to a lesser degree "true historian." Such writers would also have an immense impact. "Great thoughts match and inspire heroic deeds." The disciples of Clio that performed such functions would "stir our souls" just as Lincoln did with his remarks at Gettysburg and his second inauguration.²⁵

A major theme in the speech was the social function of scholars exploring the past: "History, taught for a directly and immediately useful purpose to pupils and the teachers of pupils, is one of the necessary features of a sound education in democratic citizenship." In performing this function the scholar of the past should endeavor to develop "broad human sympathy, and the need of lofty and generous emotion" in their readers and students. "Only thus can the citizenship of the modern state rise level to the complex modern social needs."

²³ *The Boston Daily Globe*, December, 28, 1912, morning edition, 1; *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 28, 1912, part 1, 6; Rhodes to Charles Harding Firth, January 15, 1913 and Rhodes to Heary Cabot Lodge, February 9, 1913 in M.A. DeWolfe Howar, *James Ford Rhodes: American Historian*. (New York: Appleton, 1929), 236-237; Rhodes to Myers, January 7, 1913, in John A. Garaty, ed., *The Barber and the Historian: The Correspondence of George A. Myers and James Ford Rhodes, 1910-1923*. (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1956), 18.

²⁴ *The Boston Daily Globe*, December, 28, 1912, morning edition, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid*; Theodore Roosevelt, "History as Literature." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3. (April 1913). 473-489.

Although he believed historians had a civic duty to perform, he had no desire to see these educators become nationalistic publicists. "Those who tell the Americans of the future what the Americans of to-day and of yesterday have done will perforce tell much that is unpleasant." He believed, however, that the strengths of the nation outweighed its weaknesses and defects, "That with many blunders and shortcomings, with much halting and turning aside from the path, we shall yet in the end prove our faith by our works, and show in our lives or belief that righteousness exalteth a nation."²⁶

The most effective fashion in which historians could perform this function was to produce good, clearly written accounts of the past. Intellectually stimulating, well-written and evocative works was history at its best. "Unless he writes vividly," the historian, Roosevelt stated, "cannot write truthfully; for no amount of dull, painstaking detail will sum up as the whole truth unless the genius is there to paint the truth." The negative reaction many scholars had towards well-written works was wrong. "Indeed, not a few learned people seem to feel that the quality of a readableness in a book is one which warrants suspicion. Indeed, not a few learned people seem to feel that the fact that a book is interesting is proof that it is shallow." He understood some of their objections, but believed these critics overstated their case. "They feel that complete truthfulness must never be sacrificed to color. In this they are right. They also feel that complete truthfulness is incompatible with color. In this they are wrong."²⁷

Roosevelt carefully avoided a direct attack on the collectivist approach towards history that legitimized narrow studies and that so many in his audience tended to favor. While this style was less than optimum in his opinion, he recognized that individuals could still make important contributions through this form. "The investigator in any line may do work which puts us all under lasting obligations to him, even though he be totally deficient in the art of literary expression, that is, totally deficient in the ability to convey vivid and lifelike pictures to others of the past whose secrets he has laid bare." Any work that was the product of well marshaled facts and a good argument always deserved an audience. "A book containing such sound teaching, even if without any literary quality, may be as useful to the student as creditable to the writer, as a similar book on medicine."²⁸

Roosevelt did, however, make a subtle, indirect attack on this approach. He understood that historians were beginning to branch out into a variety of sub-disciplines, and that the traditional focus on wars, treaties, and politics would no longer hold center stage. He thought there was nothing wrong with this development; diversity was good. Yet, within these new fields, there was a large homogeneity since academic experts were writing for one another. Individuals writing for the public often produced much more diverse books, and Roosevelt encouraged this trend. "Among a great multitude of thoughtful people there is room for the widest possible variety of appeals. Let each man fearlessly choose what is of real importance and interest to him personally." He also added a word of caution: "In the revolt against the old tendency of historians to deal exclusively with the spectacular and the exceptional, to treat only of war and oratory and government, many modern writers have gone to the opposite extreme. They fail to realize that in the lives of nations as in the lives of men there are hours so fraught with weighty achievement, with triumph or defeat, with joy or sorrow, that each

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *The Boston Daily Globe*, December, 28, 1912, morning edition, 1; Roosevelt, "History as Literature," 473-489.

²⁸ Ibid.

such hour may determine all the years that are to come thereafter, or may outweigh all the years that have gone before."²⁹

Historians also needed skills other than a deft ability to turn a phrase. Roosevelt believed that historians should be innovative. Following generations would have greater and greater amounts of information to process and would think of new directions, but innovation was no excuse to write poorly. The historians of the future "must use the instruments which the historians of the past did not have ready to hand. Yet even with these instruments he cannot do as good work as the best of the elder historians unless he has vision and imagination, the power to grasp what is essential and to reject the infinitely more numerous non-essentials, the power to embody ghosts, to put flesh and blood on dry bones, to make dead men living before our eyes. In short he must have the power to take the science of history and turn it into literature." In fact, he believed that non-traditional studies would require better composition than works on well-established subjects. "The great historian must be able to paint for us the life of the plain people, the ordinary men and women, of the time of which he writes. He can do this only if he possesses the highest kind of imagination."³⁰

What he had done was state directly a number of views he had long held about the study of history as a discipline and the style of writing to be found in works about the past. While he lived in the White House, he told Trevelyan "inasmuch as books were meant to be read, good books ought to be interesting, and the best books capable in addition of giving one a lift upward in some direction. The great historian must of course have the scientific spirit which gives the power of research which enables one to marshal and weigh the facts; but unless his finished work is literature of a very high type small will be his claim to greatness."³¹

B. TR as a Military Historian

The next day Roosevelt gave another, little known speech as part of an AHA panel on military history. His "The Lessons of our Military History," drew a large crowd, but minimal press coverage and Roosevelt scholars and biographers since then have all but ignored this address. The discussion focused on how to advance and further the study of military history. Professor Robert M. Johnston of Harvard was the driving force behind the organization of this panel and established the parameters of the meeting with his opening comments. He noted a general hostility towards the study of the armed forces among other historians. "There is more than a disposition to frown it down, to taboo it as being in some way antagonistic to the call of pacifism which holds the public ear," he said. Johnston had first made a name for himself as a scholar in Europe with several works on Napoleonic campaigns and when he returned to the United States became determined to improve both the quality and standing of military history in his home country. This panel was the first step in a long-term plan. The best way to change to improve the status of military history, Johnston said, was to establish an organization and a journal devoted exclusively to the study of military history. These

²⁹ Ibid; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 84, 89-94

³⁰ Roosevelt, "History as Literature," 473-489.

³¹ Roosevelt to Trevelyan, January 25, 1904 in Elting E. Morison, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. III, *The Square Deal*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 707-708; "The Meeting of the American Historical Association at Boston," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912*. (Washington, 1914), 27.

developments should take place in conjunction with the U.S. Army, which should form a history section in the general staff.³²

The discussion that followed centered on the establishment of a history center somewhere within the War Department. This symposium reflected the political debate between the cause of international peace and what would soon become known as the military preparedness movement. Captain Arthur L. Conger of the Army Service School at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas began the discussion with a presentation about the historical section of the German General Staff. Conger contradicted his self in his presentation. He convincingly showed that the German government had "a policy not only of suppression but, where desirable, of conversion of facts, and the employment of the official historical bureau to promote certain political aims soon became adopted as a fixed policy." History in Germany served "a point of view promulgated by the government for its own purposes." Conger then, however, recommended that the general staff of the U.S. Army create a history section, saying Americans would never make the same mistakes as the Germans. Oswald Villard, editor of the *New York Evening Post*, was in the audience and disagreed, saying, "Is it not a fact that gentlemen who are engaged in the military profession and who are most honorably inspired with zeal to improve that profession, to elevate it in this country, to dignify it, would necessarily, from their very position in the military profession, have a bias?" No one present at the panel agreed with Villard. Many of them saw the study of military history as an intellectual function of the need for a larger military establishment. The past should provide lessons for current and future developments. Professor Frederick M. Fling of the University of Nebraska attempted to move the discussion away from the semi-political: "It seems to me that we are confounding some things here that should be kept apart." He explained that his historical research interests and his political views were two separate things. Even though he was a military historian, he was no supporter of the preparedness movement. "History has to be of the past and not of the future. And whatever we may think of the future there is no question that there has been a great deal of fighting in the past."³³

Other panelists continued with presentations that often reflected their political views rather than their historical interpretations. Roosevelt arrived at the session at noon, just as Fling was finishing his talk. Roosevelt listened to a speaker from the Army War College and the editor of the *Infantry Journal* argue both the merits of preparedness and the creation of a General Staff historical division. Roosevelt had always used his historical writings to argue current politics and fully believed in military preparedness. "In essence, I have only to say 'ditto' to the two gentlemen whose papers I have heard read since entering this room," he said. "The way to prevent the possibility therefore is to keep ourselves, our whole military system, the Army and Navy as part of the whole military system, in such a condition that

³² "Conference on Military History," *Annual Report*, 159-162. The efforts of Johnston to initiate these changes are described well in Carol Reardon, *Soldiers and Scholars: The U.S. Army and the Uses of Military History, 1865-1920* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 164-181.

³³ *Ibid.* 162-189; *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 28, 1912, 1; Theodore Roosevelt, "The Lessons of our Military History," *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt: Memorial Edition*, Vol. 18, *American Problems*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 312-313.

there won't be any temptation on the part of anyone else to go to war with us. You can't do that unless you make our people wake up to the real meaning of our past history."³⁴

Roosevelt gave the last paper of the panel, and again discussed the role of the historian as a medium between the people and the past. In doing so, he backed away slightly from the inclusive elements in his main address and used muted language compared to the night before. "I am perfectly clear that the military history must be written primarily — not entirely, but primarily — by military men, and for that reason I have felt that it should be written under the observation of the General Staff, but I feel that there should be the collaboration of civilians with military writers, and if those civilian writers are of the proper type some of the most important lessons will be taught by them, and they will be among the most important lessons because they will be lessons the military men can't with propriety teach. I don't wish to see the military history written by the General Staff alone, because the General Staff can't with propriety tell the whole truth about the Government and about the people to the Government and the people."³⁵

Roosevelt recognized that military affairs involved matters far more complex than just combat operations, and believed that good studies should amount to more than just accounts of drum and trumpet. It was, however, inappropriate for military officers to interject themselves into the political debates, even those about the role of the armed services in society. "A proper history of the Army must in part be written by the right type of civilian, because it must deal with our national shortcomings, not only governmental, but popular, and point out truthfully what those national shortcomings have cost us in the past when war came upon us."³⁶

Often times when a celebrity attends a scholarly conference to talk about matters in which their expertise is based on first hand experience, their presentation quickly breaks down into a series of personal reminiscences. This occasion with Roosevelt was no different. He threw in a number of recollections about his time as an assistant secretary of the navy during the days leading up to the war with Spain. He also added a number of references to fairly contemporary events. He later wrote Lodge that his "one pleasure" while in Boston was having Villard sit twelve feet in front of him, while he used historical examples to ridicule the idea that a system of adjudication could settle all disputes in world affairs. (International arbitration was an idea that the editor advocated.)³⁷

III. IMPACT

The immediate reaction to Roosevelt's presence and speeches was quite positive. An informal reception was held immediately after his presidential address at the Copley-Plaza hotel. The *Boston Evening Transcript* reported that he was the center of attention as several hundred people tried to meet him and shake his hand. The crowd was so large that the

³⁴ Ibid, 162-189; *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 28, 1912, 1; Theodore Roosevelt, "The Lessons of our Military History," *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt: Memorial Edition*, Vol. 18, *American Problems*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 312-313.

³⁵ Ibid, 310-311.

³⁶ Ibid, 312.

³⁷ Ibid, 312-322; Roosevelt to Lodge, December 31, 1912, *Selections*, 429

reception moved to the hotel ballroom. Roosevelt stayed for an hour before retiring for the evening. There were other functions where a large crowd gathered to hear the AHA president speak. In a hostile review, a writer for *The Nation* begrudgingly admitted that another large audience had gathered to hear Roosevelt's comments at the session on military history.³⁸

There was more to the reaction of the historians than eagerness at the chance to meet a national celebrity. James Ford Rhodes, a former president of the Association, was impressed with Roosevelt's actions at the AHA conference. Despite having political differences with the Rough Rider, Rhodes liked the speech. "His address in Symphony Hall was a real masterpiece," he wrote. It was both "interesting and excellent." Jameson, editor of *The American Historical Review*, also agreed with Roosevelt. He believed, in general, that the writing ability of most individuals in his profession needed vast improvement. The problem as he saw it was that there was no real way the Association could advance literary skills in the same way it facilitated research with various indexing and bibliographic projects.³⁹

Another historian who enjoyed the address was Lodge. "I feel in full accord with you in what you say about presenting the life of the people." From first hand experience he had learned that this was a difficult process. "I mention this because it is illustrative of what you said, and the scientific historian is so apt to go to the wrong place when he wants to describe the life of the people at a given time. It is the lack of imagination, which as you justly say is just as necessary in a historian as in a statesman." Roosevelt then sent him a copy of the full speech, which the senator read with interest. "It is very fine; one of the best things, I think, you have ever done," he wrote. He also recognized that Roosevelt had led by example, offering the scholarly community an address that had merit in its own right. "Your wide knowledge of history of all times, joined to your accurate and ready memory, enables you to think of so many admirable illustrations that you made it an example in itself of the way history should be written. It has great literary quality, as well as real eloquence." He went on to complain about "the stupidity of our specialists and scientific friends in not seeing the importance of the literary quality." The general public took most of its historical understanding from novels, plays, and poetry. Scholars should recognize this fact, and attempt to make their works more accessible, not less.⁴⁰

The press also reacted well to his speech. H.W. Brands notes: "Newspapers and magazines gave the speech far wider coverage than the head of the historians' guild had ever received before or would again." There is a good deal of truth to this statement, but it can be taken too far. A number of major news outlets ignored the speech, making no mention of it, but several other important publications across the country such as *The New York Times*, the *Boston Evening Transcript*, the *New York Tribune*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Outlook* magazine published portions of the text. "All that he said was obvious and it is observed by the best current writers," the reporter covering the event for the *Boston Daily Globe* noted, "but the way in which he said it and the personality of the man gave it a note of distinction." Another journalist and political critic of Roosevelt's who was

³⁸ *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 28, 1912, part 1, 6; *The Nation*, January 9, 1913, 29-30.

³⁹ Robert Cruden, *James Ford Rhodes: The Man, the Historian, and his Work*. (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1961), 131; Rhodes to Myers, January 7, 1913 in John A. Garaty, ed., *The Barber and the Historian: The Correspondence of George A. Myers and James Ford Rhodes, 1910-1923*. (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1956), 18; Jameson to Bryce, January 10, 1921 in Leo Francis Stock, "Some Bryce-Jameson Correspondence." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2. (January 1945), 292.

⁴⁰ Lodge to Roosevelt, January 13, 1913; Lodge to Roosevelt, April 22, 1913, *Selections*. 430-433, 435.

sitting in the audience gave even greater praise. Villard of the *New York Evening Post* called the speech "remarkable." He added, "I think most of us will agree Mr. Roosevelt is the leader among our historians." An editorial in *The Christian Science Monitor* noted: "At a time when the country is just regaining its normal poise after a strenuous presidential campaign it is both interesting and significant to find the leading agitator of the combat emerging as president of a society of historians and lecturing on 'History as Literature,' revealing the varied mental resources and acquisitions of omnivorous reading which made interesting his addresses in European capitals, following his trip to Africa." (Following a post-presidential lion hunting safari in Africa, Roosevelt toured the European continent and gave several important speeches on intellectual and educational matters. The best known was his delivery of the Romanes lecture at Oxford University on "Biological Analogies in History.") The editors of the paper characterized the speech as a mixture of American public service and scholarly study. "The effect upon the deliberations is to broaden and to vitalize them." In a review for *The Bookman*, Brander Matthews, a Columbia University professor and a former president of the Modern Language Association, offered high praise for the address and several others when it appeared as a book in 1913. Matthews declared Roosevelt was in "possession of the interpreting imagination which can survey the whole field of history past and present."⁴¹

One of the few negative notes came on the pages of *The Nation*, which had always been critical of the AHA president. "Mr. Roosevelt's address on 'History as Literature' offered nothing of special interest to the historian; nor was it an important contribution to literature." Such was the tone of the rest of the review. In a concluding statement, the reviewer "hoped that the presidency of this great national learned society will hereafter be reserved for scholars rather than political leaders," which ignored the positive assessment of Roosevelt's historical studies that could be found in the back issues of that publication. Later in 1913 another reviewer for *The Nation* assessed the book as a mediocre collection of essays. "That the knowledge which they exhibit is wide rather than deep, the expression of opinion suggestive rather than convincing, and the criticisms of accepted standards often airy and superficial, is, of course, entirely characteristic."⁴²

Afterwards Roosevelt considered the speech a success — one of the best he had ever given — but suspected it would not have the audience it deserved. "Personally I thought it at least as good as the Sorbonne lecture, or the Romanes lecture, or that at the University of Berlin." Although his talk in Boston had received a good deal of attention, it did not compare to these presentations. He suspected American newspapers had given his most recent speech less attention because he delivered it domestically. He also thought lingering partisan resentments from the election of 1912 also played a role in limiting his audience.⁴³

⁴¹ Brands, *T.R.*, 731; *The Boston Daily Globe*, December, 28, 1912, morning edition, 1; "Proceedings of the Conference on Military History," *Annual Report*, 170; *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 28, 1912, part III, 2; *New York Tribune*, December 28, 1912, 6; *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 28, 1912, 4, 36; *The Dallas Morning News*, December 28, 1912, 2; *The New York Times*, December 28, 1912, 2; Lodge to Roosevelt, January 10, 1913, *Selections*, 430; Brander Matthews review of *History as Literature* by Theodore Roosevelt, *The Bookman* 38 (December 1913), 418-422 quoted in Lawrence J. Oliver, "Theodore Roosevelt, Brander Matthews, and the Campaign for Literary Americanism," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (March 1989), 96-105.

⁴² *The Nation*, January 9, 1913, 29-30; October 16, 1913, 364.

⁴³ Roosevelt to Lodge, January 14, 1913, *Selections*, 433; Brands, *T.R.*, 663.

A. Long-Term Legacy

Perhaps such factors were at work in 1912, and in one sense, the speech failed in its objective. Measured over the course of the Twentieth Century, most professional historians have ignored Roosevelt's words. These individuals produce most of the books on the past, and although there are many of exceptions, these people generally write only for other specialists.⁴⁴ In another sense, though, the speech had a lasting impact on the historical profession among those at the forefront of the profession over the course of several decades. Joseph L. Gardner argues in his study of Roosevelt as an elder statesman that this former President of the United States frustrated with his lack of power pursued a number of initiatives that ruined his reputation and legacy. Such is clearly not the case in educational and intellectual matters. A number of important historians — many who became leaders in their fields, but were not in Boston on that cold day — heeded his remarks. The author of the Roosevelt obituary that appeared in *The American Historical Review*, noted: "The admirable address on History as Literature which he read as president of the American Historical Association...while setting forth his general views as to the writing of history, exhibits also the astonishing range and versatility of mind that made him so supremely interesting a figure in the great world." In 1926 Homer C. Hockett, who three years later would become president of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association — the current Organization of American Historians — wrote, "With his usual acuteness in catching the trend of opinion, the Colonel uttered an eloquent plea in behalf of a movement which was already stirring the ranks of the historical guild. This movement has since gained momentum, and both precept and practice indicate that the literary motive has become well-nigh the ruling impulse of the hour." In the *Harvard Guide to American History* Samuel Eliot Morison endorsed Roosevelt's message and regretted that Roosevelt's "trumpet call fell largely on deaf ears, at least in the academic historical profession." Morison complained that far too many scholarly studies use "long, involved sentences that one has to read two or three times in order to grasp the meaning; poverty in vocabulary, ineptness of expression, weakness in paragraph structure, constant misuse of words and, of late, the introduction of pseudoscientific and psychological jargon." Historian Allan Nevins of Columbia University and an early proponent of oral histories agreed. "What is history?," he asked. "Theodore Roosevelt said that history is a vivid and powerful presentation of scientific matter in literary form; and it would be difficult to improve upon this statement." Robert William Fogel, a pioneer of statistical analysis in history called the Roosevelt address "one of the most powerful and insightful statements" on writing about the past. "It is obligatory reading for all who aspire to master the craft, whether they view themselves as 'scientific' or traditional historians." It is no accident that those that listened to Roosevelt went on to become leaders in the profession.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Louis R. Harlan, "The Future of the American Historical Association," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, (February, 1990), 1-8.

⁴⁵ Gardner, *Departing Glory*, vii; "Historical News: Personal," *American Historical Review* Vol. 24, No. 3, (April 1919), 525; Ray Billington, ed., *Allan Nevins on History*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 284; Homer C. Hockett, "The Literary Motive in the Writing of History," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (March 1926), 469; Samuel Eliot Morison, "History as Literary Art," *Harvard Guide to American History*, Vol. 1, Revised Edition, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 3-4; Robert William Fogel, "'Scientific' History and Traditional History," in Robert William Fogel and R.R. Elton, *Which Road to the Past: Two Views of the History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 21, fn. 15.

B. Legacy in Military History

Even Roosevelt's comments on military history had impact. The session received enough attention to convince the delegates at the AHA meeting to approve two resolutions: one calling for the creation of a temporary committee to investigate "the best method of furthering the study and presentation of military history and of bringing into common action professional and civilian students;" and the second urged the organizers of the 1913 AHA meeting to include another session on military history. When the committee made its report a year later, it recommended that the AHA executive council create a permanent standing committee on military history, create a prize for works in this field, that the organization support the creation of a historical section in the general staff of the U.S. Army, and that it establish ties with the nation's major patriotic and military societies so that it could exert control over the use and preservation of source material in the possession of these organizations. The executive council initiated several of these ideas, including the creation of a permanent committee, which it wanted Roosevelt to chair despite his minimal administrative involvement with the Association. Johnston had invested a good deal of time and energy in his efforts to promote military history and he understandably wanted the position for himself. He and the rest of the members of the committee threatened to quit if Roosevelt became the chairman. More than ego and pride was involved. Johnston had an agenda and Roosevelt's commitment to it was uncertain. "With Colonel Roosevelt as chairman, the technical or professional standards which the Com[mi]t[te]e is anxious to reach would probably have been neglected," Johnston later observed. As historian Carol Reardon has noted in her study of the U.S. Army and its use of military history, the 1912 and 1913 AHA meetings helped initiate the creation of the historical section in the U.S. Army general staff in 1914.⁴⁶ The publicity that Roosevelt brought to the military history panel was an extremely valuable asset that Johnston used well. Neither he nor Roosevelt, however, lived to see the establishment of his other goals, a society and journal devoted solely to the study of military history. These developments would wait until 1933 and 1937 with the creation of what would eventually become the Society for Military History and *The Journal of Military History*.⁴⁷

As this article comes to a close, it is important to remember that Theodore Roosevelt was an important cultural figure, as well as a political one in the America of his day. As an historian he had a real impact on the profession. In his speech to the American Historical Association as its president, he focused on issues that still have relevance to the profession. He tackled matters such as the nature of history as a discipline, the style of historical writing, and the social role of the historian as a medium between the people and their past. This speech has had lasting, if limited influence. Contemporary and later historians, including many leading figures in the profession, agreed with his comments. His participation at the session on military history had significant influence on the development of that sub-field.

⁴⁶ Reardon, *Soldiers and Scholars*, 169-173, 186.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181

This episode with the AHA is an example of how, even without access to political power, he was able to use his celebrity status to influence American life in more ways than one.