

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Vernon Louis Parrington's Lyon County Years, 1877-1897

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This study investigates Parrington's involvement in athletics during his years in Lyon County, Kansas. Chapter I reviews earlier scholarship on Parrington's *Main Currents In American Thought* and traces the instant success and rapid decline of his 1928 Pulitzer Prize-winning work. Additionally, this chapter critiques previous biography, and focuses primarily on scholarship concerning Parrington's early Lyon County, Kansas, years. Chapter II investigates Parrington's early years in Americus, Kansas, and offers a brief family history and a detailed account of Parrington's farm and hunting experiences. Chapter III investigates Parrington's involvement in baseball as a student and professor at the College of Emporia. Additionally, Parrington's participation on a local semi-professional baseball team is detailed. Chapter IV examines the controversies surrounding his role in the organization of the first College of Emporia football team, and focuses on his involvement as a professor and football player.

SPORTSMAN, ATHLETE AND SCHOLAR:
VERNON LOUIS PARRINGTON'S LYON COUNTY YEARS, 1877-1897

A Thesis
Presented to
The Division of Social Sciences
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by
Gary Don Poulton
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INTRODUCTION

Few people had heard of him. Except to the students, faculty, and administrators at the University of Washington, he was unknown. Those acquainted with him knew little more than that he had graduated from Harvard, had taught at the University of Oklahoma prior to coming to Seattle, and had been raised somewhere in Kansas. Some may have known his wife Julia and their three children Elizabeth, Louise, and Vernon, and had probably seen the family working together in their garden, or experiencing the warmth of a Seattle summer during family outings at the park. But, to other than his closest friends, Vernon Louis Parrington was just another professor at the University leading an ordinary, yet seemingly uneventful, life.

This changed in 1928 when Parrington became the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Main Currents in American Thought*. Since its publication in 1927, *Main Currents* has been a mainstay, albeit controversial, in the fields of literature and history. Considered obsolete by today's scholars, *Main Currents* cannot justifiably be banished from college courses primarily because of its cross-disciplinary appeal. Historiography instructors, should they neglect *Main Currents*, would fail to provide their students with a basic understanding of the Progressive Movement's first, and most controversial, scholarly work. And literature professors, should they ignore Parrington, would fail in their responsibilities to

their students. The most telling evidence of the popularity of *Main Currents* is the fact that librarians have not been forced to engage in "guerilla librarianship" (the use of "surreptitious measures by librarians determined to resist the large-scale 'deaccessioning' of rarely used books"¹) to save it from the discard bin. Paradoxically, the necessity of professors to accept *Main Currents* for its applicability, yet reject it on the basis of its obsolete literary or historical scholarship, has both aided in its perpetuation as well as in its decline.

Other reasons explain the resilient nature of *Main Currents in American Thought*. It had gained the respect of the intellectual community by breaking new ground in the area of historiography and transformed historical research in the United States, but perhaps more importantly, it was the first comprehensive history of American culture to present the development of American thought from the Colonial period to the 1920s. Parrington was the first to successfully complete such a bold venture, and in doing so, developed a "literary road map" for other scholars intent on embarking upon similar ventures. "His work is one of those monuments," stated Richard Hofstadter "by which one can take one's bearing as one finds one's way across the historic terrain of American thought. . . ."2

Another reason for its staying power was that Parrington, along with Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles A. Beard,

and Harvey Robinson, greatly assisted in the conversion of history from merely a narration of events to a science.³ *Main Currents* was an integral part of the intellectual storm that billowed during the 1920s which focused primarily on the "observed environment as a conditioner of men's actions, and the concrete and practical interests which actually stimulated them."⁴ Parrington stated in 1917, "To love ideas is excellent, but to understand how ideas themselves are conditioned by social forces is better still."⁵ Thus, Parrington began to approach his work as a means to show how economic, political, religious, and social conditions influenced ideas, and ultimately history. By adhering to what he believed were the strict rules of scientific study, Parrington assisted in legitimating history as a true social science.

If Parrington and others had made great strides in the creation of new historical methods and approaches, then he alone made great advances in American literature studies. Progress was slow, however, as most conservative American scholars of the day looked to England for great intellectual and literary works and, in large part, rejected American literature. Before the publication of *Main Currents* and the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize, Parrington's high opinion of American writers and his insistence on teaching American literature over English literature cost him promotions and pay raises on more than one occasion.⁶ With its publication, however, American literature was raised into the realm of

legitimacy. Beard declared in his review for *The Nation*, "[Parrington] yanked Miss Beautiful Letters out of the sphere of the higher verbal hokum and fairly set her in the way that leads to contact with pulsating reality--that source and inspiration of all magnificent literature."⁷ *Main Currents* was a triumph over an antiquated system used in the study of "acceptable" literature, and a harbinger of a new method of literary and historical scholarship.

More remarkable than its resiliency were the changes in critics' attitudes toward Parrington and *Main Currents*. Initially, *Main Currents* was considered by many as the newly preferred direction for scholarship. "This is a work of the first importance," wrote Henry Seidel Canby in *Saturday Review*,

lucid, comprehensive, accurate as sound scholarship should be, and also challenging, original in its thinking, shrewd, and sometimes brilliant. It is the book which historians and critics of American literature have been waiting and hoping for."⁸

Others joined in the celebration, seemingly attempting to outdo other critics in their praises of Parrington's work. Carl Van Doren lauded, "It reinterprets with vigor and candor various classic figures who have been allowed to settle into positions of honor which their intrinsic merits do not earn. Nothing equals it as a study of the development of democracy in the United States."⁹ Charles A. Beard cheered: "A truly significant book; according to signs on every hand, a work that promises to be epoch-making, sending exhilarating gusts

through the deadly miasma of academic criticism."¹⁰ Even the Canadians found *Main Currents in American Thought* applicable to their history. G. W. Brown wrote in the *Canadian Historical Review*, "Canadian readers will find here much valuable comment on American influences which have affected Canadian history. The author's style is pungent and clear, although nothing would have been lost had he more often restrained his love of polysyllables."¹¹ Only Professor Morris R. Cohen of City College dared to challenge *Main Currents* on the grounds it failed to consider the thoughts of America's leading scientists and legal experts.¹² Yet that was not Parrington's purpose. It was, after all, *An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*.

Ironically, what *Main Currents* lacked, and perhaps even needed, was a true dissenting opinion. Unlike Beard's work on the Constitution or Turner's frontier thesis, *Main Currents* was simply accepted at face value. Most scholars understood that minor flaws existed with Parrington's methods but as a whole, these flaws were not controversial enough to stimulate serious academic debate. As a consequence, *Main Currents* was simply forgotten.

It was not until the late 1930s (nearly ten years after its publication) that the rumblings of criticism began to be heard. Granville Hicks, in "The Critical Principles of V. L. Parrington," criticized Parrington on numerous points, including his incessant need for heroes and villains. "There

are times," wrote Hicks, "when it seems that Parrington is so anxious to have heroes that in effect he makes them up." Moreover, according to Hicks, Parrington assumed that there were two opposing forces throughout American history--liberals and conservatives. "So eager is Parrington to preserve the conservative-liberal dichotomy," asserted Hicks, "that he even tries to turn Southern plantation owners into liberal Jeffersonians, in order to have some group to set over against the Northern capitalists."¹³ Unforgivable in Hicks's opinion was Parrington's liberal-bias. Percy Boynton, in *Literature and American Life*, agreed and echoed Hicks's sentiments stating, "In the study of evolving American character there is no more reason for a historian's taking sides with the characters, groups, or regions than there is for a chemist's showing an emotional partiality for one of the elements."¹⁴

During the 1930s, *Main Currents* became popular reading with the liberal-left. Many Marxists wrote that Parrington's research pointed to the inevitability of a popular uprising once the illusions of the frontier were dismissed. Misreading *Main Currents* (or perhaps worse, reading something into Parrington's research) many Marxists soon claimed Parrington as a fellow Marxist, albeit insufficiently so in many of their opinions. In *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War*, Granville Hicks stated:

Parrington belonged to and was interested in a group of Jeffersonians who saw more or less clearly that, with the closing of the frontier, they must abandon the hope of establishing democracy on a basis of agrarian individualism. They turned their attention, though somewhat skittishly, to the proletariat, which Jefferson had feared, and they urged collective action of a circumscribed sort. Parrington might try to defend himself, Charles Beard, and others from the charge of going to school to Karl Marx, but he did not deceive their critics. If he was primarily . . . Jeffersonian, he was also, on occasion and to a certain extent, a Marxist. If that is a paradox the fault is Mr. Parrington's.¹⁵

Bernard Smith's *Books That Changed Our Minds*, echoed Hicks's sentiments and added that Parrington had been influenced by Marx and Engels but that he was not willing to admit it. Rather, according to Smith, he hid behind the "Jeffersonian disclaimer" in his "Introduction" to *Main Currents*. "I can state dogmatically," argued Smith,

that [Parrington] had some acquaintance with Marxism, had been influenced by it. I have seen a letter by him in which he said as much. . . . He did not speak merely of 'environments' or vaguely of 'economic groupings'; he did not describe a given epoch as a whole, possessing characteristics shared by all who lived in it; he spoke clearly of classes and class struggles.¹⁶

Unfortunately, Parrington had died in 1929 and could not refute such ludicrous accusations. As for the alleged letter in which Parrington propounded Marxist views, Smith was unable to produce any evidence that would support such claims. One can only assume that Smith, Hicks, and others were gravely mistaken in their assessments of Parrington's political affiliations.

New, young, and highly motivated critics emerged in the early 1940s and 1950s who were much more severe in their

assessments of *Main Currents*, but did not limit themselves merely to the criticism of Parrington's work. In 1940, Lionell Trilling published "Reality in America," and, in many respects, paved the way for others to broaden their attacks on Parrington. "Parrington was not a great mind;" wrote Trilling, "he was not a precise thinker, or except when measured by the low eminences that were about him, an impressive one."¹⁷ In "Parrington and the Decline of American Liberalism," Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr. stated "Ironically, the scholar who comes closest to being a kind of American Gibbon or Spengler is Vernon Louis Parrington."¹⁸ And John Higham's "The Rise of American Intellectual History," asserted,

Parrington ignored legal thought, intellectual institutions, and nonliterary arts. In fact, the book was basically a study of certain political and economic ideas as revealed in writings which Parrington deemed to be literature.¹⁹

The arguments were nothing new, for Professor Morris R. Cohen of City College had raised many of the same issues earlier. Yet, this criticism sounded new, fresh, and invigorating, and in many ways was. Unlike the critics of 1927, those of the 1940s and 1950s were ready to give such criticism and others were willing to hear it. Merrill D. Peterson explained in "Parrington and American Liberalism," "he never made up his mind what kind of history he was writing. 'Main Currents' cannot stand scrutiny as a history of American thought, so . . . partisan are its judgements."²⁰

Although *Main Currents* appeared to have lost widespread

favor with its critics by the 1950s, (most scholars today agree that it was during the 1950s that *Main Currents* began its drastic decline) it certainly held its own with other historians around the country. In 1951, the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* published the results of John Walton Caughey's "Historians' Choice: Results of a Poll on Recently Published American History and Biography." The purpose of the poll was to determine which works in American history had made the most impact on American scholarship, and those most preferred by American historians. "In drawing up this panel," wrote Caughey, "the aim was to get an approximate cross section of the profession." One hundred and twenty-five ballots were sent to past presidents of the American Historical Association, fledgling Ph.D.s, specialists of different phases and periods of American History, and graduate students. The results listed Parrington's *Main Currents* as the most preferred work in the category of "American History, 1920-1935." It edged out Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Frontier in American History" by one vote, capturing 84 votes to 83."²¹ Where Parrington had failed to please his critics, he had succeeded with many of his peers.

In 1962, James L. Cowell subtly shifted the attention away from the numerous errors of *Main Currents*, which had been so poignantly indicated by the critics of the 1940s and 1950s, and pondered the influences populist Kansas had on *Main Currents*. His tactic was not new, however. As early as

1941, Richard Hofstadter in "Parrington and the Jeffersonian Tradition" claimed that Parrington was "a thinker whose own roots were firm in populist soil."²² In 1942, Alfred Kazin, in *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern Prose Literature*, claimed that Parrington "was reared in the heart of Kansas Populism and was a radical from his youth."²³ And Eric F. Goldman,²⁴ in *Rendezvous with Destiny*, found Parrington's life in Kansas "a vivid portrayal of many facets of the agrarian distress."²⁵ Numerous others linked Parrington's association with Populism and the political tone of *Main Currents*.

The difference between Cowell's and earlier scholarship was the manner in which Parrington's biographical data were used. Earlier references to Parrington's populist ties were mentioned merely as matters of fact; Parrington was from Kansas, thus he was a radical populist, and Populism influenced his writing; end of story. Usually, presented in a paragraph or two, these biographical sketches served no purpose other than to indicate from whence Parrington approached his writing. Cowell, on the other hand, investigated Parrington's early life, expanded the biographical sketch, and in "The Populist Image of Vernon Louis Parrington," convincingly proved that neither Populism nor the populist movement had any real impact on Parrington or on *Main Currents*.²⁶ Colwell's findings, in addition to destroying earlier myths pertaining to Parrington's ties to

Populism, also raised other questions about previous scholarship: If previous research had erred in its assessment of Parrington's political affiliations, could not it have also erred in other areas? Thus, scholars in the 1960s began to reevaluate Parrington's work.

It was still customary (perhaps even a rite of passage) for scholars in the 1960s to highlight the errors in Parrington's work, but their efforts focused less on finding fault with Parrington's work, and more on attaining equilibrium in the extremes of criticism: the unconditional praises of Parrington's contemporaries, and the nearly complete decimation of his work by the New Critics. This should not imply that during the 1960s scholars engaged in consensus history, but it does indicate an effort on their part to assess Parrington's work fairly.

The first efforts in the reevaluation of *Main Currents* were Robert A. Skotheim's and Kermit Vanderbilt's "Vernon Louis Parrington: The Mind and Art of a Historian of Ideas," and Skotheim's "The Progressive Tradition, II" from his book *American Intellectual Histories and Historians*. These works investigated the extent to which Parrington's Jeffersonian social thought influenced "the nature and role of ideas in history which he expressed." Although Skotheim and Vanderbilt found many faults with *Main Currents*, their purpose was not to destroy his research but to explain the conclusion at which he had arrived, regardless of his inconsistent methods.

Skotheim and Vanderbilt concluded that "Writing *Main Currents* was Parrington's personal contribution to this effort to 'leaven the American lump'--to provide historical analysis of the triumphs and failures of American 'liberalism.'"²⁷

Complementing these efforts was Robert J. Merikangas's Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Vernon L. Parrington's Method of Intellectual History." Merikangas stated, "It has long been apparent that a Jeffersonian liberalism was both his principal subject and the standard by which he evaluated the writings of the representative authors; however," he convincingly argued, "further reflection demonstrates that his Jeffersonian view of social ideas reflected generally a concern for the history of American political rhetoric, and the moral judgements on that tradition constituted rhetorical criticism."²⁸ All three works critically judged Parrington's methods and conclusions, finding more than enough to scrutinize, but at least their criticisms were fair.

The most celebrated study of Parrington generated in the 1960s was Richard Hofstadter's *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington*. Hofstadter's work, in many ways, returned to the negativism that had been so abundant during the 1940s and 1950s. "Compared with Beard or Turner," stated *Time* magazine's review of Hofstadter's book, "Parrington seems a somewhat perfunctory figure. . . . [He] emerges as largely a self-taught loner who organized the English Depart-

ment at the University of Oklahoma, coached a rawbone football team . . . and was fired in 1908, . . . for smoking."²⁹

Unfortunately, *Time* magazine was correct in its assessment of Hofstadter's portrayal of Parrington. Many of Hofstadter's other opinions of Parrington were misguided and misconstrued; he could not (or perhaps *would not*) relinquish his belief that Parrington had been greatly influenced by Populism (apparently he did not consult Cowell's work on the subject). Although Hofstadter stated that "Parrington did not turn Populist overnight," he devoted many paragraphs to Kansas's agrarian distress in conjunction with Parrington's youth and had implied a connection between the two. Yet Hofstadter had made considerable contributions to what was known about Parrington's life. He devoted an entire chapter of his book to biographical information; considerably more than any other work. His criticisms of *Main Currents*, however, were intolerably "old hat."

Between 1968 and 1979, few works were published dealing with Parrington or *Main Currents* and they added little to the knowledge of either. Marcus Cunliffe's and Robin W. Winks' *Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians* (1969) detailed the difficulties Parrington experienced publishing *Main Currents*. In "Judging Vernon Louis Parrington," (1975) Barnett Singer concluded that "Parrington could write engagingly about matters as disparate as biography, economic theory, frontier literature, and urban history; forty years

before his time he was thoroughly interdisciplinary."³⁰

Richard Reinitz, in "Vernon Louis Parrington as Historical Ironist," (1977) asserted that "when Parrington came to deal with the years following the Civil War . . . disillusionment led him to abandon his progressive categories for an ironic vision that links him to some more recent historians, both consensus and new left."³¹

In "Parrington's Opposition to War: An Undercurrent of his Liberal Thought," (1978) Charles Howlett claimed that Parrington's opposition to war "was related to his own philosophical support for the principals of liberalism." (If Howlett was correct in this assertion, then Parrington would have certainly rolled over in his grave had he known that, in 1943, Permanente Metals Corporation of Richmond, California, launched the *U.S.S. Vernon Louis Parrington* for duty in World War II.³²)

Gene Wise traced the origins of American Studies in "'Paradigm Dramas' In American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," (1979) and bestowed upon Parrington the title of "Intellectual Founder of American Studies."³³ By the end of 1970s, however, it was apparent that scholars' interests in Parrington's *Main Currents* had diminished and their attentions were focused elsewhere.

As most scholars began turning away from topics related to Parrington, H. Lark Hall completed her dissertation

entitled "Vernon Louis Parrington: The Genesis and Design of *Main Currents in American Thought*." Her research, in part, involved the analysis of Parrington's "Autobiographical Sketch" and diaries; materials that had not been available to scholars since Parrington's son, Dr. Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr. closed them in the early 1950s. Two years later, Hall published "V. L. Parrington's Oklahoma Years, 1897-1908: 'Few High Lights and Much Monotone'?" in which she showed that Parrington's life in Oklahoma was anything but "monotone." Those works, in addition to further research on the Parrington papers, served as the basis for her 1994 publication of *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art*, the first comprehensive biography to trace Parrington's intellectual journey through life.

In the seventy years since the publication of *Main Currents in American Thought*, Parrington and his work have endured and survived praise, analysis, criticism, rapid decline, revision, rejection, and, when things could not get any worse, biography. With the publication of Hall's biography of Parrington, it seemed that there was nothing left to prove or accomplish with respect to Parrington or his work. To be sure, Hall's research was impeccable and her portrayal of Parrington's early life in Lyon County, Kansas, his Oklahoma years, and the years spent at the University of Washington in Seattle proved the most extensive and complete analysis of Parrington's private and professional life. Yet,

her biography of Parrington stands alone and unchallenged, and in many ways has been "just accepted."

Of particular interest to this study is Hall's analysis and conclusions of Parrington's early years in Kansas. From the onset, it was clear that Hall, as most previous scholars, was concerned only with those conditioners of Parrington's life that related to his intellectual development. Unfortunately, her approach resulted in the absence of many other interesting aspects of Parrington's life, such as his involvement in athletics and the importance that sport had in his social development. In her effort to highlight the importance of Parrington's early academic involvements, she wrongly concluded that Parrington's social standing (popularity with school peers) was derived from his abilities as an orator and his winning an oratory contest in 1891. She all but ignored the fact that Parrington was considered one of the best athletes in the State of Kansas, (although she mentioned that he did play shortstop during summers) and that he was mentioned repeatedly in *College Life*, the College of Emporia's student newspaper, for his heroics on the baseball diamond. Nor does she mention Parrington was a fairly good tennis player; elected president of the Lawn-Tennis Association in 1890, and continued to play competitively during the years he taught at the College of Emporia.³⁴

While other factors such as geography, the political atmosphere in Emporia, and the general economic conditions of

eastern Kansas have been popular avenues in which to search for influences on the origins of Parrington's intellect and political ideology, they have many times provided false and misleading assertions about his youth. Many scholars have cited Parrington's "Political Sketches" that appeared in the school's newspaper between April 17, 1897 and May 15, 1897, and his unsuccessful political bid (Populist ticket) for the school board in 1896, as proof Parrington was first and foremost a political creature in his young adulthood. Russell Blankenship erroneously claimed, "In politics, . . . Mr. Parrington was a militant democrat. . . ." ³⁵ This, and other scholarship has led many to believe that as a youth, Parrington was a radical.

Indeed, Parrington was radical, but, as Cowell has shown, not in the populist sense. Parrington's radicalism could be found on the football field. "By the 1890s" states Gail Bederman in *Manliness and Civilization*, "team sports had come to be seen as crucial to the development of powerful manhood. College football had become a national craze; and commentators like Theodore Roosevelt argued that football's ability to foster virility was worth even an occasional death on the playing field." ³⁶ Emporians, particularly the faculty and administration at the College of Emporia, did not agree with Roosevelt's opinion on the value of the sport. Yet as a professor, Parrington continued to support, coach, and even play the sport, much to the chagrin of his employers. Hall,

Hofstadter, and others who have written extensively on Parrington's early life have briefly and superficially mentioned Parrington's involvement in football as a coach, but have failed to acknowledge his participation as a player and have ignored the controversy Parrington created by instituting the radical sport of football at the College of Emporia.

Instead, scholars have opted to focus on family, education, religion, and the myth of agrarian distress to find the main currents of Parrington's youth. Unfortunately, such scholarship has erroneously combined politics with normal, youthful interests and developments, and has placed the responsibility on his childhood to yield influences that later affected Parrington's *Main Currents*. Even biographers have failed to remember that Parrington was a child and a teenager before he was a politically motivated, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian. Scholars enamored with Parrington's Pulitzer Prize have all but ignored the importance of sport in his social development and have implicitly concluded that the only aspects of his youth that are of importance are those which benefitted his intellectual development.

This study of Parrington investigates the influence that sport had on the early life of one of America's most significant literary historians. Chapter I investigates Parrington's early years in Americus, Kansas, with particular attention given to his love of hunting, as well as his early

farm life. Chapter II looks at his Emporia years (1884-1891) as a student, initially in the preparatory program and later as a college student, at the College of Emporia, and focuses primarily on his participation in baseball. This chapter also investigates Parrington's participation in baseball after he returned to Emporia and began teaching at the College of Emporia (1893-1897). Chapter III deals with Parrington's return to Emporia to assume a teaching position at the College of Emporia, but focuses mainly on Parrington's role in organizing the first football team and his participation as coach and player on the team. A brief portion of this chapter does describe the changes Parrington made in the English department and the literary societies at the College of Emporia, but is the only discussion in this thesis on his activities as a professor. This chapter will neither attempt to discuss, analyze, and recount his poetry, nor will it indicate or imply any or no significance of the political activities he engaged in during his last few months in Emporia. Furthermore, the thesis nowhere implies that, as a youth, Parrington's involvement in hunting, baseball, or football had an influence on *Main Currents*.

NOTES

¹Anne H. Soukhanov, "Word Watch," *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1997, 124.

²Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 352.

³Malcolm Cowley and Bernard Smith, eds., *Books That Changed Our Minds* (New York: Kelmscott Editions, 1938), 182; Smith, *Forces in American Criticism: A Study in the History of American Literary Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 331.

⁴Ibid., 182.

⁵Parrington quote taken from Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians*, 396.

⁶See H. Lark Hall, *Vernon Louis Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) for complete discussion on Parrington's employment at the University of Washington at Seattle, his relationship with J. Allen Smith, and the controversies surrounding Parrington's curriculum.

⁷Charles A. Beard, "Fresh Air in American Letters," *The Nation*, CXXIV (18 May 1927): 560. For an interesting discussion on Beard's review and the relationship between Beard's writings and Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* see Michael Kraus and Davis D. Joyce, *The Writing of American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 269.

⁸Henry Seidel Canby, "Review of *Main Currents in American Thought*," *Saturday Review of Literature* 3 (June 1927): 925.

⁹Carl Van Doren, "Review of *Main Currents in American Thought*," *New York Herald Tribune*, 1927.

¹⁰Beard, *The Nation*, 18 May 1927.

¹¹G. W. Brown, "Review of *Main Currents in American Thought*," *Canadian Historical Review*, 1927.

¹²Cowley and Smith, 447.

¹³Granville Hicks, "The Critical Principals of V. L. Parrington," *Science and Society, A Marxian Quarterly* 3 (Fall 1933): 447.

¹⁴Percy Boynton, *Literature and American Life* (Boston: n.p.), 540. For additional critics' comments on Parrington's biased writing, see William T. Utter's "Vernon Louis Parrington," in William T. Hutchinson, ed., *The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays In American Historiography*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1937).

¹⁵Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War*, (New York: Mcmillan and Sons, 1933), 221.

¹⁶Cowley and Smith, *Books That Changed Our Minds*, 188-189. See Barnett Singer, "Judging Vernon Louis Parrington," *Research Studies: A Quarterly Publication of Washington State University* 4 (Vol 43, 1975): 209-221 for an interesting discussion on the critics treatment of Parrington's work. Note: Singer's work, in my opinion, is one of the few worthy publications that appeared during the 1970s.

¹⁷Lionel Trilling, "Reality in America," *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), 3. Note: "Reality in America" was first published in the *Partisan Review* in 1940, and later reprinted in *The Liberal Imagination* in 1950.

¹⁸Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., "Parrington and the Decline of American Liberalism," *American Quarterly* 4 (Winter 1951): 295.

¹⁹John Higham, "The Rise of American Intellectual History," *American Historical Review* 3 (April 1951): 461.

²⁰Merrill D. Peterson, "Parrington and American Liberalism," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 1 (Winter 1954): 39. Note: Peterson, in *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York, 1960), 321, stated that Parrington was a Kansas born Populist and a Harvard-educated Professor of English. He was right on one account.

²¹John Walton Caughey, "Historians' Choice: Results of a Poll on Recently Published American History and Biography," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 2 (September 1952): 289-302.

²²Richard Hofstadter, "Parrington and the Jeffersonian Tradition," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, II, (October 1941): 391; idem, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 200.

²³Alfred Kazin, *On Native Ground: An Interpretation of Modern Prose Literature* (New York, 1942), 156.

²⁴Eric F. Goldman was the last scholar to analyze Parrington's personal papers before Parrington's son, Dr. Vernon Louis Parrington, closed them to further investigation in the early 1950s.

²⁵Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform* (New York, 1953), 467.

²⁶James L. Cowell, "The Populist Image of Vernon Louis Parrington," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XLIX (June 1962 - March 1963): 52-66. Note: The *Emporia Gazette* printed excerpts from Cowell's essay in its September 21-22, 1962 editions.

²⁷Robert A. Skotheim and Kermit Vanderbilt, "Vernon Louis Parrington: The Mind and Art of a Historian of Ideas," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 1 (January 1962): 113; Robert Allen Skotheim, *American Intellectual Histories and Historians* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), 124-148.

²⁸Robert James Merikangas, "Vernon L. Parrington's Method of Intellectual History" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1966), x; For a discussion of Parrington's political views as determined by his writings, see Mary Susan Power, "Vernon Louis Parrington and J. Allen Smith: An American Political Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1961).

²⁹Review of Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington, Time* (October 25, 1960), 104.

³⁰Singer, 219.

³¹Richard Reinitz, "Vernon Louis Parrington as Historical Ironist," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 3 (July 1977): 113.

³²Allen Henderson, "Ships in World War II," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (May 1947): 124. See also Charles Howlett, "Parrington's Opposition to War: An Undercurrent of His Liberal Thought," *Peace and Change* 2-3 (1978): 52-62;

The *Emporia Gazette*, October 12, 1943; December 11, 1943.

³³Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' In American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *American Quarterly* 3 (Bibliography Issue 1979): 293-337.

³⁴*College Life*, November 22, 1890; October 10, 1891. March, 21, 1896.

³⁵Russell Blankenship, "Vernon Louis Parrington" In *The Nation* 7 August 1929, 141-142.

³⁶Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15.

CHAPTER I

In 1897, Vernon Louis Parrington ended his tenure as the English and French instructor at the College of Emporia. After packing the last of his belongings and saying farewell to his beloved mother and father, Parrington boarded a train¹ to the Oklahoma Indian Territory. There, he was to assume a teaching position at the newly organized college at Norman.

It was perhaps luck, or even fate, that Parrington had received a teaching position at the Oklahoma college. During the summer of 1897, President David Ross Boyd of the University of Oklahoma had traveled East on business, and his train had a scheduled stop in Emporia. Parrington learned through family friends that there was a position open at the college in Norman, and that Boyd was to lay over in Emporia. He was determined to speak with President Boyd and inquire about the job. "I met him at the station," recalled Parrington, "[and] rode a short distance with him." Parrington turned the meeting into an informal interview. It is not known what they said that day riding across the Flint Hills, but the Oklahoman was impressed with Parrington. Within a few weeks, Parrington received a letter from Boyd. It was "an offer to Oklahoma," Parrington remembered, "as instructor of English and Modern Languages, at a salary of \$1000, with the prospect of increase."² He accepted, and left for Norman that fall.

Parrington was born August 3, 1871 in Aurora, Illinois to John William and Louise McClellan Parrington, and moved

with the family to Americus, Kansas, in 1877. There the family lived until 1885 when they moved to Emporia after John William was elected Probate Judge of Lyon County, Kansas.

Parrington's father was remarkable. Born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1830, his life had been difficult. Shortly after his birth, his parents moved the family to Gorham Corners, Maine, to set up a carpet weaving mill. Not long after the family's arrival in Gorham, John William's father suddenly died. Unable to make ends meet, John William's mother put him and his two sisters into the homes of friends willing to raise the children. John William lived in the home of James Mann. Little else is known of John William's boyhood, but Parrington later wrote of his father's youth:

Of his boyhood I know very little; the trick of being closed-mouth seems to be a Parrington characteristic, and he talked rarely of his early days. He went to school and was doubtless mischievous enough to seem to justify the free use of the birch. One evening he announced triumphantly that he had not had a single whipping that day.³

After being graduated from preparatory school, John William attended Waterville College in Maine. By "hook and crook" John William graduated in 1856, and for a few years, taught at the Boys Latin High School in Portland, Maine. There, he also began studying law. In 1858 or 1859, John William got the opportunity to move West. He became the principal of West Side High School in Aurora, Illinois. It was in Aurora that he met Louise McClellen.

Louise McClellen was "Scotch-Irish by name and in

disposition, but with a pretty large admixture of English blood." Her family had a long tradition in Illinois; it was one of the first families to settle around Fort Dearborn, what is present day Chicago. Louise's father, James McClellan, was a Baptist minister for a short time but resigned his church position because of poor health. While Louise was still a child, James McClellan died to leave his wife Eunice to raise their six children. Eunice also died, not long after James's death, and Louise and her five siblings found themselves orphans. It is unknown what happened to her brothers and sisters, but Louise went to live with her uncle. She remained in his house until she married John William in 1861.⁴

Two years after the Parringtons wed, John William joined the Union Army and received a Captain's commission. For John William, there was no other choice but to side with the Union during the Civil War. Parringtons had traditionally opposed slavery, and as a young boy growing up in the Mann house, his anti-slavery views had been reinforced and solidified. Louise McClellan had been raised with similar views as well. James McClellan was a "radical, an abolitionist, and his house was a link in the underground railway that aided runaway slaves escaping to Canada."⁵ To be sure, the Parringtons had inherited their families' views toward slavery.

Shortly after receiving his commission, John William was

assigned to Company A, Fourth Colored Infantry, Army of the Potomac. Parrington later recalled that his father,

served till the end of the war, was wounded in the hand at the second attack on Petersburg--the battle in which Captain Vernon King, the one for whom I was named, was cut in two by a shell--was brevetted Lieutenant Colonel, and was mustered out in 1866.

After the war, he returned to Aurora to practice law and try his hand in politics. Perhaps on the heroics of his military service, John William was elected clerk of Kane County, Illinois.⁶

With the war behind him and established in local politics, the time seemed right for John William and Louise to start their family. In 1869, their first son John was born. Two years later, Louise gave birth to Vernon. With the birth of two sons and a successful political career and law practice, John William's life should have been complete. By 1874, however, he had grown tired of law and politics, and "cast about for something" else that would enable him to support his family. In 1875, he ventured to Texas to purchase sheep, drove them to market, and failed to make a profit. He returned to Aurora to make plans for other prospects out West.⁷

In early spring the next year, John William headed West toward Kansas. According to Parrington, "The westward migration which followed the close of the Civil War was in full swing and father caught the rever [sic] (fever) and went to the border, choosing 'sunny Kansas' to the more inhospit-

able Dakota and Nebraska." Believing the land around Americus of better quality and more abundant than that near Emporia, John William chose the former.⁸ He remained in Americus the spring and part of the summer of 1876, making improvements on his newly acquired land to safeguard it from claim jumpers and prepare for the arrival of his family. Near the end of the summer, he returned to Aurora. Early the next spring, the Parringtons packed their belongings and moved to Kansas.⁹

During the latter 1870s, merely a third of Kansas had been settled. Americus was a community that lay on the line of settlement, simultaneously providing the comforts of civilization and the ruggedness of the frontier. "It [Americus] lay for the most part naked to the world," remembered Parrington, "hot in the summer, cold in the winter, miry in wet seasons and dusty in dry, trees and grass and flowers having not yet clothed it. . . ." ¹⁰ About one-hundred people lived in Americus when the Parringtons arrived. A leisurely walk down Main street would put the citizens of Americus in the center of the business district. Businesses consisted of a hardware store (owned and operated by Stuart Gibson), a dry goods store (ran by John D. Gibson), and a grocery store (operated by Morrow Gibson). At the end of the block was Wood's blacksmith and wagon shop. Wood's "was a favorite loafing place of mine," wrote Parrington, "where treasures were to be picked out of piles of iron scraps and excitement

attended the shoeing of a refractory horse." To the West of Main Street stood The Sutton House, complete with orchard and livery stable. South of the hotel stood John Bond's drug store, the post office, two grocery stores and a general store. On the edge of town lay the railway station. Americus did not seem like much to Parrington, it was "crude and ugly enough . . . and yet not so ugly as some other western villages I have seen, . . ."11 but it was home.

A farm house was not one of the improvements John William made in 1876 on the land North of Americus. Thus, when the Parringtons arrived in Americus in 1877, they rented a place in town. After John William secured a temporary residence for his family, he set about making plans to construct a house on the farm. During the next year, he made further improvements and prepared for the move to the farm.

While John William tended to family business, the Parrington boys attended school. "I went to school," wrote Parrington, "but I recall nothing of the school room beyond my fondness for drawing horses on my slate." It was at school that Parrington became friends with George Gibson, the son of the owner of the hardware store, Stuart Gibson. The two boys seemed inseparable, perhaps spending a great deal of time at Wood's blacksmith and wagon shop looking for "treasures" and lending a helping hand to Mr. Wood, or picking apples from the orchard behind The Sutton House. If it was not a school night and if all the chores were done, Parrington-

ton was oftentimes allowed to sleep over at George's house. "Some of my pleasantest recollections of Americus cluster around the hospitable Gibson home," wrote Parrington, "where I often stayed all night and ate many a meal."¹²

On days when school was closed and Parrington was not about town with George, John William took his sons with him to the one hundred and sixty acre farm. As an opportunity for the boys to leave the confines of Americus and perhaps as a chance for Louise to enjoy a few brief moments of silence, the farm trips were surely as much anticipated by Louise as they were the boys. There were always new things to see and experience at the farm. One particular visit made quite an impression upon Parrington:

I had gone out with father and while there he bade me look up at the sun. I looked and saw a cloud moving across the face of it. 'That grasshoppers on the move,' he explained and pointed out to me how bare the wheat field had been eaten.

Another visit to the farm yielded an even more spectacular sight, "The Northern lights danced and quivered in October skies," remembered Parrington, "and once a blazing comet flamed in the early morning sky, wild, unearthly. I have forgotten the name of the comet, and the year, but that blazing tail across the eastern sky I shall never forget."¹³ One can only imagine the stories Parrington shared with his friend George of what had been witnessed during those visits to the farm.

It was an early spring morning in 1879 when John William

walked the short distance from his rented house just off Main Street to the livery stable to pick up Doll and Bill, the Parrington's pony team. Moving day had arrived and John William needed to get his horses and a wagon to carry the family belongings to the farm. Tagging along to help were his two sons. Perhaps Parrington faced this day with mixed emotions; excited at the prospects of living on the farm, saddened by the realization that sleep overs at the Gibson house and lazy afternoons spent at Wood's shop would be limited. By late afternoon the household goods had been piled in the wagon and the Parringtons headed off to the farm. Later that evening, they settled into their new home.

Improving the land and building the house had been difficult, and it had become evident that John William needed help, so he enlisted a carpenter, a Mr. Conkling. While John William dug a fifty foot water well, cultivated fifty acres of land, and built a horse stable, Mr. Conkling constructed the farm house. "Architecturally it was no great success," wrote Parrington,

either in plan or elevation, but it was warm, for the walls were filled in with blue clay from the well diggings. It rose from the level ground . . . with no porches or bays to break its angularity, little planting to screen it, no walks leading up to it, its queer hipped roof where a gable and should have been emphasizing the bare effect. . . .¹⁴

What the house lacked in beauty was only compounded by the absence of conveniences. Lacking indoor plumbing, Parrington made numerous trips to the well to "fetch" bath water that

was then heated on the cook stove. Parrington shared bath water with his older brother, knowing the water had been considerably warmer for John than for himself. And a trip to the outhouse was but a walk across the back yard during pleasant weather, but quite an undertaking during a cold Kansas blizzard.

A stable for Doll and Bill was built. During earlier farm visits, John William, and perhaps his sons, on a few occasions spent afternoons along the Neosho River cutting posts that were used in framing the stable. Over cross poles "and around on three sides was piled prairie hay." "Inside it was like being in the heart of a haystack," wrote Parrington,

and it was snug and warm until the horses ate their way through the protecting covering. By spring most of the roof and walls had passed through the stomachs of the live stock and the stable was reduced to its gaunt framework till another haying came around.¹⁵

Of the fifty acres of cultivated land, John William used twelve acres for an apple orchard and planted corn on the remainder. Corn was, and still is, a very important crop for Kansas farmers. The Parringtons, like other Flint Hills settlers, used corn to feed cattle, pigs, and chickens. Doll and Bill also ate many a meal of corn and probably looked forward to a daily handful of kernels, especially after they had all but eaten away their stable. Corn cobs were also of great importance to Kansas farmers. They were a source of fuel for cooking and staving off brutally cold winters. "One of the inevitable chores of my boyhood which might not be

shirked," wrote Parrington, "was to go into the pig pen or the cow lot with a bushel basket and pick up the cobs scattered about. They made a brisk, clean and hot fire, but they burnt out so quickly as to keep me trotting between pig pen and kitchen, to my huge disgust."¹⁶

Parrington was seven years old when the family moved to the farm. As he had perhaps anticipated, the leisurely days of chumming around with his pal George had been substituted with the responsibilities of farm life; chores replaced mornings spent at the blacksmith's shop, and late evenings at the Gibson house turned into early mornings fetching water and late afternoons among the pigs and cattle. "I was the special custodian of the water and swill bucket. There is nothing lovely about swill, and to carry it out to the pig pen, pour it in the trough and watch the hogs guzzle it, is far from poetic."

Too young for heavy field work, Parrington worked with his mother around the house "setting the table, washing dishes, churning, scrubbing, turning the wringer, [and] taking my place at the laundry tub." In addition to the domestic chores conducted under the watchful eye of his mother, he was responsible for herding, milking, and other odd jobs around the farm yard. In many respects, Parrington gauged his growth toward adulthood by the responsibilities given him around the farm. By the time the Parringtons moved to Emporia in 1884, Parrington had assumed the responsibil-

ities of lighter field work. "In the last year or so [at age thirteen] I began to do my share of driving the rake and go-devil in haying and even cultivating, cutting and shucking corn."¹⁷

From 1879 to 1884, the Parrington boys attended school at a newly built school house one mile North of their farm. After early morning chores around the farm were completed, the boys began the mile-long walk to school. Depending on the season, the walk could be either pleasant or dreaded. In the spring, as the flowers bloomed, the prairie grass grew, and the birds and other wildlife became more numerous, the walk, no doubt, seemed too short. During the dead of winter, however, as the wind rushed down the plains from the North bringing sleet and snow and misery, the distance between the Parrington farm and the school house seemed to miraculously become longer. Officially known as School District 84, the one room school was nicknamed "Pumpkin Ridge" and "Pleasant Ridge" by the students attending classes. To Parrington, neither name truly suited the school: "the school house stood rather in a hollow than on a ridge, and the situation was neither pleasant nor related in any way to pumpkins." Furthermore, the school was "a frankly utilitarian affair dedicated to the three R's and not at all to culture."¹⁸

Perhaps the class of people attending the school influenced Parrington's opinion of Pumpkin Ridge. "At school I first came into contact with foreigners," wrote Parrington,

the children of German immigrants who were coming to the district and buying farms. They were an alien element in our little world . . . and quite unable to enter into our ways. We were fully conscious of their inferiority; for inferior they indubitably were. They were peasants and boors. . . . Of their thrift our common saying will give an indication, they sold everything saleable, what couldn't be sold they fed to the hogs, what the hogs wouldn't eat the family lived on.¹⁹

Yet, not all the students at Pumpkin Ridge were, as Parrington so delicately described them, "peasants and boors." It was while attending school that Parrington met Vernon Cook, who would become a life-long friend. The boys walked to school together, helped each other with school work, and, after their school work was completed, shared magazine stories they had read of great wilderness adventures and Indian wars; Parrington in *Saint Nicholas* and Vernon in *Youth's Companion*.²⁰ Sometimes, they would fight side by side in school yard arguments: "He was older and larger and stronger, and a convenient help at a pinch when the battle was hot."²¹ Later, they attended the preparatory school in Emporia, and graduated from the College of Emporia in the same class.

It was also with Vern Cook that Parrington discovered, and ultimately became enthralled with, hunting. "In this border environment," Parrington wrote, "the hunting instinct was early aroused. As I look back I seem to live in a world of primitive chase." Many a winter's morning he arose just before the light of day, dressed in his winter clothes, and headed out to the corn field to hunt rabbits. Parrington's

greyhound dog, Dixie, accompanied him on these hunts. Possibly he talked to Dixie, whispering so as to not spook their prey, and rebuking her for being too anxious and perhaps a little too noisy. Then, when they least expected it, "Jack rabbits hop out from clumps of tall grass, and lope off easily with ears up, till Dixie takes up the chase; then those long ears go down on the rabbit's back and it becomes a life and death matter with him."²² More often than not, Parrington and Dixie returned to the farm house with that day's dinner.

As a young boy not ready for the responsibility of a shotgun, Parrington relied on the bow and arrow as his main weapon. Pheasant, quail, duck, and geese were too difficult to kill with the bow, thus, out of necessity and, perhaps because of many successes, rabbit became his favorite animal to hunt. "Little cottontails skurry [sic] back and forth continually," wrote Parrington, "I kick them out of grass clumps in the orchard, I run upon them in the corn fields. It is worth being a boy if only for the excitement of seeing a Cottontail scoot out of a corn shock, and of experiencing the pride with which some unlucky victim is borne home in triumph."²³

During the summer months when it was too hot to chase rabbits, Parrington turned his attention to hunting rattlesnakes. Knowing full well the consequences of its bite but ignoring the hazard, "we used to dance around it bare-

footed keeping out of reach of his dangerous strike, and shooting till all our arrows were stuck in the ground about the snake." Perhaps being a young boy intent on killing his prey, Parrington seemed undiscouraged by the fact that he frequently found himself without ammunition. There "arose the great problem of how to get back our arrows to continue shooting," recollected Parrington, it was "a problem which we always solved somehow, for in the end the snake's rattles became our trophy."²⁴

Just as Parrington had gauged his growth toward young adulthood by the responsibilities given him around the farm, so too did he gauge that growth by the different weapons he was allowed to use. When Parrington was about ten years old, he got his first cross bow. It was a "more powerful and truer weapon than the bow alone," claimed Parrington. Furthermore, the cross bow represented being one step closer to owning a gun. Added to his arsenal of bow and arrow and cross bow was the tomahawk, which proved most essential to Parrington. On one particular outing, Parrington, his brother, and Vern Cook spotted a squirrel in a tree, and proceeded to kill it. "Now a squirrel with a proper sense of sportsmanship," Parrington detailed, "will fall from the tree when hit hard, but this one lodged securely in a crotch and could not be brought down." Determined to get the squirrel, they spent the morning chopping down the tree. Triumphant, they were too tired to continue the hunt.²⁵

Like many young boys growing up on a farm, Parrington longed for the day he would own a gun. He was eleven years old when he got the chance to fire a shotgun for the first time. After much persuasion by the Parrington boys, John William borrowed a neighbor's shotgun for the boys to shoot. The weapon was old and proved too difficult for the boys to handle. It was promptly returned to the neighbor.²⁶

Firing that old weapon had given Parrington experience with guns, however, and shortly afterwards, he was allowed to borrow the Cook's shotguns, which were much newer and in much better condition. But it was not until Parrington was twelve years old that he owned his first shotgun. It was Christmas 1883, and unbeknownst to the Parrington boys, Louise had purchased two shotguns for five dollars apiece. One can only imagine the surprised looks on the faces of the boys as they awoke Christmas morning to find that Santa Claus had not left the presents sitting under the Christmas tree, but had left them leaning against the wall. "They were just alike," recalled Parrington,

Zulus they were called by trade name; in reality Civil War muskets, bored out, cut down, and with an ingenious breach block devised which made breach loaders out of them. Excellent shooters they proved to be, . . . a weapon any boy need wish for.

With the shotguns, the boys received one hundred empty shells and a loading outfit, and we "discovered as much fun in loading as in shooting."²⁷

Parrington carried his love of hunting throughout his

life. During the years he taught at the College of Emporia, he often challenged colleagues and students to rabbit hunting competitions. He rarely lost such engagements. Later in life, Parrington wrote "This [hunting] I may account the one great interest of my boyhood, . . . and to this day there is more zest in handling a shooting iron and smelling the burnt powder than in anything else that comes to me."²⁸

Life in Americus seemed to follow the patterns of the seasons. During the spring and summer months farm work demanded and received most of Parrington's attention. The routine of chores had become so familiar that many times he carried them out with little thought. As he grew older, he was entrusted with more responsibilities; washing clothes and setting the table was replaced with milking and herding the cows. With the arrival of fall perhaps the workload expanded; school was to be attended, but harvest and putting up stores for a long, cold winter required most of Parrington's time. Only after winter had set in could he pay full attention to his school work, and occasionally spend a Saturday hunting with Vern. Springtime started again the cycle of Parrington's life.

Yet, not all of Parrington's existence revolved around farm and school work. On many occasions, the Parringtons traveled to Emporia to shop, exchanging butter and eggs for groceries and other needed goods. Together, Doll and Bill could pull a buggy loaded with goods to the city limits of

Emporia in about two hours. If they left by eight o'clock in the morning and arrived by ten o'clock, they would have about six hours to explore the big city before returning to Americus to complete the evening chores. "It was a hard trip," recalled Parrington, "but a happy one for us boys, for there was much to see and learn." After leaving their ponies and buggy at the livery stable, the Parringtons would tend to business. Newman's, a dry goods store, always seemed to attract the attention of Parrington. After a short while of meandering through Newman's, the Parrington brothers would leave their parents and walk the streets looking for new adventures. "On one such trip," recalled Parrington,

my brother and I first made the acquaintance of bananas. A bunch was swinging at the booth of a street-corner vendor, and we stopped to gaze, wondering if they were good to eat. The vendor explained their merits and persuaded by his recommendation we parted with a nickel for one, and started to eat it without peeling. After the huckster had set us right in that little mistake we tried again with little better success; after taking a bite or two apiece we threw the rest away. It was too mushy.

Another visit to the city was marred by unhappy occurrence brought about by a dishonest merchant. "We had taken a firkin of butter to Tanner Brothers and Heed in Emporia," explained Parrington,

The buyer seized a dirty testing iron, stuck it to the bottom of the firkin, and drew out a core of butter, smelt of it, and pronounced it rancid, and then cut the price. My mother protested indignantly that it was the filthy tester which smelt rancid, and while she argued the matter I stood by in silent rage. Protest in vain for it was the buyer's business to cut the price.²⁹

At the time of the butter incident, perhaps 1880 or

1881, Parrington had not reached the political awareness that he later would attain. The incident did instill in him, however, a strong dislike for "profit-mongers." Later in life Parrington claimed that "It [the butter incident] was out of such an economic condition that Populism was born, and although it was not to make me a convert until later [1896-1897], the seeds of rebellion were being sown."³⁰ Yet Parrington, from a young age, had been aware of politics. His first experience with politics had been during the infamous election of 1876 which pitted the Republicans and Rutherford B. Hayes against the Democrats and Samuel J. Tilden. Although Parrington understood neither the fraud, corruption, and violence, nor the implications of the election, he did remember a couplet of verse. "I hear myself shouting shrilly: `Hayes on a white horse, Tilden on a mule, Hayes was elected and Tilden was a fool!'"³¹

It was the election of 1884, however, that truly awoke Parrington the "romance of politics." As Parrington later recalled, "Kansas in that year was ablaze with Republican zeal, and Blaine and Logan flambeau clubs marched in many a rally. One such rally in Emporia I attended, and it was a spectacle better than any fourth of July had offered me." It was clear that, at thirteen years of age, Parrington had been seduced by false displays of patriotism offered by fireworks, parades, and marching bands. "It quickened my partizanship [sic] to a high pitch; I was the most ardent of Blaine

followers; and I recall the sense of overwhelming calamity that fell on me at the news of his defeat." To be sure, Parrington's partisanship reached such "high pitch" because his father was a die-hard Republican, and it is not uncommon for politically minded youngsters to favor the party of their parents. Added to his excitement, and no doubt his commitment to the Republican Party, was the fact that his father ran for an office that year. As he fondly remembered, "This great campaign of 1884 touched me more closely still for it brought about the next step in my life. [Father] was nominated for Probate Judge . . . and was swept into office on the momentous day that saw the defeat of Blaine."³² The following spring, the Parringtons moved to Emporia.

NOTES

¹According to Parrington's "Autobiographical Sketch," he was to have taken the midnight train for Norman but it was delayed and did not reach the Oklahoma Indian Territory until late the next afternoon. Parrington described the trip as intolerable, p. 41.

²Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 40.

³Ibid., 4.

⁴Ibid., 5-6.

⁵Ibid., 6.

⁶H. Lark Hall, *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994), 7.

⁷Hall, *Through the Avenue of Art*, 14.

⁸The "Old Parrington farm lies in the northeast quarter of Section 26 in Township 17 of Range 10. Copies of the deeds to the homestead and to another quarter-section (36/17/10) are filed with Parrington's papers. See Hall, *Through the Avenue of Art*, "Notes to pages 13-23," 477.

⁹Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 7.

¹⁰Ibid., 8.

¹¹H. Lark Hall, "Vernon Louis Parrington: The Genesis and Design of *Main Currents in American Thought*" (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1979, 59.

¹²Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 9.

¹³Hall, "The Genesis and Design of *Main Currents of American Thought*," 56.

¹⁴Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 12.

¹⁵Ibid., 11.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 13; Hall, "The Genesis and Design of *Main Currents in American Thought*," 64.

¹⁸Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 14."

¹⁹Ibid., 14.

²⁰Hall, *Through the Avenue of Art*, 18; *idem*, *Dissertation*, 67

²¹Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 22.

²²*Ibid.*, 17.

²³*Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, 19.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*College Life*, December 19, 1896; "Autobiographical Sketch," 18.

²⁹Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 22.

³⁰Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 23.

³¹Hall, "The Genesis and Design of *Main Currents in American Thought*," 73; Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 23.

³²Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 25.

CHAPTER II

Parrington was nearly fourteen years old when the family moved to Emporia in the spring of 1885. His father had moved to Emporia earlier in January to assume the office of Probate Judge and to find a new residence for the family. During the first year in Emporia, the family lived on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Commercial Street. The next year, John William purchased a house on Tenth Avenue and Rural Street.¹ This house was "a one-story, four-room place, cheaply built and doomed to suffer much making over and adding on, and yet never to arrive at an altogether satisfactory habitation."² But, for the first time since the Parringtons lived in the rent-house owned by Stuart Gibson, neighbors lived closer than a few miles away.

Other differences between living on the farm and life in the city were also evident. The excitement generated by earlier day trips to Emporia had become routine. Newman's dry goods store was within blocks of the Parrington home, and seeing vendors selling bananas or other goods on street corners was so common it went unnoticed. The city also offered reprieve from daily farm chores. No longer were early mornings spent carrying the swill bucket or afternoons and evening collecting corn cobs; farm work gave way to other activities (or perhaps *inactivity*) such as spending time with friends at the local hangout. "For years," recalled William Allen White,

that corner in the bookstore there in Commercial Street was a hangout for the young fellows around town, young fellows too proud for pool, too wicked for prayer meetings, too lazy for baseball (though Vernon Parrington pitched a mean curve on the Emporia Browns), too sophisticated for the local poker game, and too young . . . to let the world go by without trying to understand it.³

The move offered advantages not possible with farm life. John William's election to Probate Judge had been a step up financially for the Parrington family, and with the office came the responsibilities of increased social status. As the son of a newly-elected Probate Judge, Parrington could no longer "hang out" with friends or be seen around town dressed in overalls, suspenders, and a straw hat. Fine clothes and new shoes replaced hand-me-downs and work clothes. "Our outward transformation was magical," recalled Parrington,

never did boys put off country ways and put on town ways more speedily. . . . Soon we became connoisseurs in scarfs and neck-ties. For a few fleeting months we were seduced by the unwonted spell of celluloid collars; but that was while we were still victims of lingering country prejudices. Our eyes were soon opened and a celluloid collar became henceforth the sign of a country jake, and aroused our mirth when it appeared . . . encircling the neck of some clod-hopper.⁴

This "outward transformation" resulted in a change of attitude as well, and there emerged from within Parrington a new self-image. The attitudes and values of farm life in rural Americus quickly gave way to the "sophistication" of the city. Parrington later rejected those early farm years, stating "in spite of the romance which youth discovers in the crudest reality, I was never so romantic as to believe [they] were years of pleasant or desirable existence."⁵

In the fall of 1885, Parrington enrolled in preparatory courses at the College of Emporia (C. of E.), a school founded in 1882 by the Presbyterian churches of Kansas. According to the *Annual Catalogue, College of Emporia, 1884-1885*:

For many years the leaders of the Presbyterian church in Kansas saw the necessity of a centrally located Presbyterian college. In the early years of Kansas, when it was believed that "no part of the state of Kansas could be inhabited west of the fourth tier of counties," it was deemed advisable to concentrate our educational interests in Highland University. But when the new Kansas came into existence, and the old line of habitability was removed some hundreds of miles westward, it became necessary to have a college at a point accessible to all the state. Various propositions were made to the synod by different localities from year to year and thoroughly discussed, until in 1882, the citizens of Emporia offered to donate forty acres of land for a site, and \$40,000 with which to erect a building.⁶

Thus, in September of 1882, classes began in a small rented room on Commercial Street that had previously been a dormitory for Kansas State Normal School students. Classes were taught at this location when Parrington began his studies, but in 1886, the College of Emporia moved into the newly built Stuart Hall located in the Northwest section of town. "I had seen its corner stone laid," wrote Parrington, "and had watched the shell rise slowly; and it was with a sense of pride that I now entered its walls as a student."⁷

Little is known about Parrington's academic achievements at the College of Emporia due to a 1915 fire at Stuart Hall that destroyed most early school records. Parrington sheds some light on his early years at the College of Emporia, however, in his "Autobiographical Sketch." He stated, "the

curriculum was old-fashioned Greek and Latin and mathematics, the teaching was mostly bad; and yet it was a God-send to us, for it picked us up, crude and untaught and carried us forward till the world of ideas and exact knowledge lay open to us."⁸

College catalogues and *College Life*, the school newspaper, also give an indication of Parrington's academic achievements. The catalogues describe the courses Parrington would have taken during his preparatory and collegiate years. The school's newspaper indicates that Parrington was an extremely talented orator. "Mr. Parrington is recognized as one of the best orators among the students," reported *College Life* on January 10, 1891, "His delivery inclines slightly to the tragical [sic] at times but the gentleman appears always perfectly self-possessed." Additionally, the newspaper shows that Parrington was involved in many academic, as well as literary, activities. He was the president of the State Oratorical Association, a member of the Philologic Literary Society, and an associate editor of the school's newspaper.⁹

The most in depth study of Parrington's academic years at the College of Emporia, however, has come from Parrington's biographer H. Lark Hall's *Vernon Louis Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art*. Hall's utilization of the college catalogues, meticulous research of Parrington's diaries and analyses of an oration entitled "God in History" and his poetry, has added much to the knowledge of Parrington's early

school years. Her work is unsurpassed and has shown that Parrington excelled as a prep student and a collegian. Yet, such limited focus on academic pursuits has ignored an important aspect of Parrington's early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood; Parrington's love of athletics.

Not all historians have completely ignored Parrington's involvement in athletics. Hofstadter, in *The Progressive Historians*, mentioned Parrington's coaching activities at Oklahoma; Cowell, in "The Populist Image of Vernon Louis Parrington," indicated that, during his college days at the College of Emporia and Harvard, Parrington showed interest in and was quite proficient at baseball; and in his autobiography, William Allen White opined that Parrington could throw a good curve-ball.¹⁰

The most in depth analysis of Parrington's association with sports, however, has been Hall's biography. She dedicates one paragraph to his athletic interests: "In the summers," wrote Hall, "the Parrington boys played on the city [baseball] team . . . and in the spring of 1890 the brothers helped organize its first baseball club."¹¹ Yet it was Parrington who so distinctly recorded in 1918 the importance of athletics, particularly baseball, in his younger years. "I was seized with a passion for baseball," he wrote, "a passion that was to last for many a year and come near to carrying me off into professional play."¹² In writing this, Parrington left clues to those aspects of his youth that were

important to him later in life. Unfortunately, historians (except for perhaps Cowell) have ignored such clues and have brushed aside Parrington's involvement as mere hobby. The implications are astounding if one considers the "what-ifs," had Parrington chosen professional athletics over academia.

Parrington was introduced to and was "seized with a passion" for baseball while attending Pumpkin Ridge school near Americus. He, brother John, George Gibson, Vernon Cook, and other boys from the surrounding area played baseball on make-shift ball diamonds built on the school grounds or in back yards. When weather and farm chores permitted, the boys engaged in "inningless" games that often lasted until dark. Some games were more memorable than others. "On my tenth birthday," he fondly recalled, "I had a party to which my town chum George Gibson came. Two features of the celebration I recall vividly: the pocket knife which he brought me, and the ball game which we played. . . ."13 It seems remarkable, unless one considers the importance of baseball in Parrington's youth, that thirty-seven years after his tenth birthday he could vividly recall a ball game played in 1881.

During those early years in Americus, playing baseball was somewhat of a chore. Because of unavailability and perhaps financial necessity, Parrington and his "chums" had to make their equipment. Selecting the right piece of wood for the baseball bat, preferably oak for its sturdiness, required a keen eye, and shaping raw wood into a hand-crafted

piece of equipment demanded much effort. Making baseballs was easier. "We preferred to buy a hank of twine and wrap it tightly about an odd piece of rubber for core," recalled Parrington. "Sometimes we got the cobbler to cut and sew on a leather cover, but they were not a success as stretched badly, so we commonly sewed the twine over and over to keep it from slipping." No doubt frustrating at times, the constant upkeep of equipment was forgotten once play began.¹⁴

Parrington continued to play baseball after the family moved to Emporia. Playing for the *Browns*, a youth's summer-league team, he taught himself to pitch. "I was fifteen when I first saw an out-curve thrown," recalled Parrington, "and thereafter I was assiduous in practice until I could throw a curve that the most skeptical must acknowledge."¹⁵ William Allen White commented on Parrington's "mean curve," and, those who stepped in the batter's box and faced the young pitcher probably agree with White's sentiment. Parrington played on the *Emporia Browns* until he began taking college courses in 1888. Ironically, during his collegiate years, Parrington did not pitch, but assumed the role of catcher.

Unfortunately, little is known of Parrington's heroics on the baseball field during his freshman year of college, or about baseball generally at the College of Emporia before 1890. Sources do not shed light on these earlier years. The earliest year the College of Emporia could have engaged in baseball was in 1886, Parrington's sophomore year of

preparatory schooling and the year that Stuart Hall opened. It is unlikely that C. of E. participated in any outdoor sports between the years 1882 and 1885 primarily because it rented class room space and did not have the facilities to support extracurricular activities. The year 1886 seems unlikely also, given the fact that work on Stuart Hall was not complete at the time students started using the building. Yet Parrington made references to baseball in conjunction with Stuart Hall on page 27 of his "Autobiographical Sketch:" "We rigged up our gymnasium in the basement of Stuart Hall; we scraped our diamond and built our backs stop. . . ." This does not mean the basement of Stuart Hall was initially opened to the students for such activities during the 1886-87 school year, but it does indicate that the College of Emporia probably organized its baseball team sometime between 1887 and 1889.

What is known is that by the 1890 season, baseball was extremely popular at the College of Emporia. In anticipation of the upcoming season, students participated in various morale-building activities to show their support for the team. "With the first appearance of the tender grass blades, heralds the spring, the spirit of base ball waketh from his sleep, shaketh the kinks out of his legs and starteth forth on his triumphant career," explained one student. To prepare for a visit by the "spirit of baseball," *The Base Ball Association*, a club consisting of team members and enthusias-

tic fans, prepared the baseball field for play. The association "presented quite an industrial picture last Saturday," reported *College Life*,

[this] battalion with hoes on their shoulders marched to the tune 'Hoe, my comrades!' This motley army proceeded to the grounds where their weapons were used in clearing and leveling till no one need fear that he will step into a post-hole while running after a ball.¹⁶

After the grounds had been prepared by the "motley army," practice began for team members. Parrington's brother John was the captain and manager of the baseball team and was responsible for training the players for the upcoming season. After the team regained many of the skills that had deteriorated during the off-season, John arranged "pick up" games with boys from the public school in Emporia. "He brought to [the team] a high degree of excellence," remembered Parrington, "partly by drawing upon town boys to eke out our material."¹⁷ These games consisted of a few innings of play and usually lasted no longer than a regular practice.

As the regular season of play approached, one Class challenged another to a baseball game. These games greatly uplifted the morale of the participants, as well as the student body, and signaled the unofficial start of the baseball season. Occasionally, after such contests, a "faint yell which sounded like 'Rah, 'Rah, 'Rah! C. of E.!" could be heard around midnight, and successfully awakened the sleeping student body.¹⁸

It was not until the night of the baseball benefit,

however, that the students could officially declare the opening of the regular baseball season. Baseball benefits (unlike pep-rallies) occurred a night or two before the first game. The benefits were formal gatherings of the student body and were generally held at Stuart Hall. They consisted of vocal and instrumental music renditions--solos, duets, and quartets--poetry readings, and orations by students. These gatherings were greatly anticipated by the student body, and often lasted late into the night.¹⁹

Season openers were always played against the cross-town rival Kansas State Normal School. The rivalry stemmed, in part, from some of the "pre-game activities" carried out by students from both colleges. "There were a few pranks," recalled David Hibbard, class of '93, "[Normal's] new flag got misplaced and hung over the College [of Emporia] and our bell clapper had to be recovered and replaced." Such goings-on were usually in good fun and added much to the excitement of game day. By and large, the relationship between the two schools was amiable. "However," stated Hibbard, "[we] admitted without much pressure that we were attending an institution of higher class and more refinement."²⁰ Statements such as these were certainly contested by the Normal students, but "higher class" and a degree or two of "more refinement" meant little on the baseball field. Normal and the College of Emporia played numerous games during the season, and Normal rarely lost to the C. of E. nine. Higher

class and refinement did account for something, however, as the editor of *College Life* was always quick to point out when warranted; "The most disagreeable feature of the game (the April 18, 1890 game) was the coarse and senseless yelling of some of the town boys. . . . This was marked in contrast to the gentlemanly conduct of the College boys." On occasions when the College of Emporia defeated Normal, as on May 2, 1890, the editor of *College Life* assessed the conduct of Normal's nine differently; "Good feeling was manifested on both sides, and there was almost none of the rowdiness which so often disgusted the spectators of amateur games."²¹ Occasions to praise the opponents' conduct, however, were few.

Parrington was an integral part of the College of Emporia baseball team during the 1890 and 1891 seasons. He was the catcher throughout most of his college career at Emporia, but was not limited to duties behind home plate. He was a well rounded player able to play any position, often playing at third base or short-stop, and occasionally pitching a few innings. But he was known for his abilities as a catcher; "after one season," recalled Parrington, "I went in behind the bat, and for the remainder of my connection with the College I was the regular catcher. . . ."²² He possessed outstanding talents offensively as well. Numerous write-ups in *College Life* noted Parrington's base running abilities and sliding techniques. And his command of the bat was excep-

tional. Not all of Parrington's offensive statistics are available, but a survey of those that are indicate that Parrington maintained at least a .400 batting average.²³ *College Life's* assessment of Parrington being "one of the best amateur players in Kansas" was truly a compliment considering he played against many exceptional athletes from different Kansas teams, including Kansas University, Ottawa, Washburn, Normal, and the Haskell Indian College throughout his collegiate career at the College of Emporia.

Parrington temporarily ended his association with the College of Emporia baseball team after the 1891 season. In September of that year he transferred to Harvard to complete his education. His years at Harvard were anything but pleasant. "I felt like an outsider throughout my stay," recalled Parrington, "and indeed one must have had money, or have come of a well-known family, or been a prominent athlete, to have been anything but an out-sider. Harvard was a rich man's college. . . ." ²⁴ C. Wright Mills, in the *Power Elite*, best explained the causes for those feelings Parrington experienced: "it does not by itself mean much to [attend Harvard]: the point is not Harvard, but which Harvard? By Harvard, one means Porcellian, Fly, or A.D."²⁵ Unfortunately, Parrington, attended none of those "Harvards."

Granville Hicks concluded in "The Critical Principles of V. L. Parrington," that Parrington, while at Harvard, "seems to have won no honors, prizes, or scholarships, to have held

no class offices, to have engaged in no extracurricular activities."²⁶ While Hicks was mostly correct in his assessment of Parrington's years at Harvard, he was wrong on two points; Parrington received a tuition scholarship of one hundred and fifty dollars, and played baseball.

During the summer of 1882, Parrington determined that the following fall he would try out for Harvard's varsity baseball team. *College Life* excitedly reported Parrington's decision and added "we are glad to see his ability recognized in the East."²⁷ Yet, the East did not recognize his talents and Parrington failed to make the varsity team. "I found out that favoritism ran even into athletics when I tried out for the baseball team. I was a player of professional calibre," he explained, "yet I got no chance to show what I could do on the Varsity, and barely made the class [of '93] team." All that is known of his association with the Class of '93 baseball team comes from his "Autobiographical Sketch." He stated that the team "was the poorest excuse for a team I ever played on."²⁸

After graduating from Harvard in 1893, Parrington returned to Emporia and resumed his involvement in the sport by playing catcher on the College of Emporia baseball team.²⁹ Parrington got the opportunity to play baseball for the *Emporia Maroons*, a semi-professional team organized in June 1894. He continued to play for the College of Emporia, however, and when the teams played each other in exhibition

games, Parrington always chose to play for his alma mater. Strict rules governing collegiate athletics had not been implemented in 1884, so Parrington's involvement with both amateur and semi-professional teams generated no controversy. "We were paid our expenses and sometimes more," recalled Parrington, "but never very much. The fuss over professionalism had not yet begun."³⁰

The *Maroons* was organized at the height of baseball's popularity in Emporia. "Emporia was a red hot baseball town," noted the *Emporia Gazette*, and the fans were "agog" over their new team.³¹ Various methods were used to promote the team, including free exhibition games against local townspeople. Other practice games were also played against the College of Emporia and Kansas State Normal teams in efforts to raise funds and to prepare for the upcoming season. On game days, members of the *Maroons* dressed in plug hats, linen dusters, and canes, much to the delight of the fans. And parades were staged on Commercial Street, "with the marching teams, and band drumming up crowds for the games on Soden's Grove."³² All made for an exciting afternoon of wholesome, manly, and fun competition.

The official start of the inaugural season began with a two-game series against the Haskell Indians. These games were much anticipated by the citizens of Emporia, and appear to have been a novelty for those unaccustomed to seeing Native Americans play baseball. The *Emporia Daily Gazette*

announced, "The game to be played at Soden's grove on Saturday (June 30, 1894) between the *Maroons* and Haskell Indians will be for the especial accommodation of those living in the country who wish to see the Indians play."³³

One month before the first game, the *Daily Gazette* had begun running weekly advertisements counting down the weeks, then days, until the first game.³⁴ After months of preparation and the afternoon's parade with marching bands, over six hundred fans watched on as the teams took to the field for play. Parrington played catcher and served as the team's captain. He did remarkably well on offense as well as defense, getting three base hits, scoring one run, making a double play, and committing no errors. His efforts alone were not enough, however, and the Haskell Indians defeated the *Maroons* 13-3. The *Emporia Daily Gazette* lamented "The Red Men Win," and explained, "The Indians play better ball than our boys, . . . [they] batted well, ran bases in good style, caught the ball when it went toward them and 'coached' in a way that would make a professional jealous."³⁵

The *Maroons* regrouped after their initial loss and defeated the Haskell Indian 10-4 in the second game of the series. "ONE FOR US," screamed the *Daily Gazette*, "The Maroons were in splendid form and played a great game all the way through."³⁶ Parrington played well during the second game and for the remainder of the season. The team continued to win throughout the 1894, playing numerous Kansas teams,

including teams from Topeka, Lawrence, and Manhattan, and various college teams throughout the state. In September, they won the State Championship series against a team from Topeka.³⁷

As the summer of 1894 and the *Maroons'* inaugural season came to an end, Parrington put away his glove and bat and prepared for the upcoming school year. As late summer passed into early fall, Parrington quite possibly shifted his attention away from his academic duties and began to focus upon another inaugural season that was about to begin, the first College of Emporia football season.

NOTES

¹*Americus Ledger*, March 20, 1885; Parrington stated in his "Autobiographical Sketch" that the first address the family lived at was on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Market Street. I have chosen to use the *Americus Ledger* source primarily because it was written at the time of the move, and Parrington's sketch was written in 1918. I was unsuccessful in obtaining a city directory of Emporia for that year.

²Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 24.

³William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 267.

⁴Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 26.

⁵*Ibid.*, 12.

⁶*Annual Catalogue, College of Emporia, 1884-1885*, Box E-12, File 45, Lyon County Historical Society, Emporia, Kansas, i.

⁷Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 26.

⁸*Ibid.*, 25; H. Lark Hall V. L. Parrington, *Through the Avenue of Art* has done extensive research on Parrington's diaries. These diaries are in the possession of Parrington's family, and are not available for current research. Hall's work is remarkable in showing Parrington's early academic years at the College of Emporia. See Hall's chapter entitled "God in History: The Early Years, 1871-1891" in *Through the Avenue of Art* for a detailed analysis of Parrington's academic years; Hall "Vernon Louis Parrington: The Genesis and Design of *Main Currents in American Thought*" (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1979) gives excerpts from Parrington's "Autobiographical Sketch" and diaries; and *Annual Catalogue, College of Emporia 1884-1885*, *Third Annual Catalogue, 1885-1886*, *Fifth Annual Catalogue, 1887-1888*, and *Seventh Annual Catalogue, 1890-1891*.

⁹*College Life*, January 18, 1890 thru August 27, 1891.

¹⁰Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 371; James L. Cowell, "The Populist Image of Vernon Louis Parrington," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 1 (June 1962 - March 1963): 58-60; White, 267.

¹¹Hall, *Through the Avenue of Art*, 18;

¹²Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 14.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid; According to Parrington, the reason he preferred to make his baseballs as described was because a factory-made Spaulding baseball cost \$1.50. He stated that wehn a young man acquired a Spaulding, it became a prized possession.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁶ *College Life*, April 25, 1891.

¹⁷ Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 17.

¹⁸ *College Life*, May 10, 1890.

¹⁹ *College Life*, April 25, 1891.

²⁰ *Emporia Gazette*, June 1, 1966.

²¹ *College Life*, April 19, 1890; May 3, 1890.

²² Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 27-28.

²³ See *College Life* for years 1890 and 1891; and Hall, "God in History," *Through the Avenue of Art*, 13-33.

²⁴ Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 34.

²⁵ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 67; For an interesting and enlightening view of the influence of societies at Harvard and other Ivy League schools, see G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 24-28.

²⁶ Granville Hicks, "The Principals of V. L. Parrington," *Science and Society* 3 (April 1951): 443.

²⁷ *College Life*, September 12, 1892.

²⁸ Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 35.

²⁹ Parrington, as professor, continued to play for the College of Emporia baseball team until the end of the 1896 season. The April 17, 1896 issue of *College Life* reported that "We are trying the strictly college men plan this year and all interested agree in saying that the prospect for a good manly team was never better." It is unknown if the decision was student or administratively initiated.

³⁰ Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 28.

³¹ *Emporia Gazette*, June 11, 1954.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Emporia Daily Gazette*, June 19, 1890.

³⁴ *Emporia Daily Gazette*, March 29 thru June 28, 1890.

³⁵ *Emporia Daily Gazette*, June 30, 1894.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The *Emporia Maroons* had successful season during the years Parrington played for the team (1894-1896). The team became State Champions again in 1896. Parrington played catcher for the team during those years.

CHAPTER III

He had no teeth in the front of his mouth,
He carried his nose in a sling;
His ribs were silver, his right arm wood,
And his foot went on with a spring.

His eyes were black as the ace of spades,
His ears hung down from the top;
Thus making him look as though he'd been used
As a genuine full-fledged mop.

I asked in surprise what the reason was,
And a ghastly smile did gleam;
From his split-up mouth as he painfully said,
I scored on the football team.¹

Although this poem was not of the caliber of Longfellow, Vernon Parrington probably appreciated the student expression of her views on football. As a poet and Professor of English at the Presbyterian College of Emporia, Parrington would have cherished this student's use of effective diction, metaphor, and simile to set the tone of the poem. He would have applauded her incorporation of satire, realism, and dramatic irony to create such entertaining, didactic verse. Undoubtedly, he would have relished the fact that it rhymed.

As a football coach, however, Parrington probably winced at the poem's message. His reaction would have surely stemmed, in part, from the fact that he disagreed with these sentiments that humorously, yet graphically, described the potential dangers of the game. Adding to the injury, this witty student had successfully and humorously used Parrington's favorite literary form to criticize his preferred method of sport.

Parrington would have surely regarded the poem as one

more denunciation of the sport that he had organized at the College of Emporia in 1893. It evidenced a growing controversy between the majority of the student body, who favored a football team, and the majority of faculty members, who did not. Moreover, Emporia lacked the community support for such a program as it was "at a time when good farmers thought that this harsh contact sport was unnecessary--just to push and retrieve an inflated pigskin up and down a field."² Parrington was caught in the middle of this debate. To compound the difficulties Parrington the professor and coach might have experienced during this controversy, he was also the quarterback.

Although he was the first to successfully establish a football team at the College of Emporia, which undoubtedly exacerbated tensions between students and faculty, he was not the first to introduce the controversies surrounding the sport to Emporia. For several years, attempts by the students to organize a team had been unsuccessful because of a lack of interest on the part of administrators and faculty members who were unwilling to fund the sport. "As a rule," reported *College Life*, the College's weekly newspaper, "the Faculty takes very little interest in athletics. If they did they would make some allowance for them."³

In 1890, Reuben S. Lawrence took an interest in the sport, however, and "came out and assisted in organizing a football team." He and fifteen young men, including Parring-

ton, trained "in the gym so that a formidable body of athletes would be ready for action in the spring."⁴ A single game was scheduled with Kansas State Normal School for early April.

The odds were against the young team's success, however, because President A. Hendy and the faculty refused to allocate funds for the purchase of a football. Moreover, they showed no interest in equipping the gymnasium with the necessary apparatus for the athletes to train. As one dismayed student commented on the state of the gymnasium, "[it] does not deserve the name. Illy [sic] furnished, not repaired . . . there is little to attract the students in its gloomy interior, while the use of it is rather discouraged than insisted upon."⁵ Without the proper training equipment, and without the support of the faculty, it was no surprise that the scheduled game with Normal was cancelled, and the team was disbanded. Professor Lawrence lost all interest in the sport and directed his energies once again toward his classroom. Disheartened, the athletes who had trained all winter grudgingly accepted the decision. As one athlete rebelliously commented, "it is easy to tell what the Faculty should do, but if they don't the question then is what shall we do?"⁶ Nothing, however, was done.

During an October 20, 1891, address delivered on occasion of the baseball benefit later that school year, student S. R. Edwards called again for football, and the school's increased

participation in athletics in general. "During the last 25 years," he noted,

there has been a phenomenal growth of interest and appreciation of healthy muscular amusements. The years of college days are those in which athletic sports prove not only most attractive, but also most beneficial. So long as these are not elevated into a fetish are they admirable for developing character, beside bestowing on the participants an invaluable fund of health and strength.⁷

The administration was unmoved by Edwards' plea for increased athletic opportunities at the college.

A second attempt was made to organize a football team in 1891. The financial problem of the previous year was solved when the faculty allocated funds to purchase a football. The prospect of a team electrified the student body. In October, *College Life* enthusiastically reported that "football grounds have been laid out, the ball has arrived, and nearly enough men to fill out the eleven have been marked; it only remains now to secure an energetic [coach] and put the team in training at once."⁸

The paper reported that a college meeting to find a coach was scheduled for October 7, 1891. During the week before the meeting, the college newspaper ran numerous articles that displayed the student body's support of football, and offered advice for the new team. "Practice with team work, team-work through practice," wisely advised *College Life*, "that is the secret of a successful eleven."⁹ Some students directed their comments to fellow students who were not wholeheartedly committed in their support of a team.

"Remember," wrote one such student appealing to a senses of patriotism and school spirit, "it is every student's DUTY to assist in supporting the College ball club. Our object should be to get as many of our students as possible to take part in this [sport], for it will benefit our institution, and indirectly the nation."¹⁰

Unfortunately, no amount of support, enthusiasm, or school spirit exhibited by the students could atone for the lack of interest on the part of the faculty. The week-long excitement about the prospects of a football team culminated with the October 7, meeting. As *College Life* reported, "the foot-ball meeting on Saturday last was apparently a failure as no one seems to have attended."¹¹ This was a clear message to the student body--the faculty did not want the sport at the College of Emporia. Faculty allocation of funds for a football indicated no real interest or commitment to the game; rather, it merely represented a minor addition to the ill-equipped gymnasium. The faculty's unanimous absence from the meeting verified the existence and extent of the chasm that separated the students and the faculty on the issue of football. Something was needed to bridge the distance between them.

Following the disappointing football meeting, the student body almost immediately changed tactics to secure a team. Initially, students at C. of E. viewed football and other sports as merely extracurricular entertainment. After

October 7, however, the students emphasized two important benefits of football and other sports. First, the students asserted that sports were a necessary part of a complete education. "Now, some persons think that sports are all out of place when college students become interested in them," wrote one student, "but they are a part in school work which a student should by no means neglect but is of as much importance as any other branch of school work."

Another student concurred by stating,

football, which does not seem to interest our College very much, is nevertheless a good means of procuring good exercise, and a student attending school and getting down to hard study and thinking, and doing nothing but studying day in and day out will in course of time become weak and be visited by loss of appetite and sleepless nights, and finds . . . that he cannot study at all.¹¹

Students argued that athletics, football in particular, was a necessary part of education which would actually promote better study habits among participants. One of the best arguments came from the student who stated that

a person going through the whole college course without [sports] comes out somewhat one-sided; he has intellectual power enough but no physical power to carry the former with. [It is] better to drop some of your studies than do wholly without [athletics].¹²

Second, the students attempted to show the financial benefits of the sport to C. of E. "One of the most interesting features of college life," wrote the editor of the school newspaper, "is athletics. For most students, other things being equal, a good foot-ball team will determine their preference among several institutions. How much better

known to the youth are Harvard, Princeton, Yale, because of their renown in the amateur athletics of to-day."¹³

Although the students continued to lobby for football, the issue had really been settled two years earlier at the October 7, football meeting. Consequently, there were no further attempts to organize a football team for two years. The student's contentions were largely in vain because academic and social life was ultimately ruled by the faculty.¹⁴ Throughout the '91-'92 and '92-'93 school years, the faculty exhibited over and over again their disapproval of the game.

An important event transpired during the summer of 1893, however, that helped to reverse the school's previous decisions on football. President Hendy retired and was replaced by Dr. B. Hewitt. Hewitt hired Parrington after being graduated from Harvard. Before completing his studies, Parrington applied for a teaching position at the College of Emporia. "I had never consciously decided to be a teacher," wrote Parrington, "nor had I planned my work in that view. I drifted into it. Father wanted me to be one, and I had thought of it as a makeshift till something better turned up."¹⁵

Parrington's application was denied because President Hendy questioned his religious seriousness. After Hendy's retirement, however, Hewitt reversed Hendy's decision. Hired to teach English and French in June of 1893, Parrington accepted President Hewitt's salary offer to teach at a wage

of five hundred dollars a year.¹⁶ As he later recalled, "It was the only opening that was offered and I took it, partly because I wanted to be at home. A little over a month remained in which to plan my work, and in September, at the age of 22 I entered the class as a teacher."¹⁷

It is doubtful that one of Parrington's initial objectives was to organize a football team at the college. His highest priorities were the English Department and the literary societies, which had "fallen into neglect" while he was at Harvard.¹⁸ As local historian and College of Emporia Alumni Eugene Perry Link asserted in *The College of Emporia: In Retrospection and Appreciation*, "[Parrington's] first attention was the curriculum in which he planted the seeds for the establishment of that distinctive C. of E. spirit of intellectual questioning and curiosity mingled with a dash of protest."¹⁹ Parrington, no doubt, had been influenced by his Eastern education and fully intended on changing the English department at the College of Emporia.

Perhaps the most fundamental changes were evidenced in the differences between the 1891-1892 (before Parrington began teaching at the College of Emporia) and the 1893-1894 (after his arrival as a Professor) *Annual Catalogues of the Officers and Students of the College of Emporia*. According to the 1891-1892 catalogue:

The aim in English during the Freshman and Sophomore years, is to thoroughly familiarize the students with the fundamental principles of literary style and invention;

and to cultivate in him inventive power and method as well as facility and grace of expression.

During the Freshman year, three periods a week are devoted to the study of Style. The various principles are mastered by thorough discussion in text work, analysis of selections from English authors, and by constant practice in essay writing.

In the Sophomore year the study of Invention is pursued in the same manner, study of English master-pieces and composition of essays constantly supplementing the text.

In the Junior and Senior years English is continued as elective work. During the Junior year the historical development of English Literature is studied. As a basis of instruction, Brooke's English Primer, or some similar work is used, and from this is derived a knowledge of the historical features of literature. The more prominent writers are studied by suitable [sic] extracts from their works, the aim constantly being to have the student derive his own knowledge from actual reading of authors, rather than from a textbook in which they are extensively criticized.

In the Senior year the first semester is occupied with studies in Shakespeare. Several plays are read, and in connection with them, and drama, in its original development, is discussed. In the second semester, nineteenth century poetry is taken up and presented as fully as possible in the time allotted [sic]. The aim is rather to study carefully a few representative poets, whose works illustrate the development and tendencies of modern poets, than to attempt a superficial and inadequate study of all.

As an alternative elective in the second semester, Whitney's Language and the Study of Language is offered. This work deals with the origin and development of language, the family relations of the various groups of languages, and with the relation of thought to language.²⁰

Interestingly, this was the English curriculum that had prepared Parrington for the expected rigors of academic study at Harvard that he found unacceptable upon his return to Emporia.

In many ways, Parrington wanted to create the intellect-

ual atmosphere at the College of Emporia that he had hoped to experience at Harvard. Regrettably, Parrington was disappointed in Harvard, and stated that his "immediate quarrel with Harvard as I knew it, turned on its failure to do its work well. Two thirds of the courses that I took were so much time wasted . . . and I got an appalling percentage of shiftless and stupid instructors."²¹

Fortunately, Parrington had enrolled in several English classes offered by Barrett Wendell and Louis Gates and had found something positive about the college. "The most valuable thing I got from Harvard," he wrote,

was a method of teaching English composition and literature. English teaching was then at the beginning of the amazing development that came in the next decade. In this work Harvard was leading, and when I left college and began teaching I adopted naturally the Harvard method--a method I still think is sound. Mr. Gates and Mr. Wendell I suppose I owe most to this matter.²²

Ironically, during Parrington's years at Harvard, he considered Gates and Wendell "second rate teachers,"²³ but the best that Harvard had to offer its students.

Based on the teachings and examples of two second rate teachers and a few ideas of his own, Parrington found what he considered a successful formula for modern teaching of English and literature. In the month after Parrington accepted the teaching position at the College of Emporia and before classes resumed, Parrington worked diligently to construct a more challenging English program. Parrington described his early years at C. of E. as "the busiest years

of my life. Everything was new; the department was to be organized; each class to be prepared for in detail."²⁴ His vision of the curriculum varied greatly from that of years before. According to the 1893-1894 catalogue:

The work in English falls into two divisions: that dealing with Rhetoric and Composition, and that dealing with literature. One year of the former is required; and the latter elective work equivalent to more than three years is offered.

The department believes that the only way to learn to write is to write. With this in view during half of the Freshman year, weekly themes are required in connection with text book work and analyses of English authors.

In the Sophomore year, the writing consists of (1) daily themes, limited to one page of theme paper and intended to cultivate observation, ease of expression and regular habits of work; and (2) fortnightly themes, intended to cultivate correctness and vigor of expression.

In the study of English Literature the inductive method is used exclusively. A large amount of reading is prescribed and a still larger amount is recommended. All work is done outside the classroom. Two periods a week are occupied by the instructor in lecturing and the third is devoted to informal discussions. Either weekly critiques or occasional thesis are required. In courses V and VI, special topics are assigned and reports are listened to and discussed. The meetings are informal, the courses resolving themselves into seminars.

Course I, intended for Juniors, but open by special permission to Seniors, deals with the historical development of English Literature; particular attention being paid to the rise and decline of the pseudo-classic school and to the development of the novel. In 1894-1895 the following authors will be studied: Spenser, Marlow, Jonson, Bacon, Milton, Dryden, Swift, Addison, Defoe, Pope, Dr. Johnson, Richardson, Fielding, Goldsmith, Cowper, Burns, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Carlyle, Arnold, Macaulay, Ruskin.

Courses II and III are devoted to the study of Anglo-Saxon with a view to reading Chaucer.

In Course IV the endeavor is made to trace the

development of Shakespeare's mind as revealed by his works. In 1894-95 the following plays will be read: Love's Labor's Lost, Mid-summer Night's Dream, Henry IV, Part I; Henry V, Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, Cymbeline. In connection with the course a careful study is made of the English Renaissance, the development of the drama, and Shakespeare's philosophical teachings.

Course V deals with the romantic movement, its origin, its development and the philosophy underlying it. Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Bryan are carefully studied and occasional lectures are given on other romantic poets, both early and late.

Course VI can be taken only with the consent of the instructor. It presumes a fair knowledge of English Literature as a whole and some experience in literary criticism. The subject of realism vs. idealism will be studied with special care. A large amount of contemporary prose and poetry will be read and discussed in their relation to present sociological tendencies.²⁵

Satisfied with the new direction he had plotted, Parrington set about to prepare for the upcoming school year. "I wrote out my lectures almost in full," he recollected somewhat dismayfully, "I discovered huge gaps in my knowledge of English literature, which I must fill in. How I got so much done is a wonder to me now."²⁶

Added to the stresses of preparing for classes, Parrington became involved in rebuilding the literary societies--the Philologic, Mathonian, and Thespian--to their previous glory. Joining the Philologic a few months after it was organized in 1884, Parrington had been deeply involved with the society during his student days at the College of Emporia. According to local historian Eugene Link, the Philologic "was the first student organization and provided

opportunities for students to think for themselves."²⁷ This, no doubt, had attracted Parrington to the society during his student years. As a Harvard educated professor, however, the opportunity not only to encourage, but to facilitate free thinking among the students was too great an opportunity for Parrington to forego. He realized the importance and possibilities of such societies, but was dissatisfied with its current direction. He submitted to President Hewitt a plan for changing the societies from mere social gatherings to mandatory, academic entities worthy of their namesakes. With the support of Hewitt, Parrington drafted new rules for the literary societies:

1. Every student in the college proper shall be required, and every student in the preparatory department permitted, to belong to one or other of the three literary societies now in operation, to wit, the Mathonian, Philologic, Thespian.
2. Young men becoming applicants for membership under the above rule shall follow their individual preference in entering the Philologic or Mathonian society. Young ladies shall be enrolled in the Thespian.
3. Each society shall render a literary program once a week, and each member shall take an assigned part as often as four times every half-year, viz: three times in debate and once in the delivery of an original oration, (for all who have passed the Freshman year), or of a declamation, (for Freshman and Preparatory students).
4. Three days before a debate is to take place all contestants on both sides shall post briefs of their arguments in the society bulletin.
5. The Secretary of each society shall make weekly reports of all absences . . . to the Faculty's Committee on Literary Societies, who alone shall have power to excuse such delinquencies. Adjournment without going through the literary program shall be reported on as an absence.

6. At the close of each regular program the society shall, either by full ballot or through judges previously selected, determine who has made the best debate of the evening, and the person whom the award is given shall be named in the records of the society as having received the 'appointment' for that meeting. On the basis of these 'appointments' two representatives from each society shall be chosen at the end of the year to contest in the Hood Prize Debate.

7. In the second half of the Senior year all duties connected with the literary societies shall become optional.²⁸

Because he was a professional and a perfectionist, Parrington was able to achieve much. Yet, as witnessed by the detailed course descriptions and the strictly constructed rules for the literary societies, Parrington had the tendency to micro-manage.

To his credit, Parrington realized the difference between encouraging the students to think on their own and directing the students to his conclusions and beliefs. "Do not just read," he repeatedly urged, "but discuss, debate and write about what you read. Then you really learn."²⁹ Parrington tried to ensure that students at the College of Emporia received an education in which they would not look back with contempt, as he had Harvard.

Perhaps the biggest reason Parrington worked so diligently at creating a first rate English department was because it allowed him to infuse secular ideas into the predominantly denominational main-stream. Parrington cared very little for church-sponsored schools and was somewhat disgusted with the College of Emporia's curriculum. "Most of

the boys were studying for the ministry," he wrote, "and much was made of Bible study; but it was very badly taught and served no real purpose beyond providing a talking point in appealing to the churches for money." He went on to state, "Emporia was a Presbyterian College and religion was greatly exploited in all printed matter--often ignobly I now think. Education is a function of the state and not of any lesser body. I want no child of mine to attend a denominational school."³⁰

Correctly assessing Parrington's secularism, President Hendy may have made the right decision in denying employment to Parrington at a church school. President Hewitt, however, probably looked past Parrington's "indiscretions" for the purpose of bringing a Harvard graduate onto the faculty. Whatever the case, College of Emporia historian Dennis R. Pitts stated best the impact of Hewitt's decision,

When Dr. Hewitt brought Parrington into the faculty, he brought a new type of instructor into the academic world. Reading was to be outside work. . . . His thesis for teaching English was that the student was in the class to learn and discuss.³¹

It is doubtful that one of Parrington's initial objectives was to organize a football team at the college. Football, nonetheless, was important to Parrington. His curiosity about the game no doubt began in 1890 with Professor Lawrence. His interests were sparked once again when he was at Harvard, and developed as he watched team practices and games against schools such as Yale and Princeton. No

wonder that Parrington had become so enchanted with the grid-iron. As one student colorfully wrote his parents about Harvard, "it is "a big place, where people play football and on rainy days they read books."³² Parrington recalled, "The first [organized] football [game] I ever saw was in Cambridge."³³ Caught up in the football frenzy, Parrington too had fallen under its spell. Through it all, however, he had never experienced first-hand the thrill of playing. Given the notion that Parrington was an avid sportsman never afforded the opportunity to play on an organized football team, and considering the College of Emporia students' enthusiasm shown toward football, it was no surprise that Parrington became interested in organizing a team.

Without a doubt, Parrington was qualified for the position of team organizer and coach. First, he was energetic. During his student years at C. of E., he had proven himself one of the best athletes in Kansas.³⁴ Second, he was knowledgeable in the sport of football. Albeit the time spent at Harvard watching practices and games constituted his experience, it was more than any other person at the College of Emporia. Lastly, Parrington had "experienced" Harvard. For some time, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale had been the yard-sticks by which western schools measured their worth.

Academically, the College of Emporia believed itself equal to any school in the East. "Were the Western colleges arrayed against the Eastern in oratory," suggested the editor

of *College Life*, "probably we would win." Athletically however,

They reap laurels from the arena; we from the forum. We do not at all admit we are inferior in raw material, but we lack the means of refining it. Give us their advantages and we would not long admit their superiority in athletics.³⁵

The knowledge of the game that Parrington brought from Harvard, and by virtue of his attendance at Harvard, many believed that Parrington could refine the raw material into a team "that will challenge any other team in the state."³⁶ The question was, would Hewitt give Parrington such an opportunity?

Before Parrington's return, the college justified its lack of football by pointing to the faculty's general disinterest in, and lack of knowledge of, the sport. It simply side-stepped the issue and ended all discussions on the topic by refusing to get involved. Parrington's interest and his willingness to become involved in football, and his knowledge and "experience" of the game, provided ample justifications for the school's participation in the sport. In early November 1893, therefore, Parrington sought and received permission from President Hewitt to organize a team. "When I returned to Emporia to teach," he wrote, "I became the football coach for our early teams. . . . I usually played quarterback on those teams."³⁷

The first season was conducted on a trial basis and consisted of one scrimmage against cross-town rival Kansas

State Normal School. Almost immediately, news of the formation of a football team caused the students of the College of Emporia to erupt with enthusiasm. "We are heartily glad that football is at last starting between College and Normal," reported *College Life*, "it will do more than anything else to wipe out whatever ill feelings may have existed in the past."³⁸ With the first game only a few weeks away, another student commented that it was "a little late undoubtedly to begin training, but anything can be done with enthusiasm such as seems to be rife among the fellows."³⁹ To compensate with school spirit for whatever the football team lacked in training, one young lady colorfully reminded her peers of their responsibilities:

Anyone who will talk football, and shout for football, and then refuse to help football in the only substantial manner that it can be helped by one who does not play it, is meaner . . . than the man who crossed his bees with lightning-bugs to enable them to work in the dark.⁴⁰

At three-thirty in the afternoon of November 27, 1893, "perhaps the largest group of people that ever attended an athletic contest on campus turned out to watch the Normal-College game." After two short weeks of training, and many years of struggle, the College of Emporia football team took the field for the first time. For a twenty-five cent admission, spectators watched a strong, stubborn fight. There were no "brilliant runs," reported *College Life*, "as most of the gains were made by bucking the center and with the revolving wedge."⁴¹ Parrington did not lead the team

from the quarterback position, however. Instead, he started at the left end position and provided the much needed blocking skills for those running the ball. The battle ended at the half with Normal leading 4 to 0.

The second half of the game was very similar to the first. With the exception of a break-away run by Normal, it was a stubborn defensive game. For C. of E., the game was "lost by inexcusable blunders," and the "failure of the team to score." The C. of E. team managed, nonetheless, to "put up a strong fight from first to last." Normal was too much for this young team, however, and "showed in their teamwork the results of practice." They defeated the College of Emporia 14 to 0, in a game that was described as "rather unscientific."⁴²

The game had been a huge success, and had virtually guaranteed itself a future by drawing many spectators and boosting school spirit to unprecedented heights. Although the students were wild with enthusiasm because of the event, no efforts were made to organize a cheering section. Parrington later wrote, "One thing that will seem strange to a later generation is that there was no organized cheering at the games, or elsewhere, and no yell-leader. If we had a college yell I do not recall, and I incline to think that during my earlier years there we had none."⁴³

Still, the future of football at the College of Emporia was remarkably bright in many respects. In September 1894,

the "prevailing enthusiasm over football" and the "experience of the past" resulted in the formation of *The Football Association*, a club similar in design to *The Baseball Association*. For devotion to the sport and his increasing popularity among the students at C. of E., Parrington was unanimously elected president of the association. He, and other officers, had nearly unlimited control over C. of E.'s athletics. "It is believed," stated *College Life*, "that the result will be stronger teams, better playing, more enthusiastic support and a concentration of effort hitherto wanting."⁴⁴

To encourage greater local support for the game, rules of the game were printed in the school's newspaper so that spectators unfamiliar with the sport could better understand it. Scoring seemed to have been the most misunderstood aspect of the game, and the *College Life*, scoring was explained:

Scoring points shall be scored as follows: Goal obtained by touch-down, 3 points; goal from field kick, 3; touch-down failing goal, 2; safety, 1. In case of a tie the side which has kicked the greater number of goals from touch-down shall have 1 point added to their score.⁴⁵

Rules for the safety of the players and the conduct of spectators were included in the article.⁴⁶

To build a stronger team, Parrington relied on his Harvard experience. He had watched the eastern teams begin to practice before the season, paying great attention to muscle development and overall conditioning. Also noticed by Parrington was how the monotonous practice of fundamentals

rounded players into top form long before the first game. These measures were also taken by Parrington to prevent serious injury on the gridiron. For player motivation, as well as school spirit, Parrington encouraged the student body to watch practice. As one student noted, "A number of the ladies encouraged the football team by their presence at the practice Tuesday."⁴⁷ Certainly, Parrington welcomed this type of motivation as well.

In an effort to merge two of Parrington's interests-- football and literary societies--and in an effort to ceremoniously "kick off" the first official season of football at the College of Emporia, Parrington organized a football game between the Philologic and Mathonian Societies. "An enthusiastic crowd of students and outsiders were present at the game Wednesday afternoon," reported the school paper, "Carriages and equipage were gaily decorated, everyone in a happy mood and the game was a great success."⁴⁸ Parrington, sitting out of the game to be the umpire, called the captains of the teams, Lamb of the Mathonians and Neil of the Philologic, to the center of the field for the coin toss. Lamb won the toss and chose to defend the East goal. With the majority of "varsity" players, The Mathonians easily defeated the Philologic 10 to 0.

The game was intended to prepare players for the upcoming season and seemed to have had the results for which Parrington had hoped. College of Emporia played its first

regular season game against the Congregational Southern Kansas Academy in Eureka, Kansas, on October 25, 1894. After a grueling five hours train ride, C. of E. defeated Eureka 40 to 0. Considering the scoring system in 1894, Parrington and his team did remarkably well. "Our boys won on a large scale," reported *College Life*, "scoring eight touch-downs and kicking four goals."⁴⁹ For reasons unknown, Parrington was "ruled out" of the game by the officials and watched the second half of the game instead of playing. The results of the game were eagerly awaited by the fans who remained in Emporia. Although a telegraphic-cipher report was sent to Emporia, the fans waited an additional five hours for the team to return. Parrington and the football team were met in Emporia by two hundred students and other friends, and the "victory was fitly celebrated."⁵⁰

Two days later, the College of Emporia hosted its first home game when it played the Academy from Peabody, Kansas. Parrington started at the right tackle position to provide the necessary blocking for those running the ball. Apparently he did a very good job, as did the rest of the team; C. of E. defeated Peabody 30 to 4. The next year, *College Life* reported that Peabody had dropped their athletic programs, and boasted that "One game with C. of E. seemed to be enough to satisfy their craving for gridiron glory."⁵¹

The season was successful for the College of Emporia. In early November, however, the team experienced defeat at

the hands of Washburn College in Topeka, Kansas. Later that month, however, Parrington would exact revenge on the Topeka team defeating them 22 to 0. In all other games the first season, C. of E. was victorious, ending the season with 5-1-0 record.

Student support for the team was remarkable. After the season, team photographs were taken and sold to the student body. Purchasing team pictures became the "practical way to show pride in the fellows,"⁵² and an easy way to raise funds for the athletic department. Interestingly, Parrington apparently wore a Harvard jersey in team photos.

Perhaps the biggest indication of the excitement that was generated by football at the College of Emporia, was the notoriety it received outside of Kansas. In 1895, before the start of the regular season, Schmelzer Arms Company of Kansas City, Missouri, began advertising for football goods in *College Life*. Students could purchase a No. 1, twenty inches circumference American football for forty-cents. For fifty-cents more, students could equip themselves with a No. 6 American football that was thirty inches in circumference. For the football enthusiasts, Schmelzter Arms Company offered a complete line of "foot ball jackets, pants, shoes, belts, and the Morill Nose Mask."⁵³ The Schmelzter Arms Company was naturally interested in a profit, but their advertising campaign indicated that football was popular enough at C. of E. to be a potential market for football goods.

All were not so enthralled with and supportive of the game, however. Football had received much criticism and negative reaction. Serious opposition to the game challenged the future of the sport at the College of Emporia. Since the first scrimmage football game against Normal in 1893, *College Life* had been inundated with letters from many of the faculty and towns-people opposed to the sport. Their opposition did not stem from a simple dislike of the sport, but from a genuine disgust of a sport considered barbarous and inappropriate for students. "Football is unquestionably a thrilling game," observed one professor,

and refined young men and delicate young women enjoy the spectacle today for the same reason that refined young men and delicate young women shouted for joy and turned down their thumbs at the gladiatorial contests in the most high and mighty state of Rome. This proves nothing more than that there is something savage in the human breast.⁵⁴

Others joined in the attack. One person wryly quipped that "the humane societies should investigate the football game, [as it] is one of the roughest games ever introduced to the American people." Another suggested that since "the football [game] is over, the students will have to turn their attention to prize fights between two men only. It will seem rather tame after football, as there is not half as much chance for the contestants to get hurt."⁵⁵ To these allegations, Parrington simply responded, "[football] is a manly game, a healthy game and a safe one when properly prepared for and properly played." Furthermore, he proclaimed

"football is no more brutal than the individual players make it and the element of danger is largely removed by a rigid system of training without which no one should attempt to play."⁵⁶

In many respects, opponents of the sport had legitimate complaints--football was dangerous. Adding to the obvious dangers of the sport, such as young men running full speed into and piling on top of each other, was the primitive protective equipment worn by the players. Although heavily padded, the trousers provided minimal protection to legs against the metal cleats worn on the bottoms of shoes. Heavy wool sweaters without padding or shoulder protection did little to safeguard arms, shoulders, or backbones against crushing blows inflicted by the opponents. And the leather football hats worn without face masks may have prevented an ear from being torn off, but provided little, if any, protection against serious head trauma. Such obvious dangers inherent in the game gave weight to the numerous complaints of those opposed to the sport, and seriously challenged football's existence at the College of Emporia.

Not all arguments against football centered around the dangers. When not focused on such matters, many opponents assaulted the negative influences of football. "The game is demoralizing," stated one faculty member, "it promulgates betting and gambling." Proponents countered, "betting is not common with students. Because some men outside our own

circles are born of the devil, must we deprive ourselves of a recreation and exercise that is of great importance to our physical development?" Others who claimed that football interfered with studies were rebutted by sophomore Harvey Mathis, who argued, "you are mistaken, it is the unanimous testimony . . . of every football man that lessons are gotten easier and better when he engages in this daily exercise. Football actually stimulates the mind to quicker and keener thought."⁵⁷

Undoubtedly, such arguments were debated vigorously inside and out of the classrooms, but it was not long before the debate over the dangers of the game erupted once again. In fact, the questions regarding the safety of the players was one debate that Parrington and other promoters of the sport would never win. Opponents of football time and again commented on the dangers of the sport, citing the potential for injury to the players. "Battles are out of fashion," explained one professor, "but there is still football to reduce the surplus population. It isn't quite as sure as a shell or bullet, but it will serve." To this, students often responded, "sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish-- whatever may become of the men, football has come to stay."⁵⁸

But football was not so secure at the College of Emporia that proponents could comfortably claim that the game had "come to stay." The controversies surrounding football remained a constant threat to the team's existence and forced

Parrington and other fans to engage in yearly struggles to continue the sport. The team was successful, however, but that did not seem to influence detractors. During the 1895-1896 football season, Parrington led the C. of E. team to a 3-2-0 record, losing only to Kansas State University and Ottawa.⁵⁹ During the 1896-1897 season, C. of E. again lost to K.S.U. and Ottawa but defeated the Kansas State Normal School twice, and recorded a 2-2-0 record for the season.

Damning evidence such as mortality reports, however, greatly undermined the efforts of Parrington and his team.

"It will be pleasant," wrote a professor sarcastically,

to remember the names of those who died for glory and alma mater. James F. O'Brien of Manhattan College was hurt in a scrimmage and died November 23. J. L. Peterson of the Delaware Institute had his neck broken in a game November 5. Addis Herold was killed in the game November 11. His breast bone was crushed and his skull fractured. At least three others can be added to [this] list.⁶⁰

Such harrowing reports undoubtedly overshadowed the positive aspects of the game. School spirit, enthusiasm for physical exercise, and a four season winning record of 10-5-1 paled in comparison to the darker images of broken necks, crushed skulls, and dead young men. Not one serious accident befell the College of Emporia football team between 1893 and 1897,⁶¹ but football opponents finally gained the full attention of the C. of E. administration. By the end of the 1896-97 football season, President Hewitt had grown tired of the controversies that surrounded the sport and the incessant pressure had taken its toll on the administration.

In early January, President Hewitt made the fifty mile trip to Topeka, Kansas, to attend a meeting of the Kansas College Presidents' Association. Once there, he discussed with other college presidents, among other things, the fate of football at denominational colleges throughout Kansas. Hewitt learned that many other small colleges had the same misgivings and concerns about football, and many of the other presidents had too grown tired of the controversies surrounding the sport. Before the conclusion of the meeting, the presidents unanimously passed the following resolution banning football from their campuses:

Resolved, That it is the sense of this Association that foot ball should be forbidden in our institution, and that we recommend our respective faculties and boards of trustees to pass such resolutions to effectually banish the game from inter-collegiate athletics.⁶²

In 1897, the anti-football faction succeeded in securing a ban on the ungentlemanly sport from the College of Emporia. Ironically, a few months after the ban on football was instituted, Parrington resigned his teaching position at the College of Emporia citing a salary dispute with the administration. "At the end of my fourth year," wrote Parrington, "I asked President Hewitt for an increase in salary, which he was unwilling to grant. I was dissatisfied, however, not only with the pay but with the outlook."⁶³

In his few short years at the college, Parrington had provided the students with the activity they had desperately wanted. In return, he created for himself the opportunity to

participate in the sport that infatuated him during his student years at C. of E. and at Harvard. As Parrington later recalled, "I was deep in Athletics--very deep it seems to me now. Especially football. Three years in Emporia and four years in Oklahoma I was the sole coach, and sometimes manager and player as well; although I never played after leaving Emporia."⁶⁴

Parrington's desire to play football placed him in the middle of a controversy at the College of Emporia. Although opponents of the sport were victorious in their efforts, their victory was short lived. After a one year suspension, the College of Emporia reinstated football in 1898, and it continued to thrive thereafter.

NOTES

¹ *College Life*, December 18, 1893.

² Eugene Perry Link, *The College of Emporia: In Retrospection and Appreciation* (n.p.: Centennial Celebration, 1982), 7.

³ *College Life*, October 10, 1891.

⁴ In early 1890, the school paper printed a "wish list" of players whom they thought would lead a team to victory. Parrington, according to the editor of the school paper, would make the perfect half-back; *Emporia Gazette*, October 19, 1938.

⁵ *College Life*, October 10, 1891.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *College Life*, April 25, 1891.

⁸ *College Life*, October 2, 1891.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., April 25, 1891.

¹¹ *College Life*, October. 10, 1891.

¹² *College Life*, October 2, 1893.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *College Life*, April 25, 1891.

¹⁵ Dennis R. Pitt, *The Miracle: History of the College of Emporia* (Emporia: n.p., 1973), 99.

¹⁶ Vernon Louis Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," (February 1918) 39.

¹⁷ For full account, See H. Lark Hall, *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1994), 56.

¹⁸ Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 39.

¹⁹ Pitt, 100.

²⁰ Link, 7.

²¹Catalogue, *Eighth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the College of Emporia, 1891-1892*, 1892.

²²Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 35.

²³Ibid, 36.

²⁴Ibid, 35.

²⁵Ibid, 40.

²⁶Catalogue, *Tenth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the College of Emporia, 1893-1894*, 1893.

²⁷Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 40.

²⁸Link, 7.

²⁹Minutes, "College of Emporia Faculty Minutes," February 19, 1897.

³⁰Link, 7.

³¹Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 27.

³²Pitts, 101.

³³*College Life*, December 4, 1893.

³⁴Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 27.

³⁵*College Life*, December 6, 1892.

³⁶*College Life*, April 25, 1891.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸*College Life*, October 15, 1894.

³⁹*College Life*, November 27, 1893.

⁴⁰*College Life*, November 13, 1893.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²*College Life*, December 4, 1893.

⁴³*College Life*, December 4, 1893.

⁴⁴Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 28.

⁴⁵ *College Life*, September 24, 1894.

⁴⁶ *College Life*, April 23, 1894.

⁴⁷ A committee of college graduates called the University Athletic Club met regularly at either Yale, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, or Lehigh to discuss the rules of football and to make new rules governing the sport. The College of Emporia played football according to the rules set forth by the University Athletic Club.

⁴⁸ *College Life*, October 8, 1894.

⁴⁹ *College Life*, October 22, 1894.

⁵⁰ *College Life*, October 29, 1894.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *College Life*, October 21, 1895.

⁵³ *College Life*, December 3, 1894.

⁵⁴ *College Life*, December 11, 1893.

⁵⁵ *College Life*, December 18, 1893.

⁵⁶ *College Life*, January 15, 1894

⁵⁷ *College Life*, October 22, 1894.

⁵⁸ *College Life*, December 11, 1893.

⁵⁹ *Football at the College of Emporia, 1894-1950* (n.p: n.d), 8.

⁶⁰ *College Life*, January 15, 1894.

⁶¹ *College Life*, November 22, 1896.

⁶² In 1896, the College of Emporia football team won The Mit-Way Cup. A series of three games was played between C. of E. and Kansas State Normal School. C. of E. won the first two games by a score of 24-0 but the third game was not played. As a reward for their good playing, Mit Wilhite, the proprietor of a local hotel called the MIT-WAY, presented the winners of the series of games with a trophy, or MIT-WAY Cup. The Paper said of Parrington's play during the four seasons at C. of E., "Parrington is one of the best quarterbacks in the state. When the ball was snapped to him he never fumbled it when he tackled a man he always brought him down. When he

was called on to push the halves through he was always in the play and made it effective." *College Life*, December 19, 1896; *College Life*, January 16, 1897.

⁶³Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 40.

⁶⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

The day of Parrington's departure for the Oklahoma Indian Territory arrived mid-September 1897. As the train moved away from the Emporia station, Parrington settled into his seat, possibly closed his eyes and allowed thoughts of the future. Perhaps his mind's eye flashed intermingled images of expectations and uncertainties. The swaying car and softly clicking wheels lured him deeper into his solicitude; where daydream and reality battled to control his thoughts. Only the train's shrill whistle broke this stalemate, and allowed reality to rush forward and victoriously seize control of his thoughts once again. Conceivably, Parrington felt drawn to look back once more on the small Kansas town of Emporia as the train reached the outer city limits. "It was with deep reluctance," wrote Parrington, "that I broke the ties that bound me to Emporia. For twelve years [Emporia] had been my home, although I had lived there only ten; and those years had wrapped about me association that were not easily broken."¹

Undoubtedly, many of his connections to Emporia were those with the College of Emporia. All ten years he had lived in Emporia he had been a part of the college; three years as a preparatory student, three years as a collegiate, and four years as a professor of English and French. As a student he had excelled in his studies, and had acquired a reputation as an accomplished orator. He had become involved

in many different aspects of school life, serving in leadership roles for various campus organizations including the Philologic literary society, the State Oratorical Association and an assistant editor of *College Life*. And as a professor, Parrington had brought from Harvard a method of teaching that was new to the College of Emporia, and "Harvardized" the English curriculum. He allowed, even challenged, his students to think for themselves, making them read and write outside of the classroom, and discuss their work in class. He taught the students the value of scholarship and placed upon them more expectations than had been placed upon him while he attended the College of Emporia. In the process of these changes, Parrington gained the respect of the students and the faculty. In many respects, it was perhaps more difficult for the College of Emporia to sever its ties with Parrington, than it had been for Parrington to "break the ties" that had "wrapped about him." "It is with great feelings of sadness," wrote the editor of *College Life*,

that we note the loss to our College of Prof. V. L. Parrington, who for four years has so ably filled the professorship in the English department. . . . Being thoroughly acquainted with the work of the College, and being in perfect sympathy with the students, his thorough scholarship and gentlemanly bearing made him at once honored and respected.²

Yet, Parrington had been more than a student and professor at the College of Emporia. His interests were not limited to purely academic pursuits. As a young boy growing up in Americus, he had become a skilled hunter, spending many

early mornings walking the corn fields and apple orchards surrounding the family farm in search of rabbit, pheasant, and duck. He incorporated this activity into the social life at C. of E., often challenging faculty and students to a day's hunt. It was, perhaps, a great honor for students to be chosen for such a competition, and, given the fact that these events were important enough to warrant notice from *College Life*, it surely helped build school spirit and formulate associations with the students that went beyond the "teacher/student" relationship.

Parrington was also an integral part of the College of Emporia's athletics. He was an exceptional baseball player and had represented the school on and off the baseball field as a student and professor, teammate and coach. Baseball had been an important part of Parrington's early years, and remained so throughout his adolescence and early adult years. Hard work had been part of the formula for Parrington's successes as a baseball player. Hours spent making and repairing bats and baseballs, scraping the Kansas Flint Hills in order to build a baseball diamond, and hours of practice at throwing a "mean curve," were part of his youth that he fondly, and many times "vividly," remembered as an adult. But it was also fun, and a major part of his social life. One of his earliest memories was the game played on his tenth birthday. As he grew older, his involvement with athletics increased, solidifying friendships and creating yet more

memories. Days spent in early Spring with *The Baseball Association* clearing and repairing the field for the season's play, the baseball games between his class and perhaps the seniors or freshman, and his likely involvement in "stealing" Normal's school flag, were an important part of his collegiate years. Moreover, his heroics on the school team brought him much notoriety and recognition as one of the best ball players on the team. In 1894, Parrington began playing semi-professional baseball for the *Emporia Maroons*. He traveled around the state playing numerous games and getting paid little for his efforts. During games against C. of E., Parrington chose to play with the college team at the expense of the *Maroons'* season record. In many respects, this shows Parrington's affection for and dedication to the college that had been such an important force in his life. He and the *Maroons* were successful, winning state championships in 1894 and 1896. Baseball was truly important to Parrington, and, as he commented in his "Autobiographical Sketch," enough so that he considered pursuing a professional career.

Upon his return to Emporia in 1893, Parrington instituted the first football team at C. of E. Efforts had been made earlier to secure a team, but had failed due to attitudes toward and a lack of interest in the sport. Although Parrington was given permission by the president of the school to create a team, football immediately became unpopular among many of the faculty, administration, and townspeople for its

barbaric nature. Parrington defended the sport and continued to play on, as well as coach, the team to three successful seasons. Voices of opposition became too loud, however, and in 1896 the school's administration banned the sport from play. Shortly afterwards, Parrington resigned his position at the College of Emporia for the teaching position in Oklahoma.

To be sure, Parrington greatly influenced academics, athletics, and social life at the College of Emporia. Beginning with Russell Blankenship's 1929 assessment of Parrington being a "militant democrat" during his early Lyon County years, however, scholars and biographers have attempted to analyze Parrington's youth in terms of politics, radicalism, and intellectualism to gain insight into his early life. Unfortunately, they have ignored the importance of his athleticism, competitive spirit, and other "non-intellectual" youthful interests. In the final analysis, however, it was perhaps his students that best understood the significance of his life in Emporia and at the College. Saying farewell to their teacher, they wrote:

In every department of College work he was a master. In social life his genial humor and sterling manhood won him large circles of sincere friends. In the class rooms his quiet dignity and brilliant mind held the undivided attention of the students and stimulated them to realize the possibilities of the powers that lay in them. On the athletic field he was conscientious and painstaking in practice, and in match games the life and mainstay of the team. We realize that no words can adequately express our appreciation of his character and ability. We can only say that in the lives of us who know him there is

more of nobleness and earnestness of purpose because of our association with him.³

NOTES

¹Parrington, "Autobiographical Sketch," 40.

²*College Life*, September 28, 1897

³*Ibid.*

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Dissertations and Master's Thesis

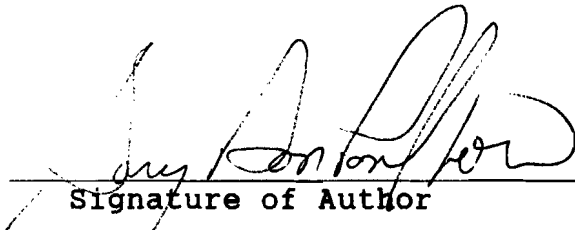
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*Sportsman, Athlete and Scholar:
Vernon Louis Parrington's Lyon County,
Kansas Years, 1877-1897.*

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