of the subject is broad, spanning the years from 1663, when the colony was chartered, to 1903, when a permanent archive was created. Dividing the book into three parts, the author first discusses the public records and their keepers, then several nineteenth century historians who tried to preserve and publish these records, and finally the historical societies which sought to collect the public manuscripts.

The organization of the volume is its greatest weakness, as there are numerous instances of repetition. Members of the state government were often either amateur historians or worked with the followers of Clio and also took part in the activities of the historical societies. Thus, they are involved in the narrative in three different places.

The surprising discovery in the first section of the book is the desperate attempt by some public servants to maintain their records and the multiplicity of laws passed by the state to aid in this endeavor. The author concludes in the second portion that the historians of the state made a vital contribution not only in publishing and collecting archival materials, but also by urging elected officials and the public to help safeguard the history of the state.

The author has not allowed the pursuit of dusty, dry documents to leave his prose in a similar condition. There are several colorful incidents in the narrative: in 1791, some of the colonial records were taken by wagon to Tennessee to prevent their capture by the British, and in 1865 the records were dispersed as General Sherman's army advanced on Raleigh. Jones' Holmes-like sleuthing to trace the course of lost manuscripts is interesting, though somewhat tedious when many pages are devoted to one such adventure.

This is the first history of a state's attempt to preserve its public archives. The publishers claim that it is a contribution to "archival science," and the author suggests the need for similar monographs for the other states. This reviewer doubts the value of such studies given the limits of the topic. The omission of private holdings and the collections of universities and other historical agencies severely reduce the significance of works of this type.

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Bancroft's volumes, the golden eagles on their covers brown with age, have long stood neglected on library shelves. Historical specialists and busy laymen have no time to follow Bancroft's stately prose as it flows majestically from the vision of Columbus to the apotheosis of the Constitution. The Classic American Historians series has rescued Bancroft for our hurried generation by issuing a volume of selections
from his *History* and tailoring it to the modern demand for economy of time and money. Bancroft labored over half a century writing and rewriting his *History*; now one can read this slim volume in a single day. Russel B. Nye, a happy choice for editor, opens the book with an interesting but all too brief account of Bancroft's life and writings. Eleven pages can hardly do justice to a life which nearly spanned the nineteenth century, a life crammed with study and writing, politics and diplomacy. The editing approaches the miraculous. Only 26 of the original 242 chapters and fewer than 400 of the original 3,500 pages are included; yet the flavor, scope, and proportion of Bancroft's *History* is scrupulously preserved. The editor is also to be commended for the informative headnotes which precede most of the chapters.

Goethe once said that "the greatest man is always linked to his own century through some weakness." Both the strengths and weaknesses of Bancroft are those of nineteenth-century America. His unshakable belief in God, country, and progress made him write history as a morality play where heroes conquered villains in the name of freedom, union, and the United States. Neither Bancroft nor his age heeded the gentle reminder of Thomas Carlyle that "all things have light and shadow." The past must not question the present; it must justify it. Nor did Bancroft doubt that the noble characters and theme of our history demanded noble treatment. His style was the prose genre of his century, stately phrases, balanced sentences, and rhetorical flourishes. His history is less the story of America from Columbus to the Constitution than a portrait of his age.

Today historians only mention Bancroft to scoff at his faith and ridicule his method. They should remember his claim that he tried not to make a statement without the original source; that he ransacked two continents in search of documents; and that contrary to this age of "kept scholars," he spent over $100,000 of his own money on historical materials. Most of all Bancroft should be read to get a prospective on ourselves. Have surer answers been obtained only by asking smaller questions? Is present-day bias less or only more subtle? Is skepticism as much a product of this age as Bancroft's optimism was of his? Will our writings three quarters of a century from now be read like Bancroft's only for the insight they give into our times?

_Duquesne University_  
Joseph C. Burke


Although much has been written about American actors and acting, _A History of American Acting_ is the first attempt to present an overview of the subject. Thus, it is a welcome and much needed book. The title is misleading, however, for the book is devoted almost entirely to the period 1820-1920. Approximately five pages serve to cover the years before 1820, while only twenty-six are devoted to acting since the First World War. Of these, a mere six are concerned with the legitimate