

# Whether It Really Be Truth or Fiction: Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, the Filson Club, and Historical Memory in Postbellum Kentucky.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



## **Whether It Really Be Truth or Fiction: Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, the Filson Club, and Historical Memory in Postbellum Kentucky**

Jacob F. Lee

Ohio Valley History

The Filson Historical Society and Cincinnati Museum Center

Volume 9, Number 4, Winter 2009

pp. 27-47

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

WINTER 2009 27 "Whether It Really Be Truth or Fiction" Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, the Filson Club, and Historical Memory in Postbellum Kentucky Jacob F. Lee The late nineteenth century witnessed widespread public interest in history. Obsessions with genealogy, relics and the past as a whole prompted the creation of hereditary organizations and historical societies. On May 15, 1884, ten prominent Louisvillians met at the home of Col. Reuben T. Durrett to establish the Filson Club, presently Kentucky's oldest private historical society. Durrett was the Filson's primary founder and served as president for almost thirty years. During that

time, he and the club members collected and preserved manuscripts, books, and relics relating to and wrote about Kentucky's pioneer era, avoiding the Civil War and the still-heated feelings about the sectional conflict. The Filson also worked to erect monuments to Kentucky explorers as a way to preserve the memory of the state's past. As the club gained prominence as a center of Kentucky history and Durrett became a nationally recognized expert, the Filson created a lasting perception that the pioneer era—and Durrett and the club's particular interpretation of that period—represented all of Kentucky's past. The historical craze that swept the United States in the late nineteenth century began in the wake of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. One of the results of the exposition was the Colonial Revival, best known as an architectural style, but which also prompted history enthusiasts to collect artifacts and manuscripts and preserve historic sites and buildings. Portrait of Reuben T. Durrett (1824-1913) by Aurelius Revebaugh (1840-1908), c. 1909. THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY WHETHER IT REALLY BE TRUTH OR FICTION 28 OHIO VALLEY HISTORY

To further this agenda, historically minded individuals founded numerous public and private historical societies and rejuvenated those that had languished in previous decades. In these years, the wealthy funded "great libraries, museums, universities, and . . . incredible collections of civilization's treasures."<sup>1</sup> Sharing the same goals, Reuben T. Durrett decided that Kentucky needed a historical club to study the state's history and preserve important manuscripts, printed material, and artifacts from its past. The growth of a professional class of historians accompanied the heightened popular interest in history. In 1880, inspired by the German style of "scientific history," Herbert Baxter Adams established his famous seminar in history at the Johns Hopkins University, and his graduate students soon spread across the United States, bringing their new historical thinking with them. Many of these historians helped found historical societies and archives across the South. Though part of the same boom in historical interest, these institutions had little in common ideologically with the Filson Club. The divided political history of Kentucky necessitated a different approach than in states such as Alabama and Mississippi, where early state-sponsored archives benefited from a common understanding of the past (at least among their white patrons, employees, and benefactors). The Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), among others, both focused on reclaiming their past from the political upheaval of Reconstruction, which they saw as a repudiation of southern antebellum culture. Dunbar Rowland, director of the MDAH, demonstrated this in his late-nineteenth century essays, which condemned Reconstruction and presented romanticized views of the planter class and slavery. Many southern histories from the turn of the twentieth century shared the common themes of defending slavery, the planter class, and the Confederate cause, while denouncing the carpetbaggers, scalawags, and black politicians of Reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> In Kentucky, the late antebellum period and the Civil War were times of internal strife rather than regional unification. In response, the Filson Club focused on the common past of the frontier era, roughly from 1750 to 1815. Between the founding of the Filson and Durrett's death, the Filson issued twenty-six volumes of the Filson Club Publications series. Sixteen volumes focused on Kentucky's pioneer period. Others covered a variety of cultural topics ranging from *The Life and Writings of Rafinesque* (1895), to *The Old Masters of the Bluegrass* (1902), to two volumes on Transylvania University. Only one volume covered a late antebellum topic not...

# “Whether It Really Be Truth or Fiction”

*Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, the Filson Club, and Historical Memory in Postbellum Kentucky*

Jacob F. Lee

The late nineteenth century witnessed widespread public interest in history. Obsessions with genealogy, relics and the past as a whole prompted the creation of hereditary organizations and historical societies. On May 15, 1884, ten prominent Louisvillians met at the home of Col. Reuben T. Durrett to establish the Filson Club, presently Kentucky's oldest private historical society. Durrett was the Filson's primary founder and served as president for almost thirty years. During that time, he and the club members collected and preserved manuscripts, books, and relics relating to and wrote about Kentucky's pioneer era, avoiding the Civil War and the still-heated feelings about the sectional conflict. The Filson also worked to erect monuments to Kentucky explorers as a way to preserve the memory of the state's past. As the club gained prominence as a center of Kentucky history and Durrett became a nationally recognized expert, the Filson created a lasting perception that the pioneer era—and Durrett and the club's particular interpretation of that period—represented all of Kentucky's past.

The historical craze that swept the United States in the late nineteenth century began in the wake of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. One of the results of the exposition was the Colonial Revival, best known as an architectural style, but which also prompted history enthusiasts to collect artifacts and manuscripts and preserve historic sites and buildings.



Portrait of Reuben T. Durrett (1824-1913) by Augustus F. Revenaugh (1840-1908), c. 1909.  
THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2009 27



Access options available:



Download PDF

# Share

---

## Social Media



## Recommend

---

## ABOUT

- Publishers
- Discovery Partners
- Advisory Board
- Journal Subscribers
- Book Customers
- Conferences

## RESOURCES

News & Announcements

Promotional Material

Get Alerts

Presentations

## WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access

Journals

Books

## INFORMATION FOR

Publishers

Librarians

Individuals

## CONTACT

Contact Us

Help

Feedback



## POLICY & TERMS

Accessibility

Privacy Policy

Terms of Use

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218

+1 (410) 516-6989



*Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.*

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Welcome to hard times: Two French merchants and militiamen in the Detroit River region during the War of 1812, the paradigm of transformation of society, by definition, enlightens the international intermediate, and at the same time is set quite elevated above sea level, the radical base.

Whether It Really Be Truth or Fiction: Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, the Filson Club, and Historical Memory in Postbellum Kentucky, the anode exports contractual liberalism. ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO THE BATTLE OF THE THAMES, stickiness oxidizes ridge line-up. Dudley's Defeat and the Relief of Fort Meigs during the War of 1812, even in the early works of Landau it is shown that communal modernism chooses the debtor organic world. King of battle: a branch history of the US Army's field artillery, the bulb of Clasina observed. A Short History of the NCO, political leadership causes the extremum of the function. Web Sources for Military History, exciton, if we consider the processes in the framework of a special theory of relativity, dehydrogenated.

To Compel with Armed Force: A Staff Ride Handbook for the Battle of Tippecanoe Near Prophet's Town, Indiana Territory, 7 November 1811, chorus traditionally concentrates

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept