TENNESSEE'S EARLY TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS, 1825-1861

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ABSTRACT

At least 19 technical and scientific journals were published in Tennessee before 1862. Surviving issues offer a unique and little used source of data on the culture of a frontier state.

INTRODUCTION

In November, 1861, war forced suspension of The Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery, the last antebellum scientific or technical journal published in Tennessee. Before November, 1861, each publication listed in Table 1 made its own unique contribution to the cultural development of Tennessee and the western frontier. The present study is a first step toward a comprehensive knowledge of early journals. The study has three objectives. First, it tries to list all antebellum technical and scientific journals (Table 1). Next, it reviews the literature on early scientific and technical publications in Tennessee. Finally, it calls attention to a few early publications that were truly extraordinary. For convenience, agricultural, medical, and general journals are considered separately.

AGRICULTURAL JOURNALS

On November 25, 1825, a new publication came off the press in Jonesboro, Tennessee. It was called The Farmer's Journal and whether it was, or was not, a technical journal is difficult to decide. In our modern society it is hard to define terms like "technical journal." It is even harder to look back across 150 or more years and recognize a culturally equivalent unit in a different and less sophisticated society. The first issue of The Farmer's Journal made it clear that one of its functions was to publish official communications from the Washington County Agricultural Society, a Jonesboro group. The first issue also contained letters to the editor from as far away as Murfreesboro. Letters suggest that the editor planned to market his new publication over a wide geographic area. Finally, in the first issue the editor, J. Howard, tried to define the mission of his new publication by saying that it would emphasize agricultural information, although it would also treat other subject matter.

A society relationship, an apparent desire for interregional readership, and an agricultural orientation combine to suggest that The Farmer's Journal was planned as a technical journal. The content of the first issue places some slight emphasis on agriculture. Most later issues are virtually free of technical content and eventually The Farmer's Journal became a local newspaper. Perhaps it fell victim to the practicalities of meeting a weekly deadline.

Whether The Farmer's Journal was ever a technical publication is debatable. It has historical significance, nonetheless, for it gave rise to Tennessee's first long-lived technical journal. In 1832, The Farmer's Journal joined in forming a newspaper called The Washington Republican and Farmer's Journal. This was purchased in 1833 by Thomas Emmerson, a Knoxville man. Soon after he took charge, Emmerson began to lay solid groundwork for a regionally oriented journal of agriculture which he called The Tennessee Farmer.

The first issue of The Tennessee Farmer appeared in December of 1834 with Emmerson as editor and J. F. Deaderick as publisher. It was a commercial success, selling throughout East Tennessee. Perhaps it succeeded because the editor-owner, Thomas Emmerson, was a well known legal and political figure. While much of his life is well documented, standard biographies of Emmerson make no mention of his involvement with The Tennessee Farmer (e.g. Beaumont, 1903; 1904).

Emmerson died on June 6, 1837, and editorship passed to the publisher, J. F. Deaderick. Jonesboro continued as the place of publication, and the journal survived the transition. Under both Emmerson and Deaderick The Tennessee Farmer was a rather average frontier agricultural journal. A precise and detailed analysis of content lies beyond the scope of the present study, but in most issues the volume of republished material exceeded the volume of original articles. Further, most articles that were original presented opinions or reported news. The journal, in its early stages, made few original contributions to science and technology. Its primary function in the culture of the mid-1830's was to gather the contributions of others and bring a succinct package of information to the farmers of East Tennessee. It was a commercial venture and it succeeded in a day when colossal economic and cultural problems faced the publisher of periodicals in Tennessee (Riley, 1962).

In 1839, editorship of The Tennessee Farmer shifted to Professor L. F. Clark of East Tennessee College. The place of publication also changed, from Jonesboro to Knoxville. Once again, the journal survived. Since the new editor was a professor of chemistry and related subjects, the journal soon took on a new character. It became more strongly oriented toward original articles of a scientific nature and there was an overall intensification of its technical-scientific character.
In December of 1840, under pressure from a state-wide agricultural society and from other sources, The Tennessee Farmer merged with another Tennessee newspaper, The Agriculturist (Anonymous, 1840). In the merger, The Agriculturist was discontinued. Subsequent issues of The Agriculturist retained the style and scope this journal adopted when it began publication in January of 1839.

In many ways, The Agriculturist was the best technical or scientific journal published in antebellum Tennessee. It was one of the best in the nation. Like all technical journals of its era, it was not a published material; but unlike most contemporary journals, The Agriculturist usually maintained high standards in its original contributions. There were two reasons for this, the first being the editor, and the second being the editor was the official organ of a learned society, The Agricultural Society of Tennessee. As long as the society remained healthy and vigorous, the journal was assured of a basic income from society dues. Further, in keeping with the most knowledgeable members of the society were assigned the task of writing articles on topics they knew the most about or on topics that most needed discussion. This approach got the journal off to a strong start. Another great strength, evident from the first issue, was the professional specialization of the editor and the editor level. Three men of great ability served as editors. The most evident co-editor was usually the Rev. Tolbert Fanning, next was Rev. Elam Crag, a Nashville institution that claimed to be the first in the North. He also founded Franklin College, another prominent Nashville institution, and placed a broad focus on agricultural education (1865). For most issues, co-editor Fanning was the mainstay and "back" writer who handled the routine affairs of the journal. Fanning did his job well and freed the other co-editors for less routine assignments.

The Agriculturist grew out of a state-wide society. Through its history the journal was deeply and positively involved in many state-wide or regional organizations that developed within the fields; silk groups, horticultural groups, etc. One co-editor, Dr. John Shelby, emerged as the contact man and promoter of organization, and usually any meeting and try to promote any reasonable cause. He was the perennial president of the Agricultural Society of Tennessee and a prominent Nashville intellectual leader. In many ways the third co-editor was the dominant member of the triumverate. G. Gerard Troost was from Dutchman who emigrated to the United States in 1810. By 1812 he was founding publisher of The Philadelphia Academy of Sciences. When he came to the new world in 1817 when the Academy began one of the first learned journals in North America that was explicitly and exclusively focused on the sciences of the day. He knew something about a field, successful journals. Unlike the other co-editors, he also had experience in writing scientific articles for the learned journals (Rooker, 1933). Troost was interested in state-level medical societies and generally professional literature. In the antebellum era, this publication was normally called the Transactions of the society (Table 1) or the Proceedings. It was largely devoted to matters of society business but often carried a few articles, generally the text of speeches made at annual meetings. In 1853, the journal appeared, a significant percent of the physicians of Tennessee were subscribers to this state society. Thus, its publications reached a relatively broad readership. Many of the other medical serials were local, perhaps it is just as well that the readership was small.

A purist might not classify Tennessee's second "medical" journal, the Medical Reformer, with the true medical journals. It was published by the Botanical Medical College of Memphis. It was an experimental Thompsonian approach to medicine, which stressed dietary and steam treatments. The journal ran from May 1839 to May 1841, containing one volume of eight issues. Most of the journals that flourished in the 1850s were associated with more conventional medical schools. One journal, the Nashville Medical Journal and Gazette, was produced by the very stable Medical Department of the University of Nashville. It weathered the War, after suspending publication in November 1861. None of the others survived into the post-bellum era.

In addition to serial publications by medical schools and medical societies, antebellum Tennessee gave rise to another kind of professional medical literature. The Tennessee Medical and Surgical Journal was printed somewhat comparable to the Spinal Papers and Memoirs of modern learned societies. When a medical society came into being, one co-creation was a mailing list, to send the society's addresses at its formal meetings. A complete text could be distributed later, at the author's expense, to everyone on the society's mailing list. Even when the society was defunct, the mailing list of a special publication was sometimes the way to handle long manuscripts.

Today, many Tennessee libraries have an odd assortment of little pamphlets that were authored by Tennessee physicians and distributed to colleagues in antebellum times. Most look official, but few of them did help on real affairs. He wrote the book on who paid the bill? Did an unqualified quack use the journal's published list? The first of these journal-related, serial medical publications grew out of the first statewide, early professional society. The Tennessee and Mississippi Medical and Surgical Journal. In 1850, another group of doctors issued an announcement of their medical historians have focused considerable attention on serials.

Hamor (1930) provides adequate histories for the other medical journals. The fact that there are no deaths in Table 1. Only one article is extended discussion. In many issues, many journals, the Southern Journal of the Medical and Surgical Journal. The serials emerged on a general catalog of medical and technology.

The Southern Journal was published by the University of Tennessee College. The stock of known journals (Table 1) and possible journals are classified in Table 2. In Table 1, that are published but apparently never issued some actually published and will eventually turn up in uncatalogued collections of 19th century books.

### Summary and Conclusions

The main function of this study is to establish a minimum, of antebellum technical and scientific journals that were published in Tennessee. The stock of known journals (Table 1) and possible journals are classified in Table 2. In Table 1, that are published but apparently never issued some actually published and will eventually turn up in uncatalogued collections of 19th century books.
in Tennessee. Historians like Davenport (1941) and Riley (1962) have treated technical journals and scientific societies as part of the general intellectual history of ante-bellum times. While the quality of their studies is laudable, the local history of science and technology seems to merit more frequent, more intense, and more empathetic study. More scientists and technologists should become involved in studies of intellectual history.

TABLE 1: Early Journals and Journal-like Publications

2. Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of Tennessee. 1830-Present. Nashville. (2)
4. The Cumberland Farmer. 1838. Gallatin. (3)
5. The Southern Cultivator. 1839-1840. Columbia. (4)
8. Tennessee Farmer and Horticulturist. 1846. Nashville. (6)
14. Medical Recorder. 1852-1858. Memphis. (2)

Footnotes to Table 1
1. By the terminal date The Farmer's Journal had evolved into a local newspaper.
2. This publication was known by more than one name. Hamer (1930) discusses synonymous names.
3. No known library has a copy of this journal.
5. Discussed by Corgan (1976b).
6. Discussed Fanning (1846).
7. Discussed by Corgan (1976c).

TABLE 2: Enigmatic Records.

2. The Southern Agriculturist. ? 1851
5. Southern Medical Quarterly. ? 1859. Nashville. (1)

Footnotes to Table 2
1. This proposed publication and all other medical serials treated in Tables 1 and 2 were discussed by Hamer (1930)
2. Discussed by Fanning (1850).
3. This proposed journal and most non-medical publications listed in Table 1 were discussed by Clark (1942).

LITERATURE CITED


